The Hindustan Times
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

{ OUR TAKE }

Steady course in uncertain times

MPC is right to wait for the transmission effects of rate cuts and keep policy rate unchanged

A lot happened in the run-up to the 56th meeting of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of RBI which ended on Wednesday. IMF's July update to the *World Economic Outlook* upgraded the Indian and world economy's growth forecasts. Post this update, US president Donald Trump imposed a tariff of 25% on India and termed the Indian economy as "dead". (Hours after the MPC decision, he announced an additional 25% tariff as penalty for India's crude oil imports from Russia.) How all of this turns out for the Indian economy is difficult to forecast at the moment. Therefore, it is understandable that the MPC has kept its growth forecast for 2025-26 unchanged at 6.5%, and not changed either the policy rate, or its stance. Having said that, the tone of the MPC resolution and the governor's statement could have been slightly more guarded.

And a more reassuring one on three fronts at least. One, Trump's tariff announcements could pose problems for exporters to the US and they might need some banking support as prospects of orders and earnings, and disruptions to them, remain uncertain. Two, if India does rejig its crude oil purchases to reduce Russian buying, it could have an inflationary impact via the energy price route and eat into the available monetary policy space on account of low inflation. As RBI itself pointed out, the existing benign inflation environment — an annual forecast of 3.1% — is largely on account of food prices. And three, if food prices remain depressed for a longer time, its benefits in terms of low inflation could be outdone by the headwinds for rural incomes and, therefore, demand.

To be sure, none of these would have warranted a different course of action in terms of policy decisions, namely the policy rate and policy stance being kept unchanged. MPC is absolutely justified in waiting for the transmission effects of frontloaded rate cuts and committing itself to what data shows in the future. This raises an interesting question as far as Indian policy making is concerned. Is RBI's, especially its quasi-independent arm MPC's, policy signalling really independent or largely in sync with the larger economic policy apparatus? If it is indeed the latter, is the current indifference to recent events in policy commentary part of a conscious strategy to deal with Trump's threats to the Indian economy's larger interests? As long as there is an objective appraisal of the Indian economy's strengths, weaknesses and negotiables in this bargain, things should be fine.

State must heed apex court's lament on probes

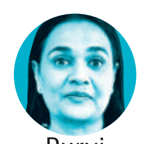
Last month, two terror cases collapsed in Mumbai courts when the judges found the prosecution could not back their claims with verifiable evidence. Against this backdrop, the Supreme Court's observations, in a Chhattisgarh corruption case, that the criminal justice system is focussed more on the "optics" of arresting and jailing the accused while ignoring much-needed institutional reforms, assumes significance. The legal process is slow and costly, and does not always serve the cause of justice. Jails are overcrowded because of undertrials awaiting closure in their cases for years.

Two of the apex court's observations stood out. One, the penchant on the part of law enforcers to establish guilt with confessions rather than follow scientific procedures. This barbaric system is a colonial legacy, as the court pointed out, and of a time when the administration was accountable to the imperial masters and not the citizenry. The relationship between the State and citizens was to have changed after Independence, but policing, despite *Prakash Singh (2006)*, has refused to abandon its colonial legacy, which endows it with absolute power and allows it to ignore the rights given to all citizens, including those accused of crimes. Two, the court's lament on the lack of investment in special prosecution wings, forensic infrastructure, and witness protection programmes. The confessions culture is an outcome of ignoring forensics and other scientific methods in probes. Lower constabulary that does the preliminary investigation, is rarely trained in forensics or the use of technology, which influences it to lean on extra-judicial methods to solve crimes. This is as much the case with investigators and courts that deal with white collar crimes such as corruption, where notional losses end up as sensational claims and, in some cases, public indictment of the decision makers, until the judiciary intervenes. Hopefully, the court will follow up on its observations and get the government to act on these concerns.

Building on the gains of Green Revolution

The birth centenary of MS Swaminathan is an occasion to reflect on the past and future of India's food production

Revisiting the Green Revolution should not only mean growing more. It must also mean growing better — and negotiating smarter. PTI



Purvi Mehta

Today, India commemorates the birth centenary of MS Swaminathan, the agriculture scientist and administrator credited for seeding India's Green Revolution. The government of India will issue a ₹100 commemorative coin to honour his contributions. This milestone also marks the country's hard-earned journey toward food self-sufficiency, a transformation that began with the Green Revolution.

The Green Revolution, launched in the mid-1960s, stands as one of the most significant turning points in India's history and a landmark in global agricultural transformation. It remains a powerful example of what science — when applied strategically and in close partnership with farmers — can accomplish.

Food sufficiency was the most urgent and fundamental challenge that India and its 330 million people faced immediately after Independence. The country's existence was described as ship-to-mouth, as it literally waited for food shipments, especially wheat from the US, to dock at its ports. This heavy dependence on the US PL-480 programme, a food aid initiative, painted a grim picture for a nation where over 70% of the population was engaged in agriculture but unable to feed itself.

The mid-1960s marked a pivotal shift, as the Green Revolution began primarily in Punjab, Haryana, and western Uttar Pradesh. A series of innovations followed: the introduction of high-yielding, rust-resistant wheat varieties; advancements in irrigation; pest management; and a strong focus on productivity. The impact was transformative. Wheat production surged from 12 million tonnes in the mid-1960s to 21 million tonnes by 1970-71, and further soared to 76 million tonnes by the late 1990s. Rice yields increased from approximately two tonnes/hectare in the 1960s to about six tonnes/hectare by the mid-1990s. India went from being a food-aid-dependent importer to a self-sufficient net exporter by the late 1980s.

Today, India is the world's second-largest food producer, self-sufficient in grains, and exporting close to $52 billion worth of agricultural products. The Green Revolution was not only a scientific and developmental triumph, it was a socio-economic and a geopolitical one as well.

This is what we celebrate on August 7 — the journey from dependency to leadership, from scarcity to surplus. It's a celebration of self-sufficiency, sovereignty, and the power of partnership between science and farmers.

But this moment of celebration is also a time for reflection. While the Green Revolution brought dramatic gains, the next revolution must focus on inclusivity, diversification, profitability, and sustainability. India's agricultural backbone remains rooted in smallholder farms: Over 80% of farms are mixed-crop, low-input, low-output systems that are highly vulnerable. It is still a story of production by the masses, not mass production.

Ironically, this August 7 will also mark the imposition of a 25% reciprocal tariff by the US on Indian goods, including key agricultural exports. This is historically poignant: The same country that once supplied food aid to India now sees it as a trade competitor and global food leader. The tariffs present a significant threat to Indian farmers and the rural economy. Export-oriented produce such as seafood, rice, and spices — often driven by small-scale producers — face the risk of cancelled orders, price crashes, and logistical chaos. For instance, Odisha's shrimp exports, valued at around $170 million and with over 95% exposure to the US market, are at high risk. This story repeats across many commodities — basmati and non-basmati rice, spices, and more. A sudden tariff shock could jeopardise the livelihoods of thousands.

At the macroeconomic level, the estimated annual loss of $7-8 billion is less than 0.2% of India's GDP, an impact the national economy might be able to absorb. But for small-scale producers, with already low risk-taking capacities, the consequences can be much more serious. These farmers and farming systems have limited buffers to withstand income loss.

India's journey in agricultural and trade dynamics over six decades is extraordinary. Once one of the world's largest recipients of food aid, with nearly 25% of its grain supply coming from foreign assistance, India is now a major food producer, exporter, and a credible voice in global trade negotiations. Agriculture, once a symbol of India's vulnerability, is now a cornerstone of its economic and diplomatic strength.

This is the double-edged reality of August 7: It is a day to honour MS Swaminathan and celebrate the Green Revolution and food sufficiency, and as a reminder that food sovereignty and food diplomacy are deeply intertwined. Sixty years ago, India depended on food aid to avert famine. Today, it negotiates 25% tariffs with its former food donor, as one of the world's largest food exporters.

Revisiting the Green Revolution should not only mean growing more. It must also mean growing better — and negotiating smarter. India no longer waits for grain ships, but in a world of shifting geopolitics and economic protectionism, the country must still navigate turbulent waters. This time, not to secure food, but to secure a fair deal for its farmers.

Purvi Mehta is an agriculture policy specialist. The views expressed are personal.

A road map to mitigate Delhi's pollution crisis

Amitabh Kant

We are months away from Delhi becoming unliveable again. Every breath then will cut years off the lives of its residents. Progress in technology, infrastructure, and economic growth is meaningless if the air we breathe is toxic.

In 2021, the annual average level of particulate matter of a diameter less than 2.5 micron (PM2.5) peaked at 126.5 µg/m3 — more than 25 times the safe limit set by the World Health Organization (WHO). During winter, these levels soar, flooding hospitals with respiratory patients. According to the 2023 Air Quality Life Index, pollution claims up to 25,000 lives annually in Delhi alone, shortening life expectancy by about 6.3 years.

The economic toll is also staggering. Estimates peg GDP loss at 3%, roughly $100 billion annually, due to disrupted work, soaring health care costs, and decreased productivity. Low-income families often left unprotected against toxic fumes are the most vulnerable. To breathe safely has become a privilege.

Despite this, policymakers have offered only temporary band-aids. Bureaucracy, overlapping authorities, and political apathy have failed the people. It is a failure of governance and of moral responsibility. The time for excuses has run out. The only option left is radical, decisive action.

What must be done?

Burning of biomass is the single-largest contributor to Delhi's air pollution, responsible for nearly 60% of PM2.5 emissions annually. Burning dung, firewood, and agricultural waste releases vast amounts of particulate matter, especially in winter. Policies promoting clean cooking fuels like LPG — with subsidies of 75% — starting in NCR+ areas need to be enforced and community biomass plants with subsidies for transition provided, even as traditional cooking methods and agricultural waste burning are phased out.

Contributing approximately 31% of PM2.5, industrial processes and thermal power plants are the second-largest source of Delhi's pollution. Delhi-NCR hosts 12 thermal power plants with a total capacity of 13.2 GW, but only seven comply with the 2015 emissions standards. The outdated and poorly regulated plants emit pollutants that jeopardise both health and the environment.

Accounting for 8% of total emissions, brick kilns are another large factor of Delhi-NCR's air pollution. Currently, around 4,608 kilns are operating primarily in areas such as Baghpat and Bulandshahr, making India's brick production industry the second-largest globally, trailing only China. Present methods employed by these kilns release harmful pollutants into the atmosphere, and also expedite soil degradation and groundwater depletion.

Mandatory flue gas desulphurisation in thermal plants must be enforced in accordance with the applicable emission standards, outdated plants older than 35 years must be shut with cleaner technologies replacing these. At the brick kilns, adoption of zigzag technology — arranging bricks in a zigzag pattern to enhance heat transfer and combustion efficiency, leading to reduced fuel consumption and lower emissions — must be accelerated. SMEs must be shifted to electric boilers, supported by rooftop solar. Industrial zones must have efficient waste management, with quarterly emission reporting and public disclosures. Establish efficient waste management in industrial zones.

Responsible for roughly 8% of PM2.5 emissions, Delhi's vehicles are a significant but addressable pollution source. The dominance of older, polluting vehicles and slow adoption of electric mobility hinder air quality improvement. India is witnessing rapid growth, where two-wheelers and three-wheelers account for about 95% of total EV sales. Delhi, however, contributes only 5% of this figure.

The need is to transition all delivery two-wheelers to electric within two to three years, retrofit or replace two-wheelers older than 10 years within 24 months. All new autorickshaws must be electric, and those older than eight years replaced within the next year (older than five years replaced in the next two years). All 30,000 taxis older than eight years must be replaced with EVs over the next two years. Procure and deploy 5,000 new electric public and school buses within three years.

Delhi produces about 11,000 tonnes of municipal solid waste daily; yet, over half of it ends up in overloaded landfills, causing land and water pollution. Its sewage treatment capacity is far below the volume of wastewater generated; untreated sewage flows into the Yamuna, polluting its waters and endangering public health. Despite some efforts, ineffective waste segregation, inadequate treatment infrastructure, and neglect of urban sanitation have only compounded the crisis.

Waste segregation at source, modelled after Surat's, must be enforced with digital monitoring and penalties. Modern, decentralised sewage treatment plants must be set up and old infrastructure repaired. Focus on formalising waste picking, expanding recycling, and supporting circular economy practices. The city must prioritise land reclamation and beautification, turning contaminated sites into green spaces. Municipal governance must be strengthened with data-driven management, akin to Bhubaneswar's, and public participation promoted through community cleanup drives and awareness campaigns. There must also be regular public disclosure of pollution data, with community-led monitoring.

Regional cooperation is another focus area, with collaboration with neighbouring states key to reducing external pollution; the aim must be to bring PM2.5 levels by 40-50% from the 2023 standards by 2028.

By 2036, India's population could reach 1.5 billion, and if growth remains unplanned, our cities will be swallowed by unsustainable expansion. In Delhi-NCR alone, real estate prices have skyrocketed by 57% since 2019, yet infrastructure remains woefully inadequate to support this surge. Residents are caught in a vicious cycle of mismanagement: government agencies, planners, and industries repeatedly neglect their responsibilities, turning urban growth into a ticking environmental time bomb.

To remedy this, implement comprehensive master planning — focused on walkability, green spaces, and sustainable growth. Enhance public transport and de-incentivise car dependence while promoting citizen involvement in urban development. Every delay exacerbates the health crisis — especially for Delhi's most vulnerable demographics.

Delhi must realise that progress without clean air is hollow. The city's survival hinges on an urgent pursuit of environmental justice, underlined by a policy overhaul, tech innovation, community push, and regional unity.

Amitabh Kant was India's G20 Sherpa and is the former CEO of NITI Aayog. The views expressed are personal.

{ SHIGERU ISHIBA } PRIME MINISTER, JAPAN

As the only country capable of conveying the horrors of the atomic bomb, we will pass down the memory of this tragic experience & lead global efforts to prevent such a calamity from happening again

On the 80th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima

How India became Test titans on foreign pitches

Ashis Ray

In India's chequered 93-year catalogue of appearances in Test cricket, they have won 183 matches, lost 186, drawn 224 and tied one. There have been since their first victory at home in 1952 — against England — and the maiden one abroad in 1968 in New Zealand, many memorable moments. But other than the tie with Australia in 1986, no match has exhibited such animated suspense until the last ball and as gripping a drama as at The Oval in London on Monday.

The back-to-back series triumphs in the West Indies and England in 1971 were an indisputable turning point for Indian cricket. At Queen's Park Oval in Port of Spain, Dilip Sardesai threw down the gauntlet with a defiant 112. Spinners S Venkataraghan, Erapalli Prasanna and Bishan Bedi then shared the spoils to clear the deck for a seven-wicket eclipse of Garry Sobers' side. Five months later, Bhagwat Chandrasekhar's whippy and deceptive wrist spin destroyed England in the second England innings at The Oval to ensure India coasted to a four-wicket win.

India's most convincing showing ever in an away series, though, was the 2-0 margin in England in 1986. The Indian swing merchants, with Chetan Sharma pre-eminent, proved to be a handful for the Englishmen, not to mention Maninder Singh's left-arm spin and Dilip Vengsarkar's immaculate centuries at Lord's in London and Headingley in Leeds. It could have been a 3-0 brown-wash, but for rain saving England at Edgbaston in Birmingham.

The 2-1 ascendancy in Pakistan in 2004, reflecting subduing of the hosts by an innings at Multan and Rawalpindi, is notable. Virender Sehwag's swashbuckling triple century, Rahul Dravid's 270, spinner Anil Kumble and pacers Irfan Pathan and Lakshmipathy Balaji caught the eye.

Then, there were the consecutive conquests in Australia — 2-1 each time — in 2018-19 and 2020-21. On the second occasion, India reversed fortunes after being abysmally dismissed for 36 in the opening test at Adelaide. In the final meeting at The Gabba in Brisbane, India, despite being reduced to a makeshift bowling attack, rose to the task, before the irrepressible batsman Rishabh Pant steered the visitors to shore.

There have, unsurprisingly, been several instances of India recovering from distress to exhilaratingly overcome the opposition. While such sagas have also occurred at home, episodes of this nature abroad in unfamiliar playing conditions have generally been classified as more creditable.

Significant Indian support at overseas venues these days, of course, renders the atmosphere less daunting than in the past, notwithstanding genuine cricket lovers in England and Australia, even in Pakistan, being, historically, appreciative of good performances by Indians. The crowd backing, though, does not eliminate the challenge of seaming or bouncing pitches, which have often been India's undoing.

In 1976 at Port of Spain, India conceded a first innings deficit of 131 runs; but thereafter successfully chased a target of 402 in the fourth innings. In fact, India's score of 406 for four continues to be the third highest successful fourth innings total in test history. Sunil Gavaskar posted 102; thereafter Mohinder Amarnath (85) and Gundappa Viswanath (112) finished the job.

At the Melbourne Cricket Ground in 1981, India trailed by 182 in the first innings; but bowled out Australia for 83 in their second innings to streak home by 59 runs. On the final morning, with Australia resuming at 24 for three on a wicket unplayable for batsmen, it was unlikely they would reach even the modest required tally of 143 runs, especially once a hitherto injured Kapil Dev became available to deliver the *coup de grâce* — which he duly did with a bag of five for 28.

In short, the foregoing illustrates situations where a trend and, therefore, the possible climax became evident after a certain juncture.

When India, on the third evening of the just concluded Test, set England an assignment of compiling 374 runs to breast the tape, there was no precedent of this being achieved at The Oval. The best ever winning fourth innings here was England's 263 for nine in 1902.

Lower order collapses had been a feature of this summer's engaging five-test encounter, epitomising the glorious uncertainties of cricket. At 347 for six on the final morning, with England needing a paltry 27 runs to nail the Indian coffin, it appeared done and dusted. But the Englishmen mustered just 20 more to descend to their doom. In a captivating hour, India engineered a sensational *coup d'état*.

The 2-2 series result arrests India's recent downward spiral as regards the shocking 0-3 surrender to New Zealand in India last autumn and the nose-dive Down Under in winter. It also secures Gautam Gambhir's slightly threatened career as Test match coach.

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R. N. I. No. 503/1957 ● Postal Reg. No. DL(ND)-11/6058/2018-19-20 'Licensed to post without prepayment' LICENCE No. U(C)-113/2006-08, AIR SURCHARGE: Raipur and beyond by Rail or Road - Rs. 5/-, Ahmedabad, Bangalore, Coimbatore, Chennai, Cochin, Goa, Hyderabad, Khajuraho, Mumbai, Trivandrum, Visakhapatnam, Vijayawada and beyond by Rail or Road - Rs. 10/-;

PRINTED & PUBLISHED BY MANHAR KAPOOR for and on behalf of HT Media Ltd. 18-20, Kasturba Gandhi Marg, New Delhi-110001 and printed at HT Media Ltd. Presses at Plot No.-8, Udyog Vihar, Greater Noida, Distt. Gautam Budh Nagar. (UP). Pin-201306.
BOARD: (011) 23361234 ● EDITORIAL: (011) 66561234 Extn. 1254, 1268 ● CIRCULATION: (011) 66561111 ● ADVERTISING: (011) 66561389 ● FAX: (011) 66561270.

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Business Standard
VOLUME XXXII NUMBER 96
NEW DELHI | THURSDAY, 7 AUGUST 2025

Inflation dynamics

No space for policy rate cuts

Analysts and economists in financial markets were debating over the past few weeks whether the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) will be in a position to reduce the policy repo rate further. A poll published by this newspaper earlier this week showed that some analysts expected the MPC to reduce the policy repo rate by 25 basis points in the August meeting. However, the six-member MPC on Wednesday unanimously decided to leave the policy rate unchanged at 5.5 per cent. The commentary accompanying this prudent decision clearly indicated that, as things stand, the committee may not be able to reduce the policy repo rate any further in this cycle. Hopes in the market had arisen after the June inflation numbers surprised on the downside and led to a downward revision in annual inflation forecasts.

The MPC also reduced its inflation projection for this financial year from 3.7 per cent to 3.1 per cent, which is significantly lower than the target of 4 per cent. However, there were several reasons for a prudent central bank not to reduce the policy rate in the present circumstances. First, monetary policy needs to be forward-looking. Therefore, while the inflation projection for this financial year has been revised lower, the inflation rate in the fourth quarter is projected at 4.4 per cent. It is further expected to increase to 4.9 per cent in the first quarter of 2026-27. Thus, given that the inflation rate is expected to be much higher than the target in the coming quarters and will substantially reduce the real policy rate, it would not have been prudent to lower the policy rate further.

Second, the lower headline inflation rate is being driven by volatile food prices, particularly prices of vegetables. The core inflation rate was at 4.4 per cent in June. A reversal in food prices would also affect the headline rate. Third, the MPC had front-loaded the rate intervention, which is still working through the system. Fourth, the MPC has not revised its growth projection. It expects the Indian economy to grow 6.5 per cent this financial year. The growth rate for the first quarter of 2026-27 has been estimated at 6.6 per cent. Given the growth and inflation projections for the first quarter of 2026-27, it is difficult to argue for a rate cut at this stage. Besides, given the level of uncertainty, it is always better to avoid any policy adventurism. In the context of the trade, which is the biggest source of economic uncertainty, United States President Donald Trump on Wednesday decided to impose an additional ad valorem duty of 25 per cent on Indian imports as a penalty for importing crude oil from Russia. This development and related uncertainties in the system will affect the growth and inflation outlook, depending on how they settle and when.

Apart from the monetary-policy decision, RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra talked about liquidity management. The RBI has injected a significant amount of liquidity in recent months. The decision to reduce the cash reserve ratio by 100 basis points in June, to be implemented in four tranches, will further increase liquidity in the system. The RBI was absorbing excess liquidity worth over ₹3 trillion daily, on average, in July. Easy liquidity conditions have helped monetary-policy transmission. However, as the transmission nears completion, the RBI needs to guide market expectations on liquidity, along with gauging possible unintended consequences. In terms of supporting growth, the RBI has done its bit and solutions to disruption induced by the external environment need to be found elsewhere.

Reckoning in Dhaka

A year since the coup, the country is in a shambles

In the year since Sheikh Hasina was ousted as Prime Minister, Bangladesh has transitioned from a model of economic transformation and poverty reduction to one of South Asia's most unstable countries, dominated by Islamic fundamentalists aligned to the China-Pakistan axis. In the process, India has lost one of its staunchest allies, now replaced by an implacably hostile regime. An indecisive "interim" government under Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus is increasingly prey to non-democratic Islamists, who envisage a Bangladeshi caliphate. None of this augurs well for the country or South Asian stability.

Inevitably, the Bangladesh economy has taken a hit. Since Dr Yunus took charge as "chief advisor", the readymade garments industry, which accounted for 83 per cent of export earnings and 13 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP), has been in a shambles. Some 140 factories have closed down, leaving over 100,000 workers, mainly women, unemployed. Some global brands have left, and 20 per cent of the country's order book has shifted to Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, and Pakistan. The economy had grown at an average annual rate of over 6 per cent since 2010, but has now slowed to 3.9 per cent. It is widely accepted that regime change was precipitated not by a spontaneous "students" movement" but by the Jamaat-i-Islami, the fundamentalists that strongly opposed the creation of Bangladesh in 1971, with support from Pakistan's military establishment and the US, which has had a history of tension with Sheikh Hasina.

But the former Prime Minister, despite presiding over the country's economic miracle, which had powered one of the world's poorest nations into a lower middle-income country in 2015, also played a role in precipitating this crisis. Her inability to diversify the Bangladesh economy added to the unemployment problem, especially among the youth. Those aged between 15 and 29 years accounted for 83 per cent of the unemployed, inevitably radicalising them and driving the students' protest movement. The post-pandemic surge in inflation, compounded by the slowdown in global growth when Russia invaded Ukraine, exacerbated these problems, prompting Bangladesh to seek the International Monetary Fund for a bailout. Garment-industry workers, the overwhelming majority in the informal sector with non-existent benefits and job security, have felt the squeeze the most. These economic weaknesses added to Sheikh Hasina's flagrant suborning of the institutions of governance such as the courts and the security forces to crack down on her opponents, an example her successors have chosen to emulate.

The protection New Delhi has extended to a hitherto dependable neighbour precipitated the outbreak of vicious and retrograde actions, including attacks on Bangladeshi Hindus and other minorities. Though India has patiently reiterated its support for a democratic, peaceful, and inclusive Bangladesh, Dhaka has rebuffed those overtures. Instead, Dr Yunus in March made a high-profile visit to China. The Dhaka-Beijing axis builds on relations Sheikh Hasina had nurtured during her long rule but the common anti-Indian slant of both countries has added a fresh dynamic to South Asian geopolitical paradigms. Dr Yunus announced on Tuesday that general elections would be held in February next year, but the Jamaat, which has rarely garnered more than 5 per cent of the vote in past elections, will be in no hurry to head to the hustings. For India, recent experiences with Sri Lanka and the Maldives suggest that patient diplomacy while events play out is the best strategy yet.

Needed: A win-win trade deal

The stakes for India and the US are very high

ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA

Swami Vivekananda said it best: "We enter the world like a gymnasium, to make ourselves strong." But the world trading system — under Donald Trump's whimsical tariffs — is beginning to resemble a wrestling mat rather than a gymnasium. Mr Trump has managed to swing trade deals in his favour by negotiating with each country individually. Even the 27 collective countries of the European Union — despite having a much larger market than the United States — have caved in to his pressure. So far, only China has stood up to him, leveraging its monopoly in rare earths.

India, whose prospects of a trade deal with the US looked promising after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's rushed visit to the White House in February, is now facing a 25 per cent tariff and an additional 25 per cent penalty for importing Russian oil. This is much worse than the 10 per cent tariff imposed on the United Kingdom, the 15 per cent levied on the EU, South Korea, and Japan, and the 15–20 per cent range applied to most of India's competitors in East and South Asia. Even Pakistan that cleverly nominated President Trump for the Nobel Peace Prize and bought his crypto currency has come out ahead of India. New Delhi seems to have irritated Mr Trump by vehemently denying that he had a role in the recent ceasefire with Pakistan. India is now as badly off as Brazil, Switzerland, and South Africa.

IF TRUTH BE TOLD

AJAY CHHIBBER

While Mr Trump has focused on tariffs to beat up on others, it must be pointed out that the US is not as open as he makes it out to be. According to the Tholos Foundation's Trade Barrier Index 2025[1], the US has low tariffs, but ranks 61st in the world in overall trade protection when non-tariff barriers (NTBs), services restrictions, and the strength of trade facilitation measures are taken into account. Mr Trump has been targeting countries such as Canada (4th), the UK (9th), Germany(15th), France (36th) and even Mexico (49th) and South Africa (41st), which have lower trade barriers than the US on this more comprehensive trade barrier index. After Mr Trump's new tariffs take effect, the US is expected to fall from 61st to 113th out of 122 countries on the index, with its tariff levels reaching those last seen in 1930 under the infamous Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act — a measure that triggered retaliatory tariffs and helped plunge the world into the Great Depression.

Of the East Asian countries, only Taiwan (26th) and Malaysia (36th) are relatively open. Others, such as Korea (85th), China (114th), the Philippines (116th), Vietnam (117th), and Thailand (118th), remain very protected with high NTB's and services restrictions. The Asean (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries, with whom India has a free trade deal, have lower tariffs than India, but other trade restrictions — especially on services — make them highly protected as well.

Mr Trump's tariff wars are also flouting World Trade Organization rules, weakening it even further. Even if a full-scale trade war does not materialise — because most countries have caved in to Mr Trump's demands — the world trading system will no longer be the same, and global economic growth will decline, according to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The World Uncertainty Index, which affects investment decisions, remains extremely high even if it has come down a bit since its peak in April 2025.

Unless things change in the coming weeks, India's exporters in gems and jewellery, garments and apparel, pharmaceuticals, organic chemicals will lose heavily if the current tariffs of 50 per cent remain, with job losses in all these areas. The US is India's largest export market and expanding trade with the US to $500 billion by 2030 — labelled Mission 500 — from around $200 billion today is key to reaching India's export target of $2 trillion by 2030.

India is in a quandary. It cannot cave in to US demands because of the heavy share of population still dependent on agriculture where the US wants India to open immediately but also because Mr Trump may demand more concessions on geopolitical issues or interfere in India's internal matters. He has imposed a 50 per cent tariff on Brazil with whom the US has a trade surplus because Brazil's judiciary has indicted former President Jair Bolsonaro (a friend of Donald Trump) and threatened secondary tariffs on countries who buy Russian oil. Mr Trump must realise that his on-off relationship with Vladimir Putin cannot be used to threaten India for buying Russian crude. Russian crude is no longer selling at a large discount and if India were to stop buying, it would disrupt global oil supplies and push oil prices higher.

On its part, India should use this opportunity to lower its exceedingly high trade barriers in a win-win agreement. India has unnecessarily increased its trade protection since 2018 and now ranks 120th out of 122 countries in the Tholos Trade Barrier Index 2025, just slightly better than Russia and Indonesia, which rank at the very bottom. Outside the sensitive agricultural sector, where the attempt to push down farm laws led to huge agitation, India has ample scope to reduce protection and make a trade deal with the US.

But Mr Trump must realise that India cannot be bullied. Indira Gandhi as Prime Minister, resisted US President Lyndon Johnson's food aid bullying and bravely helped liberate Bangladesh despite President Richard Nixon's threats. Mrs Gandhi went on to help unleash the Green Revolution, ironically with US help, and removed dependence on food aid forever.

If Prime Minister Modi could now resolve to make India more open and more competitive — perhaps even with US technology and assistance, while keeping its vital interests in view — he would have taken a step forward towards a Viksit Bharat. India must also aggressively pursue a trade deal with the EU following a successful agreement with the UK, and even consider joining the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). The scope to renegotiate the Asean free trade deal to extend it to services is also a path India will benefit from.

If Mr Trump puts penalising tariffs on top of the 25 per cent tariff already announced, India will no doubt lose heavily, and the growing warmth in US-India relations will be set back for a long time despite the QUAD (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue). Whether the rich and influential Indian diaspora in the US can help prevent a break remains to be seen. The stakes for both India and the US are very high indeed.

The author is distinguished visiting scholar at the Institute for International Economic Policy, George Washington University, and the author of *Unshackling India* (HarperCollins India), which was declared the Best New Book in Economics by *FT* in 2022.

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Navigating the EU's carbon wall

The Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) of the European Union (EU) was notified primarily to prevent carbon leakage and provide a level playing field for domestic (European) producers. Initially, the most energy-intensive sectors — such as iron and steel, aluminium, cement, fertilisers, electricity, and hydrogen — have been covered by the scheme. Other sectors will be included over time. The CBAM will become operational from January 2026.

The EU is India's second-largest export market. India exported $70 billion worth of merchandise to the EU in 2023, out of which CBAM-covered commodities were worth $7.3 billion, amounting to 10.5 per cent of its merchandise exports to the EU. Iron and steel ($5.5 billion) and aluminium ($1.8 billion) together constituted 99 per cent of India's CBAM-covered exports. According to a study conducted by the Centre for Science and Environment, if carbon is priced at €100 per tonne, the impact of CBAM would amount to an average additional tax of 25 per cent on India's exports of CBAM-covered products to the EU. This would cost India $1.7 billion, or 0.05 per cent of its gross domestic product. The World Bank's Relative CBAM Exposure Index, which measures the impact of CBAM on a country's competitiveness in the EU market, also indicates an adverse impact on Indian exports, with iron and steel being the worst hit.

RAJEEV KHER & ANSHUMAN GUPTA

In the business-as-usual scenario, price competitiveness is decided on the basis of explicit or private cost without internalising negative externalities in the price matrix. In that case, India is competitive vis-à-vis other competitors owing to its use of more emission-intensive technologies in its production processes. For example, 46 per cent of crude steel produced in India is primary steel, which uses the blast furnace–basic oxygen furnace (BF–BOF) route. Secondary steel production uses direct reduced iron–electric arc furnace (DRI–EAF) and DRI–induction furnace routes making up 23 per cent and 31 per cent, respectively. Primary steel is generally produced by the big players, whereas small and medium-sized players mainly make secondary steel. Currently, the BF–BOF route is the most prevalent and cost-effective method globally, and it is likely to constitute 60 per cent of total crude steel production in India by 2030, according to an estimate by the Ministry of Steel. The emission intensity of the BF–BOF route is roughly 3 tonnes of CO_2 per tonne of crude steel (tcs), which is much higher than the global average of 2 tCO_2/tcs. Other routes also have higher emission intensity than the global average. Once the emission cost is accounted for along with private cost, India's price competitiveness vis-à-vis competitors will erode. The same is true in the case of aluminium.

The market structure of authorised importers in the EU will also significantly influence the performance of exporters following the implementation of CBAM. It is estimated that around 20,000 authorised importers would be importing more than the proposed new exempted limit (50 tonne per importer per calendar year). The presence of such a large number of big importers indicates a reasonably competitive market structure. In a competitive environment, the exporters can reduce their profit margins to offset the additional costs arising from CBAM-related carbon pricing and still remain competitive. Similarly, importers facing competitive pressures might also choose to share the burden of these additional costs to retain market share and sales volume. This more balanced market dynamic could help Indian exporters maintain their foothold in the EU, despite the added compliance costs.

The small and medium enterprises (SMEs) will be worst hit as a result of the implementation of CBAM. They would not be able to initiate the decarbonisation process owing to a lack of finances and meet measuring, reporting and verification (MRV) requirements without hand-holding by the government. In the ongoing free trade agreement (FTA) negotiations with the EU, it is advisable to press for special concessions for SMEs . This demand is likely to find some traction, especially in light of the EU's recent efforts to strengthen its strategic partnership with India, partly in response to a shift in US engagement. The increased de minimis limit for exemption from the CBAM obligations for EU importers can also be helpful. Some facilitation efforts by the government, for example, by opening a facilitation office in the EU may help. (Though market forces should help Indian small players gain market access in the same way as in the pre-CBAM regime).

The big players are still better placed to combat this challenge. They have deeper pockets and some of them have already taken measures through their ongoing decarbonisation initiatives. These companies can also employ a dual-market strategy — exporting their low-carbon production to the EU while reserving higher-emission goods for the domestic market or countries with less stringent environmental regulations. This approach is particularly viable for sectors like steel and aluminium, which enjoy strong and growing domestic demand — a trend expected to continue given India's growth path.

The authors are, respectively, distinguished fellow and consultant with Research and Information System for Developing Countries. The views are personal

Jacinda Ardern's kind of governance

BOOK REVIEW

NEHA BHATT

Former New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's memoir begins in an unusual place: Her friend's bathroom, where she is waiting for a big reveal with bated breath. A pregnancy test lies on the sink. It's several days after election night in 2017, a time of high political drama and tense negotiations to win a majority. Ms Ardern writes: "I was days away from learning if I would run a country, and now, I was seconds away from learning if I would do it while having a baby."

The book then cuts to New Zealand's famed countryside, as her family car makes its way through the dense forest to a town called Murupara, where Ms Ardern's father served as a police officer and she attended school.

Decades later, when asked by a journalist where she "first became political," she replied, "because I lived in Murupara," where she witnessed poverty, inequality, and "the way circumstances can push a community into difficulty". This early exposure to poverty, along with dozens of other experiences she recounts in her book, reveals what fuelled her commitment to social justice and helped shape the leader she chose to become.

A Different Kind of Power is a political memoir powered by a terrific selection of stories woven together in an absorbing narrative. The book does two things particularly well. It presents a sensitively-told, vividly-imagined personal story framed against a pivotal political era in New Zealand. It also lays down, without being preachy or overt, a compelling blueprint for empathetic leadership and is a call to bring more kindness into politics, channelling Ms Ardern's trademark style, while both in power and in opposition.

A fierce debater, Ms Ardern has been a speechwriter most of her life, but to her credit, the book is nothing like a political manifesto. It is an assured and often moving account of a career built with care, but not one without frequent self-doubt. We travel with her from campaign to campaign as part of the Labour Party, as the story moves seamlessly between her deepest moments of vulnerability, grief, exhaustion, to her hard-won professional highs. It is also a thoroughly engrossing and often humorous behind-the-scenes portrait of the relentless demands of political life and being "conditioned to crisis", while trying to date and then build a family and field all kinds of sexist questions from the media and in Parliament.

From the moment she was elected as Prime Minister, Ms Ardern quickly distinguished herself in global politics as a wholesome and progressive leader — while being the world's youngest female head of state, only the second leader to give birth in office, and the first to breastfeed at the UN General Assembly.

Even as Ms Ardern walks readers through the policies she championed, including child welfare, climate change, and affordable housing, she shares intimate reflections on steering her country through crises. The most harrowing was the Christchurch mosque attack that led to a swift overhaul of New Zealand's gun laws. A deadly volcanic eruption followed, and then came the Covid-19 pandemic, where her early response earned international praise for keeping the virus at bay. But as subsequent waves triggered fresh lockdowns and economic strain, public sentiment began to shift. Ms Ardern currently faces an inquiry in New Zealand into her government's handling of the pandemic.

A Different Kind Of Power
by Jacinda Ardern
Published by Pan Macmillan
340 pages ₹899

She is candid about deeply personal moments as well. She details the toll of undergoing fertility treatment after years of choosing "politics over family" and the joy of an unexpected pregnancy. She shares the challenges of being a new parent while doing the country's top job: The pain of missing out, the effort to build a close-knit childcare circle with her partner Clarke and her family, and what happens when that support system suddenly collapses on important work days. There is the story of her stressing over baking her daughter's birthday cakes from scratch, of Clarke's marriage proposal at a special spot, security detail discreetly in tow, of her daughter's unexpected questions about profound things that catch her off guard.

While the criticisms of her government overpromising and under-delivering on housing, inflation and poverty reduction don't get much airtime, she does confront her waning popularity and growing fatigue in the months leading up to her resignation. Ms Ardern's legacy continues to resonate: Through this memoir, a new documentary, and her public work, including her fellowships at Harvard University, where she also teaches courses on empathetic leadership. These roots had long been planted back home, as she writes in the book. During one of her many school visits across New Zealand as Prime Minister, she once asked children to describe what a politician looked like. The answers were bleak: Selfish, old, liar, bald. Near the end of her tenure, at another such visit, a new description emerged: Kind.

The reviewer is a Delhi-based freelance journalist who writes on policy, development, public health, gender and culture

A thought for today

The idea of wilderness needs no defence, it only needs defenders

EDWARD ABBEY

Won't Be Trumped

GOI has called out Trump's extra tariffs for what they are. He was wrong to think hegemony will work

Three weeks from now, India will be the most heavily tariffed seller in the US market besides Brazil. Yesterday, through an executive order, Trump imposed an additional ad valorem duty of 25% on India for "directly or indirectly importing Russian Federation oil", taking the total to 50%. GOI probably saw this coming from the time Trump's tone changed from friendly to brusque a week ago. Where he had talked up the chances of a trade deal with India on July 8 – "We are close to making a deal with India" – on July 30 he slapped a 25% import duty along with the threat of an unspecified penalty. Now, the suspense is over.

It's impossible to fathom Trump's logic. From the start, China was the presumed target of his tariff war. US runs its largest goods trade deficit with Beijing – worth $295bn in 2024. At one point, Trump raised tariffs on China to 145%, but China's retaliation with a rare earths supply freeze made him see reason. Now, China is tariffed at 30%. If Russian oil triggers Trump, China and Türkiye are also big buyers, yet they have not been "penalised".

It may be that Trump's acting in frustration. He had boasted he would end the Ukraine war within 24 hours of taking office, but six months have passed and Putin remains defiant. Perhaps, Trump believes stopping oil revenues will bring Putin to the table. And since he seems unable to touch China for now, India possibly seems like a softer target to him. But this is a huge mistake. For almost 80 years, India has refused to be cowed by hegemons. Yesterday, it termed Trump's action "unfair, unjustified and unreasonable" and made it clear it will "take all actions necessary to protect its national interests".

As **TOI** has said before, the current discount on Russian oil is so little that India saves not more than $2bn a year. It could easily pivot to West Asian oil, but the resultant increase in crude prices would hurt all. Besides, *if* India chooses to pivot, it won't be on Trump's terms. While negotiations with US will continue, Indian exporters are under pressure, so deals with other countries must be prioritised. India should also look beyond goods exports – tourism, for instance – to increase forex earnings.

Eco Logic

Put ecology before economy while developing mountain infra, or prepare for more Dharalis

Tuesday's flash flood in Uttarakhand's Dharali village shouldn't be dismissed as just another mountain disaster. Its causes might have been beyond human control, but human choices amplified the effects. Traditional hill homes are built on slopes and terraces, out of harm's way, but the buildings swept away by the torrent at Dharali had encroached on the floodplain. Reports say some three dozen hotels, homestays and shops were in the water's path. In good times, these were prime "waterfront" properties, attracting pilgrims and tourists making a beeline for Gangotri hardly 20km away. Tuesday just happened to be a bad day.

As climate change makes such events more frequent, there will be more bad days across the hills. That's why choices we make now are crucial. Dharali is among the beneficiaries of govt's Char Dham push. Wider highways mean ease of travel, and tourist numbers have risen fast across the circuit. In 1956, minister OV Alagesan had told Lok Sabha: "People have to walk four days to reach Badrinath." Road construction after the 1962 war, and bus services, boosted the visitor count to 2L. But what's happening now is unprecedented, and perhaps excessive. Last year, when the highway project was 75% complete, more than 14L visited Badrinath, and over 16L Kedarnath.

Influx of millions of tourists, and their cars, into geologically fragile zones may be good for business, but is risky otherwise. Roads have been widened at the cost of forests, and hillsides and riverbeds burdened with concrete buildings everywhere, be it Garhwal, Shimla or Mandi. It's not surprising that all new mountain highway projects are plagued by landslides every day. That's why SC's remark last month, in connection with a Himachal case, deserves attention: "Earning revenue is not everything. Revenue cannot be earned at the cost of environment and ecology." Other countries have trifled with nature and paid a price. The Soviets famously dried up Aral Sea by diverting the rivers that fed it, to grow more cotton. They got revenue, but at what cost? India must seriously weigh the intangible costs and benefits of its infra projects to avoid more Dharalis.

Our fault only

One more absurd 'cause' for rape

Bachi Karkaria

'Attending late-night parties could invite rape or gang rape,' screamed posters plastered on Ahmedabad road dividers. Bet, many passers-by nodded sanctimoniously. However, social media outrage over such sexist nonsense forced police to pull down what they themselves had green-lighted. Two senior officials red-facedly confessed that they permitted a social organisation's 'traffic awareness' campaign – but did not vet its content.

So, once again women get the 'challan' for their violator's out-of-control libido. And the actual culprit is let off to rape again. Rare instances of men being told to refrain equally trivialise this grave and continuous crime. Haryana khap panchayat member Jitender Chhatar made the remarkable medical discovery that 'chowmein leads to hormonal imbalance evoking an urge to indulge in such acts'. So MSG actually stands for 'male sexual glutamate'. Wow!

CPI leader Atul Kumar Anjan's finding was as awesome. At a UP rally, he thundered that the 'condom ad featuring Sunny Leone will unleash more rapes.' He got his come-uppance: he 'kept vomiting' after watching porn, 'only for one-or two minutes' and, of course, 'only for research purposes'.

erra*tica*

Sometimes "'Tis not in ourselves, but in our stars, that we are…" A Bangalore astrologer concluded that 'Aries women are likely to be raped in the bathroom' and a Capricornian victimised by 'father, mother or colleague'. Sort of agreeing, the 94-year-old shankaracharya of Dwarka Peeth said women 'should stop all their drum-beating' over visiting the inner sanctum of Maharashtra's Shani Shingnapur temple. 'Worshipping Shani will give rise to crimes against them like rape.'

So now we know that women only are to blame for 'wearing tight clothes' and not obeying such important rules. They never get raped because they belong to wrong caste, creed or class. Who asked them to work in a powerful politician's house or public hospital; go on assignment to deserted mills; or take a late bus home? What's rape got to do with our indulgently saying 'boys will be boys'? Then, Sir, girls can also be girls, no? *Hai hai*, madam-ji, you mad or wot?

***

Alec Smart said: "Tariff *pe* tariff is trade justice delayed and denied."

It's Not Yes SIR, No SIR

EC's revision of voter rolls in Bihar shows not just that allegations of both BJP & opposition are overblown but also that ordinary citizens are not passive actors. People can successfully negotiate with state

Uday Chandra

Bihar's Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of voter rolls is now in the phase of claims and objections, which, unsurprisingly, is turning into a fierce fight not only for setting narratives but also for influencing peoples' futures. Election Commission has also found itself in Supreme Court, justifying its decision to carry out SIR at short notice even as anecdotal evidence has detailed the chaos and hardship generated by the exercise.

States collect statistics to ascertain certain truths about societies they govern. They also generate socio-economic data to work out who needs public goods and what welfare policies should be formulated. Yet such data collection exercises invariably sow confusion in the minds of citizens.

This is because even the most incorruptible bureaucracies consist of people, just like us, with political and economic preferences. The question remains wide open as to the extent to which the aims of well-meaning bureaucrats and politicians dovetail with the interests of various social groups.

Beyond the 65L deletions | Deceased individuals (22L), those with duplicate enrolments (7L), those who are untraceable or moved permanently outside Bihar (36L), and those who do not hold Indian nationality can also be removed, thereby turning the SIR into a de facto, albeit partial, National Register of Citizens. Anyone who considers themselves wrongly excluded from electoral rolls has until Aug to prove their eligibility to be on the voter list.

Each enumeration form was submitted electronically by roughly 1L booth level officers (BLOs) using an OTP-verified system on their mobile phones. In practice, BLOs may know someone locally and add them to the digital queue. Names, dates of birth, and signatures would suffice for the draft rolls, EC had conceded, and documents could be uploaded later. Physical door-to-door verification of online enumeration forms will take place between July 26 and Aug 25.

Some BLOs were satisfied with Aadhaar numbers, voter IDs and/or ration cards, all of which SC sought EC use as valid proofs of identity. Others may, however, demand other proof for age, residence, and citizenship. As in Census operations, there is considerable leeway for BLOs to exercise discretion.

Social statistics are not bedrock truths. They are, on the contrary, negotiated between states and societies, the latter shaping the contours of future governance by the former. Objections, even accusations, are as much part of the process as are clarifications of and modifications to procedures. Human error, too, is built in. There is scope for human bias, but also for crosschecking data. Last but not the least, statistics are doomed to feature in games of political football between incumbents in office and their challengers.

RJD, Congress and allies allege that Bihar's Muslims, Dalits and the rural poor are adversely affected by a hasty SIR, which, they believe, could have taken place after the state election. But if over nine-tenths of the electorate have already submitted their enumeration forms, then this line of attack loses steam.

Uday Deb

Likewise, NDA leaders claim that Bangladeshis, Nepalis and other nationalities have been found in droves. Here again, it is worth pointing out that the culling of 65L names did not consider nationality. Moreover, before physical verification of documents, it is impossible to say how many foreign nationals, if any, were on Bihar's old voter lists.

Messy social realities | These defy partisan postures. It is wholly plausible that everybody who can and wishes to vote in Bihar this Nov will be able to do so. Equally, any such EC-directed exercise may lack the capacity to double up as an NRC. It is also instructive that Assam's NRC generated a slew of complaints, including from the CM, about inclusions and exclusions.

Of the approximately 19L individuals left out of the SC-supervised NRC, non-Assamese Hindus were as likely as Muslims to face exclusion. Yet groups considered indigenous to Assam also encountered obstacles in registering. The final outcome, therefore, cannot be viewed through a partisan lens.

It may be best to regard statistical exercises such as Bihar's SIR or Assam's NRC as negotiated social processes by which 'rulers and their subjects' work out their collective futures. These negotiations are noisy, even acrimonious at times. Well-meaning activists may fret over the fate of the poor, but Assam and now Bihar suggest that the poor, however defined, do not lack the means to negotiate with modern states, about who gets to vote and who merits welfare.

Similarly, attempts to communalise enumeration exercises by contending parties rarely work: the marginalised and the minorities are far from passive victims. Despite the odds, they have learnt how to navigate the labyrinth of statecraft, and, ultimately, claim their place in our fiercely-contested democracy.

Whatever the aims of policymakers, ordinary people invariably act collectively, often across neat identity categories, to defend their rights and pursue their interests in difficult circumstances.

Digital voter rolls are now widely accepted across India. The idea of returning to the ballot boxes of yore has few takers. EC cannot avoid wrangles or questions at this time. But there would be less controversy if these updates were regular and timely, say, after every 5 years, and/or not tied in terms of optics to a key state election. For democracy to be meaningful, voters must see electoral exercises as fair and beyond reproach.

The writer teaches at Georgetown University, Qatar

In A Hostile New World, Can Our Govt Save Us?

With US & China weaponising every piece of trade, India can't depend on them for mission-critical technologies & products. It must manufacture these itself & its private sector isn't up to the task

Somnath Mukherjee

Consider three seemingly unrelated developments. "You can't hire Indians, set up factories in China and park profits in Ireland," Trump said to US big-tech in mid-July, following this by imposing a 25% effective tariff rate on Indian exports to US, followed up with a further 25% on account of India's Russian oil trade. Microsoft briefly stopped providing services to Nayara Energy, a Russian-owned oil refiner in India. India's flagship fighter programme, LCA, is further delayed as supplies of engines from GE are held up.

These developments are strung together via an umbilical thread defining the geo-economics of a new, post End-of-History world.

- While free trade is likely to continue, every single piece of it can (and will) be weaponised – in a way not seen since the formation of Opec in response to Israel-Arab war in 1973. Opec was a single trick pony. For a large-scale, omnibus global trade war, one needs to go back to the days preceding WW2.
- Every piece of leverage available will be used for a trade – either economic or political. The era of grand bargains – for example, US offering non-reciprocal market access in lieu of political alliances – is over.

Today, US is using its enormous consumer market to drive tariffs and select, often shifting, political objectives. China is using its monopoly of rare earth minerals as a counter. Note the significant softening of US's stance on China (it's recently denied permission to Taiwan's president to stop-over at New York en route to Latin America) as shortage of rare earths bite key industries. For Indians, it would seem US is weaponising Pakistan (economically a non-variable) too against India.

- To cap it all, large swathes of key technologies that underpin business and lives today are monopolised (manufactured goods with China, software technology with US), enabling a level of leverage that Opec lacked even at its peak.

India navigates this uniquely tough global board as a large, soon to be the 3rd largest economy in the world, but way smaller than the Big Two. Instinctively unwilling and practically unable to commit to alliances. Aspiring for global influence but hamstrung by the realities of a poor (but democratic) polity. What it needs is cold decision-making that's divorced from the vicissitudes of daily politics.

For starters, the manufacturing vs services debate is moot. As much as the premise of manufacturing as a jobs sink. Manufacturing is required as a strategic imperative. Not necessarily in stitching T-shirts that employ millions, but an ecosystem that can realistically support a domestic aero-engine effort.

Image: AI

Today a US big-tech firm is withdrawing critical infra services to a Russian entity in response to European sanctions. Tomorrow, what prevents a similar sanctions regime from cutting off services to India? If data isn't localised, a foreign corporation (and govt) could have the switch to cut-off India's access to India's own data.

Atmanirbharta needs to get into brasstacks mode. Some areas (those related to data, access, IT infra) are best addressed via policies, maybe even weaponised as leverage in trade negotiations. In some others, especially those related to 'crown jewel' capabilities (aero-engines, quantum computing, 5th/6th generation combat aircraft), it is necessary to have domestic design-development-manufacturing capabilities.

Encouraging private sector investments through a mix of policy and tax incentives has fallen short. In most cutting-edge areas, not only is domestic talent pool shallow but Indian private capital pool is also unwilling to make large bets on ventures with high tail-risks. An Indian private entity will not invest in designing a new Indian medium aircraft and take it through a development cycle. Ergo, it's down to govt.

A proven model already exists, in the form of Project ATV (Advanced Technology Vessel). For four decades, this ultra-secretive national programme to develop a nuclear submarine (SSBN) was run directly under PMO. Design, development and final assembly were coordinated under one roof. The submarine hull was fabricated by private sector L&T, public sector shipyard capabilities were mobilised at the Ship Building Centre (SBC) that assembled the final submarines. When critical nuclear propulsion technology was proving to be a bridge too far, Vajpayee concluded a political deal with Russia for the reactor technology.

Mission-critical technologies and products will need ATV model of execution. Public sector 'work culture', inability to pay private sector (at times, global private sector) compensation for the right talent, scepticism of end-users about an Indian product delivering only 75% of the global best performance – these are not insurmountable barriers. Beg, borrow, steal, rob, trade – nothing should be beyond scope. But only a sovereign can ensure such actions remain within scope.

India's resources are too limited and its scale too small for critical missions to be left to private risk-taking. And there is no alternative. India's freedom of decision-making will be critically dependent on its ability to be atmanirbhar in critical technologies.

Rashtra Samarthya, state capacity, is the biggest imperative for India to embrace this uncertain new world. The Indian state has to rise to the occasion.

The writer is CIO of an asset & wealth management firm

Calvin & Hobbes

Sacred*space*

Learn this from the waters: in mountain clefts and chasms, loud gush the streamlets, but great rivers flow silently.

Sutta Nipata 3.725

Stepping Into Life's Marathon With Faith

Stuti Malhotra

At 100 years old, most people would consider slowing down. Fauja Singh, however, chose to speed up – quite literally. The British Sikh centenarian stunned the world by completing marathons well into his 100s. His story is not just a feat of physical endurance, but a living testimony to the Sikh view of life and death: that both are part of an eternal race, one not to be feared, but embraced with courage, humility, and unshakable faith.

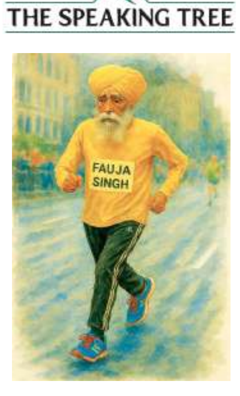
Death is not a deadline; it is a divine design. One cannot predict it, prepare for it in worldly terms, or escape it – but one can transform it from a moment of fear into a moment of remembrance of the creator of the universe. It is this profound understanding that underpins the resilience of people such as Fauja Singh.

Guru Nanak Dev declared: *"Jo aaiaa so chalsee sabh koee aaee vaareeae," (Sri Guru Granth Sahib P 474)* – whoever has come, shall depart; all shall have their turn.

What makes Fauja Singh extraordinary is not just his longevity, but the Sikh spirit of Chardi Kala – eternal optimism – that propelled his journey. After personal tragedies, including the loss of his wife and son, Fauja Singh chose to run towards health, towards community causes, and perhaps, unknowingly, towards the Sikh ideal of seva, selfless service through inspiration.

In interviews, Singh often attributed his energy to his simple living, vegetarian diet, and deep faith. He once said, "The reason i am so fit is because i believe in God." This tension-free mindset is Gurmat, the Guru's wisdom in action.

THE SPEAKING TREE



Gurbani teaches us that death is inevitable. It is the law of nature. Whosoever is born must die. Rich and poor, young and old, all die.

Guru Nanak Dev says, *"Sabhnaa marnaa aaiaa vechhoraa sabhnaah,"* – death comes to all, and all must suffer separation. The moment of death remains a mystery to all but God. Death arrives without regard for time, age, or place – often suddenly and without reason.

Perhaps there is mercy in this unknowing. For the uncertainty of our end lies in the hands of the One who breathes life into us and gently reclaims it. As Guru Nanak Dev profoundly states, *"Maran na moorat puchhiaa puchhee thit na vaar,"* – death does not ask time; it does not ask date or day of the week.

In honouring Fauja Singh's remarkable journey, we catch a glimpse of the profound unity between life and death. In this continuum, each breath becomes an invitation to run with intention, serve with grace, and remember the Divine with steadfast devotion. This awareness is not meant to burden us, but to awaken us – to infuse our days with purpose, thankfulness, and spiritual resolve. May we, too, summon our inner resilience, step into life's marathon with faith, and trust that the One who grants us breath will carry us through our final mile.

Track Rupee-Tariff, And Russian Oil, FX

Room for depreciation to tackle trade wars

The rupee is facing intense pressure from Donald Trump's latest additional 25% tariff announcement for buying Russian oil, and RBI is understood to have stepped up intervention in the forex market. The Indian currency has performed poorly against a basket of Asian counterparts because of the varied incidence of retaliatory US tariffs. Demand for dollars is climbing on account of crude oil imports and capital flight from Indian equities. Yet, the international price of oil and benchmark stock indices are relatively stable after the US tariff imposition, which limits descent of the rupee. The currency is fairly valued in terms of real effective exchange rate, and there is room for depreciation in order to counteract the altered dynamics of international trade in goods.

India's approach to exchange rate management is guided by the principle of addressing volatility, rather than targeting any specific level for the rupee. This requires a lower dependence on forex reserves to defend the rupee. To the extent that Trump tariffs could slow India's growth, rupee depreciation is an inevitable outcome. This can be managed — magnified or dampened — to suit India's export competitiveness. But such effects are likely to be incremental given the economy's reliance on services exports and remittances. Allowing the rupee to find its own level would probably be the policy outcome of choice while the US adjusts to rising inflation.

A slowing US economy has a bearing on global energy demand and capital flows, the proximate causes for rupee movement. Bigger shifts will occur, now that the Trump regime has acted on its intention to stop Indian access to Russian crude oil. The effects will be at two levels. First, the price of oil will be affected if Russian supplies are withdrawn from the market. Second, India will have to pay more in dollars for the oil imports it will need to switch away from Russia. This, however, is a developing situation, with little clarity over Chinese purchases of Russian oil. Watch this space.

HP & U'khand Again, Lessons Anyone?

Last week, the Supreme Court observed that if the deteriorating ecological balance in Himachal Pradesh goes unchecked, the state could 'vanish into thin air'. The same holds true for Uttarakhand, as the destruction caused by flash floods in Harshil Valley shows. The devastation underscores — yet again — that India's approach to development for the Himalayan states is backfiring. Instead of persisting with this destructive path, the approach must be rooted in science and ecological realities of the region.

Yes, it will require making hard choices. But looking at the scale of destruction, the choice is clear. Steep slopes, young geo-formations and diverse microclimates make the region vulnerable to climate-induced changes. The region's average temperature is rising faster than the global average, resulting in more cloudbursts, excessive rainfall and flash floods. Deforestation and unchecked rise in human and vehicular traffic only add to this destructive cocktail.

Bringing science into policymaking means moving away from business-as-usual approaches that divorce development from ecological well-being. The region's ecological specificities are well known. National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem is part of 2008 National Action Plan on Climate Change. Research institutions and Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) must be integrated into the policymaking process. Creating an interface between science, policy, people and business will provide the foundation for both economically and ecologically sustainable development. Failing to do so will leave Himalayan states trapped in a vicious cycle of extreme weather events, and loss of lives and assets, eliciting more sighs and handwringing.

EYES WIDE SHUT Does Trump have legal authority to push his tariffs through? Not really

Constitutionally Unsound

Neeraj Kaushal

What, me tariff?

New York: Donald Trump continues to rattle the world economy with unilateral tariffs and tariff threats. This includes Wednesday's executive order imposing an additional ad valorem rate of duty of 25% on India for buying Russian oil. Globally, businesses and policymakers are watching with great concern at the possible consequences. But does the president even have the constitutional authority to impose these tariffs? Apparently, not.

'Just about everything Trump has been doing on trade is illegal,' writes Paul Krugman in his August 1 Substack column, 'Trump/Brazil: Delusions of Grandeur Go South'. Krugman isn't alone. In the US, a dozen state governments, several businesses and individuals have sued the Trump regime for using executive orders to slap tariffs, overstepping the legislative process. This overuse of presidential authority, they argue, has caused immense harm to American businesses and economy. Their plea to US Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit: pronounce Trump tariffs illegal and stop government agencies and officials from enforcing them.

During hearings, federal appeals court judges have expressed scepticism on the president's authority to impose tariffs, and called it an unprecedented use of emergency powers. Strange as it may sound, International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) of 1977, the law that Trump has used to justify his sweeping tariffs, does not mention the word 'tariff'.

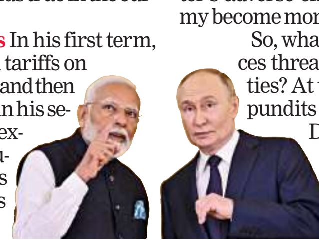
The Trump regime says that the country is under 'an unusual and extraordinary threat', arising from trade deficits and drug trafficking, and this threat validates the use of IEEPA. The plaintiffs, in turn, have called these threats bogus. They argue that the US economy has been dealing with trade deficits for decades, and yet has continued to prosper. They add that there is little evidence of drug trafficking from most countries that are subject to Trump tariffs.

In some cases, it's just Trump's personal vendetta against certain world leaders that is the cause of high tariffs. For instance, Trump has imposed a 50% tariff on Brazil, citing the trial of former president Jair Bolsonaro, a former Trump ally, an emergency. Critics claim this is a blatant misuse of the US presidential powers and interference in the governance of another country.

International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) of 1977, the law that Trump has used to justify his sweeping tariffs, doesn't even mention the word 'tariff'

The US Constitution grants the president authority to impose tariffs in three exceptional circumstances. None of them holds true in the current case:

▶ **Security reasons** In his first term, Trump had imposed tariffs on steel and aluminium, and then raised them further in his second term, using the excuse of national security. But legal experts say that since there is no imminent threat to American security, use of tariffs to address a bogus threat is baloney.



It's in India's economic interest to keep buying crude from Russia. If Russian oil is pushed out of the global market, prices could rise above $100 a barrel

▶ **Unfair trade** There is no evidence that the world is dumping its produce in the US at less than market prices. So, this is not a valid justification for sweeping duties across countries. Anti-dumping duties would require evidence of dumping against specific countries and specific goods.

▶ **Economic emergency** Trump has bragged many times that the US economy during his presidency is the greatest, ever. Surely, it can't be the 'greatest economy ever' and be in an emergency at the same time.

Earlier, in May, US Court of International Trade, based in NYC, ruled that the Trump regime had exceeded the authority granted by Congress to the president and ordered blocking enforcement of Trump tariffs. But the regime appealed that ruling in the federal circuit, which allowed the government to continue enforcing tariffs while the case proceeded.

The legal battle questioning Trump's authority to impose tariffs will likely continue for his term. It will probably come before the Supreme Court. While it has a majority of conservative judges, the court may not necessarily rule in Trump's favour, as most conservative judges are constitutionalists. Therefore, they'll be unlikely to pass a judgment that clips the Congress' authority and grants unprecedented powers to POTUS.

Trump can seek Congress' legislative approval. But the process is time-consuming, and it's not clear that even Republican legislators will give him the authority, given his haphazard and reckless ways. Republican support for Trump tariffs may decline once the latter's adverse effects on the US economy become more visible.

So, what should GoI do as it faces threats of tariffs and penalties? At the start of Trump 2.0, pundits suggested that New Delhi avoid getting into a trade war with the US. That advice is still valid. GoI has conveyed that it won't allow Trump to dictate its foreign policy, or be bullied into deciding who it should buy crude oil from.

It's in India's economic interest to keep buying crude from Russia. If Russian oil is pushed out of the global market — as Trump intends by pressuring countries to stop imports — prices could rise above $100 a barrel, sharply increasing India's import bill. Meanwhile, GoI should use the opportunity that Trump's tariff threats present to lower tariffs to improve India's competitiveness with the world at large.

The writer is professor, social policy, Columbia University, US

ChatGPT
SHAIRI
OF THE DAY

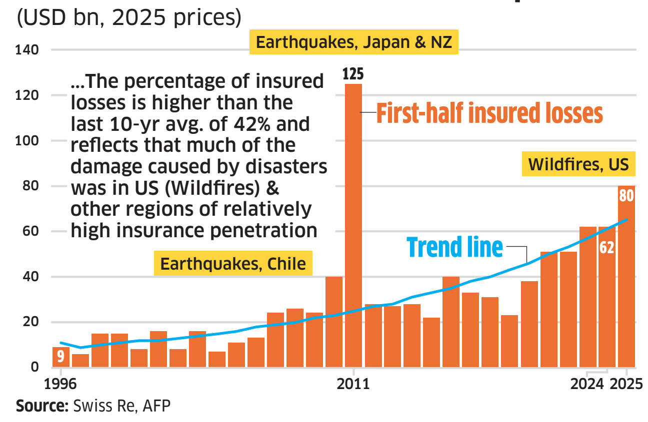
If India wants China to shiver,
It must play the role of sly giver —
Be pals with the States,
While managing fates,
Through Russia, down that old Cold War river!

...

Global Insured Catastrophe Losses

Global insured catastrophe losses reached $80 billion in the first half of 2025, above trend, according to a report by reinsurer Swiss Re. Overall, natural disasters caused $135 billion in economic losses in the first half of the year, of which insurance covered about 59%...

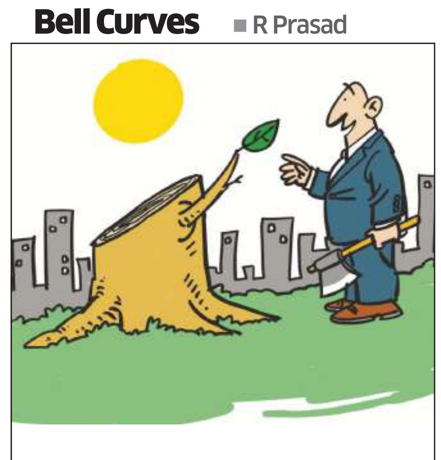
Global insured losses from natural catastrophes in H1 (USD bn, 2025 prices)



Source: Swiss Re, AFP

SANJEEV RAJ JAIN

Bell Curves R Prasad



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Flipping the Power Switch


C K G Nair and V Shunmugam

The sharp drop in the stock price of Indian Energy Exchange (IEX) in late July — almost 30% in a single trading session — reflected the market's collective reaction to CERC's decision: formal implementation of market coupling by January 2026.

The move aims to unify price discovery across Indian power exchanges — breaking IEX's dominance and potentially transforming the electricity trading ecosystem. For investors, regulators and market participants, this signals an opportunity to restructure and redefine the purpose of the power derivatives market.

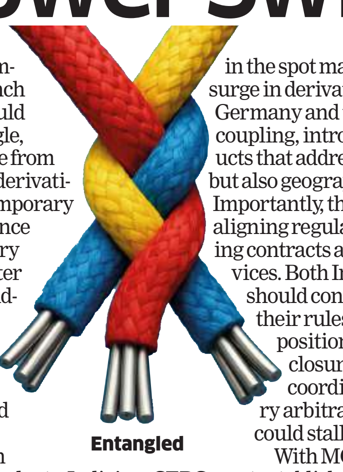
Under the new framework, all Day-Ahead Market (DAM) orders from India's three exchanges — IEX, PXIL and HPX — will be funnelled into a centralised algorithm managed by a Market Coupling Operator (MCO), a rotating role among exchanges. The result: a single uniform clearing price per time slot across all exchanges, enabling a unified price discovery process.

A first for India, the concept is inspired by European practice. In the EU, Nord Pool and EPEX Spot operate within a connected power market, using a common algorithm (Euphemia) to produce a single clearing price. After coupling, derivatives volumes increased by 20-25% across key hubs, volatility decreased and liquidity improved.

India's electricity futures market, launched days before the coupling announcement, is in a difficult position. MCX and NSE rushed to launch trading in electricity derivatives, benchmarked to DAM prices of IEX and PXIL, respectively. However, with three different DAM prices, these derivatives faced the challenge of basis risk divergence.

Had the coupling been implemented before the launch of futures, the market would have benefited from a single, transparent reference rate from the start. Instead, India's derivatives market now faces a temporary mismatch between reference benchmarks. Until January 2026, traders may encounter changing benchmarks midcycle, which could hinder participation and complicate risk management.

Regulatory clarity on benchmark formation and spot market functioning should precede the launch or scaling of derivative products. India's electricity futures market is nascent, while the underlying reference price is transforming. This creates short-term friction. To adapt, exchanges may need to revise existing contracts post-coupling — listing new series, retiring legacy ones, and aligning valuation and margining norms with the unified benchmark. A transitional roadmap issued by Sebi and CERC would help ease market adaptation and reduce uncertainty.



Entangled

Once the spot price stabilises, the case for launching additional futures (and, possibly, options) contracts — such as quarterly, seasonal and peak-load index-linked series — will strengthen. Liquidity that was historically concentrated on one platform can now be distributed more evenly across exchanges.

Market coupling will harmonise the reference DAM price across platforms, resolving the current issue of dual benchmarks in the electricity futures segment. While this structural shift is necessary, it must be carefully sequenced and communicated.

For IEX, losing its exclusive price discovery status marks a turning point in its business model. PXIL and HPX, meanwhile, are positioned to grow if they improve their service efficiency. Now, innovation — not exclusivity — will set exchanges apart in a tighter, tech-driven market.

The European experience in coupling revealed a pattern: first, consolidation in the spot market, followed by a surge in derivatives innovation. Germany and the Nordics, after coupling, introduced new products that addressed not only time but also geography and risk type. Importantly, they built trust by aligning regulation, standardising contracts and clearing services. Both Indian regulators should consider aligning their rules on margining, position limits and disclosure. Without this coordination, regulatory arbitrage or ambiguity could stall growth.

With MCO role rotating, CERC must establish a supervisory system to ensure the consistent operation of the algorithm. Euphemia is centrally managed with regulatory oversight to ensure uniformity across Nord Pool and EPEX Spot. CERC needs to adopt a similar structure — possibly with audit rights, transparency reports and version control of the algorithm — so that the turn of each exchange as MCO follows the same operational principles. This will help keep the coupled DAM truly unified, preserving the integrity of both spot and derivative markets.

India's decision to connect the power markets aligns us with global standards. However, the true success of this evolution depends on how effectively we build the supporting layers. For electricity futures to develop, the market needs confidence in the reference rate, smooth product transitions and an innovation-driven approach. Sebi and CERC can now enhance their newly established collaboration and shape an investor-friendly electricity market together.

The futures market may have been launched before the foundational elements were in place. But now that market coupling is a likely reality, the blueprint for India's integrated power market is within reach. What we need next is precise execution and cooperative governance.

Nair is former director, National Institute of Securities Markets, and Shunmugam is partner, MCQube

STEP UP TO THE PLATE

Mountain

London

There's a reason Mountain became a hot ticket in Soho just weeks after opening in 2023. Welsh chef Tomos Parry's latest offering brings the bold, smoky flavours of his Michelin-starred Brat to a larger, louder, livelier space — and it's a triumph.

The atmosphere hits you the moment you walk in: vibrant, fire-flecked, and buzzing with energy. Whether you perch near the open kitchen on the ground floor or settle into a booth downstairs, it's all about communal joy and flavour-forward food.

Start with the house-made stracciatella and raw red prawns — sweet, creamy, and gone too soon. Then go big: the lobster caldereta is a showstopper meant for feasting, and the nutty walnut bread with

peach and bottarga is a mind-bending combo you'll dream about later.

Parry's legendary fire-smoked potatoes are here too, crunchy-edged and melt-in-the-mouth. And whatever you do, do not skip dessert. The ensaimada with apricots is comfort food elevated, while the torrija — custard-soaked fried brioche with wild blackberries — is a nostalgic joyride.

Mountain isn't just a restaurant. It's a full-blown flavour fiesta. And you'll be back before the smoke's cleared from your clothes.

JUST IN JEST

Move over Leo Tolstoy, Woody Allen, a new sequel is playing...

Trade and Tariffs, the New 'Russian' Classic

In Tolstoy's War and Peace, men duel over honour, empires collapse, and everyone speaks French for no rhyme or reason. In Woody Allen's Love and Death, his 'homage' to Tolstoy's W&P and other works from Russia's 'golden age' of literature, the same happens, except with more neurosis and fewer horses. Now, there's a new sequel: Trade and Tariffs. In T&T, sabres are replaced with Excel sheets and existential dread with economic anxiety. It's Woody's L&T, but with far less love and more death... of global trade agreements with a Napoleonic-era Donaldski shouting 'Charge!' and 'Vive le moi!' alternately.

Imagine Boris, a humble soybean farmer from Iowa, who wakes up one morning to discover his soybeans are now considered a weapon of mass disruption. He just wanted to MTGA — Make Tofu Great Again. But with China retaliating to Trump's 'retaliatory tariffs' by slapping a 25% tariff on his legumes, Boris is as good as Johnson. In L&T, Boris is conscripted into war despite being a pacifist with a fear of loud noises and commitment. In T&T, Boris is conscripted into economic warfare, armed with a harvester and vague understanding of Nafta. Tolstoy gave us sweeping battles and deep monologues. Woody gave us jokes about wheat and the Grim Reaper. Today's T&T feels like a saga of bad breakups doubling as a wooing scheme. And nobody's speaking French.

THE SPEAKING TREE

It is Okay To Ask

NAJIB SHAH

Charlie Mackesy in his book, 'The boy, the mole, the fox and the horse', has the boy asking the horse what was the bravest thing that the horse ever said; the horse replied: 'Help — when I have dared to show my weakness.'

There is a profound truth in this simple admission. Far too many of us are afraid to show our vulnerability. We let our ego and status get the better of common sense. This, even though every prayer is in many cases a plea for assistance, as it is an acknowledgement of the help given by our Maker. But not everybody is strong to survive on prayers to the Unseen. We need a closer physical presence.

Seeking help, as the wise horse says, is not giving up; it is refusing to give up. The person whose help is sought should be patient and give their ear and time. When Arjun, the warrior, was torn by confusion, he did not hesitate to seek guidance from Krishn. It is said that while knowledge may be power, it ultimately is of value only when shared. Equally important is that we reach out to seek help only after trying.

While we should not hesitate to seek help, it should not be our immediate response to all challenges. Being dependent on someone else all the time isn't smart. As the wise horse says when seeing a swan gracefully gliding across the water, 'there is a lot of paddling going on beneath'. So, work hard, be brave, and you will swan-like glide through life, but if you fear you are drowning, do not hesitate to ask for a lifebuoy.

Chat Room

Happy Ending for Trumpian Tradegy

Apropos 'Op Salvage, or US Plus One' by T K Arun (Aug 6), it's worthwhile for the world's major trading blocs to consider a mega FTA excluding the US, which may open a pathway of replacing the hegemony of the dollar. Further, to make Indian agriculture internationally competitive, subsidies on inputs like fertilisers and power should be replaced with a lump sum cash transfer payable per hectare of area cultivated. Additional cash transfers could be offered to encourage cultivation of select cash crops for export, akin to income support for EU farmers. The sad reality is that fertile and mineral-rich Ukraine has become a pawn in an expansionist power game.

Chander Shekhar Dogra
Jalandhar

Bearing the Burnt Of Flaming Prices

This refers to 'When It Rains, It Soars! Kitchen Budgets on Fire' by Sutanuka Ghosal and Jayashree Bhosale (Aug 6). The rupee's sharp depreciation, exacerbated by economic uncertainties and tariff disputes, has triggered a broad-based rise in essential food prices. Consequently, the middle class is grappling with unprecedented financial strain, as food costs continue to escalate. Moreover, the cut in dearness relief for LIC and bank retirees from this month, attributed to the low inflation rate, will further raise consumption costs. GoI should devise a framework to rectify such distortions, stimulate consumption, and alleviate the burden on the middle class and senior citizens.

Subrata Daw
Kolkata

Man vs Many: A Sobers Thought

Apropos 'Summer of '25' by Anand Vasu (Aug 6), in the just-concluded England series, Shubman Gill scored more than 700 runs, Mohammed Siraj took 20 wickets, Harry Brook took 10 catches and Ben Stokes/Ollie Pope won all 5 tosses. Great? Go back to the 1966 West Indies-vs-England series. Garfield Sobers alone scored more than 700 runs, took more than 20 wickets, took 10 catches and won all five tosses. No wonder it was said that when Sobers played, West Indies had 13 players on the field — a batsman, a fast medium pace bowler and a spinner in the form of Sobers. He was the first complete all-rounder till Jacques Kallis came around.

T R Ramaswami
Mumbai

Letters to the editor may be addressed to
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thehindubusinessline.
THURSDAY - AUGUST 7, 2025

No surprises

MPC's call to pause rates almost seemed inevitable

It is a fair argument to make that even in more normal times than these, the Monetary Policy Committee would have perhaps opted to keep the repo rate unchanged, after cutting it by 100 basis points (to 5.5 per cent) since this February. But the latest volley of US tariff hikes, with India in particular taking a hit, settled the case for a status quo on rates. Central banks are likely to be in wait-and-watch mode, as the impact of the tariff hikes on trade and financial flows plays itself out.

To paraphrase Reserve Bank of India Governor Sanjay Malhotra's earlier monetary policy statement, the situation brings with it both 'known and unknown unknowns'. Even so, the RBI seems to have taken a realistic view on inflation but an optimistic view on growth. Its decision to keep FY26 growth projections unchanged at 6.5 per cent, after paring it by 20 basis points "earlier", reflects a reassuring, yet surprising confidence that the country can ride through external shocks. The Governor seemed to suggest in his press briefing that a 20 basis points adjustment was good enough for now, while adding for good measure that RBI would continue to be data-dependent. However, it is hard to say whether economic agents are as upbeat. The response to accommodative steps taken by the RBI since February (rate cut, CRR cut and liquidity infusion) has been underwhelming, with credit growing at below 10 per cent. In fact, a daily average liquidity surplus of ₹3 lakh crore reflects poor credit appetite, particularly on the investment front.

Beyond a point, opening the spigots alone cannot spur credit growth, unless demand — now restrained by sentiment and to some extent incomes in urban India, as the Governor conceded — picks up. Governor Malhotra's statement was sober in tone, but was aimed at allaying apprehensions and lifting sentiment, as the tariff shock looms large. The RBI has pared its inflation forecast for FY26 to 3.1 per cent from 3.7 per cent earlier, but has left the Q4 forecast unchanged at 4.4 per cent, while pegging the Q1FY27 inflation at 4.9 per cent. Core inflation has been pegged at a sticky 4 per cent this fiscal. There is a case for looking through the below-3 per cent inflation rates reported for May and June. These low readings are on account of a crash in food prices, which are volatile and over-represented in the retail inflation basket.

While the external account is robust, the impact of the latest upheavals would be closely watched. Governor Malhotra flagged foreign portfolio outflows in debt this fiscal. With the rupee already under some stress, not unlike currencies in other emerging markets, the approach would be one of 'tightening one's seat belts' and watching out for global developments — particularly, the US economy and the actions of the Federal Reserve. While there can perhaps be no conclusive or alarmist take at this stage on the tariff impact, the world awaits some clarity on what is surely an epochal reordering of world trade.

POCKET

RAVIKANTH

LABANYA PRAKASH JENA
ABHINAV JINDAL

GETTY IMAGES

Pension funds should prepare for climate risk

VIABLE OPTION. As pension funds move away from government securities to corporate assets in the future, they need to integrate climate risk in their portfolio choices

Climate change is a growing threat to the economy and society, and the transition to a green economy to mitigate and adapt to climate change requires trillions of dollars of investment every year, globally. India, a global leader in climate action, is committed to transitioning into a green economy. As per various agencies' estimates, India's climate mitigation goal by 2070, popularly known as net-zero, needs $10-12.5 trillion in the next 25-45 years. Besides, there is additional capital investment required for climate adaptation — 2.5 per cent of GDP by 2030 as per the Reserve Bank of India, translating into about $100 billion per annum.

Mobilising this humongous volume of capital needs all kinds of financial institutions. In India, given a banking-driven economy, the discussion is largely moving around mobilising capital from banks. One of the largest sources of capital, which is missing, is pension funds, currently managing about $600 billion and growing at a rate of 10 per cent per annum.

Although a substantial portion, more than 50 per cent, of these funds is allocated in government securities, a significant portion is parked in public equity, corporate bonds, and other financial instruments. Pension funds seldom invest in companies in the climate space. Given pension funds' long investment cycles, appropriate financial instruments, such as Infrastructure Investment Trust (InVIT), Alternative Investment Fund (AIF) and corporate bonds with credit enhancement, can be deployed to raise capital from them.

PATIENT INVESTORS

Most of the financial markets unnecessarily worry or show exuberance on rallies, market dips, and quarterly reports, which make them undisciplined, leading to suboptimal performance. Pension funds, in particular, have a long investment cycle. For example, pensioners who are contributing to pension funds are unlikely to withdraw for several years unless there is an emergency.

This long investment cycle perfectly aligns with the investment cycle of climate technology, be it renewable energy, clean transportation, or climate adaptation. Investment in all these technologies and segments could perform better than the broader market, at least better than carbon-intensive technologies, as the economy transitions to a less carbon-intensive economy.

LONG-DURATION LIABILITIES

Climate change risk, regarded as a systemic risk to the financial system, will affect the financial performance of companies and industries more in the long term. As pension funds have long-duration liabilities, pensioners withdraw funds after a few decades, and they need to be more cognisant of this risk. This has prompted several pension funds in Europe to integrate climate risk into their investment strategies to protect the interests of beneficiaries.

Pension funds are low-risk seeking investors and they avoid risky bets, and invest in companies with sound fundamentals and a resilient business model that lasts for decades and withstands all possible kinds of risks, including climate change. Although pension funds are protected from downside risks, given their large exposure to government securities, investment in corporate financial assets is also increasing. As the financial sector develops, pension funds will gradually move away from government securities to corporate financial assets. Hence, it is important that these funds integrate climate change risk in their securities selection and portfolio management.

> **Pension fund management in India remain largely insulated in terms of climate risk** management and reporting due to limited guidance from regulators

REGULATIONS ARE LAGGING

Pension fund regulation on climate risk and pension fund regulators in several countries are asking their regulated entities to disclose the latter's climate-related risks and opportunities. Although the pace of adoption varies across countries, sponsors and trustees of pension funds are taking notice of these developments in the interest of fund participants. However, pension fund management in India remain largely insulated in terms of climate risk management and reporting due to limited guidance from regulators.

Pension funds in India are primarily managed by the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) and the National Pension System (NPS). While EPFO manages the fund itself, NPS has selected fund managers to manage, although it is the discretion of the investor to choose fund managers. The NPS has a stewardship code for the fund manager to promote responsible investment practice, but it has limited wherewithal to force fund managers to follow the norms in spirit. Beneficiaries are also not aware whether fund managers are integrating climate risks into their risk management strategies.

NPS is a member of the International Organisation of Securities Commissions (IOSCO); it outlines a prescription on sustainability risk and opportunities, including climate change, for asset managers, including pension funds. This prescription is meant to standardise climate-related disclosures, ensuring that investors and regulators have access to consistent and reliable information to assess and manage climate risks. Following international best practices could allow Indian pension funds to better assess the transition risks associated with industries exposed to carbon-intensive activities and evaluate the physical risks that may affect government securities and other key assets. NPS can at least start a consulting process, like the Reserve Bank of India did last year, on climate risk and sustainable finance.

Pension fund has a crucial role to fill the green financing gap in India while making the fund resilient to climate-related financial risks, and it can start with regulation.

Jena is Visiting Senior Fellow, London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), and Advisor, CSI; Jindal is an Energy Economist

Beyond repo rates: Let's reimagine growth toolkit

With demand showing signs of fatigue amidst global uncertainties, China's approach of targeting specific sectors is an option

S Adikesavan

Discussions around Reserve Bank of India's monetary policy announcements tend to focus narrowly on repo rate adjustments and short-term liquidity measures. This repo-centric view often sidelines broader, structural policy options that could help in shaping India's long-term economic trajectory.

With growth now a pressing priority — arguably more so than inflation — it is time to re-examine the central bank's developmental mandate. While inflation management remains important, supporting growth is also a prime objective.

To its credit, the RBI and the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) have responded deftly to evolving economic challenges with timely rate moves. These decisions have helped temper inflation, even though supply-side issues may continue to drive much of the food/fuel price volatility.

Concerns about domestic demand and the global trade environment signal the need for supportive intervention by the RBI. It may be noted that growth projections of 6-6.5 per cent for the near term fall short of what's required for India to reach its ambition of becoming a developed economy by 2047. According to the World Bank's 2025 Country Economic Memorandum, India must sustain annual real GDP growth of around 7-8 per cent over the next two decades to achieve high-income status in two decades.

Sectoral trends now reflect an uneven growth pattern. While agriculture and MSMEs are expected to perform reasonably well this year, large industries are on the slow growth lane. Market demand is softening, with only modest growth projected in sectors like passenger vehicles and other manufactures.

BANK CREDIT GROWTH

Credit growth data supports this cautious outlook. Bank credit growth to large industries has been lower than overall credit increase. A recent report in this newspaper (*businessline*. July 15) revealed that sectors such as infrastructure, metals, and textiles — together comprising over half of industry credit — have recorded less than 3 per cent annual growth in the past decade.

Between 2015 and 2025, outstanding bank credit to large industries rose from ₹21.4 lakh crore to ₹27.3 lakh crore, at a compound annual growth of just 3.9 per cent. In contrast, medium industries

SUPPORT. RBI needs to look beyond conventional tools

registered 11.18 per cent CAGR, and micro and small industries grew at 7.47 per cent. This disparity suggests declining inclination or ability of large firms to invest, especially in new or capital-intensive projects.

The RBI Governor has of course pointed out that large corporates are increasingly tapping alternative funding avenues like bonds and commercial papers, which partly explains slower bank credit uptake.

Adding to the growth pangs are international headwinds seem aligned to pull down growth. Though recent tariff hikes by the US are unlikely to significantly impact GDP, given that affected exports amount to under $50 billion — modest relative to India's $4 trillion economy — the move augurs ill for global growth.

In this context, it is an opportune time for the RBI to revisit structural monetary policy tools that go beyond conventional repo rate changes. The People's Bank of China (PBoC), for instance, has implemented a few instruments aimed at supporting targeted sectors, recognising the heterogeneity of economic needs. A recent BIS paper highlights how China's structural monetary tools have helped guide sector-specific growth by targeting ground-level heterogeneity. Of interest are long-term monetary instruments like Pledged Supplementary Lending from PBoC for infrastructure lending by institutions.

India has experimented with these tools before — such as the Targeted Long-Term Repo Operations (TLTROs). Such adaptive strategies targeted at certain sectors look necessary and the RBI could expand its monetary policy toolkit to support sectoral resilience.

With global uncertainties mounting and domestic demand showing signs of fatigue, proactive, medium to long-term monetary policy interventions have to be examined.

The reviewer is a commentator on banking and finance

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.

Tread cautiously on tariffs

Apropos 'Trump tariffs are no cause for panic' (August 6), while the hike in tariffs is a recent irritant in the India-US relations, the strategic autonomy doctrine of India has been working well, though it is required to perform a tightrope balancing act. It is true that the US has been an unreliable partner. However, given the geopolitical situation in South Asia (China is even more unreliable on the border), India needs to tread a cautious path, while deciding for or against the purchase of American weapons. Even while pushing for self-reliance with increased vigour, India should weigh all opinions. Though India's exports to the US are about 20 per cent of total exports, IT services exports are quite a substantial percentage, estimated to be in the range of 60-70 per cent. India can and should diversify its exports to other regions, but it cannot be done overnight. Hence, India should bide its time, continue negotiations with the US on the trade deal, even while protecting its national interests zealously.

Kosaraju Chandramouli
Hyderabad

Economic bullying

Donald Trump's threat to raise tariffs on India reeks of arrogance and ignorance. Punishing a sovereign nation for exercising its right to trade is not leadership, it's economic bullying. His erratic decisions and crude diplomacy alienate allies and undermine global stability. India is not a pawn in America's geopolitical games. Trade relations must be built on respect and mutual interest, not Trump's tantrums. It's time the world called out this reckless behaviour masquerading as policy. India should respond strategically, not emotionally, and protect its sovereign trade rights.

Vijaykumar HK
Raichur, Karnataka

Promoting millets

The government's push during the International Year of Millets (2023) created the momentum. Millets have long had an ardent consumer base among the working class for their extraordinary sustenance and above average nutritional value. Being hardy and less dependent on water, millets thrive in both arable and arid environs. Farmers need assured procurement and MSP parity. With innovative policies and hand-holding, millet farming can boost farmers' incomes, and secure the nation's nutritional and ecological future .

R Narayanan
Navi Mumbai

Boosting the ELI scheme

This refers to 'Making ELI inclusive' (August 6). The Employment Linked Incentive scheme aims to boost job creation by providing financial support to employers for hiring new employees, particularly in sectors like manufacturing. To make the ELI scheme more inclusive, eligibility must be expanded beyond the current criteria, ensuring wider access for all job seekers, and addressing potential barriers for marginalised groups. The scheme should also actively promote gender inclusivity. Targeted outreach programmes in marginalised communities to raise awareness about the scheme should be conducted.

P Victor Selvaraj
Palayamkottai, TN

Published by Nirmala Lakshman and Printed by Praveen Someshwar at HT Media Ltd. Plot No.8, Udyog Vihar, Greater Noida Distt. Gautam Budh Nagar, U.P.201306, on behalf of THG PUBLISHING PVT. LTD. Chennai-600002. Editor: Raghuvir Srinivasan (Editor responsible for selection of news under the PRP Act). ISSN 0971 - 7528

Farm sector needs capex

Public investment in agriculture remains an issue

P Alli

AGRI TECH. More money needs to flow in

India's consolidation of agricultural schemes under integrated umbrella programmes reflects a purposeful shift in policymaking—seeking coherence, administrative efficiency, and better delivery. With an allocation of ₹1,22,529 crore to the Department of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare in 2024–25 and total subsidies crossing ₹4.5 lakh crore (Ministry of Finance, 2024), the commitment to the agricultural sector is considerable. The recent introduction of the PM Dhan Dhaanya Yojana, alongside longstanding schemes like the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY) and Krishonnati Yojana, illustrates efforts to provide a more structured approach to rural development.

But can the consolidation of schemes alone meet the sector's evolving needs? Or must public investment now be recalibrated to emphasize infrastructure, innovation, and institutional strengthening?

While umbrella schemes offer foundational support, their annual allocations — such as the ₹4,000 crore per year under the PM Dhan Dhaanya Yojana — must be weighed against the sector's vast and diverse demands. With over 146 million operational holdings spread across a range of agro-ecological zones, the scale of investment required goes well beyond what current provisions can deliver on their own.

CAPITAL FORMATION

Public investment in agriculture today remains heavily focused on input subsidies, often neglecting long-term capital formation. This has limited the sector's capacity to build durable infrastructure, such as irrigation networks, cold storage chains, rural roads, and logistics systems. India's Gross Capital Formation (GCF) in agriculture continues to hover around 15-17 per cent of agricultural GDP, significantly below the 30 per cent benchmark seen in more structurally developed agrarian economies (NITI Aayog, 2021).

One major consequence of underinvestment is post-harvest loss. It is estimated that 15–20 per cent of produce is lost annually due to inadequate storage, transportation, and processing facilities—translating into economic losses of nearly ₹92,000 crore (ICAR, 2022). The Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF), with a planned corpus of ₹1 lakh crore over ten years, aims to address this gap. However, when disbursed across more than 700 districts, the per-district average of less than ₹15 crore per year may be insufficient.

Agricultural research and development (R&D) remains a vital but under-supported area. Currently, India spends only around 0.3 per cent of its agricultural GDP on R&D and extension services — well below the FAO-recommended 1 per cent. Yet, studies suggest that each rupee spent on agricultural R&D yields nearly ₹14 in returns (ICAR-NIAP, 2021). Investments in climate-resilient crops, precision farming, and water-efficient technologies can significantly enhance productivity, particularly for smallholders vulnerable to climatic and market shocks.

Strengthening agricultural extension is equally critical. Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) and digital platforms hold promise but often operate with limited capacity.

Several States have adopted innovative and locally responsive models. Punjab has leveraged the AIF to boost post-harvest infrastructure, Telangana's Rythu Bandhu scheme has delivered timely income support, and Uttar Pradesh has used MGNREGA funds to build on-farm assets. In Maharashtra, pilot initiatives using AI-based precision farming tools demonstrate the potential of technology integration in agriculture (MoAFW, 2023; NITI Aayog, 2022). These examples illustrate that context-specific strategies—when funded and institutionally supported—can generate tangible outcomes.

Public investment also plays a crucial role in catalysing the private sector. While agricultural credit is projected to exceed ₹32 lakh crore by FY26 (NABARD), it thrives best when supported by reliable public infrastructure and risk mitigation mechanisms.

The writer is Associate Professor, VIT Chennai. Views are personal

PARTH KUMAR
KUSHAGRA GOYAL

India's coal-fired power can surely be cleaner

GREEN PLAN. Despite renewables, thermal power is here to stay. However, the more efficient and cleaner supercritical plants are not in the forefront

RAJESH N

Sustained economic growth necessitates a stable, growing electricity supply. Since 2021, India's annual electricity demand has soared beyond forecasts, with FY27 projections met in 2025 underscoring the sharp consumption rise.

Meanwhile, electricity production contributes 39 per cent of India's greenhouse gas emissions. Coal-fired plants have long underpinned India's electricity supply and still generate over 70 per cent, magnifying the challenge of balancing economic growth with climate action. Though RE expansion is a key policy aim, the total installed capacity of coal-based thermal power will rise above 280GW, surpassing the National Electricity Plan's (NEP's) 2031-32 target.

Despite ambitious RE capacity additions, the intermittency problem will persist until storage scales up. Coal power will increasingly provide the base load of the power sector. Coal consumption is unlikely to peak before the mid-2030s, emissions will rise near term, making interim decarbonisation efforts urgent.

GAPS IN COAL FLEET

Despite NEP's vision of a declining role for coal, soaring demand has paused retirement plans, necessitating a pragmatic pivot towards optimising existing fleet for reduced emissions rather than solely relying on new RE addition. According to the Central Electricity Authority's CO2 database, India's 221-GW coal fleet is relatively young, with 57 per cent of capacity added in the last 15 years.

Performance efficiency of the technology deployed for generation and unit-level performance are key metrics for assessing decarbonisation potential. Efficiency is a percentage calculated by dividing the annual net electricity generated by the amount of fuel used, with an adjustment for the fuel's energy content. Higher efficiency results in lower coal usage and reduced CO2 emissions for per unit of electricity.

Centre for Science and Environment's (CSE's) assessment, published in *Decarbonizing the Coal-based Thermal Power Sector* last month, revealed high variation in efficiency and emissions across the subcritical fleet. Around 80 per cent of the coal fleet operates on subcritical technology. Only 166 of 455 subcritical units exceed the national average efficiency of 32 per cent, and very few meet the technology's efficiency benchmark of 35 per cent.

Interestingly, some units over 25 years old are among the better-performing ones, maintaining emission factors below 0.95 tonne/MWh, while one-fourth of the newer units emit over 1 tonne/MWh. High emissions stem from deeper performance gaps, not just age.

In the mid-2010s, India began transitioning to more efficient technologies, namely supercritical and ultra supercritical units, which can achieve peak efficiencies of 40 per cent and 44 per cent, respectively. Currently, all under construction capacity is based on these technologies. CSE's assessment found subcritical plants have a higher average plant load factor (PLF) of 68 per cent, compared to 62 per cent for supercritical and ultra supercritical plants.

Notably, 24 per cent of these newer units remain underutilised, running below half capacity. Conversely, their higher capacity use delivers peak performance alongside high emission reductions. Technical inefficiency is only a part of the problem; systemic policy issues influence plant operations and utilisation levels. India's Merit Order Dispatch system prioritises power generation from the lowest-cost sources. While the current policy reduces electricity prices, it overlooks environmental performance, often advantaging high emitting and pit head units above newer technology and low emitting units.

Coal consumption is unlikely to peak before the mid-2030s, emissions will rise near term, making interim decarbonisation efforts urgent

Discoms prefer purchasing from contracted units over open energy exchanges, regardless of environmental performance. The PPAs' lack of efficiency-based remuneration, discourages upgrades, locking in emission intensive supply and integrating even new units into legacy PPAs. This system remains invisible to financially stressed Discoms and uninformed consumers, masking embedded environmental costs. Shorter PPAs with an environmental metric to the dispatch order are necessary interventions going forward.

UNLOCKING REDUCTIONS

CSE's report outlines three levers for emission reduction, i.e., achieving benchmark efficiency, shifting more generation to supercritical and ultra supercritical units, and accelerating biomass co-firing. Our decarbonisation analysis estimates, if the entire fleet operated at the benchmark efficiency of the best-performing units, emissions would fall by 157 million tonne (mt) from the BAU (business-as-usual) scenario of 1,332 mt by 2031-32. This reduction is equivalent to the total annual emissions of India's iron and steel sector.

Shifting higher PLF to supercritical and ultra supercritical units would yield an additional 22.09 mt in emission reductions, equivalent to annual emissions of Sri Lanka or Bolivia, highlighting the carbon footprint embedded in India's misaligned power dispatch.

Furthermore, biomass co-firing offers dual benefits, reducing emissions from the coal fleet and curbing pollution from crop burning. With 20 per cent biomass successfully co-fired at NTPC's Tanda unit, scaling this approach nationwide is a logical policy progression. Together, these measures could reduce emissions by 433 mt, beyond the combined annual emissions of India's iron and steel and cement sectors.

As the Indian Carbon Market prepares to launch in 2026, it excludes the country's largest CO2 emitter, the power sector. The Supreme Court's nudge in *Ridhima Pandey vs Union of India*, for a roadmap to reduce power sector CO2 emissions comes at an opportune moment. Policy must adopt aggressive emission intensity targets, complemented by systemic reform in dispatch and generation practices. Decarbonising coal power can significantly aid India's climate goals.

Kumar and Goyal are members of the Sustainable Industrialization unit at Centre for Science and Environment, New Delhi

Robust selection process of police chiefs is working

RK Raghavan

Tamil Nadu is to have a new police chief at the end of the present incumbent's term later this month. Several other States will also be choosing new Heads of Police (HOPs) in the near future. Interestingly, independent of this, the government of India recently notified a slightly modified procedure for HOP appointment. While it is not very different from the one in vogue, which was laid down by the Supreme Court, what it has done is to prescribe a format for the States to follow while forwarding a panel of names to the Union Public Service Commission for its approval.

This procedure of consulting the UPSC was laid down by the Supreme Court in the famous *Prakash Singh* case. Singh was a Director General of Police of Uttar Pradesh, with a passion for police reforms. He relentlessly pursued his petition seeking autonomy for the police and greater merit in top police appointments. Success came in 2006 in the form of a comprehensive judgment that laid down, besides other things, a minimum tenure of two years for an appointee, irrespective of his/her date of retirement from the Indian Police Service.

The Centre's latest move is aimed at ensuring that no deserving candidate is left out of the reckoning, sometimes for non-professional reasons. It is widely known that State governments prefer to have an HOP who will not mind doing their bidding even if it meant violating existing norms.

The current position is that no officer with less than six months to go before retirement will be considered for selection as new chief. Also, he/she should already hold the rank of DGP. This is most sensible because we had earlier been witnessing the phenomenon of chiefs being appointed for ridiculously short terms — on the eve of their retirement, for either distinguished professionalism, or for out-of-the way favours shown by them in the discharge of their duties in contravention of accepted norms.

Cynics are inclined to believe that the procedure laid down by the Supreme Court is no guarantee of greater autonomy for the police or its head. They, however, ignore the fact that States will now hesitate to appoint an officer with an unsavoury reputation to lead a police force. The filtering process that is now available ensures respect for seniority and the need for tested and proven integrity at the highest leadership level.

CRIMINAL PROBES. Police need to grapple with political interference

MIXED RECORD

The Indian Police has a mixed record. The force's tough handling of terrorism and of elements that seek to disturb peace in our big cities needs to be appreciated. This explains how the country's territorial integrity has been maintained even after close to eight decades of Independence.

The police chiefs have shown mettle through professional monitoring of happenings in the field. This is why quality of leadership through strict selection has paid off in matters of public peace. It is political interference in matters of criminal investigation that has affected the image of the police. Many police chiefs have unfortunately yielded space for unprofessional handling of matters which require clinical policing.

Misconduct by police personnel at the grassroots has also sullied the force's image. The common impression is that senior police personnel do not spend the required time and effort to control this. This explains why the average law abiding citizen is reluctant to approach the police for assistance. This is an area where HOPs can make a huge difference. Constant interaction with the poorer sections of society and surprise field visits can bring about a qualitative change to policing. This aspect of policing is often ignored because of excessive preoccupation with inane departmental meetings that can be effectively handled by levels below the HOP.

In sum, a clinically chosen leader has a life time opportunity to build a police force that is not only professional but whose motto is compassion to the poorest of the poor.

The writer is a former CBI Director

thehindu businessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

August 7, 2005

Excess rainfall disrupts hydel power generation

While the monsoons have spruced up the overall generation of hydro electric power, the copious rains in the catchments areas of a number of the larger power projects, combined with heavy silting of rivers, have paradoxically led to disruption of power generation in large hydel projects in the west and northern parts of the country.

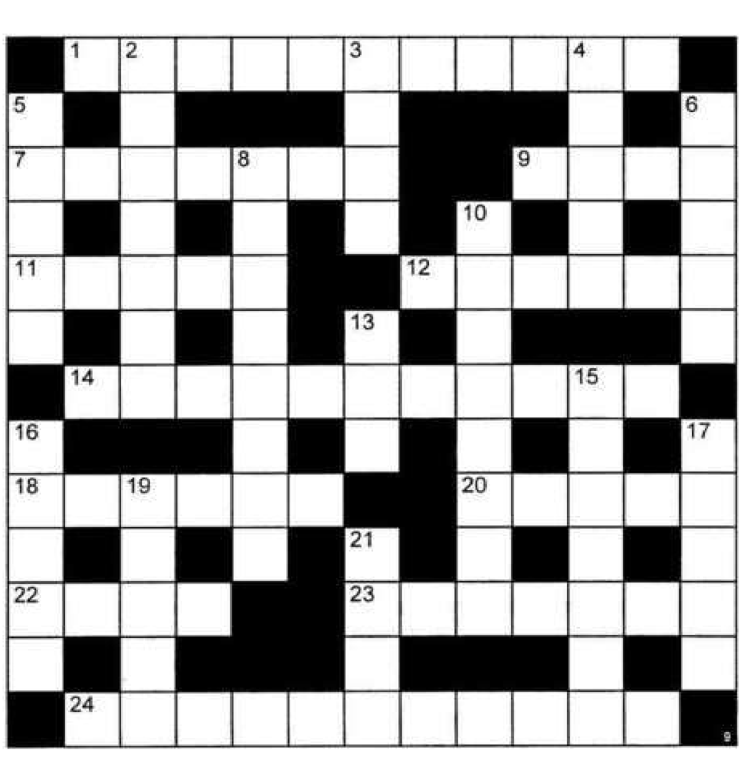
Public holding down in most Nifty companies

The sustained bull-run on the bourses for over two years has failed to lure small investors into the market in a big way. A good indicator of this trend is seen from the fall in public holding, which mostly includes investments of small investors, in most of the S&P CNX Nifty (Nifty) index companies.

PE firms — profit-booking to the fore in first six months

Private equity firms have been aggressively booking profits in the domestic market with exits crossing $1.1 billion in the first six months of the year. This was even as private equity firms made investments of $850 million upwards in the period. The first half of the year saw at least 12 high profile exits, with the largest one being Warbug Pincus' divestment of a big stake in Bharti.

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2756



EASY

ACROSS

01. Not distinctive enough to describe (11)
07. Crime against state (7)
09. Ready money (4)
11. Professorial office (5)
12. Baggage-handler (6)
14. Assume character of another (11)
18. Of late occurrence (6)
20. A mistake (5)
22. Facts given from which to infer others (4)
23. Slicing (7)
24. In good times only (friends) (4,7)

DOWN

02. Delivered with hand above shoulder (7)
03. Dispatch (4)
04. Growing thing (5)
05. Glued (5)
06. Spell; amulet (5)
08. NCO (8)
10. Relaxed, unworried (8)
13. Employ (3)
15. Destructive insect (7)
16. Woman marrying (5)
17. Hauls along (5)
19. A surplice (5)
21. 4840 square yards (4)

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

01. Second print put out is neither one thing nor the other (11)
07. Aren't so awkward as to make it a crime (7)
09. Get money for cheque as it's in church (4)
11. It's a professor's job to take the meeting (5)
12. Malt liquor, ruby wine and a half of beer (6)
14. Pretend to be another man to see RIP written out (11)
18. In the near past it shifted the centre (6)
20. Mistaken opinion back in summer, or recently (5)
22. Facts given US prosecutor on joining the Terriers (4)
23. A piece from the newspaper may be incisive (7)
24. It's just that we have change of heart, only in good times (4,7)

DOWN

02. Sort of bowling finished right in the morning (7)
03. Transmit sulphur and finish it (4)
04. It may be a police trap to put it in bed (5)
05. Can't go on giving first schoolboy his eatables (5)
06. Spell it with a flock of goldfinches (5)
08. Three-striper on the range set out (8)
10. Unemphatic movement of conductor's baton (8)
13. Take drugs regularly in various experiments (3)
15. Tim climbing in tree maybe finds the white-ant (7)
16. She's marrying the right one in the wrong bed (5)
17. Has a quick draw on fag, and is trailing (5)
19. To act may be awkward in a surplice (5)
21. Some land in port in Israel (4)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2755

ACROSS 1. Panther 5. Ample 8. Reverse 9. Argue 10. Sacrament 12. Née 13. Terse 17. Arm 19. Quartered 21. Khaki 22. Outline 24. Tasty 25. Terrace

DOWN 1. Parish 2. Novices 3. Her 4. Reeve 5. Apartment 6. Pagan 7. Eleven 11. Antiquity 14. Partita 15. Packet 16. Adhere 18. Means 20. About 23. Tar

DECCAN Chronicle

7 AUGUST 2025

India must stand up to Trump's tariff tantrum

It is laudable that India has taken a mature view of Donald Trump's tariff tantrums while using its right to point out the eccentricities. It is moot whether standing up to a bully will have the desired outcome because any negotiated settlement now may not bring the tariffs down from an extreme high of 50 per cent, which includes a fresh 25 per cent penalty for purchasing Russian energy that Trump imposed Wednesday just hours after his emissary Steve Witkoff's talks with Vladimir Putin yielded no breakthrough.

After such an outrageous gambit by the US President, India may be least inclined towards surrendering its sovereign right to secure its energy needs in a cost-effective way by buying Russian oil. Trump's supreme powers are said to be heavily employed in solving the world's military conflicts save the ones in Ukraine and Gaza, one of which he detests and the other he encourages.

Trump's disappointment at not being able to rein in Vladimir Putin may be reflected in his bizarre action against India in which he has taken tariffs to a record high. Russia's capacity to deter all US strategic and military moves, including a symbolic repositioning of two nuclear submarines, is well-known. It is one country with intercontinental-capable weaponry to forestall any forced détente through the carrot and stick of trade or stealth-bombing as the US President did with Iran.

When his insincere stand against India trading with Russia was challenged with the fact that the US was still buying from it fertilisers and chemicals, besides enriched uranium for nuclear fuel — and did so for more than $3 billion in 2024 — he did offer the excuse of not knowing this fact. That Trumpian tariff hostility was not aimed at the EU which traded freely with Russia in 2024 to the extent of $78 bn, including buying liquified natural gas worth more than $23 bn, exposes the double standards that both Trump and the EU, which has also threatened India with high tariffs, are guilty of.

Having failed to frighten China with impossible tariff rates like 150 per cent, Trump was forced to beat a retreat when China and Japan created panic in the US bond and stock markets by selling about $1 trillion worth US Treasury notes last April. He is now picking on an easy target like India that has, paradoxically, been a country friendly to the US if not quite a strategic ally, save in the loose Quad alignment.

It is obvious that the West is once again riding the moral high horse when it comes to dealing with India. The country is being singled out now for practising its own doctrine of strategic neutrality over decades while trading on its own terms with most of the world, including Russia and China.

India may not be doing itself a favour by pointing out the duplicity of the West, but the time to take a stand has been forced upon it, especially because Trump has ratcheted up the base rate to 50 per cent. Considering his whimsicality in announcing deadlines and tariff rates that are altered with the speed of a quick-change artiste, India's trade with the US may not be a lost cause yet.

India must pursue negotiations in an even-handed manner with the US trade team, regardless of what Trump and his aides have been saying in denouncing India, which is the whipping boy now. This is a challenging time, but it is also an opportunity to redefine who is an ally, friend or foe. It cannot have gone unnoticed that Russia is standing up for India in the war of trade and tariffs.

Rethink how to 'develop' hills

A massive cloudburst and flash floods that wreaked havoc at Dharali in Uttarkashi of Uttarakhand on Tuesday, killing at least five people and marooning nearly 70 people, is yet another grim reminder of climate change that is causing irreparable damage to the world.

The flash floods, according to locals, were the worst in the last 60 years. Almost half of the village — the main stopover on the way to Gangotri, which is a place of pilgrimage for Hindus — got buried under the fast flowing mudslide of slush, rubble and water. As a result, landslides blocked 163 roads impeding rescue missions.

Cloudbursts have been common for the ecological sensitive Himalayan region. However, there has been an increase in frequency and intensity for two reasons — global warming and local deforestation. While global warming has made rainfall extreme and erratic, bringing in higher volumes of water, deforestation and developmental activity removed trees that could anchor rain water flow on the Himalayas.

The massive devastation at Dharali, where several buildings fell as a pack of cards, brought back horrific memories of the 2013 deluge in Kedarnath and the 2021 Rishiganga disaster. All these are human-made disasters. While India alone cannot confront global warming, it can focus on what is in its hands — redefining development.

The government should make people realise that concrete buildings do not define development. While higher turnout of pilgrims would support the tourism economy for lakhs of people across the fold mountains, the associated construction activity is damaging Himalayas beyond repair.

Any drastic melting of the Himalayas would threaten the mighty Himalayan rivers, putting at risk the lives of nearly 200 crore people across India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet. It will also affect India's lifeline — the monsoon. This government, therefore, needs to evolve a developmental policy, which balances ecological concerns and people's livelihood.

DECCAN CHRONICLE

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Subhani

Loss of people's faith in EC puts Republic at risk

Shikha Mukerjee

The INDIA partners need to go beyond the disempowerment of voters. Thousands and thousands of people with MGNREGA job cards have not been paid in West Bengal, for instance.

The institution of the Election Commission, in its new avatar or in its constitutionally prescribed original form, has a function, a process to fulfil that function and discharge its responsibility. It is to enable people to exercise their right to vote, which can also be seen as the responsibility or duty of the sovereign, the individual voter, to decide who shall represent her/him and govern in her/his name.

The EC's job is to ensure every entitled voter, every citizen over 18, finds it easy to exercise her/his right to pick a representative through a secret ballot on the basis of universal adult franchise. The inclusion of all voters, enabling them to vote, is the EC's job, excluding 36 lakh names out of a total 7.9 crore voters in Bihar, following the Special Intensive Revision, is not the EC's job.

Saying these voters are untraceable or have permanently shifted, and another seven lakh voters were incorrectly enrolled, is not a sufficient reason to exclude any one of these 43 lakh previously enrolled voters. Migration out of a state has been listed by the EC as a reason for disempowerment. And migration was turned into a weapon to identify "Bangladeshi language" speakers, according to a Delhi police notice that reached Banga Bhavan, the West Bengal state house in Delhi. The EC's obsession with detecting illegal immigrants allegedly masquerading as citizens on the basis of fake documents is chilling.

This rigmarole of the EC deciding which documents are more credible as proof of citizenship compared to other documents has perplexed the voter, political parties and even the Supreme Court. Having spent over Rs 9,000 crores on including even newborns as part of the Aadhaar system that records address, name and age of persons, is mandatory as a proof of person for bank accounts that link a beneficiary of a direct cash transfer scheme, the EC's decision to reject it as identity proof is scarily similar to the BJP's continuing campaign against Bangladeshi-Rohingya infiltrators or illegals.

The victim of the EC's new avatar and new rules is the voter. Voters have a right to decide about participating in the voting process. Since the SIR list of voters is still at a "draft" stage, the fact is that 43 lakh missing or incorrectly enrolled voters may or may not be excluded. If even one voter is wrongly excluded due to the SIR process of SIR, that is a breach of trust, a failure of responsibility and the violation of a fundamental right.

The famed vibrancy of India's democracy is illustrated by the high voter turnout in most areas during elections. The flaws and fractures in India's democracy aren't usually debated as voter participation is around 60 per cent in Bihar, while in West Bengal it often exceeds 80 per cent, and in some places, like Nagaland, voter participation is 83 per cent or so, higher still in tiny little Lakshadweep represented by a single MP.

The Indian voter understands and knows the value of the vote. The voter understands that populist politics, often described as "cash-for-votes" politics of the Lakshmir Bhandar-Laldi Behena variety, is at its most frenzied when elections are due.

The voter understands and knows that the vote is a "cashable coupon". Therefore, excluding even one "genuine" voter, who is not the same as a "false" voter, is like disenfranchisement, amounting to real deprivation of the power to negotiate.

The exclusion of even one legitimate or genuine voter is the same as a deliberate step to disempower that voter. That is the discourse that is developing from the EC's SIR experiment, the high point of which is based on a suspicion that citizens are not citizens and must therefore prove that they are citizens. The proof required by the EC in Bihar's case, and which doubtless will be required for citizens of every state where SIRs are held later, has turned out to be the tale of a dog chasing its own tail, a vicious circle of manufacturing documents to establish that previous inclusion in the voters' list was not on the basis of other manufactured documents.

What it boils down to is this: the most vulnerable, the most marginalised, the daily wage worker, who may or may not be a migrant, is up against the State in a fight that is so unequal that she-he needs all the support that Opposition political parties, civil society and the media can give to prevent being excluded, stripped of rights and power and basically thrown out as waste, by the Election Commission.

The accusation against the EC's authority in its pilot SIR drive in Bihar, that the flawed revision is politically driven, are two factors: the BJP, which heads the minority government in New Delhi, is spectacularly aloof from among the protesters against the SIR process; two, members of the BJP and some allied parties that make up the majority coalition of the National Democratic Alliance government headed by Narendra Modi have been mostly silent and the ones who have said something have been singularly cautious, like JD(U) Banka MP Giridhari Yadav, who said he had doubts.

The weeks of controversy over the process of enrolling the sovereign, as in the voter in Bihar, through the Special Intensive Revision and its new rules of determining who shall be entitled to vote, has been a political dogfight. The Opposition under the INDIA banner is marshalling its forces to fight more.

The INDIA partners need to go beyond the disempowerment of voters. Thousands and thousands of people with MGNREGA job cards have not been paid in West Bengal, for instance. The penalty that MGNREGA job card holders have paid is because of New Delhi's reason that there are irreconcilable accounting problems on account of unsatisfactory utilisation certificates. The Narendra Modi government does not appear to appreciate that people who work on MGNREGA jobs are in desperate need of the paltry payouts, even after the Calcutta high court directed that payments cannot be withheld and the work programme needed to restart. The Modi government has now turned discrimination into a policy instrument.

The EC's actions are also discriminatory. The fact of the matter is that the EC's reputation has been soiled by accusations, always from the Opposition to the party in power, the Congress in the past, the BJP now, that it serves the interests of the ruling establishment. Never before, however, has there been a loss of public confidence in an institution on such a scale; the distrust destabilises the structure of the Republic and the idea of democracy.

Shikha Mukerjee is a senior journalist in Kolkata

LETTERS

TOP COURT IS RIGHT

The Supreme Court has correctly asked Rahul Gandhi to be an Indian and behave as an Indian. Peeved by the castigation, his sibling Priyanka Vadra says the Supreme Court is not competent to define Indianness. If the Supreme cannot instruct a person that too an MP to behave as an Indian who else is competent to do so? A person born in India should not speak ill of the defence forces who guard our borders 24 x 7 risking their lives. Priyanka should remember that she and her brother are MPs only as the representatives of the voters who are Indians and not of any outsiders.

S.Nagarajan Iyer
Coimbatore

PIVOTAL MOMENT

Prime Minister Modi's meeting with President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. marks a pivotal moment for India and the Philippines. Strengthening ties through trade, technology, and cultural exchange will foster mutual growth and resilience. Together, we can build a brighter future, empowering our nations and inspiring collaboration across the region.

TS KARTHIK
Chennai

ACT EAST

PHILIPPINES President Marcos Jr's visit to India signals a growing strategic alignment, driven by shared concerns over China's assertiveness. Defence ties have strengthened since the 2022 BrahMos missile deal, with recent joint naval drills underscoring trust. As the Philippines prepares to chair Asean, India's Act East Policy gains urgency. With waning faith in the US, Manila sees New Delhi as a more reliable partner. Agreements on visa-free travel, direct Delhi-Manila flights, and sovereign data storage reflect expanding cooperation. Marcos Jr's visit to Bengaluru highlights interest in India's tech sector. India must act decisively in the Indo-Pacific, forging durable regional partnerships.

R.S. Narula
Patiala

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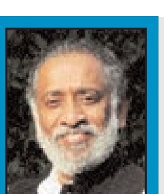

Dilip Cherian

Dilli Ka Babu

Delhi gets a top cop, but no end to uncertainty

In Lutyens' Delhi, nothing says continuity like an ad hoc appointment. And the recent move to place senior IPS officer S.B.K. Singh at the helm of Delhi Police on additional charge, no less, is a case study in how to make a statement while dodging one.

To be sure, there's a quiet satisfaction in the ranks. After years of watching outsiders parachuted into the top job, officers from the AGMUT cadre are finally seeing one of their own in the chair. That Mr Singh, a 1988-batch officer, is known to the system and carries institutional memory, makes the move feel like a return to form.

But then there's the fine print. Six months. Additional charge. Retirement is around the corner. Déjà vu, anyone? Those with long memories recall a similar baton pass with S.N. Shrivastava, another interim commissioner whose elevation came just before superannuation. That pattern isn't lost on the force.

So, what's the subtext here? A stopgap? A placeholder till something (or someone) else aligns? No one's saying it aloud, but the appointment seems designed to avoid rocking any boats while still keeping up appearances.

Insiders might be relieved, but they're not blind. An ad-hoc title rarely comes with full authority. And when the top cop has a ticking clock overhead, it's hard to chart a long-term course. For now, Delhi Police has a familiar face in charge. Whether it also has stable leadership remains to be seen.

GLASS CEILINGS MEET FOREST CANOPIES

It's not every day that a general body meeting of a civil service association generates actual buzz. But the Indian Forest Service (IFoS) Association has done just that, and without so much as a chainsaw. For the first time, its national executive is entirely led by women. And no, this isn't a diversity sidebar, it's the main story.

Jyotsna Sitling, a pioneer in her own right, now serves as Patron. At the helm is Anita Karan as President, with Monalisa Dash as Secretary-General, and a powerhouse lineup including Surbhi Rai, Suvvena Thakur, and Chestha Singh. It's not just a team; it's a statement that says competence, commitment, and calm authority come in all genders.

Not to romanticise it, though, these women officers didn't get here on slogans or tokenism. They've trudged through real jungles, not just bureaucratic ones. They've worked on the frontlines of conservation, battled forest fires (literal and institutional), and shaped environmental policy where it matters.

In a service long dominated by khaki-clad machismo and safari-hatted stereotypes, this quiet shift is no less than radical. It's also timely. As climate crises accelerate and biodiversity collapses, the forest service needs less swagger and more stewardship. This team seems poised to deliver exactly that.

So the Indian Forest Service just made history. But more importantly, it might be rewriting the future, one green leaf and one bold decision at a time.

THE QUIET REACH OF POWER

Some stories never make it to file notings or press briefings. They move in murmurs, exchanged in lift lobbies and murmured across dinner tables. One such story is circulating quietly now, involving a pair of student activists, a Delhi Police unit better known for its counterterrorism work, and a brutal episode of alleged custodial torture.

According to Lakshita and Gurkirat, the beatings they endured, allegedly with leather whips, no less, weren't the result of political provocation or subversive action. The reason, they say, was far more banal and yet more chilling. A personal dispute involving a well-placed official's family.

The dots aren't hard to connect for those in the know. The bureaucratic grapevine points toward a senior officer from the 1995 batch, currently helming a national mission in the water sector, and reportedly well-networked in the right circles. Her name isn't in the FIR, of course. It wouldn't be. That's not how these things work.

But the very idea that a private grievance could, allegedly, set off a chain of events leading to days of illegal detention and physical abuse by a specialised police unit that has set alarm bells ringing. Or at least ought to.

No outrage, no press statements. Just a ripple of unease in the system. Just whispers. And in Delhi, whispers often say more than official press releases ever will. The kind that remind everyone of what power looks like when it's exercised off the record, and off the leash.

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DECCAN HERALD
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In Gaza, hunger as a weapon of war

The genocide and famine engineered by Israel in Gaza have raised new questions to a world that has continued to fail with answers. A humanitarian crisis of unimaginable proportions has unfolded in Gaza after the Israeli government imposed a near-total siege and prevented all aid from reaching the strip, while continuing military action. The situation may be political and diplomatic, but at its core is a deeply moral issue. During the Holocaust, the world did not have knowledge of the full extent of the atrocities. But the genocide in Gaza is taking place in full view of the world – a section of the international community is complicit by supporting Israel, while others are unable to stop it for various reasons. Evidence has emerged on widespread starvation, malnutrition, and disease causing a spike in hunger-related deaths. Malnutrition levels among children under five have reached 16.5%.

Israel has violated all tenets of morality and international law. The International Court of Justice has passed strictures against the regime and acknowledged the risk of genocide in Gaza. The United Nations and major international humanitarian bodies such as Amnesty International and Doctors Without Borders have expressed serious concern over the situation in Gaza. More than at any time in history, hunger is being used as a weapon of war. Access to water is restricted and there are severe curbs on supply of fuel and other commodities. Not even basic medical facilities are available and offers of medical aid and assistance are turned away. As much as 92% of the houses in Gaza have been destroyed and forced displacement orders have been issued in about 86% of the territory. The Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, set up by Israel and the US, is a cruel joke, running just four distribution centres against the 400 that the UN and the other agencies had operated.

Starvation, malnutrition, and disease trigger deaths as Israel plans a bigger offensive

After the failure of the indirect ceasefire and hostage release talks in Doha, there are reports of Israel planning a bigger offensive for the "conquest of Gaza". The talks had aimed at a 60-day truce, inflow of aid, and exchange of half of the Israeli hostages with jailed Palestinians in Israel. There is opposition in Israel to the extension of war, but Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has sounded determined and US President Donald Trump supportive. The UN Conference on Palestine has proposed a two-state solution and some of the major countries, including France and the UK, have decided to recognise a Palestinian state. More than 145 countries have recognised Palestine. The question the world must answer is why it has failed to recognise and act on the basic human responsibility to the people of Palestine.

Fighting hate and other poisons

The Karnataka government has issued a 25-point Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) in response to two alarming cases of water poisoning in government schools, one in Belagavi and another in Shivamogga. While both incidents raise grave concerns about child safety, the Belagavi incident is particularly sinister. Here, several students were hospitalised after a drinking water tank was poisoned in a communal plot to malign the school's Muslim headmaster and engineer his transfer. The three accused, including Sri Ram Sene leader Sagar Patil, have been remanded to judicial custody.

The fact that children were targeted to further a hate-driven agenda exposes the grotesque extremes of religious fundamentalism. That the perpetrators believed they could act with such brazenness speaks of a deeper malaise: the normalisation of bigotry in politics. It is indeed concerning that when political ideologies turn into blind hatred, even innocent children are not spared. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has rightly questioned if Sri Ram Sene chief Pramod Muthalik or BJP leaders like B Y Vijayendra and R Ashoka would take responsibility for the incident. Yet, the BJP's silence has been deafening – no condemnation, no demand for a probe, no outrage. When children's lives are endangered, selective outrage is not just hypocrisy; it is complicity.

The SOP is welcome but there are larger battles to be fought against hateful ideologies

The government's SOP is a welcome and necessary step. Headmasters are now required to inspect school premises before classes begin, check for contamination or odour in water, and ensure water tanks are locked. Lavatories must be kept clean, first-aid kits must be maintained, and inspection details updated daily on the Students' Achievement Tracking System (SATS) portal. The Deputy Director of Public Instruction (DDPI), Block Education Officers (BEOs), and nodal officers are required to conduct regular checks. But this is not enough; the SOP will remain only on paper unless senior officers face consequences for lapses. Children should never be collateral damage in someone else's war; their lives should not be compromised, whether by poisoning, prejudice, or poor hygiene. However, the larger battle is against the ideological poison that has enabled this crime. The Belagavi incident cannot be seen as merely criminal. The accused should be prosecuted under the harshest laws. But beyond the courtroom, society must confront the hatred that fuels such violence. Politicians who stoke division, fringe groups that act with impunity, and citizens who remain indifferent are all to blame. The choice before us is clear: stand together and resist this toxic agenda or remain passive as hatred corrodes the very fabric of our society.

BUILDING RESILIENCE

Swadeshi call and the Goldilocks myth

India cannot become a "just right" economy without robust demand, real wages, and income distribution

DEEPANSHU MOHAN AND ANKUR SINGH

India is on the march to become the world's third-largest economy. In a recent address, Prime Minister Narendra Modi reaffirmed that amid global instability, India must remain focused on its economic priorities. His remarks came a day after the US President labelled India "a dead economy" while announcing a 25% tariff on Indian imports. Addressing traders and shopkeepers, the Prime Minister urged, "At a time when the world is going through uncertainty, let us take a pledge to sell only Swadeshi goods from our shops." Promoting 'Made in India' output, he said, is the truest service to the nation.

India's strategy to leverage its domestic market, turning MSMEs inward, makes sense, but only if the macroeconomic environment supports robust middle-income consumption. A closer look at the latest data reveals worrying trends across demand, incomes, and growth fundamentals. While India's headline CPI inflation cooled to 2.82% year-on-year in May 2025, the lowest since early 2019, this apparent success masks considerable volatility beneath the surface. Food inflation, which constitutes nearly half the average household's spending basket, dropped from 10.87% in October 2024 to 0.99% by May 2025. But this sharp fall follows months of intense strain. In real terms, a family trying to plan their grocery budget has endured swings that destabilise purchasing power and eating habits, even if headline numbers appear tamed. Volatility, in itself, is a form of economic insecurity.

Even when prices stabilise, the damage from earlier spikes persists. The impact is not merely arithmetic; it is emotional and social. Families substitute protein with starch, defer healthcare, and reduce schooling-related costs. These are choices made not in policy briefings but in kitchens and classrooms. This fragility, if unacknowledged, renders macroeconomic optimism hollow.

Meanwhile, real wages continue to lag. While average salary hikes have stayed in the 6 to 9% range, real wage growth has varied from as low as -0.4% in 2020 to 4% in 2025. In key industries such as manufacturing, FMCG, and IT, wage growth is increasingly outpaced by inflation. For most workers, a 9% raise quickly loses meaning when grocery bills, school fees, and rent consume nearly all of it. Incomes rise, but aspirations stall.

This disconnect between growth and lived experience breeds what economists call a "silent squeeze", a situation where households are technically earning more but are feeling poorer. The erosion in real purchasing power leads to reduced discretionary spending, rising debt reliance, and long-term stress, especially among the lower middle class and urban youth. Sectors like engineering, infrastructure, and consumer services have reported the lowest effective salary gains. Without sustained growth in real income, India's consumption engine, arguably its greatest internal strength, remains constrained.

While some policymakers cite improving income inequality metrics, such as the marginal fall in the Gini coefficient for taxable income, these figures are misleading. They exclude the vast informal sector and do not reflect asset-based inequality, which has only grown. The apparent narrowing of the income gap within the formal tax net tells us little about the widening chasm between the salaried class and the ultra-wealthy, or between urban professionals and informal workers. Inequality today is not just about money; it is about access to quality healthcare, digital tools, education, and opportunity.

Further complicating the picture is the fiscal space where the government operates. The fiscal deficit for 2025-26 is targeted at 4.4%of GDP, and revenue deficit at 1.5%. These are steps towards consolidation, but they also reflect constraints. India's gross borrowings are estimated at Rs 14.8 lakh crore, and the public debt-to-GDP ratio remains close to 57% in 2024-25. While such borrowing may be necessary for infrastructure and welfare spending, it limits room for future countercyclical measures. In effect, the State has less freedom to cushion shocks, whether from global demand collapses or climate disruptions.

Growth beyond GDP

This narrow fiscal bandwidth also inhibits deeper investment in critical public services, health, education, and urban infrastructure; at the moment, they are needed most. As urbanisation accelerates and climate threats multiply, India cannot afford a growth path that is numerically sound but socially brittle.

What emerges is a picture far removed from the harmonious balance implied by the term 'Goldilocks'. The Indian economy today is growing, but not equitably. Inflation is falling, but its aftershocks linger. Fiscal policy is disciplined, but constrained. Incomes are rising, but unevenly. This dissonance between macroeconomic aggregates and ground-level realities is more than a statistical glitch; it is the central economic challenge of our time.

The discourse around a 'Goldilocks' economy often focuses on alignment between growth, inflation, and interest rates. But equilibrium on paper cannot mask disequilibrium in society. The aspirational promise of a "just right" economy cannot be fulfilled unless the foundations, demand, income distribution, real wages, and fiscal capacity are strong and inclusive. Rhetoric on self-reliance must be accompanied by the material ability of people to rely on themselves. Otherwise, a call to sell Swadeshi becomes symbolic, not structural.

India's path to long-term prosperity lies not in chasing flattering economic labels but in accepting the complexity of its present and committing to correcting its contradictions. That means investing not just in roads and ports, but in human capital and income stability. It means reframing success beyond GDP growth and anchoring it in the lived experience of the majority. Unless these difficult truths are acknowledged and addressed at the highest policy levels, the idea of India as a self-sustaining, internally resilient economy may remain a slogan rather than a strategy. And the myth of a macroeconomic sweet spot, like the Goldilocks tale itself, will belong more to fiction than to the future.

(Deepanshu is a professor of economics at the Jindal School of Liberal Arts and Humanities, O P Jindal Global University; Ankur is a research analyst at the university's Centre for New Economics Studies)

RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE

Saving the sparrows

I listened to the melodious chirping of the sparrows, feeling happy I'd played a small part in saving them

VENUGOPALA RAO KAKI

My wife and I were engrossed in a TV programme in our room, enjoying the relief provided by the ceiling fan running full speed on a scorching summer day. The sound of fluttering wings and ceaseless chirping outside caught our attention, and we peeped through the window to see a couple of sparrows perched on the compound, chirping away.

"Let them be there," my spouse said with a smile. "No problem. They just keep chirping, and that's wonderful."

Just then, the sparrows flew into the room through the window and perched on the windowsill, fluttering their wings and chirping incessantly. I wasn't bothered by their presence or the chirping, but the revolving ceiling fan at high speed made me anxious. I feared they might fly across the room, hit the fan, and get hurt.

The thought made me tense, so I immediately rose from my chair and switched off the fan. The fan stopped. As I feared, the sparrows began flying across the room, chirping ceaselessly. I tried to shoo them off, but it was no use. The room was stuffy, and both of us were sweating profusely.

My wife looked uncomfortable, so I opened the main door, hoping fresh air would flow in and the sparrows would fly out. However, they landed on a flower vase and continued chirping, refusing to exit through the main door. They flew back to the windowsill, still chirping, and I sat down, unsure how to drive them away. I kept gazing at them.

Twenty minutes passed, and we were transfixed by the chirping sparrows. With the television switched off, their chirping interrupted the silence that was pervading the room. We just waited.

Finally, they flew out of the open window, and I breathed a sigh of relief. I switched on the ceiling fan, feeling grateful that the sparrows had been saved from potential harm. "Thank God," I muttered to myself.

Standing on the verandah, I listened to the melodious chirping of the sparrows perched on a nearby tree, feeling satisfied that I'd played a small part in saving these birds, which are rapidly vanishing from urban spaces.

Their declining numbers, due to urbanisation, pesticide use, and loss of nesting spaces, are a concern. It is our collective responsibility to save them from extinction.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The West stands exposed

The recent statement by US President Donald Trump threatening to raise tariffs on India (Will raise tariffs on India in next 24 hrs: Trump, Aug 6) highlights the glaring double standards of Western powers. The West has criticised India for purchasing discounted Russian commodities while overlooking its own continued engagements with Russia in energy and critical sectors. India's firm response, asserting its sovereign right to choose trade partners and uphold strategic autonomy, is welcome. The West's moral posturing, invoking Ukraine as a justification for punitive measures, rings hollow when it ignores the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza. Trump's fraternisation with Pakistan's army chief, even as India mourns the Pahalgam terror attack, is diplomatically tone-deaf and geopolitically provocative. Such moves risk eroding trust. Indo-US relations now face the threat of derailment due to Trump's short-sighted diplomacy.

N Sadhasiva Reddy, Bengaluru

Balance is key

Indo-US relations are at a crucial stage and require careful handling. Any setback could jeopardise the future of Indian students pursuing higher education in the US, as well as the large number of engineers, doctors, and immigrants who serve as a link between the two countries. It is essential to exercise utmost caution and not let trade issues dominate the relationship. A balanced approach, considering the multifaceted ties between the two nations, is necessary to strengthen and improve relations.

V Padmanabhan, Bengaluru

Focus on health

I refer to 'Single mutation in gene may be behind sudden heart attacks'(6 August). It highlights the complexity of cardiomyopathy. However, it is not just genetic factors that contribute to heart problems; lifestyle and environmental factors also play a significant role. Family tensions, poor diet, lack of physical activity, and uncontrolled pollution can all increase the risk of heart disease, particularly among young people. The government must take urgent action to address these issues, including creating public awareness about heart health and promoting healthy lifestyles. School education should include curriculum on heart health, and the government should prioritise solutions to social problems related to youth. By working together, we can reduce the incidence of heart attacks among young people and promote a healthier society.

J A Nathan, Bengaluru

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

SPEAK OUT

...Donald Trump is repeatedly imposing tariffs on India... What kind of friend is Trump to PM Modi?...

Anand Dubey, Shiv Sena (UBT) leader (On US President Trump imposing an additional 25% tariff on India over Russian oil purchases)

Friendship, n. A ship big enough to carry two in fair weather, but only one in foul.

Ambrose Bierce

TO BE PRECISE

IN PERSPECTIVE

Restoring hope for jailed children

Misreporting of age leaves thousands of children in adult prisons. A court ruling promises corrective action

ANANT KUMAR ASTHANA AND SANGAPPA VAGGAR

On July 25, the Karnataka High Court, speaking through a bench comprising Justice S. Sunil Dutt Yadav and Justice Ramachandra D. Huddar, delivered a judgement groundbreaking in terms of its judicial strategy and moral gravity within the realm of child rights. It has the potential to fundamentally reshape the course of action to be adopted by Juvenile Justice Boards when it comes to children wrongly incarcerated as adults in prisons.

This landmark ruling addresses the egregious case of an individual who had to endure 13 years long imprisonment in an adult prison, only for the court to subsequently discover and confirm that he was a minor at the time of the alleged offence and could not have been sent to jail at all. This case highlights the critical need for meticulous age determination and consistent adherence to the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015, and to the recently enacted Karnataka Juvenile Justice Rules 2025, which together lay down a comprehensive framework for the care, protection, development, and rehabilitation of children in conflict with the law.

This judgement becomes important in the context of the prevailing state of affairs regarding the treatment of young individuals within India's criminal justice system. A report released last year by iProbono, titled 'Children in Indian Prisons', had revealed that despite the existence of clear legislation like the Juvenile Justice Act of 2015, minors continue to be unlawfully lodged in adult prisons across the country. Their report had found that at least 9,681 children were illegally incarcerated in adult prisons between January 2016 and December 2021. It was in 2015 that this problem was acknowledged by lawmakers and a provision was added in the Juvenile Justice Act empowering Juvenile Boards to inspect adult prisons to trace minors lodged there and to divert them to Juvenile Justice from Jails.

Minors are often treated as adults due to faulty age determination or the absence of an investigation into the age of the accused persons at the time of arrest. This systemic violation frustrates the Juvenile Justice strategy and leads to higher rates of recidivism instead of reform and rehabilitation.

The High Court's landmark ruling emerged from an appeal in a murder case, uncovering a profound miscarriage of justice. The accused, who had been incarcerated since 2012, was discovered upon review to have been a minor at the time of the alleged offence – a critical detail overlooked during his original trial. This grave oversight meant he was unlawfully tried and imprisoned as an adult, directly contravening the Juvenile Justice Act, which mandates that minors be presented before a Juvenile Justice Board within 24 hours.

Recognising this fundamental violation, the court formally declared him a child in conflict with the law and, in a significant move, directed the Yadgir Juvenile Justice Board to order his compensation according to Rule 6 of the recently enacted 2025 Karnataka Juvenile Justice Rules.

A pathway to reform

This case shows a larger systemic malice prevalent in the criminal legal system across India. Children are often denied the protection of juvenile justice law. In many instances, their age is misreported or intentionally altered, leading to minors being prosecuted as adults. Without proper oversight, these children are sent to regular magistrate courts and from there, to the adult prisons. Karnataka, by framing its 2025 Rules, has become the first state in the country to provide a comprehensive framework to address this systemic issue.

Rule 6 mandates jail inspections by the JJBs, the framing of jail reference by the JJB to the concerned court for prompting a judicial inquiry into the age of the lodged individual, immediate transfer of wrongly held juveniles, legal accountability of the officials, and access to financial compensation for the affected children.

The July 25 judgement is more than just a corrective and compensatory verdict; it strongly affirms the need for institutional accountability and a child-sensitive justice system. It activates previously unused legal provisions and establishes a precedent for the active involvement of the Juvenile Justice Boards. This serves as a reminder that justice, even if delayed, can still be meaningful if the system is willing to correct its errors. The Karnataka High Court's decision should now serve as a model for judicial and administrative reforms throughout India, aiming to ensure that no child's future is lost in jails due to neglect, error, or oversight of those responsible for providing care and protection.

(Anant is a senior child rights and criminal justice lawyer practising at the Delhi High Court; Sangappa teaches Social Work at Bengaluru City University)

Corruption to citizenship: Sarma's eviction drive recasts poll battle in Assam

DATELINE GUWAHATI

SUMIR KARMAKAR

'*Juj ekhon hobo...*' (There will be a fight), Congress leader Gaurav Gogoi declared in May this year, shortly after being appointed president of the party's Assam unit. Gogoi, the son of three-time Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi, was referring to the Assembly elections scheduled for early next year. The mood in the Congress camp was upbeat, buoyed by negative publicity surrounding Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and the BJP over an alleged cattle procurement and distribution scam involving cattle from Gujarat's Gir region that rocked state politics in May. Senior BJP leaders, including Cabinet Ministers and the party's state unit president and Lok Sabha member Dilip Saikia, appeared visibly worried as the Opposition geared up to corner the saffron party and its allies ahead of the polls.

So confident was the Congress that Rahul Gandhi, addressing a rally in Chaygaon near Guwahati on July 16, claimed that CM Sarma would be jailed for corruption once his party came to power in Assam next year.

Just as the Congress was sharpening its attack on the BJP over corruption and its alleged failure to deliver, Sarma launched a massive eviction drive on June 16 in Goalpara, a district with a large Muslim population. Over 1,700 families, mostly Bengali-speaking Muslims, were evicted from a wetland and a reserve forest. Within about 45 days, similar eviction drives were carried out in the Dhubri, Lakhimpur, Nalbari, and Golaghat districts, displacing over 5,000 families, all Bengali-speaking Muslims.

Sarma was unapologetic. He blatantly declared in public that his government would not evict the "indigenous population" as they are not considered as encroachers. "The eviction will be done against the suspected foreigners only," Sarma told reporters on August 2. BJP considers the Bengali-speaking Muslims as "illegal migrants" from neighbouring Bangladesh and as a "threat" to Assam's indigenous communities, who dominate the state politics. By repeatedly targeting the Bengali-speaking Muslims, Sarma shifted the political narrative from Congress' pitch for a fight against corruption to a familiar BJP rallying cry: the fight against "foreigners". It is an issue that has shaped Assam's elections since the 1980s, if not earlier.

The BJP and CM Sarma have claimed that most of those evicted from forests, wetlands, and other government land are "doubtful citizens". Sarma has also alleged that many of the evicted families from North Assam's Lakhimpur and eastern Assam's Golaghat district already own land in their "home districts", mainly in Barpeta, Goalpara and Dhubri in the western part of the state.

"They are spreading to central and upper Assam as part of a larger plot for demographic invasion over the indigenous communities," he claimed. "We failed to prevent such an invasion in lower Assam; now they are trying to expand into the rest of the state," Sarma said. He said that the BJP-led government has so far reclaimed 1.49 lakh bighas of government and forest land since it formed its first government in 2016.

Badruddin Ajmal-led AIUDF, an opposition party that mainly represents the Muslims in Assam, however, questioned BJP, saying that the evicted persons are Indian citizens who got enrolled in the National Register of Citizens (NRC) by submitting pre-1971 documents. The NRC, an outcome of the anti-foreigners movement or Assam Agitation between 1979 and 1985, was updated with March 24, 1971, as the cut-off date, and 19.06 lakh (out of 3.29 crore) applicants were dropped from the draft list released in 2018. The cut-off date was also endorsed by the Supreme Court in October last year.

Organisations representing the Muslims in Assam (about 35%) have also claimed that many had settled in forests and other government land after their land was eroded by the Brahmaputra. "This government is questioning the citizenship of the Muslims to win the hearts of the Hindus, who are now very unhappy over its failure to fulfil its promise about solving the long-standing foreigners problem," a leader of the All Assam Minority Students' Union said.

"Many Muslims have even been declared foreigners by Foreigner Tribunals and were forcefully sent to Bangladesh ahead of elections with the same agenda," he said.

The Congress claims that the BJP-led government was targeting the Muslims to polarise voters and divert attention from the alleged corruption and the failures ahead of Assembly elections. "Sarma is not concerned about the people. He will soon hand over the land to Adani, Ambani and Ramdev. CM Sarma is targeting the Muslims only, but he is not responding to questions over the large quantity of land his family and his ministers have taken in the past few years," Gogoi said recently.

Gogoi has said that Congress is against the settlement of a single foreigner in Assam but has not made it clear whether the party supports the evicted persons or not.

BJP was quick to respond to Gogoi's stand. "The Congress party, during its prolonged tenure in power, had transformed Assam into a fertile ground for illegal Bangladeshi migrants. Therefore, no genuine indigenous citizen of Assam can trust such a claim from a Congress leader," BJP said in a statement.

CM Sarma on August 4 claimed that more than 29 bighas of government land were still being illegally occupied and it needs another five years to clear the land from encroachers. He also appealed to the residents not to give shelter to those evicted so far. "Our people should not give them shelter."

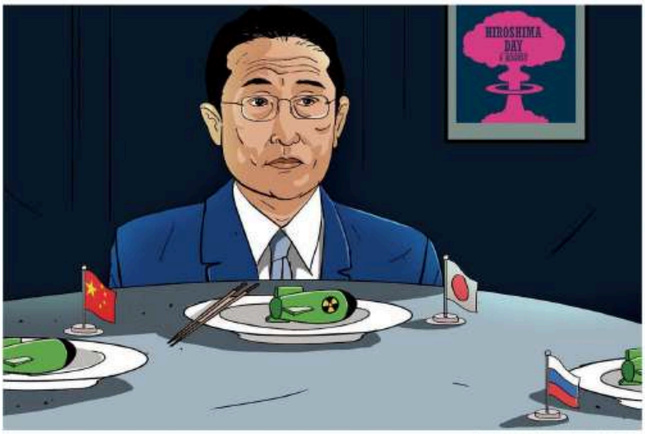
Meanwhile, taking advantage of the emotions over the eviction drives, some local organisations in the Assamese-dominated Sivasagar district have asked the Bengali-speaking Muslims, particularly labourers and small traders, to quit.

DHNS

The country's postwar Constitution is under scrutiny as Japan rebuilds its military, spooked by a rising China and other potential threats

Why Japan is rethinking its peace vow

HANNAH BEECH



DH ILLUSTRATION: DEEPAK HARICHANDAN

Nine nations now possess nuclear weapons, which can obliterate and irradiate human settlements in an instant. But only twice have they been used: 80 years ago when the destructive technology was in its infancy and in the hands of a single country. On August 6, 1945, in a drastic move thought to have hastened Japan's surrender in World War II, the United States dropped an atomic bomb on the western Japanese city of Hiroshima. A US bomber called the Enola Gay released the 9,700-pound weapon that detonated nearly 2,000 feet in the air, creating a massive mushroom cloud and searing the city with temperatures of up to 7,200 degrees Fahrenheit. The blast and its fallout extinguished about 140,000 lives by the end of the year.

Three days later, another American bomber dropped a second atomic bomb on Nagasaki, to the southwest, killing another 70,000 people. The destruction was followed by Japan's submission days later, ending its decades of brutal conquest. But the bombings also announced a more terrifying age in which human innovation could spark destruction on a previously unimaginable scale. As the flattened city of Hiroshima was rebuilt, it dedicated itself to promoting peace. Survivors of the atomic bombing have campaigned for a world free of nuclear weapons. But 80 years on, that dream is fading. Three of Japan's neighbours — Russia, China and North Korea — are nuclear powers, and Tokyo depends on the American nuclear umbrella to protect it. With tensions in the Pacific heightening and firsthand memories of nuclear devastation waning, more Japanese are questioning the national commitment to peace at all costs.

Why did Japan go all-in on pacifism after World War II?

The Americans forced it to. The Imperial Japanese Armed Forces' harsh invasion of much of Asia, its shock attack on Pearl Harbor and its willingness to sacrifice a generation of young soldiers for the empire, made the victorious Americans adamant that the country should never again wage war. Japan's so-called "peace constitution," drafted by the Americans who occupied the country for nearly seven years, forever renounced war. Its Article 9 has been interpreted to mean that Japan should never possess a military with offensive capabilities. In return, the US promised to defend Japan should it come under attack. The security treaty made Japan a beneficiary of the theory of nuclear deterrence, in which the fear of nuclear retaliation is thought to deter a first-strike attack.

So why does Japan have a military?

To take into account these constitutional limitations, Japan's military is called the Self-Defence Forces. It cannot take on combat roles in international conflicts. But that hasn't stopped Japan from expanding its arsenal to counter potential threats from Asian neighbours such as China that, in turn, worry about Japan's rearmament, given its wartime record. If budget hikes continue, Japan will soon be among the world's top military spenders.

What do Japanese think of rearming?

While many in the older generations worry about Japan's waning commitment to pacifism, younger Japanese tend to be more sanguine. Supporters of a military expansion say Japan shouldn't be forced into a defensive crouch forever, especially with security threats ratcheting up in the Pacific. (Japan also has territorial disputes with China, Russia and the two Koreas.) They worry that the US may not be a constant security guarantor for Japan, especially under President Donald Trump, who has criticised Japan for relying too heavily on the presence of US military bases. And with firsthand memories of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki disappearing, most Japanese are now removed from the kind of searing testimony that underwrote the country's pacifist, nonnuclear stance. Nippon Kaigi, an ultranationalist political bloc that aims to revise Article 9 of the constitution, has significant support among lawmakers from the governing Liberal Democratic Party. Amending the constitution was once unthinkable; it's now a political talking point.

What about nukes?

Nihon Hidankyo, a group representing atomic bomb survivors, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize last year for its campaign to rid the world of nuclear weapons. But Japan has never signed the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. In 2023, Fumio Kishida, then the prime minister of Japan, supported a statement at a Group of 7 summit he hosted in the city that implied nuclear deterrence might bring its own kind of peace. NYT

Hiroshima: Beyond the memorial

The Japanese city stands synonymous with peace. From the ashes of nuclear devastation, Hiroshima — along with the city of Nagasaki, which was bombed three days later — was rebuilt and regenerated. Burned and sickened by radiation, many of Hiroshima's survivors forgave. They wove pacifism into their DNA, the vanguards of a vanquished nation that cast off decades of imperialism.

Ever since 1949, when the Peace Memorial City Construction Law was enacted, Hiroshima has hosted conferences, concerts, musicals and mime performances, all in the name of peace. In 2024, a group representing Japanese atomic bomb survivors was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, to honor its campaign to eradicate nuclear weapons.

The survivors of the atomic bombings — August 6 at Hiroshima, and August 9 at Nagasaki — are now 80 years old or more. This anniversary will likely be the last major remembrance to include firsthand accounts of what splitting uranium and plutonium atoms wrought: flayed flesh, irradiated babies, maggot-infested burns and decades of radiation-induced disease.

Even as Hiroshima sells peace-branded mochi treats and hand towels, the nearby port town of Kure exists in counterpoise. Once home to the largest Imperial Navy base and arsenal, Kure is a beneficiary of Japan's current military expansion. The country's largest warship docks here, and a former steelyard is slated to become another naval facility. At a military history museum, origami cranes from Hiroshima's Peace Memorial Park are recycled into paper fans emblazoned with the Yamato, Japan's "unsinkable" World War II battleship, which was eventually torpedoed by the Americans. "People are realising that peace will not come just by praying," said Masanari Tade, the son of a Hiroshima survivor who died at 50. Like many who suffered, Tade's father refused official status as an atomic bomb victim because of the stigma attached to those subjected to radiation. Tade is now the Hiroshima head of Nippon Kaigi, an ultranationalist political bloc that wants to revise the constitutional clause banning a conventional military. "The lack of peace, the lack of nuclear nonproliferation, in and of itself, this is proof that the symbol of Hiroshima as a peace city has failed," he said. NYT

J M Kumarappa and the Tagore we forgot

LAWRENCE SURENDRA

On Tagore's death anniversary, let us try to retrieve him from the collective amnesia that has overtaken our understanding of his life and his contributions to education and the nurturing of young minds for the future. Many drew inspiration from Tagore – among them was J M Kumarapppa, whose doctoral thesis at Columbia University examined Tagore's philosophy of education. Published in 1930, it was titled *Rabindranath Tagore – India's School Master*.

J M Kumarappa was the elder brother of the famous Kumarappa brothers, J C Kumarappa and Bharatan Kumarappa, who bequeathed to us Gandhi's collected works. According to Deepak Malghan, biographer of J C Kumarappa, Bharatan was trained as a philosopher and Sanskrit scholar. He obtained two doctoral degrees – from Edinburgh and the School of Oriental Studies, London – where he studied the ethics of John Dewey and the Visistadvaita Vedanta theology, respectively. His London dissertation, Ramanuja's Conception of the Deity, was one of the first modern English-language works to systematically delineate the differences between Adi Sankara's metaphysical approach and Ramanuja's realism.

J M Kumarappa's guide and mentor at Columbia University was none other than John Dewey, known for his *My Pedagogic Creed* on the education of children. It is no coincidence, then, that J M Kumarappa's work focused on Tagore's contribution to the education and holistic development of children. Tagore's writings and J M Kumarappa's reflections on them a hundred years ago remain relevant today, as educational policy continues to flounder in empty debates and turf wars between states and the Centre.

The policy muddle shows no sign of resolution. Basic questions regarding the cost and purpose of school education remain unanswered. Today, school education is prohibitively expensive. Government schools in many states are in disrepair, and private schools have become the norm. Even the poor, forsaking their own nutritional needs, seek private schooling for their children. When high-priced fancy private school education dominates the discourse, it is worth recalling what Tagore wrote a century ago—as quoted by Kumarappa: "The spread of education and the bringing of higher influences into human lives are of infinitely greater importance than following the modern fad of efficient and expensive equipment, which is raised to the rank of a fetish, and which, in its conjoint action with our loveless and soulless system of education, has been an enemy of progress and the spread of education in our poverty-stricken country. To make expensive the educational part of poverty-stricken lives would be like squandering all of one's money in buying moneybags. In our country, the idea will not be accepted that Saraswathi's seat owes any of its splendour to appurtenances borrowed from Lakshmi."

Equally relevant today are Tagore's views on religion in education and public life. He warned, "Instead of expressing itself as love and service, religion has become a mere destructive formalism destroying the goodwill between the Hindus and Muslims. Formalism in religion is like nationalism in politics. It breeds sectarian arrogance, mutual misunderstanding and a spirit of persecution. Our mediaeval saints, through their light of love and inner perception of truth, could realise the spiritual unity of man. For them, the innumerable barriers of formalism had no existence, and therefore the mutually antagonistic creeds of Hindus and Mohammedans, irreconcilable as they seemed, did not baffle them. If we desire the welfare of India as a whole, Hindu and Moslem must not only unite, but they must come together on a footing of equality—not the personal equality of two rival champions, but equality in regard to the social support at their back."

This vision of shared humanity – and how we treat our fellow human beings -- lies at the heart of Tagore's concerns about education, citizenship, and nationhood. Deeply intuitive about how children learn, his Shantiniketan experiments made him a forerunner in the insights we have today about the education of children. His views aligned with that of Jean Piaget, whose theories were grounded in the idea that children are not just passive recipients of knowledge but actively participate in their own learning. The two met at a Montessori International Conference in Denmark in 1929.

Tagore was also a great admirer of Maria Montessori, and she of him, given her deep interest in India. In 1940, escaping fascist Italy, she came to India, and Tagore warmly welcomed her in a letter. In remembering Tagore today, let us remember his philosophy of life, his contributions to education, and his ideas about meaning in life and happiness as the bedrock of all education.

(The writer is a chemical engineer, environmental economist, writer and Tagore aficionado)

OUR PAGES OF HISTORY

50 YEARS AGO: AUGUST 1975

Time for new look at Constitution: Law Minister

New Delhi, August 6

Union Law Minister H.R. Gokhale told the Rajya Sabha today that the time had come "to have a look at the entire framework of the Constitution". Replying to a debate on the Election Laws (Amendment) Bill which was later passed by the House, Mr. Gokhale said the process had to start sooner or later. Mr. Gokhale said the consensus in the Lok Sabha, which passed the Bill yesterday, was that the election laws required to be reshaped in order to make them more comprehensive.

25 YEARS AGO: AUGUST 2000

Karnataka, TN governments react favourably

Chennai, Aug 6

In a surprise development, the Tamil Nadu and Karnataka governments today reacted favourably to the ten demands, all political and pro-Tamil, put forward by forest brigand Veerappan for the release of Kannada film star Rajkumar and three others being held hostage by him for the past one week and expressed the hope that the hostages would be released soon. The demands and the government's response to them were made public at a joint press conference addressed by the CMs of the states.

OASIS | ADOLF WASHINGTON

God's boundless love and forgiveness

There's an anecdote of the disciple Peter reaching heaven's gates. He finds Jesus expectantly standing outside the gate. Peter asks, "Lord, why are you standing here? Let's go inside." Jesus replies, "Yes, we will. But I am waiting for Judas to return to me."

The love and forgiveness of God is Him waiting patiently, with eager longing to receive the lost and those gone astray.

Are you waiting for someone to turn from their wayward ways? Are you waiting with love and patience or anger and impatience?

The love of God is broader than the measure of man's mind, and the heart of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind. We are all in need of forgiveness, but we so often refrain from forgiving others.

The Gospels are replete with parables that manifest God's boundless, unconditional forgiveness.

In the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32), the younger of two sons demands his share of inheritance, leaves his father and spends his life in debauchery. After losing everything, with fear and trembling, he journeys back home to seek forgiveness. To his shock, his father comes running to him, declaring to his other son, who was unhappy over celebrating his return, "Be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." (Luke 11:32)

In the parable of the lost sheep (Luke 15:1-7), the shepherd leaving the ninety-nine sheep goes in search of the lost one. Who would risk leaving behind ninety-nine for the sake of one lost one? In human rationale one would say, "After all, just one is lost; let that go." But God says, "I do not want to lose even one soul." There is rejoicing when the shepherd finds the lost sheep. The theme of God rejoicing over winning back those who are lost or have strayed away from Him echoes all through the Bible. Great love demands great patience. God waits. But why keep God waiting when we are uncertain when our life will end?

Two criminals were crucified beside Jesus on the cross. One was unrepentant even at the point of death, but the other sought forgiveness, asking, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus announced his reward: "Today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:39-43). The heart of God is like a home whose doors are always open. Are you in or are you out?

Opinion

THURSDAY, AUGUST 7, 2025

INDO-FILIPINO TIES

President Droupadi Murmu

The India-Philippines partnership is not only beneficial for the people of both countries, it is also an anchor for peace, stability, and prosperity in the region

Time to review pause

After Trump's latest blow, the MPC has only 21 days to assess the tariff impact, and plan its future moves

THE MONETARY POLICY Committee's (MPC) decision earlier on Wednesday to leave interest rates unchanged was just what the doctor ordered—until US President Donald Trump served another bitter pill late in the evening in the form of an additional 25% tariff for purchasing of Russian oil. Trump had issued the threat on Tuesday, but no one could even imagine that the blow would be so severe. According to news agency Reuters' estimate, even with the originally proposed 25% tariff and an additional 10% penalty, India could risk losing its competitive edge in nearly $64 billion worth of exports to the US. The new levy will be added on top of any existing tariffs unless otherwise exempted under specific clauses, such as those relating to national security or the Harmonized Tariff Schedule.

The MPC obviously had decided to wait to assess the full impact of US tariffs on the economy but now the waiting timeline gets much shorter as Trump said the additional tariffs will come into effect after 21 days. In his speech, Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Sanjay Malhotra said India's economy remains resilient, though external demand prospects are "uncertain amid ongoing tariff announcements and trade negotiations". That's clearly a classic central bank understatement. There is no doubt that the Trump tantrums have introduced a fresh layer of complexity and a huge uncertainty.

The MPC was anyway being over-optimistic by sticking to a 6.5% growth projection for the current fiscal year. The growth momentum has already slowed as reflected by the high-frequency indicators of the first quarter, and economists expected even a 25% US tariffs will shave off up to 40 basis points while stunting business investment. That estimate will now go up manifold. Even if a trade deal is struck in the near term, a dip in exports to the US is not ruled out in the second half of FY26, given the extent of front-loading seen in exports in the first six months of 2025. Moreover, private investment sentiment is sure to be damaged. This would undeniably delay the private sector's capex plans. The central bank obviously wanted to keep a few cards up its sleeve for calibrated future moves if conditions change drastically. The cards may have to be flashed soon as heightened uncertainty around global trade policies is likely to create volatility in capital flows and exchange rates which could in turn impact inflation, the real economy, and financial stability.

There were many reasons for the RBI to keep interest rates unchanged in its policy. Despite sharply lowering its inflation forecast, the decision to keep rates steady emanated from the focus on one-year-ahead expected inflation. It's now clear that the bar for a dovish shift in monetary policy will be much lower from here due to the latest Trump actions that could lead to substantial downside to growth prospects. Of course, this is not to say that a rate cut alone would solve all the problems—it obviously can't as there is only so much growth support the RBI can give. Fiscal spending also has its limits, therefore for the next leg of growth, perhaps it is time to focus on structural reforms which has clearly lost steam.

MPC REVIEW

IF RBI'S FY26 INFLATION PROJECTIONS REMAIN CORRECT, THEN A 5.5% REPO RATE MAY BE THE TERMINAL RATE

What do you do, sirs?

SOUMYA KANTI GHOSH

Member, 16th Finance Commission, and group chief economic advisor, State Bank of India

THE KEYNESIAN APPROACH to policy-making, "When the facts change, I change my mind. What do you do, sir?", comes to one's mind as the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) on Wednesday assiduously walked the talk (in unison), balancing a dotted line that passes through shifting sands even as geopolitical uncertainty joins hands with tactical provocations (the US has just raised tariffs on Indian imports to 50%).

A tell-tale sign that could possibly have tilted the MPC's decision to go for a pause on rate decisions, after the booster shot given in the last meeting, could be the volatile atmosphere engulfing the economy where keeping the dry powder handy is more important than firing the salvo now in anticipation. The MPC's deliberations could be split almost equally between indigenous and exogenous factors (muted growth and slowing pace of disinflation challenging policymakers globally while a new equilibrium arises in a new global order, as the governor put it) to gauge patiently the aftermath of tariff impacts that may come with a lag as stockpiling, and advanced shipping and purchases somewhat camouflage the early numbers of Q1/H2 across borders.

The challenges before the economy can be gauged from the deceleration in banks' incremental non-food credit, which grew at a tardy pace of 9.8% as on July 11 (year-to-date) against 14% a year ago. However, the slowdown is not new (though more apparent now) since the systemic credit growth had dipped by 15.9% in FY25 itself (clocking growth of ₹18 lakh crore against ₹21.4 lakh crore in the preceding financial year). Barring micro, small, and medium enterprises, all sectors have shown poor offtake in credit on a year-on-year basis, according to Q1 FY25 data, with real estate and personal loans declining the most.

The MPC has estimated real GDP growth for FY26 at 6.5%, with 6.5% for Q1, 6.7% for Q2, 6.6% for Q3, and 6.3% for Q4, while real GDP growth for Q1 FY27 is projected at 6.6% with risks evenly balanced. This should be read in conjunction with the uneven trajectory of inflation, low in absolute terms now but likely to edge up next year, according to the RBI.

Thus, the MPC projection of an inflation rate at 3.1% from the previously estimated 3.7% correctly underlines the inflation trajectory as benign. However, in Q1 FY26 inflation is likely to edge up to 4.9% according to RBI projections, and hence the bar for a rate cut has now become even higher.

Interestingly, the quasi-leading indicators are showing a mixed trend. While indicators like the purchasing managers index (both manufacturing and services that capture the intent of decision makers) have shown an uptick and coupled with growth in core sectors (steel consumption and cement production), tax collections—both direct and indirect—have shown signs of deceleration. This ambiguity of data and its slightly deceptive tone, combined with factors other than inflation (adequate returns to savers), could have held the hands of the MPC from tilting perhaps in favour of a rate cut.

> **A tell-tale sign that could have tilted the MPC's decision to go for a pause on rate decisions, after the booster shot in the last meeting, could be the volatile atmosphere engulfing the economy where keeping the dry powder handy is more important than firing the salvo now**

On the development and regulatory policy front, two measures were announced. The introduction of auto-bidding facilities in RBI Retail Direct for investment and re-investment in treasury bills was announced in RBI Retail Direct. The RBI proposed to standardise the procedure for settlement of claims in respect of deposit accounts of deceased bank customers. At the end of June, there was around ₹67,003 crore of unclaimed deposits with banks. Additionally, to enhance accessibility and simplify the search process for unclaimed deposits, the RBI has already launched the centralised web portal UDGAM (Unclaimed Deposits-Gateway to Access Information) for the public. However, the synchronised policy across banks may help the nominee/legal heirs and also reduce the burden on banks.

To cut a long story short, we may dub Wednesday's pause as the "technical pause" as the inflation projections are hovering in the band of uncertainty (while below 3% till Q3, it may sharply increase to 4.9% in Q1 FY27). Under such a scenario (along with the expectations of robust GDP growth), we believe that if the RBI's inflation projections for FY26 remain correct then a 5.5% repo rate may be the terminal rate.

However, our in-house estimates point to an even lower inflation print vis-à-vis the RBI's projections; up to 70 points lower, which increases the onus of a rate cut by the regulator going forward although time is of the essence. Can there then be a rate cut with a large intervening gap from June, even when growth is supposed to be strong on a front-loaded basis (Q1 and Q2 growth is strong according to RBI projections with Q2 being even higher than Q2, thus rate cuts in October and December look a tad difficult) and inflationary concerns significantly in check?

We think the Keynesian adage may need a little future-ready tweak. What do you all say, sirs?

Views are personal

The revenge of the original girlbosses

THE GREAT GIRLBOSS Implosion that came to a peak in 2020 created a whole category of start-up founders who seemed destined to be banished from the business world forever.

They were a group of mostly young, White women who capitalised on the 2010s Instagram era, building media-savvy, aspirational lifestyle brands that were tied to their magnetic public images. They sold not only luggage, make-up, and workout gear but also the idea that buying their products meant you were supporting feminism and inclusivity. (The term "girlboss" was a product of the same era, coined by retailing entrepreneur Sophia Amoruso in 2014.)

But as corporate America struggled through its own racial reckoning in the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd, many of these founders were accused of everything from racism to creating toxic work environments to just plain bad management—sins made worse by the feeling that they were not actually living up to the ideals that they had hawked. They'd embraced a press that had fawned over their promises to create a better kind of business on their way up, and then got burned by it for their hypocrisy on the way down. One by one, in a very public and embarrassing fashion, they resigned.

Five years later, a crop of the original girlbosses is reemerging. Last week, Tyler Haney said she was returning to her athletic apparel brand Outdoor Voices. Audrey Gelman, who came to fame with her women's social club and co-working space The Wing, has launched a hospitality company. Steph Korey Goodwin, co-founder of luggage brand Away, started a children's brand. Reformation founder Yael Aflalo has a new clothing line.

I never thought I'd say it, but I'm happy they're back. I'm not absolving them of very real misdeeds. But the business world has given second chances to plenty of male founders of the same era who were often accused of worse—if they faced any real consequences at all. We should hold all executives to a higher bar than we do. But since that doesn't seem to be in the cards, we shouldn't create a whole other set of standards for female leaders. At the same time I wish a new, more diverse set of founders was being given access to the paltry funding that's granted to women.

This time around, the girlbosses are doing it differently. The lesson they seem to have taken from their first flameouts is not that they should now build the kind of inclusive companies they initially failed to create; instead, it's that they should shake off their connections to the kind of progressive politics they once embodied.

BETH KOWITT

Bloomberg

The change-the-world vibes have vanished. Aflalo no longer talks about sustainability or a desire to cater to a customer who wants to be "a good person". Haney seems unconcerned about what being labelled "Elon Musk's reply guy" might signal about her own politics.

Gelman's transformation is perhaps the most telling. She was the first visibly pregnant CEO to grace the cover of a business mag, projecting an image of rise-and-grind and having-it-all culture. Her new venture leans cottagecore and tradwife and, as the *New York Times* has noted, is missing any social or political mission: In The Wing's "fantasy world, women had board seats and book deals, leaning in or on each other to get ahead. Her new world harks back to eras when a woman's domain was her home, before she had suffrage or a credit card". Part of the makeover reflects the marketing shrewdness these founders have always possessed. They know we are now living in an anti-woke culture that's more than willing to let the bad guys of the pandemic years reinvent themselves. Society writ large seems to no longer care as much about the kind of transgressions they were ousted over, nor does it demand that companies have a cause or do-gooder mission.

A common thread throughout these new ventures appears to be one of maintaining control. Both Haney and Goodwin have publicly signalled that they regret taking on so much funding during their last go-around, saying that it diluted their equity and that it's something they won't do again. (Female founders across the board are granted less than half the equity owned by their male counterparts.)

It's a reminder that the girlboss formula many women of the era took on was not solely their own choice, but one that was required of them by their (mostly male) investors. This time, they seem much more intent on being viewed simply as a businessperson rather than embracing their status as female founders. That may be a strategic move, a sign of the times or simply a reflection of how they now see themselves. And while I might wish women in power weren't so eager to leave feminist ideas behind, if any of these ex-girlbosses does manage a successful comeback, I'll happily chalk it up as a win for female entrepreneurs.

Credit policy clears the air

MADAN SABNAVIS

Chief economist, Bank of Baroda

Under the current circumstances, the most optimistic scenario for industry could be not more than one 25-bps cut possibly in December depending on the environment

MAINTAINING STATUS QUO in the credit policy is significant for several reasons. To begin with, the policy announcement in June did flag that there were limits to which the repo rate could be lowered in order to increase growth. This sent a strong message to the market: rates cannot be lowered just because inflation was coming down. While growth can be revived, there are limits to that. In a way, the change of stance from accommodative to neutral after lowering the repo rate aggressively by 50 basis points (bps) signalled a new wave of thinking in the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC). This was based on the principle of front-loading which would then be given time to work through the system. To complement this approach, the cash reserve ratio was also lowered by 100 bps, albeit from September onwards. It was hence a comprehensive package.

The current policy of status quo sends some messages too. The first is, India's growth story is still strong at 6.5%. More importantly, the adjustments to forecasts were not really required in the absence of any new information. This means the tariff impact was already factored in June as the US made the announcement in April. Although deferred till August, the tariff of 25% was not different from what was announced earlier. (That, however, got revised with an additional 25% tariff declared by the US on Wednesday). And surely, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had indicated that when there is new information on tariffs, revisions could always be made.

The other takeaway is on inflation. The RBI has dropped its inflation forecast to 3.1% from 3.7%. This is quite sharp based on the trajectory of food prices. Hence the forecasts for Q3 are also low at 2.1%. But then, it has been pointed out that inflation will rise to 4.4% in Q4 and 4.9% in Q1 FY27. This is of importance because any change in policy rate, when linked with inflation, has to look at the scenario in future. This is why monetary policy is always said to be forward-looking. This means that if inflation is 2.1% in Q2, with a repo rate of 5.5%, the real repo rate would be 3.4%. However, once we move to Q4, the real rate would be 1.1% and further 0.6% in Q1 FY27. In such a scenario, should the central bank be increasing rates?

Therefore, maintaining status quo can be justified even on the grounds of inflation being low today. Here the policy says more about why inflation is low. It is a pure case of statistical base effects, which means if inflation was high last year then the inflation rate will tend to get depressed this year. The same logic will take it to 4.9% in Q1 FY27 although there may not be any distortion in commodity prices.

Further, the low prices today are mainly on account of prices of food, especially vegetables. Food prices tend to be volatile and they can rise any time when crop supplies falter. Therefore, one should not get carried away by low inflation as a result of falling food prices.

Also, non-fuel non-food inflation numbers have tended to rise and are over 4%. This core inflation will be sticky for some more time as companies are increasing their prices to cover higher costs. This has been seen in education and health, where charges have been increased across the board.

Similarly for consumer products and household goods, there has been a tendency for companies to hold on to costs for an extended period as demand was sluggish. In the last year or so, they have been increasing prices to cover the costs. Thus, in both manufacturing and services there has been a series of increases in prices that had added to core inflation.

> **As long as growth is in the 6.2-6.5% range, the growth story is unlikely to be seen as under threat. Lower inflation for the year may not matter as of now as what is critical on the price front is the Q4 outlook**

The RBI has also cleared the air on liquidity issues, specifying that the current liquidity framework is good enough where the weighted average call rate would be targeted and support provided through variable rate repo and reverse repo auctions.

Here too, the RBI was expected to revise the framework as the tri-party repo market had become more popular. But the committee instituted to analyse it has concluded that the present policy is adequate and there was no need to change the target for now.

So how can one look ahead? Will there be any further rate cuts? Given the present dynamics of inflation and growth, it looks like that if the RBI forecasts hold, there would be no need to tinker with the repo rate for the rest of the year and the terminal rate can be 5.5%. The only trigger can be if growth falters sharply. This is a tough call as it does not look like growth could slip by another 0.1-0.2% in case the tariff issue turns nasty.

As long as growth is in the 6.2-6.5% range, the growth story is unlikely to be seen as under threat. Lower inflation for the year may not matter as of now as what is critical on the price front is the Q4 outlook. This should not change as the future assumptions are unlikely to get altered. Under these circumstances, the most optimistic scenario for industry could be not more than one 25-bps cut possibly in December depending on the prevailing environment.

But the market will look for external signals, which can be the Fed cutting rates, to have a bearing on RBI decisions. The Federal Reserve has been quite recalcitrant to lower rates in the tariff quagmire. But assuming it does from December onwards, the movement in foreign investment funds as well as the currency could be another justification for the RBI to lower rates. While this may not be on the MPC's radar, the market will use it as an anvil to ask for more.

Views are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Maintaining EV supply

Apropos of "Move swiftly on EVs" (*FE*, August 6), the dearth in the supply of rare earth magnets hampers the production of electric vehicles (EVs) in India and there is a resulting shutdown of such units. China has controlled the export of rare earth minerals. Now, the way forward is to augment the extraction of vast domestic rare earth reserves. India has approximately 13.07 million tonnes of rare earth elements found in monazite sand deposits along the coastal regions of the country. The government's National Critical Mineral Mission aims at attaining self-reliance in the supply of rare earth elements. The production-linked incentive scheme and attracting foreign investments are the long-term measures to augment production. At the same time, swift short-term measures must be taken to solve the crisis.

—NR Nagarajan, Sivakasi

Defence boost

In a significant stride towards modernising its armed forces, India has approved a ₹67,000-crore defence acquisition package. This push towards combat-readiness and self-reliance includes the induction of 87 armed medium altitude long endurance drones with 60% indigenous content, and over 110 air-launched BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles—both of which proved instrumental in Operation Sindoor. Long-term maintenance contracts for strategic airlift and missile defence systems ensure readiness. In sum, this deepens India's deterrence, expands maritime dominance in the Indian Ocean Region, and reflects a strategic pivot to achieve greater defence self-sufficiency and regional power projection.

—Amarjeet Kumar, Hazaribagh

●Write to us at feletters@expressindia.com

Regd. No: DL -21048/03-05. R.N.I. No.26750/74. Printed and Published by Ramesh Chander Malhotra on behalf of The Indian Express (P) Ltd and printed at The Indian Express (P) Ltd Press, A-8, Sector-7, Noida - 201301 and published at The Indian Express (P) Ltd, Mezzanine Floor, Express Building, 9 & 10, Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, New Delhi-110002. Phone: 0120-6651500. (Cover price: Patna:₹12, Raipur: ₹12, Srinagar ₹15) Chairman of the Board: Viveck Goenka, Editor: Shyamal Majumdar, Editor (Delhi) Shobhana Subramanian* (*Responsible for selection of News under the PRP Act)

WORDLY WISE

IT IS LAMENTABLE THAT TO BE A GOOD PATRIOT ONE MUST BECOME THE ENEMY OF THE REST OF MANKIND. — VOLTAIRE

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

With due respect

SC's singular definition of Indianness, restrictive eye on questions asked of government, go against its own past record

WHILE GRANTING HIM a reprieve on Monday in a defamation case over his alleged remarks on the armed forces in the wake of the 2020 Galwan clash with China, the Supreme Court censured Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi for speaking out on the issue. It also doled out a prescription for being a "true Indian" — "If you are a true Indian, you would not say all these things", it said. Only days earlier, the Bombay High Court questioned the Left parties' patriotism while upholding Mumbai Police's denial of permission to the CPM and CPI to hold a protest rally at Azad Maidan in solidarity with Gaza. The court criticised the prioritising of foreign affairs over national concerns — "You are looking at issues in Gaza and Palestine. Look at your own country", it said. The observations by the apex court and the high court are disquieting.

For one, they mark an institutional overstepping. It is not the court's remit to define, and to circumscribe Indianness, or to hand out certificates of patriotism, or to decide the LoP's responsibilities and the political party's priorities. In a climate of political polarisation, in which the right to freedom of speech is often in need of constitutional protection, and when "anti-national" is a label frequently used to demonise the dissenter and delegitimise dissent, the restrictive strictures of the Supreme Court in particular — on which questions can be asked of the government in times of conflict, and which can't, and on who is and who is not a "true Indian" — are especially dispiriting. The SC, after all, is the custodian of the constitutional letter and spirit. As such, it is the bulwark against any encroachment of fundamental rights, including and especially free expression. In fact, the Court only has to look back on its own record to see why its current stance touches off concerns. It has established a rich tradition of checking executive overreach and protecting and upholding civil liberties. In earlier judgments, it has underlined, for instance, that "national security" cannot be invoked as a ground to curb fundamental rights. In the 2021 case involving the alleged use of Pegasus malware against citizens, the SC held that while there are limits to judicial review when it comes to national security, "this does not mean that the state gets a free pass every time the spectre of 'national security' is raised". And that "National security cannot be the bugbear that the judiciary shies away from, by virtue of its mere mentioning".

The Constitution of India is distinctive for its capaciousness, for enlarging spaces for expressions of diversity and difference. It accommodates and enables plurality, while enforcing rights and accountability. By laying down a singular definition of Indianness, by turning a restrictive eye on questions asked of the dominant narrative and the government, the Court goes against its own past record and does a disservice to the Constitution. That the oral observations of the Court are not legally binding, that they are only part of the deliberative process, is not a mitigating factor. The Court must recognise that it is a measure of the enormous respect for the institution of the judiciary that what it says is taken seriously — and that, by the same token, in an argumentative democracy, it can have an undesirable chilling effect.

A considered pause

RBI keeps interest rates unchanged. Policy action depends on whether growth or inflation deviate from its assessment

IN ITS AUGUST meeting, the RBI's monetary policy committee voted unanimously to keep the benchmark policy repo rate unchanged — it stands at 5.5 per cent. Alongside, the members also voted to continue with the neutral stance. The decision, which came after the MPC had frontloaded the rate cuts in its previous meeting — in June it had reduced the rate by 50 basis points — was expected, given the prevailing global and domestic environment. As RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra said, "the current macroeconomic conditions, outlook and uncertainties call for continuation of the policy".

The central bank's forecasts accompanying the August policy indicate that inflationary pressures in the economy are expected to remain muted. The RBI has, in fact, lowered its inflation forecast for the year to 3.1 per cent, from 3.7 per cent earlier. In recent months, food price pressures have eased considerably, and a good monsoon season and trends in kharif sowing indicate that the outlook is benign. Core inflation, which excludes food and fuel, has, however, inched upwards to 4.4 per cent in June. But the price pressures are not broad-based. Inflation was muted in several non-food categories such as clothing and footwear, household goods and services. But the central bank's forecasts have pegged inflation to rise to 4.4 per cent in the fourth quarter of 2025-26 and further to 4.9 per cent in the first quarter of 2026-27, as "unfavourable base effects, and demand side factors from policy actions come into play". With some projecting inflation at around 4.5 per cent in 2026, which translates to a real interest rate of around 1 per cent, it reduces the space for further rate cuts.

On the issue of growth, it is surprising that the central bank has retained its projections. It continues to forecast that the economy will grow at 6.5 per cent this year, in line with its expectations in April and June, even as the global environment has changed considerably since then. US President Donald Trump's trade and tariff policies have already led to some analysts lowering their estimates of growth. The RBI acknowledges these concerns. Governor Malhotra pointed to the uncertainty of "external demand", and the headwinds from "geopolitical tensions" and "volatility in global financial markets". Considering that the uncertainty over tariffs continues, and that the transmission of the interest rate cuts so far is still working through the system, further policy action will possibly depend on whether growth and/or inflation deviate significantly from the central bank's current assessment.

A doubles' fault

US Open is introducing a dating reality show this year. But nothing can match the drama of a good game of tennis

IT'S NOT QUITE the centre-court showdown one might expect at a Grand Slam, but the USTA, organiser of the US Open, is hoping its latest wild card will still serve up some buzz. This year, a reality dating show, "Game, Set, Matchmaker", will shadow a former figure skating champion as she volleys her way through seven romantic hopefuls — all on the tournament venue in the week leading up to the main event. The eight-episode series will air on YouTube, with the finale dropping during the women's final, because, of course, nothing pairs with a baseline rally like a soft-focus exchange about emotional availability.

Critics are crying gimmick and if the serve feels a bit wide, it is with reason. Tennis has long flirted with the need to modernise but it has, so far, limited itself within the sport's ambit. The Australian Open has leaned into animated streaming to widen viewership; Wimbledon has relaxed its all-white dress code for women. In the US, despite the sport's grassroots popularity, national viewership still can't quite hold serve. And yet, dressing the tournament in reality-tv gloss runs the risk of overplaying the point. Tennis is, after all, a sport built on structure and restraint — its very essence born from the unscripted choreography of long rallies, the expectant hush between points, the tension of attacking and recalibrating in real time.

If the USTA really wants to connect with a new generation, it might do well to trust the drama and plot twists embedded in the game. Tennis is inherently cinematic, a love story of unusual depth built on a foundation of showing up again and again — despite its overwhelming demands, despite the critics or the scoreboard. If tennis keeps mistaking visibility for vitality, it risks forgetting that relevance isn't built through novelty alone. It's built through storytelling that respects the game — and assumes the audience can, too.

Steady amid turbulence

RBI's decision to not cut rates indicates that growth trajectory is largely insulated from tariff pressures

RAJANI SINHA

THE RBI'S MONETARY Policy Committee (MPC), in line with our expectations, left the policy rate unchanged and maintained the stance at neutral. The central bank highlighted that the sharp decline in inflation is primarily due to volatile food prices, specifically vegetable prices. Moreover, it cautioned that with the low base of this year, CPI inflation is projected to rise above 4 per cent and beyond in 2026, implying that there is limited room for further rate cuts in this cycle. The central bank was broadly optimistic about growth and kept the GDP growth projection unchanged at 6.5 per cent for FY26, while acknowledging the uncertain external demand scenario.

CPI inflation fell sharply to around 2 per cent in June 2025 and is estimated to remain benign at around 2.5 per cent in the next two quarters. With the sharper-than-expected fall in inflation, the RBI has lowered the CPI projection for FY26 to 3.1 per cent. Vegetable inflation that was very high in 2024, averaging 27 per cent, has recorded sharp deflation, averaging -15 per cent in the last three months. The vegetable price sub-index that contributes around 6 per cent to the overall CPI index has been particularly volatile in the past year. If we exclude vegetable prices, CPI inflation was in the range of 3-4 per cent for the entire FY25 and remains in the same range in Q1 FY26.

Apart from vegetables, many other components of the food basket are also seeing low inflation or deflation, supported by a good monsoon and a high base from last year. The point to note is that a large part of the fall in inflation is because of the statistical base effect. However, next year, we will see inflation rising again as the base effect reverses. We expect CPI inflation to breach the 4 per cent level in Q4 FY26 and average more than 4.5 per cent in FY27 — this is broadly in line with the RBI's projections.

> RBI remains optimistic, has maintained the GDP growth projection for FY26 at 6.5 per cent. Factors like recent interest rate cuts, strong agricultural activity boosting rural demand, benign inflationary conditions, favourable monsoon and lower income tax burden are supportive of growth. While the recently announced higher reciprocal tariff by the US has raised some growth concerns, it is to be noted that India is a domestic demand-driven economy, and merchandise exports to the US contribute only around 2 per cent to our GDP.

As far as growth is concerned, RBI remains optimistic and has maintained the GDP growth projection for FY26 at 6.5 per cent (broadly in line with our projection of 6.4 per cent). Factors like recent interest rate cuts, strong agricultural activity boosting rural demand, benign inflationary conditions, favourable monsoon and lower income tax burden are supportive of growth this year. While the recently announced higher reciprocal tariff by the US has raised some growth concerns, it should be noted that India is a domestic demand-driven economy, and merchandise exports to the US contribute only around 2 per cent to our GDP. We feel the adverse impact of tariffs through the export channel could be limited. It's also important to consider that there is still a lack of clarity on US trade policy, and hence it's difficult to assess the overall impact on GDP growth. It is quite possible that India manages to negotiate a trade deal with the US, leading to lower tariff barriers.

On the domestic front, there are some concerns around consumption and investment recovery not being broad-based. While a healthy monsoon has supported rural demand, subdued income growth in urban areas is concerning. This becomes specifically critical amidst weak hiring in the IT sector. Our study shows that aggregate headcount at the top five domestic IT firms plateaued in FY25 after a 4 per cent contraction in FY24. Growth in employee cost for IT firms in our sample (670 listed non-financial companies) slumped to just 5 per cent in FY25 from an average growth of 14 per cent between FY19 and FY24. We feel that the subdued household income growth is also getting reflected in weaker consumption growth, specifically in urban areas.

On the investment front, the Centre's push to capex has continued with a growth of 52 per cent recorded in Q1 FY26. However, private players remain cautious in the midst of economic uncertainties. Even in the midst of these headwinds, India is likely to manage a healthy growth in FY26.

India's external sector will continue to face uncertainties given the risk posed by the US's reciprocal tariff. The benefit that India had vis-à-vis some of the other Asian peers has been reversed, with India now facing a higher tariff. We expect India's merchandise exports to contract in FY26. However, services exports will remain healthy, albeit with some moderation in growth. Overall, we expect India's current account deficit to be manageable at 0.9 per cent of GDP in FY26. However, capital flows could remain volatile in the midst of aggravated global uncertainties. With forex reserves at a comfortable level of $689 billion covering 11 months of merchandise imports, we can say that India's external sector is broadly insulated, though we need to remain cautious.

What should we expect going forward? RBI had already cut the policy rate by 100 bps since February 2025 and taken measures to ensure ample liquidity in the system to facilitate rate transmission. Hence, the central bank would now like to wait and watch to see the impact of further transmission. Moreover, with average CPI inflation expected to be around 4.5 per cent or even more in 2026, we are already talking about a very low real interest rate of around 1 per cent. With growth momentum likely to be maintained at around 6.5 per cent, there is no need for further rate cuts. Only if the growth trajectory gets severely dented by the aggravation of trade risks can we expect a further rate cut by the central bank in this cycle.

The writer is chief economist, Care Edge Ratings

Rebel and statesman

Shibu Soren's success came from his closeness to the ground, arc of accommodation

SANJAY BOSU MULLICK

WITH THE PASSING away of Dishom Guru Shibu Shoren, an era in the movement of Jharkhand's Adivasis has come to an end. The era that began with the luminaries of the tribal political leadership, such as Marang Gomke Jaipal Singh and N E Horo, witnessed the formation of the Jharkhand state. Jaipal Singh failed to translate the aspirations of the indigenous peoples of Jharkhand into reality despite being educated in England. Shibu Soren succeeded to a great extent, though, unlike Singh, he wasn't exposed to the top political leadership of his time.

The trauma of losing his father at an early age, killed by the moneylenders, left a deep impact on Soren. It also played a big role in Soren becoming the spokesperson of Jharkhand's oppressed people. Unlike his mentors and contemporaries, who believed in "direct action", Soren chose the path of negotiation. His reliance on the principles of accommodation was instrumental in the emergence of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) as the largest political party in the state. Soren, who began his career as a firebrand leader with deep ties to the grassroots, became one of the most successful politicians of his time. But when he died, he left behind several unachieved goals from his early life.

Soren's political journey can be divided into two parts — before and after his entry into parliamentary politics. The gruesome murder of his father, Sobran Manji, turned

> Shibu Soren gradually entered electoral politics and, after a short teething period, succeeded in becoming an MP in 1980. The decade turned out to be a turning point in his political career. He parted with his Marxist mentors in 1984 and moved ahead to establish JMM as the most popular political party in Jharkhand, expanding its presence in neighbouring West Bengal and Odisha.

Shivcharan Majhi of Nemra — his ancestral village in Ramgarh district — into the rebellious Shibu Soren. His fight against non-tribal oppressors made him the leader of Sonot Santal Samaj, a people's platform to fight against the oppressors. On February 4, 1972, he joined hands with the Marxist leader Binod Bihari Mahato, the head of another social platform, Shivaji Samaj, to form an outfit whose agenda was not just social reform but political empowerment. The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha was formally founded the following year on the same day. It was blessed by the firebrand Marxist trade union leader of Dhanbad's coal belt, Arun Kumar Roy, who was so impressed by Soren's leadership qualities that he called him the emerging "Lenin of Jharkhand". The Marxist red flag and tribal green flag were unfurled together to unite the workers and peasants, leading to a new era in the Jharkhand movement. To the call of the leaders, "How do you want to achieve Jharkhand," the collective voice of the Adivasis resounded — "We will wage a battle to wrench it out".

Soren led the Dhan Kati movement, which encouraged Santals to harvest paddy from the lands that were illegally occupied and cultivated by moneylenders after the Adivasis had failed to pay off their debt. He was put behind bars and came out even more determined. People cheered Soren back to the movement by placing him on the highest pedestal of their social organisation, the Dishom Guru, the supreme guide of the land. Militant activism forced him to remain underground for a long time.

Activist Shibu Soren gradually entered electoral politics and, after a short teething period, succeeded in becoming an MP in 1980. The decade turned out to be a turning point in his political career. He parted with his Marxist mentors on the issues of ideology and political strategies in 1984 and moved ahead to establish JMM as the most popular political party in Jharkhand, expanding its political presence in neighbouring West Bengal and Odisha. He was elected to the Lok Sabha three times and was a three-time chief minister of Jharkhand. His leadership as the supreme leader of the movement for a separate state for Adivasis was challenged by the All Jharkhand Students' Union in 1986 — an outfit that pursued militant agitation and condemned his strategy of electoral politics. The '90s was a bad phase in his life when Soren faced serious allegations and was put behind bars.

On August 4, the rebel boy Shivcharan Manjhi breathed his last as Dishom Guru Shibu Soren at 81, leaving behind an illustrious family that includes his sons Hemant Soren, the chief minister of Jharkhand and Basant Soren, a MLA, daughter-in-law Kalpana Soren, also a MLA, and daughter Anjali Soren.

The writer, a social scientist, participated in Jharkhand's statehood movement

August 7, 1985, Forty Years Ago


INDIAN EXPRESS

Hiroshima Day

THE EXPLOSION OF an atomic bomb over the Japanese city of Hiroshima 40 years ago was marked at the blast site and elsewhere in the world with warnings that nuclear weapons should never be used again. Japanese Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone, speaking before a crowd of 55,000 people in Hiroshima's Peace Park, called for the ultimate abolition of nuclear arsenals. The park stands below the spot where the US B-29 bomber "Enola Gay" dropped the first operational nuclear weapon on the morning of August 6, 1945.

Assam Solution

THE HOME MINISTER, S B Chavan, is visiting Guwahati for two days to consult people from various sections on the possibility of a solution to the foreigners problem in Assam. Although the government has not fixed any date yet for the resumption of formal talks with the Assam agitation leaders, they may also be consulted during Chavan's Guwahati visit. Chavan's visit follows the meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs, which discussed the issue.

Women In CRPF

THE CENTRAL RESERVE Police Force is, for the first time, raising a battalion of women in an attempt to create a force of female police to be deployed in specific situations. Though it is being done on an experimental basis, the Home Ministry is credited with the view that such a force is necessary and should "be given all the encouragement". The role of policewomen in situations like communal riots and civil strife could go a long way in containing trouble, it is felt.

Oil In Cauvery

OIL AND GAS have been struck in the Cauvery Basin in Tamil Nadu. This is the second find of hydrocarbons in the onland Cauvery Basin in recent months. The Minister of State for Petroleum, Nawal Kishore, made this announcement in both houses of Parliament. The first oil find in the basin was made in January 1985. This was, however, a much smaller one and was located about 10 km from the present location.

THE IDEAS PAGE

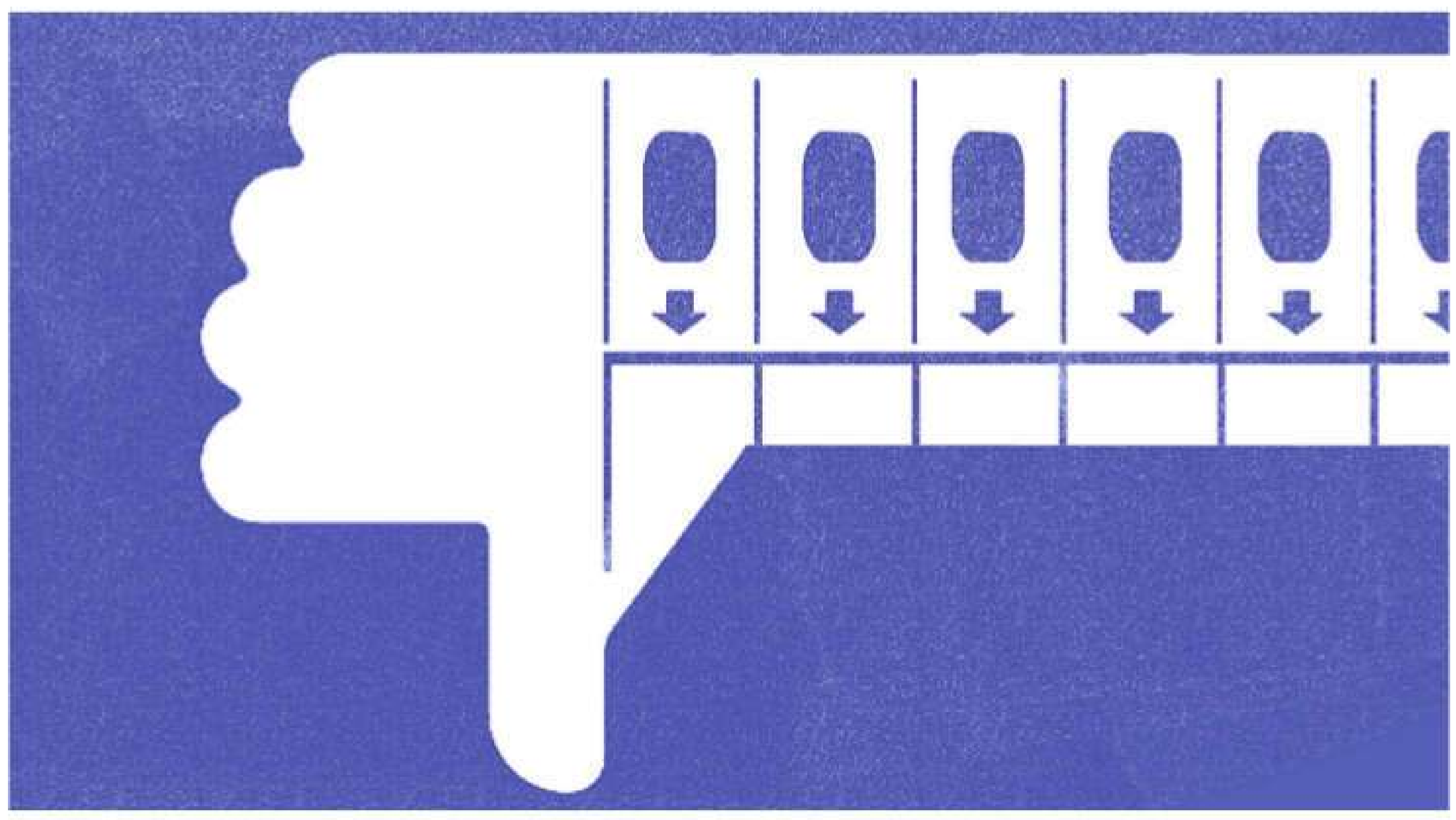
WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"One year on from the uprising, we urge critical reflection from all its stakeholders. They all must do more, and do better."
— THE DAILY STAR, BANGLADESH

Absence is abdication

Heeding calls for boycotting Bihar assembly elections in wake of controversial electoral roll revision would lead to forfeiting the fight, give ruling dispensation a walkover

S Y QURAISHI



C R Sasikumar

IN THE FESTIVAL of democracy that elections represent, participation is both a right and a responsibility. Yet, from time to time, political actors withdraw from this arena, hoping that their absence will make a louder statement than their presence. The tactic of boycotting elections — either by political parties or segments of the electorate — has become a recurring feature across democracies, old and new. But history offers a sobering lesson: Election boycotts rarely succeed. Instead, they often backfire, weakening opposition forces and strengthening incumbents.

Calls for boycotting the upcoming elections in Bihar have gained ground in recent weeks, driven by serious apprehensions about the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) ordered by the Election Commission (EC). Critics allege that the SIR is being used as a tool for mass deletion of voter names, disproportionately affecting the poor, minorities and migrants. Reports of a lack of transparency in verification processes have fuelled public distrust. While concerns about electoral integrity must be addressed seriously — and urgently — by the EC, the call for a boycott as a political response deserves deeper scrutiny.

History offers a cautionary tale from our own region: Bangladesh, 2014. That year, the country's largest opposition party, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), boycotted the general elections, demanding that the ruling Awami League hand over power to a neutral caretaker government for the conduct of polls. Their fears were not unfounded — there were legitimate concerns about state capture and political persecution. But in choosing to boycott, the BNP ended up vacating the entire field. As a result, 153 of the 300 parliamentary seats were won uncontested, mostly by the ruling party and its allies. I was in Dhaka soon after. Ironically, many observers told me that had the BNP not boycotted, they were actually winning. Their boycott gifted the ruling party a walkover and left them politically marginalised for years.

India, too, has witnessed its share of election boycotts — Punjab's 1992 assembly elections, for example. With the Shiromani Akali Dal boycotting, turnout plunged to as low as 13 per cent in some districts, and Beant Singh won on the votes of a tiny fraction of the electorate. The boycott handed Congress an easy victory and left democracy poorer for the lack of real competition.

There have been many other boycotts, though often from non-mainstream or separatist quarters. In Jammu and Kashmir, separatist groups have historically called for poll boycotts, arguing that participation would lend legitimacy to Indian governance. Yet, elections were conducted regardless of turnout, and governments formed. In some instances, low turnout allowed particular parties to win with wafer-thin mandates, undermining broader representation.

In central India, Left-wing extremist groups have regularly used violence and intimidation to enforce poll boycotts. But the EC, committed to protecting the democratic right to vote, has pushed back — with security deployments, special polling booths, and remarkable logistical efforts. The message has been consistent: Democracy will not be held hostage to boycott threats.

Globally, too, boycotts have fared poorly. Venezuela offers a textbook warning: In 2005, the opposition boycotted and the ruling alliance took every National Assembly seat; in 2018, a partial boycott helped Nicolas Maduro secure reelection amid ~46 per cent turnout; and in 2020, another opposition boycott saw ~31 per cent turnout and delivered the government a supermajority. In Zimbabwe, Morgan Tsvangirai's withdrawal from the 2008 runoff allowed Robert Mugabe to claim victory unopposed. International criticism followed, but in vain.

Serbia in 2000 proved the opposite. By contesting and then mobilising against fraud, the opposition toppled Slobodan Miloševic. Had they boycotted, he would have claimed victory uncontested, as in Venezuela 2005. But such outcomes are exceptions, not the rule. More often, a boycott becomes a symbolic gesture — loud in rhetoric but empty in consequence.

In India, the Constitution does not provide for invalidation of elections due to boycotts or low voter turnout. The EC is duty-bound to conduct polls as per schedule and to declare winners based on the votes polled. A boycott, therefore, does not halt the process — it simply ensures a walkover.

This is why the call to boycott elections in Bihar, in response to the SIR controversy, must be reconsidered. Yes, the SIR process must be subjected to robust scrutiny. The EC must remove all doubts of every party and civil society to ensure transparency in deletions and provide effective grievance redress mechanisms. Civil society, media, and courts must remain vigilant. But the electoral arena should not be abandoned.

To vacate the field is to forfeit the fight. Let us not forget that in a democracy, absence is not protest — it is abdication.

> The call to boycott elections in Bihar, in response to the SIR controversy, must be reconsidered. Yes, the SIR process must be subjected to robust scrutiny. The EC must remove all doubts of every party and civil society to ensure transparency in deletions and provide effective grievance redress mechanisms. Civil society, media, and courts must remain vigilant. But the electoral arena should not be abandoned. To vacate the field is to forfeit the fight. Let us not forget that in a democracy, absence is not protest — it is abdication.

Equally self-defeating is the Opposition's habit of boycotting Parliament. While walkouts and prolonged disruptions are sometimes intended as symbolic protest, their practical effect is to gift the ruling party a free hand to pass crucial legislation without scrutiny or debate. In India, several landmark laws — from the farm bills in 2020 to key constitutional amendments in earlier years — were pushed through in near-empty Houses as Opposition MPs staged walkouts. In Bangladesh, the opposition's long parliamentary boycotts in the 1990s and 2000s allowed the government to legislate virtually unopposed. Pakistan offers similar lessons: Opposition boycotts of the National Assembly, most recently in 2022 after the change in government, enabled the Treasury benches to pass finance bills and controversial amendments with minimal challenge. Such tactics may momentarily grab headlines, but they deprive citizens of robust debate, weaken legislative oversight, and ultimately erode the very democracy the opposition claims to defend.

Democracy thrives on participation, vigilance, and constructive engagement. Whether in elections or in Parliament, the opposition's role is to challenge, question, and hold the government to account. Boycotts may offer an outlet for anger and frustration, but they also abandon the very platforms where battles for accountability are meant to be fought.

History shows that the most effective Opposition leaders have been those who stayed in the arena, however hostile, and used the tools of democracy to expose wrongs, build public opinion, and win people's trust. By walking away, the Opposition concedes both the space and the narrative to its adversaries — a political blunder from which recovery can take years, if not decades.

Remember, an empty Opposition bench is the ruling party's dream and democracy's nightmare.

The writer is former Chief Election Commissioner of India and author of An Undocumented Wonder: The Making of the Great Indian Election

Nuclear dialogue, sans politics

Given emerging dual-capability arsenals, heightened risk post Op Sindoor, Subcontinent needs a conversation on atomic weapons' use

ARUN PRAKASH

LOST IN THE thrust and parry of the parliamentary debate on Operation Sindoor were PM Narendra Modi's several references to Pakistan's "nuclear threats" and "nuclear blackmail". They reflected a deliberate articulation of India's more assertive security doctrine, representing a calculated move to redefine the deterrence equation in South Asia. That India is prepared to act against terrorism regardless of Pakistan's "nuclear bluff" is ostensibly intended to enhance India's deterrent credibility.

The three-way China-India-Pakistan nuclear relationship has created a complex web of interlocking deterrence. All three countries are modernising and expanding their nuclear arsenals and delivery systems. Given the lack of transparency regarding nuclear arsenals and doctrines, and a marked reluctance to engage in a dialogue on measures to mitigate nuclear risk, the ongoing arms race can further destabilise the region, especially in a crisis such as Pahalgam. August 6, the 80th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima, was a reminder of the horrors of a nuclear holocaust. We need to focus on the management of this complex dynamic and on the prevention of accidental or intentional escalation.

China, while officially maintaining principles of both "credible minimum deterrence" and "no first use" (NFU), is engaged in rapid expansion of its nuclear arsenal — predicted to reach 1,000 warheads by 2030. At the same time, the PLA's Rocket Force (PLARF) is fielding increasingly sophisticated missile systems, such as the 12,000-15,000 km range DF-41 and the hypersonic DF-17. PLARF's inventory consists of both conventionally armed and nuclear-tipped missiles, raising a question about China's posture: Is this "dual-capability" a deliberate strategic choice or merely an organisational detail?

Pakistan's nuclear arsenal is aimed exclusively at India, and apart from reserving the right to "first use", it has refrained from declaring an official nuclear doctrine. Pakistan's transition from "minimum credible deterrence" to "full spectrum deterrence" (FSD), which envisages the deployment of low-yield or tactical nuclear weapons, has been rationalised as a measure to counter the Indian army's "Cold Start" doctrine. The latter, it may be recalled, was a conceptual remedy for India's slow general mobilisation during the 2001-2002 Operation Parakram. However, it is only now that this concept of integrated battle groups is seeing daylight in the form of recently announced "Rudra" brigades.

India's political leadership has stood by its two long-held beliefs: (a) that the sole purpose of nuclear weapons is to deter a nuclear attack, by holding out a threat of "massive retaliation" and (b) nuclear weapons were political instruments rather than military warfighting tools. As a status quo power, India's declarations of NFU and its intention of maintaining a "credible minimum deterrent" made eminent sense. But much has changed since this doctrine was promulgated in 2003. Moreover, emerging technologies have added to the complexity of existing nuclear conundrums.

The "dual-use" potential of technologies such as AI, advanced computing, and hypersonic delivery systems could blur the traditional distinction between conventional and nuclear. For example, a precise surface-to-surface missile could carry either a conventional or a nuclear warhead, making it difficult to ascertain the nature of an incoming attack and decide an appropriate response.

The development of smaller, "dial a yield" nuclear warheads permits calibration of a single warhead to be detonated with a range of explosive effects, varying from sub-kiloton to hundreds of kilotons. The availability of such options could make their use more thinkable in a conventional conflict scenario, potentially lowering the nuclear threshold.

Since 1998, the Subcontinent has seen a few sporadic attempts at evolving confidence-building measures and nuclear risk reduction measures (NRRMs), including the 1999 Lahore MoU on measures to prevent accidental or unauthorised use of nuclear weapons, the 2005 Agreement on Pre-Notification of Missile Tests, and the 2007 Agreement to Reduce Nuclear Risks. But these are not enough, and a sustained dialogue is essential.

In the context of NRRMs, serious note needs to be taken of media reports citing open-source intelligence that during Operation Sindoor, some of the Indian missiles that targeted Mushaf air base in Pakistan's Sargodha region and the Nur Khan air base near Rawalpindi had impacted in the close vicinity of either nuclear warhead storages or Pakistan's nuclear command and control nodes. While the IAF's DG Air Operations firmly denied the targeting of any of Pakistan's nuclear installations, mischievous speculation has persisted about India's "warning strike", implying that it was a demonstration of capability rather than an attempt to destroy the underground facilities.

The planners and custodians of nuclear weapons must note that targeting an adversary's nuclear assets, even inadvertently, with conventional weapons, can be misinterpreted as a "counter-force" strategy, which is fraught with the risk of rapid escalation to nuclear war. The hazards and doctrinal confusion that would arise from such an action bear consideration.

First, a conventional strike against a nuclear facility would be indistinguishable from a nuclear first strike. Given the extremely short timelines for decision-making in a nuclear crisis, the "use them or lose them" syndrome may cut in, leading the targeted party to launch its nuclear arsenal before it is destroyed. Desperate options like "launch on warning" or "launch under attack" may be considered.

Second, while it may not trigger a nuclear detonation, a conventional attack or "near-miss" on a nuclear storage facility could cause a massive release of radioactive material, simulating a "dirty bomb", with devastating humanitarian and environmental consequences.

Finally, conventional attacks aimed at command-and-control nodes could render the adversary deaf and blind, depriving him of the ability to assess the situation accurately, communicate with his forces or issue rational orders.

These are amongst some of the manifold reasons why there is an urgent need for initiation of a sustained nuclear dialogue between India and Pakistan, insulated from the vagaries of politics. Such an interaction, by reducing mutual suspicion and enhancing transparency, might slow down the nuclear arms race and the mindless build-up of arsenals.

The writer is a former Indian Navy chief

Citizens and others

Targeting of Bengali-speaking migrants is part of a cynical, pessimistic politics

PAROMITA CHAKRABARTI

IN RECENT MONTHS, a disturbing pattern has emerged across several states: The conflation of language, religion, and citizenship into a mechanism of exclusion. In the aftermath of the Pahalgam terror attack in May, the Union Home Ministry had directed states to identify and deport illegal migrants, especially those from Bangladesh and Myanmar. Across states such as Haryana, Odisha, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh and Delhi, the security imperative has often disquietingly bypassed due process and led to the targeting of vulnerable communities — often Bengali-speaking Muslims who are Indian citizens. In Gurgaon, blue-collar workers were rounded up and detained, many allegedly despite valid identity documents. In Delhi's Jai Hind Camp, essential services were cut off to facilitate evictions. In Odisha, over 400 Bengali migrants were detained on suspicion of being illegal Bangladeshis.

While the national security imperative is beyond dispute, the response to immigration needs to be grounded in justice, transparency, and compassion. Yet, from the former AAP-led Delhi government's campaign to identify "illegal Bangladeshi" students in schools to Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's routine targeting of "outsiders" and inflammatory references to land, flood and love "jihad", to Amit Malviya, head of BJP's IT cell, claiming "'Bengali' denotes ethnicity, not linguistic uniformity" on social media to defend Delhi Police's reference to Bengali as the "language of Bangladeshis" in a recent letter, the narrative around immigration has been deeply polarising. The repeated vilification of Bengali-speakers undermines the Constitution's promise of equality, dignity, and due process. More concerning still, it reflects a rising impulse toward majoritarian governance.

This weaponisation of identity is not entirely new. In the early 1990s, when the Sangh Parivar had first raised the pitch against undocumented Bangladeshis in India, the then Congress-led Union Home Ministry had responded with Operation Pushback in the capital, a campaign to round up and deport alleged Bangladeshi migrants. The attempt was haphazard and short-lived, but not before many were forcibly sent across the border bypassing due process.

Assam's own history of exclusion is steeped in post-colonial anxieties. The anti-Bengali sentiment in the state has roots in the mass migrations following Partition and the formation of Bangladesh in 1971. The Bongal Kheda movement of the 1960s solidified in the Assam Agitation (1979–1985) and the subsequent Assam Accord sought to protect indigenous identity — but it came often at the expense of long-settled Bengali-speaking communities. The 2019 National Register of Citizens (NRC) exercise stoked old fears. Over 19 lakh people were excluded from the final list, a majority of them Bengali-speaking, and Muslim. The process — opaque, inconsistent, and marred by bureaucratic hurdles — devolved into a Kafkaesque ordeal marked by detention centres, exclusion from welfare schemes, and a constant threat of statelessness. Under Sarma, the state government's recent move to invoke the Immigrants (Expulsion from Assam) Act, 1950 — allowing district collectors to deport individuals labelled as "foreigners" without the oversight of Foreigners Tribunals — raises pressing concerns about the erosion of institutional safeguards and the risk of communal profiling that could wrongfully implicate lawful residents alongside the undocumented.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has described the current spate of detentions as targeted assault against Bengali speakers. Referring to the Election Commission's plan to implement the Special Intensive Revision nationwide, she has accused the BJP-led Centre of attempting to introduce the NRC "through the back door". She has launched a Bhasha Andolan (language movement) in protest. With critical Assembly elections due in both Bengal and Assam next year, the thickening of identity politics can turn into a flashpoint. In 2021, the TMC's campaign slogan — Bangla *nijer meyekei chay* (Bengal wants its own daughter) — channeled regional pride in response to the BJP's aggressive Hindutva push. Now, amid corruption scandals and a spate of incidents of sexual violence, the migrant issue has given TMC a new platform. It has reoriented its campaign to focus on the rights of Bengali-speaking migrants — an estimated 22.5 lakh Bengalis work outside West Bengal.

And yet, Banerjee herself has played into this narrative earlier. In January, she accused the BSF at Bengal's border with Bangladesh of letting in Bangladeshis illegally to pin the blame of infiltration on the state government. This rhetoric of "infiltrators" and "outsiders" may reap electoral dividends in the short term, but in the long run, it foments division, distrust and a breakdown of order. In Pune last week, for instance, a mob, several of them allegedly belonging to the Bajrang Dal, barged into the home of a Kargil War veteran's relative, and demanded identity proofs, calling the family Bangladeshis.

Migration is a natural phenomenon in a country as diverse and dynamic as India. Article 19 of the Constitution guarantees all citizens the right to move and reside freely within the country. For many, migration is not a choice but a compulsion, driven by economic hardship, displacement, or historical patterns of mobility. To reduce individuals to narrow markers of language, faith, or ethnicity is to chip away at the pluralistic foundations of Indian democracy.

The warning bells are loud and clear: If identity continues to be weaponised, India risks further shrinking its civic space into something narrow, brittle, and unjust. When a system focuses on binaries — citizen vs infiltrator, us vs them — it erodes the nuanced, layered understanding of what it means to be Indian.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CAPTAIN'S KNOCK

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'The Age of Gill' (IE, August 6). It showcases the arrival of a new Team India under the leadership of Shubman Gill. The Test series will go down as one of the finest. Gill's talent and composure were on display, as were his skills as an efficient captain. His record-breaking tally of 754 runs in the series speaks volumes. Gill's most important job now will be to work on improving the side's fielding and managing the team.

Deepanshu Srivastava, *Pune*

AFTER HASINA

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'One year later' (IE, August 6). In the year since the Sheikh Hasina regime was toppled, more has stayed the same than canged. The impartiality of the country's courts and its political process remains under a cloud

S S Paul, *Nadia*

UNFAIR DEMANDS

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'Trump warns of tariff hike in 24 hrs, Russia says countries can choose trade partners' (IE, August 6). US President Donald Trump continues to take a belligerent attitude towards India. It is difficult to comprehend why he is turning so hostile. He speaks the language of the leader of an imperial power.

G David Milton, *Maruthancode*

THE RECENT THREAT by former US President Donald Trump to "very substantially" raise tariffs on India over its purchase of Russian oil is both alarming and unfair. India has the right to make decisions on trade and foreign policy based on its national interests. Energy security is non-negotiable for a country of 1.4 billion people. In this regard, Russian imports have been critical in ensuring stable, affordable energy supplies.Trump calling India as the "highest tariffed nation" and not a fair trading partner overlooks the growing economic relationship that took on great momentum 20 years ago. US-India ties have also benifitted greatly from the latter's liberalisation of key sectors over the years.

Sanjay Chopra, *Mohali*

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Loan fraud case: ED investigation against Anil Ambani

DEEPTIMAN TIWARY
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 6

FIVE YEARS after he was questioned in the Yes Bank loan fraud case, industrialist Anil Ambani is once again under the scrutiny of investigative agencies. On July 24, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) raided premises linked to his companies in connection with a Rs 17,000 crore alleged money laundering investigation. Anil Ambani appeared before ED investigators on Tuesday.

The ED action came some days after the State Bank of India classified the loan account of one of his companies as fraudulent, and markets regulator Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) issued an order detailing a systematic diversion of funds.

ED's investigation

The investigation flows from FIRs registered earlier by the CBI and inputs from institutions including SEBI, National Housing Bank (NHB), and Bank of Baroda, and covers several Reliance Anil Dhirubhai Ambani Group companies including Reliance Infrastructure, Reliance Power, Reliance Communications, and Reliance Home Finance Ltd (RHFL).

The ED suspects a scheme of loan fraud and diversion of funds involving thousands of crores. Loans extended by RHFL and Reliance Commercial Finance Ltd were allegedly routed to group companies and shell firms, bypassing norms and creating a false impression of loan performance through evergreening.

According to the preliminary investigation:

- A Rs 3,000 crore loan from Yes Bank (2017-19) was allegedly diverted soon after disbursal. In some cases, the loan was sanctioned before due diligence, and backdated documentation was used.
- Loans were allegedly onward lent on the day of sanction, often to firms with common addresses and directors.
- "C Company", an undisclosed related party, was used to route funds without disclosure. Reliance Infrastructure allegedly diverted Rs 10,000 crore in this way.
- The group allegedly took a haircut of Rs 5,480 crore, receiving only Rs 4 crore in cash and the rest in inactive power distribution companies, with no chance of recovery.

ED actions so far

The July 24 searches covered 35 premises, including 50 companies and 25 individuals, including senior Reliance Group officials.

On August 5, Anil Ambani is learnt to have told the ED that he had no knowledge of several of the alleged fraudulent transactions and loan disbursals, and asked for a week's time to verify the details.

The agency has written to a dozen banks including SBI, Axis Bank, ICICI Bank, and HDFC Bank, asking for details of due diligence on loans sanctioned to his companies, including RHFL and Reliance Communications.

On August 4, Partha Sarathi Biswal, managing director of Biswal Tradelink Pvt Ltd (BTPL), was arrested for allegedly arranging fake bank guarantees worth Rs 68.2 crore that were provided by Reliance Power for a Solar Energy Corporation of India (SECI) tender.

The ED is also examining the role of Yes Bank officials and probing possible *quid pro quo*. Under the scanner is a Rs 2,850 crore investment by Reliance Mutual Fund in AT-1 bonds of Yes Bank.

SBI loan fraud case

On June 13, SBI, in accordance with the Reserve Bank of India's directions on fraud risk management, classified Reliance Communications, along with promoter director Anil Ambani, as "fraud". The bank is in the process of lodging a complaint with the CBI.

SBI's credit exposure in RCom includes fund-based principal outstanding amount of Rs 2,227.64 crore along with accrued interest and expenses with effect from August 26, 2016, and non-fund-based bank guarantee of Rs 786.52 crore.

The loan was declared fraudulent on the ground that the company had used the funds in violation of "agreed terms", and due to "irregularities observed in the conduct of the account of Reliance Communications".

RCom has said that it is undergoing a corporate insolvency resolution process, and has earlier reported outstanding debt of Rs 40,400 crore. The company has said that the loans referred to by SBI pertain to the period before the insolvency resolution process, and are required to be resolved through the process.

SEBI's findings

In a strong order earlier this year, SEBI laid out how RHFL and its key executives, including Anil Ambani, allegedly orchestrated a fraud on public investors and shareholders.

- Rs 12,487 crore in loans were disbursed to 47 shell companies (Potentially Indirectly Linked Entities) between FY17 and FY19.
- Many of these companies shared common addresses, directors, or email domains with Anil Ambani group firms.
- Deviations from credit policies were routine: loans disbursed on the day of application, backdated sanction memos, incomplete documentation, no security creation.
- Loans were allegedly routed to repay earlier loans — an evergreening loop that misrepresented financial health.
- A forensic audit by Grant Thornton found that in many cases, the funds ended up back with group companies like Reliance Capital, Reliance Infra, and Reliance Big Entertainment.
- SEBI said the GPCL (General Purpose Corporate Loan) scheme was a facade for diversion. It restrained Anil Ambani and top company executives from accessing the securities market, pending further proceedings.

Anil Ambani's troubles

The developments have come as Anil Ambani was trying to rebuild after years of financial and reputational setbacks.

His troubles began soon after the high-profile split with brother Mukesh Ambani. Companies such as Reliance Communications, Reliance Capital, and Reliance Power collapsed under financial strain — RCom shut down operations in 2019 with liabilities exceeding Rs 46,000 crore.

The downfall was marked by defaults, insolvency proceedings, and regulatory actions, including a five-year SEBI ban on Anil Ambani for allegedly orchestrating a scheme to siphon off funds.

His troubles extended to defence and infrastructure ventures. Reliance Naval failed to deliver key defence contracts and entered bankruptcy. Other high-profile ventures like Dassault Reliance Aerospace played only modest roles in India's defence sector. Anil Ambani stepped down from several board positions, and group assets were either sold or restructured through insolvency proceedings.

A slow turnaround began in 2022. The group pivoted to clean energy, infrastructure, and defence manufacturing. Reliance Power achieved zero debt, and new defence partnerships were forged with European companies.

WITH INPUTS FROM MAHENDER SINGH MANRAL

EXPLAINED SCIENCE

HOW SCIENTISTS FINALLY IDENTIFIED THE ELUSIVE KILLER OF STARFISH

TWELVE YEARS after a mysterious disease started killing starfish in droves — more than 5 billion are estimated to have died since 2013 — scientists have identified a bacterium to be the culprit.

The starfish, or sea stars, of various species died due to a wasting disease, in which their limbs fell off and their bodies melted away to leave just a pile of gunk. The epidemic was found along the Pacific coast of North America.

A study, published in the journal *Nature* on August 5, revealed that the starfish were falling victim to *Vibrio pectenicida*, which is related to the bacterium that causes cholera in humans.

Sunflower starfish off the coast of California, US. *Wikimedia Commons*

How did scientists find the bacterium responsible?

It was a long process. While studies earlier focused on a virus type called the densovirus, it was later found to occur naturally in some starfish. Also, some studies were examining the tissue samples of the dead starfish, when the bacterium was in fact present in the coelomic fluid, the equivalent of starfish blood.

The breakthrough came at the Hakai Institute in British Columbia, Canada, where scientists raised sunflower sea stars in the labs, and then exposed them to the infected starfish in various ways, such as bringing them physically in contact with diseased body parts or injecting mixtures from such parts. It was found that injections passed on the infection, but not when their contents had been treated with heat. In effect, boiling was killing the cause of the disease, pointing to a bacterium.

The scientists then examined the coelomic fluid — a fluid that fills the body cavity and surrounds the internal organs — of both healthy and infected starfish. Dr Alyssa Gehmanopens, co-author of the study, was quoted by the UK's National History Museum as saying, "When we compared the coelomic fluid of exposed and healthy sea stars, there was basically one thing different: Vibrio. We all had chills. We thought, 'That's it. We have it. That's what causes wasting'."

Why is this significant?

Understanding the cause of a disease is the first step to treating it. Scientists will now see if starfish in the sea can be given probiotics to fight off the bacteria, and if Vibrio-resistant starfish can be grown in labs and introduced into the wild, among other measures.

Protecting the population of starfish is crucial for the marine ecosystem as they help maintain a stable food chain. When billions of starfish died, the population of sea urchins, which they feed on, exploded. These sea urchins started eating away whole forests of kelp, a seaweed other marine animals thrive on and which helps sequester carbon. **ENS**

EXPLAINED ECONOMICS

Rise of the herbicides

The growth in India's pesticide market is being led by not insecticides or fungicides, but herbicides. In recent years, the demand for this chemical has increased due to a shortage of labour for manual weeding

HARISH DAMODARAN

CROP PROTECTION chemicals, commonly known as "pesticides", are classified based on the pest they target. Insecticides target insects that cause damage by feeding on crops or transmitting disease, fungicides control fungal diseases, and herbicides kill or inhibit the growth of weeds.

India's organised domestic crop protection chemicals market is valued at roughly Rs 24,500 crore with insecticides, at Rs 10,700 crore, being the largest segment followed by herbicides (Rs 8,200 crore) and fungicides (Rs 5,600 crore).

That said, it is also the market for herbicides that, at 10% per annum, is growing at the highest rate. Here's why.

Pavan Khengre

INDIA'S CROP PROTECTION CHEMICALS MARKET

	Market Size	Annual Growth
Insecticides	₹10,706 cr	5.3%-5.5%
Fungicides	₹5,571 cr	5.5%-6%
Herbicides	₹8,209 cr	10%-11%

Source: Industry estimates for 2024-25. Growth is for last five years.

The herbicide market

Much of India's herbicide market is controlled by multinationals: German Bayer AG (which has an estimated 15% market share), Chinese state-owned Syngenta (12%) and ADAMA (10%), American Corteva Agriscience (7%), and Japanese Sumitomo Chemical (6%). Major Indian players include Dhanuka Agritech (6%) and Crystal Crop Protection Ltd (CCPL, 4%).

CCPL recently purchased the rights to Ethoxysulfuron, a herbicide used against broad-leaved weeds and sedges in rice and sugarcane, from Bayer AG for sales in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Southeast Asian countries. The deal, announced in January, covered Bayer's 'Sunrice' trademark for mixture products containing this active ingredient.

Earlier, in December 2023, CCPL had acquired 'Gramoxone', a broad-spectrum herbicide containing the active ingredient Paraquat, from Syngenta for sale in India.

"We are very bullish on herbicides. While the all-India market for this segment grew by 10% in 2024-25 (from Rs 7,460 crore to Rs 8,209 crore), our own sales rose over 47%," said Ankur Aggarwal, managing director of the Delhi-based company that recorded a turnover of Rs 2,201 crore from crop protection chemicals last fiscal.

Growth driver: labour shortage

Weeds, unlike insect pests and disease-causing pathogens, do not directly damage or destroy crops. Instead, they compete with them for nutrients, water and sunlight. Yield losses happen because the crops are deprived of these essential resources. Besides growing at their expense, weeds sometimes even harbour pests and pathogens inflicting further harm.

By keeping their fields free from weeds, farmers can ensure that the benefits of the fertilisers and irrigation water go to crops and not these unwanted plants.

Weed control has traditionally been manual: either by hand or or simple tools with flat blades such as *khurpi*. There are also power weeders that can be run between rows of standing crops to remove weeds in and around those spaces.

But manual weeding is time-consuming, with a labourer taking 8-10 hours to cover a single acre. And since the weeds regrow, the process has to often be repeated during the crop's lifecycle.

According to the Labour Bureau's data, the all-India daily wage rate for plant protection workers averaged Rs 447.6 in December 2024, as against Rs 326.2 five years ago. Cost aside, this labour is not available when the farmer needs it. While power weeders take 2-3 hours per acre, these are not effective against weeds with deep roots or growing within densely planted crop areas.

That's where herbicides come in: the demand for these chemicals is growing mainly on the back of rising agricultural labour scarcity.

How market is evolving

Farmers generally spray insecticides and fungicides only when they physically observe and assess the pest population or disease incidence to be significant enough to impact crop yield and quality.

There's a certain economic threshold level, where the cost of controlling the pest/disease using chemicals is justified by the extent of anticipated crop loss. In herbicides, too, farmers tend to mostly spray only after the weeds appear, that is, "post-emergence".

In recent times, however, farmers have also been resorting to prophylactic application of "pre-emergent" herbicides around or just after crop sowing. These stop the weeds from coming out, helping keep the field clean from the very start. Alternatively, they may use "early post-emergent" herbicides to control weeds at the crop's initial sensitive growth stage. In both cases, the spraying is preventive, as opposed to being reactive.

And it is this segment that is leading growth, as farmers increasingly opt for timely and smart weed control amid rising labour shortages. Currently, out of the estimated Rs 1,500-crore paddy herbicide market, the "pre-emergent" sub-segment accounts for roughly Rs 550 crore. That share is about a fifth in the Rs 1,000-crore market for wheat herbicides.

Monopoly concerns

Unlike seeds and fertilisers, where there are enough Indian public as well as private sector players, the crop protection chemicals industry is practically a multinational monopoly.

But some Indian companies, nevertheless, are attempting to break through, by acquiring the rights to active ingredients and brands from big global majors or introducing innovative formulations.

CCPL, for instance, has collaborated with the Ohio (US)-based Battelle and Japan's Mitsui AgriScience to develop a new paddy herbicide called 'Sikosa'. Containing two active ingredients, Bensulfuron-methyl and Pretilachlor, in a patented oil-dispersion formulation, 'Sikosa' spreads quickly in water and works well when sprayed within 0-3 days after transplanting.

"The product cost is Rs 850-900 per acre, compared to Rs 2,000-plus with manual weeding," Aggarwal claimed.

That said India is still some distance away from having its own Sinochem, which owns both Syngenta and ADAMA.

LONGER VERSION ON
indianexpress.com/explained

Why Sylheti, spoken by millions in Northeast, is not a 'Bangladeshi language'

EXPLAINED POLITICS

SUKRITA BARUAH & ARJUN SENGUPTA
GUWAHATI, NEW DELHI, AUGUST 6

AFTER A Delhi Police letter seemingly referred to Bengali as the "Bangladeshi national language", a social media post by BJP leader Amit Malviya defending the letter has sparked an outcry in Assam's Barak Valley.

Malviya claimed the letter was referring to "a set of dialects, syntax, and speech patterns that are distinctly different from the Bangla spoken in India", and gave the example of "Sylhelti" as being "nearly incomprehensible to Indian Bengalis".

But there has long been a sizable Sylheti population in India. "Over 7 million people in Northeast India...speak Sylheti. They are proud Indian and Bengalis. To dismiss their language as something foreign...is to rub salt in the wounds of a people already scarred by Partition," prominent BJP leader and former Silchar MP Rajdeep Roy posted on X.

Dialect or language?

Sylheti is spoken on both sides of the border, in the Sylhet Division of Bangladesh and the Barak Valley Division of southern Assam. There is also a sizable presence of Sylheti-speakers in Meghalaya and Tripura.

"Every language has dialects and Bengali has several of them," said Joydeep Biswas, who teaches economics in Cachar College.

The primary argument for referring to Sylheti as a dialect of Bengali — and not a language in its own right — is mutual intelligibility, that is, speakers of both tongues understand each other. However, there is scholarly disagreement on the matter.

"The claim of mutual intelligibility by some speakers of both Sylheti and Bengali may be more an effect of the speakers' exposure to both languages," linguists Candide Simard, Sarah M Dopierala, and E Marie Thaut wrote in their paper 'Introducing the Sylheti language and its speakers' (2020).

Nonetheless, Sylheti-speakers have a strong affinity to the Bengali language, and often identify as Bengali themselves. "Families such as mine also speak Sylheti. But I identify my linguistic identity as Bengali because Sylheti is a dialect. Even if non-Sylhetis do not understand Sylheti, that doesn't take away the [Bengali] linguistic identity of the Sylheti people," Biswas said.

Tapodhir Bhattacharjee, former vice-chancellor of Assam University Silchar and a Bengali literary theorist, said the primary difference between the Sylheti dialect and standardised Bengali is phonetic, and the two are near identical in morphology and syntax.

While Bhattacharjee recognises that there was once a Sylhet-Nagri script — the existence of a unique system of writing is often seen as a marker of a language — he refers to it as an "esoteric script" which was never commonly used.

Sylhet, Partition & migration

The present-day Sylhet Division in Bangladesh, comprising the districts of Habibganj, Sunamganj, Sylhet, and Moulvibazar, was made a part of Assam soon after it was split from Bengal in 1874.

"Although vast in area, this new province (Assam), with its population of 2.4 million, had a low revenue potential... To make it financially viable... [the British] decided in September 1874 to annex the Bengali-speaking and populous district of Sylhet. With its population of 1.7 million, Sylhet had been historically an integral part of Bengal," historian Ashfaque Hossain wrote in 'The Making and Unmaking of Assam-Bengal Borders and the Sylhet Referendum' (2013).

Sylhet, which is geographically contiguous with Cachar in the Bengali-majority Barak Valley, saw a churn between 1874 and 1947 over the question of whether it should be a part of Assam or Bengal.

Historian Anindita Dasgupta wrote in 'Remembering Sylhet: A Forgotten Story of India's 1947 Partition', "... the Hindus of Sylhet demanded for a return to the more "advanced" Bengal, whereas the Muslims by and large preferred to remain in Assam where its leaders, along with the Assamese Muslims, found a more powerful political voice...".

But come 1947, the situation was reversed. Now the Hindus of Sylhet demanded to remain in Assam, and hence India, while the Muslims sought to join East Pakistan. A controversial referendum held in July eventually led to Sylhet going to East Pakistan. Only a part of Sylhet, comprising present-day Sribhumi (formerly Karimganj) district in the Barak Valley, remained in Indian Assam.

In the initial years after Partition, a wave of Hindu Sylheti refugees settled in the Barak Valley. But the story of Sylheti migration across the Northeast is even older. Dasgupta wrote about "Sylheti Hindu *bhodrolok*" who were "economic migrants" in British Assam.

"Sylheti middle-class economic migrants to the Brahmaputra Valley and Cachar areas were a population in motion in colonial Assam, moving back and forth, many with simultaneous homes in both Sylhet and the Brahmaputra Valley districts and Cachar since the late nineteenth century," she wrote in 'Denial and resistance: Sylheti Partition 'refugees' in Assam' (2001).

The Census of 1901 noted that "Sylhetis who are good clerks and are enterprising traders are found, in small numbers, in most of the districts of the province (Assam)".

There was thus a significant population of Sylhetis in what is now India well before East Pakistan, let alone Bangladesh, was imagined.

India and Philippines broaden deepen ties with an eye on China

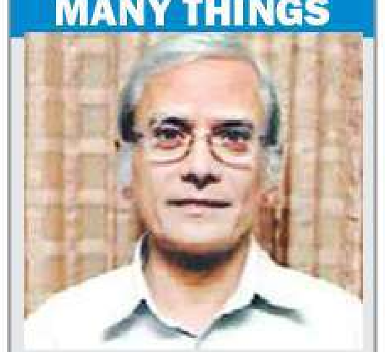
INDIA'S growing engagement with Philippines marks a substantive milestone in its regional diplomacy and defence outreach, one that promises wide-ranging strategic and economic ramifications. The relationship between the two nations has now been elevated to a strategic partnership, signalling a clear intent to broaden cooperation beyond traditional areas and anchor it firmly in the realms of defence, maritime security, and emerging technologies. The upgrade manifested itself during Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr's visit to Delhi, where he and Prime Minister Narendra Modi held comprehensive discussions that were aimed at shaping the future of bilateral ties. The leaders reviewed the state of the relationship across multiple domains and agreed to prioritise defence and maritime collaboration, a natural outcome of their shared concerns about the evolving security environment in the Indo-Pacific, particularly in the South China Sea. Both countries, which have consistently championed the principles of a rules-based order, see greater synergy in addressing common challenges that stem from rising assertiveness in regional waters.

Both feel threatened by China. A significant part of the dialogue centred on weapons procurement and joint military exercises. India, which has rapidly expanded its defence production capacity in recent years, is positioning itself as a credible partner to meet the modernisation needs of Philippines. The two discussed prospects for joint naval drills and closer operational coordination between their armed forces, reflecting a shift towards deeper interoperability. The visit also coincided with the 75th anniversary of diplomatic ties, adding symbolic weight to the substantive agreements under discussion. Looking ahead, six new agreements are set to be finalised, covering areas such as trade facilitation, digital transformation, and developmental cooperation. India has committed to expanding its development projects in the Philippines, with a particular focus on infrastructure, healthcare, and education, while also exploring ways to boost bilateral trade, which remains well below potential. Digital cooperation is emerging as a promising frontier, with India offering its expertise in fintech, e-governance and start-up ecosystems to complement Philippines' growing digital economy. Parallel to these diplomatic advances, India is undertaking a major upgrade of its own defence capabilities.

The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) recently cleared modernisation proposals worth Rs 67,000 crore, underscoring New Delhi's resolve to strengthen its military posture while promoting indigenous production. Among the headline approvals are the procurement of 87 armed Medium Altitude Long Endurance (MALE) drones and over 110 BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles. The MALE drones, designed for long-endurance surveillance and precision strikes, will be produced with 60 per cent indigenous content, aligning with India's Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative. These drones are intended to significantly enhance the capabilities of the Army, Navy, and Air Force, offering greater situational awareness and operational flexibility across India's vast and diverse theatres of operation. The BrahMos missiles, to be deployed on Sukhoi-30MKI fighter jets, will provide a substantial boost to the Indian Air Force's strike power, particularly in maritime roles where long-range precision capability is critical. Together, these steps reflect a broader strategic vision: India is not merely strengthening its defence for deterrence but also positioning itself as a reliable security provider and defence partner in the Indo-Pacific. Its growing collaboration with the Philippines fits squarely within this framework, as New Delhi seeks to build resilient networks of like-minded countries to ensure regional stability and uphold the principles of sovereignty and freedom of navigation.

Recalling the good old 'musical days' makes for joyful moments

TALKING OF MANY THINGS



DR MOHAN KANDA

THOUGH a connoisseur of English and Telugu literature, a distinguished jurist, a successful advocate and a highly respected judge, my father had no ear for music. But unlike Shakespeare's "The man that has no music in himself. Nor is moved with concord of sweet sounds, is fit for treason, stratagems, and spoils", he was a kind-hearted, affectionate, and friendly person, much liked by friends and relatives.

In 1966, as a post-graduate student in Osmania University, a few friends and I formed a group called 'Saaz Aur Awaaz' and occasionally performed variety entertainment programmes, comprising music, plays, skits, and such like. One afternoon, as our group was rehearsing for one of the events in the upstairs portion of our house, a friend of my father's, who had dropped in for a chat, asked him where I was. "He and his friends are busy making what they call music", was his cryptic reply! It was my father, again, who remarked to another friend that I played the guitar with "much greater enthusiasm than expertise!"

I have tried my hand at various activities, including outdoor games like cricket, table tennis, and tennis, indoor games such as chess, draughts and carroms. On occasion, I have also flirted with musical instruments, such as the mouth organ and the guitar. I managed to attain reasonable levels of proficiency in nearly all of them, while failing to excel in any one of them. Somewhat similar was my affair with the art of singing, in which I became good enough to be heard without complaint, but nowhere near being able to perform to a discerning audience.

The important thing, however, was that in all the activities, I was able to reach levels where I could appreciate the subtle nuances of the performance of talented experts, in games, or maestros, in vocal or instrumental music. My ability to enjoy and appreciate good performances gave me immense pleasure on several occasions.

Watching cricket greats such as the legendary Ghulam Ahmed, Sir Garfield Sobers, Sachin Tendulkar and Sunil Gavaskar, both at Hyderabad and Delhi, was an unforgettable experience. And equally memorable were the occasions, when I had the honour and privilege, of being part of a small and select group of listeners, when such legends as Duke Ellington and his Orchestra, the Violin wizard Dwaram Venkata Swami Naidu, Veena maestro Eemanii Sankara Sastry and distinguished exponents of vocal music, such as Mangalampalli Balamuralikrishna, Pandit Jasraj, Mehdi Hassan and Ustad Zakir Hussain, displayed their masterly skills.

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The first tentative step I took in getting acquainted with the art of playing musical instruments was to learn to play on the harmonica or mouth organ. A friend of mine played it with such exquisite expertise that I brought for him a slide-button harmonica, or chromatic harmonica, which utilised a button– activated slide to change the pitch of the notes, a rare thing to possess those days.

Years later, keen to realise one of my childhood dreams, I approached Richard Gnanakan, who was playing the guitar as part of a band in the popular Lido restaurant in Secunderabad, with the request that he teach me to play the guitar. He agreed although the terms were rather expensive, as the lessons came at ₹10 per session! It was much later that I also had a shot at testing my skill at playing the Mrudangam from the well-known maestro Yella Venkateswara Rao, a short-lived and half-hearted trial that soon fizzled out.

Even in my school days, so intense was my interest in music that at 8 pm on the dot every Wednesday, I used to walk to a distant neighbour's house, to listen to the extremely popular 'Binaca Geet Mala', so wonderfully anchored by the legendary Ameen Sayani.

By then the popular Vividh Bharathi, an entertainment radio channel of what was then the All India Radio Radio (AIR), was yet to be launched. One had to tune into Radio Ceylon for the commercial variety of entertainment, such as music and plays. Several extremely popular programmes were on offer at that time, such as 'Ek Aur Anek' in which one popular singer figured in each item while others changed, and 'Purane Filmon Ki Sangeet' featuring numbers from the films of yesteryear.

Over time, our household graduated from only having a radio to acquiring a radiogram, one with a record changer to boot. Gramaphone records came at that time in three speeds, with different revolutions per minute-331/3, 45 and 78. I was soon to become the proud owner of my own radio set presented to me by my father on the eve of an important cricket match at Hyderabad. At a cost, no less, than the princely amount of ₹650!

In my childhood, I had participated in group singing and enacting of plays in radio programmes as a member of the Andhra Balananda Sangham, in the AIR station at Chennai. In later years, I occasionally summoned the temerity and the guts to test the patience of audiences, albeit with some moderate success, such as singing some popular 'The Beatles' hits, along with my 'Saaz Aur Awaaz' colleagues in the AIR station at Hyderabad, giving full vent to my lung capacity, to the rather indulgent audience of my batchmates, at our annual get-togethers and participating in mass nostalgia in the golden jubilee get-together of the 1968 IAS batch, at Mussoorie some years ago.

Some endearing moments I recall of the journey down memory lane, include listening to the popular Saturday night. 'A Date With You' program as a college student at Delhi and, lest I forget, failing to qualify for the college music competitions, as a student at Hindu College, Delhi, and later consoling myself, that it was because I had chosen the wrong song!

(The writer was formerly Chief Secretary, Government of Andhra Pradesh)

Celebrating workmanship of weavers and empowering them

DR. SREERAMULU GOSIKONDA

THE Indian handloom industry, with origins tracing back to around 2000 BCE during the Indus Valley Civilization, epitomizes a living tradition of aesthetic finesse, ecological sustainability, and cultural plurality. From ancient terracotta spindle whorls to contemporary Jamdanis, Chanderis, Ikkat, Brocades and Kanjeevarams, the handloom narrative is woven into the social and symbolic life of India.

As per the Fourth Handloom Census (2019–20), India has over 31.44 lakh handloom weavers and allied workers across 2.8 million households, underscoring the sector's expansive and decentralized nature. Though handloom production today constitutes a small fraction of the overall textile market, it remains vital for rural livelihoods, gender empowerment, and sustainable development.

This piece revisits the contemporary state of the handloom sector, especially in the context of the 11th National Handloom Day, which is celebrated on August 7, and outlines strategies for its revitalization through digital integration and policy commitment. It situates discussion within the framework of constitutional obligations, international human rights instruments, and environmental sustainability, emphasizing the need to protect and empower traditional artisans in the era of climate change and digital disruption.

Historical significance, cultural anchoring:

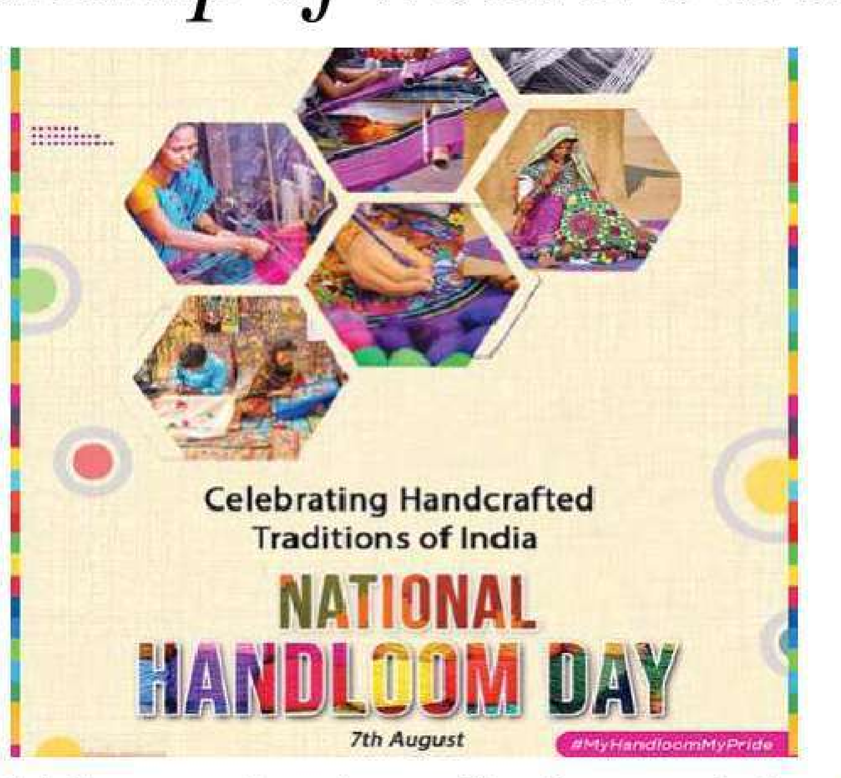
The symbolic importance of handloom in India goes beyond economic metrics. It was central to the anti-colonial Swadeshi movement, led by Mahatma Gandhi, who elevated the charkha as an emblem of self-reliance and resistance.

National Handloom Day, first observed on August 7, 2015, commemorates the launch of the Swadeshi movement in 1905 in Calcutta. The aim of the celebration is to promote pride in indigenous textile traditions and to recognize the contributions of weavers in preserving the pluralistic cultural heritage of the country.

This year's theme is "Weaving sustainability, empowering artisans." There have been renewed calls for promoting eco-friendly, handcrafted products, expanding market linkages for weavers, and emphasizing the role of youth in safeguarding textile heritage through technology and innovation. To mark the occasion, the Development Commissioner (Handlooms) is organizing the Handloom Hackathon 2025 at IIT Delhi under the theme: "Dream it – Do it" from August 2-3.

Socio-economic status:

The 4th Handloom Census of India offers critical insights into the socio-economic profile of handloom workers. Of the total weaver and allied workforce, 72 per cent are women, reflecting the sector's role in rural women's employment. However, about 67 per cent of these workers earn less than ₹5,000 per month, indicating deep-rooted economic vulnerability. Additionally, only 17 per cent of households reported access to institutional credit, and a mere 11 per cent were linked to cooperative societies—an alarming indicator of economic marginalization. The census also shows that over 84 per cent of handloom units are operated from weavers' homes, which presents both an opportunity and a challenge.



While many weavers possess traditional skills inherited over generations, formal training in design, innovation, and marketing remains limited, further constraining their growth potential in an increasingly competitive global textile economy.

The export economy:

Despite its domestic challenges, the Indian handloom sector maintains a modest yet significant presence in international markets. According to data from the Ministry of Textiles, handloom exports stood at ₹1,693 crore between April 2021 and February 2022. This includes exports of home furnishings, fabrics, scarves, and floor coverings, primarily to countries such as the U.S., the U.K., Germany and France.

These figures are reflective not only of the sector's potential in niche markets but also of the increasing global demand for ethical and sustainable fashion. Export growth, however, faces obstacles such as standardization issues, inadequate branding, and logistical bottlenecks. There is a pressing need for integrated handloom clusters, streamlined export facilitation centers, and digital marketing platforms that can directly connect rural artisans to global consumers without layers of exploitative intermediaries.

Handloom weaving stands out as one of the few large-scale industries in India that has a minimal ecological footprint. The process consumes negligible electricity and does not rely on fossil fuels. Fabrics are predominantly made from natural fibers such as cotton, silk, wool, jute, and linen, many of which are dyed with organic colors.

The low-energy, low-waste nature of handloom makes it inherently aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) and Goal 13 (Climate Action). This sustainability dimension becomes even more critical when juxtaposed with the global fast fashion industry, which accounts for nearly 10 per cent of global carbon emissions and 20 per cent of wastewater. By contrast, handloom products, though slower in production, embody principles of circular economy, durability, and ethical labor—all vital for addressing climate crises and social inequities simultaneously.

Constitutional framework:

The handloom sector's continuity is not merely a matter of economic policy but a constitutional imperative. The Directive Principles of State Policy, enshrined in Articles 39, 41, 42, 43, and 47 of the Indian Constitution, mandate the state to secure livelihood, ensure humane working conditions. Article 43 explicitly calls for the promotion of cottage industries on an individual or cooperative basis.

Moreover, international human rights instruments like s the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) affirm the right to work, fair wages, and cultural participation. Handloom artisans, often experience multiple layers of socio-economic discrimination. Strengthening their position, therefore, is essential for advancing not just economic justice, but also pluralism and inclusion.

Considering the sector's multifaceted significance, it is imperative to devise a comprehensive revitalization strategy rooted in pluralist values and sustainability. The digital revolution, rather than being viewed as a threat, must be harnessed as an enabling tool. Digital literacy campaigns, especially for women weavers, can facilitate participation in e-commerce platforms such as GeM, Amazon Karigar, or Taneira. Skill development must go beyond loom operation and encompass design innovation, brand storytelling and inventory management. NIFT and IIHT can foster collaborations between students and weaving clusters.

Furthermore, schemes such as the National Handloom Development Programme (NHDP) and Handloom Weavers' Comprehensive Welfare Scheme (HWCWS) must be rigorously implemented with thrust on transparency and accountability. There is also a need to integrate handloom promotion into broader rural development and tourism policies, with incentives for heritage mapping, community exhibitions, and educational campaigns in schools and colleges. The handloom sector is not merely a relic of the past, but a living, breathing embodiment of India's cultural diversity and sustainable ethos. On this historic day, let us not just remember the past, but actively shape a more inclusive and ecologically resilient future, commitment to a plural society that honors both heritage and innovation.

(The writer is Assistant Professor (Sociology) at Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi. Views expressed are his personal)

MEDLEY

LETTERS

K'taka CM must shun pro-Muslim bias

THIS refers to the editorial 'One-upmanship of the bizarre kind in Karnataka'. It has become a trend of sorts in Karnataka, especially by the ruling Congress government to perpetually keep alive the legacy of Tipu Sultan, including by irrationally crediting Tipu as the builder of Kannambadi Dam. Tipu Jayanthi came into controversy, promoted by the Congress government that was vehemently opposed by the level-headed citizens of Karnataka for Tipu's anti-Hindu ways that the government attempted to catapult him to the status of 'India's freedom fighter' having fought the British. It is important that the Siddaramiah government desists from the overt Muslim appeasement to the consternation of Hindus in the state. This excessive pro-Muslim pampering mentality on part of the Congress will cost it dearly in its greed for power.

K R Parvathy, Mysuru

Flood management is the need of the hour

EVERY year during the monsoon season, several states in India face disasters like floods. Recently, a devastating flood in Uttarakhand caused widespread destruction. In these circumstances, a comprehensive and forward-looking flood management system is extremely necessary for the country, where the frequency and intensity of floods have been increasing by the year. On one hand, unregulated urban development, obstruction in the natural flow of rivers, and blocked drainage systems make floods more destructive. On the other hand, the lack of early warning systems and protective infrastructure puts people's lives at serious risk. Hence, flood management must include preparedness before the disaster, relief efforts during and after the flood, and long-term rehabilitation measures. To achieve this, it is essential for institutions like IMD, Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS), ISRO's satellite services, and modern survey technologies to provide quick and accurate forecasts. Additionally, it is crucial to deep-clean riverbeds and remove encroachments around riverbanks. Public awareness is also important. The time has come for us to approach floods with a scientific mindset.

Dr Jitesh Mori, Kutch

Onus on GHMC and HYDRAA engineers

NATURE'S fury has been causing massive damages and claiming many lives for decades together. Same goes with heavy rains, which wreak havoc and bring normal life to a standstill. Our experienced engineering professionals in GHMC and HYDRAA must use the latest technology to clear all underground drainage lines and manholes that are blocked or leaking, using detectors and sensors. Like done by blood banks and organ donation camps, the engineers must create many open water storage tanks and canals to collect rainwater, which can subsequently flow into rivers. Surficial repairs will be a waste of money. We need permanent solutions. Officials from HYDRAA and the GHMC should rely on the latest infrastructure and make life easy and safe for the citizens of the twin cities.

G Murali Mohan Rao, Secunderabad-11

Proper planning can check manmade disasters

THE visuals of flash floods causing a near-total destruction of a village, Dharali, and loss of scores of human lives in Uttarakhand are heart-breaking. The rescue operations by various governmental agencies are laudable. Now it's time to dwell deep into the root causes of such disasters, which are happening regularly in the Himalayan region. The eco-sensitive zone must be kept away from so-called development with unplanned constructions. The quantity of destruction may be due to sprouting of unplanned constructions. There should be proper planning to mitigate manmade disasters both in frequency and severity.

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BENGALURU ONLINE

Two-wheeler used by Dy CM linked to 34 traffic violations, Rs 18,500 fine

BENGALURU: A two-wheeler driven by Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar during an inspection of the Hebbal flyover loop on August 5 has 34 pending traffic violation cases and a total fine of Rs 18,500, according to the Bengaluru Traffic Police website. However, Congress sources claimed that the vehicle does not belong to Shivakumar and that he was merely riding it during the inspection. According to the traffic police website, the vehicle has been booked for multiple violations, including riding without a helmet, using a mobile phone while riding, and entering no-entry or one-way zones. On Tuesday, Shivakumar shared a video on his official 'X' account showing himself wearing a helmet and riding the two-wheeler, announcing the opening of the Hebbal flyover loop. He said the move would ease traffic congestion and ensure smoother and faster commutes, aligning with the state government's efforts to build a "better Bengaluru". Traffic police have not yet responded to queries on whether any action has been taken against the registered owner of the vehicle.

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

Printed and Published by K. Hanumanta Rao, on behalf of Hyderabad Media House Pvt. Limited, Flat.No.609, 6th Floor, Kirti Shikhar Building, Plot.No.11, Dist.Center, Janakpuri, New Delhi- 110058. and Printed at M/s. Marutinandan Printers & Publishers, A-15, Bara Bagh, G.T Karnal Road, Industrial Area, New Delhi - 110033. Chief Editor: P Madhusudhan Reddy. RNI No: DELENG/2017/74095

OUR VIEW

ISTOCKPHOTO

World trade war: A risk that has raised no alarm

This century's tariff turmoil isn't proving quite as alarming as the barrier-raising outbreak of the 1930s. Geopolitics and economics point to why we've seen so few knock-on tariff hikes

The curious incident of the dog in the night-time' is an expression that has acquired a life beyond the tale of Silver Blaze, in which Sherlock Holmes solves the mystery of a missing race-horse, to highlight the significance of events that fail to occur even as we focus on events that do. It is also apt for the global response to US President Donald Trump's tariff tantrums. Unlike in the aftermath of America's Smoot-Hawley tariffs of 1930, Trump's high and uneven tariffs against country after country have not been followed by a round of protectionist measures by other trading nations. The beggar-thy-neighbour policy of competitive barriers that many US trade partners adopted back in the 1930s had deepened and spread the Great Depression that began in 1929. So far, we have had little indication that Trump's tariff victims will act in fear of their home markets being overrun by diverted goods from other countries—also faced with US market barricades—by raising their own tariffs to shield local producers from imports. While some talk of retaliation has been in the air, globally, we have not yet seen much knock-on tariff escalation. Why this 'dog' has not barked is worth exploring.

When Trump first mooted his tariffs, several countries said they would retaliate by hiking duties on imports from the US. Why this has not happened, by and large, is partly explained by America's role in assuring the security of its geopolitical allies—not just in the rich world, but elsewhere too. Till Trump came along, Europe was content to let America do the heavy lifting of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (Nato), a defence umbrella under which many rich nations could shelter even as it afforded them the luxury of spending heavily on welfare. In his first term in the White House, Trump asked all Nato allies to spend 2% of GDP on defence, as committed. Now, he wants that outlay upped to 5% of GDP by 2035. Beholden as the EU is to the US for its safety, with Russia close-by, it can hardly risk an actual trade war with its benefactor. Similar logic may be at work in the Far East as well, where China has been flexing muscle. Of course, US-archrival China has played a retaliatory game, as its strategic autonomy lets it. And while uneven US entry rates make some trade diversion within Asia likely, global tariffs have generally stayed calm.

The evident value of trade integration also militates against the likelihood of a mercantilist redux of 20th century frictions that preceded World War II, even stoked the tensions that led up to it. The EU project was partly born of those lessons. A burst of economic globalization after the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union, a moment hailed as the triumph of free-market capitalism, has left us a world that has gained from barrier-free trade and supply chains that transcend national borders. A significant gainer has been China, ever since it spotted glory in getting rich and found export markets to do just that. Even if the World Trade Organization has not offered a perfect aegis for it, much of the world has seen prosperity in trade barriers slowly being eased all around. With integrated markets, import levies act as taxes on local consumption and foreign inputs for domestic businesses, raising the barricaded country's own cost base. While Trump inflicts costs on US industry, other national leaders have shown restraint. Unless global responses take a turn for the worse, maybe the textbook theory of trade being win-win can be credited for the missing bark.

MY VIEW | OTHER SPHERE

Kaizen in school: Small changes could have an enormous impact

Amazing outcomes can be achieved through tiny improvements by people dedicated to education

ANURAG BEHAR
is CEO of Azim Premji Foundation.

It would be inaccurate to call the three rooms in this school 'classrooms.' In most primary schools, dedicated rooms are assigned to classes—Class 1 to Class 5—or shared if there aren't enough; and so they are called classrooms. Here, however, the rooms are designated by subject. Perhaps they should be called 'subject rooms.'

Unlike in other schools, when a class period ends here, students move but the teachers stay. The system is not unheard of. It exists in some countries as standard practice and in a few elite Indian schools. But to find it in a government primary school, tucked away in what we might call a 'remote' area, is astonishing. How did this happen?

The head-teacher has been with the school since it opened 18 years ago. A local, he studied in a village primary school before moving to a town for middle and secondary education. Years after founding this school, he found himself reflecting on his own student days. What stayed with him was the monotony of sitting in the same room, year after year. Through his middle school years, his class remained in one room—only the sign outside changed from 'Class 6' to 'Class 7' to 'Class 8.'

That memory sparked an idea: Why not have students move between rooms for each period? Not for any grand educational theory, but because he remembered how dull it was staying in one place all day. He suspected the children would enjoy the little chaos of moving. And so he re-arranged the school. Hindi, Maths and English each got a dedicated room. For Environmental Studies, lacking a fourth room, he fashioned a makeshift space in the courtyard, shaded by thick foliage.

The children loved it. The movement brought excitement, a break from the stillness that defines most classrooms. As the months passed, something unexpected emerged. The teachers began treating these rooms differently. These were no longer just spaces they occupied, they were 'their' subject rooms. Slowly, the rooms transformed. Posters went up, teaching aids accumulated, corners filled with games and materials tailored to each subject. What was once a storage problem—where materials were either unused or left to decay—became the enabler of thriving, subject-specific resource centres. All because the teachers now felt a sense of ownership. When I visited years later, it was clear that these changes were just one part of a broader culture of not standing still but trying to improve—pedagogical practices, teaching-learning material, handling of children, relationships with the local community and more.

The results reflected this culture of steady improvement. The Class 3 children I met had the language and math capacities expected at their age, including in English. In a country struggling with foundational literacy and numeracy, this achievement in a 'remote' rural area would be notable. But what stood out even more was their confidence, a sense of fun and joy without the faintest sign of any sort of discrimination or prejudice. When I asked the head-teacher how they had achieved all this, he had no grand theories. He simply said he tried to do his job a little better each day, and his team worked with him with total dedication.

When I pressed him further, with "Did no one try to stop you when you restructured the school so fundamentally?", his response was a matter of fact "*Kaun aata hai yahaan jo rokega yaa poochhegaa* (no one comes here, so who is there to stop or question)?" The local village community is fully with him, having observed the school's consistent improvement over the years.

This school is yet another example of the reality and possibilities of our school education. Learnings? *First*, our schools are plagued by resource constraints, have little support and serve communities in poverty, which presents an entirely different order of educational challenge. *Second*, a group of dedicated and thoughtful teachers can achieve a lot. *Third*, a head-teacher can play a significant role in setting a culture that energizes teachers and engages students to make it a truly functional school. *Fourth*, even hard resource constraints and multiple challenges can't contain the spirit of those who are committed. *Fifth*, and most importantly, we have lots and lots of people with such spirit—certainly teachers in our schools, but also in many other spheres. These are people who are dissatisfied with the state-of-affairs in the country and want to see India improve.

Our policies are often—though not always—supportive and encouraging of this spirit. But too often, their implementation is not. They get mired in a sclerotic and hierarchical culture that treats teachers as the cause of our education system's problems and not key allies in changing and improving it. This attitude must be transformed if we want to change Indian education to achieve the outcomes we aspire for.

Big changes happen through small changes—not through sweeping reforms or dramatic interventions, but via actions taken by people ready to take responsibility and act in small but consistent ways. Over time, these changes accumulate to deliver something extraordinary. Those who create these apparent miracles are our real heroes, though they are rarely aware of it. Perhaps that's why they succeed.

10 YEARS AGO

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REDUCING DEBT
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QUICK EDIT
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FUTURE FEARS
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Gold continues slide, slips below ₹25,000

JUST A THOUGHT

> With all the globalisation that has taken place, countries are a lot more interdependent and therefore 'coupled.'
>
> **GITA GOPINATH**

MY VIEW | ECO SQUARE

Watch out for the legal implications of climate inaction

LEENA SRIVASTAVA

is an independent expert on climate change and clean energy.

On 23 July, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued a landmark advisory opinion on climate action that asks all states to act. It calls upon states to (i) prevent significant harm to the environment, laying out a due diligence standard requiring countries to maintain legal, regulatory, administrative and enforcement measures to achieve rapid and sustained emission reductions, and (ii) mandatorily cooperate with other countries internationally, which involves acting in good faith through information-sharing, joint efforts to mitigate the effects of climate change and transferring the technology needed to achieve the goals of climate treaties. Both these duties are under customary law and therefore applicable to all states regardless of their signatory status *vis-a-vis* climate treaties. This ruling, although not backed by enforcement power, is being hailed for increasing the pressure of legal opinion on states that are not acting in conformity with the Paris Agreement's goals.

India too may come under increased scrutiny on its climate actions under the Paris Agreement. The possibility of legal action cannot be ruled out. The ICJ ruling recognizes and endorses the principle of common but differentiated responsibility (CBDR). But it also recognizes that the classification of countries as 'developing' or 'developed' is not static, opening the door to much stricter obligations for India as we pursue our vision of achieving developed-country status by mid-century.

Also, while India has made good progress in its adoption of renewable energy, as per its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), it is not easy to establish the adequacy of national actions towards meeting the global goal of net-zero emissions by 2050, especially when these actions are determined primarily by national circumstances rather than the global need. However, upcoming climate negotiations could very well change this flexibility, particularly in light of the ICJ ruling.

In this context, we should thank NGOs like Climate Analytics that have been fine-tuning methods to evaluate national commitments and are tracking the progress of each country against Paris goals. In their current assessment, India's policies and actions against our fair share of the burden is insufficient even to cap global warming at 3° Celsius above the pre-industrial average, while our conditional NDC targets are highly insufficient. Our alignment towards meeting our own CBDR-based 2070 net-zero commitment is rated as poor. While such analysis may not hold up in a court of law, it could still provide the basis for a future legal challenge.

India's continued reliance on fossil fuels, in particular coal and oil, and the lock-in effects of continued investment in fossil-based infrastructure could also be a red flag. India is not expected to reach peak oil or peak coal usage before 2040. As ours would be the world's third largest economy by then, our fossil energy consumption levels would be relevant to the world's ability to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050. Not only would this add to India's legal vulnerability, but also sharpen the threat of stranded assets that India cannot afford.

> **An ICJ order on climate action signals the need to rethink our strategy for legal challenges to be kept at bay**

It would also be unsurprising if, as climate impacts become increasingly tangible and large proportions of our population suffer from inevitable climate extremes, legal actions are initiated locally against businesses and governments at various levels.

It is heartening to note the 1 August observations of the Supreme Court on a petition against an order of the Himachal Pradesh high court that the entire state could 'vanish' as a result of unsustainable development and ecological impact. The apex court rightly stated that "earning revenue is not everything" and "revenue cannot come at the cost of the environment and ecology." It cited the unchecked construction, hydropower projects, four-lane roads and extensive deforestation that are pushing the delicate Himalayan ecosystem to its limit. Through this observation, the top court has lent credibility to the de-growth movement, which aims to transform economies so that they respect the planet's limits as a way to achieve sociopolitical equity and ecological sustainability.

The ICJ ruling also calls upon states to better regulate private sector activity. Domestic pressure can be placed on companies engaging in fossil fuel production and import activity and on governments for inaction. International experiences point to increasing litigation against the largest such companies. As of September 2024, the annual number of climate-related lawsuits filed against the world's largest fossil fuel producing companies had nearly tripled since the Paris Agreement in 2015. Out of 86 climate lawsuits, three categories have gained the most traction; most ask for compensation for climate-related damages such as from extreme weather events (38%), followed by allegations of greenwashing or false advertising (16%) and complaints about the failure of companies to adopt and implement emission reduction plans (12%).

These arguments point to increasing legal uncertainty and vulnerability at the international and national levels that could push the hand of the Indian government and local industries. They also reveal potential new stressors that could arise from climate negotiations. The operating environment is changing rapidly. India should urgently review—and perhaps redefine—its climate strategy with the ICJ ruling in mind.

THEIR VIEW

RBI has done well to focus on its core competence: Price stability

In times of extreme uncertainty, it is better for India's central bank to mark time. Wait for the fog to clear and then proceed

MYTHILI BHUSNURMATH
is a senior journalist and a former central banker.

PTI

On 6 August 2025, the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) policy-rate-setting Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) finally decided, in common with major central banks—of the US, UK, China and the EU—that discretion is the better part of valour. In times of extreme uncertainty, as at present, it is better to mark time. Wait for the tariff-induced fog to clear and then proceed. Hence, its unanimous decision to maintain *status quo* on the policy rate (5.5%) and keep its monetary policy stance 'neutral.'

This is welcome. Though the minutes of the last MPC meet in June had hinted as much—"After having reduced the policy repo rate by 100 bps in quick succession since February 2025, under the current circumstances, monetary policy is left with very limited space to support growth"—many in the market expected to see another rate cut. The reason is that the MPC under Governor Sanjay Malhotra has shown a marked bias in favour of growth in the inflation-growth trade-off. It has cut rates at three successive meetings (in February, April and June 2025), with its June meet smacking almost of adventurism—a 50 basis points (bps) reduction in the repo rate and a reduction in the cash reserve ratio by 100 bps!

It is good, therefore, that the MPC seems to have tacitly accepted that there are limits to what monetary policy can do. As Governor Malhotra admitted at the press conference later in the day, "It is difficult to predict the impact of tariffs." All the more reason for the MPC to bide its time before rushing in with more pre-emptive rate cuts.

To give an analogy from the world of cricket, David Frith, English cricket writer and historian, once said, "Test cricket is the only sport where doing nothing—leaving the ball—is sometimes the most intelligent act. It is only here that restraint can be heroic." That statement is particularly apt in view of the MPC's restraint (its *status quo* decision) when, contrarily, in the eyes of most observers, it has reduced its inflation projection for 2025-26 from 3.7% in June to 3.1% now.

Front-loading of rate action is not always the best option. Even if there is a growth slowdown, which there isn't—the MPC's own projection for 2025-26 remains at 6.5% and, surprise, surprise, is higher at 6.6% for the next fiscal year—a slowdown occasioned by tariff hikes and global uncertainty cannot be tackled by monetary policy. On the contrary! The remedy, if any, lies squarely within the domain of fiscal policy. Governments can talk of 'aspirational' growth; not central banks. The latter may, at best, focus on 'potential' growth, though even that is a somewhat abstruse number. Central banks must be guided by reliable data.

Indeed, many would argue there is a danger that monetary policy may already have over-reached itself. Aggressive rate cuts have adversely impacted household financial savings, even as credit offtake remains lacklustre. The argument that overall credit to the corporate sector has increased does not cut any ice. RBI's signalling mechanism is primarily intended for banks. So if bank credit has not picked up, but has in fact fallen, chances are that lower interest rates have not served their intended purpose: higher credit offtake and faster growth.

The role of monetary policy is, in any case, very limited if the reason for muted credit growth is structural, rather than cyclical. In the absence of corporate demand for credit, there is also the very real danger that banks may use easy money to expand their retail portfolios and lend to sub-prime borrowers, threatening financial stability.

At the same time, benign inflation numbers—retail inflation was at a 77-month low of 2.1% in June—can be quite misleading; the consequence of a high base (high inflation in the comparable period last year) and low inflation in the volatile food-and-beverages category that accounts for more than 40% of the consumer price index. Yet the MPC's June resolution was silent on the role of the base effect in keeping inflation numbers low.

The August resolution makes amends for this lapse. There is an explicit mention of base effects. "CPI inflation, however, is likely to edge up above 4 per cent by Q4:2025-26 and beyond, as unfavourable base effects, and demand side factors from policy actions come into play." As the governor admits, "Core inflation has been rising steadily from the recent low of 3.6 per cent recorded during December-January 2024-25 and averaged 4.3 per cent in Q1 this year.'

With the rupee likely to depreciate further (it fell to a new closing low of ₹87.8 against the dollar on Tuesday), thanks to escalating trade tensions with the US and President Donald Trump's threat to levy penalties on India for buying Russian oil and arms, the pass-through to retail inflation from higher import prices, including oil, cannot be ignored.

Monetary policy, we all know, must be forward-looking. At the same time, caution, rather than adventurism, is the hallmark of wise central banks. RBI's MPC has done well to return to form.

MINT CURATOR

Ardent rate cutters at central banks: There is a price to pay

Thailand will discover that central bank obedience isn't good for it

DANIEL MOSS
is a Bloomberg columnist.

Monetary authorities need autonomy to keep economies stable BLOOMBERG

Thailand was saddled with US tariffs and forced to call it a good deal. But the country's besieged political leaders have managed a feat that President Donald Trump has so far found elusive. In naming an advocate of aggressive monetary easing to be the next central bank chief, they got the financial manager they want—or think they want. The benefits may be short-lived.

After a campaign to pressure the Bank of Thailand to juice growth, the Thai cabinet tapped a critic of the incumbent governor to lead it. More stimulus is warranted: Deflation is a threat, business confidence is low and recession is a real possibility. The bank has eased policy this year, though it is reluctant to speed up. Outgoing chief Sethaput Suthiwartnarueput has defended the institution's independence, while being careful not to rule out additional reductions. Things seem stuck.

That wasn't good enough for an impatient and fragile coalition with a lot on its plate. Thai soldiers have clashed with Cambodian forces and Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra was suspended from office by a court last month. The government will almost certainly get the lower borrowing costs it's seeking once Vitai Ratanakorn takes over in October. Beyond the rate reductions that the government wants, it's unclear what the finance ministry gets. The case for cuts justifies a shift at the top, though perhaps only just. The move won't be cost-free.

The caffeine jolt from further easing may be noticeable, but brief. Of greater concern may be the long-term damage done to the bank's standing, specifically its autonomy. In announcing Vitai's appointment, the cabinet bypassed a respected deputy governor. That prospect prompted a group of academics to write an open letter on the eve of the announcement expressing their preference for an insider.

More damaging—and indulgent—was finance minister Pichai Chunhavajira's declaration that Vitai will work hand in glove with the state. "Its direction should align with the government's broader economic strategy," he said.

Every leader wants their own person atop powerful institutions like central banks; in the US, Trump has vilified Federal Reserve chair Jerome Powell, whom he appointed in 2018 and was granted a second term by Joe Biden. Now, the White House wants him out—Powell's term ends in May—and Trump says enthusiasm for rate cuts must be on the resume of his successor. This game is far more dangerous than the one being played in Bangkok.

Thailand is the second-biggest economy in Southeast Asia and was the epicentre of a crippling financial crisis in the late 1990s that spread to many parts of Asia, Russia and Latin America. But it has been a long time since global markets swung on events in Vitai's neighbourhood. The Fed sets the tone for policy globally and investors are highly sensitized to the slightest shift in stance or even rhetoric. The dollar's role as the main reserve currency gives America's central bank primacy. Should the Fed be seen to bend the knee to the administration, the consequences will be huge. Trump's recent decision to fire the head of the main statistics agency in response to some dour US employment figures is alarming enough.

Borrowing costs will almost certainly come down in Thailand. But rates had been likely to fall anyway. The incumbent had cut them three times since October, and the soft economy means that whoever succeeded him was going to err on the side of more stimulus, not less. This will be about the pace and extent of easing, not whether it happens at all.

Was installing an outsider who made his pitch as a forceful change agent worth the disruption? Probably, but it's a close call. Inflation is well below the authority's target, unlike in the US. Tariffs are likely to be inflationary in America; the country that is the origin of the exports will suffer a slowdown. Easier money won't solve every Thai problem and the bullying from politicians has likely been counterproductive. It's also true that independence ultimately derives from the political process; it has proven useful, but isn't a sacrament. As former Reserve Bank of Australia governor Ian Macfarlane testified last year, the condition "is not God-given."

What the Thai government cannot know is how Vitai will respond to a change in circumstances that may require holding rates or even hiking them. He must also be a canny diplomat; borrowing costs are decided by a seven-member committee. He will need to win minds consistently. Vitai and his backers will own the results soon enough. Lawmakers will need to move on and find some new scapegoats, but that's assuming they'll be in power long enough.

GUEST VIEW

Shrimp farmers reeling under US tariffs need a lifeline

RAYA DAS & SANCHIT GUPTA

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The recent move by the US to impose a 25% basic tariff on shrimp imports from India has triggered uncertainties for the sector back home. This comes on top of existing anti-dumping and countervailing duties of approximately 8% on shrimp, pushing the total effective duty to 33%, which was just 7.5% before US President Donald Trump's reciprocal tariff announcements of 2 April.

In recent years, Indian shrimp farming has shown an impressive performance. It grew at a compound annual growth rate of 18% between 2011 and 2023. This growth relied heavily on exports. Demand from the US has been a major driver of this increase. Consider the numbers. In 2023-24, India exported over $2.5 billion worth of shrimp to the US, making up nearly 38% of America's total shrimp imports, followed by Ecuador's share of 21%, Indonesia's 17% and Vietnam's 11% (ITC data, 2024).

However, major competitors of India in the US shrimp market have secured far more favourable terms in terms of import tariffs. Ecuador currently faces an effective duty of 18%, Indonesia's rate has dropped from 35% to 25.3% and Vietnam's has been reduced from a steep 46% to 20% following recent negotiations by these countries with the US. In contrast, India now faces an effective tariff of 33%, creating a 14 to 15 percentage point disadvantage compared to Ecuador, its closest competitor in US market. The widened tariff gap risks diminishing India's competitive edge and reducing its market share in the US, which would put pressure on Indian exporters, processors and farmers.

India's 'revealed comparative advantage'—a measure of a particular good's concentration in a country's export basket in relation to its share of world trade—in shrimp exports is 4.4, lower than Ecuador's 16.0, highlighting Ecuador's stronger specialization and rapid growth through vertical integration. India primarily exports raw frozen shrimp, which make up about half of US imports. In 2024, India's average landing price in the US of this export was $7.69 per kg, compared to Ecuador's $7.06. Despite higher freight charges, India's cost advantage was on account of labour-intensive peeling and processing. However, the recent 25% US tariff threatens this competitiveness.

Prepare for rising costs and shrinking margins: Even before this tariff increase, Indian shrimp farmers were facing lower profits due to high input costs. Shrimp feed, which makes up nearly 60% of total production costs, has seen the highest rise. Global inflation in feed ingredients like fishmeal and soybean, along with the depreciation of the rupee and supply chain glitches, has pushed feed prices up by 25-30% in the last three years. For small and medium farmers culturing *Litopenaeus vannamei* (white leg shrimp), the average production cost has risen to about ₹280-₹300 per kg. However, with average farm-gate prices ranging between ₹340 and ₹360 per kg, profit margins have shrunk. If farm-gate prices drop below ₹280 per kg, many businesses incur losses.

This sector's competitiveness in the US market will be hit hard but India could offer a clutch of relief measures

Indian processors are currently delivering past export orders, as the peak harvest and export period is on, with stocking underway in export destinations for a festive demand bounce. With the new American tariff rules, exporters may need to absorb the extra cost burden, reducing their margins. The impact will percolate to farmers, who are already operating on low margins. It will hit farmers in Andhra Pradesh the hardest as they account for over 82% of India's total shrimp production, followed by those in states like Odisha, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Gujarat.

The impact is not limited to coastal areas. Under the Union government's Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana, inland saline aquaculture is being promoted in inland states like Haryana and Punjab. These states are converting salinity-affected lands into productive aquaculture zones. Inland farmers, many of whom are new to shrimp farming, are now facing uncertainty just as they begin to expand operations. If farm-gate prices fall due to an export disruption, it could stall progress in these emerging aquaculture areas.

What can be done in response: The Indian shrimp industry's hope is of lower tariffs through negotiations. But if high US tariff rates persist, India must treat this trade shock as a wake-up call to diversify export markets, increase production efficiency and boost domestic demand for shrimp.

There is an urgent need to diversify India's shrimp export markets beyond the US, with a greater focus placed on East Asia, the EU, UK and West Asia. The India-UK Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement offers a timely opportunity to boost shrimp exports to the UK by leveraging the pact's tariff advantages. India's Marine Products Export Development Authority can play a key role in branding Indian shrimp and facilitating market development abroad.

Also, the farmers' access to institutional credit and insurance must be improved. Small farmers often struggle with working capital constraints and shrimp crop insurance schemes need to be scaled up with transparent and efficient claim-settlement mechanisms.

Boosting domestic consumption is no less critical. Shrimp could be mainstreamed into Indian non-vegetarian diets through awareness campaigns of its nutritional value. Our growing market for ready-to-eat and ready-to-cook food is likely to welcome it.

These are the authors' personal views.

How do we prevent Iran developing an atomic bomb, when, on the American side, dropping atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki is not recognised as a war crime?

Günter Grass

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

— Ramnath Goenka

RBI KEEPS POWDER DRY TO RESPOND TO TARIFF TURMOIL

THE RBI's Monetary Policy Committee has left the key policy rates unchanged. Even though retail inflation touched a six-year low of 2.1 percent in June, the central bank did not see the need to reduce the rates further. As a result, they remain above the pre-pandemic levels, while the real interest rate adjusted for inflation is at 2-3 percent, well above the desired 1.5-2 percent. Analysts, however, reason that Wednesday's decision—a calibrated pause while maintaining the policy stance at 'neutral'—allows the central bank flexibility to respond to unforeseen challenges. As Governor Sanjay Malhotra explained, geopolitical tensions and global trade uncertainties pose significant downside risks to growth and inflation. So, the decision to pause allows options to respond in more turbulent times. Moreover, the cumulative 1 percentage point rate cuts announced earlier are yet to filter through the credit system and the broader economy.

Despite the pause, some believe that the rate easing cycle is alive and kicking, thanks to RBI's liquidity measures. By providing adequate and timely liquidity, the central bank is ensuring that banks and financial institutions transmit the 100-basis-point cuts to borrowers. Meanwhile, headline inflation is expected to edge up in Q4, though the overall 2025-26 print will likely settle at 3.1 percent, lower than the targeted 4 percent for the first time in at least three years. That said, inflation is expected to rise again to 4.9 percent in Q1 of 2026-27 driven by the base effect. The higher trade tariffs announced by the US later on Wednesday could fuel inflation and hit India's growth prospects, which puts the MPC's decision to preserve its ammunition in perspective. A neutral stance retains policy firepower to respond with rate changes in the event of further global shocks.

As for GDP growth, the RBI kept the 2025-26 estimate unchanged at 6.5 percent, suggesting that it remained optimistic about domestic economic resilience amid global headwinds. However, Donald Trump's later announcement of raising tariffs on Indian goods to 50 percent may prompt a recalibration, as they would sharply affect exports and the manufacturing sector. Then there could be untold dangers if the global financial conditions freeze—another reason for the RBI to remain cautious. Though the market expects at least another 25-basis-point cut in 2025, much will depend on global trade retrenchment, domestic demand softening, and the rupee's trajectory.

HIROSHIMA ANNIVERSARY: HEED MAHATMA'S ADVICE

EIGHTY years since Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan became synonymous with the nuclear holocaust that killed an estimated 1.1 lakh civilians instantly, the world is not even trying to engage in disarmament talks. Instead, big powers are deploying nuclear arsenals at whim. Last week, Donald Trump repositioned two nuclear submarines around Russia after Vladimir Putin's proxy Dmitry Medvedev used incendiary language in his pushback against intense American pressure to end the invasion of Ukraine. Medvedev asked Trump to remember how dangerous the fabled 'Dead Hand' can be, a reference to a semi-automated Soviet-era command system designed to launch nuclear missiles if the Russian leadership is eliminated. Russia retaliated to the positioning of US submarines and Nato's missiles in Germany by calling off its moratorium on deployment of intermediate-range nuclear-capable missiles. As it is, the Doomsday Clock—founded in 1947 to annually warn how close the world is to self-destruction—moved closer than ever to a planet-wide catastrophe in January, 89 seconds to midnight. Going by the current trend, the clock could advance further in the next iteration.

It was rich of Trump to lecture Medvedev on the importance of words, saying they could lead to unintended consequences, given his own history of loose talk. Sample this: after the US bombarded three nuclear sites in Iran in June, degrading its ability to build a bomb at least in the short run, he insensitively drew a parallel between the Iran operation and the Hiroshima and Nagasaki blasts—thus normalising them—claiming both ended wars, drawing an avalanche of protests. In May, when India called Pakistan's nuclear-bluff as part of Operation Sindoor to avenge the Pahalgam terror strike, Trump claimed credit for averting a nuclear war—annoying New Delhi and harming the bilateral trade talks.

Violence in any form is reprehensible, more so when it involves weapons of mass destruction. India's doctrine of 'no first use' implies a massive nuclear retaliation to a first strike to inflict unacceptable damage on the enemy. It has served the country well so far. As Mahatma Gandhi said, "The atomic bomb has deadened the finest feeling that has sustained mankind for ages." Hatred can be overcome by love and not counter-hatred, he moralised. His preaching of non-violence is relevant more than ever today.

QUICK TAKE

ADVERTISE QUAKE SUSCEPTIBILITY

THE ongoing effort to zoom into the nation's seismically prone zones and outline microzones is welcome. The government told the Lok Sabha that it has covered a dozen cities including Delhi, Chennai, Bengaluru, Kolkata, Coimbatore and Mangaluru in this effort; eight more cities are being mapped with data gathered by the National Centre for Seismology. More crucially, the state and national disaster management authorities are now expected to conduct awareness campaigns in the prone regions to promote quake-resistant design requirements laid out by the Bureau of Indian Standards. It should be mandatory for all housing companies to mention in their ads the level of hazard at their sites. That would make the government's substantial efforts really effective.

Trump seemingly wants to use peace parleys with Russia to avoid punitive sanctions on its oil. With his trade demands resembling brigandage, India should call off the talks

HOW AN EQUATION IN MOSCOW AFFECTS CALCULUS IN DELHI

M K BHADRAKUMAR

Former diplomat

SOURAV ROY

US President Donald Trump's special envoy for Russia, Steve Witkoff, predicted in an interview last weekend that it would be a success if a settlement of the Ukrainian conflict is achieved by the end of the presidential term in January 2029. The remark signals Washington's belated awareness that it is futile to press Russia to compromise on its vital national interests.

Witkoff was talking to the media after a 2-month silence during which General Keith Kellogg, Trump's hawkish special envoy for Russian-Ukrainian settlement, dominated the diplomatic arena advocating a tough stance towards Moscow. The Kellogg line peaked with Trump's July 14 announcement of a 50-day deadline to Russia to end the war. A fortnight later, Trump said that Russia had "10 days from today" to end its war.

The week since then witnessed a breathtaking cascade of US-Russia tensions characterised by some calibrated brinkmanship—transfer of US nuclear weapons to the UK for the first time in 17 years; belligerent posturing *vis-à-vis* the Russian nuclear base of Kaliningrad; and deployment of US nuclear submarines near Russia.

Last Friday, the Russian response came with the stunning announcement by President Vladimir Putin on the deployment of Oreshnik, the intermediate-range hypersonic ballistic missile with multiple warheads and a speed exceeding Mach 10 (12,300 km/h) against which the West, including the US, has no defence. The Russian foreign ministry followed through last night with a historic announcement on lifting of Moscow's moratorium on the deployment of intermediate-and shorter-range missiles as a new reality in strategic balance in the face of "a growing number of facts indicating the emergence of US-made weapons in a variety of regions around the globe including the regions that are of particular national security importance for Russia".

Trump, who killed the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty in 2019, no longer has space left to hide from the humiliating defeat that Nato faces in Ukraine and the bleak future for the US's European allies having to live under the shadow of Russia's Oreshnik hypersonic missile.

The Moscow visit by Witkoff, Trump's counterweight to American hawks on Russia, signifies that the locus of Trump's policy is gradually switching back to the Russian track. Evidently, Trump is desperate to reopen peace talks. On July 31, in a radio interview, Secretary of State Marco Rubio calmed the troubled waters by signalling that first, although the sanctions route is an option, "our hope is to avoid that and to sort of figure out a way that we can get the fighting to stop... we'll continue to be available and willing to participate in something like that, if it becomes available"; and, second, "a war between the United States and Russia is not something we can ever see".

Putin reacted the very next day, saying, "Not long ago, our adversaries were confidently speaking of inflicting a 'strategic defeat' on Russia. Today, their rhetoric has shifted: now, their singular and desperate goal is to halt our offensive at any cost." But Putin won't relent until the Russian military operation fully realises its objective.

In the above fluid backdrop, Rubio, interestingly, also chose to empathise with Delhi's trade in Russian oil. Rubio said, "India is an ally. It's a strategic partner. Like anything in foreign policy, you're not going to align a hundred percent of the time on everything. India has huge energy needs and that includes the ability to buy oil and coal and gas and things that it needs to power its economy like every country does, and it buys it from Russia, because Russian oil is... cheap... So it is most certainly a point of irritation in our relationship with India... We also have many other points of cooperation with them. But I think what you're seeing the President express is the very clear frustration that with so many other oil vendors available, India continues to buy so much from Russia, which in essence is helping to fund the war effort." Rubio's remarks hinted that there is no inevitability about the US imposing a "penalty" on India.

We are, arguably, at an inflection point as Witkoff has arrived in Moscow. There is a high probability that the Russian-Ukrainian talks will be resumed. Putin has disclosed that at the Istanbul talks, the Ukrainian side had suggested that "it could make sense to discuss security for both Russia and Ukraine in the context of a pan-European security framework". Putin shared this view.

In sum, Trump is inexorably moving toward grabbing Witkoff's talks in Moscow as alibi to retreat from his threats to impose punitive sanctions against Russian oil and secondary sanctions on China and India. However, alarmed that the whole *raison d'être* of secondary sanctions is withering away, Trump has a Plan B. He is presenting a new ingenuous argument that regardless of the revival of peace talks, he'd still "substantially raise" the tariffs against India since it is allegedly profiteering by re-selling Russian oil "on the open market for big profits".

This is an astounding performance in political chicanery that is absolutely repugnant at the level of a world statesman at the helm of affairs in a superpower. Apparently, America's businessman-president abhors profit-making! Yet, by a rough estimate, the US made a profit of $10 trillion in recent years by simply letting its paper currency to be used by other countries as 'world currency'. If that is not profiteering, what is? Now we know why Trump is so morbidly obsessed with the spectre of a BRICS currency.

That said, when it comes to profiteering, Trump can be choosy. Big Oil cashed in on the European energy market after destroying Russia's Nord Stream gas pipelines to make windfall profits to the tune of $400 billion. The sordid story appears on the balance sheets of American oil companies during the period of the Ukraine war.

What began as a rewriting of the tariff regime in US-India trade is transforming as brigandage. Trump's move is spiteful. Rather than getting entangled in the shenanigans of America's avaricious and petulant president, the honourable thing to do for the Modi government will be to suspend the trade talks pending an explanation as regards Trump's itch to humiliate India. *(Views are personal)*

UMPTEEN PROOFS, BUT NO IDENTITY

C K G NAIR

Former member, Securities Appellate Tribunal

M S SAHOO

Former Chairperson, Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India

THE Election Commission's special intensive revision of electoral rolls in Bihar and proposal to extend it to other states have stirred the hornet's nest of identity yet again. But identity challenges being faced by Indians run far deeper than the EC's periodic revisions. For many, it's 'a million mutinies a day' as different authorities periodically unleash their own dream projects on identifying or improvising on the identification of their subjects.

Consider the nationwide systems. The passport system commenced in 1920 and was revamped in 1967. In 2024, there were 9.3 crore valid passports. Electoral identification dates back to the first general elections of 1951-52. The first major attempt to issue an Electoral Photo ID Card (EPIC) was initiated by the EC during 1993-96. In 2024, there were 97 crore voters with EPICs for many of them. The Permanent Account Number was introduced by the Central Board of Direct Taxes in 1972, initially as an option but made mandatory for taxpayers from 1976. The latest data says there are 78 crore PAN cards.

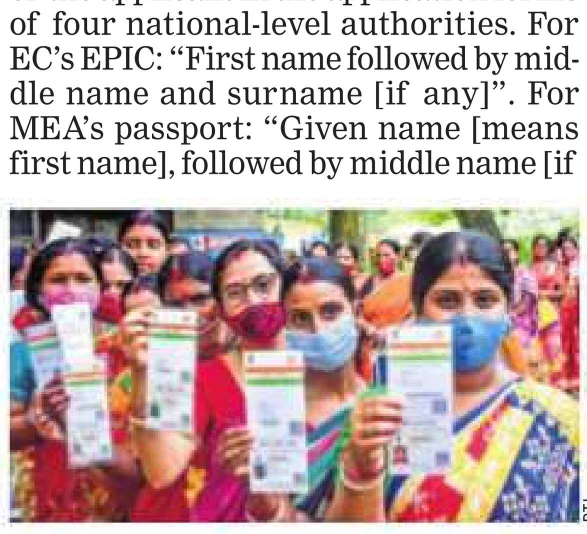
In the mid-2000s came the brilliant idea of a unique ID for every resident—Aadhaar—using biometric imprints. The Unique Identification Authority of India was set up in 2009 and the first Aadhaar card issued in 2010. After a checkered trajectory, the UIDAI has issued Aadhaar cards to about 135 crore residents.

EPIC and passports are treated as universal proofs of identity, date of birth, and address. However, they do not offer universal coverage. EPIC is for citizens above 18 years, while passports cover only about 6.5 percent of the population. PAN, though available to a wider demography, is primarily a specific-purpose identifier for tax and financial transactions, and not an address proof. Aadhaar, with the largest coverage, has become just another ID. While it is accepted for its biometric features, it is neither a proof of nationality nor of date of birth. There are also about 5 dozen other IDs accepted by various state-level authorities.

All these IDs suffer from duplication and fakery due to the incentive structures in our ground-level governance systems. Recent reports of the CBI unearthing 8.5 lakh 'mule accounts' across certain banks, likely the tip of an iceberg, and the growing incidence of identity theft in financial crimes reveal deeper structural vulnerabilities of the fragmented and often unreliable identity architecture.

This is mainly the result of the unwillingness of the identifying authorities to work together and to have a common format for the basic parameters, or at least a common pattern of writing the name and a few basic parameters.

Take the example of writing the name of the applicant in the application forms of four national-level authorities. For EC's EPIC: "First name followed by middle name and surname [if any]". For MEA's passport: "Given name [means first name], followed by middle name [if any] and surname". For CBDT's PAN: "Last name/sSurname, followed by first name and middle name". And for UIDAI, Aadhaar: "Fill in name as given in the document presented in support of the PoI, while omitting any titles, honorifics, and aliases."



PTI

Not just in Bihar, proving identity is a daily challenge for lakhs of Indians. The proliferation of uncoordinated ID systems and lack of a common format have created frustration, enabled fakery and denied livelihoods. A Planning Commission effort from the 2000s could offer an ideal systemic remedy

As long as these national IDs operated in silos, they posed no significant inconvenience to the people. However, sizable duplications across systems prompted a policy push to interlink them—PAN with Aadhaar, for example. Discrepancies in personal details, especially names, have led to frequent mismatches, making the process of linkage error-prone and frustrating for individuals. As the demand for formal proof and proof of that proof intensified, the spelling and structure of names in official documents became critical.

Aadhar was a great opportunity to bring a structure to identification. Had the UIDAI and EC collaborated on a unified identification framework, many of today's challenges could have been averted. They had the benefit of the contours of a multi-application smart card propounded by a committee appointed by the then Planning Commission in 2005. A working group in 2007 amplified the architecture of that system. The proposed model envisioned a smart identity system akin to a multi-storeyed building. The ground floor would house the basic demographic and biometric information of a resident (as in Aadhaar), while successive floors could serve different functional needs—electoral rolls, PDS, MNREGA—each protected by its own set of access controls and verification protocols.

The home to nearly a fifth of humanity cannot be governed like a city-state. India's identity challenges cannot be solved by proliferating plastic IDs and digital apps, the instruments of a burgeoning identification industry. The identity system must be well-designed, structured and orderly from the outset, rather than procrastinating endlessly like a perpetual construction site.

The system can still be rebooted if all authorities come on board. It should be accompanied by a campaign to educate every Indian on how to write her name, birth date and address in a consistent manner, and why it matters for their identity, livelihood and rights.

No, this must not be yet another ID issued by yet another agency operating in mission mode. It should be only a common format for the existing IDs or a harmonised ID. To be given to the youngest generations. Let the elder generations live in peace with whatever legally issued IDs they have.

(Views are personal)

MAILBAG

WRITE TO: letters@newindianexpress.com

Non-aligned trade

Ref: *Govt's pushback on US threats deserves support* (Aug 6). India's energy choices reflect its sovereign right to prioritise national interest, despite the US's criticism. Upholding non-alignment principles, India must resist pressure and maintain an independent path towards energy security and geopolitical self-reliance.

Avinashiappan Myilsami, Coimbatore

Tolerant troops

Ref: *Onus to ensure decorum on passengers & airlines* (Aug 6). The Indian Army is a highly disciplined force and the awkward incident has virtually tainted its reputation. Contrarily, the Lieutenant Colonel should've behaved *sans* arrogance and with copious tolerance to avoid such an ignoble situation.

Thomas K M, Ernakulam

Divorce evidence

Ref: *Spousal chats* (Aug 6). The judgement is based on precedence. When one provoked their spouse in a well planned manner in order to secretly record them and produce the outcome in court, it is untruthful. Once this is known, it may lead to both spouses not speaking at all.

Jayachandran C, Chennai

Trust roadmap

Ref: *Building trust for India Inc* (Aug 6). The article rightly emphasises that trust is the cornerstone of sustainable business success. The 15-point roadmap offers a practical framework that aligns ethics, innovation and governance. Such strategies ensure resilience, fosters credibility and strengthens India's position in an increasingly competitive global economy.

A Senthil Kumar, Tiruppur

Tariff taunts

Ref: *Substantial hike in levy in 24 hours* (Aug 6). US President Donald Trump is violating ethical conduct by repeatedly threatening India with hiking tariffs. India has recently emerged as the fourth-largest economy in the world. It seems our economic position worldwide has acted as a threat to him.

Abhilasha Gupta, Mohali

Familial connection

Ref: *Perils of chatbot counselling* (Aug 1). Adolescents' increasing reliance on AI chatbots to express emotions and personal problems is alarming. This trend indicates a serious lack of communication within families and a dependency on digital validation. It's crucial for families to prioritise open communication and emotional connection.

Raju Kolluru, Kakinada

THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

Chairman of the Board: **Manoj Kumar Sonthalia** Editor: **Santwana Bhattacharya**

Deputy Resident Editor (Andhra Pradesh) **BSN Malleswara Rao** * Published by **R K Jhunjhunwala** on behalf of Express Publications (Madurai) Private Limited, at 4th Floor, No. V, MM Complex, Opp. More super Market, AIR Bypass Road, Tirupati - 517 502. and printed by him at Sakshi Press, Survey No.2/4, Kotha palem Village, Renigunta Mandal, Tirupati Revenue Division, Chittoor District - 517 520 **Tirupati:** Vol. 11, No. 186. RNI Reg. No. APENG/2015/64463. Phone: 0877-2238202, Fax: 0877-2239005. *Responsible to decide the matter under the PRP Act.

Sleeping disasters

Governments must monitor silt accumulation at vulnerable points

The disaster in Uttarkashi district of Uttarakhand serves as a reminder of the permanent risk of destabilisation in the Himalayas. At least four persons were killed and at least 60 people are feared washed away after a mass of water, debris and muck triggered by torrential rain hit the Kheer Ganga river on Tuesday afternoon. The flood hit hotels and residential buildings in Dharali town, situated 8,600 feet above sea level, where video footage recorded by residents showed giant waves of water gushing through the area, engulfing people and homes. Several Indian Army personnel are also feared dead, according to preliminary reports.

The proximate cause of the disaster is the extremely heavy rainfall from August 3 to 5, with some parts of the district reporting nearly 30 cm of rainfall over a single day due to the monsoon and its active phase over North India. The fury and the volume of the water that gushed through the town seemed to suggest that this was a sudden event, prompting State officials to categorise it as a 'cloudburst'. However, this has a very specific meaning in how the India Meteorological Department (IMD), the official forecaster, defines it. A large volume of rain, of at least 10 centimetres in an hour over 10 square kilometres, is what usually qualifies as a cloudburst. The lack of weather radars at those altitudes means that the IMD is incapable of such a computation. Therefore, it could very well be that continuous heavy rain over the past 48 hours may have loosened the soil and combined with the craggy, undulating terrain, unleashed large volumes of silt along with copious amounts of water. Whether it was a sudden event or the result of a gradual build-up might seem only of academic interest, given the loss of life, livelihood and property. The knee-jerk categorisation as a 'cloudburst' allows state authorities to claim helplessness. Once it is projected as a freak phenomenon, the event only elicits social media commiseration from public authorities in the form of 'prayers' and 'deep sadness' and a pre-defined token sum as disbursement. The recent past shows that these are anything but outliers. Climate change has increased the probability of extreme rainfall events and, therefore, the numerous infrastructure projects undertaken in the hills and the resulting debris act as latent explosives that are triggered from such rainfall. Following relief operations, the State government must – as soon as conditions are conducive – review debris and silt accumulation at critical points in the State to buffer the inevitable damage from climate change.

Judicial overreach

The Supreme Court's remarks on Rahul Gandhi threaten democratic dissent

The Supreme Court of India's recent handling of defamation charges against Congress leader Rahul Gandhi marks a troubling shift from established norms of free speech and jurisprudence on constitutional protections for political discourse. This became clear when the Bench led by Justice Dipankar Datta, while staying the proceedings on Mr. Gandhi's remarks on the Galwan clash in 2020, made problematic oral observations. Among others, Justice Datta said that had Mr. Gandhi been a "true Indian", he would not have said what he did. The Court's primary function is to adjudicate on questions of law and constitutional principle rather than to prescribe standards of national loyalty. In a democracy, surely a 'true Indian' is one who fearlessly pursues the truth and holds the government accountable – not one who accepts official narratives without question. Mr. Gandhi's commentary, in which he questioned the government's border policies and drew attention to credible reports of Chinese intrusions, also fell well within the legitimate ambit of Opposition politics. This critiquing does not, and must not be seen to, undermine the nation. Such criticism is protected by the principles of free speech and is indispensable for a healthy public discourse. The Court's remarks, by implying otherwise, risk chilling legitimate dissent and setting an inimical precedent for future Opposition conduct.

Equally, Mr. Gandhi's statements regarding Chinese occupation of Indian territory and confrontations are not without backing in public and governmental sources. Open-source satellite imagery, parliamentary discussions, and journalistic reports have documented the aftermath of the Galwan Valley clash, including new Chinese activities along the Line of Actual Control (LAC). A parliamentary committee report has acknowledged the loss of access to certain patrol points in eastern Ladakh. Military officials and independent analysts have corroborated, at various times, the ongoing disputes and loss of patrolling rights over substantial stretches of territory, including parts of Ladakh's Galwan and Depsang areas. Local residents are also unable to access grazing lands. The loss of about 2,000 square kilometres, cited by Mr. Gandhi, is also based on estimates by independent defence experts studying China's LAC transgressions. The general thrust of Mr. Gandhi's remarks – i.e., China has altered the status quo to India's disadvantage and that the government's public statements have not always aligned with ground realities – is supported by public evidence. Thus, the Court must resist the temptation to offer moral or patriotic judgments and instead direct its considerable energies to the rigorous and impartial adjudication of legal questions. Only by adhering to this principle can the Court reinforce its legitimacy and protect the tenets of free and open public debate.

Decoding China — the lessons for a vulnerable India

Shashi Tharoor

is a former Under-Secretary General of the United Nations, a fourth-term Member of Parliament (Congress), Lok Sabha, for Thiruvananthapuram, Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs, and the Sahitya Akademi Award-winning author of 27 books, including 'Pax Indica: India and the World of the 21st Century' (2012)

The exodus of over 300 Chinese engineers from Foxconn's pivotal iPhone 17 manufacturing facilities in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka – a recent move ostensibly executed under corporate directive – is far more than an administrative recalibration. It is a meticulously calibrated stratagem, designed to arrest India's burgeoning manufacturing ambitions and to perpetuate a "unipolar Asia" under Beijing's overarching economic hegemony.

A geo-economic move

This calculated withdrawal is not simply a logistical reshuffling. It is a subtle, yet potent, geo-economic manoeuvre by a rival apprehensive of a rising India. The recall of these highly specialised technicians, possessed of invaluable expertise in establishing sophisticated production lines, optimising operational efficiencies, and troubleshooting the labyrinthine complexities of modern manufacturing, represents a deliberate impediment to the crucial transfer of technology. Such knowledge is the bedrock upon which India seeks to construct its edifice of advanced electronics manufacturing, and its withholding strikes at the very heart of India's aspirational ascent.

In addition, China has leveraged its dominance in rare earth production and processing by restricting exports of rare earths (which include elements such as gallium, germanium, graphite), and rare earth magnets, which are crucial for electric vehicles and electronics, to India. China has also imposed curbs on the export of other critical minerals that are vital for various high-tech industries. There have also been informal trade restrictions on the export of capital equipment from China to India, including high-end manufacturing equipment for electronics assembly and other sectors, heavy-duty boring machines and solar equipment, severely impacting India's ability to set up and expand its own manufacturing facilities.

The broader implication of these actions, particularly the recall of engineers and restrictions on specialised equipment, is a deliberate attempt to limit the transfer of advanced manufacturing technology and know-how to India. This aims to keep India dependent on Chinese inputs and prevent it from developing a truly self-reliant high-value manufacturing base. Crucially, many of these restrictions are not formalised bans but are implemented through verbal instructions and administrative delays. This makes them harder to directly challenge but equally effective in disrupting supply chains, increasing costs, and creating uncertainty for Indian manufacturers.

In essence, China's strategy is multi-pronged, leveraging its control over critical raw materials, manufacturing equipment, and even human capital to impede India's manufacturing ascent, especially in the high-stakes electronics and emerging technology sectors. These actions, when viewed through the prism of Beijing's anxieties concerning India's emergence as a potentially formidable manufacturing competitor in an era of "friend-shoring" by the West, align perfectly with its broader strategic calculus. China's economic success is increasingly predicated upon maintaining robust export revenues.

Consequently, any nation daring to challenge its pre-eminence in global manufacturing, particularly in high-value sectors such as electronics, is inevitably perceived not merely as a competitor but also as an existential threat. The withdrawal of these engineers, therefore, constitutes a potent stratagem to disrupt India's trajectory and safeguard China's long-entrenched export market share and economic primacy in the region and beyond. India's ambition to transform itself into a globally competitive manufacturing hub is seen in Beijing as a direct challenge to China's long-term stability.

The reality in China

Consider the demographic exigencies currently confronting China: an ageing and progressively shrinking populace, an unfortunate legacy of the protracted one-child policy, coupled with a palpable erosion of wealth occasioned by an enduring property crisis – even as local satraps exceed production targets in their zeal to impress Beijing. This widening structural imbalance between an excessive production capacity and faltering domestic consumption increasingly compels China to lean heavily on export revenues to underwrite its fiscal outlays and maintain a semblance of economic progress. As its social welfare and pension liabilities burgeon exponentially, the Chinese government finds itself under mounting fiscal duress. Any reduction of export revenues would directly impinge upon Beijing's capacity to fund critical domains such as domestic security and military expenditure, potentially precipitating an undesirable degree of social instability.

China's formidable trade surplus, now on the cusp of a trillion dollars, is not solely a testament to its industrial prowess but also a stark manifestation of weak internal consumption and persistent industrial overcapacity. The People's Bank of China's repeated interest rate reductions on savings accounts have largely failed to ignite internal demand. This chronic overcapacity, therefore, constrains Chinese enterprises to aggressively depress prices and inundate international markets in a desperate bid to remain solvent – a strategy that has, perhaps ironically, severely eroded profitability across a plethora of sectors. As a result, China's determined endeavours to stymie competition are not merely a reflection of simple geopolitical rivalry. Rather, they are an undeniable reflection of profound domestic compulsions. Should India, by dint of astute policy and diligent execution, succeed in getting its house in order and convincingly demonstrate the potential to compete comprehensively in the global manufacturing landscape, Beijing is highly likely to escalate its countermeasures. These could range from the insidious pressures of economic coercion to outright military posturing, all in a relentless quest to safeguard its core economic interests and, by extension, its internal stability.

However, the news of the U.S. raising India's tariffs to 50%, even while China enjoys a 90-day exemption from punitive tariffs despite buying more Russian oil and gas than India does, makes India less of a threat to China. While India has been seen as a key partner in western efforts to diversify supply chains away from China, the imposition of the new U.S. tariffs serves as a reminder that all alignments carry their own fragilities, and underscores the need for India to build true strategic autonomy. The Indian Prime Minister's forthcoming visit to Beijing comes against this complex backdrop.

An appraisal of India's strengths, shadows

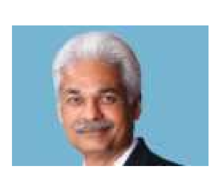
China's industrial pre-eminence is not fortuitous or trivial; it is a systemic dominance that spans critical and emerging sectors, from the esoteric realms of Artificial Intelligence and quantum computing to the cutting-edge frontiers of 6G telecommunications and electric vehicles. We need to understand that China does not merely export goods; it orchestrates and largely controls global supply chains in these advanced technologies. Even its overcapacity, otherwise a sign of economic infirmity, is being deftly weaponised as a strategic instrument for price suppression and audacious market capture. The aggressive pricing strategies employed by behemoths such as BYD in the electric vehicle segment are a quintessential illustration: by flooding global markets with irresistibly priced goods, China effectively stifles nascent competition and inexorably solidifies its global market share. This is economic statecraft in action.

In stark contrast, India's manufacturing ecosystem, despite its vibrant aspirations, remains undeniably nascent. The cherished dream of transforming into a global "manufacturing hub" frequently founders upon a litany of formidable hurdles, including persistent infrastructure lacunae and the pervasive sclerosis of bureaucratic red tape. We remain regrettably reliant on imports for a pantheon of crucial components – ranging from sophisticated chips and engines to semiconductors and sensors – even for the foundational "screwdriver technology" indispensable for basic assembly. This profound reliance on external sources underscores the considerable ground India must traverse to genuinely metamorphose into a self-sufficient manufacturing powerhouse. "Make in India" still needs help from outside India.

From Beijing's vantage point, China has nothing to worry about yet; its actions against India are an effort to neutralise potential "noise" within its immediate periphery while it assiduously scales up its economic and political corridors with key strategic partners across the sprawling geographies of Pakistan,the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Africa, and Latin America. India's narrative of offering an alternative to the Chinese behemoth falters on our own dependence. If India genuinely harbours the ambition to "compete" on the global stage, it needs a laser-like focus on its own foundational development. That is what China's behaviour has taught India: The onus is on us Indians.

China's determined moves to target India are part of a meticulously calibrated plan to safeguard its core economic interests and its internal stability

Mumbai train blasts, an exoneration, the questions



Yashovardhan Azad

is a former IPS officer who has served as Central Information Commissioner, Secretary, Security, Government of India and Special Director, Intelligence Bureau

The Bombay High Court's exoneration of all those convicted in the Mumbai train blast case of July 2006, has come as a rude shock for the families of the 189 people killed and around 800 people who were injured. The High Court has ripped apart the investigation, calling witnesses untrustworthy, deeming confessions gained as under duress, terming identification parades faulty and citing forensic evidence custody as not foolproof. It is a shocker because it was based on the same evidence that the trial court, in 2015, sentenced five of the accused to death and seven to life imprisonment.

A long wait, lapses

Who will answer for the inordinately long incarceration of the accused since 2006? The police, the prosecution, lawyers or the courts? Or all of them, that is the criminal justice system? It takes years for trials in courts. One of the defence lawyers said that the charge sheet filed by the Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) had 20,000 pages, while much lesser numbers would suffice. It is like schoolchildren taking their examinations and filling pages with answers, hoping to impress the teacher with volume rather than quality. But the nine years taken by the Special Court and 10 years by the High Court for their decisions make the waiting period so agonising to the point of being meaningless for the accused. Nineteen years is a lifetime and almost like a sentence itself.

Admitted there is tremendous pressure on investigating teams and the police chief in a terrorist or any high-profile case. The government gets unsettled with the Opposition's relentless attacks and demand to arrest the accused within minutes. It impacts investigation severely, pushing investigating officers into a corner, taking hasty decisions and bypassing protocol and procedures.

But some of the issues referred to by the High Court raise concerns. Despite two confessions taken by two different deputy commissioners of police, they appear to be not similar but actually the same, with even the ellipsis matching. The witnesses became untrustworthy because, on cross-examination, they did not remain true to their original statements. Guess no one can after a lapse of so many years. It was surprising that the drawer of the sketches of the accused was not called as a witness.

The test identification parade became suspect because the special executive officer who conducted it was not authorised to do so. Strange, because the magistrate who conducted it should have known whether he was the right person to undertake the TIP.

The investigation, however, is truly flawed if the forensic evidence purity and chain of custody cannot be vouched for faithfully. It is troubling to hear that even in such critical cases there could be lapses on this count.

The use of RTI filings

Perhaps the biggest message from this trial is how the Right to Information (RTI) Act, known as the sunshine legislation, enacted 20 years ago, has stood the test of time, bringing transparency and accountability in government functioning. Hundreds of RTIs were filed by the accused and the defence lawyers to elicit information from the police, hospitals, and the Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Limited to build up their case and cross-examine the prosecution witnesses and prove them wrong on various counts. In one instance, it was the name of a non-existent person in a hospital, named by the prosecution witness or the shift in which one person was working was proven wrong. It is the noblest use of RTI, perhaps, if it is used to defend oneself. This is a fundamental aspect of free trial and constitution under Article 20(3).

Perhaps most embarrassing for the Mumbai police would have been the discovery of an Indian Mujahideen (IM) module, busted by the crime branch Mumbai in 2008, which accepted its role in the series of blasts in Ahmedabad, Delhi and Jaipur between 2005 to 2008. The gang led by Sadiq Israr Sheikh also claimed responsibility for the series of blasts in suburban trains on that day in Mumbai at around 6.30 p.m. The charge sheet in the July 11, 2006 Mumbai train blast case had already been filed by then, and the Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) had announced it as the handiwork of the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI).

In fact, in 2008, the top man of SIMI, Safdar Nagori, general secretary, was arrested along with his associates in March 2008 in Indore, Madhya Pradesh, and was awarded life term in 2017. But how does this make any sense to the families of the victims of 7/11 or to a common man? How does it matter whether the police, the prosecution or the criminal justice system failed him? What matters is that 19 years later, he has no closure. For the accused who were incarcerated for 19 years, it is already a sentence served without proven guilty. They seek justice too.

Reform must begin

There are too many questions unanswered. The only way to answer them is to put the criminal justice system on track on a war footing. Formatting a new criminal law by changing a few old laws here and there is not enough. Every element of the criminal justice system should be reformed. Nineteen years for a decision is meaningless because the punishment has already been given. A prosecution overlooking basic issues is meaningless and an investigation overlooking the simplest of things is not worth it. Reform of the police, the judiciary, the prosecution and prisons cannot wait – we are sitting on a time bomb of people's expectations and frustrations, which may explode anytime.

The Bombay High Court's exoneration of all those convicted in the 2006 case is a reminder that every element in the criminal justice system needs to be reformed

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Trump and tariffs

U.S. President Donald Trump appears to be punishing India for obtuse reasons. India, a democratic ally, has tariffs slapped on it while the West's trade with Russia continues quietly in the shadows. India has to consider seeking partners who show mutual respect. Ultimately, India should stop seeking validation and find ways now to protect its long-term interests.

Vaibhav Kochar,
Rajpura, Punjab

The fact is that this is an issue about India's right to energy security. Going forward, global energy discussions must move towards cooperation and transparency, especially during uncertain times.

Ardra Mani,
Pathanamthitta, Kerala

The way America is trying to pressure and crush India is most unjustified which is made worse with the WTO watching silently. One hopes that this is a temporary setback and that India will bounce back.

V.R. Ganesan,
Chennai

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

Quranic justice is restorative, not retributive

A. Faizur Rahman
Secretary-General of the Chennai-based Islamic Forum for the Promotion of Moderate Thought

The case of the Malayali nurse Nimisha Priya in Yemen has spotlighted the legal and moral complexities of retributive justice in Muslim countries. Nimisha has been in prison since 2017 for the murder of her business associate, Talal Abdo Mahdi. While the Houthi Supreme Political Council dismissed her appeal in November 2023, the appeal court left open a path to clemency through the payment of blood money (*diyah*) to the victim's family, as provided for under Shariah law.

The concept of *diyah* finds mention in verse 4:92 of the Quran, which states that in cases when a believer kills another believer by mistake (*khata'an*), then, as compensation, the killer must free a believing slave, and also pay blood-money (*diyah*) to the family of the slain. The Quran also talks about legal retribution (*qisaas*) for murder and violent assault as a life-preserving deterrent (*lakum fil qisaasi hayaatun*) to curb criminal behaviour. (2:178-179 & 194, 5:45)

Restorative approach

It is essential to recognise that many of the Quranic injunctions concerning homicide and bodily harm were not retributive – they were fundamentally restorative.

Legal retribution (*lex talionis*) and compensation for murder and bodily harm had existed centuries before the advent of Islam. The Book of Exodus in the Hebrew Bible upheld capital punishment for intentional murder, exile for unintentional homicide, and either financial compensation or retaliatory injury for physical harm (Exodus 21:12-36).

Similar provisions are found in even earlier laws, such as the Sumerian and Babylonian codes. In *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*, Martha Roth cites an edict from the Hittite Kingdom (1650-1180 BCE), which stipulates that in cases of murder, the decision regarding the offender's fate rested solely with the victim's heir.

> It is essential to recognise that many of the Quranic injunctions concerning homicide and bodily harm were not retributive — they were fundamentally restorative

The Quran made a reformative switch from this sort of retributive punishment to restorative justice, inviting all those impacted by an offence to jointly determine how best to address its consequences and shape future relations. In 2:178, it asked the legal heirs of the victim to pardon (*faman ufiya lahu*) the killer, even while instructing the killer to offer fair compensation to the family out of sincere gratitude.

The same message is repeated in 5:45 with a compassionate appeal to the victim's family: "If anyone remits the retaliation by way of generosity, it would be an act of atonement (*kaffaara*) for him."

What is remarkable about this exhortation is its paradigm shift from retribution to the spiritual healing of the aggrieved party. It introduces a mechanism that not only fosters genuine remorse in the offender but also promotes social harmony and quiet dignity among all parties involved.

This is in keeping with the Quran's moral dictum (in 64:14) that God is forgiving and merciful to those who "pardon, overlook and forgive" (*in ta'fu wa tasfahu wa taghfiru*). The prophet echoed this in a hadith found in Abu Dawud, encouraging Muslims to practice mercy on 'earth' so that mercy may be shown to them from 'the heavens'.

Implications for Nimisha

It may be noted that the Quran's appeal to give up retaliation pertains to intentional murder.

For non-premeditated killing without malice aforethought (*qatl khata'*), the Quran prescribes only blood money, not a retaliatory death penalty, as stated in 4:92 above.

This carries serious implications for Nimisha. If, as reported, she did not sedate Mahdi with the intent to kill him – and this can be proven – then, under the Quranic injunctions in 4:92, his family would not have the right to demand the death penalty.

Media reports suggest that Nimisha administered the sedative only to retrieve her passport, which Mahdi had allegedly confiscated unlawfully, and that his death was the result of an accidental overdose. Besides, if Mahdi had previously served time for criminal offences, as alleged, the claim of his complete innocence is open to challenge.

Therefore, for justice to be served in Nimisha's case, the Quranic law must prevail. However, what reigns in most Muslim societies in its name is sectarian jurisprudence, which views Islam not as a moral order in which justice and rational logic are intrinsic, but a dogmatic 'religion' defined and dominated by male authority.

This internal subversion coincided with the rise of post-Prophetic schools of religious thought during the height of Muslim imperial expansion, when a convenient alliance developed between theologians and the ruling elite: rulers sought religious legitimacy for their authoritarian regimes, while theologians wanted the latitude to impose patriarchal structures.

It was the consolidation of this power dynamic that brought about Islam's shift from Quranic *deen* – a rational, justice-oriented ethical framework – to *mazhab* - a rigid, clerically dominated theology. Consequently, Islam ceased to be what is plainly stated in the Arabic text of the Quran and the Prophetic understanding of it.

This structural transformation remains one of the most significant and unresolved crises in Muslim history, reshaping the course of Islamic thought. Nowhere is this more evident than in criminal law, which often paints Islam as a harsh faith.

If Muslim theologians truly believe in the Quran's opening statement that the Islamic god is "most Gracious" (*Al-Rahman*) and "most Merciful" (*Al-Raheem*), then they must allow the merciful *deen* of Islam to prevail over their rigid juristic schools.

Rewriting the rules of school in A.P.

TDP government reworks school reforms, aiming for better access

STATE OF PLAY

P. Sujatha Varma
pothuri.varma@thehindu.co.in

The Telugu Desam Party-led NDA government in Andhra Pradesh is revisiting the education sector reforms introduced by its predecessor and is making changes wherever deemed necessary. Minister for Human Resources Development Nara Lokesh has stated that policies yielding positive outcomes will be retained, while those that failed to deliver tangible results will be rolled back. The task being both critical and challenging, the Minister is taking an objective and balanced view of the educational landscape, recognising that the well-being and future of students must remain at the heart of the new initiatives.

Officials in the education department are assessing what has worked, what needs improvement, and how best to move forward without causing inconvenience to stakeholders. The task at hand is to cater to the needs of 58,535 schools, 68,15,925 students, and 3,13,112 teachers across the State. Of these, 44,285 are government schools with 33,37,762 students and 1,84,898 teachers; 789 are aided schools with 87,612 students and 3,259 teachers; 13,461 private schools with 33,90,551 students and 1,24,955 teachers.

According to Mr. Lokesh, the TDP government inherited an education system in a state of paralysis, lacking essential frameworks and operational efficiency – a charge refuted by the YSR Congress Party, which has accused him of "systematically weakening the education sector in the State."

The data show that the State has 12,512 single-teacher schools, 5,312 government schools with single-digit enrolment, and 14,052 State-run schools with 20 or fewer students. The overall enrolment in government schools declined by 10,49,596 students between 2022 and 2024.

With declining learning outcomes, the government faces the formidable challenge of reversing the trend to secure children's futures. A recent survey suggested that 84.3% of Class III students could not read a Class-II level text, 62.5 % of Class V students struggled with basic reading, 47% of Class VIII students still could not read Class II level text, 59.1 % of Class III students could not perform basic subtraction, 54.8 % of Class VI-II students could not perform division and only 12.9% and of Class III students could solve basic division problems.

One of the most controversial decisions of the previous YSRCP government was GO 117, which reorganised schools and reapportioned teaching staff. The order divided schools into six categories and mandated the merger and demerger of classes. The fragmentation of schools led to the number of schools having fewer than 10 students rising from 1,215 in 2021-22 to 5,312 in 2024-25, and schools with fewer than or equal to 20 students increasing from 5,520 to 14,052 during the same period, indicating a severe decline in student enrolment.

To curb the ill effects of GO 117, the NDA government introduced GO 21, which revises the restructuring model by creating nine categories of schools. However, this faced trouble, with teacher unions raising serious concerns over its "negative impact on the public education system". GO 21 is part of the transformative journey called Learning Excellence in Andhra Pradesh, which aims to improve access, learning outcomes, and future-ready skills.

The recently concluded 'Mega' DSC (District Selection Committee) exam, conducted to recruit 16,347 teachers in government schools after a gap of seven years, enhanced the government's image. Other welcomed steps include the introduction of academic star ratings to assess both student and teacher performance, targeted efforts to boost school enrolment in rural and tribal areas, and the consolidation of multiple teacher apps into a single platform.

In intermediate education, curriculum and textbook revisions for first-year students are being implemented from the current academic year, aligning with the syllabus with national competitive standards. The revisions would be introduced for second-year students from the academic year 2026-27.

The reach of the changes being made is very vast, and resistance to change is natural in large systems, especially when previous reforms are still being digested. The government should remain watchful of implementation gaps that often emerge. Due diligence is key to ensuring that the quality of learning improves without sacrificing stability.

More women than men deleted from Bihar's electoral rolls

It is concerning that more women have been deleted from the rolls, given that men out-migrate more from the State

DATA POINT

Sambavi Parthasarathy
Srinivasan Ramani
Vignesh Radhakrishnan

An analysis of Bihar's draft electoral rolls released on August 1, prepared after the completion of the special intensive revision (SIR) exercise, shows that more women than men have been deleted from the rolls.

A total of 3.82 crore male electors are part of the latest electoral rolls – about 25 lakh male electors fewer than the rolls prepared in January this year. A total of 3.41 crore female electors are part of the latest electoral rolls – about 31 lakh female electors fewer than the rolls prepared in January. **Chart 1** shows the gender-wise number of electors in the January and August rolls.

In fact, in 37 out of Bihar's 38 districts, more women electors have been deleted from the rolls than men. In Gopalganj, the number of women electors fell from over 10 lakh in January to about 8.21 lakh in August – a 17.8% decline. In comparison, male electors in Gopalganj declined from over 10.37 lakh to 9.23 lakh – a drop of 11%. This means that deletions among women were 6.8 percentage points more than those among men (17.8% minus 11%) in the Gopalganj rolls. This was the highest among all districts. **Map 2** depicts the district-wise gender-gap in deletion rates.

The gender-divide in deletions raises many concerning questions. According to the Election Commission, the electors who are not part of the August list have either died, or are registered in multiple locations, or have permanently migrated out of Bihar, or are untraceable.

Death rates between men and women are generally similar. **Chart 3** shows male and female death rates in Bihar over the past five years. Except during the pandemic – when male death rates briefly spiked above those for women – the trend has largely remained nearly equal. The number of deletions due to duplicate entries or untraceable addresses is likely to be relatively smaller.

This leaves one other major factor: out-migration from Bihar. Both anecdotal evidence and data suggest that when it comes to migrating out, men vastly outnumber women. **Chart 4** shows that, in 2020-21, for every 100 male migrants in India, 31.4 had migrated from another State and 65.6 within the same State. In contrast, among 100 female migrants, only 7.2 had migrated from another State, while 92.6 moved within their home State. This pattern holds true for Bihar as well and perhaps it is even more stark for men from the State.

If men outnumber women in out-migration by this huge a margin, then why did more women get deleted than men in the post-SIR rolls? Given that deaths, the other major factor, cannot explain such a variance. A plausible explanation is a gender gap in the submission of enumeration forms during the SIR exercise. As of 2019-21, only 55% of women in Bihar were estimated to be literate – the lowest female literacy rate in the country – compared to over 76% among men. Could such low literacy levels have hindered women from properly filling out and submitting the forms?

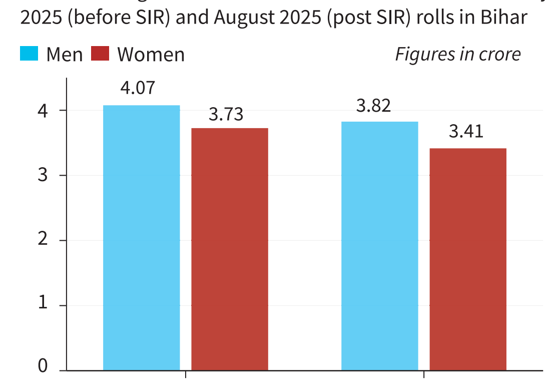
In yesterday's Data Point, we found that more deletions occurred in districts where more women than men turned out to vote in absolute numbers, even though there were more registered male electors. We had suggested that these districts had higher out-migration of men. But deletions have been more among women. This suggests that the method of self-enumeration could have affected women, among whom there is a lower literacy rate, leading to their higher deletion rates.

More analysis of the SIR exercise will follow in these columns.

Gender disparity in deletions

The data for the charts were sourced from the Election Commission of India, Sample Registration System (SRS) Bulletins, and Migration in India 2020-2021

Chart 1: The gender-wise number of electors in the January 2025 (before SIR) and August 2025 (post SIR) rolls in Bihar



Map 2: The district-wise gender-gap (male minus female) in deletion rates in the latest rolls, compared to January rolls

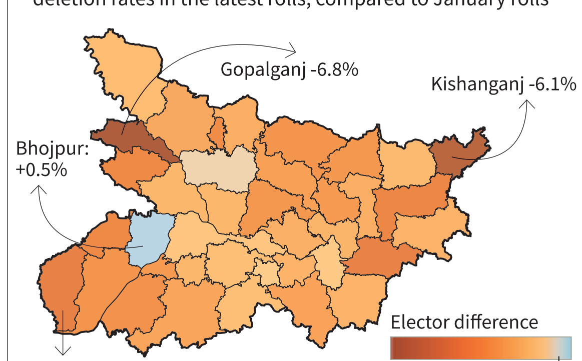


Chart 3: Male and female death rates in Bihar over the past five years. Death rate is defined as the number of deaths per thousand population in a given region and time period

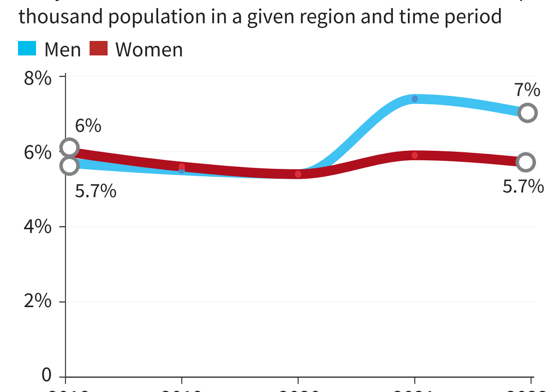
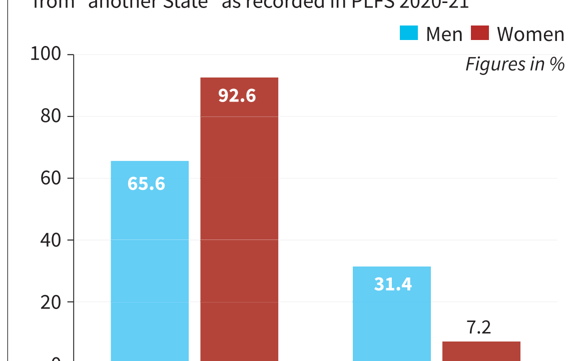


Chart 4: Percentage distribution of migrants by location of their last usual place of residence being the "same State" or from "another State" as recorded in PLFS 2020-21



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu.

FIFTY YEARS AGO AUGUST 7, 1975

Hitch delays flight of plane with Gunmen

Kuala Lumpur, August 6: Five terrorists who held 52 hostages in the U.S. Consulate for two days boarded a plane at Kuala Lumpur airport to-day and officials said they would leave for Libya at 8 a.m. local time (6 a.m. IST) to-morrow.

The five still held 15 of their hostages aboard the plane, including the U.S. Consul, Mr. R. Stebbins and the Swedish Charge d' Affaires Mr. Bergenstrahle.

Officials said they were to be released in exchange for two Malaysian and two Japanese Government officials who would accompany the terrorists to Libya as substitute hostages.

The two Malaysians were named as Mr. Ramli Omar, Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Communications and Mr. Osman Cassim, Secretary-General of the Home Ministry.

According to American officials here, the Libyan Government had agreed to accept the guerillas.

Meanwhile, the five Japanese radicals who were released from Japanese prisons and flown to Kuala Lumpur as demanded by the terrorists, were waiting in an airport building to board the plane for the flight. After exhausting negotiations, the gunmen agreed this morning to leave the American International Assurance building which houses the U.S. and other embassies in downtown Kuala Lumpur and join their five comrades at the airport. Masked, wearing gloves and carrying automatic revolvers and hand grenades, they marched their 15 hostages along with them and made the 22 km drive to the airport in a large bus.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO AUGUST 7, 1925

Spinning and weaving mills still remain closed

The Anglo-French Textile Mill Co. Ltd., which suspended operations on the 11th of July and the Pondicherry cotton mills which closed its doors on the 1st of July still continue to remain closed. As per notice put up at the gates of the Anglo-French Textile Mills the labourers were paid their fortnightly wages at the rate of Rs. 10 per month. Whether the authorities will continue to do the same after the 11th instant or not remains yet to be seen.

Text&Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Public buildings made accessible by Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan

1,835 In a written reply to the Rajya Sabha, the Minister of State for Social Justice and Empowerment B.L.Verma said ₹564.5 crore had been released to States and Union territories for retrofitting government buildings to make them accessible. PTI

Amount cleared by Italy for world's longest suspension bridge

13.5 In billion euros. The Messina Bridge will link Sicily Island to mainland Italy, aiming to boost jobs and trade in the south. The government says the bridge includes features to withstand strong winds and seismic activity in a tectonically active region. AFP

The economic toll of natural disasters in the first half of this year

135 In $ billion. Wildfires near Los Angeles accounted for $40 billion in insured losses, followed by $31 billion from severe thunderstorms. A deadly earthquake in Myanmar and other disasters added to the toll. Insured losses alone hit $80 billion which is double the 10-year average. AFP

Armed Naxals who surrendered in Chhattisgarh

9 All of them surrendered in the Bijapur district, citing disillusionment with Maoist ideology. Six out of the nine Naxalites had a collective bounty of ₹24 lakh. They were influenced by the government's 'Niyad Nellanar' surrender policy. Each has received ₹50,000 in assistance. PTI

Additional CISF personnel sanctioned for Secretariat security

735 In fresh deployment, the Ministry of Home Affairs has cleared more than 700 additional CISF personnel to guard the upcoming Common Central Secretariat (CCS) buildings in Delhi. The force's CGBS wing will secure all 10 buildings. PTI

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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What is the potential of biochar?

What are the byproducts of biochar production and how can they generate additional electricity and fuels? How can biochar help the construction sector? Why does biochar remain underrepresented in carbon credit systems? How should one enable large-scale adoption of biochar?

EXPLAINER

Harishankar Kopperi
Suresh N.S.

The story so far:
With the Indian carbon market set to be launched in 2026, CO2 removal technologies such as biochar are expected to play a crucial role. Biochar is a type of charcoal rich in carbon and is produced from agricultural residue and organic municipal solid waste. It offers a sustainable alternative to manage waste and capture carbon. However, to truly serve as a scalable pathway for negative emissions across sectors, biochar requires participation and support from multiple stakeholders.

What is biochar's potential?
India generates over 600 million metric tonnes of agricultural residue and over 60 million tonnes of municipal solid waste every year. A significant portion of both is burnt openly or dumped in landfills, leading to air pollution from particulate matter and greenhouse gases such as methane, nitrous oxide, and CO2.

By using 30% to 50% of surplus waste, India can produce 15-26 million tonnes of biochar and remove 0.1 gigatonnes of CO2-equivalent annually. Byproducts of biochar production, such as syngas (20-30 million tonnes) and bio-oil (24-40 million tonnes), can generate additional electricity and fuels. Theoretically, utilising syngas could generate around 8-13 TWh of power, equivalent to 0.5-0.7% of India's annual electricity generation, replacing 0.4-0.7 million tonnes of coal per year. Bio-oil can likewise potentially offset 12-19 million tonnes (or 8%) of diesel or kerosene production annually, leading to lower crude oil imports and reducing more than 2% of India's total fossil-fuel-based emissions.

How can biochar be a carbon sink?
Biochar can hold carbon in the soil for 100-1,000 years due to its strong and stable characteristics, making it an effective long-term carbon sink. Its application across different sectors provides scalable opportunities for reducing emissions.

In agriculture, applying biochar can improve water retention, particularly in semi-dry and nutrient-depleted soils. This, in turn, can abate nitrous oxide emissions by 30-50%. Notably, nitrous oxide is a greenhouse gas with 273-times the warming potential of CO2, making its mitigation a crucial benefit of biochar.

Biochar can also enhance soil organic carbon, helping restore degraded soils.

In carbon capture applications, modified biochar can adsorb CO_2 from industrial exhaust gases. However, its carbon removal efficiency is currently lower than that of conventional methods.

In the construction sector, biochar can be explored as a low-carbon alternative to building materials. Adding 2-5% of biochar to concrete can improve mechanical strength, increase heat resistance by 20%, and capture 115 kg of CO_2 per cubic metre, making building materials a stable carbon sink.

In wastewater treatment, biochar offers a low-cost and effective option to reduce pollution. India generates more than 70 billion litres of wastewater every day, of which 72% is left untreated. A kilogram of biochar, along with other substances, can treat 200-500 litres of wastewater, implying a biochar demand potential of 2.5-6.3 million tonnes.

Removing emissions: A biochar pit and graded sticks. GETTY IMAGES

What hinders biochar's application?
Despite its theoretically substantial potential to capture carbon, biochar remains underrepresented in carbon credit systems due to the absence of standardised feedstock markets and consistent carbon accounting methods, which undermine investor confidence.

While research confirms biochar's technical feasibility for applications across sectors, deployments are hindered by barriers such as limited resources, evolving technologies, market uncertainties, and insufficient policy support. Viable business models are yet to emerge for large-scale adoption. Market development is further constrained by limited awareness among stakeholders, weak 'monitoring, reporting, verification' frameworks, and a lack of coordination across areas such as agriculture, energy, and climate policy.

To enable large-scale adoption, sustained support for R&D is essential to create region-specific feedstock standards and to optimise biomass utilisation rates based on agro-climatic zones and crop types. Further, biochar should be systematically integrated into existing and upcoming frameworks, including crop residue management schemes, bioenergy initiatives in both urban and rural contexts, and state-level climate strategies under the State Action Plans on Climate Change. Recognising biochar as a verifiable carbon removal pathway within the Indian carbon market will generate additional income for investors and farmers through carbon credits. Deploying biochar production equipment at the village level has the potential to create approximately 5.2 lakh rural jobs, linking climate action with inclusive economic development. The additional benefits of biochar, such as better soil health, lower fertilizer requirement (by 10-20%), and higher crop yield (by 10-25%), should be systematically integrated into policy and market frameworks to fully realise its potential.

In sum, although biochar is not a silver bullet, it offers a science-backed multisectoral pathway for India to achieve its climate and development goals.

Harishankar Kopperi is a senior associate and Suresh N.S. is a senior research scientist in the Strategic Initiatives group at Center for Study of Science Technology and Policy.

THE GIST

By using 30% to 50% of surplus waste, India can produce 15-26 million tonnes of biochar and remove 0.1 gigatonnes of CO2-equivalent annually.

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What is the status of the 'recall' vote in Taiwan?

Why did the ruling DPP push to remove opposition lawmakers? Did it polarise Taiwan further?

Femy Francis

The story so far:
On July 26, Taiwanese citizens voted to recall 24 Kuomintang (KMT) opposition party lawmakers from parliament (Legislative Yuan), but in round one, all 24 members managed to retain their seats with people in their districts voting against their removal. The second round is slated for late August. The Great Recall vote, supported by the Bluebird Movement and the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), accused KMT of being in cahoots with China and of threatening national security.

When did the movement begin?
The movement started in 2024, as local protesters accused the opposition of blocking DPP bills and pushing controversial laws later declared unconstitutional. The movement failed to garner 25% support to recall opposition lawmakers in each district; DPP needed six KMT seats recalled to gain a legislative majority. Additionally, the second recall voting against seven seats of the KMT lawmakers will be conducted later this month. The DPP is pressured to get all seats in the upcoming recall vote. KMT, after its survival, is calling for a reshuffle of the cabinet.

What is the removal vote about?
The Taiwan Public Officials Election and Recall Act is a rarely used constitutional instrument, permitting citizens to remove elected officials. The act has three stages of checks to successfully remove an office holder. The first step requires a petition signed by at least 1% of the electorate, the second stage needs 10% support from the electorate, and in the final stage, 25% of the district's eligible voters need to support the recall. After the Bluebird Movement, the DPP petitioned against KMT legislative lawmakers, accusing them of undermining national security by deferring to the Communist Party of China, and for passing bills without following procedural mandates. All 24 KMT lawmakers retained office by getting a majority of votes against their recall in their respective districts.

Why was the recall petition pushed?
The recall is a consequence of a divided government in Taiwan, with two different political parties leading the executive and legislative branches of government. The structural imbalance in the composition of parliament made the ruling party obsolete in fulfilling its legislative duties. Taiwan follows the unicameral system with 113 seats in its Legislative Yuan. DPP under former President Tsai Ing-wen enjoyed a majority in both the executive and legislative branches. This changed in the 2024 elections. The DPP's presidential candidate William Lai Ching-te won with 40.1% vote. But DPP lost its legislative majority with 51 seats against KMT's 52 seats and its ally Taiwan People's Party's (TPP) 8 seats, bringing the opposition's total to 60. With this legislative majority, the opposition party blocked crucial bills proposed by the DPP. What ignited the civic movement was the hasty approval of controversial bills by the opposition.

The KMT introduced several bills and amendments that undermined the judicial and executive branches' power, while awarding extrajudicial powers to the legislature. The proposed legislative reform bills ignored parliamentary deliberation and directly sent the bill to the plenary session to be passed. The Bluebird Movement, named after the street where the protest happened, was ignited by the egregious violation of the constitution. In May 2024, 1,00,000 protesters took to the streets of Taiwan calling against the violation of the law by the opposition.

Has it further polarised Taiwan?
The progressive recall vote, which empowered citizens to hold legislators accountable, has backfired by further polarising the parties and their support base. KMT's survival raised the question whether the recall was even necessary, and if the movement was politically motivated by the DPP.

Femy Francis is a project associate with Area Studies-China, at NIAS, Bengaluru.

THE GIST

The movement started in 2024, as local protesters accused the opposition of blocking DPP bills and pushing controversial laws later declared unconstitutional.

Taiwan follows the unicameral system with 113 seats in its Legislative Yuan. In the 2024 elections, the DPP's presidential candidate William Lai Ching-te won with 40.1% vote. But DPP lost its legislative majority with 51 seats against KMT's 52 seats and its ally Taiwan People's Party's (TPP) 8 seats, bringing the opposition's total to 60.

The progressive recall vote, which empowered citizens to hold legislators accountable, has backfired by further polarising the parties.

Digital campaign strategies in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls

Lokniti-CSDS team*

India's 2024 Lok Sabha election spanned seven phases from April 19 to June 1, with around 642 million voters casting ballots at 1.05 million polling stations. While traditional campaign methods such as rallies, motorcades, and door-to-door canvassing remained influential, many voters' primary engagement with political parties came through screens. Political content flooded digital spaces through short videos on social media, targeted ads following users across apps, meme pages, and influencers weaving political commentary into lifestyle content. The 2024 election was not just supported by digital media; it was fundamentally shaped by it.

The recently released report by Lokniti-CSDS provides a data-driven analysis of digital platforms' role in the 2024 elections, showing how they complemented traditional door-to-door efforts in mobilising voters. This study analysed the social media campaigns of eight political parties – the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), Congress, Janata Dal (United) (JD(U)), Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), Shiv Sena (Shinde), and Trinamool Congress (AITC)– on X and Facebook during the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. Focusing on engagement metrics and thematic content, the study tracked all posts across both platforms, including those in regional languages translated into English. Metrics such as likes, shares, comments, and views on Facebook, and likes, reposts, replies, and views on X, were used to assess voter response and messaging effectiveness. This is Part 1 of the study.

To account for differences in follower counts, the Effective Engagement Rate (EER) was calculated by dividing total engagements by the total number of followers on each platform. Analysing engagement relative to follower count reveals the real impact of campaign messaging. A large following with low EER suggests weak content appeal, while a smaller following with high EER indicates stronger resonance with supporters. The engagement analysis revealed key platform-specific trends. On X, Congress recorded the highest engagement, followed by BJP and AAP, reflecting strong voter interaction (Table 1). On Facebook, Trinamool Congress led in engagement, with JD(U) also performing notably well.

Advertising strategies

Beyond engagement metrics, thematic analysis revealed distinct campaign strategies during the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. Posts were categorised into themes such as economic issues, policies, governance, vote appeals, and attacks on the opposition. The Thematic Average (TA) was calculated by averaging each party's thematic focus across both platforms. AAP (56%) and Trinamool (44%) focused heavily on attacking opponents, while BJP (36%) and Shiv Sena (32%) emphasised vote appeals. JD(U) centred its campaign on policy issues (60%), including reservations, youth employment, and women's empowerment (Table 2). Religious content appeared primarily in BJP and Shiv Sena posts. Demographic targeting – addressing women, youth, and farmers –was visible in posts by the JD(U) (16%) and RJD (15%).

Digital advertising is now essential in electoral campaigns, shaping voter perceptions. Social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram, both owned by Meta, have become widely used in India, enabling political parties to reach and influence a diverse audience through posts and ads. The study analysed the digital strategies of Congress and BJP in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, with a focus on their extensive use of Facebook and Instagram ads. It examines ad spend, thematic messaging, user engagement, and content consumption through the Meta Ad Library.

BJP and Congress showed stark contrasts in their digital advertising. The BJP ran 41,127 ads on Meta during the period, compared to Congress's 1,041, reflecting BJP's aggressive saturation strategy versus Congress's more targeted approach. However, the sheer number of ads does not necessarily translate into messaging effectiveness or voter engagement (Table 3). BJP's digital strategy was more diversified, placing 53% of its ads on Instagram, 45% on Facebook, and 1% on both platforms, allowing tailored messaging for each. In contrast, Congress concentrated 86% of its ads on both Instagram and Facebook simultaneously, with only 1% exclusive to Instagram and none solely on Facebook (Table 4). The language distribution of Meta ads also reveals contrasting strategies. The Congress focused primarily on Hindi, using it for 92% of ads, with limited regional presence (2% each in Tamil and Kannada), suggesting a more centralised voter appeal. In contrast, the BJP adopted a more linguistically diverse strategy, with 72% of ads in Hindi, and the rest distributed across Bengali, Odia, Marathi, and Tamil, highlighting its regional outreach within a national campaign framework.

Moreover, spending patterns of the BJP and Congress reflect different campaign strategies. The BJP favoured cost-efficiency, with 65% of its ads costing between ₹0 and ₹999, allowing for high-volume dissemination and broader visibility. The Congress in contrast, allocated more to higher-cost ads, with 34% in the ₹1,00,000 to ₹4,99,999 range, emphasising quality over quantity. This indicates Congress's focus on fewer, high-impact ads, contrasted with BJP's saturation strategy of numerous low-cost ads (Table 5). The BJP's ads were primarily focused on direct vote appeals, with significant emphasis on infrastructure, development, and the economy. Nationalist themes, such as India's global standing and the abrogation of Article 370, were also prominent (Table 6). On the other hand, the Congress's digital ads featured a more aggressive approach, with a heavy focus on criticism of the BJP's handling of economic issues, especially unemployment and inflation. Interestingly, religious content was notably absent from Congress's ads (Table 7). An analysis of ad impressions reveals contrasting strategies between the BJP and Congress. The BJP's negative ads consistently had more reach, with 23% appearing in the 1,00,000-4,99,999 impression range, compared to just 18% of its positive ads in a similar range. In contrast, Congress prioritised positive messaging, with over half (52%) of its positive ads surpassing one million impressions, while only 27% of its negative ads achieved the same (Table 8).

Outreach on Google

In the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, digital platforms, particularly Google, played a pivotal role in political outreach. A comparative analysis of the BJP and Congress reveals distinct differences in their digital strategies. The data used has been derived from the Google Ads Transparency Centre. The BJP ran 2,25,695 ads across all seven election phases (excluding the silence period), while the Congress deployed only 9,251 ads. This disparity was further reflected in their respective expenditures, with the BJP spending ₹560 million and the Congress ₹210 million (Table 9). Nearly all BJP Google ads ran for 20 days or fewer, reflecting a strategy of rapid content turnover. In contrast, most Congress ads lasted between 21 and 40 days, indicating a focus on sustained visibility. Very few ads from either party exceeded 40 days. In terms of format, both parties used image and video ads, though with different emphasis. The BJP leaned on image-based content for broad visual appeal, whereas the Congress allocated a larger share to video ads, favouring more dynamic and immersive storytelling (Table 10).

For the BJP, a majority of its ads (98%) fell within the ₹1,00,000 range, with only 2% of ads exceeding this amount. In contrast, the Congress displayed a more balanced spending distribution, with 73% of its ads falling within the ₹1,00,000 range, while 27% exceeded this threshold (Table 11). The outcomes were visible in impressions: 61% of BJP ads had fewer than 10,000 views, and only 3% crossed one million. However, 21% of Congress ads surpassed the one million mark, and over half fell within the 10,001-one million range indicating stronger reach and engagement (Table 12). Across seven election phases, the BJP used a highly localised micro-targeting strategy, focusing on specific regions while excluding others. In contrast, the Congress adopted a broader strategy, mainly targeting entire States or the country, with minimal exclusions, reflecting a less localised campaign focus (Table 13).

BJP's ads showed significant variation across phases, while Congress's remained mostly consistent, often repeating similar content. Nearly all BJP ads featured Prime Minister Narendra Modi with the slogan "*Fir Ek Baar Modi Sarkar*" (Once again Modi Government). Congress ads mainly showcased the slogan "*Hath Badlega Halaat*" (The Palm will change the condition). Unlike BJP, Congress ads did not include explicit vote appeals.

The silent period

The digital shift of political campaigns has made it easier for political parties to bypass election regulations, particularly during the 48-hour silence period meant to ensure free and fair voting. An analysis of Google Ads using the Transparency Centre data reveals potential violations of these rules by parties during the recent elections.

The Election Commission's (EC) Model Code of Conduct (MCC) requires a 48-hour silence period before polling, banning all campaigning including digital. Despite this, parties have been observed violating the silence period by running online ads.

During the 48-hour silence period, the BJP ran 179,070 ads on Google compared to Congress's 8,149 – a ratio of approximately 21:1. Yet the BJP's total spend was only about 25% higher, than the Congress's. These figures reflect all ads live at any point in the silence windows, not necessarily violations. To identify actual breaches of the MCC, researchers sampled ads to check if they targeted poll-bound constituencies during the restricted window. Only such ads were considered violations of the rules.

To assess compliance, a sample of ads from both parties was analysed in each phase. For the BJP, 2,996 ads were analysed, and 492 were found to be in violation of the MCC. In contrast, of the 958 Congress ads analysed, 698 (or 73%) were found to be in violation of the MCC (Table 14 and Table 15). These repeated violations reveal gaps in current election regulations concerning digital platforms.

**Sanjay Kumar, Suhas Palshikar, Sandeep Shastri, Aditi Singh and Vibha Attri.*

LOKNITI-CSDS SURVEY

Table 1: Engagement rates (ER) on X and Facebook

Party	Engagement rate on X	Average engagement rate on Facebook
INC	122,079	24,872
BJP	56,865	29,053
AAP	45,367	31,351
RJD	44,855	16,167
DMK	6,504	2,840
AITC	5,654	91,384
Shiv Sena (Shinde)	4,195	14,965
JD(U)	2,356	33,133

Table 2: Thematic average (TA) across parties: Facebook and X combined

Theme	Attack against opposition	Vote appeals	Policies	Democracy and Constitution	Demographic targeting	Leadership & personal	Corruption	Religion	Policy Achieve ments	Other
BJP	22	36	19	1	6	3	3	3	5	2
INC	33	13	20	7	13	2	6	0	2	4
AAP	56	13	7	7	4	6	2	1	2	2
AITC*	44	18	11	7	10	0	2	0	3	5
DMK	25	23	14	15	8	0	1	0	4	10
JD(U)	1	18	60	0	16	0	0	0	1	4
RJD	36	2	29	10	15	4	2	0	0	2
Shiv Sena	17	32	27	0	7	2	0	5	0	10

Note: All figures are in per cent. *Trinamool Congress

Table 3: Total number of advertisements run by the BJP and the Congress

Party	Total number of advertisements
BJP	41,127
INC	1,041

Note: In some instances, the same advertisement was run in multiple versions. This data only includes unique advertisements run during the period of the study.

Table 4: Advertisement distribution across Meta platforms for BJP and the Congress

	Per cent of advertisements	
Platform	BJP	INC
Instagram	53	1
Facebook	45	0
Instagram & Facebook	1	86
Unknown	1	13

Table 5: Expenditure on advertisements by the BJP and the Congress

	BJP		INC	
Money spent in ₹	No. of advertisements	Per cent of advertisements	Number of advertisements	Per cent of advertisements
0-999	26,495	65	126	12
1,000-4,999	8,105	20	105	10
5,000-9,999	2,582	6	62	6
10,000-19,999	1,822	4	85	8
20,000-49,999	1,356	3	147	14
50,000-99,999	491	1	116	11
1,00,000-499,999	266	1	351	34
>=5,00,000	10	0	49	5
Total advertisements	41,127	100	1,041	100

Table 6: Thematic analysis of advertisements run by the BJP

Theme	BJP advertisements in per cent
Vote appeals	52
Infrastructure	10
Development	8
Economy	7
International standing	5
Schemes/ policies	4
Women	4
Article 370	4
Religion	2
Youth	2
Farmers	2

Table 7: Thematic analysis of ads run by the Congress

Theme	% of Congress ads
Attack	27
Unemploy ment/inflation	26
Vote appeals	20
Farmers	10
Women	7
Schemes/ policies	4
Youth	4
Other	2

Table 8: Tone and impressions of ads run by the BJP and the Congress

		100-999	1,000-4,999	5,000-9,999	10,000-49,999	50,000-99,999	1,00,000-4,99,999	5,00,000-9,99,999	>=1M
BJP	% of positive advertisements	22	15	7	21	7	18	5	5
	% of negative advertisements	11	14	7	25	9	23	6	5
INC	% of positive advertisements	2	1	1	9	4	18	13	52
	% of negative advertisements	7	11	7	14	1	20	13	27

Table 9: Advertisements posted and money spent on the corresponding advertisements on Google

Party	Number of ads	Money spent (₹)
BJP	2,25,695	560 million
INC	9,251	210 million

Source: The Google Ads Transparency Centre

Table 10: Format of advertisements posted by the BJP and the Congress

	Format of ads	
	Image	Video
Advertisements by the BJP	91	9
Advertisements by Congress	70	30

Note: All figures are in per cent.

Table 11: Money spent on advertisements posted by the BJP and the Congress

	Range of money spent	
	Up to ₹1,00,000	Above ₹1,00,000
Advertisements by the BJP	98	2
Advertisements by the INC	73	27

Note: All figures are in per cent.

Table 12: Impressions on advertisements posted by the BJP and the Congress

	Range of impressions		
	0-10,000	10,001-1M	Above 1M
Ads by the BJP	61	36	3
Ads by the Congress	27	52	21

Note: All figures are in per cent.

Table 13: Phase-wise micro-targeting in advertisements posted by the BJP and the Congress

Party	Ads in Phase 1	Ads in Phase 2	Ads in Phase 3	Ads in Phase 4	Ads in Phase 5	Ads in Phase 6	Ads in Phase 7
BJP	96	77	84	69	84	77	100
INC	32	22	10	52	30	52	59

Note: All figures are in per cent. The rest of the advertisements for each party did not have micro-targeting.

Table 14: Number of advertisements analysed and violations recorded in the phase-wise analysis of BJP advertisements

Phases	Number of advertisements analysed	Violations
Phase 1	250	64
Phase 2	279	92
Phase 3	625	93
Phase 4	662	63
Phase 5	640	91
Phase 6	360	36
Phase 7	180	53

Table 15: Number of advertisements analysed and violations recorded in phase-wise analysis of Congress advertisements

Phases	Number of advertisements analysed	Violations
Phase 1	250	115
Phase 2	100	78
Phase 3	168	154
Phase 4	70	57
Phase 5	160	94
Phase 6	140	130
Phase 7	70	70

FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know Your English

K. Subrahmanian
S. Upendran

"... to tell you the truth, he doesn't know anything. He is ignorant with everything."

"First of all, the word ignorant has the stress on the first syllable 'ig'. The 'n' in the second syllable and the 'a' in the third syllable are pronounced like the 'a' in China."

"So, it's IGnorant?"

"Yes, that's right. And secondly, you are never ignorant with something. It's always ignorant of something. For example, the new Minister was ignorant of the facts."

"How about this sentence? The principal was ignorant of the argument that led to the fight."

"Sounds good to me. Here's another example: Many people are ignorant of the new rules."

"People who don't know how to read and write are ignorant of their rights."

"That's true. Often, people use about after ignorant. For example, the new Minister is ignorant about the old policies."

"Can I say, our principal is ignorant about politics?"

"You certainly can! Here's another example: Thanks to Star TV, many of our young people are ignorant about our rich cultural heritage."

"Rich cultural heritage! You're beginning to sound like my father. Tell me, which is more correct? Ignorant of or ignorant about?"

"As I said, both are acceptable. But some people think that ignorant of is better usage than ignorant about."

"I see. Hey, how about seeing The Lost World tomorrow?"

"I've already seen it. I saw it last Saturday."

"You did? What did you think of it?"

"It isn't all it's cracked up to be."

"What do you mean it's cracked? You mean it's a crazy movie?"

"No, no! That's not what I mean at all. Cracked up to be is an informal expression meaning supposed to be. So, the sentence The Lost World isn't all that it's cracked up to be means..."

"... it isn't as great as people make it out to be?"

"Yes, that's right. It's not as good as people say it is."

"So, can I say, this hotel isn't all it's cracked up to be?"

"You certainly can. I wanted to find out if my new boss was what he was cracked up to be."

"You have a new boss? I didn't know that! When did..."

"...relax! That was just an example."

"Oh! I was worried. I thought something had happened to your old boss."

"...dummy up, will you?"

"Dummy up? What does that mean?"

"It means to keep quiet. Whenever a salesman comes to our place, my father just dummies up and lets my mother do all the talking."

"In our school, students dummy up whenever they see the Principal walk by."

"Why have you dummied up?"

"You told me to dummy up, didn't you?."

Published in The Hindu on July 29, 1997.

Word of the day

Tapestry:
a heavy textile with a woven design, used for curtains and upholstery; a wall hanging of heavy handwoven fabric often with pictorial designs

Synonyms: tapis, arras

Usage: *The artist made a beautiful tapestry.*

Pronunciation: newsth.live/tapestrypro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /ˈtæpəstɹi/

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Editor's TAKE

Uttarkashi floods signal urgent climate action

A green future is not an aspiration for tomorrow — it is a necessity for today. The cost of inaction will be far greater than the investment required now

Climate change is not a phenomenon to unfold in the future as many thought. It is happening right now in front of our eyes. And results are devastating – properties worth billions of dollars and precious lives are being lost to the nature's fury. Flash floods, cloudbursts, melting glaciers and the rising sea levels – due to rising temperatures attributed to carbon emission – are happening now.

The recent flash floods in Uttarkashi are a grim reminder that climate change is no longer a distant threat but a rapidly unfolding reality. As torrential rains turned tranquil rivers into destructive torrents, washing away lives and livelihoods. India must act decisively – and urgently – towards a green future powered by renewable energy and sustainable practices. The devastation in Uttarkashi is not an isolated incident. Scientists have long warned that the Himalayan region is especially vulnerable due to melting glaciers, unstable terrain, and rising anthropogenic pressure.

Yet, development often proceeds with scant regard for ecological balance, and fossil fuels continue to dominate the energy mix. The country stands at a crossroads: Either transform its energy supply chain with urgency, or risk deeper human and economic losses. India's push for biofuels, solar, wind, and electric mobility is commendable – but must be accelerated at a faster pace. The success of ethanol blending – achieving the 20 per cent target five years ahead of schedule – proves what focused policy and political will can accomplish.

Similar urgency must now extend to other sectors: From mainstreaming wind power in coastal states, to incentivising rooftop solar and green hydrogen. India needs a sweeping transition away from fossil fuels. This green shift brings wide-ranging benefits: More jobs per unit of energy produced, reduced air pollution, enhanced energy security, and support for rural livelihoods through biofuel feedstock production. A greener India is not only cleaner – it is smarter and more resilient.

However, this transformation will only succeed with systemic change. Urban planning must integrate climate resilience. Infrastructure must be future-proofed to withstand extreme weather. Development in ecologically fragile zones must be re-evaluated with long-term sustainability in mind. Policies must reward sustainability, penalise pollution, and invest in climate education, innovation, and public awareness. The Uttarkashi floods-like the cloudbursts in Himachal, landslides in Sikkim, and urban floods in Delhi and Mumbai-are nature's repeated warnings that time is running out. A green future is no longer an aspiration for tomorrow-it is a necessity for today. The cost of inaction will far exceed the investment needed now. With its vast renewable potential and high climate vulnerability, India has both the responsibility and the opportunity to lead. The green transition is no longer just about economic growth – it is about survival. And the clock is ticking.

PIC TALK

Celebrating National Handloom Day, a weaver demonstrates his craft on a traditional loom.

PHOTOS: PANKAJ KUMAR

PREPARING FOR DELUGE: INVEST IN SCIENTIFIC FLOOD MANAGEMENT NOW

Every monsoon season, several Indian states are devastated by floods. Recently, Uttarakhand witnessed widespread destruction, highlighting the recurring crisis in the Himalayan regions. These floods displace thousands, claim lives, and heavily burden the economy. While some factors are natural, many stem from inadequate human planning and lack of preventive strategy.

The frequency and intensity of floods have been steadily increasing across India. Rapid urbanisation, blocked drainage systems, and encroachments along riverbanks obstruct the natural flow of rivers, amplifying the scale of damage. The absence of robust early warning systems and resilient infrastructure further endangers lives and livelihoods.

Agencies such as the India Meteorological Department (IMD), Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS), and ISRO must be empowered to deliver accurate, real-time forecasts using satellite and modern survey technologies.

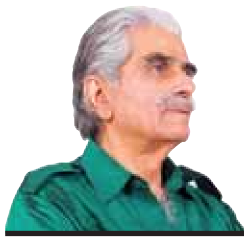
Simultaneously, riverbeds must be desilted, and illegal constructions along floodplains removed. Community – level education is vital – schools and local bodies should conduct mock drills and awareness campaigns regularly. Floods may be natural events, but the devastation they cause is largely avoidable. With climate patterns shifting unpredictably, adopting a scientific and preventive approach to flood management is not just necessary – it is imperative.

JITESH MORI | KUTCH

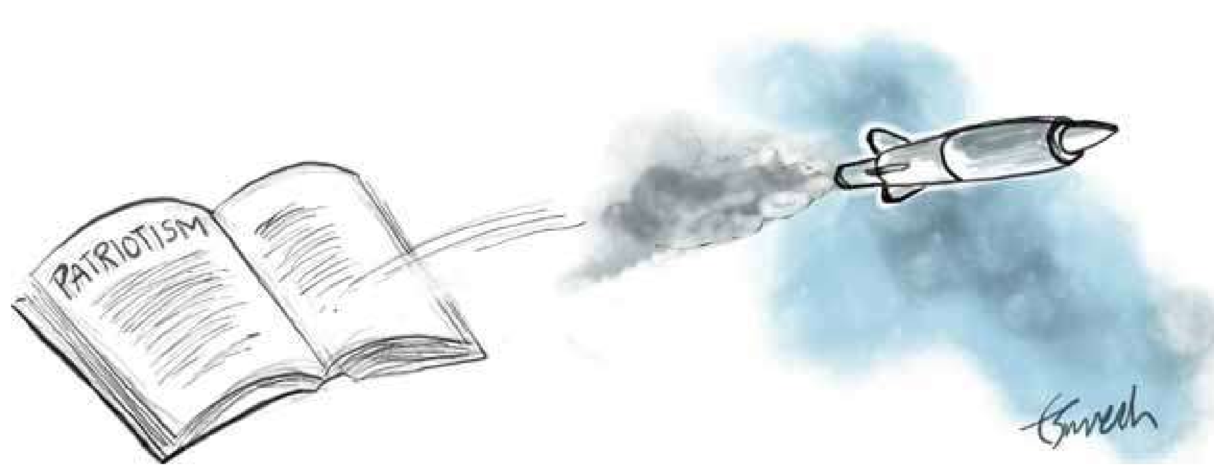
Please send your letter to the letters@dailypioneer.com.
In not more than 250 words. We appreciate your feedback.

Books, Battles and Bureaucracy

Former Army Chief Gen Nirmal Vij's book, *'Alone in the Ring: Decision-making in Critical Times,'* offers a candid insider's view into pivotal moments in India's defence history — ranging from Kargil and Op Parakram to the fencing of the LoC and the origins of the Cold Start Doctrine



ASHOK K MEHTA



Former Army Chief Nirmal Vij's book *Alone in the Ring: Decision-making in Critical Times* was released earlier this year by former Army Chief Gen VN Sharma to a packed house. Several former Army Chiefs, like Gen Mukund Naravane — whose own book *Four Stars of Destiny* has been quarantined and is currently under review by the Ministry of Defence for nearly two years after publishers released revealing excerpts on decision-making during Operation Snow Leopard and the Agniveer scheme — remain unheard. It appears Naravane's book is unlikely to see the light of day, as it does not portray the politico-military decision-making process under the present regime in a favourable light.

Vij's book was also held up, and its inauguration delayed by several months. The latest book on defence is by CDS Gen Anil Chauhan: *Ready, Relevant and Resurgent: A Blueprint for the Transformation of India's Military*. After a long hiatus, Army Chiefs have resumed writing about their experiences-a necessary step for institutional learning. Gens Ved Malik and JJ Singh have made useful contributions to Indian military literature: Malik on the necessity of institutionalised decision-making involving Service Chiefs, and Singh on China and the McMahon Line. Naravane has credibly illustrated deficiencies in decision-making, but his book has been suppressed. Vij's book focuses on critical decisions taken by him as COAS and the recommendations that were accepted by the government. Vij recounts a historic fact about Pakistan, which, in collusion with Britain (perhaps more the other way round), had its eyes on Jammu and Kashmir — a region that has become Pakistan's jugular vein. In order to seize it, Rawalpindi has tried everything: waging wars, instigating skirmishes, and conducting an unending proxy war, including Kargil and, most recently, the new-age beyond-visual-range skirmish, Operation Sindoor.

The book covers Kargil, Operation Parakram, and Operation Khukri in commendable detail. Vij also touches upon the LoC fence, Cold Start Doctrine, jointness, integration, and theatrisation; briefly covering Operation Iraqi Freedom and the initiation of several path-breaking welfare reforms. From his ringside seat, Vij played a pivotal role in the transformation of the Army. From May to July, 26 years ago, the Indian Army, supported by the IAF, fought its most gruelling infantry battles uphill due to a strategically imprudent political decision. This ill-thought decision, driven by an outdated policy of "not losing an inch of territory", was not rectified; instead, it was exacerbated by misplaced parliamentary zeal to pass unanimous resolutions aimed at retaking territories lost to Pakistan and China — resolutions that have now become irretrievable legacy pledges. The decision not to cross the LoC proved fatal and led to avoidable casualties. Vij discusses integrated operations, but the use of two different names — Operation Vijay for the Army and Operation Safed Sagar for the IAF-tells a different story. Army Chief Gen Malik's statement, "We will fight with what we have", captures the sad state of preparedness at the time. Kargil was a bad deal that ended on a high note, earning the highest per capita awards for any war or military operation. It is described as a "skirmish" at the National War Memorial. Its spin-off was the Kargil Review Committee report and the formation of four task forces on intelligence, internal security, border management, and higher defence management.

The Pioneer
SINCE 1865

MILITARY COMMANDERS MUST DISCREETLY PROVIDE STRATEGIC COUNSEL WHILE GUARDING AGAINST THE POLITICISATION OF MILITARY OPERATIONS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Just months after Kargil, IC-814 was hijacked from Kathmandu to Kandahar by *Jaish-e-Mohammed terrorists* — another fiasco under the then BJP Government's watch. Then came Operation Parakram — the war that never was-in December 2001, India's second exercise in coercive diplomacy after its failure in Sri Lanka during Operation Pawan. The attack on Parliament by Pakistani terrorists on 13 December led to the largest mobilisation of armed forces in peacetime, believed by many to signal a full-scale, decisive war that came to the brink — yet India held back. India lost more soldiers during Operation Parakram than the 512 martyrs who reclaimed the Kargil heights. Vij describes how a minister called "restraint" a strategic asset. One man bitterly disappointed by the restraint was Army Chief Gen S Padmanabhan, who wanted to teach Pakistan a lesson for its proxy war.

Operation Khukri involved the rescue of 223 Indian soldiers and 11 military observers held hostage by RUF rebels in Sierra Leone during a UN peacekeeping mission. Efforts to persuade the UN to shift the mission mandate from Chapter VI to Chapter VII — permitting the use of force-were hedged even after a delegation led by Vij to the UN failed. Eventually, the UN Secretary-General allowed a rescue, which led to the successful conduct of Operation Khukri.

The LoC fence, which was Vij's brainchild, was constructed in 2003. It transformed counter-infiltration and counter-terrorism operations, despite many detractors. The Cold Start Doctrine, whose existence was denied by the government, was revealed by Gen Deepak Kapoor in 2009 and was a direct fallout of Operation Parakram. It triggered panic in Pakistan, leading to the development of tactical nuclear weapons. The Integrated Battle Groups and the recently announced *Rudra Brigades* are the green shoots of Parakram.

Vij welcomes the appointment of a CDS and affiliated reforms, and Integrated Theatre Commands are expected. He criticises the appointment of a retired three-star General as CDS but makes useful recommendations for refining command and control structures under theatrisation and the Department of Military Affairs. The account of the US request for at least 17,000 Indian troops in Iraq in 2003 is well told, though deployment was not recommended due to command and control issues.

The crown jewel of Vij's contribution lies in welfare reforms: improving career prospects in the Army, launching the ECHS scheme, upgrading the military education system, constructing the Manekshaw Centre, and implementing the Married Accommodation Project.

One of the pivotal issues in civil-military relations is the quality of interaction between the political and military leadership. In India, where neither the civilian bureaucracy nor political leadership is deeply versed in defence and strategic matters, political control and guidance often devolve into bureaucratic overreach. This lacuna must be corrected. Military commanders must discreetly provide strategic counsel while guarding against the politicisation of military operations and achievements.

It remains unclear whether, during Operation Sindoor, military advice was presented at the numerous meetings between the two hierarchies. Otherwise, Gen Chauhan would not have spoken in Singapore about "mistakes corrected", nor would the Indian Defence Attaché in Indonesia have referred to political constraints during the initial strikes on 6/7 May. Vij has done well to allude to similar pitfalls in his book.

The writer, a retired Major General, was the Commander of IPKF South, Sri Lanka, and a founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, which is currently the Integrated Defence Staff

Briquettes from crop residue for cremation!

DHARMENDRA BHOGAL

THE PIONEER 2ND OPINION

Do you know how much wood is needed on average to cremate a single body at any Hindu funeral ghat?

Depending on the weather, an average funeral pyre requires approximately 250-300 kilograms of wood. That equates to the wood obtained from two trees that are at least 20 years old.

Nagpur's Vijay Limaye has found a solution to this colossal daily consumption of wood. It is not only sustainable but also helps save lakhs of trees that are felled every year for pyre wood. The solution is biomass briquettes.

Turning biomass into briquettes and pellets is widely discussed across India, particularly because it helps reduce stubble burning and thereby indirectly supports India's clean energy goals. Crop residue is being burnt in almost every state, but there is a lot of attention focused on the *parali* burning in Punjab and Haryana, as it directly contributes to pollution in the Delhi-NCR region.

Vijay Limaye's non-profit, which works towards eco-cremation, has pioneered the use of biomass for cremation — replacing traditional wood logs with agro-waste briquettes, which he has named *Mokshakashtha*.

He devised a formula for using locally available crop residue to convert it into briquettes. His innovation helps reduce deforestation, curb carbon emissions, and channel agricultural residue into meaningful use.

As of July 2025, six crematoriums in Nagpur city (out of more than a dozen) are using briquettes for cremation. They consume an average of 1,200 tonnes of briquettes per year. "This saves 10,000 trees from being felled in Nagpur alone," Limaye said.

Only two other cities in Maharashtra — Mumbai and Navi Mumbai — are using pellet-based cremation, at nine and 12 crematoriums respectively. Limaye is disheartened that this concept has not gained the popularity it deserves.

"The main reason is corruption. There is a strong lobby of wood suppliers to the crematoriums," he says. But more than anything, it is the absolute disregard for environmental issues by politicians and bureaucrats that angers him. "Does saving trees not count?" he asked.

Scaling it up nationwide presents clear challenges — religious beliefs aside. There is no official recognition of the practice, and therefore no policy decisions regarding it. This in turn means there is no policy to support localised production and related supply chains. Citizens who might opt for it, and farmers who need to be incentivised not to burn crop residue, both require education and awareness.

The Centre launched the Biomass Programme five years ago — a scheme to promote the manufacturing of briquettes and pellets, and biomass (non-bagasse) based cogeneration in industries for FY 2021-22 to 2025-26. Slowly and steadily, it has taken off, at least in the Delhi-NCR region. And eventually, it may spread across India.

Therefore, perhaps the next scheme the government needs to launch is a 'Use of Briquettes & Pellets for Cremation' programme — raising sufficient awareness and facilitating decentralised, local manufacturing with community participation.

The writer is an architect interested in environmental and developmental issues

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Safety begins with sidewalks

The Supreme Court has granted a "final opportunity" to the Central and State Governments to draft rules protecting the rights of pedestrians. This includes ensuring footpaths are accessible to persons with disabilities. This directive is extremely significant, especially considering that 32,825 pedestrians died on highways in 2022-accounting for over 20 per cent of all road accident fatalities. Maharashtra, Delhi, and Tamil Nadu recorded the highest number of such deaths.

The Court bench rightly observed that "the use of footpaths and pedestrian paths is an integral part of the right to life" under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution. It further stated that footpaths must be safe, accessible, and free from encroachments. The Court has ordered that the relevant guidelines be prepared and submitted within four weeks.

Failure to do so may result in further action through an *amicus curiae* (friend of the court). It is entirely reasonable for citizens to expect footpaths to be freed, safe, and functional. Pedestrian infrastructure is not a luxury — it is a basic right in a civilised society. We must hope that the government now acts with urgency and commitment to uphold this essential aspect of public safety and accessibility.

DATTAPRASAD SHIRODKAR | MUMBAI

Amit Shah: Modern-Day Chanakya

Apropos "Shah: NDA's Enduring Strongman," *The Pioneer*, Aug. 6. Amit Shah's tenure as India's Home Minister, spanning an impressive 2,258 days, marks a historic milestone — making him the longest-serving Home Minister in independent India. As the trusted lieutenant of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Shah has demonstrated remarkable leadership — strong, assertive, and unflinching in his approach to national security and internal governance.

Reminiscent of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel-India's original Iron Man and also a son of Gujarat-Shah's decisive style has earned him the moniker "Chhote Vallabhbhai Patel."

Beyond the Ministry, Shah's strategic brilliance has been instrumental in expanding and consolidating the Bharatiya Janata Party across India. Often referred to as the modern-day Chanakya, he has repeatedly outmanoeuvred political rivals, playing a masterful game of political chess in India's turbulent democratic landscape.

His legacy as Home Minister lies not merely in the records he has broken, but in the transformative impact he has had on India's internal administration and political dynamics.

N SADHASIVA REDDY | BENGALURU

Team India Shine at The Oval

In a gripping finale at The Oval in London, India defeated England by six runs in the fifth and final Test match to level the series at 2-2. What seemed improbable at the beginning of the tour — a young Indian side holding their own against England in their backyard — turned into a proud reality through spirited performances and fearless cricket. When the tour began, many experts predicted a whitewash.

With seasoned players missing and several debutants stepping in, expectations were low. But under the leadership of Shubman Gill, India's young brigade defied all odds. Yashasvi Jaiswal provided powerful starts, while KL Rahul and Rishabh Pant stabilised the innings at crucial junctures. All-rounder Ravindra Jadeja continued his golden form with both bat and ball. Washington Sundar's calm and calculated fifty in the final Test proved vital to India's win.

On the bowling front, Jasprit Bumrah led with fire and strategy, ably supported by Mohammad Siraj, debutant Akashdeep, and Prasidh Krishna. It signals the rise of a confident new generation, capable of facing hostile conditions and strong opponents. Shubman Gill's captaincy, though tested, stood tall and showed promise for the future of Indian Test cricket. Kudos to Team India.

VIJAY KOSHTI | SANGLI

A credible and liquid carbon market will be a game-changer

India has the potential, resources and market demand to become a major player in the Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) market, but it will take coordinated, strategic action across policy, infrastructure, and innovation

FIRST Column

Kushaagra Nandan is well versed in the gambit of green energies and is upbeat about India's leadership role in lowering carbon emission. Here he speaks candidly about India's quest for green energy — challenges, bottlenecks and solutions — that could take india forward towards green and clean future with India Business & Trade (IBT), in arrangement with The Pioneer. Here are the excerpts.

KUSHAAGRA NANDAN

Kushaagra Nandan is Chairman, The Nandan Group; Co-Founder, Chairman & MD, REnergy Dynamics (RED); Co-Founder & Non-Executive Board Member at SunSource Energy and Co-Chairman ASSOCHAM UP State Development Council

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How is India placed for the global leader in biofuel technology?

India is uniquely positioned to become a global leader in biofuel technology — not just on cost, but through strategic strengths that foster innovation and scale. Our diverse agro-climatic zones demand adaptable, multi-feedstock technologies, which naturally drive R&D and innovation. Combined with India's excellence in engineering, this enables the development of scalable, affordable solutions tailored for both domestic and global markets. Another key advantage is the growing synergy between startups, academia, and policymakers in the clean energy space — creating a dynamic ecosystem for biofuel innovation. With a large and growing domestic market demand for alternate fuels, India is well placed to build and refine biofuel models that are globally relevant.

According to IEA, India is poised to become the fastest growing bioenergy market in the world by 2030, expected to contribute more than a third of global bioenergy demand growth.

Key initiatives like the National Bioenergy Programme, SATAT, GOBARdhan, and advancement in achieving E20 targets along with net-zero objectives through just energy transition reflect India's long-term commitment to clean energy.

At RED, we're contributing to this national mission through our four integrated verticals-T-EPC, project development, feedstock aggregation, and product manufacturing — covering the entire biofuel value chain. As part of our efforts toward India's goal of establishing 5,000 Compressed Biogas (CBG) plants by 2030 under SATAT, we've launched comprehensive engineering solutions for small-scale CBG plants. These solutions aim to bring innovation, quality, and affordability to the forefront of the CBG sector, reinforcing India's potential to export complete project solutions — from technology to financing frameworks.

With E20/E30 blending goals, is India's ecosystem truly ready?

India's E20 rollout marks a significant milestone, signalling strong policy intent and commendable progress by the industry along with the evolving ecosystem to support this transition at scale. However, Engine compatibility remains a key concern, particularly across older segments of the vehicle fleet. At the same time, upgrades are urgently needed across the fuel value chain — especially in storage, logistics, and the widespread availability of multi-grade dispensers. Equally critical is the need to strengthen quality control and monitoring frameworks to ensure fuel consistency and performance. Without this, even the best policy targets risk falling short in implementation. For the transition to be successful, it must be phased and regionally calibrated, with alignment from OEMs, awareness among consumers, and coordination across all stakeholders.

How can biofuel projects become more attractive?

To make biofuel projects more attractive to ESG and institutional investors, it must focus on reducing risk and increasing scalability. Long-term policy stability and clear regulatory frameworks are foundational — they create market confidence allowing certainty and long term visibility to investors.

Standardising key components like plant designs, feedstock contracts, and performance benchmarks will improve bankability and ease due diligence for financial institutions.

Equally important is the availability of blended finance tools-such as green bonds, viability gap funding, and partial risk guarantees — that can help de-risk early-stage investments and lower project costs.

Monetising carbon credits through verified MRV (Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification) systems can unlock additional revenue streams and strengthen project viability. Most critically, we need transparent, ready-to-scale platforms — like the one we're building at RED — that offer integrated techno-financial solutions.

These platforms serve as bridges between clean energy projects and serious capital, enabling investment at scale and speed.

How can biofuel demand empower rural farmers?

Farmers need to be one of the key stakeholders in India's biofuel journey. With the right ecosystem in place, the growing demand for biofuels can transform agri-waste — such as crop residue, bamboo, and other biomass — into a consistent income stream for rural communities.

To make this a reality, we need structured procurement programs that ensure fair pricing and assured offtake.

It is also important to have access to shared infrastructure — like rental balers, mobile chippers, and transport-along with the establishment of village-level collection centres and pre-processing hubs. These measures will not only help monetise crop waste but also will significantly reduce stubble burning and related emissions. At RED, we've already begun enabling this shift. One of our four core verticals is feedstock aggregation, where we collect feedstocks like paddy straw, soya husk, and cane trash for biofuel production. Today, we operate more than 56 round balers making us the largest aggregation fleet operator and service provider in the country.

I strongly believe that by making farmers one of the primary stakeholders-not just suppliers — we can create a model where clean energy and rural prosperity go hand in hand.

Can digital technologies transform the biofuel value chain?

Yes, I believe digital technologies will play a pivotal role in transforming the biofuel value chain. AI can help in forecasting biomass availability by analysing weather patterns, cropping cycles, and market data-allowing for smarter planning. IoT sensors installed in digesters offer real-time insights into feedstock quality, system performance, and yield efficiency, enabling predictive maintenance and minimising downtime. Blockchain, too, is proving valuable by ensuring transparency and traceability in feedstock sourcing and carbon credit validation.

At RED, we're actively embracing this digital shift. We're deploying drone-based baling audits and digital plant dashboards that are streamlining operations, improving visibility, and driving better decision-making across the value chain.

Can India emerge as a global SAF supplier?

India has the potential, resources and market demand to become a major player in the Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) market, but it will take coordinated, strategic action across policy, infrastructure, and innovation. A Deloitte India report highlights that India generates 230 tonnes of agricultural residue, a resource that can be channeled into SAF production. Combined with waste oils, this positions India strongly on the raw material front.

However, to match the momentum of regions like the US and EU — where robust mandates and incentives are already in place — India needs policy mandates for SAF blending in domestic aviation, along with investments in technology, refining capacity, certification mechanisms, and sustained R&D.

Public-private partnerships, access to enabling finance and export-friendly frameworks, will be key to unlocking India's role in the global SAF supply chain.

How can India ensure credibility in its biofuel sustainability claims?

Sustainability in biofuels must be transparent and led by science. Mandating lifecycle emission assessments, encouraging third-party certifications, and using non-edible, waste-based feedstocks are key. Further, investments in zero-liquid discharge and water recycling systems in manufacturing units will help reduce water usage. I believe that all sustainability initiatives undertaken should be verifiable, auditable and a core part of business operations.

Relook at MGNAREGA through Yuktdhara: Mapping the soul of Viksit Bharat

BINOD ANAND

In the stillness of a village dawn, as the first light touches the fields and the sound of conch shells echoes from a nearby temple, a silent revolution is taking root — one that doesn't shout but shapes. It doesn't disrupt; it dignifies. In a small Panchayat Bhavan, a grassroots official studies a satellite map of the land around him. He's not a technocrat, yet he is making climate-smart decisions. He's not a policymaker, yet he is scripting the future. This is the quiet power of Yukthdhara — India's homegrown geospatial planning portal — infusing ancient Bharat with the precision of modern technology.

Launched by the Ministry of Rural Development in partnership with ISRO, Yuktdhara is much more than a digital interface. It is a doorway to localised, decentralised governance. It equips over 2.9 lakh Gram Panchayats to prepare climate-resilient, evidence-based, and people-first development plans. With every map explored and every asset proposed-be it a check dam, plantation, or pond-India's villages are learning to shape their own destiny. Each plan flows into NREGA Soft, where intent is translated into investment, and vision becomes action. This isn't just digitisation-it is democratisation of planning at a scale the world has never seen before.

At CNRI, our journey through India's villages has shown that rural transformation must be built on participation, not prescription. It was this conviction that guided our early work on MGNREGA, where I had the privilege of contributing to the drafting of what would become one of the most ambitious social security nets in human history. Under the visionary leadership of the Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the last 11 years, MGNREGA has evolved into more than a wage programme-it has become the backbone of India's ecological and economic resilience. Over 300 million rural citizens have been lifted out of extreme poverty, as reported by the World Bank. But beyond the statistics lies the soul of the scheme: it has brought dignity, stability, and climate-conscious infrastructure into the heart of our villages.

MGNREGA's assets — over 10 million in number — are not merely rural infrastructure. They are living symbols of local adaptation: ponds that recharge aquifers, plantations that capture carbon, bunds that protect soil, and wells that sustain livelihoods. These are peopled climate actions that global climate finance institutions must recognise. MGNREGA is already what many climate funds aspire to be — a social contract between the earth and the economy, between resilience and rights. Now, with the addition of Yuktdhara, this legacy is being upgraded through precision. The Gram Sabha has become a satellite-aided assembly. The development plan is now both on paper and in pixels. But there is a third transformative force emerging at this intersection of technology and tradition the Cooperative Economic Framework. With a renewed focus on the PACS-to-APEX model, the Ministry of Cooperation is working to ensure that India's 100,000+ Primary Agricultural Credit Societies are no longer just credit dispensers, but become intelligent, technology-enabled institutions of local production and prosperity. Yuktdhara now offers them the opportunity to plan crop patterns, assess soil health, map irrigation potential, and align their operations with scientific planning. A PACS equipped with such tools doesn't just serve farmers — it becomes a rural data center, a productivity planner, and a micro-enterprise hub.

Imagine the scale if every PACS integrates Yuktdhara data into its seasonal planning, if every Farmer Producer Organisation (FPO) aligns its storage and marketing strategies based on mapped resource availability, and if every cooperative uses satellite inputs for price prediction, logistics, and climate readiness, then rural India will no longer be reactive-it will be predictive, prepared, and prosperous. This will directly feed into India's macroeconomic health.

The cooperative sector — currently contributing about 8-10 per cent to national GDP — can scale toward 40 per cent by 2047, becoming the largest distributed economic force in the world. This is not just economic planning; this is the cooperativeisation of growth, grounded in Indian civilisational values and powered by the best of indigenous technology.

All of this is in perfect alignment with the Panch Pran articulated by the Hon'ble Prime Minister breaking free from colonial mindsets, taking pride in our roots, fostering unity, fulfilling our duties, and working toward a developed India. Yuktdhara is the very manifestation of this mission. It allows every *Panchayat* to move from dependence to direction, from charity to choice, and from vulnerability to vision. It links local action to national aspiration and places the village at the heart of the *vikas yatra*. In a world where digital tools are often seen as elite artefacts, India is showing that technology, when rooted in empathy, can become the greatest equaliser. Yuktdhara is not just a dashboard — it is a *dharma*. It does not just show us the land — it reveals our responsibility towards it.

Marching to Viksit Bharat @2047 from PACS to APEX approach Yuktdhara laced by Co-op Eco framework is turning every village into a centre of intelligent, cooperative-led, and marching towards Net Zero Emission.

And as we conclude this journey — from soil to satellite, from PACS to Panchayat, from plans to prosperity — it is only fitting to turn to the timeless Vedic voice that has always guided Bharat. In honour of that spirit, we offer this humble verse: He who fastened the heavens and steadied the earth,

Who upheld the light and created the firmament, May He now shine through this union of tools and thought,

May He inspire us to use knowledge for the upliftment of all life. Let Yuktdhara be that light. Let cooperatives be the bearers. And let every village be the sacred yajna where technology and tradition meet to forge a Viksit Bharat — bold, balanced, and beautifully our own.

The writer is Secretary General, Confederation of NGOs of Rural India (CNRI)

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Solving India's battery waste crisis with circular innovation

MUKESH GUPTA

India is at a very big inflection point in its journey toward sustainable energy. The sooner an EV-entrepreneurs-policymaker nexus revolves around greener routes, the faster a green phase sets in. With the most sought-after shift, the managing of the huge growth in battery waste emerges as the prime challenge. Hence, circular innovation has to be harnessed in India to safeguard the ecology along with the sustainability of the economy.

With the EV acceptance reaching newer heights every passing day, stockpiles of used lithium-ion batteries are mounting. Improper disposal of such batteries creates great environmental hazards. Toxic chemicals spill into the soil and surface waters, posing a long-term ecological threat and hence risk to human health. Unscientific disposal shall furthermore entail the wastage of present yet valuable materials such as lithium, cobalt, and nickel, which could be recovered and used for making new batteries.

The Pioneer SINCE 1865

Policy Framework

The Battery Waste Management Rules, 2022 aim to regulate the recycling and disposal of all types of lithium-ion batteries in India, including those found in EVs, laptops, and mobile devices. Batteries can be disposed of or recycled in various ways. According to the rules, manufacturers and importers must arrange for the collection and recycling of 25 per cent of batteries in the first year, which will increase to 70 per cent by the fifth year. Spent batteries must be disposed of by the relevant entities in an environmentally sound manner as prescribed by the Central Pollution Control Board. Penalties for non-compliance with these regulations may include fines and imprisonment. Though excellent on paper, these regulations have yet to be implemented in practice. A considerable amount of battery recycling occurs in the informal sector, often using unsafe methods that compromise both worker safety and the environment. Such informal recycling is barely profitable and lacks economic viability. The installation cost for formal facilities is exorbitant, and the absence of a standardised battery design impedes progress.

Battery recycling presents a great deal of economic benefits within the domain of greener civilisation. The EV sector, by 2030, will have created about 10 million direct jobs and around 50 million indirect jobs. With the concerted recycling ecosystem, lithium imports would be reduced, and consequently, lithium prices would shrink along with jobs in the front-end and back-end of the value chain. Nevertheless, the deployment of these recycling plants is costly and to the tune of Rs 220-370 crores per plant. The transportation costs for spent batteries are yet another huge overhead, about 35-50 of the total cost. To mitigate these hindrances, the Government would do well to offer incentives by way of subsidies, tax holidays, and a spotlight on private investment in infrastructure development. Circular innovation means designing products and systems with as little waste as possible and maximising resource efficiency. Minimising the environmental burden by using recycled material goes a long way in environmental protection with a huge footprint from new battery production. Recovering lithium from spent batteries, has been shown to incur ten times less environmental impact.

The Road Ahead

To save nature from battery waste, India shall have to adopt a proactive approach — from perfecting regulations and ensuring strict enforcement of the Battery Waste Management Rules to specifying clear guidelines for all stakeholders. Standardisation of battery designs shall bring down costs and simplify recycling. Infrastructure needs to be laid, along with financial incentives, to create organised battery recycling plants and support research. The private sector should be harnessed, and informal recyclers be integrated into the formal one. Awareness should be raised about the right methods of battery disposal and the rewards of battery recycling.

The writer is Environmentalist

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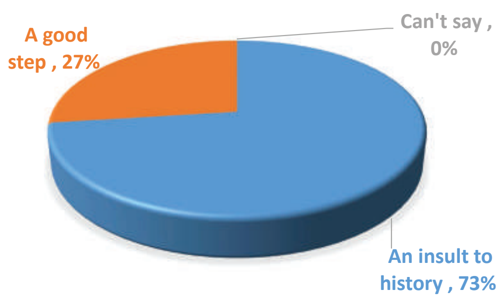
THE DAILY GUARDIAN SURVEY ON MAHADEVI ELEPHANT VANTARA ROW

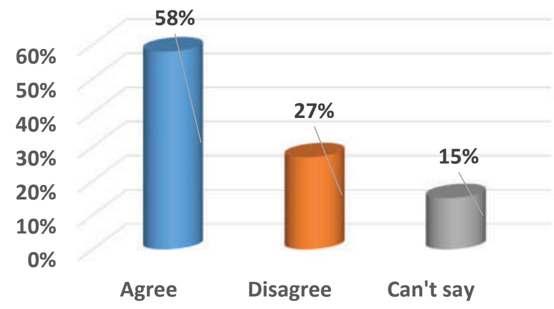
56% of respondents said shifting Hastini Mahadevi to Vantara is a conspiracy.

The India News Survey on the Mahadevi Elephant Vantara controversy reveals strong public sentiment. 73% view shifting Hastini Mahadevi as an insult, while 64% oppose using elephants in religious rituals. Majority believe relocating the elephant might be a conspiracy, yet 61% support Vantara's role in conserving wild animals.

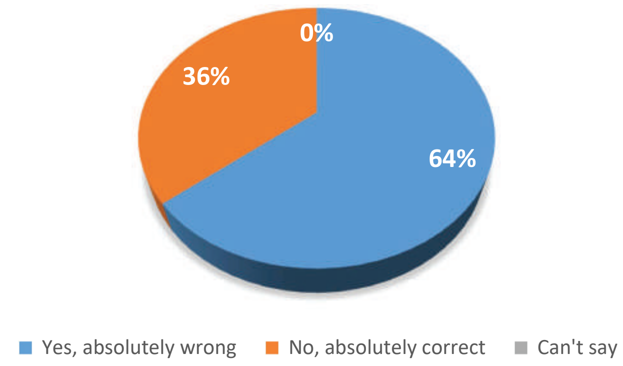
Q1. How do you view shifting Kolhapur's 'Hastini Mahadevi' to Vantara?



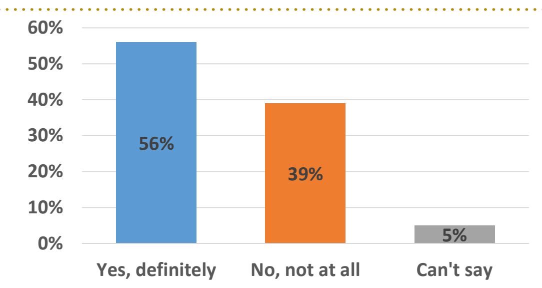
Q2. How do you view religious saints and Jain communities calling "Return Madhuri and Boycott Jio" as scams?



Q3. Is using elephants in religious rituals wrong?



Q4. Could shifting Hastini Mahadevi to Vantara be a conspiracy?

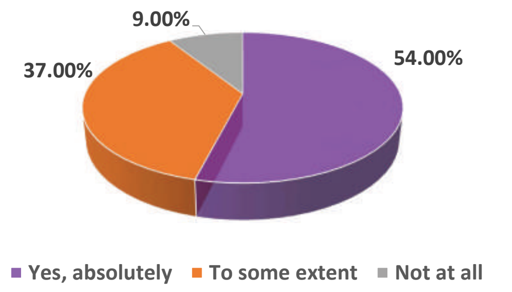


THE DAILY GUARDIAN SURVEY ON UTTARKASHI CLOUD BURST

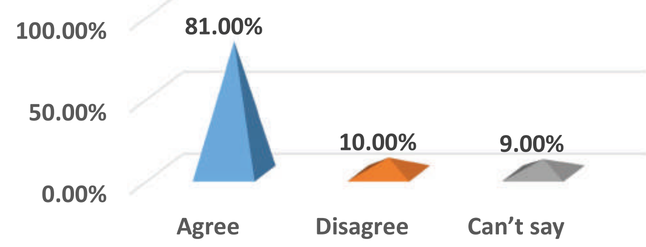
85% believe that glacier melting is the main reason behind the increasing incidents of landslides and floods.

A recent survey on the Uttarkashi cloud burst reveals growing concern over climate change and government preparedness. While 85% blame glacier melting for disasters, 58% feel such events cannot be prevented. Though 51% support government efforts, 46% remain unconvinced. Public demand for stronger, proactive disaster management and environmental action is evident.

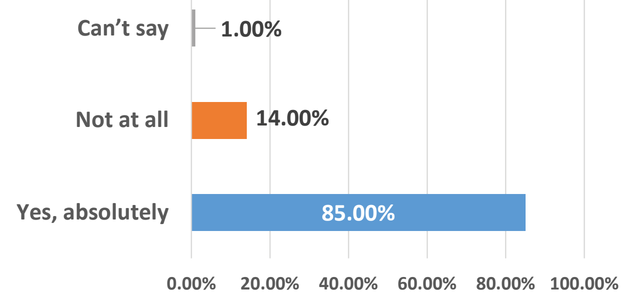
Q1. Do you find the administration's response effective after the cloud burst in Uttarkashi?



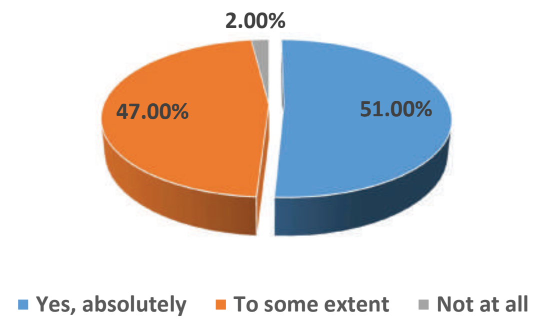
Q2. Do you believe that rapid glacier melting is responsible for the increasing incidents of landslides and floods in the Himalayan region?



Q3. Is glacier melting the main reason behind the increasing incidents of landslides and floods?



Q4. Has the central and state government taken all necessary measures to prevent such natural disasters?



India slams 'unjust' U.S. tariff hike

CONTINUED FROM P1

punitive tariffs from the U.S.

Trump's Executive Order, issued late on Wednesday, invoked national security and foreign policy concerns. It claimed India's import of Russian oil—directly or indirectly—posed an "unusual and extraordinary threat" to the United States.

The initial 25 per cent duty, announced earlier, comes into effect on August 7. The additional 25 per cent will take effect 21 days from the signing of the order, applicable to all Indian goods entering U.S. territory—excluding shipments already in transit or meeting specific exemptions.

"This rate of duty shall be effective with respect to goods entered for consumption, or withdrawn from warehouse for consumption, on or after 12:01 a.m. Eastern Daylight Time, 21 days after the date of this order," the official proclamation stated.

The Executive Order also leaves room for future revisions, depending on evolving geopolitical developments, possible retaliatory action by affected countries, or any steps taken by India or Russia to address the so-called national emergency.

The White House action follows a string of public remarks by Trump in recent days. On Tuesday, he told CNBC that India was "fuelling the war machine" by continuing Russian oil purchases, adding, "If they're going to do that, then I'm not going to be happy."

TRUMP ENVOY MEETS PUTIN AMID SANCTIONS DEADLINE

- US President Donald Trump's envoy, Steve Witkoff, met Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow in a last-ditch bid to avert new US sanctions over the Ukraine war.
- The meeting follows Trump's warning that Russia must agree to a peace deal by Friday or face economic penalties — including "secondary tariffs" on countries buying Russian energy.
- Trump has expressed doubts about Putin's intentions. Witkoff's visit comes amid heightened tensions and increased US military posturing.

PM Modi to visit to China

CONTINUED FROM P1

strain. A key turning point came during the October 2024 BRICS Summit in Kazan, where Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping agreed to a complete disengagement from all friction points along the Line of Actual Control (LAC). This led to the 21 October agreement restoring pre-2020 patrolling norms in Depsang and Demchok, including resumed grazing rights and military withdrawal.

Since then, both sides have cautiously resumed structured engagement, with significant steps such as the resumption of the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra, visa reinstatement for Chinese nationals, and renewed backchannel dialogue on investment rules and supply chain frameworks.

According to officials familiar with the summit preparations, the visit "may help lay the groundwork for a mutual economic calibration between India and China," aimed at addressing long-standing concerns over trade imbalance, market access, and investment safeguards. While no immediate announcements are expected at the summit itself, structured dialogue is likely to follow in the near future.

This visit also comes against the backdrop of record-high bilateral trade, which continues despite ongoing geopolitical frictions. In FY2024–25, India imported $113.5 billion worth of goods from China while exporting only $14.3 billion—resulting in a massive $99.2 billion trade deficit. This imbalance has been driven primarily by a surge in Chinese electronics, solar cells, and battery imports. In March 2025 alone, India's imports from China jumped over 25% year-on-year to $9.7 billion, while exports to China declined by 14.5%.

The persistent economic asymmetry has intensified calls within India's strategic establishment for a more balanced and regulated trade framework. Suggestions include local production mandates, market share caps in sensitive sectors, and national security vetting of FDI proposals.

Adding to the complexity, the summit takes place even as the United States, under President Donald Trump, adopts an increasingly adversarial stance toward India. Trump recently lumped India together with China and Russia in a social media post while announcing steep tariffs on Indian goods—despite temporarily pausing hikes for certain partners. Indian officials have described this rhetoric as "deeply unhelpful," especially at a time when New Delhi is managing multiple global partnerships.

Beijing, meanwhile, is expected to use the visit to subtly de-hyphenate its relationship with India from that of Pakistan, reflecting a recalibrated regional approach. This is particularly significant given China's vocal and material support to Pakistan during Operation Sindoor, while Washington maintained a studied distance—something that has not gone unnoticed in Indian strategic circles.

As reported by this newspaper in its March 2025 piece, "Mutual Need Doctrine: Why India Holds the Cards with China and the US," India's status as one of the world's largest consumer markets gives it unprecedented leverage over both Beijing and Washington. With China grappling with slowing growth and industrial overcapacity, and the U.S. tech sector betting heavily on India's digital economy, New Delhi is uniquely positioned to demand new terms of engagement rather than passively accept them.

The piece argued that inviting Chinese capital under a tightly regulated regime—with local sourcing requirements, market dominance thresholds, and profit reinvestment mandates—could help generate employment while reducing import dependence. At the same time, such an approach would protect India from overexposure to any single power bloc, while giving Beijing access to one of the world's largest markets—brimming with both hunger and capacity for consumption.

With External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh having already laid the groundwork during the SCO ministerial meetings in June, the Prime Minister's presence in Tianjin is being viewed as more than symbolic. It signals India's intent to engage—but on sovereign terms, with clarity and caution.

Indian Army leads rescue ops

CONTINUED FROM P1

nary Centres.

Combat engineering teams are on-site to assist in clearing debris and restoring critical access routes. The Army helipad at Harsil has been declared operational, enabling three civil helicopters from Sahastradhara, in coordination with the SDRF, to land at Bhatwari and Harsil for casualty evacuation and delivery of relief supplies.

Meanwhile, Chinook, Mi-17, and ALH helicopters are on standby at Jolly Grant, Chandigarh and Sarsawa, pending clearance for further troop and material airlifts.

Despite difficult terrain and inclement weather, the Indian Army continues to assist the civil administration in ongoing relief efforts across the disaster-hit region.

IAF joins rescue ops in isolated Harsil valley

The Indian Air Force has launched a joint rescue mission in flood-hit Harsil, deploying Mi-17 and ALH Mk-III choppers from Bareilly and transport aircraft from Agra to Dehradun. Relief material was loaded overnight despite heavy fog and rain. The IAF is coordinating with the Army to conduct sorties during brief weather clearances.

Indian Air Force personnel land at Dehradun with relief and rescue material on Wednesday. (IAFANI Photo)

11 injured Army personnel airlifted to ITBP hospital

Uttarkashi Police confirmed that 11 injured Army personnel have been airlifted to the ITBP Hospital in Matli as part of ongoing relief and rescue efforts. Flash floods and landslides triggered by a cloudburst have wreaked havoc in Dharali, Sukhi Top, and Harsil, with operations continuing in full swing across affected zones.

'Mockery of justice': SC slams Allahabad HC

CONTINUED FROM P1

guishing between civil and criminal matters. It also signals a commitment to accountability, as evidenced by the unprecedented costs imposed on Justice Kumar.

To prevent similar miscarriages of justice, judges in both High Courts and lower courts must prioritise a clear understanding of jurisdictional boundaries. Case studies like this should be used in judicial training to highlight the consequences of conflating civil and criminal law. High Courts across the country should issue clear guidelines or checklists to help determine whether a dispute involves criminal intent or can be resolved through civil remedies.

Further, appellate courts must exercise stricter scrutiny while hearing appeals or quashing petitions, and act promptly to dismiss baseless criminal proceedings. Lower courts should be equally vigilant at the stage of registering FIRs or issuing summons, rejecting complaints that lack prima facie evidence of criminality and referring civil matters to the appropriate forums.

The Supreme Court's ruling serves as a wake-up call for the judiciary to address the misuse of criminal law in civil disputes and to uphold the integrity of the legal process.

Revanth Reddy slams Centre

CONTINUED FROM P1

the caste census and approving 42 per cent reservations in the state assembly," he said.

However, he noted that the two Bills, sent to the President over four months ago, remain pending without any response.

Reddy termed the Centre's inaction "a serious affront to the aspirations of backward communities".

He further warned the BJP that failure to grant Presidential assent would confirm its anti-BC stance and added that the Telangana government had requested an appointment with the President but had yet to receive any response.

Slamming the BJP, Revanth Reddy said, "If the BJP government does not ensure approval for the BC Reservation Bills, the Congress will work towards removing it from power at the Centre."

He said the Congress had been forced to protest both on the streets and in Parliament due to the Centre's continued indifference.

Manan Mishra slams Priyanka

CONTINUED FROM P1

not tolerate such irresponsible statements..."

Mishra's comments came a day after Priyanka Gandhi defended her brother, Congress MP Rahul Gandhi, in response to a stern observation made by the Supreme Court regarding his remarks on the India-China border issue.

On Tuesday, reacting to the court's remarks, Priyanka Gandhi said the issue was being misinterpreted and emphasised that Rahul Gandhi holds the Indian Army in the highest regard.

"They do not decide who a true Indian is. It is the job of the Opposition leader — it is his duty — to ask questions and challenge the government. My brother would never say anything against the Army. He holds the Army in the highest respect. So, it is a misinterpretation," Priyanka told ANI.

THE DAILY GUARDIAN REVIEW
THURSDAY | 07 AUGUST 2025
MUMBAI
WWW.THEDAILYGUARDIAN.COM

DR. MOHAN BHAGWAT'S DIALOGUE WITH ISLAMIC SCHOLARS: A STEP TOWARD INCLUSIVE REFORM AMONG MUSLIMS

OPINION

GOPAL GOSWAMI

In a significant move toward fostering interfaith dialogue and communal harmony in India, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Dr. Mohan Bhagwat recently met with prominent Muslim clerics and scholars in Delhi on July 24, 2025. The meeting, held at Haryana Bhawan, brought together senior RSS functionaries and influential Muslim leaders. This engagement has sparked widespread discussion about its implications, not only for Hindu-Muslim relations in India but also has the potential scope for Indian Muslim scholars in leading global Islamic reforms. As countries like Saudi Arabia and the UAE push for progressive changes within Islam, Indian ulemas are uniquely positioned to project a more inclusive, tolerant, and cooperative vision of the faith as they have a strong cult all over the world Muslims. However, this vision must address contentious issues such as the intolerance in Islamic teachings, the role of madrassas, and the need for mainstream educational integration to combat radicalism and promote peace.

Bhagwat's outreach to Muslim scholars is a continuation of the RSS's efforts to bridge the communal divide in India, a country with a diverse population where Muslims constitute 14.2% (approximately 172.2 million people) of the population, making India home to the third-largest Muslim community globally. The meeting aimed to promote dialogue between Hindus and Muslims, emphasising the need for reconciliation and mutual understanding for India's progress. The Chief Imam of the All-India Imam Organisation, Dr. Umer Ahmad Ilyasi, described the dialogue as positive, noting that it focused on ending hatred and fostering unity. This initiative follows previous engagements, such as Bhagwat's 2022 meetings with Muslim intellectuals, which received endorsements from key Islamic bodies like Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind and Jamaat-e-Islami Hind.

The importance of this meeting lies in its potential to address longstanding tensions between communities in India, particularly in light of recent incidents of communal discord. By engaging directly with Muslim religious leaders, the RSS, a prominent Hindu nationalist organisation, signals a willingness to move beyond historical mistrust and work toward a shared vision of national unity. The dialogue also reflects a broader recognition that India's diverse society requires collaborative efforts to address social, educational, and economic challenges faced by Muslims because of their orthodox culture. As Niaz Ahmed Farooqui of Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind noted, the Muslim community faces significant backwardness in education and employment, which often takes a backseat to communal issues. Bhagwat's initiative could pave the way for addressing these structural challenges while promoting a narrative of coexistence. Institutions such as Darul Uloom Deoband, the Barelvi movement, and the Tablighi Jamaat, hold significant influence not only within India but also globally. Darul Uloom Deoband, established in 1866, is one of the world's largest Islamic seminaries and the birthplace of the Deobandi movement, which adheres to the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam. The institution has influenced Islamic education and thought throughout by establishing thousands of madrassas worldwide, from South Africa to Malaysia. The Barelvi movement, founded in 1904 by Ahmed Razi Khan, represents a measure portion of India's Sunni population and emphasises traditional Islamic practices rooted in South Asian culture. The Tablighi Jamaat, founded by Muhammad Ilyas al-Kandhlawi in 1926, is a global missionary movement focused on establishing radical Islam based on Quran & Hadish, with a strong presence in countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh, and South Africa.

These institutions have historically played a dual role: spreading Islamic teachings while also influencing in social and political spheres. For instance, Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind, closely associated with Deoband, was a key player in the making of Pakistan. These institutions have also faced criticism for certain fatwas and practices perceived as regressive, such as bans on photography or restrictions on women working alongside men. Seeing this, their global reach positions Indian ulemas to lead reforms that could resonate worldwide, particularly in light of progressive changes in countries like Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE have undertaken significant steps to modernise Islamic practices, emphasising inclusivity and moderation. Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 includes initiatives to curb extremist interpretations, promote women's rights, and foster interfaith dialogue. The UAE has also displayed a vision of "tolerant Islam," exemplified by the Abraham Accords and the establishment of interfaith centers like the Abrahamic Family House, construction of a Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi etc. These efforts show that reform within Islam is possible to its coexistence with other communities and civilisations with removing those atrocious and radical values of Islam including women's rights which is almost half of the population, focusing on economic progress, gender equality, and coexistence with other faiths.

Indian Muslim scholars can draw inspiration from these models while leveraging their own tradition. Institutions like Darul Uloom Deoband have already shown openness to reform, such as denouncing terrorism in 2008 and issuing fatwas against practices believed un-Islamic but they have contradicted many times. However, to lead global reforms, Indian ulemas must address contentious theological concepts like jihad, kafir (non-believer), and Darul Islam (land of Islam), which critics argue fuel intolerance, division & enmity among communities. These terms are always exploited by extremist groups, whereas contradicted by many, this requires nuanced reinterpretation to align with modern values of equality and coexistence.

The belief that "almost every terrorist is Muslim" stems believed to-be from a complex interplay of geopolitical, social, and economic factors, but the fact of the matter is its solely religious doctrine. While it is not inaccurate to attribute terrorism to Islam's core tenets, certain interpretations of jihad and the binary of Darul Islam versus Darul Harb (land of war) have been co-opted by radical groups to justify violence. Indian scholars, with their deep understanding of Islamic jurisprudence, can help remove these narratives by emphasising Islam's teachings on peace, justice, and respect for all humanity.

Madrassas, particularly those affiliated with the Deobandi movement, have often been criticised for fostering radical ideologies. Reforming madrassa education can only be possible with removal of those atrocious verses of Quran and Hadith. Without doing so, its critical to countering radicalism and integrating Muslim youth into mainstream society. Incorporating subjects like science, mathematics, and vocational training alongside religious studies can equip students with skills for modern economies, reducing their vulnerability to extremist ideologies.

India's madrassa system is vast, with thousands of institutions educating millions of students. However, their isolation from mainstream education often limits opportunities for Muslim youth, perpetuating cycles of poverty and marginalisation. Initiatives to modernise madrassas, such as those in Uttar Pradesh, have introduced secular subjects, but broader implementation is needed. By aligning with national education standards and promoting critical thinking, madrassas can become centers of holistic learning rather than breeding grounds for divisive ideologies leading to terrorism.

Bhagwat's engagement with Muslim scholars aligns with the RSS's broader goal of nation-building through inclusivity. His meetings underscore the importance of dialogue in addressing communal tensions and fostering a shared identity. By engaging with influential Muslim institutions, Bhagwat is encouraging Indian ulemas to take a proactive role in reforming Islam from within, challenging narratives of intolerance, and promoting equality for women and non-Muslims.

For Indian Muslim clerics to lead global reforms, they must focus on several key areas:

Theological Reinterpretation: Scholars should revisit concepts like jihad and kafir, emphasising their contextual meanings and promoting interpretations that align with peace and coexistence & remove verses which are against a civilised society.

Madrassa Modernisation: Integrating mainstream education into madrassa curricula will empower Muslim youth and reduce the appeal of extremist ideologies.

Interfaith Dialogue: Continued collaboration with organisations like the RSS can build trust and dispel stereotypes, fostering a culture of mutual respect.

Women's Empowerment: Addressing gender disparities within Islamic institutions, inspired by reforms in Saudi Arabia, can enhance Islam's image as a progressive faith.

Global Outreach: Indian ulemas can leverage their institutions' international networks to promote a tolerant and inclusive Islam, countering extremist narratives worldwide.

Bhagwat's meeting marks a pivotal moment in India's journey toward communal harmony and positions Indian Muslim institutions as potential leaders in global Islamic reform. As India navigates its diverse social fabric, such initiatives can pave the way for a more united and progressive future both within the country and on the global stage.

Gopal Goswami Ph.D. Is a researcher, columnist, and social worker

India's AI revolution: Charting path for Viksit Bharat in healthcare, education

OPINION

DR KIRIT P. SOLANKI AND SABARISH CHANDRASEKARAN

In the pursuit of a Viksit Bharat—an empowered, developed India by 2047—technology is both a cornerstone and a catalyst. Guided by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision, India's government is not simply embracing Artificial Intelligence (AI), it is democratizing it, making advanced technology accessible to every citizen and sector. The IndiaAI mission stands testament to this ambition, with targeted interventions grounded in accountability, safety, fairness, and the unwavering protection of human rights and privacy.

BUILDING INDIA'S AI FOUNDATIONS

India's bold initiative to develop indigenous Large and Small Language Models, uniquely trained on Indian datasets, is pivotal. These foundational models are designed to decode not just the words, but the rich contexts, dialects, and cultural nuances across healthcare, education, agriculture, climate, and governance. Leading homegrown AI startups—Sarvam AI, Soket AI, Gnani AI, and Gan AI—are on the frontline, promising models that will be open source, fueling India's vibrant startup ecosystem and ensuring innovations remain India-centric.

SAFE, SCALABLE SOLUTIONS

Central to this mission is the development of high-end AI infrastructure—massive GPU capacity to support research at scale, while the AIKosh datasets platform curates over 1,000 India-specific datasets and 200+ AI models. These resources are not just numbers: they are the backbone for inclusive solutions in health (such as AI-driven diagnosis of brain lesions), agriculture (Kisan Call Centre data powering farm advisories), and education (multilingual Text-to-Speech in Indian languages). By ensuring privacy safeguards at every step, the mission ensures innovation without compromising citizens' rights.

THE NEXT FRONTIER

India stands at the cusp of revolutionizing medical and healthcare education via AI. From adaptive learning platforms personalizing content for students in every corner of the country, to virtual and augmented reality simulators for training doctors and nurses with real-life precision. The fruits are tangible—increased pass rates in medical licensing exams, more informed health workers, and rural clinics empowered by AI-driven diagnostic support.

Equally transformative is AI's potential in real-time language translation and content contextualization, making world-class resources available in Indian languages—a true democratization of knowledge.

PUBLIC-PRIVATE SYNERGY

More than 30 AI-driven public interest applications, ranging from governance to climate, receive direct support under India AI. The IndiaAI Startups Global program, in collaboration with institutions like Station F and HEC Paris, is empowering Indian startups—PrivaSapien Technologies and Secure Blink among them—on the world stage, emphasizing cybersecurity and privacy.

India's approach to AI regulation is unique—a techno-legal model that balances innovation and protection. The establishment of the IndiaAI Safety Institute, stakeholder-inclusive frameworks for Responsible AI, and robust legal provisions under the IT Act, Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita, Digital Personal Data Protection Act, and IT Rules ensure that deepfakes, misinformation, and abuse are proactively curbed, not just reactively penalized. Investment in R&D at IITs further strengthens tools for deepfake detection, privacy, and cybersecurity.

India's strategy isn't just to legislate, but to innovate and set global benchmarks—an approach now recognized as India co-chairs the AI Action Summit and hosts the AI Impact Summit in February 2026.

CONCLUSION

India's journey in AI is more than narratives of technological catch-up—it's a story of responsible leadership, inclusivity, and global aspiration. By marrying policy with pragmatic innovation, and with an unwavering commitment to fairness and human rights, India is shaping AI not only as a tool for empowerment within its borders but as a beacon for the world.

As we move towards Viksit Bharat, India reaffirms that technology, when rooted in ethics and inclusion, is the true elixir for human advancement—redefining healthcare, education, and global collaboration for generations to come.

Dr Kirit P. Solanki, former Lok Sabha MP and Sabarish Chandrasekaran, CEO and Co-Founder, MediSim VR

Beyond tariffs, toward transformation: The India-UK free trade milestone

OPINION

DR. MONICA B SOOD

In the vast continuum of international economic relations, there are moments that define not merely the trajectory of trade but the temperament of diplomacy. The recent India-UK Free Trade Agreement (FTA) is one such moment-more than a ceremonial accord, it is a substantive leap forward in how sovereign nations craft mutual prosperity in a multipolar world.

This agreement arrives at a pivotal juncture. India, today, stands on the cusp of monumental economic transformation. Under the governance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the country has shifted from being a passive recipient of global investment to a proactive architect of global partnerships. The Make in India, Digital India, and Start up India missions have not only reshaped domestic enterprise but have also positioned India as a formidable player in emerging and advanced sectors alike.

Against this backdrop, the India-UK FTA is not a mere act of liberalisation-it is a strategic handshake between two democracies with shared histories and evolving ambitions. For India, it signals enhanced market access, regulatory easing, and the creation of a framework where goods, services, capital, and-most crucially-ideas can move freely.

Nowhere is the emotional and intellectual significance of this moment more deeply felt than in the corridors where policy was once only aspirational. I speak here not just as a commentator but as a participant in this journey. In October 2024, I addressed a conference in the House of Commons, UK Parliament, where I had the privilege of speaking about the future of India-UK bilateral relations by 2030 in the presence of Gareth Bacon, Member of Parliament for Orpington, England. It was there that I passionately articulated the urgency and potential of this trade partnership. I submitted a comprehensive memorandum to both British interlocutors and Indian economists, mapping out specific domains of collaboration-from digital trade and education to healthcare and climate technology.

To now witness the materialisation of that vision, through this meticulously crafted FTA, is not only deeply gratifying but, I dare say, a milestone in India's economic diplomacy.

This FTA has a broad scope and high ambitions. It slashes tariffs on key exports like textiles, engineering products, auto parts, and pharmaceuticals allowing Indian companies to compete on a more level playing field in the British market. In exchange, the UK gets access to the vast and ever-expanding Indian middle-class economy-now an increasingly sophisticated consumer and an increasingly ambitious and inventive producer.

However, this is where the deal is unprecedented when it comes to services and digital trade. India has a natural associate partner in the UK as they complement in information technology, legal and consultancy services, fintech and telemedicine; and the UK has a complementary regulatory and finance ecosystem. Under the agreement, seamless data flow across borders, mutual recognition of professional qualifications and liberalised visa regimes are a few aspects that provide a playing field to Indian professionals.

This is no small victory. This is indicative of a larger reality: India no longer has a comparative advantage in cheap labour; it has comparative advantage in skilled intellect, regulatory maturity, and technological agility.

In my memorandum, I had identified several sectors that required urgent convergence-education and research, healthcare innovation, defence and security cooperation, climate sustainability, and the globalisation of Ayurveda. Each of these has found resonance in the FTA's framework.

Education and research exchanges in particular-the possibility of British universities establishing collaborations or outposts or satellite campuses in India are now very much on the table. Moving beyond scholarships to well-defined, collaborative research -particularly in quantum computing, AI, and space sciences.

My suggestion of integrating Ayurvedic systems from India into the UK, as part of collaborative care models possibly through the National Health Service (NHS), is being adopted with exceptional support, and in the healthcare field. As holistic health continues to gain acceptance around the globe, Ayurvedic practices may also be used together with Western systems to relieve some of the burden on public health services, providing preventive and integrative approaches to chronic disease.

In the area of climate, both countries have pledged collaboration on renewable energy projects, transfers of technology, and breakthroughs in electric mobility – all essential to a planet whose health cannot be delegated or deferred.

This moment is not accidental. It is the product of vision, persistence, and strategic maturity. I am proud to have played a modest role in nudging this vision into reality from the floor of the House of Commons to the desks of Indian policymakers.

The India-UK trade deal is not simply a document, it is a statement of intent, a blueprint for transformation, and a symbol of two nations choosing convergence over complacency. As we look ahead to 2030, we are no longer writing a memorandum of hope. We are living its first chapters.

Dr. Monica B. Sood is a socio-economic strategist, Speaker at the 2024 India–UK Conference held at the House of Commons, UK Parliament.

Editorial Director: Prof. M.D. Nalapat; Managing Editor: Pankaj Vohra; Editor: Joyeeta Basu. Printed and published by Rakesh Sharma for and behalf of Good Morning India Media Pvt Ltd.; Printed at: Dangat Media Pvt Ltd, Mehra Centre, Marwah Estate, Off. Saki Vihar Road, Saki Naka Mumbai - 400072; Published at: 701, 7th Floor, Mangal Kutir, Arya Vidya Mandir Road, Juhu, Mumbai - 400049; The Editorial offices: 275 Captain Gaur Marg Sriniwaspuri Okhla, New Delhi -110065; Mumbai Office: Juhu Hotel, Juhu Tara Road, Santa Cruz-West, Mumbai 400049.; RNI Registration No APPLIED FOR: Title Code No: MAHENG14719; For Subscriptions and Circulation Complaints Contact: Delhi: Mahesh Chandra Saxena Mobile: +91 9911825289.

THE GOAN EVERYDAY

Ideologies separate us. Dreams and anguish bring us together.
Eugene Ionesco

Malik leaves behind legacy of courage and integrity

Satya Pal Malik, 79, former Goa governor, passed away at Delhi's Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital on Tuesday after a prolonged illness. Malik had been undergoing treatment for kidney-related complications. A chequered chapter of courage, conviction and controversies came to a close, a chapter where pages of Goa were inscribed firmly.

In the contemporary political era, where most governors adopt a subdued, apolitical stance, serving primarily as ceremonial figures to 'high commands' or diplomatic intermediaries, Malik stood out as a rare exception. His outspoken nature, unwavering principles, and bold confrontations with both the establishment and the government have left an indelible legacy of courage and integrity. Malik's journey from a seasoned politician to a vocal critic encapsulates a unique narrative of defiance in an era dominated by political conformity.

Malik's outspoken traits took Goa by storm during the Covid phase. Unlike the typically diplomatic governors that Goa had, who acted as mere rubber-stamps, Malik openly criticised the state government's Covid response and made open charges of corruption. His public comments opposing the proposed construction of a new governor's house and the mishandling of ration distribution underscored his bravado in confronting the system. Such frankness, especially in the politically sensitive environment of Goa, especially when the "double engine" sarkar was in full steam, has been unprecedented, and it is such strong posturing that people and leaders began looking at the governor as a mediator.

His journey tells us that true statesmanship involves speaking truth to power, standing firm on convictions, and prioritising public interest over political convenience

Malik's outspokenness was not exclusive to Goa. From his early days as a socialist student leader to his election to the Uttar Pradesh Assembly, and subsequently as a member of Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha, Malik's trajectory reflects his deep engagement with public issues. His tenure as governor across four states — Bihar, Jammu and Kashmir, Goa, and Meghalaya — was a testimony to his adaptability and commitment to service. It is his tenure in Jammu and Kashmir, during some of its most tumultuous times, that truly defined his legacy.

In August 2018, Malik was appointed the last governor of Jammu and Kashmir before the abrogation of Article 370. During this period, he witnessed historic events — the Pulwama attack, which claimed 40 CRPF lives, and the subsequent revocation of Jammu and Kashmir's special status in August 2019. Malik's candid critique of the government's handling of these crises distinguished him from his predecessors. He openly questioned security lapses and accused the central government of indifference, hinting at political motives behind the events. His assertions about intelligence failures and security lapses, although controversial, reflected his willingness to confront uncomfortable truths. His support for farmers' protests against the central laws, even at the cost of his relationship with the BJP, exemplifies his commitment to principles over partisan loyalty.

Malik led on his terms, a politician who refused to be confined by party lines or political decorum. He leaves behind a legacy that may be tough to follow because, in current-day politics, it is difficult for governors to embrace honesty and boldness and be outspoken. Today's era is often characterised by strategic silence and fear.

Malik's outspoken traits serve as a reminder of the vital role integrity and courage play in leadership. His journey tells us that true statesmanship involves speaking truth to power, standing firm on convictions, and prioritising public interest over political convenience. We need governors with an unwavering resolve to uphold honesty and serve as a voice for the voiceless.

OPEN SPACE >>

Govt needs to back 'khell tiatr', 'zomnivoilo khell'

Chief Minister Pramod Sawant has reportedly announced that the state government is actively working towards securing national-level recognition for tiatr, Goa's popular and deeply-rooted theatrical art form. It is a fact that tiatr has already made its mark in 28 countries across the globe. It may be recalled that South Goa Member of Parliament, Captain Viriato Fernandes, had called for the recognition of tiatr by UNESCO as a cultural and heritage treasure. Speaking during the zero hour in Parliament recently, Fernandes urged the Ministry of Culture to establish a task force in collaboration with the Government of Goa and members of the tiatr community to facilitate the process of securing UNESCO inscription for tiatr. While these steps are most welcome by tiatr lovers, it must be said that the grassroots of the tiatr art form which are 'khell tiatr' and 'zomnivoilo khell', which is performed during village feasts and occasions like Carnival, also need a boost as they have historical importance. The state government needs to financially support the 'khell tiatrs' and 'zomnivoilo khell'. It is necessary to preserve the traditional folk drama by boosting local talent.

ADELMO FERNANDES, Vasco

US under Trump is a 'fair-weather friend'

India's course must reflect its own strategic calculus and democratic priorities, not the turbulence of another country's mood swings

›The writer is a policy researcher and corporate adviser

SRINATH SRIDHARAN

When President Donald Trump announced that India would face a 25 per cent tariff from August, alongside a penalty for purchasing arms and energy from Russia, the declaration arrived wrapped in the language of friendship strained by what he called "unfair trade". This is a show of power that India must neither accept nor bow before.

The choice of words —"fair-weather friend"— is no accident. It points to the price India is now asked to pay and the doubt that shadows any promise of friendship offered under conditions. In Washington's telling, the bond holds only if India aligns its choices with American preferences, buys what it is told, and distances itself from long-standing partners deemed inconvenient to the US.

For India, the lesson must be clear: a sovereign nation cannot barter critical choices — from who supplies its energy to how it shapes its digital future — simply to appease a partner that might turn tomorrow. India's course must reflect its own strategic calculus and democratic priorities, not the turbulence of another country's mood swings.

These tariffs will sting, of course. But they are far from an existential threat. Instead, they should serve as a wake-up call to confront the structural challenges we have too often deferred. For years, we have delayed reforms that would give our industries greater internal agility, help manufacturing scale globally, and unlock more commercially enabling regulations.

These are the very changes that would bring true domestic self-sufficiency and allow Indian products to command a premium abroad. A fair trade agreement must ultimately make Indian lives better, not worse.

History shows that nations modernising under pressure, but on their own terms, emerge stronger. The months ahead will test India's resolve to blend openness with sovereignty and the ability to reform, including administrative ones. At home, India must act on what external pressure cannot force. We must liberate the economy from bureaucratic inertia and reform on a war footing. Regulations should be transparent, rational, and applied fairly, not form a maze that deters entrepreneurs and investors.

India has rightly resisted American demands to open its agricultural and dairy markets, arguing that such concessions would imperil the livelihoods of millions of small farmers. For decades, New Delhi has chosen to shield these sectors from trade pacts, not out of protectionism alone, but from a conviction that food security and rural stability are pillars of national interest.

A sense that New Delhi gave way on agriculture or dairy could provoke a backlash, not just from the opposition but within the ruling coalition, where rural livelihoods remain central. In India's democracy, the political price of appearing to trade away hard-won independence could far outweigh any short-term economic gain.

India must also hold the line on sectors where national interest is non-negotiable. Agriculture and dairy are not mere economic variables; they are tied to rural livelihoods, social stability, and food security. Conceding on these under duress would sacrifice millions at the altar of a fleeting trade peace.

Beyond trade numbers, there is a strategic contest unfolding in technology, data, and emerging industries. Washington's real objective may well be to keep India's digital infrastructure and critical supply chains tethered to American platforms and intellectual property. In areas like emerging and disruptive technologies, possibly the geopolitical supremacy tools of this century — semiconductors, cybersecurity, and AI — the United States would naturally prefer India as a downstream partner rather than an autonomous peer.

Accepting this as the hidden price of a trade détente would be a grave strategic mistake. India must instead use this moment to invest in indigenous capability, enforce full data localisation, and shape standards that reflect its own sovereign interests.

India must also stand firm in defending its digital and data moats, even if doing so hits at entrenched Big-Tech hegemonies and India's own painful dependencies currently. Today, vast swathes of India's digital economy run atop US-owned cloud infrastructure, rely on American app ecosystems, and depend on digital advertising platforms, whose algorithms are built and governed elsewhere.

Tariffs and penalties linked to India's purchase of Russian energy raise a larger question too. No single partner should hold a veto over our energy basket

India's response will be watched far beyond Delhi and Washington. Middle powers across Asia, Africa, and Latin America are observing whether a large democracy can hold its ground against superpower pressure without retreating on sovereignty.

Tariffs and penalties linked to India's purchase of Russian energy raise a larger question too. No single partner should hold a veto over our energy basket. Strategic autonomy in this century demands that India diversify its energy sources, from West Asian oil and Russian supplies to domestic renewables. That alone can ensure no external crisis or bilateral dispute jeopardises our energy security.

In a move that exposes the wily currents of 'great-power' geopolitics, Trump, only hours later, announced a fresh energy deal with Pakistan to jointly tap its oil reserves—and even hinted that Pakistan might one day export oil to India.

Above all, India cannot remain pliant in friendship with the United States while ignoring its longstanding ties with Russia. True strategic autonomy means preserving old partnerships even as we build new ones and never allowing anyone to dictate whom we may engage.

Sovereignty in trade does not mean turning inward or rejecting global commerce. India's challenge is to integrate deeply into global value chains while building domestic capabilities and protecting vital sectors. Ultimately, sovereignty in trade is not an abstract doctrine. It is the right of over a billion citizens, through democratic institutions, to decide the nation's economic destiny. A deal signed under pressure or framed by external red lines would betray that democratic mandate.

Indian negotiators note that these tariffs may be temporary, with talks progressing towards a deal by autumn. If Washington truly seeks partnership, it must understand that India's resilience is born not of isolationism. True friends respect sovereignty; true leaders reform from conviction, not fear.

-- FPJ

THE INBOX >>

Time to boost our State's agricultural productivity

How dependent we in Goa are on our neighbouring states like Karnataka and Maharashtra is borne out by the data shared recently at the ongoing Assembly session by the Goa State Horticultural Corporation Limted (GSHCL). According to the report, a whopping 12,000-13,000 tonnes of onions and potatoes each, are imported annually by the state, in addition to smaller imports of brinjal, cucumber , drumsticks , etc. A very dismal picture of our Agricultural Department even after 6 decades, given that Goa is essentially an agricultural state . It is time we step up our agricultural productivity by resorting to modern methods and technology In farming so that our farmers can earn a decent price for their crops and the people of Goa are not subjected to exorbitant prices for their daily requirements and do not have to depend on other states.

AF NAZARETH, *Alto Porvorim*

Corrupt p'yat secretaries need to be terminated

There appears to be ample proof of irregularities by Sancoale Secretary Orville Vales who now has been suspended recently by the Goa government. However key questions still remain. Why did it need to be raised by opposition for the Govt to act? Which minister was protecting him so far? Is he just suspended now to calm the storm and when all noise dies down, will he be reinstated (as we have seen recently being done with some bureaucracy who have been proven to be guilty)? Will he be terminated as there is clear evidence of the same? Will his assets/wealth under his and relatives names be investigated for any irregularities? Will Panchayat secretaries of other village Panchayats now be investigated wherever complaints are made by citizens or, will the CM/Panchayat Minister look the other way and protect these allegedly corrupt officials ? I think it's important for citizens to pursue the case and ensure his termination; even legally if the Govt tries to protect/reinstate him in the near future. This must set a precedent on how other corrupt secretaries have to be dealt with.

ARWIN MESQUITA, *Colva*

Christian nuns and priests targeted on false charges

It is really sad and hurting to see right-wing Hindu groups targeting our Christian priests and nuns. Christians are peace loving and we don't promote violence but in the name of conversion, these groups are targeting our religious people who are serving the people. Keeping silent doesn't mean that you can take the law in your hands. False cases are registered by passing anti-conversion bill. Our Christian churches are burned, priests are beaten in daylight, nuns who are helping the poor and needy people are raped and insulted in public,where we have recently seen that two nuns were harassed for conversion and human trafficking where the false cases are registered and women are insulted. Even the Muslims are harassed in India and they cannot even eat the food of their choice or do their business as the harassment continues all the time. In a democratic country everyone has a right and freedom to practice their own faith. We have Hindu friends and neighbours in Goa where we take part in each other's religious festivals. Let us live in peace in India as India is our homeland too like yours.

RONNIE DSOUZA, *Chandor*

The one per cent that controls our lives

As per recent news only 1 per cent of households controls around 60 per cent of the total wealth in India. This 1 per cent manipulates the stock market, and while they earn profits, many suffer huge losses. The 1 per cent promotes over consumption to run their business and contribute to waste generation and pollution of air, water, and land. This 1 per cent conducts land deals that cause deforestation and the filling of water bodies, contributing to global warming, climate change, and natural calamities that affect many. This 1 per cent takes huge loans from financial institutions and fail to repay them, causing inflation and stress in job markets, resulting in unemployment. This 1 per cent pays huge bribes, fueling corruption that persists, resulting in poor infrastructure and governance, leading to casualties in disasters. This 1 per cent controls politicians through sponsorship, and the decisions of these politicians impact the lives and standards of living of the masses.

ALWYN FERNANDES, *Benaulim*

Send your letters to us at editor@thegoan.net. Letters must be 150-200 words and mention the writer's name and location

Sangolda school giving nightmares for motorists

A prominent Delhi-based high school situated at Sangolda is seen giving nightmares (especially in the mornings, afternoons and sometimes even in the evenings) for commuters using the Sangolda-Alto Porvorim highway road as parents are seen parking their four wheelers right across this particular road strech while dropping/picking up their children in/from the above school and in the bargain causing massive traffic jams daily. Due to the above problem, almost everyone, from office goers, students of other schools/colleges, local taxi drivers, people going to catch their flights at the Dabolim Airport, etc are seen getting stuck at the above mentioned road stretch and finding it very difficult to even reach their respective destinations on time. Well, the management of the said high school should take a very serious note of the above problem and decide to have their own extended parking space within their property or else should shift their school to a less conjusted place and give a major relief to those using this Sangolda-Alto Porvorim highway road.

JERRY FERNANDES, *Saligao*

RNI: GOAENG/2015/65729. Printed and Published by: Sagar Lade on behalf of **Prudent Media (Goa) Pvt. Ltd. Printed at:** Elegant Offset Printers Pvt Ltd, Plot No 2/3/4, Thivim Industrial Estate, Karaswada, Mapusa, Goa. **Published at:** Second Floor, Fourth Estate (Kamat Metropolis), St Inez, Panaji 403 001. **Editor: Joel Afonso** (Responsible for selection of News under PRB Act).

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The Tribune
ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Green clearance

Supreme Court roots for the environment

AMID a fierce monsoon that has exposed flaws in the development models of several states, the Supreme Court has thrown its weight behind the environment. It has struck down a clause that exempted certain large building and construction projects from prior environmental clearance. The controversial clause was part of the January 29 notification issued by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change. The SC Bench has ruled that projects with a built-up area above 20,000 square metre — whether industrial, educational or otherwise — cannot be exempted from the environmental impact assessment (EIA) regime.

Unfortunately, sustainable development continues to be a mere slogan rather than a way of life. Environmental safeguards are often sacrificed at the altar of business interests. The ministry had claimed that the exemption in question would not only reduce the compliance burden on industries but also promote ease of doing business by reducing duplication of approvals. However, the stress on expediting green clearance by cutting red tape sparked fears that the government was opening the floodgates to industries and private educational institutions.

There is no room for compromise when our natural resources are at stake. Development activities that cause damage to the environment prove counter-productive in the long run. The EIA regime mandates tree plantation for certain categories of projects, but the monitoring mechanism needs to be strengthened. This requires close coordination between Central and state agencies. It's the job of the regulatory authorities to ensure that any project that could impact local ecosystems and communities is not approved — unless suitable mitigation measures are taken. The decision-making process has to be fair, transparent and time-bound; otherwise, it will put off investors and slow down India's growth engine. Striking a balance between development priorities and environmental concerns is the way forward. A half-hearted approach to this tough tightrope walk is literally a recipe for disaster.

Farm debt burden

A robust support system is essential

AS newly released data highlights the huge burden of agricultural debt on India's farmers, a fundamental question arises — is the credit system out of sync with how farming works? Andhra Pradesh tops the list with an average debt of Rs 2,45,554 per agricultural household. Punjab has reported an average loan burden of Rs 2,03,249, while Haryana follows at Rs 1,82,922. The figure for Himachal Pradesh is Rs 85,825. If credit dependency and the resulting debt persist on such a large scale despite governments' claims of championing farmer-friendly schemes and loan waivers, there are undeniably gaps in policy formulation and execution. Essentially, a simple cash handout may not be the answer in the absence of a multi-pronged support system. Urgent reforms in the credit strategy need to relook at the terms and timing of repayment too.

The lack of state investment that can actually make a difference for an average farmer is stark — be it in irrigation practices, crop research, storage or market access. The issue of assured price for crops awaits resolution. A failing public healthcare and education system that forces reliance on informal credit or farm loans for emergency and educational expenses adds to rural distress. Instead of investment in ensuring productivity, the credit is often used for meeting basic needs. Appeals to curb spending on social obligations, especially weddings, have had very limited impact. This is a self-inflicted strain. Its continuance is a social, community and political failure. We are all to blame.

Erratic weather conditions are now posing new challenges for the farm sector. It calls for a more robust intervention scientifically and a liberal outlook while compensating farmers. Instead, the Centre justifying 90 per cent decline in crop insurance payouts in Haryana sends a wrong message of indifference.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, FRIDAY, AUGUST 7, 1925

Unemployment insurance

WITH the adoption in this country of Western industrial and business methods and the closer link-up of India with world markets and commercial and industrial conditions, as well as on account of a host of internal circumstances, political and social, the problem of unemployment has for some time been growing more and more acute. Not the least important phase of this unfortunate matter is the extent of unemployment prevailing among the educated middle class. It is extremely regrettable that practically nothing tangible has been done so far in the matter of removing the root causes of this evil or even prevent it from assuming graver proportions. We have already had something to say about the responsibilities of the State, which though recognised and realised in so many modern countries, are notoriously ignored in this unfortunate land, about finding employment for all its able-bodied citizens who cannot obtain work in spite of their best endeavours to do so. But there is another and more pressing side of the problem which not infrequently causes even more distress and misery than the unemployment of fresh seekers of work. We refer, of course, to the cases of those who are thrown out of work on account of the exigencies of present-day conditions of employment, after having worked for some years and having formed definite habits of life and settled down to a definite scale of social existence with all its attendant liabilities. Assuring to the wage-earner some sort of material assistance in his hour of trouble, brought about through no fault of his own, is the least that the State, which is ultimately responsible for his wellbeing, can do to allay his distress.

Firm up action plan to tame flood fury

The combined impact of climate change and urbanisation needs to be mitigated resolutely

DINESH C SHARMA
SCIENCE COMMENTATOR

DISASTROUS: The monsoon mayhem underlines the perils of unbridled development in ecologically fragile areas. PTI

THE ongoing monsoon season has witnessed above-normal rainfall across the country, in line with the forecast of the India Meteorological Department. There has been heavy rainfall in many states, with hilly regions reporting rain-triggered disasters like landslides and flashfloods.

The Himalayan belt — Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Jammu and Kashmir — has seen persistent, widespread and intense rainfall. One of the worst disasters of the season has occurred at Dharali in Uttarkashi district, where flashfloods supposedly caused by a cloudburst have led to the loss of lives and property. It is a grim reminder of the danger of unbridled development in the ecologically fragile region.

In the plains too, the monsoon is causing havoc, with major cities reporting flooding of roads, casualties and collapse of old structures. Social media is flooded with images of killer traffic jams due to waterlogging; cars and trucks going down in sink holes on city roads and highways; schoolchildren and office-goers stranded for long hours; and tragic incidents such as electrocution.

Some newly built airport buildings have not withstood incessant rains. Affected cities like Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Chennai and Mumbai are hubs of significant economic activity and centres of outsourcing activities.

Brushing aside rain-related impacts as 'nature's fury' would be fallacious. What Indian cities are experiencing during the monsoon is an accumulated and combined result of poor urban planning, neglect of basic infrastructure, violation of municipal regulations, erosion of green and open areas, large-scale concretisation, etc. On top of all this we have climate change — which itself is a man-made phenomenon. For decades, scientists have been warning of a rise in extreme rainfall events as a result of climate change.

An extreme weather event occurs when the amount of rain or snow experienced in one location substantially exceeds the normal quantum, as is happening in many of our cities. The average rainfall for a city or region may remain within the normal range, but some days or places get high rainfall in a short time, resulting in waterlogging and local flooding.

The situation is only going to worsen as India is urbanising at a rapid pace. Nearly one billion Indians would be living in cities by 2050, as per current projections. But Indian cities will be unable to reach their full potential if they stay on their current development trajectory, warns a recent report from the World Bank. Indian cities, according to the report, are highly vulnerable to climate impacts due to high human density and massive concentration assets. Cities are facing higher climate impacts and disasters compared to villages as they depend on highly interconnected systems. When key infrastructure like a highway or electricity grid breaks down, it can cause a chain reaction resulting in cascading infrastructure failure and paralysing the city. Flooding can cause road closure and disrupt traffic flow, affect electricity lines and lead to economic losses, as being seen currently.

> Climate action plans for cities can't work without related governance reforms.

Going by the monsoon chaos every year, it is clear that our cities are ill-prepared for the twin challenges of further urbanisation and climate change. They have limited capacity to manage these impacts. Their planning and management systems are unable to keep pace with rapid urbanisation, climate impacts and the demand for development and services.

The existing systems are outmoded — in many cases, they date back to the British and princely eras. For instance, the drainage and stormwater system for Hyderabad was designed a century ago by Sir M Visvesvaraya for a population of about five lakh. The system was considered modern at that time and accounted for future growth and concerns like aesthetics and urban planning. Hyderabad was considered a city of lakes and gardens with a well-connected natural drainage system. All this has got destroyed due to rapid expansion of physical infrastructure and high density of population. The result is flooding.

This is pretty much the story of every major Indian city. Many cities are along the coast or in the floodplains of major and minor rivers. Urbanisation increases impermeability, making areas with previously low flood risk prone to flooding. Cities are encroaching upon floodplains. Between 1985 and 2015, built-up or settlement area grew by 82 per cent in flood-safe areas and 102 per cent in high flood-risk areas, according to the World Bank report. Stormwater-related or pluvial (surface water) flooding risk is projected to rise manifold due to the combined effect of climate change and urbanisation.

The solution lies in preparing our cities to be climate-resilient. For this, we need city-specific climate action plans. At present, these efforts are fragmented. All states have generic state action plans, most of which are poorly implemented or just remain on paper. The challenges of urban areas are varied, requiring an integrated approach. Specific strategies need to be devised to address urban flooding, based on the local risk profile. Similar action plans are needed for hilly areas.

Cities need watershed-based flood protection plans to regulate floodplain development and stormwater management. Urban authorities must prioritise investments in drains and flood embankments, and in protection or creation of open spaces that can absorb flood water or sustainable urban drainage systems. Chennai has made a start in developing a city-specific Climate Action Plan based on risk assessment. Kolkata is working on a flood forecasting and early warning system.

Climate action plans for cities can't work without related governance reforms. At present, multiple agencies handle issues related to flood protection, urban planning, drainage, etc. often working at cross-purposes. In addition, government agencies will have to work with scientists, civil society and businesses to draw and implement climate action plans. There are no easy solutions to urban flooding or continuing disasters in the hills.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

"The truth is that climate change is presenting the greatest challenge humanity has ever faced. — Al Gore"

A mountain deity and a pastor

KULBIR SINGH

IN the early 1980s, I arrived at a CRPF border outpost (BOP) at Maja, a remote place along the India-China border in Upper Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh. It was a 12-day trek from the Taliha roadhead to the BOP. At the post, I spotted domestic fowls. Some of them were big and old.

I was informed that these birds were used by tribal people as offerings to the 'mountain deity' — a prominent hill called '*Dev Baba ka Pahad*' by local residents. The fowls chose to roam around the CRPF campus rather than fall prey to the wild animals outside.

I got to know that the indigenous people are called Adis and reside mostly in the Himalayan region of Arunachal and south Tibet. Adis have many tribes spread across the state. They profess a religion called *Donyi-Polo* ('Sun-Moon'). Adis believe that humans, animals, plants, rivers and mountains are 'living spirits' and creations of the 'Sun-Moon' God. They worship these manifestations of nature to ward off distress, ailment, misfortune and evil spirits. Cattle are also sacrificed to appease the holy spirits.

During 2004-06, I got another opportunity to serve in Arunachal. I was commanding a battalion which had its headquarters at Khonsa in Tirep district and was deployed in interior areas. I noticed a sea change in the lives of the tribal people compared to the 1980s. Socio-economic and infrastructure development was plainly visible. There were roads, electricity supply and communication network in remote areas. Christianity had made significant inroads among residents. A good number of Adis, who earlier worshipped nature, particularly the Sun and the Moon, had embraced the Christian faith.

During a late-night operation under my supervision at Tissa on the Khonsa-Longding axis, we noticed two persons walking on the road. Such movement at night hours is regarded as suspicious and is mostly undertaken by insurgents. They stopped in their tracks when we warned them. One of them turned out to be a missionary from Kochi (Kerala). The other was a local tribesman who was escorting the pastor to his village. As there was no bus service at night, they decided to walk all the way. I asked the pastor why he had taken the risk of travelling at night in a disturbed area. He replied that he had to visit a number of places as it was Christmas time.

I often moved around on foot in Khonsa town to familiarise myself with the area. Once I saw a big hall at a vantage point. The building was lying abandoned — it had no doors or windows. A few children were playing inside. I noticed a marble plaque at the entrance. The hall was inaugurated in 1970 by then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. It was originally meant for nature worship by Adis, but was now in a desolate condition — apparently due to a shift in the belief system.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Propagating Hindutva agenda

With reference to 'What the PM didn't say about Cholas'; the BJP is always ready to impose its own narratives on historical facts to propagate its Hindutva agenda. The writer has effectively exposed the saffron party's efforts to portray the Cholas as an embodiment of Hindu power. The romanticising of history to suit its ideology has been the hallmark of the BJP. Thanks to social media and section of the national media, many people readily get brainwashed into believing it to be a true depiction of facts. The Chola analogy reeks of political adventurism a year ahead of the Assembly polls in Tamil Nadu, with the BJP eager to make a mark in the South.

ANTHONY HENRIQUES, MUMBAI

US President's irrational stance

Refer to 'Trump vows steep tariffs on India in 24 hrs'; it is an irrational and arbitrary move by the US President. Trump's pressure tactics are uncalled for. Every sovereign nation is free to do business with any country, prioritising its national interests. The US contention that India is 'fuelling' the Ukraine war is baseless; it is Western countries that are fanning the flames. However, India should be a little flexible during trade negotiations with the US. It should not be stubborn in safeguarding sectors like agriculture and dairy farming, but generally keep the interests of consumers and the common man in mind.

VINAY KUMAR MALHOTRA, AMBALA

Donald Trump, the big bully

The belligerent language used by President Trump against India, issuing threats and arm-twisting the government with the imposition of indiscriminately high tariffs, is highly reprehensible and deplorable. He is projecting himself as a big bully and America should be ashamed of his wild and erratic rants. He cares two hoots about diplomacy and decency in protocol. Sometimes, he uses the nuclear barb without any qualms, and at other times, he unabashedly warns of trade disruptions. His volatile and unpredictable behaviour is unbecoming of the leader of a great nation like America.

VIKRAM CHADHA, AMRITSAR

Counter the nuclear threat

Apropos of 'Hiroshima to Hard Rain: A warning we still ignore'; the world is at a nuclear crossroads. The prospect of a nuclear war poses an existential threat to humanity, apart from challenges like climate change, economic inequalities, impact of new technologies, growing geopolitical tensions, trade war and ongoing regional conflicts. The threat to use nuclear weapons is morally reprehensible; so, there is a need for fundamental changes in political thinking and international relations. Steps should be taken to build mutual trust and reduce tensions that could escalate into nuclear flashpoints. An awakened citizenry, civil society and governments should make concerted and collective efforts towards nuclear non-proliferation.

DS KANG, HOSHIARPUR

VIP convict enjoying leniency

Refer to 'Parole yet again'; despite being convicted of rape and murder, Ram Rahim continues to enjoy leniency. With nearly three months on parole this year, including a 40-day release ahead of his birthday, he is a VIP convict enjoying hospitality at the government's cost. Moreover, his outings often align with elections, raising suspicion of political favouritism. Though the prison rules incentivise good behaviour, it appears they are negotiable for him. The Haryana government must take a cue from the Kerala High Court, which rightly denied repeated parole to a lifer.

CHANCHAL S MANN, UNA

Malik spoke his mind

Satyapal Malik, former Governor of J&K, Goa, Bihar, Odisha and Meghalaya, did not mince words while criticising the Modi government on issues concerning national security, such as the Pulwama terror attack. As J&K Governor, he raised his voice against corruption in the state administration. However, the CBI targeted him over alleged corruption in connection with a hydel project. While most political leaders prefer to swim with the tide for the sake of their own interests, he was one of the few who had the courage to shun the path of sycophancy.

PREM SINGH DAHIYA, ROHTAK

Letters to the Editor, typed in double space, should not exceed the 200-word limit. These should be cogently written and can be sent by e-mail to: Letters@tribunemail.com

Bangladesh is South Asia's ticking time bomb

BRAHMA CHELLANEY
PROFESSOR EMERITUS, CENTRE FOR POLICY RESEARCH

IN the year since the violent, military-backed overthrow of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government, Bangladesh has descended into chaos. The economy is reeling, radical Islamist forces are gaining ground, young people are becoming increasingly radicalised, lawlessness is taking hold, and religious and ethnic minorities are under siege. The country's future has never looked bleaker.

Many had hoped that Hasina's ouster would open the way for Bangladesh to transition to democracy following an authoritarian lurch under the "iron lady." After all, they reasoned, it was a student-led uprising that toppled her regime. But this narrative downplayed the decisive role of the powerful military, which had long chafed under Hasina's attempts to curb its influence and ultimately forced her into exile in India. Similarly, Islamist forces — who provided much of the muscle behind the student protests — viewed her overthrow as an opportunity to end the marginalisation they faced under her secular rule.

The illusory promise of Hasina's overthrow was further enhanced by the installation of Muhammad Yunus — the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize laureate celebrated as a saviour of the poor for pioneering microcredit through his Grameen Bank — as the nominal head of the interim government. But, again, the headline misrepresents reality.

In fact, the Nobel Committee's choice was less about the Grameen Bank's actual impact than it was about geopolitical signalling. In presenting the award, the Committee chair invoked Yunus as a symbolic bridge between Islam and the West, expressing hope that his selection would counter the "widespread tendency to demonise Islam" that had taken hold in the West after the 9/11 terror attacks. It is no coincidence that former US President Bill Clinton had lobbied for Yunus.

As the leader of Bangladesh's interim government, Yunus has promised sweeping reforms and democratic elections. But elections have been repeatedly postponed. Meanwhile, despite lacking constitutional legitimacy, the interim government has launched sweeping purges of independent institutions, ousting the chief justice and the next five most-senior Supreme Court justices, and outlawing Hasina's Awami League, the country's oldest and largest political party, which led Bangladesh to independence.

HASINA'S OUSTER: One year on, Bangladesh's future has never looked bleaker. REUTERS

The government has also presided over proliferating human rights abuses and intensifying repression. Those identified as Hasina's supporters — including lawyers, academics, journalists, artists, and Opposition figures — are being jailed in droves, with thousands reportedly detained since February. International media watchdogs have sounded the alarm over escalating attacks on journalists, many of whom are charged with bogus crimes, from murder to abduction. Reports of extrajudicial killings and torture in custody have become commonplace.

> Bangladesh risks slipping into the kind of military-sanctioned dysfunction that has long plagued Pakistan.

But perhaps the most alarming development is the rehabilitation of Islamist extremists. The military-*mullah* regime that Yunus nominally leads has reversed bans on jihadist groups previously linked to terrorism, and has freed notorious Islamist leaders. Several extremists now occupy ministerial or other government posts, and mobs affiliated with them openly terrorise perceived opponents.

Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, tribal communities, and members of Islamic sects that Islamists consider heretical are being attacked with impunity. Women dressed "immodestly" face public shaming and assault. A culture of Taliban-style moral policing is rapidly taking root. The situation has gotten so bad that even the pro-regime Bangladesh Nationalist Party, long the Awami League's arch-rival, has decried the erosion of basic freedoms, the "madness that erupted in the name of religion," and the "terrifying violence" on the streets.

A collapsing economy will only exacerbate these problems. GDP growth has tumbled, foreign debt has ballooned, and inflation has soared to a 12-year high. With investor confidence plummeting, the stock market has fallen to its lowest level in almost five years. Job losses and declining living standards create fertile ground for continued radicalisation and social unrest.

Bangladesh risks slipping into the kind of military-sanctioned dysfunction that has long plagued Pakistan, the country it fought so hard to break away from. The consequences will reverberate across the region. India, which borders Bangladesh on three sides and is home to millions of undocumented Bangladeshi migrants, will be hit particularly hard.

Under Hasina, Bangladesh was one of India's closest partners, especially on counterterrorism and regional connectivity. Her departure thus dealt a blow to India's strategic interests. India's government is now scrambling to manage the fallout by stepping up border security to prevent infiltration by extremists.

Whereas India immediately recognised the risks posed by Hasina's overthrow, the US endorsed regime change. But if Bangladesh continues on its current trajectory, it will complicate US-led efforts to ensure a free, open, prosperous and a stable Indo-Pacific. Some have warned that Bangladesh could become another global flashpoint that draws in even faraway countries.

If the international community is serious about defending democratic values, religious freedom and regional stability, it can no longer turn a blind eye to Bangladesh's downward spiral.

The Tribune

TWO VIEWS

GM MAIZE TRIALS

PAU will only test GM tech, not greenlight it

BALDEV SINGH DHILLON
FORMER VICE-CHANCELLOR, PAU

MODIFICATION of plants began with the collection of plants for food by humans thousands of years ago. This effort gained momentum through deliberate crop improvement initiatives — what we now call plant breeding. Most of the crop plants, including modern maize and its parent teosinte, went through massive change.

However, these efforts were limited by sexual barrier and, thus, confined to plants which can be crossed together. This barrier was overcome by a technology developed a few decades ago, making the transfer of gene(s)/ genetic material possible practically from any other living being to crop plants. The products of this technology are known as genetically modified (GM) crops.

This technology is resource-intensive and it has become difficult for us to keep pace with the developed world. To remain acquainted with these developments, there is a need to explore public-private partnership (PPP) and evaluate the GM products developed by others. PPP is not a one-way process as the seed production of the new varieties developed by public sector is mostly done by private sector.

Further, in a world with rising population, where food and nutritional security, environmental sustainability and the livelihoods of millions of farmers are at stake, all relevant technologies should be thoroughly evaluated for any potential gains.

Punjab Agricultural University (PAU) has appropriately decided to conduct scientific trials on GM maize. These trials are to be conducted strictly under carefully monitored biosafety guidelines as was being done earlier. It is claimed that the new GM hybrids have resistance to certain insect pests and tolerance to certain herbicides (it should be assured that the use of herbicide has to be as per guidelines issued by the government). The PAU trials will help us understand how these perform in Punjab's agro-ecological conditions, and whether there is any enhancement of economic returns vis-a-vis ecological sustainability.

On this basis, the PAU will be testing the veracity of the claims made by developers. It's important to understand that the trials themselves will not lead to the permission of sale of GM maize seeds. The trials are meant to collect facts that policymakers, farmers and others can rely on when weighing pros and cons of GM seeds. The PAU's job is to test the products of new technologies, not to greenlight their entry into the marketplace. That call lies with the government's regulators, who can make decisions based only if the required data is available.

ISTOCK

It is natural to have concerns about new technologies, their health risks, environmental impacts and the potential of increased corporate control over agriculture, especially when related to food. These are important issues that deserve careful consideration.

> It is natural to have concerns about new technologies, health risks and impact on ecology.

At the same time, it is also important to recognise that GM crops undergo the required testing as per national guidelines, and that these are under cultivation in around 30 nations. Further, the acreage in developing countries has surpassed that in the developed world. This can happen only if these crops give higher returns and farmers show preference for them.

By conducting trials of GM maize, the PAU is upholding its responsibility as a leading research institution. Let PAU do what any good scientific institution should be doing.

Don't test maize, learn from Bt cotton fiasco

DEVINDER SHARMA
FOOD AND AGRICULTURE SPECIALIST

MAHATMA GANDHI'S proverbial three wise monkeys have perhaps escaped the attention of Punjab administration.

The go-ahead granted to the Punjab Agricultural University (PAU) to carry out penultimate-stage field trials of genetically modified (GM) herbicide-tolerant maize and insect-resistant maize, and that too at the insistence of the multi-national giant Bayer (which had acquired Monsanto in 2018) clearly tells us that nothing has been learnt from the collapse of cotton.

After the GM cotton debacle in Punjab, to rely on the same GM technology to breed another set of Bt maize varieties speaks volumes of scientific naivete. The area under cotton cultivation reduced drastically to less than one lakh hectares, the lowest in 2024. It essentially happened because of the failure of Bt cotton resistance against the pink bollworm pest and the devastation caused by whitefly on cotton.

Bt cotton, touted as a silver bullet, has bitten the dust, first in China and then in India. In 2021, after the damage by the pink bollworm pest, Punjab announced a compensation of Rs 416 crore. In 2015, 1.36 lakh hectares were ravaged by the whitefly insect attack, with losses estimated at Rs 4,200 crore.

> Despite the GM cotton debacle, Punjab is still demanding the Bt-3 cotton variety.

Surprisingly, not drawing any lessons, Punjab is still demanding the next generation Bt-3 cotton variety. No penalty was imposed on the GM companies for the failure of Bt-1 and Bt-2 varieties. It was the taxpayers who ended up bearing the massive crops loss.

Strange are the ways of politics. After the crash of cotton, it still favoured the same technology . Refusing to 'see the evil', as one of the monkeys had demonstrated, Punjab is seeking a hasty approval for the next-generation Bt-3 cotton variety.

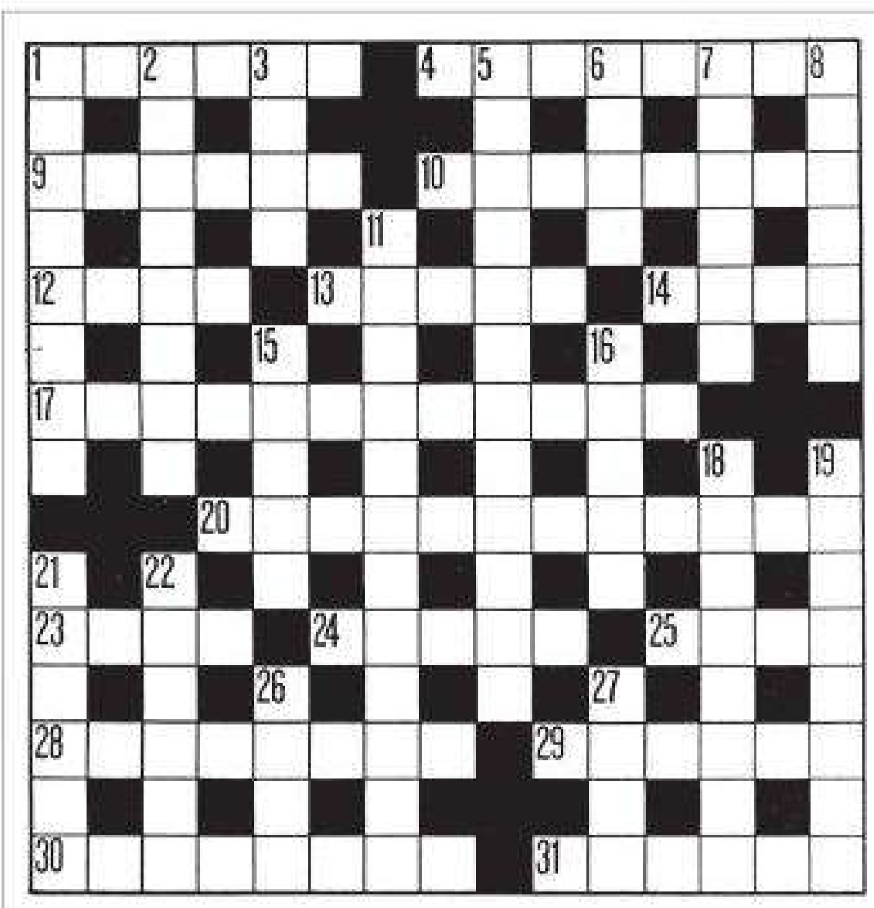
When it comes to herbicide-tolerant (Ht) maize research, the PAU is remorseless. In 2018, on the insistence of the Punjab Commission for Farmers and Farm Workers Commission, the acutely harmful herbicide, glyphosate (and its versions) were banned (to a maximum allowed period of two months). But when the university undertakes research on Ht maize, it only means that farmers will be left with no choice but to use glyphosate herbicide and its versions that have been dovetailed with the seeds of the genetically modified maize variety.

The government and the PAU also seem to have closed their ears to the plethora of court cases in America. In March 2025, Bayer (which now owns the popular glyphosate-based retail brand Roundup) was directed by a US court to shell out $2.1 billion to a plaintiff who believed the herbicide triggered a type of blood cancer, non-Hodgkin lymphoma, in his body.

In America, Bayer has already paid nearly $11 billion to reach settlements in around one lakh lawsuits against Roundup, and roughly 67,000 cases are pending. Further, a latest publication of the Pesticides Action Network (PAN) says that even at low EU standards of application, Roundup is not safe. It causes multiple types of cancer in rats, including leukemia. Nevertheless, Bayer continues to contest and is threatening to withdraw Roundup from the market. At the same time, it has filed a court case, saying that because the US Environment Protection Agency (EPA) has already approved glyphosate-based products without cancer warnings, the company can no longer be held responsible.

If only the PAU had kept its eyes and ears open, there was no reason to grab this research project. Albert Einstein has rightly said: "Two things are infinite: The universe and human stupidity; and I'm not sure about the universe."

QUICK CROSSWORD



ACROSS
1 An unsurpassed statistic (6)
4 To retreat (8)
9 An official memorandum (6)
10 Supposed lucky charm (8)
12 Votes cast against a motion (4)
13 Banishment (5)
14 Unadulterated (4)
17 Escape only just managed (6,6)
20 Be in no hurry (4,4,4)
23 Gather as harvest (4)
24 Soothing (5)
25 Abundant source of supply (4)
28 Run away (4,4)
29 An African antelope (6)
30 An embrocation (8)
31 Lay siege to (6)

DOWN
1 Hoofed cud-chewing animal (8)
2 Capital of Australia (8)
3 A fixed charge (4)
5 Virtually (2,3,3,4)
6 Greet enthusiastically (4)
7 Uproar (6)
8 Habitual (6)
11 Intense irritation (12)
15 Lesson to be learned (5)
16 Brief break in speaking (5)
18 Spruce up (8)
19 To the point (8)
21 Merciless (6)
22 Network of rabbit burrows (6)
26 Extremely small amount (4)
27 Prophetic significance (4)

Yesterday's solution

Across: 1 Asset, 4 Jackass, 8 Hue, 9 Pacemaker, 10 Endorse, 11 Usury, 13 Enable, 15 Pent-up, 18 Bathe, 19 Adviser, 21 Go flat out, 23 Urn, 24 Slender, 25 Refer.

Down: 1 Achieve, 2 Steadfast, 3 Toper, 4 Jockey, 5 Compute, 6 Ask, 7 Surly, 12 Up to snuff, 14 Leeward, 16 Partner, 17 Valour, 18 Bogus, 20 Voter, 22 Fee.

SU DO KU

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

V. EASY

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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

CALENDAR

AUGUST 7, 2025, THURSDAY

- Shaka Samvat 1947
- Shravan Shaka 16
- Shravan Parvishte 23
- Hijari 1447
- Shukla Paksha Tithi 13, up to 2.28 pm
- Vishkumbha Yoga up to 6.42 am
- Priti Yoga up to 4.39 am
- Purvashadha Nakshatra up to 2.01 pm
- Moon enters Capricorn sign 8.11 pm

FORECAST

SUNSET:	THURSDAY	19:12 HRS
SUNRISE:	FRIDAY	05:45 HRS

CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	35	25
New Delhi	35	25
Amritsar	35	27
Bathinda	37	27
Jalandhar	35	27
Ludhiana	33	26
Bhiwani	36	28
Hisar	36	26
Sirsa	37	27
Dharamsala	29	19
Manali	26	17
Shimla	25	17
Srinagar	33	19
Jammu	34	22
Kargil	28	15
Leh	26	15
Dehradun	31	25
Mussoorie	22	17

TEMPERATURE IN °C