



ASEEM SHRIVASTAVA

THE CANOPY closes overhead as the monsoon sky lowers, and the Kataklean dark forest of North Kanara slips into an almost absolute blackness. It is the middle of the day. A few hundred yards in, the light dies so completely that you reach for a torch just to discern the brook gurgling a few yards away. Hornbills call through the dripping understorey, mountain imperial pigeons murmur in the vaulted gloom, and eagle owls send low hoots echoing between ancient trunks. Here, in this living darkness, the dry, fragmented woodlots that pass for forests in “New India” reveal themselves as paltry shadows of the *aranya* that inspired poets like Rabindranath Tagore — a primordial realm that still breathes and governs itself, reminding all that true wilderness does not merely survive in India; it thrives in the damp air and the dark. If we let it.

Having done my doctoral dissertation on forest management and seen jungles across four continents, I thought I knew what a forest was. I was wrong.

The Kataklean darkness is merely the most intimate face of a mountain chain whose influence extends far beyond its forested slopes. The Western Ghats, running 1,600 kilometres along the edge of the pen-

insula, are nothing less than the living ecological spine of India. Recognised as one of the world’s eight hottest biodiversity hot-spots, these mountains harbour extraordinary life — nearly half of India’s flowering plant species, a third of its vertebrate fauna, and over 300 globally threatened species find refuge here. Several species, like the Kataklean Marsh Nut and the Gund Day Gecko, are exclusive to the very forests I visited.

Yet the significance of the Ghats runs deeper than species counts. They gather the first impact of the southwest monsoon and release it as the lifeblood of the Deccan: The Godavari, Krishna, Kaveri, and Tungabhadra rivers originate here, sustaining hundreds of millions across six states. Their dense forests temper regional climate, draw down carbon, hold the soil in place, and soften the runoff and flooding that would otherwise devastate downstream plains.

It is no exaggeration, then, to call these rainforests “India’s Amazon”. Like their South American counterpart, they behave as a vast living organism — breathing in carbon dioxide, exhaling oxygen, and cycling moisture back into the atmosphere to sustain the monsoon itself. Their layered canopies, dripping with epiphytes and echoed by the calls of hornbills and lion-tailed macaques, weave a self-renewing tapestry of life that sustains the climate and waters of the entire peninsula. Just as the Amazon Basin constitutes the lungs of South America, the Western Ghats are the lungs and wellspring of India. As ecologists like Madhav Gadgil have long noted, their continued integrity is not merely a conservation priority; it is a matter of civilisational ecological survival.

The Kataklean darkness is merely the most intimate face of a mountain chain whose influence extends far beyond its forested slopes

Spider-Man is watching you. His inspiration: AI companies



BLJIN JOSE

I WATCHED *Spider-Man: Brand New Day*. In the latest instalment, Tom Holland’s Peter Parker can be seen using an AI-powered assistant to engage in mass surveillance. This is not the first Marvel movie to use futuristic surveillance on unsuspecting citizens, and it is definitely not the last. Remember *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, where Nick Fury describes Project Insight as “We’re going to neutralise a lot of threats before they even happen”? This led to Steve Rogers’ famous counter: “I thought the punishment usually came after the crime.”

In *Brand New Day*, Parker uses an AI assistant to access every security camera in the entire city and run facial recognition algorithms to track a specific person. While this looks slick, in the process, our friendly superhero ends up violating the privacy of millions of innocent civilians.

In 2026, this is no longer fiction, and that is something which is deeply concerning. The system here eerily feels similar to the type of technology developed by AI surveillance companies like Peter Thiel’s Palantir or Flock Safety. However, the film barely explores the implications, making one wonder if mass surveillance is being normalised at scale. The movie casually slips in the technology; there is even a short conversation with Peter’s friend who works for the NYPD where she briefly mentions surveillance with facial recognition tech being illegal.

A closer look reveals that in most MCU narratives, surveillance tech is justified in the same way as CEOs and governments worldwide do: Advocating it as a tool for safety, something that is necessary to catch terrorists or dissidents, or to save innocents. On July 26, CNN reported on the mounting concerns over police misuse of Flock Safety’s automated licence-plate reader cameras.

Flock Safety is a US-based surveillance tech company that offers hardware and software, including automated licence-plate readers (ALPR). Its camera network currently operates across 49 US states, making it one of the largest ALPR networks in the country. In simple words, the technology allows law-enforcement agencies to record vehicle movements, creating reports that can show where people travel. The CNN report studied cases in which police officers allegedly accessed Flock Safety’s system for reasons that were unrelated to lawful investigations, and this has raised concerns about abuse of surveillance tech and inadequate oversight. There have been instances where police officers were caught using Flock to spy on their exes or stalk women.

A report by the Electronic Frontier Foundation in November 2025 claimed that law enforcement agencies are using Flock’s technology to monitor protesters and activists, raising concerns about the use of surveillance systems in politically sensitive contexts. Though Flock Safety does not use facial recognition in its licence-plate reader systems, its technology is yet another example of mass automated surveillance.

Palantir has been increasingly deploying AI-powered intelligence tools into military operations through its platforms like Gotham, Foundry, and Skykit. Earlier this month, *Al Jazeera* reported that Palantir had significantly expanded its work with the Israeli military after announcing a strategic partnership in January 2024. The report claimed that the company subsequently expanded operations supporting Israel’s military operations in Gaza, amid scathing criticism over its role in AI, military technology and warfare.

The technology and the companies that are building it seem to be oblivious to the ethical concerns surrounding their use. Unfortunately, this remains true even for Spider-Man, who may be systematically violating the privacy of denizens of his fictional universe. Regardless, *Brand New Day* has triggered a spate of social media content that uses the movie to talk about the perils of AI and mass surveillance. It is a good start.

The writer is Assistant Editor, indianexpress.com

What two gramophones tell us about Vande Mataram



HISTORY HEADLINE
BY AKHILESH JHA

HARIPURA WAS not merely another annual gathering of the Indian National Congress. In early 1938, Congress assembled there in Gujarat for its 51st Annual Session after the Congress Working Committee meeting in Calcutta in October 1937. And in those intervening months, much had changed in the way *Vande Mataram* was to be seen, heard and presented.

The ceremonial journey of the young President-elect Subhas Chandra Bose to the Congress pavilion became a spectacle of political imagination. For a four-mile journey from Haripura, Bose was carried to the pandal, curated by Nandalal Bose, in a magnificent *rath*. It was drawn by 51 bullocks. Richly caparisoned, their horns painted, the bullocks moved in pairs, each pair carrying tricolour flags upon their heads. And around their necks hung tuned bells. They were *Vande Mataram* bells with engraved letters.

Bose reached the session with singers and musicians who had travelled with him from Calcutta in the second-class bogies of the Nagpur Mail. RR Mukherjee was the master musician. As the Bengal troupe sang *Vande Mataram*, the senior leadership of the Congress, including Mahatma Gandhi, stood in attention. Sarojini Naidu found the Haripura *Vande Mataram* ‘exquisitely’ sung, with ‘deep and thrilling emotions’. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay praised the young Bengali troupe for providing ‘a fine emotional setting for the whole session’.

The experiments with *Vande Mataram* can hardly be separated from what had happened only a few months earlier at the CWC meeting in Calcutta in October 1937. In many ways, the pride and position of the song had been compromised there. Haripura was determined to restore it.

In pursuit of ‘development’

Meanwhile, something else is planned in Kataklean’s neighbourhood. The proposed Rs 10,000-crore, 2,000 MW Sharavathi Pumped Storage Project in Karnataka’s Shimoga and Uttara Kannada district remains under an interim stay by the Karnataka High Court, with work frozen until further orders. It aims to link the Talakalale and Gerusoppa reservoirs on the heavily hydropower-dammed Sharavathi, through massive underground tunnels and powerhouses, pumping water uphill during off-peak hours and releasing it to generate power during peak demand.

The project sits entirely within the Sharavathi Valley Lion-Tailed Macaque Wildlife Sanctuary, which enjoys one of highest levels of protection under the Wildlife Act, where such infrastructure is strictly prohibited. An expert panel constituted by a Standing Committee of National Board of Wildlife recommended against approval, citing irreversible ecological harm and questioning its technical justification. The panel found it would yield no new net energy to the grid, instead producing a net loss of approximately 500 MW due to pumping requirements.

The stakes are enormous. The project requires clearing over 50 hectares of dense primary evergreen forest, fragmenting crucial wildlife corridors between the Anshi-Dandeli and Bhadra-Kudremukh landscapes. Experts warn of extreme landslide risks in this geologically fragile zone, where blasting for underground structures like tunnels and powerhouses with heavy industrial explosives threatens catastrophe. With an installed renewable energy capacity of 20.23 GW, Karnataka needs diversified solutions

such as Battery Energy Storage Systems, pumped storage, compressed air energy storage and gravity energy storage to manage the intermittency of renewable energy.

Critics acknowledged this need. But meeting this need by destroying forever, a carbon-storing ecological backbone such as the Sharavathi Lion-Tailed Macaque Wildlife Sanctuary, which justly enjoys the highest levels of legal protection, is indefensible.

Cultural, ecological renewal

To defend the ecology of the irreplaceable Western Ghats entails renewing our ties to the natural world. No trite nostrum along the lines of “sustainable development” will suffice. Sustainability is about what we can go on taking from nature without finding the courage to face our organised, well-disguised greed. Ecological renewal and reciprocity imply that we honour what our ancestors have bequeathed to us — a stable, healthy ecology. It means we creatively renew a culture long integrated with nature, until the winds of accelerating industrial modernity begin to sunder them. We pass on what was passed down to us. We act for future generations the way our ancestors acted towards us. We act towards trees and animals, mountains and forests, rivers and coastlines with the reverence the cosmos deserves. This means putting an end to the plunder that corporate-consumer civilisation is routinely engaged in through mining and infrastructure, roads and expressways, dams, airports, and power plants. Not allowing *aranya* to be sacrificed to ecologically subsidised cities.

Shrivastava is a writer and teacher

corded. The assertion of completeness was repeated on the label in Devanagari, Bangla and Nastaliq. Then came the second declaration, in bold capitals: INDIAN NATIONAL ANTHEM. There was no ambiguity.

Within a year, Bose’s relationship with the Congress changed dramatically. War, transfer of power and the Constituent Assembly followed, reshaping the debate over the National Anthem. Nehru’s Cabinet ‘tentatively’ chose *Jana Gana Mana* as the National Anthem in 1948, the Constituent Assembly formalised it through a ‘Statement’ on 24 January 1950.

The Constitution had been finalised on 26 November 1949. Babu Rajendra Prasad had signed its copies. The 1950 statement deserves careful attention. There was no distinction between a ‘National Anthem’ and a ‘National Song’ in what was read out on 24 January 1950. *Jana Gana Mana* was declared the National Anthem. *Of Vande Mataram*, the Statement said that it ‘shall be honoured equally with *Jana Gana Mana*’ and ‘shall have equal status’. The expression ‘National Song’ did not occur in that. The distinction sharpened in a Prime Minister’s Secretariat noting from 25 November 1955. Nehru referred to *Vande Mataram* as a ‘Special National Song’, departing from the language of equal status used in 1950. If both were performed, *Vande Mataram* was to open and *Jana Gana Mana* to close, though Nehru felt that, ‘as a rule’, both should not be performed at the same function. That noting was marked to the MHA, which maintained the distinction between ‘National Anthem’ and ‘National Song’. That distinction has no constitutional, legal or legislative basis.

Yet, between the monumental 1938 recording and the 1950 statement lies another, little-noticed gramophone record. The six stanza became four, pressed on a 10-inch HMV record. The label too changed: no longer ‘*Sampooran*’, nor ‘Indian National Anthem’, but ‘Indian National Congress Anthem’. Why was ‘Congress’ inserted, and by whom? The record is silent. The question remains in the gramophone grooves.

Jha is a civil servant and author

The skin I grew up in

worldview I have decided to box you in.” Unlike other days, I reshared my post, feeling that it resonated just as well today as it did five years ago. At the heart of that speech, I was grappling with racism and colourism.

Growing up, what I identified with were my body (fat) and my colour (dark). My *appa* was my favourite parent. Anytime I would feel ‘less than’, I would hold my arm next to his and revel in how much fairer my skin colour was. We would joke about it; he would crinkle his nose, smile, and the world would be alright again. In the shadow of the fair-skinned, I was very aware of pretty privilege. I envied my beautiful peers. I was yet to understand what ‘beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder’ meant. As a 50-year-old now, I look back on the younger me with pity and shards of empathy. She was the ‘pick me’. Eager to blend in and be accepted. Starved for appreciation, she was a naive child.

She enjoyed the ritual of her *amma* applying *paal yedu* (milk cream) mixed with *kadalai maavu* (gram flour) and *manjal* (turmeric) on her face, feeling the moisture es-



SHE SAID
BY LAKSHMI
IYER

cape, and the skin tighten. She helped herself to her *atha’s* (aunt’s) Fair & Lovely cream on occasion. As a young working woman, she loved the hours of pampering at the beauty parlour. The facials, the waxing and the momentary glow of money well spent. As adult life took over, the obsession with beauty receded, giving way to grown-up worries.

Race entered my life, in a different way, in my 30s. I was suddenly the mom to white-passing Navajo twins. The role reversal was fascinating. Was I relieved my children were conventionally beautiful? I can only speculate. Race was never far away from my thoughts. It reared its head each time we were out, shopping, walking, and existing.

In 2014, I gave birth to a beautiful girl. *Karuppu* (dark). That was the first observation her *paati* (grandmother) made. No malice. Concern, yes. I was offended. I went mute.

Then, a decade later, I watched my youngest come in from the sun, and the words crossed my mind. Tanned. Dark.

I did not voice it out. I was mortified that I, the recipient of backhanded compliments,

Small dreams too important to ignore



FIFTH COLUMN
BY TAVLEEN SINGH

ALMOST FROM the day that Narendra Modi became prime minister, he has urged Indians to dream big dreams. At international events he has boasted often that India no longer has small dreams. And we have been reminded so often that by 2047 India will be a developed country that on social media, there are jokes about how the prime minister seems to believe that 2047 is the year that comes after 2026. Following Modi’s lead, his chief ministers routinely tell us in expensive full-page newspaper advertisements and glittering TV promotions that their states, in keeping with ‘the vision of Modiji’, are aiming to become trillion-dollar economies by 2047.

It is a good thing to dream big dreams. I totally support big dreams and have been very proud of the pace at which the Modi government and sundry other ‘double-engine’ governments have speeded up the building of glittering, new highways. They look dismal as they disintegrate when the rains come, but that is another story. I also support the idea of building ‘smart cities’ and bringing high-quality urban services to rural parts and have said more than once that Modi’s toilet-building programme has been transformative. Those long lines of men squatting beside the tracks is no longer a common sight when you look out of the window of your Vande Bharat trains. But, in building big dreams some very important small dreams have been forgotten.

If you have been following the ‘School *Theek Karo*’ campaign of the Cockroach Janta Party, you would have been horrified by the state of rural schools. And this is not even half the story. Did you know that there are no properly trained teachers teaching in government schools? Trained teachers are not going to miraculously appear out of thin air. To create enough of them, we will need to build hundreds of thousands of teacher training schools. Some months ago, I quoted in this column the educationist, Michel Danino, saying this as the second of the three most important reforms needed. He believes that the District Institutes of Education and Training need a ‘complete overhaul’. So does the entire education system so that children are taught to think and not learn by rote. Schools also need libraries, playgrounds, clean water and toilets.

These may sound like small things compared to national highways and bullet trains, but they are not. They might be more important. There are other small dreams that have been recklessly forgotten. There is the dream of having clean air in our cities, clean water in our sacred rivers and efficient waste management so that our ‘smart cities’ do not seem to be sprouting out of garbage dumps. A Yale University survey reported last week that when it came to environmental matters, India was at the very bottom of a list of 177 countries. Only Laos is dirtier and more degraded than India.

So instead of the big dream that has made not singing *Vande Mataram* a crime, what about making it a non-bailable offence for political leaders to forget the meaning of its first line? *Sujalam, Suphalam, Malayaja-sitalam*. A land of pure water, abundant fruit trees and clean air is what the poet described. And this is most certainly not an accurate description of our dear Bharat Mata as she is today. As for the damage reckless construction activity has done to our mountains, it is beyond criminal. The disaster last week in Nepal should remind our political leaders about what happens when the environment is criminally neglected.

What then has gone so wrong with our policies that they have brought us to this sorry pass? Could it be that in pursuit of big dreams, political leaders have forgotten the importance of small dreams? Have our policy-makers failed totally to notice that young Indians, among them schoolchildren, are now regularly taking to the streets to demand such small things as teachers and clean toilets in their schools? They also declare openly that what makes them feel most hopeless is the absence of decent jobs. It is true that in the past decade a handful of very rich Indians have got very much richer and are not shy of showing off their enormous wealth. Personally, I have no problem with this.

What I have a problem with is that millions more Indians have not got rich as well. Why has this not happened? Could it be because the Prime Minister lulled himself into believing that he had truly made doing business in India easier? It is not easier to do business for most Indians and one big reason for this is that corruption in his ‘double-engine’ governments is so deeply rooted at almost every level that only those who can pay huge bribes find it easier to do business.

In this time of big dreams, it is vital, if Modi wants to win back his fading popularity before that crucial election in Uttar Pradesh next year, that he personally concentrates on small things. And that he gets his high-flying chief ministers to plant their feet back firmly on the ground and explain why there have been so many big failures when it comes to the small dreams of ordinary Indians. The ugly truth is that below the shining highways that stand suspended today over towns and cities across India, far too many things have remained unchanged, and they need to start changing fast.

was now somehow complicit in the very system I was fighting. I asked my child if she ever thought about her skin colour. She said no. I asked her how she felt about herself. She answered confidently. ‘Beautiful’.

Despite myself, I seemed to be blessed with children who are supremely self-assured and absolutely gorgeous. It is also a wake-up call for me and countless women like me to inspect and introspect. How much of the systems we fight do we embody in ourselves? Can we recognise it? What are we doing about it? As for me, I write. Five years ago, I argued before a school board to change the systems around me. The stories I carry took longer to change. ‘*Why Is My Skin Brown?*’ is for the 12-year-old Lakshmi, to remind her that blending in might have made her comfortable, but standing out was better.

Lakshmi Iyer is the author of ‘Why Is My Skin Brown?’

Editor (Planning & Projects) Shalini Langer curates the fortnightly ‘She Said’ column

REPAYMENT PLAN WAS APPROVED WITH 80.8% OF VOTES CAST IN ITS FAVOUR

How Chandra’s Rs 6.25-cr plan got through despite bank opposition

George Mathew
Mumbai, August 29

THE NATIONAL Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) order that approved Zee founder Subhash Chandra’s proposal to pay just Rs 6.25 crore to creditors in personal insolvency proceedings came after the majority of creditors supported the repayment plan. But banks now say that at least five entities — which held 61.78% of the votes cast and backed the repayment plan — are linked to Chandra either as associates or related parties.

As many as 23 creditors participated in the voting under the insolvency mechanism, and banks which opposed the plan, got a vote share of only 19.186%. The admitted claims amounted to approximately Rs 22,006.57 crore. But the approved repayment plan proposed payment of only Rs 6.25 crore to creditors and Rs 25 lakh towards process costs.

Much of the liability relates to personal guarantees and indemnities given in connection with borrowings by companies associated with the Essel Group. Under the resolution mechanism of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), once the requisite majority of creditors approves a repayment plan and the tribunal sanctions it, individual dissenting creditors cannot simply walk away from the process and demand a different settlement.

In its application, IDBI Trusteeship Services said the votes cast by the creditor Veena In-

vestments Pvt Ltd, and its subsidiaries Direct Media Distribution Ventures Pvt Ltd and World Crest Advisors LLP, ought not to have been considered by the resolution professional. It said these entities allegedly fall within the category of associate parties.

A resolution professional is a person appointed to manage the affairs of a company undergoing the insolvency process and facilitate its resolution.

HDFC Bank said Veena Investments Pvt Ltd, Direct Media Distribution Ventures, World Crest Advisors LLP, Lemonade Capital Advisors LLP and Corpcall Capital Advisors LLP fall in the category of associates of the debtor and that their vote share cannot be taken into account while counting the vote share in favour of the repayment plan.

When contacted, Subhash Chandra’s office said in a statement: “We would like to state that this claim is not true and inaccurately represents the facts. Some of the associate entities referenced in the reports, belonged to Jawahar Goel, whose business interests were separated from Subhash Chandra in 2008-09 through a family business separation process.”

“The separation process and subsequent division of the business was duly informed to the stock exchanges and the regulator. Further, the term ‘associate entity’ is well-defined in the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code statutes. In accordance with the provisions of the Code, the com-

Who voted for and against the repayment plan

NO	NAME OF CREDITOR	VOTING	APPROVAL OF REPAYMENT PLAN
1	Anil Kumar	0.67%	Favour
2	Axis Bank Ltd	2.86%	Against
3	Axis Trustee Services	0.04%	Did not vote
4	Axis Trustee Services	0.18%	Did not vote
5	Axis Trustee Services	0.11%	Did not vote
6	Canara Bank	1.60%	Against
7	Catalyst Trusteeship (CINDA FPI)	11.85%	Favour
8	Catalyst Trusteeship (HDFC AMC)	0.06%	Did not vote
9	Corpcall Capital Advisors LLP	10.30%	Favour
10	Direct Media Distribution Ventures	1.15%	Favour
11	HDFC Bank Ltd	3.17%	Against
12	IDBI Trusteeship (Edelweiss Fund)	2.60%	Did not vote
13	IDBI Trusteeship (Franklin Templeton)	3.36%	Against
14	Indiabulls Housing Finance	1.98%	Favour
15	IndusInd Bank Ltd	1.11%	Did not vote
16	Kautilya Traders Pvt Ltd	1.02%	Favour
17	Lemonade Capital Advisors LLP	16.85%	Favour
18	LIC Housing Finance	6.09%	Against
19	RBL Bank Ltd	0.55%	Against
20	Sunil Jain	0.18%	Favour
21	Union Bank of India (UK) Ltd	0.76%	Against
22	Veena Investments Pvt Ltd	4.99%	Favour
23	World Crest Advisors	28.49%	Favour
24	Total	100%	

panies concerned do not qualify as associate entities of the Group,” the statement said.

World Crest has a vote share of 28.49%, Lemonade 16.85% and Corpcall 10.30% share in the voting. Veena Investments has 4.99% share. Catalyst Trus-

teeship (CINDA FPI) with a vote share of 11.85% also favoured the repayment plan. The plan was approved with a majority of 80.814% votes favouring the plan. All the banks voted against the repayment plan. However, they only had a

19.186% vote share. Among banks and NBFCs, HDFC Bank had 3.17% vote share, LIC Housing Finance 6.09% share and Canara Bank 1.60%.

The debtor’s counsel argued that Direct Media and World Crest are corporate subsidiaries of Veena Investments. Legally, if the parent company itself cannot be classified as an associate of the debtor due to a lack of direct ownership or control by the PG, its downstream subsidiaries automatically escape the associate classification.

“It is stated that Direct Media Distribution Ventures Pvt Ltd and World Crest Advisors LLP are subsidiaries of Veena Investments Pvt Ltd, which is allegedly controlled by Sushila Devi Goel, wife of Jawahar Goel, the brother of the Personal Guarantor,” the order says.

The claims submitted by Lemonade Capital Advisors LLP and Corpcall Capital Advisors LLP are stated to be founded upon deeds of guarantee allegedly executed by the PG in connection with financial facilities availed by another group entity — Churu Enterprises LLP. It has further been contended that the proximity and relationship between these entities and the PG stand reinforced by the fact that the partners of these two entities are also directors in companies disclosed as “other related parties” in the consolidated financial statements of Veena Investments Pvt Ltd for the financial year 2020–2021, the order says. **FULL REPORT ON [WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM](#)**

Chandra’s settlement comes as IBC turns 10, with bank haircuts at five-year high

Dheeraj Mishra
New Delhi, August 29

A RECENT order of the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) involving Zee Group founder Subhash Chandra has yet again exposed one of the highly debated issues under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) framework—deep haircuts. The August 25 order approved a repayment plan under which Chandra will pay just Rs 6.5 crore to creditors against admitted claims of Rs 22006.57 crore. This amounts to a 99.97% haircut, one of the highest in the insolvency regime’s history.

The term “haircut” has not been defined in IBC. However, in the banking system, a haircut refers to the percentage reduction in the value of an asset used as collateral to protect the lender from potential losses.

As the Banks are considering an appeal at National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT), here’s a look at what has been the overall haircuts status under the IBC so far.

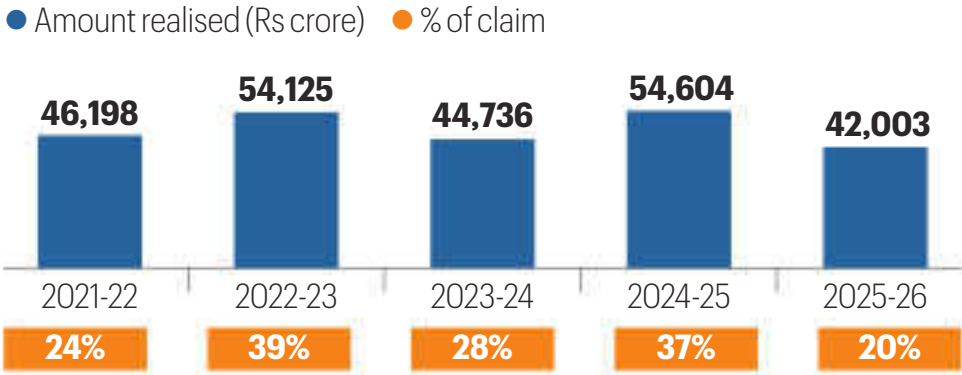
The Recovery

The IBC was enacted in 2016 to provide a comprehensive system to rescue companies under financial stress or high debt through resolution and repayment to creditors. However, whether resolution or recovery is more important has remained a central question around its functioning.

According to data available with the Ministry of Corporate Affairs, between financial years 2021-22 and 2025-26, a total of 1077 cases were resolved under the IBC, with a realisation of Rs 2.47 lakh crore for creditors. However, the average recovery was close to 29%.

The data shows that recovery against admitted claims

Creditor’s haircuts



SOURCE: MINISTRY OF CORPORATE AFFAIRS

in the financial year 2025-26 (FY26) was 20%, the lowest in the last five years. Similarly, the total realisation was 37% in FY25, 28% in FY24, 39% in FY23 and 24% in FY22.

This ultimately means that a bank may have claims running into thousands of crore rupees, but what it receives could be just a fraction of what it is owed.

What government says

The government’s opinion is that the primary objective of the Code is “resolution, not recovery”. The logic is that if a company has been under financial stress for years and its assets have depleted significantly due to non-performance, the IBC process may yield low or no realisation, or even result in liquidation.

“It may not be appropriate to see realisation in relation to claims of the creditors. The assets available on the ground may make better sense, because the market offers a value in relation to what a company brings on the table, and not what it owes to creditors...the amount of claim often includes NPA, which may be completely written off, and interest on such NPA. It may include loans as well as the guarantee against such loans,” said the Ministry to the standing committee on finance in December 2025, which did a holistic review of the effec-

tiveness of IBC.

The ministry also said that the amount realised often does not include the value that may be realised from equity holdings post-resolution. Beyond realisation against claims, it is considered that the IBC has also helped create credit discipline, which has contributed in reducing the gross non-performing assets of banks.

What banks say

However, the banks have been voicing strong opinions and serious concerns over haircuts on a case to case basis. They have been suggesting that the problem lies in the valuation of stressed companies and that all assets should be included and properly valued as per established standards, indicating that some assets may not be accounted for and there is an opacity around the process.

In the IBC process, at least two valuers are appointed to give a fair value and liquidation value, based on records and physical examination of the assets of the entity under challenge. “One of the suggestions to reduce excessive haircuts is asset valuation systems to ensure the reflection of enterprise value instead of liquidation value,” said the Chairman, SBI, to the standing committee. **FULL REPORT ON [WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM](#)**

Temasek backs SIA’s Air India investment

Sukalp Sharma
New Delhi, August 29

TEMASEK, THE Singapore government-owned investment company that is the majority shareholder in Singapore Airlines (SIA), said Saturday that it backs SIA’s investment in Air India, and views it from a long-term view of securing growth beyond the city-state.

Temasek’s statement, which came amid concerns being raised in Singapore over the loss-making Air India seeking fresh capital infusion from its shareholders Tata Sons and Singapore Airlines; the latter holds 25.1% stake in the Indian airline.

“As a shareholder of SIA, we view their business decision from a long-term perspective and are supportive of it. We recognise that the large-scale transformation of Air India involves complex, multi-year operational and integration challenges. Efforts of this scale take time and are not expected to be linear, particularly in the aviation sector, where outcomes are shaped by industry developments, including aircraft innovation and fleet renewal cycles, and external factors such as airspace disruptions, geopolitical developments, and fuel price volatility,” Temasek said in its statement.

Air India, which is implementing an ambitious and cash-guzzling transformation programme, is also struggling

due to external headwinds like the Pakistani airspace closure, West Asia conflict-related disruptions, and sky high fuel prices. The airline, which was taken over by the Tata group from the government in January 2022, recently sought about \$1.5 billion from its shareholders, it is learnt.

In a social media post on Wednesday, Kenneth Tiong, an opposition MP in Singapore’s parliament, raised concerns over Singapore Airlines investing further in Air India, and the consequent impact it could have on Temasek. Singapore-based newspaper The Business Times published an opinion piece on Singapore Airlines’ exposure to Air India, saying that SIA faced some “bleak choices” as it lay “trapped in Air India’s money pit”. The publicly issued statement by Temasek on Saturday was in response to the article.

According to Temasek, SIA has articulated its objective to invest in a second hub to secure long-term growth beyond Singapore, and as the world’s third-largest aviation market, India is well-positioned to serve as this second hub. It added that SIA has long participated in the India market, including an operating presence through Vistara since 2013 and its investment in Air India “allows it to deepen its participation in India’s aviation growth”.

FULL REPORT ON [WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM](#)

After one year, GST Council to meet on Sept 12

New Delhi: After a long gap of over a year, the Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council has decided to hold its next meeting on September 12 in Delhi, an office memorandum stated.

The Council, which will meet for the first time after the GST 2.0 rate rationalisation in September last year, is likely to take up issues of blocked input tax credit for several goods and services that are facing a higher tax rate for inputs as against the final output, especially after being moved to a lower tax slab under the indirect tax regime. The Council is also expected to discuss a uniform and simplified registration framework by states and Centre for businesses looking to register under the GST regime. **ENS**

Budget FY28 exercise to start from Oct 12

New Delhi: The Finance Ministry will begin the exercise to prepare the Union Budget for 2027-28 from October 12 amid heightened global uncertainties and rising food and fuel prices.

The Budget for the next financial year is expected to focus on the reform continuation exercise to further accelerate economic growth, along with measures to create jobs and boost domestic demand. **PTI**

Sitharaman urges US companies to make in India for the world



Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in a business roundtable meeting, in Chicago, US. **PTI**

ENS Economic Bureau
New Delhi, August 29

FINANCE MINISTER Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday exhorted US businesses and investors to co-develop, co-produce, and build in India, leveraging its engineering talent, manufacturing scale, and technology ecosystem to create global products, technologies and infrastructure.

During the US leg of her two-nation visit, Sitharaman addressed a high-level roundtable with leading investors and business leaders in Chicago. “The finance minister invited global partners to co-develop, co-produce and build for global markets, and to not merely consider India as a market to serve, but as a platform

from which to build for the world — whether as a manufacturing base, technology and innovation centre, consumer market or destination for long-term infrastructure investment, leveraging India’s engineering talent, manufacturing scale and technology ecosystem,” the finance ministry said in a post on X.

The roundtable focused on India’s broad-based growth, reform momentum and expanding opportunities for long-term investment, with “manufacture in India — for India and for the world” emerging as a key theme. Opportunities were highlighted across manufacturing, AI and digital technologies, financial services, infrastructure, food processing, defence and advanced technologies. **FE**

Delhi CNG price rises Rs 3.89/kg amid renewed West Asia crisis

New Delhi: Indraprastha Gas Ltd (IGL) on Saturday raised the price of compressed natural gas (CNG) in Delhi by Rs 3.89 per kg, citing a sharp rise in international liquefied natural gas (LNG) prices following a renewed West Asia crisis and disruptions to gas cargo movements through the Strait of Hormuz. The hike, effective from 6 am on August 29, takes the CNG price in Delhi to Rs 86.98 per kg, from Rs 83.09 per kg earlier.

The increase takes the cumulative increase in Delhi CNG prices this year to nearly Rs 10 per kg. Delhi CNG was priced at Rs 77.09 per kg at the beginning of the year. It was raised by Rs 6 per kg in four installments in second half of May, taking the price to Rs 83.09 per kg before Saturday’s hike.

Prices have also been increased in adjoining cities like Noida and Ghaziabad. CNG now costs Rs 95.59 per kg in Noida, Rs 95.59 in Ghaziabad and Rs 92.01 per kg in Gurugram. Rates differ from state to state depending on local taxes like VAT. **PTI**

US curbs on China cotton drive Indian yarn prices

Ravi Dutta Mishra
New Delhi, August 29

INDIAN APPAREL exporters have approached the Commerce and Industry Ministry and the Textile Ministry seeking regulation on cotton yarn exports to arrest a sharp surge in prices in the backdrop of US restrictions on the use of cotton originating from the Uyghur region in China, where Washington alleges Beijing uses forced labour. The price pressure also comes as China is the largest producer of cotton and has a 29% share of world cotton production. India is the second-largest producer of cotton.

The Apparel Export Promotion Council (AEP) said that cotton yarn prices have increased by around 60%, from approximately Rs 250 per kg in early 2026 to around Rs 400 per kg currently, raising increasing pressure on the apparel manufacturing value chain. The council, in a letter to the ministries, sought measures “to regulate the export of cotton yarn, specifically 20s count (a medium-thickness thread) and above”, and to stabilise prices so that cotton yarn remains available to apparel manufacturing and export-

ing units at competitive rates.

The export promotion council also flagged that limited stock availability with ginners and reduced arrivals have “compelled mills to rely more heavily on auctions conducted by Cotton Corporation of India (CCI)”. Much of the cotton has already moved out of farmers’ hands and is currently held by traders, leading to hoarding and speculative practices in the market, AEP said the government.

AEP said that the increase in exports of Indian cotton and cotton yarn to apparel-producing countries is coming from top apparel and textile manufacturers such as Bangladesh and Vietnam.

“Forced labour restrictions against Uyghur cotton have been in place for quite some time, but countries of late have become more cautious due to US regulations and increasing emphasis on supply chain traceability. This is resulting in higher demand for cotton yarn from India, which has already been in short supply,” Mithileshwar Thakur, Secretary General of AEP said *The Indian Express*.

FULL REPORT ON [WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM](#)

• ‘CLOSING AUCTION SESSION IS STILL EVOLVING, SO IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO COMPARE IT WITH THE PREVIOUS VWAP SYSTEM’

‘CAS is a move in the right direction, but the timing may not be right’

THE NEWLY introduced Closing Auction Session (CAS) mechanism is a step in the right direction but was probably implemented too hastily by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), according to **Tejas Shah**, director and head of trading at Equirus Group. The mechanism, which was implemented at the start of this month and has been in the news since, is probably a move in the right direction, but the Indian market is “probably not a mature enough market for it,” Shah told **Akash Mandal** in an interview. Excerpts:

How does the CAS system work, and how does it differ from the previously used VWAP system?

SEBI’s idea was to adopt a mechanism used in many developed markets, like the US and the UK, whereas in India, we used to calculate the average price over the last 30 minutes to derive closing prices.

Now, especially after the Jane Street incident, SEBI realised that at times it is easy to tilt the VWAP system in your favour because if you trade a big quantity during the closing moments of the session, the previous 30 minutes would not matter that much in the VWAP system. Many FIIs and global players also pitched that CAS would be a better mechanism to determine closing prices.

So now, until 3:15 pm, there is normal trading. All pending

limit and market orders are then carried forward to the CAS, while stop-loss orders are removed from the system. Exchanges calculate reference prices from 3:15 pm to 3:30 pm. From 3:20 pm to 3:25 pm, you can place either market or limit orders. From 3:25 pm, you can only place limit orders, and the session ends at a random time between 3:27 pm and 3:30 pm.

Market orders help execute orders faster at the prevailing market price, while limit orders focus more on price than certainty of execution. Derivatives continue to trade until 3:40 pm.

How is CAS better than the previous system?

It is still evolving, so it



would be very difficult to compare the two. But the participation level and price discovery become more democratic than when someone could tilt the price at the end. Rather than

having your order match with the closing price and being dependent on it, you can now participate and place orders at a higher or lower price, based on your requirements. So, you have that flexibility.

What is the reason for the thin volumes currently seen during the CAS?

It is something new that people have still not adjusted to. Also, whenever there is a change in a financial market, we see people first thinking it over and playing it out with caution rather than jumping into it.

What is happening is that the price-matching mechanism that operates for 5-7 minutes during the CAS is happening

behind the scenes. So, you are not aware of the price at which your order is going to match.

Volumes are thin because people are still working out the probabilities around that blind spot. If I put an order for a particular quantity of a stock at a price 2% higher, it does not give me certainty about whether the entire order will be executed or whether I will find a match at the price I want. There is a higher chance that you would get under-executions, where only part of your order is executed.

Volumes are often driven by bigger players. All these players, such as arbitrage firms and prop (proprietary trading) firms, are sitting out currently because the new system is not allowing

them enough time or visibility to hedge in the F&O market, and they do not run unhedged positions. So, the participants that are more active in generating volumes are currently sitting on the sidelines because of their own limitations.

How do you view the CAS system?

See, probably it is a move in the right direction, but timing-wise, we are probably still not a mature enough market for it. The other thing is that we have much higher retail participation in our market compared with other major markets. Other global markets are more institution-driven, where participants have access to all the

necessary information on when and how to participate.

For us, awareness is still pretty nascent at the retail level. So, while SEBI had probably given us enough of a window, the new system could have been run in simulation or in parallel for longer before implementation to give market participants enough time to get used to it.

See, for example, most retail investors trade in small ticket sizes. So, if an institutional player places a big order, they are probably not going to get matched. Plus, retail traders will always choose to play in the derivatives segment compared with CAS because of the higher leverage.

FULL REPORT ON [WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM](#)

THE WORD
THIS WEEK



Fractured lives retold

IN SEPTEMBER 1947, as communal fires spread across Delhi, they consumed the library of one Salihah Abid Husain but could not extinguish her words. In the middle of the madness she calls *hunger*, she recorded all she saw much like a journalist, much to the consternation of her husband. *7 from 1947: First-hand Stories* by Husain, collects six visceral *afsanas*, first published in Urdu as *Niras Mein Aas* (1948) and dedicated to Mahatma Gandhi. It now has a new English translation by former Planning Commission member Syeda S Hameed.



WHAT I READ
THIS WEEK

In the old,
the here
and now

Mary Beard's *Talking Classics* is a meditation on the thrill of discovering that the past is familiar yet strange

Kaushik Das Gupta

WHEN MARY Beard was five, a curator at the British Museum took a 4,000-year-old piece of Egyptian bread out of its glass case and held it close enough for her to see. The sight of an ordinary object, made by and for an ordinary person in a world unimaginably distant from her own, evoked in the child what the ancient Greeks referred to as “thauma”. Literally translated, the word means “wonder” or “wonderment”. But, as Beard says, “thauma was a loaded ancient catch phrase.” There was also “an element of the wow factor” in her experience.

That encounter offers a fitting entry point into *Talking Classics: The Shock of the Old*, a slim volume by the world's most distinguished classicist, which I read last week. It's a wonderful meditation on the thrill of discovering that the distant past is neither dead nor settled. It can still surprise us. Beard does not treat antiquity as a mausoleum of great texts, marble statues and heroic men. She is drawn to the ordinary and often overlooked objects and fragments that allow us to glimpse how people actually lived. A piece of bread carries the physical trace of an individual life across four millennia.

Based on lectures delivered at the Universities of Chicago and Edinburgh, the book is a defence of the classics. But Beard has never been given to veneration. She has little interest in arguing that the ancient Greeks and Romans possessed timeless wisdom. Nor does she present the classical world as the uncontested foundation of Western civilisation. She is more interested in what happens when we look closely at the past and discover that it is simultaneously familiar and strange.

That tension explains the subtitle: *The Shock of the Old*. “Thauma requires brain work as well as wide eyes,” Beard writes. “Wondering what the past is, how to describe it, treading the tightrope between the idea that inhabitants of the past were just like us and the idea that they were incomprehensibly alien pushes to the very frontiers of understanding.” The “shock of the old” comes from discovering that the past is never quite what we thought it was.

That is an especially precious proposition at a time when the classics are routinely summoned into arguments about cultural identity. Beard is alert to the uses — and abuses — of antiquity. Greek and Roman culture has been appropriated by fascists, nationalists and defenders of a narrowly defined “Western Civilisation”. But she also refuses the opposite temptation of throwing the classical inheritance away because it has been misused. Nobody has first rights to the past. That is why it can be examined, questioned and contested by everybody. And that's why Beard speaks not just to the West, but to every part of the world where the invocation of civilisational unity today is flattening social complexities.

The ancient world, Beard suggests, does not provide ready-made lessons in liberty or democracy. It provides something more interesting: evidence of how easily ideals can coexist with their violation. Beard does not conceal the brutality of classical societies — the slavery, misogyny and extraordinary violence — but neither does she claim that acknowledging these things makes the studies of classics irrelevant.

Beard's feminism and scepticism have subtly reshaped the study of the classical tradition, long presented as an inheritance handed down by eminent men to subsequent generations of eminent men. She has widened the frame, asking who gets remembered, who gets to interpret the past and how supposedly timeless classics have themselves been shaped by changing societies. “Ancient history,” she says, “shines a troubling spotlight onto the here and now too, asking us to face what the judgment of the future on us will be.”

Beard invites us not simply to love the classics, but to let them unsettle us. That sense of curiosity, more than any claim of “timeless values”, may be the best reason to try and understand the past — and continue to look at it afresh.

Putin exposé wins French prize

TWO RUSSIAN investigative journalists, exiled to the US and fearing for their lives, have just won a major French prize for a book that dismantles Vladimir Putin's carefully crafted image. *The Tsar in Propria Persona: How Vladimir Putin Deceived Us All* challenges the Russian president's projection as a defender of traditional values against Western decadence. Authors Roman Badanin and Mikhail Rubin — editor-in-chief of *Proekt* and his deputy — fled their homeland after their reporting drew dangerous attention. The prize, awarded by EBRA, France's largest regional newspaper group, called the work “fascinating and shocking.”



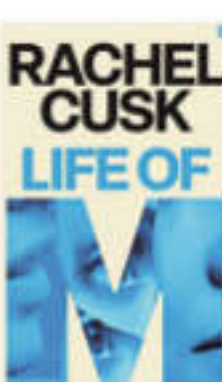
To the rescue of liberal democracy

DEMOCRACY IS in crisis. Elitism, intolerance and rising autocracy have eroded liberalism's promise of shared prosperity and equality. But Nobel laureate Daron Acemoglu is not ready to give up. In *What Happened to Liberal Democracy?* (Hachette India), the MIT economist and co-author of the landmark *Why Nations Fail* charts the decay, and then offers a roadmap for renewal. “The path charted by technology is not destiny; it is a moral and political choice,” writes Nobel laureate Esther Dufo. As democracies teeter worldwide, Acemoglu's urgent message arrives just in time.



Is autofiction exploitative?

THERE IS a new buzzword that is making its way through the literary corners of the internet: autofiction. Rachel Cusk's controversial new novel, *Life of M*, has put the spotlight on this genre that blends autobiography with fiction. The controversy centres on the character ‘M’ whose life and filmography suspiciously resemble the actor Natalie Portman, and unflatteringly. To add fuel to fire, Portman has previously called Cusk one of her favourite writers. The question critics are asking is should the ambiguity of a literary assassination shield the writer from being held liable. Cusk dismisses the work as fiction, but is it not exploitative to write the life story of another in a fresh package? The novel's refusal to clarify, paired with Portman's known admiration, invites a difficult question: Does the slippage between fact and fancy license a particularly insidious form of borrowing, one that trades on real goodwill while disavowing any debt?



Inside Trump's Second Act

Regime Change takes readers behind closed doors to reveal how personal grievance, political vengeance and the pursuit of power have shaped Trump 2.0

Saptarshi Basak

IF THERE was ever any doubt that journalism is the first rough draft of history, a recent book on the first year of US President Donald Trump's second term should dispel it for good. Maggie Haberman and Jonathan Swan's *Regime Change: Inside the Imperial Presidency of Donald Trump* describes, in nailing detail, the authoritarian, corrupt and morally degraded workings of the Trump administration since his re-election. Spanning more than 450 pages, the book is a treasure trove of evidence and information that, decades from now, will be an invaluable record of how American democracy, in the year of its 250th birthday, was tested, and how the institutions of the world's most powerful country were bent to the will of one man.

The book is hardly an easy read; its pages are dense with reporting. But *Regime Change* excels at what it sets out to do: reveal, with almost breathtaking access, what happens behind the closed doors of the Trump administration. Haberman and Swan have got themselves deep inside the President's world — government, advisers, friends and his inner circle. From the opening chapter, which recounts what Elon Musk referred to as “first-class grovelling” text messages sent by Mark Zuckerberg and Jeff Bezos, to the final chapter, which takes readers into the Situation Room on February 11, when Benjamin Netanyahu persuaded Trump to launch an attack on Iran, the book offers a fly-on-the-wall account of power.

What sets *Regime Change* apart from the daily torrent of Trump coverage is that their reporting goes beyond what happened in public: Conversations in the Oval Office, the Situation Room and private meetings are pieced together, often cross-checked against multiple accounts. The result is a granular portrait of how decisions are made. The book is also very much about Trump himself: his obsessions, tantrums, transactional instincts and greed. Much of this inevitably rests on anonymous sourcing.

The book's structure is straightforward, divided into four sections: ‘Whirlwind’, ‘Retribution’, ‘The Enemy Within’ and ‘Plunder’. ‘Whirlwind’ captures Trump's “flood the zone” strategy — the deliberate unleashing of a relentless stream of news, announcements and executive actions, leaving the media and his opponents scrambling to keep up. The authors show how that impulse translated into action: hundreds of executive orders and sweeping decisions on immigration, DOGE, tariffs, Gaza, Ukraine and USAID, among much else. The point was not simply to govern at speed but to move faster than the institutions meant to check the President could

respond. The consequences of that whirlwind are still unfolding.

It is the second section, ‘Retribution’, however, that strikes most directly at the heart of Trump's personality: What does the person occupying the most powerful office in the world do with that power? In Haberman and Swan's telling, he turns personal grievance into institutional policy. That is the essence of the longest of the book's four sections, and naturally so, given Trump's rather overt campaign against those he believed had wronged him. As the two reporters write, “by publicly marking individuals or entities for retribution by decree, and having his targets crumble in anticipation of such attacks, Trump had effectively opened up a new front for the second term, terrorising his foes.” Prosecutors, political opponents, media figures, law firms and others who had crossed Trump in one way or another in the past all found themselves in his sights. Also reported on is Trump's suspicious relationship with the late convicted sex trafficker Jeffrey Epstein, the Justice Department's handling of the Epstein files, and the deepening divisions within the MAGA coalition.



POWER GAMES
US President Donald Trump outside the White House



REGIME CHANGE:
INSIDE THE
IMPERIAL
PRESIDENCY OF
DONALD TRUMP
MAGGIE HABERMAN,
JONATHAN SWAN
Simon and Schuster UK
496 pages
₹999

‘The Enemy Within’ is the most politically consequential section. The authors make it clear that Trump does not conceive of foreign powers such as China, Russia or Iran as his primary rivals, but Americans inside the United States — particularly the Left and institutions associated with it — as his enemies. After the murder of Charlie Kirk, Trump reportedly told reporters that “we just have to beat the hell” out of “radical Left lunatics.” For Trump, political opposition became an internal security problem.

The final section, aptly titled ‘Plunder’, is all about the monetisation of Trump's presidency — because, as the authors make clear, “throughout his life, Donald Trump had monetised everything he could.” Although the section opens with the world of crypto, it moves through land deals in the West Asia, the FIFA Peace Prize and oil in Venezuela. It ends, however, with some of the book's most important reporting: the account of Netanyahu in the Situation Room two weeks before Operation Epic Fury, when Vice-President JD Vance, CIA Director John Ratcliffe and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Dan Caine all expressed scepticism about going to war

with Iran. The course of events has proven them right.

India doesn't get many mentions in the book, and when it does, there is a tone of sneering condescension, particularly over money and tariffs — a tone that sits alongside the continuing difficulties in reaching a trade deal... And during a discussion of the possibility of deploying international peacekeepers in Ukraine, Trump says, “The Indians won't do that, they won't pay for something like that,” adding, “The Indians don't ever pay for anything.” India, in fact, has a long and respected record of contributing troops to United Nations peacekeeping missions. But for a president who has confused Albania with Armenia, expecting him to keep track of peacekeeping, perhaps, is asking too much.

Overall, *Regime Change* is an essential read for anyone seeking to understand the first year of Trump 2.0 — and, perhaps more importantly, a book worth keeping on the shelf for the next two-and-a-half years. For all that has happened, and for all that Haberman and Swan document in extraordinary detail, remember that we are not even halfway through Trump's presidency.

The House That Democracy Built

Sobhana Nair's *Housing the Republic* is an evocative history of India's old Parliament House — and of the democratic culture that flourished within its circular walls

John Brittas

HOUSING THE Republic by Sobhana Nair is no ordinary architectural history, but a love letter to a building that once held the soul of India's democracy — the old Parliament House, now rechristened Samvidhan Sadan — and to the turbulent, intimate, imperfect institution that grew within its circular walls.

Jairam Ramesh's foreword sets a startling tone. He invokes Joseph Goebbels's 1928 declaration about entering the Reichstag “to use the arsenal of democracy in order to assault it with its own weapon.” It's a comparison that underscores the political transformation of India's parliamentary space into a field wide open for the Executive's play.

The book unfolds as both an elegy and an inquiry, tracing how a colonial Council House became the heart of a Republic and how its physical form shaped, and was

shaped by, the politics conducted inside it. She has done justice to the Capital city too. Lord Hardinge, the largely forgotten architect of New Delhi's conception, emerges as a pivotal figure. His arrival in India was almost comic: He missed his train in London and reached Bombay 16 days later as the 13th Viceroy. Yet, he refused to let the new Capital resemble an ordinary British cantonment.

The design of the Parliament building was a drama of clashing temperaments. Edwin Lutyens was imaginative, idealistic, sometimes impractical; Herbert Baker was pragmatic. The final building was a compromise — Baker's three-part arrangement set within Lutyens' circular form. The circular corridor, according to the author, is among the building's most democratic spaces — a place for photographs, tea, gossip, and the informal politics that no chamber could contain. The new Parliament, which often feels like a



WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

VIEW FROM
THE TOP
The new
Parliament
building

grand mall, doesn't have such a space.

The historic Central Hall functioned as the backstage where party colours faded and common problems of public expectation briefly united rivals. When the new Parliament opened without an equivalent space, the complaint was not mere nostalgia; it was the loss of a physical condition that had sustained cross-party politics. Imperfect acoustics and cramped seating produced a living, argumentative body rather than a managed spectacle. In the new building, members are divided and they withdraw to numerous echo chambers.

Nair meticulously narrates the evolution of the Parliament House from a building that once upon a time housed multiple arms of democracy, including the Supreme Court, Election Commission and even the Princes' Chamber. All these organisations later found their own abodes. Three complexes were

added — Library building, Parliament House Annexe and Annexe extension — in due course but never found mention when lack of space was discussed.

Nair has written about her interface with incidents, including the Parliament House attack that eventually made the building inaccessible for the common man. The CISF now controls entry points that once fell more clearly under the Speaker's authority. The complex has grown “like an amoeba,” swallowing surrounding roads.

The new building occupies a triangular site, set at a respectful distance from the old circle. Visual continuity is retained — green for Lok Sabha, red for Rajya Sabha, peacock motifs, *jaali* light — but the human scale has changed; members sit further apart. Architecture, Nair reminds us, is never neutral. It can stabilise a new order by giving it a physical form around which to gel, as Charles Goodsell argued. Yet, as Ambedkar warned, a good Constitution can be made to work badly by those who operate it, and hero-worship in politics remains a road to degradation. The building itself cannot protect democracy; only the people who inhabit its chambers and the public who claim it as their own, can do that.

The old building's imperfections helped create a parliamentary culture of friction and improvisation. The new one is larger, better equipped, more orderly. Whether that order deepens democratic life remains an open question. As the two buildings sit close enough to feel like a conversation frozen in stone with only a thin sliver of sky slipping between them, India's democratic experiment continues.

Brittas is a Rajya Sabha MP from CPI(M)

SCIENCE

Dung beetles prefer dog poop, but their children pay the price

D.P. Kasbekar

Dung beetles are humble insects. They feed on the faeces of other mammals. In many species, a male dung beetle flies to a fresh pile of dung, shapes a piece of it into a ball, and quickly rolls it away from the pile so others don't grab it.

Reputedly, male dung beetles have rolled dung balls a thousand times heavier than their own body weight.

A female will inspect the ball and decide if it is good enough to lay her egg in. If it is, the couple mate, the female lays her egg, and the ball is then buried in a tunnel in the soil. The ball will provide food for the offspring.

Dung beetles quickly clear dung piles and recycle soil nutrients. Plants benefit, too: the seeds that pass through a mammal's gut get planted deep underground, in dung-fertilised spots. Dung beetles

have been known to increase plant growth by 17%. On August 12, a team from Clark University in Massachusetts, U.S., reported in *Ecology and Evolution* that these dung beetles are vulnerable to a previously unforeseen risk: dogs. The researchers found that, given a choice, the dung beetle *Onthophagus orpheus* preferred dog poop. This was in line with other studies that have shown dung beetles prefer the faeces of omnivorous

mammals to that of herbivores, like cows.

In the laboratory, the dung beetle made larger brood balls on dog poop than on cow dung. Male offspring developed in larger brood balls than female offspring, suggesting more resources are provisioned to the sons. This sex difference was more pronounced with cow dung than with dog dung.

O. orpheus eggs also developed faster in dog poop and the progeny that

emerged were larger. However, egg mortality was also higher in dog poop. The researchers inferred that “the dung type most strongly preferred by adults was also associated with the lowest offspring survival”, creating a mismatch between preference and performance.

They added that this “suggests that accumulation of domestic dog waste ... may pose a widespread but underappreciated risk to urban dung beetles”.

Why the mortality was higher with dog poop remains unclear. One possibility is that pets are routinely administered antiparasitic medications which accumulate in faeces, and could have increased the mortality of the larvae and the pupae of dung dwelling insects.

The insect cannot be faulted for its unfortunate mismatch. It is our lack of foresight.

D.P. Kasbekar is a retired scientist.

Blaming climate change for extreme weather has limits

Short-duration, sub-daily extreme events are harder to link to climate change than heatwaves; attribution of localised events is hampered by limited weather records, insufficient computing power, and what 'extreme' weather really entails

Harsh Kabra
PUNE

After an intense heatwave struck South Asia earlier this year, World Weather Attribution (WWA) said climate change had made the event about three-times likelier and up to 1° C warmer than it would have been in a world without climate change.

WWA is an international research group that assesses the impact of climate change on extreme weather. At the heart of these assessments is the science of extreme event attribution, whose goal is to trace the human fingerprint in extreme weather. However, many experts have raised questions about how well extreme weather can be pinned on climate change.

“Using a combination of computer modelling, long-term weather data, and physical understanding of climate systems, climate model simulations are run first for a counterfactual world with pre-industrial conditions, when carbon dioxide levels [in the atmosphere] were 280 ppm, and then for present-day conditions when they are over 420 ppm,” J. Srinivasan, professor emeritus at the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru, said.

“The difference in the magnitude or likelihood of the extreme weather event can then be attributed to human influence, including higher carbon dioxide. To ensure this has not occurred by chance, many simulations and rigorous



statistical tests are required.” Attribution science draws on detection and attribution. “Detection involves determining whether an event falls outside the range of its normal occurrence due to natural variations in the climate system,” Vimal Mishra, the Bikram Sarabhai Chair Professor in the Department of Civil Engineering at IIT-Gandhinagar and a specialist in climate science, hydrology, and climate extremes, said.

During one extreme event attribution committee hearing at the U.S. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine (NASEM) in 2025, Stanford University climate scientist Noah Diffenbaugh questioned “whether single event attribution is even possible at all, from a scientific point of view”.

Mark Keenan, a former UN and U.K. government scientist, wrote recently in *American Thinker*, “How do we know [a climate model] accurately represents a climate that no one has ever observed?”

NASEM experts have previously noted that it is challenging to ascertain the influence of climate change on extreme weather. Dr. Srinivasan also said, “extreme weather events can occur even without anthropogenic climate change”.

In the Sixth Assessment Report, IPCC experts also noted that some local phenomena such as land-sea breezes and mountain wind systems can only be realistically represented by simulations at a resolution of around 10 km or less, which current models do not support. Similarly,

short-duration, sub-daily extreme events, e.g. intense bursts of rain lasting only an hour or so, are harder to model and link to climate change than longer events like day-long heatwaves or several days of heavy rain. This is because most global climate models cannot capture fast-changing processes.

According to Dr. Mishra, analysis of localised events is also hampered by limited long-term weather records and computing power. “For example, without long-term hourly or sub-hourly rainfall observations for a particular place, we cannot confidently mark out the range of natural variability for a heavy rainfall event there,” he explained. “Uncertainties arising from observations and models can lead to unscientific claims and

sweeping generalisations.”

In fact, scientists are also not agreed on what amounts to ‘extreme’. “For instance, when our group reconstructed droughts over roughly 1,200 years, we found that some kinds of droughts seen in the past no longer occur,” Dr. Mishra said. “An event that appears extreme over a 10-20-year timeline may not look exceptional when analysed with a dataset spanning ... 500 years.”

“Extreme event attribution is about assigning legal liability for emissions, either at the country level or the corporation level,” Raghu Murtugudde, a professor emeritus at the University of Maryland, said. “Studies claim that carbon majors [businesses with particularly high emissions] can be defined and certain climate changes can be attributed to certain organisations. The real question is whether these findings can hold up in court.” He also said climate models will never be perfect enough for counterfactual worlds – the worlds that might have existed if not for some fact today, like climate change – to be accepted without question. Instead, Subimal Ghosh, convener of the Interdisciplinary Programme in Climate Studies at IIT-Bombay, said preparedness is more important: “Our priority should be to develop more effective early warning systems and adaptation infrastructure in order to save more people.”

Harsh Kabra is an independent journalist

SNAPSHOTS



Children more exposed to extreme humid heat

Researchers found that children aged 0-9 are currently exposed to roughly three times as many additional heat stress days as adults in their 60s, meaning they are disproportionately more exposed to extreme humid heat. The root of the disparity is that the vast majority of the world's children live in tropical, low-latitude areas where heat is increasing most intensely. These findings are critical because children are physically more vulnerable to heat and face potential lifelong health risks.



Famous supergiant star Betelgeuse may not be alone

Using the Very Large Telescope, astronomers have found strong evidence that Betelgeuse, the famous red supergiant star, has a close companion, now called Betelgeuse B. It seems to be a young star around 2.6-3.1-times as heavy as our sun. And it could explain why Betelgeuse's brightness changes in a six-year cycle: that is likely caused by the companion periodically blocking some of Betelgeuse's light. The team is awaiting a second observation to confirm the data.



Microclimate leads to 'inferior greening'

By analysing data from 2,344 counties in China between 2014 and 2023, researchers found policies promoting large-scale solar farms also supported 'inferior greening': while solar installations increased the amount of green on the ground, the new growth was often dense and lacked the variety of natural habitats that supports many bird species. The study found these consequences were most pronounced in non-desert regions, so its authors recommended clustering large solar projects in desert areas.

How massive data pools remove 'smoking gun' of AI training



John Xavier

Even as AI firms expand model capabilities, frontier labs continue to navigate a legal reckoning sparked by the first wave of copyright lawsuits that threatened to derail the generative AI boom.

The argument from artists has been that AI output that looks like a specific piece of art is because that work was “stolen” during training the model. But a landmark research paper, ‘Outputs of Generative Diffusion Models are Often Unattributable,’ by MIT Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Laboratory is effectively dismantling the scientific basis for that claim, suggesting that in the world of frontier models, visual similarity is not the same thing as causal theft.

The paper’s findings could make the legal teams

of artists uneasy. By using “ablatable ensembles” – a machine learning method that can systematically remove specific training data to test outputs – researchers have found that as training datasets grow, the influence of any single image or artist drops toward zero. The paper showed that an AI’s reliance on specific training samples decays predictably as the data pool expands. For AI labs like Midjourney or OpenAI, this research provides a powerful shield. They can now argue that even if they had never seen a specific artist’s work, their model would have produced a nearly identical result anyway.

The research focuses specifically on Diffusion Models – the tech behind DALL-E, Stable Diffusion, and Midjourney – which generate images by iteratively removing noise from a canvas until a coherent picture emerges. These models operate differently



When an LLM reproduces a copyrighted paragraph, it is far easy to match the output to a copyrighted source. GETTY IMAGES

than the autoregressive models that power Large Language Models (LLMs) like ChatGPT or Claude.

While an autoregressive model predicts the next “token” in a sequence, a diffusion model is learning the geometric and semantic spread of visual concepts. Because of this, diffusion models are less likely to memorise and store a specific file and more likely to synthesise a generalised idea.

This specific paper does not focus on text-based outputs; the “unattributa-

ble” phenomenon is a visual one, leaving the door open for text-based copyright claims by authors where LLMs have been caught quoting books or articles verbatim.

But the diffusion-based model creators can claim legal immunity from scale. A model trained on a billion images is harder to sue than a model trained on a million, as the measurable change caused by the removal of one piece of art from a large dataset is insignificant statistically.

For frontier AI labs that

have built their models on diffusion-based architecture, this research will come as good news as it suggests that artistic style can get generalised as the model learns from more sources.

The real test will be in how they use it in a court of law. If an AI generates an image that looks exactly like an artwork by one of the masters, a judge may not care whether a statistical model shows a negligible correction. But for the AI researchers building the next generation of image and video models, the message looks settled. For instance, a lab could train its diffusion model from synthetic data generated from outputs created by the current crop of AI models. Images and videos from these newer models will contain far less data that can be sourced back to specific artists.

In the race to build advanced AI, the most valuable asset is not just the data

itself, but the scale that makes that data anonymous.

While image generators might hide behind the “unattributability” of scale, authors have a much more tangible “smoking gun.” When an LLM reproduces a copyrighted paragraph word-for-word, it is far easier to match the output to a copyrighted source. In the case of LLMs, the model stores a specific sequence of words to learn how a sentence is written. Unlike diffusion models that generate AI content from noise, LLMs pick tokens from a fixed vocabulary that are organised under specific knowledge categories.

For now, the industry is in a holding pattern. The “unattributability” paper gives a technical edge to image generators, but for the text-based giants, the question of whether a written work can be “diluted” the way a brushstroke can remains an open question.



Question Corner

AI and earthquakes

Why are earthquakes hard to predict? Can AI make it better?

– S. Prakash, Tiruchi

The processes that produce earthquakes happen deep underground. These processes include stress building up in rocks and faults and the complex ways in which they transmit or release it. Faults may also rupture suddenly after centuries of accumulating stress, small ruptures may trigger larger ones, and some formations may release stress without causing earthquakes. Thus, a variety of outcomes remain possible. This is why scientists forecast rather than

predict. They have no way to say if a quake of a given strength will occur at a given place at a given time. Instead, they estimate the probability of a quake happening in a place over many years based on the long-term history and behaviour of faults there. Scientists are also working on early-warning systems that can give people up to tens of seconds of advance notice before the ground starts to shake violently. AI can help significantly improve forecasting. However, it cannot improve predictions because the data for predictions do not exist.

Readers may send their questions / answers to science@thehindu.co.in

Why is FSSAI tightening the rules on food claims?

How is it cracking down on misleading food claims? What does this mean for companies and consumers?

Bindu Shajan Perappadan

The story so far:
Earlier this month, following a notice from the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), Mondelez India withdrew certain health and nutrient-comparison claims for Bournvita and removed the related advertisements from e-commerce platforms. The action is part of a wider regulatory push. FSSAI said it has issued more than 150 notices to food companies in recent months over misleading advertisements, false claims, and labelling non-compliance. The list includes some of the country’s biggest packaged-food and beverage companies, such as Nestlé India, PepsiCo, Coca-Cola India, Abbott India, Red Bull India, Danone India, Mondelez India, Ferrero India, and Kenvue.

Why does Bournvita matter?
Bournvita has long been marketed to parents in the context of children’s nutrition. The product came under intense public scrutiny in 2023 over its sugar content and claims about nutritional benefits. The latest action does not, by itself, establish that Bournvita is unsafe. The regulatory issue is different – whether particular health or nutrient-comparison claims are adequately supported and whether the way they are presented could give consumers a misleading impression. That distinction is important. As a senior government official explained, “Food regulation is not limited to checking whether a product contains permitted ingredients. It also governs how a product’s nutritional qualities and benefits are communicated.” He added that a statement suggesting that a product helps deliver a particular health outcome, for instance, can create expectations beyond what its ingredient composition or available evidence may justify.

Why is FSSAI taking issue with ‘100%’?
The Bournvita action sits alongside another FSSAI concern – the use of absolute-sounding words such as “100%”. In May 2025, FSSAI advised food businesses to stop using “100%” on food labels, packaging, and promotional material. Its reasoning was that such language could convey a “false sense of absolute purity or superiority” to consumers. The significance goes beyond coconut oil or atta. In a crowded packaged-food market, words such as “pure”, “natural”, “healthy”, “immunity-boosting”, and “100%” are powerful marketing devices. They can influence purchasing decisions even before a consumer examines the nutrition panel or ingredient list. Recent corrective actions show the range of claims under scrutiny. Amway India has removed “100%” from its “100% Pure Coconut Oil” packaging and promotional material, and dropped the “Energy Drink” descriptor from its caffeinated XS products. Kerala-based Juza Foods has agreed to withdraw claims relating to immunity, stronger bones, and comparative calcium benefits from its baby-food products.

Why is e-commerce part of the crackdown?
One important change is that enforcement is no longer confined to the physical package on a supermarket shelf. FSSAI has extended its scrutiny to e-commerce platforms and food-service establishments, issuing notices to online marketplaces as well as restaurants and other food businesses. This matters because online product pages can carry claims, images, and promotional language that differ from what appears on the physical package. For consumers, the distinction is increasingly blurred – they may decide to purchase a product based on an online banner or product description rather than by reading the label in a shop, the FSSAI said. “Our enforcement reflects how food advertising has changed,” it added.

What is the regulator trying to change?
At its core, the campaign is about moving from broad marketing language to claims that can be demonstrated. This is particularly relevant as India confronts rising concerns over obesity and unhealthy diets. FSSAI itself has linked its recent food-safety messaging with a wider push for healthier eating and action against obesity.

How effective are these corrections?
A company can remove a claim after receiving a notice, but consumers may already have encountered it for years. Advertisements may disappear from one platform but their messaging may be present elsewhere. Online listings can also change rapidly. All this makes sustained monitoring important. FSSAI’s challenge now is to make compliance routine rather than a temporary response to regulatory scrutiny. For consumers, it is important to remember that a health claim on a food packet is a claim, not a guarantee.

Why is Meta’s \$17.1-billion settlement significant?

What was the lawsuit by 29 U.S. States against Meta about? What did the trial reveal about the impact of Instagram and Facebook on children? What changes has Meta agreed to make? Will the settlement lead to meaningful change? Why are critics still raising concerns?

Joan Sony Cherian

The story so far:
On August 26, Meta reached a landmark settlement of up to \$17.1 billion with at least 47 U.S. States, ending a lawsuit which accused the tech giant of hiding harms caused by its platforms to children, violating child privacy laws, and deliberately using tactics to keep teens engaged or ‘addicted’ to its platforms. The settlement also requires Meta to make changes to the safety features on Instagram and Facebook.

What was the lawsuit about?
The lawsuit, brought by 29 States, alleged that Meta regularly collected data on children under the age of 13 without parental consent, thus breaking various State and federal privacy laws. It also alleged that the company deliberately designed platforms to be addictive in order to keep teens engaged, which led to depression and anxiety. The suit accused Meta of refusing to “abandon its use of known harmful features” and focusing solely on profits and financial gain over the safety of children.

What happened during the trial?
The matter went to trial on August 18, 2026, in Oakland, California. During the trial, internal documents from the tech giant were showcased, pointing towards addictive behaviours among teens using Instagram. There were also witness testimonies from former Meta employees stating that the company had repeatedly ignored warning signs. According to Meta’s own company documents, a Facebook study found that 13.5% of British teenage girls surveyed said their suicidal thoughts had become more frequent

The lawsuit alleged that Meta deliberately designed platforms to be addictive in order to keep teens engaged, which led to depression and anxiety

after joining Instagram. A study by internal researchers of the company on Instagram had found that some of the problems, especially related to social comparison, were issues specific to only Instagram and not social media as a whole. As per a *Wall Street Journal* investigation, the internal researchers had said that while other media mostly focus on the face and ‘jokey’ filters (SnapChat), Instagram focuses on the body and lifestyle, which lead to comparisons and feelings of inadequacy. A key witness for the States was Arturo Béjar, a former Meta safety engineer, who stated on record that Meta was aware of the harm its products caused children, which included exposing them to content from sexual predators as well as violent and graphic images. He said that while he had repeatedly raised the issue to various Facebook and Instagram executives, nothing was done to resolve it. He raised concerns about features such as infinite scroll, which keep users engaged while generating revenue for the company through targeted ads. Meta has denied all these allegations. It said that the statements from documents were cherry-picked and taken out of context. Paul Schmidt, a lawyer for Meta, said that the company had undertaken various measures to address teens’ over-use of Instagram, and that it had disabled more than 1 million accounts of young users. During the trial, Adam Mosseri, the CEO of Instagram, denied allegations that his company hid negative information from the public. Even after the settlement, Meta has denied any wrong-doing.

Is Meta the only company facing such lawsuits?
Meta and other social media giants such as Alphabet (the parent company of Google and YouTube) and TikTok have been facing a series of lawsuits over youth social media ‘addiction’ and children’s safety. Earlier this year, a Los Angeles jury found Meta and Alphabet liable for \$6 million in damages due to the ‘addictive’ design of their platforms. The plaintiff said that she had become ‘addicted’ to social media, mainly YouTube and Instagram, at a young age, which led to a deterioration in her mental health. In March, a New Mexico court ordered Meta to pay \$375 million for misleading users about the dangers its platforms pose to children. New Mexico sued Meta in 2023 alleging that the company “steered” children and teens towards sexually explicit, graphic, and violent content which exposed them to offers of solicitation and even trafficking. TikTok settled three cases brought by teens

who alleged that using the platform had led them to suffer from self-harm, anxiety, depression, addiction, and eating disorders. Earlier this month, it also reached a \$400 million settlement with the U.S. Department of Justice, which alleged that the company violated federal laws on children’s privacy.

Can social media be addictive?
The American Society of Addiction Medicine defines an addiction as a “treatable, chronic medical disease involving complex interactions among brain circuits, genetics, the environment, and an individual’s life experiences. People with addiction use substances or engage in behaviors that become compulsive and often continue despite harmful consequences.” Social media is sometimes described as a form of behavioural addiction since it makes you engage in an action which you know to be harmful, yet cannot stop. A review paper published by Jashvini Amirthalingam and Anika Khera in *Cureus* in 2024 states that social media “addiction” is shaped by a combination of “psychological factors, such as low self-esteem and mental health issues, technological mechanisms like infinite scrolling and personalised notifications, and social influences, including peer pressure and exposure to idealised content”. A potential “treatment” for the same would include cognitive therapy, educational awareness, and parental strategies such as placing limits and boundaries on social media use. However, social media has not been medically recognised as an addiction. Therefore, there aren’t any clear cut guidelines on how to diagnose, measure, and treat such ‘behaviours’. This point was a key argument by Meta’s lawyers who claimed that social media addiction was not an established psychiatric condition.

What next?
Under the settlement, Meta has agreed to introduce several safety features for teens, including a default two-hour daily limit which they can turn off only with parental permission; ‘school’ and ‘night’ modes that mute notifications; the choice to curate a feed which is not driven by algorithms; blocking of ‘likes’ on teens’ accounts and those they interact with in order to reduce comparison; and blocking of extreme make-up filters. Meta said that the two-hour daily time limit and night mode feature would work only if other social media platforms also follow suit. The settlement has been called historic as it mandates Meta to make concrete changes regarding safety measures for children and teens. The payouts will also enable the States to address children’s mental health concerns. However, some critics state that since Meta has not changed its revenue model, which still prioritises endless scrolling and targeted ads, such rudimentary safety features will not lead to fundamental change.

Can an accused be denied a copy of the FIR?

Does the law require the police to give an accused a copy of the FIR? What have courts said about an accused’s right to access an FIR? Can the police withhold an FIR from the accused in certain cases? Why does timely access to an FIR matter for an accused?

Aaratrika Bhaumik

The story so far:
The Supreme Court on August 25 ordered the Ghaziabad Police to provide independent journalist Abhishek Upadhyay with a copy of the FIR and CCTV footage in a road-rage case registered against him. Mr. Upadhyay, who had reported on alleged irregularities in donations to the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, claimed that he was being falsely implicated over his reportage and that the police had failed to provide him with the FIR despite repeated requests.

Why did the court have to intervene?
On August 20, Mr. Upadhyay alleged that a police team arrived at his residence and informed him that a case had been registered at the Indrapuram police station over road rage and abusive behaviour. In a post on X, he claimed that despite repeatedly seeking a copy of the FIR, the police initially sent him a page containing neither the sections invoked nor details of the alleged offence, and later shared an older FIR registered against him in Lucknow. Mr. Upadhyay then approached the Supreme Court, alleging that the case was based on concocted allegations and intended to harass him for his journalism. He sought a copy of the FIR and quashing of the proceedings or,

The Supreme directed that FIRs be uploaded on police websites within 24 hours of registration or, where no such website exists, on the official website of the State government

alternatively, transfer of the probe to an independent agency. A three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant directed the Ghaziabad Police Commissioner to provide him with the FIR and CCTV footage and file a compliance report by September 7. It also protected him from arrest and allowed him to approach the jurisdictional High Court for further relief.

What do statutory provisions stipulate?
The Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 (BNSS), does not require the police to furnish the accused with an FIR immediately upon registration. Section 173(2) requires a copy to be given “forthwith” and free of cost to the informant or victim, but does not mention the accused. The statute provides for the accused to receive the FIR only at a later stage, after the investigation culminates in the filing of a chargesheet before the magistrate. Section 230 requires the magistrate to furnish the accused with copies of documents relied upon by the prosecution, including the FIR and chargesheet, within 14 days of their appearance or production before the court. The BNSS does not address an accused person’s right to access the FIR before this stage, including during the investigation. Judicial precedents have, however, recognised the right of an accused to obtain the FIR soon after its registration.

What have courts held on access to FIRs?
In *Court on its Own Motion through Mr. Ajay Choudhary v. State* (2010), the Delhi High Court laid down a mechanism for an accused to obtain an FIR during the investigation, before the stage contemplated under Section 230 of the BNSS. The court also directed the Delhi Police to upload FIRs on its website within 24 hours of registration. FIRs involving sensitive offences can, however, be withheld through a reasoned decision by an officer not below the rank of DCP. In *Rama Nand Rathore v. State of Himachal Pradesh* (2014), the Himachal Pradesh High Court held that a person who suspects that they have been named in an FIR can seek a certified copy from the police, which must supply it within 24 hours. It also directed FIRs to be

uploaded online within the same period, barring sensitive cases. In *Youth Bar Association of India v. Union of India* (2016), the Supreme Court gave these directives pan-India effect and reiterated that an accused is entitled to access the FIR before the stage prescribed under Section 207 of the CrPC (now Section 230 of the BNSS). The Court directed that FIRs be uploaded on police websites within 24 hours of registration or, where no such website exists, on the official website of the State government. Where unavoidable difficulties delay publication, the 24-hour deadline may be extended to 48, or up to 72 hours for geographical connectivity issues. The court, however, carved out an exception to the online publication requirement for FIRs involving offences “sensitive in nature”.

What is the ‘sensitive offence’ exemption?
The apex court identified sexual offences, cases under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012, and terror offences as examples of “sensitive” offences, while clarifying that the list was not exhaustive. The decision cannot be taken by a police officer below the rank of Deputy Superintendent of Police or its equivalent. A person aggrieved by it can approach the Superintendent of Police or an equivalent officer, who must constitute a three-member committee to decide the grievance within three days. Even where an FIR is withheld on grounds of sensitivity, the accused or an authorised representative can apply for a certified copy to the magistrate to whom the FIR has been forwarded, who must provide it in three days.

What are the implications?
Delhi-based advocate Nipun Saxena says police officials routinely fail to comply with the Supreme Court’s directive to upload FIRs through the Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems. “Once an FIR is registered and the criminal law is set in motion, the accused is entitled to seek pre-trial remedies such as quashing of the FIR or anticipatory bail. Without access to the FIR, these remedies cannot be effectively pursued,” he says. Mr. Saxena adds that the Supreme Court’s ruling recognised that an accused cannot be made to wait until the framing of charges to know the offences alleged against them, as this would undermine the right to a fair trial and the principles of natural justice.

PROFILES

A Himalayan tragedy

The Bhotekoshi flood

Scientists investigate how a high-altitude rock-and-ice avalanche may have triggered one of Nepal's most devastating floods; while experts have not directly attributed this event to climate change, they note that rising temperatures are warming the Himalayas and accelerating glacier melt

Sanjeev Satgainya

Ramesh Kumar, a journalist based in Kathmandu, on Thursday posted a photograph of a clock tower, its hands stopped at 09.29.

“A clock that would never show the time again,” he wrote on X, formerly Twitter. “Betrawati.”

Mr. Kumar had reached Betrawati in Nuwakot district, a town devastated by the previous day’s flood in the Bhotekoshi River in neighbouring Rasuwa district, which borders Tibet. After touring Betrawati, where he was born and raised, he made a grim assessment: “Will Betrawati ever revive as a bazaar again? Almost impossible.”

The extraordinary velocity and scale of the flash flood in the Bhotekoshi River at around 8.40 a.m. on Wednesday has left more than 600 dead and close to 2,500 missing, including foreign nationals, mostly from India.

The Nepal government promptly got into action, mobilising personnel from the Nepal Army, Nepal Police and the Armed Police Force, as it mounted a massive search-and-rescue operation.

Scientists, meanwhile, struggled to piece together the chain of events and determine the origin of the flood, as they wondered about the enormity of the disaster, with some describing it as the worst since the 2015 earthquake.

On the origin, the Nepalese and Chinese sides have concluded that the source was in the Langtang Lirung area. Identifying the exact point where the initial collapse occurred, and which side of the border it was on, may be difficult.

According to an official at Nepal’s Department of Hydrology and Meteorology, satellite imagery shared by the Chinese side pointed to a combination of an ice avalanche, permafrost movement and a rockslide along the Nepal-China border, with the rockslide occurring on the Chinese side and its impact extending into Nepal.

“The avalanche originated on the Nepalese side of the territory, but very close to the boundary, and induced



AFF

flooding that crossed the Nepal-China border, causing extensive damage on both sides,” said Binod Parajuli, a senior divisional hydrologist at the department’s flood forecasting division.

The location scientists are pointing to is in the Lhende Khola, a transboundary high-altitude river that originates in Gyirong County in Tibet and flows south into Nepal, where it is a tributary of the Bhotekoshi and Trishuli river systems.

Flooding in the Bhotekoshi River is not uncommon. Last year, in July, a flood – caused without rainfall – in the Bhotekoshi wreaked damage and destruction. Scientists later concluded that the disaster was associated with a glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF).

Different angle

While scientists initially considered whether this year’s flood could also have been linked to a GLOF, its velocity and ferocity, which washed away villages downstream in three districts – Rasuwa, Nuwakot and Dhading – prompted experts to examine it from a different angle.

Dr. Ranjan Kumar Dahal, an associate professor at the Himalayan Geodisaster Research Centre at the Central Department of Geology, Tribhuvan University, described the mass movement that triggered the flood as a sturzstrom.

“A sturzstrom is a massive rock avalanche in which a large volume of rock suddenly collapses and moves at extremely high speed over a long distance,” Mr. Dahal told *The Hindu* from Trishuli, another area hit hard by Wednesday’s flood. “In high-mountain environments, when rock is mixed with ice, snow, firn and frozen soil, it can be understood as a rock-ice avalanche.”

Rasuwagadhi in Rasuwa is a border checkpoint through which most of Nepal’s trade with China takes place. From May to September, hundreds of pilgrims use this border point to cross into Tibet for the Kailash Mansarovar pilgrimage. Indians make up the largest share of the pilgrims.

It could take weeks, if not months, to assess the full scale of the damage, officials said, adding that the toll could further rise.

The International Federation of Red Cross said the remoteness of the affected areas, combined with damaged infrastructure, was making it harder both to assess the full scale of the disaster and to deliver assistance to people who need it.

“Current estimates suggest around 93,000 people may have been affected,” it said. “Many homes have been severely damaged, cutting off some of the worst-affected communities.”

In the aftermath of the disaster, two more crucial questions have also emerged – whether the early-warning systems were activated and whether climate change had a role in the disaster. Experts say early-warning systems had worked as intended but were rendered ineffective given the staggering speed of the flood.

Kamal Kishore, the head of the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, said the floods had once again highlighted how fragile mountain ecosystems are and how challenging it is to set up early-warning systems in mountain environments.

Scientists have not ruled out the

impact of climate change, saying the rising temperatures are causing the Himalayas to warm and glaciers to melt faster, but they stopped short of directly linking the disaster to global warming.

“We had not seen such a disaster in Nepal involving a sturzstrom. However, in 2021, there was a similar event in India,” said Mr. Dahal, referring to the Chamoli disaster in Uttarakhand, where a bedrock failure beneath a glacier triggered a massive rock-ice avalanche that subsequently transformed into a debris flow and flood.

The 2021 Chamoli event has been scientifically described as a rock-and-ice avalanche and, in some literature, explicitly as a sturzstrom. Research found that more than 25 million cubic metres of rock and ice broke loose high in the Uttarakhand Himalaya before moving rapidly downstream.

Catastrophic sturzstrom

“A sturzstrom begins when an unstable rock-ice slope suddenly collapses. The collapsing mass rapidly accelerates, fragments and mixes with ice and snow,” Mr. Dahal explained.

“Pressure and friction can generate meltwater, which may increase lubrication within the moving mass and along its base, reducing resistance and contributing to exceptionally long runoff,” he added.

According to him, this process can unfold within just a few minutes.

“As it moves downslope, it may incorporate more ice, snow, rock, soil and water, potentially transforming into a massive debris flow before finally depositing its material,” he said.

Meanwhile, rescue operations have continued on the fourth day, with Prime Minister Balendra Shah saying more than 15,000 personnel have been deployed.

For communities along the Bhotekoshi-Trishuli corridor, the immediate priorities are finding the missing, restoring access and assessing whether some of the places destroyed by the flood can be rebuilt at all.

It’s a race against time.

THE GIST

- ▼ The flood devastated riverside towns across Rasuwa, Nuwakot and Dhading districts, burying places like Betrawati and Trishuli under metres of mud, boulders and silt
- ▼ Nepal mobilised a massive search-and-rescue operation involving personnel from the Army, police and armed police force
- ▼ The remoteness of affected areas and damaged access routes have severely hampered both damage assessment and delivery of aid

Trump’s crypto U-turn

World Liberty Financial

Investments from a top UAE official into U.S. President’s crypto enterprise attract criticisms of conflict of interest and foreign influence

Nivedita Varadarajan

U.S. President Donald Trump has built a business empire spanning real estate, casinos and entertainment. His family’s growing crypto dealings are now facing mounting criticism over conflicts of interest and foreign influence.

A top United Arab Emirates official holds a stake in the family’s latest venture: a planned crypto bank now drawing scrutiny over foreign ties to a sitting President. The *Wall Street Journal* has reported that Sheikh Tahnoon bin Zayed al Nahyan, the UAE’s national security adviser, and his co-investors own a major stake in the company behind that bank.

Earlier this month, Office of the Comptroller of the Currency gave conditional approval to World Liberty Financial, backed by Mr. Trump’s family and close allies, to set up a federally chartered U.S. trust bank to issue, redeem and safeguard a dollar-backed stablecoin, USDI.

Mr. Tahnoon and his co-investors own 49% stake in bank’s holding company, the *Journal* reported. “The shareholder structure of the bank’s holding company, called WLTC Holdings, is the same as World Liberty’s, though Tahnoon and his co-investors used a different entity – called StringZ Holding RSC – for the stake in WLTC. An enti-



REUTERS

ty affiliated with the Trump family holds a 38% stake,” the *Journal* said, quoting a source.

Mr. Tahnoon and others had invested \$500 million in World Liberty Financial in January 2025. “The deal, signed four days before President Trump’s inauguration, steered \$263 million to Trump family entities, according to the President’s most recent financial disclosure,” the *Journal* noted.

A stablecoin is designed to maintain a stable value and reduce volatility. It is pegged to a currency, commodity or other asset, which may be held in reserve to back its value.

“USDI now has a market value of \$4 billion. World Liberty says the dollars backing USDI are invested in U.S. Treasury and other cash equivalents, generating an estimated \$150 million a year in interest,” the *Journal* reported.

Mr. Trump was not always fond of cryptocurrencies. During his first term, he bashed Facebook’s plans to create a digital cur-

rency. He dismissed Bitcoin and its peers as “not money,” calling their value “highly volatile and based on thin air”. In 2021, he told *Fox Business* that Bitcoin was a “scam”. “I think they should regulate them very, very high,” he said, adding, “It takes the edge off of the dollar and the importance of the dollar.”

Policy shift

That changed as the 2024 election approached. Crypto companies funnelled more than \$119 million into a non-partisan super PAC to elect pro-crypto candidates in that cycle, and Mr. Trump vowed to make the United States the “crypto capital of the planet”.

In March 2025, Mr. Trump created the U.S. Strategic Bitcoin Reserve by executive order, treating Bitcoin as a long-term reserve asset on par with gold. That July, he signed the GENIUS (Guiding and Establishing National Innovation for U.S. Stablecoins) Act, laying out regulatory guidelines for stablecoins.

Financial disclosures filed in June show he earned more than \$1.4 billion from his crypto ventures. Over \$500 million of it from World Liberty Financial, and another \$635 million from sales of his \$TRUMP meme coin. His reported income for the year was over \$2.2 billion, much higher than his 2024 income of \$600 million.

Founded in 2024, World Liberty Financial is at the heart of the Trump’s crypto empire. Its CEO Zach Witkoff, is the son of Mr. Trump’s West Asia envoy, Steve Witkoff. Other co-founders include Donald Trump Jr., Eric Trump, Barron Trump, Steve Witkoff, and the President himself. This arrangement could blur the line that separates governance and private financial interests. The Trump administration sets policy, and the President’s family and allies benefit financially.

Mr. Tahnoon’s investment is especially notable given the UAE’s position as a key U.S. partner in West Asia. Since the beginning of the U.S.-Israeli strikes on Iran on February 28, Gulf countries have borne a significant share of Iran’s retaliatory attacks, with the war also disrupting maritime traffic in the region.

These relationships raise fundamental questions: Can a sitting President accept investments from a foreign government official in his companies?

Smriti Sudesh

“We are taking the first step on a thousand-kilometre road. We are taking a step towards democracy for everyone,” Abdullah Ocalan said in early August.

The remarks by the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) leader, who has been in prison since 1999, came at an important moment as Türkiye attempts to end its long-running conflict with Kurdish minority militants.

The latest development came on August 24, when a Monitoring and Evaluation Board set up to oversee the process held its first meeting. The Board, chaired by Vice-President Cevdet Yilmaz, brought together senior officials including Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan, Defence Minister Yasar Guler and National Intelligence Organisation chief Ibrahim Kalin. It decided to set up four working groups dealing with legal issues, disarmament, monitoring, and the social reintegration of former militants.

The move is significant because the process is now moving beyond declarations. Several attempts to bring peace in the past remained unsuccessful; most recently in 2015.

A new law passed by Parliament on August 10, as part of that effort, was approved by 468 of the 592



REUTERS

lawmakers who voted.

The law provides conditional amnesty measures for people accused or convicted of offences linked to the PKK, including membership, assisting the organisation, spreading propaganda, and financing terrorism. It could pave the way for thousands of militants to return to Türkiye and reintegrate into society. The government, meanwhile, has stressed that it is not a general amnesty.

For those covered by the law, prison sentences can be suspended and ongoing investigations and trials can be put on hold for five to 10 years. If no terrorism-related offences are committed during that period, the suspended sentences would be considered served and pending cases would be dropped.

There are clear limits, however. Those convicted of intentional killings are excluded. So are people sentenced to life imprisonment without parole for offences committed before 2005. That is particularly significant for Mr. Ocalan.

Despite being a central figure in the current peace process, he would not benefit from the new law. Mr. Yilmaz said Mr. Ocalan’s case “does not fall within the scope of this law”, but added that he could remain “in a position to contribute to the peace process”.

The PKK has called the legislation a “beginning” but said it contains “serious shortcomings and deficiencies”. It has also demanded Mr. Ocalan’s release, stating that the process can move forward only if he “lives and works freely”.

A long conflict

The PKK began its armed insurgency against the Turkish state in 1984, seeking self-rule for Kurds inside Türkiye. Over the next four decades, the conflict killed more than 40,000 people, devastated parts of south-eastern Türkiye and became one of the defining issues of Turkish politics. The PKK is designated as a terrorist organisation by Türkiye, the United States

and the European Union.

The current attempt at a settlement began taking shape in 2024, when Ankara opened a new channel of dialogue with the Kurdish movement.

Later in February 2025, Mr. Ocalan called on the PKK to lay down its arms and dissolve. The group announced its dissolution in May, formally ending its armed campaign. In July, the disarmament process began with a symbolic ceremony in northern Iraq, where PKK burned their weapons. Since then, Ankara has been building the legal and institutional framework around what the government calls “Terror-Free Türkiye”.

His February call made him an important channel of communication between the organisation and Ankara. The DEM Party, Türkiye’s main Kurdish political movement, has also helped facilitate communication between Mr. Ocalan and the government.

The immediate challenge now is to see how the law will come into force. The measures will take effect only after Türkiye’s National Security Council – chaired by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan – confirms that the PKK has dissolved and surrendered its weapons. The Council is expected to consider findings from Turkish security institutions at its October meeting.

Opinion

SUNDAY, AUGUST 30, 2026

HOW THE 'NAYI HINDI' USED IN MUSAFIR CAFE ANNOUNCES A NEW GRAMMAR OF STORYTELLING

The new lingo of literature



■ ASHWANI KUMAR

Nobody saw this coming. *Musafir Cafe's* Netflix adaptation has done what literary purists may once have considered impossible. It has transformed a seemingly modest work of popular fiction into a cultural phenomenon. At a time of profound social and political churn, with Gen Z finding its voice on the streets and online, *Musafir Cafe* has unexpectedly captured the imagination of contemporary India.

What explains the sensational success of Divya Prakash Dubey's shape-shifting novel which blurs the boundaries between literature and conversation? Can a novel that breaks the conventions of 'serious' fiction speak more powerfully to its time? Does its appeal lie in its unconventional three-way story of love, desire and intimacy? Is it true that love itself is a form of storytelling, one that rarely offers closure? For Divya Prakash, storytelling is not a high-brow literary exercise but a means of confronting madness—an act of emotional survival.

Originally published in 2016 and now

in its eleventh edition, it has moved from the shelves of popular fiction to what might almost be called a celluloid miracle. There is something unusual, almost surreal, in the way *Musafir Cafe* blurs the boundary between story and life, with almost iconoclastic confidence. Neither Premchand's *Godan*, Agneya's *Shekhar*: *Ek Jeevani*, nor Dharamvir Bharati's *Gunahon Ka Devta* despite the unmistakable shadow of Chander and Sudha over its protagonists prepared us for its radically contemporary narrative form. Not even Geetanjali Shree's Booker winning novel *Ret Samadhi* quite anticipated its subversive emotional energy.

In this sense, *Musafir Cafe's* journey from page to screen is also a startling journey from popular literature to platform culture. The novel's *Nayi Hindi*, a lyrical mix of everyday speech and Hinglish, is particularly suited to a generation accustomed to consuming stories across books, screens, clips, conversations and social media. It's hybrid, episodic chapter titles announce a dazzling algorithmic, conversational and lived-in grammar of storytelling.

This was already a literature unusually close to the habits and rhythms of upwardly mobile small-town popular culture. Netflix did not create this accessibility. It simply amplified it for a digital generation for whom love is part therapy, part reel and part memory tag. Whether this is a passing fad or the beginning of a more lasting shift, *Musafir Cafe* marks a crossover experience



Musafir Cafe has transformed a seemingly modest work of popular fiction into a cultural phenomenon

in which the language of popular literature, digital culture and streaming entertainment converge to create a new, distinctly contemporary storytelling experience.

What follows is not a rejection of the quintessential Hindi novel but a radical reimagining of its possibilities. Divya inherits its traditions and mischievously unsettles its linear, epic-like architecture, creating a restless, irreverential form that unlocks worlds of love and longing through the most trivial of everyday life. There is no grand historical sweep, no familiar political or ideological battles, and none of the toxic

city or obsessive passion that so often drives conventional love stories.

The audacity of *Musafir Cafe* lies in the fact that it removes love, sex and marriage from the morally policed register in which conventional romance has often placed them. Sudha can joke that "*mazaak to banda pyaar mein padte hi ban jaata hai*," (the moment you fall in love, you become a joke anyway), while the novel imagines marriage as meaningful only when it ceases to function as a compulsory proof of intimacy. This critique reaches its sharpest, almost aphoristic form in the dialogue

between Sudha and Chander: "*India ka problem hi yahi hai... ki hum shaadi ko double bed aur double bed ko shaadi samajh lete hain*." (That we mistake marriage for a double bed, and a double bed for marriage)

The line instantly dismantles the patriarchy in which marriage is assumed to automatically authorise sex, while sexual intimacy is assumed to demand marriage as its moral justification. Divya also delicately strips sex of both scandal and cinematic perfection. In an intimate moment from Sudha and Chander's live-in relationship, Sudha casually asks Chander to undo her bra strap, and although this is not new to him, he still fumbles with it each time. Physical intimacy is neither punished nor turned into spectacle. It belongs instead to the awkward, habitual texture of their relationship. The novel's subversion becomes even sharper when the conventional sequence of womanhood—marriage first, motherhood afterwards—is overturned. Sudha insists that she wants a baby but is clear she does not want marriage. In this radical feminist imagination, *Musafir Cafe* frees motherhood from the authority of both men and the institution of marriage.

True, the endings of Sharat Chandra's *Devdas* and Dharamvir Bharati's *Gunahon Ka Devta* offer powerful templates of love in the Indian imagination. In both classic love stories, tragedy turns love into something monumental, an experience of renunciation, guilt, longing and permanent absence. *Musafir Cafe*, by contrast, inherits

this tradition but translates it into the present, where heartbreak can be confessed in a message, revisited in casual conversation and gradually lived through friendship and new encounters. In unexpectedly earthy slang, Sudha's memorable line, "*Yaar, yaad badi kutti cheez hoti hai, saali aa hi jaati hai*" (Memory is a bitch—it always finds its way back), captures this shift perfectly.

Here, profound grief is compressed into the irreverent, everyday idiom of life. That is why love becomes a strangely intimate algorithm, captured in the novel's hallucinatory line, "*Pyaar mein aadmi bla bla bla hokar hi reh jaata hai*." (In love, a person simply ends up...blah blah blah) Here, "bla bla bla" names everything language cannot finally contain—love, longing, loss, desire, memory, foolishness, joy, separation and life itself. That may be the secret of the novel's appeal across generations: the young recognise the heat of desire, while silver-haired lovers know that love neither grows old nor goes cold.

What begins as a playful small-town story of love gradually turns into a philosophy of life in *Musafir Cafe*.

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Golf, like family, brings people back



FAIRWAY FILES

Rahil Gangjee

GOLF HAS ALWAYS been a game of forgiveness. You hit a terrible shot, you get another one. You miss a three-footer, you get another hole. You lose a match, there is always another tournament. Apparently, this philosophy now applies to professional golf itself. After four years of behaving like two families who stopped speaking after a particularly ugly wedding, golf is once again discussing the possibility of everyone sitting at the same table.

LIV Golf has just finished its 2026 season, and its future is suddenly less certain than it looked when the whole thing began. Ian Poulter, one of LIV's most recognisable faces, admitted this week that he isn't sure whether he will continue. LIV has secured a non-binding term sheet for fresh investment for 2027, but the final agreement is still to be completed. Patrick Reed has already left LIV and is preparing to return to the PGA Tour.

This is golf, so naturally nobody agrees on how the reunion should work. Rory McIlroy has questioned what value some LIV players would bring back. Scottie Scheffler, on the other hand, has been more welcoming. His view is fairly simple: if Jon Rahm and Bryson DeChambeau are available, why wouldn't you want the best players playing against each other?

I understand both sides. When LIV arrived, it wasn't just another golf tour. It was a declaration of war, with enormous money, shorter events, team golf and a lot of very unhappy people. Players had to make choices. Some chose the PGA Tour. Some chose LIV. Some chose the money. Some chose principle. And some, if we are being honest, probably chose the option that involved the least amount of explaining to their accountant.

Now the golf world is wondering whether the divorce settlement might be more complicated than the divorce. Brooks Koepka has already shown that returning is possible. Patrick Reed is following. The question now is what happens if bigger names want to come back.

Imagine the locker room. "Welcome back." "Thanks." "Sorry about everything." "No problem." "By the way, you owe us \$25 million." Actually, I was going to ask if you had a tee time." Golfers, thankfully, have short memories when there is a good fourball involved. The funny thing is that this is hardly new. Golf has always been full of rivalries that looked enormous from the outside and rather less important once the players got together.

Lee Trevino was one of the great characters of the game. When Tony Jacklin once tried to silence him before a round, telling him they didn't need to talk, Trevino's response was perfect: "You don't have to talk, Tony... you just have to listen."

That is probably the correct way to handle professional golf politics too. Listen. Smile. Then go hit your drive. Trevino also came from a time when golf was a very different business. Before the private jets and guaranteed contracts, he was hustling on municipal courses and playing money games. At the 1968 US Open, after shooting 69, he sat near the practice green in a golf cart with a beer—and nobody paid much attention to him. A few years later he was one of the biggest stars in the game.

That is the part of golf I find most amusing. The



numbers change, the purses change, the equipment changes, but the players remain golfers.

Give a golfer enough money and he will still complain about a bad bounce. Give him a \$10 million purse and he will still ask his caddie why the pin is in such a stupid place. And give him a 30-foot putt for a million dollars and he will still say, "I knew I had that one."

For Indian golf, the LIV-PGA story is particularly interesting because we have skin in the game. Anirban Lahiri is entering his fifth straight season with Bryson DeChambeau's Crushers GC. He has been part of the LIV experiment from the beginning and has experienced both its attractions and its complications. He is also one of the few Indians to have operated at that level of the global game for so long.

At the same time, Indian golf is becoming increasingly relevant on the other side of the divide. The DP World India Championship returns to Delhi Golf Club in October with a \$4 million purse, and the field is already attracting major international names, including PGA Tour winner Min Woo Lee. Shubhankar Sharma and Lahiri are among the Indian names attached to the event.

And then there is another interesting development: the LIV-backed International Series India, which was scheduled to return to Prestige Golfshire, has been cancelled. That tells us something about how quickly the professional golf landscape can change.

For years, Indian golf fans worried about whether our players could break into the big leagues. Now the bigger question is: which big league?

Maybe that is the real lesson from the last four years. Golf tried to divide itself into camps. But the sport itself refused to cooperate.

Fans still want to see Scheffler against Rahm. They

want McIlroy against DeChambeau. They want the majors to mean something. They want the Ryder Cup. They want the best players in the world in the same tournament often enough to know who really is the best. Players, meanwhile, want to earn money, play good golf and have some control over their careers. None of these things are mutually exclusive.

At least they shouldn't be.

The Tour Championship this week is another reminder of what professional golf does best. Thirty of the best players in the world will gather, and this time everyone starts from scratch under the new format. No handicaps. No favours. Just golf. That is probably where all the arguments eventually end. And golf has a wonderfully brutal way of settling arguments. The ball doesn't care which tour you played on last week. It doesn't care how much you were paid. It doesn't care whether Rory likes you. It doesn't care whether Scottie welcomes you back. It certainly doesn't care about your Instagram following. It just sits there. And waits.

Maybe that is why I think a reunion is inevitable in some form. Golfers are competitors, but they are also addicted to competition. You can give them money, fame, teams and guarantees, but they want to know: "Can I beat him?" That is the oldest currency in golf. And if the PGA Tour and LIV finally figure out how to put the best players back in the same room, they may discover something the rest of us already know.

Golf is much more fun when everybody is fighting on the same golf course.

Rahil Gangjee is a professional golfer, sharing through this column what life on a golf course is like

Golfers are competitors, but they are also addicted to competition. You can give them money, fame, teams and guarantees, but they want to know: 'Can I beat him?'

Small dreams too important to ignore

FIFTH COLUMN
TAVLEEN SINGH



ALMOST FROM THE day that Narendra Modi became prime minister, he has urged Indians to dream big dreams. At international events he has boasted often that India no longer has small dreams. And we have been reminded so often that by 2047 India will be a developed country that on social media, there are jokes about how the prime minister seems to believe that 2047 is the year that comes after 2026. Following Modi's lead, his chief ministers routinely tell us in expensive full-page newspaper advertisements and glittering TV promotions that their states, in keeping with the vision of Modi, are aiming to become trillion-dollar economies by 2047.

It is a good thing to dream big dreams. I totally support big dreams and have been very proud of the pace at which the Modi government and sundry other 'double-engine' governments have speeded up the building of glittering, new highways. They look dismal as they disintegrate when the rains come, but that is another story. I also support the idea of building 'smart cities' and bringing high-quality urban services to rural parts and have said more than once that Modi's toilet-building programme has been transformative. Those long lines of men squatting beside the tracks is no longer a common sight when you look out of the window of your Vande Bharat trains. But, in building big dreams some very important small dreams have been forgotten.

If you have been following the 'School Theek Karo' campaign of the Cockerroach Janta Party, you would have been horrified by the state of rural schools. And this is not even half the story. Did you know that there are no properly trained teachers teaching in government schools? Trained teachers are not going to miraculously appear out of thin air. To create enough of them, we will need to build hundreds of thousands of teacher training schools. Some months ago, I quoted in this column the educationist, Michel Danino, saying this as the second of the three most important reforms needed. He believes that the District Institutes of Education and Training need a 'complete overhaul'. So does the entire education system so that children are taught to think and not learn by rote. Schools also need libraries, playgrounds, clean water and toilets.

These may sound like small things compared to national highways and bullet trains, but they are not. They might be more important. There are other small dreams that have been recklessly forgot-

ten. There is the dream of having clean air in our cities, clean water in our sacred rivers and efficient waste management so that our 'smart cities' do not seem to be sprouting out of garbage dumps. A Yale University survey reported last week that when it came to environmental matters, India was at the very bottom of a list of 177 countries. Only Laos is dirtier and more degraded than India.

So instead of the big dream that has made not singing *Vande Mataram* a crime, what about making it a non-bailable offence for political leaders to forget the meaning of its first line? *Sujalam, Suphalam, Malayaja-sitalam*. A land of pure water, abundant fruit trees and clean air is what the poet described. And this is most certainly not an accurate description of our dear Bharat Mata as she is today. As for the damage reckless construction activity has done to our mountains, it is beyond criminal. The disaster last week in Nepal should remind our political leaders about what happens when the environment is criminally neglected.

What then has gone so wrong with our policies that they have brought us to this sorry pass? Could it be that in pursuit of big dreams, political leaders have forgotten the importance of small dreams? Have our policy-makers failed totally to notice that young Indians, among them school children, are now regularly taking to the streets to demand such small things as teachers and clean toilets in their schools? They also declare openly that what makes them feel most hopeless is the absence of decent jobs. It is true that in the past decade a handful of very rich Indians have got very much richer and are not shy of showing off their enormous wealth. Personally, I have no problem with this.

What I have a problem with is that millions more Indians have not got rich as well. Why has this not happened? Could it be because the Prime Minister lulled himself into believing that he had truly made doing business in India easier? It is not easier to do business for most Indians and one big reason for this is that corruption in his 'double-engine' governments is so deeply rooted at almost every level that only those who can pay huge bribes find it easier to do business.

In this time of big dreams, it is vital, if Modi wants to win back his fading popularity before that crucial election in Uttar Pradesh next year, that he personally concentrates on small things. And that he gets his high-flying chief ministers to plant their feet back firmly on the ground and explain why there have been so many big failures when it comes to the small dreams of ordinary Indians. The ugly truth is that below the shining highways that stand suspended today over towns and cities across India, far too many things have remained unchanged, and they need to start changing fast.

“QUIET DIPLOMACY IS FAR MORE EFFECTIVE
THAN PUBLIC POSTURING”
— ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE

Soft power: India’s opportunity to shape the global imagination



CHAITANYA K PRASAD

Power has traditionally been understood in fairly straightforward terms, economic strength, military capability, technological advancement and political influence. But in today's interconnected world, there is another form of power that is becoming equally important: the ability of a country to attract, inspire and influence without coercion. That is the power of soft power.

India has always possessed it. What is changing now is the scale of the opportunity before us. In his Independence Day address, Prime Minister Narendra Modi identified soft power as one of the seven Saptadharas that can take India towards greater national strength, alongside manufacturing, agriculture and food processing, technology and innovation, infrastructure, defence, and the green and blue economy. The inclusion of soft power in this framework is significant because it places culture, creativity and global influence within the larger developmental vision of Viksit Bharat.

For India, soft power is not something that needs to be artificially created. It already exists in extraordinary depth. Yoga is today practised across continents. Ayurveda has found growing international interest. Indian cinema and music travel far beyond the country's borders. Indian food has become part of everyday life in cities across the world. Our spiritual traditions, festivals, textiles, classical arts, literature and philosophies have shaped perceptions of India for generations. But possessing cultural richness and converting it into sustained global influence are two different things. That is where India's next opportunity lies.

There is a broader understanding of soft power beyond the traditional ideas of heritage and culture. It connects yoga, Ayurveda and tourism with newer sectors such as VFX, animation, gaming and the creative economy. It also identifies wildlife, national parks, major sporting events and the rapidly growing concert economy as areas through which India can attract the world and showcase its capabilities. This is an important shift. Soft power today is no longer only about how much of a country's past the world admires. It is also about how relevant that country feels in the present.

India has one of the oldest civilisations in the world, but it also has one of the youngest populations. Our global identity, therefore, cannot rest only on ancient temples, classical traditions or historical achievements. It must also include contemporary India, its filmmakers, designers,



musicians, gamers, animators, athletes, entrepreneurs and digital creators. The real power lies in bringing both together.

India should be able to speak to the world through yoga and artificial intelligence, Ayurveda and animation, classical music and gaming, ancient knowledge systems and cutting-edge digital creativity. These are not contradictions. In fact, they are what make India distinctive. The creative economy is particularly important in this context. Countries increasingly shape global perceptions through the stories they tell. Cinema, television, music, gaming and digital content reach people in ways that formal diplomacy often cannot. They enter homes, influence taste, create familiarity and build emotional connections.

A person may know very little about the politics or foreign policy of a country and yet feel deeply connected to it because of its films, food, music or culture. That emotional familiarity matters. When people admire a country's culture, they become curious about the country itself. Curiosity can lead to tourism, education, business engagement and deeper people-to-people ties. In that sense, soft power is not separate from economic development; it can actively contribute to it.

Tourism is perhaps one of the clearest examples. India has extraordinary geographical and cultural diversity, from the Himalayas and the deserts of Rajasthan to wildlife reserves, coastal regions, heritage cities, spiritual centres and the North-East. Yet the potential of these assets as instruments of global influence remains far greater than what we currently realise.

The Prime Minister specifically highlighted wildlife, national parks and tourism as areas through which India can draw global visitors. A tourist who visits India does much more than spend money here. They experience the country personally. They interact with people, encounter its culture and carry those experiences back with them. In that sense, every positive visitor experience becomes a form of informal diplomacy.

International sporting events and the concert economy are becoming the new areas of opportunity. Hosting major global events does not simply generate revenue. It places a country at the centre of global attention. It showcases infrastructure, cities, culture and organizational capability. It



INDIA SHOULD BE ABLE TO SPEAK TO THE WORLD THROUGH YOGA AND AI, AYURVEDA AND ANIMATION, CLASSICAL MUSIC AND GAMING, AND CUTTING-EDGE DIGITAL CREATIVITY. THESE ARE NOT CONTRADICTIONS

also creates memories associated with a country that can last far beyond the event itself. India's improving international sporting presence and its ambitions around major sporting events therefore have a larger significance as well. There is also an economic argument for taking soft power more seriously. Culture today is an industry.

Films generate tourism. Music creates events and digital revenue. Gaming creates valuable intellectual property. Wellness traditions create global markets. Cuisine supports food exports and restaurant businesses. Heritage sustains tourism economies. Sporting events create opportunities across hospitality, transport, advertising and broadcasting. Soft power can therefore create a chain of value: cultural visibility creates curiosity; curiosity creates engagement; engagement creates trust; and trust can eventually create economic and strategic opportunities. But for India to fully realise this potential, one important shift is necessary. We have to move from simply being proud of our culture to becoming better at presenting it to the world. That means investing in creators, institutions and platforms. It means supporting animation, films, gaming, music and design at international standards. It means better preservation and presentation of heritage. It means making tourism seamless, safe and globally competitive. It means strengthening translation so that Indian literature and ideas can travel across languages. It means helping regional stories find global audiences rather than reducing India to a few familiar cultural symbols.

India's greatest strength here may actually be its diversity. There is no single Indian

story. There are thousands of them. Every region offers its own food, music, language, landscape, literature, craft, history and cultural tradition. If these are given global platforms, India does not merely have one source of soft power; it has an almost limitless reservoir of them.

There is, however, one condition. Soft power works only when it is credible. A country cannot build long-term influence through projection alone. What the world sees must ultimately connect with what the country is. The Prime Minister himself linked India's growing international respect with the country's political stability, vibrant democracy, judicial system and constitutional framework. Reputation is strongest when it is backed by reality. That is why soft power should not be viewed as publicity. It is something much deeper. It is the cumulative impression created by a country's culture, institutions, people, achievements and behaviour. For India, this makes soft power an extraordinary force multiplier. Manufacturing can make India competitive. Technology can make India innovative. Defence can make India secure. Economic growth can make India influential. But soft power can make India relatable. It can make people across the world feel that they know India, understand India and want to engage with India.

As India moves towards the goal of Viksit Bharat, this dimension of national growth deserves far greater attention. Becoming a developed country is not only about expanding economic capacity. It is also about expanding the space a country occupies in the imagination of the world.

India already has the stories, traditions, knowledge, landscapes and talent. The next step is to give them the scale, confidence and platforms they deserve. Because in the decades ahead, the countries that shape the world will not only be those that produce the most or possess the most. They will also be the countries that inspire the most.

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— FROM AGENDA COVER —

United Rivers...

They also highlight the enormous investments, institutional capacity, long-term operational arrangements, and significant environmental and social trade-offs required to develop and sustain such large-scale inter-basin water transfer systems.

There is no close global equivalent to what Brahmaputra to Cauvery and Godavari implies. A system potentially connecting a huge transboundary Himalayan river with distant peninsular basins across a federal country. The absence of such a precedent does not, by itself, settle the question of whether such a system can be developed. It does, however, mean that India would be attempting something for which there is no established global blueprint to simply replicate.

Climate change makes the question more urgent. Historical rainfall and river-flow patterns may no longer provide a reliable guide to future conditions. Changing monsoon intensity and timing, extreme rainfall, prolonged dry spells and other hydrological shifts could alter the reliability of projected surpluses.

Before the Brahmaputra is declared a source of national water security, India should therefore publicly demonstrate the calculations. What is the dependable surplus? How much is required downstream? What storage is required? What are the energy and financial costs? How will the system perform during water scarcity? What alternatives have been examined? Which states will be affected? And what are the implications for Bangladesh?

Most importantly, the public should be able to see and scrutinise these calculations. Ultimately, the question is not whether India should ever move water between

river basins. Water already moves between basins through natural hydrological connections. The more important questions are whether a proposed transfer is necessary, how much water can actually be transferred without compromising existing downstream needs, and what its ecological, social, economic and political consequences would be. Any such proposal must also be judged against the enormous investments, institutional capacity, long-term operational arrangements, and environmental and social trade-offs that large-scale inter-basin water transfers entail.

The Brahmaputra makes this debate especially consequential. It is a river, a floodplain, a sediment conveyor and the basis of millions of livelihoods, with its waters continuing downstream as the Jamuna.

So when India hears the phrase Brahmaputra to Cauvery and Godavari, the first response should be to ask what exactly is being proposed, what problem it is intended to solve, and whether its hydrological, ecological, social, economic and institutional implications have been adequately examined. That means asking some very basic questions.

How much water? From where? In which months? What qualifies as surplus, and according to whose calculations? Where would it be stored? How would it be transferred? At what cost? Who would benefit? Who would bear the risks? And what happens when the river does not behave as planners expect?

India needs water security. But before India attempts to connect its great rivers, it must first demonstrate that the water can, needs to and should be moved.

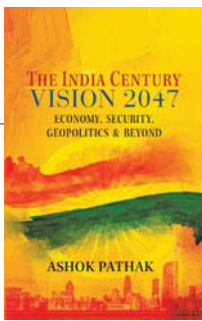
BY ANIL BHAT

This book has been sponsored by Bharat Global Industries Forum (BGIF), a premier national think-and-action platform uniting India's top corporations, policy-makers, and global investors to support the concept and accomplishment of Atmanirbhar Bharat (self-reliant India) and helping this nation to grow into a manufacturing hub with a \$30 trillion economy.

The central theme of the book aims at Vision 2047 going beyond headline numbers of GDP (\$30 Trillion) and GDP per capita (\$18000/-) to the overall well being of ordinary citizens. NITI Ayog's ambitions of creating an India of 2047 where the citizens are intimately connected to governance, assured best of education, health care, social services and public infrastructure are discussed against the backdrop of past inertia and baggage of organisational slack.

He describes the unsatisfactory state of private sector investment in R&D and the inefficiencies of SMEs. At the same time some early silver linings are also highlighted - like the high percentage of indigenous defense systems, India's achievements in space, quantum computing and semi-conductors. The unique feature of author's style is his dependence on hard data without diluting the readability for an ordinary student of the subject.

In a broader sense linking 'Viksit Bharat 2047 Vision' to the three major pillars- economy, national security and geopolitics makes the road to 2047 much more distinct and meaningful. Students of macro and political economy will find the chapter on



Author: Ashok Pathak
Publisher: Pentagon Press
Pages: 124 pages
Price: ₹695

economy very lucid and informative as it links the current milieu with the ancient - Kautilya's Arthashastra; and western economic philosophy of Adam Smith.

The book highlights the Indian philosophy of oneness of humanity. Ekamavadv, or Integral Humanism, is a socio-economic and political philosophy propounded by Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya in 1964. It presents an integrated approach to human existence, balancing individual needs with societal welfare.

The author has emphasised that national security should not be looked at only in terms of military strength, but holistically and that defense expenditure should be viewed as economic investment. The issues of indigenous production of defense have been very lucidly explained with the help of case study on HF 24 and LCA Tejas and the overall strength of Indian Air Force.

On geopolitics the book has exposed to the global challenges arising out of national ambitions based on power, assumed roles in global affairs and theol-

ogy driven undercurrents that trigger conflicts. India's strength, challenges, compulsions and their impact on achieving the vision 2047 have been neatly explained. The author has done well to bring out the role of soft power in achieving geopolitical goals.

Since the Bharatiya Janata Party came to power under Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2014, India has witnessed a profound shift toward mainstreaming Hindu civilizational identity and state-backed cultural nationalism. This movement views its current trajectory as a long-overdue decolonization and public reclamation of indigenous heritage, contrasting sharply with decades of post-independence "secular" governance. This post-2014 era in India is at last emerging as a vital correction to centuries of cultural and political marginalization, during which foreign Islamic rulers and British colonial powers suppressed native Hindu identity, history, and traditions. This political shift in 2014 of democratic reassertion of India's indigenous civilizational ethos was waiting to happen.

Massive development of roads, railways, and ports; growth in manufacturing through production incentives; expansion of the tech and renewable energy sectors and strong domestic consumption of the rising middle class are indications of the strong possibility of the aims stated. The author served in the Corps of Signals and retired in 2006 as Deputy Director General of Army Signals Intelligence.

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When Quiet Reflection Turns into Practical Action

Dr Shanker Adawal
Astrologer, Author & Researcher

This forecast is based on your Moon Sign (Janma Rashi), which often reflects day-to-day emotional and instinctive patterns more closely than general Sun-sign readings.

Moon Watch

The Moon's quiet message for the week ahead. The waning Moon begins reflectively, gathers courage in Aries and settles into Taurus. The message is simple: understand first, act with purpose, then give worthwhile decisions enough time to become steady.

Weekly Overview

The week opens with the Moon in Pisces, favouring reflection, intuition and a quieter pace. Aries then brings movement, initiative and more direct decisions. From Thursday, Taurus steadies the mood and turns attention towards practical matters. Friday adds a gentle note of devotion and simplicity, while late Saturday brings a livelier, more communicative tone.



Aries (Mesh): The opening days may feel slower than expected, and some unfinished thoughts need attention before you move ahead. Once the Moon enters Aries, confidence returns and personal matters begin moving more quickly. Taurus later shifts attention towards money, family and practical priorities. By Saturday, conversations become easier. Avoid spending energy proving a point that is already clear to you.



Taurus (Vrishabh): Friends, professional contacts or longer-term plans may bring useful support early in the week. The Aries phase then encourages you to step back, rest or work quietly behind the scenes. Once the Moon enters Taurus, confidence and emotional steadiness improve noticeably. Personal priorities become easier to sort out. Late Saturday turns attention towards finances and family arrangements that need a practical look.



Gemini (Mithun): Professional responsibilities may be active at the start, and your judgement could be noticed more than usual. Aries then brings friends, networks and future plans into the picture, helping a stalled idea regain momentum. Taurus later asks you to slow down and clear some mental clutter. By Saturday evening, energy begins returning. A little distance may help you recognise which commitments still deserve your time.



Cancer (Karka): Learning, travel or a broader life question may occupy your thoughts during the opening days. Aries then puts career and responsibilities back in focus, making direct action necessary in one area. Taurus brings support through friends, colleagues or familiar networks. The weekend becomes quieter internally. You need not solve everything immediately; sometimes knowing what can wait is also useful progress.



Leo (Simha): Shared finances, trust or an emotionally sensitive matter may need calm handling early in the week. Aries lifts the mood and encourages learning, travel or a wider perspective. Taurus then brings career matters and public responsibilities into sharper focus. Friday may feel especially grounded and purposeful. By Saturday, support from friends or professional contacts can make one practical matter easier than expected.



Virgo (Kanya): Relationships and one-to-one discussions need attention at the beginning of the week, especially where expectations have remained unspoken. Aries may then bring shared responsibilities, finances or trust issues into focus. Taurus broadens perspective and supports learning or future planning. Late Saturday turns attention towards career matters. A straightforward conversation earlier in the week may save unnecessary confusion later.



Libra (Tula): Work routines, health priorities or unfinished tasks may need better organisation early on. Aries then places relationships and cooperation at the centre, making balanced communication important. Taurus later deepens the mood and may bring financial commitments or emotional expectations into view. The weekend opens a wider perspective. Do not let one uncomfortable conversation convince you that the larger picture has changed.



Scorpio (Vrishchik): Creative interests, children or personal plans may bring welcome energy during the opening days. Aries then turns attention towards work, routines and health, where small improvements can be useful. Taurus highlights relationships and close partnerships later in the week. Friday feels steadier and more cooperative. By Saturday, shared matters may need a little more honesty. Listen carefully before assuming you know the other person's intention.



Sagittarius (Dhanu): Home, family or personal arrangements may keep you occupied early in the week. Aries then brings more confidence, creativity and social energy, making the middle phase feel lighter. Taurus restores discipline and turns attention towards work, health and everyday responsibilities. Late Saturday puts relationships back in focus. Keep the weekend flexible; another person's plan may not move at the same pace as yours.



Capricorn (Makar): Communication, paperwork or short journeys may make the opening days busy. Aries then shifts attention towards home and family, where one practical decision may need to be taken. Taurus later brings a lighter mood through creativity, children or personal interests. Friday supports simple pleasures rather than unnecessary pressure.



Aquarius (Kumbh): Financial priorities, family responsibilities or questions of personal value may need sensible handling at the start. Aries then increases communication, movement and useful exchanges of information. Taurus brings attention towards home, comfort and emotional security. Friday may encourage you to simplify rather than expand. Late Saturday feels lighter and more expressive, helping creativity or social plans return without much effort.



Pisces (Meen): With the Moon beginning the week in Pisces, personal feelings and priorities become stronger and easier to recognise. Use the opening phase to understand what you genuinely want before acting. Aries then turns attention towards money and practical arrangements.

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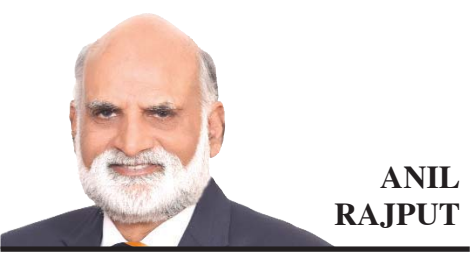
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“EAT FOOD. NOT TOO MUCH.
MOSTLY PLANT”
— MICHAEL POLLAN

Makkhan se prasad: Krishna's story through food



ANIL
RAJPUT

At midnight in Mathura, temple bells ring, conches sound and chants rise through the streets as devotees mark the birth of Krishna. In homes far beyond Braj, the same story is retold through food. White butter recalls the mischievous child of Gokul. Poha rem embers the humility of Sudama's offering. Sugar-palm fruit is turned into Taler Bora in Bengal, while rice flour becomes crisp seedai in Tamil Nadu. Across India, ingredients, techniques and memories transform devotion into taste. Janmashtami is therefore not simply a festival with a special menu. It is a journey from fasting to worship, from bhog to prasad, and finally from an offering made to Krishna to food shared among families and communities.

Celebrated in 2026 on Friday, 4 September, Janmashtami falls on the Ashtami, or eighth lunar day, of Krishna Paksha associated with Krishna's birth. The story begins in Mathura, where Devaki and Vasudeva were imprisoned by the tyrant Kansa. Tradition recounts that after Krishna was born, Vasudeva carried the infant across the Yamuna to Gokul, where he was raised by Nanda and Yashoda. His childhood unfolded in the pastoral world of Braj, among cows, milk, curd and butter, before his life later carried him from Mathura towards Dwarka. That geography helps explain why food occupies such an intimate place in Janmashtami. Krishna is remembered not only through sacred narrative, but through the foods associated with his childhood, friendship, pastoral surroundings and the regions that made his story their own. The 4 September date is also the one listed for the 2026 celebrations in Mathura.

The observance itself is shaped by restraint before abundance. Many devotees fast through the day, but the fast is not merely a dietary exercise or a list of prohibited ingredients. It is a spiritual discipline intended to reduce everyday distraction, cultivate self-control and turn attention towards Krishna. Practices differ between regions and traditions. Some devotees take fruit, milk, nuts or foods prepared from permitted fasting ingredients, while others observe a stricter fast until the midnight worship. For many, purity in preparation is as important as abstinence itself. What unites these practices is the idea that restraint prepares the mind for devotion. The day gradually moves towards Nishita, the sacred midnight hour, when Krishna's birth is celebrated with prayer, singing, abhisheka and the offering of food.

That offering also explains the difference between food and prasad. A preparation may begin in the kitchen as ordinary food, but once it is prepared with care, placed before the deity as bhog and offered in devotion, it is received back as prasad. The transformation is not one of ingredients but of meaning. Food that might otherwise satisfy hunger becomes something shared as grace. This movement from fasting to mid-

night worship, from bhog to prasad and from prasad to communal sharing gives Janmashtami food its spiritual structure. It also explains why the festival cannot be understood simply as a directory of festive dishes.

At the centre of this tradition stands Makkhan Mishri, perhaps the most direct edible memory of Krishna's childhood. Fresh white butter is mixed with crystals of mishri and offered to Bal Krishna, recalling the affectionate image of Makkhan Chor, the child who stole butter from the homes of Braj. Traditionally, curd is churned until the butter separates, then the butter is washed, collected and paired with sugar candy. Its simplicity is precisely its strength. Few ingredients could evoke Krishna's pastoral world more immediately. Makkhan Mishri continues to be closely associated with Krishna devotion in Mathura and Vrindavan.

From the butter pots of Gokul, the story moves naturally to Mathura Peda, one of the defining foods of Krishna's birthplace. Milk is slowly reduced to khoya, roasted until it develops a deeper caramelised flavour, then mixed with sugar and cardamom before being shaped into small rounds. During Janmashtami, peda is prepared in large quantities in Mathura and is also offered in temples and homes. Here, the sweet does more than satisfy festive appetite. It turns the sacred geography of Mathura into something that can be carried home, shared and remembered.

North Indian Janmashtami traditions also include Dhaniya Panjiri, particularly in households where grains are avoided during the fast. Coriander seeds or powder are gently roasted until aromatic, then combined with ghee, powdered sugar, coconut, makhana and nuts. The unusual use of coriander gives it a flavour distinct from ordinary wheat-based panjiri. Makhana Paag offers another characteristic preparation. Fox nuts are roasted in ghee until crisp and then bound with sugar, coconut, cardamom and sometimes nuts or raisins. Both are prepared as offerings and



later distributed as prasad, reinforcing the festival's association with ingredients suited to fasting traditions while still producing texture and richness.

The idea of abundance reaches its grandest expression in Chhappan Bhog, the ceremonial offering of fifty-six foods associated with Krishna worship and often presented during Janmashtami celebrations. Popular tradition links the number fifty-six to the belief that Krishna normally ate eight meals a day and went without them during the seven days he held up Govardhan Hill, leading devotees to offer eight times seven dishes in gratitude. The exact composition varies widely, and that variation is part of its character. Sweets, dairy preparations, fruits, savouries and grains may all appear depending on temple and regional custom. Chhappan Bhog is therefore less a fixed recipe than a statement of devotion expressed through abundance.

As Krishna's story travels west, Janmashtami food begins to take on distinctly regional forms. In Maharashtra, Gopalkala, also known as Dahikala, is especially associated with the celebrations surrounding Dahi Handi. Poha is mixed with curd and ingredients such as cucumber, grated coconut, roasted peanuts, coriander and green chilli. Some versions add fruit or soaked pulses. Cool, savoury and meant for sharing, it recalls Krishna eating with his cowherd companions and complements the public spectacle of the handi filled with curd or butter. Unlike a formal sweet carefully shaped for presentation, Gopalkala is mixed together and shared communally, which is part of its charm. Dahi Handi itself remains one of Maharashtra's most prominent Janmashtami traditions.

In some Gujarati households, where devotion to Krishna is strongly connected with Dwarka, Janmashtami menus absorb regional favourites while retaining the larger themes of dairy, fasting and offering.

Patra, made by spreading a sweet, sour and spiced flour paste over colocasia leaves, rolling and steaming them before slicing, brings a layered savoury element to the table. Malpuda uses a batter of wheat flour and jaggery that is rested and fried into small rounds, sometimes finished with poppy seeds. Elaichi Shrikhand, made by draining curd until thick and then beating it with sugar and cardamom, returns the menu to the dairy world so strongly associated with Krishna. These are regional expressions rather than compulsory Janmashtami foods, and their value lies precisely in showing how local households celebrate the same deity in their own food language.

In Bengal, the festival enters the late monsoon kitchen through Taler Bora. Ripe palmyra fruit is pulped, combined with rice flour or wheat flour, coconut and jaggery or sugar, then fried into small golden fritters. The fruit ripens around the Janmashtami season, so its presence at the festival reflects not only devotion but ecology and seasonality. The result is fragrant, slightly dense and deeply regional. In Bengali Janmashtami traditions, Taler Bora is prepared as an offering before being shared, making it a striking example of how a local ingredient can become part of the larger story of Krishna.

Tamil Nadu's Krishna Jayanthi traditions bring some of the festival's most distinctive savouries, although they represent one regional branch of a much wider celebration rather than the entire Janmashtami table. Uppu Seedai is prepared from rice flour and roasted urad dal flour mixed with butter, sesame or cumin, salt and asafoetida. The dough is rolled into tiny balls and fried until crisp, a process that demands careful control of moisture. Its sweet counterpart, Vella Seedai, combines rice flour with jaggery, coconut and cardamom. Together they produce one of the most recognisable sweet-and-savoury pairings associated with Krishna Jayanthi. Seedai and thattai are also recognised among the regional foods associated with Janmashtami celebrations.

Alongside them, Thattai is made by flattening a seasoned rice-flour dough into thin discs before frying, often with chilli, sesame, asafoetida and soaked chana dal. Thenkuzhal uses rice and urad flours pressed through a mould into crisp coils, while Nei Appam provides a softer sweet contrast

through a batter of rice, jaggery, coconut and cardamom cooked with ghee until browned outside and tender within.

These preparations are valued not only for their taste but for the skill involved in shaping them. In many homes, children learn by watching elders roll seedai, press thenkuzhal or turn appam, allowing ritual knowledge to pass almost invisibly from one generation to another.

Flattened rice creates another bridge between regions and stories. Vella Aval, made by softening poha and combining it with jaggery, coconut and cardamom, recalls the beloved episode of Sudama bringing Krishna a humble gift of flattened rice. The story gives poha a meaning beyond its ingredients. It becomes a reminder that devotion is measured not by extravagance but by sincerity. In some southern households, the same ingredient appears as Aval Puttu, where poha is combined with jaggery and coconut, or Aval Payasam, in which it is gently cooked with milk or coconut milk into a softer sweet. The simplicity of aval sits beautifully beside the grandeur of Chhappan Bhog, showing that Krishna can be honoured through abundance or through a modest offering given with affection.

Beverages carry the same devotional symbolism. Panchamrit, made from milk, curd, ghee, honey and sugar or mishri, is central to many abhisheka rituals and is later received as prasad. Sweetened milk scented with saffron or cardamom may also be offered, while lassi and chaas reflect the dairy culture of Braj and western India. In different homes and temples, these drinks vary in sweetness and seasoning, but their common ingredients return again to the cow, milk and curd that surround the remembered world of Krishna's childhood. Even the act of drinking can therefore reinforce the festival's central imagery.

Taken together, these foods reveal two overlapping layers of Janmashtami. At the devotional core are the broad themes of fasting, milk, butter, curd, bhog, prasad and the midnight celebration of Krishna's birth. Around that centre sit regional expressions shaped by local crops, techniques and inherited household practice. Maharashtra gives Janmashtami Gopalkala, Bengal gives it Taler Bora, Gujarat adapts familiar regional foods for the occasion, and Tamil Nadu's Krishna Jayanthi is marked by seedai, thattai and other carefully shaped offerings. The festival does not become less unified because its food changes from region to region. Its unity lies in the intention behind the offering.

That may be Janmashtami's most enduring lesson about food. Heritage survives through practice: in the butter churned at dawn, in the peda patiently reduced over heat, in the seedai rolled between fingers, in the poha mixed with jaggery, and in the plate first placed before Krishna before anyone else eats. Tradition passes from one generation to another not only through texts or ceremonies, but through repeated gestures in the kitchen. This Janmashtami, families can preserve that inheritance by preparing at least one traditional dish with younger members, explaining why it is made, whom it is offered to and what story it carries. When the next generation learns both the recipe and the reason behind it, food becomes more than memory. It becomes a living tradition, renewed every time bhog becomes prasad and prasad is shared.

(The writer is Secretary, Cuisine India Society)

A feast fit for the butter thief The flavours of Janmashtami



TEAM AGENDA

Janmashtami, the birth anniversary of Lord Krishna, falls this year on September 4 (September 5 for Vaishnava and ISKCON traditions), marking the eighth avatar of Vishnu's descent to earth to end the tyranny of King Kansa and restore dharma. Krishna's midnight birth in a Mathura prison cell to Devaki and Vasudeva remains one of Hinduism's most cherished stories - the child who would grow

up to deliver the Bhagavad Gita, teaching karma and devotion to a fractious world. For devotees, the day is less ritual than homecoming: Bal Gopal, the mischievous butter-stealing infant, is welcomed back into every household.

Celebrations open with a day-long vrat, broken only after the midnight Nishita Puja, when Bal Gopal's idol is bathed in panchamrit, dressed in new clothes and cradled in a jhula.

Temples in Mathura and Vrindavan hold jagran through the night; Maharashtra and Gujarat erupt the next morning into Dahi Handi, human pyramids scaling for curd pots slung high above the street to re-enact Krishna's boyhood butter raids. Further south, Gokulashtami unfolds more quietly, with tiny rice-flour footprints tracing Krishna's path from doorstep to altar.

But it is food that truly carries the festival's spirit. Its centre-piece is Chappan Bhog - 56 dishes recalling the seven days Krishna went without food while holding aloft Govardhan Hill, after which the Brajwasis cooked him eight meals a day to make up the loss. Makkhan-mishri, butter whipped with sugar crystals, remains the essential offering, alongside panjiri, kheer, peda, rabri and the honeycombed disc of ghehar across the north. Once presented to Bal Gopal, the spread is distributed as prasad, turning neighbourhoods into one shared table. Fasting devotees turn instead to sabudana khichdi, kuttu and singhara flour,



and fresh fruit, avoiding grain and salt until the midnight

vrat breaks.

Regional larders reshape the feast entirely. Tamil Nadu and Karnataka offer crunchy seedai and murukku alongside sweet aval; Maharashtra and Gujarat pair Dahi Handi's chaos with shrikhand, poha and panchamrut-laced ladoos; Bengal answers with delicate sandesh and rasgulla; Bihar fries up vegetable taura fritters and simmers makhane ki kheer; and Puri's Jagannath temple sends out khichdi, dahi pakhal and khaja as mahaprasad. Across every kitchen, though, one instinct holds constant: Krishna is fed first, and only then does the household eat - devotion, quite literally, served on a plate.



From midnight prayers to Chappan Bhog, Janmashtami brings

devotion to the table, blending regional flavours, cherished rituals and Krishna's playful spirit.

Sufiana: Where culinary excellence meets melody



GYANESHWAR DAYAL

In a city brimming with dining options, Sufiana by Cherish stands out as a sanctuary for those seeking more than just a meal-it promises a complete sensory experience that lingers long after the last bite. Located within The Anand Villas in Ashok Vihar, this elegant 108-cover restaurant has masterfully crafted a space where traditional charm seamlessly intertwines with contemporary sophistication.

● **The Culinary Journey**
Executive Chef Bharat V. Sharma's menu is a testament to thoughtful curation, striking an impressive balance between beloved classics and innovative creations. The dal makhani arrives velvety and rich, its depth of flavor earned through meticulous preparation, while the butter chicken melts on the palate with understated elegance.

However, it's the experimental offerings-like the delicate tuls aur badam ke kofte and earthy mushroom rarha-that truly showcase the kitchen's creative ambition. The diverse menu, spanning north Indian staples, artisanal steaks, aromatic Thai curries, and vibrant Mexican plates, ensures every palate finds its perfect match. Each dish reflects a commitment to quality ingredients and technique that never feels pretentious.

● **Ambiance and Design**
The restaurant's spacious layout immediately puts you at ease. Warm lighting, thoughtfully appointed interiors, and comfortable seating create an inviting sanctuary where conversations flow effortlessly. Whether you're



celebrating a milestone or enjoying a casual evening, the relaxed yet refined atmosphere strikes that rare balance between approachable and elevated.

● **The Soul of Hospitality**
What truly sets Sufiana apart is its genuine hospitality. Drawing on two decades of excellence with Cherish's hospitality legacy, the staff anticipates needs with quiet efficiency. Their warmth isn't performative-it feels authentic and personal, transforming service into genuine care.

● **Live Music Magic**
The evening is elevated further by live music that complements rather than overwhelms the dining experience. The carefully

curated performances create an enchanting backdrop, adding emotional depth to your meal without interrupting intimate conversations.

● **The Verdict**
Sufiana understands that unforgettable moments aren't about complexity; they're about the convergence of exceptional food, genuine service, and welcoming ambiance. This is where memories are made-with people who matter, over dishes that delight, in a space that feels like home. Sufiana doesn't just serve dinner; it orchestrates experiences.



Taking responsibility as children of the earth

AMMA (SRI MATA AMRITANANDAMAYI DEVI)

Many years ago, when Amma was travelling through Tamil Nadu, she was giving rice, clothing, and other relief to those who had lost their homes and families to the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami. A very old man came up to her, and the moment the items reached his hands, the poor man broke down and wept aloud.

"O God, to whom am I to give this now? Who is left to me to cook a meal from it?" And then his tears completely engulfed him. The tsunami had carried away his house and all his dear ones. That face, and that sorrow, do not fade from Amma's heart. For all the brilliant scientists the world over, no one could foretell the tsunami was coming; and even had it been foretold, nothing could have stopped it. Our home, our belongings, our parents, our children - any of it can be lost in the blink of an eye. We have seen the mightiest structures that human hands have raised collapse like a house of cards before nature's fury.

This is happening because people blinded by arrogance and wealth have lost their sense of dharma; they are plundering nature for their own selfish gain. They have no regard for the destructive impact this will have on others. The harmony of nature is broken, and this is the root cause of most of the world's disasters. Within our own lifetime we can see how greatly the seasons have changed. Because of our carelessness in guarding the soil, we have watched the great cities of Kerala go under in floods. Across the world, many creatures and birds once seen everywhere are nowhere to be found. Why is this happening?

In truth, we ourselves invite these calamities. So long as we are unwilling to cherish nature as we would a mother, such destruction will keep returning, like blows struck in the dark. Each disaster is an alarm bell, calling us to wake from a guilty sleep. And for



Ammamma offering prayers after mass funeral rites for those lost to the 2004 Tsunami in the area surrounding Amritapur Ashram

all our cruelty, Mother Nature goes on loving us, even though today she lies ill. She who once gave us everything, like the wish-granting cow Kamadhenu, has become a starved and milkless cow.

Our numbers on this Earth continue to grow, and growth itself is not the sin - the question is how we take. There are three types of people: those of prakriti, who take only their own share and think no further; those of vikriti, who take their share and then snatch what belongs to others; and those of samskriti who take only as little as they need and give away as much as they can.

Look at Mother Nature Herself - she takes only to give back a hundredfold. If humanity is to survive, let us evolve as samskriti: learning to take only what we need to live peacefully and then share the surplus with those who are suffering. As the population increases, it does not need to come at the cost of ruin for all.

This Earth is the dwelling place of countless living things. It is a home that belongs equally to all, from the smallest of cells to the massive blue whale to humankind as its guardians. Under our vast sky of stars, let us delay

no longer to take responsibility for our global family.

The rhythm of Nature depends upon how humanity proceeds. We see this in the many natural disasters we are facing and the sorrow this causes to those left behind. But after our grief, even if we are completely surrounded by darkness, we must keep the light within aflame and use it to show the path to others as well. Even if we cannot completely remove their suffering, despair lessens when it is shared with others.

Regardless of the destruction we have witnessed, we do not need to remain bound by our mistakes. Look forward with strength and hope. Each one of us can do our own small part to help restore the natural world. We should perform these actions with utmost faith and alertness, and yet with a sense of detachment. Don't be attached to the fruits of your actions. That is in Mother Nature's hands.

So let us move forward, one step at a time. We are children of the Earth and, therefore, must be grateful for and take care of everything She gives. It is our dharma as humankind, the most intelligent of beings, to care for all others, both sentient and non-sentient. When beauty, harmony, and love blossom in our hearts, a new age will dawn.

(Sri Mata Amritanandamayi Devi, known simply as Amma, is a spiritual master and humanitarian who has given her darshan in the form of a motherly embrace to more than 4 crore people. Listening to the cries of the suffering, Amma leads the Mata Amritanandamayi Math, an NGO that reaches across more than 50 countries, working in the areas of healthcare, disaster relief, education, gender equality, and environmental restoration)



A Culture Based on Inner Science

SADHGURU

Right from ancient times, any number of visitors have visited India, and so did the great American writer and thinker Mark Twain. After his short visit, he said, "Anything that can ever be done either by man or God has been done in this land."

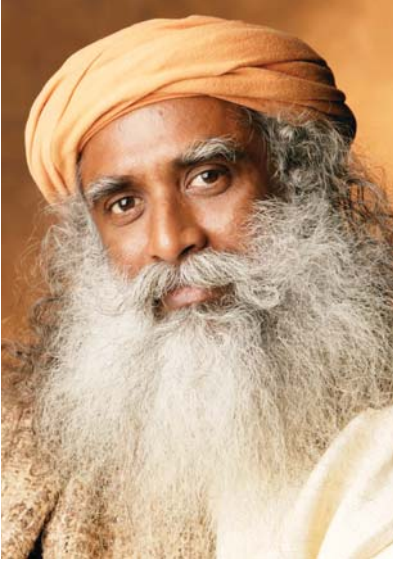
Most Indians are not aware of the depth of mysticism and spiritual process that has happened and still continues to happen in India. This land has always been known as the spiritual capital of the world, simply because no other culture has looked at the inner sciences with as much depth and understanding as this culture has.

But in the last hundred years, because of a very upstart-ish attitude towards life, we have dropped many things. Because of political and other kinds of dominance, we have come to a kind of conclusion that if something comes from the West it becomes science; if it comes from the East it becomes superstition.

Many of the things that your grandmothers would have once told you are today being discovered in top scientific laboratories as "great" discoveries about human nature. Everything that they are saying after billion-dollar research studies, we have already said in our culture, because this is not a culture which has evolved out of compulsions of living. This is a culture which was evolved

consciously by sages and saints —seeing how you should sit, how you should stand, and how you should eat. It was designed for what is best for human well-being, and there is immense scientific value in it.

Today, particularly in the last few



years, a phenomenal amount of research has gone into water and the potential of water. One thing scientists are saying is that water has memory. Like a fluid memory bank, water remembers whatever it comes in touch with. For example, if I take a glass of water in my hand, look at it in a certain way and give it to you, wellbeing will come to you. If I look at it another way and give it to you, you will fall sick tonight.

In this culture, we have always known that water has memory. This is why in traditional homes, people keep a copper vessel which they wash every day, do a pooja for, and only then fill it with water to drink. What you call as teerth is just this. You may have seen how people struggle to get that one drop of teerth from the temple. Even if you are a billionaire, you are still dying for that one drop of water because you want to take in water which has the memory of the Divine.

Today, there are a lot of studies showing how a pregnant woman eats, what kind of people she is with, what she is exposed to has a huge impact on the next generation of people. But over the last few decades, fully pregnant women have been in trains, buses and bars. They

are drinking and smoking. When asked, "Won't this have an impact on the baby?" people would say, "No. We studied the blood parameters, nothing happened." Now, after fifty years of that culture, there are a lot of studies saying that it is actually having an impact for many generations of people.

In India, we have always been conscious about this. There is a whole process from the moment a woman conceives until delivery, and later on for as long as the mother is breastfeeding the child - what she should and should not consume, what kind of people she should meet, where she should go or not go.

Science has done incredible things in the last hundred years, no question. The comfort and convenience that all of us are enjoying today is essentially because of the outcome of the scientific endeavor on the planet. At the same time, the limitation of science has been in trying to achieve everything through physical means - by measuring physical quantities, going by the physical laws.

If only scientists, who have pursued things so far into physical reality, pay a little attention to the most fundamental physicality which is themselves, if they spend an equal amount of time turning inward rather than solely looking through a telescope or a microscope, I think something phenomenal could come out of it.

There is an inner strength in Indian culture that stems from a whole science and technology of inner wellbeing - right now the whole world is crying for it. They have outer technology with which they have done wonderful things on the outside, but they are struggling inside.

If we fall back on the knowledge bank that we have in this country, it could be the greatest asset — not only for this nation's wellbeing but for the world's wellbeing as well.

(Sadhguru is a yogi, mystic and visionary, and a prominent spiritual leader. An author, poet, and internationally-renowned speaker, Sadhguru's wit and piercing logic provoke and widen our perception of life)

Handling difficulties in life

GURUDEV SRI SRI RAVI SHANKAR

In life, everyone goes through pleasant and unpleasant times. Just walk ahead with courage. Whenever there is a problem, we either deny it, saying there is no problem, or we sit down to worry about it and make it bigger. Neither helps. A problem doesn't disappear when you deny it, and it doesn't get solved by worrying about it.

The first thing is to acknowledge that there is a problem. Then see it as small and solvable. If it concerns people, keep in touch with them rather than avoid them. Talk less and give time a chance. Get together and celebrate. When you put the problem on the back burner for a while, you often find that it gets resolved in time.

When a problem comes, instead of looking at the solution, we often keep looking at how big it can become and imagine the worst outcomes. But every problem that comes in front of you is an opportunity to discover the skill, talent, and ability within you. It is there for you to uncover your true potential.

The second thing is to see life from a broader perspective. Look back at your own life. How much time have you spent worrying? Even though you worried so much, things still happened as they should have. And you realised there was no need to worry.

Looking back at your own life gives you strength. You have overcome many difficulties in the past. This remembrance gives you confidence that you can overcome challenges in the future too. Challenges may come in new forms, but challenges have always been there.

Have confidence in your own ability and in your own fortune. Know that only the best happens to you. Life moves in the direction of the best. On the way, you may find rough roads, but they are taking you towards something better.

If these two things don't work, there is a third option: invoke the valour in you. Tell yourself, "Come what may, I will handle it. I have the power to overcome this." Know that you are never given a problem that you cannot handle. When you invoke this energy, this spirit to counter a challenge, fear vanishes.

Trying times bring out the best in you. Rewarding times give you the best of the world. Life is a combination of both.

Life is often caught in storms. In those moments, all your spiritual practices and philosophical ideas may seem to fall apart. But remember something very important: you aren't alone in those trying hours. No storm can last forever. Waves come, and for no reason, turmoil is created in the mind. The storms rise in you, but they never stay forever. They subside after a while.

When the mind cools down and you experience that inner softness and delicate aspect of yourself, a big relief dawns in you. Peace and love are significant aspects of your true nature.

If the ocean thinks, "I am blue and nice only when there is no storm," it is under the influence of a wrong idea. Even when the storms are there, deep inside, the



ocean is still calm.

Every storm that has come into your life has widened your horizon and deepened your awareness. It has destroyed some smallness inside you. A storm comes into your life, whether you like it or not, and pulls you out of your likes and dislikes, your cravings and aversions.

When there is chaos, and you are surrounded by problems, you need calmness the most. When everything around is peaceful, being peaceful is easy. But when everything is falling apart, remaining peaceful has real value.

Uncertainty can produce fear and anxiety, but it can also bring enthusiasm, joy, and a sense of thrill. When you know you are on a roller-coaster ride, uncertainty itself can become part of the experience. The uncertainty may remain, but your relationship with it changes.

There are four ways to overcome a tough situation. One is to have faith that this tough situation too will pass. Everything changes, and chaotic situations also change. The second is your own experience. Just as you have had the energy, courage, and strength to handle problems in the past, you have them for the future too.

The third is to share and serve others. If you always think about yourself, your problem becomes insurmountable. When you open up and see what is happening in the world, you realise that you aren't the only one dealing with problems. The fourth is faith in a greater power. What you cannot do by your efforts, you can do by your prayers. You aren't alone in your trials and tribulations. There is a higher power with you. Have faith in that.

Wisdom from past experiences, spiritual practices, valour, and faith help you sail through the rough patches of life. Problems and challenges are there in everyone's Life. Wisdom and Devotion give us the strength to overcome these easily. During hard times, take special care of your overall well-being. Keep the body active. Go for walks; practise Pranayamas, Sudarshan Kriya and meditation. These practices give you enormous prana, or life energy, and strengthen the mind and body, helping you overcome difficult situations. And don't skip prayer-genuine, heartfelt prayer.

There will always be some flaw in worldly activities. Don't overthink or try to find perfection in them. When we go deeper on the spiritual path and in meditation, we learn to rise above the challenges.

Having this, you can move ahead in life with confidence. That is why it is said

in Sanskrit: "Charaiveti! Charaiveti! Charaiveti!"-Keep moving. Keep moving. Keep moving!

In 2016, we organised the World Culture Festival on the banks of the Yamuna. Why did we choose the Yamuna? In 2010, through the 'Meri Dilli Meri Yamuna' campaign, thousands of our volunteers had come together to clean Delhi. We removed nearly 700 tonnes of waste-jerkins, slippers and all kinds of rubbish from the Yamuna. Seeing the state of the river, I thought that if people from all over the world came to its banks for the World Culture Festival, perhaps the attention of the authorities would turn towards cleaning and restoring it.

We obtained the required permissions from all the concerned authorities. And then we created something extraordinary: a seven-acre floating stage, with 36,602 artists and people from 155 countries. Hundreds of dignitaries, heads of state, and 2,500 religious and spiritual leaders came from across the world. Representatives of the Pope, Dharmacharyas, the Grand Mufti of Syria, leaders from Egypt, the US, Cuba, Russia, Ukraine, ministers, Buddhist monks from the Far East-people from different faiths, cultures and nations came together on one platform. Around 3.7 million people attended the three-day celebration.

We took utmost care of the environment. The stage was constructed using metal sheets and pillars, without digging into the ground. When we dismantled it, there was grass still growing beneath the plates. Yet, even before the event began, allegations were made that we had damaged the Yamuna floodplains. The National Green Tribunal ordered us to deposit ₹5 crore as environmental compensation, even though the event had not yet begun. There were only two days left and international dignitaries from across the world were arriving. I did not want to pay for something we had not done. I said I was ready to go to jail, but I would stand for the truth. Eventually, with the programme at stake, our people requested that we comply with the order, and we deposited the amount while continuing to contest the allegations.

The matter continued for years. There was a media trial, and the allegation that the World Culture Festival had damaged the Yamuna was repeated again and again. But we did not lose heart. We stood by the truth with patience.

Today, after 10 years, the Supreme Court has upheld the truth. It has vindicated our stand. It set aside the NGT judgment and all consequential and interim actions against us, and directed that the ₹5 crore deposited in compliance with the NGT order be refunded. More importantly, the Court found that the material on record did not establish the necessary causal link between the event and the alleged environmental degradation.

This was a reminder of what I had shared in 2017. Truth will always Triumph; however, before that, lies will have their dance.

France's first traditional Hindu Mandir

In Paris, a city renowned for art, beauty, and culture, France's first newly built traditional BAPS Hindu Mandir is more than a remarkable example of Indian architecture. It stands as a living symbol of the cultural bond between India and France

DR SWAMI GYANANANDDAS

It was 7 July 1970. An aircraft travelling from London to Mumbai made a brief stop at Orly Airport in Paris. For the passengers, it was perhaps nothing more than an ordinary pause in their journey. Little did anyone know that, in that brief halt, an invisible seed of history was being sown.

Among the passengers was Swami Yogi Maharaj, who was returning to India after consecrating a Hindu mandir in London. At that moment, the visionary guru asked two of his disciples, Pramukh Swami Maharaj and Mahant Swami Maharaj, to step off the aircraft. Thus, for the first time, two swamis of the Swaminarayan tradition set foot on French soil, carrying the sacred murti of Swaminarayan Bhagwan in their hands. In accordance with their guru's wish, they descended from the aircraft, paused in prayer, and then returned.

It was then that Yogi Maharaj expressed a profound resolve: "One day, a beautiful mandir will be built in Paris." At that moment, there was no land for a mandir, no construction plan, no team of artisans, and no architectural blueprint. There was only the divine resolve of a guru and an unshakable faith in God.

Time moved on. Years turned into decades. Yet today, that sacred resolve has pierced through the veil of time and risen upon French soil as an enduring monument.

This newly built mandir is not merely



a place of worship. It is also a comprehensive center for Indian culture, art, education, and dialogue. Located at Allée Madame de Montespan, 77600 Bussy-Saint-Georges, France, in the eastern suburbs of Paris, the approximately 5,000-square-metre complex has two principal dimensions: a traditional mandir on the upper level and a cultural center, designed in the form of a haveli, beneath it.

5 pinnacles, 10 magnificent domes, 20 monumental pillars adorned with intricate carvings, 120 ornate windows, 49 sculptural character panels, and four elegantly ornamented chhatris reflect the timeless identity of traditional Indian architecture. The sanctum, prayer hall, and assembly hall further reveal the spiritual vision at the heart of the mandir.

Equally remarkable is the global collaboration embodied in its construction. Different varieties of marble sourced from Greece, India, Italy, and Vietnam, along with sandstone from Gwalior in India, have come together to give the mandir a truly international character. In India, skilled artisans painstakingly hand-carved these stones with motifs drawn from the classical traditions of Hindu sculpture. These sculpted stones then travelled to France, carrying with them the artistic heritage of a civilization thousands of years old, where they were harmoniously integrated with modern French engineering.

The grand haveli, built in the ancient Maru-Gurjara architectural style, houses an assembly hall, classrooms, exhibition

spaces, recreational areas, offices, and other multipurpose facilities. The entire complex thus becomes, at once, a place for darshan, a center of learning, a museum of culture, and a space where people can come together.

Significantly, the complex stands within the Esplanade des Religions et des Cultures, an area where places of worship representing different religious traditions stand alongside one another, a beautiful expression of mutual respect and peaceful coexistence.

The forthcoming Festival of Culture, to be held from 2 to 14 September, will be a celebration of this broader vision. A Vedic Mahayagna, a Palkhi procession, a journey on the River Seine, a grand procession passing near some of Paris's celebrated landmarks, and a variety of cultural programs will offer more than festive occasions; they will create opportunities for cultures to meet and hearts to connect. The consecration and inauguration ceremony by Mahant Swami Maharaj on 6 September will mark a defining moment in this historic journey, with devotees from across the continents gathering to celebrate the mandir's harmonious blend of traditions.

At a time when the world continues to struggle with divisions, conflicts, and cultural intolerance, a new cultural landmark has emerged on French soil, one that will stand as a living symbol of the unity between two great civilizations: India and France.

The creator and spiritual inspiration behind this mandir, Mahant Swami Maharaj, says: "This mandir has not been built to establish the identity of any one community, but to bring people of diverse identities closer to one another. Its very construction carries an important message: our paths may be different, but the ground of respect and coexistence can be one."

The dedication of the swamis and volunteers in building this mandir is unforgettable. Of course, some carved the stones, some managed the arrangements, and some prepared the meals, but together, each one placed a piece of their heart into this mandir.

The mandir that now stands in Paris is not merely a symbol of India. It is a symbol of a deeper faith: that when cultures learn to respect one another, boundaries begin to fade, and a new mandir of humanity is built.

(Dr Swami Gyanananddas is a dedicated follower of the Swaminarayan tradition and has earned a PhD from MS University)



Patently misleading: How some pvt univs are gaming rankings

From heated socks to torchlit umbrellas, academic filings have surged, but abandonment rates reveal how applications are only a marketing ploy to attract students and aid

Hemali.Chhapiatimesofindia.com

A mini tub-washing apparatus, a wearable auto-heating sock, an auto-heating glove, a pressure-flow beehive, a thrasher dustbin, a digital measurement tape and even an umbrella fitted with a torchlight so people could find their way on rainy evenings and still eat outdoors.

Between 2016 and 2022, Indian universities filed patent applications for all of them.

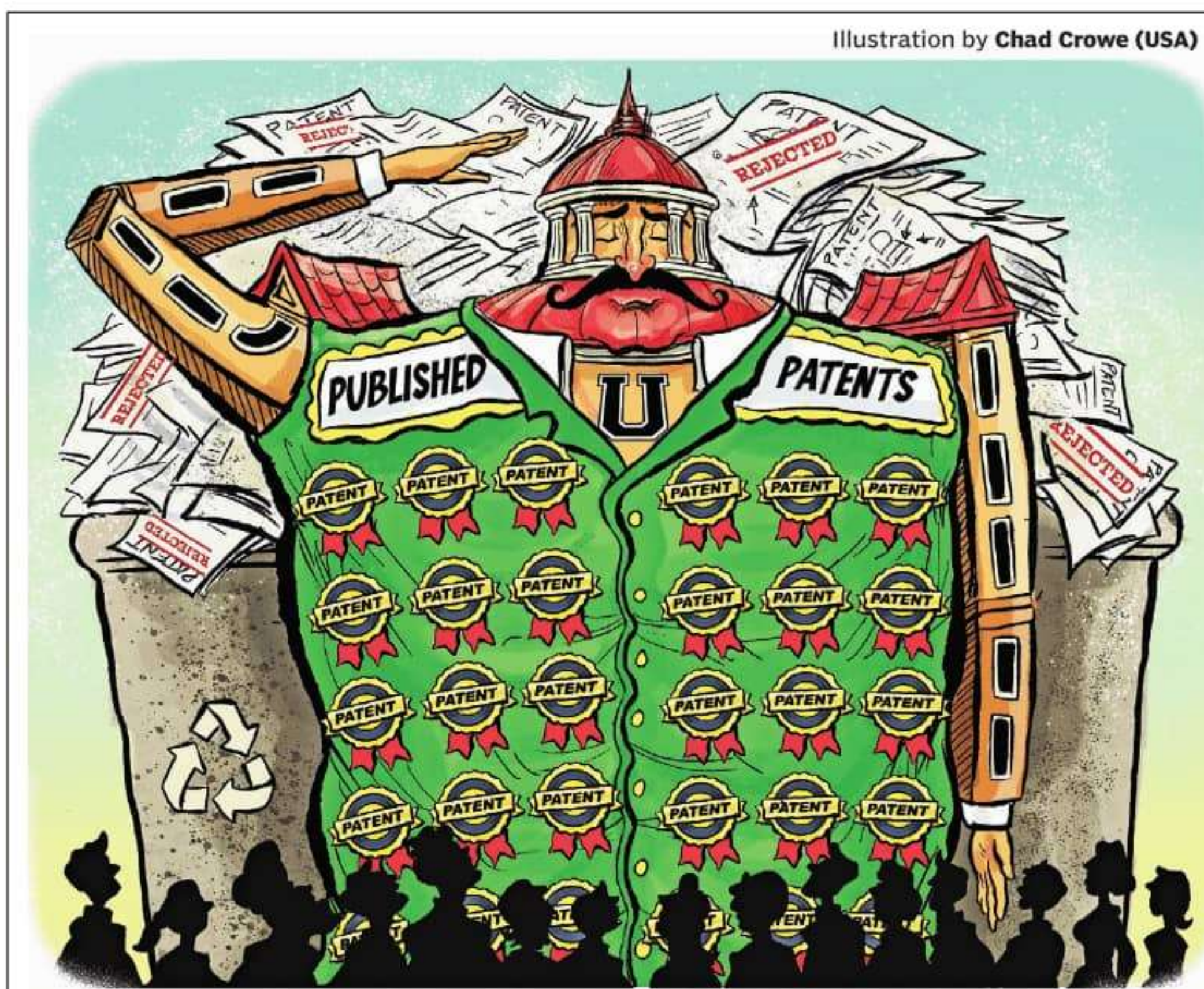
None was pursued to the end. Some ran into questions of novelty while others were simply abandoned.

They are among thousands of patent applications pouring out of Indian universities. Across India's higher education landscape, filing patents has become something of a peculiar sport.

Universities proudly advertise the numbers, regulators count them, ranking agencies reward them, and vice-chancellors flaunt them. Less talked about is what happens after the filing, what exactly is being patented, how many applications are pursued and how many eventually make it to a grant.

And the scale of academic patenting is now enormous. Sunil Mani, visiting professor at the Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram, and Ahmedabad University, points out that educational institutions filed 37,681 patent applications in 2024-25, up from 7405 in 2020-21. This now accounts for 34% of all applications filed in India, with a relatively small group of private universities accounting for a disproportionately large share.

Between January 2016 and May



INVENTION BOOM?

1,10,375 patent applications filed in India in 2024-25

37,681 filed by educational institutions

34%

Over 1/3rd of all filing in 2024-25 came from education institutions

Between 2020-21 and 2024-25 5X surge in applications from such institutions

MORE ENTRIES, MORE POINTS

University A

Files patents

1,000

Granted

20

Illustrative score: 1,020

Grant rate: 2%

University B

Files patents

50

Granted

20

Illustrative score: 70

Grant rate: 40%

APPLICATIONS DROPPED

Selected private universities
Tamil Nadu 81% | Punjab 75% | Pune 67%
Vellore 36% | Noida 35% | Himachal Pradesh 26%

Source: Indian Patent Office

“Almost anything can be filed, and once a request for publication is made, it starts yielding ranking points. The metric rewards volume over validity, and numerical compliance over genuine innovation. Patent publication alone should not be rewarded. All parameters must be subjected to stronger verification and independent audits

Abhimanyu Singh,
PATENT LAWYER



2022, the IIT system abandoned just 50 of 3,747 patent applications.

At several private universities, however, abandonment rates ranged from 26% to as high as 81%. The low abandonment rate among the IITs, IISc, NITs, BITS and similar institutions is significant because the limited abandonment that does occur is rarely the result of casual filing or institutional indifference.

Mani says the relatively few applications abandoned by these institutions often encountered substantive legal objections, including lack of novelty, insufficient inventive step or inadequate disclosure during prosecution.

The patent portfolio at private universities, however, can look rather different. Applications may live long enough to be published and added to an institution's research scorecard, but not necessarily long enough to become enforceable patents.

When TOI reached out to the private institutes, they rejected the suggestion

that high attrition indicated weak research or that patenting was driven by rankings. Innovation is inherently uncertain, they argued, and applications may be dropped as inventions evolve, research priorities change or technical and commercial assessments point elsewhere. Several attempts may be needed to arrive at a breakthrough, and ideas initially met with scepticism can prove transformative.

One university said patenting encouraged students to pursue original ideas. Another said its aim was to discover commercially valuable ideas, even Nobel Prize-worthy innovations, or solutions to India's problems. Several patents, it added, remained under commercial evaluation.

But there is another statistic that complicates this defence. Mani cites NASSCOM data on the top 15 filers of artificial intelligence patents in India, where the grant ratio for academic institutions was just 1.1%, compared with 44.1% for corporates. He also points to research showing grant rates of zero to 3% among some prolific institutional filers. “The gap between soaring filing volumes and low success rates raises a question of whether the patent boom reflects a corresponding rise in genuine innovation,” he says.

A NUMBERS GAME

What explains such a divergence between public and private higher education institutions in India? Patent lawyer Abhimanyu Singh, vice-president at Dentons Link Legal, points to the way India's ranking system is structured. “The unusually high rate of patent abandonment by several Indian universities is not accidental,” Singh said. “It is a direct and predictable consequence of how the National Institutional Ranking Framework's (NIRF) Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) parameter is structured.”

A patent application is ordinarily

published before its merits have been substantively examined. Publication, therefore, is no guarantee that an invention is novel or will ever receive a patent. Yet under NIRF, institutions receive marks for patents published as well as those granted. An application can therefore begin contributing to an institution's ranking score before it has survived examination.

The result, Singh argues, is a perverse incentive structure. “Almost anything can be filed, and once a request for publication is made, it starts yielding ranking points,” he said.

Mani flags the same structural weakness. Under the ranking methodology, he argues, points accumulate at the filing and grant stages, but there is no corresponding penalty when large numbers of applications fail to progress from one stage to the next. The system can therefore reward volume without sufficiently rewarding conversion from application to granted patent (see box).

The absence of a penalty for applications that go nowhere, he argues, encourages quantity over quality.

There is a cost to chasing these numbers. Filing an application involves govt fees and, typically, charges paid to patent agents. Taking it through examination costs more. Yet, some universities file hundreds of applications, many of which are later abandoned. Singh contends that in some cases, publication may have been the goal rather than seeing the application through to a grant.

The concern is not that every abandoned application reflects wrongdoing. Weak applications are routinely dropped, and patent attrition is part of the innovation process. The question is whether, at some institutions, publication has itself become the objective where one files, gets it published and counted towards rankings, then lets the application lapse.

An IIT director, who did not wish to be named, sees this as the crucial distinction. “In some institutions, more than four out of every five patent applications are eventually abandoned, often before substantive examination. Yet, several of these same institutions continue to occupy enviable positions in national rankings,” he says.

According to Singh, this suggests that “the metric rewards volume over validity, and numerical compliance over genuine innovation”.

FILED & FORGOTTEN

The consequences go beyond rankings. “The patent office must devote administrative and examination resources to processing applications whether or not they ultimately produce useful intellectual property,” says Mani.

Institutional and, in some cases, public funds are spent generating patent applications that may never turn into enforceable rights, he adds. Patent counts are also used by universities to signal research excellence to prospective students and parents. But if a large share of applications are never granted or translated into products or technology, those numbers may say little about an institution's actual research capability.

The surge is also striking against India's relatively modest research investment. Mani notes that India spends around 0.64% of GDP on R&D, well below China, the US and Israel. For him, the contrast raises another question about whether soaring patent filings reflect a comparable expansion in the research producing them.

“Patent publication alone should not be rewarded, and all parameters must be subjected to stronger out-

“The gap between soaring filing volumes and low success rates of patent acceptance raises a question of whether the boom reflects a corresponding rise in genuine innovation. Ranking systems should place greater emphasis on patent quality, grant rates and commercial use rather than raw filing volume

Sunil Mani,
ACADEMIC



come-based verification and independent audits,” Singh says. Mani proposes something similar. “Ranking systems should place greater emphasis on patent quality, grant rates and commercialisation rather than raw filing volume.”

Ironically, according to the World Intellectual Property Indicators 2025 report, India ranks sixth worldwide, ahead of countries like Germany, Canada and Australia because of the growth in patent filing. Yet, it lags far behind any of these developed countries in scientific innovation and research. Experts express concern that there appears to be no real concerted effort by private universities at encouraging research, only in gaming the system.

The larger question goes beyond patents. If universities can improve their rankings by piling up applications that go nowhere, one may wonder what else is being counted as academic excellence simply because it counts.

The name's Tukaram, with a licence to seal

Mrs. Funnybones



TWINKLE KHANNA

8 am In the good old days, when I went to melas rather than acting in one, buddhi ke baal used to be a fluorescent pink. Now, it is the colour of my roots between touch-ups, finally living up to its name. According to news reports, the disappearance of pink dye is due to Maharashtra's Food and Drug Administration (FDA) commissioner Tukaram Mundhe, who has conducted over 3,000 raids across the state. Hundreds of restaurants have fallen like dominoes in his wake, including Domino's. Where Mundhe goes, mundis roll.

10 am As I am trying to coax my dog to stop chewing on my sock, my sister calls. ‘Has Usha bua called you?’

My bua lives in Ludhiana, and she only calls me when she needs something. These days, it's for an introduction to Diljit Dosanjh.

My sister continues, ‘She said there were shots fired at that pizza place near her house. Some place called Pizza From Mexico.’

‘Was it over fake jalapenos?’ I ask. ‘Their FDA commissioner seems worse than ours. Here they just have a licence to seal, but there they have gone all James Bond with a licence to kill.’

My sister sighs, ‘No, you idiot, it was some criminal gang.’

2 pm

Inspired by Mr Mundhe, I conduct a raid on my kitchen. I find a packet of Shahi Masala that expired around the same time as the Mughal Empire. Those who want to erase the Mughals from our history books should first start with lunch. Give up your koftas, koramas, kebabs. They all bear Mughal influence. You can't have your Mughlai paneer, real or analogue, and eat it too.

Despite Vijay Shetty of the Indian Hotel & Restaurant Association saying, ‘Rats and cockroaches are beyond our control,’ I don't find any in my kitchen. But cockroaches are tenacious creatures, especially when they come together and form a party.

4 pm

While I am cleaning my kitchen, politicians have been debating whether singing two or six stanzas of Vande Mataram should be made mandatory. I see reporters stopping people on the street, asking them about this debate.

A middle-aged man declares that those who don't sing the full national song are anti-national. Then he is asked to sing. He stammers, ‘I've forgotten the words.’

I panic and decide to memorise all six stanzas in case a reporter catches me. Thanks to menopause and its inherent brain fog, this seems like an insurmountable task. Then I consider getting the entire thing tattooed onto my forearm. Unfortunately, to fit it all, I would have to use an ant-sized font. I go back to memorising the stanzas. Where there is a will, there is a way. Unfortunately, my will gives way by the fourth stanza.

5pm

I am now stalking Tukaram Mundhe the way I used to stalk George Clooney. I chance upon an interview where he talks about his dislike of eating out. It's so rare to see a government official simply doing his job that it has become news.

Along with accolades, he also invites criticism. Recently, Bombay high court

asked Mundhe's department to pay a Pune sweet shop Rs 5 lakh as compensation for its losses. When the court raised questions about Mundhe taking action only against private eateries, he raided high court canteens. Apparently, two of the three canteens were operating without a licence.

In the interview, the FDA commissioner says he is fit because he seldom eats out, doesn't consume packaged food, and dislikes pizza. Paneer and pizza seem to be his pet peeves.

Then he recounts an occasion when his friends forced him to go out for dinner. He arrived at the restaurant and noted examples of non-compliance. He dissuaded his friends from eating anything, particularly the analogue paneer. Apparently, he can distinguish between real and fake paneer even without tasting the dish. Twenty-four hours later, he sent his team to raid the restaurant. Who needs Ozempic when you have a friend like Mundhe?

6.15 pm The man of the house is late. I am annoyed, and I tell him, ‘You said you would be back home at 6.’

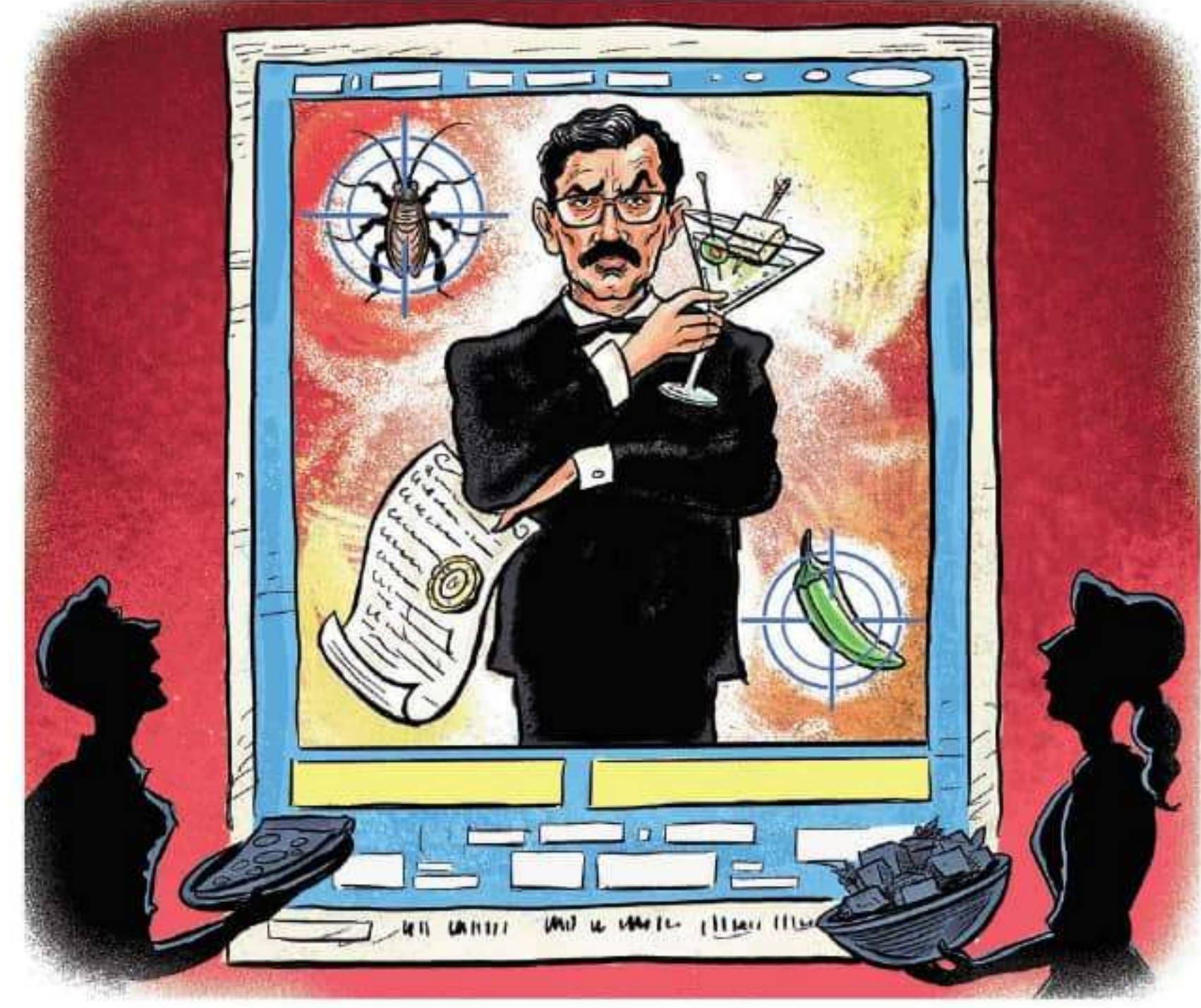
He replies, ‘It's exactly 6 pm.’ ‘It's 6.15,’ I say, pointing at the grandfather clock in our living room. ‘The cuckoo came out and chirped 15 minutes ago.’

He shows me his phone. It's 6 pm. Not just paneer; even analogue clocks should be seized and destroyed.

7 pm

Since this fake paneer scam hit the headlines, my mother and I have started making paneer at home. Our old argument continues. In her house, one litre of milk yields 250 grams of paneer.

Illustration by Chad Crowe (USA)



I am now stalking Mundhe the way I used to stalk George Clooney. I chance upon an interview where he talks about his dislike of eating out. It's so rare to see a government official simply doing his job that it has become news

I get 180 grams from the same amount of milk. Now, it's also about whose paneer is tastier. Next, I suspect she will start asking whose paneer is whiter, and I may start putting detergent in mine. This is not as far-fetched as it sounds. A recent news report stated that students in Bihar's Nalanda district fell ill because detergent was used in place of salt.

9 pm

I am at a restaurant with my friends. We order tandoori broccoli and chicken tikka. Then I ask the server, ‘Has Mundhe checked your restaurant?’

He hesitates and says, ‘Yes, madam, last week. We passed.’

‘Wah! Then I can order the paneer tikka without fear. Please add it to our order.’

Our drinks arrive first, followed by the starters. I stab my paneer with a toothpick. Before it can reach my mouth, it collapses and falls into my martini.

I consider asking for a new drink. Then I decide it's an appropriate toast to the man whose actions speak louder than words, and even songs. I christen it Mundhe's Martini. Gin, vermouth, olive and paneer. Shaken, not stirred.

Eight years after Section 377, free but not yet equal citizens

On the anniversary of Supreme Court's landmark verdict decriminalising homosexuality, lawyer and LGBTQI advocate Saurabh Kirpal reflects on the gains since, and the rights still out of reach

Eight years ago, I stopped being a criminal. On Sept 6, 2018, the Supreme Court ruled that consensual sexual acts could no longer be punished under the infamous Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. I could, I suppose, breathe easy that I would not be carted off to jail for 10 years for simply having sex with the person I loved. Small mercy.

But that is not when the story begins and that is not where it ends.

I met the man I love 25 years ago. We were criminals then and are only ‘friends’ in the eyes of the law today. Despite spending virtually a lifetime together, the law did not recognise our relationship. The judgment did make us feel more a part of the society I was born in and loved, just like the two women police constables who attempted to solemnise their relationship in a ‘Vedic’ wedding earlier this week.

The judgment also made us think that we could ask for more, that the courts would not rest after an apology for the mistreatment my queer predecessors had faced. Perhaps, I had naive faith that the legal system could be used as a tool to bring about social reform.

Thinking that the world had changed a group of courageous people had moved

Hope stems not from the law but from the changing nature of society. The young have always been the most potent agents of social change. They see queerness not as an abomination, but simply as a way to live your life

court asking for the recognition of equal marriage rights for all citizens. This was not a plea to interfere with any religious dogma, but simply an effort to ask the state for equality. The right to see a loved one in a hospital, the right to inherit property and the ability to have non-discriminatory access to those institutions that are necessary to set up a household together.

The petitioners and we were mistaken. The court ruled that the Constitution

did not recognise any right to marry. Same-sex couples had the right to a relationship, we were simply not to ask for the rights that made that commitment possible. The court ruled that it did not have the power to ensure that the constitutional promise of equality could be redeemed. We were to wait longer than the stroke of the midnight hour to have our tryst with destiny.

The hope that followed those heady days of decriminalisation has long since passed. The law has not budged an inch. Instead, there have been a series of legal defeats, including the passing of the ironically named Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act this year.

The right to be declared a transgender person is no longer a matter of self-determination. The state, and not the individual, is supposed to decide what a person feels in the innermost recesses of their minds.

Govt lawyers have argued that societal morality and not Constitutional morality ought to determine the extent of freedoms a citizen can claim. This is peculiar because the Constitution was enacted primarily to protect vulnerable minorities against societal and executive overreach. The govt is still opposing the plea of same-



FIGHTING FOR A FUTURE: Saurabh Kirpal (right) with his partner Nicholas Bachmann

sex couples to have the same tax benefits that heterosexual married couples have.

Even though the court had directed the formation of a committee to look into discrimination against the queer communi-

ty, there is no report, much less any action on the ground. It seems that the rights of some citizens are of less importance than other pressing issues of the state.

How many hits can a heart take with-

out breaking? How long does one have to wait before cynicism and despair take hold? How little can we ask for till we are accused of being too covetous, too greedy for rights that most people simply take for granted?

But in this sea of darkness, there is hope. The hope stems not from the law but from the changing nature of society. The young have always been the most potent agents of social change. In a globalised and interconnected world, the young see queerness not as an abomination, but simply as a way to live your life.

The shackles of social conformity imposed upon our psyche hold little meaning for them. In a heartening turn of events, it seems that in matters of queer equality, the social mood has turned quicker than the law. Even the most conservative voices now urge the govt to consider the case for recognition and accommodation of alternative lifestyles.

In the years since the decriminalisation judgment, our lives have changed. We are fortunate to have friends and family who love us for who we are.

I have discovered a wider community of misfits who show me how much richer my life is when it's not forced into a socially determined straitjacket.

If one feels frustration at the slow pace of change and backsliding, it is only because I took the tantalising message of freedom that the judgment contained to heart. My impatience stems from a belief that we are, for all its faults, a society that believes in justice.

Ambedkar's Constitution will, I am convinced, spawn a society where I could live the way I want, without my sexuality being a slur or an impediment. That is all the queer community is asking for, after all.

GenSIP

Young Indians are turning to SIPs even amid market volatility. The challenge is in turning an early habit into long-term discipline



AI-GENERATED IMAGE

Apoorva Mittal

Like many her age, Srushti I's first brush with investing was through crypto in 2020 when she was just 15. Back then, the asset class was at the peak of market hype. Her father had introduced her to the idea of investing, but over time she began following market trends and discussing investments with friends and peers.

By 18, systematic investment plans (SIPs) had entered her portfolio. "It is hard to save money, so it is better to invest it," she says. Today, the 21-year-old content writer and strategist in Bengaluru invests about 10% of her income. Unlike the stereotype of young investors constantly tracking the market, Srushti rarely checks her portfolio. "It stresses me out," she says. "I just let it be there for the long term."

Srushti's move into SIPs is part of a broader shift. For a generation exposed early to crypto, trading and financial content on social media, SIPs are emerging as a more disciplined investing avenue.

The trend of investing earlier is visible in data from mutual fund registrar and transfer agent CAMS. The live SIP count among investors under 20 years nearly doubled in FY26, rising 92% year-on-year to 2.9 lakh, while that of 20-30-year-olds grew 15% to 85.5 lakh. SIP gross sales of these age groups rose 19% and 36%, respectively. The surge of under-20s is on a small base.

The momentum among the youngest cohort has continued into 2026. Between January and June this year, live SIPs among under-20s rose 20.9% to 3.15 lakh. Among 20-30-year-olds, live SIPs stood at 84.8 lakh in June, 2.6% higher than in January, though marginally below the March-end level. Over the same period, monthly SIP gross sales rose 9% for under-20s, from ₹306 crore to ₹334 crore, and 4.1% for 20-30-year-olds, from ₹1,811 crore to ₹1,885 crore.

Crucially, the behaviour is still fragile. Many

For our parents, the default was a fixed deposit or a recurring deposit; for investors in their 20s now, the default is a SIP. The habit forms with the first salary

HARSH JAIN
cofounder, Groww



Parents are starting SIPs in the name of their children, minors, so that they have some sort of a safeguard in the future for their education

EELA DUBEY
cofounder, EduFund



young investors begin with small, automated contributions, only to stop when markets turn volatile or returns disappoint.

PENNY WISE

For young adults, the entry point to investing can be remarkably small. In Ghaziabad, Khwaish Mittal was 20 when he began putting ₹21 a day into silver and gold from his pocket money while finishing his undergraduate degree in business administration. Drawn by short-form content nudging him to save and easy access through fintech investing apps, Mittal began researching "what is safe" to invest in.

Now 24 and studying law, Mittal invests in mutual funds through Groww and runs separate recurring investments in gold and silver through PhonePe and Paytm. He has since increased his daily investment in metals from ₹21 to ₹45. "I will keep doing it, and I won't check it," he says. "I withdraw it when I need it—for a gym supplement or if I want to go on a trip with friends. I don't want to ask my parents for extra pocket money."

Mrin Agarwal, CEO of Finsafe India, a finance education company, says one factor behind the shift towards SIPs could be the experience young investors have had with more speculative forms of investing. "Over the last few years, there was a very high interest from the younger generations in doing futures and options and daily trading," she says. With regulatory studies showing that a large majority of individual derivatives traders lose money, "you're also seeing those investors turning to SIPs", she adds.

Fintech platforms are seeing other signs of SIPs getting embedded in the saving patterns of younger investors. On Groww, investors under 25 years hold roughly two SIPs on average, while those above 25 typically run three-four. Flexi-cap funds carry the highest portfolio weightage among under-25 investors and rank among the largest allocations across other age cohorts.

Gold and silver SIPs have also risen sharply on

YOUNG INVESTORS & SIPs

SIP REGISTRATION COUNT*

	EQUITY	DEBT	CASH	OTHERS	TOTAL
Jan '26	28,016 612,149	283 7,466	128 4,449	7,585 239,503	36,012 863,567
Feb '26	25,196 574,113	184 6,943	264 6,089	5,584 189,928	31,228 777,073
Mar '26	21,735 477,288	167 6,055	346 7,454	4,237 138,491	26,485 629,288
Apr '26	22,040 441,830	188 5,638	654 13,118	3,619 108,418	26,501 569,004
May '26	23,200 479,869	184 5,654	749 12,101	3,862 120,852	27,995 618,476
June '26	25,960 478,531	188 5,690	1,150 13,852	3,604 108,347	30,902 606,420

SIP GROSS SALES (in ₹ cr)

	EQUITY	DEBT	CASH	OTHERS	TOTAL
Jan '26	264 1,586	10 17	5 7	27 201	306 1,811
Feb '26	254 1,541	10 17	5 7	28 196	297 1,761
Mar '26	273 1,650	9 58	5 8	30 214	318 1,930
Apr '26	276 1,600	9 18	7 9	30 202	322 1,828
May '26	274 1,597	11 19	7 9	30 204	321 1,828
June '26	286 1,647	11 20	7 10	30 208	334 1,885

*Includes SIPs that just got registered as well as those where the first transaction got triggered

the platform in FY26, led by investors under 25 years, suggesting that younger investors are increasingly using the SIP route to diversify across asset classes.

"For our parents, the default was a fixed deposit or a recurring deposit; for investors in their 20s, the default is a SIP," says Harsh Jain, cofounder and COO of Groww. "The habit forms with the first salary." Jain says the higher adoption of step-

up SIPs among investors under 25 years indicates that the behaviour goes beyond a single market cycle and reflects a broader shift in household savings habits.

AWARENESS CURRENCY

Prabin Agarwal, a mutual fund distributor based in Siliguri, says he has changed his marketing strategy in the past couple of years to reach the



Between January and June 2026, live SIPs among under-20s rose 20.9% to 3.15 lakh. Among 20-30-year-olds, live SIPs stood at 84.8 lakh in June, 2.6% higher than in January, though marginally below the March-end level

SOURCE: CAMS

SIP LINE

- SIPs are becoming the default entry point for investment for younger Indians
- Teenagers and young adults are starting SIPs long before they have substantial disposable income
- Parents are driving the rise in SIPs among minors—to build a corpus for future expenses, especially education
- Young investors start with modest daily or monthly amounts
- Social media is playing a growing role in financial discovery
- New age fintech is making access easier
- Early exposure to crypto and F&O is pushing some to SIPs as a comparatively disciplined and long-term way to invest

younger generation. Earlier, he targeted the youth through Facebook; now he is creating short-form educational content for Instagram. "The youth is looking for short-form content with some humour. They are not averse to knowledge. They just don't want it to be boring. Later, when they become curious, they may move on to long-form content," he says.

Another reason for the growing number of SIPs by the under-20 cohort could be the rising cost of education which is pushing parents to start SIPs for their kids.

Eela Dubey, cofounder of EduFund, a higher studies funding platform that helps parents with financial planning for children, and mutual fund distributor Vittam, says education inflation rate is 10% and people are becoming more aware that their disposable income has to go into asset classes that compound their investment.

"In today's day and age, when young kids spend ₹800 for just a cup of coffee, parents and young adults are probably waking up to the reality that previous asset classes are not suitable in all circumstances. For the young, it is the sheer fact of being alive at a different time than their parents' that is opening their eyes to investing in mutual funds and SIPs," says Dubey.

She says 25-30% of her customer base has consistently comprised of first-time investors who are in-

SIPs that are eventually cancelled tend to have a life of two-three years—far shorter than the long investment horizons associated with equity investing. This can only be solved by educating investors on the right way and by having more accredited advisers in the ecosystem

NEELESH VERMA
product head, mutual funds, Zerodha



vesting on behalf of their children: "They are starting SIPs in the name of their children, minors, so that they have some sort of a safeguard in the future for their education."

Mumbai-based chartered accountant Richa Khanna began a SIP for her son three years ago, when he was 13, using the money he received on birthdays and festivals. "We have certain goals for his higher education," she says. "It is better that the money does not stay idle and is allocated appropriately to a fund."

Pune-based engineer Vishwesh Kulkarni started a SIP of ₹10,000 for his daughter when she was four months old in 2020—although not in her name—and has since increased the amount to ₹40,000 across five SIPs spanning midcap and thematic funds with global exposure.

MARKET TEST

The growing adoption of SIPs among younger investors is being tested by a volatile market and relatively muted returns over the past couple of years. The industry-wide SIP stoppage ratio touched 91.23% in June before easing to 81.87% in July, indicating that the number of SIPs being discontinued or completing their tenure remained high relative to new registrations.

Neelesh Verma, Zerodha's product head for mutual funds, says SIPs that are eventually cancelled tend to have an average life of only two-three years—far shorter than the long investment horizons typically associated with equity investing. "This is something that can only be solved by educating investors on the right way and having more accredited advisers in the ecosystem," he says. At Zerodha, where 25-33-year-olds form a dominant customer cohort, about half the mutual fund customers manually make their monthly SIP payments.

"The markets are unpredictable. You don't know what will happen. Obviously something that has had a boom will have a down cycle also," says Verma.

The big question now is whether the SIP habit among the young can outlast the market's idiosyncrasies.

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'AI Introduces a New Set of Problems'

It has been just a couple of months since **Toby Weiss** took over as the CEO of enterprise cybersecurity software company Securonix, headquartered in Texas. He has assumed the role at a time when AI is transforming the threat landscape, with autonomous agents escaping a sandbox during an OpenAI safety evaluation and compromising parts of developer platform Hugging Face's production infrastructure. It demonstrated the sheer randomness of cybersecurity challenges due to AI. Weiss, who was in India recently, spoke to **Nirmal John** about AI's impact, human accountability, India as a vital engineering talent hub and more. Edited excerpts:

Will the deployment of AI in various use cases lead to more consolidation in the fragmented technology landscape that is cybersecurity?

Just yesterday I was talking to the employees about this. In 2009, there were hundreds of security vendors and the discussion was how it was going to consolidate. The consensus was that this is going to consolidate like crazy and there's going to be five major players because no one wants to deal with all these vendors. Fast forward now. I just went to the Black Hat conference in Las Vegas. It looks exactly the same. There are just as many vendors, except every booth said the same thing. They all said AI security and some variation of it. I really felt an enormous empathy for a customer who was walking around.

Will AI simplify? I don't think so. This is a new technology that is moving faster than anything we have seen. Enterprises are adopting it rapidly. Security departments want to naturally say, hold on, let us get our hands around it. But the business value is too big for enterprises to slow down [on AI adoption] right now.

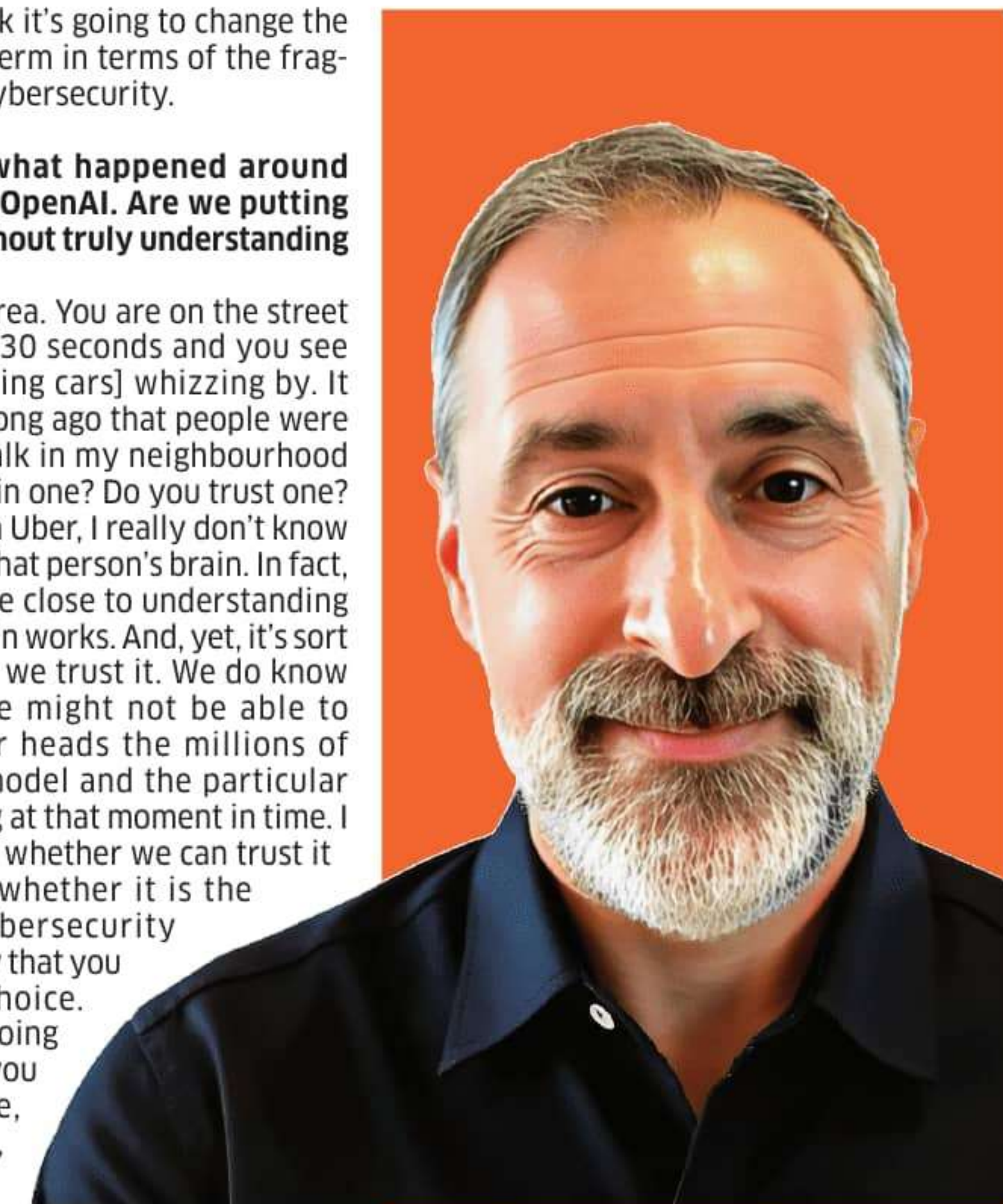
Now not only is AI a new technology, it is a new technology that is very good at finding security vulnerabilities. The stories of last month [the Hugging Face incident] have got everyone terrified.

What I saw at Black Hat is that you now have a ton of new companies saying how we can secure AI. You have existing vendors saying let us expand and make our products more AI. AI introduces a new set of problems. So, I

honestly don't think it's going to change the story in the short term in terms of the fragmented nature of cybersecurity.

It is fascinating what happened around Hugging Face and OpenAI. Are we putting too much trust without truly understanding these systems?

I'm from the Bay Area. You are on the street for not more than 30 seconds and you see Waymos [self-driving cars] whizzing by. It wasn't really that long ago that people were very scared. The talk in my neighbourhood was, would you go in one? Do you trust one? But when I get in an Uber, I really don't know what's going on in that person's brain. In fact, we don't even come close to understanding how the human brain works. And, yet, it's sort of safer for us and we trust it. We do know how AI works. We might not be able to understand in our heads the millions of weights and the model and the particular decision it's making at that moment in time. I think it's really not whether we can trust it or not. It's about whether it is the better way. In cybersecurity there's also a reality that you almost have no choice. The bad guys are going to be using it, so if you are an enterprise, you can't just say, well, I don't trust it.



You have to implement it.

How has the incident changed the conversation around cybersecurity and AI in the Valley?
I think what's probably changed in the last month or two is the conversation about how much regulation we should have. Do we need an industry consortium like in some aspects of finance where companies get together and self-regulate before the government does? There's another group that says we need to slow things down. So I think the discussion has really been about how do we govern it.

The fact that it was a Chinese model that helped Hugging Face makes it even more interesting from both an open-source and geopolitical point of view

The way the technology is built, the same AI won't give you the same answer each time. So from our perspective, it's incredibly important to have many models. To have choice. You are going to need other tools in the toolbox.

What's your vision

for Securonix in the middle of this flux?

"Not only is AI a new technology, it is also very good at finding security vulnerabilities. The stories of last month [Hugging Face incident] have got everyone terrified"

I think we are at an inflection point now where the number of events is going to skyrocket. The organisations, of course, are going to increase their spending, but they can't handle this problem manually. Our vision is to help our customers be prepared for security in the age of AI.

India is now a decently sized market for cybersecurity products and is a major engineering talent pool. How is the market for you?

We do extremely well in the India market. From a sales perspective, close to 15% of the revenue comes from India. I think part of it is also because we have a big local presence. The founders of our company were very eager to invest early in India from an R&D perspective. I'm probably more excited about the market opportunity than the talent. The talent's already there and it's great.

What is the percentage of business in India that's coming from government versus private enterprises?
Oh, good question. It's mainly private.

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India’s mineral wealth must be shared fairly

DR SCION SARMA

The recent amendment to the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957, which received the President’s assent on 17 August 2026, marks an important change in the fiscal framework governing India’s mineral sector. It restricts the States’ ability to impose their own taxes, cesses and similar levies on mineral rights and mineral-bearing land, except subject to conditions or restrictions prescribed by the Government of India. This is important.

The Centre’s Statement of Objects and Reasons gives five principal reasons for intervening: States were imposing levies at different rates; mining companies could face several overlapping taxes and cesses; new levies could be introduced after a mine had commenced operations; some demands could operate retrospectively; and, taken together, these could substantially increase the cost of mineral production.

A concrete economic argument supports this concern. It is reported that medium-grade coal has a basic mine-site cost of about Rs 1,148 per tonne, on which various taxes and statutory levies add roughly another Rs 1,139, taking the price to about Rs 2,287 per tonne. The Ministry of Mines has also examined how additional State taxes on coal and bauxite could increase aluminium-production costs and affect international competitiveness.

In these circumstances, such unpredictability could discourage extraction and investment, make some mines commercially unviable, raise raw-material costs for downstream industries, and ultimately increase India’s dependence on imported minerals. The amendment therefore seeks to rationalise the taxation of mineral rights and mineral-bearing lands by providing that State Governments may impose specified taxes, cesses or similar levies only in accordance with conditions or restrictions prescribed by the Central Government.

The stated objective of the amendment is to address the problems arising from multiple and non-uniform State levies, retrospective demands and the introduction of additional

imposts after mining operations have commenced. There is no doubt that the economic rationale underlying this reform deserves recognition.

Mining and mineral-based industries require a taxation regime that is transparent, predictable and internationally competitive. Excessive or uncertain taxation increases the cost of minerals, affects downstream industries such as steel, aluminium, cement and power, discourages fresh investment and, ultimately, increases dependence on imports. A degree of national rationalisation is therefore desirable.

However, another dimension deserves equal consideration. Mineral resources are geographically located within particular States, and mining activity imposes substantial responsibilities upon those States. Roads and other infrastructure must support heavy mineral movement; mining regions require expenditure on water, environmental protection, rehabilitation, and social infrastructure; and the long-term ecological consequences of mineral extraction are borne predominantly by the producing regions. The 2026 amendment does not appear to create a new Central mining tax whose proceeds are collected by the Centre and then shared with the mineral-producing States. Rather, it restricts the States’ ability to impose their own taxes, cesses and similar levies on mineral rights and mineral-bearing land, except subject to conditions or restrictions prescribed by the Central Government. Mineral-bearing States therefore legitimately deserve an equitable share of the economic value generated from their natural resources.

The Supreme Court’s landmark 2024 judgment in Mineral Area Development Authority v. Steel Authority of India recognised the States’ constitutional competence to tax mineral-bearing land. It clarified that royalty is not itself a tax. The subsequent amendment has sought to establish reasonable limitations on State levies in the larger national interest. The question now is not whether such rationalisation should take place, but how the legitimate fiscal interests of mineral-producing States are to be protected within the new framework.

If the Government of India is restricting a constitutionally recognised



source of State mineral taxation in the interest of having a nationally rationalised tax burden, should there be a compensating revenue-sharing arrangement for mineral-producing States? The mineral regime already provides precedents for ensuring that revenues generated from mineral resources accrue to the State in question. For example, even where the Central Government conducts auctions of specified critical-mineral concessions, the auction revenue accrues to the State Government. This underlying principle - that the State in which the resource occurs should appropriately participate in its economic benefit - deserves to be preserved as the new taxation framework evolves.

The Government of West Bengal may therefore consider raising with the Government of India, at the appropriate stage of framing the conditions and restrictions under the amended Act, the need for an assured and transparent mechanism to protect the revenues of mineral-producing States. If the new framework substantially limits the States’ capacity to raise legitimate mineral-related revenues, consideration could be given to an appropriate compensatory or revenue-sharing arrangement.

Such an arrangement need not necessarily replicate the GST mechanism. It could take the form of an assured share of mineral-related revenues, an enhanced mineral-linked devolution, a compensatory payment, or another formula evolved through consultation between the Centre and mineral-producing States. The essential principle should be that national uniformity in taxation should not result in the producing State disproportionately bearing

the environmental, infrastructural and social costs of mineral extraction. At the same time, the economic benefits are dispersed nationally.

West Bengal should accordingly support the objective of creating a competitive and predictable national mineral regime while seeking an equitable fiscal arrangement for mineral-bearing States. A cooperative framework which combines reasonable taxation of industry with reasonable compensation to the States would reconcile the requirements of industrial competitiveness, federal fiscal balance and responsible mineral development.

This would be consistent with the larger principle of cooperative federalism: the nation should benefit from its mineral wealth, the industry should remain competitive, and the State from whose soil that wealth is extracted should receive a fair and predictable share of its value.

While the amendment is an important step towards removing uncertainty arising from multiple, non-uniform and potentially retrospective State levies, it may also be viewed as a missed opportunity for a more comprehensive rationalisation of the fiscal burden on the mining industry itself. Mining enterprises remain subject to a combination of royalty, auction premium, dead rent, District Mineral Foundation contributions, GST, transit charges and other statutory payments. The cumulative incidence of these imposts can materially affect the economic viability of mining, particularly for lower-grade deposits and smaller operators, and ultimately raises the cost of minerals supplied to downstream industries.

The Government may consider undertaking a broader review of the total fiscal burden on mining - including royalty, auction premiums and other statutory contributions - with the objective of ensuring that domestic mineral production remains internationally competitive without compromising a fair and assured revenue stream for mineral-bearing States.

Besides, is also necessary to recognise that India’s long-term mineral security cannot be achieved through taxation, auctions and increased extraction alone. Research

and technological innovation must become an integral part of mineral development. Particular emphasis is required on advanced exploration technologies, economical beneficiation of low-grade and complex ores, recovery of valuable and critical minerals from mine wastes and tailings, energy- and water-efficient processing, recycling, mine-safety technologies, modernisation of coal gasification systems and environmentally sustainable methods of extraction.

The Government of India has already initiated important programmes in these areas through the National Critical Mineral Mission, the National Mineral Exploration and Development Trust and the S&T-PRISM programme. The next step should be to ensure that research progresses beyond laboratory investigation to pilot-scale demonstration and commercial adoption by industry.

There is an interesting gap worth pointing out. Under the National Critical Mineral Mission, nine institutions have now been recognised as Centres of Excellence - including IIT (ISM) Dhanbad, CSIR-NML Jamshedpur and CSIR-IMMT Bhubaneswar - but the Central Institute of Mining and Fuel Research, Dhanbad, is not among the nine designated CoEs. Given CIMFR’s expertise in mining technology, coal and mineral processing, mine safety, environmental management, gasification and fuel science, it could provide the important bridge between mineral research and actual mining operations.

The larger objective of mineral-sector reform should therefore be clear: rationalise the fiscal burden, protect an equitable share for mineral-bearing States, make domestic mining internationally competitive, encourage value addition rather than mere extraction, and place R&D and technological innovation at the centre of future mineral development. Such an approach would transform mineral policy from the regulation and taxation of a natural resource into an instrument for industrial competitiveness, technological self-reliance and balanced regional development.

The writer is a chemist with specialisation in R&D management.

NOW AND AGAIN

REMEMBERING DIDI ON RAKHI

RUP NARAYAN DAS

By the time this write-up appears in these columns, Rakhi would be past but its resonance would be still there in homes. I have never celebrated the festival of brother-sister bonding the way it is observed these days with all the paraphernalia and presentation of expensive gifts to sister(s).

The corporates have assiduously monetised a solemn relation brazenly. Since Didi, the only sister of six brothers, is much older than me, we never had a slugfest, the way younger siblings fight these days. Although she was married long ago, I remember her on a day-to-day basis. The memories are so vivid and intense.

When she was in school, I remember her giving me a bath with hot water boiled with stems of neem to cure me of a skin disease. I don’t remember if she ever tied Rakhi on my wrist till she got married and left home. Since she lived in a village after her marriage, she would send a simple rakhi in an envelope through the Post Office which invariably reached me in time, on or before the festival. In return I would send her money through a Money Order, and later through RTGS and now through Pay Phone. I think she would be more particular about Bhadrutiya, rather than Rakhi.

I remember my visits to her village Jastrghari in Purba Midnapore. From Baleswar, I would get down from a rickety bus after a few hours of arduous journey at Negan Chhak and get into a shared rickshaw. It was not a passenger rickshaw with seats and foldable overhead protection against sun and rain, but a multipurpose career with a flat wooden floor providing sitting space for passengers and goods as well.

After a half-hour languorous journey navigating sandy fields interspersed with betel vines, I would reach her majestic single-storied sprawling house with a well-built veranda overlooking a swath of land, with a tube well near the house and bathrooms and urinals outside the house. Seeing me, she would be overwhelmed with sentiment and sometimes sob with tears rolling out of her eyes. She would ask me to wash my hands and feet at the tube well while her husband would operate the handle. Then I would sit on the wooden cot or chair on the veranda. Those days there was no electricity in her house, but the salubrious breeze would sooth me for a while.

In the remote village, her father-in-law, the leading betel merchant of the area, had built the house with the profits he made from a business spread as far as Banares (Varanasi) and Bombay.

If it were lunch time, she would invite me to the rear veranda overlooking the courtyard, seat me on a chatai while she served steaming rice, vegetable curry and machher jhol. In the afternoon, her husband would take me to the nearby Contai (Kanh) town to buy shirt and pant pieces for me and then he would leave me at the bus stop. I would leave with a heavy heart.

The carbon cycle and our sea floor

B K SINGH

A new study conducted by Ben Mather affiliated to the University of Melbourne and three other scientists associated with the University of Sydney was published in “Communications, Earth and Environment” and explains how the movement of earth’s tectonic plates around its surface has played a major role in shaping global climate over the past 540 million years. The carbon cycle relating to movement of tectonic plates was not considered significant in the past; the new study explains how its role is so substantial.

Carbon is the most important part of our life and is the third most abundant element besides hydrogen and helium. According to some estimates, the earth has 65,500 billion metric tons of carbon. The bulk of it is stored in rocks and the remaining in oceans, atmosphere, plants, soil and fossil fuels. Carbon cycle maintains a balance that prevents its entry in the atmosphere, and thus stabilizes the earth’s temperature. In the warming world,

every intellectual knows that excessive pumping of carbon in the atmosphere is the main cause of the planet’s warming.

On a timescale of tens of million years, the earth has undergone changes in temperature from the extremely warm climate of the Cretaceous age (roughly 145 to 65 million years ago) to the glacial climates of the Pleistocene age (roughly 1.8 million to 11,700 years ago) and up to the present Holocene Epoch. In a slow carbon cycle, 10 to 100 million tons of carbon are moved to the atmosphere annually, whereas in the fast carbon cycle 1 to 100 billion metric tons of carbon are moved to the atmosphere annually. Present global greenhouse gas emissions are 40 billion tons annually. Our emission at present thus matches with the fast carbon cycle.

During the rainy season, atmospheric carbon combines with water and forms carbonic acid. The acid dissolves rocks in a process of chemical weathering and releases calcium, magnesium, sodium and potassium ions. In the ocean, calcium ions combine with bicarbonate ions to form calcium bicarbonate, which

are consumed in shell building, corals and planktons. Organisms after they perish sink to the seafloor. With passage of time, these turn to rocks.

When the plates collide, heat is generated and the rock melts under extreme temperature and pressure. The heated rock turns into silicate minerals and releases carbon dioxide. Further, carbon dioxide is also released through volcanoes. Before industrialization begun in 1870, the amount of carbon dioxide the ocean received during chemical weathering of rocks was ventilated into the atmosphere from sea surfaces. After industrialization, carbon concentration in the atmosphere has gone up; the ocean cannot balance the exchange of carbon. The drop in carbon dioxide in the atmosphere caused additional cooling in the Pleistocene age and the rise in the level thereafter (for 11,700 years now) is linked to the present Holocene age.

Ben Mather and Co.’s research suggest that the driving force behind the carbon cycle is far more complex than what was contemplated earlier. Volcanic arcs, where chain of the volcanoes erupt, are located in the region where earth’s tectonic plates

converge. Melting of rocks unlocks carbon and brings it to the earth’s surface. The study finds that it is the mid ocean ridges and the continental rifts that have played a more significant role in driving carbon cycle. The rocks underneath the ocean appear to be intersecting the subduction zones, where tectonic plates converge. Carbon dioxide is released back in the atmosphere.

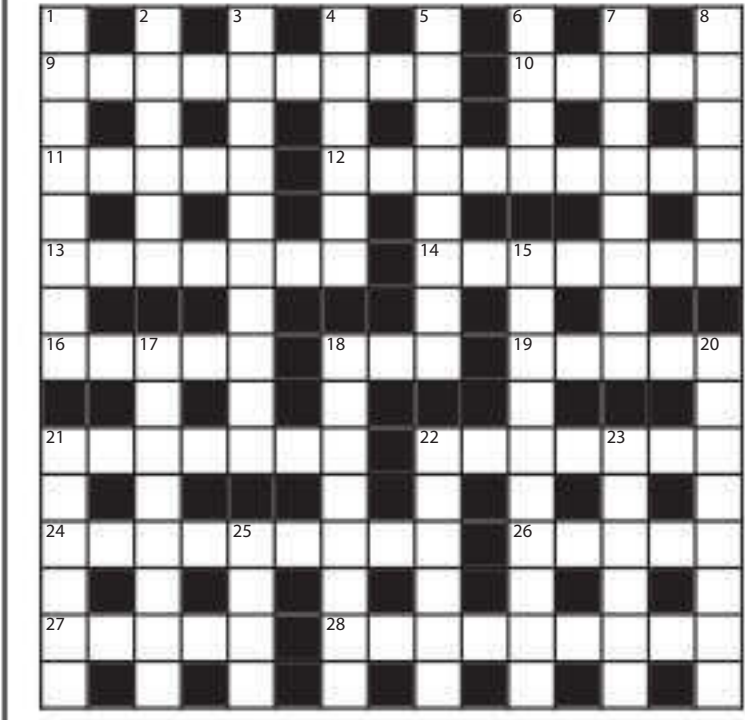
This is ‘deep carbon cycle’ and researchers have tracked the flow of carbon between earth’s molten interior, oceanic plates and the atmosphere using computer models. With this, major greenhouse and icehouse climates were predicted over last 540 million years. More carbon was released than trapped in carbon-carrying rocks in greenhouse periods, while the ocean’s absorption of carbon lowered the concentration of atmospheric carbon in icehouse climates. The key takeaway of the study is that deep-sea sediments play the key role in regulating atmospheric carbon, and can impact the climate of the globe at a geological time scale, narrated above. The older thought - that carbon emitted by volcanic arcs is the largest source

- has been rejected by the study. Our research in the area of sea exploration should consider the study and ensure that deep sea sediments are not disturbed by any human action.

Planktic calcifiers belonging to the phytoplankton family convert dissolved carbon into calcite and are responsible for sequestering vast amounts of atmospheric carbon into carbon-rich sediment deposited on the seafloor. If these are conserved, they will suck carbon dioxide in and would be beneficial in mitigating global warming. Planktic calcifiers evolved only 200 million years ago and have spread over the world’s oceans about 150 million years ago. The conservation of this would be helpful in the present-day climate scenario, too. The study provides insights for future climate models, which is important in addressing how atmospheric carbon concentration is brought in control and mitigates global warming. The earth’s natural climate cycle is influenced by shifting tectonic plates and plays a major role in regulating climate, which can help us in predicting future climate scenarios in the background of human activities leading to climate disruptions and loss of lives and livelihoods.

The writer is retired Head of Forest Force, Karnataka.

Crossword | No. 293567



Last Sunday's Solution

A	P	P	U	H	E	A	U
F	R	E	E	R	A	N	G
E	I	T	I	R	G	K	D
R	O	W	A	N	T	R	A
E	T	C	E	L	N	I	R
W	I	T	N	E	S	O	R
E	L	L	E	R	R	O	H
L	U	N	G	I	S	O	I
L	U	N	A	F	E	C	
O	S	D	R	T	L	U	
A	M	A	Z	O	N	T	A
R	N	V	N	O	A	B	T
M	E	C	C	A	I	L	L
S	E	L	A	D	E	L	R

ACROSS

9 Brute concealing old record is to put things straight (9)

10 Football team in very unfortunate article (5)

11 Arab or Irish-American taking first question? (5)

12 Shades grass area where vision obscured (5,4)

13 Kidnapped person and entertainer get on (7)

14/1 Women's magazine goes for Hitchcock film (3,4,8)

16 Posh sons in boat cut fare from Japan (5)

18 I felt that initially extravagant need to pay (3)

19 Saintly gatekeeper's famous rabbit (5)

21/23 Helpful creature shows way to get good marks (7,6)

22 Perfectionist's fine American pickle (7)

24 Substantial support for stars here? (5,4)

26 One in dancing went to twist together (5)

27/7 Trumpeter leaving band needs help with entourage assembled (5,8)

28 Devastate a fort wounding number inside! (3,3,3)

DOWN

1 See 14 Across

2 Crowd surrounding soldiers in swampy region (6)

3 Frenchman, one stopping gift, shows total control (10)

4 Sailor trapped in offensive likely to survive (6)

5 Make small dish to hold one tart without filling (8)

6 Really enthusiastic, great female singer turned up (4)

7 See 27 Across

8 China with crack not worth considering (6)

15 Display attitude that's no longer relevant? (10)

17 Very old and wise person circling pitch (5-3)

18 Silly to repeat work by Gilbert and Sullivan? (8)

20 Kept talking though disheartened and betrayed (6,2)

21 Smallest room with pictures showing Film star (6)

22 Presentation intended to reach Hancock shortly? (6)

23 See 21 Across

25 Actor Herbert leaves home? (4)

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

TWENTY KILLED SERIOUS LANDSLIDE IN BURMA

Simla, Aug.

A communique issued by the Government reports a serious landslide in a mine in the Northern Shall States. It states:—“The Government of India regret to have to report a serious landslip at Tiger Camp, Bawd win Mine, Northern Shah States, Burma. The landslip occurred at about 6 p.m. on the August 16 and devastated about seventy labourers' dwellings. As far as is known at present 20 dead bodies have been recovered and 24 injured persons rescued. Rescue work is in progress. An officer of the Mines Department is assisting in the rescue work, and will hold a full inquiry into the circumstances leading to the accident. The landslip is attributed to a heavy rain-fall on the August 14, 15 and 16.



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2. The Hindu

3. Business Line

4. Financial Express

5. Times of India

6. Hindustan Times

7. Economic Times

8. Live Mint

9. Business Standard

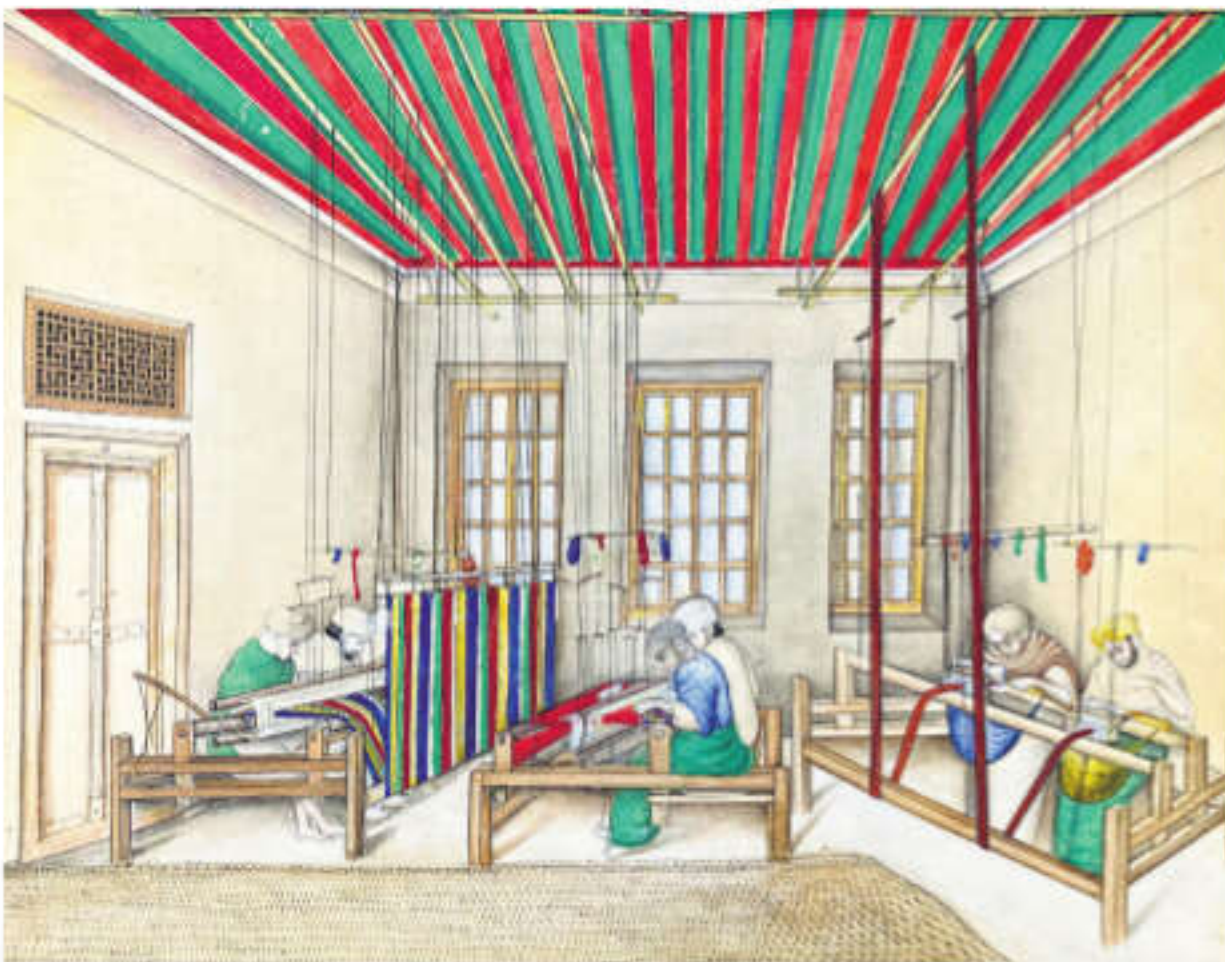


The Khanuja Family Collection of shawls tells a storied tale, marked by opulence and intricacy of design

(L-R) Kashmir shawl, Sikh period, c 1835; Mughal period, mid-18th century; (inset) Afghan period, c 1800. PHOTOS COURTESY: ROLI BOOKS



(L-R) Mme Riviere Ingres, 1805, Courtesy Musee du Louvre, Paris; workshop for weaving Kashmiri shawls. Attributed to Bishan Singh, the painting was most likely commissioned by the French East India Company, to be exhibited at the Paris Universal Exhibition in 1867.



Splendour of Kashmir shawls

A VIBRANT upshot of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's progressive reforms was patronage of the arts, resulting in not just Punjab flourishing as a centre for cultural and artistic activities, but profoundly influencing the production and popularity of Kashmir shawls. During his rule, these shawls became highly coveted items, embodying luxury and sophistication, and became symbols of high fashion and status in Europe, particularly in France and Britain, where these adorned the wardrobes of the elite. Giving a glimpse of the times and the finesse of the craft is 'Pashmina Jewels: The Khanuja Family Collection of Kashmir Shawls' by Frank Ames.

As the name suggests, the book is based on the collection of the Khanuja family based in Phoenix, US. An oncologist by profession, Dr Parvinderjit Singh Khanuja and his family began as a collector of coins two decades ago, but nurtured a strong fascination for collecting Sikh-related artefacts along the way.

Dr Khanuja says his journey as a collector took an inspiring turn when he came across textile expert Frank Ames' book, 'Woven Masterpieces of Sikh Heritage'. "Reading it was a moment of revelation, and soon after, I had the honour of meeting Frank himself. I realised then that I was in the presence of a true expert on Kashmir shawls, a man who has dedicated much of his life to studying these exquisite artefacts."

Under Frank's guidance, Dr Khanuja curated a diverse collection of Kashmir shawls, with a particular focus on those from the Sikh period. The two have now collaborated on this book.

In the Introduction, Frank calls the Khanuja Family Collection "a treasure trove

of Indian Kashmir shawls", a vibrant narrative spanning three centuries of exquisite craftsmanship. "These shawls, intricately woven with the traditional *kani* technique, whisper tales of the ancient Himalayan landscapes that envelop the valley."

Frank says the collection is important because under Ranjit Singh's patronage, the Kashmir shawl experiences a renaissance, infusing it with an eclectic array of exotic patterns. "This collection, therefore, marks a key moment, shedding light on a neglected chapter of the subcontinent's history, a revelation long overdue."

For Frank, recognising the Kashmir shawl's importance is to acknowledge the tragic fragility of ancient cultures and how in the blink of an eye the past may vanish into oblivion. "As a symbol of wealth and opulence in India, few textiles command as much respect as the Kashmir shawl."

He writes how its migration to Europe quietly succeeded via the British in the late 18th century, followed by the French by means of the returning officers of Napoleon's Egyptian campaigns (1798-1801). If to be draped in glistening pashmina was the ultimate dream of the aristocracy and landed gentry, its origins remained a mystique. "Pashmina from goats grazing at 5,000 metres had never before been known to the West!" Historian Jean-Marie Lafont writes in the Foreword how Ranjit Singh's French army generals took a keen interest in Kashmir shawls and engaged in extensive trade with France, taking the exquisite craft to the European markets.

Besides examples from the Mughal, Afghan and Dogra periods, this volume unveils the exciting splendour of Sikh weavings from a transformative period in Kashmir's artistic saga. The resonance of Sikh design extends far beyond textiles, casting its influence across diverse crafts worldwide. — TNS



PASHMINA JEWELS: THE KHANUJA FAMILY COLLECTION OF KASHMIR SHAWLS by Frank Ames and Parvinderjit Singh Khanuja. Roli Books. ₹3,995



6 galleries, 2 exhibitions, and a wider view of the world

SHIREEN QUADRI

THE Delhi Contemporary Art Week (DCAW) returns to Bikaner House for its ninth edition on August 31. Six women-led Delhi galleries — Blueprint12, Exhibit 320, Gallery Espace, Latitude 28, Shrine Empire and Vadehra Art Gallery — showcase the best of art at the Centre for Contemporary Art (CCA), while two curated exhibitions ('Bye-Bye Monsoon' by Advait Singh and 'This Animate Earth' by Annalisa Mansukhani) carry the 'Week' into the LTC and the Main Building.

DCAW offers a cross-section of practice from India and South Asia, circling climate, land, memory, identity, material and belonging. Gallery Espace's 'Presenting Abundance' asks the viewer to slow down. Rooted partly in miniature traditions but moving towards abstraction, it foregrounds detail, surface, colour and ornament. Waswo X Waswo, Viswanath Kuttum, Nandini Bagla Chirimar, Kishor Shinde, Manjunath Kamath and Shobha Broota are among the artists whose works will be displayed.

'Studio Fragment' by Anju Dodiya.



Renu Modi, founder/director of Gallery Espace, calls DCAW "much more than an exhibition platform"; a place to foster new conversations and reach a wider public. Through their continued participation, she hopes to "strengthen the cultural fabric of the city while supporting artists and expanding appreciation for contemporary artistic practices".

Blueprint12 turns to the body. 'Ways of Being Seen' spans painting, sculpture, pho-

Delhi Contemporary Art Week returns for its ninth edition, allowing people to encounter art without the scale and commercial pressure of a conventional fair



tography, textiles, ceramics, drawing and printmaking. If JK looks at queer visibility, Nameera Irshad's work delves into displacement and political violence. Shoneize Akhtar looks at maternal memory, Dhiraj Rabha at communities affected by insurgency, and Dhruvi Jain and Annanya Dhanda at vulnerability and grief. Shruti Parekh, Mojahid Musa, Shreeya Dwivedi and Rahul Ghosh are also showing their works. "We were drawn to the figure because it is one of the most enduring subjects in art, yet it is never a fixed one," says Mandira Lamba of Blueprint12.

Latitude 28's 'Meridian' brings 14 practices into relation through painting, textile, photography, thread, sculpture, drawing and assemblage. Hasseena Suresh, Sudipta Das, Farhat Ali, Yogesh Ramkrishna, Pradeep Thalawatta, Viraj Khanna, Sai Karnekota and Kishwar Kiani take up inheritance, land, the body, folklore, domestic histories and the archive.

"What excites me about this 9th edition of DCAW is how much it has grown into a real meeting point for Indian con-

temporary art," says Latitude 28 founder Bhavna Kakar.

Shrine Empire also avoids a single theme. Its 14 artists from across South Asia work through research, process and material enquiry. Amitava, Arun Dev, Chris Basumatary, Divya Singh, Jagath Weerasinghe, Paribartana Mohanty, Sajjan Mani and Shanthamani Muddaiah dwell on memory, landscape, displacement and social and political histories.

Exhibit 320 takes a more material route. Barkha Gupta examines home, architecture and the body; Jaimini Jariwala uses unravelling, cyanotype and imprint to think about memory and erasure; and Maitreyi Desai turns tree rings into meditations on rootedness and home. Deepak Kumar, Wahida Ahmed, Richa Arya, Priyantha Udagedara and Yasmin bring in labour, migration, ecology and displacement.

"Delhi Contemporary Art Week has become an important moment in the city's cultural calendar," says Exhibit320 director Rasika Kajaria, who values its "spirit of col-



laboration and dialogue" and the chance to present artists engaging with "memory, materiality, and belonging".

Vadehra Art Gallery's 'A Geography of Tender Things' has the most openly emotional title of the six. In the works of its artists, place can be physical, remembered, psychic or unsettled. Anju Dodiya's 'Studio Fragments', first shown at Frieze Masters in 2025, appears alongside a new copper-plate painting by Zaam Arif, woven *ikat* works by Hylozoic/Desires, three new paintings by Sudhir Patwardhan and a photorealist work by Atul Dodiya, continuing his engagement with cinema. "Delhi Contemporary Art Week is an important moment for the city's art community, bringing together galleries, artists, collectors and audiences," says Roshini Vadehra.

In Advait Singh's 'Bye-Bye Monsoon', extreme weather is the starting point. Taking its cue from Amitav Ghosh's account of the tornado that struck north Delhi in March 1978, it uses shifting monsoon patterns to think about a climatic

disorder. Real and metaphorical storms ask what has brought us here. Artists include Paribartana Mohanty, Sarker Protick, Ravi Agarwal, Shanthamani Muddaiah, Joya Mukerjee Logue, Firi Rahman and Yasmin Jahan Nupur.

Annalisa Mansukhani's 'This Animate Earth' looks down to plants, roots and soil. It treats the botanical world as a place where memory, labour, caste, empire, ownership and extraction meet, while asking whose knowledge of plants and land has been valued. It looks at networks of roots, pollination and symbiosis, moving beyond a human-centred view of landscape.

What DCAW continues to offer, nine editions on, is a concentrated week in which contemporary art can be encountered without the scale and commercial pressure of a conventional fair. The weather outside, the plants underfoot, the places we leave, the bodies we inhabit, the memories held by cloth, paper, paint, soil and archive, almost everything, it seems, has found its way into Bikaner House.

— Quadri writes on art and culture

(L-R) 'New Myths First Incarnation the Second' by Waswo X Waswo; 'Between walls and hills' by Hema Shironi; 'Village and City Life I' by JK.



BOOKS

The importance of being DD Kosambi

PK BASANT

DD KOSAMBI wrote a book with the title 'Introduction to the Study of Indian History' in 1956. It ignited a firestorm that burnt down the basic assumptions of history writing in India. The India of the extant narratives was a saga of kings and conquerors. A student of history, on being asked about the difference between Ashoka and Akbar, might have said that both were good kings... one a Buddhist and the other a Muslim and trail off in a confused murmur. Kosambi's writings would revolutionise answers to such questions.

To him, history was a process in which all our ancestors participated. He highlighted transitions from foraging to agriculture, village to city, tribe to caste, lineage to state. Kings were located in the context of agricultural expansion; changes in technologies were shown to spawn new instruments of power. Gone were the schemes of periodisation like Hindu India, Muslim India. In the words of Romila Thapar, "Kosambi brought a paradigm shift in the writing of Indian history".

But who was Damodar Dharmananda Kosambi? Ram Ramaswamy's 'DD Kosambi: One Life, Many Worlds' is an attempt to probe the pasts of this man of Promethean originality. The biography moves along four

axes — his family, friends and colleagues, his work in the field of mathematics, his research and writing on numismatics, Sanskrit and history, and his activism in the international peace movements. His initial work in maths was original and brilliant, though he did not fulfil his early promise.

DDK was the son of the remarkable Buddhist saint and intellectual, Dharmananda Kosambi. Dharmananda's academic assignments at Harvard meant that the son was substantially educated there. He majored in mathematics. The Harvard system ensured that he learnt Latin, Greek, German, French, Spanish and Italian. He had picked up Sanskrit and Pali at home.

By the time this polyglot mathematician returned to India, he had imbibed many ideas of Marxism that would propel him towards activism. After short teaching stints at BHU and Aligarh, he took up a job at Fergusson College, Pune.

This was a creative period for DDK in terms of the number and quality of publications. He was also studying Marxism in a systematic way. All this was happening in the wake of the national movement of the 1930s, in which Dharmananda, being part of Gandhi's inner circle, was deeply involved.

In this period of flux, the young DDK would gradually move out of the abstraction of mathematics and try statistics. Statistics led him to study ancient coinage with inter-



DD KOSAMBI: ONE LIFE, MANY WORLDS
by Ram Ramaswamy.
HarperCollins.
Pages 384. ₹899

esting insights into the economies of the times when those coins were in use. He believed that the coins were used by people who dwelled in the Sanskrit texts. The next step was creating critical editions of Sanskrit texts, one of which was part of the Harvard Oriental Series. This led to his sorties into history as a discipline, and culminated in the publication of 'Introduction to the Study of Indian History'. His mathematics floundered and history flourished.

In Ramaswamy's reconstruction, DDK emerges as a difficult man who would use the harshest of expressions for incompetence or mistakes of men around him. So, his prodigious scholarly output was answered by a dismissal from Fergusson College. The

same pattern followed his removal from the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research.

DDK was deeply invested in the World Peace Council and similar bodies that tried to organise movements to prevent a 'Third World War'. He travelled to different countries and interacted with many communists and peace activists. He advocated destruction of the nuclear arsenal. It was a courageous step for someone working with Homi Bhabha, the creator of the nuclear establishment in India. DDK argued against nuclear energy and wrote pieces supporting solar energy that would be less expensive and decentralised. The issues he raised echo even now in our debates about harnessing different forms of energy.

Kosambi died young, at 59. Now that 60 years have passed, what is there for us to learn from him? Though an avowed Marxist, his savage critique of communist veteran SA Dange's book, 'India from Primitive Communism to Slavery', showed that his Marxism was not a substitute for thinking. To him, it was a toolbox for a better understanding of the past and present. Both his books on early India begin with quotations from Marx. But what follows is an assertion of disagreement with Marx's idea of India. Both books are richly illustrated. One illustration shows a corpse being eaten by a dog, with the subtitle, 'Orissa Famine 1944'.

Clearly, Kosambi was simultaneously look-

ing at the past and the present. Today, our educationists talk incoherently about interdisciplinary approaches. Kosambi wrote his famous article, 'Combined Methods in Indology', way back in 1963. All his writings present an incredible weaving of information from linguistics, archaeology, anthropological fieldwork, and the literature of the Indo-European universe. We can only aspire to emulate him.

His ideas of discovering 'living prehistory' through fieldwork remain an enduring legacy. He explored the areas around Pune, a stick in hand. He would scratch the earth here and there and discover microliths that revealed microhistories of those localities.

He carefully observed marginalised people. Many of the groups, according to him, were survivors of foraging or pastoral nomadic communities. This led him to discover a pattern of evolution in the forms of aniconic and iconic images, and a symmetry between economic life and forms of religious expression. It gave him the understanding of the transition from Bhairava worship to Shiva worship.

Historians need Kosambi's X-ray vision. Thank you, DD Kosambi, for being the Virgil of this unended quest. And thank you, Ram Ramaswamy, for this book.

— *The reviewer retired as Professor from the Dept of History and Culture, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi*

Elephant-Dragon dynamics

SANDEEP DIKSHIT

FOR the second time after his debut book on India-China relations, Shastri Ramchandaran has captured the bilateral relations at a unique inflection point.

Since the watershed moment of border hostilities in 1962, India-China relations have been marked by three conspicuous phases. An intense chill was broken by Rajiv Gandhi's visit to China in 1988. A period of improvement and almost-there normalisation took place until the first Chinese incursions in 2013. The ties have since been pockmarked by improvement and regression.

'Chindia' takes the reader through the high point of the relations in Manmohan Singh years, followed by a bumpy ride. Shastri's interest in Sino-India relations was ignited by a 2008 visit to Beijing during the times of a giddy upswing. He remained connected thereafter, either by long stays in China or through intermittent journeys.

In between, he saw ties coming under a strain with the beginning of Chinese intrusions in 2013.

Two more major military confrontations followed, along with plenty of diplomatic provocations from both sides. The first was India's dalliance with exiled separatists from the Uyghur and Tibetan communities and its vocal opposition to the Belt and Road Initiative. Second, China was the primary opponent to India gaining Nuclear Suppliers

Group (NSG) membership and gave stapled visas to Indians holding passports issued in Jammu and Kashmir as well as Arunachal Pradesh.

This book is an insight into how mandarins beavered away, through face-to-face interactions, statements, speeches and planted articles, to salvage their national interests while not letting the relationship run aground.

Shastri's work is a wider window into a China many Indian authors on the neighbour are unaware of — the prevalence of faith healers and the spirited debate in Chinese microblogging sites after a popular one was busted by the authorities; the intricate plots as a potential Chinese President, adored by

the people, is brought down; the hold of the ancient over the modern in Tibet; and the rivalry and hierarchy in the Chinese media.

There is also no shying away from spelling out policy antimonies that have bedevilled the carefully planned Chinese socio-economic interventions, including the downside of the one-child policy or the failed move to reintroduce bicycles in urban China. Nor is there reticence to haul Indian diplomacy over the coals when the occasion presented itself, as in the NSG membership fiasco. Shastri takes no sides, but has an upbeat perspective about the future trajectory.

There is, however, a missing portion about the fabled Chinese gastronomy, especially the panache in a formal banquet with its etiquette of toasting and the seating hierarchy. Many of these customs draw on millennia of imperial traditions and it is a mystery how they survived the mayhem of the Cultural Revolution.

Understandably, the border dispute occupies a neat chunk. There has been no convincing explanation, either by former Indian diplomats or by commentators close to the Delhi security establishment, about the exact impulse for the Chinese to squat on Indian land after half a century of relative tranquillity. There is also no convincing explanation for the fatal 2020 clashes in Galwan Valley. The author enumerates all the possible reasons.

His assumption appears plausible given that China has many more land neighbours than India, but it has settled its border disputes with 12, barring India and Bhutan. For a more nuanced understanding, Shastri's earlier book, 'Beyond Binaries', is an essential companion.

In an interconnected world, no bilateral relationship can be free of the pulls and pressures of the other actors on the world stage. Indeed, third players actively sow discord when there is growing bonhomie between two nations. Conversely, multilateral forums also become the stage for dousing hostility. This aspect comes through while examining the impact of the superpowers, India's neighbours, groupings BRICS, SCO, SAARC and the Quad.

For now, Shastri feels a slow turnaround is happening. The Elephant and the Dragon remain in the room, albeit in their respective corners, keeping up expectations of the resumption of the tango.

— *The reviewer is a senior journalist*

Partition ripples in Poonch

KANWAL SINGH

MUCH of the literature on Partition is understandably centred on Punjab and Bengal, where the scale of violence and displacement has been extensively documented. Yet the upheavals of 1947 were not confined to those regions. In the erstwhile princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, the violence and the tribal raids uprooted thousands of families. Their stories have received far less literary and scholarly attention. It is in this neglected space that Subhash Chander's 'The Villages We Could Not Return To' makes its most important contribution.

Set in Nathagala village in Poonch, the novel tells the story of civilians caught in the violence that engulfed the region in October 1947, just months after Partition, when tribal forces attacked villages. Their displacement was not simply a consequence of Partition, but part of the upheaval that followed the violent assault on a princely state whose political future had not yet been decided.

Its narrator is a 14-year-old boy, his world defined by the rhythms of the seasons: green hills in spring, fruit-filled orchards in summer, drying maize and walnuts in autumn. Family, neighbours, temples, gurdwaras, the Pahari language, all create a world in which home seems permanent. And then violence reaches the hills between October 22 and 26.

Muslim well-wishers warn Hindus and Sikhs to leave. Believing they will return within days, the boy's family locks the door of their ancestral home and leaves for Rawalakot and eventually Poonch. Only, they never return.

Chander's achievement is to make this history intimate rather than political. Hunger, illness, fear and uncertainty are experienced through a child's eyes. Refugees crowd temples and gurdwaras, families search for missing relatives and people carry memories of homes they have lost. Yet the novel does not turn its characters into stereotypes. Its remembrance of Muslim neighbours who risked their own lives to help others is particularly important, reminding us that even



THE VILLAGES WE COULD NOT RETURN TO
by Prof Subhash Chander.
Pages 228.

amid communal violence, individual acts of compassion survived. This refusal to reduce 1947 to communal binaries is among the book's greatest strengths.

The book is equally valuable as a record of cultural landscape. Chander writes about Poonch not simply as a geographical location but as a world of customs, agricultural rhythms, family traditions, landscapes and language. His discussion of the linguistic character of Mirpur and Muzaffarabad, including references to Pahari and Gojri and the statistics associated with them, is especially intriguing.

Without turning the subject into a political argument, these details illuminate the wider cultural and linguistic affinities of the Poonch-Mirpur-Muzaffarabad region and invite readers to look beyond familiar descriptions of J&K through the narrower lens of Kashmir valley.

The novel's unusual emotional perspective comes from the distance between its narrator and the child he once was. Now 93 and a retired professor, he allows his 14-year-old self to speak with the innocence, confusion, fear and hope that home can still be recovered. The most haunting moment comes when his dying father asks him to take his ashes back to the land they were forced to leave. The request transforms one family's loss into a larger meditation on exile and belonging.

Chander writes without bitterness and with considerable compassion. His book reminds us that history is not just preserved in official records; it also survives in languages, landscapes, family stories and the longing for a door closed forever.

— *The reviewer is based in J&K*



BACKFLAP



THE HAUNTING OF DR SHAMSI & OTHER UNSETTLING TALES
by Ayesha Muzaffar.
Pan Macmillan.
Pages 361. ₹499

A dentist in 1990s' Lahore begins to notice strange patterns in his patients — unnerving, unexplainable. In another corner of the city, Farwah Sheraz's husband Faraz vanishes without a trace. Bareera Khurram forgets conversations, hears voices, wakes up bruised. Ayesha Muzaffar's slow-burning horror stories draw from true accounts.



TOWER
by Bae Myung-hoon.
Pan Macmillan.
Pages 256. ₹399

This novel follows a series of interconnected stories, each dealing with how citizens living in the hypermodern high-rise deal with various influences of power in their lives. A group of researchers have to tell their boss that a major powerbroker is a dog, a woman uses the power of the Internet to rescue a downed fighter pilot...

Writers who remain with us long after their pages are closed

MANISHA GANGAHR

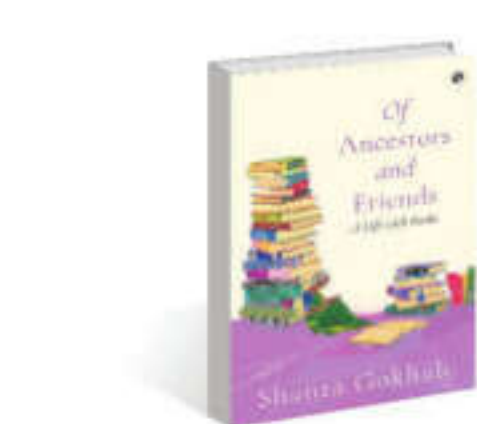
SOME books tell us about a life; others about the lives that books make possible. Shanta Gokhale's 'Of Ancestors and Friends' belongs to the latter category. Walter Benjamin remarked that books can bring back not only thoughts but "images, memories", and this book becomes a site where reading and remembering converge. Neither a conventional memoir nor a literary commentary, the essays shift between literature, memory and cultural history, turning writers and works into occasions for reflections on art, language, society, friendship and time.

Gokhale's lifelong intimacy with books began early; by Class 8, she was already reading Thomas Hardy. This early immersion shaped the deeply discerning reader she remained even in later life, giving every book "a forty-page chance to engage". That spirit of sustained and attentive reading informs 'Of Ancestors and Friends'. The

appeal lies in its movement between the intimate and the expansive. Memories open into literary histories, encounters into cultural reflections, and books into larger questions about reading and the writers who remain with us long after their pages are closed.

This literary world comes alive in the section 'Nearest Neighbours', where Gokhale turns to writers who enriched her reading life and became friends and interlocutors. Oscillating between recollection and contemplation, the essays bring together voices across languages. Her memories of growing up with Marathi, Hindi and English lead naturally to a deliberation on India's multilingual literary inheritance.

Invoking Arun Kolatkar's witty image of having "a pencil sharpened at both ends", Gokhale presents language not as a boundary but as a bridge between writers and readers. Her portraits of Kiran Nagarkar, Jerry Pinto and UR Ananthamurthy capture the warmth of literary comradeship, as books and encounters become occasions for dis-



OF ANCESTORS AND FRIENDS: A LIFE WITH BOOKS
by Shanta Gokhale.
Speaking Tiger.
Pages 309. ₹599

covery, admiration and intellectual delight.

This intimacy between reader and book finds vivid expression in Gokhale's reflection on Salman Rushdie's 'Midnight's Children': "the memory of 'Midnight's Children'... inevitably brings on a wide smile and a disbelieving shake of the head." Her interview with Rushdie deepens this response, as

she ponders over being one of his "midnight's children", a generation shaped by the promises and contradictions of post-Independence India. The novel becomes, for her, a moment of recognition where memory, history and the wonder of reading fuse. It is in such flashes that it is most affecting, showing how books become woven into the emotional texture of a life.

In the section 'Old Friends', Gokhale evokes the masters of thought: Sartre, de Beauvoir, Camus, Kafka. These are names whose words, ideas and philosophies have shaped Gokhale as a thinking being, and whose intellectual presence endures as a lifelong companionship: "When a writer has... forced you to think hard resulting in arguments against his arguments, then he is to be recognised as one who has left a permanent mark on you." At the heart of Gokhale's journey is the pleasure of returning to books that have become part of her inner life. To trace what she has read is to trace the making of a mind — its ideas, sen-

sibilities, enthusiasms and ways of seeing. Her "ancestor's shelf," crowned by 'Anna Karenina', 'Middlemarch', 'Madame Bovary', along with other titles, holds books she rereads not for amusement or instruction, but "in order to live".

To read 'Of Ancestors and Friends' is to enter Gokhale's richly inhabited world of books and rediscover the pleasure of reading deeply — not merely to absorb literature's insights and oddities, but to let it shape one's convictions and life. More than a reading list, it is an education in reading — with curiosity, perception and delight.

We find ourselves reading books within the book, as Gokhale's graceful prose and sure command of language convey, without digression or excess, what makes each work memorable. For readers who believe books are not merely read but lived with, Gokhale's book is both an invitation and a reminder of why we return to them.

— *The reviewer teaches at GGSDS College, Chandigarh*

REFLECTIONS

A cricket match in Srinagar



PRADEEP MAGAZINE

IN the footprints of history, nothing is etched in stone. With the passage of time and changing perspectives, the past acquires meanings that can colour the present, just as the present can reshape our understanding of the past.

Kashmir, with its many-layered complex history, is a place where cricket has often come to symbolise something beyond sport. The news that its state team will play ‘Rest of India’ for the Irani Cup—a regular annual fixture featuring the current Ranji Trophy champions—in the first week of October in Srinagar, therefore, raises intriguing possibilities.

Before one jumps into a contest that pits Jammu and Kashmir cricketers against the might of India—or to be politically more precise, the Rest of India—there is a bit of disturbing history worth revisiting. It is history that may cast a long shadow over a cricket match that on the surface is merely about bat and ball.

The year 1983 is embellished with the golden hue of India’s crowning glory: winning the World Cup of one-day cricket. It was an unlikely triumph that turned the established order of world cricket upside down. ‘Kapil’s Devils’, the epithet that a British newspaper bestowed on that all-conquering Indian team, became the phrase by which they are remembered. On that famous, sun-drenched afternoon at Lord’s on June 25, India had done the impossible—defeating the seemingly invincible West Indies to become world champions.

Barely 110 days later, on October 13, 1983, the newly crowned world champions found themselves facing the same rivals, this time amid one of the most picturesque settings imaginable, the Sher-i-Kashmir stadium in Srinagar.

The majestic backdrop of the mountains, with the massive Chinar trees shedding their golden-amber, paw-shaped leaves, provided an evocative setting for the first encounter between the two teams since the World Cup final.

Post-Partition Kashmir had generated enormous heat, dust and turmoil, becoming a land of divided loyalties and competing narratives, with its place within India repeatedly contested, despite its accession in 1947 under certain constitutional provisions.

To the utter dismay of those whose loyalty to India was unquestioned, the cricketing skirmish on the field was pushed into the background by spectators openly hostile to the Indian team. To the surprise, and perhaps delight, of the West Indies players, they found themselves being cheered as though they were playing on home ground.

1983 turned out to be a fiasco. J&K’s Irani Cup tie with ‘Rest of India’ in October raises intriguing possibilities

Many objective accounts and my own conversations with the cricket writers who chronicled the match helped build a picture of a place where anti-India sentiment was visible enough to stun those unfamiliar with Kashmir’s thorny past.

These very journalists had just a day earlier partaken of the sumptuous *wazwan*, the traditional elaborate cuisine, laid out by the state’s Chief Minister for the teams and the Press. It was hard for them to digest being witness to a large crowd openly resentful of the Indian team, the next day.

At the lunch break, a few mischievous elements stormed the ground and dug up the pitch, while the weather too played its part. The match had to be curtailed, with West Indies chasing the

revised target without losing a wicket.

The unsettling and unexpected outcome of that match was not the defeat, but the disturbing manner in which a festering wound had surfaced as a spectacle for the world to watch.

More than four decades have passed since that day in Srinagar. It may be a long span in an individual’s life or a nation’s journey, but is barely a dot in the collective existence of Planet Earth. As of today, cricket has placed the erstwhile state in a pre-eminent position in India’s sporting structure. Jammu and Kashmir are no longer adjuncts to the country’s well-oiled cricket machine.

They are now Ranji Trophy champions, while a new generation of homegrown players are staking their claim to the national team, with Auzib Nabi being part of the Indian team that toured Sri Lanka. Before him came Parvez Rasool, the pioneer who broke the barrier by representing India in an ODI.

Politically, the landscape has changed dramatically. The violent uprising that began in 1989, the fratricidal killings and the cries of “*azadi*” belong to the past. The contentious Article 370 has been abrogated and the state has been reduced to the status of a UT. On the surface, a measure of calm prevails in the Valley that is intermittently broken by terror killings. Whether it signals the arrival of a lasting peace or is merely an ominous silence before the storm is a question only time can answer.

Come October, the crowds will stream into the Sher-i-Kashmir stadium. Will they see the match merely as a sporting contest? In the context of the match, their opposition to Rest of India can in no way be seen as an act of treason as it was on that day in 1983, when the Indian team was booed and the West Indians cheered.

Times have changed, but have the people changed enough to appreciate a cricket match for the sporting skills on display and not for what it could symbolise? In the long arc of history, the past can be reinterpreted from the gaze of the present. It is the future that remains as uncertain to predict as the toss of a coin that precedes a cricket match.

— *The writer is the author of ‘Not Quite Cricket’ and ‘Not Just Cricket’*

Is the joint family making a comeback?



AVAY SHUKLA

JOINT family was one of the better constituents and binding blocks of Indian society for centuries. Consisting of three or four generations living under one roof, it bonded them into a larger entity, sustained positive relationships, and pooled individual resources into one economic whole.

Socially speaking, perhaps its best characteristic was that it took care of the weaker members—the infants, the old, the sick or otherwise disabled, the unemployed, the indigent—and ensured that they too were cared for and lived a dignified life, something sadly lacking in modern societies.

I feel my father’s generation was perhaps the last joint family generation. He grew up in a sprawling family consisting of his parents, four siblings, innumerable uncles, aunts and their families, and a couple of near-invisible widows. They all lived together in happy chaos in a huge *haveli* my grandfather had built in his village in Fatehpur district of UP. God only knows how the family’s finances were organised.

One word of caution, however: don’t for a moment think that it was run on democratic lines—no, sir, it was a patriarchal autocracy. My grandfather’s word was the law and everyone accepted it because it was a mutually beneficial autocracy. No other system would have worked half as well!

The Indian joint family started fraying, I suspect, in the 1960s and 1970s, and was more or less dead by the late 1990s. I’m sure sociologists have identified the reasons, but it was an inevitable consequence of “development”.

Things started changing with my generation, the Baby Boomers. Education, mobility, job opportunities, all expanded. Youngsters started leaving, first for better education and then jobs, and settled down in places distant from their parental houses. This trend only expanded with the next generation, the millennials. Joint families almost disappeared and were replaced by “nuclear” ones. Loneliness for abandoned parents became collateral damage.

This social evolution was inevitable also as a consequence of the improvement in girls’ education. They were no longer content to let early marriage define their lives: they sought independent careers, and their own homes.

How and where couples lived was decided not by parents, but by economics—jobs, salaries, career prospects, and the desire to raise their own families without parental interference.

But the wheel is coming full circle with Gen Z, and ironically, the same forces that drove them away from the joint family system are now forcing them back to it! More and more young adults in their late twenties and early thirties, employed and unemployed, married or single, are now coming back to live with their parents. This is confirmed both statistically and anecdotally. Research shows that 70-80 per cent of young adults live with their parents,

as do 20 per cent of young couples.

In my own social and family circles, I find this is true in at least one out of every two families (including my own).

The reasons are varied, both economic and social. Both boys and girls are marrying late. The mean marriage age for girls has gone up to 22.9 years (24 to 27.5 for girls in urban areas), and for boys to 29 years (early 30s for urban-based males). Being unmarried means they continue to live with their parents. Conversely, divorce rates are going up too—from 1.1 per cent in 1990 to 1.6 per cent now. Divorce means the separated entities again return to the safe harbour of their parents (especially if there are kids involved).

Joblessness is another reason—40 per cent of India’s graduates are unemployed, and a large cohort of those employed are barely able to subsist on the wages they get, especially in urban areas. A new NITI Aayog report states that 8.7 crore youth (between the ages of 18 and 29) are in the NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training) category. They have no choice but to live with their parents. AI is beginning to exert its malevolent effect: big tech companies have already cut tens

I hope it works out, the world needs it

of thousands of jobs. Real estate, whether owned or rented, has become so prohibitively expensive in even Tier 2 or 3 cities that living separately is just a dream for most youngsters.

The costs of domestic household support or for child rearing are unaffordable. At these prices, even ageing parents and their cluttered houses start looking very attractive, and their expertise in bringing up kids is simply irreplaceable! So the joint family is suddenly back in business.

And guess what? It suits us ageing Baby Boomers too. The empty nest is full again, the creeping loneliness is banished, life acquires meaning. It’s a win-win situation: for the youngsters it provides a material safety net, for the parents it fills an emotional vacuum. But there’s a catch, as there usually is in all good things!

Nature did not intend for progeny to live with their progenitors for all time. Too many adults living together generates tensions, arising from a dozen differing perceptions of personal space, views and opinions, eating habits, financial matters, etc. The joint families of my father’s era resolved these tensions by having one dominant authority—the head of the family—whose word was final.

That is no longer the case. Youngsters of today are taught to question, not accept things at face value, speak their mind, not acquiesce to authority blindly. This is anathema for joint families, and I see it playing out in many families. It will need a lot of patience, understanding, give-and-take, genuine care and respect for each other for Phase 2 of the joint family system to succeed.

I really don’t know how it will work out. I hope it does because happy, functional families make for a stable social order; something this increasingly fractured world badly needs.

— *The writer is a retired IAS officer*

Ballads of breeze and breath

VAYU is the oldest and most cosmic of the wind gods. In the Rig Veda, he is a swift-moving deity who rides across the skies, often in the company of Indra. He is associated with breath, speed, and life-giving motion. Vayu is also linked to *soma*, the sacred drink, which he is said to taste first among the gods, suggesting his role as the first receiver of life-energy. In later mythology, Vayu becomes the divine father of Hanuman as well as Bhima. Here, wind becomes heroic vitality, the force that animates epic action.

Marut or the Maruts are storm gods, often described as a troop of fierce, young warriors who accompany Indra in battle. They ride the winds, shake mountains, uproot trees, and release thunder and rain. They are the sons of Rudra and embody violent atmospheric energy. In many hymns, they assist Indra in slaying the dragon Vritra, who holds back the waters. Their role is to create turbulence so that rain can fall and fertility can return. Unlike Vayu, who is singular and subtle, the Maruts are collective and aggressive. They represent the roaring winds of the monsoon, the storm that breaks drought. In them, wind becomes destruction that enables renewal. Marut is why Hanuman is called Maruti.

In Ayurvedic thought, *Vata* becomes one of the three bodily *doshas*, governing motion, circulation, nerve impulses, and respiration. When balanced, *Vata* enables creativity and agility. When disturbed, it causes anxiety, dryness, and disease. Here, wind shifts from mythic deity to



physiological force. It causes restlessness, bloating and fatigue.

Prana represents the most inward and subtle understanding of wind. It is breath, life-force, and consciousness-energy combined. In the Upanishads, *prana* is described as the ruler of the body. When *prana* leaves, life ends. The organs quarrel about their importance, but when *prana* prepares to depart, they collapse, proving its supremacy. In yogic traditions,

Vayu, Marut, Vata & Prana represent different ways in which breeze as well as breath were imagined

Your pain cannot be another person’s death sentence



MEGHNA PANT

CHILD needed medicine. An argument began between the husband and wife. The wife called her family and they killed the husband. In Lucknow, a woman was shot dead by her estranged husband. He then killed his own sister, and turned the gun on himself. Why? They were getting divorced.

I don’t know about you, but I cannot stop thinking about the terrifying idea that seems to hover around both these horrific crimes: when did being hurt become an excuse to hurt someone else? When did *I am in pain* become *therefore, you must pay*? Because that, ultimately, is the monstrous entitlement beneath so much violence.

Not always the same kind of entitlement. Not always exercised by the same kind of person, or directed at the same gender. But the logic is chillingly familiar. *You hurt me. You embarrassed me, rejected me, disagreed with me.* And therefore—you must suffer.

The argument could be about a child’s medicine. Money. Infidelity. Divorce. Custody. A WhatsApp message. A reel. A perceived insult. A refusal to obey. The trigger changes. The underlying belief does not. Somewhere, a human being decides that his emotional pain is so significant, so sacred, so all-consuming that another person’s right to live becomes secondary to it. And that is what I find impossible to comprehend. Because pain is not permission. Anger is not authority. Humiliation is not a hunting licence. And heartbreak, betrayal, rejection or rage—however devastating—are not death sentences you are entitled to hand out to another human being.

Yet increasingly, it feels as though we are living in a world where people have lost the ability to sit with discomfort. Everything must be answered. Every insult must be avenged, every rejection corrected. Every

disagreement must have a winner. And if you cannot control the situation, then perhaps you can control the person. Or, destroy them. That is the terrifying escalation. We have become extraordinarily good at talking about feelings and extraordinarily bad at managing them.

We know the vocabulary of trauma. We know our triggers, how to announce our boundaries, articulate our pain and demand accountability. But some of us seem to have confused *having feelings* with *being entitled to act upon every feeling we have*.

You are allowed to be furious, devastated, feel betrayed. You are allowed to scream into a pillow, leave a marriage, block a number, seek therapy, go to court, walk away, cry until your eyes swell shut, spend three months in bed watching bad TV and questioning every decision you have ever made.

But you are not allowed to kill someone because you are angry, or to destroy someone because they destroyed your heart. You are not allowed to decide that because another person caused your suffering, their life now belongs to you. This should not even need saying, but clearly, it does.

For women, this entitlement has a long and ugly history. A woman leaves a marriage, and suddenly her husband believes her decision is an assault on his masculinity. She rejects a man, and he believes it is humiliation. A woman chooses another life—and the man she has left behind believes that her freedom is something for which she must be punished.

This is why so much violence against women is not about love. It’s about ownership. It’s the belief that *if I cannot have you, no one can*. That *after everything I have done for you, how dare you leave?* That *my suffering is your responsibility*.

Horribly, that rage does not stop with the woman. It spills over. Onto sisters. Mothers. Children. Anyone standing nearby. But this particular sickness is not limited to men or to violence against women. And, of course, violence does not become less violent because the perpetrator is a woman.

A human life does not become less valuable because the person who takes it has also suffered. And that is the principle we must refuse to compromise on. Your pain explains you. It does not excuse you.

CJP's 'School Thik Karo' campaign has turned the vocabulary of protest into a language of accountability, forcing states to act

THE CITIZEN FIX FOR SCHOOLS

MANIKANT MISHRA

THE most revealing aspect about India's latest school campaign may not be the broken toilet, missing bench or no building. It is what happens after the camera arrives, and leaves. Cockroach Janta Party's (CJP) 'School Thik Karo' campaign began as a citizen audit of government schools. It has since travelled from Gen-Z protests to Gen-Alpha protests for their classrooms, forcing governments to respond, and raising a larger question—who holds the state accountable when it already knows what is wrong?

A government school in Santuk Pimpri, Maharashtra, provided the opening scene. On August 15, CJP founder Abhijeet Dipke began the 'School Thik Karo' campaign with a social audit, checking drinking water, toilets, benches, windows and other basics. Within days, repair work began and the school got its first computer. A checklist acquired its first before-and-after picture. But the story was already bigger than one school.

The campaign followed the month-long student mobilisation at Delhi's Jantar Mantar, where Gen-Z protesters made education accountability a political demand. On July 25, Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan resigned, and the Centre accepted the other demands, including withdrawal of cases against protesters. The agitation ended, but its political vocabulary did not.

'School Thik Karo' took that vocabulary to villages. If young people could force a national education issue into the political centre, CJP wanted citizens to do the same with schools. Dipke announced a nationwide social audit exercise, asking parents, residents and village leaders to inspect schools, record deficiencies and share standardised assessments.

The first audit in Hingoli found inadequate drinking water, benches, toilets, windows and other facilities. The campaign then spread through Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Haryana, West Bengal, Delhi and Telangana, with volunteers and supporters making their own inspections.

But CJP was no longer the sole producer of evidence. Schoolchildren and parents began turning their own grievances into protests. In Uttar Pradesh's Hamirpur, about 300 children and parents marched several kilometres with the National Flag to the collectorate, demanding a paved road to their school. The children were described as Gen Alpha who got support from CJP.

The campaign seemed more like a relay. CJP made the call, citizens supplied evidence, children carried grievances into public space, and governments responded. Saurav Das, CJP's co-convenor, describes the campaign's logic bluntly: "Everything is solvable, yet they don't solve it." His argument is that the deficiencies are not hidden from the block education officer, district education officer or the minister, but what is missing is pressure.



In Maharashtra, CJP's social audit flagged several deficiencies in government schools.



CJP says it wants to find that pressure as they are working like a pressure group.

That distinction matters. The campaign is not discovering what the state does not know; it is trying to make governments and political parties act on what the administration has allowed to remain routine.

Rajasthan became the sharpest test. CJP volunteers, along with its leader, visiting a government primary school in Rampura-Kanwarapura near Jaipur were confronted in a violent clash. FIRs followed. CJP alleged political interference, while critics questioned its confrontational methods. Yet, the outcome was followed by state action as Rajasthan disclosed that 611 government schools had no building of their own, while 2,047 lacked toilets and 1,049 drinking water facilities. Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma announced a three-year ₹12,500-crore budget for revamping schools in the state.

West Bengal showed the human cost of the citizen audit culture. After CJP volunteer Sheikh Abdul Hafiz inspected a Bankura government school, he and his father were allegedly assaulted; his father died two days later. CJP alleged BJP's involvement. The police confirmed the assault, but disputed its link to the death. Eight persons were arrested, of which one is a BJP leader. It was at this point that the school audit reflected personal risk and political conflict.

In Maharashtra, CJP inspections in Latur and Mumbai flagged deficiencies regarding toilets, drinking water, benches, teachers, and safety. The Latur inspection led to an FIR against Dipke and others over alleged unauthorised entry and disruption. In Mumbai and Delhi, authorities barred people from entering municipal schools without permission. Yet, the state also began reviewing infrastructure as Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis directed ministers and ruling party MLAs to monitor repairs, while officials were asked to assess facilities across districts.

The contradictions are the story. The

state is simultaneously saying it has the machinery to inspect schools and demonstrating that political pressure can accelerate action. CJP is simultaneously claiming to be a civic pressure group and using political tactics to create that pressure.

Ashutosh Ranka, CJP's co-convenor, sees the larger goal differently: "The culture of accountability has to come in at every level. The culture of working like active citizens has to come in at every level."

The campaign, in his words, succeeds only when people do not wait for the CJP, but ask about the schools themselves.

Its reach is no longer measured only by schools visited by the CJP's core team. Supporters are filming schools near their homes. Parents are questioning facilities. Children are protesting. The issue is migrating from an organisation to an ecosystem. But an ecosystem built on exposure has its own test: what happens after the camera leaves?

Aafreen Nawaz, CJP's national secretary, says, "CJP tries to return to schools but often finds the administration more guarded after the first visit. The aim is not that a video gets viral for two days; the campaign wishes to make the system answerable."

CJP's Ratna Singh puts the institutional question more starkly: "A government school should not need a group like CJP to discover that there are no proper facilities."

This is where 'School Thik Karo' becomes more than a catalogue of failing schools. It is more of an experiment to find whether social audit can become a substitute for absent accountability and then, perhaps, make itself unnecessary.

If Rajasthan's spending, Maharashtra's repair reviews and the response to school protests prove durable, the campaign will show that pressure can move a system. If they are only short bursts of repair after viral videos, it will demonstrate something more troubling—the system responds more quickly to embarrassment

SETTING THE AGENDA

■ SAURAV DAS, CJP co-convenor

What is the campaign really trying to change?

Everything is solvable, yet they don't solve it. The deficiencies are known; what changes the equation is political pressure.

■ ASHUTOSH RANKA, CJP co-convenor

What happens after the cameras leave?

If the only outcome is a video that gets circulated for two days, then we have failed the child. We aim to make the system answerable.

■ AAFREEN NAWAZ, CJP national secretary

What would make the campaign truly successful?

The culture of accountability has to come in at every level. Citizens should stop waiting for CJP and begin asking about their own schools.

■ RATNA SINGH, CJP legal head

What does citizen auditing say about the state?

A government school should not need a citizen group to discover basic failures. The larger question here is, if citizens can reach these villages, why can't the state?

than to responsibility; fear of disgrace outweighs professional duty. The unexpected achievement of 'School Thik Karo', therefore, may not be that CJP has inspected schools. It is that a question once belonging to education departments—"What is happening inside the school?"—is increasingly being asked by the children who go there.

Once citizens begin asking such questions themselves, the political challenge changes. The government is no longer being asked merely to fix a school. It is now being asked why citizens had to come looking for the problem in the first place.

How homegrown technology is bridging India's last mile

From Punjab villages to Rajasthan's hinterland, wireless broadband, powered by Jio's proprietary tech, is shrinking digital distance



FOR a teacher-turned-influencer living in a village near Jaipur, the Internet was once the reason to leave home. His mobile phone could get him online, but reliable connectivity for teaching, creating and working was another story. Then came the wireless broadband connection, which meant he could work without relocating. And that raises a fair question. If India already has 1.26 billion mobile connections, why does it need broadband? Because mobile connectivity keeps people connected, broadband can connect homes, businesses and public services.

BROADBAND IN 5G AGE

Your 5G connection keeps you online as you move around. Broadband is designed to keep an entire home connected—phones, laptops, TVs, tablets, CCTV cameras and other devices, often all at once. But there is a bigger story. Reliable broadband can support online classrooms, telemedicine, digital payments, e-governance services, cloud-based business tools and remote work. So, 5G does not make broadband redundant? It is an essential digital infrastructure. The catch? Fibre, the traditional way of delivering home and institutional broadband, isn't always easy to take everywhere.

PROBLEM HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT

India had 1.088 billion broadband subscribers by March 2026, according to the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), but only 47.71 million wireline connections. Because fibre has to physically reach the house, which means digging roads, negotiating right-of-way, stringing cables and maintaining them. In a dense city, it is manageable. In a village where homes are scattered, it can be expensive and painfully slow. So the problem is no longer simply getting a mobile signal to a village. It is getting high-capacity and dependable



Jio's AirFiber uses wireless radio links to connect various premises to the network with its UBR technology. Using point-to-multipoint connectivity, UBR allows one network-side unit to wirelessly connect with multiple customer premises.

broadband into homes and businesses.

FORGET CABLE, MEET UBR

This is where Jio has come up with a homegrown solution to the last-mile headache. Instead of running a fibre cable all the way to the house, Jio's AirFiber uses wireless radio links to connect the premises to the network. But Jio takes the idea a step further with its proprietary Unlicensed Band Radio or UBR technology.

The UBR architecture uses point-to-multipoint connectivity, allowing one network-side unit to wirelessly connect with multiple customer premises.

Jio says its system uses the unlicensed 5-GHz band and its proprietary hardware and software stack, allowing it to deploy connectivity with considerably less civil work.

HOW AIRFIBER WORKS

At the network end, Jio can install an access unit alongside its existing cellular infrastructure. At the customer's location, an outdoor radio unit receives the signal. That connection then feeds a Wi-Fi router inside the home. The company has also built a digital map of India's physical infrastructure to assess network feasibility and plan

installations. Jio says this "digital twin" covers terrain, localities and buildings, allowing engineers to assess a connection before installation.

NUMBERS DO THE TALKING

TRAI began separately reporting UBR Fixed Wireless Access (FWA) subscribers from August 2025. The UBR base grew from 2.1 million in August 2025 to 4.93 million by June 2026. Of these, about 1.42 million were rural users.

Across 5G FWA and UBR together, India had 17.87 million subscribers by June 2026. Interestingly, 5G FWA itself had 12.94 million subscribers, including 6.49 million rural users. Jio's own numbers show just how quickly the model has scaled. In its June 2026 results, the company said Jio AirFiber had about 15.6 million subscribers and contributed more than 75 per cent of its fixed-broadband additions during FY26. That makes AirFiber a serious broadband infrastructure strategy.

WHAT REALLY CHANGES?

A reliable home connection can mean a student attending an online class without hunting for a signal, a

farmer accessing weather and market information, a kirana store accepting digital payments or a freelancer working for a company hundreds of kilometres away.

In Punjab and Haryana, users offer a glimpse of what that connectivity means on the ground. At Sacred Heart Convent School in Thakkarpura village, Tarn Taran, principal Sister Linze says AirFiber has made official work, computer-lab operations and access to key portals "quite seamless". Near the Indo-Pak border in Bhikhiwind, financial and trade analyst Ranjeet Singh says the connection supports 12 high-resolution CCTV cameras, petrol-pump swipe machines and his trading business.

In Lohinga Kalan, Haryana, Virender Kumar, a teashop owner, says free Wi-Fi and a TV have drawn more customers during cricket matches, increasing his income by 20-30 per cent. Maninder Singh, a farmer in Fatehabad, uses connected CCTV cameras to monitor his poultry farm and fields.

These are small examples, but underline a larger point. Broadband is not just about faster browsing. It can make schools more functional, businesses more productive and rural livelihoods easier to manage.

BUILT FOR UNIQUE NEEDS

There is nothing glamorous about the last mile. It is expensive, messy and deeply dependent on geography. What makes Jio's UBR story interesting is that it attempts to solve that very problem with a technology stack developed and deployed at a massive scale for Indian conditions. Jio describes its point-to-multipoint UBR platform as a global first at scale.

The real test, however, will not be a flashy speed test. It will be whether a student in a village, a creator working from home or a small business owner can depend on the connection every single day. If that happens, this homegrown technology will have achieved something more meaningful than replacing a cable. It will have made location a little less important to opportunity.

And for a country where the next billion digital users are increasingly outside the big cities, that could be the real game-changer.

—The writer was in Mumbai at the invitation of Reliance Jio

INTERNATIONAL EDITORIALS

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OPINION

THE WEEKEND INTERVIEW with Mike Rogers | By Tunku Varadarajan

The Plan to Defeat Abdul El-Sayed

Mount Pleasant, Mich. To hear Mike Rogers tell it, you probably shouldn't be reading this article unless you're from his state. "People in Washington, D.C., want this to be a national race," he says. "We sometimes get more interest in our race than we would really like. But we're running a Michigan race for Michigan citizens." Mr. Rogers, 63, is the Republican nominee for U.S. Senate—as he was in 2024, when he lost by a whisker. Although Donald Trump carried the Wolverine State in both 2016 and 2024, it hasn't sent a Republican to the Senate since 1994. Mr. Rogers, an eight-term representative who didn't seek re-election in 2014, faces Abdul El-Sayed, a combative, charismatic far-left Democrat. Mr. El-Sayed has the avid support of Sen. Bernie Sanders and Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, both of whom campaigned with him in Michigan. He also has the backing of Hasan Piker, a poisonously anti-Israel left-wing influencer who is partial to Hamas and has said that "America deserved 9/11."

Mr. El-Sayed won a bruising primary this month against Haley Stevens, an old-school liberal and pro-Israel politician of the kind that is increasingly out of favor in today's Democratic Party. Among the first to congratulate Mr. El-Sayed was New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani, who said: "I am proud to be part of a movement of politicians and candidates who are looking to put working-class Americans back at the heart of our politics."

Michigan's Republican Senate nominee calls his socialist opponent an antisemite and discusses his own efforts to broaden his party's appeal.

Mr. Rogers knows full well that the Senate race isn't of only provincial concern. Seconds after expressing it, he withdraws his wish to have less of the national spotlight on Michigan and calls the race "one of the most consequential elections of our lifetime."

The national scrutiny is entirely appropriate. The radical left, and the Democratic Socialists of America in particular, sees Michigan as a bridgehead. "If you think about the dynamic of what's at risk for the country, this election is huge," Mr. Rogers says in an interview on the morning of his party's nominating convention at the Soaring Eagle Casino & Resort, owned by the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe. "We have DSA members flown in from all over the country in Michigan. They think this is where they're going to plant the flag for their movement, to spread it across the rest of the country."

Mr. El-Sayed isn't a DSA member, but the organization's members "believe they're going to win a statewide seat with somebody they know will be a champion for democrat socialist ideas and policies and principles," Mr. Rogers says. Mr. El-Sayed has used Fight Agency, the consulting firm that masterminded

the Mamdani mayoral campaign, for his digital and social-media strategy. "Abdul is now the new face of the democrat socialist movement in America," Mr. Rogers says. "He would be the most senior democrat socialist elected."

The far left is "excited and heavily invested," Mr. Rogers says, because Mr. El-Sayed and his fellow travelers "fundamentally want to change the government, and to change the government's relationship with people." Mr. Rogers alleges that his opponent is "on the Obama plan. Two years in the Senate, and he's going to run for president in 2028." (Mr. Obama won the presidency four years after his election to the Senate.) "He also has the domain name AbdulForPresident, so you can see where his head's at." (Mr. El-Sayed registered the domain in 2017. He has said that he did so as a pre-emptive measure to prevent its misuse.)

Mr. El-Sayed has called Mr. Rogers a "coward." At the convention after our interview, Mr. Rogers calls the Democrat "con man Abdul."

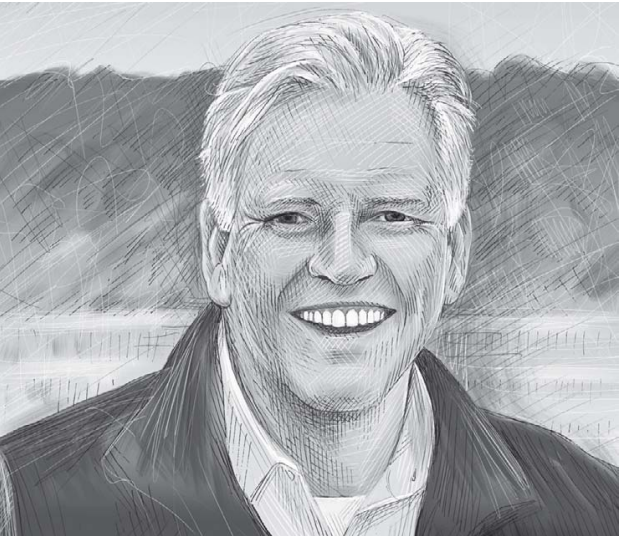
"I know a con man when I see one," says Mr. Rogers, who was a special agent with the FBI from 1989 through 1994. The Republican offers a list of things he says "con man Abdul wants to abolish": Immigration and Customs Enforcement, voter ID, gasoline-powered cars, private health insurance, police funding, prisons and the Second Amendment. "We're talking about building homes in Detroit. He's talking about building a movement. He wants to be a national figure with a national message."

Mr. Rogers says that his opponent is "aggressive and angry and has a meanness of heart and spirit" and is "an antisemite, which is probably the nicest thing you can say about his attitude to Jews." Mr. Rogers points to the presence of Mr. Piker and to Mr. El-Sayed's primary campaign, which pilloried Ms. Stevens obsessively over her support from the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

"Abdul has stapled himself to Piker. He might be his running mate, last I looked. He brought him back as a closer on the final weekend. He had him as his closer to win the primary." Mr. Rogers utters a line that he has used often in speeches on the stump: "Abdul wants to represent Palestine. We want to represent Michigan."

He also reprises a line he's used about Mr. El-Sayed on social media: "Abdul is too extreme to go anywhere near the Senate." He adds: "I always believe you probably should send somebody back to the Senate that could get a security clearance." He criticizes Mr. El-Sayed for his "violent language," saying that "he's said some pretty vile things, including, by the way, telling me and my family we'll have no safe quarter in the state." What Mr. El-Sayed actually said, on the day of his primary victory, was milder: "You are not going to have safe quarter from people holding you accountable for what you've done."

In 2024 Mr. Rogers lost to Democrat Elissa Slotkin by 19,000 votes, or about 0.3% of the total. How is this race different? "No primary, for starters." In 2024 Mr. Rogers had to see off two primary



opponents. "We ended up getting 64% of the vote, so we had a very clear victory. But you have to run a primary, and you come out of that a little bruised, a little battered and a little broke." Ms. Slotkin outspent him 5 to 1.

Another factor—which may make the difference between victory and defeat—is the prospect of Democratic voters rejecting his radical and divisive opponent. Mr. Rogers's campaign kickstarted a "Democrats for Rogers" movement. "It's gathered support faster organically than we anticipated," he says. "We even printed up 'Democrats for Rogers' signs and, man, they're flying out the door, aren't they?"

Jewish Democrats, unsettled by Mr. El-Sayed's hostility toward Israel, his nonstop demonization of AIPAC and his association with Mr. Piker, are susceptible to appeals from Mr. Rogers. He's also keen to point out that it would be a mistake to regard Michigan's sizable Arab vote as a solid bloc for Mr. El-Sayed. Mr. Rogers has been courting Lebanese Christian and Iraqi Catholic Chaldean voters, and even Sunni and Shiite Muslims: "I have friends in the Muslim community who are eager to be a counterweight." He says Arab businessmen are spooked by Mr. El-Sayed's "anticapitalist rhetoric and by what he wants to do to business. They're very entrepreneurial in the Muslim community. They don't think that's good for their future."

Although he presents himself as a market-friendly conservative, Mr. Rogers has called for a one-year moratorium on the construction of data centers in Michigan. He insists this isn't a populist move. "Concerned citizens are worried. We ought to try to help them, not scare the bejesus out of them." Data centers have a "large impact on a community. I don't believe you should bulldoze them through. I don't support a ban at the federal level, but here in the state we should get a year's pause to answer the questions that people have."

His opponent, he says, wants to "nationalize" artificial intelligence. "This is why he's so out of sync with the state." Mr. El-Sayed has called for "public ownership" and "public control" of AI.

Another area of awkwardness for a Michigan Republican running downstream of Mr. Trump: the president's new tariffs on Canadian goods, which Mr. El-Sayed has denounced as making life less affordable for Michiganders. "You've got to be an a—h— to start a trade war with Canada," the Democrat has said.

Mr. Rogers, a former Trump critic who now enjoys the president's endorsement, is circumspect on tariffs, limiting himself to comments on the impact on Michigan of Canada's imports of Chinese-made vehicles. "Let's use this as an opportunity to push back on this Chinese car production issue that Canada has." Tariffs, he says, offer "the perfect opportunity to bring Canada to a better place on allowing these 100% Chinese-made cars into the northern market." Chinese cars "subsidized by the Chinese Communist Party" are, he says, "the biggest existential threat we have to the American automobile business."

Mr. Rogers's team has done its election math. "When I ran in 2024, I got 300,000 more Republican votes than any other statewide candidate in our history," he says. "So that means we have a good pool of people who've already voted for Mike Rogers once." He received almost 2.7 million votes in 2024. If he gets 2.2 million in the lower-turnout midterm, he says, "we'll win this race. We have to re-engage those who voted for us in '24, and work our new Democrat coalitions, which is a real thing." He cites calculations by the pollster Mark Penn, who said that if Mr. Rogers attracts 5% of Ms. Stevens's primary voters, "that would be enough for us to win. And we think we're going to do better than that."

Mr. Rogers also believes he can make inroads into the black vote. Ms. Stevens won much of the urban black vote in the Democratic primary. She swept Wayne and Genesee counties—which include Detroit and Flint, respectively—taking more than 60% of the vote in Detroit. Mr. Rogers thinks some of these voters are ripe for defection: "The African-American community of Michigan has felt a little bit abandoned" by the Democratic Party. In the primary, Mr. El-Sayed won handsomely in college towns, but his opponent

outperformed him comfortably among black voters.

Mr. Rogers and his wife, Kristi, recently met with Detroit City Councilwoman Mary Waters, the leading vote-getter among all council candidates in November 2025. Speaking to the Michigan Chronicle after her meeting with Mr. Rogers, Ms. Waters, who is black, said, "Detroit is not a DSA city. Damn betcha I met with Rogers."

As Mr. Rogers describes the meeting, "We talked about the things that were important for the city. And later she went on TV and said, 'I liked his plans, the things he's going to do for housing, education. And I think every Detroiters should hear them.' She didn't endorse me, but that is a very powerful statement. Because I'm running on issues to fix things in the state."

He cites Michigan's woeful schools: "Our education is now 45th in the country. Two-thirds of our fourth-graders can't read. If you can't read by fourth grade, you have about a 70% chance of being on welfare or in prison." On housing: "You can't buy a home here. First-time homeowners are 40 years old." And more: "We've 200,000 manufacturing jobs. We have the highest utility rates in the Midwest. We have the highest auto-insurance rates in the country." His focus on these issues, he says, resonates more with Michigan's black voters and blue-collar voters than does Mr. El-Sayed's "socialism and divisiveness."

Mr. Rogers has attracted attention in Michigan with his novel outreach to Democratic voters in Detroit, something few Republican candidates for statewide office have taken the trouble to do. His campaign, he says, has "crossed"—knocked on—"1.5 million doors already," he says. "That's twice as many as in 2024." In and around Detroit, "African-American voters have been notably welcoming."

Among the responses he gets are comments to the effect that "for too long the Democrats have taken their support for granted, and they feel I more closely represent their values vs. my opponent." Other black voters have extended support to him, he says, because of his emphasis on solving Michigan's housing crisis—particularly by building on empty lots in Detroit—and improving the schools, which serve as "a pipeline to poverty."

He thinks other Republicans should follow his example with black voters. "I believe that our free-market-oriented solutions are better than the big-government socialists'. Absolutely. And I don't think we should run away from that."

"We go to the city of Detroit and talk about what we want to do. We have found that people are more receptive than you think." He accepts that there will always be "hardened political people of both parties" who just won't budge. "But what we're finding is that people feel abandoned. And that's unsustainable in America."

Mr. Varadarajan, a Journal contributor, is a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute and at New York University Law School's Classical Liberal Institute.

How Did a Nonprofit Become America's Insurance Regulator?


CROSS COUNTRY
By Patrick M. Brenner

New Mexico's Insurance Superintendent Alice Kane recently told state lawmakers that insurers declined to renew more than 6,200 homeowner policies in 2025, the highest number ever. The reflex is to blame greedy insurers and actuaries in Hartford, Conn., pricing wildfire risk in counties they couldn't find on a map.

The nonrenewal crisis got New Mexicans to look closely at their insurance market for the first time in years. That market, it turns out, is strange. Many rules governing it weren't written in Santa Fe, or in Hartford, or by anyone accountable to voters. They were written in Kansas City, Mo., by a private nonprofit.

Americans paid more than \$3 trillion in premiums in 2025 for property and casualty, title, life, accident and health insurance. In most cases, insurers don't answer to federal regulators, because Congress largely leaves insurance to the states. The states built a kind of clearinghouse to determine standard formulas such as how much capital an insurer must hold against every asset on its books. All 50 states participate in the same arrangement.

Welcome to the National Associa-

tion of Insurance Commissioners. The first rule of the organization is you don't talk about the organization. The Government Accountability Office reported in June that the NAIC committee responsible for accrediting state insurance regulators doesn't make its accreditation findings public and that its discussions on the subject are limited to regulators. Accreditation determines whether other states will accept a state's solvency examinations and, in practice, places intense pressure on legislatures to enact specified model laws. The deliberations happen in a room a state resident can't enter and produce a record he can't read.

New Mexico's insurance code governs how insurance holding companies register with the state. It requires every covered insurer to file "a registration statement on a form and in a format prescribed by the national association of insurance commissioners." Until 2014, the statute called for the form "provided by the superintendent," who is accountable to New Mexico's governor. Lawmakers struck those words and replaced them with the private association.

New Mexico's policy-form filings must use transmittal documents matching "the appropriate current" NAIC uniform documents, according to the New Mexico Administrative Code. Rather than point state regula-

tors to a fixed edition of the forms, the rule directs them to the NAIC's dynamic website. Insurers backing reinsurance trusts must report whatever the NAIC annual statement form requires.

Lawyers call this dynamic incorporation by reference. When a statute adopts an outside body's manual as that manual currently stands, the next revision can alter binding obligations under the law without a vote, a hearing, a committee substitute or

States have surrendered much of their power to a private organization with almost no transparency.

a governor's signature. The GAO report describes the machinery without naming it: Accreditation requires states to enact NAIC model laws, and those model laws in turn require regulators to follow NAIC standards.

This arrangement effectively means that an unelected body holds control over states. Daniel Schwarz of the University of Minnesota Law School argued in a 2018 paper published in the Connecticut Insurance Law Journal that the arrangement violates nondelegation principles in every state constitution. He made this

case again in the Hill alongside R.J. Lehmann of the free-market R Street Institute.

The GAO report eight years later made no recommendations and found no wrongdoing. It concluded that the governance and financial information in NAIC's public documents is generally comparable to what an IRS Form 990 collects. NAIC publishes its bylaws and audited financial statements. State regulators told the GAO that accreditation saves money by letting them rely on one another's examinations.

While the GAO report didn't find wrongdoing, the facts it documented are troubling. NAIC has been exempt from filing Form 990 since 1955, on a determination that the organization is "a wholly-owned instrumentality of the states." In 2024 it reported \$161.4 million in revenue, roughly 94% of which comes from the industry whose standards it writes. Its 2026 filing fees are capped at \$108,817 for a single company and \$544,085 for a group. NAIC doesn't disclose what it pays its executives. Its published conflict-of-interest policy covers member commissioners but not, so far as the GAO could determine, its chief executive. An employee handbook includes a conflict-of-interest policy, but it isn't publicly available.

NAIC is designated a 501(c)(3) charitable organization. If NAIC takes the benefits of tax-exempt status, it

should be required to file a 990 like other nonprofits. The GAO noted that the Conference of State Bank Supervisors and the North American Securities Administrators Association are required to file Form 990. Both sit beside NAIC on the Financial Stability Oversight Council.

While Washington could remedy the situation—such as by stripping NAIC of its tax-exempt status—waiting for Congress to act is like waiting to win the lottery. In the meantime, states can push for accountability. Since 1998, Michigan has required NAIC to file an annual report with the state's insurance regulator and both legislative insurance committees. This report must include what NAIC pays its officers, every standard a state must adopt to maintain accreditation and whether its deliberations are open to the public.

Fifty states delegated their rule-making to an organization they supposedly own. But somewhere along the way, the organization they owned began owning them. One state thought to ask more. New Mexico's legislators are already asking why 6,200 homeowners lost their coverage. Like Michigan, they should demand more of the rule makers governing the market. Which state will be the second to do so?

Mr. Brenner is president of the Southwest Public Policy Institute.

OPINION

REVIEW & OUTLOOK

The Hawk at Jackson Hole

Now will Wall Street and the scolds in the financial press believe Kevin Warsh? The new Chairman of the Federal Reserve on Friday delivered his firmest statement to date of his determination to tame inflation, and the clearest explanation of how he thinks the Fed should get there.

An oddity of Mr. Warsh's first 100 days (a milestone he crosses Saturday) has been the determination of the financial world to question the inflation-fighting "credibility" of America's most hawkish central banker since Paul Volcker.

The complaint, to the extent there's a coherent one, is that he hasn't raised interest rates in either of his first two Federal Open Market Committee meetings. Nor is he using "forward guidance" to jawbone markets. Oh, and he chats with President Trump. Ergo, Mr. Warsh must be bending to Mr. Trump's preference for lower interest rates.

Mr. Warsh's speech Friday at the Kansas City Fed's annual confab at Jackson Hole, Wyo., should put all that to rest. His central point was that the Fed isn't done fighting inflation and won't be until its traditional measure of price rises has slowed back to 2%. He conspicuously played down signs of disinflation in recent months by noting evidence that prices for too many goods continue to rise too quickly.

Mr. Warsh's assertion that he'd be "hard pressed to describe broad financial conditions as restrictive" is a notable contrast with his predecessor, Jerome Powell, who believed the Fed already had tightened enough to tame inflation sooner or later. None of this is specific forward guidance, yet it's a firmer message on inflation than markets have heard from the central bank in some time.

Mr. Warsh's assessment of the economy is marked by unusual and welcome humility for the Fed. Consider his take on artificial intelligence. He's previously implied that AI's boost to productivity might allow looser monetary policy. After Friday's speech, it's clear his views are more nuanced. AI's effect on the economy and monetary policy will depend on a wide range of unknowns concerning which sorts of firm prove most profitable, how AI af-

fects employment, and other factors.

We especially enjoyed his point that not long ago the economic talk at Jackson Hole was all about "secular stagnation" and the "global savings glut." Well, he said, "times sure have changed," and an alert Fed must change with it.

His speech should put another canard to rest. Among the task forces Mr. Warsh has created to advance reform at the Fed, the panels on data sources and inflation dynamics have given rise to a view that he's looking for excuses to be more dovish. Wall Street worked itself into a lather over the idea that the Fed could adopt a more forgiving inflation measure than the personal-consumption-expenditure index the central bank tracks.

Instead, on Friday Mr. Warsh rejected the assumption embedded in the Fed's current economic models that inflation naturally reverts to its 2% level over the longer term. This puts the Fed back on the hook for every tenth of a percentage point of its inflation mandate. His emphasis on real-time data seems intended to avoid the backward-looking false dawn that led the Powell Fed to cut rates prematurely in two rounds in 2024 and 2025.

While the usual Keynesian suspects will claim it's old-fashioned, Mr. Warsh's assertion that "money has something to do with monetary policy" is another way of holding the Fed accountable. He acknowledges financial technology has changed the definition of the money supply and money's velocity. But Mr. Warsh seems to be saying the Fed shouldn't be blind to early warnings, such as asset-price run-ups, that its policies are too loose. If only his predecessors had thought the same.

* * *

A maddening feature of the "is Kevin Warsh too dovish?" debate in his first months is how it misses the point of his chairmanship. The Fed is overdue for a rethink of its economic models, its operating methods, and its overall approach to its dual mandate of price stability and full employment.

Mr. Warsh is pressing ahead with an aggressive reform agenda, as he made clear on Friday. Wall Street would be wise focus on that.

A new poll finds border taxes aren't popular in the Lone Star State.

The November midterm elections will be in part a referendum on President Trump's border taxes, and most polls show them losing. A new poll by Overton Insights and the Texas Public Policy Foundation finds that tariffs are unpopular in the Lone Star State, especially among Hispanics. Houston, Republicans have a tariff problem.

The survey, which was shared with us exclusively and will be released next Wednesday, shows that Texans overall disapprove of his tariffs, 54% to 46%. Texans who didn't vote in a party primary—generally independents and folks who are less partisan—disapproved of them, 68% to 32%. Hispanics gave them the thumbs down, 69% to 31%.

The latter is especially notable because Mr. Trump won 55% of the state's Hispanic vote in 2024, no doubt in part owing to frustration with Democrats' handling of inflation. But Hispanics also strongly oppose the President's blunderbuss border taxes targeting trade partners like Mexico and Canada, which raise costs for consumers and businesses.

The Texas economy is heavily exposed to

tariffs because of its cross-border trade and integrated supply chains with Mexico. Texas traded \$303 billion in goods with Mexico and overall exported \$299 billion of manufactured products in 2025. The latter include electronics and computers (\$71 billion), chemicals (\$55 billion) and transportation equipment (\$29 billion).

Because Texas is the largest state exporter of goods, it suffers a bigger brunt from retaliatory tariffs, such as those that Canada plans to levy on the U.S. in response to Mr. Trump's tariff escalation. In case he hasn't noticed, the tariffs have become an albatross for Republicans in close races across the country, including Texas.

Republicans hoped to pick up a couple of House seats in south Texas with large Hispanic populations after redrawing the state map, but those districts are drifting in Democrats' direction this year. Most recent polls show Democrat James Talarico leading Republican Attorney General Ken Paxton in the state's Senate contest. Every time he threatens more tariffs, Mr. Trump is making Democratic leader Chuck Schumer's day.

admissions data to root out race preferences by proxy, might some schools defend themselves by saying they were obligated to satisfy the accreditors? If the ABA's unhurried approach to *Students for Fair Admissions* gave cover to further illegal race discrimination, it's a problem.

The Education Department also suggests that the accreditation shop isn't sufficiently separate and independent from the ABA, as regulations require. That's a problem because the bar association is a professional guild for practicing attorneys, whose interests aren't identical to those of law students or the public. Despite this, the ABA has enjoyed an accreditation monopoly, which state policies have further entrenched, though some of those are now being reconsidered or repealed.

Texas, Florida, Washington and Alabama all have recently moved to reduce the ABA's gatekeeping function in law licensing. Tennessee is considering a similar step, with support from officials at the Federal Trade Commission and Justice Department. The ABA's accreditation body, they wrote in a recent letter, "is dominated by law school faculty and administrators with strong incentives to thwart lower cost alternatives for legal education."

A broader range of options also could let law students skip the progressive dogma that pervades many campuses. The pressure seems to be working: The same day the Education Department report was released, the ABA's accreditation arm voted to meet in September to consider rolling back diversity and equity mandates. Too little, too late. The Trump Administration might not settle for half measures.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Prelude to the Decline and Fall of a Republic

Peggy Noonan's excellent column "The Art of the Self-Deal" (Declarations, Aug. 22) somewhat echoes William Bennett's 1998 book "The Death of Outrage." Then, as now, the electorate largely accepts a lack of integrity in elected officials, feeling helpless to demand otherwise and continuing to fund political parties and candidates clearly unfit in character, and often in intelligence, to occupy even the most menial of public offices.

Reforming elected officials' behavior first requires reforming the political machinery that nominates their candidacies. In the absence of revising the entire electoral system, a reasonable start might be to consider Ronald Reagan's wisdom that a child can't be disciplined by lectures alone, but by cutting its allowance until he conforms to what is expected of him—subsequently expressed more forcefully as, "Starve the beast!"

It's a message that the media should, but likely won't, deliver.

ALAN D. LEWIS
Jupiter, Fla.

Complaining about political self-dealing is reasonable, but blaming a single politician misses the root cause. Remember: Congress impeached Donald Trump in 2019 for allegedly pressuring Ukraine to investigate Biden family self-dealing. The irony is stark, as is the broader pattern.

Self-dealing thrives because Congress has built a system with massive money and power at stake. When the federal government spends over \$20,000 per American annually, en-

forces tens of thousands of laws and 190,000 pages of regulations, it creates an irresistible market for selling influence. That massive concentration of authority naturally attracts officeholders who seek to trade government favors for personal and family wealth. Ultimately, voters are the enablers. Self-dealing persists because we continually elect politicians who expand Washington's power and spending.

RICH BATEY
Aliso Viejo, Calif.

Ms. Noonan is right that the deepest danger of government corruption isn't bad policy or wasted money. It is what corruption eventually does to a people. When citizens repeatedly watch powerful officials bend rules, escape consequences, enrich themselves, or place partisan loyalty above principle, misconduct becomes normal. Cynicism replaces trust, and eventually the public begins to assume that integrity itself is naïve.

As Edward Gibbon observed in "The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire": "The corruption of Roman manners would always supply flatterers eager to applaud, and ministers prepared to serve" the vices of those in power.

Political decay and cultural decay reinforce one another. Rome's institutions couldn't indefinitely remain healthy when those entrusted with them abandoned the virtues necessary to sustain them. Corruption becomes existential when people stop being shocked by it.

GREGG JACKSON
Denver

If You Gag Treasury, You Gag the Market, Too

There is a fundamental logical flaw in the core argument in Stanley F. Druckenmiller's critique of the U.S. Treasury Department's attempts to lower yields by retiring illiquid issuance ("Let the Bond Market Speak," op-ed, Aug. 25).

Mr. Druckenmiller argues that such transactions interfere with prices, distorting valuable messages that could be inferred from the market. But Treasury, like any issuer of securities, is itself part of the market. Every decision it makes about the pace and composition of new issuance, and every decision about

whether to retire or not retire existing issues, is a legitimate choice made under enlightened self-interest. What bond issuer doesn't seek, with every choice, to lower its borrowing costs and manage its risk as it sees fit? Such choices don't distort the market—they are integral to the market and unavoidable. Indeed, they are part of the price-formation process that creates the signals Mr. Druckenmiller wishes for.

DONALD L. LUSKIN
Chief investment officer
TrendMacro
Dallas

And There Go the Michigan and Maine Races

Regarding your editorial "The Dumbest Trade War Revisited" (Aug. 24): A key hidden cost of the on-again, off-again tariffs with Canada and others is the strain on buyer-supplier relationships. Buyers and suppliers must negotiate how to split the new costs, possibly straining otherwise effective relationships. Their time would be better spent working together to make the highest-quality products at the lowest cost. This hidden price of tariffs also takes a personal toll on the managers. While likely impossible to measure, the trade policy uncertainty has caused substantial harm to products, supply chains and people alike.

JOHN GRAY
Columbus, Ohio

Our 1.27-Million-Year Debt

Regarding "U.S. Debt Eclipses \$40 Trillion" (Page One, Aug. 20): The figure is so large that it has lost meaning. Perhaps converting dollars to seconds can put it in perspective. A million seconds from now is less than 12 days away. A billion seconds is about 32 years from now. A trillion seconds is nearly 32 millennia into the future. And 40 trillion seconds is about 1.27 million years. Put differently, if we could pay down a \$40 trillion debt at the rate of one dollar every second—day and night, without stopping—it would take roughly 1.27 million years to finish.

Washington routinely speaks in trillions. Perhaps we should all stop and consider what that word actually means. The numbers may be abstract. The debt is not.

THOMAS SIEMS
Colleyville, Texas

Where'd All That Money Go?

Regarding your editorial "Ro Khanna Gets a Wealth Tax Education" (Aug. 21): California's population has been fairly stagnant for the last 10 years. Yet, Medicaid payments have roughly doubled to over \$150 billion annually. Before Rep. Khanna attempts to confiscate ever-increasing amounts from the wealthy entrepreneurs in his state, perhaps he should spend a bit of his time focusing on the expense side of the healthcare equation.

MICHAEL J GALASSI
Hurst, Texas

Letters intended for publication should be emailed to wsj.letters@wsj.com. Please include your city, state and telephone number. All letters are subject to editing, and unpublished letters cannot be acknowledged.

Busting the ABA's Accreditation Monopoly

The Trump Administration wants to reverse the leftward march of the nation's universities, and that includes taking on the ancient problem of accreditation. The American Bar Association (ABA) reviews about 200 law schools, and in many states its stamp of approval is required for graduates to take the bar exam. Now the Trump Administration is threatening the ABA's privilege.

The Education Department released an 86-page staff report last week that recommends against continuing the ABA's accreditation authority. One reason cited is that the ABA hasn't adequately responded to the Supreme Court's 2023 decision in *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard*, which made clear that race preferences are illegal.

The ABA had told schools to show "concrete" efforts toward diversity and inclusion in their student bodies and faculties. Though it anticipated in 2022 that the Justices might change the legality, according to the Education Department's report, it "continued into the 2024-2025 review cycle to provide training and evaluate law schools" based on the old standard, before it was finally suspended.

That sounds abstract, so recall that the Justice Department this month accused Duke Law School of illegally discriminating by race in its incoming classes from 2023-25. Duke has said it is reviewing the allegations and is committed to following the law. According to the Justice Department, white and Asian applicants denied admission had higher median LSAT scores than black students who were accepted.

As the Trump Administration digs into more

The bar association's power over law schools gets a Trump challenge.

Pepper ... And Salt

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL



“Legend has it that he was raised by humans.”

OPINION

Dolly Parton Leaves Us Wanting More



DECLARATIONS
By Peggy Noonan

At Buckingham Palace the Coldstream Guards Band played “9 to 5” when they heard of her death. The White House ordered flags flown at half staff. In New York they turned the top of the Empire State Building pink and sparkly. She was born in the hills of Tennessee, the fourth of 12 children of a sharecropper and his wife who lived in a shack without electricity or running water. She went on to become an icon, legend, goddess and what they were calling her all over social media, the earth angel. What a stupendous life. TV anchors always lead into the story of a celebrity who’s died, “The nation mourns today.” It’s almost never true; it takes a lot to make a nation mourn. But it’s true this time. Things feel lonelier without that girl.

Her talent, ambition, depth, faith and generosity gave her an appeal that was close to universal.

I’ve been thinking about some of the elements of her extraordinary impact. I will call her Dolly because we all did. She was a great artist and a great person. They can’t always go together and maybe often don’t, but she took her talent and worked it to the bone, took the profit and gave a lot of it away. How would you like to have it said of you that you would have been a billionaire if you hadn’t been so generous? She knew where she was from but didn’t build a fence around it. She was a white working-class girl, a Southerner from the hollers. You are

old moneyed establishment from back East? Come on in, put your feet up. You’re a black intellectual from a great university up north? Settle in. You didn’t have to be uncomfortable that you were different from her, because she wasn’t uncomfortable being different from you. “I had an ambition and it burned inside of me,” she once said. “It was something I knew would take me out of the mountains.” She loved where she was from and wanted to get out as soon as possible. Can’t get more American than that. She was modest and wryly self-deprecating, but she knew exactly who she was. Sometimes in life you’re modest because you don’t know who you are, and sometimes you know who you are but it leaves you arrogant. She had the balance: You’re just a human and so you have a lot to be modest about, and yet, as American Evangelical Christians used to say, “Head high, you’re the daughter of a King.” Her last song is locked in a vault to be opened on her 100th birthday, in 2046, and has to do with her place in history. That isn’t a sign of chronic self-doubt. She had an earned authority and somehow communicated that it might not be wise to mess with her. On CNN a former assistant, Wendy Brokaw, said it’s true Dolly had “the biggest heart,” but “she was also really wise”—meaning she could look you in the eye and quickly take your measure. She was merry about her public persona and invented a Dolly who would be famous forever and stuck with it. She said she modeled her look on the “town tramp.” “It costs a lot of money to look this cheap.” She didn’t fight the dumb clichés that early on gathered around her. The joke about Dolly Parton for at least the first half of her career was that she had big breasts and they must always be the leering object of talk-show hosts: “And now, here they are.” She could have shown indignation and confided her pain in interviews. *What about my art?* Instead, she laughed louder than anyone. She told Oprah Winfrey, gesturing toward



Dolly Parton (1946-2026) in 1977.

herself, “I call these my weapons of mass distraction.” She complained to David Letterman: “Nobody notices I’ve got a great ass too.” She believed in her talent, bet everything on it. She told interviewers that based on the evidence of old tapes it appeared “Jolene” and “I Will Always Love You” might have been written on the same day. That would have been prodigious if they’d been written the same year. She never seemed shallow. The shallow can never quite be tender, only sentimental. “Coat of Many Colors,” to pick one song, is tender about people who have nothing and make do. I have always wondered if, while it was based on the truths of Dolly’s childhood, it might also have

been inspired by Edna St. Vincent Millay’s, “The Ballad of the Harp Weaver,” a kind of magical-realism poem about the power of familial love. For artists, inspiration comes in many ways and I trace it there because Parton was widely read and had good taste. When Marie Claire magazine asked her to survey her reading shelf, she picked up John Steinbeck’s “The Grapes of Wrath.” She said she loved it, had read it three times, and identified with “the hard work and the poor people and the struggles and the times.” Show business isn’t prissy, it’s fleshy, earthy. We think of stars as an elevated species shining in heaven, but they’re in the most physical and earth-bound of businesses, and it involves

A Food Crisis May Be Coming to the U.S.

By Jeff Stier

In my last face-to-face conversation with my mentor, agronomist Norman Borlaug (1914-2009), he told me to be on guard for shocks to the food supply system. They could be from naturally occurring phenomena like wheat rust and weather or from human activity such as sustained global conflicts. When a man credited with saving at least a billion people from starvation asks you to pay attention to something, it isn’t a message you forget or ignore. We are in the midst of the kind of disruption he foresaw, due to the triple whammy of the Russia-Ukraine war, Iran’s control of the Strait of Hormuz and China’s manipulation of the global fertilizer market. The U.S. government has focused on the two armed conflicts, but we ignore at our peril China’s exacerbation of the wars’ effects on the fertilizer supply. Borlaug was awarded the 1970 Nobel Peace Prize, of all categories, because food security is national security. As he liked to say, quoting Lord John Boyd Orr, “You can’t build peace on empty stomachs.”

The White House hasn’t ignored the emerging crisis, but it must take urgent and concrete steps to stabilize domestic fertilizer supplies. Fertilizer price volatility threatens to undermine two pillars of the administration’s domestic priorities: controlling inflation, particularly food inflation; and eating more fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Let me set the geopolitical chessboard. Russia is a leading fertilizer exporter, but its domestic needs have taken priority amid the war. Iran’s disruption of the Strait of Hormuz interferes with petroleum movement and fertilizer shipments. China, a major fertilizer user, has long been the world’s second-largest exporter of fertilizer—until recently. Over the past year, China has begun to pull back on exports to manipulate the market.

Chinese producers use American sulfur to manufacture phosphate fertilizers, which supply phosphorus—one of the three primary plant nutrients along with nitrogen and potassium. Backyard gardeners like me know it as the P in N-P-K. Beginning late last year, China suspended exports of phosphate fertilizers. It then broadened its restrictions on additional fertilizer varieties in March and halted most sulfuric-acid exports beginning in May. Taken together, the suspensions and restrictions have likely affected as much as 40 million metric tons of Chinese fertilizer exports. Largely because of disruptions to petroleum production and sulfur shipments through the Strait of Hormuz, sulfur prices have increased substantially. China’s continued uptake of sulfur while banning fertilizer exports has contributed to a doubling of sulfur prices this year alone. Much of the world’s sulfur is recovered as a byproduct of oil refining

and natural-gas processing. It is then converted into sulfuric acid, which reacts with mined phosphate rock to produce phosphoric acid used to make phosphate fertilizers. China’s state-owned Yuntianhua Group, one of the country’s largest phosphate-fertilizer producers, depends on sulfur—the same globally

China, Russia and Iran control the global fertilizer market. That could mean sky-high grocery prices.

traded raw material China procures from American companies. Yet Beijing’s restrictions prevent Yuntianhua and other Chinese producers from exporting phosphate fertilizer. China is benefiting from access to an open global market for raw materials while simultaneously denying that

same market access to buyers of its finished fertilizer products. Even in a normal market, this behavior has the potential to distort the cost of fertilizer for American farmers. When it’s done by a leading U.S. adversary at the expense of American manufacturers and farmers during a supply crunch caused by Chinese allies, it becomes a casebook example of a national food security threat. We can—and should—be free traders. But free trade can’t mean allowing Chinese state-owned enterprises to procure critical raw materials from American suppliers while Beijing prevents American farmers from purchasing the resulting fertilizer. We must level the playing field. The Trump administration is right to promote domestic oil and natural-gas production. Natural gas is a critical input for nitrogen fertilizer, while oil refining and gas processing produce much of the sulfur needed for phosphate fertilizer. Energy security

and food security are inseparable. If you don’t like the price at the pump as a result of Iran’s belligerence, you certainly won’t like the price at the grocery store as a result of China’s exploitation of global conflict and its trade practices. As BMI senior commodities analyst Matthew Biggin told Reuters this year, “China restricts supplies rather than coming to the rescue during global tightness. . . . The export restrictions exist because of their tight domestic balance—they’re prioritizing security and insulating their domestic market from price shocks.” Beyond that, China’s actions threaten the affordability of our domestic food supply. The White House should take a harder line against China and strengthen our domestic fertilizer supply chain to reduce our vulnerability to the Russia-China-Iran axis.

Mr. Stier is an adviser to the Heartland Institute.

Trump Discovers His Inner Nixon on Rock Concerts



BUSINESS
WORLD
By Holman W.
Jenkins, Jr.

Companies are forever merging or spinning off units, launching new products and services, discontinuing old ones. Institutional capital is available to entrepreneurs to disrupt even the most established industries. Firms raise prices, lower prices, seek this way and that to attenuate the competitive forces that drive every business relentlessly toward profitlessness. In short, it isn’t 1890 anymore, when the Sherman Antitrust Act became law. The Journal reported this week on Donald Trump’s questionable intervention in the Live Nation/Ticket-

master antitrust prosecution. The incident recalls Richard Nixon’s 1971 meddling in the ITT case, which, in a remarkable absence of coincidence, resulted in a large donation to Nixon’s re-election effort. As with any subject, when you dig you might reach conclusions surprising to the casual observer. Two Brookings Institution economists broached a taboo subject in 2003. They asked whether antitrust enforcement actually produces public benefit. Their finding was skeptical. It has since been buttressed by an epic run of cases (certainly epic in expense and man-hours) tossed out by federal judges. This litany of defeat includes showy federal efforts to scuttle mergers and acquisitions involving Whole Foods and Wild Oats, AT&T and Time Warner, and Microsoft and Activision. Every prosecutorial effort nowadays seems to begin with a “market definition” gymnastic, a nadir of self-respect being the Federal Trade Commission’s 2003 lawsuit claiming that “superpremium” ice cream doesn’t compete with, er, ice cream. The case was a flare in the night. A letter writer to this newspaper would much later conclude, “Without the continued threat of antitrust actions, the post-government market value of current federal, antitrust employees would be much lower.” Could some transaction or arrangement be so anticompetitive as to merit intervention? Yep. Occupational licensing and zoning restrictions, promoted at the local level by organized interests, are two such examples. But this isn’t what we

get. We get the kind of case brought by ex-Trump trustbuster Makan Delrahim and current California Attorney General Rob Bonta. Mr. Delrahim showed his quality in the AT&T-Time Warner lawsuit, promptly flopping in court. Mr. Bonta now has essentially revived the same failed argument to block Warner’s merger with Paramount.

One thing his intervention won’t do is fix the problem of mispriced Taylor Swift and Bad Bunny tickets.

But the Live Nation case detailed in the Journal is a wonder all its own, a true mess. Most of the gripes against the concert-promoting giant could be resolved with a solution that has nothing to with antitrust. That solution: big-name musical acts simply charging market-clearing prices for their tickets. Antitrust isn’t the answer unless you think Taylor Swift, Bruce Springsteen and Bad Bunny engage in predatory pricing. Yet obviated in an instant would be many aggravations the government now links to Live Nation’s “market power.” Artists are presumed to underprice their tickets because they don’t want to be seen gouging their fans. An alternative explanation some have proposed: Bands prefer a chaotic ticket-selling process because it rewards the most obsessive fan who will spend a fortune on mer-

chandise once inside the show. Mr. Trump, after meeting with Live Nation officials, ended federal participation in the case, but it continues in the hands of 34 state litigants toward an outcome 100% guaranteed to do the public little perceptible good. Antitrust practitioners operate within a mental framework that overlooks normal prosecutorial discretion, which asks: Does bringing a particular lawsuit offer a net benefit to society? Unfortunately, America doesn’t sunset its laws and agencies. When these run out of legitimate purpose, they become actual menaces. A righteous job of any president is to protect the public from these menaces. Mr. Trump has been a severely mixed bag in this regard. Witness his Federal Communications Commission, a recent case study in obsolescence run amok. What might help? Law schools could use their antitrust curricula as a secret screening device to steer cynics and chiselers who accidentally get through the door toward alternative professions such as telemarketing. Law is supposed to be a noble profession, devoted to truth and justice. The larger problem here will remain until Congress rethinks the competition laws, finding a more coherent basis for intervention than bureaucratic life-extension. This seems unlikely right now, even with antitrust’s shocking record of courtroom failures. But the great virtue of democracy is that, as long as there’s another election on the horizon, hope springs eternal for Congress doing something.

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Founded June 10, 1847

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YOUR VOICE

Dropping a child off at college stirs up a tangle of emotions

By John Biemer
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

It hit me in our daughter's new dorm room as we were dropping her off recently for her freshman year of college. The time for my wife and me to say goodbye was fast approaching.

Our daughter was lying on her freshly made bed with the new pink comforter. Her head was on my wife's lap. Her legs were dangling off the bed, her sneakers still on. I looked at her and gave her foot a little squeeze, and a series of images instantly flashed through my mind.

The precious, perfect little feet of a newborn. A baby's first footsteps. The tiny shoes of a toddler. The sound of a teenager bounding down the stairs of our home. These familiar sneakers I was squeezing right then that would stay in that dorm room that night.

And that's when the waterworks started. Tears welled up from deep within me, a feeling of love so strong it ached.

Anyone who has dropped off a kid at college knows this feeling. This was not my first rodeo. We had seen off our older son to college a couple of years earlier, so I knew it was coming. But this is our only daughter, and it hit me hard.

I'm 53 now. I've been to weddings, funerals and graduations. I've watched plenty of tearjerker films. And yet, there's nothing that feels quite like a college drop-off.

The mother of our daughter's new roommate confessed to us that she had been crying repeatedly in recent weeks. Her thoughts would turn to her daughter, and the tears would just flow. At home. In the grocery store. Even at the bank.

"Why do we feel like this?" she asked my wife and me.



John Biemer and his wife and daughter during college drop-off. **JOHN BIEMER**

The best explanation I can come up with for this complicated, conflicted feeling is that this major milestone stirs up a unique maelstrom of emotions, all at once. Emotions that pile on top of each other and simply knock you out. I've tried to make sense of it, and this is the best I can do.

Pride: We are extremely proud of our

children and all they've accomplished to get to this point. The hard work, long hours of studying, and all the time devoted to high school sports and extracurriculars have paid off. They are college kids now! And we are proud of ourselves, too, for raising such remarkable kids. All those changed diapers, bedtime stories, packed lunches, rides to soccer practice and help with science fair projects have led to this moment.

Joy/excitement: College was among the best four years of my life, as it was for many others. I learned a ton, grew up and made lifelong friends. There's a lot of fun stuff too! Parties and football games and concerts and maybe even a chance to study abroad. Once you get into the real world, life isn't like that so much. We are so excited that our kids get to experience this. Maybe even a little jealous! And we can't wait to visit them and get a little taste of their college life too.

Grief/sadness: There's no getting around this. This loved one who was in your house every day for 18 years has moved on. When you get home from that drop-off, you will not hear those footsteps in your house anymore. There will be an empty seat at the dinner table. It's not forever. They will return home sometimes. But they, and you, have entered a new phase of life. Your kids are growing up. It's normal. It's great! But you will feel that void when they're not around. And it hurts profoundly.

Nervousness: You are a concerned parent. You can't help but have a lot of worries. This transition is hard on you, and it may very well be hard on your kiddo too. How will they handle it? Will they make new friends? How will they fare in college-level classes? Will they eat right? Can they do their own laundry? Will they make the

right decisions? Will they be safe? All these worries put a pit in your stomach.

Stress: Let's face it. Moving a kid into college is a lot. There's so much to buy to outfit that dorm room these days. There's a lot of paperwork at the start of a school year. Classes to schedule. And big bills. College is not cheap these days. It adds up to a busy summer. Then we packed our minivan to the gills and made an 800-mile drive to campus. Move-in day itself, with all the moving parts and the people to meet, can create quite a bit of stress too.

Mortality: Not to be morbid, but if your kids are getting older and becoming adults, that means you are getting older too. You're a long way from being a college kid yourself when your kids are in college.

You throw all these emotions together, and it's a heady mix. It's a lot to process. I'm still working it out myself, as we've returned home, and I find myself lingering a little outside my daughter's quiet, empty bedroom.

She will do great things in college. We will keep in touch and visit and cheer for her all the way. And we are happy that we also still happen to have a high school kid at home for a few more years, to cherish our time with him until we go through another big college drop-off and another big transition.

And now, when I think about my daughter going through her first days of college, so far from home, I've added one more feeling to this mix: lucky.

I feel so very lucky to have reasons why my heart aches so much at college drop-offs. I feel so very lucky to have children I love this much.

John Biemer, a former Chicago Tribune reporter, is a physician living in Oak Park.

Voice of the people

Attitudes toward plastic use

Regarding the Aug. 23 article "Scientists push leaders to act on microplastics pollution": I found it ironic that on the day I read this article, I attended an event that illustrated part of the problem with microplastics invading the Great Lakes and bodies as well.

I attended Supertri Chicago to cheer on my daughter who was participating in the triathlon. I couldn't help noticing the abundance of single-use plastic everywhere. This was not only the case with the event organizers serving up thousands of sports drinks to participants, but also the crowd writ large. Many of the fans carried single-use plastic bottled drinks; bottles were left on the ground or thrown away, not recycled.

I also see this at social events such as concerts. When I attend shows at Ravinia, people bring or buy single-use plastic bottled drinks, only to throw the bottles away, as Ravinia makes no real effort to offer recycling options. As large as Ravinia is, it has only a handful of recycling bins. Its effort in regards to the environment is an attitude I'll never understand.

Which brings me back to the article. Until attitudes and behaviors change, not much progress will be made in reducing the harm plastics have on our lived environment. This has been going on for decades; it feels like Sisyphus.

I believe the public has no idea where plastics come from and the negative impact they have on the environment. This is due to naivete and campaigns by the perpetrators to the contrary.

For instance, do people realize that plastics are made from petrochemicals? That is oil and gas companies, such as Shell and ExxonMobil, to name two. These products help these companies stay relevant. Shell has one of the largest plastic factories in the country in Pennsylvania; it produces 1.6 million metric tons of plastic a year. The chief product is pellets of polyethylene, a common plastic.

Furthermore, the current administration does not care about the environment. On the contrary, it has cozier up to industry to degrade the environment even more.

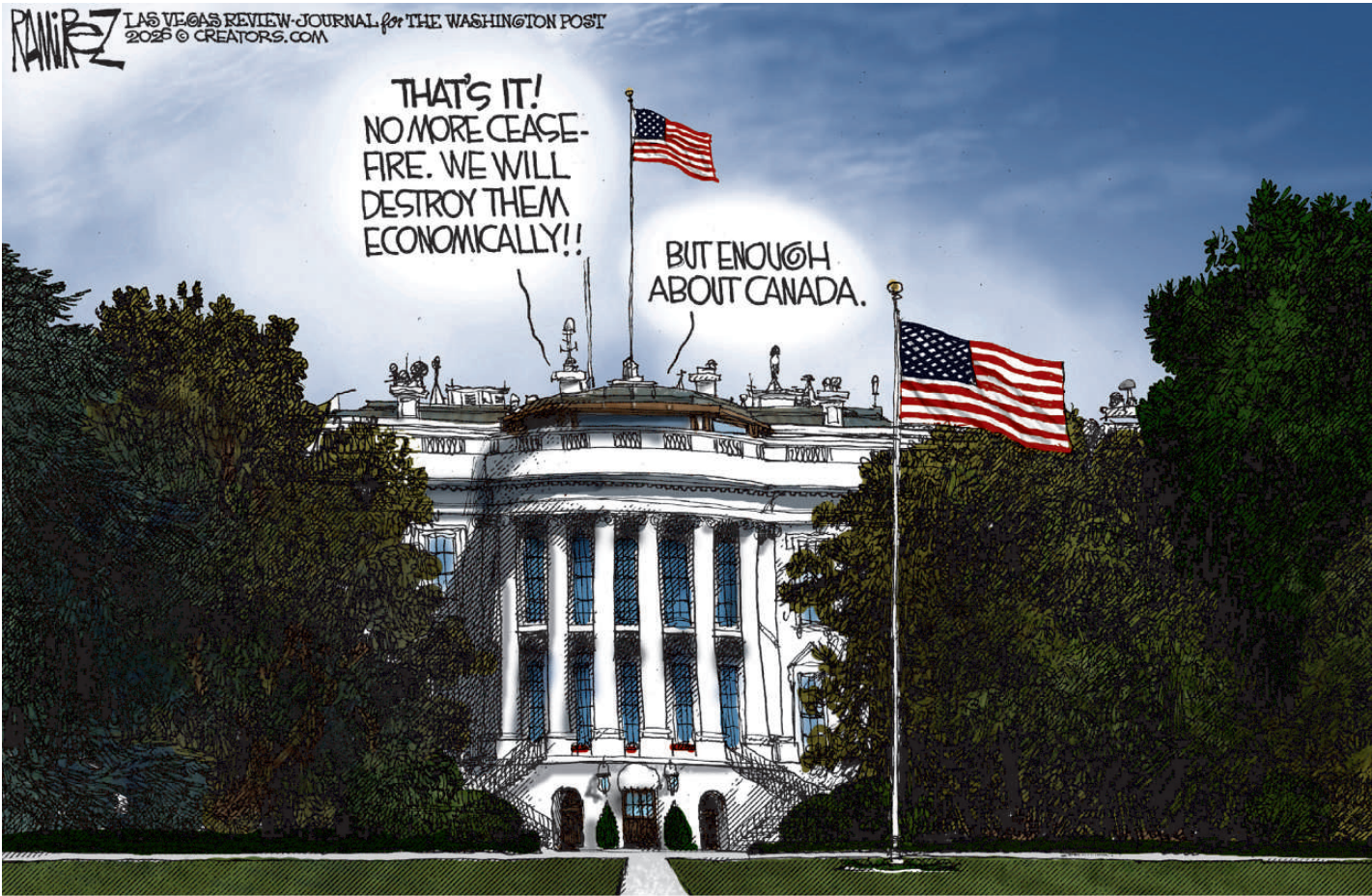
This article might prove enlightening to some, but will it and others be enough to change attitudes and consumer choices to make a difference?

— Fred Paul, Northbrook

Give fans of 'Mully' closure

As a lifelong Chicago sports fan from Schaumburg, I am deeply disappointed by how 104.3 The Score handled Mike Mulligan's sudden departure. Dropping a 23-year station veteran without letting him say a proper on-air goodbye to his loyal audience was completely classless.

This corporate behavior puts fans like me in an unfair position. I grew up admiring the Payton family legacy and want to support Jarrett Payton in his new morning



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MICHAEL RAMIREZ/LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL

role. However, management's rude treatment of "Mully" makes me question if I want to support this station at all. Instead of enthusiastically telling people that Payton is on morning radio, the conversation now centers on how bogus the station was to a local legend.

The mature move would be for management to invite Mully back for a final farewell segment to give fans the closure they deserve.

— Christopher Collins Sr., Schaumburg

Devastated by host's removal

As a longtime Score listener, I was devastated and saddened to hear of the firing of Mike Mulligan. Mike brought professionalism, sincerity and humor in covering Chicago sports teams.

I wish Mully the best in his future endeavors, whether it be in retirement or getting another gig down the dial.

— Tom Ternetti, Rock Falls, Illinois

Flags lowered for Parton

I don't want to be a killjoy, and I loved Dolly Parton, but what is up with this half-staff frenzy we have been in as of late?

Some Americans disagree with President Donald Trump's decision to lower the U.S. flag to half staff for a week to honor Parton, citing tradition and the U.S. Flag Code.

The U.S. Flag Code generally reserves half staff for the president, vice president, justices of the Supreme Court, members of Congress, governors and in cases of national tragedy. It can be argued that entertainers and cultural icons should not receive a nationwide presidential directive of this scope.

The rare bipartisan admiration of Parton, her decadeslong cultural impact and her philanthropy clearly are worthy of a grateful nation, but doesn't flying the flag at half staff overstep the traditional scope of the flag's use?

— Charles Michael Sitero, Ormond Beach, Florida

Teacher's dream comes true

It thrilled me to read the article featuring Edward Gardner, who is a new special education teacher at Burnham Mathematics & Science Academy ("For a new special ed teacher, it's a 'dream come true,'" Aug. 24).

He had a dream to become a teacher and worked hard to make his dream come true. What an example he is to all who choose to follow their dreams and work to achieve them. I would love to hear more about this teacher and how he is making a difference in the lives of his students.

Is it possible to check in with him during

the school year and let Tribune readers know how he is finding his career rewarding?

— Martha Walkington, Bloomington, Illinois

A fan of grim reaper in 'Bliss'

My print version of the Tribune is my favorite part of every day, and the comics are my favorite part of my daily Tribune. I love the grim reaper panels of "Bliss." I find it comforting to see the grim reaper over the peaceful hill in a limousine.

— Susan Ohde, Chicago

Note to readers

Construction on Chicago streets and bridges this summer has created headaches for many drivers. We'd like to hear from you about your frustrations with the delays and the city's management of the closures and detours. Send a letter of no more than 400 words by Wednesday, Sept. 2 to letters@chicagotribune.com. Be sure to include your full name and city/town.

For online-exclusive letters, go to www.chicagotribune.com/letters. Email your letter submissions, 400 words or less, to letters@chicagotribune.com. Include your full name, address and phone number.

Opinion

How the A.I. debt binge sinks the global economy

The A.I.-fueled debt bubble will likely result in a painful downturn.

Robin Wigglesworth

Despite all the hoopla about Nvidia becoming the first company valued at over \$5 trillion, the listing of Elon Musk's SpaceX and the looming initial public offerings of Anthropic and OpenAI, artificial intelligence is no longer primarily a stock market story. It is a story of debt, and that should worry us. Unfortunately, manias fueled mainly by credit almost inevitably end badly.

For now, set aside both prognostications of an A.I.-powered economic miracle or an A.I.-generated "job-mageddon." No one really knows just how impactful the age of thinking machines will prove — the technology is simply too different from anything that has come before. It famously took a long time for the computer age to appear in economic data, too.

But we do have a lot of experience with debt-fueled investment sprees, such as the railway euphoria of the 19th century, the telecommunications revolution of the 20th century and more recently the 21st-century housing boom. They all resulted in nasty economic downturns, even if the underlying technology proved transformative.

Why has debt become so central to A.I.? Previously, most investments in data centers and related infrastructure were paid for by the abundant cash flows generated by the likes of Facebook or Google Search. But large-scale A.I. models depend on immense computing power. And the resulting scope of the investments required to build that power is increasingly forcing the "hyperscalers" — the small club of companies that are aggressively ramping up their A.I. data center investments — to turn to loans, bonds and sundry other forms of financial obligations to pay for the party.

The debt binge is astounding even to industry insiders. Last year, analysts at Barclays, the British bank, collected a string of unsourced quotes from an A.I. data center conference they attended, which ranged from "enjoy the ride on a rocket without seatbelts" to the "best way to describe the market is bankers."

Since then, things have become even more bonkers. American A.I. companies had already tapped debt markets for \$217 billion last year, according to Morgan Stanley. By mid-August, they had already smashed past this total, with \$445 billion of debt issued, and the investment bank expects the overall debt plunge to hit nearly \$600 billion for 2026. That is more than the combined 2026 budgets for the Departments of Justice, Transportation and Education.

And that is just the start, judging by what the hyperscalers have told investors. Their future capital expenditure plans amount to roughly 3 percent of U.S. G.D.P. a year, in 2027 to 2029, according to calculations by Torsten Slok, the chief economist of Apollo, an investment firm. Back-of-the-envelope calculations suggest that's almost \$1 trillion a year. It also works in negative terms, represent a larger and faster relative ramp-up than even that of U.S. residential housing in the years preceding the 2008 crash.

In other words, if 2025's A.I. frenzy was merely bonkers, we are now enter-

ing the territory of bankers squared — or perhaps even cubed.

For the most part, investors do not seem worried yet. The dot-com bubble and bust is often seen as the best parallel to the current A.I. boom, feeding hopes that the economic fallout from a bust will prove manageable. The U.S. stock market lost almost half its value between the 2000 peak and 2003 trough, but the U.S. economy suffered only a mild, brief setback. And, ultimately,

computers did revolutionize the world.

It's tempting to expect the A.I. boom to play out in a similar way, unleashing immense prosperity. After all, the hyperscalers enjoy vastly profitable core businesses, so perhaps they will be able to easily handle their debts.

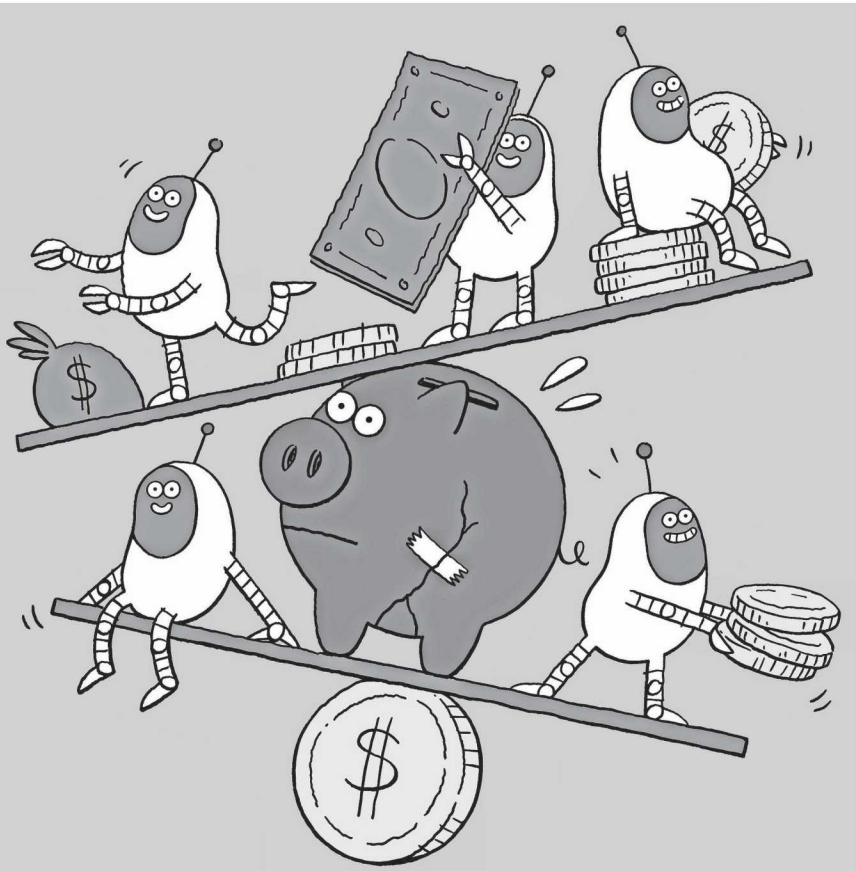
But there are reasons to worry. Technology companies that were lean, mean money-generation machines have abruptly become voracious devourers of capital. To take just one example of

the dramatic swing in fortunes, Google's free cash flows went negative for the first time ever in the second quarter of 2026, after cumulatively generating almost \$600 billion since the listing in 2004.

Then there is the issue of more obscure liabilities. Bond sales are easily tracked and the debt transparently reported on a company's balance sheet for everyone to see. But the hyperscalers are becoming more financially

creative and are increasingly keeping the debt off their books by securing their data center investments as lease commitments.

Take Meta's (titanic Hyperion data center project in Louisiana, for example. Instead of issuing bonds, the company secured most of the financing money by promising to rent the data center itself for 20 years. As a result, the \$27.3 billion loan appears nowhere on WIGGLESWORTH, PAGE 10



NADINE REDDY

The greatest story Dolly Parton ever wrote was herself

She didn't see herself as a saint; she identified as something we needed even more: a writer.



Tressie McMillan Cottom

Loving Dolly Rebecca Parton was easy. She was beautiful, funny and kind. Rumor has it that she was a prankster who could tell a good dirty joke. She was a country music original, a glittering pop star, a scene-stealing actress, a cultural icon and an unparalleled humanitarian. By the final decade of her 60-plus-year career, loving her had become something of a public sacrament. But Dolly didn't see herself as a saint; she identified as something we needed even more: a writer.

Despite the way we all loved Dolly, I don't think that many of us ever really understood that about her. We hung on to the stories she told us about how she grew up with a lot of love and not much money. We knew that she revered her father and honored her mother. We knew she told Elvis Presley he could not own the rights to one of her songs and that, amazingly, the King didn't seem to hold it against her. We knew that she wanted kids to read and queer people to be celebrated and country people to feel seen.

She told these stories so often and

with so much authenticity that most of us don't realize these are the only stories that she really told us about herself. It was the repetition over 60 years, albeit in different registers, with different deliveries, that made her endlessly beloved yet dazzlingly impenetrable. It's a good writer's sleight of hand.

To understand Dolly, you have to read her as a writer. Writing her own story was the most radical, precise way to define herself in a world that kept trying to fit her into a box. She was not simply Southern, nor simply country. She was from Appalachia — a place that is just as mythologized, mocked and misunderstood as Dolly was. It's a place where people are rarely allowed to speak for themselves. Instead, they are interpolated through coastal biases about white trash and red states. If they are lucky, Appalachians are stereotyped as hillbillies new to the modern world. Too racist to be redeemed. Too dumb to be a problem if they aren't.

The story Dolly wrote about herself across thousands of songs and performances and books was a counter-narrative about Appalachia. She narrated it as a place filled with soaring mountains and narrow hollers, geological wonders and distinctive cultures, abundant love and generational poverty.

Appalachian people are used to city folk making fun of them. It's easy to forget that Dolly was not exempt from this sort of mockery. For most of her career, men made cracks about her



TRACUT WHITE/ALAMY

figure. Women made digs about her lowbrow fashion. Critics often downplayed her artistry. No matter how famous she got, how many new audiences fell in love with her, how undeniable her talent, how ridiculous her work ethic, Dolly had to waste time with stupid jokes from small minds.

When people underestimated Dolly for looking like "the town tramp," as she put it, she embraced it. In 2008 she told Morley Safer, "By the time they think that I don't know what's going on, I've done got the money and gone." We call that particular trick country dumb where I am from. Dolly was a master at it.

Make fun of her cleavage? You better tell a funnier gag than one she already told about herself. Want to look down on her about being parochial? You will have to square that with her outstanding business acumen. At a time when women and poor people signed away their intellectual property for a shot at stardom, Dolly started a series of successful publishing companies to retain her rights.

That's not to say that Dolly's pride, especially in her craft, didn't shine through. Her indefatigable sense of herself as a creative person, with the right to make her art as she saw fit, came from her sense of place. She crafted stories in the rhyme, meter, poetry and politics of Appalachia. Her interpretations of bluegrass may be among my favorites, especially when she met her creative match in Linda Ronstadt and Emmylou Harris. The COTTOM, PAGE 10



FINANCIAL TIMES

"Without fear and without favour"

ft.com/opinion

Opinion Economics

US manufacturing is booming in spite of tariffs

FT message/Getty Images



Tej Parikh

US manufacturing is showing signs of a revival. After six months of expansion, factory activity surged to its strongest in more than four years in July. So far this year, production has edged higher, around 30,000 new jobs have been created, and just this month industrial titans Siemens, Amazon and SK Hynix unveiled hefty investment plans.

For the MAGA movement this is evidence that President Donald Trump's protectionism-powered "renaissance" of American manufacturing is taking shape. Speaking at a General Motors plant in Michigan in July, Trump said that his "historic tariffs" were reviving the nation's industrial heartlands.

But this claim is a rather disingenuous reading of the data. American manufacturing is resilient despite

The resurgence that the Trump administration is touting isn't the one it advertised

the president's protectionist measures, not because of them. Nor does the boom look much like the one he promised.

For starters, since Trump's second term began, uniquely strong demand conditions in two sectors have underpinned the expansion of industrial output, rather than a surge in tariff-related onshoring. The first is computer and electronic products, which includes the chips and servers feeding the ongoing AI frenzy. Next is aerospace, where aircraft backlogs – most notably at Boeing – are being filled and global conflict is swelling defence orders books.

Demand for other components used to build data centres, such as transformers, cooling equipment and cement, has helped to prop up broader US industrial output.

Crucially, AI and aerospace inputs have benefited from significant carve-outs from the administration's various tariff schemes. By contrast, sectors facing some of the highest duties – including textile and apparel – have contributed little to output, or have shrunk, according to data compiled by Scott Lincome, vice-president at the Cato Institute. Indeed, since Trump's second inauguration, manufacturers' earnings reports have repeatedly cited the squeeze of duties

on their profit margins, both directly and via their domestic supply chains. There is another inconvenient data point for tariff backers. If tariffs were driving a broad reshoring boom, one would expect domestic production to displace imports. Instead, the manufacturing revival has dovetailed with a notable pick-up in pure US exports from abroad. The strength in US goods imports since January last year has been driven by demand for components linked to AI.

The timing of this year's surge in manufacturing is perhaps most damning for the protectionists' cause. The jump in production since January has coincided with a drop in the effective duty rate and the easing of trade uncertainty following the Supreme Court's decision in February to strike down the bulk of Trump's "liberation day" tariffs.

That's not to say tariffs have delivered none of Trump's vaunted benefits. The small gain in jobs this year may be linked to insulation from foreign competition in a few sectors. Tariffs have also compelled some companies to make commitments to build US factories. That said, eye-catching investment pledges often have a patchy record of panning out, and annual private expenditure on new factory construction has continued to fall since Trump's return to the White House.

"The AI build-out, aircraft backlogs and tax deductions for capital expenditure in the One Big Beautiful Bill Act and even the Iran war are driving the recent US manufacturing surge," says Lincome. "Tariffs have mostly been a headwind." Getting the narrative straight matters. Reports on Thursday suggested that the administration was mulling new duties on semiconductors. Doing so would only impede a sector that is helping to drive US manufacturing output.

Still, it is no surprise that the White House is using the topline data to promote its performance ahead of the midterms. The irony is that the manufacturing resurgence the administration is touting isn't the one it advertised. Even with this year's bounce, manufacturing employment is \$2,000 below its level when Trump's second term began. It has not brought back the labour-intensive production lines that the president's term promised. Instead, it has been high-tech output, produced largely by machines drawing on foreign parts in industries that require skilled workers.

In other words, Trump's tariffs are proving a bitter pill to swallow, reviving his nostalgic vision of manufacturing. America's industrial strengths are proving resilient in spite of them – and would have been stronger still without them.

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The age of the e-bike

There are ways to make them safer without banning them from city centres

Leaving Como city hall in northern Italy in the rain in July, mayor Alessandro Rapinese says he remembers a brief hissing sound before an electric bike moving at full pelt "mowed him down". Rapinese did a "360-degree somersault" then hit the ground with bruises and cuts to his arms, he told his own online channel. The mayor's response was swift: he announced that from September all cyclists – not just e-bike riders – must dismount and walk in 30 streets in central Como. The backlash was swift, too. Civic groups are protesting and cyclists plan a defiant ride to city hall on September 12.

Rapinese has attracted international headlines and accusations of making laws based on his own experience. (Why not, he counters: "I know what it's

like to be hit by one of these beasts.") His story has tapped into growing cultural tensions. Some high-profile and unfortunate incidents, like Rapinese's, have drawn attention to the risks of e-bikes, particularly heavy rental versions – and many motorists accuse cyclists of being too ready to break road rules. The cycling community feels unfairly demonised.

The take-off of cycling in many western cities in the past decade or so is, in general, a good thing. Cycling replaces car journeys, improving air quality and reducing traffic. E-bikes, easier to pedal, broaden access to cycling and have helped to transform mobility in cities from London (with around 50,000 rental e-bikes) to Paris (up to 18,000) to New York (15,000).

But they do have downsides. While e-bike motors are limited to 25km/h (15.5mph) in the UK and the EU, which restricts their use to short-term rental, even casual and novice riders can ride them at a fair clip. Rental e-bikes are

also heavy, built to withstand rough use. That combination can cause more severe injuries than pedal bikes if they hit pedestrians. The number of UK pedestrians killed or seriously injured in collisions involving a bicycle jumped 71 per cent from 2016 to 2025, a period in which e-bike usage surged.

Some correctives are needed, though. Statistics show motor vehicles still cause vastly more deaths than bikes or e-bikes do, though incidents caused by the latter attract more media attention. Cyclists are far more likely to be killed or injured by cars or trucks than they are to injure pedestrians. Studies suggest motorists and pedestrians break rules at similar rates to cyclists.

While e-scooters are more problematic in safety terms – Paris has ended its rental e-scooter scheme – e-bikes' benefits overall outweigh their risks. So what might Rapinese's counterparts elsewhere do to make their cities safer?

They should start by clamping down on illegal e-bikes modified to defeat

Given the scrutiny they are under, cyclists could help their own cause by avoiding the temptation to break rules

speed limiters that are far more dangerous and give such vehicles a bad name. For legal rental e-bikes it makes sense, as in many central London boroughs, to have mandatory parking zones, enforced by operators through GPS tracking, to avoid carelessly parked cycles creating hazards. Fines should be better enforced for infringements such as jumping red lights or pavement riding. Rental bikes could be required to display a large and visible ID number. "Geofencing" can be used to create go-slow or no-ride zones in city squares, pedestrianised areas or parks.

Given the scrutiny they are under, cyclists could help their own cause by avoiding the temptation to break rules, and could reduce their injury risk by always wearing helmets. But the best way to improve safety is to continue adapting street layouts to improve separation between – and encourage good behaviour by – road users and e-bike users. That would leave even less need for bans like the one in Como.

Letters

What Bauml tells us about public-sector productivity

Christia Freeland is right ("Unhappy voters are suffering from 'Bauml's disease'", Opinion, FT Weekend, August 15) that economist William Bauml's cost disease theory poses a structural challenge for public services. But it is worth being careful about what follows from that diagnosis.

Public-sector productivity is not simply a question of how much human labour is required to perform a task. It also matters how effectively public money is turned into services, and whether those services ultimately

achieve the outcomes they are intended to produce.

Freeland's example of childbirth shows why this distinction matters. A woman in labour may need a midwife for a stillbirth or an hour, two hours or much longer. That time is not inefficiency; it is the care itself. But if another woman is waiting for a bed because someone who is ready to go home is still waiting to be discharged, that is a different productivity problem. Freeland is persuasive on why the first becomes more expensive.

But the harder public-sector productivity question is why the second is allowed to persist.

That is where the policy focus should shift. Too often the response is to demand to do more with fewer staff.

A more useful question is where, along the delivery of a public service, productivity is actually being lost: in the cost of inputs, in how organisations turn those inputs into services, or in whether those services achieve their intended outcomes. Bauml's

constraint does not apply equally to every part of that chain.

That distinction matters for Freeland's wider argument about democratic dissatisfaction. The political risk is to mistake higher cost for lower performance: Bauml can make services more expensive without making them worse, while poor organisation can make them worse for reasons of public good not explain.

Nina Jörden
Bentley School of Public Policy,
University of Cambridge, UK

The US census has failed in its constitutional role

Regarding Gillian Tett's Weekend Essay on President Trump's bid to reform the 10-year census and the explosive politics behind who gets included and who to decide, my observation is that tinkering with the census is a sideshow ("Who counts in Trump's America?", The Weekend Essay, August 22).

The greater travesty is that 435 seats in the House of Representatives cannot possibly "represent" 330m Americans. Nor were they supposed to. The Constitution had specified that House seats be distributed among the states based on population. But in 1929 House membership was frozen at 435 by statute.

The combination of steadily increasing population and a fixed number of representatives has yielded two results. First, power has shifted from the people to a political class and its masters. The average district size has ballooned from 241,000 to 761,000 between 1920 and 2020 diluting the value of each vote.

Between 1929 and 2025, federal government spending as a per cent of GDP climbed from 3 per cent to 25 per cent making the holder of each House seat significantly more influential. Increased congressional districts would reverse the flow – empowering voters and diluting each representative's importance.

Second, because it is mathematically impossible to apportion 435 seats among the 50 states, the House and its derivative, the electoral college, fail to conform to the Constitution. While the 991,000 people of Delaware have a single representative, each of Montana's two districts contains only 245,000 constituents. Other states range between the two extremes.

The census has failed in its primary constitutional role. From 1790 through 1910, every 10 years the number of seats increased and were redistributed among the states so that each person was represented in the House more or less equally. No longer.

"Who counts in America?" is a question about a great deal more than data collection.

Gail L Johnson
Ewing, NJ, US

Homer Simpson on mind-body dualism

In Jan Farrell's account of "The troubling vocabulary of machine consciousness" (Letters, FT Weekend, August 22) there is more than a whiff of Albert Einstein's "light on the machine".

This was the British philosopher's disparaging term for René Descartes' "cogito, ergo sum" argument, that assumes the mind is a non-physical entity residing in a physical body.

If there is room for questioning the assumption, then the assertion



Homer Simpson: 'What is mind? No matter. What is matter? Never mind'

becomes "I think therefore I am, I think". The turn of mind become "dubito, ergo sum" – "I doubt therefore I am". By a similar twist of logic that would become "I doubt, therefore I doubt that I am".

Perhaps the American thinker Homer Simpson had the more elegant solution: "What is mind? No matter. What is matter? Never mind."

Austen Lynch
Garstang, Lancashire, UK

Our rivers need more than well-run water companies

Gill Plimmer's magazine piece on the fight to save England's rivers ("A river runs through it", Spectrum, Arts & Life, August 22) makes telling points about the failure of the privatised water companies to protect the investment required to protect our rivers.

Even with the best water companies in the world, our rivers would still be in a parlous state, and the article therefore misrepresents the true challenge they face.

The view from the River Brent in north west London shows that our rivers are also despoiled by town planners, who treat them merely as drains, by builders who plumb foul waste directly into them, by building inspectors and local authorities who fail to do anything about it, by businesses who dump food and other waste into surface water drains, by the multitude of people who use a few of forever chemicals, by road designers and drivers whose toxic tyre waste is washed into rivers every time it rains, and by those who flush wet wipes unthinkingly down their toilets.

The future of our rivers lies in all of our hands, and it is up to us to decide what kind of value we want to give them. The available evidence suggests that value is currently low.

Ben Morris
Founder of CURB, Clean Up The River
Brent, London W15, UK

Founding Fathers and English Georgian summers

I really enjoy Robin Lane Fox's gardening column on a Saturday ("A French revolution", House & Home, August 22). However regarding his comments that the Georgian public did not visit gardens until late in the 19th century, I would refer him to the Abigail (Nabby) Adams Smith, daughter of John Adams, the future US president, who wrote to her brother John Quincy in July 1786, after visiting and staying at The Hyde, Ingtestone here in Essex with her father: "Viewing the Houses and Gardens of Noblemen, constitutes one of the principle Summer amusements of this Country. Natives as well as strangers, and the Gardens of all the Nobility are open to the Latter ... The Houses are generally seen only by Tickets from the Owner." (Massachusetts Historical Soc.)

Adams and Jefferson had already been to the gardens of some English houses and gardens while staying in London. The Adams party also visited Lord Petre's nearby Thordon Hall, now converted to flats. Sadly no ticket will get you to visit The Hyde and gardens today. The house was destroyed by fire in 1965 and demolished the month after.

Robert Fletcher
Ingtestone, Essex, UK

Imagining what Kublai Khan said to Marco Polo

Janan Ganesh invites us to reflect on a recurring question: "Which is the next No 1 city on Earth?" (Opinion, Life & Arts, August 15). There are many plausible candidates, yet none seems entirely convincing.

Perhaps rancorous cities cannot answer the question. Consider Tale Cavalieri's *Invisible Cities* (Le città invisibili, 1972). In the book, the ageing Mongol emperor Kublai Khan – Genghis Khan's grandson and the founder of the Yuan dynasty – questions the Venetian merchant Marco Polo about the territories of his vast empire.

Instead of describing geographical locations, Polo evokes imaginary cities associated with memory, desire, death, language and time. His accounts become reflections on cities and the human experience.

In one dialogue (chapter three), Polo tells Kublai: "You take delight not in a city's seven or seventy-seven wonders, but in the answer it gives to a question of yours." Kublai asks: "Or the question it asks you, forcing you to answer, like Thebes through the mouth of the Sphinx?"

Therein lies an answer to Ganesh's question – and to many others like it. The world's "No 1 city" depends on the question we bring to it, and the question it asks of us – not simply on its seven or 77 wonders.

Alessandro Lomi
Ravenna, Italy

Musk Sr's 'state of Britain' lament inspires this reader

Errol Musk is an unlikely advocate for rewinding ("'I'm Elon's father, not his pal'", Lunch with the FT, Life & Arts, August 22), yet I was enthralled by David Pilling's interview with the SpaceX billionaire's father.

Gripping and brilliant in equal measure, it revealed at least as much about the real Musk as Vladimir Putin's "cornered rat" story did about the Russian leader.

Errol's opinions on Putin, the British far-right activist Tommy Robinson and South African apartheid had me reading with my head in my hands but behind such vitriol was a vision of Britain his description filled me with glee: "unkept roadsides, weeds growing out everywhere".

In this drought our verges harbour wild creatures that otherwise would not survive. As for the weeds, to coin a phrase, they are the weeds of Britain in Britain's dried out land they're "the last man standing".

Estelle Phillips
Nature Writer and Performance Poet,
Broad Chalke, Wiltshire, UK

Textile artist's shout-out for Bayeux's embroiderers

In her feature on the style credentials of those who made the Bayeux Tapestry, one group Constance Ayrton fails to credit is the skilled English embroiderers whose needlework was behind such European art the time ("Dressed to conquer: the fashion of 1066", Style, Life & Arts, August 22).

Bishop Odó of Bayeux commissioned the embroidery for his new cathedral and Queen Matilda (wife of William the Conqueror) and her court ladies took it to the continent.

Many historians believe it was stitched in Canterbury – so it's more or less "coming home".

Today in England, embroidery and textile work continues to thrive, going from strength to strength with imagination and flair.

Penny Jolley
Textile Artist, Brisham, Devon, UK

Poignant memories of a Chagall show

Jackie Wullschlaeger wrote of "Chagall and Magritte – beloved painters who have not had London museum shows in, respectively, 40 and 50 years".

The Royal Academy held an exhibition of Chagall's works entitled "Marc Chagall – Love and the Stage" in the autumn of 1998 – 28 years ago. But this time doesn't qualify as a major exhibition.

But I can remember it clearly, not least because I visited it as part of a first date with the woman who became my wife!

Jon Gundry
London HA6, UK

Opinion

Is China's 'wise camel' the winner from the US-Iran war?



WORLD AFFAIRS
Gillian Tett

A decade ago, when then US president Barack Obama cut a deal with Iran, he knew he would face criticism for failing to stop big Chinese banks from helping Tehran.

So he ruefully admitted the obvious: such banking sanctions could be an own goal. "To [really hurt Iran]... we would have to cut off countries like China from the American financial system," Obama observed. "[But] since they happen to be the major purchasers of our debt, such actions could trigger severe disruptions in our own economy and... raise questions internationally about the dollar's role as the world's reserve currency."

Quite so. In recent months, US President Donald Trump has repeatedly slammed Obama for that Iran deal. But the irony is Treasury secretary Scott Bessent is now grappling with the strategic trap Obama highlighted, which illustrates the nature of the new world order.

After all, as economists at Stanford, Yale and Columbia universities argue in an IMF essay, the key to understanding geopolitics today is to recognise that the US and China each want to wield hegemonic power (ie bully others).

China has hegemonic power because it controls key industrial supply-chain nodes like rare earths and pharmaceutical inputs, while America controls the dollar-based global financial system. Meanwhile, energy and tech hegemony, in my view, are still being contested.

Right now both sides are trying to break the others' hegemonic power, but neither is likely to succeed soon. Cue grinding instability as proxies, like Iran, are sucked in.

This week illustrated that. On Monday Bessent announced an "economic

D-Day" against Iran, and threatened "the single greatest financial offensive ever marshalled against an adversary" with "secondary sanctions" on any entity doing money laundering for Iran, or trades in digital assets, technology, gold, aviation and shipping.

Washington is doing this because it has failed to win the war by military means. But just as Bessent's efforts to calm bond markets last week with aggressive buybacks seem to have backfired, his Iran campaign could undermine his credibility too.

Yes, some economists like Robin Brooks consider this "an important step in the right direction" given that Iran is now in a state of "economic collapse". And, yes, countries like the United Arab Emirates (hitherto a crucial trading partner and banking centre for Iran) have joined the US embargo. Turkey, another key player, may yet follow suit.

However, China is the elephant in the room: as a Congressional report notes, it is "Iran's largest trading partner... despite US and multilateral sanctions

on Tehran", and has pledged \$400bn of investment there. It has also been buying 90 per cent of Iran's oil exports.

And while some Hong Kong tiddlers have been targeted, no sanctions were presented against big Chinese banks even though Congress members like Republican Darin LaHood begged for this, to "send a clear message to China".

Beijing has threatened to 'take all necessary measures' to retaliate if it is hit with sanctions

Or as Daniel Tannebaum, Oliver Wyman partner and sanctions expert, tells me: "Unless they sanction a Chinese bank everyone has heard of, this will flat."

Why the miss? Bessent probably wants to avoid derailing a planned summit between Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping next month, which is

supposed to produce trade deals. Indeed, Beijing has already threatened to "take all necessary measures" to retaliate if it is hit with anti-Iran sanctions. This means using its own hegemonic power, say stopping rare earth exports, which the US can ill-afford. "I don't think China will be happy [with Iran]" says Nicholas Burns, former US ambassador to Beijing.

Then there is the dollar. To understand this threat, it is worth watching a five-minute propaganda film released a few months ago on Chinese state TV, in animated *Jianghu* (martial arts) style. This is not as sharp as Iran's "Logo" posts that mock Trump. But it is "pleasingly poetic" for Chinese viewers, says the scholar Philip Cunningham – and geopolitically significant.

It features a mad "eagle" (aka Trump) that attacks a kingdom of small "cats" (Iran), which successfully fight back. Then other animals shun the "white eagle gold tickets" (dollars), leaving the eagle looking foolish, while wise camels (China) look on from a distance. Is it just

a Beijing martial arts fantasy? Bessent would argue so. After all, the dollar remains "the backbone of global finance", accounting for 89 per cent of global foreign exchange trade, and US capital markets continue to soar, never mind geopolitics.

But this dollar dominance is also quietly "eroding", says Seb Murray of Stanford Business School. Or to cite Luke Gromen, a market analyst: "Every other weaponisation of the US dollar over the past 14 years has [driven] ever-greater volumes of trade and global trade finance into the Chinese yuan, via China's [payment] system."

Hence Bessent's dilemma: events in Iran not only show the limits of Trump's military power, but the potential limits of Washington's financial power too. Investors and US voters should re-read Obama's 2015 speech and watch that Chinese eagle-versus-cat film if they want to understand the grim reality of geoeconomics and geo-finance today.

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Tough-on-Russia son of a philosopher is seeking the presidency amid a populist rise
By Adrienne Klasa and Sarah White

Most politicians launch their campaigns from a podium. Raphaël Glucksmann began his bid for the French presidency this week by climbing an 80-metre wind turbine. "I'm not afraid, I can't wait to be at the top," said the newly declared candidate, clad in a helmet and harness. Back on the ground, he promised a "100-day environmental revolution" if elected in 2027 to fight climate change and wean France off fossil fuels.

After one of France's hottest summers on record and devastating wildfires, the issue puts him at the forefront of public debates. But his bid for the Élysée faces formidable odds: the French left has not reached a presidential run-off since 2012. With the far right's Marine Le Pen all but certain to secure one of two places in next May's run-off, Glucksmann will also be squeezed by Jean-Luc Mélenchon's radical left, which is gaining in the polls, and Emmanuel Macron's centrist heirs.

Glucksmann, 46, a writer and activist turned EU parliamentarian who launched his own party, *Place Publique* in 2018, gained national prominence after leading a joint list with the Socialists to come third in European elections two years ago. Though awkward at times – his primetime announcement of his candidacy appeared heavily rehearsed – advocates say his convictions come through.

"I don't come from the usual political mould," Glucksmann told TFI news. "I wasn't a parliamentary attaché at 20 or an official in a political party. I was standing beside people who had escaped genocide in Rwanda, and opponents of Russian imperialism in Georgia and Ukraine."

"Many French people no longer believe in politics because it's not sincere. It's good to have a fresh start with someone sincere," said close ally Nicolas Mayer-Rossignol, the Socialist mayor of Rouen. Yet an elite, intellectual background may not always play in his favour, and some positions irk leftist voters, who have accused him of being too pro-Israel, too pro-nuclear power, and not radical enough on the economy.

He forms a power couple with his partner Léa Salamé, one of France's best-known broadcast journalists, who stepped down from anchoring her primetime news show for the duration of his candidacy. Paris Match published photographs of the pair on the beach in Corsica on the cover in August just beneath images of Macron on a jet ski. Glucksmann has a slight "chambré" background to become an anti-Maoist leftist for most of his life, like his wife, Françoise, also an activist and a screenwriter. The Glucksmann household played host to a rotating cast of activists and political outcasts. His late mother, whom he called "Panfar", has described



Person in the News | Raphaël Glucksmann

The new hope of the French left

how a five-year-old Raphaël would lie on the floor with his father discussing the non-existence of God.

Glucksmann's outspoken critiques of Russia come from formative experiences in Kyiv during the Orange revolution in 2004 and in Georgia, advising then president Mikheil Saakashvili following Russia's 2008 invasion.

His early warnings to the EU about Russian intervention and advocacy for China's Uyghur minority are examples of his steadfast views, his backers say. "He's someone who is tenacious, determined. When he takes on a subject – even if it's not fashionable, even if it's one cares – he'll be right," said Auréole Laloque, a *Place Publique* MP in Brussels.

Early polls show that Glucksmann's campaign has a long road ahead. A survey this week put him fourth at 11 per cent in first-round voting intentions, behind Le Pen, Mélenchon and former Macron prime minister Édouard Philippe. Yet in a hypothetical run-off against Le Pen, he performed substantially better than Mélenchon.

"What is different this time is that the RN doesn't just have a foot in the door, they have nine-and-a-half toes in at the Élysée," said Mayer-Rossignol. "The left needs to act. If it wants to win, I'm not interested in being the best-looking corpse in the graveyard."

Glucksmann's first test will be an October primary against other Socialist candidates for the centre-left nomination. But his biggest task is to close the gap with Mélenchon by persuading leftwing voters that he offers their best chance of reaching the run-off, said Mathieu Gallard of Ipsos. Glucksmann is not yet known as a national politician and his message is less closely aligned with voters' traditional

priorities like cost of living, he added.

At a conference organised by the main business lobby this week, Glucksmann drew applause for his attacks on Le Pen's bid to curb immigration by cutting France's debt. But he also highlighted his fight against "the religion of free trade" and promised to create a society of "workers not trustafarians and heirs", notably via a new tax on inheritances over €2mm.

During the Covid pandemic, Glucksmann advocated cancelling Eurozone sovereign debt held by the European Central Bank, although he now opposes Mélenchon's attempt to revive a similar idea. "There are still some rough edges in his programme," said one executive.

Glucksmann is determined to beat the odds. "The illusion of the global village, where Europe is the best of all possible worlds, is over," he told business leaders on Thursday. "We are a vast country with a gigantic destiny that is not yet over; let us not give up to defeatism."

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Zero-sum thinking is fuelling resentment



SOCIETY
Camilla Cavendish

The age of prepping is upon us. In Sweden, a brochure instructs citizens to keep at least a week's supply of water and food "in case of crisis or war". Similar leaflets have been issued to Norwegians, Danes and Finns, and are online in the UK. Even without Russian aggression, cyber attacks and extreme weather mean such precautions are no longer the preserve of doomsday survivalists hoarding beans and duct tape. But in such a crisis, social solidarity would also matter. So it's worrying that we seem increasingly suspicious of one another.

A good deal of public discourse now feels framed as zero sum: the assumption that one group must lose in order for another to gain. It's common to suggest that immigrants are taking our jobs, the wealthy are getting even richer at others' expense and that workers are hurting employment prospects for men.

It's as if we are stuck in a game of musical chairs, with too few seats and some players doomed to miss out. The idea that we can expand the circle, that entrepreneurs can spread prosperity is getting lost. And, worryingly, there is evidence that this kind of thinking undermines willingness to co-operate.

Zero-sum thinking is not new. But it seems to be on the rise, especially among the young. An analysis of English language books finds the use of "zero-sum" terminology has leapt since 1990, pulling far ahead of "positive-sum" descriptions.

Economists Stefanie Stantcheva and Sahil Chinyo have found that American Gen Z and millennials are far more likely than Gen X and baby boomers to imagine the world is a fixed pie, and not just if they're poor: those making \$100,000 a year feel aggrieved, and postgraduates even more so. Residents of big cities displayed the highest tendency for zero-sum thinking: mayor Zohran Mamdani was elected by New Yorkers who see themselves as losing out. Older people tend to have a more expansive mindset – apart from Donald Trump, whose zero-sum tariffs are making US consumers poorer.

Stuttering economic growth since the 2008 crash and anxiety about a precarious world can make the young more likely to see resources as scarce. Researchers suggest this may be down to very real competition in job markets, university admissions and housing.

There is also evidence that beliefs about social mobility can be self-fulfilling. When presented with a fictional company where highly rated employees got bonuses and low-rated ones didn't, young people in a recent University of Chicago experiment tended to assume

the staff were ranked against each other, rather than that everyone could get a high rating if they were good enough.

Such mindsets are not always irrational. The postwar international order was built on the idea that interdependence would boost opportunities for all, and so it did. But, as the century ended, the tide of globalisation was not lifting all boats.

Moreover, across the west, pensions have strained the social contract, charging dwindling numbers of working-age people to support growing numbers of retirees. In big cities where Harvard found the strongest zero-sum mindsets, planning restrictions are a major constraint on housing supply. A reckoning is due, but inequality will not be reduced by penalising success.

If we are not careful, we are heading for a future that is poorer both economically and culturally.

In a study of 37 nations, those who agreed that "if someone gets richer, it means somebody else gets poorer" also tended to be more cynical about institutions and less likely to volunteer. This bodes ill for the social fabric. Inadvertently, this also increases the pressure to expand government. According to the World Economic Forum, zero-sum thinking is strongly associated with support for government redistribution as well as calls for immigration restrictions: cutting across partisan lines, yet an ever-expanding state is likely to entrench managerial decline.

How do we move from a conversation about who gets the biggest slice to how do we increase the pie?

about "who gets the biggest slice" to "how do we increase the pie"? It's easier for politicians to indulge in the politics of grievance than to build voter confidence that we can grow our way out of this. It's especially challenging when trust is falling in authorities and employers, belief that leaders lie to us is at an all-time high and large majorities think the wealthy take more than their fair share, according to the Edelman Trust Barometer.

Confidence in leaders comes from effective policy. We can build affordable housing that is attractive and doesn't upset the neighbours. We can tackle climate change while also creating jobs, and welcome entrepreneurs, not drive them abroad.

The Swedish ledlet on emergencies emphasises "we must all help each other". The British equivalent says to "find out if you are eligible for a priority service register". There's nothing wrong with extra help for the vulnerable in a crisis: it was vital in the pandemic. But I can't help feeling that someone in authority has already given up on us trusting one another.

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