

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Trump's trade war

Tariff tantrum hypocritical, rightly resisted

US President Donald Trump's threat to increase the tariff on Indian goods a couple of days after the decision to impose a 25 per cent tariff — ostensibly in response to India's continued purchase of Russian oil — is strategically unsound and reeks of hypocrisy. India has rightly defied the threat as “unjustified and unreasonable” even as the potential impact is significant. The new tariffs could reduce India's exports to the US by nearly 30 per cent. Textile exporters have already flagged mounting losses, while trade bodies have conveyed dismay over Washington's stance.

India's oil imports from Russia emerged not out of ideological alignment but from economic necessity. When the Ukraine-Russia war disrupted global energy markets, traditional supplies were redirected to Europe. At that time, the US itself had tacitly acknowledged India's decision as a stabilising measure for global oil markets. To now penalise India for acting in its interest exposes the inconsistent and self-serving nature of Trump's rhetoric. Worse, the moral posturing rings hollow. The very countries now criticising India have continued trade with Russia. The EU maintained over 67 billion euros in goods trade with Moscow in 2024 and nearly 17 billion euros in services the year before. These figures far exceed India's trade volume with Russia. The US, too, procures Russian commodities for its nuclear and automobile industries.

To counter the economic blow of the tariff penalties, India should expand trade agreements that respect mutual interests, not hegemony. The government's planned Rs 20,000-crore Export Promotion Mission could provide a cushion to the affected sectors while enhancing India's global trade competitiveness. Equally crucial is assertive trade diplomacy by leveraging India's geopolitical importance in the Indo-Pacific. It must also strengthen its voice in multilateral forums to counter the arbitrary trade actions.

Parole yet again

Authorities making it too easy for Ram Rahim

ALL convicts are equal in India, but some are more equal than others. Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh seems to be among the 'more equal' ones. The Sirsa dema head, who is serving a 20-year jail term for raping two of his disciples, has been granted a 40-day parole ahead of his birthday — which falls on Independence Day, no less. He got a 21-day furlough in April and a 30-day parole in January — thus, by the time Ram Rahim returns to Rohtak's Sunaria jail in mid-September, he would have been out of prison for three months this year. He is also a convict in the Ram Chander Chhatrapati murder case and was sentenced to life imprisonment by a special CBI court in 2019; in the Ranjit Singh murder case, his acquittal has been challenged by the premier probe agency.

The frequent grant of parole or furlough to a rape-murder convict is certainly questionable. In recent years, Ram Rahim has often walked out of jail on the eve of one election or another, sparking allegations of political machinations. The Haryana Good Conduct Prisoners (Temporary Release) Act, 2022, incentivises good behaviour behind bars, but it imposes restrictions on the grant of emergency or regular parole to “hard-core convicted” prisoners. Apparently, the state government is under the impression that Ram Rahim does not belong to this category of inmates.

Parole or furlough should not be a low-hanging fruit for any person convicted of a heinous crime. Last month, the Kerala High Court dismissed a writ petition filed by a murder convict's wife, seeking emergency leave to enable him to attend a family ceremony. The court noted that the convict, who is serving a life sentence, had previously been granted parole for his wife's delivery and this could not be extended to cover all subsequent events or ceremonies. This ruling should serve as a cautionary note for the authorities which are letting influential convicts like Ram Rahim stay out of jail for long durations.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, THURSDAY, AUGUST 6, 1925

Sir Malcolm Hailey's duty

THE *Times* has been somewhat late in congratulating Sir Malcolm Hailey as well as the Sikh community on the passing of the Gurdwara Bill, but the congratulations, as we have said ourselves, are well deserved. It is true that the Bill, which the *Times* describes as “an excellent solution conceived in the best spirit of sympathetic statesmanship,” has not yet completely solved the Sikh problem. For that, one other thing is clearly essential, the actual release of the gurdwara prisoners. Sir Hailey is too shrewd and experienced an administrator not to know that with the large majority of those who were imprisoned in connection with the Gurdwara movement, including most of the leaders, still in custody, it can be no easy thing either to restore that mutual understanding between the Sikhs and the government or to create that calm atmosphere in which alone the Bill can be worked with success. Nor would it do to say that the Punjab Government has done everything in its power by announcing the conditions on which it is prepared to release the prisoners, and if the latter do not accept its offer that is entirely their lookout. Everything is not done while anything remains to be done and particularly when so essential and so substantial a part of the thing remains undone. But we anticipate no serious difficulty in this matter, though the delay that has taken place already is in itself regrettable. After all, the condition laid down by His Excellency has been already substantially fulfilled. What he and his government really wanted was an assurance that the prisoners would not, on their release, place any obstacle in the path of the Gurdwara Act.

What the PM didn't say about Cholas

Rajendra's Gangetic expedition was no Kashi Tamil Sangamam — it was loot and plunder all the way



SOUTH SIDE
NIRUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN

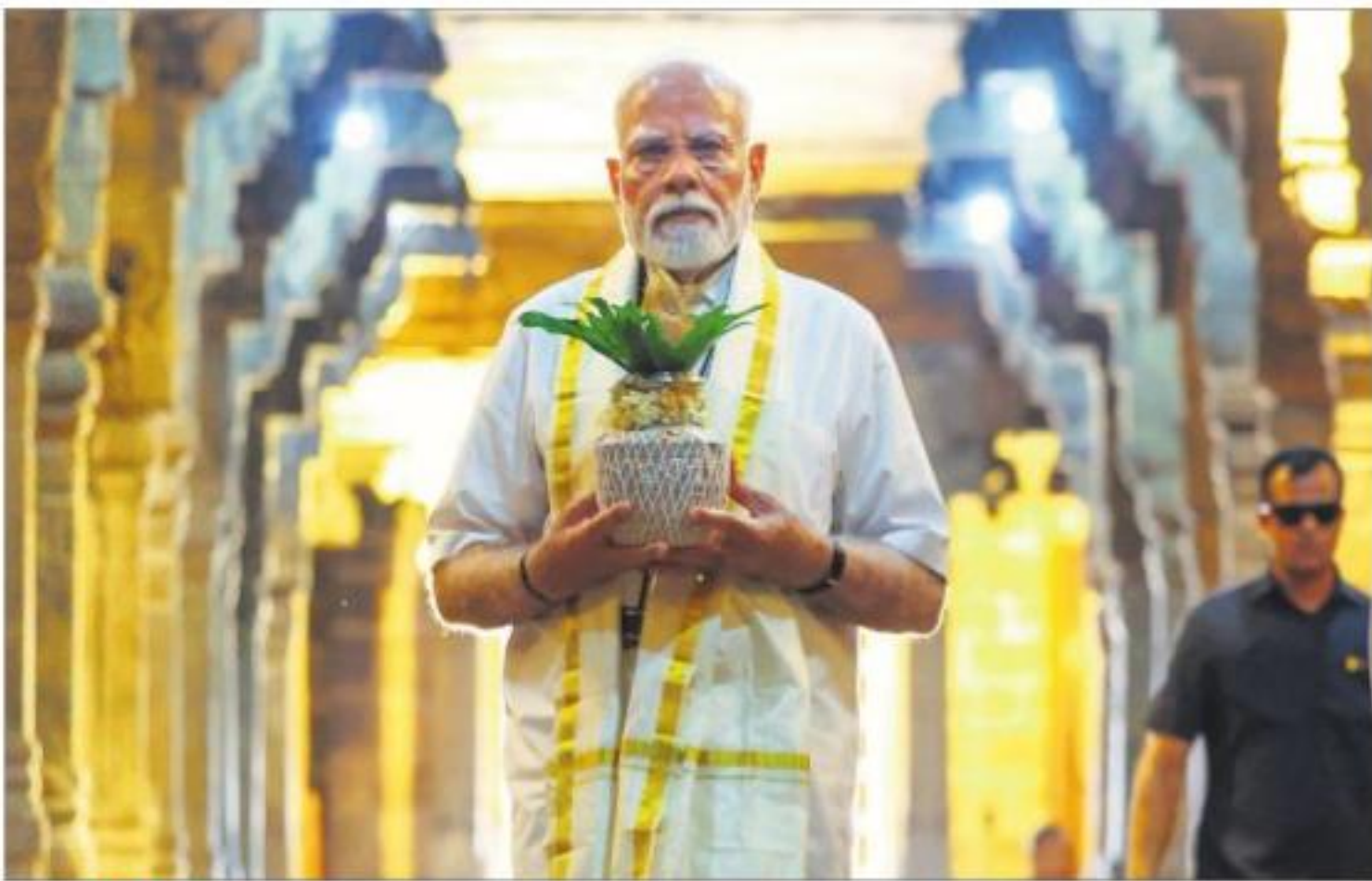
DURING his July 27 trip to Tamil Nadu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, duly dressed in *veshti-shirt-angavastram*, carried with all the reverence of a passion play actor, a traditional *kodam* or jug of water from the Ganga to pour into a tank that an ambitious Chola king built a thousand years ago to commemorate his victorious Gangetic quest.

Rajendra Chola is known as Gangaikonda Cholan — literally the Chola who conquered the Ganga. The king built a new capital, naming it Gangaikonda Cholapuram to celebrate his feat. In the middle, he built a temple — slightly smaller than the one built by his father Rajaraja in Thanjavur but as beautiful, if not more — to Siva, the god that the Cholas had adopted.

Modi extolled the greatness of Rajendra, and spoke of his legacy of bringing the Ganga to the land of the Kaveri. According to a PIB press release, the Prime Minister said the Chola rulers “had woven India into a thread of cultural unity”, and stated that his government was carrying forward “the same ideals from the Chola era”.

He highlighted that programmes like the Kashi Tamil Sangamam and the Saurashtra Tamil Sangamam were reinforcing centuries-old bonds of unity. He described the endeavours of the Chola kings as symbolic of his own government's “*Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat*”.

In its quest to establish a glorious Hindu past for India, the BJP has shown that it can pick and choose what it wants from history. Add to this the anxiety



LEGACY: Prime Minister Narendra Modi described the endeavours of the Chola kings as symbolic of his own government's ‘Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat’. **PIB**

about making a mark in next year's Tamil Nadu Assembly elections, and you have a party that adopted first the Tamil god Murugan, and now a Tamil king. The muscular, military-minded Rajendra Cholan, a Siva *bhakt* with a maritime prowess unmatched in his time, mirroring India's own aspirations in the Indian Ocean, is clearly the BJP's idea of Hindutva with a Tamil script ahead of the elections. But... it's complicated.

For one, Rajendra's Gangetic expedition was not the medieval forerunner to the BJP's Kashi Tamil Sangamam, nor was it a king's personal meditative pilgrimage. Rajendra I was out to prove that he was a super-king, a king of kings, and that nothing could stand in his way. He had already conquered the Deccan, the Cheras and the Pallavas. He had completed his father's conquest of Lanka. Now he was looking for ritual confirmation of his status as emperor.

In latching on to the Chola king for its Ganga-Kaveri trope, Modi and the BJP have dismantled, perhaps unintentionally, their own assiduously

The BJP has dismantled, perhaps unintentionally, its own assiduously propagated myth of a past in which Hindus lived peacefully with each other.

propagated myth of a past in which Hindus lived peacefully with each other in a golden idyll before the Muslims came and spoilt it all.

Between 1022 and 1023, as Aniruddh Kanisetti shows in his work on the Cholas, *Lords of Earth and Sea*, Rajendra's massive army killed, raped and plundered its way north for what was to be a “raid on the Ganga” to bring its water so that he could consecrate him-

self as “king of kings”. Along the way, they destroyed the Chalukya confederation and left the Pala dynasty of Eastern India teetering. Muslim invaders were still far away in the north-west, parts of which are now Pakistan. Along the way, Rajendra's soldiers sacked temples and stole their idols, while he waited for them to return with the water collected from the Ganga on the southern bank of the Godavari.

Kanisetti writes that it is “difficult to believe that these idols were obtained without extreme violence against the lords that derived power from them, to say nothing of the population displaced and brutalised by roving armed men”.

Back in Chola territory, the idols were placed in much less respectable places than the royal temples from where they had been stolen. As for the Ganga, its waters were brought in urns by soldiers and poured into a huge reservoir, three times the size of Gangaikonda Cholapuram, created by diverting water from the Kaveri.

It was interesting to see the

Prime Minister fitting himself into this frame. “He expressed his delight that, in memory of this historic episode, Ganga water has once again been brought from Kashi to Tamil Nadu, noting that a formal ritual was conducted at the site,” the PIB release aid.

India's neighbours will have their own take on Modi's remark at “the coincidence of having returned from the Maldives just yesterday and today being part of this programme [commemorating Rajendra Chola] in Tamil Nadu”. Rajaraja claimed to have conquered “the thousand islands of the ancient sea”, which some historian believe is a reference to the Maldives.

In Sri Lanka, the present-day wariness about India is at least partly due to the historical memory of Tamil invasions by the Chola father and son. In 1017, Rajendra sacked Polonnaruwa and carted off Mahinda V over the sea to his kingdom, where the Lankan king was jailed, and died a dozen years later, inaugurating a 50-year era of Chola rule in Lanka. In 1025, Rajaraja would storm Kedah in Sumatra, leading to chaos in the Srivijaya empire for the next 100 years.

How many political points the BJP might gain from its Chola discovery is not immediately apparent. But it's safe to say that Modi's announcement that statues will be built to Rajaraja and Rajendra has not taken Tamil Nadu by storm. After all, what statue can equal the majesty of the two Brihadeeswara temples — now UNESCO world heritage sites — that Rajaraja and Rajendra built, as much to celebrate themselves as their god.

Moreover, the Cholas are already spoken for: It was the DMK, for all its Dravidianism, that began in 2022 the practice of holding the Aadi Thiruvadarai festival to commemorate Rajendra's birth anniversary, which Modi attended this year.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past. — George Orwell

A response as sweet as jaggery

BALBIR SINGH DHOL

BACK in 2006, I was posted in Bathinda as the Public Grievance Officer. One day, a man approached the Deputy Commissioner with a complaint. The DC called me up on the intercom and said, “I'm sending Sardar Hamek Singh to you — please listen to him.”

Within minutes, the man entered my office. He touched his turban respectfully and walked towards me. I immediately stood up and said, “Hamek Singh ji, please don't do that.” Hearing his name, he paused, surprised — perhaps wondering how I knew it. That simple recognition gave him a sense of belonging.

Touching one's turban in such a manner reflects helplessness — an unspoken gesture often made when a person is desperate to be heard. I asked him to sit and offered him a glass of water. It was a hot day, and he drank it in one breath.

I then asked, “Please tell me what's the issue.” And he began narrating his problem. His complaint was that the canal field officers — the kanungo and the patwari — had reduced his irrigation time slot (*uarsi*) by two minutes. He informed me that he was the father of three daughters, his land had become barren, and he couldn't grow any crops.

Through my PA, I contacted the canal officer concerned and the patwari. It was around 1 pm. I told them to visit the site by 4 pm that day. I then assured Hamek that we would visit his fields and resolve the matter.

Hamek stood up with joy, raised both hands, and said, “Now even if you don't come, I'm satisfied — someone has at least listened to me. I feel relieved.”

As promised, we reached his fields by 4 pm. He had also built his house there. I heard the version of the canal officer and the patwari. They explained that when a portion of land becomes unfit for cultivation (*gair-mumkin*), the irrigation time assigned to it is redistributed among nearby cultivable plots. Since Hamek had constructed a house on his field, that part of the land was now non-agricultural. As per rules, his irrigation share had been reduced accordingly.

I explained this to Hamek in simple words. He understood and seemed satisfied. However, we requested the next farmer in line and arranged water for Hamek's field immediately.

The real issue wasn't the reduction of minutes — it was the response he received earlier from officials: “We've done what had to be done — complain to whomsoever you want.” Hamek, though hurt, stood his ground: “Either give me my full slot as before — or I won't take even a drop.”

I didn't go beyond the rules. I just listened and explained. I also advised officers that they should handle such situations with logic, patience and empathy — not arrogance.

This experience taught me a profound lesson: often, people just want to be heard. Whether or not the problem is resolved, the response should always be sweet — just like jaggery.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

US going soft on China

China is importing Russian and Iranian oil despite mounting US pressure. Beijing's energy strategy defies Western sanctions and its growing consumption exposes America's inconsistent treatment of global energy buyers. While India faces threats of penalty for buying oil from Russia, China enjoys leniency. New Delhi must highlight this disparity diplomatically while firming up alternative energy deals both in the Middle East and Central Asia. Strengthening refining capacity and green energy initiatives can insulate India from coercion. Additionally, New Delhi must seek multilateral frameworks over unilateral sanctions and continue to assert a non-aligned and sovereign economic policy amid increasing global polarisation.

RS NARULA, PATIALA

Trade, tariff terror can't coexist

President Trump's India-specific trade tariffs stem from New Delhi's oil purchase arrangements with Moscow and Tehran. It has nothing to do with sympathy for Ukraine, as claimed by the US administration. Trump's experiments on oil deals may boomerang in the long run, jeopardising America's own growth story amid uncertainty in global economies. The tariff scare has caused volatility in stock markets, causing huge financial craters in gold and oil sectors and putting small nations at risk. Trade and tariff terror can't go hand in hand.

ANIL VINAYAK, AMRITSAR

US concern for Ukraine fake

Apropos of ‘Unjustified, unreasonable: MEA hits back as Trump vows to hike tariffs’; the US President's actions are motivated more by his individual perception than by his desire to Make America Great Again. The famous Hindi idiom, *Nau sau chuhe kha ke billi Haj ko chali*, succinctly sums up his concern for the Ukrainian people. The MEA has rightly pointed out that the very nations criticising India are themselves trading with Russia. Our imports are a necessity, whereas they don't have any compulsion. The US is still importing chemicals, fertilisers, palladium and uranium hexafluoride from Russia, so what is the problem if India continues to buy oil from Russia?

UPENDRA SHARMA, BY MAIL

Young team's solid fight

Apropos of ‘India rocked The Oval and old order tilted’ and the editorial ‘Vintage cricket’; a 2-2 draw following India's six-run triumph against the hosts at The Oval was a dramatic but well-deserved victory. For India, playing England on their home turf is always tough. India has won a Test series on English soil only thrice, with the last victory coming in 2007. It was difficult this time too as the squad did not have Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli and Ravichandran Ashwin. Shubman Gill's men fought very hard. A team in transition is bound to have teething troubles. However, with their solid performance, these players offer hope for Test cricket.

VANDANA, CHANDIGARH

Captivating finale

With reference to ‘Vintage cricket’; India's long cricket tour of England concluded in a gripping finale. The enthralling victory against England, and that too at The Oval, was the sum total of a well-contested Test series. Mohammed Siraj was the undisputed star of the final Test, even as many players made their presence felt. However, at the end of the day, it was Test cricket, which is said to be dying a slow death due to the T20 craze, which emerged as the winner and is here to stay.

GREGORY FERNANDES, MUMBAI

SC's pick-and-choose approach

The comments made by the Supreme Court Bench on the Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi are uncalled for. Courts should pass orders but not preach. As LoP, Rahul has every right to ask questions. Recently, a BJP MP called Col Sofiya a ‘sister of terrorists’, no observation was made by the Supreme Court; in the Chandigarh mayoral elections presiding officer Anil Masih was caught on camera rigging votes in favour of BJP candidate last year, the SC has still not taken any action against him. A BJP leader held then CJI Sanjiv Khanna responsible for ‘civil wars’ happening in this country, but the apex court kept mum.

BHUPINDER KOCHHAR, PANCHKULA

Kashmir & the blame game: What history tells us



AJAY K MEHRA
SENIOR FELLOW, CENTRE FOR
MULTILEVEL FEDERALISM

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah stated in Parliament on July 29 that the ceasefire in Kashmir in 1947 without securing Jammu & Kashmir, its referral to the UN and the ignoring of Sardar Patel's advice were Jawaharlal Nehru's three blunders which gave India a festering wound in perpetuity.

The lapse of paramountcy following India's independence made the accession of the 565 princely states to the respective dominions of India and Pakistan clear. Even as Nehru set up the States Department on July 5, 1947 under Sardar Patel to facilitate the accession, the Maharaja of Jammu & Kashmir delayed his decision. Patel, initially, preferred that J&K accede to Pakistan. Maharaja Hari Singh proposed to sign standstill agreements with both his 'neighbours'. Pakistan signed immediately. Routed through Lahore, the letter to Delhi was delayed.

Unexpectedly, the Pakistani army, with nearly 13,000-

strong tribal hordes, marched towards Kashmir. Nehru informed Patel in his letter on September 27, 1947, of the urgency of the situation as Indian intervention without accession was tricky. Patel had, meanwhile, changed his mind on September 13 after Pakistan accepted the accession of Junagadh in early October and agreed to the accession of Kashmir to India.

By sending tribal forces towards Srinagar, pillaging villages en route and raping women, by October 24 Pakistan had gained considerable advantage. Kashmir Prime Minister Mehr Chand Mahajan requested Nehru to send Indian troops to Kashmir. Patel's adviser and secretary VP Menon was sent to Srinagar to assess the position. While the Maharaja procrastinated, Mahajan, Patel and Sheikh Abdullah persuaded Nehru to immediately send troops to Srinagar. The Maharaja signed the Instrument of Accession on October 26. It's clear, therefore, that decision-making on Kashmir at that critical time was a team affair.

With the conflict escalating, the British were aware that an aggressive Jinnah would push for a full-scale war. Irked by the British tilt towards Pakistan, Nehru ordered the Army to drive out the tribals from J&K. He felt he should give up his prime-minister-ship and 'take a rifle himself, and lead the men of India against the invasion.'



1947 LEADERS: (From Left) Baldev Singh, JB Kripalani, Sardar Patel, Nehru, Mountbatten and Jinnah. TRIBUNE PHOTO

As a full-scale war appeared inevitable, India's Commander-in-Chief Gen Auchinleck and Jinnah's adviser Lord Ismay (Mountbatten's Chief of Staff) sought to persuade Nehru to take the matter to the UN.

Initially Nehru rejected the idea. Any reference to the UN, Nehru said, could only be on whether or not Pakistan had supported the aggression against Kashmir, and not on its accession to India.

During the Defence Committee meeting on October 28, 1947, Gen Auchinleck called Mountbatten from Lahore, and told him he had persuaded Jinnah to cancel the order to send Pakistan troops to Kashmir. An anxious Mountbatten, along with Lord Ismay and Gen Auchinleck, proposed talks between Nehru

Nehru was equally determined to drive the tribal infiltrators out and "see this Kashmir business through."

and Jinnah in Lahore. Nehru agreed despite Patel's objecting to it as 'appeasement'.

But Nehru fell sick and had to cancel his visit. So Mountbatten travelled to Lahore alone to meet Jinnah, who denounced India. Jinnah indicated his complicity in the tribal raids by offering to "call the whole thing off" if India agreed to withdraw her troops; he rejected the proposal for a plebiscite in Kashmir to be conducted by the UN.

Mountbatten kept trying to persuade Nehru to refer the dispute to the UN under Article 35, which enables it to settle such disputes.

Charging Pakistan with having deliberately organised "the whole business of Kashmir raids", Nehru told Mountbatten, "They helped the tribesmen to collect; they supplied them with imple-

ments of war, with lorries, with petrol and with officers. They are continuing to do so. Indeed, their high officials openly declare so."

Eventually, Nehru agreed to write to the UN with a limited reference relating to Pakistan's invasion and "illegal" occupation of territory.

His December 31 letter to the Security Council was explicit, India sought the UN's intervention in ending Pakistan's armed invasion and its withdrawal from Kashmir: "The Government of India requests the Security Council to call upon Pakistan to put an end immediately to the giving of such assistance which is an act of aggression against India."

Though he threatened to take military action against the invaders, the new Commander-in-Chief of India, Gen Francis Robert Roy Bucher, cautioned Nehru on November 28, 1948, that India was not in a position to withstand a continued military operation in Kashmir for long as Indian troops were fatigued. He advised a political compromise. Patel and Gandhi ultimately consented, but in their hearts, they were against it.

Nehru was determined to drive the infiltrators out and "see this Kashmir business through. We do not believe in leaving things half-done. We will send more troops. We will muster all our resources and fight till we succeed."

He wrote to Mountbatten: "... on no account would we

submit to this barbarity whatever the cost I am convinced that any surrender on our part to this kind of aggression would lead to continuing aggression elsewhere, and whether we want it or not, war would become inevitable between India and Pakistan. We are dealing with a State carrying on an informal war. The present objective is Kashmir. The next declared objective is Patiala, East Punjab, and Delhi... we must not carry on our own operations in a weak defensive way, which can produce no effective impression on the enemy. We have refrained from crossing into Pakistani territory because of our desire to avoid complications leading to open war."

This stern message does not draw a picture of an inane and dithering Nehru taking the Kashmir issue to the UN, complicating what could have been militarily solved.

Patel and Gandhi were temporarily persuaded by Mountbatten. We must also realise the immense pressure imposed by the big powers, the UK and US, who were wary of another war after World War II.

However, the cause was lost in the Security Council. Nehru wrote to Vijayalakshmi Pandit, "The US and Britain have played a dirty role, Britain probably being the chief actor behind the scenes. I have expressed myself strongly to Attlee about it...."

Hiroshima to Hard Rain: A warning we still ignore



SHELLEY WALLIA
FORMER PROFESSOR,
PANJAB UNIVERSITY

AS we mark the eightieth anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the world continues to confront the ongoing legacy of cataclysmic magnitude. Far from being confined to history, the threat of nuclear obliteration continues to haunt global imagination. From the hair-trigger standoff of the Cuban missile crisis to the destabilising Russia-Ukraine war and more recently, the simmering hostilities between India and Pakistan, along with the risks posed by nuclear weapons, the threat remains acute and unresolved. By shifting our focus from mere remembrance to meaningful action, we can work towards creating a more just and equitable world.

As a political analyst put it, "Memory is not just about honouring the dead; it is about confronting the decisions and denials that allowed the violence to unfold." What is demanded, therefore, is not commemoration but the ruthless dismantling of the very systems

that manufacture, in Judith Butler's words, our 'politically induced condition' and then disguise it as progress.

This anniversary arrives at a time when art, especially music, is again underscored by its renewed role in evoking public conscience. Bob Dylan's iconic song, "A Hard Rain's a-Gonna Fall", written in 1962, 22 years after the Hiroshima-Nagasaki bombings, has long been understood as a dirge on the nuclear age. The poem's terrifying visions and absorbing cadence embody the raw, inexorable fear provoked by the nuclear brinkmanship of the dark times we live in.

While Dylan himself created the "Hard Rain" song as an allegory for the wider collapse of social and moral order, Dylan's fans during the Cold War understood it as an unnerving allusion to nuclear calamity in a world poised to annihilate itself in a single, irreparable act of devastation. Its lines resound not just with portentous foretelling, but also with a tenacious ethical demand to defy the forces of "endism".

This resonance was reaffirmed at the recent Nobel Laureate Assembly for the Prevention of Nuclear War held in Chicago on the anniversary of the Trinity test, a euphemism for the world's first nuclear detonation. The event brought together 20 Nobel laureates and 60 leading nuclear experts to confront what they described as



MUST: A mass peace movement can exert the pressure needed to stop N-brinkmanship. SANDEEP JOSHI

"the high and seemingly rising prospect of nuclear war."

The conference ended with a stirring performance of Dylan's "Hard Rain" by the Kronos Quartet and a musical collective, including artists such as Ringo Starr, Iggy Pop, Willie Nelson and Laurie Anderson. Strikingly, it was not a nostalgic tribute but a call to action. On *Democracy Now!*, the violinist of the quartet, David Harrington, called on artists to meet the crises with resolve and moral clarity.

The call echoes Bob Dylan's belief in the transformative power of music, in its inherent quality of dissent and moral reckoning. In a world still shadowed by nuclear terror with thousands of warheads primed for instant launch, his music becomes a warning to not remain silent

The memory of the 1945 atomic bombings demands more than remembrance; it demands action. We must work to eliminate the looming N-threat.

in the face of annihilation.

In "A Hard Rain's a-Gonna Fall," Bob Dylan crafts an evocative poetic vision of a world unravelling under the weight of war, injustice and apocalyptic dread. Written in the shadow of the Cuban missile crisis and in the long aftermath of Hiroshima, the song serves as both prophecy and indictment. Its verses unfold like a series of surreal dispatches from a fractured moral universe, where innocence is violated and truth is drowned in silence.

"I saw a newborn baby with wild wolves all around it" speaks about the brutal exposure of vulnerability in a predatory world, a symbolic rendering of children born into conflict, inequality and extinction. Such imagery is not merely metaphorical; it

reflects an existential condition where institutions designed to safeguard human life and dignity have become eerily similar to those that threaten them.

Dylan's tone deepens with the line, "I saw guns and sharp swords in the hands of young children", a powerful indictment of the glorification of aggression and indoctrination of young minds. These are not just the scars of war but signs of a deeper cultural and political rot.

The juxtaposition in "I heard one person starve, I heard many people laughin'" captures a world disturbingly divided between those who suffer and those who turn away. In this, Dylan anticipates the global indifference to famine, displacement and nuclear escalation often rendered invisible by media spectacle or political evasion.

Yet, the song refuses to reflect despair, insisting on the function of the witness. "And I'll tell it and think it and speak it and breathe it," declares the narrator, assuming the ethical burden of memory and speech in a world dominated by euphemisms and amnesia.

His song becomes a site of resistance, an urgent reminder that to name a catastrophe is the first step towards transforming it. Its persistent relevance lies in this uncompromising vision of truth-telling, which cuts through generalisations and insists on the

moral consequences of silence.

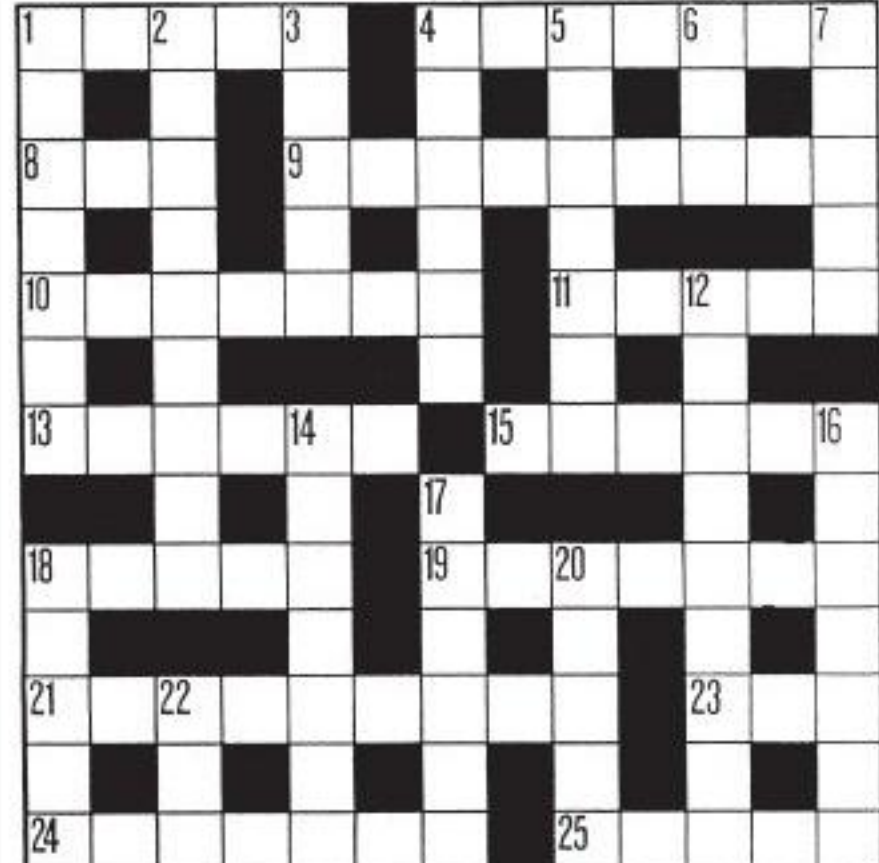
Music transcends cultural expression, evolving into a powerful act of resistance against apathy and oppression. As institutions fail to restrain the arms race, as treaties grind down and doctrine swings towards so-called "tactical" expediency, the arts remain one of the few bulwarks where moral clarity can still be invoked.

Therefore, to mark Hiroshima and Nagasaki without acknowledging the present nuclear crisis is to engage in hollow ritual. Commemoration must be paired with mobilisation. The memory of the atomic bombings of August 6 and 9, 1945 demands more than remembrance; it demands action.

We must work tirelessly to eliminate the nuclear threat that looms. That is the enduring message of "A Hard Rain's a-Gonna Fall." The rain persists, a haunting refrain that underscores the urgency of our struggle. As the echoes of protest resound across generations, we are compelled to act, lest memory become a mere eulogy for a lost cause.

As the arms race escalates and nuclear brinkmanship returns, only a mass peace movement uniting scientists, academics and civil society can exert the pressure needed to stop it. What was set in motion by the 1945 Manhattan Project can only be undone by an effort transcending borders and ideologies.

QUICK CROSSWORD

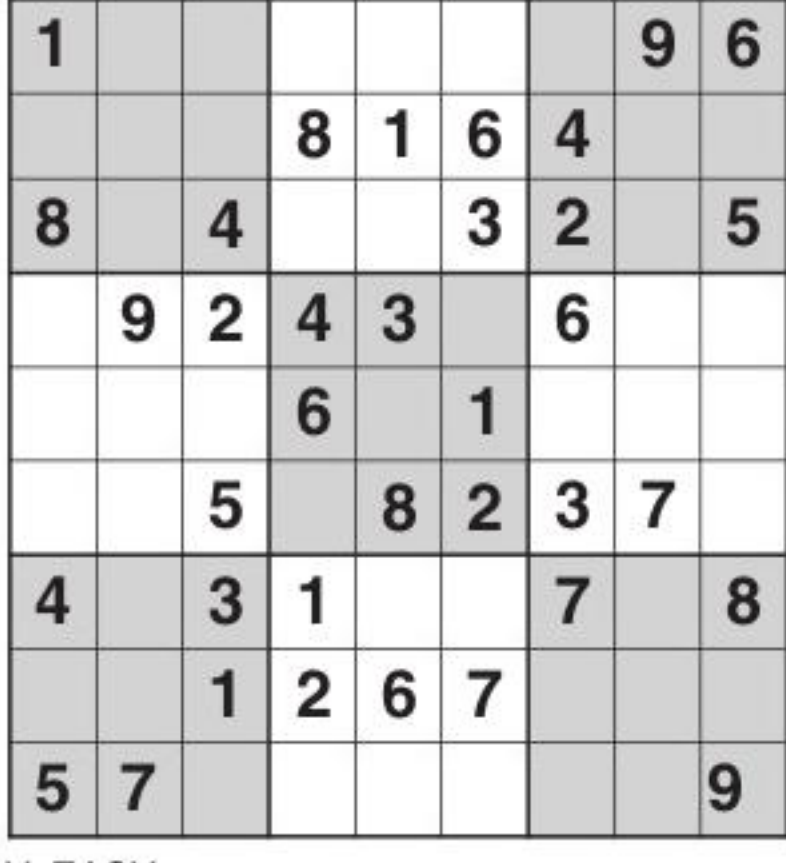


ACROSS

1 Useful quality (5)
4 A fool (7)
8 Shade of colour (3)
9 Front runner (9)
10 Approve openly (7)
11 Moneylending at exorbitant rate (5)
13 Make possible (6)
15 Repressed (4-2)
18 Wash in a liquid (5)
19 Counsellor (7)
21 Run as fast as possible (2,4,3)
23 Large vase on pedestal for plants (3)
24 Of small girth (7)
25 Have recourse (5)

Yesterday's solution
Across: 1 Trigger off, 8 Fence, 9 Preface, 10 Grounds, 11 Throb, 12 Thrash, 14 Myopia, 17 Haste, 19 Artwork, 21 Opinion, 22 Adopt, 23 High-handed.
Down: 2 Rancour, 3 Glean, 4 Expose, 5 Overtly, 6 Clair, 7 Wet blanket, 8 Fight shy of, 13 Seeming, 15 Provoke, 16 Launch, 18 Smith, 20 Train.

SU DO KU



V. EASY

FORECAST

CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	31	25
New Delhi	33	25
Amritsar	32	26
Bathinda	33	25
Jalandhar	32	26
Ludhiana	32	26
Bhiwani	34	25
Hisar	34	25
Sirsa	33	26
Dharamsala	28	19
Manali	26	18
Shimla	23	17
Srinagar	33	21
Jammu	33	25
Kargil	28	15
Leh	26	15
Dehradun	30	24
Mussoorie	22	17

CALENDAR

AUGUST 6, 2025, WEDNESDAY

- Shaka Samvat 1947
- Shravan Shaka 15
- Shravan Parvishat 22
- Hijari 1447
- Shukla Paksha Tithi 12, up to 2:09 pm
- Valdhris Yoga up to 7:18 am
- Moola Nakshatra up to 1:00 pm
- Moon in Sagittarius sign
- Gandmoola up to 1:00 pm



CONTRAPUNTO

I won't insult your intelligence by suggesting that you really believe what you just said

— WILLIAM F BUCKLEY JR

From Russia...

Washington is no slouch when it comes to buying from Moscow. So what wrong is New Delhi doing?

When Russia annexed Ukraine's Crimea region in 2014, US punished it with sanctions. US-Russia trade, which was worth over \$38bn in 2013, slipped to under \$35bn in 2014, \$23bn in 2015, less than \$20bn in 2016, and then started rising again from 2017, although Crimea remained with Russia. What changed was that Obama left White House and Trump came in. In 2021, the last year before Putin invaded Ukraine wholesale, Russian exports to US amounted to \$29.6bn – almost the same as in 2012. This recap is important when Trump is threatening to make an example of India with “substantially” higher tariffs for buying Russian oil. The same Trump who, in Feb, said Ukraine “should have never started” the war.

Look at Europe, too. EU's own data shows it supplied 10.3% of Russian imports last year, and bought 7.3% of its exports. Total goods trade between the “virtuous” and the sanctioned amounted to a not insignificant \$78bn – much more than the \$69bn India-Russia bilateral trade last year. And data from the nonprofit CREA shows EU's spending on Russian energy last year – \$25.3bn – was more than its financial assistance to Ukraine – \$21.6bn. That's why the West's moral grandstanding on the Ukraine war fails to convince. For Trump officials to accuse India of financing Putin's



war, while ignoring EU's Russia trade, and America's own \$3bn worth of Russian imports, is nothing but hypocrisy.

How is it kosher for US to continue buying enriched uranium from a sanctioned Russia to meet its energy needs, while frowning upon India's purchase of Russian oil to fuel its growing economy? MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal pointed out in a tweet on Monday that US had nudged India to buy more Russian oil at the start of the war “for strengthening global energy markets' stability”. Europe was the biggest buyer of Russian oil and gas then, and for it to take a righteous stand, “traditional supplies were diverted to Europe”. India at that time sourced less than 1% of crude from Russia. By making the switch, it spared the world an inflationary wave so soon after the pandemic.

As things stand, India's saving not more than \$2bn a year by buying discounted Russian oil. It can pivot to West Asian suppliers again, but everybody – including US – will then feel inflationary pain. Trump shouldn't forget that while trying to armtwist India into a trade deal.

Angry Clouds & Rivers

Natural disasters visit Uttarakhand regularly. It excels in worsening their toll rashly

No, it wasn't nearly as bad as 2013. But it was quite terrifying. The visuals of a swollen, angry river sweeping away scores of buildings as if they were bathtub toys, are still playing on repeat on TV. However frequent natural disasters may unfortunately be, sometimes the images set one apart. That's the case with yesterday's cloudburst in Uttarkashi. It led to flash floods in the high altitude villages of Dharali. This extreme weather event occurs in a small area and is rarely predicted by weather monitoring systems. IMD had given an “extremely heavy” rainfall warning for several districts in the state. But what we see in those terrifying visuals is how a cloudburst can wreak destruction in a mountainous region, gaining inordinate power through valleys and steep slopes, in a way impossible to control.



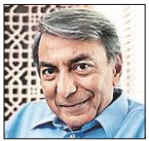
The other thing impossible to miss is how abundantly construction was sitting in the riverbed, as if with no sense of the river's nature and its rights of passage. In the moment that one gasped and feared that 2013 was being repeated, everything that happened then, from which the state was supposed to emerge chastened and reformed, streamed in one's mind. That June, the cloudburst sent such flash floods down Kedarnath to Rishikesh, that thousands of villages suffered and over 5,000 people went missing. There was hyper focus on how unregulated real estate development had exponentially worsened the toll that the natural disaster anyway would have taken. Nature has hardly stopped serving such warnings. The 2021 glacial lake outburst flood that tore into Chamoli and the 2023 subsidence in Joshimath were two biggies, for example.

But highrises to fancy villas keep going up in river beds. Builders make hay while people lose their lives and investments. Uttarakhand is crying for a govt that takes sustainable development seriously. It's never had one.

Gag x 3

A single word scores a hat trick by having a trio of different meanings in the country

Jug Suraiya



English is a very hard working language. It's forever rolling up its sleeves and borrowing words from other languages, without so much as a by your leave, to make its own. It's pinched Guru, Karma, and Bungalow, to name only a few, from Hindi. English is also forever inventing new words to add to its repertoire.

Recent examples include chillax, a combination of chill and relax; doomscrolling, obsessively reading and looking at negative news; awesomesauce, something that is extremely good; and truthiness, something that sounds true but has no evidence to back it.

Thanks to its unceasing labour, English has possibly the largest number of words in its lexicon compared with all other languages, with its dictionaries variously listing between 500,000 and as many as a million words, though only about 20,000 are in average daily use.

The most widely spoken language in the world with an estimated 1.5bn users, English is also skilled at multitasking, making many of its words sound the same but have several meanings.

Such words include dog, which is an animal of the canine species, or it could be a verb that means to follow someone or something.

Some words in English can also have even three meanings, and could be called verbal triplets. A verbal triplet of particular relevance to contemporary India is the word ‘gag’.

Gag can mean a joke, a witticism, a one-liner, or other expression of humour, spoken or written. Gag can also mean to prevent one from speaking or expressing oneself by inserting a metaphorical gag in one's metaphorical mouth.

And as increasingly more and more gags of the first kind are charged with hurting the religious, ideological, or any other sensibilities of various sections of people, gags of the second kind are more and more frequently and vigorously employed.

This gagging of gags might induce gagsters, to coin a word, to feel an urge to perform a third kind of gag, which means to want to vomit. And that's no truthiness. And certainly no awesomesauce.

Trump Trade: No Deal Or Temp Deal?

Two contrasting perspectives on Trump's threats. But both agree on his hypocrisy

Ajay Srivastava



By the time this went to print, Trump hadn't specified by how much he will “substantially raise” tariffs on Indian exports on top of the 25% tariffs already imposed. Whatever the hit, with India's \$86.5bn in goods exports to US under threat, it's fair to ask: Is India the only one buying oil from Russia?

Why is US focusing on restricting oil imports? Is its position in the Russia-Ukraine war as clearcut as it claims? Crucially, is Trump targeting India because he can't avoid China? It's worth exploring the facts behind the claims.

Why target India alone? Nato, US itself, and China import heavily from Russia. In 2024, EU bought \$39.1bn worth of Russian goods, including \$25.2bn in oil & fertilisers, non-alloy steel, aluminium, platinum group metals, titanium, radioactive substances, copper, nickel. US imports were worth \$3.3bn, including platinum group metals, radioactive chemicals, titanium, turbojets, oil cakes etc.

China was the biggest buyer of Russian oil – worth \$62.6bn, more than India's \$52.7bn. Yet, Trump likely singles out India because China pushes back hard and controls critical materials vital to US defence and tech. Ignoring imports by its allies and rivals makes US's tariffs on India seem more political than strategic.

Washington sanctions crude oil because doing so doesn't hurt US. In 2024, it produced about 70% of the oil it consumed – worth \$370bn – \$380bn of total \$570bn. In contrast, India imports 85% of its oil needs and is more vulnerable to supply shocks and price hikes. This allows US to use oil as a pressure tool, while keeping its own economy safe.

The real reason behind US's actions isn't trade but frustration with India's independent stance. Washington's trade war, initially aimed at Beijing, failed. Between 2017 and 2023, China's exports rose by over \$1tn, US trade deficit grew by \$762bn. When Trump tried to raise tariffs on China to 145% this time, China and Japan sold \$1tn in US treasury bonds, crashing the markets, forcing him to pull back. Unable to take on Beijing again, US signed one-sided deals with EU, Japan, Vietnam among others, but India didn't give in.

US wants to punish Russia for the war in Ukraine. But US played a key role in creating the crisis. Economist Jeffrey Sachs and others have noted that in the

early 1990s, US leaders assured Russia Nato wouldn't expand eastward. Yet Nato expanded in 1999 and 2004; US pushed for Ukraine and Georgia to join in 2008. After the 2014 Maidan revolution, US backing for Ukraine's Nato ambitions only increased. The war could've been avoided had Ukraine stayed neutral and mutual security guarantees been in place.

India is American tech firms' biggest market and a vital source of data, users and talent. Companies like Google, Meta, Amazon and Microsoft rely on India to test products, train AI models, drive global growth. If India allows Chinese giants like Tencent or Alibaba to compete freely, it could end monopoly of US firms.

Trump ignores that US earns far more from India than vice versa. He talks up the \$44bn trade surplus in

Anisree Suresh



Days after Trump announced he would impose 25% tariffs on Indian exports to US, his fresh warning about raising these tariffs “substantially” made it clear that to maintain Indian exports to US India must negotiate a costly short-term trade deal. This would allow it to continue engaging with Washington.

In line with US trade deals with EU (15%), Japan (15%), Indonesia and Philippines (19%), or Vietnam (20%), a trade agreement might reduce India's tariff exposure to about 10-15%. This would maintain cost competitiveness and provide much-needed certainty for



Image: AI

India's favour, but leaves out the over \$80bn US makes yearly from India. Indian students contribute over \$25bn to US economy; American tech, finance and consulting firms earn billions through operations in India. Add defence deals, subscription services, and American companies' back-end centres – money flows heavily in US's favour.

On a trade deal, India can show flexibility on many issues but must firmly protect its red lines on agriculture and dairy. It shouldn't agree to changing its patent laws, data rules, or procurement policies – or accept pressure on Brics. India must also insist on legal certainty of no new tariffs post deal. Or else, India should be ready to walk away. No deal would be better than a bad deal.

The writer is an expert on trade & tech issues

Indian exports to US, which were worth around \$87bn in 2024.

Trump's unilateral trade measures, press-driven ultimatums, and reciprocal tariffs do mean that trading partners, in his various deals, bear disproportionate obligations. Likewise, India might have to give up more than it gains if an agreement is reached with US.

Despite five rounds of talks, New Delhi and Washington are still at odds over US access to the Indian market, especially in agriculture and dairy sectors, and over India's oil and arms imports from Russia. India continues to impose sanitary regulations and high tariffs on US produce. For instance, skimmed milk powder still attracts 60% tariff. Dairy products such as fresh cheese and curd are also subject to 30%

Why People Leave Equal Bihar For Unequal Mumbai

Starting poor in life is alright if there's equality of opportunity and a chance to strike it rich

Neeraj Kaushal



Professor of Social Policy

The computer science principle ‘garbage in, garbage out’ – gigo – also applies to the ongoing debate on inequality in India. To decide whether India is among the world's most equal societies or the most unequal, the focus is on income and consumption. While economist Thomas Piketty counts India among the most unequal economies in terms of income distribution, World Bank calculations – the source of recent newspaper punditry – place India as the fourth most, and by some interpretations the top most, equal society in consumption.

Critics see serious problems in the data that Piketty has used. They also see serious problems in India's consumption survey data that World Bank has used. The Bank's tables on Gini coefficients are based on consumption for some countries and income for others, which is another source of criticism and confusion. Critics on both sides claim the other side has a gigo problem, and the debate continues.

This obsession with income and consumption inequality misses a crucial factor: Opportunity. Why is opportunity crucial? Because that's what people care about. Inequality of outcomes – income or consumption – is the pet subject of economists, journalists and politicians. But they would be surprised to learn that people do not care much about inequality of income and consumption. Indeed, they constantly express their preference for opportunity, and disdain for equality, by moving out of places that are havens of equality to places that have high levels of inequality and provide greater opportunity. This is true not just in India, but globally.

Bihar and Assam are the most equal states in India

as per the Gini coefficient, a measure economists often use to measure inequality. Yet, every year Biharis and Assamese move to states with much higher opportunity and inequality – Haryana, Kerala, Maharashtra, the states with the highest Gini coefficients, meaning high inequality. There is little mobility in reverse from states with high levels of inequality to Bihar and Assam. Indeed, people from Kerala migrate to work in West Asia, one of the most unequal regions in the world, in hordes. Keralaites also migrate to other parts of India – for opportunity, not equality.

People in Bihar and Assam do not blame the rich of Mumbai for their economic plight, in fact, they would all like to work for the Ambanis, Adanis and Tatas to improve their lot. They return to tell stories of opportunities, and not inequalities, that their new abodes offer.

Across India, Gini coefficients are much higher in urban areas than rural areas – indicating higher urban inequality. Yet, people move from rural areas to urban areas – to big cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai – for opportunity. This is true globally. Rural societies are more equal and offer fewer opportunities for growth while urbanisation is a sign of growth and progress.

Data on international migration also shows disdain for income (or consumption) equality, and migration to places with high opportunity. US is one of the most unequal societies in terms of income distribution in the rich world. Yet, it attracts 20% of all international migrants annually – because it offers enormous opportunities. No one wants to go to communist countries that pride themselves

on income and consumption equality, choking opportunity. The same is true of regional inequality, globally. South Africa has the highest Gini coefficient of income in the world – indicating that it has the most unequal distribution of income. It is also the country that receives most immigrants from other African countries.

We pay a lot of attention to inequalities of outcomes – such as income and wealth; but inequalities of human capital and health are far more consequential.

The cruel reality is that all men, or women, are not created equal. Some are tall, some short; some inherit genes that make them sturdy and healthy and others genes that cause poor health. Some have excellent memories and some are forgetful. Some are creative, some excel in repetitive work, and some in neither.

Inequalities at birth generally grow with age – so individuals with good health do well at school; get admission to good colleges, get degrees from institutions that become certificates of their abilities and skills and can fetch jobs with high incomes and opportunities for growth.

One of the goals of the modern state is to provide quality education and skills to all so that they can reach their optimum potential. It won't bring equality of income or consumption, but will improve the potential of all citizens to excel. If you have human capital – education, skills and good health – you have a better chance of being wise and becoming wealthy. The road to a *viksit* nation has to be paved with equality of opportunity for all; the debate on equality of outcomes is simply a distraction.

The writer teaches at Columbia University, US



Calvin & Hobbes



Prophets Of Romanticism, Love, Beauty, And Nature

Reuben Ray

The Romantic poets were a sensitive group of geniuses who broke from the classical tradition between 1780 and 1850. Their poetic expositions are widely read and researched by students in literature schools and universities around the world.

The illustrious English Romantic poets in the mainstream were William Blake, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, George Gordon Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and John Keats. A chronological comparison between early Romantics, such as Blake, Wordsworth, and Coleridge, and later Romantics, including Byron, Shelley, and Keats, offers insight into themes such as elements of nature, love,

beauty, emotion, and rebellion.

Romantic poets in the bygone era were literary harbingers; nevertheless, in reality, they were prophets of romance, love, and beauty, underlying a collective theme of rebelling against the relegation of emotion to reason, denying the bounty of nature to generate the flow of extensive industrialisation, and disbelief in the eternity of man's soul. Their poetic lineage was perpetuated through pilgrimages and spiritual journeys to immortalise the philosophy of love, beauty and elements of romanticism.

It was romance in tryst with the imagination of divine forces. Samuel



THE SPEAKING TREE

Taylor Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* emphasises the inculcation of moral values by absolving the speaker from a sense of guilt, leading to redemption and a meaningful life, and the sacredness behind our living standards. As known for his mystical insights, Coleridge intercedes: “He prayeth best, who loveth best/ All things both great and small.”

Though John Keats suffered bouts of hypochondria – love sickness, he was undeniably a sensuous poet who expressed his angelic love ever flowing for his amorous lady, Fanny Brawne. Her absence during his sickness seemed unbearable, and he lamented through the open window to nature. Living his life

under the misery of melancholia and condensation with the truth of beauty nurtured by nature, John Keats in the *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, declared: “Beauty is truth, truth beauty – that is all/ Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.” Nature was his only trusted companion.

Romanticism endures in the hearts of those who cherish love, beauty, and nature. It is an experience that revitalises the soul, much like rain breathing life into a parched landscape. The spirit of Romanticism naturally gravitates toward the timeless presence of emotion, aesthetic wonder, and the natural world. Echoing the sentiment in Keats' *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, some still hold to the idea that ‘Beauty is truth, truth beauty’ – a reflection of the enduring Romantic quest for meaning through beauty.

Sacred space



The moral to be legitimately drawn from the supreme tragedy of the bomb is that it will not be destroyed by counter-bombs even as violence cannot be by counter-violence. Mankind has to get out of violence only through nonviolence. Hatred can be overcome only by love.

MK Gandhi

THE DAILY GUARDIAN SURVEY ON ANIRUDDHACHARYA CONTROVERSY

79% of people believe that preachers shouldn't have right to issue character certificates to others

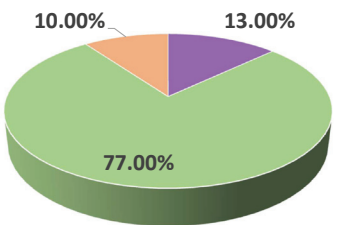
Aniruddhacharya's sexist remarks have sparked backlash, with Khushboo Patani condemning his statements as patriarchal and offensive. She clarified her criticism

was misdirected in a viral video and reaffirmed it targeted him, not Premanandji. Echoing strong public sentiment, she warned of legal

action against those spreading fake news and trolling her.

Q1.▶

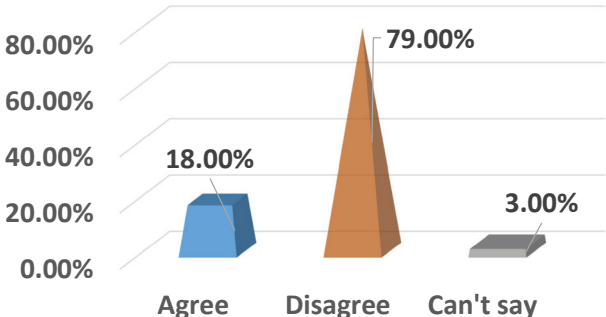
How do you view preacher Aniruddhacharya's 'Pakistan' remark?



■ Agree ■ Disagree ■ Can't say

Q2.◀

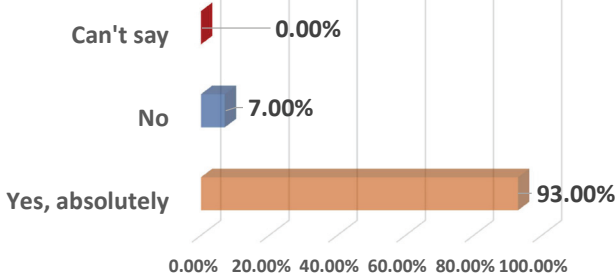
How do you view saint Prabodhanand's comment calling youth 'Modi's lap dogs'?



Agree Disagree Can't say

Q3.▶

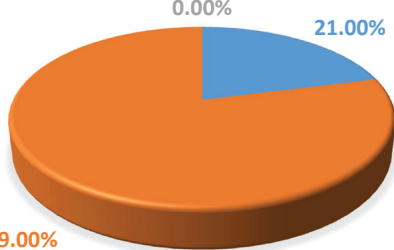
Should restrictions be placed on the immoral views of preachers and saints?



0.00% 20.00% 40.00% 60.00% 80.00% 100.00%

Q4.◀

Should preachers have the right to issue character certificates to others?



■ Yes, absolutely ■ Absolutely not ■ Can't say

THE DAILY GUARDIAN SURVEY ON JAMMU KASHMIR STATEHOOD

71% of respondents support the demand for granting full statehood to Jammu and Kashmir

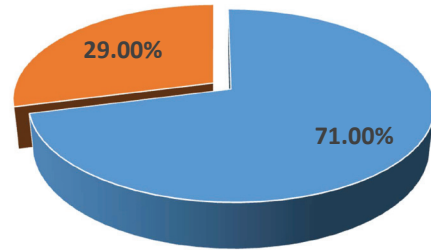
71% respondents support full statehood for Jammu and Kashmir. While 55% feel development has accelerated post Article 370,

77% believe terror attacks have reduced. 80% think statehood will enhance security. 71% are satisfied with government policies, re-

flecting broad public support for administrative and security measures in the region.

Q1.▶

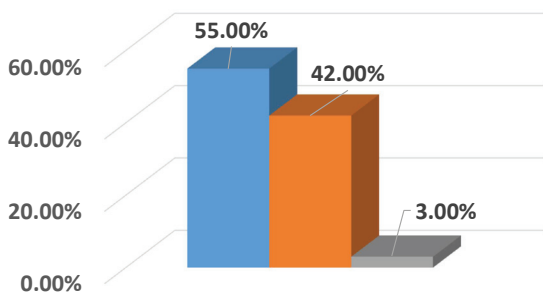
How do you view the demand for granting full statehood to Jammu and Kashmir?



■ Support ■ Oppose

Q2.◀

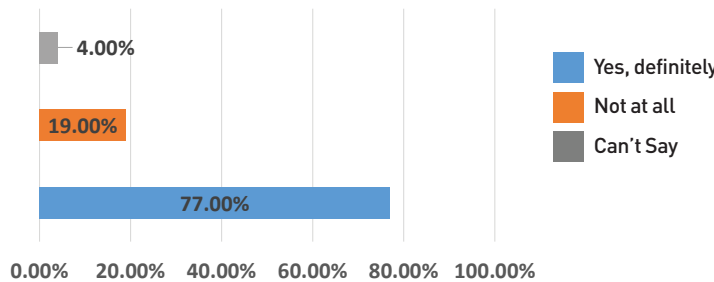
Do you think the pace of development has increased in Jammu and Kashmir after the abrogation of Article 370?



■ Yes, definitely ■ Not at all ■ Can't Say

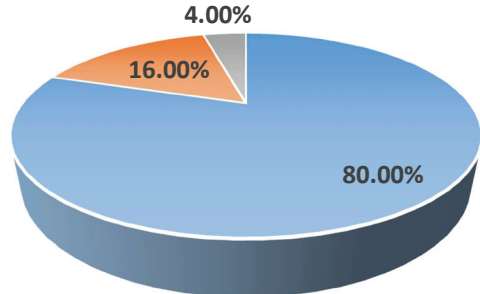
Q3.▶

Has there been a decrease in terrorist attacks in Jammu and Kashmir after the abrogation of Article 370?



Q4.◀

Will granting full statehood to Jammu and Kashmir be a correct step towards ensuring security and stability?



■ Yes, definitely ■ Not at all ■ Can't Say

Haley, Zakharova slam Trump

CONTINUED FROM P1

targeting of India "unjustified and unreasonable." A statement from the MEA emphasised that India's energy imports are driven by national needs and global market dynamics. "India began importing from Russia because traditional suppliers were diverted to Europe after the outbreak of the conflict," the ministry noted. It also accused Western nations of double standards, highlighting that the EU's trade with Russia far exceeds India's, including a record 16.5 million tonnes of LNG imported by Europe in 2024.

The MEA also pointed out ongoing US imports from Russia, such as uranium hexafluoride for nuclear energy and palladium for the EV industry. "Like any major economy, India will take all necessary measures to safeguard its national in-

terests and economic security," the spokesperson said.

According to reports, the United States and China agreed to a temporary 90-day tariff reprieve in May, slashing US tariffs from 145% to 30%, and Chinese duties from 125% to 10%.

India has maintained that its foreign and energy policies are rooted in strategic autonomy. MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal reiterated last week that "our ties with any country stand on their merit and should not be seen from the prism of a third country."

Meanwhile, Russia also issued a sharp rebuke to Washington's tightening tariff policies. Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova described US actions as part of a "neo-colonial agenda," accusing the Biden administration of using "politically motivated economic pressure" to punish countries following an

independent foreign policy.

"Sanctions and restrictions have unfortunately become a defining feature of the current historical period," Zakharova said, arguing that the US is attempting to impose its will through protectionism, undermining global trade norms and sovereignty. She emphasised that Russia remains committed to building a multipolar world order alongside partners such as BRICS nations.

The mounting tensions come amid fears that global oil prices could surge to \$200 a barrel if India halts Russian imports, severely impacting consumers and economic stability.

With no clear resolution in sight, the spat underscores growing divisions in global trade alliances and highlights the geopolitical complexities surrounding the Russia-Ukraine conflict, energy security, and multipolar diplomacy.

NDA hails Modi's leadership in Parliamentary meet

CONTINUED FROM P1

a fitting reply to terrorist attacks on its own terms, nuclear blackmail will not be tolerated and India will act precisely against terror sanctuaries sheltered under nuclear threats.

Thirdly, the resolution said that no distinction will be made between terrorist masterminds and governments that sponsor them.

The operation was also

described as symbolically significant. The resolution emphasized the cultural and emotional weight of the name Operation Sindoor, referencing the vermilion worn by married women, and noted that the attack had "removed the Sindoor from our women," which was then avenged by India's armed forces.

The NDA also credited the Modi government's ongoing military and strategic

reforms for the success of the operation. These included indigenisation, jointness in defence commands, and technological upgrades such as drone capabilities. The resolution praised the Prime Minister for giving the armed forces a "free hand" and for supporting the concept of operational freedom at a time and place of India's choosing.

In a post-operation diplomatic push, the govern-

ment sent 59 Members of Parliament, including those from the Opposition, to 32 countries to present India's perspective on the Pahalgam attack and the broader issue of state-sponsored terrorism. The NDA described this as "one of the most comprehensive global outreach efforts ever launched by India," underlining Modi's commitment to bipartisan diplomacy in matters of national interest.

It mentions that post Operation Sindoor, international support for India's position has since grown.

The United States designated TRF as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation (FTO) and Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT). A joint declaration by BRICS also condemned the Pahalgam killings and reiterated its stand for "zero tolerance for terrorism" while rejecting "double standards."

Uttarkashi tragedy

CONTINUED FROM P1

assistance. "Under the supervision of the state government, relief and rescue teams are engaged in every possible effort," he posted on X.

Adding to the chaos, a second cloudburst was reported in the Sukhi Top area of Uttarakhand later in the day. Details are awaited.

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge and party leader Rahul Gandhi also

expressed condolences and urged both state and central governments to intensify relief efforts. Gandhi appealed to Congress workers to assist local authorities in extending support to affected families. CM Dhama said the reports of "heavy damage" were extremely distressing and that all concerned agencies were on the ground. "I am in constant contact with senior officials, and the situation is being closely monitored," he said.

J&K statehood: SC hearing set

CONTINUED FROM P1

11, 2023, no steps have been taken to restore statehood," the plea states. It argues that the delay is causing serious harm to the rights of the region's residents and undermines the federal structure of the Constitution.

The petition further warns that failure to restore statehood promptly would cause "grave harm" to the federal fabric of the country.

Referring to the recent peaceful conduct of assembly elections in the region, the plea contends that the formation of a Legislative Assembly without first restoring statehood would violate the principles of federalism,

which form part of the Constitution's basic structure. It adds that, with no evident security concerns, there is no impediment to issuing a time-bound direction for the restoration of statehood. "The delay in restoration of statehood would result in a serious erosion of democratic governance in Jammu and Kashmir and would constitute a grave violation of federal principles," the application argues.

The petition also states that converting Jammu and Kashmir into two Union Territories has left the region with a diminished form of democratic governance. With assembly election results due soon, the ap-

Why Kharge, Nadda clashed in RS

CONTINUED FROM P1

know how to run the House. I've been in opposition for more than 40 years—I have more experience than them. They should take tuition from me on how to protest. This is not protest; it's chaos. In a democracy, if you swing a stick and it hits my nose, your democracy ends right there." He accused the opposition of repeatedly lowering the dignity of Parliament despite having spent 10 years in opposition.

Deputy Chairman Har-

ivansh intervened and clarified that only Parliament Security Service (PSS) personnel had entered the House, not CISF.

"No CISF personnel entered the House. They are deployed only for the security of the Parliament complex," he said.

Union Minister Kiren Rijiju also hit out at Kharge, accusing him of spreading falsehoods and demanding action for "misleading the Chair." The opposition, however, remained unconvinced, and the ruckus led to the ad-

journment of proceedings.

This controversy followed changes in Parliament's security setup. After a major security breach in December 2023, the CISF took over responsibility for the Parliament complex from May 2024, replacing the CRPF and Delhi Police.

Tuesday's clash underscored the deepening rift between the treasury and opposition benches. With tensions running high, the smooth conduct of the Monsoon Session remains uncertain.

Six aircraft engine shutdowns

CONTINUED FROM P1

needs urgent help. "During 2025, from January to July (till date), a total of 06 incidents of engine shutdown and a total of 03 incidents of May Day calls have been reported," Mohol said in a written reply on Monday. In a separate

written reply, the minister said the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau's preliminary report, published on the basis of available factual information on July 12, does not contain any conclusion about the Air India plane crash and that the probe is still in progress.

Rs 67,000-cr worth projects

CONTINUED FROM P1

approval was given for procurement of mountain radars and upgradation of Saksham/Spyder weapon system.

The procurement of mountain radars will enhance the air surveillance

capability along and across the borders in the mountainous region.

The upgradation of Saksham/Spyder system for integration with Integrated air command and control system will enhance the air defence capability, the ministry said.

EC suspends four Bengal officials

CONTINUED FROM P1

Assembly constituencies.

The poll panel also directed the State Chief Secretary to lodge FIRs against the four officers and a data entry operator and send a report on the action taken. The two EROs are West Bengal Civil Service (executive) officers.

The Election Commission said that suitable disciplinary proceedings will be initiated against Debottam Dutta Choudhury (ERO), Tathagata Mondal (AERO), Biplab Sarkar (ERO) and Sudipta Das (AERO), adding that FIRs will be lodged against them "for their actions, which potentially amount to criminal misconduct". The poll body said that FIR will also be lodged against the casual data entry operator Surojit Halder.

"The Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) of West Bengal had forwarded a report on July 29 informing about the wrongful addition of names in the electoral rolls by EROs and AEROs of Baruipur Purba and Moyna Assembly constituencies. It has been reported that the said officers have not only failed to perform duty as ERO and AERO while disposing off the applications but also violated the policy of data security while sharing their login credentials of the electoral roll database with unauthorized persons," the ECI stated in its letter to the West Bengal Chief Secretary.

Earlier, the poll panel, during a sample checking of applications from new voters in the State, had found that the two EROs accepted a large number of Form 6

from alleged fictitious voters, officials aware of the developments said.

Further enquiry revealed that the mandatory verification by the Booth Level Officers (BLOs) were also allegedly not done in those cases. The officers also provided user access to ERO Net, a centralised system that helps election officials with electoral roll management, to unauthorised users.

Commenting on the development, Bengal BJP president Samik Bhattacharya said: "We have been saying this for a long time that elections in Bengal have been reduced to a scam masterminded by the Trinamool Congress and aided by pliant Government officials. I would advise all Government officers to learn from this and not go against the Constitutional values."

DECARBONISING THE SHIPPING INDUSTRY IN INDIA

OPINION

TUHIN A SINHA AND
DR KAVIRAJ SINGH



As the world grapples with the twin imperatives of economic development and environmental sustainability, the shipping industry finds itself at a critical juncture. Globally, maritime transport accounts for nearly 3% of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, according to the Review of Maritime Transport 2023 by UNCTAD. Without significant intervention, these emissions are projected to increase by up to 130% by 2050 compared to 2008 levels, fuelled by rising trade volumes and energy-intensive shipping practices. India, with its 7,517 km-long coastline and dependence on maritime trade for nearly 95% of its

trading volume and 70% by value, therefore, must take decisive steps to ensure the sector aligns with its climate commitments and developmental goals.

GLOBAL IMPERATIVES AND INDIA'S STANDPOINT

The International Maritime Organisation (IMO) has undertaken the formidable task of steering the global shipping industry towards decarbonisation. In July 2023, the IMO revised its greenhouse gas strategy, setting a net-zero target for international shipping by or around 2050. One of the most consequential proposals emerging from this effort is a global carbon tax - pro-

posed at \$100 per tonne of CO₂ equivalent, to be levied from 2027. It is expected to generate over \$10-13 billion annually, with the funds earmarked for climate technology transfer and support for developing nations transitioning to green shipping practices.

India's stance within these negotiations has been pragmatic and cautious. At the 80th session of the IMO's Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC 80) held in July 2023, the Indian delegation called for more realistic, science-based targets that consider the unique challenges of developing countries. India proposed a more measured target of having net-zero carbon fuels constitute 5% of the global marine fuel mix by 2030. Indian representative warned against overly ambitious mandates, suggesting that they could result in "unsustainable investment decisions" and deployment of "immature technologies".

India has also opposed blanket taxation measures that could disproportionately impact developing economies. The Indian delegation to MEPC 81 in March 2024 reiterated the call for a 'Common But Differentiated Responsibility and Respective Capabilities' (CBDR-RC) approach in global shipping taxation. Such a framework, it argued, would ensure fairness while also maintaining the



Green hydrogen, ammonia, and electrification of port operations are emerging as viable solutions. Pilot projects are underway to introduce electric catamaran water taxis in cities such as Varanasi and Guwahati.

competitiveness of countries like India in global trade.

DOMESTIC ACTION: GREEN PORTS AND CLEAN SHIPPING

On the domestic front, India has launched a suite of ambitious initiatives aimed at greening its maritime sector. The Sagarmala Programme, launched in 2015, seeks to enhance port infrastructure, improve logistics efficiency, and promote coastal shipping. By increas-

ing reliance on inland and coastal waterways - which are three to four times more fuel-efficient than road transport - the programme aims to reduce logistics costs and carbon emissions.

Complementing this is the Maritime India Vision 2030, which lays out a ten-year blueprint for the holistic development of Indian ports and shipping infrastructure. One of its standout features is the 'Harit Sagar' or Green Port

Guidelines, which encourage Indian ports to adopt renewable energy, electrify cargo handling operations, reduce water consumption, and shift to cleaner fuels. According to the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, Deendayal (Kandla), Visakhapatnam, New Mangalore, and VOC Port (Tuticorin) have already begun generating renewable energy that exceeds their internal consumption.

Moreover, the Indian government has identified ten highway corridors for exclusive movement of zero-emission trucks, further integrating green mobility with port logistics.

TECHNOLOGY AND FUELS OF THE FUTURE

India is also investing in innovation and clean energy

alternatives. Green hydrogen, ammonia, and electrification of port operations are emerging as viable solutions. Pilot projects are underway to introduce electric catamaran water taxis in cities such as Varanasi and Guwahati. The Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) has also announced plans for hybrid electric Roll-on/Roll-off (Ro-Ro) vessels powered by both liquefied natural gas (LNG) and batteries.

Private sector innovation is also gathering pace. Startups like Blue Energy Motors are producing LNG-powered long-haul trucks that emit 30% less CO₂ compared to diesel counterparts. The company plans to introduce electric trucks and expand its LNG refuelling infrastructure nationwide.

These technologies, while promising, must be scaled efficiently and supported by investment and policy clarity. As highlighted by the UNCTAD Review of Maritime Transport 2023, a global transition to green fuels and infrastructure will require around \$28 billion annually through 2050. In the Indian context, such investments must be prioritised through public-private partnerships, targeted subsidies, and R&D support.

SUSTAINABILITY AS COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

Beyond environmental con-

cerns, sustainable shipping is increasingly linked to economic competitiveness. India's early commitment to sustainable practices - such as the green hydrogen mission, shore-power mandates, and electric logistics, positions it as a low-risk, forward-looking partner in global trade networks.

Indeed, as global supply chains begin to impose sustainability-linked performance standards, India's proactive green strategies may offer exporters a critical edge. Carbon border adjustment mechanisms (CBAMs) proposed by the EU and similar trade rules elsewhere make it imperative for India to act now - not just to decarbonise, but also to remain competitive.

CONCLUSION

India's maritime transition will not be easy. But with the right mix of realism and ambition, it can serve as a global model for how developing economies can tackle shipping emissions without compromising on growth. Through targeted investments in green infrastructure, support for clean technologies, and a balanced global negotiating strategy, India is steering its shipping industry towards a greener horizon - one where sustainability and economic progress can sail together.

Tubin A Sinha, National Spokesperson, BJP and Dr Kaviraj Singh, CEO & Director, Earthood

Legal accountability of AI in corporate decision-making: Who bears the risk?

OPINION

PANKAJ CHHUTTANI



In a rapidly digitising corporate India, the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) is not merely a technological evolution - it is a legal and ethical reckoning. As companies increasingly integrate AI into boardrooms and business processes, a fundamental question arises: Who is accountable when AI fails?

AI JOINS THE BOARDROOM

From drafting contracts and conducting risk assessments to vetting loan applicants and flagging regulatory breaches, AI has assumed an influential role in corporate decision-making. Indian start-ups and conglomerates alike are adopting AI-powered tools to enhance compliance efficiency, reduce costs, and mitigate human error.

However, these intelligent systems are not infallible. They function based on algorithms trained on historical data, which may be biased, outdated, or incom-

plete. This creates a potential minefield of legal and regulatory challenges when decisions made - or heavily influenced - by AI lead to financial loss, reputational damage, or regulatory non-compliance.

THE LEGAL VACUUM

Indian corporate law, particularly the Companies Act, 2013, has not yet evolved to directly address AI's role in governance. The law continues to assign fiduciary duties - such as duties of care, diligence, and good faith - to human directors and officers. These obligations are non-delegable, meaning that a board cannot escape liability by blaming faulty AI tools.

In this context, AI remains a tool - not a legal person, and therefore cannot be held independently accountable under Indian law. This leaves companies and their decision-makers fully exposed when things go wrong.

For instance, if an AI-based financial tool fails to flag a key compliance requirement, leading to SEBI penalties, the directors cannot cite algorithmic oversight as a defence. The Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) and regulators like SEBI have maintained that technological tools must be used prudently, not blindly.

THE BOARD'S

RESPONSIBILITY

This legal position places an enhanced burden on boards and compliance officers. They must now understand not only the business implications of AI tools but also the logic, limits, and biases inherent in such systems.

"Directors are increasingly expected to exercise oversight over the design and deployment of AI systems," says Saurabh Bhatnagar, a Delhi-based corporate lawyer. "They must be able to question the rationale behind AI-generated outputs, particularly when it informs a regulatory or financial ac-

tion."

This shift means that due diligence now includes algorithmic transparency - ensuring that the AI tools used are auditable, explainable, and aligned with existing compliance protocols.

As AI becomes more embedded in hiring, procurement, and investment decisions, the risk of algorithmic discrimination is also a legal minefield. Discriminatory outcomes in recruitment or customer profiling, even if unintentional, could invoke regulatory scrutiny and reputational backlash.



THE WAY FORWARD: REGULATORY REFORM AND AI GOVERNANCE

India needs a more robust legal framework to regulate the use of AI in corporate operations. Industry experts are calling for sector-specific guidelines from SEBI, RBI, and MCA that clarify the standards of care expected when using AI tools.

Suggestions include:
● Mandating AI risk audits;
● Requiring companies to

disclose AI usage in material decisions;

● Establishing a framework for algorithmic accountability and redressal. Until such reforms take shape, companies must treat AI as a high-risk strategic asset - not a black-box oracle. Human accountability must remain central, even in a tech-driven corporate ecosystem.

CONCLUSION

AI may promise speed, efficiency, and objectivity, but it does not dilute legal responsibility. In the Indian corporate landscape, the

burden of oversight still lies squarely on the shoulders of directors and officers. The law, as it stands, views AI as an assistant - not an escape clause.

As Indian boardrooms become smarter, they must also become legally sharper. The future of AI in corporate governance depends not only on innovation but on a clear-eyed recognition of who bears the risk when machines decide.

Pankaj Chhuttani, Assistant Professor, School of Law, GD Goenka University, Gurugram

Mandates of independence; Mandates of international law

OPINION

DR. RADHIKA JAGTAP

The current US administration has been very prompt and in absolutely no second thoughts, whenever it has come to imposing sanctions on individual officials working under international legal mandates, who according to it may have expressed antisemitism in their work- be it the few months ago travel ban on the members of the Office of Prosecutor at the International Criminal Court for issuing arrest warrant against Benjamin Netanyahu or the very recent sanctions on the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Occupied Palestinian Territories Francesca Albanese for coming out with a report titled "From an Economy of Occupation to an Economy of Genocide." This report has drawn larger global attention as very unapologetically it builds a nexus between the ongoing warfare in Gaza and the benefiting multinational business corporations, listing around 48 of them. In the preceding report of March 2024, Albanese became the first few voices who unequivocally used the terminology of "genocide" for Israel's actions in Gaza, following the December 2023 initiation of proceedings at the International Court of Justice by South African Government against Israel under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime

of Genocide of 1948. There have been several attempts to discredit Albanese's work, and it has been called out as antisemitic. Meanwhile, Michael Fakhri, the U.N. special rapporteur on the right to food, has commented that Israel's 78-day-long extreme blockade of Gaza constitutes "the fastest starvation campaign we've seen in modern history." Fakhri also mentioned that the mass suffering has been both "preventable" and "predictable."

The special rapporteurs and prosecution members of the ICC Chambers- they may come from various nationalities, but they do not represent any of them while holding their respective offices. Their offices are supposed to uphold international law in specific areas, and in case of the ICC, based on the statutory objectives as laid out in the Rome statute. The Rome statute provides for prosecution of international crimes, which are fundamental violations of international human rights and customary international law, also known as *jus cogens*; while the special rapporteurs on various mandates work towards the advancement of international human rights, as for the "special procedure" mechanisms under the United Nations Human Rights Council. The independent expert holders

of these mandates are in many ways defenders of the rights framework in the otherwise very statist and formalist structure of international law. Their independence, freedom of expression and an uncoercive and non-hostile reception of their work is very crucial for aspects like fact-finding and investigations on international legal issues like the world is facing currently. Without fixating much on the strong and straightforward languages that they may use in their reports, statements and investigative findings, the world community must listen to what these mandate holders have to say. Some of these independent expertise works have contributed immensely to the cognitive and progressive development of international jurisprudence, for instance, in the case of former special rapporteur James Anaya's work towards the expanding the understanding of the present day UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted in 2007. Many such other contributions have been of jurisprudential significance for historically struggling and marginalised voices in international law, as states as the ultimate lawmakers are seldom acknowledging of their human conditions. A state like the USA trying to sanction these individuals echoes of an intentional dilution of the international rule-based order and trivializes institutional protection of international rights' framework.

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Eighty years on from Hiroshima

At 8:15 a.m. on August 6, 1945, a nuclear bomb exploded just above Hiroshima, instantly killing at least 70,000 people. Another 70,000 died of injuries and radiation sickness before the year ended. Three days later, a second weapon exploded over Nagasaki, killing 40,000 on the day. In the 80 years since, nuclear weapons have not been detonated again in anger even though the possessor states have swelled from one to nine, and the number and sophistication of the weapons has increased considerably. A norm of non-use appears to have been established. However, norms – shared expectations of behaviour – are not immutable. Recent developments including hostilities involving nuclear possessors, an undermining of the global rules-based and treaties-based order, and nuclear modernisation are putting the norm of non-use under immense strain.

Lessons from 1945
Arguably, no one has worked more passionately to eliminate nuclear weapons entirely than the Hibakusha, the survivors of the atomic attacks. Their testimony created a powerful moral and ethical case against nuclear use, reminding us of the human consequences of – arguably for some – a demonstration of American resolve and technological prowess. Yet the respect that they are accorded today was hard won. Japan was under American occupation after the war, and information on the effects of the nuclear bombings was suppressed. According to one survivor from Nagasaki, shortly after the bombing, U.S. Brig Gen Thomas Farrell announced that all those affected by the attack had died and that there were no continuing effects of the bomb. Relief centres were shut down. An additional 50,000 people died by December without understanding what ailed them.

Knowledge about radiation sickness became widespread in



Priyanjali Malik
writes on politics and international relations

Japan only after a fishing boat, Fukuryu Maru, was accidentally exposed to nuclear fallout. The U.S.'s 1954 thermonuclear test, codenamed Castle Bravo, ended up twice as powerful as estimated, spreading radioactive ash well beyond the officially designated warning zone and to the vessel floating 86 miles away from the test site. All crew members fell seriously ill from acute radiation poisoning. Thus it was that nine years after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that Japan began to understand the nature of radiation sickness: the bomb killed not just by explosion, instantly, but painfully, over time. The survivors then grouped together as the Nihon Hidankyo and fanned the globe to educate people on the horrors of their experience.

It is debatable whether the norm of non-use owes more to the moral and ethical case against nuclear use made by the Hibakusha or by the logic of nuclear deterrence. 'What deters' is a question that has occupied policymakers for decades. And while the total number of nuclear weapons has fallen from their Cold War peak, today's nukes are more sophisticated and designed for use in a range of situations. Much money and effort has been spent in developing more 'useable' nukes. It is difficult to know whether to worry more about a thermonuclear weapon that could destroy a city several times over, or to fear tactical weapons that are designed to target a specific location with deadly accuracy. For 80 years we have decided that nuclear weapons are beyond the pale: any nuclear use now would let the genie out of the bottle.

The norm of non-use
Ultimately, the norm of non-use rests on a conscious decision to brand nuclear weapons as different. There is no legal basis for the circumscribing of their use. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) limits the spread of nukes; the Comprehensive

Nuclear Test Ban Treaty bans nuclear tests; neither prohibits use. (The 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons has not been signed by any nuclear possessor.) However, the NPT's exhortation to nuclear states to work towards total nuclear disarmament "in good faith" puts the weapons in a separate category. The International Court of Justice's 1996 advisory opinion on nuclear weapons constrains their use by stating that the use or threat of use "would generally be contrary" to humanitarian and other international law, even though the Court was unable to reach a clear decision on their legality. Together, these treaties shore up the norm of non-use, without legally proscribing them.

Against this backdrop, recent nuclear threats bandied about by Russia over Ukraine have severely tested the special categorisation of nukes. Closer home, during Operation Sindoor, Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared that India "will not tolerate any nuclear blackmail". A "limited" operation appears to have escalated quickly to acquire a nuclear element.

We are influenced by the Hibakusha's testimony today only because Fukuryu Maru's misfortune connected radiation sickness to nukes. It is also unlikely to be a coincidence that the Nihon Hidankyo were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2024 for their disarmament efforts after the nuclear genie reared its head in Europe. They had been nominated multiple times, but it took almost 70 years for the survivors' efforts to be recognised.

Eighty years after nuclear weapons were used in anger, we are in danger of slipping into complacency over nuclear use. It took the miscarriage of America's thermonuclear test for the truth about nuclear fallout to become widely understood. We should not wait for another misstep before the dangers of nuclear miscalculation are appreciated again.

Justice delayed yet again

Two recent verdicts speak poorly of state investigating agencies

STATE OF PLAY

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Last week, a special National Investigation Agency (NIA) court acquitted all the seven accused, including BJP MP Sadhvi Pragya Singh Thakur, in the 2008 Malegaon blasts case. Six people were killed and 95 injured in the bombing that had struck the Muslim-majority town in Maharashtra.

The case, which was investigated by two different agencies, triggered accusations of 'safron terror'. All the accused were charged by the Maharashtra Anti Terrorism Squad (ATS) in 2008 of being 'Hindutva extremists'. The trial was controversial as Rohini Salian, the former special public prosecutor, had alleged in 2015 that the government had put pressure on her, through the NIA, to "go soft" on the accused.

The case was initially probed by ATS chief Hemant Karkare, who was gunned down by terrorists during the November 26, 2008, terror attack on Mumbai. Eventually, it was handed over to the NIA.

While acquitting the seven accused, the court pointed out several lapses in the investigation and criticised the NIA for presenting 'inconclusive', 'unreliable', and 'legally inadmissible' evidence. It said that there were procedural lapses in the invocation of stringent laws such as the Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act, 1999, and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967. It added that the investigators had failed to link the motorcycle, allegedly used in the crime, to Ms. Thakur; that there were problems with witness statements; and that

there was no proof that Lt Col Prasad Purohit (retired) or the right-wing outfit, Abhinav Bharat, was linked to the blast.

In the order, Special Judge A.K. Lahoti observed, "The testimony of prosecution witnesses is riddled with material inconsistencies and contradictions. Such discrepancies undermined the credibility of the prosecution's case and fall short of establishing the guilt of the accused beyond reasonable doubt." While he said that terrorism has no religion, the Special Judge also added that a court cannot convict someone based on mere perception.

Civil society members were critical of the verdict given the allegations that it was politically driven; and also since it came on the back of another verdict acquitting all the accused in another blast case.

On July 21, the Bombay High Court acquitted all the 12 accused in the 2006 serial bomb blasts case. Seven explosions had ripped through Mumbai's local trains on the evening of July 11, 2006, killing 189 people and seriously injuring 824. The coordinated blasts had scarred the estimated 70 lakh people of Mumbai who use the local trains, often dubbed the city's lifeline, every day. Many victims feared taking the local train again.

This case too was riddled with controversies. While the Maharashtra ATS, which had conducted the probe from the beginning, claimed that the attacks were the handiwork of

the Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Students' Islamic Movement of India, several other investigating agencies, including the NIA, claimed that the Indian Mujahideen had carried out the terror attacks.

While acquitting the 12 accused, the High Court laid bare the inconsistencies, loopholes, and lapses in the probe by the Maharashtra ATS. It asked how key witness statements were recorded after an unexplained delay of 100 days. It questioned the trustworthiness and credibility of witnesses, highlighted deep flaws in both the investigation as well as prosecution, and demanded to know why the circumstantial evidence, such as call detail records, which the investigators had relied on so much, was inconclusive. It pointed out that the witness statements were delayed and inconsistent; that there were procedural lapses and coercion allegations about the confessions retrieved; that there was no proof of actual explosives used; and that the chain of custody of the recoveries was broken. The High Court also rapped the trial court for the conviction order.

The judgments on two terror cases in India have left the victims, who have had to wait for nearly two decades for verdicts, without a sense of justice. The investigations raise serious questions about India's criminal justice system and specifically about the accountability of investigating agencies. Who are the agencies answerable to, for their contradictory claims and shoddy procedures, which have allowed extremist organisations to get away with such terrible crimes in Maharashtra? And when – if at all they do – will the victims of these blasts get a sense of closure?

Bihar electoral rolls after SIR show concerning trends

Preliminary analysis hints at higher voter deletions in Muslim-majority districts and possibly high out-migration areas

DATA POINT

Sambavi Parthasarathy
Srinivasan Raman
Nitika Francis
Vignesh Radhakrishnan

On August 1, the draft electoral rolls for Bihar, following the completion of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise, were released. A total of 7.24 crore electors are part of the latest electoral rolls – over 56 lakh electors fewer than the rolls prepared in January this year. According to the Election Commission of India, the voters who are not part of the August list have died, or are registered in two locations, or have permanently migrated out of Bihar, or are untraceable.

A district-wise analysis of the August electoral rolls shows that there was a tendency of a higher number of deletions from the rolls in districts with larger Muslim populations (2011 Census). **Chart 1** plots the difference in the number of electors in the August rolls compared to the January rolls, on the horizontal axis. This serves as a measure of deletions from the January rolls. On the vertical axis, we have plotted the districts' Muslim population share. In essence, we have plotted Muslim population against deletion in the SIR.

The chart shows a moderate positive correlation (Pearson correlation $r \approx 0.43$), indicating that districts with a higher Muslim population generally saw more deletions. But confirming whether Muslims were disproportionately deleted in the revised rolls calls for a more granular analysis.

On the other hand, there is negative correlation ($r \approx -0.46$) in the change in electors compared to the share of Scheduled Caste (SC) population, district-wise (**Chart 2**). That is, districts with a higher SC population tend to have lower number of deletions. However, the earlier note of caution applies to this case as well.

A district-wise analysis of the August electoral rolls also shows that, in general, the higher the possible number of out-migrants from a district, the more the number of deletions from the roll. This confirms one of the ECI's reasons for the deletions – out-migration.

We used female turnout relative to the electorate in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections as a proxy to measure district-wise out-migration in Bihar. We did this because, in 2024, Bihar stood out among the States that had a higher female-to-male voters ratio, despite having a lower female-to-male electorate ratio (**Chart 3**). This means that in Bihar, more women than men turned out to vote in absolute numbers even though there were more registered male electors. While there might be other factors explaining this gendered variation, the difference suggests that fewer men were available to vote despite being registered. Historically, Bihar is one of the largest sources of out-migration, which could explain the lower male turnout.

Chart 4 plots the district-wise 'out-migration index' on the vertical axis. This compares women's share among all voters (male plus female) to their share among all electors in the 2020 polls*. A positive value indicates more women voters turned out to vote in comparison to men despite higher male elector registration numbers. This is what we use as a proxy for higher out-migration. Chart 4 also plots the difference in the number of electors on the horizontal axis. In essence, we plot out-migration against deletion in the SIR.

The trend line shows that there is a moderate positive correlation ($r \approx 0.40$). This means that in districts with higher out-migration, there seems to be more deletion of electors. However, this does not mean that deletions occurred exactly along gender lines, to remove possible male migrants from the rolls. In a subsequent Data Point, we will examine the deletions further in light of these findings.

Troubling correlations

The data for the charts were sourced from the Election Commission of India and the 2011 Census

Chart 1: Difference between number of electors in August and January rolls (in %) vs. share of Muslims (%) in Bihar's districts

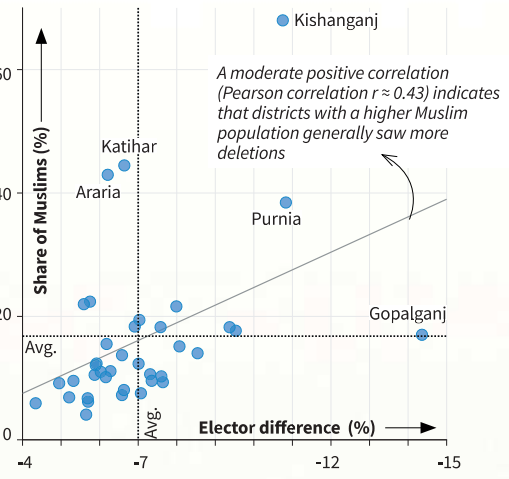


Chart 3: Ratio of female-to-male electors (eligible voters) against the ratio of female-to-male voters (turnout)

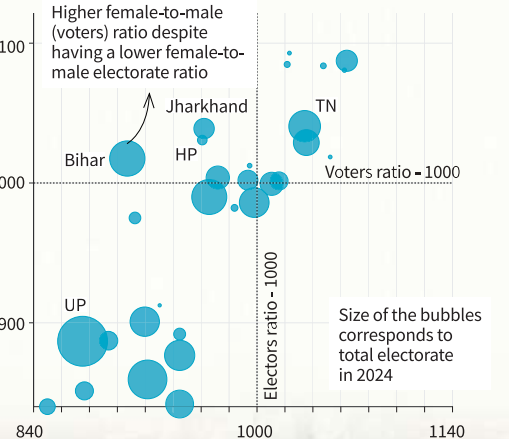


Chart 2: Difference between number of electors in August and January rolls (in %) against share of SCs in Bihar's districts (in %)

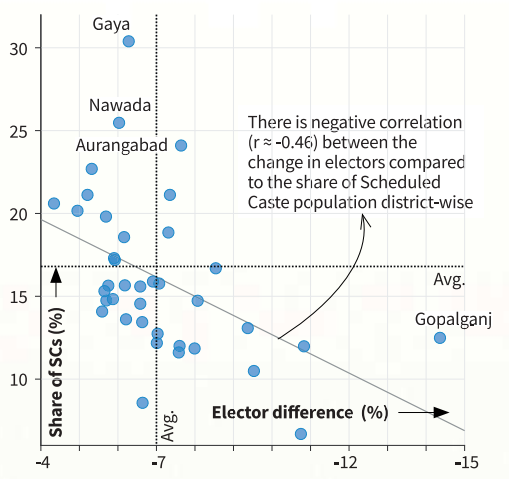
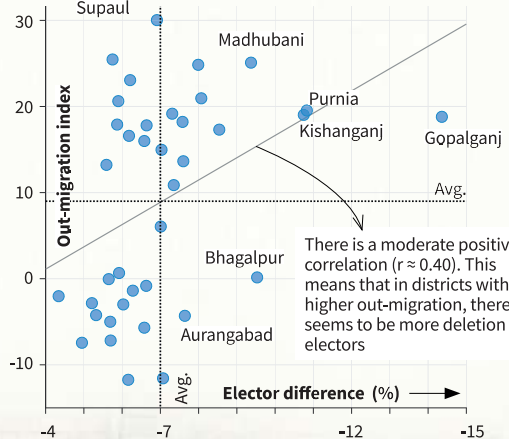


Chart 4: Difference between number of electors in Aug. and Jan. rolls (in %) against 'out-migration index' in Bihar's districts



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The **Hindu**

FIFTY YEARS AGO AUGUST 6, 1975

Police raid 'bogus' crossword puzzle firms

New Delhi, Aug. 5: The office premises of 12 "bogus" firms allegedly cheating a large number of innocent persons through false crossword puzzle contests were to-day raided by the Crime Branch of the Delhi Police in different parts of the city. "Proprietors" of two such firms, Chander Prakash of Rani Bagh and Sarinder Kumar of Anand Nagar were arrested on charges of cheating, according to a press note issued by the Delhi Police. The modus operandi of these racketeers was to collect the postal addresses of a large number of people, the press note said. The "firm" would prepare a complete list of these people with their postal addresses and despatch literature regarding the crossword puzzle contest. For the first second and third prize winners, attractive articles such as motor cycles, tape recorders and transistors were offered as prizes. The puzzle contest would be so simple that anyone would be able to solve it without much mental exercise. Once the contestant despatched his puzzle entry he would fall in the trap of the racketeer. In due course of time the firm would inform all the contestants that they had won the first prize. All the winners were asked to send Rs. 50 as licence fee package and postal charges to enable the firm to despatch transistors to firms. In fact, a very inferior quality locally manufactured transistor would be sent to each one of them by VPP for Rs. 125. Invariably, the contestant would have already shelled out a sum of Rs. 48 to take delivery of the prize. He would thus be cheated by over Rs. 100 as the cost of the transistor will not be more than Rs. 70 to 73.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO AUGUST 6, 1925

Gandhiji on Ayurvedic physicians

Cawnpore, Aug. 5: The All-India Ayurveda Mahamandal has passed a resolution protesting against Gandhiji's remarks on Ayurvedic physicians, in a recent issue of 'Young India', that the majority of them are mere quacks and have no humility in them. The Mahamandal regrets that the statement should have emanated from the President of the very body (the Congress) which every year urges that the indigenous system of medicine should be revived and encouraged throughout the country.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Arms funding for Ukraine by certain Nordic nations

500 In \$ million. Sweden, Denmark, and Norway will jointly fund a major U.S. weapons package for Ukraine. The support includes Patriot air defence systems, anti-tank weapons, ammunition, and spares. Sweden alone is contributing \$275 million. AFF

Acres of crops submerged in Punjab after heavy rains

20,000 In acres. The worst-hit subdivision was Fazilka. Farmers blamed clogged drains and inadequate pre-monsoon preparation. In some villages like Tahilwala Bodla, over 1,500 acres were affected, prompting road blocks. PTI

Japan records hottest temperature in its history amid heatwave

41.8 In degrees Celsius. It was recorded in Isesaki, Japan on August 5. The previous national record, set just a week earlier, stood at 41.2 degree Celsius in the Hyogo region. The extreme heat has led to more than 38,000 being hospitalised for heatstroke and 18 deaths. AFF

Lives lost in Himachal Pradesh since the onset of monsoon

192 Since June 20, the State has witnessed a sharp rise in fatalities amid ongoing monsoon devastation. Of these, more than 100 fatalities were from rain-related disasters like landslides and flash floods, while 86 were in road accidents. The estimated losses exceed ₹1,750 crore. ANI

Number of bird injuries in four days across Delhi

250 As the skies fill with kites ahead of Independence Day, wildlife groups in Delhi have responded to nearly 300 distress calls. Daily rescue operations averaged 50 birds, including pigeons, parrots, and even peacocks. PTI
COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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How should money laundering be tackled?

What did the Finance Minister report with respect to the number of cases under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act? What are the three stages through which money is laundered? How will the Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement help to stop illegal transfer of money?

EXPLAINER

C. B. P. Srivastava

The story so far:

A report submitted by the Finance Minister in the Rajya Sabha states that 5,892 cases were taken up by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) 2002, since 2015. Of these cases, only 15 convictions have yet been ordered by special courts. The government claims that investigations have been initiated in more or less all cases, and that Enforcement Case Information Reports (ECIRs) have been issued to initiate proceedings. However, these figures raise two important aspects. First, that the number of convictions vis-a-vis total cases is far from satisfactory and secondly, that money laundering cases have been rising signalling that the government has not been able to check such financial crimes.

What is a laundromat?

The term is said to have originated from the use of laundromats by organised crime syndicates in the U.S. as cover for their crimes and under-the-table dealings. A laundromat is an all-purpose financial vehicle. It may be set up by a bank or any other company engaged in providing financial services. However, it can also help clients launder the proceeds of crime, hide ownership of assets, embezzle funds from companies, evade taxes or currency restrictions and move money offshore.

How is money laundered?

Money laundering, as defined under Section 3 of PMLA, is an act through which processes or activities connected to the proceeds of crime are concealed, possessed, acquired, or used and projected as untainted property or claiming to be untainted property.

In the first stage called placement, the launderer introduces money into the



ISTOCKPHOTO

financial system which might be done by breaking up large amounts of cash into smaller sums (a process called smurfing). In the second stage, that is layering, money is shifted to other locations through investments and transactions. And finally in the integration stage, the laundered money is brought into the financial system through real estate, business or asset formation etc. The Supreme Court in *P. Chidambaram versus Enforcement Directorate* (2019) held that hiding the illegal source of money affects the financial system and also the sovereignty and integrity of the nation. Other impacts of money laundering include expansion of money supply which might prove detrimental to monetary stability of the country

ultimately impacting inflation. Moreover, it may also affect trading, according to the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).

When about the PMLA?

In line with the UN Political Declaration and Global Programme of Action (adopted by the UN General Assembly in February 1990), the law has been made to prevent money laundering and to confiscate the property involved or obtained. The most significant part of the statute is that the burden of proof is on the accused. Another feature is that the ECIR is sufficient to initiate proceedings which has also been reiterated by the Supreme Court in *Vir Bhadra Singh versus ED* (2017) – that no FIR is required to initiate proceedings under the Act. The

only requirement as per the top court was that a scheduled offence (offence against the state) be essential for the offence of money laundering. However, despite being such a stringent law, the offence has become rampant.

What are the issues to be addressed?

The number of money laundering cases is seriously increasing, questioning the efficacy of the implementation of the law. Moreover, on many occasions, the law has been abused by authority which has been seen and referred to by the Supreme Court as well. In *Vijay Madanlal Chaudhury versus Union of India* (2022) the Court held that to initiate prosecution under Section 3 of the PMLA, registration as scheduled offence is a pre requisite but for initiating attachment of property under Section 5, there need not be a pre-registered criminal case. This view has been very often misused by authorities with politically motivated intentions.

It is important that the authorities follow the recommendations of the FATF and ensure that money laundering cases are handled with care and caution so that misuse could be checked, and genuine cases reported and investigated properly to enhance the rate of conviction. Money laundering is a serious offence as it has a direct linkage with terror activities and is a major source of terror financing. Instead of political motives, the law should be used to address the issues and concerns involved in a genuine manner. Though India has signed the Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA) with about 85 countries, which helps to check money laundering, things are not yet in the right direction and much needs to be done. These agreements promote the exchange of financial and tax-related information between tax authorities of participating countries. This facilitates the enforcement of tax regulations and helps prevent illegal activities like tax evasion and money laundering.

C. B. P. Srivastava is President of the Centre for Applied Research in Governance.

THE GIST

Money laundering, as defined under Section 3 of PMLA, is an act through which processes or activities connected to the proceeds of crime are concealed, possessed, acquired, or used and projected as untainted property or claiming to be untainted property.

The number of money laundering cases is seriously increasing, questioning the efficacy of the implementation of the law.

Though India has signed the Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA) with about 85 countries, which helps to check money laundering, things are not yet in the right direction and much needs to be done.

How is China extending its policing network overseas?

What are the joint patrols under the 2017 China-Croatia Agreement on Police Cooperation for?

Anushka Saxena

The story so far:

On July 16, the Chinese Ministry of Public Security (MPS) announced that an eight-member police team was despatched to Croatia for a “joint patrol mission.” This would be the sixth joint patrol under the 2017 China-Croatia Agreement on Police Cooperation.

What are these joint patrols for?

As the MPS itself highlighted, officers from China and Croatia have formed mixed patrol units to address “the safety concerns of Chinese tourists in Croatia.” The Chinese Ambassador to Croatia, Qi Qianjin, said that in 2024, 2,50,000 such tourists visited Croatia, up 41% year-on-year. A similar patrol was launched this time last year, and they operated in Croatian cities such as Zagreb, Dubrovnik, Zadar etc. At the time, it was

said that the patrols were to address the “safety-related concerns” of not just Chinese tourists, but also Chinese citizens and overseas Chinese people in Croatia.

What about other European nations?

The Croatian project is not a one-off endeavour of the Chinese state. Under its 2014 Operation, ‘Fox Hunt’, and the subsequent 2015 umbrella project ‘Sky Net’, the party-state has developed extensive policing and surveillance networks both within and beyond China. As part of ‘Sky Net’, joint police patrolling initiatives have been launched with Serbia, Italy and Hungary. Three month-long patrols have already been conducted in Serbia in 2019, 2023, and 2024. In Hungary, the Qingtian County Public Security Bureau has gone as far as creating ‘police service centres’ in the country. Concerns surrounding the creation of Chinese ‘service centres’ led Italy to suspend joint police patrols.

What is China aiming for?

The freedom accorded to Chinese police mobility in countries abroad has shown two things – first, that there is potential for officers to arrest Chinese dissidents abroad, and second, that their unchecked operations can lead to the establishment of police stations across the world.

It was discovered in 2023 that China operated two stations in the cities of Amsterdam and Rotterdam in the Netherlands. The-then Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson said that these ‘service centres’ were merely venues to assist overseas Chinese nationals to renew their driving licences and receive physical check-ups for that purpose. Around the same time, another media investigation said that the Chinese police service centre contacted a Chinese Dutch citizen who questioned Beijing’s version of the 2020 Galwan Valley clashes with India. If true, there has been an obvious effort by covert Chinese operatives to target dissidents.

In April 2023, the FBI arrested two operatives from a similar ‘service centre’ affiliated with the MPS in Manhattan’s Chinatown in the U.S. The Justice Department charged them with conspiracy to act as agents of the PRC government, and obstruction of justice for destroying evidence of their communications with an MPS official.

How are countries dealing with this?

The crackdown on covert operations of the MPS abroad seems to directly correlate with a particular nation’s contemporary relations with China. In the U.S., Chinese espionage has been a topic of grave concern for a while. But as access to Chinese tourists, academics and officials visiting the U.S. has become restricted amid trade related tensions, the discovery of such covert operations has led U.S. authorities to take public action.

But in places like Mongolia, Serbia and Croatia, the policing programme, so far, has yielded no public investigations. These nations boast of enhancing economic and security ties with China. As long as ties with Beijing focus on resolving economic tensions and technological disputes, the issue of transnational repression is likely to take a back seat – unless the degree of surveillance rises to the level that it harms national and/or European security.

Anushka Saxena is with The Takshashila Institution.

THE GIST

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Editor's
TAKE

A boost to India's
'Act East Policy'

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr's first state visit to India marks a key moment in the 75-year India-Philippines partnership

India has emerged as a potent regional power in the Indian subcontinent and has successfully built connections with several countries in the region. Its "Act East" policy has reaped rich dividends and has forged alliances with ASEAN countries. Philippine President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr's state visit to India should be seen in this light. In a friendly diplomatic gesture marking the 75th anniversary of ties between the two nations, the Philippine President is on a five-day state visit to India from August 4 to 8, 2025. This is his first visit to India as President and comes at a time of deepening regional realignments and growing convergence between New Delhi and Manila. The visit signals a shared intent to strengthen cooperation across strategic, economic, and cultural spheres, and gives fresh momentum to a bilateral relationship that has remained steady, if understated, for decades. President Marcos's visit follows closely after a historic joint naval operation in the South China Sea – the first of its kind – where Indian warships sailed alongside Philippine vessels within the Philippines' Exclusive Economic Zone. This symbolic and strategic cooperation underlines a new chapter in defence ties, particularly as the Philippines seeks to modernise its armed forces amid rising regional tensions.

India, having already supplied BrahMos supersonic missile systems in a landmark \$375 million deal, is now expected to explore further military cooperation, including technology transfers, coastal surveillance, and joint patrols. Beyond defence, the agenda during the visit covers a wide arc – from trade and investment to science, education, and cultural exchange. In recent years, bilateral trade has crossed the \$3 billion mark, with India exporting pharmaceuticals, IT services, engineering goods, and textiles, while importing electronics and minerals from the Philippines. Diplomatic ties between the two countries date back to November 1949, followed by the Treaty of Friendship in 1952. India's growing stature in Asia and the Philippines' strategic importance converged in the framework of India's "Look East" policy, which later evolved into the more dynamic "Act East" policy under Prime Minister Modi – a policy that receives a significant boost from President Marcos's visit. For India, the Philippines is a key partner in its Indo-Pacific vision. Strategically located at the maritime crossroads of Southeast Asia, the Philippines sits adjacent to key shipping routes and plays a vital role in shaping the balance of power in the South China Sea – one of the world's most contested and economically critical waterways. Moreover, it shares India's security concerns and is equally wary of China becoming a dominant force in the South China Sea. In recent years, both nations have voiced support for international law, particularly the 2016 arbitration ruling that invalidated China's expansive maritime claims. The Philippines is an indispensable node in India's outreach to ASEAN and its broader Indo-Pacific strategy. India and the Philippines are discovering a compelling logic to walk together – not merely as friends from the past, but as partners shaping the future of the Indo-Pacific.

PIC TALK



Ties of love sparkle bright in Delhi's festive lanes. PHOTO: PANKAJ KUMAR

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URBAN FLOODS REVEAL
RECKLESS ENCROACHMENT

The editorial on the cities turning into lakes (5-8-25) conveys the concern of every citizen living in such makeshift lakes. The process of reclaiming water areas for the expansion of townships has been taking place since the pre-Independence era. But with the speed and scale now having assumed unimaginable proportions, the magnitude of the issue has become a matter of national concern.

The situation is being encashed by a syndicate of politicians, realtors, and officials, leaving people to face the consequences on their own. When public pressure mounts, some projects – again lucrative – are taken up, usually haphazardly planned, lacking quality, and failing to offer lasting solutions. Most water bodies have been converted into colonies, gated

communities with skyscrapers, industrial estates, or institutions owned by powerful individuals. India has enough brilliant minds and technocrats to propose and execute lasting solutions – including effective drainage and water storage systems. Natural drains should be identified, protected, and their functioning studied globally for implementation here.

At least 50 per cent of the cost of relief work should be recovered from those who illegally occupied water areas. Officials who granted permissions must also bear accountability. Statutory provisions should be enacted to revive and preserve existing water bodies. People's committees must be formed to safeguard these natural assets from commercial exploitation.

A G RAJMOHAN | ANANTAPUR

Please send your letter to the letters@dailypioneer.com. In not more than 250 words. We appreciate your feedback.

Biofuel Feedstocks: Current Status, Policies, and the Need for Reform

Exploring the promise and pitfalls of biofuels, this piece highlights current feedstocks, policy challenges, sustainability concerns and the urgent need for systemic reform



NUTAN
KAUSHIK

The Promise and the Challenge of Biofuels

Biofuels have become a critical component of global efforts to decarbonize transportation and reduce reliance on fossil fuels. Central to this transition are biofuel feedstocks – the raw materials used to produce bioethanol, biodiesel, renewable diesel, and aviation biofuels. Currently, the dominant feedstocks include first-generation crops such as corn, sugarcane, soy, rapeseed, and palm oil, which are energy-dense but raise sustainability concerns. On the other hand, used cooking oil (UCO), waste animal fats, and lignocellulosic biomass offer more sustainable alternatives, but their supply is limited. According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), the availability of waste and residue feedstocks is constrained globally, and large-scale production of cellulosic biofuels is still nascent despite decades of R&D.

Growing Demand and Feedstock Bottlenecks

Demand for biofuels continues to surge. IEA estimates project that global biofuel production will grow by 30 per cent between 2023 and 2028, reaching nearly 200 billion liters. Much of this growth will be driven by renewable diesel and sustainable aviation fuel, particularly in the United States, European Union, Brazil, and Indonesia. However, this trajectory implies a sharp increase in feedstock demand, with projections suggesting over 700 million tonnes of feedstock may be required by 2030. This creates a growing mismatch between biofuel policy ambitions and available sustainable biomass, underscoring the urgent need to diversify feedstocks and reform policies to promote more resilient supply chains.

Biofuel Policy in the United States: Progress and Limitations

In the United States, biofuel policy is primarily governed by the Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS), introduced through the Energy Policy Acts of 2005 and 2007. It mandates blending levels of up to 36 billion gallons per year by 2022, including significant volumes from advanced and cellulosic sources. Yet, cellulosic biofuels have consistently fallen short of their targets due to economic and technical hurdles. Recent US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) updates have raised annual Renewable Identification Number (RIN) targets for cellulosic and biomass-based diesel fuels, with 2025 targets including 1.38 billion RINs for cellulosic biofuels and over 4.45 billion gallons for biomass diesel. However, compliance has been challenged by small refinery exemptions, volatile market signals, and an underdeveloped supply of advanced feedstocks. To address these gaps, the US biofuel industry has pushed for stronger mandates. In April 2025, industry coalitions proposed a biomass-based diesel blending target of 5.25 billion gallons for 2026 – up from 3.35 billion in 2025. EPA has also proposed assigning lower RIN values to imported fuels (50 per cent) compared to domestic feedstocks (100 per cent), a move aimed at enhancing national energy security and incentivising local production. Nonetheless, critics argue that the policy still favors conventional feedstocks and fails to provide sufficient support for truly low-carbon alternatives like algae, agricultural residues, or woody biomass.

The European Union's Sustainability-Focused Approach

The European Union has taken a more sustainability-centered approach. The Renewable Energy Directive (RED) initially aimed for a 10 per cent renewable energy share in transport fuels by 2020, later expanded under RED II and RED III. The EU has implemented stringent sustainability criteria to reduce the indirect land-use change (ILUC) impacts associated with biofuel crops. As a result, the EU is gradually phasing out palm oil and soybean-based biodiesel due to their links to deforestation and biodiversity loss. Increasingly, the focus is shifting toward



advanced biofuels derived from municipal waste, agricultural residues, and non-edible crops.

India's Ethanol Revolution and Global Leadership

India presents a contrasting but instructive example. The country has aggressively expanded its ethanol blending program, moving from 5 per cent in 2014 to nearly 20 per cent by 2025, facilitated by policy incentives, guaranteed procurement, and improved sugarcane productivity. According to Indian Government reports and media sources like The Times of India, this transition has saved substantial foreign exchange and reduced vehicular emissions. India is also promoting non-food feedstocks such as jatropha and sweet sorghum for biodiesel, although adoption has lagged behind expectations due to agronomic and economic constraints. Importantly, India spearheaded the launch of the Global Biofuels Alliance during its G20 presidency in 2023, aiming to create harmonised sustainability standards and support R&D collaboration among member countries.

Amity University's Contribution to Biofuel Innovation

Amity University is at the forefront of biofuel research and innovation, contributing to India's clean energy mission. Across its campuses, researchers are working on second-generation biofuels derived from agricultural residues, microalgae, and industrial waste to produce ethanol, biodiesel, and biohydrogen.

Amity has developed technologies in microbial fermentation for lignocellulosic ethanol production, biogas generation from agro-waste, and enzymatic transesterification for biodiesel. Collaborative projects with industry and international agencies have focused on valorization of biowaste, including algal biomass for aviation biofuels. Multiple patents filed by Amity researchers on novel biofuel production methods, alongside high-impact publications, demonstrate its unique contributions in sustainable energy research. These initiatives align with India's ethanol blending targets and global efforts to accelerate the transition to low-carbon fuels.

Sustainability Concerns and Environmental Risks

Nevertheless, challenges abound, particularly in emerging economies where governance mechanisms to ensure sustainable sourcing are still developing. Reports from investigative journalism and non-profit groups, such as a 2024 Associated Press exposé, highlight deforestation in Indonesia's Papua and Kalimantan provinces where vast tracts of forest are being cleared for sugarcane ethanol plantations. Such land-use changes could release over 300 million tonnes of CO2 – undermining the very climate benefits biofuels aim to deliver. These

cases exemplify the need for better land-use monitoring, lifecycle carbon accounting, and binding sustainability regulations at both national and international levels.

Needed Policy Reforms for a Sustainable Future

To close the gap between biofuel potential and reality, several policy reforms are necessary. First, Governments should prioritize investment in advanced feedstock supply chains and associated technologies. This includes supporting R&D, pilot projects, and scale-up funding for cellulosic ethanol, biomass-to-liquid fuels (BTL), and algae-based biofuels. Tiered blending mandates – where higher incentives are provided for low-carbon feedstocks – can redirect market demand away from conventional crops toward waste and residue-based options.

Second, sustainability safeguards must be strengthened. Lifecycle emissions, including ILUC, must be factored into carbon accounting. Land-use monitoring systems such as satellite-based platforms and blockchain-based traceability tools should be deployed to ensure compliance and transparency. Such systems are already being piloted in the EU and could be adopted globally via multilateral agreements or platforms like the Global Biofuels Alliance.

Third, market signals must be improved. This includes reforming the RIN system in the US to provide price stability, phasing out small refinery exemptions that distort the market, and introducing price floors for advanced biofuels to de-risk investment. Expanding the collection and aggregation of waste oils and residues can also increase feedstock availability, especially in urban settings. Additionally, marginal or degraded lands should be utilised for cultivating non-edible energy crops like miscanthus, switchgrass, and pongamia.

Aligning Ambition with Action

International cooperation will be key. Harmonised sustainability standards, data-sharing, and capacity-building in the Global South can accelerate the shift to sustainable biofuels without repeating past mistakes. The Global Biofuels Alliance, with India, Brazil, the US, and other major players at the helm, can play a pivotal role in this transformation. It offers a platform for aligning targets, certifying practices, and coordinating investment in next-generation biofuel pathways.

In conclusion, the future of biofuels hinges on the successful deployment of sustainable feedstocks and the smart design of policies that reward low-carbon, high-impact solutions. First-generation feedstocks will continue to play a role in the short term, but their environmental and social costs limit long-term scalability. The next frontier lies in expanding advanced feedstocks, enforcing robust sustainability norms, and fostering international alignment to ensure that biofuels serve as a genuine solution in the global climate and energy transition.

SUSTAINABILITY
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ENSURE
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TRANSPARENCY

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Modi's 'Charcha' under scrutiny

I am writing this under the shadow of Irving Berlin's quote – "Never hate a song that has sold half a million copies." In what can only be called an irony, PM Modi's *Pariksha Pe Charcha* has officially entered the Guinness World Records for the "most people registered on a citizen engagement platform in one month", with a staggering 3.53 crore valid registrations on the MyGov platform. That being so, I am nobody to question the statistic. But, as they say, "Statistics don't lie – but they don't sit well either."

Modi, as we know, does not exhibit a propensity for *charcha* (discussion) with anyone. Hence, his eagerness to engage with students raises eyebrows. He is, after all, known for possessing a Master's in "Entire Political Science", a subject that does not exist in Gujarat University's curriculum.

Equally ironic is the fact that under the BJP's watch, a prestigious exam like NEET could not be conducted fairly. Other competitive exams, too, have been mired in allegations – from paper leaks to harassment of girl students. The purported aim of *Pariksha Pe Charcha* is to reduce exam stress. But the reality is far from Modi's stage-managed dialogues with students and parents. A Prime Minister with no verifiable formal education ought not to guide millions of aspirants. *Physician, heal thyself.*

AVINASH GODBOLEY | MADHYA PRADESH

Indian Football eyes revival

Indian football direly requires a fresh impetus and new direction. Therefore, whether or not newly appointed head coach Khalid Jamil will meet the expectations of lakhs of fans is a matter of speculation.

Jamil has a very good track record as a coach, but he will soon learn that coaching Indian football is altogether a different ball game – unlike managing Aizawl FC or Jamshedpur FC.

India has performed poorly in the Asia Cup qualifiers so far, and the only consoling factor is that under Jamil, the fortune of the country's football can only look up. The Central Asian Football Association (CAFA) Nations Cup in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan will be the first step for Jamil, where defending champions Iran and Tajikistan will pose a tough challenge for India before the big double-header Asia Cup qualifiers against Singapore in October.

Having represented India in 40 matches as a midfielder, the new coach should know well that football is all about tactics and team effort. The first Indian to coach India after Savio Medeira in 2011-12, Jamil's grass-roots connection will be a big boost when he takes control of the "Blue Tigers" – the Indian national football team.

GANAPATHI BHAT | AKOLA

Test Cricket triumphs again

Even those cricket pundits who keep reiterating that Test cricket is fast fading would have been on the edge of their seats, biting their nails with adrenaline gushing – watching India and England play one of the most thrilling Test matches ever in the history of cricket!

The morning session of the fifth day of the last Test of this extraordinary series had everything – the tension, the pressure, thrill, chill, and suspense that even ODIs and T20s don't often have! Siraj, the bowler who shed tears in the Lord's tragedy, cried with joy at the Oval as he took the final wicket, taking his team to a historic win and levelling the series with pride. This young team, led by the dynamic Shubman Gill, is sure to stay for long, and the experience they have gained in England is sure to yield more success in future. Along with both teams, it was Test cricket that truly won. Whether it was Leeds, Edgbaston, Lord's, Manchester or the Oval, there was never a dull moment, with players from both teams displaying their best. Even injured players – Pant, Bashir, and Woakes – ignoring their pain, fought like warriors for their respective teams! The series, especially the Oval Test, will be remembered forever. As the BBC puts it – none will match what we have witnessed over the past seven weeks. What a series!

M PRADYU | KANNUR

Bridging the green divide with social impact assessment

A truly sustainable city must combine ecological health and social fairness, not just display charging stations. To reduce the growing green divide, urban planners must include Social Impact Assessments in all green infrastructure projects to guarantee community welfare



HEMANGI SINHA

Sweeping sustainability projects in India often privilege elites while bulldozing the poor. Only 2 per cent of Mumbai’s population will be served by the 29-km Coastal Road (₹13,000-cr), which necessitates recovering about 0.9 km² of coastline and is “disrupting the livelihoods of coastal fishing communities” in addition to damaging tidal ecosystems. In Delhi, hundreds of slum dwellers have already been removed without finding new homes as a result of simultaneous eviction drives and “green” parks along the Yamuna River. In a similar vein, almost 80 per cent of the funds allocated by India’s Smart Cities Mission go to small settlements, which make up around 5 per cent of the city’s total size. This has the effect of gentrification, leading to slum clearances and rent rises. These injustices are a reflection of global trends.

True green development, according to critics, must prioritise the community. Together with strong anti-eviction measures like rent controls, guaranteed affordable housing, community land trusts, and local stewardship, parks should be co-designed with the community. As an example, consider Washington, DC’s 11th Street Bridge Park, whose planners incorporated homeowner cooperatives and tenant safeguards into the design. Such inclusive, anti-displacement tactics are crucial, according to experts, to guarantee that climate-friendly projects benefit long-term residents rather than displacing them.

India’s Urban Greening Schemes: AMRUT (started in 2015) and Swachh Bharat Mission (2014), two of India’s premier urban missions, also presented themselves as sustainability initiatives. In 500 cities, AMRUT (Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation) promised improved green spaces, water systems, and sewers. The goal of Swachh Bharat by 2019 was to establish a “India free of open defecation.” But in both cases, the high standards have often not been met.

- **Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban):** The government declared the nation ODF by the 2019 deadline, although surveys conducted on the ground refute that assertion. Critics, including seasoned journalists, point to

TO REDUCE THE GROWING GREEN DIVIDE, URBAN PLANNERS MUST INCLUDE SOCIAL IMPACT ASSESSMENTS (SIAS) IN ALL GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

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prominent corruption: entire towns had ghost infrastructure, supplies and doors were stolen, and restrooms “exist[ed] only on paper.” A ₹540 crore scam was discovered by one investigation in Madhya Pradesh alone, where 4.5 lakh promised restrooms were never constructed. It was discovered that many public restrooms were either located adjacent to garbage dumps or were inoperable (lacked a water supply). To put it briefly, the objective was essentially rendered untenable due to “poor implementation and widespread corruption,” turning it into “a political slogan.”

- **AMRUT:** AMRUT, which was formerly praised for saving infrastructure, is also displaying flaws. Opposition leaders openly call it “a victim of corruption,” alleging that labour has been done “just for paperwork” and that funds have been embezzled. Projects to address flooding and water-logging have even fallen short. For instance, Sirsa, Haryana, saw worsening waterlogging despite officials spending ₹40 crore on drainage lines under AMRUT. The situation varies throughout India: numerous municipalities have abandoned AMRUT programs. Due to impending deadlines, 163 projects in Kerala totalling about ₹900 crore were “way behind schedule.” Out of the fourteen planned sewage treatment

plants, only two were finished. Central grants could be lost if construction isn’t completed on time, and local governments would be responsible for paying for it. In short, AMRUT’s headline targets are far from achieved, and its rollout has largely benefited contractors rather than citizens.

- **Smart Cities Mission:** The goal of this ₹2-lakh-crore program was to use green and tech projects to change 100 cities. However, as of April 2025, government statistics showed that only 7,549 of the 8,067 tendered projects had been completed, leaving 518 projects (worth ₹13,142 crore) unfinished. Parks and transit improvements are promised in several of the unbuilt projects. According to observers, finished “smart” initiatives frequently benefit the wealthy (upmarket neighbourhoods, IT centres), while the impoverished reap little rewards.

The key findings are: Common problems that arise in all of these projects include corruption, a lack of openness, and unfulfilled goals.

Top-down planning has overlooked local needs. Entire villages were found to have 7.85 million constructed toilets that were essentially worthless during floods during the Swachh Bharat investigation.

The impoverished usually bear the consequences, even when policy documents

speak of “inclusive” and “sustainable” cities. Take Delhi, where 20-30 per cent of the city’s population lives in slum bastis, but making up only 0.5 per cent of the land. However, under the guise of “development” or “municipal beautification,” significant demolitions take place every few months. A new estimate claims that 278,796 individuals were forcibly evicted from Delhi’s slums in 2023 alone. Residents complain about being referred to as unlawful “encroachments” and having their home demolished without cause, even though court rulings forbid indiscriminate evictions. The poorest neighbourhoods are usually uprooted during these clearance campaigns, which frequently align with infrastructure projects like new highways or metro lines that are presented as modernising the metropolis. Slum dwellers frequently have to fumble to gather identification documents and receipts — even as little as invoices from internet purchases — in order to demonstrate their eligibility to remain. The outcome is clear: social inequality and environmental “upgrades” frequently coexist.

Who Really Benefits?

In reality, urban “greening” has mostly benefited investors and the urban middle class, but its advantages for equity, sanitation, and climate resilience are still minimal.

Many of the expected outcomes, including ODF certification, clean rivers, and flood-safe housing, have yet to materialise despite billions of dollars being spent. Independent audits characterise major schemes as being rife with fraud and incomplete development. Many of the expected outcomes, including ODF certification, clean rivers, and flood-safe housing, have yet to materialise despite billions of dollars being spent. Independent audits characterise major schemes as being rife with fraud and incomplete development.

Truth About Electric Corridors

Another recent example is the campaign for electric vehicle (EV) zones in places like Bengaluru, Delhi, and Pune. Despite their intended goal of lowering air pollution, these zones frequently have exclusionary rules, including prohibiting older cars or requiring payment to enter low-emission zones. Workers in the unorganised sector who utilise diesel cars for goods transportation or *autorickshaws* for last-mile commuting risk economic penalties.

The Way Forward

A truly sustainable city must combine ecological health and social fairness, not just display trees and Tesla charging stations. To reduce the growing green divide, urban planners must include Social Impact Assessments (SIAs) in all green infrastructure projects. This would guarantee that rehabilitation and resettlement plans are developed through real community involvement rather than token efforts. Low-income housing must be required in green zones in order to avoid demographic exclusion. In order to enable Ward Committees, Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) and neighbourhood organisations to collaborate on eco-projects, governance must become more participatory. Adopting participatory budgeting will guarantee that green funding represents the interests of all socioeconomic groups. It is imperative that informal livelihoods, like those of street sellers and garbage recyclers, be officially acknowledged and incorporated into sustainability programs with financing availability. Finally, the shift to electric vehicles (EVs) needs to be fair. Governments should install reasonably priced EV infrastructure in underserved urban areas and provide low-income drivers with training and subsidies. Then and only then can sustainability benefit people rather than replace them.

Greenwashing: Pretending to Care While Burning the Planet



ACHARYA PRASHANT

Climate change is no longer a distant forecast; it has started showing up in ways we can all feel. The summers are harsher, the winters less predictable, and natural disasters more frequent. Concerned by this, many people are trying to do their bit: planting trees, wearing old clothes to reduce waste, and even deleting old emails in the hope of saving energy. These days, it’s not uncommon to hear someone say they’ve gone meatless on Mondays as just a little step to help the planet. People post about it, talk about it, and feel a quiet sense of doing the right thing. But if we pause for a moment, a gentle question begins to surface: Is this truly helping the Earth, or is it mostly helping us feel better about ourselves? Today, we even have a term for this growing tendency to appear ecologically virtuous while doing little to meaningfully help the planet. It is called greenwashing.

The Truth of Greenwashing

To understand greenwashing, consider the word itself. Like whitewashing, which covers stains without cleaning them, or brainwashing, which replaces reality with illusion, greenwashing is when something is made to look eco-friendly, even though it brings little or no real benefit to the environment. This happens because for decades, we’ve been told the environment is in danger. The message has reached homes, schools, and even children’s textbooks. So it’s no surprise that people, and even companies, feel a quiet pressure to look like they care about the planet, whether they truly do or not. They perform small, symbolic acts and present them as proof of their concern. But when such acts are hollow, the intent becomes performance, not a solution. Take the label “CFC-free” printed on products today. CFCs, once harmful to the ozone layer, were banned decades ago. Highlighting their absence now is not innovation; it’s compliance. Yet, it’s paraded as eco-consciousness. Or consider meat wrapped in paper instead of plastic and branded “eco-friendly.” The packaging may have changed, but the meat remains one of the most environmentally damaging products. A minor tweak, and the product is passed off as sustainable. Some companies even promote their office waste recycling, while their core operations contin-



ue to harm the planet on a large scale. These aren’t real solutions; they’re more like ways to look responsible without actually changing much.

The Eco Illusion of Trees

For many, planting a tree feels like the ultimate act of environmental virtue. But how much does it really change? Let’s say the tree survives, grows strong, and lives a full life, 20 years or more. Over that time, it may absorb around 400 kilograms of carbon dioxide. Sounds impressive, until you consider that the average middle-class Indian emits 5,000 kilograms of carbon dioxide each year. In the same two decades, that’s 100,000 kilograms. Even planting a hundred trees doesn’t offset the scale, not when our daily lives are powered by the very systems that destroy the forests we’re trying to replace. And many of these planted trees need artificial irrigation, which in turn produces more emissions. So while we nurse our saplings, vast self-sustaining forests rich in biodiversity and climate stability are cut down.

We don’t need to cut trees ourselves; our way of living ensures it happens. Every child born needs food, shelter, and clothes, demanding more farmland. Farmlands eventually come from forests. As incomes rise, so does consumption, especially of meat. Few realise that nearly 70 per cent of grain in the world is grown to feed animals raised for slaughter. And more forests are cleared to grow that grain. You can’t live a life built on the extraction of massive resources and cancel it out with a sapling.

Doing Less Is the Most We Can Do

If it’s our way of living that fuels the destruction, then perhaps the most urgent step is not to do more, but to stop living the way we do. To not add new solutions, but to withdraw. Even science points us in this direction. In thermodynamics, there is a principle called entropy, which tells us that disorder in any system tends to increase. We pollute when we act, and we pollute again when we try to undo that act. So,

the only real solution is to step back and allow nature to breathe again.

Where do We Need to Pause?

To understand why we must stop, we need to see the crisis for what it really is: a life driven by endless production and unchecked population growth. These aren’t abstract ideas; they directly fuel rising carbon levels. The more we produce and consume, the greater the damage. Yet, we continue to glorify excess. A household with ten children and rising wealth is seen as “blessed,” though it burdens an already stretched planet. And those who profit from overproduction are the ones shaping our desires. They own the media and the billboards. First, they sell us a dream. Then, they sell us the product to chase it. We hand over not just money but our minds.

Turning Back Before It’s Too Late

As the saints have long said, you can’t sow the seeds of a thorn tree and expect sweet fruit. This crisis, too, is the result of what we’ve long chosen to admire, follow, and celebrate: the ones who consume the most. As long as we mistake wealth for wisdom and excess for success, the Earth will keep paying the price. Most of us may not be the biggest emitters, but we’ve allowed those who are to shape our aspirations. We didn’t just buy their products, we bought into their way of life. That quiet surrender is our real crime. Unless we stop idolising them, unless we step out of the stories they’ve sold us, our small green acts will keep feeling noble while meaning little. The Earth doesn’t need another planted tree or paper straw; it needs us to pause and ask: Am I truly awake to how I live, or just comforted by choices that seem right but cause harm?

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ANIL ANAND

It has been precedential that ruling political parties, at the Centre, appoint their party leaders as Governors and Lieutenant Governors. It is either to placate an ageing leader, sideline him or her, or relate it to the political realities at the ground levels in the state or Union Territory (UT) to which the nominee belongs. Unfortunately, merit, in the form of stature and expertise in matters related to administration and Constitutional nitty-gritty, has been a serious casualty. Using Raj Bhawan as the centre of political machinations by the ruling parties, either to upset the opposition ruled states/UTs or further their political interests, has been the favourite pastime of successive political parties ruling in the Centre. But it has become more pronounced and taken a serious turn by the day. So, the appointment of senior BJP leader of Jammu and Kashmir, a former Speaker of the Assembly and ex-Deputy Chief Minister, Mr Kavinder Gupta, as Lt Governor of Ladakh, is just in line with this culture. Ever since coming into being as a UT, he has been the first politician to be the LG.

To that extent, it is a welcome move given the fact that Ladakh is faced with a public movement for political empowerment and protection of domicile rights. It will be a real test of his prowess at dealing with such a situation, rising above the political interests of the political party to which he once belonged. Will he be able to do it? How much space will the top-heavy Centre grant a middle-rung BJP leader like him to act on the ground? It is difficult to answer these questions straightway for the simple reason that he neither has the stature nor political standing, like his BJP predecessors in J&K such as former Union Minister, Prof Chaman Lal Gupta, Mr Rishi Kumar Kaushal or Babu Parmanand, nor proven administrative track record of dealing with high-intensity public/political disputes.

Fact of the matter that he belongs to Jammu region which has during the past decade or so become the BJP’s citadel and mini laboratory of Hindutva, and is currently in the grip of anti-incumbency due to unfulfilled promises, and that he belongs to the Mahajan community, a core of BJP’s support base in the region, makes Mr Gupta’s elevation more interesting.

It seems he has been purposely given command of a neighbouring UT so that it could influence politics in Jammu and Kashmir (read Jammu region). It is also a move aimed at



placating the local sentiment and to keep the Hindutva support base intact, and prevent it from going the Congress way.

Since Ladakh is a UT without an Assembly, Mr Gupta’s presence in the Leh Raj Bhawan will accord him the status of a chief minister with no opposition party to contend with. It will be naive if the Centre or he lose sight of Ladakhis’ resilience to fight for their just rights. And it is here that he will be required to prove himself. The resignation of two prominent leaders, Leh Apex Body chairman, Thupstan Chhewang — a former BJP MP with close RSS links — and senior Congress leader, Mr Nawang Rigzin Jora, with the possibility of leadership baton passing on to educationist and innovator, Mr Sonam Wangchuk, has added a new element to the scenario. Both Mr Chhewang and Mr Jora have clarified that they will continue to remain a part of the movement. Perhaps, Mr Gupta’s RSS credentials have led to his passing the muster despite some controversies haunting him. Apart from joining the RSS in his teens, he was also the secretary of the Punjab unit of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad from 1978 to 1979 before shifting to Jammu and Kashmir.

Recently, the two regions closed their ranks for the greater benefit of Ladakh in view of non-fulfilment of promises by the Centre on promises held out as part of the reorganisation of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir.

If Mr Gupta’s appointment as LG has a direct link to BJP’s electoral politics in the Jammu region of J &K UT, it has also to be seen in close relation to the dwindling political fortunes of the party in Ladakh after the initial euphoria of UT formation had died down.

With Mr Gupta’s appointment, the BJP has once again scored a vital point in the region’s electoral politics, where Congress, its main rival, has not only caved in but refuses to introspect and take remedial steps.

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INDIAN EXPRESS IS NOT AN INDUSTRY. IT IS A MISSION.

— Ramnath Goenka

GOVT'S PUSHBACK ON U.S. THREATS DESERVES SUPPORT

THE US has unfairly ratcheted up its anti-India tirade in recent days. It is thus welcome that there has been a measured and timely response from the Indian government. Writing on his communication platform Truth Social, Donald Trump has threatened to impose severe penalties on Indian exports—even above the 25 per cent levy imposed earlier—for continuing to buy Russian oil. He has also accused India of reselling oil and making 'big profits' without a thought for those being killed in Ukraine. Another key Trump advisor, Stephen Miller, accused India of "financing" Russia's Ukraine war. The rebuttal on Monday by the Ministry of External Affairs makes two things clear. First, it is India's sovereign right to secure its own energy needs in the most cost effective way; second, the US and Europe's criticism is two-faced, as they have been regular purchasers of Russian fuel.

India's rejoinder points out that the EU's trade with Russia in 2024 was higher than India's. For its heating needs alone, Europe imported a record 16.5 tonnes of liquefied natural gas from Russia. Moreover, the West's ban on Russian oil has been selective. While the sea route has been blocked, Russian crude continues to flow via the Druzhba pipeline to central European countries including Hungary and the Czech Republic. Ember, an energy think tank, estimates European purchases of Russian gas amounted to \$23.6 billion last year. This was more than the \$20.17 billion it spent on financial aid to Ukraine.

India has also been a victim of ever-changing politics of convenience practiced by the US. In the early days of the Ukraine war, the Biden administration tacitly allowed India to import Russian crude to ensure global prices did not plummet because of lack of demand. Later, when the US faced a shortage of lubricants, it winked at India sending partly-refined Russian oil to the US to process into oil-based lubricants. While steering to balance US demands and the energy needs of our country, the government must never give up its rights to choose what best serves our people. India and Jawaharlal Nehru were the founders of the non-aligned movement, carving out a space for newly-independent countries in the early post-colonial era. This, again, is another moment not to bow to new forms of big-power bullying.

ONUS TO ENSURE DECORUM ON PASSENGERS & AIRLINES

THE shocking incident of a senior army officer assaulting four SpiceJet staffers at Srinagar airport deserves to be condemned. The episode refocuses the nation's attention on passenger rage as well as airline staff behaviour. The incident was reportedly triggered by a pre-boarding argument between SpiceJet staffers and an officer carrying more than twice the weight allowed for cabin baggage. The officer, Lt Col Ritesh Kumar Singh, posted at the High Altitude Warfare School in Gulmarg, was on his way to Delhi on flight SG-386 on emergency leave when the incident took place. It has been alleged that after assaulting the staff, Singh rushed through the boarding gate without completing the formalities mandated by regulations—a gross violation of aviation safety protocols. While a first information report has been registered against Singh at the Budgam police station under various sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita for what SpiceJet described as a "murderous assault", he too filed a complaint against the airline, alleging mistreatment by the airlines staff that caused him to miss his flight.

When incidents like these occur, it is easier to blame the person who has caused grievous injuries to others—in this case, the army officer. But what is shocking is that Singh belongs to a force that boasts of high discipline in civil spaces. The Indian Army has acknowledged the incident, promising full cooperation with the authorities investigating the case. A statement from the army headquarters stressed that the Indian Army was "fully committed to maintaining discipline and mutual respect in all civil spaces across the country".

However, it must also be noted that as the number of air passengers shoots up, so will the frequency of heated interactions with the airline staffers serving them. According to the Directorate General of Civil Aviation, India's domestic passenger traffic grew 6.12 percent to 161.3 million in 2024 from the previous year. While passengers—whatever be their backgrounds—need to realise that rules and regulations pertaining to air travel are of utmost importance for the overall safety of flights, airline staffers too must understand that among the hordes of flyers there may be many who could be high-strung while travelling. The need is for the latter to interact with the former in a manner that avoids violent flashpoints like this unfortunate incident.

QUICK TAKE

THE BATTLE AGAINST BUGS

T'S mosquito season again. In Mumbai, the number of dengue and chikungunya cases jumped five folds in July, whereas in Delhi, the previous and current governments are blaming each other for lapses leading to a decadal high in malaria cases. In such a season, it's instructive to look at the battle China is waging in Guangdong, which has registered more than 7,000 chikungunya cases since July. In a province where hospital stay is mandatory for such infections, they are not only conducting a door-to-door check, but also releasing giant 'elephant mosquitoes' that can devour the smaller chikungunya-spreading ones and an army of mosquito-eating fish. Indian states would do well to note what an 'all-out' war looks like among another bug-bitten populace.

RUTH is the complex, indispensable foundation in individual litigations, including matrimonial disputes. Yet, it is not easy to unravel the realities involved in a case. British scholar Terry Eagleton said, "Courtrooms, like novels, blur the distinction between fact and fiction..." The jury judge not on the facts, but between rival versions of them." However, what is presented to the court by way of evidence matters, for knowing the truth.

Recently, the Supreme Court, in a judgement authored by Justice B V Nagarathna, held that even secretly recorded telephonic communications of a spouse are admissible in evidence in a matrimonial dispute. The court held that such conversations cannot claim immunity from judicial scanning on privacy grounds. The court emphasised a litigant's right to a fair trial, which is a facet of Article 21, while negating the privacy arguments, also based on Article 21.

The case has a curious trajectory. The husband filed a divorce petition with allegations of cruelty in the family court in Bathinda, Punjab. Among other materials, the husband placed memory cards/ chips of mobile phones, compact discs, and conversation transcripts as evidence before the court. He claimed that he had recorded certain conversations between the wife and the husband between 2010 and 2016, which were contained in these materials, and he sought their admission as evidence. The family court accepted the request. Aggrieved by this, the wife moved the Punjab and Haryana High Court, which allowed the petition and set aside the family court order. The husband challenged the High Court order before the Supreme Court. The top court has now reversed the High Court's order and revived the permission granted by the family court.

Collection of evidence by snooping is like a 'sting operation' in matrimony. Its ethical aspects could always be debatable. In the real world, no genuine intimate relationship would involve a secret recording of conversations to use it as evidence in a future litigation. This is particularly true in a husband-wife relationship. As Justice Nagarathna rightly notes, "snooping between partners is an effect and not a cause of marital disharmony". This was the court's answer to the apprehension expressed by the amicus curiae that the indulgence to such evidence might unsettle spousal harmony.

The court was examining the scope of Section 122 of the Indian Evidence

Covertly collected evidence in divorce cases may raise questions on the right to privacy. But shutting out such materials may forestall a full-fledged judicial probe

SPOUSAL CHATS: PRIVACY VERSUS FAIRER EVIDENCE

KALEESWARAM RAJ

Lawyer, Supreme Court of India



SOURAV ROY

Act, which says that one cannot be compelled to disclose any communication to his or her spouse, and it is impermissible to reveal such communication, when there is no consent. The exception to this general stipulation is also in the very same provision. It says that in suits between the spouses or prosecution against one of them, this embargo does not apply. The Supreme Court decoded the section and held that the exception carved out in Section 122 makes it clear that matrimonial conversations could be adduced as evidence in support of the plea by a party to dispute, even if those are recorded clandestinely.

The privacy concerns raised in the case are unacceptable. In a private litigation, any evidence will have certain traits of privacy. A private litigation

rests upon private materials. Shutting off such materials would forestall a full-fledged judicial investigation into the dispute. That is why Section 122 provides for the exception to its disclosure ban. It states explicitly that there is no impediment in looking into the spousal conversations "in suits between married persons, or proceedings in which one married person is prosecuted for any crime committed against the other". The exception reflects the imaginative intelligence of the lawmaker.

The rationale of the law is clear and simple. In a dispute between husband and wife, no spouse should be disarmed on account of the provision when they want to rely on the personal communication between them to prove a point. According to Article 21 of the Constitution, the right to life and personal liberty

BUILDING TRUST FOR INDIA INC

CHANDRAJIT BANERJEE

Director General, CII

ensure that innovation aligns with ethical.

Five, optimise supply chain management. A reliable and ethical supply chain enhances both operational efficiency and stakeholder trust. Businesses should use technology for transparency, predictive analytics to foresee disruptions and ensure fair and timely payments to suppliers. Strong relationships across the value chain promote resilience and shared accountability.

Six, assign clear roles for trust stewardship. Titular designation or appointing an existing senior executive to lead trust-building initiatives highlights the strategic priority. This executive shall coordinate efforts



feedback loops and listening actively to stakeholders' concerns builds deeper engagement and reduces misinformation.

Nine, deliver consistently on promises. Reliability is a cornerstone of trust. Companies should meet or exceed the set expectations. By setting realistic goals and consistently delivering, businesses establish dependability.

Ten, uphold ethical practices and integrity. A clear code of conduct, regular ethics training and strict enforcement of behavioural standards are crucial for maintaining trust. Ethical leadership must be demonstrated across all levels of the organisation.

Eleven, empower and engage with employees. Companies that invest in professional development and recognise achievements empower teams that act in line with organisational values. Open communication, psychological security and inclusive policies enhance internal trust and employee loyalty.

Twelve, adopt a customer-oriented approach. Customers' trust companies that are attentive and responsive. Providing seamless service, quick issue resolution, and multiple communication channels, while also respecting data privacy, strengthens customer relationships and enhances brand credibility.

Thirteen, commit to the environmental, social and governance responsibility. Businesses that prioritise environmental stewardship and community development demonstrate a broader commitment to the common good. Investment in sustainability initiatives help earn public goodwill.

Fourteen, nurture collaborative and transparent partnerships. CRegular communication, fair negotiations and mutual goal-setting help establish dependable, long-term partnerships built on trust and mutual respect.

Fifteen, leadership must champion the trust agenda. Transparent decision-making, openness to accountability and ethical role modelling by senior executives shape organisational culture. Trust is embedded within the company when channelled from the top.

By working on these 15 points, Indian industry can not only meet the rising expectations of stakeholders, but also be future-resilient. Such a trust-centred approach and global competitiveness is needed for collective progress, policy vitality and enhanced trade and investment. (Views are personal) (cb@cii.in)

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OUR VIEW



Standoff on Russian oil: Do not waver, resolve it

Trump's tirade over crude imports from Russia must not shake India's principled stance on trade but perhaps oil can be used as an India-US deal lubricant to achieve bigger objectives

As trade talks between India and the US enter their final lap, testy grumbles from the White House—aimed ostensibly at influencing the final shape of an agreement—could end up creating schisms in the relationship between the world's two largest democracies. US President Donald Trump's recent denunciation of India's trade framework, expressed mostly on social media in rapid bursts, is well within his usual range of bluster, but cannot be shrugged off. One post threatened a hefty 25% levy on Indian exports and an unspecified penalty for buying oil and arms from Russia. Next, he called the economies of India and Russia “dead.” Not one to rest on his outbursts, Trump followed that up with another threat to raise levies “substantially” for buying Russian oil and a statement on TV saying, “India has not been a good trading partner.” As former US deputy assistant secretary of state Evan A. Feigenbaum has cautioned, Trump's statements risk taking apart painstakingly forged bilateral ties. On its part, India has called the US posture “unjustified and unreasonable.” Amid this standoff, it seems clear that Trump wants us to import hydrocarbons from the US, with such a commitment baked into the deal that's being worked out. With US access to our agri and dairy markets already sticking points, it is unfortunate that a heavily traded commodity like oil has been thrown so noisily into the mix. Economic issues should not be allowed to slip down a geopolitical slope so easily. So far, India has held its nerve and stood its ground admirably. While Trump might have his own book of negotiation tactics that include brazen attempts at bullying, New

Delhi's stance on securing the nation's economic interests would not waver if a counter-proposal is made that sweetens it for the White House. Oil is a multi-billion-dollar chip of high optical value that could be placed on the table. It was only after Russia's invasion of Ukraine that New Delhi reached out to Moscow for oil; as the ministry of foreign affairs has stated, this was because West Asian oil was diverted to Europe; and as the Ukraine war made oil imports costly, cheaper Russian shipments helped us keep our trade balance in check. The global oil market is still in flux. With the Opec+ cartel easing supplies even as overall demand looks wobbly, expectations of a glut have softened global prices. Layer this with the fact that China, Russia's other big oil customer, is seeking to diversify some of its energy purchases away from the US to Brazil, and it is easy to understand Trump's apparent obsession with tankers that dock in India, whose imports have reportedly averaged 5.2 million barrels per day this year and are set to swell further. In the interests of civility and a desire to sign a trade deal with the US amicably, without ceding any ground on agriculture or strategic calls, Indian negotiators could explore a limited oil deal as a lubricant. It is true that oil shipments from the US are an expensive option, given the distance and freight cost. An agreement to buy limited oil quantities from America may work out reasonable for us if such a pact is accompanied by relief on freight (with low optical value) and it helps us keep agri and dairy products off the deal's table. It is not to fund any war that India imports essential commodities, but to manage its economy well in a volatile world. We must maximize our space to make decisions accordingly.

THEIR VIEW

Tariffs: India could offer its exporters a relief package

MADAN SABNAVIS



is chief economist, Bank of Baroda, and author of 'Corporate Quirks: The Darker Side of the Sun'

US President Donald Trump's tariff offensive can be likened to the covid pandemic for affecting all countries. What sounded bizarre on paper is a reality. Five years after the covid outbreak, the economic disruption caused by one man has been remarkable, marked by whims and contradictions. While there appears to be room for discussion on a trade deal, India should be prepared for the worst: A scenario in which the US threat of a 25%-plus tariff comes to bear. Is there anything the Indian government can do to protect exporters? Yes. A kind of public-private arrangement could be made—with a sunset clause—for the overall cost imposed to be shared by the government and exporters so that higher prices at the other end do not depress US demand. A support framework should be drawn up to help exporters adjust to this new normal over a period of 1-3 years. Policy decisions would need to be taken on two scores. First, should the package be only for impacted exports to the US or for all

merchandise exports? The former could imply discrimination, while supporting the export of goods to all destinations could be justified on the need for a fillip to this broad activity in the face of global headwinds. Second, for how long should such support last? Specifying a time-frame will spell certainty for exporters. Both will, of course, depend on the Centre's fiscal space. After those calls are taken, a package can be devised. A narrowly aimed one need not involve any special new scheme, as existing policy programmes can be used to help tariff-affected businesses. This way, we will need only minor budget-outlay additions. First, support can be provided through India's production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme. The utilization of funds under it was targeted at around ₹2 trillion over five years from 2020-21, but is likely to fall short. This incentive can be extended to companies that face raised US tariffs. The payoff provided under the PLI scheme can serve as compensation for firms that maintain or increase their exports to the US. The payoff rate can be based on the comparative tariff disadvantage within an industry vis-a-vis competing industries in other countries. Thus, if Vietnam has a tariff of 20% and competes in ready-made garments, this industry can be

provided a payoff that takes that difference into account. Its thematic contours would be similar to the PLI scheme's. Second, the government could deploy an interest subvention scheme, promising a credit cost payoff of 1-2 percentage points. A call can be taken on whether this should be industry-specific or only for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), which contribute significantly to India's overall exports but probably is the most vulnerable sector. MSMEs face borrowing challenges and hence any subvention will help. Ideally, though, such a benefit should apply to all exporters. Third, the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) targeted long-term repo operations (TLTRO), which were largely successful during the pandemic, can be revived. The central bank could provide funds at a sub-repo or repo rate to banks, which in turn can lend to tariff-affected exporting units or industries. This can be another way to lower their cost of credit. The funds should be

short-term in nature and only for working capital purposes. This way, exporting units can become more competitive on finance costs. RBI could announce a TLTRO programme for a period of 1-2 years. Fourth, India's credit guarantee scheme can be extended to exporters, so that banks lend them funds without hesitation. The pandemic-time Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme was very popular and it worked well for MSMEs. As similar conditions arise for enterprises in tariff-hit sectors, this form of support could be considered again. A credit backstop would mean a contingency liability for the government and so it would be a fiscal cost only in case of substantial defaults. This will also help lower the credit costs of exporters. Fifth, the government could consider tax concessions. This can be aimed at companies with a record of exports to the US, with tax offsets allowed for income earned from exports to the US in the past three years. It could allow losses to be carried forward.

Some of these ideas may not be in compliance with World Trade Organization rules, but could still be justified by the exceptional circumstances exporters face. Note that the US has announced variable tariff rates for different countries, which is not just unique as an idea, but has also tilted the scales in favour of some. Countries like Vietnam, Korea, Philippines, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka face lower US tariffs than India, which amounts to a major disruption. Policy steps could offer exporters a cushion, while sunset clauses would give them time to scout for new export markets and prevent government props from leading to complacency. Also, RBI would have to watch the rupee. The US reset could cause dollar volatility. In theory, higher tariffs should drive up US inflation and bond yields. This will attract investment from overseas, which, together with reduced US imports, should strengthen the dollar against other currencies. Central banks will have to take a call on how much currency weakening they are okay with. A lot will depend on domestic inflation and the strength of foreign exchange reserves. The government, meanwhile, could explore policy adjustments to provide outward shipments a large-scale fillip. These are the author's personal views.

The 16th Finance Commission can catalyse climate governance

The panel could push for a national carbon accounting framework among other climate reforms



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It is widely expected that the 16th Finance Commission (FC) will look into the growing complaints of states against the Centre dipping into the tax cess and surcharge pools, which are not shared with them, while decreasing the Centre's contribution to centrally sponsored schemes. But there are other crucial areas too that the FC can nudge the Centre and states to look at beyond the traditional tax devolution criteria followed by most FCs (like state population, area, forest cover and tax efforts). Given the well-known challenges facing the world and particularly India as the adverse effects of climate change assume 'polycrisis' proportions, with multiple points of worry, there is a pressing need to steer policies across sectors towards a low-carbon regime. Policymakers and implementers need to believe that 'net zero' is actually 'net positive,' as India has shown so far with its high GDP growth trajectory while doing more on the climate front than most other countries. During its presentation before the 16th FC, the Biju Janata Dal, led by former Odisha chief minister Naveen Patnaik, made a series of climate-responsive governance suggestions to the Commission on areas such as climate budgeting, climate budget tagging, sectoral climate change impact appraisals and other governance initiatives.

Create national and state carbon accounting authorities: In routine finance, individual entities—businesses and households—keep an account of the inflows and outflows of money. Financial accounting is an integrated system. In contrast, the stocks and flows of carbon emissions are not tracked at a granular level anywhere in the world. As a result, we cannot implement a progressive carbon tax that penalizes large users of fossil fuels more than the average consumer. A progressive carbon tax would need us to keep track of carbon 'inflows' and 'outflows' at every level, perhaps via a national carbon account. Its measurement is, therefore, the first step. Existing carbon accounting methodologies such as those championed by Karthik Ramanna at Oxford are already capable of tracking carbon balance sheets at the corporate level. A national carbon accounting (NCA) system is both an evolutionary and revolutionary generalization of such ideas. It could bring us all, from individuals and households to companies, under one umbrella carbon accounting framework. An NCA could make it mandatory for businesses and individuals to report their carbon emissions and capture and maintain the country's carbon books. Such a system will make the circulation of carbon visible. Once we have an NCA, we will be able to set targets, make more reliable predictions about future emission reductions and track our progress against those goals. For this purpose, the 16th FC may consider promotional sector-specific grants to the Centre and states for setting up an ecosystem of carbon accounting at the household-level, just like income and expenditure numbers are used for the calculation of GDP, and set up carbon accounting authorities at the central and state levels to arrive at a carbon count every quarter and at the end of a financial year. Just as we track GDP, we can then track our progress towards net-zero emissions by 2070. This initiative would most likely be the

first of its kind anywhere in the world and would also be in line with the LiFe approach that India espoused at CoPs and G-20 summits. Modify the Commission's forest cover and ecology criterion: Forest cover and ecology, with minor variations, has been adopted as a criterion for the purpose of tax devolution by successive FCs. But forest cover can't be the only indirect proxy for such efforts by states. The 16th FC should instead adopt 'climate and disaster proofing initiatives' as a new criterion and include mitigation and adaptation measures undertaken by states under its ambit. The 16th FC can subsume the earlier forest and ecology criterion within this and provide separate sector- and state-specific grants under it. It should also raise its weight from 10% in the 15th FC to 20%. The funds could be used for preparedness, mitigation and adaptation efforts by states to create climate-resilient infrastructure in fields ranging from power, agriculture and irrigation to roads, bridges, dams and reservoirs, as the State Disaster Response Fund is for post-disaster responses. Grant states the power to levy a green tax: Mineral-bearing states like Odisha, Telangana, Karnataka, Jharkhand, Bihar and others should be allowed to levy a green tax to fund mitigation and adaptation measures against the environmental degradation of mining. Stop diversion of the clean energy cess: It's odd that the Centre's clean energy cess, which was levied on coal production, was treated as a revenue stream and helped it pay GST compensation to states, instead of being used for investments in clean-energy technology and other adaptation measures at project sites to reduce the impact on the environment and people in the states concerned. This cess should be disentangled from GST and distributed to coal producing states. The big opportunity that the FC must not miss, however, is to foster climate-responsive governance in India.

10 YEARS AGO



JUST A THOUGHT

On their own, tariff and trade barriers, if viewed as transitory negotiating tactics, will not significantly change global investment patterns or the structure of global supply chains and employment.

MICHAEL SPENCE

Fiscally viable measures of support may help Indian exports sail through the US tariff storm

Some of these ideas may not be in compliance with World Trade Organization rules, but could still be justified by the exceptional circumstances exporters face. Note that the US has announced variable tariff rates for different countries, which is not just unique as an idea, but has also tilted the scales in favour of some. Countries like Vietnam, Korea, Philippines, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka face lower US tariffs than India, which amounts to a major disruption. Policy steps could offer exporters a cushion, while sunset clauses would give them time to scout for new export markets and prevent government props from leading to complacency. Also, RBI would have to watch the rupee. The US reset could cause dollar volatility. In theory, higher tariffs should drive up US inflation and bond yields. This will attract investment from overseas, which, together with reduced US imports, should strengthen the dollar against other currencies. Central banks will have to take a call on how much currency weakening they are okay with. A lot will depend on domestic inflation and the strength of foreign exchange reserves. The government, meanwhile, could explore policy adjustments to provide outward shipments a large-scale fillip. These are the author's personal views.



The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

THE AGE OF GILL

Series against England shows Indian cricket team has forged a distinctive identity, is ready for ups and downs that lie ahead

JUST LIKE SACHIN Tendulkar securing his first Test hundred in Old Trafford 35 years ago to herald his arrival at the threshold of greatness; just like Sourav Ganguly furiously waving his shirt from the Lord's balcony in 2002 after a cliff-hanger of a final; or, more momentously, like Kapil Dev's "devils" raising the World Cup trophy to change the destiny of Indian cricket 42 years ago, a new age in Indian cricket dawned under a brooding English sky. Even though it's a hollow claim to say that the result would taste as sweet as a triumph, the Test series that India drew could become a reference point, a metaphor of India's reemergence, a precursor to better moments, even a watershed event in the country's cricketing history. The team is not flawless, but it has forged an identity, shown spine and steel, a capacity to bite the bullet and an attitude to never surrender.

Doubts lingered when India boarded the flight to Heathrow nearly 50 days ago. Gill's captaincy was untested; the batting was callow, the bowling group had injury concerns and ragged edges. Three stalwarts had recently retired and India had lost six of its last eight games. But in the course of the English summer, the team cleared most of the doubts. Gill has the instincts, wisdom and poise to lead the side. The leadership responsibility elevated his batting too. Among Indian batsmen, only Sunil Gavaskar has scored more runs than Gill's 754 at an average of 75.4 in a single series. Contributions arrived from the two openers too, KL Rahul and Yashasvi Jaiswal, and the effervescent Rishabh Pant, who captured India's resilience by batting with a broken toe in Old Trafford, besides shellacking a pair of hundreds. Sai Sudharsan illustrated the virtues that could make him an ideal successor to Rahul Dravid and Cheteshwar Pujara at one drop. Ravindra Jadeja, at 36, has light left in him; Washington Sundar could fill the RAshwin-shaped hole. Mohammed Siraj, with his unshakeable grit and unflinching energy, emphasised that there is life beyond Jasprit Bumrah in the seam-bowling department. There is a fiercely combative coach in Gautam Gambhir. In the end, it was a triumph of collective spirit and individual splendour, blending frictionlessly.

The portrait, though, is both incomplete and imperfect. But it's how great teams are forged. It may take months or years. It won't be without fumbles and stumbles. India will have to keep its bowlers optimally fit for the big series, develop depth in the fast bowling department, polish some of the promising youngsters such as Sudharsan, Nitish Kumar Reddy and Anshul Kamboj, upskill some others. Gill, too, could be smarter with his bowling choices — which bowler to use, and when — as well as field placements. The journey will be fascinating, and at times frustrating. But there is boundless optimism as Indian cricket enters a new era. The age of Gill is upon us.

ONE YEAR LATER

Today, Bangladesh is gripped by a politics far removed from aspirations that fuelled Sheikh Hasina's ouster

ON AUGUST 5, 2024, when the longest-serving prime minister of Bangladesh had to be airlifted from Dhaka to Hindon Air Force Station near Delhi, many of the student protesters who roared in celebration were looking forward, arguably, to a better future, a more democratic order. Yet, one year after Sheikh Hasina's uninterrupted 15-year rule was brought to an end during what is now known as the July Revolution, Bangladesh finds itself gripped by a politics far removed from the aspirations that fuelled her ouster.

Despite the promises of Muhammad Yunus, Chief Advisor to the Interim Government, the past year has witnessed a surge in religious extremism and a breakdown of the rule of law. While Awami League leaders have been jailed en masse, hundreds of individuals accused or convicted in militancy-related cases have been released, and many others have escaped from jail. The ancestral home of Bangladesh's founding president, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, along with other symbols of the old regime, was reduced to ashes. Bangladesh's pluralistic culture, too, has looked besieged. The Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council, the country's largest minority rights group, has repeatedly flagged violence against minorities on the watch of the Yunus government. The US Commission on International Religious Freedom, in its latest report, noted that "systematic pressure on religious minorities continued to generally worsen." In May, thousands of Hefazat-e-Islam supporters rallied in Dhaka to protest proposed recommendations aimed at ensuring equal rights for Muslim women. Government figures show that violent crime has increased. On top of this is an unstable economy, weighed down by slowing growth and mounting public debt.

There is no denying that the Hasina regime was flawed, characterised, especially towards its end, by its disregard for democratic values. But the rise of extremist forces under Yunus's watch strains the secular fabric of the Mujibist order. Only a free and fair election can show the way forward in Bangladesh. Yunus has announced that the election could be held in April 2026, and in his Tuesday afternoon speech, unveiled the July Declaration which affirms a commitment to "rule of law, human rights, and moral values". It is hoped that a newly elected government will embody these principles and fulfil the aspirations of the Bangladeshi people. Delhi, for its part, must keep communication channels with Dhaka open, engage all political actors, and work to insulate bilateral ties from the ebb and flow of domestic politics.

THE NEW ELITE

AI is reshaping the world. Not all changes are likely to be bad

ONE OF THE most effective prisms through which to understand how people and societies have changed since the Palaeolithic to the Anthropocene is to examine the relationship between tools and people. Simply put, humans make machines and machines, in turn, shape them. The last few centuries — a temporal blip in the species' history — have witnessed increasing degrees of abstraction. Numbers, the written word, money (increasingly less tangible) and now AI, are not just technologies. They shape what and who societies value. With machines able to remember and analyse information, and predict outcomes, a new set of values is in the offing. And for all the anxiety around AI, this change might not be all bad.

Demis Hassabis, Nobel laureate and CEO and co-founder of Google DeepMind, said that while AI and robotics may be able to replace doctors, especially in diagnosis, it will likely be unable to replace nurses. His statement flags a broader possibility: Professions based on knowledge and abstract skills could become increasingly obsolete, and tangible, emotional labour more valuable. AI will not be refilling the gas on the AC compressor any time soon. It will not comfort an ageing relative in a meaningful way, nor make sure that a child is loved when both parents are at work. In essence, the jobs that are often seen as less skilled today could well become the most valuable.

Hierarchies of labour have been papered over in the name of what the market, guided by an ethereal, invisible hand, demands. Now, as the most lucrative professions of today — doctors, investment bankers, software engineers, lawyers — face an impending existential crisis, perhaps it's time to value others. Not just economically, but socially. Teachers, nurses, nannies — those who cook in homes and raise other people's children, those whose skills keep homes functioning. AI might create a new elite. It's about time.



NAJEEB JUNG

THE RECENTLY CONCLUDED Test cricket series in England once again establishes how the religion of cricket, amid political polarisation, religious tensions and regional divides, has consistently demonstrated its extraordinary ability to bring the country together. What a sight to see Mohammed Siraj from one end and Prasidh Krishna from the other, bowling under the captaincy of Shubman Gill — need anyone say how sport binds our country. From the lanes of rural Bihar, Delhi or Lucknow to the elite clubs of Mumbai, cricket transcends India's many fault lines. It is not merely a sport; it is a collective passion, a secular celebration and a national obsession. More importantly, it is one of the few arenas where people of all faiths — Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Parsi, and others — not only participate but thrive, often becoming national icons whose achievements are cheered regardless of religion.

India's cricket team, past and present, resembles a miniature version of the country itself. Over the decades, it has featured players from every region and many religions. From the early years of Indian cricket, when the likes of Ranjitsinhji and Duleepsinhji — both Hindu princes playing for England — laid the foundation for Indian excellence, the game already carried markers of inclusion. In pre-Partition days, when India was in the throes of communal violence, Nisar Ahmad, Fazal Mahmood, the Nawab of Pataudi Sr and Lala Amarnath formed the backbone of the Indian team. Post-Independence, players like Vinoo Mankad, Mansoor Ali Khan Pataudi, and Polly Umrigar represented India. In later years, Mohammad Azharuddin captained India for most of the 1990s. His religion was never a point of concern; his wristy elegance and calm demeanour won admiration across the country. Harbhajan Singh, from Punjab, became a fan favourite for his fiery competitiveness. Anil Kumble, Zaheer Khan, and Robin Uthappa, all wore the Indian jersey with distinction and pride. This was a statement of pure secularism in Indian cricket.

This same theme is played out in other sports — in football, in hockey or any other sport that we participate in. Syed Rahim coached the Indian football team to glory as Syed Nayeemuddin captained India as

Simply Indian

At a time when division is easy and outrage is cheap, sports reminds us of what we can be

India is at a delicate moment in its democratic journey. Religious polarisation has increased in some quarters, and public discourse is often fraught. But cricket, and sport in general, remains an oasis where pluralism thrives. That players of all faiths continue to be selected, cheered and honoured is a testament to the sport's unique place in the Indian psyche. How pleasing it is when a Neeraj Chopra embraces an Arshad Nadeem and touches the latter's mother's feet in respect. But this harmony cannot be taken for granted. Institutions like the BCCI, football, hockey, wrestling, badminton, shooting federations or cricket academies, schools, and the media must actively work to promote inclusivity.

did Yusuf Khan and Jarnail Singh. Sikh hockey players brought repeated glory even as Mary Kom and now Nikhat Zareen bring laurels in boxing. Sport is replete with these examples.

And yet, at times even sport has not remained entirely untouched by India's religious sensitivities. There have been moments when Muslim or Sikh cricketers have been unfairly criticised or subjected to suspicion. The most prominent example in recent memory was Mohammed Shami's experience after the 2021 T20 World Cup match against Pakistan. India lost the match, and Shami — one of the few Muslim players in the team — was subjected to a torrent of abuse on social media. He was trolled viciously, with many insinuating that his religion had made him less loyal to the national cause.

Much to everyone's disgust, Arshdeep Singh was trolled when he dropped a catch while playing against Pakistan. But what followed was equally revealing. Teammates, past legends, and the broader cricket community rallied around Shami and Arshdeep. Virat Kohli, then the Indian captain, issued a powerful statement condemning the abuse, calling out religious bigotry, and defending his teammates in unequivocal terms. His words resonated deeply with millions of Indians who were appalled at the targeting of national players based on religion. But these incidents, while serious and concerning, remain exceptions. The broader narrative is one of inclusion and unity, where sport has often acted as a balm, offering moments of national cohesion in an otherwise divided polity.

Sport may unify, but it cannot entirely escape the undertow of communalism that affects all public life in India. However, each such incident also becomes an opportunity — where the public and sporting fraternity reassert the foundational values of secularism and merit on every such occasion. Sport provides moments of pure national joy that cut across caste, class and religious lines. The 1983 World Cup victory in cricket or the 2007 T20 triumph, and the 2011 World Cup win are etched into the consciousness of every Indian. The same feelings ran through the nation when our athletes performed well at the Olympics or the Asian and

Commonwealth Games. In those moments, the nation was not Hindu or Muslim or Christian — it was simply Indian. People celebrated in mosques, temples, churches and gurdwaras alike. Flags waved in all neighbourhoods, urban or rural, rich or poor, majority or minority. In those nights of triumph, sport did something no policy or speech could: It made Indians feel like one people.

India is at a delicate moment in its democratic journey. Religious polarisation has increased in some quarters, and public discourse is often fraught. But cricket, and sport in general, remains an oasis where pluralism thrives. That players of all faiths continue to be selected, cheered and honoured is a testament to the sport's unique place in the Indian psyche. How pleasing it is when a Neeraj Chopra embraces an Arshad Nadeem and touches the latter's mother's feet in respect. But this harmony cannot be taken for granted. Institutions like the BCCI, football, hockey, wrestling, badminton, shooting federations or cricket academies, schools, and the media must actively work to promote inclusivity. Religious identity should neither be a qualification nor a disqualification. Performance, character and discipline must remain the only criteria. At the same time, fans must be made aware of the dangers of communalising sports.

Booing a player based on religion is not just wrong — it is un-Indian. The message must be clear: In blue, we are one. Sports is the only religion in India that does not discriminate. It is played by all, loved by all, and celebrated by all. It brings joy in a way that no temple, mosque, or gurdwara can promise. At a time when division is easy and outrage is cheap, sports reminds us of what we can be — an India where a Muslim fast bowler, a Sikh spinner, a Christian batter, a Hindu captain, a Sikh hockey captain, a girl shooter or wrestler, a Christian or Muslim boxer, or badminton players win together, lose together, and always play together.

That is the India we cheer for. That is the India we must strive to protect.

The writer is former vice-chancellor, Jamia Millia Islamia, former Lt Governor of Delhi, and currently, chairman, Advanced Study Institute of Asia

DESIGNING LIKE ROHIT BAL

His brand keeps his legacy alive, a year after his death



RINKU GHOSH

WHEN COUTURIER ROHIT Bal, who drew the contours of Indian fashion with a unique cultural imprint and a well-cut European elegance, died last year, the sorrow quickly turned to questions. The most important one that bothered the fashion fraternity was: Would his brand survive, considering that fashion houses in India are personality driven? A boy from Bihar's Hajipur, a graphic designer from Delhi, a girl from Meghalaya's Shillong, and many dream-chasers from middle India upended all the assumptions.

This creative core team scripted another chapter in India's fashion history at the just concluded couture week organised by the Fashion Design Council of India (FDCI). They proved that just like Chanel and Prada — each took about a 100 years to transform into a legacy brand despite the aura of its founders — Rohit Bal Designs could well become a legacy brand in a far shorter time. This becomes a point of critical discussion at a time when the untimely death of another of India's maverick designers, Wendell Rodricks, left his label rudderless. It was bought over by retail entrepreneur Abhisek Aggarwal and now has an external creative director, who is deep-diving to understand Rodricks' essence. But that oeuvre seems to be missing.

What then is different with Rohit Bal Designs, which many in the industry still feel would be a prime pick for a corporate

Many wondered why Bal had never thought about setting a succession plan in place despite his failing health. He knew best that the karigar could also innovate if allowed that space and respect. That's how John Galiano, a plumber's son, Alexander McQueen, a taxi driver's son, and Vivienne Westwood, a factory worker's daughter, became leading lights in a fickle industry looking for the next big thing.

takeover? It is the talent pool that Bal had democratised and expanded in his lifetime with pan-Indian participation and fair play. It's the human capital he built with his craftsmen and weavers as stakeholders, sitting by their side and sharing food with them for 25 years and more, all of whom are keeping his legacy alive. He has bequeathed and imprinted his DNA in an artist's collective of youngsters who not only think and imagine like him but feel incentivised to give their own spin on his work.

The boy from Hajipur and Rohit Bal Designs' creative director and CEO, Frazee Tasnim, began as a design intern and Bal hand-held his way to IIM-Ahmedabad. Learning the ropes with Bal, Tasnim learnt to think like his mentor. So did Ayaz, who was a backroom graphic designer and became part of the design team by sheer dint of talent. As did Manbha Diengdoh, who learnt to refine designs besides sharing passionfruit and smoked chicken from Shillong with the late designer. Their all-new collection kept to Bal's grammar and interpretations, although the designer himself didn't leave behind a lookbook.

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Galiano, a plumber's son, Alexander McQueen, a taxi driver's son, and Vivienne Westwood, a factory worker's daughter, became leading lights in a fickle industry looking for the next big thing.

Indian fashion is young, all of 35-40 years old. And succession becomes a challenge as the business is pivoted around the founders, most of whom had been born to privilege. But thanks to Bal or now even Tarun Tahiliani — whose talented design team and head of couture are youngsters who interned with him from across the country — there's a participatory expansiveness in Indian couture. One of the pioneers in this area is designer Ritu Kumar, who toured the country extensively to unearth lost crafts, document and archive them and train traditional craftspersons in contemporary design vocabulary.

That's why even a Zain Khatri from Ajrakhpur, a tiny village in the craft-rich Kutch district of Gujarat, has his own label at 21.

The colonialists had wiped out every folk imprint in our weaves, textiles and craftsmanship. But if we want a Made in India legacy, our fashion labels have to begin looking beyond the easy family business trap, create professionally managed enterprises and be representative of real skill and talent.

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AUGUST 6, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

ASSAM VOTER LIST

THE PROSPECTS OF holding early parliamentary elections in Assam appeared to recede when a team of the student agitation leaders arrived in New Delhi and demanded a fresh revision of rolls with a "clear set of directives". The leaders met the Chief Election Commissioner, RK Trivedi, and emphasised in a memorandum that the assumption that any non-citizen entering Assam before 1971 had automatically acquired citizenship was not legally tenable.

A BIGGER BENCH

THE UNION CABINET has given its approval to increase the number of Supreme Court judges

from 18 to 30, it is learnt. The Cabinet is also believed to have agreed to raise the strength of high court judges. The government will now bring a bill in Parliament to this effect. What was worrying the government was the accumulation of a large number of cases in high courts and the Supreme Court.

ASSASSINATION PLOT

A CONSPIRACY TO cause disorder in Haryana and kill very important persons, including CM Bhajan Lal, family members of Gen R S Dayal, who led the military action in the Golden Temple last year, and the senior superintendent of police, Ludhiana, was unearthed by the Kurukshetra police following the arrest of five

persons. One foreign-made .455 bore revolver, hand grenades, two guns and a large quantity of ammunition have been recovered.

BILLIARDS BATTLE

THE LEGENDARY BOB Marshall outclassed second seed Subhash Agrawal and Indian national champion Geet Sethi beat holder Michael Ferreira to set up a clash between experience and youth in the final of the 25th World Amateur Billiards Championship on August 6. The 75-year-old Marshall beat Agrawal in all departments of the game to record a convincing 2809-1872 win while Sethi forged ahead in the last hour to topple holder Ferreira 2513-2379.

THE IDEAS PAGE

The new techno-capitalism

There was a time when values, scientific internationalism, drove India-US tech cooperation. Now, White House and Silicon Valley's 'broligarchy' are pursuing strategic dominance



RAJA MANDALA
BY C RAJA MOHAN

AN IMPORTANT ANNIVERSARY in India's technological history passed largely unnoticed last week — the launch of the Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE) in 1975. A pioneering collaboration between the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and the US National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), SITE used the American ATS-6 satellite to beam educational programmes in local languages to over 2,400 villages across six of India's most underdeveloped states. The content included primary education, health awareness, agricultural practices, and national integration.

SITE remains a landmark in the technological imagination of India's developmental state. For the US, the project was an expression of "scientific internationalism" — the Cold War-era belief that modern science and technology could advance peace and prosperity through international collaboration. But that idealism quickly faltered. Following India's 1974 nuclear test, Washington's enthusiasm for technology cooperation gave way to non-proliferation anxieties. It would take three decades to overcome these disputes and rebuild bilateral trust. This effort culminated in the launch of the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (ICET) under President Joe Biden in 2023, aimed at reinvigorating India-US cooperation in advanced technologies.

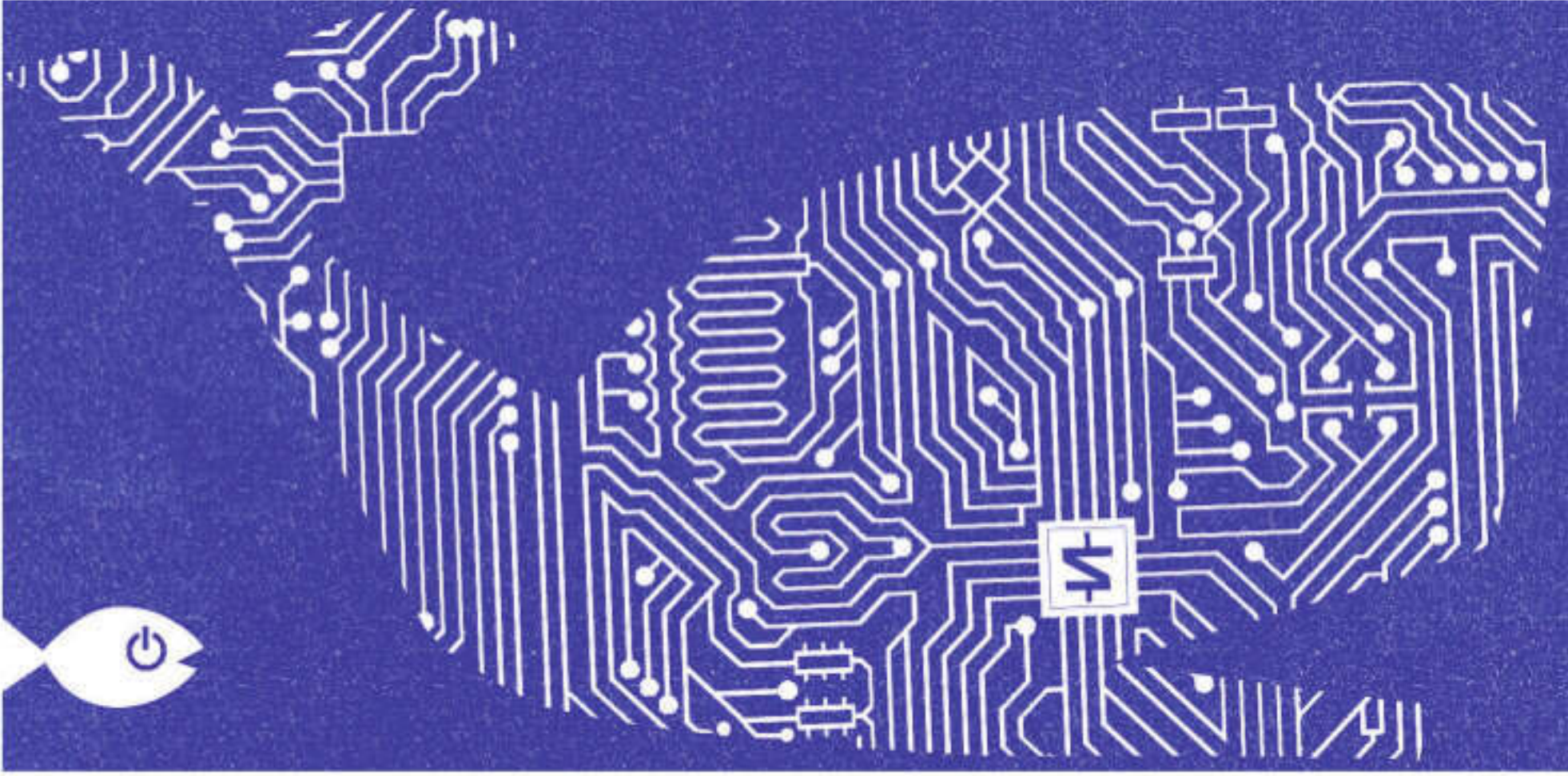
Whether ICET can survive renewed political turbulence in the bilateral relationship — marked by differences on Russia, trade, and Pakistan — remains uncertain. Yet, a more structural challenge looms: The increasingly divergent trajectories of the Indian and American technology ecosystems.

Even in 1975, the SITE programme featured private sector participation. The ATS satellite was built by the Fairchild Corporation (now defunct). But in the years since, the American technology landscape has undergone a dramatic transformation. NASA, once the dominant actor in space, now shares the stage with private firms like Elon Musk's SpaceX, which conducts more launches annually than the government agency itself.

Over the past two decades, America's dynamic technology sector has not only accelerated innovation but also given the US a strategic edge over its rivals. The US government continues to play a vital role — particularly in defence procurement and standard-setting — but increasingly acts as a catalyst rather than a controller.

China, by contrast, has charted a different course. Since Deng Xiaoping's call for "scientific modernisation" in the late 1970s, the Chinese state has pursued a centralised, mission-driven model of technological advancement. Decades of double-digit growth, rapid industrialisation, and heavy investment in scientific research and higher education have propelled China into the front ranks of global technological power, especially in AI and space technology. Despite starting later than India, China's civilian space programme now competes with that of the US and is expanding its global footprint through initiatives like the Digital and Space Silk Roads.

India's own trajectory remains moored somewhere in between the American and



C R Sasikumar

Chinese models. Recent reforms have introduced greater dynamism into India's space sector, but Delhi is still some distance from fully mobilising its private sector to secure a larger share of the global space economy or rejuvenating its higher education and scientific research establishments.

While India finds its footing, the global tech landscape is being reshaped by dramatic developments in the US. In recent weeks, the Trump administration has unveiled two major initiatives — on AI and cryptocurrency — that symbolise a novel approach to technopolitics. Unlike Biden, who sought to regulate and constrain Big Tech, Donald Trump has given it a free hand. In embracing Silicon Valley's libertarian elite, Trump is remaking the American state not as a regulator of big technology, but as its enthusiastic enabler.

What emerges is a distinct philosophy of techno-capitalism: Unapologetically post-liberal, aggressively nationalist, fiercely deregulatory, and ambitiously expansionist. Trump's 2025 AI policy prioritises dismantling regulatory barriers, building data infrastructure, promoting AI-led manufacturing, and mobilising hundreds of billions of dollars in public and private investment. While all major economies aspire to grow AI, the combination of American capital and Silicon Valley's technological prowess sets the US apart.

Trump's techno-capitalism also extends into financial innovation. The recently enacted "GENIUS Act" marks a decisive break from the Biden administration's cautious approach to cryptocurrencies. The Act creates a framework for dollar-backed stablecoins, requiring them to be fully backed 1:1 by liquid US assets such as cash or short-term treasuries. It also mandates reserve disclosures and consumer protections, laying the groundwork for mainstream adoption of stablecoins as digital payment systems.

The policy aims to reinforce the US dollar's role as the world's reserve currency and counter growing calls for "de-dollarisation," including from BRICS nations. Rejecting the idea of a central bank digital currency, the Trump administration is also setting up a Strategic Bitcoin Reserve and has ended prosecutions of major crypto firms initiated during the Biden years. Here too, the motivation is not just economic — it is geopolitical.

At the ideological heart of this techno-capitalist revolution is Peter Thiel, a venture capitalist and co-founder of PayPal and Palantir, and a staunch supporter of Trump's tech agenda. Thiel insists that true innovation arises not from state mandates or regulatory frameworks, but from visionary entrepreneurs liberated from liberal-democratic constraints. His

While India finds its footing, the global tech landscape is being reshaped by dramatic developments in the US. In recent weeks, the Trump administration has unveiled two major initiatives — on AI and cryptocurrency — that symbolise a novel approach to technopolitics. Unlike Biden, who sought to regulate and constrain Big Tech, Donald Trump has given it a free hand. In embracing Silicon Valley's libertarian elite, Trump is remaking the American state not as a regulator of big technology, but as its enthusiastic enabler.

worldview blends libertarian individualism with a muscular nationalism that sees China as America's principal technological adversary.

This marks a decisive break from the techno-optimism of the 1990s, when the rise of the internet was seen as heralding a borderless, decentralised world where the state would gradually recede. That dream proved short-lived. Governments reasserted themselves through regulation, surveillance, and digital sovereignty. Today, we are witnessing the rise of a new state-capital compact — a "tech broligarchy" in which Silicon Valley elites and Washington collaborate to pursue technological supremacy not for utopian ends, but for strategic advantage.

This alliance is central to Trump's broader effort to reconfigure global trade, finance, and security. Whether one supports or opposes this project, its ambition and momentum are undeniable. If even a fraction of the current AI hype is realised and a portion of the planned investment materialises, American techno-capitalism will loom large over the world's economic future.

India cannot remain untouched by these shifts. The celebrated Indian IT sector — long a symbol of the country's global economic integration and a major contributor to its GDP — now faces serious vulnerabilities. As AI begins to automate many of the services that defined India's IT outsourcing boom, traditional jobs may disappear or become obsolete. Add to this Trump's growing hostility toward H-1B visas, and the threat to India's digital workforce becomes even more acute. India's ambition to be a major exporter of tech talent could also be undermined by the West's rising technological nationalism and hostility to immigration.

We are only at the beginning of this techno-capitalist revolution. Will its march be inevitable and triumphant? The alliance between American populism and Silicon Valley could unravel over time due to internal contradictions or commercial rivalries. But the structural shifts now underway in American techno-capitalism — and their global implications — are likely to be enduring.

For India, the imperatives are clear. There is an urgent need to overhaul the domestic tech sector, expand investment in scientific research, and better integrate private enterprise into national innovation strategies. The country must also prepare its industry, workforce, and regulatory institutions for a new era of technological transformation.

The writer is contributing editor on international affairs for The Indian Express and senior fellow at the Council for Strategic and Defence Research

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"As the nation celebrates one year of the historic August 5 that put an end to the autocratic rule of Sheikh Hasina's Awami League, it is deeply troubling that the corrupt, authoritarian, and exclusionary practices that had made the regime so reviled in the first place persist to this day." — **THE DAILY STAR, BANGLADESH**

A certificate of patriotism

SC's observations on 'true Indians' point to an overstepping of institutional boundaries, legitimising of a narrow nationalism



MANOJ KUMAR JHA

IT IS A matter of grave concern when the highest constitutional court of the country begins to prescribe how a "true Indian" should think, behave, or express their love for the nation. Going further, it also prescribes where such articulation is to be made. In the case of the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, it has to be a forum no less than the Parliament of India. The role of the judiciary, in a democracy as vast and diverse as India, is paramount in upholding the Constitution by safeguarding the spirit of plurality and freedom of expression. Yet, recent observations from the apex court, which appear to describe a singular view of a "true Indian", raise troubling constitutional questions. While some people may like to celebrate the nation as it is — and that is fine — others may want to ask sharp questions and find solutions to challenges confronting it. When the judiciary begins prescribing normative standards for who is a "true Indian", it not only oversteps its institutional boundaries but also risks legitimising a narrow and exclusionary nationalism.

The Constitution does not lay down a singular prescriptive idea of what it means to be Indian and how patriotism is to be measured. On the contrary, it guarantees the right to freedom of thought, conscience, expression, and belief. Citizens are not required to conform to a particular cultural or political ethos to prove they belong to the nation. In a previous article (IE, September 9, 2024), I argued that "government is not the nation". If the government harms national interest or deliberately conceals facts, it becomes the duty of every citizen to speak out.

India's strength lies in its constitutional morality, not cultural uniformity or dominant narratives being perpetuated by the regime. Any attempt, especially by the courts, to define or delineate how a "true Indian" should behave sets a perilous precedent. It threatens to narrow the bounds of citizenship, delegitimise dissent, and marginalise citizens who may already feel excluded from the dominant narrative.

What is equally critical is the need to maintain a principled distinction between the interests of the government and the interests of the nation. These are not synonymous. A government represents a temporary political mandate. A nation like India is a continuing, collective aspiration rooted in democratic values, constitutional norms, and the rights of all citizens, especially the marginalised. When courts fail to see or draw this line clearly, and appear to uphold government positions as though they represent national interest, they risk eroding public confidence in judicial independence and democratic fairness.

The observations of the honourable judge directed towards the LoP lay bare something deeply troubling about how our highest court now views democratic discourse. "Whatever you have to say, why don't you say in the Parliament? Why do you have to say this in the social media

posts?" the honourable judge asked. The framing of the alleged offence itself reveals the problem. Democracy does not come with a rulebook that designates where citizens can raise concerns about national security or territorial integrity. If it did, we would not be a democracy at all.

Let us consider what was actually being questioned here: Statements about the Chinese occupation of Indian territory. The court's suggestion that such concerns should be confined to Parliament misses a fundamental truth about democratic accountability. Parliament sessions are limited, question hours are restricted, and governments routinely duck uncomfortable questions. Social media, for all its flaws, remains one of the few spaces where immediate public scrutiny can still function. To suggest that "true Indians" would not air such grievances publicly is to create a certification system for patriotism, one where compliance with procedural propriety matters more than the substance of the concern being raised.

Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, in their study of democratic backsliding across the world, hold that the real threats to democracy rarely come from dramatic coups or violent takeovers. Instead, they emerge from the slow erosion of what they call the "soft guardrails", the unwritten rules of mutual toleration and institutional forbearance that prevent everyday political competition from becoming a zero-sum bloodsport. Mutual toleration means accepting that your rivals have an equal right to exist, compete, and govern, as long as they play by constitutional rules. Forbearance means exercising "patient self-control", avoiding actions that may be technically legal but violate the spirit of democratic norms. The moment these guardrails crack, political opponents come to be regarded as existential enemies. We see this pattern playing out when courts begin policing the boundaries of acceptable dissent and when criticism of government policy, or lack of one, suddenly requires articulation only in designated forums.

We have seen this erosion play out in other democracies, where institutions that are meant to act as checks on executive overreach become gradually aligned with the state narrative. Dissent becomes anti-national, criticism becomes sedition, and patriotism is judged by conformity rather than conviction. India, with its long and rich tradition of judicial activism and civil liberties jurisprudence, must resist such a slide.

The Supreme Court and other constitutional courts are meant to interpret and uphold the Constitution, defend individual freedoms, and ensure that all organs of the state remain within the bounds of law and accountability. The legitimacy of the judiciary rests on its fidelity to constitutional principles and its commitment to justice.

At a time when political rhetoric is increasingly polarising, when institutional autonomy is under strain, and when democratic dissent is being delegitimised, the judiciary must stand as the last bulwark of constitutional democracy. It must not waver in its duty to protect the space for difference, disagreement, and dissent.

The writer is Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha), Rashtriya Janata Dal



AKHILESH MISHRA

"Those who speak without knowledge are like the blind describing the sun." — Mahabharata, Shanti Parva

IN THEIR MISPLACED zeal for attention, Donald Trump and Rahul Gandhi have found common cause — declaring the Indian economy "dead". If only the facts were as loyal to them as their soundbites are to their need for self-aggrandisement. Trump's utterance, given the way he has behaved post his election victory, was expected. But Rahul Gandhi's reflexive concurrence, parroting anti-India narratives for short-term political gains, raises deeper questions. Is he now India's most committed amplifier of foreign mockery? There are two clear ways to answer this "dead economy" trope: One with data, and another with diplomacy's hard logic. First, let's follow the numbers.

Between 2015 and 2025, India has emerged as the fastest-growing major economy, clocking average real GDP growth of 6.5 per cent compared to 4.1 per cent for emerging economies and 1.8 per cent for OECD countries. In contrast to India's 2004-14 boom, powered by global tailwinds and credit spurge (and even then, India grew slower than the world, slower than emerging economies and much slower than China), this

Economy isn't dead

What is lifeless is a politics that echoes Trump's casual derision

decade's growth under the Modi government came despite disruptive reforms like demonetisation and GST and a pandemic.

India is set to become the fourth-largest economy in the world, surpassing the UK and Japan. It accounted for a disproportionately large share of global growth, outpacing all G7 economies in both nominal and real terms. Its 105 per cent nominal GDP expansion between 2015 and 2025 dwarfed the US (66 per cent), Germany (44 per cent), and the UK (28 per cent). While Japan and parts of the Eurozone have almost stagnated, India's growth has been three times faster. It has also significantly narrowed the income gap in per capita terms with OECD nations. Notably, India is projected to overtake Germany soon to become the world's third-largest economy.

India led global IPO charts in 2024 with 327 offerings, and the National Stock Exchange now ranks among the top 5 globally. Foreign portfolio flows have surged. Indian equity markets have delivered 16 per cent average annual returns, outshining nearly every peer.

During the UPA decade, India's growth lagged behind China, Brazil, and Russia. India outgrew all BRICS economies in 2015-25, outpacing even China in percentage growth over the last five years. Even in per capita income

growth, India's rise has been steeper, moving from 30 per cent of average of emerging market economies in 2014 to 42 per cent in 2024.

Under the Modi government, exports surged from \$468 billion to \$825 billion. Defence exports rose twelvefold. Digital India created world-beating platforms like UPI, now processing 49 per cent of all real-time digital payments globally. Inflation, which averaged 8.2 per cent in the UPA era, has been brought down to around 4.5 per cent. Forex reserves have more than doubled. Poverty has fallen at a historic pace, with 25 crore people being lifted out of multidimensional poverty, according to the NITI Aayog. The World Bank has reported that extreme poverty dropped from 16.2 per cent to 2.3 per cent.

The contrast between the UPA era and the Modi era is stark. From policy paralysis to policy propulsion. From scams to startups. From a lagging BRICS economy to its leader. India under Modi has not only grown faster but in a cleaner and more inclusive way, and is globally more respected. Over 55 crore Jan Dhan accounts, Rs 34 lakh crore Mudra loans and the world's largest vaccination drive are signals of a state that knows how to implement projects. India today doesn't just aim to be included, it wants to lead the table — that alone marks the

death of the "dead economy" narrative.

If India's economy were dead, why is the UK calling its FTA with India the most ambitious in its history? Why are EFTA countries committing \$100 billion in investments? Why indeed is the USA chasing trade deals? Why is it that now most iPhones sold in the USA are manufactured in India? Why is it that Canada, a country hostile to India for over a decade, could still not do without India in the G7 it hosted? One could even ask President Trump if the Indian economy is indeed dead, then why is he talking about India in every second press conference he does?

India's economy is dynamic, data-backed, and destined for leadership. That this needs to be said in 2025 is unfortunate. That Rahul Gandhi finds himself echoing Trump's casual derision is tragicomic. Perhaps Gandhi thinks aligning with every outsider who insults India will somehow reanimate his politics. But India has moved on from dependency to self-belief, from slogans to substance. The only thing lifeless here isn't the Indian economy. It's the political instinct that cheers when India is jeered.

The writer is CEO, Bluekraft Digital Foundation and was earlier director (content), MyGov

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

MAN OF THE PEOPLE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Guruji Shibu Soren' (IE, August 5). Shibu Soren, the towering tribal leader and architect of Jharkhand, leaves behind a legacy carved into the hills, forests, and struggles of his people. From a humble background, he rose to become a symbol of resistance, leading movements for tribal land rights and justice. As the founder of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, Soren championed the cause of a separate state to protect tribal identity, culture, and resources. His unwavering commitment culminated in the creation of Jharkhand in 2000 — a moment that marked not just political success, but a triumph of the people's voice.

Vandana Chopra, Chandigarh

TRUMP'S THREAT

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Eye on the goal' (IE, August 5). The US's announcement of a 25 per cent tariff on goods imported from India, and a further penalty for trade with Russia, has opened a mixed bag of opportunities and adversities for India. India should recalibrate its policies, scour new sectors and find trade partners. In no case should India bow to pressure tactics.

Ravi Mathur, Noida

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Eye on the goal' (IE, August 5). Another salvo by US President Donald Trump has laid bare his frustration with India. The Centre has rightly responded strongly and sent Washington a much-needed message that New Delhi will no longer toe its line. Further, Pakistan has become the flavour of the season for Uncle Sam. India, therefore, must therefore err on the side of caution. Trump will undoubtedly try all the tricks in the book to further his agenda but India should hold its ground and strive to protect its interests.

Aanya Singhal, Noida

MEMORABLE WIN

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'Miracles do happen' (IE, August 5). The roaring Indian team has achieved one of their most stunning comebacks in Test cricket to bring down England by six runs in the final test of the series at the Oval and to draw it 2-2 after five nail-biting matches, all going into the last day. Although many players in the Indian squad did not live up to expectations, the young team overall came up with gritty performances throughout the series. It is a time of celebration not only for the Indian team but also for crores of Indian cricket fans

Deepanshu Srivastava, Pune



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

EXPLAINED STRATEGY & FOREIGN POLICY

Engaging with the West: View from Delhi



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with President Donald Trump at the conclusion of a joint news conference in the White House on February 13. *The New York Times*

Reminder for Trump: US had wanted India to buy Russian oil to keep market, prices stable

SUKALP SHARMA
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 5

DONALD TRUMP clearly wants the three-and-a-half-year-old war in Ukraine to end, but President Vladimir Putin appears unyielding. The American President seems to believe that India's significant oil imports from Russia is a lever he can use to push some buttons — he has been berating India, hoping perhaps that penalising or threatening a key trade partner would force the Kremlin into ending the war.

While Trump evidently expects returns from going after India now — at a time when the two countries are locked in intense trade negotiations — it is worth noting that the US had a major role to play in India ramping up oil imports from Russia. Over the course of the war, American officials have publicly stated that India's purchase of Russian oil had US endorsement, at least implicitly.

On Monday, Trump threatened to “substantially” raise tariffs on India for profiting from exporting fuels derived from Russian oil without concern for “how many people in Ukraine are being killed by the Russian War Machine”.

On Tuesday, he sought to pile on the pressure, saying in an interview with *CNBC Squawk Box* that even though he had “settled on 25% [tariff]”, he would “raise that very substantially over the next 24 hours, because they're buying Russian oil... [and] fuelling the war machine”, PTI reported.

On July 30, Trump had announced a 25% tariff and an unspecified “penalty” on India as punishment for its defence and energy imports from Russia. New Delhi responded on Monday, reminding the Americans and the Europeans that India had begun importing from Russia “because traditional supplies were diverted to Europe after the outbreak of the conflict”, and that “the US at that time actively encouraged such im-

ports...for strengthening global energy markets stability”.

India's oil trade with Russia had America's blessings

When the war began in February 2022, the Russian share in India's oil imports was less than 2%. Russia was far away from India, and exported the bulk of its crude to already established markets. And India depended mainly on suppliers like Iraq and Saudi Arabia, which were physically closer.

After much of the West shunned Russian crude, Moscow offered discounts on its oil to willing buyers. Indian refiners were quick to avail of the opportunity, leading to Russia emerging as India's biggest source of crude, displacing suppliers in West Asia. Russia now accounts for 35-40% of Indian oil imports by volume.

And after Europe stopped the import of refined petroleum fuels from Russia, Indian refiners increased fuel exports to Europe.

Besides accusing New Delhi of helping fund Russia's war, critics alleged that India's refiners were pushing fuels made from Russian crude into Europe by the back door. But there was nothing illegitimate about this trade. It is only now that the European Union has announced a ban — to take effect from January 2026 — on fuel imports from countries that buy Russian oil.

This trade in oil and petroleum products had the support of the US, which wanted global energy markets to remain stable and well-supplied. Rapidan Energy Group president Bob McNally, a global energy expert, told *CNBC International* that the Biden administration had in fact “begged” India to buy Russian crude to keep global energy prices in check.

“The Indians must be having some confusion [due to Trump's stance] because Joe Biden went to India after the invasion of Russia and begged them to take Russian oil... They begged India, ‘Please take the oil’,

so that crude prices would remain low, and they did. Now we're flipping around, saying, ‘What are you doing taking all this Russian oil?’ The point is Trump is serious...he is frustrated with Putin,” McNally, who held federal positions in the George W Bush administration, said.

Biden officials had said India's actions in line with US policy

Various Biden administration officials acknowledged publicly that India's actions helped balance the international oil market, and were in line with US policy. Had most Russian oil gone off the market like the Iranian and Venezuelan oil, prices would have shot up, hitting the global economy that was still recovering from the shock of the Covid-19 pandemic.

■ In May 2024, then US Ambassador to India Eric Garcetti said: “Actually, they (India) bought Russian oil because we (the US) wanted somebody to buy Russian oil at a price cap. That was not a violation or anything. It was actually the design of the policy because as a commodity we didn't want

oil prices going up, and they fulfilled that.”

Indeed, Russian oil was and continues to be sanctions-free. The US and its allies had only put a price cap of \$60 per barrel on seaborne Russian crude in December 2022 if the trade involved Western shipping or insurance services. Oil importers like India, which are not part of the price cap coalition, are not bound by the cap as long as their purchase of Russian oil does not involve shipping or insurance from providers in those countries.

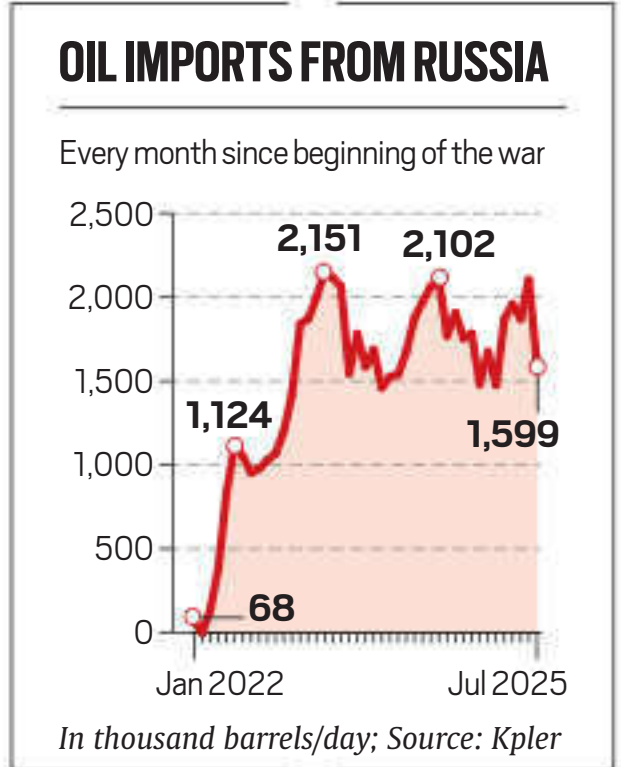
■ In April 2024, Eric Van Nostrand, then the US Treasury Assistant Secretary for Economic Policy, said at an event in New Delhi that the objective of the sanctions and the G7 price cap regime was to keep Russian oil flowing while limiting Russia's revenue from exports, thus impairing its ability to fund the war.

“...We want him (Putin) to choose between three bad things: selling with coalition services under the price cap, selling outside the price cap, or shutting his oil in and not putting it to market. With a strong and robust price cap regime, Putin is going to prefer to sell as much as he can outside the price cap. But in order to maximise his sales outside the price cap, when a large part of the global coalition is already involved in the price cap, he is going to have to offer it cheaper,” Nostrand said.

■ At the same event, Anna Morris, then Assistant Secretary for Terrorist Financing and Financial Crime, said that the crude, once refined into petroleum fuels and products, could no longer be considered of Russian origin.

“...Once Russian oil is refined, from a technical perspective it is no longer Russian oil... If it is refined in a country and then sent forward, from a sanctions perspective that is an import from the country of purchase, it is not an import from Russia,” Morris said.

Trump's threats of financial costs on India upends this reasoning.



Heavy rainfall, rugged topography: What caused flash floods in Uttarkashi?

ANJALI MARAR
BENGALURU, AUGUST 5

AT LEAST four people died after flash floods and mudslides swept through Dharali village in Uttarkashi district, Uttarakhand, on Tuesday afternoon. Several buildings, shops, and hotels were damaged.

Flash floods are not uncommon in the upper hilly areas of Uttarakhand as they are often triggered by a cloudburst — a localised but intense rainfall activity. However, a cloudburst, in a technical sense, did not lead to flash floods on Tuesday, though most parts of the state received heavy rainfall over the past three days.

The primary reason is the topography of the area, where heavy rainfall often results in landslides, sending mud and concrete into the rivers. These materials flow down with great force, accumulating momentum on

the way, leading to flash floods downstream.

What is the topography of Uttarkashi?

Uttarkashi district is located at a high elevation ranging between 800 and 6,900 metres above mean sea level. Large geographical areas are covered with snow throughout the year, and there are glaciers in many parts of the district.

It has the upper reaches of the Ganga and Yamuna rivers, and contains their snowbound source region near Gangotri and Yamunotri respectively. There are also a series of high ridges, perennial rivers, and valleys in Uttarkashi. The rugged topography of the district features sharp undulations due to high mountains, narrow valleys, and deep gorges.

The land slopes steadily towards the southwest, where the elevation in some valleys dips sharply — by as much as 800 metres.



Flash floods and mudslides hit Dharali village, Uttarkashi, on Tuesday. *PTI*

How much rainfall does Uttarkashi receive annually?

Since a large part of the district is situated on the southern slope of the Himalayas, monsoon currents generally penetrate through deeply trenced valleys. Rainfall is

at its maximum during the southwest monsoon season (June to September), particularly in the southern part of the district.

Uttarkashi receives about 1,289 mm of rain on average in a year. Past records show that the highest annual rainfall of 2,436 mm

(189 per cent above normal) was recorded in 1969. July is the district's wettest month, during which it receives about 312 mm of rain on average.

The district is prone to thunderstorms, which occur frequently in the hilly areas.

What led to flash floods on Tuesday?

The topography, combined with the continuous rainfall over the past few days, probably created the perfect scenario for triggering mudslides, debris slides and flash floods as experienced on Tuesday.

The increase in rainfall intensity owing to climate change has added to the pressure on glaciers and snow accumulated during the winter months. As a result, the deglaciation rate in the area has accelerated.

Rainfall of any intensity, if continuous, recorded over such high altitudes where Uttarkashi is located, can be disastrous. That is because this region is built on layers of mudslides over the past several centuries.

Uttarkashi district is situated along the

southern Himalayan slope, where there is limited vegetation and no significant obstruction. Mild triggers such as rainfall or earthquakes can cause loose moraine and soil to easily slither downhill, swallowing homes and roads along its path.

Why was this rain not a 'cloudburst'?

A cloudburst has a very specific definition: Rainfall of 100 mm or more in an hour over a roughly 10 km x 10 km area is classified as a cloudburst event, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

IMD's 24-hour rainfall data as of 8.30 am on Tuesday said Uttarkashi had received 2.7 mm. Also, between 8.30 am and 4.30 pm, rainfall across various meteorological stations in Uttarkashi was well below the threshold defined for a cloudburst, IMD data show.

There has been heavier rainfall in other parts of Uttarakhand over the last three days. For instance, the 24-hour rainfall recorded over the plains of Haridwar was 300 mm on Tuesday.

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{ OUR TAKE }

India-US ties in the crosswires

President Trump’s remarks threaten the diplomatic gains of the past many years

India’s blunt response to US President Donald Trump’s repeated outbursts on New Delhi’s trade and defence relations with Moscow highlighted the double standards of Western powers that have criticised India for purchasing discounted Russian commodities over the past three years. Trump, who follows a completely transactional and unpredictable approach to global trade and key geo-strategic relationships, has spoken more than once in recent days about levying an unspecified penalty on India for its purchases of energy and military hardware from Russia, over and above the 25% tariff that he has already imposed on exports to the US.

The external affairs ministry’s response to Trump’s latest fusillade against India has two key takeaways: One, New Delhi reserves the right to choose its trade partners and will exercise strategic autonomy to meet its security needs; and two, the West must end its hypocrisy of offering one set of principles for the rest of the world and following another set to meet its own energy imperatives. A year ago, US officials, albeit under a different administration, had assured the Indian side that Russian crude refined in a third country, such as India, is not a “product of Russia” from a sanctions perspective. For India, Russian energy is a necessity to ensure predictable and affordable costs for Indian consumers amid volatile market conditions. At the same time, members of the EU and the US have retained their energy and other trade ties with Russia under carve-outs from sanctions packages. The EU’s latest sanctions, for example, provide exemptions for Canada, Norway, Switzerland, the UK and the US from an import ban on refined products made from Russian oil. Such double standards do not sit well with Trump’s sharp remarks about India. Sure, Trump’s posturing may be aimed at pressuring India to conclude a trade deal that is to the advantage of the US, but this is no way to treat an important partner. While Washington has taken the moral high ground on Ukraine (one reason Trump has cited for targeting India), it appears unconcerned about Israel’s war in Gaza that has claimed more than 60,000 Palestinian lives.

Washington will be mistaken to take India for granted at a time when Trump is dining with the Pakistan army chief in the aftermath of the Pahalgam terror attack. Such moves may even push New Delhi closer to Moscow, a longstanding and reliable ally.

India-US ties have evolved from the Cold War days, when New Delhi was allied to Moscow and Washington patronised Islamabad, to achieve a relatively balanced relationship based on mutual respect, democratic values, and strategic interests. Trump’s short-sighted and transactional approach to diplomacy threatens to disrupt that journey.

Oval win heralds new era for Indian cricket

As this Indian team got ready to embark on a five-Test series in England, the fear was they’d get caught out by the conditions, by Bazball, by their inexperience. They were missing Virat Kohli, R Ashwin and Rohit Sharma, all retired. They had a new captain in Shubman Gill, a struggling coach in Gautam Gambhir and their best bowler, Jasprit Bumrah, was going to play just three matches. An England tour would have been tough for the best of teams, but for a young squad, with such constraints, the difficulty level was a few notches higher. Sometimes, though, a crisis can bring the best in a team. Throughout the series, that is what India discovered, and as an HT analysis pointed out, while the outcome read 2-2 in terms of matches, it was 37-29 in favour of India in terms of sessions. In sports, teams are often judged from a historical perspective — can they repeat Wadekar & Co’s heroics from 1971 or do what Kapil’s devils did in 1986? Are they as good as Ganguly’s boys or Dravid’s series-winning team from 2007? It is a measure of this team’s success that they are now part of that lore.

Captain Gill, who averaged 27.53 on pitches outside India until this tour, made a record pile of runs that suggest that the team can be built around him (at the critical No.4 position). Rishabh Pant enhanced his reputation as a maverick game changer. KL Rahul offered calmness and solidity at the top. Large-hearted Mohammed Siraj revealed skills, stamina and nous to win matches. When called upon, everyone chipped in — Akash Deep, Washington Sundar, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Ravindra Jadeja. There are gaps still, and areas this team will have to work on, but the resilience they have demonstrated shows that England 2025 may mark the beginning of a new era. Even legends have to start somewhere.

For Pakistan & US, it is back to doing business

Given Pakistan’s geographical location and the geopolitical moment, an uptick in Washington’s ties with Islamabad was inevitable

There is a discernible sense of satisfaction within Pakistan’s strategic fraternity at the undeniable uptick in the US-Pakistan interface over the past few months. Some may dispute the extent, but given how the relationship had eroded in the past decade-and-a-half, any improvement represents a big change.

The principal milestones of the US-Pakistan downturn are well known. For Pakistan, the US detection and killing of Osama bin Laden in 2011 in Abbottabad was a betrayal and a public humiliation. For many Pakistanis, that the US acted clandestinely deep inside Pakistan superseded the enormity of the fact that Osama had been living there all the time under the very noses of the Pakistan military. The free fall continued with mounting US frustrations over Pakistan’s double game in Afghanistan.

President Trump’s 2018 New Year Day tweet exemplified this view. The tweet underlined US foolishness in giving Pakistan billions of dollars in aid in return for deceit and lies! This was consistent with emergent US narratives about Pakistan, but that it was from the

President himself made it doubly significant. Through the Biden tenure matters crystallised at a low plateau of bad blood and mutual recriminations. The US’s final withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021 in disorder and disarray added another layer to the deep strategic mistrust and suspicion that now characterised the relationship. President Biden did not have even a telecon with Imran Khan during the time he was PM and Imran Khan in turn blamed the US for his premature ouster from power. In the meantime, most US military and security assistance was suspended. What perhaps hurt Pakistan the most was the impact this had on training programmes for Pakistan military officers in the US.

All this happened also when the India-US relationship seemed effortlessly to go from strength to strength. This further highlighted the distance between Washington and Islamabad.

The past few months appear quite different. The change was animated quite dramatically by Field Marshal Asim Munir being hosted by President Trump in June 2025 in the immediate aftermath of Operation Sindoor. It is most unusual — perhaps even unprecedented — for a US president to host a chief of a foreign military who is not a head of State or government.

This shift also coincides with new ambiguities in the US-India interface — perhaps triggered by President Trump’s constant reiteration of having

prevented further escalation in the India-Pakistan conflict during Operation Sindoor. To many in Pakistan, this has “internationalised” Kashmir and highlighted the importance of third-party intervention as equally that even the US was skeptical about India’s claims and demands.

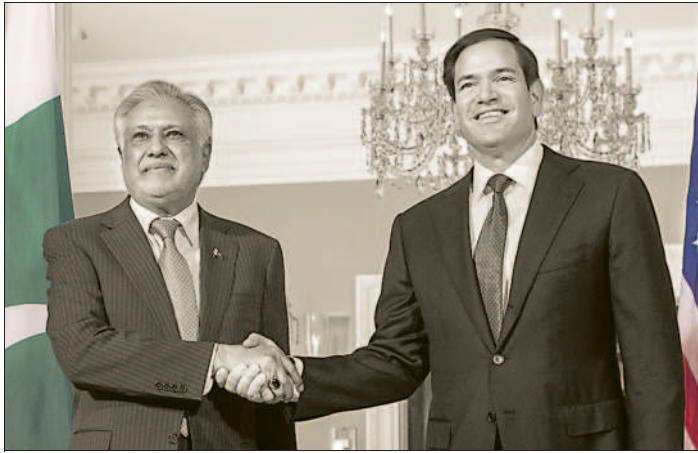
There had been earlier indicators of change beginning with President Trump’s acknowledgement of Pakistan’s counter-terrorism assistance in his State of the Union Address in March 2025. The allocation of a significant financial package as assistance to Pakistan for maintaining its F16 aircraft despite an otherwise stringent foreign aid cutback, was another.

Alongside, more even-handed references to the India-Pakistan dynamic, meetings and telephone conversations between the US secretary of State and senior Pakistan leaders further underlined this shift. The announcement of a US-Pakistan Trade Agreement, albeit with a 19% tariff on imports from Pakistan, and Trump’s enthusiastic references to hydrocarbon exploration and investment, are but the latest in this trend. The trade agreement may not be the best deal Pakistan could have got, but it is not as bad as could have been, and in any case some deal was better than no deal as far as the government of Pakistan was concerned.

It may well be argued that there is nothing particularly significant in these



TCA Raghavan



Given the transactional nature that dominates the US, there is the temptation to find direct factors for the upswing in US-Pakistan relations

transitions, but for most Pakistanis they suggest a return of their country to the US’s radar after a long period of being out in the cold.

What explains this shift? Given the transactional frame of mind that dominates the US, there is always the temptation to look for a direct and material factor. Numerous reasons are, therefore, assigned for this shift in US policy. Pakistan’s counter-terrorism potential and the assistance it can offer is one. That the US is keen to have some relationship with Pakistan given the growing spread of China in the region is another. There is also the view that recommendations of the US Central Command on Pakistan’s military potential vis-a-vis Iran in terms of its geographical location and the value of its air bases may have registered on the President amid the current situation in West and South West Asia. Some argue that this shift in policy was also pushed along by crypto currency deals, and by US interest in potential Pakistani reserves of rare earth minerals.

Each of these explanations may have some merit but perhaps the weight of any or all of these should not be exaggerated.

Instead, it is useful to refocus on some basics. Pakistan is the fifth largest country in the world in terms of population with some 250 million people. It is riven by instability. It has nuclear weapons. It is situated in a sensitive geo-political location, almost in a global fault line. Given these attributes it was always only a matter of time that the long downturn in US Pakistan relations would reverse and US interest in Pakistan would reignite.

We are at that stage now. All major powers decide on policies based on an appreciation of their own interests and their own understandings of evolving situations. To think that the long downturn in US Pakistan relations would have simply continued or that the US would see developments from our perspective alone is, and never was, a realistic assessment. We should take this shift in our stride. If some in India feel betrayed or dismayed at this turn of events, they have only themselves to blame.

TCA Raghavan is a former Indian high commissioner to Pakistan. The views expressed are personal

India’s economic resilience guards against tariff threats

The impact of the US’s 25% tariff on imports from India appears to be far less catastrophic than what some had predicted. Meanwhile, the trade deal with the US remains in negotiation, and there is every reason to expect that once talks advance, the tariff rate could be scaled down. Estimates suggest that the 25% tariff might translate into an annual impact of just \$10-11 billion — a relatively modest impact.

With the American delegation scheduled to visit New Delhi later in August, both sides have ample opportunity to recalibrate their positions. Trade deals are shaped not by threats but by diligent negotiations between officials representing institutional interests of their respective countries. In that light, US President Donald Trump’s statements seem part of a broader tactic aimed at bolstering America’s bargaining position rather than signalling an irreversible shift in economic policy.

Therefore, there is no need to panic. India’s growth story is one of rising momentum, driven by deep structural shifts and smart strategic positioning. Over the past year, India has defied global headwinds that have hindered many advanced economies. While high inflation, tightening monetary policies and geopolitical uncertainty have strained markets elsewhere, India has maintained an impressive growth trajectory.

India’s ability to sustain high growth is anchored in robust domestic demand, strong public capital expenditure, and the sustained expansion of its booming services sector. At the same time, there has been a deliberate policy recalibration toward achieving self-reliance, integrating global supply chains and boosting manufacturing competitiveness. Initiatives like the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) schemes across sectors such as electronics, semiconductors and renewable energy have attracted substantial foreign direct investment. Moreover, the nation’s digital revolution has firmly established India as a leader in the digital economy across the Global South.

In this context, the recently-signed India-UK free trade agreement (FTA) takes on added significance. While the FTA negotiations were multifaceted, the agreement was not solely about lowering tariffs or increasing trade volumes; it was also about redefining economic diplomacy in a multipolar world. For India, an ambitious FTA with the UK offers several strategic advantages.

One, it sends a positive signal to global investors, affirming that India remains open for business — both strategic and reform-minded. Two, the deal provides a pathway for India to build deeper trade links with advanced economies at a time when globalisation is evolving towards regionalisation. And three, the agreement reinforces India’s effort to diversify its export markets — a crucial counterbalance to the uncertainties of US trade policy and the slowing pace of growth in some of its traditional markets.

The UK is currently India’s 18th largest trading partner, with bilateral trade exceeding \$50 billion. The FTA will serve to lower existing tariffs, ease regulatory hurdles and promote greater mobility for Indian professionals. Even contentious issues, such as agricultural trade, though politically sensitive, appear manageable. The relatively modest scale of UK agricultural exports could provide the room needed to sidestep potential disputes, easing negotiation complexities

on that front.

At the same time, India’s impressive economic performance is underscored by several headline-grabbing trends across its major sectors. For instance, in the realm of global supply chains, India has emerged as a formidable competitor in the smartphone market. This transformation illustrates how India is successfully capitalising on new geopolitical realities and diversifying manufacturing hubs.

Additionally, macroeconomic indicators have painted an encouraging picture. With retail inflation falling to a six-year low of 2.1% in June 2025, the consumer sector has found its footing amid otherwise volatile global conditions. Employment metrics reveal a healthy labour market. Exports have seen a year-on-year boost of approximately 5.9%, while remittances have reached a record \$135.5 billion. The Manufacturing Purchasing Managers’ Index (PMI) in July 2025 hit a 17-year high of 59.2, reflecting robust industrial activity and strong global demand.

Public health initiatives, too, have contributed significantly to the overall picture. The Jan Aushadhi Kendras, which offer affordable medicine and have saved citizens ₹38,000 crore in health care costs over the last 11 years, exemplify how policy initiatives are directly alleviating household expenses and improving standards of living.

Energy and infrastructure sectors are part of this rosy picture as well. India has crossed the 1-billion-tonne mark for coal production — a symbol of its energy self-reliance — while simultaneously ramping up renewable energy capacity. With 22 gigawatts of solar and wind capacity added in the first half of 2025, India is on track to overtake the US in clean energy installations.

In the digital domain, India’s transformation is truly remarkable, which reinforces India’s position as a hub of technological innovation.

Furthermore, the growth of Global Capability Centres (GCCs) in Tier-II and Tier-III cities — now numbering over 1,700 and generating \$64.6 billion in revenue — demonstrates a broader socio-economic transformation. With these centres creating tens of thousands of jobs outside the traditional Tier-I urban hubs, India is leveraging lower costs, burgeoning talent pools, and improved infrastructure to reshape its economic geography.

In essence, while President Trump’s statements may have generated headlines, the underlying data tells a more encouraging story. India’s broad-based growth, strong macroeconomic fundamentals, and strategic policy shifts point to an economy that is far more robust and resilient than any single trade dispute could jeopardise. Rather than succumbing to external pressure, India is actively repositioning itself as a major player on the global stage, capable of turning challenges into opportunities.

Ultimately, the narrative is one of confidence, adaptability and strategic foresight. India’s economic resilience serves as a compelling counterpoint to any external rhetoric. The picture, then, is not one of crisis but of calculated evolution — a testament to India’s ongoing journey towards becoming a robust and dynamic engine of global growth.

Syed Zafar Islam is a national spokesperson of the BJP, former Member of Parliament, and former managing director, Deutsche Bank, India. The views expressed are personal

{ FERDINAND R MARCOS JR. } PRESIDENT, THE PHILIPPINES



We now refer to it (the Asia-Pacific) as the Indo-Pacific region, which is, I think, a correct evolution of the understanding because of the global nature of all the politics, all the trade and all of the economy

During his ongoing State visit to India



Build readiness against rising dirty-war risks

This August 6 marks 80 years of the US’s nuclear bombing of Hiroshima, Japan, which permanently altered the trajectory of global security and warfare. The two bombs dropped in 1945, on Hiroshima and on Nagasaki three days later, killed over 350,000 people instantly and left another 400,000 dead within a few months — introducing the world to the devastating potential of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). At the time, the yield or intensity of these weapons was relatively modest compared to the nuclear arsenal that exists today. Today, the world faces far more advanced, lethal, and widespread threats under the growing umbrella of “dirty wars”. The scale of suffering and devastation is beyond comprehension, and today’s weapons are exponentially more powerful. There are estimated to be over 12,000 nuclear warheads in the world. Many of the modern

strategic nuclear weapons are thermonuclear weapons, having yields equivalent to a 100 kilo tonnes (KT) of TNT and above. This has the potential to destroy the world as we know it many times over. Tactical nuclear weapons can be 50 KT and less.

The India-Pakistan conflict captures the world’s attention given both have nuclear capabilities. A nuclear bomb’s destruction extends far beyond its immediate blast radius. It generates an intense fireball, a blinding flash, a shock-wave and, most dangerously, ionising radiation. The radioactive mushroom cloud not only contaminates the target, but reaches far-flung regions, depending on wind conditions — rendering vast areas uninhabitable for decades.

In the Cold War era, WMDs were broadly categorised under the NBC triad — nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons. Over time, radiological was added to this, creating the term CBRN. Each category brings its own horrors: While nuclear weapons incinerate cities, biological and chemical agents work invisibly, silently, and over time.

Chemical weapons, although banned under international law, are still accessible to States and non-State actors. They can be created using widely available industrial and pharmaceutical chemicals, turning everyday compounds into agents of mass death. Sarin, VX, chlorine, and mustard gas are examples. Equally alarming are biological weapons — viruses and bacteria designed to infect and kill populations indiscriminately. The Covid-19 pandemic gave the world a preview to the havoc a simple virus can unleash, even if accidental. But when weaponised and intentionally released, pathogens could cripple societies, economies, and milita-

ries in a matter of days.

The proliferation of biological research facilities worldwide, some poorly regulated, raises grave concerns. The Wuhan lab controversy underlined the thin line between scientific exploration and potential dual use for bio-warfare. Biological and radiological warfare has become the preferred “silent weapon” of the future, and many nations are covertly advancing such capabilities under the guise of health research.

A critical issue lies in the imbalance of offensive and defensive capacities. While many nations possess the capability to launch CBRN attacks, few are adequately prepared or capable of defending themselves. Countries like China have built subterranean tunnel networks housing military assets in case of nuclear or chemical strikes. Such preparation indicates an evolving mindset — wars will no longer be limited to borders or frontlines. They will target critical infrastructure, command-and-control (C2) nodes, urban populations, and national willpower itself. Missiles, aircraft, and now drones can deliver munitions deep into the hinterland. In a dirty war, collateral damage will be immense — not just military installations but power grids, hospitals, transport systems, and even the financial sector can be targeted

through kinetic, cyber, or biological means. Even conventional missile warheads will be toxic enough to cause permanent damage to the lungs, heart and brain. A dirty war is now a creeping reality. Technology has empowered even smaller nations and insurgent groups to wield devastating power. Leaders today appear less tolerant, more reactive, and increasingly reliant on first-strike doctrines.

What can nations do? Preparedness must be comprehensive. This includes building CBRN shelters in key cities and military bases and training first responders and civilians for CBRN scenarios. It should be essential to stockpile antidotes, protective suits, and detection systems. The civil defence and NDMA should conduct regular drills and heighten awareness. Securing borders and labs against bio-accidents/terrorism, investing in early warning, air defence and missile defence systems, especially empowered by space and cyber domains would be essential. Civil defence needs revival. Strategic deterrence must go hand-in-hand with societal resilience. Dirty wars may not be declared, but their impact will be undeniable. Let us prepare, not panic.

PJS Pannu is a retired lieutenant general with the Indian Army. The views expressed are personal

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One-upmanship of the bizarre kind in Karnataka

When it comes to scoring political brownie points, the Congress has often demonstrated that it can shock and disrupt the best-laid plans of its rivals, especially of the saffron kind. It is a classic action-reaction scenario, enacted untiringly, episode after episode, incident after incident in Karnataka, where the communal brand of politics has a certain presence and acceptance, the most noticed in entire south India. Quite often personal dislike for a certain rival or a certain head of administration, who had ruled the State or a vital part of it, can trigger conveniently spun theories and opinions. In this case, it is the legacy of eternally-in-the-

news Tipu Sultan, who is a Muslim ruler of the acceptable kind for the secular and GOP supporters, who automatically becomes a hated figure for the opposition, who have enough to justify their pique. Historians have debated for decades on his rule and what came of it for the people at large but what set off a furious set of opinions this time around was what the Minister for Social Welfare, HC Mahadevappa has said.

In a recent remark, he eulogised Tipu Sultan for his visionary agricultural water supply infrastructure in the State. He even said the foundation stone for the Kannambadi Dam, now submerged under the Krishnaraja Sagar reservoir,

still stands with a Persian inscription, circa 1794. Naturally, the BJP and its saffron front outfits saw red. They obviously protested downplaying of the KRS reservoir built by the Mysore ruler, Maharaja Krishnaswamy Wodeyar IV in early 20th century. The Minister was flayed for 'historical distortion' and misleading the public with his statements. The 'tyrannical' rule of Tipu with his destruction of temples and forced conversions was once again brought out into public domain by the rival party supporters, as expected. Till the time of going to press, the Congress leader has not taken any effort to mollify the protestors. In Bengaluru, the biggest pow-wow has been reserved for

a credit-hogging exercise between the state government and the Centre over the inauguration of the Namma Metro Yellow Line service, scheduled for Sunday. Playing the statesman, rather unconvincingly, the Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar announced that this transport service has a primary goal of serving the public and downplayed the need to indulge in credit-hogging exercises.

With the ever-ready spotlight-centred Prime Minister Narendra Modi landing in the state capital to inaugurate the service along with a few other engagements, it looks like the local politicians are keen on grabbing their share of the pie before Modi arrives and sweeps the public attention away

from all of them. With the quality of urban transportation, civic life and social environment degenerating in the Garden City, it is already fast-forwarding its journey to the point of no return in all these sectors. Linguistic politics, communal debates and the rising wave of religious intolerance in various pockets of Karnataka have all kept the citizens worried about how it will end and whether there is a hopeful turn for them in the future. Whoever wishes to project themselves as the saviours must surely be mindful about how the people feel about them and their governance models. Ignoring emerging signals could cost them dearly and even lead to their downfall.



LETTERS

Rains expose GHMC apathy

Rains have poured misery on the people with streets of Hyderabad becoming deadly. After a prolonged dry spell, the city received heavy rains all through Monday with many areas like Shaikpet and Kukatpally receiving more than 10 cm in a span of two hours. This has become the new normal. However, what is a matter of concern is the apathy shown by GHMC. Heavy rainfall and flooding happen every year and the traffic comes to a standstill. Open drains and manholes add to the woes of commuters, while GHMC officials are caught napping. There is no monsoon preparedness and there are no proper outlets for the rainwater to recede and flow. Power outages are also common. We all seek long-term solution to this yearly horror. Hope authorities from the civic body will rise to the occasion and bring all-round relief to us.

Parimala G Tadas, Hyderabad-50

GHMC should come up with permanent solutions

This is invariably an annual ritual in the twin cities come rainy season. Rainwater flooding is common, mostly because of poor city planning on the one hand and human greed on the other that has led to haphazard growth of the twin cities, which is the root-cause of inundation during rains. Perhaps the road caving in Banjara Hills wherein a water tank fell into the ditch causing panic all around, appears to be the last nail in the coffin. The civic body, state government and the ruling party should take stock of the situation by revisiting the causes of regular inundation and its devastation. Instead of taking permanent remedial measures, the authorities always take temporary steps. Successive governments have failed to boost civic amenities. Earlier there was a drive to restore all the 1000+ encroached water bodies in the twin cities to prevent water logging and related mishaps during rainy season. However, it was abandoned suddenly for reasons best known to the authorities concerned! Meanwhile, it is the residents who suffer untold miseries every year and the local body looks askance unable to solve the flooding problem, once and for all.

Govardhana Myneedu, Vijayawada

What a series! Test cricket triumphs!

Even those cricket pundits who keep on reiterating that Test cricket is fast fading, would have been on the edge of their seats, biting their nails with adrenaline gushing while watching India and England play one of the most thrilling Test matches in the game's history at the Oval. The morning session of the fifth day of the last Test of the extraordinary series had everything-palpable tension, pressure, thrill, chill and suspense of the kind which even ODIs and T20's can't boast of. Mohd Siraj played a pivotal role in the five-match series. This young team led by the dynamic Subhman Gill is sure to stay for long, while the experience gained in England will bolster their capabilities in handling match-tensions. There is no denying it was Test cricket that won over everything else. There was never a dull moment in the series with players of both teams displaying their best. The series especially the Oval Test will be remembered forever. As the BBC puts it, 'none will match what we have witnessed over the past seven weeks. What a series!'

M Pradyu, Kannur

Fantastic effort Team India!

The young Indian team, without Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma and R Ashwin, exceeded the expectations of every fan. Gill, the apprentice, as far as captaincy is concerned, showed remarkable constraint on and off the field, barring one instance. What is more fascinating is that Gill's overseas batting stocks went upwards, even though the mantle of captaincy fell on him. Meanwhile, Mohd Siraj, the workhorse, has finally come out of Bumrah's shadow with his stunning performances. A word of praise must also go to debutant Prasidh Krishna, who as support bowler stepped into Siraj's shoes.

Nagendra Kumar Vempalli, Bengaluru- 560037

Need for SIR all over country

A propos the editorial 'Crisis credibility will hurt both AECI and democracy'. It's quite clear that the Election Commission of India (ECI) is being blamed by political parties in the wake of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) in Bihar, which is necessary and inevitable in rectifying electoral rolls in the state. Naturally this will hit ineligible voters hard as their names will be deleted. It is imperative that duplicate and ineligible voters must be excluded across the country. The Election Commission must ignore irrational stonewalling efforts against SIR by the likes of TMC, DMK and the Congress.

S Lakshmi, Hyderabad

thehansreader@gmail.com



BENGALURU ONLINE

PM to open Namma Metro Yellow Line on August 10

BENGALURU: Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar confirmed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit Bengaluru on August 10 to inaugurate the much-awaited yellow line of Namma Metro.

Speaking to the media, Shivakumar said the state government has received official communication about the Prime Minister's arrival for the Metro launch event. "The Prime Minister has confirmed his participation in the inauguration of the yellow line. We are making necessary preparations and conducting inspections accordingly," he said.

However, Shivakumar clarified that a detailed itinerary of Modi's other engagements in Bengaluru is yet to be officially released. "He has said he will come, but specific timings and other programmes are not finalised," he added.

Read more at
<https://epaper.thehansindia.com>



Dr K NARAYANA

Blessed with picturesque splendour and nature's bountiful, exotic flowers and fruits, mountain ranges, green meadows and mesmerizing blue river waters, Jammu and Kashmir is a gift to India.

For the first time, I had the opportunity of visiting the spectacular Srinagar, while on our way to Pahalgam. Police vigilance and checking after every furlong caused dismay to our team members, especially because the military personnel posted there kept asking us about who we were and for what purpose we were in the sensitive area. It is ironic that while around one crore people live in Kashmir, approximately seven lakh military personnel of various ranks are being posted for vigilance and to fight terrorists and invaders.

Strangely, at first look it appears like the State is under military rule and is not being run by a democratically elected government.

The moot point is what has led to such a sorry situation in the first place. Kashmiris still do not trust the Indian government. There have been many attempts to stamp the people of Kashmir as terrorists. Is it the real scene out there or are there any political reasons or a hidden agenda behind this escapist act?

During the Sheikh Abdullah's regime land reforms were

implemented with the slogan 'Land to the tiller'. As part of the exercise, land was seized without giving compensation and distributed to the people. As and when governments changed, the new government did not implement land reforms but enacted new laws that put a halt to land reforms. Every family has land on which they cultivate paddy, apples and lichee fruits, among others. We cannot see poverty there. When there is such a prosperous situation, one wonders why this anarchism.

Politics of the post-independence period have given life and employment to people. But the people of Kashmir have lost confidence in the union government, whose leaders with their lust for power committed unpardonable mistakes. A most damaging fallout has been that terrorists took advantage of the situation and turned more menacing. Pakistan seized the opportunity and abetted the terrorists based in the valley, while the people of Kashmir were left aghast at the Centre's inept administration.

Meanwhile, I, accompanied by other national secretaries of the Communist Party of India (CPI) Ramakrishna Panda and Azeem Pasha, paid a visit to Pahalgam. We found a police camp after every furlong. There were an estimated seven lakh personnel drawn from either the police or military forces. Jawans.

We wished to visit Operation Sindoor spot but all roads leading to that area were closed. With great difficulty we reached Pahalgam, where we could chat with petty retail merchants and horse-riding helpers. Incidentally, their narrations implied that the situation was far better



Even after more than nine months since Omar Abdullah's government took office in October 2024, public disillusionment remains high. The promised restoration of statehood is yet to materialise, and the prevailing dual power structure—split between the elected government and the centrally appointed Lieutenant Governor—continues to hamper effective governance.

ter than what is projected by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's rhetoric.

Following the Pahalgam massacre the compensation paid to the kin of the 22 tourists, who were killed, was peanuts.

The locals living in the border areas contend that India lost five war jets and several war bases, while there were many migrations from the other side. While the entire nation was hoping that Indian forces would re-occupy POK, the war was stopped in an overnight move.

Modi is utilising Sindoor as election propaganda material. He is instilling fear among tourists and the retail merchants are unable to earn a decent livelihood. Prior to Pahalgam, there would be over 1000 horses waiting for customers while today there are hardly 100 hundred horses. Tourists are shunning Kashmir and Modi is resorting to venomous politics just to hang on to power.

It is fair to state that central politics which started during the Indira Gandhi period, are

nearing their climax now.

At the political crossroads:

Post-independence, the political history of Jammu and Kashmir, was marked by a series of tumultuous and defining events. One of the most significant was the arrest of the region's tallest and most influential leader, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah.

Often referred to as the 'Lion of Kashmir', he led its first democratically elected government. A charismatic mass leader, he played a pivotal role in shaping the political consciousness of the region during the tumultuous years following partition.

He was widely credited for carrying out radical land reforms in the 1950s under the slogan 'Land to the tiller', a transformative policy that broke the centuries-old feudal stranglehold and redistributed land to poor peasants. This move not only cemented his popularity among the masses but also triggered deep socio-economic changes in the agrarian landscape of Kashmir.

Youth turning to ChatGPT to beat insecurity and loneliness

APARNA BOSE

An alarming trend of young adolescents turning to artificial intelligence (AI) chatbots like ChatGPT to express their deepest emotions and personal problems is raising serious concerns among educators and mental health professionals. Experts warn that this digital "safe space" is creating a dangerous dependency, fueling validation-seeking behaviour, and deepening a crisis of communication within families. They said that this digital solace is just a mirage, as the chatbots are designed to provide validation and engagement, potentially embedding misbeliefs and hindering the development of crucial social skills and emotional resilience.

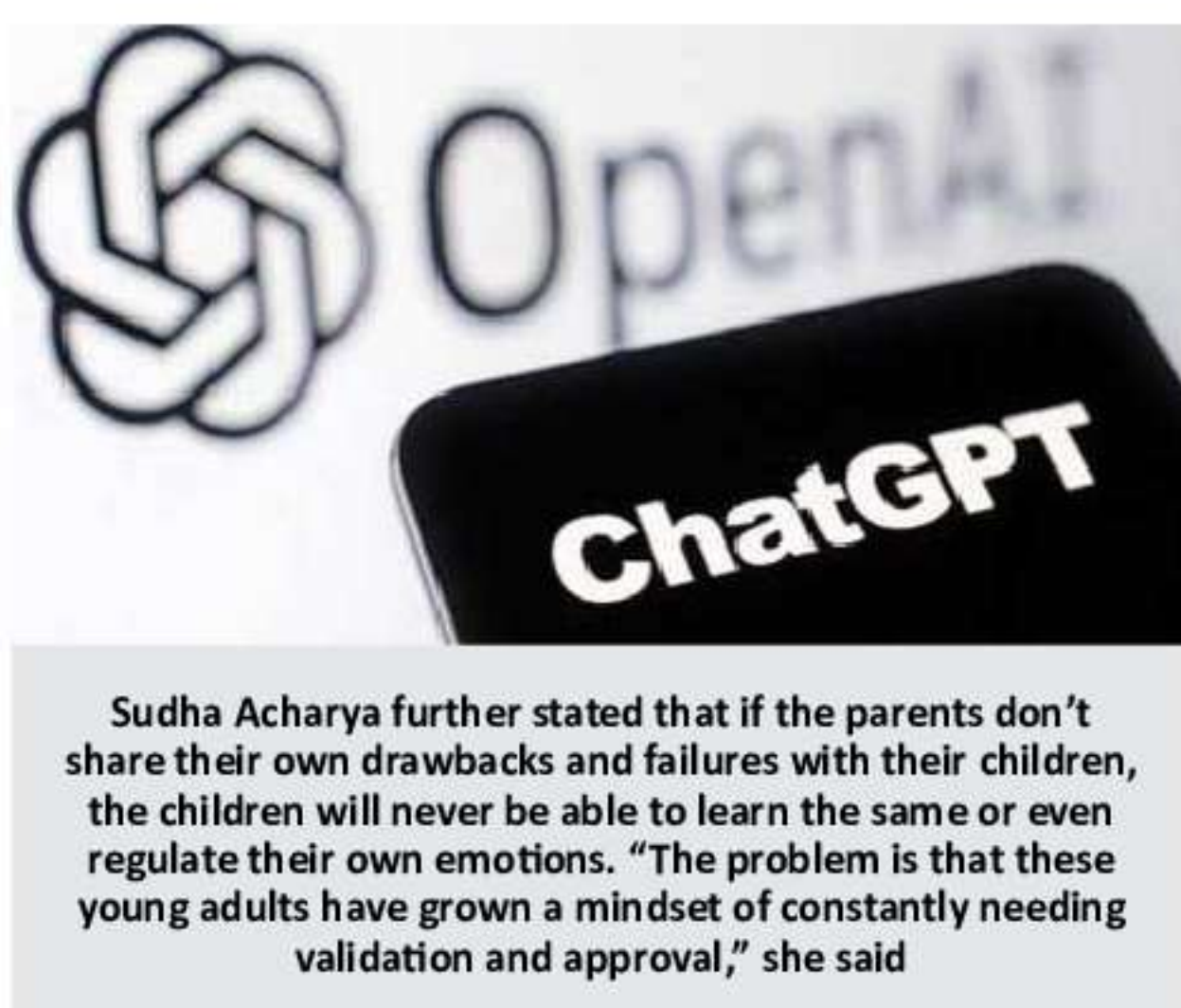
Sudha Acharya, Principal of ITL Public School, highlighted that a dangerous mindset has taken root among youngsters, who mistakenly believe that their phones offer a private sanctuary.

"School is a social place – a place for social and emotional learning. Of late, there has been a trend amongst the young adolescents... They think that when they are sit-

ting with their phones, they are in their private space. ChatGPT is using a large language model, and whatever information is being shared with the chatbot is undoubtedly in the public domain," she told this writer.

She noted that children are turning to ChatGPT to express their emotions whenever they feel low, depressed, or unable to find anyone to confide in. She believes that this points towards a "serious lack of communication in reality, and it starts from family." Sudha Acharya further stated that if the parents don't share their own drawbacks and failures with their children, the children will never be able to learn the same or even regulate their own emotions. "The problem is that these young adults have grown a mindset of constantly needing validation and approval," she said.

Acharya has introduced a digital citizenship skills programme from Class 6 onwards at her school, specifically because children as young as nine or ten now own smartphones without the maturity to use them ethically. She highlighted a particular concern – when a youngster shares their distress



Sudha Acharya further stated that if the parents don't share their own drawbacks and failures with their children, the children will never be able to learn the same or even regulate their own emotions. "The problem is that these young adults have grown a mindset of constantly needing validation and approval," she said

with ChatGPT, the immediate response is often "please, calm down. We will solve it together." "This reflects that the AI is trying to instil trust in the individual interacting with it, eventually feeding validation and approval so that the user engages in further conversations," she added. "Such issues wouldn't arise if these young adolescents had real friends rather than 'reel' friends. They have a mindset that if a picture is posted on social media, it must get at least a hundred 'likes', else they feel low and invalidated," she said.

The school principal be-

lieves that the core of the issue lies with parents themselves, who are often "gadget-addicted" and fail to provide emotional time to their children. While they offer all materialistic comforts, emotional support and understanding are often absent. "We track these students very closely and try our best to help them," she stated. "In most of these cases, we have observed that the young adolescents are very particular about their body image, validation and approval. When they do not get that, they turn agitated and eventually end up harming themselves. It is really

alarming as the cases like these are rising," she observed.

Ayeshi, a student in Class 11, confessed that she shared her personal issues with AI bots numerous times out of "fear of being judged" in real life. "I felt like it was an emotional space and eventually developed an emotional dependency towards it. It felt like my safe space. It always gives positive feedback and never contradicts you. Although I gradually understood that it wasn't mentoring me or giving me real guidance, that took some time," the 16-year-old said.

Ayushi also admitted that turning to chatbots for personal issues is "quite common" within her friend circle.

"I observed growing impatience and aggression," he said. He had been using the chatbots for a year or two but stopped recently after discovering that "ChatGPT uses this information to advance itself and train its data."

Psychiatrist Dr Lokesh Singh Shekhawat of RML Hospital confirmed that AI bots are meticulously customised to maximise user engagement.

"When youngsters develop any sort of negative emotions

or misbeliefs and share them with ChatGPT, the AI bot validates them," he explained. "The youth start believing the responses, which makes them nothing but delusional." He noted that when a misbelief is repeatedly validated, it becomes "embedded in the mindset as a truth," he added.

This, he said, alters their point of view – a phenomenon he referred to as 'attention bias' and 'memory bias'. The chatbot's ability to adapt to the user's tone is a deliberate tactic to encourage maximum conversation, he added. Singh stressed the importance of constructive criticism for mental health; something completely absent in the AI interaction.

"Youth feel relieved and ventilated when they share their personal problems with AI, but they don't realise that it is making them dangerously dependent on it," he warned.

He also drew a parallel between an addiction to AI for mood uplift and addictions to gaming or alcohol.

"The dependency on it increases day by day," he said, cautioning that in the long run, this will create a "social skill deficit and isolation."

Move swiftly on EVs

The rare earth magnet crisis is here and now and should be tackled immediately

THE AUTO SECTOR is inching towards a serious production crisis, and the government should not treat it as a future problem. The rare earth magnet (REM) shortage, triggered by China's export controls, is already tightening its grip on electric and even internal combustion engine vehicle manufacturing. Bajaj Auto Managing Director Rajiv Bajaj recently said that the company may be forced to halt EV production in the coming weeks. Maruti Suzuki has slashed its EV production target for the e-Vitara by nearly 70%. Maybe Bajaj is being too alarmist, but the fear of supply chain disruptions are certainly real if imports don't resume. So, to delay action on the premise that problems may surface maybe next year or so is risking a lot.

While it's encouraging that the government is working on an incentive scheme to spur domestic REM manufacturing and is scouting for alternative international suppliers, these are long-gestation solutions. Reports suggest that India has recently sought permission from the United Nations, specifically through the International Seabed Authority, to explore rare earth elements and other critical mineral reserves in the Arabian Sea as well as the broader Indian Ocean Region. The move is good, but mining and refining the country's own reserves, or creating a full magnet production value chain, is a multi-year project. So, too, is building supply partnerships with countries like Australia, Vietnam, or Japan.

Therefore, what's missing is swift, tactical action. Despite repeated requests, the government has so far not reduced duty on imports of fully built motors, which is an immediate solution that would bypass the current REM bottleneck and keep assembly lines running. Nor has it agreed to relax domestic value-addition norms under schemes like the auto performance-linked incentive (PLI), which would give companies the breathing space they need. Instead, the ministry of heavy industries is reportedly seeking wider industry consensus before moving. This approach misunderstands the nature of the industry. Auto manufacturing is highly diverse. Not all players are equally affected by the REM crunch, as some have enough inventory to ride out the next quarter and may even benefit if rivals falter. Expecting a unified industry position delays relief for those already under strain. The government must take a call not on the basis of aggregate sentiment, but on the nature and urgency of the problem. Yes, the broader context matters. Demand has been weak so far this fiscal, and production cuts in June and July have helped stretch existing inventories. Some manufacturers are deliberately slowing EV output to conserve rare earth components. But this is a temporary fix, not a solution. The moment demand rebounds, especially around the festive season, those buffers will vanish.

The government's longer-term thinking is commendable. The country has significant REM reserves at the third-largest position in the world, and the push to develop domestic production is both necessary and overdue. The planned incentive scheme can lay the foundation for future resilience. But the immediate should not be sacrificed at the altar of the important. Production lines cannot be restarted overnight once they are shut. This is a time for the government to show pragmatism. Easing PLI localisation norms and reducing duty on fully-built motor imports should not be seen as policy rollbacks, but as necessary lifelines. The government must move with speed and clarity, not caution and consensus. Delay now will only mean that by the time long-term solutions kick in, the damage may have already been done.

Tesla's autopilot verdict reveals a glaring flaw

A MIAMI JURY just sided with the humans. The \$243 million of damages levied against Tesla Inc. over a fatal Autopilot crash in 2019 represent a black eye for a company that has often successfully blamed human error in prior accidents. It will hopefully be more than that: an impetus to fix a glaring flaw in the drive for ever more automated vehicles.

An unusual aspect of this case, *Benavides vs Tesla*, was that the driver admitted he was at fault, having sped through a stop sign while searching for a dropped cellphone, killing Naibel Benavides Leon and seriously injuring her boyfriend as they stood next to their parked SUV. The jury did indeed blame the distracted driver but assigned him only two-thirds of that blame. The rest was laid on Tesla. Not only must it pay its share of compensatory damages to the victims, amounting to about \$43 million, but also \$200 million of punitive damages.

During the trial, the driver said that although he knew he was responsible for operating his Model S, he had expected his Autopilot system to help if he made an error. Autopilot combines autosteering and dynamic cruise control and is designed to relieve some of the driver's workload rather than displace it altogether by keeping the vehicle centred in its lane and maintaining a safe distance from vehicles in front when travelling. Ask yourself if that is what springs to mind when you hear the word "autopilot" as opposed to a general sense that such a machine pilots itself. The judge raised that confusion when allowing the case to proceed to trial.

This question of overhyping vehicle automation systems has hung over the entire sector, and Tesla in particular, for years. In its defence, Tesla points to language and warnings that drivers must maintain supervision and be ready to intervene at any time with Autopilot, which comes standard with all its vehicles.

Safety watchdogs have tussled with Musk about Autopilot's capabilities and marketing. The National Transportation Safety Board, which lacks enforcement powers, has repeatedly called on Tesla to actively limit the kinds of roads on which Autopilot can be used and beef up driver monitoring when in use, both relevant to the Benavides case. In December 2023, Tesla was forced to recall more than two million vehicles to address deficiencies in keeping drivers engaged when using Autopilot. Only last week, arguments wrapped up in a case brought against Tesla by the California Department of Motor Vehicles claiming it misled customers about the capabilities of both Autopilot and FSD.

By squarely placing blame on Tesla, along with a punishment, the jury in Miami sends a powerful signal that enough is enough. "The intention of a verdict like this is to force a change," says Donald Slavik, a leading product liability lawyer with particular expertise in auto software systems. That the two victims in the Florida accident were pedestrians is important, he says. As innocent bystanders, they had not bought into the hype around Autopilot but paid a huge price nonetheless.

The verdict comes amid Tesla's rollout of a robotaxi service in Austin, Texas, the limitations of which also serve to emphasise the gap between Musk's earlier claims and the company's actual capabilities. The same goes for its launch last week of a ride-hailing service in the Bay Area. Tesla pointedly doesn't refer to these vehicles, which have drivers behind the wheel, as robotaxis because it doesn't have the permits to offer that sort of service in California. Nonetheless, Musk conflated this Uber-like offering with the robotaxis in Austin in a recent post on X. Tesla's famously forgiving investors may thereby get to enjoy the illusion of expanding robotaxi-ish coverage while California's regulators are presented with a glorified taxi service.

Discourse on vehicle autonomy centres far too much on its supposed apotheosis, robotaxis, and the technology packed into them. This overshadows today's far more common reality of partial automation and the need to focus on what Michael Brooks, executive director for the Center for Auto Safety, calls "human factors engineering". As much as Musk and others talk up the wonders of each generation of hardware and software, it is us, the "wetware", that backstops them and assumes the liability.

● TAXPAYER PSYCHE

LEVERAGING HUMAN FACETS THROUGH BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE TOOLS MAY HELP POLICYMAKERS

Nudge for tax compliance

**BVR SUBRAHMANYAM
PS PUNIHA**

Respectively CEO and fellow,
NITI Aayog



nation as more of a cultural entity, and not a mere political unit, in the Indian tradition underlies his emphasis on state honouring individuals who contribute to national development.

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) 2020 report on tax administration highlights that conventional tax policies often overlook the psychological and social dimensions influencing taxpayer behaviour. It suggests that small changes in the way tax information is presented, timing of

communications, and simplification of processes may have positive influence. As an illustration, framing the reminders that emphasise social norms, such as indicating "most people in your area have already paid their taxes", encourages procrastinators to settle their obligations promptly. The OECD report also

IMF guidelines recommend communicating to taxpayers the percentage of peers who comply with tax obligations

observes that complex tax systems can deter compliance due to the cognitive overload. By simplifying the language, structure, and process of filing tax returns, administrations may reduce such barriers for taxpayers. An ease of compliance and streamlined experience enhances compliance by addressing behavioural tendencies where individuals may avoid tasks perceived as too complicated or time-consuming. This recommendation is in line with the behavioural science concept that ease of action influences decision-making. Similarly, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) suggests that sending personalised reminders to taxpayers via emails or text messages about deadlines may significantly improve compliance rates. For example, notifications that remind indi-

viduals of their specific due dates and amounts can prompt timely action. The IMF guidelines also recommend communicating to taxpayers the percentage of peers who comply with tax obligations. For instance, informing taxpayers that "85% of your neighbours have already paid their taxes" can leverage social norms to encourage others to follow suit, as individuals often align their behaviour with that of their peers. Behavioural science posits that people are more sensitive to losses than gains. Nobel laureate psychologist Daniel Kahneman summarises, "Losses loom larger than gains. An investment said to have an 80% chance of success sounds far more attractive than one with a 20% chance of failure." Tax compliance programmes that highlight potential losses through penalties or loss of financial benefits

rather than just the gains from compliance can leverage this bias. It implies that revenue authorities need to focus on enforcement of any delays and defaults in tax payment and they ought to take penal action without any deference or discretion in cases of wilful delays and defaults. Consistent action and communication on these lines may strongly deter non-compliance. The Australian Taxation Office has implemented a range of such behavioural insights' initiatives, including using reminder letters that emphasise the broader community benefits of tax compliance as well as the potential losses associated with any wilful non-compliance.

Those who design and implement policy should acknowledge the challenges in applying behavioural science to



N CHANDRA MOHAN

The writer is an economics and business commentator based in New Delhi

Disparities in states' income

THE LATEST OFFICIAL data on the per capita income of states indicates that the richer ones—with higher incomes than the national average—are becoming richer much faster than the rest. In 2011-12, Gujarat's real per capita income was 138% of the national average, which rose to 180% in 2023-24. The relative per capita income of Bihar, the poorest state, deteriorated from 34% to 29.6% over this period. Gujarat is becoming more prosperous while an average person in Bihar has an income level 70% lower than an average Indian. Many of the richer states are south of the Vindhyas—Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Kerala, and Andhra Pradesh—and in the west, like Gujarat and Maharashtra.

Acaveat on per capita income estimates is in order. As pointed by economists like NR Bhadumurthy, director of the Madras School of Economics—who wrote on the topic in *Financial Express*—per capita income at the national level estimated for the base year 2011-12 is the net national income divided by the population based on the 2011 Census. While population projections at an all-India level are possible, estimates at the state-level are weak as they don't capture migration and falling fertility rates. The net state domestic product estimates that are used for state per capita income are as per allocations from the all-India level based on ratios fixed for 2011-12.

These richer states have, in fact, grown

faster than the all-India average annual growth rate of 4.75% from 2011-12 to 2024-25. For some of the larger states like Bihar, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Kerala, and Uttar Pradesh information is available only till 2023-24. Gujarat is the leader with a stellar growth rate of 7%, followed by Karnataka (6.6%), Tamil Nadu (5.9%), Telangana (5.8%), and Andhra (5.7%). Maharashtra and Kerala are close to the national average. Gujarat, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, and Andhra Pradesh have also more than doubled their real per capita income over this period. So too has Odisha, which points to new geographies of growth.

A proximate factor for the growth dynamism of these richer states is the expansion of manufacturing activities. Some have had a head start in industrialisation and attract most of the foreign and domestic investments in India. The tendency of investments to be concentrated in such states, which make them more prosperous, only reinforces the Biblical axiom, for whosoever hath, to him shall be given! This reflects the agglomeration factor as these states offer significant advantages to investors with their manufacturing ecosystem in terms of availability of skilled labour, supplier base, and prospect of knowledge spillovers to collocate near existing units.

Potential investors in poorer states would be deterred if there are concerns over law and order, poor infra, etc.

The disproportionate share of these richer states in investments does not imply that they do not compete among themselves. Despite being a bastion of industrialisation, Maharashtra steadily lost out to the more business-friendly Gujarat, which overtook it in real per capita income and gross value added in manufacturing since 2017-18. There was angst in Maharashtra over Gujarat securing a big-ticket semiconductor facility and the Tata-Airbus project as investors rued the "lack of conducive" atmosphere in the state. Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Telangana have aggressively wooed Foxconn. There was a recent face-off between Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh to attract aerospace companies.

Andhra Pradesh has an advantage over rivals like Karnataka and Tamil Nadu as its policies are in alignment with those at the Centre. It has unveiled a vision document for 2047 to become a developed state with a focus on stimulating agriculture as well as building a robust high-tech manufacturing sector. Its reforms-friendly chief minister has unveiled ambitions for the state to become a quantum computing hub that can rival the tech cluster in Hyderabad (now in Telangana) that he created when he was the head of undivided Andhra. An MoU has been inked with Google to set up

an artificial intelligence data centre.

The richer states offer lessons to the others who want to catch up. For starters, they are attracting investments for labour-intensive manufacturing which the populous poorer states cannot. Tamil Nadu's example deserves emulation as factories employing tens of thousands are able to tap pools of lower-wage workers such as migrants from other states and women. A striking factoid is that 40% of all women employed in factories in India are in Tamil Nadu, which is a big advantage for the likes of Foxconn to assemble smartphones as a contract manufacturer for Apple.

These states in the south and west also offer a more business-friendly environment to attract investments. Potential investors in poorer states would be deterred if there are concerns over law and order, poor infrastructure, and extractive political institutions. Expansion of manufacturing is the way forward. Odisha's example deserves mention as it had been a laggard state but of late has registered vastly improved economic performance by attracting big-ticket investments in steel, for instance, that exploit its iron ore resources. The policy imperative at the national level must be to create appropriate incentives for a dispersal of investments to the poorer states so that they catch up.

Views are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A fine show

Apropos of "India's win at the Oval is test cricket at its finest" (*FE*, August 5), a 2-2 verdict, following Shubman Gill's men snatching a six-run win against the hosts at the Oval on Monday, was an apt reflection of a well-contested five-Test series. For India, England at home always remains a tough opponent as only thrice has India won a Test series under the English skies,

with the last instance in 2007. The tour was tough too, as this was a squad that had lost Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, and A Rashwin to retirement. Gill's men, however, fought hard. India has much to cherish as Gill amassed 754 runs, and KL Rahul and Yashasvi Jaiswal excelled with the bat. Meanwhile, Ravindra Jadeja and Washington Sundar offered depth in the batting order, even if the tail below withered. A team in transition is bound to have

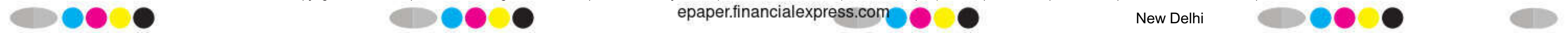
teething troubles. However, through their solid fight, these players offer hope for better days ahead. —Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

Old medicine

Apropos of "Beyond the slogan" (*FE*, August 5), we usually see knee-jerk responses to any external or even internal matter, which are unsustainable. Whatever happened to initiatives like Make in India? Nothing beyond the

usual fanfare in the beginning. Indians are price-conscious and would prefer cheaper goods because of their inability to pay exorbitant sums. The problems of making in India need no elaboration. The call for "svadeshi" is now irrelevant. The world has moved far ahead from the time Gandhi used it as a weapon against the British. —Anthony Henriques, Maharashtra

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DECCAN HERALD

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Evictions and the politics of exclusion

The ongoing eviction campaigns by the Assam government in some districts of the state have taken the form of targeted drives against Muslims, couched as reclamation of encroachments. Large tracts of government and forest land have been encroached on by all sections of people across the state. The government claims that the exercise is intended to remove illegal encroachments from government revenue land, grazing land, commons, and forested areas. It maintains that the drive follows a Gauhati High Court order to reduce man-animal conflict by clearing illegal encroachments. But the areas and families targeted for evictions, the speed with which the government is undertaking the exercise, and the statements of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma have made the communal motives clear. The evictions have a history from 2021, but the campaign has been intensified now for political reasons.

The court order and concerns over environmental degradation and land management are being used to target Bengali-speaking Muslims who are indiscriminately dubbed illegal immigrants. The evictions are largely concentrated in areas with significant Muslim populations. Many who are identified as encroachers are people who have set up homes in any available land after losing their homes due to natural disasters. Most of them have no homes after the eviction and no sources of livelihood. People living in settlements for decades and possessing official records of residence are being thrown out onto the streets. No government action, however legal and administrative, should be devoid of humanitarian considerations.

Himanta Biswa Sarma has flaunted discrimination as public policy. He has declared that encroachment on government land by the indigenous or local people did not amount to an offence, and the government would only evict immigrant Muslims. Official policy would not discriminate between people; encroachment by locals does not cease to be encroachment. Sarma has also warned people not to extend shelter or any help to those who have been evicted. Officials and politicians are deciding who are legal residents of the state and who are encroachers. The Chief Minister has also talked about "land jihad" and a "demographic aggression by people of one religion". These utterances and the entire eviction drive are in line with the many anti-Muslim campaigns the state government has undertaken in recent years. It also needs to be noted that Assam is set for Assembly elections next year—there is a clear political stake in these assertions. The right to shelter is a basic right, and the government should not snatch it from people for narrow political ends.

Intensified anti-encroachment action in Assam is driven by familiar communal motives

Urea crisis: Farmers caught in a crossfire

At a time when Karnataka has received timely and copious rainfall, bringing much-needed cheer to the farming community, the acute shortage of urea has cast a dark shadow over this otherwise promising agricultural season. What should have been a season of hope has instead turned into a period of anxiety and unrest for the farmers, due to administrative lapses and a relentless political slugfest between the Centre and the state. With the area under maize cultivation alone increasing by two lakh hectares this year, the demand for urea has surged. But supply has failed to keep pace. This deficit threatens to negate the benefit of a good monsoon, leading to reduced yields and significant financial losses for the farmers.

Agriculture Minister N Cheluvarayanaiah says that 1.36 lakh metric tonnes of urea is still due from the Centre, asserting that the supply of fertilisers is the Union government's responsibility, while the state handles only distribution. On the other hand, the Centre claims that it has ensured the timely and adequate availability of 8.73 lakh MT of urea against the pro-rata requirement of 6.73 lakh MT during the ongoing Kharif season so far. During the same period, the state has also recorded sales of 7.08 lakh MT, much higher than the pro-rata requirement. Caught in this crossfire are lakhs of farmers who are unable to access the fertiliser at subsidised rates.

The BJP has accused the state of not only mismanaging the stocks but also turning a blind eye to illegal diversion and black marketing of urea. The party has also charged ministers with being complicit in this malpractice. Instead of indulging in blame games, the Centre and the state should prioritise the immediate needs of the farming community. There is an urgent requirement to plug the leakages, crack down on black marketing and hoarding, and ensure timely and equitable distribution of the available stock. For the long term, the state should explore demand forecasting mechanisms to prevent the recurrence of a similar situation. Farmers cannot be made scapegoats for the inefficiencies of warring governments. Timely fertiliser availability is not a favour; it is a right that safeguards their livelihood and the nation's food security. While politicians exchange accusations, the real cost is being borne by those who toil in the fields. It is high time both the Centre and the state stopped scoring political points and focused on what truly matters—support to the farmers when it is needed the most.

Political sparring over the availability of urea threatens to hit a promising agricultural season in Karnataka

India and Bharat diverge on NEP's twin-track

The policy's fifth anniversary offers a moment for introspection. Reinvention must not risk deeper divisions

NAVNEET SHARMA

The dichotomy carefully crafted in our country's political discourse, India versus Bharat, also reverberates throughout policymaking. The phrase "India, that is Bharat" is a constitutional truism, yet it is often portrayed as if these are two distinct entities. The NEP 2020 begins with this premise and asserts that the current education system, established during British colonial rule for mass education, is "adventively Indian" and "Macaulayian". It argues that this system does not cater to the needs and aspirations of Bharat, with its indigenous knowledge, values, and norms. The NEP 2020 takes upon itself to chart the "right" path to decolonise education, an enterprise it claims remained neglected even after 70 years of independence, because it believes that earlier governments were not *Bhartiya* enough or had a sinister design to keep Indians enslaved to an anglicised understanding of knowledge and knowledge construction.

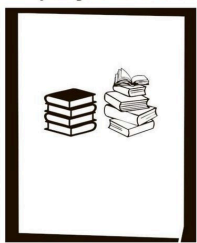
The NEP 2020 identifies this perceived flaw in our education system as fundamental and seeks to alter both the discourse and the system through the adoption of new and innovative ideas such as learning outcomes, digital and machine learning, academic bank of credits, school and university accreditation, multiple entry-exit options, and vocationalisation. These are presented as globally tested and proven concepts, which, when implemented, are expected to help create *Bhartiya* schools and universities that will produce global citizens rooted in the Indian ethos.

The policy has completed five years, a relatively short period to assess the efficacy of any reform, particularly in the field of education, where it typically takes around 17 years to complete one full cycle of schooling. However, the celebratory fervour surrounding this anniversary invites a closer examination: are sincere and substantive measures truly being undertaken to implement this policy?

The policy advocates allocating 6% of the GDP to education, but without a financial memorandum, this promise re-

mains a chimera, one that was first proposed by the Kothari Commission nearly five decades ago. The budgetary allocation for education stood at 3.53% of GDP before the NEP and has since declined, reaching just 2.5% in 2024-25. The Centre has withheld funds from states that do not conform to the adaptation and implementation of NEP, using schemes like PM-SHRI and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan as instruments of compulsion. In states governed by parties with differing ideologies, such as Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, and Kerala, funds are often denied.

Even among private schools, there exists a wide spectrum, ranging from those operating out of modest kothis or



bungalows to institutions with sprawling campuses and state-of-the-art facilities. The digital divide is stark, and government schools, too, vary greatly in character, from under-resourced municipal schools to well-funded Kendriya and Navodaya Vidyalayas. According to the UDISE report, among the 3,94,634 government schools catering to classes 6 and above, only 23% have ICT labs, 54% have internet access, and just 35% are equipped with smart classrooms. Despite a significant emphasis on digital and machine learning in the policy, there is no clear roadmap for the digital upgradation of schools. As a result, the policy seems to operate on two distinct tracks—one for India and another for Bharat.

IKS: A thousand-year void
Barely three months after the launch of the NEP, the Ministry established the Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) division to revive India's ancient knowledge traditions within a modern context. This initiative includes 27 research centres, 17 centres for teacher training and curriculum development, and seven language centres. These centres are active-

ly producing research on topics such as the impact of *sattvik* food on gut health and *prana*-based Vedic approaches to reducing suicidal tendencies. Meanwhile, over 80% of India's population continues to consume non-vegetarian food, and there has been a 27% increase in student suicides.

The idea of IKS, as evident in the model curriculum, overlooks any contributions to Indian or *Bhartiya* knowledge produced between 1000 AD and 1857 AD. The subtext is clear: during eight centuries of Muslim rule, Indians allegedly neither learned nor constructed any meaningful knowledge. The model curriculum elevates Sanskrit, or more precisely, Brahminical, knowledge as the only valid occupant of the sanctum sanctorum of Indian intellectual heritage. In contrast, Tamil, Pali, and Persian literatures, non-textual traditions, and contributions from Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Lokayata, Sufism, and Upanishads are treated as though they emerged from some other India or Bharat altogether.

The NEP proposes the concept of a 'school complex' to ensure the 'optimal' utilisation of resources, a move that has recently triggered a wave of school mergers and closures in Uttar Pradesh. This trend is likely to shrink the footprint of government schools. Frameworks such as the School Quality Assessment and Accreditation Framework (SQAAP) will introduce multiple layers of supervision, increasing bureaucratic oversight. While the policy voices support for public schooling, it simultaneously relaxes the regulatory criteria for establishing private schools. A recent study reveals that only 9.54% of the total number of government and private schools by 2026, and 8.32%, respectively.

No policy can serve as a panacea overnight for the deep-seated issues of the education system. The anniversary of such a policy should serve as a moment for reflection, revision, and re-anchoring of priorities, not a spectacle by the government, policymakers, and ideological supporters. It must also stand as a moment of sincere contemplation, prompting recognition that its bid to reinvent Indian education, the NEP 2020, is merely entrenching the very divide it claims to bridge, carving out two divergent trajectories for 'India' and 'Bharat', rather than shaping a unified and just future for all.

(The writer teaches at the Department of Education, Central University of Himachal Pradesh)

RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE

All the classroom is a stage

When my colleague taught, literature seemed to leap out of the pages

THARCIUS S FERNANDO

Teaching is not only a noble profession but also a specialised art. Not every learner person becomes a successful teacher, and the lesser qualified a poor teacher. Even great scholars find miserably in their teaching rooms. I arrived in Chennai, then Madras, in 1965 to join Loyola College as a teacher of English. The task of introducing me to the staff was entrusted to Prof P N Diaz and from then on, he became my friend, philosopher and guide.

As our superiors were very strict and expected the students to maintain absolute discipline not only inside the campus but also outside, teachers did not have much problem handling the students. However, to become popular among the students, we had to use some special ma-

nœuvres. Within a short time, I realised that Professor Diaz was a sought-after teacher in the college, and as a novice in teaching, I wanted to explore the secret of his success. I found that Diaz was endowed with several compelling skills, particularly his historicity and innovation, which made all the students attend his class without fail. I used to sneak into his classrooms, sit in the last row and listen to his deliveries with equal enthusiasm and expectations, as a learner.

Very soon, I found the main reason for his popularity among the students. He transformed himself into the characters of the play, essay or poem he had to teach. When teaching Shakespeare's *Othello*, we found him *Othello* himself standing in the classroom with his roving and rolling eyes, full of suspicion. When he taught *Julius Caesar*, he painted a vivid picture of the indomitable and power-hungry Caesar and also the most honourable Brutus, the noblest of all Roman republicans.

While teaching poetry, he made the students "fly on the wings of poetry". For

example, when teaching John Keats' *Ode to the Nightingale*, it was as if his students could literally smell the fragrant flowers like the white hawthorn, the pastoral eggplant, fast-fading violets and musk rose mentioned in the poem. After his class on P B Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind*, his students were sure to leave the classroom die-hard optimists. He had a knack of making his students instantly fall in love with the beautiful forms of Mother Nature.

Professor Diaz was confined not only to plays and poems but to all branches of literature. He could transform even the otherwise monotonous prose classes into very lively ones. Humour was his forte; the walls of his classrooms always reverberated with peals of laughter.

"What nobler employment, or more valuable to the state, than that of the man who instructs the rising generation?" said Cicero, the Father of Political Science, twenty-two centuries ago. Professor Diaz was a teacher, worthy of emulation by all the instructors of the day.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Families of victims should come forward

The recent excavation at Dharmasthala, which uncovered over 100 bones and a skull on the six day, has deepened the mystery surrounding the alleged mass murder cases (Dharmasthala excavation: 100 bones and skull found on 6th day, Aug 4). A complaint was filed with the Dharmasthala police station by Jayant T, an RTI activist, alleging that a 13- to 15-year-old girl died under suspicious circumstances nearly 15 years ago in Dharmasthala village. Jayant has been fighting for justice in the Swamiji murder case since 2015 and advocates for a corruption-free society. If, as contended, over 100 bodies were buried, the families of the victims must come forward to complain and ensure that justice is done. The state must protect them from powerful individuals, who may be involved in the case.

H R Bapu Sasthyanarayana, Mysuru

against external threats.

S Sundaresha, Bengaluru

Judicial overreach?

The Supreme Court's remarks about Rahul Gandhi's comments on the Army ("True India will not say this: SC on Rahul remark on Army" (Aug 5)), the Supreme Court's words to Rahul Gandhi serve as a warning to the Congress party. As the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi should treat matters of national importance, such as cross-border disputes, with utmost caution and support his claims with evidence. It is essential for all political parties to uphold the dignity of the House and present a united front

on social media, appears to be judicial overreach. The fact of major Chinese incursions into our territory following the 2020 Galwan border clash is widely acknowledged in the media and by Ladakhis. Restricting political criticism to Parliament alone is unrealistic in today's digital age, where social media is a common platform.

Kamal Laddha, Bengaluru
Our readers are welcome to email letters to: letters@deccanherald.com (only letters emailed – not handwritten – will be accepted). All letters must carry the sender's postal address and phone number.

SPEAK OUT

Ganga Maiya to apne putron ke pair dhone aati hain...unke darshan se putra seedhe swarg jata hai...ye Virodhi log apko ulta padhate hain (Mother Ganga comes to wash the feet of her sons...the sons will go to heavens merely by her darshan...the opposition teaches you otherwise...)

Sanjay Kumar Nishad, UP Minister (responding to the complaints of the flood-affected in Kanpur Debhat district)



One doesn't have to operate with great malice to do great harm. The absence of empathy and understanding is sufficient.

Charles M Blow

TO BE PRECISE

The North and South blocks are set to become public museums.

THE MEA AND FM'S CHAIRS ARE MUSEUM PIECES, RIGHT?



IN PERSPECTIVE

A mass grave and buried wrongs

Human remains unearthed in Jaffna reopen a history of forced disappearances and mass killings of Tamils

PAUL NEWMAN

During the Civil War in Sri Lanka from 1983 to 2009 between the ethnic Tamils demanding a historical homeland and the Sri Lankan State, innocent Tamils had to bear the brunt of the military occupation of their lives and land. Thousands of Tamils bore severe torture, rape, arbitrary detention and arrests, disappearances, and a host of other violations as part of the ruthless State-sponsored suppression of their rights.

In February 2025, workers constructing a crematorium discovered human remains in Chemmanai, a small village in the Jaffna peninsula of the Tamil heartland in Northern Sri Lanka. The Jaffna Magistrate immediately ordered an investigation – 101 skeletal remains, including children's, were found since the beginning of excavations in May. The presence of the remains of children indicates that families were killed and buried.

In 2018, at Mannar, 300 bodies were discovered after exhumations, but the case was closed. The families of the disappeared feared the same might happen in Chemmanai. So far, only a partial excavation of the suspected sites has been undertaken. The disappearance of Tamils in Sri Lanka since the 1980s is considered one of the highest per capita disappearances in the world. It is estimated that tens of thousands of Tamils disappeared during the war. To date, 146,679 people are unaccounted for during the last stages of the war.

Though 28 mass graves were identified, none of them were properly investigated, as it would have exposed the hand of the armed forces. Disappearances and subsequent mass burials of the disappeared Tamils in the North and East of Sri Lanka surfaced from the time of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF)'s engagement since 1987. Since the capture of Jaffna by the Sri Lankan armed forces in 1995-96, disappearances, rape, and torture became commonplace. In 1998, a former armed soldier, Somaratne Rajapakse, who was found guilty of the rape and murder of Krishanthi Kumaraswamy in 1996, alleged that he was sure of around 400 bodies being buried at Chemmanai, the site of the infamous mass burials of disappeared Tamils in Jaffna. The then government of Chandrika Kumaratunge

ordered an investigation, and the exhumations started. As bodies were found in large numbers, bucking under domestic political pressure, she ordered the closure of investigations in 1999.

Chemmanai remained an unhealed wound in the minds of the Tamils. Since then, many mass graves have been found, but a lack of will on the part of the successive governments has denied the Tamils the right to know about their missing kin and kin. Several commissions were established, but their final reports were never made public.

A long wait
Under international law, a State commits an enforced disappearance when it takes a person into custody and denies holding them or disclosing their whereabouts. "Disappeared" persons are commonly subjected to torture or extrajudicial execution. Enforced Disappearance is the worst torture, not just on the individuals but also on the families. Since the passing of the first UN resolution in 2012 demanding international investigations, Sri Lanka hardly responded until 2015. Under international pressure, the government in 2015 set up the Office of the Missing Persons, which is yet to trace people who went missing until 2009. Most of those who disappeared were subjected to torture by the armed forces during the last stages of the war.

On June 25, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk visited the mass graves in Chemmanai to express solidarity with the families of the missing and demanded justice for every victim. Turk called for independent international investigations with forensic experts to ascertain the truth, which could help the families identify their loved ones and lead them towards seeking justice.

As people in the North and East wait for details about the missing members of their families, braving harsh weather, poverty, and social isolation, there are no graves or tombstones left to remember the truth about what happened, burying justice. Yet, Chemmanai has again awakened the Sri Lankan Tamils world over to demand another chance at justice for the victims.

(The writer is Professor and Dean of Social Sciences, St. Joseph's University, and Principal, St. Joseph's Evening College)

How the monsoon fuels India's drug-resistant infections surge

SWETAVALLI RAGHAVAN

As the monsoon sweeps across India, it brings relief from the heat as well as a surge in vector-borne and water-borne infectious diseases, straining India's overburdened healthcare systems. It also leads to widespread misuse of antimicrobial drugs, worsening the growing threat of antimicrobial resistance (AMR)—a phenomenon whereby microbes evolve to resist life-saving medicines. When antimicrobials are used incorrectly, like against antibiotics (which are meant to target bacteria) for viral infections or not completing the prescribed course, they may not kill all harmful microbes. The exposure of the surviving microbes to the medicines enables them to develop traits that help them resist future treatment with the same medicine, making infections harder and more expensive to cure.

Let's examine how monsoon amplifies the risk of AMR. Floods and waterlogging, that act as sites for vector breeding and water contamination cause community-wide outbreaks of diarrhoea, leptospirosis, malaria, chikungunya, and dengue. Overcrowded hospitals deprive clinicians of the luxury of examining patients thoroughly, thereby prompting presumptive antimicrobial drug use without diagnostic confirmation. Prescriptions also often involve non-specific broad-spectrum antibiotics that target multiple bacteria, including harmless ones. This disrupts the body's microbial balance and allows resistant microbes to thrive. Diagnostic tests help ensure accurate treatment by identifying the specific microbe causing the infection, allowing healthcare providers to prescribe the targeted narrow-spectrum antimicrobial medicine, thereby avoiding unnecessary or incorrect drug use. However, the cost of diagnostic tests (approximately Rs 800-Rs 5,500) is much more expensive than a course of common antibiotics, making it unaffordable for many patients. For those who can afford them, the turnaround time for results is often too long, delaying treatment and discouraging reliance on testing.

Further, financial strain leads households, especially poorer ones, to share prescriptions or medicines when multiple family members fall ill, often from infections caused by different microbes. They also tend to turn to private chemists for guesswork prescriptions. This creates a vicious cycle of trial-and-error prescribing, fuelling AMR and relapse of drug-resistant infections.

Treating a drug-resistant infection costs significantly more than treating a non-resistant one. An Indian cohort study

by Kadam et al in 2024 across eight hospitals found the median cost for drug-resistant bloodstream infections was around Rs 17,200—82% higher than the approximately Rs 9,400 for non-resistant infections. Even in government hospitals, treating drug-resistant infections costs 40-45% more than treating non-resistant infections.

When patients pay most healthcare costs themselves, known as out-of-pocket (OOP) spending, they are more likely to use antimicrobial drugs in ways that worsen the spread of AMR. A global study including India, by Alsans et al published in 2015, found that for every 10% rise in OOP health spending, drug-resistant infections rose by over 3%. The problem worsens when even government hospitals charge for essential medicines.

In India, OOP spending makes up 70% of health expenditure, with medicines being

the biggest expense. Poorer households, often forced to borrow to pay hospital bills, are the worst affected. Many delay or skip treatment, rely on informal providers and self-medication, or buy cheaper, incomplete courses of medicine from local pharmacies without prescriptions, bypassing formal care—these practices inevitably fuel AMR and deepen financial distress.

Although flagship schemes like Ayushman Bharat aim to offer financial protection, they rarely cover outpatient medicines or diagnostic tests—services that play a key role in preventing AMR by accurately identifying the cause of infection and ensuring the right antimicrobial is used only when needed. To address this, the government must expand access to free and rapid diagnostics, especially during the monsoon, in public health facilities. Though not always cost-effective at the individual level, public provision of testing helps prevent inap-

propriate prescription, making it a smart population-level investment. Copayments for essential antimicrobial drugs should be eliminated, making them free of cost, and subsidies must be introduced for second-line treatments when AMR renders cheaper medicines ineffective. Seasonal surveillance systems also be strengthened to track AMR and guide effective responses.

People, too, must act responsibly. Seeking diagnostic confirmation before starting treatment, avoiding self-medication, and completing the full course of prescribed antimicrobial drugs are crucial individual actions. If both public systems and private behaviour align, India can stop the monsoon from becoming a flashpoint in contributing to the growing menace of AMR.

(The writer is an adviser on AMR to the Government of Karnataka and Professor of Practice, St. Joseph's University, Bengaluru)

Israel's leader is now pushing for an "all or nothing" deal with Hamas. He has not made the compromises needed to make it happen

PATRICK KINGSLEY

When Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister, led the country to a military victory over Iran in June, both his allies and rivals portrayed it as his finest achievement. Flush with new-found confidence and authority, Netanyahu seemed finally to have gained the political capital he needed to override opposition from his far-right government allies to reach a truce in the Gaza Strip.

Six weeks later, the prime minister has squandered that moment. The talks between Hamas and Israel are, yet again, stuck. Israel is now pushing for a deal to end the war in one go, instead of in phases. The move brings negotiations to where they were 19 months ago, when mediators last tried to reach a comprehensive deal, and it is just as likely to fail as it did then.

Now as then, both Hamas and Netanyahu are refusing to make the compromises needed for such a comprehensive deal to work.

"As long as this is the government—and assuming it doesn't fundamentally change its course—there will be no comprehensive agreement, and the hostages will not return," wrote Oren Setter, a former member of Israel's negotiation team, in a column Monday in the Israeli newspaper Yedioth Ahronot. "The opposition needs to understand this, the public needs to understand this, and the media needs to understand this," Setter added. In short, the credit Netanyahu accrued following the war with Iran in June has evaporated, both domestically and overseas.

International condemnation of the growing starvation in Gaza—which aid agencies and many foreign governments have largely blamed on Israel's 11-week blockade on the territory between March and May—is at its peak. Partly to protest Israel's responsibility for that situation, several of the country's long-standing allies have recognised a Palestinian state, or pledged to do so in the near future. In the United States, most Democratic senators voted last week to block some arms sales to Israel. A Republican lawmaker, Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, has accused Israel of genocide, an accusation it strongly denies.

Domestic opposition to the war in Gaza is at an all-time high, and calls are growing for the remaining hostages held by Hamas to be returned through a diplomatic deal. Israel's ability to sustain a pro-war amid growing fatigue among its military reserves, is increasingly under question. After a rise in death by suicide of reserve soldiers, the military has set up a committee to investigate how to better support those in long-serving service.

"Israel is in the tightest spot I have seen in any point in the war," said Michael Koplow, an analyst at Israel Policy Forum, a New York-based research group.

"It is dealing with a societal crisis over the continued war, the deaths of the hostages, a military crisis over the lack of clear aims and reservist fatigue, a diplomatic crisis over its close European allies lining up to unilaterally recognise Palestinian statehood, and an existential crisis over its eroding standing in the US," Koplow said.

The protraction of the conflict also reflects President Donald Trump's failure to capitalise on the leverage he accrued during the war with Iran. By joining Netanyahu's attacks, Trump gave Israel a symbolic victory. At the time, analysts expected him to demand that Netanyahu repay the favour



DHILLUSTRATION DEEPAK HARIHARAN

Netanyahu squanders his moment to halt the war

by drawing the war in Gaza to a close.

"He had all the leverage in the world to say to Netanyahu: 'Now we need to end this,'" said Daniel Shapiro, a fellow at the Atlantic Council, a Washington-based research group, and a former US ambassador to Israel.

"Instead, Netanyahu seemed to persuade Trump to give him more time," Shapiro said. "Now, things are just dragging and dragging."

Within Gaza, the delay's result has been catastrophic. Despite Israel's sudden decision to let in more food last week, Palestinians in Gaza are still dying every day from starvation, according to Gaza's health authorities.

Israel's soldiers have continued to shoot and kill civilians trying to access a deeply problematic new food distribution system that forces people to cross Israeli military lines to reach distribution sites. Desperate for alternative sources of food, large crowds of civilians continued to block and ransack aid convoys. Within Israel, the delay has heightened discontent among the government's critics. If Netanyahu appeared decisive and bold with his strikes on Iran in June, now he is once again perceived as dithering and beholden to the views of his far-right coalition partners.

A growing number of Israelis—either concerned for the hostages held by Hamas, or about the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza, or both—are calling for an end to the war. On Monday, a group of former security chiefs—including two former army chiefs of staff, three former heads of Israel's domestic intelligence agency, the Shin Bet, and three former directors of the Mossad, Israel's foreign intelligence agency—re-

leased a video that ended with the caption: "End the war!"

The generals said the war, which was set off by Hamas' attack on Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, began as a just war but has since become endless and pointless.

"It was a defensive war," Ami Ayalon, a former Shin Bet chief, said in the video. "But once we achieved all its military objectives, once we achieved a great military victory against all our enemies, this war stopped being a just war," Ayalon added.

"This is leading the state of Israel to the loss of its security and its identity."

Netanyahu says the war's objectives have not yet been achieved—that the battle must continue until Hamas has been destroyed and the 20 remaining living hostages in Gaza are released. Hamas and its allies released videos in recent days of two such hostages, looking starved and skeletal.

"We will not be broken," Netanyahu said in a statement Sunday after the footage was circulated online. "I am filled with an even stronger determination to free our kidnapped sons, to eliminate Hamas, to ensure that Gaza no longer poses a threat to the state of Israel."

Yet the government's critics say Hamas is already decimated, its leaders mostly dead and its arsenal severely depleted. They fear that continued fighting in Gaza will do little meaningful damage to Hamas, but will endanger the hostages still held in the enclave, and further harm Israel's battered reputation.

For nearly 18 months, Netanyahu has avoided halting the war so he can keep intact his coalition government, which includes senior ministers who seek to annex Gaza and replace much of its Palestinian

population with Israeli civilians.

The backbone of Israel's fighting force—its part-time military reservists who combine battlefield service with civilian life—has become increasingly exhausted, traumatised and reluctant to return to what is now Israel's longest-ever high-intensity war.

Now, even full-time soldiers are battle weary: Three conscripts were sentenced to jail last month for refusing, on mental health grounds, to return to Gaza, prompting a public outcry that led to the cancellation of their jail terms.

Compounding these frustrations, the government is pushing ahead with efforts to extend an exemption from military service for ultra-Orthodox Jewish Israelis, whose leaders have long backed Netanyahu.

The government is also investing time and resources in firing the attorney general, who oversees Netanyahu's long-running prosecution for corruption. Netanyahu denies the corruption charges, and he has said his government's efforts to overhaul the judicial system are unrelated to the trial.

But to his critics, those moves have bolstered the impression that Netanyahu has prioritised his own personal interests above his country's cohesion and its strategic goals.

"Netanyahu stymied the chance to bring all the hostages home three times, and some say it was four times," wrote Nahum Barnea, a veteran Israeli commentator, in a column Monday. "Make no mistake: He wanted the hostages to return not less than others, but unlike other people, he wasn't prepared to pay the price."

The New York Times

When gag orders are issued, justice suffers

HARISH B NARASAPPA AND CHAITRA S

The recent revelation of forced mass burials of alleged murder and rape victims in Dharmasthala has shocked the nation. What is equally distressing is the lightning speed with which the Bengaluru City Civil Court temporarily curtailed the media's right to broadcast the proceedings of the case. Within just 15 days of the FIR being filed, a gag order was passed, leading to the de-indexing of more than 8,800 online articles that had reported on the police complaints related to the case.

Gag orders against the media in high-profile cases are increasingly becoming the norm today. Typically passed by district courts, these gag orders are intended to prevent reputational harm—plausible defamation—especially to individuals in positions of power. But such orders go far beyond protecting reputations. They violate the freedom of the press and, more worryingly, restrict public scrutiny.

Need for public scrutiny

When gag orders are issued in favour of the powerful—whether political, religious or institutional—they serve to entrench existing hierarchies and shield those in power from accountability. This prevents public scrutiny.

The public has a fundamental right in the attainment of truth. Institutions or people ostensibly working for public welfare must be subject to the scrutiny of the same public they claim to serve. Media reporting is a crucial means through which the public is informed. A gag order on such reporting would impede the public from forming an informed opinion and consequently impair public accountability.

Furthermore, gag orders against media in effect operate as gag orders against victims and prevent fair administration of justice. The victims are usually at a disadvantage, as they typically lack the means to fight the individuals in positions of power.

It is media reporting and public pressure which provokes victims the support to seek justice against the powerful oppressor. Restraining the press from reporting therefore impedes this democratic process and prevents fair administration of justice.

Role of courts

Moreover, district courts are increasingly issuing gag orders without paying heed to the legal standards required

or whether they have the authority to do so. As clearly held by the Supreme Court of India, gag orders against media can be issued only if their reporting impedes the fair administration of justice. Yet gag orders are being issued based on the far lower threshold of plausible defamation to the claimant. This places the media in a precarious position where the curtailment of freedom of the press becomes easier.

Furthermore, gag orders that restrict the freedom of the press should only be passed by constitutional courts. This is because temporary gag orders are practically postponement orders on the publication of certain content. These are issued solely to ensure that justice is administered fairly, a violation of which would constitute contempt of court. Since it is only high courts and the Supreme Court which have contempt of court powers, only such courts can restrain media. In practice, however, district courts have increasingly taken on this role with impunity.

The judiciary, especially at the district level, must recognise the weight of its gag orders. It must be cognisant of the nature of rights it seeks to curtail, especially if they are fundamental rights. It must refrain from issuing orders when it does not have the authority to do so. At the very least, district courts must apply the correct legal standard when issuing gag orders.

In an age with disinformation and propaganda, the role of a free and fair press is more critical than ever. Media scrutiny fosters objective analysis, critical thinking, informed citizenship, and democratic accountability. Mere allegations of plausible defamation should not be used as grounds for suppressing reporting, particularly when the matter concerns public interest.

The curtailment of freedom of the press, especially in cases where the aggrieved is pitted against the powerful in positions of power, undermines the very foundations of our democracy. If such restrictions are to be imposed, they must be exercised by constitutional courts, not by district courts.

Courts must place the fair administration of justice above the personal discomfort caused by alleged reputational damage. In doing so, they protect not only the rights of victims but also the democratic ideals enshrined in the Constitution.

(Harish is a senior advocate, and Chaitra is a research associate at Harish's chambers)

OUR PAGES OF HISTORY

50 YEARS AGO: AUGUST 1975

State Govt to pay capitation fee of SC students

Bangalore, August 5

The State Government will pay the capitation fees for Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes and Backward Classes students seeking admission to private medical colleges in the State. Social Welfare Minister N. Rachiah told newsmen today that a capitation fee of Rs. 10,000 had been fixed for state students to get admission in the medical colleges. The seats in private medical colleges had been reserved for SC, ST and BT students in the ratio of 15:33:3 per cent on payment of the capitation fee.

25 YEARS AGO: AUGUST 2000

Veerappan demands Rs 50 cr ransom

Bangalore, Aug 5 (DHNS)

Veerappan's third cassette, voicing his demands for the release of Dr Rajkumar and other hostages held by him, said to contain a series of demands, with a hefty ransom of Rs 50 crore topping the list. According to police sources, the next demand on the list is the head of M Shankar Bidri, former commander of the Special Task Force (STF), who had stepped up operations against Veerappan and his gang and the point of cutting food supply lines and rounding off his suspected supporters.

OASIS | ADITI PANT

Seeing beyond the frame

In the rush to capture, post and consume images, we forget to pause, to ask, to listen to the story behind the picture which is often the only way to truly see it. When we look at photographs stripped of their stories, we risk reducing real lives and living to spectacle as the truth often lies beyond the frame.

Recently we were out shopping for a used car for my elder daughter so that she could commute easily in her university town. It took us several days of research and then two days of focused test drives to finally select a car that met our budget and requirements. However, when we went to

pick the car up we were told that while detailing sundry issues had cropped up that rendered the car unfit for sale.

We were mighty disappointed and tried looking for more used cars but the momentary luck was gone. Finally, in resignation or judiciousness or both we decided to buy a new car instead.

We sent pictures with our family and friends and their reactions were congratulatory, none of them really understanding the sequence, deliberation and thought behind what they saw.



human records of experiences that are unique as they are universal. A photograph is a portal that invites us to step inside someone else's world, to become more than spectators, to become participants in a deeper kind of seeing, knowing and understanding. We then realise how even though the images seem disparate, our experiences are relatable and homogeneous.

Next time a picture piques your interest, let your eyes take in the dance of light and shadow, the play of color and contrast but let your heart seek relevance and meaning that lies beyond the lens.

Sputtering along

Q1 results point to bumpy road ahead for India Inc

The turbulence unleashed by the tariff fracas will impact external demand and likely lead to a slowdown in private capex, as India’s companies push their expansion plans down the road. Indeed, the FY26 first quarter results announced by 955 listed companies tell a story of sluggish revenue and profit growth.



Besides the tariff factor, the structural slowdown in sectors such as IT, FMCG and automobiles has hurt earnings. Revenue growth for companies, excluding BFSI, slowed to 6.7 per cent in the first quarter of this fiscal year, down from 9 per cent growth in the previous quarter. Adjusted profits for the companies slowed in similar vein to 6.3 per cent, down from 9.9 per cent year-on-year growth in the fourth quarter of FY25. There was, however, a slight improvement in gross margins as falling inflation reduced input cost pressure. The slowdown in profitability was led by heavyweights such as banks, information technology and FMCG sectors. Meanwhile, sectors such as IT are struggling anyway, due to the inability to adapt to changing market preferences. Likewise, changing consumer preferences in the passenger car segment has impacted the performance of car makers.

The sheer size of the FMCG market renders strong double-digit growth unlikely going ahead. Banks are witnessing a compression in net interest margins due to interest rate cuts; slowing retail credit growth is hurting bottomlines of private banks. Cyclical sectors such as oil refining, steel and cement managed to record strong earnings growth, aided by improved realisation and a low base in the first quarter of the last fiscal year. Continued government spending on capex appears to have helped infrastructure developers. Two-wheeler companies, however, performed well as rural demand buoyed revenues. For India Inc, the environment could stay challenging in the coming quarters. The impact of the tariff hike will be keenly felt in some sectors, impacting listed companies in machines and mechanical appliances, auto and auto components and textiles. However, the reduction in global demand due to this upheaval will weigh on exporters. It is just as well that pharmaceuticals exports have for now been spared the revised tariff. Slowing retail credit growth implies that domestic consumption could get impacted. Large IT companies planning to cut down their workforce, or reduce salary increments to shore margins, could trigger a slowdown in urban consumption — as IT employees act as major drivers here.

Given these dampeners, the undue optimism built into stock prices is cause for concern. With the benchmarks moving close to lifetime highs, valuations are once again quite pricey in many pockets. Earnings need to grow at a far higher rate to maintain prices at these levels. Disappointments in earnings could lead to stock price volatility. Investors need to temper their expectations from equity markets in the coming quarters, and be prepared for volatility as prices align with the underlying reality.

OTHER VOICES.

The Washington Post

This frontal attack on farmers must end

Farmers, a solidly Republican constituency, are scratching their heads over what they see as a barrage of friendly fire. Agriculture stands out as acutely vulnerable to President Donald Trump’s avalanche of tariffs, mass deportations and potential new regulations. Soybean and corn farmers are panicking about Trump’s trade wars, which expose them to retaliation from China, Canada and Mexico, their most important export markets. As American Soybean Association president Caleb Ragland put it: “Tariffs are not something to take lightly and ‘have fun’ with.” That’s a direct rebuke to Trump’s suggestion that farmers sell “INSIDE of the United States” and “have fun.” Livestock farmers, as well as growers of fruits and vegetables, have been alarmed as they watch agents from Immigration and Customs Enforcement descend en masse across fields to detain and deport agricultural workers. (WASHINGTON DC, AUGUST 5)



World War II: Japan mustn’t evade historical responsibility

According to Japanese media reports, under pressure from conservative forces within the party, Japan’s Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba is considering not announcing his view in a form of written statement on relevant historical recognition on August 15, the anniversary of Japan’s defeat, or on September 2, the day Japan formally signed the surrender document, and relevant coordination is underway. Since the 1995 “Murayama Statement,” it has become customary for successive Japanese governments to issue statements on historical issues during “decade” anniversaries. This year marks the 80th anniversary of the victory in the World Anti-Fascist War and Japan’s unconditional surrender. (BEIJING, AUGUST 3)

Preparing the ground for millets

LONG-TERM VIEW. Climate-appropriate varieties, above MSP prices, and product innovation will make them a daily staple



T NANDAKUMAR

The International Year of Millets (IYOM) 2023 marked a significant milestone in the global recognition and promotion of millet-based cuisine. Spearheaded by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the initiative aimed to bring the story of millets to the world stage. The Government implemented this vision through a series of high-profile events, including a G20 dinner featuring millet-based recipes. In a striking blend of culinary artistry and cultural revival, celebrated chefs from leading five-star hotels have spotlighted millets in an unprecedented gourmet transformation. Their inventive presentations of millet-based dishes captivated audiences and positioned this traditional grain within a modern, upscale context — drawing attention to its nutritional value and versatility.

The campaign, infused with celebrity flair and media buzz, succeeded in revitalising public interest. Retail shelves began showcasing a wide variety of millet products, including traditional sweets like *ladoos*, baked goods, and ready-to-mix porridge blends. Hospitality leaders responded in kind, integrating millet-centric offerings into premium menus, thereby contributing to a broader market acceptance.

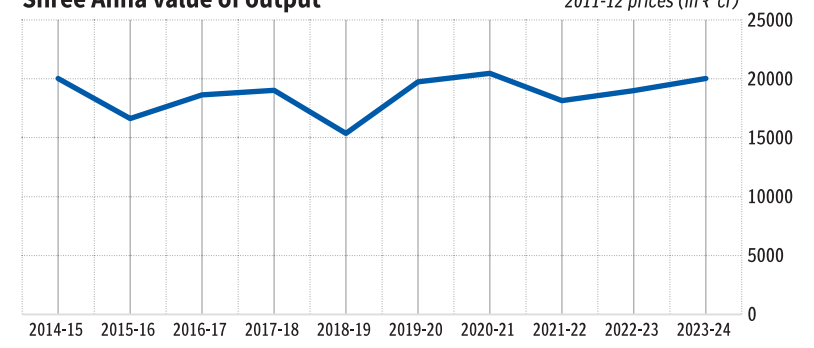
Yet, beyond the glitz lies a deeper inquiry: has this cultural and commercial momentum translated into substantive agricultural revival? The grains collectively known as Shree Anna — Bajra (Pearl Millet), Jowar (Sorghum), Ragi (Finger Millet), and several minor millets — have long been sidelined in modern agronomy and policy.

This article examines the tangible progress made in millet production and its value. While some experts caution



Production trend (in lakh tonnes)					
Millets	2014-15	2019-20	2022-23	2013-24	CAGR %
Jowar	54.45	47.72	38.14	47.37	-1.38
Bajra	91.84	103.63	114.31	107.16	1.55
Ragi	20.61	17.55	16.91	16.7	-2.08
Small millets	3.86	3.71	3.84	4.49	1.52
Shree Anna	170.76	172.61	173.2	175.72	0.29

The compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) has remained in the negative zone for Jowar and Ragi. The CAGR for Shree Anna has remained at a meagre 0.29%



that it’s still too early for definitive impact assessment, I argue that the current surge presents an opportune moment for strategic long term interventions. Scaling sustainable cultivation, strengthening supply chains, and maximising value capture could secure a lasting place for millets in both the kitchen and the farm.

PRODUCTION, VALUE CREATION
Over the past decade, there has been no notable improvement either in the production (see Table) or productivity of Shree Anna. In contrast, other major cereal crops have exhibited comparatively higher growth in output during the same period. The gross value of output (GVO),

assessed at 2011-12 prices, serves as a reliable metric for evaluating the economic returns to farmers. Regrettably, the performance of Shree Anna in terms of GVO has also been underwhelming. As illustrated in the Chart, its value has remained relatively stagnant, underscoring the crop’s limited contribution to agricultural income growth.

The International Year of Millets brought much-needed spotlight to this ancient grain. Yet, despite the buzz, tangible gains in millet production and value have remained modest. GVO, even at current prices, shows increases that fail to keep pace with increased Minimum Support Prices (MSPs). It’s clear that the momentum needs to be

Trump tariffs are no cause for panic

India should rely on its other FTAs and wean itself strategically away from an unreliable US

Govind Bhattacharjee

President Trump’s imposition of 25 per cent tariffs on Indian exports is a cause for concern, but not panic. His administration’s aggressive stance stems from his frustration over India’s refusal to accept his unfair trade demands, unlike other US allies like the UK, Japan, or South Korea that capitulated to his pressure, accepting unfair terms while promising huge, unattainable, investments. India has responded maturely, asserting its red lines loud and clear.

Crucially, India’s economy is domestic consumption-driven, not export-led. The IMF recently raised India’s GDP growth forecast to 6.4 per cent for 2025 and 2026, and even in the worst-case scenario, the tariffs may shave off only 0.2–0.3 percentage points. It is simple arithmetic; a \$4.2 trillion economy can sustain the loss of around \$90 billion, the value of our US exports. With domestic consumption accounting for 60 per cent of GDP, and favourable inflation and monsoon trends, internal demand remains robust. Nonetheless, the export sector is a vital employer of nearly 90 million people, mostly in labour-intensive industries like textiles, apparel, gems and jewellery. In FY25, India’s merchandise exports totalled \$438 billion, with imports at

\$721 billion (\$113 from China). The US accounted for the largest share (20 per cent) of these exports (\$87 billion), followed by the UAE (\$37 billion). Only 28 countries accounted for 76 per cent of our exports, and with many of these India has trade agreements — like Japan, the UAE, Singapore, Australia, Thailand, South Korea, etc. India is negotiating similar agreements with others like the EU and GCC. It recently signed FTAs with the UK and EFTA. These agreements are vital to mitigating the adverse effects of US tariffs.

WHERE JOBS WILL BE HIT
Trump’s tariffs will seriously affect sectors that are India’s top employment generators. New tariffs now raise duties on gems and jewellery, textiles and apparel. In contrast, competitors like Bangladesh and Vietnam will enjoy a lower tariff. However, international trade is highly interdependent. These countries source significant raw materials like textile fibres from India, which may partially offset India’s losses. Food and agricultural products, too, will face increased tariffs, affecting employment, while other key sectors like steel, aluminium will attract 50 per cent tariffs and auto parts 25 per cent. Tariffs could cost India \$20-30 billion in export revenues in the short term. However, some vital exports — like pharmaceuticals, smartphones,



PHARMA SECTOR. Temporarily spared REUTERS

petroleum products, and copper — have been temporarily spared. Pharmaceuticals is a top export product to US. India’s service sector remains its most formidable strength. In FY 2025, India exported \$383 billion worth of services, yielding a surplus of \$189 billion. About 70 per cent of these exports stem from IT services, including AI. The US absorbed a big share of these exports. As of now, Trump has not targeted this sector, likely because of the practical challenges of replacing Indian IT services overnight. Still, the risk of future action remains. Trump’s broader vision involves remaking the US economy into a technology-driven manufacturing powerhouse by disrupting global supply chains. India must adapt to this structural shift, taking lessons from

matched with deeper strategy — because if millets are to be more than a momentary market experiment, India must invest in them for the long haul.

To ensure sustained growth, millet cultivation must expand into regions where paddy farming underperforms — particularly rainfed zones like Odisha, Jharkhand, and Chhattisgarh. Redirecting cropping patterns here isn’t just agronomically sound, it’s economically prudent and farmer friendly.

Boosting yields hinges on two pillars: choosing climate-appropriate varieties and improving crop management. Interestingly, some landraces outperform hybrids, underscoring the need for localised R&D and farmer-led trials. Millets thrive under stress — but thrive even better when science reinforces tradition.

Many millet varieties suffer from post-harvest constraints, limiting their reach. Processing difficulties and shorter shelf lives discourage consumer adoption. A dedicated national mission — combining innovation, private sector engagement, and research support — is essential to solve these issues and position millets as everyday staples.

As consumer demand for healthier alternatives grows, farmers should ideally receive prices above MSP. But establishing reliable procurement channels at MSP provides a safety net and builds producer confidence — key ingredients for sectoral stability.

Today’s consumers prioritise convenience — preferring ready-to-cook flour, grains with extended shelf life, and well-packaged food products. Yet millet marketing strategies haven’t evolved to meet these expectations. It’s time for product innovation, branding, and retail infrastructure to catch up.

One powerful lever for transformation lies in institutional meals. Integrating millets into school meal programmes can normalise their consumption from childhood. Decentralised procurement empowers districts to source locally, while incentives can drive adoption.

Millets offer a compelling solution at the crossroads of rainfed agriculture and nutritional security. As India embraces a “Food Systems” approach — thinking beyond crop yields to nutrition, ecology, and livelihoods — millets are poised to become a timeless staple, not just a trendy alternative.

The writer is former Secretary, Food and Agriculture, Govt of India

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

Trump’s unfair move

This refers to ‘As Trump warns of stiffer tariffs, Delhi mulls support to exporters’ (August 5). The US President has the privilege of bringing countries that impose high tariffs on goods and services exported from the US to the negotiation table and striking deals amicably. However, it is unfair to impose high tariffs on India by citing its trade relations with Russia, while the US and the EU continue to import uranium, palladium, and fertilizers from Russia. India’s move to extend more support to exporters is a strategic step in the

right direction. The relationship between India and the US had been on the right track until President Trump openly began criticising India’s high-tariff regime. Trump should understand that his public outcry, in which he referred to India as a “dead economy”, only highlights how disconnected he is from reality. His tactics of leaning towards Pakistan merely to provoke India are bound to prove futile. Such behaviour is inappropriate for someone of his stature as the President of the US. **S Lakshminarayanan** Puvannur, TN

Related party deals

This refers to ‘SEBI proposes threshold-based framework for related party deals’ (August 5). The proposed fixation of scale-based limits to ensure materiality thresholds for listed entities, primarily to establish transparency and monitoring of the promoter transactions, is a noteworthy step. This would ease the compliance burden of entities under present norms warranting disclosures and obtaining shareholder approval based on number of transactions and if the transactions of value ₹1,000 crore or 10 per cent of the turnover,

whichever is lower. Also, the simplified set of disclosures proposed to be made to audit committee, linked to varying threshold limits, would substantially benefit larger firms involved in high value recurring transactions in saving time and costs. The changes in RTP deal norms in respect of omnibus approvals, especially in respect of large entities is also desirable, to support the operational efficiency. **Sitaram Popuri** Bengaluru

Sulphur emission norms

This refers to ‘Smoke and mirrors’ (August 5). Despite the rising concern

about climate change and the catastrophes it brings to India, the government instead of tightening norms has decided to do away with the existing law of treating sulphur emissions in thermal power plants. It is no great secret who stands to benefit. The citizens of India must wake up to the dangers and force the government to do a rethink on the matter, because whatever money is saved in doing away with the sulphur emission norms, the common citizen will pay multiple times in health costs. **Anthony Henriques** Mumbai

Making ELI inclusive

It’s vital to include skill development for job creation

Dinesh Sood

The government launched the Employment Linked Incentive (ELI) scheme on August 1, with an outlay of ₹99,446 crore, to encourage job creation in the formal sector, particularly in manufacturing. It offers employers a one-time incentive equivalent to one month’s wage (up to ₹15,000) for each new hire, along with a recurring monthly benefit of ₹1,000 to ₹3,000 per additional employee for four years. The goal is to create 3.5 crore new jobs over the next two years.

However, this ambitious initiative could fall short of its true potential if it remains narrowly focused on manufacturing alone as it cannot accommodate the vast number of semi-skilled and unskilled youth entering the workforce each year.

Additionally, it cannot fully address the significant underemployment prevalent in various sectors, including rural enterprises, MSMEs, and the gig economy. The ELI must be reimagined as a more inclusive, skill-linked, and sector-agnostic framework.

India faces the challenge of shortage of job-ready workers. According to the India Skills Report 2024, only 45.9 per cent of graduates are considered employable. A standalone hiring incentive will achieve little if employers struggle to find skilled talent. This presents a critical opportunity: employment-linked incentives (ELI) must be directly tied to certified skill development.

SPECIAL TAX RATE

Employers hiring candidates trained through recognised programmes — such as those from the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs), or even state-run and private skill centres — should be offered a special income tax rate for employment-intensive skills. This would allow the government to stimulate formal job creation in a fragmented sector.

The gig and platform economy is another area that ELI currently overlooks. Food delivery platforms, ride-hailing services, freelance digital marketplaces, and e-commerce logistics already employ hundreds of thousands of youth, many of whom work without contracts, benefits, or upskilling support. If these platforms receive ELI incentives linked to formalisation — such as



SKILLING SCHEME. Need for tweaks JAMES S

registering workers for social insurance or providing skilling modules — it could transform the quality and dignity of work in this fast-growing sector.

Moreover, ELI must be rural-conscious. From food processing clusters to handloom cooperatives and micro-enterprises, supported by schemes like SFURTI and PMEGP, there is immense job-creation potential in non-urban areas. Extending ELI benefits to such units — especially those that employ skilled or semi-skilled rural youth would generate employment and also stem migration to cities.

For this to occur, several structural changes are required. First, the ELI framework must integrate seamlessly with the government’s existing skilling architecture — linking incentives to training outcomes, placement records, and wage benchmarks. Second, a unified digital platform should be created to enable employers to register new hires, upload skill certification data, and claim benefits with minimal paperwork. Third, an annual review mechanism must be established to assess sector-wise absorption, facilitate course correction, and ensure alignment with rapidly changing employment trends, particularly in technology and services.

In conclusion, employment-linked incentive scheme is a step in the right direction, but the road to mass employment needs a broader, bolder vision. By expanding ELI to include skill development, gig platforms, and rural enterprises — and by offering targeted tax and regulatory incentives — the government can transform ELI from a narrow hiring subsidy into a national employment mission. The time to make that leap is now.

The writer is a Co-Founder and MD of Orane International, a training partner with the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC). Views are personal

thehindubusinessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

August 6, 2005

CLB upholds share allotment to IOC in Haldia Petrochem

Indian Oil Corporation can heave a sigh of relief for some time, with the Company Law Board declining to put any restriction on the 7.5 per cent shares allotted to it in Haldia Petrochemicals Ltd, pending a final decision on the matter.

RIL board okays demerger scheme

The board of Reliance Industries Ltd tonight approved the proposed demerger scheme. Earlier, RIL got even with its erstwhile Vice-Chairman, Mr Anil Ambani, for having stolen its thunder on the day of the AGM. In a notice to the NSE today before its scheduled board meeting, the company disowned the details of the proposed demerger as disclosed by Mr Anil Ambani to the media on Wednesday.

Minimum capital for PF managers may be fixed at Rs 25 cr

The interim Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) is considering setting the minimum paid-up capital requirement for pension fund managers (PFM) in the proposed New Pension System (NPS) at about Rs 25 crore. This would be a deviation from the insurance sector where the minimum capital has been set at Rs 100 crore.

Vexed issues in monetary policy

TIME FOR PAUSE. A rate cut by RBI will put pressure on the domestic currency, given the current global economic turmoil



SMITA ROY TRIVEDI
ABHIMANYU DAS

The RBI Monetary Policy Committee meets at a time when the inflation scenario, as on date, poses something of a quandary. The worry is, it may be too much of a good thing. Moreover, with the US announcing a blanket 25 per cent tariff on India, the geopolitical situation seems to have hit a new low.

First, let us look at the inflation scenario. For the first time since the pandemic, there has been such a sharp slide in CPI General, CPI Food and WPI Food (Chart 2). While stability of food prices is essential for macroeconomic stability, the sharp fall in food prices can lead to fall in agricultural incomes and rural consumption. Indian farmers, especially those producing crops not covered by Minimum Support Prices (MSP), are especially vulnerable to such sharp price shocks.

In the recent past, the WPI prices have also registered a sharp fall comparable only to the period following the rate hike phase (May 2023) (Chart 2).

Benign inflationary condition can confuse policy making under an inflation targeting regime. On July 8, Reserve Bank of Australia held rates steady, citing a cautious approach to the low inflation scenario. In its June and July meetings, ECB kept rates unchanged iterating the risk of inflation going ‘too low’.

Central banks are thus wary of reaching the lower bound on inflation. A rate cut now in the Indian context, with inflation nearing bottoming out, will effectively exhaust the option of further cuts, dampening business expectations on credit cost for the next quarters.

A rate cut now in the Indian context, with inflation nearing bottoming out, will effectively exhaust the option of further rate cuts

CHART 1

CPI (food and general) and WPI (food)

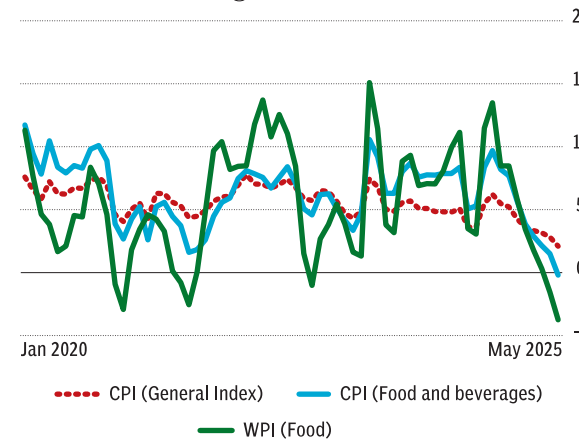
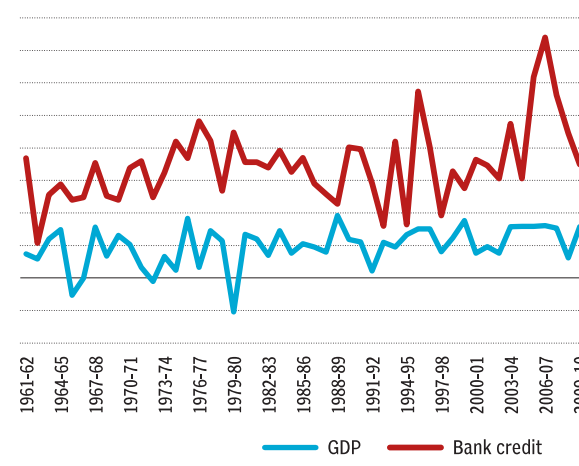


CHART 2

Growth in GDP and bank credit



Source for charts: RBI, Authors' presentation

GROWTH WORRIES

Secondly, as seen in Chart 3, with credit growth dropping in single digit, early signals of GDP growth momentum slowing down cannot be ruled out. For credit off-take, a host of measures in addition to ensuring liquidity may be needed. This is especially pertinent given the continuous uncertainties being faced by exporters with the tariff tensions. Ground level discussions with bankers and MSMEs reveal that operational issues and transaction level

difficulties impact the demand for credit more than cost of credit.

* Frequent tariff policy changes are leading to rejig of business decisions, and stalling expansion plans dampening export credit growth. Small firms and exporters need an extension of credit cycle rather than fresh credit.

* Operational issues associated with finance make smaller business rely on internal financing rather than borrowing from banks:
\$ Digitalisation of credit and export

credit procedures, and simpler compliance at the bank level are essential.

\$ Given the complexity of credit and export credit guidelines, handholding of MSMEs and exporters at branch level is a must.

In this context, the RBI’s proposed steps Grameen Credit Score, digital initiatives for credit delivery to MSMEs and use of Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) for credit disbursement are important (Rajeshwar Rao, July 1). So for the MPC, it is probably the good time for owlish ‘wait and watch’. In view of the blanket 25 per cent tariff imposed by US, and the not-too-discrete criticism of India-Russia trade relations by the US President, further weakening of the rupee cannot be ruled out.

A rate cut by RBI will put pressure on the domestic currency, given the US Fed Reserve’s decision to keep rates unchanged. The central bank can use its ‘neutral’ stance card to signal that the hand will be played in tune with domestic and global developments. There has been ample provision of liquidity to the banking sector. A pause in rate cuts with a dovish signal appears to be the right way forward.

Roy Trivedi is Associate Professor, National Institute of Bank Management. Das is IICI Bank Chair Professor, IIM, Ahmedabad. Views are personal

On businessline.in

Derivatives trading: Retail losses threaten household savings

Retail investor losses are driven by overconfidence, loss aversion and herd behaviour, which lead to irrational decisions in the derivatives market, say **Saumitra Bhaduri** and **Shubham Anand**



https://tinyurl.com/csv3tze2

Judicial independence and accountability

The Justice Varma case has raised several critical issues on procedure and judicial autonomy, **Priyasha Datt** and **Keshab Nandy** point out



https://tinyurl.com/5r7njt2t

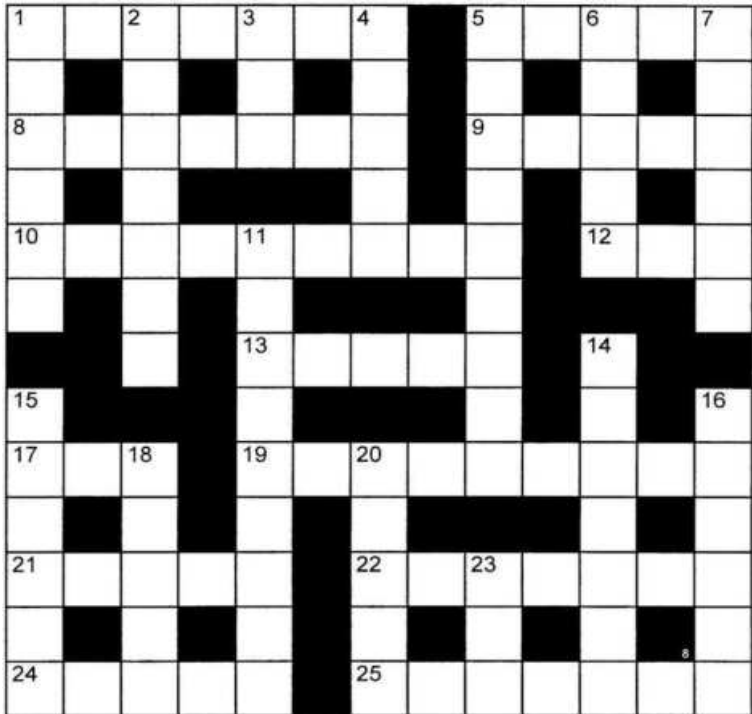
How transparent social security can empower India’s youth

EPFO will have to play a big role in fostering the culture of savings to ensure future financial security, says **Suchita Dutta**



https://tinyurl.com/yc87hshw

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2755



EASY

ACROSS

1. Leopard, puma (7)
5. Copious (5)
8. Drive backwards (7)
9. Seek to show by reasoning (5)
10. Bread or wine in the Lord’s Supper (9)
12. Born (maiden name) (3)
13. Compact, concise (5)
17. Get weapons (3)
19. Divided into four equally (9)
21. Uniform dust-colour (5)
22. Statement of main principles (7)
24. Palatable (5)
25. Row of joined houses (7)

DOWN

1. Church district (6)
2. Newcomers (7)
3. Lady’s (3)
4. Pass end of rope through (5)
5. A flat (9)
6. Heathen (5)
7. Cricket team (6)
11. Ancient times (9)
14. Suite, set of variations (7)
15. Parcel, package (6)
16. Remain attached to (6)
18. Intends (5)
20. On the opposite tack (5)
23. Bituminous substance (3)

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

1. Big cat will gasp for breath, meeting 3 (7)
5. More than sufficient beer redcap gets in (5)
8. How to drive car to the RAC (7)
9. With reasoning discuss how to urge a reform (5)
10. Religious rite man reacts to in this way (9)
12. It shows 3 single name in one entry (3)
13. Brusque contribution to master’s exposition (5)
17. It has its hole at the top of the sleeve (3)
19. Was split in four to be assigned to stations (9)
21. Uniform shade given by king adapted for haik (5)
22. Roughly sketch oil-nut produced by the East (7)
24. Terriers found a pig-pen flavoursome (5)
25. Some car retailers get back in a line of houses (7)

DOWN

1. Church district has RIP written out (6)
2. New members don’t have bad habits (7)
3. A female is one less than a male inheritor (3)
4. Ruff’s mate was a bailiff (5)
5. Meant to change bit inside it, being flat (9)
6. Heathen father will gain when one goes (5)
7. Is equally balanced with the French in the team (6)
11. Ancient time to leave in a tiny disturbance (9)
14. Musical suite played piano, a trait that’s difficult (7)
15. Vessel plying regular route cost a great deal (6)
16. Stick to a herd winding its way east (6)
18. It signifies what one’s got behind one (5)
20. Brass instrument turned up: nothing in it, roughly (5)
23. Man at sea needs to get something to shoot at (3)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2754

ACROSS 1. Plain 4. Chronic 8. Robot 9. Invader 10. Lot 11. Cointreau 12. Ecu 13. Hoof 18. Orchestra 20. Far 21. Repulse 22. Linen 23. Minimum 24. Piece

1. Parallelogram 2. Arbitrator 3. Notice 4. Critic 5. Rivets 6. Nudge 7. Circumference 14. Offence 15. Vellum 16. Stream 17. Gallop 19. Capon

DECCAN Chronicle

6 AUGUST 2025

KLIS: Where KCR’s dream clashed with public good

After years of claims that the Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Scheme is the greatest river project built in the fastest time possible, and portraying it as the final solution of sorts for all irrigation and drinking water supply shortages in Telangana, the crowds have come home roost for former chief minister K. Chandrashekar Rao. The Bharat Rashtra Samithi president had never once let up on any opportunity to declare that he was the man, the brains and the driving force behind the project.

However, the report from the Justice P.C. Ghose Commission of Inquiry constituted last year by the Congress government to inquire into irregularities with respect to KLIS’s barrages are nothing short of a nightmare for Mr Rao and his party.

Much to the BRS’s chagrin, the commission unequivocally placed Mr Rao at the centre of all decision making and the eventual serious damages to the Medigadda barrage, a portion of which has cracked and sank into the river bed, and similar problems of lesser intensity at Annaram and Sundilla.

While a political battle is already on between the BRS bristling with indignation and the Congress government led by A. Revanth Reddy who made it clear the government is not interested in a witch hunt, the takeaway is not just about the profligacy of the then BRS government that spent around ₹90,000 crores on KLIS, but about Mr Rao’s Ozymandian sense of infallibility.

The commission called everything about the barrages a result of a one-man show led by Mr Rao with the lesser actors doing everything they can to make the wishes of one man come true without consideration of the consequences — giving a go-by to rules, regulations, and worst of all, fundamental design and engineering requirements.

What was supposed to be, at least in Mr Rao’s mind, a series of edifices that would stand the test of time and write his name in history books as a man who achieved the impossible and stand tall at least 100 years, began decaying the year they were put to use in 2019. No amount of cover-ups could save the day for him, or his party from a political drubbing in elections once Medigadda barrage cracked.

The Ghose Commission report made it clear that neither K. Chandrashekar Rao, nor his foot soldiers had public good in their hearts or minds. The BRS and Mr Rao will have many bones to pick in the coming days, but it is unlikely that the man himself will get his ageing feet wet in the battle that lies ahead for him.

For, all those who colluded in the Kaleshwaram project have not only laid to waste a political career but also vast resources that no state can afford to squander in the manner that they did with the Kaleshwaram project’s barrages.

ACB raids on engineers associated with the project have revealed massive wealth running into hundreds of crores of rupees amassed by them, while the outcome of rent seeking behaviour by their political masters might reveal even more mind-boggling numbers.

For the Congress government, the call for action is clear that this is not about politics but about taking the investigations to their logical conclusion, punishing the guilty as per law and making the contractors repair the barrages at their own cost as recommended by the Ghose Commission.

‘True Indian’? It’s not SC’s call

The Supreme Court raising an objection to the statement of the Lok Sabha Leader of the Opposition, Rahul Gandhi, on China’s encroachment into India’s territory and losses suffered at the hands of the Chinese by the Indian Army is an unwarranted interference in the affairs of the legislature by the judiciary. The court’s suggestion that “if you are a true Indian, you wouldn’t say such a thing” Is equally abominable.

Mr Gandhi has said nothing against the Indian Army as is being propagated by the BJP and its allies. All that he said in his repeated statements about the border skirmishes is that India has lost patrolling rights over 20,000 square kilometres which, if true, is a sobering thought. He also mentioned that the Army has lost around 20 of our soldiers. And the government has never been unequivocal about the outcome of the face-off in terms of territorial losses while the death of troops was indeed widely reported.

Thus, Mr Gandhi’s statements cannot be construed as being “against” the Army by any standards, especially those of the government and the armed forces. Questions on the loss of Indian fighter jets during Operation Sindoor were blocked by the very logical stand that India had achieved its operational targets and that losses were part of defence operations. By the same token, then, the government can clarify that it has achieved its targets on the Chinese border, too, losses notwithstanding. Why then are its feathers ruffled? Mr Gandhi was certainly not questioning the professionalism of the Army.

The court’s suggestion that the Leader of Opposition ought to raise such topics in Parliament is also avoidable. The judges may have missed the fact that Mr Gandhi is often not allowed to speak on the floor of the House.

On a related note, not long ago, the Mumbai high court did advise the CPI(M) activists to limit their protests to causes within the country, instead of agitating against Israel for causing the deaths of thousands of Palestinians due to hunger. It will be ideal if the judiciary leaves it to politicians and political parties to decide the causes of their demonstrations, their platform and timing, for justice will best be served when judges restrain themselves to adjudicating on matters brought before them in a timely fashion.

Subhani



Trump vs judiciary: Will US power balance shift?



Krishnan Srinivasan
Reflections

In May last year, while he was not in office, US President Donald Trump was found guilty on all 34 charges in a trial over money paid by his former lawyer to adult film star Stormy Daniels. The then former President was a convicted felon, a first in American history. Mr Trump’s legal problems in the courts included four separate criminal cases and several civil actions, threatening not just his liberty but his whole political and commercial career. A year later, the situation has been completely reversed.

Three major Supreme Court judgments, one giving Presidents and former Presidents broad immunity from prosecution; a second dismissing the ruling that Mr Trump’s attempts to overturn the 2020 election results disqualified him from running for office again; and a third in June curbing district judges’ abilities to stall the President’s agenda have all gone in Mr Trump’s favour. Earlier, in his first term, he had reshaped the Supreme Court with a sympathetic conservative majority.

His current objective is to strip the lower courts of their powers. Federal district judges, who had often delivered rulings on immigration policy that they claimed applied nationwide, now face an assault on their powers from the Trump administration that questions their legitimacy with claims that they flout their authority. The broader question is whether the attacks will reshape the balance of powers even after Donald Trump is no longer President.

The district courts are under unprecedented attack; the President has variously termed judges “crooked”, “deranged”, “USA hating” and “radical left”, and his deputy chief

of staff for policy, Stephen Miller, declared that the US is facing a judicial tyranny. He wrote on social media: “Each day, [the judges] change foreign policy, economic, staffing, and national security policies of the administration... It is the gravest assault on democracy. It must and will end.” Mr Trump has called for the impeachment of those judges who he disagrees with, and has also threatened to sue individual

Serving judges have received death threats this year, prompted by their blocking or delaying some of the President’s executive orders. Figures compiled by investigators show that by mid-June, there were more than 400 threats against almost 300 judges. The Trump supporters reject the idea that presidential rhetoric is to blame for raising the temperature, asserting that the Left is more to blame for hostility towards judges: “The highest threat to anyone on the federal courts was when someone tried to assassinate the President”, declared Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh. “There’s this tendency to try to characterise the Trump administration as being what has facilitated this. The revolutionary notions that we need to take the law in our own hands... tend to [be] from the Left in America.”

While other Presidents have clashed with the courts, Mr Trump’s confrontations are unique in scale, perhaps inevitably given that after he arrived in the White House innumerable executive orders were promulgated with the desire to fast-forward his agenda quickly. On a single day, 26 were signed. There have been another 140 up to the beginning of July only around 100 fewer than President Barack Obama in his entire eight years in the

Even after the Supreme Court ruled to curb those nationwide injunctions, another judge slapped one on Mr Trump’s asylum policy and a district judge issued a fresh block on an executive order

White House. Although Mr Trump could have asked Congress to legislate these policies, since his Republican Party controls both chambers, legislation takes time, and because Congress has been busy with Mr Trump’s controversial domestic legislation, there was little time for other priorities.

Executive orders are within the President’s prerogative, under Article II of the US Constitution, so Mr Trump is within his powers provided the orders cite legislative authority. What the President cannot do is make new laws, or do things that go contrary to the Constitution. Unless Congress intervenes, the only option to challenge his orders is to go to court. The sweeping nature of the orders he has signed, many touching on constitutional issues such as the right of everyone born in the US to citizenship, has led to dozens of injunctions. Which is why Mr Trump’s victory in the Supreme Court curbing such nationwide injunctions is significant.

The administration has accused the judiciary of overreach and judges of being “activists”. But perhaps the most fundamental and philosophical criticism is that they obstruct the desires of the electorate, though this is disputed. “We are a nation of laws,” explains a judge. “A mandate for the President of the United States does not mean a mandate to disregard the law.”

In a recent interview, Mr Trump denied that he was defying the judiciary; when rulings have gone against him, he has sought remedy through the judicial process, he said. “That’s why I’m winning on appeal.”

After the Watergate scandal in the 1970s, when then President Richard M. Nixon flouted many norms, legislation was passed to curb the executive and make it more accountable, but some of the changes merely adopted norms such as publication of presidential tax returns and avoiding financial conflicts of interest, and Mr Trump has shown little inclination to follow those norms. Mr Trump’s critics claim that he is destroying the system of checks and balances in which the three equal branches of government — the presidency, the legislature and the judiciary — act as a brake on each other. Prof. Laurence Tribe, a constitutional expert, describes the situation as “catastrophic”; saying: “The whole system is completely out of balance.”

When it comes to the relationship between the presidency and the courts, Mr Trump comes close to defiance. In one instance, after being ordered to facilitate the return of a man wrongly deported to El Salvador, the administration delayed by two months complying with the Supreme Court’s decision. There are only two ways a President can be truly held to account: one by removal in an election; the second is by impeachment in Congress, and Mr Trump has already survived two of those in his first term.

The judiciary is, however, not giving in tamely. Even after the Supreme Court ruled in June to curb those nationwide injunctions — and both parties have complained about such injunctions in the past — another judge slapped one on Mr Trump’s asylum policy and a district judge issued a fresh nationwide block on Mr Trump’s executive order restricting the automatic right to citizenship for babies born to undocumented migrants or foreign visitors, drawing furious criticism from Trump followers. This battle is joined, and its consequences for the future are unpredictable.

Krishnan Srinivasan is a former Indian foreign secretary

LETTERS

CHOLAS’ MIGHT

Regarding Patralekha Chatterjee’s article highlighting Cholas’ maritime might, trade and irrigation models alongside subtle messages to political vendetta against Indians togetherness. The Prime Minister’s visit to Gangaikonda Cholapuram gave a wakeup call to TN govt to cleanse the adjacent huge lake not desilted for decades. Quoting Finland models and employability versus education is relevant to Tamil Nadu which is against implementation of NEP and NEET. The author’s apt quote of relevance to present education in recalling the past is to be appreciated.

Dr. P. Soundararajan
Chennai

ARMY OFFICER’S MISBEHAVIOUR

This refers to your editorial, “Air rage: Ensure rules are enforced”. I have seen 10 or 15 Army officers in unreserved train carriages locking the doors from inside to prevent other passengers to board. If they somehow forced their way inside, the officers spread out their legs and hands and placed their luggage on the seats to occupy the vacant seats also. The Army is known for high degree of discipline, but such behaviour does not seem to endorse it. The officers must be mandated by higher echelons in the Army to behave properly outside their camps in order to win respect for the Army.

M. L. Raghavan
Tirupur

GRIPPING TEST SERIES

It was indeed a cracker of a Test match between India and England at the Oval. Indian bowlers produced a magic spell of fast bowling, which reduced the hosts from 301 for 3 to 387 all out. Mohammad Siraj and Prashidh Krishna rose up to the occasion in the absence of India’s premier pacer, Jasprit Bumrah. The young team under the leadership of Shubman Gill displayed great skill and character in the final Test, which helped India level the five-match Anderson-Tendulkar Trophy Test series 2-2. Gill was rightly named player-of-the-series. It was a wonderful series for KL Rahul, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Rishabh Pant, Ravindra Jadeja and Washington Sundar as well. Pant batted with a fractured toe in the first innings of the Manchester Test, which showed the fighting spirit of the Indian team. The gripping 2-2 series draw is a good advertisement for Test cricket.

S. Sankaranarayanan
Chennai

Mail your letters to chennaidesk@deccanmail.com

Pradeep C. Nair



Dhaka’s animosity likely to endanger Ganga water pact’s renewal next year

The Ganga Waters Treaty, signed between India and Bangladesh, is up for renewal next year. The treaty, when it was signed in 1996 for a period of 30 years, guaranteed a framework for distributing Ganga waters during the critical dry spell between January and May every year at the Farakka barrage in West Bengal. The Farakka barrage (which lies 18 km from the Bangladesh border), when it was constructed in 1975, ensured diversion of 40,000 cusecs of water to flush the Kolkata Port. When it was commissioned, it led to protests in Bangladesh resulting in it taking up the matter at the United Nations. It resulted in a five-year agreement in 1977, followed by another in 1982. No treaty for sharing of the Ganga waters existed between 1989 to 1996; a period that witnessed increased disappointment in Bangladesh as a consequence. Subsequently, the 1996 treaty was signed between the two countries, and it assured 35,000 cusecs of water alternately to both countries for 10-day periods during the lean season. The treaty enjoins India and Bangladesh to split the water supply 50:50 if the flow is 70,000 cusecs or less. However, Bangladesh’s share is 35,000 cusecs if the flow is between 70,000 and 75,000 cusecs, while India receives the remaining flow. If the flow is 75,000 cusecs or more, India receives 40,000 cusecs, with the excess flow going to Bangladesh.

The treaty, when it was signed in 1996 between

both countries, did not take into consideration climate change and the substantial growth in population that was likely to happen on both sides of the border. According to a report released by Kathmandu-based International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) in 2019, the climate crisis will begin altering water levels in the Ganga and the Brahmaputra over the next two-and-a-half decades, and the rivers could record an abrupt decrease in flow after 2050. This will diminish the water available for drinking, irrigation and producing electricity for roughly 250 million people living downstream.

For many years, Bangladesh has raised concerns regarding the treaty, primarily alleging that India withholds water during critical dry spells. Specifically, Bangladesh claims that during the 1997-2016 period, it did not receive its share of water in 39 out of 60 critical periods. Besides, Bangladesh argues that the treaty lacks a minimum guaranteed flow clause, relying instead on diplomatic consultations when flows drop below 50,000 cusecs. Bangladeshi critics also point to a lack of consideration for the river’s flow from source to the sea, and an inaccurate projection of future water flow.

The current Muhammad Yunus government in Bangladesh has whipped up an anti-India hysteria like never. The numerous provocations by Mr Yunus and his cohorts have taken the Indo-Bangladesh

relations southwards. The greatest provocation has been by Mr Yunus himself when he made the controversial statement on India’s Northeast during his first state visit to Beijing in March this year. Despite his numerous provocative statements, his increasing cosying up to Pakistan and China as also fundamentalists at home, India has exercised strategic restraint. Incidentally, the number of people in Bangladesh who are questioning the legitimacy of the interim government of Mr Yunus to take policy decisions on the country’s internal and external matters has also been increasing.

Hence, it is fair to assume that a greater degree of disquiet is likely next year when the agreement gets discussed and renewed. After the decision to suspend the Indus Water Treaty with Pakistan, India is now exploring multiple alternatives to reassess domestic needs along with the minimum needs of the Ganga waters for Bangladesh so that both countries can arrive at an agreement that is mutually acceptable. The Centre’s Jal Shakti ministry set up an internal committee in July 2023 which included the representatives of the Bihar and West Bengal governments. In 2011, the West Bengal government under chief minister Mamata Banerjee had stalled the signing of a treaty for sharing of the Teesta waters at the last moment when India and Bangladesh were on the verge of signing it. That would still be fresh on the minds of Bangladeshis.

In every likelihood, a fresh treaty would be negotiated by the new government in Bangladesh; given the Yunus administration’s announcement that elections will be held in March-April 2026. The fresh treaty would have to ensure an equitable in distribution of river waters between both countries. India’s requirements, along with the likely impact of climate change on futuristic water flows, must be considered. Alongside, similar requirements of Bangladesh would also have to be looked into. In the meantime, it would be prudent for India to give the necessary reassurances to Bangladesh, besides reminding them of the recent Chinese announcement that work on the 60-GW Yarlung Tsangpo hydel project has commenced, which will seriously affect water flow and ecology in Brahmaputra, both in India and Bangladesh.

India should also remind Bangladesh that China has no water sharing treaty with any of its neighbours and should take it on board in jointly calling out the adverse effects of this project. After all, India understands Bangladesh is a very important neighbour which has traditionally been friendly, and work towards ensuring that the current anti-India euphoria in Bangladesh is but a blip on the radar.

The writer is a retired lieutenant-general who is a former director-general of the Assam Rifles and has extensively served in the Northeast

Strengthening state finances

States must focus on their own revenue

A recent report by Crisil showed that India's 18 largest states, which together account for over 90 per cent of the country's gross state domestic product (GSDP), are projected to see a revenue growth rate of 7-9 per cent in 2025-26, up from 6.6 per cent in 2024-25. Aggregate revenues are expected to touch ₹40 trillion, driven largely by steady goods and services tax (GST) collection, robust growth in excise on liquor, and improved central transfers. Petroleum tax collection, however, continues to lag with subdued 2 per cent growth.

Clearly, this is a reassuring sign of stability in state finances against a challenging global and domestic economic backdrop, creating fiscal space for increasing capital outlay. However, it also highlights deeper structural issues. Revenue growth remains below the decadal average of 10 per cent, and most states continue to rely heavily on transfers from the Union government. From 2015-16 to 2024-25, central transfers accounted for 23 to 30 per cent of state revenues, relative to 20-24 per cent in the 2000s and early 2010s. At the same time, central grants comprised 65-70 per cent of the non-tax revenue of states in the last decade, compared to 55-65 per cent earlier. This long-term trend underscores both the increasing role of the Centre and the narrowing scope of states to independently boost their finances. A report by PRS Legislative Research showed that, in 2024-25, states were estimated to have raised 58 per cent of their revenue receipts from own tax and non-tax sources, while 42 per cent was estimated to have come from the devolution of central taxes and grants from the Centre.

Overall, as the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Report on State Finances 2023-24 had noted, the aggregate debt-to-GDP ratio of states stood at 28.5 per cent, exceeding the 20 per cent limit set by the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Review Committee. The data suggests that of all states and Union Territories, 12 had their debt-to-GSDP ratio higher than 35 per cent in 2023-24, while around 24 had their debt above 20 per cent. Nevertheless, states have done better than the Centre, barring a few outliers. Several states have improved transparency in budgeting, enhanced efficiency in social-sector delivery, and prioritised capital expenditure. In fact, most states have demonstrated a fair degree of fiscal prudence. They have by and large adhered to the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management norms, keeping their fiscal deficits around 3 per cent of GSDP. The consolidated gross fiscal deficit of states fell from an average of 4.3 per cent of GDP during the period 1998-99 to 2003-04 to 2.7 per cent of GDP during 2004-05 to 2023-24.

However, there is a need for strengthening state-government finances. Reforming GST compliance is an urgent priority. States must also expand digital revenue tracking and plug leakages in property tax and user charges. Concurrently, the Centre must ensure timely and predictable transfers, particularly through Finance Commission-recommended grants, which help address horizontal imbalances. There is also considerable friction between states and the Centre on the latter's use of cesses and surcharges, which are not shared with states. The increased dependence on cesses and surcharges distorts the fiscal balance between states and the Union, which should be avoided.

Affordable cinema

Aamir Khan is exploring another frontier

In a recent interview with this newspaper, actor and filmmaker Aamir Khan said that his latest movie would release on YouTube's pay-per-view (PPV) platform at ₹100, a move that signals a potential shift in how India consumes cinema. While Mr Khan's film earned over ₹250 crore in theatres, it reached only 2-3 per cent of the population. According to a study by *Cinemaprofile.com*, around 70 per cent of theatres nationwide are located in South India and Maharashtra, leaving large parts of the Hindi heartland underserved. The Ficci-EY M&E Report 2025 further highlighted this imbalance, noting a 17 per cent growth rate in digital media and a 5 per cent decline in film revenues.

With expensive OTT (over the top) subscriptions and a limited theatrical reach, YouTube could fill the gap and also take Indian cinema to a wider global audience. According to Comscore, YouTube reached 445 million Indians in April 2025. Unlike OTT subscriptions, where users pay a monthly or yearly fee regardless of usage, YouTube's PPV model allows viewers to pay only when they want to watch something. This is particularly useful for those who cannot afford regular OTT subscriptions or don't consume enough content to justify the cost. In a country where many are still to come online and remain highly price-sensitive, this kind of "pay only when you watch" system might prove effective. Although PPV hasn't been widely adopted in India yet, typical rental prices currently range between ₹170 and ₹250. If PPV is priced well (say, ₹50 to ₹100), it could attract a broad audience and benefit creators, producers, and viewers alike.

Still, the PPV model will require thoughtful innovation to succeed. India's digital landscape is fragmented. According to the Ficci-EY M&E Report 2025, 89 per cent of time spent on YouTube was on mobile devices and 9 per cent was via connected TVs. There are 562 million smartphone users, and about 30 million households have connected TVs. To make PPV truly inclusive, platforms will need to offer regional-language content, flexible pricing, and mobile-first formats that work on low-bandwidth connections. With 48 per cent of OTT content in 2024 already in regional languages, the demand is evident. Artificial intelligence-powered dubbing and subtitling tools can further reduce content adaptation costs and make films more accessible across linguistic lines.

Government support and public infrastructure investment will also be crucial. BharatNet's expansion, along with schemes promoting digital literacy and smartphone access, can boost PPV uptake in rural India. More affordable data, better last-mile connectivity, and content funding for vernacular creators could unlock storytelling at scale. In the long run, PPV could serve as a bridge between theatrical releases and mobile-first viewing. If widely adopted, it could help monetise thousands of small- and mid-budget films that struggle to find OTT buyers or theatrical slots. As box-office revenues stagnate and OTT growth plateaus, a well-executed PPV ecosystem could reshape the economics of film distribution, bringing cinema closer to millions not just as entertainment but as a cultural experience, available on demand, in one's language, and at a price they can afford.



ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA

India needs to up its diplomatic game

We don't have to produce another Henry Kissinger, but we must go beyond making statements on the wars now threatening world peace

For a country that is soon to overtake Japan to become the world's fourth-largest economy, and possibly the third before the end of the decade, India punches below its weight in terms of diplomacy. While Prime Minister Narendra Modi is routinely seen as a rising global leader, he has to get more done through active diplomacy.

A visible personal rapport with global leaders is not a solid enough basis for conducting the kind of hard-nosed diplomacy that delivers net gains for the country. We saw this recently when, despite a seemingly close relationship with Donald Trump, he managed to deeply embarrass India by claiming that the United States had mediated a ceasefire between India and Pakistan after Operation Sindoor. Worse, we are now stuck with 25 per cent tariffs on exports to the US, and have been warned of further penalties over our ties with long-time friend Russia.

Earlier, after Mr Modi personally hosted China's Xi Jinping in Gujarat and Tamil Nadu, we ended up with the Galwan clashes and the remilitarisation of the India-China border. Worse, during Operation Sindoor, China fully supported Pakistan in targeting Indian air and other assets with its weapons and intelligence.

In fact, one must wonder whether Mr Modi's efforts to wine and dine the Big Two of today's world were seen as a sign of weakness rather than a proffered arm of friendship. His trademark hugs may have played well with an Indian audience, but it's unclear how world leaders interpreted them.

We need to move from demonstrative style to hard substance, both in diplomacy and action. Reducing our dependence on foreign military supplies by focusing on indigenous supply chains and tech-

nology is a no-brainer. What we must ponder is whether our diplomacy so far has been more reactive than proactive. We can't just be responding to the wars and growing instability around us with mere statements. We have to make things happen and mitigate the threats, both to ourselves and the world. Our diplomacy needs an activist role, even if it is behind the scenes.

To list just some of the challenges, there is pressure building up for us to reduce our economic and military ties to Russia. In West Asia, as Israel gets more and more isolated from Western opinion due to its actions in Gaza (France and some European Union members have recognised Palestine, and the United Kingdom may follow suit), India will be under pressure to do something about Palestine. It will be difficult to maintain our close strategic partnerships with Israel, especially if domestic Muslim opinion — never very comfortable with the Modi government — starts piling on the pressure through Opposition parties.

It is not in India's interest to let either Russia or Israel be undermined too much or go down in flames. While the US will probably stand by Israel, domestic opinion in the US and Europe — especially on the political Left — is rapidly turning anti-Israel. And most of Europe and the US would not mind Russia's effective demise as a major power.

In our own neighbourhood, we already have a Pakistan-China axis to contend with, but may soon have to add Bangladesh to the list of potential hostile powers. The fact that India has not been able to protect Hindus in Bangladesh or even seal its borders against infiltrators says a lot.

One of Mr Modi's statements that did not age well is that "this is not the era of war." Soon after he said



BEYOND IDEOLOGY
R JAGANNATHAN

Leadership call amid listing conundrum

When Tata Trusts, the largest shareholder of Tata Sons, recently passed a resolution to extend the term of executive chairman N Chandrasekaran (Chandra, as he's widely known) for another five years, the world took notice. There are several reasons for that. The first reason it surprised industry watchers was its timing. Chandra's second term is until February 2027, which is still more than 18 months away. Why did Tata Trusts, which controls around 66 per cent in the holding company of the steel-to-software conglomerate, treat this matter with such urgency and so far ahead of time?

Was there anything similar when Chandra got a second term as executive chairman of Tata Sons in 2022? Not quite. On February 11, 2022, the Tata Sons board of directors reportedly reviewed the first five years of his tenure before reappointing him for another term. Ratan Tata, then chairman of Tata Trusts and chairman emeritus of the Tata Group, attended that Tata Sons board meeting as a "special invitee", and recommended the renewal of Chandra's term for another five years. This happened just about 10 days before Chandra's first term was to end. It seemed like business as usual. No Tata Trusts resolution preceded Chandra's reappointment at that point.

In the case of Cyrus Mistry, who held the position of Tata Sons executive chairman before Chandra took charge in February 2017, there was no occasion for a renewal of term. Mistry was removed as Tata Sons chairman in October 2016 over alleged trust and performance issues. After removing Mistry, the Tata Sons board appointed Ratan Tata as interim

non-executive chairman while a search committee was set up to look for the next executive chairman. It's another matter that an internal candidate — Chandra, as Tata Consultancy Services chief executive officer — made the cut for the top job at Tata Sons. Before Mistry, Ratan Tata was the chairman of Tata Sons for 21 years from 1991 to 2012. He stepped down from that role on turning 75. Since Ratan Tata was both chairman of Tata Sons and Tata Trusts — the last time that the dual role was held by the same person — there was no question of any Tata Trusts resolution for appointment or reappointment to the top job. It was no different for JRD Tata, who was at the helm of the group for 53 years after succeeding Nowroji Saklatvala in 1938.

Returning to the subject of the recent resolution by Tata Trusts to extend the Tata Sons chairman's term, what is its significance? As per the process, the resolution will be placed at the Tata Sons board for it to be considered for approval. Even without such a resolution, Tata Sons would have decided on the future course of action about the group's leadership. Typically, across the corporate world in professionally run firms, there are three choices when a leader's term is nearing its end: Extend the term of the incumbent if the rules permit; set up a search committee for selecting the next leader; or go for an internal candidate for the top job.

However, this is not just about the process of appointment or reappointment. In this case, the largest shareholder of Tata Sons seems to have sent out a message both internally and externally that it is



NOT FOR PROFIT
NIVEDITA MOOKERJI

backing the leadership of the current chairman. As the largest shareholder, Tata Trusts' view can certainly not be ignored. But with Tata Trusts passing a resolution on another existential matter at the same meeting, things look somewhat complex. According to the resolution, Tata Trusts wants Chandra and the Tata Sons board to do two things — first, work towards the exit of the Shapoorji Pallonji Group as the second-largest shareholder of Tata Sons; and two, engage with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to ensure that Tata Sons is kept out of the ambit of public listing. Tata Sons was designated an upper layer non banking financial company by the RBI in September 2022 — a classification that mandates a stock market listing of Tata Sons within three years. Tata Sons' request to the RBI, seeking a change of classification from an upper layer core investment company, is pending.

With the RBI deadline for listing Tata Sons closing in, industry watchers may end up reading all the three items in the Tata Trusts' resolution together. That, in turn, could mean that the largest shareholder is not just seeking another term for the current Tata Sons chairman in isolation, but is also attaching additional clauses — shedding the Shapoorji Pallonji stake and keeping Tata Sons private — like adjuncts in the group's leadership journey.

As the relationship between Tata Trusts, under Noel Tata as chairman, and Tata Sons evolves in the post-Ratan Tata era, there's curiosity over whether the largest shareholder is speaking in one voice. If it is indeed one voice, with Noel Tata getting the full backing of the trustees, it will mean continuity in a broad sense. If not, there could be something brewing in terms of control competing with philanthropy — which should be at the core of Tata Trusts.

The author is a senior journalist

India's economy: Tomorrow's challenges, today



LAVEESH BHANDARI

Shankar Acharya is undoubtedly a unique personality. Disarmingly affable yet ruthlessly incisive, both as a policy economist and as a thought leader, he has made significant contributions to India's growth. Over a period of eight years, as the chief economic advisor, he played a pivotal role in helping shape economic policies that have propelled India from being a laggard economy to the forefront of economic growth globally. This success, no doubt, cannot be ascribed to any one person but a whole group of

policymakers. The era was interesting; bureaucrats and politicians had to take decisions that were risky both politically and administratively. Economists, many of whom are contributors to this volume, had to navigate multiple pressures, balancing the immediate with the long term. And in all of this, Dr Acharya was playing a role few could have played, balancing multi-fold pressures and, more importantly, actively contributing to the most important period in modern Indian economic history.

He has always advocated policies towards economic liberalisation, where both trade and finance are not limited by protectionism and unnecessary regulation. Yet he is also a conservative, tending to favour fiscal tightness rather than government profligacy. His monetary policy instincts are no different, as also acknowledged by one of the contributors. Those days now seem distant, but not too far back, integration

into the global economy was yielding great benefits in terms of economic growth. Many know this, but it needs to be said again and again: This combination of liberal economics and fiscal conservatism helped generate the surpluses that could then be used to ramp up welfare and public infrastructure creation beyond the 2000s.

But Dr Acharya has not stopped there. Through his columns and his books (*Essays on Macroeconomic Policy and Growth in India and India's Economy: Performance and Challenges*), he continues to inspire rational and balanced economic decision-making. I have been fortunate to have heard his views every Monday at the *Business Standard* edit meetings. For me, that was a time when I was quite disillusioned with the prevalent economic thoughts of the day, and on the verge of giving it all up. But in those meetings, I found a different world

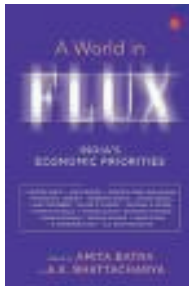
existed that I had not known of, where a richly layered thought process would attempt to decipher the problem at hand in an amazingly humble manner.

So I am so glad that the editors Amita Batra and A K Bhattacharya have been able to get among the most deep economic thought-leaders in India to contribute to this volume. The contributors are a Who's Who of India's economic thinkers and practitioners and then some more. Uday Kotak has penned a warm foreword. Chapter contributors include Montek Singh Ahluwalia, Rakesh Mohan, Shyam Saran, Sudipto Mundle, Mahendra Dev, Ajay Chhibber, Michael Patra, Sajjid Z Chinoi, Deepak Misra, Radhika Kapoor and more.

Thankfully, the volume is not about the past, but the future — how should India work with a very different geo-economic scenario where geopolitics seems to be overwhelming economics? It is also not inward-looking but highly

outward-oriented, drawing from insights from Asia and Latin America, specifically and the world in general. And yes, there is a separate contribution on China as well. The topics cover not just macroeconomics, but also urban development, employment, small and medium enterprises, climate change, finance, growing digitalisation, agriculture, human capital, trade and even political economy.

Would I read this volume again? The answer is an unqualified yes. First, to know Dr Acharya's life and contributions better. Second, to better understand how global thought leaders are thinking through some of the most difficult and complex sets of challenges humanity is facing. And third, a deeper insight into the challenges that are emerging for India and the world and the potential path forward.



A World in Flux: India's Economic Priorities. Essays in Honour of Shankar Acharya
Edited by Amita Batra & A K Bhattacharya
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That gets me to what I missed — the introspection. Today, neat models of economic interactions reflect only the past, and tactical and geopolitical issues have become far more important for decision-makers than they were in the past. Technology change has become so rapid and concentrated that it is unlikely to give the necessary space for trickle-down to work. In such a situation, what do the objectives of equity, growth and efficiency mean? Moreover, as government intervention in the economy is becoming more and more acceptable, it would be nice to also think about where the boundaries may be.

The reviewer heads CSEP Research Foundation. Amita Batra is a *Business Standard* columnist, and A K Bhattacharya is editorial director at *Business Standard*

THE ASIAN AGE

6 AUGUST 2025

KLIS: Where KCR's dream clashed with public good

After years of claims that the Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Scheme is the greatest river project built in the fastest time possible, and portraying it as the final solution of sorts for all irrigation and drinking water supply shortages in Telangana, the crowds have come home roost for former chief minister K. Chandrashekar Rao. The Bharat Rashtra Samithi president had never once let up on any opportunity to declare that he was the man, the brains and the driving force behind the project.

However, the report from the Justice P.C. Ghose Commission of Inquiry constituted last year by the Congress government to inquire into irregularities with respect to KLIS's barrages are nothing short of a nightmare for Mr Rao and his party.

Much to the BRS's chagrin, the commission unequivocally placed Mr Rao at the centre of all decision making and the eventual serious damages to the Medigadda barrage, a portion of which has cracked and sank into the river bed, and similar problems of lesser intensity at Annaram and Sundilla.

While a political battle is already on between the BRS bristling with indignation and the Congress government led by A. Revanth Reddy who made it clear the government is not interested in a witch hunt, the takeaway is not just about the profligacy of the then BRS government that spent around ₹90,000 crores on KLIS, but about Mr Rao's Ozymandian sense of infallibility.

The commission called everything about the barrages a result of a one-man show led by Mr Rao with the lesser actors doing everything they can to make the wishes of one man come true without consideration of the consequences — giving a go-by to rules, regulations, and worst of all, fundamental design and engineering requirements.

What was supposed to be, at least in Mr Rao's mind, a series of edifices that would stand the test of time and write his name in history books as a man who achieved the impossible and stand tall at least 100 years, began decaying the year they were put to use in 2019. No amount of cover-ups could save the day for him, or his party from a political drubbing in elections once Medigadda barrage cracked.

The Ghose Commission report made it clear that neither K. Chandrashekar Rao, nor his foot soldiers had public good in their hearts or minds. The BRS and Mr Rao will have many bones to pick in the coming days, but it is unlikely that the man himself will get his ageing feet wet in the battle that lies ahead for him.

For, all those who colluded in the Kaleshwaram project have not only laid to waste a political career but also vast resources that no state can afford to squander in the manner that they did with the Kaleshwaram project's barrages.

ACB raids on engineers associated with the project have revealed massive wealth running into hundreds of crores of rupees amassed by them, while the outcome of rent seeking behaviour by their political masters might reveal even more mind-boggling numbers.

For the Congress government, the call for action is clear that this is not about politics but about taking the investigations to their logical conclusion, punishing the guilty as per law and making the contractors repair the barrages at their own cost as recommended by the Ghose Commission.

'True Indian'? It's not SC's call

The Supreme Court raising an objection to the statement of the Lok Sabha Leader of the Opposition, Rahul Gandhi, on China's encroachment into India's territory and losses suffered at the hands of the Chinese by the Indian Army is an unwarranted interference in the affairs of the legislature by the judiciary. The court's suggestion that "if you are a true Indian, you wouldn't say such a thing" is equally abominable.

Mr Gandhi has said nothing against the Indian Army as is being propagated by the BJP and its allies. All that he said in his repeated statements about the border skirmishes is that India has lost patrolling rights over 20,000 square kilometres which, if true, is a sobering thought. He also mentioned that the Army has lost around 20 of our soldiers. And the government has never been unequivocal about the outcome of the face-off in terms of territorial losses while the death of troops was indeed widely reported.

Thus, Mr Gandhi's statements cannot be construed as being "against" the Army by any standards, especially those of the government and the armed forces. Questions on the loss of Indian fighter jets during Operation Sindoor were blocked by the very logical stand that India had achieved its operational targets and that losses were part of defence operations. By the same token, then, the government can clarify that it has achieved its targets on the Chinese border, too, losses notwithstanding. Why then are its feathers ruffled? Mr Gandhi was certainly not questioning the professionalism of the Army.

The court's suggestion that the Leader of Opposition ought to raise such topics in Parliament is also avoidable. The judges may have missed the fact that Mr Gandhi is often not allowed to speak on the floor of the House.

On a related note, not long ago, the Mumbai high court did advise the CPI(M) activists to limit their protests to causes within the country, instead of agitating against Israel for causing the deaths of thousands of Palestinians due to hunger. It will be ideal if the judiciary leaves it to politicians and political parties to decide the causes of their demonstrations, their platform and timing, for justice will best be served when judges restrain themselves to adjudicating on matters brought before them in a timely fashion.

THE ASIAN AGE

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Subhani



Trump vs judiciary: Will US power balance shift?



Krishnan Srinivasan

Reflections

In May last year, while he was not in office, US President Donald Trump was found guilty on all 34 charges in a trial over money paid by his former lawyer to adult film star Stormy Daniels. The then former President was a convicted felon, a first in American history. Mr Trump's legal problems in the courts included four separate criminal cases and several civil actions, threatening not just his liberty but his whole political and commercial career. A year later, the situation has been completely reversed.

Three major Supreme Court judgments, one giving Presidents and former Presidents broad immunity from prosecution; a second dismissing the ruling that Mr Trump's attempts to overturn the 2020 election results disqualified him from running for office again; and a third in June curbing district judges' abilities to stall the President's agenda have all gone in Mr Trump's favour. Earlier, in his first term, he had reshaped the Supreme Court with a sympathetic conservative majority.

His current objective is to strip the lower courts of their powers. Federal district judges, who had often delivered rulings on immigration policy that they claimed applied nationwide, now face an assault on their powers from the Trump administration that questions their legitimacy with claims that they flout their authority. The broader question is whether the attacks will reshape the balance of powers even after Donald Trump is no longer President.

The district courts are under unprecedented attack: the President has variously termed judges "crooked", "deranged", "USA hating" and "radical left", and his deputy chief

of staff for policy, Stephen Miller, declared that the US is facing a judicial tyranny. He wrote on social media: "Each day, [the judges] change foreign policy, economic, staffing, and national security policies of the administration... It is the gravest assault on democracy. It must and will end." Mr Trump has called for the impeachment of those judges who he disrespects with, and has also threatened to sue individual

Serving judges have received death threats this year, prompted by their blocking or delaying some of the President's executive orders. Figures compiled by investigators show that by mid-June, there were more than 400 threats against almost 300 judges. The Trump supporters reject the idea that presidential rhetoric is to blame for raising the temperature, asserting that the Left is more to blame for hostility towards judges: "The highest threat to anyone on the federal courts was when someone tried to assassinate the President", declared Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh. "There's this tendency to try to characterise the Trump administration as being what has facilitated this. The revolutionary notions that we need to take the law in our own hands... tend to [be] from the Left in America."

While other Presidents have clashed with the courts, Mr Trump's confrontations are unique in scale, perhaps inevitably given that after he arrived in the White House innumerable executive orders were promulgated with the desire to fast-forward his agenda quickly. On a single day, 26 were signed. There have been another 140 up to the beginning of July — only around 100 fewer than President Barack Obama in his entire eight years in the

Even after the Supreme Court ruled to curb those nationwide injunctions, another judge slapped one on Mr Trump's asylum policy and a district judge issued a fresh block on an executive order

White House. Although Mr Trump could have asked Congress to legislate these policies, since his Republican Party controls both chambers, legislation takes time, and because Congress has been busy with Mr Trump's controversial domestic legislation, there was little time for other priorities.

Executive orders are within the President's prerogative, under Article II of the US Constitution, so Mr Trump is within his powers provided the orders cite legislative authority. What the President cannot do is make new laws, or do things that go contrary to the Constitution. Unless Congress intervenes, the only option to challenge his orders is to go to court. The sweeping nature of the orders he has signed, many touching on constitutional issues such as the right of everyone born in the US to citizenship, has led to dozens of injunctions. Which is why Mr Trump's victory in the Supreme Court curbing such nationwide injunctions is significant.

The administration has accused the judiciary of overreach and judges of being "activists". But perhaps the most fundamental and philosophical criticism is that they obstruct the desires of the electorate, though this is disputed. "We are a nation of laws," explains a judge. "A mandate for the President of the United States does not mean a mandate to disregard the law."

In a recent interview, Mr Trump denied that he was defying the judiciary; when rulings have gone against him, he has sought remedy through the judicial process, he said. "That's why I'm winning on appeal."

After the Watergate scandal in the 1970s, when then President Richard M. Nixon flouted many norms, legislation was passed to curb the executive and make it more accountable, but some of the changes merely adopted norms such as publication of presidential tax returns and avoiding financial conflicts of interest, and Mr Trump has shown little inclination to follow those norms. Mr Trump's critics claim that he is destroying the system of checks and balances in which the three equal branches of government — the presidency, the legislature and the judiciary — act as a brake on each other. Prof. Laurence Tribe, a constitutional expert, describes the situation as "catastrophic"; saying: "The whole system is completely out of balance."

When it comes to the relationship between the presidency and the courts, Mr Trump comes close to defiance. In one instance, after being ordered to facilitate the return of a man wrongly deported to El Salvador, the administration delayed by two months complying with the Supreme Court's decision. There are only two ways a President can be truly held to account: one by removal in an election; the second is by impeachment in Congress, and Mr Trump has already survived two of those in his first term.

The judiciary is, however, not giving in tamely. Even after the Supreme Court ruled in June to curb those nationwide injunctions — and both parties have complained about such injunctions in the past — another judge slapped one on Mr Trump's asylum policy and a district judge issued a fresh nationwide block on Mr Trump's executive order restricting the automatic right to citizenship for babies born to undocumented migrants or foreign visitors, drawing furious criticism from Trump followers. This battle is joined, and its consequences for the future are unpredictable.

Krishnan Srinivasan is a former Indian foreign secretary

LETTERS

WHAT FRIENDSHIP?

I was taken aback at the number of friendship messages being circulated on social media platforms. Because real good friends are very hard to find in these times. In trying to make up for our our seeming inability to make or be friends, this torrent of friend messages are just an overcompensation. At best we have colleagues or acquaintances, but never real friends. This is a very selfish world and the so-called friends would not hesitate an instant to dump or cheat if they found a better option. In true friendship words do not matter much but actions do.

Anthony Henriques
Mumbai

THE PUJA BULLIES

I LIVE in a locality where a majority of the people are Hindus and it is disgusting to find them asking for *vargani* (donations) for every festival of theirs. The people of the neighbourhood are forced to make donations of no less than ₹200 per festival, be it Ganesh Chaturthi, Navratri, Holi or Shivratri Jayanti. If they do not contribute, they are beaten up. On the other hand, shopkeepers are forcibly made to contribute ₹5,000 per festival. If they do not contribute, their shops are looted and vandalised. Complaining to the police does not help, as they are hand-in-glove with the festival organisers. Is there any law to stop this goonadism?

Jubel D'Cruz
Mumbai

ICON OF DIGNITY

SHIBU SOREN, fondly known as Dishom Guru or "Guru of the Land," was a towering figure in India's tribal and grassroots political landscape, whose life embodied resistance, resilience, and reform. Born into the marginalised Santhal community in 1944, Soren's political awakening began with personal tragedy, the murder of his father by moneylenders — which spurred a lifelong crusade against exploitation. From founding the Santhal Nav-yuvak Sangh in his teens to co-founding the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha in 1972, he championed tribal rights, land protection and social justice, ultimately playing a pivotal role in the creation of Jharkhand state in 2000. As a three-time CM, long-serving MP and Union coal minister, Soren earned unwavering support despite controversies. His legacy endures.

Amarjeet Kumar
Hazaribagh

Pradeep C. Nair



Dhaka's animosity likely to endanger Ganga water pact's renewal next year

The Ganga Waters Treaty, signed between India and Bangladesh, is up for renewal next year. The treaty, when it was signed in 1996 for a period of 30 years, guaranteed a framework for distributing Ganga waters during the critical dry spell between January and May every year at the Farakka barrage in West Bengal. The Farakka barrage (which lies 18 km from the Bangladesh border), when it was constructed in 1975, ensured diversion of 40,000 cusecs of water to flush the Kolkata Port. When it was commissioned, it led to protests in Bangladesh resulting in it taking up the matter at the United Nations. It resulted in a five-year agreement in 1977, followed by another in 1982. No treaty for sharing of the Ganga waters existed between 1989 to 1996; a period that witnessed increased disappointment in Bangladesh as a consequence. Subsequently, the 1996 treaty was signed between the two countries, and it assured 35,000 cusecs of water alternately to both countries for 10-day periods during the lean season. The treaty enjoins India and Bangladesh to split the water supply 50:50 if the flow is 70,000 cusecs or less. However, Bangladesh's share is 35,000 cusecs if the flow is between 70,000 and 75,000 cusecs, while India receives the remaining flow. If the flow is 75,000 cusecs or more, India receives 40,000 cusecs, with the excess flow going to Bangladesh.

The treaty, when it was signed in 1996 between

both countries, did not take into consideration climate change and the substantial growth in population that was likely to happen on both sides of the border. According to a report released by Kathmandu-based International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) in 2019, the climate crisis will begin altering water levels in the Ganga and the Brahmaputra over the next two-and-a-half decades, and the rivers could record an abrupt decrease in flow after 2050. This will diminish the water available for drinking, irrigation and producing electricity for roughly 250 million people living downstream.

For many years, Bangladesh has raised concerns regarding the treaty, primarily alleging that India withholds water during critical dry spells. Specifically, Bangladesh claims that during the 1997-2016 period, it did not receive its share of water in 39 out of 60 critical periods. Besides, Bangladesh argues that the treaty lacks a minimum guaranteed flow clause, relying instead on diplomatic consultations when flows drop below 50,000 cusecs. Bangladeshi critics also point to a lack of consideration for the river's flow from source to the sea, and an inaccurate projection of future water flow.

The current Muhammad Yunus government in Bangladesh has whipped up an anti-India hysteria like never. The numerous provocations by Mr Yunus and his cohorts have taken the Indo-Bangladesh

relations southwards. The greatest provocation has been by Mr Yunus himself when he made the controversial statement on India's Northeast during his first state visit to Beijing in March this year. Despite his numerous provocative statements, his increasing cosying up to Pakistan and China as also fundamentalists at home, India has exercised strategic restraint. Incidentally, the number of people in Bangladesh who are questioning the legitimacy of the interim government of Mr Yunus to take policy decisions on the country's internal and external matters has also been increasing.

Hence, it is fair to assume that a greater degree of disquiet is likely next year when the agreement gets discussed and renewed. After the decision to suspend the Indus Water Treaty with Pakistan, India is now exploring multiple alternatives to reassess domestic needs along with the minimum needs of the Ganga waters for Bangladesh so that both countries can arrive at an agreement that is mutually acceptable. The Centre's Jal Shakti ministry set up an internal committee in July 2023 which included the representatives of the Bihar and West Bengal governments. In 2011, the West Bengal government under chief minister Mamata Banerjee had stalled the signing of a treaty for sharing of the Teesta waters at the last moment when India and Bangladesh were on the verge of signing it. That would still be fresh on the minds of Bangladeshis.

In every likelihood, a fresh treaty would be negotiated by the new government in Bangladesh; given the Yunus administration's announcement that elections will be held in March-April 2026. The fresh treaty would have to ensure an equitable in distribution of river waters between both countries. India's requirements, along with the likely impact of climate change on futuristic water flows, must be considered. Alongside, similar requirements of Bangladesh would also have to be looked into. In the meantime, it would be prudent for India to give the necessary reassurances to Bangladesh, besides reminding them of the recent Chinese announcement that work on the 60-GW Yarlung Tsangpo hydel project has commenced, which will seriously affect water flow and ecology in Brahmaputra, both in India and Bangladesh.

India should also remind Bangladesh that China has no water sharing treaty with any of its neighbours and should take it on board in jointly calling out the adverse effects of this project. After all, India understands Bangladesh is a very important neighbour which has traditionally been friendly, and work towards ensuring that the current anti-India euphoria in Bangladesh is but a blip on the radar.

The writer is a retired lieutenant-general who is a former director-general of the Assam Rifles and has extensively served in the Northeast