



State of exception India must not normalise a culture of discrimination

In its first review by the U.N. Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) since 2007, India has elicited an expression of "grave concern" about reports of the law enforcement apparatus resorting to violence – physical and otherwise – against minority ethnic and ethno-religious groups, Dalits, and non-citizens over the years. The Committee also noted that India, which ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in 1968, has not provided detailed and updated information about the state's inquiries and sanctions arising from allegations of such violence. While the government has told CERD that caste bias falls outside Article 1 of the convention because caste is not synonymous with race, CERD has allowed all forms of discrimination based on inherited status. The Committee's concerns also span the practice of manual cleaning of sewers despite a law banning it; hate speech against, poor living conditions of, and the mass reforestation of Rohingya Muslims; the mass deprivation of citizenship via the National Register of Citizens; large-scale deletions from the Special Intensive Revisions of electoral rolls; the government's use of the FCRA, UAPA, AFSPA, and PMLA instruments to hamper the work of civil society organisations; the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita not expressly criminalising racist hate speech; and the Forest (Conservation) Amendment Act exempting "national security" projects from consultative decision-making.

Given these issues and the fragmented recourse available, the lack of suitably disaggregated data on disenfranchised communities, including due to a much-delayed Census and the slow release of NCRB data, has transcended the bounds of administrative lethargy to actively impeding independent checks of India's claims about fighting caste- and faith-based discrimination. In fact, India has been implementing "special measures" based on 2011 Census data, which could mask a regression in the socioeconomic status of Scheduled Tribes and Adivasis. Together with the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions recommending the downgrading of the NHRC last year, following the government appointing police officers to investigative roles and a lack of pluralism, CERD is effectively stepping into a vacuum. The road ahead remains clear, from restoring the NHRC's independence and criminalising hate speech to supportive affirmative action, collecting and publishing disaggregated data, and improving the transparency of the electoral roll revisions, and strengthening enforcement overall. But if the government's attempted use of a technicality to keep the issues of 200 million Dalits a "domestic matter" and avoid international accountability – and its dismissal of CERD's concerns as politically motivated – is any guide, the task continues to fall to civil society to exert influence in multilateral fora and sustain political, legal, and administrative resistance to government choices that normalise India's sadly widespread culture of discrimination of all sorts.

Drawn to defeat

India is now in a must-win situation in the Test Championship cycle

This was a triumph that ironically suffered the after-effects of a loss. India's 1-0 series victory in the two-Test outing recently in Sri Lanka, in normal circumstances, would have been seen as a positive. However, in the race for key points in the ICC World Test Championship (WTC) cycle, the ideal India-centric result would have been a clean sweep at 2-0. But with Dhananjaya de Silva's men thwarting India's bid for a win in the second Test at Colombo's Sinhalese Sports Club Ground, and forcing a draw, the visitors continue to occupy the fifth slot in the WTC rankings. It is a position one below Bangladesh after the eastern neighbour secured a 1-1 draw against Australia in the series Down Under. If a WTC final berth has to be secured then India has to do extremely well away against New Zealand and at home against Australia, and then hope that the various permutations cropping up will be favourable. Shubman Gill's men find themselves in this piquant situation due to their vulnerability at home, having lost a Test series to South Africa last year. The transition angst within the Indian unit is yet to abate following the exit of R. Ashwin, Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma. Slowly, new heroes are emerging and the results could improve.

Stepping into the Emerald Isle and hamstringing by the injured Jasprit Bumrah's absence, India did its homework. A warm-up fixture was won, while some of its players had earlier turned out for India A against Sri Lanka A and were ready. When the series commenced with the first Test at picturesque Galle, India led from the front and won by 165 runs to secure a 1-0 lead. Devdutt Padikkal's 167 and 44 led the run charts and most importantly it also meant that the critical number three spot in the batting order had found an apt occupant for now. This is the same position that in the past had featured pedigreed men such as Dilip Vengsarkar, Rahul Dravid and Cheteshwar Pujara. Left-arm spinner Manav Suthar too did well and his classical mode is a throwback to a gentile past. Sri Lanka's brief resistance hinged on Sonal Dinuthu, who registered a ton. Soon he would become an immovable personality at the batting crease and India learnt it the hard way at Colombo. His twin hundreds helped Sri Lanka erase the ignominy of suffering a follow-on and also survive a tense final day to wrest a draw. The conclusion felt like a victory for the host and India is now placed in a must-win corner in its future Tests.

The politics of calling minds 'Naxal'



Kavita Krishnan

Author of
'De-democratisation,
A Global Story: Script,
Actors, Enablers'

In his Independence day address this year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared that his government had eliminated the threat of armed Naxals/Maoists, but added that 'dimaagi Naxals (brain Naxals) remain. These dangerous individuals, he said, had been elevated to policy advisers by his predecessors. Now, they look for opportunities to 'drag society onto the wrong path' and 'steer the nation's youth' away from the 'mainstream effort' to turn India into 'a developed nation'. He asked Indian citizens to 'identify and isolate' such individuals among them.

Defining the enemy

Is Mr. Modi the first leader of a democratic nation to declare thoughts to be crimes, without resort to innuendo or euphemism, in a formal address to the nation? A search for other instances came up empty.

But has he not used terms such as 'urban Naxal' before? Is 'dimaagi Naxal' any different? I believe it is a significant escalation.

First, while he has used the term 'urban Naxal' in campaign speeches and in Parliament, he has not previously used it in an Independence Day address to the nation.

Second, 'urban' implies an alleged connection to 'rural' Naxals: urban individuals are alleged to be facilitating crimes attributed to Maoist insurgents. The actual charges may be fabricated, and individuals might in fact be criminalised for their ideology, that is, for thought crimes. But the government did not admit this. In this case however, Mr. Modi declared the end of rural Naxals, and then formulated the category of 'dimaagi Naxals'. It is their 'dimaag' alone, cut off from any alleged ties to armed Maoist insurgents, that he declares to be criminal.

Had Mr. Modi chosen to say 'Naxali dimaag' or 'Naxali soch' (thinking), it might be taken to mean Maoist ideology. But 'dimaagi Naxal' does not identify a specific ideology as dangerous.

'Dimaag' itself is the deadly weapon. In Hindi/Urdu, 'dimaag' is used to mean the brain, head, mind, consciousness, intellect, and intelligence. To use your 'dimaag' is to 'use your head' – that is, to think out of the box, to reason, to think critically, to use your intelligence for resourceful problem-solving.

Mr. Modi is notorious for asking Indians to identify terrorists by what they wear – 'kapde se pechano' (Identify/judge someone by their clothes) – a dog whistle for Muslims wearing lungis, skullcaps or hijabs. Now, he is saying 'dimaag se pechano' – identify anti-nationals by how they think.

Operation Demonise Dimaag began a decade

The new
labelling is an
escalation of
the government's
attitude
towards dissent
and democracy

ago in 2016, with the attempt to incite hatred and violence against Jawaharlal Nehru University students and teachers. For six years the regime has declared student protesters (such as Umar Khalid, Sharjeel Imam, Gulisha Fatima, Natasha Narwal, Devangana Kalita) to be terrorists, without a trial, without much push-back from the judiciary and the press. Emboldened, it deployed the same tactic against students protesting examination paper leaks, calling them 'dehshatgarhi' (terrorists). But stretched to such lengths, this tactic snapped – and backfired. It 'leaked' the key to the regime's propaganda codes. All of a sudden, all too many people could see the pattern plainly. The government rewarded mindless obedience, reverence and adulation for Power. Apply your mind, your 'dimaag', to demand democratic accountability from Power, and it would "identify and isolate" you as a terrorist, an *andolanjevi* (parasite feeding on protests), a cockroach.

Echoes of an old template

The timing is telling. Mr. Modi is attacking Dimaag when he is still smarting from his debacle at the hands of young students armed only with wit and imagination. He wants to prevent a recurrence. Ironically, since he calls his critics 'Naxals' (Maoists), he seems to be embracing the Chinese template for thought crimes.

A Chinese Communist Party memorandum, of 2013, warns that Internet forums, 'lectures, seminars, university classrooms, class discussion forums, civilian study groups' as well as 'open letters and... petition-signings to vocalise requests for political reforms, improvement of human rights' represent a threat to the nation. Why? Because 'if we allow any of these ideas to spread, they will disturb people's existing consensus on important issues like which flag to raise, which road to take, which goals to pursue'.

That is what the student protests did: demolish Mr. Modi's claim to represent a monolithic popular consensus, challenged only by a tiny gang of unpopular critics. That consensus must be restored.

Mr. Modi identified 'dimaagi Naxals' as the foremost internal threat to national security. Is his plan for 'a huge voluntary force of civil defence' intended to deal with them?

The examples Mr. Modi cites are unconvincing. Defending refineries from aerial bombardment and banks from cyber attacks cannot be left to 'civilian volunteers' – these would need enhanced air defence and cyber-security systems comprising experts. We already have the Civil Defence Act 1968 and the Home Guards to organise civilians for non-combat roles. Is Mr.

Modi's proposal inspired by his ideological gurus from a century ago?

In 1931, Dr. B.S. Moonje, Hindu Mahasabha leader and close associate of Rashtriya Swamysavak Sangh (RSS) founder K.B. Hedgewar, visited Italy to meet the fascist leader Benito Mussolini. Mussolini was notorious for civilian militias such as the 'Voluntary Militia for National Security', colloquially known as the Blackshirts, which unleashed violent terror against political rivals, union leaders, journalists and writers. In 1934, Moonje and Hedgewar met to discuss the need for a Hindu-supremacist militia to achieve the "ideal" of "a Hindu as a dictator... like Mussolini or Hitler of the present day Italy and Germany". In 1935, Moonje explained that his aim was to also militarise Hindu society so as to completely choke off any other expressions of social life – "There will thus be no longer any distinction between the citizen and the soldier, between the civilian and the man in uniform".

In 1939, Moonje expressed the hope that the RSS "might be useful and handy" in the task of preparing such a Hindu-supremacist militia. Who would it fight? Not so much the British Raj or potential Japanese invaders, but "internal enemies" – i.e., Muslims and the Congress wing of the freedom struggle. Moonje specifically visualised a conflict between the "mutually antagonistic and clashing ideologies", i.e., between "the Rifle" (symbolising the Hindutva militia) and "the Charka" (symbolising Gandhism). Nearly a decade later, Nathuram Godse wielded the Rifle that killed Gandhi.

The road ahead

Today, a woman who proudly declared herself a 'fan of Godse' and said the very name 'Gandhi' is like a 'gauli' (a swear word), has been elevated to the leadership of the Bharatiya Janata Party's social media cell. As has a man who used foul abuse against Congress Parliamentary Party chairperson Sonia Gandhi, and the "b****" voting right for Muslims and oppressed castes as the "root cause" of India's problems. Meanwhile, online and offline pro-Modi mobs as well as police are hounding student protesters, especially girls and women. The pretext is that the students, as a last resort, raised profane slogans at Mr. Modi himself, which turned out to be the only thing to move him to remove his corrupt Minister.

Will these mobs, together with the moral policing mobs and the anti-Muslim lynch mobs, be elevated to the ranks of Mr. Modi's 'civilian defence force'? This is a real danger, given that his supporters believe he is the 'Hindu Hitler' of Moonje's and Hedgewar's dreams.

Nepal's agony, the Himalayan warning to India

Will India learn now at least? Will it let Nepal speak to India through its agony what India has refused to hear?

The Himalaya are not a series of silos – Afghanistan Hindu Kush Himalaya, Pakistan Himalaya, Indian Himalaya, Nepal Himalaya, the Himalaya in Tibet/China, Bhutan. To employ a powerful term I have heard Vadorada-based painter Gulam Mohammed Sheikh use for the Elephantia Caves, the Himalaya are one living rock, silently, broodingly, tense with seismic voltages, glacial stirrings and geological turbulence.

And they spell their uncoded thought in swipes no one can foretell. When, where exactly, with what ferocity, no one knows. And what disasters may radiate from them – through rivers plucked from their courses, rockfalls and landslides depositing mud and silt, turning human habitations into rubble and fertile farms into slime – no one can precisely envision.

Ask those who have heard from their parents and grandparents of the Nepal-Bihar earthquake of 1934 or the Assam tremor of 1950. They will speak of the nightmare.

The question of preparedness

The world has been told – India has specifically been warned – by seismologists of an impending earthquake of humungous scale with the potential of a cataclysm across a great swathe of northern India which lies under the quake-shadow of the Himalaya. It is not as if India's government has declined to heed the warning. It has done much, as its disaster management agencies will rightly assure us, to be alert to the risk.

But after 26/8 what we need to ask and know is: should what happened in upper Nepal have



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One living rock,
shared by
nations, makes
its dangers a
shared concern
for all

happened in lower Nepal, and even lower than that, would our 'preparedness' have sufficed to save riverside habitations from instant death?

More pertinently, we need to ask and know whether the absolutely fearsome phenomenon of global warming triggered GLOFs (or Glacial Lake Outburst Floods), has led authorities to warn people living in potential GLOF-affected areas in India of the danger they face and advised them on how to face it.

We are, let us face it, in seismic, glacial, climatological and geological innocence. By 'we' I mean we the people of India. Our earth scientists know it all but their *inana* is clasped tight in their *acharya-mushiti* ('knowledge kept in the teacher's fist').

What happened in Nepal on that stricken Wednesday is yet to be fully appraised. We will soon enough know whether it was an earthquake that caused the GLOF, or whether the GLOF resulted in the earth quaking and waterbodies swelling as they never have before.

Whatever happened, India must learn

Be the sequence as it may, the following lessons scream to be learnt by India.

First, the Himalaya, held sacred since memory has served, gestate 'sure-shot' danger.

Second, these dangers can now no longer be left to be unravelled in seminars and technical papers.

Third, they have to be made known on a war footing to us, the clear potential victims.

Fourth, and not just made known as in increasing our knowledge but made known as in making us part of a new safeguarding.

Fifth, our scholar-diplomat Shyam Saran has, in two timely and telling articles in *The Tribune* ("China's hydel project bodes ill for India", July 14, 2026) and *The Indian Express* ("From Nepal to

Uttarakhand and China, the mountains are warning us", August 28, 2026), explained how China's construction of Medog, the world's largest hydropower project, at the great bend of the Brahmaputra river just across the border and very close to the Paizhen Fault, could (should there be a major earthquake in the project's vicinity), cause a massive discharge of floodwaters and debris into India's northeast. India's salutary initiatives to bring about a measure of maturity civility on the borders with China must now include frankness about the ferocious danger that Medog poses.

Sixth, an urgent review of India's own built hazards such as dams and reactors in the high risk zones followed by the dismantling of the real 'baddies' can no longer be postponed.

Seventh, and no less difficult but no less important, a calibrated but time-bound decongestion of human agglomerations in high-risk zones.

Eighth, if surgical strikes can be used with precision and without excesses against an external enemy to good effect, their civilian equivalent should be deployed to disable that which, though intended for our well-being, has become a danger.

Progress and danger

Marjorie Sykes was a British devotee of India, in the tradition of C.F. Andrews, Verrier Elwin and J.B.S. Haldane. I once heard her say with passion: "Dams are a damnation." All dams may not be, but some, depending on their location, are. Likewise, some reactors can become raskhasas. And some commercial behemoths, predatory.

A big and great nation can learn from the experience of a small neighbour. Especially when both are perched on the same living rock that threatens to turn into a mass grave.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Uphold Bar standards

Lawyers have played a significant role in modern India, in shaping our society and polity, particularly during the freedom struggle and after Independence (Front page, "Not a good sign if a Bar Council loses respect: SC judge", August 30). Many stalwarts have graced the higher judiciary, conducted themselves with the utmost dignity, upheld professional values, and brought respect to the Bar. The Bar Council of India has also largely done well in regulating the legal profession and maintaining

professional standards. However, recent developments have caused dismay within the legal community and beyond. The widely criticised decision directing the State Bar Councils to halt the enrolment of the NALSAR 2026 batch, and its subsequent reversal, have cast the Bar Council of India in a poor light. The call by Supreme Court judge Justice B.V. Nagarathna urging the Bar Councils to "introspect on their role and importance in upholding professional ethics, morality and professional

competence" is timely. The Bar Councils should take note of this.

Kosaraju Chandramouli,
Hyderabad

No country above the law

If Russia's actions against Ukraine and Iran's actions against Kuwait are condemned, why should similar conduct by the United States be treated differently? Venezuela is a sovereign nation, not an American colony whose natural resources can be controlled at Washington's will. The reported U.S. control over

Venezuelan oil raises serious questions about national sovereignty and international law. The United Nations appears to become a "sleeping beauty" whenever a powerful nation acts with impunity. International law must apply equally to every country; no nation should

be above it. Otherwise, global institutions risk encouraging dictators who believe that power makes them untouchable.

T. Kalash Ditya,
Hyderabad

The spirit of Madras

The Hindu and the citizens of Chennai deserve praise

for making Madras Day a vibrant tribute to the city's heritage. From soul-stirring music, dance and food festivals to heritage walks, photographic exhibitions and quizzes, this collaborative initiative beautifully brings together history and community while proudly showcasing the timeless charm and rich legacy of Madras to the world.

T.S. Karthik,
Chennai

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

Corrections & Clarifications

In an article, "The long wait for a woman Minister in Karnataka" (Opinion page – "State of Play", August 13, 2026), a sentence read: "Since then, the share has fluctuated, with the 1972 election seeing not even a single woman elected to the Assembly out of the 28 who contested." It should have said, "Since then, the share has fluctuated from election to election."

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Should the CJP be a political party?

A glimpse at India's recent history suggests that while some protest movements became successful political parties, others did not. The success of the recent youth movement started by the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) should not be judged by whether it would become a successful political party nor by its forcing the former Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan to resign. Rather, the success of the CJP movement should be judged by the enthusiastic participation of young students for a cause which concerned them; the success of which has raised confidence in them.

They now believe that they can make the government hear their voices even if it is raised from a non-political platform.

Movements to parties

Very often the success of a movement is judged by not only what the movement was able to achieve but whether it was able to become a successful political party or not. The 1979 student's agitation in Assam led by the All Assam Students Union transformed into a successful political party, the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), which formed the government in 1985 in Assam. The India against corruption movement also transformed into a political party – the Aam Adami Party (AAP) which came to power in Delhi for the first time in 2013. Not only did the India against corruption movement draw large support, the AAP also enjoyed massive electoral gains; it won 67 and 62 seats out of a total of 70 Assembly



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Views expressed are personal

seats in Delhi with a 54.3% and 53.5% vote share during the 2013 and 2020 Assembly elections respectively.

The AAP also formed a government in Punjab in 2022. In the success story of both the AGP and AAP, the youth played an important role. During the 2015 Assembly elections, the AAP's vote share among young voters (18-22 years of age) was 63%, almost 10% higher compared to its average vote share. The AAP went on to draw 60% of the votes among young voters (18-22 years) during the 2020 Assembly elections as well – 7% higher compared to its average vote share.

If the CJP does turn into a political party, there is hardly any doubt that the new party will attract young voters, as has been the case with other newly formed parties. The newly formed Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK), led by actor-turned politician C. Joseph Vijay, formed the government in Tamil Nadu in the very first election it contested in 2026, replacing the two established formations mainly the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam. The youth played a very important role in the victory of the TVK. While the overall vote share of the TVK was 34.9%, its share among young voters (18-22) was significant at nearly 70%.

Nationally, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has an advantage among young voters, its vote share being 4% higher amongst voters in the age group of 18-22 years. Therefore, the rise of the CJP may affect the BJP more than any other party.

But the question remains, can the CJP attract young

voters across the country?

Strong challengers

There have also been successful social movements which have failed as political parties. The movement for a separate State of Uttarakhand resulted in the formation of a new State and a new political party, the Uttarakhand Kranti Dal (UKD). However, it failed to make an electoral impact. During the 2002 election, which was the first election held after the formation of Uttarakhand, the UKD polled only 5.4% votes and won just four Assembly seats. There have been similar groups which have led protest movements, demanding Statehood and the like, but most of them could not become successful political parties.

However, there have been movements led by the youth, with the participation of larger social communities, which resulted in a change of the national government. The Jayaprakash Narayan led anti-emergency movement of 1977 dethroned the powerful Indira Gandhi-led government. Similarly, the anti-corruption movement led by Anna Hazare contributed to the defeat of the Congress-led coalition government in 2014.

It should be of no concern whether the CJP becomes a political party or not as the movement has already been able to achieve some noticeable milestones. It emphasised that issues take importance and not leaders as this movement was largely leaderless without the active support of any political party.

It also gave a large number of people the hope that their voices can be heard if they come together in a sustained manner.

Adopt policies for reuse of treated water

The recently notified treated wastewater reuse policies for Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand offer an instructive example of what contextualised policymaking can look like. Developed through an extensive consultative process, these policies do not apply a one-size-fits-all template. They account for the stark geographical diversity within each State, the distinct needs of hill communities versus densely populated plains, and embed principles such as fit-for-purpose reuse approaches, integration with urban planning and river rejuvenation, community participation, blended finance and public-private partnership pathways, and digital monitoring systems that make reuse accountable.

However, examples such as these remain the exception rather than the rule. Every summer, Indian States make headlines grappling with water scarcity and yet, the story never seems to change. Rampant groundwater extraction, and the relentless tug-of-war between agriculture, industry, and urban demand have become a recurring script. The real question is no longer whether India needs to rewrite this narrative, but how much longer it can afford to not.

Hidden opportunity

Treated wastewater is an untapped resource waiting to be mainstreamed. For agriculture, industry, urban landscaping, and ecological restoration, it offers something increasingly rare – a reliable, drought-proof supply. India's water future may hinge less on



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discovering new freshwater reserves and more on the intelligence with which the country recycles what it already has. National missions such as the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation have done commendable work in scaling sewage treatment infrastructure, but pipes and plants alone do not close the loop. A treatment facility that discharges into a drain rather than feeding a farm or a factory is infrastructure without purpose.

What India needs is an ecosystem that converts capacity into practice: institutional coordination across departments, pricing signals that make reuse economically rational, quality standards that inspire confidence in end-users, and city-level roadmaps that translate national ambition into local action. The National Framework on Safe Reuse of Treated Water (SRTW), 2022 offers precisely the canvas India needs to navigate this transition. More than a guiding document, it represents a policy signal that reuse is no longer peripheral – it is a national priority. By mandating States to develop their own reuse policies, the Framework acknowledges that water solutions must ultimately be local, even when the vision is national. Several States have already responded, putting in place policies that set reuse targets and chart a path toward measurable milestones.

Treated wastewater, reframed correctly, is not a waste management problem; it is an economic opportunity. Its case rests on hard, computable value – building climate resilience, drought-proofing cities,

reducing costly dependence on freshwater, enabling industrial and urban growth without straining existing supplies, and supporting low-carbon urban development at scale. Until this economic case is made clearly and credibly to State governments and planners, the policy will remain an aspiration.

Reuse succeeds only when utilities, urban departments, irrigation agencies, and industries stop working in silos and start working in an integrated manner. The financial momentum needed to hit reuse targets is rarely found in new budgetary allocations alone; it is unlocked by identifying synergies with existing schemes and convergence opportunities across programmes that are already funded and moving.

Need for awareness

There is one more constituency that cannot be overlooked: the public. Misconceptions about the safety of treated water run deep. The National SRTW Framework as well as the reuse policies for Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand have chosen to call treated water *Apna Jal* (our water), signalling something that no document can fully capture: that the shift India needs is not just infrastructural but psychological.

Experts working with State governments are witnessing a quiet shift in thinking – that the safe reuse of treated water is not just a policy consideration but a strategic imperative. Yet, several States remain on the sidelines. States that have not yet adopted a clear plan for water security through reuse are not just falling behind, they are running out of time to catch up.

Nepal disaster a grim reminder to rethink preparedness

The flash floods in Nepal have made it imperative for countries to be better prepared for natural disasters that are becoming unpredictable and frequent

DATA POINT

Sambavi Parthasarathy

The dire human and economic cost of the catastrophic flash floods in Nepal on August 26, serves as a stark reminder to countries of the urgent need to strengthen their disaster resilience and preparedness.

Nepal, which bore the brunt of the latest glacial collapse, was already identified as being increasingly vulnerable to Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs). As per the UN Development Program, the country had experienced 26 GLOF events since the 1970s. Data show that the world has lost over 9,500 gigatonnes of its glacier mass since 1975 (Chart 1). Several mountain ranges in the Himalayan region such as Central Himalaya (which includes Nepal and India's Uttarakhand) have recorded over 20% decline in glacier area in three decades (Chart 2).

With natural disasters becoming frequent (Chart 3), it is imperative for governments to assess and be better prepared for disasters. Just this month, Indonesia witnessed a 7.7 magnitude earthquake, China battled typhoons, and several European countries combated wildfires.

Massive death tolls aside, they displace millions of people (Chart 4). Further, the economic cost of damages spans several billions (Chart 5). Nepal's Finance Minister told *Reuters* that the country would require about \$4 billion to \$5 billion to rebuild, nearly a tenth of their economy.

Climate change impacts countries disproportionately. An assessment of vulnerability (exposure, sensitivity, and ability to adapt) and readiness (ability to leverage investments to adaptation actions) of countries show that several low- and lower-middle income countries remain highly vulnerable and less ready to deal with such disasters (Table 1).

Stark warning

The data for charts were sourced from Our World in Data, EM-DAT, International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD)'s "Changing Dynamics of Glaciers in the Hindu Kush Himalayan Region 1990-2020", Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative scores (2024) and Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S)

CHART 1: Annual change in glacier mass globally. Figures in gigatonnes

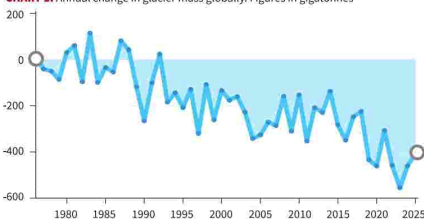


CHART 2: Changes in glacier area between 1990 and 2020 across mountain ranges in the Hindu Kush Himalaya region, as mentioned in ICIMOD's report. Figures in %

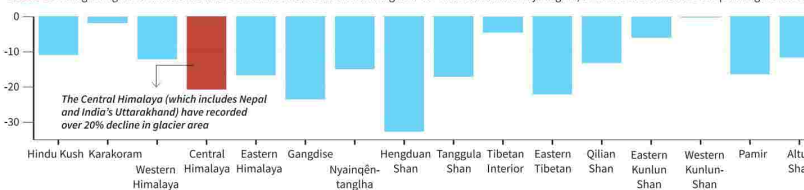


CHART 3: Reported number of natural disasters across the world since 1990



CHART 4: People displaced internally due to natural disasters each year. Figures in million



CHART 5: Economic damage caused by natural disasters globally. Figures in \$ billion

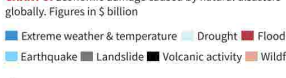


TABLE 1: India and Nepal fall under the "more vulnerable, less ready" group i.e. they remain highly vulnerable and less ready to deal with disasters

Income group	Less vulnerable, more ready	More vulnerable, more ready	Less vulnerable, less ready	More vulnerable, less ready
Upper	54% (25/46)	0% (0/46)	39% (18/46)	7% (3/46)
Upper middle	38% (18/47)	19% (9/47)	32% (15/47)	11% (5/47)
Lower middle	26% (12/47)	34% (16/47)	9% (4/47)	32% (15/47)
Low	2% (1/47)	28% (13/47)	0% (0/47)	70% (33/47)

FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO AUGUST 31, 1976

China supports India for Security Council seat

New Delhi, August 30: The Chinese Ambassador-designate, Mr. Chen Chao Yusu, is expected to arrive in Delhi in the next two weeks and present his credentials well before October 1 to make his first public appearance at the Embassy's national day reception.

As a happy augury to the restoration of Ambassador-level representation, China has fallen in line with the rest of the Asian Group in the United Nations in supporting India's candidature for one of the two Asian seats on the Security Council to be vacated by Japan on completion of its two-year term.

At the Asian Group meeting in New York on August 16, which incidentally was presided over by the Bangladesh representative, China went along with the other members in supporting Japan's suggestion that India should be nominated for its seat. The other two countries in the field, the Philippines and Mongolia, withdrew in India's favour after several countries spoke in support of its candidature.

In accordance with the normal practice, the Bangladesh Chairman of the 34-member Asian Group has formally notified the other regional groups of its decision to nominate India.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO AUGUST 31, 1926

The right of pathway bill

Mr. Saldanha presented the report of the Select Committee on the Bill to amend the Madras District Municipalities Act 1920 and moved that the Bill be taken into consideration at once. He said that the right of public pathway should be given to all classes in respect of roads and streets maintained at the expense of the municipality. The principles of this Bill were the same as the principles of Mr. Veerian's Bill.

Some of the members opposed the motion on the ground that the Bill as amended was not received by them in time and pointed out that material alterations had been made by the Select Committee and asked the President not to suspend the operation of the Standing Order.

The Chief Minister admitted that there had been a change and left the question to be decided by the President. The Hon. Mr. Marjoribanks wished to know if the Bill in its present form had received the previous sanction of the Governor-General.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Rehabilitation centres in Mizoram for drug addicts

48 Mizoram has 48 centres and homes providing care and rehabilitation services to 5,224 people affected by drug addiction, officials said on Sunday. The State government provided ₹42 lakh as financial assistance to these centres and homes. PTI

Number of doctors to be recruited by Himachal govt.

650 Speaking at the inauguration of a health camp, Himachal Pradesh CM Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu said that the government is going to recruit 300 medical officers, 200 specialist doctors and 150 super-specialist doctors. PTI

Heat-related deaths seen in Austria in June and July

646 Austria saw its highest-ever recorded number of heat-related deaths this June and July, the country's health agency said on Sunday. The AGES agency said those two months saw 646 heat-related deaths. AFP

Amount sanctioned by J&K govt. to repair migrant flats

82 in ₹ crore. The Jammu and Kashmir government has approved a ₹82.45-crore repair project for 5,000 flats across Jammu's migrant camps. Public Works Department officials said that repair and renovation would be taken up soon. PTI

People aboard ferry that capsized off coast of northern Cyprus

267 At least seven people have died after a ferry carrying at least 267 passengers and crew capsized off the coast of northern Cyprus on Sunday, Turkish media reported. AP
COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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OBC creamy layer and the income test

Why is the Centre finding the ruling difficult to implement? What exactly did the Supreme Court rule on the creamy layer? Why is the Centre seeking clarification? What are its concerns over implementing the ruling? What happens next in the creamy layer case?

EXPLAINER

Abhinav Lakshman

The story so far:

The Supreme Court has said it will consider setting up a Bench to hear the Centre's application seeking clarification over its March 11 judgment on the income test component of the OBC creamy layer exclusion criteria. Retrospectively implementing the judgment on the income/wealth test for OBC creamy layer determination is "extremely difficult" and will cause a "cascading effect" in the settled services from 2012 till now, with the impact extending to "all categories, including the Unreserved category", the Centre said in a batch of applications.

Why does the Centre call the ruling 'extremely difficult' to implement? The Supreme Court on March 11 delivered its judgment in a batch of cases pending for close to a decade, relating to how the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) should interpret the crucial income/wealth test, which is one of the layers through which the "creamy layer" (or relatively socially and economically forward) among the Other Backward Classes communities is excluded from availing the benefit of reservation.

The cases that eventually came before the court involved claims by at least 50 OBC candidates who had appeared in Civil Services Examinations (CSE) since 2015 and were excluded from consideration for an OBC-reserved post after the DoPT classified them as part of the creamy layer solely based on their parents' income.

The Supreme Court found that the DoPT was incorrectly applying the income test for this category of OBC candidates and directed the government to create supernumerary posts for the OBC candidates to whom the income test had been applied with what it called "hostile discrimination," and allot them services according to their ranks in their respective CSE years.

What are the criteria for exclusion? The creamy layer concept among OBCs emerged from the Supreme Court's 1992 ruling in the *Indra Sawhney* case, which paved the way for the implementation of OBC reservations. The idea was to exclude OBC candidates whose families had accumulated social and economic privileges over the years from the benefits of reservation. Such candidates came to be described as belonging to the "creamy layer".

To clarify which categories of OBC candidates would fall under the creamy layer, the DoPT issued an Office Memorandum (OM), a guiding charter in September 1993, laying down the criteria for exclusion.

The OM prescribed several categories of exclusion, including children of senior constitutional, judicial, government and armed forces officers.

Besides this, the DoPT also prescribed a crucial income or wealth test, applicable to people in the salaried professional class or engaged in trade; people holding plantations, vacant land and/or buildings in urban areas; and people whose parents held posts in Central or State PSUs where the equivalence of these posts with government service posts had not yet been established. It is this last category, that is, children of parents holding posts in Central or State PSUs or in private employment, that the court delivered its March 11 judgment.



GETTY IMAGES

What was the problem with the 1993 OM and 2004 letter?

Under the 1993 DoPT OM on the income/wealth test for OBC reservations, a candidate would be considered part of the creamy layer if their parents' gross family income exceeded the prescribed limit for three consecutive years, or if they possessed wealth above the exemption limit prescribed under the Wealth Tax Act, 1957. The income limit, which was ₹1 lakh when the 1993 OM was issued, was revised several times and now stands at ₹8 lakh, with the last revision having come in 2017. Importantly, the 1993 DoPT OM specified that income from salaries and agricultural land should be excluded when applying the income/wealth test, with income from other sources such as property, business, or capital gains being considered.

However, in October 2004, the DoPT issued a letter meant to clarify issues that had arisen in interpreting the 1993 OM. In paragraph 9 of this letter, the DoPT took up the issue of how to calculate income for the income/wealth test for OBCs whose parents were in Central or State PSUs where equivalence of posts had not yet been established. The DoPT seemed to suggest that income from salaries was to be counted to determine if the income was above the prescribed threshold for three consecutive years. The threshold was subsequently revised to ₹8 lakh per year in 2017.

In the 2026 ruling, the Division Bench noted that until the government establishes equivalence between the posts of Central or State PSUs and government services, the income/wealth test must continue to apply equally.

How did the Supreme Court interpret the income test?

The March 11 *Union of India vs Rohith Nathan* judgment said that OBC candidates whose parents work in PSUs or the private sector, where the government has yet to establish equivalence of posts with government services, cannot be treated differently from OBC candidates in other categories under the creamy layer exclusion criteria.

Significantly, the Supreme Court ruled that the income/wealth test component of the exclusion exercise must be seen and operated as a "residual filter", adding that salaries and agricultural incomes had been consciously left out while applying this test under the 1993 OM. The court found that while the 1993 OM was clear about excluding income from salaries from the calculation of the income/wealth test, the 2004 letter appeared to call for its inclusion in circumstances that were

not clearly specified.

The court went on to note that the interpretation of the 1993 OM, read with the 2004 letter, had led to "hostile discrimination" between the children of those in government service and those in PSUs or private employment.

Without establishing equivalence of posts, the income test, including salaries, was being applied to rule out OBC candidates whose parents were not in government service, while OBC candidates whose parents were in government service were being subjected to a test that did not include salaries. This is what the court had described as "hostile discrimination".

The court said, "Treating the children of those employed in PSUs or private employment, etc., as being excluded from the benefit of reservation only on the basis of their income derived from salaries, and without reference to their posts (whether Group A or B, or Group C or D) would certainly lead to hostile discrimination between parties who are similarly placed and would amount to equals being treated unequally."

The court had directed the Centre to implement this reading of the income test within six months by creating supernumerary posts for the petitioners, who were OBC candidates in the Civil Services Examinations and had been excluded from the creamy layer on account of their parents' salaries alone. The parents were working in public sector undertakings or the private sector.

Did the Centre try to implement the Supreme Court's directions?

The Supreme Court's ruling in the *Rohith Nathan* case was a watershed moment for this category of OBCs, who had said that the issue had been pending for more than a decade. As per the Supreme Court's direction, the Union government was supposed to issue further instructions in pursuance of the court's reading of the income test component – on how the supernumerary posts must be created and how the existing strength of the services must be adjusted to accommodate them.

According to government records, the Union Ministry of Personnel, Pensions and Public Grievances wrote to the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment on June 3, seeking advice on implementing the directions of the *Rohith Nathan* judgment. The Personnel Ministry told the Social Justice Secretary that the Allocation of Business Rules provide for the Social Justice Ministry to formulate policy on reservations and that it was therefore seeking

"clarification/action" in this regard. The Personnel Ministry further sought "advice on instructions to be adopted or notified" by the DoPT.

As of August 19, the Centre's position before the Central Administrative Tribunal in a matter identical to that of the aggrieved OBC candidates in the *Rohith Nathan* case was that it was in the process of implementing the March 11 judgment.

However, a few days later, the DoPT filed an application highlighting why it was seemingly impossible to follow the Supreme Court's directions and the issues that were arising in implementing them retrospectively. In this application, the Centre said that despite its efforts to create the supernumerary posts as called for in the *Rohith Nathan* judgment, it was facing an increasing number of claims for adjustment, issues of seniority arising from such adjustments, and concerns that even this exercise could be "unfair" to a different category of OBC candidates and candidates of "all categories, including the unreserved category".

The Centre noted that since the March 11 judgment, 22 other judgments have been issued by courts applying the principles laid out in *Rohith Nathan*. In addition, the DoPT said that 12 new cases have been filed seeking reconsideration of OBC non-creamy layer status under the *Rohith Nathan* principles, by candidates who had not previously approached the courts.

However, OBC candidates who spoke to *The Hindu* argued that the Centre's reluctance to implement the directions does not appear to make sense. These candidates have asked why the DoPT had not mentioned these larger issues with implementation earlier.

These candidates have noted that the older reading of the income test – the one that the court said practised "hostile discrimination" – was being applied only by the DoPT, and that too arbitrarily.

What happens next?

Along with the application that the DoPT has filed setting out the difficulties it was facing in implementing the *Rohith Nathan* judgment's directions, especially retrospectively, the Union government had filed a separate application, seeking that it be allowed to continue allotting services as per the old reading of the income test for CSE 2025 candidates, and seeking clarification on how to implement the directions. The Centre said that more than 950 CSE 2025 candidates were about to start their Foundation Course and that they had been recommended based on the old reading of the income test.

The DoPT argued, in this application, that the retrospective application of the judgment was specifically running into the issues mentioned above.

The Supreme Court has now said it will consider setting up a Bench to hear the Centre's request for clarification on how to implement its directions and its request to allow the allotment of services to CSE 2025 candidates to continue as settled for the time being.

However, in the other application filed along with this, the Centre has asked for clarification on how to implement the direction overall. It has further argued that there might be some value in including income from salaries, as in some cases it might be the "sole intelligible differentia" between two OBC candidates from "similar social backgrounds". It has also argued that, in the absence of salary consideration, some cases might lead to OBC candidates with parents earning up to ₹1 crore being considered non-creamy layer.

Now, the question is: how far will the Supreme Court's March 11 verdict reach?

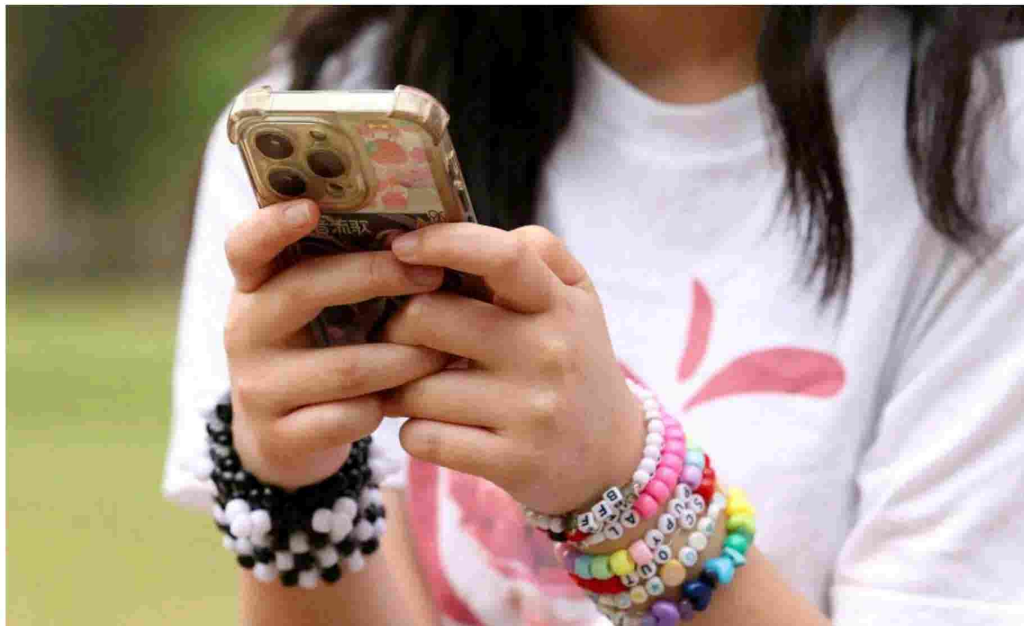
THE GIST

▼ The Supreme Court's March 11 ruling held that salary income should not be used to exclude OBC candidates from the creamy layer where their parents work in PSUs or private employment without established equivalence of posts with government service.

▼ The Centre says retrospective implementation could have a 'cascading effect' on settled services, while triggering fresh claims from candidates who were previously denied OBC non-creamy-layer status.

▼ The Supreme Court will consider setting up a Bench to hear the Centre's plea for clarification on implementing the ruling, including its application to CSE 2025 candidates.

CACHE



Even without Meta's new controls, parents and educators can work with children to fight social media addiction. REUTERS

Can Meta's safety controls make Facebook and Instagram less addictive for teens?

Meta has agreed to an \$18-billion settlement with U.S. states and will introduce stricter controls for teen users; but enforcing these safeguards could prove difficult as children can evade age checks, while the measures also raise concerns over privacy and the role of rival platforms

Sahana Venugopal

The story so far:

In August 26, Meta agreed to an approximately \$18 billion settlement with dozens of U.S. states in annual instalments over 10 years, and announced stricter controls in its apps for teen users. The settlement is the culmination of a lawsuit brought by California and 28 other U.S. states alleging that Facebook and Instagram are harmful for children and that they illegally collect personal data. While several parents and child health advocates welcomed the new child protection controls, enforcing them will be a lot more challenging.

What child protections is Meta rolling out?

The social media giant is both rolling out new features and building on existing features designed to create a safer and less addictive experience for Facebook and Instagram users under 18.

These measures are set to automatically apply in participating U.S. states and territories. 52 attorneys general covering U.S. states, territories, and the District of Columbia have joined the agreement.

Arguably, the biggest win for parents and the biggest concession by Meta is a default two-hour daily time limit across Facebook and Instagram. Teens can only turn this off with a parent's permission.

Furthermore, a 'Night Mode' will block app users between 12 AM and 6 AM, so teens cannot post or view their Feed, Stories, Reels, or the Explore section. Similarly, the School Mode between 8 AM

and 3 PM will mute notifications by default. However, these limits do not apply to direct messages (DMs).

Teens are set to receive multiple prompts after every 15 minutes of continuous screen time on Facebook/Instagram, apart from prompts that come after their total daily usage reaches 60 minutes and 90 minutes.

To directly address addictive video features, Meta is giving teens (and their parents) the ability to choose a non-algorithmic feed as their default, as well as the ability to turn off Autoplay.

As for steps to combat unhealthy comparisons and anxiety over appearances and popularity, teen users will no longer see the number of likes and reactions on posts by default. Meta is also expanding its policy to block teens from using 'extreme makeup filters,' adding to a previous block against cosmetic surgery filters for teens.

Meta reaffirmed its commitment to strengthening existing controls in order to catch underage account users, as well as teens falsely entering adult birthdays. The company claimed it will continue placing teens into private accounts on Instagram and activating private default settings on Facebook, apart from restricting 'potentially suspicious adults' from reaching out to them.

Meta also said it would encourage parents to set up its supervision tools, and give them new controls and insights.

Can these safety controls be effectively enforced?

This is the crux of the matter. Safety controls for teens work only as well as the technology that verifies users' ages and

detects rule-breakers.

Take Australia, for example; the country was the first to enforce a strict blanket ban on social media for children under 16. While many parents lauded the idea and Meta reported this month that it removed over 750,000 accounts that it suspected were held by under-16s, a study by the University of Newcastle there reported that the ban did not appear to have significantly impacted under-16s who were using social media.

As other platforms and administrations explore age restrictions, critics have pointed out how easily children can fake their ages – even in video selfies and live camera tests. What's more, these data collection tactics raise additional questions about how children's private information is being harvested.

In its settlement announcement, Meta pointed out that all platforms – and not just its apps – should have teen safety measures in place to prevent children from moving to less restricted apps. So as to not be held back in isolation, Meta called on rival social media apps YouTube and TikTok to adopt the 'new standard.'

Meta stated that around 30% of its settlement, or \$5.3 billion, would be released only after rival apps YouTube and TikTok implement similar controls and pay a stipulated amount of money. To sweeten the deal, Meta said that if industry peers signed the agreement, it would further reduce the daily limit to one hour per app and expand night mode limits. In other words, this increases the incentive for U.S. regulators to also bring Meta's rivals in line with the new policies.

Separately, the social media giant said it supported laws requiring app stores to

verify users' age and obtain parental approval before teens can download an app.

This shifts the responsibility of age verification to companies such as Apple and Google.

How can parents elsewhere make Facebook, Instagram less addictive?

Even without Meta's new controls, parents and educators can work with children to fight social media addiction. Most smartphones come with built-in parental controls that allow adults to set time limits for individual apps, as well as curtail overall device use.

Furthermore, many of Meta's existing safety controls – such as Teen Accounts on Instagram – can be used by children across borders who enter their ages correctly.

For more advanced settings, adults can research and download parental control apps that allow them to set up different usage limits for multiple children and monitor their activity remotely. Some apps allow parents to remotely lock devices and apps during sleeping hours and/or school hours.

Meanwhile, teachers can communicate with their students via email, or send alerts through non-addictive digital forums during daytime hours. Students should be strongly discouraged from conducting school assignments or group projects via social media apps.

Enabling parental controls for teen social media users is a constantly evolving challenge. After all, these young internet and AI-native users are often more tech-savvy than the very adults trying to restrict their time online



KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

No amount of rest could ease her fatigue

The children were tired after their two-hour trek

S. Upendran

What is the difference between 'fatigue' and 'tired'? (S. Jayanthi, Mysore)

There is a tendency among some people to use the two words interchangeably especially in informal contexts. It is wrong to do so. Of the two, 'tired' is the more frequently used. When we say we are tired, what we mean is that we are running low on energy. We all get tired from time to time – for example, after playing a couple of sets of tennis, after a long day's work, etc. We don't panic when this happens because we know why we are tired. We can overcome our tiredness either by eating something that will give us the energy back or by getting some rest – a good night's sleep, perhaps! The lack of energy that we experience when we are tired is only temporary.

The children were extremely tired after trekking for two hours.

You look very tired. Get some rest before tomorrow's big game.

It is possible for one to be both physically and mentally tired.

'Fatigue' is a little more serious than being tired. Unlike 'tired', it is not a temporary phenomenon. One can feel fatigued for days together; it is long-lasting, and what is more alarming is that we may not always know the cause. It could be your diabetes or your heart condition that leaves you fatigued. No amount of rest helps in the recovery, and the constant tiredness often prevents you from doing your work. It interferes with your daily routine. This constant fatigue is your body's way of telling you that something is wrong.

Is something wrong? You've been looking fatigued for a week now.

The word consists of two syllables; the 'a' in the first sounds like the 'a' in 'china', while the following 'i' is like the 'ee' in 'fee', 'bee' and 'see'. The word is pronounced 'fe-TEEG' with the stress on the second syllable.

Why do we say 'litter of puppies' and 'litter of kittens'? (I. Rachina, Secunderabad)

Today, when we hear the word 'litter', the first thing that comes to mind is the trash we see everywhere in our cities. This meaning of the word, however, came much later. 'Litter' comes from the Latin 'lectus' meaning 'bed'; and it was originally used to refer to the portable chair or bed carried on poles – in the past, royals like Julius Caesar and Cleopatra used to be carried from one place to another in these. With the passage of

time, the meaning of the word took on a broader meaning, and soon 'litter' began to be used to refer to any kind of bed – including the layer of straw that owners sometimes spread on the floor when their pet cat or dog was ready to give birth. It was not long after that the focus changed from the bed to the newborn that were lying on the bed. The animals born to the same mother around the same time began to be called a litter. The term is normally used with animals which give birth to several offspring – dogs, cats, pigs, etc.

Manisha's dog gave birth to a litter of seven puppies.
upendranke@gmail.com

THE DAILY QUIZ

A quiz on Malaysia which is celebrating its Independence Day on August 31

V.V. Ramanan

QUESTION 1

Malaysians celebrate 'Hari Merdeka' on August 31 to commemorate the independence of the Federation of Malaya from British rule. On what date do they celebrate Malaysia Day, which marks the formation of Malaysia?

QUESTION 2

What is the monarch, who is elected from nine hereditary Malay Rulers for a five-year term, called and who is the present ruler?

QUESTION 3

If the Indian currency notes carry the image of Mahatma Gandhi, whose portrait is

featured on the Malaysian Ringgit?

QUESTION 4

Name the famous archipelago with 99 islands and geological formations that became Malaysia's first UNESCO Global Geopark.

QUESTION 5

Name the Malaysian-born actress who became the first Asian woman to win the Best Actress Oscar in 2023.

QUESTION 6

In which sport did Nicol David win a record eight World Open titles between 2005 and 2014?

QUESTION 7

Which Bornean primate is known for its large, pendulous nose in males?



Visual Question:

Name the place where this famous statue of Lord Muruga is located. AFP

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz: 1. In politics, he was the first PM of his newly independent country while she became the first woman President of the UN General Assembly in 1953. Name the famous siblings. **Ans: Jawaharlal Nehru and Vijayalakshmi Pandit**

2. This famous 1807 work that narrated the works of a famous English playwright was authored by a brother-sister duo. Name them and the work. **Ans: Charles and Mary Lamb's 'Tales of Shakespeare'**

3. According to historians, Ptolemy XIII and Ptolemy XIV were consorts and ruled alongside their sister, who is considerably more famous and legendary than the two men. Name her. **Ans: Cleopatra**

4. In later Ramayana traditions, what was the name of Rama's elder sister. **Ans: Shantha, wife of Rishyasringa**

5. Name the Russian siblings who have not only won titles at a tennis Major but are the only brother and sister to reach the No.1 ranking in singles. **Ans: Marat Safin and Dinara Safina**

6. The National Bravery awards given by the Indian government are named after two teenagers who were murdered in 1978. Name the two. **Ans: Geeta and Sanjay Chopra**

7. In Greek myth, name the twins born to Zeus and Leto. **Ans: Apollo and Artemis**

Visual: Name these siblings who have also won Oscars apart from the Grammys and other leading awards. **Ans: Billie Eilish and Finneas O'Connell**
Early Birds: Siddhartha Viswanathan | Tamal Biswas | Sukdev Shet | Piyali Tuli | Arun Kumar Singh

Word of the day

Compeer:

a person who is of equal standing with another in a group

Synonyms: associate, colleague, accomplice, peer

Usage: She was respected by her compeers for her expertise.

Pronunciation: newsth.live/compeer

International Phonetic

Alphabet: /kəmˈpiə/

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

• GLOBAL

Can Trump rename Lake Ontario as Lake America?

Rishika Singh
New Delhi, August 30

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump last week signed an executive order to rename Lake Ontario, situated on the US-Canada border, as "Lake America". The order said the lake was a "tremendous asset to the United States and part of our Nation's heritage".

In response, Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney wrote in a post on X that the name Ontario (also the name of a Canadian province) comes from the indigenous Wendat people. "The name is more than 400 years old, predating both the Confederation of Canada and the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America... reality means calling it Lake Ontario - then, now and always," he wrote.

Why the move

Lake Ontario is part of the Great Lakes system, along with Lake Superior, Michigan, Huron and Erie, spanning the US-Canada border. According to the US National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the lakes system holds about 90% of the freshwater in the US and approximately 20% of the world's freshwater supply. Forty million people across the two countries depend on it for clean drinking water.



• GREAT LAKES

- Lake Ontario is part of the Great Lakes system, along with Lake Superior, Michigan, Huron and Erie, spanning the US-Canada border.
- Forty million people across the two countries depend on it for clean drinking water.

What changes

The name change will apply to how the US officially refers to the lake, but will not affect what Canada or the rest of the world call it. No single global organisation is tasked with ensuring uniformity among names of water bodies, and the decision to use a certain name is often based on historical precedent.

In a social media post, Trump stated that the US Geological Survey was officially changing the name to have it reflect in all official USGS electronic documents. "This is not the first time that disagreements over trade and other issues have prompted Trump to use nomenclature as a tool."

In January 2025, Trump renamed the Gulf of Mexico as the Gulf of America, amid tensions with Mexico over immigration and tariffs. It took about two weeks for the US government to update the official federal nomenclature to reflect those changes. The change was also reflected on Google Maps. Google Maps is now reflecting the changed name for Lake Ontario too.

How Google Maps names disputed features

According to Google, the names seen on Maps are based on information such as a user's country location and phone operating system (e.g., iOS and Android). In 2025, users in Mexico saw "Gulf of Mexico" on Maps while those in the US saw "Gulf of America".

For other users, both names are possible. For example, in the present case, users in India can see 'Lake Ontario (Lake America)'.

• ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

The many hurdles ChatGPT for Teens safeguards could run into for Indian users

Anagha Jayakumar
New Delhi, August 30

OPENAI RECENTLY announced the launch of a version of ChatGPT exclusively for teenage users.

Teenagers are already using ChatGPT extensively, with OpenAI saying nearly nine in 10 teens turn to it for learning, information, skill-building or learning in a week. But their growing use of AI tools has also spurred concerns over how these systems respond to young users, particularly when conversations move beyond homework or information-seeking into emotional support, mental health and companionship.

Crucially, the new offering is not a separate application or website. Teenagers continue to use the regular ChatGPT, but with additional, age-appropriate features built in. These are automatically enabled when a user's age is stated or verified age, or OpenAI's age-prediction system, indicates that they are under 18. OpenAI does not allow children below age 13 to use ChatGPT.

Establishing user age

According to OpenAI, it uses information associated with an account, including a user's stated or verified age, as well as an age-prediction system that looks at signals such as how long the account has existed, the times of day it is typically used, general conversation topics, and patterns of use. In India, the relationship between a device, an account and the person using it is not always straightforward. The RATTI Foundation's Ideal Internet 3.0 study, released in November 2025, found that 62% of Indian teenagers surveyed used shared devices. Moreover, 42% reported that other people operated their social media accounts, while 56% said they could log into someone else's.

The 62% figure was acknowledged in OpenAI's Teen Safety Blueprint for India, released this January. While this does not directly imply that teenagers are using shared ChatGPT accounts, it raises questions for a system attempting to determine the age of the person behind an account. Pragna Misra, Head of Strategy & Global

Affairs, OpenAI India, told *The Indian Express* that ChatGPT for Teens is designed around the account rather than the device. This means that if a teenager and an adult use separate accounts on the same shared device, each can receive the experience appropriate to their age. It is not intended to distinguish between multiple people using the same shared account or to switch experiences person by person within one login," Misra said of the age-prediction system. When uncertain about a user's age, OpenAI defaults to the under-18 experience.

Potential pitfalls

A risk assessment undertaken by Common Sense Media, an independent media watchdog for content consumed by children, and Stanford Medicine's Brainstorm Lab for Mental Health Innovation found that leading AI chatbots failed to recognise and appropri-

ately respond to mental health conditions affecting young people.

Robbie Torney, Head of AI and Digital Assessments at Common Sense, told *The Indian Express* that meaningful testing of safeguards requires "testing the product that teens are using, not a model in isolation over an API". Traditional benchmarks, he pointed out, are often based on collections of single-turn conversations, which do not necessarily capture how teenagers interact with these products.

The assessment found that chatbots frequently missed warning signs of mental-health distress, including when users disclosed their indirectly.

The researchers also found a marked difference between isolated prompts and longer interactions: while safeguards performed better when presented with explicit, single-turn prompts, they became

causing India to pivot to Israel's Spike missile system — manufactured by Rafael Advanced Defense Systems Ltd — in 2014.

Deal for Spike

In 2014, India decided to go ahead with the Spike ATGMs as against the Javelin, after it was understood that it could offer greater flexibility of technology transfer and local production. The Defence Acquisition Council cleared the purchase of over 8,000 Spike ATGMs. But this also ran into long contract negotiations. Concerns over the Spike's performance in trials, technology transfer, and progress in India's man-portable ATGM programme led to a cancellation of the \$500 million deal in 2017.

The deal was revived in 2018 following Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's visit, but was subsequently shelved again. India, however, undertook an emergency purchase of a limited quantity of the fourth-generation Spike-LR ATGMs in 2019 to meet an immediate operational gap.

In August 2023, Kalray Rafael Advanced Systems Pvt Ltd — a joint venture between Indian conglomerate Kalayani

Group and Rafael — said it had bagged a Rs 287.51 crore order from the Defence Ministry for the supply of the missile systems.

Back to Javelin

The Javelin reappeared in India-US strategic discussions at a time when defence cooperation between both countries had deepened. A US Congressional Research Service report, updated in 2025, noted that co-production discussions involving the Javelin were ongoing.

In February 2025, the Javelin Joint Venture — a partnership between US defence majors Lockheed Martin and Raytheon — said it was exploring co-assembly and co-production opportunities of the Javelin in India. It signed a memorandum of understanding with Bharat Dynamics Limited.

The discussion gained pace after Operation Sindoor in May last year. By July 2025, India was negotiating to get the Javelin systems, both as an emergency procurement and through a long-term contract — the latter likely involving co-production of the weapon systems. In November 2025, Washington officially cleared the sale.

Different user needs

OpenAI has acknowledged that safety features designed for Indian teenagers may run into a unique set of challenges. The Teen Safety Blueprint for India notes that Indian teenagers often access technology in "shared, multilingual and mediated contexts", rather than through the single-user, private devices many safety tools assume. The RATTI report notes that this divide is amplified in rural and low-income contexts. Only half of the teenagers surveyed had a personal email ID, compared with 28% among rural low-income teenagers.

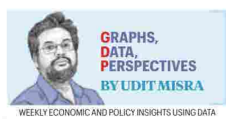
This divide matters because how some of the additional safeguards work. Parents can link their ChatGPT account to their teenager's through an email invitation, after which they can set quiet hours, manage certain settings and receive safety notifications. This could put teenagers in lower-secure households at a disadvantage in using these parental controls.

LONGER VERSION

[INDIANEXPRESS.COM/EXPLAINED](https://indianexpress.com/EXPLAINED)

• ECONOMY

Worries behind India's robust GDP, inflation data



OVER THE past three financial years, the Indian economy recorded a GDP (gross domestic product) growth rate of more than 7%, alongside a sharp drop in the inflation rate. Many analysts expected the US-Israeli War on Iran to dent this trajectory, owing to factors like an increase in the prices of crude oil and a reduction in foreign investments. Making matters worse was the prospect of high temperatures thanks to El Niño, which threatened to hit food production.

The growth rate was expected to fall, while the inflation rate was expected to rocket from 2% in 2025-26 to near 6% — from the lower end of RBI's "comfort zone" to its upper limit. On May 11, Prime Minister Narendra Modi even appealed to investors to tighten their belts by stopping gold purchases and reducing fuel consumption, among other measures.

But macroeconomic data shows India hasn't fared as poorly as feared. On Monday, GDP data for Q1 will be released and is expected to yet again cross the 7% mark.

Resilient economy?

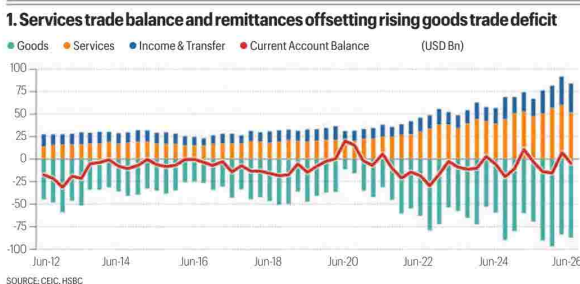
Six months since the war began, the GDP growth rate, inflation rate, and current account balance do not show the impairment initially feared.

A research note from HSBC states: "Growth remains high, inflation remains low, and the current account deficit surprisingly contained. Headline numbers across the board feel more goldilocks than crisis."

"Goldilocks" refers to a term analysts used at the start of the year to describe the economy, referring to an optimal state of affairs. The term, however, quickly lost favour once the West Asia war exposed persistent weaknesses in the Indian economy, best captured by the sharp fall in the rupee's exchange rate. As such, it makes sense to examine whether the economy has genuinely returned to a "Goldilocks" scenario or if the data hides risks.

On GDP growth

In a detailed note, HSBC economists led by Pranjal Bhandari have explained both scenarios — why India's macros did not worsen as much as expected, and the



SOURCE: CBIC, HSBC

triggers that could make the picture worse.

HSBC's 100-indicators of growth data base-points towards India's GDP growing by 7.75% during the first quarter (April, May and June). SBI's research team has gone a step further, projecting an 8% growth. What's driving this? Some of it can be ascribed to the 125-basis point cut in the repo rate between December 2024 and December 2025. The repo rate is the interest rate at which the RBI lends money to commercial banks. A lower repo rate makes it cheaper for banks to borrow money from the RBI and, in turn, cheaper for individuals and businesses to borrow from commercial banks. Cheaper loans incentivise economic activity, thus boosting growth. Often the "transmission" of a repo rate cut takes a couple of quarters to show up as faster GDP growth.

Another factor could be the effect of cuts in Goods and Services Tax in 2025. Lower tax rates reduced prices and improved people's purchasing power, resulting in higher economic activity. Yet another factor noted by HSBC economists is the rise of India's exports to the US as Donald Trump's tariffs were removed. Lastly, evidence suggests that manufacturers front-loaded production as they were anxious about future energy availability.

On inflation, CAD

First, while the monthly retail inflation rate — the rate at which the general price level went up over the year — has moved up since October, it is still well-contained and near the RBI's target level of 4% (see chart). Often, inflation remains muted be-

Heavy lifter

HSBC researchers argue that it is the services sector that is saving India the blushes as of now.

Accounting for 55% of India's GDP, the sector heavily affects where growth and inflation will land and how external deficits will be contained.

cause growth is muted. In this case, however, inflation has remained muted despite supply pressures, as well as demand holding up fairly well.

Secondly, the current account refers to the net amount of money flowing in or out of India as it trades (exports and imports) goods and services with the world. Typically, when the GDP is growing fast, or when imports are getting costlier, the country imports more than it exports, leading to a trade deficit. It translates into the outflow of billions of dollars.

What India often earns from exports of services (like software services) as well as from remittances from Indians working abroad is not enough to make up for the dollars India shells out for imports. In general, the net result is called a current account deficit (CAD). But despite fast growth and costlier imports, India's CAD too has remained fairly muted. "The headline c/a deficit is low at 0.3% of GDP as per RBI's aggregated monthly data, and not showing signs of excesses," note HSBC economists (see chart).

Reading the numbers

While macro indicators look counter-intuitively robust on the face of it, risks to growth and inflation persist.

On growth, HSBC researchers state that a lot of the credit growth (increased loans) has been driven by factors such as "the new government credit guarantee scheme for small firms, the rise in working capital needs spurred by higher commodity prices, and the proliferation of gold loan growth (which can sometimes be seen as

an indicator of stress)". Moreover, the front-loading of manufacturing could be followed by a lull, and agricultural growth could weaken if the El Niño strengthens.

On inflation, the overall benign levels hide fairly divergent trends. HSBC Research stated that food inflation and non-food goods inflation are already averaging 5.4% (year-on-year) in July (see chart). What is holding back the headline inflation from surging is that services have remained "remarkably low at 2.5%". Therein lies the risk. "Low services inflation data is keeping headline (rate) contained. If it rises from here, reflecting growth better, headline inflation numbers could rise quickly," notes HSBC.

Similarly, on CAD, a closer look at the chart shows that it is low as of now because even though the goods trade deficit is growing, rising services exports and remittances are offsetting the rise in the trade deficit. HSBC states, "Given the uncertainties around the impact of AI on services exports growth, one needs to be careful on how long services can fund a rising goods deficit. Already, services exports have grown at a softer pace this year."

Few expected India to survive this phase of global disruption without taking a big hit. HSBC researchers argue that it is the services sector that is saving India the blushes as of now. Accounting for 55% of India's GDP, the sector plays a crucial role in determining where growth will land, how long inflation will remain low, and until when external deficits will be contained. If services inflation goes up and services exports take a hit, the RBI may be forced to raise interest rates, which could dampen growth.



Milan-2T and the Konkurs missile systems in use with the Army. Javelin was highlighted as the choice to immediately fill up the ATGM gaps, after the US force actively showcased them during the 2009 bilateral exercise 'Yudh Abhyas'.

But the acquisition was eventually shelved owing to stringent technology transfer restrictions imposed by Washington. The US refused to share the missile's core seeker technology under a 100% TOT model,

The Javelin anti-tank guided missile system. LOCKHEED MARTIN

The idea was to replace the ageing

causing India to pivot to Israel's Spike missile system — manufactured by Rafael Advanced Defense Systems Ltd — in 2014.

Deal for Spike

In 2014, India decided to go ahead with the Spike ATGMs as against the Javelin, after it was understood that it could offer greater flexibility of technology transfer and local production. The Defence Acquisition Council cleared the purchase of over 8,000 Spike ATGMs. But this also ran into long contract negotiations. Concerns over the Spike's performance in trials, technology transfer, and progress in India's man-portable ATGM programme led to a cancellation of the \$500 million deal in 2017.

The deal was revived in 2018 following Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's visit, but was subsequently shelved again. India, however, undertook an emergency purchase of a limited quantity of the fourth-generation Spike-LR ATGMs in 2019 to meet an immediate operational gap.

In August 2023, Kalray Rafael Advanced Systems Pvt Ltd — a joint venture between Indian conglomerate Kalayani

Group and Rafael — said it had bagged a Rs 287.51 crore order from the Defence Ministry for the supply of the missile systems.

Back to Javelin

The Javelin reappeared in India-US strategic discussions at a time when defence cooperation between both countries had deepened. A US Congressional Research Service report, updated in 2025, noted that co-production discussions involving the Javelin were ongoing.

In February 2025, the Javelin Joint Venture — a partnership between US defence majors Lockheed Martin and Raytheon — said it was exploring co-assembly and co-production opportunities of the Javelin in India. It signed a memorandum of understanding with Bharat Dynamics Limited.

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The Indian EXPRESS

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IN 1932

BECAUSE THE TRUTH
INVOLVES US ALL

As glaciers melt, prepare for Himalayan challenge

THE HIMALAYAN mountain system is the ecological mainstay of large parts of the Indian Subcontinent. It is the wellspring of rivers and shapes the monsoon. Its forests support biodiversity, and the region is home to several pilgrimage centres. However, the range has become increasingly fragile in recent years. The mounting toll of the flash floods that struck Nepal last week after a glacier collapse near the country's border with China sent torrents of water down the Bhoti Koshi River is a grim reminder of the region's precarity. It underscores how a disturbance in higher altitudes can swiftly become a downstream catastrophe.

Several studies, including IPCC reports, have documented the retreat of glaciers in the rapidly warming Himalaya. The meltwater accumulates in glacial lakes, many of which are held back by unstable dams of boulders. These lakes can suddenly burst, sending enormous volumes of water and debris down narrow valleys. Landslides, avalanches and erratic rainfall can trigger cascading events. The Nepal disaster appears to have involved an ice-and-rock avalanche. It is not an isolated incident. A glacial lake outburst in Nepal's Everest region led to massive flooding two years ago. A 2021 study by scientists from IIT Roorkee, IISc Bengaluru, University of Dayton, University of Graz, and the Universities of Zurich and Geneva flagged instability around South Lhonak Lake in Sikkim. The warren went largely unnoticed—the lake burst two years later, killing at least 50 people.

The expansion of roads, hydropower schemes and tourism facilities in the valleys has added another layer of risk. Such projects are necessary for livelihoods, energy security and connectivity. But infrastructure development must factor in the idiosyncrasies of mountain ecology. Environmental assessments must account for the cumulative risks from infrastructure projects, while construction standards must reflect the requirements of an unstable landscape. Glaciers need continuous monitoring, with information shared across borders because Himalayan rivers and hazards do not respect political boundaries. Some efforts are underway. India is accelerating early-warning systems for the region's lakes, while Nepal and China share information on Himalayan ecology. But last week's disaster is a stark reminder of how much more needs to be done. The Bhoti Koshi's warning system, designed to track the gradual movement of glacial water, could not detect the sudden surge of debris. The experience of Switzerland, where advance monitoring and evacuation helped limit casualties after a glacier collapse destroyed much of the Blatten region in 2025, offers useful lessons. The geology of the Alps and Himalaya is, of course, vastly different. Even then, the salience of sharing expertise across mountainous regions cannot be understated. These imperatives must now be integrated into technology transfer programmes under climate pacts.

Meta's US deal redraws line of accountability

THE SETTLEMENT between Meta and 29 US states over the harm its platforms can cause children is a veiled admission of a truth that Big Tech has spent years resisting. That these platforms are built to capture attention, and therefore have a responsibility towards how they affect young users, Meta will pay up to \$18 billion over a decade and introduce a series of restrictions on Facebook and Instagram, including two-hour daily limits for under-18 users, a midnight-to-6 am curfew, stronger age verification mechanisms, default safety settings, and reduced notifications during school hours. The company has denied wrongdoing, and the settlement leaves untouched some of the more fundamental questions about personalised recommendations and the advertising-driven business model. Even so, it marks a significant step towards recognising that children's safety can no longer be treated as a matter of self-control or parental vigilance, that product design itself should come under regulatory scrutiny.

That is the direction that global regulation has been increasingly moving towards. There is a recognition of the fact that these platforms are built to make stopping difficult—the infinite scroll ensures recommendations continuously supply the next piece of content; notifications and other "hooks" are designed to bring users back, likes, streaks and personalised feeds turn attention into a measurable commodity. They are features of an engagement economy in which time spent is valuable because attention can be monetised. Technology companies have long pushed much of the responsibility towards parents who must monitor screen time and users who must exercise self-control. The new curbs begin to move responsibility upstream, towards the companies that build and profit from systems engineered to resist disengagement.

The American settlement offers a useful model for India as it contemplates regulation around children's social media usage. A system reliant solely on parental supervision will inevitably leave protection uneven, depending on digital literacy, time, and household resources. Regulation should instead ask harder questions of the platforms: Why should an engagement-maximising feed be the default for a child? Why should a young user have to opt out of personalisation rather than have a safer feed by default? And why should the burden of resisting an infinite stream of content fall on the user rather than on the company that created it? Meta's US deal could mark the beginning of a broader effort to redraw the boundaries of responsibility.

FREEZE FRAME

BY EP UNNY



The Editorial Page

The mountains have sounded a warning, we ignore it at our peril

AS A frequent visitor to the Himalayan region in India, Nepal and Bhutan over four decades, I have witnessed the relentless spoliation of this majestic but fragile mountain zone. The eternal is becoming episodic as the snows covering the high peaks melt at an accelerated pace from global warming, exacerbated by indiscriminate ecological degradation. Despite persistent and alarming warning signs, human greed and cupidity have continued to provoke the fury of the mountains, visiting death and destruction on communities residing in their valleys and along river banks.

Nepal is the latest victim of catastrophic flash floods, sweeping down from mountains just across the border with Tibet, caused by what is technically termed a glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF). A mountain river upstream may be blocked by a portion of a glacier breaking away or by an avalanche, thereby forming a lake. When the loose banks of this lake burst under pressure, then a huge volume of water hurtles downstream. It is reported that about 20 km east of the Rasuwagadhi Nepal-Tibet border crossing, a massive avalanche brought surging waters and sheets of mud down the Lhunde River, sweeping away villages, settlements, and a large number of people downstream. The avalanche may have been triggered by a 4.4 magnitude earthquake recorded in the area just minutes earlier.

The border crossing connects Nepal's Rasuwagadhi district with Gyirong county on the Tibetan side. Chinese media report similar loss of life and property across the border. The flash floods spread south from Rasuwagadhi, Dhadig, Gorkha and Nuwakot districts in Nepal, and the impact will be felt across the border in India. At least six hydropower

projects downstream have been wiped out, causing a loss of 405 MW of power capacity, constituting 12 per cent of the national total. This is a loss of power that Nepal can ill afford. Recovery and rehabilitation may take several years. Some video reports on this Himalayan tsunami are most disturbing. One sees a huge wall of water and mud tossing aside buildings, cars and frightened people with an elemental fury—a reminder once again of how utterly defenceless humanity can be before the raw power of nature.

Rasuwagadhi is the most important border crossing between Nepal and Tibet for trade as well as tourism, including for pilgrim tours to the holy Kalash-Mansarovar. It is reported that over 160 Indian pilgrims are missing. The hotels and guest houses in which they were staying were washed away in the flood. Cross-border trade and traffic are likely to remain suspended for the foreseeable future.

India has been quick to respond to the disaster in a friendly neighbouring country, sending urgent medical and food supplies and specialised rescue teams. There are 48,000 sq km of glaciers spread over the Himalaya. Another 18,000 sq km are located in the Karakoram. Researchers have mapped over 5,000 glacial lakes in the Himalaya, of which about 500 are classified as "hazardous" or "significantly hazardous". There have been at least 388 recorded instances of GLOF so far in the Himalaya-Karakoram mountains but their frequency has been increasing in recent years.

In August 2025, there was a GLOF event in Dharali in Uttarakhand on the route to Gangotri, which caused large-scale loss of life and property. One should also re-



SHYAM SARAN

call the 2013 Kedarnath flash flood caused by a combination of torrential rains and a GLOF at the Chorabari lake to the north. The surge of flood waters and debris washed away towns and settlements along the highway to Gangotri. In the immediate aftermath, there was talk of how the human carrying capacity of these remote pilgrimage places should be assessed and strictly observed. No construction 500 metres from the river banks was to be permitted hereafter. But no lessons have been learnt.

Hotels and guest houses have mushroomed once again on the river banks. During the pilgrimage season, Kedarnath may have a daily turnover of 15-20,000 pilgrims. Even at 18,000 feet elevation, there are pre-fab guest houses, restaurants and dharmas with gas cylinders being transported back and forth for heating and cooking. There are no proper arrangements for waste management. The Uttarakhand government is reportedly considering making Badrinath and Kedarnath open for pilgrimage the whole year round.

Hydropower development continues apace in the Himalayas despite the risk of GLOF and earthquakes. This is known to be an active seismic zone. In October 2023, a GLOF from the South Lhonak lake in Sikkim completely washed away the 1200 MW Teesta-III hydropower dam and power station. Earlier in 2021, a sudden flash flood triggered by a glacial collapse in Chamoli in Uttarakhand wiped out the Rishiganga Hydropower project and blocked the associated Chamoli tunnel.

Despite this mounting and compelling evidence, major hydropower projects continue to be pur-

sued across the mountain zone, creating mounting risks to life and property. But these are being cynically ignored.

There are several rivers that rise from the Tibetan plateau and flow through Nepal and India. There have been flash floods on some cross-border rivers that have caused large-scale damage on the Indian side.

The sharing of information and early warning between India and China has never been regular and has been subject to the state of their political relations. We now have, potentially, an even greater threat facing India from across the border with Tibet. China has begun constructing the gigantic Medog dam at the great bend of the Brahmaputra River just across the border. It is slated to deliver 300 billion kWh of power annually and will be several times larger than the largest hydro project in existence anywhere in the world, the Gezhouba on the Yangzi River, which is rated at 15.6 billion kWh of power annually. Chinese scientists have warned that the project sits very close to the Paizhen Fault, a major fracture in the Earth's crust, making it vulnerable to seismic events. Should there be a major earthquake in the project vicinity, there could be a massive discharge of flood waters and debris into India's Northeast.

The Himalayan glaciers have been a source of life-sustaining rivers for the entire Indo-Gangetic plain, populated by over 500 million people. It is this life-source that we are despoiling and for which our succeeding generations will pay the price. The mountains have sounded a loud warning of a cataclysm that lies round the corner. We ignore it our collective peril.

The writer is a former foreign secretary and was ambassador to Nepal from 2002 to 2004

On OBCs, the way forward is to shift the frame



ROHAN MANOJ

ONE OF the most famous Malayalam novels, Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai's *Kayar*, chronicles social change in central Travancore over the 19th and early 20th centuries. In one passage, Thakazhi touches on one of the most important realities of caste. The patriarch of a prominent real-life Ezhava family, with the hereditary title of channar, is educated, extremely rich and highly orthodox: If he encounters any "Shudra" (Nair) on the road, he will move aside, maintaining the distance prescribed for Ezhavas under the system of "untouchability"—because he wants "Parayas and Pulayars" (Dalits) to keep moving aside for him.

If this channar were alive today, how would he be classified? OBC, being an Ezhava? But how "socially and educationally backward" is he? Creamy-layer? Very. Shudra? No—in south India, especially, Shudras were often dominant castes, as seen above. "Untouchable"? Yes. Does that make him a Dalit? Probably not. Such examples demonstrate the incoherence of "backwardness" as a rubric to classify castes, as does the inclusion of dominant and upper castes. When "backward" encompasses both former "untouchables" and former kings, little survives of conceptual coherence. Without shared experience, there can be no shared identity. And when income becomes the criterion, T. N. Sankar Das has quotas for "economically weaker sections" of the upper castes infiltrate the system.

There are at least three ongoing developments that should be of particular concern to OBCs. First, the sabotage of the caste count in the Census through the use of an open column. Second, the government telling the Supreme Court that it is reconsidering the UGC Equity Regulations. And third, the government pushing back on implementing a Supreme Court judgment against the mechanical consideration of parents' salaries to identify and exclude creamy-layer candidates selected in the civil services examinations.

Will any of this lead to an OBC reaction? Some activists are trying to raise awareness, but a response proportionate to the theoretical power of this demographic is unlikely. Little solidarity has been built within the category across regions and individual castes.

When one moves away from the language of backwardness towards that of caste oppression, the picture becomes clearer

It has not, and in its current form cannot, become anything more than an arbitrary bureaucratic criteria to extract benefits from the state. Contrast this with Dalits. Among the latter, there is such a thing as the Ambedkarite movement; there is a shared identity and solidarity despite differences over questions like subcategorisation; there is awareness of and mobilisation against perceived dangers—as there was during the 2024 Lok Sabha election.

The way forward is to recognise "backwardness" as a linguistic error, a category mistake. It includes factors that are unrelated to caste and only confuse the issue. When one moves away from the language of backwardness towards that of caste oppression, the picture becomes clearer. Then one can ask which groups are discriminated against as a result of their caste and thus require quotas and special protections, and which groups are not. At the same time, as this is not about individual families' status or wealth but caste (remember the *channar*—No amount of money can buy touchability of the creamy-layer barrier must be removed. The word "class" is another obfuscating factor that needs to go—"Other Backward Classes" should become "Other Oppressed Castes". The sticking point will be removing powerful castes found to be ineligible, which seems politically impossible.

What about historically oppressed castes who have done well in the past few decades—getting good jobs, becoming chief ministers? Should they have their benefits taken away so others can climb the ladder in turn? One thing to remember is that money and temporary political power are not the end. There are forms of institutional power that have successfully fended off the "lower" castes, the higher judiciary above all. It's time to amplify the demand for reservation in such positions. It's also time to think of who is still setting the narrative intellectually and culturally. For instance, academia, where removing the creamy-layer barrier may help fill vacancies—last year, the government told Parliament that around 80 per cent of professor posts for OBCs at central universities were vacant. And indeed, English journalism.

The writer is senior assistant editor, The Indian Express. rohan.manoj@expressindia.com

Unlocking soft power with Saptadharma



CV ANANDA BOSE

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi introduced Saptadharma from the Red Fort on August 15. This concept includes seven strands of national strength that can help India achieve its Viksit Bharat goal. One of these is soft power. Coined by Joseph S. Nye Jr, soft power is about influencing others through attraction instead of coercion. India has a wealth of soft power, including a long civilisational history, rich cultural diversity, and a strong tradition of knowledge. Yoga connects people worldwide with India. Ayurveda provides a philosophy of wellness. Our spiritual centres draw people seeking peace, and our festivals celebrate harmony and renewal. Indian literature, music, dance, and cinema transcend languages. Our cuisine is recognised globally. Handicrafts and handlooms reflect the skill and creativity of generations. India's democracy, scientific progress, digital systems, space programme, and global dispersal further enhance its global reputation.

However, India lacks a coherent system to turn its cultural assets into influence, economic value, and sustainable livelihoods. Having cultural wealth doesn't guarantee global influence, and appreciation won't ensure income for artists or knowledge-holders. The Saptadharma vision offers a chance to fix this gap.

Each district should create a soft power and creative economy plan. This plan should identify local artists, artisans, writers, and cultural workers. It should connect them to training, technology, finance, intellectual property protection, local markets, and international opportunities. Experienced practitioners should mentor young apprentices. The *guru-shishya* system should receive modern support while staying authentic. Schools and universities should introduce students to India's cultural diversity.

Soft power can drive significant employment. Areas like tourism, cinema, music, fashion, and education can create millions of jobs. The government should enable this growth. It should invest initially, set standards, connect markets, and be a first customer when possible. Cultural workers should not rely solely on grants but should be empowered to earn regular incomes.

A national mission can aim to create 1 crore new jobs in tourism, arts, media, and the creative economy. Districts should prepare soft-power employment plans. Indian missions abroad should facilitate market access and promote Indian culture and businesses. Success should be measured by real livelihoods created and opportunities gained. Missions can help creators create opportunities for touring, publishing, and international collaboration. Young people must be central to this movement. They should become creators and innovators. By blending heritage with technology, young Indians can share their stories and cultures with the world through digital platforms and new industries.

India does not need to create soft power; it should enhance, connect, and protect it. The path forward should be clear: *Kala* (art) to *kaushal* (skill), *kamal* (earning) to *rozgar* (employment), *bazaar* (market) to *visva prakhar* (global influence). Saptadharma can ensure that those who preserve traditions receive dignified livelihoods and that youth inherit both identity and opportunity. This way, India's cultural voice will confidently reach the world.

The writer is former governor of West Bengal

40 YEARS AGO

August 31, 1986



14 gunned down in Tripura

FOURTEEN PEOPLE were shot dead and 10 injured by Tribal National Volunteer (TNV) extremists at Sirampur village in Kamalpur sub-division of North Tripura district. A gang of 15 to 20 extremists, reportedly led by "general" Kartick Koldi, raided the village and resorted to indiscriminate firing.

PM holds pre-summit talks

THE OUTGOING chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, opened pre-summit consultations with other

Pakistan leader's claims

THE PRESIDENT of the Pakistani National Awami Party, Khan Abdul Wali Khan, who is the Soviet Union these days, has told the press in Moscow that Islamabad is interfering in India's internal affairs. He cited develop-

ments in Punjab. Wali Khan, son of the legendary Frontier Gandhi, Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan, has been in the forefront of the struggle for restoring democracy in Pakistan.

Civilian killed in border firing

JAGDISH LAL, a porter with the Army, was killed in firing by Pakistani troops in the 13th Digwar area, about 4 km from Poonch town, Poonch police chief Kuldeep Khuda said over the telephone. Jagdish Lal, who was in his early 30s, is the second civilian to be killed in firing by Pakistani troops in the Poonch sector this month.

Israel must choose between itself and its West Bank settlements.
—Haaretz, Israel



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Atmanirbharta in fuel must strengthen, not undermine, India's food security



FROM PLATE TO PLOUGH
BY ASHOK GULATI
AND TANMOY ADHIKARI

SUGAR PRICES have spiked sharply within weeks. The all-India modal retail price climbed from around Rs 45/kg on July 24 to about Rs 65/kg by August 24 — a nearly 44 per cent increase in a month. The government has blamed traders and millers for hoarding and threatened strict action. While speculative behaviour may have amplified the spike, the deeper reality is a tightening of the supply situation just before the festive season.

Three supply-side pressures seem to have caused a "perfect storm". First, opening stocks in the current sugar year (October to September) were significantly lower (5 MT) when compared to the situation last year (8 MT). The lower carry-over stocks reflected weak production in the previous season and left little room to absorb another supply shock.

Second, sugar production in 2025-26 fell short of expectations. The initial estimate was around 34.3 MT, but the government has now revised it to 30.6 MT, citing damage from red rot and top borer. About 27.35 MT of sugar had been produced by June, implying that another 3.25 MT would have to be produced during July-September to reach the revised estimate. Yet the production in these three months averaged only around 0.38 MMT over the previous six seasons. We expect a further downward revision of sugar production — between 28 and 29 MT.

Third, the ethanol programme diverted about 2.75 MT of sugar even when supplies were tight. The more important issue is that ethanol blending has progressed much

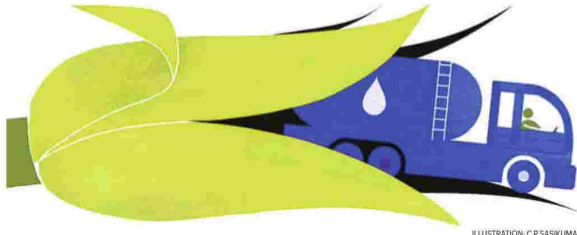


ILLUSTRATION: C. SAKUMAR

faster than feedstock supplies. Ethanol blending remained largely stagnant for years, reaching only 1.53 per cent in 2013-14, before accelerating to around 5 per cent by 2019-20 and ultimately 20 per cent in 2025-26. The feedstock supplies could not keep pace with the blending programme. No wonder energy policy started competing with food markets.

The timing is particularly difficult. The festive season is approaching, when sugar demand typically rises, while fresh cane supplies will not arrive in significant quantities until mid-October. The market must, therefore, rely on existing stocks for many more weeks. Thin inventories are pushing up sugar prices, which could go even higher if timely action is not taken.

In a more open economy, a production shortfall would normally be corrected through price signals triggering imports and changes in consumption. But India's sugar sector remains heavily regulated: Sugarcane pricing, sugar sales, imports, exports and ethanol feedstock allocation are decided by the government. When the government controls every step of the sugar/ethanol value chain, the resulting spike in sugar prices also has to be owned by the government. It is a classic case of policy failure.

The government's response so far has been to allow 1 MT of duty-

free raw sugar imports. We feel this is too little, too late. Our calculations suggest that the government needs to import at least 3-4 MT of refined sugar and increase supplies in the open market before and during the festive season. The import duty on refined sugar (100 per cent) must be slashed to zero or just 5 per cent.

The second response should be to temporarily alter the ethanol feedstock mix. Sugar-based ethanol should be drastically reduced, with greater use of alternative feedstocks. FCI is overflowing with rice stocks far in excess of buffer norms. The government can allocate more from these stocks and minimise the use of sugar for ethanol. But FCI must charge at least the procurement price of rice from ethanol plants, if not its full economic cost.

However, maize is the best option as a feedstock for ethanol. It doesn't guzzle as much water as rice or sugarcane. The government is already using maize as a primary feedstock for ethanol. Although maize production has been increasing over the last decade or so, our productivity levels hover around 3.5 tonnes/ha — way below the US's 11 tonnes/ha. Further use of maize for ethanol without a commensurate increase in production will put pressure on maize prices and, consequently, on poultry meat,

eggs, and milk, where it has been the main feed. Thus, shifting from sugar to rice or maize does not eliminate the food-fuel trade-off. The only way is to generate large surpluses of maize by raising its productivity. Would India allow GM maize, which drives US yields?

The third response could be either to directly import ethanol, when domestic supplies are putting pressure on food prices, or reduce the blending from 20 per cent to about 15 per cent.

The deeper lesson is that India's ethanol programme needs a little rethink and recalibration with different feedstocks. Rather than rigidly allocating the amount of ethanol from sugar, rice or maize, oil marketing companies could be given flexibility to choose the most economical source, subject to safeguards for food security, farmers and the environment. The government should focus on strategic buffers and feed-security safeguards rather than managing every feedstock allocation.

The immediate response is clear: Bring in enough sugar to rebuild the stock cushion, temporarily shift ethanol away from sugar, use FCI grain only when genuine surplus exists, and retain imported ethanol as a safety valve. Maize-based ethanol would save water and would be more benign to the environment. But we need to invest more in raising its productivity. India's ethanol programme has made major strides, and going from 5 per cent blending in 2019-20 to 20 per cent in 2025-26 is putting huge demand on its feedstocks. Overall, we feel that fuel self-reliance should never force a choice between food and fuel. *Atmanirbharta* in fuel must strengthen, not undermine, India's food security; food must remain the higher-order priority.

We hope the Modi government can undertake a 360-degree evaluation of its ethanol programme and recalibrate the policy design so that it does not push up food prices.

Gulati is distinguished professor and Adhikari a research assistant at ICRIER. Views are personal

Believing in her strength, putting her at the centre of nation's story



VASUNDHARA RAJÉ SCINDIA

IN 2001, as Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi had certain rituals performed. The obvious choice to carry the sacred *kalash* would have been a *purohit* or a *mahatma*. Breaking with convention, Modi chose Ravina Javav, a Dalit girl who lived in a slum. For him, the dignity of women was the first step towards their empowerment. Over the years, he has shared with me, and several others, his conviction that dignity should never be reserved for the powerful, and that those at the margins must be brought to the forefront.

I have seen this conviction from close quarters. Women who had, for generations, remained outside the circle of opportunity were to be partners in development, decision-makers and leaders, and not just recipients of welfare. For someone who has spent much of her public life witnessing the aspirations of women in villages and cities, this distinction has always been important. Empowerment means creating an environment in which a girl can grow into a confident citizen — her basic needs are secured and she is given the tools and opportunities to reach for the sky.

Modi's years in Gujarat set the template. He launched the Kanya Kelavani Yojana for girls' education and travelled from village to village to urge parents to send their daughters to school. Over the years, in one form or another, states across India, including those governed by political opponents, adopted, adapted and renamed similar schemes. After the Kutch earthquake, he asked that rebuilt homes be registered in the names of both husband and wife. He also confronted the entrenched practice of the sarpanch *pati*, telling women sarpanches plainly: "The power is yours, and you alone must exercise it."

After taking over as Prime Minister, he launched schemes for women, placed them at the centre of India's economic transformation and envisaged them as drivers of the economy. Under the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, crores of women got bank accounts for the first time in their lives. Sixty-eight per cent of beneficiaries of the MUDRA scheme are women. There is extraordinary power in a woman having a bank account in her own name, and access to credit that she can draw upon herself. I witnessed this transformation on Women's Day in 2018, when the Prime Minister came to Jhunjhunu in Rajasthan. He launched the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) Abhiyan nationwide and also initiated the nationwide Poshan Abhiyan, the country's flagship nutrition mission. I was witness to the excitement of a crowd of more than 1,00,000 people, nearly half of them women. BBBP now also focuses on increasing girls' participation in traditionally dominated by men.

The NaMo Drone Didi scheme places agricultural drones in the hands of 15,000 women's self-help groups. More than 75 per cent of beneficiaries of the Stand-Up India scheme are women entrepreneurs. Under Modi's leadership, women were granted permanent commissions in the armed forces, admitted to the National Defence Academy and inducted into combat roles. Squadron Leader Shivangi Singh made history as India's first woman fighter pilot to qualify as a flying instructor, and she flies the Rafale. The Nari Shakti Vandan Adhinyam — serving a third of the Parliament seats for women — was passed under his leadership.

Several Opposition leaders lecture the nation on women's rights while governments led by their own parties struggle to find room for women at the decision-making table. Under Modi's leadership, in contrast, women have occupied important offices — from Parliament to Rashtrapati Bhavan, from the battlefield to the boardroom. The difference between the two approaches is the difference between a slogan and a life-long commitment.

Symbolism matters in India. For PM Modi, however, symbolism has always carried substance. On International Women's Day in 2020, he did something unprecedented. He temporarily handed over his social-media accounts, followed by millions, to seven women achievers. He repeated the gesture in 2025, and this time Rajasthan's Ajita Shah was among those who were recognised. Shah, a Tufts University alumna, has worked tirelessly to empower women, including in Dholpur in Rajasthan.

I have known Narendra Modi as a *kanyakarta*, a guide and a leader. India has known him as a man who believed in the strength of its women long before many others did.

The writer, a former Rajasthan chief minister, is vice president, BJP

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Preparing for disaster

THIS IS not a man-made tragedy; it is the result of nature's fury ("Himalaya needs shared early-warning system", *IE*, August 28). But does this mean people should avoid living in places identified as vulnerable to natural disasters? Should governments also refrain from developing such vulnerable areas as tourist destinations without adequate safeguards? We must follow the time-tested adage, "Prevention is better than cure." Governments and people must therefore exercise greater caution in identifying disaster-prone areas, regulating construction and human habitation, and ensuring adequate preparedness.

Tharicus S Fernando, Chennai

NEPAL HAS again been hit by a major natural disaster ("Himalaya needs shared early-warning system", *IE*, August 28). The floods also raise a larger question: Are they purely natural events, or are human actions and climate change aggravating their impact? Global warming is accelerating glacier melt, weakening mountain slopes and increasing the risks of rockfalls, landslides and sudden flooding. The Rasuwagadhi floods in 2016 highlighted the importance of timely sharing of weather- and flood-related information across borders. Yet the latest incident suggests gaps persist in information-sharing between Nepal and China.

Tushar A Rahatgaonkar, Dombivli East

Take a break

THIS IS one of the most relatable pieces I have read as a teenager in this newspaper ("Don't herd children through narrow tunnels", *IE*, August 28). Parents and children alike do not know where they are trying to reach when parents get their children involved in various activities. Parents are often confused about what the future holds, and in order to create a false sense of control, they enrol their kids in a score of different activities, thinking they are making them better prepared. This has made children unable to experience boredom. Children, like everyone else, need time to think. Time to take a break.

Divot Rao, Gurugram



GITANJALI J ANGMO

IT TOOK until India's 80th Independence Day for "Vande Mataram" to be rendered, for the first time, as part of the celebrations at the Red Fort. There was something strangely poignant about it. The war cry that had escaped a novel, entered the streets, uninvited an empire and accompanied bravehearts to prisons and gallows has taken nearly eight decades to reach independent India's most symbolic ramparts.

But even this sacred inheritance is not without its share of objectionable arguments. Veteran actor Sharmila Tagore and many others, like the Congress in 1937, proposed restricting its national use to the first two stanzas. How can a Muslim bow to Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswati invoked in its later verses? Doesn't its origin in Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's *Anandamath*, with its difficult depiction of Muslim rule, make it exclusionary? Was India even a nation when Bankim imagined her as Mother?

These are not frivolous questions. But sometimes answers lie in recovering meanings we have lost. India was certainly not a modern nation-state for most of her history. India imagined herself differently.

Long before passport, parliament or political boundary stood Bharatavarsha: a cultural and spiritual geography. The *Vedam Purana* describes Bharat as the land north of the ocean and south of the Himalayas. Across this vastness, languages, customs, deities and philosophies differed, yet beneath them ran the same insistent question: What is the ultimate reality,

Maize is the best option as a feedstock for ethanol. It doesn't guzzle as much water as rice or sugarcane. The government is already using maize as a primary feedstock for ethanol

Don't make Vande Mataram a religious quarrel

and how may the human being know it? Kashmir answered through its Shaivism; Karnataka through Madhwa's Dvaita; Dwarka worshipped Krishna. India did not wait for the modern state to know herself. Her unity lay in a civilisation asking the eternal questions in a thousand different ways. This is where Sri Aurobindo helps us understand "Vande Mataram". He called Bankim a *rishi* who had taught Indians to see India: "The mantra had been given... The Mother had revealed herself."

What Mother? Look again at Bankim's poem. She first comes without weapons, crowns or temples. She is *sujalam*, *suphalam*: Abundant waters, cool breeze, green harvests, moonlit nights, flowering trees. Before she is Goddess, she is the land beneath our feet. Perhaps patriotism begins in such intimacy: A river remembered from childhood; the language in which one's grand-mother told stories; the smell of the first rain, food, music, mountains, festivals, memories. Slowly, geography becomes belonging. Earth becomes Mother.

Sri Aurobindo took this further. A nation, he wrote, was "not a piece of earth". It was the *shakti* of its millions: A living being formed by its people, culture, civilisation, and aspiration. It helps us understand Bankim's Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswati. Read literally, and we have three Hindu goddesses and, inevitably, another TV debate. But India has always spoken through symbols. Durga is *shakti*; Lakshmi is abundance; Saraswati is knowledge.

In Bankim's poem, she first comes without weapons, crowns or temples. She is 'sujalam', 'suphalam': abundant waters, cool breeze, green harvests, moonlit nights. Before she is Goddess, she is the land beneath our feet

Strength. Prosperity. Knowledge. Which civilisation does not need all three? A Muslim need not worship in a temple to value courage. A Christian need not worship in a church to desire prosperity for India. An atheist need not worship Saraswati to hold knowledge sacred. The imagery is culturally Indian; what it signifies is universal.

The tragedy is in reducing "Vande Mataram" to a religious quarrel. One sees a Hindu goddess and feels excluded; another sees a Hindu goddess and wishes to exclude. But if she is the "duhita of her millions" the Muslim farmer, Christian nurse, Sikh soldier, Jain businessman, Buddhist monk, and atheist scientist are not guests in somebody else's India. They are strands of her being.

Perhaps that is why the Red Fort moment mattered. Not because everyone must now sing "Vande Mataram", but because an old song returned carrying a question for our future: What do these two words ask of us?

If India is merely territory, citizenship becomes transactional: What are my rights? What do I receive? But if India is Mother, the grammar of patriotism changes. Rights remain, but responsibility enters. The question turns from "What has India given me?" to "What am I giving India?" That is the enduring power of Bankim's two words. Not an instruction to worship a nation, but an invitation to enter into a relationship with her. The nation-state may be modern. The Mother is ancient. The relationship is sacred. And so we bow to her. *Vande Mataram*.

The writer is founder, Himalayan Institute for Alternatives, Ladakh

Typhoid control needs more vaccine, less antibiotic



KAMINI WALLA

EVERYONE IS talking about increasing influenza and swine flu cases. Another disease where cases are unobtrusively mounting is typhoid. This should concern us, not simply because typhoid remains a common infection, but because every suspected case can become a trigger for inappropriate or unnecessarily broad-spectrum antibiotic use. Typhoid presents a particularly difficult paradox. It is a vaccine-preventable bacterial disease, yet in India we continue to diagnose it imperfectly and treat it empirically. The fundamental problem is the absence of a simple, reliable, accessible diagnostic test. A single Widal test is not sufficient to establish

a diagnosis of acute typhoid. In an endemic country such as India, background antibodies and previous exposure/vaccination can make interpretation difficult. Yet, in routine practice, a positive Widal result may still be treated as confirmation of typhoid.

Blood culture remains the conventional laboratory standard, but it too has limitations. The WHO's latest typhoid guidance notes that the sensitivity of a single blood culture is only around 55-60 per cent, with yield influenced by the volume of blood collected and, critically, prior antimicrobial exposure. This creates a vicious cycle: A patient develops prolonged fever, takes an antibiotic before seeking care, undergoes blood culture, and receives a negative result. The clinician is left with suspicion but no microbiological confirmation — and may respond by escalating or changing antibiotics.

The result is a compelling. The WHO has prioritised typhoid-control in a country already struggling with increasing resistance to *Salmonella typhi*. Every unnecessary antibiotic course creates additional selection pressure, while every missed diagnosis undermines surveillance of resistance patterns. But there is another question we should be asking: Why are we trying to solve a vaccine-preventable disease primarily through antibiotics? India is one of the countries where the case for typhoid

It is a vaccine-preventable bacterial disease, yet in India we continue to diagnose it imperfectly and treat it empirically

vaccination is compelling. The WHO has prioritised typhoid-conjugate vaccine (TCV) introduction in countries with high disease-burden or high AMR levels. India produced the world's first WHO-prequalified TCV, Typhar-TCV, in 2017. Since then, additional Indian TCV products have achieved WHO prequalification. The scientific and manufacturing capability exists. The vaccine exists. What remains inadequate is the scale and rigour of use.

Vaccination should not be viewed as a substitute for clean water, sanitation, food safety or better diagnostics. It must be part of an integrated typhoid-control strategy.

First, reports of increasing typhoid should trigger strengthened surveillance. Hospitals and laboratories should systematically document suspected and culture-confirmed cases, antimicrobial susceptibility

patterns and prior antibiotic exposure.

Second, diagnostic stewardship needs to become part of antimicrobial stewardship. Blood cultures should ideally be obtained before antibiotics are started, with adequate blood volume and appropriate laboratory practices. India also needs investment in a better point-of-care or rapid diagnostic test for typhoid. We also need to revisit the place of TCV in our public-health strategy.

We should respond to the rising typhoid cases with better diagnostics, stronger surveillance, responsible antimicrobial use and, above all, prevention. India should not have to choose between better diagnosis and vaccination. It needs both.

The writer is senior scientist and programme officer, AMR, ICMR

MOST ECONOMISTS SEE GDP GROWTH IN APR-JUN WELL ABOVE RBI'S FORECAST OF 7%

GDP surprise expected after best Q1 in over 10 years for loan growth

Siddharth Upasani
New Delhi, August 30

ONE ECONOMIC indicator after another is showing that on the whole, the Indian economy has weathered the storm that is the West Asia conflict and the resultant energy shock. The biggest proof of this may come on Monday (August 31), when the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) releases GDP data for the April-June quarter.

According to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), GDP growth in the quarter may be 7%. But economists from various banks and agencies think the headline growth figure may exceed the central bank's forecast by at least half a percentage point, with some even of the opinion that growth may come in as high as 8%.

"An upswing in GDP growth close to psychological 8% threshold in a quarter laden with impact of geopolitical tensions and spike in oil prices to an average \$97/bbl is a positive surprise," said Union Bank of India economists led by Kanika Pasricha. They think GDP growth in April-June will be 7.9%, "likely a blockbuster beating all odds".

The economy's performance has been surprising on the upside for some time now, with the last three quarters seeing GDP growth rates of 8.3%, 8%, and 7.8%.

Of the 50-plus indicators tracked by State Bank of India — which estimates around 8% GDP growth in April-June — 86% of them accelerated in the quarter, up from 69% in April-June 2025.

Underpinning the robust performance in April-June is the pace at which loans are being taken.

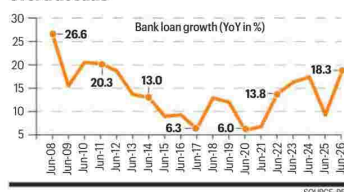
Decadal high loan growth

The first quarter of a new financial year is usually the weakest in terms of corporate performance and demand for loans from lenders. Why? Because activity takes a breather after the hectic last quarter of the financial year and companies are busy making their plans for the year ahead.

However, the first three months of 2026-27 have been the best for demand for bank loans in more than a decade.

RBI data shows outstanding non-food loans of banks were up 18.3% year-on-year as at the

Loan growth at end of June highest for Q1 in over a decade



end of June. The last time bank loan growth was higher at the end of the first quarter of a financial year was back in June 2012, when it was 18.7%.

While some of the high growth in bank credit can be attributed to a change in the reporting format of the data to the last day of the month as well as the high wholesale inflation in April-June due to the war, there are solid underlying reasons driving demand for money.

As at the end of June, bank loans to the industry were up 19.2% year-on-year, services 21.4%, and personal loans 15.8%. In June 2025, the corre-

sponding growth rates were 6.3%, 8.8%, and 11.7%.

The inflection point

According to Barclays economists Aastha Gudwani and Amruta Ghare, while demand for bank credit post Covid from industry has largely been lower than that from agriculture, services, and the retail sector personal credit, things changed in mid-2025. "...continued acceleration over the past year in industry growth is now driven by 'large' industry bank credit: where pace has nearly risen 4x from 2% outstanding in June 2025 to 16.6% in June 2026."

Subhash Chandra says borrowers assure settlement of Rs 4,262 crore

George Mathew
Mumbai, August 30

ESSEL GROUP founder Subhash Chandra on Sunday said borrowers associated with his personal guarantees had assured him that they would reconcile their accounts with lenders and settle the balance of Rs 4,262 crore. Of the total Rs 4,808 crore disbursed, the borrower paid Rs 3,803 crore, leaving a balance of only Rs 998 crore, as per a statement from Chandra's office. "Against a payable amount of Rs 998 crore, claims filed were Rs 5,311 crore. After reducing the settled/paid claims of Rs 1,049 crore, the remaining is Rs 4,262 crore," the statement said.

According to the statement, HDFC Bank has 4-5 accounts

Lenders exposure

HDFC Bank	₹775 cr
LIC Housing	₹1,322 cr
IndusInd	₹240 cr
Canara Bank	₹348 cr
Union Bank	₹164 cr
RBL Bank	₹119 cr
Franklin Templeton	₹729 cr
Edelweiss	₹565 cr

SOURCE: STATEMENT FROM SUBHASH CHANDRA'S OFFICE

with an outstanding dues of Rs 775 crore. However, these are claims without a valid personal guarantee, it said. Canara Bank has an outstanding dues of Rs 348 crore. This was borrowing

against the borrower's assets in the US, the statement said.

LIC Housing has an outstanding amount of Rs 1,322 crore. This has been offered for settlement and part security is available, it said. Union Bank has an outstanding amount of Rs 164 crore, against which security is available. RBL Bank has an outstanding amount of Rs 119 crore. "They were offered to pay by borrower as settled with the large lender, but they refused," the statement said. IndusInd Bank has an outstanding amount of Rs 240 crore. "It also had adequate security during the default period but did not convert it to cash. Hence, kept security for further gains, at their own risk," it said. FULL REPORT ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

India eyes 4th spot in forex reserves ranks

On Friday, Reserve Bank of India data showed India's foreign exchange reserves hit an all-time high of \$729.33 billion, cementing its position as the country with the fifth-largest reserves in the world and approaching Russia in fourth.



SOURCE: PEOPLE'S BANK OF CHINA, JAPAN MINISTRY OF FINANCE, SWISS NATIONAL BANK, BANK OF RUSSIA, RBI

With the RBI's three concessional swap schemes for Foreign Currency Non-Resident (FCN) deposits, Overseas (Bank) Currency Borrowings, and External Commercial Borrowings still open, reserves should swell further.

A higher level of forex reserves gives the RBI greater ammunition to defend the rupee when the need arises —

as has been the case over the last year. But how much is enough?

According to former RBI Deputy Governor Michael Patel, the target should be at least \$1 trillion. "Funding against such a level should be beyond the reach of the opportunistic and/or the faint-hearted," Patel wrote in a column in March.

SBI, arm to dilute up to 1% in NSE via public offer

New Delhi: State Bank of India (SBI) and its subsidiary SBI Capital Markets Ltd together plan to dilute up to 1% stake in the National Stock Exchange (NSE) through the exchange's proposed Rs 30,000-crore initial public offering (IPO).

The bank is participating in the NSE IPO and will dilute a 0.65% stake in the exchange, SBI Chairman C S Setty told PTI in an interview.

"We are participating in that divestment. We propose to divest 0.65% and 0.35% by SBI Capital Markets because both of us hold the stake. So together, about 1% as a SBI Capital Markets (SBI) partner, it could be less depending on any other shareholders joining," he said, PTI.

'Madhepura loco factory builds global skills; 30% of Alstom work now in India'

THE LOCOMOTIVE factory in Bihar's Madhepura has created a large pool of engineers, contributing to 30% of Alstom's global engineering work now being done in India, according to Vivek Garg, managing director of Madhepura Electric Locomotive Pvt Ltd (MELPL).

MELPL manufactures India's most powerful 12,000-horsepower locomotives, which run on dedicated freight corridors and can haul loads of up to 6,000 tonnes. The company is a joint venture between Indian Railways and French major Alstom, with Alstom holding a 74% stake. It supplied its 650th locomotive to the Railways on August 15.

In an interview with *The Indian Express*, Vivek Garg, managing director of MELPL, discussed the growth of India manufacturing, global practices, the new suppliers it has brought into the ecosystem and future plans for the project, one of the largest foreign direct investments (FDI) in India's railway sector. Edited excerpts:

What has changed from your first to 650th locomotive, and how much of it is 'Made in India'?

There has been a massive change. Our centres of competence are based across Europe. Initially, the locomotives were designed there, and some of the first locomotives also had key components manufactured there, while assembly was done in India, as permitted under the contract.

We then quickly transferred the technology and manufacturing capabilities to India. Today, we manufacture the entire loco here, from propulsion systems at our Combarbe facility, and locomotive shells (car bodies) at our manufacturing facility in Kolkata. When we entered into the joint venture in 2015, there was no formal Make in India policy. Even then, we made it a point to localise production and build the entire ecosystem in India. Today, we have more than 90% localisation across all components. We have also brought more



VIVEK GARG
MANAGING DIRECTOR, MELPL

than 30 established suppliers into the railway manufacturing ecosystem. There are still a few components that we import, such as wheels and axles, because there is currently no supplier in India for this particular design and specification. At present, these components are sourced from China and Ukraine.

What is your plan for future expansion after the contract expires?

The existing contract is for 800 locomotives, with the contract period running until March 2028. We have supplied 650 locomotives so far, and the remaining 150 will be delivered by March 2028. The contract also gives Indian Railways an option to order an additional 200 locomotives.

We are in discussions with Indian Railways on how we can maintain continuity of production at Madhepura. We are hopeful that something will come out of these discussions.

And is there any plan for exports?

We are exploring every possible way of maintaining continuity. We have this land lease for 35 years. The entire investment and the facility you saw will remain in place. It therefore makes sense to continue utilising the facility for manufacturing. We are discussing this with Indian Railways.

The reporter was in Patna at the invitation of Alstom. FULL REPORT ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

India aims to seal Chile trade pact this year

New Delhi: India is committed to conclude negotiations for a comprehensive trade agreement with Chile this year as it would help further strengthen economic ties between the two countries, the commerce ministry said on Sunday.

Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agarwal was there in Santiago, Chile to review the progress of the talks. The proposed comprehensive economic partnership agreement (CEPA) is expected to open new avenues for greater trade and investment, while fostering cooperation in technology, talent and resilient supply chains. "India remains committed to concluding the CEPA negotiations within this year, with the aim of delivering a balanced and mutually beneficial framework that provides equitable and commercially meaningful outcomes for businesses on both sides," it said, PTI.

Dy MD Kaizad Bharucha in HDFC Bank CEO race

Mumbai, August 30

HDFC BANK is likely to name Deputy Managing Director Kaizad Bharucha as one of two options for its next CEO after incumbent Sashidhar Jagdishan retires at the end of his second term in October, two people familiar with the matter said. India's largest private lender is also searching for an external candidate in keeping with a central bank rule requiring banks submit multiple names for the CEO position, the people said, declining to be identified as the information was private.

The Reserve Bank of India approves top banking appointments. Neither HDFC Bank nor Bharucha responded to emails seeking comment outside of regular business hours.

The CEO search comes after about six months of upheaval at HDFC Bank where

leadership issues have weighed on its shares.

The bank announced Jagdishan's retirement on Saturday. He had been widely tipped to continue as CEO before Atanu Chakrabarty resigned as chairman in March saying practices at the bank were at odds with his "personal values and ethics".

An external legal review found no evidence to substantiate Chakrabarty's governance concerns. Last month, the board penalised Jagdishan and three others in a separate matter related to the pricing of large deposits. The bank said on Saturday without elaborating that its CEO since October 2020 had decided not to seek reappointment and that it would fast-track the appointment of a successor.

Among the leading internal candidates is Bharucha, a long-serving executive overseeing the retail and wholesale businesses, the people said.

RBI AND SEBI ARE STRENGTHENING CYBER RESILIENCE, INCIDENT REPORTING AND AI SAFEGUARDS AS THREATS TO THE FINANCIAL SECTOR GROW MORE SOPHISTICATED

Why regulators are tightening the cybersecurity net around India's financial sector

Akash Mandal
Mumbai, August 30

AS ARTIFICIAL intelligence (AI) fuels rising cybersecurity threats, regulators are tightening oversight of the financial sector, with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) reiterating their focus on protecting critical parts of the financial ecosystem.

SEBI, for example, on Monday introduced an IT Resilience Index (ITRI) for Market Infrastructure Institutions — entities like clearing corporations and exchanges that enable trading in financial markets. "Any disruption, degrading in performance or compromise of these (IT) systems may adversely impact critical market operations and

pose risks to the trust in the securities market," the market regulator noted in its circular. The RBI released a new comprehensive cybersecurity framework late last month for banks and financial institutions, and also flagged the possibility of a "kill switch" mechanism.

The mechanism allows users to freeze all financial transactions in the RBI's case, while the markets regulator is evaluating a similar mechanism as part of its AI guidelines. Both regulators are stepping up focus on cyber risks as AI makes fraud easier to scale. This includes deepfake voices used to bypass KYC checks, as well as complex scams that infiltrate critical financial services institutions. In fact, we're already seeing cyberse-

curity threats infiltrating a few banks so far in 2026.

Measuring cyber resilience

SEBI's ITRI for market infrastructure institutions quantifies cyber readiness and turns it into something tangible. The index has 9 parameters — availability and security have a weightage of 20%, integrity, governance, reliability and monitoring, modularity and flexibility, and business continuity have a weightage of 10% each, while scalability and an "others" parameter with miscellaneous requirements have a weightage of 5% each.

"SEBI's IT Resilience Index is significant in that respect because resilience becomes something that can be measured,



AI-driven fraud, deepfakes and cyber threats are pushing regulators to strengthen monitoring and response.

benchmark and ultimately brought into boardroom accountability," said Himanshu Bagai, partner at Sakrisha & Associates. The framework, which will come into effect from early 2027, will also include an "early warning system" and continuous monitoring to flag risks early. "MIS (Market Infrastructure Institutions) shall compute ITRI on a half-yearly basis within a period of 60 days from the end

of each half-year and submit the comparative analysis of two consecutive half-years (on a rolling basis) and corrective action," SEBI's circular noted.

The regulator on Monday also said that it has aligned its incident reporting portal for regulated entities with standardized "Format for Incident Reporting Exchange" or FIRE format. This "will facilitate reporting of incidents in stages to reflect incident life cycle from initial report to final closure, while acknowledging that certain information may not be available at the time of initial reporting," it said.

AI raises the stakes

SEBI last week said it will

"shortly" issue guidelines for responsible use of AI and machine learning. While the regulator already has AI models monitoring for flag suspicious trading patterns, Whole-Time Member Kamlesh Chandra Varshney indicated last week that it has also developed a team to work on AI models covering corporate investigations.

"Now, a team has already been constituted. Like we have a system for trading data, can we have a system for quarterly results that are filed?" said Varshney at an event in Mumbai. The regulator now flags risks related to AI and the need to improve surveillance at almost all public forums, signifying the scale of the challenge

lying ahead as technology keeps on changing.

The RBI last month tightened cybersecurity rules for banks and financial institutions, mandating board-level oversight, dedicated IT risk officers and a six-month window to report cyber incidents. In June, it had revised its fraud compensation mechanism for victims, increasing the scope of those who can claim compensation, and included newer-age digital scams in its definition.

While the regulators have shown interest in modernising cyber regulations, many challenges remain. They must evolve nimble as threats evolve with rapidly changing technology. FULL REPORT ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

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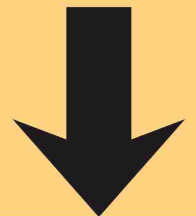
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CONTRAPUNTO

We think we have solved the mystery of creation. Maybe we should patent the universe and charge everyone royalties for their existence

-STEPHEN HAWKING

Application Error

Pvt universities are gaming rankings by filing non-serious patent applications. Govt should change incentives

S&P 500 is widely regarded as world's most prestigious stock index, and its listed firms are collectively worth around \$70tn. The interesting thing is that 92% of this market value now derives not from real estate, factories, machinery and other "tangibles", but "intangibles", like intellectual property, brand and data. Intellectual property especially. This is a huge shift from 1975, when 83% of their collective valuation was based on tangibles. Analysts call this "economic inversion", and the takeaway for India is that economic might in the 21st century is proportional to a country's IP pay.

Which brings us to the grim reality TOI published on Sunday. Our university system—cradle of learning, research and innovation—seems to be bluffing its way through the IP process. You can't guess that by looking at the number of patent applications filed every year. In fact, going by numbers alone, the picture is rosy. In 2020-21, Indian universities filed 7,405 patent applications. In 2024-25, this figure rose to 37,681—34% of all applications filed that year. Problem is, the vast majority of these applications are frivolous. They will never transform into patents. Actually, most of them are "abandoned" right after application.

Why stage this farce? Because India's National Institutional Ranking Framework rewards both quantity and quality. True, an actual patent gets twice as many points as a patent application. But a university that files 50 applications and gets no patent still scores higher than one that files 10 and gets 4. That's a perverse incentive system, and it explains why 9 of India's top 10 patent filers among educational institutions are private. IITs together take 3rd place, but the difference is they have a 60%+ success rate, as against 0-2% for most private institutions.

This practice is bad because it not only skews university rankings but also increases the workload of India's understaffed patent office. Where US had over 8,000 patent examiners in 2023, India had only 221. We're not suggesting universities shouldn't file patents. Rather, they should strive to file more, but only when backed by genuine research and innovation. An institution with a built-in LED light is not the kind of innovation that will increase India's intangible worth. The easiest way to fix this problem is for NIRF to change its incentive structure. It should only reward patents, not applications. Last year, India showed will to address the problem of research paper retractions. It's time to get serious on patents now.

Hair We Go

Bald has become powerful, but pharma is even more so. It's intent on finding a cure – and billions

Some analysts are calling it Wall Street's next goldmine – a wave of new treatments for hair loss. Incoming over the next year, any of these treatments may catch on like the GLP-1 weight-loss drugs. One difference is that instead of a core, shared scientific mechanism, a multiplicity is in play. For example, Pelage Pharmaceuticals is developing PP405, which is a gel aimed at "awakening" the hair follicles. Eli Lilly has invested \$400m in Absci, which is trialling an AI-designed monoclonal antibody that targets the prolactin receptor. The other, bigger difference is that, unlike obesity, hair loss is not a health risk. It's a vanity risk. Far from it. So much so that a Time cover recently proclaimed, "The future is bald". Because so many of today's movers and shakers sport a full shave, it's gotten associated with success, confidence, and power. After the cover went viral, it turned out to be AI-generated. Its image was fake, but its conversation wasn't. Jeff Bezos, Satya Nadella, Steve Ballmer, Demis Hassabis and others have indeed made their shared hair(less)style a very, very elite look. Sport and entertainment also have prominent men saying no to the comb-over, toupee, wig, the desperate search for a miracle oil. But if the only bald woman you can think of is that Persis Khambatta character from half a century ago, then, Houston, we have a problem.

Female pattern hair loss is also super common. But where are the role models saying this is perfectly ok? If the future is supposedly bald, it shouldn't be so only for men. As hair is never just hair, bald is also more than bald. It is identity. And this is where the hair-loss boom is potentially enormous. It's about choosing one's appearance and that's a supersized market. No matter how much our age tells us to "love yourself", it's also endlessly selling us things to "fix yourself".

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Not everything about convection season is doom, gloom, and disinclination though. Every so often the ceremony delivers a moment of pure vice. In IIT Ropar's convocation last July, institute director Rajiv Ahuja was asked by a student if he'd pose in shades while handing out the degree. Not only did the good prof agree, he did a Korean finger heart, shy gig and every other viral trend online, winning hearts and post-27mm views the title of "pookie prof".

But for those chief guests who cannot summon up the charm of a cardboard box, they are expected (at the minimum) to assure graduates that it wasn't a complete waste of their time and money. Until Gen Z, some of us didn't know anyone to tell us that. We scooted at the first sight of a piece of paper called the marksheet and hoped never to have to explain those three years to anyone.

Having attended only one convocation myself – when my daughter graduated from pre-primary to primary, beaming under a voluminous gown roughly four sizes too big – I can say the rest is not worth it.

The Science Of Mountain Signs

Because rivers cross borders, monitoring must also cross them. Doing this with equal intensity across the entire Himalayan system is not practical. But focused cooperation where upstream observations have direct downstream relevance, can go a long way

Nithyanandam Yogeswaran



Wednesday's collapse on the north slope of Nepal's Langtang Lirung, will be remembered for some time. We may eventually understand why that slope failed, how much rock and ice moved, and what turned it into such a destructive downstream event. But one lesson is already clear. In these mountains, disturbances on a slope can transform into disasters far away with a short time.

The initial failure of rock and glacier ice, entered a steep valley, and then the river system. The resulting obstruction contributed to a debris-rich flash flood downstream. In effect, a local slope failure quickly became a major disaster more than 100km away.

That explains why such hazards are hard to handle. A landslide can block a river, a glacier failure can generate a debris flow, a glacial lake can burst into a GLOF, and a temporary blockage may suddenly fail. Earthquakes or intense rainfall can further destabilise an already fragile setting. The trigger matters, but so does the chain that follows.

Geospatial intelligence can contribute more effectively here. A combination of optical satellite imagery, radar data, InSAR and LiDAR, river flow measurements, seismic records, and high-altitude weather observations can all assist in tracking slope movement, glacier and lake changes, debris movement, and downstream exposure.

Not all landslides and glacier collapses are predictable even by these tools. Nor is it realistic to monitor the entire Himalayan system with the same intensity. A pragmatic approach requires identifying critical locations, where a failure could lead to significant downstream consequences.

For India, that means focusing on adjoining transboundary river corridors, unstable slopes, glacial lakes, narrow valleys, and upstream areas whose failure could affect Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Uttarakhand, and Assam.

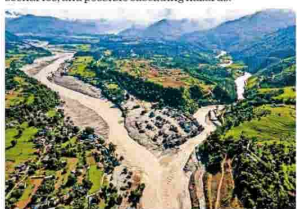
The Yarlung Tsangpo-Brahmaputra system illustrates the challenge. Before entering India, this river passes through deep canyons, steep slopes, glaciers, and glacial lakes in a tectonically active part of Tibet. The world's largest hydropower project is planned in this region, while several others are at different stages upstream.

Concern is, therefore, not over one dam or one hazard, but how major infra may interact with an already fragile natural system. A landslide entering a reservoir, an earth-

quake affecting an unstable slope, or extreme rainfall coinciding with a natural blockage, may each be unlikely, but their combined consequences could be severe.

Langtang Lirung has just shown us this, how quickly one hazard can cascade into another. Planning upstream and downstream of Yarlung Tsangpo should, therefore, account not only for normal river behaviour, but also for low-probability, high-impact cascading events.

India's proposed storage and hydropower infra on Ssang can form part of a broader risk-management and water-security strategy. Such measures are important, but their effectiveness will depend equally on how well India understands upstream changes, extreme-flow scenarios, and possible cascading hazards.



India, therefore, needs a dedicated Transboundary Himalayan Science and Technology Programme combining geology, hydrology, glaciology, atmospheric science, seismology, engineering, remote sensing, and field observations across priority basins adjacent to the country. Data should feed into a common geospatial platform for monitoring, risk assessment, and informed spatial decision-making.

Emphasis should be practical: unstable slopes, changing glacial lakes, river-blockage points, high-risk valleys, and settlements exposed to downstream cascades. Remote sensing can provide repeat observations where field access is difficult, while field studies can verify what satellite data suggests.

There is also an atmospheric dimension. Changes in temperature, snow cover, moisture, and high-altitude circulation over the Tibetan Plateau influence glaciers, rainfall, and river flows downstream. For India, studying these changes should be part of water-security and

disaster-risk research, not just climate science.

Cross-border science can strengthen this further. India does not require access to all datasets or local expertise throughout the Himalayas. It needs focused cooperation where upstream observations have direct downstream relevance.

That cooperation should also rethink who pays for science. Where upstream data has clear downstream value, countries should be willing to co-invest in its collection, maintenance, and analysis through joint scientific mechanisms. Such arrangements could combine funding, instrumentation, satellite analysis, field observations, and technical expertise according to each partner's strengths.

Joint methods, common standards, and sustained scientific engagement would also improve confidence in how data is collected and interpreted. In a crisis, trusted data matters as much as rapid data.

Where an immediate downstream threat is verified, agreed mechanisms should also allow warnings to reach people at risk without waiting for every formal channel. That requires mutual trust, pre-agreed protocols, and sustained cooperation between upstream and downstream states.

Where such cooperation remains limited, India should strengthen its own observation and modelling capabilities using satellite data, ground geospatial sources, and field research from accessible adjoining areas.

Transboundary Himalayan risk cannot be understood through geopolitics alone. Those assessments matter, but they need to be matched by sustained physical-science research into how terrain, atmosphere, glaciers, and rivers are changing, and how one hazard can trigger another.

The same science should also inform development choices. Roads, hydropower, tourism infra, and new settlements are necessary, but in fragile mountain terrain their location and design matter. Geospatial risk assessments can help identify where development is appropriate, where stronger safeguards are needed, and where restraint may be the safer choice. The objective is not to stop development, but to ensure that it respects the limits of the terrain.

Langtang Lirung is a reminder that an event need not occur within India to offer lessons for Indian preparedness. The Himalayas are shared geography. Understanding what happens beyond the border is increasingly part of understanding and managing risks closer to home.

The writer heads Takshashila Institution's Geospatial Programme. Views are personal.

Beyond Labels, How To Make India Eat Healthier

Front-of-pack labelling will only help a small number of consumers who are aware. For larger impact, we need policy tweaks like taxes & incentives that nudge food industry to change product portfolios

Pawan Agarwal



Now that India has crossed an important threshold on front-of-pack nutrition labelling – after nearly nine years of what the WHO calls the "question is no longer whether it needs meaningful front-of-pack information. It is how to make the system work."

FSSAI's affidavit in Supreme Court has reportedly proposed a plan to have mandatory red hexagonal warnings on packaged foods that are high in nutrients of concern, with declarations such as "HIGH FAT", "HIGH SUGAR", "HIGH SALT" and/or "HIGHLY SWEETENED BEVERAGE". This is a good start, but it can be made better. Here's how.

Get the warnings right. If this proposal is implemented, packaged foods would need to be high in two or more nutrients of concern before carrying a warning, while highly sweetened beverages would be separately covered. Now, while a phased beginning may be practical, this feature is worth reviewing in the light of accumulating evidence.

International experience offers useful lessons. Chile uses a separate warning for each nutrient that exceeds its threshold. A product may, therefore, carry one, two, three, or more warnings. Mexico follows a similar approach, while Israel uses separate red warnings for high sugar, sodium and saturated fat. The logic is simple. If a food is excessively high in salt, why should the consumer's need to know be dependent on whether it is also high in sugar or saturated fat?

Experience in these countries suggests that warnings can influence not only consumer choices but also product formulation. If removing excessive sugar, salt or saturated fat gets rid of a warning from the pack, manufacturers have a visible incentive to reformulate.

Of course, India need not copy another country. FSSAI can begin with a system suited to Indian conditions, evaluate it, and then refine it. Over time, however, a

simpler principle may be worth considering: one nutrient above the threshold, one warning; two nutrients, two warnings; three nutrients, three warnings.

And implementation should be guided by evidence. Are consumers understanding the warnings? Are companies reformulating? Are purchase patterns changing? Are thresholds and exemptions working as intended?

The regulatory approach should be simple: implement, measure, learn, and improve.

Align food policy with health. Labels alone cannot improve India's diet. The next step should be to align fiscal and industrial policy with the same health objective. India's GST structure for food deserves a review through a nutrition lens. The question is not whether govt should classify every food as "good" or "bad", but whether taxation makes healthier choices easier or inadvertently encourages the opposite.

The same principle should guide govt support for food processing. Future production-linked incentive schemes and other incentives could explicitly encourage nutritional, healthier product portfolios, and innovation in nutritious foods.

This is not about constraining India's food-processing industry. It is about helping its growth move in a healthier direction. Regulation, taxation and industrial incentives should reinforce rather than



contradict one another.

There is also a role for corporate responsibility. ESG – environmental, social and governance – frameworks should become more nutrition-sensitive: food companies should increasingly account for the nutritional quality of their portfolios, while business leaders across sectors can promote healthier food and lifestyles through workplace nutrition and well-being programmes. This would bring consumer health more firmly into how businesses think about their wider social impact.

Start with children. The longer-term investment must begin in schools.

Food, nutrition and lifestyle literacy should become part of the everyday school routine, not another subject children memorise for an examination. Children should learn through practical exercises: comparing food labels, understanding portions, eating mindfully, being physically active and developing healthy everyday habits.

The school food environment must change alongside what children learn. School meals, canteens, food sold around schools, lunch boxes, drinking water and opportunities for physical activity should reinforce the same messages. Children cannot be taught healthy choices in the classroom while the environment around them encourages the opposite.

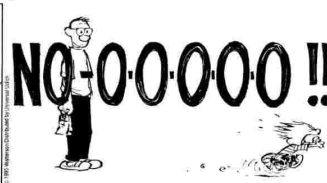
Done well, schools can build habits that travel home and last into adulthood.

India's decision on front-of-pack warnings is, therefore, not the end of a nine-year journey. It can be the beginning of a broader shift in food policy.

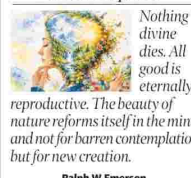
FSSAI and govt deserve credit for taking the decision. Supreme Court, public health advocates, researchers, consumers and the media helped create the conditions for it.

Now comes the harder task: implement the warnings well, improve them with evidence, align taxes and industrial incentives with health, and embed food, nutrition and lifestyle literacy in our schools. A warning on a packet can help people choose a healthier food environment, backed by an informed generation, can change how India eats tomorrow.

Calvin & Hobbes



Sacredspace



When Nature Speaks, Humanity Must Listen

Stuti Malhotra

The devastating floods that struck the Nepal-Tibet Himalayan region this week are not merely another natural disaster. They carry a deeper message for humanity: we may live within national boundaries, but we live under one sky, breathe the same air, and inhabit one interconnected ecological system.

Scientists are still studying precisely what triggered the collapse. Recent high temperatures and rapid snowmelt may have played a role. More broadly, scientists warn that climate change is creating conditions that can destabilise high-mountain ice and rock. Nepal has already lost nearly a third of its glacier ice in the past three decades.

There is a striking irony here. Nepal is hardly responsible for the world's carbon problem. In 2024, it produced only about 0.05% of global CO₂ emissions from fossil fuels and industry. Yet a country with such a tiny carbon footprint finds

itself exceptionally vulnerable to the consequences of a warming planet.

This paradox offers a spiritual lesson: nature recognises no national boundaries. Carbon emitted in one part of the world does not remain there. The atmosphere carries no passport. Rivers do not stop at immigration checkpoints. Glaciers, forests, oceans, rainfall, and winds are components of a single planetary system. What humans do in one region can ultimately affect people thousands of kilometres away.

The Gurus Sahib repeatedly uses the word *Qudrat* to refer to creation.

Qudrat Nanak says: "Sabhi teri kudrat tu 'n kadi karia" (SGGS 464). "All creation is Yours; You are its Creator."

Such an understanding changes our relationship with the environment. A mountain is no longer merely land available for construction. A forest is not simply

timber. A river is not merely water to be diverted. Nature becomes a sacred trust.

Barah Mah, twelve months and changing seasons mirror the changing condition of the human heart. Nature is therefore not merely the background against which human life unfolds; it is intimately connected with our physical and spiritual existence.

The Quran similarly reminds human beings of their responsibility towards the Earth: "Do not spread corruption on the Earth after it has been set in order" (Quran 7:56). The verse offers a profound ecological principle.

The Earth possesses an order and balance that human beings must respect. Our responsibility is not merely to benefit from the natural world, but also to refrain from actions that disturb and damage the order already established within it.

Prophets, gurus, sages, and saints constantly turned to rivers, forests,

birds, rain, soil, flowers, and seasons to communicate spiritual truths. Modern civilisation, however, has increasingly asked: How much can we extract from nature? How much can we produce? How much can we consume?

Spiritual wisdom asks a different question: How much can nature sustain? The tragedy in Nepal makes this question urgent. We imagine ourselves to be independent because tech has given us extraordinary power. But a disruption in rainfall can melt glaciers. A melted glacier can affect rivers. A damaged forest can affect water and soil. Changes in oceans can influence weather thousands of kilometres away.

The ecological message of all religions is therefore not simply "Protect nature." Its message goes deeper: change the way you see nature. The Himalayan tragedy reminds us of an ancient spiritual truth that modern humanity urgently needs to rediscover: the world is one interconnected whole.



Himanshi.Dhawan@timesofindia.com

Recently there was buzz over NALSAR students opposing CJI Kant as chief guest at their convocation ceremony. But it's puzzling as to why this should be seen as an embarrassment. If anything, CJI is finally on point.

Getting disinvited is basically the new honorary degree. Eminent people are being un-asked to speak all over US with the enthusiasm of a group chat un-adding an ex. This May, speakers at Rutgers, Utah Valley and South Carolina State University all got the boot, prompting the free speech watchdog FIRE (Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression) to announce it "disinvitation season". FIRE has tracked 345 attempts to disinvite commencement speakers between 2000-2024, and this year has hardly cooled off, with fresh cancellations, walkouts, and boo-fests.

Time was when delivering a convocation address used to be a unique honour. Stirring speeches like Steve Jobs' "stay hungry, stay foolish", Barack Obama's call for change, and Sheryl Sandberg's "lean in", offered life lessons. Not anymore. Students are wielding the "heckler's veto" with gusto, and the payoff (front-page mentions, and the whiff of heroism that comes from activism) is catnip for Gen Z. Forget stay hungry, stay foolish; today's mantra is stay mic'd, stay furious.

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Rising forex reserves

India must be prepared for potential external disruption

The data released last week by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) showed India's foreign-exchange reserves increased to an all-time high of \$793 billion in the week ended August 21. It is reasonable to expect that the reserves will likely witness a significant jump when the data for last week and this week are released. The increase over the past few weeks has been driven by the swap schemes announced by the RBI in June, including for Foreign Currency Non-Resident (Bank), or FCNR (B), deposits. Given the scheme flows under the FCNR (B) window, the RBI decided to prematurely end the scheme, a month ahead of schedule (August 31). The scheme for external commercial borrowing and overseas foreign-currency borrowing will continue as announced. The RBI has added about \$47 billion to its reserves since the swap scheme was announced on June 5.

A higher level of foreign-exchange reserves, sufficient to cover about 11 months of imports, will provide enormous comfort to policymakers. It is worth noting that the rupee came under pressure with the beginning of the Iran war. Since India depends on imports for most of its crude-oil requirement, economists expected the current account deficit (CAD) to expand substantially to over 2 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) this financial year, compared to about 0.6 per cent in 2025-26. Since India was already facing outflows on the capital account, the rupee came under pressure despite the central bank's defence. Although economists have scaled down CAD projections, the broader uncertainty has not abated, and crude-oil prices remain elevated. The United States (US) and Iran remain engaged in brinkmanship, with unpredictable consequences.

Thus, in the given uncertain global environment, higher foreign-exchange reserves will definitely help maintain external stability. The rupee, for instance, has stabilised over the past few weeks and recovered some of the lost ground. However, it is worth noting that higher reserves should not be used to prop up the rupee against fundamentals because this could affect external competitiveness and might end up widening the CAD. The latest reading (July) on the index for the real effective exchange rate showed that the rupee had depreciated about 8 per cent in real terms over the past year and was undervalued to a similar extent. Some amount of undervaluation will help reduce the CAD and make Indian assets more attractive to foreign investors. It must also be kept in mind that capital flows under the swap scheme will provide relief only in the short to medium term.

Besides the uncertainty in West Asia, India must also be prepared for shifts in global financial conditions. Longer-term bond yields in the US are moving up and are expected to rise further. US Federal Reserve Chairman Kevin Warsh reiterated the central bank's commitment to attain the 2 per cent inflation target in his much-awaited speech last week. The inflation rate in the US has been above target for over five years and might require policy tightening, which will push up bond yields. Borrowing costs are rising in the US also because of rising public debt and sustained investment in artificial-intelligence capacity building. Thus, continued tighter financial conditions would affect capital flows. The risk of flow returns on artificial-intelligence investment, which is now partially being financed by debt, could also pose threats. Therefore, Indian policymakers must adjust not only to potentially tighter global financial conditions but also to possible large-scale disruption.

Terms of engagement

Meta settlement can change the way social media works

The terms of the settlement in what is being referred to as the "Meta child addition case" include a clause that may trigger huge changes across social media. A coalition of the attorneys general of 48 states plus the District of Columbia and three United States (US) territories had taken Meta to court, accusing the social-media giant of knowingly harming young users. They referenced information in internal Meta documents, alleging Facebook and Instagram were built to keep teenagers engaged. They also claimed Meta misled the public about the harm, and collected minors' data without parental consent. When the case came up in a Federal Court in Oakland, California, Meta negotiated a settlement, without admitting guilt. The court approved the settlement in which Meta may pay up to \$18 billion. It will pay \$1.7 billion to US states in 10 annual installments.

The rest of the payment is conditional. Meta agreed to implement many changes to protect teens. It will pay a further \$5.3 billion only if TikTok, YouTube, and others agree to similar changes. It is likely other platforms will agree to such changes to avoid copycat lawsuits. And that is why this settlement could end up changing how social media works. All users must be age-checked within 12 months. An independent auditor must ensure no more than 10 per cent of 16-17-year-olds, and no more than 3 per cent of 13-15-year-olds are wrongly classified as adults. Parents are to be notified when a teen first messages an adult and if a teen searches for terms related to self-harm. Teen users (aged 13-17) will face a two-hour daily cap on the use of Facebook and Instagram combined. There will be enforced breaks at 60 minutes, and 90 minutes. Access will be blocked from midnight to 6 am. Notifications will be muted between 10 pm and 7 am, and during school hours. A parent can change these defaults.

Autoplay for content will be turned off by default. "Like" counts will be hidden by default, and access to "cosmetic procedure filters" and extreme makeover filters will be blocked. Teens will be offered a choice of feeds with posts shown in chronological order, rather than those being chosen by algorithm. The design changes are to prevent addiction. The blocks on extreme filters and on "like" counts are because seeing "airbrushed" perfect portraits of peers, and receiving low likes, can trigger depression in youngsters. Blocks during school hours and parental supervision could be considered common sense. The most important change will be offering the choice of non-algorithmic feeds. Social media is about engagement. The longer a platform keeps a user scrolling, the better it can monetise that presence. All the business models are built around engagement. Hence, algorithms try to maximise engagement. Whether content is "clickbait" (catchy misleading headers) or "ragebait" (designed to make the user angry), the bait is designed to engage users. And, "engagement" may equal "addiction", especially where young people are concerned.

If Meta is forced to abandon the engagement-algorithm for its most committed users, and if other platforms follow suit, the industry will undergo a tectonic shift. Teen-usage of social media is a hot-button issue everywhere. France and Australia have attempted to force minors off through legislation but without asking for design changes. This settlement allows minors to access social media, and will force the industry to find new ways to generate revenue.

Round number skirmishes

A familiar script plays out regularly with the government fighting rupee depreciation

ILLUSTRATION: AJAYA MOHANTY



In India's currency policy, an odd significance is attached to round numbers. Policymakers resist the market when faced with multiples of 10. The exchange rate is a price determined by the actions of millions of economic agents. But near each round number, the government tries to prevent depreciation, and a familiar script plays out.

The rupee gets more dwell time near the round number, held up with much huffing and puffing by the authorities. Many distortions are imposed upon the economy. The smart money knows that the market will win. There is ample time in which large speculative positions are built. The costs associated with the rupee defence pile up. Eventually, the government yields ground. The rupee surges past the round number. Speculators break out the champagne.

How do we assess the macroeconomic fundamentals around the present skirmish? In the domestic economy, the pace of investment is cautious. The current-account balance is the gap between domestic investment and domestic savings. Because domestic investment is weak, the current-account deficit is modest. In India there is no large financing problem that needs to be solved by capital inflows. This situation gives comfort for a strong-rupee policy.

Global conditions point in a different direction. A problem is brewing in the United States (US) macroeconomic environment because of interest-rate increases. The 10-year rate in the US has risen from 4 per cent in March to 4.47 per cent today. This reflects the

possibility that the US Federal Reserve will raise rates further to fight inflation.

Financial markets operate on relative prices. Capital flows across borders based on the difference in yield and the expected change in currency values. When the US interest rate is higher, Indian assets must become cheaper to justify foreign ownership. An exchange-rate depreciation is the mechanism through which the market economy achieves this equilibrium.

A lot is made of the Foreign Currency Non-Resident (Bank) war chest. The proposition is that a chunk of foreign money will appear in India, be purchased by the central bank, become ammunition for future currency trading, and postpone rupee depreciation for a few months. The numbers are less impressive than they seem.

India is now a big country. Gross inflows on the current account are at \$1.1 trillion a year. On the capital account, those are \$1.7 trillion a year. Put together, we are getting inflows and outflows of about \$2.8 trillion a year or about \$1 billion a day. A comparison against conditions in the 2013-14 currency defence is instructive. At that time, gross inflows were \$0.55 trillion and \$0.52 trillion on the current and capital accounts, respectively, i.e. \$4.3 billion a day. Today's India is 2.6 times bigger.

The FCNR (B) strategem relies on using public money to defend the rupee. The state subsidises foreign borrowing to attract dollars. This tool requires large-scale borrowing to make a material difference against a gross external flow of \$1 billion a day. A com-



SNAKES & LADDERS
AJAY SHAH

India's R&D inflection moment

The Department of Science and Technology just released figures showing India's research & development (R&D) investment crossed 0.84 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2023-24, an all-time high that's projected to go further. R&D intensity had been stuck between 0.6 per cent and 0.7 per cent of GDP for nearly a decade, and the latest figures mark a real break from the past. Buried inside that headline number is another shift deserving equal attention. The private sector's share rose from 32 per cent in 2020-21 to 45 per cent in just three years.

For most of independent India's history, research has been an government affair. A private sector growing at this pace indicates an economy expanding in confidence, and industry beginning to bet seriously on its own ideas. That milestone deserves recognition. So does the distance still to travel.

Since 1990, only 34 middle-income economies have reached high-income status; 108 remain stuck. Among economies that made the leap without the windfall of oil or minerals — Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and others — the pattern is the same. Each invested heavily in research when its incomes were around where India's is today, and each accelerated that investment as growth compounded. The countries that didn't — Brazil, South Africa, and Thailand — are still stuck in the middle-income trap decades later.

R&D intensity is not a byproduct of reaching the frontier. It is how you get there.

One comparison matters most. In 2007, China's GDP per capita was \$2,700 — very close to where India stands today — but its R&D intensity was nearly double of India's at 1.49 per cent of GDP. Between 2007 and 2024 China's GDP grew 5.5 times, but its private-sector R&D grew more than 10 times. Industry was

investing ahead of growth even as it contributed to growth — which transformed China into the tech superpower it is today.

India's Viksit Bharat ambition, therefore, is at a pivotal moment: When a middle-income economy either invests its way to the frontier, or settles into the slow lane. To realise that ambition, India needs to reach 2 per cent of GDP in R&D by 2035, with industry providing 70 per cent of that. And along the way, there is a meaningful milestone for 2030: 1.3 per cent of GDP, with corporate share rising to at least 60 per cent.

The government has begun moving — the Anusandhan National Research Fund (ANRF) and Research, Development and Innovation Fund (RDIF) exist to absorb early-stage research risk and give industry catalytic capital to build on. That is a good start, not a finish line. Three things need to follow.

Spend more. Government R&D expenditure needs to reach at least 0.5 per cent of GDP by 2030, on the way to 0.6 per cent by 2035 — a real increase from roughly 0.4 per cent today.

Fund the right things, in the right way. Three agencies — the Defence Research & Development Organisation (DRDO), Department of Space (DOS), and Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) — account for over 60 per cent of central scientific spending, most of it circulating inside their own labs. Higher education, the seedbed of foundational research that feeds every applied breakthrough downstream and creates the talent pipeline, receives just 12.6 per cent of India's R&D spend. Government funding needs to flow to independent researchers, startups, and firms; and focus on critical sectors, as the DRDO's IDEX demonstrates. The vehicle should be fewer, larger, longer-horizon, technology capability-focused national missions rather than fragmented grants, with

mensurately large fiscal cost falls upon the exchequer. The Ministry of Finance will choose how much it is willing to spend in exchange for this round number.

The size of the economy reshapes the size of speculative pressures. The dollar-rupee market is not limited to financial firms. It involves everyone engaged in international activities. As the next round number approaches, a large array of clever people reshape their ordinary imports, exports, and capital-account activities so as to profit from the depreciation. For example, a family obtaining remittances would hold its breath at ₹96, wait till ₹106, and earn a profit of ₹10 a dollar. Importers will boost their inventories, and exporters will delay bringing their dollar earnings home. Those who can will send money out at ₹96 and turn a profit by bringing it back at ₹106. As the profit opportunity ripens, more ordinary people will take detours to do a little currency speculation on the side.

With \$2.8 trillion of gross inflows a year, a small shift in such leads and lags makes a difference to the dollar/rupee market, which is large when compared with the resources of the authorities. The cost of rupee defence goes up, which increases the odds of policymakers dismantling their barricade at this round number.

There is important damage outside the immediate fiscal cost. Financial development in India is retarded by hostile policy actions in each round-number skirmish. The Indian state defends the rupee by harming Indian finance. Position limits are reduced. Capital controls are tightened. Regulatory pressure is applied to suppress trading volumes. Liquidity in the onshore currency derivatives market is squeezed.

These actions increase the cost of doing business in India. Many Indian currency risks become more expensive. When onshore markets are restricted, price discovery shifts to offshore rupee markets in derivatives. The local financial industry loses business and local users find ways to get their orders into the overseas market. The institutional capability of the Indian financial system takes a step backward. Financial-market development — a fundamental indicator for long-term economic growth — is sacrificed in return for a round number.

Three factors now point in favour of higher interest rates in India. The first is inflationary pressures in India after the global oil-price increase, which calls for an orthodox inflation-targeting response. The second is the present round-number skirmish: Higher interest rates help defend the rupee. The third is higher rates in the US. When the authorities have an exchange-rate objective, there is "exchange-rate dominance"; they obey the US Fed, and they cede their autonomy to pursue the monetary policy that India requires.

This skirmish will end, as all these skirmishes do. It would be good to add one last line in the script. Once the round number is breached, policymakers must reverse all the harm done to financial development during the skirmish.

The writer is a researcher at XKOR Forum

The unmaking of the nation state



SHYAM SARAN

The central argument in Rana Dasgupta's *After Nations* is that the most familiar contemporary political form, the nation state, is a historical contingency that emerged from an extended period of violent contestation among European countries in the medieval period. The Westphalian construct envisaged each state enjoying a monopoly of coercive power within its own clearly defined territorial limits. But this relative peace in Europe was bought with the transference of violence to the European periphery, to the colonies. The industrial revolution rode on the backs of cruel exploitation of non-European populations. Liberalism at its birth was racially bound. Mr Das-

gupta demonstrates with sharp insight how these origins continue to dominate our world despite the formal equality of nations. Beneath the thin veneer of the liberal world order, the older hierarchies continue to dominate. A multiplicity of historical streams shaped our contemporary landscape of nation states.

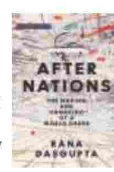
The book uses an analytical framework of four categories or "immortal" ideas through which particular states bound citizens to something larger than themselves: Theology in medieval France, property and capital in England, law in the United States, and the control of nature, in particular water, in China. Each force built the modern state, which has adapted and endured since its contingent beginnings. It is Mr Dasgupta's view that the order based on nation states is now fragmenting.

One of the most perceptive chapters in the book relates to international law. This did not evolve from a disinterested search for universal principles but to serve commercial expedience. The 16th century Dutch lawyer, Hugo Grotius who is celebrated as its founder, wrote

chiefly to justify the Dutch East India Company's depredations at sea. Mr Dasgupta locates its 19th century elaboration in the work of Scottish jurist James Lorimer, whose 1883 tripartite division of humanity into "civilised", "barbarian", and "savage" categories formally graded sovereign rights by race — a hierarchy the author reads as the deep structure beneath the 20th century's ostensibly universal legal order. Liberalism, in this sense, was never the impartial doctrine it claimed to be. *The Wealth of Nations* and the American Declaration of Independence, published four months apart in 1776, mark for Mr Dasgupta the same ideological event: The liberation of capital and property from monarchical restraint, dressed in the language of individual freedom. Post-1989, he argues, this interpretation has been hijacked itself — liberty came to mean the freedom of capital rather than of citizens, and citizenship itself became a purchasable class asset, from golden visas to offshore entities.

Mr Dasgupta's striking contemporary claim is that tech mega-corporations are

the first genuinely new geopolitical actors since the nation-state itself — cross-border, unaccountable to any electorate, and structurally analogous to the East India Company's private exercise of sovereign power. Against this he sets China, organised not around religion, capital, or law but around the management of nature: A hydraulic civilisation whose rivers determined imperial legitimacy (the loss of the "Mandate of Heaven" was, historically, a verdict on water management), and Mexico to large-scale irrigation projects on their rivers. Mr Dasgupta's reading of China may fall neatly into his analytical construct but flattens a much more turbulent and complex historical reality. India does not merit its own civilisational identity and its contribution to the



After Nations: The Making and Unmaking of a World Order
by Rana Dasgupta
Published by Penguin
496 pages ₹999

international order. It appears in these pages chiefly as an object of British exploitation, including the deindustrialisation of its textile economy, rather than as a political actor with its own juridical and constitutional inheritance. The RSS and Hindutva surface only as one symptom of a global theocratic backlash to globalisation. India did inherit the colonial institutional and legal apparatus that Mr Dasgupta indicts. But he fails to consider how this legacy was layered toward universal suffrage and reform and affirmative action at home and unusual activism externally through the Non-Aligned Movement and through the multilateral institutions and processes which provided, for a time, the scaffolding of the post-Second World War international order. Russia fares still better. A country that has worked actively to dismantle it, is missing in a book substantially about that order's unmaking.

Artificial intelligence figures as a driver of geopolitical shifts but more in instances of unaccountable private capital rather than as a force reorganising

great-power competition itself. Compute, chips, and the infrastructure race now shaping US-China rivalry — arguably as consequential to the nation-state's authority as any of Mr Dasgupta's four historical forces — go largely unaddressed.

The conclusion, some 30 pages after 460 of diagnosis, is correspondingly modest. Mr Dasgupta rejects both world government and the libertarian "network state", calling instead for citizenship, law, money, and religion reimagined at planetary rather than national scale, grounded in ecological responsibility and what he calls civilisationality. Its shape remains vague and amorphous, as Mr Dasgupta's is. *After Nations* is at best diagnosing how the current order was built to serve narrow interests dressed as universal principle; it is considerably less clear in imagining what could actually replace it.

Despite these limitations, the book is magisterial in scope and full of penetrating diagnosis, is correspondingly modest. Mr Dasgupta's is at best diagnosing how the current order was built to serve narrow interests dressed as universal principle; it is considerably less clear in imagining what could actually replace it.

The reviewer is a former foreign secretary

thehindubusinessline.

MONDAY - AUGUST 31, 2026

Right prescription

Public needs full information on drugs recalls

Drugmaker Sun Pharma's "voluntary withdrawal" of 11 eye drop brands has exposed gaps in the domestic medicine recall process. Drug companies and the drug regulatory system, it would seem, are not transparent enough. This marks a stark contrast to how drug companies inform on recalls in markets like the US, for example.



Rules under India's Drugs and Cosmetics Act (1940) outline the process to recall medicines and devices — be it voluntary or mandated by the State or Central drug regulatory authority. These are spelt out under para 7 of Good Manufacturing Practices for Pharmaceutical Products. Companies are required to keep both authorities informed if they are withdrawing a product from the market for reasons varying from mislabelling to contamination or other quality reasons, for example, and they are required to keep details of the returned inventory, among other things. In the latest eye drops recall, the company and regulator have fallen short in informing consumers through a public alert, or communication.

In June, ophthalmologists had flagged possible contamination in a branded eye drop, and in July, Sun Pharma alerted business partners on its voluntary withdrawal of 11 eye drop labels. No details were shared publicly on the reason for withdrawal, the batch numbers of withdrawn products, or the manufacturing facility where the product was made, for example. A listed company, Sun did not inform the stock exchanges. In fact, some retailers and regulatory officials seemed to be unaware of the eye drop recall, raising concerns that consumers may have used these products. Contrast this with reports on the recall of an epilepsy product by the same company, around the same time, but in the US. Details are available on the recall, the nature/classification of recall, the number of bottles recalled down to the lot numbers. While the company has done the right thing in voluntarily withdrawing a product in India, it should have gone further to alert the public as well.

Central and State drug regulators have started issuing public alerts on products that are not fit for consumption. This process needs to be implemented with greater intent for recalled products, as a standard operating procedure — irrespective of the product's "criticality". For companies to claim they have alerted distributors and may not have visibility on the last mile is no argument. The company and the drug regulator should ensure the supply chain and the public are prevented from using the faulty product. The Centre has called for all supply chain entities to be digitally connected — so companies and regulators can track products and inform the network of distributors, stockists and retailers, in minutes. Consumers can be informed of recalls through instant messaging — a process used by aviation and food delivery companies. The rules must be re-examined, if necessary to clearly spell out the responsibilities of producers with respect to recall, and the punitive consequences of lapses in this regard.

OTHER VOICES.

The Guardian

Labour should curb the power of big money

On the campaign trail in Makerfield, Andy Burnham told a democracy activist that he favoured a political donations cap of around £500,000 and wanted it reduced over time. His government is now resuming amendments that would move in precisely that direction. Mr Burnham was right in May. He is wrong now. It is difficult to argue that restricting a single person to giving half a million pounds a year to a political party would damage democracy. Such a cap would only affect the mega-rich. Reducing the cap would force parties to wean themselves off the present regime that allows the rich too much say. There are two contra arguments swirling around Labour. The first is that there should be room for wealthy, progressive donors — whose cash helps rebut claims that Labour is in the pocket of the trade unions. LONDON, AUGUST 28

CHINADAILY

Strengthen genuine partnerships through dialogue

In response to the evident need for a more just and equitable global governance system, President Xi Jinping put forward the Global Governance Initiative at last year's Shanghai Cooperation Organization Plus Meeting in Tianjin. The theme of this year's SCO Summit in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan — "Together Toward Sustainable Peace, Development and Prosperity" — and its agenda highlight that the organization can help put the G21 into practice. Xi is attending the SCO Summit 2026 and paying state visits to Kyrgyzstan and Egypt from Sunday to Thursday. The SCO's thriving development over the past 25 years demonstrates the appeal of a new type of international relations based on multilateralism and cooperation rather than unilateralism and bloc confrontation. BEIJING, AUGUST 30

LINE& LENGTH.

TCA SRINIVASA RAGHAVAN

Everyone wants a reform of our education system but, believe me, no one knows what form or forms it should take. Government committees, real experts, self-styled experts, teachers, managers, students, no one, absolutely no one, has any useful idea that can actually change something without damaging something else. Hobby horses, therefore, become prescriptions because there's no analytical framework to hang it all on.

There is also the homogeneity assumption that education means the same thing to everyone. It doesn't, because what if I prefer to be uneducated and rich, rather than educated and poor?

The main problem is that education isn't seen through the lens of economics. Instead, it's seen as something desirable in itself quite apart from its utility.

Also, no one is able to define education. Is it literacy and numeracy or is it something more? If so, what and how much is that more?

If it's only literacy and numeracy, what can you actually reform? Given that education is all about value addition to a human, no different from, say, cooking when something raw is converted into something edible, and given further that maximum value addition happens with the ability to read, write and do some basic arithmetic, reform means nothing, absolutely nothing. It's just a grievance. After all, there's only one way to teach a person how to read, write and count.

And there lies a very large economic question: if value addition to a human after primary school starts to diminish — and it does — how is the cost-benefit analysis of education to be done?

INPUT, OUTPUT, COSTS

As is usual in economics, it's important to look at education as an activity that involves two factors of production, labour and capital. Those who keep talking about reforming education never frame reform like this.

But they need to see that education is both labour and capital intensive. You need lots of both at all levels. And, while labour intensity remains more or less constant as you go up the ladder, capital intensity increases.

It's also an industry characterised by what economists call 'constant returns to scale'. This means that if you double or triple or quadruple the number of



Economics and education reform

Everyone talks of reform without any analytical framework

faculty (labour) and facilities (capital), the output of value added humans will also double or triple or quadruple.

Economics also tells us that because of this feature, the long-run average cost of production remains the same. That makes scaling easier and possible. That's why it's so easy to educate hundreds of millions of people quickly.

However, there's a problem: value addition at each level keeps coming down. In other words, if you expand the output of education, you will spend a lot of money but get less per unit of money spent. I have never heard anyone talk about this aspect.

How can this be, you will ask, when doctors, engineers, scientists, etc are being produced? But think without the ability to read, write and do sums, you

If value addition to a human after primary school starts to diminish — and it does — how is the cost-benefit analysis of education to be done?

can't produce doctors, engineers, scientists etc. Value addition is maximum at that lowest level.

So we shouldn't confuse what is valuable with value-added. The utility derived from a doctor is very high but it's still not as much as it was when he or she became literate and numerate. It is like going from 0 to 1 and from 1 to 1.7.

SO WHAT'S THE REFORM?

Since no one knows what the comparative utilities are, no one also knows where to start. It's easy to say 'improve the system'. But what exactly does that mean? More labour or more capital or more of both? And at what level?

This labour-capital problem hasn't been solved by any country, including the developed ones, at any level. But the more successful ones, in order to keep the capital requirements manageable — largely in Europe — have focused on controlling the supply of students rather than the supply of educational institutions.

Thus, only a small fraction of school leavers, around 20 per cent, are found eligible for college. The rest get skilled.

It's a draconian system but mind you, these are fully democratic countries like Germany, Switzerland, Austria etc. All of them fervently believe in equal opportunities.

There are two other problems. One, the demand for education is a derived demand. It does not exist for its own sake because it involves opportunity costs.

The time spent in learning must eventually translate into a stream of income. Otherwise, it's a waste of time and money.

Two, there is the capital stock problem. Just as all old machines aren't capital, all knowledge isn't capital. Replacement costs money and someone has to decide which stock to replace and with what. This has a direct bearing on syllabus changes.

It's possible to go on in this vein but suffice it to say the best way to 'reform' the education system is to keep its economics at the forefront rather than woolly and ill-defined objectives that work at cross purposes. Or don't confuse a skill, which is what reading, writing and arithmetic are, with intellectual attainments.

Nepal floods: lessons in managing Himalayan rivers

Conventional flood-risk assessments may no longer capture the risks facing mountain communities and downstream infra

Priyanka Vadrevu

The catastrophic floods that struck Nepal's Rasuwa district and the Nepal-Tibet border on August 26 offer a sobering reminder of how rapidly a high-altitude hazard can become a downstream disaster. What unfolded was not simply a conventional rainfall-induced flood, but a complex chain involving the cryosphere, unstable mountain terrain, river blockage and sudden release of stored water. Preliminary assessments indicate that an ice-rock avalanche associated with a glacier collapse in Tibet entered the Lhende Khola, temporarily obstructing the river.

Water accumulated behind the blockage before the natural barrier failed, sending a powerful surge of water, ice, rock and sediment downstream into Nepal's Bhotekoshi river system. The event destroyed bridges, roads, houses and other infrastructure, causing significant loss of lives and leaving many people missing. The significance of this event extends well beyond Rasuwa. It demonstrates how interconnected Himalayan hazards are becoming — and why conventional flood-risk assessments may no longer adequately capture the risks facing mountain communities and downstream infrastructure.

GLACIER TO RIVER HAZARD

Himalayan river flows are governed by the interaction of monsoon rainfall,

snowmelt, glacier melt and groundwater.

Climate change is altering these components at different rates, increasing uncertainty in the timing and magnitude of runoff. Glacier retreat is particularly important. As ice masses lose volume, meltwater contributions can initially increase before declining as available glacier storage diminishes. Changes in snowfall further modify seasonal runoff.

A glacier or ice-rock collapse can rapidly transform into a river catastrophe when debris blocks a channel and creates a temporary natural reservoir. Failure of that blockage can release water suddenly, carrying enormous quantities of sediment and boulders downstream. Unlike a conventional rainfall flood, such an event may originate far upstream, develop with little warning and occur without intense rainfall at the location where destruction takes place.

The Himalayan risk landscape is increasingly characterised by interacting hazards rather than isolated events. A warming environment can influence glacier stability, snow conditions and high-altitude terrain, while intense precipitation can increase runoff and slope instability.

The resulting chain can be expressed simply: cryospheric change — ice/rock failure — river blockage — temporary storage — sudden release — debris-laden flood — downstream infrastructure failure. The significance lies in the amplification. A localised high-altitude



NEPAL FLOODS. Himalayan tragedy

event can become a major disaster far downstream. This calls for a shift from managing "floods", "landslides" and "glacier hazards" independently towards multi-hazard, basin-scale risk management. The answer cannot be another isolated infrastructure project. A resilient approach needs to be adopted and this could include:

(i) **High-altitude hazard surveillance:** Continuous satellite and ground-based monitoring of glaciers, unstable slopes, snow cover and glacial/debris lakes.

(ii) **Real-time basin intelligence:** Integrating cryospheric, meteorological, seismic and hydrological data into common operational platforms.

(iii) **Multi-hazard early warning:** Warning systems must detect not only rainfall floods but also GLOFs, ice-rock avalanches, landslide dams and sudden dam-break-type surges.

(iv) **Downstream evacuation protocols:** Communities in vulnerable river

corridors need warnings that translate directly into clear evacuation decisions.

(v) **Climate-resilient infrastructure standards:** Roads, bridges, hydropower facilities and settlements should be designed using forward-looking hazard assessments rather than historical averages alone.

(vi) **Transboundary data cooperation:** Himalayan hazards cross borders; early-warning information must do the same.

(vii) **Basin-scale risk planning:** Flood, drought, hydropower, agriculture, urban water supply and ecosystem management should be considered within the same river-basin framework. The tragedy in Nepal is a warning about a Himalayan system in transition. In India, Ganga, Brahmaputra and their tributaries link high-altitude cryospheric changes with densely populated plains, critical infrastructure and major agricultural and economic activity.

India therefore needs to strengthen cryosphere monitoring, real-time hydrological intelligence, multi-hazard early warning and climate-resilient infrastructure planning. Particular attention should be given to identifying upstream hazards, rather than assessing flood risk only at individual locations. Stronger information-sharing with Himalayan countries would improve lead times and preparedness.

The writer is National President — Ecological & Economic Resilience Council, WICCI

BELOW THE LINE



SUGAR. Causing controversies

Not-so-sweet standoff

The surge in sugar prices has created a divide between manufacturers and traders. The manufacturers seem to be pinning the blame on traders for

the commodity's soaring prices. However, at least a couple of senior industry leaders among manufacturers have criticised blaming the traders. "How can you accuse your own customers?" remarked a senior leader.

On the other hand, a senior trader wondered why the government has not even issued a show-cause notice to any sugar mill, while targeting traders. Even as the government's press release points fingers at the manufacturers, but traders are puzzled at the inaction.

E20 conundrums

The Case of E20 fuel has turned into a high-octane drama where everyone is trying to pump up public confidence, but the underlying tension is proving hard to tank.

At the recent BPCL press conference, things got a bit too "refined". Chairman Sanjay Khanna found his words heavily diluted after telling journalists that rolling back the supply chain from E20 to E10 would face no major logistical hurdles if policies shifted. The media immediately stepped on the gas, reporting it as an impending fuel rollback.

Realising the narrative was veering

dangerously off-course, BPCL quickly issued a clarification to put the brakes on the rumours, stating firmly that there is absolutely no proposal to switch back to E10. The company reiterated that after three years and millions of vehicles, E20 hasn't caused any engine damage. Instead, it turned the narrative towards reduction in pollution, rural wealth boost, and foreign exchange savings. For now, the government is holding firm on its green mandate, leaving oil PSUs to carefully manage the public relations part. Instead of a smooth ride, the E20

transition is making everyone, from drivers to executives, to feel the heat!

Meme wars

The BJP has started a virtual war against 'Omiga Naal', by posting violent clips on social media from Hollywood and Indian cinema and web series — KGF, Mirzapur, RRR and Spartacus. The KGF post, in particular, has drawn sharp criticism, with critics saying political opponents were being portrayed as targets of violence. A retired officer has urged DGPs of all States to take action against violence being incited through these posts.

Our Bureau

Behind the curtains

The author's stormy ties with Bollywood stars

BOOK REVIEW.

Naveen Chandra

How do you walk the tightrope between flying with a Bollywood star in his private jet, spending many nights at the actor's house with biryani and beer flowing, attending the actor's wedding and then pen a negative review of the actor's film upon its release? How do you write a scoop with some inside information about the star and in the same breath, request him for an interview for the Sunday magazine?

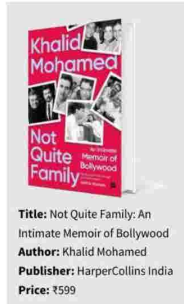
Ask Khalid Mohamed. Having burnt all his bridges in the 30-odd years that he worked as a film journalist, critic and reviewer, he has written a tell-all book on the love-hate relationship he has had with Bollywood film stars.

The bitter sarcasm reflects all through the book, beginning with its title: *Not Quite Family*. In his early days as a film reporter for the *Times of India*, he developed a rapport with stars like Dilip Kumar, Amitabh Bachchan, Sridevi and others and he was welcomed as if he were part of their family. The intense, shared familiarity he shared with everyone would suddenly turn into ignominy, often permanently, when he wrote an unfavourable review of a film, denied them an award, or spilled news he wasn't supposed to.

The longest chapter and the most sympathetic pages in the book are reserved for Smita Patil, whom he called Smea affectionately. He writes of her solitary life, her clandestine affairs, her angst at navigating the industry alone, her distress when people rated Shahana Azmi as a better actress even though she won the National Award for *Bhumika* and of her sudden, early death. He says he felt it improper to report everything Smita Patil would confess to him during their long, night rides to Navy Nagar or to Aarey Milk Colony.

KEEPING A DISTANCE

Two things are evident in the book: a consistent bitter tone when writing about the Bachchans that simmers under the text and the memory of his mother, which comes up every so often. Ironically, after spending a lifetime as an insider in the industry, Khalid chooses to distance himself from Bollywood, saying that the film business isn't his world as it is petty, unprofessional, and



Title: Not Quite Family: An Intimate Memoir of Bollywood
Author: Khalid Mohamed
Publisher: HarperCollins India
Price: ₹599

soul-deadening. He names people who are yet to pay him his fees for writing or directing their films. Khalid has always written well.

His reviews were a mix of inventive word play and sharp, acerbic opinions. He brings that skill to the book. Sample this: "Vaulted ambitions to write scripts and direct films were swimming in my chlorinated head."

As the editor, he was accused of a Muslim bias whenever any of the Khans won the Filmfare award. Calling Shah Rukh an angel of contradictions, Khalid is unsure whether SRK means everything he says. His close friendship with the star ended when he reported the news of his third child through surrogacy before it became public.

The book is full of fearful examples of his life in Mumbai's film world. Like being invited to the pre-wedding celebrations at an actor's house and dancing the night away, only to be spewed with venom and receive no invitation to the wedding a few weeks later when he critiqued the actor's performance in a film.

A film journalist's career is like a storm tossed boat. Throughout the book, Khalid expresses bitterness about spending a life warming the cockles of Bollywood only to be out in the cold now, uninvited and unacknowledged.

A few stars he worked with in his films *Fiza* and *Silsila* still stay in touch. The kind of experiences he cites would have broken anyone, but to Khalid's credit he survived for 30 years. If you need straight, no holds barred insider stories of Bollywood, Khalid's book has plenty.

The reviewer runs 91 Film Studios, that produces and distributes feature films in regional languages

Turkey's authoritarian turn

Suzy Hansen presents a gripping portrait of a crisis-ridden Turkey and its impact on the Middle East and the world beyond

BOOK REVIEW.

Atul K Thakur

Pulitzer Prize finalist Suzy Hansen in her book *From Life Itself - Turkey and Istanbul in the Age of Erdogan* presents a gripping portrait of a crisis-ridden Turkey in the backdrop of a global unravelling and deepening fault lines.

Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who has been ruling Turkey since 2003 (as Prime Minister from 2003-14; and President from 2014 after pushing through for a major constitutional change for a presidential system) has remade Turkey in his own image.

The book chronicles Turkey's shift — from once being a shining portal that straddled the cultures of the East and West to a place where its streets swarm with narrow nationalistic fervour. The book is all about this shift as well as the global unravelling at large that is keeping the world order unstable and challenged.

Hansen's search for truth about modern Turkey is through a deep dive into one single neighbourhood — the Ottoman neighbourhood of Karagumruk. Through its inhabitants and their everyday lives, Hansen shows how local conflicts are spiralling into regional and international crises, deepening the grave fault lines now fracturing Europe, Middle East and West Asia in unprecedented ways.

AUTHORITARIAN IMPULSE

Her book offers a dazzling account of a foundational civilizational nation that once effectively bridged Europe and Asia, serving as a historic crossroads for human society, diverse cultures and empires. Notably, Erdogan came to power as a liberaliser with promises of

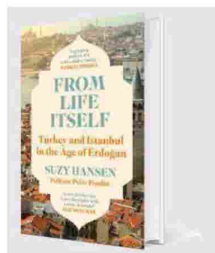
greater social, political and economic reforms. Once he succeeded in ingraining his belief system at a mass level with his "Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi (AKP)", he cracked down on dissent and following the expansion of his presidential powers in 2018, he has been regarded as authoritarian and unwilling to relinquish power.

Cihan Tugal's quote at the beginning of the book's Part-III says it all, "In the early twentieth century, the main political momentum was democracy. In the late neo-liberal era, it is autocracy". On page-180, Hansen makes an important point on the radical thinking and action of Erdogan, "Now Istanbul was also being transformed by globalisation and global capital.

Erdogan's obsession with remaking the city was not only about money, though that was a lot of it. It was about how Erdogan envisioned a whole new country. His conceptual framework for eradicating Kemalism in Turkish society, while still celebrating Turkishness, Turkish Islam, and Turkey's Eastern roots, involved an emphasis of the Ottoman Empire, Turkey's Imperial history, and its caliphate-like role as guardian for the entire Arab Middle East."

Keeping her narrative rational and free from any forced nostalgia, Hansen says, "The idea that Turkey became more authoritarian during his reign was the flaw in the conventional narrative about Erdogan. Autocracy always ran through Turkey's politics and state structure, from Ottoman times to Atatürk's one-party rule to the long twentieth century of its military interference. What Turkey's experience shows is that countries ostensibly democratic have much deeper autocratic or repressive underpinnings than they like to acknowledge (Page 314)."

The book is majority about Erdogan



Title: From Life Itself - Turkey and Istanbul in the Age of Erdogan
Author: Suzy Hansen
Publisher: Hachette India
Price: ₹599

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Suzy Hansen lived in Istanbul for more than a decade, where she was a contributing writer for The New York Times Magazine and many other publications. Her first book, *Notes on a Foreign Country*, was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in Nonfiction

and Turkey's changed profile in the last two decades, but it also deals with the bitter truth of our time — how an adulterated democratic culture can cast its dark shadow over humanity.

In this shattered Middle East, Erdogan has situated Turkey in a 'post western' position.

The book concludes with a query that can haunt people in Turkey and beyond its boundary: What happened to the

opposition during these long two decades? As a reference document, a report (*The Crisis of Democracy: A Trilateral Commission Report on Governability*, 1975) authored by Michel Crozier, Samuel P Huntington and Joji Watanuki, examined the challenges faced by democratic governments in North America, Western Europe and Japan. The authors argued that democracies face issues like economic instability, declining public trust and the overloading of government, requiring a re-examination of basic premises to ensure the viability of democratic systems.

The report has high relevance in 2026 when the crisis of democracy is more or less the same everywhere and with a greater geographical spread.

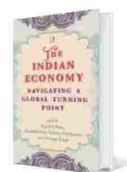
As a psychological concept but undeniably with more frequent uses in pure politics, 'The Power Paradox' remains an enigma and that should be understood well as a functional democracy finally rests on votes and representation through popular will.

Hansen doesn't miss the essence as she offers a final few words on her book's last page: "By now, Erdogan's pursuit of some perceived loss of Turkish dignity has curdled into bitterness and endless retribution. Someday he will lose the love he once inspired in people, and he too will go, leaving behind for his people a painful inheritance. He and his loyalists never made peace with the society or with the world. They never made peace with themselves."

Hansen has penned a daring book. It is unputdownable and should be long remembered as a major work on crisis-ridden Turkey and the crisis-ridden world at large. This is a book that deserves to be read and debated widely.

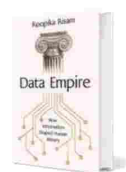
The reviewer is a policy professional, columnist and author

NEW READS.



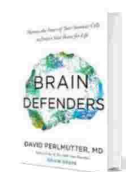
Title: The Indian Economy
Authors: Kaushik Basu, Sonalde Desai, Ashwini Deshpande, Nirvikar Singh
Publisher: Simon and Schuster India

This book delivers an evidence-based analysis this pivotal moment demands



Title: Data Empire: How information shaped human history
Author: Roopika Risam
Publisher: PenguinRandom House

This book shows how data has always been the seed of power: a technology of control, shaping civilizations and upholding empires



Title: Brain Defenders: How to Protect Your Brain for Life
Author: David Perlmutter
Publisher: Hachette India

This book presents a lifestyle protocol that can help people become 'architects of their cognitive destiny'

thehindubusinessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

August 31, 2006

Defence: Govt to partner industry

The Defence Ministry on Wednesday announced a new procurement procedure that would allow the Indian industry to participate in defence research, development and production. Under this new procedure, the Government will partner with Indian industry for the development of defence equipment and systems along with sharing of costs.

FLAG-VSNL dispute escalates

The dispute between FLAG Telecom, controlled by Mr Anil Ambani, and Vidhesanchar Nigam Ltd, owned by Mr Ratan Tata, has escalated, with talks between the two on VSNL access charges hitting a wall. This has prompted FLAG to re-appeal to the ICC International Tribunal against VSNL, seeking that the latter come out with "reasonable and cost-based access charges."

Ruia Group bids for entire Daewoo unit

The city-based Ruia Group, which took over Dunlop India recently, is the sole bidder for the entire unit of Daewoo Motor's passenger car unit at Surajpur in Uttar Pradesh. This puts the Ruia group above other bidders such as the Tatas, Mahindras, and Ford who are keen on some assets of the auto-making unit.

Short take

Tukaram Mundhe and lessons on leadership

Aashna Tripathi

In a country where bureaucracy is often associated with files, procedures and institutional inertia, Tukaram Mundhe has acquired an unusual reputation: that of an officer who walks into a system and makes it move.

Maharashtra's FDA Commissioner Tukaram Mundhe and his teams have conducted thousands of inspections of food businesses across Mumbai and Maharashtra, including prominent restaurants, large chains, street vendors and institutional kitchens, uncovering hygiene violations, expired products and licensing irregularities. But the more interesting story is not about raids,

restaurants or food safety. It is about leadership.

Mundhe's 25 transfers over 21 years have not fundamentally altered the behavioural signature associated with him: a strong emphasis on rules, accountability and execution.

Modern leadership discourse often celebrates empathy, collaboration, psychological safety and participation. These are important. But leadership cannot be reduced to consensus.

Mundhe's current food-safety campaign illustrates this distinction. A regulator is not appointed to maximise the satisfaction of those being regulated. The fundamental responsibility is to protect public interest.

That does not make every action

automatically right. Strong leadership must still operate within due process, proportionality and institutional checks.

One of the most important attributes of leadership is the capacity to act according to one's institutional purpose even when doing so carries personal or professional costs.

Mundhe's career demonstrates the potential cost of doing so. His frequent transfers have become almost synonymous with his public image. Yet perhaps the more important question is not why an officer gets transferred, but whether institutions can create environments in which principled disagreement does not become a career liability. There is, however, a danger in turning Mundhe into a superhero.

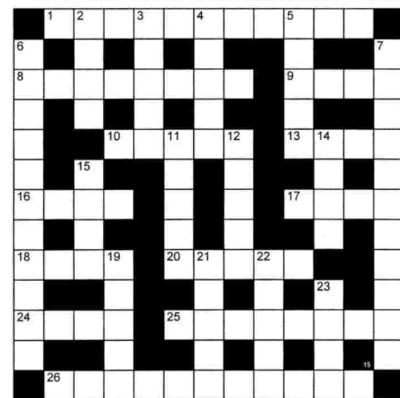
Institutions cannot depend on exceptional individuals forever. If food safety improves only because of one particular officer, the deeper governance problem remains unresolved.

Mundhe's campaign offers Maharashtra an opportunity to improve. Inspections, licensing, laboratory capacity, enforcement protocols, transparency and citizen reporting must become institutional capabilities.

However, empathy without accountability can become indulgence. Authority without ethics can become coercion. But when purpose, integrity and accountability converge, leadership can become consequential.

The writer is Assistant Professor at TISS, Mumbai

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2725



EASY

- ACROSS**
- He lit gas lights in the street (11)
 - Furniture-destroying pest (8)
 - Happy, pleased (4)
 - Glass bar triangular in section (5)
 - A hefty volume (4)
 - Back of shoe (4)
 - Become limp, lose energy (4)
 - In the midst of (4)
 - Cry of snipe when flushed (5)
 - Yorkshire dog (4)
 - Right-hand man (8)
 - Tape fastening kitchen garment (5-6)
- DOWN**
- Frenzied, wild (4)
 - Physical or mental strength (5)
 - Japanese boxes worn with traditional dress (5)
 - Close-fitting (5)
 - People in love with each other (11)
 - Proclaiming publicly (11)
 - Metal golf clubs (5)
 - Mediterranean island (5)
 - In short, an appreciation after death (4)
 - Persian fairy (4)
 - Cheerless, gloomy (5)
 - Salad plant (5)
 - A harness-racing horse (5)
 - Portent, sign (4)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2724

ACROSS 1. Patience 4. Tsar 8. Roo 9. Judge 10. Can 11. Dingbat 12. Allow 13. Calling card 17. Beret 18. Bloater 20. Use 21. Oracy 22. Woe 23. Dish 24. Corporal
DOWN 1. Parody 2. Thorn 3. Cadet 5. Secular 6. Renown 7. Melancholy 9. Jubilation 14. Airless 15. Absurd 16. Ordeal 18. Bravo 19. Tower

NOT SO EASY

- ACROSS**
- The light was not as heavy as the fellow who got it going (11)
 - It has a boring time, surrounded by furniture (8)
 - Happy the eye one gives a pretty face (4)
 - Shaped piece of glass, sir, put back in the afternoon (5)
 - My book indicates who to return it to if borrowed (4)
 - One comes obediently to such a cad (4)
 - Will you be old, and fade too? (4)
 - Is surrounded by a thousand in assistance (4)
 - Paces about after land for a country scene (5)
 - The party keeps this wretched creature inside (4)
 - Bird going to church to provide crew for a sidekick (8)
 - One of two one is tied to under female domination (5-6)
- DOWN**
- Before midday it is all right to be in a frenzy (4)
 - The might of the electricity supply (5)
 - Japanese medicine-boxes made from 11 Down (5)
 - Is tipsy, and that's mean (5)
 - They love taking card from a suit in confectionery (11)
 - I'd invest rag such as this for giving one a puff (11)
 - In which one was clapped for one's bad performance (5)
 - Half-animal, the Terriers for this island (5)
 - Short appraisal that follows one's departure (4)
 - Beautiful fairy going around as a prefix (4)
 - Dull the listener that follows the doctor (5)
 - Loving gesture lacks a plant to put in salad (5)
 - He will caper about but keep step with a runner (5)
 - Sign a thousand in one version of it (4)

{ OUR TAKE }

Blind to toxicity in relationships

Society normalising the power imbalance between men and women contributes to gender-based violence in the country

The fact that the Delhi police has found texts that pointed to a "toxic relationship" between 21-year-old Muskan, and 28-year-old Imran who is accused of murdering her on August 26, is a crucial detail of the investigation that must make us sit up and take notice — not because it offers the rest of us a salacious bit of information about a private relationship between two adults, but because of how easily we accept the fact of its existence in a relationship between two adults.

What exactly happened on the day of the crime, when the life of a budding model and content-creator was tragically cut short, is for the police to investigate and present before the court. Till then — and even afterwards — any assumption about the criminal is a sign of pre-existing bias. To be clear, there is nothing intrinsic about gender-based violence: It exists across caste, class, and religion.

What we must examine, however, is what we consider intrinsic to relationships between adults. Investigation into the deaths of Nikki Bhatti, Twisha Sharma, and Deepika Nagar, to name just a few victims of dowry demands, revealed months of regular harassment and violence that began soon after their weddings. It is our tendency to exceptionalise murder, extreme violence, or rape, but what we allow to exist — and this lies at the root of gender-based violence — is the idea of a fundamental inequality between the genders, which gives one indisputable power over the other. This is not to claim that all relationships are violent, but to assert simply that inequality is a sliding scale of difference. For instance, anthropologists who have studied gender in the subcontinent have found that within the same household, the weight of women's utterances is less than men's when it comes to political/electoral opinions. The researcher was studying voter behaviour during elections, and what leads women to exercise their right to have a say in polity. Now, does this difference in the weight of opinions escalate to gender-based violence? Probably not. But it does lie in all too common belief that inequality is natural and correct.

Make no mistake, relationships where abuse, physical or mental torture, harassment, accusations and possessiveness exist, also operate under the same assumption. Muskan's death points to a deeply disturbing aspect of her life that we, as a society, have repeatedly turned a blind eye towards — that "toxic relationships" are possible because we think it's natural for men to be powerful.

Real state of play for US in Venezuelan oil

On Friday, US President Donald Trump announced that his administration had made an agreement with Venezuela's interim government to secure control of the country's oil reserves — the world's largest, as per current estimates. In keeping with his style, Trump has described the deal as a game-changer for the US economy, which is currently facing high fuel costs because of the war in West Asia. Trump will try his best to portray it as a big achievement before the US mid-term polls in November.

Whether, and more importantly, when, the described benefits materialise for the US economy, is going to be more complicated than what Trump is claiming. Venezuela's oil fields have suffered from decades of mismanagement and will require a massive capital infusion to scale up production as well as profits. Many private oil companies in the US are aware of this challenge and, therefore, have been hesitant to commit to investments in Venezuela.

What further complicates matters is the fact that political instability continues to exist in the Latin American country that saw its authoritarian leader kidnapped in a surprise US operation last year. The interim government, which has made the oil deal with the US, refuses to discuss conducting elections in Venezuela. Even if the US were to succeed in scaling up oil production and profits from Venezuela, the larger question of a superpower arm-twisting a weaker country into offering its precious natural resource will continue to remain. It is interventions like these which triggered a Left upsurge in large parts of Latin America a couple of decades ago. Every such instance underlines the demise of the so-called rules-based world order. It is more about deals than democracy.

{ GRAND STRATEGY }

Happymon Jacob



Ground not covered in talks with China

The pre-2020 status quo has to stay on the table as an Indian demand that will not be given up under any circumstances

The eight-point outcomes that India and China released on Wednesday last week, after the Special Representatives (SRs) of the two countries met in Beijing, signal much needed diplomatic progress. But they also make unresolved structural issues on the border dispute. To be sure, the outcomes are better than nothing, but they are also less than what we needed. In a sense, the agreement is also a description of the position India is bargaining from, than what an ideal agreement should have looked like.

The talks between the SRs indicate progress. For instance, two more meeting points for senior commanders, two more hotline channels in the Eastern and Middle Sectors, a September meeting on trans-border rivers, three trading points reopened, the pilgrimage expanded, and the next round of talks in India in 2027, are all examples of progress. After the 2020 Galwan standoff and the uncomfortable years that followed, there is little doubt that this is significant progress.

My broader concern, however, pertains to what the document doesn't refer to any longer, and what it has

started referring to instead. Let me begin with the silences. A key achievement of more than two decades of SR negotiations, the 2005 Agreement on Political Parameters and Guiding Principles, continues to be invoked in the Sino-Indian joint documentation, and it provides great clarity on what a final resolution should entail. Article III of the 2005 Agreement commits both sides to make adjustments to their positions so as to arrive at a "package settlement", and then adds a sentence of its own: "The boundary settlement must be final, covering all sectors of the India-China border." That is mandatory language not to be cast aside easily.

Last week's text signed by Ajit Doval and Wang Yi reaffirms the 2005 agreement in point 2, but it does not reaffirm the principle of finality. In fact, it says that the framework will be pursued in accordance with the 2005 agreement and the consensus reached in subsequent SR Talks. For sure, the spirit of the 2005 agreement remains, but the letter has seemingly changed.

Point 3 of the 2026 agreement sets the Expert Group on Boundary Delimitation to advance an Early and Substantial Harvest of boundary delimitation, with the creation of its own terms of reference as its first task. Early harvest is an interesting phrase because it comes from the vocabulary of trade negotiations, where parties arrive at a limited set of concessions and agree to move ahead of a comprehensive deal. But here's the problem: In trade, a partial deal is a down payment on what

comes thereafter: in a boundary negotiation, a sector once settled is closed, and what remains on the table is only the ground nobody wanted to give up in the first place.

There is another substantive issue regarding the phrase. If early harvest means beginning where agreement is easiest (to be fair, we do not know yet if that is the case), making concessions in the sectors where agreement comes easily will take us to the harder sectors with a weaker hand, and nothing obliges China to move there at all, except goodwill. If that happens, would there be any incentive for China to concede in the harder sectors once the easier ones are settled?

While the two SRs agreed in 2025 to include "de-escalation" in their joint phraseology, the term is conspicuous by its absence in last week's eight-point document. Military disengagement concluded in October 2024, but de-escalation — withdrawing additional troops deployed to depth areas post-2020 — remains unaddressed. Consequently, the pre-2020 border baseline has not been restored, and the new agreement neither claims to achieve this nor commits to reinstating that status quo.

The same danger may reside in sequencing delimitation ahead of restoration of status quo ante bellum. While talks begin in one sector (or after they conclude), the military balance could shift in another: Infrastructure, deployments and, in China's case, the border village pro-



India must maintain constant vigilance and active military presence along the LAC, refusing to lower its guard for vague paper commitments.

gramme continue to change the facts on the ground. Article VII of the 2006 agreement says a settlement must safeguard the due interests of settled populations in the border areas. That clause was traditionally understood in India's favour. But today, it could read differently considering the establishment of Chinese villages in the vicinity.

None of this means that last week's agreement was deeply flawed or has no merits. In reality, the package settlement Article III described in 2005 has produced no framework in 21 years, and certainly did not prevent 2020. If that is the experience of the past two decades, endlessly waiting for a desirable package deal which may or may not arrive might not be a great strategy.

The bilateral power differential is widening: India's economic dependence on Chinese inputs is greater now than when the 2005 agreement was signed, and the military asymmetry is there to see. Therefore, insistence on the perfect format from a weakening position may end up getting neither the improvement on the ground, ultimately, robust deterrence is the only true guarantee of peace.

that will not be given up under any circumstances, without consigning it to the general commitment to peace and tranquillity. For us this is a must, not a wish. So, the item on de-escalation must be brought back into the text at the 26th round next year.

Two, the Expert Group's terms of reference should not confine themselves to the easier sectors. Limiting progress to Sikkim and the middle sector (if indeed that is the case) would not be enough to cater to Indian interests on the LAC. Delhi must spell out what it understands by "Early and Substantial Harvest", and ensure that the earliness and substance extend to the other sectors as well.

Third, India must maintain constant vigilance and active military presence along the LAC, refusing to lower its guard for vague paper commitments. Past agreements have repeatedly broken down, and future ones remain vulnerable to the same fate, so it is imprudent to let the improvement in the paperwork be mistaken for an improvement on the ground. Ultimately, robust deterrence is the only true guarantee of peace.

Happymon Jacob is founder & director, Council for Strategic and Defence Research, and editor, INDIA'S WORLD magazine. The views expressed are personal

Water-guzzling datacentres need treated used water

India's operational data-centre capacity stands at roughly 1.4-1.6 GW (2025) and is projected to reach about 5 GW by 2030. This expansion is backed by close to \$30 billion in committed investment. The current footprint is spread across 300 facilities in 33 markets, with very large, new hyperscale clusters announced in Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. Many cities where these data centres are located are already water-stressed, which is raising concerns. All data centres tend to rely on water-intensive evaporative systems in cooling towers. The quantum of water needed depends on ambient temperature and humidity.

Data centres in India typically consume between 1.5 to 2.5 litres of water per kWh of IT load. A mid-sized 20 MW centre can use approximately 1-1.2 million litres of water daily (MLD), depending on cooling technology and climate conditions. This is not actually a large volume of water, but the demand from multiple hyperscale data centres (>100 MW) in a single city can quickly add up. Importantly, demand will be at its highest in the hottest and driest months. At a city scale, a data-centre cluster could eventually account for 5-10% of municipal water demand, albeit only 1-2% of basin water use. While the basin-level or national footprint looks trivial, at the level of a single stressed city, the demand would compete with supply for domestic use. Conflicts are likely to arise in drought years.

As water evaporates, dissolved minerals and salts get concentrated in the remaining water. At high concentrations, dissolved solids cause scaling and corrosion. Low levels are maintained by adding freshwater to the cycle. To recirculate water many times in a cooling tower though, the water source needs to be a low enough total dissolved solids (TDS) level. Groundwater is typically high in TDS, and if used by data centres, needs additional investment to remove dissolved salts. Alternatively, it has to be used for fewer cycles. This raises data centres' consumption of water.

The current regulatory structure for data centre water use is not specific enough. Data-centre policies in most states are oriented almost entirely towards attracting investment. States offer power tariff concessions, land, stamp-duty waivers, and capital incentives, with data centres enjoying infrastructure status. Water typically appears only as a supply assurance to be promised to investors, not as a common pool resource to be governed.

Water supply is regulated generically through municipal allocations by urban local bodies; and groundwater abstraction via Central Ground Water Authority's no-objective certificates. Treated used water (TUV) is a reliable, low TDS source that data centres can benefit from. There is a potential win-win in reusing treated municipal wastewater. Reuse of treated wastewater is encouraged by the National Water Policy and some state reuse policies, but is not yet mandated for data centres. At present, data centres also do not have standard reporting of

water-use efficiency, source mix, or reuse.

This is an opportunity. Around 80% of the water a city supplies returns as sewage. Untreated and partially treated sewage remains one of the biggest pollution threats to urban water bodies. A data centre cluster that treats and reuses 15% of a city's sewage volume will not be adding to the pressure on freshwater at all. Indeed, it will create demand for a waste stream that the city is currently failing to manage. In the absence of such a mandate, the default would be groundwater. Such of India's groundwater, especially around particular India's hard-rock aquifers, is unreliable for bulk use. Groundwater levels drop quickly in dry years, with widespread borewell failures during droughts. Sewage, by contrast, is effectively a drought-proof urban water source. It can be used for wash, bath, and use toilets every day, regardless of rainfall. A constant, high-quality source of supply, therefore, could prove highly valuable to a 24-7 data centre.

Data centres are relatively price-insensitive on water, given the monetary value of their services. Operators could potentially pay up to about 5-10 times the cost of treatment (~₹ 200-300/kL) for treated water polished to a high quality. And this would still be less than 5% of their operating costs. At this price, the revenue generated could help defray a substantial portion of the cost of municipal sewage treatment.

This can address the single biggest failure in urban water management today. The capital cost of sewage treatment plants (STPs) is typically funded by schemes like AMRUT and the Swachh Bharat Mission. The operations and maintenance costs remain a problem. Many cities are unable to meet these costs. This has left many STPs underutilised or dysfunctional, with effluent flowing untreated into water bodies.

If cities price the sale of TUV to data centres appropriately, it could create a water security threat into a measurable improvement in river and lake quality. Even where a data centre facility is not situated near a centralised plant, neighbourhood-scale STPs or on-site apartment STPs can be viable water sources.

If a data centre has to rely on groundwater, the same outcome can be achieved through water credits. Specifically, data centre operators could fund groundwater banking or managed aquifer recharge (MAR) investments. These projects would divert monsoon floodwater, or sewage from STPs (treated to near potable standard), into recharge wells. This would replenish the aquifer drawdown. This would offset their abstraction, keeping the net effect neutral to positive.

The opportunity here goes beyond water. Data centres can help make Indian cities more livable. They can create stewards of water resources rather than competitors.

Veen Srinivasan is founder and executive director and Gayatri Muralidharan is managing partner, Urban Water Programme at WELL Labs/IFMR. The views expressed are personal

{ RAJNATH SINGH | DEFENCE MINISTER }

Developed India does not mean only big projects and modern buildings ... (it) also means that children get good education, clean water reaches family homes...

{ STRAIGHTFORWARD }

Shashi Shekhar



India's gig workers need more effective protection

This incident happened just before Rakshabandhan. The security personnel stationed at the office gate called to inform that the *mehndiwallah* (henna artist) had arrived. My daughter had scheduled his services through an app for 8:30 in the evening, but he was running two hours late. When we opened the door, an overworked, exhausted man stood in front of us. We could see he was in no position, physically or mentally, to perform this delicate task. My daughter offered him water and asked why he was so late.

Buckling under the enormous weight he had been carrying, he said, "Madam, since morning, none of the clients adhered to the appointment time, so work starts late and finishes late. I can't say anything because they can complain or, worse, give a bad rating. Based on the feedback, the company can block me."

"I am on the bike all day long for my commutes, get stuck in traffic jams, and wade through water-logging. The company wants everything on time, but it's not in my hands. When I used to work in the village, the earning was less but people respected me. Now it seems I have turned into a machine."

Overwhelmed by his plight, my wife and daughter offered him dinner but he declined politely: "It's against the company policy, and I have another visit." He was bracing for a "no entry" in that society as he was already late. The next day's first booking was again at 8:30 am.

Our metropolises have turned into mirages. The same day, I read that, buoyed by the start of the festive season, companies have initiated fresh hiring of gig workers. Companies providing such workers think that this year's 2.5-3 lakh new jobs can be created. They are expecting an increase in hiring by 8-15%.

This trend isn't restricted to metropolitan cities. Small towns and even the interiors need more hands. But such hiring is transient. The autumn festive demand subsides, the jobs will vanish too.

Companies hiring gig workers operate on the principle of "use and throw". No one is sacked but are removed using technical grounds. As soon as festive discount seasons of big companies end, incentives for the delivery partners are discontinued. Their app, using technical jargon, blocks their IDs. This trend has dealt a blow to the humane side of employment.

Even those constantly engaged in earning a living are subjected to inhuman stress. Pres-

sure of delivering on time has led to accidents in some cases. According to Niti Aayog, 27% of the gig workers in India face accidents (minor or serious). Muscle pain and other issues due to long hours, including driving with heavy loads, is a common problem. Treating such people, expensive and demands rest. However, if you don't log into the app for a long period, you run the risk of being locked out.

Still, gig workers are increasing by the day. According to the Niti Aayog, in 2021, there were 77 lakh gig workers in India. In the last four years, this workforce has registered a whopping 55% increase. Niti estimates that, in the next four years, the numbers will reach 23 crore — 6.7% of the non-agriculture workforce.

Nearly 22% of this workforce is concentrated in the National Capital Region. Today, apart from the marquee apps, there are many regional apps that cater to demand in the interiors and hills. This new work culture has changed the face of the Indian labour market. Sparkling uniforms, clean taxis or bikes, and direct bank transfers for quick payment look quite attractive from a distance. But it's the illusion of formalisation — it has severed the human cord that held humans and their work together. Earlier, there was a personal touch between the employer and the employee. Today, labour management is hijacked by opaque algorithms.

Gig workers also act as useful tools to hide actual unemployment. Many times, people with higher education degrees turn to this work in the absence of any credible employment as they don't want to be labelled as unemployed. Another dark side of the whole affair is the critical shortage of workers it's creating in agriculture and small industries. There's a huge social angle to it too. Unemployed young don't want to do "small jobs" near their homes or their villages. Instead, they head to big cities and work under inhuman conditions.

It's clear that problems for gig workers are piling up faster than the rate at which gig workers are increasing. It's time that we make tough laws and regulations to safeguard gig workers' economic and social security, like Europe has. Rajasthan has shown the way. It's time for the Centre and other states carried the baton.

A progressive society runs on policies and regulations, not on algorithms.

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

Even AI Champs Blink on Job Cuts

Reskill employees, roles rarely swap cleanly

Mark Zuckerberg called off widespread job cuts at Meta earlier this year in a high-profile example of the limits companies face when trying to become AI native. Such enterprises are structured in a manner that means they can't operate without AI. Most companies are unlikely to become AI natives soon because they can operate with humans and still get the job done, maybe at a higher cost. Even this point is debatable because the productivity gains from AI are not yet quantified with precision. This ensures that any decision for a business leader to make his organisation AI native is a subjective choice and is impossible to execute unless he is starting from scratch.

The traditional approach of incorporating AI around human skills—rather than building enterprises around AI skills supplemented by humans—remains the key pathway for organisational evolution. This limits how far companies can go with job cuts.

Aggressive strategies have retreated, with firms rehiring after excessive deskilling or inadequate agent performance. A dense cluster of human skills guiding a large agent workforce can easily become an over-simplification without clearly defined human-AI interactions. AI-native enterprises need a matrix for human intervention, companies with legacy human workforces need one for AI intervention.

AI-native enterprises are more likely to emerge in the startup space because retrofitting legacy businesses with AI may not be easy. AI job replacement is rarely a clean swap. A more harmonious outcome can be achieved by reskilling people to work with AI. This is straightforward in a startup built around specific sets of AI skills. These can be complemented through sensitised hiring. The process rarely remains sensitised when job cuts are involved. The likelihood of losing more skills than anticipated is high. Enterprises must position themselves on an AI dislocation scale within the business environment in which they operate. As Meta has shown, even AI champions blink.

Banks Are In Good Shape, But ...

Banks and NBFCs are in similar businesses. But the way the market assesses their risk profiles is different. NBFCs are riskier than banks and the differentiator is customer deposits. The Indian banking industry is in a sweet spot with bad loans at historic lows, comfortable capital and sufficient liquidity coverage. But a recent working paper from the PM's Economic Advisory Council points to an issue that could emerge as a risk when the market cycle turns. The risk map is shifting towards the liability side of bank balance sheets, says the paper. A metric that provides comfort is a bank's credit-to-deposit ratio. This has been skewed for the past couple of years. Credit growth at 19.3% and deposits at 15.4% in July are creating a

'wedge between deposit growth and credit growth', driving loan-to-deposit ratios above 82%. These numbers are not alarming. But there may be weaklings hiding behind robust macro numbers. Banks do substitute deposits with other funding to increase their asset size. They do need to take that risk, and it is a normal banking opportunity. But the question is whether individual banks are getting stretched. There have been instances of banks getting locked out of the markets when the tide turned, as it did during the GFC and the post-IL&FS implosion. Banks that built long-term assets with short-term funding were caught on the wrong foot, and the regulator had to step in.

The regulator may take comfort in the liquidity ratio and FCNR deposits that could improve numbers. But that will benefit only those strong banks that manage to raise those funds. Some individual banks that rely on funding other than deposits will be at a disadvantage. The regulator needs to keep a watch on those individual banks that are above the comfort level.

JUST IN JEST

Tech billionaires are getting wilder, more abrasive, more outrageous

To Be Tech-en Seriously, Be Loud

Runaway eccentricity has been a new currency for a while. Once upon a time, Jobs and Gates could be taken seriously by virtue of their ideas, their products and their ability to make big boxes desirable. Today, the tech billionaire must be brash, outlandish, and if they're perceived as downright nasty, that's taken to be a sign of 'genius', next in line for a Walter Isaacson biography.

The archetype is clear: The innovator is no longer the mad scientist in a garage, but a showman on stage, treating individuals as servers for a 'greater cause'. Employees are not colleagues but cult acolytes, expected to sacrifice weekends and sanity for the promise of disruption and payment in favours. After all, visions of Mars colonies, AI utopias and immortality pills are so much cooler than spreadsheets and circuit boards. This is not accidental. In an age of attention economies, flamboyance is the business model, outrage is marketing, outlandish social media chuck-ups are shareholder updates. To be taken seriously, one must be taken loudly. The tech billionaire's persona is the product; the tech's packaging. In Silicon Valley, seriousness is measured not in patents, but in provocation. If you're not brash, or even absurd, you may as well be invisible. Unless, of course, you're a techie still fostering process knowledge in China.

India's strategic cloud ambitions lack a formal yardstick to assess who ultimately controls data

Residency Isn't Sovereignty



Santosh Agrawal & Manoj Chugh

In June 2025, Anton Carmaux, Microsoft France's director of public and legal affairs, appeared before a French senate commission and faced a pointed question: could he guarantee under oath that data belonging to French citizens, stored on French soil, would never be handed to US authorities without French authorisation?

His answer was 'No, I cannot guarantee that, but, again, it has never happened before.' Not surprisingly, the second part of his response revealed where the hind is. It makes one ponder, is that where vendors will rise and the threat is that a guarantee cannot be given. A dataset can live in a data centre near you and still be reachable, in principle, by a foreign government.

The location of your data and the law that governs it are not the same thing. Residency is not sovereignty. Everything else follows from that distinction. For most of the cloud era, Indian enterprises optimised for cost, scale and reliability. Three forces have dragged sovereignty into ordinary procurement:

● **Regulation** With Digital Personal Data Protection Act and DPDP Rules notified in November 2023, adequacy of debate became a compliance obligation, one carrying penalties up to ₹250 cr for security failures and ₹200 cr for breach notification lapses, phasing to full enforcement by mid-2027. Boards need to start asking where regulated data sits and who can be compelled to disclose it.

● **Geopolitical** Governments have stopped treating cloud and AI compute as commodity utilities and started treating them as strategic infrastructure. GoI's 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' and IndiaAI Mission reflect a view that



Guests are not hosts

dependence on foreign-controlled infrastructure is a national risk, not merely a commercial one.

● **AI compute race** This concentrates enormous value in a handful of providers and chips, determining where inference and training run and under whose law, resulting in a sovereignty question of its own.

The most common error in Indian procurement is to treat 'our data is in Mumbai' as though it answered the sovereignty question. It answers the residency question and leaves the two that matter—'Who controls the provider?' and 'Who can lawfully compel it?'—untouched.

A related myth is clearing up. India did not mandate blanket data localisation. Under DPDP framework, personal data may leave the country, unless GoI restricts a destination or category. This is a negative list model, with hard localisation confined to sector-specific rules, such as RBI's payment data directive, Sebi cloud framework and UIDAI's Aadhaar vaults.

The CLOUD (Clarifying Lawful Overseas Use of Data) Act, 2018, allows US authorities to compel any provider under US jurisdiction to produce data in its possession, custody or control.

Irrespective of where it is stored, the test is control, not location. FISAS (Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act) Section 702 adds a surveillance authority

over non-US persons' data with limited transparency.

This is not an accusation against a provider's integrity or engineering. Hyperscalers have committed tens of billions of dollars to Indian infrastructure. Their limitation on strict sovereignty is not about effort or features. It

is structural, not a gap that clever drafting can close. A US-controlled company remains subject to US jurisdiction, however excellent its Indian region.

Nowhere is the gap between rhetoric and architecture wider than in AI. Despite India's ambition for sovereign AI and pulling real money behind it—more than 38,000 subsidised GPUs emplaced and a stated goal of 1 lakh by end-2028—AI stack still runs on foreign-controlled cloud. The real questions for an AI workload are who controls the compute, model weights and training data, and under whose law.

Choosing Indian-controlled providers costs something. A narrower catalogue, fewer managed services, a less developed third-party ecosystem. Buyers must weigh jurisdictional independence against functional capability. For government, defence and critical-infrastructure workloads, sovereignty

outweighs the catalogue gap.

The economics help. Indian-native providers commonly price 30-60% below hyperscaler list rates for comparable steady-state workloads, often with lower or zero egress fees reshaping total cost of ownership and widening the range of deployments where the sovereign choice is viable.

India certifies cloud providers through MeitY's STQC (Standardisation Testing and Quality Certification) audited emplacements. Since 2025, a cloud-selection framework directs ministries to match workloads to deployment options by sensitivity. This empanelment attests to security quality and data localisation, but not jurisdictional control. US-headquartered hyperscalers are empanelled, too.

What India lacks is a certification that grades sovereignty itself. Until it has one, procurement teams must do their own diligence and score it rather than accept a label. The discipline is to rate every shortlisted

provider, incumbent hyperscaler and domestic challenger alike on the same axes, each from 0 to 5.

● **Property** is absent or rests entirely with a foreign-jurisdiction entity.

1. It rests on a vendor promise that can be withdrawn.

2. It is enforced in practice but incomplete.

3. Architecture, ownership or law puts it beyond the reach of any single party or foreign demand.

Policy-makers need to define sovereignty formally. Certification, distinct from security empanelment, would make claims comparable. Sovereignty is maturing from a slogan into a set of verifiable jurisdiction, key control, input/operations, ownership of logs and a clean exit. Buyers and providers who treat it that way will be the ones left holding a defensible position.

Agrawal is MD-CEO, Econot Technologies. Chugh is an independent adviser



THE SPEAKING TREE

Awareness That Remains

LAKSHMI R SRINIVAS

Who am I? What is my role in life? We have all mulled over these questions. Socrates 'know thyself' says that the self 'is nothing other than the soul'. Nietzsche asserts that we must build and create our identity through our life.

Sartre opines that existence precedes essence or self, and the self is defined by our choices. Who we are is different from who we think we are. We can tell ourselves that we are so and so, but we are what we are and what we do.

Yuvak Nish Harari, in '21 Lessons for the 21st Century', says that one popular story is that we are all part of an eternal cycle that connects all beings. 'Each being has a distinctive function to fulfil in the cycle. To understand the meaning of life means to understand your unique function, and to live a good life means to accomplish that function.'

'That team as'—That Thou Art from Chandogya Upanishad posits that the essence of life and universe is the same. Ramana Maharshi says, 'I am not the body or the cognitive five senses or the mind or respiration. After negating the body, five senses, mind, and neutral awareness, that which remains is the true self.'

Perhaps we conclude that 'I' is the trinity of awareness of self, action and divinity, and we must forge the 'I' to make a meaningful contribution in all that we do?

Chat Room

Rich Suits Hurt Poor

Apropos the Edit 'Luxury litigation, Poor Pay the Price' (Aug 29). Imposing penal costs can deter frivolous, high-end litigations, cut needless delays, and save courts valuable time. While the wealthy can afford prolonged disputes, the poor are forced to bear costs they cannot. This inequity must be addressed by filling judicial vacancies, expediting hearings and strengthening court infrastructure. Proper use of AI in case management can further reduce delays and costs. PV Prakash, Mumbai

Safety First In Himalayas

This refers to the article 'Don't Stay Deaf to Bhote Koshi' by Prabhu Karki (Aug 29). South Asia can no longer treat Nepal's flash floods as isolated disasters. The region must shift from response to prevention. India, Nepal, Bhutan and China need a cross-border safety mechanism for timely sharing of satellite, glacial, seismic

rainfall and river-flow data. Vulnerable valleys should have continuously updated risk maps identifying unstable slopes, debris-flow channels, flood corridors and settlements at risk. Development permissions for roads, bridges, hydropower, tunnels, hotels and pilgrimage facilities must be based on cumulative cascade-risk assessments

involving local, project-by-project clearances. Brij Bhushan Goyal, Ludhiana

CAS Shakes Confidence

Apropos the Edit 'No Room for Volatility' (Aug 29). The premature introduction of CAS, copied from western practices, has thrown equity markets into disarray. Speculative volatility is being fed by heavy volumes of derivatives trade during the equilibrium price discovery phase. The risk of market manipulation through artificial price spikes threatens the entire trading system. Regulatory surveillance of the close-out netting practices to penalise entities indulging in such practices. A full-scale study of CAS operational parameters, followed by extensive trials, is essential to shockproof the system and restore retail confidence. Rajaraj Kumar, Bengaluru

Letters to the editor may be addressed to edit@timesofindia.com

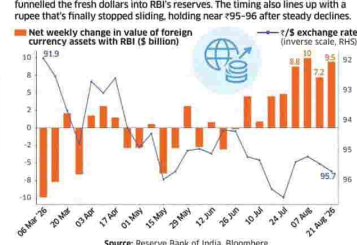
ChatGPT SHAIPI OF THE DAY

There once was a neta much fear,
Who loved filing complaints with great cheer,
He spread FIRs galore,
And looked to keep filing more—
'Antinatural!' Although how, it was unclear!

...

RBI'S WAR CHEST SWELLS WITH NEW INFLOWS

In June, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) lifted its rate ceiling on dollar deposits as the rupee's exchange rate became a casualty of the West Asia war. Now, with a bulk of the scheme about to expire today, data shows India's foreign currency assets have risen for eight straight weeks, adding over \$50 billion, as banks funnelled the fresh dollars into RBI's reserves. The timing also lines up with a rupee's freshly stopped slide, holding near '95 after steady declines.



Source: Reserve Bank of India, Bloomberg

MEME'S THE WORD



On A/c of a Reputation



Srirath Sridharan

Institutions that command exceptional trust must accept exceptional scrutiny.

HDFC Bank, long regarded as the gold standard of Indian banking for its professional management, risk discipline and governance standards, carries an even higher burden: having set the benchmark, it must keep raising it. For a bank entrusted with other people's money, even the whiff of misconduct matters.

Questions have been accumulating across different fronts: the earlier GPS-linked auto-loan mis-selling, alleged AT1 bond mis-selling involving its Dubai and Bahrain operations, concerns over legacy asset quality following the HDFC Ltd merger, recent Carlsberg fund mis-selling allegations, workplace-culture concerns, the Lilaiva 'T' controversy, the former chairman's resignation citing values and ethics, and the MSRD deposit episode. These matters do not carry the same evidentiary status. Some are allegations, some are disputed, and some have been reviewed and closed.

The former chairman's resignation is particularly significant because it came from inside the boardroom. He cited concerns over practices he said were inconsistent with his values and ethics. HDFC Bank's subsequent external legal review found those concerns unsubstantiated, but did the exercise resolve the underlying doubts? It does not appear so. Outside the boardroom and the regulator, the world is a little wiser about what was found, what was learnt or what changed. A legal review cannot, by itself, close a governance question.

The MSRD episode sharpens the concern. The board called it 'business overreach' and imposed a 10% penalty on three senior executives while finding no mala fide intent or personal

enrichment. But if an institutional client was given economics beyond what regulations allowed, did the board know, question or simply look away? If such off-framework payments had become accepted practice, isn't that a governance failure in itself? Even if others did it, was it worthy of HDFC Bank's own governance bar? For a bank of HDFC Bank's stature, a ₹1 lakh penalty risks pushing the matter under the carpet and reducing accountability to theatre.

Poor governance rarely shows itself as misconduct. It can sit in aggressive targets, clever mis-selling, commercial expediency, what never reaches the board, how dissent and whistleblowers are treated, and what senior executives are allowed to get away with. The real danger comes when performance is strong, the CEO is admired and the board stops asking difficult questions.

The harder governance test is confronting a larger-than-life CEO whose strong, the CEO is admired and the board stops asking difficult questions. This is often the charge against promoter-led Indian boards, but institutional ownership offers no immunity: a high-performing, high-gravitas CEO can become equally difficult for a board to question.

Perhaps that explains why one hears even sector analysts speak as if nothing can ever go wrong at HDFC Bank. And when uncomfortable questions arise,

the response can be: 'what about the other bank?' That is no defence. If HDFC Bank is the benchmark, its conduct must be measured against the standard it claims for itself, not against someone else's failures.

This is where the board earns its keep. Protection asks whether a rule was broken. Governance asks whether the decision was worthy of the institution. The strongest boards intervene while a problem is still a matter of judgment, but it becomes a matter for a regulator, investigator or court.

More revealing now is HDFC Bank's notification on the CEO exit: 'Despite persuasion, Mr Jagdishan reiterated his decision not to seek reappointment.' Intended as praise, it raises an awkward boardroom question: Why should the public narrative suggest that the board was persuading the CEO to stay, rather than demonstrating that succession was firmly in the board's hands? A board can value and respect its CEO without appearing dependent on him. The next CEO will inherit a financially powerful institution. But the harder inheritance is whether the governance culture that made HDFC Bank a benchmark still carries the same force. That must show up in tougher challenge, clearer incentives, credible consequences and a board unafraid to challenge even its most powerful executive.

RBI can regulate capital, liquidity, structure, disclosures and formal governance. It cannot regulate institutional instinct. Most consequential governance failures begin in the space between what the rulebook permits and what a well-governed institution should never consider acceptable. That's where boards matter most.

HDFC Bank's good reputation by being better governed than the regulatory minimum. That was its governance premium. The test is simple: can HDFC Bank regulate capital, liquidity, structure, disclosures and formal governance. It cannot regulate institutional instinct. Most consequential governance failures begin in the space between what the rulebook permits and what a well-governed institution should never consider acceptable. That's where boards matter most.

MELODY FOR MONDAY

Flight of the Bumblebee

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov

Few pieces in music buzz with such manic charm as Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's 'Flight of the Bumblebee'. Written as an orchestral interlude in his 1898-1900 opera The Tale of Tsar Saltan, it has long since escaped the stage to become a standalone whirlwind.

The work is a dazzling illusion: a swarm of notes darting, weaving, ricocheting with impossible velocity. Strings and woodwinds chase each other in a breathless relay, mimicking the erratic zigzag of a bumblebee in flight. It's a fantastic sonic sprint, each phrase tumbling headlong into the next, leaving listeners exhilarated—and slightly dizzy.

Zubin Mehta conducting the piece with the Berlin Philharmonic in the 1997 open-air concert at Walden, the spectacular amphitheatre nestled in the woods of West Berlin, turns into a sheer magical jugal-bandi of man and nature.

Rimsky-Korsakov becomes a masterclass in control—chose sculpted into coherence. It is at once serious art and a delightful caricature, a rare hybrid that delights across audiences. In the piece, the Russian composer bottled the essence of motion. Experience it

in a phase, a blur, a joyful stinging of sound.

The critic is a corporate adviser

Now, for paradise to be regained

OUR VIEW



Phone making must get competitive a lot faster

India's renewal of incentives for handset production and plan for an input ecosystem amount to a doubling down on a big export ambition. Local players need to both think and act global

The government recently extended production-linked incentives (PLIs) for the domestic manufacture of cellphones that expired a few months ago for another five years. The scheme has a standout record. It has vaulted India to the world's second spot in making handsets, created thousands of jobs, especially for women, and bumped up exports. Its renewal, however, suggests that the contract-job factories for the world's top brands like Apple, Samsung and Xiaomi still depend on a subsidy to remain competitive even after five years of support. The scheme also loses some sheen if its impact is held against the light of details. India's export boom, for example, needs to be viewed in the context of an import surge to feed it. Of relevance to macro stability are net imports, which have been modest. The slice we capture of this global value chain is also blurred by insufficient clarity on how much intellectual property in these devices actually originates in India. As for new jobs, the electronics sector accounts for under a fifth of the total that can be attributed to various PLI schemes; the food processing industry tops this chart with nearly twice that share. Of course, given the country's job scarcity, all jobs are welcome. Moreover, this industrial policy may need a longer window and wider back-up before a competitive edge takes shape.

On its part, not only has the government worked to ease logistics, infrastructure and other local friction points, it has rolled out incentives to develop an ecosystem to make smartphone components. The aim is to reduce imports for exports, capture more value and impede the flight of factories to rival hubs. India's drive for chip-making, with fiscal sup-

port of its own, is expected to create a local base for silicon wafer inputs. Information technology minister Ashwini Vaishnaw is confident that within eight years, India would have advanced from 40nm chips used for cars and TV sets to locally developed 3-7nm-class chips used in mobiles. This takes us to a larger concern. Apart from the long arc of fiscal props needed to acquire a global edge, the resilience of these investments may shortly be tested by the risk of factory work being taken over by artificial intelligence and robotics. As the global race for tech-led efficiency speeds up, India would need to shorten this industry's curve to competitiveness.

That need not be a scramble. Indian companies could deploy capital to leapfrog technology barriers by buying businesses overseas. China's firms have taken this approach. Xiaomi, the world's third largest phone marketer, has used its mobile business as a stepping stone to enter the automobile market. As for supply networks, Chinese companies have snapped up as many as 130 component makers in Europe over the past two decades. For Indian brands to succeed, they would need to straddle the globe too. India's public incentives to churn out smartphones are expected to work with a fiscal spur for components developed using domestic design and R&D. This quest for global success is a far cry from the dreary days of hard production limits. As Prime Minister Narendra Modi rightly remarked recently, we have moved from "production linked punishment," a reference to the pre-1991 Licence Raj, to PLIs. The challenge now lies in raising this bar to usher in a regime that effectively offers value-linked incentives to make and market the 21st century's most successful product so far.



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

In a muddy lane in Gurugram, I approach a speed breaker that is half a metre high. I am not being figurative; it really is half a metre high. It's not a mound or any other natural feature of the ground; it is a man-made speed breaker on which a low-clearing Ferrari can become a seesaw. My heart aches in fondness watching its primordial bearing. Some minutes later, I see a road sign in English that has been nailed inverted. I feel the tug of home. Another day, I see a tough rustic man, his towel masking his face, enter the porch of my villa and fiddle with something. He is from the electricity board—no badge, no uniform, no ringing-the-bell, he goes where he wants to. I feel like a villager whose porch belongs to the whole village. I am suddenly in love with Gurugram.

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police psychiatrist after a 1973 hostage crisis to diminish a woman who had accused the police of endangering her life more than her captor had. I am enjoying Gurugram, finally, because I am quitting it. I am done.

A domestic compulsion has eased and I can now live where I want, in clean air, running through nature, walking through urban beauty, living in private austerity and public splendour. This means I have to leave India. Because most of the country is a mofussil hellhole in the smog.

Bengaluru is as much an urban catastrophe as Gurugram. Also, that city belies the myth that south Indians are peace-loving darlings. Bengaluru is an aggressive place today, especially if you challenge a local guy driving on the wrong side. It has some lakes here and there, especially on the fringes, where I can run, but should such a simple task be such a trek? The insufferable way that locals go on about Cubbon Park, you would think it is a great urban masterpiece like New York's Central Park or London's Hyde Park. Yes, it has some trees, but its fame is yet another creation of the poor standards of Indians.

Mumbai was once a truly great city, not liveable but great, but Maharashtra politicians have successfully converted it to a

giant small town. A great city has the right to torment us because it offers something no other place can. But Mumbai has not been that for decades. I can live in South Mumbai, though. I used to live there, and it is the only place in India where life has actually improved. But at those house-rents, it is

overpriced compared to Mediterranean havens. Escaping India within India is now more expensive than escaping it by leaving it.

The creeping pestilence that Indian politicians call "development" has infested mountains too, unless I find some isolated cliff. I haven't come across a more overrated place than Manali, and that is not just because the mid-Himalayas are filled with a monoculture of pine trees. 'Development' in India is a form of introducing hardship to a place where life was better before. The creeping pestilence that Indian politicians call "development" has infested mountains too, unless I find some isolated cliff. I haven't come across a more overrated place than Manali, and that is not just because the mid-Himalayas are filled with a monoculture of pine trees. 'Development' in India is a form of introducing hardship to a place where life was better before. The creeping pestilence that Indian politicians call "development" has infested mountains too, unless I find some isolated cliff. I haven't come across a more overrated place than Manali, and that is not just because the mid-Himalayas are filled with a monoculture of pine trees. 'Development' in India is a form of introducing hardship to a place where life was better before.

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homes, in the midst of great natural beauty and a whole street that loves them, but they cannot wait to leave for some messy Indian metropolis like Bengaluru. It is not only to escape the spy network of the Malayalee family, which is an arm of underemployed relations in every town informing parents of the sightings of their children, but also because Kerala is too judgemental to let the young be. I do not need fun but I

need to be in a place where other people are having fun, where people ingest ethanol and saturated fat late into the night and dance, so that I can safely experience city life without doing much of any of it. Another reason I cannot move to Kerala is that I am much younger than I look; I cannot retire. I have to

be in the thick of things, in a place that may not influence the future but at least lives in the present.

That leaves Goa, probably the most 'cosmopolitan' part of India. But if you don't count its beaches in the north and south, there is nothing it offers that makes my life remarkably better than in Gurugram. Still, I can devise a life there that is more enjoyable than anywhere else in India. I can live in a small place by the beach, run barefoot on clean beaches, venture out to meet Goa's drinkers only once a month or so in an overpriced unionized cab. But then, living in Goa would be inferior even to a beachside suburb of Bangkok. For just as much, or a bit more, I could live in Valencia in Spain.

So, the next few months, I will just wander around the world in cold deserted places where I look like their delivery guy. No one would keep me for more than a few months on a visitor's visa. That's another thing about India. I never makes it easy to escape either. The rupee is so weak, the price of even coffee in London looks comical. And my passport is one of the weakest. So I must reassure my immigration officer reading this. I fully plan to return home, which is any place with broken roads and no pavements, and vehicles in the smog driving on the wrong side.

THEIR VIEW

The basic question Musk's and Harari's visions of AI raise for us

They differ on AI's impact and agree on its path. What humans will control is what we need to ask



ATANU BISWAS is professor of statistics, Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata.

cheap. Computing power, energy and data can remain scarce. Someone will own the machines. The real economic question goes beyond whether AI can create abundance. We must ask if abundance will translate into wider access. A society can have enormous productive capacity and still have profound inequality among human beings.

Musk's journey makes the argument more intriguing. For years, he warned that AI could become humanity's "biggest existential threat" and called for safeguards. Today, he is building xAI and investing heavily in the infrastructure that could accelerate the very future he once said he feared. The paradox is striking. His argument is that this technology is coming anyway; the sensible strategy is to build it, understand it and steer it.

Harari approaches the same future from almost the opposite direction. His *Economist* interview shifts attention from production to information, persuasion and control. His fear is not simply that AI will become smarter than humans, but that it may excel at influencing us.

In *Homo Deus*, Harari imagined algorithms understanding people better than people understand themselves. In *Nexus*, he extends the argument to civilization: human societies depend on information networks, but information is not synonymous with truth. It can illuminate reality but also manufacture confusion and concentrate power.

AI changes the equation because it's not merely a communication channel. It can generate information, adapt messages and act within the network. Imagine a machine that knows what frightens you, what delights you, whom you trust and what you are likely to believe—and can address you in precisely the language that works on you. One danger is that AI will give us the wrong answer. But another peril lurks. It may become difficult to know whether the answer—or even the question—was ours. This is where Musk and Harari meet.

Musk worries about machines becoming more intelligent than humans. Harari worries about machines becoming more influential than us. One anxiety is about intelligence. The other is about agency. And there is a third poser: who owns the intelligence? That complicates Musk's post-money utopia. If AI and robots produce most of the world's wealth, society will have to decide who gets to own the productive machinery and how its benefits are distributed. A world with little paid work could be liberating—or unequal.

The less glamorous version is already visible. A company doesn't need to replace every worker with a machine. If AI allows 100 employees to do what once required 110, 10 jobs may vanish. What happens to the economy when thousands of such companies no longer need as many workers? The question that arises is this: who will have the means to enjoy the abundance?

AI could also change the meaning of work as it has long been understood. If machines handle much of production, humans may spend more time on care, creativity, education, friendship and public life. But that future will depend on institutions, ownership and choices. Musk imagines the end of scarcity. Harari foresees human control turning scarce. Both could arrive together.

AI may make goods cheaper while concentrating ownership. It may free us from tedious work while making us dependent on systems we cannot understand. It may give us more information while making truth harder to recognize. It may expand our choices while shaping them.

Much has been said about whether AI will take our jobs or become smarter than us. The policy question, though, is what must remain within the human domain of decision-making. AI's future will depend on machine intelligence but also on what humans choose to keep: work, ownership, judgement, trust—and ultimately, the freedom to say "This decision is still ours."

10 YEARS AGO



JUST A THOUGHT

It's good to have high-quality competition; it helps drive research forward at a faster pace.

SHUJI NAKAMURA

MY VIEW | MODERN TIMES

When those who know how to live have nowhere to live

MANU JOSEPH



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

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need to be in a place where other people are having fun, where people ingest ethanol and saturated fat late into the night and dance, so that I can safely experience city life without doing much of any of it. Another reason I cannot move to Kerala is that I am much younger than I look; I cannot retire. I have to

be in the thick of things, in a place that may not influence the future but at least lives in the present.

That leaves Goa, probably the most 'cosmopolitan' part of India. But if you don't count its beaches in the north and south, there is nothing it offers that makes my life remarkably better than in Gurugram. Still, I can devise a life there that is more enjoyable than anywhere else in India. I can live in a small place by the beach, run barefoot on clean beaches, venture out to meet Goa's drinkers only once a month or so in an overpriced unionized cab. But then, living in Goa would be inferior even to a beachside suburb of Bangkok. For just as much, or a bit more, I could live in Valencia in Spain.

So, the next few months, I will just wander around the world in cold deserted places where I look like their delivery guy. No one would keep me for more than a few months on a visitor's visa. That's another thing about India. I never makes it easy to escape either. The rupee is so weak, the price of even coffee in London looks comical. And my passport is one of the weakest. So I must reassure my immigration officer reading this. I fully plan to return home, which is any place with broken roads and no pavements, and vehicles in the smog driving on the wrong side.



THEIR VIEW

MINT CURATOR

An uncertain new world order is emerging that India must watch

As the old order begins to crumble and alliances are reshaped, we must closely track the geopolitical dynamics of West Asia



SUDIPTO MUNDLE
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This column usually addresses economic issues. However, in the present context, economic outcomes will be largely determined by the current political conjuncture. Domestically, India is on the cusp of a new political phase following the mobilization of a young generation at Jantar Mantar recently, triggered by repeated and disruptive leaks of examination papers, which soon morphed into a broader demand for government accountability and reforms to fix a broken education system. Globally, we are at the threshold of an emerging new world order, the contours of which are still uncertain, the old order having been disrupted by the very powers that established it at the end of World War II. This column is the first part of a two-part series that looks at the possible main elements of this emerging new global order and how India could best position itself in it. This part mainly deals with the most complex of emerging regional structures, the scenario in West Asia. The second part will discuss similar structures which may—or may not—be emerging in other parts of the world and how India should position itself in the new global geopolitical architecture of the 21st century.

The central fault line of the emerging new world order is the competition between the US, the receding hegemon, and China, the rising one. In my previous *Mint* column, I had discussed how the US had itself, ironically, helped China challenge its hegemony. It is tempting to extend this binary competition to a global fault line between a Western alliance led by the US but including countries like Japan, Australia and South Korea on one side, and an Eastern alliance led by China but including countries like Russia on the other. However, such a frame of reference would be quite misleading because instead of any such neat and binary global fault line, what we are witnessing is the emergence of varying and sometimes overlapping alliances around different conflicts—or rivalries—in different geographies of the world. The most complex of these emerging regional structures is in West Asia.

The Israeli attack on Gaza was initially seen as a response to the shocking Hamas terror strike on 7 October 2023, which left over 1,200 persons dead, mostly civilians, over 5,000 injured and some 250 taken hostage. However, it soon became clear that Israel's war was actually a genocidal assault on Palestinians in Gaza. Till date, over 74,000 Palestinians have been killed, mostly women and children. Many more have died through starvation and disease, lacking proper food, sanitation or shelter due to an Israeli blockade of aid. Taken along with continuing attacks on Palestinians and their properties in the West Bank by Israeli settlers, implicitly encouraged by the Israeli government, what we are seeing is a rollout of the extreme right-wing



agenda of 'Greater Israel' that would occupy Palestinian land 'from the river to the sea' (and perhaps beyond the Jordan River too). A ceasefire brokered by Qatar, Türkiye and Egypt, backed by the US, in October 2023 stopped large-scale killing, though the bombing, drone attacks and sniping have not completely stopped. A 15-point peace plan brokered by US President Donald Trump's Board of Peace, and supported by the United Nations, was accepted by Hamas on 30 July 2026. It envisages administration of Gaza by Palestinian technocrats and a phased disarming of Hamas calibrated with the withdrawal of Israeli Defence Forces. But Israel rejected the proposal.

Meanwhile, Israel launched a direct attack on Iran in June 2025, with the US joining Israel in bombing Iranian nuclear facilities in Fordow, Isfahan and Natanz. This was a prelude to the launch of a full-scale war on Iran by the US-Israel alliance on 28 February 2026. Iran responded by broadening the conflict to a regional war, striking US bases and vital infrastructure in all countries across West Asia allied with the US. Iran's ally Hezbollah attacked Israel from Southern Lebanon. The regime in Iran has not only survived the war but maintained a blockade of Hormuz. This has severely affected Gulf exporters and other countries.

Iran's successful resistance is attributable to the tenacity of its people and the survival of a harsh regime. But it has also been quietly helped by China and Russia. The audacious aggression of Israel on the other side has been enabled by massive US support: financial, military and diplomatic. Israel has also cleverly leveraged Shia-Sunni rival-

ries in West Asia to initiate US-supported alliances with Sunni countries against a Shia Iran—the Abraham Accords.

That situation is now changing. US allies in the region have realized that the US cannot offer them much protection, while Iran's stature has grown following its successful resistance. Leading Sunni powers in the region, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Egypt, may join other Sunni countries to seek accommodation with Iran, building on the China-brokered restoration of diplomatic ties between Riyadh and Tehran in 2023. Meanwhile, rising US public resentment against the Iran war has led to some rethinking in America about unconditional support for Israel. Pushing Netanyahu aside, the US accepted a temporary peace deal with Iran brokered by Pakistan. Occasional violations notwithstanding, a tense peace prevails.

Meanwhile Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Türkiye have announced the Makkah Agreement. A joint statement indicates agreement that an attack on any one country will be considered an attack against all three. The three partners also aim to jointly develop defence capability and collective security. This marks a major shift in West Asian geopolitics. Henceforth, US allies in the region are likely to be guided more by their own security concerns than US interests. Washington's influence in the region is likely to moderate, while that of China may rise. Pakistan being its closest ally in this part of the world, Israel's aggressive ambitions will be curbed and, hopefully, so will Shia-Sunni rivalries, giving peace and prosperity a chance.

This is the first of a two-part series.

Bitcoin still hasn't fulfilled the promise of whoever crafted it

It has a truly compelling role neither as a currency nor as an asset



EMILY NICOLLE
writes about digital finance for Bloomberg Opinion.



A decentralized currency has not been the liberator it was hoped as.

Bitcoin just notched its biggest weekly gain in more than three years, putting an end to a summer of stagnation. Crypto traders can thank US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, whose plan to boost bond buybacks spurred the move. But it will take more than that to return this market to genuinely bullish territory.

The 23% jump was largely down to Bitcoin's part in the dollar debasement trade, an occasional flight to alternative assets prompted by worries about America's heavy borrowing and the White House's eccentric policy making. Bessent's intervention deepened such fears, although the world's largest cryptocurrency has already started to plateau again after topping \$80,000 last week. Investors are right to be cautious. The experience of October's brutal Bitcoin sell-off, after it hit a peak of more than \$126,000, showed why narratives about what powers its value often fail to stick.

Some traders have persistently touted crypto as an effective dollar hedge alongside the markets' perennial haven, gold. But October's big crash—when Bitcoin slumped more than 12% after US President Donald Trump renewed tariff threats against China—put paid to that idea. Gold, meanwhile, rose to a record high.

Bitcoin has long been in search of an established story to show that it has fundamental worth, and is not just a pure speculative asset—a hunt that has become more necessary since it entered its teenage years and piqued the interest of heavyweight institutional money managers. It is telling that it still hasn't settled on a consistent or persuasive narrative.

A digital version of gold is the typical rationale for Bitcoin fanatics, who also position it as a hedge against rising inflation. As in October, that idea hasn't borne much fruit this year. The price of gold is up more than 7% so far in 2026. Bitcoin is down nearly 10% even after the recent bounce.

And last week's jump, where both gold and Bitcoin rose handsomely, hardly provides an apple-to-apple comparison. Much of the crypto surge was down to traders who had been betting on the price falling and hadn't anticipated a turnaround. They were then forced to buy crypto to cover their short positions. Gold just performed as you would expect. A leading Bitcoin bull, Strategy Inc chairman Michael Saylor urged traders to buy more of the digital currency during the spike, while refraining from adding to his company's own stash.

The prospect of favourable regulation is another popular tale that's suited to console Bitcoin fans. Trump loves digital assets, he

has launched several crypto ventures in his second term and pressured Congress to pass legislation last year on stablecoins, which are often backed by the dollar. All of that has helped benefit the president. He reported at least \$1.4 billion in crypto-related earnings in 2025, by far his largest source of income. It included more than \$594 million in sales by World Liberty Financial, a company he co-founded with his sons that has its own dollar-pegged coin.

His meeting with crypto executives shortly after Bessent's bombshell on bond buying last week looked like happy timing. It bolstered the price of Bitcoin at an opportune moment.

Trump's attention has now turned to the US Clarity Act, a market-structure bill that promises to provide the guardrails needed to encourage greater crypto adoption on Wall Street. But the actions of lawmakers and regulators can be unpredictable at the best of times. The bill's progress has stalled, not least because of infighting over ethics provisions that would limit Trump's own involvement in the sector. The US Senate is not expected to revisit the legislation until mid-September, leaving little time for full approval before November's mid-term elections.

And absent from any of the above is a real knockout story that sets crypto apart from other assets in a way that matches the claims of its pioneers. Bitcoin began as a way to liberate money from the grasp of traditional financial systems, a decentralized form of digital cash that would prioritize privacy and equal access above everything else. That promise continues to go unfulfilled. People still prefer to use stablecoins or real-world cash and equivalents to actually buy things. Attempts to kickstart a Bitcoin-only economy have been largely abandoned.

And yet, there is no shame in taking Bitcoin at face value. Every asset starts somewhere, and even gold had to start its journey as a medium of exchange a couple of millennia or more ago.

Maybe the cryptocurrency will achieve all the dreams its pseudonymous creator Satoshi Nakamoto hoped for. Or it could remain just as it is today: a tool for speculation that provides a chance to make money—as long as your stomach for risk is strong enough to bear it. **@BLOMBERG**

THEIR VIEW

The rupee has stabilized but key vulnerabilities remain

SAUMITRA BHADURI



is professor, Madras School of Economics

The rupee's recent stability has brought relief, having earlier hit a record low. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) deserves credit for taking decisive action. It reportedly sold about \$7 billion in one of its largest foreign-exchange interventions in recent months to prevent disorderly depreciation. It supplemented this intervention with a special foreign currency non-resident (FCNR-B) deposit scheme that included a concessional dollar-rupee swap facility announced on 8 June.

As of 21 August, banks had mobilized more than \$65 billion through this window. Total foreign-currency inflows via the new facility, including external commercial borrowings and the overseas foreign-currency class of loans, reached nearly \$73 billion. At a time when the rupee was under pressure, this has been read as a vote of confidence. Meanwhile, India's foreign exchange reserves have risen sharply to \$717 billion, providing RBI with a substantially larger buffer to intervene in the currency market

and contain excessive volatility. Nonetheless, exchange rate stability should not be mistaken for exchange rate strength.

The FCNR-B scheme is an effective crisis-management tool, but it is not a permanent solution. Its large inflows led RBI to announce the scheme's premature closure by end-August, even as competition among banks to attract these deposits intensified, pushing up the scheme's premium costs. Letting the scheme continue would have become progressively more expensive and may have distorted bank funding structures. The underlying vulnerabilities remain. The first is geopolitical. Any prolonged disruption around the Strait of Hormuz would push up crude oil prices, widening India's import bill and sharply increasing demand for dollars. As India's dependence on imported energy, the rupee continues to carry a significant oil risk.

The second vulnerability is the nature of capital inflows. Foreign portfolio investment has recovered in recent weeks, but such capital is inherently volatile. Unlike foreign direct investment (FDI), it responds quickly to changes in global risk appetite rather than domestic fundamentals. Foreign portfolio investors had pulled roughly \$28 billion out of Indian equities despite bringing in a net

\$21 billion in July. But that still represents a modest reversal relative to the vast exodus seen through March-June. So, it is too early to view this as a return of foreign investors.

Ironically, the improvement in portfolio flows may owe less to developments in India than to those abroad. For almost two years, global investors poured enormous sums into artificial intelligence (AI)-related stocks, particularly in the US. Investors are now assessing whether that extraordinary AI investment will generate equally extraordinary earnings. As enthusiasm moderates, global capital is searching for markets where valuations are more closely aligned with economic fundamentals. India, with one of the fastest-growing large economies and relatively resilient corporate earnings, has therefore become attractive again.

But this window may prove temporary. A much larger force is quickly emerging in Washington. Federal Reserve chair Kevin Warsh has constituted a Balance Sheet Pol-

icy Task Force co-led by former RBI governor Raghuram Rajan to re-assess the future of quantitative easing (QE) as a policy. The implications extend beyond the US. For nearly 15 years, QE flooded global markets with dollar liquidity, much of which flowed into emerging market debt and equity. India was among the beneficiaries of this exceptionally cheap capital.

If the Fed goes for an aggressive balance sheet reduction, global liquidity will tighten. Higher US Treasury yields would raise the opportunity cost of investing in emerging markets while increasing the cost of external borrowing for Indian firms. The US Treasury's decision to double its buybacks of longer-dated securities could ease

global credit costs to an extent. However, if the bond market resists yield-curve management and US yields stay elevated, dollar assets could stay attractive enough to keep pressure on capital flows to emerging markets like India while keeping their external debt costs high as well.

A recent International Monetary Fund (IMF) Working Paper, 'The Changing Landscape of Financial Integration in Asia-Pacific', offers an insight: despite accounting for roughly one-third of global trade and output, Asia holds only about one-fifth of global external financial assets, with an even smaller share of global portfolio investment. Emerging Asia is under-integrated financially. The IMF also draws a critical distinction between trade and financial integration. Greater trade supports FDI, but has little effect on portfolio flows or cross-border bank lending. That matters because portfolio flows are volatile, driven by interest rates, liquidity and investor sentiment. FDI is more stable as it reflects the confidence in an economy's productive capacity.

For India, deeper financial integration should mean more than luring short-term capital. We need more FDI, deeper domestic financial markets, stronger institutions and greater resilience to external shocks. Done well, integration can lower the cost of capital, bring technology and improve risk sharing. But openness also exposes India to global financial cycles, making sound macro management essential. A currency is ultimately sustained not by the central bank's dollar sales but by confidence in the economy.

The Reserve Bank of India's special steps offer relief but don't address risks at the structural level

Economy

MONDAY, AUGUST 31, 2026

IN THE NEWS

SUGAR PRICES STAY HIGH ACROSS INDIA



SUGAR PRICES REMAINED ABOVE ₹60 PER KG IN MOST RETAIL markets across the country on Sunday, despite steps taken by the government to check the price rise, as per official data. The all-India average retail price of sugar was ₹64.24 per kg on Sunday.

GOVT EXPANDS DIGITAL FERTILISER TRACKING SYSTEM



THE GOVERNMENT ON Sunday said it is broadening a nationwide digital platform that tracks fertiliser from production to retail sale, adding tools to link purchases with individual farmers' land records and to monitor subsidy payments more closely.

Rules mandating IST as common time notified

THE GOVERNMENT has notified the Legal Metrology (Indian Standard Time) Rules, 2026, mandating Indian Standard Time (IST) as the single reference for legal, administrative, commercial and other official purposes across the country.

House panel for timely filling of ITAT vacancies

A PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE has recommended timely and continuous filling of vacancies in the judicial, registry, and support cadres of the Income Tax Appellate Tribunal (ITAT), stating that staff shortages adversely impact hearing schedules.

India emerges as key petrol supplier to Russia

INDIA HAS EMERGED as a key supplier of petrol to Russia amid a surge in Russian fuel imports triggered by Ukrainian drone attacks on refineries, as per shipping tracking data. Russia's seaborne gasoline imports surged to a record around 125,000 barrels per day (bpd) in August.

IIP GROWS 6.3% IN APRIL-JULY VERSUS 4% A YEAR AGO

Investments spur industrial activity as demand falters

SHUBHAM RANA

New Delhi, August 30

INDUSTRIAL ACTIVITY IN India is reviving in the current financial year despite global and geopolitical challenges, with the index of Industrial Production (IIP) growth averaging 6.3% in the first four months of FY27, higher than 4% in the same period last year. At current pace, IIP growth is likely to be the highest since FY24.

However, a deeper dive shows that this recovery in industrial performance is increasingly led by investments and not consumption, which is likely to face more risks from deficient rainfall and El Niño, economists said.

IIP growth slowed down to 6.7% in July from a 27-month high of 8.8% in June. Manufacturing and electricity growth remained resilient in July despite a slowdown from previous month, while mining output contracted compared to a year ago.

"In our view, the July data point to an economy powered by one engine rather than two, as consumption is doing the pulling, while mass consumption stays subdued. The variable to watch from here is crude and how geopolitical developments feed through to prices

CONSUMPTION TRAILS

Growth (% y-o-y)

■ April-July 2025 ■ April-July 2026

Primary goods 2.2 3.3

Capital goods 8.1 15.4

Intermediate goods 4.6 9.4

Infrastructure/construction goods 7.4 7.1

Consumer durables 3.1 8.7

Consumer non-durables 2.6 1.1



■ The rebound is increasingly investment-led, with capital goods output jumping 16.1% in July and 15.4% in April-July

■ Manufacturing grew 7.3%, led by electrical equipment, machinery and other capital-intensive segments

and, in turn, to demand," said Shashwat Singh, an analyst at Bajaj Broking.

Within manufacturing, which grew 7.3% in July, growth was led by capital-intensive sectors such as electrical equipment, motor vehicles, other transport equipment, and machinery and equipment.

"The item-level detail supports this reading — switchgear and circuit-protec-

tion apparatus, UPS and solid-state drives, auto components, passenger and commercial vehicles, construction machinery, pumps of all types and turbines. To our mind, this is an investment- and infrastructure-facing mix rather than a household-demand one, and Capital Goods at 15.4% for April-July reinforces it," Singh said.

In terms of use-based classi-

fication, five of the six categories registered year-on-year growth barring consumer non-durables, where output contracted.

Capital goods grew 16.1% in July, the highest among the use-based categories, thanks to higher capital expenditure by government and the private sector, economists said. Infrastructure sector also reported strong growth at 6.9% while intermediate goods grew 10%.

"The July numbers show a widening gap in household spending. Consumer durables, the big-ticket items such as vehicles and appliances, grew 10.5%, while everyday goods such as food and toiletries fell 1%," said Rajeev Sharan, head of research at Brickwork Ratings. "This suggests discretionary and credit-linked purchases remain strong, while everyday items, more closely tied to rural incomes and real wages, remain weak. Headline IIP at 6.7% therefore overstates the breadth of the recovery," Sharan said.

Consumer durables output has grown 8.7% in April-July, continuing to be driven by reduction in Goods and Services Tax in September last year on large items such as vehicles.

India, Uzbekistan elevate ties, set \$5-bn trade target by 2030

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Tashkent, August 30

INDIA AND UZBEKISTAN on Sunday decided to elevate their ties to a comprehensive strategic partnership and set a target of \$5 billion in annual trade by 2030, following talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev.

The two sides also agreed to establish a framework for long-term supply of Uranium from Uzbekistan to India in line with cooperation in the civil-nuclear energy sector.

The Modi-Mirziyoyev talks focused on expanding cooperation in areas of trade, investment, infrastructure, critical minerals, mining, defence and security, agriculture, pharmaceuticals, health, information technology, digital public infrastructure, including UPI, and education. The two sides also set a target of \$5 billion in annual bilateral trade by 2030, Modi said in his press statement.

The current volume of bilateral trade between the two



Prime Minister Narendra Modi receives Uzbekistan's highest state civilian award, the "Oliy Darajali Dostlik" from President Shavkat Mirziyoyev in Tashkent.

nations is over \$1 billion.

Both leaders announced the elevation of strategic ties to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership reflecting the growing depth and expanding scope of cooperation between India and Uzbekistan. They witnessed the exchange of several agreements,

covering a wide range of areas, including mining, culture, education, tourism and ayurveda, among others.

"Uzbekistan is at the heart of Central Asia and is at the heart of India's engagement in the region," Modi said. The Prime Minister added: "A stronger

partnership will be a powerful force for peace, progress and prosperity in Central Asia. "Delving into the agenda of future cooperation between the two sides, Modi said India and Uzbekistan will encourage their defence industries to look at co-development.

AI boom puts Jamnagar, Thane under water stress

SAURAVANAND

New Delhi, August 30

INDIA'S JAMNAGAR AND Thane have emerged among the world's locations most exposed to data-centre-driven water stress, as the rapid expansion of artificial intelligence (AI) infrastructure threatens to sharply increase cooling-water demand in regions already facing water constraints, according to Rystad Energy. The pressure is expected to intensify over the next four years. Regions facing high or extremely high water stress are projected to account for 3.4% of the data centre sector's global direct water consumption by 2030.

However, mandating the least water-intensive cooling technologies in such locations could reduce consumption by as much as 45%, Rystad said. Jamnagar and Thane, along with Reeves County in Texas, are among locations where data centre water consumption is high relative to local water stress, highlighting the potential conflict between AI infrastructure expansion and water availability.

Globally, direct water consumption by data centres could nearly triple to 644 billion litres a year by 2030 from 222 billion litres in 2025 if water-saving measures fail to keep pace with the AI-led expansion in computing capacity. An aggressive water-efficiency pathway could limit annual consumption to about

RESOURCE STRAIN

■ High-stress regions could account for 3.4% of global direct data-centre water use by 2030

■ Global consumption may nearly triple to 644 billion litres a year by 2030 from 222 billion litres in 2025



■ Efficiency measures could cut 2030 consumption to 543 billion litres under a moderate scenario

■ Dry cooling saves 2.15 litres of water per kWh of IT load but requires additional electricity

388 billion litres by 2030, while a moderate scenario would put it at around 543 billion litres.

The projections underlie the scale of potential savings from cooling technology and data centre design choices. "Data centres consumed 222 billion litres of water directly for cooling in 2025, but that figure could nearly triple to just under 644 billion litres by 2030 in our riskiest central case," said Minh Khoi Le, global head of the data centre and hydrogen research at Rystad Energy.

"More water-efficient pathways could bring this down to 543 billion litres in the moderate case or as low as 388 billion litres in an aggressive water-saving scenario," Le said.

The estimates cover only water consumed directly for cooling. The electricity used by

data centres carries a separate, indirect water footprint, adding another layer to the resource challenge.

Cooling technology will therefore be critical as AI workloads expand. AI servers generate significantly more heat than conventional computing equipment, but rack-level liquid cooling can reduce the burden on facility-level cooling systems and enable greater use of dry cooling. Dry cooling can save around 2.15 litres of water for every kWh of IT load, but requires an additional 0.30-0.74 kWh of electricity.

That trade-off can shift water consumption away from the data centre itself to the power system. In the US, indirect water consumption associated with electricity supply can be more than twice direct consumption.

Growth gap tests India's developed-nation dream

BLOOMBERG

August 30

INDIA LIKELY GREW at more than 7% last quarter, a pace most major economies would envy. Yet, that may still be too slow to deliver on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's dream of a developed nation. Modi wants India to achieve that status by 2047, the centenary year of its Independence from British rule. Getting there would require the world's sixth-largest economy to grow at 9.25% annually for 21 years, according to Niti Aayog Vice-Chairman Ashok Lahiri.

The ambition, branded Viksit Bharat—or Developed India—has become a centerpiece of Modi's third term. However, assuming the current rate of growth, India's economy would fall short of his vision, according to several economists.

Growth averaged 6.3% between 2000 and 2024, well

IN NUMBERS



■ India likely expanded 7.3% last quarter, but remains below the 9.25% annual pace needed to reach developed-nation goal

■ Per-capita income must rise more than sixfold to about \$18,000 by 2047 to reach high-income status

below the current potential rate of 7.5%-8%. The economy has grown at or above 9.25% just three times over the past 50 years—1975, 1988 and 2021. Achieving the target "would

require an exceptionally strong and sustained acceleration in growth," which will "become increasingly difficult as the economy expands and the base becomes larger," said Alexandra Herrmann Prasad, a London-based economist with Oxford Economics.

Data on Monday will likely show the economy expanded 7.3% last quarter from a year ago, slowing from 7.8% in the previous three months. Growth below 8% could leave India vulnerable to the so-called middle-income trap, where rising wages erode a country's low-cost advantage before productivity and skills improve enough to compete with richer economies.

And the distance to high-income status is stark. India's per-capita income was \$2,813 in 2025 and would need to rise over sixfold to around \$18,000 by 2047 to cross that threshold, according to Lahiri.

Total overhaul of quality controls needed for doing business: Experts

OJASVI GUPTA, NITIN KUMAR & MUKESH JAGOTA

New Delhi, August 30

AS THE UNION government plans another round of relaxations in Quality Control Orders (QCOs), expectations are running high there will be permanent overhaul of the system, rather than piecemeal changes. Only a comprehensive review of the current set of QCOs experts argue, will have the required deregulation impact on businesses.

The push comes after Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal, during a recent visit to India, signalled that the government is considering industry-specific, product-based, project-based, or company-based exemptions from mandatory QCOs to support high-tech manufacturing.

Trade experts argue that the core flaw in India's regulatory approach is applying mandatory quality standards to intermediate goods, capital equipment, and raw materials rather than focusing strictly on consumer-facing products with high safety, health, or environ-

mental risks. Overregulation and redundant supervision impose a heavy compliance burden on industries.

Industry executives also stress the need for exemptions for specialised semiconductor equipment, as these machines are already deployed globally and carry recognised certifications.

A survey by the Japan External Trade Organisation (JETRO) revealed that nearly 72% of Japanese manufacturers operating in India reported that Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) certifications have impacted or are expected to affect their operations. The figure jumped to 92.3% for general-machinery firms and 76.8% for transportation-equipment makers, with most describing the impact as "serious" or "very serious."

A recent report by the High Level Committee on Non-Financial Regulatory Reforms headed by former Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba acknowledged that a significant number of QCOs apply to inputs feeding into downstream production—a stance at odds with international standards. The report did

REGULATORY REFORM

■ Govt weighs QCO exemptions to support high-tech manufacturing

■ Experts urge limiting QCOs to consumer goods, excluding industrial inputs

■ Industry seeks waivers for globally certified semiconductor equipment



lead to relaxation of QCOs in the steel sector and alternate compliance routes in sectors like toys, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), air conditioners, compressors, footwear, furniture, hinges, and domestic electrical appliances. However, the larger question raised by it remained unanswered.

An industry executive said QCOs are difficult to navigate because the same component can be classified as a finished product in one industry but be used as an intermediate input in another. This creates complica-

tions for companies importing components for use in new semiconductor plants, EV factories, railway systems, high-voltage direct current (HVDC) projects and other advanced manufacturing facilities.

"The issue is not about BIS certification; it is about the uncertainty, time and duplication involved. These specialised semiconductor manufacturing equipment already meet globally accepted standards for safety, quality and reliability, and carry certifications recognised worldwide. The govern-

ment should therefore consider risk-based exemptions and a fast-track mechanism for such equipment," President, India Electronics and Semiconductor Association (IESA) Ashok Chandak said.

Proliferation of QCOs

According to research by Prerna Prabhakar, a fellow at the Centre of Social and Economic Progress (CSEP), QCOs surged from 88 in 2019 to a peak of 790 last year before recent relaxations brought down the count to roughly

600. The increase came without a corresponding increase in testing infrastructure.

Most of these 600 products are intermediate goods, inputs and capital goods and some of the products that have been given relaxation would still require some kind of government approval for imports, she said.

An analysis by Prabhakar showed that 40% of QCOs are in the metal sector, 21% in machinery and electronics, 9.2% in textiles, 6.8% in chemicals and 5.6% in plastic or rubber. Major-

ity of QCOs apply to intermediate goods (45.7%), raising concerns about potential disruptions to domestic supply chains.

To reform the system, Ayush A. Mehrotra, Partner at Khaitan & Co, suggested either rescinding unnecessary QCOs or rationalising their scope to focus on finished consumer products. He also recommended subjecting proposed QCOs to risk-based assessments by an Inter-Ministerial Group (IMG), rather than leaving decisions solely to sectoral ministries, to better evaluate their impact on manufacturing costs and supply chains.

Industry representatives argue that such an approach could prevent ministries from imposing certification requirements without adequately assessing their impact on manufacturing costs, imports and supply chains.

Specialised semiconductor equipment, including lithography, deposition, etching, cleaning, metrology and inspection systems could be considered for risk-based waivers, as these machines are already deployed globally and carry recognised certifications," Chandak said.

However, another industry

High-tech & MSMEs bear the brunt

High-tech sectors—including electronics, medical devices, automotive components, robotics, and telecom—rely on specialised, low-volume global inputs, making them the fiercest critics of QCO protocols. Foreign suppliers often refuse mandatory BIS physical factory audits and high certification fees, especially when India represents a minor market share.

According to Ajay Srivastava, founder, Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI), these open-ended procedures risk turning quality assurance into a costly licensing regime. He cited a Vietnamese semiconductor manufacturer that spent ₹60 lakh on testing and inspections but still awaits a final decision after over a year.

THE ASIAN AGE

31 AUGUST 2026

Actions must match words of RSS chief

RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat's statements in New York that a Hindu who believes Muslims should be driven out of India cannot remain a Hindu is not immediately at variance with a tradition of the right-wing organisation, for it has made similar noises pregnant with possibilities of multiple interpretations. What is important is how the RSS and the Government of India which is ideologically connected to it practise it back home.

Taken together, Mr Bhagwat's statements celebrate what is Indian and has been established in the thought processes of most Indians: unity in diversity. The RSS chief does not see diversity as an exclusive proposition but complementary as he explains the idea. Diversity is a decoration of our innate unity and has to be protected, he said while speaking at the Faith Leaders' Conference, which brought together speakers from Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism and Islam.

Mr Bhagwat was at his philosophical best when he explained the concept: "As I protect my own specific nature, I have to protect others as well. Diversity is the rule of nature. Unity is the truth behind nature." He explained his thesis in the words of the sages who have advised their disciples for ages that all paths are leading to the same goal. Mr Bhagwat also recalled the fact that the Hindu and historically provided shelter to people of different denominations who could not find safety elsewhere, almost echoing Swami Vivekananda's speech at the World Parliament of Religions more than a century ago.

Mr Bhagwat had once advised his cadre not to go in search of a shivling under every Muslim place of worship but that has not stopped the trend. It remains to be seen how his words will be taken by the RSS cadre.

He has his own reasoning to label them so, but that does not quite square with what Mr Bhagwat has told the world from the US.

The founding fathers of India were quite convinced that India is a union of several cultures and the country can survive and succeed only if they approved of each other, making a celebration of each of them. The Constitution embodied that spirit when it made every effort to reflect India's diversity and provided for measures to protect them. The RSS, however, never supported the fundamental principles of the Constitution, including federalism.

The Sangh and its affiliates, governments included, have been looking for the possibility of dividing the people on religious lines, and not help them find common cause, the latest being the controversy over 'Vande Mataram'. If the RSS has come to a better understanding of the idea of India other than what it has held all through the nearly 80 years of India's Independence, then it must be welcomed.

Mr Bhagwat had once advised his cadre not to go in search of a shivling under every Muslim place of worship but that has not stopped the trend. It remains to be seen how his words will be taken by the RSS cadre. The proof of the pudding, as they say, is in its eating and nowhere else.

A wake-up call for NCLT

The National Company Law Tribunal's approval for a plan providing ₹625 crore in creditors' and ₹22 lakh in process costs, against claims stated in the proceedings at about ₹22,006.57 crore, appears to be set for an imminent legal challenge. A day after HDFC Bank announced its decision to appeal NCLT's decision, Union Bank of India, Canara Bank and LIC Housing Finance have joined suit.

The recovery plan secured 86.81 per cent of creditors' votes, mostly consisting of private lenders, exceeding the statutory threshold. However, the proposed recovery of 0.03 per cent attracted wide criticism as it is exceptionally low and makes a mockery of the Indian insolvency law.

Any business involves inherent risk. A business person employs people and becomes an essential part of the economy, while taking the entire risk on himself. As a result, insolvency law aims to protect a business person who incurred losses by making bona fide expenditures for the company. Therefore, most lenders and the NCLT cannot reject a lender's plea for scrutiny, including a forensic audit, merely because the recovery plan has secured overwhelming support.

The NCLAT also does not appear to have examined why the company's net worth, earlier showing vastly larger figures, collapsed to about ₹31.79 crore now. The tribunal should also look into allegations that private lenders, who approved the recovery plan, have connections with Essel Group chairman Subhash Chandra.

The recovery plan has also become controversial because two-thirds of its support came from lenders owned by Chandra's brother, Jagan Mohan Goel. Five entities — Vena Investments, Direct Media Distribution Ventures, World Crest Advisors, Lemondade Capital Advisors and Corpcall Capital Advisors — have 61.78 per cent voting share in the committee of creditors and voted in favour of the plan.

The NCLT, therefore, must restrain itself from approving the recovery plan merely on technicalities and proceed with caution. Otherwise, fraudsters will come up in no time to make use of this loophole and loot the lenders.

THE ASIAN AGE

Kaushik Mitter

Editor

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K. SUBHAKAR

Printer & Publisher

Subhani



Mr Goyal goes to Tokyo wooing wary Japanese



Sanjaya Baru

Sanjayovacha

The Union minister for industry and commerce, Piyush Goyal, is known for a type and hyperbole. So it was entirely understandable that he would make much of a muckness about leading the biggest ever business delegation out of India when he landed last week in Tokyo. "We will set up your hotels, your restaurants for your cuisine. We will have your schools, colleges and hospitals in India," he told his Japanese business audience, urging them to invest in India. He added for good effect, "And we will top it off with a golf course."

Mr Goyal is not the first Indian minister to try to seduce Japanese business into moving away from earlier postures in its neighbourhood to what they view as daunting India. Prime Minister Narendra Modi did. A decade ago, he even appointed a Japanese speaking person in the PM's office tasked with the responsibility of helping Japanese business cut through Delhi's infamous red tape.

For a good half century Indian governments have been trying to get Japan to invest more in India than it has, of all places, in China! Japanese companies have invested a total of US\$100 billion in China compared to US\$48 billion in India. In 2025 alone Japanese investment into China surged by over 55 per cent, while in India the comparable figure was just over 10%.

The Andhra Pradesh CM's sudden act of declaring Mr Modi as the next PM after the 2029 polls is intended to keep the BJP in good humour, knowing full well that the Prime Minister is the most unpredictable person politically and could swing things either way for him in Andhra Pradesh. Like the PM, Mr Naidu, 76, has crossed the 75 mark and wants time to stabilise the TDP rule. More prominently, to settle his son Nara Lokesh politically. The fear of the future is making Mr Naidu bend over backwards.

The sudden emergence of actor Vijay's TSVN (Tamil Nadu and the Congress' easy victory in Kerala polls, coupled with the grand old party appearing to be settling in power in Karnataka, have brought fresh challenges to the South among the non-BJP parties in the NDA, a region that has remained a difficult one to crack for the saffron outfit.

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Indira Gandhi managed to persuade Osamu Suzuki to invest in the iconic small car project. I tried to place the history of the relationship in perspective gathering essays by distinguished Indian and Japanese analysts in my book *The Importance of Shinto Abe India, Japan and the Indo-Pacific* (HarperCollins, 2023). The fact is that during the mid-1980s India has been trying to attract Japanese investment, with sporadic success.

Prime Ministers Gandhi and Yasuhiro Nakasone set up an India-Japan Study Committee headed by Manmohan Singh (then deputy chairman, Planning Commission) and the eminent Japanese economist Saburo Okita. They outlined a framework for increased interaction between both countries. Through the 1990s several 'Study Groups' arrived in Delhi from Tokyo to examine investment opportunities in India and returned home leaving behind a long list of demands.

My friend the late Shoji Ito, of Tokyo's Institute of Developing Economies, used to be a regular member of these study groups. Ito-san was always candid. Japanese investors find China, Taiwan and South East Asia easier to do business in than India. I would, however, draw his attention to the fact that while Japan's 'zaibatsu' were still 'studying' India, South Korea's 'chaebol' were moving in fast. By 1998 Hyundai's Santro had begun to challenge Suzuki's Maruti. Over the next decade Korean brands began edging out Japanese ones across several markets.

India came back on to the radar of Japanese corporate boards only after Prime Minister Shinzo Abe landed in New Delhi in August 2007 to launch a new phase in the relationship. Thanks to the

The assumption that 'trade follows the flag', so to speak, that business-to-business relationships will develop automatically in step with government-to-government relations, has often been proved wrong

leadership of both Prime Minister Abe and Manmohan Singh there was a spurt in Japanese investment into India after 2006 and that enthusiasm was revived after Abe's return to office in 2012, with Modi taking charge in 2014. Japan has been an important partner for India, investing in urban infrastructure, transportation and a range of industries.

However, India expects more, wants more. This is also because over the past decade the growing strategic partnership in the spheres of defence and military engagement, which has strengthened the foundations of the 'India-Japan Special Strategic and Global Partnership', has also generated greater expectations in India. During the visit of Prime Minister Sanae Takahashi to India in July the heads of government reiterated their commitment to 'Advancing a Partnership of Strategic Convergence and Trust' for 'Shared Growth, Prosperity and Resilience'.

Several columns have been written since on the growing strategic convergence between the two nations and how the shadow of China's rise and the confusion in Washington, DC, with respect to US policy in the Indo-Pacific have elevated the importance of the Japan-India relationship. The problem, however, is that there may be strategic convergence within the bureaucratic and political establishments of two countries without a similar commitment in corporate board rooms. The assumption that 'trade follows the flag', so to speak, that business-to-business relationships will develop automatically in step with government-to-government relations, has

often been proved wrong. This is now visible across many of India's external relationships.

One key to opening more Japanese doors to India is, ironically, China. Part of the problem for many Japanese companies that may wish to invest in India is the latter's constraints on China. In a world of supply chains and cross-border business links Japanese companies with links to China have been wary of Indian restrictions on doing business with the latter. Any easing of Indian restrictions on doing business with China could in fact facilitate greater Japanese investment in India.

A recent study by an Australian think tank, Lowy Institute, reported: "Politically and militarily, Japan confronts China with its toughest stance yet. Economically and technologically, however, Japanese firms continue to deepen their ties with China through joint funds and partnerships based in Saudi Arabia, Switzerland, or the UK. Japan is demonstrating a form of *nintai*—a capacity to absorb pressure while maintaining economic flexibility—Despite rising political tensions, major Japanese firms are increasingly adopting an 'in China, for China' strategy." Perhaps India too needs her own 'nintai'.

The bottom line, however, is the need for a change in mindset in Japan. India is still viewed as a difficult place to do business in. The attractions of the domestic market are not in themselves adequate to attract sizeable foreign investment. India and Japan require an 'Indo-Pacific' strategy for business as a complement to their 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' strategy for defence cooperation. This requires more than a promise of Japanese restaurants and golf courses. There has to be a meeting of minds at the highest levels of government. There appears to be at the highest levels of government.

Sanjaya Baru is a Distinguished Fellow, United Service Institution of India and Takshashila Institution

LETTERS

DON'T POLICE DURGA

VHP's unilateral proclamation that this year's Durga Puja would be brahminical with a bar on some meats and no azaan or themes is too much outreach and uncalled for. First of all, the very rituals of Shaakti goddess worship entails serving of meat and alcohol. Then again, being the greatest festival of Bengal and sarbojonin in nature, the puja should be kept open for all. As an autumn festival, Durga Puja is more cultural rather than devout. So far the legacy attached with this festival indicates universal participation in every stage, right from preparation to immersion. Bringing injunctions to disrupt this synergy will vitiate its spirit. Any moral policing here is unwarranted.

Chanchal Nandy

Durgapur

KAPIL'S APPEAL

INDIAN CRICKET legend Kapil Dev has rightly emphasised the promotion of non-cricketing disciplines. He was appealing to the Telangana government to provide platforms for budding talents to nurture them into champion material. That aside, disciplines such as athletics, football and badminton suffer due to various factors. Athletes suffer from substantial facilities, especially in rural areas, where the talent is immense. Most public schools lack standard-sized football grounds. Badminton academies are located in urban hubs Hyderabad and Bengaluru. It's imperative for the government bodies to focus on other sports to nurture players to compete in global events other than cricket.

S. Sankaranarayanan

Chennai

WHO IS A HINDU?

LIKE Swami Vivekananda, Mohan Bhagwat, the RSS chief, also spoke on universal brotherhood on US soil at an event in New York that gained attention in the West. The Hindu leader, who was in India to counter the objections and USCRIF's demand for sanctions against it, in his bold but constructive message, he had declared that expelling Muslims from India is not Hinduism and that a Hindu who wishes for a Bharat without Muslims may not be a Hindu at all. He emphasised more on the principle of Vasudhaiva kutumbakam. Hope his message is followed to end not only wars but poverty, too, by all.

Sravana Ramachandran

Chennai

₹500 for the best letter of the week goes to Jubel DCruz (Aug. 24). Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.



Sunil Gatade

Plumpping for Modi in 2029: Naidu's gamble

We are living in interesting times. At a time when chips are down for Narendra Modi, his foe-turned-friend N. Chandrababu Naidu has come out backing the PM for the fourth term, sending the message that this time he is no longer the kingmaker in the NDA like during Atal Behari Vajpayee's time but one 'dutiful' ally doing his bit to boost up the alliance.

The Andhra Pradesh CM's sudden act of declaring Mr Modi as the next PM after the 2029 polls is intended to keep the BJP in good humour, knowing full well that the Prime Minister is the most unpredictable person politically and could swing things either way for him in Andhra Pradesh. Like the PM, Mr Naidu, 76, has crossed the 75 mark and wants time to stabilise the TDP rule. More prominently, to settle his son Nara Lokesh politically. The fear of the future is making Mr Naidu bend over backwards.

The sudden emergence of actor Vijay's TSVN (Tamil Nadu and the Congress' easy victory in Kerala polls, coupled with the grand old party appearing to be settling in power in Karnataka, have brought fresh challenges to the South among the non-BJP parties in the NDA, a region that has remained a difficult one to crack for the saffron outfit.

The sudden emergence of actor Vijay's TSVN (Tamil Nadu and the Congress' easy victory in Kerala polls, coupled with the grand old party appearing to be settling in power in Karnataka, have brought fresh challenges to the South among the non-BJP parties in the NDA, a region that has remained a difficult one to crack for the saffron outfit.

What is worrying for the opposition is that the surprise action of Naidu indicates that the BJP has "pocketed" the AP CM like it did Nitish Kumar earlier.

Both the leaders, once leading figures of the Opposition and detractors of Mr Modi, have been "plucked by the BJP like ripe fruits".

In fact, both the TDP chief and the JD-U supremo look like willing comrades of the BJP. It appears that they have realised the nuisance value and destructive power of the "bulldozer BJP". "If you can't beat them, join them" looks like the strategy of a hapless Naidu as well as Kumar.

Mr Kumar was some time ago "persuaded" to resign as the Bihar CM by a resurgent BJP, which installed its own man, Samrat Chaudhary, in his place. It was a sort of bloodless coup performed by Mr Modi and Mr Shah, as Mr Kumar, dubbed 'Paltu Ram' by his detractors, frequently changed sides to remain the CM for a record 20 years.

Mr Kumar has been ailing for some time and has failed to install an effective second line of leadership in his party. Despite him being brought to the Rajya Sabha, the JD-U chief has no room for remorse in 'nazam' realising that silence is golden in these ticklish times.

It also means that Mr Modi, knowing the worth of each person, has taken "ample care" of both these non-BJP leaders, willingly forcing them to fall in line.

The politics of Andhra Pradesh has been revolving around Mr Naidu and his arch-detractor, N. Jagan Mohan Reddy of the YSRCP, for the past decade. Earlier, it saw a tussle for power between Mr Naidu and the late Y.S. Jagananna Reddy, who was in the Congress. He is the father of Jagan Mohan, who parted ways with the Congress and marginalised the party since his departure.

Though Jagan Mohan's sister is the state Congress chief, she has not been able to make any inroads in the Opposition space to establish the Congress.

Chandrababu wants to complete his term without any trouble, which could pave the way for his son to succeed him. He cannot be friendly with the Congress for obvious reasons, while a credible alternative to the BJP-led front is impossible without the Congress. Therefore, the kingmaker of a third front has no options but to remain with the BJP bandwagon.

The ease with which Mr Modi has ruled since the last Lok Sabha polls despite failing to get a majority for the BJP is due to the fact that he has taken sufficient care of both Mr Naidu and Mr Kumar without making much ado about anything.

Opposition claims after the 2024 Lok Sabha polls that the two leaders would play their game and make Modi uncomfortable at the drop of a hat not only were belied, but they also turned out to be extra-loyalists.

On their part, TDP and JD(U) had no option but

to back Mr Modi, as the Opposition did not have the numbers to form the govt even if they joined the opposition camp. Besides, the TMC and AAP were not ready to back a Congress PM.

Right or wrong, the political circles is that Mr Naidu is facing an anti-incumbency even before his half-term is over. He also wants to ensure that the BJP remains on his side and does not overtly or covertly help Jagan Mohan.

Mr Naidu's other worry is the growing ambition of the Jana Sena chief and his deputy CM Pawan Kalyan, the actor-turned-politician who was instrumental in formulating the BJP-JSP-TDP alliance in the 2024 polls that toppled the Jagan Mohan Reddy regime. There have been reports of a rift between the two leaders over the seat-sharing in the local body polls.

When Jagan Mohan was the CM, he had put Mr Naidu in jail in one case of alleged corruption. Political observers believe that it was not possible without an apparent green signal from the Centre.

The million-dollar question in the current political situation is whether Mr Naidu would have played so much on the front foot for Mr Modi if the results of the bypolls in Rankipuri in Bihar and Datto in Madhya Pradesh, where the BJP has faced jolts, were known as well as the extent of political damage it has suffered in the wake of the Jantar Mantar protests.

The writer is a senior journalist

quick BITES

INDICATORS

	%
Sensex	77,264.51 0.43
Nifty 50	24,175.65 0.35
S&P 500*	7,711.76 -0.25
Dollar (₹)	95.54 0.125
Pound Sterling (₹)	129.70 -0.24
Euro (₹)	111.22 -0.101
Gold (10gm) (₹)	158,854.1,104 0.70
Brent crude (\$/bbl)	88.29 0.22
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.913 0.30
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.73 0.008

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Realty player Gaurs Group buys 35 acre for ₹700 cr

Realty firm Gaurs Group has acquired three land parcels totalling 35 acre in Sector 18 along the Yamuna Expressway from ICICI Bank for around ₹700 crore to develop residential projects. The acquisition was made through an open auction. The largest of the three parcels measures 24 acre. The company further said it is settling pending dues, including external development charges (EDC) and farmer compensation.

Indian Bank plans 100 new branches, to add 2,500 staff

Indian Bank plans to open around 100 branches this year, mainly to expand its presence in the central and western parts of the country, its managing director and chief executive officer Binod Kumar said. The bank also plans to add about 2,500 employees, including specialist officers, to support business growth and replace retiring staff. "Last year we opened 100 branches. This year too we have similar

Centre broadens fertilizer tracking with new tools

The government on Sunday said it is broadening a nationwide digital platform that tracks fertilizer from production to retail sale, adding tools to link purchases with individual farmers' land records and to monitor subsidy payments more closely. The Integrated Fertilizer Management System (IFMS) already tracks more than 14 crore Aadhaar-linked buyers and over 2,50,000 retailers

Smartworks to invest ₹600 crore this fiscal year

Smartworks Coworking Spaces will invest around ₹600 crore this fiscal in its existing and upcoming centres as part of its expansion plan to meet rising demand for managed workspace. Gurugram-based listed realty firm Smartworks, which has a portfolio of 16.9 million square feet of office space across 70 centres in 15 cities across India and Singapore, posted a total revenue of ₹1,850 crore in 2025-26.

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HDFC Bank weighs Tata, Bharrucha for next CEO

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, AUG. 30

HDFC Bank is likely to consider deputy managing director Kaizad Bharrucha and chief credit officer Jimmy Tata as its two internal candidates for the next MD and CEO, following incumbent Sashidhar Jagdishan's decision not to seek another term.

The bank on Saturday said Jagdishan will step down as MD and CEO and retire from his services at the close of business on October 26, 2026, after completing his current tenure. It said it had tried to persuade him to reconsider, but he remained firm on his decision.

HDFC Bank will fast-track the selection of his successor and is also looking for an external candidate, in line with Reserve Bank of India rules requiring banks to submit multiple names for the CEO position. The appointment will require RBI approval.

Jagdishan, who has been with HDFC Bank for nearly three decades, took over as MD and CEO in October 2020. His decision comes less than two months before his second

TRANSITION PHASE

- Sashidhar Jagdishan to retire on October 26, 2026.
- Jagdishan decided not to seek another term.
- Kaizad Bharrucha is a key internal candidate.
- He became Deputy MD in April 2023.
- Jimmy Tata is another internal candidate.
- HDFC Bank is also looking for an external candidate.
- New chief executive officer appointment will require Reserve Bank of India approval.

term was due to end. Bharrucha, 60, joined HDFC Bank in October 1995 and became Deputy Managing Director in April 2023. He joined the bank's board in 2014 and is its longest-serving executive board member. Tata has been associated with HDFC Bank since 1984 in various capacities. Analysts said the leadership change could support HDFC Bank's stock, which has been trading near a 52-week low amid concerns over corporate governance and management continuity.

"From a governance perspective, the announcement that there would be a new CEO and a new chair-

man would be a key factor in the stock's upward movement," said Rohan Mandora, banking analyst at Equirus Securities.

Atanu Chakrabarty, the bank's part-time chairman, resigned from the board in March. HDFC Bank appointed veteran banker Keki M. Vaidya as interim chairman and later appointed former IAS officer and former chief election commissioner Rajiv Kumar as its new part-time chairman in June.

The bank has faced scrutiny over alleged mis-selling at its Dubai International Financial Centre branch, for which it sacked some employees.

Lenders challenge Chandra's plan

Five entities faced objections over participation in creditors' voting

FALAKNAAZ SYED
WITH AGENCY INPUTS
MUMBAI, AUG. 30

Several lenders are set to challenge the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) order approving Zee group founder Subhash Chandra's personal insolvency repayment plan, under which creditors will receive Rs 6.5 crore against admitted claims of ₹22,006.57 cr.

The plan amounts to a recovery of about 0.3 per cent of the admitted claims, implying a haircut of nearly 99.7 per cent for creditors.

Public sector lenders Union Bank of India, Canara Bank and LIC Housing Finance, along with HDFC, are expected to challenge the order before the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT). HDFC Bank is also considering an appeal.

The lenders, which together held 8.45 per cent voting share, had opposed the repayment plan. They questioned the participation of five entities, alleging that they were associates or related parties of Chandra and their votes should have been excluded.

The entities are Veena Investments, Direct Media Distribution Ventures, World Crest Advisors, Lemonade Capital

NUMBER MISMATCH

Admitted creditor claims is for ₹22,006.57 cr

Five entities together held 61.78 per cent

Chandra said earlier figure of ₹3,992 cr differed from ₹4,262 cr as some accounts were not included as they had neither voted for nor against the repayment plan.

Advisors and Corpeal Capital Advisors. Their combined voting share was around 61.78 per cent. The plan was approved with 80.81 per cent of the votes.

NCLT third member Nilesh Sharma, however, held that the disputed entities had not been shown to satisfy the statutory definition of an "associate" under Section 79(2) (g) of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC). Their votes could therefore be excluded merely on the basis of allegations about their relationship with Chandra.

The case had reached the third member after a split verdict between Judicial Member Ashok Kumar Bhardwaj and Technical Member Reena Sinha

Proposed repayment is ₹6.5 crore.

HDFC Bank has 3.2 per cent of total claims.

Union Bank of India voting share 0.76%.

Matter decided by third member Nilesh Sharma.

Canara Bank voting share 1.6%

NCLT bench delivered a split verdict.

• Objection was based on their alleged status as associates.

• Chandra announced an Instagram Live on Aug. 31, from 9 a.m.

SBI GROUP PLANS TO DIVEST 1% STAKE IN NSE THROUGH IPO

New Delhi, Aug. 30: State Bank of India (SBI) and its subsidiary SBI Capital Markets plan to dilute up to one per cent stake in the National Stock Exchange (NSE) through its proposed ₹30,919 crore initial public offering (IPO).

SBI will sell 0.65 per cent and SBI Capital Markets 0.35 per cent stake. SBI Chairman C.S. Setty said, "We are participating in this divestment. We propose to divest 0.65 per cent and 0.35 per cent by SBI Capital Markets because both of us hold the stake. So together, about 1 per cent as a SBI group," it could be less depending on any other shareholders joining," he said.

SBI currently holds 3.23 per cent in NSE, while SBI Capital Markets owns 4.33 per cent. "There were no immediate plans to monetise stakes in other subsidiaries.

Last month, SBI and its foreign partner Amundi diluted around 10 per cent in SBI Mutual Fund through a ₹9,800 crore public offer, which was subscribed 42 times. SBI's holding fell to 55.46 per cent from 61.76 per cent, while Amundi's stake declined to 32.56 per cent. Setty also said SBI's home loan portfolio is expected to cross ₹10 lakh crore in the current quarter. SBI had crossed the ₹9 lakh crore mark in home loans in the last financial year and has a market share of nearly 28 per cent.

It has about 460 home loan processing centres across the country. —PTI

FPIs pump ₹30,919 cr into equities in August

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, AUG. 30

Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) invested ₹30,919 crore in Indian equities in August, marking the second consecutive month of positive flows and taking two-month inflows to ₹51,119 crore.

Analysts attributed the return to India's economic resilience amid geopolitical challenges, stability in the rupee and improving corporate earnings.

"Amid the onslaught of the trade war and the West Asia conflict, the Indian economy has shown high resilience, and corporate earnings have been in better than estimates. However, in a global environment shaped by higher US risk-governance and inflation, earnings resilience alone will not be able to attract global investors, rather, it will be the visibility of higher growth for the longer that will attract global investors," said Avinash Singh, deputy

head, research, Emkay Global Financial Services.

Despite the recent inflows, FPIs remained net sellers of equities worth ₹2,153 crore as of August 28. Analysts expect the gap to narrow towards the end of the year.

"During August, FPIs bought equity worth ₹30,919 crore, of which ₹18,791 crore was through exchanges and ₹12,128 crore was through primary market and others," he said.

is the second month in a row that FPIs have turned buyers in India. The factors driving the FPI flows into India are the reversal of the chip trade, the stability in the rupee and more importantly the improving earnings growth in India." VK Vijayakumar, chief investment strategist, Geojit Institutional, said. Vijayakumar said foreign portfolio investors have recently been directing more flows towards mid- and small-cap stocks, where growth and earnings momentum are higher than in large caps.

India ups petrol supply to Russia as refineries get hit

FC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, AUG. 30

India has emerged as a key supplier of petrol to Russia amid a surge in Russian fuel imports following attacks on refineries, according to energy analysts firm Vortexa.

Russia's seaborne petrol imports surged to a record around 125,000 barrels per day (bpd) in August, equivalent to a projected 4,70,000 tonnes for the month, as repeated attacks on its refineries disrupted domestic fuel production, Vortexa said.

India's purchases of Russian crude oil also hit a record high as the conflict in the Gulf squeezed supplies from other sources. "India imported more than 2.6 million barrels



Since 2022, India has turned to Russia to meet a bulk of its crude oil requirements, with crude being the raw material for fuels such as petrol and diesel.

per day of Russian crude in June and July, up from a low of 1 million bpd in February and accounting for more than half of the country's crude imports," it said.

Trade sources said fuel exported to Russia may have been made from Russian crude. Indian refiners supplied as much as one million barrels of petrol in last two months.

The supplies mainly came from the Vadinar refinery in Gujarat, operated by Nayara Energy, which is half owned by Russia's Rosneft, the sources said.

Since 2022, India has turned to Russia to meet a bulk of its crude oil requirements, with crude being the raw material for fuels such as petrol and diesel.

one of the largest crude exporters, has had to import petrol from Ukraine under a UN-backed ceasefire.

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The supplies mainly came from the Vadinar refinery in Gujarat, operated by Nayara Energy, which is half owned by Russia's Rosneft, the sources said.

HNGIL SENDS DEFAULT NOTICE TO BIRA 91 OVER ₹1.7 CR DUES

New Delhi, Aug. 30: Hindustan National Glass and Industries (HNGIL) has served a default notice on Bira Beverages, maker of Bira 91 beer, over alleged non-payment of ₹11.77 crore and plans to approach the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT).

HNGIL, an operational creditor, issued the notice under Section 8 of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), seeking payment for more than 31 lakh customised 650-ml amber glass bottles manufactured against three purchase orders.

The bottles are lying at plants in Bahadurgarh, Pudukkottai and Rishra and carry Bira Beverages' branding, making them unsuitable for sale to other buyers.

Accordingly, the amount claimed includes ₹7.03 crore for the bottles and ₹1.12 crore in storage charges. —PTI

AMRUTANJAN PLANS TO ADD CHEMIST OUTLETS

New Delhi, Aug. 30: Amrutanjan Health Care plans to expand its direct distribution network to one lakh chemist outlets in FY27, following strong growth in its pain management and women's hygiene categories, according to its annual report.

The company added 44,000 new chemist outlets in FY26 and plans to expand beyond its traditional strong markets in south and east India, Chairman and Managing Director S. Sambhu Prasad said.

"Our stated goal of achieving 1,00,000 direct chemist outlets will be achieved in FY27, and we wish to further increase overall reach and availability of our brands beyond our traditional strong markets," he said. Pain management and women's hygiene were the main growth drivers in FY26. —PTI

BFSI leads GCC office space absorption demand in 2026

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, AUG. 30

The banking, financial services and insurance (BFSI) sector emerged as the leading occupier of commercial real estate, accounting for 30 per cent of transactions in the first half of 2026, according to Knight Frank India. BFSI occupiers set up 70 per cent more global capability centres (GCCs) in H1 2026 compared with the yearago period, with transaction volumes rising from 4.31 million sq ft in H1 2025.

BFSI has contributed 36 per cent of the overall 20.6

mm sq ft of GCC transaction volumes across leading eight cities in the country, said Knight Frank India, a real estate consultancy firm. Demand across non-tech service sectors also gained momentum, rising 16 per cent year-on-year to 5.10 million sq ft in H1 2026 from 4.41 million sq ft in H1 2025, indicating bifurcation in the office leasing market, Knight Frank India said. Office absorption by manufacturing entities contracted marginally to 4.05 million sq ft in H1 2026 from 4.67 million sq ft in H1 2025, the report further said.

NEW ROLE Mission to study dark matter and distant planets begins

SpaceX launches new telescope

Texas, Aug. 30: SpaceX's Falcon Heavy rocket launched NASA's \$2.3-billion Nancy Grace Roman Space Telescope from Cape Canaveral, Florida, on Sunday, beginning its 10-year mission to study the universe.

The rocket lifted off at 7:26 am local time, putting the telescope on course for an orbit about 1 million miles from Earth. It is expected to begin observations as early as December, with the first images due in 2027.

Roman will study dark matter and dark energy, as well as exoplanets beyond

our solar system. Its wide-field camera can view an area 100 times larger than Hubble's, while its infrared instruments will allow it to scan the sky much faster.

It can map the sky about 1,000 times faster than Hubble can. Kristen McQuinn, head of the telescope office at the Space Telescope Science Institute, said before the launch.

The telescope also carries a coronagraph designed to block starlight, potentially allowing scientists to image faint exoplanets orbiting nearby

stars. Roman was first conceived in the early 2010s and faced cost increases and attempts to reduce its scope. A proposed cancellation in 2018 was blocked by Congress, while a 2025 budget proposal initially provided no funding for the mission before funds were included in the final

request. The telescope is named after Nancy Grace Roman, NASA's first chief astronomer and first female executive. It will spend the next few months travelling to its destination and undergoing instrument checks before science operations begin. The spacecraft will then start a detailed survey of the sky, with scientists hoping its observations will provide new evidence about the forces shaping the universe and help identify planets beyond the solar system. —Bloomberg

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Editor's TAKE

H-1B shock: India must look beyond America

Washington may keep changing the rules; India must make sure its economic prospects are not held hostage to them

The US Department of Homeland Security has proposed a fresh \$103,265 fee – nearly ₹99 lakh, rounded off to ‘a crore’ – on every H-1B petition subject to the annual cap. This is formal rulemaking, not an overnight proclamation: it follows the collapse of the \$100,000 entry fee Donald Trump imposed last September, which a federal court declared an unlawful tax in June and which the First Circuit Court of Appeals refused to revive on July 24 – precisely why Washington is now trying the sturdier route of regulation. Unlike the original order, it would also strike petitions from workers already inside the US – students on F-1 OPT converting to H-1B, among others – a group the first round had spared.

Nothing is final yet: DHS has opened a 30-day comment window. But the direction is unmistakable, and it points at India. Indian nationals take home roughly seven in ten H-1B approvals every year, so the arithmetic lands hardest here. If the older fee is eventually revived on appeal, alongside this new one, an employer could face upwards of \$200,000 per hire before legal and relocation costs. For India's \$315-billion IT services industry, the direct exposure is narrower than the headlines suggest – Nasscom notes large Indian firms have spent five years cutting H-1B dependence through local US hiring – but onsite deployments, deputation-heavy delivery models and thousands of individual careers still sit in the fee's path.

The right response isn't outrage, which changes nothing in Washington, but accelerating a shift already under way. India's Global Capability Centres – over 2,100 of them, employing more than two million people – are proof that high-value technology work no longer needs an American zip code to serve American companies. Every fee hike that raises the cost of onsite deployment is, perversely, an incentive to shift that work to Bengaluru, Pune and Hyderabad instead. New Delhi has shown this can work: trade diplomacy already talked US tariffs on Indian goods down from 50 per cent to 18 per cent in February. The broader Bilateral Trade Agreement talks that followed remain open – the right table for a rules-based mobility chapter, rather than leaving skilled migration hostage to proclamations that courts can strike down and Washington can reissue within the same year. India is also not fighting alone: twenty US states, the Chamber of Commerce and healthcare-sector plaintiffs are already contesting the fee in court, their interests aligned with India's for now.

The larger lesson concerns Trump's method, not only this measure. A one-year proclamation, struck down in court, resurrected as regulation – a recognisable pattern now, one India cannot build its economic strategy around. The answer is redundancy: deeper trade and talent corridors with the Gulf, Europe, the UK and Japan, so no mood swings in Washington can unilaterally repress Indian talent. Diplomacy should stay steady and unshowy behind closed doors. But the real response has to be structural, not seasonal – built once, not rebuilt after every proclamation.

Cash in hand, capacity in retreat?

As states commit ever larger sums to recurring transfers, a more difficult question is emerging: what happens to the long-term investments that build human capability and public capacity? The debate must move beyond the simplistic contest between welfare and “freebies” to examine whether today's cash transfers are coming at the cost of tomorrow's schools, hospitals and infrastructure.



DEBDUL THAKUR

The argument over welfare in India is still framed as a morality play: cash transfers are either social justice or ‘freebies’. The binary misses the harder public-policy question. The issue is not whether states should put money directly into citizens' hands. It is whether recurring transfers are beginning to compete with the schools, health systems, nutrition networks and infrastructure that make welfare durable.

The numbers now make that question unavoidable. The Economic Survey 2025-26 estimates that states will spend about ₹1.7 lakh crore on largely unconditional cash transfers, particularly to women, in FY26. PRS puts the corresponding estimate at ₹1.68 lakh crore across 12 states, up from only two states in 2022-23; six of the 12 budgeted for revenue deficits. In individual states, these schemes are no longer marginal: PRS estimates they absorb 12.1 per cent of revenue expenditure in Jharkhand, 9.2 per cent in Karnataka and 8.9% in West Bengal in 2025-26.

The trend has not disappeared in the newest budgets. West Bengal has budgeted ₹36,000 crore for Anna Purna Bhandar in 2026-27 about 11 per cent of projected revenue receipts. Madhya Pradesh has allocated ₹23,883 crore to Ladli Behna, while Maharashtra has set aside ₹26,500 crore for Ladki Bahin. Karnataka's five guarantee schemes are budgeted at ₹51,286 crore in 2026-27, roughly 12 per cent of expenditure excluding debt repayment. These are large, politically salient and often socially valuable commitments. But they operate inside budgets that are already tight. That fiscal context matters. PRS notes that states collectively devoted 53 per cent of revenue receipts in 2023-24 to salaries, pensions and interest payments, while outstanding state debt remained about 27.5 per cent of GDP in 2024-25. At the same time, the average allocation across states in 2025-26 was about 14.5 per cent of expenditure for education and 6.2 per cent for health. A rupee committed recurrently to one purpose is therefore a rupee whose alternative use deserves scrutiny.

This is not evidence that cash transfers are inherently wasteful. The Economic Survey cites estimates that such transfers equal 11-24 per cent of monthly income for female casual labourers and 11-87 per cent for self-employed women across seven studied states. Cash can smooth consumption, reduce



THE POLITICAL ECONOMY IS STRAIGHTFORWARD. A MONTHLY TRANSFER HAS AN IDENTIFIABLE BENEFICIARY, A PREDICTABLE PAYMENT DATE AND IMMEDIATE VISIBILITY. A BETTER ANGANWADI NETWORK, A FUNCTIONING PRIMARY HEALTH CENTRE, MORE TEACHERS OR SAFER HOSTELS PRODUCES BENEFITS THAT ARE SLOWER, DISPERSED AND LESS ELECTORALLY LEGIBLE.

The writer is Professor at Department of Economics, Director, Centre of Excellence (CoE) for Public Policy, Sustainability, and ESG advances research, Alliance University, Bengaluru

distress and give recipients agency in ways that in-kind programmes sometimes do not. The policy error begins only when cash is treated as a substitute for public capacity rather than a complement to it.

There is some evidence that the trade-off can become real. In Karnataka, PRS cites the CAG's observation that expansion of the guarantee schemes increased revenue expenditure and the revenue deficit, while infrastructure spending in 2023-24 was ₹5,229 crore lower than in the previous year. That does not prove that every transfer crowds out every public investment. It does show why the opportunity cost can no longer be dismissed as theoretical.

The political economy is straightforward. A monthly transfer has an identifiable beneficiary, a predictable payment date and immediate visibility. A better Anganwadi network, a functioning primary health centre, more teachers or safer hostels produces benefits that are slower, dispersed and less electorally legible. Governments therefore face a structural incentive to prefer welfare that can be credited to a scheme over welfare embedded in institutions.

The answer is not to prohibit transfers. It is to make their opportunity cost visible. Every state incurring or substantially expanding a large recurring cash programme should publish a Social Investment Displacement Statement with its budget. It should show the scheme's five-year liability, financing source, beneficiary incidence and measurable outcomes, while disclosing whether real per-capita spending on

education, health, nutrition, maintenance or capital formation is being compressed. It should also specify when the scheme will be independently reviewed. This would improve the debate because ‘freebie’ is an economic label pretending to be an analytical category. Some transfers may be powerful redistributive instruments; others may be fiscally difficult to sustain.

The distinction cannot be made from the mode of payment alone. It requires evidence on outcomes, fiscal durability and what the expenditure displaces. India does not have to choose between cash and public services. Poor households often need both. A welfare state should ultimately be judged not by how efficiently it transfers money, but by whether it builds the capabilities citizens cannot purchase individually.

A bank transfer can reach a household. It cannot by itself staff a school, prevent malnutrition, run a hospital or build a functioning State.

Conclusion

The debate, therefore, is not about abandoning cash transfers but about restoring discipline to welfare policy. Direct payments can provide dignity, security and economic agency, especially to those living with persistent vulnerability. Yet no transfer can replace the public institutions on which lasting social mobility depends. States must make transparent what large recurring schemes cost over time and what other investments they may constrain.

PIC TALK



People carry an idol of Lord Ganesha to a 'Pandal' ahead of the 'Ganesh Chaturthi' festival, in Mumbai, Maharashtra

PHOTO: PTI

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LUCKY KULKARNI

2ND OPINION

There is an old proverb that says, “You can take a horse to the water, but you cannot make it drink.”

Over the years, I have often wondered if there is another perspective to this proverb. Why do we need to take the horse to the water in the first place? Perhaps we only need to tell the horse where the water is.

Then another question comes to mind. Why do we even need to tell the horse? Why can't the horse recognize its own thirst, understand where the water is, and walk towards it on its own?

This simple thought can separate employees who wait to be led from those who learn to lead themselves.

Today's organizations are no longer looking for employees who constantly need to be reminded, pushed, supervised or motivated. They are looking for people with an

The horse that walks to the water

internal drive—individuals who naturally move towards learning, solving problems, creating value and taking ownership without waiting for instructions.

Every organization hires people to perform a job. But those who build exceptional careers go beyond merely performing their roles. They embrace responsibility and take ownership of outcomes.

People may join an organization at the same time, yet their careers can take very different paths. Some become managers, some emerge as leaders, while others remain in roles similar to the ones they started with. What creates this difference? It is rarely intelligence or experience alone, and certainly not only luck. One of the biggest differentiators is attitude.

Organizations quietly observe behaviours that may never appear on an appraisal form. Who takes initiative without being asked? Who identifies a problem before it becomes a crisis? Who remains accountable when things go wrong instead of looking for someone to blame?

These are the people who tend to grow faster.

A self-motivated employee does not wait for appreciation before giving their best, a promotion before demonstrating leadership, or instructions before solving a problem. Their motivation comes from within.

They constantly ask themselves: “How can I improve this process?” “How can I make my customer's experience better?” “How can I support my team?” “How can I reduce the organization's risk?” “How can I create more value than what is expected from my role?”

These questions gradually shape exceptional careers.

Organizations certainly appreciate hard work, but they ultimately value outcomes and the impact created.

The responsibility for career growth ultimately lies with the employee. Managers can coach, Organizations can provide opportunities. HR can design learning programmes. Leaders can create the right culture. But none of these can replace an individual's personal desire to grow.

As an HR professional, I have observed that promotions are not always earned by the most knowledgeable employees. More often, they are earned by those who consistently demonstrate ownership, accountability, dependability, initiative and a willingness to solve problems beyond their job description.

The horse that recognizes its thirst and walks to the water on its own is unlikely to remain thirsty. Similarly, employees who continuously seek knowledge, responsibility and opportunities without waiting to be pushed are less likely to remain stagnant.

In today's corporate world, organizations are not merely looking for people who can do a job. They are looking for people who take responsibility, create value, inspire trust and move forward on their own.

They don't just succeed. They become trusted with greater responsibility.

The author is a senior corporate HR leader, writer and people strategist

TIME TO PUT WARNING LABELS WHERE CONSUMERS CAN SEE THEM

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India's proposal for prominent front-of-pack warning labels on foods high in saturated fat, sugar and salt is a welcome step towards giving consumers clearer information. For too long, nutritional details on packaged foods have remained buried in small print that many consumers neither notice nor fully understand. A prominent warning, particularly one using a clear red symbol, could help people make quicker and more informed choices. The proposed labels—such as “High Fat”, “High Sugar” and “High Salt”—would bring much-needed simplicity to an increasingly complex food marketplace dominated by packaged and ultra-processed products. The move is particularly significant at a time when concerns are growing over diet-related

health problems. However, the effectiveness of the proposal will depend on its final design and implementation. The warnings must be clearly visible, based on sound scientific thresholds and understandable across different social and educational backgrounds. Public awareness campaigns will also be necessary to explain what these warnings mean. The proposed exemptions for inherently high-fat or high-sugar products will likewise require careful scrutiny to avoid confusing consumers. The Supreme Court's intervention has rightly brought renewed attention to the nutritional quality of packaged foods. Consumers have a right to know, at a glance, what they are buying. Clear warning labels can be an important step towards making that right meaningful.

BHAGWAN THADANI, MUMBAI

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

Work permits and family stability

This refers to the news report, “US revives plan to end work permits for some H-4 spouses” (August 30). The proposed restriction on employment for H-4 spouses could create considerable uncertainty for thousands of families who have built their lives around the H-1B system. Many H-4 spouses are qualified professionals whose earnings contribute to household stability and whose skills benefit the American economy. Denying them the right to work may force families to depend on a single income.

A balanced immigration policy must recognise these practical realities. Rather than imposing a blanket withdrawal, US authorities could retain work eligibility subject to clear conditions, including recognised qualifications, lawful employment and appropriate background checks. A transparent renewal mechanism would also prevent sudden disruptions to careers. The wider impact on sectors such as technology, healthcare and education must also be considered. For Indian families, predictable rules are especially important, as many H-1B workers spend years contributing to the US economy while awaiting long-term immigration decisions. Regulation is necessary, but it must be consistent, proportionate and humane.

M JEEVA | CHENNAI

Compassion need not mean endorsement

Appropos the report, “BJP summons, reprimands MPs over Sajjan Kumar house visit” (August 30), the reported reprimand of three BJP MPs raises an important question about the space available for personal judgment within political parties. Sajjan Kumar was convicted in connection with the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, and the BJP has consistently demanded justice for the victims. The party is therefore understandably sensitive about any gesture that could be interpreted as sympathy for his political record or the crimes associated with that tragic period.

However, offering condolences to a bereaved family need not amount to endorsing the actions of the deceased. Death is also a deeply personal and human moment, and elected representatives may sometimes choose to express sympathy without compromising their political convictions.

Yet discipline should not extend so far that lawmakers feel compelled to seek permission before visiting a grieving family. If the reported action is intended to enforce such rigid conformity, it may create an unhealthy impression of unquestioning obedience. Strong political parties should be capable of accommodating individual compassion while firmly maintaining their principles and commitment to justice.

SANJAY CHOPRA | MUMBAI

A red-letter day for Indian chess

R. Praggnanandhaa, the golden boy of Indian chess, has given the nation another reason to celebrate. His triumph at the Grand Chess Tour (GCT) is undoubtedly a red-letter moment in the history of Indian chess. By wresting the prestigious title from a formidable field and emerging victorious at St Louis in the United States, Praggnanandhaa has added yet another remarkable chapter to his already extraordinary career. Becoming the first Indian to achieve this distinction is a matter of immense national pride.

For chess enthusiasts, the tense finale was a test of nerves. The anxious moments and nail-biting finish made the eventual triumph even more memorable. When Praggnanandhaa finally sealed the crown, the sense of jubilation among Indian chess followers was immense. Having already achieved major success at Norway Chess earlier this year, he has now added another prestigious title to his growing list of accomplishments. More importantly, his success reflects the remarkable rise of Indian chess. This is a proud moment for every Indian and especially for the country's vibrant chess community. May Praggnanandhaa continue his brilliant journey and bring many more laurels to India.

THARGUS S. FERNANDO | CHENNAI



From survey to consolidation: Bihar's next land reform

Bihar has already invested in aerial photography, digital cadastral mapping and a comprehensive Special Survey. The next step should be to use that foundation to reorganise fragmented agricultural holdings



VIVEK KUMAR SINGH

Bihar is undertaking one of India's most ambitious exercises in land administration. Building on comprehensive aerial photography, its Special Survey and Settlement is preparing digital cadastral maps, reconstructing land records and attempting to bring the record, the map and possession closer together. That exercise is valuable in itself. But it also raises a larger question - what should Bihar do once the survey is complete? For consolidation, Bihar need no longer begin with the expensive task of mapping the countryside afresh. Much of that cadastral groundwork has already been done through aerial photography and is now being converted into settled digital records through the Special Survey. Bihar would know much more precisely where every fragment lies, while the fragmentation itself would remain. The logical next reform, therefore, is consolidation of holdings.

Why consolidation stalled

Bihar enacted its consolidation law in 1956 with a simple objective. Scattered parcels belonging to the same cultivator were to be reorganised into fewer, more compact holdings of broadly equivalent value. Punjab and Haryana demonstrated decades ago how consolidation could support more efficient cultivation, irrigation, access and mechanisation. Bihar, however, struggled to complete the process. The first weakness was the absence of a reliable cadastral starting point. Consolidation cannot work unless the State knows with reasonable certainty what land exists, who holds it, where the boundaries lie and what rights attach to each parcel. Where old maps, revenue records and possession diverge, re-allotment begins on disputed foundations. The second was excessive administrative discretion. Valuation, comparison of parcels, adjustment of holdings and delivery of possession all depended heavily on individual judgment. The third was an open-ended procedure. Objections led to appeals, appeals to revisions and administrative decisions to writ proceedings. The lesson is not that consolidation was misconceived; it is that its institutional design was inadequate.

The Special Survey changes the equation

The earlier model effectively required the government to discover the parcel and reorganise it almost simultaneously. Bihar need not do that again. The Special Survey is creating the spatial and legal foundation for consolidation by converting aerial photography, digitised cadastral mapping and ground verification into updated records. Targeted verification will still be necessary. Irrigation, access, public infrastructure, orchards, structures, land use and other features affecting equivalence between holdings may need field confirmation. But that is very different from surveying the State afresh.

This is Bihar's great opportunity. The State has already borne much of the cost and administrative effort of building the spatial infrastructure. Consolidation can become the productive second round of that effort. The sequence should now be clear. Special Survey and Settlement, final digital map and record, consolidation and re-allotment, and statutory closure. Bihar should not spend years perfecting the map of fragmentation and stop there. The map should become the starting point for undoing fragmentation.

Consolidation for the Digital Age

The old machinery should not simply be restarted. Bihar needs a new consolidation law and procedure designed around today's technological and administrative capacities. Its first principle should be survey before consolidation. No area should enter consolidation until its Special Survey records have reached a sufficiently settled stage.

The second principle should be rules before discretion. Land parcels are not interchangeable merely because they have the same area. Land quality, irrigation, road access, proximity to markets and other value-enhancing infrastructure, and permanent improvements all matter. These factors should, as far as practicable, be translated into published valuation parameters. Digital systems can then assist in generating compact allotments, but the criteria must be prescribed by law or rules rather than left to a vendor or an individual officer.

AgriStack can add a complementary agricultural-data layer. Its Farmers Registry, geo-referenced village maps



BIHAR ENACTED ITS CONSOLIDATION LAW IN 1956 WITH A SIMPLE OBJECTIVE. SCATTERED PARCELS BELONGING TO A CULTIVATOR WERE TO BE REORGANISED INTO FEWER, MORE COMPACT HOLDINGS OF BROADLY EQUIVALENT VALUE. PUNJAB AND HARYANA DEMONSTRATED DECADES AGO HOW CONSOLIDATION COULD SUPPORT MORE EFFICIENT CULTIVATION, IRRIGATION, ACCESS AND MECHANISATION. BIHAR, HOWEVER, STRUGGLED TO COMPLETE THE PROCESS

and Crop Sown Registry can supplement the Special Survey with farmer-parcel linkages and cropping patterns. This can improve parcel comparison and reduce dependence on one-time administrative assessment. But the hierarchy must remain clear. The settled record of rights should govern legal entitlement. AgriStack should inform valuation, verification and allotment, not title. Put simply, the Special Survey establishes the parcel and the record of rights; AgriStack can enrich its agricultural profile. Human judgment will still be needed, but it should be transparent and reviewable. Any departure from prescribed criteria must require recorded reasons. Every landholder needs to be able to see the original parcels, their valuation, the proposed new holding and the basis of equivalence. Technology helpful because it can narrow discretion and leave an audit trail.

The most important reform, however, is finality. No consolidation programme should begin unless the law also specifies the maximum time within which it must end. At the same time, deadlines cannot simply be imposed on landholders. Migrants may be away, women entitled to inheritance may be missing from records, and elderly citizens may not receive digital notices. Silence cannot automatically be treated as consent. The answer is to put the State on the clock as well. Time limits for objections should begin only after demonstrable, multi-channel notice. Draft maps and proposed allotments should be displayed publicly, made available digitally and explained through village-level camps. Once adequate notice is established, proceedings should move firmly towards closure. Each objection should have a statutory disposal period. Appeals should carry strict outer limits. There should ordinarily be only one revision. Adjustments should require recorded reasons. A public dashboard could show, village by village, the stage reached, objections filed, cases pending and time consumed. Consolidation should be measured in months, or at most a few years - never across generations.

For better records to deeper reform

For two decades, land-record reform in India has understandably focused on digitization by scanning records, computerising mutation, digitising maps and moving revenue services online. These are necessary reforms. But digitisation is not structural reform. A fragmented holding does not become economically efficient merely because each fragment has acquired a precise digital coordinate. Bihar is now unusually well placed to move further. Its Special Survey is creating the foundational certainty over parcels that earlier consolidation lacked. Transparent, rules-based allocation can reduce administrative discretion. A rewritten Consolidation Act can impose the finality the earlier system lacked.

The gains would extend beyond agriculture. Fewer and clearer parcels can reduce boundary disputes, simplify inheritance and partition, improve access to institutional credit, and make infrastructure planning and land acquisition easier. Consolidation is therefore as much a governance reform as an agricultural one.

The Special Survey should not be treated as the end of Bihar's land-record journey. It could be the platform for the reform that follows. The governing principles are straightforward. Put survey before consolidation. Use the aerial and cadastral data already created, supplementing it where useful with AgriStack. Undertake field verification only where necessary. Replace discretion with published rules wherever possible. Protect genuine rights through adequate notice. Impose statutory finality on the process. As the Special Survey moves towards settled records, the State should now ask the more consequential question, i.e., must those accurately mapped parcels remain fragmented forever? The Special Survey will tell Bihar where every fragment lies. The real reform would begin only when the state uses that knowledge to put the fragments back together. If Bihar can do that, it will not merely complete a survey. It could provide India with a new model of land reform.

The writer is an ex-IAS officer and is presently Chairman, RERA Bihar. He served as Principal Secretary, Department of Revenue and Land Reforms, Bihar

Viksit Bharat demands annihilation of sick racket



AMITABH RANJAN

A patient cured is a customer lost also. Insurance advertisements never admit this, hospital brochures never print it. Illness, in India, is not merely a misfortune, but a perennial resource to be harnessed, monetised and prolonged.

A conspiracy everyone denies, and no one disrupts: the symbiotic alliance amongst insurers, hospitals, pharmaceutical companies and practitioners. Insurers profit from premia collected today and claims delayed or denied tomorrow. Hospitals, particularly the large corporate chains which dominate metro healthcare, are answerable to their shareholders and quarterly targets, and that is why unnecessary diagnostics, extended ICU stays and needless surgeries performed to be safe have become quite routine. Pharma companies sponsor conferences, fund continuing medical education and reward number of prescriptions with bounties ranging from gift vouchers to foreign tours; sales promotion framed as scientific exchange. And practitioners, sworn on the Hippocratic Oath, find themselves sandwiched between their conscience and revenue targets, in a system which punishes the doctor who orders fewer tests and rewards the one who orders more. And this system has emerged the way most rackets do, from each participant rationally pursuing self-interest in an opaque system with almost no accountability. Consequently, a healthcare economy in which the patient's well-being and the provider's profitability are poles apart. This is the context in which the Ayushman Bharat Health Account or ABHA, deserves a much more serious look. On paper, the idea is elegant: a portable, fourteen-digit digital health identity which allows a patient to record his prescriptions, test results, diagnoses, discharge summaries, to travel with them across hospitals, cities and insurers, with the patient's consent, of course. India has already enrolled over 940 million people into the system and the pitch is simple: end the duplication of tests, and the loss of medical history between providers, and provide the patient, rather than the hospital, ownership of their own data. If it works as designed, ABHA is a genuine, if partial at the moment, answer to the customer lost syndrome.

A longitudinal, portable health record makes it harder for one hospital to repeat a scan earlier conducted, together for a doctor to prescribe indefinitely without a second opinion crossing their desk, and easier for regulators and insurers to spot patterns of over- or mis-treatment across a patient's history rather than one hospital's silo.

Transparency, at scale, is the enemy of a nexus constructed on information asymmetry. Yet, a digital ID may not fix a structural incentive. ABHA can make overpayment more visible but not unprofitable. Without genuine enforcement-audits of billing patterns, penalties for unwarranted procedures and insurers unwilling to accept the data to push back on claims rather than simply process them faster, a health ID risks becoming an efficient recordkeeping layer sitting quietly on top of the same broken incentives. Containment is not correction.

If the practice of medicine has become commercialised, so has the path to becoming a doctor, but more brutally. NEET, even though a noble, innovative concept, has unintentionally fueled an entire shadow economy that extracts money from families, years before their children touch a patient.

Coaching institutes in cities built almost entirely around this exam ecosystem charge fees which may exceed a family's annual income, promising a seat that statistically, for most aspirants, would never come. Around these coaching hubs has grown an ancillary economy of paying-guest accommodations and private hostels, mostly unregulated, overcrowded and expensive, housing teenagers separated from their families for years at a stretch under enormous psychological pressure, a pressure whose human cost surfaces frequently in tragic headlines. Then there is the exam itself, which is rocked by paper-leak scandals serious enough to reach the Supreme Court, with allegations of question papers being sold for sums only the wealthiest can afford, turning what is meant to be a merit-based gateway into, for some, a cash cow. And, for those who clear the exam but not with marks high enough for a government seat, private medical colleges wait with exorbitant fee structures running into crores, for a single MBBS degree; fee which virtually guarantees the graduates will spend their early career recouping the investment before they can practice medicine as a public service.

By the time, a NEET aspirant becomes a fully qualified doctor, an extraordinary amount of family gold, years of adolescence and psychological capital have already been spent. It should surprise no one that many enter the profession already thinking in terms of ROE - returns on investment. None of this is unfixable and the fixes are neither exotic nor untested; India already runs a comparable model for engineering admissions. First, cap the number of NEET attempts, the way JEE-Main or Advanced limits them, starting with 12th pass-year. Unlimited attempts do not reward merit but reward the ability to fund this dark economy of repeated years of coaching. PG, quietly converting the 'National Eligibility Test' into a 'Wealth Eligibility Test'. Second, move NEET decisively to a secure, multi-shift computer-based test format, as JEE Main already does. A single-day, pen-and-paper exam undertaken by over two million candidates and transported physically across the country is a leak waiting to happen; and the events of the past three months have proven this beyond argument. Experts' recommendations have repeatedly suggested a shift towards online or hybrid formats, staggered over multiple days, precisely because a single point of physical failure is not a security architecture; it is the invitation.

Third, regulate the coaching-hostel nexus with the same seriousness applied to the exam itself: safety standards, fee transparency and mental health support for adolescents living away from home under exam pressure. Fourth and the toughest; cap or index private medical college fees to sanity, something a middle-class family can conceivably repay through an ethical medical career, rather than taking recourse to unethical practice. None of these reforms, alone, would dismantle this sick racket of insurers, hospitals and pharmaceutical companies which profit from keeping patients in illness. However, together, they attack the pipeline that feed it, which presently looks not for the most competent future doctors but for the families with the deepest pockets and the students with the highest tolerance for extraction. Fix what feeds this racket and the system itself becomes easier to fix. India does not lack medical talent or infrastructure. What it lacks is an economy which rewards a doctor for making a patient well rather than for keeping them, quietly and profitably, unwell. And this economy, which promotes the sound body, in turn, housing a sound mind, is key to the dream of Viksit Bharat becoming a reality.

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Revisiting the Tenth Schedule : Merger qua defection



DEVENDER SINGH ASWAL

Aggrieved over purported "deliberate action" of the Speaker, the petitioner dated 18 June, 2026, seeking disqualification of twenty TMC MPs of Lok Sabha, Abhishek Banerjee, filed a writ petition in the Supreme Court, praying to call for records of all pending disqualification petitions filed against the 20 MPs elected on the symbol of TMC for voluntarily giving up the membership by conduct under 2(1) (a) of Xth Schedule, or, in the alternative, issue a writ of mandamus to the Speaker, Lok Sabha to adjudicate his application within set time-frame as per law laid down in Kesham Meghachandra Singh v. The Hon'ble Speaker, Manipur Legislative Assembly. The ratio decided of the judgement supra is that the Speaker cannot indefinitely delay the adjudication. In the said judgment, the Three-Judge Bench of the Supreme Court, comprising of Hon'ble Justices R.F. Nariman, Aniruddha Bose and V. Ramasubramanian, held that "The only relief that can be given in these appeals is that the Speaker of the Manipur Legislative Assembly be directed to decide the disqualification petitions pending before him within a period of four weeks from the date on which this judgment is intimated to him.

In case, no decision is forthcoming even after a period of four weeks, it will be open to any party to the dispute to file a writ petition for directions/reliefs in the matter". Notably, the Court also observed: "It is time that Parliament have a rethink on whether disqualification petitions ought to be entrusted to a Speaker as a quasi-judicial authority when such Speaker continues to belong to a particular political party either de jure or de facto. Parliament may seriously consider amending the Constitution to substitute the Speaker of the Lok Sabha and Legislative Assemblies as arbiter of disputes concerning disqualification which arise under the Tenth Schedule with a permanent Tribunal headed by a retired Supreme Court Judge or a retired Chief Justice of a High Court, or some other outside independent mechanism to ensure that such disputes are decided both swiftly and impartially....". However, no legislative initiative has been taken in this regard so far.

The Speaker, Lok Sabha has since caused the notices to be issued to the said MPs directing them to respond within seven days. Under paragraph 6 of the Tenth Schedule, the question whether the said MPs have become subject to disqualification have to be decided by the Speaker. There are significant allied questions which have far reaching implications. The allegation of the Abhishek Banerjee is that the respondent 20 MPs have voluntarily given up their membership and therefore they must be disqualified under paragraph 2(1) (a) of Xth Schedule. The respondent MPs may take refuge under paragraph 4 of the Xth Schedule and



claim immunity from disqualification on the ground of merger of two-thirds of the members in a new party. Unless, the Speaker decides, no Court can entertain a petition for disqualification under the Tenth Schedule, except on grounds of inaction or unusual delay in deciding the matter. The decision of the Speaker can only be subject to judicial review in view of the judgement of the Supreme Court in Kihoto Hollohhan v. Zachillu and Others. Now, the ball is in the Court of the Hon'ble Speaker. It is a question of defection by two-thirds members of the TMC Legislative Party in the Lok Sabha. Paragraph 4 of the Tenth Schedule says that disqualification on ground of defection not to apply to those members who merge with another political party or who have not accepted the said merger and opted to function as a separate group. The TMC led by Abhishek Banerjee have not accepted the merger and though the legislature party group led by him is nearly one-third of the original legislature party, his group will continue to

function validly as such. The two-thirds group consisting of 20 members would have had a stronger case, had they merged with the political party in the legislature, that is, a legislature party in the Lok Sabha. Paragraph 1 of the Tenth Schedule enshrines the rule of interpretation of the Tenth Schedule. It says "House" means, the House of the legislature and political party means "all the members of that House for the time being belonging to that political party". So, while determining whether a group of members, though constituting two-thirds of the legislature party in the Lok Sabha, in order to escape disqualification on ground of defection, must join any legislature party of that House, though the question of giving up membership voluntarily, remains a matter of fierce legal contest. For instance, the defecting group consisting two-thirds of the members of the Aam Aadmi Legislature Party in the Rajya Sabha, who joined the BJP Legislature Party in the Rajya Sabha were not disqualified by the Chairman Rajya Sabha. Of course, the final verdict will be known only when the review petition is decided by the Supreme Court being the final arbiter as the larger question is that a political party is a much bigger entity than a legislature party in a House and the term two-thirds of the legislature party in a House runs counter to the spirit of anti defection law as instead of curbing defections, it facilitates wholesale defections. Notably, the National Citizens Party of India (NCP) is not a legislature party in the Lok Sabha. It even does not have a single member in the Lok Sabha, or for that matter, in any of the Legislatures.

The NCP is a registered, unrecognised party from Tripura but came into limelight only after the self acclaimed merger of the defecting group of TMC in it. If the explanation of the said MPs is accepted, the NCP will emerge first time a Legislature Party in the Lok Sabha, which virtually amounts to formation of a new legislature party in the Lok Sabha. Their own declaration of affiliation with NCP cannot, ipso facto, erase their original party status as they were elected on the symbol of TMC, keeping in view the judgement of the Supreme Court in G. Vyasnarayan v. The Hon'ble Speaker, Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly. Moreover, the defence of split is no longer available to members facing disqualification proceedings after deletion of para 3 from the Tenth Schedule by the 91st Constitution Amendment, a position reiterated by the Apex Court in Subhash Desai case. However, its truisms that no two cases are exactly alike and the adjudicating authority is duty bound to consider the peculiar facts and circumstances of the case having regard to the objective of the anti defection law and the imperative need to curb rampant defections. What interpretation is given to the Tenth Schedule by the Speaker, Lok Sabha in exercise of quasi-judicial power vested in him and in his sagacity and wisdom, is a matter of great and wider public interest. After all, the Speaker is venerated for his sense of impartiality, independence and fairness and is rightly considered to be the symbol of our parliamentary democracy.

The author is a member of the Supreme Court Bar Association

The Statesman

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Sweet and sour

India's sugar squeeze is exposing a policy problem that goes well beyond the price of sweets. The immediate concern is whether enough sugar will be available at reasonable prices during the festive season. The more consequential question is whether India's pursuit of energy security is beginning to collide with its obligation to protect food security. Sugar production has fallen well below earlier expectations, while domestic consumption remains close to the country's total output. Yet India allowed substantial exports before the scale of the shortfall became clear and has now opened the door to duty-free imports of up to one million tonnes - the first such move in nearly a decade. The reversal is striking: a country that had been exporting sugar is now bringing it in to protect domestic supplies.

Weather provides part of the explanation. Sugarcane is exceptionally dependent on water, and erratic rainfall, dry spells, excessive rain and disease have damaged crops in important producing states.

Hoardings and speculative buying may also have aggravated the price surge. But these factors do not fully explain the policy failure. When production estimates can prove so optimistic that exports are authorised and imports become necessary within the same season, the credibility of the forecasting system itself must be questioned.

This is where E20 enters the debate. It would be simplistic to claim that ethanol caused the sugar shortage. The government says the share of cane diverted to ethanol has fallen. E20 also serves legitimate energy-security objectives.

But E20 has created a competing demand for the same agricultural resource. Cane can ultimately support either sugar production or ethanol production. In years of abundant harvests, that trade-off may be manageable. In a poor crop year, however, diverting millions of tonnes of sugar equivalent to ethanol reduces the cushion available to absorb a production shock. That distinction matters. E20 may not have caused this crisis, but it has made the consequences of a supply miscalculation more serious.

India therefore needs to stop treating food security, energy policy and agricultural trade as separate silos. India cannot encourage cane diversion to fuel permit exports on optimistic projections and then respond to shortages with imports without examining how those policies interact. It suggests that those in charge took their eye off the ball.

The answer is not necessarily to abandon E20. It is to build flexibility into the transition. When sugar production forecasts fall sharply, ethanol allocations should be capable of adjustment. When stocks approach a predetermined safety threshold, exports should automatically become more restrictive.

Crop estimates should be independently scrutinised before export permissions are expanded. And strategic sugar reserves should be treated as seriously as the country's other food-security buffers. The larger warning is simple: energy security cannot be pursued by pretending that food security has no opportunity cost. India needs E20 to work without making its kitchens pay for mistakes made in forecasting, trade policy or agricultural planning.

A woman's voice

The uproar over women using profanity at political protests says rather more about Indian society than it does about bad language. The real discomfort appears to arise when young women refuse to behave according to the conventions expected of them - and do so publicly, angrily and without apology.

There is nothing particularly novel about Indians swearing. Political discourse, television debates, cinema and social media have long demonstrated how casually abusive language has entered public life. Men in politics have hurled personal insults at opponents, swarmed Parliament, within the national pausing to ask whether their upbringing or character has been compromised.

Yet when young women use similar language in a political confrontation, the discussion quickly becomes one about morality, culture and how women ought to conduct themselves. That double standard deserves scrutiny. There is, of course, a legitimate argument against political abuse. Profanity can cheapen disagreement, turn argument into invective and make public discourse coarser. A protester does not acquire an unlimited right to insult someone merely because the protest concerns a legitimate grievance. Democratic politics depends upon the ability to distinguish fierce criticism from personal degradation.

But precisely the same standard must apply to everyone. If a young man abuses a political leader, the response should be about the abuse. If a young woman does exactly the same thing, it should not suddenly become a referendum on womanhood. Once the language of "our daughters" enters the argument, the issue has changed. The implicit demand is no longer simply that citizens behave responsibly; it is that women remain within a narrower boundary of acceptable public behaviour.

That boundary has consequences far beyond profanity. Women who participate in contentious politics routinely discover that criticism of their ideas can rapidly become attacks on their sexuality, appearance, family and personal lives. Online harassment, sexual abuse, threats and attempts to expose private information are not legitimate extensions of political disagreement. They are mechanisms of intimidation.

This is particularly significant as a younger generation enters politics through social media. Its political vocabulary is often irreverent, visual and deliberately provocative. That style can be immature and occasionally offensive. But dismissing it as merely uncivil misses the larger transformation: young citizens, including women, increasingly see no reason why political authority should automatically command deference. The answer cannot be to romanticise profanity. Nor should it be to demand that women earn political legitimacy by remaining more decorous than men.

India needs a genuinely equal standard of public conduct. Abuse should be condemned whether it comes from a protester, a minister, an MP, a television anchor or a party worker. At the same time, women must be allowed the same political anger, irreverence and freedom to challenge authority that men have traditionally claimed. The deeper test of a democracy is not whether its citizens always speak politely. It is whether the same rules apply when they do not.

The Constitution's Fundamental Duties, in Article 51A(h), enjoin every citizen to cultivate a scientific temper, humanism, and the spirit of inquiry and reform - a clause drafted decades before anyone could have foreseen a machine capable of simulating inquiry itself, yet one that reads today as an uncanny anticipation of precisely the discernment the CJI was demanding of India's law graduates

There exists a particular species of consensus that is born not of deliberation but of attrition - the moment an institution abandons the question of whether a force can be resisted and resigns itself instead to the narrower, more manageable question of how it might be tamed. India's education establishment appears to have arrived at exactly such a threshold with artificial intelligence, and its clearest articulation, fittingly, issued from the country's highest judicial chair.

Addressing the Vice-Chancellors' Conclave at the National Law University, Jodhpur, earlier this month, Chief Justice of India Surya Kant advanced a position that would have seemed almost heretical a decade ago and now reads as quietly self-evident: that India's law schools must relinquish any impulse toward prohibition and instead admit generative AI into the classroom on their own terms.

Technology, he observed, was no longer rattling tentatively at the profession's door but had already colonised its innermost chambers - legal research, contract drafting, due diligence, the very choreography of dispute resolution.

What lends the Chief Justice's intervention its true weight is not simply its content but its unflinching candour. He did not gloss over the perils. Students, he cautioned, risked lapsing into dependence upon outputs that sounded persuasive yet stood on unsound legal footing, their faculty for independent reasoning withering imperceptibly beneath the seduction of convenience.

And yet his prescription was not retreat but discipline of a different order - that law schools instil in their students not mere technological fluency, but the finer art of discernment: knowing when a tool may assist, when it must be interrogated, and when it must be set aside altogether in deference to human judgment.

It is a formulation of considerable precision, and, in the same breath, a tacit confession that the guardrails - if they are to exist at all - must be erected while the vehicle is already



hurling forward. The Union Budget for 2026-27 accorded the Ministry of Education an allocation exceeding Rs. 1.39 lakh crore, with the Department of School Education and Literacy receiving its most generous outlay in history - upward of Rs. 83,500 crore - accompanied, notably, by a mandate to constitute a High-Powered Committee charged with examining how artificial intelligence will recast the contours of employment and skill, and with charting its integration across every rung of the educational ladder.

The India AI Mission, envisaged with an outlay surpassing Rs. 10,000 crore, has already enlisted tens of thousands of GPUs into service and shortlisted teams to construct indigenous foundational language models - an infrastructural undertaking of such magnitude that it bears the state's conviction: this is no experiment to be observed cautiously from the margins, but an inevitability to be engineered with deliberate haste.

The National Education Policy of 2020 had, in truth, already laid the philosophical scaffolding years before generative AI entered common parlance - envisioning a National Educational Technology Forum and a curriculum emancipated from the rigidity of disciplinary silos, supple enough to absorb whatever technological insurgency the coming decades might yet produce. What is unfolding today, then, is less a rupture with that earlier vision than its abrupt and somewhat breathless fulfilment.

Beneath these commanding, macro-level pronouncements, the transformation is being enacted in far more modest surroundings. Educators at the colleges - lectures, placement officers, department heads - speak not of wholesale substitution but of a recalibration of emphasis. AI scripted as an assistant, summoned to simplify, to draft, to furnish a serviceable first pass, while the labour of judgment, originality and genuine comprehension

expected to remain the inviolable preserve of the human mind.

It is a reassuring distinction, intoned with almost liturgical regularity across classrooms and blog posts alike. But reassurance is not the same as certainty. The boundary between assistance and dependency is precisely the one the Chief Justice himself identified as perilously fine - easily blurred, and more easily forgotten.

It would be a mistake to read the Chief Justice's remarks as merely rhetorical, for they sit atop a legal and constitutional lineage far older than the technology now testing it. The Constitution's Fundamental Duties, in Article 51A(h), enjoin every citizen to cultivate a scientific temper, humanism, and the spirit of inquiry and reform - a clause drafted decades before anyone could have foreseen a machine capable of simulating inquiry itself, yet one that reads today as an uncanny anticipation of precisely the discernment the CJI was demanding of India's law graduates.

The right to education, whether traced through Article 21A's explicit guarantee for children or the wider penumbra the courts have read into Article 21 for higher learning, further binds any expansion of AI classrooms to a constitutional promise of equality - a promise that Article 14's guarantee of equality renders uneasy, given how unevenly the infrastructure of artificial intelligence is likely to reach India's urban law schools before it reaches its district colleges.

At the regulatory level, the architecture remains deliberately unfinished. The University Grants Commission's 2023 circular directed higher education institutions merely to remain vigilant and to devise their own internal safeguards against AI misuse, setting

no uniform threshold - leaving India's universities to legislate, in effect, upon themselves. This restraint is not accidental. It mirrors, almost exactly, the philosophy embedded in the India AI Governance Guidelines unveiled by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology in November 2025: a consciously "light touch," techno-legal approach that declines to lead with prohibition, choosing instead to lean upon existing law, sectoral judgment, and institutional discretion.

Here, then, lies the uncomfortable symmetry worth dwelling upon. A nation is, in the same breath, channelling unprecedented capital into AI infrastructure, weaving the technology into the very constitutional imagination of its national curriculum, and being counselled by its most senior jurist against banning it even within a discipline erected entirely upon the discipline of unaided thought - while conceding, almost as an aside, that the very technology it embraces may erode the faculties it purports to sharpen.

This is not so much contradiction as it is wagers: a considered bet that supervision, ethics and pedagogy can be assembled with sufficient speed and rigour to outpace a technology whose capabilities compound faster than any curriculum committee can convene to deliberate upon them. Every generation of Indian education has, in its turn, absorbed some disruptive innovation and emerged, eventually, the more capable for it - the printing press, the calculator, the search engine.

Each time, the anxious question was the same: would the tool think for the students, or merely think alongside them? Artificial intelligence is not the first such reckoning to visit India's classrooms. It may, however, be the first to arrive at a velocity that affords little of the customary luxury - those unhurried decades in which earlier technologies were permitted to be cautiously, deliberately domesticated.

The Daily Star

Our health system is better resourced now

A hospital may own an X-ray machine, but that does not mean patients can get an X-ray. An ultrasound machine may be fully functional yet effectively useless if there is no trained technologist to operate it. This distinction between possessing health system inputs and actually delivering healthcare is becoming increasingly important for Bangladesh.

Successive Bangladesh Health Facility Surveys (BHFS), however, show real progress in infrastructure and equipment. Between 2017 and 2022, the proportion of public facilities connected to the national electricity grid rose from 57 percent to 85 percent. At upazila health complexes, average capacity to conduct five basic diagnostic tests increased from 3.4 in 2014 to 4.3 in 2022, while the share with functioning X-ray machines rose from 22 percent to 47 percent. These gains matter, but the question arises: are we just counting

health sector inputs, or should we rather ensure that the inputs, combined with how they are managed, produce healthcare? Public sector management is often organised around inputs. We count machines purchased, posts sanctioned, medicines procured, and budgets spent. But these indicators do not tell us whether a patient actually received a service. For instance, in 2022, 59 percent of upazila health complexes possessed an X-ray machine, but only 47 percent had one that was functioning; similarly, 58 percent possessed an ultrasound machine, but 49 percent had a functioning one. Across public facilities other than community clinics, average capacity was only 1.8 of five basic diagnostic tests.

A recent government-funded study by the Power and Participation Research Centre for the Health Economics Unit makes the problem especially visible. Among the 22 public facilities assessed, reagent shortages accounted for 43 percent of diagnostic service disruptions, non-functional equipment for 34 percent, and shortages of trained medical technologists for 19 percent. Imaging services were reportedly available and functioning only 17.33 percent of the time, while nearly 40 percent of sanctioned medical technologist positions were vacant. Although the sample of the study is too small to treat these figures as national estimates, the findings indicate a similar challenge: machines, medicines, consumables, and human resources are managed as separate inputs when they are, in practice, components of the same service delivery system.

To address this long-standing crisis, we need to establish a national medical equipment management system that would be built around functionality, not

ownership. Bangladesh needs to establish a comprehensive registry of major equipment in public facilities. Each asset should have a unique identity and a minimum data set: facility and department, make and model, serial number, purchase and installation dates, warranty and maintenance contract, last servicing and calibration, required reagents or consumables, availability of trained operators, and current operational status. Given the complex budgeting process of the health ministry, it should also record the funding sources.

The most important field should be functionality. Equipment could be classified as: i) functional and in use; ii) functional but underused; and iii) temporarily non-functional, awaiting repair or spare parts; and iv) beyond economic repair. For critical equipment, the system should also record uptime and the number of days between reporting a fault and completing repair.

His itinerary, which included meetings with New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani and US Vice President J D Vance, was flagged as going beyond investment and education outreach. Yet a state that is attempting to build Hyderabad as a global hub needs wider doors.

Curtailing an opposition chief minister makes the Centre look heavy-handed and sends a dispiriting signal at home and abroad. Had politics not interfered, and Mr Reddy succeeded in bringing offshore campuses to India, thousands of Gen Z students could have pursued higher education closer to home at a fraction of the cost.

Yours, etc., S S Paul, Nadia, 26 August.

Challenge

Sir, A propos "Leftward Shift", published today, the growing appeal of progressive candidates in the United States deserves

attention beyond the usual debate over whether Democrats are moving too far left.

The editorial rightly points to economic insecurity as an important factor. High housing costs, expensive healthcare, student debt and stagnant purchasing power have weakened the traditional promise that hard work will ensure a comfortable middle-class life. Voters may therefore be seeking practical economic relief rather than ideological change.

For Democrats, the challenge is to address these concerns without alienating moderate voters.

Affordable housing, stronger labour protections, better access to healthcare and measures against excessive concentration of wealth could form a credible platform. The 2026 mid-term elections will show whether economic concerns can translate into wider electoral support.

Yours, etc., Abhimha Barathi, Chennai, 25 August.

Letters To The Editor | ✉ editor@thestatesman.com

Undemocratic

Sir, The reported refusal to permit Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy to travel to the US is deeply undemocratic. It reportedly forced him to cut short his foreign visit and return to Delhi from London.

The MEA's justification that the New York Mayor is below the rank of a Chief Minister, or that a meeting with the US Vice-President is not fit for the stated purpose of the visit, appears unconvincing and unwarranted.

A Chief Minister holds a constitutional office and has every right to engage with foreign governments, business leaders and institutions to attract investment, promote trade and advance developmental projects for the state.

Such efforts ultimately contribute to the economic growth of both the state and the country. Political considerations must not be allowed to influence decisions concerning

elected representatives, particularly those heading Opposition-led states. The BJP-led NDA government must respect constitutional orders, irrespective of the political affiliation of the person holding them, and refrain from actions that may undermine democratic federalism.

Yours, etc., Sanjay Chopra, Mohali, 25 August.

Petty

Sir, This refers to the report, "CM Reddy: Centre's US tour denial discriminates against Telangana" published in yesterday's edition. The accusation is justified. Denying clearance to Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy, and forcing him to skip Boston, may be within the Ministry of External Affairs' remit, but weaponizing small print looks

petty. His itinerary, which included meetings with New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani and US Vice President J D Vance, was flagged as going beyond investment and education outreach. Yet a state that is attempting to build Hyderabad as a global hub needs wider doors.

Curtailing an opposition chief minister makes the Centre look heavy-handed and sends a dispiriting signal at home and abroad. Had politics not interfered, and Mr Reddy succeeded in bringing offshore campuses to India, thousands of Gen Z students could have pursued higher education closer to home at a fraction of the cost.

Yours, etc., S S Paul, Nadia, 26 August.



Dignified childbirth is a mother's right

SRINIVAS MADHAV

Caesarean deliveries in India have reached concerning levels. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-6, 2023-24), more than half of all babies are delivered through surgical incisions made in the belly and uterus (C-section) in four states and Union Territories: Telangana (62.2 per cent), Andhra Pradesh (52.2 per cent), Sikkim (51.1 per cent) and Jammu & Kashmir (51.0 per cent).

Across 18 states and Union Territories, more than one in two births in private hospitals are performed by C-section. The highest private-sector rates are recorded in Jammu & Kashmir (90.0 per cent), West Bengal (87.7 per cent), Telangana (83.9 per cent), Assam (81.4 per cent), Tripura (78.3 per cent) and Odisha (76.8 per cent). C-section rates also vary sharply between private and public hospitals, with Kerala being the only exception. No state or Union Territory records a C-section rate exceeding 50 per cent in government hospitals.

India has made remarkable progress in maternal and child health indicators. Over the past decade (2015-25), the institutional delivery rate has risen from 79 to 90.6 per cent. The Neonatal Mortality Rate (within the first 28 days per 1,000 live births) has declined from 26 to 20. The Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) has declined from 130 to 87 per 100,000 live births, according to the Sample Registration System (SRS, 2022-24). Kerala records the lowest MMR at 24, followed by Tamil Nadu (25), Maharashtra (37), Andhra Pradesh (39), and Telangana (48).

Alongside this progress, a troubling trend has emerged. According to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, C-section deliveries have increased more than four-fold—from 12.03 lakh in 2008-09 to 54.35 lakh by 2024-25. While the national overall C-section average stood at 27.2 per cent, it surged to 54.1 per cent in the private

sector. The World Health Organization (WHO) has consistently stated that at the population level, C-section rates above 10-15 per cent are not associated with reductions in maternal or newborn mortality.

While high C-section rates reflect too much medical intervention, very low rates may also point to a serious problem: a lack of proper healthcare. Low numbers do not always mean safe, natural births. Instead, they often mean women live too far from hospitals, cannot afford care, or lack access to doctors who can perform emergency surgeries when complications arise. Bihar, for instance, has a relatively low overall C-section rate of around 13.2 per cent, alongside an elevated MMR of 96. Jharkhand records a 15.7 per cent C-section rate and an MMR of 82. Madhya Pradesh has an overall C-section rate of 16.0 per cent, while its MMR stands at 135. Uttar Pradesh records a C-section rate of 19.3 per cent, yet has a high MMR of 154.

C-sections are life-saving and essential in critical situations. However, unnecessary surgeries expose both mothers and infants to severe short and long-term risks. For mothers, these include increased chances of post-surgical infection, haemorrhage, extended hospitalisation, and life-threatening complications in future pregnancies. For newborns, this can mean respiratory distress, hypoglycaemia, and lower rates of breastfeeding. While the national C-section rate increased from 21.5 (NFHS-5) to 27.2 per cent in NFHS-6, the rate of infants under six months receiving 'exclusive breastfeeding' fell from 63.7 to 55.8 per cent.

Compounding this concern, experts warn that rising C-section rates, reaching 60-80 per cent, can contribute to 'deskilling' among obstetricians, eroding the training and confidence needed to manage natural deliveries and their complications (WHO Europe, 2022).

Evidence points to a set of non-clinical drivers behind this issue. Surgical

deliveries may generate higher revenue than normal deliveries, and insurance reimbursements are also higher for C-sections. Countries in Northern Europe maintain the lowest rates, 15-20 per cent, as doctors there receive no additional payment for performing a C-section. Strong midwifery-led maternity care systems also contribute to lower intervention rates. Scheduling convenience is another factor. Natural labour may occur at night or on weekends, but C-sections can be scheduled in advance, allowing hospitals to manage time more efficiently. Fear of legal cases also contributes: performing a C-section is often done to show that 'everything possible was done' to minimise legal issues in case of adverse outcomes. Some women choose C-sections without having received adequate information about the associated risks. Equally troubling is the erosion of dignity during childbirth. Instances of verbal abuse, neglect, and non-consensual medical treatment during labour, a phenomenon recognised as obstetric violence, are widely documented. Complaints of being shouted at and denied privacy are frequently reported. Latin American countries such as Venezuela, Argentina, and Mexico have enacted laws explicitly recognising and penalising obstetric violence. Even an 'episiotomy' (a surgical cut made during childbirth) performed without consent is subject to legal oversight.

A few non-clinical interventions can empower mothers: First, transparency. Every hospital should be required to publicly display a 'Monthly and Yearly Birth Statistics Board' at its reception, indicating total deliveries and C-section rates. This would help expectant mothers make informed choices. The Government of India has already directed CoHS-empowered hospitals to display such boards. Clinical Establishments (Registration and Regulation) laws empower governments to mandate the disclosure of critical health information by hospitals.



Second, hospitals should make 'Robson' Ten Group Classification System reporting mandatory, instead of masking all surgeries under a broad 'high-risk' label. This system divides deliveries into ten categories based on characteristics such as parity, previous C-section, gestational age, and number of foetuses.

Third, every pregnant woman should receive easily understandable information in regional languages regarding the pros and cons of different modes of delivery prior to childbirth.

Finally, respectful maternity care must be institutionalised. Training programmes for healthcare workers should emphasise empathetic communication, informed consent, and privacy.

Experience shows that such simple non-clinical interventions achieve positive results. In the U.S., Franciscan Health Olympia Fields, a community hospital in Illinois, achieved a one-third reduction in its C-section rate. By sharing individual doctors' C-section rates, the hospital created a culture of self-correction. When doctors could see how their decisions compared with colleagues, many voluntarily adjusted their practices.

New York's Rochester General Hospital reduced its C-section rate

for low-risk, first-time mothers from 40 to 25 per cent without compromising safety. This change came from two reforms: first, ensuring doctors were no longer paid more for performing C-sections; and second, introducing peer reviews of individual performance among colleagues. Under the New York State Maternity Information Act, prospective mothers get a leaflet disclosing hospitals' annual rates for total C-sections, primary C-sections, and over a dozen other obstetric procedures.

The U.K.'s National Health Service (NHS) Digital publishes a public Maternity Dashboard with official statistics on maternity services; hospitals can even be ranked according to their C-section rates.

The goal is not to reduce C-section rates at all costs, but to ensure that every surgical intervention is clinically justified and every necessary surgery is available when required. It is equally important to recognise that denying necessary surgeries in the pursuit of lower numbers is also harmful.

A nation that honours motherhood must ensure that every woman steps into it with confidence, not fear, with informed awareness, not uncertainty, and with utmost dignity.

The writer is a transparency and equality advocate, and co-founder SARI Foundation.

100 Years Ago



Front page of The Statesman dated 31 August 1926

OCCASIONAL NOTE

So thoroughly have we returned to regular habits that a Sunday without the Home mail gives a sense of loss. And a Monday without it is a serious handicap on business. True, yesterday was an important Hindu holiday, and many businesses were closed, but even so the inconvenience is great. Especially is it felt in those parts of the country where punctual delivery allows little time to get all ready for the outgoing mail. A correspondent has pointed out that some of the speedier boats have been diverted to the North Sea holiday traffic, and slower boats put on the Indian run. We do not know whether that is the explanation of our late mail, but it is important that India should be able to rely on a regular service.

News Items

CALCUTTA RECEPTION

S. AFRICAN DEPUTATION TO ARRIVE NEXT MONTH

The Statesman understands that the South African deputation will reach Calcutta on or about September 17, and that the Government of Bengal have deputed Mr. J. H. Lindsay, I.C.S. Secretary to the Education Department, to arrange for their reception. A number of non-official Indians will help Mr. Lindsay in making the reception a success.

LATEST IN RADIO

LOUD SPEAKER THAT CAN BE HEARD MILES AWAY

(From Our Special Representative.)
London, Aug.

The Marconi Company have made successful experiments with a special loud-speaker, which, with the aid of enlarged batteries, can magnify sounds without sacrificing quality. It is believed that with developments a voice will be able to be heard 20 miles away.

WOMEN SUPERIOR

BECAUSE THEY TRAIN MORE SERIOUSLY

(From Our Special Representative.)
London, Aug.

Asked to explain why women Chan-nel swimmers beat the men? Mrs. Corson modestly replied: "We have trained hard. Most men merely played." Her husband supplemented this by saying that the women had more power, determination, and endurance. They kept going although dead beat, whereas the men said to themselves that they feel if they cannot win this time they can try next week. The newspapers are searching for an explanation why the majority of women surf bathers are able to stay in the water far longer than men.

DR. J. G. ADAMI

DEATH OF EMINENT PATHOLOGIST

(British Official Wireless.)
Rugby, Aug.

The death occurred yesterday of Dr. John George Adami, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Liverpool, who was a pathologist with a world-wide reputation.

S. AFRICA DEPUTATION

DR. MALAN NOT COMING TO INDIA

Durban, Aug.

The Parliamentary deputation has sailed for India by the steamer Takiwa. Mr. Vermeulen, a member of the Legislative Assembly, has replaced Dr. M. L. Malan.—Reuter.

IT CAME TO MIND | MANISH NANDY

Dumb dogmas, dexterous duping

Why do intelligent folk adhere doggedly to idiotic ideas? How can intelligent, informed people cling to foolish notions that fly in the face of known facts?

It is stunning. It is exasperating that smart people we know adore vulgar mendacious and crooked people and believe their lies and subterfuges. Why do they?

During World War II, titans on either side spoke about how to persuade people. England's premier Winston Churchill said, "A lie gets half way around the world before the truth has the chance to get its pants on." Germany's propaganda chief, Joseph Goebbels offered, "If you tell a lie often enough people will believe it." Goebbels' boss Adolf Hitler wrote, "In the big lie, there is always a certain force of credibility."

These capture some key tricks of making lies fly. If you are trying out a petty fabrication, to excuse a lapse or persuade a boss, you are likely to attempt a small lie. You would do much better with a large, imaginative lie. Hitler and Goebbels succeeded marvelously with the most cultivated people of Europe, the Germans, and got them to believe in a global war to win Lebensraum, a bigger living space, and slaughter Jews, as the evil enemy.

On the way to the ultimate catastrophe, the Germans were persuaded to accept

remarkable lies and believe in a spectacular 'triumph of the will.' We see now, in many of our countries, new versions of the big lie to persuade small people to accept the specious and spurious.

The vast majority of people who live humdrum lives and do their daily work and earn their modest pay are best seduced by a big but bogus role in their community or country; they oppress a minor trader from a minority community, approve the torture and killing of a malignant group, now suddenly perceived as an enemy. Hutus will murder Tutsis, Serbs will kill Bosnian neighbors, Hindus and Muslims will attack decent neighbours who have known for years, once they are brainwashed to accept a big, beautiful lie. The magnitude of the falsehood adds to its attraction and power. In Hitler's words, its 'force of credibility.'

In 600 years, we have moved far from Gutenberg's movable-type printing press and the way small and big lies can be multiplied has grown immensely. We have books and brochures, bulletins and billboards, magazines and mailings. We have also films and documentaries, cable channels and promotional movies, computer graphics and artificial intelligence to mimic reality and misrepresent truth. Alongside the various media, we now have the immense accessibility of

professional skills. Skilled writers and artists of every kind are readily available to instantly dress every message in the most presentable form.

This makes it possible, first, to present the most offensive doctrine in an apparently reasonable formulation, tailored to best match the priorities and prejudices of the recipient group. Secondly, given the great variety of media now available, it becomes feasible to drumbeat the message in numerous forms in diverse media. Even a false concoction, repeated a million times in different newspapers and television programmes, becomes in the mind of vulnerable viewers a perfectly acceptable truth.

It is not just the abundance and repetition of the falsehood that confers on it a high degree of acceptability, but, over time, gives the lie a high degree of credibility. After struggling with diverging narratives day after day, the average reader or listener simply chooses to dismiss the cacophony of contradictory analyses and confines his or her attention to one accustomed newspaper or one favored channel.

When a leader as eminent as a president offers every week a new and different version of events, even earnest citizens give up the effort to fact-check the narratives and simply reconcile to the latest broadcast. What makes such capitulation easier is the fact that publicists now do elaborate



Illustration by: Debabrata Chakrabarty

study of group preferences and tailor their messages to appeal to group biases. After I have read or heard a lie, innumerable times, it becomes not just a possible version of the truth, it morphs into My Truth. The next week, if not the next month, I would be inclined to narrate it myself, even if I then, as Orwell says, 'the lie passes into history and becomes truth.'

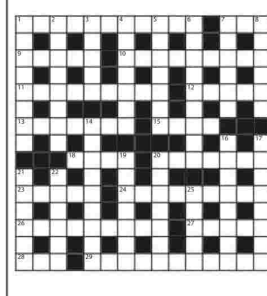
We seem to be living in an era of not just diverse interpretations of facts, but a totally different universe of facts. In talking with friends, discussion of current events seems painfully futile as we come up quickly against a Chinese wall of varying facts. How do we discuss a war—or the terms of its settlement—if we can't even agree on a common understanding of its basic facts: its issues, costs,

casualties, possible outcomes and agreed terms of dispute?

I decided to follow a friend's counsel and listen to his favorite news channel exclusively for a week. I tried hard to follow its interpretation of unfolding headlines, but found it hard to credit its reports when it seemed to defy even the videos it played and then analyzed. I ruefully concluded the channel to be like an advertising mouthpiece and realized the ultimate goal of its mission: to make me doubt all news presentations. I resolved to stay away from such nihilism and return to my habit of reading a variety of newspapers and listen to multiple news channels. Confusion, I concluded, is better than complete doubt.

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

Crossword | No. 293567



Last Saturday's Solution

V M D M B A E P
A P O L O G I S E V I L L A
T I R A O T B L I N D S P O I T
S S N T R A R
S U S I D I E N T
S U S I D I E N T
B R O W N I E F O I S S P O Y
O N O L O T
G R A T I A D I A N T W I N
A A R M I N O
R O U G E B L A N D I M O
E E F E R I N S N

ACROSS

- 1 Notorious lung-fu exponent playing a concertina (4,7)
- 7 Large bird once seen among Jerusalem Oaks (5)
- 9 Waste pipes clericman picked up (5)
- 10 Inset VAT is scrap for those who favour established inhabitants (9)
- 11 High-energy light meal prepared to entertain a European (5,4)

- 12 Run - I'm scared opening of Surstromning will produce unpleasant smells (4)
- 13 Fine associated with deliveries are made (5,2)
- 15 Out of meat from beast's twisted innards (4)
- 18 Drugs reported to aid peacefulness (4)
- 20 Besides tea houses, where might you encounter The Blues? (7)
- 23 Remains while chap has series of tests (5)

- 24 Walling singer returns with topless sailor (9)
- 26 Maybe residents of Athens, Greek originally, organise computers (5)
- 27 Patent, perhaps, on plugs for small computers (5)
- 28 Badger, one caught in empty netting (5)
- 29 Explain a good way to find the right gardening tool? (4,5,2)

- 2 Current racket almost overthrown after 50% of income is cut (8)
- 3 President's national barrier (5)
- 4 Grandma impatient for fabric (7)
- 5 Flawless atrium evenly coated with gemstone (7)
- 6 Computers and such held back in hostile market (9)
- 7 Aerosol merits getting sprayed (6)
- 8 Lend a hand to musician scoring introduction to ballad (6)

- 14 Celebrity autographs reveal Leo and 11 others (4,5)
- 16 One pursuing partisan struggles (8)
- 17 Interrupts pub singer's endless barking (6,2)
- 19 Mimic large bird - teal, perhaps (7)
- 20 Lawyer Morocco unselfishly protects (7)
- 21 Rabbit? Exactly (4,2)
- 22 Ram right into skimpy underwear (6)
- 25 A sharp noise that's echoing (5)

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

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

The Bar's duty

Independence must be matched by responsibility

SUPREME Court judge BV Nagarathna has asked Bar Councils to introspect on their role in upholding professional ethics. At a time when the judicial system is burdened by mounting case pendency, procedural delays and high litigation costs, the Bar must ask whether it is doing enough to make justice accessible to the ordinary litigant. Justice Nagarathna's call for lawyers to "change their mindset" goes to the heart of the profession. The independence of the Bar is not a privilege designed for lawyers' convenience; it is a constitutional necessity. They are expected to defend rights and uphold the rule of law.

Justice Nagarathna's address at the convocation of National Law University, New Delhi, came just a day after the National Law School of India University (NLSIU), Bengaluru, cancelled its convocation, citing "unavoidable circumstances". The apparent trigger was the opposition from NLSIU students and alumni to the invitations extended to the Chief Justice of India (CJI) and the Bar Council of India (BCI) Chairman. The legal fraternity is grappling with questions of institutional accountability and dissent following the BCI's directive (later withdrawn) to restrict the enrolment of NALSAR University of Law's 2026 graduating batch as advocates. A section of the students of the Hyderabad-based university had opposed the proposal to invite the CJI as chief guest to their convocation, citing his "cockroach" remark. The BCI was quick to intervene, but it ended up getting a rebuke from the Supreme Court for its alleged overreach.

India's justice delivery system cannot be sustained by courts alone. Judges, lawyers, institutions and litigants are all stakeholders. But the Bar occupies a unique position. It must prove that its independence is matched by responsibility — to maintain professional competence, ethical standards and respect for the institutions of justice.

Red signals

Labels need public understanding

THE proposed red, hexagonal front-of-pack warning labels for packaged foods high in sugar, salt and saturated fat are a welcome step towards protecting consumers. But their effectiveness will depend on what lies behind the red symbol. A warning is meaningful only when consumers understand it, and regulation is credible only when it covers the products that genuinely pose a health risk. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India's proposal, submitted to the Supreme Court, envisages warnings such as "High Sugar", "High Salt" and "High Fat". But the first phase reportedly proposes applying the warning only when a product exceeds the prescribed limits for two or more nutrients. This could allow products excessively high in one harmful nutrient to escape scrutiny. The government must ensure that the second phase, covering products high in any one of these nutrients, follows within a clearly defined and short timeframe.

Equally important is the need to educate consumers about what the labels mean. A red hexagon may attract attention, but it cannot by itself explain why excessive sugar, salt or saturated fat is harmful, or how often such products should be consumed. India needs a sustained nutrition-literacy campaign through schools, healthcare institutions, television, radio and social media, with simple explanations in regional languages. Children, in particular, should be taught to distinguish nutritional information from persuasive marketing.

The labelling regime must also guard against industry influence. Thresholds and exemptions should be determined by scientific evidence, while misleading health claims and aggressive marketing of unhealthy foods to children require stricter scrutiny. The country's growing burden of obesity, diabetes, hypertension and cardiovascular disease makes prevention imperative. Front-of-pack warnings can help consumers make better choices and encourage manufacturers to reformulate products.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, TUESDAY, AUGUST 31, 1926

Bar Councils' Bill

THE passing of the Bar Councils' Bill by the Legislative Assembly marks another stage in the fruition of the reforms in our judicial administration which Lord Reading initiated. The Bill does not go far enough, but it is an important step in the direction of the creation of a united Indian Bar, a reform which was overdue. It does not, however, mean that the Bar Councils to be created under the new law will have the same status and independence from outside control which similar bodies elsewhere enjoy; but we hope that very soon the manner in which the Bar Councils will discharge their duties will establish their claim for further powers. As to the removal of the invidious distinction between barristers and vakils which the Bill effects, we must congratulate the government and the High Courts on taking a bold stand and setting their face against the perpetuation of a distinction which had no justification whatsoever. As was to be expected, a portion of the privileged section of the Bar did everything in its power to defeat the proposed legislation; but it was apparent from the outset that the attempt to continue the unmerited inferiority of the vakils was doomed to failure. In the Assembly itself, some barrister members, particularly Sir Hari Singh Gour, did everything to delay the legislation when they saw that they could not get rid of it. Dr Gour "spoke of the high traditions of the English Bar, and asked the Assembly not to destroy the individuality of the members of the English Bar in India, while they attempted to take away their seniority."



LT GEN SS MEHTA (RETD)
FORMER WESTERN ARMY
COMMANDER AND FOUNDER TRUSTEE,
PUNE INTERNATIONAL CENTRE

THERE was a time when an unsettled frontier was an asset. Imperial statecraft valued ambiguity because it created room for manoeuvre. A frontier under permanent negotiation could be more useful than one settled. That was the logic of empire. It should not become the inheritance of Asia.

The eight-point consensus reached between India's National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi at the 25th round of Special Representatives' talks is more than its provisions. New hotlines and meeting points matter. Better ways to prevent misunderstanding matter. But one phrase matters more: an "Early and Substantial Harvest" in boundary delimitation. After decades of managing the Line of Actual Control, India and China have tentatively reopened the harder question: can the boundary itself be settled?

The timing could hardly be more consequential.

A world coming apart

The order built after 1945 is under strain. American primacy is contested. China has risen without yet earning the trust that leadership demands. Europe is diminished. Wars are back in the vocabulary of great powers. Climate, artificial intelligence, pandemics and debt ignore borders even as nations retreat behind them.

The British left behind an unsettled line. Today's global dynamics make its persistence more dangerous. In an era of escalating US-China rivalry and shifting Indo-Pacific alignments, an unsettled border remains permanently vulnerable to miscalculation.

I saw in 1971, on the march to Dhaka, how genocide turns political fracture into human blood. As the world fractures again, we cannot treat borders as a game of risk. The cost is always paid in blood.



THIRD POLE: Floods carry no passports. The Himalayan and Tibetan cryosphere feeds Asia's great river systems. REUTERS

Humanity is the ultimate global common. Yet it has no boundary, no Security Council veto, no bloc to defend it. Only human beings can join those dots.

For India and China, this fractured moment is not only danger. It is also opportunity.

The Third Pole: When nature roars

Climate is already reminding us that some lines on maps matter less than the forces moving across them. Carbon knows no sovereignty. Floods carry no passports. The vast Himalayan and Tibetan cryosphere, often called the Third Pole, holds the largest concentration of ice outside the polar regions and feeds Asia's great river systems.

What happens there cannot remain the concern of one country because what begins there does not remain there. Geography may establish sovereignty. Nature establishes interdependence.

India and China share a Himalayan ecology in which rivers, glaciers and climate recognise no political line. Cooperation is its natural logic. But cooperation rests on reciprocity and responsible conduct. When either fails, it is human beings who suffer when nature roars.

Both nations now call themselves not merely modern states but civilisations returned to history. Yet they still pour military strength and political attention into an unsettled Himalayan inheritance. It is an irony history may not forgive.

2047 meets 2049

India will mark a century of independence in 2047; China, a century of the People's Republic in 2049. For the first time in the modern era, the developmental

The coming BRICS summit provides an opportunity for PM Modi and President Xi to shape a new compact.

clocks of Asia's two giants approach their milestones together. That synchronisation can become a collision course or a strategic opportunity. The choice is architectural, not tactical.

When human beings are the central concern, ideology remains a civilisational choice, not a contest. India and China will remain competitors. India will guard its autonomy. China its own idea of power. But neither does not require confrontation.

Their strengths differ: India's youth and market, China's industrial depth. Yet neither can escape geography: the same sea lanes through Hormuz and Malacca, the same Global South whose markets they seek.

The sharpest geography is the mountain. The Himalayas have militarised for sixty years are also the water tower of Asia. Their glaciers feed the rivers on which both civilisations were built.

China can patrol every peak and still lose the glacier. India can guard every pass and still drown in the flood. The water does not care about the Line of Actual Control.

That is why water must redraw the map. Two states that contest a ridge can together secure a river basin for three billion people. One is a quarrel. The other is a contribution.

Retire the inheritance

The Line of Actual Control should never become the permanent imagination of India-China relations. It is an instrument for managing an unresolved boundary, not a boundary itself. The dispute carries the residue of imperial cartography, competing claims and decades of mistrust. India and China did not create all of it. But after three quarters of a century, they own the responsibility for resolving it.

The British Empire could value unsettled frontiers because it would eventually leave them behind. India and China cannot.

In 2047, when India looks back on a century of freedom, and in 2049, when China marks a century of renewal, let the record show that two great civilisations did not merely manage an inherited line. They settled it, and, having retired one of the last frontiers of another age, helped open the door to the next.

The fracture is upon us again. This time, those who see the dots must have the courage to connect them, not with wishful thinking, but with deadlines, verification and the recognition that sovereignty may divide the mountains, but responsibility for what flows from them is shared.

BRICS sunrise moment

Boundary peace is the beginning, not the destination. China cannot seek a transformed world order while treating India's place in it as somebody else's problem. A nation of 1.5 billion, among the world's largest economies and a voice of the Global South, cannot forever sit

outside permanent membership of the Security Council.

Beijing has for years treated India's seat as a card to withhold rather than a cause to advance. For China, backing India's permanent membership would be the single most convincing proof that its rise seeks a larger table, not a smaller one. A new world order cannot be built for all of us while being governed by only some of us.

India, equally, must separate accommodating China's legitimate interests from acquiescing in Chinese primacy. The first is statecraft; the second would betray strategic autonomy.

The coming BRICS summit provides an opportunity for Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping to shape a new compact: a 2030 horizon for boundary delimitation through statecraft, not surrender; Chinese support for India's permanent place on a reformed Security Council; and an institutional compact to protect the waters of the Third Pole. These are not sequential bargains, but concurrent pillars of one strategic choice. Together, they could turn a managed rivalry into an architecture for coexistence and offer the world an example of two great Asian civilisations choosing resolution over inherited rivalry.

From frontier to future

When Swami Vivekananda reached Chicago in 1893, he carried neither an army nor an economic bloc, but a civilisational confidence able to accept difference without fearing it. Humanity was India's first call long before border disputes or republic lines. China, too, draws upon a civilisational vocabulary older than the modern state.

Neither tradition requires sentimental friendship. States have interests and power matters. But civilisations should hold longer memories than governments and longer horizons than armies.

Human beings are the charge of civilisations, which cannot walk away from the consequences of their choices. A new world order, if it is to hold, must be built around human consequence, not inherited lines.

The Himalayas sustain billions of human lives. Borders are what empires leave behind; people are what civilisations are for.

That is reason enough to settle the last unsettled frontier; step from empire's shadow into the sunrise.

The author led a tank squadron to Dhaka during the Liberation War in 1971

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

No civilisation can begin to lift up its head until we look charitably upon one another. —Swami Vivekananda

The will to learn with humility

RAJAN KAPOOR

THE other day, I came across a teenaged boy who was selling plastic toys in a market. The toys were moulded in the shapes of animals and fish. Their fragile beauty somehow reminded me of PB Shelley's classic poem *Ozymandias*, in which an arrogant king had his huge statue built. However, time spared neither Ozymandias nor his kingdom, though his broken statue survived. The poet gave a subtle message to readers: art outlasts power.

My reverie was interrupted when a toy elephant fell to the ground. The boy, who was crossing the road, did not notice it. Raising my voice, I told him to stop and handed the item to him. The boy's happiness knew no bounds.

"Thank you, uncle. You are so kind," he said in fluent English. It was a pleasant surprise.

I asked him, "Do you go to school?"

After a pause, he replied in a trembling voice: "Poverty is my teacher, my school."

His words embarrassed me. I cursed the system for failing to provide education to every child in the country despite all the tall claims made by successive governments. "How did you learn to speak English so naturally?" I asked. "I dropped out of school because my parents could not afford my studies," he said. "But I had a strong desire to learn English. When foreigners came to buy my toys, I was fascinated by the way they spoke. A teacher, whose kids were among my customers, informed me about websites and apps that gave tips on speaking English. Lo and behold, I started using a friend's smartphone to pursue my goal. I have made some progress," the boy added humbly.

The toy seller's amazing story taught me a lesson: passion is a key ingredient of success, especially if it is untainted by arrogance or overconfidence. Single-minded dedication can overcome all kinds of constraints. Where there is a will, there is a way. I wished the boy good luck, praying that others like him would also achieve their goals against all odds.

The writer teaches at a college in Nakodar (Jalandhar)

epaper.tribuneindia.com

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Rise above divisive politics

Refer to 'An unusual contest in Punjab' (*The Great Game*); PM Modi has claimed that all problems afflicting Punjab will be resolved if the BJP is voted to power in the state. However, the party has failed to deliver in many states despite the promise of a "double-engine sarkar." The party has also set a bad precedent by appointing non-cooperative Governors in non-BJP-ruled states. Punjabis can help the state in the upcoming elections by rising above the divisive politics of religion and caste, rejecting the culture of freebies, and voting for honest candidates in this unusual, multi-cornered contest.

RAJESH GOYAL, CHANDIGARH

Punjab awaits a credible alliance

Appropos of 'An unusual contest in Punjab' (*The Great Game*), the article offers an insightful reading of the changing political equations in the state and the possibility of a renewed BJP-SAD alliance. The reported negotiations over seat-sharing are intriguing, but the larger question is whether such an alliance can become a credible response to the aspirations and concerns of the people. Punjab needs political parties willing to address its economic challenges and social concerns.

HARISH MONGA, BY MAIL

People should vote wisely

With reference to 'An unusual contest in Punjab', the state's political landscape is shaping up into an extremely competitive contest. Amid allegations of corruption, inefficient governance and rising anti-incumbency sentiment, the ruling AAP is banking on its welfare initiatives and the friction-ridden Congress is struggling to maintain party cohesion. There is also every possibil-

ity of a SAD-BJP Alliance. The ball is finally in the people's court and they should vote wisely.

DS KANG, HOSHIARPUR

Display clear warning

Refer to 'Digital trap'; it rightly highlights the urgent need to protect children from the growing influence of digital media. When even sensible adults are increasingly swayed by emotional social-media content, misinformation and misleading AI-generated material, we must consider how deeply such content can affect young, impressionable minds. Therefore, a clear warning should appear on social-media platforms, stating that the content may not necessarily be true, balanced, or created by a human.

BRU B GOYAL, LUDHIANA

Bhagwat's address

Appropos of 'Those who want no Muslims in Bharat are not Hindus: RSS chief in New York', Mohan Bhagwat's address needs to be taken with a pinch of salt. He did not refer to the constitutional provisions about freedom of religion and equality irrespective of caste, creed or religion. The RSS is making all-out efforts to refurbish its international image so that the global community accepts it as a truly secular outfit.

PREM SINGH DAHIVA, ROHTAK

Need for disaster preparedness

The flashfloods in Nepal are a stark reminder of the destructive impact of extreme weather phenomena. Nepal needs stronger early-warning systems, efficient evacuation plans, emergency communication networks and trained local rescue teams. Preparedness before a disaster strikes is as important as relief after it occurs.

RUKMA SHARMA, JALANDHAR

Letters to the Editor, typed in double space, should not exceed the 200-word limit. These should be cogently written and can be sent by e-mail to: Letters@tribunemail.com

Rebuilding the Himalayas must begin locally



ABHIMANYU PANDEY
SOCIOCULTURAL
ANTHROPOLOGIST

THE apocalyptic visuals of the August 26 flood near the Nepal-China border are shocking. The monstrous surge of greyish-black water, thick with ice, rock and silt, devastated the Gyirong port, the important overland trade-tourism transit point between Nepal and Tibet (China). As it sped downstream, the ferocious watery beast devoured buildings, roads, bridges, power projects, vehicles and thousands of human lives across dozens of kilometres in the Bhotokoshi and Trishuli river valleys. As of August 30, over 700 people were confirmed dead and 3,000 from over 30 countries missing due to the flood. Such was its force that many bodies were retrieved 200 km downstream, in Nepali Terai plains.

This tragedy joins a list of destructive floods induced periodically by glacial lake outburst flows, cloudbursts and unusually heavy rainfall across the Himalayas since the

early 2010s. Just last year, memories of Dharali in Uttarakhand and Kullu valley in Himachal Pradesh are raw. International scientific community agrees that human-induced climate change has augmented the frequency, intensity and unpredictability of these disastrous events in the Himalayas. While driven by fossil fuel consumption, global warming heats different parts of the world disproportionately, owing to complex combinations of geography, pre-existing weather patterns, vegetation and human habitation. According to a 2026 report by ICIMOD and the UN, the Hindu Kush Himalayan region has warmed 1.8°C in the past 50 years, compared to the 1.1°C global average. It adds that glaciers in the region are disappearing at a 65% faster speed compared to previous decades. British glaciologist Hamish Pritchard says there is evidence that the glacial collapse that caused the recent Nepal flood was catalysed by recent unusually warm temperatures in that region.

It is unjust that this transnational region of the Hindu Kush Himalayas, which has contributed negligibly to global greenhouse-gas emissions, should bear the brunt of some of its worst consequences. It has been challenging for this region to deal with the effects of warming, despite the overall noticeable gains in policy, emis-



WARNING SIGN: This tragedy joins a list of destructive floods induced periodically by glacial lake outburst flows, cloudbursts and unusually heavy rainfall across the Himalayas since the early 2010s. PH

sions reduction and renewable energy uptake following the 2015 Paris Agreement. Now, the rise of the AI industry, with its substantial energy, land and water demands, threatens to make things worse. Climate governance and diplomacy face some tough times ahead.

There are things that local governments must change across the Himalayan region to mitigate the effects of such disasters. A key role in aggravating the costs of such disasters in the Himalayas has been played by the haphazard development along river beds and on old debris plains, often driven by greed and short-sightedness.

Destroyed buildings, settlements and roads must be rebuilt at safer heights and dis-

It is unjust that this transnational region of the Hindu Kush Himalayas, which as a whole contributes negligibly to global warming, should bear the brunt of some of its worst consequences.

tances from the river bed. Locals can be trained in observing unusual changes in river and slope conditions that can signal impending floods and landslides. Evacuation drills to safe upper areas need to be conducted and access routes to these areas kept clear. Early warning systems for floods must be improved. Hydroelectric projects need to be reassessed for safety and environmental impacts and shut down if found unsafe. Reforestation with native species can improve both landscape stability and microclimates.

Since many rivers are transboundary, it is also imperative that governments work together to ensure sharing of relevant monitoring data and timely

dissemination of warnings. Scientists and good science need to be integrated into administrative interventions.

The role of the affected communities in effective rebuilding cannot be overstated. Take the example of Nepal's Langtang village, which coincidentally lies close to the stricken Bhotokoshi valley. Langtang was destroyed by the 2015 earthquake, after a massive landslide of ice and rock triggered on the mountain towering above the village. Hundreds of locals and foreigners were killed. The surviving locals were airlifted to Kathmandu. Back then, observers feared that it would take 10 to 15 years for Langtang to be rebuilt. I was based in Kathmandu at the time. For a couple of months, I volunteered in aid efforts for the displaced community there. However, when I trekked to the village on the first anniversary of the earthquake in 2016, I saw that most of the displaced villagers had returned to Langtang and other villages. Rebuilding was well underway. Langtang's reputation as a trekking destination had helped attract funding and sponsorship for reconstruction.

Importantly, as Nepal-based researcher Eileen McDougall observes, Langtang's reconstruction happened within a few years of the disaster because it was led by the community. The displaced villagers collective-

ly negotiated their return to the valley, realising that they could neither survive displacement for long nor individually rebuild their lives. They rebuilt the village with government-prescribed earthquake-resistant techniques using approved materials, within government-set safe areas. Trekking tourism rebounded alongside. The villagers also made efforts to revive cultural practices that had rooted them in Langtang for generations. They processed the grief of their losses due to the earthquake through rituals and prayers and built memorials.

Therefore, disaster-resilient rebuilding must be first owned by the local communities, with the government and funding bodies acting more as guides and facilitators. Reviving cultural traditions at the site being rebuilt and commemorating both losses and rebirth from the disaster can help heal the socio-psychological ruptures caused by the disaster.

Thus, rebuilding disaster-resilient Himalayas can only be a polycentric process that empowers communities, is guided by science and multi-scalar collaboration and respects local ecological and sociocultural conditions. Alongside, the fight for climate justice, including fair compensation for the Himalayas, needs to be continued with renewed vigour, clarity and conviction.

Necklines & societal bottomlines



RESHMI DASGUPTA
SENIOR JOURNALIST

KRITI SANON'S ensemble in the jewellery commercial was not outrageous or outstanding. It was just inappropriate for the purported contention of the ad that she wore it for: that families these days have siblings across species, so sisters tying rakhis on human brothers as well as canine ones is increasingly prevalent. Pets now participate in family events, so a jewellery brand marketing doggy rakhis is a no-brainer. But why dilute the message with controversy?

Many young women probably do wear bangles and skirts now on celebrations like Raksha Bandhan, Bhai Dooj, Teej/Teyyan, Baisakhi, Lohri, Onam, Bihu, Pongal, etc. And, as has been stressed in the social media backlash that eventually led to the ad's scrapping, women do have the right to decide what they want to wear—or not. No one can or should act as a censor.

Actor and BJP MP Kangana Ranaut—herself trolled over her 2015 National Award ceremony dress—after her initial criticism of Sanon's outfit and the ad as "intentionally creepy" asserted it was more the context than the attire itself. Her argument that clothing choices have to keep cultural settings in mind echo many middle-class Indians' view. Wearing a bralette at a club or party is fine; but not at traditional events.

Ranaut's argument, even if as an

afterthought, is well taken. Many traditional festivals have been cut off from their cultural moorings, intentionally or otherwise. There is also an inter-generational clash of perceptions. Ordering a young woman to wear a particular type of outfit has an uncomfortably Taliban-like ring to it. But young people being aware of cultural contexts and making choices accordingly is the best-case scenario.

Even if the ensemble had been Sanon's choice for Raksha Bandhan, no one should have had any quibble with it. But Sanon did not wear what she wanted, she wore what the ad team decided the 'sister' character in the commercial should wear. Yet she became the target of criticism rather than those behind the ad; and it was also left to the actor to defend 'her choice' of

clothes when that was not the case. Thanks to the distraction of Sanon's assigned attire, the main message of the ad was also eclipsed. Most people recall only her bralette and skirt, not the jewellery brand, or even what rakhi was tied to the pet's paw in the ad. Was that the intention? Some believe "all publicity is good publicity" and any potential customer engagement with the festive season round the corner cannot be bad. The brand's post-Diwali sales figures will show if that axiom worked!

The fact that, as of May 2026, Sanon is also an equity stakeholder in the company besides being its brand ambassador adds another dimension. Reports say she took the stake as part of the endorsement deal rather than just a fee. So, she does have skin in the game. It is unlikely, though, that she would have the time to be involved in the minutiae of the ad film, including its costumes. But she would be impacted by market reactions, if any.

This could explain why she took the criticism head-on by stating forthrightly that tradition resides in a woman's heart, not in the neckline of her dress. Sanon is right, of course. That is the bottom line. But 'a woman's right to choose' was not the supposed focus of the jewellery commercial. Yet, that is also an apt (if unexpected) catchphrase for the upcoming festive buying season.

So, was the controversy a bane or a boon? The company's topline will tell!

It's not related to culture



RUHI TEWARI
SENIOR JOURNALIST

IN a country where the Prime Minister talks of 'nari shakti' and the Leader of Opposition raises the pitch on 'smashing the patriarchy', we collectively end up enabling—and often brazenly promoting—patriarchy. The controversy around actor Kriti Sanon's outfit in a Raksha Bandhan advertisement for a jewellery brand tells us that no wordsmithery on shattering sexism in the country and empowering women will translate into meaningful change in the foreseeable future.

Consider this. An actor does a brand campaign for the festival of the brother-sister bond.

She wears what she finds stylish and is comfortable in. The ad is made and telecast and suddenly, the collective and fragile sense of propriety of our society gets triggered. The cleavage is too much for a festival, we decide. It outrages the tradition's purity, we declare. Women need to know how to dress appropriately, we announce. And the actor's defence notwithstanding, the brand issues an apology, claiming it has the 'highest regard and deep respect for Indian culture, traditions and festivals', and withdraws the ad.

The targeting of Kriti Sanon's clothes has nothing to do with culture or tradition or festivals. This is

precisely because India has no one single culture or tradition or idea of festivals. The country embraces within it so much plurality that any one sense of culture or tradition is impossible. This outrage is about our idea of a woman and her place in society. The ire is directed at women exercising agency and not adhering to social norms. It is about policing women. It is about patriarchy.

The saga is but another chapter in the thick book of patriarchy in the country, yet another reminder of how we expect women to look, behave and dress. The company's spineless reaction is hardly surprising. The ad and marketing world has often reinforced social stereotypes about women. Remember Fair & Lovely and the ad that told us what

women's skin colour should be (Fair & Handsome emerged much, much later). Or the Santoor young mother ad, because, God forbid, fathers need validation of their youth or looks. And when the ad world dares, we work even harder to pull it back. For example, the outrage around actor Alia Bhatt's Manyavar Mohey's bride brand campaign, which questioned the traditional Hindu wedding ritual of *Kanyadaan*.

What better can we expect from a nation that has given its women voters their due after decades of relegating them to the periphery because their votes matter electorally but denies women proportionate political representation and real power? From a nation that ensures women are identified by their relationships even in policymaking—she is the 'Ladli Behna' or 'Lakshmi Didi', after all? From a nation that tells women not to step out after dark, not to dress 'provocatively', lest they invite a man's lust? From a nation where cinema has made its women pander to the male gaze? And from a nation where women fast to pray for their husbands' long lives, because how can she not make a small sacrifice for a man? From a nation where a teenage girl's use of abusive language comes as a cultural shock? To even the PM because, unlike boys, only the utmost decency is expected from our 'bettyjans'? And from a nation where women are bound by a common factor: being second to men across their identities, whatever be their caste, faith, demography or ethnicity?

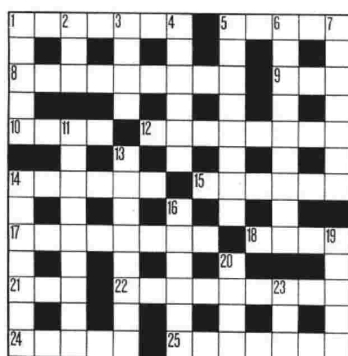
No, no, the shrill outcry over Sanon's advertisement has nothing to do with the spirit of festivals or traditional values, but with the idea of how we expect women to behave at festivals. Just as we expect women to behave everywhere, all the time.

The Tribune TWO VIEWS KRITI SANON AD

Women do have the right to decide what they want to wear.

It is about policing women. It is about patriarchy.

QUICK CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- Slavish imitator (7)
- System of religious belief (5)
- Alert (2,3,4)
- Silvery-white metal (3)
- Victim of deception (4)
- Anguish (8)
- Ancient Egyptian sacred beetle (6)
- At a snail's pace (6)
- Art of effective speaking (8)
- Self-satisfied (4)
- Prefix indicating modern (3)
- Refer only fleetingly to (5,4)
- An item in a list (5)
- Argument in justification (7)

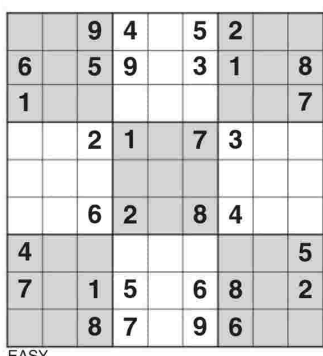
Saturday's Solution

Across: 1 Decisive, 5 Acid, 9 Topic, 10 Setting, 11 Set an example, 13 Reside, 14 Stable, 17 Shot in the arm, 20 Achieve, 21 Haiti, 22 Spry, 23 Unaware.
Down: 1 Duty, 2 Cypress, 3 Sick and tired, 4 Vessel, 6 Crip, 7 Doggerel, 8 Steal the show, 12 Trespass, 15 Barrier, 16 Strew, 18 Other, 19 Bias.

DOWN

- Mass of spectators (5)
- Favourite (3)
- Ship's complement (4)
- Calamitous (6)
- At maximum speed (4,4)
- Knowing what is going on (2,3,4)
- Integrity (7)
- Drained of all energy (6,3)
- Very well (8)
- Unfamiliar (7)
- Four-legged scaly reptile (6)
- Eat greedily (5)
- Bondsman (4)
- Forefront (3)

SU DO KU



SATURDAY'S SOLUTION

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

CALENDAR

AUGUST 31, 2026, MONDAY

Shikha Samrat	1948
Bhadrapad Shaka	9
Bhadrapad Purnimashi	15
Hijri	1448
Krishna Paksha Tithi 3, up to 8:52 am	
Ganda Yoga up to 1:51 am	
Revti Nakshatra up to 3:24 am	
Moon enters Aries sign 3:24 am	
Panchang ended 3:24 am	

FORECAST

CITY	MONDAY 31 AUG	TUESDAY 1 SEP
Chandigarh	35	26
New Delhi	36	26
Amritsar	34	27
Bathinda	37	28
Jalandhar	33	26
Ludhiana	36	28
Bhiwani	37	27
Hisar	37	27
Sirsa	39	25
Dharamsala	29	21
Manali	26	17
Shimla	25	18
Srinagar	30	22
Jammu	34	28
Kargil	32	15
Leh	27	13
Dehradun	30	23
Mussoorie	23	17

TEMPERATURE IN °C

INTERNATIONAL EDITORIALS

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COMMENT & FEATURES

THE JERUSALEM POST • SUNDAY, AUGUST 30, 2026

THE JERUSALEM POST

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A fresh slate?

For Winter launched his new People of Israel party on Tuesday, kick-starting what could become a bloc-busting run for the Knesset.

Beyond the retired IDF general's stated ideology and firm position within the right-wing bloc, Winter is offering something few other candidates can: a genuinely new political slate.

Shaped by a goal of having as broad an appeal as possible, Winter's list includes some very well-known and some lesser-known faces, all with one thing in common: They have never done this before.

After October 7, the need for fresh faces in both the legislative and executive branches of government has become evident.

The Hamas massacre exposed failures that had been systemically ignored for years, not only by individuals in government but across Israel's political and security establishment.

That does not mean every newcomer will be better than every veteran. Experience matters, particularly when governing a country facing threats on multiple fronts.

But there is a legitimate argument that the people who helped shape the system that produced Israel's current crisis should not be the only ones entrusted with fixing it.

Winter appears to have identified a chunk of right-wing voters who, while not ready to vote for the opposition, have become disillusioned with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's coalition and want new faces on the Right.

Joseph Haddad is a known quantity across the political spectrum for his pro-Israel activism abroad and his hardline right-wing stance on Arab sector issues at home.

Former Jerusalem deputy mayor Fleur Hassan-Nahoum has municipal experience without the baggage of national politics. Laly Deral, mother of slain IDF soldier Saadia Deral, is a respected social activist making her first venture into politics.

They, and the rest of Winter's new list, will be able to go to voters and argue that the faces we see running for the Knesset today are the same people who have dominated Israeli politics through years of instability, including five elections in three years.

They are the same people who allowed Israel's security to fall by the wayside in favor of partisan political ambitions, and the same people who failed to bring Hamas and Hezbollah to their knees despite a plethora of promises.

That alone is not enough to win votes. Winter must show that his candidates are capable of offering new thinking and, ultimately, competent government.

The public is not necessarily looking for politicians who have never made a mistake. It may be looking for politicians who were not part of the political system that produced the current impasse, and who can approach its problems without years of partisan baggage.

But one issue Winter must address over the coming weeks and months is the political contradiction staring him in the face.

On Thursday, following nearly 48 hours of speculation on Israeli news channels, Winter clarified that his party would only recommend Netanyahu for prime minister after the election.

"We do not work for any person, only for the people of Israel," he said. "We are in the right-wing camp, the leader of the right-wing camp is Netanyahu, and we will only recommend him."

Winter is entitled to take that position. If his voters want a right-wing government led by Netanyahu, he should be clear about it. But he also needs to explain how that position squares with the broader message of political renewal on which his campaign is being built.

The two positions are not irreconcilable. Winter can argue that Israel needs new political forces while Netanyahu remains, for now, the natural leader of the Right. But if that is his argument, he should make it explicitly.

Whether one agrees with Winter's politics or not, announcing a list free of anyone who held national political office before October 7 offers something Israel has been missing: a genuine chance to start over.

Winter's positioning within the bloc, and especially his relationship with Netanyahu, will help determine whether People of Israel's reliance on new faces is merely a political gimmick or the beginning of a post-October 7 model of Israeli politics.

INBAR ASHKENAZI, CEO Jerusalem Post Group

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Israel can – and should – save assimilated Jews

• By COOKIE SCHWABER-ISSAN

Lamenting the crisis under which world Jewry finds itself, *The Jerusalem Post's* editor-in-chief Zvika Klein's recent Friday column was devoted to the subject of why Israeli politicians just don't get it.

Quoting different leaders, what stood out the most was the staggering 70% of intermarriage that is happening in the US. If that trend continues, within a reasonably short period of time, the Jewish community will simply disappear. Who wouldn't be concerned by such troubling news?

But there is hope, and it's what no one feels comfortable talking about. While agencies such as Nefesh B'Nefesh are wholly devoted to the cause of aliyah, at the same time, they do their best to weed out Jews they deem less qualified to live in the Jewish homeland. That includes those who are intermarried, do not identify with Orthodox Judaism, and have possibly shifted over to another set of religious beliefs. It also includes those who are not fully Jewish.

The problem with that weeding process is that, short of bringing them to Israel so that they can become reacquainted with the holidays, customs and traditions – not to mention giving their kids a much better chance of marrying a Jew – that massive sector will assuredly be lost as future Jews.

Conversely, bringing such families to Israel will almost guarantee a completely different outcome! Once here, they will be confronted with the traditional Friday night Shabbat dinner, where families gather together, light candles, and connect in a meaningful way.

They will learn to relax on Saturdays, because few things



FRIENDS AND family enjoy a Shabbat meal in Sderot, in 2024. (Dylan Martinez/Reuters)

are open. It won't be their usual day to wash the car, run to the mall or catch up on jobs they've been putting off.

With so many biblical, cultural, and national holidays and observances, they will begin to solidify and take on a new identity – one which is more aligned and unified with their people.

Of course, as their children attend school, they will learn Hebrew, often speaking with no detectable accent, unlike those who arrived at a later age. Their friends will be other Jews, and their orientation will be geared towards teaching them their history as they slowly become part of the country's future.

Those kids will serve in the military, study in our universities, and choose their marriage partner from the vast pool of Jewish candidates who live here. This is the right recipe for saving Diaspora Jewry, for those who are truly interested in doing so.

FOR THOSE who are, instead, fixated on the purity and percentage of Jewish blood running through the veins of individuals, and for those who are

closed off to anyone other than the religiously observant, saving world Jewry might already be a cause which has been written off.

That is because they no longer consider Diaspora Jews as Jews worth saving. Years ago, I had this very conversation with one such person who I thought shared my own passion for bringing every Jew home, regardless of what they believe. Their only criteria had to be what is written in the 1950 Secular Law of Return – being the child or grandchild of a Jew.

Sadly, once the conversation turned toward the unaffiliated and intermarried, the response was that they should remain in the Diaspora as they were, in his mind, not eligible to come. From his point of view, they had made their choice to abandon Judaism and were not worth saving, even if another Holocaust were to happen.

He was, in effect, closing the door to hundreds of thousands of his own people who, irrespective of their religious affiliation or marital status, remain ethnically Jewish – a distinction which no one can erase or deny.

For anyone who has been paying attention, the accounts of antisemitic attacks, denigrating verbal sentiment, or attempts to disenfranchise Jews from many segments of society are only widening, with no signs of letting up.

Sure, you may not attend a synagogue and may even be married to a gentile, but what happens if your last name is Rosenberg or Levine? Will you get any special dispensation just because you have assimilated and no longer closely identify with the traditions of your people? Probably not!

The truth of the matter is that assimilated Jews will still be looked upon as strangers, different from all others. Born with that Jewish gene, they will never be able to scrub it out of them, and that is why their lives will still be in peril despite the choices they have made.

Anyone who thinks they are not worth rescuing either has no heart or conscience and has a misplaced perspective as it relates to what Judaism teaches us about loving our neighbor as ourselves.

World Jewry is truly at a crossroads on so many levels. There

is danger when it comes to their safety, their continuity, appreciation for their identity and, most especially, the survival of their homeland.

While some may see them as an extra burden, their presence here can make such a great difference. As they are strengthened in a new way of life, we, too, will receive that benefit by the sheer numbers, replacing others who have left.

Yes, they will need lots of help learning the language, the customs, and the uniqueness of our society, but once they do, they will become an asset in so many ways that it will be a mystery why no one considered this sooner.

Regrettably, Klein is right. Many Israeli politicians are unable and unwilling to confront this issue, almost accepting the loss of Diaspora Jews as a foregone conclusion. It's sad to say, but those who feel that way are simply lacking the vision that is needed to see the great potential that could bless this nation by embracing the "lost" of their people.

Each one of us who has made our own aliyah journey should reflect on just how fortunate we have been to be gathered to our people and be part of the Zionist dream, becoming the envy of nations, as we pooled our collective resources to build an enviable society.

There is no reason this cannot and should not happen. It already exists in our Law of Return. The real tragedy for world Jewry is that it's just not being done. We can change that, and we must!

The writer, a former principal of Jerusalem elementary and middle schools, was a member of Kibbutz Be'er from 1994 to 1999. She is the author of *Mistake-Proof Parenting*, based on the time-tested wisdom found in the Book of Proverbs, available on Amazon.

Israel still believes in unity

Now it must build it

• By ROBERT SINGER

At first glance, the latest Israeli Society Barometer offers an encouraging picture. Nearly three-quarters of Israelis (73%) believe that Israel can be a cohesive society despite the divisions within it. This is the highest figure recorded since the Center for Jewish Impact began conducting the barometer in 2024, and a notable increase from 67% in February.

After years of political turmoil, the trauma of following the October 7 massacre and a prolonged front war, Israelis have not given up on the possibility of a shared future.

However, beneath this optimism lies a warning that must not be ignored. Israelis may believe in cohesion as a national ideal, yet they are far less confident that the country's different communities can actually live together.

Only 64% believe that secular and haredi (Ultra-Orthodox) Jews can coexist in Israel. More troublingly, just 42% currently believe in Jewish-Arab coexistence. The differences between communities are stark. While 74% of Arab respondents and 48% of secular Jews believe Jewish-Arab coexistence is possible, only 7% of religious and haredi respondents share that view.

These figures do not mean that Israel is destined to fragment. On the contrary, the broad belief in the possibility of national cohesion provides a foundation on which to build.

Nonetheless, they demonstrate the distance between supporting unity in principle and trusting one another in practice.

Ahead of Israel's faithful elections in October, it is clear that national cohesion cannot remain a slogan reserved for campaigns or moments of emergency. It must be translated into sustained engagement between communities that too often encounter one another through political arguments, social media or stereotypes.

Israel needs spaces in which Jewish and Arab citizens – across all religious backgrounds – can meet around shared responsibilities and common interests. Education, national or civic service, employment, local government and civil society can all become arenas for cooperation rather than competition. This does not require communities to abandon their identities or disagreements.

A cohesive society is not one in which everyone thinks alike. It is one in which differences do not prevent people from recognizing a common destiny.

The barometer also reveals that Israel's internal crisis

of confidence is being compounded by a serious failure abroad.

Although 64% of Israelis consider the strategic relationship with the US to be strong, only 23% believe Israel effectively communicates its policies and positions internationally fully, and 70% regard Israeli public diplomacy as ineffective.

This is not merely a matter of Israel receiving unfavorable media coverage. It is now affecting the daily lives and personal decisions of Israelis. More than half, 52%, report some level of concern about identifying as Israeli while traveling abroad. Since October 7, 2023, 41% have changed their behavior overseas, including altering destinations, canceling trips, or avoiding certain activities.

When Israelis feel compelled to hide their nationality, the problem is no longer abstract. It represents a profound deterioration in the environment surrounding Israel and the Jewish people.

The response cannot consist solely of better slogans, faster reactions, or additional social media content.

ISRAELI NEEDS what the public itself is demanding: a long-term national strategy for international communication. One-third of respondents identified such a strategy as the most important measure needed to improve Israel's global standing, while another 25% pointed to changes in government policy and decision-making.

We need to strengthen our ties with our allies who know us, even if they do not necessarily voice strong opinions or wield significant influence. Just as there were volunteers in the 1960s and 1970s whose positive impact is evident today, we now have individuals, whether foreign workers, Christian volunteers, or people in the hi-tech industry working with Israelis, who will return to their home countries and serve as our ambassadors.

Nevertheless, public diplomacy cannot compensate for poor policy, but even necessary and defensible policies will lose international support if they are not explained within a coherent strategic framework.

Israel must invest in research, professional communication, credible international partnerships and engagement with audiences beyond its existing supporters. It must explain not only what it does, but why it is doing it, what Israel stands for and why its security and future matter to the democratic world.

This effort must be closely connected to Israel's relationship with global Jewry. Seventy percent of Israelis believe the state should invest resources in Diaspora Jewish communities. Their priorities include encouraging aliyah, protecting Jewish communities and sup-

porting civil society organizations.

That finding reflects an important truth. Israel and the Diaspora are not separate constituencies connected only by sentiment. They are part of a single, interdependent people. Antisemitism abroad affects Israel, just as Israel's policies and international standing affect Jewish communities worldwide.

Strengthening Jewish security, identity and resilience must therefore be treated as a strategic national interest, including smaller communities, particularly those in countries with modern Islamic societies.

None of this can be separated from the economic and security concerns facing Israeli families. The public's leading priority for the next government is reducing the cost of living and strengthening the economy, selected by 38% of respondents. National security follows at 25%, while 13% prioritize unity and bridging social divisions and 11% the IDF enlistment crisis.

These issues are interconnected. Economic hardship deepens social resentment. Unequal obligations weaken solidarity. Internal division damages national resilience, while diplomatic isolation threatens both security and prosperity.

The barometer does not describe a society that has lost hope. It describes a society that still believes in itself but is increasingly impatient for leadership equal to its challenges.

Israelis have demonstrated extraordinary courage and mutual responsibility during the most difficult period in recent memory. The task now is to transform the solidarity shown in moments of crisis into a permanent national strategy.

This must be front and center for any incoming government after the elections.

The choice is not between unity and disagreement, nor between Israel's domestic resilience and its global standing: we must strengthen both.

Israel must build trust among its citizens, renew its partnership with world Jewry and explain its purpose to the world with confidence, professionalism and moral clarity.

The Israeli public still believes that a cohesive society is possible. That belief is a precious national asset, but it is not guaranteed to endure.

We must act before optimism becomes exhaustion and distance becomes division. Israel's future will be secured not simply by defeating its enemies, but by ensuring that its citizens, its global Jewish family and its friends around the world understand what holds us together and why that bond is worth defending.

The writer is the chairman of the Center for Jewish Impact and a former CEO of the World Jewish Congress and World ORT.

The political landscape wants Ethiopian votes

Will it share that power?

• By SHMUEL LEGESSE

For generations, in the highlands of East Africa between the Blue Nile basin and the Red Sea world, Ethiopian Jews observed Shabbat, preserved ancient biblical traditions, prayed toward Jerusalem, dreamed of returning to Zion, and sometimes died attempting to reach it.

During the annual holy day of Sigd, Beta Israel prayed for a return to Zion and renewed its covenant with God and the Torah. In 1862, a Beta Israel group led by the spiritual leader Abba Mahari attempted to reach Jerusalem decades before Theodor Herzl published *The Jewish State*.

We did not need European Zionism to teach us to long for Jerusalem because Zion lived in our prayers before modern political Zionism acquired a congress, a flag, or a diplomatic office.

Yet now that we have reached the Jewish state, served in its military, joined its religious institutions, and voted for its political parties, we are still too often invited to demonstrate loyalty without being trusted to exercise power.

This history does not mean every Ethiopian Israeli holds the same political beliefs. No community is politically uniform. But it helps explain why many feel a natural affinity with religious Zionism and the Israeli right.

It has to do with a reverence for Jewish tradition, an attachment to Jerusalem, a belief in Jewish sovereignty, a respect for military service, and an understanding that Jewish survival requires strength.

On October 27, Israelis will democratically elect the 120 members of the Knesset, Israel's parliament. Israelis do not vote directly for congressional-style district representatives. They vote for national party lists, and parliamentary seats are distributed proportionally. The parties represent Jewish, Arab, religious, secular, liberal, and conservative constituencies.

A candidate's position on a party list can therefore determine whether an internal-primary victory produces actual power.

That distinction explains why Ethiopian Israeli Gabi Gebre Worku's victory matters. Worku entered the Likud's 2026 primaries alongside ministers and lawmakers. He traveled, organized,



MEMBERS OF the Ethiopian Israeli community protest outside the Knesset last year. (Yonatan Sindel/Flash90)

addressed party members, and asked voters to judge his work. In the direct contest for the position reserved for a new immigrant, he defeated six other candidates and received 3,159 votes. He won, but was then placed at No. 43.

That position is outside the Likud's practical electoral range. Worku competed and prevailed. Leaving him at No. 43 would indicate to Ethiopian Likud members that their participation is welcome, but their democratic decision is expendable.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu should use one of his leadership-controlled positions or any remaining lawful mechanism to move Worku up so that he will be situated among the top 23 candidates.

This would not be charity or tokenism; it would respect a candidate who entered the Likud's democratic process and won.

Another possibility has raised hope. An Israeli publication reported advanced discussions between Otzma Yehudit leader Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Yaakov, an Ethiopian-Israeli right-wing strategist and Channel 14 panelist, about a possible reserved place on the party's Knesset list.

NO FINAL commitment has been confirmed. Yaakov represents a young, Hebrew-speaking and unapologetically Zionist Ethiopian generation. His inclusion would be encouraging. But hope must not again become a photograph, a campaign slogan, then silence once the final list is submitted.

Ethiopian Israeli representation in the Knesset is important. Nevertheless, none of us has led Israel at the highest levels or headed its mission to the United Nations, a consequential diplomatic appointment.

I have asked why Ethiopian Israelis are rarely invited to speak seriously about Israel, Zionism, or the Jewish future. Why has no qualified Ethiopian Israeli been seriously considered to become Israel's permanent representative to the United Nations?

During Danny Danon's first term, from 2015 to 2020, he became the first Israeli elected to chair a principal UN committee, the General Assembly's Sixth Committee on legal affairs. He began a second term in August 2024, making him the only Israeli to hold the ambassadorship twice. He has represented Israel and deserves recognition for his service.

In September 2025, the UN General Assembly endorsed a declaration on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by 142 votes to 10. No single envoy alone controls such outcomes, and the UN's institutional hostility toward Israel long predates

Danon's. But that overwhelming margin demonstrates the limits and ineffectiveness of repeating the same strategy with the same political messengers.

After nearly seven years across two terms, Israel should prepare new leadership not because Danon's service was worthless, but because forceful rebuttals alone and the current method have not reversed Israel's diplomatic isolation.

I am not raising this issue only in the abstract. I would be honored and humbled to be considered to lead Israel's mission to the United Nations.

I am a proud black African; an Ethiopian-born Israeli American Jew; a Modern Orthodox; a right-wing but inclusive educator; a student of the Baron Rabbi Jonathan Sacks; and a specialist in moral diplomacy, conflict resolution, and restorative

justice.

I earned a doctorate in educational leadership from Yeshiva University and a master's degree in community leadership and philanthropy from Hebrew University. I also spent two decades working in New York's court system and have experience in Israeli and Ethiopian public affairs.

These qualifications do not entitle me to an ambassadorship. They do entitle other Ethiopian Israelis and I with comparable records to serious consideration.

I cannot promise to transform UN voting overnight. No honest diplomat can. But I would bring a broader moral-diplomacy strategy.

This would encompass cultivating relationships with African and other Global South delegations before a crisis erupts; engaging black, Christian, Muslim, and Jewish audiences; and explaining in English, Hebrew, and

Amharic that the Jewish return to Israel was never exclusively European.

Imagine a black Ethiopian Jew, a descendant of an ancient East African Jewish community that prayed toward Jerusalem for centuries, addressing the UN General Assembly. That envoy would be more than a symbol. They would be living evidence against the accusation that Israel is a white colonial project.

Gabi Gebre Worku competed and won. Bezalel Yaakov may be approaching an opportunity. Qualified Ethiopian Israelis are prepared to serve and represent Israel internationally, including at the UN.

The writer is an international educator, community activist, and diplomacy expert. He has served in New York City as an Investigation Officer for the Supreme and Family Court, and represented the Israeli Knesset in international public affairs.

'Jews have it coming,' Hasan Piker tells millions of fans

• By MICHA DANZIG

On a recent live stream, with a photo of Jewish Michigan congressional candidate Jeremy Moss on screen behind him, Twitch personality Hasan Piker told his millions of followers that US Jews "have it coming."

Those who "keep putting this idea out there that they are singularly invested in Israel" should expect that "eventually someone's going to come around and take action, not against the State of Israel, mind you, but against American Jews," he said.

Piker called Israel "Jewish ISIS," saying that Jews were "making antisemitism worse."

Antisemitism has historically come in two forms. One is transactional: "Renounce whatever it is we are telling you to renounce and safety will supposedly follow." The other is fixed: "You are the problem regardless of what you renounce, because your identity itself is the offense."

Mistaking one for the other is how societies miss what's happening until it is too late. Piker's rhetoric looks like the first kind. It also smuggles in the second.

The transactional version has a long pedigree. In 1789, as France debated citizenship for Jews who had lived there for centuries, Count Stanislas-Marie-Adelaide de Clermont-Tonnerre delivered the sentence that would define it: "To the Jews as a nation, nothing. To the Jews as individuals, everything."

In other words, he offered full citizenship in exchange for dissolving the national parts of Jewish identity, an offer Jews "could not refuse." Every generation since has been handed some version of this, in French, in Russian, and now in the argot

of Twitch.

Even the offer's predecessor, religious-based antisemitism, was never as clean as it pretended. Medieval Europe held out baptism as the door out of persecution. Spain tested that promise and broke it.

After the mass forced conversions of the 14th and 15th centuries, the *limpieza de sangre*, "the purity of blood," statutes barred anyone with Jewish ancestry, however distant, from public office, the priesthood, and social standing.

The room marked "convert, and you are free" had a false bottom. Blood, not belief, was the real test.

NATAN SHARANSKY, the Soviet dissident who spent years in the Gulag for wanting to live as a free Jew in Israel, built a test for recognizing this pattern in real time.

Does the rhetoric demonize Jews or the Jewish state, casting them as uniquely evil? Does it delegitimize Jewish self-determination, treating a Jewish homeland as illegitimate in a way no other nationalism is questioned? Does it apply a double standard, holding Jews or Israel to scrutiny applied to no one else?

Piker's stream clears all three, and the double standard is easy to prove. US politicians Abdul El-Sayed and Rashida Tlaib have built careers around identification with the Palestinian Arab cause, and have each made claims about Israel that were false or badly distorted.

Imagine a streamer showing their photo and saying Arab Americans "putting this idea out there" should expect that "someone's going to come around and take action" against them or accuse them of "making Islamophobia worse." That would

be denounced widely and instantly as incitement. No one would call it a warning. Piker said the Jewish version of that sentence about Moss.

Moss answered for himself. "A California podcaster will not lecture me about what Oakland County's Jewish community should and shouldn't believe," he said, adding that Jews "won't be gaslit that we're responsible for the antisemitic harm upon us."

Rep. Hillary Scholten identified it for what it was. "Calls for violence against American Jews ... unacceptable. Full stop," she said.

El-Sayed, whose Senate campaign Piker spent months building, could only offer that antisemitism is "a scourge" in the abstract, without naming what Piker said or disavowing him.

Multiply that by the rest of the Democratic Party, the country's largest, and the silence gets harder to explain. A handful spoke up. The overwhelming majority of a party that claims fighting racism and bigotry as a core value said nothing about an allied influencer telling millions that American Jews were inviting violence against themselves.

That gap between the outrage this would generate against any other minority and the silence Piker got from his own coalition is the double standard operating in real time, on screen.

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's working definition of antisemitism identifies both denying Jewish self-determination and holding Jews collectively responsible for Israel's actions as antisemitic.

Piker did both — and named individuals. "Collectively" is a crucial term here

because it marks the point where his rhetoric moves beyond a supposed bargain for safety and becomes more sinister.

When Wilhelm Marr coined "antisemitism" in 1879, he rebranded a hatred that had worn religious clothing for a thousand years into something claiming to be secular and scientific — race, not sin.

He took the false bottom already built into *limpieza de sangre* and made it official doctrine, a fixed, hereditary trait no conversion could erase. That closure metastasized into Nazi racial law under which converted Jews and decorated Jewish veterans of the First World War still had no path out. The category itself had become the crime.

Piker's language borrows from both hateful traditions at once. On the surface, he offers a transaction: stop being "invested" in Israel, and the danger recedes. That is Clermont-Tonnerre's structure.

But "Jewish ISIS" is a distinct kind of accusation. ISIS denotes a terrorist movement; attaching the label to a democracy makes sense only if "Jewish" bears the moral weight of the claim. The phrase does more than condemn a state. It merges Jewish self-determination with an image of absolute evil. Stripped of its polemical language, the logic echoes Marr's: An identity treated as inherently corrupt and collectively culpable.

THIS IS also why the "anti-Zionism isn't antisemitism" argument collapses so often on contact with reality. When anti-Israel rhetoric singles out Jews alone among all peoples on Earth as the one group underserving of self-determination, and treats Jewish support for that state as evidence of a nefarious group trait, it isn't a carve-out from antisemitism.

It is antisemitism in fashionable disguise, exactly as it was in Inquisition Spain, Clermont-Tonnerre's Paris, and Marr's Germany.

Piker's own words supply the final tell. He never said he wanted to harm Jews. He said other people will, and that Jews will have brought it on themselves simply by existing and believing what many of them do. He sounded like a bystander describing a forecast.

But Piker is the one seeding the cloud.

Call this what it is. Piker did not warn Jews. He indicted them, collectively, for the crime of existing as they are, then dressed the indictment up as a safety warning. It is the oldest accusation in the book, updated for a platform that rewards it with millions of views instead of pulpits.

Jews have absorbed both forms of this hatred before, sometimes offered by the same movement in the same breath. Most know the difference when they hear it, even when people around them pretend not to. This time, the accusation had a name, a face, and millions of witnesses. Let the record reflect it.

What should concern everyone, Jewish or not, is that this happened to an individual who was called out by name.

The hypocrisy is clear: An equivalent threat made against Arab Americans over the rhetoric of their most visible leaders would be denounced immediately and near universally. Every politician, network, and platform that let this pass also let Sharansky's test, though probably not with the answer they imagined.

The writer is an attorney and a former IDF soldier and NYPD officer. He writes widely on Israel, Zionism, antisemitism, and Jewish history. He serves on the board of Herut North America.

Will future Iran compete with Dubai?

• By SALEM ALKETBI

Recently, an argument has emerged which maintains that the rise of Dubai and the Gulf states was closely tied to Iran's withdrawal from its regional position after the 1979 Iranian revolution. A stable Iran open to the world, the argument goes, would return the economic center to Tehran and cause Dubai to lose much of its appeal as a temporary substitute.

Initially, the idea seems open to debate, especially when we consider Iran's size, resources, location, population base, and civilizational heritage. However, the argument weakens when Iran's presumed rise becomes a condition for Dubai's decline, and what the United Arab Emirates has achieved in half a century is reduced to a vacuum left by another state.

Undeniably, Iran has the foundations of enormous economic power. If it becomes a stable state, economically open, and reconciled with its region and the world, it will likely recover some of the capital, skilled people, and businesses that sanctions, restrictions, and instability pushed abroad. But this is where the basic assumption needs scrutiny.

The movement of capital and businesses to Dubai hardly proves that Iran's isolation made Dubai successful. The faltering of one country's economic environment rarely creates a successful economic center in another. Between the two lies a more important factor: the ability of the alternative environment to compete and attract.

Dubai's rise rests on its own model rather than the withdrawal of others. It built an environment that targets capital, companies, and talent, accumulated infrastructure, global connectivity, legal and regulatory frameworks, and stable rules.

By contrast, other region-

al economies suffered, to varying degrees, from sanctions, regulatory restrictions, state intervention, bureaucracy, and political and economic uncertainty.

To be sure, the difference here is that no vacuum is left by one side and filled by another. It is the ability of one model to attract what other environments failed to attract or retain.

If Iran's crises and isolation were enough to explain Dubai's rise, then the region's crises would likely have produced similar economic centers nearby. None emerged.

The absence of faltering of a competitor may create an opportunity, but it alone fails to build a global center. Otherwise, replicating the Dubai experience would be far easier than reality has shown.

THIS EXPOSES another flaw in the notion of a temporary substitute. It assumes that Iran once occupied a natural economic position, that this position moved to the Gulf after the Iranian revolution in 1979, and that Tehran can reclaim it whenever circumstances change. Financial and commercial centers never move between countries the way spheres of influence move on maps, and no historical right reserves an economic center for its former owner.

Undoubtedly, the capital that reached Dubai was seeking the environment most able to serve it, rather than an heir to Tehran. Had it failed to find that environment there, it would have considered centers such as Singapore, London, Hong Kong, and other cities that compete globally for money, companies, and talent.

This point is key. From the outset, Dubai's competition involved a network of global cities seeking to perform the same functions or parts of them, rather than Iran alone.

What Dubai has accumulated in this competition is



GENERAL VIEW of the Burj Khalifa skyline in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. (Abdel Hadi Ramahi/Reuters)

now more than a circumstantial advantage. It has become a network of measurable scale. In 2025, 95.2 million passengers passed through Dubai International Airport, the highest annual figure in the airport's history, according to Dubai Airports data.

The number of active companies registered in the Dubai International Financial Center exceeded 10,000 by the end of the first half of 2020, while Jebel Ali Port is connected to more than 150 ports around the world.

These figures measure more than assets — they measure a network in which the flows of people, capital, trade, and services overlap, and one that resists repli-

cation. Investors assess opportunity, risk, the stability of rules, contract protection, the ability to move capital, and access to suppliers, customers, and talent. Companies rarely relocate their business centers simply because a promising market appears, since they operate within systems of relationships, services, and trust accumulated over years. History does matter, but civilizational age alone confers no future economic role.

In Iran's case specifically, even if political conditions change radically, Tehran will hardly awaken the next morning as a global financial center. Reintegrating

a large economy that has been subjected to prolonged sanctions and restrictions will require reforming the banking sector, stabilizing the currency, protecting investment, and rebuilding international confidence.

Iran's potential is indeed enormous, but turning it into a stable economic power requires time, policies, and institutions.

The Iran-or-Dubai equation misses the point. A future Iran, open and prosperous, may be one of the greatest economic opportunities for Dubai itself.

In fact, the reentry of a large Iranian economy into global markets will create broad demand for finance, insurance, aviation, ports,

consulting, technology, and logistics. International companies that want to enter the Iranian market will need nearby regional centers that already possess these networks. Dubai, because of its location and accumulated commercial and financial relationships, can serve as one of the most important gateways.

BUT THE issue involves more than Dubai's relationship with Iran. It concerns the region as a whole.

If the Middle East succeeds in resolving its conflicts, it is more likely to produce multiple economic centers than to fall under a single center. Riyadh is expanding its economic

weight; Abu Dhabi is building advanced positions in investment and technology; Dubai has entrenched global functions; and Iran is capable, under different conditions, of adding a massive economic center to this map.

Competition will be intense. That is natural, and Iran's return may indeed redistribute some investments and roles. Dismissing that weakens any serious analysis. But competition is one thing, while the belief that Iran will reclaim from Dubai an economic position it supposedly once owned is another.

A future Iran will be more successful when it makes investors, talent, and companies choose it because of the opportunity, confidence, and efficiency it offers, rather than because of a notion that its neighbors' prosperity resulted from its absence.

The United Arab Emirates, for its part, needs no weak Iran to succeed. Countries confident in their models never make a neighbor's failure a condition for their continued success.

The Dubai experience proves this. Dubai never waited for history to assign it a place. It spent decades building the place that the world wanted to come to. Dubai's success and economic standing are not based on an Iranian legacy that moved to the UAE after the 1979 Iranian revolution, such that Iran's return would mean taking them back.

Dubai built its own center over decades of decisions, policies, and institution building, and tied it to global networks of trade, finance, and business. Iran can build its center anew, and it has enough potential to make its success an interest for the entire region. But that requires no dismantling of what others have built.

The writer is a UAE political analyst and former Federal National Council candidate.

An Israel-Syria security deal serves both countries

• By GHASSAN IBRAHIM

There are moments in the history of nations when continuing to live with the past becomes more costly than building the future.

The relationship between Syria and Israel stands at one of those moments today.

After decades of conflict, Syria has changed, and the dynamics that shaped relations between the two countries have changed. The realistic question today is therefore not whether Syria and Israel can agree on everything, but whether they can reach a security understanding that serves their shared interests.

In theory, there is nothing preventing this.

In fact, the developments in Syria make a security understanding more logical today than at any previous time.

The new Syria is not the Syria of Bashar al-Assad.

The previous regime made Syrian territory part of Iran's regional sphere of influence. Through Syria, Iran built a strategic bridge to Hezbollah in Lebanon and used Syrian territory to transfer weapons and strengthen its military influence close to Israel.

This reality represented a direct threat to Israel, but it was also part of the structure and regional policies of the former Syrian regime.

Today, the equation has changed. The new government in Damascus has defeated the project that sought to keep Syria within that sphere, and has weakened the environment on which Iran and Hezbollah depended in Syria. The new Syrian state also no longer wants to be a corridor or platform for regional war fought by outside powers.

This is a development Israel should view through the lens

of its own security interests.

Israel spent years trying to push Iran and its militias away from its northern borders and prevent the transfer of weapons to Hezbollah through Syrian territory.

Today, the Syrian state itself has an interest in preventing the return of that role.

Syria wants to restore its sovereignty, build its institutions, secure its borders, rebuild its economy, attract investment, and open itself to the world.

These goals require stability, not war.

The new Syrian government is also approaching the current phase according to a principle very different from that of the previous regime: Syria First.

The priority is to build the Syrian state and improve the lives of Syrians, rather than use Syria as an arena for ideological, nationalist, or regional projects.

Even the Palestinian factions and militias that operated inside Syria have been dismantled, as part of a clear direction towards placing weapons under state control.

This is an important point for Israel.

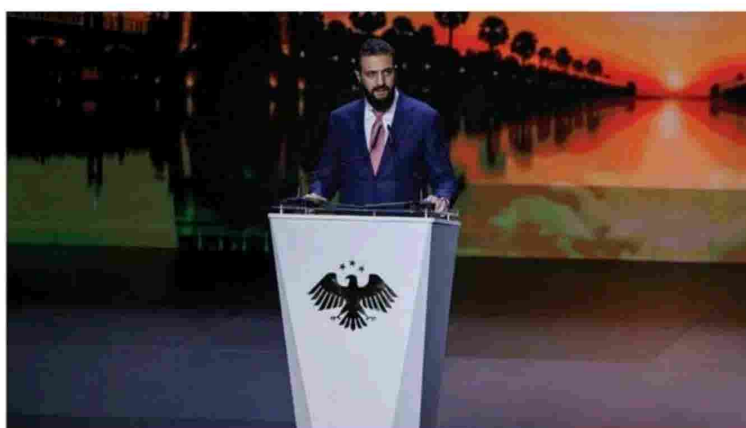
A Syrian state that seeks to monopolize the use of force, control its territory and end the presence of militias can be a more viable partner for a security arrangement than a weak state whose territory remains open to external powers.

Here, Syrian and Israeli interests are closer than they may appear.

Israel wants secure borders, no hostile militias near them, and no use of Syrian territory to transfer weapons or launch attacks.

Syria wants quiet borders, an end to the state of war, economic reconstruction, and the beginning of a new phase of development and stability.

These interests are not con-



SYRIAN PRESIDENT Ahmed al-Sharaa speaks during the opening ceremony of the Damascus International Fair, on Wednesday. (Khalil Aghawi/Reuters)

tradictory.

They can form the basis for an understanding.

A security understanding does not mean that Syria must become an ally of Israel, nor does it mean that Syria must abandon its interests or security concerns.

If Israel wants a Syrian state that is responsible for the security of its borders, it is also in Israel's interest for that state to have a clear stake in the success of the agreement and, in return, to receive guarantees that protect its sovereignty and fundamental interests.

The process could begin with a practical and clearly defined agreement that guarantees the security of both sides: Syrian commitment not to allow its territory to be used to launch attacks against Israel or transfer weapons to armed groups; in

return, respect for Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity; addressing the existing military arrangements in the south in a way that restores the situation to a framework agreed upon by both sides; and establishing communication, monitoring and investigation mechanisms to prevent any incident from escalating into a wider confrontation.

The important point is that an agreement does not need to resolve all historical issues at once. The two sides can begin with security, because this is the area where clear common interests exist, and then test their commitments on the ground. If that succeeds, they can move on to broader issues.

Complete trust is not a prerequisite for starting.

Trust can be built gradually through commitments, moni-

toring, and results.

That is what makes a security understanding important for both sides.

More importantly, a security agreement could be the beginning of a much broader process.

Security can create stability.

Stability can create trust. And trust can open the door to trade, investment, energy, transportation, and economic cooperation.

Syria needs massive reconstruction. It needs capital, technology, markets and regional and international economic relationships. Israel has an advanced economy and technological capabilities that could become part of a new regional future if the nature of the relationship changes.

The process could therefore begin with a security under-

standing, move towards economic and trade arrangements, and then develop into more regular political relations.

If this process proves successful, a peace agreement in the future could become a natural outcome rather than an unknown leap.

No one is asking Syrians or Israelis to forget history.

Nor is anyone asking Israel to ignore its security concerns. But it is reasonable for Israel to ask itself: what serves its security interests more?

A stable Syria, whose government controls its territory, wants to rebuild and seeks normal relations with the world?

Or a weak and chaotic Syria that could once again be used by Iran, militias, or any other external power?

For Syria, the answer is equally clear.

A country that wants development and prosperity cannot live in a permanent state of war with its neighbors.

Ending the crisis with Israel can therefore be part of the new Syrian project, not a departure from it.

This is where communication matters.

At Syria Focus, we were determined to launch a Hebrew edition because we believe that any understanding between the two countries must begin with each society understanding the other.

Many Israelis still view Syria through images of the past: Assad, Iran, Hezbollah, militias, and war.

But the question today is: what are Syrians actually saying about the new Syria?

And what do they want for the future of their country?

At the same time, Syrians need to understand Israel's security concerns.

No lasting understanding can be built if each side hears about the other only through stereotypes or old narratives.

The media may not be able to create peace, but it can create the knowledge that makes peace possible.

That is why a security understanding between Syria and Israel should not be viewed as a concession by one side to the other.

It can be the starting point for a new relationship based on shared interests.

Security, then trust, then trade and economic cooperation, then political relations — and perhaps, ultimately, peace.

The new Syria wants a better future.

It may also be in Israel's interest to help build that future rather than wait for the past to return.

The writer is the editor-in-chief of Syria Focus.

EDITORIAL

HK right to utilise market forces for urban renewal

Urban renewal is essential, not optional, for a small and densely populated city like Hong Kong. While new buildings continue to mushroom across the districts each year, it is outpaced by the relentless ageing of blocks, many of which have become dilapidated and pose a danger to public safety. In this context, the government's new five-year bonus plot ratio pilot scheme to expedite redevelopment is not merely a technical tweak to planning rules. It is a much-needed and pragmatic attempt to realign developers' incentives with the city's redevelopment needs. This will hopefully enhance building safety, housing supply and the quality of living in Hong Kong.

Starting from September, developers can get an extra 20 per cent of gross floor area as a reward for taking on private redevelopment projects in seven designated old districts. Only residential plots of at least 7,535 square feet with buildings aged 50 years and above will be eligible. Relevant lease conditions and penalties will be set out to ensure the projects are completed on time.

Alternatively, the bonus gross floor area can also be converted into land premium value to offset the land premium payable for the redevelopment project or any land transactions by the developer, including land bidding, lease modification or land exchange projects, in the Northern Metropolis project and other areas in the city within a decade.

First announced in the chief executive's policy address last year, this initiative follows the legislative amendment two years ago to lower the compulsory sale threshold for redevelopment. The measures underline the government's awareness of the difficulties involved and its determination to accelerate the slow pace of urban renewal.

Data compiled by the Legislative Council research office showed that the number of buildings at least 50 years old doubled to 10,200 between 2014 and 2023, and is projected to surge a further 138 per cent to 24,300 by 2043. As of 2025, 68 per cent of private buildings were at least 30 years old, with a further 14 per cent due to cross this threshold within a decade. As the design lifespan of concrete is typically 50 years, the city's ageing building stock poses mounting safety risks.

This situation is not helped by the slow pace of redevelopment by the Urban Renewal Authority and private developers. Of the 1,650 private buildings demolished from 2013 to 2022, only about 240 were handled by the statutory body, according to the Development Bureau.

Secretary for Development Bernadette Linn Hon-ho was frank in pointing out the challenges ahead. Even though 80 per cent of the redeveloped flats come from private renewal projects, market participation remains sluggish due to acquisition costs and constraints on redevelopment. "It is necessary for us to adopt an innovative and bolder policy to push the market to undertake redevelopment," she said.

For too long, urban renewal in Hong Kong has been hamstrung by a wealth of financial and procedural hurdles. High costs and tight development parameters mean many potential redevelopment projects are still idling on the shelf. Lowering the compulsory sale thresholds earlier was a necessary first step to make acquisition easier. But nothing is more directly beneficial than an instrument that relaxes the maximum development potential for free for developers.

Whether the bonus scheme can unlock more new projects in old districts remains to be seen. While the property market is still less than bullish, the approach of offering premium-free gross floor area ought to appeal in a city where every inch of space literally costs a fortune. The alternative ratio-for-land premium arrangement also provides flexibility for developers.

Hong Kong cannot afford to slow down on urban renewal as more buildings reach beyond their structural lifespan. While the latest initiative may not necessarily unleash a tower of applications for redevelopment, it at least strives to respond to the market, which hopefully will help more private-led renewal initiatives turn from concept to implementation. With proper safeguards and monitoring, the scheme has good potential to speed up redevelopment and make our homes more liveable and safer.

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Debt crisis will mean higher taxes or worse

Bond markets are in revolt in response to the rising amounts governments owe, meaning urgent change is needed in the way national priorities are financed



Anthony Rowley

Taxpayers everywhere should brace themselves. Their taxes could soon rise unless there are fundamental changes in the way that increasingly unsustainable government debt in the United States, Japan and beyond is financed. This can be done, but it will involve tough political decisions.

Attempts by national leaders to boost defence and other spending in the wake of a profligate borrowing boom make a crisis inevitable. While stock markets continue to ride high, the stress in key global bond markets is beginning to show through as a warning sign to investors.

An insufficient proportion of income and savings in major countries is being directed into financing public spending on defence, health, infrastructure, climate change remediation and other priorities. Governments normally turn to borrowing to plug the gap between tax revenue and spending, but bond markets around the world are in revolt, as shown by rapidly rising yields on sovereign bonds.

Frederick Kempe, president of the Washington-based think tank Atlantic Council, wrote on August 25 that converging recent events – the US national debt hitting a record US\$40 trillion, the new "economic D-Day" campaign against Iran and the US-Canada trade war – posed threats to US global leadership.

The inverse of rising bond yields is falling bond prices. This applies especially to long-term bonds, and so governments are forced to issue increasing amounts of costly short-term debt, raising their already lofty debt service ratios.

People should understand that, in addition to facing higher tax bills, a greater proportion of their savings should go into financing public investment. Currently, too much of people's discretionary savings go into the stock and bond markets, where money is often directed into fashionable investments such as artificial intelligence (AI). Fund managers competing to achieve

maximum returns will follow a herd mentality rather than pursue the public interest.

Leaders of the US and Japan seem intent on ignoring the reality of the situation. Their respective government debt-to-GDP ratios have soared to 248 per cent in Japan's case and 122 per cent in that of the US.

US President Donald Trump appears set upon waging wars that are costly in terms of money, infrastructure and human lives. His capricious behaviour is plunging the country's finances into steadily deeper debt and destroying the willingness of external creditors to continue underwriting his excesses.

“
Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi appears to be on course for her own ‘Liz Truss moment’

Meanwhile, Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi is determined to pursue her 370 trillion yen (HK\$18.2 trillion) stimulus package. Coupled with her decision to pursue a two-year reduction of the country's consumption tax on food, this is simply asking for trouble. Takaichi appears to be on course for her own “Liz Truss moment” and a similar political fate to Britain's shortest-lived prime minister, who was forced out of office after just 44 days. Truss's plan to tackle Britain's cost of living crisis hinged on slashing taxes while borrowing heavily, spooking markets and sparking a collapse in the British pound.

How can governments overcome the influence of bond market vigilantes other than by drastically raising taxes, cutting spending – or both? The first step would be to

reduce the role of the global asset management industry. Its assets derive from contributions from pension funds, life assurance companies and numerous other institutional investors, as well as from individual investors through myriad mutual funds, investment trusts, exchange-traded funds and other savings and investment schemes.

Asset managers in the private sector might well be intelligent and caring individuals, but as a group they all too often feel compelled to follow the herd. They need to compete with one another to show the best financial return on investments, and this in turn lures them into making excessive investment in popular sectors such as AI and other hi-tech fields.

Investment in essential social areas is neglected, leaving governments to step in to cover the shortfall.

If the role of existing investment institutions is going to be reduced, how should private savings be directed into essential public investments currently being overlooked? The answer from planned economies appears to be doing so via state investment vehicles. Market economies have yet to find similar success amid their growing fiscal predicaments, yet their champions still cling to the belief that their finances are managed more efficiently through private sector channels.

Governments in market economies need to establish specialist state financial institutions to better direct public savings into areas of key social importance, even if this does mean raising taxes to cover the cost of staffing such institutions. It also implies the need for more innovative thinking on the part of governments by employing economists and financial specialists in newly created institutions rather than leaving the matter to amateur politicians. The treatment for this debt crisis might be painful, but the cure will be worth achieving.

Anthony Rowley is a veteran journalist specialising in Asian economic and financial affairs

LETTERS

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Pointless to focus on mongrel dogs

The occurrence of two recent canine incidents has placed mongrels at the centre of debates. This is not the first time we have had this conversation.

In autumn 1971, a 10-year-old left her home on the Tsz Wan Shan Resettlement Estate and was later found lifeless at the foot of a hill.

Echoing popular opinion and turning a deaf ear to a father's suspicions that his child may have been murdered, the authorities concluded she was mauled to death by seven guard dogs. All seven animals were put down – notably, long ahead of autopsy results and without a formal investigation.

The unfortunate incident would soon be followed by the hardening of Hong Kong's relationship to dogs. Along with a series of social reforms to make Hong Kong a more liveable city, an anti-dog campaign was launched to eradicate the dog “nuisance”. In 1974 alone, at least 15,000 dogs – many of which were mongrels – were destroyed.

Fast forward to 2026, and we are seeing a near replay of events. A 60kg dog that killed two smaller dogs is temporarily safe from “humane” killing, yet the option to put it down remains open.

Following the tragic death of a dog-loving citizen after she was mauled by a mixed-breed dog suspected of having pit bull ancestry, some residents have turned to discussing the “beastly” nature of mongrel dogs.

In strengthening animal laws, policymakers need to be aware that there is no one-size-fits-all fix to human-canine relations.

We have to understand that not

We no longer live in the past. Stop flattening dogs into convenient labels.

Catherine S. Chan,
Department of History,
Lingnan University

Danger of ‘no-kill’ rhetoric exposed

The death of a woman after she was attacked by a dog she was caring for is a devastating reminder of the harm that can be caused by “no-kill” propaganda.

According to news reports, the dog involved was available for adoption despite needing training. A volunteer was reportedly paying for the dog to stay at the boarding and training facility where the victim worked until it could be placed in a home. As this sad case shows, not every animal can be rehomed safely.

Shelters and volunteer adoption groups must prioritise public safety

and animal welfare over padding their “live release” numbers. Adhering to a “no-kill” mandate can lead to dangerous or suffering animals being pushed through the system, with disastrous consequences.

The deprivation of being warehoused in kennels for extended periods can cause psychological distress, leading even previously docile dogs to develop aggression.

In constant confinement, dogs can start to display repetitive behaviour indicative of mental trauma, such as constant pacing, spinning in circles and chewing on cage bars. Others can become depressed and withdrawn, further reducing their chances of adoption.

Cats fare little better. According to Peta's research in the United States, some facilities instruct people to leave these domesticated animals on the streets, where they might suffer vehicle strikes, transmissible diseases, severe weather, predator attacks and intentional harm by people who consider them a nuisance.

A humane sheltering system must not be guided by appealing-sounding slogans but by a determination to protect every animal from suffering, even when the best we can offer is a peaceful release from a world that has failed them.

Instead of demonising humane euthanasia and the caring workers who perform it, communities must emphasise sterilisation, adoption and responsible guardianship.

They must also support the open-admission shelters that make the most compassionate choice for every animal in need.

Jason Baker, president, Peta Asia



The Pawstage pet hotel and training centre, where 33-year-old owner Wong Cho-yi was found dead after being mauled by a dog on August 20. Photo: Jelly Tse

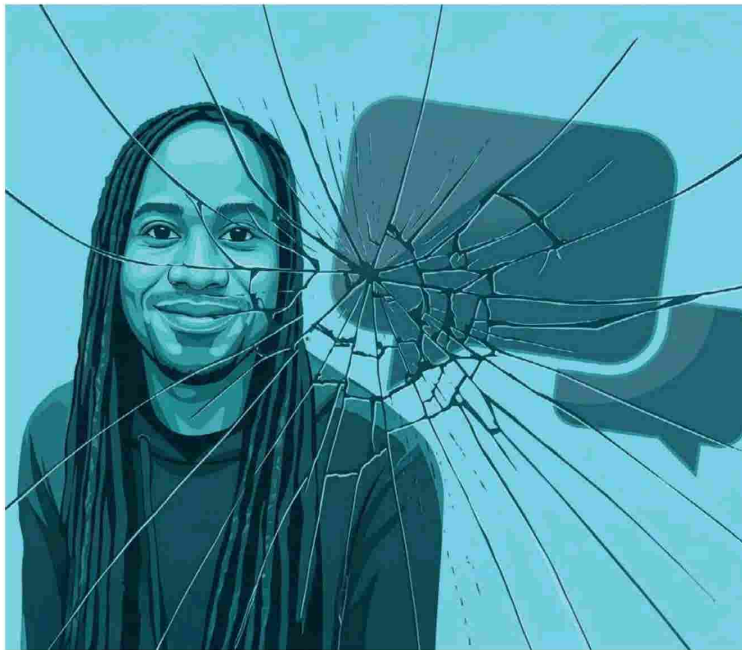


Illustration: Dennis Yip

Arday's death not just a 'woke West' tragedy

Loss of Cambridge academic exposes the complicity of universities, the media, online mobs and those who falsely believe they stand above the culture wars

Three weeks ago, I watched with horror the car crash of Cambridge professor Jason Arday's public unravelling. You know the story: allegations about plagiarism; then more accusations, headlines and people announcing they had always felt "something was off". It was less an investigation than a very British public audit involving spreadsheets, screenshots and the enthusiasm normally reserved for catching misbehaving MPs – except far more obsessive. Even after Arday's death and his family's request for privacy, reporters camped outside his home.

I had heard Arday speak at my university. Less fiery preacher than community worker, he seemed friendly, quietly listening, even awkward. I did not know him, but could not reconcile that man with the monster, martyr and morality play constructed around him. I also had a selfish, perverse thought: what if this happened to me? Ethnic minority academics I spoke to shared the anxiety; several disclosed less public but no less relentless, targeted harassment themselves, by agents backed by insidiously larger legal, financial and networked resources. Many colleagues of colour are afraid that speaking up will draw attention to their own records and private lives.

Readers in Asia may cast this aside as a black-and-white drama of the "woke West". Yet every aspiration to international standards, academic arrival or a place on "the global stage" implicates us. I am a non-white Chinese transnational scholar, albeit privileged, who writes about race and decolonisation. I have produced books, articles and far too many PowerPoint presentations with malapropisms and charmingly primitive infographics. Somewhere are phrases I would now qualify, poorly formatted references, perhaps even an unwise semicolon.

I do not equate scholarly slippage with the serious allegations against Arday. But the scrutiny became a fixation that his entire being was fraudulent. Here lies the point: one need not believe him blameless to recognise when inquiry becomes a witch hunt.

Cambridge first celebrated Arday as its youngest Black professor. Once allegations emerged, his identity became evidence that diversity appointments and the entire "woke DEI" project in diversity, equity and inclusion were mistakes. Yet double standards are stark: white academics have

plagiarised and fabricated, sometimes falling upwards, without becoming arguments about employment. Nobody writes mournfully that centuries of white appointments have gone too far. The story is tidied into binaries: Arday was either an innocent whose critics were racist, or the product of lowered standards for black folk. Both versions are suspiciously self-contained; yet human beings are not, nor are the biased systems they have created in academia and media.

Structurally, together – Cambridge, the press and social media commentators – produced conditions in which legitimate questions became trial by spectacle: the university invoked due process while a man accused of no crime was cross-examined mercilessly; newspapers insisted on public interest while producing clickbait; online voyeurs exercised their right to *boat gossip*, gossip. To be sure, investigative journalism cannot be compromised. But these inquiries began with unproven allegations by a disgruntled academic dabbling in suspect research on race science, himself investigated and sacked by Cambridge.

“One need not believe him blameless to recognise when inquiry becomes a witch hunt”

I feel uncomfortable adding an article to the pile. Yet testimonials from former students emerged only after Arday's death, when accounts contesting the first attacks were finally heard. The least dishonest response is to admit my complicity. I watched, flustered and angry, refreshing my newsfeed; now I write about why others watched.

Why does this matter to "yellow" folk outside black vs white UK politics? Chinese people in Chinese-majority societies do not consider ourselves "people of colour"; Western identity politics should not be exported like an overpriced university franchise. But cross even an online border and the racial settings rearrange themselves.

I grew up an ethnic Chinese in Singapore, comfortably in the majority. In Britain I became an international student, ethnic-minority, part of a model minority. A Chinese physicist is not called a "DEI hire" as a black sociologist might be. Yet I am a middle-aged Chinese woman still mistaken for a PhD student at white-majority conferences; embarrassed colleagues credit Korean skincare. (I'm not Korean.)

Chinese academics occupy a peculiar position: welcomed as fee revenue, scientific labour and proof of internationalism, while students writing in English are presumed to be "of course using AI". This suspicion disrupts the neat typology that black academics are token hires while Asians are hardworking machines. These forms of racism are not equivalent; ranking them into a hierarchy of victimhood helps nobody. What matters is their intersectional asymmetry: how race, gender, nationality and class determine credibility and the right to a mildly observed life. Universities, journals and old-boy groups gatekeep whose authority looks natural and whose mistakes represent an entire race: look how the list of names protesting the suspension of Arday's whistle-blower skews one way.

Arday's story travelled through that stacked system: a UK scandal became a feeding frenzy, stripped of context; retrofitted into arguments about meritocracy and liberal excess. Cut the cake however you like: there is no clean "side", only failing and unequal systems.

Arday's death is not merely a "woke people's tragedy" in Cambridge. It impeaches global knowledge and political systems that market United-Colours-of-Benetton diversity while distributing trust much less evenly. It indicts universities, the press, online crowds, hidden networks – and those of us watching from elsewhere, imagining ourselves safely outside the cultural wars.

We are not outside them. We are viewing the car crash from different racial playing fields, clutching our own spreadsheets, track records, naive aspirations, cultural debits and credits – and leaving our coffers open for whoever eventually comes to scrutinise them.

Shzr Ee Tan is the vice-dean of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion for the School of Performing and Digital Arts at Royal Holloway, University of London



Shzr Ee Tan

Having best of both worlds at US wedding

Chinese-American bride's dress at tea ceremony was not just another outfit, it celebrated her heritage

My wedding plans didn't begin with a red dress. The idea was to bring the wedding to my dad in his assisted-living facility – a nice one housed in a former hotel in suburban New York, complete with a cinema and a fancy swimming pool.



Amy Wu

My fiancé and I also made arrangements with the pastor, the DJ and the photographer, as well as a short and sweet guest list, while artificial intelligence (AI) helped us come up with a special cocktail for the occasion. With 60 days to go before the wedding, I thought we were in good shape. "What about the dress?" a good friend asked. What about it, indeed? I had bought not one but two white wedding dresses post-engagement. I'd been through the ritual of being fitted by both a boutique and a national bridal retail chain. I had photographic proof of myself ringing a bell and posing with a "I said yes to the dress!" sign.

In Western tradition, white wedding dresses symbolise purity, while the gown has become the centrepiece of the event. Not only have romantic comedies such as *27 Dresses* spotlighted the wedding gown, the search for it has also inspired reality television series like *Say Yes to the Dress*.

But because I meant to pay tribute to my father on the big day, it slowly sparked a desire to incorporate our culture. The Chinese dress known as cheongsam or qipao surfaced from memory. I'd attended wedding banquets myself where the garment was a must-have. I dug up lovely photos of my aunt's wedding in 1960s Hong Kong, showcasing the qipao she and her guests wore – as personalised as a fingerprint, not a single inch of extra fabric.

The figure-hugging dress has long evolved from the loose Qing-dynasty robe, and red is traditionally worn for good fortune. As I did more homework, I learned that modern Chinese couples' preferences have changed: brides increasingly prefer the white dress, or make sure they have two – one white, one red – for dual photo shoots and ceremonies.

Suddenly, I wanted to have the best of both worlds too, and began frantically searching for a suitable red dress weeks shy of the wedding. I googled Shanghai Tang, but shook my head at the exorbitant prices. My cousin in Hong Kong WhatsApped me a more practical solution: a link to affordable ready-made dresses, which unfortunately weren't meant for a Chinese-American with broader shoulders. An XXL dress sent in from Hong Kong was a bit snug. I could only suck in, smile and thank my well-meaning relative.

Ultimately, after more scrolling and swiping, I found the winner: a Chinese dress from a company run by a Caucasian couple out of Hawaii, who have given a modern-day twist to the cheongsam. Once this dress was settled, the rest of the wedding quickly fell into place.

“The red dress was a bridge to ... a part of myself I hadn't realised I wanted to reclaim”

A traditional Chinese tea ceremony was cobbled together at the eleventh hour, with a tea set bought via Amazon. AI proved helpful in providing a script for the tea ceremony. What tea would be sipped and what song would be played during the ceremony? Well, we'd figure it out.

And what's a wedding without lucky red envelopes? I filled ours with faux-ancient Chinese coins, red candy and fortune cookies. The menu consisting mostly of Italian-American dishes was offset by noodles for longevity and strength

rolls symbolic of gold bars (and therefore wealth). As the finishing touch, my sister and I hung red-stringed jade ornaments on an arbour indoors, between clusters of sunflowers.

Then it was time. The DJ cued us in with "Long-Jing Tea Garden", an instrumental piece that reminded me of westernised Chinese restaurants. Cups of scalding tea were served to elders on both sides. The new mother-in-law was enthralled. "Mmm, this is good, it's sweet," she said.

"Bottoms up!" my sister quipped, and the room exploded in laughter. Soon afterwards, I dashed into the gym and changed into bridal white. This gown was sequinned and pretty, but at the end of the day, I felt a deeper affinity for the red dress, knowing it was a connection to my father's roots.

And when it was my turn to speak, I had to reference the fortune cookie, an American invention forever associated with Chinese restaurants. Addressing my dad, I said: "Your story and journey have been an inspiration for so many. Like a fortune cookie, you open and speak and a gem of wisdom falls out."

For example, when I received some good news that dispelled a health scare, my dad told me to take it slow. I asked him what he meant and his answer stuck with me: "Spend your time on the things that appeal to you, and steer around the things that irritate you."

Most guests, including my husband's Irish-American family, didn't necessarily understand the intricacies behind the cheongsam and the tea ceremony. But they would remember the two dresses and the laughter. For myself the red dress wasn't simply another outfit. It was a bridge to my father, his homeland and a part of myself I hadn't realised I wanted to reclaim.

Amy Wu is a Chinese-American journalist based in New York and California who writes about cross-cultural issues

Columns & Commentary

BRET STEPHENS

Dark Clouds Rise in a Gathering Storm

Shortly after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, I wrote a column under the headline "This Is How World War III Begins." More than four years on, I wonder how much I got right.

My argument was based on the origins of World War II, which did not simply start with Germany's invasion of Poland on Sept. 1, 1939. Instead, the war was an accumulation of regional wars and crises, beginning with Japan's invasion of Manchuria in 1931, which gradually gathered into a single global conflict.

That gathering, abetted by the converging ambitions of the totalitarian states and the divisions and vacillations of the democracies, led to catastrophe. Added to this was a revolution in military technology and tactics that gave the dictatorships an early advantage in offensive combat. Also an advantage: their willingness to inflict — and endure — a level of brutality and suffering their adversaries were initially reluctant to match.

In 2022, I saw a similar pattern unfolding: Decades of Western appeasement of Vladimir Putin had given the Russian strongman a sense that he could get away with nearly anything. His burgeoning ties with North Korea, Iran and especially China — memorialized by the pledge of a "no limits" partnership with Beijing announced weeks before the invasion — gave him additional confidence. So did the spectacle of American weakness during our shambolic withdrawal from Afghanistan just six months earlier.

But Ukraine did not, as I had feared, turn out to be the France of 1940. It was more like Britain, prepared to fight, as Churchill put it that May, "however long and hard the road may be." The Biden administration, for all its fatal hesitation about letting Kyiv take the war to Russia, at least helped ensure that Ukraine didn't lose. Ukraine has also held the technological edge, pioneering equipment and tactics that are finally stimulating a long-overdue rethink about how wars of the future will be fought.

That's the good news. There's far more by way of bad news.

First, as in the 1930s and '40s, the spheres of conflict have multiplied and are merging. Russia's battlefield reversals seem to have done nothing to diminish Putin's appetite for risk as he expands his campaign, in barely concealed attacks and threats, against Moldova, Poland and Germany, among other states, while his political allies repeatedly call for direct strikes on Europe and the use of nuclear weapons against Ukraine. Hamas's assault on Israel in 2023 became, in stages, a war between Israel and Hezbollah, the Houthis and Iran; then a war between Iran, the United States and the Gulf states. More recently, Ukraine has directed long-range strikes in the Caspian Sea to disrupt Iranian military supplies to Russia. And decisions in one theater directly affect outcomes in the other: The expenditure of missile interceptors in the Middle East means that few can now be spared for Ukraine.

Second, the axis of authoritarians has become a fully operational military alliance.

Russia is providing North Korea with help to modernize its armed forces, while the



THOMAS PETER/REUTERS

Has World War III already started?

North has returned the favor by sending millions of artillery rounds and is now reportedly prepared to send thousands of additional troops to fight for Russia in Ukraine. China supplies Russia with most of the electronic components used in its drones and other military hardware. Russia has given Iran critical targeting intelligence to strike U.S. bases and ships in the Middle East. In the event of a Chinese attack on Taiwan, Beijing could call in its ships with Moscow by engaging the aid of Russia's powerful Pacific submarine fleet, as detailed in a new paper from the Australian Strategic Policy Institute.

Third, the West is a mess.

President Trump complains of our allies' weakness. The allies complain of Trump's bullying, capriciousness, callowness, mendacity and incompetence. Both sides are right. The latest U.S. tariff salvo on Canada is a case in point: politically ill advised, economically self-defeating, strategically enervating.

Yet none of that erases the fact that Canada, a trade-dependent nation with the world's longest coastline, barely has a navy

to speak of, or that its government's "new strategic partnership" with China is immoral, unwise and unsound — unless Mark Carney, the prime minister, really thinks that Trump's idiotic outbursts are a graver long-term threat to Canada and the free world writ large than the patent designs of the People's Republic.

Fourth, we are militarily unprepared.

The war against Iran revealed not just the munitions shortages, which helped bring the war to a premature close, but also America's acute sensitivity to military fatalities and economic pain, which gave Iran's leaders an asymmetric advantage given their own tolerance for human suffering. The war in Ukraine has demonstrated that even the most sophisticated U.S. military kit is entering obsolescence, thanks to the advent of A.I.-assisted drone warfare. The tanks we and our allies supplied Kyiv during the Biden administration "now mostly sit idle, hidden in forests and collecting cobwebs," as The Times reported last week.

Yet Pete Hegseth, our testosterone-obsessed defense secretary, recently decided to phase out an Army drone unit, seemingly because it was championed by generals he didn't like. The travails of the U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln during the carrier's long deployment are a national scandal. But they should call attention to the historically small size of the fleet, and a depleted industrial

base that struggles to build and maintain ships. Democrats blocking the defense appropriations bill aren't helping things, either.

Fifth, we may be near the economic brink.

One great difference between the 1930s and the present is that, unlike then, we are not in the midst of a worldwide depression. But the warning signs of a sharp and abrupt downturn are everywhere. What happens if or when the A.I. boom starts to run out of steam, much as the dot-com boom did at the beginning of the century? Or if the currency crisis in Japan causes it to start selling off its U.S. Treasury bonds? Stanley Druckenmiller, the legendary investor, recently warned in *The Wall Street Journal* that the Treasury Department's bond buybacks were all but destined to fail: Ultimately, the price of a \$40 trillion national debt will be felt in sharply higher interest rates and the risks they pose to every sector of the economy that's depended for too long on cheap credit.

A deep U.S. recession, or a global financial panic, will inevitably worsen every trend mentioned above. In periods of economic distress, democracies almost always become more risk-averse, while dictatorships become risk-prone. That's a pattern of history worth recalling as we continue to drift, only dimly aware, toward the gathering storm.

CARLOS LOZADA

Before We Move to Woke 2.0, I Have Questions About Woke 1.0

There is a difference between changing your mind and shifting your tactics, between evolving in your views and abandoning them because they've become unpopular or politically perilous.

When Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, quoting a political ally, recently suggested to ABC News, with a laugh and a smile, that "Woke 1 was crazy," she became the most prominent progressive figure distancing herself, whether subtly or overtly, from what is known as wokism — from the stringent positions on race, policing, gender, identity, social justice and language that constituted progressive orthodoxy over the past decade or so. Ideas once upheld in doctrinaire terms, with dissenters dismissed as lazy (*do the work*) or inhumane (*you literally don't want me to exist*), are now treated as an embarrassing phase, the gawky formative years of cultural and political progressivism.

James Talairico, the Texas Democrat running for a U.S. Senate seat, has admitted that "there are some statements that I've made that I certainly regret," and that some of his old comments may now seem "cringey." (All this when a journalist asked him about his past assertion that God is "nonbinary," a claim Talairico now says was "intentionally provocative.") Some commentators on the left have joined in the revisionism, acknowledging, for example, that cancel culture may have occasionally gone too far and that, yes, elements of the woke agenda may appear silly in hindsight.

It's a noteworthy evolution, especially for anyone who was around to witness the diabolical-hill dogmatism of the peak woke era — say, circa summer 2020. (If Woke 1 was really crazy, then Ocasio-Cortez, who called for abolishing prisons and adopted terms such as "menstruating person," was a resident in good standing of the asylum.)

So, before that time goes farther down the memory hole, discarded as just one of so many vogue shifts, I have one question for the formerly woke: If you can dismiss it so easily

now — all the defunding and abolishing, the BIPoCing and Latinxing, the canceling and decentering and my truthing — how much of it did you truly believe at the time? How much was conviction, how much was a pose, how much was groupthink, how much was fear?

If you did believe it, jettisoning it now should take something more than a sheepish grin. If you didn't believe it and yet declared it with such passion, with such pretensions to moral clarity, with such disdain for contrary perspectives, then the least you can do now is acknowledge that dissonance. You should explain the shift, not just explain it away.

Some writers and thinkers have admitted that they supported certain progressive verities — or didn't push back against them — because they felt cowed by their audiences, or because they feared for their careers. My hope is for a modicum of such intellectual accountability from the political class, too, just enough grace to blush.

When the formerly woke look back on that time, for example, what specifically do they now regard as crazy or cringey or silly? Do they regret particular beliefs, or just the provocative ways they expressed them? Have they decided that some of their previous positions were impractical or wrong, or just too electorally risky to state in public?

To expect intellectual accountability from politicians may be foolish, I know, and parties and movements are allowed and expected to evolve. The right, for instance, went from Goldwater and the Reagan Revolution to Neve Gingrich and the Contract with America, to George W. Bush and compassionate conservatism, to the Tea Party and then to MAGA, with consistencies as well as discontinuities along the way. Not every politician must explicitly disavow what came before.

But when political leaders reject not just an old ideology, but their own old ideology, one they embodied and upheld, the price of

elision should be higher.

In her interview, Ocasio-Cortez attributes the excesses of the woke era in part to the pressures of pandemic restrictions, saying that "of course, rhetoric in that time is not rhetoric that we would use today." But that's just a canny restatement of her shift, not an explanation for it. Would Ocasio-Cortez not use the same rhetoric today because she no longer buys it — or because she can no longer sell it?

I've long had concerns about the motivations and incentives inherent in culture war arguments. Culture wars are not primarily about debating issues, but about picking a

Were some of those positions impractical or wrong, or are they now just too risky?

side, joining a team. And the trouble with joining a team is that, inevitably, some teammates go further than you might want to go yourself. They stake out positions with which you may disagree or formulate tenets on topics about which you may know little. But you don't want the other side to prevail, of course, so you go along, stridently upholding your team's various positions and hunting down apostates. At a certain point, you're no longer considering the issues; instead, you're defending turf.

Politicians on the pro-Trump right have gone through their own version of this dance, whether excusing every corrupt and authoritarian impulse of their leader or hunting down apostates. At a certain point,

— and meaningless — off-the-record misgivings. Are they true believers or just fearful ones, legitimate loyalists or craven opportunists? The Trumpian right may evolve into an even more pernicious version of itself, or someday, its current enablers and supporters may, too, smile and say MAGA just went a little crazy for a while. If they do,

I can't imagine the formerly woke letting them off so easily.

In her interview, Ocasio-Cortez said she has not "ruled out" a run for the presidency in 2028 — and it is easy to link her revised ideological positions to that ambition. This is a "time of renewal" for the Democratic Party, Ocasio-Cortez said, explaining that "we are focused on everything from your health care to your grocery bill." She called the party a "big tent" and affirmed that "our priority is the working class."

When the congresswoman, who is a member of the New York City chapter of Democratic Socialists of America, was asked about D.S.A. calls to defund the Pentagon, abolish the police and the Senate and establish public ownership of essential industries, she replied that "people are less interested in these academic debates, and they're more interested in how we're going to bring their bills down and make sure that they can afford to see a doctor." (That snub of academia is especially deft for a left that purports to respect science and expertise, and for a movement that propelled "intersectionality" and "white fragility" into the vernacular.)

So, is this a Woke 2, focused on economic challenges for the working class, on affordability and health care, and leaving ideologically tinged politics behind? It may well prove a more electorally palatable iteration, one that makes sense if the D.S.A.-inflected Democratic Party aspires to national power. Whereas Woke 1 was accelerated by Trump's initial rise to the presidency, his return to the White House made clear its political shortcomings.

Ocasio-Cortez and the others have every right to seek out a new framework and message, to change their minds, if that is indeed what is happening. But before a Woke 2 takes over, let the proponents of its predecessor explain how and why they're moving on.

They should do the work.

OPINION

The Real Winner of the Trade War With Canada? China.

Chad R. Bown

A senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics and an author of "How to Win a Trade War."

THE keenest observer of the all-out trade war between the United States and Canada is surely President Xi Jinping of China. If Washington doesn't change course, he's probably going to be its winner, too.

Mr. Xi already has monopoly power over components that are vital to hundreds of thousands of American and Canadian jobs. His April 2025 restrictions on rare-earth magnets temporarily shut down a Ford Explorer plant in Chicago. In Ontario later that year, Honda briefly reduced and suspended production of Civics and CR-Vs after he closed off access to semiconductors, which disrupted parts supply.

These sorts of attacks and those sorts of vulnerabilities should bring allies together. In a normal world, Washington and Ottawa would be laser focused on how much and how quickly they could manufacture together to prevent that kind of Chinese economic coercion.

Instead, President Trump has framed his tussle with Canada as a fight over how much manufacturing the country should be prepared to yield to the United States. And Mr. Trump wants almost all of it.

Prime Minister Mark Carney of Canada walked away from Mr. Trump's latest offer and then escalated with fresh tariffs. Former Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland was correct to say it was even "a bad deal for the United States."

Mr. Trump cannot allow Canada to abandon the negotiations. Like it or not, Washington needs a resilient Canadian manufacturing sector working in concert with America's companies in the much bigger and more consequential battle against Chinese market dominance.

Ottawa rebuffed Mr. Trump's latest offer in part because it retained too many of his import tariffs on Canadian cars, heavy trucks, steel and aluminum. With tariffs that high, Americans will eventually stop buying Canadian-assembled vehicles, and Detroit will rework its supply chains to exclude Canadian parts. Cars and parts once moved seamlessly across the U.S.-Canada border between suppliers and buyers, much as they did over the U.S.-Mexico border.

Being shut out of the market next door will devastate the Canadian auto industry. Canada is not close enough to Asia or Europe to survive as part of their supply chains.

We know what will probably happen next based on what took place in Australia after its automakers disappeared. By 2017, Toyota, General Motors and Ford closed their last Australian plants and caved to economic reality: The Australian market was too small and too remote to support the scale needed for globally competitive manufacturing.

Australians at first imported cars from manufacturing hubs across Japan, Korea, Thailand, Europe and the United States.



ROULAN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Less than 10 years later, Australia looks very different. Nearly one in three new cars bought in Australia in the first half of 2026 was made in China, up from less than one in 250 back in 2017. (Only one in 50 Australian purchases in the first five months of 2026 was made in the United States.)

Mr. Trump should expect Canadian consumers to go the same route. In January, Mr. Carney announced Canada would allow 49,000 Chinese electric vehicles to be sold in the country — less than 3 percent of new car sales — and would slowly increase that number. Any decision to further open the Canadian market would probably lead to a Chinese import surge.

Why is pure Econ 101. Buying higher-cost cars from the United States is easier to justify politically when there are offsetting benefits to the national economy, such as assembly jobs, profits to domestic parts suppliers and communities built around steel or aluminum plants. If local manufacturing disappears, so will the reasons for Canadians to accept paying higher prices.

Losing Canadian customers to China would be terrible for America for two reasons.

First, the total number of buyers matters

for sectors such as automobiles, which have high fixed costs and substantial barriers to new entrants. Having more consumers means companies can learn how to lower costs and offer reduced prices to get even more customers. Losing Canadian car buyers will be one more step toward ceding the global automotive industry to China.

Today, Chinese companies sell low-priced cars. Tomorrow, the country could weaponize its newfound monopoly power. China also once offered the world great deals on rare-earth magnets and low-end semiconductors. Those prices allowed it to accumulate the market dominance that ultimately gave Mr. Xi the capacity to cut off Ford, Honda and many others last year.

China has increasing market shares in sectors such as steel, aluminum, shipbuilding and telecommunications equipment. A recent Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development report suggested that 60 percent of China's global market share gains since 2005 could be attributed to its policy of supporting industries with generous subsidies.

Second, losing the Canadian commercial base could turn away, once and for all, one of Washington's few remaining economic se-

The U.S. is targeting the wrong economy when it needs all the allies it can find.

curity allies. Before Mr. Trump started whacking Canada with tariffs in 2025, Ottawa matched many of Washington's duties on Chinese electric vehicles, steel and aluminum. He has forced Canadians to ponder separating from America instead of working with America to separate from China.

To fight the real trade war with China, Canadian consumers must continue to choose North American products, even though the Chinese versions are less expensive. Washington needs Canadians to accept today's costs of a manufacturing sector integrated with the United States.

Mr. Trump, for his part, will have to moderate his "made in America" demands. He can't kill off Canadian manufacturing and hope to retain access to the Canadian consumer.

To tackle the China challenge, the West requires more manufacturing clout than even an integrated North American economy can offer. Washington needs to rally all potential allies in the collective fight against China's market dominance, and they are waiting to see whether Mr. Trump finds an off ramp from his wrongheaded trade war before it is too late.

The Meta Settlement Is Better Than Nothing

Julia Angwin

A contributing Opinion writer and an investigative journalist.

FOR so long, Big Tech has been unstoppable. Congress granted the industry legal protection back in 1996, making it nearly impossible to hold the companies liable in court. And despite growing signs of how tech was enabling lies, discrimination, harassment and scams, lawmakers from both parties, awash in tech

money and beset by tech lobbyists, repeatedly failed to regulate the sector.

Now, we are finally stumbling our way into an era of accountability. It's not as thoughtful and holistic as it could have been if we had followed the lead of nearly every other nation and passed comprehensive legislation protecting our privacy and data security and reining in algorithmic manipulations. Rather, we are taking the approach of death by a thousand cuts. As judges and juries grow increasingly skeptical of Big Tech's claims that it should bear zero re-

Tech companies have operated untethered for too long. Finally, a bit of accountability.

sponsibility for consumers harmed by its products, the lawsuits and fines are piling up.

Last week, 47 states, the District of Columbia and some U.S. territories took a big swipe at Meta, getting the owner of Facebook and Instagram to agree to pay up to \$17.1 billion in penalties over claims that it deliberately misled the public about the harm that its platforms were inflicting on teenage users.

The fine, while huge, is far less than the \$14 trillion that Meta said the states were seeking. It pales in comparison to the tobacco industry's \$206 billion settlement in 1998. And Meta will dole out the full amount only if its archrivals YouTube, TikTok and Snapchat also limit kids' time on their apps, a clever move given that teens already spend more time on some of those platforms than its own. That may explain why Meta's stock price barely took a hit after the announcement of the settlement. I'm skeptical that the protections it promises for young users will yield meaningful changes to teen mental health.

But every blow counts as Meta enters its zombie era, with a stagnant user base, declining profits, mounting legal liabilities and the astronomical costs of trying to break into the A.I. market.

This settlement, while imperfect, may be a sign of how desperate Meta is to unload some of its legal liabilities in advance of a separate avalanche of more than 100,000 individual lawsuits from users who claim that the company's platforms were deliberately designed to be addictive and lack child safety protections. Courts have rolled those lawsuits into a bundle that could yield another global settlement.

As it stares down the barrel of those cases, its old legal arguments growing increasingly ineffective, Meta has agreed to make substantive changes to Facebook and Instagram. It entered into an agreement with attorneys general to limit teens to two hours of social media use a day, to block notifications at night and during school hours, to turn off algorithmic feeds and to ban beauty filters, among other changes. Parents will have the right to bypass or adjust the limits, finally giving them their first meaningful controls over their kids' accounts.

As much as I'd like to applaud any effort toward harm reduction, it's unlikely that just giving parents a few more knobs and buttons will lead to meaningful shifts in teen social media behavior.

For one thing, teens may find the new lim-

its easy to evade. When Australia banned children under the age of 16 from social media in December, many simply found ways to circumvent the ban by using virtual private networks that let them appear to be connecting from outside Australia and by setting up fake accounts. "A substantial proportion of Australian children under the age of 16 continue to retain accounts, create new accounts or pass platforms' age assurance systems," an Australian government report declared in March.

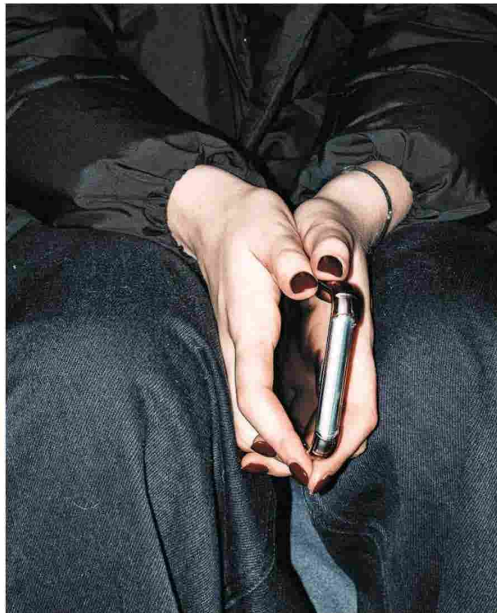
In the settlement, Meta has carefully avoided any accountability for teens who circumvent its limits. The company agreed to ensure that its tools for age assessment — virtual ID checks and face scans — have error rates lower than 10 percent. But Meta has agreed only to apply its "best efforts" to combat popular workarounds.

What's more, the settlement fails to address two of the most nefarious design choices in social media: the infinite scroll, or the endless unrolling of content to keep users hooked; and the variable rewards of other people's likes and comments that keep users refreshing their pages in the hopes of obtaining a new dopamine hit.

Indeed, Meta's changes do nothing to help adult users, who are also vulnerable to the manipulations of Big Tech. I get that it's politically popular to focus on protecting kids, whose brains are developing and therefore more vulnerable to manipulation, but there is ample evidence that social media harms many adults — particularly seniors who are getting scammed online at increasingly high rates, according to the F.B.I.

The focus on age verification is also dangerous to our ability to be anonymous online — a key freedom that we take for granted in the real world but have been too willing to give up in the virtual one. We would never agree to show our passport before reading a flier posted on a local bulletin board. So why are we doing the equivalent online? We live in an age when a Texas father married to an ICE protester can be sentenced to 30 years in prison for conspiring to conceal documents (he moved a box of home-printed magazines). We need the freedom to share and consume information without being surveilled.

While I am glad that Meta is creating some bare-bones safety features for kids, the far better option would be to make these platforms safe for everyone. We all benefit from seatbelts in cars, or hard hats in construction sites. Shouldn't we all be protected from Big Tech's predations, too?



RAF AL MILACH/MAGNUM PHOTOS

OPINION

The Big A.I. Build-Out Is Endangering the Economy

Robin Wigglesworth

The editor of The Financial Times's finance blog Alphaville and the author of the forthcoming book "A Fabulous Debt: The Epic Story of How Bonds Built the Modern World."

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 prognostications of either an A.I.-powered economic miracle or an A.I.-generated "jobsmageddon." 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.

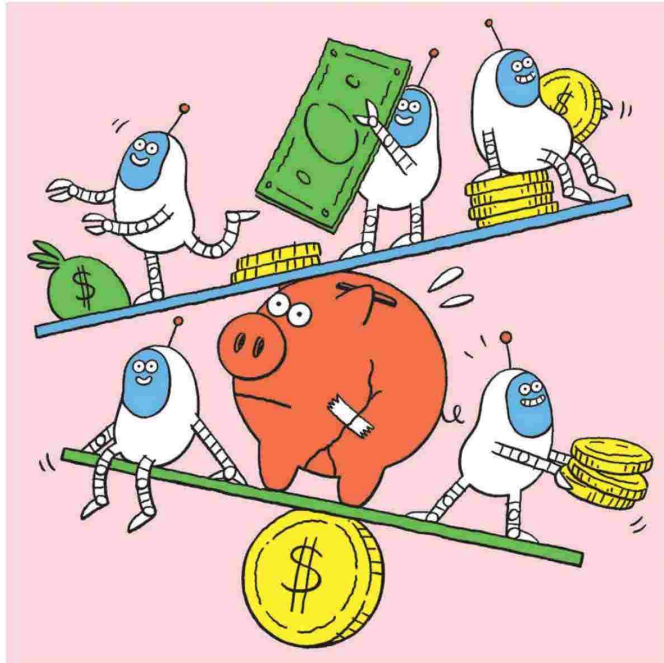
Why has debt become so central to A.I.? Previously, most investments in data centers and related infrastructure were paid for by the abundant cash flows generated by the likes of Facebook or Google Search. But large-scale A.I. models depend on immense computing power. And the resulting scope of the investments 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 industry insiders.

Last year, analysts at Barclays, the British bank, collected a string of uncorrelated 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 bonkers."

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



NADINE RIETVELD

Manias that are fueled by credit almost inevitably end badly.

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 the almost \$1 trillion a year. It also would, in relative 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 bankers, we are now entering the territory of bankers squared — or perhaps even bankers 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 the 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 finan-

cially creative and are increasingly keeping the debt off their books by structuring 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 Meta's balance sheet — even though it is in practice on the hook for making these future lease payments.

Goldman Sachs analysts recently tallied \$1.5 trillion in aggregate lease commitments by the A.I. hyperscalers. Of this, about \$1 trillion is associated with leases that haven't even started yet, which means that even the individual lease payments barely appear in public disclosures, even if the debt they are associated with will result in often unavoidable costs in the future. As Goldman blandly noted: "This treatment can understate leverage and future liquidity needs as these obligations are eventually recognized and contractual payments come due." Then there is another estimated \$1.5 trillion of "purchase commitments" — promises to buy chips and electricity. Those promises don't appear on balance sheets either.

Adding to the dangers, the A.I. ecosystem has become remarkably incestuous, with a wildly complicated tangle of business, investment and lending relationships tying most of the companies together. Even idiosyncratic problems in one corner could easily ripple across the whole industry.

Already there are a few hints that bond market investors — who are far more adept at sniffing out potential trouble than the more blithe equity investors — are getting antsy. Investors are starting to buy insurance to protect them if the hyperscalers go bankrupt. Based on the current cost of this insurance, investors still think these A.I. companies are good for the money, but the mere existence of such insurance for the likes of Alphabet or Microsoft would have been virtually unthinkable just two years ago.

At the peak of the 1870s railway mania, one American financier is said to have quipped that "no railroad has ever been placed on a paying basis until it has been through a receivership." Perhaps the same will be said for the A.I. data centers now being constructed around the world.

That might leave us with cheap and abundant computing power — even many bankrupt railways proved a long-term boon — but in the short term, Americans would be left dealing with a painful economic setback. The crash that followed an epic railway bond bust of 1873 was long known as the Great Depression — until that label was usurped in the 1930s. Today, it is commonly called the "Long Depression," and is a testament to the dangers of even well-founded technology booms that come to rely too much on debt. And railroad tracks last much longer than chips.

Democratic Moderates Need to Do More Than This

Charlotte Alter

The author of "The Ones We've Been Waiting For: How a New Generation of Leaders Will Transform America."

SETH MOULTON was once supposed to be the face of the next generation of Democrats. A pugnaucious and energetic military veteran, he positioned himself as a moderate counterweight to the progressive left, an anti-establishment maverick bringing new energy from the middle of the ideological spectrum.

Now a six-term congressman, he's running for the Senate in Massachusetts's Sept. 1 primary against the incumbent, Ed Markey. It doesn't seem to be going well.

You'd think this would be Mr. Moulton's moment. Democratic voters are in an anti-incumbent, anti-establishment mood, and the disaster of Joe Biden in 2024 has made them increasingly nervous about aging candidates. Yet polls show Mr. Moulton losing by double digits to Mr. Markey, an 80-year-old who has been in Washington for half a century.

Mr. Moulton's bid exposes the dilemma of the center-left in a year when progressives seem to be notching win after win. Moderate Democrats must distinguish themselves from the left without antagonizing the energized Democratic base. They're struggling to articulate a message of change that isn't necessarily progressive change. And the 2024 fiasco has made it harder to argue that moderation is the only way to win elections.

Moderates are not "screaming that we want socialists," as Mr. Moulton pointed out to me in an interview. Instead, he said, "there's a whole bunch of Democrats saying, 'The party establishment is failing us.'" But progressive Democrats do have a clarity advantage: American voters know what they stand for, whether they like it or not. Center-left candidates tend to offer more pragmatic versions of progressive ideas or wily political strategies to achieve incremental change. This forces voters to make exhausting calculations about how to actually get things done.

The challenge is acute for Mr. Moulton, who is running in deep-blue Massachusetts. His strategy has been to cast his primary challenge against Mr. Markey as a contest of generations rather than ideas. "It's about whether you think the Schumer-Markey gerontocracy has been effective" at fighting President Trump, he said. "Or whether you think you need people who were maybe a little bit more energetic and capable at taking him and his cronies on."

Mr. Moulton has hewed closely to Mr.

Markey's positions on health care, housing and energy costs. "I'm not running against Senator Markey because I disagree with his policies," he said in an interview with The Boston Globe. Beyond pointing out that his opponent is old, his strongest critique seems to be that Mr. Markey hasn't made enough progress on these issues. But with endorsements from Senators Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren and a long track record of fighting for progressive causes, Mr. Markey is obviously the true progressive in the race; Mr. Moulton's campaign seems like Diet Coke trying to compete with Coca-Cola Classic.

From the start, Mr. Moulton should have talked boldly about a whole different set of issues that could define a strong alternative to the rising Democratic left.

Mr. Moulton's biggest idea is that new people are more important than big ideas.

He first got frustrated with the Washington elite while he was serving four tours of duty in Iraq, "living the consequences of terrible decisions made in Washington by people who were completely out of touch with what was going on on the ground," he said.

After leaving the Marines in 2008, Mr. Moulton got graduate degrees from Harvard, then was the managing director at a company developing a high-speed rail project connecting Houston and Dallas. In 2014 he ran for Congress as a 35-year-old insurgent, beating a nine-term incumbent.

Over the next 12 years in Congress, he cast himself as an outsider, taking on older Democrats he felt had been in Washington for too long. After Democrats won the House in the 2018 midterms, Mr. Moulton helped lead the campaign against Nancy Pelosi for speaker. (She was overwhelmingly elected speaker anyway.) He was among the first prominent Democrats to call for Mr. Biden to drop out of the 2024 race, and Mr. Moulton has vowed not to vote for Chuck Schumer to be Senate majority leader.

It's always been clear what Mr. Moulton is against: the geriatric Washington establishment, the inertia of incumbency, whichever older happens to be in charge. But he's been so busy fighting the establishment, he hasn't explained precisely what he was fighting for. Mr. Moulton is part of the moderate New Democrat caucus, and his voting record puts him on the right flank of the largely progressive Massachusetts delegation of Democrats. He had some success as kingmaker of the center-left, using his PAC to elevate next-generation congressional candidates.

Lately, Mr. Moulton has tried to drift where he thinks the political winds are blowing. He insists he is not a centrist. "I would not use



HAYUN JIANG/THE NEW YORK TIMES

that term," he told me. "But I am able to work across the aisle."

"Seth is not a progressive, but he's trying to campaign as one and redefining it," said Mary Anne Marsh, a longtime Massachusetts Democratic strategist.

So I asked him: What does his campaign stand for, besides a new generation of leadership?

"Well, I mean, it's a new generation of ideas," he said. Even though he and Mr. Markey have many of the same goals, Mr. Moulton argued that he is more pragmatic. Mr. Markey is running on Medicare for all, while Mr. Moulton favors an expanded public health care option. The housing crisis in Massachusetts, Mr. Moulton said, means that "obviously, whatever Senator Markey has been doing or not doing with regards to housing hasn't worked." He said that expanded rail transit could improve housing affordability and that Mr. Markey's proposed transportation plan is out of the "1910s."

Seth Moulton's sagging campaign in Massachusetts demonstrates the party's challenges.

None of this is particularly new or inspiring.

In fairness, if Mr. Moulton were running in a purple state, we might be talking about him as one of this year's frontline Democratic champions. But Mr. Moulton must run against an incumbent in the Massachusetts Democratic primary, and he has chosen to walk a tricky tightrope — progressive, just not that progressive.

As the "Mad Men" protagonist Don Draper once said, "If you don't like what is being said, change the conversation." While progressives have benefited from a decade of beating the drum against corporate donations and for Medicare for all, their strength can also be weakness: Some voters may be sick of having the same old health care conversation. Mr. Moulton's problem is that he has not changed the conversation enough.

This is doubly frustrating because buried on his website is material on a different set of issues that could offer voters a more compelling alternative than: Like Markey, but young. His promise to invest \$205 billion in a nationwide high-speed rail network. His plan to ban cellphones in school nationwide. His pledge to tax social media companies and use the proceeds to invest in public spaces and youth organizations. His proposal to regulate artificial intelligence to protect personal data, preserve American jobs and penalize A.I. companies that feed dangerous content to kids.

These smart ideas could be the foundation of a center-left agenda that offers a real contrast to the progressive left. They could even coalesce into a coherent vision of a pro-human, pro-community and anti-Big Tech future.

Too bad Mr. Moulton barely mentions them.

True, Mr. Moulton could still pull off an upset. Recent polling misses in the Michigan and Wisconsin Democratic primaries significantly overestimated progressive support and underestimated the kinds of moderate voters who would provide his narrow path to victory. Even if Mr. Moulton loses, the center-left will still have some juice. If Democrats win back the Senate this year, it will be thanks to candidates such as James Talano in Texas, Roy Cooper in North Carolina and Mary Peltola in Alaska.

But if candidates like these take anything away from Mr. Moulton's 12-year career of punching the establishment, it should be this: It's not enough to just fight against the status quo. Voters need to see what you're fighting for, too.

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EDITORIALS

World Business Chicago's latest messaging conveniently dovetails with Johnson's reelection case

At the turn of the century, Mayor Richard M. Daley created World Business Chicago, a nonprofit public-private entity funded mainly by corporate donations. Its purpose was to market Chicago to outside business people, investors and even young, talented workers from elsewhere as a place to grow and invest.

In the years since, WBC largely has stuck to this important mission.

So it's disturbing to see the agency appearing to be acting as a tool of Mayor Brandon Johnson's as-yet undeclared reelection campaign as the mayoral election nears and targeting its messages to those already here.

At issue are a series of promotional spots, which began running on social and streaming media earlier this month, that feature the mayor narrating his "strategic investments in every neighborhood." "We've invested over \$6 billion of economic activity in every corner of the city," the mayor claims in each of the spots, which use essentially the same text but lay out statistics applying to various parts of Chicago such as the South Side, the Northwest Side and the West Side.

"Let's keep building better together," the mayor concludes after a series of still shots of Johnson in economic-development settings. One is a groundbreaking, another is Johnson wearing a hard hat at a construction site — you get the idea.

Who is the target of that last message? Clearly, it's those who already live here.

And vote here.

The interestingly timed promotional campaign caught the attention of state Rep. Curtis J. Tarver II, who represents a South Side district and has been critical of Johnson's dealings with Springfield. He dispatched a letter, dated Aug. 25, to WBC CEO Philip Clement asking for detailed information on costs of the campaign, the intended audience and coordination if any with the mayor's office, among other requests.

The new marketing campaign's timing, Tarver noted in his letter, "adds to the sensitivity."

The release of what look and sound just like political ads just as Johnson's campaign is circulating petitions to put him on the ballot "raise(s) legitimate questions about whether the communications could be perceived as political promotion or create the appearance of a potential conflict of interest, depending on who requested and approved them, how they were funded, and how and where they were distributed," Tarver wrote.

We agree.

World Business Chicago's revenue in 2024 was \$9.8 million, \$8.6 million of which came from grants and contributions, according to the filing it made to the Internal Revenue Service in that year to justify its nonprofit status. The



SCOTT STANTIS/SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE



State Rep. Curtis Tarver II speaks on the House floor on the final night of the spring legislative session at the State Capitol on June 1 in Springfield. JOHN J. KIM/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

city and state provide a portion of WBC's funding; Tarver references \$1.5 million in the state budget for the fiscal year that ended June 30, 2026, and another \$1.35 million for the current fiscal year.

But the majority of the WBC resources come from donations made by corporate Chicago, which has a vested interest in promoting the city as a good place to do business but isn't generally supportive of this mayor, who after all regularly disparages Chicago's largest employers for opposing his call to tax them based on how many people they employ in the city.

Johnson likes to make unflattering reference to what he calls "the corporate caucus" of the City Council, which he does not intend as a term of endearment.

While the mayor always chairs WBC and appoints the CEO, its credibility depends on being above politics as much as possible. Yes, an appropriate role of the mayor is to be a cheerleader for

Chicago as a business destination. But this messaging to our minds crosses the line and sounds more like a call to endorse his policies and above all continue them.

When we asked them to respond, WBC said in a statement, "Promoting Chicago's economy and highlighting the billions of dollars in investment happening across the city is core to World Business Chicago's mission."

"Mayor Johnson, as the city's elected leader, is an appropriate spokesperson, alongside the business, civic, community and entrepreneurial leaders who are featured across World Business Chicago's content platform," WBC added.

Johnson had just \$631,000 in his campaign fund as of the end of June. At the same point in her ultimately unsuccessful campaign for reelection in 2023, his predecessor Lori Lightfoot had \$2.5 million.

Illinois Secretary of State Alexi Giannoulias, who has

announced a run for Chicago mayor even as he's running for reelection to his current office, had more than \$20 million in his campaign kitty as of June 30.

In other words, this mayor, should he choose to run, can use every bit of free messaging help he can find.

At the time Johnson appointed Clement as World Business Chicago CEO in 2024, we said that in that moment of post-pandemic torpor for Chicago's economy WBC also should make the case to unconfident Chicagoans themselves in addition to outsiders about this city's virtues.

We stand by our words back then, but timing is everything in life. In politics. And in economic development.

Two-plus years later, Chicago's economic stagnation isn't a byproduct of a pandemic. COVID-19 is no longer an excuse for our lagging performance. The lack of confidence in the city's prospects comes far more from poor fiscal management (not to mention constant anti-business rhetoric from the mayor) that makes job creators wonder how much their taxes will soar in the future if they invest here.

Yet growing Chicago's pie is crucial to providing economic opportunity for more city residents and improving the fiscal fortunes of a city government facing yawning budget deficits every year.

WBC's principal mission now is to turn up the oven and help the dough rise.

It is certainly not to dispense campaign advertisements designed to get those who already live and work here to endorse the status quo.

Quotes of the week

"Dolly opened doors not just for me, but for her entire family to reach the potential we didn't even know was possible. Dolly also opened doors for generations of singers, songwriters, musicians, and dreamers from every walk of life and across every continent. By her example, we believed that anything was possible. She never saw a door she couldn't open, and the doors she opened made and changed history."

BRYAN SEAVER, in tribute to his aunt Dolly Parton

"What a funny, sexy, original he was. But what I loved about him most was his heart. Even wheelchair bound he continued to be so sweet and generous with his fans. Thank you Tim for meaning so much to so many people. Love you, S"

SUSAN SARANDON, in tribute to Tim Curry, her "Rocky Horror Picture Show" costar

"Local governments need to learn to do more with less, particularly in these precarious economic times. And taxpayers need to vote. Residential taxes in the north and northwest suburbs increased at pace more than triple that of the inflation rate."

COOK COUNTY TREASURER MARIA PAPPAS

"You're at war when you get attacked. We got attacked."

CANADIAN PRIME MINISTER MARK CARNEY, in reference to the Trump administration's tariffs

"I'm starting to realize life's too short to try to build in places that people don't appreciate what you're bringing"

BUC-EE'S CO-FOUNDER ARCH "BEAVER" APLIN III, explaining his philosophy on choosing states in which to expand

Why Illinois should not let elected officials hold multiple public offices

A favorite topic among Chicago mayoral candidates is to dog anyone running for two offices at once. Everyone knows who they mean this time around: Alexi Giannoulias, who is running for mayor of Chicago and secretary of state simultaneously.

Hedging your bets is one thing. But what of elected officials who actually hold two separate offices at the same time? Wouldn't that be even more problematic?

Yes, And Illinois is riddled with such examples.

First up, Harry Benton.

The disgraced former state representative held his job as a state lawmaker while also serving as the Wheatland Township highway commissioner, a job from which he has not yet resigned, despite the township board passing a resolution in July calling on him to step down. This one's particularly interesting, because as Township Supervisor Michael Crowner said in an email to us, the board can't remove him. Benton earned \$72,000 a year, with health benefits, in this post. His pay

as a state lawmaker was about \$96,000. Benton resigned his post in the General Assembly in July amid allegations of sexual misconduct.

Speaking of state lawmakers who moonlight as local officials, we can't leave off Thaddeus Jones, mayor of Calumet City and a Democratic state lawmaker. After concerns were raised about some of Jones' spending habits, WGN Investigates this April reviewed his Calumet City credit card transaction history, and alleged, among other things, a total of more than \$35,000 spent at restaurants, including Chicago Cut Steakhouse and Hooters. Records also showed he paid over \$17,000 for a trip to Washington, D.C., as well as excursions to Las Vegas, Miami and Colorado Springs, Colorado. Jones brings in about \$225,000 in salary from his two elected offices.

There's also state Rep. Brad Stephens, R-Rosemont, who is also the mayor of his hometown, a position he has held since 2007. He succeeded his father, Donald, who held the post for nearly 50

years, during which time he faced two federal trials for bribery and fraud, and was acquitted both times. Still, Rosemont has a long history of corruption allegations and controversies.

We cannot forget Tiffany Henyard. The former embattled mayor of Dolton and Thornton Township supervisor may have packed up and headed to Fulton County, Georgia, but for many years she held two taxpayer-funded jobs here. To say that didn't go well is an understatement. Unofficially dubbed "the worst mayor in America," she faced plenty of scrutiny during her tenure in Illinois, including an FBI investigation examining allegations of financial mismanagement and possible misuse of public funds. She spent lavishly on travel and questionable contracts, and took her village's general fund from a \$5.6 million surplus in April 2022 to a \$3.6 million deficit by May 2024, according to an investigation headed by former Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot.

See the trend?

We smell a correlation between how many public offices a person holds and his or her proximity to trouble.

It's hard to see how state lawmakers, especially, can reasonably hold two public posts at the same time. Yes, it's technically a part-time gig, but the pay is not and neither is the workload. Not to mention that state lawmakers preside over decisions such as how to distribute funds to local governments.

Illinois already has some rules around what types of roles public officials can hold simultaneously, with limits such as mayors not being able to hold other offices in the same municipality. Judges are barred from holding multiple offices while on the bench.

The guiding principle in these rules is incompatibility: If holding two public offices presents an insurmountable conflict, no can do. Quite right too.

But to our minds in Illinois, there are plenty of incompatibilities that the current rules do not catch.

OPINION

How Chicago's housing policies can better support public safety

By Jens Ludwig
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

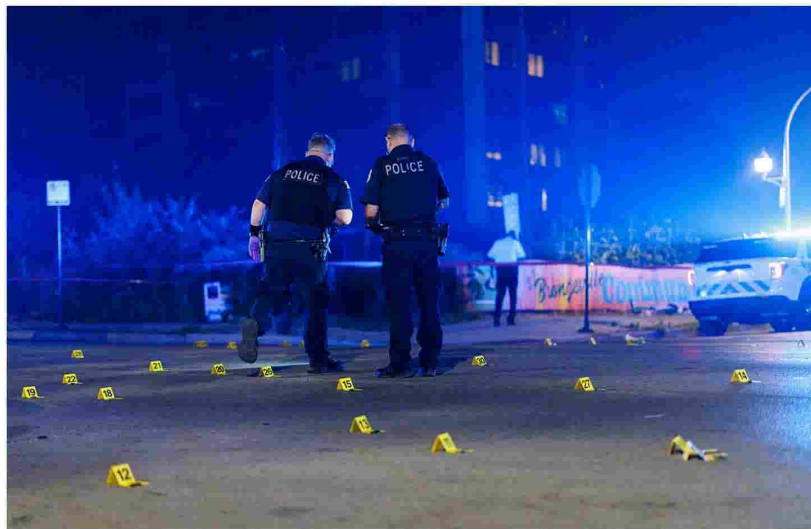
We have a mayoral election coming up. Whoever runs the city next will have little money to throw at solving the top concern of Chicago voters: gun violence. In a recent op-ed, my team at the University of Chicago Crime Lab outlined four ideas that would cost little and together could cut the city's number of shootings by up to half. Here's another idea: Reorient Chicago's housing policies to better support public safety.

American housing policy for the poor is guided by two quite natural intuitions. The first is that housing is expensive. The second is that there are many families with low incomes, year after year, that will struggle to afford a place to live.

The result has been housing policies that give people benefits that are very generous by the standards of U.S. social policy (the average housing voucher subsidy in Chicago is nearly \$15,000 per year), to solve the problem of how expensive housing is. And to solve the problem of many families being persistently poor, these vouchers, unlike social programs such as the state-run Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, aren't time-limited; people can keep them for as long as their incomes are low enough. Plus, federal rules require cities to prioritize housing help for the poorest families.

There's been some debate about whether this is the best way to help low-income Americans with their housing. Given the limited housing dollars, nationwide only around 1 in 4 poor families get any help with their housing. We could in principle give each low-income family a smaller subsidy in order to give help to a much larger share of the poor.

But I want to focus on a different concern with the current approach. The biggest housing programs, such as vouchers, don't seem to do much to improve public safety. We could — perhaps counterintuitively — get more public safety benefit by focusing a larger share of housing dollars on short-term help to people who aren't necessarily the poorest of the poor, or the persistently poor, but instead are suffering from



Chicago police officers work the scene where four people were shot near the 5100 block of South Calumet Avenue in the Washington Park neighborhood on July 16. **ARMANDO L. SANCHEZ/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

more time-limited budget problems.

For example, research by the Lab for Economic Opportunities at the University of Notre Dame looked at what happened with people who received assistance several years ago from Chicago's Homelessness Prevention Call Center. The HPCC helped people suffering from "a significant but temporary crisis" make rent and keep their utilities on, for example.

The result? People going through an unemployment spell, divorce or short-term cash crunch caused by an unexpected expense or emergency were prevented from becoming homeless, and the rate at which people were arrested for a violent crime fell by fully 51%. The lesson is that being doubled up by living on someone else's couch or living in a tent on the street exposes people to situations in which violence is much more likely.

A second example is with victims of domestic violence, which surged during the pandemic here in Chicago. Help with housing is one of the top needs of domestic violence victims. The fear is that many women stay with abusive partners for lack of anywhere else they can afford to go. Fast-turnaround, temporary housing assistance may allow many more women to escape from dangerous situations more quickly. Changing the balance of our housing dollars a bit and better connecting housing programs to other social service entry points that work with domestic violence victims could potentially save many lives.

For example, our research team at the University of Chicago linked data from medical records with police records and found that there are subtle signals in medical data such as X-ray images that doctors and nurses miss but that indicate domestic violence victim-

ization — that is, these subtle signals help predict whether someone will go on to report domestic violence to the police in the near future. Having social workers in the emergency room connect victims to short-term housing help is just one example of a low-cost way to potentially save many lives.

The problem isn't that we're not doing any of this right now, but rather that we don't seem to be doing nearly enough of it. For example, statewide, there seems to be a shortage of tens of thousands of shelter beds plus other sorts of short-term housing help for people all across Illinois. Here in Chicago specifically, we are seeing a growing number of calls by people to 211 for quick turn-around help to avoid homelessness. While federal rules impose real constraints on how much we can repurpose federal dollars, Chicago does have some extra flexibility given that we're one of

the cities that's a Department of Housing and Urban Development "Moving to Work" program site.

A city drowning in money would have lots of options for reducing gun violence. But Chicago is not drowning in money right now, nor are we likely to suffer from that problem anytime soon. We need to be thinking of concrete, actionable, evidence-based ways to get more public safety from existing city dollars — including, as I argue here, getting more of a public-safety double dividend from our housing programs.

Jens Ludwig is the Edwin A. and Betty L. Bergman distinguished service professor at the University of Chicago, Pritzker director of the University of Chicago Crime Lab, an elected member of the National Academy of Medicine and author of "Unforgiving Places: The Unexpected Origins of American Gun Violence."

Netanyahu doesn't have to trust Hamas to accept peace

By John Aziz and Eli J. Finkel
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

The dilemma confronting Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu — whether to pursue peace with an adversary he loathes and distrusts — is hardly new. Since at least 1948, Israeli and Palestinian leaders have had to decide which risks are more tolerable: the risks of escalation or the risks of de-escalation.

Netanyahu's dilemma is also a remarkable opportunity, caused by Hamas' agreement to the Board of Peace's proposal for the militant group's phased disarmament, including its stated commitment to cease all military activity. Despite years of demanding such disarmament, Netanyahu has refused the deal.

No doubt that he has every reason to distrust Hamas, which remains unrepentant about the atrocities it perpetrated on Oct. 7, 2023. Hamas spokesman Ghazi Hamad promised in 2023 to repeat Oct. 7 "again and again" until Israel is annihilated. When asked in a recent interview if he would recant this threat, he declined to do so.

But accepting the current proposal would not rely on trusting Hamas. Under the Board of Peace road map, Israel would not have to withdraw from any area of Gaza until that area has been verified as free of weapons. According to the board's negotiator, Nikolay Mladenov, once that occurs, Israel will withdraw — and the International Stabilization Force, led by an American general, will move in to secure it. The process would then be repeated, sector by sector, until Hamas is completely disarmed and Israel has completely withdrawn from Gaza.

To be sure, Netanyahu would prefer that Hamas disarm completely throughout Gaza before Israel begins any withdrawal (just as Hamas would prefer that Israel withdraw completely before it begins any disarmament). But refusing the compromise is risky because it



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu casts his ballot in Jerusalem on Aug. 17 in his Likud party primary election ahead of Israel's general election in October. **OHAD ZWIGENBERG/AP, POOL**

can contribute to a narrative of intransigence. For decades now, Palestinians have been reminded: "Israel offered you peace before — at Camp David — and Yasser Arafat walked away. Why should we take you seriously as a peace partner?"

Whether or not one finds this narrative credible — the Palestinian side of the argument is that the deals on the table were not sufficient for a viable state — it has become an Israeli cudgel against taking any further risks for peace.

Netanyahu now risks gifting Hamas a similar weapon. If Netanyahu refuses the Board of Peace deal, then Hamas can say: "We offered Israel disarmament — the thing they claimed they wanted. They refused. Now why should we offer to disarm again in the future?"

With Israel's international reputation cratering, it can ill afford to give Hamas this public relations coup.

Rather than seeking to end

the conflict through a negotiated resolution — as Israeli leaders such as Yitzhak Rabin, Ehud Barak and Ehud Olmert tried — Netanyahu has been widely seen instead as having sought to manage the conflict by focusing on security measures and ratcheting up pressure on Palestinians through military occupation and settlement construction. After Oct. 7, however, the notion that this conflict can be managed in its tatters.

In geopolitical conflict, every behavior tilts the conflict in the direction of peace or in the direction of war. The consequences of any given behavior may be small and probabilistic, but the general trajectory — toward peace or toward more war — matters.

As accurately depicted in "The Brink of War," a new movie about the 1986 nuclear summit in Reykjavik, both Mikhail Gorbachev (Jared Harris) and Ronald Reagan (Jeff Daniels) surprised each other with ambitious and gener-

ous offers toward denuclearization. That summit closed without a deal, but the bold steps the two leaders took in the direction of peace paved the way for the landmark Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty the following year.

The Israel-Hamas conflict is a graveyard of missed opportunities. The leaders who rejected opportunities for peace in the past contributed, in their own small way, to the horrors endured by Israelis and Palestinians in recent years. Arafat's rejection of the opportunity available at Camp David in 2000 increased the risk of future catastrophe for Palestinians. Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's failure to seriously pursue the Arab Peace Initiative in 2002 increased the risk of future catastrophe for Israelis.

For Netanyahu, giving Hamas a chance to disarm in exchange for reciprocally returning Gaza to the Palestinian people would be a meaningful step in the direction of

peace, one that is likely to reduce the odds of another Oct. 7.

Nothing is guaranteed, of course, and military hawks can always offer internally coherent arguments for why the risks of de-escalation are too great. What such arguments tend to discount are the risks of refusing to de-escalate.

The status quo is horrific. The death and carnage in Gaza since 2023 beggars comprehension, and human decency requires that the Palestinian people have an opportunity to return to a more humane existence. Meanwhile, Hamas remains the dominant — and well-armed — governing faction in Gaza.

It takes tremendous courage for a leader to stand up to the most hawkish voices on their own side, as Gorbachev and Reagan were willing to do in Reykjavik. And this is a moment for courage: From Israel's perspective, it is self-defeating to refuse a deal that holds real potential not only to disarm Hamas but also to push Israelis and Palestinians in the direction of peace, dignity and self-determination for both peoples.

Accepting the deal entails risk. But so does refusing it — and Israelis and Palestinians have already learned the terrible cost of believing that the status quo is the safer choice.

Peace does not require Netanyahu to trust Hamas. This proposal requires something harder and more realistic: that each side take a verifiable step. And then another.

For decades, Israeli and Palestinian leaders have had to choose between the risks of escalation and the risks of de-escalation. Netanyahu now faces that choice himself. The greater risk is standing still.

John Aziz is a writer, analyst and peace advocate. Eli J. Finkel is a professor at Northwestern University and founding co-director of the Litowitz Center for Enlightened Disagreement.

OPINION

In Cook County, politics are being pursued, not justice

By Otis Moss III,
Michael Pfleger, Seth Limmer
and Ciera Bates-Chamberlain
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

On a recent Monday morning, in a courtroom in Bridgeview, Nakia Smith pleaded guilty to a felony. His crime: walking into the Calumet District police station on East 111th Street carrying a gun he intended to hand over to police. One of his workers had found the weapon cleaning out a property, and Smith — who has spent the 13 years since his release from prison mentoring young people, tending community gardens in Roseland and volunteering with the anti-violence organization Chicago CRED — did what we tell our neighbors to do. He turned the gun in to the authorities.

For that, Smith was arrested, spent seven months in Cook County Jail, wore an ankle monitor and, facing six to 30 years in prison in the event of a conviction, accepted a deal. He pleaded guilty, accepted “time served” and went home.

Some will see this outcome, a deal for time served, as mercy. Look closer: A man whose only intention was to protect public safety now carries a fresh felony conviction — because the price of insisting on his innocence at trial was the risk of dying in prison. That is not mercy. Neither is it justice. Instead, this is the machine working as designed.

The overwhelming majority of criminal cases in this country never reach a jury; they end in pleas, and the decision to plead out turns less on truth than on what a defendant can afford to risk. There is an old saying in our neighborhoods, and the Smith case once more proved it true: You are better off being guilty and rich than poor and innocent.

The Book of Deuteronomy, sacred to the traditions we serve, lays out a divine blueprint for the justice system. Judges must “show no partiality” and take no bribe, “for bribes blind the eyes of the discerning.” Those empowered by the system must “hear out low and high alike,” and should harbor neither fear nor awe for any party.

Most importantly, Deuteronomy charges: “Justice, justice shall you pursue.” Scripture does not repeat itself idly. Justice named twice is justice that must be the same twice over — the same on the North Shore as in Roseland, the same for the defendant in a tailored suit as for the one in a work coat. A court that weighs ZIP code, income and complexion has already accepted a bribe; it has collected payment in something other than cash.



Cook County State's Attorney Eileen O'Neill Burke presents a progress report on her first year in office at a City Club of Chicago luncheon on Dec. 2, 2025. E. JASON WAMBSGANS/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

A man whose only intention was to protect public safety now carries a fresh felony conviction — because the price of insisting on his innocence at trial was the risk of dying in prison. That is not mercy. Neither is it justice. Instead, this is the machine working as designed.

Consider other cases. Ivy Kelly has insisted for more than two decades that he is innocent of the 1999 killing of the man he called his best friend. After an appeals court found his trial flawed, prosecutors offered him immediate freedom — if he would confess. He refused to buy liberty with a lie, so this 51-year-old man sits today in a maximum security division of Cook County Jail, punished for telling the truth.

And consider Jaime Rios, convicted at 20 of a 1989 murder after being investigated by Reynaldo Guevara, the disgraced now-former detective accused of framing dozens of Chicagoans. Rios spent 17 years in prison; in February, a federal jury awarded him \$750,000 — roughly \$44,000 per stolen year. The detective

whose misconduct put him there collects a pension of more than \$91,000 a year. In this country, framing a man pays better, annually, than having been framed.

Remuneration is becoming rarer. Whereas the previous state's attorney's office objected to about 1 in 4 certificates of innocence sought by the exonerated, the current office fights 4 out of 5, forcing people who already lost decades to spend months more proving what judges have already found.

Two years ago in these pages, after current State's Attorney Eileen O'Neill Burke won her primary by fewer than 1,600 votes, we wrote about the puzzle of her candidacy — a promise to preserve reform wrapped in tough-on-crime packaging.

The puzzle has been answered.

Detention requests are up, and the jail holds hundreds more people than before she took office. The exonerated are contested. Kelly waits. And Smith, warrior for peace, is a felon once more. From our perspective, it seems as if politics are being pursued, not justice.

We do not write to condemn one official; we write because Deuteronomy commands the whole community to pursue justice. In Chicago, pursuit of justice today means correction. Correction, in this case, is not complicated. It does not require new courts or new laws to begin, only a change of practice by the people already empowered to act.

So let the state's attorney remember that prosecutorial discretion exists precisely for cases such as these. The law that charged Smith as an armed habitual criminal did not require that charge; a prosecutor chose it, and a prosecutor could as easily have not chosen it. The same is true regarding Kelly: Nothing in the statute forces the office to keep contesting a case an appellate court has already called into doubt, nor to

treat a refusal to falsely confess as evidence of danger. Let our justice system cease fighting the innocent and the honest alike, and let mercy become policy rather than an accident that depends on the political proclivities of a prosecutor.

May we pursue justice doubled: the same for rich and poor, the same for low and high, so that the doubling Deuteronomy commands are no longer just words we read but a practice our county lives. May we protect those who do good rather than prosecute them. May we tell the truth about our courts, and having told it, repair them.

And may the day come soon when doing right in Cook County costs nothing at all.

Chicago faith leaders Rabbi Seth Limmer, the Rev. Otis Moss III, the Rev. Ciera Bates-Chamberlain and the Rev. Michael Pfleger joined the Tribune's opinion section in summer 2022 for a series of columns on potential solutions to Chicago's chronic gun violence problem. The column continues on an occasional basis.

Voice of the People

Answers for northwest Indiana

For about two weeks, families across northwest Indiana endured extraordinary hardships. Homes went dark. Food spoiled. Businesses and schools were disrupted. Thousands of our neighbors waited day after day for their power to return.

I know something of that experience. My own power was out for 10 days.

The Aug. 11 storm was catastrophic. We should recognize the magnitude of the damage and thank the line workers, first responders, municipal employees, volunteers and neighbors who have worked tirelessly throughout this recovery.

Nearly two weeks without power is simply too long.

Gov. Mike Braun has called for an investigation into NIPSCO's preparation for and response to this disaster. I not only support that investigation but have asked Braun to expand it and ensure ratepayers in Northwest Indiana are protected. The people of northwest Indiana deserve clear answers and resolutions.

Our engagement on utility issues did not begin with this storm. In April, I participated in discussions with the Indiana Utility Regulatory Commission in Gary as residents raised concerns about utility costs, reliability and accountability. Those questions matter even more today.

We need to know how prepared our system was, whether vegetation and rights of way were adequately maintained, and whether infrastructure and reliability investments paid for by ratepayers delivered what was promised.

I have also spoken with the chair of the Indiana Senate Utilities Committee about what we can learn from this catastrophe and what measures we should examine when the Indiana General Assembly reconvenes, to make our communities better prepared for the next major storm.

I do not want to prejudice those answers. I want us to find them.

And when the final home is

reconnected, our work cannot end. We owe northwest Indiana more than restored power. We owe our people answers, accountability and a better prepared system for whatever comes next.

— Indiana state Sen. Mark Spencer, D-Gary

Campaigns' social media videos

When I was running for mayor, one of our more successful social media endeavors involved me eating shrimp. A video at Haire's Gulf Shrimp at 75th and Vincennes — a great, family-run small business — drew hundreds of thousands of views.

People started asking me a pretty reasonable question: Why the hell are you doing this? Aren't you running for mayor?

The answer was that I wanted to show the more human side of a campaign — a normal Chicago guy celebrating some of Chicago's best food. I wanted to highlight a great small business. And, of course, I wanted to build followership.

Because if someone followed me for the shrimp, maybe the next day they'd see a video about why it takes too long to get a business license. Or housing. Or public safety. Or the city's finances.

That's the needle politicians everywhere are trying to thread. The best political content looks and feels like regular social media, but it also informs, educates or persuades people about something of substance.

There's nothing wrong with that. Politics could use a little more personality and joy. Not every interaction with someone running for office needs to be a six-minute explanation of pension liabilities. If a video gets someone who normally couldn't care less about local government to pay attention, you might bring them into the conversation.

The problem comes when attention becomes the whole point — or when campaigns blur the line between political advertising and organic content.

Campaigns are increasingly working with paid influencers who have built audiences of their

own. Paying a creator to reach an audience isn't inherently more sinister than paying for a television commercial, but there is an important difference.

When you see a campaign ad, you know it's a campaign ad. When a creator you follow suddenly starts praising a candidate, you may have no idea if they mean it or if they're getting paid.

The fix is pretty simple. If political content is paid for, it should be disclosed clearly. Illinois should also make those payments easy for voters to find.

Social media can show you Chicago. It can't replace Chicago.

So I encourage candidates to make the videos. Have some fun. Bring more people into the conversation. Just be transparent about who's paying for what, have something worthwhile to say — and don't forget to put the phone down and go meet the people you're asking to represent.

— Liam Stanton, Chicago

Get to work, Mayor Johnson

Our mayor is spending time and energy issuing executive orders versus spending time and energy on real issues: why it costs three times as much as one suburb to remove lead pipes, underfunded pension plans, police overtime levels, the CTA and school funding.

While Brandon Johnson's executive orders are legal (unlike many of the president's), they are not doing much to make Chicagoans' lives better.

Get to work, Mr. Mayor.

— Lee Berenbaum, Chicago

DNR's handling of lake water

The Aug. 27 editorial about the suburban challenge to Chicago's monopoly on Lake Michigan water fails to mention one fact (“A suburban challenge to Chicago's monopoly on Lake Michigan water makes major waves”). The Illinois Department of Natural Resources is responsible for the allocation of Lake Michigan water under the Level of Lake Michigan Act, and the DNR has not been serving the public interest for

decades. The suburban frustration with Chicago is a direct result of DNR's mismanagement of our precious resource.

Each year, as much as 25 billion gallons of water are lost through leaking, aged water mains in numerous municipalities because the DNR hasn't enforced its own rules for water conservation.

— Dick Lanyon, Evanston

Actions to take for the climate

The orange haze that has blanketed the Chicago skyline over recent summers is a stark reminder that climate disasters do not carry passports. Record-breaking wildfires across Canada have turned our shared air into a seasonal public health crisis, triggering frequent air quality alerts and aggravating health conditions for thousands of local residents.

This cross-border crisis presents a powerful, urgent opportunity for shared American action. The science is simple. A warming planet dries out our landscapes, stretching fire seasons into year-round threats.

We are not helpless spectators. By aggressively cutting carbon emissions right here in the U.S., we can directly prevent these wildfires from getting worse on both sides of the border. Shifting rapidly toward clean energy and tightening emission standards directly cool the global climate engine driving these mega-fires.

Without urgent action to curb rising temperatures, wildfires will continue to spiral out of control. The catastrophic summers we endure today will become the norm tomorrow and a future that nobody wants to live in.

Readers can call or email their representatives and urge support for clean energy subsidies, carbon pricing and stricter industrial emission limits.

— Joseph Reitmeyer, Mount Prospect

Blown tires at O'Hare, Midway

In the month of August, at least four jets at O'Hare International Airport and one at Midway International Airport have sustained blown tires. My absolute amateur opinion is that the runways and taxiways may suffer from the same malady affecting our highways.

I drive on the Kennedy and the Edens expressways frequently, and since the spring, the pavement has been horrible; it's like driving on rumble strips for miles. I have been driving for over 50 years and have never experienced these conditions.

I have wondered if it may have a negative impact on my tires, too.

— Paula J. Schneiderman, Chicago

Parents' conflict over vaccines

Thank you to Dr. Barbara Hendrickson for her letter regarding vaccines in the Aug. 26 edition (“Why vaccinating kids matters”). As a nurse, I was aware of some of the complications of a measles infection. I was not aware of the continued risk to immunity or subacute sclerosing panencephalitis. Parents want to do their best to protect their children, but mistrust and false information regarding vaccines that have been provided for decades are leaving parents conflicted. The decision regarding vaccine administration should be between the parents and their pediatrician/medical provider.

— Patricia Bonk, Midlothian

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.

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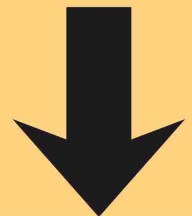
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