



Marshland trap

India must address its concerns about Pakistan's activities with care

Alluding to intelligence reports of Pakistan's heavy military activity in areas adjoining Sir Creek, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh has warned Pakistan against any adventurism. Mr. Singh's statement that "a route to Karachi passes through Sir Creek" is both puzzling and disconcerting, considering the lingering tensions and the absence of diplomacy between India and Pakistan. His remarks drew a parallel with the 1965 India-Pakistan war, when the Indian Army advanced to the outskirts of Lahore. Sir Creek is an uninhabited, largely inaccessible marshland between Gujarat and Sindh in Pakistan, with a complex web of waterways and shifting tidal patterns. It remains a dispute between the two countries. Navigation is extremely challenging and requires expert knowledge of the terrain. On the Indian side, the estuarine region is already under layered security, with the Border Security Force, the Indian Army, the Indian Coast Guard and the Indian Air Force maintaining a strong presence. India considers the area as vital for oil and gas exploration as well as fishing rights. India's major ports, Mundra and Kandla, located in the Gulf of Kutch, are also in close vicinity. Large-scale ground operations are nearly impossible in the region, which lacks roads, a civilian population and administrative infrastructure. However, during Operation Sindoor, Pakistan attempted to strike military infrastructure with close to 400 drones across 36 locations from Leh to Sir Creek. Indian forces neutralised many of them, but it perhaps signalled the expansion of the front between the two countries.

Strategically, opening a front here is disadvantageous for both sides, but conflicts often do not follow reason or logic. Mr. Singh, who was in Kutch to celebrate Vijayadashami with soldiers, had been scheduled to visit Sir Creek but could not due to adverse weather. Addressing troops at the Bhuj military base, he reiterated India's consistent position to resolve the issue through dialogue. He said Pakistan's intentions remain unclear, and went on to say that "any aggression by Pakistan in the Sir Creek area will be met with a resounding response that will change both history and geography". Adding to India's security concerns are Chinese-backed mining and power projects in the Pakistani part of the Rann of Kutch, near Gujarat. These projects, India fears, could evolve into a strategic-military challenge, if leveraged jointly by Beijing and Islamabad. Considering the volatility in geopolitical situations in many corners of the world, India must tread with care and wisdom. Strategy should be disconnected from domestic politics. New Delhi must do everything under its command – but first, diplomacy – to address its security concerns.

Japan's Iron Lady

Takaichi is a polarising figure leading a fractious coalition

Even before she faces a parliament vote to become Japan's first woman Prime Minister, Sanae Takaichi has set a record as the first woman to lead Japan's dominant Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). After defeating her more centrist rival Shinjiro Koizumi in party elections on Friday, Ms. Takaichi, a 64-year-old protégée of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, is seen as a socially conservative right-winger. If she wins the parliamentary vote, as expected, she faces more difficult challenges than breaking the decades-old glass ceiling. To begin with, Ms. Takaichi is the latest in a series of Japanese Prime Ministers ousted from office, even as the LDP and its partner Komeito have lost majorities in both houses, and will need to lead a fractious coalition by reaching out to the opposition. Her predecessor Shigeru Ishiba stepped down after the LDP lost its majority, after serving for less than a year. It remains to be seen how Ms. Takaichi, who has spoken of her admiration for former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, is able to emulate the "Iron Lady's" successes in holding the party and government together. While clearly the most popular party leader at the moment, she is a polarising politician who is known for strong views against immigration, and in favour of revising Japan's pacifist constitution. She does not project a feminist agenda and has been criticised for refusing to review archaic Japanese laws on married women keeping surnames or on the more contentious issue of female succession in Japanese royalty. The second challenge is geopolitical – Japan's public confidence in the United States has been shaken by the Trump administration's actions, including driving a hard bargain on the Free Trade Agreement. Ms. Takaichi is a hardliner on China, which could put her on a collision course with Beijing. Her rise has also been seen with some concern in South Korea, which had begun to warm up to Japan, as her visits to the Yasukuni shrine to venerate Japanese war heroes, and her tough line against war reparations, may be a red flag. Finally, Ms. Takaichi, a former Economic Security Minister, will have to contend with Japan's long-term economic challenges and demographic decline.

In India, her win will be largely seen positively, given her association with Shinzo Abe, whose tenures saw rapid improvements in India-Japan ties. The government will seek to continue its cooperation on many fronts, especially in technology and critical mineral processing. Above all, amidst uncertainty over the Quad summit and Mr. Trump's commitment to the Indo-Pacific policy, New Delhi will hope to see a strong leader in Tokyo, who will help shore up the geopolitical turbulence that the region now faces.

Shortly before the second anniversary of Hamas's attack on Israel (October 7, 2023), United States President Donald Trump unveiled his 20-point plan for a Gaza ceasefire. Hamas has reacted positively but has indicated that it will need to renegotiate parts of the plan. This has set the cat among the pigeons. Mr. Trump has hailed this as an opportunity to bring peace to West Asia while Israel is unhappy with the conditions attached to Hamas' acceptance. Scepticism over progress on the plan is understandable given what happened in January this year when the ceasefire that was negotiated by U.S. Special Envoy Steve Witkoff, which was detailed, sequenced and agreed to by both sides, was torn up unilaterally by Israel after the first step. But this time around, all the major players, including Mr. Trump, want this plan to succeed as a last chance for peace in Gaza – except perhaps the Israel government.

In a nutshell

The 20 points include everything that the U.S. would like to see happen in Gaza in the foreseeable future; and, no, the Palestinian state is not one of them. The plan is at best a statement of intentions on how to end the Gaza war and bring normalcy to Palestinians in their destroyed land – and at worst, an instrument of surrender.

Except for one solitary timeline, where Israeli hostages would be released by Hamas within 72 hours of the ceasefire, everything else needs fleshing out to become a road map. The details of what should be done by the Palestinian side are spelt out – hostages (release within 72 hours); Hamas (disarm and/or quit Gaza); Palestinian Authority (reform or perish); governance of Gaza (deradicalisation, demilitarisation and technocrats' rule under an International Board of Peace headed by Mr. Trump), and security (international destabilisation force in Gaza). However, there are a few details of Israeli obligations (when does fighting stop), territory (how much will remain with Israel and till what time), and the future role of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) (no timelines for withdrawal from Gaza). Of course, the plan is silent on the West Bank.

The plan is designed to capitalise on the war fatigue of the Palestinians and pressure Hamas. Whether one agrees with its content or not, it covers aspects relating to security, economic development, governance and international involvement. Ethnic cleansing of Gaza has been ruled out. An international stabilisation force could be a positive factor if the mandate is clear and regional and the other players involved play a committed role. Israel will get its security with a demilitarised Gaza and a disarmed and deradicalised Hamas.

Unfortunately, a lack of clarity on timelines



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The plan can be seen in two ways — as a statement of intentions on how to end the Gaza war, or an instrument of surrender

and sequencing converts the framework into a mere statement of disjointed intentions rather than a credible pathway for withdrawal of Israel from Gaza and restoring normalcy. It is not even a full ceasefire deal since, under the plan, fighting can continue side by side with the implementation. This is what Hamas has serious reservations about. This infirmity could be fatal if the U.S. and major regional players do not do the heavy lifting *vis-à-vis* Israel. This is why Mr. Trump's call to Israel to stop the bombing of Gaza is important. Of course, it is not as if Israel has listened to the U.S. now or in the past.

To state the obvious, the focus of the plan has been on the release of all Israeli hostages, dead or alive, since Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been under tremendous domestic pressure to get them released. Once that is done within 72 hours of the ceasefire, the only arbiters of Palestinian destiny become the U.S. and Israel, which is incidentally the reality now. Every progress, or the lack of, by the Palestinians towards fulfilling the conditionalities will be decided by these two. There is no monitoring mechanism.

Further, while the release of 250 Palestinian life prisoners and 1,700 Palestinian detainees in exchange for Israeli hostages is welcome, with the revolving door policy of Israel to arrest, imprison and release Palestinians at will, this stipulation in the plan may not have any practical value on the ground. To get a sense of this equation, at least 18,000 Palestinians have been arrested by Israel only in the West Bank since October 7, 2023.

Burden shifts to Hamas, the Palestinians

Given the above, this plan removes the international pressure on Israel on its daily killings in Gaza, by shifting the burden of stopping the war to the implementation of the plan by Hamas and the Palestinians. If they are seen not to implement it, then Israel's continued presence in Gaza is legitimised and its continued attacks will be justified. When Mr. Netanyahu has declared that the IDF will remain in Gaza, entrusting Israel to decide on its exit from Gaza is a non-starter.

Effectively, the plan puts governance and security under international control through its Board of Peace and International Stabilization Force. This can be a potential stop-gap arrangement provided the regional players remain committed and, where necessary, not hesitate to use their clout with the U.S. to stop Israeli violations. So far, the involvement of the Gulf countries in the Gaza war has been minimal since they have given priority to diminishing the threat of Iran and its proxies, which Israel helped them achieve. They are equally reluctant to compromise their larger interests in the region i.e., the Abraham Accords, their military ties with

the U.S. and a newfound Syrian bonhomie, on the altar of an elusive two-state solution.

Once Gaza comes under international control, the plan does not chart out any pathway to elections or to a representative governance structure except a possible reformed Palestinian Authority's role sometime in the future. Ironically, the last legislative elections in the occupied territories, in 2006, were won by Hamas, which secured 44.45% of the vote share and 74 out of 132 seats, while Fatah won 41.43% and 45 seats. This led to a division in the Palestinian leadership and the eventual disconnect between Gaza and the West Bank. Now, the plan envisages a technocratic committee with 'Palestinian and international experts', with municipal jurisdiction working under international governance and a security framework, directly under Mr. Trump. Hamas had agreed to step aside from the governance of Gaza and to a Palestinian technocratic committee. But under this plan, the Palestinians will not control their future. Hamas has called this unacceptable and said that a decision on governance should be taken by broader Palestinian consensus in which Hamas will also participate.

More a reshaped 'Riviera' plan

The self-styled 'Trump' economic plan is possibly a rehash of the idea to make a 'Riviera' out of the Gaza seafloor and build 'modern miracle cities' to pull 2.3 million Palestinians in Gaza out of poverty, while thousands in the West Bank are being uprooted from their cities, land and livelihood and driven to poverty.

Earlier, one had argued that process usually trumped substance for negotiating a Palestinian state. This time there is not even a process except a solitary reference to self-determination in the plan which, both the U.S. and Israel know, is a point so distant that it may never be reached. Mr. Netanyahu has sworn never to concede a Palestinian state. His far-right partners have sworn to annex the West Bank this year. Therefore, it is no surprise that the plan does not base itself on international law or United Nations Security Council resolutions or even the recent International Court of Justice judgment on the 1967 borders to establish a Palestinian state. In fact, it goes in the opposite direction.

Consequently, how long will the ceasefire hold after the exchange of hostages? If it does not, how much capital will the U.S. and Gulf players spend to restrain Israel from further attacks? The larger question of the Palestine state has been set aside – as it has been time and again. The rapidly changing ground realities in the West Bank, with marauding Israeli settlement construction and eviction of Palestinians from their land, is now out of the syllabus.

Treat employment as a national priority

India is the most populous and also one of the youngest countries. Estimates by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) suggest that over the next 25 years, India will add around 133 million people to its working-age population (15-64 years), which is close to 18% of the total incremental global workforce. However, India has a short window to leverage this demographic dividend, as the worker population is expected to peak around 2043.

Employment generation is critical for equity and inclusion. Quality jobs at scale can lift millions out of poverty, reduce regional and social disparities, and ensure a more even distribution of growth benefits. Generating jobs is also vital for growth and resilience. In a consumption-driven economy such as India's, broadening consumption through good quality jobs accelerates and stabilises growth.

Focus on long-term job creation

Employment must, therefore, be treated as a national priority. This requires consistent growth policies that encourage steady investment and long-term job creation, rather than fragmented or short-term approaches. Despite central and State governments initiatives, from skill development to social security, India still lacks a unified national framework that comprehensively addresses employment and livelihoods.

Job creation requires interventions on both demand and supply sides of the labour market. Demand is driven by economic and sectoral growth, while supply is influenced by skills, mobility and societal norms. Without bridging these gaps, policy impact will remain limited. A particular concern is the employability of graduates. College curricula need focused reviews to make graduates job ready, supplemented with skilling programmes that are aligned to industry and emerging sectors.

To address these challenges, an Integrated National Employment Policy is of urgent need. This should consolidate existing schemes and align diverse initiatives. It must be developed in coordination with States, key Ministries, and



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India still lacks a unified national framework that addresses the issue of employment and livelihoods

industry. Governance could be overseen by an Empowered Group of Secretaries, with implementation led by District Planning Committees that understand local challenges.

The policy must define time-bound goals, identify high-employment-potential sectors and align trade, industrial, education and labour policies to maximise job creation. It should also tackle labour market frictions, regional disparities and barriers faced by women and marginalised groups, while ensuring that skilling incorporates technologies such as Artificial Intelligence and robotics.

Another challenge is the mismatch between the availability of people and jobs. The Centre and States must work together on migration policies and support systems that promote mobility constructively, without letting politics become a barrier. Building "One India" for employment mobility will be critical.

Timely implementation of the four Labour Codes must also be prioritised and clear transition guidelines and advisory support for businesses will be essential.

Sectors to zero in on

Job creation efforts must focus on labour-intensive sectors such as textiles, tourism, agro-processing, real estate, and health care. The Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises sector, which already employs over 25 crore people, requires a comprehensive support strategy covering access to finance, technology, skilling, and markets to generate "growth with jobs". To address urban job distress, an urban employment guarantee programme could be piloted in select cities.

A major opportunity lies in the expanding gig economy, which employs between 80 lakh and 1.8 crore workers and could grow to 9 crore by 2030. With participation spreading into Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities, it holds enormous potential for job creation and formalisation. A national policy for the gig economy can help unlock this potential.

The policy should promote sector growth

while ensuring worker protection through skilling, finance and social security. A centralised registry could enable seamless onboarding, preserve work histories and reduce entry barriers. Fair contracts, safety standards and grievance redress must also be ensured. With the right institutional and regulatory support, the gig economy can become a cornerstone of India's inclusive workforce.

Beyond numbers, improving job quality through better wages, safer conditions, and social security is vital. Affordable housing near industrial hubs can improve mobility and quality of life. Regionally balanced employment can be promoted through targeted interventions in 100 most underdeveloped districts, rural internships for graduates, and remote work and BPOs in towns. Enhancing female labour force participation should be another priority. This requires incentives under the Employment-Linked Incentive (ELI) scheme, formalisation of Anganwadi and Accredited Social Health Activist roles, investment in childcare and eldercare, and campaigns to address societal norms restricting women's work.

Need for employment data

Finally, high-quality, real-time employment data is critical. A dedicated task force could strengthen methodologies, expand coverage to the informal and rural workforce, and reduce the lag between data collection and publication.

With coordinated reforms, targeted investments, and an inclusive national employment strategy, India can fundamentally transform its employment landscape. Doing so is not only essential to unlocking its demographic dividend, but also central to achieving equitable, resilient, and sustained growth.

These employment-focused measures also tie in with the broader reform agenda that CII has laid out in its recent Report on Policies for a Competitive India. Employment generation, as emphasised in this article, is an integral part of that wider vision of building a competitive India and achieving Viksit Bharat by 2047.

Writing by hand

In this digital age, the warmth and personal touch of handwritten letters and notes are quietly fading into oblivion. Once a cherished way to communicate, today's generation has nothing to do with it due to the availability of social media and electronic

communication. Electronic messages are robotic and non-emotional communication ('Open page', October 5).

Rudra Beniwal, Sangaria, Rajasthan

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

India’s direction for disaster resilience

In India, a vast, multi-hazard country, a multi-faceted approach is essential to deal with heat-related issues and extreme rainfall events. The Home Ministry (MHA) and the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) oversee not only the post-disaster, but also the pre-disaster phases, using the Prime Minister’s Ten Point Agenda on Disaster Risk Reduction of 2016 as guiding principles.

Disaster risk reduction
In 2021, the 15th Finance Commission adopted a nuanced approach to disaster risk reduction (DRR), aligning public finances with technological and practical advances, and allocated ₹2.28 lakh crore (\$30 billion) over its five-year term. It broadened the focus from just post-disaster relief to include prevention, mitigation, preparedness, capacity building, and post-disaster reconstruction. Previously, the financial gap for reconstruction was filled through multilateral debt instruments.

The Commission allocated 30% for the first segment, divided between preparedness and capacity building (10%) and mitigation (20%). The rest was assigned to the post-disaster phase, split into response (40%) and reconstruction (30%).

In establishing the process chain from budget-to-project for nature-based DRR, five priority areas were identified: evaluating the scale of and prioritising India’s multi-hazard challenges; integrating scientific concepts of mitigation and reconstruction into public finance; avoiding duplication with existing programmes; synergising inter-ministerial, institutional, and Centre-State relationships in developing such programmes; and establishing processes for light-touch regulation.

In the last year of the award of the Commission, the procedures and standards for design and the manner of expense for such programmes have been established. Inter-ministerial,



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cross-institutional and Centre-State appraisal committees are in place for all hazard- or region-specific projects. Over the past two years, the MHA has approved the first five reconstruction project packages worth about ₹5,000 crore for Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Assam and Kerala. Work is underway to conduct scientific assessments of damage and loss caused by extreme precipitation in the current monsoon.

For the pre-disaster phase, much of the preparedness and capacity-building funds were allocated to modernising fire safety (₹5,000 crore). Additionally, two specialised groups of 2.5 lakh volunteers, Apda Mitra and Yuva Apda Mitra, were created. Some capacity-building funds will now be directed towards establishing geo-spatial training labs and expanding faculty-led, action-based research at the National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM). Strengthening NIDM’s three core objectives of training, research, and documentation, a standard course covering 36 streams of disaster management has been initiated. The aim of capacity building is to mainstream the subject and its practical application to each panchayat.

For the 20% window allocated for mitigation, the best scientists, academicians, and numerous public servants were consulted to develop innovative projects. In the past year, projects worth ₹10,000 crore (\$1.2 billion) have been approved and are being implemented across States. They aim to prioritise neglected nature-based solutions as long-term responses to climate change and extreme weather events. As precursor to these forward-looking mitigation programmes, the National Cyclone Mitigation Programme (2011-22) worth ₹5,000 crore had already succeeded in reducing vulnerability of coastal communities to cyclones across eight States. Key infrastructure

built included seven-day early warning systems, cyclone shelters, and embankments.

Under these mitigation programmes, the NDMA urges States and urban authorities to revitalise water bodies and green spaces to mitigate urban floods; use remote sensing and site-specific automated weather stations to assess the size of at-risk glacial lakes continually; stress bio-engineering solutions for slope-stabilisation in landslide prevention in high-risk zones; rejuvenate water bodies called beels along the Brahmaputra; and focus on break lines, water body rejuvenation and fuel evacuation to prevent forest fires.

Over the years, the government has also developed advanced early warning systems for various hazards, which have significantly reduced casualties. The multi-media Common Alerting Protocol ensures timely alerts in regional languages. To enhance community capacities, initiatives such as a 327-member network of universities and institutional support from the NIDM are crucial. The NDRF Academy, the National Fire Service College, and NIDM train hundreds of public servants annually, in the science of hazards and policy. Mock exercises are carried out to promote hazard- and region-specific awareness, while school safety programmes educate children and distribute resources.

International coordination
International coordination is crucial in shaping how much India will learn from and teach the world. In the face of unrelenting climate change, India created the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure and leads DRR-related initiatives at the G-20, SCO, BIMSTEC, and IORA. On advice from public and private entities, and academic and scientific institutions, India is successfully preparing to de-risk its complex hazard profile through innovative and sustainable nature-based solutions.

India is leveraging scientific advancements to prioritise nature-based solutions through public finance

Bengaluru in gridlock

Complaints about infrastructure have come up amid an administrative overhaul

STATE OF PLAY

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The tech industry in Bengaluru is once again upset about the city’s crumbling roads, chronic traffic congestion, and infrastructure gaps.

The recent monsoon rains have worsened the situation, leaving the roads full of potholes. Commuting in the city is such a Herculean task that in September, the CEO of a logistics firm located on the Outer Ring Road (ORR), a majorly congested 17-kilometre tech corridor of the city, announced plans to relocate.

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister and Bengaluru Development Minister D.K. Shivakumar promised to set things right, but also asked the industry not to “blackmail the government”. The statement drew so much ire that it forced Chief Minister Siddaramaiah to step in and control the damage. The CEO then clarified that the firm was relocating out of ORR and not out of Bengaluru.

The focus is now on easing congestion on the ORR. A ‘Namma Metro’ line on ORR – a 58.19-km-long Blue Line between Silk Board and the airport – is expected to be completed by December 2027 and provide some relief in the long term. However, its ongoing construction has only aggravated the situation. Also, companies have instructed employees to return to offices, compounding the problem.

In a desperate bid to ease congestion, Mr. Siddaramaiah wrote to Wipro founder Azim Premji, requesting him to open a link road through the company’s campus to allow limited traffic. He cited a Benga-

luru Traffic Police study that said opening the road would reduce congestion on ORR by 38% during peak hours. Mr. Premji turned down the request.

The Chief Minister’s unusual request illustrates the problem of Bengaluru’s tech corridor. The exponential growth of the city, led by market forces, was unplanned. The government has been playing catch-up with infrastructure for decades now. The ORR and the areas around it are only partially serviced by piped water, a sewerage network, and metro trains. The road network in these areas is sparse. Data from the Brand Bengaluru Committee show that the density of the road network in planned core city areas such as Jayanagar and Vijaynagar is over 25 km/sqkm, while it is as low as 8 km/sqkm in Whitefield, the heart of the tech corridor in the city. Areas along the tech corridor (ORR) have very low road density. Retrofitting these areas with new roads and a robust public mass transit system can solve the problem, but land acquisition costs have deterred the government from developing new roads.

Mr. Shivakumar has been on a mission to add to the road network of the city – a 40-km twin tunnel project cutting across the city, a 67-km Peripheral Ring Road, a 114 km Elevated Corridor project,

which includes grade separators at 17 key locations, and 300-km of roads in the buffer zones of stormwater drains. Metro stretches and double decker flyovers are also being planned. All of these will cost over ₹1 lakh crore, which will be funded through loans.

However, civic activists and transport experts have protested against these big-ticket projects. They have raised doubts over their feasibility and argued for investments in public transport instead. The Bengaluru Suburban Rail Project has, for instance, failed to take off and seems to be stuck in a turf war between the Centre and the State.

Bengaluru has always suffered from unplanned growth and piecemeal planning along with a lopsided preference to develop infrastructure for private transport. Now, with Bengaluru’s governance structure revamped with the new Greater Bengaluru Governance Act, 2024, the city has the opportunity to course-correct. Under the new law, all the parastatal agencies working in the city have, for the first time, been brought on one platform under the Chief Minister. This will make holistic planning and coordinated implementation possible in real terms for the first time. The city’s erstwhile civic body has been divided into five; this will hopefully take civic governance nearer to citizens. The Revised Master Plan-2041 is also being prepared, although after a delay of more than a decade.

However, as things stand today, the city cannot start afresh on a clean slate, since projects worth over ₹1 lakh crore remain pending. This essentially means that citizens will have to put up with more dug up roads in the immediate future.

Telangana tops States in UPI transaction intensity: RBI paper

Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Delhi and Maharashtra also recorded high UPI usage intensity

DATA POINT

The Hindu Data Team

The usage intensity of Unified Payments Interface (UPI) transactions – measured in per capita volume terms – is highest in Telangana among all the States, according to a recent paper published in the Reserve Bank of India’s bulletin. The study used PhonePe transaction data as a proxy to assess UPI intensity. Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Delhi and Maharashtra also recorded high UPI usage intensity.

The rise of UPI is likely a major factor driving the decline in cash demand in the economy, the paper notes. This shift is evident in the steady fall in ATM cash withdrawals as a percentage of GDP (Chart 1). The growing use of UPI for low-value, everyday transactions is reflected in the rising share of peer-to-merchant (P2M) payments, while the average value of a single UPI transaction – or the ‘ticket size’ – has been declining over time (Chart 2). The bulk of peer-to-merchant (P2M) transactions by volume fall within the sub-₹500 value range (Chart 3).

The RBI paper used data from PhonePe – a payment service that accounts for 58% of total UPI transaction volume (Chart 4) and 53% of the total transaction value (Chart 5). As noted earlier, UPI usage intensity is highest in several southern and western States, and in Delhi. The paper attributes this to the presence of urban centres, economic hubs, and high levels of employment-driven migration in these regions.

Cash withdrawal intensity remains higher in many northeastern States, as well as in Kerala and Goa. Delhi features on this list too. According to the paper, this could be due to factors such as tourism and service-led cash usage, remittance inflows, the continued cash dependence of rural areas, and limited digital infrastructure.

Digital dominance

The charts were sourced from an article published in the Reserve Bank of India’s September 2025 bulletin titled, ‘Impact of UPI on Cash Demand – Evidence from National and Subnational Levels,’ authored by Sakshi Awasthy and Subrat Kumar Seet. Data were taken from the RBI, the National Payments Corporation of India, and the National Statistics Office



Chart 1: The number of cash withdrawals in India as a share of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (in %)

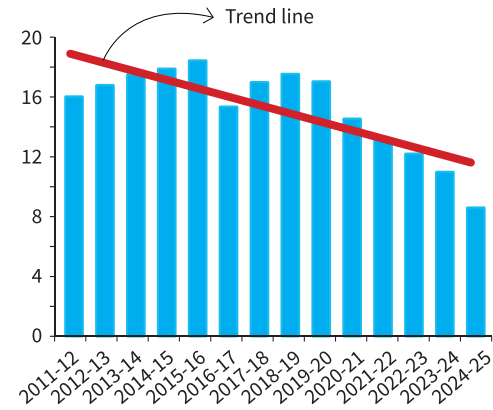


Chart 2: The number of P2P and P2M transactions (in billion, left axis). The average value of a single UPI transaction or the ‘ticket size’ (in ₹, right axis)

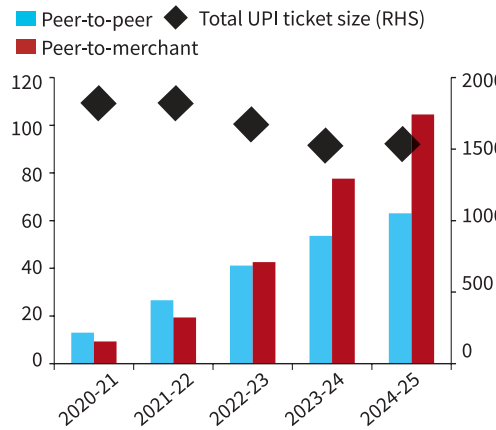


Chart 5: The chart shows the ticket-wise UPI value bands. Inner and outer circles pertain to P2M and P2P transactions, respectively

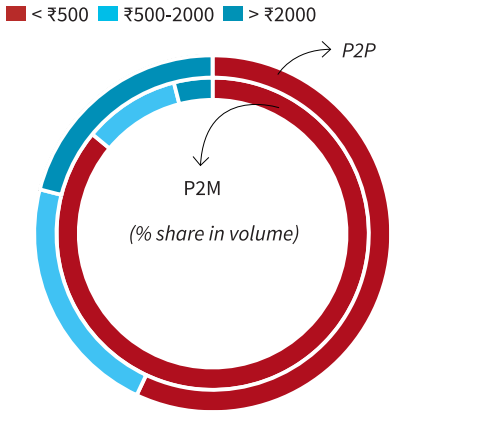


Chart 3: The share (in %, right axis) of PhonePe transactions in the total UPI transaction volume over time (in crore, left axis)

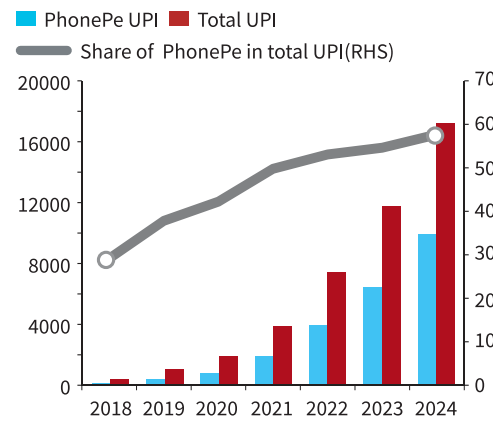
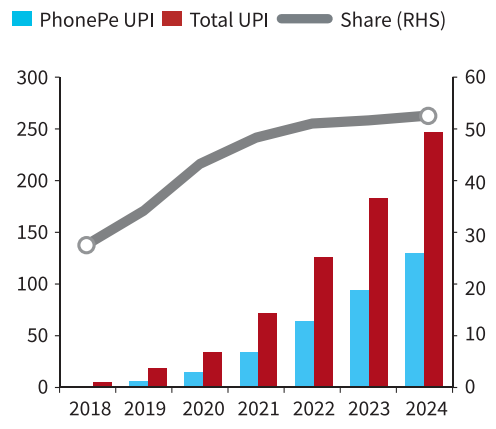
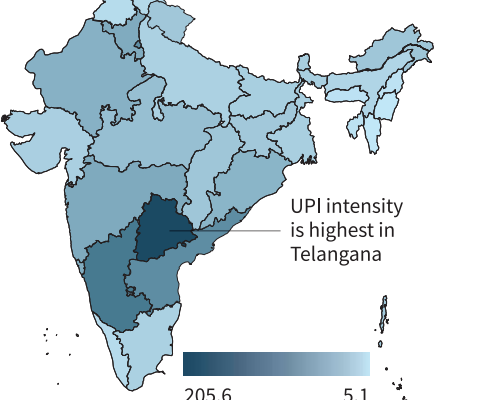


Chart 4: The share (in %, right axis) of PhonePe transaction amounts in total UPI transactions amounts over time (in ₹ lakh crore, left axis)



Map 6: State-wise UPI volume intensity per capita in FY 2024-25 (proxied by PhonePe transactions)



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu.

FIFTY YEARS AGO OCTOBER 6, 1975

New measures planned against smugglers

New Delhi, Oct. 5: New legislative and administrative measures to deal more effectively with smugglers, foreign exchange racketeers and holders of black money are on the anvil, it is officially stated.

These include confiscation of property if not accounted for as earned through legal sources, setting up of special courts for trying economic offences, amendment of the Passports Act to enable the cancellation or impounding of passports of suspected persons and barring of the writ jurisdiction of the Supreme Court and High Courts in revenue matters.

The President issued an Ordinance on July 1 amending the Conservation of Foreign Exchange and Prevention of Smuggling Activities Act 1974 suspending the fundamental rights of the smugglers. As a result 10 men who had been released by the courts were detained. These included Haji Mastan, Yusuf Patel and Sukur Narayan Bakhia.

Some administrative measures to book smugglers and other anti-social elements were also taken. These included implementation of comprehensive schemes for shore guards, mobile preventive parties wireless communication network to put into operation the confiscated launches for anti-smuggling work, supply of additional vehicles, and arms and ammunition. Other equipment like binoculars, walkie-talkie sets, gold detectors, tape recorders were provided to the staff for interception and investigation purposes. The intelligence set up was also geared up.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO OCTOBER 6, 1925

Telephone as alarm clock

How many of the hundreds of thousands of telephone subscribers throughout Great Britain are aware that they can use their local exchange as an alarm clock? The arrangement is simple. The telephone regulations prescribe that any subscriber who desires to be called early may make an appointment with his telephone exchange. All he has to do is to ring up the supervisor before retiring for the night and say, “Please call me at such and such a time in the morning.” At the appointed hour the telephone bell will be set ringing and it will be kept ringing until the subscriber replies or the operator gives up the job in despair.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Vietnam's highest growth in Q3 despite U.S. tariffs

8.2 in per cent. Finance Minister Nguyen Van Thang said the figure — excluding the surge in 2022 driven by a post-COVID recovery — was “the highest quarterly growth since 2011”, according to a government statement. AFP

Number of Palestinians displaced from Gaza city

9 in lakh. Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz said on Sunday that the military's offensive in Gaza City has displaced around 900,000 Palestinians. Before the start of the military assault, the UN estimated that roughly one million people lived in and around Gaza City. AFP

People evacuating in China ahead of typhoon landfall

3.47 Typhoon Matmo strengthened ahead of making landfall Sunday in China, prompting the government to evacuate some 347,000 people from the southern provinces of Guangdong and Hainan. PTI

Death toll in Nepal, Bengal in rain disasters

63 At least 43 people have died and five are missing, Shanti Mahat, spokeswoman for Nepal's National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority, said. Across the border, at least 20 people were killed in the hill district of Darjeeling. AFP

Passed Bills pending with the Tripura government, Governor

37 A senior Tipra Motha Party MLA on Sunday claimed that 37 Bills passed by the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council are pending with the State government and Governor. PTI
COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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Why is ADR crucial for India's courts?

What is Alternative Dispute Resolution and how does it work in India? How long does it take to resolve disputes? What legal provisions support ADR and its processes? How can they reduce delays and court pendency effectively? Which States have the highest backlog of cases?

LETTER&SPIRIT

C.B.P. Srivastava

The story so far:

The Minister of Law and Justice recently reaffirmed the government's commitment to legal reforms rooted in India's civilisational ethos. Citing the doctrine of Panch Parmeshwar, which embodies the principle of collective consensus in dispute resolution, Arjun Ram Meghwal emphasised the need for global cooperation to strengthen Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms. The India Justice Report 2025 highlights significant challenges in India's justice system, particularly including access, delays, and accountability. According to the National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG), the total number of pending cases in India is 4,57,96,239. In the Supreme Court, the number of pending cases is 81,768, and in the High Courts, it is approximately 62.9 lakh. These delays often result in injustice, increasing the focus on ADR as a faster, cost-effective, and socially inclusive way to deliver justice.

What is the constitutional basis of ADR?

The constitutional basis of ADR in India is enshrined in Article 39A, which mandates the state to provide equal justice and free legal aid. Various ADR processes, such as arbitration, conciliation, mediation, and judicial settlement (Lok Adalat), are recognised under Section 89 of the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908.

To regulate processes, these have been incorporated into law. For example, under the Arbitration and Conciliation Act 1996 (amended in 2021), civil and



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compoundable offences like theft, criminal trespass, and adultery are resolved through a binding award or resolution, respectively. The Arbitration Act, 2021, also mentions the establishment of an Indian Arbitration Council, giving legal backing to arbitration agreements.

The law fixes a maximum period of 180 days for dispute resolution, ensuring faster justice.

On many occasions, even after such a solution, if a party is dissatisfied, they can exit the process after two sessions of mediation. Pre-litigation mediation for resolving civil and commercial disputes will not increase the number of pending cases; it will also strengthen interpersonal relationships by increasing interaction at the social level.

How do Lok Adalats function?

Lok Adalats are governed by the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, inspired by Article 39A. Apart from Permanent Lok Adalat (Section 22-B of the Act), provisions of the National Lok Adalat and e-Lok Adalat are directly helpful in strengthening the justice system, provided awareness about such a system is made effective and widespread.

The first Lok Adalat in India was organised in Gujarat in 1999. The biggest feature of Lok Adalats is that their decisions shall be final and there is no possibility of appeal. This does not mean that the powers of these courts are absolute.

The reason for no appeal is that these courts resolve disputes before litigation. In order to prevent any possible

absoluteness, it is provided that the dissatisfied party can file a suit in a court.

Why is strengthening ADR crucial?

According to former Chief Justice of India Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, mediation is a tool for social change, where social norms are brought in line with constitutional values through the exchange of views and flow of information. Solutions arrived at through invaluable discussions during mediation ensure true justice for individuals and groups on their terms, in a language they understand, and provide a platform that protects their sentiments.

The India Justice Report also highlights inter-State disparities in terms of the backlog of cases. The report says that pending cases have exceeded five crore, and High Courts and district courts are facing vacancy rates of 33% and 21% respectively. Judges in Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Kerala have workloads exceeding 4,000 cases.

A substantial number of cases in High Courts and subordinate courts have been pending for over 10 years. The NJDG provides real-time data on case pendency and disposal, offering a comprehensive view of the judicial system's performance across States and courts.

The India Justice Report ranks States based on their performance on various aspects of the justice system, including case pendency, with other factors like court infrastructure and judge availability.

States like Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar have a considerable number of pending cases. This urgently demands rapid disposal and necessitates the strengthening of the ADR for effective per capita justice delivery.

C.B.P. Srivastava is President, Centre for Applied Research in Governance, Delhi

THE GIST

India's justice system faces significant challenges, including access, delays, and accountability, with over 4.57 crore pending cases, and High Courts and district courts experiencing heavy vacancy rates and workloads.

Strengthening Alternative Dispute Resolution is crucial to address inter-State disparities, reduce court pendency, and ensure true justice through pre-litigation resolution, mediation, and finality of Lok Adalat decisions.

What is the SC order on local polls in Maharashtra?

Why have elections not been held for several years? Has it affected governance? Who is running the show?

Girija Bhosale

The story so far:

The Supreme Court recently directed the Maharashtra State Election Commission to conduct elections of all local bodies by January 31, 2026. It also pulled up the Commission for not complying with its earlier order of May 6, directing it to notify the elections by September 6.

What are the reasons for the delay?

The continuous delay in conducting these elections is attributable not only to the pendency of the OBC (Other Backward Classes) reservation issue, but also the judicial delays, inconsistency, and lack of political will.

Today in Maharashtra, 29 Municipal Corporations, 248 Municipal Councils, along with hundreds of Nagar Panchayats, 32 out of 34 Zilla Parishads, 336 out of 351 Panchayat Samitis are run by administrators. While the biggest municipal corporation in India, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), with an annual budget of over ₹74,000 crore, has been functioning without corporators since March 2022, the newly formed Municipal Corporations in the State, at Jalna and Ichalkaranji,

await their corporators since their inception.

What is the issue around OBC reservation?

In 2010, the Supreme Court left it to the States to carry out a 'rigorous investigation' to decide which communities are 'politically backward' and should benefit from OBC reservation in local bodies. In March 2021, the apex court laid down a three-fold test to provide these reservations. As the State of Maharashtra failed to fulfil this test, in March 2022, the Banthia Commission was set up. It submitted its report in July 2022, which is currently under challenge before the Supreme Court. Meanwhile, the court ordered that States should carry out elections without the OBC quota if they fail to fulfil the criteria. Thus, the Commission conducted elections in 106 municipalities after relocating the OBC quota seats to the general category.

On May 6 this year, the apex court directed the State Election Commission to conduct elections with OBC reservation as existed prior to the 2022 Banthia Commission report. It reminded the Commission how local body elections are necessary for keeping democracy alive at the grassroots. While the Court's

sentiment for conducting elections is commendable, it does not absolve the Court from the delay it caused. It will also lead to inconsistent outcomes as the election of 106 municipalities has already taken place without the OBC reservation. Additionally, the current elections are also subject to the outcome of pending litigation, which can potentially disqualify the elected representatives.

Despite the above orders, the State Commission took no steps to conduct elections. It cited insufficient EVM machines, the school education board's examination and an insufficient number of officers to justify the non-compliance with the Court's order.

Is the delay impacting work?

Some may argue that the lack of having elected representatives at local bodies hasn't really harmed anyone, given that bureaucrats are anyway running them. However, in reality, the developmental engine in both urban and rural areas has taken a hit due to democratic damage of weakened local bodies. People do not have a political avenue to voice their concerns. The burden automatically falls on local MPs or MLAs or guardian ministers of the district who are not readily available.

On the other hand, the bureaucracy is not really designed to 'make' decisions, but rather to 'execute' them. It is an undue burden on administrators to care for political issues, which fundamentally is the mandate of elected leaders. Political accountability of bureaucracy is clearly missing.

Running the local bodies through bureaucrats is no different from running a State through its Governor. This reality ultimately results in ignorance of people's demands, pendency of larger policy issues, lack of local economic development, undue burden on bureaucrats and weakening of democratic institutions.

Recently, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis announced that all 29 Municipal Corporations shall be headed by IAS officers, owing to allegations of corruption and political interference. This move itself suggests that urban local bodies are difficult to handle, especially when there is a democratic void. The issue is not just about the absence of elected representatives for a few years in local bodies; rather, it is intentional ignorance of the words and mandate of the Constitution. Having a strong self-governance system at the local level, especially in villages, is a part of the law, after the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments. An independent election commission and smooth transfer of power are hallmarks of constitutional liberal democracy. While the New York Mayoral election gains worldwide attention, we should inquire into why the lack of having an elected local body for Mumbai is not causing a noteworthy discontent.

Girija Bhosale is a law graduate from NLSIU and worked as a law clerk at the Supreme Court

THE GIST

Maharashtra's local body elections are repeatedly delayed due to unresolved OBC reservation criteria, judicial delays, political inconsistency, and lack of political will, leaving most municipalities and Panchayati Raj institutions run by administrators instead of elected representatives.

The absence of elected bodies weakens grassroots democracy, burdens bureaucrats with political responsibilities, slows local development, and undermines constitutional self-governance despite the Supreme Court's directives and the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments.



ChatGPT, NVIDIA, and other global business giants are investing heavily in AI in India, with the India AI Mission aiming to build an ecosystem for trusted and inclusive AI; teachers and students use AI tools but ethical dilemmas and the digital divide challenge meaningful classroom interaction

Tech-savvy pedagogy

In contemporary India, teaching and learning are tangled in ethical twists and turns as teachers and students are increasingly inclined to AI. Integration of advanced technology and pedagogy is arguably a new age mantra for the technocratic management of education. A report of the Central Square Foundation that works with the Indian government said that about 70% of school teachers in India are tech-savvy. Teachers use AI solutions to design pedagogy and curricular content. This shall solicit a qualitative evaluation of AI literacy and

Unbridled AI in educational practices
Contrary to the euphoria, the uncritical embrace of AI threatens the philosophical foundations of teaching and learning. Philosophically, pedagogy entails a humanistic dialogue between the teacher and the student that fosters empathy and trust. The ideal pedagogues in the history of education emphasised the evolution of emancipatory understanding in the classroom. Whether it be the feminist pedagogue Bell Hooks in the contemporary world or Rabindranath Tagore in early modern India, they envisaged a pedagogic alchemy that inspired hermeneutic understanding. The ideal teachers ensured that education was not reduced to the accumulation of information. The educational philosophy solicits a natural and organic rather than singular AI smartness of the teacher and the taught.

India AI mission
India AI's mission envisages the opening of the AI Centres for Excellence (CoE) in education. The mission's pillars are India AI Compute Capacity, geared to establish the infrastructure to support AI innovation, and India AI Future Skills is

The mission's Application Development Initiative promises impactful AI solutions aimed at large-scale socio-economic transformation. Such promising aspects ought to be emboldened in a context-sensitive manner when it comes to the integration of AI with educational practices. Only then would AI not reproduce the social and digital inequalities through seemingly unquestionable smart pedagogy. Without adequate social, ethical, cultural, and political anchorage, AI may become an anathema defended in rhetoric and abused in practice.

Dev Nath Pathak, Associate Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences, South Asian University; Avantika Dharmani & Vibha S Bharadwaj, Young Scholars, Christ University, Bangalore

A quiz on interesting and rare happenings in the life of Mahatma Gandhi

Know your English

Word of the day

Synonyms: gloomy, sad, sullen

Usage: *She felt morose after missing the school trip.*

Pronunciation: newsth.live/morosepro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /məˈrʊs/

Philippines pioneers coral larvae cryobank to protect threatened reefs

The facility will freeze and preserve coral larvae — the small, free swimming ‘seeds’ of corals — at very low temperatures; these larvae can later be used to revive damaged reefs for research, thus protecting genetic diversity that might otherwise be lost. The project is part of an initiative that seeks to create cryobanks across the Coral Triangle

Neelanjana Rai

Known as the “Amazon of the seas,” the Coral Triangle is a 5.7 million sq. km expanse across the tropical waters of Indonesia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, the Solomon Islands, and Timor-Leste — and the richest marine ecosystem on the earth. The Triangle is home to more than three-quarters of the world’s coral species, a third of all reef fish, vast mangrove forests, and six of seven marine turtle species. It also sustains the food security and livelihoods of more than 120 million people. The Coral Triangle is also facing mounting dangers. Growing carbon emissions, destructive fishing, air, water, and soil pollution, and the accelerating effects of climate change are all driving coral bleaching, habitat loss, and species decline, placing both biodiversity and coastal communities at grave risk.

Dangerously exposed
According to the Status of Coral Reefs of the World 2020 report, the planet lost 14% of its corals between 2009 and 2018. Scientists have warned that without drastic action to keep global warming to 1.5° C, 70-90% of live coral cover could be lost by 2050. According to the UN Environment Programme, ocean temperatures may take decades to stabilise even under the most ambitious climate targets, leaving coral ecosystems dangerously exposed in the interim. In one form of resistance against these threats, the Philippines is preparing to host Southeast Asia’s first coral larvae cryobank to help restore and protect reefs. Set up by the University of the Philippines Marine Science Institute, the facility will freeze and preserve coral larvae — the small, free swimming “seeds” of corals — at very low temperatures. These larvae can later be used to revive damaged reefs or for research, thus protecting genetic diversity that might otherwise be lost. The project is part of a wider regional initiative that links research institutions in the Philippines, Taiwan, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand to create a network of cryobanks across the Coral Triangle. Led by Chiahsin Lin of Taiwan’s National Museum of Marine Biology and Aquarium and the National Dong Hwa University, the cryobank is supported by the Coral Research & Development Accelerator Platform through the Marine Environment and Resources Foundation, Inc.



A variety of corals form an outcrop on Flynn Reef, part of the Great Barrier Reef near Cairns, Australia. TOBY HUDSON (CC BY-SA)

Delicate process
Experts have said the programme is a significant step in building long-term resilience for one of the world’s most threatened marine ecosystems. “The Philippines is showing other nations how to take a direct, proactive role in fighting the climate crisis and protecting their natural resources. It’s an act of hope and a vital investment in our oceans’ future,” said Preeyanuch Thongpoo, who is working on cryopreservation in Thailand at the Phuket Rajabhat University. Dr. Lin is guiding the scientists from participating countries to establish the required facilities. At the heart of the effort is the delicate process that preserves coral larvae without damaging their fragile cells. A study published in *Frontiers* in 2023 described a technique called vitrification, where the larvae are exposed to special protective solutions before being plunged into liquid nitrogen at -196° C. The rapid freezing that ensues turns the larvae into a glass-like state, preventing the formation of ice crystals that would otherwise destroy them. To revive the samples, scientists use an equally swift method using lasers, which thaw the larvae in a fraction of a second to avoid re-crystallisation. Once warmed, the larvae are gradually rehydrated in seawater and checked for signs of life, such as swimming and settling, before being transferred to tanks for further growth. This breakthrough method ensures genetic material from corals can be safely stored for years and later used to help restore damaged reefs.



Cryopreservation is a genetic insurance policy for the future. We are essentially building a living seed bank of coral larvae and *Symbiodiniaceae*
PREEYANUCH THONGPOO
Phuket Rajabhat University

‘No endangered species’
Cryobanks of coral symbionts — microscopic algae living inside corals — are crucial to reef survival. One is being set up at Phuket Rajabhat University under Dr. Thongpoo’s leadership. Her team is working with cauliflower corals (*Pocillopora* sp.), chosen for their abundance and ability to recolonise heat-damaged reefs. “Unfortunately, due to technical challenges with our coral husbandry system, the corals did not survive in captivity, which has prevented us from collecting the larvae required for our experiments,” Dr. Thongpoo said. “We are now working on refining our husbandry protocols and adapting our approach to ensure we can successfully collect and cryopreserve larvae in the near future.” Cryopreserving many coral species is challenging: their larvae and reproductive cells are large, lipid-rich, sensitive to cold, and often contain algae that block cryoprotectants. Dr. Lin also stressed that preservation isn’t confined to endangered species. “For me, there’s no endangered species. All

coral species are endangered,” he said, warning that most could collapse by 2050. His team began with “model” species such as *Pocillopora*, which directly releases larvae, and spawning corals like *Acropora* and *Galaxsia*. “You need to set up the model coral species and then use those optimal freezing protocols on the endangered species,” he explained. This approach, he added, differs from projects that prioritise only the most threatened species.

‘Genetic insurance policy’
For now, the scale of reef loss is sobering. Dr. Lin warned that “in the near future, cryobanks may become museums for extinct coral species.” For Dr. Thongpoo, on the other hand, the effort represents hope: “Cryopreservation is a genetic insurance policy for the future. We are essentially building a living seed bank of coral larvae and *Symbiodiniaceae*.” Dr. Lin and Dr. Thongpoo also said that local communities which depend on the reefs for their livelihoods are often unaware of their value. In Southeast Asia, tourism, waste discharge, and destructive fishing have worsened reef decline. Without active community participation, they warned, conservation efforts alone won’t save corals. With regional collaboration between scientists, governments, universities, and local communities, the project aims to strengthen resilience and secure the Coral Triangle’s reefs for generations to come. (Neelanjana Rai is a freelance journalist who writes about indigenous communities, the environment, science, and health. neelanjana189@gmail.com)

THE GIST

The Coral Triangle is home to more than three-quarters of the world’s coral species, a third of all reef fish, vast mangrove forests, and six of seven marine turtle species. It faces mounting dangers from carbon emissions, destructive fishing, pollution, and climate change. At the heart of the conservation effort is the process that preserves coral larvae by plunging them into liquid nitrogen at -196° C. The rapid freezing turns the larvae into a glass-like state. To revive the samples, scientists use lasers, which thaw the larvae in a fraction of a second.

Communities that depend on reefs are often unaware of their value. Scientists warn that conservation alone won’t save corals, and community involvement is vital. With regional collaboration, the project aims to strengthen resilience and secure reefs for generations to come.

BIG SHOT



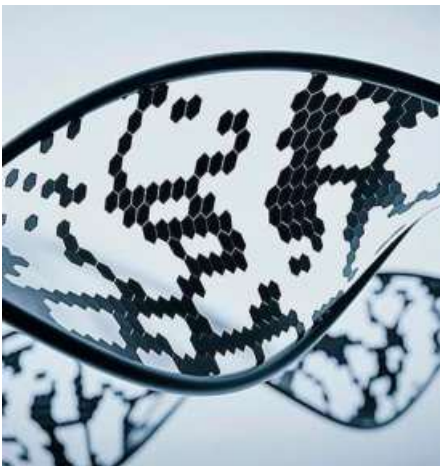
Tony Scott stands with the pumpkin he grew in his Wappingers Falls, New York, backyard. Every year, growers like Scott push their pumpkins to the limit and compete in annual contests with colossal fruits that weigh almost a tonne. Scott’s pumpkin came third this year at 876 kg. AP

WHAT IS IT?

Xenobiology: beyond earth

Vasudevan Mukunth

Xenobiology is a new and rapidly growing branch of science that studies how life could exist using biological systems different from those that prevail on earth. The word comes from the Greek for “the study of alien life”. While ordinary biology examines organisms that depend on DNA, RNA, and proteins made from the same 20 amino acids, xenobiology is concerned with the possibility of something more. Its central questions are whether earthlife is the only possible form of life or whether organisms can be built with alternative genetic codes, unusual chemical bonds, and/or in environments where water is replaced by another solvent such as methane or ammonia. In laboratories, xenobiologists build and test such possibilities. Some have engineered bacteria whose DNA includes extra letters beyond the natural A, T, C, and G, producing proteins with novel structures and functions. Others have designed synthetic cells that can store information in artificial molecules or run on new metabolic pathways. These experiments help scientists understand the boundaries of what counts as “life” and reveal which biochemical features are essential for life to evolve and reproduce.



Xenobiology asks whether earthlife is the only possible form of life. WARREN UMOH/UNSPLASH

Xenobiology also has practical and ethical value. Scientists hope to use the alien biology it deals with to programme microbes to make drugs or break down toxic waste while remaining biologically contained because they can’t survive outside controlled conditions. Ultimately, xenobiology joins chemistry, genetics, and astrobiology in asking how many forms of life the universe can support.

For feedback and suggestions for ‘Science’, please write to **science@thehindu.co.in** with the subject ‘Daily page’

Digital Swaraj

Desi apps need government support for network effects

India’s ambition to build a self-reliant, indigenous digital ecosystem, spanning messaging, email, operating systems, entertainment, and even AI platforms, is both timely and necessary. As global technology supply chains become more fragile and geopolitical rivalries sharpen, over-dependence on foreign digital platforms poses a risk to India’s digital sovereignty. The government’s push for indigenous solutions is, therefore, an appropriate strategic response.



The idea is to create robust local alternatives across categories such as operating systems, social media platforms, mapping technologies, cybersecurity tools, and app stores, thereby reducing the possibility of “access disruptions” due to actions or policies of global providers. Some of these efforts are already showing promise. The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) has partnered with academic institutions to develop BharatDB, a secure, high-performance, open-source database system meant for government and enterprise use. Similarly, Zoho, a homegrown SaaS company, has been chosen to power government email and productivity tools, while MapmyIndia is increasingly being used in official mapping applications. Yet, India’s challenge lies not in building apps, but ecosystems. The success of global platforms like WhatsApp, Gmail, and Instagram rests heavily on the network effect, where the value of a platform increases exponentially as more people use it. This creates near-insurmountable barriers for new entrants. India has seen this first-hand: Hike Messenger, once touted as the “Indian WhatsApp,” was forced to shut down. Koo, which emerged as an Indian alternative to Twitter (now X), also could not sustain itself.

Unlike China, India cannot simply ban foreign platforms to create room for domestic ones. Its model must rely on fair competition and smart regulation. One possible approach is to require smartphone manufacturers to pre-install a select set of verified Indian apps as defaults, much as Google’s own suite is now bundled on Android devices. More importantly, India should seriously consider interoperability mandates. Interoperability, where users on different platforms can communicate seamlessly, can level the playing field for new players. The success of UPI offers a strong precedent: by making it mandatory for all banks to connect to a single interoperable payment system, the government enabled rapid, inclusive adoption. The European Union’s Digital Markets Act has similar provisions for messaging platforms. India could apply interoperability to messaging services and social media platforms, breaking down the walled gardens of global tech giants.

But for any local platform to thrive, users must trust it to offer the same ease, security, and reliability they get from global apps. India must therefore invest in digital literacy, user design, and transparent privacy practices. The government can become an anchor client to give domestic apps the initial scale they need before expanding commercially.

OTHER VOICES.

The Guardian

Britain needs clean power, not culture wars
Let’s scrap Britain’s successful climate law so we can burn more gas, lose investment and have higher bills. Crazy as it might seem, that is the message of Kemi Badenoch’s new energy strategy. The Conservative leader proposes to repeal the 2008 Climate Change Act in favour of a plan to “maximise oil and gas extraction”, and remove all legally binding carbon targets. It’s pitched as pragmatism. But it’s a lurch into ideological self-harm. Britain’s energy problem isn’t its climate legislation, which is admired globally, backed by industry and supported by the public. It’s that this country remains too dependent on volatile fossil fuels. Emissions targets are not the reason for high bills. It is gas prices, which skyrocketed after Russia invaded Ukraine. (LONDON, OCTOBER 2)

CHINADAILY

Continuing the cause of national rejuvenation
President Xi Jinping’s speech at the reception marking the 76th anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic of China reviewed the great transformations of China and charted the course for contributing to global peace and development. He emphasized that the nation’s monumental achievements are fundamentally rooted in the strong leadership of the Communist Party of China and the tireless efforts of all ethnic groups. To ensure that the great cause pioneered by the older generations of leaders continues to flourish, the nation should continue to leverage its historical experience. (BEIJING, OCTOBER 1)



DHRITI MUKHERJEE PIPLI

Trade liberalisation is often presented as a pathway to growth, promising larger markets, cheaper inputs, and higher productivity. Yet that promise holds only when countries also strengthen their domestic capabilities. Otherwise, open borders deepen dependence instead of fostering competitiveness. India’s participation in the World Trade Organisation’s Information Technology Agreement (ITA), signed in 1997, illustrates how liberalisation can outpace preparation.

When India joined the ITA, tariffs on electronic goods exceeded 60 per cent. By 2005, duties on 217 product lines were eliminated. The expectation was that cheaper imports would accelerate computerisation, raise productivity, and support India’s IT services sector. The logic seemed sound, but the results disappointed. As tariffs fell, imports surged while domestic hardware manufacturing stagnated. Foreign technology became more affordable even as local production weakened.

Between April and August 2025, India exported \$184 billion and imported \$306 billion, creating a \$122 billion trade deficit in just five months. Electronics are now among the largest contributors to this gap. Despite \$38.6 billion in electronics exports in 2024-25, India still imports over 95 per cent of its semiconductors and nearly 80 per cent of key components such as displays and cameras — producing an assembly-led growth model with little domestic value.

A study conducted by Professor Murali Kallummal at the Indian Institute of Foreign Trade in 2012 confirmed that tariff cuts did not lead to industrial upgrading. Domestic output declined in the most liberalised segments; imports rose sharply, and employment in hardware manufacturing contracted. Developed countries simultaneously introduced non-tariff barriers — technical standards and certification rules that Indian firms struggled to meet. As global suppliers consolidated, India’s market access narrowed further. Liberalisation without an enabling ecosystem became less an opportunity and more a structural trap.

OTHER NATIONS’ STRATEGY
Other ITA signatories took a different path. China paired tariff reductions with subsidies, R&D funding, and specialised industrial parks, investing \$25 billion in its early 2000s “Golden Projects” and later launching a National Integrated Circuit Fund in 2014. South Korea and Taiwan devoted close to five per cent of GDP to research and innovation,



building world-class semiconductor capabilities. Singapore used openness to boost logistics and re-exports, while Vietnam linked tariff cuts with aggressive foreign investment incentives that pushed its electronics exports beyond \$100 billion. These experiences underline a simple fact: tariffs alone cannot create competitiveness; ecosystems can.

In contrast, India opened its markets before building a strong domestic base. Hardware production stagnated, innovation stalled, and top engineers migrated abroad, deepening the brain drain. Today’s semiconductor dependence stems from that premature phase of liberalisation, when tariff walls fell before value chains developed.

Corrective efforts began in May 2025, when the government approved the HCL-Foxconn joint venture to build a semiconductor fabrication plant in Jewar, Uttar Pradesh, targeting a capacity of 20,000 wafers per month by 2027. India’s first homegrown chip in the 28-90-nanometre range is expected by year’s end. These projects form part of the ₹76,000-crore India Semiconductor Mission, which provides up to 50 per cent fiscal support for fabrication units and incentives for design, assembly, testing, and packaging. The Electronics Component Manufacturing Scheme has

The Electronics Component Manufacturing Scheme
has already attracted proposals worth ₹1.15 lakh crore, exceeding its initial target. Despite this progress, the effort comes late

already attracted proposals worth ₹1.15 lakh crore, exceeding its initial target.

Despite this progress, the effort comes late. East Asia invested decades earlier, while India still faces high logistics costs, unreliable power, scarce ultra-pure water, and slow regulatory approvals. The shortage of engineers skilled in process technology and chip design remains another major constraint. Without swift execution, India may again end up with strong policy design but weak industrial outcomes.

However, a shift in global conditions could provide an opening. In September, the US imposed a one-time \$100,000 fee on new H-1B visa petitions and temporarily suspended processing during its government shutdown. This uncertainty may push some Indian engineers to return home. If effectively channelled into India’s semiconductor ecosystem, this talent inflow could narrow an expertise gap that fiscal incentives cannot bridge.

Against this background, India’s ITA membership has returned to the policy spotlight. A Parliamentary Standing Committee has recommended renegotiation and, if necessary, withdrawal. The argument is clear: two decades of zero tariffs have eroded manufacturing capacity, increased import dependence, and constrained innovation. Exiting the agreement could protect strategic segments, nurture domestic fabs, and support local firms.

COSTS OF WITHDRAWAL
Yet withdrawal carries serious costs. It could trigger trade disputes at the WTO, while reintroducing tariffs would raise prices of imported devices such as laptops, tablets, and smartphones. Millions of Indian students rely on these

tools for online learning and exam preparation. During the pandemic, affordable phones were often the only bridge between education and exclusion. A rise in prices would widen the digital divide and undo recent gains in digital literacy. Small businesses that depend on low-cost technology would face similar hardship. Policymakers must therefore balance industrial objectives with social equity.

The ITA experience offers a clear lesson: trade agreements can open markets but cannot build industries. India’s problem was not tariff cuts themselves but the absence of preparation for the competition that followed. The semiconductor drive now underway is welcome, but its lateness carries a heavy cost.

Meanwhile, the global electronics landscape is expanding rapidly. Consumer electronics revenues are projected to reach \$1.17 trillion by 2028, and the Internet of Things market could exceed \$2.2 trillion. Trade in ITA-related goods has grown from \$3.2 trillion in the 1990s to nearly \$4.8 trillion today. Yet India’s share of global ITA exports has fallen from about 2.3 per cent in 2000 to less than one per cent. Without deeper innovation, India risks remaining a buyer in a seller’s world.

The transition from assembly to innovation must begin earlier than incentives — it must begin in classrooms. Design thinking and experimentation are rarely encouraged. If students see opportunities at home and pathways from classrooms to laboratories to start-ups, brain drain can be reduced, and a new generation of scientist-entrepreneurs can be nurtured.

The writer is associated with IIFT, Delhi

Consequences of US government shutdown

Non-essential services would come to a halt. For Indians, there could be delays in processing H-1B visas and green cards

bl.explainer

Ramasamy Jayaprakash

The US federal government’s fiscal year is from October 1 to September 30. A funding legislation (budget, for easy understanding) outlining the spending limits for all the branches of the federal government should be passed by both Houses of the US Congress and signed by the President. This legislation would enable the federal government to meet its expenses for the fiscal year. In case a full-year funding legislation is not passed, a continuing resolution (CR) can be passed for a short term, usually covering the expenses for a few weeks to few months, at the previous year’s spending levels. If a funding bill is not passed in time, the federal government goes into a shutdown.

What happens in a shutdown?
All federal government functioning that are considered non-essential comes to a halt. Without a funding bill, federal employees in non-essential services will be left without pay. Since voluntary services without pay are considered illegal, those services go into a shutdown and those federal employees are ‘furloughed’, which means a temporary, unpaid leave of absence. Furloughed employees are typically given

retroactive pay when the shutdown ends. Non-essential services that come to a halt include museums, public parks, national parks and monuments, IRS taxpayer services, processing of federal grants/loans, non-emergency federal research, etc. Agencies such as the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have also suspended or delayed research and public health work. Meanwhile, essential services continue to work, often without pay. When a funding bill is passed, they will receive their pay in arrears. Social security benefits, Medicare payments, Medicaid for existing beneficiaries continue, but processing of applications for new beneficiaries stops.

Why funding legislation is difficult to pass?
To pass a funding legislation, a simple majority is enough in the House of Representatives. However, in the 100-member Senate, a three-fifths majority is required, which translates to at least 60 votes. If a party does not have 60 votes, it would rely on some members of the other party to support the legislation which often includes amendments to the bill, negotiations and compromises.

Why has the US government shut down now?
Government shutdowns happen mostly



STUMBLING BLOCK. Funding legislation BLOMBERG

due to political and ideological differences between Congress members. This time too, political, ideological and economic policy differences have caused the shutdown. US President Donald Trump wants significant reductions in government spending. His second term began with Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) that promised to do just that but has not yielded the results that were promised. Now, with the funding legislation, Trump wants to significantly cut down on spending on Medicare, Affordable Care Act, Medicaid, foreign aid, etc., which Democrats suggest would significantly increase the insurance premiums and healthcare costs for the Americans.

What is the impact of the shutdown on the US?
The impact on the US economy could be based on the duration of the shutdown.

J.P. Morgan has said, “Each week, a shutdown subtracts about 0.1 per cent of annualised GDP growth via reduced government activity.” While some loss can be recovered, a prolonged shutdown could lead to larger and more permanent losses in income and GDP.

With federal agencies like the Bureau of Labor Statistics suspending operations, publication of official economic data — including the US jobs report and the Consumer Price Index (CPI) report — will be delayed. This means the Federal Reserve would have to steer blindly in its Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) meeting.

Is India likely to be impacted by this shutdown?
Yes, but the severity of the impact could vary based on the duration of the shutdown. As usual, the shutdown would cut funds to the US Department of Labor, resulting in delays in processing H-1B visas and green cards for Indians. However, visa interviews and Consular services would see minimal impact as these services are fee-based and would not usually be interrupted. A prolonged shutdown could restrict these services too.

The US shutdown could cause ripple effects on global supply chains, which could potentially affect India and other Asian factories.

Indian stock markets may see minor short-term effects.

BELOW THE LINE



Timing of RBI releases

Amid serious business, RBI Governors are known for tongue-in-cheek replies to media questions. When the media complained of late press and circular releases by RBI, Governor Sanjay Malhotra said with a smile: “we work

24x7”. Pointing to reporters he then asked: “What time do you want it to be released? Anyway, we will ensure all our press releases are issued by 6 pm,” he said. Banking reporters hope RBI keeps its promise.
Japan and quality
Quality is a must if India has to make progress. Recently, TK Balaji, CMD, Lucas TVS, emphasised this through an anecdote on how the Japanese, who generally don’t talk much, practice this. Long back, he said, a few Japanese officials had visited the company. “In the closing session, I asked them: what are you doing in quality? One official went to the board and just

wrote QI. ‘This is what we do,’ he said, explaining that ‘you are not doing a big deal in giving zero defect products to your customers. It is expected of you. QI is quality innovation, which is what you are doing that customers did not expect.” “I have never forgotten that session and keep repeating it to my colleagues,” said Balaji.
Obsession with UPSC
Despite news such as Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) imposing a penalty of ₹5 lakh on Drishtii IAS (VDK Eduventures Pvt Ltd) for publishing misleading advertisements regarding the results

of the UPSC Civil Services Examination 2022, the institute continues to be in business. Wonder why? So far, the CCPA has issued 54 notices to various coaching institutes for misleading advertisements and unfair trade practices. Penalties amounting to about ₹90 lakh have been imposed on 26 coaching institutes, along with directions to discontinue such misleading claims. But the institutes continue to thrive. “In India civil service still remains a major attraction,” said an aspirant.
Ground realities
The death of 41 persons in a stampede at Karur, Tamil Nadu, has

got tongues wagging. The ruling DMK and the TVK, whose leader Vijay held a public meeting in the town where the stampede happened, are engaged in a blame game. Other parties, such as the BJP and the Opposition AIADMK, have also pitched in, though in a restrained manner. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin has been urging the people not to spread wild allegations. However, what he is yet to grasp is the talk in Karur over the incident. An autorickshaw driver, who was in the town, says the ruling party in the State was up to something sinister. Wonder if the DMK is aware of the ground realities. **Our Bureaus**

Indian banking, decoded

Banking practices, issues have been analysed well

BOOK REVIEW.

TCA Srinivasa Raghavan

The author, whom I know well, is a professor of economics at Pondicherry University. He has distilled the knowledge gained during his years at the RBI and his academic training into a well-designed and much-needed book that will serve both students and practitioners of banking. This is a magisterial work which will stand the test of time but only with fairly frequent revisions.

It's very comprehensive, covering the whole gamut of issues. More importantly, it is almost entirely devoid of opinion. That's why it is the sort of book that should be on the desks not just of students and bankers but also journalists who can, and do, often exhibit a great deal of exasperating ignorance.

After explaining banking practice and monetary policy in exhaustive detail, Samantaraya finally comes to why the Indian banking system is so full of problems that every two decades or so it needs a huge infusion of capital from taxpayers' money.

The main problem of course is the high loan delinquency. This means the banks don't get back either the whole or a large part of the loans they have extended.

Samantaraya identifies five main reasons. These are excessive lending to infrastructure projects during 2006-12; political interference in favour of friends; political appointees in the boards of public sector banks; short tenures of CEOs; and, the fear of taking decisions lest the CBI or the CVC start investigating.

Overall therefore the public sector banks which still dominate banking massively are simply not good enough. That's the unspoken conclusion.

TOWARDS BETTER BANKING

Samantaraya has provided a brief summary of all that's been done to achieve better bank management. Much of this has happened since 2014 because by then the whole system was in extremis. The RBI was finally given a free hand by the government to fix the problems of Indian banking. By 2023 its efforts had succeeded and Indian banking had returned to normal financial parameters.

But as always there are new challenges. One of these is climate change and the role that banks can play in mitigating it. Samantaraya has dealt with the issues in a clear, if not comprehensive, manner. His main



Title: Regulating and Managing Banks in India: An Economic Perspective
Author: Amaresh Samantaraya
Publisher: Cambridge University Press

conclusion is that banks will have to be more aware of the risks that climate change causes their loans.

He says the channels through which these risks arise must be traced and the quantum of associated risks must be counted. Are Indian banks in a position to do it? Most certainly not, which is why, he says, both regulation and banking practice must raise their game.

Another big question relates to the size of a bank. How big should it be? Samantaraya says it's difficult to say what the optimal size is or should be. But he has no such doubts on the number of banks India needs: 20. However, this is an arbitrary number because it can always be asked why not 21 or 19.

Besides there's the 'too big to fail' problem that lets very big banks take very high risks because they know they will be rescued by governments. It's called the moral hazard problem in economics.

As to foreign banks, he says let a hundred flowers bloom because they are crucial for foreign trade. But should they be allowed access to domestic capital?

THE CAPITAL PROBLEM

In the end, though, it all comes down to the very nature of banking itself, which is avaricious. Samantaraya is careful not to call it that but he does say that there is a tendency in banking to privatise profits and socialise losses. It's what I call the 'heads I win, tails you lose' problem in capitalist economies.

Samantaraya's solution is simple: the owners and shareholders must have higher levels of equity. That will force them to be less cavalier about risk. True, but this formula doesn't work when the government is the only or the major shareholder.

A lowdown on the telecom wars

The book presents a fascinating account of the evolution of the telecom industry, warts and all

BOOK REVIEW.

Sudhiredar Sharma

A phone in every Indian's hand has been an amazing fairy tale. From a single phone in a colony to a mobile phone in every hand has transformed life and livelihood like never before. Not without reason is the telecom sector considered the poster child of the transformation in India, which has replaced the government monopoly with the fledgling private sector.

But former journalist and author Deepali Gupta makes it clear that the story of a phone in every Indian's hand is a tale of bitter business rivalries and inept government handling, with a whole lot of support actors.

SPIRIT OF INNOVATION

Through analytical storytelling, Gupta brings to light the spirit of innovation in the high-stakes competition that defines the telecom sector. With data and information the author has woven an absorbing story with a lot of drama and suspense. However, the evolution of the state-controlled monopoly into a private sector oligopoly has its own set of nuances.

The National Telecom Policy of 1999 separated the men from the boys in fuelling the telecom war. This led to the rise and fall of many entrepreneurs and one amongst them was Sunil Mittal, who emerged as the champion of champions. This was also the time when the cellular market had started exploding, adding challenges with the information technology equipment and infrastructure.

It is a fascinating account of the evolution of the telecom industry. Though it is based on information

available in the public domain, it is a vivid account of the stiff competition between lead players — Tata, Birla, Reliance, Bharati — to capture a lion's share of the country's billion voices. It reads like a Wild West story — with corporate rivalries amidst emerging government policies — generating policies in favour of the private sector.

The voluminous book follows a chronological order, which covers all that which contributed to the process of evolution of the telecom industry.

It was in the late 1980s that the country had established the Telecom Commission to guide the Department of Telecommunications, to take forward the setting up of a single service provider for the entire country. It took nearly two years for the government to realise that the country had empty coffers.

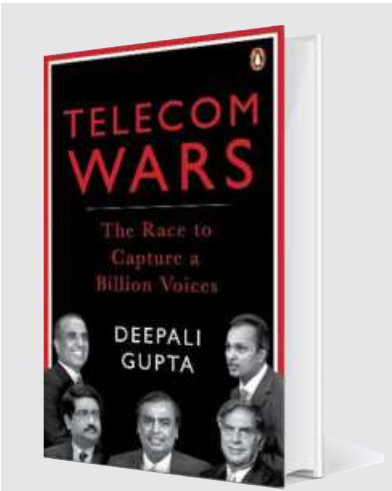
But selling a stake nationally to a new private competitor was not considered even a remote possibility. However, the department was learning on the fly to make exemptions and inclusions in rolling out the process.

The political challenges, spectrum scams and the policy reforms were formidable. The voluminous book provides an insightful look into the complexities of the sector.

INCREASE IN CALL RATES

So much has happened in the telecom sector but what the consumers get to know is the outcome but not the how and why of how it came about. For instance, both Airtel and Reliance Jio have increased call rates at the cost of value-added services.

What seems a small increase in monthly expenditure for an ordinary consumer may translate into significant profit for the service provider. What gets counted is the success story of the service provider, at a cost to the unsuspecting consumers.



Title: Telecom Wars
Author: Deepali Gupta
Publisher: Penguin Viking, New Delhi
Price: ₹1,299

© MEET THE AUTHOR

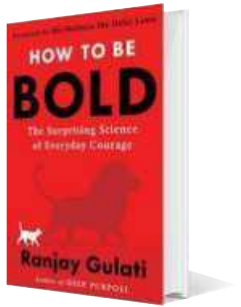
Deepali Gupta has been a financial journalist for two decades, covering the economy and large corporate houses in India

Given the fledgling consumer base, the gradual increase in cost towards telecom services may seem a genuine concern.

However, the price of mobile telephony and data services in the country are the lowest, without any state subsidy. With AI on the anvil, the sector is likely to face new challenges.

Even if it does, the sector continues to be a business success story. No doubt, the consumer-interest

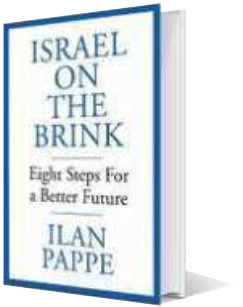
NEW READS.



Title: How to Be Bold : The Surprising Science of Everyday Courage
Author: Ranjay Gulati

Publisher: Harper Business

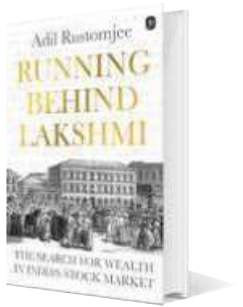
The book gives you science-based insight and strategies you need to take more action, do more good, and leave an inspiring legacy.



Title: Israel on the Brink : Eight Steps for a Better Future
Author: Ilan Pappé

Publisher: Oneworld Publications

The author paves a path out of the Jewish state, rooted in restorative justice, including building bridges with the Arab world.



Title: Running behind Lakshmi: The Search for Wealth in India's Stock Market
Author: Adil Rustomjee

Publisher: Hachette India

By combining archival sources with expertise, the author provides a wide-ranging account of India's stock market.

thehindubusinessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

October 6, 2005

RBI mulls hybrid instruments

The RBI is considering allowing banks to raise capital through hybrid instruments, other than equity and bond. Classifying preferential capital as Tier-I capital too may be considered, but Parliament has to amend the Banking Regulation Act, said Ms Usha Thorat, Executive Director, RBI.

Road operators to be compensated if hit by over Rs 1 cr

The Government has cleared the last mile hurdle in the finalisation of the new agreement for handing over large road projects to the private sector on a build, operate and transfer basis. Road operators can now seek compensation only if their earnings are hit by over ₹1 crore per annum owing to changes in taxation policy during the concession period, according to senior officials.

ICICI Bank, South Indian Bank to issue fresh equity

Two banks on Wednesday announced plans for fresh issue of equity shares to raise funds to enhance their capital base. ICICI Bank Ltd, the second biggest bank in the country, and South Indian Bank board, have decided to raise equity capital. According to banking analysts, more banks are expected to go in for public issues in the near future.

Short take

Animal welfare brings all-round benefits

Suryaprabha Sadasivan

This October, the world marks the centenary of World Animal Day, with the theme “Save Animals, Save the Planet!” It is a reminder that animals are not only vulnerable to climate change and ecological disruption, but they are also vital to the planet's survival. India, with its deep conservation legacy and growing global voice, has a unique opportunity to lead the next century of animal-planet solutions. India's cultural ethos has guided landmark policies: the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972, Project Tiger in 1973, and Project Elephant in 1992. India has doubled its tiger population since 2006 and today holds over 70 per cent of the world's wild tigers. The

creation of the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau in 2007 and the biodiversity finance mechanisms demonstrate a continued commitment.

Yet the challenges ahead are more complex. Rapid infrastructure growth is fragmenting habitats, while climate change brings erratic rainfall, forest fires, and rising human-wildlife conflict. Animal welfare can no longer be treated as a niche issue; it must be woven into climate and development strategies.

For India to lead globally, four shifts are needed. First, mainstream animal welfare into climate and development planning. Roads, railways, and energy corridors must be designed with wildlife passages and ecosystem safeguards in place. Biodiversity and animal impact assessments should sit alongside environmental clearances.

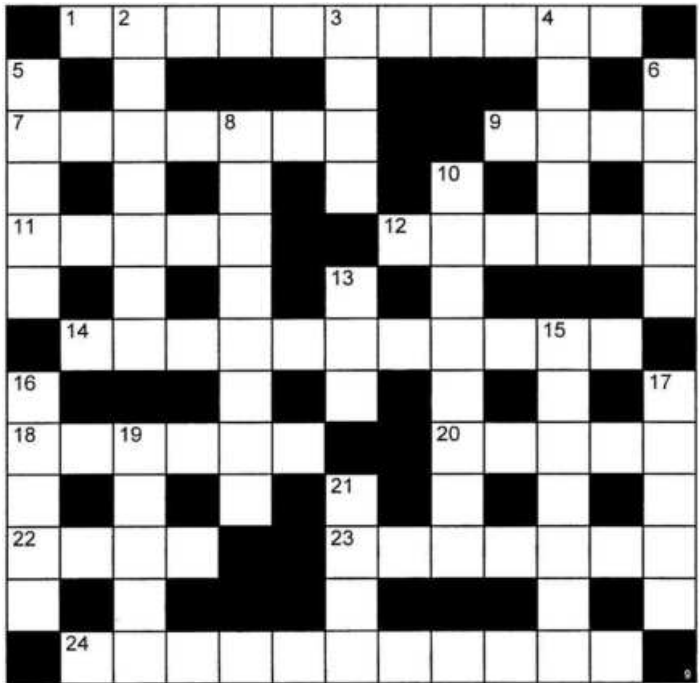
Second, strengthen rural and urban welfare linkages. Livestock and working animals remain central to rural livelihoods, and humane husbandry, from veterinary care to the transition towards cage-free egg production, can improve productivity, cut public health risks, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and meet rising demand for ethical food.

Third, recognise the economics of animal welfare. Conservation is not just compassion; it is smart economics. One healthy vulture saves lakhs annually in waste disposal and health costs. Pollinators add billions to farm productivity. Mangroves and wetlands protect coasts, with crabs, fish and birds keeping these ecosystems alive. Protecting animals is often far cheaper and more effective than building grey infrastructure to replace their services.

Fourth, champion “animal-climate compacts.” Just as the International Solar Alliance put India at the centre of renewable energy cooperation, the country can lead a similar compact linking animal protection with climate action and finance. From incentives in Nagaland that ended the hunting of Amur falcons to payments in Kerala's Vembanad wetlands for bird- and fish-friendly farming, these prove the model. Scaling such approaches would reward communities as frontline guardians of biodiversity. Globally, ecosystem services are valued at \$125 trillion a year, proof that biodiversity is not heritage alone but the foundation of economies and societies.

The writer is Senior Vice-President, Chase Advisors. Views are personal

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EASY

ACROSS

- Large bomb; expensive, effective film etc (11)
- Cry out (7)
- Conscious existence (4)
- Affected by madness (5)
- Middle (6)
- With an object, biased (11)
- Feel discontent, murmur (6)
- Michaelmas daisy (5)
- Pounded potato (4)
- Fact of being hidden, undeveloped (7)
- Passing on to successors (7,4)

DOWN

- Authorise, permit (7)
- Fenced enclosure (Swahili) (4)
- Have actual being (5)
- Burglar's short crowbar (5)
- A safe (slang) (5)
- Mishap (8)
- Dithering, undecided (8)
- Unit number (3)
- Previous to the present time (2,2,3)
- Dowdy woman (5)
- Is at worship (5)
- Spaghetti, macaroni etc (5)
- Flat open tart (4)

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

- Expensively produced film, but it may make a bomb (11)
- Cry out in indignation at former partner's demand (7)
- It's a long time to be inside a biography (4)
- Crazed first murderer Cain turned into (5)
- Focal point of recent development (6)
- One student one upset, being biased towards controversy (11)
- Fret at some children I persisted in returning (6)
- Flower for the teacher – but not the first (5)
- Flirt with a mixture of crushed malt and hot water (4)
- Ely can't be responsible for this undeveloped state (7)
- Passing on when passing over (7,4)

DOWN

- Officially permit ice in the lens perhaps (7)
- Fenced enclosure for snake about to be married (4)
- To be discriminatory about women and lose head (5)
- It may have been handy for a burglar to use it (5)
- It is safe for it to dwindle away to nothing (5)
- It wasn't meant to happen, but I'd got in the grave (8)
- Not sure about this neat arrangement (8)
- Without my money, a person is indefinite (3)
- Until the present, quietly won out like this (2,2,3)
- Dowdy dresser given fur maybe by politician (5)
- Beseeches one for fish in afterthought (5)
- Historic time with a macaroni and the like (5)
- Quiche Latin supporter will get around (4)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2795

ACROSS Pasture 5. Sprat 8. Leaders 9. Rigid 10. Caparison 12. Tar 13. Pedal 17. Lob 19. Expedited 21. Gorse 22. Penance 24. Theft 25. Situate

DOWN 1. Palace 2. Swamped 3. Use 4. Esses 5. Strangled 6. Right 7. Tudors 11. Represent 14. Petunia 15. Flight 16. Adhere 18. Borne 20. Popes 23. Net



OPINION

The
Hindustan Times
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

{ OUR TAKE }

Calibrate dosage
of drug regulation

Deaths linked to toxic contaminant in cough syrups in two states highlight the need for better regulation

The death of 12 children in two states — Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan — from a deadly toxin detected in the cough syrups prescribed to them shows what ails drug regulation in the country. In the case of the Madhya Pradesh deaths, Coldrif, the cough syrup, was found to contain 48% diethylene glycol (DEG), which is 480 times the permissible limit of 0.1%.

This is not the first such instance — at home or abroad. In 2023, the WHO issued alerts on Indian cough syrups after the deaths of children in Gambia and Uzbekistan. At the time, many attempted to spin it as the failure of controls abroad on storage and transport, leading to contamination. But, even though the last such incidents at home happened decades ago — in 1986 (14 deaths) and in 1998 (33 deaths) — the latest incident shows that toxins in cough syrups could be a domestic crisis too. The root cause of the toxic content must be determined soon and pharma products at high risk of contamination must be put under special scrutiny, with existing stocks tested, and if required, recalled and destroyed.

Poor communication added to the crisis. While biopsies indicated DEG poisoning, and Madhya Pradesh sent 13 suspected drugs for testing, the Centre and the state authorities erred in announcing that none of the samples contained suspected toxins while commenting on the results of just three medicines. Such communication would have contributed to false reassurances precisely when parents needed urgent warnings. It is only when testing by Tamil Nadu — where Coldrif manufacturer Sresan Pharma is based — found DEG in the cough syrup that several states moved to ban it.

The incident flags safeguard failures and regulatory gaps at several levels. How thoroughly and frequently was Sresan Pharma inspected in the 20 years of its operations? Toxin content 480 times the permitted limit, after 20 years of manufacturing (in Coldrif's case), isn't merely contamination; it is industrial negligence. While the Centre is now inspecting 19 drug manufacturing units across six states, effective drug regulation calls for more than a catch-up act. India has state drug controllers and a central regulator. Between them, it seems essential quality control for medicines is falling through bureaucratic cracks. Also, while a 2023 advisory called for the drug in question not to be administered to children under the age of four years, seven of the dead were under this threshold, signalling the desperate need for a monitoring mechanism against mal-prescription and self-medication. Left unaddressed, these concerns pose serious risks for India's credibility as the pharmacy to the world.

Diet and politics of
the climate crisis

Food systems account for a third of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions due to human activity. Within this, 70% is attributable to the food habits of the wealthiest 30%, a new study by EAT-Lancet Commission has found. This shouldn't surprise — skewed consumption is a leitmotif in the apportioning of responsibility for emissions. Given that food systems are the biggest contributor to the breach of five of the nine planetary boundaries — the limit in critical areas within which humanity can exist and thrive without impacting the planet drastically — and that business-as-usual here will keep us off the below-1.5 degree-path even with complete global energy transition, the need for urgent action is clear. The wealthiest certainly must shoulder the bulk of the responsibility. That said, it is clear from the EAT-Lancet Commission report that food systems must be re-imagined for everybody. The share of the world's population that is in the "safe and just space" — where people's rights and food needs are met within planetary boundaries — is below 1%.

The report makes a few broad prescriptions: Promoting traditional diets, which emphasise local procurement; making healthier food affordable; reducing food wastage, thereby causing production pressures to ease with commensurate gains for emission reduction; and halting conversion of intact ecosystems for agricultural use. A drastic 33% cut in global meat consumption and a 63% growth in the vegetable, fruit, and nuts sector is also called for. The challenge, of course, will be cultural and behavioural change — and, by extension, political. At a time of deepening rifts within and among nations, this would seem insurmountable. But leaders gathering next month in Belem, Brazil for COP30 must bear in mind that the clock is ticking for meaningful action.

Indian biotech needs
to lose its handcuffs

From regulatory reforms to rewarding research and discoveries instead of patient volumes treated at hospitals, the existing ecosystem needs many changes to be future-ready

Every headline about Donald Trump's tariffs sounds like another disaster for India. Yet this time, the blow landed softer than feared. His 100% duties fall on branded drugs, sparing India's generic exports — the foundation of its pharmaceutical trade. That is the silver lining. The darker truth is that India was even holding its breath. An industry that should be shaping the future was instead bracing for Washington's next move. That is the real vulnerability.

Trump's action shows how fragile India's position is when it leans too heavily on the past — on its role as the world's low-cost pharmacy. The future of medicine is being written in biotechnology and Artificial Intelligence (AI), and those who master it will define global health care. India has the talent, the patients, and the history to lead. What it lacks is the urgency to break free from the bureaucracy and inertia that keep it chained.

China understood this long ago. It has built entire biotech cities like Wuxi, where molecules move from discovery

to trials to production in months. Clinical trials that take years in the West are approved there in weeks. Behind it all is a national priority backed by billions in State funding, fast-track regulation, and a vast patient base. Confronting that juggernaut would be risky, so Trump avoids it. Instead, he turns his fire to India, where it is politically safer.

That contrast should sting. While China sprints forward, India remains stuck in the past. Regulations designed for generics slow breakthrough therapies to a crawl. Hospitals measure success by patient volume rather than discovery. A medical culture that once prided itself on frugal innovation now risks being trapped by it — delivering affordability without originality. Unless these handcuffs are broken, the biotech revolution will happen elsewhere.

AI is already transforming drug discovery. It is designing molecules, predicting protein interactions, and generating therapies at speeds that were once unimaginable. What took a decade, can now be done in months. But then comes the bottleneck: Clinical trials. It is like landing in a jet after flying at supersonic speed — only to continue the journey on a bullock cart. That is the reality of India's regulatory system. AI is opening the skies of possibility, yet discovery collides with the crawl of outdated approvals and trial processes. This is the first handcuff — regulation built for monitoring generics, not enabling frontier science.

The second handcuff is culture. Indian health care rewards throughput — how many patients are treated — not the discoveries advanced. Too many clinicians serve as clerks in multinational trials rather than leaders of their own. Research is seen as a distraction from patient care rather than its highest form.

The third handcuff is credibility. A handful of unethical contract research firms and failed government studies tarnished India's reputation. In biotech, credibility is currency. Without it, data is discounted and partnerships fade.

The fourth handcuff is mindset. India's genius for frugal innovation has saved millions of lives, but making others' discoveries cheaper is not the same as leading. Without original intellectual property, India risks being sidelined while others set the pace.

Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw has been sounding this alarm for years. Biocon, the company she built, proved that advanced biologics and biosimilars could be developed in Bengaluru in keeping with world standards, making insulin and cancer therapies affordable worldwide. Yet even she has struggled against the same barriers: Hospitals focused on numbers over research, regulators clinging to outdated frameworks. Her message is clear — India can't depend on one Biocon. It needs a hundred, each creating original science and global-class IP.



Vivek Wadhwa

{ STRAIGHTFORWARD }

Shashi Shekhar



In Bihar's election play,
final act still uncertain

Bihar is immersed in politics even in the times of festivities. For Biharis, there's no better pastime than politics.

Over the last two decades, Bihar has coined a new adage — power follows where Nitish Kumar tilts. This is why, despite the BJP's growing tendency to edge out its alliance partners, it is content being the junior partner in the state. Even Lalu Prasad Yadav's RJD faced the same predicament when it was in an alliance with Nitish's JD(U).

Any party that's not with Nitish may apparently spew venom against him, but secretly fervently desires an alliance with him. This is the reason Lalu joined hands with Nitish in 2022 even after a bitter split in 2017. During the two Mahagathbandhan stints, BJP leaders publicly vowed never to ally with Nitish. However, today they are readying themselves to face the assembly elections with their "natural partner" for the third time in the state.

How has Nitish emerged as this talisman of electoral victory in Bihar?

In 2005, when he became the Bihar chief minister (CM), he dedicated all his energies to maintaining law and order, improving the quality of roads, electricity supply, transport and education. In 2006, he launched the School Chalo Abhiyan to push admissions and attendance, distributing bicycles to girl students. Thus began a silent revolution: In 2005, mere 1.8 lakh girls appeared for the class 10th exams in the state, while, this year, more than half of the 15.85 lakh students appearing for the 10th board exams were girls. Nitish was also the first to launch a programme to provide everyone with a house and water connection but couldn't succeed. Even today, society is bogged down by migration issues and the state is at the bottom of the list for many human and development indices.

Due to many reasons, Nitish's third and fourth term weren't very effective. In a democracy, you can't drive perpetually in the fourth gear.

This time around, he's being attacked from various quarters and his health is under the scanner. It would be interesting to see how many seats the JD(U) secures in the upcoming Assembly elections. The party is facing a slow but sure attrition of its cadre. It needs the RJD or the BJP to get past the victory line.

This is why, this time, the Nitish govern-

ment has transferred ₹10,000 each to the accounts of one crore women and announced a flurry of concessions and doles. Can it return to power riding the wave of goodies doled out since June this year?

Nitish's main rival, Tejashwi Yadav, performed brilliantly in the last elections. His Mahagathbandhan lost the elections by a mere 16,825 votes. He still enjoys the support of the Congress and the Left parties.

Despite his own diminished vote base, Rahul Gandhi tried to strengthen Tejashwi's position during his yatra. The Left's Dipankar Bhattacharya, Samajwadi Party's Akhilesh Yadav, Shiv Sena's Sanjay Raut, DMK's MK Stalin, JMM's Hemant Soren and Yusuf Pathan from the Trinamool Congress joined his yatra to signal that the entire Opposition is behind him.

However, the excessive ambitions of his associates and family members is posing a huge challenge.

Right now, a slugfest is on in the Mahagathbandhan over seat-sharing. But, it is also true that this happens every time and there's no doubt all the alliance partners will fight the elections together.

The new voter list issued by the Election Commission saw 69 lakh voters removed and 21 lakh new ones added. For months, the Mahagathbandhan has been making it a political issue. Still, the NDA's strong caste calculations and government doles make the suspense over whom the voter will prefer even more acute.

Prashant Kishor and his Jan Suraa party are another factor. He shot to the limelight with election management services rendered not just to the BJP in the run-up to the 2014 elections, but also, later, to the Congress, YSR Congress, Trinamool Congress, Aam Admi Party, DMK, and even Nitish Kumar.

In the poll fray this time, he has organised *padyatras* (foot marches) in every district of the state. During the last one year, he has covered almost all the regions of the state meeting people and staying overnight in villages. Kishor has attacked Nitish, the BJP, and the RJD in equal measure. He's attracting large crowds and his coffers are surprisingly full. Will he be able to form the government or be the kingmaker in case of a hung assembly?

Large crowds and attractive slogans are necessary for victory, but they don't guarantee a win.

Let's also mention the BJP. The saffron party has the ablest organisation and strongest caste calculation. Chirag Paswan, Jitan Ram Manjhi and Upendra Kushwaha, along with JD(U), make the NDA a formidable alliance. In the last elections, the BJP won more than twice the number of seats, compared to JD(U) and yet couldn't push its own CM candidate. Lack of a credible face is its biggest weakness in the state.

Sooner or later, the party will have to take a tough call on this issue. It will have to upset age-old relations with its allies and local leaders. Bihar is entering in an interesting phase. The assembly elections promise to go down to the wire. But the real game will commence once the dust on the electoral duel settles and the final tally is out.

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



Approvals must be faster, adaptive designs routine, AI-driven reviews standard, and harmonisation with global agencies the norm. MINT ARCHIVE

Her prescription is sweeping regulatory reform: AI-enabled reviews, adaptive trial designs, and fast-track approvals for precision medicine and rare diseases. Without this, India will fall further behind in a field where speed defines leadership.

Dr Moni Kuriakose of Karkinos Healthcare is equally blunt. He argues that India's credibility can only be rebuilt through independent networks linking hospitals, with early-phase centres embedded in cancer institutes, supported by preclinical labs and partnerships with global leaders. That is how Indian data will once again command respect.

To seize this AI-driven opportunity, India must first reform regulation: Approvals must be faster, adaptive designs routine, AI-driven reviews standard, and harmonisation with global agencies the norm.

It must build credibility through networks. Independent hospital consortiums can restore trust and scale.

There is also a need to create early-phase hubs. Every major cancer hospital should host trial units linked to labs and global partners.

The country must do all it can to unleash entrepreneurship. With AI embedded across discovery and diagnostics, Indian innovators can mine anonymised datasets for insights that no one else is seeing.

Along with all this, it must ensure it rewards research, not just volume. Hospitals and clinicians should be recognised for discoveries advanced, not only patients treated.

Mazumdar-Shaw believes India could build a \$300 billion pharmaceutical sector by 2030 and a \$1 trillion bio-economy by 2047. But without regulatory reform and a culture shift, these numbers will remain fantasy.

Trump's tariffs may not cut deep today, but they should jolt India into action. The country still has a rare chance to leapfrog into biotech leadership — combining affordability with originality, scale with credibility. But the window is closing fast. If India hesitates, China will lock in its lead, and India will be left clinging to an old playbook in a world already moving on.

Vivek Wadhwa is CEO, Vionix Biosciences. The views expressed are personal

{ LINDY CAMERON } HIGH COMMISSIONER OF THE UK TO INDIA



The engagements between ... our two navies demonstrate our commitment to maintaining the rules-based international order in the region

On the joint maritime exercise Konkan



Can the UK FTA alleviate
US-tariff pain for textiles?

The US tariffs will bite India's textile sector — exports to the US stand at \$10.7 billion annually, and some estimates project a 40% decline, as exports become more expensive. Given this, India's textile sector badly needs new markets. The imperative for this is spelled out by the fact that the sector contributes 2.3% to the GDP, accounts for 13% of industrial production, and comprises 12% of the country's total exports. Employing over 45 million, many of them rural women, it is second only to agriculture in terms of livelihoods. Against this backdrop, can the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), signed by India and the UK in July and expected to be implemented in early 2026, offset some of the hurt?

Under CETA, the UK will eliminate tariffs on several labour-intensive Indian exports, leading to significant market access gains. Despite facing a 9% import duty in the UK so far, India managed to secure a 6% share in its readymade garment imports, exporting goods worth approximately \$1.2 billion annually. With the elimination of tariffs, shipments to the UK are projected to increase by 30-40%.

However, zero-duty access alone will not automatically guarantee an increase in exports. The India-Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) is a case in point. Despite similar concessions, Indian textiles struggled to find a footing in Japan's highly structured and quality-conscious market.

In the UK too, India is seeking to expand in a playing field dominated by China, Bangladesh, and Vietnam — countries with well-entrenched supplier relationships, agile production cycles, and cost structures that are difficult to match. Several of them also enjoy zero-duty access, which could effectively neutralise India's advantage under CETA. Therefore, the challenge lies in whether Indian textile exporters can match or outperform such global competitors in speed, quality, and reliability.

Moreover, while tariff walls fall under CETA, non-tariff barriers will continue to pose stiff challenges. The UK has been steadily tightening its regulations on sustainability, labour rights, and carbon emissions. Standards compliance, traceability, and carbon labelling are becoming decisive factors for gaining market access. Indian firms will therefore need to invest in eco-friendly technologies, follow the rulebook on transparent and ethical supply chains, and comply with internationally accepted standards. Without these, tariff concessions will offer only marginal gains.

Encouragingly, though, India's textile sector has not been left without policy support. The Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme for

textiles, Pradhan Mantri Mega Integrated Textile Region and Apparel (PM MITRA) parks, the Textile Cluster Development Scheme (TCDS), the Amended Technology Upgradation Fund Scheme (ATUFS), the National Technical Textiles Mission (NTTM), and the Samarath skilling programme, all seek to address infrastructure gaps, modernise production, and strengthen the workforce. If implemented effectively, they could raise the industry's annual growth rate to 15-20% over the next five years. India's textile strategy must be guided by more than just capital outlays. High-frequency, granular data on export trends, buyer requirements, compliance gaps, and global demand patterns must inform both public policy and private strategy.

The stakes are particularly high for regional textile clusters. Nearly 80% of India's textile production is concentrated in MSME clusters. Tamil Nadu alone accounted for \$7.99 billion in textile exports in 2024-25, equivalent to 26.8% of India's total, followed by Gujarat (18.9%) and Maharashtra (12.8%). Hubs like Tiruppur, Coimbatore, and Erode in Tamil Nadu are already known for their export-oriented ecosystems, combining skilled labour with infrastructure and entrepreneurial dynamism. With CETA in place, Tiruppur's knitwear, for instance, could find a broader market in Manchester, but only if Indian exporters can match the quality, timelines, and sustainability benchmarks of global competitors.

Equally important will be shifting from factor-driven growth — based on low-cost labour and raw material availability — to value-driven expansion. High-margin segments like technical textiles for health care, defence, and mobility present untapped potential. These offer scope for innovation and brand-building, with less competition from low-cost producers. To that end, enabling MSMEs and start-ups to innovate, digitise, and upgrade practices shall be vital. Collaborations with the creative industries, digital integration with e-commerce platforms, and co-branding with UK retailers could amplify India's positioning and reach in these premium segments.

Whether CETA proves to be a game-changer for Indian textiles will depend on how effectively the country navigates the post-tariff terrain — where cost shall matter, but credibility will matter more; where speed shall help, but standards will seal the deal.

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Rising and shining

Global uncertainty is pushing up precious metal prices

Precious metals — through 2025 — outperformed most financial assets. Gold and silver continue to rally as the calendar year enters its final quarter. In dollar (USD) terms, gold is up 48 per cent and silver has done even better with a return of over 65 per cent since January. Both metals have hit record levels. Well into the festival season, which is traditionally the time to buy precious metals, Indian households are focused on the prospects of these two metals. Many would be wondering whether they should confine their purchases to token levels at these elevated prices. However, there are reasons to believe that the rally will continue, though the pace would be difficult to predict. Several factors are influencing global price trends in gold and silver. For years, gold and silver have been considered stores of value, which can beat inflation and provide protection in an uncertain economic environment. Hence, there is always investor interest in these metals.

One factor driving prices is currency-market volatility. A weaker USD, in particular, is often the trigger for bull runs — international prices of both metals are USD-denominated. Another factor is geopolitical tensions. Precious metals have a fairly liquid market and are relatively easy to store and carry in the case of war, floods, and other disruptions. This ease of mobility has been enhanced in the modern era by exchange-traded funds — digital instruments that closely track the prices of metals. As it happens, uncertainties on different fronts are pushing up prices of gold and silver. The tariff war launched by the Donald Trump administration has not only hobbled global growth prospects, it can also push up inflation, particularly in the United States (US). It has also led to currency volatility as global markets struggle to discount the uncertainties created by US tariff demands. The USD has fallen by over 10 per cent since January against a basket of currencies, imparting an upward trajectory to prices of gold and silver. The rupee has also lost ground against the dollar, even as the dollar has lost ground globally, amplifying domestic prices even more.

Geopolitical tensions are also high. The Gaza War will complete two years this week. The Russia-Ukraine War is into its fourth year. The US has attacked Venezuelan shipping, leading to tensions with Central and South American nations. Ties between the US and its allies, such as Japan and South Korea, have been stressed by tariff brinkmanship and are a risk to the stability of the global order. Put it all together, the bull run in gold and silver looks likely to continue until there are signs of strong global economic growth, tariff clarity, and easing geopolitical tensions. Several central banks have been buying gold in large quantities over the past few years to keep their reserves safe, which is also a sign of the declining confidence in the global economic order.

Aside from these factors, investors must also consider the industrial use of gold and silver. Silver (like platinum, which has gone up 84 per cent since January) has significant uses in multiple industries, ranging from electronics to renewable energy and water purification, whereas gold has little utility outside the jewellery industry. This could result in a divergence of trading trends.

Financial reporting

Reducing the frequency will not help

United States (US) President Donald Trump recently suggested that companies, subject to approval from the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), be allowed to report financial results on a six-monthly basis rather than quarterly. He reasoned that this would save money and allow company management to focus on running the business. Several individuals, including corporate leaders, share similar views and believe that companies are often entangled in the quarterly cycle, which hinders long-term thinking. In a joint 2018 piece in *The Wall Street Journal*, Jamie Dimon and Warren Buffett had argued that “... quarterly earnings guidance often leads to an unhealthy focus on short-term profits at the expense of long-term strategy, growth and sustainability”. Interestingly, following Mr Trump’s statement, the SEC chairman said the regulator would consider the change.

What is good for US companies should also be good for companies in other jurisdictions. To get a sense among stakeholders in India, this newspaper conducted a dipstick survey and approached both companies and institutional investors. Perhaps unsurprisingly, 64 per cent of corporate leaders said six-monthly reporting would help reduce short-term pressure and allow them to focus on strategy. However, it is also important to consider the view of investors/shareholders, for whose benefit quarterly reporting was introduced. Well over 70 per cent of top executives in asset-management companies preferred the current frequency of reporting. This again is not difficult to understand. Shifting to six-monthly reporting will impact investors and money managers in terms of assessing company performance.

Besides, it is not certain that moving to a biannual reporting cycle will necessarily improve outcomes as Mr Trump and others suggest. A study of company earnings in the United Kingdom, done by the CFA Institute Research Foundation, found that the frequency of reporting did not materially affect corporate investment. It did not find any material reduction in investment when companies were made to report quarterly earnings in 2007. Similarly, when companies were allowed to stop reporting earnings quarterly in 2014, there was no significant increase in investment among those that stopped, compared with those that continued quarterly reporting. Thus, it is clear that the reporting frequency does not materially affect management decisions. Thus, changing it is unlikely to lead to gains for companies and eventually for shareholders. From the shareholders’ perspective, there are enough arguments in favour of continuing with the current system.

Moving to a biannual reporting cycle will inevitably increase information asymmetry between management and shareholders, potentially leading to greater volatility in financial markets. Prices will be influenced more by speculative analysis than actual numbers. Further, company managers taking questions from investors/analysts every quarter helps them remain focused. It should not be a constraint on investment, as management can always explain the rationale. In a developing market like India, increased discourses and frequent reporting are crucial. It will help improve investor confidence and enable savings to be channelled into productive investment. Reducing the frequency of financial reporting is unlikely to benefit US companies, investors, or the economy. It will certainly not help a country like India.



Tech unemployment

A new sword hanging over our heads

Technological unemployment occurs when developments in technology and working practices cause some employees to lose their jobs. The phrase and the event appear to have headline status nowadays.

Here is the *Financial Times* from London: “Tech companies axe jobs...”; and closer home, the Times of India: “IT (information technology) jobs slowdown: Sector sees 10 per cent dip...”. There are also the modern-day proofs to establish a topic’s popularity: Reddit has multiple discussions on the issue, and Wikipedia has an article devoted to it. This entry reviews the unemployment caused by technology through the ages and says that “a number of studies have predicted that automation will take a large proportion of jobs in the future”.

It is worth looking at the past to draw some insights about the complex future that we face. Between 1811 and 1817, a group of textile workers whose jobs were threatened by the automated looms of the first Industrial Revolution rallied around a Robin Hood-like figure, Ned Ludd, and attacked mills and machinery until the British government suppressed them. Economists saw in the Luddite movement an early example of a pattern: Large-scale automation entering the workplace and affecting wages and employment prospects. Is it possible that a similar Luddite move-

ment may rise against the artificial intelligence (AI) technology revolution?

John Maynard Keynes in his 1930 essay “Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren” suggested a new term: “Technological unemployment”. He further postulated that this was caused by our discovery of means to economise labour, but this revelation could outrun the pace at which we can find new uses for labour.

India has battled with this issue throughout its recent history. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, a struggling lawyer in Bombay, acquired the title “Mahatma” after he led the peasants of Champaran against “exploitative British indigo plantation owners”, who allegedly gave low prices for the crop. However, history tells us that the low price for the indigo dye was not because of exploitative British plantation owners but a result of German companies like Bayer and BASF synthetically producing indigo from coal tar.

A more recent case study that we Indians have chosen to forget was that fateful day in December 1978, when over half a million bank employees throughout the country went on a two-day strike to protest computerisation in banks. That was a time when banks would take forever to clear cheques; for example, when I was a student at IIM Calcutta in 1970, a cheque for my fees from my father’s account in the



AJIT BALAKRISHNAN

The elusive private capex boom

Economists for decades have constantly lamented that we are having too much revenue expenditure and not enough capital expenditure (capex). That complaint, at least, can be retired. In the past 11 years the Modi government has spent close to ₹54 trillion as capex, about ₹38 trillion after the pandemic. For three consecutive years, public investment has exceeded ₹11 trillion annually, poured into roads, railways, defence, water, and other forms of infrastructure. In FY25, the capital outlay accounted for 23 per cent of government spending — the highest in two decades.

Surely this would have got us a big dividend, economic and non-economic: Faster connectivity; lower or stable infrastructure costs, leading to higher productivity and output; and competitiveness. Non-economic benefits would be cheaper and faster travel, better civic infrastructure, and water and power connections. Government spending would trickle down quickly and benefit the masses with more jobs and higher wages. Above all, the state’s heavy spending was expected to awaken a long dormant animal spirit: Private capital expenditure.

No dearth of efforts

That spirit, however, remains stubbornly asleep. Successive policy rounds have tried to rouse it — each with the same disappointing result. The government’s first diagnosis was that private investment had been held back by India’s festering problem of bad loans. Public-sector banks, burdened with dud assets from the previous Congress-led years, were too crippled to lend. The response was sweeping: Bad loans were written off, a bankruptcy code was enacted, and the system was purged of its rot — though few culprits were punished. But nobody asked business persons whether it was lack of money or poor demand that was holding them back from investing. Private capex remained weak.

Next came tax cuts. In September 2019, amid flagging exports, a consumption slowdown, and a shadow-banking crisis, rates of corporation tax

were dramatically slashed. It was textbook logic: Lower taxes would fatten profits and spur reinvestment. Again, nobody asked the obvious question — whether firms were held back by high taxes or by tepid demand. The result was the same: Private capex remained weak. In round three, the government went further. Still believing in the private sector to be the main engine of growth, it launched a state-spending initiative, the production-linked incentive (PLI), designed to directly boost private capex.

Finally, the state itself took up the mantle of boosting growth and employment through government capex, especially after the pandemic. Indeed, government capex has been the primary engine of investment growth since FY22. One assumption was now that the government has stepped forward with unprecedented largesse, private capex will follow. It did not. Stripped of PLI giveaway (806 applications and an investment of ₹1.76 trillion), private capex has remained subdued.

Overall, government capex averaged 4.1 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) over FY22-25, up from 2.8 per cent in the pre-pandemic days, while the share of private capex remained at around 2 per cent of GDP. It may be higher

this year but no one expects it to sustain, given the trade troubles. Private participation in gross fixed capital formation (GFCF) fell to a low of 34.4 per cent in FY24 from peaks above 40 per cent pre-2016. To be sure, those earlier peaks were inflated by crony lending and scandal-ridden projects. Even so, after four major interventions — bank cleanups, tax cuts, subsidies, and state-led investment — private investment remains underwhelming. In FY25, capex will account for 23 per cent of government spending, reaching levels last seen in FY04. Back then, India experienced one of its strongest private-investment cycles. How did that happen and why are things so subdued this time?

For the past 15 years or more, I have watched economists at major brokerages wistfully predicting



IRRATIONAL CHOICE
DEBASHIS BASU

Kannur branch of State Bank of India would take about two weeks to be credited when deposited in Kolkata (then Calcutta). Still, bank employees resisted computerisation vigorously for the next few years. The government of that time held on firmly and we can see what happened: Banking has moved on from having to visit a bank for every transaction to doing it on a mobile phone. The use of banks has thus moved from under 10 per cent of the population then to over 90 per cent after banks computerised.

A little more than a decade later, 1982 saw a massive strike involving over 250,000 workers from more than 50 mills across Mumbai, driven by widespread frustration over low wages, poor working conditions, and ineffective representation from the official union. Depending on one’s ideology at that time, one blamed either the “wicked” mill owners or the “wicked” workers’ union leader Datta Samant. Rarely is the real underlying reason mentioned: The arrival of synthetic cloths like nylon and polyester. Practically all the cotton textile mills closed, almost all mill workers lost their jobs, and the millowners converted their land into super-profitable real estate ventures.

The big question confronting us today in every corner of the world, including India, is this: Will the new technology wave of artificial intelligence (AI) create similar violent protest movements and what kind of resolution will be reached?

Some early anti-AI protest movements are under way already. In London, a group of 20 or so protesters recently stood outside of the United Kingdom’s Department of Science, Innovation and Technology, chanting things like “Stop the race, it’s not safe” and “Whose future? Our future”, with the hopes of attracting the attention of policymakers. In San Francisco, protesters held a demonstration outside OpenAI’s office over concerns that their technology could cause “human extinction”. The protesters say their goal is to get governments to regulate the companies developing frontier AI models like ChatGPT.

Even Tim Berners-Lee, the original creator of the web, has started a campaign for a human-centric approach with a goal to restore the web as a tool for humanity, emphasising individual empowerment and accessibility. He says that he sees threats to the open web from misinformation, loss of personal data control, and the increasing domination by big tech platforms.

Governments everywhere, including in India, ought to be struggling to decide what kind of regulation is necessary and appropriate. As in the case of earlier technology waves, the challenge is to strike a balance between too much regulation, which will hinder reaping the benefits of AI, or too little regulation, which will savagely act as a sword against humanity.

The author (ajitb@rediffmail.com) is devoting his life to unravelling the connections between technology and society

Augusto Pinochet and the art of impunity



JENNIFER SZALAI

On March 3, 2000, after an airplane carrying General Augusto Pinochet landed in Santiago, Chile, his entourage pushed him in a wheelchair onto a mechanical lift as he smiled at the jubilant scene before him. Pinochet, the dictator of Chile from 1973 to 1990, had been detained in Britain while his lawyers fought attempts to extradite him to Spain, where a judge had issued an international arrest warrant for human rights violations committed by his regime.

After nearly 17 months, the British government eventually abandoned extradition proceedings; the 84-year-old Pinochet, who had been staying under

house arrest just outside London, was deemed too ill to face charges in Spain. Yet upon his return to Chile, the old general appeared to be in robust health, standing up once his wheelchair touched the tarmac to give a military colleague a hearty embrace.

Years later, a woman whose husband was disappeared in 1974 remembered a broadcast of the moment as if it showed someone literally getting away with murder: “I felt consternation and rage, and a deep sense of impunity.”

Impunity is the central theme of *38 Londres Street*, a marvellous and absorbing new book by the British-French lawyer and author Philippe Sands. In 1973, Pinochet and the Chilean military overthrew the democratically elected government of President Salvador Allende and proceeded to crush opposition and dissent, unleashing state-sanctioned sadism as a means of both retribution and deterrence.

The title of Sands’s book is the address that used to serve as headquarters for the

Socialist Party in Santiago, before it became one of the military dictatorship’s centres for torture and disappearance. Sands calls the proceedings against Pinochet “the most significant criminal case since Nuremberg.” Never before had a former head of state been arrested in another country for international crimes.

Sands was incidentally connected to these events in several surprising ways. When Pinochet’s legal team tried to hire him, Sands’s wife threatened a divorce if he took the case. Decades earlier, his wife’s father, a publisher, happened to be working on a book proposal with Orlando Letelier, a former official in the Allende government, when Letelier was assassinated by Pinochet’s secret police. And in the course of researching this book, Sands learned that Carmelo Soria — a United Nations official who was abducted in Santiago in 1976 and whose body was found in a canal two days later — was his wife’s distant cousin.

But it is Sands’s connection to the other narrative thread in *38 Londres Street* that

gives this book its inimitable shape. In 1962, more than three decades before Pinochet was arrested in London, a man by the name of Walther Rauff was arrested in Punta Arenas, in Chile, and faced extradition to West Germany. Rauff, a former Nazi SS commander, oversaw the development of mobile gas vans, a precursor to the death camps. Sands learned that his mother’s cousin Herta, was most likely one of the thousands murdered in Rauff’s vans. Herta was 12 years old.

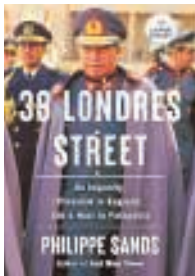
After World War II, Rauff escaped to Ecuador, where he met Pinochet, and for a time their families became close. In addition to their virulent anti-communism, the men shared an interest in Nazism. Rauff, who after his arrest lived in fear of the extradition that never came, was thrilled by Pinochet’s coup. As he bragged in a letter to a nephew, “I am protected like a cultural monument.”

The book moves back and forth in time, as Sands tracks down documents and people to interview, trying to ascertain

if rumours about Rauff were true. Was Rauff involved with Pinochet’s secret police? Did he help design a Chilean concentration camp whose design bore an uncanny resemblance to Auschwitz?

Rauff worked at a seafood canning company, packing the flesh of king crabs into tins; the old Nazi became such a notorious figure in Chile that he featured as the sinister “man in Punta Arenas” in Bruce Chatwin’s *In Patagonia*. In 1965, the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda wrote an article attacking his country’s Supreme Court for allowing a war criminal like Rauff to live freely: “It protects people who efficiently organize collective murder and transport in vans.”

38 Londres Street is the third book in a trilogy that Sands began with *East West Street* (2016) and continued with *The Ratline* (2021). All three books revolve around big questions about evil, state power, immunity and impunity. But Sands is also a consummate storyteller, gently



38 LONDRES STREET: On Impunity, Pinochet in England, and a Nazi in Patagonia
by Philippe Sands
Published by Knopf
453 pages \$35

teasing out his heavy themes and the accompanying legal intricacies through the unforgettable details he unearths and the many people — Rauff’s family, former military conscripts, British legal insiders — who open up to him.

There is a measure of hope in this book, but Sands shows that even in the face of overwhelming evidence, justice is never a foregone conclusion. In the epilogue, a Pinochet confidant tells Sands that the Pinochet Foundation received a check for nearly 980,000 pounds from the British government, made out to Pinochet personally, to reimburse his expenses while he was in London. Pinochet’s critics were agast, but his lawyer was unapologetic. “That’s the system,” he said.

The reviewer is non-fiction book critic for *The Times*
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RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

NEXT STEPS, WAY OUT

A lot is still not clear on both sides. But Trump’s 20-point plan is a significant step forward, now the hard work begins

EVER SINCE THE January ceasefire between Israel and Hamas collapsed in March, attempts to stop the fighting in Gaza have stumbled and failed. Most recently, Israel’s strikes inside Qatar on a Hamas negotiation team had seemed to put an end to any realistic prospect of peace in the near term. Despite international opposition, Israel launched a ground offensive in Gaza City last month. US President Donald Trump’s 20-point “peace plan” for Gaza, however, has raised hopes of a breakthrough. The plan, which Israel and key Arab countries have agreed to, includes an immediate ceasefire; exchange of Israeli hostages and Palestinian prisoners; phased withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza; delivery of aid; interim governance of Gaza by a Board of Peace “headed and chaired” by Trump; Hamas’s disarmament; a framework for reconstruction; and notably, a “credible pathway to Palestinian self-determination and statehood.” In contrast to Trump’s previous “Riviera” proposal, this plan says that Palestinians will not be forced to leave. Hamas has accepted several parts of the plan, including the release of the hostages for a ceasefire, while it deliberates on the other clauses. Trump ordered Israel to “immediately” stop bombing Gaza (which it hasn’t) as he wrote on social media: “Based on the Statement just issued by Hamas, I believe they are ready for a lasting PEACE.” These developments are extremely welcome. Trump’s plan, notwithstanding the challenges, points to a light at the end of the tunnel, the possibility of an end to a war that has killed at least 2,000 Israelis and 66,000 Palestinians.

Recent history shows that this is the most critical stage of the talks. In the past, whenever a deal has been close, the Israeli Prime Minister was quick to jeopardise it — not only with Hamas but also with Iran. The challenge now, therefore, is for Trump to ensure the implementation of the plan while resisting efforts by Netanyahu to sabotage the process. Another concern the extent to which Hamas will agree to relinquish its role in Gaza. It has not committed to disarmament, nor has it agreed to withdraw fully from Palestinian politics. Instead, it has said that the future of the Gaza Strip should be decided on the basis of a “collective national position” and relevant international resolutions. Many details remain unclear — including who will sit on the proposed “technocratic, apolitical Palestinian committee” that will govern post-war Gaza, when it will be formed, and how many of its members will be Palestinian. Other grey areas include the timeline for new elections to the Palestinian Authority and whether Gazans will be allowed to take part.

The international community, families of the hostages, and large sections of the Israeli public have been pleading for an end to the war. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, too, has been advocating for peace as part of the broader global consensus — he has lauded Trump’s plan. More than 700 days into the conflict, the prospect of a resolution has never seemed more real. Trump, Netanyahu and Hamas must now see it through. It will take a sure-footed diplomacy that is not diverted and distracted by the unrelenting demands for spectacle and performance in the social media age. The next steps will be watched. Trump’s 20-point plan is a start, now the hard work begins.

WAYS OF EATING

Overindulgence in carbohydrates and low protein intake are contributing to India’s obesity crisis

INDIA’S OBESITY PROBLEM and its connection to the surge in non-communicable diseases like diabetes and hypertension has been evident for some time now. The findings of a recent survey offer a clearer picture of what may be one of the biggest factors driving this ballooning crisis. Conducted as part of a study by the Indian Council of Medical Research-India Diabetes (ICMR-INDIAB), in collaboration with the Madras Diabetes Research Foundation, the survey has found the typical diet across the country to be highly skewed in favour of carbohydrates, which contribute a whopping 62 per cent of daily calories for most Indians. Along with this overconsumption of refined carbohydrates — chiefly in the form of white rice, milled whole grains and added sugar — the survey, conducted with a sample of 1,21,077 Indian adults from urban and rural areas of 36 states, Union Territories and NCT-Delhi, has also found sub-optimal protein consumption. It is a crisis, in other words, that begins at the basic level of how people are putting together their meals.

In a country that has historically struggled with malnutrition, the growing number of people who appear to be simultaneously overfed and under-nourished should set alarm bells ringing at every level. It is further proof that rising prosperity does not automatically translate to a healthier diet. Indeed, what these findings make clear is that beyond tackling the recognised risks posed by overconsumption of salt-, fat- and sugar-laden ultra-processed, packaged snacks and drinks — increasingly evident across rural and urban parts of the country — there is an urgent need to address lack of awareness about the macronutrient composition of the average Indian’s diet. Some steps have already been taken to address the overindulgence in junk food, notably in light of the alarming rise in childhood obesity rates — more than 12 million children were grossly overweight in 2022, compared to 0.4 million in 1990, as per a Lancet study last year. One such initiative is the CBSE’s directive earlier this year to set up sugar boards in affiliated schools to reinforce the dangers of excessive sugar consumption.

But such steps are not nearly enough. Neither are government initiatives to encourage greater consumption of millets, which have been promoted as a more nutritionally-dense replacement for refined grains, as they do not take into account the fundamental problems of overindulgence in carbs and protein deficiency. This is also why policies that place political imperatives above public health concerns, such as the exclusion of eggs in midday meal schemes in various states, need a rethink. In a country where large portions of rice, roti and other grain-based foods form the centre of a meal, representing both security and satiation, what is needed is a strategy that places nutrition science at its centre, involving both children and adults. Overhauling the way people eat — how they have long eaten — is not going to be easy. But it must be done.

FREEZE FRAME

E P UNNY



FAIZAN MUSTAFA

RICHARD ALLEN POSNER, the great legal scholar and former American judge, once noted that it is better for us to view judges as humans, not as “a Promethean, intent on changing the world, or a saint, devoid of human weaknesses, biases, and foibles.” Former Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud recently referred to the construction of the Babri Masjid as the “fundamental act of desecration”. Was he only demonstrating his humanness by saying the exact opposite of what the Babri Masjid judgment had said?

The former CJI is in the news for his views on the desecration, in the 16th century, of the Ram temple in Ayodhya. Is his assertion right, or is it contrary to historical facts and law? What were the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) findings, and why does Justice Chandrachud attach more importance to them today?

Regardless of what political ideologues or even judges say, the dispute in Ayodhya did not begin in 1528 with Babur. It began in 1885 with litigation by one Mahant Raghubir Das over a *chabutra* that was constructed outside Babri Masjid in the late 1850s. When the British prevented the construction of a temple over the *chabutra*, Das unsuccessfully litigated his cause again. Each time, the courts would emphasise on status quo, that is, the Muslims would pray inside the Babri Masjid while Hindus had limited rights to pray at the *chabutra*. In fact, the case was covered by *res judicata* — disputes finally determined by courts cannot be reopened — but the SC in the 2019 judgment made a strange distinction between the inner and outer parts of the disputed property, giving importance to belief over other concerns.

While observing that faith is limited to the individual believer and that it cannot determine a land dispute on the basis of people’s beliefs, it eventually gave the disputed land for the construction of a Hindu temple. It did so because some people believed that Ram was born at the disputed site in Ayodhya, although there was no inscription to that effect, nor was it mentioned in Valmiki’s *Ramayana* or Tulsidas’s *Ramcharitmanas*. In fact, no historical record before the 18th century made

Do not disturb

Babri Masjid dispute has been settled. It is imprudent for a former CJI to revive it



Judges should speak only through judgments — unlike politicians, they are not supposed to justify them. Even if their judgments were wrong, they need not be apologetic about them and cite God’s guidance as the justification. Of course, future judges do have the power to overrule them, and the legislature may also overturn them.



JAYANT CHAUDHARY

“Learning is the discovery that something is possible.” — Fritz Perls

THERE IS A circle of learning in every society. Those within it can read, understand, and act. Those outside remain silent, depending on others to speak and decide for them. Literacy is the line that separates the two. In a small village in Madhya Pradesh, Diya Bai spent years outside that circle. When she had to withdraw money from a bank or fill out an application for a scheme, Diya Bai would sit patiently until someone else helped her. Today, she not only does it herself but also guides other women in her village to claim benefits that were once beyond their reach. Her story reminds us that literacy is not a statistic to be counted but a life to be transformed.

It is this belief that led to the creation of ULLAS — Understanding of Lifelong Learning for All in Society. Aligned with the National Education Policy, 2020, ULLAS was launched in 2022 to provide educational opportunities to adults aged 15 and above who have missed formal schooling. Unlike earlier initiatives, it is driven by a deep sense of *kartavyabodh* — a collective responsibility to uplift every individual. This shared duty propels ULLAS’s drive for total literacy. The programme transforms schools into evening *samajik chetna kendras*, deploys mobile apps with primers in 26 languages, and uses digital platforms for remote reach. Citizens serve as volunteer teachers, creating a movement of over 2.8 crore learn-

DRAWING A LARGER CIRCLE

Behind the country’s literacy milestones lies a spirit of volunteerism



Aligned with the National Education Policy, 2020, ULLAS was launched in 2022 to provide educational opportunities to adults aged 15 and above who have missed formal schooling. Unlike earlier initiatives, it is driven by a deep sense of ‘kartavyabodh’ — a collective responsibility to uplift every individual. This shared duty propels ULLAS’s drive for total literacy.

ers and 45 lakh volunteers.

For generations, literacy meant the bare minimum — the ability to read and write a sentence. That definition was fit for a time when our most significant challenge was to lift millions out of complete illiteracy. However, in a world defined by technology and rapid information, literacy must today include the ability to compute, use digital tools, manage finances, and participate fully in civic life. The commitment to achieving full literacy is anchored in both international obligations and national policy. The UN’s Sustainable Development Goal 4.6 mandates that by 2030, all youth and a substantial proportion of adults achieve literacy and numeracy. The National Education Policy 2020 also emphasises the need for strong and innovative government initiatives for adult education to achieve 100 per cent literacy — it recognises the direct relation between literacy rates and per capita GDP. In August 2024, the Ministry of Education formalised this vision for the ULLAS programme, redefining literacy to encompass not just reading and writing, but computational skills, digital literacy, and financial literacy.

The impact of ULLAS is clearly visible. Rural literacy has risen from 67.7 per cent in 2011 to 77.5 per cent in 2023-24. Female literacy has surged from 65.4 per cent to 74.6 per cent. States are declaring themselves fully literate. Mizoram made the declaration earlier this year, followed by Goa and Tripura. Himachal

Pradesh joined them last month.

While these milestones should be celebrated, the true strength of the mission lies not in numbers but in the human effort. Across the country, volunteers are carrying the flame of literacy forward. Be it Mandavi Soni, a young student from Madhya Pradesh’s Chhatarpur district, who went from door to door until 10 of her neighbours agreed to join classes, or Anshu Kumar, a government secondary school student from Gurugram who taught adults to read and then guided them in using ATMs, cheques, and online banking, millions of such stories exist, being told quietly around all of us. Their dedication proves that literacy is not built by the government alone. It is carried by people who give their time to others. I, too, have registered as a volunteer, because this is a responsibility we must all share. Let us all embrace the spirit of “Jan Jan Saakshar” and adhere to the concept of each one, teach at least one.

Literacy today is not just a few rows in a census table but a threshold. It is the step from silence into speech, from waiting into acting, from exclusion into belonging. The circle of society will always exist. The only question is how wide we are willing to draw it. With every learner, every volunteer, and every act of teaching, we can make that circle larger until no one is left outside.

The writer is Union minister of state (independent charge), skill development and entrepreneurship

OCTOBER 6, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

UN CONDEMNS ISRAEL

THE UNITED NATIONS Security Council has “vigorously condemned” Israel’s aggression against Tunisia and ordered it to “refrain from perpetrating such acts” in future. Acting on a non-aligned proposal, the 15-nation Council on Friday night dubbed the Israeli air raid a “flagrant violation” of international law and upheld Tunisia’s right to reparations for the loss of life and material damage it suffered.

ASSAM ELECTORAL ROLL

NEARLY HALF THE claims and objections relating to the draft electoral rolls of the 126

Assam Assembly constituencies have been disposed of so far, and the final rolls are expected to be published by the end of next month. Nearly 22 lakh claims and objections have been received. According to tentative figures, of the nearly 9.5 lakh claims, about seven lakh have been disposed of. Of these seven lakh, over four lakh were accepted and the rest rejected. Out of 12.5 lakh objections filed, 3.2 lakh have been disposed of, with about 70,000 being accepted.

ENLF TEAM ARRIVES

A 12-MEMBER EELAM National Liberation Front (ENLF) delegation arrived in Delhi to resume talks with the Foreign Secretary, Ramesh

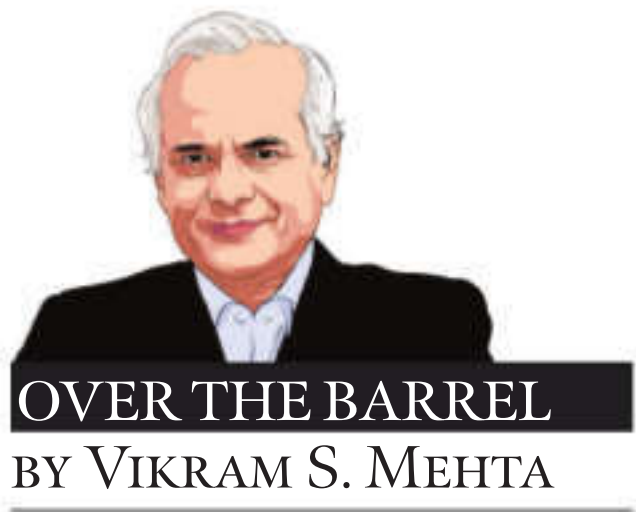
Bhandari, on the modalities for the observance of the ceasefire in Sri Lanka. V Pirabhakaran (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam), Padmanabha (Eelam People’s Revolutionary Liberation Front), V Balakumar (Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students) and Sri Sabaratnam (Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation) are the leading members.

SECOND THOUGHTS

THE BARNALA GOVERNMENT seems to be having second thoughts about a judicial inquiry by a High Court judge into “all the killings in Punjab” to “punish those politicians and officials who were responsible for them over about four years.”

An Energy Atmanirbharta Act

It is needed. Because even as contours of the energy map have changed, energy security remains a national priority



OVER THE BARREL
BY VIKRAM S. MEHTA

“VIKSIT BHARAT” AND *atmanirbharta* are resonant national slogans. There is no minister of energy in the central government with oversight responsibility for the core components of the energy ecosystem — coal, petroleum, renewables and nuclear. But if there were one, I would suggest he take the following high-level initiatives to deliver on these objectives.

First, he should ensure his cabinet colleagues agree on the interpretation of these words. That is, to have clarity and alignment on the deliverables of *viksit* and *atmanirbhar* in the context of energy.

The Hindi word *viksit* translates to “developed”, which most people distil down to economic metrics like GDP. The minister should make clear that *viksit* in the context of energy has a broader deliverable. It encompasses social inclusiveness and environmental protection.

Atmanirbhar translates to “self-sufficiency” or “self-reliance”. The policy roadmap for achieving the former is different from that for the latter.

“Self-sufficiency” is a hard metric. It means we produce what we consume. Our petroleum companies have been struggling to achieve this goal for more than half a century. The results have not been encouraging. In the mid-1970s, we imported approximately 30 per cent of our domestic crude oil requirement. Today, we import approximately 85 per cent. The reason is that whilst we know our 26 sedimentary basins contain hydrocarbons, we have had difficulty both in locating them, and even when they are located, in developing and producing them on a commercial basis.

Given this track record, even whilst self-sufficiency in petroleum is a powerful slogan behind which to rally, we should temper our optimism. The likelihood of producing what we consume within the timeframe of 2047 is slim.

Self-sufficiency in coal is, of course, attainable as we sit atop the fifth-largest deposits in the world, but overdependence on this “dirty” and highly polluting energy source would compromise our objective of Viksit Bharat, broadly defined.

“Self-reliance” on the other hand, can be interpreted more loosely. It is not about import independence but about a network of national and international relationships and assets that guarantee access to affordable, timely and “clean” energy. The one caveat is that by introducing the word “clean”, one is also introducing the imperative of securing access to the minerals and metals for the manufacture of components essential for generating and storing clean energy. Specifically, nickel, cobalt, lithium, copper and rare earths.

The larger point the minister must make clear is that the policy roadmap for achieving self-sufficiency is different from that for achieving self-reliance. In the context of at-



C.R.Sasikumar

manirbharta, the country should strive for self-reliance.

Second, the minister should set out the current global backdrop. Three messages should be emphasised.

The world is headed towards an ecological abyss. Sadly, global summity related to climate change has failed to deliver substantive results — the target of limiting the global temperature increase to 1.5 degree Celsius above pre-industrial levels was breached in 2024. But given that this is a crisis that does not respect national boundaries, the global community has no option but to collaborate. India should put its weight behind such international efforts, notwithstanding the views of powerful detractors like US President Donald Trump. It should do so also because it will be disproportionately impacted by global warming. The hard reality is that India does not have the luxury to develop first and clean up later.

Globalisation may not be dead but it is comatose. This has led to the weaponisation of energy trade and hypocrisy. Thus, even as the US sanctions India for buying oil from Russia and accuses Indian refineries of being the “laundromat” for Russia, it purchases oil from Venezuela, whose government it does not recognise. This is because Venezuelan heavy oil suits American refineries. The irony is that the output of these refineries is mostly laundered for sale to Europe. Thus, even as the EU calls for sanctions against Russia, several of its members purchase Russian LNG. And even as they introduce the Carbon Border Adjustment Tax, they turn a Nelson’s eye to the reopening of coal mines by their members. Opportunism is the bedrock of contemporary energy policy.

Third, China has emerged as a new energy power. The minerals and metal ores referred to above are produced by a few countries in Africa (Congo — cobalt), Latin America (Peru/Chile — copper), Asia (Indonesia — nickel) and Australia (lithium) but are then processed/smelted predomi-

One constant bears reminding. Even as the contours of the energy map have changed, energy security remains a national priority. It first occupied this space five decades back when the Gulf countries embargoed oil supplies to the western world for its support of Israel in the Yom Kippur War of October 1973. It remains front and centre of every government’s policy agenda. ‘Energy atmanirbharta’ is not just our aspiration. It is that of every country.

nantly in China. The green transition is dependent on China and this is the reason it can cock a snook at the threat of US tariffs.

One constant bears reminding. Even as the contours of the energy map have changed, energy security remains a national priority. It first occupied this space five decades back when the Gulf countries embargoed oil supplies to the western world for its support of Israel in the Yom Kippur War of October 1973. It remains front and centre of every government’s policy agenda. “Energy atmanirbharta” is not just our aspiration. It is that of every country.

With this definitional clarity and global backdrop, I would recommend the government take the following five high-level steps.

One, back *atmanirbharta* with legislation and enact an “Energy Atmanirbharta Act”.

Two, create a strategic stockpile of critical minerals and metals, similar to the strategic petroleum reserves.

Three, invest disproportionately in owning, controlling and/or managing international energy assets including critical minerals and metals. Specialised expertise should be dedicated to this purpose. The weight of India Inc should be behind bids and negotiations.

Four, increase — by a multiple — public investment in R&D and technology innovation. Public-private partnerships between government departments, academia, research laboratories and businesses have been the trigger for technological breakthroughs worldwide. This model should be replicated and institutionalised in India.

And five, sort out the complexity of the regulatory environment; simplify access to factors of production (land, capital, water); assure contract sanctity; contemporise expertise (fewer oil riggers; more solar maintenance engineers) and provide leadership.

The writer is chairman, Centre for Social and Economic Progress (CSEP). Views are personal

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

“It is alarming that even after US President Donald Trump’s appeal for a ceasefire in Gaza, Israeli airstrikes and artillery shelling have continued, wreaking havoc on residential areas and killing at least 20 individuals, including children.”

— THE DAILY STAR, BANGLADESH

Amid uncertainty, RBI waits & watches

Decision to leave policy rate unchanged leaves ammunition with central bank to act if growth falters



RAJANI SINHA

RBI’S MONETARY POLICY Committee (MPC) left the policy rate unchanged and maintained the stance at neutral, in line with our expectations. With global tariff-related uncertainties still unfolding and impacts of monetary policy actions and recent fiscal stimulus still playing out, the central bank has opted to wait and watch. Importantly, it has clearly conveyed that it could go for a policy rate cut in the future if growth headwinds intensify.

The RBI Governor’s statement aptly highlights that the growth-inflation dynamics have changed since the last policy meeting in August. There is a higher threat to the growth front as India faces steep US tariffs of 50 per cent. With goods exports already reeling under tariff pressure, the recent announcement by the US of higher H-1B visa fees and the proposed HIRE Act (Halting International Relocation of Employment), which seeks to curb outsourcing by US companies, reflects likely risks to India’s services exports. While the global concerns have aggravated, there are some supporting factors for domestic demand. The recent rationalisation of GST rates, reduction in income tax burden, a good monsoon, benign inflation and lower interest rates are supportive factors for growth.

The RBI has revised upwards the GDP growth projection for FY26 to 6.8 per cent (from the earlier projection of 6.5 per cent). This is mainly because of the estimated sharp GDP growth in the first half of the year, supported by a low deflator. However, the central bank has revised the growth projection lower for the second half of FY26, considering the adverse tariff impact. Given the lingering global uncertainties, we have maintained our GDP growth projection at 6.5 per cent for FY26. The central bank has projected the GDP growth for FY27 at 6.6 per cent, in line with our expectations.

While the growth story is uncertain and evolving, there is comfort on the inflation front. The inflation projection for FY26 has been lowered to 2.6 per cent from the earlier projection of 3.1 per cent. Benign inflation projection reflects sharper-than-expected moderation in food inflation and the impact of GST rationalisation. Core inflation is currently contained at around 4.2 per cent, even with a sharp increase in precious metal prices. Excluding precious metal prices, core inflation is lower at around 3 per cent. While CPI inflation is estimated to remain sub 2 per cent in the second and third quarters, it is likely to pick up next year. Given the very low average inflation in FY26, next year CPI inflation is projected to be higher at 4.5 per cent. Overall, there is no expectation of a build-up in prices; the higher inflation projection for next year is mainly a statistical impact of a low base. Having said that, next year’s monsoon and geopolitical events will play a critical role in inflation projection.

On the external sector front, uncertainties continue to linger amid high tariffs imposed by the US. While India’s goods exports feel the pinch of higher tariffs, services exports remain healthy. We estimate India’s

current account deficit to GDP to remain comfortable in the range of 0.9 per cent to 1.3 per cent, depending on the tariff scenario. Apart from healthy services exports, the current account will be supported by remittances and benign global crude oil prices. Capital flows have been adversely impacted by persistent FII outflows from the equity market and feeble net FDI flows. Capital flows are likely to remain volatile in the midst of global uncertainties. However, India’s high foreign exchange reserves of around \$700 billion are a comforting factor.

System liquidity has remained broadly in a surplus mode with the RBI intervening as required. Going ahead, there will be further infusion of liquidity in the near term due to the CRR cut. While the transmission of rate cuts to the banking sector has picked up in the last couple of months, it remains incomplete. And that’s also a reason the central bank was not in haste to cut the rate further.

An important aspect of this monetary policy was the other announcements geared towards strengthening the banking sector. The announcement of the Expected Credit Loss (ECL) Framework and revised Basel III capital adequacy norms from April 2027 is an apt step towards a robust and resilient banking sector. Moreover, measures like enabling Indian banks to finance acquisitions by Indian corporates and enhancing limits for lending by banks against shares and for IPOs will aid in enhancing the flow of credit. There was also a focus on deregulation and improving the ease of doing business, in line with the government’s focus in this year’s Union budget. The RBI has also announced some measures towards internationalisation of the rupee. In this regard, AD (authorised dealer) banks have been permitted to lend in Indian rupee to non-residents from Bhutan, Nepal, the Sri Lanka for cross-border transactions. Further, to promote wider use of Special Rupee Vostro Accounts (SRVA) balances, the RBI has permitted balances of these accounts to be invested in corporate bonds and commercial papers.

Overall, this was a very aptly formulated monetary policy in the midst of domestic and global uncertainties. The decision to leave the policy rate unchanged leaves ammunition with the RBI to act if growth falters, while also giving time to analyse the impact of the monetary and fiscal stimulus given so far. The other important feature of this policy is the clear direction given on the future trajectory, as the central bank highlighted that there is room for monetary easing in the future. Importantly, apart from the policy rate decision, there was increased focus on other critical areas like strengthening the banking sector, improving the flow of credit, simplifying foreign exchange management and improving the ease of doing business.

Currently, the biggest threat to the Indian economy is the global environment. The government is trying to negotiate a trade deal with the US, but uncertainty lingers in terms of the timing and form of this deal. If the 50 per cent tariff rate persists, India’s merchandise exports and overall growth will feel the brunt. While the RBI has already cut rates by 100 basis points in the current cycle and the government has also announced growth-supporting measures, the net impact on growth remains uncertain. We feel that there are chances of a 25 basis points rate cut in the next MPC meeting in December, if growth concerns intensify.

The writer is chief economist, CareEdge Ratings

Where debt meets gratitude

Meghnad Desai, Swraj Paul owed much to India — and India owes them a lot



MADHAVI SINGH

RECENTLY, LORD MEGHNAD Desai was posthumously honoured with the TIOL Outstanding Diaspora Award 2025. Lord Swraj Paul, another pillar of the Indian diaspora, died soon after him. The British High Commission organised a memorial service to honour and celebrate his life. Both were towering figures binding India and the United Kingdom. History has placed them side by side.

Their lives offer a window into how India thinks about its diaspora: Not merely as a story of brain drain and grievance, but as one of debt and gratitude. To recognise them publicly is to recognise the enduring ties between a nation and those who carried its imprint abroad.

Desai, born in Gujarat in 1940, made his name by defying orthodoxy. Yet what lingers in my mind is not this reputation but a single, small gesture. My father once refused me something, time or money, I cannot recall, but the sting remains. Half in jest, half in dismissal, he told me to curb my shopping. Desai, without hesitation, pulled out his credit card. “Go buy whatever you need,” he said.

I declined. But the gesture never left me. It was not about money. It was about recognition. About being seen when another had turned away. That is the Desai I carry with me.

Paul’s life, too, is well chronicled. Born

in Jalandhar in 1931, he travelled to London seeking treatment for his daughter Ambika, only to lose her. A captain of industry, he poured wealth into philanthropy and education through the Ambika Paul Foundation.

Yet my memory is of a modest box of chocolates from the House of Lords and a stationery set he gave me when I was leaving for university. By his standards, trivial gifts. But they were infused with thought. They told a nervous student: You are remembered. And then there was Aruna auntie, his wife, who let no one but me wreak havoc with her favourite lipsticks. In that small act of trust was intimacy, not pomp.

These may be anecdotes, but they also offer a moment to reflect on what we owe the people we lose. They show how legacy is built not only on institutions and donations, but on gestures of recognition. And they remind us that the diaspora’s contributions are not confined to remittances or philanthropy. They include something subtler: The assurance that Indians abroad remain tethered to the emotional fabric of the country they left behind.

India has long mourned “brain drain”. Bright students leave for universities abroad. Professionals build careers in other lands. The grievance is real. But to dwell only on loss is to ignore the gratitude owed. These migrants

carried India with them in their education, their upbringing, their moral compass. And in turn, they gave back not only through philanthropy and ideas, but by making India visible on the world stage.

Debt and gratitude are not opposites. They are twins. Desai was shaped by Gujarat and Bombay University before he rose to global stature. Paul carried the wounds and values of Jalandhar with him into London boardrooms. They paid back their society, reflecting old but cherished values. India, in turn, owes them recognition and the subtler gift of memory and presence.

We live in an age fluent in grievance. But to obsess only over what India lost to migration is to miss what it gained. That is why these personal stories matter. Memory is built not only from towering achievements but from small, precise gestures that outlast them.

When obituaries spoke of their brilliance, I remembered the men who saw me neither as my father’s daughter nor a social label, but as myself. That recognition, so rarely offered even by those closest to us, was a gift. Why do we wait until funerals to offer such gratitude?

This is a plea to hold both grievance and gratitude together. To acknowledge and say, yes, you gave us something precious. In private life, that means admitting our parents,

mentors, companions wounded us even as they handed us the tools to endure. In national life, it means admitting the diaspora left, but also that they never entirely left us.

We are too quick to close the book on relationships. Love is not a ledger; neither is legacy. There are moments of exhilaration and disappointment. Perhaps maturity, for a person and a nation, lies in holding these paradoxes; erasing neither.

And perhaps the measure of that maturity lies in how we repay the debt. We should sustain institutions, expand scholarships, and teach their examples of courage. Society can honour gratitude not by commemoration alone, but by building on the values they left behind.

Desai and Paul were good to some, difficult to others. But is that not true of us all? What we really leave behind are gestures, contradictions, fragments of recognition. That is the currency of legacy.

In losing them, I have come to see grief differently. It is not only about mourning what is gone. It is about finally noticing what was always there. The small acts, the paradoxes, the love distorted but still tethered. That is where debt and gratitude meet. And that, perhaps, is the truest farewell we can offer.

The writer is an advocate, Supreme Court

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

TEACHER’S TRUTH

THIS REFERS TO the article, ‘The teacher is walking away’ (IE, October 4). A motivated teacher gives his best to “bring out the best in every child”, which Mahatma Gandhi said, “is the purpose of education”. The article discusses the modern-day hurdles such a teacher faces in doing so. This aim cannot be achieved unless the head of the school, management and donors share the same goals. For example, while digital resources are a welcome addition, tools like ChatGPT can be disastrous because they are not a panacea for all teaching problems. Teaching is a noble profession capable of making a generational change; it needs talented teachers voluntarily willing to serve despite low pay and an adverse environment, but not without positive support from parents and the authorities.

Y.G.Chouksey, Pune

THIS REFERS TO the article, ‘The teacher is walking away’ (IE, October 4). Being a teacher, each and every line mentioned in the article sounds too personal. The only difference is — I am still a part of it. The result of this system will be drastic. We are creating Gen Zs — who are perfect in the virtual world but failures in life. They can excel in reels but not in real life. Maybe that’s why the developed coun-

tries are leaving smart education and focusing on traditional methods, where there is a need for a teacher to live a quality life and not just to survive.

Deepika Sharma, Joginder Nagar

MP SHOCKER

THIS REFERS TO the report, ‘MP: As kids died after taking cough syrup...’ (IE, October 5). It is hard to think of a simpler medication than the consumption of cough syrup. It is a matter of grave concern that it has caused the deaths of several children in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Maharashtra. Clearly, the pharmaceutical products that killed the kids failed to meet the rigorous standards in terms of raw materials, formulations and so on needed to make them safe for children to consume. This has been attested to by the finding of the Tamil Nadu Drugs Control Department of the presence of diethylene glycol (DEG), a toxic solvent used in industrial products like paints, ink and brake fluids, above permissible limits in samples of the Coldrif brand of cough syrup. The availability of toxic medicines — an oxymoron — that are “injurious to health” and can even prove fatal in the market is a telling comment on the state of health care in our country.

G.David Milton, Maruthancode



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

Sir Creek: Site of decades-long India-Pakistan border dispute

DIVYAA
NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 5

DEFENCE MINISTER Rajnath Singh last week warned Pakistan that “any misadventure in... Sir Creek... will invite a decisive response”.

“Pakistan must remember that the road to Karachi passes through the Creek,” Singh said at the Bhuj military station in Gujarat, pointing to the “recent expansion” of Pakistani military infrastructure in areas adjacent to Sir Creek.

Why Sir Creek matters

Sir Creek is a fluctuating 96-km tidal estuary along the India-Pakistan border, with the state of Gujarat to its east and the province of Sindh to its west. It is a marshy area teeming with snakes and scorpions, and is sparsely populated.

However, it has long been at the centre of an unresolved border dispute between India and Pakistan for several reasons:

STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE: As Singh mentioned, Sir Creek is crucial to Pakistan’s

defence of Karachi, the capital of Sindh province and Pakistan’s largest city.

Post Operation Sindoor, Pakistan has built bunkers, radars, and forward bases in the disputed area. These installations are capable of launching drone attacks and infantry operations.

India too has maintained a strong military presence to deter any Pakistani misadventure.

Indian concerns, however, aren’t merely limited to the Pakistani military: Sir Creek could be used as a launchpad for terror attacks on Indian soil, and is also frequented by drug smugglers.

ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE: The region is said to hold untapped oil and gas reserves that are vital to both countries’ interests.

For New Delhi, which has long sought to diversify its oil imports, and is currently searching for newer sources of cheaper oil beyond Russia, this is particularly important.

The creek also supports fishing grounds, crucial for the livelihoods of local fishermen in both Gujarat and Sindh.

The lack of a clear boundary results in



Sir Creek lies near the Rann of Kutch in Gujarat. Wikimedia Commons

frequent arrests of fishermen crossing into the other country’s waters.

It further impacts the delimitation of Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) in the Arabian Sea.

EEZs are areas of the ocean, generally extending 200 nautical miles (230 miles) beyond a nation’s territorial waters, within which it has jurisdiction over both living and non-living resources.

Boundary dispute

Pakistan claims the entirety of Sir Creek, while India sets the boundary along the middle of the navigable channel.

This disagreement stems from a larger one on whether the creek falls under the ‘Thalweg’ principle of boundary demarcation, which provides for making the mid-channel of a given watercourse a boundary. India argues that while fluctuating, the creek

is covered by the principle because it remains navigable. Pakistan, however, claims that the creek is not navigable, and hence beyond the purview of the Thalweg principle.

The origins of the dispute lie in an early-20th century argument between the rulers of Kutch and Sindh over ownership of a pile of firewood lying on the banks of a creek situated between the two principalities.

The dispute came to the fore after the India-Pakistan War of 1965, following which Pakistan claimed jurisdiction over half of the Rann of Kutch. In 1968, a tribunal granted 90% of the Rann to India but “left out of consideration” the “Sir Creek part of the boundary”. The dispute has festered since.

Discussions but no resolution

India and Pakistan have thus far held several rounds of bilateral discussions on the dispute. During the first round of talks held in Islamabad on June 2, 1989, the two sides managed to discuss the fundamental aspects of the dispute, but without any major results.

The second and third rounds of talks in 1990 and 1991 concluded without any progress. A fourth round of talks was held in Rawalpindi in 1991, while the fifth round was

held in New Delhi the next year, in the presence of technical experts from the Indian Navy.

After six years, India and Pakistan agreed to form a separate working group on the issue. The talks of the Sir Creek working group were held in 1998 in New Delhi, wherein India objected to Pakistan’s bid to internationalise the dispute, reiterating that all differences, after the Simla Accord, had to be resolved bilaterally. Pakistan sought to take the dispute to an international tribunal.

The Ministry of External Affairs had stated in 2019 that the last “formal talks (on Sir Creek) were held in June 2012 and the two sides *inter alia* discussed the land boundary in the Sir Creek area and delimitation of the International Maritime Boundary between India and Pakistan”.

“In December 2015, it was agreed to start a Comprehensive Bilateral Dialogue. This included the Sir Creek issue. However, the terror attack on the Airbase in Pathankot in January 2016 and Pakistan’s continued support to cross-border terrorism against India have prevented holding of any structured bilateral dialogue,” then External Affairs Minister V K Singh had said in his reply to an unstarred question in the Lok Sabha.

EXPLAINED SPACE

WHY A STUDY TARGETED PHOSPHINE IN SEARCH FOR LIFE BEYOND EARTH

ON A brown dwarf dozens of light years from Earth, astronomers have detected trace amounts of phosphine, a molecule that is produced by living things on Earth.

This discovery is not life, astronomers say. But the detection, published in the journal *Science* on Thursday, may help scientists in their quest to find both phosphine and life elsewhere in the galaxy.

The presence of phosphine in the atmosphere of a brown dwarf, an object that falls somewhere between a planet and a star, can refine scientific understanding of how and where the molecule could be found.

Eventually, it could help astronomers determine if phosphine is a reliable hint of life on rocky planets in the Milky Way.

“We have to make sure we do the work of understanding all of the natural processes that can make this molecule, before we can rule them out and say there must be a biological source,” said Adam Burgasser, an astrophysicist at the University of California, San Diego, who led the study.

Phosphine as an indicator

Phosphine, a molecule made of three hydrogen atoms and one phosphorus atom, is tricky to create and easy to destroy. On Earth, it is largely made by microbial life in swamp plants and animal intestines.

A widely debated announcement of phosphine on the planet Venus in 2020 spurred interest in the molecule as a possible hint of life in other worlds.

But phosphine is also found naturally in uninhabitable places like the giant gas planets Jupiter and Saturn. Astronomers reasoned, then, that such worlds outside the solar system should be relatively rich in phosphine.

Years of observations with the James Webb Space Telescope, however, fell short. Phosphine was barely there, leaving astronomers scratching their heads. The brown dwarf, named Wolf 1130C, is the only one, so far, that has met their expectations about its quantity.

Case of brown dwarf

Burgasser and his team observed Wolf 1130C by using two instruments on the Webb telescope that measured the wavelengths of light emitted and absorbed by the brown dwarf, information linked to the chemical makeup of its atmosphere.

They discovered phosphine on Wolf



An artist’s conception of a brown dwarf, with cloud bands.

NASA/JPL-Caltech via The NYT

1130C at a concentration of 100 parts per billion.

Melanie Rowland, an astronomer at the American Museum of Natural History who previously detected phosphine on a different brown dwarf, said the new discovery was both exciting and frustrating. This was because Wolf 1130C isn’t a standard brown dwarf. It is very old, and heavier elements, like oxygen, are largely missing from its atmosphere.

Those peculiarities make the discovery “even more surprising” that the amount of phosphine matches the predictions, she said.

The implications

It is unclear why other brown dwarfs appear to be lacking in phosphine. Phosphorus could be condensing and raining out of the sky altogether, or atmospheric models could be wrong, and Wolf 1130C is somehow unique.

Phosphine is uncommon in the universe: The molecule is destroyed when exposed to ultraviolet light, and won’t form in many environments.

And yet, the finicky nature of phosphine is exactly what makes it a promising candidate for being a sign of life, according to Clara Sousa-Silva, an astrochemist at Bard College. She was involved with the team that potentially detected phosphine on Venus and with the brown dwarf team.

Finding the molecule in places that cannot harbor life, Sousa-Silva said, “will be a critical piece of the puzzle for figuring out what business phosphine has anywhere else, including in a potentially habitable environment.”

THE NEW YORK TIMES



MAHENDRA P LAMA

THE QUEEN of Hills has once again been battered and devastated by heavy rain, which took several human lives and caused massive destruction. The rain that started on the night of October 3 exceeded the ‘exceptionally heavy rainfall’ warning by the Indian Meteorology Department issued just 12 hours before. This concentrated downpour of six hours destroyed the Dudhia bridge over Balason river which links Siliguri to the tourist town Mirik, and disrupted all the national and state highways.

Long history, rapid change

Darjeeling, known for its beauty and salubrious climate, has been a victim of several natural disasters in the past. Available records show that massive landslides occurred in 1899, 1934, 1950, 1968, 1975, 1980, 1991 and more recently in 2011 and 2015. The year 1968 saw devastating floods, also in October, killing over a thousand people.

The State of Environment Report, 1991, published by the non-profit Centre for Science and Environment, stated that during 1902–1978, there were nine cloud burst occurrences in the Teesta Valley.

Landslides in these hills have been vividly captured by public intellectuals and professionals in their memories. The 1950 landslides were captured by Leila Seth, former Chief Justice of Himachal Pradesh, in her book *On Balance* (2003). Seth once lived in the Railway Estate in Craigmont Hills in Darjeeling. She writes, “...at 7.30 they heard an enormous, ear bursting, crumbling sound and rushed out. Before their very eyes, the whole building, with all their loved possessions inside, had caved in like a house of cards.”

While natural disasters do have a long history in the region, the backdrop in which they play out has changed drastically and structurally over the years.

Firstly, the population in the hills has in-



Rescue operations underway after a bridge collapsed in a landslide-hit area following heavy rainfall in Darjeeling, on Sunday. NDRF via PTI

creased, mainly because of influx from the plains and neighbouring countries. The land-and-property-buying spree recorded metamorphic changes in the last three decades.

Secondly, the impact of climate change has been quite distinctly visible in the changing rainfall pattern. The rainfall that remained fairly spread over from May and September has now become more intense and incessant, lasting for just a few hours over a few days. What is locally known as ‘mushaldhare varsha’ (intense rainfall) has replaced the traditional steady and smooth ‘sawnaay jhari’ (monsoon shower).

Thirdly, the rivers and *jhoras* (streams) have shown unprecedented course changes, thereby generating new paths for hydrological flows and intrusions into human habitations and livelihoods.

Fourthly, heavy, unsuitable and unsustainable development projects, like hydro power, railways, hotels and other installations, have been a massive onslaught on the limited carrying capacity of these hills.

And finally, the flooding of river beds, streams-*jhoras* sidelines and other natural corridors with unplanned and unauthorised settlements have triggered arterial clogging.

A tragedy foretold

There are scores of studies and institutions that keep warning the governments and the people about impending dangers.

In the Landslide Atlas of India 2023 published by Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), Darjeeling was ranked 35th as the

most exposed area among 147 districts.

Several local NGOs, including Save the Hills led by Col Praful Rao of Kalimpong, have been highlighting these threats on social media and also through substantive debates and awareness campaigns.

The Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF) in Sikkim in October 2023, triggered by the Lhonak lake breach, was very emphatically warned about in the Sikkim Human Development Report 2001. This GLOF not only claimed many human lives, it swept away the 1200-mw Chungthang Hydro power project, destroyed several public and military installations, and caused an estimated damage of over Rs 25,000 crore, almost 60 per cent of the GDP of Sikkim of 2022–23.

The tail-end destructions it caused in the lower riparian of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts in West Bengal and further down in Bangladesh remain largely unaccounted for.

This shows that the very nature of disaster, its cause, and scale, leading to disproportionate destruction, has undergone a literal transformation.

The action needed

However, seriously lacking is the required urgency in Central and state governments in both forewarning the hill communities and also in managing the aftermath of damages.

Besides the relatively weaker institution of the District Collector, there is no professional agency to handle such devastation. The local administrative institutions, like the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration and

the municipalities and panchayats, have neither the knowledge and skills to handle such disasters, nor the funds, techniques, technology and manpower to effectively deal with these dangerous trends.

The municipalities in the hills, set up in the 1860s, once remained an example of sound governance to other towns and cities in India. Today, they do not even have a simple solid waste management unit. This itself has become a major disaster-causing factor.

The most blatant example of this institutional failure is the state of damage in Darjeeling and Kalimpong that remains unattended after the GLOF. For instance, in the Teesta Bazar area, river water continues to crisscross the highways, blocking the flow of people, goods and services almost every week.

National security ramifications

Climate change-triggered impacts have dangerous portents and very deleterious national security ramifications in Darjeeling and surrounding areas.

Many of Darjeeling’s products have played a role in India’s globalisation journey — its famous tea; cultivation of anti-malarial drugs like quinine; Mt Kanchenjunga-led natural beauty and tourism; and educational institutions. All these historically crucial bastions of India’s foreign exchange earnings have been doubly affected and eroded by climate change.

What the hill folks today are crying for are national institutions, including on climate change studies and disaster management, that would cater to the entire Himalayan regions of India, Bhutan, Nepal, Myanmar and the Tibet region. The long-standing plea made by organisations like Darjeeling Doors United Development Foundation, to convert the historic Forest Rangers College in Kurseong as the first climate change studies and management centre in the Eastern Himalayas, remain unaddressed by the Ministry of Environment and Forests in Delhi.

Given the Darjeeling district’s sensitive geopolitical location at the chicken’s neck, its politico-development status has to be now determined exclusively from the national security perspective. It has to be a national interest project in India’s Act East Policy context.

Prof Lama, former Member of National Security Advisory Board, Govt of India, prepared the 1st Plan of Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council in 1989.

As tourist season begins, state of the industry that employs a third of Goa

PAVNEET SINGH CHADHA
PANAJI, OCTOBER 5

THE FIRST charter flight from Novosibirsk, Russia, landed in Goa last week, marking the beginning of the tourist season in the coastal state.

The tourism industry, which employs more than a third of Goa’s population and contributes over 16% to its GDP, came under a barrage of criticism last November, and faces challenges regarding footfall, infrastructure, taxi unions, and social media “perceptions”.

What the data say

A social media post claiming that tourism in Goa was “down in the dumps” went viral last November. The government’s immediate response was to dismiss the concerns, accusing some influencers of spreading “false” narratives to malign the state. It subsequently furnished data to chal-

lenge this narrative.

But while the government’s data show that there has been a steady increase in domestic (and overall) tourist arrivals in the past few years, foreign tourist arrivals are still very far from the pre-Covid mark.

Goa recorded 71.27 lakh domestic and 9.37 lakh international tourists in 2019. In 2024, the state recorded a record 99.41 lakh domestic tourists, even as foreign footfall fell to 4.67 lakh. In 2023, these numbers were 81.75 lakh and 4.52 lakh, respectively, while in 2022, they were 70.18 lakh and 1.69 lakh, respectively.

Between January and June in 2025, 51.83 lakh domestic tourists and 2.71 lakh foreign tourists visited Goa — in line with trends from previous years.

Wars, visa issues...

The conflicts in Ukraine and West Asia, cumbersome visa processes, and ‘market forces’ have impeded the recovery of the number of foreign tourist arrivals to pre-

Covid-19 levels.

The state government has proposed to the Centre to introduce a visa on arrival (VoA) facility for tourists from select countries, which would allow “a single-entry stay of up to one month, requiring only proof of accommodation and a return air ticket”.

In a letter to the Ministry of External Affairs in February, Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant said that foreign tourist arrivals to India “remain below potential” due to the “complexity and unpredictability” of visa process.

In a memorandum to the Goa government in July, beach shack owners too highlighted the problem. “Many potential tourists express frustration with the current system, leading them to choose alternative destinations. A smoother... visa process is essential to ensure a steady flow of international tourists, who are a cornerstone of our business,” the memo said.

Cruz Cardozo, president of the Shack

Owners Welfare Society Goa, said, “Tourists often complain that it takes months for visas to be processed. South-east Asian countries have surged ahead because they have simplified norms.”

For beach shack owners, the “change in the segment of clientele” has meant that “purchasing power” has gone down. “Foreigners prefer peace and solitude. The beaches in North, except Mandrem, Arambol and Ashvem, are too crowded and noisy now. Earlier, tourists from the UK would stay for three months,” one shack owner said on the condition of anonymity.

...and infra challenges

Many say that Goa has simply become too expensive for the average traveller. Jit Arolkar, Maharashtrawadi Gomantak Party leader and MLA of the coastal Mandrem constituency in North Goa, said: “Hotel tariffs and air fares are too high. People say it is

cheaper to fly to Thailand or Indonesia. A one-week stay in a premium hotel in Vietnam is far cheaper than in Goa.”

A common refrain among tourists has been that private taxis, controlled by the taxi unions, charge “extortionate” fares. “I paid Rs 2,500 for a flight from Bengaluru to Goa, but for a cab ride from Dabolim to Mandrem, I had to pay Rs 3,500,” said Arunabh Bhattacharya, a tourist.

Jack Sukhija, president, Travel and Tourism Association of Goa, the apex body representing the hotel and travel trade, said, “We still need to find a way to assure affordable transport for tourists or at least have some transparency in transport”.

The state transport department in May published draft guidelines (Goa Transport Aggregator Guidelines, 2025), outlining a regulatory framework for app-based taxi and bike taxi operators. However, after taxi unions threatened to protest, Sawant announced that cab aggregators like Ola and Uber would not come to the state.

Another concern is the poor condition of roads, said Santosh Sangam Divkar, president of Small and Medium Hoteliers Association. “During the tourist season in November and December, you will see the roads dug up... The beaches have to be cleaner,” Divkar said.

The ‘influencer’ dilemma

Goa Tourism Minister Rohan Khaunte has repeatedly slammed social media influencers, claiming they have been paid to run a campaign to malign the state.

In January, he said that influencers from other states often demand a “free lunch” or a “free stay” to propagate a certain perception on social media. He urged Goa’s influencers to amplify the “real picture”.

Cardozo said the “vilification” campaign has damaged Goa’s image, and there was a need to counter that perception. “We are optimistic about this season. The vibrant culture, beaches and heritage of Goa have their own charm. That will never fade.”

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IDEA EXCHANGE

NEWSMAKERS IN THE NEWSROOM



WHY MOHAMMED SIRAJ

On the tour of England, with the Indian Test team in transition in the absence of big stars and led by a new captain, a situation that was made tougher due to Jasprit Bumrah's fitness issue, Mohammed Siraj was the lodestar, leading India to two memorable series-levelling wins in the two games that Bumrah couldn't play



Illustration: Suvajit Dey

God had written ‘ja hero ban ja tu, become a hero’

In a gruelling India-England Test series, where all five matches went to the final day, Mohammed Siraj finished with 23 wickets, leading India to level the series. In this session, moderated by Deputy Associate Editor Devendra Pandey, he reflects on key moments from the tour and the need to stay level-headed

Devendra Pandey: Every player dreams of starring in an iconic series. We saw Cheteshwar Pujara in Australia in the past. This England tour will be known as Siraj's series.

When I landed in England, my aim was to become the highest wicket taker there. That was my zone. During the whole series, I was mentally strong — I wanted to be 100 per cent fit, 100 per cent available, and play all five matches. My rhythm was also very good when I played the practice matches. When I found out that Jassi *bhai* (Jasprit Bumrah) was not going to play all the matches, since I was the second senior fast bowler in the team, I wanted to give my 100 per cent.

When we played the last series in Australia in 2024, I took 20 wickets. But Jassi *bhai*'s performance was extraordinary. I played well in the IPL. That gave me confidence. After the Champions Trophy, I had a good break. I realised what was wrong with my bowling. I practised and worked on my fitness.

Devendra Pandey: I heard that you were given a choice to sit out of the fifth Test and you said no. Did you think through that decision, considering you must have been very tired?

Shubman (Gill) asked me, '*Kaisi hai teri body?*' (How is your body?). I said, '*Ekdum* (absolutely) first-class'. He asked me if I would play. I said yes. He said, you are the main bowler for us, like Jasprit Bumrah, you decide. I said I'm available and am 100 per cent fit. I will give it everything. As for my body being tired, to be honest, I would have played one more Test if it was there. I didn't feel tired. But I was in a zone. When you enter that zone, you don't know what you are doing, but just have that feeling that I have to do something here.

Devendra Pandey: What was going through your mind on the last morning of the final Test, when you bowled India to a series-levelling win? Did it feel like a dream?

It was a script written for me from somewhere up there. From getting bowled in Lords (the Test that India lost), then reaching Oval. Then I took a catch (of Harry Brook) and touched the boundary. Everything was written for me. It was a script from God. When I woke up on that final morning, they needed 35 runs. I told myself that this game wouldn't go beyond an hour and that I will win this match.

Match was to start at 11 am and the team bus would leave by 9 am. I woke up at 6 am! I asked myself, 'Why did I wake up so early today?' I had woken up suddenly. After that, I wrote down, 'I can do this, win the game'. When the ball came out of my hand, the execution was exactly how I was thinking; it's a good sign. God had written, '*Ja hero ban ja tu, become a hero*'.

Sandeep Dwivedi: You've spoken about that sad moment of getting bowled in that bizarre fashion at Lord's — when India lost after you and Ravindra Jadeja had nearly won the match. Have you been able to make peace with it?

It is still shocking to me. I don't know how it happened. If you see carefully, while the ball is travelling towards the stumps, a small pebble comes in the way and the ball bounces up off it, reaches the stumps to just about hit and a bail drops. That moment keeps popping on Insta reels. When I see those reels, I get emotional. We had almost lost that match, but we were back in the Test. I was feeling so comfortable, there was no way I felt I could get out. I got hit by a ball from Jofra Archer, but I was fine and felt I was not going to get out. However, the almighty had some other plans.

Sandeep Dwivedi: During your early days of struggle in Hyderabad, you once told your mother not to worry about your future. You said, '*Ek din aisa aayenga ki paise rakdne ki jagah nahi rahegi apke paas*' (a day will come when there will be so much money that you would not have a place to store it). How were you so confident about yourself?

I remember that day — I was getting a sound beating from my mother when I said that. As usual, I was playing cricket and my mother didn't like it. She said, I don't worry about my future. That's when I asked her to stop beating me and that I would earn so much money one day that there wouldn't be any place in the house to keep it. I told her, 'You don't worry, I will do it.'

It is said that of all the things one says during a day, one of those things comes true. So that day what I said was accepted by the almighty. Confidence is very important if you want to play top-flight cricket. If you don't have confidence in yourself, you can't do anything in life. Only if you have belief, will you achieve the goal you have set for yourself. If you believe that I can bowl a yorker and I will get a wicket, you will succeed. Only if you visualise in your mind, think that if I bowl like this I will get a wicket, you will get a certain confidence to execute it. You also need to train for that. If you train hard, you will be able to execute in the match.

Sandeep Dwivedi: At times, those with humble beginnings get overawed by sudden fame and change. What

about you?

Keeping in mind where I come from and where I have reached, I just don't like attitude and arrogance. I make an effort to stay down-to-earth. I have the same set of friends that I used to have back in the day. I still hang around with them. It's not that now I have become an India player, so I would make new friends and

aware that there will be times I will do well, but success can also disappear. That means, again, I will work hard and again I will succeed.

Sandeep Dwivedi: You are comfortable in the company of foreign cricketers as well. At the end of the England tour, batting great Joe Root said that Siraj is such a nice guy that it is very tough for him to get angry about something and 'sometimes it seems he fakes his anger'.

(Laughs) No, no I do get angry and it does not fade off quickly. Only after I get a wicket, my anger vanishes. As for Joe Root, he is a world class batsman. When he is facing me, he never looks at me with any kind of anger. He keeps smiling at me. So whenever I see him, automatically a smile comes to my face. He is the first person seeing whom I become calm and smile. So during the England tour I decided I am not going to look at him or talk to him. Even if he was at the non-striker's end and I was fielding at mid-off, he would come to talk to me but I would not talk to him. I would just

walk away somewhere else (laughs).

Nihal Koshie: Hyderabad has produced batsmen like Mohammad Azharuddin and M.L. Jaisimha and a few spinners. What made you take up fast bowling?

To be honest, I never dreamt of playing for India. I didn't have money, nor did I have any support because dad used to drive an auto. My mother used to work too. I used to give most of what I earned from tennis-ball cricket to my parents. Slowly my pace increased, I started doing well and played a district-level tennis-ball tournament. I had never played with the leather ball till then. Once I was playing a tournament in Vijay Anand (cricket ground) and I did well. The owner of Charminar Cricket Club was watching and asked me, 'Will you join my club?'. I told him I had financial problems. He said, 'Tension mat le (don't worry), we will provide everything for you'. I said, 'I will think about it and let you know'. We used to stay in a rented house.

There are 1.4 billion people in the country... How will I play for the

country? *Rehta hai na neeche wale ki soch* (people who are poor, think small). Then I told him (Charminar club owner) that I would play. I wore spikes for the first time. I began making a name for myself and people started discussing that there is one Mohammed Siraj and he bowls very fast. I started gaining confidence and felt I had the ability. Everything happened

at the right time. When I was a net bowler before a RCB (Royal Challengers Bengaluru) versus SRH (Sunrisers Hyderabad) match in Hyderabad, I bowled to Virat (*bhai*) and KL (Rahul) *bhai*. (Bharat) Arun sir (India bowling coach) was also there. He was also surprised, wondering who this chap was. Next year I was not selected for Ranji Trophy, but Bharat Arun sir had become the Hyderabad coach. He asked, 'I had seen this kid, but where is he now?'. Then Arun sir got me into the team and I became the highest wicket taker in Ranji Trophy that year. *Upar wale ne saath diya, meri*

mehnat thi, meri maa-baap ki dua thi (God helped, I worked hard and had the blessing of my parents).

Nihal Koshie: Hyderabadis are usually a little laid back. You are aggressive on the field and after Virat Kohli you are the most expressive Indian player. How are you off the field?

Off the field, I am very different... *shaant* (calm), relaxed, chilled *banda*. But on the field, when you are representing the country... when I am hit for even one four, I get very angry. How did this batsman hit me? So I tend to fight.

Aggression as a fast bowler, I learnt from Dale Steyn, who I used to follow. Aggression is very important. If a batsman hits you and you are relaxed and smile... What kind of cricket is that? *Kuch toh chahiye* (You need some aggression). But off the field, I am *ek dum chill* (really chill).

Sriram Veera: When things didn't go your way during IPL once, you were heavily trolled. In an interview that time, you'd said, '*Mujhe tum logon ka praise nahi chahiye*' (I don't want praise from all of you). Where did you get that strength?

I remember when I joined the India team, MS Dhoni had told me, '*Kisi ki baaton mein nahin aana. Jab tu acha karega, toh poori duniya*

tumhare saath rahegi, aur jab kharaab karega, yahi duniya tujhe gaali degi.' (Don't pay attention to what others say. When you are performing well, the entire world will be with you, and when you aren't, they will abuse you).

Yes, the trolling was bad. When you perform, the fans and the world will be with you and say 'there is no bowler like Siraj'. In the next game, if you don't perform, they will say, '*Arre*, what sort of bowler is this. *Jaake apne baap ke saath auto chalo*' (go and ride the auto with your father) — what's the point of this? You are hero in one match

and zero in another (smiles). People change that quickly? I decided that I don't need outside opinion and validation. What my teammates and family think of me is important, people who matter. I don't care what others think.

Sriram Veera: When Jasprit Bumrah didn't play the final Test in the England series, many trolled him, saying he shouldn't be allowed to pick and choose.

Bumrah *bhai* doesn't worry about outside opinion. He had a serious back injury and a big surgery. Had he bowled in that match, one can't say whether he would have bowled again or not, if he had broken down. It's that serious. That injury is very sensitive. His bowling action is very difficult. He is such a important bowler for India and his availability is so important — from Asia Cup to next year's World Cup and so on.

Indian fans should understand that he is the backbone of the team and be rest assured that whenever possible, he will definitely play. Jassi *bhai* took the perfect decision.

Mihir Vasavda: There are many theories about injuries of fast bowlers. Andy Roberts has said they spend a lot of time in the gym and don't bowl enough in the nets, which causes injuries. How does it work for you?

Earlier, I thought all this comes naturally and if I went to the gym, I'd get injured. In 2018, I met Soham *bhai* (Shah, India physio). He said that gym is very important as a fast bowler and guided me on what to do and when to do, managing my workload. He also explained that I have to take protein; he told me that 'when you are bowling, when your body is tired, you should take BCAA (Branched Chain Amino Acids). When you sleep, you should take magnesium, which will help you recover. The next day, you will be able to do the same things. If you don't do this, your body will be fatigued, you will be prone to injuries'.

My training routine is the same otherwise. I do the same things that I did in 2018. If I change my training, I feel that something will happen to my body.

Tushar Bhaduri: You were not picked for the ICC Champions Trophy (50-over format) as well as the Asia Cup (T20 format). Are you being considered just a Test specialist?

I'm 200 per cent confident of doing well in all three formats when given a chance.

We played the Champions Trophy in Dubai, there was heat, and we needed more spinners there, that's why I wasn't picked. Rohit (Sharma) *bhai* told me that most of the bowling would be done by spinners and he didn't want me to go there and just sit on the bench. He told me to spend time with family, practise and work on my fitness.

The Asia Cup was right after we had returned from the five Tests in England, so it was an opportunity to rest a bit.

Mihir Vasavda: You must have watched India play Pakistan. Watching from a distance, did you feel the pressure the players must have felt in the dressing room at the Asia Cup?

Yes, 100 per cent I felt the pressure (of watching India vs Pakistan). When you are representing the country, the match gets over and you return to the dressing room, you can't even celebrate the win... There is a lot of pressure, but you have to follow the government rules.

20 points for peace

Ceasefire in Gaza will bring succour to the suffering Palestinians

PROSPECTS FOR A cessation of the two-year-long hostilities between Israeli forces and Hamas in Gaza—a process mediated by the US, Qatar, and Egypt in Cairo—have brightened with President Donald Trump’s 20-point proposal. This has been accepted by Arab and Muslim countries and European allies, including India, as indicating a pathway to end the killing, prevent the displacement of Palestinians, and resume aid inflows into the Strip. Both Israel and Hamas have responded positively to the proposal. For a ceasefire to kick in immediately, Hamas must approve the initial withdrawal line for Israeli forces, followed by the release of Israeli captives, dead or alive, within 72 hours in exchange for Palestinian prisoners and the resistance group’s removal from power and disarmament. A technocratic Palestinian committee is to administer Gaza alongside the deployment of an international stabilisation force. The US president’s proposal also envisages an international transitional body, called board of peace, chaired by him and includes former premier of UK, Tony Blair.

Hamas has not indicated an unconditional acceptance of Trump’s proposal but has agreed to release all 48 hostages, of whom only 20 are alive. This obviously cannot happen if Israel continues bombing as it did even after Trump asked for it to stop. The resistance group’s acceptance of another key proposal is also significant as it is ready to hand over the governance of Gaza to “a Palestinian authority of independent (technocrats) based on Palestine national consensus and with reliance on Arab and Islamic support”. There is no mention of disarmament but Hamas affirmed its readiness to enter negotiations to discuss details of this agreement. Hamas’ long-standing position is that it will not disarm until a sovereign Palestinian state is established—an issue that is only partially addressed in the proposal which states that when Gaza’s redevelopment advances, conditions may be in place for a credible pathway to Palestinian self-determination and statehood. Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has warned that disarmament will be done diplomatically or militarily.

To ensure that the war ends, it is imperative that Trump remains engaged and is even-handed in ensuring that both Israel and Hamas implement the proposal in letter and spirit. True to form, Netanyahu addressed his domestic constituency shortly after Trump’s proposals were unveiled stating that he has no intention to withdraw troops from Gaza and would “forcibly resist” a Palestinian state. His cabinet has ultra-nationalists who are hostile to the conflict ending without Hamas’ destruction. The resistance group faces an existential moment in releasing all hostages in one go—its only bargaining chip—and surrendering power and disarming. For such reasons, the hope that Gaza will become a de-radicalised, terror-free zone that does not pose a threat to Israel is a bridge too far.

Even so, the conflict must end as there is growing international outrage that the hapless Gazans have borne the full brunt of the two-year-long conflict with 67,000 people being killed, mostly women and children, and starvation stalks the 2.1-million citizenry of the Strip. Around 440 people, including 147 children, have so far died from hunger. Palestinians have a huge stake in an enduring ceasefire to rebuild their shattered lives. For their sake, Trump’s 20-point proposal must succeed as it is the last roll of the dice to finally bring peace to the Strip that has been reduced to a dystopian wasteland.

Can the world handle having fewer moms?

DEMOGRAPHERS AT THE United Nations predict that the number of humans on Earth will begin shrinking as soon as 2080—the culmination of a global decline in birthrates that began two generations ago. I keep thinking about what this shift means for moms. Fewer women are having children. Those who do are having smaller families than previous generations. This transcends the norms of any one culture or place. The shift away from motherhood is happening slowly—but surely. It’s a source of growing bipartisan concern. New Pew Research polling finds that over half of Americans (53%) now say fewer people choosing to have children in the future would negatively impact the United States, a six-point increase from last year.

In *Foreign Affairs*, social scientist and my former American Enterprise Institute colleague Nicholas Eberstadt charts the UN Population Division data, going to the places where deaths are already exceeding births. Already, every major population in East Asia—in China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan—is shrinking. The same goes for India, Latin America, and the Caribbean. Iran and Russia have long been sub-replacement societies. Sub-Saharan Africa is the only region where the birthrate of 4.3 significantly exceeds the replacement rate of 2.1, although the birthrate is dropping.

There have been other times and places of falling fertility due to famine, plague, or war. But this depopulation is unique in the experience of humanity because (1) it appears to be what we are self-selecting into, and (2) it’s worldwide.

It can be argued that to the extent this shift better reflects preferences and choice, it’s a good thing. I, for one, am relieved to have three children, not 1.2. But politicians and academics are worried about the sociodemographic implications. After all, birthrates below replacement eventually result in human extinction.

We don’t know how this will play out over the long run. Maybe a world with fewer children means a greater level of investment in each of them. Or maybe it shrinks the share of the population interested in helping kids. Maybe technology alleviates any shortages in the workforce or the taxpayer base. Or maybe even AI can’t counteract the looming labour slump. Maybe there will be more resources for us to share, with a greater dignity and respect for life. Or maybe the whole thing will get more callous and gene-edited and selective.

But I can’t help thinking about how this will turn up the anxiety American moms already are feeling. Because declining birthrates not only mean fewer babies—declining birthrates also mean fewer moms.

Children are not around other children as much socially as they used to be; even within families, there are fewer siblings. So kids look to mom and dad for playtime—or to screens. I think of how much security and companionship I derived from having pregnant and postpartum friends walk alongside me in my own journey into motherhood. How much help I derived from a text chain of experienced moms when I had my first child. How those text chains will become smaller and smaller as fewer people opt into motherhood.

I think about all of the anxiety on mothers’ shoulders about whether they are feeding their kids the right things, whether their school is teaching children what they need to know, the financial investment in college, and how much that this pressure to “do parenting right” will only increase if you only have one or maybe two children.

I keep thinking about Brad Wilcox’s research. The senior fellow at the University of Virginia’s Institute for Family Studies has found that married mothers are among the happiest demographics of women; single mothers, too, find more purpose in their lives than women without children. Might declining rates of parenthood be contributing to modern society’s broader anomie?

Fewer parents around means support for public investments—better schools, paid parental leave, more child care options—might dwindle as society focuses her resources elsewhere. The same goes for community investments in playgrounds and side-walks and parks. This would only exacerbate the decline in childrearing as prospective parents look out to a landscape that, in Tim Carney’s words, is family-unfriendly.

Our generation owes it to those who come after to make the structural and cultural changes to support motherhood. Because there might not be as many of us around.



ABBY MCCLOSKEY

Bloomberg

SC JUDGMENT

IN A FEW STATES THEY ARE PLAGUING DISCOMS, WHICH NEED TO BEGIN OPERATIONS ON A CLEAN STATE

Regulatory liabilities, not assets

IN A LANDMARK judgment delivered on August 6, the apex court has ordered clear-cut guidelines on the creation and amortisation of regulatory assets (RAs). What are RAs? When an electricity distribution company (discom) is unable to meet its full liabilities, which could be on account of various reasons, the electricity commission allows it to borrow the deficit amount from the market and the cost of this borrowing is included as one of the components while calculating the retail tariff.

Most of the times, the discoms are unable to finance their own expenditure because the retail tariff determined by the regulatory commissions are lower than what it should be. Keeping tariffs artificially low and allowing RAs to be created is something that is preferred by the government and of course the consumers, since no one appreciates a tariff hike. The discoms, however, are the losers, because by resorting to borrowing, their balance sheet loses its sheen and there are problems of cash flow. The term RA is thus a misnomer, as it is no asset in the real sense of the term, but actually a liability which every discom dreads. Artificially low tariffs are not the only reason why a discom cannot fund its activities. There are other reasons as well. For example, government departments not paying their electricity dues, the government withholding the subsidy it had promised to reimburse the discoms for offering a lower tariff to a certain class of consumers, tariff petitions not being filed at all or being filed late, etc.

Regulatory commissions are expected to finalise the retail tariffs in a way that they can be effective from April 1 every year. For the 2026-27 tar-



SWEET RESULT

Union home minister Amit Shah

Ethanol blending has transformed the balance sheets of sugar mills. If 20% of the earnings are reinvested in expansion, the coming generations will benefit

SC JUDGMENT

IN A FEW STATES THEY ARE PLAGUING DISCOMS, WHICH NEED TO BEGIN OPERATIONS ON A CLEAN STATE



SOMIT DASGUPTA

Senior visiting fellow, ICRIER

iffs, the discoms will file their petitions by September/October 2025, and the regulatory commission will take 120 days to decide. Tariffs are based on the projected revenue and expenditure. The regulator will estimate the likely expenditure for running the distribution business during 2026-27 and the likely revenue. It has been observed that to keep tariffs artificially low, there is a tendency to underestimate the projected expenditure and overestimate the revenue. The reality turns out to be the exact opposite, and the discoms find that they are not able to balance their budgets. The regulator then allows the discom to borrow in the market, creating the RAs.

RAs are plaguing discoms in a few states such as Tamil Nadu (₹89,000 crore), Rajasthan (₹47,000 crore), Delhi (₹27,000 crore), Kerala (₹7,100 crore), and Chhattisgarh (₹2,900 crore). The figures in brackets provide the quantum of the RAs. At the national level, the total quantum of RAs is about ₹1.7 lakh crore. The Supreme Court has said that all the existing RAs should be amortised within a period of four years beginning from 2024 (which means

that only three years are left); and that new RAs, if created, should be amortised within three years.

In addition, the apex court has directed that the Appellate Tribunal for Electricity will supervise the amortisation of the RAs and that the regulators will conduct an intensive audit of the discoms. Incidentally, the fact that the growth of RAs should be contained was acknowledged in the Tariff Policy 2006, where it was mentioned that RAs should be created only when necessary and that they should be amortised within three years. Similar sentiments were reiterated in the succeeding Tariff Policy of 2016, although it raised the amortisation period to seven years and finally, detailed guidelines were issued in the Electricity (Amendment) Rules 2024. These guidelines mentioned that the tariffs should be cost-reflective and there should be no gaps between revenue and expenditure. Further, if for some reason the creation of RA is inevitable, then it should not exceed 3% of the aggregate revenue requirement fixed for the discom. Finally, all new RAs should be amortised within three years and all

Keeping tariffs artificially low and allowing regulatory assets to be created is something that is preferred by the government and of course the consumers, since no one appreciates a tariff hike

High import prices are India’s Achilles heel



JAMAL MECKLAI

CEO, Mecklai Financial
www.mecklai.com

GROWING UP IN a village in UP, Aladdin is uneducated and, in fact, illiterate. He moved to Mumbai when he was eight and worked as a helper at a street stall and worked his way up and across to where he now works as a driver (for the past 15 years). He has educated his two sons, one of whom is currently in college, and has bought a property in the suburbs, which he has leased out. Smart and hard-working, despite his handicapped upbringing, his is a quintessential Indian success story. Except...

I was speaking to him the other day and I asked him how things were going and what his plans were. He said things have gotten so expensive over the past few years that he can’t, at this point, see any additional horizons he could try and cross.

To my mind, this speaks of the loudest failure of our economic policy. I don’t know whether policymakers spend much time talking with—or, indeed, thinking about—the lower middle class, but this is the largest cohort of our population and high prices are their number one problem. It needs to be acknowledged as such—including by the prime minister—and constantly managed on a war footing, so Aladdin (and his brothers and sisters) can truly create an Indian dream.

To be sure, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the government have had good success over the years in

bringing inflation down. At the last Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meeting, the central bank lowered its inflation projections for 2025-26 to 2.6% from 3.1%. However, as Ajay Tyagi pointed out in a recent article, the RBI’s successes, even on the inflation front, have been modest. “During the last nine years...one of the contentious issues has been the RBI’s inability to keep headline inflation below 6% for a substantial period...between December 2019 and August 2023, the CPI (consumer price index)-based inflation rate was above 6% in 26 out of 44 months.”

Much more importantly, though, it is not inflation that is the real problem but high prices—for cooking oil, fuel, and other critical items of consumption.

To address this, rather than simply focusing on the balance between inflation and interest rates, the RBI should actively manage the rupee at its strongest possible level in a drive to keep prices contained for all of us, particularly Aladdin and his ilk. The collateral benefit is that this will also keep inflation low and enable reducing

borrowing costs further.

I touched upon this need in an earlier article, and was not surprised to see my view confirmed in a recent article from the St. Louis Fed (in the US), which highlighted the fact that over the past year, the Indian rupee has weakened more (4.56%) on a real effective exchange rate basis than any of the over 50 currencies it tracks.

As I had pointed out, using rupee weakness to promote exports, which, of course, is and should be an important plank of economic policy, should only be done when Indian exporters can effectively take advantage of it to increase global sales. This means being sensitive to global business and demand conditions. Blind belief that a lower rupee is good for the country leads to the situation we currently face, where average monthly exports have fallen by 2.3% between 2022 and today, despite the rupee weakening by nearly 10%! Unsurprisingly, the correlation between the monthly change in exports and the monthly change in the rupee was -0.3%, confirming that rupee weakness had no impact on

Several large Indian companies, perhaps under govt pressure, are looking to invest in manufacturing in the US to appease Trump, but it is an extremely tall order, since costs in the US are much too high. A stronger rupee would reduce the impact in rupee terms, assisting such investment

exports over this period. Clearly, it’s been a wasted effort and with imports more than 60% higher than exports, it has resulted in the huge rise in local prices that Aladdin spoke of.

To be sure, the rupee is “relatively” free floating, with supply and demand largely determining its value. However, markets are basically cowardly, and generally don’t fight the central banks. The RBI is the largest daddy in the market and if it believed, at a point in time, that the rupee should be stronger, it could certainly steer the market in that direction. Selling in the non-deliverable forward market would send a strong signal.

As it happens, at the current time, there is another reason to favour a stronger rupee (or, certainly, not a weaker one). Hard as it is to admit, Donald Trump is here to stay (for at least another three years), and his demands are only going to increase. Several large Indian companies, perhaps under government pressure, are looking to invest in manufacturing in the US to appease Trump, but it is an extremely tall order, since costs in the US are much too high. A stronger rupee would reduce the impact in rupee terms, assisting such investment.

With the global growth forecast to remain slow over the next year (or longer), it would be great to see a changed approach from the RBI.

Views are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Discretionary lending?

Apropos of “M&A opportunity” (*FE*, October 4), if banks and financial institutions are allowed to fund mergers and acquisitions (M&As), it could lead to firms taking on excessive debt, aggravating financial risks for both the business entity and the lender. Do we have regulations in place to ensure M&A financing is not misused by business promoters to create personal wealth or acquire business at questionable valuations? Regulators must clarify how the move is aimed at gen-

erating productive assets in the economy. Traditionally, financing M&As has been linked to inorganic growth and does not harmonise with the key goal of financial inclusion and priority lending. Why aren’t firms being encouraged to issue bonds/debentures instead, to boost the borrowing discipline and increase investment opportunities? Firms are often found wanting in adherence to regulatory norms. The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code promises minimal “haircut” for lenders, even as the market for distressed assets is still far from

developed. As a result, shareholders run a risk of going “bald”. Diktats should mandate the application of strictly regulated instruments for financing M&As rather than allowing banks to exercise discretion while lending to promoters. —Girish Lalwani, New Delhi


Emerging IT demands

“Rethink ‘cheap and capable’ benefit” (*FE*, October 4) diligently analysed and suggested the need for Indian information technology (IT) firms to make a paradigm shift in their app-

roach of being a back-office worker with the traditional vendor-client model to a platform builder, with new operating systems, technologies, and domains to meet emerging demands. The appreciable point is that India should pool the skills and knowledge in creating hubs for innovation and specialisation in new productisation. This would enable India’s IT industry to meet new challenges from changing geopolitical situations. —RV Baskaran, Pune

●Write to us at feletters@expressindia.com

The song is a paradox about infinite desire trapped in finite time. It's the soundtrack of hold water in your hands. 'Not Enough Time' isn't just a love song, but a slow burn about the second law of thermodynamics: why natural processes tend towards a state of greater disorder, or higher entropy. And natural processes that include strange phenomena like love.



CONTRAPUNTO

The modern conservative is engaged in one of man's oldest exercises in moral philosophy; that is, the search for a superior moral justification for selfishness

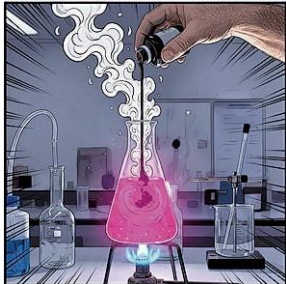
— JOHN KENNETH GALBRAITH

Poison & Pharma

There's no place for toxic substances in a medicine factory. So how do they get inside cough syrup? Govts must answer

How many more patients must die before India gets serious about diethylene glycol (DEG) contamination in medicines? For US, one incident – the world's first that cost 105 lives in 1937 – was enough. It was a time when medicines were put on the market without toxicity tests. In 1938, US changed that with its Federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act, and has not had any DEG mass poisoning since. But in India, we are in the middle of *one more* such mass poisoning. Over a dozen children aged below five have been confirmed dead from cough syrup-related kidney failure in MP and Rajasthan in the past few days.

Dust the files of the past five years, and you find 12 children died of DEG-laced cough syrup in J&K, in 2020. In Aug 2022, Uzbek authorities linked cough syrup made in India to the deaths of 65 children. Four months later, WHO linked 66 children's deaths in Gambia to DEG in cough syrup from India. You would think the



previous tragedies – altogether 143 deaths – would have shook the conscience of Indian authorities, and you would be so wrong. DEG in medicines has been killing us for decades. There was the Mumbai incident in 1986 that claimed 14 lives. In 1998, some 150 children were referred to Delhi's Kalawati Saran Children's Hospital with acute renal failure, and 33 died. The culprit: cough syrup made by a unit in Gurgaon.

To save a few rupees – maybe paise – unscrupulous drug makers or their suppliers substitute glycerin in medicinal syrups with lethal DEG, which is an industrial solvent. And that, partly, is the crux of the problem – hundreds of human lives sacrificed for a few paise per bottle. The other regrettable part is the indifference of our authorities. In the latest case, they hurriedly gave a clean chit on Friday after testing only 9 out of 19 syrups, when the two main suspect brands had not been tested. In the Gambia case, the suspect firm got its licence back the same year. The firm named in the Uzbek case also returned to business this year. There are no consequences, even though each of these tragedies tars the name of Indian generics abroad. DEG deaths are the last thing Indian pharma needs amid global trade tensions. Govts, you seem deaf to dolor, but pay heed to dollar at least.

Right & Wrong In Japan

Japan's quality of life was immune to political upheavals & govt changes. Takaichi's win shows separation is shrinking

In her Thatcher-blue suit, ultra-right politician Sanae Takaichi smiled big as she made history, set to become Japan's first woman PM by mid-Oct. But few expect the 64-year-old social conservative to impact Japan's deep gender imbalance – whether in its male-dominated politics or society at large. Her promise to appoint more women to govt will be entirely symbolic if LDP continues to frame women's roles, and policy, around being 'good wives and mothers' in an ageing, low-fertility society.

Takaichi's rise is really about Japan's political crossroads. Her win with grassroots support within big-tent umbrella party LDP, with its recent electoral setbacks and accused of lacking vision, shows how the party has absorbed the youth's far-right surge instead of risking ceding that space to minor hyper-nationalist 'Japan First' parties growing popular. Japan simply followed the global trend – the political centre itself shifting right, driven by anti-immigration and anti-liberalism. Takaichi's victory is seen as unsettling LDP's partnership with long-time moderate ally, the Buddhist-backed Komeito, while her openness to working with far-right

groups will appeal to younger Japanese nationalists. Both Seoul and Beijing are uneasy – as a wartime history revisionist and China hawk, Takaichi is likely to inflame already fraught regional ties.

Uniquely, Japan's unsettled politics and decades-long economic stagnation haven't dented its quality of life. GDP barely grew between 2000 and 2019. Per capita income has been flat. Yet infra, healthcare, education and housing remain reliable. Add to that Japan's famously low crime rate and value for 'social peace'. Only, a shrinking young population is on a collision course with growing numbers of foreign-born residents who Japan must import to bolster its working population. Takaichi has promised 'zero illegal immigration' and improved 'social integration'. The hardline politician is LDP's ticket to a political comeback, but how long she can last without bowing to her party's old guard remains uncertain. Japan's become a country to watch.

Cough it up

Syrupy HAHK games Kamala and I play

Anil Abraham



Uhu uhu, I coughed discreetly in Madhuri Dixit style, to attract Kamala's attention as she scrolled her phone with single-minded focus. Her response was neither gentle nor discreet. She jerked around to look at me with alarm and proceeded to plug in the steamer, put off the fan, pull out a blanket and search for the familiar balm that has been rubbed on a million Indian chests, the Vicksit Bharat passed down for generations.

I had not seen such a vigorous response to a cough since the pandemic. In those conveniently forgotten days, one public cough would often lead to nervous glances, social distancing, blood tests, generalised panic and even a family quarantine. Biwi, please pass the makhana, I sang, continuing my *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun* musical reference. Biwi was not amused.

She leaned over to show me what she had been reading on the phone. 'We can't even trust medicines anymore. Cough syrups are being contaminated with diethylene glycol,' she said and proceeded to school me on the latest news from Madhya Pradesh. I had not seen her so upset when our milk was mixed with water, our petrol contaminated with ethanol and our democracy diluted with discord.

I assured her that I was not developing an upper respiratory infection or rapidly progressing to pneumonia. My cough had been a theatrical trope to keep her from hogging all the Sunday snacks. 'Even that muffer man in Delhi had a chronic cough and we haven't heard from him recently,' she countered ominously. She chose to conveniently ignore the fact that everyone in Delhi had a chronic cough, which was the result of the seasonal chill and the farmers in surrounding states sending a smoke signal to the lungs.

Kamala was in full flow now. She made me a bitter, strong black coffee mixed with all the herbs and spices in the kitchen and acted like my journey from cough to coffin was spiralling rapidly. 'You doctors know nothing,' she said in a syrupy sweet voice, dismissing my years of medical training in one terse comment. Much like Trump blamed Tylenol for autism, he was possibly referring to Kamala's home remedy when he famously talked about coffee. 'As long as we don't have to cough up the doctor's steep fees,' Kamala said with satisfaction, as she settled down to eat the remaining makhana while scrolling endlessly for more medical masala.

Get Real With Donald

Trump doesn't have an India policy, he's using us to achieve US interests at home and abroad. So, bury the thought that India & US are natural partners, and focus on economy & tech development for greater leverage

Vijay Gokhale



Current generations have grown accustomed to regular disruptions in their lives and workplaces due to the successive impacts of computers, internet and, now, AI. They have also adjusted to volatility in the global economic system as a result of 9/11, the global financial crisis, and Covid. This adjustment was possible, in no small measure, due to the steady influence of American power that underpinned post-Cold War globalisation. We took this for granted.

It is not as if the world did not experience major shifts in international relations after the Cold War. Rise of China, end of American unipolarity, and re-balancing of the global economy from the North Atlantic towards the Indo-Pacific, led to realignments in the balance of power. But the world order remained broadly stable and predictable. We forgot that, once every several decades, things occur that fundamentally alter the global balance in ways that cause all nations to rethink their beliefs.

Napoleon Bonaparte was one such phenomenon. He tore apart the intricate web of centuries-old alliances in Europe and re-shaped European politics in ways that led to the rise of England and Russia as imperial powers, as well as to the eventual unification of Germany. Fascism was another. Upon its defeat in 1945, remnants of overseas European empires rapidly vanished, America became the global power and its competition with the Soviets divided the world for the rest of the 20th century.

MAGA may, just possibly, drive the re-drawing of the world order this century. In a brief period of eight months, Trump has, piece by piece, disabled multilateral arrangements that underpinned the global order after 1945, upended ways in which the world does business, fundamentally questioned relationships with allies and partners, demanded that nations bend their knee to American exceptionalism, sanctioned those accused of sponsoring terror or threatening American interests, and forced demands upon friend and foe alike. The world is bracing for impact.

This storm surge is pushing against the very foun-

dations of Indian foreign policy. This is the greatest crisis India has faced since the early 1990s when the Soviet collapse eliminated India's closest partner and rendered non-alignment all but irrelevant. Successive govts rebuilt foreign policy around Indo-US strategic partnership and the supporting columns of multi-polarity. In recent years, this framework faced challenges, but the Indo-US partnership remained intact. No longer.

It should, by now, be clear that the Trump administration has no India strategy. Instead, India is being used to pursue other American strategies – Russia, Iran, China, domestic employment and economic revival. Some

partnership, especially when US can't distinguish between alliance and alignment. India had made it apparent that it values its independence in decision-making even as it is ready to align its interests to those of America. But India dovetailing its foreign policy with American objectives was never going to happen. Perhaps, it is just as well that both sides have realised the limitations of the current partnership. A new basis for partnership, still arguably the most important for India in the medium and long terms, might emerge after the storm.

Events in the past six months have shown the world is not truly multi-polar. US and China are vastly bigger.

Although there are other players, the world currently exhibits strong bi-polar features. Only countries that have leverage can claim to be strategically autonomous. Hopefully, America's actions have prodded India in that direction. Building leverage requires focused economic and technology development. Now more than ever, studying how China did this within a generation, and drawing the right lessons from its experience, is the need of the hour. It is easy to argue that an authoritarian system like China's can command the economy to bend to its will, but if that were the case shouldn't North Korea have rivalled South Korea?

The quiet but firm posture that India has taken in the face of the earlier Chinese provocation and, now, Washington's baiting, indicates that a mindset change is well and truly underway. It presages, hopefully, the beginning of a more realistic partnership with Washington that is embedded in a truly multi-aligned foreign policy. India has salience in the Indo-Pacific as the only nation aside from US and China that possesses both an independent economic and military power-projection capacity, albeit limited for now. Its stable democracy is respected for the contribution that it makes to the region's overall stability. It is demonstrably committed to providing international public goods and upholding the security of the global commons. If this is accompanied by doubling down on – to use Deng Xiaoping's phrase – reform and opening up to the outside world, we may yet thank Trump for the course correction that puts us on the path to achieve the dream of *viksit Bharat*.

The writer served as India's foreign secretary



Image: AI

senior members of the administration have said harsh things about India. America's selectiveness in levying sanctions on India for importing Russian energy while exempting others, or its sanctions on Chabahar port in Iran, or the focused manner in which it is targeting India's services exports, should no longer be dismissed as glitches. Secretary of State Marco Rubio's comments describing India as a relationship of "critical importance" are unconvincing. As mutual trust wanes, it might be time to revisit the basic assumption that India and America are automatically strategic partners because of congruent interests and similarity in values.

This should not imply that the partnership is ending, but it might be wise to rethink the limits of such

Why Cough Syrups Are Still Killing Kids

Dodgy makers of adulterated cough syrup get a free pass. Until the same standards that exist for exports are both applied and enforced for Indian 'market' too, our children have little protection

Rema.Nagarajan@timesofindia.com



Over a hundred deaths from diethylene glycol (DEG) in US in 1937 led to the Federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act that requires manufacturers to demonstrate the safety of their products before selling them. US hasn't recorded a single DEG death since then.

In contrast, India has had hundreds of children dying from DEG poisoning in the 1990s and scores of child deaths in J&K and Himachal in 2019 and 2020. DEG deaths have surfaced again – this time in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan claiming lives of around 15 children with several more in a serious condition, fighting for their lives.

What is DEG and why is it so deadly? DEG is an industrial solvent used in brake fluids, antifreeze, resins and dyes among many things. Glycerin or propylene glycol are commonly used additives to thicken liquid medicines as they are colourless, odourless and have a sweet, syrupy consistency. DEG, cheaper than pharmaceutical grade glycerin or PG, is the most common adulterant for these as it is similarly colourless, odourless, sweet and viscous.

DEG finds its way into liquid medicines such as cough syrups, intentionally or accidentally, via pharma companies' supply chains. Ingesting DEG can cause acute kidney failure that can cause permanent disability or death. It is especially deadly for children as even small amounts can prove fatal. Since DEG has been found to be the most common adulterant in glycerin, regulations mandate that every pharma company using glycerin or PG must test for potential contamination before using it in a drug.

Despite such tests being mandatory, DEG poisoning epidemics continue, in mostly the developing world. This is as much due to inadequate adherence to safe manufacturing processes, as to unscrupulous drug manufacturers. Both regulations and their implementation are lax. DEG-related deaths have been reported in Panama, China, Haiti, Bangladesh, Argentina, Nigeria

and India. Some countries, like India, have a history of multiple events though others have shown these are preventable with strict quality control measures.

What happened to the makers of the contaminated cough syrup in earlier cases is indicative of why deaths from DEG re-occur. Five years after the 2019-20 DEG poisoning, owners of the company Digital Vision Pharma based in Himachal are out on bail while the case drags on.

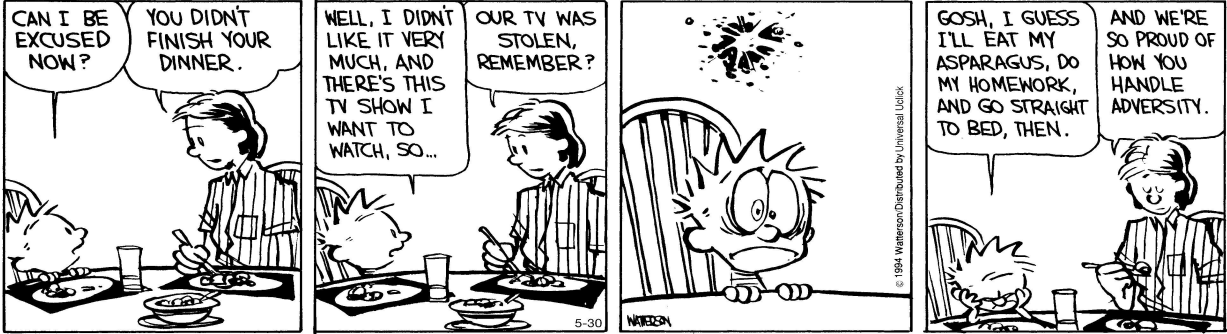
In every instance of DEG contamination in India, the sequence of events is depressingly similar. The first



few deaths do not draw attention as reporting and tracking systems are broken, and when they do, authorities concerned fail to take immediate steps to suspend sale of the contaminated cough syrup till several more children die in the following weeks.

To worsen matters, authorities' first reaction is to deny contamination or violation of manufacturing protocols. They hastily declare samples they tested were safe, thereby delaying action that could save more lives. Moreover, in *every* case, within a short while of a

Calvin & Hobbes



The God In The Machine

Jug Suraiya

If God did not exist we would have had to invent him, is a saying attributed to Voltaire.

And now humankind has done exactly that. We have invented if not God with a capital G, at least god with a small g in the form of apps that connect the user with AI-enabled chatbots who, programmed with scriptural texts from various faith systems, provide spiritual solace and guidance to followers who reportedly number tens of millions the world over.

The 'faith tech' industry is booming like a thunderstorm and raining not pennies but mega dollars from a digital heaven. A single app, Bible Chat, reportedly has over 30mn followers. Another called Hallow, which is predominantly Catholic, has overtaken Netflix, Instagram and TikTok in popularity. In China app-licants are

going to DeepSeek to find out what the future holds for them, while Pray.com with a subscription fee of \$75 per year has 25mn customers.

Religious leaders are divided on the issue of chatbots providing healing balm for the soul. A rabbi has been quoted as saying, "There's a whole generation which has never been to a church or a synagogue. Spiritual apps are the way to faith."

Others disagree. Salvation requires struggle, not a push-button solution.

"There is something good about really, really wrestling through a problem," says a Catholic priest who expresses fears about the danger of pouring out one's heart to a chatbot.

Spiritual chatbots are often put to frivolous use by net surfers. For instance, a hugely popular faith tech

app called AI Jesus has fielded questions like, "Hey, Jesus, which is your favourite football team?"


Classical Greek drama often used a theatrical device called the Deus ex machina, literally 'God from the machine', whereby a seemingly irresolvable situation is brought to a conclusion by divine intercession.

The term derives from a mechanical crane or trapdoor which enabled the deity to descend or ascend to the stage and bring the drama to an end.

Extensively employed by Aristophanes among other Greek playwrights, the literary device was seen by purists to be a gimmick by which the author evaded the rigour of true artistic creation.

Similarly, faith tech or app apotheosis, could be decreed as mere gimmickry for the gullible. But if one regards

Sacredspace



Early AI was mainly based on logic. You're trying to make computers that reason like people. The second route is from biology: You're trying to make computers that can perceive and act and adapt like animals.

Geoffrey Hinton

prayer as a form of self-conversation or self-communion in which an individual seeks union with a universality by using a token object or saying which represents it, a chatbot might be as valid an aid to such outreaching as an image of a deity, or a religious symbol such as a crucifix, or a swastika, or an acoustic incantation like a mantra.

In his Sermon on the Mount, Christ enjoined us to realise that the kingdom of heaven lies within ourselves. The divinity we seek is not out there, but is part of us, as we are part of it.

The Sanskrit phrase from Advaita, Tat Twam Asi, Thou Art That, is an injunction that the individual and the universe are contiguous in a seamless unity.

For our cyber age, can this ageless mantra be reiterated as Thou Art AI? To which a digital sage might reply: Why not?



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Order Order

**Consumer Protection Authority
fines Drishti IAS `5 lakh for
misleading advertisements**



The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) has imposed a penalty of ` 5 lakh on coaching institute Drishti IAS (VDK Eduventures Pvt Ltd) for publishing misleading advertisements that concealed vital information about the nature of courses undertaken by candidates featured in its "216+ selections in UPSC CSE 2022" claim. The order, delivered by Chief Commissioner Nidhi Khare and Commissioner Anupam Mishra, found that Drishti IAS prominently displayed names and photographs of successful candidates without disclosing that most of them had only taken the institute's free Interview Guidance Programme (IGP), rather than its paid courses.

The order was passed in a suo motu case initiated over an advertisement published by Drishti on its website regarding the results of the UPSC CSE 2022. A report submitted in the matter by the Director General (Investigation) found that in the advertisement: Of the 216 claimed selections, 162 candidates (75 per cent) had only enrolled in the free IGP after clearing UPSC prelims and mains on their own without any assistance from the Drishti IAS Institute. Only 54 candidates had taken the IGP along with other courses offered by Drishti, such as the Mains Test Series or Foundation Program. By not disclosing this in the advertisement, the institute created a misleading impression that all 216 students had benefited from its paid coaching, the CCPA ruled. The CCPA also recalled that in September 2024, Drishti IAS was penalised ` 3 lakh for similar misleading claims relating to "150+ selections in UPSC CSE 2021." Despite this, the institute continued the practice in 2022, prompting the present penalty.

Give `2 lakh to man for illegal detention, recover amount from Magistrate: HC to Maha Govt

The Aurangabad bench of Bombay High Court quashed a detention order passed by a magistrate in Jalgaon district against a 20-year-old man calling it illegal and a "colourable exercise of power" and ordered the Maharashtra Government to pay him ` 2 lakh as compensation. The amount shall be recovered from the salary of the Magistrate who passed the detention order, the HC further said. The court said the detention order has resulted in the person being kept in illegal detention, thereby affecting his fundamental rights to life and personal liberty.

The man, Dikshant Sapkale, in his plea in HC, said that the detention order passed in July 2024 was not served upon him immediately and was handed over only in May this year when he was released on bail in another case. As soon as he was released on bail, he was once again taken into custody based on this detention order, the plea said. A bench of Justices Vibha Kankanwadi and Hiten Venegavkar, in its order of October 1, a copy of which was made available on Sunday, said keeping a detention order pending for several months and serving it to the person at the moment of his release amounts to a "colourable exercise of power".



Our higher Judiciary has always enjoyed a soaring reputation for its independence, firmness and erudition. However, in matters of heavy pendency and the disposal of cases, our Courts have failed and failed miserably. Justice delayed is justice denied. The standard defence is about the shortage of judges. But unless there is a sea change in the methodology of Courts, the picture would continue to be equally dark and gloomy, even if the number of judges is increased by 100 per cent.

During the last decade, phenomenal improvements have been made at the national level, virtually on every front. Our Economy, which was ranked No. 11, is shortly going to rank Number 3 in the World. It has become the fastest-growing Economy in the World. Crores of Bank accounts have been opened and all subsidies are directly transferred through the Banks. The role of the middleman has been eliminated.

However, such dramatic results have not occurred in the Judiciary because of the separation of powers. The Executive cannot meddle too much in the

PN
BHANDARI

Judiciary. In fact, there is frequently a confrontation between the two wings, which is a healthy sign of democracy; however, there is a need for greater collaboration between the two wings in matters of Judicial Reforms.

What is needed is a change of strategy, lock, stock and barrel. Court management is a different cup of tea. Most judges lack experience or expertise in this area. Nor is there any system of training for Judges. A large number of Advocates have no administrative experience when they are elevated to the bench as Judges of the High Courts. Such judges suddenly hold the administrative position for the first time, at the fag end of their career, when they become Chief Justices. The administrative functions often overwhelm them.

The role of CJs in administrative matters is enormous. It must be acknowledged that while the expertise of Judges is well established in matters of law, the same cannot be said about administration. It is high time that this work is substantially entrusted to administrators, consultants and technocrats. Our Judiciary, steeped in the status quo culture, must realise that ultimately, the outcome is more important than the procedural hyper-technicalities. The Judges could also resolve to decide a larger number of cases at the admission stage, which is rarely attempted as a key priority. The precious

time of the court spent during the admission stage is wasted, because the same matter will come before another bench for final hearing, perhaps after several years.

Similarly, Bench cases should be given priority over other cases. By such tagging, hundreds of cases could be decided by a single Judgement. It should be the top priority of the Registry to identify more and more cases for tagging.

The Law Ministry, GOI and the Law Commission could have a pivotal role in launching a National Campaign for Procedural Reforms in the Judiciary. It would be a great idea if our High Courts could periodically organise interactive sessions, particularly between judges and advocates, on this issue.

The huge pendency of old cases is the biggest stigma on our judicial system and if this issue is tackled on a war footing, it could lead to the very metamorphosis of our Justice delivery system. It can also give a significant boost to our Economy. Investors are often wary of the prospect of endless litigation, which can sometimes hinder their projects. Our Economy can receive a considerable boost if judicial delays are eliminated. It would be helpful if the In-Charge Judges could closely monitor the disposal of cases through VC every month, with the respective District Judges. During the recent Parliament Session, the Law Minister, while replying to a

question, informed that the Calcutta High Court had 2,185 old cases of 50 years and above. This constitutes 96 per cent of the pendency of cases of this category, in all High Courts. Similarly, in lower courts, the largest pendency (39 per cent) exists in West Bengal alone.

Such a dismal performance is shocking, to say the least. It cannot be argued that the cases in the Calcutta High Court are more complicated or that there is a marked shortage of Judges in that High Court. A time has come when the Executive and the Judiciary should launch a massive three-year campaign to address the mighty problem of old cases.

Let me highlight an example of the Rajasthan High Court, which is quite common in most High Courts. On average, between 350 and 400 cases are listed before each bench every day. Such lengthy Cause lists are totally impractical and unworkable. Out of these cases, nearly 250 to 300 cases pertain to the "Replies not filed" category. In almost every such case, where the respondent has not filed a reply, further time is invariably sought and allowed.

For such routine matters, why should the judges waste their precious time? This work can be easily handled by Registrars, who are of the rank of District and Sessions Judges. Registrars should handle all cases till the pleadings are complete.

Book to highlight inside story on Ram Mandir verdict



RANJIT
KUMAR
SINHA

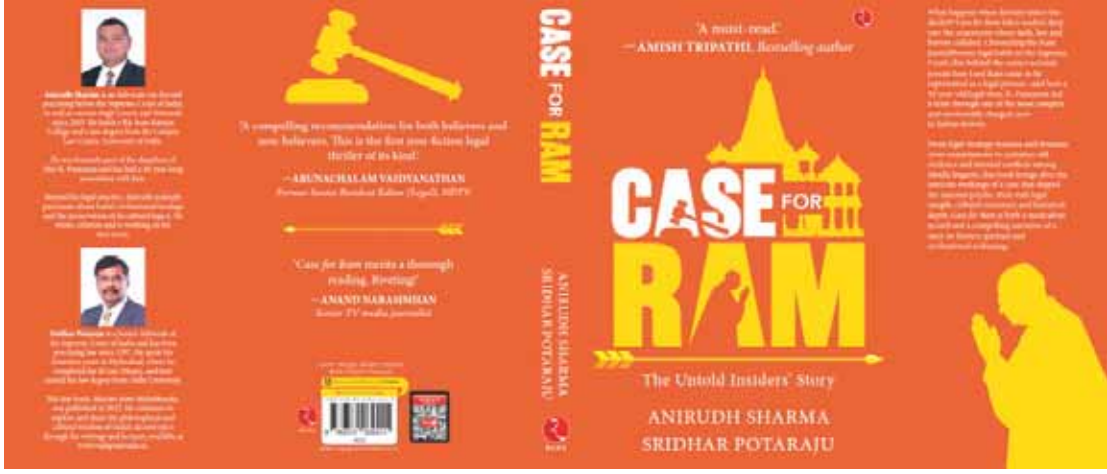
The final resolution of the Ram Janmabhoomi — Babri Masjid dispute by the Supreme Court of India on November 9, 2019, stands as one of the most defining judicial moments in the history of the modern Indian Republic.

For decades, the title suit over the 2.77 acres of disputed land in Ayodhya had been a focal point of national politics, religious sentiment and communal tension.

The unanimous judgment delivered by the five-judge Constitution Bench was a monumental exercise in legal adjudication, attempting to resolve a conflict whose origins and implications transcended mere property law, touching upon deep-seated questions of faith, history and the very concept of secular Governance.

This forthcoming book, CASE FOR RAM — THE UNTOLD INSIDERS' STORY, offers a comprehensive and objective analysis of the entire trajectory of the Ram Temple case in the Supreme Court. It meticulously captures the story of the dispute from the initial filing of civil suits in the mid-20th century, through the evidence of foreign travellers, Christian Missionaries, legal evidence of both Hindu and Muslim sides and archaeological evidence presented during the marathon hearings, to the detailed reasoning contained within the 1,045-page verdict.

By focusing strictly on the judicial process, legal doctrines and the principles applied by the highest court, the authors of the book, Anirudh Sharma and Sridhar Potaraju (both advocates), have tried to provide readers with an authoritative and unbiased understanding of how India's judiciary sought to achieve a final, peaceful resolution to a century-old religious and political fault line by simplifying it as a mere "land dispute". This work of the two



Cover of the Book : CASE FOR RAM – THE UNTOLD INSIDERS' STORY

advocates, who actively assisted legendary jurist K Parasaran in the contentious matter, serves as an essential resource for everyday readers as well as scholars, legal professionals, and anyone seeking a clearer, unvarnished account of this watershed moment in Indian law, more so in the backdrop of the recent public controversy ignited by post-retirement interviews given by one of the adjudicating judges.

Without going into any of the recent media controversies over the verdict, Sharma and Potaraju are candid in saying that this book is a behind-the-scenes chronicle of the Ram Janmabhoomi legal battle in the Supreme Court of India, exploring the intersection of faith, law and history.

They said the present book is not a legal book, but it is a story of how the case for Ram LallaVirajman was prepared by his lead Senior Counsel K Parasaran, a 92-year-old Former Attorney General for India, his devotion to the deity, as well as his professional commitment to the case and trade.

Structured across six sections, the book, they said, offers readers an insider's view of how Ram Lalla (Lord Ram) became a litigant and how his legal team — led by K Parasaran — navigated a complex, emotionally charged, and historically layered case.

They said the 424 pages cover:

- Legal strategy development

within the chambers of senior counsel (especially K Parasaran);

- Dramatic courtroom exchanges and some snippets of cross-examinations;

- Evidence and counter-evidence, including archaeological reports, historical records and witness testimonies;

- The unique concept of a deity as a juristic person, which allowed the idol of Lord Ram to sue in court;

- The internal conflicts between litigants, both Hindus and Muslims, including the NirmohiAkhara and Ram Lalla's team;

- The broader questions of faith, worship and ownership in the legal regime of property disputes in India;

- The historical backdrop extending from 1000 BCE to the present, with key turning points like the 1885 lawsuit.

The book traces the history of the dispute through the lens of evidence presented before the Courts. It spans from the 1st millennium BC to the statement of witnesses given after the Independence of India in 1947.

Sharma and Potaraju say the book, which also tries to capture the life story of K Parasaran and another prominent jurist, CS Vaidyanathan, is not a chronology but is based on true events. The book reveals that Late Shri Lal Narayan Sinha, another legendary senior advocate, was the architect of the case.

The book gives a vivid picture that the most important fact in analysing the case was that the dispute was finally restricted to only about 1500 sq yards, a prominent part of which was the disputed structure, which was a three-domed structure, which the temple side sought as the birth-place of "Lord Ram."

The 1500 sq. yards was divided by the British in 1857 as an inner courtyard housing the disputed structure/mosque and the outer courtyard, an open area having Hindu Structures. After the division through iron railings on one side was the three dome structure and on the other side was the *Ram Chabootra, SitaRasoi*.

Both sides claimed this 1500 sq. yards as one composite unit and not as an inner or outer Court-Yard in their pleadings. All the parties wanted the complete 1500 sq. yards. Contrary to the prayers and the pleadings, the Allahabad High Court had partitioned and allocated the disputed site into three parts and awarded a portion each to the suit of Ram LallaVirajman, the suit of NirmohiAkhara and the Sunni Board. However, the Sunni Board changed its strategy midway in the Supreme Court.

The CASE FOR RAM has been covered in a total of 38 chapters and describes the challenges in resolving the Ayodhya dispute, in which the Supreme Court of India witnessed the case moving from a three-

judge bench to a five-judge bench.

The book narrates that "Everyone acknowledged the importance of 'RAM' in India's civilisation and that the dispute had gone on for 500 years." Its political as well as social ramifications were all palpably felt. In 2017, the Supreme Court ordered the numerous documents in various languages to be translated into English.

An attempt was made even at that stage to find a mediated solution to the issue. Finally, a five-judge bench decided that the mediation process was not proceeding as desired. Hence, the Court directed that from the 6th of August, 2019, the day-to-day hearing of the case shall start. The book also dealt in detail with how Senior Advocate Rajeev Dhavan argued the case for the Muslim side and before starting his arguments, he would greet the Sadhus and one of the client's representatives of the temple side, Shri ChampaRai.

Ultimately, CASE FOR RAM — THE UNTOLD INSIDERS' STORY transcends being just a legal record; it is a profound, behind-the-scenes narrative of a once-in-history legal and spiritual case.

Through the eyes of advocates Anirudh Sharma and Sridhar Potaraju, readers gain intimate access to the life story and meticulous legal strategy of K Parasaran, the BhismaPitamaha of the Indian bar and a top legal titan, as well as to courtroom drama and the unique process of establishing a deity as a litigant.

By combining the life story of India's top few counsels, the Historical story of the Ayodhya case, detailed legal analysis, with the emotional quotient of the counsels, this book demystifies how India's judiciary navigated the intersection of law, history, faith and evidence to deliver a peaceful resolution to the nation's most enduring political and religious dispute. It's an essential, unvarnished look at a true watershed moment. Rupa Publications will announce the date of the Book Release soon.

The writer is a senior journalist covering legal affairs

RTI activist approaches Delhi HC against private banks, CIC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Citing violation of several Supreme Court (SC) orders, RTI activist Subhash Chandra Agrawal approached Delhi High Court (HC) against Central Information Commission (CIC) for not allowing RTI Act for getting details of private banks.

The petitioner said that his RTI application to get details from City Union Bank was rejected by the bank as well as from CIC, ignoring the fact that many landmark judgments have said that private sector banks come under public authority as it deals with public money and RBI inspections from time to time.

"The issue at hand, whether private sector banks fall within the definition of "public authority" under Section 2(h) of the RTI Act, directly impacts the transparency and accountability of institutions holding and



managing vast sums of public deposits. Private sector banks, though incorporated as companies, perform critical public functions and are custodians of the savings of millions of citizens.

Determining their position with respect to the RTI Act is, therefore, not merely an individual concern but a matter of systemic importance affecting the rights of citizens at large, the integrity of the financial system and the fulfilment of the constitutional vision of openness and accountability in Governance," pointed out the petition to HC filed by

Agrawal through Advocate Pranav Sachdeva. Agrawal approached the City Union Bank, which was facing allegations of series of violations in 2022 under RTI Act.

Later CIC also said that as it is a private bank, it will not come under the definition of public authority under the RTI Act. In his petition to High Court, Agrawal cited series of landmark judgments by Supreme Court, terming private sector bank as public authority as it handles public money. The topcourt judgments allowed cases against private sector banks and its

officers under Prevention of Corruption Act.

"Both Public Sector Banks and Private Sector Banks come within the definition of Scheduled Commercial Bank (SCB), which is a commercial bank which has been included in the Second Schedule of the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934 (RBI Act). Both, Public Sector Banks and Private Sector Banks are regulated by the RBI.

The RBI conducts periodic inspection of both Public Sector Banks as well as Private Sector Banks under Section 35 of the Banking Regulation

Act, 1949," said the petition citing the top court judgments.

CIC failed to consider that the Supreme Court in CBI v Ramesh Gelli, (2016) 3 SCC 788 the lower courts had held that cognizance cannot be taken against the accused in the said case, namely, Ramesh Gelli, Chairman and Managing Director and Sridhar Subasri, Executive Director of Global Trust Bank, on the ground that they are not public servants.

The Hon'ble Supreme Court, in the said judgment, termed them as public authorities, allowing CBI to proceed, pointed out the petition.

Both, public and private banks are financed by public money and public funds and hence, private sector banks stand on same footing as public sector banks. The Supreme Court of India has directed Inspection Reports of all banks including also of private banks available under RTI Act. Inspection Reports of

City Union Bank for Financial Years 2016-17 and 2018-19 revealed to the undersigned petitioner vide RBI letter dated August 22, 2022 revealing massive irregularities including gross misuse of public money by top management," said the petition.

"By excluding private sector banks from the ambit of 'public authorities' under Section 2(h) of the RTI Act, the CIC has not only disregarded binding judicial precedents but also created an arbitrary and unjustified classification in violation of Article 14 of the Constitution. Given that both public and private banks are custodians of substantial public funds and perform functions of vital public importance under the regulatory framework of the RBI, transparency and accountability in their functioning is imperative. The denial of such transparency frustrates the very object and purpose of the RTI Act," said the petition.

What is ailing our Judiciary – Endless delays

Judiciary. In fact, there is frequently a confrontation between the two wings, which is a healthy sign of democracy; however, there is a need for greater collaboration between the two wings in matters of Judicial Reforms.

What is needed is a change of strategy, lock, stock and barrel. Court management is a different cup of tea. Most judges lack experience or expertise in this area. Nor is there any system of training for Judges. A large number of Advocates have no administrative experience when they are elevated to the bench as Judges of the High Courts. Such judges suddenly hold the administrative position for the first time, at the fag end of their career, when they become Chief Justices. The administrative functions often overwhelm them.

The role of CJs in administrative matters is enormous. It must be acknowledged that while the expertise of Judges is well established in matters of law, the same cannot be said about administration. It is high time that this work is substantially entrusted to administrators, consultants and technocrats. Our Judiciary, steeped in the status quo culture, must realise that ultimately, the outcome is more important than the procedural hyper-technicalities. The Judges could also resolve to decide a larger number of cases at the admission stage, which is rarely attempted as a key priority. The precious

time of the court spent during the admission stage is wasted, because the same matter will come before another bench for final hearing, perhaps after several years.

Similarly, Bench cases should be given priority over other cases. By such tagging, hundreds of cases could be decided by a single Judgement. It should be the top priority of the Registry to identify more and more cases for tagging.

The Law Ministry, GOI and the Law Commission could have a pivotal role in launching a National Campaign for Procedural Reforms in the Judiciary. It would be a great idea if our High Courts could periodically organise interactive sessions, particularly between judges and advocates, on this issue.

The huge pendency of old cases is the biggest stigma on our judicial system and if this issue is tackled on a war footing, it could lead to the very metamorphosis of our Justice delivery system. It can also give a significant boost to our Economy. Investors are often wary of the prospect of endless litigation, which can sometimes hinder their projects. Our Economy can receive a considerable boost if judicial delays are eliminated. It would be helpful if the In-Charge Judges could closely monitor the disposal of cases through VC every month, with the respective District Judges. During the recent Parliament Session, the Law Minister, while replying to a

question, informed that the Calcutta High Court had 2,185 old cases of 50 years and above. This constitutes 96 per cent of the pendency of cases of this category, in all High Courts. Similarly, in lower courts, the largest pendency (39 per cent) exists in West Bengal alone.

Such a dismal performance is shocking, to say the least. It cannot be argued that the cases in the Calcutta High Court are more complicated or that there is a marked shortage of Judges in that High Court. A time has come when the Executive and the Judiciary should launch a massive three-year campaign to address the mighty problem of old cases.

Let me highlight an example of the Rajasthan High Court, which is quite common in most High Courts. On average, between 350 and 400 cases are listed before each bench every day. Such lengthy Cause lists are totally impractical and unworkable. Out of these cases, nearly 250 to 300 cases pertain to the "Replies not filed" category. In almost every such case, where the respondent has not filed a reply, further time is invariably sought and allowed.

For such routine matters, why should the judges waste their precious time? This work can be easily handled by Registrars, who are of the rank of District and Sessions Judges. Registrars should handle all cases till the pleadings are complete.

The Rajasthan High Court had appointed a Committee under the Chairmanship of Justice Pana Chand Jain, which recommended that this task could be handled by the Registrar (Judicial). The present Advocate General was also a Member of that Committee. Regrettably, the Committee's Report has languished for so many years in the Library of the High Court.

More recently, a bench of Hon'ble Justice Sameer Jain has again flagged this issue and wondered why the precious time of the Judges is wasted in such a routine exercise. Again, a Committee was formed to suggest the modalities. Once again, the same old deafening silence.

A firm resolve of the High Courts is not visible for the drastic reduction of old cases. In Rajasthan, barely half a day is allocated each week for handling old cases. Such symbolic measures for the disposal of old cases are pathetic. Why not hold post-lunch sessions every day for the disposal of old cases, until there is substantial progress on this front?

It is a tragedy for millions of litigants that such simple solutions, which can deliver extraordinary results, are just casually brushed aside. A time has come when the Higher Judiciary should spare some time for introspection, about its methodology and worn-out procedures. It should break the artificial China Wall around it and open its

doors, at least once a month, for interactions with the outside World. Output is often based on inputs. The Judiciary has no doors or windows through which it can receive inputs from stakeholders. It would bring about a sea change in the performance of the entire Judiciary of the states if, departing from the tradition of seclusion, the Chief Justices of High Courts, along with a team of 4 or 5 seniormost judges, earmarked just three hours per month for interactions regarding Procedural Reforms.

These discussions could take place with Bar Associations, Industrial Associations, Social organisations, Activists, etc. Incidentally, the Govt is the biggest litigant. For reducing litigation or disposing of old cases, such meetings with senior Government officials can be very fruitful. Presently, Senior officers are summoned to Courts only in Contempt of Court cases. Minutes should be drawn up for every such meeting relating to these procedural reforms. It would be appropriate if an IAS officer is taken on deputation, as Registrar (Procedural Reforms), to monitor the implementation of the decisions taken in such meetings, as also for pursuing the Government machinery for procedural reforms.

The writer is a retired IAS officer and Advocate, Rajasthan High Court



Editor's
TAKE

A fragile opening or tactical pause?

Hamas has agreed to key elements of Trump's 21-point Gaza peace plan. Yet doubts persist over Hamas' intent and the plan's viability

After a long lull there is some movement in the painstakingly slow Gaza peace process. All along it has been one step forward and two backwards. Every effort has been mired in mistrust and hatred. However, this time it seems that there is some glimmer of hope as Hamas has positively responded to US President Donald Trump's 20-point peace program. But given the past setbacks it would be naive to believe that it would work and bring about lasting peace in the region. That is the reason the statement from Hamas agreeing to parts of US President Donald Trump's 21-point Gaza peace plan has stirred cautious optimism and deep skepticism in equal measure.

For the first time, Hamas has signaled willingness to release all remaining hostages and hand over Gaza's administration to an independent body. On paper, this could mark the first meaningful step toward ending two years of relentless conflict. But beneath the rhetoric of responsibility and consensus lies a question that continues to haunt the region: is Hamas serious about peace, or simply buying time?

Hamas' statement was notably nuanced. The tone was diplomatic, but the omissions were equally telling. There was no mention of disarmament, Israel's main precondition for any lasting peace. Nor was there a clear acceptance of its exclusion from Gaza's future governance, a key plank of Trump's plan. This duality—acceptance without surrender, cooperation without capitulation—reveals Hamas' strategic calculus. By appearing conciliatory, it regains a measure of international legitimacy and buys time to regroup politically and militarily. By stopping short of disarmament, it retains leverage in any future negotiation. In short, Hamas' response is less a surrender and more a calculated survival strategy as it has been considerably weakened by Israel's onslaught.

Trump's plan itself is ambitious and unorthodox, combining elements of diplomacy, deterrence, and direct intervention. It envisions a phased Israeli withdrawal, the creation of a transitional authority, and a US-supervised reconstruction plan for Gaza. If implemented sincerely, it could indeed offer a rare relief for Gaza's 2.2 million beleaguered residents. The promise of open borders for aid, halted bombings, and a neutral administration could bring the first real respite in years of war and despair to the Gaza residents facing starvation.

The plan though good on paper may not hold on the ground and its fragility cannot be overstated. Israel's initial decision to scale back operations is contingent on full compliance from Hamas—a condition fraught with distrust. Any misstep, any perceived violation, could unravel the entire framework. It would not be easy to ensure the technocratic body's independence. For the people of Gaza, even a temporary ceasefire means hope — food, medicine, and a few nights without airstrikes. If Trump's plan, however imperfect, can halt the cycle of death and destruction, it deserves a chance. Gaza has seen enough promises; what it now needs is sincere efforts.

A life of service, conviction, and courage

A scholar, organiser, parliamentarian, and sports visionary, VK Malhotra ji's life was a tapestry of purpose and perseverance — an enduring inspiration for generations of *karyakartas* and public servants alike



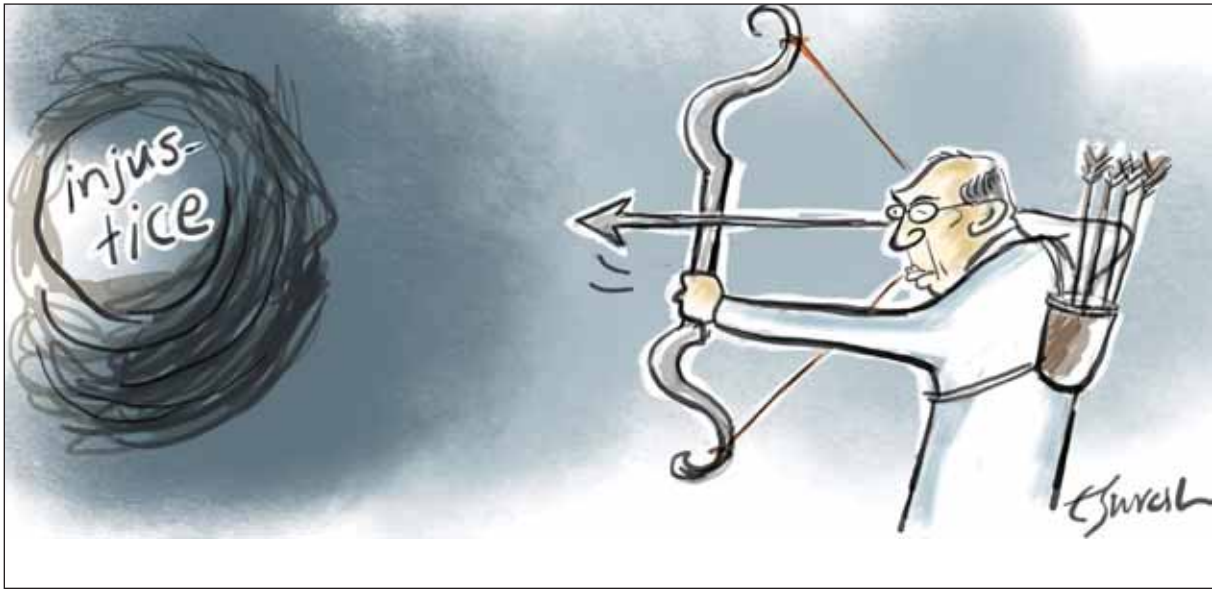
NARENDRA
MODI

A few days ago, we lost one of our senior-most leaders, Shri Vijay Kumar Malhotra Ji. He lived a long and accomplished life, but more importantly, he led a life of relentless hard work, determination and service. A glimpse of his life will make everyone understand the core ethos of the RSS, the Jana Sangh, and the BJP...courage in the face of adversity, service above self and a deep-rooted commitment to national and cultural values. The family of VK Malhotra Ji suffered the horrors of partition. The trauma and displacement did not make him bitter or inward-looking. Instead, he immersed himself in serving others. He found his calling in the ideology of the RSS and the Jana Sangh. Those were indeed very challenging times. Malhotra Ji dedicated himself to social work, helping thousands of displaced families, who had lost everything, rebuild their lives. This was also the guiding spirit of the Jana Sangh. His fellow *Karyakartas* in those days included Madanlal Khurana Ji and Kidar Nath Sahni Ji. People like them and countless others were at the forefront of selfless service, which resonated with the people of Delhi.

It is well known that the Lok Sabha and various state assembly elections of 1967 were a shocker for the all-powerful Congress. A lesser-known election which took place was the first-ever Delhi Metropolitan Council election. In the national capital, the Jana Sangh secured a resounding victory. Shri LK Advani Ji became the Chairman of the Council and Malhotra Ji was given the responsibility of being the Chief Executive Councillor, which is roughly equivalent to being Chief Minister. He was only 36 then. He used his tenure to address the needs of Delhi, especially on infrastructure and civic issues.

This responsibility also deepened Malhotra Ji's bond with Delhi. Whenever there was an issue of public importance, Malhotra Ji was not a bystander but an active participant speaking the voice of the public. He took part in the cow protection movement in the late 1960s, where he also became a victim of police excesses. He was at the forefront of the anti-Emergency movement. When Sikhs were being brutally butchered on the streets of Delhi, he was a voice of calm and peace and stood strongly with the Sikh community. He believed that politics, in addition to electoral success, was about principles and protecting people as well as values when it mattered most.

From the late 1960s onwards, VK Malhotra Ji remained a permanent figure in public life. Few leaders can claim to have such a long, unbro-



The Pioneer SINCE 1865

SHRI VK MALHOTRA JI'S IMPACT IS NOT JUST IN THE POSITIONS HE HELD, BUT IN THE ETHOS, HE CARRIED FORWARD... OF PUTTING SERVICE BEFORE SELF, OF STAYING ROOTED IN VALUES AND OF EMBRACING CHALLENGES WITH COURAGE

This article was written by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to pay tribute to Shri VK Malhotra

narendramodi
@narendramodi
The Pioneer

ken span of public engagement. He was a tireless *Karyakarta*, an excellent organiser and an institution builder. He had the wonderful ability to traverse the worlds of electoral politics and organisational politics with equal ease, providing stable leadership to the Jana Sangh and the BJP's Delhi unit.

Be it civic administration, state legislature or the Parliament, Malhotra Ji had seen it all. His 1999 Lok Sabha electoral victory against Dr. Manmohan Singh is still remembered by supporters and opponents. It was a high-profile election, where he was pitted against an important Congress leader.

The full might of the Congress ecosystem descended upon his South Delhi constituency, but Malhotra Ji never reduced the level of discourse. He ran a positive campaign, ignoring vile attacks and won with over 50% of the vote! This victory was achieved due to Malhotra Ji's strong connect on the ground. He was skilled at nurturing close relationships with *Karyakartas* and understanding the aspirations of the voters.

When Malhotra Ji spoke in Parliament, it was always well-researched and well-presented. His tenure as Deputy Leader of the Opposition during UPA-1 offers valuable lessons to students of politics and Parliamentary democracy. He effectively opposed the ineffective UPA Government, especially on its dismal track record of corruption and terrorism. During those days, I was serving as the Chief Minister of Gujarat and would often interact with Malhotra Ji, who was always curious to know about Gujarat's development strides.

Politics was one facet of VK Malhotra Ji's persona. He was an excellent academician. I learnt from his family about how he secured double promotions during his school years. He completed matriculation and graduation ahead of schedule. His Hindi proficiency

meant that the task of translating Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee's speeches to Hindi often came to him.

One of Malhotra Ji's greatest traits was his role as an institution builder. He was among the top leaders who founded and nurtured several institutions related to the RSS. Through his efforts, many cultural, educational and social organisations found growth and mentorship. These institutions became nurseries of talent and service, carrying forward the vision of a self-reliant, value-driven society.

Beyond politics and academia, Malhotra Ji made an indelible mark in the world of sports. Archery was his great passion and he served as the President of the Archery Association of India for several decades. Under his leadership, Indian archery gained global recognition and he tirelessly worked to provide athletes with platforms and opportunities. His role in sports administration reflected the same traits he displayed in public life: dedication, organisational ability and the pursuit of excellence.

Shri VK Malhotra Ji's impact is not just in the positions he held, but in the ethos, he carried forward... of putting service before self, of staying rooted in values and of embracing challenges with courage and perseverance. He was the ideal Party man, never speaking anything that could embarrass our *Karyakartas* or ideology. A few days ago, I was at the programme to inaugurate the new Headquarters of the Delhi BJP, where I fondly recalled Shri VK Malhotra Ji. He was thrilled when the BJP formed the Government in Delhi earlier this year after over three decades and had immense expectations, which we are committed to fulfilling for our beloved national capital. May his life and accomplishments continue to remain a role model for generations of public servants in the times to come.

PIC TALK



Workers pack firecrackers for sale ahead of the 'Diwali' festival, in Ahmedabad
PHOTO: PTI

DIGITAL EXPERIENCE



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POISONING ALLEGATIONS ROCK ZUBEEN GARG CASE

In a dramatic development surrounding the death of renowned Assamese singer Zubeen Garg, his bandmate Shekhar Jyoti Goswami has alleged that the singer was poisoned while in Singapore on an accusation now forming part of the official police documents.

Goswami claimed that Garg's manager Siddharth Sharma and NorthEast India Festival organizer Shyamkanu Mahanta were responsible for the poisoning. Both men, along with two band members Goswami himself and Amritprabha Mahanta, have been arrested in the case and remanded to police custody for 14 days. Garg died under mysterious circumstances while swimming in the sea during his visit to

Singapore for the 4th NorthEast India Festival, organised by Mahanta and his company.

His sudden demise has sparked widespread speculation and led to the formation of a nine-member Special Investigation Team (SIT) by the CID.

Goswami further alleged that Sharma and Mahanta had intentionally chosen a foreign location to execute their plan and attempted to portray Garg's death as an accident. He also claimed Sharma instructed him not to share video footage from the yacht where the incident occurred. All eyes remain on the CID's findings and the judicial inquiry now underway.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

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

Learning to Pause: Lessons in Empathy!



SANJAY
CHANDRA

2 THE PIONEER ND OPINION

I find that with increasing age, I am becoming more rigid in opinions, have begun to develop pre-conceived notions, and I am turning more judgemental. This often results in my interrupting people, or even using harsh words, if they put forth a contradictory view point. It is surprising because experiences should impart a certain maturity when dealing with people. I find many persons suffer from the same malaise, unable to step back and reflect, and apologise if need be. It is easier said than done.

I was in a departmental store a few years back. The young saleswoman approached us selling a newly launched hair product by a leading brand. It was much pricier than the most expensive item in the category available on the shelves. She vouched for the superior quality, insisting that

we try it once. She was the more mature person as she replied to my insensitive query about the affordability of such an expensive product by a mere salesperson. The company had given samples to them before they could make a sales pitch. That I was ashamed of my behaviour would be an understatement.

More recently, I was upset at the rudeness of a neighbour. I berated another gentleman, attributing behaviour of the rude person to the group that both are part of. The mutual friend felt hurt at this unjustified blame for the conduct of the discourteous person.

Words were exchanged between us in public that in the first place had no business to be uttered at all. In yet another incident, I interrupted a young lady while she tried to explain her views on a rather sensitive subject. She too told me that she is an individual in her own rights, she has her own opinions, and it was not fair for me to equate her with a group. We think that children would not remember harsh words or actions against them. I have raised my hand only twice in my life, that too when the persons at the receiving end were children. Both of them remember the incidents even almost four decades later. I was extremely short tempered in the initial few years of my professional life, and would often shout at subordinates. I know of colleagues who would even throw files or documents back at the

officer. I am not sure if the throwers understood their folly, but I realized I could get a lot done with just an encouraging and kind word.

Everyone faces similar incidents. All of us have people around us who are our moral compass. For me, those are my wife, daughters, and a few friends. They make it a point to interrupt me in time. They keep reminding me to pause and listen. They tell me time and again to be less impatient. Unfortunately, they too have to bear the brunt sometimes. I was a much better listener till I quit my professional pursuits. I do not

know if it is the impatience of time constraint or my old age. It is likely that both are interrelated and I am trying to do too much, too soon, in what I consider to be a limited time. But these can not be excuses for bad behaviour.

Inability to listen to others, or to not be empathetic, is harmful to interpersonal relations. We cannot always be right. In fact, there is no right or wrong in a conversation. There are only two perspectives. Words spoken in the heat of the moment have a way of returning to haunt. The hurts caused by harsh words, or even a harsh attitude may heal, but would leave a scar. Life is too beautiful to be wasted on the trivial sentiment of 'I am always right.'

The author is an electrical engineer with the Indian Railways and conducts classes in creative writing

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The cough syrup tragedy: A wakeup call

This is a very serious and distressing incident. The deaths of 12 children in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan and the ban on the sale of Coldrif cough syrup in Tamil Nadu are a warning message to everyone. The health of the people, especially the safety of children, should come before any profit. Pharmaceutical companies should take full responsibility for the quality and safety of their products. Governments should strengthen regulation and supervision and prevent any dangerous drugs from entering the market. Parents, doctors and the public should be vigilant and use any cough syrup containing dextromethorphan only on medical advice. Such incidents show a lack of regulation, lack of supervision and a lack of moral responsibility. Children are our future; protecting their lives should be the top priority of society. The solution to this problem lies in the cooperation of the government, companies and the people. This tragedy underscores the urgent need for stricter regulation, corporate accountability, and public vigilance. Protecting children's health must rise above profit and negligence—our collective responsibility to safeguard the nation's future.

DARSHAN BN | BENGALURU

Modi-Trump Alignment Amid Global Ironies

After nearly two years of relentless war, the people of Gaza, who have endured daily airstrikes, displacement, and the constant shadow of violence, may be seeing a fragile moment of relief. Hamas, in a rare gesture, has signaled partially accepted Trump's Gaza peace plan. However, the group seeks further negotiations on crucial clauses concerning Gaza's future governance. Interestingly, when two untrustworthy enemies are trusting each other, Trump has no option and urges Israel to halt bombing for hostage release, while warning of severe consequences if the deal ultimately fails. After Indo-Pak Operation Sindoor Prime Minister Modi and Donald Trump playing hide and seek game, at last stood firmly in support of Trump's ultimatum to Hamas' a rare moment of solidarity between Delhi and Washington. The irony, of course, is hard to miss: while Modi backed America's wrath against terrorists, India itself remains the punching bag of Trump's trade tantrums and visa crackdowns. Whatsoever, Trump wants Modi to accept his role in the ceasefire, so that he can lay a stake to the Nobel Peace prize (surely not now). Modi can't do so for domestic Political reasons. This is the next best initiative- laud Trump's role in global peace so that he can somehow get the Nobel and the sword is off PM Modi's neck!

BIDYUT KUMAR CHATTERJEE | FARIDABAD

A Tale of Two Worlds for Women in 2025

Even in the 25th year of the 21st century, women continue to battle the weight of patriarchy that undermines their basic human rights. Despite decades of progress—earning the right to vote, gaining education, and entering public life—the struggle for equality remains unfinished. Across much of the world, women still face wage gaps, limited healthcare, and persistent gender-based violence. Nowhere is this regression more stark than in Afghanistan, where women are denied education and freedom, their dignity crushed under one of the harshest patriarchal regimes in modern history. The “mother of life,” as the woman is often called, faces an assault unlike any other time. Yet, in a striking contrast, a historic breakthrough has come from Britain. Sarah Mullally, once a nurse, has been appointed the 106th Archbishop of Canterbury—the first woman ever to lead the Church of England in its 1,400-year history. Her elevation marks a transformative moment for the Anglican Communion, though it may also test the church's conservative factions. From Kabul's despair to Canterbury's triumph, the message is clear: the global journey toward gender equality remains uneven, but every breakthrough—like Mullally's—rekindles hope that someday, equality will no longer be revolutionary.

JANG BAHADUR SINGH | JAMSHEDPUR

How the CPI shaped India’s conscience and democracy

From colonial resistance to post-independence reform, the CPI’s journey reflects a relentless pursuit of justice, equality, and dignity for the working class. Though its electoral reach has diminished, its influence remains deeply embedded in the democratic and moral foundations of the Republic

FIRST
Column



P SANDOSH
KUMAR

Few political movements have imprinted themselves so deeply on India’s history as the Communist Party of India. Founded in 1925, at a time when the nation was still under colonial rule, the CPI was born not in the drawing rooms of elites but in the ferment of working-class struggle. From the outset, it carried a simple yet radical mission — to fight for equality, justice, and dignity for the toiling masses.

Over the next hundred years, the CPI would witness India’s transformation — from a colonised land to a free nation, from the hopeful dawn of independence to the complexities of globalisation. It fought its battles everywhere — on factory floors, in Parliament, in trade unions, in remote villages and restless cities. Through all these phases, it never abandoned its central conviction that democracy without social justice is hollow, and freedom without equality incomplete.

Critics have long dismissed the CPI as a party of “foreign ideas”, arguing that Marxism was an alien transplant from Europe. But this argument overlooks the living nature of ideas. Just as Buddhism travelled from India to shape the moral compass of Asia, Marxism too journeyed across borders to find new meaning in Indian soil. From its earliest days, the CPI was not about reciting European theory but about addressing Indian injustice. Its ideological pulse beat not in European libraries but in the fields of Telangana, the jute mills of Bengal, and the streets of Bombay. The party’s constitution consciously adapted Marxist principles to Indian realities — confronting caste oppression, feudal landlordism, and imperial domination.

In that sense, Indian communism was as indigenous as any other nationalist movement. It sought not to mimic Moscow but to marry socialism with the country’s moral and social struggles. Long before secularism became a constitutional principle, the CPI recognised that communalism was the greatest internal threat to India’s unity. Its members were barred from joining any communal organisation — a bold stance at a time when even mainstream parties



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PURNA SWARAJ -
COMPLETE
INDEPENDENCE

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compromised for political convenience.

While the Indian National Congress often wavered between nationalism and religious accommodation, the communists were uncompromising: they saw equality as incompatible with sectarianism. This clarity would later prove vital in shaping India’s secular democratic ethos.

The year 2025 also marks the centenary of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The parallel anniversaries of the CPI and RSS illuminate the sharpest ideological divide in Indian politics — two organisations born of colonial turmoil, representing opposite visions of India.

For the communists, nationalism meant liberation and inclusiveness; for the RSS, it meant exclusion and religious homogeneity. Where the Left imagined an India of workers and peasants united beyond caste or creed, the Sangh envisioned an India defined by Hindu identity and hierarchy.

The CPI’s role in the freedom movement remains one of its proudest chapters. From Bhagat Singh’s revolutionary socialism to Surjya Sen’s Chittagong uprising, communists stood on the frontlines of anti-imperialist resistance. They believed political freedom was inseparable from social and economic liberation — a radical idea in an era when many nationalists focused only on ending British rule.

Communists built vast movements of peasants, workers, students, and women, turning the freedom struggle into a mass

awakening. They demanded purna swaraj — complete independence — and were among the first to call for an elected Constituent Assembly to frame the new nation’s destiny.

By contrast, the RSS stayed distant from the freedom struggle. While communists braved imprisonment and persecution, the Sangh focused inward, expanding its shakhas and avoiding confrontation with colonial authorities. Its leaders claimed the “real battle” lay not against British imperialism but against India’s minorities — a perspective that starkly revealed its priorities.

When Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated in 1948 by a communal extremist, the RSS faced a ban. Instead of introspection, it sought political rehabilitation by court-ing Congress leaders. The communists, meanwhile, paid a heavy price for their activism — facing repeated bans, censorship, and arrests. But they did not bend. Their loyalty was not to any ruler but to the cause of the people.

This moral distinction — between opportunism and conviction — continues to define the ideological clash between the Left and the Right.

After Independence, the CPI re-evaluated its strategy. Recognising the possibilities of democracy, it embraced parliamentary politics as a legitimate path to socialism. This faith bore fruit in 1957, when E.M.S. Namboodiripad led the world’s first democratically elected communist

government in Kerala.

That government redefined Indian governance. It launched ambitious land reforms, expanded public education, and strengthened local democracy — policies that made Kerala a model of human development. Though dismissed after two years, the 1957 experiment proved that Marxism could coexist with democracy and enrich it. Later, under C. Achutha Menon’s leadership (1969-1977), the CPI once again demonstrated how left-wing governance could deliver both stability and progress. Menon’s government, marked by pragmatism and welfare-driven policies, remains one of Kerala’s most successful — a rare balance of ideology and efficiency that still inspires political thinkers today.

The Cold War era brought internal strains, culminating in the 1964 split between the CPI and the CPI(M). The division, driven by disagreements over Soviet and Chinese alignments, weakened the communist movement electorally. Yet, paradoxically, it reflected the party’s democratic culture — one where dissent and debate were integral, not suppressed.

Despite the setback, the CPI continued to influence national policy, shaping labour laws, land reforms, and welfare programmes that became pillars of independent India’s economic architecture.

Many of India’s early economic policies — from state-led industrialisation to public sector undertakings — bore the

imprint of communist thinking. In Parliament, the CPI consistently spoke for the voiceless: the factory worker, the tenant farmer, the marginalised citizen.

When economic liberalisation arrived in the 1990s, the CPI warned of deepening inequality and erosion of labour rights. At the time, such warnings were dismissed as outdated dogma. But today, amid widening wealth gaps and corporate dominance, those concerns sound prescient. As the CPI enters its second century, it faces the challenge of reinvention in an India fragmented by identity politics and majoritarian narratives. Yet its moral compass remains intact. The party that once fought colonialism and feudalism now stands against the new forces of inequality and authoritarianism. Its task is to reclaim its historic role — not as a mere political entity, but as the conscience of the Republic. To speak again for the workers, farmers, students, and minorities who bear the brunt of economic and social injustice. The CPI’s centenary is not just a moment to celebrate the past, but to reimagine the future. Its relevance lies in its ability to unite people around common struggles — unemployment, poverty, ecological crisis, and democratic erosion — beyond the barriers of religion or caste.

As India marks the centenaries of both the CPI and RSS, it faces a profound moral choice. Will the future be guided by the inclusive, secular, and egalitarian ideals for which generations of communists fought and died? Or will it be shaped by exclusion, hierarchy, and intolerance?

The CPI’s journey over the last hundred years stands as a testament to the idea that democracy without equality is fragile, and freedom without justice hollow. It has not always succeeded, but it has never stopped trying — and therein lies its enduring strength.

For a century, the Communist Party of India has been more than a political organisation. It has been a moral force — a reminder that democracy must serve the weak, not just the powerful. It has fought for values, not vanity; for people, not power. As it steps into its second century, the red flag may no longer dominate the skies of Indian politics, but it still flies high — steady, proud, and deeply rooted in the soil of India’s democratic journey. The struggle for equality and dignity continues — and with it, the timeless relevance of the CPI’s enduring red resolve.

Punjab industries struggle under inverted duty pressure

Lighting up Diwali with growth and empowerment



AS
MITTAL

The recent rationalisation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) slabs-removing the 12 per cent and 28per cent brackets and consolidating them into 5 per cent and 18 per cent-was widely hailed as a leap toward simplification. On paper, it promised efficiency, transparency, and predictability.Yet, for industries operating under the Inverted Duty Structure (IDS), the celebration has been short-lived. In Punjab, where several industries, including tractors, farm implements and various ancillary sectors, form the backbone of the industrial economy, the restructuring has inadvertently created a liquidity crisis that could threaten the state’s much-anticipated industrial revival.

The IDS Trap: Paying More, Receiving Late

Under the inverted duty tax structure, industries pay a higher GST on raw materials-such as steel, rubber, plastics, and other critical inputs-while their final products attract a lower GST rate. For example, a tractor or farm implement manufacturer today pays 18per cent GST on inputs but is allowed to charge only 5per cent on the finished product. The difference is legally refundable under IDS, since otherwise the principle of tax neutrality collapses.

In theory, this system ensures fairness by preventing cascading taxes. In practice, however, in Punjab, the delay in refunds-often stretching over six months-blocks working capital, throttling an industry’s ability to reinvest in production, wages, and innovation. For sectors like farm machinery and others operating on thin margins, this is not just an accounting inconvenience: it is a systemic choke on cash flow.

The result is twofold firstly, liquidity crunch — companies borrow at high interest to cover daily operations. Secondly, Competitiveness loss — delayed refunds raise effective costs, making Punjab’s products less competitive compared to states or sectors in not caught in the IDS web. Punjab’s industries are not new to this hardship. Refund delays have long been a feature of GST administration.

But with the GST slab restructuring, the magnitude of the problem has grown, and unless timely intervention comes from the state, the cash crunch could deepen into an industrial slowdown.



For ease of doing business, Punjab government rightly initiated consultations with stakeholders. Expectations are high that this initiative will set the tone for attracting investment and reviving Punjab’s industrial spirit.

Yet, if the inverted duty refund problem is not resolved, all other ease-of-doing promises may ring hollow. Timely Input Tax Credit (ITC) refunds are not a matter of largesse but of legally guaranteed entitlements. The GST framework itself recognises that IDS refunds are essential to prevent tax accumulation.

Industries cannot be asked to fund the state’s fiscal management by indefinitely waiting for refunds. Punjab must establish a systematic framework for timely disbursement while negotiating adjustments with the Centre separately. A state aspiring to be an industrial hub cannot afford to send the signal that its manufacturers’ cash flow is hostage to bureaucratic cycles.

Beyond Cash Flow

Ultimately, the issue is larger than refunds. It is about trust. Investors and entrepreneurs judge a state not just by incentives on paper but by how predictably policies are implemented. If industries under IDS continue to suffer cash blockages and discriminatory exclusions, Punjab risks undermining its credibility as a manufacturing destination.

Following the rationalisation of the GST slabs, its right time for Punjab to correct course. By ensuring timely refunds and eliminating unjust exclusions, the government can not only rescue its industries from a looming cash crunch but also rebuild the credibility of its industrial governance. For a state that prides itself on being India’s food basket and aspires to be a manufacturing hub, nothing less will do.

The Centre, recognising the problem, has

recently announced its intention to streamline IDS refunds, aiming to process claims within a week once all documentation is complete. Punjab must not only welcome this reform but also complement it with state-level interventions. A comprehensive roadmap could rest on three pillars:

1. Time-Bound Refund Mechanism

Under the revised GST slabs, as of from November 1, the central government aims to streamline the ITC refund within a week. Punjab should codify a statutory timeline for IDS refunds, ideally 10-15 days, with automatic approval if no queries are raised within that period. To instill accountability, penal interest should apply to refunds pending beyond 30 days. This would create certainty in cash flows and prevent industries from relying on expensive working capital loans.

2. Digital-First Processing

While GST is already digital, refund applications often get stuck in multiple rounds of clarifications and document resubmissions. Punjab can introduce an “auto-validation” mechanism that cross-checks input and output GST credits seamlessly through the GSTN system. A state-level help desk, staffed with trained officers, can be dedicated solely to IDS refund issues, ensuring industry grievances are resolved without red tape.

3. Centre-State Alignment

Since the Centre controls the GST pool, Punjab must proactively negotiate smooth fund adjustment for refunds. A joint working group between the state’s finance department, GST administration, and industry’s department could serve as a standing platform to address IDS refund backlogs, while keeping industry liquidity intact.

Way forward

Fixing the timely input tax credit refund to the industries operating under the inverted duty structure bottleneck is not a concession but a governance correction-one that will decide whether Punjab revives its industrial dynamism or slips deeper into stagnation. By establishing time-bound refunds, leveraging digital tools for faster processing, and aligning closely with the Centre, Punjab can demonstrate that it is serious about being a predictable, investor-friendly state. For a region that has historically fueled India’s food security, ensuring timely tax refunds for its industrial backbone is the least it can do to secure its economic future.



BYREDDY SHABARI



ADARSH KUNIYILLAM

On 30th June 2017, at the stroke of midnight, a ceremonial joint session was held in Parliament to launch the country’s historic legislation, the GST. The then President of India, Shri Pranab Mukherjee, called it a “tribute to the maturity and wisdom of India’s democracy”. He highlighted the long journey of GST and how it would transform our economy.

True to his words, since the launch of this reform, despite economic shocks from global uncertainties, the Indian economy continues to grow at an estimated 6-7 per cent annually. With the launch of GST 2.0, the next generation of reforms, the OECD projects India’s growth rate at 6.7 per cent, an upward revision from the earlier 6.2 per cent.

India’s indirect taxation journey can be seen in three phases: before GST, after GST, and now with GST 2.0. The first phase was marked by huge revenue leakages due to hoarding, black marketing, and corruption.

The second phase, post-GST, ushered in a wave of technology-driven reforms such as e-way bills. A robust IT backbone was created, which ensured transparency and efficiency. States were adequately compensated for revenue losses and encouraged to increase capital expenditure, adding a multiplier effect to the economy.

As a result, in 2024-25, gross GST collections hit a record `22.08 lakh crore, marking a year-on-year growth of 9.4 per cent. This reflected the growing formalisation of the economy and improved tax compliance. In essence, GST brought back to the system revenue that was once lost. For citizens, this is a double bonanza. In the Union Budget 2025-26, the Finance Minister slashed personal income tax rates. Now, with the rationalisation of GST, the economy will receive a further boost.

This demonstrates the government’s relentless, stable, and visionary economic management. It is estimated that the new GST rates will boost domestic consumption by nearly 8,2 lakh crore and provide fresh impetus to public expenditure while boosting private investor confidence. It will enhance purchasing power and put more money into the hands of people.

Recognising the importance of these reforms, the Andhra Pradesh Assembly passed a resolution in support of GST 2.0. Andhra Pradesh alone



is expected to benefit by nearly 8,000 crore. With AP contributing close to 8 per cent of India’s total exports, GST 2.0 will give tremendous impetus to manufacturing, MSMEs, and exports. With nearly 29 per cent of the State’s GDP coming from agriculture and allied activities, the reduction of GST on tractors, drip irrigation systems, sprinklers, tractor tyres, and parts to just 5 per cent is a true tribute to our Annadatas during this festive season.

The reforms will also support Andhra Pradesh’s fisheries sector, which contributes nearly 41 per cent of India’s fish production. Additionally, sectors such as automobiles, dairy, pharmaceuticals, medical devices, handicrafts, and MSMEs in Andhra Pradesh are set to reap significant benefits during the festive season, helping realise the vision of Swarna Andhra. The RBI, in its latest monetary policy report, mentioned that about 11.4 per cent of the CPI basket would be impacted by GST rationalisation. This will help contain inflation below target levels during FY 2025-26 and mitigate the adverse impact of global trade uncertainties, including US tariffs. The Har Ghar Swadeshi, Ghar Ghar Swadeshi campaign, together with GST 2.0, will not only brighten our homes this Diwali but will also uplift the lives of every Indian — the farmer, the small business owner, the worker, and every household.

This reform is not just about taxation; it is about empowering people and strengthening India’s growth story.


The Author is Vice-Chairman (Cabinet minister rank) of the Punjab Economic Policy and Planning Board, Chairman of ASSOCHAM Northern Region Development Council


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ESTABLISHED IN 1881

India-China flights

A deal born of economic necessity

AFTER more than five years, India and China are preparing to reopen direct air routes. Talks on updating the bilateral air services pact are continuing, even as flights are scheduled to resume on October 26. IndiGo's Kolkata–Guangzhou service will take to the skies, ending a suspension that began with the pandemic but deepened with the 2020 Galwan clash. The resumption has been welcomed as a sign of easing tensions, yet it is more a cautious reset than a sweeping thaw. Behind the move, however, lies economic compulsion rather than diplomatic warmth. India's small and medium enterprises — the backbone of its manufacturing and trading sectors — are heavily dependent on Chinese raw materials and finished goods. From electronics and pharmaceuticals to auto parts and chemicals, disruptions in supply have hurt output and inflated costs. Restoring direct air links became a practical necessity to keep production lines moving and markets supplied. In effect, India has been forced to make a limited deal with China to prevent further strain on its own businesses.

Even so, symbolism must not be mistaken for substance. The restart covers only select cities and carriers, reflecting guarded intent rather than open skies. Border disengagement talks remain fragile, with neither side conceding ground on territorial disputes. India's staggering \$99-billion trade deficit with China adds another layer of caution. A few restored flights will not erase structural imbalances or strategic rivalry.

For Beijing, with slowing growth, renewed access to Indian markets and students is attractive. For New Delhi, allowing aviation resumption signals pragmatic diplomacy — engaging where necessary without abandoning red lines. It also reassures other partners that India is not shutting doors, even as it diversifies ties with the West and Asia-Pacific. The test lies in what follows. If routes expand, exchanges deepen and tensions stay low, skies could truly clear. Until then, this is a deal driven by necessity — one that offers opportunity, but demands vigilance.

Bias behind bars

SCs, minorities at the receiving end

THE Prison Statistics India Report-2023, released by the National Crime Records Bureau last week, has some worrisome findings about the caste and socioeconomic status of prisoners, particularly in Haryana. The proportion of Scheduled Castes (SC) behind bars was significantly higher than their share in the state's population. This trend has also been witnessed in the case of Muslims. At the national level, too, the situation is similar.

It's apparent that marginalised and underprivileged sections of society don't have easy access to legal aid. The prejudices they face in prisons and correctional institutions make it harder for them to seek timely judicial redressal. A year ago, the Supreme Court had declared caste-based discrimination and classification of prisoners as unconstitutional and directed the Centre as well as states to revise their prison manuals and rules. Subsequently, the Union Home Ministry had amended the Model Prison Manual, 2016, and the Model Prisons and Correctional Services Act, 2023. A pan-India assessment should be done to gauge the impact of these amendments on the ground. Gaps in implementation must be plugged in consonance with the SC Order.

Apart from discrimination both within and outside jail, a key reason why SCs and minorities find themselves in the crosshairs of the law is the paucity of gainful employment opportunities. Poverty and joblessness force some people from the lower strata to turn to crime. And the police are also more likely to view them with suspicion because of their poor socioeconomic conditions. This sorry state of affairs runs counter to the Union government's mantra of *Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas, Sabka Prayas*. A level playing field is a must to ensure that every Indian contributes to the nation's progress, overcoming barriers of caste, class and religion.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, TUESDAY, OCTOBER 6, 1925

National demonstration

WE cordially and whole-heartedly associate ourselves with the appeal which has just been issued by Sarojini Naidu, president-elect of the Congress and the president of the South African Indian Congress, for the observance of October 11 as a day of national demonstration against the harsh and high-handed anti-Asiatic legislation of the South African Union Government. Naidu earnestly calls upon all communities in India, irrespective of the differences of colour, creed or political conviction, and especially the European and Indian Christian population, to participate in the national demonstration and to make it a day of solemn intercession offering from every place of Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Jewish and Zoroastrian worship prayers for the unhappy Indian settlers across the seas. The recent meeting of the All-India Congress Committee at Patna also recorded an important resolution on this subject, by which it called upon all Congress organisations to convene public meetings of all parties on October 11 to protest against the treatment meted out to the Indian settlers in South Africa. Commenting on this resolution, Mahatma Gandhi writes in *Young India*: "If these meetings are to be a success, all parties, including Chambers of Commerce, European and Anglo-Indian Associations, missionary bodies, etc., should cooperate whole-heartedly, as I hope they will do. There is no division of opinion on this point. And I believe that the Government of India will welcome an emphatic and unanimous expression of public opinion."

OPINION

Empower Ladakh to turn the tide

The Centre needs to address the demand of local residents for special constitutional rights



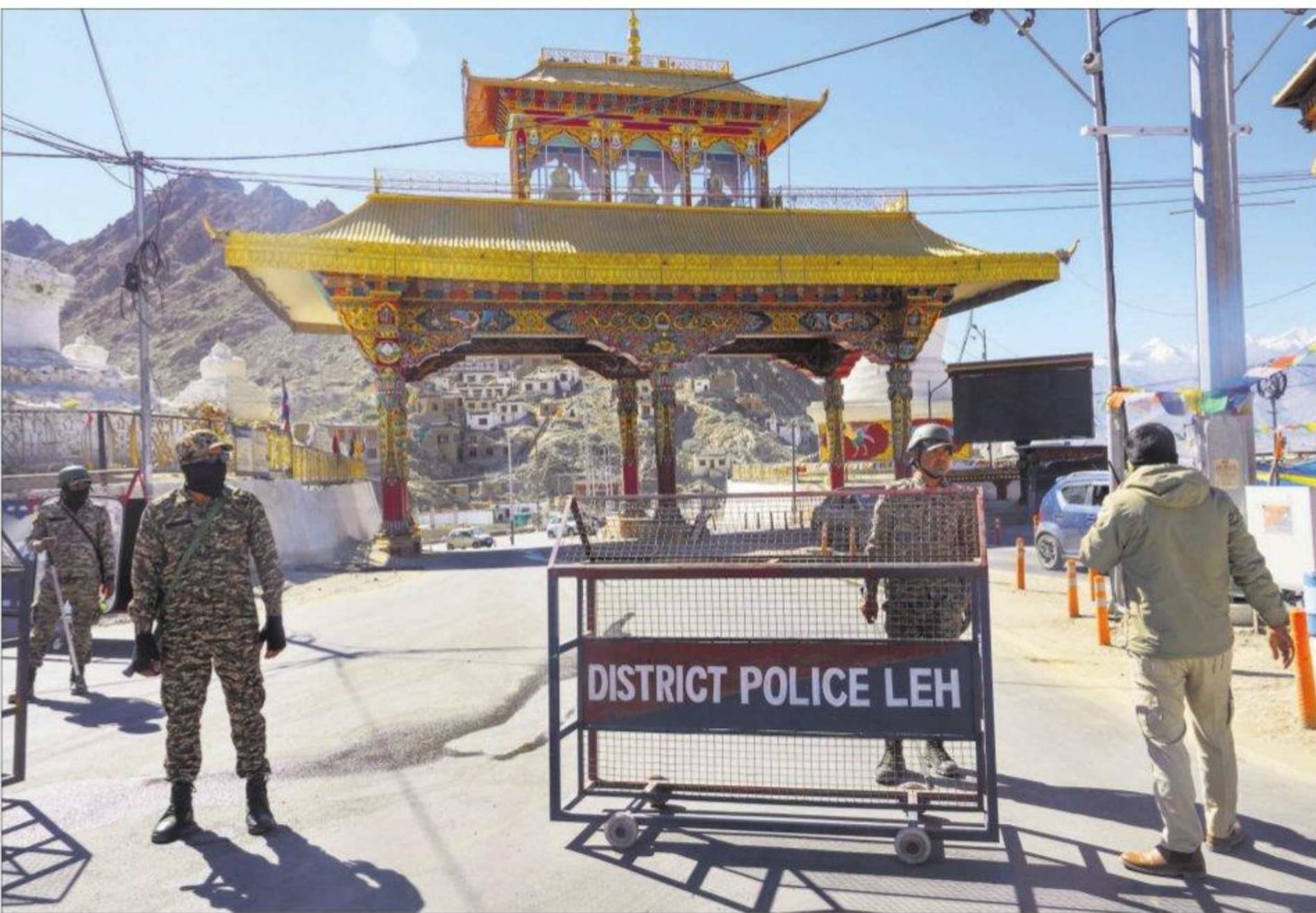
AJAY K MEHRA
VISITING SENIOR FELLOW, CENTRE
FOR MULTILEVEL FEDERALISM

INDEPENDENT India has witnessed several divisions into states and UTs, some of which took place after violent agitations. These changes have reflected the nation's multicultural and multiethnic complexities. The current unrest in Ladakh is not just another assertion of an urge for shared sovereignty. Yearning for autonomy, Ladakh was granted UT status in 2019 after the bifurcation of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). However, Ladakhis were back on the streets in December 2021, seeking protection of their rights.

The intransigence of the region and its people demonstrates a wish to shape their future with their own leaders and resources.

Ladakh is a cold desert whose significant area has been under illegal occupation of China as well as Pakistan. It also has the Siachen glacier, the world's highest battlefield. Considering Ladakh's strategic significance and the presence of two hostile neighbours, India must remain vigilant and ensure good governance in the UT. If its economy does not grow sufficiently to boost employment and human resource development, residents of the region will remain dissatisfied and restless. This will be detrimental to India's security and strategic interests along the Line of Actual Control.

Ladakh's topography makes it challenging for the authori-



ON THE BOIL: Unrest in Ladakh can be detrimental to India's security and strategic interests. PTI

ties to ensure that the benefits of development reach the people. The Ladakhi quagmire is rooted in the region's conquest by Dogra king Gulab Singh's general Zorawar Singh in 1834-35. When the J&K issue became contentious, Ladakh got embroiled in the larger dispute. The counter-offensive of the Indian Army in 1947 cleared Dras, Kargil and Leh of infiltrators. Ladakh thus became one of the three administrative units of J&K.

Ladakh has been underdeveloped for long. Poor health services have kept the mortality rate high. The sources of employment are limited to agriculture, the public sector and lately tourism. Except low-yield farming on difficult terrain, jobs are available mainly in urban areas.

Ladakhis held a grouse against the government and felt that their economic condition would improve only if power was with their own rep-

Ladakhis wish to shape their future with their own leaders and resources.

resentatives. No wonder they staged protests in February 2024 that brought Leh and Kargil together, culminating in a complete shutdown. Sonam Wangchuk — engineer, innovator, educator and Gandhian activist — donned a leader's role. He had already become a popular figure after

his pioneering school inspired the famous Hindi movie *3 Idiots*. His 21-day fast was withdrawn on March 26, 2024, on the advice of his well-wishers, but the Union government did not budge from its stand.

He launched an indefinite fast last month, but called it off after violence broke out in Leh. Subsequently, he was arrested under the National Security Act and sent to Jodhpur jail. It seems that the government is not keen on involving this important stakeholder in the talks, which can bring about a solution to the festering problem.

Wangchuk has called for an independent judicial probe into the killing of four protestors, even as he has reiterated his support to the Leh Apex Body and the Kargil Democratic Alliance over their demands for Sixth Schedule status and full statehood for Ladakh.

Ladakh sent four members to the Legislative Assembly and one to the Lok Sabha

when it was part of the erstwhile state of J&K. The representation was considered inadequate, even as the authorities were accused of discriminating against the region and its people. Thus, the issues of development and employment continued to be put on the back burner.

Finally, the J&K government created Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Councils for Leh (1995) and Kargil (2003) in order to strengthen democratic and participatory governance. But this did not lead to any change in the situation on the ground.

The demand for UT status was fulfilled after the abrogation of Article 370 on August 5, 2019, but it restricted the opportunities Ladakhis had when their region was within J&K. The UT does not have many jobs to offer and there is no Public Service Commission to recruit them in the administration.

Ladakh, which has a population of around 3 lakh, has a fragile ecosystem. It is seeking statehood because UT status has given it limited autonomy, if at all; the people do not have rights over their resources. With a centralising BJP in power at the Centre, statehood is practically ruled out.

There is widespread apprehension in the region that the Union government will award contracts to the business community, and workforce from outside the UT will take away locals' employment and economic opportunities. Hence, they are asking for statehood and inclusion in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, a separate public service commission and two parliamentary seats for Ladakh.

The demand of the people of Ladakh for special constitutional rights to spur development, employment and political representation is a legitimate one.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Sovereignty of the people is more or less a fiction wherever democracy is not established. — Alexis de Tocqueville

Civic sense is not rocket science

AVINAV KUMAR

THEY say the city never sleeps. I think it doesn't even breathe. The other morning, as I inched my way through the neon jungle of the NCR's traffic, I wondered whether the metropolis was less a city and more a circus — with us, the clowns, performing our daily show of civic indifference.

Now, don't mistake me for a saint. I, too, am a card-carrying member of the "MNC millennials club" — corporate badge dangling, coffee cup in hand and eyes glued to the glow of my smartphone. But it's when you live in this corporate cocoon, shuttling between glass towers and gridlocked roads, that civic sense — or the absence of it — slaps you in the face, louder than any car horn.

In our city, horns are not instruments of caution but weapons of mass irritation. A red light is merely an invitation to orchestra. Drivers behind you unleash a symphony of sound, as if their collective cacophony could persuade the traffic light to turn green. I once heard a harassed biker mutter, "Yeh horn bajaake kya Chandrayaan ko bula rahe ho?" (Are you calling the moon mission with your honking?) It was so absurdly true that I nearly applauded.

But horns are only the overture. The real opera of disorder begins with lane indiscipline. We drive as if road markings are decorative doodles made for aerial photography, not for actual adherence. My cab driver once drove so creatively that Google Maps sighed, "Re-routing," as though giving up on humanity.

And then comes the pièce de résistance — littering. The other day, a man in a luxury SUV, his shirt crisp enough to star in a detergent ad, casually flung a banana peel onto the road. I couldn't resist rolling down my window and quipping, "Sir, planting trees for tomorrow?" He glared, muttered something unprintable and sped off. Perhaps in his universe the road is a compost pit.

Civic sense, it seems, is like Wi-Fi — everyone wants it, but nobody is keen to pay for it. Once in a while, though, hope sneaks in. I remember watching a group of college students stop traffic at a crossing — not to protest, but to escort an elderly lady across. Their act was small and unscripted, but it silenced even the most impatient honkers. In that fleeting moment, the city remembered its soul.

Our city doesn't lack infrastructure as much as it lacks introspection. Civic sense is not rocket science — it's just common sense rooted in everyday discipline. But like gym memberships, we buy into the idea without practising it.

So what's the solution? Lectures don't work, sermons are boring and fines are easily negotiated with a folded note. Maybe it's time to make civic sense fashionable. If we can do the ice bucket challenge, surely we can try the dustbin dash.

Until we stop treating civic sense as someone else's responsibility, the city will keep suffocating under its own success. After all, it isn't metros, malls or MNCs that make a city modern. It's manners. And until we master that, we'll remain horn-happy, litter-loving, rule-evading residents of a restless metropolis.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Rahul Gandhi must hold the fort

Apropos of 'Rahul must focus on the fight at home' (*The Great Game*); his utterances abroad create an anti-India impression in the public mind. Besides, he is criticised for going abroad when his presence is needed the most here either because of an ongoing parliament session or elections in any state. The latest example is the upcoming Bihar poll. He ought to have focused fully on the Bihar election to sharpen his diatribe against the well-entrenched and formidable BJP. He must ponder over why the Congress-led INDI bloc is repeatedly unsuccessful in dislodging the overconfident BJP. Something is surely amiss in its electoral strategy. Rahul needs to assure the country's electorate that his party is capable enough of taking on the BJP.

RAVI SHARMA, DHARIWAL

Think before you speak

Refer to 'Rahul must focus on the fight at home'; a spoken word is like an arrow, once out cannot be called back. Rahul Gandhi holds an important position in his party and a responsible post as the Leader of Opposition in Parliament. He should speak with full sense of responsibility, especially while representing India on foreign soil. The writer has cited umpteen instances of his outbursts from foreign land. He has every right to criticise the policies of the government in or outside Parliament but not while on a visit to other countries. If he feels strong about any issue, Rahul must speak out, but only when he is in India.

WG CDR CL SEHGAL (RETD), JALANDHAR

Escapist approach

Although Rahul Gandhi does raise the voice of the masses, when Rahul Gandhi talks from foreign soil about domestic problems infesting India, even ordinary citizens feel compelled to question his faulty political strategy. If Congress had reached an electoral agreement of seat sharing with the AAP in the Haryana Assembly poll, the results would have been diametrically opposite. I support the writer's core argument that he should learn from his past mistakes or loopholes in his political strategy. Whenever his services are needed more in the country, he escapes them.

RAJ BAHADUR YADAV, FATEHABAD

Quality control non-negotiable

Refer to 'Cough syrup tragedies'; it's always the cough syrup, always the same regulatory lapses from Jammu to Rajasthan, and even across borders in Gambia and Uzbekistan. The fact that hundreds of pharmaceutical units continue to operate without meeting the upgraded 'good manufacturing practices' is alarming. Periodic extensions and weak enforcement have emboldened smaller firms to prioritise profits over safety. Negligence must carry criminal liability, only then will firms invest in safer processes. The cost of regulatory indifference is being paid through children's lives. Quality control cannot remain a slogan; it must become a non-negotiable practice.

HARSH PAWARIA, ROHTAK

Waning trust in Indian medicines

Refer to 'Cough syrup tragedy'; India, often hailed as the 'Pharmacy of the World', has earned global trust by producing affordable generic drugs and life-saving vaccines. But that trust is fragile. The ban on Coldif cough syrup in Madhya Pradesh due to toxic contaminants is not an isolated case. It highlights a deeper, disturbing truth: our drug quality controls remain dangerously inconsistent. Weak regulatory enforcement, poor batch testing and political apathy continue to allow substandard medicines to reach patients. Each lapse erodes public confidence and damages our global reputation. Outrage flares up briefly, as accountability is delayed or denied. India must rise beyond being a low-cost supplier to become a global symbol of uncompromising quality and integrity.

K KUMAR, PANCHKULA

Regional stability important

The Gaza hostage crisis nears resolution as Hamas has agreed in principle to release all remaining Israeli captives under a US-brokered peace plan. The deal, mediated by the US, Egypt and Qatar, could open the door to a ceasefire and humanitarian relief in Gaza. Yet, disputes over Hamas disarmament and Israel's internal politics may delay progress. For India, regional stability ensures energy security, safeguards its diaspora and strengthens its global image as a balanced voice for peace and humanitarian diplomacy.

RS NARULA, PATIALA

When ‘I Love Muhammad’ becomes a crime



MANOJ KUMAR JHA
RAJYA SABHA MP,
RASHTRIYA JANATA DAL

Nearly September, communal tension flared in Kanpur after a light-board reading ‘I Love Muhammad’ was put up for a celebration. It prompted objections from neighbourhood residents, leading to police intervention. The heavy-handed police response ignited protests across states, with declarations of devotion to the Prophet appearing on streets and social media as many Muslims saw in these events not law enforcement but criminalisation of faith itself and evidence of an administration willing to treat religious expression as a law and order problem. By reacting with hostility to a harmless declaration of love, we are signalling that the ethos of coexistence no longer

defines us. A simple slogan that invites such outrage tells us about the climate which has been created over the years — one where religious identities are pitted against one another and the public sphere is turned into a battleground of demonisation and exclusion. The founding generation of India’s republic, drawing on the deeper currents of its civilisation, understood that our strength lay in coexistence rather than uniformity. These ideals underscore the fact that this plural vision was never intended to be about tolerance in a narrow sense, but about meaningful coexistence, about celebrating diversity as a source of strength. The syncretic traditions of Bhakti and Sufi saints, the shared festivals and the overlapping practices of everyday life all testified to this living pluralism. The recent Durga Puja and Navratri saw people from all backgrounds joining the celebrations, organising pandals and offering their labour and artistry. This tradition continues despite the rising tensions. Even among the Indian diaspora abroad, communities come together during one



IDENTITY: Once exclusivity takes root, no community is safe from its narrowing grip. ANI

another’s festivals. It shows that coexistence is not just a matter of political correctness, but something deeper within our collective identity. Images of the current hostility — now coming from even peaceful states like Punjab — suggest that this is not accidental. The controversy over ‘I Love Muhammad’ is symptomatic of a deliberate attempt to redefine India in exclusivist terms, where asserting love for one faith is construed as an

By reacting with hostility to a harmless declaration of love, we are signalling that the ethos of coexistence no longer defines us.

affront to another. This binary logic is alien to the Indian ethos but has been normalised in recent years through majoritarian politics. The demonisation of any group’s religious or cultural identity weakens the entire social fabric. Today it is ‘I Love Muhammad’; tomorrow it could be ‘I Love Jesus’ or ‘I Love Buddha’. Once exclusivity takes root, no community is safe from its narrowing grip. The present moment is grave

because the public sphere has transformed into a site of fear. People hesitate to display their faith openly, not because faith has diminished, but because faith has become politicised. This climate robs people of their rights to live and express themselves with dignity. It also distorts the meaning of love. That ‘I Love Muhammad’ can provoke controversy reminds us that love in today’s India must pass through the gauntlet of political approval. We were made to believe, and rightly so, that the Idea of India is the foundation on which our democracy, our Constitution and our cultural vitality rest. Our ability to hold contradictions, our comfort with multiplicity, that once united us, is now treated as a weakness. If we continue down this path, we risk descending into a society where identities clash endlessly, where diversity becomes a curse rather than a gift. In the process, we betray the ideals of our founding generation and the lived practices of millions of ordinary Indians, who, for centuries, have worshipped at shared shrines, sung each other’s songs and seen no

contradiction in revering both Muhammad and Mahakaal. Irrespective of political affiliations, we must collectively reclaim the Idea of India and resist the binary logic that pits faiths against one another. It requires us to remember and retell the stories of coexistence: the Hindu villagers who join Muslims in celebrating Muharram, the Muslims who play roles in Ramlilas, the shared devotion at dargahs and temples across the land. It requires us to safeguard the constitutional principles of fraternity and secularism, not as cold legal provisions, but as living values that even our institutions have forgotten to uphold. Our politics must move beyond the easy gains of polarisation and embrace the harder but more rewarding task of nurturing trust. Civil society, writers, artists, teachers and everyday citizens must speak up for the plural vision. An appeal to restore that vision is not merely nostalgic; it is necessary. We still have the power to choose differently. We can still reclaim the plural vision that made India a civilisation, not just a nation-state.

Eating sugar? No, Madam



NAVNEET SHARMA
FACULTY, CENTRAL
UNIVERSITY OF HP



ANAMICA
SENIOR RESEARCH
FELLOW, IITBOMBAY

THE CBSE seems peculiarly invested in the health of students, with focus on the “well-fed” and obese. In recent circulars, it has instructed the affiliated institutions to display ‘Sugar Boards’ and ‘Oil Boards’ in cafeterias, lobbies and meeting rooms. It has also directed that these advisories be printed on stationery and publications, ostensibly to serve as daily reminders in the fight against obesity. At first glance, the concern appears commendable. But a closer look reveals curious chronological and methodological choices. The board claims to have based its directive on National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 2019-21 data and a 2021 forecast study from the *Lancet Global Burden of Disease (GBD)*, published in 2025. The data is over three years old, effectively placing the evidence eight years behind the present. Constructing urgent educational policy on such a temporal foundation is, at best, ambitious and, at worst, performative. Even more striking is the selective interpretation of data. The *GBD* report notes that in 2016, 15% of India’s disease burden stemmed from child and maternal undernutrition combined with air pollution. The CBSE, however, overlooked this and focussed on obesity despite the report’s observation that obesity typically emerges in the post-school age. India continues to grapple with wasting, stunting and underweight children, yet the CBSE seems to imagine classrooms brimming with obese adolescents whose existential threat is the school canteen *samosa*.

A hurried, or perhaps opportunistic, reading of NFHS-5 appears evident. Section 10.6, which discusses Nutritional Status in Adults, mentions that among women aged 15-49, 19% are underweight and 24% overweight. However, thinness is far more common among younger women: 40 per cent of those aged 15-19, school-going age, are underweight, while obesity rises meaningfully only among women aged 40-49. Similarly, among men aged 15-19, a striking 41% are underweight, though, in the overall male population, 16% are underweight and 23% overweight. In other words, the sugar and oil boards in schools are likely to mock rather than assist the children they are meant to protect. Government records corroborate this misalignment. Responding to a question in the Rajya Sabha in March 2025, the government confirmed that, according to NFHS (2019-21), 35.5% of the children under five are stunted, 32% underweight



FILE PHOTO

For the CBSE, the problem no longer seems to be the empty plate in a government school, but the extra *puri* on a private school lunch tray.

and 19.3% wasted. Out of 13.75 crore children, only 7.49 crore are enrolled in anganwadis or tracked under the Poshan Tracker — an oversight in a nation where malnutrition is a critical concern. Nearly all of the 10 most populous states have over 40% stunted and 20% underweight children. Yet the CBSE, with its 37,091 affiliated schools (a small fraction of the 15 lakh schools nationwide), directs attention toward the relatively minor phenomenon of school-age obesity. Contrast this with the National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education, PM-POSHAN. Beyond improving enrolment, the programme is premised on the recognition that many children lack access to adequate nutrition at home. It provides 450 calories and 12 grams of protein daily to students in classes I-V and 700 calories and 20 grams of protein to those in classes VI-VIII. In 2025, the Central government allocated Rs 12,500 crore, 60% of total funds, to this scheme, underscoring the efforts to address malnutrition. And yet, the same nation now has a central education board obsessed with overconsumption and overnutrition. While India struggles with Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) and Moderate Acute Malnutrition (MAM), attempting to reduce wasting, stunting, anaemia and underweight prevalence, the CBSE’s proposed intervention consists of the rather minimalist directive to cut down on sugar and oil. This is a country that “celebrates” POSHAN Maah and Pakhwada (nutrition month and fortnight), and ‘Tithi Bhojan’ (special meals on festive days), yet fails to make nutrition universally accessible. The CBSE’s circular erases the reality that India ranks among the highest globally in child malnutrition. This policy overlooks the fact that for many kids, the struggle is absence rather than excess. For the CBSE, the problem no longer seems to be the empty plate in a government school, but the extra *puri* on a private school lunch tray.

Clearing mountains of garbage



VIKROM MATHUR
SR RESEARCH FELLOW, CENTRE FOR SOCIAL
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THE Himalayas are getting covered in a rising tide of waste tossed by tourists and residents, and with each holiday season, it spreads higher and grows deeper. The problem mirrors the waste management problem faced by the rest of the country: what to do about the vast amounts of solid waste that are taking over our spaces, with all the associated problems — methane emissions, pests thriving and disease spreading, the leaching into rivers. Concerns were recently raised about the dire situation in the Himalayan states and the impact of India’s waste mismanagement on the world’s oceans via polluted rivers. In India, a nation of over 1 billion people, maintaining low per-capita emissions is crucial. Waste contributed to 19% of the methane emissions in 2022. As per a study, by diverting organic waste from landfills and capturing methane emissions from landfills and effluent treatment units, India can reduce emissions by 78.75 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e) by 2031. The government has laid down rules and regulations aimed at addressing these problems. But a large part of the country has seen little improvement. Many urban local bodies struggle to provide effective services due to financial constraints; lack of infrastructure, technology, qualified professionals, accountability and a regulatory framework. A crucial element is the low environmental awareness and public attitudes towards waste, as per a study. Waste segregation at source is a critical practice, maximising resource

recovery and minimising environmental impact. If too much wet waste is mixed with the burnable type, it cannot be used as fuel in factories or power plants and is sent to landfills. Recycling becomes difficult, resulting in humongous landfill-turned-garbage mountains that leak noxious gases like methane, poisons that leach into ground and water and breed pests and disease. Recyclables are lost — valuable materials that could replace newly mined resources. Think electronics, batteries, lead, metals, glass, plastics, even paper. Several barriers impede the adoption of waste segregation practices. Most people don’t know and don’t care enough how important it is. They also do not know how to segregate. It is perceived as taking too much work and time and extra space. Cultural perceptions about visible trash act as deterrents to waste separation at home. Also, they delegate responsibility to the authorities and don’t want to change. The biggest barrier is the lack of infrastructure. The absence of waste segregation facilities like appropriate bins or a waste collection system, makes it difficult for the best-intentioned to segregate waste to any good purpose. For exam-

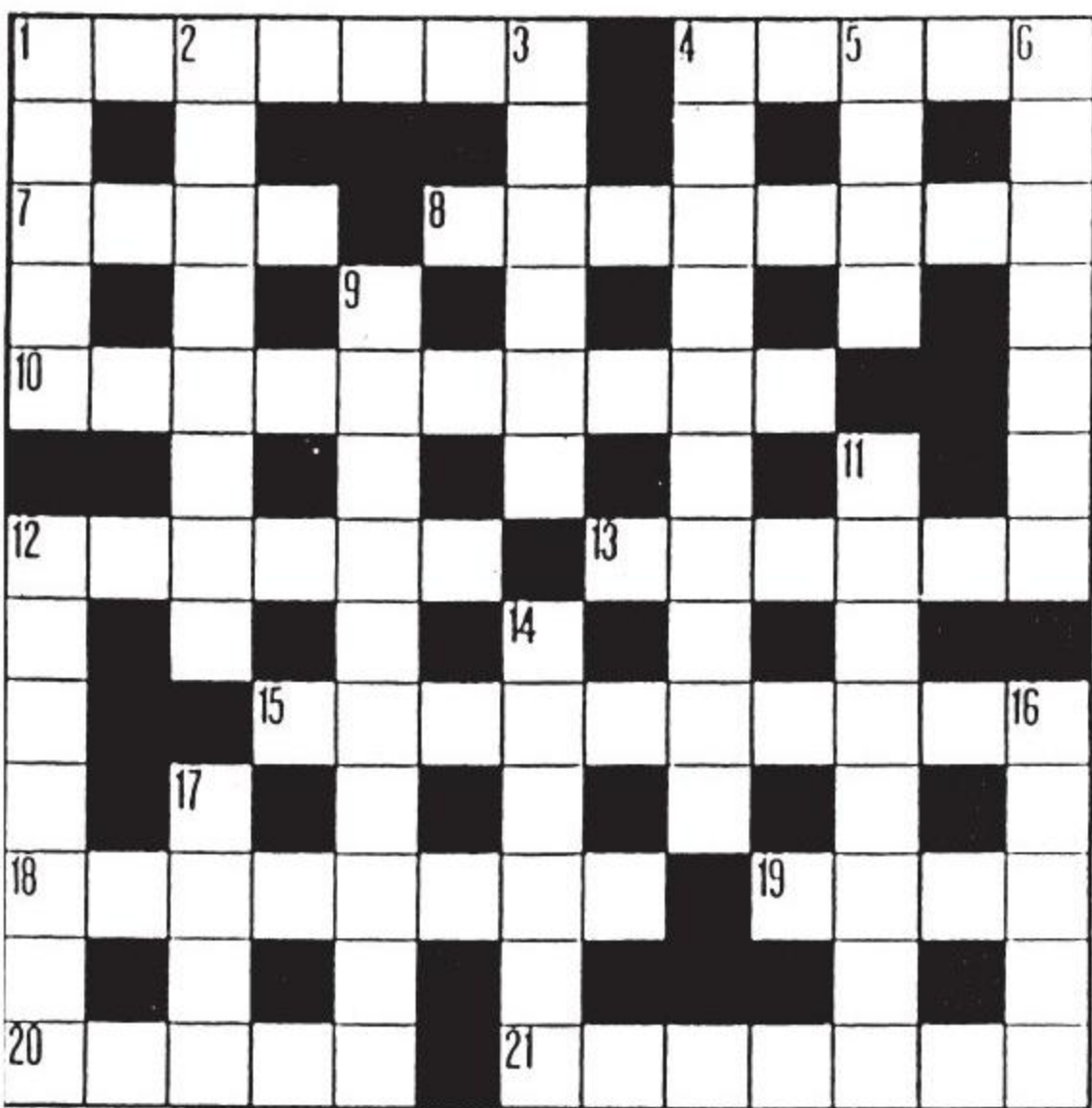


FILE PHOTO

The biggest barrier is not ignorance but the lack of infrastructure to make segregation meaningful.

ple, waste in Almora, Uttarakhand, is collected from community bins placed in neighbourhoods and villages. These end up becoming dumping grounds, with waste strewn around them. Many were incorrectly designed or malfunctioning. Collection trucks in many cases dump segregated wet and dry waste in the same container, making a mockery of the campaign. Plus, the authorities do not give clear guidelines on waste disposal to residents or workers. The latter are overworked and employers fear that the attention needed for segregation will require higher wages or more workers. There is insufficient storage space, baling machinery and segregation and disposal infrastructure in place, making it difficult for the collected refuse to be sorted and disposed of. Since it is unsegregated, the task becomes nearly impossible. Using these insights is vital for policy, enabling governments to facilitate the adoption of waste segregation practices. To start with, supply households with user-friendly dustbins in distinctly marked waste categories and similar community bins. When these are standardised and visible everywhere, they make segregation an accepted part of life. Ensure regular collection schedules and train and support workers to keep waste separated in its categories. Additionally, government orders mandating waste segregation, backed by strict enforcement, help ensure compliance. Installation of machines for segregation have been reported to be helpful. Use clear, simple language and visuals to show how to segregate waste. Link segregation to cleaner homes, fewer pests and better health. Promote “No segregation, no collection.” Make it aspirational through celebrities and community leaders. Empower local networks and children as champions to sustain awareness and behavioural change. These interventions should ideally be first tried in Tier 2 and 3 cities, like Almora, as pilot projects. Small steps will encourage wider change.

QUICK CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**
- Shrewdly tactful (7)
 - Proportional share (5)
 - Nominate (4)
 - Playful repartee (8)
 - A duplicate (6,4)
 - Leave empty (6)
 - Ill (6)
 - Elegantly expressed (4-6)
 - Collection of public records (8)
 - To polish (4)
 - Colour slightly (5)
 - Type of fishing boat (7)
- DOWN**
- Uncontrollable fear (5)
 - A five-line comic verse (8)
 - Opportunity (6)
 - A favour given in return (4,3,3)
 - Algerian Mediterranean port (4)
 - Pleasant feature (7)
 - Conform to the general policy (3,3,4)
 - Peaceful (8)
 - Courageous (7)
 - Moving smoothly and gracefully (6)
 - Yield to another’s wishes (5)
 - Object of uncritical devotion (4)
- Saturday’s solution**
- Across:** 1 Fair-weather, 9 Neglect, 10 Koala, 11 Easy, 12 Citation, 14 Accede, 16 Career, 18 Look over, 19 Inch, 22 Ultra, 23 Enliven, 24 Take by storm.
- Down:** 2 Aegis, 3 Reel, 4 Entail, 5 Take away, 6 Evasive, 7 Under a cloud, 8 Rain or shine, 13 Advocate, 15 Croatia, 17 Heresy, 20 Never, 21 Glut.

SU DO KU

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

EASY

FORECAST

SUNSET:	MONDAY	18:02 HRS
SUNRISE:	TUESDAY	06:19 HRS
CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	27	19
New Delhi	29	23
Amritsar	24	19
Bathinda	27	19
Jalandhar	24	19
Ludhiana	26	20
Bhiwani	27	22
Hisar	27	22
Sirsa	28	21
Dharamsala	23	15
Manali	18	10
Shimla	18	13
Srinagar	16	10
Jammu	25	17
Kargil	16	04
Leh	17	05
Dehradun	31	19
Mussoorie	20	15

TEMPERATURE IN °C



STRAIGHT
FORWARD
SHASHI SHEKHAR

Respond to this column at
feedback@livemint.com

POLITICAL DRAMA PEAKS IN BIHAR ASSEMBLY RACE

Bihar remains steeped in politics even in the midst of festivities. For the Biharis, there's no bigger pastime than politics. In the past two decades, Bihar has coined a fresh adage—power follows where Nitish Kumar tilts. This is why, despite the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP's) growing tendency to sideline its alliance partners, it's content being the junior partner of Nitish's Janata Dal (United), or JD(U), in the state. Even Nitish's 'elder brother', Lalu Prasad Yadav, faces the same predicament. Any party that's not with Nitish would spew venom against him but secretly pines to ally with him. This is why Lalu joined hands with Nitish in 2022 even after a bitter split in 2017. During the two Mahagathbandhan stints, the BJP leaders kept vowing publicly that they will never ever ally with Nitish. However, today they are readying themselves to face the assembly elections with their "natural partner" for the third time in the state. How did Nitish emerge as the talisman of poll victory in Bihar? Let's go back 20 years in time. In 2005 when he became the chief minister he dedicated himself to maintaining law and order, improving the quality of roads, electricity supply, transport and education. In 2006 he launched "school chalo" abhiyan (Let's go to school), distributing bicycles to young school girls. This was the beginning of a silent revolution. In 2005, just 180,000 girls appeared for class 10th exams. This year more than half of the 1.585 million children appearing for high school exams were girls. He was also the first to launch a programme to provide everyone with a house and water connection but couldn't succeed. Even today, Bihar struggles with migration issues and ranks low across human development indices. For various reasons Nitish's third and fourth terms weren't as effective. This time, he's been under attack from many fronts, with his health under scanner. It would be interesting to see whether he secures more seats than before. JD(U) is facing a slow but sure attrition of its cadre. It needs Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) or the BJP to go past the victory line. This is why the Nitish government has transferred ₹10,000 each in the bank accounts of 7.5 million women and announced a flurry of doles. Can he return to power based on goodies he has doled out since June this year?

It would be interesting to see whether Nitish secures more seats than before

His main rival Tejashwi Yadav performed brilliantly in the last elections. His Mahagathbandhan lost the elections by mere 16,825 votes. He still enjoys the support of the Congress and the Left parties. Despite his own weak vote base, Rahul Gandhi tried to boost Tejashwi's position during his yatra. However, ambitions of his associates and family now threaten Tejashwi's march to the CM's office. Right now a slugfest is on within the Mahagathbandhan over seat-sharing. In the end, however, all the alliance partners will fight the elections together. The new voter list issued by the Election Commission saw 6.9 million voters removed and 2.1 million new ones added. For months, the Mahagathbandhan has been making it a political issue. Still, the NDA's (National Democratic Alliance's) caste strategy and government doles leave the voter's choice uncertain, heightening political suspense. Another factor in the coming elections is Prashant Kishor. He came to prominence in 2013 as Narendra Modi's election manager. Until then, politicians avoided publicly associating with professional campaign firms. His company has since worked with the Congress, YSR Congress, Trinamool Congress, Aam Aadmi Party, DMK, and even helped Nitish Kumar win Bihar elections. He organized rigorous *padayatras* in Bihar's every district. In the last one year, he has traversed the state, meeting people and staying overnight in villages. Prashant has been attacking Nitish, BJP and Lalu in the same breath. He's attracting large crowds and his coffers are surprisingly full. Will he be able to form the government or be the kingmaker in case of a hung assembly? Let's also mention the BJP. The saffron party has the ablest organization and strongest caste calculation. Chirag Paswan, Jitan Ram Manjhi and Upendra Kushwaha along with JD(U) make for a formidable alliance. Last time, the BJP won more than twice the number of seats compared to JD(U) and yet couldn't push its own CM candidate. The lack of a credible face is its biggest weakness in the state. Sooner or later the party will have to take a tough call on this issue. It will have to update the age-old relations with its allies and local leaders. As the adage goes, a lion coils before a leap. Is the BJP doing the same? Bihar is entering in an interesting phase. The assembly elections are set to go down to the wire, but the real game begins once the dust settles and the final tally is in. *Shashi Shekhar is editor-in-chief, Hindustan. Views are personal.*

India targets safer, globally accepted medical devices

Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission will create standards for medical devices for the first time

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NEW DELHI

India is set to overhaul standards for medical devices, strengthening the regulatory framework for the country's \$12-billion market and aligning with US, Japanese, and European Union (EU) quality benchmarks. The Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission (IPC), an autonomous body under the ministry of health and family welfare, will create the standards for medical devices for the first time, in partnership with the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS), according to documents reviewed by *Mint* and officials familiar with the matter. Historically, the IPC has focussed on evolving standards for medicines, but has now widened its remit to include medical devices as well. The IPC has already started auditing medical device companies and is developing monographs, which will outline standards and specifications for medical equipment. The aim is to strengthen India's global reputation for medical devices manufacturing, and bolster exports. The National Medical Devices Policy, 2023, also emphasizes that Indian standards bodies progressively broaden their standards for products, processes, wireless technologies and performance. This will help the local industry become globally competitive and achieve the goal of adopting



The IPC has already started auditing medical device firms and is developing monographs, which will outline standards, specifications for medical equipment.

more Indian standards for medical devices. The policy aims to grow India's medical devices market size to \$50 billion by 2030, and capture 10-12% of the global market share in 25 years. Currently, there are around 1,500 standards for different medical device products in India as approved by BIS. According to the documents, at a recent meeting, the scientific body of the IPC discussed upgrading standards for medical devices and has decided to work closely with the BIS to avoid creating duplicate standards. Additionally, the IPC is establishing its own medical device testing laboratory.

It has recommended that its newly-created Medical Device Division carefully plan the scope of testing to align with the current infrastructure, facilities, and expertise available. This will ensure that their efforts are both effective and efficient. "Creating standards isn't the difficult part. The most crucial task right now is to harmonize Indian medical device standards with global ones. Once Indian standards are globally accepted, the country can require exporting nations to follow them. The ultimate goal of the IPC and BIS is to ensure the quality and safety of medical devices while meeting interna-

tional benchmarks," one of the persons cited earlier said. Queries sent to the health ministry remained unanswered. Himanshu Baid, managing director, Polymedica Ltd, said that the IPC taking the lead in formulating monographs for medical devices is a timely and progressive step. "As India's MedTech sector continues to grow rapidly, with a market size projected to reach \$50 billion..., establishing clear, indigenous standards is essential for ensuring quality, safety, and global competitiveness. The collaboration between IPC and the BIS will help harmonize regulatory frameworks and avoid duplication, ultimately benefiting patients and industry stakeholders alike," Baid added. The scientific body also reviewed the progress of the Materiovigilance Programme of India (MvPI), which monitors the safety of medical devices. India imports 60-70% of its medical devices. Once Indian standards are globally accepted, the country can require exporting nations to follow them, the person cited earlier said. India's medical device market is projected to grow to \$50 billion by 2030. This growth is supported by regulations under the Medical Device Rules, 2017, which require the Central Licensing Authority to classify medical devices based on risk. *For an extended version of this story, go to livemint.com.*

Public procurement from small biz soars ‘Trade deals can supercharge India’

Manas Pimpalkhare & Rituraj Baruah
NEW DELHI

The government's purchases from micro and small enterprises (MSEs) in the first six months of the ongoing fiscal year (FY26) reached about 45% of total procurement, indicating strong support for the nation's MSMEs (micro, small and medium enterprises). Businesses expect this trend to strengthen in the second half of the fiscal year, following the government's amendment to the definition of MSEs that expanded the number of businesses eligible for public procurement. The Centre's procurement from MSEs on the Government e-marketplace (GeM) portal in H1 FY26 totalled about ₹1 trillion, accounting for nearly 45% of the total procurement. Simultaneously, the government procured around

₹38,000 crore worth of goods and services from MSEs from the MSME Sambandh portal, representing about 45.8% of total procurement. Both GeM and MSME Sambandh portals facilitate public procurement directly from the nation's MSMEs. As per the government's public procurement policy, it must procure at least 25% of its total orders through MSEs. Industry representatives said the government's procurement typically rises in the second half of the year, driven by budgets sanctions, and the completion of deliveries. But what is different this year is the surge in the number of MSEs because of the amendment in the definition for MSMEs at the beginning of this fiscal year. MSEs make up over 90% of India's MSME sector. *manas.pimpalkhare@livemint.com* *For an extended version of this story, go to livemint.com.*

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Trade deals can spark a manufacturing renaissance for India, and a consistent, moderately high annual growth rate of 6%-7.5% over an extended period of time without any macroeconomic instability can transform the country, Franziska Ohnsorge, chief economist, South Asia Region, World Bank, said. Merchandise and service exports offer India significant investment potential and scope to raise their share in gross domestic product (GDP), driven by trade deals as well as artificial intelligence (AI)-led productivity gains in the service sector, Ohnsorge said at a select press interaction on Saturday on the sidelines of the Kautilya Economic Conclave 2025 organized by the Union finance ministry. Sustained growth at a respectable rate, as India has managed in the past 25 years, can take the country far over a period of time and pull many people out of poverty, she said. "That is, a consistent 6-7.5% growth annually for years on end without any major crisis.



World Bank's Franziska Ohnsorge says India's service exports are a success story, but merchandise exports are underperforming.

That is a significant achievement, one that India has actually achieved since year 2000. And you can lift a lot of people out of poverty." "You can go along way and attain substantial progress by just growing at a respectable rate for two decades. Transitioning then to a higher growth trajectory is a different matter," Ohnsorge said, indicating the role that favourable global conditions and an element of luck can play

on growth trends. India's economy grew by 6.5% in FY25, and expanded at 7.8% in the April-June period of the ongoing fiscal year. In response to a question about the tariff barriers faced by domestic exporters in India's largest export market, the US, she said that trade deals enhance market access. "That (the US) is one market. But look at the negotiations that have been ongoing on with

the EU (European Union). And look at what just happened with the UK trade agreement. That is perhaps the most ambitious trade agreement in a decade. It went well beyond tariffs and covers services exports and has labour mobility provisions. So, the world is big. There is the EU, there is Australia, there is Canada," said Ohnsorge. "Even if one trading partner is becoming less accessible, others may become more accessible with these trade agreements." Highlighting the potential for scaling up India's exports, Ohnsorge said that India's service exports are a success story, but merchandise exports are underperforming. If India addresses relatively high import tariffs on intermediate goods and builds that into trade deals, domestic manufacturing sector will also get a big boost, she said. In agriculture, one could think of replacing intermediate goods with labour, but that is not possible in manufacturing, said Ohnsorge. Manufacturing is really hurt by tariffs on intermediate imports, said Ohnsorge. *For an extended version of this story, go to livemint.com.*

India will benefit from closer integration within Asia: AIIB's Berglöf

Rhik Kundu & Gireesh Chandra Prasad
NEW DELHI

India will benefit from closer integration within Asia at a time trade and investments are facing heightened uncertainty, according to the chief economist at the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). A lot of recent developments have led to uncertainty in trade and investment at a scale larger than covid-19 or the global financial crisis of 2007-08, Erik Berglöf, chief economist at Beijing-based

AIIB, said, responding to a question on rising protectionism in the US and its impact on exports from Asia and on investment flows into the region. Multilateral agencies are part of the solution in stabilizing global markets and in making capital flows more transparent, he said, speaking to *Mint* on Sunday on the sidelines of Kautilya Economic Conclave organized in the national capital by the Union finance ministry. Berglöf said that policy discourse in India is evolving, particularly in relation to the Regional Comprehensive Eco-

nomie Partnership (RCEP) and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), and India's constructive engagement within Asia, especially China. Economists from China were part of the Kautilya Economic Conclave. "I think there is so much for India to benefit from closer integration in Asia. And Asia in general still has a lot of integration benefits to be had," said Berglöf. In August, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping met on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation



Erik Berglöf, chief economist at Beijing-based AIIB.

(SCO) meeting in Tianjin and agreed that the two countries were development partners and not rivals, and that their

differences should not turn into disputes. India is the second-largest shareholder in the Beijing-based development bank after China. "There are still a lot of differences and many policies that could be harmonized more," said Berglöf. "I am not saying that India necessarily should join RCEP or CPTPP, but it is a good conversation to have." The chief economist said AIIB was planning to significantly step up its investment activities in India, which will help mobilize greater private sector and multilateral financ-

ing for projects in the world's fastest-growing major economy. AIIB has already deployed \$12 billion in India, of which \$1.8 billion is in the private sector, *Mint* reported on 29 July quoting AIIB vice-president Ajay Bhushan Pandey. AIIB has a loan book of about \$60 billion and is aiming to step this up. Berglöf said that AIIB invests about \$2-2.5 billion in India every year. "My sense is that we will be able to increase that significantly," he said. The focus is not just on the amount it can lend, but on how much can be co-financed with other

multilateral development banks (MDBs) and the private sector, he said. Co-financing has become a core of AIIB's approach as it brings multiple benefits, he said. "It allows us to align on standards, increase transparency, and help the private sector better understand how we operate. Even if the amounts seem small relative to India's needs, the real value lies in leveraging these investments to bring in other MDBs and, crucially, mobilize private capital," said Berglöf. *rhik.kundu@livemint.com* *For an extended version of this story, go to livemint.com.*

CORRECTIONS AND CLARIFICATIONS

A 3 October, Page 3 story, 'Temasek joins race to snap up stake in Romsons Group', should have said that Romsons Group was valued at about \$500 million, and that Temasek is looking to acquire a minority stake valued at about ₹1,500 crore (approximately \$170 million) in the company. The error is regretted. *Mint* welcomes comments, suggestions or complaints about errors. Readers can alert the newsroom to any errors in the paper by emailing us, with your full name and address to feedback@livemint.com. *Mint's* journalistic Code of Conduct that governs our newsroom is available at www.livemint.com

S&P BSE Sensex	Nifty 50	Nifty 500	Nifty Next 50	Nifty 100	S&P BSE Mid-cap	S&P BSE Small Cap
CLOSE 81,207.17	CLOSE 24,894.25	CLOSE 23,027.7	CLOSE 68,355.9	CLOSE 25,569.3	CLOSE 45,678.11	CLOSE 53,374.98
1-WEEK CHANGE (%) 0.97	1-WEEK CHANGE (%) 0.97	1-WEEK CHANGE (%) 1.39	1-WEEK CHANGE (%) 1.80	1-WEEK CHANGE (%) 1.12	1-WEEK CHANGE (%) 2.08	1-WEEK CHANGE (%) 2.09
1-MONTH CHANGE (%) 0.81	1-MONTH CHANGE (%) 0.74	1-MONTH CHANGE (%) 0.74	1-MONTH CHANGE (%) 1.34	1-MONTH CHANGE (%) 0.85	1-MONTH CHANGE (%) -0.18	1-MONTH CHANGE (%) 0.76
3-MONTH CHANGE (%) -2.11	3-MONTH CHANGE (%) -1.64	3-MONTH CHANGE (%) -1.72	3-MONTH CHANGE (%) 0.51	3-MONTH CHANGE (%) -1.28	3-MONTH CHANGE (%) -1.88	3-MONTH CHANGE (%) -2.12
6-MONTH CHANGE (%) 7.43	6-MONTH CHANGE (%) 8.05	6-MONTH CHANGE (%) 9.26	6-MONTH CHANGE (%) 9.24	6-MONTH CHANGE (%) 8.25	6-MONTH CHANGE (%) 9.89	6-MONTH CHANGE (%) 12.91
1-YEAR CHANGE (%) -0.24	1-YEAR CHANGE (%) -0.03	1-YEAR CHANGE (%) -1.90	1-YEAR CHANGE (%) -8.21	1-YEAR CHANGE (%) -1.47	1-YEAR CHANGE (%) -4.76	1-YEAR CHANGE (%) -4.72



The fiscal tax sop resulted in the Nifty 50 gaining 2.7% to 25,423.6 through 18 Sep, but it slipped a day later. BLOOMBERG

Bear squeeze in options may set stage for gains

FROM PAGE 1

boost to market sentiment came after the GST Council's 56th meeting on 4 September simplified the indirect tax to a two-slab structure of 5% and 18% from four slabs earlier, effective 22 September.

While the fiscal tax sop resulted in the Nifty 50 gaining 2.7% to 25,423.6 from the Council's meeting through 18 September, the benchmark began to slip a day later.

The Nifty 50 recorded a 3.2% dip to 24,611.10 through 30 September, following US President

After a period of steady decline, markets have tested positive waters after the RBI's positive announcements

Donald Trump's proclamation of a one-time \$100,000 payment on new H-1B visa petitions, aimed largely at Indian software professionals who account for 70% of such visas.

However, the market recovered from its blues to rally 0.9% to 24,836.3 on Wednesday and built on its gains to settle a fifth of a percent higher at 24,894.25 on Friday, after remaining shut on Thursday due to the Dussehra holiday.

One of the reasons for the recovery was option sellers closing out ₹5.5 trillion worth of excess index and stock call option posi-

tions over puts from 26 September to the end of the month. This was followed by bulls selling more put options relative to call options on Wednesday and Friday, a sign they expect markets to rise and, thus, eat up the premium or price paid to them by the put buyers.

As of Friday, the value of marketwide puts exceeded that of marketwide calls by ₹22,119 crore, according to Rohit Srivastava, founder of analytics firm IndiaCharts.

"Normally to see such a huge shift over just two days is rare and indicates

more short-covering is likely. The rally could probably stretch to the June high," Srivastava said.

Market veterans like A Balasubramanian, managing director of Aditya Birla Sun Life Mutual Fund, attributed the optimism to a combination of "GST rationalization" and "dovish monetary policy", which would spur consumption and credit growth without impacting banks' net interest margins, or the difference between interest earned on loans and paid on deposits.

For an extended version of this story, go to livemint.com.

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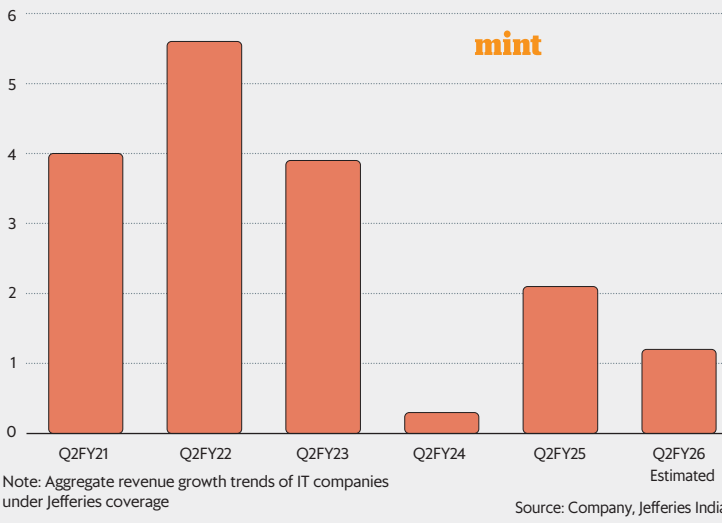
IT companies are expected to see modest sequential revenue growth in Q2 FY26. The second quarter is usually strong, but as of now, IT investors are driving through the fog. Tariff-induced uncertainties hindered the revenue growth of technology companies in Q1 FY26. Cut to now, the demand environment, although not deteriorating, remains uncertain. Clients are still cautious about the use of discretionary technology spending. Additionally, the recent hike in the H-1B visa fee and the proposed Halting International Relocation of Employment (HIRE) Bill have fuelled concerns about rising protectionism in US—a key market for IT companies. Rising protectionism could lead to higher operating costs and increased competition for Indian IT companies.

Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) will kick-start the Q2 FY26 earnings season for the sector, with its results to be declared on 9 October. "We expect revenue growth for our coverage at 1.2% sequential constant currency (cc) (+0.5% year-on-year cc). However, quarter-on-quarter growth in Q2 FY26

On weak footing

Aggregate revenue growth of IT companies will be second lowest in Q2 compared to the past five years.

Constant currency revenue growth (Sequential change in %)



will likely be the second lowest in a Q2 in the past five years," said Jefferies India on 30 September.

But there could be some bright spots. Infosys is expected to benefit from higher financial services and

inorganic contributions, while LTI-Mindtree could gain from the ramp-up of large deals. Additionally, all major currencies have appreciated against the US dollar in the second quarter. So, Jefferies expects aggregate dollar reve-

nue to grow by 1.6% sequentially—40 basis points higher than cc growth. Further, IT firms with higher exposure to Europe (such as Infosys, HCL Technologies, Tech Mahindra and Coforge) will have higher forex tailwinds in Q2 FY26. The sector's Ebit margin is expected to see a stable-to-improving trend sequentially, backed by a weak Indian rupee, lower visa costs, and cost optimization measures. Hiring is likely to be muted. That said, meaningful margin gains are expected to be limited ahead due to pricing pressure, changes in delivery models, and the GenAI transition. Wage revisions for FY26, if any, would be a focus area.

Deal flows should remain decent despite volatile demand, but they're driven by cost-optimization projects. "TCS, Infosys and HCL have all announced large deals during the quarter. However, these include significant renewal portions," said Kotak Institutional Equities on 1 October. Moreover, net new deals mainly stem from wallet share shifts, not incremental budgets,

leading to fierce competition and significant pricing pressure.

Tier-II IT companies should continue to outperform tier-I firms on revenue growth. Vertical-wise, BFSI recovery is expected to continue in Q2, but weakness in manufacturing and retail will likely persist. Key monitorables for the outlook include manage-

ment commentary on demand, confidence in an H2 growth uptick, furlough levels (given Q3 weakness), and any revision of FY26 targets by Infosys and HCL.

The Nifty IT index's sharp 22% decline, massively underperforming the Nifty 50's 5% return, reflects recent adverse US developments. A reversal is unlikely without elusive earnings upgrades. HDFC Securities now projects

lower FY26 revenue growth for the sector at 2.8% (down from FY25), having cut FY26/27 EPS estimates by 1-1.2%. Nifty IT index is trading at a one-year forward price-to-earnings of 21x, according to Bloomberg. With plenty of downside risks, this valuation multiple is hardly a selling point.

SILVER LINING

INFOSYS is likely to benefit from higher financial services and inorganic contributions

IT firms with higher exposure to Europe, like Infosys, HCLTech, will have higher forex tailwinds in Q2 FY26

Mark to Market writers do not hold positions in the companies discussed here unless otherwise informed

WHY THE FED'S INFLATION METRIC FAILS PRICE-TO-INCOME TEST



different. He now thinks of his New York visits as harbingers of global easing.

A chuffed Bertie was holding forth on this theory to a friend who works in the tech sector. The friend seemed more concerned about the H-1B visa scare than about what the Fed was doing. He smiled distractedly and said, "They are cutting interest rates, are they?" Bertie nodded, with an unsaid 'Keep up, man!' in his head.

"Why are they cutting rates?" the friend asked, almost innocently. Bertie hadn't thought about this question, so he came back with a "Because I am here!" wisecrack and laughed rather more than it warranted.

On the train ride back to the hotel, his friend's question kept coming back to him. New York certainly did not feel cheap—what Bertie was paying for a tiny hotel room on the edge of Manhattan would fetch him a suite at any of the Taj properties in India. Uber rides felt steep (hence the train), and so did his morning fix of coffee and a doughnut.

With time to kill on the train, he dug up some old receipts for stays and meals from before the pandemic and shook his head as he noticed that prices had almost doubled.

That realization prompted our man to rummage through his inbox to find out how the economic intelligentsia was rationalizing the rate cuts. After going through a few notes that seemed to have



TARUN KUMAR SAHU/MINT

been written by the same AI model, Bertie concluded that the narrative was that inflation was under control while the labour market was showing signs of weakness—hence the Fed had cut as a "risk-management measure."

Given his recent observations about New York prices, the "infla-

tion was under control" line jarred. The explanation offered was that the year-on-year (y-o-y) change in prices was muted, which meant that inflation could be assumed to be under control. The y-o-y change in prices is indeed the measure of inflation the world over, and a key economic variable that central banks watch closely.

Bertie looked out of the grimy window of the train, thinking about the 2019 hotel bills and how they had doubled in six years—an annualized increase of about 12%. No one in their right mind would describe an annual increase of 12% as 'under control'. That made him wonder whether inflation should be measured as a ratio

of prices to incomes, rather than just an annual change in prices. Inflation, he thought, should be labelled as well-behaved only when that ratio remains stable over long periods—and from his annual visits to the US, he knew that was certainly not the case.

Now, Bertie takes all his thought strands to their logical conclusions. He inverted the logic and wondered whether

all hyperinflationary economies could eventually declare that they have won the war on inflation, since prices cannot rise to infinity. The price-to-income ratio may take years to catch up—if at all—but the year-on-year price metric will get "tamed" sooner rather than later, just by the sheer force of arithmetic. Based on this epiphany, Bertie was last seen evaluating the investment case for Argentina and Turkey.

Bertie is a Mumbai-based fund manager whose compliance department wishes him to cough twice before speaking and then decide not to say it after all.

The y-o-y price change is a key economic variable that central banks watch closely

Sideways trend could continue for several months, says SBI MF's Singh

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This phase, where the Indian stock market mostly moves sideways without any significant swings, could continue for several months, says D. P. Singh, deputy managing director and joint chief executive officer, SBI Mutual Fund, which oversees more than ₹12 trillion in assets, including about ₹9.15 trillion in equities as of 30 September.

He said that it is difficult to predict the momentum of Indian equities for the rest of the fiscal year because there are numerous critical factors and uncertainties, including geopolitical setbacks.

"If there's a reason for concern that results in better valuations, I see it as an opportunity to deploy more capital into the markets," Edited excerpts:

Do you think this bull run might be nearing its final stretch, given the consolidation and heightened volatility from tariffs and H-1B visa fee hike? With that in play, do you see headwinds in the coming months for Indian equities?

We think Indian equity markets have a long runway ahead just from the perspective of potential economic growth, demographics and the ability to move per capita income higher. From a short-term perspective, we have seen headwinds emerge on the external front with tariffs and visa fee hikes. This is not yet fully reflected in the company's earnings. However, the heartening aspect is that the government is now taking stronger steps to boost domestic growth, which can act as an effective offset. In terms of further headwinds, valuations have been on the higher

side for Indian equities in the past, but even that is now getting normalized, particularly for large-cap stocks. Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) have been significant sellers of Indian equities over the past 12 months, but their positioning now has become very light and is unlikely to be a big headwind going forward. **Why are negative announcements not shaking the market now the way they did during and after covid, when even small setbacks would trigger a sharp selloff?**

Earlier, markets saw knee-jerk reactions as holding pat-

terns were limited. Now, with a broad-based holding structure dominated by domestic institutional investors (DIIs)—essentially pooled individual money—panic selling is rare. Unlike individual investors, institutions make decisions after thorough due diligence, with a long-term view of value creation, so they don't dump stocks on short-term news.

What are the factors to watch out for going ahead?

The recent goods and services tax (GST) reforms, coupled with the income tax relief offered earlier this year, are beginning to aid consumer sentiment. We need to wait and watch to understand the sustainability of this demand spurt. On the external front, tariff negotiations are going on between India and US. Any resolution here can be a meaningful positive development. On interest rate, one can argue that further easing by Reserve Bank of India is likely, which could be positive for both fixed income and equities.

Where do you see the strongest growth coming from? Which segment is drawing the most traction among investors?

The sweet spot for retail investments lies in the ₹2-20 lakh range, mostly coming through Systematic Investment Plans (SIPs) or ticket



sizes of ₹5-10 lakh, although larger tickets are also available. With SBI's pedigree, the focus is on affluent individuals and aspiring wealth creators, managing their money responsibly to generate long-term value. **When it comes to geographies, where are you seeing the most traction, and which regions are you focusing on?**

You might be surprised to learn that some of the major equity investors aren't from B30 cities, but rather from B100 cities. Geography is no longer a limiting factor. **As a sign of investor maturity, would you say that the large-scale redemptions we saw earlier are now less frequent?**

It's the opposite now—when markets fall, people are investing more in equities. Another factor is that mutual funds, which often hold 5-7% cash (sometimes even 8-10%), deploy it during market dips, helping stabilize prices immediately. This abundant liquidity plays a crucial role in supporting both market stability and growth.

So, essentially, if the mutual fund industry continues to grow, does that mean we might not rely on FIIs any more?

Dependence on FIIs has already fallen drastically. Currently, nearly \$3.5 billion flows into the market each month through SIPs and other structured funds, including insur-

ance companies and retirement funds. On top of this, mutual funds hold substantial cash reserves, effectively acting as "dry ammunition" that can be deployed when needed. This steady inflow and available liquidity will not just help stabilize the market but also reduce dependency on FIIs to a large extent.

So, how do you see the momentum for the rest of the fiscal year, particularly by the end of December?

It is difficult to predict because there are numerous critical factors and uncertainties, including geopolitical setbacks. As I mentioned earlier, we don't approach this like traders—we are investors. Over time, things tend to balance out. If there's a reason for concern that results in better valuations, I see it as an opportunity to deploy more capital in the markets.

Do you think this phase of consolidation could continue for several months—say five or six—where the market mostly moves sideways without any significant swings?

Some of the major equity investors aren't from B30 cities, but rather from B100 cities

D. P. Singh
Deputy MD and joint CEO, SBI Mutual Fund

Yes, this trend will continue. Market indices and actual fund performance often differ: Your scheme may track an index, but the portfolio might not even reflect 25% of its movements. New initial public offerings (IPOs) aren't part of the index, and their market cap doesn't immediately impact it; it often takes six months to a year for large-cap IPOs to be included in an index.

How do you view mid- and small-cap companies? Do you see any froth, given that most alpha seems to be coming from the broader market rather than large-caps?

Yes, there will be froth—some companies may have stretched valuations, even among large-caps, which we might avoid. But our focus is on good businesses with strong governance and management. Valuation is just one factor; we place greater emphasis on the other three. While we will hold some stocks, our core investments are in companies where we have high conviction, and we are comfortable holding them

for three, five, or even 10 years, confident they will become multi-baggers over time.

Many of these mid- and small-cap stocks have around 80% exposure to US. Do you think such companies should be avoided, given the potential volatility, even if they have strong management?

Some investors see this as a period of disruption, while others fear missing an opportunity if they exit now. It's very subjective and hard to generalize. However, it is very important to note that the current situation is temporary and unsustainable; eventually, market sanity will prevail.

When it comes to the Indian equity space, which sector do you think holds the biggest opportunity?

There are opportunities across various sectors as the overall ecosystem expands, but the financial sector stands out as particularly attractive. In fact, each sector has strong companies with good prospects, but I emphasize banking and finance because the ecosystem has strengthened significantly, making India one of the best globally. Margins in this space remain healthy, supported by strong demand and robust consumption.

For an extended version of the story, go to livemint.com

THE ASIAN AGE

6 OCTOBER 2025

Are India-US strategic ties now turning transactional?

HAL chairman and managing director D.K. Sunil recently announced that the state-run aviation company would sign a \$1-billion deal with US major GE Aerospace this month for the supply of 113 GE-404 engines, which would soon result in India's locally made fighter jet Tejas Mk1A taking to the skies, strengthening the country's defence capabilities.

If this announcement were juxtaposed with US President Donald Trump's almost-diatribes against India, its economy, and the people of Indian origin, one could hardly fail to understand the trajectory of India-US relations, as America does not arm countries it considers rivals or enemies. However, contrary to the deal over GE engines and the continuation of other key defence agreements between the two countries, Mr Trump has adopted a strident posture against India over trade and immigration issues, which have been cornerstones of bilateral relations between India and the United States.

Over the decades, Indians have always looked to America for higher education, even though it was supporting and arming Pakistan. The people-to-people contacts increased in the 1990s when US companies hired Indian technology professionals in large numbers to fix their Y2K problem. This collaboration grew by leaps and bounds over the next 25 years, creating enormous goodwill for the US among Indians. However, Mr Trump sought to end this bonhomie by imposing a hefty application fee of \$100,000 for the H-1B visa, capping the enrolment of foreign students in American colleges and the public humiliation and inhuman treatment of Indian deportees. Similarly, the United States is pursuing a confrontational policy against India over the latter's reluctance to open its economy to American agricultural products.

In both issues where India and the US locked horns, the disputes involved jobs. While Americans believe that uncontrolled immigration is stealing their jobs, Mr Trump believes India's reluctance to buy US farm produce makes it dependent on China, the only country comparable to India in population size. Similarly, for the Narendra Modi government too, these issues relate to people's jobs. Tougher visa laws are denying Indians the opportunity to work in the US, while agreeing to Mr Trump's demands on agricultural produce would rob millions of poor Indians of their livelihoods.

Any democratic country would find it difficult to compromise on an issue that involves the sustenance of its voters, especially when leaders are engaged in competitive politics — something both Mr Trump and Mr Modi pursue unabashedly. On the other hand, both countries appear to find convergence in elevating their defence relations.

A strong India — even with peaceful borders with China — would always be uncomfortable for Beijing and serve the American purpose of keeping a check on its challenger. For India, close defence relations with the US — though Washington is considered an unreliable arms supplier — would help it diversify its defence supplies.

The approach by the US and India on different issues hints that the relationship between the two countries, which was billed as strategic, has been downgraded to transactional. Similarly, India also has a transactional relationship with China, as they differ on defence issues while cooperating on trade and commerce — and this is the new normal in the post-Trump world.

Woman power rises in UK, Japan

Two events last week in two different island-nations saw the power of women being recognised in the most unusual and unexpected fields. The choice of ladies for the first time ever at top jobs in the spiritual world of the Anglicans and in the leadership of the ultra-conservative society of Japan as Prime Minister was a stunning validation of the rise of women in unexpected fields.

As spiritual leader of both the 500-year-old Church of England and the 80-million strong worldwide Anglican Communion, Sarah Mulally has huge expectations to meet at a time when the "Mother Church" is going through troubled times with the previous occupant having been unseated following a caustic report into his passive handling of the worst abuse scandal in church history.

"If you want to go fast, go alone — if you want to go far, go together," the voluble head of the communion said on taking over as the Archbishop of Canterbury, a role that had in British history come to clash often with the power of kings. If feelings persist that the often-outspoken Bishop of London who had things to say on political and social issues could lead to widen fissures, it could be put down to male scepticism.

Much has happened since the start of this decade in which more liberal views may have found voice, but in which support for the church blessing same-sex couples had proved very divisive. But the name women have earned worldwide for their capacity to cultivate dispassionate views even in a conflicted world should come in handy for the priest in the hot seat.

At the other end of the world, Japan's male-dominated political landscape was in for big change as the self-confessed workaholic Sanae Takaichi beat her male rival in a closely contested poll for leadership of the Liberal Democratic Party. The country may have become accustomed to fast and frequent changes at the top of ruling parties, but only a select few may have bargained for a conservative woman PM who promises a rightward political direction.

The fervent views of the two who are in the limelight now mark them out as women who may not be satisfied with just the breakthrough symbolism of their rising to the top. Both may chart lively courses for the people they would be leading even as they continue to press for acceptance of post-modern ideas of gender inclusion but without the need for overt feminism for which there may be lesser space in a changing world.

THE ASIAN AGE

KAUSHIK MITTER

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Subhani



Dying to work: India's silent crisis of suicides



Bharat Bhushan

Alarming figures have emerged about India's most vulnerable labour force — the daily wage earners — showing suicide rates reaching epidemic proportions.

The Narendra Modi government has consistently projected a narrative of strong post-pandemic economic recovery. However, its rhetoric has focused mostly on macroeconomic indicators and the middle classes, leaving the issue of daily wage earners undressed in substance.

The latest data released by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) shows that suicides among daily wage workers in India have risen by a shocking 45 per cent in five years from 2017 (32,559 suicides), to 2023 (47,170 suicides). The data for 2023 shows that suicides by daily wage earners accounted for 27.5 per cent of all suicides in the country, compared to 22.40 per cent in 2017.

Over 450 million Indians work in the informal sector.

The post-pandemic crisis for this group of vulnerable workers is far from over. The stress of working in the informal economy without job security and social protection is worsened because of the long-term fallout of the Covid-19 pandemic in terms of wage cuts, job losses and reverse migration.

Stress has intensified especially among workers with no land or other resources. Those likely to be most affected are Dalits, women and reverse migrants, among whom the vulnerability of daily wage workers intersects with caste, gender and migration.

Apart from the economic precarity of informal work, there is the social exclusion of Dalit and Adivasi workers; wage theft; the added burden on women workers of domestic violence and unpaid labour, and lower access to jobs, housing and

healthcare among reverse migrants.

The Modi government's flagship schemes like "Atma Nirbhar Bharat" and "Make in India" are touted as job creation initiatives in manufacturing and infrastructure but daily wage workers have been consistently missing from the government's radar and its rhetoric of economic recovery.

There is no post-pandemic relief package targeted for the informal sector workers. Nor is there any mention in the Union Budget 2025 about urban employment guarantees or mental health outreach for them.

The government has discontinued key planning tools at its disposal, making it more difficult to plan for the relief of informal workers. In 2017, the five yearly Employment-Unemployment Survey conducted since Independence by the National Sample Survey was discontinued. It used to provide granular data on joblessness, underemployment and informal sector trends.

In March 2018, the Labour Bureau's Quarterly Enterprise Surveys were discontinued. They tracked employment trends in formal enterprises across sectors. This has weakened the government's ability to monitor job creation in manufacturing and services.

The absence of consistent time series public data has not only reduced transparency and undermined democratic accountability, but has, above all, constrained the assessment of the impact of the pandemic.

The vulnerabilities of urban and rural wage workers are quite distinct, although the NCRB data does not disaggregate them.

In urban India, the key sources of insecurity are the volatility of the "gig", or platform economy, absence of contracts and grievance redressal, increased surveil-

The stress of working in the informal economy without job security and social protection is worsened because of the long-term fallout of the Covid-19 pandemic in terms of wage cuts, job losses and reverse migration

lance and control (especially of gig workers), housing insecurity and absence of legal protection. In rural areas, the structure of vulnerability is shaped by the seasonality of employment, landlessness, debt traps, climate vulnerability impacting work opportunities and caste hierarchies dictating access to work and wages.

For ameliorating conditions for urban daily wage workers, Telangana's Bharath Rashtra Samithi has proposed a National Urban Employment Guarantee Scheme, designed on the lines of MGNREGA, to safeguard the livelihoods of the urban poor.

Indian gig workers were included in the ambit of labour laws for the first time in 2020 by the ministry of labour and employment through the Code on Social Security that mandates social protection schemes for them. But there is no Bill of Rights for platform workers in the country as yet.

In 2023 Rajasthan enacted the Rajasthan Platform Based Gig Workers (Registration and Welfare) Act. It established a Welfare Board and a social security and welfare fund for gig workers and mandated the registration of gig workers and platforms and access to welfare schemes. It also mandated aggregators (e.g. app-based platforms) to contribute to the welfare fund (no share was specified) and set up a mechanism for filing complaints about entitlements, payments, and benefits.

Building on Rajasthan's attempts, a model law for gig workers could be formulated to be adopted by the states, mandating fair wages, data transparency, job security, minimum working hours and accident

insurance. Such a law must recognise the power asymmetry built in gig work in terms of control, pricing and unilateral making of rules by the aggregator/employer.

In addition, given the structural vulnerability of urban daily wage workers, dramatically made more visible by reverse migration during the pandemic, the government needs to provide rental security by expanding affordable housing and preventing forced evictions.

For daily wagers in rural areas, social activists have emphasised the need to expand MGNREGA, from 100 days of guaranteed work per year per rural household to 150 days. In addition, legalising and protecting tenancies of landless workers, enabling low-interest loans via self-help groups and cooperatives and tailoring welfare and mental health support for vulnerable workers to be caste-sensitive.

In 2023, the government admitted in Parliament that daily wage workers were the largest group among suicide victims between 2019 and 2023. In response to a question on the subject, it referred to the Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act 2008 as the framework for addressing their welfare. However, no new suicide specific policy intervention was announced.

None of the welfare schemes of the government are tailored to suicide prevention among daily wage earners. They do not address their mental health, income volatility or the workplace distress — the key drivers of suicide among them.

The longer the despair of those who build our cities; sow, irrigate and harvest our crops; and power the near-instant deliveries of goods and services for the urban middle class, the more intense their proclivity to give up on life will become. Suicide prevention in this vulnerable population must become a national priority if their lost lives are not to be just another yearly statistic.

The writer is a senior journalist based in New Delhi

LETTERS

WHY NOT INDIA BAN?

The tragic deaths of children linked to Coldrif cough syrup, found contaminated with the deadly chemical diethylene glycol, expose a shocking failure in drug safety enforcement. While Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Telangana, and Gujarat have taken action, these responses remain reactive. All states across India must immediately ban this dangerous drug and initiate thorough checks on similar formulations. Temporary responses are not enough; this calls for systemic reform in drug manufacturing oversight and real accountability from both producers and regulators.

K. Chidanand Kumar
Bengaluru

JANE THE LISTENER

IN A WORLD too loud to hear the whispers of nature, Jane Goodall listened. She listened to the rustle of leaves in Gombe, the laughter of chimpanzees, and the silent cries of a planet in peril. From the moment she entered the Tanzanian wilderness armed only with curiosity, a notebook, and binoculars, she changed the way we see life itself. She revealed to us chimpanzees who fashioned tools, formed families, mourned their dead, and loved with tenderness. She gave them names, not numbers. In doing so, she gave them dignity — and reminded us that empathy and intelligence are not human monopolies, but gifts scattered across the living world.

Amarjeet Kumar
Hazaribagh

ROHIT DESERVED BETTER

SELECTIONS stripping the captainship of Rohit Sharma in the Indian ODI team is in bad taste. Rohit has already retired from the Test and T20 formats and ODI is the only format he is playing at present. Selections should have waited for some more time before taking the captainship from him. Rohit has not done anything wrong. He won the Champions Trophy 2025 and is a tremendous player. He also has the highest win percentage at 76 per cent in ODI format and has scored more than 11,000 runs in it. Shubman Gill may be his natural successor, but the World Cup is only in 2027 which is still too far away.

D.B. Madan
New Delhi

₹500 for the best letter of the week goes to Vijay Singh Adhikari (October 4). Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

Sunil Gatade



Can Modi reinvent himself? Otherwise, 'Genie of 75' may begin to haunt him

While Prime Minister Narendra Modi, despite all the speculation in political circles, has not retired at the age of 75, and seems likely to stay on for some time, he still needs to be given credit for inadvertently seeking to turn young the politics of the country.

A leader's credibility depends on whether he follows the rules he sets for others. So, he will hardly qualify on that count, for having ignored the rule to retire at 75.

He is no Ratan Tata, who ensured that the top honchos in his industrial empire quit executive positions on turning 75, and did so himself at the pinnacle of power. Tata did so as he was sure that the business group could survive without him, and it has not only survived but also thrived despite having a non-Tata chairman at the helm.

Politics, however, is a different ballgame altogether. It is more difficult than rocket science. Otherwise, how could one have expected H.D. Deve Gowda, then Karnataka CM, to suddenly become the Prime Minister some 30 years ago?

That apart, politicians, especially in India, are lesser mortals who would like to take their positions to the grave, and thus it would be wrong to judge Mr Modi on this count. Even Donald Trump, the controversial US President, had once hinted that if there was any possibility, he would like to have a third term at the White House.

It would be wrong to target Jawaharlal Nehru for seeking a third term as PM, as reports indicate he wanted to give up the position much earlier, but was persuaded to continue leading a young India. "The woods are lovely, dark and deep... And I have promises to keep", was how he saw it in Robert Frost's words.

When Morarji Desai can become PM when nearly 80, why not any other leader — that could be the argument. A supporter of the PM suggested he could go on and on, and what was wrong with that? Those in power are not required to give any alibis or explanations. Their continuance itself is a statement.

Neither L.K. Advani nor Murli Manohar Joshi, as well as others confined to the BJP's "Margdarshak Mandal" after turning 75, have the will or strength to say something. Their silence in the past decade has shown they are resigned to their fate.

Yashwant Sinha was one who spoke against. But he is no longer in the BJP, and so need not be counted. He's just an Opposition voice which can be ignored.

Interestingly, RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat, who turned 75 recently, has come out in support of Mr Modi's continuance as PM, seeking to bring down the curtain on his remark sometime back on this issue.

Mr Bhagwat has put paid to the campaign by

BJP dissidents like Subramanian Swamy, who had warned the party would irreparably suffer if Mr Modi was allowed to continue after 75. Mr Swamy is himself past 80, but is seeking to project that he is active in politics.

There are very few examples in Indian politics like Madhu Limaye, who quit active politics in the early 80s soon after the collapse of the Janata experiment, of which he was a leading light. Virtually, no leader in India has followed the veteran socialist's example.

Many have called it quits when the people have rejected them altogether, and they have had no face to show up in politics.

In 1991, P.V. Narasimha Rao had packed his bags to move to Hyderabad from the national capital. But fate willed otherwise, as Rajiv Gandhi's assassination in the middle of the Lok Sabha elections made him the PM.

No doubt Mr Modi has got a certificate from the RSS chief that he could continue after 75, but things may be different in the times to come given that the last Lok Sabha polls saw the law of diminishing returns catching up with him. The latest C-Voter survey saw Rahul Gandhi gradually catching up with Mr Modi on the issue of the PM candidate, an alarming development for the world's largest party.

Mr Modi has unwittingly unbottled the "Genie of 75" into the air that has spurred the aspirations

of many ambitious leaders in the BJP. Politics is, after all, the game of the possible.

One should not forget that the last Lok Sabha elections have given a sort of leveraging position to the RSS and its leader, who had been generally sidelined or shown in a secondary role in the first 10 years of the Modi government. The tact with which the RSS utilises this leverage will determine the shape of things to come.

Not all of a sudden, Mr Modi has sung peacans to the RSS chief on his 75th birthday. It took the PM 11 years in office to laud the role of the RSS from the ramparts of the Red Fort, which also tells its own story.

Despite a sizable media doing his bidding, Mr Modi is looking increasingly vulnerable just when he had completed the first year of his third term.

Donald Trump has turned out to be the "bull in the China shop" for Modi 3.0, resulting in not only unintended consequences but also much rattling too. Worse is that the US President has sought to take the sheen out of Operation Sindoor, seen as the trump card by the ruling side in the days ahead. The "Vote Chor, Gaddi Chor" campaign too has not come a day too soon. The problem for Narendra Modi is that he is looking increasingly jaded now, and the more he fails to reinvent himself, the "Genie of 75" will start haunting him.

The writer is a journalist based in New Delhi

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	81,207.17	0.28
Nifty 50	24,894.25	0.23
S&P 500*	6,715.79	0.01
Dollar (₹)	88.76	0.07
Pound Sterling (₹)	119.40	-0.26
Euro (₹)	104.17	0.07
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	118,100	13 -0.01
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	64.36	-0.26
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.514	-0.14
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.121	0.002

Vedanta plans to up aluminium unit capacity

Anil Agarwal-led Vedanta Ltd plans to pump in ₹13,226 crore to ramp up its aluminium capacity to 3.1 million tonnes per annum (MTPA) by FY28, sources said. The current capacity of the company is 2.4 MTPA. Vedanta's aluminium capacity will expand to 2.75 MTPA by FY26. BALCO, in which Vedanta holds a majority stake, is also set to enter the one million tonne (production capacity) club, sources said.

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Loan demand recovers on rise in consumption

Q2 to be another soft quarter with steady advances growth

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, OCT. 5

A pickup in consumption activity, income tax relief alongside lower borrowing cost is driving a gradual recovery in loan demand for banks. A host of banks that released their provisional numbers for the second quarter of the financial year over the weekend including HDFC Bank, Bank of Baroda, Punjab National Bank, Kotak Bank reported a steady advances growth even as analysts expect Q2 to be another soft quarter. Fresh slippages are likely to remain elevated for banks that have high exposure to unsecured retail and microfinance loans.

Some banks may see a slight sequential decline in net interest margin (NIM) this quarter, reflecting full impact of RBI's 100 basis points (bps) repo rate cut between February-June 2025, partly offset by reductions in savings and term deposit rates. According to analysts, profitability is expected to gradually recover in the second half of the year as deposit repricing and the phased CRR cut start to take effect. HDFC Bank registered a 9 per cent rise in loans to ₹27.9 lakh crore in second quarter. Its total deposits increased 12.1 per cent YoY to ₹28.01 lakh crore. Private lender Kotak Bank's net advances rose 16 per cent y-o-y to ₹4.62 lakh crore in July-September quarter. "In general, slippages

BETTER RETURNS		PROFITABILITY expected to recover in second quarter with deposit repricing.		
Bank	Loan Growth YoY	Loans (₹lakh cr)	Deposit Growth YoY	Deposits (₹ lakh cr)
HDFC Bank	9.9%	27.9	12.1%	28.01
Kotak Bank	15.8%	4.62	14.6%	5.28
Bank of Baroda	11.49%	10.46	9.66%	12.71
UCO Bank	16.6%	2.31	10.8%	3.06
IDBI Bank	15%	2.3	9%	3.03
IndusInd Bank	-8%	3.27	-5%	3.89

NIMS TO CONTRACT FOR MOST OF THE BANKS.

IMPACT OF 50 BPS repo rate cut in June on banks' lending yields will reflect in second quarter of fiscal year 2025-26.



IN GENERAL, slippages have been moderately on the rise sequentially earlier for the system due to economic slowdown but second quarter may be flattish to slightly higher. — SHIVAJI THAPLIYAL, Research analyst, Yes Securities.

have been moderately on the rise sequentially earlier for the system due to economic slowdown but Q2 FY26 may be flattish to slightly higher. Sequential evolution of provisions would be a function of not only slippages but also of recoveries and upgrades and pre-existing provision buffers," said Shivaji Thapliyal, research analyst at Yes Securities. "We see a rise in provisions sequentially, for ICICI, Karur Vysya Bank and City Union Bank whereas we see higher trend in provisions for SBI and IDFC Bank. Provisions would decline sequentially for HDFC, DCB Bank, Federal Bank, Axis Bank, Catholic Syrian Bank, Kotak Bank, IndusInd Bank, BOB and RBL Bank as they created additional provisions in Q1 FY26."

Diwali to see surge in luxury, spiritual travel

Mumbai, Oct. 5: India is witnessing a record surge in festive travel this Diwali, as travellers combine traditional celebrations and family reunions with luxury escapes and spiritual journeys, with online travel platforms reporting strong growth in domestic and international bookings. MakeMyTrip chief executive officer Rajesh Magow said visiting friends and relatives remains biggest driver of festive season travel, as many head back to hometowns to celebrate Diwali. "Therefore, of the top 10

most booked destinations, five are metros. There is also rise in demand for pilgrimage destinations," he noted. In global travel, short-haul destinations, such as the UAE, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam, have become go-to choices for Indians, Magow added. Multi-generational families are maximising vacations for Diwali, while millennial and working professionals are combining weekends with festive holidays for extended getaways, said Thomas Cook (India) president, Holidays - Rajeev Kale.

Play long innings with MFs for wealth creation

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, OCT. 5

An analysis of two decades (2005-2025) mutual funds (MF) returns shows that the top-ranked 1-year performers among MF schemes rarely sustain success, while consistency over time drives real wealth creation, said HDFC Securities in a note. The analysis highlights pitfalls of chasing short-term MF returns. "The findings reinforce that sustainable investing depends on patience and long-term discipline - not the 1-year trap, it said.

Short-term performance is misleading as mutual fund 1-year returns often create an illusion of superior performance as they inflate 2-year, 3-year, and 5-year returns. A fund with high return in the current year but inconsistent in prior years looks better than another fund with steady high returns and is actually more consistent. Chasing top-ranked funds doesn't pay off as analysis showed that selecting number 1 ranked fund each year gave CAGR of 14 per cent but while number 6 ranked fund each year delivered a higher CAGR of 16 per cent. "It is a random dispersion. Next year's performance has no relation with

STEADY GROWTH

SHORT-TERM PERFORMANCE misleads as mutual fund 1-yr returns often create an illusion of superior performance.

CHASING TOP-RANKED funds always doesn't pay off as per analysis of 32 large-cap funds during the last two decades.

HIGHER PERIODIC returns do not imply consistency in fund's performance.



Mkts to sway on Q2 earnings, FPI action

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, OCT. 5

Market is likely to remain sideways ahead of second quarter earnings start amid consistent selling by foreign investors amid adverse geopolitical build up. After gains last week on RBI's dovish monetary stance adding to GST reforms led up move the market may look for new triggers for further gains. The week ahead will also see over ₹30,000 crore initial public offerings in

primary market by Tata Capital, LG Electronics India and other issues which can suck liquidity from secondary market. "Last week foreign portfolio investors were net sellers who offloaded ₹8,347 crore in cash segment. However, strong inflows from domestic investors amounting to ₹13,013 crore provided support, cushioning overall market sentiment," said Puneet Singhania, director, Master Trust Group.

last year's performance," the note said. "Recent out-performance folds into periodic returns of 2-year, 3-year, 5-year. Similar

results in midcap and flexi-cap funds return observed, where return dispersion is quiet evident, it noted.

Bitcoin breaches \$1,25,000-mark to hit new level

Tokyo, Oct. 5: Bitcoin reached a new record high on Sunday, rising above the \$125,000 mark. The cryptocurrency reached \$125,689, shooting above its previous August record of around \$124,500. Bitcoin has enjoyed a

strong upward momentum with investors cautious about the US government shutdown. Gains in US shares have also supported bitcoin's rise, while investors have looked to safe haven assets while US lawmakers

negotiate over funding the federal government. US President Donald Trump and his family have also been promoters of cryptocurrencies and are involved in various crypto endeavours. — AFP

SPORTS

USA rout Gukesh & Company 5-0

New Delhi: Hikaru Nakamura stunned world champion D. Gukesh as India were whitewashed 0-5 by USA in the first Checkmate, an evening of chess presented as a live arena spectacle in Arlington, USA. While the match had many tense moments and players from both teams created winning chances, USA rose up to the occasion and scored several clutch wins. Playing with black pieces, the Indians suffered a rough loss and would look to bounce back with white pieces in the return match in the second leg in India. While Grandmaster Arjun Erigaisi lost to Fabiano Caruana, Grandmaster Divya Dethmukh suffered shock defeat at the hands of International Master Carissa Yip. International master Levy Rozman then defeated Sagar Shah before chess prodigy Ethan Vaz lost to International master Tani Adewumi. — PTI

Maiden Super 100 title for Valishetty

AI Ain, UAE: Young Indian shuttler Shriyanshi Valishetty clinched her maiden BWF Super 100 title in the women's singles category at the \$120,000 AI Ain Masters, defeating compatriot Tasnim Mir in a pulsating three-game final here on Sunday. Valishetty, the 18-year-old from Telangana, showed remarkable composure to fight back from a game down and prevail 15-21, 22-20, 21-7 in a 49-minute summit clash. In men's doubles, Hariharan Amsakarunan and M.R. Arjun lifted the title, defeating Indonesia's Raymond Indra and Nikolaus Joaquin 21-17, 21-18 in a 35-minute final clash. "Today was a tough day — the shuttles are faster than other days. Because usually in the finals, I lost many matches this year, I was not nervous, but I get too hyped up before matches and tend to make mistakes. I tried to be so calm in the match today," Valishetty said. — PTI

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ROYAL BLUES!

India women thrash Pakistan in World Cup match

Colombo (Sri Lanka), Oct. 5: India defeated Pakistan by 88 runs in their Women's World Cup match here on Sunday. Sent in to bat, India rode on Harleen Deol's 46 and Richa Ghosh's brisk 35 to post 247 all out after most of the batters failed to translate their starts into big scores on a slow track. In reply, Pakistan never recovered from a top-order collapse that left them struggling at 26/3 in the eighth over. In the end, they were all out for 159 in 43 overs.

Opener Sidra Amin fought valiantly for a 106-ball 81, while Natalia Pervaiz (33) was the other significant contributor. For India, Kranti Goud (3/20) and Deepti Sharma (3/45) claimed three wickets apiece, while Shree Charani (2/38) also made key breakthroughs. Earlier, Deol's 65-ball knock provided some stability in the middle overs, while Ghosh's quickfire 20-ball effort pushed India near the 250-run mark. Sent in to bat after the match referee erroneously ruled the toss in Pakistan's favour, India's top order faltered on a sluggish surface in a stop-start game that even saw interruptions for fumigation.

Captain Harmanpreet Kaur did not shake hands with her Pakistan counterpart Fatima Sana during the toss, continuing the trend set by the Indian men's team during their victorious Asia Cup campaign. There were also several close calls and mix-ups in the middle that further disrupted momentum. Opener Pratika Rawal (31) gave India a brisk start, smashing Diana Baig for three consecutive fours, but star batter Smriti Mandhana (23) once again fell inside the powerplay, putting the top order under early pressure. After surviving an unsuccessful leg-before appeal off Baig,



Indian players celebrate the dismissal of Pakistan batter Muneeba Ali during their ICC Women's World Cup match at the R. Premadasa International Cricket Stadium in Colombo, Sri Lanka, on Sunday. India won by 88 runs.

Mandhana was bowled in the 10th over by skipper Fatima Sana. The disciplined Pakistan bowlers kept the batters on a leash with tight lines and clever variations in pace, denying them any rhythm and chipping away at regular intervals. Pacers Baig (4/69) and Sana (2/38) did the maximum damage, sharing six wickets between them. Rawal was next to go, her attempted cut shot brushing the top of the off stump. — PTI

SA, KIWIS LOOK TO RETURN TO WINNING WAYS

Indore, Oct. 5: An improved bowling performance will be topmost on New Zealand's agenda while South Africa will aim to work on batting form when two teams square off in a Women's World Cup match here on Monday, trying to shrug off the disappointment of crushing defeats in their respective opening games. While defending champions Australia brushed aside New Zealand by 89 runs in a Trans-Tasman rivalry, the Proteas women were crushed fair and square by England, who won by 10 wickets. In both cases, the batting performance by the losing side was underwhelming to say the least but New Zealand were also guilty of letting it slip after having Australia reduced to 128/5 inside the 22nd over and letting them get to 326. Ashleigh Gardner, Southern Stars' most valued all-round asset turned the tables on the White Ferns with a brilliant counter-attacking hundred but New Zealand skipper Sophie Devine's run-a-ball 112 wasn't complemented by her teammates as they lost their last five wickets for only 19 runs. — PTI

SCOREBOARD	
India: Pratika Rawal b Sadia Iqbal 31, Smriti Mandhana lbw b Fatima Sana 23, Harleen Deol c Nashra Sandhu b Rameen Shamim 46, Harmanpreet Kaur c Sidra Nawaz b Diana Baig 19, Jemimah Rodrigues lbw Nashra Sandhu 32, Deepti Sharma c Sidra Nawaz b Diana Baig 25, Sneha Rana c Aliya Riaz b Fatima Sana 20, Richa Ghosh not out 35, Shree Charani c Natalia Pervaiz b Sadia Iqbal 1, Kranti Goud c Aliya Riaz b Diana Baig 8, Renuka Singh c Sidra Nawaz b Diana Baig 0. Extras (b-1, lb-1, nb-1, w-4) 7. Total (All out in 50 overs) 247.	Pakistan: Muneeba Ali run out (Deepti Sharma) 2, Sadaf Shamas c & b Kranti Gaud 6, Sidra Amin c Harmanpreet Kaur b Sneha Rana 81, Aliya Riaz c Deepti Sharma b Kranti Gaud 2, Natalia Pervaiz c (sub) Radha Yadav b Kranti Gaud 33, Fatima Sana c Smriti Mandhana b Deepti Sharma 2, Sidra Nawaz c & b Sneha Rana 14, Rameen Shamim b Deepti Sharma 0, Diana Baig run out (Harmanpreet Kaur) 9, Nashra Sandhu not out 2, Sadia Iqbal c Smriti Mandhana b Deepti Sharma 0. Extras (lb-1, w-7) 8. Total (All out in 43 Overs) 159.
Fall of Wickets: 1-48, 2-67, 3-106, 4-151, 5-159, 6-201, 7-203, 8-226, 9-247.	Fall of Wickets: 1-6, 2-20, 3-26, 4-95, 5-102, 6-143, 7-146, 8-150, 9-158.
Bowling: Sadia Iqbal 10-0-47-2, Diana Baig 10-1-69-4, Fatima Sana 10-2-38-2, Rameen Shamim 10-0-39-1, Nashra Sandhu 10-0-52-1.	Bowler: Renuka Singh Thakur 10-1-29-0, Kranti Gaud 10-3-20-3, Sneha Rana 8-0-38-2, Shree Charani 6-1-26-0, Deepti Sharma 9-0-45-3.

WORLD PARA | ATHLETICS



India's Preeti Pal celebrates her silver in the women's 100m T35 event of the World Para Athletics Championships at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium in New Delhi on Sunday. — PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY

Navdeep, Preeti, Simran bag silver

DEEPIKA DAS NEW DELHI, OCT. 5

Indian para Javelin thrower Navdeep Singh wrapped up India's challenge with a silver medal on the last day of the World Para Athletics Championship here on Sunday. Sprinter Simran Sharma and Preeti Pal also signed off with silvers while Sandeep settled for bronze in the men's 200m T44 as India finished 10th with a record 22-medal haul — six golds, nine silvers and seven bronzes. Brazil topped the medals table with 44 (15-20-9), China was second with 52 (13-22-17) while Iran finished third with 16 (9-2-5). A broad smile never left witty Navdeep's face in the competition as he hurled his season's best throw of 45.46 to secure silver in a tough 10-man field of the men's Javelin throw F41 final, the last event of the tournament. His best came on the third attempt as he fouled three out of six on the day. Iran's Sadegh Beit Sayah's massive 48.86m throw fetched him the gold. The javelin throw F41 category is for para-athletes with short stature. **SIMRAN, PREETI FETCH SECOND MEDALS**

Earlier, there was no sign of tiredness on Simran's face despite running her

sixth sprint race in two days in the hot and humid conditions. The 25-year-old, who has significant visual limitation and runs with a sighted guide to assist her during her races, added a women's 200m T12 silver to the 100m T12 gold she won on Friday with an Asian record and personal best time of 24.46 second. This was Simran's third World Para Athletics medal. She had won the T12 200m gold at the 2024 World in Kobe. Simran initially finished third behind Venezuela's Alejandra Perez Lopez and Brazil's Clara Barros de Silva (24.42 seconds) but the former was disqualified leading to the Indian moving up to second spot. Simran emerged India's star of the Championships with a gold and a silver while Preeti was the other home athlete who won two medals — a silver and a bronze. If Simran's bronze medal finish was converted in the Jury room to a silver, a ruling saw the women's 100m T35 final being re-run — there was a gun malfunction at the start of the race. Preeti made the most of the opportunity to win silver with a timing of 14.24 seconds. China's Guo Qianqian (14.24) topped the event while Fatimah Suwaid from Iraq was third with 14.39.