

KEY FIGURE

One aspect that has surprised — puzzled? — the pundit and the politician alike in the days leading up to the assembly elections in Bihar — the polls begin today — is Nitish Kumar's continuing political relevance in that state. Mr Kumar has been in power, save for a brief spell, for two decades. So anti-incumbency is a natural opponent. Mr Kumar's Janata Dal (United) fetched a diminished kitty in 2020, enabling the Bharatiya Janata Party to emerge as the proverbial Big Brother. Mr Kumar's record as chief minister on employment-generation and attracting industry has been disappointing. Of late, there has also been speculation about the state of his health. In the initial stages of this election campaign, even Mr Kumar's allies — some BJP leaders — were not too keen on projecting him as the chief ministerial candidate. Yet, as the campaigning continued, reports from the ground suggested that Mr Kumar's acceptability amidst the electorate has not been eroded. The change in tone in the BJP could well be attributed to Mr Kumar's political durability even after years in power.

There are several explanations for this. Mr Kumar, who was initially seen as a representative of his Kurmi community only, has been able to, over the years, forge a wider caste solidarity, especially amidst the other backward classes and the Dalits, thereby building a reliable support base that makes him a contender for the top job in each election. His welfare measures for women have also been instrumental to his political longevity in a state where voter turnout among women has been higher in recent years than among men. The National Democratic Alliance's announcement of a financial grant of Rs 10,000 for women on this occasion is a testament to this constituency's centrality to the electoral math. The JD(U)'s principal rival — and occasional ally, thanks to Mr Kumar's unpredictability — the Rashtriya Janata Dal has also contributed to Mr Kumar's endurance. The RJD may have emerged as the single largest party in 2020 but it has not been able to efface its own unruly legacy; little wonder then that its adversaries hope to benefit from invoking the fear of jungle *raj*. Lalu Prasad and, now, Tejashwi Yadav, have also failed to widen the RJD's presence within Bihar's caste matrix beyond its traditional Yadav support base. 'TINA', the lack of an alternative, both in terms of a leader and a vision, perhaps keeps Mr Kumar in the saddle.

NEW FORCE

New York City on Tuesday defied history, the power of the billionaire donor class, and the Democratic Party's Establishment to elect 34-year-old Zohran Mamdani as its mayor. Mr Mamdani, who defeated the former New York governor, Andrew Cuomo, will be the first Muslim and the first South Asian mayor of America's largest city. The self-described Democratic Socialist's victory will reverberate throughout the United States of America, and possibly beyond. The US president, Donald Trump, has repeatedly taken on Mr Mamdani, described him as a communist, and threatened to cut funding for New York City if he were to win. That threat will now be on test, as will Mr Mamdani's many bold promises that galvanised a wide coalition of supporters and won him more votes than any mayoral candidate in the city since the 1960s. It is one thing to run a radical campaign, painting mainstream politicians as compromised collaborators with the wealthy. But to deliver on his promises — from free buses to a rent freeze in many apartments to a tax increase for the rich — Mr Mamdani will need the legislative and the political support of a wide set of elected representatives. He will also need their support to truly stand up to Mr Trump in what could well emerge as a defining political battle of the next few years.

That looming face-off appears especially likely because Mr Mamdani managed to do something that few Democrats have been able to do since Mr Trump's 2024 presidential win: inspire. Many Democratic Party stalwarts who had hesitated to endorse Mr Mamdani, including Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, have now congratulated him. How Mr Mamdani performs once in office, and whether he is able to make the city more affordable without driving away wealth, will determine whether his plans will echo in other cities and whether he emerges as a national face for the party. America is diverse, and there is little evidence that socialist policies will resonate everywhere. But as much as the content of his campaign — many of his pledges have been made by others previously — it was Mr Mamdani's style that other politicians will want to learn from. Confronted with better-known opponents, Islamophobic and racist attacks, and with only a fraction of his opponent's donations, Mr Mamdani stayed smiling but firm. He did not flinch or bend as his campaign's energy became a magnet for voters. On Tuesday, New York rewarded him for it.

SCRIPSI

'Insane people are always sure that they are fine. It is only the sane people who are willing to admit that they are crazy.'

NORA EPHRON

The state should choose its future today What Bihar wants

MANOJ KUMAR JHA

There is a peculiar ache that comes with belonging to a place that has been historically positioned as a supplier of resources, labour, and talent but rarely as a beneficiary of its own wealth, much less its own aspirations. Bihar knows this ache intimately. For decades, we have watched our sons and daughters, our fellow Biharis, board trains to distant lands, carrying dreams too large for a state that was never allowed to aspire for itself. We have seen, on the one hand, our minerals extracted, our produce harvested, and our artisanal skills marginalised while, on the other hand, the infrastructure crumbles and opportunities wither. This is not our destiny. This is a policy failure spanning generations.

The question before us, as Bihar goes to the polls today, is not only about choosing a government but also about the state's future. A quarter of a century into the 21st, it is more about choosing a future where development is not a favour — or shall I say *revdi*? — bestowed but a right claimed. The future of Bihar must be one where dignity is not up for negotiation but the birthright of every citizen. What we need today is a Bihar where *being* Bihari is not a joke or a stereotype but a badge of pride. For decades, this land has stood for talent, hard work, and resilience — yet the system has failed to recognise and nurture these strengths.

It is time for Bihar to reclaim both its image and its direction. As long as our youth are forced to leave their soil in search of employment, our politics remains incomplete. As long as a Bihari faces prejudice in other states, our society remains unjust. We must build a Bihar where development is not measured merely in numbers but reflected in people's dignity. And that, essentially, is the subterranean rhythm of this assembly election. If the outcome does not match the yearnings of an average Bihari, that would mean that we need to reboot our politics all over again.

Bihar's *per capita* income remains among the lowest in India, and employment is the primary reason Bihar's migrants leave the state. Bihar's unemployment rate, particularly among youth, remains significantly higher than the national average. The young people who should be building Bihar's future are instead being forced to build someone else's.

The social justice movement in Bihar gave voice to those who had been systematically silenced. The Mandal era ensured that Dalits, backward castes, and minorities could walk and speak in the corridors of power. But representation by itself is only half of the battle of social and economic justice. This is the fundamental question that worried B.R. Ambedkar on the eve of the country de-

Manoj Kumar Jha is a member of the Rajya Sabha. His recent book is *In Praise of Coalition Politics and other Essays on Indian Democracy*

Blind spot

■ Sir — It is regrettable that the world remains largely oblivious to the renewed genocide in Sudan. Thousands of people have reportedly been massacred by the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces after it took control of El-Fasher, the capital of North Darfur. The United Nations has confirmed that more than 460 people, including patients and their companions, were reportedly killed at the Saudi Maternity Hospital in El-Fasher. Human lives have no value for the RSF. Why is the world not as outraged as it was by what was happening in Gaza? The silence of the UN member countries on Sudan is inexplicable.

Kunal Kanti Konar, Calcutta

■ Sir — I used to think that the United Nations Security Council and the International Court of Justice had the authority to resolve global issues and civil wars. However, these institutions have no power. Their orders are not binding in any way. This is why they fail to alleviate the troubles of people like those in Gaza and Sudan.

Jang Bahadur Singh, Jamshedpur

Core idea

■ Sir — By placing consent at the core of its rape law, France has reaffirmed a fundamental truth: the absence of a 'yes' is in itself a 'no' ('No means no', Nov 5). India, however, continues to



Choose freedom

■ Sir — An article in *Vogue* asking whether having a boyfriend is now embarrassing has received an overwhelming response in the affirmative from women. This captures a strange, modern irony. Women were once expected to treat finding a man as the cornerstone of their lives. Now many view relationships with them as unpaid internships. The growing disinterest is not a rejection of love but a quiet refusal to tolerate mediocrity. Emotional labour without reciprocity is exhausting, and it seems women are finally done with it. The embarrassment at having a boyfriend comes from realising that many partnerships resemble caretaking more than companionship. If the choice lies between solitude and parenting an adult partner, the answer appears obvious.

Bidisha Das, Durgapur

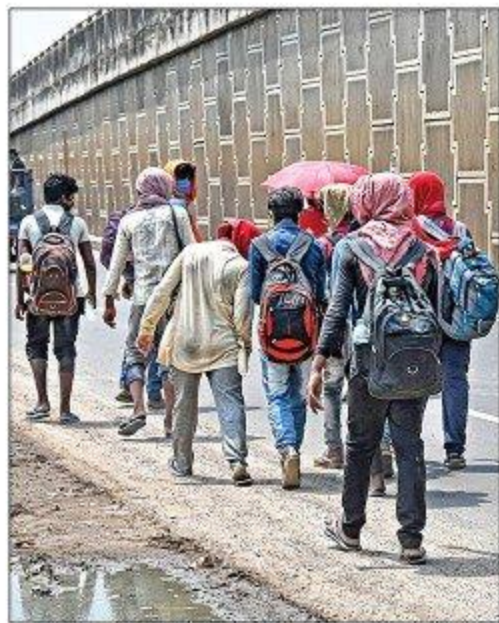
tether definitions of rape to the use of force and physical resistance to it, revealing a deeply regressive mindset. The marital rape exemption in the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita is also glaringly unjust. It denies women the right to their own bodies. Consent is not a marital clause or cultural courtesy; it is a universal right. India must reform its laws to reflect that in every relation-

ship, no means no, without any exceptions for anyone.

K. Chidanand Kumar, Bengaluru

Note the change

■ Sir — The article, "Offence & outrage" (Nov 3), by Sukanta Chaudhuri highlighted the fact that in spite of a recent surge in crimes against women in Bengal's



Left behind

clarifying itself a republic. Now, the gains of representation need to be supplemented with heavy investments.

Fair development means acknowledging that Bihar's agricultural economy needs urgent diversification. The primary sector accounts for a relatively small portion of the state's economic output, yet it employs more than half of its workforce. This mismatch between where people work and where economic value is generated creates a trap from which communities cannot escape through hard work alone. The social justice agenda succeeded in creating space. Now we must design, construct, and make that space not only habitable but also comfortable. This means we need functional public education institutions and healthcare facilities that ensure a qualified and healthy workforce; roads and a reliable power supply that can boost productivity; and support and incentives for the manufacturing and service sectors, which offer employment opportunities. At the centre of this transformation will be massive employment creation. Its multiplier effects will not only empower individuals but also strengthen communities and the state.

There is a dangerous seduction in grand visions that overlook mundane realities. Bihar does not need utopian promises. It needs functional schools and colleges, reliable electricity, clean drinking water, and accessible healthcare. The basics matter because they form the foundation on which everything else is built. Fixing the basics is not glamorous. It wins no awards, generates no headlines, and makes no one a visionary. But it is the difference between real development and performative governance.

Bihar's budget runs into lakhs of crores. But allocation is not implementation. The distance between budgetary line items and actual delivery is where development goes to gasp and die. This gap is not technical; it is a political one. It reflects choices about accountability, about who matters, about whose needs count.

There is a wholesale of hate going on at the ideological level, where grand narratives pit community against community and caste against caste. Then there

is the retailing of this hate: the everyday humiliations, the casual violence, the systematic exclusion that corrode social fabric. The connection between social harmony and economic prosperity is not theoretical. Development cannot take root and flourish in a soil of discord. Regions with higher social tensions consistently show lower economic performance. The wholesaling of hate serves political interests, but it destroys economic ones.

Every instance of caste-based discrimination, every act of communal violence, every moment of gendered harassment pushes Bihar further from the development it seeks. We need policies that address discrimination as the economic impediment it is. We need accountability for those who profit from division while our state continues to pay the price.

These days, there is no dearth of Bi-hari content on the internet. Young Bi-hari artists, musicians, and writers are on to something. They are reclaiming pride in the Bi-hari identity. The stereotype of the 'Bi-hari migrant' — hardworking but somehow lesser, ambitious but somehow crude — is being challenged through vibrant cultural production. Increasingly, the diaspora is also changing its relationship with home. Young people are embracing their Bi-hari identity in their work, art, and innovations. This matters because economic development without cultural dignity may just be hollow. And cultural pride without economic opportunity, as we all know too well, is very painful.

Elections are typically transactional. Votes are exchanged for promises, and promises are forgotten after victory. Bihar deserves better. We deserve a covenant: a sacred agreement that is future-oriented.

The voices from Bihar's villages and cities are clear: voters are prioritising employment, refusing to accept a future where their children must board trains to Mumbai, Delhi, or Punjab to earn a livelihood. Women voters, once considered passive recipients of welfare schemes, are now asking harder questions about inflation, healthcare delivery, and whether government programmes translate into actual dignity and safety. Across constituencies, voters are demanding not just promises but accountability, transparency, and the right to be treated as equal stakeholders in governance rather than beneficiaries of political favours. The widespread anger over voter roll deletions has crystallised a deeper frustration: that the most basic constitutional guarantee, the right to vote, can disappear without explanation, reflecting how the poor, migrant, and marginalised communities continue to be treated as disposable.

In this election, more than choosing representatives, we will be making a choice whether we accept the *status quo* or demand the development and the dignity we have earned through our resilience, our contributions to nation-building, and our patience through decades of being taken for granted.

hospitals, there seems to be no public anger of the kind that followed the rape and the murder of a doctor at the R.G. Kar Medical College and Hospital last year. This is perhaps due to the disillusionment after the failure of last year's movement. It is also concerning that during Mamata Banerjee's tenure as chief minister, there has been a pattern of dismissing or trivialising crimes against women. This is often coupled with attempts to protect the perpetrators, at times with links to the ruling party, or to cover up such incidents.

Kiran Agarwal, Calcutta

Age no bar

■ Sir — Rohan Bopanna is undeniably one of the greatest male tennis players in India ("Two decades on, Bopanna calls time on career", Nov 2). His retirement will leave a great void in Indian tennis. Bopanna has cited age — he is 45 years old — as the primary reason for his retirement. His career is a perfect example of perseverance. He attained the world



Rising above age

Strike a balance

GAUTAM CHAKRABORTI

Recently, an institution managing 150-year-old properties along the Hooghly unveiled a new tagline: "heritage-led development". The occasion was the leasing of the 19th-century Chote Lal Ki Ghat to a hotel conglomerate. Possibly coined by a social media team, the tagline revealed the yawning gap between slogan and substance.

The Hooghly's banks are not decorative peripheries but the amphitheatre where the city's destiny has long played out. They are among the world's great historic waterfronts — departure point for indentured labourers and the stage for the Bengali Renaissance. Yet today, the site is overshadowed by a leased-out building, a bar, and a café, its meaning drowned by loud music and the waft of alcohol.

There are more such dispiriting examples. A maritime museum is now a dumping ground; Kumortuli — a historic *ghat* — has been leased out to a politico-corporate behemoth; the Judges Ghat has been conserved recently after five years of sustained non-governmental effort — this shows that protection comes not by default but through struggle. Doric *ghats*, Palladian facades, Glasgow iron arches, warehouses fallen into neglect, illegally occupied, some crumbling, tell a moving story. Volunteers write blogs, organise festivals and photo walks, but their voices remain fragile against commercial appetite.

Beyond the riverfront, the pattern repeats. A report in this newspaper said that the 1854 relic that was part of the Chandernagore station was razed without notice despite the railways boasting a 'Heritage Committee'. Countless ancient temples, old houses, graves, godowns across Bengal remain abandoned. They could enrich heritage tourism but fade into obscurity because the state looks only where commercial returns glitter.

Marine ecology is severely ignored. The Hooghly faces rising seas, soil loosening at its bends, salinity, endangering marine species such as the Gangetic dolphin.

Gautam Chakraborti is former adviser, Security (and Heritage), Kolkata Port Trust

The historic Botanical Gardens is at risk of subsidence. Yet kiosks and cafés crowd the waterfront while ecological alarms go unheeded. In cities like Amsterdam or London, ecology and heritage are inseparable. In Calcutta, the river is asked to bear the load of commerce, recreation, and waste, but is rarely given care. The Durga Puja is heritage but the river which takes the brunt of immersion is not.

At UNESCO's World Heritage session in 2024, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had said: "Heritage is not only history, it is a shared consciousness of humanity," coining the slogan, "Vikas bhi, Virasat bhi". Noble words, but permissions, leases, and facades tell another story.

Kalighat shows the dilemma. A multi-crore renovation widened pavements and added a skywalk. Officials saw order; conservationists saw rupture in the shrine's centuries-old rhythm. In Kashi, corridors opened sightlines to the Ganga but erased *mohalla* textures; in Delhi, the Central Vista imposed a new monumental narrative. Each case shows redevelopment outrunning conservation's first principle — significance must be understood before intervention. By contrast, the United Kingdom's guidelines define conservation as "managing change in ways that best sustain significance".

What might this mean for Calcutta? Think precincts, not just monuments. Dalhousie Square, College Street, Bow Barracks, the Hooghly *ghats* — their value lies in rhythms of life as much as in facades. Reject the false choice between access and authenticity. Kiosks and plazas are not destructive in themselves, but when leasing drives design, the result is generic spectacle.

Citizen movements are showing the way: heritage walks, student mapping, petitions to save cemeteries. International practice shows that civic engagement is essential. Some reinventions prove that balance is possible. The Alipore Jail museum evokes memory while creating new meaning.

Development without heritage breeds placelessness; heritage without development risks neglect. The task is balance.

No. 1 ranking after winning his first major men's doubles title at the 2024 Australian Open with Matthew Ebden, becoming the oldest first-time No. 1 at the age of 43..

Jayanta Datta, Hooghly

■ Sir — Age really is just a number for Rohan Bopanna, who won his maiden men's doubles Grand Slam title in 2024 to become the oldest in the open era to do so. At an age when many of his contemporaries had retired, he was redefining athleticism, determination and perseverance. His achievement put him in the elite bracket of Martina Navratilova and Leander Paes who played professional tennis even after turning 40. Bopanna is a true role model for thousands of young kids in the country. Hopefully, India will find his successor soon from the tennis academies in the country.

Bal Govind, Noida

■ Sir — Senior players should realise when their time on the field is up and find a dignified way to step aside as Rohan Bopanna has done.

C.K. Subramaniam, Navi Mumbai

Another milestone

■ Sir — The successful launch of the navy's advanced communication satellite, GSAT-7R, marks another milestone for the Indian Space Research Organisation in its quest for self-reliance in space technology

("Bahubali" booster for ISRO satellite", Nov 3). This is the first time that ISRO has placed a communication satellite weighing over 4,000 kilogramme into a distant geosynchronous transfer orbit from Indian soil. So far, it had to rely on private space agencies from other countries for the launch of its heavier satellites. The focus of ISRO remains the Gaganyaan mission, which will eventually include crewed missions to space. ISRO is relying on its core strength of thinking big and smart.

Khokan Das, Calcutta



Milestone achieved

■ Sir — The launch of the GSAT-7R is yet another milestone for ISRO. This bodes well for future projects like the proposed manned space mission. One wishes the scientists at ISRO all the best.

K.R. Gagan, Tumkur, Karnataka

Letters should be sent to:
The Telegraph
6 Prafulla Sarkar Street,
Calcutta 700001
ttded@abp.in



XXCE

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Rahul's onslaught

Onus on EC to counter his 'vote chori' charge

A day before the first phase of the Bihar Assembly elections, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi turned the spotlight on the 2024 Haryana polls, in which his party had suffered a shock defeat at the hands of the ruling BJP. Citing electoral roll data to claim that as many as 25 lakh entries were fake, the Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha accused the Election Commission of India (ECI) of colluding with the BJP to ensure its victory. This is Rahul's biggest allegation of 'vote chori' so far — arguably his so-called H-bomb — and also his strongest attack on the ECI. Earlier this year, he claimed that such malpractices had taken place in Mahadevapura and Aland Assembly constituencies of Karnataka. His two-week-long Voter Adhikar Yatra in August was aimed at alerting Bihar's electorate about alleged attempts by the BJP and the ECI to steal votes through the Special Intensive Revision (SIR).

Rahul's claim about one out of every eight voters in Haryana being fake does strain credulity, but it's no doubt a serious charge that demands a thorough probe. He has tried to drive his point home by sharing the voter list of Haryana's Rai constituency, where the photo of a Brazilian model was used 22 times in 10 booths, with names such as Seema, Sweety and Saraswati. This indicates that there were some wrongdoings; whether these were on a small or large scale is the question.

Poll panel officials are wondering why the Congress' booth-level agents did not flag these irregularities at the time of the elections in October last year. That's a valid point, but it doesn't automatically give the clean chit to the ECI and the state electoral office. The authorities should counter Rahul's allegations with concrete evidence instead of harping on the 'why now' question. At stake is the sanctity of the poll process as well as the ECI's credibility. It's vital to safeguard public trust in the entire exercise, especially amid the nationwide SIR.

Zohran Mamdani

Historic win for New York & progressive politics

ZOHRAN Mamdani's election as mayor of New York City is historic, symbolic and emphatically local. At 34, he becomes the city's youngest mayor in over a century, its first Muslim mayor and first Indian-origin mayor. His grassroots campaign, built on rent freezes, free transit, universal childcare and higher taxes on the ultra-wealthy, reflects both voter frustration and a broader surge of progressive politics in urban America. At his victory rally, Mamdani invoked Jawaharlal Nehru's 'Tryst with Destiny' speech: "A moment comes, but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new... Tonight, New York has stepped out from the old into the new." The reference highlights his immigrant roots and progressive vision, resonating emotionally with Indian-origin communities worldwide while underscoring that the contest's stakes remain local.

Mamdani's win also illustrates the rising influence of minorities and young voters in US urban politics. His success against former governor Andrew Cuomo and Republican Curtis Liwa demonstrates the effectiveness of grassroots mobilisation and high voter turnout in reshaping city leadership. Yet his ambitious policy agenda faces practical hurdles: NYC's complex budget, entrenched bureaucracy and the need for council support will test whether his victory translates into tangible reforms.

Beyond heritage and ideology, this election is a reaffirmation of local democracy. While Mamdani's Indian connection and Nehru quote inspire diaspora pride, the measure of his leadership will be how he addresses housing, transit, education and inequality for the New Yorkers. The milestone reminds the world that urban elections carry global symbolism but remain grounded in local accountability. Even as Mamdani's achievement is celebrated and its historic significance noted, the locus of power remains in the city's Brooklyn, Queens and Manhattan localities, whose voters have decided to trust the future of their city in Mamdani.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 1925

The Khyber Railway

THE construction of the Khyber Railway is one of those projects that can be justified only by their results. It is one of the costliest railway schemes ever undertaken in India. For less than 28 miles of railway line, a sum of no less than Rs 2.50 crore has been spent, and it has taken the engineers no less than five years to construct the system. We don't have before us at the time of writing the figures for the other difficult railways in India, such as the Kalka-Simla Railway, The Darjeeling Himalayan Railway and the Assam-Bengal Railway, with which alone the new railway can be properly compared, but it is safe to assert that both in respect of the time and labour involved and the rate of expenditure per mile, the new railway easily beats most of its predecessors. It was perhaps for this reason as much as for any other that it became necessary for Sir Clement Hindley to dwell with particular emphasis on the arduous nature of the difficulties that had to be encountered in the construction, and the skill, energy and initiative that was needed to overcome them, adding somewhat significantly that "the finished work shows so little sign of the difficulties and anxieties which have been buried behind the lining of tunnels or beneath other structures." The question which the man in the street will naturally ask, however, is, has this expenditure of time, energy and money fulfilled its objects? Is it likely to do so in future? It is a pity that this is exactly the point in respect of which no data for an adequate judgment is afforded either in the two otherwise interesting speeches made on the occasion of the opening of the railway or in the Viceroy's message.



MANOJ JOSHI
DISTINGUISHED FELLOW,
OBSERVER RESEARCH FOUNDATION

THE recent meeting between US President Donald Trump and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping in South Korea has been judged as a draw/ceasefire/truce in the long-term competition between the two world powers. From a situation suggesting decoupling, the relationship seems to have taken a 180-degree pivot. This seems to be a consequence of China besting the US in its trade negotiations.

Trump termed the outcome of the meeting as scoring a hyperbolic 12 out of 10. US Secretary of War Pete Hegseth, who was in Kuala Lumpur for the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus, tweeted after he met his Chinese counterpart Admiral Dong Jun, "I just spoke to President Trump and we agree — the relationship between the US and China has never been better".

Having spoken to Admiral Dong twice in a day to restore ties between the US and Chinese militaries, he declared that the tone had been set by Trump's "historic G2 meeting" and ended by noting "God bless both China and the USA!"

He was echoing Trump's tweet posted hours earlier: "My G2 meeting with President Xi of China was a great one for both our countries. The meeting will lead to everlasting peace and success. God bless both China and the USA!"

Both sides have pulled back from some of their more dire threats and actions. Effectively, they have kicked the can down the road by making their deci-



TRUCE : Donald Trump and Xi Jinping have kicked the can down the road. REUTERS

sions valid for just the coming year. At another level, they seem to be trying to work out the framework in which G2, or a global US-China condominium, can operate.

In his official tweet on the Dong Jun meeting, Hegseth noted the importance of maintaining a balance of power in the Indo-Pacific and US concerns about Chinese activities in the South China Sea and Taiwan.

In the Phase I trade deal that China signed with the US during Trump's first term in 2020, Beijing was forced to make unilateral commitments to buy American products. But the current deal is all about give and take.

The US backed off from its new Entity List export restrictions in exchange for China doing so with its rare earths rules. The Entity List rule was unveiled on September 29, barring Chinese firms at least 50 per cent owned by previously sanctioned Chinese companies from receiving restricted US tech exports using subsidiaries. What it did was to effectively increase the number of Chinese firms on the Entity List from 1,400 to a massive 20,000.

The détente, which now seems to be verging on an entente, should not generate a false sense of security.

This had led China to use its *brahmastra* of rare earths on the eve of the Xi-Trump meeting. Under this rule, export controls would kick in even if 0.1 per cent of the product used Chinese rare earth processing technologies anywhere in the world. This virtually covered almost all smartphones, hard drives, TVs, motors and medical devices in the world.

The Chinese also agreed to resume soyabean purchase, much to the relief of Trump,

whose farmer support base was becoming increasingly restless over the Chinese decision not to buy American soyabean. The US suspended the implementation of measures under its Section 301 investigation targeting China's maritime logistic and ship-building industries for a year.

The US will now drop its overall tariff rate for China to 47 per cent. This is, in effect, where it was before Liberation Day, April 2. If we take the 20.7 per cent tariff that existed before Trump assumed office and add 10 per cent of the reduced fentanyl tariff, we are left with just 10 per cent additional tariff which was the baseline figure applicable to all.

Both sides have agreed to cooperate on the fentanyl issue, but there are other matters that need to be resolved, such as Chinese access to Nvidia chips and the ownership of TikTok. The Taiwan issue seems to have been side-stepped for the present.

A major reason for China's success has been tactics. While Beijing systematically prepared for a possible clash in the last few years, Trump led Wash-

ington to hit out recklessly on the tariff issue. Instead of targeting China alone, as it had done in 2020, the US sharply escalated the fight with China and hit the whole world with its Liberation Day tariffs, alienating friends and allies.

To an extent, this was also an underestimation of Chinese developments in recent years. There was a belief that the American economy, with the help of artificial intelligence (AI), had gained a decisive edge, while Covid-19 travails, economic slowdown, unemployment and military purges had weakened China.

The détente, which now seems to be verging on an entente, has brought a sense of relief around the world. A US-China implosion would have had consequences for the entire global economy. But the developments should not generate a false sense of security. Despite Trump's and Hegseth's effusive take on the China relationship, the reality is that there have been too many recent ups and downs to predict a stable future.

One thing is clear: the threatened decoupling of the Western and Chinese economies is not around the corner. The race now is for global leadership amidst some shaky guardrails between the G2. Here, while the US has been seeking ephemeral gains through tariffs, the Chinese are preparing for another future. Their latest five-year plan focuses on quantum technology, bio-manufacturing, hydrogen energy and nuclear fusion. China already leads in some of these fields, but the US remains ahead overall and has placed its current bets on AI.

The economic and geopolitical consequences of competitive US-China relations in these areas are hard to forecast. But they cannot be particularly comforting for countries like India that had counted on the US to maintain geopolitical heft against China.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

You'll never learn a thing from a competitor weaker than you. —Harvey Mackay

Number 52 is special for Sikhs

RAMAN KUMAR GROVER

THE number 52 has a special significance for the Sikhs. It symbolises divine completeness, spiritual wisdom and gender equality.

Guru Amar Das, the third Guru of the Sikhs, established 52 *Piris*, which were sub-centres for the social uplift and spiritual guidance of women. Headed by a preacher called 'Bibi ji', their aim was to propagate the teachings of Guru Nanak among womenfolk. A similar system, named Manji, was set up for men; it was headed by a devout Gurmukh.

The number appears in the *Pawan Baani*, named *Bawan Akhari*, composed by Guru Arjan Dev and Bhagat Kabir. It consists of 52 verses, and all 52 letters of the Gurmukhi alphabet have been used in it. It is found on *ang* (page) 250-262 and *ang* 340-343, respectively, in the Guru Granth Sahib.

The legacy of '52' was enriched by Guru Hargobind, the sixth Guru, who was deceitfully sent to the Gwalior jail, where 52 kings/princes were languishing and had no hope of being released. The Guru virtually turned the prison into a gurdwara to offer prayers.

This gesture made an impact on Mughal Emperor Jahangir, who ordered the Guru's release. The latter, however, said he would go out only when all prisoners were set free. Then, the emperor ordered that anyone who could hold the Guru's cloak could go out. The Guru got stitched a large robe (*chola*) with 52 tassels. With his blessings, all 52 prisoners came out of the jail by holding the *chola*. This compassionate act of the Guru earned him the title of *Bandi Chhor* (liberator of prisoners). The Sikhs celebrate this day as Bandi Chhor Divas, which coincides with Diwali.

The seventh Sikh master, Guru Har Rai, established 52 gardens at Kiratpur Sahib along with the famous Naulakha Bagh with rare plants and herbs. Medicinal herbs from the Bagh cured Dara Shikoh, son of Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan, from an illness caused possibly by poisoning.

This number attained greater glory when Guru Gobind Singh set up a court of 52 distinguished people at Anandpur Sahib; they were known as 'Bavanja Kavis'. This group included poets, scholars, writers and translators, who translated Vedas, Upanishads, the Mahabharata, the Ramayana and the Bhagavad Gita into Punjabi and Braj Bhasha.

The 52 *Hukamnamas* (edicts), which laid down a code of conduct for the Khalsa Panth, were issued at Sachkhand Sri Hazur Sahib in 1708 in Nanded (now in Maharashtra). Thus, this number continues to take pride of place in Sikh religion and culture.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Foundation of social justice

Apropos of 'In Guru Nanak's world, all were equal'; the Guru's insistence on equality — rejecting all notions of caste, creed and status — offers a solid foundation for social justice. His principles of *kirat karo* (earning an honest livelihood) and *vand chhako* (sharing one's earnings) are, essentially, an ancient blueprint for equitable economic distribution and sustainability, standing in stark contrast to the extreme wealth concentration we witness today. By speaking out against blind ritualism and narrow fanaticism, he championed rationality. His teachings are relevant today as societies worldwide grapple with misinformation, fundamentalism and the political weaponisation of religion and ethnic identity.

HARJINDER SINGH THANDI, MOHALI

An average New Yorker's pride

Apropos of 'Why Zohran Mamdani fights for the underdog in New York'; the young, charismatic and dynamic socialist with Leftist leanings has an agenda to 'better the lives' of the marginalised or those on a shoestring budget, living in the world's costliest city. His presence in the US political landscape is significant and a result of his wide interaction with the masses at a young age and his multi-ethnic roots. He is rudely passionate about what he says and has ready solutions for an average New Yorker's problems.

BM SINGH, AMRITSAR

Need better service delivery

Apropos of 'Glaring inequality'; in a free market economy, some people will always be more successful than others due to talent, luck, innovation, or other factors. The harmful effects often associated with inequality can be mitigated or avoided by making affordable healthcare and education accessible to the widest possible sections of society to enable them to reap fruits of this progress. This does not just require greater budgetary allocations but better service delivery through effective monitoring and regulation. In the past, efforts to reduce inequality through radical means have failed. If we are able to improve the standard of living for all economic strata, the negative impacts of the widening gap may become less significant.

CHANDER SHEKHAR DOGRA, JALANDHAR

Crony capitalism distorts markets

With reference to 'Glaring inequality'; the article captures the stark reality of our times — a world where the richest 1% hoard two-fifths of new wealth while the bottom half receive crumbs. India, too, mirrors this imbalance, with a 62% rise in the wealth of its richest in just two decades, even as the median income stagnates. The rise of dollar billionaires like Ambanis and Adanis, particularly in resource sectors like mining, oil and gas, reflects how crony capitalism distorts markets and deepens inequality. Amartya Sen has long argued that unchecked accumulation undermines both moral order and economic stability. Growth divorced from equity erodes social trust and weakens democracy.

HARSH PAWARIA, ROHTAK

Keep armed forces out

With reference to 'Rahul sparks row with army remark'; physical fitness is a key requirement for recruitment as jawans and officers. The Army is not like any other government service. The army's strength lies in its regimentation, traditions, customs, lofty standards and secular ethos. Political leaders should respect the army's autonomy and avoid actions and words that could be perceived as politicising the institution. The armed forces are a symbol of national unity, where individuals from diverse backgrounds come together to serve a common purpose. Focusing on merit, physical fitness and leadership qualities ensures that the best candidates are selected, regardless of their background.

CAPT AMAR JEET (RETD), KHARAR

No roundabouts in Master Plan

Refer to 'Why break rule for Tribune Chowk flyover, HC asks UT'; it's true that the proposed flyover runs contrary to the Master Plan. However, Le Corbusier's original Chandigarh Master Plan did not have any provision of roundabouts. Before 1970, there was no roundabout in the City Beautiful. The trend started with the first roundabout at the Sector 17/21 crossing. If roundabouts can be introduced to ease traffic woes, why not flyovers?

ASHOK KUMAR GOEL, PANCHKULA

The Centre has put on hold the overhaul of Panjab University, first reported by *The Tribune*, but the debate rages on

The genesis of reforms



ARUN GROVER
FORMER VC, PANJAB UNIVERSITY

A 15-MEMBER National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) committee that reviewed Panjab University (PU) in March 2015 had stressed the need for urgent reforms in the university's governance structure, particularly the procedure for appointing deans of faculties.

The committee noted that the governance framework, as laid down in the Panjab University Act (1947) and its statutes, had remained largely unchanged since Independence and needed revision to reflect present-day academic and administrative realities.

The PU Act (1947) was modelled on the Indian Universities Act (1904), which created a Senate comprising the Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, ex-officio Fellows and ordinary Fellows — elected by registered graduates and university faculties, or nominated by the Chancellor.

When this system was framed, PU had no departments or teaching staff. Fellows were assigned to multiple faculties across disciplines to manage academic work. Since each Senator typically had expertise in only one area, about 75 per cent of members in any faculty lacked specialised knowledge of that field.

To address this, the concept of 'Added-members' was introduced. Any two Senate members could nominate a college teacher or professional as an Added-member in their faculty. Later, professors and heads of university department were included as ex-officio members in their faculties.

By 1961, when the university moved to its present Chandigarh campus, there were 28 professors and heads of department as ex-officio members compared to 336 Senate members and 152 Added-members across 11 faculties. By 2015, the number of ex-officio members had increased to 233, while Senate members and Added-members stood at 356 and 185, respectively. The faculty constituency, which elected six Senators, soon became a convenient route for politically savvy individuals to retain their positions by manipulating faculty combinations and nominating Added-members.

Faculty members repeatedly highlighted these imbalances before the NAAC Committee. Acting on their feedback, the President of the Panjab University Teachers Association (PUTA), then a nominated Senator, submitted proposals on governance reforms on October 8, 2015.

Based on the Syndicate's recommendation, a

16-member Governance Reforms Committee (GRC) was set up on November 29, 2015, headed by a former chief justice of a high court. The GRC was tasked with exploring reforms through three sub-committees focusing on amendments to the PU Act, changes in statutes and regulations, and improvements through administrative delegation.

While the Senate elections for 2016-20 were held pending the GRC's report, PUTA continued to press for action. In September 2016, it wrote to the Union Home Minister seeking regulations to restrict multiple faculty choices and limit voting rights of Added-members in elections of Deans and Senators. Around the same time, the Punjab and Haryana High Court took up a suo motu public interest litigation (PIL) on governance and financial concerns at PU. The VC was directed to file an affidavit detailing corrective measures.

The sub-committees submitted their reports in June 2018, which were reviewed by the GRC and circulated among Syndicate and Senate members.

The recommendations were also submitted to the high court. In December 2019, the Chancellor's emissary visited Chandigarh for consultations before the 2020-24 Senate elections. However, the pandemic disrupted the process.

In February 2021, the Chancellor constituted another panel, chaired by the Central University of Punjab VC, including representatives from the UGC, MHRD, Punjab Government and UT Administration. The report was not made public or placed before the Senate.

Despite repeated efforts, neither the 2016-20 nor the 2021-24 Senate acted upon the GRC's 2018 recommendations. The Senate's term ended on October 31, 2024, and elections for 2024-28 were withheld by the Chancellor, reportedly because certain issues related to the previous election remained sub judice.

At present, the Senate comprises only the Chancellor and VC as members, with the Registrar as non-member Secretary. They appear to have finally taken cognisance of the reporting in the Chancellor's office since 2021. A recent Gazette notification has aligned PU's governance structure with that of other affiliating universities in Punjab.

The long-awaited reform is expected to ease the functioning of the VC's office, improve accountability, streamline decision-making and end conflict between executive authority and vested interests — marking a significant course correction for one of India's oldest and most prestigious universities.



The Tribune

TWO VIEWS

Autonomy Vs Control at Panjab University



DISAPPROVAL: Former Punjab CM Charanjit Singh Channi with student protesters. FILE

The future of higher education will be measured by the courage of its institutions to remain free.

The long-awaited reform is a significant course correction for one of India's oldest and most prestigious universities.

A blow to autonomy



SHELLEY WALIA
FORMER PROFESSOR, PU

FOR over a century, Panjab University has stood as a beacon of higher learning. Its Senate and Syndicate, established under the PU Act of 1947, embodied a model of collegial governance that safeguarded both autonomy and accountability. That legacy now faces a challenge.

The Gazette notification redefining the constitution of the Senate and Syndicate marks a break from the university's model of self-governance. The official rationale is that these bodies had become arenas of factionalism and patronage, where elections were driven less by vision than influence.

Reform was deemed essential. Yet, what has emerged is less reform than reconfiguration — one that risks converting an autonomous institution into a bureaucratic extension of the state.

The reconstituted Senate has a smaller membership and an altered composition.

While a measure of election remains, a large proportion of members will be nominated by the Chancellor or drawn ex officio from government or administrative offices. This shift from representation to nomination weakens the democratic principle.

The introduction of political representatives and civil servants tilts the scales toward hierarchy rather than deliberation. Professors, associate professors and principals, who are the main electorate, operate under the VC's authority. Structural dependence constrains their freedom to dissent. It is difficult to challenge authority when authority determines one's professional future.

The Syndicate, the university's executive body, similarly reflects bureaucratic dominance. Chaired by the VC, it includes government secretaries and directors alongside others nominated by the VC on the basis of seniority. In principle, seniority rewards experience; in practice, it often rewards compliance. The result is a concentration of authority

that blurs the line between administrative streamlining and academic control.

The question underlying this crisis is fundamental: what is a university meant to be? Traditionally, it is a self-governing community of scholars devoted to reasoned dialogue and the pursuit of truth — not an arm of the state nor a corporation. The new structure shifts the balance from autonomy toward control.

For all its imperfections, the earlier system sustained PU through Partition, political transitions and social change. It allowed a balance between state oversight and institutional independence. Under that framework, the PU built its reputation as a leading centre of learning, producing scholars who embodied both intellectual rigour and public responsibility. To abandon that legacy now would be to erase one of the last bastions of academic self-rule in the country.

Much will now depend on the VC's temperament and the Chancellor's commitment. If they approach their offices with respect for dialogue, the new structure might still function constructively. But if they yield to bureaucratic expediency, the democratic character will erode swiftly.

The Ministry of Higher Education's directive raises constitutional questions. What appears a routine administrative measure is, in truth, an encroachment on university autonomy and a troubling instance of centralisation. The Chancellor's powers under the 1947 Act are largely ceremonial; direct intervention in internal governance stretches constitutional propriety to its limits.

Panjab University is not a central institution but a creation of the Punjab Vidhan Sabha under the Panjab University Act of 1947. Any change to its governance requires the legislature's consent. By unilaterally altering its structure through ministerial notification, the Centre not only bypasses that requirement but also undermines India's federal character.

Equally damaging is the elimination of the graduates' constituency, a bridge between academia and civil society that allowed ordinary citizens and alumni to shape PU's moral direction. The new Senate may prove efficient in form but hollow in spirit.

The issue is about preserving the conditions under which thought can remain free. When universities are governed by fiat rather than consensus, scholarship becomes servitude and intellectual freedom is the next casualty.

If the Centre unilaterally redefines a state university's governance, it sets a precedent that threatens every public university. The future of higher education will be measured not by administrative efficiency but by the courage of its institutions to remain free.

AI sovereignty: The new frontier of digital power



ATANU BISWAS
PROFESSOR, INDIAN STATISTICAL INSTITUTE

AS the country prepares for the India AI Impact Summit 2026, it is important to note that AI sovereignty was a central issue at the Paris AI Action Summit held in February 2025. The concept of AI sovereignty primarily determines the direction of today's massive AI-related investments worldwide.

According to French philosopher Bernard Stiegler, an influential theorist of the digital age, to comprehend the world, it is necessary to go beyond the

conventional concept of technology. He said that "psychopolitics" — where media and technology have the ability to shape our minds and attention — defines the 21st century.

Stiegler contends that technology is a "pharmakon" — a poison and a cure at the same time — and that we must choose whether to let technology "use" us or to use it for "critical intensification" to reclaim our rational sovereignty from modern agencies that would take it away from us.

However, the early 21st century saw a reorientation of the concept of "tech sovereignty", mostly as a result of geopolitical conflicts and sanctions. Then, to avoid dependence on foreign powers, various countries began exerting control over digital infrastructure, data and AI. The 2018 trade war between Trump's first regime and China further stoked the demand for sovereign AI.

AI sovereignty is the ability of a nation or company to control its AI technologies to ensure national security, regulatory compliance and strategic autonomy. It entails avoiding reliance on foreign control points, maintaining sensitive data within a jurisdiction and developing and implementing AI systems within domestic frameworks. Thus, sovereign AI seeks to guarantee that AI is produced domestically, including the data that the AI uses for training, explores during research and produces as output. Thus, "data sovereignty" and "AI sovereignty" are linked. But sovereign AI ensures that AI conforms to their cultural, ethical and legal standards.

Nations today know the risks and benefits of GenAI and their potential impact on security and economic growth — eg by 2035, AI could boost India's economy by \$1.7 trillion.

According to a World Eco-



ISTOCK

AI sovereignty may prove to be an Achilles' heel for many middle-income countries today.

omic Forum article published in April 2024, the push for sovereign AI doesn't imply digital isolation but a push for strategic resilience, which can be carried out in tandem with international cooperation.

The path to sovereign AI is intricate and necessitates long-term strategic planning. Among examples of sovereign AI are a govt-funded AI model in Singapore which can communicate in 11 languages; ILMUchat in Malaysia, built by a local construction company; and Apertus in Switzerland. In India, in March 2024, the Union Cabinet approved the India AI Mission, where Rs 10,300 crore was allocated over five years with 38,000 GPUs deployed.

Jensen Huang, CEO of Nvidia, in 2024, said that "every country needs sovereign AI." Today, sovereign AI services are mostly provided by some US and Chinese tech giants and countries are compelled to

long-term reliance on them for infrastructure and chips.

These big companies are influencing the discourse on sovereign technology by essentially providing sovereignty as a service. Nvidia referred to the parts that make up this infra as "AI factories". It is installing infrastructure in many countries. Microsoft has contracts with the UAE, etc. Amazon Web Services provides an "AWS European Sovereign Cloud." Private businesses can also access sovereign clouds from Microsoft Azure and Google Cloud. And, different open-source and multilingual AIs have also been hailed as promoting digital and AI sovereignty.

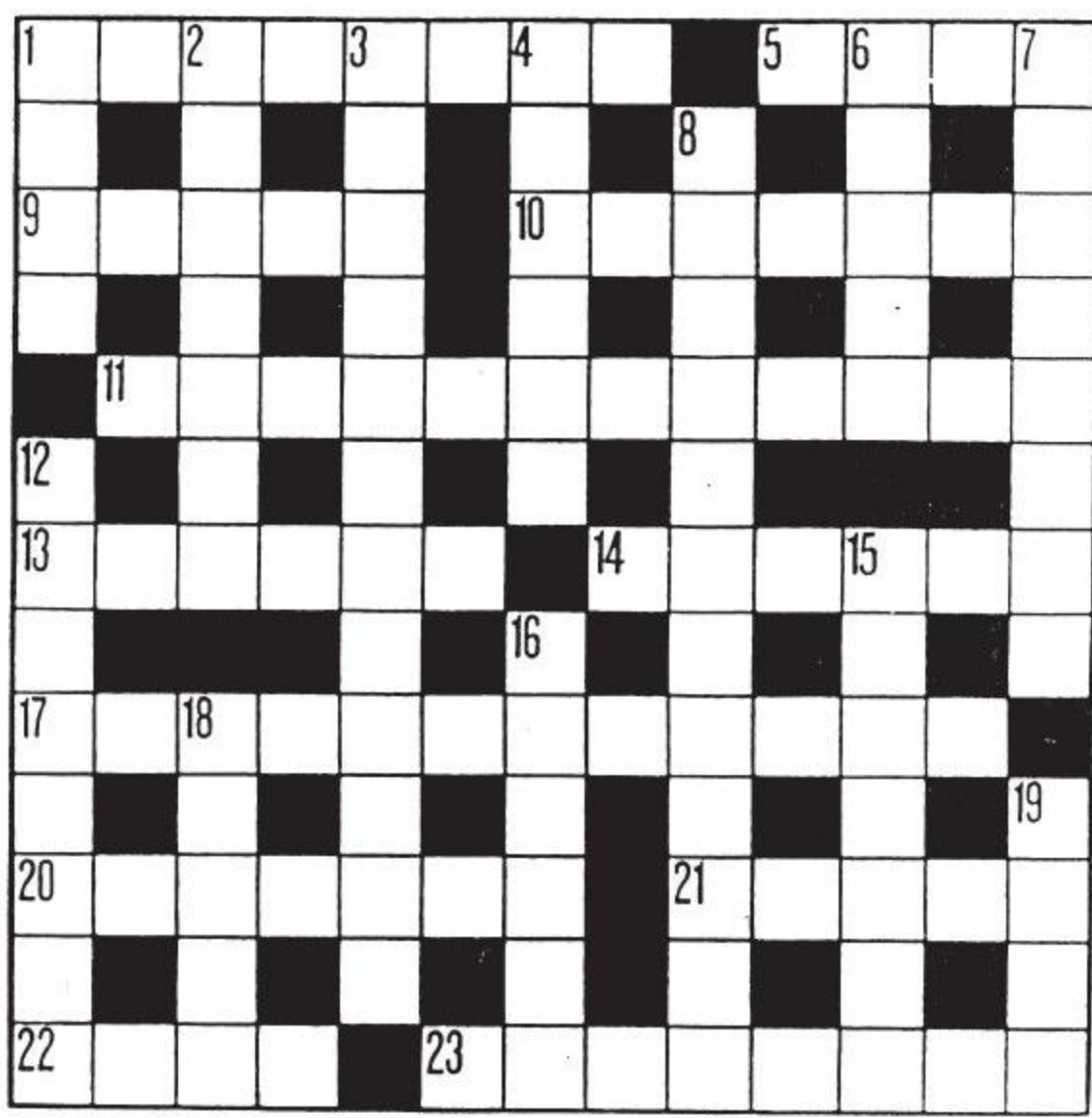
However, rhetoric soon emerged characterising such 'sovereignty as a service' as a contemporary form of colonialism. Laleh Khalili's article in the *London Review of Books* titled 'Collective Property, Pri-

vate Control' describes this.

Governments are compelled to spend billions, on their own "sovereign" AI technologies. There are also proposed alternatives. Researchers from the University of Cambridge's Bennett School for Public Policy have suggested a public AI firm that would be divided among a group of middle-income nations. In fact, open-source AI can be a "cornerstone of digital sovereignty", serving as the basis for "autonomy, innovation, and trust" in countries, according to Hugging Face, a firm based in New York.

AI sovereignty may prove to be the Achilles' heel for many middle-income countries. They must weigh their ability to make financial investments, economic return, data privacy and national security. In this AI era, it is an evolving dynamic where concepts of sovereignty are manifesting in engineering, tech and politics alike.

QUICK CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1 Firmly lodged (8)
- 5 Dense aggregation (4)
- 9 Relation by marriage (2-3)
- 10 Rude (7)
- 11 Up and running (3,3,6)
- 13 Firm opinion (6)
- 14 Sparing (6)
- 17 With a show of reluctance (5,7)
- 20 Permanent (7)
- 21 Moneylending at exorbitant rate (5)
- 22 Fencing sword (4)
- 23 Defect (8)

Yesterday's Solution

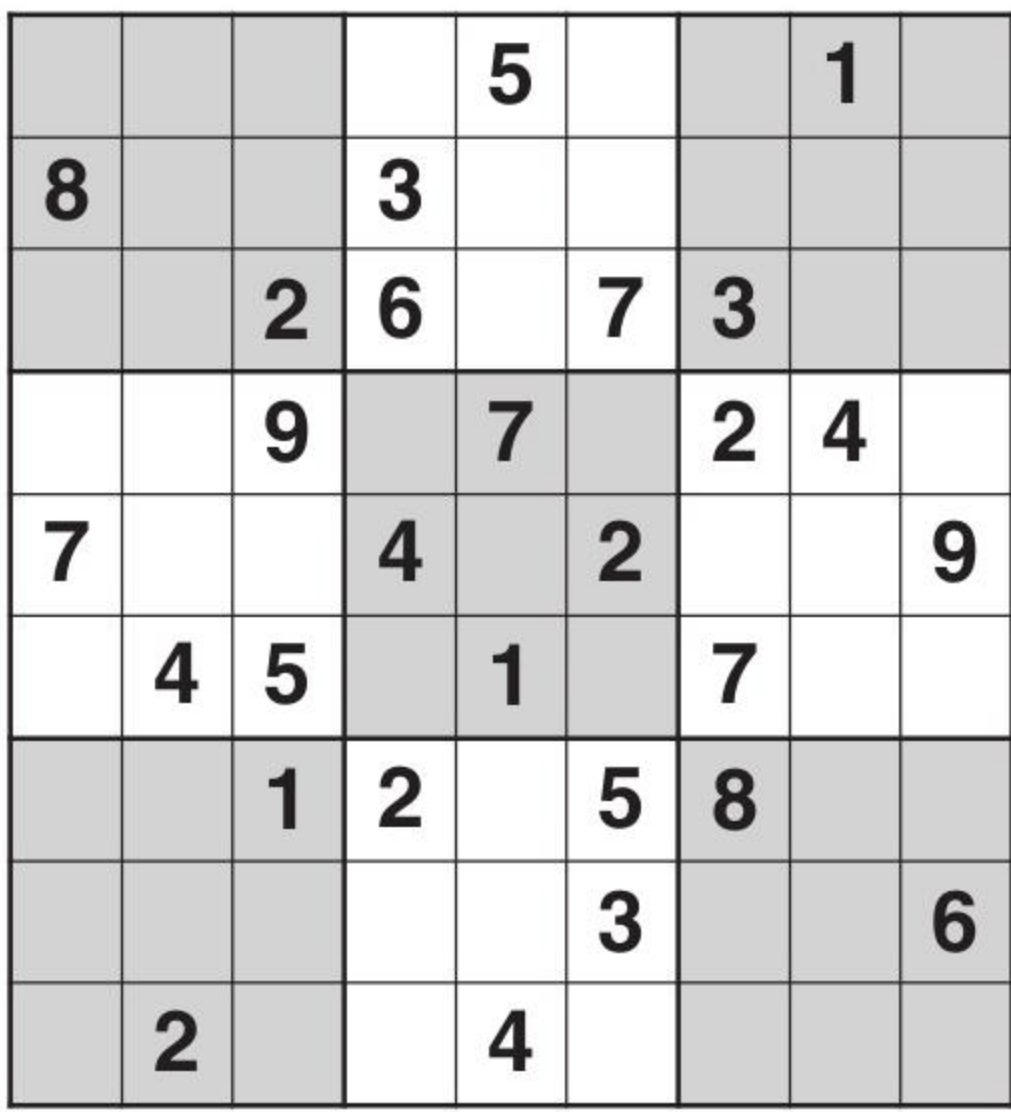
Across: 1 Full speed, 8 Rumba, 9 Bayonet, 10 Swerve, 11 Helium, 12 Bump into, 15 Deadbeat, 18 Excess, 20 Insult, 21 Minutes, 22 Stove, 23 Table talk.

Down: 2 Usage, 3 Look-in, 4 Preamble, 5 Draw up, 6 Imprint, 7 Bare bones, 11 Headfirst, 13 Material, 14 Passion, 16 Ballet, 17 Occult, 19 Shell.

DOWN

- 1 Large-scale and heroic (4)
- 2 Malignant (7)
- 3 Utterly wasted (4,3,5)
- 4 Token (6)
- 6 Valediction (5)
- 7 Plan of work (8)
- 8 Aghast (6-6)
- 12 Resisting persuasion (8)
- 15 Indicate by body language (7)
- 16 Capital of Czech Republic (6)
- 18 Compel (5)
- 19 Affirmative votes (4)

SU DO KU



MEDIUM

FORECAST

CITY	THURSDAY FRIDAY		17:33 HRS 06:38 HRS	
	MAX	MIN	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	28	14		
New Delhi	29	15		
Amritsar	26	13		
Bathinda	29	13		
Jalandhar	26	13		
Ludhiana	30	13		
Bhiwani	29	12		
Hisar	29	12		
Sirsa	29	12		
Dharamsala	21	11		
Manali	17	05		
Shimla	17	08		
Srinagar	23	04		
Jammu	29	16		
Kargil	13	0		
Leh	10	-02		
Dehradun	28	13		
Mussoorie	20	10		

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

3	6	9	4	2	5	7	1	8
5	8	1	3	7	9	4	2	6
7	2	4	6	1	8	5	9	3
2	5	8	1	3	6	9	4	7
1	3	7	9	8	4	2	6	5
4	9	6	7	5	2	3	8	1
8	4	5	2	6	7	1	3	9
9	7	3	8	4	1	6	5	2
6	1	2	5	9	3	8	7	4

CALENDAR

NOVEMBER 6, 2025, THURSDAY

■ Shaka Samvat	1947
■ Kartik Shaka	15
■ Kartik Parvishte	21
■ Hijari	1447
■ Krishna Paksha Tithi 1, up to 2:55 pm	
■ Vyatapata Yoga up to 7:05 am	
■ Vairyan Yoga up to 2:41 am	
■ Kritika Nakshatra up to 3:28 am	
■ Moon enters Taurus Sign 11:47 am	

DECCAN
Chronicle

6 NOVEMBER 2025

Zohran Mamdani’s win a boost for US Democrats

The electoral verdicts in the United States in the contest for the New York mayor’s post as well as the races for Governor in New Jersey and Virginia were a sharp rebuke to President Donald Trump’s second term. The election of Zohran Mamdani, a Democratic socialist immigrant candidate who is the very antithesis of him and who will be the first Muslim, first Indian-origin, man and first born in Africa to become mayor of the Big Apple is a slap in the face for Mr Trump who took greater interest in the New York poll.

To read too much into the wins, which came in largely Blue-leaning states, and project it as a solid comeback for the Democrats might be to leap to conclusions. The fact remains that Mr Trump’s actions and antics as President have not been universally popular. More of it may be at play next year when the midterms might see a tough battle for control of the Senate and the House of Representatives.

As Mr Trump argued, he was not on the ballot, but what happened in the polls may be a reflection of his authoritarian style of governance, his disdain for actions by the book of statutes and his upending all traditions and conventions in his pardoning people who defied the rule of law on January 6, his tariff tantrums and in the proven racially discriminatory treatment of immigrants. In short, it can be taken to be an early vote against Trump’s supremo style of governance.

The stunningly quick rise of Mr Mamdani, born in Uganda to a Muslim father in scholar Mahmood Mamdani and a Hindu mother in the accomplished film director Mira Nair and married to Rama Duwaj, an artist born in Texas to Syrian parents, to topple a political dynasty was owed solely to the Trump factor. His appeal to the most basic needs of the average citizens of New York like reasonable rent, free commutes, lower grocery prices and the restoration of power to the working class in a metropolis of very stark inequalities struck a chord with all as a massive number of voters turned up.

Quoting from Jawaharlal Nehru’s famous ‘Tryst with destiny’ midnight speech of 1947, Mr Mamdani, who was not afraid to flaunt his Indian heritage during the campaign, asserted that New York after his victory had “stepped out from the old into the new”. His victory is significant considering the influence that the Jewish lobby holds in the metropolis and how they may have had reason to fear his political advance though he had shunned claims of anti-Semitism and had indeed been calling for a safer, fairer, more inclusive New York.

The Democrats, too, might feel the tide is turning against Trump’s Republicans after the two Governorship triumphs, a trio of state Supreme Court victories and ballot measures from Colorado to Maine, besides a state proposition to redraw congressional districts in California. In choosing a progressive candidate in New York and in promising to improve the quality of life for the middle and lower classes, they had given themselves a better chance to overcome the defeat in the presidential race of 2024.

The Democratic campaigns had different playbooks in each of the poll states, but nowhere did they have to take on the President as directly as Mr Mamdani did after getting Mr Trump’s dander up in the audaciousness of his march to power as a young state assembly lawmaker seeking a higher executive office like that of the mayor of New York. He had even drawn a threat from Mr Trump to defund the city and, given his record, such a threat is real.

New refund rule to aid fliers

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation’s (DGCA) proposed guidelines on air ticket refunds will offer great relief to passengers, who have been at the receiving end with opaque refund policies, steep cancellation fees, delayed reimbursements and forced credit shells.

The draft Civil Aviation Requirements (CAR) issued by the aviation regulator seeks to address the crucial issues by establishing minimum standards of transparency, accountability and fairness across the aviation sector.

At the heart of the proposal is the introduction of a 48-hour “look-in” window, which allows passengers to cancel or modify their booking without any penalty. This measure acknowledges that people’s travel plans can change, and they should not be punished for reconsidering itineraries shortly after purchase.

In an attempt to protect the interests of airlines, the DGCA sought to exclude flights departing within five days (domestic) and 15 days (international) to prevent misuse of the look-in provision and affecting airlines’ operational planning.

The DGCA has also clarified that when even tickets are booked through travel agents, the responsibility for issuing the refund lies with the airline, as the agent is the representative of the airline. This removes a grey area which the airlines often used to escape accountability.

The proposal also mandates that airlines must clearly display cancellation charges upfront and caps these fees to prevent them from exceeding the basic fare plus fuel surcharge. These steps could put an end to the practice of airlines retaining nearly the entire ticket cost even when cancellations are made well in advance.

Despite proposing changes to the refund, the regulator has made it clear that it was forced to intervene to safeguard the interest of people after airlines failed to address passenger grievances satisfactorily. Unless the airlines arrive at a mutually beneficial business proposition that takes care of the interests of passengers as well, they cannot have long-term stability.

DECCAN CHRONICLE

KAUSHIK MITTER
Editor

K. SUBHAKAR
Printer & Publisher

DECCAN CHRONICLE offices are located at:

Hyderabad: 36, Sarojini Devi Road, Secunderabad - 500 003, Ph: 040-27803930-4; Fax: 040-27805256
Vijayawada: No.C-3 & 4 Patamata, Industrial Estate, Auto Nagar, Vijayawada (A.P.), Ph: 0866-2555284.

Visakhapatnam: Survey No.1/3A Beach Road, Near Kailasagiri Ropeway, Sector-9 MVP Colony, Visakhapatnam - 530 017 (A.P.), Ph: 0891-2552333/2552334; Fax: 0891-2755285

Rajahmundry: Vemagiri, Dhawaleswaram Rd, Rajahmundry, Ph: 0883-2417618/2417208; Telefax: 0883-2417208

Anantapur: Thapovan colony, Bangalore By-Pass Road, Anantapur - 515004, Ph: 08554-276903; Fax: 08554-276904

Karimnagar: H. No. 1-21-12/1, Cheralabhturk Road, Mugudhumpur Village, Karimnagar-505186, PH. NO. 9121181123.

Nellore: Survey No.527/2, Burrampur Village, Venkatachalam (M), Chennudugunta Panchayat, Nellore, Ph: 0861-2348581/82; Telefax: 0861-2348580

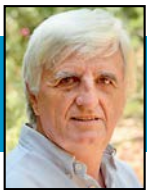
Chennai: SP-3 Developed Plot, Industrial Estate, Guindy, Chennai - 600 032, Ph: 044-22254747/ 48/50/51; Advt Fax: 22254765/22254766/42305325

Coimbatore: Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited, No. 2/22 Sengalipalayam Road, N.G.G.O Colony Post, Kurudampalayam village - 641 022

Subhani



Beijing’s missing generals:
What is Xi Jinping up to?



Claude Arpi

China is a strange country. It has the most sophisticated war gadgets, the largest number of ships and the latest technology for rockets and space warfare, but it has fewer and fewer generals. Who is going to lead the troops in case of a conflict? It is a valid question.

In the meantime, all sorts of rumours are floating around, most of which is fake news, though indicating the present climate in the People’s Liberation Army (PLA). Wanjun Xie, the New York-based chairman of China Democracy Party, an active student during the Tiananmen Square revolt in 1989, recently wrote: “It is reported that the announcement stating that Xi Jinping is no longer the chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC) has been issued to all military units at the brigade level and above throughout the entire army.”

A few days later, on September 17, Chairman Xi was seen in Beijing, when he met with representatives from various groups involved in organising the commemorations marking the 80th anniversary of the victory against the “Japanese aggression”.

But let’s go back a few weeks earlier.

On August 20, Xi Jinping, General Secretary of the Communist Party of China and CMC chairman, landed at Lhasa’s Gongkar airport to celebrate 60 years of the Tibet Autonomous Region. China watchers examined the composition of the large delegation accompanying Mr Xi from Beijing to decipher the visit.

Mr Xi was accompanied, among others, by Wang Huning, No. 4 in the party, Cai Qi, No. 5 and director of the General Office of the Central Committee, Li Ganjie, head of the United Front Work Department, and Gen. Zhang Shengmin, one of three remaining un-

formed CMC members.

Gen Zhang Youxia, the CMC vice-chairman, did not turn up, probably because he and Mr Xi have lately not seen eye to eye. One can assume that it is the difference of perceptions between the two leaders which has fuelled most of the recent wild rumours.

But there was more to be decoded. Lt Gen. Wang Haijiang, who since August 2021 has been commanding the Western Theatre Command, opposite India, was missing in action. Earlier, Gen. Wang had a long career in Tibet. Has he been purged? Also missing was Lt Gen. Wang Kai.

Another surprise for the watchers during the gala reception in the evening was Gen. Zhao Zongqi, the artisan of the Doklam confrontation (2017) and the East Ladakh Chinese intrusions in 2020, posturing, seated in full uniform in the row behind the top leader. Gen. Zhao retired from the PLA in December 2020; he was then serving as commander of the Western Theatre Command. In the past, Gen. Zhao had created havoc in Sino-Indian relations. So, why was he invited? Probably to show India that the border issue is far from being completely settled, despite the recent high-level meetings.

A friend, closing following the developments in China, told me: “Don’t worry, we will get more information on the absentee generals on September 3, during the grand parade.”

It was not to be the case. The *South China Morning Post* (SCMP) published a piece entitled: “Why were China’s generals missing in action during the Victory Day parade?”

The Hong Kong publication explained: “When Chi-

Lt Gen. Wang Haijiang, who since August 2021 has been commanding the Western Theatre Command, opposite India, was missing in action. Earlier, Gen. Wang had a long career in Tibet. Has he been purged? Also missing was Lt Gen. Wang Kai.

na held its first Victory Day military parade in 2015, more than 50 generals joined troops to march down Changan Avenue in central Beijing. The generals of all stripes led dozens of formations past the Tiananmen rostrum, saluting President Xi Jinping as the official announcer read out each commander’s name.”

Four years later, the same practice was followed. “The generals were also out in force for the National Day parade in 2019, giving observers a rare opportunity to see the PLA’s new generation of rising stars,” the SCMP said, and added: “[Such] events were also a valuable chance to learn who was in charge of each unit.”

While the names of 89 generals (including four full generals, two lieutenant-generals and 83 major-generals) leading 59 formations were announced for the September parade, none appeared on September 3.

Just before the start of the CPC’s fourth plenum on October 20, Senior Col. Zhang Xiaogang, spokesperson for China’s defence ministry, confirmed the dramatic changes: “With the approval of the Communist Party of China’s Central Committee and the Central Military Commission, the CMC’s Discipline Inspection Commission and Supervisory Commission have opened formal investigations into nine senior military officials.”

It included Politburo member and CMC vice-chairman He Weidong and CMC member and director of the political work department, Miao Hua. According to the spokesperson: “Investigations revealed that all nine officials had seriously violated Party discipline and were suspected of committing major duty-

related crimes involving extremely large sums of money.”

What is strange is that all nine had been promoted to three-star-generals by Xi Jinping himself, often jumping rank over senior generals.

More intriguingly, He Weidong, Miao Hua and Lin Xiangyang had previously served in the 31st Group Army, Mr Xi’s former power base in Fujian. Why would Mr Xi sack his own men? Has he lost control over the PLA?

It is a valid question, but still remains unanswered.

But this does not tell us if China can fight battles, in Taiwan or elsewhere, with revolving generals, who have a constant sword hanging over their heads.

Earlier this year, Joel Wuthnow, a senior research fellow in the Institute for National Strategic Studies at the US National Defence University, wrote an essay “Can Xi Jinping Control the PLA?” for the publication *China Leadership Monitor*.

While presuming that Xi Jinping is in control of the PLA, he noted: “The recent purges of senior Chinese military officers have renewed the question of how firmly in charge of the People’s Liberation Army is Xi Jinping.”

Mr Wuthnow’s conclusions were: “[Xi] has largely preserved a tradition of PLA autonomy relative to the party leadership, both to consolidate his own power... and to focus on its war-fighting missions... The scope of the dismissals has remained narrow.”

They may be relatively narrow, but they are significant; indeed, can an Army fight with a constant sword above the heads of its senior officers?

Will the energy and time of the generals be spent to preserve their future (and their heads) or can they seriously do war preparation planning. The answer seems obvious that they cannot.

Claude Arpi is Distinguished Fellow at the Centre of Excellence for Himalayan Studies, Shiv Nadar Institution of Eminence (Delhi), and writes on India, China, Tibet and Indo-French relations

LETTERS

SOPS IN BIHAR

Tejashwi Yadav, the CM candidate in the ensuing Bihar elections has promised a dole of ₹30K for all women in the state, free electricity for farmers, ₹300 per quintal of rice and ₹400 for wheat as bonus over the MSP if I.N.D.I.A bloc comes to power (*Tejashwi: Women will get ₹30K dole, Nov. 5*). This is but corruption in the state. Hope the ECI, ED and the CBI are watching.

Shivane Datta
Hyderabad

If it is a hung Assembly after the result then horse trading will take place and people who voted for a particular candidate will switch to another party. A huge amount of money is being spent as sops. The EC should monitor these aspects.

Lal Melwani
Hyderabad

ORPHANED GIRLS

The Chevella bus accident is a great blow and an irreparable loss to the victims of the bereaved families (*Orphaned by Chevella bus crash, girls unable to speak, Nov. 5*). It is hard for the orphaned girls to fend for themselves. The Telangana government must provide them with monthly fiscal relief apart from ex gratia and compensation.

Zubair Khan
Hyderabad

EDUCATED DUPED

How can educated people fall for such traps? (*Woman looks for marriage duped of 48.5 L by fraudster, Nov. 5*). Education means nothing if you can’t spot a fraud.

Muneer M.S.
Hyderabad

GOPICHAND HINDUJA

The passing of Gopichand P. Hinduja marks the end of an era in Indian and global business (*Gopichand Hinduja passes away after prolonged illness, Nov. 5*). As chairman of the Hinduja Group, he combined enterprise with ethics and built one of the world’s most respected conglomerates. His leadership of ventures like Ashok Leyland and Gulf Oil reflected his vision for industrial growth rooted in integrity. His philanthropic work and efforts to strengthen India-UK relations earned him wide admiration. His legacy will continue to inspire generations.

Nagarajamani M.V.
Hyderabad

Email your letters to
info@deccanmail.com,
editor@deccanmail.com.

Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu



IPS glass ceiling
in paramilitary
forces shattered
by SC decision

For years, officers within India’s Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) have quietly seethed at the glass ceiling above them; one made not of merit, but of deputation. Top posts in CRPF, BSF, CISF and other forces were long dominated by Indian Police Service (IPS) officers parachuted in from state cadres, while equally capable insiders watched their career graphs stagnate.

The Supreme Court’s latest refusal to review its May 2025 ruling, which ordered a phased, two-year reduction of IPS deputations to CAPFs, is more than a bureaucratic adjustment. It’s a long-overdue course correction. The court’s message to the ministry of home affairs (MHA) is unambiguous: Build institutions, not dependencies.

The ruling recognises CAPFs as Organised Group-A Services, giving their officers long-denied perks like non-functional financial upgrade and structured career progression. More importantly, it restores dignity to their leadership ranks. These are men and women who’ve spent decades in border zones and Maoist belts rather than conference rooms in state secretariats.

Of course, the MHA’s reluctance to let go is understandable. Old hierarchies die hard, and the IPS lobby is nothing if not resilient. But with the review petition now dismissed, it’s time for the ministry to stop sulking and start implementing.

The paramilitary forces have earned their autonomy.

NORTH BLOCK’S MISSING SIGNATURE

It’s been four months since Ajay Seth moved from North Block to IRDAI, and India still doesn’t have a finance secretary. For a ministry that drives everything from taxation to reform, that’s like flying without a pilot. Six powerful departments — revenue, expenditure, economic affairs, financial services, public enterprises, and DIPAM — are running solo, while the one person meant to keep them in sync is missing in action.

Cabinet secretary T.V. Somanathan is said to be doubling up, but that’s hardly ideal. With the Budget season fast approaching, the gap isn’t just procedural, but perilous. The finance secretary isn’t just a post; it’s the ministry’s nerve centre, the one that ensures coordination, discipline, and policy coherence across the board.

Without that anchor, inter-departmental drift is inevitable. Each arm starts chasing its own agenda, and before long, the ministry begins to sound like an orchestra without a conductor: busy, but off-key.

There’s also the matter of perception. Markets, rating agencies, and global institutions read such silences closely. The absence of a clear fiscal leader suggests indecision at the top, not confi-

dence. The finance ministry may still function, but without its designated head, India’s fiscal ship risks looking adrift — just when steady hands are most needed.

Time someone picked up that one-rupee note and signed it!

INDIA’S BABUDOM NEEDS A HARD RESET

A post on social media about a Rajasthan officer’s spouse reportedly earning ₹37.54 lakh from private firms without any record of work done has once again exposed the rot beneath India’s bureaucratic polish. We like to talk about “efficient administration” and “good governance,” but the reality often looks more like a private club where privilege trumps principle and accountability is just a decorative word in annual reports.

What’s alarming is not just the incident itself, it’s how unsurprising it feels. When those close to public office can pocket hefty sums from private players without raising red flags, it shows how blurred the lines between duty and indulgence have become. Babus were meant to serve the people, not be served by corporate patronage. Yet, the system’s moral compass seems to have gone conveniently magnetic, always pointing towards power and influence.

Transparency, meanwhile, remains a selective

exercise. Probes are announced with much fanfare, reports leak in dribbles, and the conclusions, if they ever come, rarely shake the walls of entitlement. We hear endless chatter about digitisation, e-governance, and accountability dashboards, but the reality behind closed doors is a culture that quietly rewards silence and complicity.

For the many honest officers who still take their oath seriously, such episodes are more than just embarrassing; they’re demoralising. When shortcuts and “contacts” yield faster dividends than merit or efficiency, what message does that send to those trying to play by the book?

The reputational damage is immense. India wants to project itself as a place of clean governance and ease of doing business, but that narrative crumbles when bureaucratic power is seen as transactional. The world notices. Investors notice. Citizens notice.

The Rajasthan episode is just a symptom; the disease runs deeper. If governance wants to match our aspirations, it needs to move beyond slogans and ceremonies to real accountability.

Love them, hate them ignore them at national peril, is the babu guarantee and Dilip’s belief. Share significant babu escapades dilipcherian@hotmail.com.

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	83,459.15	-0.62
Nifty 50	25,597.65	-0.64
S&P 500*	6,772.34	0.012
Dollar (₹)	88.66	-0.14
Pound Sterling (₹)	115.63	-0.14
Euro (₹)	101.96	0.00
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	120,286.489	0.41
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	64.12	-0.50
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.530	0.03
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.081	-0.01

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Grasim posts 52% rise in net profit to ₹1,498 crore

Grasim Industries on Wednesday reported a 52.4 per cent rise in its net profit to ₹1,498.04 crore for September quarter of FY26 from ₹982.94 crore for same quarter a year ago, supported by a higher profitability in cement and chemical businesses. Grasim's revenue from operations increased 16.6 per cent to ₹39,899.5 crore in second quarter of FY26 against ₹34,222.50 crore in corresponding quarter a year before.

Sun Pharma sees net profit rise 2.5% to ₹3,118 cr

Sun Pharmaceutical Industries posted a 2.56 per cent increase in its consolidated net profit to ₹3,118 crore for the second quarter of FY26 from ₹3,040 crore for same period of previous year, aided by robust sales in India and emerging markets. Its revenue from operations increased to ₹14,405 crore in September quarter against ₹13,264 crore in year-ago period, Sun Pharma said.



One 97 to use Groq for building new AI models

Fintech firm One 97 Communications, which owns Paytm brand, will deploy Groq AI technology to build high-performance AI models that enhance transaction processing, risk assessment, fraud detection, and customer engagement across its platform. Founded by a former Google engineer, Jonathan Ross, US-based Groq specialises in ultra-fast artificial intelligence (AI) chips called language processing units.

M3M India to invest ₹7,200 cr in township

Realty firm M3M India on Wednesday said it will invest ₹7,200 crore to develop a 150-acre integrated township in Gurugram as part of its expansion plan. The company said it has launched the township project 'Gurgaon International City' (GIC), spread across 150 acres. "The company will invest about ₹7,200 crore in development, which is expected to generate a topline of around ₹12,000 crore," M3M said.

Printed & Published by K. Sudhakar on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited, Printed at Deccan Chronicle Press at Deccan Chronicle Holdings Ltd. #563/9/D&9/E, Behind Andhra Bank Pet Basheerbagh, Kompally, Ranga Reddy Dist. Editor: Kaushik Mitter, RNI Reg No.APENG/2008/24282. © All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission of The Editor, Financial Chronicle ® is prohibited.

Govt to foster innovation, regulate AI when needed

Framework outlines compliance for developers, industry, regulators

FC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, NOV. 5

Government wants to leverage AI to make sure that it delivers the maximum benefit for the people of the country. In this direction, its current focus is on innovation in AI space and it will introduce regulation or legislation when required, said S Krishnan, secretary, MeitY on Wednesday.

"There is a lot of play for innovation in the AI space. Having said that, let me again assert that if the need arises for legislation or regulation, the government will not be found wanting," Krishnan said at the release of IndiaAI governance guidelines report submitted to the government by a sub-committee under the IndiaAI Mission.

The national framework aims at ensuring that artificial intelligence is developed and deployed in a safe, responsible and inclusive manner across sectors. The guidelines form a core component of the Government's IndiaAI Mission, which is focused on accelerating innovation while safeguarding users and society.

The framework outlines guiding principles for ethical AI, key recommenda-

STRONG PILLARS

PEOPLE FIRST

INNOVATION OVER RESTRAINT

TRUST IS FOUNDATION

FAIRNESS AND EQUITY

ACCOUNTABILITY

UNDERSTANDABLE BY DESIGN

SAFETY, RESILIENCE & SUSTAINABILITY

AT THE HEART of it all is human-centricity - ensuring AI serves humanity and benefits people's lives.

— S. KRISHNAN, secretary, MeitY

tions across governance pillars, and compliance measures for developers, the industry and regulators.

These are aimed at ensuring transparency, accountability and safety in AI rollouts at scale.

"Our focus remains on using existing legislation wherever possible. At the heart of it all is human-centricity, ensuring AI serves humanity and benefits people's lives while addressing potential harms," said Krishnan.

Ajay Kumar Sood, principal scientific adviser, said the guiding philosophy of the framework is 'Do no harm'. The approach, he noted, prioritises innovation sandboxes and a flexible system that mitigates risks as technologies evolve.

In the preface to the report, Krishnan highlighted that India's success with digital public infrastructure — including Aadhaar, UPI and DigiLocker — has shown how technology can drive

inclusive development. As AI becomes the next engine for public services such as healthcare and citizen interfaces like Bhashini, he said.

The mission is investing in expanding national graphics processing unit (GPU) capacity, a unified data-sharing platform, and skill development to ensure artificial intelligence is accessible to researchers, students and startups. In this journey, major focus will be on safety and trust.



STIGLITZ REPORT FLAGS INEQUALITY IN WEALTH CREATION

SANGEETHA G. CHENNAI, NOV. 5

The top 1 per cent have grown their share of wealth by 62 per cent between 2000 and 2024, increasing the economic inequality in the country, finds a study by G20.

During the same period, the world's top 1 per cent captured 41 per cent of all new wealth, while just 1 per cent went to the bottom 50 per cent.

Between 2000 and 2023, the richest 1 per cent increased their share of the wealth in over half of all countries, which contain 74 per cent of the global population. In India, the top 1 per cent have grown their share of wealth by 62 per cent over this period, a G20 committee chaired by Nobel Prize-winning economist Professor Joseph Stiglitz said in its report.

The richest 1 per cent captured 41 per cent of new wealth since the year 2000, while the bottom 50 per cent of humanity have increased their wealth by just 1 per cent, it said.

The richest 1 per cent has seen their average wealth rise by \$1.3 million, while the bottom 50 per cent have seen their wealth rise by just \$585 over the same period, the study finds.

India set to slash direct imports of Russian oil as deadline nears

FC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, NOV. 5

Refiners in India are set to reduce direct imports of Russian crude from late November, following US sanctions on Rosneft and Lukoil, effective Nov. 21.

Indian refiners, accounting for more than half of the country's import of Russian crude oil, are expected to comply with the latest sanctions on Moscow's two largest oil exporters, PTI reported.

The reduction will trigger a decline in Russian arrivals in December.

Even as the buying of Russian oil by India would reduce, a swift and complete replacement remained highly unlikely, Kpler had said in a report earlier. Companies like

ENERGY DRIVE

- Top importer Reliance Industries to stop buying Russian oil.
- Nayara Energy's Vadinar refinery likely to maintain Russian crude intake.
- Indian refiners to increase procurement from Middle East, Latin America, US
- Indian refiners account for more than half of country's import of Russian crude oil.

Reliance, which are under term contracts with the sanctioned Russian producers, are likely to resume heavy buying once the supply chain is rearranged, the report had said.

As per reports, Indian refiners are reviewing the bills of lading for Russian oil cargoes arriving after the wind-down period

ends on November 21.

At the same time, the refiners in India are expected to assess risks on dealings with sanctioned Russian firms while waiting for clarifications from the government, as the decision on whether to continue taking the Russian barrels could extend beyond economic considerations.

Amazon sues Perplexity AI over agentic shopping feature

Seattle, Nov. 5: Amazon.com is suing Perplexity AI to try and stop the start-up from helping users buy items on the world's largest online marketplace, setting up a showdown that may have implications for the reach of so-called agentic artificial intelligence (AI).

The online retailer filed a lawsuit demanding Perplexity stop allowing its AI browser agent, Comet, to make purchases online for users. The e-commerce giant is accus-

ing Perplexity of committing computer fraud by failing to disclose when Comet is shopping on a real person's behalf, in violation of Amazon's terms of service, according to complaint in US court.

The clash between Amazon and Perplexity offers an early glimpse into a looming debate over how to handle the proliferation of so-called AI agents that field more complex tasks online for users, including shopping. — Bloomberg



WEF: Financial mkts may see crypto, AI, debt bubbles

Sao Paulo, Nov. 5: The world should watch out for three possible bubbles in financial markets, including artificial intelligence (AI), the head of the World Economic Forum (WEF) said on Wednesday, in comments that came amid sharp falls in global technology stocks.

Analysts say the falls are a cause for caution but not panic as markets have been touching record highs and some valuations are looking overblown.

"We could possibly see bubbles moving forward. One is a crypto bubble,

second an AI bubble, and the third would be a debt bubble," WEF president Borge Brende said.

Governments have not been so heavily indebted since 1945, he added. Markets have for months shrugged off concerns over elevated interest rates, stubborn inflation and trade turmoil, pushing higher partly on expectations that AI could transform prospects for global economy and businesses.

AI offers the possibility

of big productivity gains but could also threaten many white collar jobs, said Brende.

"There is a rust belt in those big cities that have a lot of back offices with white-collar workers that can more easily be replaced by this AI," he said.

"We also know from history that technological changes over time lead to increased productivity, and productivity is the only way over time to increase prosperity," Brende added. — Reuters



INDIA, U.S. BILATERAL TRADE DEAL TALKS CONTINUING: GOYAL

Auckland, Nov. 5: Commerce and industry minister Piyush Goyal on Wednesday said India and the US are holding continuous discussions for the proposed bilateral trade agreement.

"Talks are going well and are continuously going on. There are many sensitive issues, many serious issues, so it is natural that it will take time," he told reporters here.

Goyal is here on a four-day official visit. He is leading a business delegation. Five rounds of talks have been completed so far for the first phase of the bilateral trade agreement between the US and India.

He also said that significant progress has been made in the negotiations of the proposed trade agreement with New Zealand.

The fourth round of negotiations is underway here for a pact between senior officials of India and New Zealand.

"India never compromises on the interests of dairy, farmers and MSMEs. We consistently protect the interests of vulnerable sectors," Goyal told reporters.

The remarks are important as New Zealand is a major dairy player in the world, and it may seek greater market access in the sector. — PTI

Rising gold price causes ₹93,284-cr loss in govt bonds

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, NOV. 5

Launched to wean people away from physical gold and reduce imports, the Sovereign Gold Bonds (SGBs) have led to a capital loss of ₹93,284 cr (excl interest payments) to the government based on the latest redemption price of ₹12,704 announced for 2017-18 Series IV as gold prices soared.

The government had started issuing SGBs in November 2015 and did 67 tranches with the last one being in February 2024.

As of Oct. 23, outstanding SGBs stood at 125.3 tonnes. At the ₹12,704 redemption price, the cost to the government would be ₹1.59 lakh cr. The price at issue amounts to about ₹65,885 cr. Thus government is losing about ₹93,284 crore due to increase in gold price.

When the RBI started issuing gold bonds in November 2015, the price was around ₹25,000/10 grams while the current price stands at ₹1.29 lakh per 10 grams.

Investors of SGBs have made phenomenal returns. For instance, the SGB 2017-18 Series IV rewarded investors with an absolute return of 325 per cent in eight years. Additionally, investors earned an annual interest of 2.5 per cent. Similarly, the 2018-19 series has given over 300 per cent return, 2019-20 offered over 200 per cent return.

The year to date price of gold has increased over 50

COST MATTERS

GOLD IMPORTS increased around 31% in FY24 and 27% in FY25.

HIGHER PRICES

reduced gold imports by 9% to \$26.5 bn in Apr-Sept. of FY26 from \$29 bn during same period in FY25.

RBI GOLD reserves rises to around 880 tonnes in 2025.

RECENT DISCOVERIES

of new gold mines in Deogarh, Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj districts of Odisha, Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh and Kurnool in Andhra Pradesh to ease on imports.

per cent in 2025.

A report by SBI Research, titled 'Coming of (a turbulent) Age: The great global gold rush,' said that the total consumer demand increased to 802.8 tonnes in 2024, which is 26 per cent of the global gold demand putting India at second rank, next just to China, with consumer demand of 815.4 tonnes.

Assets under management in gold ETFs jumping 165 per cent year-on-year, reaching ₹90,136 crore in September 2025. Inflows into gold ETFs have grown 2.6 times in FY26 versus FY25. Similarly, gold-backed lending by banks has soared to ₹3.06 lakh crore by March 2025.

PM E-DRIVE SCHEME DEPLOYS 10,900 E- BUSES IN 5 CITIES

SANGEETHA G. CHENNAI, NOV. 5

Under the PM electric drive revolution in innovative vehicle enhancement (PM E-DRIVE) scheme, 10,900 electric buses have been deployed in five cities.

Post FAME-II scheme expiry, the government introduced PM E-DRIVE scheme in FY25 with an outlay of ₹10,900 crore for the deployment of e-buses and establishment of charging infrastructure.

The scheme subsidises up to ₹10,000/kWh, which is capped at ₹35 lakh on the purchase of electric buses for state transport undertakings (STUs).

In initial phase, of total e-buses 41 per cent sent given to Bangalore, 25.69 per cent to Delhi, 18.35 per cent to Hyderabad, 9.17 per cent Ahmedabad and 5.5 per cent to Surat.

At present, e-bus deployment is largely confined to a few cities such as Delhi, Mumbai. The government plans to expand e-bus presence in tier-2 and tier-3 cities gradually.

The top five OEMs jointly hold an order book of over 25,000 e-buses to be delivered in next two years. However, deliveries have been slower than expected, primarily due to supply chain bottlenecks, including dependence on imports of components.

FC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, NOV. 5

Public sector banks (PSBs) posted a cumulative profit of ₹49,456 crore in the Sept. quarter, which is nine per cent more than ₹45,547 cr profit made by all 12 PSBs in same quarter last fiscal. It was ₹44,218 cr in June quarter.

SBI contributed about ₹21,500. Indian Overseas Bank reported net profit of ₹1,226 crore. Central Bank of India net profit was ₹1,213 crore.

During the quarter, Bank of Baroda posted

net profit of ₹4,809 crore. It is eight per cent lower than ₹5,238 cr it had the year-ago period. Union Bank of India saw a net profit of ₹4,249 cr, a 10 per cent decline.

Bank of Maharashtra and Punjab & Sind Bank reported a 23 per cent rise in profit, while Canara Bank, Punjab National Bank and Indian Bank posted 19 per cent, 14 per cent and 12 per cent, respectively.

Bank of India saw eighth per cent growth in net profit and UCO Bank posted three per cent rise.

Toyota, Honda, Suzuki spending big on India mkt

Tokyo, Nov. 5: Toyota, Honda and Suzuki are spending billions of dollars to build new cars and factories in India, a sign of the country's growing importance as a manufacturing hub as Japanese automakers redraw global supply chains to reduce dependence on China.

Toyota, the world's largest carmaker, and Suzuki, the leader in Indian market with almost a 40 per cent share, have separately announced investments totalling \$11 billion to beef up manufacturing and exports in world's third-largest auto market.

Honda also said it will



make India a production and export base for one of its planned electric cars.

India's low costs and vast labour pool have long been an attraction for manufacturers.

Now, Japanese automakers are stepping up operations as they pivot away from China, both as a market and a manufactur-

ing base, multiple industry executives said.

Another benefit: India remains all but closed to Chinese EVs, so Japan's carmakers - at least for now - won't face bruising competition from BYD and others there.

Other draws include the improved quality of local manufactured goods, and incentives from government, executives say.

Japan's annual direct investment in Indian transport sector, which includes automakers, jumped more than sevenfold between 2021 and 2024, hitting 294 billion yen (\$2 billion) last year. — Reuters

Shareholders will vote on paying CEO \$878 bn in stock

Tesla AGM to decide on Musk's pay

Los Angeles, Nov. 5: Tesla's board of directors has pushed in all its chips on Elon Musk. Now investors must decide whether to back the biggest bet in company history.

Shareholders will vote on stark choice presented by the board: pay Musk up to \$878 billion in company stock or take the risk he will leave - potentially driving down the company's stock. The decision, experts say, amounts to a referendum on whether traditional corporate-governance rules apply to the world's richest man.

The board and many

investors argue that only Musk can deliver on his promises to transform Tesla into an artificial-intelligence juggernaut delivering millions of self-driving robotaxis and humanoid robots. If Musk hits all the board's performance goals within a decade, Tesla's market value will have grown to \$8.5 trillion - with Musk owning about a quarter of stock.

That is exponentially more compensation than any other CEO, and Musk would still collect record payouts - tens of billions - if he misses most performance goals. Many investors



are not blinking at the eye-watering sums.

The threat of Musk leaving now, causing a collapse in Tesla's stock, gives him enormous power to make unprecedented compensation demands, some corporate governance experts say. Board chair Denholm suggested as much in an

October 27 letter to shareholders: "Without Elon, Tesla could lose significant value, as our company may no longer be valued for what we aim to become."

Tesla India

Tesla has appointed former L&Borghini India head Sharad Agarwal to lead its India operations, sources said.

The appointment comes at time when the company is looking to strengthen its presence in Indian market.

Agarwal took on the role of chief business officer at M&M. — Reuters

THE CITY ESTRANGED

NOTES ON URBAN AFFAIRS



Hussain Indorewala

mirrorfeedback@timesofindia.com

Property development aye, human development nay

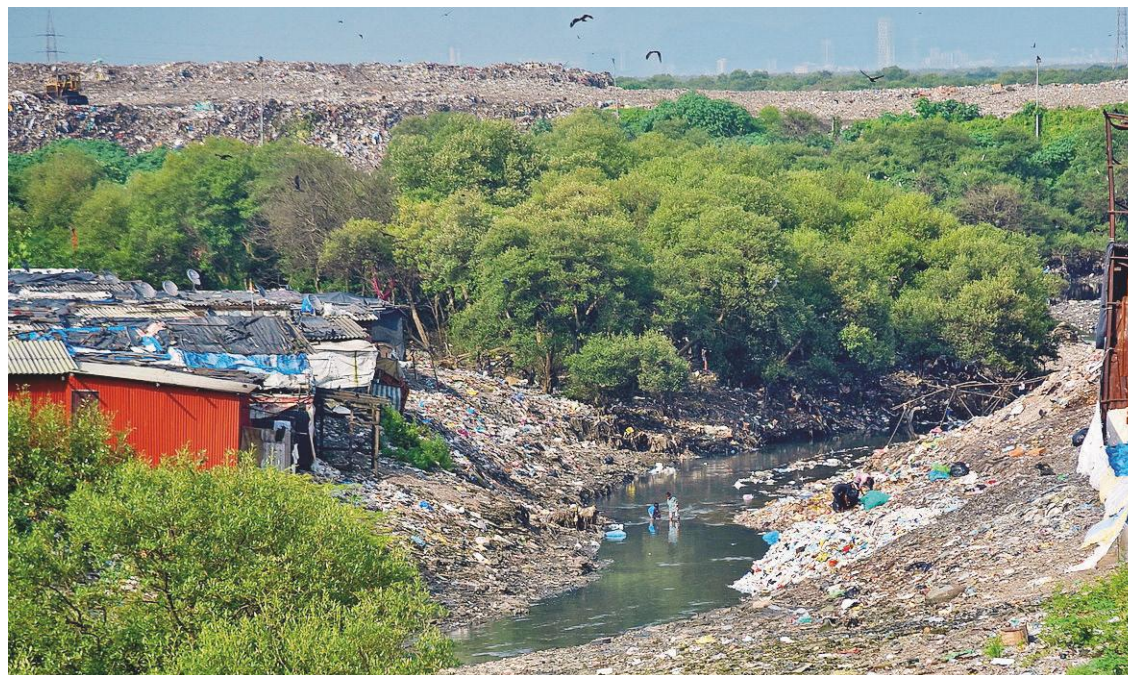
Mumbai's planning system needs to be oriented towards human development, as opposed to the current obsession with urban renewal

Fifteen years ago, something rather unexpected happened. The BMC prepared, for the first time, a report that analysed Mumbai from the perspective of human development. This was desirable, the report remarked, to highlight the city's inequalities and to guide policy decisions. As a rare moment of official self-reflection, the report was immensely insightful, which perhaps explains why such an exercise was never undertaken again.

In its opening pages, the report said: "Mumbai exults in its wealth" but urban poverty in the city dwarfs "other major Indian cities in its extent and complexity". This has to do with the "absence of distributive justice", which has consequently produced a "sharp spatio-sectoral imbalance and social inequality" that defies "simplistic solutions".

Yet, Mumbai abounds in simplistic solutions. The most well-known of course, is redevelopment. For creating parks, schools and hospitals, the solution is redevelopment. To create basic services in slums, to generate employment, the solution is redevelopment. Even problems created by redevelopment can be solved by more redevelopment.

The term "development" in the



The Deonar dumping ground in M-East Ward, which ranks lowest in the city's human development index

MRTP Act of 1966, under which Mumbai's development plans are prepared, is borrowed along with its definition from post-war UK. Development is defined as "the carrying out of buildings, engineering, mining or other operations in, or over, or under, land or the making of any material change, in any building or land or in the use of any building or land".

The definition was later amended to include partial or complete demolition of any building or structure, land reclamation, redevelopment or lay-out and sub-division of land. Notice the narrowness of conception. It turns out that bulldozing people's homes to build a bridge is development, construction of pent-

houses for the uber-rich is development, digging a hole is development and filling it up is development. The purpose or consequences are irrelevant. Legally speaking, development does not imply social advancement, but "material change" to real estate.

Human development, in contrast, is described by the UNDP as the creation of an "enabling environment" for people "to enjoy long, healthy and creative lives". It involves an advancement in terms of access to knowledge, nutrition and health, livelihoods and leisure; it implies security against physical harm, political and cultural freedoms, and social agency.

The BMC's 2010 report provided a measure of human development

(HDI) for all wards. It revealed a glaring picture of fractured and uneven urban growth: wards D, C, R-Central (Malabar Hill, Marine Lines and Borivali) at one end of the spectrum with an HDI over 0.84, and wards M-West, L, M-East (Chembur, Kurla and Deonar-Govandi) on the other with an HDI below 0.33. The HDI for Mumbai as a whole was 0.56. The M-East ward was ranked lowest, with a measure of 0.05. A TISS study in 2015 remarked that this ward is a geography with "almost exclusive occupation of the poor" – its social indicators comparable to some of the poorest regions in the world. Why? Because over the decades, the ward has hosted a range of polluting land uses, absorbed numerous waves

of displaced slum-dwellers, has the highest percentage of slum households, and has always seen negligible investment in basic infrastructure and services.

If policy decisions in Mumbai were guided by human development measures, the wards with low HDI would be the priority. Instead, we see almost the opposite. A recent study by TISS and Praja of ward-wise budget estimates between 2021-22 and 2025-26 suggests that budget planning priorities are based on other criteria: Allocations for waste management, health and slum improvement prioritise Island City wards; and allocations for roads works and parks prioritise wards with high property prices.

Most disturbing is the treatment of the M-East ward which has among the lowest allocations for health, road works, markets, gardens, waste management as well as slum improvement.

This is a staggering portrait of municipal priorities in Mumbai, where the region with the lowest human development continues to be subjected to a policy of systematic neglect and underdevelopment.

If this is to change, Mumbai's planning system will need to be oriented towards human development as opposed to the current obsession with urban renewal ("redevelopment"). Such a planning method would be directed towards alleviating the city's socioeconomic and spatial deficiencies: By surveying the health, educational, cultural infrastructure, affordable shelter and mobility conditions, by formulating goals that can be assessed in qualitative and quantitative terms, and by identifying the appropriate means for their fulfilment. This, however, is easier said than done.

After all, Mumbai's planners want to enable "material changes on land and building" for private profiteering, rather than to enable common citizens live long, healthy and creative lives.

Hussain Indorewala is a teacher and urban researcher at KRVI, Mumbai. Views are personal

A glacier disappeared in record time; warning for coastal cities

Dino Grandoni
 mirrorfeedback@timesofindia.com

More than five miles of glacial ice in Antarctica vanished in only two months, retreating 10 times faster than the previous record, with possible implications for the stability of other glaciers and the pace of sea-level rise on a warming planet.

The research on the ice retreat was published this week in the journal Nature Geoscience. Hektoria Glacier, on the eastern side of the

Antarctic Peninsula, is tiny by Antarctic standards. But its rapid retreat – the fastest ever recorded for a glacier tethered to the ground – may be a preview of what is possible for the continent's other, much larger glaciers.

If some of those crumble as quickly as Hektoria did, their disintegration could accelerate sea-level rise and spell trouble for island nations and coastal cities.

The research was led by Naomi Ochwatt, a glaciologist who had been studying other ice formations

in the region when she noticed in satellite photos just how quickly Hektoria seemed to be vanishing. She told Scambos they needed to investigate what was happening.

Ochwatt and her colleagues found that Hektoria shrank by about 16 miles between January 2022 and March 2023.

Ochwatt said she got goose bumps thinking back to her last visit, when she flew over the site in February 2024 and saw what had happened to the river of ice once the size of Philadelphia. "What was

left was just this mushed-up mélange of all these icebergs," she recalled. "It was Hektoria's remains."

The chain of events leading to Hektoria's demise started in the ocean. Hektoria is a tidewater glacier, meaning it flows across land before ending in the sea. After rising temperatures reduced the amount of sea ice in the bay abutting the glacier, waves broke down ice fastened to the coastline that had protected Hektoria. And, without that buffer, the floating end of the glacier began cracking and shedding icebergs.

After the glacier lost its floating portion, the rest began to thin. A gently sloping plain under the glacier allowed the ocean to seep in, causing the glacier to bob and break up quickly, Ochwatt added. But Christine Batchelor, an ice sheet scientist who was not involved in the

paper, said there is disagreement in the glaciological community about the glacier's grounding zone – that is, the spot under the ice where the ground ends and the ice begins floating. If the grounding zone is more inland than the paper suggests, that would mean most of Hektoria's ice was already bobbing in the water.

But Ochwatt said the fact that seismic sensors picked up on a series of earthquakes while Hektoria was in retreat suggests the ice had been resting on bedrock. "Because that ice is touching the Earth, we get earthquakes."

The research team's next goal is to see if any other Antarctic glaciers are also sitting on slick, shallow beds – and are also vulnerable to runaway retreat.

—The Washington Post



Transfer assets: Now or later?

Distributing assets while you are alive or after your demise has its own complications. Go through these succession tools to know which one best suits your circumstances

Riju Mehta
@timesofindia.com

For every well-intentioned parent who wants to leave a legacy for his/her progeny, there are thousands of legal disputes over inheritance across the country. According to a 2017 study by a Bengaluru-based civil society organisation, Daksh, nearly one-third of all disputes in the country relate to land or property, with 80% of these about inheritance or ownership. It also found that 66% of all civil litigation involved land and property cases.

Many of these disputes can be attributed to the absence of wills or testamentary ambiguity, disagreements among multiple heirs in complex family structures, perceived unfairness in the distribution of assets, gender disparities, and forged or fraudulent wills, among other reasons.

Though a will is universally acclaimed for its efficacy, it can still be contested and trigger family conflicts after one passes away. Is it then better to distribute assets while one is still alive? Or should one resort to instruments other than wills?

While several succession tools can be used to pass on assets—gift deed, family trust, testamentary trust will, settlement deed, joint ownership—it ultimately depends on one's financial situation, relationship with heirs, type of assets (movable or immovable), as well as one's awareness about the suitability of instruments.

THE WAITING GAME

Though distributing assets during one's lifetime seems like an easy solution to family friction and legal disputes after death, it does not come without its share of problems. "Transferring assets during one's lifetime can ensure smooth succession and minimise the possibility of disputes or challenges to the will after one's demise," says Sneha Makhija, Head of Wealth Planning, Products & Solutions, Sanctum Wealth.

However, it must be done with careful consideration. "Once an asset is transferred, the owner permanently loses control and ownership, a decision that may have long-term implications if relationships or circumstances change," asserts Raj Lakhota, Managing Partner, LABH & Associates.

Hence, it is important to focus on safeguarding one's own financial security and independence. Ensure you have a home to live in and means to support yourself before distributing assets. Neha Pathak, Managing Partner, Trust & Estate Planning, Motilal Oswal Wealth Limited, believes that only surplus or non-essential assets—those not required to maintain one's lifestyle and future needs—may be considered for transfer during one's lifetime.

"In many families, certain assets such as jewellery or heirlooms are often gifted at significant life events like a child's marriage or the birth of a grandchild, which can be both emotionally meaningful and financially practical," says Makhija.

If you do not want to transfer assets during your lifetime, at least identify the assets you want to pass on, and begin the process of consolidation, preferably with the help of financial and legal experts. Completing the documentation for each asset and keeping these ready for transfer will save the children time and effort.

TRANSFERRING WHILE ALIVE

Liquidation of assets

Selling assets and converting these into a financial legacy may seem like a simple exercise, resulting in fair distribution and keeping friction at bay. For instance, if parents want to bequeath a residential property among multiple children, liquidation may be the best option as a split later



Right time to distribute assets

DURING YOUR LIFETIME

PROS

CONS

- Smooth succession.
- Minimal disputes after death.
- Assets go to intended heirs.
- Risk to financial security.
- Loss of control and ownership of assets.
- Likely dependence on heirs.
- May attract high costs like stamp duty, clubbing provision, and tax implications for heirs.

AFTER YOUR DEMISE

PROS

CONS

- You retain control of property, assets till death.
- Assets are distributed as per the owner's wishes.
- Assets inherited via a will or succession laws are tax-exempt.
- Tools like wills are cost-effective.
- Likely pressure/harassment from heirs while alive.
- Family conflict, legal disputes among heirs.
- High legal and administrative costs for heirs.
- Transfer process can be delayed.
- Assets may not be protected from creditors.

may be difficult. It could also be challenging as joint ownership can complicate future use and sale of property. "If the family feels the heirs may be unable to manage assets effectively, in case they live abroad, have demanding careers or are not interested in maintaining them, it may be wiser to liquidate and distribute the proceeds," says Pathak.

"With advancing age, it may become difficult to maintain immovable assets, and a security threat could be a concern. In such scenarios, indi-

viduals liquidate and distribute the wealth while alive," says Rajat Dutta, Founder and Initiator, Inheritance Needs Services.

On the flipside, selling assets can attract capital gains tax and stamp duty (real estate), and may be affected by prevailing market conditions that don't always reflect their true value.

Gift deed

Gifts also helps avoid acrimony among family members and assets are passed on to the

intended beneficiaries. Besides, it's easy to execute and helps avoid probate. "It allows immediate and dispute-free transfer of ownership," says Rohan Mahajan, Founder, LawRato.com.

Gifts to relatives are tax-exempt, making them an efficient tool for early succession and asset protection, says Pathak.

However, gifts to non-relatives can be taxable in the recipient's hands. "A Hindu also has the option to gift personal property to the family HUF or his own HUF. While this is not taxed in the hands of the HUF, any income from the asset is clubbed with the income of the individual under Section 64 (2) of the Income Tax Act," says Dutta.

More importantly, once a gift deed is executed, it is irrevocable and the donor loses control of the asset. For immovable property, one may also incur hefty stamp duty and registration charges.

Private family trust

One of the most effective and robust structures, a family trust can be formed during one's lifetime, with oneself and the heirs as beneficiaries. It allows the creator to specify how assets are to be managed and distributed, maintaining confidentiality and avoiding probate.

"It allows the owner to retain structured control over assets, plan for tax efficiency, and ensure continuity of management even in case of incapacity or absence," explains Lakhota. This also helps provide financial support to children with special needs or minor kids. Besides, it protects the beneficiaries from creditors, especially in case of an irrevocable trust.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 15



Death on the move

Road accidents are not resulting in an overhaul of infrastructure and licensing

The highway accident on November 3 that claimed 19 lives at Chevella near Hyderabad was far too routine to change India's disgraceful record in fatal road accidents. The driver of a gravel-laden truck apparently swerved to avoid a pothole and rammed into a bus. There were no dividers, no streetlights and no signages on that stretch of National Highway 163. India's roads are a major public hazard. Pedestrians, bus riders and two-wheeler motorists constitute the majority of the over 400 people who die on India's roads on average, the equivalent to a full transcontinental flight going down. Flight disasters invite scrutiny, multi-agency probes and quick remedial actions but road accident deaths that mostly involve poorer folk trigger perfunctory probes and glacial change in rules, if any. Government documents identify human error as the most common cause but deeper reasons – vehicular and infrastructural – are unaddressed.

In India, the road test for getting a driving licence examines whether the person is able to handle a vehicle of certain specification, largely a skill test, rather than one of his knowledge and execution of safe driving practices. No safety training is mandated. Most accidents are collisions from the back – whereas exemplar driving tests in other countries filter out tailgating tendencies and arbitrary lane changing. The system of certifying and monitoring drivers and vehicles is broken and corrupt. For nearly all Indians, navigating RTOs is unpleasant. The SaveLIFE Foundation advocates License Seva Kendras – on the lines of Passport Seva Kendras – so that they are transparent, digitised, and ensure good driver skills and safety awareness. One in five accidents are head-on collisions, which have happened even on four-lane highways, indicating wrong-side driving and the state of road dividers. In general, national highways need to adhere to Indian Roads Congress guidelines but States have made no mandates as required by the Motor Vehicles Act. There are potholes, dangerous curves, drainage systems, bridge parapets and concrete objects, but no crash barriers or energy absorbers. Collision-risk warning devices are relatively inexpensive and can be mandated on commercial vehicles. Better pedestrian infrastructure alone can prevent many fatalities. In Hyderabad, a community health-care centre was available for immediate treatment and a government hospital was not far away. But that is often not the case elsewhere. In States such as Bihar, fatality rates are double because of inadequate trauma care infrastructure. An overhaul of the road transport system is an urgent requirement in India.

Winter of discontent

U.S. election results are a referendum on the Trump administration's policies

Democrats have swept the first major election in the U.S. during the second term of President Donald Trump, indicating a degree of frustration with the ongoing federal government shutdown but also signalling a broader barometric downturn in the approval ratings of his administration's policies. In a historic first, Zohran Mamdani, a Uganda-born, Muslim Democratic Socialist New York State Representative, scored a decisive victory over former Governor Andrew Cuomo and Republican candidate Curtis Sliwa, garnering over one million votes – 50.4% of the total polled – to secure the post of Mayor of New York. Similarly, Democrats Abigail Spanberger and Mikie Sherrill won gubernatorial races in Virginia and New Jersey, respectively, making them the first female Governor and Democratic female Governor of their States. Additionally, Indian American Democrat Ghazala Hashmi is projected to become Virginia's next Lieutenant Governor and is on track to become the first Muslim woman elected statewide. In California, voters approved Democratic Governor Gavin Newsom's campaign to redraw the State's congressional map in a manner that would help the party secure five additional seats in the U.S. House of Representatives in the 2026 midterm elections. Mr. Trump has blamed the Republican setback on the fact that he was not on the ballots and on the government shutdown, which he has repeatedly faulted Democrats for. However, what is now officially the longest federal government closure raises questions about his ability to bring lawmakers together to strike a deal in Congress for the betterment of the American people.

While each of these results offers a snapshot of voter preferences within limited geographies, it also serves as a broader referendum on the Trump administration's policies, especially regarding questions of the economy, jobs and cost of living. Mr. Mamdani ran on a platform focused on issues close to the heart of the ordinary American – affordable housing, broader offerings for childcare, greater support for immigrant communities, and free public transport. Mr. Trump responded to his campaign by vowing to slash federal funding if Mr. Mamdani prevailed as Mayor. After his victory, Mr. Mamdani hit out at the involvement of Mr. Trump's family in the federal government. Indeed, Mr. Trump's approval rating has dropped to its second-term low, with voters suggesting that affordability was their main concern. The question is whether he will now double down on the MAGA agenda, for example by accelerating immigration raids and deportations despite resistance by States, or by pressing on with the global tariff war despite costs faced by U.S. importers. Whichever path he chooses, the Democrats have put the White House on notice, and 2026 will be a further indicator of voter mood in this context.

Today, in the Brazilian Amazon, the Belém Summit opens ahead of the 30th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP30). World leaders convened here in the days leading up to the COP so that we can all commit to acting with the urgency that the climate crisis demands.

If we fail to move beyond speeches into real action, our societies will lose faith not only in the COPs but also in multilateralism and international politics more broadly. That is why I have summoned leaders to the Amazon: to make this the COP of Truth; the moment we demonstrate the seriousness of our shared commitment to the planet.

Humanity has shown its ability to overcome great challenges when it acts together and guided by science. We protected the ozone layer. The global response to the COVID-19 pandemic proved that the world can act decisively when there is courage and political will.

Back to Brazil

Brazil hosted the Earth Summit in 1992. We approved the Conventions on Climate Change, Biological Diversity and Combating Desertification, and adopted principles that defined a new paradigm for preserving our planet and our humanity. Over the past 33 years, these gatherings have produced important agreements and targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions – from ending deforestation by 2030 to tripling renewable energy use.

More than three decades later, the world has returned to Brazil to confront climate change. It is no coincidence that COP30 takes place in the heart of the Amazon rainforest. This is an opportunity for politicians, diplomats, scientists, activists and journalists to witness the reality of the Amazon.

We want the world to see the true state of the forests, the planet's largest river basin, and the millions of people who live in the region. COPs cannot be mere showcases of good ideas or



Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva

is the President of Brazil

The setting of the Belém Summit – in the Amazon – will help lead the way in effective action to tackle climate change

annual gatherings for negotiators. They must be moments of contact with reality and of effective action to tackle climate change.

To confront this crisis together, we need resources. And we must recognise that the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities remains the non-negotiable foundation of any climate pact.

That is why the Global South demands greater access to resources – not out of charity, but justice. Rich countries have benefited the most from the carbon-based economy. They must now rise to their responsibilities, not only by making commitments but also by honouring their debts.

Brazil is doing its part. In just two years, we have already halved deforestation in the Amazon, showing that concrete climate action is possible.

A move to preserve forests, other measures
In Belém, we will launch an innovative initiative to preserve forests: the Tropical Forests Forever Facility (TFFF). It is innovative because it operates as an investment fund, not a donation mechanism.

The TFFF will reward those who keep their forests standing and those who invest in the fund; a genuine win-win approach to tackling climate change. Leading by example, Brazil has announced a \$1 billion investment in the TFFF, and we expect equally ambitious announcements from other countries.

We also set an example by becoming the second country to present a new Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC). Brazil has committed to reducing its emissions by 59% to 67%, covering all greenhouse gases and all sectors of the economy.

In this spirit, we call on all countries to present equally ambitious NDCs and to implement them effectively.

The energy transition is fundamental to meeting Brazil's NDC. Our energy matrix is among the cleanest in the world, with 88% of our electricity coming from renewable sources. We

Clean up the voter list urgently, but not the Bihar way

According to Ministry of Road Transport data, there are roughly 40 crore (400 million) vehicles registered in India across all States and Union Territories. No two vehicles across the country have the exact same registration number. Similarly, there are 20 crore (200 million) people in India with a driver's licence. No two people have the exact same driver's licence number. Each number is unique. The same person may have many driving licences (albeit illegal), but each driving licence number is unique.

It is obvious and elementary that every vehicle registration or driving licence number or any ID number is unique, and that two records cannot have the same number. Yet, this simple and basic principle is violated in the voter lists of the Election Commission of India (ECI). Voters in Bengal have the exact same voter identification number as some in Uttar Pradesh; this pattern is one that repeats itself across many States. Nearly two decades earlier, in 2008, the then Chief Election Commissioner boasted that the ECI had given electoral photo identity cards (EPIC) to every voter. Apparently, he did not know that the most elementary rule of any identity system is for the ID number to be unique and not have the same number for many.

Much cause for worry

It gets worse. For example, if you are a registered voter, I can change your registered mobile number to my number using Form-8 without you getting to know it. Then, using my mobile number and OTP for your voter id, I can submit an application to delete you as a voter. It is as simple as that. This is how there was an attempt to delete 6,000 genuine voters in the Aland constituency in Karnataka – which the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, exposed on September 18, 2025.

Five days after Mr. Gandhi's exposé, the ECI, after vehemently denying his charges, quietly and surreptitiously changed this process to now use only the Aadhaar-linked mobile number. While this is a welcome and positive change, such a significant move to link Aadhaar to voter id was done without any press release or discussion. This is a clear and implicit admission by the ECI of the egregious faults in its voter list management system that has been exploited to manipulate and impact electoral outcomes.

It has also been clearly established, as Mr. Gandhi showed yet again, on November 5, 2025, that India's voter lists are riddled with duplicate, fake and ghost voters. A lack of unique voter id numbers, and allowing anyone to change voter



Praveen Chakravarty

is Chairman, All India Professionals' Congress and Data Analytics of the Congress party

It is welcome that the Election Commission of India acknowledges the serious issues with India's voter lists, but its method of cure must not be worse than the disease

details are such elementary system errors which even an engineer in his teens with a basic knowledge of databases will not commit. It is evident that the ECI is staggeringly incompetent in its database management abilities. This is cause for worry as the voter list is India's most important database. It is abundantly clear that India's voter lists need to be purified and managed better by more competent people and processes.

A Bihar-style SIR is bad

In this context, the idea of a Special Intensive Revision (SIR) to purify voter lists is welcome. There is no doubt that India's voter lists need to be cleaned up. But can this be entrusted with the same authorities under the very process that muddled it in the first place? The ECI, as seen in press conferences held by the Chief Election Commissioner, has proved that it is blatantly biased and partisan. So, the ECI lacks both the trust and the capabilities to come up with its own processes and rules to conduct an SIR to clean up voter lists. The only alternative is for the ECI to undertake this cleaning up exercise as a joint constructive exercise with the involvement of all political parties in every step, and not just issue diktats and orders.

First, the Bihar-style SIR is not the way to conduct this exercise in other States. The Bihar SIR was malicious in intent, and was rushed with the sole aim of the deletion of genuine voters under the false reason of removing illegal migrants from the list.

Second, the Aadhaar is fundamental and integral to having a clean voter list. There is deliberate conflation and confusion being created by the ECI on the use of Aadhaar, claiming that it is not proof of citizenship and so it cannot be used, which is true. Every Aadhaar holder need not be a voter. But every voter must be an Aadhaar holder. Aadhaar linked de-duplication of a voter list is the most efficient and cheapest method to remove duplicates, fakes and ghosts and ensure that every voter has only one voter id card that is unique and non-transferable. By repeatedly rejecting the Aadhaar and even the need for de-duplication, the ECI is showing itself to be either technically ignorant or willingly malevolent or both.

Third, genuine voters must be enrolled by visiting every household and registering voters using proper documents, and not by asking voters to download forms online or collecting them from a centre and registering themselves on their own. The ECI must go to voters instead of asking voters to go to them, as they did in Bihar.

lead in biofuels and are advancing in wind, solar and green hydrogen energy.

Redirecting revenues from oil production to finance a just, orderly and equitable energy transition will be essential. Over time, oil companies worldwide, including Brazil's Petrobras, will transform into energy companies, because a growth model based on fossil fuels cannot last.

People must be at the centre of political decisions about climate and the energy transition. We must recognise that the most vulnerable sectors of our society are the most affected by the impacts of climate change, which is why just transition and adaptation plans must aim to combat inequality.

We cannot forget that two billion people lack access to clean technologies and fuels for cooking, and 673 million still live with hunger. In response, we will launch in Belém, a 'Declaration on Hunger, Poverty and Climate'. Our commitment to fight global warming must be directly linked to the fight against hunger.

The need for a climate change council

It is also fundamental that we advance the reform of global governance. Today, multilateralism suffers from the paralysis of the United Nations Security Council. Created to preserve peace, it has failed to prevent wars. It is our duty, therefore, to fight for the reform of this institution.

At COP30, we will advocate the creation of a UN Climate Change Council linked to the General Assembly. It would be a new governance structure with the force and the legitimacy to ensure that countries deliver on their promises, and an effective step toward reversing the current paralysis of the multilateral system.

At every Climate Conference, we hear many promises but see too few real commitments. The era of declarations of good intentions has ended: the time for action plans has arrived. That is why, today, we begin the COP of Truth.

When a State such as Telangana can do a complete census of 3.5 crore people by visiting every household in two months, the ECI must and can do this also. This is the only way to ensure that no genuine voter is left behind. This also implies that the ECI cannot rush this exercise in a month like it did in Bihar. Clean voter lists are too important and fundamental for an SIR to be done in a hurried and shabby way.

Listen to the Opposition

Political parties are integral and a vital cog in the wheel of the SIR process. The ECI is known to be unresponsive to complaints and suggestions from Opposition parties. A striking example was in Maharashtra where, in October 2024, a month before voting, all Opposition parties wrote a joint letter to the ECI with clear evidence of the mass addition of fake voters. But this was completely ignored. We know how 75 lakh new and mysterious votes were cast in the Maharashtra State election. Shockingly, the BJP alliance got exactly 75 lakh more votes in the Assembly election vis-à-vis the Lok Sabha election to win a majority. Had the ECI taken the Opposition's complaint more seriously, Maharashtra might have had a different Chief Minister.

The all-party meetings that the ECI convenes are a farce where the ECI puts on a show of listening to parties but then issues its own rules and procedures. The SIR process must be one where political parties are consulted at all levels and at every step – from the State leadership in the State capital, to every district, to every booth. These meetings must be video recorded, and suggestions, complaints and ideas given by political parties must be clearly documented.

The most important and strongest demand by the Opposition parties is for the ECI to publish the final, consolidated and machine-readable digital copy of the photo voter rolls after the SIR process. This is an absolutely critical step for the ECI to do for it to win back the trust of the Opposition parties and the public.

It is not that the ECI woke up one day and realised the need for cleaning up voter lists through SIR exercises. After the Congress party exposed clear anomalies in the Maharashtra 2024 State election and, subsequently, in two constituencies in Karnataka, and in Haryana, it became crystal clear that India's voter lists are being manipulated to impact elections. It is welcome that the ECI acknowledges the serious issues with the nation's voter lists and wants to rectify. But the cure must not be worse than the disease. The Chief Election Commissioner must understand that a Bihar-style SIR is a bad idea.

shareholders. A chunk of Tata equity rests with philanthropic trusts. In an era obsessed with profits, the Tatas face the challenge to temper capitalism with compassion, serving both enterprise and equity. Despite boardroom debates, that legacy may yet prevail over primacy to the balance sheet.

R. Narayanan,
Navi Mumbai

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

constructive ideas to make elections more transparent.
V. Lakshmanan,
Tiruppur, Tamil Nadu

Boardroom battles
The ancient dictum of Chanakya found modern embodiment in Jamsetji

Tata's belief that industry must exist not merely for profit but for the progress of the people it touches. The Tata philosophy was built on trusteeship capitalism – the idea that enterprise is a means to uplift society, not just enrich

Corrections & Clarifications

A report ('Sport' page, November 3, 2025), "Tjen gets the better of Birrell to clinch her maiden WTA 250 title", referred to Janice Tjen as an Australian tennis player in one instance. She is Indonesian, as mentioned correctly in the rest of the report.

The Readers' Editor's office can be contacted by Telephone: +91-44-28576347/28576300; E-mail: readerseditor@thehindu.co.in

Data, dissent and uncertainty

The Vokkaligas and Vee-rashaiva-Lingayats do not want the report going public, while the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, who form about 25% of the population, are indifferent because it is of little consequence to them. Kuruba, a large caste group within the OBCs, is looking to secure a Scheduled Tribe tag. With varied caste interests at play, how the report will be received and interpreted remains to be seen.

Can Congress overcome its 'weak link' tag in Bihar polls?

Unequal partners

Four top Bangla leaders in jail assassinated

Plot to assassinate Soviet leaders

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Number of left parties that have merged ahead of polls in Nepal

9 Nine left-wing parties in Nepal, including the CPN (Maoist Centre) and the CPN (Unified Socialist), have merged to form the Nepali Communist Party ahead of the March 2026 elections. The merger is seen as a response to growing youth-led protests against corruption and political disorder. PTI

Number of Palestinian bodies received under ceasefire deal

15 Gaza's Nasser Hospital said that it received the bodies of 15 Palestinian prisoners as part of the ongoing U.S.-brokered ceasefire exchange deal between Israel and Hamas. With this, the total number of bodies handed over under the agreement has reached 285. AFP

Value of hybrid ganja seized by Thane police in narcotics raid

76 In lakh. Thane police confiscated hybrid ganja worth over ₹76 lakh and arrested one person during an anti-narcotics operation near a housing complex under the Kapurbawdi police station. Officers recovered 755 grams of hybrid ganja along with mobile phones. PTI

Illegal hawkers evicted from Mumbai's Colaba Causeway

67 The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) has evicted 67 illegal hawkers from Colaba Causeway, one of south Mumbai's busiest shopping hubs, during a civic drive. The action aimed to remove encroachments that were obstructing pedestrian and vehicular movement. PTI

Number of booth level officers deployed for SIR exercise in T.N.

68,467 The authorities have deployed 68,467 Booth Level Officers and 7,234 supervisors in Tamil Nadu for the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls that began on November 4. PTI

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

Follow us facebook.com/thehindu X.com/the_hindu instagram.com/the_hindu

Challenges facing the upcoming income survey

The upcoming Household Income Survey promises to provide a detailed snapshot of India's households – their incomes, expenses, and changing dynamics. Yet, collecting accurate income data remains a challenge due to the sensitive nature of the questions, which many respondents may find intrusive or difficult to answer

ECONOMIC NOTES

Vignesh Radhakrishnan

The upcoming Household Income Survey, 2026, which is going to be the first of its kind, could offer the clearest picture yet of India's households, revealing how they are coping, changing, and moving towards the future. However, the challenge with such an exercise lies in the sensitive nature of questions about individual income, which many respondents may be reluctant to answer. While the survey design is valuable from a policymaker's perspective, for respondents, such questions can feel intrusive and, in many cases, difficult to answer accurately from memory.

On past surveys

Indian policymakers lack actionable information about household income. While surveys like the Periodic Labour Force Survey attempts to capture earnings, it views wages and salaries through the lens of labour market dynamics, and falls short of offering detailed insights into household characteristics. The Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) relies on spending patterns to infer household income. While this survey is considered more reliable, using consumption data as a proxy for income involves a leap that may not always hold up in practice. Then there is the RBI's Consumer Confidence Survey which tracks how income levels rise or fall over time among urban and rural consumers. Put together, these survey tools have either captured broad trends in income changes, relied on proxies to gauge them, or examined income through specific analytical lenses.

The upcoming Household Income Survey, however, aims to collect income data to understand income itself and its interplay with other household characteristics. The new survey gathers



GETTY IMAGES

detailed information on social group, religion, and occupation – covering whether households are engaged in agriculture or other economic activities. It also records land ownership and use, property details such as the size and type of dwelling, and loans taken.

This survey, for the very first time, collects detailed information on regular salaries, including allowances such as overtime pay, performance-based bonuses, stock options, leave encashments, and severance payments. For casual workers, the survey will record the number of days worked, average daily wages earned, and even tips received. In the case of self-employed respondents, it will gather details on the type of crops sold, the quantity, and the value of those sales. For those engaged in non-agricultural work, the survey will note down the sector of business and the gross value of receipts earned.

By combining such information, the survey will make it easier to understand

class dynamics across different types of employment and whether certain jobs are concentrated within specific social groups. It may also shed light on what share of a household's total income goes toward loan repayments – an important metric in an economy driven by EMI-based spending, particularly among urban households. When it comes to agriculture, the detailed questions make this survey an excellent direct tool to test claims like “doubling farmers' income”, and assess related government schemes.

Expenses recorded

While measuring income is important, considering spending patterns is equally essential. Therefore, this survey repeats some questions from the HCES. For instance, the survey asks farmers to report input costs for each item, including seeds, labour, and transport. For those engaged in self-employment in other sectors, it seeks details on raw material costs, rental payments, and repair and

maintenance expenses. By gathering both cost and income data from the same households, the survey enables accurate measurement of profit margins.

Additionally, it measures pension payments, family support transfers such as alimony or child support, and remittances. More importantly, for the first time, the survey collects data on funds received through State-specific schemes such as the *Kalaigiar Magalir Urimai Thittam* in Tamil Nadu, along with several Union government schemes.

Testing troubles

In August this year, the proposed survey was pilot-tested by randomly selecting households across India to answer its questions. This exercise generated some concerning feedback. Close to 95% of the respondents considered the information to be sensitive and felt uncomfortable disclosing income from different sources. A majority of them refused to answer questions about income taxes paid. Most respondents thus are likely to feel cautious when answering these questions. The survey team is aware of this challenge and is addressing it by increasing public awareness, dispelling misconceptions, and planning outreach across various media. They also aim to deploy field staff familiar with local languages to build trust. The testing team observed that respondents in rural areas sought fewer clarifications, whereas those in affluent households asked for more. Due to this hesitation, unusually, the government is considering introducing a self-compilation system exclusively for affluent and gated communities. Under this system, respondents would receive a written request explaining the survey's objectives and the importance of providing accurate income data.

Moreover, during field visits, many households overstated their expenses or misunderstood their income levels. Respondents also found it difficult to recall details about their financial assets and were often unaware of the interest earned from savings or fixed deposits.

THE GIST

▼ This survey, for the very first time, collects detailed information on regular salaries, including allowances such as overtime pay, performance-based bonuses, stock options, leave encashments, and severance payments.

▼ In August this year, the proposed survey was pilot-tested by randomly selecting households across India to answer its questions. This exercise generated some concerning feedback.

▼ A majority of them refused to answer questions about income taxes paid.

What constitutes as contempt of court in India?

How does the Constitution define courts of record? What are the two types of contempt?

C. B. P. Srivastava

The recent controversy over the alleged contemptuous and derogatory remarks against the Chief Justice of India and the Supreme Court has not only raised eyebrows, but can also be considered an act of diminishing the ‘authority’ of India's top court. Moreover, such remarks being spread through media and social media may also be seen as an act of interfering and obstructing the administration of justice, thereby directly damaging the edifice of constitutional morality. This has been the basis for the demand to initiate contempt proceedings.

Understanding contempt

The phrase ‘contempt of court’ is used in Article 19(2) as one of the grounds for imposing reasonable restriction on fundamental freedoms yet the Constitution does not give guidelines on

how to initiate such proceedings. In India, the Supreme Court and High Court have been designated as courts of record under Article 129 and 215 respectively. A court of record is one whose decisions are kept in reserve for future references and inherently it also has the power to punish for its contempt. This implicit constitutional provision is explained in the Contempt of Court Act, 1971.

The Act classifies contempt into civil and criminal. Section 2(b) of the Act defines civil contempt as wilful disobedience to any judgment, decree, direction, order, writ or other process of a court or wilful breach of an undertaking given to a court. On the other hand, criminal contempt is defined in Section 2(c) of the Act, as the publication (whether by words spoken or written or by signs or by visible representations or otherwise) of any matter or the doing of any act which – (i) scandalises or lowers the authority of any court; or (ii)

prejudices or interferes or tends to interfere with, the due course of any judicial proceeding; or (iii) interferes or tends to interfere with the administration of justice in any other manner. This makes it clear that contempt is different from mere disrespect. It is beyond just covering disobedience and disruption in the working of the justice system. The Act further states that the High Court or Supreme Court may initiate contempt proceedings *suo moto*. It may also be initiated by a third party provided the petition has consent from the Attorney General or Advocate General for the Supreme Court and High Court respectively.

The mode of criticism

It is now a settled principle that fair criticism of a decided case is not contempt, but criticism that transgresses the limits of fair commentary may be considered contemptuous as held in

Ashwini Kumar Ghosh versus Arabinda Bose (1952). Further, in *Anil Ratan Sarkar versus Hiral Ghosh* (2002), it was held that the power to punish for contempt must be exercised with caution and shall only be exercised when there is a clear violation of an order. One of the landmark cases is of *M. V. Jayarajan versus High Court of Kerala* (2015) in which the top court upheld a contempt finding against an individual for using abusive language in a public speech while criticising a High Court order, establishing that such actions could be considered criminal contempt for undermining the judiciary's authority and disrupting the administration of justice. The top Court recently in *Shanmugam @ Lakshminarayanan vs. High Court of Madras* (2025) has held that the very purpose to punish for contempt is to ensure administration of justice.

Criticising the Courts' action democratically is not wrong; however, one needs to consider that the judiciary is playing a crucial role by contributing to setting the priorities for the state so that the sanctity of administration of justice is maintained. Both the state and the citizens need to understand that any kind of misrepresentation would not only amount to contempt, it would also be detrimental to democratic principles, affecting the delivery of substantive justice (elimination of injustices).

The author is President, Centre for Applied Research in Governance, Delhi.

THE GIST

▼ The phrase ‘contempt of court’ is used in Article 19(2) as one of the grounds for imposing reasonable restriction on fundamental freedoms.

▼ In India, the Supreme Court and High Court have been designated as courts of record under Article 129 and 215 respectively.

▼ It is now a settled principle that fair criticism of a decided case is not contempt, but criticism that transgresses the limits of fair commentary may be considered as contemptuous.

BIBLIOGRAPHY



Globalist: K. M. Panikkar presenting his credentials to Mao Tse-tung, Chairman of People's Republic of China, as the Ambassador of India to China in 1950. HINDU PHOTO ARCHIVES



Forgotten men: the story of two peacemakers and their ideas of the world

Their paths didn't cross but U Thant, the UN's first Secretary General from the global south in 1961, and K.M. Panikkar, India's first ambassador to China in 1947, were both internationalists. Their roles in history have been largely airbrushed, and two biographies try to make amends

Suhasini Haidar

With elections for the next United Nations Secretary General (UNSG) due in 2026, expect the next few months in global politics to be dominated by discussions on what or whom the world body needs, to stave off predictions about the UN's imminent death. That threat comes not just from the conflicts and calamities the world faces, but from a slew of populist leaders worldwide taking their countries down an uber-nationalist path that diverges from the multilateral global system and the international rules-based order.

At such a time, it may be useful, even comforting to recall the words of U Thant, the UN's first Secretary General from the global south (Third World as it was called then). In his farewell speech Thant, a former Burmese school teacher who switched careers to become a diplomat, said he was proud of the fact that the flame of internationalism kept burning through his tenure (1961-1971). "Patriotism is good, but an additional allegiance to the entire world community is now essential. We have to get rid of the concept of 'my country, right or wrong'," Thant told an eclectic audience, that included Jackie Kennedy, John D. Rockefeller, Jacques Cousteau, John Lennon and Yoko Ono.

A new lens
The farewell story begins the vividly recounted biography of Thant, *Peacemaker: U Thant and the Forgotten Quest for a Just World* (Juggernaut), written by his grandson Thant Myint-U. Thant took over the uneasy mantle of UNSG suddenly after his predecessor Dag Hammarskjöld was killed in a plane crash in the Congo. Hammarskjöld was Swedish, and Trygve Lie before him was Norwegian, but Thant was undaunted by

the realisation that "no one who looked like him had negotiated with big powers", and set out to purposefully bring an Afro-Asian lens to his brand of peace-making.

He cajoled those powers into committing funding for the UN and ensured the defeat of colonialist powers in Congo and Algiers. He often pitched himself into conflict, but his shuttle diplomacy between Washington and Moscow and mediation to end the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, as well as between Delhi and Islamabad during the 1965 war earned him respect. In a Gallup poll survey in 1967, Thant was named the sixth "most admired person" in the U.S., behind Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy, but ahead of Nixon.

Thant Myint-U, himself a former UN official, and now an acclaimed writer of a number of books on Myanmar, such as *The Hidden History of Burma: Race, Capitalism, and the Crisis of Democracy in the 21st Century* (Juggernaut) and *Where China Meets India: Burma and the New Crossroads of Asia* (Faber), brings to life not only his grandfather's work and the amazing times he lived in, but also the inner labyrinthine and often frustrating workings of the United Nations.

Like many UN Secretary-Generals, Thant was backed by the U.S. and its allies when he came to office, but fell out with those same Western forces when he questioned their actions. The book recounts his futile but unrelenting quest to end the U.S. war in Vietnam, including his run-in with U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk who asked him, "Who, do you think you are, a country?", as well as the acrimony he faced from U.S. newspapers for ordering UN Peacekeepers to stand down during the Six-Day War. The U.S. also opposed his push to recognise communist China rather than Taiwan for the UN seat, but eventually Beijing won its

place in 1971, just before Thant demitted office. The biography, that is based mainly on archival material and Thant's correspondence, is not a personal one. It is a dispassionate account of the peacemaker's successes, and the setbacks he faced. Where he does voice his disappointment, is in the manner Thant's record has been "airbrushed" from history.

'Renaissance' men
The airbrushing of inconvenient legacies and internationalism are themes in another biography of an Indian diplomat, K.M. Panikkar (*A Man for All Seasons: The Life of K.M. Panikkar*/Westland Books by Narayani Basu). The first Ambassador to China, Panikkar never crossed paths with Thant but grappled with many of the same global issues.

Panikkar, like Thant, was not educated in global elite institutions, but was an internationalist in his ideas. In today's times he would be seen as a "Renaissance man", a thinker and writer, the founding Editor of *The Hindustan Times*, whose treatise on Indian maritime power is a textbook, a freedom fighter who also fought for the rights of princes in the soon-to-be independent India, earning the moniker "Sardar Panikkar".

Through a dizzying series of friendships and associations in Kerala, to Aligarh's Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College (later Aligarh Muslim University), to Oxford and Paris, which are expertly stitched together by Basu, makes the 800-page tome a delightfully easy read. As India's diplomat at the United Nations, Panikkar worked with Vijayalakshmi Pandit on India's decision to oppose the creation of Israel at the UNGA in 1948, although he himself was personally close to Chaim Weizmann and other Zionist leaders. He later persevered, unsuccessfully at the time, in pushing for

India's recognition of Israel, especially when he was India's ambassador to Egypt, concurrently accredited to Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. He also helped shape India's leadership during the Suez Canal crisis.

China stint
The most intense period of Panikkar's career, was no doubt, his stint in China (1948-1955). Nehru first decided to send him as Ambassador to Peking under the Kuomintang, as someone who shared his belief in India's civilisational heritage as well as to "consolidate its position as a postcolonial power", but then unconventionally returned him as Ambassador under the Communist government. The Panikkar's were equally well regarded by Chiang Kai-Shek as by Mao and Chou Enlai, but the continued assignment was bitterly controversial, first over Panikkar's recommendations on recognising the communist government before other countries had, in 1949, and then his failure to predict China's occupation of Tibet in 1950. Mr. Panikkar came in for sharp criticism from Home Minister Sardar Patel, who wrote to Nehru his disappointment that India's Ambassador had been blindsided and unnecessarily obsequious to the communist government. The assignment ended long before the 1962 war, but Panikkar's reputation for having "gone native" in Beijing with a belief in an India-China compact for Asia, overshadowed his legacy. It is to Basu's credit that she chose a character with such a troubled reputation, and shone a kinder and more comprehensive light on his larger, brilliant body of work.

Like Thant, Panikkar's contributions demanded a re-look, even as present-day conflicts call for a debate on the global order that both men made their mark in first building decades ago.

THE DAILY QUIZ

Virat Kohli was born on November 5, 1988. Here is a quiz on the legendary cricketer

Sindhu Nagaraj

QUESTION 1
Which team does Kohli represent in domestic cricket?

QUESTION 2
Sachin Tendulkar has scored the most number of international centuries (100). How many has Kohli scored?

QUESTION 3
Kohli's first half-century in domestic cricket happened at Feroze Shah Kotla, where he scored 70 runs against which team?

QUESTION 4
Kohli came into the limelight when he led the team to victory in the U-19 World Cup in Malaysia. This happened in which year?

QUESTION 5
Kohli's international career began when the 19-year-old had a "surprise call-up" to the ODI squad for a tour of which country?

QUESTION 6
In which country did Kohli score his maiden Test century?



Visual question:
This has been considered as Kohli's signature stroke. Name it. GETTY IMAGES

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz: 1. Name the Scotland-born monarch that the Gunpowder Plot targeted in 1605. **Ans: James VI**
2. Identify the man born in Midland who devised the Gunpowder Plot. **Ans: Robert Catesby**
3. The conspirators intended to destroy this specific chamber of Parliament. **Ans: House of Lords**
4. Name the statute swiftly passed after the plot's discovery that ordered an annual church service and day of gratitude on November 5. **Ans: Thanksgiving Act 1605**
5. This graphic novel and its later film adaptation popularised a particular mask as a modern symbol of resistance. **Ans: V for Vendetta**
Visual: Name this princess whom the conspirators wished to install on the throne. **Ans: Elizabeth, 'The Winter Queen'**
Early Birds: Piyali Tuli| Dodo Jayaditya| Mahima Sajani Jacob| Sachin Dandekar| Siddhartha Viswanathan



Language in conversation

Vaishali R. Venkat

"Dear Moon, why are you crying?"
"Genie, my brother says his math homework is such a pain in the neck. It must be hurting him so badly! Shall we take him to the doctor?"
Genie chuckled, swirling like a whirlwind as he emerged from his lamp. "Ah, my dear Moon! Your brother doesn't need a doctor for his neck. It's you who need a doctor of English idioms!"
"Genie! How can you mercilessly laugh at someone's pain?" shouted Moon, pouting. "And what has English got to do with it? It's math homework, not English!"
"Ah, Moon, it's not your brother's neck that suffers! Pain in the neck is a way of saying that something or someone is terribly annoying. Your poor brother's homework is merely irritating him. It tests his patience, not his cervical vertebrae!"
"So my brother's neck is perfectly fine and not hurting?" Moon giggled.
"Exactly, Moon! And if you want to help him, you'll have to stick your neck out and dash across the busy, rickety street to borrow his friend's notebook so that your brother can copy it!"
"Genie... What do you mean by stick my neck out? Is it like in a cartoon or a ghost story, wherein characters or monsters might tie sticks around their necks to scare people?"
Genie puffed up his chest and wagged a finger. "No, Moon! No sticks, no ghosts, no monsters. To stick your neck out means to take a risk to do something brave. By crossing the busy street to fetch your brother's notebook, you are taking a risk. That is exactly what it means to stick your neck out!"
"Interesting, Genie... but I will not stick my neck out by going alone. You have to accompany me!"
Genie twirled in the air, wiggling his eyebrows. "Certainly, Moon, but where is your brother's friend? Ah, yes, I remember now, he is in the neck of the woods!"
"Genie, you've become a zombie with too many 'necks' around, but my brother's friend is not in the forest; he is just two streets away."
"It just means the 'neighbourhood' where he lives, Moon."
"Is that so, Genie? You know, whenever my brother and his friend start their homework, they always write at the same speed and finish at the same time. Both are really fast at writing!"
"Then they are neck and neck – exactly equal or have equal chance of winning!"
"Wow, Genie! Are there many more such 'neck' words in English?"
"Yes, Moon! But I'll tell you just two more – an albatross around one's neck; and be like a millstone around someone's neck. An albatross around one's neck means a big, heavy problem that troubles someone. For example, mounting debt is an albatross around Alice's neck. Likewise, to be like a millstone around someone's neck means to be a responsibility that is hard to bear and causes problems or worries. For example, the high EMI on Michael's new bungalow has become a millstone around his neck."
"Wow, Genie! I think I can spot neck words everywhere from now on!"

Word of the day

Obsequious:
attempting to win favour from influential people by flattery; attentive in an ingratiating or servile manner

Synonyms: bootlicking, fawning, sycophantic

Usage: *His obsequious assistant agreed with whatever he said.*

Pronunciation:
newsth.live/obsequiouspro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /əbˈsiːkwiːəs/

For feedback and suggestions for Text & Context, please write to **letters@thehindu.co.in** with the subject 'Text & Context'

Clearer black hole merger signal yet allows probe of Hawking’s law

As the clearest gravitational signal ever detected, GW250114 allowed researchers to draw conclusions about fundamental physics; they analysed the frequencies of gravitational waves emitted by the merger to present the most compelling evidence to date of the black-hole area theorem

Shreejaya Karantha

On September 14, 2015, researchers using a pair of giant detectors in the U.S. detected gravitational waves for the first time – a century after Albert Einstein predicted their existence in his general theory of relativity. For their contributions to building these detectors, called the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-wave Observatories (LIGO), Rainer Weiss, Kip Thorne, and Barry Barish were awarded the Nobel Prize for physics in 2017.

According to the general theory of relativity, when any sufficiently massive object accelerates through spacetime, it will set off ripples of gravitational energy through its fabric. These gravitational waves can travel uninterrupted across billions of lightyears at the speed of light. The louder waves are produced by the most fierce cosmic events, including colliding neutron stars and black holes.

This year, as researchers worldwide celebrated the 10th anniversary of the first detection of gravitational waves, they also announced another groundbreaking discovery. A network of detectors – LIGO in the U.S., Virgo in Italy, and KAGRA in Japan – had detected a clearer gravitational wave signal from a pair of merging black holes. The event was named GW250114 as it was detected on January 14, 2025.

Notably, the researchers said this was the clearest gravitational wave signal detected to date, allowing them to use it to test some of the more elusive predictions of fundamental physics theories.

Their results were published in *Physical Review Letters* in September.

Black-hole hunter

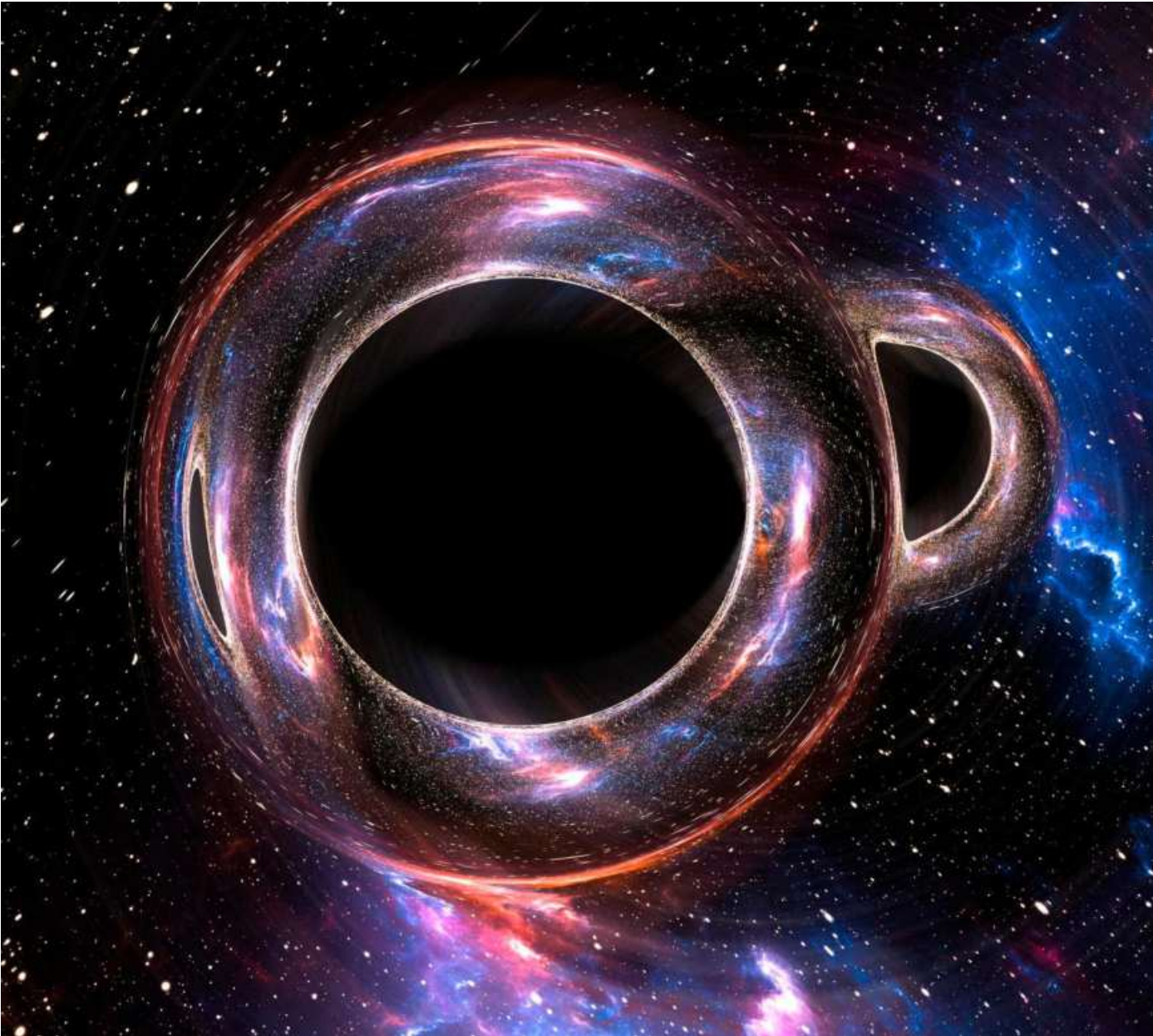
The twin LIGO detectors first detected GW250114. Each LIGO consists of two 4-km-long arms arranged in an L-shape. The arms have a vacuum. At the elbow, a highly stable laser beam is split into two beams and sent down the perpendicular arms, bouncing back and forth between mirrors about 300 times.

When no gravitational wave is passing through the detector, the two beams travel exactly the same distance and cancel each other out when they recombine at a photodetector at the elbow. But when a gravitational wave is passing through, it distorts spacetime there in minute ways, slightly stretching one arm while compressing the other, changing the distance each beam travels by a small fraction. This causes the laser light waves to shift out of phase and produce a measurable flicker of light at the photodetector.

Virgo and KAGRA work on similar principles. When a gravitational wave is detected, the teams operating these three detectors share their data and run joint analyses.

“We look for signals in the data from our detectors with several methods. Some are model-agnostic and others are model-independent,” study coauthor, Virgo team member, and Gran Sasso Science Institute doctoral student Jacopo Tissino said.

Model-agnostic methods try to identify excess energy that appears simultaneously across all detectors,



Artwork of a pair of merging black holes with differing masses. The gravity of the black holes bends and twists light around them. CARL KNOX, OZGRAV, SWINBURNE UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

without making any assumptions about the nature of the signal. In contrast, model-dependent methods search the data specifically for signals that align with theoretical expectations for black-hole mergers.

The GW250114 signal, which came from about 1.3 billion lightyears away, was detected using both methods.

Cosmic bell

The team found that the new signal was similar to the one detected in 2015.

“They are both pairs of nearly identical black holes, with small or no spin, masses just over 30-times that of the sun each, and revolving around each other in an orbit that’s close to a circle,” Mr. Tissino said.

Thanks to advances that increased the detectors’ sensitivity, the new signal was also much clearer. According to Mr. Tissino, these advances include lower laser noise, cleaner mirror surfaces, and lower measurement uncertainty.

As the clearest gravitational signal ever detected, GW250114 allowed the researchers to draw important conclusions about fundamental physics. Notably, they analysed the frequencies of gravitational waves emitted by the merger to present the most compelling observational evidence to date of the black-hole area theorem, which Stephen Hawking proposed in 1971.

The theorem states that the total



We look for signals in the data from our detectors with several methods. Some are model-agnostic and others are model-independent

JACOPO TISSINO

GRAN SASSO SCIENCE INSTITUTE

surface area of black holes should never decrease, referring to the sum of the areas of the event horizons.

To this end, researchers independently analysed the signals from the early stages of the merger, when the black holes were relatively far apart, and from a later post-collision stage, when the merged black holes were settling into a single entity.

“With these two analyses, we could extract the areas of the initial two black holes and of the remnant left after the collision, and directly compare them to confirm that there was an increase as predicted,” Mr. Tissino said.

Growing catalogue

After the merger, the researchers also ‘listened’ to the new black hole’s vibrations and identified two distinct modes of ringing. These frequencies indicated that the resulting black hole behaved like a rotating black hole. Such black holes are expected to emit

gravitational waves at specific frequencies and these waves are expected to fade at a certain rate.

As a result, the new study was also able to empirically verify a solution that New Zealander mathematician Roy Kerr had proposed for rotating black holes in 1963.

Mr. Tissino said that for signals like GW250114, the main sources of error are well-understood and can be controlled. Researchers carefully selected data from different points of time before and after the merger and tested different assumptions, like whether the black holes’ orbits were circular or eccentric. In the process, they checked potential issues in the detectors’ calibration and confirmed they didn’t affect their analyses.

The continuing detection of merging black holes is helping astrophysicists build a steadily growing catalogue that’s helping them fine-tune their understanding of black hole formation and test more and more intricate predictions.

As the authors wrote in their paper, “The gravitational-wave signal GW250114 is a milestone in the decade-long history of gravitational-wave science. ... The next decade of gravitational-wave science is bound to enhance our view of these highly dynamical, relativistic systems.” (Shreejaya Karantha is a freelance science writer. shreejayakaranth@gmail.com)



A scanning electron micrograph image of the *Staphylococcus aureus* bacteria, typically found in the upper respiratory tract. us CDC

New physics-based model shows healthy guts resist microbial chaos

Vasudevan Mukunth

The human gut is a vast ecosystem of microbes whose balance is central to health. When this balance, known as eubiosis, is disturbed, the result is dysbiosis, which is linked to conditions such as inflammatory bowel disease. Traditional models of microbial communities tend to focus on how many species are present and how abundant they are, but they rarely capture how these species interact. Yet the web of microbial interactions defines whether a community is stable or prone to collapse.

In a new study in *eLife*, researchers from the University of Padova in Italy, ETH Zurich in Switzerland, and Paris Cité University in France sought to fill this gap by using the tools of statistical physics to study microbial ecosystems. Specifically, they borrowed ideas from the theory of disordered systems, which was originally developed to understand complex materials like spin glasses. Their goal was to connect measurable data from metagenomic sequencing to theoretical models that describe how thousands of species interact. By doing so, they hoped to identify mathematical fingerprints that could distinguish healthy from unhealthy gut microbiomes.

The researchers used the disordered generalised Lotka-Volterra model (dglV) – a framework that describes how populations of species change over time based on random interactions. Each microbial species’ growth rate depends on its own capacity to thrive and on the positive or negative effects of other species. The interaction strengths, which are impossible to measure directly, were treated as random variables.

Using cross-sectional gut microbiome data from 91 healthy and 202 diseased samples, they extracted a set of numbers that they used to summarise each community’s behaviour. Then, an algorithm adjusted the dglV parameters so that the model’s predictions matched the empirical data. This allowed the

The study revealed that healthy communities had stronger but more heterogeneous interactions that absorbed fluctuations without destabilising the system

researchers to infer the statistical structure of inter-species interactions and to quantify how ecological stability differed between the healthy and diseased samples.

The analysis revealed that healthy and diseased microbiomes occupy distinct zones in the model’s parameter space. That is to say, healthy communities had stronger but more heterogeneous interactions, reflecting a balanced network where fluctuations are absorbed without destabilising the system. Diseased microbiomes had lower interaction diversity and higher randomness, indicating instability and loss of resilience.

Mathematically, the diseased systems were found to lie closer to a critical line that marks the transition to chaotic or unstable dynamics. This suggests that while healthy microbiomes operate in a stable equilibrium, diseased ones hover near disorder.

The new framework reframes gut health as a problem of statistical structure rather than a matter of simple composition. It implies that dysbiosis is less about which microbes are missing and more about how their interactions have weakened or become erratic. As a result, the study suggests that by examining collective behaviour, one might predict or even correct unstable microbial states. The authors also acknowledged limitations in their effort. For one, their model assumes a static set of interactions while real microbes evolve and respond to changing environments in different ways. They suggest future studies might allow interactions to fluctuate, capturing their dynamics more realistically.

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

THE SCIENCE QUIZ

The infinite wonders of space

Vasudevan Mukunth

QUESTION 1

Which rare kind of compact remnant of a dead star spins once every few seconds and sometimes experiences “starquakes” that trigger intense bursts of X-rays and gamma rays, often seen as repeating high-energy flares? This object is also famous for possessing the strongest magnetic fields known in the universe.

QUESTION 2

What do astronomers call worlds of mass comparable to that of a planet but which drift through interstellar space without orbiting any star? They are usually detected using microlensing or a faint infrared glow. Scientists believe they may have been ejected from young systems or formed alone in collapsing clouds.

QUESTION 3

Sometimes a star can be flung from the centre of a galaxy after it interacts with a supermassive black hole, which accelerates it. This star can be flung at lakhs of kilometers per second. What are these stars called?

QUESTION 4

In 2019, astronomers using long-wavelength maps noticed enormous yet faint ring-like structures around distant galaxies, far larger than supernova remnants and unlike known galaxy shapes. What did they call these mysterious features? Hint: the acronym is the name of a fictitious race in the work of JRR Tolkien.

QUESTION 5

What hypothetical type of extremely dense star is proposed to be made of the particles that also make up protons and neutrons?

But instead of forming protons or neutrons in the star, their high-energy environs cause them to be “deconfined.” The star’s density is expected to be between that of a neutron star and a black hole.

Answers to November 4 quiz:

1. Standardised naming system in biology – **Ans: Binomial nomenclature**
 2. Physical specimen designated as the name-bearing reference – **Ans: Holotype**
 3. Evolutionary tree branch denoting all descendants from that ancestor – **Ans: Clade**
 4. When distant lineages independent acquire similar traits – **Ans: Convergent evolution**
 5. Method to identify species by sequencing a standard DNA stretch – **Ans: Barcoding**
- Visual: **Alfred Russel Wallace**
First contact: K.N. Viswanathan | Tamal Biswas | Anmol Agrawal | Mahima Sajani Jacob | Joe V.R.



Visual: Name this galaxy in the constellation Serpens Caput that’s famed for being nearly symmetrical. It was identified in the mid-20th century. NASA/ESA

Turning point

SC relief to Vodafone can spur competition in telecom

The Supreme Court’s recent decision allowing the Centre to take a call on granting relief to Vodafone Idea (Vi) in the long-running Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR) case marks a turning point in India’s telecom story. It is not merely a reprieve for a struggling company; it is a moment that could reshape the structure and competitiveness of the sector itself.



For nearly five years, the AGR issue has drained Vodafone Idea of both financial strength and operational vitality. The roots of the problem go back to 2019, when the Supreme Court upheld the Department of Telecommunications’ (DoT) definition of AGR, one that controversially included revenues from non-telecom services for calculating the licence fee and spectrum usage charges. This interpretation saddled telecom companies with massive retrospective dues, but it hit Vodafone Idea the hardest. Since then, the operator has lost substantial market share, lagged in technology adoption, and struggled to invest in network upgrades. While rivals Bharti Airtel and Reliance Jio poured capital into 4G expansion and raced ahead on 5G rollout, Vi fell behind, leaving India’s telecom market dangerously close to becoming a duopoly. Such a market structure may not serve consumers well.

Vodafone Idea’s debt today exceeds ₹2.1 lakh crore, with AGR-related dues alone amounting to over ₹83,000 crore. This mountain of debt has crippled the company’s ability to raise fresh funds. The Centre, recognising the systemic risk of a two-player market, had already intervened by converting a portion of Vi’s dues into equity, emerging as the single largest shareholder. Yet, the company was unable to find any new investors due to the AGR overhang. The recent relief from the Supreme Court gives the Centre and the DoT the flexibility to finally act decisively. The government had argued before the court that circumstances have changed since its earlier orders, notably because public money is now at stake. By allowing the DoT to review or waive the AGR dues, the court has paved the way for a pragmatic policy solution. The government must move swiftly. It should consider restructuring the AGR dues in a manner that allows Vodafone Idea to attract new strategic investors or private equity participation. Once the balance sheet is cleaned up, the Centre can exit by selling its stake to a credible long-term investor. The promoters, too, must get real. If they are unwilling to recapitalise the company, they should allow a new management to take over. The longer the indecision continues, the harder it will be for Vi to regain lost ground.

To avoid further delay, as was the case when it took over a year for the government to execute its earlier equity conversion, the Centre could even park the AGR dues in a special purpose vehicle, much like the bad asset mechanism used during the Air India sale. This would immediately make Vi a more attractive investment proposition. A strong third player is essential for a healthy telecom ecosystem.



POINT
BLANK.


LOKESHWARRI SK

Recent news about Kerala High Court passing an interim stay order to exempt GST on premium paid for group health policies taken by retired bank employees, gave a minor jolt to many. While everyone was rejoicing on the removal of GST, at the rate of 18 per cent, on individual and family floater health policies, the fine print which mentioned that the exemption was not extended to group health policies had largely gone unnoticed.

The All-India Bank Pensioners and Retirees confederation appears to have been the first to notice it. Some of the two lakh retired bankers opting for the group health insurance policy through this association appear to have flagged that they were still being asked to pay the GST on the annual premium. While the stay on the levy of GST on these policies gives some relief, this may change depending on the outcome of the Court hearing.

But the outcry of the ex-bankers has helped highlight the plight which many others find themselves in too. The FAQ issued by the CBIC states that, “the exemption is explicitly for all INDIVIDUAL life and health insurance policies and the 18 per cent GST rate will be applicable on Group Insurance policies.”

The use of the bold font and capital letters to stress on the word ‘individual’ by the CBIC is interesting. It does not mean that all health policies covering individuals are exempt. It means that only those policies covering individuals and taken individually through separate contracts with the insurers, are exempt. If individuals opt for a policy collectively with a group, they must pay GST on the premium.

These rules are unfair because almost 82 per cent of the people have taken health covers through group policies. Groups such as retired employees, self-employed, those taking cover for parents through the employers’ group policies etc are hurt hard by these rules. If the objective of the waiver is to prompt more people to take health cover, then group health insurance policies must also be encouraged.

The GST must be waived for not just retired bank employees, but for all group health insurance policies.

THE RATIONALE
The number of people being covered by group health insurance is not small, at 25.5 crore in FY24, as per IRDAI. These people account for 82 per cent of the total group and individual health insurance policies. This number excludes people covered under government schemes.

Win for Democrats, with messages to both parties

Trump may not have been on the ballot, but the outcome is seen as a repudiation of his policies and rhetoric

Sridhar Krishnaswami

The Democrats could not have asked for more. A clean sweep on November 4 elections that is bound to send wake-up calls in the political establishments of the Grand Old Party besides a reminder to the Democrats themselves of the dangers of getting carried away.

For a party that is yet to come to terms with the shocking drubbing in November 2024, Democrats have carried New York Mayor’s race, the Governor races in Virginia and New Jersey and a win of Proposition 50 in California on re-districting that opens up the possibilities of picking up five Democratic seats in the House of Representatives.

Add to these the important win in Pennsylvania where three Democratic Justices in the State Supreme Court were voted to remain for another 10 years.

Political analysts are seeing Tuesday’s results as a shot in the arm for Democrats as they look at the Mid Term elections of November 2026; and the immediate focus is on the House where the Republicans currently have only a

three-seat advantage. Flipping the House would mean applying the brakes on the legislative agenda of President Donald Trump.

RE-DISTRICTING GAME
The strategy of the Trump White House was to start an aggressive re-districting plan, at least in the Red States, with a view to keeping the majority in the House. And this process started in Texas and soon the political fight was seen in Indiana, Ohio, North Carolina and Florida, to mention a few. Now, the Democrats will be seeing their efforts getting a boost not only in California but also with the wins in Virginia and New Jersey.

The re-districting game of the states has also had another unintended effect — that of law makers of both parties deciding not to contest in next year’s Mid Terms. One count has 20 Republicans and 11 Democrats gracefully bowing out of November 2026 leaving the field open in their respective parties.

For instance with Democrats unable to unite their various factions, there appears to be a movement from progressives to pressure the old guard to step aside and facilitate new blood in a



HISTORIC WIN. Zohran Mamdani
REUTERS

party that is searching for leadership and ideology. And in the current stand off over government shutdown, a clear warning was issued to the Democratic leadership in the House and Senate not to cave into the pressure and demands of the GOP.

Trump may not have been on the ballot, but the outcome is definitely seen as a repudiation of his policies and rhetoric since coming to office for the second term in January 2025. His latest standing in the opinion polls is at 37 per cent, the lowest thus far; but by and large

he stayed out of November 4 other than in New York where he championed the cause of Democrat Andrew Cuomo who ran as an independent and did not endorse the Republican on the ticket.

His argument for Candidate Cuomo: “A bad Democrat is better than a communist”. And as for California’s Proposition 50, Trump called the voting as a “fraud” and a “sham”.

In ways more than one, the elections outcome must remind Republicans and Democrats of different things. To the GOP of the current policies of the Republican administration that go far beyond food prices and inflation to include issues of race and voting rights; and to Democrats, of the need to scale back on rhetoric and focus on deliverables.

Zohran Mamdani, the new youngest Mayor of New York, knows that his policies on affordable housing will matter more than his anti-Israel remarks. And nationally, the Democrats will have to look for ways to work with their Republican colleagues to find a way out of the shutdown mess that has broken all closure records so far.

The writer is a senior journalist who has reported from Washington DC on North America and United Nations

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

Freebie menace
This refers to the Editorial “Freebies Unplugged” (November 5). The freebies being announced by the contesting political parties for securing votes without considering the state’s fiscal conditions are imprudent. Parties announcing the freebies must reveal to the electorate how they plan to fund them.

Luring the electorate through the freebies is not less than an act of bribing voters. Voters must be made aware of the health of State finances. Such information and data will enable the electorate to understand the feasibility of the declarations being made by the contestants and

will enable them to arrive at prudent decisions to cast a vote.
VSK Pillai
Changanacherry (Kerala)

It is with reference to the article ‘Building India’s semiconductor equipment ecosystem’ (November 5). Momentum is building up in semiconductor ecosystem in India with the six approved projects already in various stages of execution.

With dedicated policies, increasing private sector involvement and global partnerships, India is actively building the full semiconductor value-chain from fabrication and assembly to packing. Massive capital investment, skilled labour, long-term policy stability

and advanced supply chain are required to construct more semiconductor fabs.
P Victor Selvaraj
Palayamkottai (TN)

Tread with caution
Apropos ‘Banks seek higher exposure limit for M&A financing’ (November 5), the call by banks to relax exposure limits for merger and acquisition funding signals India’s growing appetite for corporate consolidation. But aggressive lending without adequate safeguards could expose the banking system to undue risks. The RBI must, therefore, walk a fine line between enabling growth and preserving financial stability. A

pragmatic approach would be to allow higher exposure limits, but only for well-rated, transparent entities with proven governance. Gradual implementation, backed by strict disclosure and stress-testing norms, can ensure that ambition doesn’t outpace accountability. In doing so, India’s banking framework can foster dynamic expansion while keeping systemic risks firmly under check.
A Myilsami
Coimbatore

This refers to “Banks seek higher exposure limit for M&A financing” (November 5). The RBI’s draft allows banks to fund acquisitions up to 70 per cent of deal value but caps their total

exposure to such finance at 10 per cent of Tier-1 capital and largely restricts it to listed, profitable firms. Banks now want this ceiling raised to 30-40 per cent and extended to unlisted acquirers, a move that would significantly raise risk. Globally, 70-90 per cent of mergers fail to meet stated goals. Given that banks already struggle with complex project appraisal, M&A financing demands far stronger analytical and monitoring skills.

Instead of an outright hike, the RBI should adopt a graded increase tied to demonstrated performance and sound risk-management capacity.
Srinivasan Velamur
Chennai



Why the raw deal for group health insurance?

If GST exemption is intended to improve health security for the masses, then group health policies must get the waiver too

As far as premium goes, gross premium on group health policies was ₹55,666 crore in FY24. This accounted for 57 per cent of the premium from individual and group policies. Now, the Council has agreed to forego GST of around ₹7,500 crore by waiving GST on individual and family floater policies (as per FY24 numbers).

It will have to forego an additional ₹10,000 crore, if the group plans are also waived, based on FY24 numbers. If we account for the increase in premiums over the last two years, even then, the revenue foregone is expected to be less than Rs 15,000 crore. This is surely not a tall ask given that there is an urgent need to ensure health security with the public healthcare system in disarray and not sufficient to cope with the growing healthcare needs.

The rationale for not granting GST exemption on group health policies appears to be that — these policies are commercial contracts entered between a company/an association of persons and

With the additional tax foregone being limited to under ₹15,000 crore, the Council should seriously consider exempting all group health policies from the incidence of GST

the insurer. These contracts are different from individual policies in many ways — the premium is lower, there is no waiting period for pre-existing diseases, no medical check-up is necessary and so on.

But those participating in group insurance need not be punished because they are deriving these benefits. If GST is waived on these policies, their attractiveness will increase and more companies and associations may come forward to offer group insurance to their employees, thus improving penetration.

The claim that companies can avail input tax credit on the GST paid and so the exemption is not needed, is misleading. ITC on GST on insurance premium is allowed only in sectors where such group policies are mandated by law or if the outward supply is in the same category as the input service. This is not true in most cases.

PREMIUM PAYMENT MODELS
There is wide variation within group health insurance models and painting them all with the same brush leads to wrong policy decisions.

In the first model, the company bears the entire premium burden. Many companies in India follow this model since it is a form of employee welfare expenditure and is akin to meeting the healthcare cost for the employee. This is done with the intention to increase employee loyalty and improve employee retention.

In the second model, the employer

pays the premium for a standardised minimum cover. But if the employee wants higher cover, then he/she must bear the additional premium on enhanced cover.

Third, the employer negotiates on behalf of the employees and gets them a lower premium and all the benefits which group policies enjoy. But the entire premium is deducted from the payroll in a phased manner. Many companies offer cover for parents under this model. In the fourth model, the insured could be a retired person or a self-employed person, who is a part of an association which negotiates with an insurance company for a group health insurance cover. The entire premium must be borne by the insured in such cases as well.

DIFFERENT STROKES NEEDED
The GST Council needs to acknowledge that premiums for all group policies are not borne by employers. In three out of four models, the individual is paying money out of his pocket, though the contract is negotiated by the company or the association.

The fourth category is especially vulnerable as it consists of senior citizens and the more vulnerable non-salaried people. Slapping GST on these groups is far from equitable.

With the additional tax foregone being limited to under ₹15,000 crore, the Council should seriously consider exempting all group health policies from the incidence of GST.





OPINION

The
Hindustan Times
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

{ OUR TAKE }

Building politics
of hope in NY

Zohran Mamdani’s win in New York
will resonate beyond the Big Apple

The election of Zohran Mamdani, a democratic socialist of South Asian and Muslim origin, as the mayor of New York will resonate beyond that city and even the US. Mamdani’s spectacular success, merely six months after he joined the mayoral race, in defiance of the Democratic establishment, and against a concerted campaign by President Donald Trump who called him “my little Communist mayor” and threatened to cut federal funds in the event of his election, suggests a pushback to the Make America Great Again (MAGA) agenda that has roiled the US since last December.

There are multiple takeaways from his win. One, Mamdani, 34, built his success around a new political coalition that includes the working class, ethnic minorities, and people disgruntled with the old guard in politics. This coalition of dissenters warmed up to Mamdani as he privileged a moral politics that offered hope, equity, and justice. It was successful because New York is a melting pot of cultures and ethnicities and has, historically, warmed up to inclusive political agendas. Two, his campaign, which promised a freeze on rent, universal childcare, and free public transport, reimagined the urban geography as a shared, class-agnostic space, where people are more important than the market. He concluded his post-victory address with the words, “This city belongs to you”, reinforcing his reading of the mandate as one for change, a new kind of politics, and a city that people can afford. Three, young voters were key to Mamdani’s success; his critics railed about his age and inexperience, and he turned both into an appeal for endorsement from the youth, whom he courted through targeted social media campaigns and Indian-style *padayatra* politics. In short, the Gen Z character in this result is unmistakable. The basket of his political views — pro-immigrant, pro-Palestine, pro-poor, anti-dynasty, anti-rich — endeared him to younger voters and won over many niche segments of the electorate.

Now, can Mamdani — and Gen Z politics — stay the course, and deliver? Mamdani has promised that “our greatness will be anything but abstract”. Delivering tangible benefits in the face of a hostile White House and against the logic of the market will test his political smarts, for sure. Power politics is ultimately the art of negotiation and compromise. The trouble with radical agendas is that these appear convincing in the abstract, but their realisation often leaves supporters disappointed. Winners get challenged in office where the abstract makes way for the concrete — budgets, social fault lines, lobbies, legacies. That said, it is the promise of Utopia that keeps politics running, and currently, Mamdani is its prophet. Good luck to him!

Regional vs national
in the Northeast

The new, yet-to-be-named political party announced by Meghalaya chief minister and National People’s Party (NPP) chief Conrad Sangma and TIPRA Motha leader Pradyot Manikya DebBarma, among others, is an interesting experiment. There is no shortage of regional parties in the Northeast, but a pan-regional party is rare. The NPP was founded as a pan-Northeast outfit in 2013, but it has remained a Meghalaya-centric outfit. TIPRA Motha has failed to win office even in its home, Tripura, where it advocates special privileges for the indigenous communities. The proposed party intends to combine the agendas of the NPP and TIPRA Motha — a regional agenda and the rights of indigenous people, respectively — which are mostly at variance. The Northeast is a federal entity whose political geography reflects its linguistic, ethnic, and religious diversity. Regional parties here have built their case by articulating subnationalist agendas and prioritising the local over the national. These parties have also worked together with the party in power at the Centre to ensure political and fiscal stability in the states.

The relationship among the national, regional, and indigenous in the Northeast is riddled with contradictions because of the nature of state formation in the region. Waves of migration have changed demographics, turning “indigeneity”, a tenuous concept, into a political issue in almost all states. Any party that wants to articulate a common vision for the region will have to reconcile the differences and project a federal and inclusive politics. That’s no easy task. However, with the BJP holding its place as one pole and the Congress in decline, a new third pan-regional party may eye the 25 Lok Sabha seats in the Northeast.

A quiet rehaul of
India-UK relations

The relationship, long tainted by mistrust, is on the mend. The UK is now increasingly, and meaningfully, sensitive to India’s strategic concerns and New Delhi recognises that it needs London

Beyond the words on the page of the agreement is the spirit and the confidence that has given to our two great countries to work even more closely together,” noted Keir Starmer, the British Prime Minister, during his recent visit to Mumbai. He was referring to the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) the two countries signed. The agreement promises to augment bilateral trade volume by £25.5 billion every year from its current standing at £44.1 billion. The UK-India Technology Security Initiative adds collaborative substance in the critical minerals and Artificial Intelligence space. But the spirit of this story, as Starmer hinted, is fundamentally political.

India’s ties with Britain are undergoing a silent revolution. The timing is notable. A relationship long tainted by mistrust, despite known historical depth and interactive breadth, is on the mend in an age of collapsing order. From resenting

London’s relations with Pakistan, to rubbishing post-Brexit Britain as strategically inconsequential, India took measures big and small to communicate its anger to Whitehall. In return, London kept its guard up with what it viewed as a Russia-friendly power that excels in protectionism, is prickly in diplomacy, and overconfident in its posturing. No more.

The shift in needle is not just on trade and tech, but also in the security sphere. The former plays out on the frontstage, and the latter on the backstage. On trade, the UK urgently needed trading partners as Brexit loomed. The India-UK Roadmap 2030, released in 2021, concentrated minds on opportunities and initiated CETA negotiations in 2022. The strategic urgency of this deal was not lost on London. Britain needed India. But the translation of political will into action amidst a fast-moving round of ministerial musical chairs required the civil service to up its game. Mostly occurring on the backstage, the changes in how Whitehall responded to the moment remain underappreciated.

India started talking trade, and Britain began speaking security. New Delhi’s decision to appoint a new high commissioner to London in 2022 changed the game. Vikram Doraiswamy cracked the British cultural code that more gets done over proverbial pints than formal luncheons. In response, Whitehall appointed a

former cyber security head of Northern Irish heritage as high commissioner to New Delhi in 2024. Lindy Cameron entered the role with expansive knowledge of the emergent tech landscape, openness to India’s security concerns, and awareness of Britain’s complicated colonial legacies. The resulting synergies were topped by candid conversations between national security advisors and foreign ministers.

The Khalistan issue tested the relationship. A crisis that risked burning bridges, ended up strengthening ties. To be sure, Indian, and British views continue to differ on this issue. But there is more understanding than misunderstanding. The UK responded by owning the radicalisation of pro-Khalistan elements as a British problem and responsibility. In turn, India went the extra mile to reassure Whitehall that it was not in the business of extrajudicial and extraterritorial coercion to tackle such problems. It took time for such messages to percolate and sediment. But today both sides discuss counterterrorism more than they have before, and more than one would have imagined two years ago.

Such understandings have helped Raisina Hill and Whitehall to better manage the troika of China, Russia, and Pakistan. Both countries have identical approaches towards China. They view Beijing as a security challenge but seek to capitalise on its economic potential. Regarding Russia



Avinash Paliwal



New Delhi’s decision to appoint a new high commissioner to London in 2022 changed the game.

and Pakistan, the gulf remains but has reduced. London has learnt to accommodate India’s Russia equities without giving up on sanctions against private entities that indirectly finance Russia’s war machine. Similarly, New Delhi has developed a nuanced view of Britain’s Pakistan equities. Whitehall does not hold a roseate view of Pakistan. But to prevent risk spillover, it needs to engage Rawalpindi. Far from hyphenating, engagement with both countries is an expression of Britain’s realities, which is, India offers opportunity, and Pakistan accrues risk.

This foregrounds the final, paramount, challenge. The US presidency under Donald Trump is a disruptive force. While Trump’s focus on Russia is welcome in London, Whitehall will not let its relationship with India become hostage to the whims of a mercurial White House. This is why it will not impose punitive tariffs despite pressure to do so from across the pond. Plus, Pakistan’s army chief Asim Munir will not be feted in the UK the way he has been in the US post Operation Sindoor, routine engagements notwithstanding. London is increasingly, and meaningfully, sensitive to India’s strategic concerns across the subcontinent and the Indian Ocean. The value of

this partnership, then, is not lost on New Delhi. India needs Britain.

But revolutions, good or bad, and trust, built or inherited, must never be taken for granted. To ensure that these successes are not lost to expected and unexpected turbulence, both sides need to be clear-eyed about two things. One, improved trade is not an insurance against future risk. Britain is facing severe economic and political tumult. In this environment, English nativism typified by Reform UK and weaponised by figures such as Tommy Robinson risks translating into targeting of British Indians — just like the Make America Great Again (MAGA) movement did with Indian Americans. This will test the bilateral. Two, depending on the direction the Russia-Ukraine war takes and how Europe responds, India could drop in the UK’s prioritisation. Both sides need to prepare for such eventualities and ensure that diverging priorities do not become conflicting interests.

Avinash Paliwal teaches at SOAS University of London and served at the UK Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office in 2024-25. The views expressed are personal

In Bihar, the wait for a
new governance model

Back in 2010, I, like scores of development researchers and policy wonks, was a frequent traveller to rural Bihar. The joke was that if you wanted a job in “development”, all you had to do was to stand in Patna’s (then rickety) airport. There were no fancy hotels, malls or highways, but Bihar was abuzz with possibility. “*Sushasan Babu*” — Nitish Kumar — had won a landslide re-election.

Credited with freeing Bihar from the dark days of “jungle raj”, his second term held the promise of transformation based on a politics that married social justice with material progress. Women were at the centre of this promise through a triad of path-breaking interventions from enhancing access to education (every morning as we set out to administer our surveys, we would be greeted by uniformed girls cycling to school), Jeevika (a network of women’s self-help groups; every village I went to had a recently appointed Jeevika Didi serving as a much needed needle between citizens and the bureaucracy), and enhanced representation through 50% reservation in local governments. Long before Narendra Modi, Nitish Kumar had recognised the power of women as a mobilised political constituency.



Yamini Aiyar

By 2025, the rickety Patna airport, has transformed into a glittering 21st century one, alongside malls and highways but the promise of *sushasan* (good governance) has faded into the sunset.

Slowing economic growth alongside the lived realities of entrenched unemployment, price rise, and corruption, are a daily reminder that *sushasan* stopped short of unleashing an economic transformation. In 2025, hope has been replaced with discontent.

As Bihar gets ready to vote, its failures from the possibilities of Lalu Prasad’s upending of caste equations in the 1990s to Nitish’s *sushasan* and present-day cynical caste and welfare calculations, has excited much commentary. Missing in this is a serious engagement with the state’s governance model, itself a product of Bihar’s complex political economy, and the limits it has set on the possibilities of realising radical transformation. Regardless of who wins, the state’s future will depend on the new government’s ability to transcend these limits and enable genuine social and material progress.

To understand Bihar’s present dilemmas, it is important to look back at the era of “jungle raj” and the governance breakdown it enabled. As scholars like Jeffery Witsoe have carefully documented, the governance breakdown of the Lalu era was by design, part of the political project of wresting control over state institutions from upper-caste dominance. Power was transferred to local politicians, who openly undermined the

bureaucracy, creating new networks of Yadav patronage and “jungle raj”. State capacity was hollowed out both through political interference and a preference for keeping posts vacant and government funds unspent over appointing upper-caste officials.

For Lalu, the politics of social transformation could not be divorced from governance, even if this meant decapitating governance to achieve the transformation.

In its heyday, Nitish’s governance model was a technocrat’s delight. In 2005, he rode to power on the back of a unique alliance with BJP upper caste supporters and the disparate group of non-dominant lower castes (the extremely backward castes and Maha Dalits). Freed of Lalu’s constraints Nitish was able to fuse social justice with governance by wresting power back from politicians to bureaucrats. Fiscal transfers from the Centre increased and the administration was slowly repopulated, including by appointing Jeevika Didis, whose pay hike is a key promise of the Tejashwi Yadav-led Mahagathbandhan. Recapitulating the government enabled Kumar to present himself as “*Sushasan Babu*”, as he set about restoring law and order and implementing a development agenda.

This model was essentially technocratic, seeking to insulate governance from the excesses of politics, particularly at the grassroots, where citizens encountered the State and entrenched patronage networks indulged in active corruption. To achieve this, power was centralised, and it fell to a small group of elite senior bureaucrats to govern from the top down. This model served Bihar well. Between 2005-2011-12, annual per capita GSDP grew at an average of 8.8% and the foundations of key welfare programmes from providing cycles to school-going girls to women’s self-help groups were laid.

However, it also contributed to trapping the state in a low equilibrium. Nitish’s model of technocratic governance was simply not designed to challenge the patronage networks at the grassroots. Thus, while it successfully erected school buildings, distributed cycles and set up self-help groups, it hit a wall when it came to challenging entrenched interests that built on these gains — ensuring that teachers and doctors showed up and performed, and protecting labour rights.

The two-decade long reign of Nitish raises an important question: Can governance stripped of politics achieve the goal of radical social transformation? Lalu’s politics decapitated governance even as it upended upper caste dominance of the state. Nitish chose governance, while his model of technocracy without politics restored order, it stopped short of dislodging entrenched patronage networks, leaving the state trapped in a low equilibrium.

The challenge for the new government, regardless of who wins, will lie in marrying politics with sustaining the State rather than suppressing State capacity. Biharis are impatient for transformation, but are its politicians up to the task?

Yamini Aiyar is senior visiting fellow, Brown University. The views expressed are personal

{ ZOHRA MAMDANI } MAYOR-ELECT, NEW YORK CITY



New York ... you have delivered a mandate for change, a mandate for a new kind of politics, a mandate for a city we can afford and a mandate for a government that delivers exactly that



Basic structure touchstone
for anti-conversion laws

As of August 2024, four years after Uttar Pradesh enacted its anti-conversion law, 1,682 people have been arrested and 835 criminal cases filed under the Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Religious Conversion Act, 2021. The number of convictions? Fewer than a dozen. Since then, nine other states have followed suit, including Uttarakhand and Rajasthan, where disproportionately severe amendments prescribe prison terms of up to life.

But India’s uneasy relationship with religious conversion runs deeper. The Constitution guarantees every Indian the right to “freely profess, practise and propagate” religion, yet the State often struggles to distinguish persuasion from coercion. In *Stanislaus v. State of MP* (1977), the Supreme Court ruled that “propagating” does not include “proselytising”. This narrow reading — although later viewed as a departure from the spirit of Article 25 — nevertheless gave legal cover to the first generation of so-called “Freedom of Religion” laws that claimed to protect choice but often ended up policing it.



Insiyah Vahanvaty

Today’s laws go much further. They criminalise conversion through vague terms like force, allurement, or undue influence and reverse the burden of proof. In Uttar Pradesh, anyone intending to convert must inform the district magistrate two months in advance, after which the state will conduct an inquiry to verify if the conversion is “genuine”. Anyone can file a complaint, allowing neighbours, political groups, or vigilantes to trigger investigations.



Ashish Bharadwaj

While these laws claim to protect the vulnerable, their real-world impact is chilling. Vigilantes use them to harass interfaith couples, suppress minority rights, and instill fear in them. Many registered cases involve Muslim men and Hindu women in consensual relationships who now face both social hostility and legal vulnerability. “Love jihad” may have been debunked, but such laws give it legal legs. Claims of guarding against deceitful conversions ring hollow when couples marrying across faiths are arrested, or when volunteers handing out food are accused of enticement. Behind the rhetoric of forced conversions lies a deeper anxiety: Of religious majoritarianism in a nation constitutionally bound to pluralism.

The case now before the Supreme Court, *Citizens for Justice and Peace v. State of UP* (2020), challenges the constitutional validity of these laws across Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Guj-

arat, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh. The Court must now decide whether these laws violate fundamental rights under Articles 21 (life and personal liberty), 25 (freedom of conscience) and 26 (freedom to manage religious affairs), whether they breach Article 14’s promise of equality, target marriage-linked conversions, or conflict with the Special Marriage Act. The Court has already hinted that these laws may not pass constitutional muster. On October 17, it quashed five FIRs from Fatehpur that alleged mass conversions of Hindus to Christianity, noting they were based on “incredulous material” with no victim complaints, amounting to harassment.

On October 23, in a sharp reminder of India’s secular foundation, it questioned several provisions of Uttar Pradesh’s anti-conversion law, observing that it imposes an “onerous” procedure on those wishing to change faith. Referring to the Preamble and the secular nature of the Constitution, the judges also raised a deeper constitutional concern: whether such laws erode the Constitution’s basic structure.

The concept of basic structure, introduced in *Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala* (1973), comprises the set of fundamental principles (such as secularism, democracy, and fundamental rights) that form the core of the Constitution and cannot be altered or destroyed by any amendment or legislation. By reopening this debate, the Court has brought India back to a foundational question: Can a secular democracy dictate the terms of faith? This moment demands a clear-eyed reckoning of societal implications. The fury over Tanishq’s 2020 ad showed us how even a tender image of interfaith love can spark outrage in a climate of fear. By casting such doubts, these laws risk deepening mistrust between communities. Instead of building bridges, they build walls, turning neighbours into watchers and friends into suspects.

The right to believe — or not believe — is not a gift from the State. It is foundational to human dignity. The Supreme Court’s answer will decide whether India’s secularism still beats with its own heart — or survives only by permission of laws.

Insiyah Vahanvaty is a socio-political commentator and author of ‘The Fearless Judge’. Ashish Bharadwaj is professor & dean, BITS Pilani’s Law School in Mumbai. The views expressed are personal

State finance fault lines

Cash transfers to women need a wider debate

PRS Legislative Research has published a comprehensive report on state-government finances. Even though state governments account for about two-thirds of general government expenditure, their finances do not receive adequate attention in public debate. Reports like these, therefore, fill a crucial gap in the general understanding of state-government finances. Expectedly, the study underscores several fault lines worth discussing here. It shows, for instance, in 2023-24, states spent over 60 per cent of their revenue receipts on heads such as salaries, pensions, subsidies, and interest payments. In the aggregate, states also ran a revenue deficit worth 0.4 per cent of gross state domestic product (GSDP), which means they borrowed to fund recurring expenditure. High levels of committed expenditure constrain state governments’ ability to undertake developmental work.

Capital expenditure in states is being supported by the special-assistance scheme of the Union government. Under this, states are provided 50-year interest-free loans. Between 2020-21 and 2025-26 (till August 11, 2025), states were given over ₹4 trillion under the scheme. The analysis suggests that states’ capital expenditure from their own revenue sources has remained flat, and the increase is supported by the central scheme. This is not an optimal outcome because discontinuing the assistance, which the central government is not obliged to continue, could lead to a sharp decline in their capital expenditure, with implications for overall growth. Another important outcome highlighted in the report is increasing inequality among states. Those with higher per capita output raise higher revenue and, consequently, have a higher capacity to spend on development. This will continue to widen the gap between rich and poor states, and this could have not only economic consequences but also social implications. Addressing this widening gap will be a serious challenge for policymakers.

Another important aspect that has received a fair bit of policy attention is the unconditional cash transfers for women. Numbers compiled by PRS show that the number of states providing such assistance has increased from two in 2022-23 to 12 states in 2025-26. In 2025-26, states have collectively budgeted over ₹1.68 trillion, or about 0.5 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP), for such transfers. About half the states providing those are expected to run revenue deficits this financial year. In effect, they are borrowing to distribute cash. Given the political appeal of such schemes, it is reasonable to assume that more states will opt for such schemes, and competitive politics will lead to increasing outlays over time.

Unconditional transfers mean different things to different sections of people. For political parties, the incentive is clear. It has been argued that such transfers lead to better socioeconomic outcomes. However, it’s worth debating and probing whether this is the best way to improve socioeconomic outcomes, with the given Budget constraints. A clear understanding can improve the allocation of budgetary resources. States collectively had debt worth 27.5 per cent of GDP as of March 2025. The Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Review Committee had in 2017 recommended a debt ceiling of 20 per cent for states. Besides, states also guarantee borrowing by their public-sector enterprises. Such borrowings was worth 4.2 per cent of GSDP in 2023-24, and are a risk for state finances. It is also worth noting that some states, such as Himachal Pradesh and Punjab, are in a much deeper fiscal problem than what the aggregate figures show and may require a different set of policy interventions.

Testing times for Trump

US polls give signals for November 2026 mid-terms

Key elections across the United States (US) were largely seen as a political test for Donald Trump’s second presidency ahead of critical mid-term elections next year. The results suggest that, at the very least, the Republicans will have a tough battle on their hands in November next year. Nowhere was this more evident than in the extraordinary election of 34-year-old Ugandan-born Democratic Socialist Zohran Kwame Mamdani as the first Muslim and South Asian mayor of New York City. With 50 per cent of the vote, Mr Mamdani polled almost nine percentage points more than Andrew Cuomo, a former Democrat governor of New York who ran as an independent financed by billionaires across the political spectrum, including former mayor Michael Bloomberg. Mr Cuomo also received an unsolicited endorsement from the President, who threatened to cut federal funding to New York if “Communist Candidate Mamdani” is elected (though the Constitution allocates this power to Congress).

This extreme descriptor is rooted in Mr Mamdani’s progressive platform that mainstream Democrats eschew: Free bus rides and child care, and the imposition of a four-year freeze on rents in rent-controlled apartments to address the cost-of-living crisis. Funding for these freebies is to come from a sharp increase in corporate-tax rates from 7.25 to 11.5 per cent and a 2 per cent tax on incomes above \$1 million, explaining why billionaires bankrolled his opponent. Though the less wealthy districts — the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Harlem — delivered the expected votes, Mr Mamdani scored surprise victories in some upscale neighbourhoods such as the Upper West Side and parts of the Village. Still, this charismatic former New York state representative will have his work cut out meeting these heightened expectations. First, his funding plans need to be approved by a state legislature dominated by mainstream Democrats. Second, in an era of increasingly mobile capital, his tax plans could precipitate a flight of businesses to lower-tax jurisdictions, which could restrict the city’s growth on which he is banking to deliver more revenue.

Though Mr Mamdani’s progressive politics is being seen as an alternative to the Democratic Party’s agenda, middle-of-the-road platforms mobilised voters elsewhere. In Virginia, a former Democrat Congresswoman and Central Intelligence Agency officer Abigail Spanberger defeated Republican Lieutenant Governor Winsome Earle-Sears by a margin of 15 percentage points in the governor’s race. As a state that swings between the two parties, Ms Spanberger’s victory is being seen as a bellwether for the November mid-terms. In New Jersey, a former navy helicopter pilot and four-term Democrat member of Congress, Mikie Sherrill, defeated a Trump-endorsed candidate to become the first woman governor of a state that had seen a rightward shift in recent years. No less significant is the overwhelming vote (64 per cent) in California, America’s largest state by voter numbers, in favour of Democrat plans to redraw its electoral districts in its favour as a counter to Mr Trump’s efforts to gerrymander in Republican states. With the federal government heading for a record closure over political differences over welfare funding, these elections may have signalled ways to break the deadlock.

Corruption and the Gen Z revolts

Each revolt in our neighbourhood was driven by corruption, with lessons for India

ILLUSTRATION: AJAYA KUMAR MOHANTY



In the recent Sardar Patel Memorial lecture, India’s National Security Advisor Ajit Doval correctly identified governance as a key factor in the toppling of governments in Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. Gen Z led revolts have now knocked down corrupt and tone-deaf regimes across India’s neighbourhood and are spreading further afield. The latest is Madagascar in the Indian Ocean, where protesters claim they were inspired by uprisings in Nepal and Sri Lanka. Similar, Gen Z protests in Indonesia, the Philippines, Kenya, and Morocco have also forced governments to reverse policies. A common symbol — a grinning skull and crossbones wearing a straw hat — is becoming the leitmotif of these revolts, inspired by a Japanese manga and anime series called *One Piece*, in which a crew of pirates takes on corrupt governments.

The immediate trigger for each revolt is slightly different. In Bangladesh, it was a decision to bring back a government job quota system; in Nepal, a social media ban; in Indonesia, higher salaries for parliament; and in Madagascar, electricity and water shortages. But the broader reasons for the revolts are the same, whatever the initial trigger may be. The young are revolting because of a lack of opportunities and poor services, but a common cause across all these uprisings is anti-corruption. Social media has made the young aware of how ineffective and corrupt elitist governments are ruining their lives and mortgaging their future.

Transparency International (TI) publishes a Corruption Perception Index every year. The index is based on business perceptions of the extent of corruption in 180 countries, ranked on a scale of 0 to 100 — where a higher score means less corruption.

According to the TI scores, Bangladesh has an extremely high level of corruption (ranked 150th), as does Madagascar (ranked 140th) and Sri Lanka (ranked 121st) — all of which have seen an increase in corruption (see table). Nepal is also a highly corrupt country (ranked 107th) but has not seen a significant increase over the last decade, according to TI. However, Nepal has exceedingly high levels of recorded youth unemployment at 20.8 per cent — just a bit lower than Sri Lanka, where recorded youth unemployment stands at 22.5 per cent. The actual unemployment may be much higher.

The protests have now spread to Latin America in Peru (rank 127th), where corruption has risen hugely in recent years. Countries with extremely high levels of corruption that are vulnerable are Mexico (rank 140th) and Pakistan (rank 135th). Across Asia, we see substantial improvements in anti-corruption efforts in China, South Korea, Taiwan, and Vietnam, but not much success in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand. The country that has shown the most improvement in its corruption Index is Vietnam (rank 88th), and, as a result, it is also doing very well economically. The trial of the richest Vietnamese woman Truong My Lan, convicted of financial fraud, showed that Vietnam was serious about tackling corruption.

It is hard to predict where the next revolt will be but expect more Gen Z revolts around the world as geoeconomic fragmentation and uncertainty rise. What are the lessons for India?

India (rank 96th) showed improvements in its TI corruption score initially during the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government’s first term, but those improvements have been subsequently eradi-



IF TRUTH BE TOLD

AJAY CHHIBBER

Telecom’s question of fair play

How the Union government reacts to the latest Supreme Court order linked to adjusted gross revenue (AGR) of Vodafone Idea (Vi) could throw up many questions.

Earlier this week, the apex court allowed the Centre to re-examine Vi’s entire AGR dues up to financial year 2016-17. This was a modification of an order issued on October 27 that had focused only on an additional demand of ₹9,450 crore. The subsequent order of November 3 has widened the scope of relief for the struggling telco manifold. And this leads us to the question how the Union government, which holds a 49 per cent stake in Vi, would act now.

Will the government waive the AGR dues, which are currently pegged at ₹83,400 crore, of the stressed telco in “public interest”? Will the government pick up an additional stake in Vi, in lieu of its financial liability, and become a majority owner in the telecom company that’s a joint venture of the Aditya Birla Group and UK-based Vodafone? Also, how will the government deal with Bharti Airtel’s plea seeking relief on its AGR dues, which stands at around ₹38,604 crore? The other major telecom player, Reliance Jio, does not have any pending AGR dues as it started its operations only in September 2016.

If the government takes further steps, including granting relief to Vi on its piled up liabilities, to prevent a duopoly situation in the telecom industry, another question may not be out of order. Can’t the state-owned telcos, Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd and Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Ltd, together provide

the required bandwidth to keep the telecom industry competitive and duopoly-resistant? As of September 30, 2025, private telecom players had over 92 per cent market share, while public sector telcos held the remaining 8 per cent.

And as for duopoly, there are other consumer-facing sectors such as aviation witnessing a near duopoly situation — not a best case scenario, though.

Although the customer base of a telecom company (around 127.78 million wireless/broadband subscribers in the case of Vi) is often cited as one of the main reasons for the government taking measures to keep an entity afloat, number portability has been an option available to mobile phone users for some years. However, absorbing such a large number of users would be difficult in one go.

At this point, if the government grants relief to Vi in public interest and not to its rival Airtel, the question of level-playing field could come up. Even other players with no pending dues could ask for a level playing field in some other area of operation — for instance, in satellite broadband.

Satellite broadband has been stuck for a long time as spectrum allocation — who will get how much and how — has not been firmed up so far. We do know, however, that spectrum for satellite broadband will be given out through the administered allocation mechanism and not through auction, in sync with the global practice. The divide among the potential players in this segment could resurface on the question of level-playing field. The



NOT FOR PROFIT

NIVEDITA MOOKERJI

Governance barometer

Transparency International corruption perceptions score: Selected countries

	Bangladesh	Sri Lanka	Madagascar	Nepal	India	Vietnam
2014	25	38	28	29	38	31
2019	26	38	24	34	41	37
2024	23	32	26	34	38	40
2024 (Rank)	151	121	140	107	96	88

Source: Transparency International

cated, and India’s TI corruption score is back to where it was in 2014. These scores are based on perceptions of businesses. What about citizens? What is the level of corruption they face in their day-to-day lives when dealing with government agencies, paying bills, obtaining a driver’s licence, or completing legal and real estate transactions? Anecdotal evidence tells us that Indian citizens face huge levels of corruption — despite the digitisation of bill payments and tax filing. Anyone you meet will have a horrific story about bribery — especially when dealing with the courts or the police.

We need not rely on anecdotes alone. Transparency International’s 2020 Global Corruption Barometer surveyed citizens about their interactions with government officials and whether they had to pay a bribe. The survey found that among citizens who had contact with a government official, Indians reported the highest incidence of bribery (39 per cent) — higher than in any other country, including Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. Bribery and corruption are now an accepted part of life in India. Even with digitisation, officials have found ways to extract bribes, one way or another. At the highest levels, the electoral bond scheme provides huge opportunities for large-scale political funding without transparency. But what really counts — and hurts a citizen’s daily life — is everyday corruption: Dealing with the police, navigating the courts, obtaining government licences, or completing property transactions — the so-called petty corruption.

This does not mean that India will necessarily see a Gen Z revolt like we have seen in our neighbourhood. The country’s enormous size and stronger institutions act as a buffer, but pockets of huge vulnerability do exist. A safety valve is migration, with large numbers of youth leaving poll-bound Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Odisha for work in other parts of the country. But this too is creating tensions in the receiving states, some of which have now instituted quotas for their own citizens — even though they benefit from in-migration. Nevertheless, the revolts in our neighbourhood should serve as a warning that India must address not only youth unemployment but also the deeper, more pervasive cancer of corruption that runs through the system and acts as a heavy tax on its citizens.

The author is a distinguished visiting scholar at the Institute for International Economic Policy, George Washington University. His book *Unshackling India* (HarperCollins India) was declared the best new book in economics by the *Financial Times* in 2022

A multidimensional assessment of national security



DAMMU RAVI

During the Cold War, the idea of “national security” was usually narrowly viewed through a politico-military prism. That understanding has now evolved, say Arvind Gupta and Rajesh Singh in this co-authored book. Mr Gupta is a former diplomat and currently director of the Vivekananda International Foundation. He was earlier deputy national security adviser and headed the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses. He is one of the foremost scholars on national security and foreign policy. Mr Singh is a veteran journalist, author and media adviser on political and security matters. The authors point out that Operation

Sindoor marked a turning point in the evolution of India’s national security criteria, while the Pahalgam terrorist attack compelled a deeper recalibration of India’s threat assessment. Keeping India’s concerns in the backdrop the book invites readers to examine the non-traditional threats caused by disruptions in finance, food, water, health, energy, climate change, technology as well as from terrorism and organised crime and so on.

The title of the book *The Silent Enemy* aptly captures the listless attitude at the policy level that tends to treat these issues as secondary. The authors lament this lackadaisical approach, since security and development are two sides of the same coin. They call for an integrated approach, an understanding implicit in the classical writings of the *Arthashastra* that lays emphasis on the King’s duty to ensure *yogakshama* (welfare) and govern according to *dharma* (rule of law). In contrast, the West views national security from the angle of human rights and freedoms. This perspective gave birth to a draconian UN resolution: “the responsi-

bility to protect” (R2P), which, in turn, created a dangerous crevice for justifying external intervention.

The book alerts readers to the weaponisation of geo-economics through tariffs, sanctions and export restrictions. The deliberate disruption of energy supply chains is a familiar adage; in 1973, the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) used it against those supporting Israel and the 1990 Gulf War was all about US control over oil. The imposition of additional tariffs by the US and sanctions by the European Union for buying discounted Russian oil is a grim reminder of our vulnerability. The suggestion that India enhance the ratio of renewables in the energy mix may not be a silver bullet but can have a mitigating effect.

Food security is a critical factor for social stability. Its causal link was amply clear during the Arab Spring when, in Tunisia, high food prices triggered popular outrage with a contagion effect across the Arab world. Although India has achieved self-sufficiency through the

Green Revolution, it is still vulnerable to food inflation. Meanwhile, conflicts over water pose security challenges; Asia and Africa account for about 80 per cent of the intra-country conflicts. For India, cross-border disputes over the Indus waters and the Brahmaputra have sharpened security concerns.

Maritime security should naturally form part of a nation’s strategic calculus. This assertion is in sync with the 19th century US naval officer and historian Alfred Thayer Mahan’s belief: “Whoever rules the waves rules the world”. India can ill afford to ignore this imperative given its 75,000 sq km-long coastline and about 2.3 million sq km Economic Export Zone. The Indian Ocean is also a major artery of global trade with about 60,000 ships passing through it every year, carrying 50 per cent of world trade and 75 per cent of energy supplies. India’s SAGAR policy, launched in 2015, aims to achieve a secure, stable and prosperous Indian Ocean Region in cooperation with its neighbours. However, the authors’ recommendations miss an essential strategy — that

of enhancing economic stakes for neighbours in the initiative to make maritime security enduring.

The importance of technological autonomy has been highlighted in the book, underlining the importance of rising investment in research and development (R&D) from the current low of 0.6 per cent of gross domestic product. Skilling forms a logical corollary of this approach, especially for a country like ours where nearly 12 million graduates enter the job market every year.

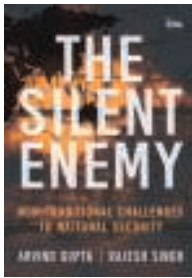
The authors draw attention to the contagion effect of financial crises — for example, the 2008 global financial crisis was triggered by the sub-prime lending rates in the US. The growing inequalities within and across nations, especially in the Global South, can cause unrest. Nobel laureate Thomas Piketty suggests finding alter-

natives to dollar usage such as trade settlement in national currencies. In this, India could assist the Global South with its low-cost solutions under its Digital Public Infrastructure programme.

The authors lay emphasis on building soft power diplomacy to complement the nation’s hard power tools, especially if they are aligned with national security objectives. India’s projection of cultural attributes in the spirit of *Vasudeva Kutumbakam*, they observe, can be effective in influencing outcomes and countering deep fakes and false narratives in the age of artificial intelligence.

The book makes compelling reading for all those interested in understanding the multidimensional aspects of national security and the need to tackle them in a forthright and realistic manner, which hinges on good governance and whole-of-government approach.

The reviewer is retired IFS officer dammuravi@gmail.com



The Silent Enemy: Non-traditional Challenges to National Security
by Arvind Gupta and Rajesh Singh
Published by INK
445 pages ₹899

Remarkable victory but real test begins now

NEW YORK CITY’S first Muslim and South Asian mayor — and the first immigrant to ascend to City Hall in nearly 50 years — Zohran Mamdani has charted a remarkable course. Riding on a wave of popular discontent with mainstream politics, the 34-year-old may well have rewritten the script in a city that most illustrates the open arms with which America once greeted the “outsider” and which remains a mosaic of identities. It is a victory of many resonances. It is also merely a beginning for a man being hailed as the new political star, whose energetic and imaginative campaign mobilised a record turnout in a highly polarised election.

For Mamdani, the real test begins now. The coalition that brought him victory — the immigrants, minorities and “the next generation of New Yorkers who refuse to accept that the promise of a better future was a relic of the past”, that he referred to in his victory speech — will expect transformative change. This will not be easy, and not just because of the radicalism of his positions. His open espousal of socialism in the world’s most capitalist city has spooked many. Mamdani’s win comes at a fractious time in relations between the federal and local governments in the US. With President Donald Trump threatening to cut funding to cities that don’t comply with his priorities, Mamdani can expect a tough battle for the resources he needs to fulfil his promise of making NYC more affordable and liveable. In an America of deepening political faultlines, New York’s new mayor will be closely watched.

Mamdani’s rise is inextricably linked to the story of New York itself, with its vibrant immigrant base and progressive-leaning electorate. But that is also what could limit its transformative potential beyond the urban centre, into the hinterlands of an America that is yearning for change, although not necessarily of the kind that the mayor-elect represents. It is also a moment of reckoning for the Democratic Party, floundering after last year’s MAGA wave. Mamdani’s victory shows an electorate that wants boldness, authenticity and a politics that isn’t just for insiders. In a different but complementary register, a figure like Abigail Spanberger, a moderate, represents the other face of a party in transition: Following a campaign that, like Mamdani’s, was laser-focused on cost-of-living issues, she was elected governor of Virginia on Tuesday. Her pragmatic realism and Mamdani’s idealism speak to a churn that the Democratic Party needs to recognise and more fully face. It must find a way to reconcile the demands of its new insurgent wing with the needs of governance — or risk alienating the very voters it must appeal to.

Bihar deserves better than more of the same

THERE ARE BROADLY two Bihar stories. The first, embodied in the manifestos of the NDA and Mahagathabandhan, is about politics as usual — a series of humdrum promises that seek to tap into established grievances and identities. In themselves, jobs and social security schemes targeted at historically marginalised sections or those aimed at the youth are unexceptionable. However, they are also — as with Tejashwi Yadav’s promise of a government job for every household — fiscally untenable. The second story that needs to be told as the state heads into an important election is one that recognises the possibilities of Bihar, and acknowledges that it needs to leapfrog to the next stage.

Bihar’s tallest leaders, including Lalu Prasad and Nitish Kumar, have changed the grammar of politics. The former focused on social injustice and representation of backward castes in a state of raging inequalities. The RJD’s fall came by not building on the social coalitions it mobilised, by presiding over de-institutionalisation and inattention to governance. Its failure on the law-and-order front continues to haunt the party. Under Nitish Kumar, social justice was vitally linked to governance, schemes such as providing cycles for girl students were targeted interventions with outside benefits. Bihar is growing. But is it growing fast enough, and at the same pace for everyone?

Out-migration, at its current scale, is a symptom of a lack of opportunity. But it can also be an asset. Rather than lament the current state of affairs, the political class must frame *palayan* as a form of diasporism that can benefit the state. The young, ambitious, aspirational Bihari is present in almost every part of the country and on every rung of the value chain. The student at IIT, the professor at an Ivy League university — each should have a stake in the state. How can the remittances, talents and networks of the 74-million diaspora be used to take Bihar forward? New player Prashant Kishor’s appeal to the voter to cast her ballot for her children’s future may be idealistic or just a clever turn of phrase. But it must serve as a wake-up call for established political players. Bihar’s people deserve better than more of the same.

J&K’s missed chance to play the game

FEW SPECTACLES IN the Subcontinent can match the palpable electricity that surrounds a cricket match. In the stands, anticipation hums like a taut string, fans chant slogans and time seems to slow down and speed up all at once. Cricket, arguably more than any other team sport, is theatre and community combined: A choreography of skill and athleticism, of patience and strategy. The IPL distilled that alchemy into a modern carnival — a commercially successful blend of legacy and novelty.

In Jammu and Kashmir, however, a similar dream seems to have slipped through the fingers. The Indian Heaven’s Premier League (IHPL), an attempt to bring global franchise cricket to the Valley and boost both sports and tourism in the region, has unravelled in scandal with unpaid players and match officials, vanishing organisers, and outstanding hotel bills. The league, which featured former players such as Chris Gayle, Jesse Ryder and Praveen Kumar, had to be abandoned.

Corruption in sport is not new — the 2011 money-laundering scandal involving the J&K Cricket Board is only one reminder. But its toll is always cumulative: Sponsors drift away, infrastructure decays, and young cricketers find themselves fighting not just opponents but a weary system that seems to have forgotten them. In recent years, players like Abdul Samad, Yudhvir Singh, and Rasikh Salam have carried the Valley’s hopes into the starburst of the IPL. Yet debacles like the IHPL do more than squander opportunity — they erode the players’ and the fans’ trust. What slips away is not merely a tournament, but a chance for a region to see itself reflected in the game it loves.

Mamdani’s win in New York reminds us that identity is no substitute for strategy

AFTER THE President of the United States, the mayor of New York City is the second most visible job in America. Now, Indian American Zohran Mamdani holds the title. Winning over 50 per cent of the vote in a decisive election powered by South Asians, young people, and fed-up New Yorkers, the 34-year-old Mamdani has helped rekindle faith in American democracy. In the same year that the Trump administration force-fed stories of hate and fear, the Mamdani campaign reminded the city that joy and unity can prevail.

The road ahead for the first Muslim and Indian American mayor of New York City will not be smooth. Even so, many people are buoyed by what is possible, especially in the dark days of a Trump presidency. New Yorkers elected a fighter, one who triumphantly challenged Donald Trump on election night with the words, “Turn the volume up.”

The political establishment will scramble to understand a victory that is being termed improbable and remarkable. What’s clear is this: Mamdani ran an impeccable campaign, rooted in consistency, creativity and commitment.

His message, “make this city affordable”, resonated with many New Yorkers. Throughout the race, the candidate made affordability the cornerstone of his administration. In debate answers, off-the-cuff comments, and his acceptance speech on Tuesday night, he defined af-

fordability as a rent freeze, no-cost childcare, and fast, free buses. That consistency mattered not just because it kept his comments clear and understandable, but because it reminded voters that he is steadfast and reliable. As he said in his first speech after the election result: “You showed that when politics speaks to you without condescension, we can usher in a new era of leadership.”

The campaign’s creativity did not suffer as a result of the consistent message. The impressive field operation engaged voters who were going to the polls for the first time as well as those who were undecided. In the last days of his campaign, Mamdani visited senior centres and night clubs, connecting with New Yorkers seemingly everywhere. As he danced salsa and soca and zipped around on a cycle, he showed authenticity and reminded us that we all deserve to be joyous. The campaign’s mood was in stark contrast to that of Andrew Cuomo, who stoked fear and appeared defensive.

Alongside consistency and creativity, Mamdani showed a commitment — to himself and to us. In his tireless campaigning — from visits to churches and gurdwaras and to the streets of New York — he demonstrated his values by working hard for our support. Despite being targeted by Islamophobic attacks, the mayor-elect doubled down



SAYU BHOJWANI

The political establishment will scramble to understand a victory that is being termed improbable and remarkable. What’s clear is this: Mamdani ran an impeccable campaign, rooted in consistency, creativity and commitment

Trump looms over COP, even after pulling US out of Paris Pact



MANJEEV SINGH PURI

THE NEXT UNFCCC COP will be held in Belem, Brazil, from November 10 to 25. Times couldn’t be tougher for the negotiations — even in 1992, when the UNFCCC was adopted in Rio de Janeiro, there was no questioning climate change. The negotiations were about commitments, obligations, and responsibilities. Today, things are different.

The US has been a long-time naysayer at the UNFCCC, but now, for a second time, it has withdrawn from the Paris Agreement of 2015. At the UNGA, President Donald Trump called climate change “the greatest con job ever perpetrated on the world”. He is pushing fossil fuels — a bonanza of now limited time given technological advances in alternative fuels. His administration, playing disruptor at Belem, shouldn’t, therefore, be taken lightly — they are still in UNFCCC, and recently at an IMO conference used every tactic, including browbeating smaller countries to avoid setting net-zero targets.

To make matters worse, the Europeans, who project themselves as climate champions, are now pulling back on their own climate ambitions. Some people also feel the negotiations are becoming a “tamasha” as was witnessed at the Dubai COP in 2023, with a huge expo and too much space for fossil-fuel producers.

Others, like Bill Gates, think that global warming shouldn’t be the highest of global priorities, and instead, the focus should be on health and prosperity. The World Bank has also shifted focus from sustainability to employment, despite a push by many countries to raise its funding for climate change to \$1 trillion. There should be little doubt that these shifts appeal to Trump, but they shouldn’t be overlooked. The UNFCCC had better be aware.

Brazil has rightly chosen to focus on implementation and not new commitments. And it is taking a diplomatic way in choosing to vest the COP presidency in veteran multilateralist Andre do Lago, Brazil’s former ambassador to India.

Climate change is an important issue

for BRICS, which adopted a Leaders’ Declaration on Climate Finance at its summit earlier this year in Brazil. With the developed world hesitant, an increase in fund mobilisation does not appear realistic at Belem, though for the Global South, some success is a must, along with ensuring that climate negotiations continue in a multilateral framework. This is bolstered by the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, which recognised the global threat of climate change with a legal obligation for countries to mitigate this huge challenge.

The BRICS, as the largest countries in the South, therefore, have not only an obligation but a vested interest in adding their heft to the South’s demands. With the US out and Europe ambivalent, checking the Chinese ambition of global leadership on climate change is an urgent imperative. It needs to reach out to the South.

The Brazilians are also looking at broadening the climate discourse. At the WTO, do Lago floated the idea of a platform, the Integrated Forum on Climate Change and Trade, as Brazil’s flagship initiative at Belem. Brazil’s ideas on working on the climate and trade nexus have been met with a degree of hesitation from the South, which sees them as a vindication of non-tariff barriers and a dilution of the principle of differentiation. On the other hand, the EU certainly and possibly even the Chinese are positively inclined. Given the Brazilian push and the key imperative for success at Belem, and to keep multilateral negotiations on climate change going, it would appear useful for the BRICS to join these conversations while negotiating for guardrails to safeguard their development imperatives. For India, collaborative global action on climate change is also key to the pursuit of its twin goals — Viksit Bharat by 2047 and net zero by 2070. India also has an interest in the multilateral negotiations, having shown an interest in hosting the COP in 2028.

The writer, a distinguished fellow at TERI, is former Indian ambassador to the EU & former lead negotiator for India at UNFCCC

on his commitment to his faith and being who he is. In his acceptance speech, he reinforced this message, saying that “New York will remain a city of immigrants” and be “led by an immigrant”.

In City Hall, Mamdani will continue to navigate minor but meaningful irritations like the mispronunciation of his name and challenges to his citizenship. Instead of making him exceptional, these behaviours remind many Americans that he is like us. Especially now, with the Trump administration waging war on immigrants, Mamdani’s victory is a message that America belongs to all of us, including those who are Muslim, Indian, foreign-born. On Election night, speaking to an audience of supporters, he declared, “This city is your city, and this democracy is yours, too.” That’s the kind of spirit that led South Asian aunties to volunteer on his campaign and sing a loving tribute for him in Urdu-Punjabi.

The New York City mayor-elect is one of three Muslim Americans who ran mayoral campaigns in major US cities. Omar Fateh, a Somali American state legislator in Minneapolis, and Mussab Ali, a Pakistani American in Jersey City, ran unsuccessful campaigns. Like Mamdani, Fateh and Ali are under 40 and ran as progressives. These local races have national and global significance, given the intense polarisation within the United States and

● WORDLY WISE
Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness.
— Desmond Tutu

Gurgaon’s new traffic rule: Mind your manners, please



SHOBHIT MAHAJAN

IT WAS recently reported that the Gurgaon traffic police authorities have asked traffic cops to say “sorry” and “thank you” when they stop people for violating traffic rules. This seemed superfluous to me, since in my experience the traffic cops have always been extremely courteous when they inform me about how I could either “settle” the challan immediately or go spend hours in the traffic court to take care of it.

Recently, I was stopped after a red light by one of them. My ostensible offence was crossing the intersection on the yellow light. The intersection in question is a very long one and I had entered it when the light was green. However, by the time I was through, the light had changed to yellow. I tried explaining this to the cop — he was very courteous and politely asked me to show him a video of what happened! I was a bit perplexed and told him to look at my white hair: Did I look like a person who would even know how to shoot a video while driving? This led to some amusement among his fellow cops, who then let me go with a warning.

The case of this intersection is a curious one — most lights now come with a time indicator that will tell you how many seconds before they turn yellow. However, at this fairly long intersection, the indicator mysteriously never works. And, of course, the cops are ready during rush hours to pounce on any poor, hapless driver who happened to have entered the intersection, like me, when the light was green but couldn’t cross it in time.

The traffic cops are not just concerned with traffic violations — they also want to make sure you are safe. Driving on the Delhi-Gurgaon highway is usually a nightmare during rush hour. But at other times, vehicles can drive at a reasonable speed staying within the speed limit. The cops obviously don’t want you to speed at all since it is dangerous for you. And so they have come up with an ingenious plan. They stop and check commercial vehicles precisely at places where there is potential for a bottleneck. This closure of one lane obviously causes a huge jam and so the other vehicles inch along. A brilliant way to make sure you stay safe on the road.

A similar modus operandi is adopted by the Delhi Transport Department people who check the permits of long-distance sleeper buses from Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. They are waiting for them at precisely the same place every morning. The problem is that the place where they stop them also happens to be a particularly narrow stretch of a very busy road. The tailback this causes is so predictable that I just factor it in while planning my daily commute.

The traffic cops don’t need any instructions to be courteous — they are very courteous and go out of their way to help you “settle” the penalty for your traffic violation. And since they are busy making sure you pay for breaking the rules, the traffic, especially during rush hours, becomes a free-for-all. Maybe the authorities need to instruct them to, for once, manage the traffic instead of concentrating on collecting funds for the exchequer.

The writer is professor of Physics and Astrophysics, University of Delhi

40 YEARS AGO

November 6, 1985



Stabilising prices

THE GOVERNMENT and the RBI should show due concern for achieving the price stability objective, taking into consideration the socio-economic objectives of planned development, an RBI-appointed committee has said. In its report reviewing the functioning of the monetary system, the committee was of the view that it was necessary to evolve a framework for ensuring that increases in money supply were not too far out of alignment with year-to-year growth in output.

PM on Af-Pak

PRIME MINISTER Rajiv Gandhi said on Tuesday that Pakistan appeared to be interested in keeping the Afghanistan issue alive to secure more arms. He also expressed concern over Pakistan’s attempt to revive the Kashmir issue, and said Gen Zia-ul-Haq’s speech at the UN was a clear indication of that. He also said he hoped it

would be possible to reduce tensions between India and China following the talks now in progress.

KGB officer ‘kidnapped’ by US

VITALY YURCHENKO, a high-level Soviet KGB officer, who the State Department claims defected to the United States, said he had been drugged, brought to the US unconscious and against his will and offered \$1 million for his cooperation. Reacting, the State Department said his charges were “completely false and without any foundation”. Yurchenko repeatedly described his ordeal as “state-sponsored terrorism”, and told of being drugged before meeting with CIA director William Casey.

Relief for disenfranchised

THE CENTRE will not hesitate to give legislative cover to the 1966-71 stream of illegal immigrants in Assam who would be disenfranchised for 10 years following the accord

signed in August, Union Home Minister SB Chavan said. When pressed on whether the legislative measures would be taken before the Assembly elections, he said, “I believe so.” Chavan said that bringing in such legislation was also part of the Assam Accord.

Reliance case in SC

THE SUPREME COURT (SC) in a special leave petition filed by the Union of India in the Reliance case ruled that Reliance Industries, which had already imported 5,000 tonnes of terephthalic acid (TPA), could not use the material till the final decision of the court. The SC has also directed that the main writ petition in the Bombay High Court be disposed of within three weeks. Reliance Industries had filed a writ petition in the Bombay HC over the government order transferring the import of TPA from the Open General Licence to the permissible list. The Bombay HC, in its interim order, had permitted Reliance Industries to import limited quantities of TPA.



READ. THINK. SHARE.
Scan the QR code to explore curated editorials and opinions from leading voices

Pakistan’s double game with China and America is its ticket to disaster



THAROORTHINK
BY SHASHI THAROOR

PAKISTAN’S FOREIGN policy today resembles a high-stakes trapeze act over a geopolitical chasm. On one side stands China, the “all-weather friend”, whose over \$70 billion investment in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) — the single largest project in Beijing’s Belt and Road Initiative — has made it Islamabad’s primary economic and strategic anchor. On the other, the United States, a historically fickle partner now being courted anew, given the transactional pragmatism of the Trump administration. The potentially unsustainable contradictions of this “double game” were thrown into stark relief by two recent, simultaneous developments: Pakistan’s endorsement of the Moscow Format declaration, and the quiet offer of the Pasni Port to American investors.

The Moscow Format meeting on Afghanistan, attended by major regional powers including India, Iran, Pakistan, China, and Russia, concluded with a joint statement that explicitly rejected the establishment of foreign military bases “in and around Afghanistan”. This is a direct pushback against the possibility of the US attempting to regain a military foothold in the region after Trump announced his desire to regain Bagram Airbase — abandoned by the US when the Biden Administration beat a hasty retreat from Afghanistan. The Moscow Format’s statement and the meeting’s formal position strongly aligned with Beijing and Moscow’s strategic priorities, in which Pakistan clearly felt it had to acquiesce.

Yet, almost in the same breath, reports emerged that the powerful Army Chief, Field Marshal Asim Munir, has pitched a plan to US officials for American investors to build and operate a commercial port in Pasni, Balochistan. Pasni is critically located, a mere 70 miles from the mammoth China-backed Gwadar Port and close to the Iranian border, offering access to Pakistan’s claimed, allegedly vast, deposits of critical rare earth minerals. While officials insist the Pasni proposal is purely commercial and specifically excludes military use, its geo-



ILLUSTRATION: C R SASIKUMAR

political symbolism is impossible to ignore. It is a direct counter to Chinese influence in a vital location on the Arabian Sea, providing Washington a valuable economic toehold near a flagship Chinese project.

The Pasni Paradox captures Pakistan’s current convolutions: Trying to sell a non-aligned, anti-bases principle to its eastern and northern partners, while simultaneously selling exclusive, long-term commercial access to its Western partner in the very same geostrategic backyard.

Pakistan’s current policy is driven not by shared values (does it possess any core political values beyond the domestic dominance of its military?) or enduring alliances (it is, after all, allied to both the US and China) but by a transactional calculus. The military-run establishment is focused on immediate diplomatic gains and financial benefits, using its geography as its only real currency.

Pakistan’s relationship with Beijing is structural, built on decades of defence cooperation and the massive CPEC investment. China is Pakistan’s lifeline, protecting it diplomatically at the UN and providing it real-time operational intelligence from satellites during Operation Sindoor, as well as planes and missiles, plus bank-rolling its infrastructure. This means the Moscow Format’s anti-US military posture is non-negotiable — it is a core plank of the

There is also a domestic imperative: Pakistan’s economic fragility. It is severely import-dependent, needs constant inflows of foreign direct investment, and is desperate to monetise its untapped mineral wealth. Playing the US and China off each other is seen as the viable path to attract capital

China-Pakistan strategic alignment. At the same time, the relationship with the US has always been opportunistic. Having found a “new benefactor” in a US President who operates on a client-regime model, Pakistan’s focus has shifted to maximising short-term benefits: Investment in minerals, IMF assistance, and a diplomatic shield against India. The Pasni offer, though billed as commercial, is the socioeconomic price for high-level US engagement.

There is also a domestic imperative: Pakistan’s economic fragility. It is severely import-dependent, needs constant inflows of foreign direct investment, and is desperate to monetise its untapped mineral wealth. Playing the US and China off each other is seen as the only viable path to attract capital flows necessary to stave off economic collapse. This strategy, while providing temporary relief, is fundamentally unsustainable. It inevitably risks eroding trust with both sides.

China understands the Pasni offer is a hedging strategy aimed at reducing over-dependence on the CPEC. Islamabad wants to show Beijing that it does have options. But if China perceives Pakistan as giving the US a significant strategic advantage, it could punish Islamabad by slowing the pace of CPEC investment, or worse, dialling down military support.

With the US, the problem is dif-

ferent. The Trump administration has made it clear that the one thing it values is fawning loyalty (witness Shehbaz Sharif’s cringe-worthy show at Sharm-el-Sheikh recently) and transactional clarity (“what’s in it for me?” Is the subtext of many a Trumpian pronouncement). Pakistan’s simultaneous endorsement of the anti-US Moscow Declaration will be seen as duplicity. A future administration, or even the current one, could abruptly withdraw economic or military support, reverting the relationship to its Trump 1.0-era default of mutual suspicion.

Pakistan’s manoeuvres intensify the strategic rivalry among the four major regional players: China, the US, Pakistan, and India. The Pasni port, if developed with US backing, effectively creates a maritime strategic quadrangle on the Makran coast, comprising Iran’s Chabahar Port (backed by India), Pakistan’s Gwadar (built and operated by China), and the newly proposed Pasni (backed by the US). This concentration of competing great power infrastructure in a volatile region like Balochistan — already plagued by an indigenous insurgency — exponentially raises the risk of proxy conflicts and internal destabilisation.

Pasni is not exactly located in a zone of tranquillity. Insurgent Baloch nationalist groups view all foreign infrastructure projects as the economic exploitation of their resources in the interests of the Punjabi military elite, without local benefit. By inviting a fresh layer of great power competition into the yet underdeveloped province, Pakistan’s military establishment risks fuelling the Balochistan fire, making the region potentially a new frontline in the Sino-American contest. A proxy “war” between an American and a Chinese port on the same coast would make for an extraordinary spectator sport for Pakistan’s neighbours.

Ultimately, Pakistan’s current geopolitical dance is a short-term survival tactic masquerading as a clever diplomatic strategy. While the transactional approach yields immediate benefits, it places an unsustainable burden on its diplomatic credibility and internal stability. The price of playing the three major powers against each other will eventually be paid in full: A loss of strategic autonomy, the betrayal of an “all-weather” friend, and the further destabilisation of its most volatile province. Too clever by half, Pakistan has potentially written itself a ticket to disaster.

The writer is MP, Thiruvananthapuram and Lok Sabha chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs

In Bihar, everyone is talking about women but few give them a voice



PULAPRE BALAKRISHNAN

WOMEN’S AGENCY, termed so often as “empowerment”, has become an issue for debate in Indian elections once again. In Bihar, Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, and his challenger, Tejashwi Yadav, have engaged in heated exchanges on the matter. Kumar has queried what the RJD has done for women when in power. Yadav has responded by announcing ambitious schemes for women. Over the past two decades, Kumar’s coalition has introduced welfare transfers including bicycles for schoolgirls and passed legislation such as prohibition. The most recent scheme is the Mukhyamantri Mahila Rojgar Yojana, whereby cash transfers of Rs 10,000 are made as assistance to start a business. The exchange of words between the two goes to the heart of the matter. It raises the question of which public interventions empower women, not to mention how to determine what women must want. The answers have implications for India beyond Bihar.

Amartya Sen’s work on development as freedom throws light on how to think about the issue of women’s empowerment. He proposes that an individual is free to the extent that she has the capability to lead the kind of life she values. Goods, including cash transfers, will not hurt for sure but they are not the story. We must be endowed with capabilities to actualise our aspirations. What these capabilities are has intentionally been left unstated, for what constitutes a valuable life is to be chosen by the individual and not any other entity — it is certainly not to be decided by the political class. Sen suggests that

ILLUSTRATION: KOMAL



Bihar’s leading parties must field women candidates in numbers equal to those of men. Their discourse imagines women as passive recipients of welfare without addressing their aspiration for agency

the proximate determinants of human capabilities are health and education, though social norms can mediate outcomes. Small amounts of money to women will not result in the ecosystem needed to develop their capabilities. The recent spate of targeted cash or goods transfers can be considered inequitable.

Cash transfer on a large scale can wreck public finances. It leaves the government without the financial heft for infrastructure which the private sector is unlikely to provide. Two instances relevant to Bihar have been highlighted by the national media. First, there are public schools that function without proper buildings, electricity supply or enough qualified teachers. Second, a recent interview on national television showed a female student speaking of the absence of roads from her village to her college. It signals the relative roles of private and public goods in our lives. Cash

transfers can provide an individual with the former but cannot generate roads, the quintessential public good, and which, it bears repeating, only the government is likely to provide. It is worth remembering that Kumar is completing two decades in office. That is long enough to have equipped Bihar with all the school buildings and roads that its people need. Their absence points to the consequence of positioning *sushasan* or good governance as cash transfers while ignoring the building of schools, hospitals and roads as necessary tools of empowerment.

A telling detail on the status of women in Bihar is the female-to-male labour force participation ratio. For every 100 men in the labour force, there are only six women here. The national average is over five times higher. Surely it cannot be the case that Bihar’s women are so different in their aspirations from their compatriots. Whether women have chosen to stay out of the workforce or they face constraints in employment is the crucial question. Ascertaining the aspirations of women and what may be working against their hopes would require far greater representation of women in government, which is markedly low all over India. Lalu Prasad had once stated that the social group he represented was seeking *sur*, or voice, and not *vikas*, or the development being offered in their name. He had gone on to bring about a caste revolution in governance. Now, it is time for a gender revolution; Bihar’s leading parties must field women candidates in numbers equal to those of men. Their discourse imagines women as passive recipients of welfare without addressing their aspiration for agency. Gender parity in governance is *sine qua non* if this is to change.

The author is honorary visiting professor, Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Suppressing dissent

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘Regime Change bogey is undemocratic’ (IE, November 5). The incarceration of Umar Khalid and others undermines the principle of the presumption of innocence, which points towards the government’s suppression of dissent. The Delhi Police opposing the bail plea and claiming the accused were plotting “regime change” is a hue and cry the ruling dispensation raises whenever anyone expresses democratic disagreement with its policies and governance. This is not only undemocratic but also a shrinking of spaces for dissent.

Indrajeet Shukla, New Delhi

Reclaiming winter

THIS REFERS TO the article, ‘Once there was a Delhi winter, now we have a mask’ (IE, November 5). The piece vividly captures how Delhi’s winter charm has been replaced by smog and suffocation. What was once a season of warmth and togetherness has now turned into a period of caution and confinement. The focus must shift from temporary solutions to long-term interventions. Equally, citizens need to adopt responsible behaviour. Only then can we reclaim the purity of our winters.

Dattatray S Giri, Pune

Ghatak’s legacy

THIS REFERS TO the editorial ‘At 100, Ritwik Ghatak is so contemporary’ (IE, November 5). Though Ghatak was not widely appreciated during his life, today his films are seen as emotionally rich and socially relevant, capturing the pain of displacement and human struggle with rare honesty. Ghatak never compromised his art for popularity. Remembering Ghatak inspires us to value films that come from truth and lived experience.

Parul Rana, Zirakpur



VIVEK KATJU

THE PHENOMENON OF political dynasts often attracts negative notice, but that of political parachutists is seldom, if ever, examined. A parachutist is not a dynast and is inducted into political office without prior political experience. Dynasts are believed to damage democracy, while parachutists are considered favourably, especially by the middle classes. Parachutists who are professionals, members of the civil services or businesspersons are seen as persons of integrity, dedicated to cleansing Indian politics and administration. An examination of the parachutist phenomenon is needed because it is doubtful if they meet the criterion expected of politicians in our electoral democracy.

Politics requires a direct connection of a political nature with the people. This can only be made by spending long years in the field, which gives an insight into people’s needs, beliefs, aspirations and fears. It’s also required to gain people’s trust. Persons holding high political office should be leaders in their own right. They need to have an independent standing in their party and the confidence of their

Professionals, former administrators, diplomats or businesspersons can be advisors or consultants. But expert advice has to be refracted through the prism of political realities

leadership. Professionals, former administrators, diplomats or businesspersons can be advisors or consultants. But expert advice has to be refracted through the prism of political realities.

Dynasts belong to political families, while parachutists have an adoptive political parent to whose fortunes their careers are linked. Parachutists generate resentment in a political party because the party does not really consider them as belonging to it. Generally, no sooner than the fortunes of the adoptive parent dip do the knives come out.

Parachutists are different from political protégés. Leaders of political parties have their likes and dislikes. If protégés are savvy, they build their own group of supporters in a party. Parachutists can also build bases, but it is difficult.

The preferred route of the parachutist is through the safety of the Rajya Sabha. Some do contest elections to the Lok Sabha, and that is admirable because it gives them a feel for politics in the field as distinct from the comfort of party headquarters. Of course, the Constitution does not make Lok Sabha membership the only eligibility for political office, but continuous

Not just dynasts, look at the political parachutists

Rajya Sabha membership cannot give a political connect. It is also true that any Indian national has the right to join politics. If anyone does so, for instance, after retirement, it would be preferable that they work in the field. They would, then, not have a desire to be parachutists but would only be following their convictions. They would bring the benefit of their experience to national life.

Perhaps the most significant parachutist in India’s history was Mannohan Singh. He did not hold a political office till he was inducted as Finance Minister by Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao. The trust of the Gandhis enabled him to remain in leadership roles even though he lost a Lok Sabha election. In 2004, Sonia Gandhi made him the PM, but retained real political power. For the next 10 years, what should be quintessentially a political office was engaged only in policymaking and administration.

The Indian political system does not contemplate dyarchies. The PM and the cabinet as the elected executive cannot bow to the will of, or be controlled by, outside individuals or organisations. Looking to them for political or ideological guidance would be contrary to their popular mandate.

The writer is a former diplomat

Could he have won if he had an accent?

respective levels of integration in the host societies. Mamdani, while being confidently — even performatively — multicultural, has become American in the tradition of that “nation of immigrants”. Could he have become mayor of New York City if he had an accent? Arnold Schwarzenegger managed to become the “Governator” of California despite (or perhaps because of) his accent, but he is a White European. It may have been one strike too many against a Brown, Muslim socialist who has been very critical of Israel.

Such distinctions are important when asking the question, “What is the measure of a non-foreigner in the eyes of the ‘native’?” And consequently, “How far will a given immigrant or child of immigrants

be accepted in the host society and even be able to succeed in fields traditionally reserved for ‘natives’, such as politics?” In this context, recall that Mamdani’s counterpart in London, Sadiq Khan, and the former British Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, are both British-born. The foreign-

Mamdani’s triumph has symbolic significance in the face of the nativist tide sweeping the West, which is policing all dialogue, cancelling its critics and normalising racism

born Mamdani, on the other hand, is constitutionally barred from holding the highest office of the United States.

In that sense, Mamdani stands out from the others as a true immigrant who integrated and has now broken into the most jealously guarded of native domains. This is especially noteworthy amid the rise of the White nationalist, anti-immigrant politics embodied by President Donald Trump in the US and others across the West. But it would be unwise to read too much into that — the “melting pot” of New York is not America, its demographics and politics are different, and what is achievable there may be a wild fantasy elsewhere. Mamdani’s true victory may lie in broadening the horizons of the

Democrats and their idea of what is realistic or possible, in terms of his left-populist politics rather than his identity. And also, in living in a rent-controlled flat in Trump’s head.

Mamdani’s triumph also has symbolic significance in the face of the nativist tide sweeping the West, which is policing all dialogue, cancelling its critics and normalising racism. It can form part of a badly needed counter-narrative of hope, of the idea that the migrant can be accepted and even embraced — once a foundational truth of America, now under serious assault.

The writer is Senior Assistant Editor, The Indian Express

Back to business

Noel Tata must consolidate his position and sort out issues so that operations of the group do not suffer

THE NEXT MEETING of the Tata Trusts board should be a quiet affair with members focused on the matters at hand. Indeed, just when it seemed like a protracted legal battle was in the offing, former trustee Mehli Mistry has decided to put an end to the dissension within the Trusts. As is known, there has been much internal strife over the past few months, with two sets of trustees pitted against each other. This resulted first in Vijay Singh, former defence secretary, being voted out of the Tata Sons board and later Mistry being ousted from the Tata Trusts board. Last week, Mistry had approached the Maharashtra Charity Commissioner’s office, ostensibly in a bid to try and become a trustee for life in accordance with the resolution passed by the Trusts in the October 2024 resolution. But he seems to have had second thoughts. It’s just as well he has decided to step aside before any more damage is done to the reputation of the Trusts and Tata Group, as he said in his letter to the trustees.

Precipitating matters would indeed have caused irreparable harm to the Trusts’ credibility. The Tatas are known for being principled and upholding the best standards of corporate governance. The brand has always been synonymous with integrity, commanding the kind of goodwill that any corporate group would be envious of. As such, a messy wrangling between the seniors, who are there to protect the group’s interests, is undesirable to say the least. Mistry’s exit will help Tata Trusts Chairman Noel Tata to assert himself and consolidate his position within the group. This is important since Tata Trusts holds a 66% stake in Tata Sons. Noel Tata simply cannot allow a repeat of what has happened. Since there have been some differences of opinion on how much influence Tata Trusts should wield over Tata Sons, in terms of information being shared, some discussion on this should be useful. As the majority owner, the Trusts can ask for more information on the operations of Tata Sons. But it must desist from slowing down the latter’s functioning and be reasonable in its demands.

Noel Tata must also quickly resolve the issue of the listing of Tata Sons, the deadline for which—as imposed by the Reserve Bank of India—lapsed in September. Media reports say the trustees were not in favour of Tata Sons going public, but some changed their mind. This paper has been of the view that Tata Sons should list and that the Shapoorji Pallonji Group is justified in renewing its demand for a listing. Transparency will not erode the Tata ethos; on the contrary, it will protect it.

Noel Tata might want to rethink the resistance in making Tata Sons a listed entity and reinforce what the Tatas stand for—fairness and accountability. Tata has reportedly been looking to onboard some new members to the Tata Sons board. These include veteran banker Uday Kotak, senior lawyer Bahram Vakil, and Tata Steel MD TV Narendran. However, the Mehli Mistry camp had reportedly been stalling the move. In fact, Mistry is believed to have been looking for a seat on the Tata Sons board, something that Tata was reportedly not in favour of. With Mistry no longer in the way, Tata now should be able to fill the vacancies on the Tata Sons board with members of his choice.

Toyota buyout is a major test for Japan's reforms

JAPAN INC HAS made great strides in corporate governance over the past decade that buoyed the stock market and ignited interest in dealmaking. It is now facing a landmark test of those efforts in a case involving the Toyota group. Minority investors are upset about the group’s bid to take one of its listed affiliates private. They’re concerned about many issues, mainly pricing and a lack of disclosure. The outcome of the ¥4.7 trillion (\$31 billion) deal is being closely watched, especially in South Korea, which is starting to improve its own governance. A letter signed by two dozen investors addressed “widespread concern” about the plan to buy out Toyota Industries Corp (TICO), the original company from which Toyota Motor Corp eventually emerged. The world’s biggest carmaker indicated last week there were no plans to raise the offer, which has been widely criticised for being too low, according to *Bloomberg News*.

The buyout is a logical move given the recent boom in mergers and acquisitions. It would also strengthen the founding family’s control over Japan’s largest business group. Toyota Motor Chairman Akio Toyoda’s direct stake in the firm amounts to less than 1%, shows data compiled by *Bloomberg*. TICO, a maker of looms and auto parts founded by Toyoda’s grandfather Sakichi in 1926, has a more significant stake at 8%.

The deal would, in theory, be a massive win for Japan’s efforts to improve rules for how companies are overseen, which began in earnest with Abenomics in 2013. Since then, codes on stewardship and governance have been introduced. They encouraged institutional investors to be more active in promoting accountability and required firms to treat shareholders equally. The Tokyo Stock Exchange and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry established their own guidelines to bolster reform efforts.

Under the proposal, Toyota Fudosan—a privately owned property company that effectively operates as the family’s investment arm—plans to formally launch a tender offer of 16,300 yen (\$106) per share for TICO. That’s about 11% below its closing price on the day of the June announcement. A new unlisted holding company will be established. The shares closed at ¥17,000 on Tuesday. Because of Toyota’s size and prominence, taking TICO private would be an important step in unwinding a common parent-child shareholding structure that has long attracted criticism for using capital inefficiently and raising conflicts of interest. Minority investors don’t object to the rationale behind the deal. Instead, they have concerns over the process and how it’s being implemented. The group, which represents more than 100 members worldwide, many of them institutional investors, publicised the letter last month.

In their view, the lack of proper disclosure means their interests are being given short shrift, which contravenes the spirit of the reforms. The letter sent to the boards of TICO and Toyota Motor challenges what they call an opaque valuation process and diluted protections for minority shareholders. Stephen Codrington, CEO of Codrington Japan, an independent research firm and a signatory to the letter, said that ¥20,000/ share would be a more appropriate price for TICO. But then again, without fuller disclosure it’s difficult to know. The investors have also singled out as “particularly troubling” the designation of three Toyota affiliates—Denso, Aisin, and Toyota Tsusho—as independent minority shareholders for the upcoming tender vote. The trio have been presented as members of the Toyota group of companies elsewhere, raising questions over potential conflicts of interest. This means TICO may need less support from minority shareholders to finalise the takeover bid, rather than a true 50% majority.

TICO said in an emailed statement it had followed the disclosure rules in place at the time of the June announcement. It had engaged with concerned investors and would continue to do so. The company added the three Toyota affiliates were listed firms independent of the carmaker and the larger group, which had made their own decisions on participation. Though it’s not legally obligated, the TICO board should engage further with investors to explain how it had arrived at the offer price and deal structure, in line with new rules issued by the Tokyo Stock Exchange in July. It should also consider updating the offer if market conditions change sufficiently.

The proposal is now expected to be presented to shareholders early next year. If approved, it would be the third largest of its kind in Japan’s recent history, according to Dealogic. How TICO handles the concerns of its minority investors will have widespread implications for ongoing corporate reforms.

Japan Inc has come a long way since Abenomics when reforms were sought to revitalise the underperforming stock market. It would be a shame to see any backsliding.



JULIANA LIU
Bloomberg



INDO-JAPANESE TIES

Union external affairs minister S Jaishankar

The India-Japan partnership enhances strategic stability in the Indo-Pacific at a time when ensuring the region remains free and open has become a more complex challenge

COMBATTING CLIMATE CHANGE

IN NINE G20 EMEs, FINANCING OF CHARGING INFRASTRUCTURE IS THE KEY CHALLENGE

Greening road transport

RAKESH MOHAN JANAK RAJ

President Emeritus and Distinguished Fellow & Senior Fellow, CSEP



EVs in the nine EMEs was already about 44% in 2022, particularly because it had reached 61% in China. Excluding China, the share of EVs in the eight other EMEs was only 5% in 2022, which is expected to rise to 28% in 2030. Meanwhile, in China, this will rise only marginally from 61% in 2022 to 63% in 2030. This is entirely due to a decline in Chinese e-two-wheeler (e2W) sales as people switch to affordable small cars. The sales of EVs in all other categories in China are projected to rise significantly. Hence, overall, the share of EVs in the nine EMEs is expected to rise to 47% in 2030. The two economies with the largest proportionate increases for this number will be India (from 6% to 34%) and Indonesia (from 1% to 30%).

Of all EVs sold in the nine EMEs in 2022, about 97% were in China. This will decline to 73% by 2030, but it will rise to 20% (from 2% in 2022) for India. The share of EVs in most other economies in total EVs sold in the nine EMEs are projected to remain small—1% or lower.

For switching over from internal combustion engine vehicles (ICEVs) to EVs, all the nine economies combined are estimated to save capex of \$5 billion for the road transport sector for 2023-2030. This is entirely due to China, as their total vehicle sales are

projected to decline in 2030 relative to 2022. Accordingly, capex in China for road transport is estimated to decline by \$110 billion. Excluding China, climate finance for the eight other economies for 2023-2030 due to the switchover from ICEVs to EVs is estimated at \$105 billion. These expenditures are almost entirely done by households and the private sector.

The successful transition from ICEVs to EVs needs significant investment in a robust charging infrastructure. There were 2.7 million public charging points installed worldwide in 2022. Of these 60% were in China.

Costs of developing charging infrastructure consist of setting up charging stations, including charger cost, installation cost, land, and labour costs. The average cost structure of three types of chargers (slow-speed, medium-speed, and fast-speed) and their installation costs vary significantly. China has the highest cost of installing charging infrastructure as it is building mostly fast-speed charging stations, the cost of which is about seven times more than that of slow-speed chargers. The cost of setting up charging infrastructure in Türkiye is also relatively high because of the regulatory requirement that each station should contain minimum 50 charges. The additional capex for building

charging infrastructure in the nine economies is estimated at \$465 billion. By saving about \$5 billion in the switchover from ICEVs to EVs, aggregate capex for the road transport sector for the nine economies comes to \$460 billion (\$58 billion, on an annual average) from 2023 to 2030. The large capex requirement for charging infrastructure is mainly on account of China. Excluding China, climate finance for the eight other economies from 2023 to 2030 due to the switchover from ICEVs to EVs and building the charging infrastructure works out to \$123 billion or \$16 billion annually. The public expenditure expected would essentially involve investing in the charging infrastructure.

China needs the largest amount of climate finance of \$336 billion for the road transport sector, followed by Indonesia (\$38 billion) and Russia (\$27 billion). India’s climate finance requirement for road transport is relatively small at \$18 billion vis-à-vis some other countries mainly because the electrification of the road transport fleet here so far has largely involved two-wheelers, and there is not much difference in the capital cost of e2Ws and their ICE counterparts.

In sum, road transport in the nine G20 EMEs is shaping at varying paces, with China by far being the dominant player not only in terms of share of EVs in total vehicles, but also in building fast-speed charging infrastructure. In all the eight other EMEs, the share of EVs in total vehicles is small, though it will rise significantly in India and Indonesia by 2030. In the other six EMEs, the share will remain small even in 2030. The overall cost of switching over to EVs during the rest of the decade is clearly achievable and affordable. Governments must focus on the provision of widespread charging infrastructure, much in the same vein as gas stations.

Transform retail for a *Viksit Bharat*



LALIT BHASIN

Former President, Indo American Chambers of Commerce, and President, Society of Indian Law Firms

AS THE GOVERNMENT crafts next-generation reforms under the Viksit Bharat 2047 vision, India’s focus on long-term, structural growth marks a departure from the short-term approach of earlier decades. Sustainable prosperity requires a robust domestic ecosystem of investment, consumption, and innovation. The world over, every developed economy shares a common foundation—an expansive, dynamic retail sector that fuels job creation, attracts steady capital inflows, and stimulates consumer demand through simplified rules and modern infrastructure.

Now on the cusp of a consumption revolution, India must relook its retail landscape through this lens. Simplifying investment norms and modernising retail regulation will not only deepen competitiveness but also accelerate the journey toward a \$30-trillion inclusive economy powered by investor confidence and resilient supply chains. The government’s recent decision to consider e-commerce exports under the inventory model is a welcome and progressive step in this direction, signalling its commitment to expanding India’s retail sector potential.

Unleashing the next wave of India's retail growth

India’s retail sector, valued at \$1.06 trillion in 2024, is set to nearly double to \$1.93 trillion by 2030, driven by rising

incomes, demographic shifts, digital adoption, and the rapid expansion of organised retail into smaller towns. Globally, the scale of retail in economies such as China (\$5.2 trillion) and the US (\$7.4 trillion) shows the possibilities that lie ahead for India as its consumption base deepens.

For a fast-growing economy like India that relies heavily on domestic consumption, the case for reforming retail policy is both strategic and urgent. It can channel long-term capital into modern supply chains, boost formal jobs, and strengthen the very engine that drives growth. To fully realise this opportunity, India must modernise the regulatory framework that governs investment in retail.

Aligning retail policy with a modern economy

At the heart of the challenge lies India’s foreign direct investment (FDI) categorisation system which divides retail into single-brand, multi-brand, wholesale, and inventory and marketplace e-commerce. Each model is governed by distinct rules on ownership, sourcing, and operations—a structure that has served the sector well through its formative years. As India’s retail ecosystem evolves and the lines between

offline and online channels blur, there is now an opportunity to modernise this framework to reflect a more integrated, innovation-driven market.

Reforming India’s retail sector investment policy offers a powerful opportunity to align regulation with market realities. A more flexible FDI framework that enables companies to expand across retail segments without being constrained by predetermined categories would allow investors to respond more effectively to emerging opportunities. It would enable businesses to adopt omnichannel models that seamlessly integrate physical and digital retail and encourage more efficient use of shared infrastructure such as warehouses and distribution networks. Such modernisation would create a seamless, innovation-driven marketplace, one that reflects the pace and diversity of today’s consumer economy.

Simplified structures to multiply benefits

The government already recognises the retail sector’s pivotal role in job creation, micro, small, and medium enterprise (MSME) growth, and digital empowerment, and reform can build on that foundation. Simplifying retail regulation would deliver multi-fold

OpenAI deal

OpenAI has signed a \$38-billion tie-up with Amazon Web Services to supply Nvidia chips and expand its artificial intelligence (AI) infrastructure. The deal includes 500 Stargate systems, with 100 using Nvidia, 25 Intel, and 13 Microsoft technologies—totalling over \$800 billion in collaborations across tech giants. The diversification follows Microsoft’s earlier exclusive tie-up, marking a strategic shift toward

shared cloud ecosystems. It aims to strengthen AI compute power and prepare for an initial public offering, potentially valuing OpenAI at \$1 trillion. But analysts warn that despite massive revenue growth, high losses make such valuation speculative. The move could redefine AI’s industrial reach. But questions remain on sustainability, regulation, and profit models. —RS Narula, Patiala

● Write to us at fletters@expressindia.com



A thought for today

Housing is stability. Housing is dignity. Housing is absolutely necessary, critical infra

RAPHAEL WARNOCK

New York & Beyond

Politics turns sharply right or left when centrists ignore the social contract of tech-led entrepreneurship model

The NYC mayoral result shouldn't be seen through the lens of a Trump vs Mamdani bout. Yes, a young, foreign-born, Muslim democratic socialist will now lead the capital of capitalism, defying opposition from Trump and other billionaires. But is it because of who he is, or what he publicly stands for? Mamdani the man, or the idea of Mamdani in the context of a moment in history? Clearly the latter. Just as America, overall, veered sharply right last year to find solutions to its problems, NYC has now swung left. And both outcomes reflect the growing disenchantment with the centre.

Which is unfortunate because centrism – founded on the principles of individual rights, equal opportunity, liberal democracy and cultural pluralism – has shaped the world since WWII. And while it has flaws in practice, it has generally served well. Trade, migration, economic growth, cultural mingling, all advance when the mood isn't polarised, when communities and countries aren't constantly bad-mouthed and painted as the cause of our troubles. In theory, centrism is meant to carry people along to a better place. That's its social contract.

But the US vote on Nov 5 last year, and NYC's vote on Nov 4 this year, show the people consider this contract broken. That's because they find themselves worse off than they were before. There's the cost of living crisis – a quarter of New Yorkers can't afford food and rent. The city's poverty rate was double the national average in 2023, and grew by 7 percentage points in the next two years. Meanwhile, the rich keep getting richer. The number of billionaires goes on rising. When voters get the feeling the system isn't working for them, they choose the 'outsider' promising free childcare, free buses and rent control – all very un-American things.

But the mood that's gripped American voters is also palpable in other democracies. The space for polarisation and populism has been growing in Europe and India. Everywhere, the complaint is the same – people's simple needs aren't being met. The housing market, especially, is broken everywhere, including India. So, xenophobia and promises of state action can be seductive. That's bad news for not only centrists but also the technology-led entrepreneurship model they have enabled, which has brought about record growth over the past few decades. Centrist leaders must introspect and course-correct before the pendulum swings too far to the right or the left.

Petty Pak

Barring Hindu pilgrims from Nankana Sahib is a new low for Pak. But India isn't consistently sticking to its syncretism

In a despicable but not wholly unexpected move, Pakistani authorities separated and barred Hindu pilgrims from travelling to Nankana Sahib for the birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev, while allowing Sikh pilgrims through. This was the first Sikh jatha (religious group) to travel to Nankana Sahib after Operation Sindoor. Hindu pilgrims were also part of the group. In barring the latter, Pakistan has further exposed its moral bankruptcy. It's a failed basket case of a state that can't stomach the fact it will never be able to catch up with India. Hence, it resorts to petty tactics. Plus, Pakistan's deep state has been trying to sow divisions between India's Sikhs



and Hindus by working with known khalistanis abroad. It won't succeed.

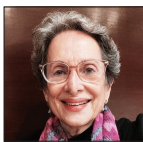
That said, there's also a recent trend in India to replicate Pakistan's pettiness. But this tit-for-tat approach not only ill behoves our secular, syncretic traditions but also gives joy to Islamabad. Pakistan's very existence is premised on the idea that a secular India can't survive. We have proved them wrong for 78 years. When Op Sindoor was launched, dealing Pakistan a bloody nose, it was Colonel Sofiya Qureshi and Wing Commander Vyomika Singh – a Muslim and a Hindu – who together conducted the media briefings. It is this secular India that is the biggest challenge for Pakistan.

But this secular strength needs to be nurtured and protected on a daily basis. Traditions like Delhi's Phool Walon Ki Sair that bring Hindus and Muslims together are an integral part of our syncretic ethos. It's terrible that Phool Walon Ki Sair won't be held this year for the first time in more than six decades – thanks to administrative permissions not coming through. Such secular cultural heritage needs to be prioritised. Pakistan is a decrepit, Islamist, schizophrenic state. There's no need for us to follow its example.

Sarkari tarkari

Is its version of Unesco's tag the 'thin end of the veg'?

Bachi Karkaria



Last week Lucknow was declared Unesco 'Creative City of Gastronomy'. Culture Ministry's proud tomtomming of the honour on X etc: Great. Distinctly vegetarian-looking that accompanying the boast: Grate. This visual is now bone of contention, with critics pointing out that it should have said 'Pehley aap' to the city's storied meat-feast. So, what should we call this? Cultural misrepresentation? A 'skewering'? Revival of the original Mrs G's 'derecognition of the princes in 1971'? Indeed, some *naawabi* descendants might find this culinary slight particularly galling in the week when we were celebrating Sardar Patel, who first threw them into the national *khichdi*.

How fair really is the fare featured in the sarkari visual? Did Unesco's tag honour Lucknow's 'Pure Veg' delectations? True, *chaat*@Chowk is a major reason why *Awadh ki shaam*, along with *Banaras ki subah*, is anointed the ultimate immersive experience.

True, there's much 'gastronomic creativity' in sizzling skewers of 'paneer seekh' complete with distinctive smoky aroma. But the Chowk also has enough meaty stuff for those unbarred from the Real McKebab; the famed *tunde* doesn't yet have some *tinda* clone.

True, even confirmed carnivores unabashedly join the *shahi-tukda-tukda* gang in its packed sweetshops, where all distinctions melt away like *malai makkhan*, the winter speciality. But hailing *malai paan gilauri* shouldn't mean guillotining *galouti* or nullifying *nalli-nihari*.

Ji-huzoor, saffron is as essential to biryani. And this steam-cooked rice and meat delectation is Lucknow's first claim to fame. Any *dum* donkey can tell you that. Bias-ed? Me? Being bawā doesn't mean I want only *sali-boti* with my *roti*. In fact, I was hooked on *maharaj* Shankar delectations during my two-year guest-ship at Delhi's gracious Jain House. It was unputdownable 'Love in the Time of Karela'.

It's not just us lesser minorities. In food, there aren't any Hin-du's and don'ts either, no? What we, who religiously love to eat, fear is that sarkar's vegification of Lucknow's Unesco honour covertly fothers its Eat Pray Love agenda. Like it's saying 'Promote the *chikankari*, not chicken curry.'

America's DONZO Moment

Donald Trump & Zohran Mamdani are good for each other's aggressive identity politics. But if Trump can paint all Democrats as Mamdanistas, he'll be the bigger winner nationally



Arnab Ray

Mamdani is mayor! Which means Rejoice citizens of New York city – cheap groceries, free bus fares, free child care, and laadli behena/kanyashree for Carrie and Samantha. Okay scratch that last part, but you get the drift, it's Socialism and the City.

According to some, this focus on the common man is exactly what the Democrats need. Because Trump beat Kamala because of rising grocery prices. Except, no he didn't. Pundits like to think that people vote based on self-interest. They don't. They vote on impulse. On emotion. And nothing provokes emotion more than identity – especially the fear of losing it in one's own country.

A country isn't defined solely by its borders. It's defined by its shared values – especially those held by its majority. When progressives tried to reshape those values with the blunt force of cultural revolution, the empire struck back. That's why the normal yardsticks used to evaluate presidents don't apply to Trump. What he's saying is, "As long as I'm here, America will be like that America – the one in your imagination." In short, MAGA.

But the pendulum doesn't swing in one direction forever. As Trump's movement grows more extreme, so does the progressive response.

New York isn't just any city. It's the Rome of the American empire. The city of Gordon Gekko, of Wall Street, of "greed is good", representing what many Americans believe made the country great: risk-taking, hard work, merit. Or, as Mamdani might describe it: privilege, oppression, racism.

Wall Street's new mayor tweets, "Taxation isn't theft. Capitalism is." He says billionaires shouldn't exist. His policies are rooted in wealth redistribution. He identifies as a socialist. Perhaps he hopes most Americans don't know that socialism, according to Marx, is the stepping stone to communism. But again, it's not going to be the policies that shake the system. It never is.

Mamdani is Muslim. Unlike America's past non-Christian politicians who downplayed their heritage, he leans into his identity. He's not the apologetic Hindu like Vivek Ramaswamy nor the denying Hindu like Bobby Jindal. Mamdani embraces who he is, and speaks to his base using that connection, to the Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Somali, and other immigrant communities who

actually live and vote in the city.

If someone had predicted three years ago that New York's mayor would call for the arrest of Netanyahu for war crimes, make the price of halal meat a political slogan, and be photographed eating rice with his hands, they'd have been laughed out of the room. Yet, here we are.

For years, Trump's base has believed they're being replaced in their own country – by Indians in high-paying tech jobs and illegal immigrants in low-wage labour. Politics is the last bastion of traditional American power and most politicians with real influence are still white men, and Mamdani's rise threatens that status quo too.

It's no coincidence that Trump took the extraordinary step of endorsing a Democrat – Andrew Cuomo – against Mamdani. His base understands the real battle isn't Democrat vs Republican. It's 'us vs them'. Mamdani, with his unapologetic identity and radical platform, represents 'them'. Cuomo, a man from a powerful political family and old wealth, represents 'us'.

As Trump swings further right and consolidates power, many Democrats argue their party must swing further left to mount an effective resistance. The current leadership (centrist) is seen as too out of touch and timid. Plus, for many progressives, the fight isn't just about winning seats. It's about winning the high ground in defining what America is. Figures like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Jasmine Crockett, and now Mamdani are seen not just as politicians, but as cultural counterweights to Trumpism. They are aggressive, pugnacious, social-media savvy. They play identity cards that can trump Trump's own.

Mamdani's victory isn't just a win for the progressive wing. It's a signal that the fissures within America are deepening. Extreme forces from both sides are gaining ground, squeezing out rational centrists who want to compromise and get things done, as the war for the heart of the country becomes a classic war of tribes.

As for the price of groceries, the one thing both Trump and Mamdani promised to bring down, that will likely be the collateral damage.



Dan Cassino

New York City politics isn't like anywhere else in US. Democrats outnumber Republicans seven to one, with suburban voters that tend to moderate Democratic coalitions outside city limits. A socialist would have a hard time winning in most of US, but he's not far out of mainstream in NYC politics. Indeed, a previous mayor – David Dinkins, who preceded Giuliani – was also a member of the Democratic Socialist party.

Democrats are so dominant here that Mamdani's real rival in the mayor's race wasn't the Republican candidate, but Andrew Cuomo. Formerly governor of New York State, hounded out over sexual harassment allegations, Cuomo chose to challenge Mamdani in the general election after losing to him in the Democratic primary earlier this year.

Mamdani's campaign focused relentlessly on the brutal cost of living, promising to freeze the rent in housing controlled by the city, make buses faster and free to use, and build non-profit grocery stores to bring down the cost of food. Cuomo argued these ideas were simply too big, too extreme, to be feasible, and he would keep things on an even keel, negotiate with Trump rather than antagonise him.

On a deeper level, the fight between Cuomo and Mamdani was about how Democratic Party should respond to Trump's Republican Party. Cuomo's strategy, and of the institutional Democratic Party going back to Clinton, was triangulation: ignoring voters on the far left and the far right, building a coalition of moderates from both parties. This was the policy of Obama, and of Biden, based on an enduring belief that Republicans and Democrats can come together in pursuit of commonsense solutions to difficult problems.

The problem is it didn't work – neither Obama nor Biden was able to get Republican support for any of their key initiatives. It's also entirely at odds with the governance strategy of Trump, who demonises Democrats alongside

anyone in his own party who doesn't immediately fall in line. The response to this among Democrats has led to the current divide in the party.

Establishment Democrats, like Cuomo, argue that moderation, finding common ground with moderate Republicans, is the only way forward, and that liberal policies will only serve to alienate the voters that Democrats need to win elections.

The alternative – embodied by Mamdani – is to do essentially what Trump Republicans have done on the right. Acting on what their supporters want, rather than waiting to build consensus, passing laws by leveraging support within their own party, rather than making any attempts to reach out to the opposition.

There's little chance Mamdani's proposals will get much traction outside of his progressive base, but he's pushing forward anyway. His argument is that voters might be sceptical of progressive policies, but they're looking for action on issues like affordability, and care about results more than ideology.

The institutional Democratic Party, meanwhile, is worried about Mamdani scaring the moderate suburbanites who make up much of their base. Scaring them by being an avowed socialist, being a Muslim, being a man who has dark skin and a beard.

Of course this was not a race just about ideology. It got very ugly, with Mamdani accused of antisemitism, with Trump threatening to use federal gov't powers to hurt NYC if it elected Mamdani, with false claims that Mamdani celebrated the 9/11 attacks. These felt less like the normal give and take of a campaign, more an attempt to find something, anything, that could derail Mamdani's ascent.

But alongside Mamdani, moderate, institutional Democrats also won big races in the rest of the country, including governor races in both New Jersey and Virginia. These candidates ran up huge margins with exactly the centrist, moderate campaigns that Mamdani shunned. So even as progressives celebrate their win in New York, moderates can point to their wins in New Jersey and Virginia as evidence that they're the future of the party.

And while these results are a rebuke to Trump, they're also an opportunity for him, as he'll spend the next year running against Mamdani, painting the Democratic Socialist as the face of the opposition. And if he can convince voters nationwide of that, he'll wind up being the real winner.

Do Parties Really Understand Bihar's Young?

Scramble to woo youngsters ignores the price they pay to escape the stigma of unemployment



Manisha Priyam

As Bihar votes today on 141 constituencies, all eyes are on smaller parties like Chirag Paswan's LJP(RV), Manjhi's HAMS, Kushwaha's RLM, and Sahani's VSIP that may hold the key to the final result. Bigger parties need to combine with these smaller-but-crucial players – voices of specific marginalised segments, especially women and subaltern youth.

If conventional right-leaning political talk against infiltrators and illegal immigrants combined with targeted cash transfers for women and unemployed, a strategy used extensively in Europe and Latin America, Mahagathbandhan's *voter adhikar yatra* used a rights-based vocabulary, mirroring the Brazilian leanback on the right-to-information campaigns against Bolsonaro.

The *yatra* also highlighted *padhaat-kammai* (education-jobs) with its appeal to subaltern youth. Political startup Jun Saraj's founder Prashant Kishor's ideas have resonated among youth who look up to RJD's Tejashwi and his offer of *sarkari* jobs for every family. NDA too has an unemployment allowance of ₹1,000 to youth in search of jobs, but no real programmatic offer of gov't jobs.

So, how do we decode the meaning of this Bihar vote for *yuva varg*? Will the poor youth seeking to escape unemployment be heard? Or are they a silent lot noted for their precarity, heads down engaged in test preparation for *sarkari* jobs? Nearly a third of the Bihari population is young – 28.8% in the 18-29 age group per population projections, 2011-36, National Commission on Population. Youth unemployment

rates are high at about 10% – but half of what's reported for Nepal's youth.

Long-term ethnographic fieldwork since 2019 reveals that the once reputed Patna University has been abandoned by the new generation of subaltern youth flocking to the state capital in search of useful education and jobs. Instead, they find a toehold in the cramped *gallis* across the University – the Musallahpur *haat*, once an important trading area for vegetables. Several cold-storage godowns have been repurposed and host 'coaching centres' promising success in competition for gov't jobs.

The centres are associated with their respective 'sirs' – Khan Sir, Guru Rahman, Samrat Ashok, etc. Self-styled educators, the 'sirs' are an older generation of unemployed youth who've set up individual empires of test-preparation for gov't jobs they themselves couldn't secure. They lampoon the university as a decadent site of 'time-waste', rampant with party-politics of *chaatra netas* and corruption.

Instead, the *galli* is portrayed as an apolitical site, characterised only by the hard work of youth. In reality, contending backward castes of kurmis and kushwahs clash for control over the coaching area and allied businesses such as hostels and messes for the poor youth. Kurmis have their famous Patel *chaatraवास* adorned with a large golden statue of Sardar Patel, and admit rural youth based on 'recommendations'. On the other hand, kushwahs claim their lineage from

Samrat Ashok – this entire land belongs to them they claim. Photos of Samrat Ashok, Samrat Chaudhary, and local kushwaha leaders hang on banners across the *galli*.

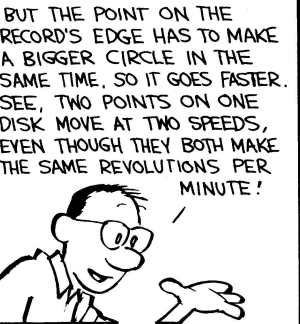
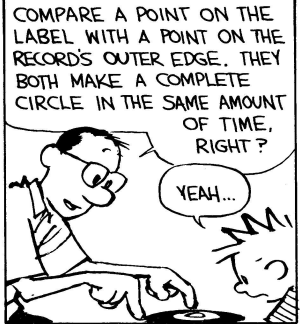
What relevance does this hold for decoding Bihar's macro-politics? First, poor youth desperately seek *bharti* (recruitment in gov't jobs) to overcome agrarian distress and landlessness-induced forced migration.

The university that once gave Bihar its highly regarded politicians like Lalu, Nitish and Sushil Modi is no longer a site of youth optimism. Political protests are not an option as this may cast the youth as 'bad character' and therefore make them ineligible for *sarkari* jobs. They feel let down by contractual *agniveer* but are afraid to raise their voice.

In contrast, the *galli* culture does not discuss caste-*jati* or reservations but makes the youth aware of the power of kurmis and kushwahs – OBCs who fight for domination in the *galli* but hold power together in Raj Bhavan. Programmatic offers of secure jobs may hold greater appeal for the youth, but their everyday lives preparing for jobs are under the control of coaching sirs and local leaders they must obey. Their road to the future is a silent pursuit of jobs and abstaining from politics.

The writer is Sir Louis Matheson Distinguished Visiting Professor, Monash University, Melbourne

Calvin & Hobbes



K M Gupta

The essence of everything is space. It is the foundation and cause of all things; existence itself is merely a tenant at the will of space. Space is both the first and final cause of existence.

Space is originally dimensional (0^0), and therefore the universe originally had no form whatsoever: space acquires form when it deforms to L^1, L^2, and L^3. The Big Bang forms the universe: forming is deforming. In forming, the original dimensional space deforms about 5%. Everything is the forming, deforming, dimensioning of formless space: L1 is time, L2 is mind, intelligence, and consciousness,

L3 is matter; gravity is breakdance. The cause of the Big Bang is periodic oestrus – the base and cause of all energy. The 3D universe is a 5% deformation of the original dimensional space. Newton's Third Law of Motion is creator of the world – forming, deforming, and dimensioning agent of space.

As every action (+) has its equal and opposite reaction (-), everything in the universe is virtually 0: (+) + (-) = 0. This is space without circumscription: everything in the world is 0, that is, space. At c, the cosmic speed limit, observer, observed, and observation –

all three become one and space becomes dimensional again. All energy is the oestrus of space: all positive (+) energy in the universe is always cancelled by an equal amount of negative (-) energy: 0^0 is the ultimate theory of the universe.

So, the simple 0 is the Theory of Everything; 0 and Space are identical: 0 = Space. Dimensional space is the basis of all. Space is the first and last cause. It creates all by splitting as the referent and their opposite, the referred. Time is L^1. Consciousness, intelligence, mind and

all energies are L^2. Matter-energy is L^3. Distortion makes the surface of space undulating. Gravity is the trough of the undulation. Distortion is negligible at 5%; 95% is dimensional. Distortion takes place when space is at its periodic oestrus. The universe is the result of this periodic oestrus and its pains. At menopause, space returns to its dimensional simplicity.

Religion is a pompous expression of race, nation, ethnicity or tribe – a show of magnificence, parade, and power: a procession distinguished by ostentation and splendour, a pageant. A god, every god, is a totem of its original race, tribe. The real God – universal God – is Space. The world is indifferent to original God.

erratica

True, there's much 'gastronomic creativity' in sizzling skewers of 'paneer seekh' complete with distinctive smoky aroma. But the Chowk also has enough meaty stuff for those unbarred from the Real McKebab; the famed *tunde* doesn't yet have some *tinda* clone.

True, even confirmed carnivores unabashedly join the *shahi-tukda-tukda* gang in its packed sweetshops, where all distinctions melt away like *malai makkhan*, the winter speciality. But hailing *malai paan gilauri* shouldn't mean guillotining *galouti* or nullifying *nalli-nihari*.

Sacred space



Robert Greenleaf

Good leaders must first become good servants.



Editor's TAKE

Delhi's deadly air: A public health emergency

Systemic reform, urgently implemented, is essential to mitigate Delhi's complex air pollution as a persistent public health emergency

Come November, the city begins to resemble a gas chamber. The AQI worsens every winter, pollution levels soar, and relief remains nowhere in sight. What Delhiites endure daily has been starkly highlighted by a new analysis of Global Burden of Disease (GBD) data, which should serve as a wake-up call for both authorities and residents. The report paints a grim picture: in 2023, one in seven deaths in Delhi was linked to air pollution. With nearly 17,200 lives lost to toxic air, pollution has emerged not merely as an environmental nuisance, but as the capital's single largest health threat.

Each winter, as Delhi's skyline fades under a thick, grey shroud, air pollution dominates headlines and claims lives. Yet the GBD data reveal that Delhi's air crisis is not confined to November and December; it is a year-round killer, quietly eroding public health and shortening lives. Long-term exposure to fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) is the primary culprit.

To put this in perspective, air pollution kills more people than high blood pressure, diabetes, or obesity. Yet official responses remain ambivalent, with authorities still debating whether air pollution can be "conclusively" linked to mortality. The data, however, speak for themselves.

Despite multiple interventions – from graded response plans and odd-even schemes to curbs on stubble burning – pollution-linked deaths have risen, from 15,786 in 2018 to 17,188 in 2023. This points to systemic failure: policies have remained reactive and seasonal, while the sources of pollution have multiplied and entrenched themselves in the city's urban fabric.

Contrary to popular belief, Delhi's crisis is not just about winter smog or Punjab's stubble burning. CREA's latest assessment finds crop residue burning contributed less than six per cent to Delhi's PM_{2.5} levels this October. The real culprits are closer to home: vehicular emissions, industrial pollution, construction dust, and unchecked waste burning. Nearly half of Delhi's air pollution originates from vehicles.

Air pollution must now be treated as a public health emergency, not merely an environmental concern. Framing it as a health issue demands stronger accountability, better monitoring, and targeted interventions akin to epidemic responses. Stricter vehicular emission norms, accelerated electrification of public transport, industrial emission audits, and dust control mechanisms must be implemented with the urgency of a pandemic response. The CREA findings are a wake-up call – one that demands not token measures, but transformative action.

The time for incremental measures is over; Delhi requires bold, systemic reforms. Citizens, authorities, and industry must act in unison to reclaim breathable air. Only sustained, coordinated action can halt the rise in pollution-related deaths and restore the city's health. Delhi's future depends on treating air quality as a non-negotiable public health priority.

Who is responsible for double votes? Tech-driven SIR 2.0 for electoral integrity

ECI's All-Is-Well Claim and Blame-the-Voter Mindset? Administrative lapses, not voters, are behind duplication; many who shift residence for work face double entries unknowingly



RAJEEV KUMAR

The SIR in Bihar faced strong criticism from political parties, leading the Supreme Court to direct the Election Commission of India (ECI) to draw lessons from it before undertaking a nationwide revision. The new exercise, called SIR 2.0, commenced this week, presenting itself as a paperless, people-friendly, and procedurally robust initiative.

With nearly one billion voter entries, a digital approach is not only inevitable but indispensable. The electoral roll is no longer a static, state-wise record but a dynamic national database whose precision directly defines the integrity of India's elections. However, questions about its credibility have already begun to surface.

This article examines the issue of double or multiple listings of a single voter, exemplified by the recent case of a voter in Bihar whose name appears in both the Bihar and West Bengal rolls. The duplication defeats the core purpose of the SIR and reflects procedural lapses rather than voter fraud. The problem affects countless citizens who relocate and unknowingly remain registered in more than one constituency—a situation the author has personally observed in several similar cases. A hanging sword remains suspended over voters' heads, unknowingly and unalarmed, mainly due to the Election Commission's high-handedness and administrative indifference.

Sound Legal Framework, Poor Enforcement

Under the Representation of the People (RP) Act, 1950, duplicate entries technically constitute a violation, though such lapses may not be intentional. Many law-abiding citizens, simply by shifting residence, inadvertently find themselves in breach of the Act through no fault of their own. The RP Act, 1950, defines the framework for maintaining the integrity of electoral rolls and preventing duplication.

Under Section 22(b), if a voter changes residence within the same constituency, the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) should transpose the entry to the appropriate part of the roll. Section 22 concerns the inclusion of names in the electoral rolls. When a voter moves to another constituency, Section 23(2) governs inclusion in the new roll. It mandates that the ERO, if satisfied that the applicant is entitled to be registered, shall direct inclusion of the applicant's name in the

SIR 2.0 MUST NOT DEGENERATE INTO ANOTHER BUREAUCRATIC RITUAL. THE GAPS ARE ADMINISTRATIVE, NOT TECHNOLOGICAL. ECINET, ALREADY A ROBUST DIGITAL SYSTEM, SHOULD BE STRENGTHENED THROUGH AADHAAR INTEGRATION AND UPDATED STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES. BEFORE ROLLOUT, THE ELECTORAL DATA MUST BE CLEANED, DUPLICATES FLAGGED, AND DELETED AFTER VERIFICATION

The writer is a Tech-Education Policy Consultant, a former Professor of Computer Science at IIT Kharagpur, IIT Kanpur, BITS Pilani, and JNU, and a former Scientist at DRDO and DST

[dailypioneer](#)

[@dailypioneer](#)

[rajeev-kumar-51679611](#)

new roll. The section further requires that if the applicant is already registered in the roll of another constituency, the concerned ERO must inform the officer of that constituency, who shall then strike off the applicant's name from that roll. Thus, a double vote exists mostly due to the inaction of electoral officials. In practice, double votes persist largely because electoral officials fail to act with the diligence and coordination required by law.

To ensure the uniqueness of every voter's registration, Sections 17 and 18 explicitly prohibit multiple registrations—no person may be listed in more than one constituency or more than once in the same constituency. Violations constitute an offence under electoral law. Duplication often occurs when a voter's name is added at a new place of residence but not simultaneously deleted from the previous one.

In essence, the Act places the primary responsibility on the EROs to ensure that transposition, inclusion, and deletion are carried out accurately, promptly, and simultaneously. This process is crucial in preventing duplicate registration and ensuring the credibility, transparency, and integrity of the national electoral database.

Procedural Flaws in Voter Duplication

The ECI has consolidated the above provisions related to change of residence and correction of voter details in Form 8, used for transposition or correction of entries. A change of address request may fall under four categories: (i) no change in constituency or polling station; (ii) no change in constituency but a change in polling station; (iii) change in constituency within the same state; and (iv) change in both constituency and state.

The most common causes of double entries occur in Type III and Type IV cases, where a voter either changes constituency within the same state or relocates to another state. The new entry may retain the same EPIC (Electors Photo Identity Card) number or generate a new one. For example, a recent case in Bihar involved two entries with different EPIC numbers, while the author has observed several instances where both entries shared the same EPIC. In either case, the responsibility for not deleting the earlier entry rests squarely with the concerned Electoral Registration Officers (EROs), whose timely coordination and action are crucial to preventing duplication in the national electoral roll.

Another source of duplication arises when a voter misuses Form 6 for a change of residence, although it is meant for new voter inclusion. As mandated under Section 19 of the RP Act, 1950, the form applies to those who have attained 18 years of age and are ordinarily resident in a con-

stituency. It requires a declaration that the applicant is enrolling for the first time and is not registered elsewhere. However, voters shifting residence often conceal their existing registration, resulting in duplication. Such false declarations constitute a legal violation, with accountability shared by both the voter and the officials responsible for verification.

Technology in Place, Accountability Missing

The backbone of India's electoral roll is ECINET, a fully digital, nationwide system designed to assign each voter a unique EPIC number, ensuring a single verifiable entry per individual. With records of nearly one billion voters, ECINET can detect duplicates, flag inconsistencies, and enable corrections through authorised verification, maintaining a complete update history for traceability. Its voter search APIs can identify duplicate entries and generate alerts for review and deletion. With such capabilities, there is little justification for the continued existence of duplicate records.

Whether the SIR is paper-based or paperless, the real challenge lies in database accuracy and administrative responsiveness, as detection and deletion in a digital system can be instantaneous. Most duplicate entries arise from the failure to delete older records, whether linked to the same or a different EPIC number. This recurring issue reflects not a technological gap but an administrative lapse rooted in poor coordination and weak accountability within the electoral machinery.

Trust Through Technology

SIR 2.0 must not degenerate into another bureaucratic ritual. The gaps are administrative, not technological. ECINET, already a robust digital system, should be strengthened through Aadhaar integration and updated Standard Operating Procedures. Before rollout, the electoral data must be cleaned, duplicates flagged, and deleted after verification.

With software-led validation, digital audit trails, and real-time corrections, the process can evolve into a trust revolution. The future SIRs may become unnecessary, as electoral rolls remain perpetually accurate, updated, and verifiable. Thus, in Digital India, technology must take charge of enforcing accountability—replacing bureaucratic inertia and complacency with precision, transparency, and efficiency. ECINET must function as a reliable public utility with instant dispute resolution and continuous updates—shifting India from verification-by-ritual to verification-by-design, achieving SIR with Technology and Trust: A Model for the World.

PIC TALK



A priest conducts special prayers at Gurudwara Chhathi Patshahi during Guru Nanak Jayanti celebrations in Srinagar.

PHOTO: FI

DIGITAL EXPERIENCE

www.dailypioneer.com

facebook.com/dailypioneer

[@TheDailyPioneer](https://twitter.com/TheDailyPioneer)

instagram.com/dailypioneer

linkedin.com/in/ThePioneer

MALDIVES LEADS WITH BOLD GENERATIONAL SMOKING BAN

A generational smoking ban is a ticklish issue that has faced numerous obstacles in its effective enforcement. In the United Kingdom, the proposal is yet to see the light of day, whereas in New Zealand the ban was repealed within a year of its implementation. The biggest hurdle lies in arranging logistics and addressing minute details. Secondly, laxity and corruption among the stakeholders involved in the execution of the project can prove to be a major impediment for governments. Moreover, resistance from the targeted group itself can easily derail the policy.

However, the Maldives Government appears determined to enforce its generational ban on smoking: anyone born after January 1, 2007, will be prohibited from handling

tobacco in any form, including smoked and chewed tobacco—its consumption, purchase, or sale. A substantial penalty has been proposed for violators of the law, which came into force on November 1.

No doubt, the Maldives is a small island nation compared with the UK or even New Zealand. Nevertheless, the Mohamed Muluzzu dispensation has made a commendable beginning that has drawn global attention. If the policy proves successful, other countries could well take a leaf out of the Maldives' book. If implemented effectively, the Maldives' move could become a model for global tobacco control. Its success may well inspire larger nations to follow suit in safeguarding future generations.

GANAPATHI BHAT | AKOLA

Canada must stand firm against intimidation



MANINDER GILL

2ND OPINION THE PIONEER

Canada is at a turning point in its foreign policy. Under Prime Minister Mark Carney and Foreign Minister Anita Anand, Ottawa is charting a pragmatic and forward-looking course—one that seeks to normalise and strengthen relations with both India and China, two of the world's largest and most influential economies. This is not merely a matter of diplomacy; it is an act of strategic necessity for Canada's future prosperity and global relevance.

Yet, as Anand and Carney pursue this responsible foreign policy, radical Khalistan organisations are attempting to sabotage it. These groups, which the Canadian Government itself has previously flagged for violent or extremist activities, are trying to impose a veto on Canada's India policy.

Their methods go far beyond protest: they are engaging in intimidation and threats against public representatives—including Minister Anand—simply because they refuse to submit to their divisive agenda. What makes this campaign especially vile is its targeting of Anand's identity. A proud Hindu and Canadian of Indian origin, Ms Anand embodies the multicultural and inclusive spirit of this country. Yet extremists have twisted her faith and heritage into a weapon against her. They have forgotten or wilfully ignored the central message of the Sikh Gurus, who preached universal brotherhood, compassion, and justice.

In an act of shocking malice, these radicals have displayed violent imagery in Vancouver, pointing guns at posters of Ms Anand and the late Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, depicting a grotesque assassination scene. This is a deliberate attempt to justify violence against Ms Anand's person. This is not "activism"; it is political intimidation, pure and simple. Such actions are intended to terrorise and silence public servants—a direct attack on Canada's democratic institutions.

I want to commend MP Randeep Saral for his principled stand in condemning this intimidation and defending his colleague. His courage represents the best of Canadian democracy—a willingness to speak up when it matters most.

However, it is deeply disappointing that many of his fellow MPs have remained silent. If twenty-one Members of Parliament cannot defend one of their own colleagues against such blatant threats, the public has every right to question whether these same leaders will stand up for ordinary Canadians when the time comes. Leadership demands courage, not convenience. Canada cannot and must not tolerate this. The threatening of elected representatives is not free speech; it is a crime.

The Government must respond with the full force of the law. Political violence—whether inspired by ideology, religion, or nationalism—has no place in a democratic nation built on peace, tolerance, and mutual respect. Prime Minister Carney and Foreign Minister Anand are right to put Canada's interests first. They understand that constructive engagement with India and China is essential for trade, technology, climate action, and global stability. No fringe movement should be allowed to hijack that national agenda. It is time for Canadians of every background to reject intimidation and stand with those who work for the nation's good. Anita Anand deserves not fear, but our respect and protection. The true spirit of Canada calls for courage in the face of hate, and unity in the pursuit of peace.

The writer is the Managing Director of Radio India, Surrey, British Columbia, Canada

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Widening gap between rich and poor

The Economic disparity has peaked worldwide following the era of liberalisation and globalisation. In research undertaken by the G-20 panel of independent experts, researchers found that inequality has reached an alarming level across the globe. According to statistics, the richest one per cent of the world's population owns the majority of new assets acquired between 2000 and 2024. India is no exception to this trend.

In just two decades, the country's richest one per cent has seen a 62 per cent growth in wealth. At a time when the world's fourth-largest economy continues to expand, this disparity has worsened the unequal allocation of resources between the rich and the poor. Undoubtedly, the panel's findings will motivate policymakers to seek methods to address the widening inequality gap. Last week, the Kerala Government announced that the state had abolished poverty among its most impoverished groups. However, several specialists have disputed these claims.

Though the benefits of people-centred development and community participation in the state cannot be overlooked, this programme has assisted thousands of extremely poor families in accessing food, healthcare, and a better standard of living.

ABHIJIT ROY | JAMSHEDPUR

Digital lending reshaping inclusion

Digital lending refers to the process of extending credit or loans via digital channels—mobile apps, websites, and online platforms—using automation, analytics, and minimal manual intervention. It typically involves customer acquisition and onboarding online, credit assessment through algorithms and alternative data, digital disbursement of funds, and online servicing, repayments, and collections.

Because of these features, digital lending promises speed, convenience, and broader reach, especially for underserved borrowers. It is transforming retail credit in India, making it faster, more accessible, and scalable. At the same time, the regulatory landscape is tightening to protect borrowers and ensure sustainable growth. Embrace digital lending with innovation but build it upon transparency, compliance, and customer-centricity.

Digital lending in India is a rapidly growing sector, projected to become a \$350 billion market by 2025. Driven by smartphone penetration, India Stack (Aadhaar, UPI), and rising demand for instant credit, it is regulated by the Reserve Bank of India through comprehensive guidelines ensuring consumer protection and transparency.

CK SUBRAMANIAM | NAVI MUMBAI

Women cricketers create sporting history

Apropos editorial Indian Women's Cricket Team Scripts History, It was rightly observed that this World Cup triumph should serve as a call to action—a reminder for schools, academies, and state associations to invest in girls' training and equal facilities.

The Indian women's cricket team has created a golden chapter by winning the ICC Women's World Cup trophy for the first time, defeating South Africa by 52 runs in a thrilling final at the DY Patil Stadium. Electing to bat first, India scored 298 for seven in 50 overs and dismissed South Africa for 246. Deepthi Sharma's explosive batting and five wickets sealed a heroic victory.

This triumph testifies to years of dedication and discipline. Supported by the Government and the Ministry of Sports, the players' determination and skill brought glory to the nation. Indian daughters like Shefali Verma, Deepthi Sharma, Captain Harmanpreet Kaur, Smriti Mandhana, and Richa Ghosh have displayed exceptional sportsmanship, inspiring young girls to pursue cricket alongside their academic commitments. Their remarkable achievement has redefined women's cricket in India, proving that talent knows no gender. May this victory become the foundation for a stronger, more inclusive sporting future.

YUGAL KISHORE SHARMA | DELHI

Is Modi following Patel's trajectory towards a united India?

History often turns on a single decision. In 1946, Gandhi's veto changed India's destiny — denying Sardar Patel the nation's leadership and shaping a Republic Nehru envisioned, not necessarily one Patel dreamed

FIRST
Column



BALBIR
PUNJ

On October 31, India marked a momentous milestone-celebrating the 150th birth anniversary of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the nation's first Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister. Yet, even today, a lingering question captivates minds: How might India have looked if Mahatma Gandhi had not exercised his 'veto' in 1946 during the selection of the Interim Prime Minister?

Prominent Journalist Durga Das, a credible witness to those eventful years, best captures the entire Interim government process of that time.

In his book *India - From Curzon to Nehru and After*, he vividly recalls:

"Patel was the head of the Congress Parliamentary Board, and the provincial Congress committees had expressed their preference for him as Azad's successor. But Gandhi felt Nehru would be a better Instrument to deal with Englishmen as they would talk in a 'common idiom'."

It was the first instance of a 'vote choir' in India's political history, which declared Nehru the victor, despite the majority of Congress's provincial committees nominating Patel.

Interestingly, Nehru's 136th birth anniversary is just around the corner on November 14, prompting us to reflect on how India would have been shaped with the legendary Sardar at the helm.

Sardar Patel's political philosophy was passionately anchored in India's rich civilisational heritage and cultural nationalism. If the young Republic had adopted his vision of secularism, the long-standing Ayodhya dispute, much like the Somnath case, might have been settled many decades earlier.

The pending disputes over the temple and mosque in Kashi and Mathura, which have caused tension both inside and outside the courts for centuries, might have been resolved long ago.

On the night of December 22-23, 1949, when the Idol of Ram Lalla miraculously appeared inside the disputed structure at Ayodhya, the first eyewitness was not a Hindu but a Muslim policeman named Abdul Barkat.

Moreover, over a dozen local Muslims sub-



SARDAR PATEL CONSISTENTLY PUT THE COUNTRY'S INTERESTS ABOVE HIS PERSONAL OR FAMILY CONCERNS. MORE THAN JUST A HISTORICAL FIGURE, PATEL REMAINS A GUIDING FORCE THAT CONTINUES TO SHAPE INDIA'S FUTURE

The writer is the author of 'Tyst with Ayodhya: Decolonisation of India' and 'Narrative ka Mayajal'

@balbirpunj

@balbirpunj

The Pioneer

mitted affidavits before the city magistrate, willingly acknowledging Hindu ownership of the Ram Janmabhoomi site. Even the then United Province (now Uttar Pradesh) Chief Minister Govind Ballabh Pant, the then Home Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri, senior bureaucrat KK Nayar, City Magistrate Gurudutt Singh, Chief Secretary Bhagwan Sahay, and local Congress leader Baba Raghavdas-along with both the administrative and social leadership-favoured rebuilding the Ram temple. Still, the issue was hanging fire for seven decades, mainly due to Pandit Nehru's distorted interpretation of secularism. Nehru was also known to be uncomfortable with the reconstruction of the Somnath temple; however, as long as Gandhi and Patel were alive, he could not bring himself to stop it.

Once these towering figures faded into the background, Nehru's bias against Hindu culture began to surface. He went so far as to dismiss Hindu temples as mere "oppressive" structures, revealing his colonised mindset.

This ideological stance reached a shocking low in 2007, when the Congress-led UPA Government submitted an affidavit to the Supreme Court, claiming that there was no evidence to support Lord Ram's existence. Patel's approach-combining

persuasion, accommodation, firmness, and strategic force-was instrumental in unifying over 550 princely states. Meanwhile, Nehru, for some inexplicable reasons, kept personal control over the volatile Jammu and Kashmir.

Patel regarded Jammu and Kashmir as merely one among many princely states that were integrating into the Indian Union. However, Nehru perceived it as a unique case for two reasons.

Firstly, Jammu and Kashmir was the only Muslim-majority state to accede to India, which led Nehru to grant it particular consideration-an arguably communal approach.

Secondly, Sheikh Abdullah, who clandestinely aspired to become its 'Sheikh', a sovereign ruler, held substantial influence over Nehru and succeeded in misleading him. The result was disastrous: Kashmir was subjected to a plebiscite proposal; Articles 370 and 35A granted it special status; the issue was internationalised at the United Nations; and a premature ceasefire was declared even before the Pakistani invaders were fully expelled.

One can only imagine — if Nehru had similarly approached Junagadh or Hyderabad, they might also have become Pakistani territories, turning into festering

wounds that would have kept bleeding, causing India to remain fractured for decades.

The truth is plain: had Patel dealt with the Kashmir issue, peace would have prevailed there, as in the rest of India. There would have been no stone-pelting on Indian soldiers, no communal killings based on religious identity, and Pakistan would have thought twice before interfering in the Valley. The genocidal exodus of Kashmiri Hindus during 1989-90 might never have taken place.

Imagine a world where the Indus Waters Treaty of 1960 never came into existence — its disadvantages to India's long-term prospects seemingly erased.

Instead of clinging to the outdated hope of 'Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai' diplomacy or bestowing China with a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, a more strategic and determined approach could have been employed to check China's aggressive expansion. Such a shift in strategy might have significantly impacted history and the outcome of the 1962 war.

Had India been under Patel's leadership, the nation's economic destiny might have taken a different path-one driven by innovation and self-reliance rather than sluggish, crony socialism.

With his unwavering vision, Patel would have inspired Indians to unlock their full

creative potential and would have taken a strong stance against foreign-funded protests, often masquerading as environmental and human rights campaigns, that threaten national progress.

India's inherited Marx-Macaulay brand of secularism, shaped by Nehru, has deeply skewed the nation's social fabric. It often paints the Hindu community-longstanding victims of religious intolerance and persecution-as aggressors rather than the enduring victims they truly are.

The origins of this inversion can be traced to Nehru's letter to the Chief Ministers dated May 18, 1959. In it, he unilaterally shifted the burden of maintaining "communal peace" onto the "majority Hindus", while confidently asserting that "Muslims in India cannot, by their very nature, adopt aggressive attitudes."

For over a millennium, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, and Jains have suffered relentless assaults-facing invasions, forced conversions, and the destruction of their sacred temples-all fuelled by bigoted monothetic zeal. Can anyone truly claim that Islam in the subcontinent has fundamentally transformed or shed its historically iconoclastic tendencies?

Patel saw the menace of fanaticism with striking clarity. In 1939, in Bhavnagar, Gujarat, he narrowly escaped death when Jihadists hiding within a mosque attacked him with swords. While these terrifying episodes were often left out of the mainstream narrative, Patel had already seen the deadly consequences of neglecting Islamist extremism-an oversight that still threatens to undermine the very unity and integrity of the nation. On January 3, 1948, addressing a gathering in Calcutta, Patel candidly said: "Among the Muslims who remain in India, many-perhaps most-had supported the creation of Pakistan. It is beyond my understanding how their hearts could have changed overnight."

Three days later (January 6, 1948), in Lucknow, he asked, "Why do Indian Muslims not condemn Pakistan's aggression upon Indian soil?"

Sardar Patel consistently put the country's interests above his personal or family concerns. More than just a historical figure, Patel remains a guiding force that continues to shape India's future.

It might not be an overstatement to assert that Prime Minister Modi, for more than a decade, has been endeavouring to rectify the errors made by Nehru and to guide India back onto the trajectory that Patel would have pursued.

Bihar in numbers: Growth without private investment and the price of development



SAMRIDHI
PRAKASH

As Bihar heads into another election season, political slogans about development and growth will once again echo across its towns and villages. But beneath the rhetoric lies a quieter story told by numbers-one that speaks of progress, paradoxes, and persistent challenges. To grasp Bihar's economic paradox, one number says it all. In 2024-25, Bihar's per capita income is estimated at around ₹69,321 (MOSPI); roughly what India's average income was in 2012-13. Put simply, the average Bihar today is as prosperous as the average Indian was over a decade ago. Bihar, in 2011-12, had a per capita income of ₹28,671. Even though it grew 142 per cent by 2024-25, faster than India at 137 per cent, the low base meant the State is sprinting hard just to stay in place within India's growth story.

The Numbers Story

Bihar's per capita Net State Domestic Product (NSDP) at current prices for 2024-25 is estimated at ₹69,321 (MOSPI), trailing far behind India's national average of ₹2,05,324 for FY 2024-25. Patna, the State capital, remains Bihar's economic engine, with an estimated per capita income of over ₹1,85,000-nearly triple the State average and far higher than lagging districts like Sheohar, Araria, and Sitamarhi, where per capita incomes barely cross ₹20,000-₹30,000.

Growth of Bihar

Bihar's 13 per cent growth in FY 2024-25, above the national 10 per cent, looks impressive but stems largely from a low base. Despite a decade-long 11 per cent growth, the State's per capita income is only 34 per cent of India's average. Though home to 9.1 per cent of India's population, Bihar contributes just 3.2 per cent of national GVA. Its dependency ratio is 70 per cent, 15 points above the national average, and 88 per cent of its people live in rural areas, underscoring an economy that remains agrarian, young, and heavily burdened.

Structure of the Economy

The primary sector contributes 23 per cent of Bihar's GVA, with crops forming half of it. The secondary sector adds another 23 per cent, but manufacturing is just 7 per cent, while construc-

tion dominates at 13 per cent. Services lead with 54 per cent, a structure largely unchanged since 2011-12. Employment reflects this imbalance: In 2022-23, half of Bihar's workers were in the primary sector, 29 per cent in services, 18.4 per cent in construction, and only 5.7 per cent in manufacturing. The 4.3 per cent unemployment rate masks low labour participation, especially among women (23.9 per cent vs 39.8 per cent nationally). Job quality is weak: only 9 per cent of workers hold regular salaried jobs, 29 per cent are casual labourers, and 62 per cent self-employed (India: 23 per cent, 23 per cent, 54 per cent). In urban Bihar (12 per cent of the population), just 29 per cent have regular jobs, compared to 48 per cent nationally-a direct consequence of limited industrialisation that restricts upward mobility.

Industries and Productivity in Bihar

The decline in registered factories highlights Bihar's industrial stagnation. As per the Annual Survey of Industries (ASI), the number of factories fell from 3,623 in 2015-16 to 3,307 in 2022-23, even as the rest of India saw steady growth. Productivity gaps in the unincorporated sector remain wide, with poor infrastructure, low capital investment, and limited market access restricting the workforce's potential. Chronic underinvestment by the private sector has left Bihar dependent on construction and public expenditure, limiting job creation and forcing successive Governments to rely on fiscal expansion and populist spending to sustain growth.

Fiscal Statistics

These fiscal pressures stem from Bihar's weak private sector base. With limited industrial investment, the Government has increasingly relied on public spending to drive growth. In FY 2023-24, the fiscal deficit, budgeted at 3 per cent of GDP, rose to 9.2 per cent; the revenue deficit climbed from 0.1 to 4.1 per cent, and the primary deficit from 0.9 to 6.9 per cent. The CAG's 2021-22 audit flagged these gaps, urging reforms in budgeting and revenue systems.

With 42 per cent of revenue expenditure spent on wages and pensions, fiscal space for capital investment is minimal. Bihar leads in multidimensional poverty reduction, yet challenges persist. The share of the poor fell from 51.89 per cent in 2015-16 to 33.76 per cent in 2019-21, with NITI Aayog projecting 26.6 per cent by 2022-23. Over 2.25 crore people exited poverty between 2015 and 2023, second only to Uttar Pradesh. However, with national poverty now in single digits, Bihar's level remains high. Monthly per capita consumption in 2023-24 rose to ₹3,670 in rural and ₹5,080 in urban areas, but the State still ranks among the bottom five in household consumption.

Human Development and Schooling

Bihar's overall literacy rate trails national averages (81 per cent for India, much lower in Bihar). The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2022 showed only 43 per cent of rural children in Std V can read Std II texts; basic numeracy is even lower. Districts like Gaya and Bhagalpur demonstrate innovative school improvement projects (eg, digital classrooms, toilet construction), but physical and digital infrastructure remains patchy in flood-exposed villages and urban slums.

A Policy Roadmap

The next Government, irrespective of its political colour, must move beyond populist freebies and focus on a transformative economic agenda. Four priorities stand out:

- **From Agrarian Dependence to Agri-Prosperity:** Bihar must move from subsistence farming to value-added agribusiness. With fertile land and water, policies should promote food processing, cold chains, and organised retail. The White and Blue Revolutions hold vast potential but need private investment and better market access.
- **Human Capital Mission:** A ten-year Bihar Education and Health Mission is essential, with major investment in school infrastructure, teacher training, and learning outcomes. Reducing stunting and IMR through integrated nutrition and health programmes is equally critical-a healthy, educated workforce drives growth.
- **Governance and Ease of Doing Business:** The single-window system must move from slogan to practice. Simplifying regulations, enforcing contracts, and ensuring transparent administration are key. Bihar should actively attract investors by highlighting its large, trainable, low-cost workforce.
- **Urban Renaissance:** With one of India's lowest urbanisation rates, Bihar needs a planned urban strategy focused on transport, sanitation, environmental sustainability, and affordable housing to spur growth and enhance living standards.

What Bihar Needs Now

As Bihar prepares for a political transition, the real test will be whether the next Government can shift from fiscal dependence to productive investment. Development must be built from the districts upward: enabling industrial clusters around local strengths, improving infrastructure, and attracting private enterprise to create durable jobs.

When Artificial Intelligence becomes truly human



CHAITANYA K
PRASAD

There are moments in history when invention meets intention-when technology doesn't just advance but awakens. Artificial Intelligence stands at one such moment.

There is a lot of talk about algorithms, competition, and existential risk in boardrooms and on the news. But in addition to all the hype, a more important and quiet question is coming up: can AI help people thrive instead of just surviving? In February 2026, New Delhi will host the AI Impact Summit, which will look at how technology could change people's lives, the environment, and progress. Instead of arguing about how machines can take over, the world will come together to talk about how they can heal, include, and lift people up. The challenge is not just to make AI smarter, but also to make it 'Jan AI'-people-centred, participatory, and purposeful. The seeds of that idea are already there. Doctors can find diseases early with the help of an AI-powered tool in a district hospital. A farmer in a small village uses an app that gets satellite data to predict when it will rain. A digital tutor explains a maths problem again in the child's first language.

These aren't stories about the future; they're peeks into a present that is slowly changing through lines of code that aren't visible and acts of kindness that are. AI now predicts cyclones before they strike, manages traffic to cut emissions, and tracks deforestation in real time. It helps cities breathe cleaner air and farmers grow more food. Yet beyond these applications lies something deeper-the democratisation of access. For the first time, intelligence itself can be shared. A voice assistant empowers a person with disability to access services. Once unattainable, an AI tool helps a rural business owner obtain credit. AI that is empathetically designed improves societies by making them more equitable in addition to making systems smarter.

The global AI map is still not level, though. Its centres of creation are concentrated in a few wealthy nations, trained on datasets that mirror privilege. When algorithms fail to understand Hindi or Swahili, or optimise farming for temperate climates, they reveal an uncomfortable truth: AI reflects the world that builds it.

To change that, the Global South must move from testing ground to co-author. Its languages, cultures, and lived realities hold both the data

and the wisdom to make AI truly universal. The shift isn't only moral; it's practical. In the absence of diversity, intelligence is not intelligence but imitation. In this way, India embodies the world's complexity and hope. With 1.4 billion people, hundreds of languages, and a digital revolution that is extending to even the most remote regions of the nation, India offers the ideal setting for inclusive innovation. The goal of the Government's IndiaAI Mission is to make AI beneficial to all citizens, not just those with connections. Technology builds capability, but communication builds trust. To make Jan AI real, we must translate the abstract into the accessible-turning algorithms into stories, data into dialogue, and ethics into everyday empathy. Just as Swachh Bharat turned cleanliness into a civic emotion and Digital India made technology a shared dream, Jan AI must become a people's movement-a conversation that demystifies, decentralises, and democratises intelligence. Awareness campaigns can show how AI improves lives. Community radio, vernacular content, and local influencers can make it relatable. Storytelling in schools and skilling programmes can nurture curiosity and caution together. When citizens understand AI's promise and pitfalls, they participate not out of fear but with a sense of ownership.

A movement like Jan AI cannot be top-down. It must be expressed in multiple languages, felt in daily interactions, and communicated through a range of media. By promoting ethical data sharing, influencing local applications, and demanding accountability, it should not only encourage citizens to use AI but also to co-create it. By presenting real-life examples of nurses, teachers, and farmers using AI for good, digital media, motion pictures, and popular culture can humanise these possibilities. Each story and creation acts as a spark for a wider awakening, showing how inclusivity can guide intelligence to become collective.

In a world anxious about what machines can do, the New Delhi Summit asks a different question: what can we do with them-for each other? With empathy and inclusivity, technology cannot be the end of humanity's story but rather the start of its next chapter. India's leadership offers a chance to direct the world's discourse. If the answer begins here, in the heart of the Global South, perhaps 'Jan AI' will usher in the era of Artificial Intelligence where the solution starts here. In the centre of the Global South.

And perhaps, just possibly, the most human era will finally dawn, driven by dharma as well as data.

The author is a Research Associate at Pahl India Foundation

@daily_pioneer

@daily_pioneer

samridhi-prakash-979b58170

The writer is a former civil servant, who writes on cinema and strategic communication. With inputs from Zoya Ahmad and Vaishnavi Srinivasan

@Chatty111Prasad

daily_pioneer