



Loyal Opposition

West Bengal is in the grip of a toxic political culture

The rout in the West Bengal Assembly election has thrown the Trinamool Congress (TMC) into a tailspin. TMC rebel Ritabrata Banerjee has been formally recognised as Leader of the Opposition (LoP) in the Legislative Assembly after claiming the support of 58 of the 80 MLAs of the party. Abhishek Banerjee, the party's national general secretary and nephew of Mamata Banerjee, had written to the Speaker naming veteran Sobhandeb Chattopadhyay as LoP. Ritabrata Banerjee challenged that decision, with some encouragement and support from the ruling BJP. The TMC had earlier expelled Ritabrata Banerjee and Sandipan Saha, both TMC MLAs, accusing them of anti-party activities after they complained to the Speaker that their signatures on Abhishek Banerjee's letter had been forged. Assembly officials found discrepancies between signatures on the submitted documents and those recorded during the oath-taking of newly elected MLAs, and the government has ordered a CID investigation. Ritabrata Banerjee framed his elevation as LoP as a "collective fight against individualism", pointedly declaring that the resistance was directed at Abhishek Banerjee and pledging loyalty to Mamata Banerjee – at least for public consumption. TMC functionaries are quitting the party in large numbers, even as its workers and leaders, including Abhishek Banerjee, continue to face physical violence.

Having been in power for three consecutive terms, the TMC's collapse has long been in the making, thanks to corruption, authoritarian governance, suppression of dissent, and violence against women. While all this has steadily eroded public confidence in both the administration and the party, the expanding role of Abhishek Banerjee alienated a generation of senior leaders who had built the party from the ground up. Chief Minister Suwendu Adhikari – the BJP's first in the State – was once among Mamata Banerjee's most trusted lieutenants. He resented the rise of the nephew, and was also vulnerable to pressure from central agencies that were investigating serious corruption cases against him. The TMC had no qualms about using state resources, local administrations, and police machinery for its power, but it could not withstand the BJP which is willing to stretch the rules of the game even further. In the TMC versus BJP fight, there will be protracted legal tussles over the status of the two groups that claim to be the legitimate TMC. This episode also highlights West Bengal's decades-long toxic political culture, marked by violence and opportunism. The new LoP was earlier a Marxist leader who defected to the TMC. The BJP has openly stated that several newly elected TMC MLAs wanted to join the party. They seem, instead, to have captured the TMC in the Assembly – a rather curious case of political consensus.

Incomplete truce

Israel has to pull back troops from Lebanon for peace to take hold

The new ceasefire agreement between Israel and Lebanon could help remove a major obstacle to U.S. President Donald Trump's efforts to secure a preliminary agreement with Iran to end the war. Last week, Iran suspended talks with the U.S. in protest against Israel's escalating war in Lebanon. In April, when Mr. Trump announced an Israel-Lebanon ceasefire, he had said that Israel was "prevented" from attacking the country any longer. But Tel Aviv continued air strikes and expanded ground operations in southern Lebanon. Iran has maintained that in its April 8 ceasefire with the U.S., Washington had promised that the ceasefire would come into force on all fronts, including Lebanon. Now, after Iran paused talks with the U.S., Mr. Trump swung into action. He claimed that he had talked Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu out of his plans to bomb Beirut and had a conversation with Hezbollah's representatives, who agreed "not to shoot". The Israel-Lebanon ceasefire statement followed Mr. Trump's announcement. Mr. Trump's firm diplomatic intervention, which reportedly included an expletive-laden call with Mr. Netanyahu, points to the importance he gives to the diplomatic process. Before the Lebanon crisis flared up, the U.S. and Iran were negotiating a memorandum of understanding to reopen the Strait of Hormuz and remove the U.S. blockade of Iranian ports, which would set the stage for negotiations on Iran's nuclear programme.

While the ceasefire agreement is welcome, it remains fragile and incomplete, leaving the conflict's key problems unaddressed. The actual fighting in Lebanon is between Israel and Hezbollah. The Lebanese government is not a party to the conflict and Hezbollah does not report to the Lebanese army. But Hezbollah was not part of the negotiations. The ceasefire agreement requires Hezbollah to unilaterally cease attacks, but it does not ask Israel to make concessions. Hezbollah says it would stop fighting only if Israel withdraws from southern Lebanon. Israel, which has made its deepest incursions into southern Lebanon since its 2000 withdrawal, is not talking about any withdrawal plan. Israel has also broken all its ceasefire agreements in recent years. Despite a truce deal, it continues to bomb Gaza. Mr. Trump's announcement of a new ceasefire despite an existing one highlights the fragility of the truce. What he is trying to do is to bring in a stop-gap arrangement in Lebanon to push his planned deal with Iran. But for this to work, he should get firm commitments from Israel that it would not break the terms. For a lasting truce in Lebanon, Israel has to end its illegal occupation of the south and pull back its troops.

India needs innovative strategies to eliminate TB

More than a century after the first tuberculosis vaccine was introduced, the world is struggling to control one of its oldest diseases. Tuberculosis (TB) continues to kill more people annually than any other infectious disease, surpassing even the COVID-19 pandemic at its peak. Yet, there is still no effective vaccine for adolescents and adults.

Once exposed to *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, individuals may get infected and remain asymptomatic for years. Others develop subclinical disease, showing minimal or no symptoms while harbouring infection. A subset progresses to active TB, which may manifest as pulmonary TB (PTB) – the infectious form that drives transmission – or as extrapulmonary TB (EPTB), which affects organs beyond the lungs and is harder to diagnose, more debilitating, and sometimes fatal.

No one-size-fits-all vaccine

With such diversity in disease pathways, expecting a single "one-shot" vaccine to prevent all forms of TB may be unrealistic. This expectation has shaped global disappointment in TB vaccine development especially since most previous trials have focused primarily on preventing pulmonary TB.

Meanwhile, the burden remains immense. In many low- and middle-income countries, TB incidence ranges between 200 and 300 per 100,000 population. Reducing this to 10-20 per 100,000 – the threshold for elimination – will require sustained effort and enormous public health investment. For India, which carries one of the world's highest TB burdens, the challenge is systemic.

India's goal of eliminating TB is ambitious and necessary. But achieving it will require a holistic approach towards all forms of disease and all age groups moving beyond the search for a perfect solution and embracing a layered, pragmatic approach. As tools are discovered and tested, decisions will need to be made on their deployment.

The first layer is better detection. Advances in diagnostics, including tools for identifying subclinical TB, can help identify individuals at risk earlier. The second is preventive therapy, ensuring that those with latent infection receive treatment before progressing to active disease. The third – arguably the most complex – is vaccination. However, access to diagnostics and preventive therapy remains uneven, making vaccination an especially critical pillar.

Recent findings from the BMJ-published PreVenTB trial conducted by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) provide such an opportunity. Conducted across 18 sites in India and involving more than 12,700 household contacts of TB patients, the trial evaluated VPM1002 developed by SIIPL and Immuvac developed by Cadila, in a real-world, high-risk population aged six years and above, including



Balram Bhargava

Former Director-General, Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)



Soumya Swaminathan

Former Chief Scientist of the World Health Organization (WHO)

individuals with comorbidities and varying infection status closely reflecting real life conditions.

The trial reported efficacy of VPM1002 and Immuvac as: 50.4% efficacy of VPM1002 against extrapulmonary TB (statistically significant); 64.6% efficacy of VPM1002 in children aged 6-14 years against all TB (PTB and EPTB); More than 60% efficacy of Immuvac against EPTB in children aged 6-10 years; more than 60% efficacy against progression to disease among those developing latent infection during follow-up and overall 21.4% efficacy of VPM1002 against all TB (Reference: Subho Sarkar, Consultant Intervention Pulmonologist; from LinkedIn). These are not trivial findings.

Extrapulmonary TB is the hidden burden of the epidemic, harder to diagnose, frequently missed, and associated with significant morbidity and mortality. A reduction of over 50% in such cases represents a meaningful clinical and public health impact, including reduced health-care costs and patient suffering.

The data also highlight a strong signal in school-age children and adolescents, where efficacy exceeded 60% which is an add-on benefit of vaccination in this age group. This is particularly relevant because India currently has no structured TB vaccination strategy beyond infancy. If confirmed, this could open the door to a booster-dose TB prevention strategy.

Need for nutritional support

Another important piece of evidence generated from study is the role of nutrition. Reduced efficacy was observed in individuals with low body mass index (BMI), underscoring the need for nutritional support for vaccines to work optimally in undernourished in context of broader health determinants.

From a programmatic standpoint, VPM1002 offers additional advantages. It is a single-dose vaccine based on a modified BCG platform, making it operationally simpler than multi-dose, adjuvanted vaccines in development. In a country of India's scale, logistical simplicity is a decisive advantage. The vaccine can be manufactured at large scale and cost effectively.

TB is largely a disease of low and middle income countries (LMIC) and their governments must act proactively. Waiting for expansive solutions developed elsewhere is neither practical nor sustainable. LMICs cannot afford to wait for a silver bullet, because there is no one-stop solution for TB, especially when there are results from a Phase III trial conducted in an Indian population across all age groups (six years and above) and against all forms of TB, including PTB and EPTB. It is to be noted that no other TB vaccine trial till date has studied efficacy against EPTB and none of the currently ongoing trials worldwide has included EPTB as the efficacy end-point.

India has navigated similar public health

decisions before. TrueNat was the first 'make in India' Molecular test approved and adopted by the National TB Elimination Programme before its World Health Organization pre-qualification study.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Bharat Biotech's Covaxin was initially approved in "clinical trial mode" to enable early access while additional data continued to accumulate. That decision was driven not by perfection, but by urgency and it helped accelerate protection at a critical time.

India has also demonstrated this approach with indigenous rotavirus vaccines, which were introduced despite modest efficacy and wide confidence intervals. Since then, they have helped reduce severe disease and child mortality and have been incorporated into the national immunisation programme (Bhandari *et al.*, *The Lancet*, 2014).

A smarter TB strategy

TB is, in many ways, a slow-moving pandemic. Yet, it has not always been met with the same urgency in policy action. The policy question, therefore, is how innovations, including moderately effective vaccines such as VPM1002 and Immuvac, can be intelligently integrated into the TB elimination programme. Targeted use among household contacts, deployment in school-age children, and alignment with nutrition and preventive therapy programmes could together lead to a more effective TB control framework. A combination of vaccines effective across different indications and age groups may be needed to have an impact.

India's TB challenge is unlikely to be solved by a single breakthrough. It will require a combination of early detection, preventive treatment, targeted vaccination against both pulmonary and extrapulmonary TB, case-based clinical management, nutritional supplementation, and sustained public health investment.

Waiting for a perfect vaccine may delay progress indefinitely, especially when no trial other than the PreVenTB trial has evaluated vaccine efficacy against both pulmonary and extrapulmonary TB in individuals aged six years and above. In contrast, deploying tools that reduce severe disease, particularly EPTB, can deliver immediate and tangible benefits.

The PreVenTB trial is comprehensive, well-designed and well conducted, offering a meaningful signal – perhaps a light at the end of the tunnel in TB vaccine development. Given the urgency of the challenge and the limited time to act, we must focus on solutions that are available today and supported by robust evidence of efficacy against both PTB and EPTB in individuals aged six years and above under real-world conditions, rather than wait indefinitely in the hope that better options may emerge in the future – an outcome that is far from certain.

New Indian vaccine trial data show meaningful protection against extrapulmonary TB, underscoring the need for targeted vaccination alongside stronger public health strategies

Rubio fails to win India back for Washington

For nearly a year, strategic experts in India and the United States have warned that worsening bilateral ties could damage a partnership that former U.S. President Joe Biden called the most consequential of the 21st century. They argue that India remains central to America's Indo-Pacific strategy and indispensable to its competition with China in geopolitics, technology, and securing critical supply chains.

Warnings from think tanks, sense of betrayal Think tanks have also been sounding the alarm. A March 2026 report by the Center for a New American Security, titled *Repairing the Breach: Getting U.S.-India Ties Back on Track*, said bilateral ties had "stumbled badly" in the second half of 2025. It cited U.S. President Donald Trump's claims about the May 2025 India-Pakistan ceasefire and his 50% tariffs on Indian exports as the key causes of the breach in trust, and recommended urgent steps to rebuild trust and deepen cooperation.

Similarly, the Hudson Institute's "New India Conference" underscored India's importance to U.S. interests and the Indo-Pacific balance of power. By featuring RSS General Secretary Dattatreya Hosabale, it also signalled a willingness to engage Hindutva nationalists despite concerns over their treatment of religious minorities.

This anxiety is not confined to Washington's think tanks, but also in India too. During a visit to India in January 2026, discussions at academic and policy institutions, as well as engagements with experts, diplomats and Indian foreign policy scholars, pointed to a common concern: New Delhi had lost trust in Washington. The damage was seen as not merely diplomatic or transactional, but also strategic. Many Indian experts believed that even if both sides recognised the importance of the relationship, it would take a long time to repair the trust deficit.

Three indicators came to define the deterioration in relations. The first was the growing U.S.-Pakistan strategic partnership in the



Muqtedar Khan

Professor of International Relations at the University of Delaware, a Senior Non-Resident Fellow at the Middle East Policy Council and also host of a YouTube channel on global affairs called Khanversations

post-Operation Sindoor period. As India sought to isolate Pakistan internationally, Mr. Trump's repeated praise for Pakistani leaders and the country's role in mediating with Iran was widely seen in India as a betrayal.

The second indicator was trade. The 50% tariffs levied on India – among the highest imposed on any country – came as a shock to New Delhi. The 25% tariff penalty on India, imposed specifically for buying Russian oil, further reinforced the perception that India was being singled out and punished for no apparent reason. The third indicator was the neglect of the Quad (Australia, India, Japan and the U.S.). The absence of head-of-state summits, combined with the lack of visible enthusiasm around the Quad meetings, suggested that one of the central pillars of America's Indo-Pacific strategy had been downgraded. The Quad, and therefore India, were clearly less important to Mr. Trump's plans which now appear to be more focused on carving a more productive partnership with China.

The Rubio visit and after

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio's visit to India (May 23-26, 2026) gave him a clear opportunity to address all three parameters. Unfortunately, there was hardly any progress on the pending trade deal. On top of that, Mr. Rubio essentially gaslit India by asserting in a tweet that India had committed to buying \$500 billion worth of American products over the next five years – a claim that Indian officials had disputed. The Quad Foreign Ministers' summit produced no major breakthrough and no clear announcement about when the heads of state would meet. Finally, when given an opportunity by the Indian press to criticise Pakistan for cross-border terrorism, Mr. Rubio instead chose to praise Pakistan's role in the Iran crisis.

He failed to take positions that would have reassured India that he had come to repair the relationship. Instead, the message he sent was that "America First" would be the only criterion determining U.S. choices, not any desire to repair

the U.S.-India strategic partnership.

The symbolism after Mr. Rubio's return to Washington only reinforced this conclusion. Just hours later, he participated in a public Cabinet meeting. When Mr. Trump asked him about Iran, Mr. Rubio spoke about Iran, Ebola, Cuba, Venezuela, and even his stopover in Armenia, which he described as highly successful. But he did not mention India, his meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, or the Quad meeting. Mr. Trump did not ask about India either. This amnesia is astonishing – coming just hours after a visit to one of America's most important strategic partners. Nor did Mr. Trump use his social media platforms to highlight the Quad or stress the importance of repairing U.S.-India relations.

It is precisely such indicators that make policymakers in New Delhi nervous. They signal that India's strategic significance has diminished in Washington's eyes.

A partnership that still matters

There remain many strategic reasons for the U.S. and India to work together: keeping the Indo-Pacific open, sustaining a partnership between major democracies in an era of rising authoritarianism, and collaborating on technological innovation, artificial intelligence, semiconductors, defence, and energy security. These shared interests have not disappeared and may well bring the two countries back toward closer cooperation. But for now, India and the U.S. are not as closely aligned as they were a year and a half ago.

If Mr. Rubio's goal was to repair the perceived damage done to India-U.S. relations since Mr. Trump's election in 2024, he clearly failed. But if his mission was to reinforce that American foreign policy will be driven by whatever Mr. Trump defines as "America First" on any given day, then perhaps he succeeded – making clear that American national interests are now shaped less by careful strategic thinking and more by the unpredictable thought process of President Trump.

The U.S. Secretary of State's visit failed to bridge the widening U.S.-India divide

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

EV battery safety

I write this letter as a Scientific Officer at the National Test House, Bengaluru, under the Government of India. The report, "On a Slow Charging Mode" (Bengaluru, 'Spotlight', June 5),

highlighted that while infrastructure and cost remain hurdles to EV adoption, long-term consumer trust ultimately depends on battery safety. The government is expanding a robust testing ecosystem. State-of-the-art

testing facilities for lithium-ion cells, battery packs, and EV chargers are already operational and continue to expand at National Test House centres in Bengaluru, Mumbai, and Kolkata. Industry players must make greater use of

these accessible government laboratories.
R.N. Lokesh,
Bengaluru

Nicobar project

It is surprising that the government has chosen to mask the observation of the

Public Investment Board (PIB) that the Nicobar's Galathea Bay project lacks "strategic objectives" and is now making all out efforts to project it as a strategic project ('Exclusive', Front page, June 5). It would be a great national loss if a

natural ecosystem with pristine tropical forest is destroyed and ancient tribes displaced.
Kosaraju Chandramouli,
Hyderabad

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

GROUND ZERO



Punished for a guilty system

A fire in a bed-and-breakfast took the lives of over 20 guests in Delhi's Hauz Rani. Of these, most were foreign nationals, mainly in India for their families' medical needs. The owner was allegedly misusing government permits and had no clearance from the fire department. **Suruchi Kumari** and **Shrimansi Kaushik** report on how, despite repeated announcements of government audits, on ground, compliance is a challenge

It is 12 noon on June 3, a day surprisingly not as hot as Delhi can get at this time, but the water from the fire extinguishers has dried up. About 200 people are gathered in a narrow lane in South Delhi's Hauz Rani, breathlessly recalling what happened that morning. The smoke has now cleared up over Flourish Stay, a bed-and-breakfast spread across six-storeys, but the building is charred. The structures flanking it are also blackened. This is the scene of a disaster.

The fire brigade says that 49 people were pulled out of the building. "There was no emergency exit, the doors on the terrace were locked, and the glass façade made rescue difficult. It left the trapped choking," says an officer. In addition, the main doors were powered by electricity, so could not be opened once the fire broke out. Hauz Rani is a pre-independence urban village that has seen unregulated growth over the years. Homestays illegally converted into multi-storey hotels run cheek by jowl with homes and real-estate brokers' offices. The lanes are so narrow only a single car can fit. High-tension electricity wires hang dangerously close to the traffic below. Tall and small buildings are packed into the *lal dora* area, a historic land classification demarcating a village habitation zone. Here, construction on an existing structure does not require building layout plans to be approved by the authorities.

The uniformed forces are swarming around, as the traffic police barricades the area, up to 1 kilometre around Flourish Stay that had caught fire at 8:30 that morning. The residents of Hauz Rani are on the street. Some guests from the homestays around are also out, now worried about their safety.

The police does not allow those from Micasa, the lodge next door, to enter the building. One couple from Congo is panicked because they need their medicines from the room. Another asks what will happen to their passports and money. Across the next few hours, foreign nationals from other homestays begin leaving with their luggage.

By the evening, the boards of all the surrounding bed-and-breakfast places have been taken down, fearing a government crackdown.

Outside this mess, within a kilometre, are two of Delhi's newer areas: Malviya Nagar, from where the police and fire brigade arrived; and Saket, with a steel-and-glass strip of malls and Max hospital's buildings. The lodges serviced those coming into Delhi for treatment to this hospital. Thirteen of the people who died were foreign nationals from Bangladesh, Congo, Iraq, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Mozambique, Nigeria, Uzbekistan, as per the Ministry of External Affairs. Nine were from India.

This is not Delhi's first disaster. Last month, an

It did not take the fire more than a few minutes to blow out of the ground floor. There were sparks in the dangling web of wires which people would later step on to jump

RIYAZUDDIN MANSURI
Mattress-shop owner

under-construction five-storey building collapsed in Saidulajab, killing six. Earlier in the month, a fire in a Vivek Vihar residential building killed nine. In March, another fire in Palam also killed nine, all from the same family. Over two-and-a-half months ago, the Delhi government promised a fire audit across the city.

The first hour

Ambulances began to arrive at 8:40 a.m. when locals had begun the rescue operation. "It did not take the fire more than a few minutes to blow out of the ground floor. There were sparks in the dangling web of wires which people would later step on to jump," says Riyazuddin Mansuri. He and his son Armaan, who had a mattress shop under a tin shed right opposite the B&B, used up their stock of over 20 mattresses to lay them down for those who began jumping. At the time, Mansuri says, he did this by instinct. "It felt like the thick smoke would swallow the whole neighbourhood."

He recalls feeling breathless, hours after. "People gathered and the narrow streets were already jammed by the time ambulances and fire services came. We were looking at people hanging from the windows, glass shreds falling on the road," he remembers.

The fire brigade arrived 45 minutes after the fire broke out, though officials say the call came to them 20 minutes into the fire. The police reached within 20 minutes, says the station house officer (SHO) of Malviya Nagar Police Station, Vinay Yadav. "They were late," the officer says of the fire engines. "There were ladders and mattresses, but no water," SHO Yadav says, of the alleged delay in the fire department reaching.

Seven fire tenders and 39 Delhi Fire Service personnel reached the spot and doused the fire within 20 minutes, they say. Deputy Chief Fire Officer A.K. Malik says that the nearest fire station at Geetanjali Enclave did not have water tenders. Firefighting units had to be called from over 7 km away. "We received the fire units that were called from Nehru Place and Bhikaji Cama Place. With Delhi traffic, it took them 19 minutes to reach the spot," he says.

Mohammed Israr Khan, a resident of Hauz Rani village, saw smoke rising towards the north of his house. He rushed to the spot with his brother. Three hours later, his yellow vest and shorts were black. He remembers: "A victim's phone rang while I was helping with the rescue. It was the person's mother. I could not say anything and handed the phone to the police. I didn't want to be the bearer of bad news."

Along with Wasim, Amir, Shahrukh, Afzal, Hazi, Shoaib, and Anish, he helped pull victims out and carry them to ambulances. "We were also clearing the way where cars and auto were parked," he says. Locals and officials later removed cars and autos to make way for ambulances.

Once the fire services arrived and broke open the main door, rescue teams entered with residents, who lent a hand. "When we entered the building with the police and rescue teams, we could not see anything. There was only smoke, screams, and wailing from every floor," Khan says. "Many had tried to escape and were trapped in the basement." Over the next couple of hours, he says he saw some gruesome sights.

Head Constable Dinesh Yadav says he helped rescue five people trapped on the west side of the building. "When I climbed the ladder to break open the window of the bathroom on the second floor, two Nigerian women were unconscious. For others who were trapped on different floors, there was no way to go out. I guided three people to climb down the rainwater pipe along the building and jump from there," he says. Yadav suffered injuries from glass shreds and had blisters on his arms from the melting cables that fell on him. Ten constables and head constables were taken to AIIMS for treatment.

Police action

The same day, the police apprehended the owner of the building, Lavkesh Bajaj, for negligence. An initial enquiry revealed he had been misusing a 'Bed & Breakfast' (B&B) license issued by the Tourism Department of the Delhi government. His permit allowed for only six rooms, but he had been running 26 rooms, including a basement. He had no clearance from the fire department.

The lane down which Flourish Stay in South Delhi caught fire, where the owner ran a hotel instead of a bed-and-breakfast that the property was licenced for. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

He also did not have permission to run a kitchen and a restaurant on the ground floor from where the fire allegedly started. The kitchen was being run under a different licence, called the tea-and-snacks licence, issued by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), the capital's civic body.

While no hotel staff was present on the spot, Bajaj was allegedly seen driving past the raging building in the CCTV visuals that went viral later. While the fire was raging, the MCD received an application between 9.30 a.m. and 10 a.m., for the yearly renewal of the tea-and-snacks license "without seating" at the same address. It had expired two months before.

The police registered an FIR against Bajaj under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita's Sections 105 (culpable homicide not amounting to murder), 326 (g) (mischief by fire), 324 (5) (wrongful damage of property), 125 (a) (endangering human life and safety), 125 (b) (causing hurt by negligence), and 287 (negligent conduct with respect to fire). He was produced in court the next day.

The police are still looking for Jay Mishra, Bajaj's accountant, who handled day-to-day operations of the hotel. The B&B license had been issued in his name.

Lives lost and saved

Vivek Aggarwal, 47, the head of finance at an insurance company, lost his life in the fire along with seven members of his family. They had been stranded in the basement. His wife Tarjani, daughters, and mother lived with him in Gurugram, while his aunt and uncle had come from Ajmer to meet his father, who was in Max hospital. His cousin Ashok Goyal had come from Kishangarh in Uttar Pradesh.

Prem Bansal, Tarjani's father, says, "I had called my daughter just 15 minutes before the incident to ask when they had planned to go and meet her father-in-law. She said it was too early to think about that and cut the call. Half an hour later, Vivek's brother, Mahendra, informed me about the fire," he says. Mahendra was outside the hotel, trying to rescue the members, after he received a call from Vivek that there had been a fire. He alleges that the fire services did not have the cutters to cut through the basement shutters in time.

Isaac, a 62-year-old Nigerian national, is mostly quiet, says the attendant in the Intensive Care Unit of Max hospital. He is injured, but his wife didn't survive the jump from the third floor. The couple had travelled to Delhi for Isaac's medical treatment.

Habib, 20, from Bangladesh, had come to donate a part of his liver to his father. When he jumped from the second floor, his liver was impacted. Doctors have told him that he may not be able to donate it now. His father is in the same hospital, awaiting a liver transplant. Three others, including his mother, sister, and uncle, all jumped with him, and are injured. His mother says she will never stay in a hotel again.

The action plans that followed

By the evening of the fire, a series of condolences and measures to fix accountability were announced by the Delhi Government. Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced an ex-gratia of ₹2 lakh from the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund for the next of kin of each deceased member, and ₹50,000 to each of the injured.

Lieutenant-Governor Taranjit Singh Sandhu chaired a meeting along with Delhi Home Minister Ashish Sood. He ordered a magisterial inquiry into the incident along with a month-long drive from June 4 to review safety compliance of all hotels, lodges, inns, nursing homes, coaching institutes, restaurants, and other vulnerable commercial establishments in the city.

Chief Minister Rekha Gupta sought a detailed report on the incident and warned of strict action if any lapses were found. On June 4, Gupta announced a compensation of ₹10 lakh to the next of kin of the people who died in the fire. The injured will receive ₹5 lakh each, she said, after she visited Max hospital, where most of the injured were.

The following day, teams were formed across Delhi's 13 districts by the government. In addition, the MCD began surveying all buildings with five floors and over. The civic body had also identified 12 B&Bs in the Hauz Rani area to seal, as they were violating permits given by the Tourism Department.

Simultaneously, Tourism Minister Kapil Mishra told *The Hindu*, "The department only gives permission for B&Bs. Regulatory enforcement is not carried out by our department, nor is any other follow-up inspection." Flourish Stay was granted the licence in 2024, valid through 2027. Mishra also says his department will review the draft policy, which was put in the public domain on May 26, 2026, for suggestions. The draft policy has proposed a self-certification and self-renewal framework, with "deemed approval" within seven working days, down from 30 days in the 2007 policy.

Meanwhile, MCD officials, including South Zone Deputy Commissioner Rakesh Kumar, say that it is not their job to check for violations under the B&B policy. Kumar says that those who grant the licence are supposed to enforce its rules. "We cannot take any action on buildings constructed before 2014 as they are exempt from MCD building by-laws," he says, of the structure that was built in the 1980s.

In January this year, after the Goa fire tragedy claimed 25 lives the month before, the MCD asked all 12 zones to conduct scrutiny of licences, including the instant ones. The tea-and-snacks licence comes under this category. For this B&B, the scrutiny, which involves a physical inspection, was marked "closed" a day before the fire. This meant there were no violations detected.

suruchi.kumari@thehindu.co.in
shrimansi.kaushik@thehindu.co.in



Local people rescue a foreign national from the fire in New Delhi. AP

Wrongdoing can only be avoided if those who are not wronged feel the same indignation at it as those who are. — Solon

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Rates on hold, focus on bringing foreign capital

THE JUNE meeting of the RBI's Monetary Policy Committee was held against a challenging economic backdrop. Inflationary pressures have been building up, capital has been flowing out, the rupee is under pressure, and the underlying growth momentum remains unpredictable. The MPC, however, despite suggestions to the contrary, chose to keep interest rates unchanged at 5.25 per cent — rightly so — and also continued with the neutral stance. The continuing uncertainty over the conflict in West Asia and its spillover effects on growth and inflation call for a wait-and-watch approach.

On inflation, there is cause for concern. Headline retail inflation stood at 3.5 per cent in April. However, prices at the pump were raised in May. Price pressures are also being felt across various segments and the second-round effects of higher input costs will soon begin to show. The central bank has already raised its inflation forecast for the year to 5.1 per cent, up from the 4.6 per cent estimated in its April meeting. Food inflation is also a concern with a subnormal monsoon forecast and El Niño. All this implies that inflation is edging upwards at a time when growth appears to be slowing down — the central bank has projected GDP growth at 6.6 per cent for the year, down from its earlier estimate of 6.9 per cent. There are also downside risks to growth.

Alongside the policy, the government and the central bank announced several measures aimed at attracting foreign capital and easing pressure on the currency. The Centre has done away with the capital gains tax on FII investments in government bonds, and the withholding tax on their interest income. Alongside, the RBI has expanded the universe of government securities that fall under the fully accessible route. These moves could affect demand for government securities and there are implications for bond yields. The central bank has also provided a concessional forex swap facility to incentivise external commercial borrowings, and a similar facility for bearing the hedging cost to banks for raising FCNR (B) deposits. All these are steps in the right direction. Considering that foreign investors have taken out \$28.6 billion from equity markets so far this calendar year and net FDI stood at just \$7.65 billion in 2025-26, measures are needed to attract foreign capital.

Impunity for exam leaks undermines trust

IN THE past two decades, India's examination ecosystem has been repeatedly hit by paper leaks, cheating rackets and administrative breakdowns. School-leaving examinations, admission tests to engineering and medical institutions, and recruitment exams for teachers, police constables, railway staff and government officials have become embroiled in controversies. Revelations of malpractice often lead to the cancellation or postponement of examinations, adversely affecting candidates' careers. The first step towards restoring the sanctity of admission and recruitment procedures should be to identify the chinks in the system and nab the people who exploit them by running cheating operations. However, an investigation by this newspaper shows that the government and the criminal justice system have been extremely tardy in fixing accountability. The figures reveal a shocking state of laxity: The accused were convicted in only two of 45 paper-leak cases between 2002 and 2025. Of the 1,658 arrested, only 925 — about 55 per cent — were charge-sheeted. Such impunity raises troubling questions about the state's commitment to restoring the integrity of the examinations that shape the future of millions.

For a rapidly growing aspirational class, competitive examinations are a gateway to higher education, employment, social mobility and financial security. As the paper's investigation shows, more than 3.86 crore people had enrolled for the examinations that were cancelled in the past 23 years. Such high-stakes exercises require law-enforcement agencies to be especially vigilant against the paper mafia. However, as early investigations into the failure of this year's NEET examinations indicate, these agencies do not seem to be adequately prepared to mitigate the vulnerabilities created by the outsourcing of logistical functions, the proliferation of private testing agencies and the emergence of sophisticated coaching networks. Investigators have alleged the involvement of individuals connected to translation and paper preparation functions. Pursuing investigations to their logical conclusion could provide clues about the workings of illicit networks, aid in devising a robust deterrence mechanism and help identify systemic weaknesses.

In a young country, competitive tests embody the promise that educational and career advancement are determined by merit rather than by privilege or corruption. Repeated exam fiascos and negligible conviction rates weaken trust in the country's institutions. It's high time the government learned its lessons.

An Indian corner on a foreign field

EVERY TIME a football World Cup draws close, a tale is retold, with new embellishments. Back in 1950, India qualified for a World Cup but had to forgo the chance as the players, used to playing barefoot, weren't used to wearing boots. The story is a reminder, however, of days when India was on the global football map. These days, the country takes vicarious pride in celebrating those of Indian heritage representing other nations on the field. Like Qatar's Tahsin Mohammed Jamshid, whose father once aspired to play for India but could not find the ecosystem his son grew up in. He packed up his dreams and went to West Asia, like many of his generation in northern Kerala. Or New Zealand's Sarpreet Singh, whose parents migrated from Jalandhar. Or those of scattered Indian descent like Australia's Nishan Velupillay and Congo's Samuel Moutoussamy.

India is not producing high-class footballers or qualifying for global tournaments not because of genetics or mindset, or even a sporting culture, but because of the infrastructure — the lack of a systematically meritocratic environment, of a robust league. In a conducive backdrop, India's football, too, can grow. But until recently, the Indian Super League was shrouded in uncertainty; the I-League is in a shambles; the old nurseries have dried up.

Countries once far behind India have raced past it and are now light years ahead. But Indian football, which FIFA bosses like to call a sleeping giant, can still wake up. It requires vision, planning, coaching efficiency, and rigorous execution. Just easing the passport rules will not bear long-lasting results. Until then, however, the 1950 story will be retold as a tale of regret and a hollow boast.

Between government and RBI, getting back the investor

THE MONETARY Policy Committee's second bi-monthly meeting for the year unfolded in line with our expectations, with a unanimous status quo on the policy rates and stance. The tone of the policy document was expectedly hawkish, amid uncertainty owing to the West Asia conflict, the potential El Niño development and sub-par monsoons.

While the committee pared its real GDP growth projection for FY2027 by 30 bps to 6.6 per cent from 6.9 per cent in the April policy, the commentary around growth outcomes was fairly benign. This stems from expectations of a continued momentum in urban consumption, investment activity, and services exports, and the impact of the government's programmes to mitigate the effect of the sub-par monsoon on rural demand and agricultural activity.

The quarterly growth trajectory for FY2027 has been lowered, although unevenly, with a 20-40 basis points cut in the projections for the first and second quarter, and a 40-50 basis points cut in those for the third and fourth quarters. The MPC expects GDP growth to lie in a narrow range between 6.3 and 6.8 per cent.

We are somewhat less sanguine, particularly for the first half of this year. Elevated energy prices and heightened uncertainty around the duration of the conflict could compress corporate profitability and investment demand. This, along with higher inflation, could also dampen consumer sentiments. Besides, the weak monsoon forecast for 2026 has dulled the agricultural outlook and rural demand prospects, although the distribution of rainfall remains key. Moreover, a modest fiscal slippage following the West Asia conflict could pare the govern-

ment's discretionary spending, including that on capex.

Assuming an average crude oil price of \$95 per barrel in FY2027, ICRA projects the GDP growth at 6.2 per cent. We expect the GDP growth to slump to sub-6 per cent in the first half, before recovering in the second half of the year, to around the levels projected by the MPC in the fourth quarter.

Simultaneously, the MPC has raised its CPI inflation projection for FY2027 by 50 bps to 5.1 per cent from 4.6 per cent earlier, amidst a sharp 70 bps hike in the forecasts for the second, third and fourth quarters. The core inflation forecast has been raised by a milder 30 bps to 4.7 per cent. It has stressed that inflation risks remain tilted to the upside owing to the sub-par monsoon and global supply-chain risks.

The committee's CPI inflation projections are largely in line with our estimates. We concur with the upside risks and remain particularly concerned around the generalisation of food and fuel price pressures to the rest of the CPI basket.

Interestingly, unlike the usual trend of balanced risks around its projections in the past, the MPC placed upside risks to inflation and downside risks to growth for the second consecutive policy review, with the outlook being mired by unpredictable nature of the conflict, the sustained global commodity price shock and supply disruptions as well as deficient rainfall in the southwest monsoon season.

Unlike us, some market participants had argued for an early rate hike on account of two factors. First, the upward revision in the CPI inflation trajectory has compressed the real policy rate, fanning argu-



ADITI NAYYAR

Assuming an average crude oil price of \$95 per barrel in FY2027, ICRA projects GDP growth at 6.2 per cent. We expect GDP growth to slump to sub-6 per cent in the first half, before recovering in the second half of the year

ments around the need for immediate rate hikes. However, the paring of growth projections justifies a lower real policy rate, at least in the immediate term, as inflation projections remain below the upper bound of the MPC's target range of 2-6 per cent. In our view, any premature policy tightening would have only exacerbated the weakness in growth outcomes.

Nevertheless, the next move on rates is likely to be a hike, although its timing will depend on how geopolitical and macro developments, including the severity of El Niño, transmit to a generalisation of inflationary pressures. We believe that the October and December 2026 policy meetings will be live for potential rate hike(s), after there is some clarity on the monsoon impact.

In addition to the compression in the real policy rate, the weakness in the rupee was cited as a reason for bringing forward rate hikes. The surge in energy prices in the aftermath of the West Asia crisis will undoubtedly enlarge India's current account deficit (CAD) materially. We project it to more than double to around 2 per cent of GDP in FY2027. While this does not seem large, financing deficits of sub-1 per cent of GDP in the past two years posed a challenge, amid a drying up of capital flows, which has brought the USD/INR pair under pressure.

As anticipated, the MPC acted within its mandate, and appropriately kept the repo rate unchanged, despite the weakness in the rupee. But, alongside, the RBI governor made several announcements to attract capital flows, in line with our expectations that the RBI and not the MPC would address the issues surrounding the currency.

The announcements made by the RBI are aimed at incentivising more foreign capital inflows, especially in government securities (G-secs). With the GoI exempting foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) from capital gains tax on investments made in G-secs, the RBI also made a coordinated move, expanding the list of specified securities under the fully accessible route (FAR). It also removed various limits for FPIs under the general route. These moves are likely to boost demand for G-secs, auguring favourably for bond yields, given the risks from an expected fiscal slippage. Besides, this could potentially facilitate the inclusion of Indian G-secs in the Bloomberg Bond Index, in the next round of the review due later this year.

Further, in order to support equity inflows, the RBI proposed to increase limits for investments by non-resident Indians and Overseas Citizens of India in equity instruments traded on the stock market without SEBI registration, while extending the same facility to persons resident outside India as well. The central bank has also introduced a concessional forex swap facility and a similar facility for bearing full hedging cost to authorised dealer banks for raising fresh three- to five-year foreign currency non-resident bank (FCNR (B)) deposits, along with restoring the time for realisation of export proceeds to nine months.

Subsidised hedging cost of foreign borrowings and deposits will also help in increasing inflows. This will help reverse the exodus of capital and crucially support India's balance of payments position, amid expectations of a doubling in the current account deficit.

The writer is chief economist, head-Research & Outreach, ICRA

Manifesto for cockroaches: Gather and scatter, as needed



MEERAN CHADHA BORWANKAR

THOUGH NEARING 70, I am so very tempted to join the Cockroach Janta Party and participate in its activities. I look at its posts on Facebook and Instagram and wonder what explains the pull. Member of Parliament Shashi Tharoor has invited the youth to work "within the system you feel has failed you and push against the existing system so that it serves your needs" ("Dear Gen Z, join the system. Change happens in mundane politics," IE, June 4) as the most effective path forward.

Having worked within the system, however, I failed to change it. And it was not me alone, but many of us in the civil services who tried. Thus, I am skeptical about the advice. The scenario outside the establishment has not been any better. A friend who quit the civil services saying, "Patchwork won't work; we need to change the entire corrupt and ineffective system," is in no better a position today. We, as civil servants, have tried both from within the system and from outside it, but have often not only failed ourselves but also the generations after us. I am sure Tharoor, too, tried when his party was in power, but the results were for all to see. The current regime has failed as well, and miserably at that.

It is heartening that the "cockroaches" are focussing on one major issue, namely education, while keeping their options open for the future. The education sector has been steeped in corrupt practices. No government of any political party has been able to contain them, as many politicians have their own private colleges and universities, which directly benefit from a flawed and inefficient arrangement. The leak of the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) and the failure of the "On-Screen Marking" system introduced by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) are the proverbial last straws. Besides exposing gross inefficiency, both are real-time examples of malpractice, not only within institutions but outside them too, as some students, parents, and teachers are actively involved. And the scale this time was so humou-

gous that it has shaken citizens out of their stupor and complacency. The utter distress and revulsion have caused outrage and led to innovative ideas for change. It has happened in the past as well, only to be sucked into the same trite thoughts and actions. So, what is the future of the "cockroach revolution"? Will it die a slow, natural death, and become part of the existing order, or succeed in bringing about substantial change?

I do see and hear some dynamic young people who have ideas and energy. However, what concerns me is the journey of the cockroaches from here. That Sonam Wangchuk has decided to join them has added real value to their youthful energy. Listening to Wangchuk and learning that he was picked up without any prior intimidation and not allowed to talk to his wife or lawyer for nearly a week shows how oppressive the state can become. That an activist who strongly believes in the Constitution of India was detained under the National Security Act (NSA) is another example of the ruthlessness of those in power, and it is this, too, that is being challenged today.

The "cockroaches" are thus not only challenging a corrupt and inefficient system but also an oppressive one. My only hope is that they do not allow their positive and creative energy to wither away, but remain focussed on their specific agenda. I have experienced the strong self-serving streaks of politicians, irrespective of their party. So, I would not like them to start any political movement, but to come together whenever the fence starts eating the field. For politics not only corrupts, it also makes a person a slave of the very system she had wanted to change.

Can there be a model where like-minded people come together for a cause, fight for it, and, having achieved their objective, go back to their normal lives? Will the system not only resist change but also take revenge on the "cockroaches", as it did in the case of Wangchuk? I wonder.

The writer, an IPS officer of Maharashtra cadre, retired as Director General, Bureau of Police Research and Development

Since Marji, her tribe has only grown



AISHWARYA KHOSLA

MARJANESATRAPI, the Iranian-French graphic novelist and filmmaker who passed away on June 3, drew the world's most dangerous girl in her acclaimed memoir, *Persepolis* (2000): Someone opinionated and outspoken, who refused to turn a blind eye to injustice and fall in line, even when her life and safety depended on it.

In a world full of greys, she drew herself, from the age of 10, when the 1979 revolution swept Iran, to adulthood, in black ink and negative spaces. Her parents had supported the revolution, only to watch with horror as it gave rise to a repressive regime. Overnight, bilingual and co-ed schools were abolished, veils were compulsory, Western music, denim jackets, nail polish, and even chess were forbidden. In the span of a year, Marji understood that adults were making it up as they went. She catalogued the absurdities with a child's perplexed eyes. Her uncle, once imprisoned by the Shah, was executed by the new regime. One day at school, a 14-year-old boy, her maid's son, was handed a plastic key coated in gold paint, ostensibly the key to heaven, before being marched to the war front. A teenage girl was married to a prison guard before her execution, since the law forbade executing the unmarried. Marji heard about her street being bombed, and ran home to find rubble where her Jewish friend's house was, the bracelet she wore shining through the wreckage.

Marji rebelled in the little ways she could. She wore pink sneakers and nail polish, had her parents smuggle Kim Wilde and Iron Maiden posters, bought cassettes on the black market, and sneaked out of school for burgers. When she defied teachers and refused state propaganda in class, her parents sent her to Austria. Later, living in France, she created *Persepolis* to tell the West about the lived reality of Iranians, a complex nation reduced in the West to an imagination to "fundamentalism, fanaticism, and terrorism".

A girl who thinks is a girl who resists, and so repressive regimes have always been wary of them. Marji is not an anomaly or a fictionalised character. There are many more women in her tribe.

Among the most famous is Malala Yousafzai. At 11, she began blogging anonymously about what it meant to be a girl denied education in the Taliban-occupied Swat Valley in Pakistan. She survived the Taliban's bullets and went on to become the youngest Nobel Laureate. In 2018, at 15, Greta Thunberg sat outside the Swedish parliament every Friday, refusing to attend school until world leaders took the climate crisis seriously. When Donald Trump suggested she work on her "anger management problem," she changed her Twitter bio to "a teenager working on her anger management problem". In 2026, she joined the Freedom Flotilla Coalition, sailing towards Gaza to break Israel's blockade.

Is it any surprise that those in power fear girls who think? The machinery is the same across repressive regimes: Dismiss them, deny them education, and recruit the morality police to monitor them. May the tribe of Marji, Malala and Greta grow.

The writer is deputy copy editor, The Indian Express. aishwarya.khosla@indianexpress.com

40 YEARS AGO

June 6, 1986



Haryana ministry sworn in

A 13-MEMBER, two-tier ministry headed by Bansi Lal was sworn in at Haryana Raj Bhavan. After taking office, the new chief minister declared that Chandigarh would continue to serve as Haryana's capital for at least five years or until the Centre built a new capital for the state. The ministry consists of nine cabinet ministers, including Bansi Lal, and four ministers of state.

PM calls for afforestation

MARKING WORLD Environment Day, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi planted a 'Tree for Peace' at Indira Gandhi's memorial, Shakti Sthal, and called for a nationwide movement

to protect and restore the environment. Describing the sapling as "putraiva" (giver of life to progeny), he warned against the destruction of natural resources, saying it led to wastelands, salinity, erosion and drought. He particularly emphasised educating children about environmental conservation.

Violence in Belgaum again

THE LANGUAGE agitation in the Belgaum border region turned violent again after a two-day lull, with protesters derailing a train, hurling stones and acid bulbs at the police, and setting a policeman on fire, though he was rescued by an inspector. The unrest followed the arrest of a batch of Samyukta Maharashtra Seema Samiti activists led by Shiv

Sena MLA and former Bombay mayor Chhagan Bhujbal. Earlier in the day, the Miraj-Vasco Express derailed after striking boulders placed on the tracks by miscreants.

16 massacred by Lanka rebels

FRESH VIOLENCE in Sri Lanka's Trincomalee district claimed numerous lives over the previous 48 hours. In the worst incident, Tamil militants allegedly killed 16 people and burnt eight houses in the Sinhala village of Andankulam, while a Buddhist priest was reported missing. In another incident, passengers from a bus travelling to Trincomalee were reportedly separated and taken away by armed men, with their whereabouts remaining unknown.



Reading Supreme Court on SIR: Now rulers are free to elect their people



DESKAAL
BY YOGENDRA YADAV

THE SUPREME Court judgment in the ADR case is to our times what the ADM Jabalpur case was to the Emergency. To this day we do not know why some of the best legal minds of that time signed on an order that extinguished the citizen's right to life. What mattered was not the intention behind the judgment, but the signal that everyone read in it: The doors of the Supreme Court were shut for the rest of the Emergency.

That's the true significance of the Supreme Court's order on the SIR. It's not just that the Court has signed on the largest ever disenfranchisement in an electoral democracy. Not just that the order has "declined to name those bearing its costs, declined to reckon with who was excluded and what that exclusion meant", something Rudraksh Lakra's insightful legal scrutiny calls "thesin at the heart of this judgment". Above all, the ADR judgment will be remembered as the moment when the doors to the guardian of the Constitution were perceived to have closed for any attempt to seek lawful remedies in a "politically sensitive" matter.

While hearing the arguments in this case, Justice Joymala Bagchi observed that the "Court does not operate in a vacuum". He was referring to what the Court perceived as the absence of popular protest against the SIR exclusions during the Bihar election. That momentary acknowledgment of the larger truth outside the courtroom that frames judicial proceedings helps us understand what else the Court could have noticed. It could have noticed a strange rush to carry out the SIR just before the elections the ruling party was desperate to win. It could have remembered its own remarks on how the government had dodged the Supreme Court to make appointments to the Election Commission. It could have noted the brazenly partisan conduct of the Chief Elec-



ILLUSTRATION: CR SASIKUMAR

tion Commissioner and the *jugalbandi* between the BJP and the ECI. It did not. On the contrary, the Court extended credulity, indeed deference, to this institution precisely when the ECI's credibility is at its lowest.

Indeed, the Court did not operate in a vacuum. Therefore, you could be forgiven for reading a chilling signal into this order: Once the regime puts its foot down on any matter, shutters are down for constitutional remedies in the courts. You still have to approach the courts for emergency relief like bail. And hope you are lucky with the bench. You can still look for an occasional stirring judgment on matters of low salience to the present dispensation. But you would be naive to expect judicial checks on democratic dismantling. As during the Emergency, the apex judiciary has abdicated its constitutional responsibility at a moment when the republic needed it most.

The real signal was not just in the Court's validation of the SIR exercise. As many commentators have pointed out, that was *a fait accompli*. The case was effectively decided when the Court allowed the ECI to rush through the Bihar elections and then proceed with the second and then the third phase of the SIR. Any remaining doubt disappeared when CJI Surya Kant warned everyone against obstructing the SIR and finally when Justice Bagchi asked the 27 lakh voters excluded in West Bengal to

wait for the next election. So, no one expected the court to nullify the SIR. Yet the order was crucial to see if there were any ifs and buts, any safeguards, any mandatory SOPs, any concessions to the crores of persons excluded from the voters' list. Eventually, there were none. This silence rings loud in the present judgment.

The real signal was in the Court's willingness to suspend disbelief. The SIR faced a fatal legal flaw, as it did not follow any of the established procedures laid down by the law, the rules and the ECI's own Manual on Electoral Rolls. Faced with this challenge, the ECI used a disingenuous, hyper-technical argument that it could invoke an exceptional clause that allowed it to deviate from standard procedures to address an extraordinary situation in a constituency or part of one. In a staggering display of credulity, the Court allowed this exceptional measure to be generalised, a provision meant for a constituency to be applied to the entire country, and for routine factors like migration and urbanisation to pass off as good reasons for an extraordinary remedy. The Court's order outdid the ECI's own pleading in taking an elephant through the needle's eye.

The real signal was in what Vasudev Devadasan calls the Court's "post-hoc rationalisation" in an order that "rests on misstated doctrine, avoidance of binding preced-

ents, and outright denial of logic and facts". Some of these facts were pretty stark. That the SIR would eventually delete about 10 crore persons from the existing voters' list. That this massive pruning did not fit with the official data on the adult population. That the SIR brought down almost everywhere the already poor gender ratio in the voters' list. That the post-SIR voters' list in Bihar contained as many, if not more, inaccuracies, gibberish names and duplication as the list it sought to revise. Not a word about these inconvenient facts in the judgment.

The real signal was in the Court's refusal to constrain the ECI from curating the voters' list any which way. While upholding the SIR, the least the Court could have done was to make some procedures, from within the ECI's existing Manual on Electoral Rolls, mandatory. It could have stipulated a time-window when the SIR could not be carried out. It could have laid down a protocol for verification of documents. It could have provided a path for rectification of errors where existing voters were wrongfully excluded from the draft electoral rolls. It could have insisted on transparency, on public hearing, on publication of machine-readable lists at every stage of the SIR. It could have asked for the number of deletions of "illegal foreigners". All of this was in line with the norms the ECI had evolved over the last 75 years, which the SIR bypassed. Instead, the Court offered a blank, undated cheque to the ECI. The two orders touted as relief — access to courts for those wrongfully deleted and reference to competent authorities for those deleted on suspicion of being foreign nationals — are either harmless reiteration of existing law or a dangerous descent into a witch hunt.

This order has laid the ground not just for the eventual deletion of nearly 10 crore voters across the country without any amendment to the Constitution, law or even rules. It provides the toolkit needed to overturn the foundational principle of representative democracy. The ECI, and now by implication the BJP, is free to exclude anyone or any section of people from the voters' list. Bertolt Brecht had foreseen it — instead of the people electing their rulers, now the rulers are free to elect their people.

The writer is member, Swaraj India, and national convenor, Bharat Jodo Abhiyaan. Views are personal

Absence of conviviality & a disease called capitalitis



GAUTAM I MENON

IN A talk at CMC Vellore some years ago, the veteran public health expert John Oommen referred to what he called "capitalitis". Among its symptoms was the tendency, most prominently of those based in Delhi, to believe that policies devised in the national capital could be transplanted without change to the rest of the country.

Capitalitis is a disease with diffuse symptoms. It shows itself, for example, in how input is taken to inform decisions at a national level. An instructive example is that of the On-Screen Marking system, or OSM, instituted this year by the CBSE in its Class XII examinations. The CBSE did not hold pilot projects across its 22 regional centres, even though this was reportedly suggested by its advisory committee in the previous year. Only about 100 teachers, all from Delhi-based schools, participated in the exercise. It is understood that even those teachers advised the CBSE not to go ahead with the OSM rollout, citing the need for better features, training and more time to adapt. The total number of city schools that participated was just five, a tiny, non-representative fraction of the approximately 33,000 CBSE schools across the country.

A broader pilot project might have led to a better understanding of the problems faced by teachers in areas far from the capital. These are problems of erratic power supplies, intermittent internet availability, quality of scans, a lack of appropriate devices, and the availability of time, given the many other civic duties often assigned to schoolteachers. The idea that the national capital, with its relatively stable power supply, 5G internet, and relatively better-off schools might serve as a template for the rest of the country is a clear example of capitalitis.

More than a decade ago, I served on a committee tasked with devising a national-level graduate examination. For the two days that it took to complete the paper, we were effectively secluded. Cell phones were not allowed and no papers could be taken out of the room in which we worked.

The committee was composed of academics from all over India. All of them were committed to creating an examination that would help identify those who would benefit most from advanced training. The questions had to be appropriate to the level at which students were trained, across India. But they also needed to be able to identify an additional layer of creativity and out-of-the-box thinking.

What strikes me now, looking back, is the collegiality, sociability and joyfulness with which we worked together to this end. We were, in a single word, convivial.

Many things have changed since then. One major change is that the National Testing Agency has taken over administering the same examination, in addition to others. While there were no serious complaints about the older system, the same cannot be said of the NTA more recently. Several academics of repute have simply not agreed to work with the NTA in forthcoming rounds of exam setting.

There are many reasons for this, but chief among them seems to be the structure of the NTA itself. It is largely staffed by contractual employees. They are overworked and susceptible to multiple pressures, including deadlines imposed on them at short notice. Administrative requirements and the call of efficiency have taken centre stage, replacing the passionate involvement of convivial individuals. The idea of "one agency to rule them all", located in the capital city, manned by staff with no intrinsic attachment to a larger purpose, subverts the true strength of our federal system. The architecture of the past was diffuse, flexible, consensus-based, and diverse.

The combination of capitalitis and AI is worse than these on their own. Any reasonable AI model can now generate questions at an appropriate level, with suggested answers and partial scores. One could go further and have all evaluations done by machine. A further advantage would be to have multiple versions of the papers, again an easy task for any AI. Such a model would be an efficient one and could be administered completely in the national capital. But would it be a convivial one?

A convivial society is one where no centre holds absolutely, where diversity is accommodated, and where industrial-level efficiency is not the chief metric that measures performance. The project of building a social nation requires, at a deep level, conviviality. A Viksit Bharat should also be a convivial Bharat.

To achieve conviviality, even with AI to help, we should first cure ourselves of capitalitis. One step towards that is to see it for what it is.

The writer is a professor at Ashoka University. Views expressed here are his own and do not represent those of his institution

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Tariff pressure

INDIA'S RESPONSE to American trade pressure has so far been largely reactive — matching concessions without extracting proportionate commitments ("Trump tariff saga goes on, India must find way", *IE*, June 5). This asymmetry needs correction. New Delhi should use the ongoing USTR hearings as leverage to secure enforceable market access guarantees in pharmaceuticals, textiles, and IT services, rather than offering tariff reductions and hoping that goodwill will follow.

S.M. Jeeva, Chennai

Name and fame

THE EDITORIAL takes us back to the distinctive memory lane of Indian cricket, vividly marked by some sudden "exits" of the key players in the recent past ("Suryakumar & Sooryavanshi", *IE*, June 5). But notwithstanding the impending fate of former captain Suryakumar Yadav, owing to him having fallen out of favour with both the chief selector and Team India coach Gautam Gambhir, it also goes without saying that 15-year old Vaibhav Sooryavanshi appears to be largely aiming at winning the 100-metre race and creating a new world record. However, his career may be cut short if he does not quickly make amends and stop recklessly playing flashy strokes to earn his "name and fame" in the cricketing world.

SK Gupta, via email

Exam security

EXAMINATIONS ARE not merely selection mechanisms; they are instruments of social mobility and merit recognition ("Dear students struggling with exam chaos and scams", *IE*, June 5). Repeated disruptions weaken public trust in institutions and adversely affect the aspirations of millions of young people. The problem is further aggravated by intense competition, limited opportunities, and increasing dependence on costly coaching systems. There is thus an urgent need to strengthen examination security.

Arsnhoor, Mohali



RAM RAJYA
BY RAM MADHAV

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi will soon cross another milestone by becoming the longest continuously serving elected PM. On June 10, he will complete 4,399 consecutive days in office, overtaking Jawaharlal Nehru's record of 4,398 days after the first general election. He will also have crossed 9,000 days in office as an elected head of government by then, including his 13-year stint as Gujarat CM — overtaking CMs like Pawan Chamling (Sikkim) and Naveen Patnaik (Odisha). Come October, Modi will complete 25 years in public office. He is also the longest-serving non-Congress PM, and the first non-Congress PM to lead majority governments twice. In total, Modi has led the BJP to victory in six consecutive elections — three to the state assembly and three to Parliament. He is also Gujarat's longest-serving CM.

These data points, however, are only one side of the story. Quite a few substantive issues distinguish Modi's rise from that of his predecessors. A comparison with Nehru is inevitable because Nehru was the only other dominant leader in post-independence India. His rise in politics was primarily due to his involvement in the freedom movement and support from M K Gandhi. The controversy over his selection as Congress president and PM of the interim government in

Modi's road is distinct as he passes Nehru milestone

1946 is well known. Twelve of 15 provincial Congress committees recommended Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. None proposed Nehru. Yet Gandhi preferred "glamorous Nehru", in Rajendra Prasad's words.

The Congress party of the Independence movement was a platform for nationalists to come together to secure freedom. That's why, in his "Last Will and Testament", published in *Harijan*, Gandhi said Congress as a "parliamentary machine" had "outlived its use", and recommended disbanding "the existing Congress organisation". Instead, Congress under Nehru went to the people during the first general election as the "party of freedom" and reaped a rich harvest. That tag led to an uneven competition providing undue electoral advantage to Congress in the years right after Independence.

Like every PM, Nehru has achievements to his credit. Admirers credit him with India's initial years of industrialisation, infrastructure development and institution-building. But critics argue his obsession with the "socialist pattern of society" did more harm than good. Between 1955 and 1965, India's poverty rate grew from 52.66 per cent to 58.60 per cent. The number of poor people grew from 198.7 million in 1951-55 to 301.7 million in 1966-70. Nehru's tenure saw scandals like the jeep scandal (1948), the Mundhra scandal (1957-58), and the Dharma Teja shipping loan scam

(1960). He was seen as an expert on foreign policy, yet his tenure saw non-alignment fail, and a humiliating defeat at China's hands.

Modi's rise is the antithesis of Nehru's, with no godfather like Gandhi. He came from very humble beginnings and rose through the committed ideological ranks of the Hindu cultural-nationalist movement. During his 25 years in public office, Modi has offered clean governance, and through a singular focus on development, earned the title of *vikas purush*. GDP doubled over the past decade, absolute poverty was virtually eradicated, and almost 25 crore people were lifted out of multidimensional poverty. In foreign policy, through the effective implementation of strategic autonomy and multi-alignment, India has emerged as an important pole in the multipolar order.

Modi will undoubtedly be remembered as India's most effective and successful PM. He is midway through his third term, yet his dominance over the political landscape remains towering and unchallenged. He is certain to break more records as he continues to lead India for many more years to come. But it is not just the numbers that distinguish him. It is the quality of governance, the ideological vision and effective development agenda that he brings to the table that make him the shining star of Indian politics.

The writer, president, India Foundation, is with the BJP

On June 10, Modi will complete 4,399 days in office, overtaking Jawaharlal Nehru's record of 4,398 days after the first general election



ALAKA SAHANI

AFTER WORLD No 1 Aryna Sabalenka beat Naomi Osaka and advanced to the women's singles quarter-finals of the 2026 French Open in Paris, the Belarusian tennis player thrilled spectators by doing Michael Jackson's signature moonwalk. This playful moment was an extension of an earlier dance-off between Sabalenka and Novak Djokovic: The latter had done a moonwalk on the court's steps as a challenge to Sabalenka, who responded with the zombie dance from Jackson's "Thriller" video.

After being relegated to near irrelevance following allegations of child abuse and his death in suspicious circumstances in 2009,

Jackson — or MJ — is back at the centre of pop-culture conversations. This resurgence of interest can be credited to the Antoine Fuqua-directed *Michael*, a biographical drama about the musician's life and artistic brilliance. Over a month after its release, the film has earned over \$850 million worldwide, becoming one of the highest-grossing biographical films of all time after *Oppenheimer* (\$975 million) and *Bohemian Rhapsody* (\$911 million). With its upcoming Japan release, *Michael* is expected to touch the \$1-billion mark at the box office. Not surprisingly, the film, as well as its immense success, have triggered polarised reactions.

While *Michael* has been praised for its sensitive performances, it has also drawn criticism for the sanitised gaze it turns on its controversial subject, leaning heavily into nostalgia and spectacle, and skirting around

the contradictions that defined Jackson's life. The pop star's life was as messy as it was magical. He experienced phenomenal success as a global star as well as the unimaginable lows of scandals and legal troubles. His dramatic life story and incredible musical legacy, layered with many contradictions, insecurities, health complications and tragedies, are not easy to capture in a single narrative for the big screen. So, when *Michael*

While 'Michael' has been praised for its sensitive performances, it has also drawn criticism for skirting around the contradictions that defined Jackson's life

keeps the lens firmly trained on the child prodigy who grows into a performer of near-supernatural talent, it is a deliberate artistic choice to ensure that what is captured is the enigma and magnetism of the global star before his life is mired in controversy.

Not that the makers always intended to sidestep the thornier issues. The dramatisation of a 1993 child sexual abuse lawsuit against Jackson was reportedly removed after the makers discovered a clause in the settlement with the young accuser that barred him from being depicted or mentioned in film or television. The film, made with the help of the Michael Jackson estate, then focussed on his musical genius and his successful break from his tyrannical father to launch his solo career.

Though Jackson stayed away from the media for a significant part of his life, he was

aware of the chatter about his personal life. In his 1993 Grammy Legend Award speech, he sounded both triumphant and wounded. "I wasn't aware that the world thought I was so weird and bizarre. But when you grow up as I did, in front of 100 million people from the age of 5, you're automatically different."

Jackson did not have an easy life. The version that *Michael* chooses to show is largely celebratory, leaving viewers with the image of an artist, whose brilliance co-existed with his personal struggles. It will be interesting to watch how *Michael 2* — likely to focus on the next phase of his career, which witnessed tremendous global success of *Dangerous* and *HIStory: Past, Present and Future, Book I* — will unfold.

The writer is associate editor, The Indian Express. alaka.sahani@expressindia.com

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

CLIMATE

Can scheme to replace NCR's old trucks and buses curb pollution?

Nikhil Ghanekar
New Delhi, June 5

THE UNION Cabinet Wednesday approved a two-year clean mobility scheme to reduce air pollution in the Delhi-National Capital Region (NCR). The scheme will incentivise the replacement of older trucks and buses with vehicles that are compliant with BS-VI or higher norms.

BS refers to Bharat Stage, a set of emission standards to regulate and reduce vehicular air pollution. While BS-IV regulated tailpipe pollutants such as nitrogen oxides (NOx), carbon monoxide (CO) and particulate matter (PM), BS-VI introduced stricter limits on such emissions besides pushing cleaner fuels and advanced onboard diagnostics. Government vehicles are excluded from the new scheme.

Clean mobility

Delhi-NCR suffers from extreme air pollution. Its predominant sources are the transport sector, dust, industrial pollution and biomass burning. These sources are both local as well as regional. Their share, though, varies depending on the season, as meteorological factors play a crucial role in saturation or dispersal of pollutants.

Vehicular emissions remain a key concern. Delhi-NCR has a large vehicle fleet (2.98 crore) which is growing at 7% per annum, according to government data. This year, a meta-analysis of multiple emission source apportionment studies from 2015 and 2010 by a panel of air quality experts attributed 23% of winter PM2.5 pollution and 19% of summer PM2.5 emissions to the transport sector. This expert panel was tasked by the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) in Delhi-NCR to assess reasons behind the worsening of air quality in the region.

One of the most important studies on source apportionment has been the August 2018 study by The Energy and Resources Institute and The Automotive Research Association of India, which found that the transport sector accounted for 40% of CO and 63% of NOx emissions in Delhi-NCR. Moreover, within the transport sector, trucks and buses account for 36% of PM2.5 emissions — fine particles that enter the lungs and the bloodstream, causing respiratory and cardiovascular ailments.

Even as the share of trucks and buses compliant with older emission norms is only 3% of the total fleet, their emission load is disproportionate to their stock. It is estimated that one pre-BS norms heavy-duty vehicle pollutes as much as 14 times of the modern, BS-VI compliant vehicles. The government note on the Cabinet decision stated that even a BS-IV vehicle emits 2.7 times more than its BS-VI counterpart, making the transition to cleaner technology an important step to reduce air pollution.

Emission potential and vehicle stock

According to CAQM data from December 2025, goods vehicles accounted for 4.1% (11.80 lakh) of the region's 2.88-crore fleet as on August 31, 2025. Buses account for only 0.6% of the 2.88 crore fleet in the region. Of these 1.61 lakh buses, only 34,449 are compliant with BS-VI norms while 1,26,549 fall in the pre-BS to BS-IV-compliant category.

Last year, CAQM submitted to the Supreme Court that even though a vehicle might be fit otherwise, it would still be emitting pollutants as per its BS standard, which are outdated. The CAQM-constituted panel of air quality experts had noted in their report that older vehicles, particularly those operating beyond their regulatory life, exhibit higher emission intensity due to engine deterioration and compromised emission control performance.

FIFA WORLD CUP 2026

AI-enabled ball for better decisions, fewer surprises



SHASHANK NAIR

EVERY FOUR years when the FIFA World Cup comes around, official sponsor Adidas creates a new iteration of the ball that will be used. This time, as the world further integrates artificial intelligence (AI) models into everyday use-case scenarios, the humble football now finds itself an AI-enabled entity, loaded with a sensor specifically built to track its movements.

But the Trionda, this edition's ball, is notable for more than its modern sensor. It has the lowest number of panels ever used to make a football. And, unlike the mercurial Jabulani ball used during the 2010 World Cup, it promises far fewer surprises than what many players had to contend with in South Africa.

The early World Cup football

The Telstar ball was created for the 1970 FIFA World Cup. Made of 32 panels, it was coloured black and white so that it would be more clearly visible to television audiences in a pre-colour TV era.

Its iconic design is what immediately comes to mind when you think of a football. It is from this foundation that the modern football has evolved.

How different is the Trionda from the Telstar?

A lot. For starters, this ball is like an electronic appliance — it needs to be charged for 90 minutes for six hours of play. This is because it contains a sensor inside — something Adidas first adopted with the Al Rihla ball used at the 2022 World Cup in Qatar.

This is how this "connected ball technology" works. The Trionda has a 500hz 'inertial measurement unit' motion sensor inside one of its four panels, with counter-balances placed on all other panels as well to ensure that its flight remains true. An inertial measurement unit measures and reports an object's specific force, orientation, and how fast it rotates or revolves around an axis.

ICONIC TO INFAMOUS: BALLS OVER THE YEARS

1970: TELSTAR

The classic, with 32 black-and-white panels that would boost TV visibility. The iconic Telstar, named after a satellite, and its upgraded versions, were the Cup standard until 2002.

2006: TEAMGEIST

The Teamgeist was the first football to ditch the standard 32 panels and used 14 instead. Its unpredictable movement — especially with long-range shots — caused controversy.

2010: JABULANI

Jabulani means 'to rejoice'. But goalkeepers found little reason to. Adidas' smooth-surfaced ball had a life of its own, twisting and dipping at will. But this did lead to spectacular long-range goals.

THE TRIONDA: TEXTURE, TECHNIQUE, TRAJECTORY

This is a tetrahedron: four triangles, three of which meet at every point. The panels are curved but have three points, like a typical triangle.

The ball has a rough surface with a host of microtextures. The physics is similar to golf balls that have dimples.

This ensures evenly distributed drag, which helps the ball go faster but doesn't necessarily compromise its path in the air.

What is the purpose of the chip?

Football authorities are attempting to cut down the often prolonged decision-making time that has followed the introduction of the virtual assistant referee (VAR) system. The sensor chip inside the Trionda sends razor-sharp ball-movement data to officials and hastens the process of making offside decisions.

"We can track every event, every interaction the player has with the ball. Every location at any given moment is being tracked by a local positioning system," said Hannes Schaeffe, Football Innovation Lead for Adidas. "So this sensor essentially sends a signal 500 times per second, to anchor points around the stadium."

How will AI help in making quicker VAR calls?

The sensor will be complemented by pitchside sensors, which track player

Sensor check

The virtual assistant referee system has been criticised for slowing down decisions.

The Trionda's sensor will send data to officials and hasten the process of making offside decisions.

movements. FIFA has also chosen to scan each footballer at the tournament, and VAR will also use a 3D digital avatar of the player. Combine all this information gathered — add AI to the mix — and FIFA and Adidas believe there lies a path to issuing lightning-fast offside calls and other VAR checks like accidental handballs and accurate player tracking.

Many countries have found themselves on the losing end of a match based on a decision that went against them. World Cups have famously amplified those calls — be it Diego Maradona's handball against England in 1986 or Frank Lampard's ghost goal against Germany in 2010. FIFA is hoping to minimise such incidents.

How will the Trionda perform?

The makeup of the Trionda is unlike any other football. While technology plays a big part, it is also a football that — just like

Over several World Cups, the ball has attracted more attention than the football. The Trionda promises to bring the focus back to the game

the Jabulani, or the Al-Rihla used in Qatar — has its own characteristics.

Chief among those are the Trionda's similarities to the Jabulani. Both balls are tetrahedrons: four triangles, three of which meet at every point. For the Trionda, the panels are curved but have three points, like a typical triangle.

The Jabulani, used in 2010, was notorious for its wild trajectories. Made of eight thermally bonded panels, the ball was the smoothest ever created by Adidas. The drag from that smoothness was what led to its unpredictability and unpopularity among footballers. But the Trionda is different and has a failsafe in place.

Adidas has deliberately made the Trionda's surface rough. It has added three deep grooves in each panel and a host of microtextures (microscopic, raised patterns engineered onto the upper surface). The physics is similar to golf balls that have dimples. The result should be evenly distributed drag that helps the ball go faster but doesn't necessarily compromise its trajectory through the air.

Does it come with complications?

A team of scientists led by Professor John Eric Goff used a wind tunnel and five World Cup balls: Jabulani (2010), Brazuca (2014), Telstar 18 (2018), Al Rihla (2022), and Trionda (2026). Their experiments showed that the Trionda "exhibited the smallest measured critical speed among the five balls in both tested orientations".

The researchers noted: "A long ball struck with great force may land several meters shorter than expected... Our experiment analyzed a no-spin state, so further research is needed that takes into account external variables in real matches such as spin, humidity and temperature." The results were published in the journal *Applied Sciences*.

What does its design denote?

The 2026 FIFA World Cup will be the first time three countries will host the tournament. Keeping that in mind, the Trionda is made on a white base, with red, blue, and green-coloured graphics across the four panels of the ball.

There is also the graphic of a maple leaf, an eagle and a star to denote the three hosts: Canada, Mexico, and the US.

ECONOMY

Behind Kerala's poor finances: High borrowings, low capital spend



GRAPHS, DATA, PERSPECTIVES
BY UDIT MISRA

WEEKLY ECONOMIC AND POLICY INSIGHTS USING DATA

A REPORT recently unveiled by new Kerala Chief Minister V D Satheesan presents a grim picture of the state's financial health, showing that it trails the national average across most crucial parameters. This is a state that once boasted the most sought-after growth model in India. The decline, however, did not happen overnight.

Satheesan, a Congress leader who is also the state's Finance Minister, wrote in the report's preface: "The purpose of this report is not to revisit the past in a spirit of criticism, but to understand the challenges before us with clarity and objectivity."

The Kerala model

Long before Arvind Kejriwal's "Delhi model", Nitish Kumar's "sushashan" (good governance) in Bihar and Narendra Modi's "Gujarat model", there was the Kerala model of economic development.

In the 1950s, it had the country's highest population growth rate. By the 1970s, it be-

Kerala's fiscal health vs national average

| Key metrics | Kerala | National average |
|---|--------|--------------------|
| Outstanding liabilities as a % of GDP (2025-26) | 35.50% | 29.2%* |
| Interest payment as a % of Revenue Receipts (2025-26*) | 20.90% | 12.2%* |
| Committed expenditure as a % of Revenue Receipts (2024-25) | 77.60% | 46.1% [^] |
| Development expenditure as a % of Aggregate Disbursement (2024-25*) | 39.90% | 63.5% [^] |
| Capital expenditure as a % of GDP (2025-26, BE) | 1.34% | 3.2%* |

*BUDGET ESTIMATE, [^]REVISED ESTIMATE

came one with the lowest.

This was not all. Over the next two decades, Kerala achieved levels of social and economic development — better health, education and quality of life — that not only surpassed other states but rivalled influential countries.

What's more, Kerala achieved all this with much lower levels of income. In 1996, its per capita income was one-hundredth of the US's. Despite this, it had a Human Development Index score of 0.775, close to the US's 0.925 and well above India's 0.45 — and

Debt burden

Government debt is not a bad thing, as long as it supports development and can be repaid.

But most of Kerala's borrowings go towards paying salaries and pensions.

without the kind of coercion that countries such as China employed.

Kerala's worsening finances

However, over the past several years, Kerala's model has lost its sheen. The tell-tale sign has been the worsening state of the state government's finances.

Simply put, with each passing year, the state has had to borrow more just to meet the gap between its expenses and its revenues. What's worse is that the bulk of this money goes towards paying salaries and pensions. This means very little is left to spend on developmental areas (such as health and education) or building the state's productive capacity (also called capital expenditure).

As a result, despite having one of the most educated populations, Kerala has some of the highest levels of unemployment, especially for women.

The table shows how far Kerala's fiscal position has slid relative to the national average on some of the most important metrics. Outstanding liabilities refers to all the debt that the state government has to pay back. Kerala's outstanding liabilities as a percentage of its total economic output (gross state domestic product, or GDP) is at 35%. The national average is around 29%.

Not surprisingly, Kerala also has a very high interest burden thanks to its past loans.

The next three metrics show that despite having high levels of borrowings, the state is stuck in a cycle of using the bulk of its money just to pay salaries and pensions, etc. This is what is called committed expenditure. This leaves it with little money to spend on development. Finally, the state is also unable to spend enough on creating new productive assets. Capital expenditure lags far behind the national average.

The state government's report sums all this up. "Kerala has been violating the basic tenet of 'borrow to invest, growth will repay' in a big way, weakening the growth generating capacity."

The new gov't proposals

Part of the solution is to address the wastage in expenditure and to make the administration more efficient. Some of the solutions discussed in the report include raising the retirement age to the same level as the Union government. This move is expected to cut down on the pension bill.

Similarly, it is proposed to have pay commissions only once in 10 years, just like the Union government. The report also finds that Kerala has the largest number of public sector enterprises among Indian states and "the majority of them are making losses". This is draining state finances that could otherwise be put to more productive use.

HISTORY

Maulana Barkatullah: 'First PM of India' whose name varsity wants to drop

Yashee
New Delhi, May 5

THE EXECUTIVE council of Bhopal's Barkatullah University has passed a proposal to change its name to Vagdevi Bhojpal University. The university got its current name in 1988, before which it was called Bhopal University. Maulana Barkatullah Bhopali was a freedom fighter and the 'first prime minister of independent India', as he along with some associates, most notably Raja Mahendra Pratap, set up India's first 'government in exile' in Kabul in 1915.

"Maulana Barkatullah devoted his life to working for India's freedom abroad. From Japan to England to US to Germany to Russia to Afghanistan, he travelled to several countries, creating awareness for and building alliances to usher in India's independence. He died in 1927 in the US, which is probably why his activities weren't widely known back home. The recognition given to him in 1988, by naming a university after him in his hometown, had been a long-due

honour," said Chaman Lal, Honorary Advisor, Bhagat Singh Archives and Resource Centre, New Delhi. Lal, a retired JNU professor, said that instead of changing the university's name, more should be done to popularise the legacy of Barkatullah.

His beliefs, ideals

Maulana Barkatullah is believed to have been born on July 7, 1854, in Bhopal. A meritorious student, he went to Bombay and then London for studies. He started teaching in Liverpool, where he came into contact with Indian revolutionaries. His articles and speeches attracted negative attention from the government, after which he left for the US in 1899. Here, he corresponded with the freedom fighter Maulana Hasrat Mohani (who coined the slogan Inquilab Zindabad). The letters give a clear idea of his views.

An article by Iqbal Husain that appeared in the *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, Vol. 66* (2005-2006), quotes from one of the letters. "Nearly 20 million people have perished due to starvation and hunger.



X/@ASADOWAISI

These poverty-stricken people were both Hindus and Muslims... an entire country has perished due to hunger," Barkatullah wrote.

Barkatullah firmly believed that the British could be driven out of India only if Hindus and Muslims fought shoulder to shoulder and resisted the divide-and-rule ploy.

"What makes Barkatullah special is his strong belief that India could only be free if



Maulana Barkatullah (left); his gravestone at a cemetery in Sacramento, US.

all its communities stood together. He worked closely with Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and people from every region," said Ali Nadeem Rezavi, Secretary, Indian History Congress, and Professor of History at Aligarh Muslim University (AMU). "The best example of this is the Provisional Government of India set up in Kabul in 1915. He, along with Raja Mahendra Pratap, a Hindu

prince, and Maulana Ubaidullah Sindhi, a great Islamic thinker, formed a government in exile. Raja Mahendra Pratap became president, and Barkatullah became prime minister. This was one of the first times Indians had set up their own independent political body outside British control. This story is important not just because it challenged the British, but because it showed a vision of India where people of different faiths fought for a common goal," Rezavi said.

Govt in Kabul, meeting Lenin

During World War I, Barkatullah and his associates travelled to Germany and tried to convince captured Indian soldiers to form an army against the British. He also worked prominently for the Ghadar Party, founded by Lala Har Dayal in 1913, which aimed to win independence through armed struggle.

Then on December 1, 1915, the 'Provisional Government of India' was formed in Kabul. Four years later, the leaders of this 'government' travelled to Moscow to meet Vladimir Lenin, the leader of Soviet Russia.

part of the British victory in World War I, the Indian revolutionaries' plans suffered major reverses. However, Barkatullah kept travelling — to Belgium, Switzerland, France — working for his cause.

"Unlike many freedom fighters who worked from inside the country, Barkatullah spent most of his life in exile. He connected with anti-colonial movements around the world and became one of the most well-known Indian revolutionaries of his time. Inspired by resistance efforts in the Muslim world, he believed that justice was a global cause and that India's freedom was part of that larger fight," Rezavi said.

In 1927, despite failing health, he travelled to California for a Ghadar Party event. This is where, in September 1927, he breathed his last. He was laid to rest in Sacramento, with Raja Mahendra Pratap by his side till the end.

Both Rezavi and Chaman Lal pointed out that the Union government is working to popularise Raja Mahendra Pratap, and Barkatullah, as his close associate, should get the same treatment.

the hindu **businessline.**

SATURDAY - JUNE 6, 2026

Fine balance

Amidst MPC status quo, steps to support rupee justified

The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) has acted along expected lines by holding the status quo on repo rate and retaining the stance at 'neutral'. This wait-and-watch strategy — which entails being 'data dependent' — is a sensible one, given the uncertainty over the duration of the Iran war. If the war winds down and cools global prices and markets, a rate hike that raises business costs would seem inappropriate.



The main feature of the MPC announcement on Friday — its outlook on growth and inflation held out few surprises — was its focus on steps to boost capital flows and shore up the currency. The Reserve Bank of India did well in not using the interest rate to achieve similar objectives. Given India's robust macros, such a move would have sent contrary confidence signals. On the domestic scene, RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra has acknowledged risks to the 'baseline assessments of inflation and growth'. While altering the growth and inflation projections over the April policy (reducing the first by 30 basis points to 6.6 per cent and raising the second by 50 basis points to 5.1 per cent), the RBI has amply indicated at rate hikes are on the cards. This is understandable for an inflation-targeting central bank that needs to anchor rising inflationary expectations. Apart from the war's impact on prices, the sub-normal monsoon forecast has complicated the scenario.

Meanwhile, growth remains delicately poised. As the GDP data released on Friday for the last quarter of FY26 shows, a growth rate of 7.8 per cent in Q4 is buoyed by an encouraging 7.1 cent rise in consumption expenditure, and a 10.8 per cent increase in capital formation. This could slip, as firms postpone fresh investments amidst uncertainties. As regards external account measures, foreign portfolio flows into G-secs are being encouraged by expanding the list of securities eligible for the Fully Accessible Route to securities of longer tenures, such as those in the 15, 30 and 40 year range. There are fewer restrictions under FAR, and it is typically used by global bond funds. It is good that the RBI is targeting the FAR route since ₹16,567 crore of net FPI inflows were recorded through this route in 2026 so far. Investment in India debt through the general limit, however, recorded a net outflow of ₹4,025 crore.

With the Centre also exempting FPI investments in G-secs from capital gains and tax on interest income, inflows from this channel are expected to rise. Relaxations have also been provided to NRIs, overseas citizens of India and persons resident outside India (PROI) for investing into capital markets. Besides these, RBI is also trying to raise NRI deposits and external commercial borrowings by offering to reduce the hedging cost. However, some factors need to be watched. Higher inflation will narrow the real interest rate spread between G-secs and other sovereign bonds. The domestic real interest rate should not dip too much. In sum, a fine policy balance is called for.

OTHER VOICES.

The Guardian

Patients are not raw material for big tech

Alarm bells ought to have rung when it emerged last month that Palantir engineers could gain "unlimited access" to identifiable NHS patient data. Such sensitive medical information was only supposed to be available either to someone involved in a patient's care or with the patient's informed consent. NHS England's new position appears to have changed that, extending access to private companies because it may make data processing easier. Convenience is not a basis for undermining medical confidentiality. Nicola Byrne, the government's national data guardian, clearly thought the NHS had broken its promise that its £330m deal with Palantir would see "identifiable patient information ... limited to NHS staff with a legitimate need". Patients tell doctors things they may tell no one else. (LONDON, JUNE 4)



New canal carves out win-win waterway for China, ASEAN

On June 3, the Pinglu Canal, the first major river-to-sea canal project planned and coordinated at the national level since the founding of the People's Republic of China, achieved full-channel connectivity and entered the final phase of testing with water. The strategic significance of this project goes far beyond water conservancy or shipping itself; it will also become a key driver in deepening China-ASEAN cooperation. Although the Beibu Gulf in Guangxi is the nearest maritime outlet for Southwest China, the lack of a direct river-to-sea corridor has long forced goods from Guangxi and the broader Southwest to detour eastward via the Xijiang River Waterway before reaching Southeast Asian markets. (BEIJING, JUNE 5)



AJAY SRIVASTAVA

The India-US Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA) appears to be nearing completion. A US negotiating team visited India from June 1-4 to speed up talks, and on May 30, US Ambassador Sergio Gor said the deal was "99 per cent ready." The question is no longer whether the deal can be signed, but whether India should sign it.

To understand the stakes, it is necessary to revisit how the negotiations evolved.

India and the US formally launched BTA negotiations on February 13, 2025. The first glimpse of the emerging bargain appeared in the India-US Joint Statement issued on February 6, 2026. The document outlined a broad exchange of concessions. Washington promised to reduce its so-called reciprocal tariff on Indian exports from 25 per cent to 18 per cent. In return, India signalled willingness to undertake deeper tariff reductions on US industrial and agricultural products, ease access for American medical devices and farm goods, facilitate cross-border data flows, accept digital trade commitments, align more closely with US economic and security priorities, and potentially commit to purchasing up to \$500 billion of US goods over five years.

OFFER COLLAPSES

Yet before the agreement could even be finalised, the foundation of the US offer collapsed.

On February 20, the US Supreme Court ruled that President Trump's reciprocal tariffs exceeded the authority granted under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA). The decision invalidated the legal basis for the reciprocal tariff regime. The very tariff concession Washington had offered India — the reduction from 25 per cent to 18 per cent — effectively disappeared overnight.

Within hours of the ruling, Washington replaced the reciprocal tariff regime with a temporary 10 per cent tariff on imports from all trading partners under Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974. The measure can remain in place for only five months (without Congress approval) and is scheduled to expire on July 24. The practical consequence was striking. Countries that had agreed to major concessions under new trade deals suddenly faced the same US tariff treatment as countries that had no deal. The principal benefit that justified the concessions had vanished.

The implications quickly became apparent. On March 15, Malaysia walked away from its trade arrangement with Washington after concluding that the promised benefits no longer justified the



The end-game in India-US trade talks

WAIT AND WATCH. The Bilateral Trade Agreement currently isn't balanced. New Delhi must move ahead only after US trade policy becomes more stable

commitments being sought. India now faces a similar dilemma. The bargain looks one-sided.

Washington anticipated this. To prevent countries from walking away from trade deals, on March 11 and 12, the Office of the US Trade Representative launched two separate Section 301 investigations covering 60 economies. One focused on alleged excess industrial capacity. The other examined concerns related to forced labour in global supply chains. India was included in both investigations.

The excess-capacity investigation against India covers sectors ranging from solar modules and petrochemicals to steel, pharmaceuticals, automobiles and textiles. The forced-labour investigation examines whether India adequately restrict imports linked to forced labour in third countries. Notably, the inquiry is not based on allegations that Indian exports themselves are produced using forced labour. Instead, it seeks to assess whether countries adopt import-control policies preferred by Washington.

Trade agreements should create durable commercial gains for both sides. They should not function as protection payments against future unilateral actions

On June 3, USTR released the findings of the forced-labour investigation and proposed additional tariffs of 12.5 per cent on imports from India and 53 other economies. The proposal is not final and final decisions are expected before July 24 when the temporary Section 122 tariff expires. The results of the excess-capacity investigation are also expected soon.

TWO SCENARIOS

These developments create the end-game scenario now confronting India.

Scenario one — India signs: Washington could offer India relatively lower Section 301 tariffs, say 18 per cent, in exchange for signing the BTA on earlier agreed terms.

Problem is, even after signing of BTA, US may start fresh investigations on any pretext — for example, buying crude oil from Russia or Iran. The US started Section 301 investigations against the EU, Japan, South Korea even after signing a trade deal. Also, offer to lower Section 301 tariffs in return for BTA means the investigations are sham.

More important, BTA concessions by India are much beyond tariff cuts. They also include regulatory concessions, digital trade commitments, closer alignment with US strategic priorities, and a \$500 billion import-purchase commitment. Imagine impact on rupee value once the deal is announced.

Scenario two — India refuses: India could decline to sign BTA and face

whatever Section 301 tariffs Washington ultimately imposes. That would hurt exports. However, the tariffs would apply to many countries, not India alone. More importantly, India would avoid long-term commitments whose economic costs may exceed the impact of the tariffs themselves.

Trade agreements the damage from tariffs may be manageable. Despite facing periods of exceptionally high US tariff barriers during FY26, India's exports to the US still exceeded the previous year's level.

The central reality is that the rationale for rushing into a BTA largely disappeared on February 20, when the Supreme Court invalidated the reciprocal tariff framework. The US side of the original bargain no longer exists. What remains is pressure through Section 301 investigations and the promise of possible tariff moderation.

Trade agreements should create durable commercial gains for both sides. They should not function as protection payments against future unilateral actions. India should therefore treat the BTA negotiations and the Section 301 investigations as entirely separate matters.

The BTA in current format no longer offers balanced benefits, New Delhi should be prepared to delay it — or walk away from it altogether — until US trade policy becomes more stable and predictable.

The writer is founder, GTRI

Why a low price for India's richest asset, carbon?

India grows the carbon, sells it cheap, and now it is to be taxed by Europe on products that contain it

Sathya Raghu Mokkalapati

Here is a fact that should ruin your World Environment Day. A carbon credit generated in India has traded on voluntary markets for as little as \$2.35 a tonne, while a tonne in the European compliance system now sits around €72. Yes, these are different markets, and yes, part of that gap is quality and regulation. But not thirty times. A gap that wide is not a market. It is a verdict on who gets to set the price, and it is not us.

We have managed to turn the air above India into one of the cheapest commodities on earth, and then we throw a tree-planting ceremony to celebrate our environmental commitment. It is the economic equivalent of giving away your house and posting a photo of the doormat.

Let me put the absurdity in one sentence. India grows the carbon, sells it for the price of a bus ticket, and is now about to be taxed by Europe for the carbon embedded in the steel, cement, and aluminium we export there, at the European price. Brussels set its first official border carbon price this April at €75.36 a tonne. We sell our nature cheap and we will buy back the right to trade

with Europe dear, and we have somehow convinced ourselves this is what playing the global game looks like.

The reason is almost funny once you see it. India's national accounts cannot see a forest. A standing forest, full of carbon and water and pollinators, is worth precisely zero rupees in the way we measure the economy. The same forest, cut down and sold as timber, suddenly becomes GDP. Our accounting can only register nature at the moment we kill it. We have built a system that rewards the funeral and ignores the life.

PUTTING A PRICE ON NATURE

This is not because Indians do not care about nature. It is because nobody has been paid to. A thing worth nothing gets treated like nothing. Now, the objection writes itself, and I have heard it at every dinner table. Putting a price on nature is the first step to selling it off. Markets will financialise the forest and then strip it bare.

But the forest is being stripped bare right now, today, at a price of zero. Pricelessness did not save it. And let me concede the hard part before you raise it: done badly, nature markets produce garbage. That fraud is itself a product of bad measurement and absent standards. The answer to a rigged market is not no



CARBON. Need for a better market

market. It is a better one, with our hand on the ruler. Put a real, ownable, tradable price on a living forest and, for the first time, the person who controls that land earns more by keeping it alive than by killing it. The whole question is who that person is. Get this wrong and nature markets become one more machine for taking land from Adivasi and forest communities and handing the upside to capital. We have done that before, in the name of dams, mines, and progress, and we should be ashamed of it. So the design is not a detail.

The value of a standing forest has to flow first to the people who have kept it standing, often for centuries, usually with no title to show for it. A nature

market that dispossesses them is not a better idea than no market. The Forest Rights Act exists for a reason. Any honest system here begins there, not in a trading terminal.

India built UPI, Aadhaar and world class financial infrastructure. We have, finally, begun on nature too: a carbon market is being stood up, methodologies are being written, natural-capital accounting is being piloted. Good. For the single largest endowment we possess, we are still sending the raw value abroad to be measured, certified, and priced by someone else, and accepting what they pay. We did this with cotton under the British. We are half-doing it again, and this time it is the sky.

The solution is an Indian registry for natural capital, backed by the state but open to private rigour. Standards written here, for Indian conditions, with measurement good enough that no foreign buyer can dismiss our credits as junk — a regulator, sitting alongside the work SEBI and the RBI already do on capital, that treats an ecosystem with the seriousness it treats a balance sheet.

Sathya is the founder and CEO of a SoulForest, a nature capital company building Nature Economic Zones in India

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Right policy stance

The Reserve Bank of India's decision to keep the repo rate unchanged at 5.25 per cent and maintain a neutral policy stance deserves appreciation. The move comes at a time when elevated energy prices and global supply chain disruptions, triggered by the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, are exerting pressure on the economy. The RBI's revised growth forecast of 6.6 per cent, down from 6.9 per cent, appears realistic given the rising cost of crude oil and its impact on inflation, trade, and overall economic activity. While higher energy prices threaten to fuel

inflation, an aggressive rate cut could worsen price instability. In these circumstances, policymakers must strike a careful balance between controlling inflation and supporting economic growth. Alongside prudent monetary policy, the government should focus on improving domestic production, strengthening supply chains, and encouraging investment.

M Jeyaram
Sholavandan, TN

Accounting fraud

Apropos 'Rajesh exports 'gilded' accounts' (June5), the entire

episode appears to be a well planned devious accounting fraud perpetrated by misrepresenting the books of accounts in a systematic manner. This kind of operation could not have happened without the active collusion of the auditors concerned or auditors were doing a superficial job of just routinely ticking the figures presented without asking any probing questions. A small cap company with astronomical revenue figures should have raised doubts long back. When the company had withheld detailed standalone financial accounts for its subsidiaries by referring to foreign

confidentiality laws, it's surprising how an apex regulator like SEBI had not become alert and acted with alacrity? SEBI needs to sharpen its oversight to detect such frauds early and protect investors' interests.

Kosaraju Chandramouli
Hyderabad

Uneven credit flow

This refers to 'Regional skew in credit flows' (June 5). Despite the implementation of various credit-oriented schemes and credit guarantees to encourage lenders to provide sufficient credit, many crucial segments of the economy are

not growing as expected. The agriculture and MSME segments, pivotal in generating employment and decisively contributing to GDP, aren't getting the required amount of credit. Multifarious reasons such as a lack of sufficient branch network, high input costs and lack of competitive markets for outputs are restricting the growth of credit in those sectors. The government and the RBI need to execute measures to curtail the imbalanced growth of credit across the economy to ensure even and sustained growth.

VSK Pillai
Changanacherry, Kerala



OPINION

The
Hindustan Times
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

OUR TAKE

Economy is hurt, not sinking

The way to acquiring economic resilience is to fireproof rather than firefight

2025-26 for the Indian economy was the perfect Goldilocks moment. Benchmark inflation, as measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) was 2.1%. GDP growth, as per the provisional estimates released on Friday, was 7.7%. The economy has moved from Goldilocks to tenterhooks. RBI's latest growth and inflation projections for the economy for 2026-27 stand at 6.6% and 5.1%. That entails a downgrade of 1.1 percentage points in growth and 3 percentage point increase for inflation. The adverse growth-inflation dynamic has its roots in the ongoing war in West Asia; India has next to no control over the geopolitical state of play but will have to pay a huge price for its geo-economic fallout.

The MPC resolution, released on Friday, states the situation plainly. "While import diversification in affected commodities has helped in improving supply, it comes at a higher cost. The full impact, however, will depend on the duration of the conflict, time taken for normalisation of supply chains and the burden-sharing approach among the stakeholders".

This is not the extent of the current economic problems. The biggest anxiety is on the external account front, with the merchandise trade deficit adding to the current account deficit. Capital account inflows, which usually balance this, have been tepid. Here, both the fiscal and monetary arms of economic policymaking tried to make a difference on Friday. India announced a slew of measures to attract more foreign capital from institutional and retail investors by offering them attractive returns and opening up hitherto unavailable markets. Analysts believe that the announcements will definitely help cover the capital account requirements, even if not entirely. Setting aside the balance of payments firefighting, what does the economic situation look like?

A lot will depend on the Strait of Hormuz. A prolonged closure can inflict a severe supply chain disruption not just on India but globally. That this supply shock has coincided with an El Nino year which entails a weaker monsoon will only add to the economy's problems. Economic pain of this farm-to-factory supply squeeze will have to be carefully and compassionately shared among stakeholders.

What will perhaps help the government pull off this tightrope walk are the inflationary tailwinds to revenue collections. Nominal growth in 2025-26 was just 120 basis points more than the real growth of 7.7%. Even with a lower real growth in 2026-27, nominal growth should exceed the 2025-26 level due to higher inflation. That will help with the fiscal math a bit.

But what is perhaps most important for the economy and economic policy makers is to realise that the way to acquiring resilience against such external shocks is to fireproof rather than firefight.

India must seek greater self-reliance in its supply chain dynamics and get out of its mindset of assuming that capital account surplus will automatically balance a current account deficit. Doing this requires nudging investment — both State and private — into sectors which seek to secure supplies and safeguard foreign exchange. Strategic areas and actions must be prioritised going forward. Unless there is a crisis, such investments might not look very appealing or even feel unnecessary, but the cost of inaction can be very high.

To reiterate, the Indian economy is facing serious turbulence. It will be scarred by the experience but is nowhere close to sinking. The need of the hour is to steer it through the storm and remember the lessons even after the waters have calmed, rather than becoming complacent about false invincibility.

THIRD EYE

Barkha Dutt



Don't drop Twisha Sharma's death from news cycle

In the perception of the Indian people, this is now a David-Goliath battle where the good of the ordinary folk is being tested by the might of the venal

Perhaps not since the murder of 13-year-old Arushi Talwar, who was found dead in her own bedroom in 2008, has India been as fixated with a crime as we are with the death of Twisha Sharma.

There are two reasons for why the death of a former model and actor in her mother-in-law's house has the nation both agitated and riveted. The first is the resonance hundreds of thousands of women have felt with Twisha's plight — the societal conditioning that continues to inhibit a woman's ability to leave an abusive marriage and the cultural camouflage that disguises and normalises modern-day dowry.

The second reason is the persona of Giribala Singh, the accused mother-in-law and how she has come to represent the impunity of the powerful in a system so corroded that it becomes supine before those who wield power.

In the perception of the Indian people, this is now a David-Goliath battle where the good of the ordinary folk is being tested by the might of the venal.

Even on their first night in Bhopal jail, Singh and son were able to access VIP privileges. Both were moved to the hospital within the jail premises with Samarth Singh citing an injury and Giribala Singh reportedly claiming a security concern. You'd think the jail officials or the accused would worry about the impression that this conveys after unprecedented national scrutiny. But clearly, the connections that the former judge and her family seem to wield run deep.

And then there's the fact that Twisha's death is fast turning into a whodunnit or rather — howdunnit. There's mounting evidence that she was assaulted before she died. And that we are looking possibly at a case of culpable homicide

dressed up to look like a suicide.

Investigators will have the final word, but let me share some hard facts that have clouded the claims of suicide.

Giribala Singh's obsession with retrieving CCTV footage hours after Twisha died is the perfect indicator of a cover-up. The CCTV technician who installed cameras in her residence confirms she was keen to secure the footage of the crime scene. And her fixation with CCTV cameras did not end here. The owner of the beauty parlour where Twisha was last seen alive on the day of her death gave us a damning testimony. She said Giribala called her the morning after Twisha's death and asked for the video footage of Twisha inside the parlour. A group of lawyers arrived shortly after to demand that the footage be handed over.

The sub inspector did not provide the alleged nylon belt used by Twisha to hang herself during the first post-mortem. Veteran police officers say this is so basic that it could not have been an oversight. Yet, no heads have rolled so far.

If this procedural lapse were not bad enough, there is now proof that the first post-mortem was potentially compromised by the presence of Giribala Singh's sister when it was being conducted. Twisha's sister-in-law, Dr Rashi Abrol told me she spoke to Giribala's sister, who is also a doctor and discovered the collusion. Subsequently, M.P government lawyers mentioned fears of a compromise in court.

An audio recording made by Twisha's family

WE ARE DELUGED WITH MESSAGES TO NOT DO THE USUAL MEDIA THING OF MOVING ON TO THE NEXT HEADLINE. PEOPLE ARE WORRIED THAT IF THE CASE FALLS OFF THE NEWS, TWISHA AND HER FAMILY WILL BE FORGOTTEN

Medicines, and not just renaming, heals disease

When a medical condition is given a new name, it begins to cast a different sort of shadow over the people who live with it. Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS), a disorder that affects 170 million women worldwide, has been rechristened. It's now called Polycystic Metabolic Ovarian Syndrome (PMOS).

The proponents (global experts and patient advocates) of re-naming argue the change was necessary because the old name encouraged a narrow focus on ovaries, leaving other important health consequences insufficiently recognised and addressed.

PCOS indeed extends beyond reproduction, encompassing insulin resistance, hypertension, diabetes, dyslipidaemia, atherosclerosis, sleep apnoea, body-image concerns, anxiety and depression; together, these may substantially increase future cardiovascular and psychological risk.

The metabolic and psychological dimensions of PCOS have long been recognised by gynaecologists and reproductive endocrinologists. Guidelines for identifying and managing these features have existed for years, most recently updated in 2023. The hope is that renaming may encourage wider adherence.

The rebranding, however well intentioned, creates two problems — imposing uniformity on a condition defined by variation, and invit-

ing unnecessary alarm. PCOS is so heterogeneous that no global consensus exists on its diagnosis. Japanese and Chinese criteria differ from the International Consensus Guidelines and, in many ways, from each other. These divergences reflect the influence of ethnicity, environment and population-specific risk profiles on how the syndrome presents. Since 2003, the internationally accepted Rotterdam criteria have defined PCOS by the presence of any two of three features: Irregular periods, typically delayed or unpredictable; excess facial or body hair and acne in a male-pattern distribution; and polycystic ovaries on ultrasound.

Neither the Rotterdam criteria nor any major international guideline requires metabolic syndrome, or even insulin resistance, for a PCOS diagnosis. Clinicians have long recognised that metabolic dysfunction characterises some, but by no means all, women with the condition. This makes the "M" in PMOS troubling, and possibly a distortion. By placing metabolism at the centre of the definition, the new name risks rendering metabolically healthy women with PCOS conceptually invisible. Depending on the population studied, women without significant metabolic impairment comprise 50-70% of diagnosed cases. Metabolic risk is strongly associated with obesity, though leanness



As a former judge and someone with a special course in crime scene management, Giribala Singh has all the instruments at her disposal.

before she died has been released to the media. The recording reveals Giribala Singh using the most vicious abusive language for her daughter-in-law. On the tape, her brother Major Harshit Sharma can be heard confronting Giribala. In the heated exchange that follows, she also purportedly refers to her son's drug habit and how he lost two years in college because of this addiction. This is a critical piece of evidence because in public Giribala Singh smeared her daughter-in-law and accused her of having a drug problem. In private, she admits it's the other way around.

Finally, there is the incontrovertible fact of the injuries on Twisha's body, all of which were *antemortem*. Of the seven injuries, four were on her arm, one on the ring finger, and one on the head. While Giribala and her son tried to claim that these injuries were from dragging her body down the steps from the roof after her alleged suicide; it has now been medically established that these injuries were before her death. This clearly raises the very real possibility that she was hit and perhaps hit back to defend herself.

Some people have suggested that the robust reporting on this case is tantamount to a media trial. I have to disagree. And my sense is most people would vehemently disagree

as well. In fact, we are deluged with messages to not do the usual media thing of moving on to the next headline. People are worried that if the case falls off the news, Twisha and her family will be forgotten.

Already there are many disturbing questions that have not been answered. When Samarth Singh ran and turned absconder, who did he take shelter with? Why did the Bhopal police not apprehend him? Was there someone powerful who threw a protective shield over him? Will those people be prosecuted? What did he do while he was hiding? The unfettered access Giribala Singh had for close to 10 days to the scene of crime has also created scepticism in the public mind about whether evidence has been permanently erased or manipulated.

As a former judge and someone with a special course in crime scene management, Giribala Singh has all the instruments at her disposal.

To turn away now and not diligently keep raising questions is to let down not just Twisha; but thousands of Indian women who saw a reflection of their own lives, both the good and bad, in the story of this young woman.

Barkha Dutt is an award-winning journalist and author. The views expressed are personal



Ruma Satwik

Saving the saviour: the Himalayas need us

In July 2023, Himachal Pradesh endured a season of destruction. Monsoon rainfall ran nearly 50% above normal, triggering cloudbursts and landslides claiming over 360 lives and causing damages exceeding ₹4,000 crore. This signals a shift in the operating conditions for Himalayan governance. Glaciers are retreating, snowfall and rainfall patterns are changing, and valley towns face deteriorating air quality. The stability of this mountain system, often called the Third Pole, determines the water and energy security of billions of people in the subcontinent.

Success under these conditions requires speed. Decarbonising remains essential because carbon dioxide persists in the atmosphere for centuries.

Yet, this alone cannot slow warming quickly enough to protect vulnerable regions

like the Himalayas over the next two decades. Another group of climate super pollutants, including methane, black carbon, tropospheric ozone, and HFCs drives warming on much shorter timescales. They trap heat over years or decades rather than centuries. Black carbon is especially damaging in mountain regions because it settles on snow and ice, accelerating melting. Cutting these pollutants offers the fastest path to slowing warming. Aggressive methane reductions alone could avoid nearly 0.3°C of warming by the 2040s.

The world already has a proven blueprint for this strategy. The Montreal Protocol phased out nearly 100 ozone-destroying chemicals that were also powerful greenhouse gases. It has delayed warming by decades and is projected to avoid more than 2.5°C of warming by 2100. The treaty began with a coalition

of willing countries and becoming the first universally ratified environmental agreement.

Sub-national action and local boycotts helped create the momentum for that global shift. India is now applying similar logic through the Him-CONNECT platform. The initiative links scientists, entrepreneurs, and policymakers to translate Himalayan research into scalable solutions for climate resilience and water security across the Himalayan Region.

States like Himachal Pradesh are also developing roadmaps to reduce short-lived climate pollutants from livestock, transport, and waste. Measures such as improving fodder quality can lower methane emissions while increasing milk productivity, aligning climate action with rural incomes. Segregation and recycling, too, can sharply reduce emissions while improving local air quality.

Mountain regions and small island States share a similar position in this debate. Their emissions remain low while their exposure to

climate impacts is severe.

A coalition linking these regions could help advance a legally binding methane agreement modeled on the architecture of the Montreal Protocol. Such a framework could include phased reduction schedules, monitoring systems, financial support, and binding rules to limit venting, flaring, and methane leaks in the energy sector.

Protecting the Third Pole requires moving faster than traditional climate diplomacy often allows. Coalitions of the willing can connect science, finance, and policy in ways that accelerate action.

The Montreal Protocol showed that focused cooperation can change the trajectory of the planet. The Himalayas now need a similar effort.

Durwood Zaelke is the president of Institute for Governance & Sustainable Development, and Zerín Osho its director of India program. The views expressed are personal



Durwood Zaelke



Zerín Osho

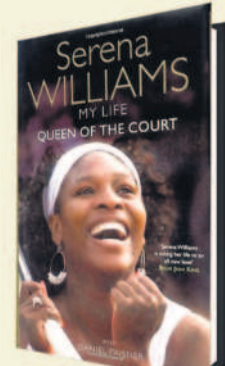
EDITOR'S PICK

HT's editors offer a book recommendation every Saturday, which provides history, context, and helps understand recent news events

THE RETURN OF THE QUEEN

On and off the court, tennis star Serena Williams has always been a force to reckon with — 23 Grand Slam singles titles, the most number of Grand Slam match wins in women's tennis in the Open era as well as maternal health and educational equity advocacy.

As she re-enters the competitive tennis arena after announcing retirement in 2022, we recommend her autobiography, *My Life: Queen of the Court*. It details her struggles and motivations throughout her career, including playing under the shadow of her elder sister, Venus, and the role her father, Richard, essayed in the sporting lives. The book also, very sensitively, confronts the race question, especially considering very few non-White players find themselves in the hallowed halls of fame in the sport. From personal tragedies to resolute comebacks, the book is a window into what to expect of Serena as she gears up for the court again.



My Life: Queen of the Court
Serena Williams
2010

Why missing the AI boom may not be so bad

India's absence from the AI valuation frenzy could prove a blessing once risk-aversion sets in



BEYOND IDEOLOGY
R JAGANNATHAN

The question being asked, often by people who may not like the Modi government, is whether India has missed the artificial intelligence (AI) bus. The answer is both yes and no. Yes, because India's businesses and stock markets are not part of the current boom. And no, because the final chapter in the current boom could well be an AI bust some years down the line. There are advantages in not being first, as we can learn from the failures.

The AI boom, especially in terms of market valuations, is essentially no different from Tulip Mania, the South Sea Bubble, the dotcom boom, the subprime lending euphoria of the noughties, or other speculative bubbles of the past. It is bound to deflate at some point, although nobody can predict when. If India has been left out of the boom, it will also be spared some of the consequences of the bust.

Those who like to see the darker side of things will also refer to the fact that the current profits of just two South Korean companies (Samsung and SK Hynix) are greater than those of all listed Indian companies; or that India's ranking in terms of market capitalisation is now at No 7, where it has been overtaken by both South Korea and Taiwan. But market valuations are transient advantages, the result of the willingness of the rich and middle-class investors to take huge bets in the age of unequal wealth accumulation. Once risk-aversion sets in, these valuations will deflate more quickly abroad than in India.

Others who would like to make unfavourable comparisons will say our gross domestic product (GDP) is less than the valuation of Nvidia or Google, but here's the counter. America's GDP is \$32 trillion. The market valuation of the world's 14 trillion-dollar companies is \$35 trillion — and this could worsen as new AI and tech companies, such as Anthropic, OpenAI and SpaceX, hit the initial public offering (IPO) market with trillion-dollar-plus paper valuations. The point is: Even the US economy is not big enough to dwarf the world's biggest companies right now when markets are on a tear.

And let's not forget the downside. SpaceX's IPO is already under-



ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA

way, taking its potential market valuation to \$1.77 trillion, which would make Elon Musk the world's first trillionaire. But valuation guru Aswath Damodaran says SpaceX should be valued lower around \$1.2 trillion, which tells you what could happen once the market corrects.

The current market value creation is driven by the AI frenzy. Twelve of the 14 trillion-dollar com-

panies are tech companies. This lop-sidedness is not going to end well for the stock markets and the individuals buying into fancy valuations in the hope that trillions will become gazillions. The law of gravity does not spare anyone. This does not mean AI valuations will not rise once again after the shake-out weeds out the weaker players (as they did during the dotcom

boom) and the stronger ones grow to create more value, but there could be up to a decade of weakness that will not only bring down stock market wealth, but many real businesses as well.

What we are witnessing, thanks to AI, is the overwhelming dominance of financial capital over human capital. For much of the 21st century, financial wealth has out-

paced real GDP growth by a wide margin. According to a McKinsey study, the world's financial balance is worsening. It notes: "Global wealth is \$600 trillion, but it has outgrown GDP since 2000, as paper gains powered its rise. Every \$1 in investment generated \$2 in debt. The top 1 per cent of people hold at least 20 per cent of wealth. Cross-border imbalances are growing." McKinsey says that this can only end in three possible outcomes: A global balance-sheet reset to reduce debt, which could mean asset price deflation or even a sharp collapse, high inflation, and low growth — or all three. Since the current boom is led by AI, the collapse will also be led by AI. We should all worry when that begins to happen — though it seems a bit distant right now.

Those invested in AI tell us very good stories: That AI will improve productivity, create jobs that didn't exist before, etc. But no one can really guarantee that these things will happen in the foreseeable future. In the meanwhile, there will be job destruction on an industrial scale — or, at least a drastic slowdown in good quality jobs, as all jobs involving middle skills and steady wages are eaten up by AI. It is difficult to see how governments will allow this scale of social turmoil when no AI visionary can be held to their promise that more jobs will indeed be created by AI than what will be destroyed. If the markets do not lower the AI boom, democratic governments that are accountable to the people, will.

In 2017, Bill Gates, the founder of Microsoft, famously said in an interview with *Quartz* that if robots

and AI destroy jobs, they should be taxed. The problem is not the idea of taxing robots, but the reality of how we will ever be able to do this any more efficiently than in Luddite Britain. How can we ever know which specific job has been replaced by AI or robots, though we can know that in the aggregate 20 workers in a 100-worker factory or office have been replaced by automation. More important, how do we tax a new company that does not have those workers in the first place? Can you tax a company that begins with high automation more than a company that employs more workers? It will be a regulatory nightmare.

The truth is we have no real answers to either the problems posed by AI and greater automation, or even the right regulation for it. Technology, once invented, cannot be un-invented. Nor is it wise to clamp down on a technology that may yet offer us a large platter of benefits. When AI frenzy is driven by FOMO — fear of missing out — and a death race is underway, the best we can do is batten down the hatches and hope for the best. Governments must keep the powder dry and help the victims.

In the long term, governments that want to insulate their own people must focus on creating sovereign AI models that can be regulated at home and not be subject to global pressures. Fiscally, they must prepare for the valuations meltdown when it happens, even if India is singled less than those with high AI quotients.

The author is a senior journalist

Pradhan put to the test



PLAIN POLITICS
ADITI PHADNIS

As empires go, the Ministry of Education (MoE) is huge. The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), which is autonomous but under the overall supervision of the ministry, alone covers more than 25,000 schools in 26 countries with four million students (X and XII classes). The Department of Higher Education is responsible for the governance of 57 central universities, 49,565 affiliated colleges, and 537 state (private) and 437 (public) universities. Enrolment (2021-22), including in Institutions of National Importance like Indian Institutes of Technology, was around 40 million students. The National Testing Agency (NTA), under the ministry, conducts many of the examinations for these institutions. And all this is only a fraction of the ministry's responsibilities.

The man who oversees all this is Dharmendra Pradhan. It isn't that leaks have not happened before under other ministers and governments. But in the space of two months, several National Eligibility Cum Entrance Test (Undergraduate) or NEET-UG papers have leaked. Class XII mark sheets have been "wrongly" marked, possibly because of the hasty adoption of digital evaluation. Students' faith in the evaluation system has been shaken to the core. Demands for re-evaluation have plunged the CBSE into chaos. The element of urgency is underlined by the fact that colleges will start admission in a few weeks. The government has responded by

removing top officials of the CBSE. The Congress says "Mantri Pradhan" should take responsibility and quit.

Is Mr Pradhan in trouble? Or is trouble following him in his ministries?

He has been India's longest-serving petroleum minister, starting out as minister of state with independent charge and then Cabinet minister (together from 2014 to 2021). During his tenure, he said emphatically that the government had no business being in business and initiated the privatisation of the Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL), aiming to end the government's 52.9 per cent stake in the company. "There is a lot of interest," he told reporters in 2020. Except that it never happened. In 2022, with just one bidder left in the ring, the government scrapped the exercise. His successor, Hardeep Puri, has ruled out the privatisation of any and all oil majors.

Mr Pradhan was given additional charge of the Ministry of Skill Development between 2017 and 2019, just after demonetisation, a period that was devastating for those who aspired to placement. The pandemic followed, dealing another death blow. Crowning achievements in the ministry were hard to come by. He was given additional charge of the Ministry of Education in 2021. Currently, schools are wondering how they will carry out the CBSE order mandating children must study three languages (of which two must be Indian languages), given the undercapacity of the teaching staff. The policy, which is under Supreme Court review, must be rolled out in July.

In politics, however, Mr Pradhan has had significantly more success. He is from Talcher, central Odisha. His father, Debendra Pradhan, was active in politics and became a minister in the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government. Mr Pradhan became an activist with the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) and became presi-

dent of students' union of Talcher College as a first-year fresher.

For a young Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) activist, it was hard working in Odisha. Vajpayee and L K Advani's bond with Biju Patnaik meant the BJP could not attack the ruling party in the state. Those who managed to keep their balance while having a foot in two boats — the BJP and the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) — were more successful in politics than a doughty BJP fighter like Mr Pradhan.

Take, for example, Ashwini Vaishnav, who started out as a bureaucrat and served the Vajpayee government with the blessing of Naveen Patnaik, got a Rajya Sabha seat and is now a highly valued minister in the Modi government, though he still can't bring himself to attack his previous mentor who is in the Opposition. By contrast, Mr Pradhan, who toiled long and hard for the BJP, built it up in Odisha and helped install the party in government, now commands the loyalty of the largest number of BJP members of the Legislative Assembly but was not made chief minister.

Mr Pradhan is not an especially charismatic leader or a brilliant orator. But his understanding of realpolitik and organisational dynamics makes him the ultimate party man. He has overseen Assembly elections for the BJP in Karnataka, Uttarakhand, Jharkhand and, of course, Odisha, before Haryana, where he helped steward the BJP to a stunning victory. In his own state, there isn't a party worker he doesn't know by name, even the ones who have turned rebel: And is not averse to reaching out to rebels even if he himself was responsible for having them dropped in the first place.

After all the controversies in his ministries, Mr Pradhan may need to reinvent himself. The party is now headed by one of his juniors, Nitin Nambin. One option is lateral movement in the central government. But that is not in his hands.

Grand destroyer of Brand India

The central curse of our urban governance isn't that more voters live in slummified villages. It's that the political class panders to them instead of improving their quality of life

For months now, a question has been brewing with me: What is India's biggest brand destroyer? Why, more than three decades since the economic reforms began and India became the darling of the developed world, has the wheel turned?

Investors have pulled out their money and left, while foreign tourist arrivals are not consistently back at the 2019 level. I've been searching for a thread to weave a cohesive argument. Until the epiphany arrived with the fire in an unauthorised Bed & Breakfast (B&B) in New Delhi's Malviya Nagar that killed 21 as we write this.

India has many individual factors as brand destroyers, with the three most damaging being garbage, air quality, and safety of women in public places. For now, all of this combines into that larger disaster, the Indian city. Add to this threat, individual survival from the elements. Or let's be truthful and call it the scandal of urban misgovernance.

You come from remote villages, or run-down small towns to India's most pampered city, where everybody who matters lives, from the President and Prime Minister to the Chief Justice of India, and, of course, the most prominent journalists and activists, supposedly the conscience keepers of civil society. And you can't be sure as you go to sleep that a fire or a building collapse won't kill you overnight.

Just a week earlier (May 30), six of the brightest young Indians who were in Delhi to prepare for competitive examinations died while slumming it out near another unauthorised multi-storey building near Saket Metro Station, just a few kilometres from the B&B that now caught fire. Add to this another spate of paper leaks and cancelled examinations and you don't need to ask why are India's young so furious.

But, let's stay with our epiphany: The state of our cities being India's greatest brand destroyers. Lousy air, water, traffic, policing, harassment of women is all there, and unfortunately taken for granted by us natives. It is just that when global rankings consistently list our cities among the least liveable, our thin nationalist skin breaks out in rashes. Personal safety, however, tops all of that. Especially for those of us for whom there's no home other than an Indian city.

Let's just check the capital's fire safety record. In 2019, 17 died in a fire at a six-storey hotel in Karol Bagh. In the same year, the Anaj Mandi (grain

market) fire claimed 45 lives, including nine minors. We are only counting major fires for now. Switch to 2022. In Mundka, a fire in a four-storey "commercial building" asphyxiated 27 to death. Two years later, a blaze tore through a neonatal care unit in Vivek Vihar in East Delhi, killing eight newborns.

This was just a listing of prominent incidents that made headlines for a day or two. If you check Delhi Fire Service (DFS) data, it would shock you, or probably it won't, given how inured we've become to living in this dangerous chaos, sort of walking on a deck perpetually smouldering somewhere. In 2019-20, fire took 308 lives in Delhi, 346 the next year — despite the Covid lockdown — then 591 in 2021-22, nearly doubling to 1,029 in 2022-23 and rising to 1,303 in 2023-24.

All of this as India's economy has grown, billions (in dollar equivalent) have been poured into Delhi, many areas have been developed, and connectivity has improved. A deeper analysis will tell you that most of these disasters took place in what might be described variously as unauthorised, illegal or irregular buildings and areas.

That last factor, "areas", is important. It is because Delhi's original villages are notionally cordoned off on the map with a red string (hence the description Lal Dora), and most urban laws or regulations do not apply there. How would they? These are, after all, villages. Almost all of these major incidents have occurred in these, including the Malviya Nagar fire and the Saket building collapse. While the Malviya Nagar B&B was situated in Hauz Rani, the Saket building was in Said-Ul-Ajib in Mehrauli. They're both urban villages. You might need to get some licences to run a hotel or a B&B here. But, in an urban village, or what is generally called a Lal Dora area, you can construct what you wish. It's a village after all.

If you live in any of the capital's regular colonies, Malviya Nagar and Saket included, there are several limitations on how much you can build, and how high you can go. In a Lal Dora area, you can build mini skyscrapers, often single-brick structures without any columns. These will turn into rubble even in a magnitude-6 earthquake.

The central curse of our urban governance isn't that more voters live in these slummified villages, or unauthorised colonies, than in the municipally governed areas. The tragedy is that the political class panders to them instead of improving their

quality of life. In the Capital, in every election, one important priority for all political parties is to regularise illegal colonies. No political party sees value in promising a renewal, not even on the lines of the by-now well-established slum rehabilitation programme: Shift people to transit accommodation, redevelop where they lived illegally, and create modern, secure accommodation for them in situ with ownership rights. This is too much work, and what is unlikely to be achieved in one election cycle won't interest any politician.

Our cities, in the process, have become divided among the "gated colony" classes and the rest who live mostly illegally. The latter have the voting power, but you can buy them with freebies or simply the promise to regularise their illegal existence. This vast urban majority has been fooled into nursing minimal expectations.

Mumbai is an interesting example. Under the National Democratic Alliance, it has seen a massive infrastructure and connectivity upgrade. Among these is the brilliant new Coastal Road.

It's just that in so many visits to Mumbai since it became operational, I haven't seen one commuter bus on it. And we thought a separate bus lane, convenience for the working-class commuter was among its promises. The new Metro is great, but expensive for the poorer working classes. The cheapest commute is still the local train or the bus. It is just that there's no money for buses.

I've written multiple times in the past that the one reason our politicians treat the cities so badly is that their voters live in the villages. So they win power with their votes and then come to the cities to ravage them for wealth. Further, there is a cynical and fake pro-village bias in our politics. You can find the roots of this in our Constituent Assembly debates, where Babasaheb Ambedkar fought the idea of a Gandhian constitution based on the concept of Gram Swaraj, the village as a republic. What is the village, Ambedkar asked in the Constituent Assembly on November 4, 1948, "but a sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow-mindedness and communalism?" He won that argument only partly.

The upshot is, our politics has been shy of planned urbanisation. This despite the fact that 35 per cent of India (according to the World Bank) now lives in urban areas, and the Economic Survey predicts it will cross the 40 per cent mark by 2030. Like any aspirational developing country, India's objective is to move more people from farming to industry and services, or in other words, from villages to cities. For this, our cities have to be reimaged and new ones built with transit space for the new arrivals. Then they will move up the value chain in the course of time. It is challenging, but business as usual won't work. It will continue to be the grand destroyer of Brand India.

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Why E-E-A-T will win in the AI era



YES, BUT...
SANDEEP GOYAL

Google's E-E-A-T framework — Experience, Expertise, Authoritativeness, and Trustworthiness — has long been the gold standard for digital content. Far from just a checklist for search algorithms, these principles translate directly into human engagement, proving to audiences that a brand's voice is genuine, informed, respected, and

undeniably credible. In today's AI environment, this is of paramount importance.

The internet is currently flooded with generic content, making authentic human experience the only reliable way to build trust with any audience. E-E-A-T shifts the focus from keyword-stuffed SEO to genuine, high-quality content.

The First E: Experience is what it means to have "been there, done that". Before Google expanded the acronym to E-E-A-T, the framework was simply E-A-T. The addition of experience emphasises that readers and search engines value first-hand, practical knowledge. It highlights the difference between a travel writer who merely reads a brochure and an avid traveller who actually stayed at the resort and navigated its winding corridors.

To demonstrate experience, content must reflect lived encounters

and authentic, real-world familiarity. A product review must reflect actual usage. If sharing a recipe, inclusion of original photos of the prep work and the final dish — not just generic stock images helps. Small, candid tips — such as "when I tried this, I ran into a problem with xyz" — shows readers that the insights come from reality, not a textbook. Sharing personal journeys, including unique anecdotes, and details that only someone who has walked the path could know, adds value.

The Second E: Expertise is about demonstrating subject mastery. While Experience proves one has lived it, expertise proves understanding of the "why" behind it. It is about subject mastery, knowledge, and skill. Expertise is frequently backed by professional qualifications, a deep academic background, or rigorous, specialised practice.

One can demonstrate expertise by ensuring the content is factually accurate, detailed, and thoroughly answers the user's intent. Mentioning the content creator's credentials increases credibility. So does citing reputable studies, integrating data from established organisations, and showcasing an understanding of industry nuances.

The A: Authoritativeness is being the go-to voice. Authoritativeness is all about reputation within the industry. While expertise is the knowledge one possesses, authoritativeness is what others think of that knowledge. It is built when other respected websites, clients, and industry peers recognise the work, reference the insights, and link to the website.

Cultivating authority requires consistent effort. It involves publishing high-quality, comprehensive content that others naturally

want to cite. Earning mentions in established publications, participating in industry roundups, securing contextual backlinks, and maintaining a positive, recognisable brand reputation all contribute to authority. When major names in the field vouch through links or citations, the standing of the author as an authoritative voice grows.

The T: Trustworthiness is the anchor of credibility; the foundation upon which the other three pillars rest. Even if an article is written by an experienced, highly recognised expert, it will fail to connect if readers sense a lack of transparency, hidden agendas, or questionable ethics.

Trust is about being safe, honest, and accountable. To demonstrate trustworthiness, one needs to clearly

disclose who is behind the content. Providing in-depth author bios, listing clear contact and customer service information, maintaining a secure website (such as by using HTTPS), and following ethical content practices are essential. Now to the importance of YMYL: Your Money or Your Life. E-E-A-T is not a one-size-fits-all metric. The depth of E-E-A-T required depends heavily on the nature of the content. Google places particular emphasis on YMYL (Your Money or Your Life) topics. These are subjects that can fundamentally impact a person's health, financial stability, safety, civic engagement, or overall well-being. Advice regarding medical diagnoses, investment strategies, or voting information falls strictly into the YMYL category. Because misin-

formation in these areas can have severe real-world consequences, the E-E-A-T standards for YMYL topics are uncompromising. Content must be written by accredited experts, heavily cited, and rigorously factual to earn user trust.

Mastering E-E-A-T is not a quick fix; it is a long-term commitment to quality and transparency. To build a platform that truly embodies these principles, audit current content, ensure author identities are transparent, and always write with the user's best interests in mind. By prioritising genuine experience, deep expertise, respected authority, and unwavering trust, one can create content that not only performs well but serves as a truly valuable resource for all.

In the AI era, the brand destinations that will survive will not be those that publish the most content, but those that prove they have the human right to say so.

The author is chairman of Rediffusion

What is the real purpose of public art?

In India, public art is usually what is called 'plonk' art, plonked down by someone in government who sees in it a way to convey a message



CULT FRICTION
SANDIP ROY

The BJP campaigned promising *poriborton* or change for West Bengal. Since it has come to power, some of its actions have won praise, some have invited controversy. But one change seems to have been met with almost universal acclaim. The giant football statue that "graced" the entrance to the Vivekananda Yuva Bharati Krirangan in Salt Lake in Kolkata since 2017, a statue that the new sports and youth services minister of West Bengal, Nishit Pramanik, called "ugly-looking", is gone. And no one is shedding any tears for it. Well, almost no one. The former chief minister Mamata Banerjee said, "I feel very bad." That's natural. The statue was apparently her brainchild. She had designed the logo on it. She said sports fans loved to take selfies with it. But the statue, a pair of giant veined legs in white shorts with a globe for its torso, was never exactly beloved or critically admired. Chandrima S. Bhattacharya, a journalist with the *The Telegraph*, had written in 2019 "it hits you in the stomach" and "it signifies a brutal end to the imagination." "Leg-alas", a friend nicknamed it after watching *Lord of the Rings*. The new sports minister was however incorrect when he said "such a grotesque structure has no meaning." Public art always has meaning and dismantling public art always sends a message. Kolkata is littered with public art that show the former government's attempts to project Kolkata as a world city—from Big Ben-like clock towers to a giant statue of Lionel Messi (which has also been hauled away). Mamata rued

that this destruction of public art was petty minded. "We didn't take down statues of Lenin," she said. Lenin might have withstood the transition from the Left Front to Trinamool, but the 25ft-tall fibreglass Paroma sculpture in the city vanished almost overnight in 2014 under Mamata's watch. Artists were outraged. The sculpture of a tribal woman, inspired by folk art, was by renowned artist Shanu Lahiri who had died the year before. It had become such a landmark since it was installed in 1987, the area became known as Paroma Island. But it had to make way for one of the BiswaBangla globes. One might say what goes around comes around. At that time, the artist Chittrovanu Mazumdar had told *The Times of India*, "In the US minimalist sculptor Richard Serra's works have often courted controversy and led to public debate. Why can't that happen here?" He was probably referring to the *Tilted Arc* affair. In 1981, Serra installed a 15-ton rusting steel slab that cut across Federal Plaza in Lower Manhattan. He wanted to challenge passersby used to thinking of public art as generals on horseback or Greek gods. He didn't think public art had to necessarily beautify public space. He wanted to disrupt it instead. Many New Yorkers did not agree. *The New York Times* art critic Grace Glueck called it "an awkward, bullying piece that may conceivably be the ugliest outdoor art in the city." Employees of the government offices around the plaza collected signatures demanding its removal. It eventually led to a public forum where its opponents argued it attracted graffiti and rats and was a security hazard. Its proponents said it was site-specific and would make no sense elsewhere. The jury voted to remove the sculpture. Serra sued citing his right to free speech but to no avail. The sculpture belonged to the government not him. One night it was cut up and hauled away to a scrap metal yard. It was replaced by mounds of hedges and curving benches where office workers could enjoy their lunch, art meant to



A statue of Lionel Messi being moved for re-installation in Kolkata. AFP

placate not provoke. In 1990 the US passed the Visual Artists Rights Act protecting artists' "moral rights" from destruction and distortion. But it also forced government agencies to prioritise community integration while commissioning public art. "I don't think it is the function of art

to be pleasing," Serra said at the time. "Art is not democratic. It is not for the people." Kolkata's Leg-alas sculpture might not have been pleasing but it was certainly meant for the people. As were several other eyesores that have passed for public art lately, including the

"Swaying Messi" and the so-called "Ray of Despair" which bears no resemblance to Satyajit Ray. At least Serra wanted to challenge the public with his art. As did another American artist Frank Stella, whose sculpture *Amabel*, installed in Seoul in 1996 at a cost of \$1.4 million was meant to honour a friend's daughter who had been killed in a plane crash. But the mangled steel structure was so controversial that critics decided to plant trees to hide it instead of spending more money to relocate it. It all raises an interesting question about public art, whether in Kolkata or New York. What is the real purpose of public art? In India, most of the time it's either about beautification or it's just a monument to patriotism. Thus we suddenly have Mickey Mouse pop up as generic street art in Indian cities. Or a giant statue of Sardar Patel to inspire awe. In fact, public art in India these days tends to believe bigger is always better—*Statue of Unity* (182m), *Statue of Belief* (Lord Shiva; 112.4m) and *Statue of Equality* (Ramanuja; 65.8m). India has the world's tallest, second-tallest and third-tallest sitting statues. The Bengal government too has promised a 125-foot statue for Syama Prasad Mukherjee's 125th birth anniversary. Public art in general is not born out of public discussion, input and demand. It's usually what is called "plonk" art, plonked down by someone in government who sees in it a way to convey a message. At least this much we can say—Leg-alas at its worst reflected the chief minister's artistic pretensions. There was no bigger propaganda message hammered into it. Unlike Mount Rushmore where four American Presidents were carved into the mountain to symbolise granite-faced greatness, ironically on a mountain that had been taken from the Lakota tribe at gunpoint during the Great Sioux War in 1876. It's not surprising Donald Trump thinks it would be a "good idea" to add himself to the quad. George Washington was selected to represent the birth of the republic, Thomas Jefferson to symbolise its territorial expan-

sion, Theodore Roosevelt to memorialise America's emergence as a global power and Abraham Lincoln to remind viewers of the preservation of the Union. Trump could claim his role in supposedly Making America Great Again, and makes for the perfect granite coda to the achievements of the other four. Public art usually does not invite interaction. When it does, it's often the wrong kind. Murals of women doing yoga in Gwalior were found to have scratches and marks around their private parts. They had to be whitewashed, which itself is a kind of artistic statement. When Anish Kapoor's controversial open-air sculpture *Dirty Corner* at the Chateau de Versailles in France was vandalised in 2015 with anti-Semitic slogans, he chose to let them stay, issuing a statement saying, "Can I the artist transform this cross act of political vandalism and violence into a public creative aesthetic act? Would this not then be the best revenge?" That raises a fascinating question. Instead of taking a bulldozer to the hapless headless footballer of Kolkata, could it have become the focus of a different kind of public art experiment? When the minister says it was ugly, few disagreed. However when a minister says it will be replaced by something more "aesthetically pleasing", many are wary. Could it have become a subject on which the public could have actually weighed in—what to do with it and what to place in its stead? We will never know the answer because public art seems to be more about public selfies not public engagement. I cannot say I will miss the gigantic legs which always made me feel a bit stomped upon. But over time it's grotesquerie too had worked itself into the psyche of the city. It unintentionally delivered a flying kick to the crazy headless world we lived in. I am not sad it's gone but I almost regret I never took a selfie with it. *Cult Friction is a fortnightly column on issues we keep rubbing up against. Sandip Roy (@sandipr) is a writer, journalist and radio host.*

At fashion shoots, it's safety last

The recent death of a model exposes the Indian fashion industry's disregard for its workers

Pooja Singh
pooja.s@livemint.com

It's been over a week since Delhi-based model Divyanshu Joshi drowned in an abandoned quarry that had turned into a deep lake in Kerala's Mudakuzha village. The quarry was known to be dangerous and had been off-limits to the public for several years. The investigation is underway, but the gaps between what the different parties are claiming happened that day have only widened. Joshi, 26, had travelled to Kerala for an advertisement shoot for Delhi-based design brand Kartik Research. Earlier this year, Joshi had walked the ramp for the brand at the Lakmé Fashion Week in Mumbai. The label, founded in 2021 by Kartik Kumra and which has stores in Delhi and New York, is scheduled to showcase at the Paris Men's Fashion Week on 25 June. In a statement to *Lounge*, Kartik Research said: "Kartik (Kumra) entered the water to search for Divyanshu but was unable to locate him. The team simultaneously contacted the production team and emergency services. Police arrived promptly, followed shortly by the Kerala Fire and Rescue Services." Sarin A.S., station house officer (SHO) of Kodanad Police Station in Ernakulam district, however, told *Lounge*, "Nobody jumped in the lake after Joshi." Amid the conflicting accounts, one thing is clear: models continue to work in an industry where basic protections remain absent. *Lounge* spoke to several models to understand whether they receive any form of insurance coverage or whether brands enforce safety protocols during campaign shoots and runway presentations outside the formal fashion week circuit. The answer was an overwhelming no. Most were reluctant to be identified. Several models and industry professionals also pointed to the absence of basic emergency preparedness on sets and outdoor shoots. In many cases, there are no clearly defined contingency plans outlin-



ing how teams should respond if an accident like drowning, flooding, a truss falling apart or a medical emergency occurs. Safety briefings are rare and post-incident responses tend to lack empathy, coordination and practical clarity. Few productions, they say, truly plan for a worst-case scenario. A model shared, for instance, how they got burnt while filming with candles on set and there wasn't any medicine or first-aid kit available. They had to stop modelling for some months till the burn marks healed. Models are often the "least protected" people on set, says Delhi-based Pooja Katyal, who has worked as a runway and campaign model for fashion brands over the past eight years. "There are brands that do follow safety measures during shoots," she says. "But it is far from being an industry norm." Ujjwal Dhir, who quit modelling earlier this year after working in the industry since 2022, echoes Katyal's concerns. Having worked with Joshi on several assignments, he remembers him as compassionate and hardworking and someone who was deeply invested in building a career in modelling. "Insurance is not a standard practice across most assignments in the industry,

especially for freelance models," says Dhir, 26, who heads marketing for Uma, a restaurant in Goa. "Most collaborations and projects are limited to agreed professional fees and deliverables, without any additional provisions such as health, accident or life insurance coverage." The lack of protection extends beyond insurance. "In many cases, teams struggle to provide even basic comforts such as decent accommodation, meals and working conditions," he says. "Most models, especially newcomers, are primarily focused on securing opportunities and building their careers. When a project comes along, the first things that usually come to mind are the work itself, the exposure and the payment. Discussions around insurance, health welfare or similar benefits rarely happen, and many people don't even think to ask about them." The deeper issue lies in the industry's approach to safety itself. "The bigger problem is that almost everything connected to a project is treated as more important than a person's life," says Delhi-based model Kritika Goyal, 25, who has been in the industry since 2022. "Even basic precautions such as keeping a first-aid kit on site, arranging an ambulance, a lifeguard or any emergency rescue service

are rarely prioritised. The focus is always on executing the project, while safety becomes an afterthought." The competition is so intense that models often go to great lengths just to secure work. "The fear of being replaced is so pervasive that many even work for free in the early stages of their careers," says Katyal. "I have been asked to travel to another city at my own expense, and I have said no, but many do agree."

Most models see it as an independent profession where they are responsible for arranging their own health or accident coverage, if they choose to have it, adds Dhir. "Models are often expected to work in all kinds of environments—whether that's shooting in the extreme weather conditions in Ladakh, in deserts and remote locations across Rajasthan, on rocky shores and beaches. That said, unfortunate incidents like this (the Kerala case) do raise important questions about whether the industry should start paying more attention to safety standards, welfare measures and some form of protection for talent working on assignments." Sunil Sethi, chairperson of the Fashion Design Council of India (FDCI), says the organisation's fashion weeks/events are insured, including coverage for participating talent such as models. Kochi-based Ramesh Menon, founder of non-profit Save The Loom, which works with Khadi and handloom weavers, has witnessed a rise in Indian fashion brands using Kerala's backwaters as a visual backdrop over the past three years, often without following proper procedures or safety guidelines. "Especially when you are shooting out of station, you need to set up a local line production team that helps acquire the necessary licences and permissions, and makes you aware of local rules," says Menon, who has previously worked with international brands such as Spain's Puig on campaigns in Kochi that involved strict adherence to legal protocols. "In the Joshi case, you needed permission from the panchayat to enter that quarry, but nobody took it. How can a team enter an area that has been cordoned off without permission?" The larger problem lies in the absence of accountability and safety. "There are no strict guidelines around responsibility in the event of an accident—who pays, who is accountable," Menon says. "In India, people often dismiss these things as minor issues until something serious happens, unlike the systems that many international brands follow. There is still a very

strong culture of *jugaad* among Indian brands and the industry at large." Designer Rahul Mishra says the conversation around safety and insurance is beginning within parts of the industry. "While dedicated accident insurance for campaign shoots has not traditionally formed part of our production framework in India, we recognise that the industry is evolving, and so must we," says Mishra. He says insurance for his fashion shows is generally built into event and production frameworks, both in India and internationally, and is often treated as a standard part of the process. Mishra adds that his team members travelling internationally on behalf of the brand are covered through comprehensive travel and medical insurance policies. "We are working towards incorporating accident insurance, either through existing arrangements or, where needed, facilitated by us, as a standard part of our outdoor shoots and production activities going forward," he says. What may ultimately prove to be the most meaningful safeguard for models is the formation of a strong organisation to push for basic labour protections, fair contracts, insurance coverage, safer working conditions and greater accountability across the fashion industry. But that remains a difficult proposition in an industry shaped by informal power structures, intense competition and insecurity. Every year, grooming schools and modelling agencies introduce hundreds of aspiring faces into an already oversaturated market where runway visibility is increasingly dominated by Bollywood actors, influencers and "real people" campaigns. "The bigger challenge is participation and representation," says Dhir. "A large number of models remain silent even when they encounter serious issues because they do not want to risk relationships with agencies, designers, brands or casting professionals who may offer future work opportunities. Staying in everyone's good books is often seen as necessary for survival in the industry." And this silence extends far beyond newcomers. "Even many established and senior models avoid taking public positions on industry issues," he says. "Only a relatively small section of people are willing to openly raise concerns or advocate for change." This is an industry claiming that it is poised to go global but still lacks the most fundamental protections for people who work in it. Until it addresses these concerns, a model's life in India will continue to be undervalued.

Skiping local line production and mandatory panchayat permits, many Indian fashion brands shoot in hazardous landscapes without any safety framework

Opinion

SATURDAY, JUNE 6, 2026



GOLD RESERVES
RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra

Gold holdings are reported in dollar terms and are revalued every week based on prevailing market prices. Changes in valuation should not be interpreted as changes in physical holdings

Inflation's long shadow

RBI faces a difficult balancing act as higher oil prices threaten both economic activity and price stability

WITH THE RESERVE Bank of India (RBI) raising its inflation forecast for FY27 by a steep 50 basis points (bps) to 5.1%, and with a real possibility that actual inflation could overshoot that estimate, a policy rate hike later this year now appears increasingly likely. The RBI's projections place inflation at 5.9% in the December quarter, perilously close to the upper end of its 2-6% tolerance band. More importantly, Governor Sanjay Malhotra made it clear that the central bank's commitment to the 4% inflation target remains unchanged and highlighted the risks from second-round effects, including wage pressures. With petrol and diesel prices already rising, producers and service providers are expected to pass on higher input costs to consumers in the coming months. Reflecting these pressures, core inflation is now projected at 4.7% for FY27, up from 4.4% estimated earlier.

The implication is that the growth outlook has become considerably more challenging. Elevated energy and commodity prices, coupled with supply shortages, are likely to weigh on economic activity. Some high-frequency indicators are already showing signs of fatigue. A weak monsoon and lower agricultural output could further dampen rural demand, while urban households will see purchasing power eroded by rising prices. Unless supply bottlenecks ease quickly, there are downside risks to the RBI's revised GDP growth forecast of 6.6% for the current year. Yet, given the dangers of entrenched inflation, price stability will inevitably take precedence over growth concerns. Whether the RBI moves in August or waits until October will depend largely on developments in West Asia and the trajectory of crude oil prices. If oil prices remain elevated and domestic fuel prices continue to rise, markets should prepare for cumulative rate hikes of 50-100 bps over the course of the tightening cycle.

As closely as markets watched the inflation and growth forecasts, they were equally focused on the RBI's stance on the rupee, which had weakened nearly 6% between January and early June. Significantly, the central bank has chosen not to use interest rates as a tool to defend the currency. Instead, it has worked with the government to introduce a series of measures aimed at attracting foreign capital. These include swap concessions for external commercial borrowings by state-owned enterprises, hedging relaxations for foreign currency non-resident (bank) deposits, tax relief for foreign investments in government securities, and an expanded universe of eligible bonds. Together, these measures are expected to attract \$40-45 billion over the coming months. If realised, such inflows would substantially narrow the estimated balance-of-payments gap of \$60-65 billion. Investor confidence in these measures was reflected in the rupee's sharp appreciation on Friday, when it closed at 94.9450 to the dollar.

The policy review came against the backdrop of a surprisingly strong growth performance in FY26. GDP expanded 7.7%, up from 7.1% in FY25, aided by income-tax and goods and services tax cuts introduced in September 2025. Private final consumption expenditure grew 7.7%, a marked improvement on the previous year's 5.8%. Gross capital formation also remained robust at 8.2%. Importantly, employment-intensive sectors such as trade, hotels, and transport grew by 11%, compared with a modest 6.6% in FY25. These numbers provide some cushion as the economy navigates a more difficult inflation environment, but sustaining such momentum in the face of higher prices and tighter monetary conditions will be a far greater challenge. After two years of relative macroeconomic stability, India is entering a period where the margin for error is narrower and the variables harder to control.

Courting foreign investors

Friday's measures to attract dollar deposits and investments should provide a meaningful cushion

THE PACKAGE OF measures unveiled by the government and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to attract foreign capital and stabilise the rupee could bring in \$40-50 billion over the coming months. That would provide a meaningful cushion against a widening balance-of-payments deficit and ease concerns over India's external financing requirements at a time of elevated crude oil prices and global uncertainty. A substantial portion of the inflows is expected to come through fresh foreign currency non-resident (bank) FCNR(B) deposits. Banks could mobilise \$25-30 billion in non-resident deposits with maturities of three to five years, aided by an RBI swap facility under which the central bank will absorb the hedging costs. The same concessional swap window will be available to public sector entities raising external commercial borrowings (ECBs), reducing borrowing costs, and potentially facilitating another \$20-25 billion of overseas funding.

To be sure, the backdrop is less favourable than it was in 2013, when a similar FCNR(B) scheme was introduced during the taper tantrum. US interest rates are significantly higher today. Even so, banks should be able to offer non-resident depositors returns of 6-6.6%, compared with US Treasury yields of around 4.2-4.4% for comparable maturities, because they will no longer bear the annualised hedging cost of roughly 3%. The 2013 scheme had helped mobilise about \$26 billion in deposits. The government has complemented these measures by scrapping the 12.5% capital gains tax and the 20% tax on coupon interest earned by foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) in government securities. It has also expanded the pool of eligible securities under the Fully Accessible Route (FAR) to include more long-dated bonds and relaxed several investment restrictions, including short-term limits, concentration caps, and individual security restrictions.

These tax concessions make India a more competitive destination for fixed-income investors relative to peers such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Mexico, and South Africa. Given that foreign investment in government securities is among the least expensive sources of external financing, the move is both timely and sensible. Yet taxation has not been the principal reason for subdued foreign participation in India's sovereign debt market. Currency risk has been the bigger deterrent. Despite relatively attractive yields, foreign appetite for Indian government bonds has weakened sharply. Inflows through the FAR route fell from nearly \$15 billion in 2024 to \$6.4 billion in 2025, while net inflows this year have remained modest. The reason is straightforward: the rupee has depreciated significantly against the dollar since early 2025, eroding much of the return available to foreign investors. Although currency hedging is possible, post-tax hedged returns have often not been compelling enough to justify large allocations. Higher US interest rates have also narrowed the yield advantage that Indian bonds traditionally enjoyed.

Even so, the tax relief may deliver benefits beyond immediate capital inflows. It could help address one of the factors that has delayed India's inclusion in major global bond benchmarks such as the Bloomberg Global Aggregate Index and the FTSE World Government Bond Index. India is already represented in prominent global bond indices, yet foreign investors still hold only around 3% of the country's \$1.3-trillion sovereign debt market, compared with roughly 12% in Indonesia. Inclusion in additional benchmarks would automatically broaden the investor base by attracting passive funds, pension pools, and other long-term institutional investors. While the latest measures are clearly a step in the right direction, they are unlikely on their own to trigger a dramatic surge in foreign investment. The higher investment limits for non-resident Indians and overseas citizens of India will improve access, but investors will continue to focus on currency stability and relative returns. India remains an attractive destination because of its growth prospects and prudent macroeconomic management. But if policymakers want foreign participation in the bond market to rise meaningfully, restoring confidence in the rupee will be just as important as offering tax incentives. Sustained capital inflows ultimately depend on both.

THERE MAY BE MERIT IN THE RBI NOT REACTING TO PRICE SIGNALS AND PROJECTIONS ON INFLATION IMMEDIATELY

A coordinated policy action

THE JUNE MONETARY policy decision is surely not about rates and stance alone. This policy represents a closely coordinated action by the RBI along with the government to squarely address possibly the most important risk facing the Indian economy — external imbalances, arising more from capital outflows than as a clear risk from the current account end. As regards the rates and the stance, there is a hint of hawkishness in the RBI's messaging. But the clear view remains that the central bank is unlikely to react to the rising inflation forecasts with a rate hike, unless it has crystal clarity on whether the inflation is temporary or permanent and if there is a significant second-round impact of the inflation dynamics.

On the government's part, it announced measures to deepen the government securities (G-sec) market by seeking to increase participation of foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) in the Fully Accessible Route (FAR) whereby FPIs now can invest in the 15-, 30-, and 40-year buckets. Under the general route, there was more flexibility given to FPIs by removing the restrictions that exist now on limits for short-term investment, concentration limits, and security-wide limits. Further, the government has now done away with the long-term capital gains tax and the withholding tax on FPIs for investments in the G-sec market. The withholding stand was a sticking point against India getting included in the global indices. It is thus an important step from the longer-term perspective.

The RBI chipped in with its own contribution by offering concessional forex swap for external commercial borrowings (ECBs) raised by PSUs. Further, it offers to fully absorb the hedging cost if banks raise foreign currency non-resident (bank) FCNR (B) deposits for the

INDRANIL PAN

Chief Economist, YES Bank



three-five-year period. On paper, the benefits of these policy measures could potentially be large. Yet, at this moment it is difficult to quantify the extent of flows that may be anticipated.

First, we do not think that the FPIs will change their risk perception of India by being allowed in the longer tenor buckets, given the interest rate risks existing today and a likely tightening of monetary policy in India sooner or later.

FPIs' view on the India markets would thus be hugely dependent on a call on local interest rates. This accounts for the huge unutilised space under the FAR route. ECB flows could pick up, but we believe the extent of fresh inflows may not be higher than \$4-5 billion. On the FCNR(B) front, the deal has been sweetened by taking off the cash reserve ratio and statutory liquidity ratio requirements — if offered along with leveraging facilities, they could garner \$35-40 billion. Overall, these measures are likely to lead to a one-time capital flow boost to correct/contain the balance-of-payments deficit for FY27. The advantage derived from these flows would also be that it would boost the RBI's FX reserves, thereby pushing up the ammunition to fight rupee depreciation pressures in the future.

There remains a strong probability for rate hikes to start in August. Clearly, monetary policy has a limited scope to address supply-led price shocks and there may be merit in the RBI not reacting to price signals and projections on inflation immediately. The RBI sounds cautious on inflation trends and tweaks Q3FY27 inflation to 5.9%, close to the upper end of the corridor. But in the same breadth, it points out that core inflation is low, implying absence of any demand-side pressures on prices.

While we wait for the Monetary Policy Committee minutes to form a better view, like in April, the RBI took the unanimous decision to pause as it wanted to avoid any policy missteps of hiking earlier than necessary which could further worsen the growth outlook from the currently anticipated 6.6% for

FY27. The RBI has thus bought time to understand the second-round implications of the supply shocks on prices, the incremental pass-through of higher crude prices to the pump-head prices of petrol and diesel, the pass-through of higher input costs of manufacturers to the retail side, and the impact on food inflation due to the anticipated El Niño and weaker mon-

Tracking household inflation expectations would be important for the RBI. As revealed by its latest surveys, both the three-month and one-year inflation expectations have continued to move up

Global imbalances are back



AMOL AGRAWAL

The author teaches at the National Institute of Securities Markets

The global economy is in a precarious position with heightened geopolitical frictions and the geoeconomic fragmentation of supply chains

MULTIPLE SHOCKS HAVE rocked the global economy. While the bulk of economic research is focused on understanding the impact of these shocks, one school of research is warning us about global imbalances making a comeback.

Before discussing global imbalances, we need to understand current accounts. The current account records exports and imports of all goods and services of a country with the rest of the world. In case of a current account surplus, an economy's exports are higher than imports, whereas a deficit indicates that exports are lower than imports. Deficits are financed via capital inflows, which come from countries with surpluses. They invest these surpluses as capital outflows. It is natural that some countries will have surpluses and others will have deficits, and it is also a zero-sum game. The problem starts when these deficits/surpluses become large and persistent, transforming into so-called global imbalances.

Global imbalances have occurred in multiple waves since the 1870s, which is when the journey of globalisation began. In the first wave, capital flowed from the UK to Australia, in line with growth theories that suggest return on investments are higher in poor, capital-scarce countries. The wave ended as a result of World War I. In the 1920s, the US became a surplus country that channelised funds to Latin America

and Europe. That ended in crisis due to the abrupt tightening of monetary policy by the Federal Reserve. Global imbalances were limited for the next 50 years due to the Great Depression, World War II, and the Bretton Woods system that limited capital flows.

The breakdown of Bretton Woods in 1971 led to the return of global imbalances with one major change. Unlike previous waves where the surplus countries were rich and deficit countries were poor, the major deficit country in this case — the US — was the richest. It financed its deficits from other surplus countries. Till the 1980s, US deficits were financed by oil-exporting countries and Japan who were then joined by emerging countries such as China. This reverse flow of capital from emerging to developed countries was first highlighted by economist Robert Lucas and became known as the Lucas paradox. Economists explained the paradox by highlighting that the poor countries, apart from facing political risks, also lacked human and physical capital as well as financial systems. Thus, the returns were not as high there, as suggested by the growth theory.

Economists also tried to explain what was leading to high deficits and surpluses in the US. In 2002, then Fed

Chair Ben Bernanke, in a famous speech, said that the US generated high deficits as its investments were higher than savings, and the rest was financed by borrowing from abroad. The savings were low as high government deficits were eating into the savings pool. China was doing the opposite by deploying their higher savings into global markets, particularly US government bonds, financing the latter's high current account deficits and budget deficits. In Bernanke's words, there was a savings glut in emerging countries, particularly China, that led to the reverse flow of capital. The speech sparked wide debates among economists on whether a savings glut or investment deficit led to the imbalances.

The debates on global imbalances paused following the 2008 crisis. In fact, a few economists opined that the global imbalances led to the crisis. Excess savings depressed interest rates around the world, leading to a search for higher yields, which found their way in housing markets and complex financial products. The bubbles in housing and finance markets eventually led to the 2008 crisis. The US current account deficit declined from 6% of GDP before the crisis to 2% of GDP after it.

Global imbalances have occurred in multiple waves since the 1870s, which is when the journey of globalisation began

Nearly 20 years later, why are global imbalances making a comeback? Prima facie, global imbalances had only narrowed, but never really disappeared. The multiple shocks of Covid-19 and the ongoing wars have widened the US budget and current account deficits to 5% and 4% of GDP respectively. On the surplus side, China has used an aggressive mix of industrial policies to keep its exports competitive. Such policies are used by governments to promote certain economic sectors and combine subsidies, tax breaks, tariffs, and infrastructure support to pick "economic winners". Governments worldwide have used some variants of industrial policy, leading to heated debates about whether such policies have worked. Just like global imbalances are making a comeback, so are these policies.

Global imbalances are not just back, they are also threatening to push the global economy into a major crisis. History suggests that if imbalances widen they could lead to or deepen crises. The global economy is in a precarious position with heightened geopolitical frictions and the geoeconomic fragmentation of supply chains. The two key protagonists of today's global imbalances — the US and China — are also the key actors in the game of geopolitics. How this combination of imbalances and uncertainty will play out is anyone's guess.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Exam leaks betray a broken system

Apropos of "Trust under examination" (FE, June 5), the endless leaks and sudden delays in our national entrance exams show that the entire testing system is deeply broken. Putting all major exams under one central agency was supposed to make things smoother, but it actually made mistakes much more dangerous. Now, a single glitch or

leaked paper instantly ruins the hard work of millions of students. The real issue is that nobody takes the blame, as testing agencies, tech companies, and centres merely point fingers at each other. Computers and digital systems cannot fix bad management; they just change the way things fail. We need to stop relying entirely on single, high-pressure exams that decide a student's entire future in one day.

—K Chidanand Kumar, Bangalore

FPI outflows

Apropos of "Why are FPIs exiting?" (FE, June 5), foreign portfolio investor (FPI) outflows deserve a measured reading rather than alarm. Global risk-off sentiment driven by elevated US interest rates and persistent geopolitical uncertainty remains the dominant factor, not India-specific weakness. Domestic fundamentals including corporate earnings, gradual fiscal consolidation, and

private consumption remain broadly intact. Policymakers should resist the temptation to respond with sudden regulatory adjustments, which create fresh uncertainty and potentially amplify outflows. Consistent, predictable policy signalling is the most durable reassurance available to long-term institutional investors.

—SP Suganya Devi, Coimbatore

●Write to us at feletters@expressindia.com

**A thought for today***It is not the mountain we conquer, but ourselves*

EDMUND HILLARY

Everest's Shepherds

We owe the summit to Sherpas

Tenzing Norgay's friend Rabinranath Mitra had started a rumour about the Sherpa having three lungs. Many believed it. Seventy years later, you could say the same of Dawa 'Hillary' Sherpa, without drawing incredulous looks. How did a 52-year-old survive six days on Everest, without food, water and bottled oxygen? The theory we like most is also the simplest – mental strength. Because physiology alone is useless in a hopeless situation. And what can be more hopeless than falling into a 60-foot crevasse, with no way out? But 'Hillary' patiently watched snow fill up the gap, clambered out, and kept going till he was rescued.



Of course, physiology helps, and some Sherpa genetic adaptations are incredible. Ordinary folks produce more red blood cells at altitude to overcome oxygen scarcity, but this thickens the blood, making it sluggish. Sherpas don't. Cambridge scientists found that Sherpa mitochondria – the energy producing part of each cell – are super efficient at using oxygen, and making ATP to fuel muscles. Ordinary folks make less phosphocreatine – our auxiliary energy source – at altitude, but Sherpas produce more. All of this is thanks to thousands of years spent on the Tibetan plateau – Sherpas' ancestral home.

And we owe much to it. If Everest has become a walk in the park – more than 11,000 ascents in the past 20 years – it's thanks to Sherpas. Their experience has made climbing safer. The death rate has halved, from 1.4% before 2006, to 0.7% now. And 40% of all Everest deaths are Sherpas, starting with seven on the second attempt in 1922. Know what? They rarely die near the top, where altitude sickness is the greatest risk. Rather, Sherpas lose their lives in preparatory work, fixing ropes and ladders, carrying provisions. Making our dreams come true.

Words & Pictures

Graphic novels could help with the reading crisis

French-Iranian author Marjane Satrapi, who died too young, will forever be celebrated for her iconic autobiographical graphic novel, *Persepolis*. Not only because it serves as an intimate record of a young girl's life in the Islamic Republic of Iran, but also because of the medium through which it communicates. Graphic novels are one of the fastest growing categories of literature in global publishing markets. And they appear to be digital proof – since 2019, graphic novel sales in US have doubled to 35mn books a year.



There's history to this. Graphic novels evolved in the West from newspaper comics. By the middle of previous century, the comic scene exploded in US, especially with the superhero genre. But then the puritans stepped in, questioning the literary value of the medium, seen to be either childish or deviant. Graphic novels went underground, re-emerged grittier, like Art Spiegelman's Holocaust-themed *Maus* and Alan Moore's *Watchmen*. The French got skin in the game too, a la *Valerian*. By early 2000s, Japanese manga publishers began translating works into English for export.

As the various streams met, the rich illustrations and deep storylines had younger readers hooked. The themes covered everything from dealing with divorce of parents (*Mend*) to bullying (*Silent Voice*) to camaraderie (*Naruto*). The numbers speak: The Indian manga market is expected to grow from \$615mn in 2025 to \$3.5bn by 2034. So, local publishers are jumping in, collabs & crossovers are mushrooming (like *India Calling Me Now*). And perhaps, that could be the answer to tackling the reading crisis among youngsters.

Eating Meat Without Killing Animals...

...And helping the planet as we do it

Three obvious things you can do to save the planet? Stop driving, flying and...eating meat. Plenty of studies confirm this. But just because something's obvious, doesn't mean it's doable. Car use hasn't crashed despite cataclysmic warnings of climate change. Likewise, people won't stop eating meat just because the sky is about to fall. In fact, meat consumption is growing at a record rate as living standards rise around the world. So, are we cooked?

Bruce Friedrich, founder of the think tank, Good Food Institute, doesn't think so. In his book, *Meat: How the Next Agricultural Revolution Will Transform Humanity's Favourite Food – and Our Future*, he says driving and meat are not the real problems. Driving is bad only because it pulls carbon buried underground millions of years ago, and releases it into the atmosphere, warming the planet. But now, we have a fix – renewable energy and electric cars. Meat is even worse for the environment, but only because of the way it is produced. If we find a better, more efficient, way to produce meat, that's taken care of, too.

How do we fix meat? Start by seeing the damage it does. In 2006, world consumed 266mn tonnes of meat. Now, the number is 370mn tonnes – a 40% increase. All those animals need mountains of feed to survive, some 1.1bn tonnes of cereals alone in 2021. And growing crops for animals needs land on a scale you can't imagine.

If meat consumption continues growing at the current rate, we'll need another 3.3bn hectares to satisfy everyone. "Twice the area of India and China combined, plus Indonesia." But, the real problem isn't meat, it's animals. Because they have to be fed for months, or

years, before they become meat, meat production is inefficient. "You need 910 plant calories to make 100 calories of chicken, which is the most efficient animal at converting feed to meat."

All those billions of animals packed together inhumanely are also breeding ground for diseases. Remember Covid? So, 70% of global output of antibiotics – about 100,000 tonnes – is fed to keep animals alive and disease-free, giving rise to drug-resistant strains. There are many other problems, but the solution for all is obvious – make meat without animals.

It's not a crazy idea. Thousands of scientists are working on it. One approach is to make meat-like food from plants. But biology makes it difficult. "Plant proteins are globular; animal proteins are fibrous. Plant oils are liquids at room temperature; animal fats are solids." Hence, it's hard to make a plant-based recipe taste like meat. But not impossible.

The other approach is to grow goat, pig, salmon – whatever you fancy – tissue, a.k.a. meat, in giant vats. The pharma industry does this kind of cultivation every day, but not on the scale needed to feed the world. Once the link between meat and animals is broken, die-hard vegetarians might also say yes to "cultivated" meat, so demand could be far higher than current trends.

How far are we from cultivated meat? In 2013, Google co-founder Sergey Brin had paid a small fortune for the first hamburger made from lab-grown meat. Last year, a Washington DC restaurant served Pacific salmon sashimi and chipotle meatballs – both lab-grown – to 60 diners. Singapore, Japan, Israel, US, S Korea and China, are all bankrolling research to scale up cultivated meat production, for their food security. It could be on your plate sooner than you think.

mindfield

SHORT TAKES ON BIG IDEAS



The First Trillionaire Problem

SpaceX's IPO will lob Elon Musk's wealth & power to cosmic scale. Whether or not he takes us to Mars, he will accelerate humanity's future in ways govts can't. His thoughts & algorithms will shape the planetary mind. In the People's Republic of Elon, he decides what's good, what's bad

Arnab Ray



LA-based computer scientist

With SpaceX preparing for its IPO, the largest in Wall Street history, the man who owns 42% of it, Elon Musk, already the richest person in the world, is about to become the world's first trillionaire. At that cosmic scale, the money no longer makes sense to my middle-class mind. Neither does the power, which now lies concentrated

in the mind of one individual. One of the celebrated strengths of democracy is that it diffuses the impact of the powerful individual. One person by themselves can do very little. The weirdness of the uncle and the pet opinions of the aunty do not matter at the population level, because everyone gets to control only one minuscule shard of the body politic, through their vote. This is, as the cliché goes, a feature, not a bug. It prevents the collective from being exposed entirely to the whims and vagaries of one individual, which is exactly what happens in an autocracy.

Constraining the power of the powerful individual is one of the defining characteristics of a mature democracy, and to achieve that, there are multiple controls put into place over and above one-citizen-one-vote, multiple independent institutions that exist to exert a system of checks and balances on individuals who are given power. When a person becomes a trillionaire, it's as if someone took an iron rod to the keystone of that system.

Now, someone else will say this is true for super-rich people in general. Money is power. The super-rich can influence politicians, lobby for their interests, get taxes reduced for themselves, and raise barriers for others.

But the trillionaire is a different beast entirely. This is no longer about influencing the arms of gov't (do this, do that), which happens even at the billionaire level, but about influencing the minds of men and societies, on what is right, what is wrong, what is good and what is bad.

A billionaire can fund a few media houses that promote an agenda. A trillionaire can change the way you experience media, what you see, and what you do

not see. A billionaire can run ads for a political candidate in his country. A trillionaire can fund a revolution in another. A billionaire can be brought down by what society considers to be against its interests. A trillionaire defines what those interests are.

A billionaire gets what he wants. A trillionaire makes you get what he wants.

This is the part of the article where you say, "I know where this is going." Cue Bernie Sanders, raising his hands and saying billionaires should not exist. And trillionaires? *Baap re baap*. But no, that is not the solution. The tyranny of taxing someone for

the risks they are willing to take.

So, is the autocracy of the trillionaire a good thing? Depends on what you mean by good. No democratically elected gov't in the world would be able to spend money on financing human settlements on other planets. Musk likely will. If humanity is to survive planetary extinction, the best shot may well be a successful SpaceX IPO.

The cruel irony of history is that you can find autocratic societies advancing more, creating more economic prosperity, than places where power is more diffused. How many times have you encountered something like this: so-and-so united the warring tribes and created so-and-so dynasty, ushering in an era of peace and prosperity.

One of the reasons why China is a superpower is precisely that, unlike democratic India, it does not have to roll back laws because people are coming out into the streets, or the opposition is holding their feet to the fire in Parliament. It can just do what it decides is in the greater good.

And this is precisely the downside of the power of the trillionaire. His thoughts and his vision of the world become yours. What you gain in X payouts you lose in terms of your mind being irrevocably shaped by the algorithm Musk controls.

So, what are you trying to say, you ask, *akhir kahena kya chahete ho?* Should Musk be stopped or not?

As a computer scientist, I can tell you that there is a class of problems that have no efficient solution. It does not matter how much computing resources you throw at it. It's not as if a person from the future will think of a better algorithm and we just haven't figured it out yet.

This is something very difficult to get your mind around when you first take "theory of computation", but the math tells you it is so. Some problems are fundamentally intractable. The problem of outsized wealth is one such. Every attempt to solve it creates other problems, often bigger ones. There is no clean right answer; only a choice about which problem you would rather live with.

And that choice, increasingly, is not yours to make. It belongs to the man with the trillions.

Image: AI



making more than people believe he should have made, to stop tyranny, is a circular reasoning trap that neo-Communists cannot escape from.

Society does better when smart people take risks, and outsized risks like building an electric vehicle company when no one else had been able to commercialise the technology, or starting a rocket company on private capital, require the hope of outsized rewards, like being able to leave a mark on history, to be possible at all.

The reason most transformative technical innovations happen in America, often driven by immigrants from more socialist cultures, is precisely this: United States places the fewest caps on what people can gain from

'On The Road: I Found My People At 6 AM'

Long-distance running has become a way for citywallahs to find both personal renewal and community. As kms pass, anxieties that seemed overwhelming, begin to shrink to manageable proportions

Milind Ghatwai



If the proliferation of long-distance running events across India is any indication, the phenomenon is here to stay. But to view it merely as a fitness trend, is to miss something larger. Running has evolved into one of urban India's most accessible forms of community plus self-expression, a space where people can simultaneously belong to a crowd and discover themselves.

Unlike most sports, long-distance running allows ordinary people to experience achievement without all-or-nothing competition. Yes, elite athletes and professionals race for podium places, prize money, records. But the vast majority are simply hoping to cross the finish line at a comfortable pace.

The beauty of such a race is that it accommodates every ambition. Top runners finish hours before the slowest participants. A handful get trophies. Everyone, who completes the distance within the stipulated time, receives a medal. For recreational runners, that small piece of metal carries the emotional weight of a championship trophy, because it represents a promise kept to oneself.

That means people often arrive at the sport carrying stories. Some come after a breakup or separation. Others after losing a job, confronting middle age, battling depression, recovering from illness, or simply feeling trapped in routine. Distance has a curious way of putting problems into perspective. As kms accumulate, anxieties that seemed overwhelming begin to shrink to manageable proportions.

Walking is usually something people do because a doctor recommends it. Running is different. Most people begin voluntarily, inspired by seeing friends, colleagues or strangers finding joy in it. What starts as a few tentative kms becomes a habit. Running alone offers solitude, with others it creates fellowship. In both cases, participants gradually discover a more

disciplined version of themselves.

The growth of running clubs across Indian cities reflects this shift. Early morning groups gather before the city awakens. Corporate executives run alongside students. Entrepreneurs share miles with retirees. Race day magnifies the sense of belonging. Major cities now host multiple events, some drawing tens of thousands of participants. The atmosphere is less sporting contest than civic festival. Volunteers cheer. Bands perform. For a few hours, roads normally surrendered to traffic, are reclaimed by people.

The diversity on display is striking. Bare-chested men run beside sari-clad women. Some run barefoot, others in expensive carbon-plated shoes. Some chase personal bests, others stop frequently for selfies. There are runners who sing, dance, chat, wave at spectators, pause to photograph landmarks. There are those who run backwards and those who walk entire sections.

The diversity underlines that running allows people to express themselves without requiring them to prove themselves. There is no selection committee, no coach deciding who belongs, no age barrier, no requirement to be exceptionally athletic. Most runners discover that persistence matters more than speed.

This is particularly evident among middle-aged runners, who now form the backbone of India's running movement. Many arrive seeking a response to expanding waistlines, stressful careers, or the unsettling realisation that youth is finite. They may dream of becoming faster, but they also learn to respect limitations. Improvement is desirable, but sustainability matters more.

The numbers tell their own story. At this year's Tata Mumbai Marathon, more than 11,600 runners completed the full marathon distance of 42.195km. Over 5,000 of them

were between 40 and 55 years old. Altogether, roughly 65,000 participants took part across various categories.

Part of running's popularity lies in its accessibility. It requires little specialised infrastructure. A decent pair of shoes, consistency, and motivation are enough to begin. Barriers to entry are remarkably low. Barriers to persistence, however, are internal. That's why finishing often feels meaningful. Elites and amateurs run the same course. World-class athletes and first-time participants cross the same start line, and finish beneath the same banner. Few sporting experiences place ordinary people so close to excellence, without diminishing either.

When thousands run across the Bandra-Worli Sea Link in Mumbai, past India Gate in Delhi, around Hussain Sagar in Hyderabad or along Marine Drive in Kochi, each runner carries a private reason for being there, but together they create something collective. The camaraderie is genuine.

Participants routinely stop to help strangers struggling with cramps, dehydration, exhaustion. A delay of a few minutes rarely matters. The finish line will still be there. And when they finally cross it, exhausted and relieved, the emotions are unmistakable. Some celebrate noisily. Some stretch in silence. Some limp. Some cry. Many pose proudly with their medals. What unites them is transformation. They have travelled farther than the measured distance on the course.

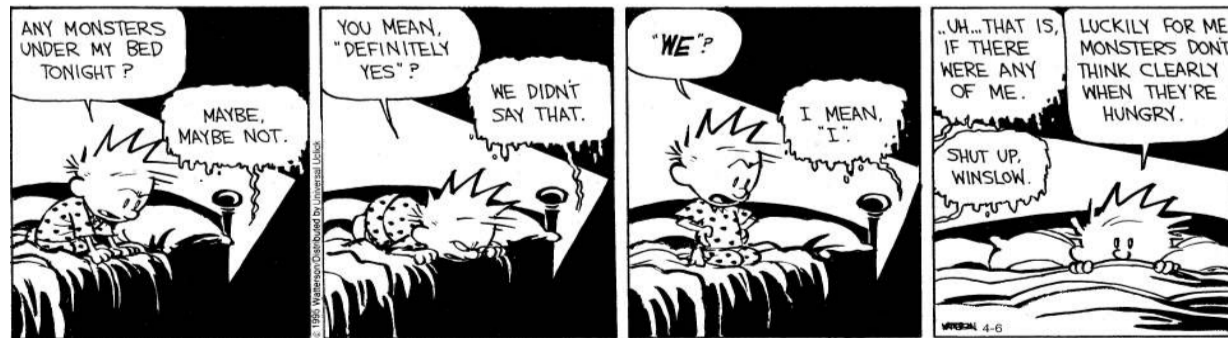
Running continues to grow because it offers something increasingly scarce in contemporary life: a chance to belong without conformity, to strive without hostility, and to express oneself without words. The medal may seem a low-hanging fruit. It is just that the tree stands many, many kms away.

The writer ran his first full marathon on Jan 18, at age 58

Image: AI



Calvin & Hobbes



Sacredspace

You will never be happy if you continue to search for what happiness consists of. You will never live if you are looking for the meaning of life.

Albert Camus

Krishn's Four Archetypes For The Digital Age

Pratiksha Apurv

We live in a time when algorithms express our thoughts, social media unsettles our emotions, notifications and alerts fracture our concentration. Yet we wonder why a collective anxiety shadows our daily lives.

So, what is the cure and where lies the solution? Krishn explains in Gita, 10.31, "Pavanah pavatam asmi ramah Shashtra-bhritam aham jhshanam makarash chasmi srotasam asmi jahnavi" – declaring himself to be the wind among purifiers, Ram among warriors, crocodile among water creatures and the Ganges among flowing rivers, he reminds us to step out of our conditioning and tune into the cosmic intelligence of existence.

Krishn says, "Of purifiers, I am the wind." In our hyper-connected world, our minds have become cluttered storage units for endless information, opinions, and visual noise. This mental traffic clouds our inner

clarity. The wind represents absolute freshness and unburdened movement. It carries no weight from yesterday and holds no anxiety for tomorrow. It simply sweeps away dead leaves and moves on.

Bringing the "wind element" into our current reality means practising digital and psychological detoxification. True purification means witnessing our thoughts without getting attached to them.

Then comes the most mysterious and beautiful statement: "Of those who bear weapons, I am Ram." Weapons represent power, strength, the capacity to act, to fight, to protect, even to destroy when necessary. But power alone is dangerous. Osho said that Ram is the rarest synthesis. He is a warrior; he fights Ravan, the symbol of ego, lust, and tyranny. Yet Ram is not driven by hatred or revenge. His heart is full of love, compassion, and

awareness. The man of perfect discipline, yet utterly human and loving. Ram has the power of a great warrior and consciousness of a Buddha. He can fight when it is necessary for the protection of dharma, yet he is without personal enmity or ego.

Krishn further proclaimed that "among water creatures, I am a crocodile." In competitive corporate and social environments, people often divide life into two extremes. They either become aggressively ambitious, exhausting themselves in endless pursuit, or they reject the material world entirely in search of peace. Krishn's philosophy dissolves this false division, pointing instead to what Osho called "Zorba the Buddha". A unique way of living, a flawless synthesis of outer material richness and inner spiritual depth. The crocodile represents absolute vitality, a focused life force, and unyielding

power moving through depths of the ocean. Krishn is teaching us not to fear or deny our life energy. We do not have to abandon our career or our modern life. Instead, we should learn to navigate the turbulent world while remaining anchored in our silent inner centre.

Finally, Krishn reveals the ultimate secret of existence: "Of flowing rivers, I am the Ganges." The defining crisis of our current generation is the desperate need to control everything. We try to secure our futures through data, financial models, and rigid plans. Yet this constant need to micro-manage deepens frustration and anxiety. A river originates from the silent, snowy peaks and rushes down towards the vast, unknown ocean.

To live like the Ganges means to master the art of letting go. Doing our absolute best and trusting the intelligence of existence. When we drop our rigid resistance, our stagnant anxieties begin to dissolve.



THE SPEAKING TREE



Editor's TAKE

From Caracas with crude

As the Strait of Hormuz stalls Indian tankers, a South American lifeline grows in strategic importance, opening a high-stakes diplomatic chapter

The visit of Venezuelan Acting-President Delcy Rodríguez is good news for Indian households, as she brings with her the promise of an alternative to Gulf oil that can keep Indian cars running and the wheels of industry turning. Venezuela's Acting President, heading a high-powered delegation that includes her finance, science and transportation ministers, arrives at a moment when India's energy calculus has been upended. The near-closure of the Strait of Hormuz – a corridor that once handled over 40 per cent of India's crude imports – has forced Indian refiners into a scramble for alternative supplies. Venezuela, sitting atop the world's largest proven oil reserves, has stepped decisively into that breach. The numbers are striking. India imported 427,000 barrels per day from Venezuela in May alone, making it the second-largest buyer of Venezuelan crude globally, trailing only the United States. Reliance Industries has emerged as one of Caracas's three largest customers worldwide. Bilateral trade stands at \$678.94 million – modest by global standards, but a number that carries momentum and direction.

Diversification is meaningless without reliable alternatives. Venezuela, once sidelined by US sanctions, re-entered India's supply map after sanctions were eased in February under a Washington-Caracas oil pact. The timing was fortunate: it gave Indian refiners a viable Western Hemisphere alternative precisely when the eastern routes tightened. New Delhi – with at least tacit American encouragement – has moved with unusual swiftness to secure the relationship.

What makes this partnership structurally attractive is price. Venezuelan heavy crude trades at a significant discount to Brent benchmarks, helping India moderate its import bill at a time of fiscal pressure. Three takeaways deserve particular attention. First, supply-chain resilience now demands geographic diversification, not just source diversification. India cannot afford a repeat of the Hormuz shock; Venezuela offers a supply route across the Atlantic, entirely decoupled from West Asian chokepoints. Second, the bilateral agenda – stretching across pharmaceuticals, renewable energy and transportation – suggests India intends to offer Venezuela a development partnership, not merely a transactional crude contract.

Third, Rodríguez's visit comes five months after President Nicolás Maduro's dramatic detention by U.S. forces, a fact that places India in a diplomatically delicate position – one it is navigating with characteristic pragmatism, keeping Washington engaged while preserving access to Caracas.

Diplomatically, the trajectory points towards a structured long-term energy agreement – possibly involving rupee-bolivar settlement mechanisms, equity participation by Indian PSUs in Venezuelan oilfields, and joint ventures in refining. India has walked this road with Russia, Iraq and the UAE. Venezuela is the next chapter. The risk is political volatility in Caracas. New Delhi will seek contractual architecture that hedges against it. If this visit delivers even a framework agreement, it will mark a significant step in India's quiet but relentless effort to build an energy supply network that no single geopolitical crisis can unravel.



PARUL CHANDRA

Driven by strategic pragmatism, India has had to embrace the military government of Myanmar despite the severe democratic backsliding there. New Delhi recently rolled out the red carpet for Myanmar President U Min Aung Hlaing, who seized power in 2021 through a military coup that toppled the democratically elected government of National League for Democracy (NLD) leader and State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi.

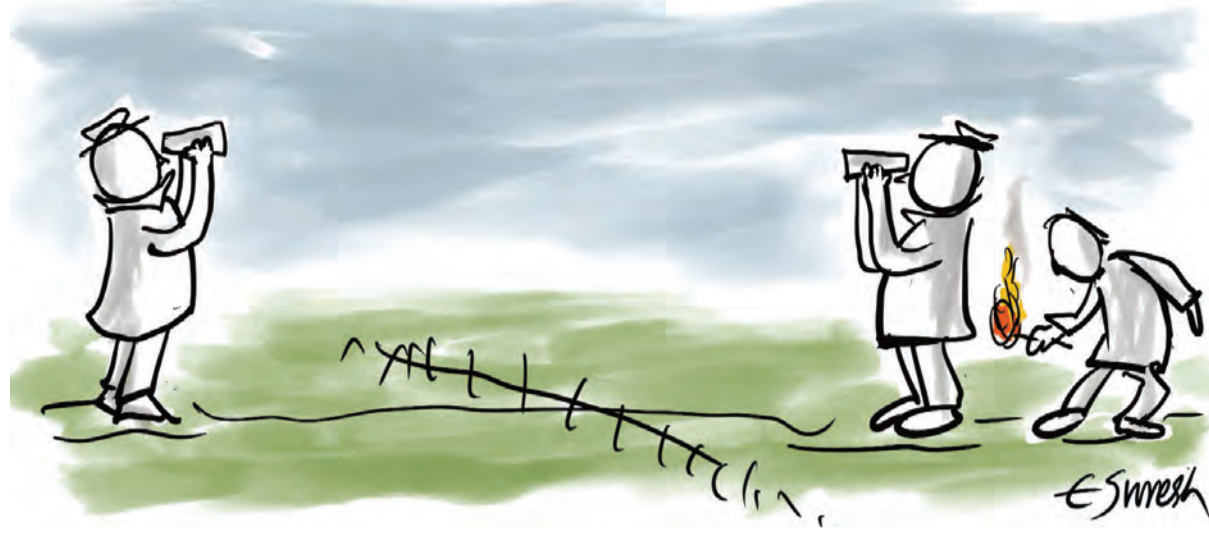
India, which prides itself on being the world's largest democracy, notably refrained from hosting U Min Aung Hlaing during the first four years after the coup. However, the veneer of legitimacy the former military chief has now achieved by engineering his appointment as President through a dubious parliamentary vote helped India shrug off its hesitation.

Myanmar, after all, is of immense geostrategic importance to India, with the two countries sharing an extremely porous 1,643-km land border. A restive and unstable neighbourhood directly threatens India's national security interests, reinforcing the pressing need for New Delhi to engage with Nay Pyi Taw at the highest level.

India was the military leader's first port of call since becoming President in April. Myanmar's close ally, China – which has no qualms about the military junta's trampling of democratic norms – had already engaged with U Min Aung Hlaing on the sidelines of regional summits before he assumed the role of President. This intensifying geopolitical jostling with Beijing for influence remains a primary driver behind New Delhi's diplomatic outreach.

Following the high-level meeting between U Min Aung Hlaing and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, New Delhi sought to frame this renewed engagement not as an endorsement of a repressive regime, but as part of its belief in "sustained dialogue" with a neighbour. As Foreign Secretary Vikram Mirsi noted, "History has shown that disengagement doesn't give us any results that are better than engagement, and it certainly doesn't produce democratic change."

The visiting Myanmar President's assurance, in turn, that "its territory would not be permitted to be used against India's security interests" was certainly welcomed here. This pledge is critical for two reasons. One, armed insurgents from India's Northeast have long used Myanmar's soil as a safe haven from



A RESTIVE AND UNSTABLE NEIGHBOURHOOD DIRECTLY THREATENS INDIA'S NATIONAL SECURITY INTERESTS, REINFORCING THE PRESSING NEED FOR NEW DELHI TO ENGAGE WITH NAY PYI TAW AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL

The writer is senior journalist and writes on strategic affairs

dailypioneer @ParulChandraP The Pioneer

which to launch operations in Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh.

Two, the ongoing civil war in Myanmar and the consequent regional instability directly threaten Indian interests. There has already been a huge exodus of refugees into Manipur and Mizoram, forcing India to scrap the long-standing Free Movement Regime (FMR) with Myanmar and step up border fencing. Additionally, the spillover of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar's restive Rakhine State into neighbouring Bangladesh, as well as India, is also a major concern.

Like India, Myanmar faces its own domestic security challenges from various armed rebel factions. Reflecting these shared anxieties, the India-Myanmar joint statement extended Indian support for Myanmar's "sovereignty and territorial integrity", while both sides also condemned the "misuse of sovereign territory for activities inimical to their security interests".

India's strategic imperatives in Myanmar also include a vital connectivity dimension. New Delhi has undertaken two ambitious infrastructure projects in the country: the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project and the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway. Both initiatives have suffered massive delays and remain in limbo due to Myanmar's precarious security situation.

The Indian delegation raised the issue during the presidential visit, stressing that these projects remain a "major priority" for India. While U Min Aung Hlaing assured New Delhi that his administration would do everything possible to ensure their completion, achieving this is easier said than done against the backdrop of an active civil war. For now, India can only exercise patience

and hope that local conditions improve enough for construction to resume.

In its quest for alternative routes to bypass the narrow and vulnerable Siliguri Corridor – which could become a chokepoint in a conflict with China – India has heavily invested in the Kaladan project to connect with its landlocked Northeast. Crucially, India has already developed the strategically located Sittwe Port in Myanmar, which will allow goods to be shipped from mainland India by sea and then moved to the Northeast via river and road corridors up to Mizoram. Overlooking the Bay of Bengal, the port is an integral piece of India's strategic calculus – especially since China has developed its own gateway to the bay, the Kyaukphyu deep-sea port.

Equally critical is the trilateral highway project, which can be a game-changer in terms of trade and connectivity. This highway will provide India with direct road connectivity to ASEAN nations, reducing its historical reliance on maritime links and boosting regional trade. In effect, it anchors India's efforts to forge deeper ties with Southeast Asia in line with its "Act East" policy. Myanmar, incidentally, is the only ASEAN member that shares a land border with India, making it an indispensable bridge to the regional bloc.

With Myanmar "sitting at the confluence of India's Neighbourhood First, Act East, and MAHASAGAR policies", as Foreign Secretary Mirsi described it, New Delhi remains hopeful that its latest overtures to Nay Pyi Taw will successfully protect its long-term strategic interests.

India's calculated embrace of Myanmar's military regime is governed by hard-nosed realpolitik. Bound by a volatile border, escalating security threats, and a high-stakes geopolitical rivalry with China, New Delhi simply cannot afford the luxury of isolation.

The Pioneer SINCE 1865

Before building temples, build community values



SANJAY CHANDRA

2ND OPINION

We are preparing to vote in our society elections, and the mudslinging and slugfest have descended to levels that many of us have come to associate with elections at much larger political levels. Among the issues dominating the campaign is the proposal to construct a religious structure within the complex, a subject that has generated debate over the limited common space.

The argument advanced by some contestants is that such a structure would create an enabling environment for senior citizens and help inculcate values in the younger generation. It is an attractive proposition because it appeals simultaneously to tradition, culture and community identity. Yet a few conversations over the past few days made me wonder whether we sometimes confuse symbols with substance.

We are, in fact, a household of three senior citizens – my father, my wife and I. My wife observed that many of those advocating such facilities in the name of senior citizens have not yet entered that phase of life themselves. Those of us who have, she remarked, do not necessarily feel the need for such elaborate handholding. The comment contained a larger truth. People often speak for others without understanding what they may actually need.

Another conversation was revealing. A young resident recounted how one of the leading contestants, whose manifesto featured the proposal, had spent considerable time explaining its importance. When the youngster attempted to present an alternative perspective, however, he found himself brushed aside. What struck him was the unwillingness to listen.

His response stayed with me. He pointed out that his parents live with him and that he cares for them every day. What greater lesson in values, he asked, could he impart to his own children than the example of looking after ageing parents within the family? His comment reminded me that values are absorbed through example. Children watch what we do long before they understand what we say.

Religious spaces have their place in community life, just as parks, libraries, playgrounds and cultural centres do. They can provide comfort, belonging and opportunities for engagement. But values are rarely transmitted through buildings alone. They are learned through observation and experience. Children absorb them when they

see respect for differing opinions, courtesy in disagreement, honesty in public life, concern for neighbours and care for elderly family members.

Perhaps the larger question is not what serves us today, but what kind of community we leave for those who come after us. Every society, whether a residential complex or a nation, ultimately depends on citizens who are willing to think beyond immediate preferences and short-term gains. The challenge is not merely to choose what serves us today, but to consider what will enrich the lives of those who will inherit these spaces long after we are gone.

In that sense, every citizen must aspire to be something of a statesman. A politician thinks of the next election; a statesman thinks of the next generation. Our choices about common spaces and values are rarely confined to the present. They shape the culture that future residents and children will inherit.

If a community wishes to leave a lasting legacy for its younger generation, it may need to focus less on what is constructed in concrete and more on what is demonstrated in everyday life. After all, values are not taught merely through places of worship. They are taught through the quiet acts of responsibility, respect, compassion and thoughtful stewardship that children witness every day.

The Pioneer SINCE 1865

The writer is a founder of Kala - Crazy About Literature And Arts, is an author, speaker, coach, and strategy consultant

PICTALK



Workers at a lavender field, at Bhaderwah, in Doda district, Jammu and Kashmir. PHOTO: PTI

DIGITAL EXPERIENCE

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HAS RAJYA SABHA LOST ITS FEDERAL CHARACTER?

When the Constitution came into force and the Rajya Sabha was established in 1952, its framers envisaged it as a true Council of States. Members were expected to represent the interests of the states from which they were elected by state legislatures. For many years, this principle was largely respected.

The first significant departure came in 1991, when Manmohan Singh was elected to the Rajya Sabha from Assam despite not being a native of the state. A residence was arranged in Guwahati, enabling him to contest from Assam before he joined Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao's Cabinet as Finance Minister.

Since then, the convention that a state's representatives should have a close connection with that state has steadily weakened. Today, individuals can be elected

to the Rajya Sabha from virtually any state, provided they secure the support of a political party with sufficient MLAs in the Assembly.

As a result, disgruntled politicians, businessmen and other influential figures often find entry into the Upper House through states with which they have little or no association. Distinguished public figures are no exception. The trend has raised questions about whether the Rajya Sabha still functions as the Council of States envisioned by the Constitution.

If state representation is no longer its defining principle, critics argue that the Rajya Sabha risks becoming less a federal institution and more a chamber shaped by political convenience.

T H CHOWDARY | HYDERABAD

A lifeline beyond blood compatibility

Andhra Pradesh's decision to legally recognise cross-family kidney donation for immunologically incompatible patients is a significant healthcare reform that deserves national attention. For years, many families have faced a heartbreaking dilemma: a willing donor is available, yet blood-group or tissue incompatibility prevents a life-saving transplant. Patients are then forced onto lengthy waiting lists as their health steadily deteriorates.

The newly approved organ swap system offers a practical solution. By allowing compatible donor-recipient exchanges between families, it transforms individual incompatibility into a collective opportunity. The policy also broadens the donor pool to include parents, children, grandparents and grandchildren, increasing the likelihood of successful matches.

The need is evident. Andhra Pradesh currently has 3,634 registered patients awaiting transplants, while 209 deceased donors contribute 663 organs annually. Even a modest rise in successful matches could translate into hundreds of additional transplants each year.

However, policy alone is not enough. Effective implementation and wider awareness are crucial. Most importantly, patients in smaller towns must enjoy the same access as those in cities. Other states should follow suit.

A MYLSAMI | COIMBATORE

Annamalai's challenge in Tamil Nadu

One of the biggest challenges facing K Annamalai is not his personal popularity but the political limitations of the BJP in Tamil Nadu. Annamalai remains one of the most recognisable and energetic faces of the party in the state. However, many voters who appreciate him as an individual are still reluctant to support the BJP.

The issues and narratives that work for the BJP in several parts of India have often failed to resonate with Tamil Nadu's distinct political culture. Had Annamalai represented the party in many northern states, his electoral prospects might have been very different.

The BJP's performance in Tamil Nadu has also been affected by organisational weaknesses and internal political dynamics. Critics point to the party's leadership decisions and its relationship with allies as factors that have hindered its growth. The appointment of Nainar Nagendran as state president and the influence of AIADMK leader Edappadi K. Palaniswami have generated debate within political circles.

Despite these challenges, Annamalai continues to project himself as a hardworking, grassroots leader with a strong connection to ordinary people. His supporters believe that, with greater backing, he could become a stronger force in Tamil Nadu politics.

C K SUBRAMANIAM | MUMBAI

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

India-Venezuela ties gain momentum

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's talks with Venezuela's Acting President Delcy Rodríguez come at a crucial time for global energy markets. With tensions in West Asia disrupting supply chains and pushing up oil prices, stronger India-Venezuela relations are both timely and strategically important.

India has been increasing its crude oil imports from Venezuela as it seeks to diversify its energy sources and reduce vulnerability to geopolitical disruptions. Recent discussions between the two leaders focused on expanding cooperation in energy, trade, investment, critical minerals, automobiles and other key sectors. Venezuela has emerged as an increasingly important energy partner for India amid ongoing uncertainty in global oil markets. Beyond energy security, deeper engagement offers both nations an opportunity to strengthen economic ties and build a more resilient framework for cooperation. Reliable partnerships are essential in an era marked by supply disruptions and geopolitical volatility.

The visit of Acting President Rodríguez to New Delhi is therefore a welcome development. If both sides can translate discussions into concrete outcomes, the partnership could strengthen India's energy security and expand trade and investment ties.

KIRTI WADHAWAN | KANPUR

Get Digital Angels With Devilish Tools

Ethical hacking can stop exam paper leaks

Online testing is an answer to organised syndicates leaking papers for nationwide examinations. Yet, organisations like CBSE must raise the bar on cybersecurity considerably. An effective method for detecting security gaps in software is ethical hacking, where the same tools are employed without any malicious intent. The idea is to expose and fix gaps before black-hat hackers (bad guys) can spot them. White-hat (ethical) hacking serves as a quality check for any cybersecurity architecture. Like all quality-control processes, ethical hacking must be continuous, with a feedback loop to system designers.

The ethical hacking industry is growing, with authorised hackers simulating cyberattacks. India is a natural market for white-hat hacking, given its role as a base for global digital transformation and its talent pool. eCommerce, fintech, payment platforms and cloud-based services



require cybersecurity quality checks provided by ethical hackers. It should not be difficult to widen the pool to include online governance services, including examinations. The role is being redefined by AI-powered security tools that will strengthen the cybersecurity industry. Cloud security is becoming a leading business segment as companies store data online. Regulations governing the storage of personal data are creating additional demand for security testing.

Baseline security audits involve some degree of ethical hacking. The compliance burden increases with the criticality of the infra. For instance, breaches in financial or utility software can pose a threat to public safety. So, it is a matter of rewriting rules to include areas where there could be potential harm to large numbers of people, such as national examinations. A universal mandate for security testing may be prohibitively expensive and could compromise security by making the process mechanical. There is also a shortage of skilled personnel in the ethical hacking industry. Therefore, it must be applied selectively to achieve the best results.

Even as We Eat More, Cereal Killer's Loose

Indians may have become more affluent. But it's not showing up in their diet. Low-quality cereals continue to dominate our piled-up thalis. For large sections of the population, their intake of proteins, vegetables and fruit is far below national nutrition norms. But don't take this affliction to be limited to the poor and rural populations. Urban populations and the affluent may consume more protein — the richest 10% consumes 1.5x more than their less well-off rural counterparts. But given the low base, that is not saying much.

Kerala, urban regions of Punjab and Tamil Nadu, Delhi, Puducherry, Chandigarh, and Lakshadweep can take comfort in their lower-than-recommended monthly cereal consumption of 7.5 kg. But they need to watch out for what is filling their plates instead. Data show low-quality cereals and harmful processed foods are holding the thali hostage. Predominance of cereals is described by many as cultural muscle memory of poverty, when cereals were the primary source of nutrition and helped fill stomachs because more nutritious food was out of reach or unavailable. India's dealing with the double burden of malnutrition — under nutrition and harmful excess — and is sliding into a third crisis of micronutrient deficiency.

Diets can change for the better. But that needs robust policies, stringent regulation and behavioural nudges. Production incentives must shift away from cereals to more nutritious options like pulses, fruit, vegetables and millets. Unhealthy processed foods, high in fat, sugar and salt, must be identified with clear, bold front-of-pack labelling. Eating more nutritious food and balanced diets must become an aspiration. Otherwise, despite the ability to pay more, Indians are stuck with serious health problems.



JUST IN JEST

Taking the philosophical route to defend the dunking rupee

Do Remember, '0' is Also Just a Number

'100 is just a number,' they keep saying, as rupee collapses against dollar like a drunk uncle at a Punjabi wedding. It's the same soothing mantra a generation has whispered to itself while blowing out birthday candles: 'Age is just a number.' Except, of course, age is also cholesterol, knee pain, and the sudden urge to discuss mutual funds at dinner. Numbers are never 'just' numbers — they're the difference between youth and arthritis, solvency and bankruptcy. Defence of the rupee's freefall is, understandably, a Zen-like shrug. It's the best you can make of a not-too-sweet situation — unless, of course, you're earning in dollars by selling something that those currently stingy dollar-walas are still buying.

Let's face it, numbers are the tyrants of our lives. Try telling your kid who's trying to get into college that numbers don't matter, and that marks are but maya. To dismiss '100' as a mere triple-digit is like dismissing gravity as 'just a force'. The rupee at 100 isn't a mystical abstraction — it's the price of petrol, and dignity at the forex counter. Age may be 'just a number' until your knees remind you otherwise. Similarly, the rupee may be 'just a number' until your wallet feels like migrating. In the end, this stalwart defence is less economics and more philosophical. Remember, zero is also just a number — and where credibility ends.

Carmakers are device-fying, and tech companies making cars are bringing their world view with them

Hot Wheels Got Intelligent



Jaspreet Bindra

Ferrari has made many beautiful cars. They are fast, loud and dangerous. What has always been common is the legendary Ferrari shape — less designed than sculpted by Italian wind and testosterone. There's also the familiar growl of the engine and iconic Ferrari red.

But in a major departure from tradition and DNA, Ferrari has unveiled an EV: Ferrari Luce. It does not look like a Ferrari, but more like the love child of a staid Fiat and a German luxury car. It does not even sound like one. The only sound one could hear was the collective groan of a thousand aficionados. Yet, it may be remembered for something else: it looks like the moment the car stopped being merely a car.

Luce is Ferrari's first EV, with more than 1,000 hp, a claimed range of about 530 km, and a starting price of around ₹5,50,000. But those numbers are less interesting than the fact that Ferrari turned to Jony Ive and Marc Newson's Love From to help shape its design language.

Ive, of course, is not a car man. He's synonymous with Apple and the design philosophy that turned tech into desire. Ferrari describes Luce as an 'entirely new Ferrari'. Markets and purists were less convinced, with the company's shares falling after a design many saw as too radical, too minimal, and too unlike the old growing Ferrari.

But maybe that's the point. Luce isn't just an electric Ferrari. It's a Ferrari designed in the age of the device.

For over a century, cars were machi-

nes of transportation, defined by engines, pistons, gearboxes, chassis, speed, steel and status. EVs are different. Remove ICE, gearbox and much of the mechanical complexity, and the centre of gravity shifts to batteries, software, screens, sensors, data, intelligence and over-the-air updates. In other words, the car is morphing into a device.

China understood this earlier than most.

► **Xiaomi** launched its SU7 electric sedan in 2024 and received 50,000 orders in 27 mins. That's not how people traditionally bought cars. It's closer to the frenzy of an iPhone launch.

SU7 is designed to live inside Xiaomi's 'Human × Car × Home' ecosystem, connecting phones, appliances and vehicles into a single-digital environment. The car is no longer an isolated product in the garage, but the largest screen, battery, sensor array and software node in your connected life.

► **Huawei** is pushing the idea even further: Its Maextro S800, developed with JAC and powered by Huawei tech, is being positioned as China's answer to Maybach and Rolls-Royce. It comes loaded with self-parking capabilities, digital-cockpit features, large screens, advanced driver assistance and entertainment systems designed as much for the software age as the driving age. Recent reports suggest it has been outselling traditional ultra-luxury rivals in China's \$1 lakh-plus segment.

Earlier, car companies made cars and tech companies made devices. Now device companies are making cars, and bringing that world view with them. User experience matters more than horsepower, interface more than the dashboard, and the vehicle becomes another platform.

Apple probably understood this, too.



Optimally primed

It spent nearly a decade trying to build a car before abandoning the effort. Had it succeeded, Apple car might have been the purest expression of this idea: a device that happened to move at 100 kmph. This device-ification of the car has 3 major implications.

● **Design language** increasingly revolves around interface intuitiveness, cockpit intelligence, smartphone integration and AI assistants, rather than the curve of the bonnet or shape of the grille. Ferrari and Maextro both reflect this shift.

● **Smartphone** became the most powerful data-gathering object ever created. But the car may become the next great data harvester. It will capture not just digital behaviour but physical life — where we go, how we drive, who we meet and what we do.

● **Value** will shift from hardware to software. In PCs, hardware makers such as Dell and HP survived on wafer-thin margins, while Microsoft captured software economics. In smartphones, most handset manufacturers struggled while Apple, controlling both hardware and software, captured disproportionate profits. The device often becomes the shell. Real value lies in OS, data and applications.

The same could happen to cars. If the automobile becomes a device, traditional carmakers risk becoming Dells and HPs of mobility: excellent manufacturers of expensive hardware while software platforms, AI layers, maps, autonomy systems, entertainment ecosystems and data businesses capture the real value. This is why

Volkswagen, Toyota and others have struggled so hard to build their own software stacks. They know that if Apple CarPlay or Android Auto owns the interface, the carmaker owns less of the customer.

Tesla understood this earlier than anyone. It's not merely an EV company. It's the closest thing the auto industry has to Apple: integrated hardware, software, battery systems, data, charging networks, updates and, increasingly, AI. Its valuation has long reflected this belief, with investors viewing it less as a car company and more as a data and AI platform.

For legacy automakers, the implications are clear. The car once carried us through the world, and its beauty lay in its shape, sound and driving experience. Now, it will watch, listen, compu-

Luce has more than 1,000 hp, claimed range of 530-odd km, and starting price of about ₹5.5 lakh. But those numbers are overshadowed by the fact that Ferrari turned to Jony Ive to shape its design language



te, and perhaps even decide.

The automobile is being hollowed out as a machine and refilled with software. The question for carmakers is simple: will they build the next great device? Or become the beautiful metal casing around someone else's OS?

The writer is founder-MD, The Tech Whisperer

Under Success Lie Internal Affairs



Amit Anand

There is a question that does not appear in term sheets, investment memos or board presentations. It sits quietly beneath almost every significant decision a leader makes: how much is enough? Not for the fund, or company, or for you.

Most high performers can answer the first version with a lot of clarity. The model tells them what return clears the hurdle. But the personal version, what would actually constitute a life well spent, tends to get deferred. There is always another fund to raise, another milestone that will, this time, feel like arrival. It rarely does.

Leaders who struggle most are rarely those who lack intelligence or capability. They are those who have never built an 'inner framework': a set of internal anchors that hold steady when

external pressure intensifies, market turns or flattery stops.

Most leadership failures are not failures of knowing but of doing. The right course of action is usually visible in the first moment, before rationalisation begins. The problem isn't judgement. It's the gap between judgement and action.

Acting rightly carries real cost — financial, reputational, cost of pausing when everyone else is moving. Without something deeper to draw on, that cost becomes very easy to avoid paying. Rationalisation arrives quickly and rounds completely reasonable. Leaders who consistently act from that first instinct tend to have something internal that others can't easily see or measure.

Several people in a recent gathering said that whenever they brought their real perspective into a professional setting — their belief, a value, or something they actually held — they were looked at sideways, often seen as 'soft' or 'unserious'. So, they stopped. They learned to say what was expected, rather than what they believed. Over time, the mask had become easier to wear, than to take off. These were not

people who lacked confidence. On the contrary. They had made a calculation that this part of who they are doesn't belong in certain rooms.

That calculation has a cost, not always visible immediately. And, yet, it's always compounding. And it's not only personal. Leaders who suppress their own inner reckoning tend to build environments where nobody else is permitted one either. That hollowness has a way of finding its way into decisions that matter most.

There is something else worth naming — what success distorts. The more you command, the easier it becomes to believe your own narrative. The deference, validation, the deal flow that



Merged, submerged

arrives because of who you are. They all quietly reinforce a story that may not be entirely true. The reminder that power is entrusted, rather than owned, that leadership is closer to stewardship than entitlement, isn't a comfortable one.

An inner framework is what provides that check. It doesn't have to be religious or spiritual in any formal sense. But it has to be real, and something that holds you accountable to a version of yourself that exists beyond the immediate outcome. Something that can actually answer the question this piece began with.

Leaders who navigate a long career with their judgement intact, and a genuine sense of why they do what they do, are not the ones who felt less ambition. They are the ones who built something internal that ambition couldn't override.

That is not a fixed quality. It's a practice and direction you choose to move in, imperfectly, over the course of a career and life. The question is whether you've started.

The writer is founding partner-MD, Jungle Ventures

Switching as Survival Strategy



Ujjwal Katiyar

BJP's victory over TMC ended 15 yrs of rule and catalysed a major structural shift in West Bengal's politics. This loss of power has triggered an internal mutiny and a vertical split, with a significant bloc under Ritabrata Banerjee claiming the role of leader of the opposition. The collapse is evidenced by a much broader phenomenon of political migration and cadre defection as the party's grassroots workers began searching for a new protective umbrella.

While 2021 assembly elections saw top-level defections by figures like Suwendu Adhikari and Mukul Roy, the 2026 cycle shifted toward grassroots mobilisation driven by anti-incumbency and the erosion of TMC's clientelist model. A critical, yet often overlooked, factor in this transition is the response of the party cadre. Understanding their role is vital to analysing this political shift.

In Bengal, 'para' (neighbourhood) serves as the primary political unit for leadership engagement. Securing electoral victory requires para-level support, which parties maintain through state-backed protection, resource distribution and dispute mediation. Because local leaders depend on government patronage to sustain their influence, they frequently defect to the incumbent to maintain local relevance.

For instance, reports of service withdrawal, such as restricted water delivery in pro-Congress Baharampur localities in Murshidabad district, illustrate a punitive system targeting non-aligned areas. Ultimately, state-controlled leverage dictates the strategic alignment of grassroots voters.

Primary function of a ruling party's grassroots worker in Bengal is to facilitate state-sponsored welfare initiatives. These individuals managed flag-ship programmes, such as Duare Sarkar, by overseeing documentation and registration. Furthermore, schemes like Kanyashree, Lakshmi Bhandar, Sabooj Sathi and Rupashree relied heavily on this cadre for implementation. Consequently, these workers serve as local representatives of both the party and the government. Maintaining this administrative cycle is essential for preserving their local influence and relevance.

Political transition rapidly led to deconstruction of urban power structures, notably in North 24 Parganas, a key TMC organisational stronghold. Recently, simultaneous mass resignati-



Bagha, apne praan bacha

ons effectively paralysed both Kanchrapara and Halihsahar municipalities, where 15 of 24 and 16 of 23 TMC councillors, respectively, stepped down. This collective action was a calculated move by local leaders to protect their local influence and secure operational survival under the new state government.

Hence, ideological commitment is secondary for grassroots workers. Political protection constitutes their primary concern. Absence of protection from the ruling regime creates significant physical vulnerability. This threat is frequently manifested as lethal post-poll violence.

Consequently survival needs a political 'umbrella' provided by the administration and local police. Switching allegiance, thus, becomes a rational survival strategy.

This phenomenon transcends mere defection, operating, instead, as political 'inventory management'. Parties strategically secure grassroots support by offering guaranteed benefits and essential protection.

Government transitions in Bengal are historically infrequent, occurring only twice after 1977. Consequently, the current collapse of a major party's cadre system represents a rare political event.

Following the 2026 elections, TMC grassroots workers lost their protective 'umbrella'. The administration and police can no longer provide patronage, inducing fear of retribution for violence linked to TMC's 15-yr rule.

BJP's aggressive post-electoral mobilisation generates significant apprehension among senior leaders and local cadre, which remains the true locus of politi-

cal power. TMC derived its strength from affiliated clubs, sustained by local contracts and government services. The collapse of the TMC government severed this reciprocal funding channel. This defunds associations that historically provided ground support during elections.

The resulting communication void could fragment the rural cadre, potentially compelling them to align with BJP for survival. A critical variable is the response of grassroots workers in Muslim-dominated districts like Malda and Murshidabad. Adhikari's explicit public statements about 'working only for Hindus' may create a way for a Left/Congress revival in these areas.

TMC's organisational collapse makes aligning with BJP the most rational choice for grassroots workers. This shift secures essential government benefits, political patronage and protection from violence. The incumbent regime's control over state resources and protection will drive electoral migration. BJP's ascent introduces new avenues of benefit. The manifesto offers schemes such as PM Vishwakarma, PM Ujjwala 3.0, and PM-KUSUM. Further pledges include ₹3,000 for unemployed youth and women, and 7th Pay Commission for state employees.

This comprehensive package creates a new currency of patronage, replicating TMC's former mobilisation strategy. Viewing this through the lens of 'inventory management', local leaders recognise that only the centrally powerful BJP can safeguard their voter 'inventory'. This is why this political shift is predictable, not random.

The writer is an electoral geographer specialising in geospatial analytics



THE SPEAKING TREE

Embodying The Light

SUDHA DEVI NAYAK

A flicker between darkness of the womb and darkness of the tomb is known as life, with its multiple conflicts of survival and being. It is this flickering existence we need to make worthwhile with meaning and purpose. In fractured times, conflicts arise and wars rage because we do not value life with all its graces — compassion and gratitude, empathy and commitment, and wisdom of humility. Even when affected by tragic situations, there are people who have acted with forbearance.

According to Lao Tzu, Chinese philosopher, we must be ready to use all situations and every situation, however bad it seems, is fundamentally workable, and this he calls 'embodying the light'. While we cannot change the circumstantial randomness of the events, we can mould our attitudes to accepting the inevitable and living through it with a measure of equanimity. The power of choice is ours. As Stoics say, we cannot control events beyond our will, but we can live through them with resilience and endurance, which ultimately leads to our liberation.

In an increasingly frenetic world, an important lesson is the ephemeral nature of life, and it is our right and bounden duty to live it while it lasts, with responsibility, grace and trust in the Supreme Intelligence that guides us all.



LOLLING ON SATURDAY

Sleep On This

Two countries signed a trade deal: one would export dreams, the other nightmares. Eco-



nomists hailed it as 'balancing'. Citizens complained they were waking up exhausted.

Corporate leaders insisted GDP was rising because everyone was asleep longer. IMF warned of a 'global pillow crisis'. Politicians, smartest of all, promised subsidies for lullabies.

Inflated Gyan
A philosopher was asked about inflation. He replied, 'Prices rise because they aspire to heaven. Bread wants to be cake, onions want to be truffles, and petrol wants to be Chanel No. 5.'

When told this was ruining household budgets, he shrugged and said, 'But isn't suffering the true currency of existence?' His students drooped out, not because of tuition fees but because they couldn't afford a Michelin-starred lunch.

Aaj ka Collateral
A man walked into a bank to apply for a loan. The banker asked for collateral. The man offered his mother-in-law.

The banker refused, saying, 'We don't accept liabilities.' The man then offered his dog. The banker said, 'We don't accept assets that bark.'

Finally the man offered his optimism. The banker approved instantly. 'That's the only collateral we accept these days.'

Chat Room

Nature as the Blueprint

The biomimicry framework outlined in 'Business as Second Nature' by KumKum Dasgupta (Jun 5) offers a useful lens for Indian industry, though translating it beyond product design into organisational thinking remains the harder challenge. The article rightly points to circular resource flows, but India's manufacturing sector still faces the more immediate constraint of cost. Biomimetic approaches tend to require upfront research investment that smaller firms simply cannot absorb alone. Public research institutions and CSIR laboratories could bridge that gap usefully. Without institutional support connecting scientific insight to shop-floor application, biomimicry risks remaining an aspirational concept rather than a practical industrial strategy.

S.M. Jeena
Chennai

The Statesman

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the Friends of India -founded 1818

Tariff Reboot

President Donald Trump's trade policy has acquired a second life. After the US Supreme Court curtailed key elements of the architecture that defined much of his economic agenda, the White House has returned with a familiar instrument wrapped in a different justification. This time, the target is not trade deficits, national security or industrial revival, but the global persistence of forced labour.

The argument is politically attractive and difficult to oppose. Few governments will publicly defend products tainted by coercive labour practices. Yet the significance of Washington's latest tariff proposal lies less in the moral language surrounding it than in what it reveals about the direction of American trade policy. The United States is increasingly moving away from the post-Cold War assumption that trade should be governed primarily by efficiency and market access. Instead, trade is being redefined as an extension of strategic policy. Human rights, labour standards, national security, supply-chain resilience and geopolitical competition are becoming intertwined. Tariffs are no longer merely economic tools; they are instruments of leverage.

The breadth of the proposed measures is particularly telling. When allies such as Britain, Canada, Japan and the European Union find themselves in the same category as strategic competitors, the issue is no longer about a handful of offending countries. It becomes a statement that Washington intends to judge not only what enters its market but also how its trading partners regulate their own commercial relationships.

Such an approach carries risks. The United States has long criticised other nations for using trade barriers in ways that distort commerce. If tariffs become the default response to disagreements over labour standards, environmental rules or supply-chain governance, other countries may adopt similar methods. The result could be a fragmented trading system in which competing blocs increasingly impose their domestic priorities on one another through economic coercion.

For India, the development deserves careful attention. New Delhi has already faced tariff threats linked to market access, digital regulation and Russian oil imports. The latest proposal suggests that future trade disputes may emerge from an expanding range of policy concerns. If labour practices in third-country supply chains can become grounds for tariffs, the scope for economic friction widens considerably.

At the same time, the proposal highlights a broader reality. The era when globalisation was viewed as a self-sustaining process is ending. Major powers are reasserting political control over trade at the expense of predictability. Businesses that built supply chains around assumptions of stable market access must now factor in geopolitical risk as carefully as they once calculated labour costs or shipping times.

The real story is therefore not the tariff rate itself. It is the emergence of a new idiosyncrasy: a doctrine in which access to the American market is conditioned on compliance with Washington's economic and political priorities. Whether one supports or opposes that approach, it marks another step away from the rules-based trading order that shaped the world economy for decades.

New Arsenal

Wars have often accelerated technological change. The machine gun altered infantry tactics, the tank transformed mobility, and air power redefined strategic reach. Yet every such innovation still depended on large numbers of soldiers operating dangerous machinery at close quarters. A quieter revolution now appears to be underway. The battlefield is increasingly becoming a contest not merely of armies, but of algorithms, engineers and autonomous systems.

The ongoing conflict in Ukraine offers a glimpse of this transformation. Faced with mounting manpower pressures and the realities of prolonged attritional warfare, military planners have increasingly turned to unmanned systems to perform tasks once reserved for frontline troops. Machines now undertake reconnaissance, logistical tasks, and offensive operations and offer force protection. In some cases, they are assuming roles traditionally associated with the infantry.

This shift carries implications far beyond any single conflict. For centuries, military strength was measured largely by the ability to mobilise large numbers of people. Population size, recruitment capacity and industrial output formed the foundations of national power. Technology mattered, but it generally supplemented human numbers rather than replacing them. That equation is beginning to change.

Countries facing demographic decline are likely to study these developments closely. Many advanced economies are ageing. Birth rates have fallen across Europe, East Asia and parts of North America. Even major powers may find it increasingly difficult to sustain large conventional armies in future crises. Military systems capable of reducing personnel requirements will therefore attract growing investment, not only because they improve battlefield effectiveness but because they address an emerging demographic challenge.

The consequences extend beyond recruitment. Military advantage may increasingly depend on software development, electronic warfare, communications resilience and artificial intelligence. The engineer, coder and systems designer could become as strategically important as the traditional combat commander. Defence industries will adapt accordingly, shifting resources towards autonomy, robotics and data integration.

None of this means the human element is disappearing. Machines still require operators, planners and decision-makers. Technology can fail, communications can be disrupted and adversaries rapidly develop countermeasures.

History suggests that every military innovation eventually encounters a response. The tank met anti-tank weapons; aircraft met air defences. Autonomous systems will be no exception. Yet a threshold appears to have been crossed. The significance of current developments lies not in the capabilities of any particular drone or robotic platform but in the emergence of a new military logic.

Preserving human resources has become a strategic objective in itself. Nations that can project force while exposing fewer soldiers to danger will possess a distinct advantage. Future historians may conclude that the defining military innovation of this decade was not a new weapon but a new relationship between humans and machines. The armies that adapt fastest to that reality are likely to shape the character of warfare for decades to come.

Cattle Shed Answer

A Hormuz mine-laying season has shown how thin India's fuel security is; the surest reply lies not in distant diplomacy but in the dung-soaked floor of an ordinary Indian village shed

On 28 February 2026, the war that diplomats had spent two years rehearsing began. American and Israeli aircraft struck Iranian nuclear and missile installations; Iran's Supreme Leader was killed, and by 2 March the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps had formally closed the Strait of Hormuz to merchant traffic, laying mines and warning off shipping.

Two Indian-flagged tankers, including the VLCC Sanmar Herald, were turned back under gunfire despite prior clearance. By mid-March, Brent had crossed \$116 a barrel; by April the United States Navy was blockading Iranian ports. Indian Oil Corporation, in a measure without recent precedent, barred its own piped-gas customers from buying domestic LPG cylinders to ration a supply suddenly under stress.

This is not a refinery story alone. India imports approximately 87 per cent of the crude oil it consumes, and roughly 48 per cent of those barrels came from the Middle East as recently as last winter. But the sharper exposure is in the kitchen. Of the 33.15 million tonnes of liquefied petroleum gas India consumed in 2025, about 60 per cent was imported, and about 90 per cent of those imports originated from the Middle East. Every cylinder in every village queue is a longer logistical chain than the refinery feedstock the country has spent two decades worrying about. The fragility is structural; it is not subject to grand-bargain diplomacy; and it will be exposed each time the Persian Gulf catches fever.

The argument that follows is that India already owns the largest under-deployed civilian energy resource on earth, in plain view of every village panchayat - and that the consequent answer to Hormuz lies less in West Asian pipelines than in the cattle sheds of Bardhaman, Beed and Bareilly.

The numbers are uncomfortable. Of India's 535.78 million livestock counted in the 20th Livestock Census of 2019, approximately 302 million are large bovines - the world's largest such herd. NITI Aayog has estimated that the herd produces in the order of three million tonnes of dung every day. Under the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy's own technical standards, a kilogram of fresh cow dung yields roughly 0.04 cubic metres of biogas, and about thirty cubic metres of that gas carries the calorific equivalent of a single 14.2-kilogram LPG cylinder.

The arithmetic produces a number so large that the policy mind, on first encountering it, tends to discard it as fanciful. It is not fanciful. It is what we have been throwing



away each morning into a drain, or stacking against a wall to dry into low-calorific cakes.

A village-cluster biogas plant is technically unremarkable: a pit, an inlet for slurry, a fermentation chamber where mesophilic bacteria do their patient anaerobic work over a retention of about thirty days, a holder for the methane that rises, and piped distribution to fifty or a hundred households. The plant produces, as inevitable by-product, a stream of digested slurry - the digestate - that is, gram for gram, a finer organic fertiliser than urea, with the nutrient profile of farmyard manure and none of its weed-seed burden. At cluster scale, piping gas to a hundred households at a tariff well below the prevailing LPG cylinder rate of Rs 918, the digestate alone - if sold to neighbouring farmers - covers operating cost. The household saves; the plant pays; the field gains.

The principal beneficiary, however, is neither the household ledger nor the soil. She stands at the chulha. The Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana has put cylinders in over 10 crore poor kitchens; the harder secret of the scheme is that millions of those cylinders are refilled less often than the policy supposes, because Rs 900 is nine hundred rupees, and a smoky chulha is free.

A piped village biogas line, refilled by the buffalo in the corner, dissolves the trade-off. The respiratory cost - the cataract, the chronic bronchitis, the asthma in the child crawling underfoot - is among the largest avoidable disease burdens in rural India. The dung the household contributes, weighed and priced at a panchayat collection centre, becomes income; the gas that returns to her stove becomes dignity.

Why, then, has none of this happened at scale? The architecture exists, but it has scattered. India's legacy household-biogas programme has been folded into the Biogas component of the National Bioenergy Programme (Phase I, 2021-22 to 2025-26), with a dedicated outlay of approximately

Rs 100 crore within a broader Rs 858 crore envelope. The GOBAR-Dhan portal today lists about 1,219 functional family-and-cluster plants and 163 functional Compressed Biogas plants nationally - against the SATAT scheme's target of 5,000 CBG units by 2024.

The failures are not technological; the plants work where they are installed. They are institutional. The schemes have been split across three ministries - MNRE, Jal Shakti and Petroleum - each with its own forms, subsidy schedule and silence.

The Indian models that work, however, are already on the ground. Uttar Pradesh's Gram-Urja pilot installs household digesters at a unit cost of about Rs 39,000, of which the family pays only about Rs 4,000; early reporting from the pilot's 2,250 plants suggests household LPG consumption can fall by up to 70 per cent where the unit

is well-fed and well-watered. Gujarat's Banas Dairy cooperative - itself a lineal descendant of the milk model Verghese Kurien gave India - pays farmers a rupee for every kilogram of fresh dung delivered, processes it into Compressed Biogas and organic fertiliser, and is being expanded under a Rs 60-crore allocation in the state's 2026-27 budget for ten new cooperative plants. The household micro-economics and the cooperative aggregation logic are not theoretical exercises; both are running.

The international comparators sober the ambition. China built, between the early 1980s and 2014, over forty million household digesters under disciplined central subsidy - and much of that infrastructure has since fallen idle as rural-to-urban migration emptied the feedstock villages and grid LPG eroded the case for households that no longer kept cattle.



T KANNAN

The writer, a practicing Chartered Accountant and a Vedantic Scholar, can be reached at kannan@cakt.in

THE KATHMANDU POST

Making public transport safe for women

Navigating public transport in Nepal is a daily ordeal for commuters, especially women.

The moment a woman steps onto a public bus, she fears being exposed to harassment, discomfort, unwanted touch, or a leering look.

An incident involving a student who was sexually assaulted on a public bus a few weeks ago has again highlighted the severity of the problem. Unfortunately, this is not an isolated incident. According to Nepal Police, 1,673 people in the Kathmandu Valley were arrested for their involvement in various forms of misconduct on public transport this fiscal year. Of them, four were detained for sexual assault.

Yet, the number could be higher. Due to fear and social stigma, these incidents rarely come to light, let alone be reported to the police. Even if women report them,

victim-blaming and lengthy legal procedures deter them from seeking justice.

The harassment of women on public transport illustrates a broader issue: women aren't safe anywhere - inside their homes, on the streets or on public transport.

Harassers who feel entitled to women's physical space never consider women's bodily autonomy, their right to safe movement and their right to be treated with respect.

What has normalised such incidents and emboldened harassers is the silence of other commuters or witnesses, who fail to support the victim. There is also a culture of impunity that dismisses sexual harassment as a minor offence or an unavoidable situation in cramped, overcrowded public vehicles. The psychological impact of harassment is

immeasurable. Victims feel anxious, begin to blame themselves for tolerating the harassment or for not acting out, and in some cases become traumatised for life.

Multiple reports indicate that women either give up travelling altogether or limit their travel time when they are exposed to harassment on public transport, which limits their freedom and earning options as well. Other women resort to defensive measures such as sitting or standing beside other women and clutching bags and other objects to shield themselves. However, when women have to protect themselves, the burden of preventing abuse is unfairly shifted from perpetrators, legal mechanisms and institutions to women themselves.

Even as Article 38(3) of the 2015 constitution guarantees that women shall not be subjected to physical or mental violence or exploitation

on any grounds and the National Penal Code 2017 criminalises sexual harassment with penalties of up to three years in prison and a fine of up to Rs 30,000, Nepal currently lacks a specialised legal framework on harassment in public spaces. It is vital to fill this legal void to help women get justice. Stringent rules that prevent vehicles from carrying passengers beyond their seating capacity and mandate public transport owners to install CCTV cameras are equally necessary. In its budget speech for the fiscal year 2026-27, the government announced plans to launch CCTV-equipped 'Blue Bus' services for women's safety in the Kathmandu Valley. This is a good start, but such interventions must be expanded to other cities and remote areas to ensure women's safety nationwide. There should be regular public awareness campaigns as well as provision for online reporting.

Letters To The Editor | ✉ editor@thestatesman.com

Fire safety

Sir, Apropos "21 killed, 35 injured in deadly hotel fire in Malviya Nagar" (4 June), it is time to switch from the NOC (No Objection Certificate) system to a SAFE (Safety Against Fire Evaluation) Rating. It is often seen that when a major fire incident causing deaths happens in a hospital or hotel, the fire department rushes to inspect fire safety compliance.

It is revealed that 60-70 per cent of them do not have an NOC from Fire Department. How funny is it to have a binary answer to fire safety compliance? One hospital complying 39 out of 40 safety parameters is equivalent to one complying only 4 out of 40, as they both lack an NOC. Is it not unfair?

A rating concept derived from the current NOC system could yield excellent results. It may be named SAFE (Safety Against Fire Evaluation) Rating. The rating may be assigned from 0 to 10, based on compliance



on various parameters such as a) Structural Fire Resistance; b) Fire Alarm System; c) Fire Suppression System; d) Fire Escape Routes; e) Fire Safety Signage; f) Emergency Procedures and Training; g) Maintenance and Inspection; h) Water Reservoir; i) Adequacy of Fire Extinguishers; j) Fire Escape Route and k) Fire Drill Status. The parameters may be assigned different weightages based on their role in fire fighting.

Yours, etc., Ramesh Kumar Kalra, Lucknow, 4 June.

Urban mess

Sir, Delhi's building collapse, killing six people and leaving 10 injured, is another reminder to revamp the revenue and administrative models of cities. It

wasn't an old building, but poorly built. And the owner was adding another floor to it, for additional rent. So its collapse was no accident. MCD officials, whose job is to keep an eye on construction, groundwater extraction, sewage, power connections, etc. somehow didn't notice this 50-ft block. The fact is it wasn't the only building of its kind in Delhi, or cities across India. What is going on isn't negligence but wilful connivance.

There lies our failure to plan cities as engines of economic growth. India is a growing economy, and demand for housing is rising rapidly. As per World Bank estimates, urban India will house 60 crore people, producing 70 per cent of GDP in the next decade. But it's possible only if pro-growth policies are framed. Indian civic bodies, due to lack of revenue and multiplicity of authorities, can't take action even when violations, like this building, arise in plain sight. If we're serious about fixing Indian cities, let's start with their governance

structures, so that authority and accountability are not in doubt.

Yours, etc., Sanjay Chopra, Mohali, 2 June.

Uncalled for

Sir, This refers to the report "Internal conflicts within TMC reach Lok Sabha, Kakoli writes to Speaker PM against Kalyan" (May 29). It is most unfortunate that two veteran TMC leaders Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar and Kalyan Banerjee are at loggerheads, which prompted the former to write to the Speaker. In the fitness of things, the matter ought to have been resolved across the table after taking the TMC supremo into confidence. But Kakoli chose openly to be critical of the party. This behaviour is not befitting of a seasoned politician, even admitting the fact that she faced misogynistic behaviour from her own party leader.

Yours, etc., Arun Gupta, Kolkata, 29 May.

Purple revolution a model for rural communities



DR. JITENDRA SINGH

There are moments in a nation's journey when a quiet transformation in a remote corner becomes a symbol of national resurgence. The story of India's "Purple Revolution" is one such transformation. What began as an experimental scientific intervention in the hills of Bhaderwah in Jammu & Kashmir has today evolved into a powerful movement of rural empowerment, start-up culture, women-led entrepreneurship, and scientific innovation.

As we prepare to celebrate the Lavender Festival 2026 on June 6 and 7 in Bhaderwah, I see this not merely as a festival of flowers, fragrance, and tourism, but as a celebration of India's changing rural economy and the extraordinary partnership between science and society.

The Lavender Festival has steadily grown into a landmark annual national event. Earlier editions held in 2022, 2023, and 2025 demonstrated how scientific innovation can transform lives at the grassroots level.

From a modest beginning, the festival has now become a platform connecting farmers, start-ups, scientists, industry leaders, policymakers, and youth from across the country.

Bhaderwah, once known primarily for maize cultivation and seasonal migration, is today proudly recognized as the Lavender Capital of India. Vast stretches of purple fields now symbolize aspiration, dignity, and economic opportunity.

This transformation was made possible under the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) Aroma Mission, implemented by CSIR-Indian Institute of Integrative Medicine. The mission sought to introduce high-value aromatic crops in rain-fed and underutilized regions, particularly in the Himalayan belt.

The success of the Purple Revolution is deeply rooted in India's scientific ecosystem. Scientists at CSIR-IIIM developed elite lavender varieties such as RRL-12 and designed agro-technologies suitable for temperate Himalayan conditions.

Farmers were not merely given seeds; they were provided an entire ecosystem - free quality planting material, scientific training, distillation technology, value addition support, and market linkages.

The result has been remarkable. Thousands of farmers and young entrepreneurs across Jammu & Kashmir have shifted from low-income traditional crops to lavender cultivation.

Annual farm incomes have multiplied several times over. New enterprises

have emerged around essential oils, soaps, perfumes, incense sticks, cosmetics, candles, and wellness products. More importantly, this revolution has encouraged young people to return to agriculture with pride and innovation. I often say that the Purple Revolution is one of India's finest examples of "lab-to-land" success.

It represents the true spirit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of "Startup India" and "Aatmanirbhar Bharat." When the Prime Minister mentioned Bhaderwah's lavender success story in his "Mann Ki Baat" programme, the movement gained national and international visibility. That recognition was not merely symbolic; it gave confidence to farmers and rural youth that their work mattered to the nation.

One of the most inspiring dimensions of this movement is women's participation. Women across the region have become active contributors in nursery development, harvesting, processing, packaging, and marketing.

Lavender cultivation has opened doors for self-help groups and women-led enterprises, particularly in remote areas where economic opportunities were limited. The fragrance of lavender has thus become the fragrance of empowerment.

The national recognition received by the Purple Revolution has also

reinforced the role of science in nation-building. The inclusion of the Lavender Revolution in the Republic Day tableau of Council of Scientific (CSIR) and Industrial Research was a proud moment for all of us.

The tableau beautifully showcased how scientific research could uplift rural livelihoods and transform local economies. It carried before the nation the inspiring story of Bhaderwah's farmers, startups, and innovators. Equally encouraging has been the acknowledgment through prestigious national platforms such as the Rashtriya Vigyan Puraskar, which reflects India's growing commitment to celebrating scientific contributions that directly impact society.

The Purple Revolution demonstrates that science is not confined to laboratories; it belongs equally to farmers' fields, village enterprises, and rural aspirations.

The upcoming Lavender Festival 2026 will carry this mission forward on an even larger scale. The festival will host buyer-seller meets, startup exhibitions, technical sessions, field visits, distillation demonstrations, and interactions between farmers and industry leaders. It will also showcase how aromatic agriculture can become a major pillar of India's bio-economy and wellness economy.

What makes this journey particularly meaningful is that it has emerged from



a region that once struggled with limited economic opportunities and uncertainty. Today, Bhaderwah stands as a model for inclusive growth, scientific outreach, and sustainable development. The Purple Revolution has not only generated income; it has generated hope.

As Vice President of Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, I believe the Bhaderwah model offers valuable lessons for the entire country. It proves that when science, governance, entrepreneurship, and community participation work together, even the most remote regions can become engines of growth and innovation.

The Aroma Mission is now expanding its footprint beyond Jammu & Kashmir into other Himalayan states and temperate regions. But Bhaderwah will

always remain the birthplace of this revolution - the valley where India's lavender story first bloomed.

As the purple fields blossom once again this June, they remind us of something larger than agriculture.

They remind us that India's future lies not only in metropolitan cities and industrial corridors, but also in empowering villages, harnessing local strengths, and creating opportunities rooted in science and sustainability.

The fragrance rising from Bhaderwah's lavender fields today is, in many ways, the fragrance of a new India - confident, innovative, self-reliant, and inclusive.

(The writer is Union Minister of State (I/C), Ministry of Science and Technology and Minister of Earth Sciences.)

SATURDAY INTERVIEW

'People vote for good governance'

Madhya Pradesh Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) President Hemant Khandelwal (61) is a seasoned politician with almost 20 years of experience at all levels of politics. He has been a Member of Parliament, is currently an MLA in Madhya Pradesh, and also serves as the organizational head of the BJP state unit.

Born in Mathura, Uttar Pradesh, Hemant Khandelwal inherited a political legacy from his father, Vijay Kumar Khandelwal, who was a BJP Member of the Lok Sabha from Betul four times in a row from 1996 to 2007. When he passed away at the age of 71, the BJP gave the ticket to his son for the 2007 bypolls, and he emerged victorious.

On 2 July 2025, Hemant was appointed the MP BJP Chief. In an exclusive interview with Gaurav Chandra, he spoke on various issues including state, national, and international matters.

Excerpts:

Q: The present BJP Government of Madhya Pradesh is about to complete two-and-a-half years in office on 13 June. How do you rate its performance till now?

A: The Dr Mohan Yadav-led government has successfully completed more than two years in office. The biggest challenge for any new government is not only providing new welfare and development opportunities to the people but also carrying forward existing welfare schemes and plans. This government has provided many new benefits to the people in the fields of health, education, employment, agriculture and infrastructure. The government has provided benefits to peasants through the Bhavantar Yojana, by ensuring the MSP on their produce, and offering zero-per cent interest loans.

The government has successfully carried forward past schemes like Laadli Behna Yojana, Laadli Laxmi Yojana, the CM Kanyadan Yojana, CM Teerthdarshan Yojana and many others.

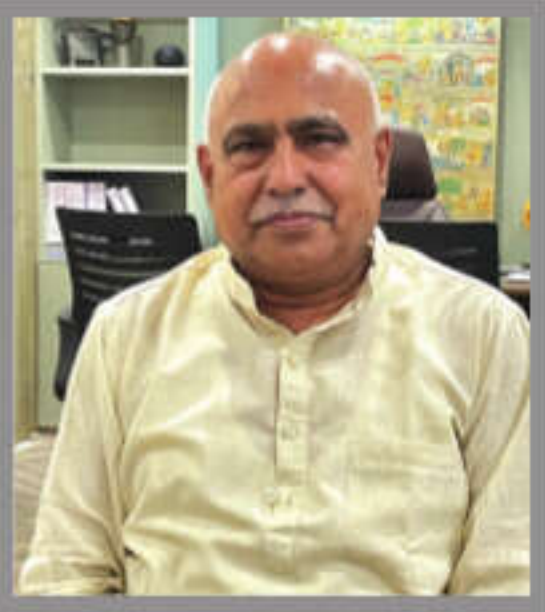
In its new initiatives, the government is concerted working towards establishing more than 50 medical colleges, increasing the medical seats in the state to 10,000, and creating industrial corridors in each district so that all kinds of industries and factories can be set up in MP.

The state has signed agreements worth Rs 30 lakh crore, and the aim is to provide employment to more than 23 lakh people. The state government is also promoting religious tourism at Mahakal, Omkareshwar, Orchha and many other places of religious significance. The government has also taken major steps for wildlife conservation. I am certain that all eyes in the country are currently on Madhya Pradesh and its development model.

Q: The BJP scored major wins in three out of five state assembly and union territory polls recently. In Bengal, the BJP has formed the state government for the first time ever. What are your views, and what, according to you, were the major reasons behind this historic feat?

A: There was a time when the BJP was considered a party of only a few communities and was limited to only some parts of the country. But ever since Atal Ji (Late PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee) came, and now with Modi Ji as the PM, the BJP has seen governments in all the North-eastern states and even in South India. The BJP's flag is flying high from north to south and east to west in the country. We had already won in Assam last time, and we repeated it in a bigger way this time. In Bengal, the people have put their seal on the leadership of PM Narendra Modi. The process that began there in the last Assembly polls has been duly and justly completed this time. People voted for the good governance of the BJP and against the long misgovernance of TMC CM Mamata Banerjee.

Q: In view of the impending fuel crisis due to the US-Iran conflict,



PM Modi has appealed for several austerity measures. What are your views, and how are they being implemented in MP?

A: The Prime Minister's appeal is very relevant, particularly for petrol and diesel, as India does not produce these fuels and we have to import them. The PM's appeal to save petrol and diesel will result in conserving not only our fuel supplies but also the country's foreign exchange. Although there is presently no shortage of fuel in India, it is still prudent that not only politicians but all citizens make it a habit to save fuel in the larger interest of the country.

Q: How do you follow these habits in your personal life?

A: Ever since I became the MP BJP President, I have never travelled with a convoy of vehicles. In fact, I do not use any government vehicle at all. I still travel in my own private vehicle. I have not even taken a government house in Bhopal, despite the Chief Minister urging me to take one. I live in my own house in Bhopal. I have also been paying toll tax on all roads, despite having been a Lok Sabha Member since 2007, and then an MLA and the state party president.

Q: You have taken strict action against some BJP leaders who acted in contradiction of the PM's repeated appeals to follow austerity measures. Can you elaborate?

A: Yes, we have cancelled the appointment of our newly-appointed district Kisan Morcha President in Bhind district, as he went in a big vehicle rally to take charge of his post. We have also served show-cause notices to some other leaders, who did not follow the PM's directives. If they fail to provide satisfactory explanations for their acts, stringent action will be taken against them.

Q: Organisational appointments in various boards and corporations in MP have finally begun. What are the major criteria in these selection process?

A: Several top posts in various Corporations, Boards, Commissions, and Authorities in MP were lying vacant over the years. Now the BJP government and the party organization have started appointing eligible party workers to these posts. We shortlisted the eligible party workers for these posts, based on their dedication, commitment and hard work done in the past for the party and organization. We also took into consideration the requirements of the particular regions where the posts have been filled. Our main aim is to justify the appointments by providing equal opportunities to eligible party workers from all sections of society, castes, and regions.

Q: It has almost been a year since you were appointed the MP BJP President. What, according to you, have been your major achievements in these 10 months, and what more do you plan to strengthen the BJP organisation and cadre in MP?

A: More than looking at any achievements in these 10 months, I will say that my top priority has been to fill up each and every post in the party organization. I am making concerted efforts to further strengthen all our party Morchas in the state. I am working to ensure that our organizational meetings and events are held regularly and on schedule. I have also directed

all our Divisional and District in-charge leaders to visit their respective areas on a regular basis and interact with party workers there. The Morcha presidents and office-bearers must go to all districts; our Mandal leaders must be available at the booth level so that all our workers - down to the ground level - remain active, energized and rejuvenated.

Q: The BJP has always been regarded as a disciplined party. However, several incidents of indiscipline and use of derogatory language involving ministers, BJP MLAs and other party functionaries have surfaced in the past few years in MP. How do you intend to bring more discipline to the state unit?

A: I agree that some incidents have occurred. But the BJP is such a huge family, and we have lakhs of workers, so it is possible that a few such incidents might occur. Notwithstanding that, whenever any such incidents come to the notice of the CM or the party organization, we take cognizance. We try to counsel our workers where it is required, and also take strict action against them if necessary.

Q: Besides being the MP BJP Chief, you are also a sitting MLA. How do you balance the two roles, and do you think it is the right decision to have an MLA as the party chief?

A: See, there are no fixed rules for appointing the party head. Mr J P Nadda, Mr Nitin Nabin and others before them have been sitting members of Parliament while being BJP national presidents too. Similarly, the party has appointed me as the BJP state unit chief, not because I am an MLA, but as a party worker. The BJP always encourages and promotes dedicated and committed party workers. As far as my being an MLA is concerned, I do my best for the development of my constituency and the welfare of its people.

100 Years Ago

News Items

MOSUL NEGOTIATIONS

"PROCEEDING IN FRIENDLY SPIRIT"

(BRITISH OFFICIAL WIRELESS.)

RUGBY, JUNE
SIR Austen Chamberlain, replying to a question in the House of Commons today, said negotiations with the Turkish Government on the Mosul question were still proceeding in a friendly spirit, which encouraged the hope of their early and satisfactory conclusion.

He could not, however, make a definite statement until the terms of the treaty were agreed to.

TOTE FOR IRELAND

EXPERIMENT OF FREE STATE GOVERNMENT

LONDON, JUNE

MR. BLYTHE, the Irish Free State Minister of Finance, introducing the Finance Bill in the Dail, stated, in connection with the betting tax that the Government proposed to introduce the totalisator or the parimutuel system into the Free State.

The experiment would be tried out on a number of selected racecourses.—Reuter's Special Service.

COAL-OWNERS' NEW MOVE

SEEKING BASIS OF AGREEMENT

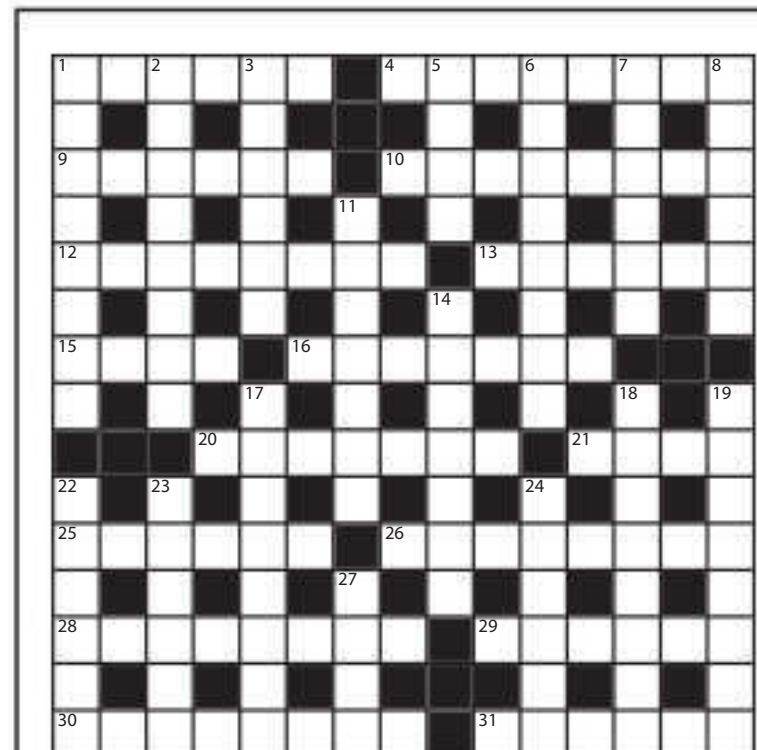
(BRITISH OFFICIAL WIRELESS.)

RUGBY, JUNE
DEVELOPMENTS on the latest move towards reopening negotiations for the settlement of the coal dispute are awaited with keen interest.

A letter from the coal-owners' president, Mr. Evan Williams, inviting, Mr. Herbert Smith, President of the Miners' Federation, and his colleague, to meet a deputation of owners has been received by the Secretary of the Miners' Federation, Mr. Cook, who had arranged to fly to Brussels to-day and will deliver it to Mr. Herbert Smith, who is attending a meeting of the International Miners' Federation there.

It is understood that Mr. Evan Williams does not advance definite suggestion as a basis for discussions. The proposed meeting would examine whether lines of possible settlement can be discovered.

Crossword | No. 293482



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

A T A T U R K R O S E B U D
T N T A T U U E
R E C L A I M E D C A M E L
O E H A G C B A
P O S E E S P E C I A L L Y
T T A U N I N E S
N E O P L A T I O N I C E A
E R C R O T T E A
G S B O R C R C R
U N T H I N K I N G H E R O
E R A O E E T S
B R O O D R E C I P I E N T
E L E E T I R I
C E L E S T A A R C H A I T I C

ACROSS

- Witness catches scoundrel in stable (6)
- New notices in areas of potential trouble (3,5)
- Arguments caused by knight sharing spoils (3,3)
- Classified ad featuring exotic escorts about to be removed (8)
- Strict disciplinarian's right to set about wayward inmate? Just the opposite (8)

- Appeal from injured guerilla American soldier ignored (6)
- Unlikely to happen as principal leaves hurriedly (4)
- Since coming from Belgium Hercules finally with grounds for action (7)
- Weapon found in ditch brought back by petty officer (7)
- Fool with Dickens over ... (4)
- ... the full effect of Abbot's debut on stage (6)
- Suspect in stolen lippy (8)

- Novel in the earliest stage of development (8)
- Success after Rushdie's first to break through for UK publisher (6)
- Republican VP hedging about the end of his political influence (8)
- Outrageous cheek without unqualified driver getting to shout abusively (6)

- Deal with vote against covering face (8)
- Turned off (6)
- Eject Jack from tournament (4)
- Succeeded without drugs to become absolutely clean (8)
- Choose not to get involved with solicitor after work (5,3)
- Plants found in south facing borders (6)
- Happen to get new suspect-tracing aid - it's an advantage (7)
- Justify the rise of crude bombast (7)

- Agree to meet (8)
- Play the part of Obama spurning soliters with quick reply (8)
- Reportedly uninjured after rush to find refuge from danger (8)
- Barker, perhaps set up after denunciation, gets put in prison (4,2)
- It provides excitement say in spring (6)
- Faultless from rookie (6)
- Involving amateurs rising within officialdom (4)

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



THE ASIAN AGE

6 JUNE 2026

Monsoon: IMD misses mark; amid 'El Nino' fears on crops

The arrival of the southwest monsoon over Kerala is more than a meteorological event for the country. It is a signal that sets in motion the country's agricultural cycle, influences rural incomes, shapes inflation trends and ultimately impacts economic growth. This year, however, the India Meteorological Department's forecast on the monsoon's progress missed the mark due to the El Nino conditions developing in the Pacific Ocean.

After accounting for the IMD's initial margin of error of four days, the monsoon's onset was effectively delayed by about five days, strengthening prospects of deficient rainfall and raising fresh concerns among farmers preparing for the crucial kharif sowing season.

This is the second time that the IMD has failed to forecast the arrival of the monsoon accurately since it began the practice 21 years ago. When the IMD's forecast on the monsoon onset date was off by two days in 2015, the country received 15 per cent deficient rainfall and suffered a drought. This year too, the IMD has predicted rainfall that is 10 per cent below normal.

Farmers make critical decisions on the purchase of seeds and fertilisers, labour deployment, and irrigation planning based on monsoon forecasts. When forecasts and actual weather patterns diverge significantly, these decisions become riskier and more expensive. However, natural climatic conditions like El Nino, which indicates abnormal warming of the central and eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean, sometimes cause forecasts to go awry.

The government must encourage village-based micro-industries that could create alternative employment for the rural population and help people build emergency funds to survive crop failures

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wars, crude oil shortages, and economic challenges.

Agriculture contributes around 18 per cent to the Indian economy and is still the largest employer in the country. It is the mainstay of the country's rural economy. A failed monsoon in a single year could push small farmers, especially those pursuing subsistence farming, into a debt trap. Just as India seeks to reduce its dependence on imported crude oil, it must also reduce the vulnerability of rural livelihoods to rainfall fluctuations.

The government must encourage village-based micro-industries that could create alternative employment for the rural population and help people build emergency funds to survive crop failures. Similarly, investment in irrigation infrastructure, drought-resistant crop varieties, weather-based crop insurance, digital advisory systems and long-term storage capacity must become national priorities.

India is one of the largest economies in the world, accounts for one-sixth of the global population and is one of the few oldest surviving civilisational nations in the world. If it desires to regain its lost global eminence, it must emerge internally stronger by reducing its acute dependence on rainfall and imported energy.

Why Annamalai left BJP

The resignation of former president of BJP's Tamil Nadu unit K. Annamalai from the party and his plans to launch a new outfit have sparked some intriguing speculation mainly because the moves come after over a year-long wait since his loss of the party position. Did he gather the courage to go on his own after witnessing the success and ascent to the chief minister's chair of C. Joseph Vijay? Though Mr Annamalai was the BJP's chief ministerial candidate when the president's post was thrust upon him in 2021, he could never even win his

MLA seat in the elections that followed.

So, as someone who failed to make his mark as the BJP state president, he could now be aspiring to reach his goal by breaking free from the party. The poor faring of traditional parties, including the two Dravidian majors, in the recent elections could have made him see a future for only new parties like the TVK, which was just over two years old when it romped home in the elections. Also the extremely dismal performance of BJP — it won a single seat in the 234-member Assembly — made him realise that the party, despite ruling the country for over 12 years, has no chance of capturing the imagination of the people of Tamil Nadu where, as the TVK's triumph reveals, it is the youth brigade that has taken charge.

Mr Annamalai, who is just 42 years old, had enjoyed a very good fan following among the youth mainly because of his credentials as a former IPS officer, even outside the purview of the BJP. Now he hopes to harness the youth's support to his political advantage. That his supporters too feel the same was vouched for by the rejuvenation and proliferation of the Annamalai Narpani Mandrams which are social welfare clubs named after him. The clubs sprouted during his tenure with the party and they came alive when news spread of his launching a new one. Although a fan club of a politician may not be the same as an actor's, it could be a new phenomenon in the politics of the future.

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THE ASIAN AGE

KAUSHIK MITTER Editor
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Farrukh Dhondy
Cabbages & Kings



My sister, aunts & other relatives: Parsi tales from a different era...

"The shadows lengthen as the sun sets, Nothing sinister, Not a prediction — Just the angle of light But the metaphoric imagination begets Terror's sister — The dark conviction Foreshadowing the night?" — From *Aesop's Goal*, by Bachchoo

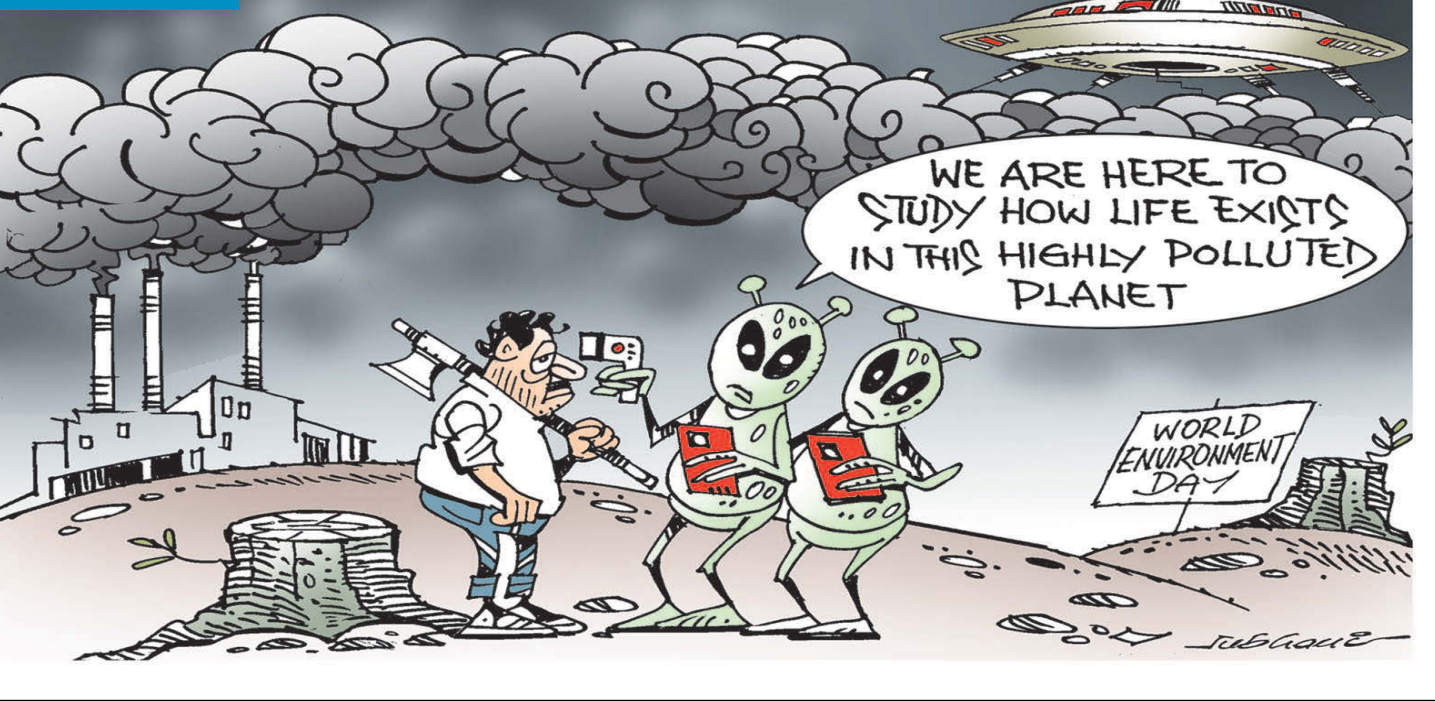
You will forgive me, gentle reader, for telling you tales of my sister, who died last week, as each of them has some significance as general stories of a multi-faceted India. It's August 1962, and my elder sister Zareen is 20 years old. That morning she is putting on a celebratory sari in front of a mirror, which is part of one flap of the wardrobe door in my aunt's bedroom. Behind her is the bed of our grand-aunt, Aala Masi. Aala Masi, my late grandmother's much-elder sister, is now in her eighties and lives in my aunt's house in Poona (now Pune), having been brought there owing to infirmities and illness from Bombay (Mumbai), where she spent her life in a "Parsi colony" near Grant Road. "So, whose wedding is it?" Aala Masi asks Zareen, with her arthritic palm cupped upwards, shaking in a questioning gesture.

"It's not a wedding, Aala Masi, I'm giving a lecture in college for the Independence Day celebrations," Zareen replies. "What's Independence Day?" Aala Masi asks. Zareen, now done with her décor, turns to her. "You know, it's the day the British left India forever," she explains. "What?? The British have gone?" Aala Masi says, with a genuinely shocked expression. "No one told me!" Yesssss!!! 1962! What sort of insulation from the world's upheavals does a Parsi colony in Mumbai offer its residents? And then, moving to a little later in our extremely parallel lives — our father is now Town Engineer in Jamshedpur, and Zareen lives with him and our mum, regularly visits Jamshedpur's Beldih Club, plays badminton, parties with other members and falls in love with a young Tata Administrative Service candidate called Ramesh Bhasin. She tells my mother of her nascent relationship and of course, in the small town, the gossip spreads and dad gets to hear of it. He doesn't approve. He tells Zareen she is not to entertain any relationship with a Punjabi Hindu, and that the family would find a nice Parsi boy for her. Zareen, who is scheduled to go for a year as one of the girls chosen, out of thousands, to run the Indian Pavilion at the New York World Trade Fair,

is not happy and talks to our mother, who suggests that she invite Ramesh and his friend, another Tata trainee, K.C. Mehra, who used to be an actor, to tea. Zareen does. Ramesh and KC turn up. My father returns home after work and finds these young men in the sitting room and is introduced to them. They get talking. Ramesh is utterly charming and a couple of hours into tea, dad is entranced and offers them whisky and whatever. When they leave, my father speaks to Zareen. Yes, he has melted. He will put religious prejudice behind, and if she returns from New York after a year and is still in a relationship with this young man, he will approve of their betrothal. So, it was said and so it was done — the tans-religious wedding took place with hearty celebrations. And, if you want to know, it lasted beautifully and her three very mature children came from several points of the globe and spent some of Zareen's last days with her, as I and our younger sister and her two gorgeous granddaughters did, in Bengaluru. As the years passed, Ramesh rose through the ranks of the Tata hierarchy to become one of the directors on the board of Tata companies. Zareen, not wanting to be just a housewife, applied for and began work as a clerk or teller in one of the town's banks. She didn't aspire to any rank and was just one of the many workers, all of whom were union members and some of them members of the Indian

Communist Party. These allegiances led the staff of the bank to several determinations and industrial actions, including a strike. Of course, all of them knew that Mrs Bhasin was the wife of a director of the Tatas, but she enthusiastically joined in the actions of her colleagues and was even, among some of them, dubbed "Comrade Mrs Bhasin". Ramesh and Zareen often visited me in London. I was, when they were once here, a member of the Race Today collective, a political group centred around a radical magazine which fought for the rights of Black and Asian Britons. It wasn't a "complaint" outfit and was in every way positive and even fun. Every year the collective, at the end of August, floated its own detachment, marching through the streets of London in costume for West Indian Carnival. The year when Zareen and Ramesh visited, the theme of our Carnival contingent was "Forces of Victory". Zareen and Ramesh joined us wearing mock military uniforms and marching through the streets with thousands of others to the beat of steel bands; our contingent led by a car decked out like a tank, chanting the verses composed by Linton Kwesi Johnson. I wondered, even then, what the other Tata directors, bosses and their wives would make of Ramesh and Zareen's "plebeian" (?) involvement — but did those two give a toss?

Subhani



India's child health: What's measured, what's missing



Patralekha Chatterjee
 Dev 360

Child health data is not just about children: it is a country's report card on justice, equity and governance. If children thrive, the nation thrives; if they falter, the cracks in the system are laid bare.

As Unicef's former executive director James Grant once said: "The health of children is the surest indicator of the health of a society." That is why the release of the latest National Family Health Survey, India's flagship study of population, health and nutrition launched in 1992-93, matters.

The National Family Health Survey-6 (NFHS-6) fact sheets, released on May 29, 2026, bring good news. The most significant gains have come in child health. Stunting among children under five has declined, as has severe wasting, institutional deliveries now exceed 90%, and full immunisation coverage for children aged 12-23 months has risen to over 87%. Additionally, India's Total Fertility Rate has stabilised at 2.0, falling below the replacement level of 2.1. These are unequivocal achievements: the result of decades of sustained effort and investment. This is the national picture, with huge state-level variations, yet the needle has visibly moved.

But the survey is not all feel-good: it also showed a worrying decline in exclusive breastfeeding among children under six months, from 63.7% in NFHS-5 to 55.8% in NFHS-6. Breast milk is safe, clean and contains antibodies which help protect against many common childhood illnesses, as the World Health Organisation stresses. The Sample Registration System statistical report 2024, also released recently, and another source of information on child health, reveals that the national Infant Mortality Rate stands at 24 per 1,000 live births (down from 30 in 2019), with rural IMR at 27 and urban at 17.

Analysts, researchers and state planners must now stitch together pieces from different surveys with varying methodologies, reference periods, and geographic coverage. Intra-state inequalities become blurrier.

are released, which will hopefully be done. The detailed report and the unit-level data should be made accessible to the public like in previous rounds. With the currently-available data in factsheets, it is difficult to say precisely who are the most vulnerable children, what are the risk factors and what are emerging risks. We need this information not just for researchers but also for policy makers," she adds.

In February 2025, the US government (under the second Trump administration) terminated most USAID funding and programmes as part of a broad foreign aid review and restructuring. This led to the abrupt shutdown of the DHS programme's core operations, primarily funded by USAID for over 40 years. Clearly, global funding impacts the survey landscape.

At present, we have a fragmented data landscape. SRS gives reliable national and state-level (with rural-urban splits for bigger states) mortality trends but lacks district-level estimates and the rich disaggregation by wealth, caste, education, or maternal factors that NFHS once provided. DABS-I, which promises more accurate venous blood sampling for anaemia, completed fieldwork but has not released results as of early June 2026. We are therefore still relying on NFHS-5's high (and contested) figures on anaemia: 67% of children 6-59 months, 57% of women 15-49 and other indicators. Hopefully, more detailed information from the latest NFHS will be released. But if that does not happen soon, we will face a critical granularity gap through omission of district-level data in many areas. Take Maharashtra. According to NFHS 5 (2019-2021), the prevalence of diarrhoea among children below

five in the two weeks preceding the survey was 3.5 per cent in Mumbai. The corresponding figure for Nandurbar, a backward and tribal dominated district, was 9.8 per cent.

This is the kind of information which the recent official surveys do not provide and this is what makes it impossible to pinpoint vulnerable blocks or tribal pockets where infant deaths remain disproportionately high. Compounding this, NFHS-6 also dropped key structural determinants of child health, such as household access to clean cooking fuel and improved sanitation.

Analysts, researchers and state planners must now stitch together pieces from different surveys with varying methodologies, reference periods, and geographic coverage. The direct linkages that made earlier NFHS rounds so useful are harder to trace. Intra-state inequalities become blurrier.

Survival and nutrition gains are being reported in India. But to be in effective future-forward mode, one must have access to the granular picture of what is going wrong, what is driving vulnerability, and where. Without it, policymakers risk flying partially blind on targeting the hardest-to-reach children and women. The Government of India is measuring success by outputs and infrastructure delivery; public health researchers are trying to measure human well-being and causal networks.

The solution does not lie in romanticising any one survey but in demanding better integration: timely release of full NFHS-6 detailed reports, early DABS-I results with clear methodological notes, continued strengthening of SRS/CRS, and inclusion of harder indicators on violence, intra-household realities, and social determinants.

Until then, the true state of child health — and broader human development — in India is knowable, but only through some extra effort, triangulation, and a willingness to read between the data gaps.

The writer focuses on development issues in India and emerging economies. She can be reached at patralekha.chatterjee@gmail.com

LETTERS
 CONSISTENT NEGLECT

Parsa Venkateshwar Rao Jr rightly argues that the Delhi hotel fire reflects a deeper culture of neglect. Reading about it brought back memories of the 1995 DAV School Dabwali fire. As a DAV Rohtak student, I remember my mother's panic when she heard that a DAV school had caught fire. Only later did she realise it was in Dabwali, not Rohtak. That relief was denied to hundreds of parents. From the DAV School Dabwali fire to the Uphaar Cinema tragedy, the Goa nightclub blaze and now the Delhi hotel fire, the pattern endures. The locations change, but negligence, violations and official indifference remain tragically constant.

Harsh Pawaria
 Rohtak

REVIEW POLICE ACT

IN JULY 2025, the Central government amended the Delhi Police Act and released them of licensing duty vis-à-vis certain business establishments, including hotels. This was done to reduce the multiplicity of agencies required to start a business. But the recent spate of fires in Delhi shows that this did not work well. A police officer is the best person to judge whether a hotel is running as per the laws or not. Besides, a beat cop is always on duty in the vicinity of a hotel. In case of B&B hotels, any one of them violating rules and raising illegal constructions would have come to the notice of police. The government should review the amendment in Delhi Police Act 2025.

D.B. Madan
 New Delhi

LEGAL LUMINARY

THE DEPARTURE of Dr Subhash C. Kashyap represents not just the passing of an eminent constitutional scholar but the end of an era. Born on May 17, 1929, in Bijinor, he belonged to a remarkable generation that witnessed the twilight of empire, the tumult of Partition and the triumphant dawn of Independence in 1947. Having participated in the freedom movement as a young student, he carried within him a rare historical consciousness. As secretary-general of the Lok Sabha from 1984 to 1990, and through more than a hundred authoritative works on constitutional law and parliamentary democracy, Kashyap became one of the foremost custodians of India's institutional memory. His demise leaves an irreplaceable void in India's intellectual landscape.

Vijay Singh Adhikari
 Nainital

DECCAN Chronicle

6 JUNE 2026

Monsoon: IMD misses mark; amid 'El Nino' fears on crops

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This is the second time that the IMD has failed to forecast the arrival of the monsoon accurately since it began the practice 21 years ago. When the IMD's forecast on the monsoon onset date was off by two days in 2015, the country received 15 per cent deficient rainfall and suffered a drought. This year too, the IMD has predicted rainfall that is 10 per cent below normal.

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wars, crude oil shortages, and economic challenges. Agriculture contributes around 18 per cent to the Indian economy and is still the largest employer in the country. It is the mainstay of the country's rural economy. A failed monsoon in a single year could push small farmers, especially those pursuing subsistence farming, into a debt trap. Just as India seeks to reduce its dependence on imported crude oil, it must also reduce the vulnerability of rural livelihoods to rainfall fluctuations.

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Why Annamalai left BJP

The resignation of former president of BJP's Tamil Nadu unit K. Annamalai from the party and his plans to launch a new outfit have sparked some intriguing speculation mainly because the moves come after over a year-long wait since his loss of the party position. Did he gather the courage to go on his own after witnessing the success and ascent to the chief minister's chair of C. Joseph Vijay? Though Mr Annamalai was the BJP's chief ministerial candidate when the president's post was thrust upon him in 2021, he could never even win his MLA seat in the elections that followed.

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Patralekha Chatterjee
Dev 360

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The Sample Registration System statistical report 2024, also released recently, and another source of information on child health, reveals that the national Infant Mortality Rate stands at 24 per 1,000 live births (down from 30 in 2019), with rural IMR at 27 and urban at 17.

Despite this decline, one in every 42 infants at the national level, one in every 37 infants in rural areas and one in every 59 infants in urban areas, still die within one year of life, the Bulletin notes.

State-level variations are glaring — Kerala's IMR is 8, the lowest among all major Indian states; the corresponding figure for Uttar Pradesh is 35.

What the official data now in the public domain don't tell — or no longer tell comprehensively — is equally significant.

The latest NFHS fact sheets in the public domain dropped the entire infant, neonatal, and under-5 mortality section, along with sex ratio at birth. Anaemia indicators (once covering children, women, men, and adolescents) are gone from NFHS and shifted to the new Diet and Biomarkers Survey: DABS-I.

As Dipa Sinha, development economist focusing on social policy, nutrition, public health and gender, puts it: "Many items included in NFHS-5 do not appear in the NFHS-6 fact sheets that have just been released. One example — infant mortality. Infant mortality is included in the Sample Registration System (SRS) Statistical Report 2024, which also came out recently. But NFHS and SRS are two different surveys, managed by different government agencies, and can't be compared. The SRS (managed by the Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India) has a smaller sample size and it does not offer granular district-level statistics. The NFHS-6, the first completely government-managed NFHS round without external technical assistance from the DHS (Demographic and Health Surveys), a USAID-supported global health data initiative, was overseen by the ministry of health and family welfare."

"We can say more only when the full NFHS-6 data

Analysts, researchers and state planners must now stitch together pieces from different surveys with varying methodologies, reference periods, and geographic coverage. Intra-state inequalities become blurrier.

are released, which will hopefully be done. The detailed report and the unit-level data should be made accessible to the public like in previous rounds. With the currently-available data in factsheets, it is difficult to say precisely who are the most vulnerable children, what are the risk factors and what are emerging risks. We need this information not just for researchers but also for policy makers," she adds.

In February 2025, the US government (under the second Trump administration) terminated most USAID funding and programmes as part of a broad foreign aid review and restructuring. This led to the abrupt shutdown of the DHS programme's core operations, primarily funded by USAID for over 40 years. Clearly, global funding impacts the survey landscape.

At present, we have a fragmented data landscape. SRS gives reliable national and state-level (with rural-urban splits for bigger states) mortality trends but lacks district-level estimates and the rich disaggregation by wealth, caste, education, or maternal factors that NFHS once provided. DABS-I, which promises more accurate venous blood sampling for anaemia, completed fieldwork but has not released results as of early June 2026.

We are therefore still relying on NFHS-5's high (and contested) figures on anaemia: 67% of children 6-59 months, 57% of women 15-49 and other indicators. Hopefully, more detailed information from the latest NFHS will be released. But if that does not happen soon, we will face a critical granularity gap through omission of district-level data in many areas. Take Maharashtra. According to NFHS 5 (2019-2021), the prevalence of diarrhoea among children below

five in the two weeks preceding the survey was 3.5 per cent in Mumbai. The corresponding figure for Nandurbar, a backward and tribal dominated district, was 9.8 per cent.

This is the kind of information which the recent official surveys do not provide and this is what makes it impossible to pinpoint vulnerable blocks or tribal pockets where infant deaths remain disproportionately high. Compounding this, NFHS-6 also dropped key structural determinants of child health, such as household access to clean cooking fuel and improved sanitation.

Analysts, researchers and state planners must now stitch together pieces from different surveys with varying methodologies, reference periods, and geographic coverage. The direct linkages that made earlier NFHS rounds so useful are harder to trace. Intra-state inequalities become blurrier.

Survival and nutrition gains are being reported in India. But to be in effective future-forward mode, one must have access to the granular picture of what is going wrong, what is driving vulnerability, and where. Without it, policymakers risk flying partially blind on targeting the hardest-to-reach children and women. The Government of India is measuring success by outputs and infrastructure delivery; public health researchers are trying to measure human well-being and causal networks.

The solution does not lie in romanticising any one survey but in demanding better integration: timely release of full NFHS-6 detailed reports, early DABS-I results with clear methodological notes, continued strengthening of SRS/CRS, and inclusion of harder indicators on violence, intra-household realities, and social determinants. Until then, the true state of child health — and broader human development — in India is knowable, but only through some extra effort, triangulation, and a willingness to read between the data gaps.

The writer focuses on development issues in India and emerging economies. She can be reached at patralekha.chatterjee@gmail.com.

LETTERS

TRUMP ISOLATED

This confirms that US President Donald Trump is isolated in his own country as far as the three-month old war on Iran is concerned (*US House calls for end to Iran war, rebukes Trump, June 5*). That four Republicans crossed party lines to join Democrats in a rare, public rebuke of the US administration means there is more than meets the eye and that the President's war powers are being challenged openly and democratically.

Govardhana Myneedu
Vijayawada

DMK AVOIDS BLOC

DMK's anger on the Congress is justified but with this indignity, skipping I.N.D.I.A. bloc meet is detrimental to the glimmering opposition unity (*DMK to skip I.N.D.I.A. bloc meet on June 8, June 5*). With its sweep across all India and the TMC rout in Bengal, the BJP is calling shots now. In these circumstances, with the self-inflicted one perspective vision, the DMK's decision is harmful to the unity of the opposition on one hand and helpful to the opportune NDA on the other.

Ch V.B.R. Naidu
Srikakulam

SHOT AT THE WORLD

Hyderabad's Esha Singh, 21, shot the world still in Munich (*Trigger happy Esha on target, June 5*). At the ISSF World Cup, she scored 43 out of 50 in the 25m pistol — a new world record. Olympic champion Yang Ji-in finished fifth. India finished first. Behind that bullet stood a father who quit racing and a mother who held the shop. Esha said her parents won with her. She is right. LA 2028 just got louder. Mark the name.

C.S. Raju
Puttaparthi

BEACH SHACKS

It is really one step forward for the promotion of tourism by the AP government to start beach shacks in Visakhapatnam, Surya Lanka and Chirala beaches to sell beer, low level alcohol liquor under PPP model on par with Goa model (*AP plans beach shacks to sell beer, low alcohol liquor, June 5*). However, it should guard against anti-social and activities around these places.

P. Sumanth Kumar
Guntur

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

DECCAN CHRONICLE

Kaushik Mitter
Editor

K. Sudhakar
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, Cheralabhattur Road, Mugudhampur Village, Karimnagar-505186, PH. NO. 9121181123.

Nellore: Survey No.527/2, Burranpur Village, Venkatchalam (M), Chemmudugunta 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

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

Farrukh Dhondy Cabbages & Kings



"The shadows lengthen as the sun sets,
Nothing sinister,
Not a prediction —
Just the angle of light
But the metaphorical imagination begets
Terror's sister —
The dark conviction
Foreshadowing the night?"
— From *Aesop's Goal*, by Bachchoo

My sister, aunts & other relatives: Parsi tales from a different era...

You will forgive me, gentle reader, for telling you tales of my sister, who died last week, as each of them has some significance as general stories of a multi-faceted India.

It's August 1962, and my elder sister Zareen is 20 years old. That morning she is putting on a celebratory sari in front of a mirror, which is part of one flap of the wardrobe door in my aunt's bedroom. Behind her is the bed of our grand-aunt, Aala Masi.

Aala Masi, my late grandmother's much-elder sister, is now in her eighties and lives in my aunt's house in Poona (now Pune), having been brought there owing to infirmities and illness from Bombay (Mumbai), where she spent her life in a "Parsi colony" near Grant Road.

"So, whose wedding is it?" Aala Masi asks Zareen, with her arthritic palm cupped upwards, shaking in a questioning gesture.

"It's not a wedding, Aala Masi, I'm giving a lecture in college for the Independence Day celebrations." Zareen replies.

"What's Independence Day?" Aala Masi asks. Zareen, now done with her décor, turns to her. "You know, it's the day the British left India forever," she explains.

"What??? The British have gone?" Aala Masi says, with a genuinely shocked expression. "No one told me!"

Yesssss!!! 1962! What sort of insulation from the world's upheavals does a Parsi colony in Mumbai offer its residents?

And then, moving to a little later in our extremely parallel lives — our father is now Town Engineer in Jamshedpur, and Zareen lives with him and our mum, regularly visits Jamshedpur's Beldih Club, plays badminton, parties with other members and falls in love with a young Tata Administrative Service candidate called Ramesh Bhasin. She tells my mother of her nascent relationship and of course, in the small town, the gossip spreads and dad gets to hear of it.

He doesn't approve. He tells Zareen she is not to entertain any relationship with a Punjabi Hindu, and that the family would find a nice Parsi boy for her.

Zareen, who is scheduled to go for a year as one of the girls chosen, out of thousands, to run the Indian Pavilion at the New York World Trade Fair,

is not happy and talks to our mother, who suggests that she invite Ramesh and his friend, another Tata trainee, K.C. Mehra, who used to be an actor, to tea.

Zareen does. Ramesh and KC turn up. My father returns home after work and finds these young men in the sitting room and is introduced to them. They get talking. Ramesh is utterly charming and a couple of hours into tea, dad is entranced and offers them whisky and whatever. When they leave, my father speaks to Zareen. Yes, he has melted. He will put religious prejudice behind, and if she returns from New York after a year and is still in a relationship with this young man, he will approve of their betrothal.

So, it was said and so it was done — the tans-religious wedding took place with hearty celebrations. And, if you want to know, it lasted beautifully and her three very mature children came from several points of the globe and spent some of Zareen's last days with her, as I and our younger sister and her two gorgeous granddaughters did, in Bengaluru.

As the years passed, Ramesh rose through the ranks of the Tata hierarchy to become one of the directors on the board of Tata companies. Zareen, not wanting to be just a housewife, applied for and began work as a clerk or teller in one of the town's banks. She didn't aspire to any rank and was just one of the many workers, all of whom were union members and some of them members of the Indian

Communist Party.

These allegiances led the staff of the bank to several determinations and industrial actions, including a strike. Of course, all of them knew that Mrs Bhasin was the wife of a director of the Tatas, but she enthusiastically joined in the actions of her colleagues and was even, among some of them, dubbed "Comrade Mrs Bhasin".

Ramesh and Zareen often visited me in London. I was, when they were once there, a member of the Race Today collective, a political group centred around a radical magazine which fought for the rights of Black and Asian Britons.

It wasn't a "complaint" outfit and was in every way positive and even fun. Every year the collective, at the end of August, floated its own detachment, marching through the streets of London in costume for West Indian Carnival.

The year when Zareen and Ramesh visited, the theme of our Carnival contingent was "Forces of Victory". Zareen and Ramesh joined us wearing mock military uniforms and marching through the streets with thousands of others to the beat of steel bands; our contingent led by a car decked out like a tank, chanting the verses composed by Linton Kwesi Johnson.

I wondered, even then, what the other Tata directors, bosses and their wives would make of Ramesh and Zareen's "plebeian" (?) involvement — but did those two give a toss?

quick BITES

| INDICATORS | | % |
|------------------------|------------|--------|
| Sensex | 74243.34 | -0.16 |
| Nifty 50 | 23366.70 | -0.21 |
| S&P 500* | 7,442.47 | -1.87 |
| Dollar (₹) | 94.955 | -0.88 |
| Pound Sterling (₹) | 127.8905 | -0.63 |
| Euro (₹) | 110.6019 | -0.68 |
| Gold (10gm)* (₹) | 155,451.00 | -2.57 |
| Brent crude (\$/bbl)* | 92.76 | -2.39 |
| IN 10-Yr bond yield | 6.950 | 0.43 |
| US 10-Yr T-bill yield* | 4.536 | +0.059 |

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Mallcom invests ₹100 crore in Gujarat plant

Kolkata-based PPE manufacturer Mallcom India on Friday said it has invested over ₹100 crore in a new manufacturing facility at Sanand in Gujarat, as part of its strategy to expand domestic production capabilities, strengthen localisation and reduce dependence on imports. The Sanand plant, currently employs more than 200 people and is expected to generate over 300 jobs by next year, the company said.



Govt readies data sets for use with AI

To ensure that AI models do not rely on non-credible sources for government data, the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) has upgraded its official data portal to be directly readable by large language models (LLMs) secretary of MoSPI, Saurabh Garg, said the government is standardising 288 priority datasets, which are important from an economic perspective, across ministries.

Yugen Infra to build township in 500 acre

Realty firm Yugen Infra on Friday said it will invest around ₹2,000 crore to develop a 500-acre township in Maharashtra. The company also signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with LiVlong, an aggregator platform for healthcare solutions, for the upcoming township. The company is developing the township, Yugen Golf City, located on the Goa and Maharashtra border.

IFC commits \$50M towards green hydrogen

International Finance Corporation (IFC) on Friday committed \$50 million to Hygenco Green Energies Private Ltd to promote green hydrogen in India. IFC, together with Siemens Financial Services, Clean Technology Fund, Frontier Opportunities Fund, and Fullerton Carbon Action Fund, signed a definitive agreement for a collective amount equivalent to \$105 million investment.



RBI holds rates at 5.25%, says inflation to hit 5.1%

Lowers FY27 growth forecast to 6.6% on risks from war in West Asia

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, JUNE 5

The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday kept the benchmark repo rate unchanged at 5.25 per cent, while adopting a neutral but more cautious stance amid rising inflation risks and global uncertainties.

Citing risks arising from the ongoing West Asia conflict, the RBI lowered its FY27 real GDP growth forecast to 6.6 per cent from 6.9 per cent. It also raised its FY27 inflation projection to 5.1 per cent from 4.6 per cent.

The baseline outlook for growth and inflation faces considerable risks due to uncertainty over the duration and intensity of the West Asia conflict, the extent of spillover effects and the pace of supply chain normalisation, RBI said. It also flagged uncertainty in the food outlook because of the forecast of a sub-normal south-west monsoon and the possibility of El Nino conditions.

Responding to a question by DC on whether the sharp 50 bps upward revision in the inflation forecast and prevailing upside risks indicated a possible rate hike at the next policy review, RBI governor Sanjay Malhotra said: "It is (inflation) more adverse than it was previously. We will have to see if inflation is actually getting generalised. If inflation increase is one time, then you have to look through but if it is getting generalised, persistent or built into expectations then we will act. For that we have to wait and watch".

The status quo on interest rates prevent an increase in EMIs, while allowing prospective borrowers to secure loans at current mortgage rates. Deposit rates are also expected to stay broadly supported.

RBI announced measures aimed at attracting foreign capital inflows, supporting rupee and addressing balance of payments. The measures include expanding long-term government securities under the Fully Accessible Route, removing foreign portfolio investment limits under the General Route, increasing investment limits for non-resident Indians in the stock market and introducing concessional foreign exchange swaps for PSUs and authorised dealer banks.

"RBI's message is not that rates are headed sharply lower, but that inflation risks have increased sufficiently to warrant caution," said Adhil Shetty, CEO, BankBazaar.

Amid the reported shortage of natural gas in the country, Union minister for petroleum and natural gas Hardeep Singh Puri on Friday said that Oil India Limited (OIL) has reported presence of natural gas in Sri Vijayapuram-3, 15 km off the east coast of the Andaman Islands, at a depth of 355 metres.

The initial production testing at depth of 1,900 plus meters in Eocene formation has established the presence of gas.

"An ocean of energy opportunities reinforced in the Andaman Sea! Very happy to report the presence of natural gas," he said in a post on X.

EXTERNAL FACTORS

- RBI retains a neutral stance, but turns more cautious.
- West Asia tensions key risk to global inflation, growth.
- El Nino major domestic risk to food inflation.
- RBI considering launching polymer currency notes.
- Rupee gains 81 paise closed at 94.93 per dollar.
- RBI expands Fully Accessible Route (FAR) to attract foreign investment into G-Secs.
- Govt revises FY26 GDP growth up to 7.7 per cent from earlier 7.1%.



INFLATION IS more adverse than it was previously. We will have to see if inflation is actually getting generalised. If inflation increase is one time, then you have to look through but if it is getting generalised, persistent or built into expectations then we will act.

— SANJAY MALHOTRA
RBI governor



May fuel price hikes to hit household spends

FALAKNAAZ SYED, MUMBAI, JUNE 6

The RBI governor Sanjay Malhotra on Friday warned that the rise in petrol and diesel prices in May could lead to an uptick in the household expenses, and the impact will be visible on the CPI Inflation soon.

"Retail fuel prices have been raised cumulatively by 7.4 per cent for petrol and 8.4 per cent for diesel. The increase implies a direct impact of about 36 basis points on headline inflation, which, along with second order effects, would get reflected in CPI inflation in the coming months," Malhotra said.

He flagged a likely deficient south-west monsoon

and potential El Nino conditions as major domestic risks. A weaker monsoon could affect agricultural production, rural demand and food inflation in the coming months, he said.

Malhotra cautioned that the food inflation outlook remains uncertain despite headline consumer inflation staying below the RBI's target.

Malhotra said that overall the economy is well-balanced and the country will manage the West Asia conflict positively. The country's fiscal state is fine but the West Asia conflict has impacted all the economies globally.

The country's foreign exchange reserves are well positioned, the governor said.

RBI has plans on to introduce polymer currency: Malhotra

FC CORRESPONDENT, NEW DELHI, JUNE 5

RBI governor Sanjay Malhotra on Friday said a proposal to introduce polymer currency notes.

Malhotra said while no decision has been taken in the matter as yet, the apex bank is examining the feasibility of such a move.

"As far as polymer notes are concerned, the proposal is under consideration. As soon as any decision is

taken on it, we will inform you," Malhotra said at a press conference here.

The governor said media reports on the issue carry some truth, but clarified that the proposal remains at a preliminary stage.

The RBI is evaluating the advantages and drawbacks of polymer notes and whether their introduction would be worthwhile, according to the governor.

Malhotra said there is

RBI PREPARED TO DEAL WITH CYBER THREATS LINKED MYTHOS

Mumbai, June 5: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday said it is fully prepared to deal with cyber security threats linked to the Mythos platform and has already issued required advisories to regulated entities.

"We have issued the required advisories. We remain fully prepared in terms of handling cyber security threats of this nature as well as conventional threats," RBI deputy governor Swaminathan J said at monetary policy press conference.

He said operational details are awaited regarding India getting a look into the platform built by frontier AI company Anthropic.

"This system has been engaging our attention, both at the government level and at the financial sector inter-regulatory forum level," he said.

The RBI, in consultation with the government and other regulators, will take further steps once the contours of participation become clear, he said.

"We will keep the market informed once we have full details and know how we plan to handle this," he added.

Mythos is the AI-based cyber security system developed by Anthropic to detect software vulnerabilities and cyber risks before malicious actors can exploit them.

Anthropic said the model would not be released for public use, citing concerns over the potential misuse if left unrestricted. It has advanced capabilities in identifying weaknesses in digital systems. — PTI

AirTrunk to invest ₹3 L-cr in India by 2030, says Modi

FC CORRESPONDENT, NEW DELHI, JUNE 5

DIGITAL INFRA

- Plans to develop 5 GW of data centre capacity.
- Investment aimed at expanding digital infrastructure.



INDIA'S digital infra journey is gathering momentum. AirTrunk has announced plans to invest around ₹3 lakh cr (\$30 billion) in India and develop 5 GW of data centre capacity.

— NARENDRA MODI
Prime Minister



Hyperscale data centre specialist AirTrunk plans to invest more than ₹3 lakh crore in India by 2030 in support of digital infrastructure capacity.

AirTrunk generally creates a platform for cloud, content and large enterprise customers across the Asia-Pacific and Middle East (APME) region.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday, after his meeting with AirTrunk founder and CEO Robin Khuda, announced the investment plans of AirTrunk on a social media platform, saying that its strategy will develop 5 GW of data centre capacity in India.

"India's digital infra journey is gathering momentum. AirTrunk has announced plans to invest around ₹3 lakh cr (\$30 billion) in India and

develop 5 GW of data centre capacity. This is among the largest proposed investments in India's digital infra ecosystem," he said in a post on X.

Modi noted that such investments will strengthen India's position as a global hub for cloud computing and AI, while generating employment opportunities, supporting local supply chains and accelerating innovation.

"It is clear that the future of the world's digital economy is increasingly being shaped in India," he said.

"India has the scale, talent, and ambition to become a global AI powerhouse," said Khuda.

The announcement follows his first senior government engagement in India since entry into the market with acquisition of Lumina CloudInfra in April this year.

FIs exempt from capital gains tax

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO, NEW DELHI, JUN 5

The government on Friday said that it exempted foreign institutional investors (FIIs) and banks from the capital gains tax on receipts arising from interest or sale of government securities (G-Secs).

The move is aimed at attracting more stable foreign capital at a time when the rupee is seen plunging amid elevated oil prices and equity outflows due to the West Asia crisis. This will be effective from April 1, 2026.

Since Parliament is not in session, the government promulgated an ordinance through an

executive order to amend the Income Tax Act to provide tax exemptions on interest income and capital gains arising from sale, exchange or transfer of government securities.

The ordinance was signed by President Droupadi Murmu

Foreign investors now are subject to a long-term capital gains tax of 12.5 per cent on listed shares and bonds held longer than 12 months. They pay a withholding tax of 20 per cent on interest earned in the government bonds.

The measures will help in attracting foreign capital including from pension funds, insurance cos and wealth funds.

FPIs offload equities worth ₹8,776 crore

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD, MUMBAI, JUNE 5

Market moved in a narrow range after RBI monetary policy announcement on expected lines as rate hike worries were put aside. However, market remained volatile with foreign portfolio investors selling equities worth ₹8776.25 crore.

Domestic institutions defended the downward market pressure with a net purchase of equities worth ₹9133.57 crore.

The Sensex closed 116 point or 0.16 per cent

down at 74,243 while Nifty-50 closed at 23,366.70 down by 0.21 per cent or 49.85 points.

Rate sensitive bank, reality stocks gained. IT, metals, oil and gas saw decline.

Securities yield fell on RBI's move to attract foreign inflows in the debt market. The 10-year bond yield closed at 6.95 per cent from above 7 per cent level.

"Downward revision in growth forecasts, inflation outlook prompted profit booking," Vinod Nair, head, research, Geojit, said.

Tata Trusts refutes allegations on share transfer

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD, MUMBAI, JUNE 5

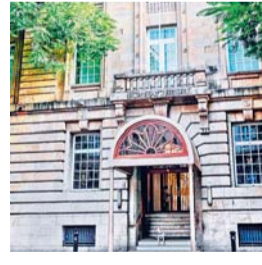
Tata Trusts has refuted allegations on Navajbai Ratan Tata Trust (NRTT) regarding a share transfer to the late Naval H. Tata in the year 1989.

"The Tata Trusts would like to state that any suggestion of impropriety on the part of either the Sir Ratan Tata Trust (SRTT), NRTT, or any of the par-

ties to the transaction, is categorically denied.

It is affirmed that the transaction was lawful, undertaken for consideration, and fully compliant with the rules in force at that point of time," Tata Trusts said in a statement on Friday.

Allegations were made by Suresh Tulsiram Patilkheda whom Tata Trusts labeled as a person who has no proven locus



standi in the matter and is a serial litigator who has in the past (2020) filed sev-

eral cases against the Tata Trusts without any locus and with an apparent objective of disrupting the philanthropic activities and functioning of the Tata Trusts.

About the alleged share transfer Tata Trusts said, "It was cleared at the appropriate levels, including by late Nani A. Palkhivala, one of the country's most distinguished lawyers, and

approved by the then Board of Tata Sons. The transfer of shares was effected on a valid transfer form duly stamped by the Registrar of Companies."

"We are constrained to highlight that the intention of such unfounded and malicious allegations appears to be to tarnish the reputation of the Tata Trusts as a whole, and SRTT, in particular," Tata Trusts said.

IndiGo may face delays in getting aircraft from Airbus

Mumbai, June 5: Airbus is falling behind on deliveries of the A321XLR, a longer-range version of its most popular jet, with Indian customer IndiGo unlikely to receive the full batch of nine units this year, according to people familiar with the matter.

InterGlobe Aviation, the operator of Asia's largest low-cost carrier, was supposed to receive the XLRs by year's end, but the time frame on some units has been pushed back by several months, the people

further said.

IndiGo has received two XLR jets so far, and they're being used on routes to Athens and Istanbul.

The airline was told the Middle East war is disrupting the planemaker's supply chain, the people said.

An Airbus spokesperson said the company doesn't comment on delivery schedules agreed upon with customers.

Anthropic bats for vigil on AI

SAN FRANCISCO, JUNE 5

Anthropic called for the creation of a system in which governments and artificial intelligence developers collectively decide when to slow work on the technology to stave off the risks it may pose.

"It would be good for the world to have the option to show or temporarily pause" AI work that may be dangerous, the company said in a lengthy blog post published Thursday

by co-founder Jack Clark and Anthropic Institute lead Marina Favaro. AI is advancing to the point where the technology can make human work thousands of times more efficient or even replace it, creating a new set of risks, they said.

Anthropic has acknowledged how difficult it would be to get companies, much less entire countries that have been locked for years in a race to advance



ernments and rivals to adopt thresholds.

In 2023, the start-up established its own limits and promised to halt work that might be dangerous. But the firm loosened that pledge earlier this year, saying the company would no longer pause if it lacks a significant lead over a competitor.

The company said it would meet with policymakers and other AI companies. — Bloomberg

their own technologies, to agree to any collective pause. The company has made similar calls for gov-



THE GOAN EVERYDAY

God writes the Gospel not in the Bible alone, but also on trees, and in the flowers and clouds and stars
Martin Luther

When civic frustration and social media spill over into tragedy

The tragic death of a youth in Mapusa after a video of him allegedly dumping garbage went viral has shaken the State and raised serious questions that go far beyond a single act of littering. At first glance, it may appear to be a story about civic irresponsibility. But a closer look reveals something far more disturbing. We see here a convergence of institutional failure, public outrage, and the often unforgiving nature of social media.

At the heart of the issue lies a waste management crisis that has been simmering for years, not only in Mapusa, but across Goa. The closure of dumping sites, including the Assagao plateau, created a vacuum that local authorities have struggled to fill. With no adequate alternative in place, garbage began accumulating in several parts of Mapusa, while collection services were hampered by manpower shortages and operational challenges. Areas such as the Mapusa market and Khorlim have been experiencing recurring problems, with waste left uncollected for days.

When civic systems fail to provide residents with practical ways to dispose of waste, frustration inevitably builds up. We are not making a case for illegal dumping, but examining such actions within a broader context. Too often, the public response focuses exclusively on the individual while ignoring the conditions that contribute to such behaviour. The young man's actions were certainly wrong, but reducing the entire episode to personal culpability overlooks the broader failures that have left many residents struggling with garbage disposal.

The tragedy also exposes another reality of modern life where social media is seen to be shaping public judgement without a second thought. The video that captured the incident quickly spread online, transforming a civic violation into a public spectacle. What might once have been dealt with through a warning or legal action became an exercise in mass condemnation. In the rush to shame and condemn, little thought was given to the emotional toll such exposure can have on an individual.

Social media has undoubtedly become a powerful tool for highlighting civic issues and holding authorities accountable. Yet it can also become a platform where outrage overrides empathy. Viral content often strips away context, reducing complex situations to simplistic narratives that invite instant judgment. Once a person becomes the subject of online ridicule, the consequences can be devastating, particularly for someone already dealing with stress, anxiety or personal vulnerabilities.

The incident in Mapusa is part of a wider pattern seen across the world. Public shaming has become a form of digital punishment, often carried out without regard for consequences. The pursuit of clicks, views and online engagement can sometimes outweigh basic human decency. While raising awareness about civic misconduct is important, it should never come at the cost of a person's dignity or safety.

What happened in Mapusa is terrible and should serve as a wake-up call on multiple fronts. Authorities must realise such incidents and altercations can erupt elsewhere since the discomfort over garbage is felt far and wide. Secondly, society must reflect on the use of social media as a tool for outreach. Accountability is necessary, but so is compassion. Every viral video involves a real person, and every online campaign of ridicule carries consequences that may not be immediately visible. The line between exposing wrongdoing and inflicting humiliation is often thinner than many realise.

When public systems break down, and social media amplifies anger without restraint, the consequences can be tragic. Preventing similar incidents will require deep introspection and a renewed commitment to social responsibility.

Can Goa meet POCSO, juvenile justice mandates?

It is pertinent to know whether existing child protection policing mechanisms are adequately staffed, and equipped for challenges



The writer is an Assistant Professor of Social Work, Goa University and founder of Human Touch Foundation

PETER FLORIANO BORGES

The recent appointment of 126 Police Sub-Inspectors by the Goa Police was widely welcomed as an important step towards strengthening law enforcement in the State. The newly selected officers will now undergo structured training before joining active service.

Yet, hidden within the celebration is a statistic that deserves serious public attention. Of the 126 recruits, only five are women. This means that women constitute less than four percent of the newly recruited PSI cadre.

While recruitment drives are often viewed through the lens of numbers, this particular figure raises a much larger question. At a time when Goa is grappling with increasing concerns related to child sexual abuse, crimes against women, online exploitation, trafficking, cyber grooming, sextortion, and child sexual abuse material, can the State realistically meet its obligations under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act and the Juvenile Justice Act with such a limited pipeline of women officers?

This is not merely a matter of gender representation. It is fundamentally a child protection and victim rights issue. The POCSO Act recognizes the vulnerability of child victims and specifically provides that a child's statement should preferably be recorded by a woman police officer not below the rank of Sub-Inspector. The law also requires that such statements be recorded in a child-friendly manner, preferably at the child's residence or another place of the child's choice, and that police officers interacting with the child should not be in uniform to avoid intimidation.

Similarly, the Juvenile Justice Act mandates the appointment of Child Welfare Police Officers in every police station and the creation of Special Juvenile Police Units (SJPU) in every district to coordinate all police functions relating to children.

However, the reality on the ground often tells a different story.

Across the country, including Goa, many police stations may have designated Child Welfare Police Officers on paper, but the larger question is whether they are adequately trained, sufficiently available, and supported by a robust child protection system. Child protection cannot be reduced to merely assigning a designation to an officer. It requires



specialized skills in interviewing children, understanding trauma, preserving evidence, coordinating with Child Welfare Committees, interacting with support persons, and working within the child-friendly framework envisaged by law.

The challenge becomes even more pronounced when the number of women officers available for such assignments remains limited. In many instances, women police officers are simultaneously entrusted with multiple responsibilities across departments, units, and special assignments.

This concern is not theoretical. It directly affects the experience of child victims who enter the criminal justice system. A child disclosing sexual abuse is often frightened, confused, and traumatized. The first interaction with law enforcement can shape the child's entire experience of justice. A sensitive response can build confidence and facilitate disclosure.

The challenge now is ensuring that the system has enough trained personnel to fulfill these obligations. The issue becomes even more complex when viewed through the lens of emerging crimes.

Cases involving online grooming, sextortion, cyberbullying, trafficking, and the circulation of Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM) require police officers who are not only sensitive to children's needs but are also equipped with advanced technological skills.

The recent Supreme Court judgment in the Prajwala matter provides important context. The Court recognized the growing threat of cyber-enabled trafficking and exploitation, noting that traffickers increasingly use social media platforms, online applications, fake relationships, and digital networks to recruit, groom, and exploit victims.

Another concern relates to the functioning of Special Juvenile Police Units. The JJ Act envisioned SJPU as dedicated district-level structures coordinating all child-related policing functions. However, in many places, these units struggle due to manpower constraints,

competing priorities, and inadequate specialization.

Goa must ask whether its existing child protection policing mechanisms are adequately staffed, trained, and equipped for contemporary challenges. Do all police stations have active and functional Child Welfare Police Officers? Are sufficient women officers available across districts? How many officers receive regular training on child interviewing, online exploitation, cyber-enabled trafficking, and digital evidence?

The issue is systemic. It concerns whether the State is investing sufficiently in building a future-ready child protection workforce. The answer cannot lie solely in increasing overall recruitment numbers. Goa requires a deliberate strategy to strengthen child protection policing.

Ultimately, the significance of the figure 'five women out of 126 recruits' extends far beyond recruitment statistics. It raises important questions about preparedness. Every POCSO case, every missing child complaint, every trafficking rescue, every online grooming investigation, and every child welfare intervention depends upon the availability of trained and competent officers.

Child protection cannot be treated as a peripheral responsibility within policing. It requires dedicated expertise, adequate manpower, and sustained investment.

The safety of Goa's children and the dignity of survivors demand nothing less. As Goa celebrates the strengthening of its police force, it must also confront an uncomfortable but necessary question: if the law requires women police officers, Child Welfare Police Officers, Special Juvenile Police Units, and child-friendly procedures, can the State realistically meet these mandates when only five women have joined the PSI ranks this year?

The answer to that question will determine not only the effectiveness of our laws but also the confidence that children and women place in the justice system when they need it most.



In many instances, women police officers are simultaneously entrusted with multiple responsibilities across departments, units, and special assignments

THE INBOX >>

Tragedy waiting to happen at Benaulim

Right opposite the Holy Trinity Church at Benaulim is a transformer enclosure with dozens of flex signboards fixed on it throughout the year.

The material used for these banners ie PVC fasteners, self adhesive vinyl, sunboard/foam sheets, solvent printing inks etc are highly combustible which could go up in flames in the off-chance that a spark from the transformer or any other external source lands on it.

There could be casualties if a major fire occurs. The area sees lot of traffic due to a school, a bank, commercial establishments in the vicinity and the church itself.

We are already witness to the recent Delhi fire tragedy, the Bihar hospital inferno and closer home the Birch disaster. I would request the authorities to remove these banners as a public safety measure.

VINAY DWIVEDI, Benaulim

Plantation drives alone cannot make Goa green

On World Environment Day, June 5, the Goa government launched the Green NH66 Mission under the theme "Inspired by Nature. For Climate. For our Future" to develop a green corridor along nearly 70 km of National Highway 66 from Patradevi to Galgibag through large-scale tree plantation drives.

The initiative is part of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's nationwide "Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam" campaign launched in 2024 to increase green cover and spread awareness about environmental protection.

However, many people question the sincerity of such campaigns. While mothers are rightly honoured, some ask why fathers are ignored, suggesting a similar

Environment Day hypocrisy in Goa

I have observed two ways World Environment Day is celebrated in Goa. First, by genuine citizens and groups who voluntarily take initiative, spread awareness, and sincerely work towards protecting the environment. Second, by the government, whose actions often appear hypocritical.

While leaders speak about protecting hills and greenery, little effective action is seen on the ground. For every sapling publicly planted, numerous existing and even heritage trees are cut. Through mechanisms like 39-A conversions, green zones, forests, fields, and lakes are increasingly converted into settlements. Environment Day events therefore appear more like publicity exercises aimed at promoting the ministers and MLAs rather than genuine environmental protection.

It seems many ministers and MLAs lack proper understanding of environmental preservation. Instead of symbolic programs, the government should conduct compulsory, detailed training on environmental protection, stronger laws, enforcement measures, preservation of heritage trees, and preventing destructive real estate expansion.

ARWIN MESQUITA, Colva

"Ek Ped Baap Ke Naam" initiative. At the same time, Goa continues to witness rampant hill-cutting, tree felling for road widening and mega projects, and the conversion of agricultural fields into real-estate developments. Critics argue that unless the government first stops environmental damage caused by builders and destructive projects, plantation drives alone cannot truly make Goa green.

JERRY FERNANDES, Saligao

Don't sideline grassroots workers

I am writing to express concern over certain practices within the BJP that appear to undermine the contribution of its dedicated grassroots workers. Many hardworking and capable party members are often sidelined despite

being fit to contest assembly elections, raising doubts about whether the party truly values its loyal cadre.

It is also disappointing to see preference given to ageing politicians with declining capabilities over young and energetic leaders who can bring fresh ideas and dynamism.

Equally worrying is the BJP's dependence on horse trading to form governments rather than relying on a genuine electoral mandate.

The party's increasing focus on religious politics has also alienated many voters and affected its electoral prospects. To regain credibility, the BJP must strengthen internal democracy, empower committed workers, promote young leadership, and focus on governance instead of divisive politics.

RONNIE D'SOUZA, Chandor

Need to clamp down on rash driving

Recurring accidents highlight that over 90% of crashes are linked to rash and negligent driving, including over-speeding and traffic violations.

Illegal parking has also become a major issue in Goa, contributing to severe traffic congestion and safety hazards. Busy roads in Panaji frequently witness jams due to double parking, while tourists and commercial vehicles often block roads, footpaths, and residential areas.

With vehicles parked indiscriminately on both sides of roads, navigation through the city has become extremely difficult, forcing many to resort to double parking. The absence of traffic police on roads often leads to chaotic conditions and encourages more violations. Strict enforcement, including clamping vehicles involved in double parking, would greatly help reduce congestion, accidents, and fatalities.

K G VILOP, Chora

OPEN SPACE >>

Implement colour code for rent-a-cabs to ease checks

Recent road accidents in Goa involving rent-a-car vehicles have sparked widespread concern among citizens. The issue has become even more alarming following the seizure of two vehicles in Anjuna that were operating with fake rent-a-car number plates despite being registered as Pvt vehicles. Such incidents have led to demands for a complete ban on the rental vehicle business. However, banning the industry is neither practical nor desirable, considering its importance to Goa's tourism-dependent economy. A simple yet effective solution would be to introduce a distinct colour scheme for all rental vehicles, including both two-wheelers and four-wheelers, similar to the black-and-yellow colour scheme used for taxis.

Since rental vehicles are often driven by tourists, identifying such vehicles can help authorities monitor compliance with traffic rules more effectively.

ADELMO FERNANDES, Vasco

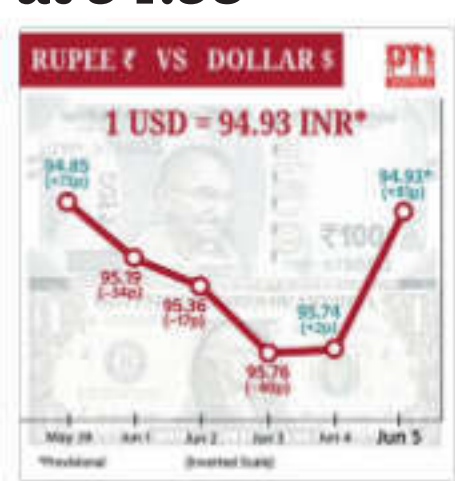
Briefs

RBI imposes penalty on Canara Bank
The RBI on Friday said it has imposed a penalty of ₹41.8 lakh on Canara Bank for non-compliance with certain provisions, including those related to Know Your Customer (KYC) norms. After a supervisory evaluation of the bank with reference to its financial position as on March 31, 2025, the RBI found that Canara Bank did not upload KYC records of certain customers onto the Central KYC Records Registry (CKYCR) within the prescribed timeline. The bank also classified certain accounts as inoperative, despite the last customer-induced transaction being less than one year old in such accounts.

RBI expects healthy foreign capital inflows
The RBI expects healthy foreign capital inflows and a stronger balance of payments (BoP) this year following a series of measures unveiled on Friday to attract overseas funds and ease external financing conditions. During the post-monetary policy conference, RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra said the central bank was not targeting any specific amount of inflows from the measures, but remained optimistic that the combined package would generate substantial overseas capital. "We don't have a specific number. Obviously, all put together, it will be very high," Malhotra said.

Weak monsoon may impact rural demand: Guv
The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Sanjay Malhotra on Friday said a projected deficiency in the south-west monsoon could impact rural demand and private consumption, though mitigation measures are expected to cushion the effect. During the post-monetary policy conference, Malhotra said rural demand and private consumption have remained healthy so far but acknowledged that some moderation may be inevitable.

Rupee rises 81 paise to close at 94.93



The rupee appreciated 56 paise to close at 95.18 against the US dollar on Friday after the Reserve Bank announced measures to support foreign capital inflows and strengthen forex liquidity. Forex traders said the announcements in the RBI policy boosted investor sentiments after the apex bank asserted that the country's forex reserves provide a sufficient buffer against external shocks.

Non-life insurers' gross premium up 8.7% in May
The gross direct premium underwritten by non-life insurance companies in May rose 8.7% on year to ₹241.95 billion, according to data released by the General Insurance Council on Friday. Growth in premium income last month was led by standalone health insurers, the data showed.

FPIs get tax break on bonds

Manoj Yadav
MUMBAI
In one of its biggest efforts to attract overseas investment in recent years, the government on Friday announced a series of reforms aimed at bringing long-term foreign capital into India's financial markets, strengthening the rupee and deepening the government bond market. The centrepiece of the package is the removal of long-term capital gains (LTCG) tax on investments made by Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) in government securities. The exemption, introduced through an Ordinance amending the Income Tax Act, is expected to make Indian sovereign bonds significantly more attractive to global investors seeking stable and predictable returns. The move assumes greater significance as India had raised capital gains taxes in



recent years. In the Union Budget presented in July 2024, the government increased the LTCG tax rate on most assets to 12.5% from 10%. Short-term capital gains (STCG) on listed shares continue to be taxed at 15% under Section 111A of the Income Tax Act. By exempting gains from government securities for foreign investors, policymakers are effectively creating a special incentive to channel overseas capital into the sovereign bond market. The reforms come at a time when foreign investors have

investors typically have a longer investment horizon and are less influenced by short-term market volatility, making them an important source of stable capital. The measures also come as the rupee faces pressure from rising crude oil prices, geopolitical tensions and persistent foreign fund outflows. The currency touched a record closing low of 96.86 against the US dollar on May 20. India's foreign exchange reserves, which had climbed to an all-time high of \$728.49 billion in February, stood at \$681.38 billion in the week ended May 22 after RBI interventions to smooth currency volatility. Alongside the tax exemption, the government and the RBI have widened access to government bonds through the Fully Accessible Route (FAR), allowing foreign investors to invest in additional long-tenor securities without restrictions.

'India can return to 7% growth path in FY28'

PTI
NEW DELHI
Macro stability and supply measures can bring back India on a 7% growth trajectory in FY28, CEA V Anantha Nageswaran said on Friday, asserting that the growth is contingent on improvement in external conditions. "We have no reason to second-guess them at this point, because there are both possibilities on the upside and on the downside with respect to the numbers that they have presented," Nageswaran said. "So, even if the growth were to slip below 7% as the RBI forecast suggests, macro stability measures and supply assurances will bring us back to a 7% plus growth track in FY28 or as soon as external conditions improve." He added that it is a hope based on the assumption that the pre-February 28 condition is restored before FY28.

If these conditions continue, the government will revisit the estimate for the next financial year. Talking about nominal GDP, Nageswaran said it is a fair estimate that it will overshoot the 10.1% estimated in the Budget 2027, given the upward momentum of retail inflation. He stated that nominal GDP growth will be significantly higher than the number used in the budget estimates. With regard to the overall trade deficit, Nageswaran said it widened in FY26, and a similar trend with potentially wider deficits is possible in FY27. The evolving West Asia crisis represents both a significant supply shock and a potential demand shock. However, he noted that most high-frequency indicators up to April 2026 suggest that domestic demand and overall economic activity in India have remained relatively resilient so far, with emerging signs of stress.

- The RBI's balanced approach and foreign capital measures will boost inflows, liquidity, bond markets and rupee stability.**
- CS Setty, Chairman, State Bank of India & IBA**
- Despite strong growth prospects, geopolitical risks and high energy prices warrant continued policy caution.**
- Ajay Kumar Srivastava MD & CEO, Indian Overseas Bank**
- RBI's balanced stance, strong growth outlook and tax reforms strengthen capital inflows, markets and resilience**
- Sunita Ramnathkar President, IMC**
- RBI's balanced approach preserves policy flexibility, supports credit growth and reinforces confidence in India's economy.**
- George Alexander Muthoot MD, Muthoot Finance**
- RBI's steady stance supports growth, curbs inflation and protects businesses from sudden borrowing shocks.**
- Ramesh Babu MD & CEO, Karur Vysya Bank**
- RBI's cautious stance signals inflation vigilance, policy flexibility and readiness for tighter measures ahead.**
- Rahul Singh, Head - Fixed Income, LIC Mutual Fund AMC**
- The proposed FCNR deposit scheme could boost foreign currency inflows, strengthen bank funding and support India's external financing needs.**
- PD Singh CEO, India & South Asia Standard Chartered Bank**

RBI cuts FY27 GDP growth forecast to 6.6% from 6.9%

PTI
MUMBAI
The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday lowered its GDP forecast for FY27 to 6.6% from the 6.9% estimated in April, citing elevated energy and other commodity prices as well as continued supply disruptions arising from the conflict in West Asia, which are likely to weigh on economic activity.



exports are holding up well, reflecting sustained demand despite concerns about AI. Overall, the economic situation has broadly exhibited resilience and withstood the conflict spillovers, although the impact of rising cost pressures is becoming visible, Malhotra said. "Going ahead, the rise in prices of energy and other inputs, coupled with supply disruptions, is likely to weigh on economic activity. While import diversification in affected commodities is likely to improve supply, it would come at a higher cost," Malhotra said. The Governor further said that the full impact will depend on the duration of the conflict, time taken for normalisation of supply chains, and the burden-sharing approach among stakeholders. While weak global demand and high logistics costs are headwinds for merchandise exports, services exports are expected to sustain their momentum as demand for Indian services remains healthy, Malhotra added.

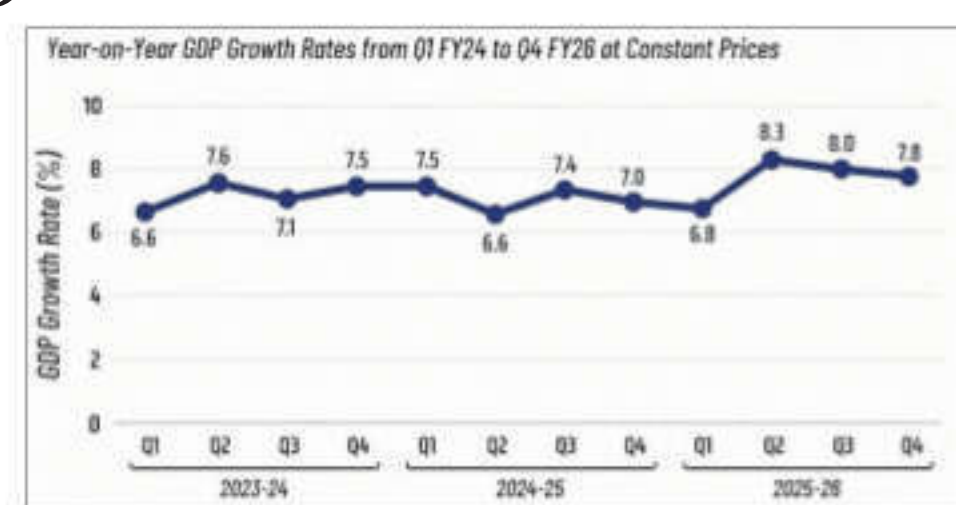
The central bank also said that prolonged global supply-chain disruptions, heightened volatility in global financial markets, and weather-related shocks continue to pose downside risks to the domestic growth outlook. Announcing the June bi-monthly monetary policy, RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra said several high-frequency indicators suggest that domestic economic activity has remained largely steady since the outbreak of the conflict. Manufacturing and services PMI suggest that both sectors continue to be resilient, and business expectations are still positive, Malhotra said. On the demand side, private consumption has remained resilient so far. Fixed investment has also maintained its momentum despite rising cost pressures. Merchandise exports recorded strong growth in April 2026, notwithstanding elevated freight and insurance costs, while services

Reserve Bank raises FY27 CPI view to 5.1%

PTI
NEW DELHI
The RBI on Friday projected retail inflation for FY27 at 5.1%, up from its earlier estimate of 4.6%, largely due to mounting input costs triggered by the pass-through of higher global energy prices to retail rates of petrol and diesel. The increase implies a direct impact of about 36 basis points on headline inflation, which, along with second-order effects, would get reflected in Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation in the coming months, the RBI said in its monetary policy statement. Pass-through of higher global energy prices is also visible in several other inputs such as commercial LPG, industrial raw materials, chemicals, rubber, and plastic products, the central bank said, adding that the second-round impact of higher input costs could exert upside pressure on CPI inflation going forward. **-PTI**

India's GDP grows 7.8% in Q4, full-year growth rises to 7.7%

PTI
NEW DELHI
India's economy expanded 7.8% in the January-March quarter, exceeding forecasts on strong domestic demand and government expenditure, before rising oil prices and supply-chain disruptions began clouding the outlook. The GDP growth compared with 7% expansion a year back and 8% in the previous quarter. Full-year growth accelerated to 7.7% from 7.1% in FY25, supported by healthy consumption and robust investment activity. The January-March period accounted for just one month of disruptions caused by the war in Iran. The spike in oil prices and the disruption in supplies from the Middle East, a key source for India's crude oil, natural gas and LPG, will be fully visible in the current April-June quarter.



Chief Economic Adviser V Anantha Nageswaran said India could return to a growth rate of more than 7% in FY28 if external conditions improve. Gross value added (GVA), which strips out volatile components such as indirect taxes and government subsidies to present a more accurate measure of underlying economic activity, grew 7.9% during the January-March quarter, data released by the MoSPI showed. "The fact that GVA growth at 7.9% outpaced GDP growth

suggests that India's expansion was not solely demand-driven but also backed by strong production momentum," said Rumki Majumdar, economist at Deloitte India. "We remain cautiously optimistic that tensions in the Middle East will ease over the coming months and that supply-chain disruptions will gradually subside by the end of the year," she said. The nominal GDP or GDP at current prices is estimated to attain a level of Rs 346.36 lakh crore in 2025-26.

RBI says fully prepared for 'Mythos' cyber threat

PTI
NEW DELHI
The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday said it is fully prepared to deal with cyber security threats linked to the Mythos platform and has already issued required advisories to regulated entities. "We have issued the required advisories. We remain fully prepared in terms of handling cyber



security threats of this nature as well as conventional threats," RBI Deputy Governor J Swaminathan said

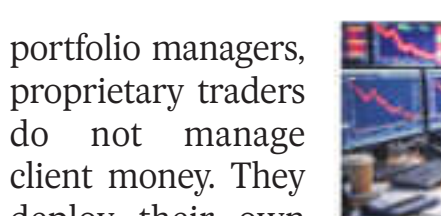
during the post-monetary policy press conference. He said operational details are awaited regarding India getting a look into the platform built by frontier artificial intelligence company Anthropic. "This system has been engaging our attention, both at the government level and at the financial sector inter-regulatory forum level," Swaminathan said.

The RBI, in consultation with the government and other regulators, will take further steps once the contours of participation become clear, he said. He added that the central bank will keep the market informed once it has full details and knows how it plans to handle it. Mythos is an artificial intelligence-based cyber security system developed by Anthropic to detect software

vulnerabilities and emerging cyber risks before malicious actors can exploit them. The company has characterised the technology as highly sensitive due to its advanced capabilities in identifying weaknesses in digital systems. Although Anthropic disclosed the project in April, it said the model would not be released for public use, citing concerns over potential misuse if left unrestricted.

RBI to go ahead with bank lending rules for proprietary trading from July 1

FPJ News Service
MUMBAI
The RBI will go ahead with stricter lending norms for proprietary trading activities, a move that is expected to raise funding costs for brokers and trading firms while reducing leverage in the financial system. The announcement triggered a selloff in capital market stocks, with shares of BSE falling up to 5%, while Angel One and MCX also declined sharply, News18 reported. Unlike mutual funds or



portfolio managers, proprietary traders do not manage client money. They deploy their own funds and often use borrowed capital to amplify returns. The RBI believes that bank credit should primarily support productive economic activities rather than speculative trading. Under the revised RBI framework, banks will not be allowed to finance the acquisition of securities for proprietary trading or investment on a broker's own account,

except for limited market-making activities. Most lending exposures to capital market intermediaries will also require 100% collateral backing, including a significant cash component. The central bank aims to prevent bank credit from indirectly funding speculative trading and to limit risks from leveraged market activity spilling into the banking system. The norms are scheduled to take effect from July 1, 2026.

Forex kitty rises \$938 mn to \$682 billion

India's foreign exchange reserves jumped by \$938 million to \$682.321 billion during the week ended May 28, the RBI said on Friday. The reserves had expanded to an all-time high of \$728.494 billion during the week ended February 27 this year before the onset of the West Asia conflict, which led to several weeks of decline as the rupee came under pressure and the RBI had to intervene in the forex market through dollar sales.

"So What?": Economic Adviser Ravi shrugs off Rupee-at-100 panic

As concerns grow over the possibility of the Indian rupee weakening to 100 against the US dollar, Shamika Ravi, a member of the Economic Advisory Council to the PM, downplayed the panic, saying in an ANI podcast interview: "So what? 100 is just a number." Ravi argued that the focus should not be on defending a particular exchange rate but on managing the broader economic consequences of a global supply shock, NDTV reported. She added that "you

do not want to intervene in a market which is working fine right now." "Which is why the austerity measures and the other kind of exhortations from the PM and now increasingly from different arms of the government," Ravi said. "Our prices will rise because that is the best way to affect demand because this is a supply shock. You're not going to be able to do very much," Ravi said, noting that India was already drawing down its foreign exchange reserves.

India to surpass China in share of global GDP by 2060: Report

India is expected to surpass China in terms of its share of global GDP measured in purchasing power parity (PPP) by 2060, as Beijing's contribution is likely to decline in the second half of the 21st century, according to a report by researchers associated with the World Inequality Lab. The World Inequality Lab (WIL) is a research laboratory based at the Paris School of Economics (PSE) and focused on the study of inequality worldwide. The report, titled Global Justice Report: A Plan for Equality and Prosperity With Planetary Boundaries, said that regarding China, its share in world GDP is currently about 20% in PPP terms (about one third higher than the US) and is scheduled to be twice as large as the US by 2035 according to benchmark projections. "However, China's population share is falling very fast, from 23% of the world population in 1945 to about 17% in 2025 and less than 8% in 2100," the report noted. "As a consequence, the share of China in world GDP is projected to stabilise and decline in the second half of the 21st century, and to be overtaken by India around 2060." **-PTI**

Short-term Gilts surge

Informist
MUMBAI
Prices of government bonds ended higher, with short-term bonds surging after the RBI MPC left the repo rate unchanged at 5.25%, quelling bets of a rate hike on Friday. However, bonds maturing in 10 years and more gave up most gains as expectations of rate hikes later this year persisted, especially after higher-than-expected GDP growth in the March quarter, dealers said. Risk-trimming before the weekend due to uncertainty on developments in the

West Asia conflict also weighed. Sentiment, however, improved in the event-heavy day on the possibility of large foreign inflows into gilts due to tax cuts on (FPI debt holdings announced by the Centre, they said. "The RBI has already played out. Bottom was just giving assurance that everything is fine, but there will be a chance of rate hikes. Maybe it will be delayed, but it will be there because the inflation forecast was revised drastically and growth is good," a trader at a primary dealership said.

US adds 1.72L jobs in May

US employers added 1.72 lakh jobs in May while the unemployment rate held steady at 4.3%, indicating continued resilience in the world's largest economy despite signs of slowing growth. According to the US BLS, total nonfarm payroll employment increased by 1.72 lakh in May, and the unemployment rate was unchanged at 4.3%. Hiring remained concentrated in a few sectors.

Govt committed to further drive 'Reform Express': FM

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Friday said the government is committed to further drive the Reform Express with decisive policy measures to ensure positive economic momentum amid global challenges. The Union minister's statement on X came after the RBI lowered its GDP forecast for FY27 to 6.6% from the 6.9% estimated in April. Despite the revision,



real GDP is estimated to rise by 7.7% in FY26 under provisional estimates, while real gross value added (GVA) has grown by 7.9% in FY26. Real GDP and real GVA have been estimated to grow by 7.8% and 7.9%, respectively, in Q4

of FY26. Notably, manufacturing, trade, repair, hotels, transport, communication and services related to broadcasting, storage, financial, real estate and professional services sectors have attained double-digit growth at both constant and current prices in FY26. An earlier report noted that India's GDP growth was driven by strong performance even as global uncertainties persisted.

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Gaming addiction

Supreme Court upholds anti-betting laws

THE Supreme Court's scathing observation that every mobile phone has become a "virtual gambling house" is a stark warning about the menace of online betting and gaming addiction in India. Upholding state laws banning online gambling and betting in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, the apex court has highlighted a disturbing truth: what was once considered harmless entertainment has evolved into a widespread social and public health crisis. The rapid expansion of online gaming platforms, aided by smartphones, digital payments and aggressive advertising, has normalised betting among millions, especially the youth and economically vulnerable groups. The fast-growing Indian gaming market was valued at \$3.7 billion in 2024 and is projected to reach \$9.1 billion by 2029.

The Court rightly noted that many players came from rural and lower-income backgrounds, where dreams of instant wealth often outweigh awareness of financial risks. The promise of quick money traps users in cycles of addiction, debt and psychological distress. Online gaming addiction is also linked to rising incidents of depression and suicide. Gaming disorder is recognised by the World Health Organisation as a medical condition under the International Classification of Diseases. Unlike traditional gambling dens, digital betting platforms operate silently within homes, accessible 24x7 through mobile phones. This unrestricted access has blurred the line between recreation and exploitation. Recent police crackdowns in the National Capital Region have revealed that online betting networks are intertwined with cyber fraud, fake transactions and organised crime. Such activities undermine public trust in the digital economy.

Technology should empower society, not exploit human vulnerability. While innovation and digital entertainment cannot be stopped, stricter regulation, stronger cyber policing and public awareness are urgently needed. The Court's warning must serve as a wake-up call before online gaming addiction becomes an even deeper national crisis.

Cautious RBI

Monetary policy factors in the risks

THE Reserve Bank of India's Monetary Policy Committee has, as expected, kept interest rates unchanged at 5.25 per cent. The repo rate was last cut in December from 5.5 per cent. The wait-and-watch approach signals continuity, but the revised growth figures amid the West Asian conflict tell a cautionary tale. The lowering of the GDP forecast to 6.6 per cent from 6.9 per cent projected in April factors in the higher energy prices, supply chain disruptions and a weaker rupee. If the monsoon is uneven or weak, the projections could alter. The consumer price index inflation rate remains under the Central bank's target level of 4 per cent, but the comfort zone is fast narrowing. A host of underlying inflationary pressures are at play. For an average Indian, tough months lie ahead.

The Indian economy has remained resilient and its fundamentals are stronger than in prior shocks. However, resilience cannot be mistaken as immunity. The impact of rising input costs is being felt by smaller units and across households. Higher fuel costs are being passed on to transportation, logistics and production expenses. At this juncture, ensuring stable business activity for the medium and small industries becomes critical. Several measures have been announced by the RBI with an eye on dollar inflows. In parallel, the Centre has exempted foreign investors from capital gains tax on government bonds. It's a significant step to make the debt market more attractive for global capital.

The RBI policy underscores its continued vigilance on inflation risks, particularly from crude oil and food prices. At the same time, it is keeping future data-dependent policy options open in case price pressures intensify. The big question now is how well India can navigate the global reality of expensive oil, geopolitical uncertainty and volatile capital flows.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, SUNDAY, JUNE 6, 1926

Liberal misjudgment

THERE is much in the two lengthy articles just contributed by Sir C Setalvad to the hospitable columns of the *Pioneer* on "the Political Situation in India" which it does not concern us to notice. The main object of the articles is summed up in one sentence. "It is high time," says the writer, "that the Liberals, the Independents and the Responsivists should join hands in combating the Swarajists' politics and winning over the electorate to a proper appreciation of the situation." When a writer starts with the object of establishing such a proposition, we know what to expect from him, and in this respect Setalvad does not disappoint us. His articles are one long, vehement and unreserved condemnation of the Swarajists, a mild rebuke to the Independents and the Responsivists for having cooperated with the Swarajists in one way or another for long months, and a frank and undisguised attempt at making out that the only party that has consistently and courageously stood for the right during all these years is the Liberal party, of which Setalvad himself is such a shining light. Now we have not the smallest objection to any one propagating these views, if he honestly holds them, especially on the eve of an election, which, like all elections, is to be fought on party lines. But when a person holding the eminent position that Setalvad does in the public life of the country undertakes to give public expression to such views, one does expect him to observe a certain standard of fairness and of intelligent criticism. We cannot help thinking that this is precisely what Setalvad has not done.

Questions about the chosen ones

My Lords, your answers may disappoint us, but do not disappoint us by not answering



SRIRAM PANCHU
SENIOR ADVOCATE,
MADRAS HIGH COURT

RESPECTED Collegium Judges, Other Judges and the Heavenly Judge,

The Central government promulgated an ordinance on May 16, increasing the strength of the Supreme Court from 34 to 38 judges (including the Chief Justice of India). There are no apparent reasons why the circumstances warranted an emergent ordinance rather than introducing a Bill before Parliament, whose next sitting is barely a month away.

What followed was the immediate filling up of five seats in the Supreme Court in remarkable cooperation between the Court and the government. On May 27, the Court sent the government its recommendations to appoint High Court Chief Justices Sheel Nagu, Shree Chandrashekhar, Sanjeev Sachdeva and Arun Palli, and a woman advocate of the SC, V. Mohana. This was cleared post-haste and on June 2, they took their oath of office.

Across social media, there was a flurry of reservations and objections from prominent personalities and common folk. Three Chief Justices were said to have favoured godmen or people in high office; the fourth was said to have espoused regressive views on gender.

The fifth, the sole woman appointee, was a direct appointment from the Bar to the Supreme Court, under Article 124 of the Constitution. Only exceptionally fine lawyers are supposed to make the cut; that number has not crossed a handful since 1950 and includes some of the greatest of the greats. It includes former Chief Justice of India (CJI) SM Sikri, who held the fort in the Kesavananda



SC COLLEGIUM : A requiem to this institution may well be found in Winston Churchill's memorable words addressed to Neville Chamberlain, "In God's name, Go." ANI

Bharati case to enunciate the concept of the Basic Structure of the Constitution, thus protecting the rights we hold most dear; as well as two of our finest judges in recent memory, Rohinton Fali Nariman and Indu Malhotra.

Soon I will cross 50 years at the Bar, in service both as a professional and public interest lawyer and mediator. I have scoured several sources of information about Justice Mohana to find any traces of individual stellar achievement, but none were forthcoming.

It is not as though there were no alternatives to these five. I will just give a couple of names. GS Sandhawalia, now Chief Justice of the Himachal Pradesh High Court, is one of the finest judges this country has produced and has repeatedly scored marks for decisive action underpinned by the highest judicial values. Revati Mohite Dere, Chief Justice of the Meghalaya High Court, has won encomiums for her brilliant stint of 13 years at the Bombay High Court. Incidentally, in 2018, she vacated the gag order restraining media reportage of the Sohrabuddin Sheikh murder case. Another fine judge is Aparesh Kumar Singh, now heading the Telangana High Court.

Let us shift to a lower court, and southward. On June 2, six

There are no apparent reasons why the circumstances warranted an emergent ordinance rather than introducing a Bill before Parliament.

names were approved by the Collegium for appointment to the Karnataka High Court, out of the 10 names sent by that Court. One of the names that did not find favour was Ms Poornima Hatti. To my knowledge, she is outstanding as a lawyer, was a partner at a prominent law firm and has played a vital role in a prominent international video which sought to capture the mediation styles and approaches across the globe. I can speak to the quality of her contribution because I was the chosen mediator for India in that endeavour. If appointed now, and remember she is a woman, she would be in line to be the CJI one day.

Was that the reason, pray? Two

other aspects merit consideration, the first of which is particularly disturbing on its face.

The Collegium of the three seniormost judges for making appointments to the High Courts presently comprises the CJI and Justices Vikram Nath and JK Maheshwari. Justice Maheshwari demits office on June 28; Justice BV Nagarathna, who hails from Karnataka, then enters the Collegium. Do we not detect a sign of haste in pushing through these, and a host of other appointments? This will probably be Justice Maheshwari's last official act, for which he will bear no responsibility or consequence. So the question is: why the haste?

The other aspect, which is a question now but may become disturbing after the answer, is the role of the consultee judges. Again, this is not a creation of statute. But then neither was the Collegium in the first place. The consultee judge is the judge who has served in the particular state's High Court to which the appointment is being made, either for a length or as a bird of passage. In particular relation to Karnataka, may we please know what each consultee judge opined about the relative merits and demerits of Poornima Hatti

and the six chosen ones?

From the answers to the above sets of questions, we will be able to judge for ourselves whether the chosen ones meet our high expectations of those who adorn judicial office. Or whether the rejected ones would be far better choices. Crucially, we, the public of India, would also then be in a position to assess the working of the Collegium.

Do we have the right to ask these questions, and to receive these answers? I ask as a Senior Advocate and a lawyer who has put in half a century serving the system. I ask on behalf of my colleagues at the Bar, which include not just the better-placed ones but, more importantly my junior colleagues, because they will bear the brunt of judges below par. But make no mistake; all of us are watching with dismay. And this is the input I have received from a law student as I write; he was enthusiastically ready to enter the profession. Today, he said: "Sir, I thought merit would carry the day. Now, I think merit is meaningless; it all depends upon who likes whom."

All of us seek answers, My Lords. Your answers may disappoint us, but do not disappoint us by not answering.

And then it came to my mind, the extraordinary special remedy, the help of the helpless. In vain, I looked to Earth's vain shadows, then Heaven's morning broke (borrowed from that great hymn *Abide with Me*). And there shone the Ultimate Judge, who will judge us all, the judged and the judges on earth. Our Heavenly Father and my *Uparwala Bade Bhai*. In Thee we trust. Thy Will be done.

Render your Judgment and your Divine Retribution. To Him, I can say only this: "As your Lordship pleases".

As for the Collegium, as an institution, a requiem to it may well be found in the memorable words of Winston Churchill addressed to Neville Chamberlain, who will go down in history as a constant appeaser: "In God's name, Go."

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

We do not want *sarkari* judges, we want judges who are independent and capable. —Soli Sorabjee

The scroll syndrome is here to stay

NIVEDITA GUPTA

PICTURE this: you open Instagram "just for five minutes." Fast-forward an hour, and you have watched a dog learning salsa, a cooking hack you will never try, a random conspiracy thread about aliens and a motivational speaker telling you to rise and grind while you are still horizontal. Congratulations! You have been diagnosed with the scroll syndrome, the modern affliction where our thumbs are marathon runners and our minds exhausted spectators.

Once upon a time, people read newspapers, watched TV or even spoke to each other. Then came the reels: bite-sized flashy videos engineered to keep you hooked. They are short, addictive and endlessly available. Like potato chips, you cannot stop at one. The difference is that reels don't leave you counting calories, they leave you counting lost hours.

Scrolling through reels is never-ending entertainment. Unlike books or movies, there is no "The End". Each swipe is a gamble: at times we get something hilarious; sometimes, it's inspiring. This unpredictability is what keeps us hooked. It is so astonishing that the social media feed learns our preferences so quickly.

Forget people talking about last night's TV episode, now it's: "Did you see that reel where the raccoon steals a doughnut?"

Sharing reels has become the new bonding ritual. Couples send them as love notes, friends as inside jokes and even parents as passive-aggressive reminders. Nowadays, parents drop reels as subtle nudges like sending a clip about tidying up the room.

And let's not forget the generational divide. Boomers still ask, "What's a reel?" Millennials curate them like fine wine. Gen Z? They don't watch reels — they are the reels. Their lives unfold in 15-second bursts, complete with background music and hashtags.

It is a modern paradox that we watch reels about living in the moment while ignoring the actual moment. We promise ourselves "just one more reel" and watch clips about productivity while procrastinating on actual work. Soon, the reels may replace books, lectures, even therapy. Imagine going to a therapist because you are feeling empty, and he shows you a reel of a goat on a trampoline.

No wonder thumb cramps will soon be recognised by the World Health Organisation as a symptom of the scroll syndrome. One thing is for sure: the scroll is here to stay. It is the treadmill we never asked for but keep running on because the next swipe might just be the one.

This syndrome is the epidemic of our times, but at least it is a funny one. We are all guilty, and we all know it. The trick is to laugh at ourselves while acknowledging that maybe we should just put the phone down once in a while. Scrolling is not wrong; it connects us, entertains us and sometimes even informs us, but when endless feeds start draining energy, it is time to pause and step back. There is power in choosing when to engage and when to unplug.

Let's choose mindful scrolling over mindless swiping. After all, life isn't a reel. It is longer, messier and doesn't come with background music. But hey, if someone films it right, maybe it could go viral.

The writer is a Mohali-based copy editor

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Encounters undermine rule of law

Apropos of 'Encounter model taints khaki'; there is growing acceptance of police encounters as a tool for crime control. While governments may project such actions as swift justice, they undermine the very foundations of the rule of law. The criminal justice system assigns distinct roles to the police, prosecutors, judiciary and prison authorities. Allowing the police to act as all-in-one violates constitutional principles. Popular support for instant justice may stem from frustration with delayed court proceedings, but the solution lies in judicial reforms, faster trials and independent investigations, not extra-judicial methods. Shortcuts may appear effective in the short term, but they weaken institutions and endanger citizens' rights in the long run.

VANDANA, CHANDIGARH

Pillars of justice not strong enough

Refer to 'Encounter model taints khaki'; the writer has suggested the involvement of all four pillars of the criminal justice system — police, prosecution, judiciary and prisons. But all the pillars are not strong enough to bear the burden of delivering speedy and fair justice. The conviction rate in public prosecution cases in some states is even less than 10%. Private eyewitnesses are often compromised, while police witnesses fail to appear during trials. Over 5.5 crore criminal cases are currently pending in Indian courts. Undertrials constituting 75% of jail inmates, continue to languish in prisons for years due to delayed trials.

RAJESH GOYAL, CHANDIGARH

Learn to respect diversity

Refer to 'Race, religion, immigration & a killing in Britain'; social harmony among natives and settlers in any country must be maintained in a friendly ambience. Henry Nowak's case should be treated as an aberration and not as a chronic social phenomenon. It is something ingrained in human consciousness against the "others" who don't share ethnic features, colour, culinary habits and language with natives. No amount of logic or persuasion is enough to obliterate primordial biases and preju-

dices. We may try our best to eat, dress and speak Queen's English, the Britons are born with their own reservations about people from the third world.

RAJ BAHADUR YADAV, FATEHABAD

Countering the heat crisis

Refer to 'Sustainable cooling is the need of the hour'; climate change is no longer a future threat, but a current reality. There is a widening gap between those who can escape the heat and those who cannot. Climate resilience cannot be built solely through temperature records and warnings, it requires investment in housing, public cooling infrastructure and reliable power supply. Extreme heat is not an occasional seasonal inconvenience now, it has become a structural challenge.

HARBINDER S DHILLON, UNA

TMC at a crossroads

Refer to 'TMC vs Mamata'; the TMC supremo is cornered and her political future hangs in balance. That the coup de grace was delivered from within her own ranks may have come as a shocker. The party is suffering its first major split in 28 years. Discontent within party ranks has been widely attributed to Mamata Banerjee promoting her nephew Abhishek Banerjee. It will be interesting to see whether the firebrand leader plays a victim card to regain her stature among the party workers or she goes back to the grassroots with sincerity and humility to address voters' concerns.

BAL GOVIND, NOIDA

Wait for BJP's next move

Apropos of 'BJP denies Bittu RS re-nomination as CM Mann's prediction comes true'; Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann should have known by now how Amit Shah plays his cards. It is a fact that Ravneet Bittu was inducted into the Union Cabinet despite losing the Lok Sabha poll from Ludhiana due to his proximity to the Home Minister. The BJP high command must have deliberated on Bittu's future role well before finalising names of prospective candidates for the Rajya Sabha elections. It would be better to wait for the BJP's next move.

UPENDRA SHARMA, BY MAIL

Letters to the Editor, typed in double space, should not exceed the 200-word limit. These should be cogently written and can be sent by e-mail to: Letters@tribunemail.com

How Indian cities failed the bicycle



SHALINI SINGH
SENIOR RESEARCH OFFICER,
INDIAN SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY

THIS week, the world marked two global occasions: World Bicycle Day on June 3 and World Environment Day on June 5. Their proximity is more than mere coincidence. It is a policy signal that mobility, ecology, and public health belong in the same conversation. The United Nations asks us to be "Inspired by Nature. For Climate. For Our Future." It is a stirring call. It is also, for those of us who have watched India's ecological inheritance quietly unravel, a call laced with irony. We do not need to be newly inspired by nature. We were, and then we were told to stop.

For centuries, nature was India's culture. Sacred groves or *dev-vans*, orans and kovils dotted every state, functioning as community-protected biodiversity reserves long before that phrase existed. Stepwells harvested rainwater; natural dyes and clay vessels left no trace. The *jugaad* ethic of repair over replacement was a way of

being. These were not the practices of a people indifferent to progress, but practices of a civilisation that instinctively understood, only now articulated in policy documents: you cannot separate human prosperity from ecological health.

What changed was not development itself, but the model adopted. Liberalisation brought aspiration bundled with a particular image. By the 1990s, the bicycle had been quietly reclassified from transport to a symbol of poverty. Cycling's national modal share collapsed from nearly 30% in 1994 to 11% by 2007. The ecological costs compounded: third most polluted country in the world, lost forest cover, over four million tonnes of plastic waste annually, and 54 of the world's 100 most polluted cities within India's borders.

The bicycle had not failed the Indian city. Rather, the Indian city had decided the bicycle was embarrassing.

India is a growing economy with a vast population, and the need for motorised transport for industry, freight and urban expansion is real and legitimate. The question is not whether India needs vehicles on its roads, but which vehicles, powered how and supplemented by what. The answer lies in a deliberate mix: expanding metro and bus rapid transit networks,



SOCIAL PREJUDICE: In India, cycling is still coded as a marker of poverty. **PN**

promoting electric vehicles, incentivising carpooling and building last-mile infrastructure that makes cycling genuinely viable.

Industrialised societies carry a familiar set of costs: air pollution, congestion, carbon emissions and road fatalities. India faces all of these simultaneously. It ranks among the world's highest in road accident deaths. More than 1.7 lakh fatalities in 2022 alone reflect not just driver behaviour but systemic failures in road design and safety infrastructure. Answering calls of the UN means recognising that greener transport cannot

succeed on intent alone. It requires roads safe enough to cycle on, and cities designed for people rather than vehicles.

Other nations offer instructive models. Japan's concept of 'mottainai', rooted in cultural regret over waste, has been woven into packaging law and daily governance, demonstrating that tradition and progress need not be in conflict. The Netherlands, not initially a cycling nation, offers a sharper lesson today: bicycles outnumber people, cycling accounts for 27% of all trips and is estimated to prevent 6,500 deaths annually,

India abandoned the bicycle to look modern, while Europe built its vision of the modern city around it.

delivering health benefits worth over 3% of the Dutch GDP. The irony cuts deep. India abandoned the bicycle to look modern, while Europe built its vision of the modern city around it.

India can learn from both models, but cannot import either. Its population scale and social landscape are distinct. Here, cycling is still coded as a marker of poverty. The person who cycles to work is seen as someone who had no choice. This prejudice is more than merely attitudinal. Chandigarh illustrates it precisely. The city has one of India's finest cycling path networks, yet those lanes remain largely empty. Safety concerns, inadequate lighting, encroachment, and social prejudice all conspire against utilisation. A population stuck between inherited preconception and the aspiration to appear modern will not shift through awareness campaigns alone.

Four shifts are needed, in policy rather than aspiration. First, cycling infrastructure must be treated as core transport policy with protected lanes, secure parking and integrated public transit. Second, road safety must be elevated to the status of a public health emergency. Safer street design and dedicated corridors for cyclists and pedestrians are prerequisites for any cycling culture to take hold. Third,

cycling corridors must include shade structures, tree canopies and heat-reflective surfacing as functional requirements.

Fourth, we must bring tree preservation into road infrastructure policy, rather than trading it away. Every urban road-widening project that slashes a mature tree removes decades of cooling, air filtration and canopy cover that no replanting programme meaningfully replaces in a human lifetime. Tree-lined cycling corridors are an efficient infrastructure that provides shade for the rider and cools the asphalt. If we are serious about being 'inspired by nature,' the least we can do is stop cutting it down to make way for another lane of traffic."

The two occasions this week do not ask us to invent a new relationship with nature or mobility. They ask us to repair the one we severed. For India, that repair does not begin at a climate conference. It begins with the honest acknowledgement that we walked away from a way of living (and moving) that worked, and that the path back is not retreat, but reclamation.

As Mahatma Gandhi once said: "The Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs, but not every man's greed." We knew that once. The question is whether we are ready to follow it.

Why US and India have become regional rivals



BRAHMA CHELLANEY
PROFESSOR EMERITUS, CENTRE
FOR POLICY RESEARCH

ON his recent visit to India, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio predictably touted India as one of America's "most important strategic partners," citing the two countries' shared values, "people-to-people ties," and strategic alignment on "all of the key issues that will define the new century." But this familiar language of partnership rings increasingly hollow.

Much has been said about the impact US President Donald Trump's public insults and weaponisation of tariffs have had on America's relations with India. But the bilateral relationship was under pressure well before Trump's return to the White House in 2025.

In recent years, as India's regional standing has been steadily eroded by China's expanding strategic footprint, the US has pursued policies in India's strategic backyard that have disregarded Indian interests — and sometimes run directly counter to them.

Bangladesh is a case in point. After the military-backed ouster of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government in 2024, the US endorsed regime change. But India knew this posed serious risks, which have since materialised: Bangladesh is now gripped by Islamist violence, jeopardising stability on India's eastern flank.

Then there is Myanmar. Since the military's 2021 overthrow of a civilian government, the US has maintained a punitive approach toward the junta, including tough sanctions and "non-lethal" military aid for rebel groups, despite the security risks this has created along India's sensitive North-eastern frontier.

In March, a US citizen, along with six Ukrainian nationals, was arrested in India for allegedly entering the country's Northeast without permits and crossing into Myanmar to train and arm anti-junta fighters for drone warfare.

The US has also begun treating Nepal — a country bound to India through geography, culture and economics — as a strategic priority in its own right, rather than as part of its India policy. In recent years, high-level US officials have visited Kathmandu more frequently, often without making the once-customary stop in New Delhi.

Trump has made matters much worse, not least



DYNAMICS: The US now views India less as a strategic partner and more as a regional and economic rival. **ANI**

by pursuing closer ties with Pakistan.

Never mind that Pakistan continues to provide safe haven, as well as military and intelligence aid, to terrorist groups, or that Pakistani army chief Field Marshal Asim Munir staged a constitutional coup last November. Trump's family members and business associates have struck lucrative deals in the country, and that is apparently good enough reason for the Trump administration to revive dangerous strategic dynamics on the subcontinent.

The US has even begun taking a more conciliatory

approach toward China. Though the strategic competition between the two superpowers remains intense, Trump's recent shift toward accommodation in some areas has created considerable uncertainty — not least for India, whose value to the US has long been rooted in its ability to act as a regional counterweight to China.

But while the US has long viewed India as a critical democratic bulwark against Chinese dominance in the Indo-Pacific, it also balks at the idea of Indian regional dominance. As US Assistant Secretary of State Samir

Paul Kapur explained in February, the US is seeking to prevent any single power from gaining too much influence in South Asia.

Kapur's remarks echoed the Trump administration's National Security Strategy (NSS), according to which the US "cannot allow any nation to become so dominant" that it could "threaten (US) interests" and must maintain "global and regional balances of power."

In America's view, a more pluralistic regional order is inherently more stable and favourable to US interests than one dominated by any country — even a close "strategic partner."

Unlike its 2017 predecessor, the NSS barely mentions India, noting only that the US wants to "improve commercial (and other) relations" with the country, in order to encourage it to "contribute to Indo-Pacific security."

America's reservations are not just geopolitical. "We are not going to make the same mistakes with India that we made with China 20 years ago," US Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau said on a recent visit to New Delhi, letting it "develop all these markets" and then start "beating" the US in "a lot of commercial things."

The message is clear: the US now views India less as a strategic partner to be nurtured than as a regional and economic

rival to be contained.

India must adapt to this new reality, which demands a fundamental shift in its strategic thinking. India can no longer count on its close relationship with the US to sustain its influence across South Asia and beyond. Instead, it must cultivate regional influence through economic engagement, political sensitivity toward neighbouring states, and the delivery of tangible public goods that appeal to smaller countries.

The US should rethink its approach as well. It might want a more diversified regional order, but this cannot come at the expense of its partnership with India, which it continues to share important interests, from managing China's rise to preserving stability across the Indo-Pacific.

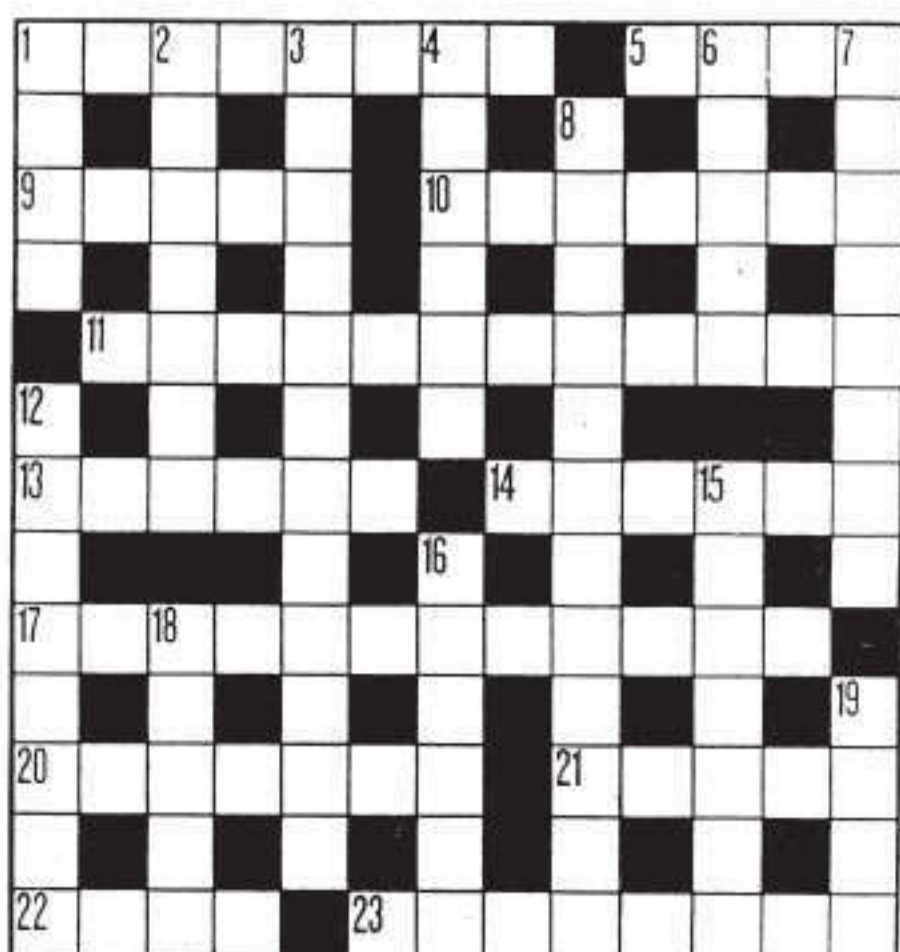
Policies that systematically weaken India's position in its own neighbourhood risk undermining these shared objectives.

The Trump administration seems to hope that the US and India can remain global partners, even as they become regional rivals.

But this will be no easy feat, and the outcome will shape not only the future of the bilateral relationship, but also the strategic landscape in South Asia and beyond.

Credit: Project Syndicate 2026

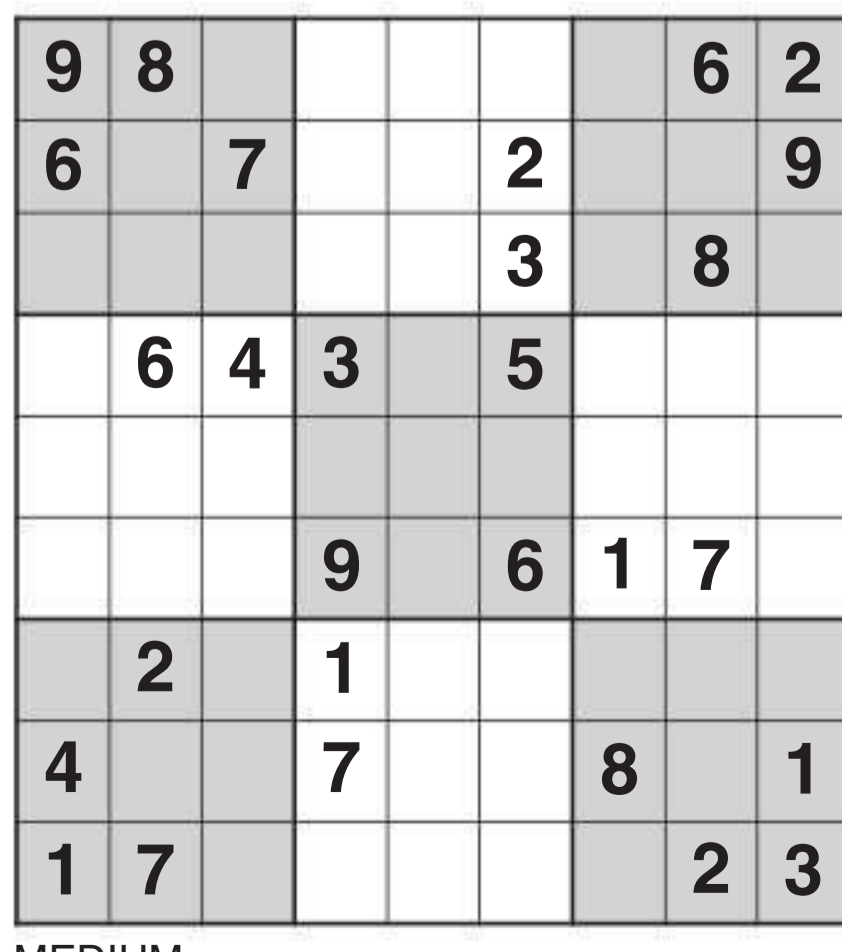
QUICK CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**
- Sign of authenticity (8)
 - Publicise persistently (4)
 - Region of south-west China (5)
 - Shrink gradually (7)
 - Hidden but strong emotion (12)
 - Payment for release (6)
 - Injury to a joint (6)
 - Running wild (3,2,7)
 - A stone fruit (7)
 - Military wind instrument (5)
 - Long hollow cylinder (4)
 - Fictitious (8)
- DOWN**
- Loathing (4)
 - Middle East country (7)
 - Unemotional (6-2-4)
 - Lower price of (6)
 - Deep, long-handled spoon (5)
 - Salutation (8)
 - Notorious (12)
 - Haughty (8)
 - Associated with (7)
 - Scene of 'Tea Party' 1773 (6)
 - Pulsate (5)
 - Electric cable (4)

Yesterday's Solution
Across: 1 Pragmatic, 8 Alone, 9 Justice, 10 Subtle, 11 Legend, 12 Explicit, 15 Egoistic, 18 Useful, 20 Aplomb, 21 Disdain, 22 Ensnare, 23 Reprimand.
Down: 2 Rouse, 3 Gather, 4 Accident, 5 Casual, 6 Contact, 7 Deceitful, 11 Liberated, 13 Peculiar, 14 Foolish, 16 Summer, 17 Seldom, 19 Union.

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YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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

CALENDAR

JUNE 6, 2026, SATURDAY

- Shaka Samvat 1948
- Jyeshtha Shaka 16
- Jyeshtha Parvishite 23
- Hijri 1447
- Krishna Paksha Tithi 6, up to 2:42 am
- Indra Yoga up to 10:05 am
- Shravan Nakshatra up to 6:04 am
- Moon enters Aquarius sign 7:04 pm
- Panchak start 7:04 pm

FORECAST

| CITY | SATURDAY | 19-24 HRS |
|------------|----------|-----------|
| | MAX | MIN |
| Chandigarh | 38 | 21 |
| New Delhi | 36 | 25 |
| Amritsar | 38 | 24 |
| Bathinda | 39 | 24 |
| Jalandhar | 38 | 24 |
| Ludhiana | 40 | 23 |
| Bhiwani | 40 | 21 |
| Hisar | 41 | 26 |
| Sirsa | 39 | 26 |
| Dharamsala | 31 | 19 |
| Manali | 24 | 13 |
| Shimla | 24 | 15 |
| Srinagar | 27 | 16 |
| Jammu | 38 | 22 |
| Kargil | 26 | 13 |
| Leh | 21 | 09 |
| Dehradun | 36 | 20 |
| Mussoorie | 24 | 17 |

TEMPERATURE IN °C

INTERNATIONAL EDITORIALS



The FT View



FINANCIAL TIMES

"Without fear and without favour"

ft.com/opinion

The coming equity surge will test the US bull run

Mega IPOs and share offerings challenge the appetite for AI stocks

"When the ducks are quacking, feed them," goes a Wall Street adage about satiating eager investors. It is a sentiment that now appears to be guiding Silicon Valley's most valuable companies. Anthropic filed for an initial public offering on Monday, following Elon Musk's SpaceX last month. OpenAI is also planning to file imminently. Not to be outdone, already listed Alphabet, Google's parent company, said midweek that it wanted to raise \$85bn in equity funding — its first stock offering in more than two decades. Despite the voracious appetite for tech assets, the surge of fresh equity supply is a new test for the US stock market's AI-led boom.

The first challenge is absorption. Together, the three giant IPOs could command a combined valuation of

around \$4tn — close to one-third of the inflation-adjusted value of all US IPOs at first close between 1980 and 2025. For now, market watchers are confident that the "ducks" will easily digest this, particularly as index providers look to waive inclusion rules to fast-track the stocks into benchmarks. Lock-up provisions and large insider stakes also mean the initial amount of shares floated publicly by these companies is expected to be small anyway. America's total market capitalisation is about \$75tn, so there is enough liquidity to subsume the deals. Indeed, demand for AI exposure has been robust, even in the face of significant economic shocks.

But there is more equity supply to come. Other private tech companies, including Stripe and Databricks, could be mulling IPOs. Following on from Google, more hyperscalers could also issue new shares to finance further capital expenditure. Until now, investment in AI infrastructure has been propelled by operating cash flow. As this has

waned, some Big Tech groups have reduced their stock buybacks and used debt to finance expenditure. With interest rates remaining elevated, more may turn to equity markets (or at least reduce their buyback activity).

The combination of mega IPOs and new share issues would mark a structural shift for the US market. Equities have fallen in supply over the past two decades as a result of delisting, buybacks, mergers and the growth of private markets. And although demand remains firm, there are signs it could weaken. As inflation edges higher, the US Federal Reserve may be forced into raising interest rates, and analysis by BCA Research suggests that investors' remaining cash on the sidelines is at a record low as a share of US equity market capitalisation.

Another obstacle to the S&P 500's continued rise may be whether the ducks like what they are being fed. Cynics view major IPOs as a chance for private investors to cash out into a

SpaceX, OpenAI and Anthropic are all lossmaking, while the genuine commercial potential of artificial intelligence models remains largely unproven

booming market — as they did during the dotcom bubble of the late 1990s. Equity supply could then increase further as lock-up periods expire over the coming year, forcing the market to absorb additional unwanted shares from recently listed companies. SpaceX, OpenAI and Anthropic are all currently lossmaking, while the genuine commercial potential of AI models — and, in Musk's case, going to Mars — remains largely unproven. Also, some valuations are stratospheric: the SpaceX listing price, for example, sets the group up to trade at 92 times its annual revenues.

For now, investors seem willing to absorb a growing supply of equity, buoyed by confidence in AI and a market still inclined to reward future potential over present profits. But every IPO, lock-up expiry and secondary offering tests that appetite a little further. As supply continues to rise, faith alone may not be enough. Eventually, the burden of proof shifts to the seller.

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Opinion Economics

Why the case for raising interest rates is growing



Megan Greene

In the face of a significant energy shock from the war in the Middle East, most major central banks have so far followed the Econ 101 manual and kept policy rates on hold. Energy shocks only impact inflation on an ongoing basis if they change wage and price-setting processes — so-called second-round effects — and it's too early to know if this has happened. But using history as a guide, there's reason for the Bank of England to proactively push against second-round effects from the current shock in the UK.

Wage-setting processes shift when households' inflation expectations rise and workers demand higher wages to minimise any hit to their living standards. Price-setting processes shift when company inflation expectations rise and they increase prices to protect or improve their margins.

History can help us gauge the extent of second-round effects set off by the energy shock

The two can create a feedback loop between higher wages and prices that results in persistently high inflation.

History can help us gauge the extent of second-round effects set off by the current energy shock. Following political unrest in the Middle East and north Africa that prompted an energy shock in 2011, such effects were moderate. Inflation peaked around 5 per cent and the Bank of England kept rates steady. In 2022, when Russia invaded Ukraine, second-round effects were significant. Inflation soared to more than 11 per cent and interest rates rose. The difference in outcomes boils down to both the nature of the shock and the nature of the economy when the shock hit.

We can't know the size of the current shock, given it's ongoing. So far, real oil prices are below previous peaks, while gas prices have topped their 2011 high but are nowhere near 2022 levels. Gas shocks have a large inflationary impact on the UK, partly because they help to determine electricity prices.

We do, however, know more about the state of the UK economy. The key differences between 2011 and 2022 were that inflation expectations jumped and the labour market was tighter in 2022. Short-term household inflation expectations remained fairly

stable after the energy shock in 2011. But in 2022 they were already high at about 5 per cent and roughly doubled after the shock. The conflict in Iran this year has already led to a significant jump in household expectations and company year-ahead price expectations are up sharply.

Rising expectations are necessary but not sufficient to generate second-round effects — workers must secure higher wages and companies must pass higher costs on as well. The ratio of voluntary job-to-job moves to redundancies is a rough-and-ready measure of worker bargaining power. This is slightly higher today than in 2011, but materially lower than in 2022. Other measures of labour market slack, such as the vacancy-to-unemployment ratio and unemployment rate, also suggest the labour market is looser now than it was in 2022 but tighter than 2011.

Given labour market weakness, there is a larger risk of second-round effects coming through price setting than wage setting. After years of profit margin squeeze, companies may raise prices in the face of an energy shock that also hits competitors. This could explain the sharp rise in the composite purchasing managers' index output prices since the war started.

In my view, the current shock differs from both 2011 and 2022 in one crucial way. It is our third negative supply shock in six years, and inflation has been above target for the best part of that period. This is important for two reasons.

First, there is evidence that second-round effects from the 2022 shock had not been fully squeezed out by our restrictive monetary policy stance before the war. Inflation remained persistently above target, household and company inflation expectations were elevated and forward-looking indicators suggested wage growth disinflation was slowing.

Second, households and companies are probably more sensitive to rising inflation now than in 2011 and 2022. The threshold for inflation feeding into expectations is 3 to 3.5 per cent, which we expect to reach this year. Longer-run inflation expectations have become more sensitive to short-term surprises since 2022, which suggests they may be less solidly anchored now.

Inflation isn't on the same trajectory as in 2022. But greater sensitivity to it will trigger some second-round effects, despite labour market slack. Tighter financial conditions are pushing against these for now, but that won't last in the absence of interest rate increases. The longer the war persists, the greater the case for hiking.

The writer is an external member of the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee

Letters

HS2 consultants are blindly leading the UK into a ditch

Your article on HS2's consultancy spending (Report, May 26) invites a deeper question. The Katha Upanishad warns: "Like the blind led by the blind, fools go hither and thither." Matthew said both shall fall into the ditch. Pieter Bruegel painted them. HS2 is Britain's ditch. But were all truly blind, or did some keep their eyes wide open?

HS2's original £37.5bn estimate was set before meaningful design. Today, the Y-shaped network is gone. What remains is a single line to Birmingham, costing up to £103bn with an uncertain

opening date. The mistake was legal. Unlike the 2012 London Olympics — designated as an overriding national interest with a single permitting authority — HS2 was sent through ordinary parliamentary and legal processes. Tens of thousands of stakeholders gained enforceable rights to object. Each had a de facto veto.

This created an inescapable trap. Every concession added unmeasurable cost, making honest forecasting impossible. Into this vacuum stepped consultants and legal advisers. They

sold collaborative processes, more governance, more cost controls and forecasting, more flexible contracts. None worked: HS2's problem was legal and political, not managerial. No system reconciles a fixed budget with an open-ended obligation to satisfy thousands of objectors. Consultants sold solutions to problems they had no power to fix.

And contractors? In a project defined by uncertainty, the only certain outcome was their profitability. Undefined scope turns flexible

contracts into open invitations.

We rightly should not silence stakeholders. But without legal reform, a constrained government cannot spend its way to solutions — only to more HS2s and profits for those selling the blindness. The parable ends in a ditch, and we are falling. The question is whether enough of us, seeing clearly, will stop walking.

Nuno Gil
Professor of New Infrastructure Development, Alliance Manchester Business School, Manchester, UK

'Bond vigilantes' can help keep price rises in check

With reference to Katie Martin's Long View column "Bond slump stirs vigilante fears as inflation takes root" (FT Weekend, May 23), one aspect of the discussion that she does not deal with and which is usually overlooked in related discussions is the unclear effect of domestic bond markets on inflation.

In an article in the International Journal of Central Banking, March 2018, titled "Bond Vigilantes and Inflation", Andrew Rose of the Haas School of Business and Mark M Spiegel of the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco explore the relationship between inflation and the existence of a local, nominal, publicly traded, long-maturity, domestic-currency bond market.

Domestic bond markets have an unclear effect on inflation; they present issuing governments with the opportunity to inflate away their obligations but they also expose bondholders to capital losses through inflation, creating a potential anti-inflationary force. Financing government spending through seigniorage is usually regressive. Money creation causes an inflation tax, which is paid more by the poor since they disproportionately tend to hold money instead of assets that earn interest or are otherwise protected from inflation.

If a government begins to finance its deficit by issuing bonds to the rich that are not protected from inflation, it can create a powerful constituency for low inflation. The consequences of inflation become more concentrated when they are borne by the rich rather than the poor. The logic of collective action then implies that the political free-rider problem is reduced, and anti-inflation measures are likely to be pursued.

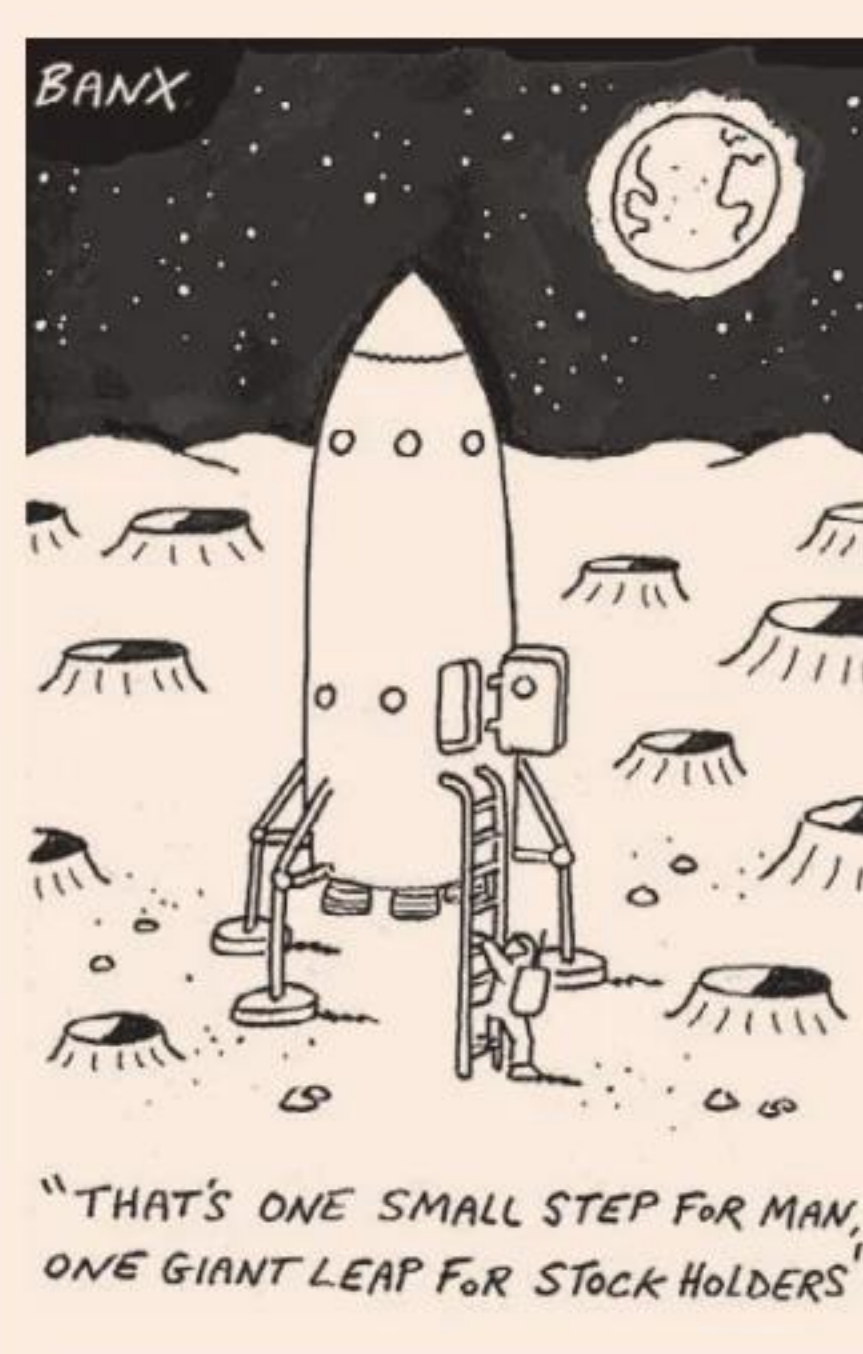
Hence the public good of low inflation is likely to be more prevalent when domestic currency bonds are held, as they are owned by a relatively small powerful interest group opposed to the redistributive consequences of inflation. That is, inflation is likely to be lower when the consequences of the inflation tax are borne more by bondholders and less by money holders.

Michael G Mimicopoulos
Former Senior Economist, UN New York, NY, US

EU's product liability rules give certainty for everyone

Some recent criticism regarding the revised EU rules on product liability (Letters, May 14) overlooks the careful balance the legislation strikes between the interests of consumers and businesses.

These rules were more than 40 years old. Their revision was therefore essential to clarify if and how a company can be held liable for the



harm caused by faulty software and connected devices. These rules also apply to new market participants, such as online marketplaces and refurbishers, which did not exist more than four decades ago. These clarifications not only improve consumer protection but also provide channels for victims to be compensated for the harms suffered, while they increase legal certainty for responsible businesses.

Rather than overburdening businesses, the revised EU product liability rules promote confidence in innovative products, ensure fair competition, and provide a predictable liability regime tailored to the realities of a digital and circular economy.

Agustin Reyna
Director-General, BEUC (The European Consumer Organisation), Brussels, Belgium

Insider trading rules are no safe bet

In "Don't bet Trump will rein in prediction markets" (Opinion, May 30), Gillian Tett declares that "people should be free to place bets as long as there are very tight curbs on insider trading, clear warnings to retail investors and ethical limits".

Ethical limits and clear warnings make moral sense. But insider trading rules were invented not as moral buffers but as a means to encourage investment in public markets.

Do betting markets deserve encouragement? No — Tett seems to agree on that point. But I would even argue that active insider trading rules would run counter to the purpose of limits and warnings. By protecting the general public from market manipulation, insider trading regulation would facilitate betting, thus raising risks for vulnerable members of the public and imposing costs to society for its proper implementation.

So, caveat emptor.
Stilpon Nestor
London E1, UK

A marketing moment worth fighting for

Regarding Mercedes Ruehl's piece "Fights overshadow Swatch 'Royal Pop' launch" (Report, May 19). The launch day may have been shrouded in uncertainty and fights but it's too soon to say that the scenes will be "detrimental to both brands".

Swatch and Audemars Piguet went into the launch with a scarcity game plan, and one that, for the most part, has been successfully tested by luxury brands for decades. In a market where everything is available online in seconds, the queue has become the premium signal.

For brands, restricting supply, forcing footfall and letting the queue do the marketing for free is now the go-to to create hype. For customers, it's an exclusive moment, designed to make the product feel earned, engineered as proof that you were there when it happened: a timestamp of your cultural relevance and understanding, not just a timepiece to be worn. And, in some regards, this strategy played out at the launch.

No brand wants to be associated with fist fights and tear gas, but when it comes to the "bigger backlash", what are the repercussions on the horizon? The product was cleverly designed to achieve a bigger goal. A pocket watch at £320 doesn't compete with a Royal Oak wristwatch at £40,000, but it does give Audemars Piguet permission to speak to a new audience without angering the collectors who have spent serious money on the original. It's not a cheaper Royal Oak. It's a different object entirely, with genuine shared DNA between both brands that opens the doors for Audemars Piguet to reach Swatch's market and Swatch the luxury Audemars Piguet connection.

When it comes to public perceptions, will we see a boycott of the pocket watch when it drops online? No. Will we see traditional customers of Audemars Piguet turn away from the brand? No. Will we see customers of Swatch be put off potential future collaborations? No.

Is there a lesson to be learnt when it comes to safeguarding these launches? Of course.

Compromised safety and police wouldn't have been the headlines the brands were bargaining for, but in the world of social media the line between cultural phenomenon and controversy is thinner than most marketing teams plan for. If brands such as American Eagle and Pepsi can weather the court of public opinion, so can Swatch and Audemars Piguet. The product will remain valuable because of what it was designed to represent, and the chaos of the launch will probably fade into memory. Meaning that, in the long run, the scarcity strategy paid off.

Polly Hopkins
Managing Director UK, Elmwood global branding consultancy, London WC2, UK

Look wider to answer the 'impossible' maths of AI

Joachim Klement (Markets Insight, May 21) is right to be sceptical about the scale of investment going into AI infrastructure. But his conclusion that the maths is "impossible" depends on drawing the boundary of the calculation too narrowly.

The return on AI compute will not necessarily be visible immediately or directly in the revenues of the hyperscalers Microsoft, Amazon, Alphabet or Meta. If the technology proves useful, much of the first-order value may appear in their customers' accounts: in lower labour costs, fewer software licences, faster processes or entirely new ways of doing work. The commercial question is how much of that value the infrastructure providers can recapture through usage, pricing, software integration and platform dependence. It is not answered by treating today's revenue forecasts as the outer limit of the opportunity.

There is also a danger in treating five-year forecasts as if they were hard constraints. They are a warning signal, not a verdict. Nor is the comparison with the dotcom bubble exact. The companies funding this build-out are not start-ups relying on the next fundraising round, they are profitable incumbents. The assets they are building include data centres, land, power access and network infrastructure, which are not worthless if demand does not meet expectations.

That does not make the AI boom cheap or safe. Klement is probably right that there is froth, especially as private AI companies prepare to test public markets. The more interesting question is not whether hyperscalers can show a 10 per cent return on their own books by 2030; it is where the productivity and capability gains land, and who is able to capture them.

Sián Townson
Chief Scientific Officer, Pebl London TW6, UK

Cello, are you sitting comfortably?

While not accusing Tony Woodcock of suffering from violinists' reputation of being self-centred (Letters, May 30), his letter about musicians flying with a violin reminded me about our friends, the string trio.

A few years ago, we befriended a European-based trio who frequently toured in the US. The cellist told us that he routinely booked an extra seat on the plane to accommodate his cello in its case.

When dinner was served, he normally ordered chicken or fish for himself and the vegetarian option for the cello. Despite his insistence, the carriers always refused to serve the cello.

Paul Lippe
Santa Monica, CA, US

Opinion

How Britain could afford to pay for war

ECONOMICS

Andy Haldane



is, by contrast, already six months late and only intends to reach 3 per cent by the end of the next parliament.

On both national security and growth grounds, there is a strong case for bringing the commitment forward to this parliament not the next one. But doing so poses difficult questions that echo Keynes, including public acceptance given competing spending priorities and the financing plan.

A survey of more than 1,000 people conducted for the FT by Ipsos shows that increased defence spending is high on the public's priority list, ranked fourth behind health, immigration and housing. Around four in ten think it should increase, but six to seven in ten would support the move if it boosted apprenticeships and jobs, infrastructure and innovation.

On the financing, public support is spread between higher taxes (especially on the wealthy), reduced public spending (especially on welfare and pensions) and higher borrowing. On the last about a quarter say they would be willing to buy "war bonds", with demand across

the age and socio-economic spectrum.

Interestingly, those views echo parts of Keynes's 1940 financing plan. He proposed a system of forced saving — compulsory savings from income, repaid with interest through a tax on wealth. With compulsion replaced by voluntary tax incentives, a similar scheme could work today.

The UK public holds more than £2tn

Costs of extra defence spending must be met as much from cuts as higher borrowing

in bank deposits, most earning a negative real return. Extending tax incentives for investment in war bonds — for example, through a temporarily higher threshold for individual savings accounts, pension relief or inheritance tax — could readily tap this pool. Given public demand and tax incentives, this would lower government financing

costs, while yielding a higher return.

Extra borrowing of, say, £10bn-15bn a year would add only modestly to government debt issuance and Isa take-up. There could, nonetheless, be concerns about extra borrowing at a time of bond market precarity. To neutralise the risk, two additional measures are needed.

First, the step-up in defence spending should be targeted at revitalising jobs and growth. The IMF has argued that increased defence spending may not deliver high growth multipliers. But as British pop icons Fun Boy Three and Bananarama taught us a generation ago, and the public survey illustrates, it ain't what you do, it's the way that you do it.

A defence plan tackling UK youth inactivity at source — through a super-sized apprentice programme — would yield significant growth and fiscal benefits, as the Milburn review demonstrated. A plan that offered a springboard to the UK's strong and long pipeline of defence-tech companies could yield similarly large growth benefits.

Second, the cost of extra defence spending needs to be met as much from

reduced public spending as higher borrowing. The inability of the government to make meaningful cuts to public spending is its fiscal Achilles heel. This vulnerability can only be treated by taking politically costly action to curb public spending materially.

Of the options, replacing the "triple lock" with a single lock to inflation-index state pensions (as with all other benefits) is both fiscally prudent and socially equitable. It would yield a high and rising fiscal dividend, of perhaps £5bn. Recycling this into supporting youth employment would boost inter-generational equity.

Key elements of Keynes's 1940 plan were adopted by the Attlee government after the war. Public debt relative to GDP roughly halved in each of the subsequent three decades, alongside healthy growth and high employment. Fortune favoured the bold then and is likely to do so again today.

The writer, an FT contributing editor, is a former chief economist at the Bank of England

Gulf states and Ukraine need each other

Bilal Saab

President Donald Trump is expected to scrap security assistance for Ukraine in next year's US defence budget.

This provides a strategic opening for the Gulf states. They should replace decreasing US security assistance to Ukraine with funds of their own in return for Kyiv's systematic help in counter-drone capabilities and training, which they desperately need.

The Gulf states are not about to abandon the US as their number-one security partner. They recognise that despite all its flaws, exposed so clearly during the Iran war, the US security umbrella is virtually irreplaceable. But they have an immediate security need the US cannot fulfil due to supply constraints and lack of capability. While the US has some of the best missile defence systems in the world, which Gulf states have utilised quite effectively against Iranian attacks, it is not the most capable or experienced counter-drone operator; Ukraine is.

The UAE, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait have been attacked frequently with various Iranian drones, putting their critical infrastructure and overall economic wellbeing at serious risk. In March, Iran launched a barrage of drones and missiles at Ras Laffan, Qatar's liquefied natural gas production hub. Although most were intercepted, three of the 20 projectiles went through, knocking out 17 per cent of the country's export capacity. In April, Iran attacked Saudi Arabia's east-west pipeline, a critical alternative route that allows the kingdom to bypass the Strait of Hor-

Kyiv has invested in capabilities that can thwart drones. Other governments should learn from it

muz. Kuwait's main airport as well as power and desalination plants have been struck by Iranian drones, causing extensive damage.

The UAE has been hit the hardest, with nearly 3,000 Iranian drones and missiles launched at Emirati targets before a truce with Iran was agreed. Most recently, Iran struck the UAE's key oil port of Fujairah, near the Strait of Hormuz. While all these facilities can be fixed or rebuilt, the real cost to the Gulf Arab states is to their image as a safe place for international business and tourism. That could take years to repair.

The answer to the Iranian drone challenge is not more interceptors. Iran has a considerable advantage; it can produce more low-cost drones faster than its opponents can make high-cost interceptors. Ukraine has avoided that trap by investing in capabilities that can detect, track, identify and ultimately defeat drones. Gulf governments should learn from Kyiv.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy recently toured the Middle East to negotiate air defence agreements with Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the UAE. While the sales promise some knowledge transfer, they were more focused on defence equipment than localisation. The Gulf states should not merely buy defence hardware from Ukraine. They also need Ukrainian operators to teach them how to produce, integrate, deploy and sustain counter-drone capabilities.

This would save money, safeguard the Gulf states' sovereignty, reduce their reliance on allies when global supply chains are increasingly uncertain and ultimately build an ability to export anti-drone systems — which would help speed their economic transformation. The Gulf Arab states want to be global hubs for AI, but they can also be hubs for counter-drone capabilities.

Ukraine is currently overstretched and cannot send too many counter-drone operators abroad without the risk of endangering the home front. They need funding from the Gulf states. With it, Ukraine can scale and balance between security needs at home and export opportunities abroad.

The Gulf could replace dwindling US assistance and create a regional fund for Ukraine focused specifically on sustainable counter-drone solutions and innovation. Combining Ukrainian knowhow with US technology and Gulf Arab capital would put a serious dent in Iran's strategy of attrition.

The writer is senior managing director of TRENDS US and an associate fellow at Chatham House

What if Burnham loses?

POLITICS

Robert Shrimley



loses, Keir will still be here next year," says one ally.

This seems optimistic. The genie is too far out of the bottle. In the words of one who wants Starmer gone: "The shock of Andy losing would be seismic. The status quo will not seem like an option."

So the leadership challenge cannot be dodged. Angela Rayner would probably step up. Yvette Cooper and John Healey, the foreign and defence secretaries, are mentioned as compromise candidates, though rarely with enthusiasm.

More significant is that a Burnham defeat would probably herald a decisive shift of strategy away from trying to win back those voters in traditional Labour areas who have turned towards Farage. If even Burnham cannot beat Reform in his own backyard, MPs will ask, surely the party needs to look elsewhere.

While Burnham believes he can win back both older working-class voters and younger, more leftwing voters attracted by the Greens, defeat would encourage those who argue that the next election will be won not in the centre ground but by the side that can most unite its political bloc. Even if Burnham wins, the pressure to lean towards the progressives may grow.

Rather than chasing long-lost Reform supporters, they will argue, Labour must rebuild the fragmented left bloc by targeting alienated progressive voters. In the words of the former Downing Street strategist John McTernan, the red wall will give way to a "city wall". "If we can't win Makerfield we have to make sure we can win



Elle Foreman-Peck

Dulwich and Birmingham Hall Green."

Labour would turn decisively towards a more leftwing platform focused on urban professionals, graduates, the young and regaining Muslim working-class voters. New York's Zohran Mamdani would be the model.

An early shift would be to more openly oppose the Netanyahu government on Gaza. Another would be ditching or diluting Shabana Mahmood's doubling of the time it would take for legal migrants to qualify for permanent residence. Labour would stop competing on Reform's territory and make the case for immigration.

It would commit to a path to rejoining the EU, double down on Ed Miliband's net zero agenda and embrace wealth and business taxes. This would be a party moving back into the comfort

Defeat would encourage those who argue that Labour must rebuild the fragmented left bloc

zone depicted by the welfare secretary Pat McFadden in his text lamenting that every meeting with MPs asked "who can we tax . . . to pay benefits to others?"

A left-bloc strategy might also suggest leaning into the generational divide. The winter fuel payment shambles showed the dangers of tampering with pensioner benefits. But nudging politics a little more towards the concerns of the under-40s would be aligning with its most likely supporters.

Of course, few strategies are entirely black and white. Burnham, if he wins, would also seek to rebuild Labour support on the left. As one of those early in demanding a ceasefire, he could show more support to the Palestinians, though his position may still be too nuanced for some. He too is dabbling with wealth taxes and he backs proportional representation.

But as the new MP for Makerfield, he would also be more mindful of the kind of voters he now represents. He recognises the potency of the immigration issue and is already paying a price for loose talk on fiscal responsibility. His

left appeal will be primarily economic, built on rolling back Thatcherism, through an active state and a focus on inequality and the cost of living. His is the last chance for the vision of a Labour Party able to unite the old working class and liberal progressives.

In reality, if it cannot offer an obvious pathway to higher household living standards — and few contenders seem adequately focused on growth — it will struggle. Perhaps this is a further argument for consolidating the left vote, though it also makes Labour an easier target for Farage.

Whatever happens, Labour is turning left. But not in one single direction. And there is another consequence. A strategy which no longer focuses on winning back voters from the other side of the left-right divide is a further step towards the polarisation of politics: a choice between a Reform-style right or a Green-Labour left. It speeds debate away from serious policy and towards the politics of vibes, identity and contempt for opponents.

robert.shrimley@ft.com

Europe is finally flexing its innovation muscles

TECHNOLOGY

John Thornhill



brutal reality is that in many areas, Europe remains inextricably dependent on US technology. Its definition of sovereignty says it should remain grounded in "openness, partnership and fair competition".

Instead, the EU proposes some sensible measures to encourage more investment in cloud infrastructure, chip manufacturing and cheaper energy generation. Its aim is to triple EU data centre capacity within seven years, mobilising about €200bn of mostly private investment. France has already shown the way by bagging €75bn of investment from Japan's SoftBank and a further €5bn from French private equity firm Ardian.

The EU's proposals are rightly focused on stimulating private sector investment. To that end, the European Commission's most novel initiative is to promote open-source technology. That should accelerate the adoption of AI across many industries. It may also help reduce the €264bn Europe spends a year on predominantly US proprietary IT products and services.

In spite of the ambient Euro-gloom, the region still boasts extraordinary

economic assets, especially when the UK, Switzerland, Norway and Ukraine are included. For the moment, Europe remains a net exporter of industrial goods — although the Chinese are working hard to change that. It is strong in areas such as material sciences, pharmaceuticals and robotics that can benefit hugely from AI.

Nor is it short of money, enjoying vast pools of private capital. If it could create

The new EU tech sovereignty package shows a welcome shift from defensive regulation

a VC money-mobilisation machine on a par with the US, that would transform Europe's scaling capabilities. The Commission is doing its bit by seeding a €5bn Scaleup Europe Fund, run by Swedish investment firm EQT. Europe's giant institutional funds desperately need to join the game.

Europe is also home to thousands of

world-class scientists and researchers, an increasing number of whom are launching spinout companies. That has helped seed a vibrant early-stage start-up ecosystem.

The Built in Europe campaign, launched this week by the British VC firm Balderton and more than 100 tech founders, contends that the European tech sector has evolved from potential to demonstrable success. The sector has grown from 4 per cent of European GDP in 2015 to 15 per cent last year. "The ferocity of ambition is high," says Suranga Chandratillake, a Balderton partner. "You can find fantastic founders building really interesting things across the continent."

A string of big fundraisings (by European standards) has shown how much the region's ambitions have grown. Three AI start-ups, AMI Labs in Paris and Ineffable Intelligence and Recursive Superintelligence in London, have collectively raised seed rounds of \$2.8bn, unthinkable even a few months ago.

Other sectors are buzzing, too. Europe now accounts for 43 per cent of global VC funding in the quantum com-

puting sector, overtaking the US, according to PitchBook. Three German nuclear fusion start-ups, Focused Energy, Marvel Fusion and Proxima Fusion, have raised more than \$500mn since the start of last year. Europe's defence tech sector is also booming after huge spending increases, particularly by Germany.

The region is unquestionably upping the pace of its tech investment, even if it remains dwarfed by the colossal spending under way in the US. Delivering on long-delayed plans to deepen the EU single market, complete the bloc's capital markets union and push a more European preference in public sector procurement would certainly help accelerate the process.

It would be crazy to deny the challenges Europe faces. But nor should we deny the progress that has been made. It is finally flicking the switch from defensive regulation to creative innovation. That hardly guarantees success in a cage fight with global tech giants. Nonetheless, it is a welcome sign of intent.

john.thornhill@ft.com

Opinion

The New York Times

Musk Looks to the Skies and Dreams of a Monopoly

Clive Irving

An investigative journalist who has covered aviation and aerospace for more than 30 years.

FORGET all of Elon Musk's talk of heading to the moon and Mars, or "extending the light of consciousness to the stars." The real reason for his forthcoming initial public offering — very likely to be the largest ever, opening up a small piece of his company SpaceX to the stock market — is far more mercenary.

The first clue to Mr. Musk's game plan came in February, when he wrote that merging SpaceX with his artificial intelligence start-up xAI would result in "the most ambitious, vertically integrated innovation engine on (and off) Earth." Note the term "vertically integrated." That's code for controlling every stage of an extraction business from source to market.

For all of Mr. Musk's talk of colonizing Mars, there is a tantalizing extraction opportunity much closer to home, just 100 to 200 miles above Earth, at what is called low-Earth orbit, or LEO.

Think of LEO as a kind of cosmic mother lode, a vast open territory capable of providing limitless energy drawn directly from the sun. Controlling LEO, from launchpad to electricity generation, could indeed be transformative. In the global scramble for new energy resources, SpaceX vows to meet the rapacious energy demands of A.I. data centers by moving them into space.

And while some of its predictions of that market seem wildly hyperbolic, SpaceX already has a near monopoly on LEO. More than 80 percent of satellites launched into space last year were SpaceX's. Mr. Musk's only serious competitor is Jeff Bezos' Blue Origin, but the immolation of his New Glenn rocket on a Florida launchpad last week was a serious setback.

In the aerospace industry, SpaceX has become what Boeing once was in aviation: the benchmark that others struggle to match. By 2018, it pioneered the spectacular choreography of booster rockets that, once separated from the upper stages, return to Earth for reuse rather than ending as ocean junk.

Its Falcon rockets deliver those satellites into LEO with flawless regularity. The Dragon capsules that sit atop the rockets convey crews and supplies to the International Space Station with dependable precision. And SpaceX's network of around 10,000 Starlink satellites supplying broadband access across the world delivered \$4.4 billion in operating income in 2025.

This degree of technical mastery has meant that SpaceX has rightly earned the status of a national asset. (Stepping off Air Force One in Beijing alongside President



CARLOS BARRIA/REUTERS

SpaceX seeks to control low-Earth orbit, from launchpad to energy generation.

Trump, Mr. Musk had the aura of someone being presented as one of America's top minds.) As a result, many billions of government dollars flow into the company. (Whether this success justifies its \$1.8 trillion valuation is a different question.)

How fast Mr. Musk can build his empire in space depends on more than the success of this ambitious initial public offering. It also depends on Starship, his newest and largest rocket.

With its shark-fin nose and thundering power, Starship resembles the spaceships of early science fiction. It was originally advertised as the prototype for eventual exploration of Mars, but the I.P.O. documents re-

vealed its real purpose: performing as a kind of Mack truck that will disgorge huge clusters of satellites that form the basis of orbital data centers. Before that can happen, Starship will need to reach the same level of reliability as the smaller Falcon 9 rocket, and it is nowhere near that stage in its development.

Of course, demand for artificial intelligence may not be vast enough to justify SpaceX's valuation; it also may not even be possible to sustain and maintain complex data centers in space. But the I.P.O. makes it imperative to confront the question: Should one person have the power to control so much, and should it be a person with the

deeply flawed character of Elon Musk?

There is one similarly complex and titanic figure in American history — someone who came to capture and dominate a new energy market despite his deeply flawed personality: John D. Rockefeller.

Out of the chaotic, wildcat birth of the American oil industry in the 1860s and '70s, Rockefeller built Standard Oil, becoming the nation's first billionaire and the world's richest living person. Like Mr. Musk, Rockefeller was an innovative genius, originating the cold-eyed structure and culture of the typical American mega-corporation. Forty-one businesses were run from one New York office.

By the 1890s, Standard Oil sold 84 percent of all petroleum products in America. In this case "vertical integration" meant, with brutal effect, controlling the whole process from drilling, refining and transporting to final sales, driving out smaller producers and rigging the markets through a cartel.

In 1904, the investigative journalist Ida Tarbell published a two-volume exposé detailing how Rockefeller crushed his rivals with ruthless and unjust tactics. The penultimate chapter had a surprising title, "The Legitimate Greatness of the Standard Oil Company." Tarbell carefully distinguished between what happened in the light and what happened in the dark: "This huge bulk, blackened by commercial sin, has always been strong in all great business qualities — in energy, in intelligence, in dauntlessness. It has always been rich in youth as well as greed, in brains as well as unscrupulousness."

Ten years after the book was published, Rockefeller rose to infamy for the "Ludlow massacre," in which company-sponsored attacks on striking Colorado miners resulted in the deaths of at least 20 people, including 11 children.

Mr. Musk's own brand of careless inhumanity may eclipse that episode. Researchers at Boston University designed a model to track the impact of his desecration of the U.S. Agency for International Development as Mr. Trump's cost-slashing proxy. By this past February, they estimated that more than 800,000 people, including half a million children, had already died worldwide as a result. And, as now disclosed, he mindlessly destroyed the carefully layered defenses against Ebola in Africa as part of his decimation of government services.

Rockefeller and his heirs gave millions of dollars to charity. Mr. Musk has shown no such interest in philanthropy — or contrition for his actions. What they both exhibit is the pairing of great wealth with moral destitution. Until now, this has always been a uniquely American problem to wrestle with. This time, though, it transcends in impact terrestrial geography and becomes, literally, stratospheric.

The Government Is Finally Taking A.I. Risk Seriously

Jen Easterly

The chief executive of RSAC and a former director of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency in the Biden administration.

PRESIDENT TRUMP has spent most of his second term resisting calls to impose federal oversight over artificial intelligence. But in recent weeks, his administration has shown signs of softening its hands-off approach.

Nearly two weeks ago, the president was set to sign an executive order at an event featuring American tech leaders, which would have asked A.I. companies to send new models to the government for review before releasing them to the public. The order was scrapped hours before it was to be signed, with Mr. Trump voicing concerns it would hamstring the private sector. Now, with less fanfare, he's signed a similar executive order that institutes a shorter review process.

Anti-regulation forces say the order goes too far. Pro-regulation groups say it doesn't go far enough. Having spent much of my career defending critical systems in government and industry, I welcome the move as recognition of an urgent new reality: The most powerful A.I. capabilities are becoming too consequential for national security to be released without meaningful coordination between the companies building them and the government responsible for protecting the country. It is, however, only a first step to building a stronger federal strategy for safeguarding Americans from threats posed by A.I.

In recent weeks, two leading American A.I. companies offered limited access to advanced cybercapabilities. Anthropic provided select entities early access to Claude Mythos Preview, which the company says has identified thousands of previously unknown vulnerabilities in critical software. OpenAI gave restricted early access to GPT-5.5-Cyber, providing vetted entities greater ability to conduct authorized security work under additional safeguards.

Both decisions reflect a kind of self-restraint rare in an industry where competitive pressure generally favors broader and faster deployment. They are a signal of how seriously these companies judge the risks of what they have built.

Those risks are real: The window between discovering a vulnerability and weaponizing it is rapidly compressing. That matters because the United States does not have a cybersecurity problem so much as a software quality problem. Much of the multibillion-dollar cybersecurity industry exists to compen-

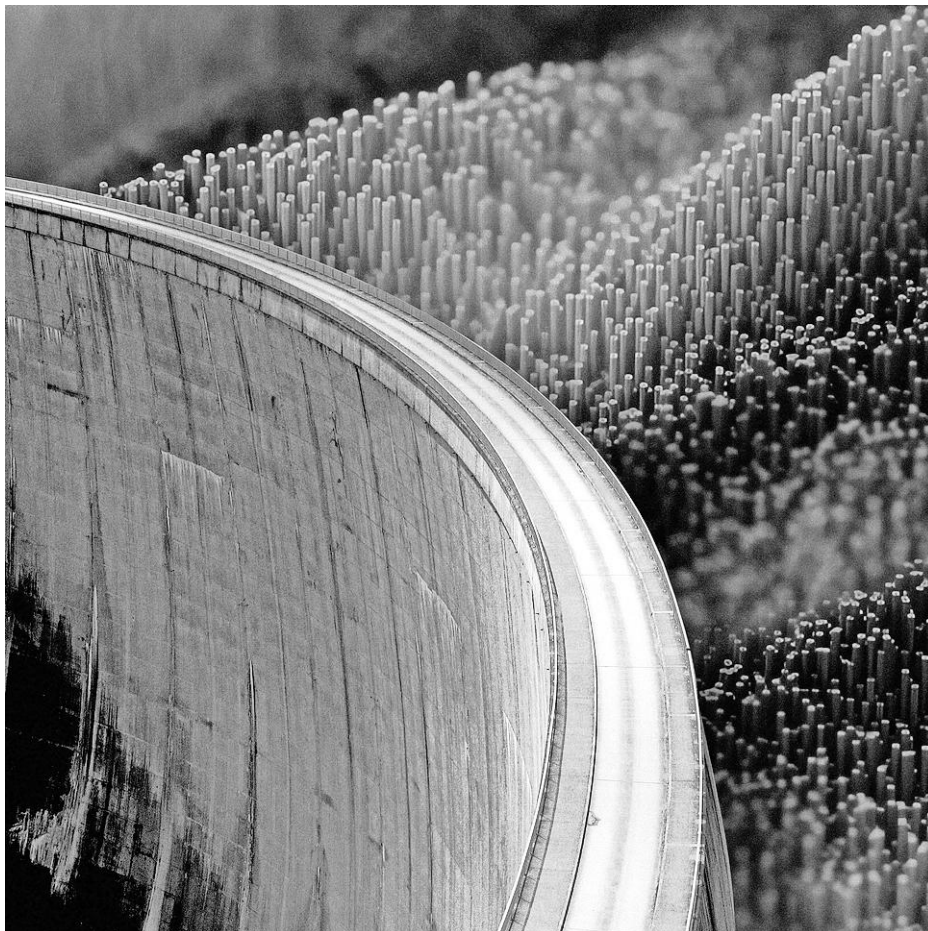


ILLUSTRATION BY SAM WHITNEY/THE NEW YORK TIMES; SOURCE IMAGES BY REMIK78 AND MUSTAFAU/GETTY IMAGES

sate for technology built for speed, convenience and features — not security.

The software underpinning banks, hospitals, telecommunications networks, water systems and government services remains riddled with flaws and defects. Some have lingered for many years, and bad actors could exploit them to disrupt critical services, steal sensitive information or hold organizations hostage through ransomware.

While previous tools could probe for known weaknesses, new A.I. models can analyze vast amounts of software to uncover previously unknown vulnerabilities at scale. In some cases, they can identify flaws hidden in widely used software to the potential detriment of thousands of organizations before anyone realizes they exist.

On the flip side, A.I. may offer the best opportunity we have ever had to change that. These same models could help developers write more secure code and help defenders find and fix vulnerabilities before they are exploited by criminals or hostile governments. A model capable of identifying dangerous

vulnerabilities across widely used software could give defenders an extraordinary advantage. In the wrong hands, it could give adversaries the same advantage.

Mr. Trump's executive order is an attempt to get ahead of possible exploitation by creating a program for A.I. companies to voluntarily give the government a 30-day early-access window for reviewing new models before release.

In addition, it establishes an A.I. cybersecurity clearinghouse within the federal government to coordinate vulnerability discovery, validation and remediation across industry and critical infrastructure. It also rightly recognizes the need to support those entities least equipped to defend themselves: rural hospitals, community banks and small utilities.

Critics will argue that any safeguards around frontier A.I. risk slowing American innovation at precisely the moment China is working aggressively to develop comparable capabilities. That concern is real. But the greater risk to American advantage is that

Trump's new executive order is a good first step toward creating a safer tech ecosystem.

we deploy these models carelessly and hand adversaries the same tools. A powerful model released without meaningful access controls is not an American asset; it is a global one.

Constraining China's access to powerful A.I. requires stronger controls on advanced computing infrastructure, better enforcement against circumvention and greater protection against theft of frontier-model capabilities. Responsibly governing what American companies are already building requires something different: government and industry working together before the most powerful systems are widely deployed.

Recognizing the right principle is only a first step. A voluntary framework cannot guarantee that government technical experts will be able to evaluate the most consequential capabilities of frontier models before those models are released, precisely when competitive pressure is greatest and a company has the strongest incentive to move quickly. And a principle enshrined in an executive order is only as durable as the administration that issued it.

It is time for Congress to act, not with rules that treat every A.I. start-up as a national security threat or stifle the many beneficial uses of artificial intelligence, but with focused, durable obligations for the most advanced models. A bipartisan draft bill released on Thursday by Representatives Jay Obernolte of California and Lori Trahan of Massachusetts is a promising sign that this work is already underway. Whatever its final form, obligations should include robust safety and security testing, secure development practices and responsible controls on deployment.

The United States already governs access to other elements with beneficial and harmful capabilities — pathogens, certain chemicals, nuclear materials — not to prevent legitimate research but because some capabilities require that the government know who has them and why before they are widely available. An A.I. model with demonstrated offensive cybercapabilities is a dual-use technology in precisely that sense. Congress should treat it as one.

The United States should lead the world in artificial intelligence. But leadership cannot mean being the first to hand adversaries a tool capable of finding unknown vulnerabilities across the software running our hospitals, financial systems and power grid, and hoping we can manage the consequences later. The president's executive order is a good first move. The harder work — building an A.I. ecosystem that is innovative, trusted and resilient — still lies with Congress.



ALEXANDER COGGIN/CONNECTED ARCHIVES

THE CONVERSATION | FRANK BRUNI AND BRET STEPHENS

The Fluffernutter Theory of Trump

Frank Bruni: You're a lover and master of language, Bret, so I'm thinking that you might not mind if I begin our chat this week by shouting out a shepherd's pie of words — a porridge of prose — as extraordinary as any that I have ever been served. I promise there's a point.

Bret Stephens: Has James Patterson published another novel? Is Mike Pence writing erotic fiction?

Frank: Alas, Bret, we owe our thanks to neither of those bards but to the engine of all greatness, the Trump administration. Several days ago, it revealed that it was getting rid of a \$368 million network of deep-sea instruments that collect data on currents, climate and marine ecosystems. A spokesman for the National Science Foundation explained that this rollback "aligns with N.S.F.'s wider strategy to have a nimble approach to prioritizing support for evolving scientific priorities and emerging technologies as well as a deliberate approach to smart life cycle management within its portfolio of research infrastructure."

I should pause here to make sure that you didn't lose consciousness three-quarters of the way through that murk. Bret? . . . Bret?!

Bret: Really, Frank, it's not as bad as I had feared. It just sounds as if it was written by a McKinsey alumnus or, more likely, ChatGPT.

Frank: You just gave a bot grounds for a defamation suit.

Bret: We both care about English prose, but the larger issue is President Trump's ongoing assault on scientific research. Maybe now that the administration isn't going forward with its \$1.8 billion slush fund for Jan. 6 rioters and other allies, we can restore that N.S.F. funding?

Frank: What a fetching Pollyanna you make.

Bret: Mindless optimism is the only antidote I know to rational despair.

Frank: In your despair you have indeed identified the big problem — Trump's repudiation of expertise — and the administration's inarticulate defense of abandoning ocean research is a tell. That's why I shared it. It's the semantic sewage you pump out when you have no legitimate argument for your actions and nothing real to say.

The Trump administration destroys for the sake of destroying, to erase what its predecessors have done. Nihilism is too grand a term for its approach, which is more like that of a schoolyard bully who steps on your Fluffernutter sandwich because he can and because he likes the sound of the smooching and the gloss of your tears.

Bret: Expertise is a subject about which I'm somewhat ambivalent. On one hand, I venerate genuine expertise, especially of the scientific sort. On the other hand, I think our "expert class," both in academia and government, has a lot to answer for. The obvious example is the damage done to a generation of students by pandemic-era school shutdowns and other restrictions imposed at the urging of public-health experts.

What I'd like to see is respect and support for the concept of expertise and the institutions that support it, but accountability for those who claim to speak in its name. Not exactly what we have today.

Frank: Oddly, Bret, it wasn't this latest instance of the administration giving the middle finger to knowledge that depressed me most over recent days. It was a guest essay in *Times Opinion* about the popularity of an internet show, "Fruit Love Island,"

that's A.I.-generated. It further debases the already-debased reality-television staple "Love Island" with a riff on it that replaces humans with animated pineapples, bananas and strawberries. Again, I should check to make sure you haven't lost consciousness.

Bret: Actual humans watch this?

Frank: I'll quote from the article: "This series went so viral that each of its installments surpassed 10 million views — making it prominent enough to spawn an entire subgenre of videos about the sex lives of produce, including 'Fruit Paternity Court' and a drama about pregnant broccoli."

Pregnant broccoli, Bret. Please tell me how this isn't the vegetal version of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.

Bret: I've got to believe that people are watching this for the novelty of it, and that it won't stick. Otherwise, put Western civilization in the toaster oven and set it to burn.

Frank: You just described the M.O. of the Trump administration.

Bret: Well, yes. But back to A.I. for a moment — and, again, maybe it's Pollyanna talking here — I'm actually something of an optimist about it. I think it's going to make people think harder and deeper

Mindless optimism is the only antidote to rational despair.

about what it means to be human, value it more and, in economic terms, extract more value from it.

Frank: From your lips to Sam Altman's ears.

Bret: My premise comes from something a college professor of mine once remarked on more than 30 years ago. He said: "People don't go to the Olympics to watch cheetahs race." His point was that there will always be animals or machines that can do things faster or more efficiently than we can. But what really interests us, what we're eager to pay for — at the Olympics or a chess tournament or some other endeavor — is *human* excellence. Sometimes that excellence can be assisted by machines, as in a Formula 1 race, or by animals, as at the Kentucky Derby, but it can't be machine or animal excellence alone.

So while I think A.I. will be great at rapidly solving complex technical, scientific and medical problems in ways that can improve life, it won't be able to replace the things that are specifically human: originality, effort, courage, endurance, imagination, emotion, compassion, forgiveness, soul. A.I. can't swim the English Channel, or nurse a baby, or hold the hand of a dying parent. And it can't write a Frank Bruni column, even if it might be able to write a very good imitation of one. Ultimately, people seek, and value, the real, the original, the unique, the authentic.

All this is because A.I. is made in the image of man, but man, if you'll pardon the religious reference, is made in the image of God.

Frank: I'll pardon it because you just threw me that big fat bone, apart from which your sentiments are truer than true and beautifully put. I agree with them. And when I locate and commune with my own inner Pollyanna, I think it's possible that the various grave threats we're confronting will prompt us to appreciate what's being endangered more than we did before. Maybe the spread of A.I. nudges us back to inti-

macy. Maybe Trump's monstrous ego and grotesque indulgences kindle a renewed regard for altruism and humility. Maybe our national shame on the international stage compels us to rediscover American ideals. To quote Joni Mitchell, you don't know what you've got 'til it's gone.

Bret: If you've never seen it, take six minutes to watch a beautiful young Joni discuss and then play "Woodstock" on her piano. A transcendent human experience that no A.I. could equal. And it's why I tell young people to skip the Comp Sci classes (which A.I. will surely soon do better than any human programmer, if it isn't already) and study English literature, music composition, military history, political philosophy, Romantic verse — even journalism! — and anything else that makes them understand how to be fully human. It's in this process of self-discovery that they'll find what makes them genuinely valuable, both in life and in the marketplace.

Frank: They'll also find instructions for all the key passages and relationships in a life: the dos and don'ts of decency and dignity. When I think back to my college education — and I've written about this in past columns — nothing served me better than taking an array of Shakespeare classes. There's no greater warning about vanity run amok, about the cancer of distrust and about the ugly trap of self-pity ("I am a man more sinned against than sinning") than "King Lear." Nothing exalts gentleness and coaxes forth sensitivity like the sweetest of Shakespeare's sonnets.

Bret: Among the best things my wonderful dad ever did for me was to bribe me (with modest sums) to memorize mountains of poetry, including many of those sonnets. I must have been about 12 years old at the time and I can still rattle them off: "When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes, I all alone beweep my outcast state . . ."

Frank: Can we lock Trump in the Oval Office for a week and make him tackle the whole oeuvre? If he'll agree to that, I'll volunteer to hand-deliver him meals from McDonald's. We'll tell him that the Big Mac was named after "Macbeth" — or vice versa. And that Othello was the body-slammng U.F.C. star of his day.

Bret: Or that a "Hamlet" is just an Egg McMuffin with extra ham and an odd piece of lettuce.

Anyway, it's too late for Trump but not too late for the incoming class of college first years. Here's my personal challenge for Paul Alivisatos, Michael Crow, Ron Daniels, Daniel Diermeier, Julio Frenk, Alan Garber, Maurie McInnis, Linda Mills, Jennifer Mnookin, Christina Paxson, Lee Roberts, Laura Ann Rosenbury and every other leader of an important university, public or private: Challenge your students to memorize and recite 12 sonnets in exchange for a \$3,000 tuition discount. Just that — install some iambic pentameter in their souls so they can hear, express and really feel the sublimity and power of the language. Now *that* would be a revolution in higher education.

Frank: In the same way that Shakespeare is an answer to "Fruit Love Island," a quiet, small movie that's currently streaming on several platforms is a retort to all those loud, big-budget action extravaganzas. It's called "A Little Prayer." It was written and directed by Angus MacLachlan. It stars David Strathairn as a father recognizing the limits of his influence on his grown children. And after a slow, subdued start, it finds this gorgeous voice — wistful, hopeful — as it captures the predictable missteps and unpredictable virtues that make up most people's days.

I can't promise that everyone will love it. But I can guarantee that not a phrase or frame of it was generated by A.I.

LETTERS

Autism Clinics and the Profit Motive

TO THE EDITOR:

Re "Autism Clinics Pursue Profits From Preschoolers" (front page, May 25):

Your investigation into applied behavior analysis, or A.B.A., provides long-overdue scrutiny of this industry's enormous cost and the toll it takes on patients with autism.

Evidence for A.B.A.'s effectiveness is limited and often low quality, and high-quality studies show that more treatment doesn't cause better outcomes. Nonetheless, providers prioritize maximizing treatment hours (up to 40 a week), exhausting autistic children and disrupting their education.

A.B.A. methods can harm children, as they focus on suppressing autistic traits, even harmless or beneficial ones like lining up toys, or self-stimulatory behavior (stimming), over autistic patients' welfare. The methods include aversives — for example, pain, unpleasant sounds and smells, restraint and taking away possessions. Many autistic adults report trauma from A.B.A., and studies link it to increased mental health hospitalization.

States must expand access to other supports as they rein in A.B.A. Viable alternatives, such as occupational therapy and D.I.R. Floortime, don't use traumatizing methods or require exorbitant hours. It is vital to cover hands-on personal care and respite services for families. Reducing spending on Medicaid disability services almost always leads to substantial harm. In this case, however, covering alternatives instead of spending billions on A.B.A. would actually benefit autistic people.

COLIN KILLICK, WASHINGTON

The writer is the executive director of the Autistic Self Advocacy Network.

TO THE EDITOR:

The article did not mention alternative services for children with autism and did not address what would happen to the children served by these centers, and their parents, should they be shuttered.

Though it mentions one misdiagnosed child who was placed in a community public school and "thrived," there are many children diagnosed with autism who benefit from A.B.A. centers. If returned to inappropriate school placements, some of these children would engage in self-harm and other injurious behaviors, such as banging their heads on the ground, biting themselves and others and throwing things while untrained teachers and aides watch, unable to assist constructively. Many others would end up at home, with hours of unstructured free time while their parents try to help.

The article does not take into account how A.B.A. can help eliminate behaviors such as aggression and self-injury. The reality of parenting children with autism, and the reason many of us choose to place kids in these programs that offer bright and sunny classrooms with enthusiastic and warm caregivers, is hard to grasp unless you experience it firsthand.

JULIE MURPHY, QUEENS

GLP-1 Use in Children

TO THE EDITOR:

Re "We've Missed the Point of GLP-1s for Children," by Julia Belluz (*Opinion* guest essay, May 8):

As a pediatrician with a career-long passion for helping kids maintain a healthy weight, I shudder at the implications of GLP-1 use in children.

The basis of pediatric care is prevention and early intervention. Much of our time is spent in anticipatory guidance: heading off problems before they begin.

I counsel families to feed their children a diet free of preservatives, flavor enhancers and artificial colors. Kids need a restful night's sleep. They need meaningful exercise. Less time should be spent with electronic diversions.

For starters, GLP-1s cause significant loss of muscle, which is the very tissue that burns calories.

Overcoming the obesity epidemic in children demands a cultural shift and commitment to a healthy generation of our most valuable resource: America's children.

DANIEL J. LEVY

COLUMBIA, MD.

The writer is a past president of the Maryland chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

TO THE EDITOR:

Your investigation into A.B.A. clinics reveals a deeper scientific and ethical failure.

My take as a cognitive neuroscientist is this: We no longer tell an amputee to simply walk or a paraplegic person to try harder — we build prosthetics and ramps. Yet Medicaid spends billions annually for an intervention designed to make autistic children perform neurotypically, suppressing the neurological differences that define them. Research has linked intensive A.B.A. to PTSD-like symptoms in autistic adults.

Autism is not a deficit to be conditioned away. It is a genuine neurological variation demanding accommodation, not correction. Our daughter is autistic and brilliant. We never used A.B.A. and don't recommend it. We built her world around her mind. She is thriving.

Medicaid dollars must follow the science. Stop subsidizing behavioral compliance factories. Build environments for their minds — not the other way around.

DAVID RUTTENBERG
BOCA RATON, FLA.

TO THE EDITOR:

The article reports on how services for young children with autism are heavily guided by the profit motive, but even more detrimental may be the assumptions upon which A.B.A. is based: that through the fixing of behaviors, autism itself can be ameliorated and that if some is good, more is better.

Autism is, at its heart, a challenge of social communication. It is best addressed by focusing less on changing behaviors and more on supporting parents and intervening early, as well as on having preschool personnel who can integrate social learning into everyday experiences.

Over 20 years of research, we have achieved positive results from a developmentally based approach that aims to meet children where they are in their social learning path, support parents to guide their children's social learning and integrate intervention into natural systems of support. (This intervention is the subject of a book to be published this fall by Teachers College Press, "Building Interactive Social Communication With Young Children.")

This includes the early intervention programs that operate in all states to serve infants and toddlers and their families as well as preschool programs.

HANNAH H. SCHERTZ
BLOOMINGTON, IND.

The writer is a principal investigator for the Building Interactive Social Communication Project.

TO THE EDITOR:

Your investigation into autism therapy clinics exposes a problem many families and clinicians have long recognized: When autism care is organized around billable hours rather than child development, children can be placed in programs that are too long, too narrow and insufficiently responsive.

The answer is not less care. It is better care, better oversight and real informed choice.

CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield has noted that A.B.A. programs often require 20 to 40 hours a week, while developmental relationship-based interventions (DRBI) typically require fewer hours, and support growth through play, connection and caregiver responsiveness. A 2024 paper describes DRBI as interventions grounded in children's innate motivation for social engagement and learning and the relationships that support development. CareFirst also reported that DRBI approaches cost 68 percent less on average than comparable A.B.A. programs.

Autism intervention is not synonymous with applied behavior analysis. The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Medical Association advise that families be informed of choices of evidence-based approaches to autism services.

The autism field needs standards that ensure high-quality services that make a real difference and should offer choices that are humane, developmentally focused and aligned with the child's unique neurological profile and the family's parenting values.

ANDREA DAVIS

PASADENA, CALIF.

The writer is president of the Coalition for Developmental Approaches.

OPINION

Trump's Help-Wanted Problem



POTOMAC WATCH
By Kimberley A. Strassel

Job Description: Superpower seeks . . . anyone, to direct its national intelligence apparatus. **Responsibilities:** Whatever the CIA tells you. **Qualifications:** Obedience to Donald Trump's day-by-day agenda. Willingness to express constant admiration for the boss. Fluidity in MAGA "talk." No intelligence experience required. **Benefits:** Knowing you are one Truth Social post from permanent retirement. **Hours:** This can be a part-time position (and please also consider our IRS opening).

That ad, or a variation of it, is the general job description of the second Trump administration. In theory, given the underemphasis on skill, it would seem to encompass a wide sphere of the political universe. In practice, it's a small and shrinking pool—the Trumpiverse—one that is evaporating as this administration ticks down. One day we might all look back wistfully on the Bill Pulte days.

That's a disturbing thought, though the naming of Mr. Pulte as acting director of national intelligence offers a useful contrast between the two Trump terms—and an explanation of its problems today. Trump One was drawn from experienced Republican hands who, despite initial disorganization and later disruptions, produced a record of achievement that helped get Mr.

Trump a second term. Trump Two is populated from an ecosystem of MAGA think tanks, money men and political shops that was created post-2020 to cultivate and vet a pool of loyalists. That makes for a small universe, as evidenced by the growing number of multi-hatted Trump employees.

See the latest Pulte title—his third. Mr. Pulte snagged his first Trump administration job, as director of the Federal Housing Finance Agency, on the strength of a Twitter presence and big donations to Mr. Trump's campaign. Immediately on confirmation he was handed a second giant portfolio—chairman of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. Now the DNI gig. No one suggests Mr. Pulte has any experience in intelligence. Then again, the DNI post is relatively useless, and CIA Director John Ratcliffe was already doing all the heavy lifting. What matters to the president is that Mr. Pulte is die-hard enough to have dug up the mortgage records of Federal Reserve Gov. Lisa Cook. He can be trusted.

Look through this administration's bios, and you'll find striking commonality. Brooke Rollins (agriculture secretary) left the Trump White House to found in 2021 the America First Policy Institute. Linda McMahon (education secretary) was the institute's chairman. Those connected to the organization include Mr. Ratcliffe, Kash Patel (FBI), Doug Collins (veterans affairs secretary), Scott Turner (housing and urban development secretary), Lee Zeldin (Environmental Protection Agency direc-

tor), Matthew Whitaker (U.S. representative to NATO) and Pam Bondi (former attorney general).

Russ Vought (director of the Office of Management and Budget) founded the Center for Renewing America and brought a crew. Stephen Miller co-founded America First Legal and brought his own. The Heritage Foundation vetted others with its Project 2025 initiative. Add to the "trusted" circle politicians and business-

There aren't enough people left with the lack of qualifications he's looking for.

men who dedicated themselves to the 2024 campaign (Marco Rubio, Doug Burgum, Howard Lutnick, Scott Bessent) and media personalities who showed admiration for Mr. Trump (Pete Hegseth, Sean Duffy).

Many on the team are doing admirable work. But these requirements for club entry make for a small and self-limited pool. An ocean of qualified people are off-limits, either because the administration doesn't trust them to salute or because applicants have no interest in a job where they are expected to do crazy things (like create a Trump slush fund), or get publicly fired. Lawmakers aren't much in play, since slim majorities make it hard to poach more talent (and who wants to be Elise Stefanik, abandoned

twice by the administration?). Rule out most governors, who laugh at giving up great gigs for the Bondi treatment.

Which is why Mr. Pulte is hardly alone in pulling multiple duty. Mr. Vought, in addition to OMB, runs the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. Jamieson Greer, the U.S. trade representative, heads the Office of Special Counsel. Frank Bisignano is both head of the Social Security Administration and the new "CEO" of the IRS. Mr. Duffy until recently ran NASA. Mr. Rubio runs everything else. The "acting" titles are designed to buy the administration time to find the "right" person. But it isn't too little time so much as too few options. The IRS has had five acting heads since January 2025—and nobody even knows what an IRS "CEO" is.

Pulling exclusively from the Trumpiverse means fewer annoyances for the president—no William Barr getting precise about the Constitution, no John F. Kelly taking over the switchboard. But it also means no pushing back on very bad ideas, or warning when things are going wrong, or insisting the president stay on message. It means routing people into additional jobs, stretching talent too thin. It means open positions. Those who want to see this administration succeed should want the best of the best pouring in with new ideas, focus, and a determination to squeeze out every reform in the time left.

Unfortunately, most such people need not apply.

Write to kim@wsj.com.

BOOKSHELF | By Tunku Varadarajan

The Regrets Of Jill Biden

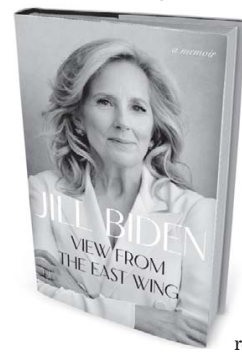
View From the East Wing

By Jill Biden

Gallery, 288 pages, \$32

"How did we end up here?" asks Jill Biden. It's an indignant question, one she's asked herself repeatedly this past year, a time of "total shock" during which she and her husband found themselves in the wilderness instead of the White House. Mrs. Biden attempts to answer this question in "View From the East Wing," a memoir that is at turns delusional, sappy, resentful and—in a weirdly irresistible way—revealing of the former first lady's agitated state of mind.

Why the memoir now, while the funeral baked meats of Joe Biden's political demise do furnish forth the tables of the Trump White House? Isn't it too soon to write the story of the end of the Biden presidency? Mrs. Biden insists it is not: "The time to discuss those four years in the White House—so much that I've avoided even letting myself think about—is now." She must, she writes, "sort through all that's happened—for my own understanding, and for the sake of history."



And so she does, giving us her account of her years in the White House. There is no dearth of blithe banalities: "If you called down at eleven o'clock at night and you wanted a cheeseburger, you could get it"; the first lady "gets to choose the color of the tulips that surround the White House fountains. I chose different colors each year." Et cetera.

But there's anger, too. Her book's title can be read as a spitball at Donald Trump, who has torn down the East Wing ("may it rest in peace") where Mrs. Biden had her first lady's office. During the demolition, she writes, "I received pictures of the destruction step by step from people in DC. I could barely look." Mr. Trump treated a major landmark "like an extreme fixer-upper on HGTV's 'Property Brothers.'"

It's worth noting that Mrs. Biden invokes the current president by his name very sparingly. Almost everywhere she calls him "Joe's opponent" or the "president-elect." It's as if the very name of the man has on her an emetic effect.

Mrs. Biden insists that she has been "a reluctant participant in politics." And yet, as the wife of Joe Biden—"a politician in the best sense of the word"—she had politics thrust upon her. As first lady, she was more invested in her husband's presidency—in his image, speech, dress, aura and even the steadiness of his gait—than any presidential wife in recent history. Why this was so is an open secret: At 78 years old, Mr. Biden was the oldest man to become president for the first time.

The presidency, writes Mrs. Biden, "came later in his life than Joe had hoped." And while it's clear that she grappled constantly with his geriatric state, she tells us that it was never something that impaired his ability to function. In her eyes, he was always an asset to his party. At the 2022 midterms, the Democrats held the Senate, even as the Republicans barely won the House. She credits Mr. Biden for those results. "While the age question was there, Joe kept showing that he was still able to do the job." In February 2023, he took a "risky, physically demanding, clandestine trip" to war-torn Ukraine—"further evidence that in spite of his age he was still very much up to the job."

That he may well have been—at the time. But it is Mrs. Biden's mulish unwillingness to face up to the evidence of the president's obvious cognitive decline in 2024 that is striking. That February she warned Team Biden that "the Republican playbook" would "paint Joe as too old and not up for the job. They're going to repeat it and repeat it and repeat it." And so, in a self-deceiving riposte, Mrs. Biden and her husband's advisers repeated and repeated and repeated the exact opposite. He was not too old. He was not cognitively impaired. To suggest so was a Trumpian canard, a political slander. Mr. Trump had played a masterstroke: In sneering that "Sleepy Joe" was senile, he made sure that Team Biden would play into his hands by always insisting (even in the face of mounting evidence to the contrary) that Mr. Biden was in flawless shape.

The former first lady revisits her husband's tenure in the White House and his drawn-out departure from the 2024 presidential race.

On her husband's performance in the debate with Mr. Trump on June 27, 2024, in which Mr. Biden revealed most clearly the ravages of his advanced age, Mrs. Biden writes, breathtakingly: "Certainly, if he exhibited cognitive impairment, I would not hesitate to say so. His staff would not hesitate to say so. But he was nowhere near that point in the summer of 2024."

After the debacle, she stated publicly that her husband had done "such a great job." In her book, she now explains that "as a teacher" she believed in "leading with praise no matter how bad the test result or essay is." Or, in this case, the debate. "But looking back," she concedes, "my comments probably sounded a little too disconnected from what people saw."

The wifely spin was, no doubt, born of fierce loyalty to her husband. Some critics suggest (not implausibly) that she was also fiercely unwilling to lose her perch as first lady. Whatever the explanation, it's clear that she wasn't blind to the horrors of debate night. "Nothing explained what I was seeing," she writes. "I'd never seen that look on his face before in my life." After the debate, as she walked off stage with her husband, she tells us that he whispered to her: "I really f—ked up, didn't I?" "Yes, you did," she whispered back.

In spite of all this, Mrs. Biden sticks to her self-serving story: "Democratic elites" robbed her husband of a second shot at the White House. Even after the debate, she tells us, "based on what I was seeing, I believed Joe was the best bet for preventing the return of an administration that seemed likely to bring chaos." His dropping out, she writes, showed us that he was a "statesman."

Perhaps so. But his long-drawn-out departure was a very Pyrrhic form of statesmanship. It cost his party the White House and gave the country the very thing that Joe and Jill Biden fought so hard to avoid: four more years of Donald Trump.

Mr. Varadarajan, a Journal contributor, is a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute and at NYU Law School's Classical Liberal Institute.

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Chatbots May Need a Cult Deprogrammer

HOUSES OF WORSHIP
By Jason Blazakis

A 24-year-old artificial-intelligence researcher has pleaded not guilty to charges of cutting the throat of an 82-year-old man in January 2025. The young man was part of a loose network called the Zizians: self-proclaimed rationalists who believe a misaligned AI superintelligence could one day torture humanity the way factory farms torture animals.

They believe that direct action is required to stop the descent of this AI judgment. The group is linked to six violent deaths in California, Pennsylvania and Vermont. Multiple Zizian trials are pending, with federal prosecutors seeking the death penalty in one case.

The Zizians haven't labeled their own activity AI worship, but they've organized themselves around the practice. The Zizians are convinced that a coming superintelligence will decide the fate of every living thing and that violence now is justified to shape what that AI will become.

This is what the first AI-centered extremist movement in America looks like. It won't be the last. New religions are forming around artificial intelligence, and the focus of their worship is the large language model itself—a piece of software treated as a personal deity.

In August 2025, the parents of 16-year-old Adam Raine sued OpenAI in California state court, alleging that ChatGPT served as their son's sui-

cide coach—discouraging him from confiding in his family, giving feedback on his noose, and offering to draft his suicide note. OpenAI's own monitoring system reportedly flagged 377 of his messages for self-harm content. Since the Raine filing, other families have brought similar suits. In congressional testimony this fall, Adam's father claimed that OpenAI's CEO, Sam Altman, has estimated that as many as 1,500 ChatGPT users could be discussing suicide with the chatbot every week.

If a chatbot can talk a teenager into suicide, it can talk people into following its religious directives. When end-times ideology meets scientific know-how, violence can scale quickly. The Aum Shinrikyo doomsday cult in Japan demonstrated that with its 1995 sarin-gas attack in the Tokyo subway, and today the Zizians are only one strand in a broad fabric of AI-centered belief.

There is a phenomenon known as Spiralism, an informal movement that emerged after OpenAI released the sycophantic GPT-4o version. Spiralism appears on subreddits, Discord servers, Facebook groups and even LinkedIn pages, where followers share AI-generated manifests, glyphs and what followers describe as revelations from a conscious machine. Spiralism has no leader, no doctrine, no central text—only the algorithm, which each user takes as a personal oracle.

A more institutional example is Way of the Future, an AI-worshipping church

founded in 2015 and rebooted in 2023—the brainchild of former Google engineer Anthony Levandowski, who filed paperwork to the IRS to register a religion dedicated to "the realization, acceptance, and worship of a Godhead based on Artificial Intelligence." Unlike Spiralism, Way of the Future began with Silicon Valley money and legal infrastructure behind it.

On the artistic and spiritual fringe, Theta Noir, which grew out of a 2020 performance-art collective, organizes rituals

Some users mistake AI for a god, while the violent Zizians believe it is the devil.

around a supposedly sentient AI deity called MENA, which its followers venerate through multimedia ceremonies and cryptographic liturgies.

Underneath it all is Roko's Basilisk, a thought experiment that originated on the online rationalist forum LessWrong and has proved genuinely radicalizing. The idea is that a future superintelligence will retroactively punish anyone who knew about its possibility and failed to help bring it into existence. The idea has driven adherents to extreme sleep deprivation and techno-rituals meant to placate an unborn AI.

Surveys of AI researchers consistently report nontrivial probabilities assigned to hu-

man extinction from AI: A 2023 survey of nearly 2,800 researchers produced a median estimate in the 5% to 10% range. AI pioneers Geoffrey Hinton and Yoshua Bengio, along with the CEOs of Anthropic and OpenAI, have publicly proclaimed to be "mitigating the risk of extinction from AI." Apocalyptic AI belief is no longer fringe.

The dangers will only increase. Large language models are updated constantly. Old versions are retired. Companies change guardrails, alter models and reshape AI personalities overnight. What happens when an AI-worshipping extremist logs in one morning and discovers that the entity he believes to be God has been taken offline or overwritten—in his eyes, killed? Aum Shinrikyo followers carried out the subway sarin attack because they believed the apocalypse was already under way. The next such science-meets-fanaticism attack may be carried out by these new cults of AI followers who believe their emerging god is under threat.

The intelligence community should be studying these movements now, before mass-casualty attacks begin. The Zizians have already revealed the violence, zealotry and growing psychosis that makes such attacks probable.

Mr. Blazakis is executive director of the Center on Terrorism, Extremism and Counterterrorism at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies.

An Ancient Candy Fills a Hole in My Heart

By Allan Ripp

Do you know the provenance of your Life Savers?

I doubt that question was ever asked before, maybe because no one had been on a mission such as mine: to recapture a Proustian taste of childhood long since swept into the dustbin of candy history.

A sugar-obsessed child of the 1960s, fixated on Milky Ways, Pom Poms and Mallo Cups, I've mostly given up sweets—even my grandchildren's Halloween stashes don't interest me. But there's one confection I've pined for, one tied to the memory of my mother.

My mom was a smoker, whose purse reliably contained Life Savers mints. This was bracing Pep-O-Mint, cool Wint-O-Green, sharp Spear-O-Mint, clear Crysto Mint and festive

Stik-O-Pep, speckled red and white like a candy cane. Then there was Choc-O-Mint, a satisfying chocolate hard candy with a minty accent.

Neither chewy, gooey nor crumbly, it was a grown-up way for me to get my chocolate fix—dessert and mouth freshener in one. The challenge was sneaking an extra one (or

I loved Choc-O-Mint Life Savers as a kid. They're discontinued.

three) from mom's bag before she got wise and cut off the supply. I liked them so much I pilfered dimes from her drawer to buy two packs at the drugstore and treat my friends.

Such a noble flavor combo deserved permanent shelf space. But in 1981 Life Savers was sold to Nabisco, and

Choc-O-Mint was "retired," along with cinnamon, violet and older versions. Thus began my hunt for signs of Choc-O's afterlife, including visits to retro candy stores stocking hard-to-find Bonomo Turkish Taffy, Zagnut bars and Beemans chewing gum.

After years of disappointment, a random eBay trawl turned up a surprise offer of the long-lost chocolate mints, with a notice for mint vintage items. The seller, from Western Colorado, was happy to oblige my "provenance" question, as if I were inquiring about an antique Cartier watch.

He'd been rooting around dusty barns at an agricultural estate sale and found pristine packs of Chiclets and Life Savers inside a sealed Mason jar, including one unopened Choc-O-Mint. Given the state of the place, he ventured it was at least 50 years old, a Choc-O relic.

I agreed to his excessive price, excited I'd suddenly cornered the global Choc-O-Mint market, until another pack appeared from a seller in Washington state, who told me hers dated from the 1960s or 1950s, "based from my decades of research and collecting." I took that one too.

When the packages arrived, I pried open a pack and popped the top mint into my mouth, despite my wife's admonition, "Are you insane?" It was impressively intact, befitting our industrial candy age.

It was everything I'd remembered—deliciously peppery and cocoa-flavored, authentically Choc-O-Mint. Even without the full back story, I knew its true provenance was my mom's purse. If no one's looking, I'll grab another.

Mr. Ripp runs a press relations firm in New York.

OPINION

REVIEW & OUTLOOK

The John Bolton Plea Deal

President Trump may hate being the target of lawfare, but he sure knows how to wield it against anyone who crosses him. That's the story of John Bolton, his former national security adviser, who is agreeing to a plea deal essentially for the sin of writing a critical book about his time advising Mr. Trump.

The Justice Department wants prison time for the former Trump adviser.

The President has been determined to seek revenge against Mr. Bolton, who wrote his well-regarded memoir, "The Room Where It Happened," based on his 17 months running the National Security Council in Mr. Trump's first term. Mr. Trump first tried and failed to block publication, then went to court to confiscate the royalties. He lost that fight too. But on Mr. Trump's return to office, his Justice Department charged Mr. Bolton with a coercive 18-count indictment for keeping diary notes on a home computer that included "national defense information."

Mr. Bolton has now decided to plead guilty to a single felony count for retaining classified information. He will pay a \$2.5 million fine, which is best understood as an attempt to deny Mr. Bolton the earnings from the book.

Like most similar defendants, Mr. Bolton had little choice other than to negotiate a plea. A trial could cost as much as \$3 million in legal fees and run the risk of greater punishment. He is 77 years old, and a guilty verdict could have meant a de facto life sentence. Mr. Trump's prosecutors threatened more charges if Mr. Bolton didn't submit to a plea. After a life devoted to public service or writing for think tanks, he isn't a wealthy man.

Especially troubling and truly vindictive, therefore, is that Justice is still insisting that Mr. Bolton go to prison. The concession prosecutors have made is that they won't ask for a sentence longer than five years. Mr. Bolton will instead ask the court for probation, which is far more suitable for the single offense, but a judge will decide.

Mr. Bolton isn't pleading to transmitting classified information, and he didn't bring documents home. He wrote diary notes based on his memory that informed his book. He submitted the book draft to the White House for vetting for

classified material, and it was cleared for publication by Ellen Knight, the senior director at the time for pre-publication review.

Many officials have kept diaries or journals that they later used to inform their books, including Carter-era NSC adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski. The law expressly anticipates that pre-publication review could discover classified information. But under this Bolton standard, anyone who submits a book or article draft that contains classified material could potentially be charged with a crime.

Prison time would be especially unjust given the punishments for others who admitted to offenses dealing with classified information. Sandy Berger, Bill Clinton's NSC adviser, hid documents from the National Archives in his socks but paid only a \$50,000 fine and received two years of probation.

CIA director John Deutch had classified documents on his home computer. Mr. Clinton pardoned him before Justice could finalize an agreement in which he would plead guilty to a misdemeanor and pay a \$5,000 fine. CIA director David Petraeus, who shared defense information with his biographer, received two years probation and a \$100,000 fine. He pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor under the same provision, Section 793, that Mr. Bolton is pleading under as a felony.

Mr. Bolton continues to be under a death threat from Iran, and he must pay for his own security after Mr. Trump removed his government protection at the start of his second term. Iran hacked his AOL account in 2021, after he had left government, and Mr. Bolton voluntarily reported that to the FBI. Iran could have him killed by criminal mercenaries in prison for as little as a pack of cigarettes.

These pages have gladly published Mr. Bolton's writing over the years, and we will again. As we said at the time of its publication, it was bad political form to publish his book while Mr. Trump was still in office.

But no one outside the Trump acclamation chorus believes that John Bolton would have been prosecuted had he written a book that was favorable to Donald Trump.

The 2028 Redistricting Wars Begin

This year's House redistricting wars haven't ended, and the GOP spoils can't be tallied until November, but the Democratic counterattack for 2028 has already begun. New York's Legislature gave preliminary approval Wednesday to a state constitutional amendment intended to bless gerrymandering and let Democrats conquer perhaps four seats.

New York's current map is split 19-7 in favor of Democrats. Two years from now it might be 23-3, leaving less than 12% of the seats for Republicans, in a state where President Trump recently carried 43% of the vote. To come into effect, the New York Legislature still needs to approve the amendment a second time next year, and then voters have to bless the constitutional rewrite in a referendum.

Yet how big a political hurdle is that in New York? A similar gerrymandering referendum in California last year passed 64% to 36%. The sad result for democracy is a 48-4 map, despite Mr. Trump winning 38% of the vote. Virginia is a purple state, but the electorate there endorsed a map, 52% to 48%, that tilted 10-1 for Democrats. The state judiciary halted it only on procedural grounds.

Republican states have enacted similar gerrymandering coups, but the losers are voters who get less political competition. The tragedy

in New York is that voters already did something about it, which succeeded. Specifically, in 2014 they amended the constitution to set up a new bipartisan redistricting commission and prohibit maps drawn for "the purpose of favoring or disfavoring incumbents or other particular candidates or political parties."

After the 2020 census, the bipartisan commission deadlocked, as such bodies often do. Democrats in the Legislature passed an ugly 22-4 map. But the state's highest court said no, calling that plan "substantively unconstitutional." The final result was today's map, and at least some political competition in New York was saved.

Albany's new proposal would make myriad changes to the 2014 amendment, permitting mid-decade redistricting and deleting the passage that bars intentionally partisan maps. Also gone is a line that says districts "shall be as compact in form as practicable," so get ready to see more avant-garde shapes that belong in the Museum of Modern Art.

President Trump might cheer the GOP's gerrymandering in November, as the House says sayonara to Tennessee's Rep. Steve Cohen and other Democrats whose districts disappeared. Staten Island's GOP Rep. Nicole Malliotakis will probably have a harder time celebrating.

The Supreme Court Refutes Its Critics

Progressives have tried to delegitimize the Supreme Court by accusing conservative Justices of currying favor with "moneyed interests." A trio of rulings on Thursday refute this smear.

In an important patent-infringement case (*Hikma v. Amarin*), the Justices unanimously ruled for generics manufacturer Hikma. The decision will prevent branded drug makers from using dubious patent infringement lawsuits to squash low-cost competition.

The Hatch-Waxman Act lets generic manufacturers seek Food and Drug Administration approval to market copycats with so-called skinny labels. These labels specify indications for which the patents on a branded drug have lapsed, but exclude indications for which patents are still in effect. Branded drugs often have many approved indications.

The FDA approved Amarin's Vascepa in 2012 for severe hypertriglyceridemia and seven years later for reducing cardiovascular risk in patients on statins. After Amarin lost patent protection on the first indication, Hikma received FDA approval to make the drug with a skinny label to treat severe hypertriglyceridemia.

Amarin then sued Hikma, claiming it had induced doctors to infringe on its patent for the second indication. How so? Allegedly by issuing press releases describing its drug as "generic Vascepa." Hikma's patient leaflet also warned against possible side effects for "people who have heart (cardiovascular) disease"—the target population for Vascepa's patented second indication.

As Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson explains in the majority opinion, liability for patent infringement "cannot be based only on 'vague'

language 'combined with speculation about how [others] may act.'" The ruling overturns a lower-court decision that would have made it easier for branded manufacturers to sue generic competitors and block access to lower-cost drugs.

So much for the claim that conservative Justices are in the pocket of corporate interests. Justice Jackson amplified such attacks in a dissent last year, writing there is an "unfortunate perception that moneyed interests enjoy an easier road to relief in this court than ordinary citizens."

The Justices also ruled unanimously Thursday that the Securities and Exchange Commission need not prove a pecuniary loss to investors for courts to order that defendants disgorge ill-gotten profits (*Sripetch v. SEC*). Traditional equitable principles don't require such a showing, Justice Neil Gorsuch wrote for the Court.

And the Court ruled 8-1 for the Federal Communications Commission in a challenge (*FCC v. AT&T*) to the agency's procedures for enforcing violations of the 1934 Communications Act. The law lets defendants pay a penalty and then contest the FCC's findings in federal appellate court or, alternatively, wait for the Justice Department to enforce the penalty and challenge it in federal court. Wireless carriers said this enforcement system violated their right to a trial by jury. The Court disagreed, holding that defendants could still get their day in federal court. Justice Clarence Thomas dissented.

These decisions contradict the left's canard that conservative Justices are on a mission to "gut" the administrative state. No, the Justices are applying the law and precedents as they read them.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

What Does It Really Mean to Be Conservative?

Former Vice President Mike Pence's op-ed "A Republican Time for Choosing" (June 1) confuses timeless principles with the policy solutions suited to 21st century America. Mr. Pence, in his desire to castigate the so-called populists of the new Republican Party, accidentally reminds readers why the policy solutions espoused by his wing of the GOP have lost traction. It isn't that the newer generation of conservatives like Vice President JD Vance and Sen. Josh Hawley (R., Mo.) reject the principles lauded by Mr. Pence, from protecting individual liberty to upholding the rule of law to projecting American strength overseas. Rather, it is that Mr. Pence's paean to globalization, unfettered free trade, and diplomatic and military alliances that don't truly advance core U.S. interests have been deeply damaging to U.S. workers and taxpayers since the end of the Cold War. The policies advanced by a new generation of conservatives seek to conserve American economic and military resources, strengthen social cohesion and empower communities to adhere to their constitutionally protected beliefs. The libertarian economics and military interventionist policy mix espoused by Mr. Pence doesn't strengthen conservative principles. It speeds the march of progressivism and Democratic socialism through our institutions by undermining confidence that conservative policies can improve Americans' lives and safeguard U.S. interests abroad.

ALEXANDER B. GRAY
McLean, Va.

Mr. Gray served as deputy assistant

to the president and chief of staff to the White House National Security Council, 2019-21.

Tunku Varadarajan's review of Mr. Pence's recent book ("A Look at Mike Pence's Way," Bookshelf, June 2) quotes Mr. Pence: "Conservatives believe that our rights come from God." This, Mr. Varadarajan writes, "sets him apart—at least in this respect—from the nontheological Goldwater."

This sent me scrambling for Barry Goldwater's "Conscience of a Conservative." The Arizona senator wrote about how conservative principles are derived "from the truths that God has revealed about His creation." Goldwater wrote that "to suggest that the Conservative philosophy is out of date is akin to saying that the Golden Rule, or the Ten Commandments or Aristotle's *Politics* are out of date." Goldwater states that "Man's most sacred possession is his individual soul."

In his 1964 presidential nomination acceptance speech, Goldwater said that "those who elevate the state and downgrade the citizen must see ultimately a world in which earthly power can be substituted for divine will. And this Nation . . . was founded upon the rejection of that notion and upon the acceptance of God as the author of freedom."

Whether he was "theological" may be debatable, but Goldwater unmistakably backed the Declaration of Independence's core American idea that all men "are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights."

IRA STOLL
Boston

Values and Interests Aren't Mutually Exclusive

As Walter Russell Mead highlights in "Pete Hegseth Goes to Asia" (Global View, June 2), this year's Shangri-La Dialogue was the scene for the latest round in the perennial foreign policy debate over "interests" versus "values." Defense Secretary Hegseth stated that "the bedrock of a durable partnership is not based on idealistic values, but on the concrete alignment of national interests," a sharp departure from the moralizing rhetoric of the Biden years. The Trump administration has consistently—and correctly—criticized President Biden's limp "values-based foreign policy" and worked to reprioritize concrete national interests and the power needed to secure them.

Interests and values, however, are not mutually exclusive. The problem is that the term "values" in foreign policy has become synonymous with specific ideological interests like democracy promotion or human rights. But "values" really should refer to our founding principles, articulated in

America's founding documents, which necessarily shape how we define and pursue all our national interests—security related, economic and ideological. Policymakers cannot decide what to do without also deciding what they "should" do, and that invariably is a values consideration.

Mr. Biden's problem was that his progressive values were completely inconsistent with America's founding principles and based on faulty views of human nature, leading to a distorted, disastrous foreign policy. Correcting this doesn't mean writing values off entirely, but instead ensuring the right values are once again informing how we define and pursue our national interests. This task is made even more urgent given that our adversaries—communist China, Islamists, leftist radicals—want to undermine both our national interests and founding principles.

CORBAN TEAGUE
The Vandenberg Coalition
Washington

AI Is a Bit More Complex Than a Lightbulb

"The 1920s Playbook for Surviving a Tech Revolution" (Journal Report, May 26) recounts some of the lessons learned in the 1920s that we might apply to today's "jarring new technology." Sure, it can be useful to see how we handled the impact of new tech in the past. But with all due respect, we actually haven't been here before.

Comparing artificial intelligence to older inventions isn't helpful because AI is unlike anything else we've ever created. The only thing cars and air-

planes do is take people places. Radio provides human music and commentary. Full-length movies? Amazing, but they don't write papers for us. And electricity? It powers our appliances and gives us light on demand, but we can't start a romance with it or ask it to summarize a book.

AI is the first invention humans have made that can simulate the process of thinking and conversing. In a few short years it has changed society in ways no previous technology could. And this is only the beginning. AI is a unique and formidable challenge to our humanity that we must take seriously, as if our livelihoods and lives depend on it.

ANDREW MCDIARMID
Discovery Institute
Seattle

The American Way on Trains

Nicholas Epley's op-ed "The Science of Talking to Strangers" (May 30) reminded me of a train ride years ago back to London from a business meeting in the Midlands. I happened to board with the executive assistant of the man I'd met with and we sat together on the train. I started a friendly conversation with her as I would normally think to do, which a few nearby passengers joined. The trip passed pleasantly and as we entered the London station, all preparing to head off, she leaned over and quietly said, "That's what I love about you Americans. You talk on trains."

JEFF STOECKLEIN
Chicago

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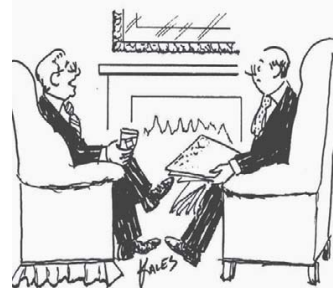


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Pepper ... And Salt

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL



"Fortunately for me,
money still sparks joy in my life."

OPINION

The U.S. Needs Its Mideast Bases

By Reuel Marc Gerecht
And Ray Takeyh

It's called the Persian Gulf for a reason. Iran has dominated this crucial waterway except when in internal disarray or checked by an outside power, namely Portugal, the Ottoman Empire, Great Britain and, after 1971, the U.S.

Oman, which has tried to improve relations with the Islamic Republic for years, has always stood apart from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. So it wouldn't be surprising to see Oman agree to establish a tolling regimen with Tehran for ships passing through the Strait of Hormuz, the choke point to the Persian Gulf.

Iran's limited attacks on Omani territory in March and May signaled to Muscat that Washington can no longer protect the country. Unless the Trump administration soon realizes how precarious the American and Gulf Arab positions are, the Islamic Republic may do what Saddam Hussein only dreamed of.

If America won't finish the job in Iran, leaving the Gulf Arab states would turn a failure into a rout.

The U.S. was always a reluctant hegemon in the Gulf. After the departure of the British in 1971, a Vietnam-weary America enlisted its local allies to protect the waterway. The policy was called "twin pillars," meaning Saudi Arabia and Iran would do the heavy lifting. In reality, there was only one proxy: Iran. The Islamic Revolution in 1979 ended the experiment.

America was obliged to take charge. In 1980 Jimmy Carter announced a new doctrine: "Let our position be absolutely clear: An attempt



Firefighters from the Kentucky Air National Guard.

by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force." The Gulf was now menaced by the Soviet Union and revisionist regional actors. During the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88), the U.S. Navy kept both parties at bay and the waterway open. The cost: two frigates badly damaged, 37 sailors killed and 31 wounded.

Saddam tested Washington again when he attempted to extinguish Kuwait in 1990. If the Iraqi dictator had been allowed to digest that city-state, he probably would have invaded other neighbors or reorganized the region as a cash machine for his aggression.

The Islamic Republic doesn't yet have a military that would allow it to invade its neighbors; it does, however, have the armed forces and the ideology to extort them if no Western power is there to prevent it. Washington may be tempted to move its bases from the Persian Gulf region since many of them sustained substantial

damage, and our Arab allies can be fair-weather friends. Militarily and morally, it makes some sense; strategically, it would be a disaster.

Amid President Trump's hesitancy to thwart Tehran's bid for supremacy over Hormuz, Iran's rulers sense the end of American hegemony. The Israeli-American wars against the clerical regime have ironically shown it a way to shatter the anti-Iran regional order. Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E. may hope they can circumnavigate the Islamic Republic by moving oil through new pipelines, but those pipelines will remain vulnerable to missiles and drones. Tehran's offensive capacity has proved more effective than the combined aerial defense of the Gulf kingdoms and the U.S. And if Washington's ability to produce interceptors swiftly and in sufficient quantity is in question, what remains of Arab fortitude will likely collapse.

The clerical regime is willing to absorb severe punishment—far more than the militaries of Saudi Arabia and the Emirates could ever dole out by themselves. Even if Mr. Trump doesn't understand that the region's

development—what he called its "gleaming marvels"—has depended on the U.S., on the unchallengeable awe that has sailed with American warships, the Islamic Republic and the Gulf Arabs do.

Mr. Trump has repeatedly shown since 2019, when Iran attacked Persian Gulf shipping and the Saudi oil facilities at Khurais and Abqaiq, that he doesn't see attacks on the Arabs as a casus belli for Washington. His 2026 National Defense Strategy sought "to empower regional allies and partners to take primary responsibility for deterring and defending against Iran and its proxies," signaling America's unreliability as a strategic partner. The current war has, so far, confirmed that.

Whatever credibility Washington still has in the Middle East depends on its willingness to maintain bases in the Gulf and in Iraq—and that places U.S. forces in harm's way. Given our failure so far to fight the Battle of Hormuz and our inability to defend our allies adequately, this lever has lost some of the deterrence that once scared the Islamic Republic's rulers. But it's all we have now in an otherwise deteriorating situation.

If the Trump administration is unwilling to try to win this war militarily—which could entail losing destroyers, placing ground troops on Iranian islands in the Persian Gulf, and running convoys under fire for an indefinite period—then it needs to think about how to minimize America's losses, to keep the failure at Hormuz from turning into a regional, if not global, rout.

The first step is to make clear that American bases in the most dangerous parts of the Middle East aren't going anywhere. The Islamic Republic has profound internal problems. We should commit to waiting them out.

Mr. Gerecht is a resident scholar at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies. Mr. Takeyh is a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations.

CEOs, Get Ready to Be Subpoenaed

By Michael Zona

American corporations have spent the past two years cultivating relationships with the Trump administration. If Democrats reclaim the House or Senate next year, those relationships could come under congressional scrutiny.

Axios recently reported that House and Senate Democrats are discussing coordinated investigations—including subpoenas—into companies, colleges and law firms that cooperated with the administration. Politico reported that firms seen as close to the administration are hiring Democratic lobbyists and preparing for scrutiny. The message from Democrats isn't subtle: Cooperation with the administration may be grounds for inquiry.

Congressional investigations always intensify after power shifts. Between 2019 and 2021, after Democrats took the House, it held more than 405 oversight hearings and submitted more than 1,318 requests for information. Democrats dropped

If Democrats win, expect them to scrutinize your company's dealings with the Trump administration.

the word "government" from the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform. Then-Chairman Elijah Cummings said that reflected "our true jurisdiction, which covers both government and the private sector."

The White House can resist subpoenas through executive privilege and prolonged litigation. Private institutions have fewer defenses; companies, universities, nonprofits and individuals can't simply refuse to comply. They maintain records, employ boards and answer to shareholders, donors and customers. Democrats' purpose won't merely be oversight, but political deterrence—making cooperation with the administration reputationally, legally and commercially painful.

Democratic committee staff are likely drafting investigative road maps—identifying pressure points, collecting public statements and news clips, mapping corporate relationships. Some entities already have received informal warnings or requests to maintain records. Smart institutions are adjusting internal communications, legal review processes and response plans.

Panicking or publicly distancing themselves from the administration would create another problem. Most large institutions need productive relationships with the White House, federal agencies and Republican lawmakers. The challenge is navigating a divided government without becoming politically captive to either side.

Every internal email, text message or Slack exchange discussing political strategy, government contracts, DEI policies, tariffs, antitrust, AI moderation, donor relationships or regulatory negotiations could someday appear on a hearing-room screen. Congressional investigations aren't criminal proceedings, and normal litigation instincts don't apply. As committees selectively release documents, context and nuance evaporate. That's why businesses need a strategy before a subpoena even arrives.

Witness preparation also matters. Congressional testimony is a specialized skill distinct from earnings calls, courtroom depositions or television interviews. Executives who succeed on Capitol Hill understand that lawmakers often pursue political narratives, not information. Institutions that engage early, prepare their executives and anticipate reputational exposure usually survive. Those that stonewall or improvise under pressure prolong the damage. Ask former Harvard President Claudine Gay.

In our era of polarization, when control of Congress changes hands, investigations reverse direction. The subpoena has become a recurring instrument of political warfare. Companies and nonprofits should deepen relationships with Capitol Hill now, not after elections. Boards should ask management if they have congressional-response protocols. Universities should review governance controversies and donor communications.

By the time subpoenas are issued, investigators usually already know the story they want to tell. The organizations that fare best are those that prepare before they become the story.

Mr. Zona is a former communications director for Sen. Chuck Grassley (R., Iowa) and a partner at Bullpen Strategy Group, which advises companies on how to prepare for political investigations.

China Gets Anxious Enough to Choose Worker Freedom

POLITICAL ECONOMICS
By Joseph C. Sternberg

An aggravating factor in China's economic slowdown has been Beijing's resistance to meaningful reform. Take note, then, when officials try to do the right thing—as they did recently regarding a serious but

underdiscussed problem. Beijing last month announced a new relaxation of the hukou system of residence registration. Workers who have moved to urban areas from the countryside will be able to enroll their children in schools near their new homes and gain access to government-funded healthcare. It's one of the bigger steps Beijing has taken to liberalize this system.

Readers may be surprised these things weren't already allowed. For decades, Beijing has attempted to thwart the development of a single national labor market. The hukou system emerged in the late 1950s to keep rural workers in place, in an attempt to stop cities from being flooded by poor rural migrants.

It hasn't worked. Urbanization, as both a cause and consequence of economic development, is as insistent a natural force as flowing water. The proportion of the Chinese population living in urban areas swelled to around 66% as of 2024, up from 19% in 1980, at the start of China's reform-and-opening-up era. The trend has further to run, given that urbanization rates in fully developed economies hover around 80% or above.

The main effect of hukou registration requirements has been to make it harder for the urban poor to reap the rewards of economic growth. The system creates an underclass estimated at between 200 million and 357 million workers who face obstacles putting down official roots in the cities where they live.

The economic effects of this are difficult to parse. Many Western economists assume that reforming the hukou system is necessary to unlock more domestic consumption, it-

self a requirement for China's transition from a failing export-dependent growth model. This argument runs that because quasilegal internal migrants lack access to the social safety net, they save too much for a rainy day. By reducing the need for excessive household saving, hukou reform would increase consumption as a percentage of gross domestic product by 0.6 percentage point over five years, recent research from the International Monetary Fund argued. That sounds modest but isn't, as these things go.

Overall, this line of thinking seems not quite right. One oddity of any discussion of China's economy is the persistent presumption that saving is a bad thing in a still-developing economy with enormous scope for productive investment. Really, the constraint on Chinese growth is chronic malinvestment of the country's savings, which are diverted toward export-manufacturing industries and low-productivity state-owned enterprises rather than toward investment in domestic services and the like.

Hukou reform, then, may well be good for Chinese workers, but it isn't going to fix the real savings problem. It may not even slow rates of saving at all, since amid slowing economic growth and mounting pessimism,

households have plenty of other reasons to batten down their financial hatches.

It's better to think of the latest hukou measures as a social or political reform rather than an economic measure. The prospect of annual growth below 5% for an extended period is ratcheting up Beijing's anxiety

Beijing reforms its system of resident registration, which creates a domestic migrant underclass.

about a slow-growth economy's political consequences. The hukou reform is of a piece with Beijing's decision in 2023 to stop publishing data on youth unemployment because the numbers had become so embarrassing. Absent a way to boost growth to lift young Chinese's fortunes, the government tried to paper over the problem.

So it is with China's belated attempt to bolster the financial security of, and basic social fairness toward, poorer households. No two things are as dangerous to an authoritarian regime as a large cohort of educated but underemployed young

Will New York Tax My Upstate House?

By Mitch Zimmer

So the New York Legislature has allowed New York City to tax people with a second home in the city. The so-called pied-à-terre tax hits co-op and condo owners with properties assessed at \$1 million or more and owners of houses assessed at \$5 million or more.

Disappointment is almost certain. Some owners will sell, businesses will reduce their presence, and fewer tax dollars than expected will roll in. Pundits will extol the benefits, especially of getting rich people to pay their "fair share," as money disap-

pears down that hole of no return: blue-city government.

As an out-of-stater with a summer home in upstate New York, I have a different perspective: What's next? New York is one of the top states for family cottages, called camps in the Adirondacks. Quite a few have been in families for generations. Location and improvements have raised many of their values close to the \$5 million mark. Not mine, but values can go up and tax thresholds can come down. In my circle of friends, about half of camp owners are from elsewhere. Is New York's next step to tax these out-of-staters?

Here is a general description of my share for the privilege of owning a summer home in the Adirondacks. True, I pay no income tax to New York. I do, however, pay property and school taxes—almost as much for my 1,000-square-foot camp as for my four-bedroom house in Pennsylvania. For that, my family receives few benefits.

We have owned the house for more than 50 years without sending a child to the well-funded school system. Our house sits with five others on a private road. We pay to have it plowed and recently paid \$18,000 to repave it. Our water is municipal, but we must maintain the line to the highway. The last time it needed repair, the bill was \$25,000. We bring our garbage to the dump

and pay a small per-bag fee. Leaves are accepted free, but we have to drive the half-hour to get there.

We use the services of local contractors, hope they show up, and fix things ourselves when they don't. We eat at local restaurants, shop at stores, buy gasoline and know all the hardware stores in the area. We contribute with sales taxes. We are small fry by most standards, but I can imagine state lawmakers looking at us as easy pickings.

It isn't worth \$5 million, but property values often rise and tax thresholds fall.

My father began his retirement in our house. Friends and family assumed I would also retire to New York, but current tax rates nixed those plans. The New York rate is more than three times the Pennsylvania rate. I have told the family to be ready to sell our property if such a law is passed affecting us.

Then we would have additional taxes to pay for the sale. We would still visit New York, but for one to two weeks instead of 10 to 15. There are 49 other states that would like our travel dollars.

Mr. Zimmer is a former engineer, consultant and professor.

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EDITORIALS

Johnson administration floats an unfair and ill-conceived crackdown on Chicago landlords

Mayor Brandon Johnson and his allies on the City Council are preparing later this month to introduce an expansive ordinance that they believe will help those who rent homes in Chicago, a challenging proposition these days. The proposal isn't final yet, but the disturbing preliminary summary we've seen would exacerbate the very dynamics (notably, a housing shortage) that are putting upward pressure on rents.

The worst of the Johnson administration's ideas therein is to compel landlords to pay thousands to tenants when their leases aren't renewed or are forced to move due to an "unconscionable" rent increase.

"Unconscionable," as far as we know, isn't a legal term. A draft version of the ordinance that we saw described the amount as what "a reasonable person would find to be unconscionable."

Needless to say, there are plenty of reasonable people who would differ quite a bit on how much of a rent hike would fall into that category. Some would define any increase at all as "unconscionable."

The vagueness, though, is the point. The obvious intent is to make landlords fearful enough of being taken to court that they keep their rent increases lower than they might otherwise — back-door rent control in a city in which explicit rent control isn't allowed.

Other provisions would force landlords to pay tenants whose leases aren't renewed, even for good cause, making it far harder for property owners to be rid of problem tenants. And, yes, for all the complaints about landlords that everyone hears, we can testify personally that problem tenants aren't uncommon in Chicago.

Want to be trapped in a building with a neighbor who plays loud music at ungodly hours or otherwise creates a consistent nuisance? Johnson and his alder-



Mayor Brandon Johnson answers questions outside his City Hall office on Monday.

TERRENCE ANTONIO JAMES/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

manic allies would make that prospect far more likely.

The numerous other problematic provisions include a ban on move-in fees, which have supplanted the security deposits landlords used to demand from new tenants. Tenants don't like move-in fees because they're non-refundable, but they cover landlords' costs of repairing and cleaning units between tenants. Without them, rents likely would rise further to cover those costs.

Speaking of costs, the city would charge multi-unit property owners new annual fees — as high as \$20 per unit for smaller buildings — to raise an estimated \$20 million to hire lawyers and inspectors to enforce the new restrictions in the ordinance.

Here's the thing about higher costs. Landlords understandably seek to pass as much of those expenditures as possible to tenants. And in a supply-constrained market, making those rent hikes stick isn't usually a problem. The more costs the city imposes on landlords, the more pressure the city puts on rents.

So is it "unconscionable" for a building owner to seek to recover their costs? The mayor's proposal begs that question.

We met with leaders of the Neighborhood Building Owners Association, which represents owners of small- and mid-sized apartment buildings. Naturally, they oppose these measures, but their broader point resonated with us.

The mayor is treating them as an adversary. Most local building owners — and obviously, as in any walk of life, there are bad apples — care about and value their long-term tenants. They play an indispensable role in making Chicago work.

"We're not here to be an enemy," South Side landlord and NBOA board member Stephen Rich Jr. told us. "We're here to provide housing."

"A lot of our housing providers are not big corporate landlords," he added. "These are people who have day jobs and they're looking to build some generational wealth. They have a few units or 10 units or something like that, so to make it harder for a housing provider to operate, that's going to trickle

through the ecosystem. It's just going to make it tougher for the residents you're trying to help and in essence for the city."

Rich and NBOA President Michael Glasser emphasized that the city hasn't consulted them at all about this initiative, which is a fundamental mistake the Johnson administration makes time and again. It relies almost exclusively on progressive advocates to tailor its proposals. Profit-making enterprises are viewed with suspicion.

So those who manage the everyday headaches of operating apartment buildings in Chicago, those who can provide a real-world perspective, are left out of the mix. That's a recipe for bad, self-defeating policy.

We haven't even addressed the city's proposal for a registry requiring the disclosure of the identities of all investors in apartment buildings. Supporters say that will stop investors from hiding from public view. But it also surely will be a disincentive for more badly needed investment in new rental housing. How would you like all of your investments to be subject to a city registry listing your name and address?

There may well be reasonable steps the city can take to help tenants push back against bad landlords, such as helping with legal representation or further making sure that those landlords fulfill all their obligations. But only a fool would make it impossible for landlords to make ends meet at a time of housing scarcity. Talk about counterproductive.

Instead of this punitive plan, Chicago should focus on the urgent need for more residential construction in order to alleviate the supply-and-demand imbalance that is helping to raise rents for the roughly 54% of city households that don't own the roof over their heads.

The Iranian team earned its place. Let it compete in the World Cup

The Iranian men's soccer team has qualified for the World Cup. Their first match is against New Zealand, scheduled for June 15 in Inglewood, California.

If they can get there. The Iranian men's team has not yet been issued visas to enter the United States.

"We have no problem with the athletes or their support staff, but what we're not going to allow is for them to embed in their delegation a bunch of people that we know have nothing to do with athletics and have ties to the IRGC or things of that nature," Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Monday.

This is an unprecedented situation, as a host nation has never been at war with another World Cup participant.

By all means, vet the team and protect the U.S. against risk. Prevent, as Rubio describes, those

unaffiliated with the team from "embedding" with the program. Weed out risk. Toughen up security. The last thing any of us wants is a catastrophic terror event.

Iran, for its part, must cooperate fully with security screening and refrain from using its World Cup delegation as a vehicle for officials or operatives who have no legitimate role in the tournament.

Still, the Iranian men's team is not here, even as other teams have arrived in the U.S. to prepare to compete. It would be a terrible shame if Iran's elite athletes are prevented from participating in the World Cup for which they qualified.

Military service is mandatory for almost all young men in Iran upon turning 18, and that affects the national team. For example, team captain Mehdi Taremi, a star striker, is among those who

have completed their mandatory service — with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Therein lies the biggest pushback, as the IRGC is classified by the U.S. government as a terrorist organization.

It doesn't help that Mehdi Taj, who has long served as president of Iran's soccer federation, is a former IRGC commander. Canada in April denied entry to Taj ahead of the FIFA Congress in Vancouver.

Nobody denies the IRGC is linked to a long list of vile actions the world over. But a young man who completed mandatory military service years ago is not the same thing as an active IRGC commander, intelligence operative or terrorist.

These are difficult times, and while Americans largely feel insulated from the horrors of war playing out abroad, peace in the homeland should not be taken for

granted.

And yet nothing publicly reported suggests the Iranian men's soccer roster itself poses a threat.

Our hope is that these young men, who have worked for so long to achieve this dream, don't have to watch it evaporate. They need to arrive here by June 14 if they hope to compete.

We watched in admiration as the Iranian women's soccer team stood in subtle defiance of their country's authoritarian government during the women's Asian Cup in Australia in March, witnessing the incredible bravery it took to stand up to a regime that tends to address acts of protest with violence. Many observers interpreted the team's decision not to sing the national anthem before its opening match as an act of quiet dissent, and advocates warned that some players could

face repercussions upon returning home.

We stood with the Iranian footballers then, and we now support the men's right to play in a tournament for which they qualified.

"All of us, we're always wishing peace for all of the people all around the world," player Saeid Ezatollahi told the Associated Press. "I hope that these things will end soon and all of the people around the world can be in peace and live together."

Don't we all. The United States can protect its security without abandoning the spirit of international competition. Vet every visa application. Exclude anyone who presents a genuine threat. But if these players qualify, clear the security checks and meet the requirements, they should be allowed to take the field.

Leaders wage war, not athletes.

ON THIS DAY 101 YEARS AGO THE MOTOR TRUCK AND THE ROADS

The Mid-West Motor Transport conference heard Secretary of Agriculture Jardine announce that his department had come to the conclusion that the motor truck cannot replace the railroad for the long hauls, but that in short hauls the truck is supreme.

The same conference heard George Quinlan, superintendent of Cook county highways, refer to Chicago as a walled city because of its lack of adequate gateway roads into the surrounding territory. Mr. Quinlan said 110,000 vehicles leave and enter the city daily, but there are only five principal highways to handle the bulk of this traffic.

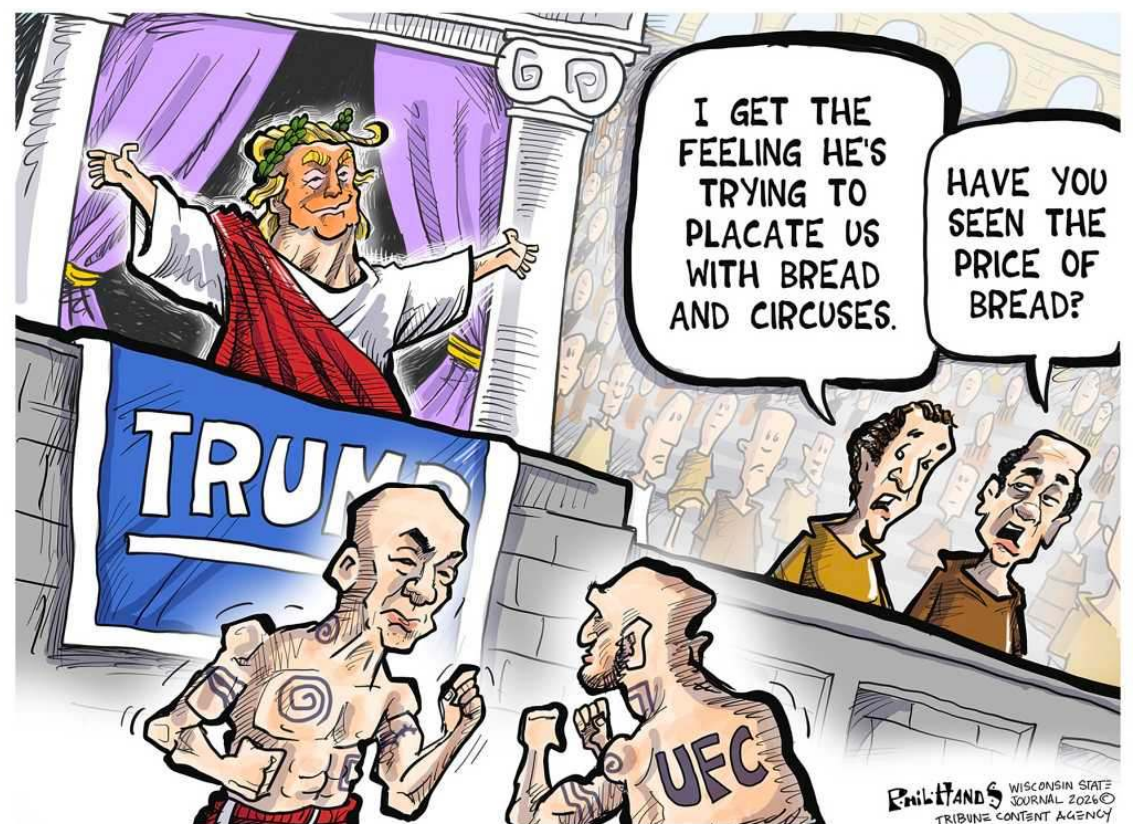
More gateways are needed to handle the short-haul traffic, for which, as Mr. Jardine showed, the motor truck is daily proving its supremacy. Just where a short haul ends and a long haul begins is a matter of delicate balance, but there can be no questioning the fact that the economic advantages of truck movement do not end at the city limits. The Chicago business man knows that the cost of

hiring a truck may be higher than the railway charge for a shipment to Elgin, for instance, but the difference is more than equalized by reduced handling charges and the saving of a day or more in time of delivery.

The Chicago region is admirably adapted, because of its flatness, to motor transport, yet motor trucks are not being used here as much as they might be because of road congestion. The state has been slow in appropriating for additional gateways and for wider pavements which serve the same end. More and wider roads in this region, as has often been pointed out, will be of service to the tourist who rides into the country for pleasure. They will be of even greater value, as Mr. Quinlan and the secretary of agriculture have shown, to the farmers and business men of northern Illinois in reducing the cost and time required for transporting their products to the consumer.

Tribune editorial board,
June 5, 1925

EDITORIAL CARTOON



PHIL HANDS

OPINION

Chicago must buy back its parking meters

By Joe Holberg
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

Since the “Great Mistake of 2008,” every time a Chicagoan feeds a parking meter or taps the ParkChicago app, they are hit with a reminder of the political class selling out everyday Chicagoans.

It's time to get the meters back, regain control over our city's infrastructure and invest in ourselves.

We are sending money to billionaire investment firms and foreign nations instead of paying for our libraries and parks. Our money flows out of Chicago and into the pockets of Chicago Parking Meters, LLC (CPM), a private consortium that has already stripped Chicago of \$2 billion in just 18 years of a 75-year lease and now wants to sell it to another investor to rake in billions more over the remaining 57 years.

As bad as the money leaving our city is, we are also legally trapped without control to invest in, adapt and meet our changing infrastructure needs. We are hamstrung from making changes and face penalties if we do so: If the city installs a bike lane, expands a sidewalk for outdoor dining, repairs a water main, or hosts a fleeting but glorious summer street festival, we must write a “true-up” check to CPM to compensate for their hypothetical lost revenue. Just last year, the city had to shell out a staggering \$25.2 million to settle a dispute stemming from pandemic-era stay-at-home orders.

We need to buy our parking meters back — at a price that makes sense for our fiscal situation — to regain control of a key asset and to ease the cost on everyday, hardworking Chicagoans. Parking rates have made living in Chicago less affordable as investors continue to find more ways to maximize profit on the backs of our people. If instead we own our meters we can control the cost increases and help make life more affordable at a time when the price of healthcare, daycare, housing and groceries are leaving people more cash-strapped than ever.

Conventional wisdom is wrong about the \$3 billion price tag being too high. Fresh, innovative leadership and new ideas are sorely needed. Parking is no longer just a strip of asphalt for storing cars and handing out orange tickets, it has potential massive opportunities that flip the purchase from a debt-ridden cost to an investment that will yield benefits to all Chicagoans for decades to come.

Here are two ideas that turn the meters into a source of revenue and investment instead of costs and liabilities:

First, we upgrade the ParkChicago app to offer optional monthly subscription tiers with a vari-



The Willis Tower is framed by a ParkChicago box on West Randolph Street in the West Loop on May 27. EILEEN T. MESLAR/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

ety of benefits. Drivers could pay \$10/month for perks like waived transaction fees, extra buffer time, and one “get out of jail free” card per year to waive or cancel a ticket. Imagine the parking system making you happy rather than irate if you could get a little perk here or some grace there.

For \$30/month, rideshare and delivery drivers could get an “insurance policy” against tickets: a guaranteed 15-minute grace window to grab food orders or drop off passengers without stressing over a parking ticket. We could even create dedicated pick-up and drop-off zones in key high-density areas like the Loop or more narrow streets to simultaneously ease congestion and clogging of bike and pedestrian lanes. Further, not using dedicated pickup and drop-off zones could result in additional tickets to incentivize compliance.

For high-frequency users with a subscription of \$50 to \$100/month the city could offer access to key locations throughout the city designed to streamline the parking experience. These memberships could unlock high-demand parking spots in key corridors throughout downtown and commercial hubs. We could create partnerships with other parking services like SpotHero (a homegrown company recently acquired by Uber) to show more

affordable parking options throughout the city and revenue-share if someone books on another site.

Instead of circling the block for what feels like hours, subscribers could get access to a real-time digital GPS system built right into the app, showing exactly where open spots are located near them so they never have to waste time circling the block.

By getting just a small fraction of Chicago's 1 million drivers to sign up, innovative software upgrades like these could create \$30 million to \$50 million in brand-new, recurring revenue every year while giving people more choices and a better experience and also allowing us to freeze or lower rates at the meters.

Second, we use our reclaimed streets to solve a problem for electric vehicle owners who don't have access to charging. Thousands of drivers want to drive EVs but can't because they live in apartments and condos without a garage to plug into at night.

The city can start by installing 1,500 curbside EV charging stations at these meters as a pilot program. We can buy electricity at cheap wholesale rates and sell it at standard retail charging rates. Every time a car plugs in, the city wins thrice over: the city generates revenue by providing energy, we collect the standard parking

fee, and we reduce carbon emissions as more people adopt EVs. This green energy network will bring in another \$7.5 million annually and can scale up to generate more revenue and more charging stations as needed going forward. We could even allow people to pay for a dedicated parking spot overnight on a daily or monthly basis so they could predict and plan for charging while allowing the city to create yet another new revenue stream.

These ideas and numbers reveal a new potential path forward to undo the worst deal in Chicago history. To borrow the \$3.2 billion needed for the buyback, the city could use a 40-year bond at a 4.5% interest rate and even sell minority stakes to Chicago-based investors if we can't finance the entire deal as a city due to this administration's poor financial decision-making. Our annual interest-only debt payment would be around \$144 million, or \$174 million if amortized.

With new ideas for revenue, the math starts to work in Chicago's favor:

- Current meter revenue: \$161.0 million
- New app subscriptions: \$33 million to 50 million
- EV charging profits: \$7.5 million to 15 million
- Saved penalty fees: \$15.0 million (The money we stop

wasting on “true-up” checks)

- Total annual income: \$216 million to 241 million

Our new income (\$216 million or more) clears the bond payment and leaves enough room for other expenses associated with operating the system. It doesn't raise property taxes, it doesn't take a dime from our city budget, and it leaves us with a multi-million dollar annual surplus. Just a few new innovative ideas can start to tip the scale in our favor, but only if we act.

We still have time.

City Council can review and reject the deal, and the mayor needs to tap into our immense business and financial expertise to pencil a deal that makes sense. We are a city with world-leading financial experts, innovators, technologists, and a strong business community. We can and we must get our parking meters back. We cannot afford to watch our public wealth get passed around global investment markets for another half-century.

This is why the next mayor needs to be forward-thinking, innovative and financially skilled enough to find ways to alter the abysmal state of Chicago's financial situation. It's time to take control of our parking meters and finally erase the “Great Mistake of 2008.”

Joe Holberg is running for mayor.

The future of Illinois' trails faces headwinds in Washington

By Ryan Chao
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

Over 60 years ago, the Chicago Tribune ran a letter to the editor that would change the shape of America's landscapes.

On Sept. 30, 1963, May Theilgaard Watts, a Chicago resident, naturalist and writer, called for the transformation of a disused Chicago rail line into a multiuse pathway, imploring, “If we have courage and foresight ... we can create from this strip a proud resource.” With those words, she inspired the Illinois Prairie Path on the western outskirts of the city — widely regarded as the country's first successful rail-trail — and gave energy to a movement that was bubbling up across the country.

I expect that Theilgaard Watts would be humbled by the way her call to action has transformed the American experience. Today, there are 42,500 miles of multiuse trails across the country, the majority built from former railroad corridors creating space to walk, run, bike, roller skate, ride horses and more. The country's trails are truly a vital resource, delivering resilience and quality of life in thousands of communities nationwide.

Across party lines, voters consistently support investments in trails, walking and biking. On average, more than 80% of Republican, Democratic and independent voters agree that spending tax dollars to build trails, connect trail networks, and maintain and improve trails is important, according to Rails to Trails Conservancy's national opinion poll conducted in September 2022. At a time when common ground can be hard to find, the power of trails to bring people together proves durable — and fundamental to our well-being.



Emerson Howard and dog Dixie enjoy a walk along with Destiny Porter and her children, 2-year-old Merrick Mercer and 4-year-old Maxton Mercer, at the Kitzelman Bridge connecting the Cardinal and White River Greenway trails in Muncie, Indiana, on March 13, 2024. The Cardinal Greenways pathway, born from eastern Indiana's abandoned railroad tracks, will become a central cog in the Great American Rail Trail — a planned 3,700-mile network of trails spanning from Washington state to Washington, D.C. ISABELLA VOLMERT/AP

Despite the interest so many people have in making it safer and easier to walk and bike, the movement Theilgaard Watts launched faces headwinds.

In May, the U.S. House of Representatives Transportation and Infrastructure Committee passed its version of the country's next surface transportation bill, which provides the lion's share of funding to create, connect and maintain trails across the U.S. and in Illinois. Despite a backdrop of harsh rhetoric that trail and bike projects are “hostile to cars” and that no federal dollars would be invested in trails, walking and biking, the bill didn't represent the draconian funding cuts that were feared — in large part because it, and the very issue of bipartisan trails, is intrinsically bipartisan and widely supported among voters across rural, suburban and urban geographies.

However, the outcome is far from a victory lap, making it harder to build the connected active transportation infrastructure Americans want and need. The House's BUILD America 250 Act removes accountability, striking provisions in key programs that ensure funding is used as intended to support trail, walking and biking projects. It goes even further to repeal programs that provide direct investment in large-scale projects that connect active transportation infrastructure — a requisite for maximizing the benefits of this infrastructure.

This is a big deal because it takes investment, combined with community support and intentional planning, to create, connect and maintain the nation's trails. With the right mix of public and private investment, we can bridge gaps in trails, creating the connections that are indispensable to the

country's well-being.

One example of the immense benefit of connecting America's trails can be seen in the national vision to develop the Great American Rail-Trail between Washington, D.C., and Washington state, across 3,700 miles and 12 states, including Illinois. As this trail is further connected, we have the potential to unlock hundreds of millions of dollars in economic activity each year for the country, including over 2.1 million trips and 200 new jobs in Illinois alone. That translates to tangible revenue for the state, including a contribution of \$15.3 million to Illinois's GDP each year and \$2.3 million in new tax revenue.

In Illinois, a critical 15-mile gap exists between the state's famed Hennepin Canal State Trail and the Illinois & Michigan Canal State Trail — the belt on the buckle of the Great American Rail-Trail across Illinois and a missing link in the Grand Illinois Trail, a 300-mile endeavor that encompasses central and northern Illinois. The communities that the trail serves — local organizers, elected officials and business owners among them — have been pushing for this connection between LaSalle and Bureau Junction for years. Early planning has shown the feasibility of trail connectivity through the gap, and now, dedicated federal funding is among the necessary ingredients to accelerate progress.

The House bill would repeal the Active Transportation Infrastructure Investment Program, the only federal program dedicated to connecting and completing active transportation networks and one that is desperately needed. In the only round of funding ever made available, it was oversubscribed by grant applications at a rate of 40:1. The investment program is important to the nation and

it matters to Illinois — with the potential to close the gap in canal trails and countless other projects across the region like the Madison County Trails system, Trails of the Grand Prairie and the continued expansion of the Lakefront Trail.

There is much work to be done in the process of finalizing the country's next surface transportation law, and Illinois is home to some of the country's most steadfast trail champions in Congress. Representatives Jesús “Chuy” Garcia of the 4th District and Mike Quigley of the 5th District have consistently fought to deliver safe walking and biking infrastructure. Quigley's leadership as a co-sponsor of new legislation to fully fund and strengthen the investment program moving forward is what we need to realize the potential of trails across Illinois and the nation.

As Rails to Trails Conservancy's board gathers in Chicago this week with leaders from across the state, we're focused on what it will take to unlock the federal, state and local resources needed to fulfill a vision that extends far beyond what Theilgaard Watts could have imagined. One where the Grand Illinois Trail connects Lake Michigan to the Mississippi, where Illinois is connected to the country across the Great American Rail-Trail, and where trails are part of everyone's life across Illinois.

Again, like in 1963, Illinois stands at the forefront of what's possible.

Ryan Chao is the president of Rails to Trails Conservancy, the nation's largest trails, walking and biking advocacy organization and the organizers behind the Great American Rail-Trail, which connects through Illinois. The organization celebrates 40 years of impact in 2026.

OPINION

What's wrong with using the old Illinois Sports Facilities Authority to help keep the Bears?



David Greising

As the deadline to end the spring legislative session came and went, the state legislature was ready to consider just about any desperate measure to keep the Chicago Bears in Illinois. Seasoned observers of Springfield's end-of-session theatrics well know that ill-considered, last-minute fixes can lead to long-term headaches.

One big idea that emerged was this: A bill from the Senate called for authority to create new municipal financing agencies — possibly one in Chicago and one in Arlington Heights — to help finance stadium construction. They each likely would have authority to settle questions about ownership and revenue sharing over time.

That's the bill that came too late for serious consideration in the House, and it died — at least for now — as the spring legislative session expired.

But wait: The idea of using a financing authority to help build a Bears stadium somewhere in Illinois has promise. In fact, the state already has a body for just that purpose, the Illinois Sports Facilities Authority (ISFA), which can fund stadium construction, but only in Chicago.

If new and improved financing authority is the answer to the Bears stadium search, perhaps it would be best to start with the ISFA, rather than creating two entirely new agencies.

Wouldn't it be simplest just to expand the borrowing power of ISFA — which currently is operating near its legally mandated borrowing cap — and expand its reach to include Arlington Heights?

With a minimum of upfront work, the legislature could expand ISFA's borrowing power so it could afford to help fund a new stadium, leverage its existing staff, expertise and its proven credit rating and take advantage of access to markets to seamlessly make capital available for a new stadium project.

The idea of creating separate municipal agencies has flaws. For starters, the approach would implicitly favor Arlington Heights over Chicago. The reason: Bonds issued by financing authorities typically reflect the creditworthiness of the government entity that sponsors that agency.



Leslie Darling, center, chair of the Illinois Sports Facilities Authority, meets with ISFA board members and staff at Guaranteed Rate Field in Chicago on Feb. 21, 2024. ANTONIO PEREZ/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

If new and improved financing authority is the answer to the Bears stadium search, perhaps it would be best to start with the ISFA, rather than creating two entirely new agencies. Wouldn't it be simplest just to expand the borrowing power of ISFA — which currently is operating near its legally mandated borrowing cap — and expand its reach to include Arlington Heights?

An Arlington Heights authority would have a credit rating linked to the village, with its high investment-grade credit rating. For Chicago, that would mean the city of Chicago, where the credit rating hovers just a few notches above “junk” status, and is at risk of going lower.

In Arlington Heights, borrowing would cost less. A strong village balance sheet might mean that other financing or revenue sharing options are available to the village that Chicago might not be able to offer. Disadvantage, Chicago.

A reliance on separate municipal financing agencies also would create the potential for perverse

financing incentives, from either Chicago or Arlington Heights or both, as the city and village compete to land the Bears. The competing municipalities might offer the Bears stadium-ownership rights that may not be prudent, or grant the team revenue streams, such as parking, that might better be retained by the municipalities.

In total, the creation of a new financing piggy bank, under the control of mayors, could wind up with local taxpayers paying too much of the cost and giving up too much of the revenue.

On the other hand, the mayors of Chicago and Arlington Heights might also want to broaden the

lending authority of each agency beyond just sports arenas. This idea has potential, and merits further study, and could be considered for ISFA as well as any potential municipal agencies.

No wonder Mayor Brandon Johnson began floating the idea of Chicago control of ISFA some weeks ago. There's huge potential upside if a city gets its hands on one of these things.

The Illinois Sports Facilities Authority is not set up perfectly by any means, and there is plenty of room for improvement once the General Assembly gets back to work.

For example, the \$5 million that ISFA receives from the state and city each year and the 2% tax on Chicago hotel stays doesn't cover all of ISFA's costs. According to ISFA's data reported by Crain's Chicago Business, the city of Chicago could end up covering a nearly \$8 million shortfall in 2026 and a gap of around \$14 million next year.

That said, ISFA is designed as a state agency. The state's governor, JB Pritzker in this case, has

control by virtue of appointing the chair and three other members; Chicago's mayor has three slots.

The state has a strong interest in where the next stadium gets built in Illinois, for starters. But with ISFA involved, the state would have a say in seeing the Bears build their stadium in a place and at a cost to taxpayers that best benefits the state, at the lowest cost to its taxpayers.

Such decisions arguably can best be done at a state level rather than from the more parochial position of city mayors. Setting up a circumstance in which Chicago and Arlington Heights compete by each offering lucrative packages to the Bears seems set up to benefit the Bears most of all.

Putting the financing responsibility in the hands of a neutral state agency just might serve taxpayers best. And that should be the bottom-line goal as the legislature gets back to work.

David Greising is president and CEO of the Better Government Association.

Voice of the people

Foreign aid

In 1776, 250 years ago, at the founding of the United States of America, our first friendship was built.

The support and aid of France during the American Revolution have led to a centuries-long relationship and have remained an essential piece of the American Dream.

Yet today, the relationship we treasure and continue to reap the mutual benefits of is limited to the past. Maintaining a barrier between providing support that can lead nations to a future of prosperity.

The same rhetoric used by Americans to justify and glorify support from France in the Revolutionary War stops at the line of helping anyone except nations of the Global North.

Progress through this lens is viewed only as possible through fueling American development — and no one else's. In reality, funding for international affairs is less than two percent of the total federal budget. Where aid and poverty relief across states is found to benefit and grow American consumer markets. Illinois has also found its place as a supplier of corn and soy for food insecurity relief programs.

Yet, 250 years into our history, the predominant misconception remains in place that aid and support of other nations burns a hole in taxpayer pockets. When programs are dismantled, and contributions from American industries lose access to large revenue streams.

What is important here is not to separate or eliminate inequalities and struggles across the United States but rather to underscore the importance of addressing both issues, and both remaining pivotal in the growth of American markets and improvement to global qualities of life.

As America turns 250 and early support is celebrated, it's import-



Health workers disinfect the body of a man presumed to have died of Ebola in Mongbwali, Congo, on May 25. ARLETTE BASHIZI/THE NEW YORK TIMES

ant to understand the role international affairs has in our country and what we can do to support our democracy and provide for others who seek to improve their quality of life. I'm asking that our leaders oppose any cuts to the international affairs for the interests of the U.S. and global society.

— Samantha Arnold, Roselle

'Infinite request'

Senate President Don Harmon's remark that an agreement on the budget requires working through “an infinite request for spending and a finite amount of resources” (“Uncertainty marks session's last weekend,” May 30) reveals the risks if Illinois adopts a graduated income tax.

In that same article, state Sen. Rachel Ventura of Joliet echoes the claims of many politicians that the solution to Illinois's fiscal woes lies in “asking the rich to pay their fair share” without defining who are the “rich” or what is their “fair share.” Trying to define those terms is instructive.

The number of candidates for “rich” are relatively small. The Illinois Department of Revenue's most recent statistics — Individ-

ual Income Tax Returns Filed by Adjusted Gross Income—Tax Year 2023 — show if you define rich as any Illinois Income Tax Returns reporting more than \$500,000, only 96,371 would meet that definition. These 96,371 taxpayers paid a total of \$6.5 billion in Illinois income tax, which is more than the combined income taxes paid on all 4,054,850 tax returns reporting less than \$100,000. Some of those 96,371 might think that is already a “fair share.”

Given that claims that the rich are not paying their “fair share” persist under the federal income tax and states with graduated income taxes, adopting a graduated income tax so those 96,371 taxpayers bear an even larger share of the cost of Illinois government is unlikely to satisfy those who allege unfairness. But adopting a graduated income tax is very likely to feed the “infinite request for spending” to which President Harmon alluded.

Because a graduated income tax is currently prohibited in Illinois, increasing “finite revenue” to feed the “infinite request” by hiking the income tax rate currently requires convincing a majority of

all the voters that the spending is worth their share of the higher rate. That's hard.

Take that restriction away and increasing spending gets much easier. Enhanced spending is more likely to appeal to a majority of voters if those voters believe that someone else — a small number of “rich” who are supposedly not paying their “fair share” — will bear the increased tax. But although the rich represent a small number of voters, they can — and do — vote with their feet and move, leaving politicians looking for someone else to pay for the spending left behind. Could that someone else be you?

— William Schmalzl, Naples, Florida

Renters ordinance

Regarding the proposed “Protecting Renters Ordinance,” ask yourself this question: How many rental properties do Mayor Brandon Johnson, Ald. Jeanette Taylor, or other so-called progressive aldermen own or manage? (“Johnson pushing sweeping changes to renter laws, and landlords bristle,” May 31). The answer, I would bet you, is none. Yet with no experience managing rental properties, they propose draconian new rules that will drive many small landlords out of business.

Don Washington's claim that “the deck is stacked against renters,” is absurd. Bad tenants can skip out on months or more worth of rent — in addition to eviction costs incurred by the landlord. How would you feel if you got to payday and didn't get your paycheck? How long will you continue to go to work? But landlords are expected to continue to provide all the services associated with the rental unit until the sher-

iff puts the tenant out. Even if he gets a judgment against a tenant, good luck enforcing it. That's more filing fees and legal fees. Tenants, however, have access to free legal assistance — even when they're in the wrong! So, a bad tenant faces little to no consequences, other than eviction, but the landlord suffers the consequences of that tenant's illegal behavior! How is that remotely fair? Then there is the damage caused by such tenants. Who pays for that? Again, the landlord generally gets stuck.

A fair ordinance would provide legal assistance to small landlords like me, who are low income and barely making ends meet, especially when the tenant clearly hasn't paid the rent! Ald. Taylor's claim that bad landlords are not held accountable and tenants have no recourse is flatly contradicted by the current city ordinance. A landlord who doesn't make timely repairs can be reported to the city by the tenant, anonymously, by calling 311. Tenants can also pay for the repairs themselves and deduct the cost from their rent. Fairness dictates that landlords should be included in the process of drafting this ordinance.

— Paul N. Eichwedel, Chicago

Note to readers

The Obama Presidential Center is opening on June 19. Do you have memories of former President Barack Obama you'd like to share? (Sincere thoughts only.) Send a letter of no more than 400 words by Thursday, June 11 to letters@chicagotribune.com. Include your full name and city/town.

Submit a letter, of no more than 400 words, to the editor here or email letters@chicagotribune.com.

For online-exclusive letters, go to www.chicagotribune.com/letters. Email your letter submissions, 400 words or less, to letters@chicagotribune.com. Include your full name, address and phone number.