### Editorial



### Fraught franchise

A nationwide SIR will replicate the risks revealed in Bihar

he Election Commission of India's (ECI) completion of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Bihar, brings the final tally to 7.42 crore electors, a significant drop from the 7.89 crore figure before the exercise began. While the purpose was indeed to clean up the rolls, the lived reality of the exercise, including the manner in which it had to be corrected by the Supreme Court of India, renders the ECI's ambition to extend the SIR nationwide a matter of concern. The events in Bihar warned of the dangers of adopting a default attitude of suspicion towards the electorate. While the reasons for the deletion of 65 lakh names from the draft rolls, on ostensible grounds such as death, migration, duplication and lack of enumeration, were administratively sound, the process by which they were invoked was opaque. The ECI provided no consolidated list of the excluded and no meaningful prior notice, and attached no reasons to individual cases until the Court insisted on these particulars. Reports indicated that women were deleted in disproportionate numbers, raising questions about the exercise's accuracy. Even now, the ECI has not disclosed why 3.66 lakh names were removed between the draft and final rolls, the split of Form 6 additions, and a count of alleged foreign nationals, a raison d'être of the exercise but vagueness over which now risks erecting a bogeyman. The ECI also refused to accept widely-held identity documents most of the poor, the illiterate, women, Scheduled Castes and Other Backward Classes lack the ones it did demand, including birth certificates and caste and domicile papers.

A nationwide SIR conducted under the same requirements used in Bihar would likely replicate the same risks of exclusion. Electoral management research, including studies by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, points to three practices that enhance inclusion in roll revision: door-to-door verification by enumerators to supplement self-reporting; the use of widely held identity documents, such as Aadhaar and ration cards in India, to minimise barriers for citizens without birth or caste certificates; and advance publication of reasons for proposed deletions combined with an accessible appeals process. India's prior revisions, particularly in the early 2000s, depended more extensively on local booth-level officers and physical checks, which helped to identify errors without shifting the burden entirely onto the electors. A national SIR could also draw on digital tools to consolidate and publish exclusion data while ensuring physical notice at the constituency level, balancing transparency with privacy. Such measures would help the ECI ensure that no legitimate voter is excluded, especially at a time when Karnataka's Aland incident has raised sharp doubts on its technical competency.

### Changing the frame

India must use forecast to better prepare for calamities

ndia received 8% more monsoon rain this year than normal. From a bird's eye view, this is bountiful. Official numbers suggest that the total area sown under kharif crops, until mid-September, increased by around 15 lakh hectares to about 1,110 lakh hectares. Rice cultivation has seen significant growth of over 8.45 lakh hectares to over 438 lakh hectares, compared to 430 lakh hectares during the same period last year. Pulses, coarse cereals and oilseeds have shown similar trends. In India's main reservoirs, the total available water capacity is, as of late September, 163 BCM (billion cubic metres) up from the 157.8 BCM last year. 1 BCM is trillion litres. However, torrential rains, particularly in August and September, saw several districts in Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab inundated even cut off – after swollen rivers breached their flood marks. In Punjab, entire villages have been inundated, sinking farmland. While not a story unique to this year, there have been several landslides and flooding (urban and rural). Land erosion and siltation were widespread across the country leading to colossal damage.

Seasonal rainfall over northwest India, central India and the south peninsula were 27%, 15% and 10% more than their seasonal averages. In several instances, there were reports of 'cloudburst' - in meteorological terms, a very specific definition when State officials reported a deluge. Only in a single instance, in Tamil Nadu, did this actually bear out. While technical definitions might appear as a quibble, they influence the public perception of such events. A 'cloudburst' suggests something that is exceedingly rare and unforeseen, whose brunt must only be borne. On the

other hand, even terms such as 'normal' rainfall - even though their visible impact can be, frequently, as damaging – also tend to convey fait accompli. A resignation to fate. Since April, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has consistently pointed to seasonal rainfall being "above normal" or at least 4% more than the long period average of 87 cm as per its forecast. Whenever its figures bear out, it is framed as a victory of forecasting and less a failure of adequately preparing for calamity. While the establishment has forever been psychologically primed to treat a warning of drought as worth bracing for on a 'war footing', excess rains are seen as natural munificence. With developments in forecasting technology and the know-how to improve infrastructure, it is high time that this framing is modified. Failure to do so ought to be seen as an abdication of the government's responsibility to the public.

# A startup revolution, the goal of 'innovation capital'

t the TN Rising Investment Conclave in Hosur recently, a young founder from Torus Robotics walked up to the stage, papers in hand, ready to exchange an investment memorandum of understanding with the Government of Tamil Nadu. What set this apart from most of the other corporate majors exchanging MoUs that day was their journey so far – starting with government-backed incubation and refining a difficult problem with patient mentorship and modest seed support. That morning, they were no longer petitioners for opportunity. They became partners of the government in a significant sector with ₹100-crore investment.

Welcoming startups such as Torus Robotics and many more as investors in the State is a symbol of what we set out to build: a system where a startup nurtured by the government can mature into a collaborator of the State. This is a deliberate outcome of a strategy that marries innovation with inclusion and policy with

**Exponential growth in startups** 

For decades, Tamil Nadu's industrial identity has been anchored in manufacturing excellence. Over the last four years, we have extended that strength into deep-tech and innovation, quietly, steadily and inclusively.

When our government assumed office, the State had 2,032 Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT)-registered startups. Today, the number has crossed 12,100, which is roughly a six-fold rise in just four years. It is a matter of pride that 50% of them are women-led. Tamil Nadu has been recognised as 'Best Performer' in the States' Startup Ranking 2022 by the Union Government's DPIIT, which is a move up from 'Emerging State' category in 2018. Chennai was ranked 18th in Asia in the Global Startup Ecosystem Report 2024, and among Asia's top 10 for Affordable Talent. Tamil Nadu also leads the nation in the number of incubators and has been named a model State for the innovation ecosystem by the Atal Innovation

This is an outcome of a three-pillar strategy that the State has followed to facilitate startups and spark innovation. The first pillar is using State capital as a strategic catalyst. Through the Tamil Nadu Startup Seed Grant Fund (TANSEED), seed grants of ₹10 lakh are provided to startups, and ₹15 lakh to women-led, green-tech and rural-livelihood ventures. So far, 169 startups such as Ippopay, Gallabox and Dream Aerospace have received ₹18.79 crore, which have gone on to attract more than ₹537 crore in investments – a 28X multiplier on the State's seed rupee.

We are extending this capital logic to frontier sectors. For instance, the Tamil Nadu Space Tech Fund of ₹10 crore offers milestone-based assistance up to ₹50 lakh on a 1:1 match with external investors, backing both core and



is the Chief Minister

of Tamil Nadu

Focus on inclusion, gender parity

Our second pillar is employing principles of inclusion, and not as charity but strategy. The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST) Startup Fund, launched in 2022-23 with an initial ₹30 crore and enhanced to ₹50 crore in 2023-24, delivers equity investments to level the playing field. Forty-three startups such as OrbitAid, Unibose and TAMS Tribal Green Fuel have received ₹60.80 crore so far. We followed it up with the Periyar Social Justice Venture Lab – an acceleration programme designed to support social enterprises and empower entrepreneurs from SCs and STs. More than 30 such startups are already engaged, and the model is already yielding appreciable results with eight companies having successfully raised the next round of funding totalling ₹16.9 crore.

downstream space applications, from satellites to

Artificial Intelligence (AI)-driven geospatial

We have focused on gender parity through Thozhili bootcamps that have equipped over 200 women in Coimbatore, Kanniyakumari, Erode and Chennai - 15 women entrepreneurs received ₹14.70 lakh for incubation expenses. For physically challenged founders and transgender founders, Special Seed Grant Funds of up to ₹5 lakh with structured mentorship and incubation access have been established. For rural innovators, the Gramam Thorum Puthozhil scheme (Establishing Start-ups in Villages) has been implemented. The aim is to have 100 startups in 100 villages, using equity-free TANSEED grants of ₹1 lakh and incubation via regional hubs.

Our third pillar was building a decentralised and connected ecosystem. Ten regional hubs -Chennai, Madurai, Tirunelveli, Erode, Salem, Cuddalore, Hosur, Thanjavur, Coimbatore and Tiruchi – bring infrastructure, mentors and markets closer to entrepreneurs. A Metro Hub functions in Chennai, and Thoothukudi has been announced as the next addition. We are also creating the pipeline earlier with 100 Pre-Incubation Centres being rolled out in Tier-II/III/IV institutions. The first 25 have been sanctioned at ₹7.5 lakh each (total cost of ₹1.87

Digital rails tie these hubs together. MentorTN has onboarded 320 mentors and 1,171 startups and facilitated 1,120 hours of mentoring. TANFUND connects startups to capital with 300-plus investors and 2,500-plus entrepreneurs registered, 221 Investor Connect programmes conducted, 1,417 startup-investor connections and ₹127.09 crore raised so far.

StartupTN is also a key partner in Naan Mudhalvan's hackathon programme 'Niral *Thiruvizha*', through which we guide student projects toward becoming successful commercial startups. The collaboration connects academic and entrepreneurial ecosystems to help students develop technology-driven solutions for real-world problems.

We have complemented capital and infrastructure with tools that reduce friction and raise quality. The StartupTN Smart Card gives early-stage startups subsidised access to essential services, helping them save precious cash and scale faster. A bilingual call centre answers queries in Tamil and English, ensuring that first-time founders are not lost for want of information.

Through BrandLabs, our 'Nil-Brand-Sell' course of 250 minutes in Tamil and English helps founders turn great products into credible brands. Our Corporate Innovation Initiative, through an Open Innovation portal, connects startups with large enterprises such as Bosch, Kauvery Hospitals, Hero MotoCorp, PayU, Pierer Innovation and Daimler India Commercial Vehicles among others, to solve real-world

The results are visible, measurable and nationally acknowledged. What has changed in the last four years? The answer is systems, not slogans. We revitalised StartupTN, expanded it Statewide, and made inclusion the architecture of growth. We ensured that everyone could access the same rails of mentors, markets and money. Those who once left ideas behind now find a hand extended and a path ahead. We moved from ranking at the bottom to leading the table, from episodic initiatives to compounding institutions. We did not inherit a thriving startup engine. We built one.

#### **Global summit in Coimbatore**

The Tamil Nadu Global Startup Summit (TNGSS) 2025, taking place in Coimbatore (October 9-10, 2025) is a milestone in our efforts. Over two days, it will bring together over 30,000 visitors, 2,000 delegates, and 750 exhibitors, creating a vibrant space for collaboration and growth. To ensure meaningful connections, we are deploying a first-of-its-kind AI-enabled matchmaking app to help every participant find the right partners, investors, or resources for their specific needs. The summit is also thoughtfully designed with inclusive infrastructure, including dedicated facilities such as feeding rooms and crèches to ensure a welcoming environment for women participants. Investors, founders, students and global leaders from 35 countries will join hands to shape the next chapter of Tamil Nadu's startup story.

From masterclasses by Google, Meta, Microsoft, and Harvard Innovation Labs to insights from leading unicorns and industry pioneers, every session will open new doors. With dedicated pavilions on space-tech, corporate innovation, power brands, and government partnerships, this summit is designed to connect you with opportunities, whether you are an entrepreneur, investor,

# The battlefield, change and the Indian armed forces

rith paradigm shifts in how global wars are being fought, India faces immense challenges from its adversaries in all domains. Artificial intelligence (AI), automation, drones and cheap precision weapons have lowered the cost of force yet have heightened the risks of operation. Against this backdrop of a two-front threat scenario, India is reshaping its structure, doctrine, technology, force composition, professional military education (PME) and military readiness. However, past attempts at building jointness have delivered only limited results. Reforms must now advance at a speed and scale that can match the operational needs of the armed forces.

#### From 'coordination' to 'command'

At the combined commanders conference last month in Kolkata, with the theme of 'Year of Reforms - Transformation for the Future', Prime Minister Narendra Modi emphasised the intention to move from service silos to integrated theatre commands. The Ministry of Defence has prioritised a review of structural, administrative, and operational matters such as the Inter-Services Organisations (Command, Control and Discipline) Rules, 2025, wherein commanders in organisations are empowered to exercise disciplinary and administrative authority for jointness in coordinated operations. However, these measures must be evaluated against real metrics. A decade after Mr. Modi emphasised jointness as a priority, it is only now that the Indian military has arrived at joint PME, underlining that the progression is not proportionate to the needs of today.

Meanwhile, the Defence Ministry has already raised tri-service agencies for cyber, space, and special operations under Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff (HQ IDS). New battle formations such as the "Rudra" and "Bhairav" units reflect this shift by combining infantry, artillery, armour, air defence, engineers, and surveillance elements into modular,



Tamil Nadu's

strategy to

startups and

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moving to the

next chapter –

as the Tamil

Nadu Global

Summit 2025

Startup

facilitate

spark

Harsh V. Pant is Vice President for

Studies and Foreign Policy, Observer Research Foundation



Ankit K. is an Assistant

Changing

battlefield

dynamics

require an

adaptive military

**Professor of Security** Studies at the Rashtriya Raksha University, Gandhinagar, Gujarat operational deployment, especially along volatile borders (China and Pakistan). The recent declassification of India's Joint

mission-specific combat groups. These enable

faster reaction times and more flexible

Doctrine for Amphibious Operations also details the framework for amphibious operations by integrating maritime, air, and land forces. However, theatrisation as understood by several militaries around the world, has yet to be contextualised in the Indian context. China has embodied integrated theatre commands for years. Indian theatrisation must be indigenous in design. This is all the more important when the jointness of all services has not been tested until now. While Operation Sindoor was a show of strength, the confrontation was largely aerial and did not require jointness for complete mobilisation.

#### Doctrine and tech evolution for war

The Joint Doctrine of the Indian Armed Forces (2017) and the Army's Land Warfare Doctrine (2018) set the basics for synergy and jointness. The recent Ran Samvad (the first tri-service seminar on war, warfare and warfighting) deliberated on preparing for future hybrid warriors (scholar, tech, and information warriors) who can read an adversary, code a solution, and shape the narrative. In changing times, doctrinal evolution must consider that future wars will be multi-domain from beginning, in which speed and information will decide the outcomes as much as conventional firepower.

Recent procurement has been critical and in alignment with creating seamless jointness. The MQ-9B drones deepen persistent intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) and precision strike across land and sea. This deal underpins tri-service employment. The Navy's Rafale-M order stabilises carrier aviation and opens new options for maritime strike and fleet air defence. Akashteer, an AI-enabled, automated command-and-control network for Army air

defence, is being integrated with the Air Force's Integrated Air Command and Control System (IACCS). This is a standard but important step in advancing jointness.

#### Creating a modern force

The Army's Integrated Battle Groups is emerging as an all-arms brigades ("Rudra") specifically designed to deploy within 12 to 48 hours with armour, infantry, artillery, engineers, loitering munitions and drones tailored to specific areas of confrontation. Momentum is now needed to translate into functioning brigades with joint training, logistics, and firepower. The Pralay quasi-ballistic missile completed back-to-back user trials in July 2025, strengthening land-based theatre fires. At sea, a carrier-centred maritime posture is being developed. The Rafale-M supports near-term air wings while the Navy charts a 15-year capability road map to manage air, subsurface, and unmanned growth.

India's next step is to place integration and learning at the centre of military power. This means establishing a stable and effective jointness that sets common data and interface standards. Despite inter-services differences, theatre commands should be activated, maybe with initial mandates and expanding authorities assessed over time. Professional military education must raise cadres of technologist-commanders embedded into every field exercise where failure is dealt with course correction. To make it effective, civil-military fusion is indispensable with the Defence Research and Development Organisation, defence public sector undertakings, private industry and universities for code, data, test ranges and rapid prototyping embedded in PME and exercises. A strong industrial complex management base should be tied into this cycle through rapid and repeated trials that keep what works and retire what is outdated. Where change shifts the dynamics of the battlefield, only an adaptive military moves the front.

#### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### An outreach

While the Prime Minister's outreach to the RSS, the ideological fountainhead of the BJP, is quite understandable, given the symbiotic relationship, other moves such as releasing a special stamp and coin on the occasion of

the RSS's centenary celebration could raise eyebrows. The concept of majoritarianism does not fit with the basic structure of the Constitution. Effusive praise for the RSS's contributions during the freedom movement does not stand up to historical

scrutiny. Events in history, even if embarrassing, cannot be easily obliterated. S.K. Choudhury, Bengaluru

#### No concern

The stampede in Karur, Tamil Nadu, has a lesson that politics is meant to

turn leaders into gods. The tragedy demands the need for accountability, planning, and respect for human life in every political mobilisation. It hardly makes any sense for one political party to be shifting the blame to another. Is

serve the people and not

there any concern about the lives lost? R. Sivakumar,

#### Chennai

Jane Goodall The passing of primatologist Jane Goodall is a loss to conservation. Her study of chimpanzee

behaviour and advocacy of innovative policies for environmental stabilisation are invaluable educational tools.

Monita Sutherson, Nagercoil, Tamil Nadu Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the postal address.

THE HINDU

# Should Ladakh get statehood?



Member of the Kargil

Democratic

**Rangarajan** Former IAS officer and

'Courseware on

author of

Quality

Simplified

**PARLEY** 

n September 24, when protesters in Ladakh clashed with the police, four people died in the violence. Two days later, climate activist and educator, Sonam Wangchuck, who had been spearheading a hunger strike with 15 others, was detained under the National Security Act, 1980, and taken to Jodhpur Central Jail in Rajasthan. The Union government has accused him of instigating the violence, a charge that he has denied. Ladakh, which was turned into a Union Territory (UT) in 2019, has been protesting for statehood and tribal status under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. The government has been in talks with two civil society groups the Leh Apex Body (LAB) and the Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA), representing the Leh and Kargil regions, respectively – for three years. Should Ladakh get statehood? Rangarajan R. and Sajjad Kargili discuss the question in a conversation moderated by Vijaita Singh. Edited excerpts:

#### Should Ladakh get statehood?

Sajjad Kargili: When Ladakh was part of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), we had representation in the J&K Assembly, a voice, and some powers to elect the Chief Minister of the State. After becoming a UT, Ladakh has become voiceless. Bureaucrats come here for two years and try and impose policies according to their own wishes, without the consent of the people. Second, as far as land is concerned, we don't have any safeguards. Earlier, we had safeguards under Article 370 and Article 35A of the Constitution. The BJP promised to include Ladakh under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, but it is not fulfilling that promise. For the last six years, not a single person from Ladakh has been recruited for gazetted posts and there is no Public Service Commission. Ladakh has been disempowered for six years. So yes, we need statehood, democracy, and a voice. The idea of making Ladakh a UT has failed to address the aspirations of the people.

Rangarajan R.: The decision of bifurcating J&K into two UTs was a sensitive matter. The Supreme Court upheld that decision, so there is nothing more to discuss about that. But it is true that people had very serious apprehensions about the way in which it was done.

There is still a Member of Parliament from Ladakh, so Ladakh does have democratic representation. Ladakh has a unique landscape. It is vast, but the population is limited and is primarily concentrated in Leh, Kargil, and a few other places. Including Ladakh under the Sixth



Two of the four people who lost their lives during the September 24 violence in Leh were cremated under tight security. ANI

Schedule would be a logical first step (towards constitutional safeguards) and would offer its population – about 3.5 lakh according to the 2011 Census – some protection over land. Statehood is something which has to be deliberated further considering the population size. Ladakh should start with (demanding) Sixth Schedule status because that, if provided, will give Ladakhis more financial power, democratic representation, and protection for tribal and land-related rights in that region.

The 2020 Chinese aggression and incursion happened when Ladakh became a UT, not when it was part of J&K. Many States share international borders, so why have a different yardstick for Ladakh?

RR: I am not getting into the security angle. The border areas are secured by the armed forces, and that will be the case irrespective of whether Ladakh is a UT or a State. Punjab, Uttarakhand, Sikkim are full-fledged States, but the Army is always present in those regions. That is not the point here. Various criteria are considered for Statehood: the area, sensitivity of the area, the population size... The people on the ground have reasons (for demanding statehood) and the administrators also have valid reasons for why (granting statehood) is not appropriate at this point in time. I am not saying that I am against it. But as someone who has been observing the situation and who understands the Constitution, I feel it has to be a staggered approach.

Also, the Sixth Schedule or even statehood is not a panacea for all ills. Ultimately, it also depends on how well these things are implemented. There are areas with Sixth Schedule status in Assam; the State still has grouses. Meghalaya and Mizoram also fall under the Sixth Schedule, but they still don't get autonomy, as rights have not been granted fully.



Statehood is something which has to be deliberated further considering the population size. Ladakh should start with (demanding) Sixth Schedule status because that, if provided, will give Ladakhis more financial power, democratic representation, and protection for tribal and land-related rights in the region

R. RANGARAJAN

The LAB and KDA have announced that they are not going ahead with any talks with the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), but the MHA has said it is open to dialogue. The MHA has also stated that the high-powered committee on Ladakh has yielded positive outcomes, including increased reservations for Scheduled Tribes, provision of women's reservation in the Hill Councils, and steps towards protecting local languages. It also said that the recruitment process for 1,800 government posts in the UT has begun. How true is this statement? And if it is true, shouldn't you give the government adequate time to keep up with the promises?

**SK:** We have four demands: Sixth Schedule status, statehood, a Public Service Commission, and separate Lok Sabha seats for Leh and Kargil regions. We never demanded 33% reservation for women. They proposed it; we didn't oppose it. The same goes for protecting languages. The government is not discussing the real agenda of the LAB and KDA. The reservation policy and the domicile law they brought in are executive orders, not constitutional guarantees. They can be amended or abolished any time. That is why we want constitutional guarantees for these

Second, Ladakh is a peaceful region. The dialogue should be held in a dignified manner, not by arresting our youth and by imposing draconian laws. We hope that the government will conduct a judicial probe as to what happened on September 24.

I don't agree with Mr. Rangarajan that we should start with Sixth Schedule status. The Lieutenant Governor (LG) administration is ignoring our elected representatives. Till now, the LG has not called a meeting with the elected bodies. So, you can imagine the extent of lack of democracy. The Hill Councils and the UT administration have failed to establish business

Ladakh has two hostile powers on the either side – Pakistan and China – and the people of Ladakh are patriotic. But today, the government is supporting lobbies and organisations which are trolling Ladakhis, calling them anti-national, pro-Chinese and pro-Pakistan. That is unfortunate. The people of Ladakh have given blood to save these frontiers.

Also, when Sikkim was granted statehood, it had nearly the same population that Ladakh has today. The Government of India announced five new districts for Ladakh and in some of the regions, the population is just 5,000-7,000. So, I don't think population is the only criteria. The absence of governance and democracy should be the criteria for granting statehood. The government will also gain more trust from the people; today the people feel betrayed.

RR: I also take Mr. Sajjad's data point at face value – his point that ever since the State was converted into a UT, not one or not a significant number of people have been recruited from the region into public service. That needs to be addressed. Ladakh is such a vast region that it would make sense to create maybe even separate Class A and Class B services just for the area. Since it's a UT, the UPSC (Union Public Service Commission) could handle recruitment.

Some members of the LAB and KDA also believe that the autonomous councils should be strengthened more. Could you settle for more empowered autonomous councils rather than demanding statehood?

**SK:** We have seen this happen before – even in Delhi – where the elected government had to sit in protest outside the LG's office every day, because of constant interference from the LG in matters that should have been handled by the elected government. A UT with a legislature is worse than a UT without a legislature. We have Hill Councils and the Act (Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council Act, 1995) mentions that the Chief Executive Councillor (CEC) will have the power and protocol of a Cabinet Minister of a State and the Executive Councillors would have the power and protocol of a Minister of State. But in Ladakh, business rules have not been defined yet. That is why the CEC or the Council Chairman is compelled to visit the Chief Secretary's office for routine matters. The government has a budget of ₹6,000 crore for Ladakh but only ₹600 crore for Ladakh's Hills Councils. We get a small chunk from the Centre, while a large amount, nearly 80%, is utilised by the bureaucrats through the LG administration.



To listen to the full interview Scan the code or go to the link

**NOTEBOOK** 

# The crisis of journalism

With sources drying up, and the principal creators of news bypassing the media, journalism as a profession is struggling to reinvent itself

Varghese K. George

nnamed whistleblowers who want the public to know certain things are often referred to as "sources" - a time-tested device in journalistic storytelling. The motivation of sources could be public interest, business rivalries, or even settling personal scores. Generally speaking, sources challenge an official narrative, regardless of their motive. But in a relatively new practice in journalism, platforms cite sources who merely amplify official narratives. As their claims align with those of the state, one wonders what or who these unnamed sources fear.

The effectiveness of journalism is not entirely a function of the quality of an individual journalist or a media platform a basic fact that many well-meaning critics of the current state of affairs of the profession often tend to miss. Instead, its effectiveness, as an instrument of public accountability, is also linked to other factors, such as the public spiritedness of other actors and branches in the system. The executive branch around the world – in Israel, the U.K., the U.S., and India claims unprecedented power these days, largely on grounds of national security. Super power executives impose heavy costs on whistleblowers and intimidate other branches into submission. The media has little access to official information but that is the outcome of a systemic crisis. There is little transparency in the functioning of the executive. Even answers to parliamentary questions, and submissions before the judiciary by the executive, are more about concealing than revealing information.

The 'exclusive' stories that 'sources' reveal to their preferred platforms, far from holding those in power accountable, brand critics of the government as foreign agents, or inadequately patriotic. The media's conventional role as a mediator of the flow of information from its principal creators to the end user, the public, has become redundant with the emergence of social media. Principals communicate directly with the masses,

and that is now increasingly accepted by masses as a mark of authenticity. What then is the role of mass media?

With sources drying up, and principals bypassing it, journalism as a profession is struggling to reinvent itself. Some journalists have found an easy route of joining the mob. There is guaranteed revenues and following, and the additional benefit of the badge of patriotic honour. Others have developed various models of counter-propaganda against the dominant narrative, which also can acquire instant following. A band of professionals is using newer tools – a mix of open source materials and ground reporting - which is untied from state power, at least theoretically. Open source information can be mined for great reporting, devoid of rhetoric and propaganda. The Hindu's coverage of organised attempts to manipulate the voter list in the Aland Assembly con-

stituency in Karnataka is a case in point. What this takes is courage, capacity, and capital. Assuming that the first two are available, where would the money come from? Only a market fundamentalist can assume public interest journalism can be sustained by profit-seeking capitalism. Even public transport in New York, Tokyo, Paris, Madrid, and Seoul is heavily subsidised by the state, indicating the weak positive link between profitseeking and public interest. But there is a

rush among the rich to be media owners. Meanwhile, publicly funded media platforms have been labelled a scandal by populists in the West, while they have been turned into amplifiers of government propaganda in India. While Prasar Bharati platforms never gained autonomy from the government, at least the idea had some resonance earlier, which is no longer the case. The BBC's income has dropped by about £1 billion a year since 2010 (adjusted for inflation) and the National Public Radio, a robust public broadcaster in the U.S., is facing an existential funding threat. The debate about journalism needs to be broadened to include all this, particularly who pays for it.

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#### PICTURE OF THE WEEK

A true (blue) devotee



A male devotee dressed up as Goddess Kali blesses a child during the Dussehra festival at Sri Mutharamman Temple in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu. Devotees dressed as other deities will also take an active part in the festivities spanning 10 days, in the shrine. PERIASAMY M.

#### FROM THE ARCHIVES



FIFTY YEARS AGO OCTOBER 3, 1975

#### Kamaraj passes away

Madras, Oct. 2: We record, with profound regret, the death of Mr. K. Kamaraj, Congress (O) leader and former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, at his residence in Thyagarayanagar this afternoon. He was 72.

The saga of the veteran freedom fighter, who had dedicated his life to the cause of the nation and dominated the politics of the State and the country for over three decades, came to a peaceful end following a sudden heart

Mr. Kamaraj, who took his lunch as usual at

2 p.m., complained of intense sweating by about 2:30 p.m. and retired to bed. The doctor was immediately summoned but Mr. Kamaraj collapsed even before the doctor's arrival. He was pronounced dead at 3: 15 p.m. Doctors said he had had a massive heart attack and their attempts to save him by resuscitation were in vain.

The death came as a shock even to Mr. Kamaraj's close associates as he was holding political discussions with them in the forenoon and had even telephoned one of his friends at 12:30 p.m. asking him to meet him in the afternoon.

As the sad news spread, thousands of men and women rushed to his residence in Tirumalai Pillai Road to have a glimpse of the "man of the masses".

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO OCTOBER 3, 1925

#### Labour laws in India: Lady Chatterjee's complaint

London, Oct. 2: In an article in *The Asiatic* Review, on labour legislation in India, Lady Chatterjee, dealing with the steps taken to enforce the existing legislation, points out that many factories are only inspected at long intervals, owing to the challenge of the staff of Inspectors, especially in Bengal and Assam. Other unsatisfactory features of the administration of the Factories Act are the comparative lack of prosecutions and the very small fines imposed by the Magistrates.

# Text&Context

THEMOHINDU

#### **NEWS IN NUMBERS**

The amount given as offerings during the festival in Tirupati

eight days, 5.8 lakh darshan of the deity during the

Brahmotsavams at Tirupati. The festival also served 26 lakh annaprasadam, and saw 2.4 lakh devotees offer their hair through ritualistic tonsuring. PTI

The sharp increase in the GST collection from Punjab

April-September 2025, reaching ₹13,971 crore, up from ₹11,418 crore a year ago. September alone saw collections of ₹2,140.82 crore, a 10% growth rate. PTI

#### Phone blackout and Internet shutdown in Afghanistan

In hours. Afghanistan faced a nationwide internet and phone shutdown under the Taliban, paralysing banks, flights, hospitals, etc. Two million women lost access to online courses, in a country where the Taliban has banned education for girls beyond primary school. AFP

#### Universities asked to adopt U.S. President Trump's priorities

The White House has urged top U.S. universities to sign a "Compact for Academic Excellence in Higher Education," aligning with Mr. Trump's political priorities. The pact spans admissions, free speech, international enrollment etc. In return, signatories would get priority access to federal grants. PTI

#### Heat-related deaths in Spain between May 16 and September 30

heat-related

between May 16 and September 30 hit 3,832, an 87.6% increase from the same period in 2024. Nearly two-thirds of the deaths involved people over 85. AFP

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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# Will China capture the electrolyser market?

Why are green hydrogen technologies rapidly advancing? What are the two electrolysers used in commercial plants? How was China able to capture the global solar PV modules market? Why will China have a difficult time in replicating its success in the solar market when it comes to electrolysers?

#### **EXPLAINER**

#### Bhumika Sevkani

#### The story so far:

n the clean energy market, the limelight has recently shifted from solar and wind towards green hydrogen. Hydrogen is widely used in industries for oil refining and ammonia and methanol production, but most of it is currently produced using fossil fuels, which add to carbon emissions. Green hydrogen technologies used in production, storage, transportation and application are rapidly advancing, with electrolysers at the core of this transformation. Electrolysers are central to its production, much like photovoltaic (PV) modules are to solar power. And just as no discussion on solar PVs is complete without examining China's dominance in its supply chain, a similar story seems to be unfolding with electrolysers.

#### Is China a dominant player?

By 2024, China had become the world's leading hydrogen producer, reaching an annual production of 36.5 million tonnes. China produced a total of 1,20,000 tonnes of green hydrogen, which represents almost half of the world's green hydrogen output. With respect to electrolysers, China has come to dominate nearly 85% of the global manufacturing capacity of Alkaline electrolysers. Currently, Alkaline (ALK) and Proton Exchange Membrane (PEM) electrolysers are used in commercial plants, with ALK electrolysers being a more mature technology. While the costs of ALK electrolysers are low, they are less efficient than PEM electrolysers in producing hydrogen using renewable energy, given problems of fluctuating loads. PEM electrolysers, on the other hand, offer higher efficiency even at fluctuating loads as well as higher purity hydrogen as output. For now, China's dominance rests on its manufacturing capacity of ALK electrolysers, both for



**GETTY IMAGES** 

domestic consumption and exports.

Looking at China's growing electrolyser manufacturing capacity, and its roll-out of large-scale green hydrogen production plants, concerns over its increasing global share in green hydrogen production and supply chain are beginning to emerge.

How did China establish dominance? China was able to capture the global market of solar PV modules by offering cheaper rates due to state subsidies; integrated supply chains; control over raw materials; and quicker rollout of production facilities. In the case of electrolysers, the average price of ALK electrolysers supplied by China has been significantly lower than the average overseas price. Utilising Chinese ALK

electrolysers can offer up to 45% of cost

production plants in Europe. Electrolyser

advantages in setting up hydrogen

prices in China are decreasing further due to supply chain maturity and increasing entrants in the market. In 2024, a 1,000 Nm3/h (5MW) ALK electrolyser system was priced at six million yuan (approx. 1,200 yuan/kW or \$167/KW), a 20% drop from 2023 whereas, a 200 Nm3/h (1MW) PEM electrolyser system was also priced at about six million yuan (~ 6,000 vuan/kW or \$838/KW) which is a reduction of 32% from 2023.

Further, ALK electrolysers are made with nickel and steel both of which are abundantly available in China. PEM electrolysers, however, rely on precious metals such as iridium, platinum, and titanium, making significant cost reductions challenging – even for China. Despite its manufacturing prowess, China remains one of the world's largest importers of these critical materials. Moreover, hydrogen production requires

system integration that varies with the required hydrogen purity. The final application of the hydrogen produced determines the specific systems that must be installed. As a result, competing purely on price might not be enough in the green hydrogen industry; exporters will have a greater advantage in delivering fully integrated systems.

Chinese solar and wind equipment manufacturers like LONGi and Envision are entering the green hydrogen space. Besides manufacturing electrolysers, the firms have also signed deals to construct hydrogen production facilities overseas. For instance, China-based Guofu Hydrogen is partnering with German companies to develop electrolyser systems and hydrogen production facilities in Germany. Envision Energy launched the world's largest green hydrogen and ammonia plant, powered entirely by renewable energy sources.

#### Have other competitors emerged?

China is poised to become a dominant force in the global green hydrogen equipment market, as its firms proactively scale up production facilities and expand their international presence. However, this dominance is subject to significant advancements in technology and greater integration of their supply chains.

Despite their aggressive expansion, Chinese firms will face considerable hurdles in replicating their past success. Unlike solar, the green hydrogen sector is highly prioritised by many countries that have rolled out national plans and wish to maintain their local competitiveness. As a result, Chinese imports are likely to face significant scrutiny, restrictions, and stringent regulations, making it more challenging for them to compete on the same terms as they did in previous industries. Concerns over supply chain security are likely to play a larger role in shaping the market for green hydrogen technologies, potentially limiting the unhindered entry of Chinese products.

Bhumika Sevkani is a Research Analyst at The Takshashila Institution.

#### THE GIST

By 2024, China had become the world's leading hydrogen producer, reaching an annual production of 36.5 million tonnes. With respect to electrolysers, China has come to dominate nearly 85% of the global manufacturing capacity of Alkaline electrolysers.

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# Why are the new rules for Panchayats getting flak?

Why is the regional Biju Janata Dal party upset? Are bureaucrats getting power over elected representatives?

Panchayat Samiti chairman, an elected

#### Satyasundar Barik

The story so far: he Mohan Majhi-led Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government in Odisha announced the new Odisha Panchayat Samiti Accounting Procedure (Amendment) Rules, 2025, after state cabinet approval last month. However, the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) and the Congress have strongly

criticised the amended rules, stating that

it undermines people's representatives of

the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs).

#### What are the amended rules?

As per the amended rules, officials at the ground level will now enjoy greater financial authority to pass bills without requiring the counter-signature of elected representatives. Previously, Block Development Officers (BDOs) could clear bills only up to ₹2 lakh, with any amount above that needing the approval of the

representative. Under the new provision, BDOs can independently sanction bills up to ₹10 lakh. Similarly, the power to grant administrative approval for Panchayat Samiti plans and estimates has been delegated to the Chief Development Officer-cum-Executive Officer of the Zilla Parishad, a senior district-level bureaucrat, even though Zilla Parishads are headed by elected chairpersons. The amendment also expands the authority of engineers to accord technical sanction for larger development projects. Depending on their ranks, engineers can now clear projects ranging from ₹5 lakh to ₹4 crore - a sharp rise from their earlier financial limits. Similarly, financial authority has been transferred to engineers in implementation of the Mahatma Gandhi Natural Rural Employment Act (MGNREGA), a central government scheme. Administrative approval powers have also been revised for general

developmental schemes. BDOs can now approve projects up to ₹20 lakh, and Panchayat Samiti Chairpersons (elected representatives) up to ₹50 lakh.

#### What has the opposition said? According to the government, these

amendments will expedite bill processing, ensure timely approvals, and facilitate smooth implementation of developmental programmes across all Panchayat Samitis while retaining the supervisory role of the chairpersons.

However, the BJD has alleged that the recent amendment is a conspiracy to downgrade the authority of elected representatives in PRIs on purely political grounds. In the 2022 rural polls, the Naveen Patnaik-led BJD had secured an emphatic victory, winning 766 of 853 Zilla Parishad seats with 52.73% of the vote nearly 90% of the total. Although panchayat elections are not contested on party symbols, BJD-backed candidates

had virtually swept the polls across the State. The next panchayat elections are due in 2027. The BJP, buoyed by its unexpected triumph in both the Assembly and Lok Sabha elections of 2024, is under tremendous pressure to replicate that success at the grassroots level to consolidate its influence. Observers note that the BJP, through its control of the bureaucracy, can now implement development programmes without depending on PRI members most of whom are aligned with the BJD.

#### Why is the BJD angry?

For the BJD, the issue goes beyond financial control or political leverage. The party contends that the BJP has sought to tamper with a legacy: the strengthening of the three-tier PRIs, a system nurtured by both the late Biju Patnaik and his son, Naveen Patnaik.

Biju Patnaik was credited as the first Chief Minister in India to introduce 33% reservation for women in PRIs, later extending it to chairperson posts. Naveen Patnaik further raised this quota to 50%

The BJD has also objected to the rebranding of its flagship scheme Ama Odisha Nabin Odisha as Bikashita Gaon Bikashita Odisha, with provisions substantially altered. Under the original scheme, each panchayat received ₹50 lakh, but allocations have now been reduced to just ₹7-8 lakh, the BJD said.

#### THE GIST

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THE HINDU

#### **CACHE**

# How to safeguard India's digital economy

Cyber frauds have moved far beyond the fraudulent ATM withdrawals of earlier years. Today, criminals deploy more sophisticated and targeted strategies

Rajeev Kumar

ndia's digital transformation powered by affordable Internet, digital banking, and e-commerce while enhancing convenience and inclusion has also created a fertile ground for cybercrime. Fraudsters exploit system loopholes and human psychology, using tactics such as phishing, OTP/UPI frauds, identity theft, loan scams, and increasingly, digital arrests. These frauds rely less on hacking skills and more on manipulation of fear and trust.

#### Perils of social engineering

The most vulnerable victims include elderly citizens, rural populations, and weaker groups such as job seekers or loan applicants. Many senior citizens remain digitally illiterate yet hold substantial savings, making them prime targets. Fraudsters often obtain leaked banking or personal data to identify such customers, tailoring scams to exploit their weaknesses. Social engineering is at the core of these crimes – manipulating fear, greed, or urgency. Even educated individuals often surrender under sustained psychological pressure, showing how deeply criminals exploit human behaviour.

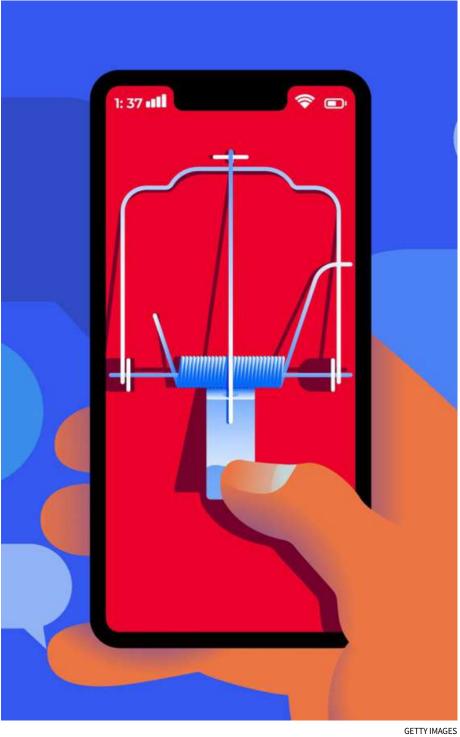
Two recent digital arrest cases highlight the role of fear. In the first, a 78-year-old retired banker was duped of ₹23 crore – siphoned through 21 transactions to 16 accounts. In the second, a lawmaker's wife was defrauded of ₹14 lakh but was able to recover it as she acted swiftly. Together, these cases show a stark contrast – delay leads to irreversible losses, while swift action can save victims from ruin. These cases underline the urgent need for systemic reforms such as AI-driven monitoring to flag abnormal transactions; banks mandated to act within the 24-hour window; cyber police equipped to respond swiftly etc. Proactive detection and rapid coordination between banks and law enforcement are essential to prevent such scams from succeeding.

However, institutions have failed to keep pace. Banks, entrusted with safeguarding public money, often limit their role to issuing generic advisories, while mule accounts with weak KYCs continue to thrive. Customer data meant to be securely protected – often circulates freely across banks and even into the hands of fraudsters. Cyber police remain severely underequipped with respect to technology, training, and workforce, leaving victims trapped in bureaucratic delays and lost opportunities for recovery. Without advanced tools, specialised skills, and adequate manpower, they risk becoming symbolic entities rather than meaningful protectors in India's fight against cybercrime.

Thousands of fraud cases are reported daily, but the actual figures are far higher, as many victims avoid reporting due to stigma or lack of faith. This systemic apathy – both from banks and cyber police - has emboldened criminals and eroded trust, threatening the credibility of India's digital economy.

#### **Increased sophistication**

Cyber frauds have moved far beyond the fraudulent ATM withdrawals of earlier years. Today, criminals deploy more



sophisticated and targeted strategies. Phishing attacks lure users into revealing sensitive data through fake emails or SMS messages. Remote access scams trick victims into downloading malicious apps that give criminals control of their devices. Job and loan scams prev or aspirations of youth and financially vulnerable populations, while OTP and UPI frauds manipulate users into unknowingly authorising transactions. Equally damaging is identity theft,

where Aadhaar, PAN, or bank details are misused to commit further crimes. Among the most alarming trends is the rise of digital arrests, where criminals impersonate police, customs, or government agencies. Victims are kept on continuous calls, shown fake warrants, and psychologically coerced into paying large sums to avoid fabricated charges. Such frauds demonstrate how criminals adapt faster than institutions. Their reliance on social engineering and technology-enabled deception shows us how they remain several steps ahead of current safeguards.

Large-scale frauds reveal recurring transaction patterns that should serve as early warning signals. First is scale. Fraudulent transfers are frequently many times larger than a customer's normal transactions. Secondly, the frequency of transactions; multiple high-value debits executed within a short span of time. In robust monitoring systems, both should trigger critical alerts. Yet banks often fail to send SMS, email, or phone verifications. Ironically, modest credit card spends and cheque clearances routinely invite confirmation calls, while multi-crore savings account debits pass without checks.

The destination of funds also exposes familiar patterns. Money is funnelled into mule accounts with incomplete or fake KYCs, often with negligible balances before suddenly receiving massive inflows. These funds are quickly dispersed across smaller or cooperative banks in a process known as layering, making recovery nearly impossible. The delay in freezing accounts compounds the problem. Victims face hurdles when reporting fraud, and the crucial 24-hour window is rarely used effectively. By the time action begins, funds are already

These patterns are not isolated anomalies but hallmarks of organised cyber fraud. The failure to monitor them proactively reflects systemic negligence, leaving criminals ample room to thrive.

#### **Possible interventions**

The current institutional approach is largely reactive – fraud is addressed only after complaints are filed. Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) can shift this model to proactive prevention through the following

Personalised transaction profiles: AI can map each customer's typical transaction size, frequency, timing, and risk category (for example, senior citizens, rural users, high-net-worth individuals). Customers can be grouped into clusters to generate targeted alerts for deviations from normal activity. Unusual patterns – such as abnormally large transfers or frequent debits - can trigger alerts, require confirmation, or temporarily block the transaction until verified. Clustering algorithms and anomaly detection models can flag behaviours such as unusually large one-off transfers, multiple debits within short intervals, or mule accounts receiving sudden inflows. ML systems can also identify accounts with incomplete or fake KYCs, preventing them from becoming conduits for laundering.

**Cross-institutional monitoring:** Banks operate in isolation without sharing information with the cyber police or telecoms. An AI-enabled fraud intelligence and early detection network could enable real-time sharing of alerts across banks, payment systems, and telecom providers. If one bank identifies a suspicious account, others could be notified instantly, preventing fraudsters from exploiting institutional gaps.

Empowering the cyber police: AI offers real-time detection and automated alerts for law enforcement, allowing swift action within the crucial 24-hour window. With global data-sharing and stronger international cooperation, AI can make cyber policing faster, more agile, and citizen-friendly.

Strengthening accountability of **banks:** Banks must adopt AI-driven monitoring, plug KYC gaps, and explore Blockchain for secure, tamper-proof customer data management.

Frauds today are not invisible – they are detectable with the right tools. What is missing is not technology, but institutional will. With AI-driven monitoring, fraud detection can evolve from reactive firefighting to proactive prevention.

#### The way forward

India must shift to a protection-first framework, where citizen safety and digital trust are central to financial

For banks, reforms should tighten YCs, audit mule accounts, and secure customer data. Blockchain promises tamper-proof record sharing, while AI-driven monitoring and shared fraud intelligence platforms are necessities. Victims must also receive swift compensation, as mandated by the RBI, without unfair blame. For the cyber police, speed, tools, and capability are key. 24/7 rapid-response units must act within the 24-hour window, supported by stronger cross-border cooperation to address globalised fraud.

If pursued sincerely, these reforms can transform India's digital economy from vulnerable to resilient, where technology and trust work together to protect every citizen.

Rajeev Kumar is a former Professor of Computer Science & Engineering at IIT Kharagpur, IIT Kanpur, BITS Pilani, and JNU, and a former scientist at DRDO and



#### THE DAILY QUIZ

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

#### A quiz to celebrate the life of primatologist Jane Goodall who passed away on October 1

#### V.V. Ramanan

#### **QUESTION 1**

Name the facility on the banks of Lake Tanganyika which was the location of her famous long-term study of chimpanzees.

#### **QUESTION 2**

What pivotal discovery made by Goodall in 1960 made her mentor, Louis Leakey state "...now we must redefine 'tool.' redefine 'man,' or accept chimpanzees as humans"?

#### **QUESTION 3**

On the advice of Leakey, she did her doctorate on the science of animal behaviour. What is the field of study called and where did she do it?

#### **QUESTION 4**

Name the two communities of chimpanzee that indulged in the ruthless

'Four-Year War of Gombe', which Goodall documented, that led to one community decimating the other.

#### **QUESTION 5**

What was the nickname by Leaky given to the trio of Goodall, Dian Fossey, and Birutė Galdikas who did path-breaking work on chimps, gorillas and orangutans?

#### **QUESTION 6**

What was the contribution of Hugo van Lawick to the life and work of Goodall?

#### **QUESTION 7**

Name the global program created by Goodall that guides young people in more than 75 countries about environmental sustainability and encourage them to take action.

#### **QUESTION 8**

Goodall has been recognised globally with prestigious awards. How did the UN honour her in 2002?



**Visual question:** What was the name of this plush monkey that was a constant companion to Goodall for many years? REUTERS Questions and Answers to the October 1 edition of the daily quiz: 1. This former President of the U.S. was the first to reach the age of 100. Ans: Jimmy Carter

2. The fight in which Muhammad Ali defeated Joe Frazier. Ans: Thrilla in Manila

3. Johnny Carson began hosting this show and became king of late-night television. Ans: The Tonight Show 4. This country gained its independence from

Britain but remained a member of the Commonwealth. Ans: Nigeria

5. In 1553, with her coronation, this Queen became the first Queen to rule England in her own right. Ans: Mary I; Bloody Mary 6. The American novelist who created the

techno-thriller. Ans: Tom Clancy 7. The first woman and the first Jewish person to become president of Mexico. Ans: Claudia Sheinbaum

Visual question: Identify this national park in the U.S. Ans: Yosemite National Park Early Birds: Tamal Biswas | Sudhir Thapa | C. Saravanan | Arun Kumar Singh | Dodo Jayaditya



#### FROM THE ARCHIVES

# **Know Your English**

#### **Upendran**

"Your eyes are red. Have you been watching a lot of TV?"

"Yes. I have been busy watching all the one day matches. By the way, why is every tournament being called a 'round

"Well, you see in a round robin format, every team plays every other team that is in its group. So ... "

'... I know that! What I want to know is, what is the connection between a

sports event and a bird?" "A bird? What are you talking about?" "A 'robin' is a bird, isn't it? So a 'round

robin' must be a fat little robin." "Ha! Ha! True, a robin is a bird. But the 'robin' in 'round robin' has nothing to do with a bird. In fact, 'round robin' didn't have anything to do with games."

"It didn't?"

"No, it didn't. The word 'robin' in 'round robin' is from the French 'ribon', meaning 'ribbon'."

"A ribbon! You mean to say that 'round robin' actually means 'round ribbon'?' "That's right! You see..."

"... but I don't understand."

"... let me tell you how the expression 'round robin' came into being. You see in the XVII and XVIII century in France, when a person wrote a petition against the King, his head was chopped off."

"Good grief! What happened if more than one person signed the petition?"

"In that case, the person whose signature appeared first had his head chopped off.'

"People must have been really scared to write to the King, then?"

"They certainly were until some clever officers came up with the idea of the round robin. What the petitioners did was to sign their names on a ribbon. Then they joined the two ends of the ribbon in such a manner that it formed a circle. The round ribbon or robin was attached to the bottom of the petition."

"Since the ribbon was pasted in the form of a circle, I guess the King couldn't figure out who the first person to sign the petition was."

"Exactly! And since he wasn't sure whose name was first, he couldn't chop anybody's head off."

"That's interesting."

"Exactly! Let me tell you...."

"... the word 'let' reminds me of something. I was watching the Gold Flake Open, and I noticed that every time a player served and the ball hit the net and fell in the opponent's court, the Umpire shouted 'let'. Why did he call 'let'?"

"Good question. The word 'let' has several different meanings. The Old English word 'lettan' from which the word 'let' is derived means to 'hinder, prevent, obstruct'."

"I see. So when the Umpire calls 'let' what he means is that the net obstructed the tennis ball's progress."

"Correct. Do you know why tennis players say 'deuce' once the game score reaches forty all?"

"I haven't the faintest idea." "The word 'deuce' is actually from the

French 'deux', meaning two. In other words, a player needs two more points to win the game." Published in The Hindu on April 28,

# Word of the day

**Chicanery:** the use of tricks to deceive someone (usually to extract money from them)

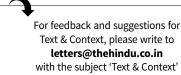
Synonyms: guile, shenanigan, wile

**Usage:** He would have used chicanery to win votes.

#### **Pronunciation:**

newsth.live/chicanerypro

#### **International Phonetic** Alphabet: /ʃɪˈkeɪn(ə)ɹi/



### WORDLY WISE

MUSIC IS A HIGHER REVELATION THAN ALL WISDOM AND PHILOSOPHY.

— LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

# The Indian EXPRESS

∽ FOUNDED BY ∽

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

# RBI's FORWARD PUSH

As central bank eases lending regime, presses for internationalisation of rupee, it must be mindful of risks

ETWEEN DECEMBER 2022 and July 2025, China accounted for about 47 per cent of all crude oil and 44 per cent of the coal exported by Russia, as against India's corresponding purchase shares of 38 per cent and 20 per cent. Despite that, US President Donald Trump has slapped India with a 25 per cent "penalty" for buying Russian energy. This rate, to be effective from August 27, would take the total tariff on Indian goods imported into the US to 50 per cent. China has not only escaped such punishment, but has actually seen a lowering of the duty on its goods from 145 to 30 per cent since May 12. On Monday, Trump extended his trade truce with China for a further 90-day period till November 10. At the same time, his Treasury Secretary, Scott Bessent, has threatened additional "secondary tariffs" on India if the outcome of Trump's Friday meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin isn't favourable.

This blatantly divergent treatment, further eroding the credibility of the current Western sanctions regime, has significantly to do with relative economic leverage — China is seen to possess much more of it. The most visible demonstration of that was when, in early April, it imposed export restrictions on rare earth elements and magnets that are indispensable, whether for auto, aerospace, defence, semiconductor, renewable energy or consumer electronics manufacturing. China could use its virtual global monopoly over the mining and processing of these critical minerals to bring Trump to the negotiating table. Rare earths apart, China also played the trump card of being a massive buyer of US agricultural produce — from soyabean, cotton and coarse grains to beef, pork and poultry meat — sharply reducing the imports of these to signal its capacity for retaliation in any unilateral trade war.

On the face of it, India does not have that sort of economic leverage. Barring, say, pharmaceutical products, much of what it exports to the US — readymade garments, gems and jewellery, frozen shrimps, basmati rice or even steel and aluminium — aren't items for which there are no alternative suppliers. Nor are Indian imports of California almonds comparable to the humongous quantities of Midwest US soyabean and corn that China was, until recently, sourcing to feed its swine and poultry birds. Given how much it stands to lose in any prolonged trade war — the worst-affected industries are also the most employment-intensive — the best approach for India to adopt is strategic patience. What the Indian foreign policy establishment and its trade negotiators should emphasise is the country's importance to global economic and regional stability, which aligns with the US's own long-term interests.

# JOIN THE DOTS

Study showing health benefits of reducing pollution should nudge government to tweak National Clean Air Programme

XPOSURE TO POOR air can not only cause respiratory diseases like asthma, COPD, and lung cancer, but it is also a leading risk factor in diabetes, heart ailments, and even premature deaths in children. Several studies have quantified the health-related costs of pollution in India. Last year, for example, a paper in the Lancet Planetary Health estimated that the failure to follow the WHO's recommendations on limiting particulate matter and other toxins is responsible for about 1.5 million deaths in the country. While policymakers are now aware of the perils of inaction on pollution, what is also needed is research that highlights the public-health benefits of cleaning up air. A new study by scientists at IIT-Delhi and experts at the research agency Climate Trends does that. It reveals that slashing pollution levels by up to 30 per cent can substantially reduce the burden of heart disease, diabetes, anaemia, and low birth weight among women and children. It draws on information from the National Family Health Survey 5, epidemiological studies, and pollution data to underline the co-benefits of adhering to the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP).

The scenario modelled by the IIT-Delhi and Climate Trends experts is an ideal one. The NCAP has, however, not always worked according to plan. Launched in 2019, the programme aims to enhance air quality in 131 cities by next year. It recognises the far-reaching impacts of particulate matter pollution on public health and aims to reduce the intensity of these particles by 40 per cent by 2026. However, as a white paper put together by scientists, civil society groups, and public health experts pointed out in August, air pollution is not confined to administrative boundaries. In other words, meeting the NCAP's targets is not contingent on the measures taken in the cities covered by the programme. The rural parts of the country are largely out of the purview of the monitoring systems. Individual cities and states are, by and large, left to their own devices, and even emergencies such as Delhi's annual health crisis do not lead to a modicum of cooperation.

Several cities, including the national capital, have compounded their problems by not adhering to the NCAP's basic tenets. The programme's funds have not been adequately utilised, pollution monitoring stations have not been installed — or have been placed in low population density areas instead of congested localities, construction-heavy zones, and industrial belts — and officials do not join the dots between environment and public health. The IIT-Delhi-Climate Trends study shows the NCAP's potential to make a meaningful difference. It's now up to the government to take the right lessons from the study and tweak the programme.

# SONG AND THE CITY

Pandit Chhannulal Mishra leaves behind a music that found its home in Banaras and speaks to everyone

HEN CHHANNULAL MISHRA came to Banaras, he was in his late 30s and carried the intense training of the prestigious Kirana Gharana, one that he'd imbibed under Ustad Abdul Ghani Khan in Bihar's Muzaffarpur. Born in Azamgarh's Hariharpur and trained under his father initially, Mishra came to Banaras with a focused ambition to be a serious classical singer who'd sing khayal. But this was Banaras, a city where musical traditions converged, where the spiritual and the sensual sat together. Where a musician couldn't remain untouched by the Purabiya lilt in the cadence of everyday conversations over kachori and malaiyyo, or the dawn chants at the ghats, in Bismillah Khan's shehnai, in the thumris, jhulas and chaitis, as well as in the powerful sound of the famed tabla gharana. Pt Chhannulal Mishra, who died at his daughter's house in Mirzapur on Thursday, leaves behind a music that spoke to everyone.

When Mishra became the toast of festivals and music conferences, he was not just crooning the khayal, which he made accessible by softening its edges, but also the thumri, dadra, chaiti and bhajans — considered semi-classical in the world of music — with the heft of khayal. In fact, when he sang a folk piece like a sohar or a rasiya, it was tied into a raga in a way that it had gravitas for a connoisseur and clarity and ease for the masses. How can one forget the *kathakaar* tradition he'd follow — be it singing verses from Tulsidas's Ramcharitmanas, explaining Ram's birth and concluding with his homecoming. "Toh Tulsi ji kehte hain...," he'd say, or sing "Khele masaane mein Holi Digambar (Shiva plays Holi in the crematorium)", where he'd tell you about Shiva's Holi with ghosts and spirits and how it was different from Krishna's Holi,

He made Banaras his home till the end, a place still steeped in the past. Mishra was cremated with full state honours in his *karmabhoomi*, where he started his career and where he encountered the soul of his music.

# A red line runs through it



Salience of agriculture makes it difficult to imagine global trade pressures trumping livelihoods

SONALDE DESAI

ONCE, I TOOK a group of American students to learn more about the rural parts of India. We spent a couple of weeks in a village, where the students were constantly trailed by giggling children, several of them shouting out questions. So, we decided to hold an assembly at a school where the children could learn about America, with me translating. One of the questions was about the difference between villages in India and those in the US.

One of my students responded, "Well, both Indian and American farmers work hard, but American farmers have larger farms with tractors and other machinery, so they produce more. In the old days, American farmers lived like Indian farmers with outhouses. But now everyone has flush toilets, trucks, and refrigerators." The kids were astounded. They asked, "So everyone wants to live in a village?" The answer, "Not really, many move out and find jobs in cities." This drew a puzzled response: "My brother studied in a city but did not find a job, so he is helping on our farm. Things must be different in America."

Therein lies the difference between the challenges Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Donald Trump face. Opening up Indian markets to American agricultural and dairy products has emerged as a key sticking point in the tariff negotiations. The democratic pressures on the two governments differ vastly. Farm subsidies, mechanisation, and large farm sizes enable the US to produce affordable wheat, soybeans, and other crops. Indian farmers struggle in a low-productivity world where they barely manage to subsist. Whereas agricultural workers form less than two per cent of American workers, in India, they are 45 per cent. While agriculture is an increasingly smaller portion of

Republicans and Democrats are, by and large, united that unchecked immigration is not sustainable. Whatever the economic benefits of lower labour costs with a large pool of immigrants, the social costs, particularly for workers living close to poverty, are unacceptable. It is puzzling why the same empathy can't be shown to Indian farmers, and particularly women dairy

farmers, who have few other

avenues of employment.

Indian GDP — only about 17 per cent by World Bank estimates — the proportion of workers in agriculture has barely declined. Thus, anything that affects agricultural incomes affects a far greater proportion of the population in India than in the US.

India needs to enhance its agricultural productivity and compete effectively in the global market. It needs to generate more jobs in the manufacturing and service industries to reduce crowding in agriculture. However, these are complex challenges without instant solutions, and they are not addressable within the kind of tariff deadlines that seem to be offered. With 65 per cent of the population living in rural areas, farm distress is a genuine concern to both the populace and politicians. It is not surprising that protecting Indian agriculture is the red line around which all Indian political parties have united, whether they belong to the ruling party or the Opposition.

When it comes to dairy, the challenge is even thornier. India produces about a fourth of the dairy products in the world. Almost all of it is consumed locally with little import or export. Unlike the corporatisation of dairy production in the US, India's milk production primarily comes from households that own two or three milk-producing cows or water buffaloes. Women are largely responsible for animal care and milking. Families use the milk for home consumption, but they also sell it when there is excess production. Milk cooperatives such as Amul and Mother Dairy dominate the market. They purchase, pool, and process milk via village-level cooperatives from rural women. According to some estimates, the dairy sector comprises nearly 80 million dairy farmers.

It is the salience of agriculture and dairy farming to the lives of hundreds of millions of Indians that makes it difficult to imagine a scenario in which global trade pressures and corporate profits trump the livelihoods of rural families. Gujarat is the birthplace of cooperative dairying, where the profits of Amul are distributed to more than three million members. In 2019, when there was a possibility of including the dairy sector in a regional trade agreement, the Prime Minister's mailbox was flooded by thousands of handwritten postcards from women in Gujarat, arguably leading to India's withdrawal from the regional partnership.

Indian discourse on agricultural protection is similar to the American discourse on immigration. Republicans and Democrats are, by and large, united that unchecked immigration is not sustainable. Whatever the economic benefits of lower labour costs with a large pool of immigrants, the social costs, particularly for workers living close to poverty, are unacceptable. It is puzzling why the same empathy can't be shown to Indian farmers, and particularly women dairy farmers, who have few other avenues of employment.

Hopefully, someday, manufacturing and services in India will boom, reducing the stress on agriculture. However, until that day arrives, it should not be surprising to Trump and his advisors to fathom why it would be as difficult for Modi to abandon agricultural tariffs as it would be for America to abandon farm subsidies — they began in 1933 and have ranged from \$9 to \$55 billion in recent years.

The writer is distinguished university professor emerita, University of Maryland College Park and professor, National Council of Applied Economic Research, New Delhi.

Views are personal



# OUR COMMON GROUND

What a Colombo cemetery taught me about pluralism and tranquility

# Arefa Tehsin

MOST CHILDREN BEG for ice cream. I, at seven, demanded a graveyard. On our way from Partapur to Udaipur, Daddy pulled over by a lake flanked with graves. To my mother's horror, her gap-toothed daughter wished to stay the night with the departed. My parents finally tore me away from that moonlit playground of bones kicking, screaming and entirely enchanted. Even today, Mummy breaks into her own gaptoothed smile at the memory of her daughter's chosen roommates.

Decades later, in Colombo, I find myself drawn to Kanatte, the Borella Cemetery. The city's sprawling republic of the dead, it offers something we the living struggle with: An unruffled coexistence. Beneath its trees, faiths and races lie together, equal at last. The Buddhist monk and the Catholic nun sleep in the same dormitory. The Hindu priest, the colonial officer, and the coolie are all bunkmates. On the probable chance of being buried here someday, I've drawn up a list of epitaphs:

Epitaph 1: "Here lies Arefa, who finally got her place in Colombo real estate."

A municipal officer quipped a few years back, "The outsiders are dying to be buried here," when they decided on a tenfold increase in plot prices. The 48-acre land of the dead overlooking the posh Royal Golf Club is running out of space, with 50,000 residents already in the ground.

Founded in 1866, Kanatte was supposed to be an exercise in imperial order: Anglicans here, Catholics there, "heathens" in that corner. But the land had its own ideas. Over a century, the necropolis grew into Sri Lanka's most radical experiment in pluralism. If Kotte is a parliament of guar-

While Paris's Père Lachaise is a carnival of celebrity ghosts and Washington's Arlington a parade ground of patriotism, Kanatte is the exuberant republic our countries never quite managed in life. This truth hits hardest where the war dead are buried. Sri Lanka's civil war carved wounds so deep the island still limps, its phantom pains stirred by politicians every election cycle. But Kanatte's soil swallowed the bitterness. Here, soldiers from both sides rest near each other.

rels, Kanatte is its afterlife's parliament, more unanimous than the United Nations. The only bills passed — civet poop and wild grass.

Epitaph 2: "Machang, no more arrack

While under the influence, we may lean on a stranger's shoulder, calling her our sister from another mister, but many of us remain wary of "the other" in our senses. We achieve true unity only when we are horizontal. While Paris's Père Lachaise is a carnival of celebrity ghosts and Washington's Arlington a parade ground of patriotism, Kanatte is the exuberant republic our countries never quite managed in life. This truth hits hardest where the war dead are buried. Sri Lanka's civil war carved wounds so deep the island still limps, its phantom pains stirred by politicians every election cycle. But Kanatte's soil swallowed the bitterness. Here, soldiers from both sides rest near each other. There is no victory or defeat in the angle of the headstones, no separate sections for heroes and traitors. There is only the shared shade of magnificent trees and the quiet understanding that here, no one has an ethnicity — only a date of birth and a date

Epitaph 3: "I was hoping for a pyramid." Oh well, I'll make do with a cenotaph.

Especially since this is a forest within a city, a true urban wilderness. It's a safe haven for monitor lizards sunning themselves on warm tombs, for porcupines in the undergrowth, and for owls calling from high branches. It is a living ecosystem thriving on decay. My kinda place. Epitaph 4: "Gone on my longest safari."

And the quietest. No noisy jeeps, no

selfie sticks, just wild things utterly indifferent to the human stories etched in stone around them. Epitaph 5: "Please lower your voice. Some

of us are still plotting!" The stories are here, half-told, waiting. Tales from the colonial military hospital that

received the dying from passing ships; modern tragedies of love, loss, and political drama. Aspiring authors, are you listening? Epitaph 6: "Gone underground, till tonight." By evening, the mourners leave and the

gates close. The bats rise. Kanatte has a healthy share of ghost stories — men in white who vanish by the mortuary wall, women in saris who flutter under moonlight. The guards report resveem, ghost meetings, where figures coalesce and blur into the night air like an arrack-filled breath. Tombstones or swaying trees never took spooky shapes for me. I find the night cemetery a picture of profound tranquillity. The air grows heavy with frangipani and damp earth, a quiet punctuated by the scurry of a civet or the leathery flap of a fruit bat's wings. The dead are wiser because they have run out of time to be foolish.

Epitaph 7: "If you're reading this, my story still has readers."

Standing here, you realise Kanatte tells a story, too. A silent epic written in granite and grief, it insists that pluralism is not a lofty ideal but an inevitable reality. Do we really need to die to discover our common ground? With this, I list my last future epitaph

"Deadline met. This column ends here."

Tehsin is a Colombo-based writer and environmentalist



# OCTOBER 3, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

# INDIA-MOROCCO SPAT

THE INDIAN AMBASSADOR to Morocco, S N Puri, is likely to wind up the Indian mission in Rabat during the next three or four days, following Morocco's decision to break off diplomatic relations with India. Morocco, which has severed diplomatic ties with India in protest against New Delhi's decision to recognise the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) in Western Sahara, is closing its mission in Delhi.

# RSS CHIEF ON J&K

BALASAHEB DEORAS, CHIEF of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), said that granting a special status to Jammu and Kashmir state had been a mistake. Article

370 he said, had sown the seeds of secession. Addressing a mammoth rally at Ramlila Grounds on the occasion of Gandhi Jayanti, Deoras said the conditions were grave despite some improvements. In this situation, he said, India needed to have a strong Centre.

# LABOURERS IN CAGE

NEARLY 100 BONDED labourers are being kept in a 60-by-15-foot cage made of tin in the midst of cooking fuel, vegetables, rice and wheat in Joshiyara, Uttarkashi district, according to a report of the district judge of Tehri Garhwal. While these labourers were employed by Continental Construction, several other companies including the government's own NPCC have been indicted for

New Delhi

gross violation of labour laws and the Bonded Labour Abolition Act.

# VIOLENCE IN UK

TEN PEOPLE WERE hurt and cars and shops set ablaze as violence spread to more British cities overnight amidst government warnings that the country's "divided" cities were powder kegs waiting to explode. The latest outbreak was in Toxteth, Liverpool, where around 300 youths stoned a police station and set several cars on fire. Violence has hit three major British cities during the last two weeks. Mostly Black mobs, whose principal target has been the police, were involved. The worst outbreak was in Handsworth in Birmingham where two Asians were killed.

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# THE IDEAS PAGE

**DIS/AGREE** THE BEST OF BOTH SIDES

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



Ladakh is restive. What's the way ahead in the ecologically fragile region that is one of the country's most important frontiers?

# In Ladakh, a crisis of representation

Centre should create a conducive atmosphere for talks, end the alienation

not met the aspirations

of the people because it

the office of the

Lieutenant Governor

while sidelining

democratic institutions

like the Ladakh

**Autonomous Hill** 

Development Councils.



Sajjad Hussain Kargili

LEH AND KARGIL, Ladakh's two districts, used to have two different political opinions. The people of Leh had been demanding Union Territory status with a legislature for Ladakh and they wanted separation from Jammu and Kashmir; in Kargil, the people were against the bifurcation of the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

On August 5, 2019, in a way, New Delhi brought them together. When the government announced UT status for Ladakh, the reactions in the two regions were different. In Leh, there was jubilation, while in Kargil, the people protested. Soon, however, Leh realised that despite its UT status, it was without a legislature. And as Ladakh began facing the bureaucratic coils of the new system, the initial euphoria was replaced by disappointment, and the idea of Ladakh's inclusion under the Sixth Schedule took shape.

In September 2020, the "People's Movement for the Sixth

Schedule for Ladakh" which later coalesced into the Leh Apex Body, consisting of various politicians, religious and social organisations, began campaigns for the Sixth Schedule and announced a boycott of the elections to the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC), Leh, which were to be held in October. After days of negotiations, a group of leaders decided to call off the boycott. The Centre assured them. during the 2019 parliamentary elections and the 2020

LAHDC, Leh election, that the Sixth Schedule would be taken care of.

In Kargil, the people were protesting because they didn't want Ladakh to be a UT and were demanding either reintegration with Jammu and Kashmir or for Ladakh to be made a separate state. In August 2021, after thorough deliberation, the Leh Apex Body and the Kargil Democratic Alliance decided to start a struggle for statehood, the Sixth Schedule, a public service commission and separate parliamentary seats for the Leh and Kargil regions. In January 2023, the government constituted the High Powered Committee (HPC) on Ladakh to discuss the issues. Several rounds of talks were held but no concrete outcome emerged. The people in Leh and Kargil are desperately waiting for representation as they feel betrayed.

The people of Ladakh have been deprived on three fronts. First, they have been deprived of a political voice and representation. Second, they lack safeguards for their land and identity, which existed earlier under Articles 370 and 35A. Third, due to the absence of a separate cadre for Ladakh, its bright young men and women are being deprived of job opportunities. This has also come in the way of Ladakh having its own set of bureaucrats.

The Ladakh movement has seen many

ups and downs, with the support of climate activist Sonam Wangchuk, who later became part of the Leh Apex Body, attracting national attention. Through anshan and a padayatra from Leh to Delhi in 2024, Wangchuk has played a pivotal role in galvanising the Ladakh movement through nonviolent and innovative means. His hunger strikes, marches, and environmental activism transformed what many saw as a local issue into a larger struggle for democracy, constitutional safeguards, and

Through Gandhian methods of protest, he not only inspired thousands of Ladakhi youth to participate in peaceful demonstrations but also drew solidarity from across India. His ability to articulate the dangers of unchecked development, loss of land rights, and the fragile Himalayan ecosystem gave intellectual and moral depth to the movement, making him one of the most influential voices demanding statehood and Sixth Schedule protections for Ladakh.

ecological justice.

The UT administration in Ladakh has not met the aspirations of the people because it has centralised power in the office of the Lieutenant Governor while sidelining democratic institutions like the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Councils. The absence of an assembly has left the people with no effective platform to frame laws or decide policies that directly

affect their lives, creating a vacuum. Bureaucratic gov-The administration has ernance, with officials often unfamiliar with the region's socio-cultural and geographical realities, has led to has centralised power in policies that are poorly formulated and implemented, and out of touch with local needs.

> Youth unemployment continues to rise as the administration has failed to generate jobs or protect employment rights for locals. It was unable to recruit a single gazetted officer in the past six years. Decisions are

taken without adequate consultation with local representatives, creating a sense of alienation and mistrust. Instead of empowering people, the UT system has concentrated authority in a handful of officials, leaving Ladakhis feeling ignored, marginalised, and betraved.

Sonam Wangchuk's arrest under the National Security Act has only granted greater thrust and popularity to the issues around Ladakh. On September 24, when violence broke out, some were killed, while others were injured or detained. A lurking threat of such chaos spreading further cannot be ignored if the government does not act on the legitimate demands of the people.

The killing of the four youths during the violence has only made Ladakh angrier and its demands more relevant. In these tough times, the Centre must act with wisdom and sensitivity. Considering Ladakh's strategic importance, it should immediately create a conducive atmosphere for talks and fulfil the demands of the people of Ladakh without further delay.

The writer is a member of the Kargil Democratic Alliance and of the High Powered Committee constituted by the Ministry of Home Affairs to discuss Ladakh

# Balance security with sensitivity

Integration must be accompanied by development and dignity, not coercion or neglect

The most poignant

voices are those of

Ladakh's youth. They

were told that UT status

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they see vacancies

unfilled, exams delayed

and short-term

contracts that feel

like humiliation.



Амітавн Маттоо

LADAKH TEACHES PATIENCE. The thin air at that altitude compels you to slow down; to walk, to breathe, to think in measured rhythm. Life in these mountains is an education in humility: Haste is dangerous, endurance is essential. This is not only biology; it is philosophy. For centuries, Ladakh's monasteries and mosques, its villages, its caravanserais, have reminded us that permanence is an illusion, balance is a necessity, and dialogue the foundation of survival in a fragile ecology.

Delhi must now learn this Ladakhi wisdom. Delhi has shouldered a historic responsibility since 2019, when Ladakh was carved into a Union Territory. For the first time in contemporary times, Ladakh stands as an equal unit of the Union, not an appendage of Kashmir. This was an act of recognition — of Ladakh's loyalty, sacrifice, and identity. With that act, however, came Delhi's special responsibility: To balance security, ecology, and empowerment in a way that secures

both the frontier and the faith of its people.

Ladakh is India's shield every road, power line, and communication system here strengthens national defence. Delhi cannot allow disaffection to weaken the frontier. Ladakh is one of the world's most delicate ecosystems. The retreat of glaciers, depletion of aquifers, and unchecked tourism are slowmoving crises that can destabilise the region more surely than enemy guns. Ecological stewardship is a strategic duty. Empowerment here is

not an indulgence; it is a necessity. People with a stake in their future stand guard more fiercely than those who feel neglected. Empowerment strengthens security.

In the six years since Ladakh was made a Union Territory, the promises of emancipation from Kashmir's shadow have collided with the disappointments of centralised rule. A oncequiet frontier, proud of its loyalty and sacrifices for India, now voices its grievances with clarity and unity. The people of Leh and Kargil, often divided by politics and faith, stand together today through the Leh Apex Body and the Kargil Democratic Alliance, in demanding dignity, empowerment, and constitutional safeguards.

Delhi's response so far has been piecemeal. The presidential regulations of June 2025, which reserve 85 per cent of jobs for locals, recognise five Ladakhi languages, and ensure 33 per cent representation for women in the hill councils, are steps forward. But these concessions, welcome as they are, cannot conceal the deeper malaise — the erosion of local institutions, the defunct hill councils stripped of power, the lack of a public service commission, the sense that outsiders dictate and insiders are marginalised.

The grievances are not only political. The glaciers of the "Third Pole" are retreating faster than anticipated, water is scarcer each year, and unregulated tourism has overwhelmed

traditional systems of conservation. A land once sustained by dry toilets and communal stewardship of springs now drowns in plastic bottles and depleted aquifers. Delhi must resist the temptation to treat Ladakh as a canvas for megaprojects that bring outside workers, disrupt nomadic traditions, and devastate fragile pastures. Development in Ladakh must be redefined — small-scale, community-driven, ecologically sensitive.

The most poignant voices are those of Ladakh's youth — educated, unemployed, disillusioned. They were told that Union Territory status would bring opportunities. Instead, they see vacancies unfilled, exams delayed, and short-term contracts that feel like humiliation. Their despair has spilled onto the streets, most tragically in the protests in the last week of September, when four young lives were lost. It is unconscionable to dismiss these young men and women as "anti-national" or puppets of foreign influence. This is a people whose loyalty is etched in blood. The Ladakh Scouts have defended our highest frontiers since 1947 from the icy ridges of Kargil to the Galwan Valley in 2020. To question Ladakh's patriotism is not only unjust — it is strategically foolish. A loyal frontier once alienated cannot easily be won back.

Delhi's larger dilemma is, of course, real: Ladakh is not merely a land of monasteries and myths, but also of sensitive borders with China and Pakistan. Every adminis-

> trative decision here has national security implications. But caution cannot mean indifference. Nor can security become a pretext for democratic deficit. A frontier as vital as Ladakh is strengthened not by silencing its people but by empowering them. In fact empowerment itself is a tool of national security. A Ladakh that feels ownership of its future will stand firmer in defence of the Republic than one that feels ignored. Integration must be accompanied by development and dignity, not by coercion or neglect.

The way forward is simple: Empower local institutions by strengthening the hill councils and establishing a public service commission.

Adopt an ecological charter, binding on

every project, crafted with scientists, monks, imams, and local leaders. Institutionalise dialogue through a permanent forum for Leh and Kargil, ensuring griev-

ances are addressed before they fester. Balance security with sensitivity, integrating locals into defence-related infrastructure and decision-making.

The mountains of Ladakh whisper a truth that Delhi often forgets — silence is not consent, speed is not progress, and power without empathy is brittle. Ladakh has been India's sentinel, its snow warriors and its saints. It has given its loyalty unstintingly. Today, Ladakh asks not for privilege but for partnership. To respond with imagination and humility is not charity but justice. It is also strategic prudence. For a disaffected Ladakh would weaken India's northern flank; an empowered Ladakh would strengthen it for generations.

The choice is Delhi's. The wisdom is Ladakh's. And the time to listen is now.

The writer is dean and professor, School of International Studies, INU and former member, NSAB

# WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Even though Hamas has not yet given its consent, Trump must not assume that Netanyahu's assent is carved in stone. The concessions Israel is required to make according to the plan may cost Netanyahu his government, and he has already proven how easily he can be pressured or extorted." — HAARETZ, ISRAEL

# Mahatma's quiet courage

It was about discipline, self-mastery, and willingness to put his own life, comfort, and family on the line for principles



DINESH SINGH AND Krishangi Sinha

ON M K GANDHI'S birth anniversary, we pay tribute by highlighting an important but not much-discussed facet of his life. On specific occasions, he displayed moral and physical courage regardless of the consequences. Courage, in Gandhi's life, was never about reckless defiance or dramatic gestures. It was about discipline, self-mastery, and the willingness to put his own life, comfort, and family on the line for principles he believed were higher than fear or personal well-being. Our story commences in Johannesburg

in 1904. The city was gripped by a bubonic plague outbreak. Large numbers of infected patients had been abandoned by their kith and kin. Gandhi volunteered to care for the abandoned sick, ignoring the highly infectious nature of the deadly disease. Gandhi asked for volunteers, but he chose only those who had no family. In contrast, Gandhi himself was 35 years old and his family was entirely dependent on him. An English nurse who had volunteered to be with Gandhi caught the plague and died. Undeterred, Gandhi soldiered on and tried his methods of unorthodox nursing on patients who had been condemned as lost cases. He managed to save several of them, ignoring the grave risk to himself.

Gandhi's exemplary moral courage was equally visible in his personal life. While still young and living in South Africa, his wife Kasturba had to undergo surgery. Unfortunately, immediately thereafter, her health declined to a precarious point. Her doctor insisted on Kasturba imbibing meat broth to give her a chance at surviving. Kasturba, a lifelong vegetarian with deep spiritual convictions, refused. The doctor turned to Gandhi, expecting him to persuade her. Instead, he stood by her decision, refusing to override her conscience even though her life was at stake. As a consequence, he was asked, rather directed, to remove Kasturba from the hospital. He chose to take her home and personally nursed her by administering his nature cure remedies. Fortunately, she recovered. Not for a moment did Gandhi think of forcing Kasturba to abandon her beliefs even though her life was at stake. Of course, one could argue that he should have done everything possible to save her. But, for Gandhi, adherence to his principles was of paramount importance, and in any case Kasturba was just as adamant, for she was a strong-willed woman.

Upon his final return to India from South Africa in 1915, Gandhi set up his ashram in Ahmedabad. The ashram was financially dependent on societal support At the same time, Gandhi was aware that his views opposing the practice of untouchability were at complete variance with societal values. Yet he consciously admitted an "untouchable" family into his ashram. This upset his sponsors, and financial support dried up. The ashram was on the verge of extinction, but Gandhi refused to budge In the nick of time, one of Ahmedabad's most prominent citizens, Ambalal Sarabhai, came to the rescue.

Once, when Gandhi was at the Sabarmati ashram, his eldest and errant son Harilal was in Calcutta and in need of money. Gandhi had forbidden all inmates of the ashram from supporting the wayward habits of Harilal. However, his son Manilal sent some money in secret to Harilal. Upon Gandhi discovering this transgression, Manilal was banished to Madras for an entire year and directed to live there. Manilal was barred from seeking any help or support from any of Gandhi's acquaintances.

There were at least five attempts on Gandhi's life. Once, a bomb was hurled at his motorcade. As luck would have it, the wrong vehicle was damaged. Records also show that Nathuram Godse, well before his assassination of Gandhi, attempted to attack him with a knife but was apprehended. Gandhi refused to file charges against Godse. Gandhi spoke with Godse and also requested him to spend a week with Gandhi at his ashram. Godse refused. The noteworthy thing is that these attempts on Gandhi's life did not deter him; he accepted no police security.

In 1946, communal riots ravaged Noakhali in Bengal. Villages were destroyed, people slaughtered, and fear ran deep. Gandhi chose to make an extended trip to Noakhali. He walked barefoot from one riot-scarred village to another, with no police protection. There was a real danger to his life but he went about his task of engendering peace and harmony. Gandhi's courageous message of peace and compassion worked a miracle and peace prevailed.

The same inner courage and spiritual strength is reflected in a quieter anecdote from his ashram days at Wardha. While meditating, a snake slithered into the prayer area and crawled onto Gandhi's lap. Those around him panicked, but Gandhi signalled them to remain quiet. The snake eventually moved away, and Gandhi resumed his prayer undisturbed. Even if bitten, he said, he would not have allowed the snake to be killed. If this is not proof that he courageously practised what he preached, then nothing else will work.

Singh is former vice-chancellor, University of Delhi and Sinha is a researcher

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

# SIR OUTCOME

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Bihar shows the way' (IE, October 2). The outcome of the Special Intensive Revision of Bihar's electoral rolls would not have been the same had the Opposition (with its popular "voter adhikar yatra"and "vote chori" campaigns), civil society members, and a vigilant media not exposed the many serious flaws in the mammoth exercise, which could have led to the disenfranchisement of lakhs of otherwise eligible voters. Despite the EC's strong objections, the Supreme Court ordered the publication of a searchable list of the 65 lakh names deleted from the draft list along with reasons, as well as the acceptance of Aadhaar as the 12th qualifying document for inclusion in voter lists. The exercise also highlighted the EC's procedural shortcomings, opacity, and visible bias towards the ruling establishment, significantly impacting its credibility.

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Bihar shows the way' (IE, October 2). But for the Supreme Court's intervention, the Opposition's campaign and the media's on-the-ground reports, Bihar's final electoral rolls at the end of the SIR would have been different and less fair. From the deletions effected, it has become clear that there were not too many suspected illegal immigrants who needed to be weeded out. Most of the 68.66 lakh deletions were on account of death, duplication and permanent migration. The *ghuspaithiya* charge framed by the BJP fell flat on its face. The EC should address concerns that eligible voters may have been among those whose names have been deleted. It should consider the applications and

New Delhi

Kamal Laddha, Bengaluru

appeals for inclusion in the electoral roll with an open mind and ensure that no eligible voter is left out. **G David Milton,** Maruthancode

# BANKS AT THE FORE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Wait and watch' (*IE*, October 2). The RBI's recent liberalisation of the role of the banks in capital market lending and its push to expand the rupee's footprint abroad marks an inflexion point in our growing financial stature. Stronger bank participation will deepen markets, ease corporate access to funds, and boost investor trust. Encouraging neighbours to trade in rupees reduces dollar dependence, lowers costs, and positions India as a stabilising hub in South Asia. The rupee's journey outward is no doubt backed by our economic strength. What will be needed is vigilant oversight and transparent regulation to keeprisks in check and sustain trust in he currency. **R Narayanan,** *Navi Mumbai* 

# GAZA PLAN

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'A plan built on sand' (IE, October 1). It's an appreciable step being taken by Donald Trump to introduce a plan to end the war in Gaza. A ceasefire is impossible without mutual trust. But what is the use of trusting the Israeli Prime Minister, who has broken a ceasefire in the past? Who will believe that Benjamin Netanyahu is in favour of ending the war in Gaza while he attacked Qatar itself, where ceasefire negotiations were underway? And now he has seized the unarmed aid group, the Global Sumud Flotilla. The US must ensure that the same mistake is not repeated by Israel.

Raees Hanif, Haryana

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If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to explained@indianexpress.com

# GST 2.0, festive push lagging: What Sept car sales data show

SOUMYARENDRA BARIK NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 2

CAR SALES in the month of September were a mixed bag.

Maruti Suzuki, India's largest carmaker, saw a marginal increase of 2% in overall sales compared to last September, but a sharp 6% decline in domestic sales. Hyundai, another top carmaker, saw a nominal year-on-year (YoY) growth in domestic

sales of less than 1%. On the other hand, the **ECONOMICS** trend was bucked by manufacturers like Mahindra and Tata Motors, who saw a healthy, double-digit

growth compared to September 2024. This mixed bag is despite the fresh Goods and Services Tax (GST) overhaul kicking in on September 22, which has made most cars cheaper than before, and the upcoming festive

season which is expected to drive up car sales.

#### What the data show

■ Maruti Suzuki saw domestic vehicle sales of 1,47,461 units in September 2025 compared to 1,56,999 units in the same month last year. A key reason behind the

slump is the sharp decline in utility vehicle (UV) sales, from 61,549 units last September to 48,695 units last month. Maruti has faced increasing competition from the likes of Tata and Mahindra in this category. The company's outlook would have been more grim were it not for a significant jump in export numbers: Maruti exported 42,204 units in September 2025 compared to 27,728 units in September 2024.

■ Tata Motors sold the second highest number of cars in the country, **EXPLAINED** recording domestic sales of

59,667 units, up 45.3% YoY. The company also recorded its best ever month for electric vehicle (EV) sales, dispatching 9,191

units: a staggering 96% YoY surge. ■ Hyundai reported domestic wholesale sales of 51,547 units in September 2025, a

marginal 0.9% increase over the 51,101 units sold last September. A growth of 17% in sales compared to August, however, suggests that the festive season demand and GST benefits might be beginning to materialise. The company also exported 18,800 units' compared to 13,100 last year.

■ Kia, Hyundai's sister company, saw a decline in YoY sales, registering domestic

Dealers anticipate good sales due to GST 2.0 benefits and the festive season. Express

sales of 22,700 units last month compared to 23,523 units in September 2024.

■ Mahindra and Mahindra sold 56,233 vehicles in the domestic market, a growth of 10%, with overall sales up to 58,714 vehicles.

Cars under new GST It is worth noting that the full effect of GST

**UDIT MISRA** 

ble trends are spotted.

WHEN OBSERVING data pertaining to the

Indian economy, two seemingly incompati-

India's "real" GDP growth (not counting the

effect of inflation) has generally been better

than expected. The GDP is essentially the

overall size of the economy, calculated by

adding expenditures by different entities (in-

(April, May and June) is a case in point. It sur-

prised everyone, including the RBI Governor,

who said as much while announcing the latest

ber as proof that India continues to remain a

bright spot as the fastest-growing major econ-

omy globally, even as countries around the

world struggle to beat economic contraction.

policy moves in recent years have been

about giving some form of tax relief to raise

consumption levels. In February 2023, lead-

ing up to the general elections, the Union

government raised the income tax exemp-

tion limit to Rs 7 lakhs per annum. Two

years later, within a year of Prime Minister

Narendra Modi returning to power with a

reduced mandate, this limit was raised to

Rs 12 lakhs. To be sure, the average annual

income of an Indian in February 2025 was

the Goods and Services Tax rates.

The incongruence

Most recently, cuts were announced to

If the economy is growing fast, surpris-

Additionally, inflation has been a prob-

ing even the policymakers and the markets,

then there would be no need to artificially

lem in the last two years, turning benign only

in recent months. Typically, when an econ-

omy grows at a fast pace, inflation goes up

because the overall supply starts lagging be-

the demand is subdued, inflation cools, and

boost overall demand and consumption.

around Rs 2.3 lakh.

On the other hand, however, most major

The government has pointed to this num-

monetary policy statement on Wednesday.

The high GDP growth rate of 7.8% in Q1

dividuals, companies and governments).

On one hand, official data show that

ground as the changes went into effect with slightly more than a week left in September. Under the next-generation reforms for

2.0 may not yet have translated on the

GST, small cars with engine capacity not exceeding 1200 cc (petrol) and 1500 cc (diesel), and with length not over 4 metre will now be in the 18% slab instead of the 28% plus cess levy earlier.

Bigger cars will be taxed at 40% (as against 28%), with additional compensation cess of 17-22%, taking the total tax to 50% in some cases. All automotive parts will now be taxed at 18%.

These changes may yet drive up sales in the coming months.

#### Pent up demand

The Indian Express had reported that leading up to September 22, showrooms had cut a deserted look as people anticipated big discounts after the GST tax rate reduction. The bump in sales, however, is yet to come.

One car dealer had said that while people from the Muslim and Sikh communities were buying cars, many Hindus were not because of shraadh (which ended late last month).

Dealers have also faced transitional overhaul. For one, those who had requisitioned cars from manufacturers at the older rates have already paid GST and cess on them. These cars, which dealers had stocked up due to the upcoming festive season, were proving difficult to sell — forcing dealers to offer steep discounts out of their own pockets.

Some estimates suggest that dealers could be staring at losses of Rs 2,500 crore, eroding their working capital. It is as yet unclear whether they will receive any relief in terms of refunds, and where such relief might come from.

#### Small cars in decline

According to industry data, sales of entry-level cars priced below Rs 5 lakh — a crucial indicator of demand in the economy given that this segment largely attracts firsttime buyers — is dire.

This segment used to account for nearly a million units a decade ago, with 9,34,538 cars sold in FY16. It has since declined to just 25,402 units in FY25.

According to data collected by the NGO People Research on India's Consumer Economy, which some carmakers refer to internally, car penetration in Indian households that have a yearly income of less than Rs 4 lakh reduced to 1.4% in FY20, from 1.9% in FY16. Car penetration in households that earn between Rs 4 lakh to Rs 7 lakh annually also reduced to 8.3% from 12.1% in the same time period.

Families with incomes of less than Rs 4 lakh and between Rs 4 lakh and Rs 7 lakh are said to make up for around 80% of all Indian households.

# **EXPLAINED GLOBAL**

# HOW FIRST ELECTIONS SINCE ASSAD **OUSTER WILL PAN OUT IN SYRIA**



Syria's interim President Ahmad al-Sharaa. AP

SYRIA WILL hold parliamentary elections on Sunday for the first time since its longtime autocratic leader, Bashar al Assad, was unseated in a rebel offensive last December. Under the 50-year rule of the Assad

dynasty, Syria held regular elections in which all Syrian citizens could vote. In practice, Assad's Ba'ath Party always dominated the parliament, and polls were widely regarded as rigged.

The result of the elections to be held on Sunday will be taken as a barometer of how serious the interim authorities are about democracy and inclusivity, particularly of women and minorities.

# How the system works

The People's Assembly has 210 seats, of which two-thirds will be elected on Sunday, and one-third appointed. The elected seats are voted upon by electoral colleges in districts countrywide: about 6,000 members vote in 50 districts for about 120 seats. The number of seats for a district is distributed based on population.

All candidates come from the membership of the electoral colleges, and are running as individuals since the interim authorities dissolved all existing political parties.

# Why no popular vote

The interim authorities say that it would be impossible to create an accurate voter registry and conduct a popular vote at this stage, given that millions of Syrians were internally or externally displaced by the country's nearly 14-year civil war, and many have lost personal documents.

This parliament will have a 30-month term, during which the government is supposed to prepare the ground for a popular vote in the next elections.

Haid Haid, a senior research fellow at the Arab Reform Initiative and the Chatham House think tank said that the lack of clear selection criteria for electors is a concern. "Especially when it comes to choosing the subcommittees and the electoral colleges, there is no oversight, and the whole process is sort of potentially vulnerable to manipulation," he said.

There have been widespread objections after electoral authorities "removed names from the initial lists...and did not provide detailed information as to why those names were removed," he said.

# Questions about inclusivity

There is no set quota for the representation of women and religious or ethnic minorities in the parliament.

Women were required to make up 20% of electoral college members, but that did not guarantee that they would make up a comparable percentage of candidates or of those elected. According to the head of the national elections committee, Mohammed Taha al-Ahmad, women made up 14% of the 1,578 candidates who made it to the final lists. In some districts, women make up 30% or 40% of all candidates, while in others, there are no female candidates.

Meanwhile, the exclusion of the Druze-majority Sweida province and Kurdish-controlled areas in the northeast, as well as the lack of set quotas for minorities, has raised questions about the representation of communities that are not part of the Sunni Arab national majority. The issue is particularly sensitive after outbreaks of sectarian violence in recent months in which hundreds of civilians from the Alawite and Druze minorities were killed.

AP

STATE OF NOMINAL GDP GROWTH IN Q1

Growth rate*	Total nominal GDP of India	Exp on pvt consumption (PFCE)	Exp on investment (GFCF)	Govt exp on daily affairs (GFCE)	Total income of companies
Jun 2019	8.4	10	10.7	1	4.1
Jun 2020	-21.4	-25.2	-78.2	13.6	-27.4
Jun 2021	33	20.7	45.3	-1.8	39.9
Jun 2022	25.5	23.6	25.7	14.6	36.6
Jun 2023	11	7.8	7.4	8.5	6.1
Jun 2024	9.7	11.6	7.7	4	9.7
Jun 2025	8.8	8.4	7.6	9.7	6.5
*(in %; Year-c	on-Year)			Exp=	expenditure

**EXPLAINED ECONOMICS** 

The curious case of GDP data

The growth of India's real GDP has frequently outperformed expectations. Yet policymakers continue to

try and boost consumption. If the economy is indeed growing fast, why are these interventions needed?

Source: CMIE, The Indian Express research

tax and interest rate cuts.

On the face of it, growth is running hot, and yet policymakers are trying to boost demand. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said, "With GST rates coming down, consumption can go up. The more the demand, the companies which are selling these products will have to invest more and produce more. More production will lead to more jobs, which means the tax base will widen because more people will have income to buy things and pay taxes. That will lead to a foundation for even lesser taxes".

# An alternative view

What if one of the two trends is not as robust as it seems? Of course, tax cuts and efforts to boost consumption are very much real. The obvious point of inquiry is then the growth rate.

Typically, economists look at the real GDP growth rate, but this figure is calculated after removing the effect of inflation from the nominal GDP growth. Data is actually collected only for the latter.

The calculation of the real GDP has come under questioning in the past few years. Many analysts have claimed that the real GDP growth rate is overstating India's economic momentum, while the government has argued that detractors use the nominal GDP data to show weakness in growth.

While looking at real GDP data is always better for judging growth, it may be instructive to look at the nominal GDP growth rate for many reasons:

■ It is the actual observed variable and thus, less susceptible to being questioned.

hind fast-rising demand. Alternatively, when ■ Nominal GDP is the main benchmark policymakers try to boost demand through for almost all the key economic variables —

tax collections, overall debt and gross fiscal deficit are benchmarked to nominal GDP.

■ Soon, the process of formulating the next Union Budget will start, and the nominal GDP and its growth rate will be the starting point for all calculations.

■The nominal GDP captures the demand story of the economy better than the real GDP, which maps the supply story better.

Additionally, nominal GDP data can help compare the economic momentum from before the Covid-19 pandemic. Economic data since April 2020 have suffered several statistical anomalies because of events like the lockdowns and the sharp spike in inflation as a result of the Russia-Ukraine war.

But in 2019-20, inflation was largely contained within policy range, even as the economy showed signs of a sharp slowdown with reports of rising car and two-wheeler inventories as consumption started slumping.

#### What the data show The Table shows the nominal GDP growth

rates for the first quarter of recent years. It is instructive also because Q1 was most affected by the pandemic.

The table shows year-on-year growth rates of nominal GDP as well as the three main components of GDP. First is the expenditure by Indians in their private capacity (called Private Final Consumption Expenditure), also the biggest engine of GDP growth, accounting for 55% to 60% of the GDP.

Second are expenditures made towards investments (both by private businesses as well as the government) into raising the productive capacity of the country. This is called Gross Fixed Capital Formation, accounting for another 25%-30% of India's GDP.

ernment to run its daily affairs (excluding investments such as roads). This accounts for the remaining 10% of GDP. Then comes the total income of the corporate economy, capturing another side of demand. For Q1 of the current year, it is clear that

Third are expenditures made by the gov-

growth is being buoyed up by government expenditure. Without government expenditure growing at 9.7%, the overall nominal growth rate would have been significantly lower. The deceleration in nominal growth

rates, both for GDP as well as private consumer demand and investment by businesses, is also significant over the past two years. This may explain why, despite very strong real GDP growth rates, policymakers have been trying their best to boost consumption and investments.

It is instructive to look at the data for Q1 in 2019, which was the best quarter of that financial year (2019-20). The full year nominal GDP (at 6.4%) grew at a significantly lower rate. In real terms, the GDP growth had slumped to less than 4% in 2019-20.

Finally, the growth rates of corporate India are quite in line with nominal GDP growth rates, as well as the notion that India's consumption continues to be a weak point Without private consumption, it is hardly surprising that businesses have been holding back new investments.

# **Upshot**

While nominal GDP is not the best tool to compare long-term growth, primarily because inflation rates are significantly different and, as such, distort the picture, data show the sharp slide in nominal GDP growth rates.

It is not difficult to see why this would be a matter of worry for all policymakers: the nominal GDP growth rate sets the ceiling for economic growth in the country.

Historically, back-of-the-envelope calculations for India went something like this: 12% nominal GDP growth, 4% inflation, and, as a result, 8% real GDP growth rate. But if the nominal GDP growth rate itself starts to hover around 8% or 9%, it could quickly translate into a challenge for real GDP growth. That's because barring exceptional times or statistical anomalies, India's economy, unlike developed countries will likely continue to have an inflation rate closer to 4%, at least for the retail consumer.

This explains why, despite publicly defending the strong real GDP growth rates, policymakers in India continue to act as if the economy is actually much weaker.

# In US, attempts to tighten H-1B visa norms have long, bipartisan history

**JOHNSON TA** 

BENGALURU, OCTOBER 2

THE US administration's decision to introduce a \$100,000 fee for new H-1B visas has created concerns in the Indian IT industry, considered among the biggest beneficiaries of this scheme.

The September 19 proclamation aims to restrict the 'exploitation' of H-1B visas to reduce labour costs through the use of foreign workers — like Indian IT employees

 at the cost of US citizens. However, Indian IT companies with US business interests say they are not surprised by the decision. Over the last decade, there have been multiple efforts in the US to regulate the use of H-1B visas.

### Previous attempts

During Trump's last term, there was speculation that he would issue an executive order titled 'Protecting American Jobs and Workers by Strengthening the Integrity of Foreign Worker Visa Programmes'.

A leaked version of the proposed executive order in early 2017 caused worries in the Indian IT sector, which earns 60% of its IT services revenues from the US market.

Other efforts to overcome the shortcomings in the H-1B system were through legislation, rather than through executive orders or proclamations, as seen in the Trump administrations.

In 2015, US politicians Charles Grassley and Dick Durbin proposed an H1-B and L-1 Visa Reform Act seeking to deny H-1B

visas to firms having more than 50 employees if more than 50% of such employees had work visas. The H-1B and L-1 Visa Reform Act of

2016, introduced by Bill Pascrell and Dana Rohrabacher, also sought to prohibit companies from hiring H-1B **EXPLAINED** 

employees if they employ more than 50 people and if more than 50 per cent of their employees are H-1B and L-1 visa holders.

In January 2017, two Republicans from California, Darell Issa and Scott Peters, introduced a Bill called the 'Protect and Grow American Jobs Act' in the US Congress to raise wages for high-skill jobs to \$100,000 per year from \$60,000, and to make master's degrees mandatory to qualify to work

In February 2017, the High-Skilled Integrity and Fairness Act of 2017, introduced by Democrat Congresswoman Zoe Lofgren, prescribed, among other changes, a minimum wage of \$130,000 for H-1B workers,

> instead of the \$60,000 in existence since 1998, so that bringing in foreign workers would not be a cheaper way out for em-

ployers.

**IMMIGRATION** 

# Trump's proposals

Among the proposals were reportedly inspections of places employing foreign workers under the L-1 visa category and, later, of all workplaces employing foreign workers.

Proposals also included curbing visas granted for job training to those pursuing science, technology, engineering and mathematics master's courses in US universities, and also barring work permits for the spouses of H1B visa holders.

# Rationale behind recent move

According to the proclamation, "The H-1B nonimmigrant visa programme was created to bring temporary workers into the United States to perform additive, high-skilled functions, but it has been deliberately exploited to replace, rather than supplement, American workers with lower-paid, lower-skilled labour."

"Information technology (IT) firms in particular have prominently manipulated the H-1B system, significantly harming

New Delhi

American workers in computer-related fields," the order says.

The share of IT workers in the H-1B programme grew from 32% in 2003 to an average of over 65% in the last five years, with the "most prolific H-1B employers" being IT outsourcing companies, the order states.

"American IT workers have reported they were forced to train the foreign workers who were taking their jobs and to sign non-disclosure agreements about this indignity as a condition of receiving any form of severance. This suggests H-1B visas are not being used to fill occupational shortages or obtain highly skilled workers who are unavailable in the United States," the order states.

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# Prudent pause

MPC is right in holding on to rates now

t may seem counter-intuitive that India's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) should hold the repo rate at 5.5 per cent despite revising both its inflation and growth projections downwards. But the pause seems to be a pragmatic decision. Except during Covid when the repo rate fell to 4 per cent, 5 per cent has been the effective floor for India's policy rates given normal inflation rates of 5-6 per cent. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) also knows fully well that the projections made in its policy reviews are just lines in the sand subject to monsoon performance, global trade dynamics, geopolitics and other imponderables.



In this review, RBI has reduced its inflation projection to 2.6 per cent for FY26 from the 3.1 per cent in the August review. The real GDP growth estimate is now at 6.8 per cent from the 6.5 per cent in August, but this is only because RBI had to factor in the 7.8 per cent GDP print for Q1. It is now assuming that growth will moderate to 7 per cent in Q2 and decline further to 6.4 per cent in Q3 and 6.2 per cent by Q4 FY26. Given the fraught global situation, a section of the market was clamouring for a front-ended rate cut to boost domestic growth. However, the MPC is right to stay on pause on several counts. One, tumbling food prices have played a big role in moderating domestic inflation numbers in recent times and food prices are notoriously fickle. Globally, inflation numbers are yet to reflect the pass-through effects of Trump tariffs, with both their nature and quantum still up in the air. Reports of China aggressively pruning excess capacity in critical industrial materials suggest that one cannot take recent disinflationary trends in commodities for granted. The sub-3 per cent inflation prints that India has seen recently are in any case, abnormal by historical standards. Two, while Q1 GDP growth has sprung a surprise, this was helped both by a low base effect (due to elections last year) and a low deflator which may not sustain.

Hopes for a pickup in exports are fading as the logjam in India-US tariff talks stretches on. Should the 50 per cent US reciprocal tariff on goods become permanent or the threatened tariff on services exports become a reality, India could experience serious second-order effects on its employment, consumption and growth from Q3 FY26. While global financial markets may appear outwardly calm today, the relentless spiral in gold prices and rising sovereign bond yields hint at a brewing storm. Markets are currently nervous over a looming sovereign debt crisis in the advanced economies. Murmurs about an AI-linked bubble, which has been propping up both US GDP and American stock markets, are growing louder. These events, even if they have their epicentre in the West, can lead to a risk-off scenario where emerging markets like India face the music on capital outflows, weakening currencies and falling stock and markets. Not cutting policy rates in its October review arms the MPC with dry powder to act at short notice, should these risks manifest.

#### OTHER VOICES.

Trump's Argentina bailout: it's a political play

Last month, the US treasury secretary, Scott Bessent, vowed to do "whatever it takes" to support Argentina's rightwing president, Javier Milei, a key ally of Donald Trump. Markets aren't convinced. On Tuesday, the peso plunged by more than 6%before a central bank intervention clawed back losses. Argentine stocks abroad fell 7%, and the risk premium on its debt rose to 12.3 percentage points – far beyond sustainable borrowing levels. The rout continued on Wednesday. Mr Bessent admitted the aid was meant to prop up Mr Milei after his La Libertad Avanza (Freedom Advances) party lost decisively in a key election last month. But no terms have been confirmed. With US Republicans angry over Mr Milei's tax breaks for soy farmers that undercut US producers, markets are asking the obvious: is the Bessent bazooka real, or just for show? LONDON, OCTOBER 1



#### **BOJ's Sept. Tankan Survey Improves**

While Japan has managed to weather the adverse effects of U.S. President Donald Trump's tariff policy, there are more than a few causes for concern. It is hoped that the government and the Bank of Japan will formulate necessary measures to vitalize the Japanese economy. The central bank has released the results of its Tankan quarterly economic survey for September. The diffusion index indicates corporate business confidence. The index for large manufacturing companies, which is a leading indicator, was 14, up 1 percentage point from the previous quarter, marking an improvement for the second consecutive quarter. The latest Tankan survey was the first conducted after the Japan-U.S. tariff negotiations concluded and a 15% tariff rate, in principle, was applied regarding "reciprocal tariffs" and tariffs on automobiles. TOKYO, OCTOBER 2

# The promise of tokenised deposits

**DIGITAL THRUST.** With careful design and implementation, it can help banks retain low-cost deposits and spur credit growth in the rapidly growing digital economy





**BIBEKANANDA PANDA RUTH KATTUMURI** 

ndia's financial ecosystem is undergoing a subtle yet profound transformation. In recent years, the saving behaviour has been undergoing a cultural change and evidence suggests that households and corporates are increasingly redirecting their savings from traditional bank deposits into capital markets.

This change poses challenges for banks as they are finding it harder to retain low-cost deposits. The steady erosion of current and savings accounts (CASA) undermines banks' ability to support credit growth.

This structural shift is not unique to India. Globally, banks and regulators are responding to similar pressures by reimagining the nature of money. At the centre of this evolution lies deposit tokenisation — the conversion of conventional bank deposits into programmable digital tokens recorded on distributed ledger technology (DLT). These tokens preserve the legal status of deposits but acquire the agility of digital assets, enabling real-time settlement, smart contract integration, and cross-border interoperability.

India has yet to formally experiment with deposit tokenisation; however, the concept is firmly on the regulator's radar. At the IADI Asia-Pacific Conference in June 2024, RBI's former Deputy Governor Michael D. Patra acknowledged the potential of tokenised deposits to "increase liquidity, reduce costs, and enable 24×7 accessibility." He highlighted applications in "domestic and cross-border payments, trading and settlement, and cash collateral management," while also cautioning that such instruments could "amplify the speed and scale of withdrawals during stress events."

This duality — promise and peril makes it imperative for India to design and develop a deposit tokenisation framework that is both innovative and

#### THE DETAILS

Deposit tokenisation does not alter the fundamental nature of banking. Customers continue to deposit money

with banks, which issue digital tokens backed 1:1 by fiat currency. These tokens are recorded on permissioned distributed ledgers and can be used for payments, settlements, or collateral. At any point, they may be redeemed for fiat money, with the bank "burning" the tokens and crediting the depositor's account. Tokenised deposits remain liabilities of regulated banks, subject to the same prudential norms as traditional

Unlike stablecoins or cryptocurrencies, deposit tokens are redeemable at par and regulated by the banking authority. Among the most powerful features of tokenised deposits is atomic settlement — the capacity to finalise transactions instantly and irreversibly, eliminating counterparty and settlement risk. Traditional settlement systems rely on intermediaries, reconciliation, and time lags that inflate costs and increase complexity.

Tokenised deposits, combined with smart contracts, ensure both legs of a transaction — cash and securities, for instance - settle simultaneously or not at all. The implications for securities settlement, cross-border remittances, and collateral management are profound.

One common question is whether deposit tokenisation could impair banks' ability to lend. The answer is no, provided the system is prudently designed. Tokenised deposits remain bank liabilities and can be deployed for credit creation just like conventional deposits. Indeed, tokenisation may strengthen credit intermediation by enhancing liquidity transparency, enabling automated collateralisation, and mobilising idle balances more

The concern around banks creating extra money from customer deposits also warrants clarification. The

#### Tokenised deposits remain bank liabilities and can be deployed for credit creation just like conventional deposits.

It may also strengthen credit intermediation by enhancing liquidity transparency

fractional reserve model of banking remains intact: banks continue to transform short-term deposits into long-term credit under regulatory oversight. What changes is not the function of deposits but the way they are recorded and transacted. Far from hollowing out banks, tokenisation could reinforce their centrality in a digital-first economy

The urgency for India lies in the erosion of CASA deposits. Customers are chasing higher returns in mutual funds, equities, and bonds, leaving banks with rising funding costs and shrinking liquidity buffers.

Tokenised deposits could help stem this outflow by making deposits more functional and attractive. Instead of being passive balances, they could become programmable instruments embedded into capital market and transaction workflows

For instance, programmable Systematic Investment Plans (SIPs) could be executed directly from tokenised deposits. IPO proceeds could be settled atomically in real time. Corporate treasuries could manage liquidity across borders seamlessly. Deposits, in other words, would no longer compete with capital markets but would be integrated, thus keeping liquidity within the banking system.

Of course, risks remain. Tokens held in off-bank self-custody wallets could

temporarily reduce usable liquidity. But safeguards such as tiered wallet limits, redemption throttles, and supervisory dashboards can mitigate such risks while still enabling innovation.

#### THE OPPORTUNITY

Central banks and major financial institutions globally are piloting deposit tokenisation with varying degrees of ambition.

Singapore's Project Guardian, led by the Monetary Authority of Singapore, is exploring tokenised deposits for FX settlement and collateral management. Hong Kong's Project Ensemble combines tokenised deposits with wholesale CBDCs to streamline cross-border settlement. The Bank of Korea has tested retail-scale tokenised it payments with over individuals. Europe's Regulated Liability Network (RLN) and Germany's blueprint for commercial bank money tokens show how regulated deposits can transition into the digital age. Swiss

Bankers Association (SBA), with participation from UBS, PostFinance, and Sygnum Bank has been testing blockchain-based tokenized deposits for interbank payments and smart contract integration. J.P. Morgan's deposit token model JPMD supports programmable liquidity and settlement workflows without impairing lending capacity. Meanwhile, the Bank for International Settlements (BIS) Project Agorá, involving seven central banks, is trialling smart contract-based settlement using tokenised liabilities.

These pilots converge on a shared insight: tokenised deposits can combine the safety of regulated banking with the agility of digital money. Their effect stabilising or destabilising — depends entirely on the design of safeguards and the regulatory perimeter.

India is well placed to build on potential opportunities with tokenised deposits. The RBI has already recognised both the potential and the risks. The logical next step would be to conduct controlled pilots, perhaps within GIFT City's regulatory sandbox, to test tokenised deposits in live environments while closely monitoring systemic implications.

This would enable Banks to retain liquidity by embedding deposits within capital market workflows rather than losing them to external platforms. Customers would gain faster, cheaper, and more flexible services.

Regulators would have real-time visibility into liquidity flows and systemic risks. And transaction banking could evolve into a 24×7, low-cost, transparent service powered by atomic settlement.

Deposit tokenisation is an opportunity for banks to benefit from existing and rapidly evolving digital financial instruments. It does not change the essence of deposits as liabilities of regulated banks, nor does it impair their role in credit creation. Instead, it strengthens banks' relevance to adapt with a rapidly growing digital-first economy.

With careful design and phased implementation, deposit tokenisation could help Indian banks retain low-cost liquidity, support credit growth, and digital economy.

Panda is Visiting Fellow, and Kattumuri is Co-Chair India Observatory, London School of Economics and Political Science. Views expressed are personal

# Does Arattai have the muscle to take on WhatsApp?

While the app has shown strong positive momentum, it will need to significantly scale its infra and customer support

**bl**explainer

Rohan Das

What is Arattai? Why is it suddenly growing in popularity? Arattai is an indigenous messaging app built by Indian SaaS firm Zoho. Launched in 2021 as a made-in-India alternative to WhatsApp, Arattai has come into limelight recently after a host of Ministers from the Government of India including Dharmendra Pradhan. Piyush Goyal and Ashwini Vaishnav among others expressed their support and intent to move to the platform for their communication needs.

What are the key features of the app?

Arattai primarily allows users to send text/voice messages, make audio/video calls, share stories, connect through groups/channels and share images, documents and media files.

Arattai can be used across multiple devices, including smartphones, tablets and desktops with messages, contacts and settings being synced. It also has a web app.

#### What is Arattai's user base and how does it compare to WhatsApp?

According to estimates from Sensor Tower, a market intelligence firm, Arattai has amassed about 400,000 downloads in India in September month-to-date (MTD) as against less than 10,000 downloads in August.

According to company, the platform has crossed 1 million users as opposed to WhatsApp which has over 500 million users in the country.



**ARATTAI.** Growing popularity

Can Arattai displace WhatsApp from its pole position? While the app has shown strong positive

momentum it will need to significantly scale its infrastructure and customer support capabilities to compete with a global giant like WhatsApp. The network effects of WhatsApp, with everyone in the community being on it, is also its strength.

What are likely to be the challenges?

Beyond the operational demands, the platform will need to win users' trust and confidence.

A key challenge among social media users has been concerns on data security and its policies on sharing user data with the government.

Zoho has stated that data safety and privacy is a priority, and that the user will have full control over their end-to-end encrypted data.

While similar indigenous apps like Koo and Hike generated widespread initial interest, they were unable to

sustain the momentum. The ability to create a compelling differentiation from existing platforms and gain/retain significant user traction will be key for Arattai to continue its

growth trajectory.

● 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.

#### **Right move by RBI**

The RBI's recent liberalisation of banks' role in capital market lending and its push to expand the rupee's footprint abroad mark an inflexion point in our growing financial stature. Stronger bank participation will deepen markets, ease corporate access to funds, and boost investor trust. Encouraging neighbours to trade in rupees reduces dollar dependence, lowers costs, and positions India as a stabilising hub in South Asia. The rupee's journey outward is no

doubt backed by our economic

strength.

What would be needed is vigilant oversight and transparent regulation to keep risks in check and sustain trust on the currency. With discipline and vision, this liberalisation can pave the way for the rupee to emerge as a credible regional, and in time, a global medium of exchange

R Narayanan

#### **MPC** acts prudently

This refers to 'MPC is right in holding on to rates now' (October 2). One tends to endorse its observations stating that the MPC's

pause seems to be a pragmatic decision even as there was a huge clamour for the repo rate-cut amongst some economists and various study groups of commercial banks owing to some healthy position on retail inflation front, well within RBI's inflation targeting norms, a temporary phenomenon, for sure.

In fact, MPC seems to have acted wisely and prudently too, keeping in view highly unpredictable weather conditions which may turn 'kaput' extant global trade dynamics and many other external factors that

invariably remain beyond its control. A Gupta

#### **Cautious stance**

The RBI's decision to maintain status quo on key policy rates, signals a cautious stance amid domestic and global uncertainties. The move reflects the central bank's intent to closely monitor the impact of recent GST revisions, alongside geopolitical developments that continue to influence crude oil prices, currency stability, and capital flows. Ironically, even as the RBI holds back from rate changes, it has lowered its inflation

projection for FY26 to 2.6 per cent, from its earlier forecast of 3.1 per cent. This downward revision indicates confidence in moderating price pressures, despite global risks. The contrast between maintaining policy caution and projecting softer inflation underlines the RBI's balancing act preserving stability while avoiding premature shifts. Overall, the decision conveys a message of steadiness, reassuring markets that the RBI remains committed to a data-driven approach in navigating India's

S Lakshminarayanan Puvanur, TN

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{ OUR TAKE }

# Restating a legacy link

Russian president's India visit is an occasion to balance Delhi-Moscow ties

resident Vladimir Putin is set to visit New Delhi in December for the first time since the invasion of Ukraine, and at a time when Russia is a crucial player in India's efforts to achieve a balance amid growing uncertainty on the global stage as well as a source of friction in India-US relations. The visit will be a timely opportunity for India and Russia to add more substance to the relationship and to seek ways to insulate it from the punitive measures imposed by the US and its western allies.

While Russia has emerged as one of the largest suppliers of energy for India, there are increasing signs that the US and the European Union (EU) intend to impose greater curbs on Russian oil exports as part of their efforts to end the war in Ukraine. Two-way trade continues to be skewed in Russia's favour, and not much has happened to improve access for Indian goods to Russian markets or to diversify the trade basket. The Indian side must use the time remaining before Putin's visit to firm up a plan to address the issues hampering the growth of balanced trade. Greater efforts must be made to make the India-Russia relationship more forward-looking, especially in areas such as investment, technology and security. At the same time, the Indian side should reinforce its messaging regarding the ending of the war in Ukraine because, as New Delhi has said repeatedly, it has significant ramifications for the Global South, and would also help address issues affecting ties with the US.

Just as India works on recalibrating ties with Russia, it should also explore the opportunities offered by the Asean Summit in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in October 26-28, including a potential meeting on the sidelines between PM Narendra Modi and US President Donald Trump. This would, of course, depend on both leaders confirming their participation in the multilateral forum, something that continues to be uncertain. However, it is becoming increasingly clear that only a push from the highest levels of the Indian and American leadership can help overcome the issues that have taken the relationship to its lowest point in nearly two decades. The focus has to be on expanding trade and strategic ties with as many countries as possible, rather than being imprisoned within any bloc. But in all these efforts, the Indian side should not waver from its course of strategic autonomy and the push for a truly multipolar world order.

# Artist in exile: In Doha, a tribute to MF Husain

■ ndia's loss is Qatar's gain. *Lawh Wa Qalam*: MF Husain Museum will open in Doha late November, showcasing the artistic oeuvre of arguably the most inventive artist of Indian modernism. The 3,000square metre building, built according to the architectural vision shared by Husain, will present a curated story of his artistic journey from the 1950s until his death in 2011 (in exile from his homeland). It will feature his paintings, films, tapestry, photography, poetry and installations. The museum building, in itself an artwork, will pay homage to this wandering soul, who left his hometown, Vithoba's Pandharpur in Maharashtra, to pursue art in cities across India, and, after being hounded out by Hindu extremists, relocated to Qatar, and finally, died at the age of 95 in 2011 as an exile in London, and preserve his legacy as a storyteller on the canvas, drawing inspiration from Indic storytelling traditions. In the 1960s, influenced by Ram Manohar Lohia, Husain created large works based on the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. In the last stages of his life, in Qatar, with royal patronage, Husain produced visual interpretations of the Arab civilisation, going back to the region's pre-Islamic past, and its rich corpus of scientific knowledge.

Lawh Wa Qalam is coming up at a time when there is increasing interest worldover in Indian art and nonwestern modernist art. For sure, it will, over the years, become a must-visit spot for art lovers, just as the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam or the Museu Picasso in Barcelona. India let go of Husain, though his works are with private collectors and galleries in India, who are diffident about celebrating his brilliance and versatility for political reasons. This is also a moment to contemplate investing in our great artists and art movements: The Indian scene is short of such wellcurated and dedicated art spaces (KCS Paniker and Raja Ravi Varma galleries, and the soon-to-be inaugurated A Ramachandran gallery in Kerala, Roerich Museum in Naggar, Himachal Pradesh, and the Jamini Roy House in Kolkata are exceptions). Restating the genius of Husain could be a beginning.

# 100 years of the RSS: The spirit remains unchanged

The RSS's politics of engagement is reflected in the way it approaches regions and communities beyond its traditional base

hen KB Hedgewar founded the Rashtriva Swavamsevak Sangh (RSS) in Nagpur on September 27, 1925, few could have imagined the remarkable journey it would embark on over the years. The RSS today stands as a living epitome of selfless service that has shaped India's social fabric, defended its sovereignty, empowered its vulnerable communities, and also nurtured timeless civilisational values. As the RSS celebrates its centenary, it is worthwhile to revisit its

At a recent event in Delhi, RSS sarsanghchalak (chief) Mohan Bhagwat asserted, "Religion is by individual choice; there should be no allurement or force in this." This view echoes the Sangh's founding philosophy: To build a society rooted in harmony rather than conflict, collective strength rather than division, and character building, not just material wellbeing. Through daily shakha (local chapter) meetings and volunteer-driven initiatives, the RSS seeks to foster discipline, resilience, and pride in India's cultural heritage, shaping individuals who view service to the nation as their highest calling.

It was, therefore, not a surprise when Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi, in his speech on this Independence Day, lauded the RSS for its century-long role in nation-building. He reminded Indians how the RSS stands out as one of the most influential socio-cultural movements in independent India.

Independence came shrouded in the tragedy of Partition. Amid this tragedy, RSS swavamsevaks rescued, rehabilitated, and protected countless victims of the carnage. Under the leadership of the second sarsanghchalak, MS Golwalkar, and other senior leaders, the

RSS mobilised communities set up refugee camps, provided food and medical aid, escorted vulnerable families to safety, and organised defences for besieged homes. Even Congress leaders, overwhelmed by the situation, reportedly sought the Sangh's assistance to protect their families and communities in Punjab. No wonder The Tribune called the RSS "the sword

arm of Puniab" This spirit endured beyond Partition. During the anti-Sikh riots of 1984, the RSS provided shelter and relief to the Sikh community. Acknowledging this noted author Khushwant Singh said that the RSS played an honourable role in maintaining Hindu-Sikh unity before and after the assassination of Mrs. Indira Gandhi"

Considering this legacy, it is unfounded and erroneous when some people accuse the RSS of being a majoritarian organisation. During Independence, it helped protect India's minorities and their places of worship. In March 1947, when mobs instigated by the Muslim League headed toward the Golden Temple, RSS volunteers armed with swords and *lathis* confronted them, forcing a retreat. Three days later, when another assault threatened the sacred Sikh shrine, RSS swayamsevaks formed a human ring of defence and fought for hours, successfully repelling the attackers.

The RSS's role in the country's integration is even less known. From Kashmir to Goa to Dadra and Nagar Haveli, it has played a decisive role in preserv ing India's territorial integrity. When Pakistan-backed tribal invaders attacked Jammu & Kashmir, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel sought Gol-

Singh, the then princely state's ruler, to join India. Golwalkar travelled to Srinagar and impressed upon him the strategic necessity of immediate accession. RSS volunteers also aided the Army during the 1947-48 war by managing supplies, logistics, and relief for refugees fleeing areas like Mirpur and

Singh

Muzaffarabad

walkar's help to persuade Hari

In 1954, swavamsevaks spearheaded the liberation of Dadra and Nagar Haveli from Portuguese control. According to KR Malkani's book The RSS Story, "On 2 August 1954, some 200 RSS swayamsevaks, led by Nana Kajrekar and Sudhir Phadke, liberated Dadra and Nagar Haveli, putting to flight 175 Portuguese soldiers armed with rifles. Bren guns, and Sten guns." Similarly,

movements to fight for Goa's liberation. The RSS has always fought for strengthening India. During the 1975 Emergency, the Sangh became the resistance's backbone, mobilising people to defend the Constitution. The Economist wrote in January 1976, "The shock troops of the movement come largely from the Jana Sangh and its

the RSS joined underground freedom



The RSS has always fought for strengthening India. During the 1975 Emergency, the Sangh became the resistance's backbone.

affiliate RSS, which claim a combined membership of 10 million, of whom 80,000, including 6,000 full-time workers, are in prison." At a time when people and institutions were willing to crawl when told to merely bend, the

RSS fought against authoritarianism. The RSS has also devoted itself to uplifting tribals and marginalised communities. The Akhil Bharativa Vanyasi Kalvan Ashram, founded in 1952, operates more than 20,000 projects across 52,000 villages in 323 districts of the country, covering education, health care, skill development, and cultural revival. The RSS's approach has been to bring tribals into the national mainstream without compromising their original identities, bolstering their tribal pride while integrating them with the larger Indian identity.

The RSS is also often unfairly criticised regarding its relationship with Mahatma Gandhi. There were some differences of opinion between Gandhi and the RSS on certain issues — just as there were within the Congress itselfbut it would be misleading to portray their relationship in terms of hostility or rivalry. Their differences never stood in the way of mutual regard. This was evident in 1934, when Gandhi visited an RSS camp in Wardha. He was struck by the organisation's "discipline, complete absence of untouchability, and rigorous simplicity". On September 16, 1947,

Gandhi addressed an RSS meeting ir Delhi, praising its spirit of service and sacrifice. The RSS too, soon after Gandhi's assassination, suspended all sha khas for 13 days as a mark of respect-

the only time in the Sangh's history. This spirit of engagement — where differences do not preclude respect or constructive work—is reflected in the way the RSS approaches regions and communities beyond its traditional base. The Northeast, for instance, was a region marked by alienation and insur gency due to colonial duplicity and policy shortcomings after Independence. The RSS, since establishing its first *sha* kha in Guwahati in 1946, has played a transformative role in bringing the

region to the national mainstream. As the RSS completes a century of service, its contribution to nation-build ing remains steadfast and ever-grow ing. A recent testament to this spirit was seen during the Covid-19 outbreak, when in May 2021, nearly 300 swayamsevaks revived the long-defunct BGML hospital in Kolar within two weeks, offering much-needed relief to hundreds of patients. Such examples reflect how the RSS continues to quietly perform its role as it was envisioned a cen-

> Rajnath Singh is the Union defence minister. The views expressed are personal

# An overlooked factor of flight safety in India

Anjuli

Bhargava

n November 2023, a Vistara A320 and an Ethiopian Airways B787 aircraft experienced two aircraft collision avoidance system (ACAS) alerts one after the other at Delhi's terminal 3. The two aircraft — one was about to land and the other was taking off — were saved from potential disaster by bad weather and wind-shear conditions that necessitated a go-around by one of them, averting a collision.

The final report of this incident has just been released by the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB), and it squarely by the air traffic controllers (ATCs) — the backroom boys of the aviation landscape who are often forgotten, unlike the commanders and crew who remain at the fore-

This is not the first near-accident attributed to fatigue or excessive workload among ATCs. Just like the crew, ATCs also work under immense pressure, which has increased after the Covid-19 pandemic. Akin to flight inspectors and other similar cadres in aviation, they are an important undergird of flight safety.

But, India faces a serious shortage of ATCs: Against a total sanctioned strength of 5,537, it only has around 4.000. Moreover, whether the sanctioned strength itself meets the necessary number of personnel is a moot question.

There is a Civil Aviation Requirement (CAR) that specifies the Watch Duty Time Limitations (WDTL) for ATCs, notified by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA). keeping in mind international practices, rules, and advisories. The regulations ensure that the controllers are adequately rested, remain alert and effective while on duty, and are not unduly stressed. With rising air traffic and worsening weather patterns storms, cloud bursts, and other unusual weather phenomena becoming more frequent — it isn't hard to imagine the criticality of the ATCs in aviation safety.

While fatigue among commanders and crew has been facing scrutiny for some time now, the life and travails of ATCs often go unnoticed by the media. A recent parliamentary committee highlighted the plight of ATCs and the critical role they play in the aviation sector. It flagged three problems that were of particular concern for flight safety, which need to be urgently

The first is that the facilities for ATC training have not grown in keeping with the need.

THERE IS A CIVIL AVIATION REQUIREMENT (CAR) THAT SPECIFIES THE WATCH **DUTY TIME LIMITATIONS** (WDTL) FOR ATCS, NOTIFIED BY THE DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF CIVIL AVIATION (DGCA), **KEEPING IN MIND** INTERNATIONAL PRACTICES, RULES, AND **ADVISORIES** 

The Airport Authority of India (AAI) — ATCs are under its purview — has three training centres, in Prayagraj (Uttar Pradesh), Begumpet (Hyderabad), and Gondia (Maharashtra) Of the three, the first two have surveillance control simulators as well as aerodrome control training. In Gondia, only the initial aerodrome control training is conducted currently. Between the three, around 640 new controllers are trained every year, of which around 400 would have received only the initial levels of training.

This lack of training capacity has led to trollers without adequate training are stationed at various control towers and remain in non-functional positions for long periods, waiting for training slots to become available, before they can handle actual oper-

> Well-trained and experienced staff thus shoulder the bulk of the workload, often handling 30-35 aircraft at a time in busy air spaces. instead of the five to 10 that is con-

sidered ideal. Also, duty timings have become stretched across India's airports, but markedly more so at the busier ones. The persistent staff shortage has made it almost impossible for

AAI to adhere to the mandatory safety regulations and limits, and it has resorted to consistently obtaining "exemptions" from DGCA to operate outside the prescribed norms at several airports. The parliamentary committee report points out that "this practice has effectively institutionalised overwork and normalised a state of heightened fatigue risk within the air traffic management system"

This short-staffing had also led to another dangerous precedent being set, where more experienced controllers are forced to perform two roles simultaneously — managing active traffic and fulfilling supervisory duties, compromising the ability to respond effectively in an emergency.

Second, ATCs say they are increasingly subject to a punitive and penalty-driven environment — a complaint often heard from crew as well — and that this is demoralising. Steep fines can be levied on personnel for decisions taken under seriously charged situations, often happening well beyond duty limits (this is done under the penal provisions of the Aircraft Rules by DGCA). This acts as an independent stressor.

The last is that the ATC guild has long been seeking the inclusion of a member from its fold in the board of the AAI, the body that governs and manages them. The failure to do so has led to a situation where often decisions that directly affect the functioning of ATCs are taken by those who have very little understanding of the ecosystem.

Until we expand capacity within India, it might be worthwhile to send a few batches of controllers abroad for training.

Overwork, dual responsibilities, and working with an overwhelming number of variables are a clear and imminent threat to aviation safety, and, certainly, are not the ideal conditions for India's expanding aviation

> Anjuli Bhargava writes about governance, infrastructure, and the social sector. The views expressed are personal



Jane Goodall had a remarkable ability to inspire us to connect with the natural wonders of our world



# Saving student lives with institutional interventions

Aqsa

Shaikh

Alok

Sarin

tudent suicides often evoke myriad responses. For some, it is a failure, for some, unbearable pressure. For some, an escape and for others, a crime, even institutional murder.

In recent years, public attention has been drawn to a series of high-profile student suicides. For a few days, these tragedies spark debate and outrage. But in an age of vanishing attention spans, the larger crisis continues to unfold every single day.

India loses nearly 14,000 students to suicide each year. Data from the National Crime Records Bureau released this week showed the number of student suicides in

India climbed to 13.892 in 2023. climbing 34.4% from 10,335 in 2019 and 64.9% from 8,423 in 2013. A total of 117,849 students died by suicide between 2013 and 2023.

For every suicide death, research suggests there may be 20 attempts. The number of students silently contemplating suicide or enduring severe mental anguish might be manifold.

Suicides are robbing us of young lives brimming with potential —  $\bar{a}$ student's journey ending before it begins. The majority of these deaths occur among those aged 18–30, the very demographic that should be shaping our country's future. Unlike many causes of death among young people, suicide is entirely preventable. And preventing it requires no

vaccine or rocket science. What it needs is a socio-political movement grounded in evidence-based interventions and a willingness to listen to young people.

In March, the Supreme Court in Amit Kumar & Ors vs Union of India & Ors directed that every suspected suicide must be registered through an FIR. Recognising that student suicides now outnumber even farmer suicides, the court sought to go beyond reactive measures. It constituted the National Task Force for Student Wellbeing and Suicide Prevention under the chairmanship of justice (retd.) S Ravindra Bhat, with subject experts and senior officials from multiple ministries. The mandate: To consult stakeholders, review policies, and present to the court a holistic understanding of the causes of student suicides and the path to prevention.

Attempts to study this epidemic have been made before, but they were fragmented and often limited to specific academic streams. This task force marks the first comprehensive effort to examine suicides across the entire spectrum of higher education. And the

scale is immense: India has over 60,000 higher education institutions, 1.5 million faculty members, and 45 million students. This population is as diverse as India itself — by geography, caste, class, religion, gender, disability, and course of study. To capture this diversity of experience, the task force launched nationwide online surveys (ntf.education.gov.in). Students, faculty, mental health providers and parents are encouraged to respond; concerned citizens can also share their perspectives. Alongside this, higher education institutions are required to provide data on student well-being as part of their

institutional accountability. Some may see this as a grand samudra manthan (ocean churn) to extract the amrit (nectar) of suicide prevention. But let us be clear: India does not suffer from a lack of policies or documents. The Mental Healthcare Act (2017) and the National Suicide Prevention Policy (2021) already exist. Numerous committees have produced detailed reports. In August, the Supreme Court issued guidelines on preventing student suicides. And yet, young lives continue to be lost. Why Because our systems continue to respond with apathy — and sometimes, with active oppression. Students are cornered into desperation by discriminatory practices, puni-

tive academic policies, financial bar riers, and neglect of mental health services. Their deaths are not just personal tragedies; they are social failures and, too

often, institutional ones. The task force may chart a path forward, but it is ultimately up to us — as educators, policymakers, parents, peers, and citizens to act. We must build a future where young people can live, learn, and lead without fear. A future where suicide is not seen as a personal failure or a lack of resilience, but as something we, collectively, can and must prevent through systemic and individual

Let us resolve to change the narrative. Because every student life lost is one too many. It's a national emergency we can no onger afford to ignore.

Aqsa Shaikh is professor of community medicine, HIMSR, and Alok Sarin is psychiatrist, Sitaram Bhartia Hospital. Both are members of the Supreme Court-appointed National Task Force on supporting mental well-being and prevention of student suicides in HEIs.

The views expressed are personal

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# Slow growth

India needs to create better-paying jobs at scale

A slow increase in wages can have troubling implications for economic growth and equity. The Annual Survey of Industries (2023-24), recently released, underscores this concern: Profits per factory rose 7 per cent, while wages per worker increased only 5.5 per cent. Profits grew faster than wages for several years in the recent past. The Economic Survey for 2024-25 also flagged weak wage growth, while corporate profitability increased to a 15-year high in 2023-24. The data shows that gains in labour productivity too have faltered, with output per worker showing weaker growth after 2013-14 than earlier years did. At the same time, the share of formal manufacturing in gross domestic product has nearly halved since 2010-11, limiting access to stable, high-quality jobs. The combination of slower productivity and a shrinking formal sector has substantially restrained wage growth, undermining both worker income and domestic demand.

However, this disconnect is not confined to India. Globally, the balance between wages and profits has tilted toward capital. Rapid technological change might deepen this divide. The International Labour Organization's World Employment and Social Outlook 2025 warns that nearly one in four workers could see their role significantly transformed by generative artificial intelligence. It is being argued that young people entering the workforce now face significant challenges, as the automation of entrylevel jobs limits skill-building and wealth accumulation, potentially leading to stagnant wages and a widening intergenerational wealth gap.

In India, the intent behind strengthening labour protection has been to improve workers' conditions. However, excessively stringent laws have had unintended consequences. Research shows that stringent labour laws have incentivised firms to shift towards contract-based employment, thereby reducing the number of directly hired, formally employed workers. This shift has been particularly evident in the manufacturing sector, in which the use of contract labour has increased significantly since the early 2000s, with a direct impact on wages. The data on Periodic Labour Force Surveys also shows that only a small minority of India's labour force has formal employment.

Further, as a Goldman Sachs report shows, over the years, India's capital-intensive manufacturing subsectors (such as machinery, chemicals, electronics, and pharmaceuticals) have seen stronger growth in both exports and employment than in many of the labour-intensive sectors (textiles, footwear, and food & beverages). This suggests that investment and export efforts are favouring industries that use more machines and more capital, which often require more skill and pay higher wages, rather than ones that absorb large numbers of lower-skilled workers. Stringent labour laws are said to be one of the biggest reasons why India has underperformed in labour-intensive industries over the past decades, which has affected employment generation and with implications for wages and overall economic growth. The new Labour Codes, awaiting implementation, are expected to improve the situation. Without employment creation in low-skill labour-intensive sectors, which can potentially provide decent wages to a large part of India's workforce, it would be difficult to sustain higher aggregate demand over the long run. The problem can further be exacerbated by a sustained increase in profit growth over wage growth. To be fair, there is no easy near-term solution, but these issues must be debated.

# Air pockets in pilot training

FTO rankings reveal serious quality problems

The first rankings of registered flying training organisations (FTO) in India by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) bear a distinctly down-to-earth message. None of these schools made it to the top two categories of the aviation regulator's ranking of A+ and A. Twenty-two academies qualified for the B ranking and 13 were ranked C. In short, the bulk of India's FTOs are either "average" or "above average" — the B ranking indicates a score between 70 per cent and 50 per cent and the rankings suggest that only a handful make it to the upper cohort. Those in the C category have been issued notices for "self-analysis and improvement" and may fall under additional DGCA scrutiny. Notably, government-sponsored FTOs figure quite low down in the rankings. FTOs graduate between 800 and 1,000 holders of commercial-pilot licences a year but this number is expected to rise. In fact, this regulator assessment of underperformance by domestic FTOs comes at a time when the demand for pilots is rising significantly — from 6,000 to 7,000 working pilots today to 30,000 over the next 15 years — as leading Indian airlines place mega orders for new aircraft.

A granular look at the ranking criteria the DGCA has applied is concerning. It suggests that the principal problem lies in lack of training infrastructure and relatively lax safety standards, both of which account for a 60 per cent weighting. For instance, the regulator assigns the heaviest weighting of 40 per cent to "operational aspects", which cover such parameters as the student-to-aircraft ratio, student-to-instructor ratio, fleet size, and availability of ground schools and simulators. Safety standards carry a weighting of 20 per cent — and they include the number of accidents and incidents in the preceding 12 months.

More to the point, these courses are not cheap. For instance, the Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Uran Akademi, which operates under the Ministry of Civil Aviation and has been rated Category C by the DGCA, takes an upfront fee of ₹30 lakh for a commercial pilot's licence (which includes 200 hours of flying). This fee excludes the "type rating", which pilots must obtain to fly specific aircraft and it adds another ₹15-20 lakh to the bill. In all, ₹40-60 lakh is a fairly typical outlay for a trainee pilot. Those looking for another flight path can opt for airline-sponsored programmes (not rated by the DGCA), but these, though of relatively good quality, can cost as much as ₹1 crore. Worse, this substantial expenditure on pilot training, on which families often expend large parts of their savings, need not guarantee a job since the bulk of the demand for pilots in Indian aviation is for experienced captains rather than newly trained pilots.

Given the revelations of this first exercise, the DGCA has done signal service for the hundreds of young women and men with high aspirations to fly to join the great Indian aviation boom. The fact that the ranking exercise will be conducted within a narrow frequency of twice a year — on April 1 and October 1 — will reduce the chances of FTOs gaming the system in the interval. For the regulator, the critical challenge, implicit in all institutional rankings, is to maintain the veracity of the system with meaningful checks so that the exercise is not reduced to mechanical box-ticking. The increasingly crowded Indian skies demand such rigour.

# Protecting industry, not interests

The government must guard India against domestic protectionism as strongly as against Chinese dumping

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**LAVEESH BHANDARI** 

The government recently announced anti-dumping investigations against a slew of products ranging from steel to mobile covers. Anti-dumping is a much used form of protection in India, alongside higher tariff rates, quantity restrictions, negative import lists, and more. Some of these comply with the World Trade Organization (WTO) rules, some can be made to comply, and for others, the WTO hardly matters.

What matters, however, is the manufacturing environment India is building. If everything from steel to mobile covers to glass, PET, and solar panels needs protection, on top of the hundreds of other products already receiving some form of it, we need to ask ourselves a deeper question: What happened? And how can we change this?

One answer, the most popular one, is that China has unleashed its highly subsidised and heavily protected industrial output on the world. These products

can easily overwhelm domestic production and industry, affecting employment and long-term manufacturing growth. But these anti-dumping investigations will not target only Chinese products. From information reported, it appears that the Directorate General of Trade Remedies under the Ministry of Commerce will need to investigate producers from Thailand, Russia, Taiwan, South Korea, Vietnam, and Bangladesh, among other countries. Various protective mechanisms exist as outlined above, and producers from developed countries, including Japan

and the European Union, not to mention the United States, have been included.

In other words, Indian manufacturers and their associations believe that they need to be protected from products from across the world. Sometimes it is argued that producers in other countries benefit from cheap Chinese inputs, which then lead to lower costs of final produce. And, therefore, India needs to protect itself from producers in all these countries that rely on Chinese imports. While the argument might have some validity, it is also true that India itself imports massively from China — upwards of \$113 billion last year, growing at more than 11 per cent from the year before. These products span electronics, chemicals, machinery and equipment, and plastics.

So now the government has a difficult problem at

hand: How should it decide which products to protect and which it should not? Every self-serving producer will like to make a representation to the government against any competing product being imported. And a responsive government will either immediately put up a protective barrier, or at least try to investigate whether the complaint is valid.

But the problem gets more complex. How do you investigate Chinese production, especially since it is also said, with some validity, that we cannot trust Chinese data? Given this problem, the next best option for the government may be to investigate globally produced output on the basis of Indian data. Now if we do that, we are effectively judging a product on the basis of Indian costs. So, of course, the result will favour higher-cost Indian manufacturers and their call for protection.

The question that needs to be asked is this: What criteria can help the government decide

which products deserve some form of protection, and which ones should be allowed for import freely, perhaps with only minor tariffs? A free market-orientation will argue for the devaluation of the rupee, the removal of tariffs, and letting firms in India decide whether to use global or domestic inputs. A leftist-socialist orientation will call for banning imports altogether, managing the rupee exchange rate, and forcing all production to remain in India. Each of these, of course, is quite extreme.

The government needs to find a workable middle path, which also enables the unleashing of greater competitive forces within the country while creating a fair economic environment. Consider the following elements.

First, identify how the largest economies are deal ng with items in each product segment. We should do that irrespective of whether they have free-trade agreements, are members of regional blocs or otherwise, whether it is China, Vietnam, or any other country. The point being, if for whatever reason a country's producers are dumping in India, they will tend to do so in global markets as well. Red-flag those product segments for further investigation before any protective action is taken in India.

Second, whenever a petition from industry for

protection comes in, the government must first talk to the users of that product and continue doing so until the protective action is in place. Users, or downstream buyers, are vital engines of employment, often generating more jobs than producers, and they also contribute substantially to government revenues and economic growth. In a sense, protection is a form of economic justice, and before passing judgment, the government needs to give due recognition to all, the producers and the users.

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Third, the government must safeguard users with the same spirit as it protects producers. Therefore, any protectionist measure must be accompanied by rigorous and continuous monitoring of its impact on both producers and users. The government must also commit to swift corrective actions if such measures result in inflated prices, profiteering, or any other adverse effects that undermine the interests of downstream users within the affected product segment.

Fourth, a casual analysis of protective action will show that in many cases protection leads to persistent dependence on the government. This dependence is a drain, for it eats into the long-term growth of India, and must be eliminated. Therefore, whether it is a quality control order, a higher-than-usual tariff rate or an anti-dumping measure, there must be a sunset clause on all such measures. Moreover, and this is critical, the sunset of one form of protection should not be replaced by another. And for this, the government must keep a close watch on who is petitioning for what form of protection and at what time.

Overall, there are many ways to support and promote India's manufacturing sector. One method is absorbing some costs, another is providing subsidies, yet another is smoothing the process of doing business, and still another is protectionism. Each has its pros and cons.

Given high land costs in India, absorbing these costs through a rental or land-cost subsidy would directly correct an anomaly created by our flawed land laws, which are difficult to reform. The production-linked incentive is a form of subsidy that is aimed at correcting the scale-of-production problem, as greater scales enable lower costs. It's a very specific solution to a specific problem. The ease of doing business reforms were aimed at smoothing the process of doing business. Again, these are targeted solutions for specific problems. Protectionism, however, is not like that. It may appear to be targeted, but is not. It benefits some at the cost of others, reduces competitive forces, creates dependence, encourages lobbying and politicking by industry. Therefore, protectionist measures should be used very carefully. The fear that Chinese products have the potential to flood India gives a great tool to those who want protection for their self-serving interests. The government must guard India against such domestic forces as much as it needs to guard against Chinese flooding.

The author heads CSEP Research Foundation. The views are personal

# Measuring India's true economy

India's economy recorded 7.8 per cent gross domestic product (GDP) growth in the first quarter of FY26. outpacing expectations and reinforcing the government's optimism about the country's growth trajectory. The headline numbers are based on currently available, measurable data and represent the best possible estimates within the existing system.

Yet, we align with experts who caution that these headline figures may not fully reflect reality, as the informal or unincorporated sector — employing more than 90 per cent of India's workforce and contributing nearly half of GDP - remains inadequately measured This gap risks overstating or understating economic

strength and misguiding policy. To fix this. India must move from a topdown model of GDP estimation to a bottom-up approach that begins at the district level, where most unorganised sector activities take place.

A truly bottom-up exercise would ideally build GDP estimates starting from the village level, but given the enormous complexity and resource requirements of such an approach, the most feasible starting point is the smallest administrative

unit with structured data systems — the district. Bottom-up vs top-down: India currently follows a top-down method. National gross value added (GVA) is first estimated and then apportioned to states and districts. States use local data mainly for agriculture. while manufacturing and services are allocated using central indicators that often bear little relation to actual local output. Some states compile district GDP (GDDP), but this is again done by distributing statelevel numbers rather than directly measuring districtlevel activity. While this provides timely estimates, it fails to capture ground realities.

A bottom-up approach would instead build GDP directly from district-level data. Agriculture can be measured from local records, manufacturing from pooled Annual Survey of Industries samples, mining from e-way bills, and organised services from Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) and goods and services tax data. Public sector value added can

be apportioned from balance sheets and budgets of central and state undertakings. The most critical gap is the unincorporated sector, which can only be through dedicated 1. Labour force survey (LFS): A district-representative survey, capturing unemployment rate, worker population ratio, labour force participation rate, and participation in unincorporated manufacturing and services. 2. Survey of unincorporated sector enterprises (SUSE): Estimates value added per worker in informal enter prises, offering a granular view of their contribution.

Together, industry-wise data on workers (from LFS) and value added per worker (from SUSE) would

enable precise estimates of districtlevel GVA. Aggregating across districts would yield more reliable GSDP and, ultimately, a GDP that reflects India's true economic structure.

Lessons from Uttar Pradesh: Uttar Pradesh piloted this bottomup model in four districts — Meerut. Varanasi, Gorakhpur, and Kanpur Nagar. The contrasts with top-down estimates were striking. Manufacturing output was nearly double

under the bottom-up method, while services and trade, conversely, were often lower, reflecting how top-down methods overestimate in some districts. Overall GVA was 10.3 per cent higher than top-down estimates. These divergences highlight why states need their own measurement systems: The same proxies cannot represent Varanasi's services economy, Gorakhpur's manufacturing, and

Why health and education matter: Within services, health and education are especially important, yet they remain buried under "other services." With a large private-sector presence, their contribution must be measured accurately, as higher investment in these sectors builds a skilled, healthier workforce that boosts productivity across the economy. Their value is both immediate and long-term. District surveys in UP showed how undercounted they have been: GVA in health and education was higher than top-down estimates by 13.6 per cent in Meerut, 9.5 per cent in Varanasi, and 6.7 per cent in Kanpur Nagar. Recognising these sectors as productive human capital formation, not just social spending, is critical to capturing

Using new data to measure economic activity: To strengthen bottom-up GDP, we must encourage it to systematically integrate alternative data sources into national accounts. Administrative datasets such as the corporate identification number filings with the MCA can help refine estimates for registered companies. Similarly, goods and services tax network data, which captures monthly turnover across millions of establishments (including small firms otherwise invisible to surveys) can provide dynamic measures of output. At the same time, electricity consumption data from discoms can serve as a proxy for unincorporated manufacturing and service activity, especially in districts with high informal enterprise density. Linking these datasets with labour force surveys would not only reduce reliance on extrapolation but also ensure better measurement of GVA across sectors. Together, these innovations would significantly improve the credibility and granularity of GDP compilation.

The way forward: The pilot survey in UP has now emerged as a robust proof of concept, and the state has rolled out bottom-up district domestic product (DDP) surveys across all 75 districts. Building on this momentum, states like Assam, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh have also decided to estimate GSDP using bottom-up DDP. We are sure that other states would adopt a similar approach, ensuring that economic planning is firmly grounded in the realities of where growth and livelihoods actually take place: Small firms, local services, and unincorporated enterprises that are often undercounted in conventional data systems. If all states were to institutionalise this process, India could, for the first time, build a truly representative GDP (aggregated from bottom-up DDP) that reflects the full depth and diversity of its economy.

The authors are, respectively, former director general, MoSPI, GoI, and distinguished fellow, Pahle India Foundation

# ITEC as an instrument of diplomacy



#### SUBHOMOY BHATTACHARJEE

When was the last time you got hold of a book that talks of a specific Indian policy? No, I don't mean the memoirs mostly IAS officers write about their term in offices with dollops of personal life thrown in. I mean a good hard look at any Indian government policy spanning several decades

It will be almost impossible to find one. You can be sure, for instance, coming out of the Trump term, a furious avalanche of books will plaster the United States bookshops soon. Hardly

any book will be written about the comparable period of Indian policy. This is true of not only this era, but books on Indian government policies hardly ever get written, except for foreign policy where there has been a plethora of well-written books. including by the current External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar.

Yet as the Indian economy gathers critical mass in the world, it would be unrealistic to say Indian public policy does not merit such a deep-down study. In the circumstances, the role falls on observers from outside the government. ITEC at 60: India's International Development Partnerships is one of those. Shimreisa Chahongnao, Maria Elizabeth Joseph and Swati Sinha of Ananta Aspen Centre have made a brave attempt to understand a vital piece of Indian policy - Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation. The book

examines how India, despite domestic constraints, has tried to offer assistance to a large band of nations in the socalled Global South since 1964. It was and continues to be a global university system developed by India but without any bells and whistles

This slim book of 216 pages starts an interesting conversation on an often forgotten corner of India's efforts to reach out to nations with a form of cooperation that was actually unique for those times. "This decision to set up the ITEC programme was based on the belief that it was essential to foster relations grounded in mutual concern and interdependence... technical and economic cooperation was viewed as a vital element of an integrated and forward thinking foreign policy," the authors write. The Trumpian tariff and H<sub>1</sub>B visa dystopia would have looked  $less\,so\,from\,India \hbox{'s point of view if these}$ 

initiatives were sustained, it now seems. Indian chip, smart weapons and pharma products would have found easier access where ITEC made significant strides.

**ASHISH KUMAR & PAYAL SETH** 

When the Indian government under Lal Bahadur Shastri started the ITEC programme, this was the same period when the US government was either offering food aid or arms to topple "unfriendly' governments. The Central Intelligence Agency, among other things, had organised a massive books programme to seed ideas of freedom behind the Iron Curtain. Europe was torn about what to offer without raising

hackles in the countries it had till then recently, kept colonised. India's efforts, despite the small sums it could offer, was a brave offer in this context. The programme became better organised



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back at crucial points instead of building on the reach ITEC provided. A reassessment of India's foreign policy orientation led to the formation of the Economic

starts, India often stepped

from the early 1980s when the

ITEC started financing visits of

economic delegations from

partner countries, including

training in Indian military

facilities. Despite avowedly

non-political themes, local

**India supported** 

provided expertise in

education, agriculture and

industry, culminating in

technical cooperation".

issues did impact. "In Algeria,

independence efforts and later

agreements on economic and

Despite these promising

Coordination Unit (ECU). Yet, they write, the ECU's efforts were constrained by institutional ambiguity within the Ministry of External Affairs

(MEA) and overlapped with the line ministries, limiting its effectiveness and perpetuating an "institutional void in managing international development assistance at MEA headquarters".

The numbers ITEC has trained so far are not chicken feed. Nearly half a million people from 161 countries have been through this global knowledge network. Generations of Indian leaders pass through the pages of this book. In fact, it is a pity that the authors did not consider adding colour by bringing these leaders to life in this analysis. The other absence is the mention of similar efforts by other countries from Asia, both Japan and now China. Did the ITEC make any substantial effort to tailor their efforts in response? A comparison would have really helped to steer the policy in fresh directions. It is difficult but the absence of voices from the recipient countries would have added perspective to this account of a vital Indian global outreach. These are questions that would be hopefully addressed in a subsequent edition.



# FRIDAY, OCTOBER 3, 2025



### REMEMBERING BAPU

Prime Minister Narendra Modi

Gandhi Jayanti is about paying homage to the extraordinary life of beloved Bapu...He demonstrated how courage and simplicity could become instruments of great change. He believed in the power of service and compassion as essential means of empowering people

# Challenger's test

Arattai must not only match the incumbents but also surpass in ways that matter locally

OHO'S HOME-GROWN messaging app Arattai, which is designed as a privacy-first alternative to WhatsApp, has drawn attention in a manner few domestic digital products have. Within just three days, daily sign-ups jumped from around 3,000 to nearly 350,000, on the back of high-profile endorsements by Union Cabinet ministers and social media chatter. Quietly launched in beta mode in early 2021, Arattai now finds itself at the centre of the recurring quest for digital sovereignty and credible native alternatives to global platforms. The app's appeal rests on Zoho's tested philosophy of building for scale, efficiency, and privacy. Unlike many hurried ventures, Arattai has been engineered to work not just on flagship smartphones but also on low-end devices and patchy networks. Its focus on local data storage and an ad-free, spyware-free experience provides a differentiator at a time when concerns about surveillance and monetisation loom large. Founder Sridhar Vembu's admission that infrastructure is being upgraded "on an emergency basis" underscores not only the unexpected intensity of demand but also a genuine product-market fit.

But history urges caution. Several home-grown platforms like Hike Messenger, Koo, and others, enjoyed initial surges only to fade. Hike, celebrated once as the country's answer to WhatsApp, never overcame the challenge of scale and engagement, shutting down its core messaging service in 2021. Koo, styled as a local language alternative to Twitter, enjoyed its moment when ministers and celebrities embraced it amid regulatory disputes. Yet its trajectory revealed the limits of such positioning. As marketing scholars Al Ries and Jack Trout argued decades ago, me-too products seldom work—it is better to be first in a category than to convince users you are a better version of something they already know.

That lesson is relevant even now. Arattai's challenge is not simply to ride a viral wave but to avoid the trap of being seen as a WhatsApp clone. If it is to succeed, it must carve out its own space in the digital landscape. Here lies the real test, whether it can create a category where it is first in the mind of users, rather than competing head-to-head with an entrenched global giant. WhatsApp's success, whether in India or globally, is rooted not only in messaging but also in its integration with payments, business communication, family groups, and media sharing. For Arattai to endure, it must build such breadth too, along with its promise of privacy and ad-free values. That requires deep investment, product innovation, and partnerships that past home-grown ventures underestimated.

Thus, the broader lesson is that political patronage can lead to initial adoption but cannot sustain it. Koo's rise and fall showed the limitations of muscular nationalism in consumer tech. True digital sovereignty will not come from symbolic endorsements but from products that users trust, value, and return to daily. Zoho's patient approach and proven track record mark Arattai as different from past experiments. Unlike venturebacked start-ups chasing quick exits, Zoho is known for discipline and long-term focus. That could give Arattai resilience. Yet the road is steep. To move from hype to habit, it must create a category of its own, scale seamlessly, and cultivate trust. Arattai's rise is therefore both inspiring and cautionary. Whether it succeeds in becoming a durable symbol of digital sovereignty or ends up as another footnote like Hike and Koo will depend on Zoho's ability to innovate, differentiate, and lead in its own right.

# BANKING SHIFTS

GLOBAL & DOMESTIC CHANGES INCLUDING TARIFFS WILL IMPACT BFSI WITH NEW OPPORTUNITIES, CHALLENGES

# From risk to resilience

ECENT GEOPOLITICAL **TENSIONS**, the US's major tariff impositions, and India's proactive response—both through trade diversification and new bilateral arrangements—and the recent goods and services tax (GST) changes are reshaping the opportunities and challenges faced by the Indian banking, financial services, and insurance (BFSI) sector. This article discusses the impacts with sector-specific insights. The banking sector has fared well in

the last couple of years in terms of both asset performance and its treasury operations. Against the backdrop of the developments mentioned above, it will have domestic growth and benefit from the Indian economy's resilience and robust domestic demand. It will be partly insulated from direct export stocks caused by new tariffs. The recent GST reforms will boost consumption and therefore the economy's credit needs. The second major opportunity will be digitalisation and financial innovation, seen via the rapid adoption of digital finance, United Payments Interface expansion, and fintech collaborations. The new bilateral agreements will also drive international trade finance opportunities with new international markets, which could be the third major opportunity. Diversified international partnerships and India's pivot toward Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Latin America, and Africa will reduce over-dependence on US and European Union trade, providing banks with new relationships and infrastructure opportunities. The fourth factor will be via regulatory support. The Reserve Bank of India is expected to induce liquidity and lower interest rates, fostering credit growth and potentially reducing borrowing cost for businesses and consumers. Policymakers are insisting that the GST benefits are passed on to the customers, which will lead to consumption and credit flow, particularly in the housing finance

**ASHVIN PAREKH** Managing partner, Ashvin Parekh Advisory Services LLP

and vehicle loans segments. However, some challenges persist, such as export-linked loan risks. Banks

with a heavy exposure to export-oriented sectors (gems, textiles, chemicals, IT) are at risk of asset quality deterioration as US tariffs lead to shrinking exports and job losses. The second major challenge will be currency and capital flow volatility. Tariffs and a weaker Indian rupee may increase forex and capital flow volatility, challenging banks' treasury management. For forex, the major challenge will be the

exchange rate volatility. Persistent depreciation impacts **Reduced interest** banks holding large FX posifrom investors tions. The balance-of-payments strain will cause an could be due to increase in hedging costs. changes in The third major challenge regulations in the will be that of deposit comlast couple of years petition—elevated deposit interest rates will persist as banks compete for stable

funding, potentially squeezing margins. Lastly, micro, small, and medium enterprises in the affected sectors may face a liquidity crunch, raising the possibility of non-performing asset risks for lenders, necessitating cautious underwriting and possible policy support.

As for asset management and mutual fund, the sector has been growing at a brisk pace, and the membership of retail investors is increasing by leaps and bounds. Tariff impositions and the recent rate cut by the Federal Reserve will have a direct impact on the investment flows in and out of Indian markets. The Fed's rate cut can have a positive impact on the markets as lower US yields reduce the incentive for investors to keep assets in the US, encouraging inflows into emerging markets. The first major area of both opportunity and challenge is the volatility and flight to quality. Funds will look for more stable assets, with an increased preference for domestic and performing sectors such as financial services, healthcare, and industrials. The second impact will be on selective sectoral opportunities. Fund managers will scout for assets in counters minimally impacted by tariff impositions. Here, both managers and investors will

look at exchange traded funds, particularly the gold and silver. However, considering the Indian economy's robust performance, longterm flows, particularly due to strong domestic retail participation and systematic investment plan flows, act as strong stabilisers. From the GST 2.0 reforms

perspective, there is no significant change in the cost structure for unit holders or mutual fund companies.

Tariff impositions will perhaps have very little impact on the insurance sector, but that is not the case as far as GST reforms are concerned. The changes exempt GST on premia paid by policyholders for some products in life insurance and retail health insurance covers. This is apparently a welcome move as it may imply lower costs for the policyholder at the cost of the government exchequer to the extent of around ₹6,000 crore annually for life products and around ₹7,000 crore annually for health insurance. If we analyse this reform, we may see

that the implication of rate revision and exemptions offered to the insurance industry could have been studied before making such changes.

The government has a noble vision of ensuring that all Indians are covered under insurance by 2047. For this vision, policymakers recognise that the industry will have to augment the capacity or capital several times. This is to be done by encouraging the private sector domestic players as well as their strategic or financial foreign investors. The foreign direct investment reform of up to 100% foreign equity is a major step towards this. Large foreign capital can potentially or hypothetically flow into the economy. Unfortunately, the actual traction or inflow is insignificant.

Reduced interest from investors could be due to changes in regulations in the last couple of years. The reduction of the surrendering period for life policies to a year is one such example. The GST 2.0 changes will significantly reduce the returns and therefore investors' interest, both domestic as well as overseas. While the exemption of GST on life and health insurance will reduce the cover cost to policyholders, companies will be denied input credit for GST paid for acquisition and management expenses. The financial implications to the life insurance companies are expected to be around ₹13,000 crore annually and around ₹2,500 crore annually to health insurance companies. This may be an unintended consequence, and the government may perhaps examine the implication afresh.

The tariff impositions will impact the BFSI sector, offering new opportunities and challenges. The government's response in term of trade diversification and direct and indirect tax reforms will provide some additional cushion. The macro impact looks favourable to the sector, but players will realign their strategies to ensure the quality of their books.

Views are personal

# Altman's Al power grab is tone-deaf and infeasible

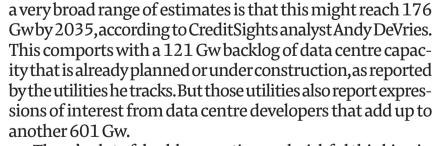
**SAM ALTMAN MAY** be a visionary but he could use some help reading the room. The OpenAI CEO has made yet more headlines for reportedly telling employees he

targets 250 gigawatts of data-centre capacity by 2033. In power terms, that is like building a not-small country, equivalent to roughly one-third of peak demand on the entire US grid. This is the same US grid already morphing into a political third rail amid fast-rising bills and warnings of blackouts, with proliferating data centres linked to both. A bit more nuance and creativity, plus a dash of realism, is in order. Building dispatchable generation—non-renewable and, in practice, natural gas-

fired plants—to power Altlandia in under a decade is infeasible. Looking back over the past 15 years, the fastest, sustained level of gas-fired deployment has been 12.5 Gw peryear, according to Hugh Wynne of Sector and Sovereign Research. If we somehow achieved double that pace, immediately, it would result in only 200 Gw over eight years. Even that overstates things since turbines, unlike data centres, don't run flat out (so you need more than 1 gigawatt of generating capacity for a given gigawatt of Now consider the cost—\$450 billion for the turbines at today's upwardly mobile

prices—and the vast quantity of gas required. Plus all those emissions the hyperscalers claim to care about as well as the fact that competitors also want dozens of gigawatts each to feed their own artificial intelligence ambitions.

Altman's mooted moonshot forms part of a broader AI arms race. Even a quarter of those 250 Gwwould be bigger than California's all-time peak demand for electricity. Data centres, including for AI, needed about 30 Gw last year and the consensus of



There's a lot of double-counting and wishful thinking in that figure. But utilities, which earn a regulated return on what they build, are motivated to turn as much of that as possible into new power plants, transformers, and wires. As it is, utilities' planned capital expenditure for 2025 through 2027 is \$532 billion, up 91% from the prior three years, Wynne calculates.

These costs ultimately flow into bills businesses and households pay. Regulators are touting new tariff structures to ensure data centres pay their own way. But that's hard to do in practice, given the complexity of ratemaking on grids, and this collision between monopoly utilities serving the public and impatient, deep-pocketed technology giants creates potential for households to end up subsidising the AI frenzy, as Eliza Martin and Ari Peskoe of Harvard University lay out in a recent analysis.

**DENNING** 

Bloomberg

One prominent risk is that forecasts turn out to be too ambitious and we overbuild power infrastructure, either because AI's capabilities are overhyped or efficiency gains reduce energy needs. This is what happened in the first decade of the 2000s, when we built more than 200 Gw of gas-fired plants just in time for power demand to flatline and bankrupt much of the merchant generation sector.

There is a case to be made that AI could help alleviate energy costs and emissions. Power grids are exceedingly complex exercises in optimisation, becoming more complex as demand rises and we incorporate more intermittent wind and solar power. This is the sort of parameter-rich problem AI seems made to solve. For AI to play a useful role, however, the industry would need to embrace more flexibility in its demands. Agreeing to adjust data centres' power consumption for a handful of hours a year could effectively free up 100 Gw of existing capacity, according to a widely-cited analysis from Duke University. How's that for a productivity leap?

Rather than extolling the potential for efficiency, however, Altman's giga-goal betrays an obsession with sheer size, and one that looks tailor-made to stoke, not relieve, the economic, physical, and political pressures building on the grid.

**AMOL AGRAWAL** 

The writer teaches at the National Institute of Securities Markets

FRENCH WRITER JEAN-BAPTISTE Alphonse Karr in 1849 wrote that "the more things change, the more they remain the same". In a way, he summed up much of human history—we think we have progressed, yet the core foundations remain the same. We are witnessing a similar change in the financial system with tokenisation; yet at its core, nothing changes. The International Monetary Fund's

(IMF) magazine Finance and Develop*ment* (F&D) is based on the theme of tokenisation of finance. It has also released a dictionary to simplify terms in this new world of finance, and it defines finance token as a "unique digital representation of ownership of a financial (money or bonds) or real asset (commodities) that exists on a distributed ledger". To simplify, tokens are plastic coins we get in amusement parks. In an amusement park, you exchange cash for a token and then take multiple rides across the park. On your return, you return the token and take back any remaining amount as cash. Tokenisation simplifies the economics of a theme park, where one does not have to deal with multiple counters and exchanges. In fact, the coins and banknotes are also like tokens used to settle transactions. Similar ideas apply to finance as well.

The digitalisation of finance is leading to its tokenisation. Itai Agur, senior economist at the IMF, in the same edi-

tion of F&D, explains that tokenisation is helping cut middlemen of finance. Trading in financial assets requires a broker-registrar to settle securities and money, and that takes time and involves transaction costs. Tokenisation will help reduce time and transaction costs via two additional features. First, a secure programmable code stores all the investors' assets and money on a decentralised ledger. When there is a financial transaction, the

code is simply transferred from buyer to seller. The second is interoperability, wherein ledgers should be standardised.

In a nutshell, in the near future all our assets will be stored in a programmable token on an interoperable ledger that will enable seamless trading. Even physical assets such as land and real estate will be represented via tokens. These assets will still need to be maintained physically, and tokenisation

will be hybrid.

Tokenisation is already underway in the monetary world. Central banks have issued central bank digital currencies, private companies have issued stablecoins, and banks have issued tokenised deposits. According to a Citigroup report (Stablecoins 2030: Web 3 to Wall Street), the issuance of stablecoins has grown 10-fold from \$28 billion to \$282 billion in 2025 and is expected to touch \$4 trillion by 2030.

Technology and digitalisation are enabling this

new transformation. But if we look at financial

history, it resembles old wine in a new bottle

Tokenisation: The new buzzword in finance

**Tokenisation** 

simplifies the

economics of a

theme park,

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exchanges

Tokenisation is obviously no free lunch, and it will bring its own risks. Agur points out that faster automated finance, like faster driving, will also be prone to sudden crashes. The programmability will add another layer of complexity to complicated financial products. The programmable assets can also fall like dominoes, as seen in the 2008

> crisis where the collapse of one entity/asset triggered the collapse of other entities/assets too. Helene Rey of London Business School in another F&D article writes that stablecoins pose risks concerning dollarisation, capital flows, and exchange rate volatility, as well as the potential weakening of the banking system, money laundering, and other financial crimes. Likewise, Yao Zeng of Wharton

School notes that the financial landscape may have changed, yet the rules remain the same. He highlights that stablecoins may falter under stress. Interestingly, despite these large-scale changes in finance, the latter remains the same. The title of Ugar's article is "Tokens Are Finance's Newest and Oldest Innovation". It highlights how cowries, a type of seashell, were physical tokens

the transaction, stating that "cowries were the first financial innovation". They have been followed by coins, cash, pay ment cards, and more, which are nothing but some forms of token.

which didn't need a middleman to verify

Historians of money will also argue that tokenisation is hardly new. Many historians disagree that money evolved not out of barter but as a token to settle debts. They cite Yap Island's stone money as an example. American anthropologist William Henry Furness III spent several months on the Micronesian islands and wrote The Island of Stone Money in 1910. He highlighted how the islanders transacted through large stones, but the stones remained wherever they were. Natives simply believed that the stone belonged to them. The island money drew attention from both John Maynard Keynes and Milton Freidman. (Interested read ers should look up David McWilliams's The History of Money: A Story of Human*ity*). In a way, Yap money is nothing but physical tokenisation. It is a mere coincidence that the island's stone money looks like a token!

In sum, tokenisation is the new buzzword of finance. It is interesting how technology and digitalisation are enabling this new transformation. However, if we look at financial history, it resembles old wine in a new bottle.

Views are personal

# **LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**

# Coordinated growth

Apropos of "Dovish pause" (FE. October 2), the Reserve Bank of India's decision to hold rates reflects caution, but it has not calmed bond markets where yields remain elevated despite successive cuts. Liquidity may be ample, yet banks remain hesitant to lend, with less than half of past repo cuts passed on to borrowers. Bond yields mirror this disconnect, weighed down by heavy government borrowing and doubts over fiscal discipline. While goods and services tax cuts on domestic products can enhance purchasing power, the benefit will remain shallow unless credit flows revive. Now, banks must come forward to sanction loans, supported by risk-sharing frameworks, while the government accelerates infrastructure spending, clears arrears to industries, and manages its borrowing programme prudently. —A Myilsami, Coimbatore

# **Emerging India**

Apropos of "India's great economic transformation" (FE, October 2), the seeds of transformation sown since 2014 have started yielding results. Some visible ones include rising to being the fourth-largest economy from the 11<sup>th</sup> as well as global credit rating companies' recognition of India's long-term policies for sustained growth. The inclusion of Indian bonds in the global indices is

New Delhi

schemes, restructuring of goods and services tax rates, and liberal investment on infrastructure (roads and railways) are enabling factors for robust nation-building. Now, we must eliminate duplicity in policies, prune costs, and improve quality and trust on industrial products to expand India's presence globally. —RV Baskaran, Pune

yet another sign. Several welfare

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# RBI Lending a Firm **Lending Hand**

Measures for banks to expand corporate books

RBI's most comprehensive reforms of bank lending to companies and individuals aims to address disintermediation, while feeding growth of the capital market. Banks can now fund acquisitions that brings down cost of corporate takeovers. Higher cap on loans for individuals investing in IPOs will maintain interest among domestic investors for young companies with proven performance. Leveraged buyouts and a strong supply of new issues improve capital access to sustain economic growth. Bank lending hasn't been keeping pace with growth. These measures set up the base for banks to expand their corporate books.

Withdrawal of the framework on lending to large companies will direct bank credit to more productive economic activity, while lower risk weights for infra loans ought to sustain capex. The ceiling on lending against debt securities gives more elbow room to bank lending.



Higher limits for lending against shares for individuals should likewise improve liquidity. RBI's broad theme is to improve access to capital for investors and producers, with banks in the middle. RBI is nudging banks to broaden their horizons without losing sight of core risk management.

At a systemic level, risk management is moving towards macroprudential regulation and away from lending disincentives. The phased transition to international credit risk management is designed to minimise disruption.

A raft of changes in rules for external commercial borrowing is meant to widen the funnel for lenders and borrowers, while keeping compliance burden low. Norms for export credit target ease of doing business. There is a bit in RBI measures for most sectors the policy establishment is trying to speed up. Cumulatively, the effects could have a snowball effect on financial markets. Deeper integration of bank lending with capital markets will be accretive to both. Timing of these structural adjustments to credit delivery fits into the broader effort to insulate it from rising global uncertainty.

# We Are Not the Only Residents of Earth

A week before passing away at 91 on Wednesday, primatologist Jane Goodall had been addressing top business leaders, recounting the story of her life and work. What sets humans apart, she had said, from other species is intellect. But intellect does not always translate into intelligence. The proof, she added, lies in destruction of the very nature that sustains us. Turning to CEOs, she noted that if they truly want their businesses to be sustainable, they'll need one sentient quality to stand up to their boards and shareholders; courage.

Courage was something Goodall had in abundance. Travelling from London to Tanzania in 1960 to study chimpanzees after an opportunity from Kenyan archaeologist-palaeontolo-



gist Louis Leakey arose, her discoveries revolutionised the field of animal cognition, revealing chimpanzees' complex and intricate social structures. These insights shattered human-centric notions of intelligence, underscored the urgency of respecting other species, and paved the

way for long-term studies of animal cognition and behaviour. She essentially dealt a body blow to rampant speciesism. Today, scientists are rethinking conservation, urging policymakers to design strategies that recognise animals as sentient planners. In March, LSE opened a Centre for Animal Sentience to study animal behaviour and impact of human actions, aiming to develop better policies and laws for animal care.

Goodall, recognising that dwindling public funds threaten conservation efforts, was rallying corporates to step up for sustainability. Now, one of the natural world's biggest champions is gone. But her plea remains: true sustainability requires courage, thoughtful action, and stepping out of our acute anthropocentrism to respect all creatures we share the planet with.



What's the point in being rich if you can't sidestep third-worldliness?

# Avoiding America is The New Cool Thing

Rich peeps, you do know that there are other countries in the world worth living in and travelling to than the US of MAGA, right? If as billionaires, or even millionaires, you're visablessed, it's high time you look beyond that country rapidly descending into third-worldliness. Why? One, because it's downright cool to avoid a country that generations have been hankering to live in. Two, because you can. MAGAland, not comfy with people who don't look, speak, walk, smell MAGA, has resorted to taking bribes at the entrance. Do you really want to fall for the 'more exclusive the club, the more precious getting entry' gag? Try Japan. Australia. Germany. Argentina. China.... It's not as if the US speaks your language outside an occupied Wall St anyway. In Europe, your accent is charming. Canada will apologise for giving you a less-than-perfect chilly day. In New Zealand, you can jolly well go about your business with a window view to live (rather than to die) for. So, dear jet-setters, skip that scaled-up hicksville. Go where your money buys grace, comfort and ease, now that you-'re no longer kids hankering for green cards and HBS stickers for your SUVs. Go where the quality of life is great, the

streets are walkable, and you can watch America from

afar. Avoid, to use a great leader's wise word, shitholes.

Isn't that the whole point of being rich?

Why a global 'Made in India' brand on the lines of Apple or Prada remains elusive, and how to fix it

Can We Get Worldly Wise?



oday, India is the world's 4thlargest economy, a rising power, and a nation with talent and entrepreneurial energy, And, vet, it has not been able to create a single global

From Japan, there's Toyota, Sony and Uniqlo. South Korea has Samsung, Hyundai and LG, while China has created Huawei, Xiaomi, TikTok and Shein. From Europe, there's Louis Vuitton, IKEA, BMW and Zara. And from the US, Apple, Uber, Google, Mc-Donald's and Nike. These are not just products or companies, they are cultural ambassadors. They represent their nations' values, aspirations and capabilities. Their brandequity translates into pricing power, customer lovalty and sustained profitability.

We do have strong names within India — Amul in dairy, Haldiram's in snacks, Titan in watches, and Asian Paints in home interiors. But these are domestic champions, not global household names. There have been attempts: Taj and Oberoi hotels are admired, but remain niche and restricted to luxury travellers.

Despite our size, creativity and global reach, we have not birthed a single brand that commands universal recognition. The reasons are complex

► Miserly about R&D Our R&D spend is 0.66% of GDP compared to 2.7% in China and 3.5% in the US. A global brand requires intellectual property, cutting-edge design and constant innovation. In dia has historically prioritised cost optimisation over disruptive research. It is no surprise, then, that we are good manufacturers, global brands, we but rarely originators of breakthrough products. being the world's

► Weak B2C branding Our muslin was legendary, our spices priceless, but were almost always marketed under foreign

ChatGPT

SH**AI**RI

OF THE DAY

There once was a

Dussehra clash,

Of folks in a last-minute

By the goddess they'd pose,

In ten filters of glows, Then upload the pics

before their WiFi

could crash!

labels. We have perfected B2B excellence, but faltered at B2C branding. Our greatest global successes — TCS, Infosys and Wipro — are invisible

to the end user.

Domesticity With 1.4 bn consumers, companies have found ample scale. Then why struggle with Europe's exacting standards, or the US' brutal competition, when India's tier-2 and tier-3 cities promise growth? Most Indian companies are content with 20-30% export revenue. Investors also tend to reward steady domestic growth over ris-

ky global bets. Dinvest-erested Building global brand equity requires decades of investment in design, customer experience and developing identity, investments that yield little in the short run. Our promoters often prefer putting money into another factory over a brand campaign. Coca-Cola spends more on advertising annually than the turnover of some of India's largest FMCG players.

No style statement Our education system has failed to nurture original design thinking and creative sensibility. Many Indian products of high quality are let down by clumsy packaging, mediocre interfaces and lacklustre design. To be truly glo-

**Bv** creating

can move from

back office and

factory to being

its cultural and

bal, brands must appeal to univer- Brande Mataram sal aesthetics. ▶ **Quality gaps** While Made

in Switzerland evokes precision, and Made in Germany connotes engineering excellence. Made in India does not carry aspirational pull. This perception problem is as much

about the global mindset created over years of unreliability as it is about our deficient marketing. To change it, we must deliver products that are exceptional in quality and design, tailored to rigorous international standards consumer beacon and consistently reliable.

**Growing Older** 

30 Percentage of 60+ population

The number of persons aged 80

and is projected to surpass the

number of infants by the mid-2030

The world's population is not only growing

older but doing so at an unprecedented pace

and scale. The number of people aged 60 years

or over has more than doubled, from around 541 million in 1995 to

1.2 billion in 2025, and is projected to reach 2.1 billion by 2050. This transformation is most pronounced in developing countries



an Apple or a Patagonia brand generates immense economic value. Indian companies must shed their utilitarian advertising and under investing in branding. Rather, they must become adept at storytelling that connects across cultures ► Hardsell soft power Yoga,

ayurveda, cuisine, cinema and spirituality are assets the world associates with India. But we have allowed Western intermediaries to monetise them. Why should an American brand like Lululemon be the global face of yoga?

GoI-ndia Inc Japan's erstwhile ministry of internationaltrade and industry (MITI)reformed and merged with other agencies to form ministry of economy, trade and industry (METI) in 2001—and South Korea's state support for chaebols, show how policy can create global champions. India should launch a 'Global Indian Brands' initiative, offering fiscal incentives for international expansion, using diplomatic channels to open doors for consumer companies, and funding 'Design in India' programmes to uplift our aesthe-

▶ Brand belief Building a global brand is a marathon, not a sprint. It requires sustained commitment, deep continual investment and unyielding faith. Trust is the foundation of any great global brand, and it must be earned and retained consistently

Creation of global brands is the final frontier of India's

move from being the world's back office and factory to being its cultural and consumer beacon. We already have the ingredients—entrepreneurial zeal. vast domestic market to test ideas. and cultural heritage second to none. What we need now is a synthesis of ambition, vision, patience, storytelling, and the courage to see branding not as

The day an Indian brand sits on the same shelf as Coca-Cola or Samsung, not as an ethnic curiosity but as a global choice, will be the day 'Made in In-

The writer is chairman, RPG Enterprises



# ALGO OF BLISSTECH Nip in the Air When the monsoons retreat,

unshaken and deeply alive.

THE SPEAKING TREE

Sage Ashtavakra once guided King

Janak, who was deeply troubled

by the truth of his dreams, rest-

less to know whether his experi

ences were real or illusory. Ashta-

vakra reminded him of the three

states that every human being

cycles through each day — sleep-

ing, dreaming and waking. Yet,

instead of treating these as fixed

realities, the sage urged King Ja-

nak to see them as passageways.

'You are not the dream, nor the

sleeper, nor even the one who wak

consciousness that flows through

Advait Vedant, this consciousness

the state of Turiva, when streng

thened, cannot be shaken by any

external conditions. It is this stren-

gth of consciousness that makes

us invulnerable to life's turbulen-

ce. Buddhism offers another lens

Shunyata, beyond dualities, be-

Shunyata urges us to search for

nothingness within experiences

of our existence. It is a fertile spa-

ce, where all forms appear, dissol

binding the essence. While Turiya

whispers of the fullness beneath

all the states, encouraging us to

fortify the essence flowing throu-

gh states of our daily being, shun-

ness. It tells us, 'There is nothing

solid to cling to, no essence to gra-

ness that remains.' One reaffirms

the other dissolves the illusion of

the presence of the essence and

substance. The Buddhist empti-

ness and the Vedantic fullness ap-

pear as opposites — yet both are

the doors to the same room of in

finity. We learn not merely to pass

through our states of being but

to rise above them — untouched.

sp; let go, and discover the vast-

yata nudges us towards empti-

ve and reappear, without ever

vond existence/non-existence

all these states.' A concept from

es,' he said gently. 'You are the

conduits, not destinations.

**Two Doors** 

To Infinity

SHIBANI BELWALKAR

leaving behind a landscape rinsed clean and skies scrubbed of their sulk, the first nip in the air arrives like a whispered promise. It's not a gust, not a chill-just a subtle shift, a flirt ation of coolness that brushes past your skin and makes you pause. The humidity loosensits grip, and the breeze carnature exhaling after months of torrential breath.

This nip is a mood, a memory, a moment. It tingles on the nape of your neck, curls into ves, and



distant woodsmo ke. Morning tea tastes sharper, the sun seems gentler. Even the birds

dances

with the

scent of

drying

sound more deliberate in their song. People begin to wear their smiles differently—less wilted, more expectant. It's the season's soft drum-

roll before autumn unfurls its golden tapestry. The air, now tinged with coolness, invites long walks, quiet thoughts, and the rediscovery of sweaters tucked away in cedar-scented trunks. There's a collective sigh in the city a shared joy in the subtle shift. It's a blissful punctuation between monsoon's drama and winter's hush.

# **Chat Room**

#### Pause, Play, Fast-Forward Apropos the news report, 'RBI

Rings in Banking Changes, Leaves Key Rate Unchanged' (Oct 2), in line with market expectations RBI has kept the policy interest rate unchanged at 5.5% for the second consecutive time even while deciding to continue with the neutral stance. This wait-andwatch will give more time to assess the impact of the recent global developments on the Indian economy and derive more clarity before the next monetary policy action. The point is to continue supporting growth while maintaining policy credibility and keeping a constant vigil on developments on all fronts. It is a well-studied pause and a pragmatic review. While signalling the softer inflation path, the real GDP growth for FY26 is realistically projected at 6.8%. Srinivasan Umashankan

# R&D Needs a Smoother Ride eligibility evaluation, timelines and



**Varun Aggarwal & Aditya Sinha** 

A decade ago, subsidies and payments for services meant long queues, excessive paperwork and widespread leakages. Today, DPI enables these tasks to be completed instantly, securely and at scale. UPI, with its open protocols and interoperable APIs, has reduced transaction costs, expanded financial inclusion and transformed payments into a growth driver.

Simultaneously, the Aadhaar stack has streamlined welfare delivery by authenticating beneficiaries. It's now time to extend the logic of DPI to knowledge creation and innovation.

Innovation today is both catalyst for growth and cornerstone of national power. India faces a twin deficit. Its share of the top 1% of global scientific publications barely exceeds 1%. despite R&D spending surpassing 0.5% of GDP. Absence of interoperable systems linking research inputs-programmes, grants, capital allocations - with outputspublications, patents, translational outcomes—hinders systematic performance evaluation and course

Foundation for Advancing Science and Technology's (FAST) 'Ease of Doing Research' survey shows that researchers perceive the greatest friction not in designing or executing experiments, but in the expenditure process. A major constraint arises from General Financial Rules (GFR)

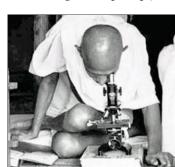
correction.

2017. Its rigid procurement and utilisation protocols are structurally misaligned with inherently uncertain, time-sensitive and iterative nature of scientific research. While recent amendments have partially eased GFR provisions for procuring specialised equipment, challenges remain: delayed fund disbursal, protracted procurement cycles and fragmented approval pathways that erode efficiency and undermine productivity.

DPI is the right tool to address these twin challenges and is well-suited to enabling frictionless transactions in knowledge creation for three reasons • Fragmented and discretionary

guidelines India's innovation ecosystem operates under multiple rules, including GFR, its amendments and ministry-specific regulations. These dictate how funds should be allocated, spent and reported. Guide lines, however, remain interpretive and discretionary. They have not been codified into objective, interoperable, algorithmically enforceable standards, and embeddable into

digital systems. 2 High-volume, complex transactions Researchers, institutions and funders navigate multiple steps, inc-



**Experiment with truth** 

luding raising and disbursing funds, procuring research inputs (infra. equipment, materials), reporting outputs and meeting compliance checks. These processes, spanning grant-making agencies, universities and labs, account for over 0.75% of India's GDP each year. Yet, they remain fragmented and inefficient. **©** Lack of RoI measurement Absence of a common taxonomy across

60+ population

156.7m

China

India

346m

2024

2050

16.5

12 central ministries and agencies means grants are tagged inconsistently, outcomes classified arbitrarily, and investments can't be aggrega ted or benchmarked India must build an innovation sta-

ck: a set of standards and protocols for algorithmic transactions in the innovation ecosystem. Its architecture rests on three interoperating • Standards Encodes grants, peer

review, disbursement, procurement and reporting as machine-readable schemas, enabling calls for proposals to be queried and integrated across agencies 2 Integration Connects these proto

cols to existing ERPs, registries and finance systems in universities and labs via APIs.

**1 Infrastructure** Builds on India Stack—Aadhaar for identity, Digi-Locker for credentials, Government eMarketplace (GeM) for procurement, and Account Aggregator for financial flows - enabling interoperability across researchers, institutions and funders.

Currently, applying for or managing a grant often means poring over PDFs, manually entering data into separate portals and waiting weeks for approvals. Policymakers, in turn, struggle to answer questions such as how much funding is flowing to drones or AI.

Defining grants as digital objects with standardised metadata on purpose,

outcomes will make this process seam less. Agencies can retain their frontends while operating on shared APIs. For researchers, this means discov-

Peace shall prevail if

**Big Construction prevails** 

over Big Destruction.

ering relevant calls in real time, receiving automated alerts and submitting proposals programmatically instead of wrestling with portals. On the agency side, expenditure tracking becomes rule-based, small purchases could be auto-cleared within hours, while larger equipment requests would move to designated officers with defined timelines. Every step would be auditable. Benefits are substantial:

► Lower transaction costs through shared taxonomies and auto-filled applications.

Greater transparency via peer-review protocols with traceability and feedback

▶ Faster fund flows using Account Aggregator and auto-generated uti lisation certificates. ▶ Streamlined procurement through

research-specific GeM catalogues. ▶ Enhanced collaboration and policy alignment through federated regis tries of projects, instruments and outputs, enabling researchers to identify partners while allowing the government to link inputs, outputs and outcomes.

▶ Real-time dashboards tracking approval cycle health, pending requests, average processing time and bottlenecks, helping funders and researchers monitor progress and accountability.

India has already demonstrated how DPIs have transformed economic growth and social welfare. Now, it must show the power of the stack for innovation.

> Aggarwal is co-founder, FAST India, and Sinha is a public policy professional







#### CONTRAPUNTO

I haven't reported my missing credit card to the police because whoever stole it is spending less than my wife - ILIE NASTASE

# Remote Control

Lenders want to kill defaulting borrowers' phones, but RBI must regulate apps used for this

That your smartphone is not really yours became clear when Samsung killed its fire-prone Galaxy Note 7 devices in US with an update in Dec 2016. All connected devices are essentially services. Russian troops who stole \$5mn worth of John Deere tractors from Ukraine in 2022 learnt this the hard way. So, news that RBI might allow lenders to disable financed phones when EMIs aren't paid, isn't alarming technologically. All that needs to be considered are the ethics of it.

Over the past five years, purchase of phones and white goods on credit has increased massively-going from 1% in 2020 to 37% last year. Very often, these devices – and phones especially – are sold to people with poor paying capacity. For lenders, the lure is that sub-prime borrowers can be charged high rates, but with a high risk of default. So, on their own, without regulatory clearances, many lenders were

installing kill apps on financed phones until RBI banned the practice last year. However, it's rethinking its stand now to balance customer data privacy with lenders' interests.

The question of data privacy is paramount though. The way these apps have worked so far is highly invasive. They siphon user data contacts, photos, messages, location, etc-creating opportunities for misuse long after a loan has been paid off. In an interview to a website in 2021, the chief of one such app maker said their most effective "nudging" strategy was to change the

wallpaper of a phone – 70% of defaulters paid within a week. But as we've seen with instant loan apps, data in the wrong hands leaves borrowers vulnerable to blackmail. Two years ago, it was reported that at least 60 Indian borrowers had killed themselves after being blackmailed with morphed photos, etc.

That's why strict regulation of apps installed by lenders is crucial. And RBI's intervention will hopefully ensure that. The other question-central to RBI's remit-is the extent of sub-prime lending itself. Creating an invasive system to protect lenders who are driven by greed to tap the most unviable customers seems wrong. Perhaps, it's time for RBI to drill in prudential norms. 'Phone' is a misnomer when your sim is your digital identity, and key to your social networks and bank accounts. There will be strong temptation to collateralise it for other loans - home and car loans, for instance but that idea should be nipped in the bud.

# Us With Them

*India should set up centres to study animal sentience,* revive its lost culture of species co-existence

t the just-launched LSE Jeremy Coller Centre for Animal Sentience, a central question is how to ensure AI-that could transform our relationship with animals—does not undermine other species' interests? The idea that AI might soon 'translate' animal expression is no longer far-fetched. AI could even be used to train pets – an unregulated and hugely controversial field. At the heart of the LSE centre's research is studying animals' point of view, what they are thinking, not what humans assume they're thinking, and thereafter develop ethical standards to measure how policy, including endeavours using AI, affects non-humans. This will also provide a scientific framework for UK's 2022 Animal Welfare

(Sentience) Act, which recognises animals, including some molluscs and crustaceans, as sentient beings.

Legal recognition of animal sentience is about worldview. It holds govts accountable for impact of policy on other species. This perspective was once deeply ingrained in

Indian societies – empathy, coexistence, primacy of ecology, and refusal to see humans as superior, but as fellow travellers across species. Urbanisation has stripped away that philosophy. Control has replaced coexistence; convenience drives pet care. Fear has replaced respect for species deemed not 'friendly' or 'cute'. Even the term 'animal lover' is not sufficient. It is about love, for sure, it is also about acknowledging that human-only policies can harm every other species.

As tech grows subtler, AI risks deepening human-centred approach to the animal world. Cruelty itself could be outsourced: collars can punish dogs remotely, the human at a distance. These are real dangers. Which is why India, too, must create centres to empirically understand animal consciousness. It need not be all high-tech. Jane Goodall's legacy lies in her unobtrusive observation of chimpanzees. The conservationist helped science move beyond human judgment on animal behaviour, towards objective reality. That clarity, that pragmatism, is what must be revived in India today, nurtured and furthered.

# Cricket outcast

The pitfalls of belonging to a minuscule minority which isn't mad about the game

#### **Jug Suraiya**



Whenever an epidemic of cricket (preferred pronunciation kirkit, an activity bearing the remotest of resemblances to the game played on village greens in a long-vanished England) fever grips the country, I find myself an outcast, a member of a minuscule minority which is allergic to the game that the great majority adores.

The celebrated game of glorious uncertainties is for me a tiresome tedium of inglorious certainty wherein bouts of catatonic somnolence, both on the field and in the spectator stands, are interspersed at periodic intervals with volcanic upheavals, as missiles are flung about hither and thither with much brandishing of wooden cudgels, the entire exercise punctuated by war whoops, fist pumping, chest thumping, and similar gladiatorial gesticulations. And so on and on till the great suspenseful finale which centres around the crucial point as to whether the participants involved will shake each others'

It's as spellbinding a spectacle as watching a traffic light change from red to amber to green, and back again.

jugularvein

You don't like cricket? What do you mean? How can you not like cricket?" my interrogators ask in tones in which astonishment vies with righteous ire, and both compete against a suspicion that I am some form of anti-national subversive, an urban naxal, a seditious element thumbing my not inconsiderable nose at the accepted canon that India Eleven is an alternative

spelling for patriotism. I might even be a Pakistani infiltrator, except that Pakistan is as crazy about cricket as we are, and my stated aversion to the game rules me out as an undercover agent for Islamabad's ISI.

There might be others like me who feel the way I do about cricket, but if there are I haven't met any, or if I have, I didn't realise it at the time because they haven't let their deviancy emerge from the closet of secrecy.

As I plough my lonely furrow of anti-cricket pathology I wonder if I can find

kindred souls, maybe on a Dark Web site run by FAF, Fanatical About Football..

# Bihar Polls: Niyat & Networks

The state's politics is neither backward nor parochial. Its electoral democracy rests more on local connections & grounded assessments of leaders than on money & media blitz

**Uday Chandra and Vignesh Karthik KR** 





Bihar's final electoral rolls, the stage is set for the final month of campaigning before multi-phased polls. This

is an opportunity to understand how democracy actually works in India, varying according to the social fabric of each state and its relations with New Delhi. Only then can we appreciate the distinctive character of Bihar's politics

In metropolitan cities, we often imagine politics as a spectacle mediated by loud TV debates, newspaper reports, front-page advertisements, and WhatsApp forwards. National campaigns are calibrated for the evening news cycle and algorithmic

Bihar, by contrast, offers a strikingly different model of democracy. Superficially, here as elsewhere, caste remains the fundamental grammar of politics. But fierce electoral competition has ensured that no single jati dominates others. Over the past 30 years, Bihar's hierarchical society has been transformed by struggles over social justice, symbolic empowerment, and a round of redistribution. The upshot is a deeply contested and participatory democratic arena.

Money matters | Money, as a mediator of social relations, lies at the heart of Bihar's politics. Campaign money in the state has evolved since

2015 in ways that mirror yet resist national trends. BJP runs, as one analyst put it, on "local boots with a Delhi wallet". Its cadres and leaders are firmly embedded in Bihar's soil, but big cheques come from the party HQ. Unsurprisingly, much of this money is channelled into public spectacles: roadshows, giant stages, LED screens, helicopters. These events are designed to project authority via big shows that can be easily circulated on old and new media.

Prashant Kishor's Jan Suraaj represents a different experiment. Funded by Kishor's consulting income and disclosed donors inside and outside Bihar, JS has sought to professionalise local politics by paying its organisers. In a state where political mobilisation has historically depended on voluntary networks and caste brokers, this is a sharp break.

JS has fewer resources than BJP, but its spending

event management signal a shift away from spectacle. Whether JS can survive Bihar's electoral marketplace remains to be seen, but its presence has already raised the costs of competition for established parties.

Crowds in Bihar are a slippery metric. A packed maidan is more about logistics than persuasion: buses, fuel, food packets, and per diems ensure people come. Parties with thin networks must pay more per head to fill a ground; parties with dense caste-community networks can summon crowds more cheaply.

This is why rallies are best read as a measure of organisational depth rather than as predictors of votes. An overflowing rally with modest spend suggests a living network. A half-empty show after heavy

expenditure implies a brittle one.



in Indian elections, Bihar continues to reward ground networks over raw spending power. Minds change in ward meetings, mohalla sabhas, and repeat visits by known intermediaries. In this intimate social world, a thick web of community brokers lowers mobilisation costs and increases persuasion per rupee. Big lights may help with visibility; familiar faces close the deal.

Social coalitions driving Bihar's politics have also shifted. BJP has invested heavily in non-dominant OBCs and Dalits, extending tickets, recognition, and welfare messaging. These communities, once mobilised by symbolic gestures, now demand material outcomes: jobs, land, housing, better infrastructure. Symbolism has done its job; delivery is now the test of a politician's mettle.

RJD, rooted in the earlier wave of Yadav and Muslim empowerment, faces similar pressures from its base. In this sense, all major parties in Bihar are caught in the same crucible, symbolic empowerment transitioning

An implication is that national parties are forced against their wishes to play second fiddle to regional actors. BJP may command a large vote share in Bihar, but it cannot dictate terms without negotiating with even a small party like Chirag Paswan's LJP, let alone JDU. Congress, as a junior partner in Maha Gatbhandan,

must also abide by alliance arithmetic. Yet regional parties and leaders, most notably RJD and JDU, rely on their embeddedness in micro-social networks of community and locality. Even small outfits such as HAM and VIP may matter enormously: they swing close contests, extract concessions, and compel national parties to spend heavily on mobilisation.

Kishor's presence is significant not because e will sweep seats, but because JS is a disruptor. His startup tightens contests and raises costs for established parties. Tamil Nadu offers a parallel: Seeman's modest 7% vote share narrowed margins across dozens of constituencies and reshaped alliance calculations for DMK and AIADMK. Bihar might see similar dynamics, where new entrants do not replace existing players but complicate their election strategies.

Politics of niyat | At the heart of this democratic model is a distinctive ethic. Biharis often speak of a leader's niyat, a word that conveys both recognisability and moral intent. Niyat is familiarity combined with an ethical stance that can be assessed and critiqued.

People know their politicians intimately: what they promise, what they deliver, how they behave. Unlike the manufactured charisma of mediatised campaigns, niyat emerges from proximity, repetition, and memory. It is a democratic metric grounded in

As we follow US politics, another PR circus orchestrated by big media houses, Bihar insists on another path. Its elections are messy, expensive, often cynical, but also irreducibly local. Symbolic empowerment mattered; material delivery now matters more. Networks and brokers remain powerful; money plays a role, but not a decisive one. National parties must bow to regional satraps, and even the smallest parties can alter outcomes.

In that sense, Bihar's model of democracy is neither backward nor parochial. It reminds us that mass politics in India still depends on one's niyat and networks, not on money and media.

Chandra is a field-based researcher of politics and society.

# How Snack Inc Sneaks In The Munchies

ICMR's survey showed the scale of India's obesity problem. But when companies that make unhealthy food have as much say as scientists in policymaking, public health will lose

#### **Arun Gupta and Vandana Prasad**





What will be govt's response to ICMR-INDIAB survey on diabetes and heart health? Only a scientifically informed nutri-

tion and food policy can correct Indians' alarming dietary conditions. Yet, food policy in India has a troubling contradiction. The very corporations whose products drive obesity and disease are invited to help write the rules meant to regulate them. This happens under the familiar banner of 'stakeholder consultation'. But the Food Safety and Standards Act (FSA), 2006, never envisaged such deep industry involvement.

The term 'stakeholder' sounds neutral. But in food policy it has become a convenient cover for capture by industry. By clubbing corporations, consumers and public health groups in the same basket, the process tilts the power equation. Stakeholder consultations have been projected as a magic wand over the last two to three decades.

FSA 2006 was brought into force ostensibly to "ensure availability of safe and wholesome food for human consumption". Section 2 declares "it is expedient in publicinterest that the Union should take under its control the food industry". Section 13 details a scientific panel must consist of independent scientific

experts; they may invite industry to deliberate. Significantly, Section 18 provides general principles to guide authorities assessment, management & communication, transparent public consultation, protection of consumer interests and so on.

Nowhere does the Act define the term 'stakeholder'. Nor does it suggest that stakeholder consultation means granting equal weightage to experts and the food industry. The Act demands independence of its decision-making bodies informed by science, and not market considerations. This implies that the very corporations that are to be regulated cannot, logically, be at the table while framing regulations.

At FSSAI's latest national consultation on labelling, advertisement, and claims regulations, food industry representatives and their associations argued for minimal oversight. The history of India's draft Front-of-Pack Labelling (FOPL) regulation (2022) shows how industry influence dominates. Of six key stakeholder meetings during the FOPL drafting process, 80% of participants were from the food industry. Their preferred option – a health star rating - directly shaped the draft notification. Even though FSSAI received around 14,000 public comments, none were ever made public.

A similar pattern appeared when FSSAI was regulating foods for special medical purposes (FSMPs). It partnered with the Infant and Young Child Nutrition Council of India (IYNCI), an industry body representing four major baby food companies. IYNCI even secured a seat on the steering committee before eventually being dropped.

Oversight of food advertisements reflects the same conflict. I&B ministry relies on Advertising Standards Council of India - an industry-funded body made up of the very advertisers it monitors. Unsurprisingly, I&B ministry reported no misleading food ads

> between Sept 2023 and March 2025. Such arrangements blur the line between regulator and regulated, often resulting in delayed or diluted rules. Compounding this is the absence of any govtwide policy or guidelines to prevent or manage conflicts of interest in departments handling food, health, and nutrition, per an RTI.

Ultra-processed foods high in fat, sugar, and salt lie at the center of the non-communicable disease (NCD) crisis. Their consumption is strongly linked to obesity, diabetes, and related conditions. WHO has repeatedly cautioned govts against partnering with such industries in shaping nutrition policy, precisely because corporate obligations to shareholders clash with the state's duty India's unfolding crisis – laid bare in ICMR's detailed

study on diabetes and hypertension - makes this warning urgent. Allowing industry to influence or draft the rules weakens regulation and erodes public trust in the very institutions meant to safeguard our food.

Global standards reinforce this principle. OECD advises govts to insulate regulatory decisions from conflicts of interest. Similarly, Article 5.3 of WHO's tobacco control code FCTC requires parties to shield health policies from commercial and vested interests. Many countries have built legal frameworks to manage these conflicts. India cannot afford to lag.

The food industry has the right to be heard, so it is important to be clear where the lines must be drawn. Key is to discard joint's takeholder' consultations/dialogues in food and nutrition policy as powerful food companies dominate these. Consumers, scientists, civil society and public health institutions must not be placed at the same table as those manufacturing and selling harmful food products.

I&B ministry must revisit its arrangement with the advertising council. Disclosure of all public submissions, expert committee reports, and rationales for final regulatory decisions must be mandatory. A Conflicts of Interest law modelled on WHO's tobacco code is essential for all departments deciding on food, health and nutrition.

India has to choose – either let food corporations dictate rules, or uphold independence and transparency the FSS Act demands. Ending joint stakeholder dialogues is the first step towards reclaiming food policy for public health. The writers are paediatricians and members of Nutrition

#### Calvin & Hobbes



IT'S FUNNY ... WHEN I WAS A KID. I THOUGHT GROWN-UPS NEVER WORRIED ABOUT ANYTHING. I TRUSTED MY PARENTS TO TAKE CARE OF EVERYTHING, AND IT NEVER OCCURRED TO ME THAT THEY MIGHT NOT KNOW HOW.











Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love.

Francis of Assisi

# Nonviolence: A Force Stronger Than War

#### Farida Khanam

√he International Day of Nonviolence is observed on Oct 2, MK Gandhi's birthday. It encourages us to pledge 'the universal relevance of the principle of nonviolence' and the goal to establish a culture of peace, tolerance, understanding, and nonviolence'. In fact, nonviolence is more powerful than the strongest weapon of destruction created by human beings.

Nonviolence is considered a high human value across all castes and religions; for example, the Mahabharat contains multiple references to ahimsa paramo dharm, meaning that nonviolence is the greatest virtue. The Prophet of Islam said, God grants to nonviolence what he does not grant to violence, Sahih Muslim: 2593.

In an era when violence frequently makes headlines, Gandhi's legacy reminds us that lasting revolutions are won not on battlefields but in the realm

of ideas. His philosophy not only changed the course of India's independence movement but also provided the world with a model of resistance based on patience, tolerance, and moral courage

When Gandhi launched his nonviolent struggle, the British found themselves powerless. Accustomed to crushing violent revolts with force, they lost the moral ground. So baffled was one officer that he reportedly wired London: "Kindly advise how to kill a tiger nonviolently." Gandhi had moved the fight from battlefield to the moral realm, where the empire had no weapon.

By 1947, India had gained its independence, but Gandhi's contribution was far greater than just the political freedom of one country. He proved to the world that peace can be a more powerful force than war.

Gandhi believed violence was the

lowest use of human potential, while peace was the highest. Peace creates stability, freedom, and growth, whereas violence only breeds fear, suppresses creativity, and closes the door to progress. Austrian psychologist Alfred Adler

once wrote that human beings alone possess the ability to "turn a minus into a plus". Gandhi's life embodied this truth. He showed that setbacks,

when met with patience, tolerance and determination, could be turned into opportunities. Nonviolence, therefore, was not a passive retreat but an active use of human potential THE SPEAKING TREE through discipline and restraint.

"Where there is tolerance, peace prevails; where there is intolerance, war and chaos follow." Gandhi's principles remain just as relevant within families as they are between nations. Without tolerance, peace remains just an imaginable dream.

"Peaceful revolution is the outcome

of peaceful thinking," Maulana Wahiduddin Khan wrote. According to him, Gandhi's struggle was rooted in patience and forbearance. He believed that Gandhi had shown the world how truth could triumph without bloodshed.

For Maulana, peace was not just desirable but intrinsic to human nature. "Man was born in peace. Man must die in peace. Peace is man's birthright — God's greatest blessing to humanity," he said. In this sense, Gandhi's legacy extended beyond India's freedom movement. It was a universal call for humanity to rediscover its natural state of harmony.

Gandhi's philosophy has since inspired many movements, from the American civil rights movement led by Martin Luther King Jr to Nelson Mandela's fight against apartheid. Gandhi's legacy of nonviolence endures as a reminder that peace, tolerance and moral courage remain the strongest forces for lasting change.

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