

The Tribune

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Farmers first

Trump's pressure tactics will test PM's resolve

US President Donald Trump's tariff blitzkrieg against India has triggered a firm response from Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who has reassured the country's farmers that their interests will not be compromised at any cost. His statement has assumed greater significance on the birth centenary of renowned agri scientist MS Swaminathan, the architect of the Green Revolution that transformed a food-deficient India into a food-surplus nation. It's obvious that New Delhi has decided to stand up to Washington, which wants reduced tariffs on products like corn, soybean, apples, almonds and ethanol, besides increased access to the Indian market for American dairy goods. The PM's commitment to protect livelihoods in three key sectors for rural communities — agriculture, dairy farming and fisheries — is commendable. However, this strong resolve will be put to the test by Trump, who is bent on exerting more pressure on India to wean it away from Russian crude oil.

Understandably, the Modi government is unwilling to antagonise the farming community, having learnt a bitter lesson from the year-long agitation at Delhi's borders in 2020-21 against the three Central farm laws. The contentious laws were eventually repealed, but only after more than 700 protesting farmers passed away. The logjam over a key demand — legal guarantee of MSP (minimum support price) for various crops — has persisted despite several rounds of talks between the Centre and farm unions. There is a need for the stakeholders to close ranks in order to confront the US, which seems keen to use India as a dumping ground, particularly for its dairy products.

Making Indian agriculture more resilient and profitable is a must for withstanding Trump's onslaught. The oppressive debt burden on India's farmers is worrisome, especially in food bowl states such as Punjab and Haryana. And what happened to the grand promise of doubling farmers' income? A fitting tribute to Swaminathan would be to wholeheartedly support the toiling *annadata* through thick and thin.

Saini woos Punjab

Sikh icons, caste equations shape BJP plan

HARYANA Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini's recent visits to Punjab are part of a broader political strategy, not mere ceremonial engagements. His floral tribute to Shaheed Udham Singh in Sunam, tree-planting drive and outreach in the Puadhi belt — home to a sizeable Saini community — reveal the BJP's intent to penetrate Punjab's fractured political space ahead of the 2027 elections. Saini, the BJP's OBC face in Haryana, is clearly being positioned as a bridge between the two states. His visits to Sikh-dominated areas, gurdwaras and symbolic gestures aimed at the community's pride are calculated moves to soften the party's image in a state where the BJP has long struggled with credibility among Sikhs, especially after the BJP's split with the SAD. The Haryana government's plan to build a Sikh museum in Kurukshetra on the lines of Virasat-e-Khalsa also assumes significance in this light.

Saini's frequent presence in Punjab is energising BJP's grassroots cadre. The party sees in him a potential face for 'Mission Punjab' — someone who can connect with the region. However, all is not hunky-dory. Saini's earlier visit to Ludhiana sparked protests, indicating public unease with what is also viewed as political opportunism for electoral gains. Also, in the backdrop of simmering contentious issues like inter-state water-sharing, BBMB control and farmer unrest, the perception gains ground that Saini's forays are less for unity and more for exploiting regional identities.

Thus, the big question is whether this outreach is resonating beyond symbolic acts and identity politics. Will it translate into trust and votes or will it backfire as opportunism? Either way, Saini has managed to stir Punjab's political pot. For a state starved of credible alternatives, this may be a precursor to a more competitive political landscape ahead of 2027.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, SATURDAY, AUGUST 8, 1925

Surendranath Banerjee's death

IT is with the deepest regret that we announce the death of Sir Surendranath Banerjee at his Barnackpur residence. It is only yesterday morning that we learnt from a Calcutta telegram that he was suffering from an attack of influenza. The telegram described the attack as slight, but before we went to press, there came another telegram which described his condition as critical. In the case of a man aged 77, illness like this has usually only one end, but such was our faith in Sir Surendranath's vitality that we still hoped for the best. Now, alas, there is no room for hope left, and while the terrible shock inflicted upon the motherland by the death of Deshbandhu CR Das is still fresh, she is once again plunged in grief over the death of another son as dearly beloved in the prime of his life as Deshbandhu was in his, and who until some years ago had held as conspicuous a position in the public life of his country as it is given to any man to fill in a subject country. It is, indeed, the literal truth to say that for many years, Sir Surendranath had been looked upon as a veritable institution in India, as William Gladstone was looked upon as an institution in his time and country, embodying all that was best and strongest in its public life and political aspirations, an undaunted warrior who knew no greater pleasure than that of fighting his country's constitutional battle for constitutional liberty, a hero of literally a hundred fights, with many victories to his credit and many defeats even more glorious than victories.

Grieving for Karkare after Malegaon verdict

Acquittal of all seven accused in 2008 blast case delivers a death blow to justice



TRYSTS AND TURNS
JULIO RIBEIRO

I am grieving for my friend, the late Hemant Karkare, who was a good man and a professional. He was one of the officers who did the Indian Police Service (IPS) proud. Like many respected IPS officers I know, he was a stickler for truth and justice.

Karkare was killed by Pakistani terrorists who attacked Mumbai on November 26, 2008. We mourned his death at that time. Today, we mourn the demise of justice after seven accused, including former BJP MP Pragma Singh Thakur and Lt Col Prasad Purohit, were acquitted in the 2008 Malegaon blast case.

A day before he was killed, Karkare had called on me for advice on a ticklish problem he was facing while carrying out his duties honestly and faithfully. The state Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) headed by him had initially suspected jihadis of involvement in the terror attack near a mosque in Malegaon, a Muslim-dominated town in Nashik district, on September 29, 2008. Six local Muslims had died when a bomb planted on a motorcycle had exploded.

Later, it was found that the bike had been registered in Gujarat in the name of Pragma, a feisty, hardcore Hindutva activist. She had become a Sadhvi and either sold or handed over the bike to a close aide, Ramji Kalsangra, who has remained untraceable till date. The markings on the engine and chassis had been erased, but experts had restored one of the two markings. I had no reason to disbelieve my friend. He had no motive to implicate fellow Hindus, including a Hindutva activist and an Army officer, with whom



PURSUIT OF TRUTH: As the head of the Maharashtra Anti-Terrorism Squad, IPS officer Hemant Karkare probed the Malegaon case until his death in the 26/11 Mumbai attacks. **PH**

he had no previous acquaintance.

Evidence of meetings held in cities of different states by Pragma with Lt Col Purohit and five others had been collected. The group, which included Kalsangra, called itself Abhinav Bharat. It appeared to Karkare and also to me that the group had a grouse against the government for not acting more forcefully against the jihadis despite their terrorist depredations. The group seemed to have decided to act independently to take revenge, which they had attempted in a very amateurish manner and certainly not in the manner of the jihadis schooled and trained in the obnoxious practice of killing innocents.

The acquittal of all seven accused by a special court of the National Investigation Agency (NIA) in the Malegaon case was widely anticipated. Karkare had been advised by a top BJP leader from Delhi to go slow on Pragma (a request that unnerved him and nudged him to seek my counsel). The consequent transfer of the probe from the Maharashtra ATS to the NIA (controlled by the Union Home Ministry); the visit of an NIA officer to the office of Special Public

Interrogation of suspects should be monitored by CCTV cameras, as done in many advanced democracies.

Prosecutor Rohini Salian in Mumbai, asking her to "go slow" on the prosecution; the replacement of a highly respected prosecutor like Salian probably because she publicly berated the NIA for trying to influence her; the fact that the probe agency told the NIA court that there was no evidence to prosecute Pragma and Lt Col Purohit, and that the ATS had planted the RDX in the house of one of the accused — all this pointed to the intention of the rulers to ensure that the

accused were set free.

It is tragic that justice is being dished out on the wishes of the powerful and not according to the truth of the matter. In our police training institutions, we are told to ferret out the truth and collect proper evidence to bring the culprits to book. If police investigation agencies go about arraigning in courts of law the persons identified by their political masters and exculpate the real perpetrators of the crime, the entire concept of the rule of law will crumble like a house of cards.

Unfortunately, sides are taken on the grounds of religion, caste or linguistic identities of the culprits. In the 2006 Mumbai train blasts case, the 12 persons convicted of killing 187 commuters and injuring 800 others were members of the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI), a known jihadi terrorist organisation. When the Bombay High Court acquitted them, many co-religionists of the acquitted men rejoiced! In the Malegaon case, too, some co-religionists celebrated when the seven accused were acquitted.

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis proclaimed, "Terrorism was never saffron, is not, and will never

be!" Did the CM suggest that Karkare, a good Hindu himself, had manoeuvred the investigation to spite fellow Hindus?

I grieve for Karkare and his team members. Similarly, I grieve for former Police Commissioner Anami Roy and his dedicated officers who worked for months to nail the culprits in the Mumbai train blasts case. Many of my friends and well-wishers disagreed with me when I said that the Bombay High Court was wrong in its decision to acquit the jihadis.

I am convinced that the guilty have got off the hook in both cases. Courts go by evidence on record. They acquit the accused even if they sense their guilt. The reliance of the prosecution on oral witnesses and more importantly on confessions should be abandoned. The emphasis should shift to forensic evidence, which is hard to refute.

With the aim of achieving this goal of shifting to forensic evidence, the police top brass needs to address the current culture in all police establishments of relying solely on witnesses who are prone to pressures or inducements. The emphasis on forensics should begin at training institutions.

Interrogation of suspects should be monitored by CCTV cameras, as done in many advanced democracies. We are spending crores of rupees every year on modernisation, but the purchase of equipment alone will not spur police investigators to change their methods. A new culture has to be dinned into them daily. And all of them should be trained in forensics and subtler methods of interrogation. A whole new breed of interrogators should be the ultimate goal.

A massive awareness campaign should be launched to educate the public on the need to discourage custodial violence. I remember a state Home Minister gently upbraiding me for "not even slapping" a boy suspected of theft in the house of one of his acquaintances! "What kind of police are you," he asked me!

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Justice and judgment lie often a world apart. —Emmeline Pankhurst

Posters, promises and the piles beneath

AVINAV KUMAR

EVERY morning, as my cab rattles and wheezes its way toward my workplace, I pass by a slideshow of surreal sights that would give Salvador Dalí a run for his moustache. The city unfolds like theatre of the absurd — its acts patched with promises, punctuated with potholes and perfumed occasionally by *paan* spit.

We halt, as usual, at the red light near Plaza Mall. That's where I see it again — the massive flex banner with a smug politician flashing the victory sign, as if he'd heroically vanquished a fly-over or personally handpicked every plastic wrapper off the street. The slogan screams, '*Swachh Bharat, Sundar Bharat!*' in bold, bubblegum-pink letters. And right beneath that sugary shoutout lies a garbage garrison — vegetable peels, polythene puddings, torn textbooks and leftovers from yesterday's campaign. A bored cow, clearly unimpressed by the development discourse, munches meditatively on what I suspect is a discarded electoral leaflet.

A few metres away, past the *chai* stall with its eternally boiling potion (better known as 'special *kadak*'), floats another poster — this one more glamorous. A porcelain-skinned model in chiffon stares wistfully into smoggy nothingness, her lips parted like she's about to recite a poem on peace. The caption reads, 'Breathe Elegance'. Right below, a gurgling drain has its own interpretation of fragrance. A defiant dog splashes through the slime with the composure of a Vogue model on a rainy runway. The city whispers dreams through high-definition hoardings while choking on its low-tech truths.

Further down, a bright board boasts: 'Transform Yourself in 30 Days!' It hangs crookedly on a mildew-coated wall that's clearly beyond any transformation. In peeling paint, someone has scribbled: '*Yeh deewar bhi thak gayi hai*.' The wall, like the city's conscience, seems exhausted. A few steps away, an old woman warms her wrinkled hands over a flame fed by plastic and old cardboard — her version of daily transformation.

Then there's that mural near the Film City Street, painted by hopeful hands — two children flying kites over gleaming gardens and spotless streets. Below it, real kids tug at paper planes fashioned from old newspapers, beside an open manhole that burps like a grumpy old man protesting the lies floating above him.

These are the juxtapositions that city life offers freely — irony without invitation, satire served street-style. Billboards brag. Roads retaliate. And we, the daily drifters, float somewhere in between — half amused, half anaesthetised.

The cab lurches to its final halt. I pay the fare, nod at the driver and step out onto the office footpath — carefully avoiding a puddle of something unnameable.

Cities don't lie. Their truths just wear makeup. And often, the prettiest posters conceal the most pungent paradoxes — proof that in urban India, fiction is flex-mounted and truth lies, quite literally, beneath our feet.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Environment in peril

The climatic upheaval in Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand is a result of human greed that has converted mountains and forests into concrete jungles. The respective governments cannot escape responsibility as all necessary NOCs for construction are given by its own departments. Builders, hoteliers and industrialists are encouraged in the name of tourism and their activities go unchecked under the nose of the authorities. There has been no statement from the Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change Bhupender Yadav on the tragedies. Unfortunately in India, environment protection can never be a top priority because it does not fetch votes. Unless the matter is prioritised and handled in all seriousness, the citizens will remain vulnerable.

YASH KHETARPAL, PANCHKULA

Greed for monetary benefits

Apropos of 'Firm up action plan to tame flood fury'; recent cloudbursts, landslides and floods have revealed that we have not learned lessons from disasters like the 2013 Kedarnath tragedy. The greed for monetary benefits has resulted in unplanned development and creation of infrastructure without caring for the environment. It is high time we followed the requisite norms for maintaining environmental balance keeping in mind the local topography.

SUBHASH VAID, NEW DELHI

SC upholds green vigilance

Apropos of 'Green clearance'; the Supreme Court's verdict quashing the exemption of large-scale construction projects from the Environmental Impact Assessment regime is timely and momentous. The rescinded clause excluded buildings over 20,000 sq metre from prior environmental scrutiny. Touted as a move to reduce procedural friction and promote industrial ease, it effectively dismantled a crucial safeguard against unchecked development. The court has rightly recognised that environmental diligence is not a dispensable formality but a prerequisite for sustainable growth. The apex court's intervention restores balance to a process increasingly skewed in favour of expediency over foresight.

SANJEEV KUMAR GARG, RAMPURA PHUL

Priority to ecological balance

Refer to 'Green clearance'; the Supreme Court's ruling is a strong reaffirmation that environmental concerns cannot be brushed aside for short-term business gains. In a country like India, where there is geographical diversity and varied climatic conditions, the balance between development and sustainability is crucial. The way forward lies in upholding robust environmental laws, streamlining regulatory processes and ensuring strict compliance. Half-hearted efforts and policy loopholes are a recipe for disaster, both for the environment and the economy. The verdict is not only legally binding but also a wake-up call to place the environment at the heart of India's development journey.

GAURAV BADHWAR, ROHTAK

US setting disturbing precedent

President Trump's imposition of an additional 25% tariff on Indian imports on top of the earlier 25% is both unfair and alarming. With around 35 per cent of India's crude oil now sourced from Russia, this step is driven purely by economic necessity, not politics. Imposing 50 per cent tariff penalises India for prioritising its energy security amid global volatility. Such actions will strain Indo-US relations and set a disturbing precedent. It is essential that India continue to defend its sovereign right to make independent decisions without succumbing to external pressure.

TANISHQ KAUR, PATIALA

Trump's own business flourishing

The contrast between Donald Trump's decisions for his country and his family's business dealings in India is a clear example of hypocrisy. While Trump criticises India's trade practices, his own family-run company, The Trump Organisation, is expanding its real estate business in Mumbai, Pune, Kolkata and Gurugram at a rapid pace. This situation raises serious questions about his ethics as the President of the most powerful nation in the world. Despite his personal financial interests, he is trying to arm-twist India to submit to US hegemony.

HARSHITA SINGLA, RAJPURA



CONTRAPUNTO

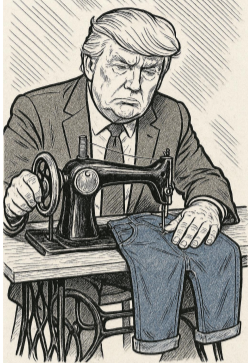
History is largely a history of inflation, usually inflations engineered by govts for the gain of govts

- FRIEDRICH AUGUST VON HAYEK

MAGAMATICS

Trump sold America the dream of greatness built on tariffs, but the math doesn't add up

After threats and extensions, Trump's enforced his "reciprocal" tariffs. It's an economic experiment that will bleed foreign sellers and US buyers before it's over, but for Trump it's the foundation for rebuilding American greatness. While campaigning on the 'America First' plank last year, he claimed, "This new American industrialism will create millions and millions of jobs." Will it though? Trump's 2018 tariffs against China "neither raised nor lowered US employment in newly-protected sectors," analysts said last year. However, China's retaliatory tariffs had "clear negative employment impacts" thereafter. It's easy to see why. Tariffs are all about beating rival products with a price disadvantage. But no matter how hard Trump tries, making things cheaply in



factory ecosystem to one where \$2,000 doesn't suffice? Especially when the \$200 ecosystem has built up the advantage of scale. Apple CEO Tim Cook announced on Wednesday that every iPhone and Apple Watch sold anywhere in the world will now use glass made by Corning in Kentucky. But Corning has 21 plants in China to cater to the other 81% of mobile phones worldwide, plus tablets and other devices. That's why China's price advantage on everything from solar panels to lithium batteries and cars – due to scale – is hard to beat. Trump is thrilled by growing tariff revenue and vague investment promises from companies and countries – Japan's \$550bn, Korea's \$350bn – but costly goods, especially non-discretionary categories like medicines, are going to bite US customers. Inflation is already inching up in US, and if India stops buying Russian oil – as Trump wants – the resultant inflationary pressure could be severe. In this scenario, a Trump-Putin meeting that ends the Ukraine war and lifts sanctions on Russia will be in everyone's interest, India especially. But Trump's want of tact and Putin's guile mean we'll be waiting with fingers crossed.

Wheels Within Wheels

SC right on Matheran's hand-pulled rickshaws. But the how part of the change looks tricky

How many mountains might need to be climbed before Matheran's 94 rickshaw pullers can be transitioned into running their own electric rickshaws? Supreme Court has given Maharashtra six months to completely remove these rickshaws from India's lowest hill station, a mostly tribal eco-sensitive zone since 2003 and a getaway for Mumbai residents. SC did well to emphasise that "stressed economic compulsion could not justify degrading labour" – unlike the touristy view of these being a 'quaint throwback'. Hand-pulled rickshaws and horses are Matheran's only conveyance. Authorities also find it a challenge to dispose of the daily tonne of horse dung produced – tiny Matheran is also overrun with 460 horses and 200 ponies catering to tourists way beyond its carrying capacity. E-rickshaws successfully run here already, started years ago as a pilot. They're cheaper than hand-pulled carts or horses, and are a boon for locals. It sounds like child's play to remove these rickshaws. Yet, there will be challenges. At the most basic level, the question of who will fund the purchase of battery-operated ricks for these 94-odd workers? Will authorities treat them as marginalised 'victims' or as gig workers? They should not become victims to an owner-hirer system of e-ricks that will only escalate pullers' exploitation. It must be ensured licences do not go to middlemen or tour operators. As SC noted, in Azad Rickshaw Pullers Union vs State of Punjab (1980) it had devised an interest-free bank loan scheme for cycle rickshaw pullers. But where are the banks that would, without hesitation, extend loans to hand-rickshaw pullers? SC has said it will brook no govt argument on paucity of funds. On paper, even an end to manual scavenging sounds easy. On ground, rehabilitation from degrading work into new livelihoods has been every govt's worst failure. SC must keep a bird's eye view on Matheran.

Bitter medicine

From childhood we are taught that what we dislike is good for us, and what we like is bad

Jug Suraiya

For years I've been using homoeopathic eyedrops in the fond hope that the medication will keep cataracts at bay. Allopathy dismisses the eyedrops, as it does all homoeopathy, as a mere placebo that has no benefit apart from providing a feel-good factor.

The eyedrops come in two formulations, one which contains alcohol and one without. I use the one with alcohol, in preference to the non-alcohol variety, because when applied the alcohol eyedrops induce a stinging sensation which the non-alcohol version doesn't. Wouldn't it make for comfort, not to mention common sense, to use the non-alcohol, non-stinging drops, which don't hurt? It *would* make for both. But in this case, as in so many others, comfort and common sense are overruled by the uncommon sense that is drilled into us from our childhood years: that the more bitter-tasting the medicine, the more good it will do us by way of effecting a cure. This bad-equals-good equation applies not just to medical products, but to almost all things. At school we were told that learning boring things, like multiplication tables, all the way up to 16 times 12 is 192, and mugging up history dates like when the three battles of Panipat were fought, was good for building up our mental muscles. Growing up, we are told that all the things that taste nice and which we like to eat, like samosas and talebis and pizzas and burgers are bad for us and will give us high cholesterol, and triglycerides, and BP. And all the things that taste bad, like karelas and boiled lauki, are good for us and make us kick serious ass where all that nasty cholesterol and BP are concerned. Call it the puritanical ethic of asceticism, or the stern voice of duty, or military school discipline, or the gym instructors' injunction that there's no gain without pain, we are programmed to believe that hard is better than easy, tough better than soft. And that's no stinging eyewash.



jugularvein

India's 21-Day Trump Trap

He's left a short window before penal tariffs apply. There's no question of appealing him. But GOI can be smartly flexible, like buying more US oil if it's priced competitively or engaging Russia on the ceasefire issue

Syed Akbaruddin

Trade disputes are not new. But when commerce is weaponised to dictate foreign policy, rules of engagement shift. In 21 days, Indian exports to US will face a 25% penalty for continued purchase of Russian oil. Combined with existing reciprocal tariffs, Indian goods will face the highest trade barrier in US alongside Brazil, at 50%. Washington has fused trade, diplomacy, and global strategy into a single ultimatum. The message is clear: The stakes are high. The window is closing fast.

This is not a dispute over market access or pricing, nor is it a technical matter for trade negotiators alone. It is a geopolitical ambush with a 21-day fuse and a public countdown. Washington wants New Delhi to press Moscow towards a ceasefire. The deadline is less a timetable than a test of India's resolve, restraint, and skill. For India, this touches the core of strategic autonomy. How New Delhi navigates the storm will shape not only its economic resilience but also its credibility as a global actor that charts its own course in a polarised world. India has called the move unfair, pointing out that many others continue to trade with Russia. Discounted Russian crude has helped stabilise domestic inflation in India and contributed to global energy equilibrium. India is not alone in balancing energy pragmatism with geopolitical complexity. China continues purchasing Russian oil and gas despite Western disapproval, prioritising economic interests while keeping diplomatic channels open with US, Türkiye, a Nato member, has maintained energy ties with Moscow while facilitating initiatives like the Black Sea grain deal. These cases underscore a broader trend among emerging powers resisting binary choices in a polarised global landscape. The tariff threat is serious, but not unprecedented. US has had sharp trade disputes even with close allies. In 1980s, Washington targeted Japan's growing automobile and electronics exports. Tempers flared, tariffs followed, but the alliance endured. Similarly, the long-running aircraft subsidy dispute between US and EU led to waves of retaliatory tariffs. Wine, cheese, aircraft parts and motorcycles became

pawns in a global economic chess match. Yet ties between EU and US remained intact. When conditions shifted, tariffs were suspended and cooperation resumed. Such examples show that sharp trade disagreements need not fracture strong relationships. The key is to adopt calibrated responses. India must be firm in principle but flexible in approach. It must avoid a false choice: appease Trump and lose credibility, or resist and risk economic fallout. The 21-day delay in implementing tariffs is a tactic.

Washington is signalling urgency, but the delay also leaves space for negotiations. It allows for quiet engagement, where gestures can be exchanged during planned trade negotiations in late Aug, without compromising long-term interests. India could adjust energy sourcing, including more US oil if competitively priced. This can be done without any suggestion of yielding to pressure. India can also work quietly with other partners to reinvigorate ceasefire diplomacy in Ukraine. NSA Ajit Doval, who has been in Moscow this week, can explore this possibility and turn a geopolitical ultimatum into a diplomatic opportunity.

Trump has announced that 'great progress' was made in the meeting between his envoy Witkoff and Putin. He also signalled openness to meeting Putin next week, with Zelenskyy to follow. If a ceasefire or even a temporary pause emerges, the logic of the penal tariffs collapses. At the same time, India must prepare for the scenario in which the tariffs are enforced. Diversifying export markets, deepening trade ties with other economies, and examining reciprocal duties, similar to the measured steps India took after the withdrawal of Generalised System of Preferences benefits in 2019, are all on the table. This moment also offers India a chance to reflect on its own trade practices. It maintains relatively high tariffs across several sectors, which have drawn criticism and limited deeper economic integration. A recalibration towards a more open and competitive tariff regime could enhance India's global competitiveness and attract investment at a time when global companies are rethinking supply chains. Above all, India must project a consistent message of sovereign decision-making, grounded in economic logic and strategic balance. The broader India-US relationship has seen moments of friction, but also remarkable resilience. The ties span education, energy, defence, technology, people-to-people exchanges and a shared vision for a stable Indo-Pacific. Neither country benefits from prolonged confrontation. US risks alienating a key partner. India risks disruption in critical export sectors. But while the risks are real, so is the opportunity. This is a chance to reinforce that mature powers can differ on tactics without breaking on strategy. India must play this phase with quiet confidence. It should neither overreact nor underestimate the seriousness of the move. If handled with composure, the 21-day window can become a platform for diplomatic creativity rather than a countdown to confrontation. What India needs now is the nerve to hold steady and the craft to step out of Trump's trap on its own terms. Ultimately, this is a test not of how India reacts to tariffs, but of how India upholds its values and vision. Strategic independence, economic pragmatism, and principled diplomacy have long defined India's external conduct. They must now define its response. That is the India the world respects. And that is the India that must respond.



What India needs now is the nerve to hold steady and the craft to step out of Trump's trap on its own terms. Ultimately, this is a test not of how India reacts to tariffs, but of how India upholds its values and vision. Strategic independence, economic pragmatism, and principled diplomacy have long defined India's external conduct. They must now define its response. That is the India the world respects. And that is the India that must respond.

The writer is former permanent representative of India to UN

WHAT PUT DHARALI IN HARM'S WAY?

Climate change is big in the Himalayan region. But instead of mitigating risks, govts are aggravating these. Environmental clearances are un dependable. So, local communities pay the price

Anjal Prakash

First and foremost, flash floods that wreaked havoc in Uttarakhand's Uttarkashi district on Tuesday underline the perils of neglecting ecological fragility in planning. Himalayas are sensitive to temperature rises, glaciers are retreating, and the terrain is increasingly prone to landslides and sudden floods. Post-2013 Kedarnath disaster, there was much talk about stricter regulation and ecological preservation. Yet, unchecked construction, hydropower projects and tourism infra have continued to mushroom, often ignoring environmental clearances. This recklessness has heightened the risk for vulnerable, local communities. Secondly, the event exposes the shortcomings of our early warning and disaster preparedness systems. The absence of an extensive network of Automatic Weather Stations (AWSs) and real-time monitoring means authorities are often reacting late, unable to evacuate or alert populations in time. According to a 2020 report by IMD, only about 150 AWSs are operational across the Himalayan region, far short of the needs dictated by a vast and fragile landscape. On Tuesday, it was initially assumed that a cloudburst was the cause of the flash floods. Since then, experts have suggested that these may have been caused by the catastrophic failure of a glacial pond or lagoon in the snow-covered mountains to the north of the village. Some of these glacial ponds have common features across the region. Typically stable, they overflow dangerously during surges in snowmelt or rainfall, particularly the former. In the case of Dharali village, it is believed that one among these glacial ponds burst suddenly, resulting in a huge debris of water and ice that flowed downhill with immense force. The slope caused it to "exponentially get bulldozed" toward the village. To add to the seriousness of this, the Kheer Ganga river that runs through the village, and that finds its

Calvin & Hobbes

WHEN IT SNOWS, YOU CAN GO SLEDDING. WHEN IT'S WINDY, YOU CAN FLY KITES. WHEN IT'S HOT, YOU CAN GO SWIMMING.



..THE ONLY SPORT IS DRIVING MOM CRAZY.



glacial pond, both have global warming as their cause. Both say that India has to stop viewing the Himalayas merely as resource reservoirs or scenic spots. Their fragile ecology means the country is inviting calamity by disturbing natural processes unnaturally with the human economy. The likes of the Char Dham project and the Joshi-math eco-tourism corridor focus on traditional gray infra – roads, highways, embankments, dams, concrete channels, no matter how ecologically degrading these are. What takes a backseat is building retention basins, restoring natural slopes, integrating sponge zones – all of which are needed to absorb, store, slow down water, and reduce flood risks.



Shifting focus to climate-resilient infra would also involve due attention to early warning systems and community participation. Increasing tourism and traffic is a myopic goal. Especially with haphazard and dangerous constructions reaching the highest slopes. As seen in Dharali, these constructions have no guarantees or insurance, and put local communities in great danger. The Himalayas are spread across 13 Indian states and Union Territories, with distinct cultural and developmental contexts. But in their interconnected ecosystem, the risks they face are similar. A state-wise approach is thus insufficient. What's needed is bio-regional planning. This means understanding the ecological boundaries – watersheds, mountain corridors, forests – and managing the resources collectively. For instance, the Ganga-Brahmaputra basin spans multiple Himalayan states and supports millions. So, coordinated efforts across states to implement upstream flood control, forest conservation, and eco-sensitive development are imperative. We need Himalaya-wide governance forums and we need local communities to be heard properly in these, as much as the environmental experts, govt agencies and policymakers. Ecological restoration and the creation of natural buffers must become standard practices in all development projects. And there must be strict enforcement of environmental regulations. Right now, large infra projects are often approved after superficial impact assessments. Credible penalties for violations of environmental laws are rare. It is all this that has actively put fragile mountain areas in harm's way. It is only Nature-based solutions that are sustainable, cost-effective, and adaptable to changing climate conditions. Disasters like Dharali are where our mountains are crying for better protection. Their growing frequency and severity are clear signs of an ecosystem under extreme stress. Climate change has to be mitigated at a global level. But changing course on unplanned development is very much in Indian hands. That's how to save Indian lives.

The writer is research director, Bharti Institute of Public Policy, ISB

Sacredspace



If we will be quiet and ready enough, we shall find compensation in every disappointment.

Henry D Thoreau

Use Free Will To Design Your Own Destiny

Jaya Row

The Law of Karm never fails. No one escapes its reach. It works like gravity – unerring and universal. Action is the pivot around which life revolves. Every intentional action yields its corresponding result. Driven by greed, hatred, and delusion, you sow seeds of pain. Motivated by generosity, love, and wisdom, you harvest abundance and happiness. Action springs from desire. Desire arises from vasana – a deep-rooted inclination or leaning towards something. As your vasana, so are your desire, action, and environment. When you act driven by desire, you create more such vasanas. But when you act out of duty, whether you like it or not, you break free from the stranglehold of desire. An apple seed will yield apples. No amount of pleading, manipulation or



THE SPEAKING TREE

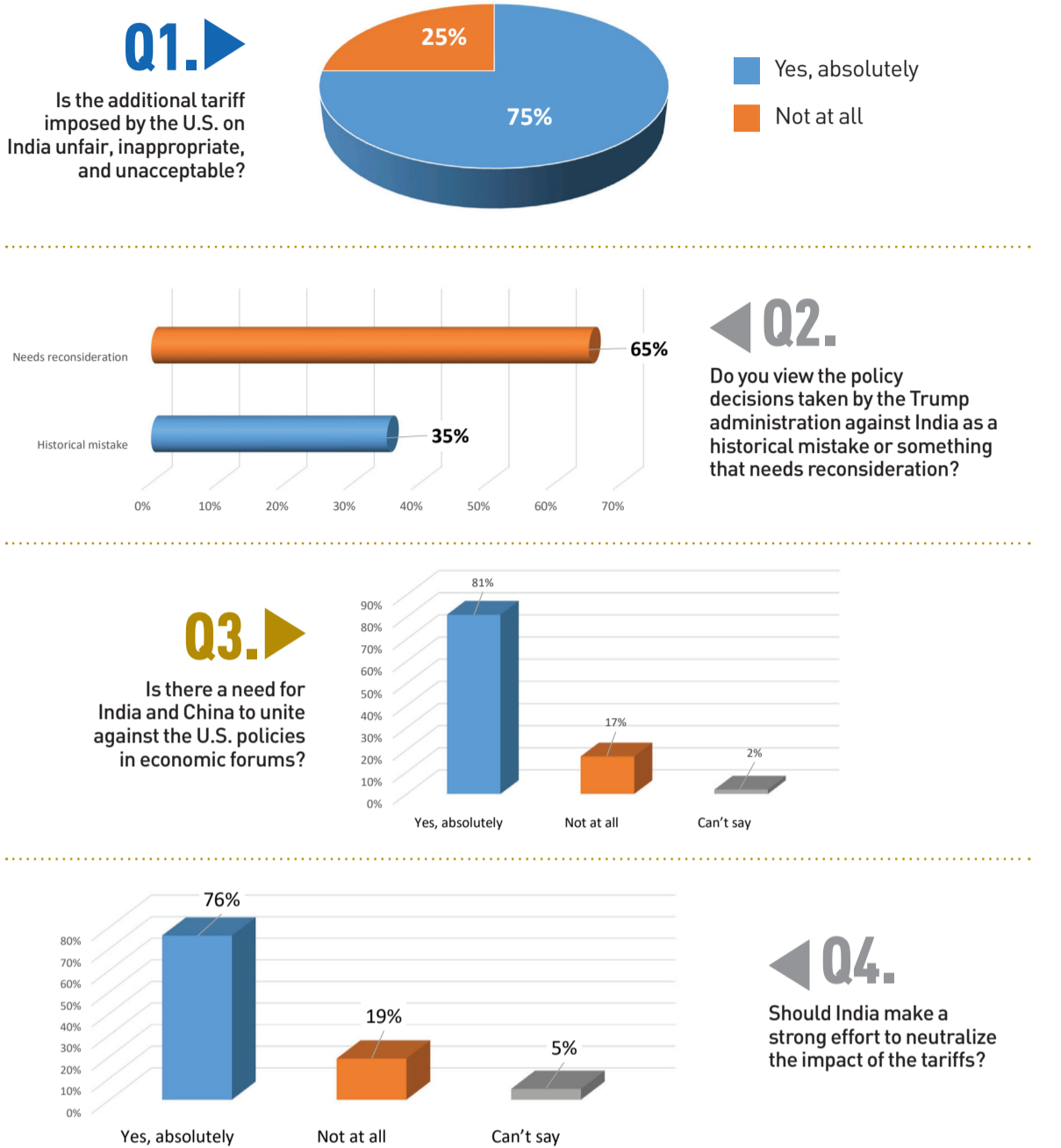
scheming will produce mangoes. The only way to get mangoes is to plant mango seeds. Plant seeds of happiness and success and your life will transform. Though destiny or prarabdhi may steer you one way, you can use your free will – purusharth – to take you on a totally different trajectory. No matter how dark your past may be, steadfast, consistent, positive effort can reshape your life, allowing you to carve out a brilliant future. The law is clear: As you think, so you become. Your thoughts sketch the blueprint of your character and circumstance. A joyful mind births a joyful world; a bitter mind breeds anger. A petty mind clings to trifles; an evolved mind beholds the universe's splendour. When your surroundings are not conducive, you

cannot go out into the world and battle them. Elevate your thoughts and watch the world around you rise in harmony. You cannot achieve greatness with a small mind. You have to first think big, beyond yourself. Excellence doesn't demand more degrees, sharper skills, or wider networks. It needs elevated thoughts. This is easier said than done. The grip of selfish desire and attachment holds you back. You need wise guidance to spark this change. Understand the futility of worldly pursuits. Seek the permanent. With the knowledge of the higher, enjoy the passing, ephemeral joys. Surround yourself with good people, loving and uplifting ideas. As your mind expands to accommodate the higher, you naturally get detached from the lower. Ultimately, you take that giant leap into the realm of the Infinite.

THE DAILY GUARDIAN SURVEY ON TRUMP'S TARIFF WAR ON INDIA

81% respondents said there was need for India and China to unite against the U.S. policies in economic forums.

A recent India News survey of 283 respondents reveals strong disapproval of Trump's tariff policy on India. 75% termed the tariffs unfair, while 81% supported India-China unity against U.S. actions. 80% demanded international intervention. Most respondents believe India must act firmly to counter the economic impact, with 65% calling for policy reconsideration rather than labeling it historical error.



WHILE TRUMP RANTS, INDIA STANDS TALL: A VISUAL METAPHOR FOR NOISE VERSUS RESILIENCE

OPINION

RAKESH K CHITKARA



In the high-stakes arena of global trade, the imposition of 25% tariffs by the United States on select Indian exports, announced with characteristic drama by President Donald Trump, is less a catastrophe and more an opportunity in disguise. It is a wake-up call that India should embrace, not resist. If handled with foresight and firm resolve, these tariffs could catalyse a strategic reset in India's economic orientation.

The Trump administration, both in its previous and current avatars, has displayed an instinct for transactional diplomacy, often clouded by spectacle and short-term optics. The most

recent tariff move, packaged with vague penalties related to India's continued engagement with Russia, now signals a shift not just in trade tactics but in Washington's deeper view of India. More concerning than the policy itself was the rhetoric that accompanied it—Trump's reference to India as a “dead economy” was not only factually baseless but also diplomatically unwise. That such a sentiment was echoed by a few opportunistic voices within India's own political class makes it all the more important to respond with strategic maturity, not emotional reactions.

In the immediate term, certain sectors will be affected. India's labour-intensive manufacturing exports—textiles, auto components, and generic pharmaceuticals—may face stiffer entry conditions in the U.S. market. However, India's economy is far more diversified and resilient than what is captured in tariff spread-sheets. The impact, while not negligible, is unlikely to derail our broader growth trajectory.

What India needs is not panic, but a pivot. Tariff disruptions must be treated as the price of transition—a stepping stone toward building trade resilience, expanding bilateral alternatives, and reducing over-dependence on any single market.

STRATEGIC DEPENDENCE

A critical area that warrants recalibration is defence procurement. India's increasing reliance on U.S.-made platforms—while technologically valuable—exposes the country to the unpredictability of Washington's policy climate. Unlike Russia, which has consistently respected India's strategic autonomy, the U.S. has often allowed domestic politics to intrude into defence cooperation.

India must maintain its multi-alignment stance, sourcing technology and platforms from a diverse range of trusted partners including France, UK, Israel, and Russia, while also boosting indigenous development. The objective should be not only Atmanirbharta (self-reliance) in manufacturing but also strategic self-assurance in policymaking.

U.S. CORPORATES: TIME TO RETHINK EXPECTATIONS

An equally important dimension is the role of U.S.



corporations operating in India. For years, many have enjoyed access to India's growing consumer base, talent pool, and regulatory hospitality. Yet, the value addition to India's economy has often been marginal compared to the commercial benefits extracted.

Sectors such as digital advertising, e-commerce, software services, and healthcare stand out as examples. U.S. tech giants have capitalised on India's massive user base and market size while investing comparatively little in local R&D or manufacturing infrastructure. Similarly, consumer goods companies have benefited from premium pricing without proportionate reinvestment in domestic supply chains. These asymmetries now need to be called out.

If this tariff moment leads to a recalibration where U.S. firms begin reassessing their alignment with India, it is a conversation worth having. India should not be viewed as a market to be exploited, but rather as a partner to be respected. If certain American firms find alignment with “Trumpian protectionism” more profitable, they are free to redirect their focus to other geographies.

More constructively, U.S. companies that value the Indian market must take the initiative to engage directly with the White House and policy-makers in Washington. If India is indeed, as Trump claims, a “dead economy,” then why are leading American companies expanding operations, hiring local talent, and integrating with

Indian supply chains? The contradiction is glaring—and it must be challenged not just by New Delhi, but by the U.S. business community that stands to lose from misguided trade posturing. Trump may come and go, but India will remain a dynamic, growing market with unmatched potential.

In this context, the role of bilateral business forums such as the U.S.-India Business Council (USIBC) and U.S.-India Strategic Partnership Forum (USISPF) must be questioned. These entities, while well-intentioned, have failed to shield Indian interests during moments of stress. Whether it is tariffs, visa regimes, or digital taxation debates, Indian companies have often found themselves navigating hostile terrain alone.

It is time for Indian conglomerates, including Tata, Reliance, Mahindra, and Sun Pharma, among others, to reevaluate the value derived from memberships in such forums claiming to represent Indian industry interests with the US Government. Resources might be better invested in regional alliances, Africa-oriented trade bodies, or domestic capacity-building platforms that better align with India's economic destiny.

CHINA, RUSSIA AND THE ROAD AHEAD

While strategic tensions persist with China, it would be short-sighted to rule out selective engagement. Regional multilateral forums like BRICS, SCO, and RCEP present opportunities for cooperative coexistence in areas like supply chains, infrastructure, and digital governance. Russia, despite Western sanctions, has remained a consistent and mature partner. India's energy, defence, and nuclear cooperation with Moscow exemplify a relationship based on trust and mutual interest.

As the global order evolves, India must ensure it is not merely reacting to the whims of superpowers but actively shaping the narrative. The next decade presents an opportunity for India and China—the two largest emerging econo-

mies—to provide counterweights to the volatility of Western unilateralism.

A TARIFF TODAY, A STRATEGY TOMORROW

In the final analysis, the Trump tariffs are not a verdict on India's economic health, but a reflection of America's inward turn. If Trump continues to drive U.S. policy along isolationist lines, the long-term damage may not be India's to bear, but America's to repair. It is widely expected that the next U.S. president, regardless of party affiliation, will inherit a deeply fractured global image and an economic order in need of rehabilitation. Undoing this damage may take not one, but two presidential terms.

India, meanwhile, must press ahead. Our priority should not be lobbying for tariff relief, but investing in trade diversification, regional integration, and economic diplomacy. The global South is rising, and India must place itself at its vanguard.

In disruption lies opportunity. In tariffs lies a test. And in strategic realignment lies the future.

Rakesh K Chitkara is a public policy expert. He has led public policy practice for large corporations in infrastructure, healthcare, agriculture, and chemicals.

Maharashtra Special Public Security Bill 2024: Security or threat to liberty?

OPINION

DR. AMAN KUMAR SHARMA & SHELU SHARMA



INTRODUCTION TO THE TERM “URBAN NAXAL”

In recent times, the term “Urban Naxal” has gained prominence in Indian political and social discourse. This term refers to individuals who may not be directly involved in Naxalite activities but support them from urban areas through spreading their ideology, providing financial assistance, or offering indirect help. To curb the influence of such individuals, the Maharashtra government has introduced a new bill named the Maharashtra Special Public Security Bill 2024.

LEGISLATIVE PROCESS AND BACKGROUND

Like any other law, the bill must be passed in the state legislature and signed by the Governor before it becomes an Act. Although this bill was first introduced

in 2024, it was not implemented at that time due to various concerns and public feedback. Reportedly, the government received around 12,500 suggestions, out of which only three were accepted partially. In 2025, a revised version of the bill was reintroduced and passed in the legislative assembly and now it is in legislative council.

PURPOSE OF THE BILL: COMBATING URBAN NAXALISM

The core objective of the bill is to curb left-wing extremism, especially its urban offshoots. It is believed that some intellectuals, journalists, writers, or activists based in cities indirectly support extremist ideology. The bill aims to equip the government with stronger legal tools to take action against such support mechanisms.

KEY DEFINITIONS AND BROAD

PROVISIONS

The bill outlines certain vague and broad terms, such as “potential threat,” “public concern,” and “suspicion” as grounds for government action. It allows the government to take proactive actions against groups or individuals suspected of posing threats. State can impose a ban on the group or detain individuals who are found under suspicion.

This proposed legislation gives a huge amount of discretionary power to executives, which can be misused. As anything can be interpreted as a “threat,” or “public concern,” it may vary from person to person who is analysing the situation.

EXTRAORDINARY POWERS TO THE GOVERNMENT

A big threat to the justice system is that the executive will be given enormous power, such as enabling them to take immediate actions, bypassing the required legal procedure, which may deprive the accused of their fundamental right to be heard before taking actions against them.

Additionally, once a group or activity is banned, there is no fixed duration specified for how long the ban will last it can be extended indefinitely.

JUDICIAL LIMITATIONS AND LEGAL RECOURSE

No access to District Courts, this bill proposes to take away the right to access courts for challenging State's Actions. Original Jurisdiction to challenge actions of state is kept with High Court or Supreme



Court, which make legal process very difficult for common citizen. Past incidents have shown that individuals have been wrongfully imprisoned for years under similar charges, only to be acquitted later. However, the bill grants immunity to officers acting in “national interest,” meaning they cannot be held accountable even if their actions were incorrect.

SECTION 2(F): A THREAT TO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION?

One of the most controversial parts of the bill is Section 2(F). It states that any written or spoken statement can be subjected to action if it is perceived as a potential threat to public order. This provision directly impacts freedom of speech, as even peaceful protests, writings, or speeches could be criminalized under suspicion.

This raises serious concerns for journalists, writers, student activists, and civil society members who could be silenced under the guise of security.

PRESENT STATUS OF NAXALISM IN INDIA

This bill comes at a time when Naxalism is on the decline. As of April 2025, only six districts in India are reported to have high Naxalite activity. These are primarily in central and eastern states such as Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, and parts of Maharashtra (notably Gadchiroli district). Earlier, this activity was spread across 12 districts, but concentrated efforts have significantly reduced their impact. The regions most affected fall under what is commonly called the “Red Corridor,” known for its association with Maoist extremism and left-wing violence.

EXISTING CENTRAL LAW: UAPA AND BNS

One of the strongest criticisms of this bill is that India already has a robust national law to deal with unlawful activities — the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), 1967. This central law empowers the government to declare any organization or individual as unlawful if found working against the unity and integrity of the country. UAPA has been amended

over the years, including significant changes in 2004 and 2019, allowing the government to label individuals as terrorists, not just groups. Given the broad scope of UAPA, many questions the need for a separate state law.

The Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023, replaces the colonial-era Indian Penal Code and marks a significant modernization of India's criminal justice system. Among its key innovations are updated provisions specifically addressing terrorism and its financing. Section 113 of BNS defines terrorism in clear terms, encompassing acts that threaten the sovereignty, integrity, or security of India. Section 114 explicitly criminalises financing, harbouring, and assisting terrorist activities, while Section 115 focuses on recruitment and training for terrorism. Section 116 provides for seizure and forfeiture of property used for or derived from terrorist activities. These provisions ensure a comprehensive legal framework aligned with international conventions and standards.

OTHER STATES WITH SIMILAR LAWS

Maharashtra is not the first state to introduce such legislation. States like Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Telangana, and Andhra Pradesh already have similar laws in place. However, jurists argue that when UAPA exists, there's no need for states to implement parallel laws that may contradict or overlap with central provisions.

POTENTIAL FOR MISUSE AND POLITICAL SUPPRESSION

Several concerns have been raised by legal experts, political analysts, and activists:

- Suppression of Dissent: Peaceful protests or public movements may be suppressed by labeling them a “threat.”
 - Lack of Transparency: No clear mechanism is in place to justify actions taken under this law.
 - Political Motivation: The law could be misused against opposition parties, activists, or social movements.
 - Freedom of Expression: Basic democratic rights speech, association, and protest are at risk.
- For example, a youth group demanding employment opportunities could be labeled a threat if their protests are seen as “potentially disruptive.”

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS AND LEGAL FOUNDATION

The legal basis for such laws lies in Article 19(2) of the Indian Constitution, which permits reasonable restrictions on freedoms in the interest of national security, public order, and

the integrity of the nation. UAPA was originally designed to provide for the more effective prevention of certain unlawful activities of individuals and associations and for matters connected therewith, like terrorism. Over time, its scope expanded to include terrorism and extremism.

WAY FORWARD: BALANCING BETWEEN SECURITY AND LIBERTY

Maharashtra Special Public Security Bill, 2025 may be considered as a step towards ensuring national security, considering Article 19 (2), but at the same time, it poses a threat to Fundamental Rights such as freedom of Speech, Rights of an arrested person, Personal Liberty, and right to access Justice. The lack of clear definitions and procedural safeguards makes it susceptible to abuse of power.

With clearer definitions or “evidentiary tests” to consider an action as “potential threat,” “threat,” or “public concern,” along with a speedy justice delivery mechanism, can serve the purpose. In a democracy like India, it is vital to balance security with constitutional freedoms. Otherwise, it is evident from the past that the state can misuse its powers by using the authority for repression instead of protective laws.

Dr. Aman Kumar Sharma, Assistant Professor (Constitutional Law), Symbiosis Law School, Pune, Symbiosis International (Deemed University), Pune. Mrs. Shelu Sharma, Ph.D. Scholar (Criminology), Faculty of Law, Banasthali Vidyapith, Vanasthali, Rajasthan



Time for action

The Reserve Bank of India did well to pause rate cuts amid the uncertainties

The Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) Monetary Policy Committee was sensible to pause its rate cuts, as announced on Wednesday. RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra rightly pointed out that the uncertainties surrounding tariffs are still evolving, and that the 100 bps of rate cuts implemented since February 2025 are still percolating through the system. Mr. Malhotra's statement was made before U.S. President Donald Trump approved an additional 25% tariff on imports from India, over and above the existing 25% reciprocal tariffs. However, his assessment that the matter is far from over was nevertheless accurate. India is still in the process of negotiating a Bilateral Trade Agreement with the U.S., and the final tariffs are far from decided. In the meantime, Mr. Trump has already indicated that similar additional tariffs – “penalties” for buying oil from Russia – may be imposed on other countries as well, which will impact India's comparative advantage. Leaving room for another rate cut later in the year when things might be clearer, thus, was the sensible thing to do. The other broad reason why the pause makes sense is that it allows the RBI to see whether such monetary measures are working. A 100 bps cumulative cut in rates over the last six months is significant, and the banking system needs time to pass that on to borrowers. The Governor also pointed out that there is ample liquidity in the system, which means the banks have the money to lend.

The question, however, is whether there is enough growth-related borrowing happening. RBI data show that, as of end-June, loans to purchase consumer durables had contracted about 3% compared to the previous year. Growth in housing loans slowed sharply to 9.6% from 36% a year earlier, while vehicle loans too slowed by five percentage points over the last year. In line with this subdued demand outlook, companies too seem to be slowing their borrowing. Loans to industry grew 5.5% in June 2025, down from 8.1% in June last year. Simply reducing rates, therefore, is not enough and that is something the Governor alluded to when he said stronger policy frameworks “across domains, and not just limited to monetary policy”, would be pivotal in achieving India's growth potential. The government has to intervene in a more focused manner than just increasing capital expenditure across the board. A lot can be done through tax. The Goods and Services Tax rate rationalisation, that was promised several times, is long overdue. A reduction in fuel prices in line with lower oil prices, too, will lift consumer sentiment. The RBI can, for the moment, afford to wait things out. The government does not have this luxury.

Mending ties

India and the Philippines are showing intent in improving their relations

The state visit of Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. to India that ends on Friday, and his meetings with Prime Minister Narendra Modi provided a hard power edge to the two countries, with historical-cultural ties between them, by signing a Strategic Partnership Agreement. On his first visit to India since taking office in 2022, Mr. Marcos has taken a strong position against Chinese incursions in the West Philippine Sea, and has been keen to engage India more closely. Coinciding with his visit, the Indian Navy held its first joint maritime exercises with the Philippine Navy in the South China Sea area. The drills were criticised by China. India has consistently supported the 2016 UNCLOS tribunal arbitration award in favour of the Philippines, calling on China to respect the multilateral order in the Indo-Pacific, and Mr. Marcos appreciated this. Moreover, while India has signed dozens of such Partnership Agreements worldwide, for the Philippines, India is only its fifth Strategic Partner – after Japan, Vietnam, Australia, and South Korea. The Philippines is also the first export destination for the BrahMos missile, and Mr. Marcos is understood to have expressed interest in buying more Indian military hardware. The two sides signed agreements to enhance strategic cooperation, including an exchange of Terms of Reference for all three services and the Coast Guard. They also agreed to free up visas and begin direct flights. There is no substantial bilateral trade at present – \$3.3 billion in 2024-25 – but investments are growing as technology and pharma companies have tied up in many areas.

The Marcos-Modi meetings sent out a more comprehensive message for India's ties with South East Asia. The Philippines is the incoming chair for ASEAN in 2026, and the coordinator for the ASEAN-India comprehensive strategic partnership. The invitation to Mr. Marcos was also a way of easing relations that have been riled by Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal's unnecessarily abrasive remarks in June, where he called many ASEAN countries the “B-team of China”, and mocked the 2009 ASEAN-India Trade in Goods Agreement (AITIGA). The government has since moved to fast-track talks to revise the AITIGA, with talks in Delhi next week. India and the Philippines have separately discussed launching talks for a Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA), indicating India's intention to keep negotiating for a more liberalised trade regime globally even as it faces the brunt of the U.S.'s tariffs and penalties. The visit is a reminder that India's interest in peace and security in the Indo-Pacific is not restricted to the Quad grouping, and that it is mindful of strengthening ties with all the countries in the region, especially as it essays the current geopolitical turbulence with bigger global powers.

The Bihar migrant worker, a Scylla-Charybdis moment

In the ‘Odyssey’, a major epic in Greek mythology, King Odysseus had to navigate between the dangers of Scylla, a monster residing in a rock, and Charybdis, a monster embodying deadly whirlpools. In the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the Bihar electoral rolls initiated by the Election Commission of India (ECI), many migrant labour whose names have been dropped from the draft electoral roll are facing a similar predicament.

The term ‘ordinarily resident’

The electoral rolls are prepared by the ECI, as in the provisions of the Representation of the People (RP) Act, 1950. Section 19 of the RP Act requires that a person must be ‘ordinarily resident’ in a constituency for inclusion in its electoral roll. The requirement of being ‘ordinarily resident’ for inclusion in the electoral roll is to ensure that the voter maintains real ties with the constituency that preserves representative accountability. It is also aimed at preventing fraudulent registrations.

Section 20 provides the meaning of the term ‘ordinarily resident’. It specifies that a person shall not be deemed to be ‘ordinarily resident’ in a constituency only because he/she owns or possesses a dwelling house therein. However, a person temporarily absent from his/her place of residence shall continue to be ‘ordinarily resident’ therein. Section 20A was added in 2010 to enable Non-Resident Indians who have moved out of India even for the long term, to register and vote in the constituency in which their address given in the passport is located.

The ECI has classified electors who were not found in their residence or did not submit the enumeration forms as part of the SIR process as ‘permanently shifted/not found’ and excluded them from the draft electoral roll.

Article 19(1)(e) of the Constitution guarantees every citizen a fundamental right to reside and settle in any part of the territory of India. It follows that any citizen has the right to shift his/her vote to their new place of residence anywhere in India if they so desire.

The issue arises in respect of migrant labourers. The Periodic Labour Force Survey of 2020-21 estimated that around 11% of India's population migrated due to employment-related reasons. This translates to close to 15 crore voters being migrant labour within or outside their



Rangarajan R.

is a former IAS officer and the author of ‘Courseware on Polity Simplified’. He currently trains at Officers IAS Academy

The issues around the disenfranchisement of migrant voters are complex, which the Supreme Court must consider when it passes its orders

States. Most labourers, short-term or long-term, migrate due to the lack of opportunities in their region. Many migrant construction and security workers also migrate alone (without family). They live in temporary shacks/residences at their place of work and move from one location to another, within a State or even in different States, as part of their work. They return to their home State at regular intervals and exercise their right to vote from the place where their families live and properties exist.

The Gauhati High Court, in *Election Commission Of India & Anr vs Dr. Manmohan Singh & Ors* (1999), indicated that the term ‘ordinarily resident’ shall mean a habitual resident of that place. It must be permanent in character and not temporary or casual. It must be a place where the person has the intention of dwelling there permanently. A reasonable man must accept him/her as a resident of that place. While migrant labourers may not be residing permanently in their native constituency, the philosophy behind being ‘ordinarily resident’ – in the opinion of the courts – is broadly fulfilled with respect to that residence for such migrant workers.

Legality versus realpolitik

The ECI maintains that under the RP Act, migrants who have shifted out of their native State/constituency can register as an elector in their new place of residence. Many migrants are anyway not keen to shift their vote. They may not have any document other than an Aadhaar card in their new place of residence (which is not in the list of eligible documents for fresh voter registration under the SIR process). Further, it can be challenged whether they fulfil the conditions of being ‘ordinarily resident’, as laid down by the courts, with respect to the new residence.

Keeping those legal arguments aside, the political issues on the ground in the in-migration States that they reside in cannot be overlooked. Regional political parties in such States have already begun raising issues about the possible inclusion of migrants in the electoral roll of their States. They object to it on the ground that this would vitiate the democratic process since these migrant labourers are not permanent settlers in their States.

They argue that migrants do not understand

the political issues in their States and, hence, should not be allowed to vote in these elections. While it may be argued that migrants can be included in the rolls of in-migration States *de jure*, it could potentially result in their de facto disenfranchisement due to the social and political issues in their place of work. The Supreme Court of India should take these factors into consideration while passing its orders in the cases linked to the SIR.

Towards a fair and inclusive process

In India we accept election results where almost 50% voters in many metropolises do not step out of their houses to vote in booths which are less than 500 metres from their residence. Most non-resident Indians, who have the right to vote, do not exercise their franchise as they are unable to come to their constituency on the day of elections.

While these arguments can be made for the case of inclusion of migrant labourers in their original place of residence, it cannot be an alibi for the lack of their participation in elections. Steps such as ensuring strict enforcement of statutory holiday on the day of polling as well as the running of more special buses and trains can effectively increase the participation of migrants in the electoral process within a State. With respect to inter-State migrant voters, the ECI had developed a pilot of Multi Constituency Remote Electronic Voting Machine (RVM) that could handle up to 72 constituencies. It had planned a demonstration of the same to recognised political parties in January 2023. However, this was short lived following concerns raised by political parties as well as administrative challenges. With the advent of newer technologies, robust and secure methods (acceptable to all stakeholders), for remote voting should be feasible. Until this happens, steps such as enabling more train and other transportation services as well as incentives for a few additional days of paid leave for travel can be explored to ensure more electoral participation by migrant voters.

Parliament, which represents the will of the people, should also consider suitable amendments to the RP Act to preserve the choice of migrant labourers with respect to their place of voting.

The views expressed are personal

World court’s advisory opinion boosts climate action

In light of the existential threat posed by climate change, the International Court of Justice (ICJ), also known as the World Court, delivered a landmark advisory opinion on the obligations of states concerning climate change. Advisory opinions, while not technically binding, are regarded as authoritative interpretations of international law by the World Court. They can influence the behaviour of states by generating international pressure. A notable example is the United Kingdom's handover of the Chagos Islands to Mauritius, which followed the advisory opinion on the matter.

States cannot ignore their duties

The World Court unanimously ruled that states have legal obligations to protect the climate system and clarified the consequences for failing to meet these obligations. Recently, other international courts, such as the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), have also recognised significant responsibilities for states in addressing climate change. This issue transcends politics; states cannot ignore their duties.

This advisory opinion is noteworthy in many aspects. First and foremost, the court has interpreted all climate treaties, including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Kyoto Protocol, and the Paris Agreement, in a seamless manner, along with the best available scientific consensus, to strengthen the operation of many of the treaty provisions. For example, the Paris Agreement aims to limit the increase in global average temperatures to “well below 2°C” and “pursue efforts” to limit it to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. However, the court used current scientific consensus as well as subsequent conference of parties (COP) decisions to hold that 1.5°C is the relevant threshold that states must work towards. Similarly, the Paris Agreement requires parties to prepare their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs),



Prabhash Ranjan

is Professor and Vice Dean (Research), Jindal Global Law School



Rahul Mohanty

is Assistant Professor, Jindal Global Law School

The decision has major implications for the Global North-South divide and climate justice

which outline the climate actions they plan to take. However, the court rejected the argument that states had unfettered discretion in preparing their NDCs and that NDCs did not create any legally binding obligations on states. It held that, due to their duty of due diligence and cooperation, states must ensure that their NDCs reflect their ‘highest possible’ ambition and must proactively take measures that are reasonably capable of meeting those NDCs.

The decision also has significant implications for the Global North-South divide and climate justice, with the court highlighting the importance of the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR-RC). Accordingly, the standard for assessing countries' climate actions would depend on factors such as historical emissions, level of development, and current national circumstances. The court also explained the duties of cooperation and assistance, and clarified that developed countries have a legally binding obligation to provide financial resources and technology transfer to developing countries for both mitigation and adaptation. While the Paris Agreement does not specify a specific level of financial support, the court observed that this obligation must be interpreted in light of the overall temperature goal and subsequent agreements. Breach of this obligation can be assessed against a standard of good faith and due diligence.

Self-contained regime

Notably, the court rejected the argument of some countries, including India, that the climate treaties constituted a self-contained regime and that the principles and rules of general international law and environmental law were inapplicable. The court identified obligations to mitigate climate change, including the duty of due diligence, the duty to prevent significant harm to the climate system, and the duty to cooperate in protecting the climate, stemming

from various environmental treaties, the Law of the Sea Convention, and uncodified customary international law. The court also noted the adverse effects of climate change on various human rights, particularly the rights of especially vulnerable peoples, which must be taken into account by countries when taking climate action. In practice, this means that withdrawal from climate treaties, as the United States has done, does not exempt a country from its climate-related obligations. It also means that, in working toward a green transition, countries must ensure that human rights are not violated and that a just transition is achieved.

The court dismissed the argument that countries cannot be held individually responsible for violating these obligations, because proving causation and attribution is difficult. It pointed out that it is scientifically possible to determine each state's total contribution to global emissions, considering both historical and current emissions.

This is leverage for the Global South

It is noteworthy that the small island-states, which face an existential threat due to climate change, were the ones that pushed the UN General Assembly to request this advisory opinion. This is a significant legal victory for them and will strengthen their efforts to hold major emitters accountable and push for more ambitious action. This decision is likely to bolster the ongoing strategic litigation concerning climate change in various countries, where the climate actions taken by the countries have been challenged as insufficient and violative of human rights, including the Ridhima Pandey case pending before the Indian Supreme Court. Countries in the Global South, such as India, can leverage this decision to collectively pressure developed nations to better fulfil their commitments to climate finance and technology transfer, while resisting policies that disproportionately impact developing countries.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

More tariffs

For the U.S. President, friendship with India seems to be substantially different from his presidential decisions (Front page, August 7). For all the bonhomie with New Delhi, the U.S. continues to treat India as a secondary power. India may have to accept that Mr. Trump will arm-twist countries to force them to fall in line with his policies. If New Delhi can get the tariff hike postponed it would give it elbow room to manoeuvre.
A.V. Narayanan,
Chennai

Is the U.S. trying to derail

India's economic standing? Mere expressions of verbal protest are not enough. The Government of India must respond firmly and decisively. Continued silence could have severe consequences, particularly for Indian businesses.
Gulam Rabbani,
Bajpatti, Sitamarhi, Bihar

While India and the U.S. share a strategic partnership built on mutual respect and shared values, this sort of punitive trade action risks prioritising business interests over the spirit of friendship. The U.S. should choose dialogue that honours both

economic realities and the deepening bond between the two nations.

Anush D'Cunha S.J.,
Thiruvananthapuram

Nature's warning

The ‘cloudburst’ that wreaked havoc in Uttarkashi's Dharali and Sukhi Top areas is a reminder of the Himalayan region's vulnerability to extreme weather events. The message is clear. The region desperately needs transformation, from reactive responses to proactive resilience building. Only through such an approach can we protect the Himalayan communities

while also preserving this ecosystem for future generations.
R. Sivakumar,
Chennai

Deletions, gender disparity

How can the Election Commission of India (ECI) ensure free and fair elections in Bihar when there are major issues with deletions and omissions in the electoral rolls?The ECI finds itself in a catch-22 situation. Its actions, once unquestionable, are being questioned by the Opposition and the judiciary. It will be a disaster if the ECI's responses to the Supreme

Court's candid observations are not met with concrete replies, evidence and action (Data point, August 7).
Balasubramaniam Pavani,
Secunderabad

On the tomato

I write this letter as former Director, Regional Institute of Ophthalmology and Government Ophthalmic Hospital, Chennai. The article, “The virtues of tomato, a healthy vegetable” (‘Science’ page, July 27), was descriptive in terms of the health benefits of consuming tomatoes. But as a health-care provider, it is my duty to issue caution against some negative

factors in this angel vegetable. Consumption in excess can lead to side-effects in certain individuals. These include acid reflux, allergies, digestive issues and potential kidney problems due to high potassium content. Being rich in calcium and oxalates, the tomato can induce kidney stone formation. The tomato is a nutritious gift from mother nature, but moderation is the key for good health.

Dr. M.V.S. Prakash,
Chennai

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

Should there be a ceiling on salaries of top management?



Praveen Chakravarty
Chairperson
All India
Professionals’
Congress



Sridhar Kundu
Consultant
economist,
World Bank

PARLEY

After Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) announced its decision to lay-off 12,000 employees, Nasscom (National Association of Software and Service Companies) said that the tech industry is at an “inflection point” due to the increasing integration of AI and automation into core business operations. Meanwhile, the All India Professionals’ Congress (AIPC), in conjunction with IT employee unions and forums, is pursuing strategies to address the issue of lay-offs in the IT sector. It plans to raise this matter in Parliament, advocating for a policy that would cap the pay disparity between top leadership and average employees. Should there be a ceiling on salaries of top management? Praveen Chakravarty and Sridhar Kundu discuss the question in a conversation moderated by A.M. Jigeesh. Edited excerpts:

TCS, the fourth largest employer in the country, is laying-off about 12,000 senior employees from the company. In a statement on social media, the AIPC leadership spoke of the huge disparity in salaries in companies such as TCS. Can more jobs be saved by bringing about parity in salaries?

Praveen Chakravarty: AI will first be an attack on the massive pay disparity between the top management and average employee and bring enormous pressure to reduce that gap. With AI, we are realising that skills that what we thought were skills of the high end of the workforce are in fact automatable and being made redundant. AI is not taking away the jobs of barbers, gardeners, or plumbers. AI is saying, ‘If you are a hedge fund analyst, you are not needed’; ‘if you are the CEO of a company, you are redundant.’ So, in this context, how can one possibly justify a 350-500 times ratio of CEO or top leadership pay to median employee pay in a company? In TCS, the CEO’s pay is about 325 times the salary of the median employee. And that is actually among the lowest in IT. In Infosys, the ratio is 850; in Wipro, it is 600. This ratio was perhaps 40-50 times in the 1960s and the 1970s.

Sridhar Kundu: The World Bank’s recent report said that inequality has come down in India. In India, we don’t have reliable income data. There are several agencies who put out some kind of data, but the authenticity of these data can be challenged. The Periodic Labour Force Survey report, published by the government, doesn’t highlight the wage gap across sectors. If you examine the microdata in detail, you will see that the inequality of wages



A man walks past a logo of TCS in Mumbai. REUTERS

as measured by standard deviation is higher for salaried employees compared to the self-employed. Wage inequality across sectors is persistent. The policy of minimising wage inequality via wage cut policy at the top level would reduce the average wage rate. Globally, the average wage rate in India is less compared to many developing countries such as China and the Philippines. In this context, I am pessimistic about the argument that a decrease in the wage gap can create employment opportunities in a sector. The upper limit wage fixation as a solution to inequality reduction and additional employment generation raises a few questions, though the truth behind this hypothesis is not clear to anyone. First, in a competitive labour market, can the private sector retain the quality labour force by fixing an upper wage limit? Second, can the government intervene by fixing a wage rate in the private sector? Third, is government intervention in fixing wages admissible by the private sector?

Companies are arguing during lay-offs that the skill sets of retrenched employees were becoming obsolete. Can someone save their job by enhancing their skill sets?

PC: I don’t know why we still use phrases like skill enhancement. It is time to smell the coffee. This is not about skill enhancement. The so-called highest skills are the ones that have been automated and have been taken away. If anything, AI is telling us what the true essential services are; what we all refer to as ‘menial jobs’. AI is restoring dignity of labour. So I think the whole idea that skilled upgradation is the solution is completely flawed.

As the chairman of the AIPC, I can tell you there are 2-3 very concrete policy suggestions or ideas that we are coming up with. We will take these to both the IT Minister and to the



IPL has a ceiling. The National Football League has a ratio and pay cap ceiling. Sports teams are still very competitive and their talent is thriving. So this notion that meritocracy and productivity will be impacted by a ceiling is exaggerated.

PRAVEEN CHAKRAVARTY

chairperson of SEBI (Securities and Exchange Board of India). One of them will be about the ratio of pay disparity. For example, should there be a ceiling on the ratio of pay? I’m not saying everybody should have equal pay. But is there excess? Let us say there can be a policy idea that for all publicly listed companies, the ratio should be around 40-50 times, not 800 times. Is this idea bizarre? Will it destroy corporate India, as is the concern? Will it destroy productivity?

Let us take the most meritocratic professions in the world, which is sports. Do you know all sports leagues have a player cap ceiling? IPL (Indian Premier League) has a ceiling. Virat Kohli may be the best IPL player, but they don’t say he can get paid whatever he wants and that the market will provide it. The National Football League, the largest sports league in the world by revenue, has a ratio and pay cap ceiling. Sports leagues have their ceilings, and they have shown these have worked very well. Sports teams are still very competitive and their talent is thriving. So this notion that meritocracy and productivity will be impacted by a ceiling is somewhat exaggerated. The current ratio, going up to 800 times, is obscene, ugly, and abominable. So can I think, 50 times? Perhaps. Can that help save jobs? Yes. And this is a short-term solution while we figure out how we deal with labour market disruptions in the long run.

SK: When a sector grows, the growth of employment opportunities in that sector should follow the same direction. In India, the service sector has shown a substantial growth rate over the last few years. So, the lay-off in this sector is a little surprising. We may see this issue in a different context. India is a labour-surplus economy. Management of any organisation sees labour as a low-hanging fruit, and for any reason or sometimes none at all, it can fire labour with or without notice. For the service sector, there is a high substitution of technology for labour. Any adoption of new technology finds new reasons to lay-off surplus labour. This may not be the complete picture for the present lay-off, but it can be a possibility. Whatever may be the reason, if the labour lay-off continues, it might impact growth in the long run.

Are there any policy suggestions to address this crisis?

SK: Government intervention is important. AI has an important role in the service sector. The sector employs technologically efficient and educated people. AI can be a challenge for them. So we have to see where the government can intervene. This labour cannot be absorbed into the agricultural sector because these people are not going to add value to current agricultural practices. They cannot to be absorbed into government schemes such as MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Employment Guarantee Act) or any other kind of informal sector scheme. So, in that case, government intervention is quite important. Governments can improve self-employment activity. This has increased, according to Periodic Labour Force Surveys, so some kind of absorption of labour can take place in that category.

PC: There are several employee forums and unions in the IT sector that have reached out to the AIPC. Several more have reached out after my comments about the TCS situation. So I see a distinct effort in the direction towards collectivisation, mobilisation, and collective bargaining powers in the IT sector.

Our job as the principal Opposition party, the Congress, it is to speak up for justice for the affected employees. But we are not here to argue against lay-offs or against a company’s need to retrench or to downsize depending on business situations. I want be very clear about that. That is why I said this is far more nuanced. We are not an activist, Leftist organisation saying there can be no lay-offs. Our nuanced approach is to look at the huge disparity in pay between the top leadership and the median employee in the service sector, specifically in the IT sector and in financial services. Second, we will be launching a series of stakeholder consultations regarding the draft proposal, which could include ideas such as what Bill Gates had talked about, say, a decade ago – a robot tax. Could there be tax that could be used as basic income or welfare for some of these affected employees? These are all just ideas at this point in time.

Labour is a State subject, so while we will try and persuade the Union government to take this issue up, we are discussing this with Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy on what to do as Hyderabad is a very big IT centre. We will soon speak to the Karnataka Chief Minister as well.



To listen to the full interview
Scan the code or go to the link
www.thehindu.com

NOTEBOOK

A suffering that doesn’t end

After several trials and tribulations, the victims of the Malegaon and Mumbai blast cases are left with a sense of hopelessness and pain

Vinaya Deshpande Pandit

As journalists, we have the privilege and the responsibility of witnessing and writing the first draft of history. We rush in to locations where others desperately try to move away from – the sites of terror attacks, fires, accidents, and other disasters. Though the passion to keep telling stories keeps us going, big tragedies leave us with scars that sometimes take years to heal.

The Mumbai blasts of 2006 and the Malegaon blasts of 2008 are tragedies that the people of Maharashtra will never forget. Hearing the two court judgments in these cases over the last few weeks, I immediately remembered the struggles and flickering hope of some of the victims, and the resilience of the accused.

In July 2010, Mumbai was observing the fourth anniversary of the serial blasts that had ripped through trains on July 11, 2006, killing 189 people and injuring over 800. Just days earlier, the media had been barred from entering the courtroom to cover the trial. I was getting ready to go to a hospital, where victims of the blasts had gathered. Many of them were agitated that the government had not been able to nab the accused, who had allegedly gone to Pakistan. They were also struggling to cope with medical expenses, failing health, and the impact of the injuries caused by the blasts.

One of them was Rajesh Jha. His ear-drums had been damaged due to the impact of the blast. The nerves on his left hand had been permanently damaged. Yet, Jha remained surprisingly positive. My brief interaction with him stayed with me for years. Later, Rajesh called to tell me that he had undergone a surgery and had become a chartered accountant.

That was also the time when Parag Sawant had become a symbol of the tragedy. Sawant was going home in a Virar-bound local train in 2006, when a bomb exploded in his compartment at Mira Road station. Sawant’s wife Priti Sawant was pregnant at the time. Sawant had been lying comatose for four years at a hospital and opened his eyes in 2010. His

wife said that she was very happy that he recognised her. But this was not a story that ended well – nine years after the blasts, Sawant succumbed to his injuries.

While the victims’ stories spoke of the senselessness of the tragedy, the trial moved at a snail’s pace. In 2015, one of the accused, Ehtesham Siddique, was given the death sentence by a trial court. He was acquitted by the Bombay High Court recently. Every time I walked into court, I would hear that Siddique had filed a fresh Right to Information (RTI) application. Siddique filed hundreds of RTIs seeking to know whether the officer who had conducted the identification parade was authorised to do so, information on the log book entries of the vehicles cited in the probe, call detail records of the accused, and so on. He sought writing material and enrolled himself in educational courses. Siddiqui also wrote a memoir about the blasts and how he was falsely implicated, titled Horror Saga. Eventually, it was due to the efforts of Siddique and others, who relentlessly filed RTIs, that the prosecution’s case collapsed. The Anti-Terrorism Squad had to admit to the Bombay High Court that it did not have the call detail records, a crucial piece of evidence. Can anything compensate Siddique and others for the loss of the years that they spent in jail?

I also remember the frustration and agitation of a senior public prosecutor who was asked to “go soft” on the accused of the 2008 Malegaon blasts, including former MP Sadhvi Pragya Singh. While some of the accused in the Mumbai train blasts case had alleged that they had been tortured in prison, the senior public prosecutor said that a few of the accused in the Malegaon case threw tantrums in jail, refusing to let the staff touch them for routine examinations. Some accused are more equal than others.

After all these trials and tribulations, the victims feel nothing but a sense of hopelessness and pain today. Covering their stories, one cannot help but feel their frustration as well.

vinaya.deshpande@thehindu.co.in

PICTURE OF THE WEEK

Remembering horrors of the past



Small bonfires commemorate the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park in Japan, on August 5. On August 6 and 9, 1945, the United States dropped atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, bringing unprecedented devastation and leading to the end of World War II. GETTY IMAGES

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO AUGUST 8, 1975

‘Most of Soviet-aided units earn profits’

New Delhi, Aug. 7: A majority of the Soviet-aided industrial projects in India now earn profits, says Mr. Kuznetsov, the Soviet Economic Counsellor in Delhi. More than 70 industrial and other projects have been or are being built with Soviet economic co-operation in various parts of the country. These include basic industries like ferrous and non-ferrous metallurgy, machine-building, oil extraction

The ~~100~~ Hindu.

and refining, power generation and power equipment, coal mines, drugs and pharmaceuticals and precision instruments. In an interview on the occasion of the fourth anniversary of the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Co-operation, Mr. Kuznetsov noted how five projects among them had contributed Rs. 70 crores in net profit during 1974-75. Of the five, the Bhilal steel plant alone gives a profit of Rs. 10 lakhs each day, Mr. Kuznetsov said. The other projects are Koyali and Barauni oil refineries (each earning an annual profit of Rs. seven crores), Oil and Natural Gas Commission (Rs 23 crores a year) and the Instrumentation Limited at Kotsh (Rs. 1.5 crores to Rs. two crores per annum).

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO AUGUST 8, 1925

Bombay corporation

Bombay, Aug. 7: With reference to the boycott resolution passed by the Bombay Municipal Corporation in March 1923, Mr. Clayton, the Municipal Commissioner, made enquiries regarding the treatment of Indians in New Zealand and Wellington, and in reply, the Minister of Customs in New Zealand authoritatively states that His Majesty’s Indian subjects in the Dominion enjoy (with one exception) all the rights and privileges of citizenship, without any distinction whatever.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Amount released by NEC for development projects in NE region

11.31 In ₹ crore. The North Eastern Council (NEC) said it has released over ₹11 crore during July this year for implementation of development projects across the northeastern region. Among the significant allocations, ₹2.09 crore was released for establishing kiwi orchards. PTI

The operating profit of the Kochi Metro for financial year 2024-25

33.34 In ₹ crore. The Kochi Metro Rail Ltd. announced an operating profit for the financial year 2024-25, marking its third consecutive year of posting a surplus. In a statement, it said the profit rose by ₹10.4 crore compared to the previous financial year. PTI

Number of persons rescued in disaster-hit Uttarkashi so far

274 Rescue operations gathered pace in the disaster-hit Dharali village in Uttarkashi as weather improved and more than 270 people stranded in different locations in the district were evacuated to safety with the help of the IAF's Chinook and Mi-17 helicopters. PTI

Constructions bulldozed by the U.P. govt. in two months

130 The Uttar Pradesh government on Thursday said it had demolished more than a hundred unauthorised constructions, sealed 198 and had served notices to 223 along the Indo-Nepal borders, as part of an ongoing crackdown on illegal encroachments. PTI

Books banned for 'secessionism' in Kashmir

25 Police raided bookshops in Srinagar after authorities issued an order targeting titles said to promote separatist ideologies. The banned list includes works by Arundhati Roy and A.G. Noorani. Critics called the move unconstitutional. AFP

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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Is the Indian economy perfectly balanced?

When real wages stagnate against rising costs and growth disproportionately benefits a select few, and when the government operates under significant fiscal constraints, the promise of a 'just right' economy rings hollow for the common household

ECONOMIC NOTES

Deepanshu Mohan

A few weeks back, India's Finance Ministry declared the Indian economy to be in a "Goldilocks situation" – a rare alignment of moderate growth, subdued inflation and supportive monetary conditions. Analysts too, taking a narrow, quarterly view of the Indian economy conceded, marking this as a "mini-Goldilocks moment" for its macroeconomic position, spurred by 7.6% GDP growth, peaking interest rates and stable corporate earnings. A few other macroeconomic observers pointed out that India exiting FY2024 as a \$3.6 trillion economy with an underlying growth of over 7.6% projects a buoyant macroeconomic backdrop for 2025.

Yet beneath the veneer and hyper-optimistic outlook lies a more complex reality for India's macroeconomic position. More astute observers of the Indian economy with historical data, question this so-called golden equilibrium which disguises underlying structural imbalances.

Inflation and stagnant wage growth

A closer look at Chart 1 reveals a nuanced story behind headline price stability. While the Consumer Price Index (CPI) indeed showed a commendable deceleration, falling from 4.8% in May 2024 to 2.82% by May 2025, hinting at inflation within the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) comfort zone, the path to this point and the underlying dynamics, warrant significant scrutiny.

Throughout much of 2024, the Consumer Food Price Index (CFPI) consistently ran significantly higher than general inflation. For instance, in October 2024, when CPI (General) peaked at 6.21%, CFPI surged to an alarming 10.87%. Even in August 2024, with CPI at 3.65%, CFPI stood at 5.66%. This persistent divergence is critical because food accounts for nearly half of the consumption basket of an average Indian household, particularly within lower-income groups. High and volatile food inflation, driven by factors like unseasonal rains, supply chain disruptions and global commodity price fluctuations, severely erodes the purchasing power of the common citizen.

Economists like Dr. Pronab Sen have argued that policymakers such as the RBI should focus on core inflation rather than headline CPI inflation, because core inflation excludes volatile food and fuel prices and better reflects the sustained burden of price increases across essentials like housing, education, transport, and personal care.

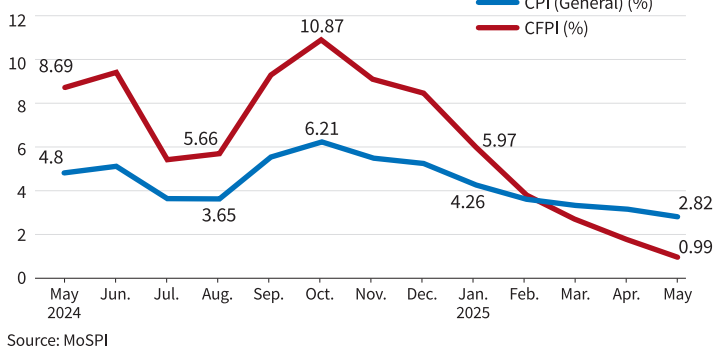
For an average family, the meaning of 10% food inflation is a direct and painful cut in real income, forcing them to either compromise on dietary quality, incur debt or drastically reduce other essential expenditures. The eventual dip in CFPI to 0.99% by May 2025, while welcome, must be viewed in the context of the preceding periods of severe pressure. The volatility itself creates uncertainty and hinders household budgeting and savings, directly countering the stability implied by a "Goldilocks" environment.

This inflationary pressure on essentials directly impacts the everyday reality captured in Chart 2 which delivers one of the most compelling arguments against the "Goldilocks" perception. This data powerfully illustrates the chasm between nominal salary hikes and the actual improvement in purchasing power. For

India's Goldilocks moment

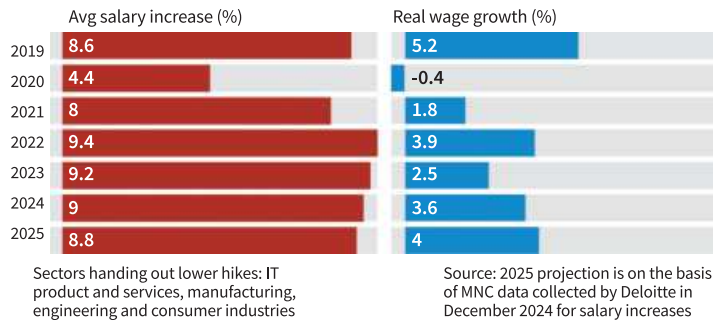
While the number of billionaires in India has surged, real wages for many at the lower end of the income spectrum have remained the same. This persistent inequality can undermine social cohesion

Chart 1: All-India inflation rates: CPI (General) and CFPI (May 2024- May 2025)



Source: MoSPI

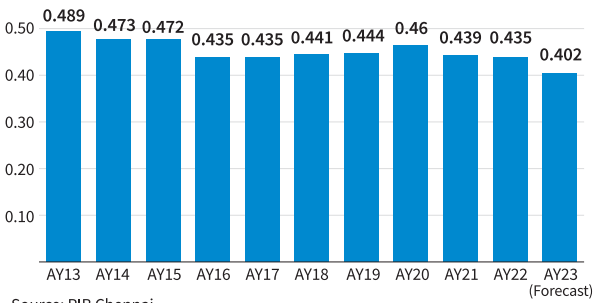
Chart 2: Salary increase vs real wage growth (2019-2025)



Sectors handing out lower hikes: IT product and services, manufacturing, engineering and consumer industries

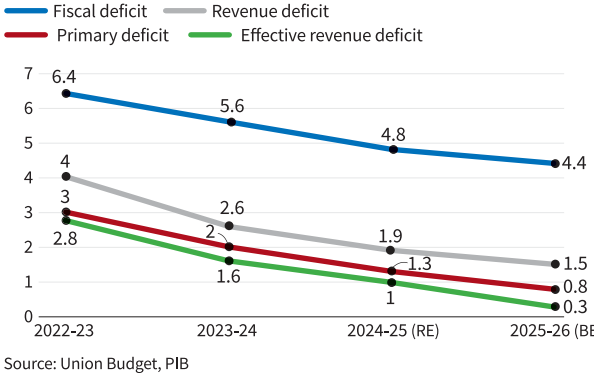
Source: 2025 projection is on the basis of MNC data collected by Deloitte in December 2024 for salary increases

Chart 3: Gini coefficient on taxable income (AY13-AY23F)



Source: PIB Chennai

Chart 4: Trends in fiscal and revenue deficits (% of GDP)



Source: Union Budget, PIB

THE GIST

A few other macroeconomic observers pointed out that India exiting FY2024 as a \$3.6 trillion economy with an underlying growth of over 7.6% projects a buoyant macroeconomic backdrop for 2025.

However, volatile food inflation eroding purchasing power, persistent income disparities despite growth, stagnant real wages for the majority, and a tight fiscal space, paint a picture far more complex than the harmonious "Goldilocks" narrative suggests.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) and various labour economists have consistently pointed out challenges vis-à-vis job quality and stagnant real wages in many emerging economies, including India.

instance, in 2023, while the average salary increase was a respectable 9.2%, the real wage growth stood at a mere 2.5%. More critically, in 2020, real wage growth turned negative, registering -0.4%, even as nominal salaries saw a 4.4% rise. Even the 2025 projection of 4% real wage growth against an 8.8% average salary increase indicates that half of the nominal gain is still being eroded by inflation. This numerical gap translates into a tangible daily struggle. A 9% salary hike sounds promising, but if inflation is 7%, their actual ability to buy goods and services only increases by 2%.

This "silent squeeze" diminishes household savings, forces families to cut back on discretionary spending, and can lead to increased reliance on debt, particularly for those in sectors like IT product and services, manufacturing, engineering, and consumer industries, which usually hand out lower hikes.

Income inequality

The International Labour Organization (ILO) and various labour economists have consistently pointed out challenges vis-à-vis job quality and stagnant real wages in many emerging economies, including India. Without substantial and sustained growth in real wages, the consumption demand, which is a critical driver for the Indian economy, remains constrained, undermining the foundations of a truly buoyant and broad-based economic recovery.

This unevenness in economic gains also finds reflection in Chart 3, which offers a glimpse into income distribution. The Gini coefficient, a measure of inequality, shows fluctuations over the decade, starting at a high of 0.489 in AY13, dipping to 0.435 in AY16, and forecasted at 0.402 for AY23. While a declining Gini coefficient on taxable income might suggest some improvement, it is crucial to recognise the limitations.

Taxable income primarily captures the formal sector and those above a certain income threshold, potentially missing the vast informal sector and the broader distribution of wealth. A recent essay by ORF authors Garima Nain and Ria Kasliwal describe India's post-pandemic

economy as a multi-speed or K-shaped recovery, where certain segments, particularly the affluent and those in specific industries, thrive, while others lag.

While the number of billionaires in India has surged, real wages for many at the lower end of the income spectrum have remained the same. This persistent inequality can undermine social cohesion, limit access to quality education and healthcare for a large segment of the population, and ultimately stifle long-term inclusive growth. When a significant portion of the population feels left behind, despite robust GDP numbers, the notion of a universally beneficial "Goldilocks" state becomes deeply questionable.

Adding to these domestic pressures, Chart 4 showcases the government's fiscal position and its trajectory. While there's a clear commitment to fiscal consolidation, with the fiscal deficit projected to decline from 6.4% in 2022-23 to 4.4% in 2025-26 (budget estimate), and the revenue deficit decreasing from 4% to 1.5% over the same period, the absolute levels of these deficits remain substantial.

The primary deficit, which indicates the current year's borrowing excluding interest payments on past debt, is also projected to fall from 3% to 0.8%. However, for a developing economy like India, sustained high deficits can pose several macroeconomic challenges. They necessitate significant government borrowing, which can potentially crowd out private investment by increasing demand for funds and putting upward pressure on interest rates. This could deter private businesses from investing and expanding, thus limiting job creation and overall economic growth.

Furthermore, a high public debt-to-GDP ratio (which stood at around 81% for the general government in 2022-23, significantly above the fiscal responsibility and budget management Act target of 60%) implies a substantial portion of future revenues will be diverted to servicing this debt. For the average citizen, this translates into reduced fiscal space for critical public spending on social sectors like education,

healthcare, and infrastructure, or potentially higher taxes in the future to manage the debt burden.

Complicating the goldilocks narrative

Taken together, these critical indicators, volatile food inflation eroding purchasing power, persistent income disparities despite growth, stagnant real wages for the majority, and a tight fiscal space, paint a picture far more complex than the harmonious "Goldilocks" narrative suggests. The so-called macro sweet spot is not universally experienced, and therefore, its underlying fragilities are becoming increasingly apparent. The socio-economic realities on the ground, consistently analysed by a broad spectrum of economists, reveal that the journey towards inclusive and sustainable prosperity for all Indians remains an uphill climb.

Indeed, for those willing to look beyond the headlines and delve into the granular data, the myth of the macro sweet spot is cracking open.



The allure of a "Goldilocks" economy, while comforting, risks obscuring the lived realities of millions. True economic equilibrium transcends mere GDP numbers or headline inflation targets; it's fundamentally about how these aggregate statistics translate into tangible improvements in daily lives.

When real wages stagnate against rising costs, when growth disproportionately benefits a select few, and when the government operates under significant fiscal constraints, the promise of a "just right" economy rings hollow for the common household. India's true economic strength will not be defined by fleeting perceptions of balance, but by its capacity to foster genuinely inclusive growth, bolster real incomes, and build robust fiscal resilience for all its citizens. It is in addressing these profound challenges, rather than embracing a superficial sweet spot, that India's sustainable economic future lies.

Deepanshu Mohan is Professor of Economics and Dean, O.P.Jindal Global University (JGU) and Visiting Professor, London School of Economics (LSE). Ankur Singh contributed to this column.

How social media campaigns shaped the 2024 Lok Sabha elections

LOKNITI-CSDS SURVEY

Table 1: Focus of the campaign songs									
Party	Tone(%)			Main focus	Catchy phrases used				
	+	-	Neutral						
BJP	92	1	7	■ Praising Modi	■ <i>Modi hai to mumkin hai</i> ■ <i>Modi ki guarantee</i> ■ <i>Ab aaya hai Ram Raj</i>				
				■ Developmental works carried out by the NDA government					
				■ Visuals of Modi with global leaders					
				■ Leadership qualities of Modi, Amit Shah and Yogi Adityanath in both national and global sphere					
				■ Winning the 2024 elections					
Cong.	67	14	19	■ Historical legacy of Congress	■ <i>Indira-Rajiv ne desh ke khatir jaan gawayi</i> ■ <i>Nehru si soch hai</i> ■ <i>Desh ki dhadkan</i> ■ <i>Rahul, har behen ka bhai</i> ■ <i>Rahul, Bharat ki takdeer</i> ■ <i>Rahul Gandhi hu mai, neta nahi desh ka beta</i> ■ <i>Rahul Gandhi is shown as a protector of democracy</i>				
				■ Visuals and lyrics glorifying Indira Gandhi, Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, Rajiv Gandhi, and Sonia Gandhi					
				■ Visuals of Rahul Gandhi especially from Bharat Jodo Yatra					
				■ Visuals highlighting the sensitive, humble, and understanding nature of Rahul Gandhi					
				■ Rahul Gandhi is shown as a protector of democracy					
				Table 2: Representation in visuals and lyrics					
				Target Group		Visual representation		Representation in lyrics	
						BJP	INC	BJP	INC
				Women		15	16	20	12
				Youth		11	14	8	17
Hindus	7	1	28	3					
Muslims	2	2	1	3					
Elderly	10	8	2	2					
Farmers	9	6	14	13					
Poor	3	2	NIL						
Rural	9	11	NIL						
Urban	9	14	NIL						
Students	7	10	NIL	2					
Others	18	16	27	48					
Note: NIL represents the fact that references to these demographics were absent. All figures are in per cent.									
Table 3: Themes addressed in campaign songs									
Theme	Representation in campaign songs (%)								
	BJP	INC							
Leadership/persona	44	18							
Accomplishments	35	2							
Social justice/ equality	2	6							
Policy proposals/ vision	2	19							
Attack against the opposition	1	22							
Need for change/ reform	1	17							
Other	15	16							
									
Table 4: Display of religious connotations									
Religious Connotations (%)	Yes	No							
BJP	72	28							
INC	10	90							
Table 5: Religious motifs									
Religious motifs	Representation in videos (%)								
	BJP	INC							
Temples/religious buildings	37	43							
Slogans/chants	15	<0							
Priests/religious clerics	11	29							
Other	37	28							
Note: All figures are rounded off.									
Table 6: List of third-party campaigners and the corresponding number of advertisements posted as well as money spent									
Name	Number of ads	Money spent (in million/₹)	Funder(s)*						
Ama Chinha Sankha Chinha	1,800	73	Ama Chinha Sankha Chinha						
Ellorum Nammudam	859	22	Populus Empowerment Network Private Limited/ Ellorum Nammudan/ DMK/ J Arunkumar						
Phir Ek Baar Modi Sarkar	1,173	16	Phir Ek Baar Modi Sarkar/ phirekbaarmodisarkar.com						
Mahathugbandhan	608	10	Mahathugbandhan						
(Our Modi)	1,966	10	manamodi.com						
Modi Sang Bihar	1,379	8	http://modisangnitish.com/ Modi Sang Bihar / 2020 Modi Sang Nitish						
Meme Hub	256	8	Memes Xpress						
Kharge Fan Club	793	7	Kharge Fan Club/ INC						
Tamilakam	463	7	Tamilakam - Ulta Chashmaa						
Political X-Ray	361	6	Ulta Chashmaa/ Political X Ray						
Ketedina Sahibaa?	1,390	6	Ketedina Sahibaa?						
Stalinin Kural	166	6	Populus Empowerment Network Private Limited						
Amaar Sonar Bangla	147	5	Ulta Chashmaa						
Hirak Rani Bye Bye	2,247	5	Hirak Rani Bye Stalinian						
Subarna Odisha	387	5	Subarna Odisha						
Sidha Chashma	110	4	Sidha Chashma						
Questioning Telangana	1,091	4	PrashnithunnaTelangana.com						
Mudde ki Baat	244	4	Mudde Ki Baat						
Punithare Modi	1,483	3	Punithare Modi						
Trinamoole Nabo Jowar	91	3	Trinamoole Nabo Jowar						
CM Ramesh	244	2	Aadhan Media Pvt Ltd/ Vyuhah Consulting						
Jagananna Suraksha	95	2	Jagane Kavali						
Malabar Central	114	2	Malabar Central/ Ulta Chashmaa						
Memu Siddham Maa Booth Siddham	27	1	Jaganna Tho Siddham						
Jagane Kavali	80	1	Jagane Kavali						
Maaveeran Modi	259	1	Maaveeran Modi						
Jagananna Kosam Siddham	27	1	Jagananna Tho Siddham						
MemeXpress	80	1	Ulta Chashmaa/ Memes Xpress						
Memantha Siddham	24	1	Jaganannatho Siddham						
Jagananna ki Thoduga	39	1	Jagan Anna Ki Thodunga						
Mansoor Khan Fan Club	163	1							
Source: Meta Ad Library									
Source: Meta Ad library. Note: The data of money spent pertains to a 90-day period ending on June 29, 2024. This timeline was selected as it is one of the default options available on the Library. The amount spent is rounded off.									
* Entities/individuals funding the third-party campaigners.									
Table 7: Amount of money spent on ads by third-party campaigners									
Range of money spent (in ₹)		%							
0-5,000	45								
5,001-10,000	7								
10,001-50,000	20								
50,001-1,00,000	13								
Above 1,00,000	15								
Table 8: Impressions on ads posted by third-party campaigners									
Range of impressions		%							
0-1,00,000	27								
1,00,001-5,00,000	26								
5,00,001-1M	9								
Above 1M	38								
Table 9: Relationship between tone and impressions of third-party ads									
Tone	Impressions								
	0-1,00,000	1,00,001-5,00,000	5,00,001-1M	Above 1M					
Negative (total 64%)	23	24	7	46					
Positive (total 33)	35	27	12	26					
Neutral (Ttotal 3%)	23	49	11	17					
Note: All figures are in per cent.									
Table 11: Content posted by *SSMIs and **CSMIs				Note: All figures are in per cent. Percentages may exceed 100 as the data is based on a multi-response question. *Supportive social media influencer **Critical social media influencer					
CSMI	(%)	SSMI	(%)						
Leaders	52	Leaders	47						
Elections	26	INDI Alliance	42						
Controversies	23	Hindu/Muslim	17						
Institutions	17	Controversies	17						
INDI Alliance	10	Elections	16						

Lokniti-CSDS team*

The recently released report by Lokniti-CSDS provides a data-driven analysis of digital platforms' role in 2024 elections, showing how they complemented traditional door-to-door efforts in mobilising voters. This is Part 2 of the study.

Campaign songs are increasingly vital tools for political communication, offering a catchy and accessible medium to amplify candidates' messages and mobilise voters. This study analysed 150 YouTube campaign songs – 80 supporting the Congress and 70 the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) – uploaded between January 1 and April 10, 2024. These two parties were selected due to their nationwide presence and high digital output. Songs were chosen through stratified sampling from a master list created via keyword-based YouTube searches. Sampling was done from different sources: official party channels, candidates' channels, and independent supporter channels, with attention to diversity in engagement levels and channel size. Songs were manually coded using a structured codebook covering themes, tone, references, mobilisation cues, and production styles. Most songs were sourced from independent channels (89% for INC, 81% for BJP), with fewer uploads from official party or candidate accounts. This methodology allowed the study to analyse both official messaging and grassroots, decentralised narratives, including more fringe or extreme perspectives, especially with respect to content from the BJP's supporter base.

BJP songs centred on Prime Minister Modi, projecting trust and continuity. Religious references ("Ram," "temple," "saffron") underscored Hindutva appeals, particularly around the Ram Temple. Nationalist themes were prominent, with

terms such as "Bharat Mata," "Kashmir," and "enemy" being commonly used. Economic themes appeared via words like "guarantee," "farmer," and "poor," while "victory" and "wave" conveyed momentum and confidence. The Congress's songs highlighted leadership through frequent mentions of "Gandhi," "Rahul," and "Priyanka." Core themes included justice, rights, and systemic change, signalling a focus on equity. Words like "hope" and "save country" framed the campaign as reformist.

Catch-phrases and narratives

A lyrical and word cloud analysis reveals distinct strategies by the BJP and Congress. BJP songs focused on Mr. Modi, with slogans like "*Modi hai to mumkin hai*", "*Modi ki guarantee*", and "*Aayega to Modi hi*" linking him to progress and stability. Direct attacks on opponents were rare (Table 1). Congress songs highlighted Rahul Gandhi and the party's legacy with phrases like "*Desh ki dhadkan Rahul*" and "*Nehru si soch hai*", portraying him as a modern visionary. Emotional appeals referencing sacrifice, such as "*Indira-Rajiv ne jaan gawayi*", sought to inspire loyalty and continuity. Unlike BJP, Congress songs contained direct criticism, with lines like "*Loktantra ka bhediya*" and "*Jhutho se desh bachana hai*", framing the ruling party as a threat to democracy. Both the BJP and the Congress employed campaign songs to engage key voter groups, emphasising distinct priorities. BJP's lyrics highlighted Hindu identity, women, and farmers, whereas Congress focused more on youth, women, and minority inclusion. Visual content reinforced these themes, with Congress giving greater prominence to urban, rural, and student populations (Table 2). Moreover, BJP songs heavily highlighted past achievements (35%), showcasing governance successes, while the Congress focused on future promises

and reforms (Table 3). Calls for change (17%) and themes of social justice (6%) appeared more prominently in Congress's messaging, aligning with its opposition role. Congress also directly critiqued the ruling party in 22% of its songs; BJP rarely engaged in this (1%).

Religious connotations were prominent in BJP's songs (72%), reflecting Hindu nationalist themes and featuring symbolic references to Ram Mandir and slogans such as "Jai Shree Ram." Unofficial songs were more overtly communal. In contrast, only 10% of Congress songs contained religious themes, reflecting a more pluralistic communication style (Table 4). While BJP's religious messaging was largely rhetorical, the Congress leaned more on visual representation. Religious imagery appeared in 43% of the Congress's videos compared to 37% of the BJP's. The Congress also featured religious clerics more prominently (29% versus BJP's 11%), signalling efforts to engage multiple faith communities (Table 5).

On third-party campaigners

Third-party campaigners, including individuals, political consultancies, and advocacy groups, have gained significant influence in the digital age, shaping electoral dynamics through targeted advertisements on platforms like Meta (formerly Facebook). These entities, which do not field candidates, often campaign for or against specific parties, candidates, or issues. In India, third-party campaigners invest heavily in digital ads, sometimes bypassing political finance and content regulations. This unregulated spending raises concerns about transparency and accountability, suggesting potential collusion with political parties. Their growing role underscores the need for stronger oversight in modern electoral campaigns.

The Lokniti-CSDS study focuses on digital campaigning by third-party

advertisers on Meta (formerly Facebook) during the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. Conducted over the critical months of April and May 2024, the study also focused on identifying the top

Second Chance

The dramatic collapse of Sheikh Hasina’s government on August 5 last year followed by the installation of a caretaker administration under Muhammad Yunus has ushered Bangladesh into uncharted political territory. A year after the student-led uprising that drove Sheikh Hasina into exile, the country finds itself perched on the edge of democratic reinvention, or yet another cycle of political turmoil. The announcement of elections in February 2026, while symbolically powerful, raises fundamental questions about the readiness of Bangladesh’s institutions, the sincerity of the new political order, and the ghosts of a repressive past that continue to cast long shadows. The scale and intensity of the youth-led protests that forced the fall of a 15-year-old regime surprised many, but the grievances fuelling them had been simmering for years. Widespread allegations of state repression, enforced disappearances, and crony authoritarianism under Sheikh Hasina’s Awami League had hollowed out public trust. The tipping point, sparked by a quota system seen as deeply unfair, morphed into a nationwide demand for accountability in governance and civil liberties. The caretaker government’s commitment to enshrining this movement in the constitution through the so-called “July Declaration” appears to be a nod to this mass mobilisation ~ but whether it is more than a symbolic gesture remains to be seen. The sheer scale of youth participation signalled a generational shift, not just in leadership demands, but in the political imagination of Bangladesh itself. This was no ordinary transfer of power. Muhammad Yunus’s promise of inclusivity and reform has earned cautious optimism from a fractured opposition. The presence of key political blocs on stage during his election announcement ~ the BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami, and the student-led NCP ~ reflects a rare convergence. Yet this unity is brittle. Many of these actors carry their own histories of intolerance and opportunism. Bangladesh’s political culture is marked by swings between absolutism and chaos, and the lack of institutional maturity has made every transition vulnerable to relapse. What remains especially delicate is the handling of transitional justice. The new government has committed to prosecuting abuses committed under the previous regime, including charges against Sheikh Hasina herself. Yet, without a clear and credible process, ideally one independent of political influence, the risk is high that justice will be seen as retribution. Moreover, hundreds of Awami League supporters reportedly remain detained without trial, echoing the same human rights failures the new order claims to repudiate. India, as Bangladesh’s closest neighbour and strategic partner, must observe these developments with measured engagement. While political stability is in India’s interest, so too is the emergence of a truly democratic Bangladesh. A facade of change will not suffice. The road to February 2026 offers a rare chance to reset the republic. But to succeed, Bangladesh must go beyond toppling personalities and pursue real structural reform. Liberation slogans may rally crowds, but lasting freedom will require building institutions that outlast their founders.

Justice or Closure?

Seventeen years after the Malegaon blast shook Maharashtra and scarred a community, a special court has acquitted all seven accused in a verdict that is as legally final as it is socially inconclusive. Among those cleared of all charges are high-profile figures once at the centre of national headlines. The court has cited lack of direct evidence, procedural inconsistencies, and unreliable witness testimonies. But for those who lost loved ones in the explosion ~ or lived under the shadow of suspicion ~ the ruling brings neither closure nor clarity. At the heart of this case lies a deeper crisis: the erosion of public faith in institutional processes that are expected to deliver justice impartially. More than 300 witnesses were examined during the trial, and at least 34 turned hostile. The investigation changed hands from the state ATS to the NIA. Some accused were initially given a clean chit, only to face trial later under serious charges. When a case proceeds like this for nearly two decades, doubt naturally shifts from the individuals involved to the system itself. The court has rightfully pointed out that justice must be based on cogent evidence, not moral conjecture or public perception. In the rule of law, the burden of proof rests squarely on the prosecution, and the presumption of innocence is not negotiable. However, what happens when the prosecution itself appears hesitant or inconsistent? When key testimonies are withdrawn or altered? When investigators deliver conflicting narratives? In such a vacuum, the truth ~ whatever it may have been ~ disintegrates, leaving only a trail of ambiguity. The silence surrounding the institutional lapses in this case reflects a deeper unwillingness to confront uncomfortable truths ~ about bias, inefficiency, and the slow decay of prosecutorial integrity in high-stakes trials. The Malegaon case was one of the first to bring allegations of right-wing extremism into the spotlight. That it ended without a single conviction, despite the gravity of the accusations, raises troubling questions about the balance between national security and political sensitivity. Were legal standards compromised in the heat of public discourse? Or was the entire case inflated beyond evidentiary support? We cannot ignore the symbolic weight this verdict now carries. It may be seen by some as vindication, by others as betrayal. Either way, it has rekindled debates on how terrorism cases are pursued, framed, and, ultimately, remembered in India. If the state cannot establish culpability in such a high-profile case, how will it fare in less visible ones? For the families of the victims, the legal process may have ended, but the emotional trial endures. They are now left to contemplate appeals, with limited faith in a system that has already consumed nearly two decades of their lives. This verdict should not be viewed as the end of a case, but as the beginning of a reckoning ~ about our investigative standards, prosecutorial accountability, and the true cost of justice delayed.

Far from Dead

‘Dead economy?’ The numbers say otherwise. India is the world’s fourth-largest economy and is on track to become the third-largest by 2028. We are clocking towards a growth rate of 6.8 per cent, with the IMF revising next year’s forecast upward to 6.4 per cent. India is the fastest-growing major economy, far outpacing the US and other developed nations. Foreign capital continues to surge in, with India rising to 15th in global FDI rankings and drawing investment from over 110 countries. Inflation remains contained at around 3 per cent



Recently, some voices have claimed that India is a “dead economy,” a statement both puzzling and detached from the facts. To label a nation sprinting ahead with such vigour as fallen is to misunderstand the race it is running. Let us look closer at the reality behind the rhetoric. “Dead economy”? The numbers say otherwise. India is the world’s fourth-largest economy and is on track to become the third-largest by 2028. We are clocking towards a growth rate of 6.8 per cent, with the IMF revising next year’s forecast upward to 6.4 per cent.

India is the fastest-growing major economy, far outpacing the US and other developed nations. Foreign capital continues to surge in, with India rising to 15th in global FDI rankings and drawing investment from over 110 countries. Inflation remains contained at around 3 per cent.

The real pulse of India’s transformation, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi has often asserted, is the collective ambition and work ethic of its people. Indians often understate their achievements, yet they are building the dreams of 1.4 billion people ~ more than four times the US population. India maintains the world’s second-largest road network, expanding highways by 60 per cent in last ten years.

The railway system is now the fourth-largest globally and has doubled its capacity. Our logistics outperform even advanced economies ~ container dwell time is just three days compared to seven in the US,

and port turnaround time is a minuscule 0.9 days, beating Singapore and Australia.

Metro rail systems have expanded from five cities to over twenty-two. Central infrastructure spending has soared from Rs 2.5 lakh crore in 2014 to Rs 11.1 lakh crore in 2024~25, reflecting a nation-building commitment of extraordinary scale.

This momentum is rooted in a hard-won shift from a colonial legacy that left India economically hollowed out.

Today, India is no longer fragile. Annual service exports exceed \$340 billion, while manufacturing’s share of GDP rises steadily, driven by advanced engineering and electronics. India makes iPhones for the world, is renowned as “the Pharmacy of the World” supplying 20 per cent of global generic drugs, and has developed a world-class indigenous defence sector.

With over 1.5 lakh startups ~ including 110+ unicorns ~ India is the third-largest startup ecosystem globally and is home to the second-highest number of R&D centres among Fortune 500 companies. These are signs of ascent, not decline.

Progress is firmly anchored in the rural heartland. Agriculture, the backbone of the economy for centuries, is seeing record output and technological transformation.

India leads globally in milk,

pulses, and jute, and is the largest rice exporter. This strength is matched by a leap in government support, with the agri-budget rising from Rs 11,915 crore in 2008-09 to Rs 1.2 lakh crore in 2024-25.

Legal and regulatory reforms have further fuelled India’s rise. Since 2014, the Ease of Doing Business ranking has climbed by 79 places, reflecting improved governance.

Over 180 business offences have been decriminalised, and 29 labour laws merged into four streamlined codes. Skill India has trained over 1.4 crore youth and reskilled 54 lakh, generating 17.1 crore new jobs from 2014 to 2024.

The unemployment rate has dropped from 6 per cent to 3.2 per cent, and youth employability has soared from 34 per cent to 55 per cent. More than 4.7 crore young Indians have found formal employment as per the Employees’ Provident Fund Organisation numbers since 2017.

The transformation extends into the digital realm. India leads the world in per-user mobile data usage, averaging 32 GB per month ~ almost 50 per cent higher than North America, at the world’s lowest rates. The IMF recognises India as the leader in rapid digital payments, with the Unified Payments Interface handling

over 18 billion transactions monthly, now expanding internationally. The Aadhaar biometric ID system has enabled over 154 billion authentications and underpins efficient service delivery. India already commands a 10.2 per cent share of global IT and telecom exports.

On sustainability, India’s clean energy revolution is in full swing. Solar capacity has expanded 30-fold to over 100 GW in 2025.

Electric vehicle sales rose from 95,000 in 2018 to over 1.6 million in 2024, with signature programmes like the National Green Hydrogen Mission and E20 fuel blending. As the Prime Minister repeatedly emphasises, clean and inclusive growth is at the heart of his government’s vision.

India’s growth is also lifting others. With forex reserves topping \$680 billion, India has shifted from being an aid recipient to a donor nation. Since 2000, it has provided over \$48 billion in assistance to more than 65 countries, building infrastructure and partnerships. During the pandemic, India distributed over 240 million vaccine doses to nearly 100 countries.

When Sri Lanka faced economic collapse, India was the first to respond with \$4 billion in urgent aid. India quietly supports neighbours during disasters and crises, contrasting a so-called “dead economy” with the footprint of a trusted, rising power. To any true Indian swayed by criticism, remember: you are part of a thriving, determined, and rising nation ~ not a dying one.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

editor@thestatesman.com

Prepare better

Sir, Every year during the monsoon season, several states in India face disasters like floods. Recently, a devastating flood in Uttarakhand caused widespread destruction.

In the Himalayan regions of North India, floods lead to thousands of people losing their homes, lives, and cause a heavy burden on the economy.

This situation is not only due to natural causes but also reflects the failure of human planning and strategy. Therefore, a comprehensive and forward-looking flood management system is extremely necessary for the country.

In India, the frequency and

intensity of floods have been increasing year after 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.

In such circumstances, 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 the India Meteorological Department

(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 ~ people must be educated about what actions to take during a flood. Training and mock drills should be organized through schools and community centers to spread awareness.

Floods are natural disasters, but they become catastrophic only when we are not prepared in advance. The time has come for us to approach floods with a scientific mindset.

Yours, etc., Dr Jitesh Mori,
Kutch, 6 August.



New peace plan increases pressure on Israel, US

A new vision for Middle East peace emerged last week which proposes the withdrawal of Israel from Gaza and the West Bank, the disarming and disbanding of Hamas and the creation of a unified Palestinian state. The plan emerged from a “high-level conference” in New York on July 29, which assembled representatives of 17 states, the European Union and the Arab League. The resulting proposal is “a comprehensive and actionable framework for the implementation of the two-state solution and the achievement of peace and security for all”. Signatories include Turkey and the Middle Eastern states of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Egypt and Jordan. Europe was represented by France, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Spain and the United Kingdom. Indonesia was there for Asia, Senegal for Africa and Brazil, Canada and Mexico for the Americas. Neither the United States nor Israel were present.

Significantly, it is the first time the Arab states have called for Hamas to disarm and disband. But, while condemning Hamas’s attack on Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, and recalling that the taking of hostages is a violation of international law, the document is unsparing in its connection between a state of Palestine and an end to Israel’s assault on Gaza’s

The Jakarta Post

civilians. It says: “Absent decisive measures toward the two-state solution and robust international guarantees, the conflict will deepen and regional peace will remain elusive.” A plan for the reconstruction of Gaza will be developed by the Arab states and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation supported by an international fund. The details will be hammered out at a Gaza Reconstruction and Recovery Conference, to be held in Cairo. It is a bold initiative. In theory, it could end the Israeli mass killing in Gaza, remove Hamas from power and begin the implementation of a process for a state of Palestine. The question is whether it has any chance of success. First, there appears to be growing momentum to press ahead with recognition of the state of Palestine as part of a comprehensive peace plan leading to a two-state solution. France, the UK and, most recently, Canada have announced they would take that step at the UN general assembly in September. The UK stated that it would do so unless Israel agreed to a ceasefire and the commencement of a substantive peace process. These announcements follow those made in May 2024 by Spain, Ireland and Norway, three of the other European signatories. By the end of September at least 150 of the UN’s 193 members will recognize Palestinian statehood. Recognition is largely symbolic without a ceasefire and Israeli withdrawal from both Gaza and the West Bank. But it is essential symbolism.

UNPARDONABLE

Sir, This is in response to the news report titled “Mamata slams Delhi police’s ‘insult’ to Bengali language” (August 4). Referring to Bengali as the “Bangladeshi language”, the authorities prove their utmost ignorance, indifference and of course hatred towards Bangladesh, West Bengal, Bengalis, Muslims and the Bangla language as a whole. There neither exists any language named “Bangladeshi” nor are Bangla speakers necessarily Bangladeshis!

It is simply a disgrace and an unpardonable offence to treat

BULLYING

Sir, 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 the time the world called out this reckless behavior masquerading as policy. The Centre should respond strategically, not emotionally and it should protect India’s sovereign trade rights.

Yours, etc., Dr. Vijaykumar H K,
Raichur, 6 August.



Rivers have a right to flow

GIRIJA K BHARAT AND S K SARKAR

Floods have been part of the natural rhythm of riverine ecosystems for centuries. However, with rising urbanization, unregulated development, and outdated flood management strategies, the damage caused by floods has intensified - posing severe threats to human lives, infrastructure, and the environment. Rather than attempting to control nature, it is time to reframe our approach to floods: from flood control to flood resilience. This paradigm shift requires recognizing rivers as living systems with their own rights and aligning our development strategies with ecological wisdom.

At the heart of flood resilience is the recognition that rivers are not mere conduits of water to be channelized or obstructed at will. A river has the right to flow, the right to meander, and the right to meet the sea. These are not abstract ecological ideals but essential processes for maintaining sediment transport, water quality, and the ecological integrity of aquatic life. When rivers are forced into rigid channels through embankments or dammed extensively, their natural processes are disrupted. The denial of these rights leads to increased sedimentation upstream, waterlogging in surrounding areas, and intensification of flood risks downstream. Embracing the natural behavior of rivers is the first step toward true flood resilience.

Since Independence, India's flood policy has been centered on large dams, embankments, and other hard infrastructure. While these structures were initially seen as solutions to protect life and property, decades of evidence now show that such approaches have often exacerbated the problems they sought to solve. Dams disrupt natural flow regimes, embankments often breach during high floods, and flood-prone regions have continued to suffer heavy losses year after year. In contrast, a flood-resilient approach focuses on coexistence. It promotes adaptive infrastructure, community awareness, and livelihood systems that can withstand or recover quickly from floods. This includes stilt housing, floating agriculture, flood-resilient crops, and early warning systems.

One of the key drivers of flood-related disasters in urban and semi-urban areas is unregulated development on floodplains and riverbanks.

These regions are natural buffers that absorb excess water during floods. When they are occupied by construction, commercial ventures, or encroachments, the water has nowhere to go - leading to flash floods and prolonged inundation. Clear zoning laws must be enforced to prevent construction on these sensitive areas. Riverfront development should prioritize ecological restoration over real estate expansion. Urban planning authorities must be mandated to treat rivers and their floodplains as protected ecological assets, not empty land waiting for development.

Modern urbanization, especially in metropolitan areas, has ignored the natural pathways of rivers and stormwater. In both rural and urban areas, traditional water bodies like ponds, lakes, wetlands, and tanks have historically acted as natural sponges, absorbing excess rainwater and helping regulate groundwater levels. Protecting, rejuvenating, and integrating these water bodies into flood management systems is crucial. In cities, this may include creating decentralized rainwater harvesting parks, urban wetlands, and blue-green infrastructure that slows and stores floodwater.

Floods cannot be managed in isolation. They must be addressed at the river basin scale, considering the entire network of tributaries, catchment areas, wetlands, and human interventions. A River Basin Master Plan, based on hydrology, ecology, climate risks, and socio-economic dimensions should guide all river-related decisions. This integrated plan can help restore degraded rivers, enhance groundwater recharge, reduce flood risks, and ensure water security. It must involve participation from all Riparian states, local communities, and experts.

Diversions of river flows for irrigation, industry, or urban water supply must be tightly regulated. While such diversions may serve short-term needs, they often deprive downstream ecosystems and communities of their share, increasing flood risks during sudden releases or breaches. A transparent water allocation system based on ecological flow requirements, equitable distribution, and scientific assessment must replace ad-hoc diversions.

The National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) and National Institute



of Urban Affairs (NIUA) have launched the River-City Alliance (RCA), which aims to bring together city administrations and river management authorities to promote sustainable urban-river relationships. All urban centres near rivers should become part of this alliance and adopt integrated approaches to river health, flood risk management, and community engagement. Such platforms foster innovation, peer learning, and scalable best practices.

The Urban River Management Plan (URMP) in India is a strategic initiative under NMCG-NIUA aimed at integrating river health into urban planning. It promotes sustainable, river-sensitive development by addressing pollution, encroachments, and degraded riverfronts. URMP emphasizes rejuvenation of urban rivers through ecological restoration, protection of floodplains, wastewater treatment, and community engagement. Cities are encouraged to prepare URMPs to align infrastructure, land use, and governance with river conservation goals. This initiative supports climate resilience, biodiversity, and livability, ensuring Indian cities coexist harmoniously with their rivers.

Floods in India cannot always be fully prevented, as they are natural events. Some of the technological interventions that can greatly reduce their frequency, intensity, and impact of floods are:

- Advanced flood forecasting and early warning systems, such as:

Satellite-based monitoring, Doppler weather radars, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) to analyze data and community-level alerts through SMS, mobile apps, and sirens.

- River basin and reservoir management using real-time reservoir operation systems (RT-ROMS) to adjust dam releases based on incoming rainfall and downstream capacity, Hydrological modeling software like MIKE-FLOOD or HEC-RAS for better water release planning.
- Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping for flood-prone areas, catchments, and urban drainage networks. This helps planners avoid construction on floodplains and improve zoning laws and identifies vulnerable populations and infrastructure for targeted interventions.
- Drones in post-flood damage assessment and real-time monitoring of river embankments and breaches. Remote Sensing is used for tracking changes in river courses, sedimentation, and encroachments over time.
- Blue-Green infrastructure and design have permeable pavements, green roofs, and rain gardens in cities to reduce surface runoff and smart stormwater drainage systems equipped with sensors to reduce urban flooding.
- River Information Systems (RIS) for real-time digital systems tracking

river flow, rainfall, dam discharge, and flood alerts. These are decision support tools for authorities for coordinated response and disaster preparedness.

- Crowd-sourced data and mobile apps for citizens to report water-logging or rising water levels via flood-reporting apps. This feeds into centralized monitoring systems and helps enhance data coverage and rapid response.

Flood resilience is not about building higher walls or bigger dams. It is about building harmony between humans and rivers. It means designing cities that breathe, restoring nature's own infrastructure, and empowering communities with knowledge and tools to adapt. While floods cannot be entirely prevented, integrating technological tools into flood management policies, urban planning, and community response mechanisms can significantly reduce damage and save lives. For a flood-resilient India, technology must go hand-in-hand with ecological wisdom and sustainable planning. By recognizing the rights of rivers and shifting our focus from controlling floods to coexisting with them, we can create a future where floods are no longer disasters, but part of a resilient and thriving ecological cycle.

(The writers are, respectively, Managing Director, Mu Gamma Consultants, Gurugram, and Distinguished Fellow, TERI and Former Secretary, Ministry of Water Resources, Govt. of India.)

100 YEARS AGO

OCCASIONAL NOTE

THERE have been troubles in French Syria ever since 1820 owing to the activities of Nationalist Turks and Syrian Arabs. The present disturbances do not seem to be as serious as those which resulted in the temporary loss to the French of the important town of Aintab. On this occasion the revolt is confined to what is known as the Jebel el Druse, a district once under the control of the Government of Damascus, but now under French supervision, the Emir Abdulla being apparently only too pleased to be rid of the task of governing a "sanjak" which is reputed to contain more brigands to the square mile than any other part of the world. Unlike Arabs generally the Bedouin of the Jebel el Druse do not confine their raiding habits to their own territories but are accustomed to wander far afield. The building of the Hedjaz railway has provided them with opportunities of holding up trains, in the Wild West fashion, at stations many miles apart. On one occasion they held up a train in which were travelling the Syrian Prime Minister, the Minister of the Interior, and the President of the Council of State, murdering all three, their chief object being loot. The French press, it is to be noted, inclines to the view that the present rising is not connected with Arab nationalist aspirations.

NEWS ITEMS

'SOVIETIZING' IN CHINA

ATTEMPT TO DESTROY COMMERCE

HONG-KONG, AUG. 5.

A MEETING of workers in Canton has passed a resolution declaring that the really effective method of fighting Imperialists is to strike, which is far more powerful from the point of view of results than the boycott is.

"A strike will tie up the shipping and business. We are certain of victory, because we hold the life of Hong-Kong in our hands."

A meeting of Chinese merchants at Hong-Kong passed a resolution protesting against the enforcement of Bolshevik measures by the de facto Government of Canton. The meeting declared that the measures were aimed at the destruction of commerce by cutting off the supplies of food from Canton to Hong-Kong as a preliminary to "Sovietizing" the area under their rule.—Reuter.

ARAB REVOLT IN SYRIA

MOROCCO DANGER

It is persistently reported that French troops have suffered a serious reverse in an engagement with rebel Druses in Syria, and that the Druses have captured Suedia, the French seat of Government, along with guns, aeroplanes, and munitions of war.

The statement is also made that the situation in Morocco has recently been much more perilous to France than has been officially admitted. Positions Were lost daily and there were numerous defections on the part of the tribesmen.

The danger in Morocco now is diplomatic, and the only way to deal with Abdel Krim (it is said) is to end all negotiations.

RUBBER OUTPUT RESTRICTIONS

BRITISH FIRMS URGE MODIFICATION

LONDON, AUG. 7.

A MANIFESTO signed by fourteen rubber manufacturing firms has been issued. It urges the Government to consider the immediate modification of the Stevenson restriction scheme. It estimates that at present less than four months' world-consumption of rubber is in stock; while it is generally acknowledged that the normal stocks are eight months' consumption.

The Stevenson scheme provides for the extra release of the maximum of 80,000 tons a year, which is equivalent to only two months' supply at the present rate of consumption.

Unless the scheme is modified the result will be a growing acute shortage of supplies for a few years, which will be naturally and gradually terminated by greater supplies from countries outside the Empire from estates financed by foreign interests.—Reuter.

FRONTIER MARAUDERS

MAHSUDS RAID BANNU VILLAGE

PESHAWAR, AUG. 7.

NEWS is received from Bannu that the Jani Khel khassadars of the Nikors Post were somewhat roughly handled by a large gang of Shabi Khel Mahsuds.

The Mahsuds attempted to drive off the cattle of Malikshahi village which were grazing over the border. The khassadars went in support of the villagers, but were out-numbered and partially surrounded.

They lost two men killed and two captured before they succeeded in re-covering the cattle. The captured men were released the next morning.

When time is of the essence

NILAVA BANDHOPADHYA
AND ADHIP RAY

In the fast-paced world of infrastructure delays can lead to spiraling costs, missed deadlines, and even the collapse of major projects. When disputes arise - over payments, project delays, or contract breaches, parties often need urgent relief to protect their interests. Traditionally, this meant turning to the courts, but the process can be slow and cumbersome. Enter emergency arbitration: a modern solution that is rapidly changing the landscape of dispute resolution in India's infrastructure sector.

What is Emergency Arbitration? Emergency arbitration is a process that allows parties to seek urgent, temporary relief from an "emergency arbitrator", before the main arbitral tribunal is formed. This is particularly useful in situations where waiting for the full formation of the main tribunal may take time and therefore, could result in irreparable harm. The emergency arbitrator can grant orders like injunctions, asset freezes, or directions to maintain the status quo, typically within days.

Emergency arbitration internationally gained traction in the early

2000s, with institutions like the International Centre for Dispute Resolution (ICDR) and the Singapore International Arbitration Centre (SIAC) introducing emergency arbitration provisions.

In India, however, the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996 does not provide for emergency arbitration. The Law Commission of India in its 246th Report (2014) recommended amending the Act to include emergency arbitrators, but this suggestion was not adopted in subsequent legislative amendments.

While the Arbitration Act remains silent on emergency arbitration, the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India played a pivotal role in shaping its legal status with the landmark decision in Amazon.Com NV Investment Holdings LLC v. Future Retail Ltd., (2022) 1 SCC 209, by holding that orders passed by an emergency arbitrator in an India-seated arbitration are enforceable under Section 17(2) of the Arbitration Act, treating them as equivalent to interim orders of a regular arbitral tribunal.

Thereafter, major Indian arbitral institutions such as the Mumbai Centre for International Arbitration and the Delhi International Arbitration Centre have also incorporated emer-

gency arbitration into their rules, requiring the entire emergency arbitration process to be completed within 14 days.

Infrastructure projects - roads, bridges, power plants, and more - are often high-value, complex, and time-sensitive. Disputes can arise over payments, performance, or unforeseen events. For instance, if a contractor threatens to walk off a project or a government agency seeks to encash a performance guarantee, these disputes require immediate resolution.

Under the present Arbitration Act, in most circumstances, a section 9 petition has to be filed in a District Court, where even after filing the case, the registry might take time to clear the same and thereafter, further time may be taken to list the case before the Court. Sometimes, this process may take days and even weeks. Emergency arbitration, however, offers a lifeline by providing a quick, neutral, and confidential forum to resolve the issue, allowing parties to obtain urgent relief without waiting for the full tribunal or navigating the slow-moving court system.

While emergency arbitration is a powerful tool, it has some challenges. First, it is only available if the parties have agreed to institutional arbitra-



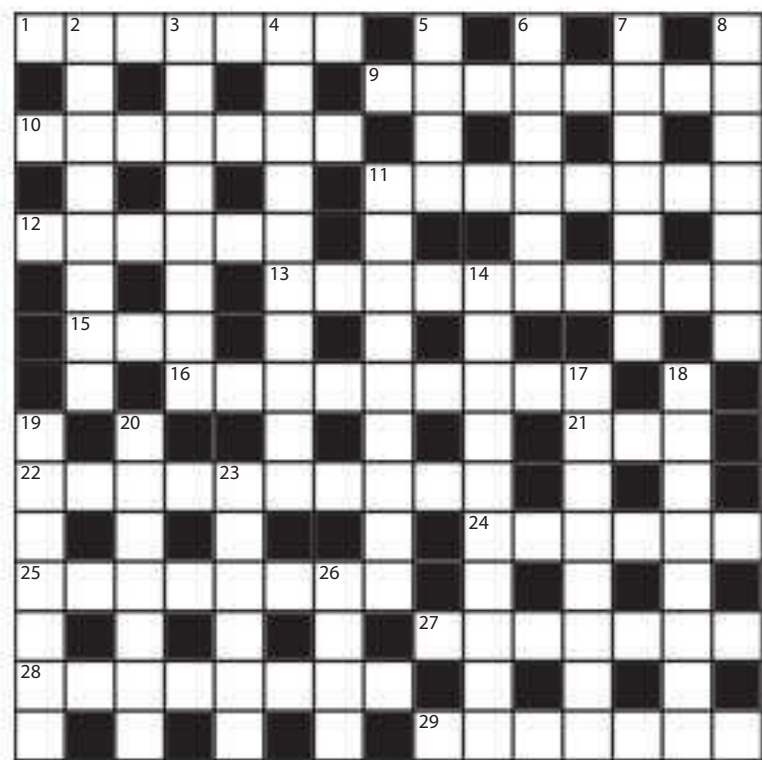
tion under rules that provide for emergency arbitrators. Many Indian infrastructure contracts still opt for ad hoc arbitration, which does not offer this mechanism. Second, the enforceability of emergency awards from foreign-seated arbitrations remains uncertain in India. Finally, institutional arbitration can be more expensive, potentially limiting access for smaller players.

Emergency arbitration has the potential to be a gamechanger for India's infrastructure sector, offering a swift and effective remedy for urgent disputes. As more parties embrace institutional arbitration and as legislative reforms catch up, emergency arbitration is set to play a major role in keeping India's infrastructure projects on track.

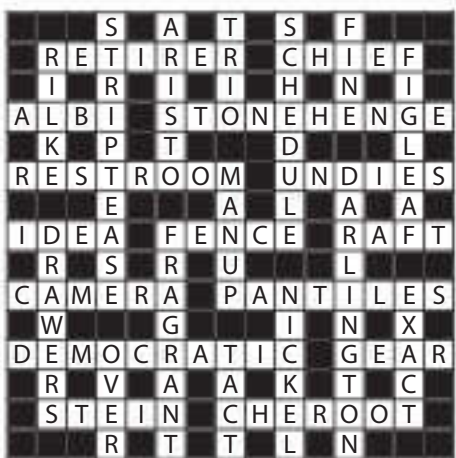
(The writers are, respectively, Senior Partner and Partner at S&A Law Offices.)

CROSSWORD

NO-293218



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION



ACROSS

- Let's not have bird shivering — it's uncivilised (7)
- Brilliant band showing class in Sinatra number (5,3)
- Mr Bean remake involves good film director (7)
- Antiseptics pioneer takes in northeast one hears (8)
- Anglican thinker covering viewers' angles (6)
- Barrel-maker had succeeded in works

- without confrontation (10)
- 15/11D Port stores uranium in ramshackle holding area (3,9)
- Cantor was behind this fixed idea (3,6)
- Principles not constant in lyric poem (3)
- Gives gears thrashing — like some white van drivers? (10)
- Mental activity is pre-empted by votes against (6)

- Bird and horse knackered by rodent (8)
- Couple crossing river that is in grassland (7)
- Not awfully keen about news boss being sharp (2,3,3)
- Shows rock debris navvies cleared out (7)

- Kills time: then prescribes first time must be forgotten (10)
- In Herculaneum I'm inside sewer, doomed (4)
- Curry was one using fish and rice for starter (6)
- 7/19 Fragranced candle supplier upset wag worth plenty (7,7)
- Sort of gas enshrouding Belgian battlefield tree (7)
- See 15 Across

- Self-interested Pickles accepting money after game? (10)
- Balboa's greeting to Abraham in Californian park? (8)
- Peak in clear — one near borders (8)
- See 7
- It takes a crowd gathered outside to cause trouble (7)
- Where driver starts, about to steer over missile (6)
- Northerner will need second home in country (4)

NOTE: Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required. (By arrangement with The Independent, London)



Editor's
TAKE

Catalysing India's Green Energy Future

Biofuels have emerged as a vital solution for clean energy transition. The Biofuels 360° Summit, hosted by *The Pioneer*, aims to accelerate this momentum

Earth is our home and the only place we can live as there is no alternative habitable planet known so far. But we have played havoc with its environment and caused immense damage to its ability to sustain life. Our reckless approach has led to polluting its air and water and soil. In the last hundred years or so we have raised its temperature substantially. While the current global average warming is around 1.1°C since the late 19th century, exceeding 2°C would trigger more extreme weather events, increased biodiversity loss, and further melting of polar ice sheets. If the present rate of emission of green house gases is not reverse we will have catastrophes unfolding in front of our eyes.

But all is not lost. We have solutions ready but they need to be implemented in right earnest. We need to strive for net-zero ambitions and energy diversification, biofuels have emerged as a vital solution. Recognising their potential, *The Pioneer* is hosting the Biofuels 360° Summit, a global forum uniting stakeholders across policy, industry, finance, academia, and innovation. With India striving for energy security and climate resilience, the summit comes at a pivotal moment in the nation's green energy journey. The summit is designed to drive dialogue, action, and partnerships across the full spectrum of the biofuels ecosystem – from ethanol and biodiesel to second and third-generation fuels. Set against the backdrop of India's climate goals and the urgent need to reduce fossil fuel dependence, the summit is more than just a conference. It is a strategic gathering of leaders, including policymakers, international agencies, financial institutions, producers, start-ups, academia, and youth.

The Biofuels 360° Summit addresses both opportunities and roadblocks in the bioeconomy. Through policy dialogue, the summit explores national and international mandates, incentives, and regulatory frameworks that can enable large-scale deployment of biofuels. A standout feature is the 'Innovation Exchange,' where cutting-edge technologies from research institutions, start-ups, and established industry players will be showcased. This aims to spur collaboration and adoption of sustainable biofuel technologies. Another critical theme is investment and finance, which seeks to connect developers with financiers, foster sustainable project pipelines, and develop risk mitigation frameworks necessary to support viable and climate – smart investments.

Recognising the importance of human capital, the summit also emphasises skills and capacity building. The summit aims to build consensus, enable knowledge transfer, and foster actionable solutions. *The Pioneer's* Biofuels 360° Summit stands as a timely and strategic intervention. It reinforces the fact that sustainable development requires collaboration, investment, and bold vision. As the summit unfolds, it is expected to deliver not just dialogue but direction – a roadmap that can power India's biofuel revolution, and in doing so, help the world move closer to a greener, more resilient future.

Minorities: Breaking down stereotypes

Drawing lessons from global experiences and India's own past, introspection and reform within the Muslim community are imperative to strengthen national unity and align with the constitutional vision of equality and integration



PRAFULL
GORADIA

Shaukat Ali Quadri, in his article in this esteemed publication on July 31, has made wise and moderate suggestions, so that Muslims can retain their identity and yet be an integral part of the Indian populace. In this regard, it would be useful to first enumerate the compulsions that loyal Hindu citizens apprehend about their country.

The country is vast, with a correspondingly large population. The population speaks a variety of languages, not to mention the numerous dialects. There is a variety of castes; besides these, India also has religious diversities to take care of, not to speak of the racial differences that go with the largeness of the country, with its long and often contentious history.

India obtained its independence from Imperial Britain in August 1947, but before relinquishing the reins of power, several observers, mostly British, had predicted that if Indians were not careful, their country could be threatened with secessions and breakups. In short, having given Muslims the Pakistan the latter wanted, it was now for the Hindus to be cautious, if not also careful.

To that extent, India is not a typical nation of the kind the Western world is used to. Such a typical country should ideally have all or most of its citizens' souls breathing together.

These are points that have never been driven into the minds of Muslim citizens who remained in India after August 15, 1947; Pakistan having been born the previous day. Each political party has propagated its own ideology, which generally has been music to the Muslim ear but not necessarily to the integrity of the country.

Islam has, from its beginnings, been a transnational religion, rather like Judaism and Communism. In these beliefs, the coming together of several peoples or groups is no big thing, nor is the break-up of a country a calamity to be mourned. Take the example of Egypt and Syria during the time of the presidency of Col. Nasser.

These two countries briefly formed a union called the United Arab Republic (UAR) in 1958, which dissolved in 1961. Again, a significant number of people in the western wing of Pakistan did not mind their eastern wing seceding. The Soviet Union comprised sixteen republics.

Moscow spontaneously let secede fifteen of these republics and go their way one day in 1991. In fact, the Soviet constitution provided for



The Pioneer SINCE 1865

INDIAN
MUSLIMS,
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IMPULSES

The writer is a well-known columnist, an author and a former member of the Rajya Sabha

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dailypioneer

secession if any republic felt like seceding. This provision in the Soviet constitution reflects the transnational outlook of the communist ideology. Chaim Weizman, the first prophet of modern Israel, had said that there were no Polish Jews, Hungarian Jews, Russian Jews, British Jews, etc, but Jews in France, Jews in Britain, Jews in Russia and so on. Chaim Weizman was also the president of the Zionist Organisation and later first president of Israel. "Workers of the world, unite" was the exhortation in the *Communist Manifesto* of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in 1848.

Indian Muslims, therefore, in today's times, have to find a way to rise above these transnational impulses. There can be no denying that separatism, and the feeling of being 'distinct' or different from other communities, has been a particular feature of this community's consciousness as well as conduct.

In India, this feeling of separateness and being distinct has existed vis-à-vis the Hindus of the country ever since the Muslims first came as invaders to settle in parts of the country – their rule over it and subsequent Hindu resurgence leading to the collapse of Islamic rule and the partition of the country after the departure of British colonial rule in 1947.

It is reasonable to expect that the members of all religions who expect personal laws to be retained would be of a similar bent of mind. In the Constitution of India, Article 14 insists

on equality of all citizens. But by the time we reach Article 25, different communities are allowed different personal laws. There is a Directive Principle of State Policy which expresses a desire of the Constitution to have a Uniform Civil Code, but after 75 years of the Constitution being in force, one community continues to enjoy its personal laws, which have been imported from abroad.

Hindus are allowed to have family trusts, while Muslims have the privilege that are called *waqf*, which is entirely different, and increasingly a matter of contention.

With so many variations, it is difficult to be assured that India is a united and well-integrated nation. The question of all the souls of the country breathing together could be a tall order. Everyone needs to be reminded that there are two nations in the neighbourhood that were once parts of the British Empire.

This makes the Hindu heart harbour fears that one minority or the other might be harbouring extra-territorial or transnational loyalties in its heart. It would be much preferable if the scope for such fears did not exist. We must also not forget that for decades together, the communist parties have been operating with weapons in the hands of many of their armed cadres. Transnational ideologies and the demands of loyalties they impose negate the very notion of national integration and oneness. Therefore, for the Muslim citizens of the country, the path of reform beckons, in their own interest.

Recognise ethanol and CBG as carbon neutral fuels



VAIBHAV
DANGE

THE PIONEER 2ND OPINION

As the world grapples with the challenges of climate change, energy security, and economic growth, the importance of leveraging multiple clean energy options – including biofuels such as ethanol and Compressed Biogas (CBG) – cannot be overstated. India's flagship Ethanol Blending Programme (EBP) has been a phenomenal success, increasing the blending rate from 1.5 per cent in 2014 to 20 per cent in 2025. Additionally, the Sustainable Alternative Towards Affordable Transportation (SATAT) initiative has promoted the use of CBG as a clean and sustainable fuel.

Ethanol and CBG are both carbon neutral fuels, as the carbon emitted during their use is recaptured by the feedstock used to produce them. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) states that the biogenic portion

of pure ethanol is 100 per cent, making it a carbon neutral fuel. Similarly, CBG – also known as biomethane – is a renewable energy source produced from organic waste, which can significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Benefits of Ethanol and CBG

Their use can yield numerous benefits, including:

- Ethanol and CBG can help reduce reliance on imported fossil fuels, thereby improving energy security and reducing trade deficits.
- Lowering greenhouse gas emissions: The use of ethanol and CBG can significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions, contributing to a cleaner environment and mitigating climate change.
- The production of ethanol and CBG can provide new opportunities for farmers and rural communities, boosting their income and livelihoods.

As the initiator of the Global Biofuel Alliance (GBA), India has a unique opportunity to take the lead in securing global recognition of ethanol and CBG as carbon neutral fuels. By collaborating with member nations of the GBA and the Global South, India can advocate for the inclusion of the environmental benefits of ethanol and CBG in the joint statement at COP 30. This will help the Global South to holistically achieve the three 'Es' – energy transition, economic growth, and ecological sustainability



Key Recommendations for COP 30

- The joint statement at COP 30 should acknowledge the scientific fact that ethanol and CBG are carbon neutral fuels, based on their biogenic nature and life cycle analysis.
- Adopt multiple clean energy options, including biofuels, to achieve decarbonisation and energy security.
- COP statement should recognise the unique circumstances of countries in the global south and support their efforts to achieve energy transition and ecological sustainability.

By taking a leadership role in promoting ethanol and CBG as carbon neutral fuels, India can help shape the global agenda for sustainable energy transition and ensure a more equitable and scientifically-driven approach to addressing climate change.

The writer is a Founder Director at IFGE and a public policy expert on infrastructure, sustainable mobility, and bioenergy

INDIA POISED TO LEAD GLOBAL BIOFUEL REVOLUTION

India stands at a crucial juncture in its transition towards green energy, with the potential to lead the global biofuel movement – particularly in the Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) sector. As highlighted by Kushaagra Nandan, India's unique strengths – diverse agro-climatic zones, engineering excellence, and a dynamic innovation ecosystem – position it as a serious contender in the global bioenergy market.

The Government's initiatives, including the E20 rollout, SATAT, and GOBARDhan, reflect a strong commitment to clean energy. However, challenges remain, particularly in ensuring feedstock availability, standardising technologies, and upgrading infrastructure. Addressing these gaps will require coordinated efforts between policymakers, industry leaders, and investors.

Digital technologies like AI, IoT, and blockchain can revolutionise the biofuel value chain by improving transparency, predictive maintenance, and efficiency. Moreover, the creation of a credible carbon credit market and blended finance options can attract significant investments and reduce risks. India's ambition to become a major SAF supplier is not just a sustainability imperative – it is a strategic economic opportunity. With the right policy framework, R&D focus, and global collaboration, India can transform into a biofuel innovation hub. Success in this sector could help the country meet its climate targets, generate employment, reduce import dependency, and foster rural development. This is the moment for India to act decisively.

ADITYA KAMBLE | KALABURAGI

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

CK SUBRAMANIAM | NAVI MUMBAI

VINOD JOHRI | DELHI

P VICTOR SELVARAJ | TAMIL NAIDU

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A proud nation turns 79

We need to congratulate one another and take pride in completing 79 years of Independence. We now enjoy the fruits of freedom and cherish the memory during this long weekend.

The Partition of India saw the carving up of the sub-continent along sectarian lines, the massacre of millions, and the rending of a country into two – making it one of mankind's greatest tragedies. While India celebrated its much-awaited freedom on August 15, 1947, after nearly two centuries of British subjugation, the enormous human cost could not be forgotten.

Since then, we have made great strides, maintaining the momentum of Independence. Elders remember the sacrifices of our freedom fighters, while children – India's future – display their talent, vital for national development.

A fitting tribute to the present Government would be to provide these youth with the means to earn in India, a land rich in resources, rather than working overseas and never returning. As we complete 79 years of freedom, let us pledge to use our time wisely. Though not a long period in the life of a nation, it is enough to reflect generously and optimistically on our democratic journey.

Trump erodes foreign base

Apropos of the report and editorial on the fresh 25 per cent tariff slapped on India – after contemptuously labelling it a 'dead economy' – the US President must re-assess his figures on bilateral trade.

In truth, the entire US economy depends on foreign income-whether from trade, visa earnings, patents, intellectual property, foreign students, tourism, or investment companies. Its global trade is only a fraction of its GDP.

In India's case, Trump's decision-making on tariffs and penalties is grossly flawed. Besides India's imports of \$41 billion from the US, Indian students pay \$8 billion in tuition fees. Amazon alone accounts for \$13 billion in US-linked business. American investment firms earn \$40 billion from India. Coca-Cola's India business is worth \$290 million.

While India's Russian crude purchases may have prompted the new tariff, US-Russia trade itself totals \$5.2 billion. In totality, the US is the big winner in Indo-US bilateral trade.

The US is also slowly losing its edge in Asia. The combined GDP of Asian countries stands at \$41 trillion, compared to the US GDP of \$31 trillion, which is growing at a sluggish 1.8 per cent.

India must not be singled out

In reference to the report 'Trump Slaps 50 per cent Tariff' (August 7), the additional 25 per cent tariff by the US on Indian goods – as a penalty for importing Russian oil – is unjust and discriminatory.

Halting Russian imports would force India to turn to Gulf countries, increasing our energy bill. Why is India being singled out, when other countries also continue buying Russian energy?

This move places India among the "most heavily taxed" US trading partners, giving competitors like China, Vietnam, and Bangladesh an unfair advantage. Meanwhile, the US avoids penalising China due to its dominance over critical minerals crucial to US defence and technology. Moreover, this tariff contradicts World Trade Organisation norms, which aim to promote free trade and reduce trade barrier.

Using economic coercion to achieve geopolitical goals has long been part of American policy and is only expanding under Trump. India is a sovereign nation, and under no circumstances should it compromise its independent international trade policy.

This punitive tariff undermines the principles of fair trade and sets a troubling precedent for economic coercion in global diplomacy.

Biofuels for Sustainable and Clean Energy Transition

Fueled by a mix of sugarcane and grain-based biofuel production and backed by strong policy support, India’s ethanol success story is as much about clean energy as it is about empowering farmers and building a more resilient, self-reliant economy

FIRST
Column



H R P
YADAV

Due to the increasing trend of green house gases (GHGs) after burning of fossil fuels, the global climate change impacts are affecting the environment, ecology, flora and fauna. The fossil fuels in the transportation, thermal power generation and other man-made activities create carbon footprints, and the built — environment becomes carbonised. There has been huge challenges in the environment, such as air and water pollution, waste disposal, electricity generation with carbon emissions. To address these challenges, Government of India have taken some key initiatives like bio-fuel policy, green hydrogen mission, net zero emission by 2030, 500 GW power generation from renewable energy by 2030. The Hon'ble Union Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas during India Energy Week held in February 2025 at New Delhi stated that there has been a link between economic activity and energy use and there will be requirement of more energy as time passes from \$4 trillion to \$10 trillion economy and beyond. India is moving ahead on sustainable aviation fuel (SAF). It is preparing the ground for biofuels to be integrated into its supply chain. India has set a target of 5 per cent blending in SAF mandatory by 2030 and there is an opportunity for the export of the fuel of the future. India is also striving to increase the share of gas in the economy to 15 per cent from six per cent. Apart from this, India has also set a target of production of five million metric tons of green hydrogen annually.

Sustainable Biofuel Opportunity For India's Energy Transition

As India has entered into the transitions towards a cleaner and more sustainable energy solutions, the role of biofuels has emerged as a critical component in reducing carbon emissions and mitigating threat of energy security. Its adoption of biofuels in the energy mix across the globe has been muted as it still faces scrutiny regarding food security, higher costs, and deforestation.

The Global Biofuels Alliance (GBA) roundtable at India Energy Week 2025 brought together policymakers, industry leaders and international organisations to address the pressing need for harmonised sustain-



for the 2G ethanol plants being set up by the oil marketing companies.

SAF production in 2024 was around 1 million tonnes. According to IATA, SAF demand is expected to hit 50 million tonnes by 2050. With the right regulation, technologies, demand from consumers, and feedstock for production, could help create a new industry.

Vision 2040 for India's aviation sector has estimated passenger traffic at 1.1 billion and freight traffic at 1.7 million tonnes. India currently accounts for a little over two percent of the global ATF demand. Given India's abundant feedstock for SAF and high exposure to exports for ATF (50 percent of ATF produced being exported), India is well-positioned to capitalise on the rising global demand for SAF.

2G Ethanol Plants For Biofuel Production

2G ethanol plant produces ethanol using non-food biomass like agriculture waste, such as rice straw or sugarcane bagasse in place of food crops like corn or sugarcane. 2G ethanol plants are designed to utilise technologies like pre-treatment, hydrolysis and co-fermentation to convert biomass into ethanol, biogas and even bio-CNG. The production process involves pre-treatment to break down biomass, hydrolysis to convert complex carbohydrates into simpler sugars and fermentation to produce ethanol.

Benefits Of 2G Plants




2G ethanol production reduces the dependence on food stocks for biofuel production. It utilises wastes from agriculture resources and contribute to a sustainable and circular economy principles. Government of India has been promoting 2G ethanol through the schemes like the Pradhan Mantri Jivan Yojana offering financial support and incentives to the prospective industry.

Conclusion

Using biofuel like bioethanol and biodiesel as renewable energy can help reducing green house gas emissions and achieve climate targets by 2050. However, the challenges to create infrastructure for harnessing renewable energy sources need to be addressed by the policy makers. Biofuels can reduce dependence on fossil fuels particularly in transport sector.

USING BIOFUEL LIKE BIOETHANOL AND BIODIESEL AS RENEWABLE ENERGY CAN HELP REDUCING GREEN HOUSE GAS EMISSIONS AND ACHIEVE CLIMATE TARGETS BY 2050

The writer is Professor and Head Civil-Environmental Engineering Department, Amity University Gurugram

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 dr-hrp-yadav-b255a114b

ability criteria for biofuels.

The leaders called for collaborative action to develop transparent, inclusive, and adaptable sustainability frameworks, which would enable sustainable biofuels' broader adoption and long-term success.

The industry's huge potential, including its ability to decarbonise and deliver one-third of today's natural gas consumption and reduce global greenhouse gas emissions by 11 per cent has also been considered as one of the positive steps towards net zero emissions drive by 2030. Charlotte Morton Chief Executive of the World Biogas Association, however, has said that there are many challenges due to the lack of acceptability and acknowledgement of biofuels and various discouraging statements about bioenergy.

The biofuels industry is seeking the rightful place in the global energy dialogue. They are critical to decarbonising hard-to-abate sectors like transportation, aviation, shipping, and heavy industries.

Roberto Bocca, Head, Centre for Energy and Materials, and Member of the Executive Committee at World Economic Forum said that the future of bioenergy systems is more complex because they bring more opportunities. More opportu-

nities mean more complexities, meaning infrastructure investment will depend on clarity.

"So, it is critical that we understand the direction, size, volume, and not just the taxonomy but also the potential of these different solutions. This will mean the investments can flow more confidently," said Bocca.

Over a year after the inception of GBA, led by the US, Brazil, and India, the alliance has expanded to include 28 countries and 12 organisations, including the World Bank, the World Economic Forum, and the International Energy Agency. It is playing a pivotal role in increasing the adoption of sustainable biofuels on the global stage. The joint collaborative efforts by the industry and academia on sustainable biofuels emphasised a shared commitment to accelerating biofuel development, adoption, and integration into the global energy mix, emphasising international cooperation, policy support, and technological advancements.

The Policymakers also explored the potential of non-food feedstocks in advancing India's biofuels sector, key opportunities, challenges, and policy considerations for scaling sustainable biofuels and strengthening energy security.

The Hypocrisy of Green Living: Cutting Trees, Buying Plants



VISHWARUPA
BHATTACHARYA

The traditional school holidays in Delhi, once confined to the summer, and winter vacations, have evolved in recent years. Today, schools in the city are also closing for holidays every year due to dangerously high Air Quality Index (AQI) levels. During such closures, residents express growing concerns about the escalating pollution, and the long-term negative effects it will have on the health and well-being of our children. While their concerns are entirely justified, and understandable, I find it rather hypocritical that they too are doing their bit to contribute to exacerbate the problem.

In gated communities, residential neighborhoods, and private properties, tree pruning is carried out recklessly. And the reasons are so absurd that it feels incredibly frustrating. Whether it is an aversion to falling leaves/branches, concerns about blocked sunlight or obstructed view or a mere preference for a tidier look, many residents order heavy trimming without understanding the science of proper pruning. In doing so, they overlook the fact that nature's untamed beauty has its own charm and ecological significance.

What makes this situation concerning is that the government department responsible for regulating tree felling, and pruning appears to be struggling with effective enforcement. Rather than strictly implementing the guidelines, and closely monitoring tree maintenance, there are instances where they carry out excessive cutting under the pretext of upkeep. Additionally, the workers assigned for pruning often seem to lack specialised training. Without adequate knowledge of proper tree care, they tend to follow instructions from residents, who may also be unfamiliar with responsible pruning practices. As a result, instead of assessing tree health, and applying scientific pruning methods, large branches are sometimes removed indiscriminately, sometimes leaving nothing but a bare stump.

The irony in all this is striking: after mindlessly felling or severely pruning the very trees that have been growing for decades, the same individuals then turn around, and spend thousands of rupees on potted plants, hoping to achieve the same benefits — like air purification, and aesthetic value — that mature trees naturally provide on a much larger scale. This contradic-



tion highlights a deep misunderstanding of the ecological importance of full-grown trees considering that a single large tree can contribute more to carbon sequestration, temperature regulation and habitat support than an entire room full of indoor plants. According to the US Department of Agriculture, in one year a mature tree will absorb more than 48 pounds of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and release oxygen in exchange. In contrast potted plant might absorb only around 1 to 3 pounds (0.45 to 1.36 kg) of carbon dioxide.




The irony doesn't end here. Even after being aware that big trees can reduce surrounding temperatures (According to a Lancet planting more trees would reduce the mean temperature by 0.4C), they end up recklessly pruning trees and then turning to artificial means-air conditioners (ACs) — to cope with the heat, which directly contributes to higher energy consumption and exacerbates pollution.

Potted plants have become a modern symbol of eco-consciousness and sophistication. They are easy to maintain, visually appealing, and fit neatly into the minimalist designs of contemporary homes. According to various reports, the global indoor plant market is a significantly growing market. Social media has further fueled this trend. Platforms like Instagram and Pinterest are filled with images of lush, green interiors that inspire people to create their own

indoor jungles. While potted plants offer undeniable benefits — better air quality, stress relief, and aesthetics — they can never replace the vast environmental advantages of green cover outdoors. It's a troubling paradox that many of us, when choosing where to live, prioritise green spaces and lush surroundings. We are willing to pay a premium for homes in neighborhoods that are green and tree-filled, valuing the tranquility, air quality and natural beauty that these spaces offer — help lowering stress, improving air quality, reducing noise, and providing aesthetic appeal. However, once we settle into these neighborhoods, the very greenery we sought out is often the first thing we end up destroying.

This behavior speaks of our disconnect between our environmental consciousness and our daily actions. We champion sustainability, advocate for cleaner air, and lament rising temperatures, yet our choices — whether it's cutting down trees for convenience, over-relying on air conditioning, or prioritising aesthetics over ecological balance — contradict these very concerns.

The writer is Additional Director, Research Division, Rajya Sabha Secretariat

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 @TheDailyPioneer
 dailypioneer

Countervailing Trump: A Crude Trade



RAGHAV
PRIYADARSHI

Terms of trade, revealed comparative advantage, NTB, MFN — jargon which has underpinned global trade over the past thirty years has been assigned to the proverbial WTO bin by Donald Trump. A new Agent Orange is wreaking havoc across fields of globalisation assiduously tilled by the liberal economic order.

This calls for a complete reset in how India negotiates its economic national interest, moving away from the *dharma* of *Yudhishthira* and learning a trick or two from *Shakuni*. It is *Shakuni's* cunning which must be India's guiding principle in resetting trade relations with the US — premised more on an understanding of human psychology and ego than trade economics. A crude man will respond to a crude plan, so India needs to do just one simple thing to set matters right — buy more US crude!

India should unilaterally announce its intention to become the largest buyer of US oil, pledging to purchase 1 million barrels per day (bpd), effective immediately. This statement should be formally issued by India's petroleum minister Shri Hardeep Singh, preferably as a live telecast to global news media.

Let's review the math: India exported approximately USD 87 billion of goods to the US in 2024. India's goods imports from the US stood at approximately USD 41 billion. This translates to a deficit of around USD 46 billion, which Trump

looks to bridge with bombast.

Now let's review India oil import bill: In FY24, India's crude oil imports stood at about USD 130 billion. Russia accounted for around 35-40 per cent of total supplies by value, whereas the US only contributed around five per cent of this total. In 2025, India has increased purchases of US crude to around 270,000 barrels per day (bpd), but India's purchase of Russia oil is still seven-fold greater at around 1.8 million barrels per day (bpd). If one assumes that India enjoys a discount of USD 10 per barrel on Russian oil




compared to purchasing US oil, then increasing purchases of US oil by around 700,000 barrels per day to hit the targeted 1 million figure, would increase India's oil import bill by USD

7 million per day, or USD 2.5 billion per annum. More consequently, this increased oil purchase would increase overall imports from the US by around USD 17 billion, reducing the US trade deficit with India by a third to approximately USD 30 billion.

India should further sweeten the mix (pun on crude intended) by offering a carry on the proposed deal:

- reduce two barrels of Russian oil for each incremental barrel purchased from the US and
- offer to pay half of its oil import bill in US stablecoins, endorsing Trump's GENIUS (Act). Give the man a deal he cannot refuse to "drill baby drill" while maintaining market access (and linked livelihoods) for USD 87 billion of goods exports minus punitive tariffs.

The writer is Partner at Koan Advisory Group

 raghavpriyadarshi
 @TheDailyPioneer
 raghav-priyadarshi-8a44a525

HIMALAYAN HAVOC: FRAGILE ECOSYSTEM LED TO THE BRINK

THE patience of nature's fragile ecosystem in Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand is wearing thin. At least 15 cloudbursts and flash floods have taken a heavy toll on human lives and infrastructure in upper Himachal and the Kumaon-Garhwal region since late June. In Uttarakhand, the fury wiped out picturesque Dharali earlier this week and more such devastation is forecast. The reason is evident: rising temperatures increase moisture in the atmosphere in the hilly region, causing extreme weather conditions, and the ground situation exacerbates the mess. Dharali, which sprang up close to Khirganga, a placid mountain stream, is a classic example. The stream looks shallow and innocent, and unregulated construction encroached on its course and banks. The volumes of concrete weakened the region's capacity to withstand heavy rains and buckled under cloudbursts. Hundreds of streams and rivers continue to groan under chaotic construction. The ecological strain that the Char Dham all-weather project and similar high-ways and tunnels cause is well documented.

The administration is at fault for promoting tourism—the primary source of revenue—without considering topographic studies in both states. The Himalayan terrain is geologically young. Its fragility makes it sensitive to any disruption. If forests are cut rampantly, stream courses are changed, and slopes are weakened by scraping or expanding them, fissures appear in the terrain's rock structure. The hills become landslide-prone. The streams erupt into torrents in heavy rains. Adventure tourism in Himachal Pradesh and religious tourism in Uttarakhand are the reasons why the construction spree never stops. Yesterday's pilgrims are today's consumers, seeking the trappings of urban facilities in the pristine hills, which cannot take the pressure of lakhs of vehicles, hotels, and homestays. Even the Supreme Court lamented recently that Himachal could "disappear" if the mayhem went on.

Dharali is the latest wake-up call we ignore at our peril. Scientists already warn of more glacial bursts like the one near the Nanda Devi massif in Chamoli in 2021. The to-do list is straightforward: halt construction in ecologically sensitive zones; relocate current habitats along water banks and mountain cliffs in these zones; conduct an independent environmental audit; mandate climate-resilient infrastructure norms; set up sustainable limits to tourism; avoid building roads without proper drainage; and implement rubble disposal rules. Do not tame the Himalayas like the plains.

FIX EXAM GLITCHES THAT HARM ASPIRANTS' FUTURES

EVEN years after a Staff Selection Commission exam was investigated for widespread irregularities and paper leaks, another SSC exam has hit the headlines for the wrong reasons. Software crashes, faulty biometric systems, and wrong locations assigned to candidates have forced the authorities to rethink the Phase 13 exams held between July 24 and August 1. Several candidates who had travelled long distances became aware of the disruptions upon arrival. Worse, protests by some job aspirants and their teachers, who demanded an independent investigation and reforms in the exam's management, faced the police's high-handedness. SSC Chairman S Gopalakrishnan indicated in a media interview that a fresh test may be held for candidates who did not get a "fair chance" during the original test window.

These are not isolated cases—a pattern emerges when seen along with the troubles concerning several other exams conducted by central authorities. A Railway Recruitment Board exam in March to recruit assistant locomotive pilots was partially cancelled due to technical glitches related to improper loading of question papers at some centres. The National Eligibility cum Entrance Test for medical seats conducted by the National Testing Agency (NTA) has faced tech malfunctions for the past 3 years. The Delhi High Court recently asked the NTA to set up a grievance redress committee for the candidates who lost exam time because of such problems at NEET-UG 2025.

Meanwhile, calls for systemic reforms to ensure fair and glitch-free practices at SSC exams are gaining ground. Candidates are demanding a thorough probe into the tech companies whose track records have been poor. It raises the larger consequential question about our ability to handle large-scale recruitment drives. Tech insufficiencies cannot be an excuse given to the ever-increasing number of candidates in the world's most populous country. The recurring glitches also reflect poorly on the country's image as a leading supplier of IT services across the globe.

The government ought to set up a permanent, robust and tested infrastructure to ensure smooth management of these highly competitive exams. No student should ever have to lose valuable exam time and suffer heightened mental stress because of technical failures. India's youth deserves a far better shot at securing their future.

QUICK TAKE

FILL THE VACCINE BLANKS

A bad news for the US could be an opportunity for India. The US health department is terminating 22 federal contracts for mRNA-based vaccines, questioning the safety of a technology credited with helping end the Covid pandemic. The decision—which could affect \$500 million in funds—is owed to health secretary Robert F Kennedy Jr's long-held vaccine scepticism. India, which boasts of being one of the largest vaccine exporters including mRNA ones, could step up to fill the gap. At the same time, the government must fund and coordinate research into the after-effects of vaccines, especially among children, to dispel the bubbles of suspicion that have floated up in India as well.

KERALA, long celebrated as god's own country, is today grappling with an economic paradox that belies its natural beauty and human development achievements. While the state boasts of high literacy rates, robust healthcare systems, and a globally admired social model, its economic underpinnings are alarmingly fragile.

The state's unemployment rate stood at 9.6 percent in 2022-23, significantly higher than the national average of 4.1 percent. The industrial sector remains stagnant, contributing only 23 percent to the gross state domestic product, compared to the national average of 29 percent. Meanwhile, Kerala's public debt has surged to ₹3.57 lakh crore, exacerbated by declining central transfers and fiscal constraints. The state government spends more every year on debt servicing than on development—and it ends up borrowing more to pay off the interest on its past borrowings.

Kerala's economy has long been buoyed by remittances from its diaspora, but this over-reliance on external inflows—which once accounted for nearly 30 percent of Kerala's economy—has left the state vulnerable to global shocks. The pandemic-induced disruptions exposed the fragility of this model, with remittances declining and unemployment surging.

The unemployment rate remains stubbornly high, the industrial sector stagnant, and the fiscal health precarious, with mounting debt and dwindling revenues. Meanwhile, the state's industrial sector remains woefully underdeveloped, hamstrung by bureaucratic red tape, outdated labour laws, and an aversion to private enterprise. The agricultural sector, once a cornerstone of Kerala's economy, has also suffered from declining productivity and climate-related challenges.

If Kerala is to reclaim its place as a beacon of progress, it must confront these challenges with bold, pragmatic reforms that prioritise ease of doing business, investor confidence, and sustainable development. To extricate itself from this economic quagmire, Kerala must embrace a new paradigm that fosters entrepreneurship, attracts investment, and ensures equitable growth.

For instance, under the Kerala Shops and Commercial Establishments Act, 1960, women working night shifts must be grouped in teams of at least five, with a minimum of two female employees per group, for safety reasons. Employers are also required to provide safe transportation for female employees commuting during night hours. While these provisions aim to ensure safety, they also limit employment opportunities for women in sec-

God's own country should harness its strengths in education and health to foster a knowledge-driven economy. Doing business must be made easier and the investments protected

BOLD ROADMAP TO AN ECONOMIC DAWN IN KERALA

SHASHI THAROOR

Fourth-term Lok Sabha MP, Chairman of Standing Committee on External Affairs, and Sahitya Akademi-winning author of 24 books



SOURAV ROY

tors that require flexible work arrangements, such as IT and hospitality. Employment laws specify too many details, which can sometimes reduce Kerala's competitiveness in attracting IT firms, especially when compared to states with more flexible labour laws. Many companies have argued in favour of a broad mandate—for example, a 45-hour work week—with the actual details left to the company to apply in accordance to its practices and operational requirements. By amending the law to balance worker rights with economic competitiveness, Kerala can unlock its full potential and position itself as a leading hub for innovation and investment.

On the ease of doing business, which has increasingly become an empty slogan, Kerala must shed its reputation as a bureaucratic labyrinth and create an environment where businesses can thrive without undue interference. This requires

streamlining regulatory processes, digitising approvals, and ensuring time-bound clearances. Kerala is notorious for the number of hurdles any proposal must clear before it sees the light of day. While the state government claims to have streamlined clearances, investors and businesspeople tell me a different story. The state should slash regulations and establish single-window systems across the board (and not just in one or two favoured areas) for investors and entrepreneurs, reducing the procedural delays.

An additional safeguard I have long advocated is investor protection legislation. Confidence is the currency of investment, and Kerala must enact robust investor protection laws to attract both domestic and foreign capital. These laws should guarantee transparency, enforceable contracts, and swift dispute resolution mechanisms. They must also guarantee that no project,

WHEN SILENCE IS NOT GOLDEN

A FAIZUR RAHMAN

Secretary-General, Islamic Forum for the Promotion of Moderate Thought

A CROSS time and cultures, the adage 'silence is golden' has come to embody the virtue of restraint in speech. It perhaps originated in the ninth-century Arabic saying: "If speech is silver, then silence is gold."

The sentiment it conveys echoes in religious traditions, too.

Prophet Muhammad, as reported in *Sahih al-Bukhari*, advised Muslims to either speak good or remain silent. The Epistle of James in the *New Testament* urged Christians to be "quick to listen and slow to speak". And in its 17th chapter, the *Bhagavad Gita* describes silence (*maunam*) as an "austerity of the mind" (*tapo maanasam*).

Such pronouncements have strengthened the belief that silence is not the absence of speech, but the presence of meaning—deep, intentional, and spiritual. However, this perception often overlooks the fact that what the aphorisms endorsed was judicious restraint, not muteness born of indecision or avoidance. In other words, silence is noble only when it is chosen as a form of prudence in the face of great responsibility. When it accompanies oppression, it joins in the crime and becomes its voice.

Hence, Prophet Muhammad declared that the highest form of *jihad* is "a word of justice" (*kalimatul adl*) spoken against a tyrannical ruler (*sultaamin jaa'ir*). Jesus too inspired courage in his followers saying: "What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the rooftops." And in the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna tells Arjuna that there is nothing more honourable than fighting a righteous war (*dharma-yam sangramam*) to uphold justice.

Indeed, no serious philosophy upholds silence as a virtue when injustice demands a response. Yet, betraying its original nuance, the phrase "silence is golden" has been used to shield selfishness or cowardice, thus transforming silence into quiet hypocrisy.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the political quiescence surrounding Israel's ongoing assault on Gaza—an onslaught that many experts now describe as genocide. It has already claimed over 60,000 lives, razed entire neighbourhoods, and now threatens to starve a million innocent people to death, including countless children.

Silence in the face of these atroci-

ties can perhaps be excused in lands where denouncing Israel brings the threat of imprisonment or worse. But what explains the silence of those who, free to speak, choose not to?

Evolutionary psychology suggests that an intense fear of outsiders that prevailed among early humans persists even today because natural selection honed our protective instincts. In contrast, modern humans possess the cognitive sophistication necessary for negotiation or conflict resolution. Yet, they exhibit atavistic tendencies as if evolution had passed them by.



Several significant philosophies have extolled the virtue of silence as a form of prudence. It can also be a powerful form of resistance for the oppressed who are stunned into wordlessness. But staying silent on the genocide happening in Gaza is an outright moral failure

Scientifically speaking, behavioural modernity equipped *Homo sapiens* with remarkable cognitive powers such as abstract thought, complex language, social cooperation, cultural imagination, and technological innovation. These advances should have made us more empathetic and peaceable. Yet the paradox of our species is that we used the very intellect evolution granted us to refine violence. We expanded organised warfare, perfected weapons of mass destruction, and became more violent than Neanderthals ever were.

Among the non-violent majority, human fellowship failed in subtler ways—

through social identitarianism, propaganda, and ignorance of history. If most people today confine their solidarity to those who share their nationality, religion, or class, it is because disinformation-driven mistrust paints the 'other' as a threat. As a result, even after being endowed with the capacity for unity, we chose division.

This moral failure often takes the form of silence, cloaked in specious justifications: that the victims are in a distant land; that speaking out brings us no gain, while staying quiet costs us nothing; that condemning genocide might endanger our interests; that a single voice cannot sway the oppressors; and that our solidarity will do little to alter the victims' fate.

But these are lame excuses. They are shamelessly invoked to avoid confessing the uncomfortable truth: we are silent because we don't care.

Needless to say, it cannot be denied that silence can, at times, be a powerful form of resistance. But this holds only for the oppressed who are stunned into wordlessness by trauma. For those who watch from safety, silence is no act of dignity or courage. It is an abdication of social responsibility by which they not just surrender their freedom of speech but lose their humanity.

This makes reclaiming our humanity the biggest requirement for most of us today. But it is not an easy task. Mirza Ghalib had warned: "*Bas ke dushwaar hai har kaam ka aasaan hona / Aadmi ko bhi muyassar nahin insaan hona*" (Because it is difficult for every task to be easy / Even man finds it hard to become human).

Indeed, to look human is easy; to be one is not. Humanity is about preserving the humanitarian traits that nature has given us. The highest among them in the present state of affairs is our courage to speak for the victims of genocidal violence. We may find temporary refuge in silence. But in the end, silence is a verdict. It does not shield us—it condemns us.

(Views are personal) (themoderates2020@gmail.com)

once approved, will be vulnerable to the political and bureaucratic interference that in the past has led to investor suicides, a uniquely Kerala phenomenon. Once the government has approved a project, investors must be guaranteed that their funds are invulnerable to regulatory extortion, political blackmail or frivolous litigation—that the state, not the investor, will assume the regulatory risk, and businesspeople will only have to bear business losses.

Additionally, Kerala's strengths in education and healthcare can be harnessed to build a knowledge-driven economy. The state should invest in research and development hubs, foster public-private partnerships, and incentivise startups in emerging fields like biogenetics, biotechnology, artificial intelligence, renewable energy, and sustainable agriculture. As a highly-educated state with an openness to innovation, Kerala can actively court greenfield investments in these sectors. Tourism, a traditional strength, must be reimagined with a focus on eco-tourism and cultural heritage, ensuring that it remains a sustainable revenue stream. Given our long coastline, new avenues must be explored in shipbuilding, logistics, and marine research.

Economic revival is not merely a matter of policy, but of political will and visionary leadership. I have long argued that Kerala's leaders must rise above partisan politics to forge a consensus-driven approach that prioritises the state's long-term prosperity over short-term gains. People are tired of the constant back-and-forth negativism that characterises politics in the state. They want a focus on the future. Yes, the state's reputation as a leftist bastion has held it back; but public awareness campaigns are essential to help dispel misconceptions about private enterprise, fostering a culture that values innovation and entrepreneurship.

The challenges are formidable, but not insurmountable. The state's human capital, natural resources, and cultural riches provide a strong foundation for renewal. By embracing ease of doing business, investor protection, and technology-driven sectoral innovation, Kerala can chart a path toward inclusive and sustainable growth, ensuring that its economy is as vibrant as its landscapes. The time for action is now. Assembly elections are just nine months away. Kerala must shed its inertia, embrace reform, and reclaim its rightful place as a model of progress and prosperity. In Tagore's words, "Faith is the bird that feels the light and sings when the dawn is still dark." For the economy, it is still dark in Kerala, but the glimmer of dawn is visible. We must find that faith—and act upon it.

(Views are personal)

MAILBAG

WRITE TO: letters@newindianexpress.com

Historical wisdom

Ref: *Hiroshima anniversary: Heed Mahatma's advice* (Aug 7). I can't help but feel deeply disturbed by how little the world has learned from the dark chapters of history. India's stance of 'no first use' is a mature and responsible doctrine. It reflects on the wisdom that retaliation does not always equal strength.

Aditya Kamble, Kalaburagi

Bengal's contribution

Ref: *Stop politics over use of Bangla across India* (Aug 5). Bangla, Bengali art traditions and Bengalis have been an integral part of India's national consciousness and should not be allowed to be disregarded in such discriminatory fashion. Through their works, Bengali literary figures and artists have historically enriched Indian literature and art.

SM Visakh, Thiruvananthapuram

Trump's diktat

Ref: *How an equation in Moscow affects calculus in Delhi* (Aug 7). It is strange that the US President Donald Trump is dictating India's trade with Russia and yields to his diktats which suit his whims and fancies. This carrot and stick policy is an illusion, hardly making 'America great again'.

Parthasarathy Mandadi, Tirupati

Identity ordeal

Ref: *Umpteen proofs, but no identity* (Aug 7). India's identity crisis stems not from lack of IDs, but from fragmented and conflicting systems. Inconsistent formats, duplicate databases, and poor coordination make proving identity a daily ordeal. Reforms must focus on structure, clarity, and citizens' ease, not bureaucratic expansion or digital patchwork.

SM Jeeva, Chennai

Go local

Ref: *Double Trump-le* (Aug 7). The threat from the US president exhibiting his 'big brother' attitude must be tackled effectively by India. We have, through time, cosied up to consuming foreign products and have forgotten the values of self-reliance.

Rajakumar Arulanandham, Tirunelveli

Vulnerable ecology

Ref: *All over in 34 seconds* (Aug 7). The cloudburst that wreaked havoc in Uttarkashi serves as a reminder of the Himalayan region's vulnerability to extreme weather events. The region desperately needs a transformation from reactive response to proactive resilience-building.

R Sivakumar, email

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OUR VIEW



Moon race II: Squash the risk of a lunar meltdown

The US plans a nuclear reactor on the moon. This may enable another leap for humankind but the lunar imprint of this project must not end up as a space-age memorial to human folly

Didn't I promise you the moon?" That's what a harried-looking Uncle Sam is seen telling protestors in a cartoon published in a US newspaper on 20 May 1969, two months before *Apollo 11* landed on the moon. In Frankie Morse's drawing, Uncle Sam stands under our only natural satellite, emblazoned with "US Space Feats" on its dark side. Placards on planet earth yelled 'end the war,' with street crowds drawing attention to disarmament, pollution, human needs, inflation, law-and-order, urban crises and so on. Things seem to have come full circle. Fifty-six years on, as the US plans to set up a nuclear reactor on the moon by 2030, the cartoon's message has a familiar ring. With some variations and updates, that litany of complaints has held constant, just as charges of skewed priorities remain resonant. But this century's race for the moon has a new driver: As the world heats up and worsens our lives, what if we need other habitable places? No wonder the lunar-reactor plan has made the world sit up.

America's National Aeronautics and Space Administration (Nasa) is in charge of that power project. According to documents obtained by *Politico*, Nasa administrator Sean Duffy has sped up US plans for reliable energy sources on the moon: specifically, a 100-kilowatt nuclear reactor. The basic idea, it seems, is to beat China and Russia in the space race underway, which is partly aimed at making the moon habitable. "Since March 2024, China and Russia have announced on at least three occasions a joint effort to place a reactor on the moon by the mid-2030s," Duffy said in his directive. "The first country to do so could potentially declare a keep-out zone," he added, which would inhibit

the US from "establishing a planned Artemis presence if not there first." The Artemis accords signed by the US with over 50 other nations—India included—duly pledge adherence to international law. So, would a lunar no-go zone be legal? Or some version thereof? Can the moon be carved up under national flags? The Outer Space Treaty, ratified by the US and others in 1967, bars extra-terrestrial assertions of national sovereignty. Also, while it explicitly bans nuclear weapons in space, it is silent on dual-use technology. True, nuclear power would plug the gaps in solar energy made inevitable by a lunar night that lasts 14 earth-days. Nasa is also right that it would boost its capacity for space exploration. Given the discovery of lunar ice, for which India's Chandrayaan-I mission deserves credit, water may not need to be hauled from earth to run a small fission reactor up there. A human base enabled by this could plausibly be used as a launchpad to explore Mars, moving to which is more than just an Elon Musk fantasy. Living so remotely is not an easy nut to crack. Can India chip in? Several Isro-devised tests done aboard the International Space Station by Shubhanshu Shukla were aimed at growing edible stuff in orbital conditions.

Human frisson over lunar fission must not eclipse the challenges posed by this Nasa project. All nuclear reactors must be kept under close watch, given the risk of a meltdown that releases radiation. While the moon is too remote to endanger people on earth, this must not reduce our concern for safety. Standards must never slip. Disasters at Chernobyl and Fukushima have shown the difficulty of rear-guard action even with resources close-by. The lunar imprint left by this leap for humankind mustn't end up as a memorial to human folly.

GUEST VIEW

Trump's tariff tirade is an opportunity for tax reforms

ARBIND MODI



is former member, Central Board of Direct Taxes, and former senior economist, International Monetary Fund

India's tariffs are often described as 'excessively protectionist,' but the reality is more complex. They function less as blanket barriers and more as a response to distortions: an overvalued rupee that makes exports uncompetitive, goods and services tax (GST) exemptions that give imports an unfair edge and transfer-pricing practices that allow multinationals to shift profits abroad. Since tariffs are shaped by wider trade and fiscal policy, they serve to disguise rather than cure the structural weaknesses that limit India's competitiveness. They have been employed to protect domestic industry, encourage local manufacturing and cut import dependence. But continued reliance on tariffs risks trapping India in a cycle of inefficiency and retaliation, emphasizing the urgency of structural reforms.

An overvalued rupee is a major problem as it makes imports cheaper and exports more expensive, effectively acting as a tax on exporters and a subsidy for importers. This undermines export-oriented domestic pro-

duction by reducing India's competitive advantage in global markets. Instead of using high tariffs to counteract this, India should allow the rupee to depreciate sharply to its true market value. This would make Indian exports much more competitive and neutralize high US tariffs. As exports rise, the rupee will appreciate, creating a natural reset in its value without intervention by the Reserve Bank of India. The adjustment may create short-term price pressures as imports get costlier, but these would be outweighed by the long-term benefits of stronger export growth and a better balanced trade account.

Another factor influencing India's trade prospects is the exemption of certain goods, including their imports, from GST. Eliminating these exemptions, with a single rate of 12% used across all goods and services, would create a level playing field, restoring fairness for domestic manufacturers and encouraging investment in local production. At the same time, concerns that ending exemptions might raise costs for the vulnerable can be effectively addressed through direct cash subsidies. India already has excellent digital infrastructure in place, undergirded by Aadhaar, Jan Dhan accounts and the Unified Payments Interface, that enables the government to make direct cash

transfers to those in need of support. By using this system to protect low-income households from any cost rise, India can make the GST regime more equitable and efficient, supporting domestic industry without compromising social protection.

Tariffs also serve as a blunt tool to counter profit-shifting by multinational corporations. Many of them manipulate intra-group trade prices to minimize their taxable income, undervaluing Indian exports or inflating imports to shift profits to low-tax jurisdictions. A destination-based cash flow tax (DBCFT) offers a clean and more effective solution. As opposed to corporate income tax, which is tied to where profits are reported, a DBCFT would be applied on the value of sales in India. Its border adjustment—taxing imports while exempting exports—would neutralize the incentive to shift profits abroad and safeguard the domestic tax base without relying on tariffs. By eliminating the

source of transfer-pricing abuse, a DBCFT (with some tweaks) would provide India with a system for taxing global companies that is more transparent and also WTO-compliant. This would improve revenue stability and investor confidence.

While tariffs have helped offset such distortions, they carry heavy costs. Trading partners often retaliate, curbing India's export access, even as consumers pay more and industries reliant on imported inputs see their competitiveness eroded. High barriers also deter foreign direct investment, as global firms view India as a costly and less predictable market. A DBCFT paired with a truly free-floating rupee can deliver the same protection with far fewer side effects. A rupee allowed to find its natural value would make exports more competitive in the short term; as foreign demand strengthens, export earnings would eventually support a more stable and sustainable currency level. Also, such reforms

would enhance our credibility in trade talks, showing that we are committed not to protectionism but to fair, modern and efficient frameworks that encourage open trade.

We need a decisive shift away from tariffs as India's main line of defence to a more efficient system that corrects distortions without undermining growth. By adopting a DBCFT, ending GST exemptions and letting the rupee adjust to market forces, India would strengthen its export competitiveness, create a fair playing field for domestic producers and remove distortions caused by currency misalignment and tax loopholes. Such reforms would let us reduce our average tariff rate to a uniform band of 3-5% (without exemptions), with lower rates applied where free trade agreements call for it.

This would not only dispel perceptions of India being a high-tariff economy, but also align our trade regime with global norms.

We must resist the temptation to counter Trump's tariff rhetoric with a competitive tariff structure, as this would undermine the interests of the Indian economy. Instead, by implementing the above reform measures as a comprehensive package, the country would be far better placed to seize opportunities that arise once the ongoing storm of tariff rhetoric subsides.

MY VIEW | FARM TRUTHS

India's rural jobs scheme is more relevant today than it may seem

It alleviates poverty but also has compound effects that can help revive demand in our hour of need



HIMANSHU is associate professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University and visiting fellow at the Centre de Sciences Humaines, New Delhi

August 2025 marks two decades of the landmark Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). It was first started in 200 backward districts and expanded to the rest of rural India later. In terms of reach among rural households, it is the second-largest mass-benefit scheme after the National Food Security Act. Both these legislations enacted under the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government created a rights-based framework for social protection. The last two decades have seen multiple changes in the way MGNREGA has been implemented, but it remains our most important social safety net in rural India.

It was not the first attempt by India's government to provide employment to millions of poor people. But it differed in three ways. *First*, since it was enacted by Parliament as a law, this public employment programme had legal backing and was thus immune to government whims and fancies. *Second*, its universal applicability in rural areas, based on the principle of self-selection, helped avoid errors of targeting that plagued our public programmes. *Third*, its indirect gains far outweigh its direct benefits of poverty reduction and employment generation.

While its primary purpose is to offer the rural poor manual unskilled jobs, it has enabled significant changes in the

rural market for labour. Women make up more than half the workforce employed under MGNREGA. The share of Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) workers has been around a fourth, significantly higher than their population share. Self-selection by the marginalized has been a feature that continues even today.

It has contributed indirectly through infrastructure creation, which has boosted rural productivity. It is difficult to quantify the indirect investment in agriculture through village level irrigation projects, access to markets provided by rural road building, gains of soil conservation and so on, all of which have helped increase farm productivity. In many cases, these have been undertaken on land belonging to marginalized communities, raising agricultural productivity for the poorest farmers.

Second, MGNREGA wages have helped lift market wages and reduce rural poverty. Several studies credited the scheme for the significant rise in wages seen from 2008 to 2013 of more than 6% in real terms. The scheme's payroll not only helped raise incomes of the poorest, but also helped raise demand in the rural economy.

Under the UPA-II government, the programme gradually weakened. Unlike the initial phase under UPA-I,

when wages under MGNREGA were kept higher than market wages, these were set lower than market levels after 2011-12. The situation has worsened since then, with MGNREGA wages found to be lower than market wages in 20 states in 2023. Since 2014, several other changes—related to its wage payments, mandate of biometric authentication and administrative conditions for states—have led to stagnation in real expenditure on the scheme. So much so that in West Bengal, it has been suspended for two years in the wake of an administrative tussle with the Centre.

Despite MGNREGA wages being lower than market wages, almost a third of India's rural households continue to take up work under the scheme. Proof of the programme's success (and value) was clearest during the covid pandemic, when millions of more workers sought and received jobs under it. Yet, it suffers administrative apathy (from the Centre and states both), as reflected in our rural-wage stagnation since 2013. This has hurt rural demand and worsened rural distress.

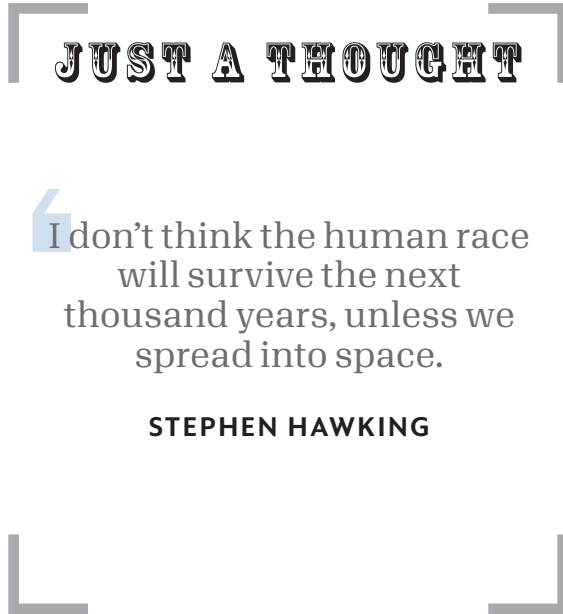
With rural wages and farm incomes stagnant, the rural economy is currently in a vulnerable state. MGNREGA can serve as an engine to revive it. Work provided under the scheme will have positive spillover effects on rural wages and productivity, and is likely to help revive consumption demand. Given today's global uncertainty, domestic demand will have to be the primary engine to drive economic growth.

In other words, MGNREGA has a vital role to play. The scheme proved its worth after the 2008 financial crisis and later during the pandemic. It can do so again if Indian states and the Centre work together. The scheme needs an increase in its budgetary allocation, a hike in the wages paid under it and the removal of administrative bottlenecks. Aligning MGNREGA with its stated objectives is not just a political necessity, but an economic imperative, given the distress in our rural economy.

QUICK READ

India's rural employment guarantee has several direct and indirect benefits for our economy but successive governments have unfortunately weakened it over the years.

In employing the rural poor, it creates infrastructure that raises farm productivity and could stoke demand in times of global uncertainty that require us to rely on domestic growth drivers.





THE EDITORIAL PAGE

WORDLY WISE

TACT IS THE KNACK OF MAKING A POINT
WITHOUT MAKING AN ENEMY.
— HOWARD W NEWTON

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

BRACING UP

India must continue trade talks with US. But who it does business with should be guided by national interests alone

FROM EDGING CLOSER to signing a trade deal in early July, to the imposition of a 25 per cent penalty on August 6, on top of a 25 per cent tariff levied just a few days earlier, India-US trade relations have now moved into uncharted territory. While the additional tariffs will come into play in 21 days, opening up a possible window for negotiations — US trade negotiators are slated to arrive in Delhi on August 25 — the weaponisation of tariffs by US President Donald Trump to achieve what seem to be both trade and non-trade objectives, has placed India at a considerable disadvantage when compared to competitors such as Vietnam and Indonesia. In the face of this mounting pressure, India must stand firm, put its national interest first.

Not surprisingly, Trump's action has evoked a strong response. Calling it "unfair, unjustified and unreasonable", the Narendra Modi government has said it will take "all actions necessary to protect its national interests". As it continues the trade talks with the Trump administration, it may be possible to offer more concessions in certain segments, there may be room for greater give and take. But, at the same time, Delhi should stay with its red lines in the face of mounting pressure in sectors such as agriculture and dairy — politically contentious areas, which are critical to the livelihoods of large sections of the Indian labour force. On Thursday, speaking at the M S Swaminathan Centenary International Conference in Delhi, Prime Minister Narendra Modi emphatically stated the government's position: "India will never compromise on the interests of its farmers, livestock rearers and fisherfolk".

India's purchase of discounted Russian oil, which has ensured price stability in the global oil market, was a pragmatic move to secure its energy supplies. But with Trump raising the costs of continuing with this trade — as he attempts to curb the flow of money to Russian President Vladimir Putin, ostensibly to end the conflict in Ukraine — the same hard-headed realism must guide Delhi's approach now. Imports of Russian oil were at 1.6 million barrels per day in July, down 24 per cent from the month before, as per a report in this paper. The cost-benefit analysis of relying on one source of supply to such a large extent, however, must be seen only through the prism of India's interests — not dictated by Trump. Goldman Sachs, an investment firm, has estimated that the steep tariff on India could bring down economic growth by around 0.6 percentage points. But who India should trade with, or for that matter, which grouping it should be part of — Trump has in the past also taken umbrage at BRICS — should be guided by India's interests alone. Such issues should, in any case, not be part of trade talks between the two countries.

RESPECT THE MOUNTAIN

Uttarkashi tragedy is a warning. Development can ill afford to hurt the fragile ecology of Himalaya

THREE DAYS AFTER flash floods wreaked havoc in Uttarkashi district in Uttarakhand, more than 50 people from Dharali village, the epicentre of the disaster, are reported missing. At least four people have lost their lives as mountainsides collapsed and floodwater inundated homes and destroyed shops, hotels and other commercial establishments. Authorities have reportedly said that it will take about a week to gauge the scale of the calamity. However, it's clear that the devastation underlines multiple challenges for policymakers, including planning development in ways that do not hurt Western Himalaya's ecology.

The Central Water Commission initially ascribed the flash floods to a cloudburst. However, India Meteorological Department officials have reportedly contradicted this hypothesis, and the jury is out on the exact cause of the disaster. Uttarkashi's topography — much of the district is located on the southern slope of the Himalaya — combined with continuous rainfall, does make the region vulnerable to mudslides and flash floods. In the mountains, even small streams are known to swell up during the monsoons, change course and turn treacherous. In recent years, the melting of glaciers has exacerbated such risks. Nature's vagaries, however, are only a part of the reason for the sufferings of Uttarkashi's residents. The region is a part of the Bhagirathi Ecosensitive Zone (ESZ). The ESZ status, notified in 2012, was meant to provide a security net against unregulated development to a 4,100 sq km expanse between Gangotri and Uttarkashi town. The purpose of the notification has been defeated because the rights of passage of the region's rivers have been constantly violated. In their zeal to expand tourism, the Centre and the Uttarakhand government appear to have shown inadequate sensitivity to the vulnerabilities of the area, and repeatedly ignored the red flags raised by members of the committee that monitors the implementation of the ESZ norms. Experts reckon that the chipping away at rocks to widen roads and constructions on the floodplains could have made Tuesday's disaster more severe.

Constant rainfall and huge mounds of muck, almost like quicksand, have made the task of the rescue workers difficult. Bolstering climate resilience would require creating swifter and more effective responses to such exigencies. It would also call for establishing more automatic weather stations and utilising data from satellite-based observation systems to create early warning mechanisms. The writing on the wall has been clear since the disastrous flash floods of 2013 in Uttarakhand: Policymakers need to join the dots between climate change, the risks faced by people in the Himalayan region, early warning and disaster management systems and developmental initiatives. Tuesday's tragedy is a warning that this imperative cannot be put off for long.

FRIENDLY LIKE THE FEMALE

Research on gorillas in Rwanda shows how friendly females build more enduring ties and provide more safety than alpha males

FORTOO LONG, too much of culture has been in the grip of metaphor, based on a misunderstanding of how social dynamics operate among social mammals. Since at least the second half of the last century, a crass social Darwinism has wormed its way into pop culture, backed by pseudo-science. Boys and men have been sold the myth of the "alpha male" — aggressive, domineering and with predatory undertones — as being at the top of the social pyramid. Beta males, on the other hand, are weak creatures, more social than aggressive. These misconceptions were based on studies of wolves and, more importantly, simian cousins of homo sapiens such as chimpanzees and gorillas. As it turns out, primates were setting a better example all along.

Research based on 20 years of data on gorillas in Rwanda, published in the *Royal Society Journal Proceedings B* on August 6, shows how females, even when they move between social groups, search for and maintain friendships. Most primates change groups and locations, likely as a defence against inbreeding. New members are usually at the bottom of the hierarchy and can face aggression and ostracisation from more established, dominant females. Rather than aggression, however, they rely on past ties with other females, some of whom they have not seen since childhood. And the "friendly females" build more enduring ties and provide more safety than alpha males do.

This latest piece of research is of a piece with a growing body of work that shows that social skills, empathy, grooming, etc, are far more important in achieving status and success among primates. Bonobos, genetically as close to humans as chimps, are known as the "loving ape" because of how non-violent they are. Even among chimpanzees, the dominant male is often the one with the most social and political skills — with brains rather than brawn. Perhaps it's time that humans emulate the reality of the friendly females rather than the myth of the alpha male.



ROHIT LAMBA

THE AMERICAN TARIFF tantrum has arrived on India's shores, and we must not panic. On August 6, President Donald Trump signed an executive order doubling the already declared 25 per cent duty to 50 per cent on every Indian product entering US ports — from diesel and diamonds to t-shirts and turmeric alike. India has 21 days before the additional 25 per cent takes effect.

America buys nearly a fifth of what we export, worth \$87 billion last year. A blow this size can rattle factory floors, shake the rupee, and spook investors. Yet, India must view this punch as negotiable, and respond with calm, clarity and a plan. To be effective, we must first understand why India faces 50 per cent tariffs — almost the highest in Trump's global trade war.

Four factors explain Trump's escalation. First, the White House is burying what commentators in Washington DC call strategic altruism toward India — carve-outs justified by the promise of a long-term partnership. Second, and perhaps most critically, Trump appears personally offended that India didn't acknowledge the US's possible role in the May 10 India-Pakistan ceasefire. Third, there is an echoing of Silicon Valley's irritation with India's rules requiring data storage within its borders. Modern AI is ravenous for information, and India holds one-fifth of humanity's supply. Fourth, the administration wants to punish India's discounted Russian oil purchases, prioritising domestic political theatre over economic logic.

Reading between the lines, this represents high-stakes bargaining rather than permanent hostility. However, given the grip of tariff primacy in the White House and personality clashes between world leaders, New Delhi must prepare for tariffs to persist even after negotiations.

First, Delhi must target specific exemptions, not blanket relief. Reports suggest America has already granted over a trillion dollars in tariff exemptions. India should claim its share. Pharmaceuticals and smartphones appear exempt for now; we must push to include textiles, jewellery, and electronics. Second, it must mobilise allies within the US. Tariff walls often crack from within. American retailers facing expensive Christmas inventory will protest. We should feed them hard numbers showing how tariffs will increase US inflation and hurt American consumers. Third, India should prepare retaliation, but hold fire:



ROHAN BANERJEE

WHEN YOU ENTER a karaoke bar, you know there are some guarantees. There will be boisterous, tuneless singing from all, except that one friend who is annoyingly good. There will be a lot of microphone grabbing. You may have requested a song but once the lyrics are on the screen, all bets are off. And there will be a moment — after someone shrieks through 'Zombie' by The Cranberries, before someone massacres Queen's 'Bohemian rhapsody' — when 'Wonderwall' will play. The crowd will let out a roar of approval, take a deep breath and belt out the first verse.

For those who grew up in India as the 20th century folded into the 21st, TV offered a first brush with the West. Enid Blyton and Tintin had given us a glimpse of a mythic land with ginger beer and bejewelled sopranos; but satellite TV brought the world to our homes. American sitcoms and movies were within arm's reach. MTV and VH1 made English music mainstream. But our diet of Western culture was restricted to a drip-feed of daily programming. Until we became pirates.

Only a fortunate few grew up in homes stocked with vinyl records and tape cassettes of English rock bands. Even with the advent of Planet M and Music World, Western music remained an expensive taste. We dealt, instead, in pen-drives and CDs, peddling playlists cu-

Response to US weaponisation of trade should be mature statecraft

Trade disputes are now permanent features of global politics. The world's largest economy is willing to weaponise market access, and global supply chains will keep re-routing in search of certainty. For India, the answer is not panic, nor a stunt of hyper nationalism, but methodical statecraft: Negotiate firmly, build alliances, diversify always, and prioritise domestic competitiveness. This crisis could catalyse necessary changes. India might finally reduce its own high tariffs selectively, making our exports more competitive globally.

Publish a list of politically sensitive US exports worth billions — California almonds, Washington apples, Wisconsin motorcycles. Announce duties will apply only if talks fail. The threat alone creates pressure.

Four, bundle tariff reductions on luxury goods and automobiles with concessions America values: Increased purchases of US natural gas and controlled access for American financial technology firms. These don't compromise core interests while giving Washington an off-ramp. Five, while keeping strategic ties separate from trade disputes makes sense, Delhi has cards to play. Multi-billion-dollar drone purchases and the landmark GE-HAL fighter engine deal can proceed more smoothly once tariffs disappear — a carrot without weakening our Indo-Pacific deterrence. Six, India should support vulnerable sectors and extend credit to export-focused small businesses and boost incentives for garments and pharmaceutical companies. These are temporary bridges, not permanent subsidies.

Finally, it must manage personalities pragmatically. India must defend its dignity and strategic autonomy while protecting economic interests. Direct dialogue between Modi and Trump could help, even if core disagreements remain.

Beyond immediate tactics lies a larger chessboard. India cannot yield on agriculture and dairy — these sectors support hundreds of millions of livelihoods and ensure food security. What it must do is build coalitions with countries facing similar tariffs: Vietnam, Bangladesh, Brazil, and even close US allies like the EU and Japan. And, despite the current frost, even China. With the WTO proving ineffective, new partnerships must emerge.

Consider adopting China's proven workaround: Use Mexico and Canada as intermediate stops. A medical device manufactured in Gujarat, minimally processed in Tijuana, then shipped to Houston, faces Mexican rather than Indian tariffs. We sacrifice small margins for crucial market access.

Export diversification becomes essential. With the US taking 20 per cent of our merchandise exports, over-dependence creates vulnerability. Fast-track the pending EU trade agreement, implement the recent UK deal, and expand ties with Gulf countries and Latin America.

India's ace remains our services sector,

largely exempt from tariffs. Information technology and business services to the US generate massive revenues through people-to-people connections rather than shipping containers. The rise of Global Capability Centres — where American firms build their largest non-US offices in India — deepens this integration.

This model, built on Indian talent globally, must expand further. As technology blurs manufacturing and services boundaries, being embedded in critical knowledge chains worldwide increases our leverage beyond any tariff's reach.

Trade disputes are now permanent features of global politics. The world's largest economy is willing to weaponise market access, and global supply chains will keep re-routing in search of certainty. For India, the answer is not panic, nor a stunt of hyper nationalism, but methodical statecraft: Negotiate firmly, build alliances, diversify always, and prioritise domestic competitiveness.

This crisis could catalyse necessary changes. India might finally reduce its own high tariffs selectively, making our exports more competitive globally. We could accelerate manufacturing reforms that have been delayed for decades. Most importantly, we could build economic resilience that doesn't depend on any single nation's goodwill.

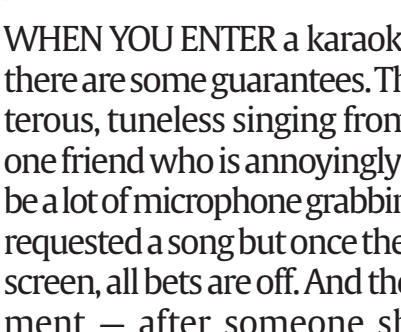
Deng Xiaoping's wisdom — "hide your strength, bide your time" — applies perfectly today. Avoid confrontation while building capabilities. Remember, leaders change, nations endure. With pragmatic planning, this tariff tantrum will be remembered not as a wound, but as the push that launched Indian trade strategy into its next, more confident phase.

The American market matters, but India's growth story doesn't depend on it alone. It has domestic demand, global diaspora networks, and emerging partnerships worldwide. And eventually, dignity and sovereignty, as Pratap Bhanu Mehta argued in these pages ('Against imperialism', *IE*, August 5), matter above all. Stay calm, negotiate smartly, and keep building. This too shall pass, leaving India stronger and more self-assured.

The writer is assistant professor of economics at Cornell University and the co-author of *Breaking the Mould: Reimagining India's Economic Future*

OUR WONDERWALL

Oasis shaped a generation. Its reunion tour is whistle-worthy



ROHAN BANERJEE

We dealt in pen-drives and CDs, peddling playlists curated by more learned peers with faster internet. 'Wonderwall' was a fixture in those playlists. It prompted you to scrounge for a few of their other songs, to get a feel of their music. 'Don't look back in anger' did not disappoint. When you heard 'Stop crying your heart out', you thought they were a proper band. And by the time you discovered 'Champagne supernova', you were at a crossroads.

The first path led to fandom. It meant devouring every Oasis album. It also meant wincing over the bust-ups the Gallagher brothers seemed to enjoy more than making music. For most of the 2000s, sibling strife left the band teetering on the brink of implosion. When Noel hit Liam with a cricket bat, you felt the blow in your bones. When they brawled in Barcelona, you carried the bruises for days. Finally, in 2009, when Liam held Noel's guitar "like an axe" and brought it crashing down during a fight, your heart — and Oasis — splintered.

Whatever your allegiance, you soon became one of those people who would interrupt conversations about Hamlet being the greatest tragic drama, to say, "Yes, Shakespeare's alright, but did the Prince of

Denmark experience anything close to the pain of watching Oasis break up?" When Oasis announced their reunion tour, you wept tears of joy. Liam and Noel back on stage together — it'll be as whistle-worthy as when Shah Rukh and Salman Khan joined forces in *Pathaan*.

The other road led away from Oasis. Half a dozen of their songs were burrowed into your brain, but in the years that followed you cared little for the band. You dimly registered the news of the group collapsing. Apparently, the brothers were a nasty pair who hated each other. Later, when the Gallaghers became regulars at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester, you were not surprised. Fans of Manchester City FC are known to be insufferable, after all, surpassed in obnoxiousness only by fans of Manchester United FC.

When someone told you Oasis are on a reunion tour, you expressed mild interest. You remembered the friends who were obsessed in their youth. You smiled at the memory, but soon enough, the Gallaghers and Oasis drifted out of your mind. But it won't be a long absence. They will flit into your consciousness when you enter a karaoke bar. Someone will put on 'Wonderwall' prompting you to take a deep breath before belting out the first verse.

The writer is a Mumbai-based lawyer

AUGUST 8, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

PUNJAB POLLS

THE GOVERNMENT AND the Opposition could not arrive at a consensus on the question of holding elections in Punjab before the expiry of the present term of President's Rule. While regional parties from the South and Congress (S) were in favour of early elections, all other opposition parties opposed. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi said that the government had an open mind on the issue.

TADA IN J&K

THE LOK SABHA passed the Terrorists and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Amendment Bill seeking to extend the provisions of the act

to Jammu and Kashmir following an assurance by Home Minister SB Chavan that it would not be misused to curb political and trade union activities as apprehended by some members. Chavan said clear guidelines had been given to state governments and Union territories when the original Bill was passed in May that it would be invoked only to curb activities spelt out by the Bill.

PM ON DOORDARSHAN

PRIME MINISTER RAJIV Gandhi has asked Doordarshan to tune up its news and feature programmes and not make a deliberate attempt at any kind of image building for him and his ministers. He has also called for the develop-

ment of a "distinctive professional character" by Doordarshan, making news bulletins "crisper" so that they do not sound like "press releases". Gandhi felt that weather bulletins should be more informative and have greater scientific content with tips to farmers in layman's language.

CHAMPION GEET SETHI

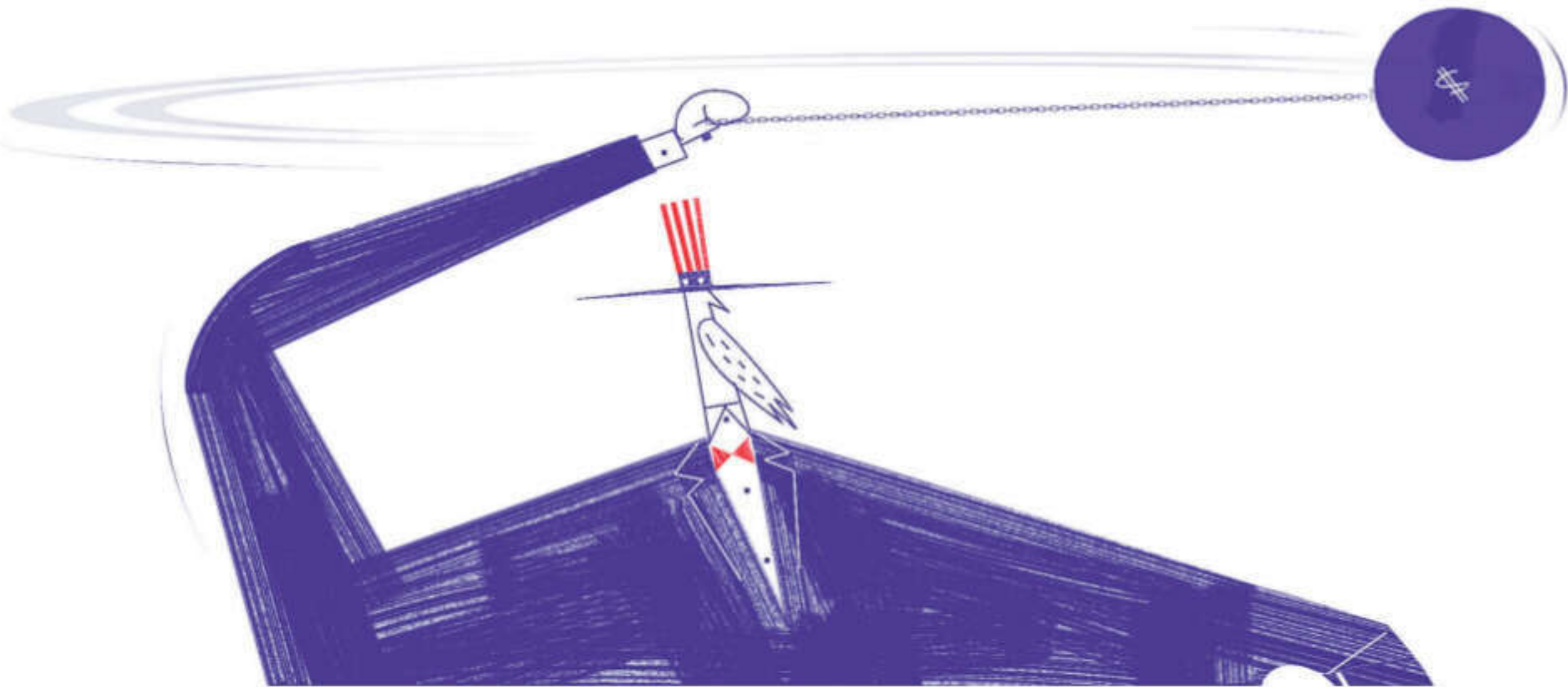
UNSEEDED GEET SETHI of India rose to meteoric heights as he became the undisputed king of the World Billiards Championship at the Taj Palace Darbar Hall in New Delhi. The youngest player ever to wear the prestigious crown in his maiden appearance, Sethi silenced the great grandpa, Bob Marshall of Australia.



The Ideas Page

DIS/AGREE
THE BEST OF BOTH SIDES

A fortnightly column, which offers not this-versus-that, but the best of both sides, to inform the debate



CR Sasikumar

US President Donald Trump has cited India's dealings with Russia as a reason for doubling tariffs on India to 50 per cent. How should New Delhi navigate this predicament?

A bargain with US is still possible

India-US relationship is too important to be derailed on the Russia oil imports issue. Delhi must avoid raising decibel levels



PANKAJ SARAN

INDIA HAS FINALLY come into the crosshairs of the Trump storm, having lived a reasonably charmed life in the initial weeks of his presidency. The magnitude of Donald Trump's additional 25 per cent tariff, taking the total to 50 per cent, goes beyond the narrow confines of bilateral trade and economics. It has political ramifications, meant to hurt India.

When we look back, India was quick off the mark to engage with Trump 2.0, with visits by the External Affairs Minister for the inauguration ceremony and then by Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself within a month of Trump taking office. Behind the scenes, India was also quick to present a forward-looking trade package to American negotiators, having drawn lessons from his last term when Trump withdrew the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) for India. Geopolitically, India welcomed the US President's intention to end the Ukraine conflict. It viewed the announcement of tariffs on China as a much-needed correction to Western indulgence of China. The personal chemistry between PM Modi and President Trump was taken as an accepted fact. Things seemed to be going well.

Admittedly, there was foreboding of tough times on trade and tariff matters. The pejorative references to India were becoming uncomfortably frequent and strident, and the memories of difficult negotiations under Trump 1.0 never went away. Yet, India escaped Trump's notice as he set about turning against US allies, striking at the foundations of the trans-Atlantic alliance, challenging Canada's sovereignty, not to forget renaming the Panama Canal and the proposal to buy Greenland.

The vocabulary and mood of the India-US relationship has changed. The romanticism of shared values is no longer visible. It has now boiled down to teaching a lesson and meting out punishment at the leadership level. We are told that the President is a man in a hurry, and is counting his time, not in weeks but days. The relationship has been dealt a severe blow, the likes of which has not been seen in recent memory. India has been stigmatised for allegedly funding Russia's war effort, in addition to being called the "tariff king".

Passing the blame for lack of progress in Eastern Europe on India or believing that punishing Delhi will bring Moscow to the table is obfuscation. Russia's war is funded not by India. It is built on the billions of dollars of earnings from energy exports to Europe over decades, besides ongoing imports. The war machine will continue even if India were to bring its imports to zero. It is a well-advertised fact that top US and Russian negotiators were, till a few months ago, discussing potential US investments, trade and

economic cooperation with Russia.

A better attempt to enfeeble Russia would be to squeeze Beijing. Painting India and China with the same brush is a geopolitical self-goal. Moscow and Beijing are happy to see the US doubling down on India. India is not going to fall, but questions which were considered settled on the durability of friendship with the US have resurfaced.

Some in the West and the US project India's purchase of oil from Russia as an exhibition of its pursuit of "strategic autonomy". Nothing could be more inaccurate. India has justified its energy trade with Russia ad nauseum. There is a bigger concern at play. If this is an era where transactionalism and unilateralism form the basis of foreign policy and there are no taboos, why should India not brace for a scenario of the US striking a deal with China, or even a breakthrough in US-Russia relations? It is the existence of such uncertainties that strengthens, rather than weakens, the Indian impulse towards geopolitical hedging. The surreal hosting of the Pakistani army chief in the White House and other encomiums heaped on Pakistan, turning a deliberate blind eye to its sponsorship of terrorism in India with Chinese backing, make such hedging more imperative.

There is more to the tariff war launched against India than frustration with Russia. Other sources of anger seem to stem from India's non-committal posture on buying certain high-value defence platforms, and the denial of any mediatory role played by the US during Operation Sindoor. There is frustration on Indian bargaining hard on agriculture and dairy imports on the trade track. Added to this are accusations relating to Indian immigration practices, cut back in visas, and people-to-people movement, considered a foundational element of the relationship. Several pressure points are being applied. The India-US relationship is being tested to its limits. It will get worse before it gets better.

For Indians, this is a useful reality check. National security and economic growth cannot be outsourced. India is far from being a rejectionist state, but its interests are real, not imagined. The tariffs imposed could lead to the outpricing of Indian goods, services and human resources from the US market; to a possible unravelling and dismantling of the connectivities built over the last few decades. How should India respond to the US President's onslaught?

To begin with, keep calm, avoid raising decibel levels, and control the damage. There is a need to focus on internal reform and rebalancing. The India-US relationship is too important to be derailed. The two countries have had a history of talking straight to each other, which has seen them through seemingly unbridgeable positions in the past. Red lines cannot be shifted, but grand bargains are always possible. The past seven months of the Trump era have been marked by volatility and sharp turns. The next few months are likely to be much the same, because much of what Trump is doing is still work in progress.

The writer is convenor, NatStrat, former deputy national security adviser and former ambassador to Russia

Russia is a red line for India

New Delhi will have to take a hard call: For now, economy-greasing oil from Russia, and a plan for diversification in the future



MANJEET KRIPALANI

INDIA'S NATIONAL SECURITY Advisor Ajit Doval arrived in Moscow on August 5, to discuss regional stability, counter-terrorism, energy security and defence purchases. According to reports, Russian President Vladimir Putin is expected to visit India later this year. This will be Putin's first trip to India in four years. The high-level activity in the Russia-India corridor is not matched by a similar engagement in the India-US space. On August 1, President Donald Trump threatened India with 25 per cent tariffs on its exports plus additional penalties of up to 500 per cent if New Delhi didn't stop its purchases of Russian oil by August 7; on August 6, he doubled the threat to 50 per cent.

Is Russia the red line for India? It may well be. The US tariffs come at a time when India is re-entering the global commercial arena as an equal player. The country is currently negotiating free trade agreements (FTAs) with six countries, including the US, having

by Washington, and will play to it. Russia has some frustrations with India which will be conveyed to NSA Doval. First, though bilateral trade has reached a record \$68.7 billion, over 90 per cent of it is oil, and India runs a massive deficit with Moscow. Second, US and EU sanctions against Russia have forced the rupee-rouble trade practice back into the bilateral, and now 90 per cent of all India-Russia trade is in local currencies. Russians are unable to invest much in India, as Moscow needs funds to run its own war-time economy. Third, on the Ukraine war, Russia has been less than happy with India's make-peace-not-war statements.

Regionally, though Russia has managed to separate its historical proximity with India from its new and deep friendship with China, at the SCO, there are clear sides: Russia-China-Central Asia on one side, with India being the outlier. Bilaterally, India has specific needs from Russia, viz defence equipment. India would like to buy more, but Moscow is using large quantities of its production for the Ukraine war.

It doesn't compare with India's current unhappiness with Washington. Sanctions on traditional oil suppliers like Iran and Venezuela have cut off those supplies for India, and now penalties on Russian oil threaten to do the same, destabilising India's growing economy. It has been a particularly unkind cut, as the Biden administration had

appealed to India to buy Russian discounted oil to keep energy markets steady.

Trump has been cavalier about the QUAD, which was meant to keep China in check in the Indo-Pacific. The next QUAD meeting, due to be held in India in October, may be a damp squib without the presence of the US President. Meanwhile, Trump's irritation with BRICS, which he sees as nations colluding to displace the US Dollar's dominance, will only increase as India takes the chair of the plurilateral in

2026. India has been holding off a reconvening of the Russia-India-China Trilateral, but if it does so, Trump will have one more grouse against India.

New Delhi will have to take a hard geopolitical call, and take the bargain available on the table: Economy-greasing oil from Russia for now, and a plan for future diversification. On Ukraine, India could take a stronger position, emphasising that the West acknowledge the fundamental reason for Russia's war with its neighbour. India could project a harmonious partnership with Russia, with Putin visiting New Delhi in the next few months – a sure way to infuriate Trump. That may compel India to be a grown up and take the 50 per cent tariffs hit, till a renegotiation takes place or a trade agreement to mutual US-India satisfaction comes about. It will also force Indian companies to diversify into new, non-G7 markets, and invest more in research and development at home. An all-important domestic benefit to going the Moscow way: Standing up to Trump will give PM Modi a boost just before the Bihar election.

The writer is executive director, Gateway House: Indian Council on Global Relations

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The Russian president had a friend in Donald Trump but a paranoid addiction to war prevents him from doing a deal."

— THE GUARDIAN

Warning bells, unheard

As Uttarkashi reels from avalanches and floods, India must confront deadly consequences of unsustainable development in fragile Himalaya



RAVI CHOPRA

THREE CLIMATE-RELATED catastrophes devastated a short scenic stretch of the upper Bhagirathi (Ganga) river valley in Uttarkashi district on August 5. They devastated Dharali — a pretty Himalayan town along the Bhagirathi about 20 km before Gangotri, a portion of Harshil, six kilometres downstream, known for its apple orchards, and some nearby settlements, according to initial reports.

In the evening, the Central Water Commission released a brief disaster report. It described the first incident, around 1:00 pm, as a suspected cloudburst flood, "severely damaging" much of Dharali, sweeping away residential houses, shops and possibly affecting many people gathered in the town for a mela. A second cloudburst occurred around 3:00 pm in a small mountain stream valley, downstream of Harail. A third flood, at 3:30 pm, submerged the Harshil helipad that could affect later relief efforts. About 100 Army personnel, assisted by The National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), State Disaster Response Force (SDRF), Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) and local police teams began prompt rescue operations.

Later, a Dehradun-based IMD officer denied the occurrence of a cloudburst in Uttarkashi district. News media revealed that a 50-60 ft-deep debris flood had submerged Dharali's bazaar, about 20-25 hotels and homestays, and the much venerated, ancient Kalp Kedar temple. The district administration reported four deaths and about 60 to 70 missing, including about nine Army personnel. Detailed damage assessments are continuing.

Late at night, Navin Juyal, Uttarakhand's most intrepid geological scientist, provided a scientific explanation of the disaster on his YouTube channel. The affected Dharali stretch lies at the base of a steep slope covered with towering deodar trees, amid rocks and boulders brought down by small mountain streams and frequent avalanches. The trees arrest the avalanches and their roots stabilise the slopes.

Several cirques or "hanging glaciers" – hollowed glacial ledges full of rocks, boulders and other debris left behind by receding glaciers in the past – dot the crests of the slopes. Five or six small streams emerge from these cirques and rush down the slopes. These streams can create havoc during periods of intense summer monsoon rains. Rising temperatures on the high crests melt the winter snows that quickly form massive avalanches, along with ice, rain water and the glacial moraines, as they rush down the stream valleys. The recent catastrophes were due to three such avalanches, all within 2.5 hours, Juyal explained.

In 2012, the Union government had notified the Gaumukh to Uttarkashi watershed of the Bhagirathi as an Eco-Sensitive Zone (BESZ). This was to preserve its pristine areas and regulate infrastructural activities in the region. Later central and state governments, however, have been lax in enforcing the reg-

ulations, despite the strenuous efforts by some members of an MoEF&CC appointed monitoring committee.

With the governments ignoring the BESZ notification, the Union Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) prepared plans to widen the National Highway in the BESZ to accommodate Gangotri's summer tourist traffic. In 2020, Juyal, as a member of the Supreme Court directed High Powered Committee (HPC) to investigate the construction of the Char Dham highway, warned his committee colleagues, BRO engineers and senior Uttarakhand and central government officials of the high probability of repeated future avalanches due to global warming and climate changes.

In 2020, in its final report to the Supreme Court, the HPC recommended that the sensitive slopes not be disturbed. To protect the BESZ, particularly to conserve the deodar forest stretch, it recommended that an elevated highway stretch closer to the riverside be considered as an alternative to widening the highway. It would minimise felling of the deodar trees. Highway authorities have not only ignored the HPC recommendations, they have marked 6,000 precious deodar trees to be cut down.

Mountain researchers have been studying and issuing warnings for decades now, in print and at high-level conferences where decision-makers are participants, that the Himalayan region is more vulnerable to climate change than most other parts of the Indian subcontinent. They have identified specific sensitive areas in the Himalaya and the policies and actions needed to avoid disasters or minimise their impacts. They have pointed out that HEPs should not be built in para-glacial regions, human settlements and built structures be located at safe distances from flood-prone rivers, particularly small mountain streams that can suddenly turn treacherous, road widening along slopes steeper than 30 degrees should be avoided, and that carrying capacity studies are desperately needed in the Himalayan towns and cities. Senior government officials pay lip service to these recommendations but do nothing to implement them.

The warning bells of the Kedarnath tragedy (2013), destruction of the Tapovan-Vishnugad hydro-electric project by the Raunthi Gad avalanche (2021), fissures in the ground and buildings in Joshimath (2023), glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF) in the Teesta valley (2023) and the repeated monsoonal landslides and floods in Himachal Pradesh are ignored by decision-makers in their headlong drive to push unsustainable infrastructure development in ecologically and geologically sensitive areas. As the saying goes, "You can't wake a person who is pretending to be asleep."

It is long past time for Indian citizens, bewitched by images of rapid economic growth, real for some but dreams for many, to wake up to the warning bells of climate change and demand safer, sustainable and equitable economic growth. Recognising and respecting nature's boundaries is our safest, most logical route to survival and economic development.

The writer is a former director of the People's Science Institute, Dehradun. He headed two Supreme Court nominated committees to investigate the Kedarnath flood (2013) and the Char Dham Pariyojana (2019-2022)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

PRESERVE NPT

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Nuclear dialogue, sans politics' (IE, August 7). Decades ago, the NPT was set in place as one of the most important international security agreements to restrict states from acquiring nuclear weapons, and nuclear-armed states eventually gave them up. However, tensions regarding the fulfilment of these obligations have always prevailed, with states-parties being more divided on how to enforce the treaty. As a treaty's success depends on universal compliance, there is a need for a consensus on the need to strengthen and preserve the NPT.

Vaibhav Goyal, Chandigarh

TARIFFS AND RBI

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'A considered pause' (IE, August 7). We live in tumultuous times and who knows it better than the RBI. Its job, with respect to monetary policy especially, has become all the more crucial since the announcement of the increased tariff rates by US President Donald Trump. The projected revised rates of inflation and the fear of lower rates of growth are of immediate concern to the institution.

Sanjeev Raina, Greater Noida

TERRIFIC START

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'The age of Gill' (IE, August 6). When the Indian Cricket Team left for England to play a test series against the English, cricket pundits were not expecting much from a team considered inexperienced under the newly appointed captain, Shubman Gill. After the retirement of legends like Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma, the talented Gill was awarded the responsibility of leading the team. India, however, displayed a fierce approach against its rivals in their own backyard, drawing a tough series 2-2.

Amandeep Bains, Sirsa

LET SANITY PREVAIL

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'Trump doubles India tariff to 50 per cent, opens 21 day window' (IE, August 7). There are no prizes for guessing that the US tariffs will dent the Indian economy by a few notches. The precarious situation merits not only forbearance but prudence. Trump is missing the forest for the trees by imposing additional tariffs. Had he zeroed in on clinching a trade deal with India, it would have resulted in a win-win situation for both countries.

Aanya Singhal, Noida



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

What to expect from Trump-Putin meet

The two Presidents could meet as early as next week. ARJUN SENGUPTA spoke to one of India’s foremost experts on Russia on the state of the war, what the Trump-Putin meeting could achieve, and what it could mean for Ukraine, Europe, and India

EXPLAINED INTERVIEW



NANDAN UNNIKRISHNAN

Where does the Russia-Ukraine war stand? Which side would be happier if the war ended today?

Currently, Russia is winning, and Ukraine will be unhappy under all circumstances. Although Russia is yet to fully capture the four oblasts (Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, Kherson) that were constitutionally incorporated into Russia in 2022, most experts agree that if the current tempo of the war is sustained, they will get there by the end of the year.

After losing Crimea in 2014, Ukraine has lost another 20% of its territory, and may lose more land in the coming months. Ukraine has neither the economic power nor the human resources to turn the tide of the war.

Russia may be challenged if NATO enters the war but that could lead to a quick escalation to the nuclear level. This is why NATO, while supporting Ukraine’s war efforts, has been very careful not to cross certain red lines. This is unlikely to change.

In this context, what does a meeting between President Donald Trump and President Vladimir Putin aim to achieve?

The two leaders will enter the meeting with very different expectations.

Trump will hope to extract some kind of a promise from Putin — at the very least of a ceasefire that will halt the fighting. Trump believes he has the personality and the leverage to get Putin to agree to whatever he wants.

But Russia’s President is unlikely to agree to any deal unless he is given guarantees that Ukraine will never become a member of NATO and will not receive any security guarantees from the West. Moreover, Putin will insist that the territories his forces have captured, including Crimea, be recognised as Russian.

Is Putin likely to receive these guarantees?

During his presidential campaign and in the first months of his presidency, Trump indicated that he was willing to consider several of Russia’s demands.

The US President does not see Ukraine as a part of NATO, a grouping that he personally doesn’t appear to be too invested in. Trump and members of his administration had also indicated that they were not averse to Ukraine ceding territory to Russia to end



US President Donald Trump (left) meets Russia President Vladimir Putin at the G-20 summit in Hamburg, Germany on July 7, 2017. The upcoming meeting will be the first between the Presidents of the two countries since 2021. *The New York Times*

the war.

Trump does not consider the war in Ukraine to be a legacy that he has to continue. Given that Ukraine is not that strategically important to the US, Trump does not see the war as a path to achieving American dominance in world affairs. In fact, he was trying to push Ukraine into accepting these demands, as his public bust-up with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in the White House made clear.

But with the so-called peace deal not coming together, Trump, who sees himself as a great peacemaker, is irritated. The pro-Ukrainian lobby in the US has had time to work on him, and the President seems to have had a change of heart since the end of May. The President also seems to have been cornered by his own rhetoric. Having signed agreements with Ukraine, talked about the country’s sovereignty, and reopened arms supplies, he will find it difficult to walk back to his older position.

Nevertheless, the Russians have said that Trump’s envoy Steve Witkoff had during his talks with Putin on August 6 presented an “acceptable” offer for peace. This is an indication that the US appears to be seriously con-

sidering Russia’s concerns about Europe’s security architecture.

Can Trump’s secondary sanctions compel Putin to agree to a deal?

Trump undoubtedly is using these secondary sanctions as leverage to get Russia to the negotiating table.

The problem for Russia is that these secondary sanctions affect other countries, such as China and India. Russia has survived a lot of sanctions and, in a sense, built a sanctions-proof economy. But Russia will suffer if — and this is still a big if — it is unable to sell its natural resources or trade with the world. A substantial part of its budget comprises taxes on exported natural resources including oil and gas.

At the same time, from a Russian perspective, they are fighting an existential threat. Ukraine becoming a part of NATO, meaning that Western countries could put their weapon systems and people on Ukrainian soil, is a red line for Russia. Given this aim, it is unlikely that Russia will compromise due to economic pressure.

Putin may indeed agree to a ceasefire, but he will only do so if it suits Russia’s interests.

Given the stakes for him and the state of the war, he is very much in the driver’s seat.

Where does this leave Ukraine?

Zelenskyy had hoped that by signing the critical minerals deal with the US, the Americans would be forced to enter the war to protect their own interests in the minerals covered under the deal. But Trump’s likely meeting with Putin indicates that the deal alone is not enough for the US to commit to war.

The Ukrainian President has been calling up various European leaders and trying to get himself invited to the Trump-Putin meeting. He is worried that Putin may be able to persuade Trump to accept some of the positions that Russia has been voicing from the beginning of the war — which the American President himself does not appear to be fundamentally against.

What are the implications for Europe, whose leaders have framed the war as an existential threat to the continent?

There is not a shred of evidence that any European leader can provide about Russia’s aggressive intentions towards even the Baltic

countries, let alone Western Europe. This is a scare that European elites created and ingrained in people’s minds as a distraction from the situation on the continent.

Europe is facing a recession. The European Union, at least Germany, which has long been the locomotive of the EU’s development, is facing deindustrialisation. There are fundamental issues with the economic model that the EU had going: they were buying cheap energy from Russia to make products to sell to the world, particularly China. Now, they are being squeezed at both ends. The war has stopped the flow of Russian gas to Europe, and the Americans are pressuring the EU to restrict its interactions with China.

As the European economies struggle, it is the European elites — and not Europe itself — who face an existential crisis. If they were to back out of supporting Ukraine now, they would definitely not survive in power, especially with far right parties already posing serious challenges to traditional political elites. Europe’s elites are, in effect, stuck: they cannot help Ukraine win the war, but ending it by acquiescing to Russian demands will be an unacceptable defeat.

For India, what does a Trump-Putin meeting entail?

India is caught in Trump’s attempt to exert leverage on Russia. His “extra” tariffs have put India in a difficult position. To use a phrase used by former National Security Adviser J N Dixit, India will need to do a “complicated Bharatnatyam dance” to extricate itself from this situation.

The US is our largest trading partner. It is also one of the few countries with which India has a trade surplus that offsets, at least partially, the deficit we have with China and Russia.

India is not a fully export-oriented economy, and the tariffs, as they are structured, provide India with some wiggle room. For example, petroleum products, pharmaceuticals and IT products are exempt from the tariffs imposed for import of Russian crude. India has to decide whether ceasing to buy cheap oil from Russia is worth the hit that American tariffs will entail.

This is also about the country’s image. If India gives in to Trump’s demands it is likely to be perceived as “weak” and its image as a global leader is likely to be hit. This also will have to be part of the calculations on how India should proceed.

In this difficult situation, the best would be if Trump and Putin were to agree on a roadmap to peace next week. Such an agreement would likely make the threat of additional tariffs irrelevant.

Nandan Unnikrishnan is Distinguished Fellow at the Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi

TRUMP’S TARIFF & INDIA’S RED LINES

What Trump’s 50% tariff means for India

UDIT MISRA
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 7

ON WEDNESDAY, United States President Donald Trump announced that imports from India would attract an additional 25% tariff as penalty for India buying Russian energy. Together with the 25% tariff that Trump had announced earlier, imports from India will now attract a total 50% tariff — making India (along with Brazil) the country facing the highest tariff wall in the US.

India has described these actions as “unfair, unjustified and unreasonable”, and said it would take “all actions necessary” to “protect national interests”. Experts suggest that the tariff can result in India’s annual economic output (measured by gross domestic product or GDP) to fall by over half a percentage point.

What is Trump’s grouse against India?

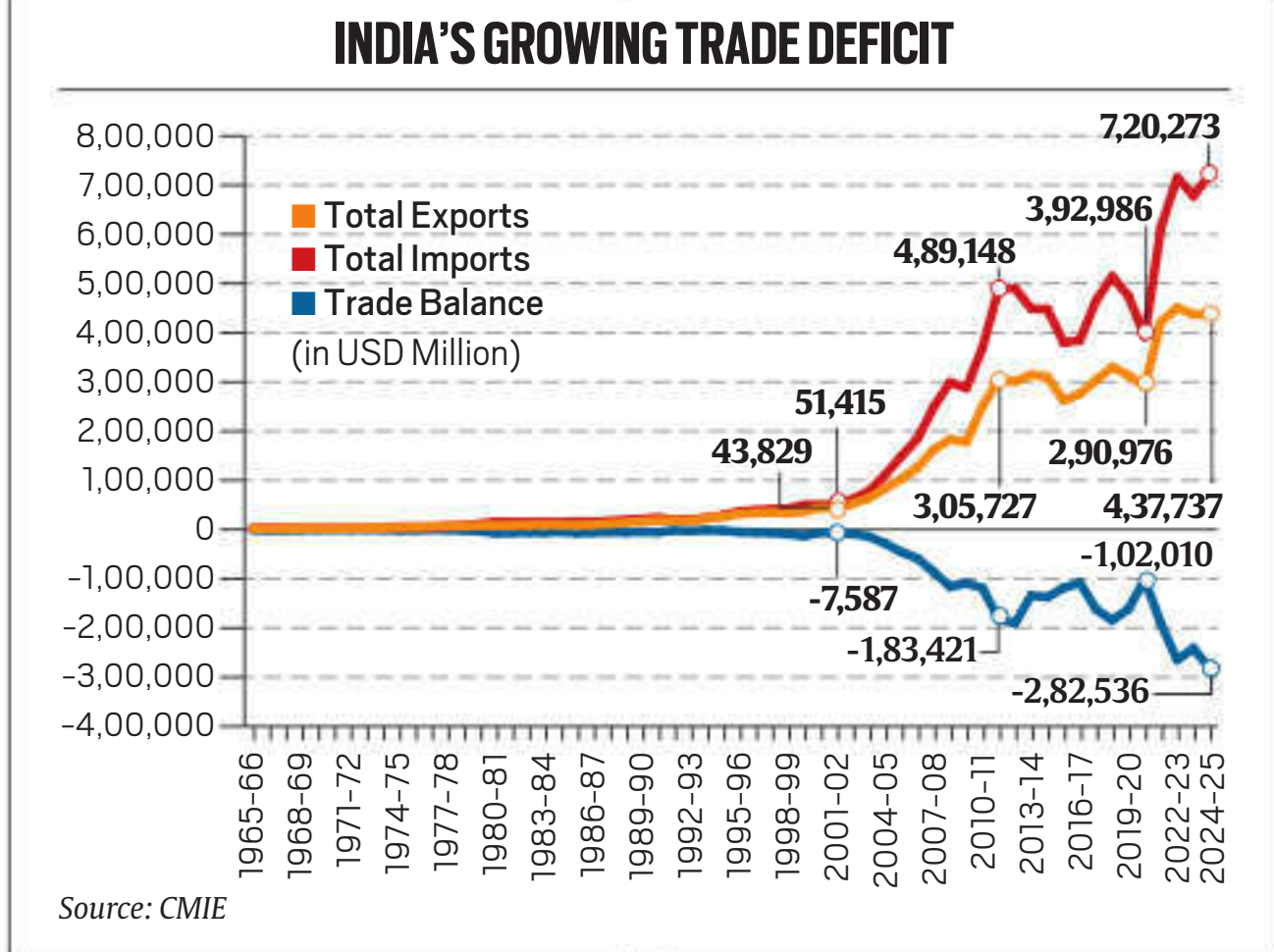
The additional 25% tariff appears to be driven not so much by a desire to punish India for importing energy from Russia — the stated reason — as to use it as a negotiating tool to force New Delhi to sign a trade deal that suits the US. Several countries such as China and those in the European Union, as well as the US, continue to import goods and energy from Russia.

More broadly, Trump has repeatedly described India as one of the world’s most protectionist countries, with very high tariff and non-tariff barriers that make it difficult for producers in the US to sell their products in India. According to Trump, this is the reason why the US has a trade deficit with India. At the heart of his tariffs policy is a desire to eliminate the US trade deficit and have balanced trade relations.

How will tariffs reduce the trade deficit?

A tariff is essentially a tax on domestic consumers when they import goods from abroad. So when the US puts a tariff of 50% on imports from India, American buyers find Indian goods 50% costlier.

With the rise in prices, demand falls. High tariffs are thus meant to drive Americans to a cheaper alternative or stop them from buy-



ing the specific product at all. As imports from India fall, presuming exports to India do not change, the US’ trade deficit will reduce and eventually close up.

Tariffs can also be used as a threat to force India to strike a trade deal that would open up two other ways to eliminate the trade deficit. One, by forcing India to open its markets to American goods — a rise in US exports to India will bridge the trade deficit. Two, by forcing the Indian government and its associated entities to buy more American goods — say defence equipment or crude oil — to reduce the trade deficit.

Does that mean Trump is a champion of free-trade?

Not really. Trump has imposed tariffs even on countries with which the US enjoyed trade surpluses such as the UK and Australia.

Trump believes that only balanced trade — that is, zero trade deficit — is fair trade. A trade deficit, in his worldview, implies that the other country (India, for instance) is cheating the US. As a result, even if there was complete free trade between the US

and the other countries, if the US suffers a trade deficit, Trump can still be expected to slap tariffs.

What makes this stance of Trump troublesome is that no two countries naturally achieve balanced trade. More often than not, a country has trade deficits with some countries and surpluses with others. What matters for any country is not to have an overall trade deficit which is unsustainable.

Is Trump singling out India?

No. Since taking over on January 20, Trump has gone after several of its closest trade and military allies — such as Canada, Mexico and the EU — slapping or threatening to slap punitive tariffs.

Many countries are still negotiating with the US, and it is possible that they may see even higher tariffs being slapped on them. It is equally possible that Trump may hike tariff rates against India if he believes that even after these tariffs the trade deficit will not go away.

Should India retaliate by putting tariffs

on imports from the US?

No, for two reasons. One, a tariff essentially penalises the domestic consumer. Putting a tariff will only make it more costly for an Indian consumer to import a good from the US.

Two, placing tariffs will result in reducing India’s imports from the US, thus widening the trade deficit and triggering yet another cycle of tariffs because Trump is only looking at wiping out the trade deficit.

What will be the exact impact of these tariffs?

Tariffs disrupt long-established supply chains. A small scale firm or entrepreneur in Ludhiana who loses a contract for supplying T-shirts to a New York store as a result of these tariffs may not recover if that business order goes to a competitor in Bangladesh.

The exact impact will depend on how capable Indian firms are in taking a hit on their profits, for how long, and whether there are close competitors in other countries who are in a position to take advantage.

The real damage is not in terms of the loss of GDP but in terms of the loss of livelihoods and employment. Sectors such as textiles and carpets or food-related exports are heavily labour intensive, and the same half a percentage point fall in GDP in such sectors could create much deeper devastation of livelihoods.

What can India do?

In the immediate term, Indian negotiators have to limit the damage in terms of the trade deal that is being negotiated.

But in the medium to longer term, this is yet another clarion call for domestic reforms. Policymakers and citizens alike should question: Why is it that growth in Indian manufacturing lags even Indian agriculture? Why are Indian youth unskilled despite college degrees? What can be done to reduce logistical costs? How can we improve the ease of doing business?

Trump’s reluctance to have a direct confrontation with China, which is the factory to the world, shows that when it comes to global trade, strength matters and weaknesses don’t just get exploited but also punished.

Why PM spoke of farmers, livestock rearers & fisherfolk

HARISH DAMODARAN
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 7

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi said on Thursday that his government would never compromise the interests of India’s *kisaan* (farmers), *pashupadalak* (livestock rearers) and *machhuare* (fisherfolk), even if it entailed his paying a very heavy personal price.

Both the occasion — an international conference to commemorate the birth centenary of the Father of India’s Green Revolution M S Swaminathan — and the context — the stalled trade talks between India and the United States — suggested that the PM was responding to pressure from the Donald Trump administration to open up the country’s market to American farm produce.

Modi did not refer to the deadlocked negotiations or Trump’s unilateral action to impose a 50% tariff on Indian goods imported into the US. But the PM’s clear identification of *kisaan*, *pashupadalak* and *machhuare*, and placing their interests as his government’s “topmost priority” suggests that the signal was to the US that there are red lines as far as agriculture is concerned.

What are the concerns specific to the three primary agricultural producer-stakeholders that have hindered the finalisation of the India-US bilateral trade agreement?

Farmers

The main issue here is with the US’ pressure on India to open up its domestic market to genetically modified (GM) soyabean and maize. Both crops are widely grown in India — on 13 million and 12 million hectares respectively. But average per-hectare corn yields in India, at around 3.5 tonnes, are a fraction of the 11 tonnes in the US. In soyabean, Indian average yields are just over 0.9 tonnes, as against the 3.5 tonnes in the US.

This difference is to a significant extent on account of American farmers cultivating GM varieties that can tolerate the application of herbicides such as glyphosate and glufosinate, or resist attacks by specific pests.

Indian farmer organisations fear that allowing imports of GM maize and soyabean from the US would lead to a crash in domestic prices. They consider such opening to be unfair, when the planting of GM crops (other than cotton) is not permitted in India.

The US also wants India to allow imports of ethanol for use as bio-fuel. Currently, only ethanol produced from domestically grown sugarcane, maize, and rice is used for blending up to 20% with petrol. Sugar mills have opposed any move to import maize for bio-fuel purposes. They say that this will ultimately hurt India’s sugarcane farmers.

Livestock rearers

There is all-round opposition from the Indian dairy industry to the imports of milk powder, butter oil, and cheese under any free trade agreement, whether with the US, the European Union, New Zealand, or Australia. India levies 30% import duty on cheese, 40% on butter, and 60% on milk powder.

There is also the requirement — which the US claims is premised purely on religious and cultural grounds — that all imported dairy products should be derived from animals not fed on any formulation produced from the internal organs, bone meal or tissues of animals. Any reduction of import duties or the relaxation of these non-tariff barriers is unlikely in the present context.

Fisherfolk

Here, the threat has less to do more with exports. India’s seafood exports to the US were valued at \$2.48 billion in 2024, and a 32.5% growth has been posted in the first six months of this calendar year.

Given that the US is a major market, particularly for frozen shrimp, the latest Trump tariff of 50% can hugely impact aqua farmers in states such as Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Odisha, and Tamil Nadu.

This is more so when lower tariffs of 10-20% have been put on competing countries like Chile, Ecuador, Indonesia, and Vietnam.

New red lines in trade talks

Trump’s demand that India open up its farm, dairy and fisheries sectors is unreasonable

Reacting to the US tariffs for the first time, Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi has reiterated his resolve to protect the interests of India’s farm, dairy and fisheries sectors even in the face of adversity. Modi’s statement, delivered at a programme marking MS Swaminathan’s birth centenary, gives the first official hint that India’s refusal to succumb to US demands for opening up these critical sectors was a key factor in Trump’s 25% tariffs, on which he added another 25% on Wednesday. Given the fact that trade negotiations between India and US are far from over, the PM’s assertion draws an important red line for the terms of the talks.

The government of India is absolutely justified in sticking to its position in protecting India’s farm, dairy and fisheries sectors which would suffer heavy losses if faced with a deluge of heavily subsidised exports from the agro-industrial complex of countries such as the US. Conceding ground to the US on this could have raised similar demands from other players too. India, the US should be reminded, has been consistent about its position on these issues throughout the long arc of the making and unmaking of the now moribund multilateral trade regime.

While the government’s position deserves bipartisan support within the country and also from the entire Global South — India played a vanguard role in clinching the Doha agreement in World Trade Organization, which forced the advanced countries to acknowledge the concerns of the poor in the Global South — this is only a necessary and not a sufficient condition for the well-being of the Indian economy and its non-rich stakeholders.

Thanks to the Green Revolution and its iterative versions in dairy and fisheries, India is now self-sufficient in food production and even a major exporter of many products. While this has done away with crippling supply-side constraints that the Indian economy used to face until the 1960s, India’s current day economic challenge requires solving a second order problem of pushing the envelope on demand to boost mass income levels. It is here that export earnings and tariff-driven disruptions to them can hurt the Indian economy.

The government should try and find as good a short-term solution to the American escalation on the tariff front without succumbing to Trump’s blatantly unreasonable demand of opening up critical sectors such as farming. But it should also work with the understanding that long-term solutions for the Indian economy have to be outside the farm sector.

When fries turn out to be a hot potato

A study published in *The BMJ* links potato consumption — especially fried potatoes — to a higher likelihood of developing Type 2 diabetes (T2D). Boiled and baked potatoes pose a lower risk than fried, but substituting the vegetable with whole grains further reduces the risk of T2D. White rice, however, is associated with greater risks of T2D.

The findings are of particular interest for India and should prompt a course correction, given the country is grappling with high T2D incidence — as per the International Diabetes Federation, China, India, and the US make up the top three countries for the highest number of diabetics and are projected to remain so till 2045. Potato’s ubiquity across regional cuisines in India and the versatility of its use are well known. This is what makes it so singularly dangerous for India in the context of battling diabetes. While the per capita consumption is low — less than 15% of world leader Belarus, as per the *World Population Review* — overall consumption is quite high, second only to China.

Childhood obesity — with strong links to T2D in later years — is on the rise in the country. Consumption of fried potato-based snacks such as French fries and potato wafers has boomed over the past few decades — indeed, as India turned a major exporter of frozen French fries from being an importer, domestic consumption also rocketed. Throw in India’s high white rice consumption, and the diabetes threat starts to look like an epidemic. Diabetes is associated with systemic degradation — it can cause blindness, renal and cardiac troubles, and skin ulcers, among others, mediated by various neuropathies, myopathies and vascular conditions linked to it. The *BMJ* findings should be an opportunity to focus on reducing risks by nudging healthier eating by children and adults alike. This will not be easy given rice and potato are staples.

Trump’s tariff shadow on India-US relations

Bilateral trade talks may help allay the secondary tariffs threat

US President Donald Trump announced a secondary tariff of 25% on India, which is scheduled to come into effect from August 28. This was not entirely unexpected, especially as President Donald Trump had recently threatened “substantial” tariffs on India. Stacking this on top of the 25% “reciprocal” tariffs announced on July 30 takes the total tariff to 50%.

Based on comments made by the president in his latest executive order, these secondary tariffs have little to do with the trade deficit that India runs with the US, and more with the “threat to the United States by the government of the Russian Federation”. We would assume that if Russia engages, or agrees to engage, in peace talks with Ukraine, these secondary tariffs may well be reconsidered. After all, India is not the only country that imports oil from Russia, and other such importing nations have yet to face similar tariffs.

For clarity, as of now the reciprocal tariff of 25% is in effect and the secondary tariff will come in effect from August 28. If and when both reciprocal and sectoral tariffs are implemented, we estimate that the total US tariff rate on India in trade-weighted terms would be 35.6%, much higher than 20.6%, including the reciprocal and sectoral tariffs. This secondary tariff, if implemented, would certainly dent India’s growth outlook, but we believe that this

announcement could be another negotiation tactic, and final US tariffs on India could end up lower than the announced 50% rate. There are hopes that the US delegation’s scheduled visit to India on August 25 for a sixth round of talks on the bilateral trade agreement concludes in some form of deal, allaying the secondary tariff threat.

Even before the secondary tariffs became a reality, the reciprocal tariffs of 25% by itself were relatively higher when compared with other emerging market Asian peers and other large trading partners, putting the Indian economy at a relatively disadvantageous position. From “we are very close to a trade deal with India” to “be prepared for substantially higher tariffs”, the US’s outlook towards India has undergone a sea change over the past month. India has called these additional duties unfair, unjustified and unreasonable.

Clearly, given India’s purchase of Russian oil is at the heart of this secondary tariff threat, it becomes critical to understand whether India is willing to pay the price for buying discounted Russian oil. The Indian government has stated that energy imports are meant to ensure “predictable and affordable” energy costs domestically, characterising oil imports from Russia as “safeguarding national interests”. India’s rationale for purchasing Russian oil stems from the cost advantage that allowed relatively cheaper imports from 2022-2024. Russia’s share of India’s total oil imports went from ~2.7% in FY21-22 to 26% in FY24-25 (in

US dollar terms), surpassing erstwhile top suppliers, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. We estimate imports of discounted crude oil from Russia allowed savings of ~\$7-10 billion on a gross oil import bill of \$186bn in 2024.

As of now, the discount on oil imports from Russia has narrowed to around \$3-8/bbl lower than Middle Eastern grade. Should India decide to diversify its oil supply and pivot back to traditional West Asian suppliers and new exporters such as Brazil to make up for lost Russian supply, the price increases could be in the region of ~\$4-5/bbl. With global oil prices in 2025 so far settling around \$9/bbl lower than 2024, such a diversification of oil supply sources is unlikely to hurt India’s oil import bill.

The latest data suggest that India has already diversified its source of crude oil imports in FY25-26 so far (April-May), with the share of mineral fuel imports from US rising to 9.8% of India’s total, compared with 6.6% in FY24-25 (surging by 69% y/y). That Russia’s share of India’s oil imports was marginal pre-2022 suggests lowering (but not entirely replacing) imports from Russia is possible, provided the alternative supply is available at a reasonable price.

The deadlock in the trade negotiations between US and India is driven by three factors. One, India’s continued purchase of Russian oil and military equipment; two, the high tariff and non-tariff barriers imposed by India on US imports; and three, India’s reported



Aastha Gudwani



India’s high import tariff structure is a long-maintained policy position of protecting the domestic agricultural sector.

unwillingness to provide market access to US dairy and agri products into India.

India’s high import tariff structure is a long-maintained position of protecting the domestic agricultural sector and that is likely to be a red line due to the cooperative, small-scale nature of farming and dairy in India, as well as ethical and cultural concerns. This has been a sticking point between the two sides throughout; we think India will continue to keep these items off the table.

What can India offer instead? It is notable that India had already committed to increasing bilateral trade and increasing purchases of US defence products and energy. In particular, India agreed to integrate US-origin defence items in its inventory and to “establish the United States as a leading supplier of crude oil and petroleum products and liquefied natural gas to India”. Quantifying these commitments can be one channel through which India makes progress on the bilateral trade agreement talks with the US delegation in end-August. We

think the Indian administration, as part of its dialogue with the US counterparts, would continue to highlight the reductions in import tariffs effected in Budget 2024-25 and 2025-26, especially those for lowering duties on US-made motorcycles and whiskies.

Specifically, our estimates indicate that trade-weighted US import tariffs on India, at 20.6% (and potentially 35.6% if the secondary duty comes into effect), stand more than double the tariffs imposed by India (9.4%) and around 10 times the US tariffs at the start of 2025 (2.7%).

Despite the announcement of these secondary tariffs, we expect the Indian government will still plough on with the next round of trade discussions. A scenario in which India retaliates cannot be discounted, but on balance, we would not expect India to do so.

Aastha Gudwani is India chief economist, Barclays. The views expressed are personal

Airlines’ push for speed: Is safety becoming a casualty?

Those who flew in the 1960s and 1970s may remember how flying was a relatively relaxed and pleasurable experience. Of course, there were reports of untoward incidents, but these were extremely rare. By and large, flying was a happy, stress-free experience — for both passengers and airlines.

Then came the entry of private airlines. More aircraft, more slots, and more choice for the fliers. Run by the government, airports — especially in the metros — got busier, and their shortcomings soon became visible. The rules of the game, however, remained largely unchanged, and flying remained an exclusive club, out of reach for most.

Air Deccan’s entry reset the paradigm — this time, by ushering in the low-fare flight revolution. Other companies followed, and flying became far more accessible, replacing

hours each aircraft flies and cut aircraft turn-around times. This has often led to a situation where a long line of passengers looking to board a flight sweats it out in the vestibule, waiting while those who arrived on the same flight disembark. While this may be important for the carriers to reduce aircraft turn-around time, it makes fliers feel rushed and adds to the “assembly line” feeling of boarding a flight.

As a senior airline insider and frequent flier asked me, “Why should I care how quickly the aircraft is turning around?”, arguing that the Directorate General of Civil Aviation should be laying down the maximum number of hours an aircraft should be utilised rather than letting airlines push things to the breaking point. He argues that ground engineers, in particular, should be given ample time to declare an aircraft worthy of flying. In this mad rush, something might give. In the worst-case scenario, he points out, safety could be the casualty.



Anjali Bhargava

But it is what has happened after the pandemic that is worrying. Even though flying today is much safer than five or six decades ago, the entire ecosystem now seems set to a frantic pace, making the whole experience more tense. Post Covid, leisure travel has come back with a vengeance, and business travel has limped back, albeit at a much slower clip. Airports — some with improved facilities given the private-sector funds pouring in — have become more crowded. And commanders and crew have emerged from the pandemic far more stressed than when it started.

Amid this, the near-hostile relationship developing between crew and management in almost all Indian airlines is deeply concerning. Crew members allege that an obsession to cut costs (and maximise profits) seems to have crept into the psyche of the carriers — including the market leader that sets the tone. In some ways, this penny pinching and the obsession with on-time efficiency runs counter to safety.

Let me elaborate on a few new practices that are of no benefit to the passenger and serve only one purpose: Maximising revenue and profit. These are on top of the additional costs imposed on passengers, such as clubbing food with drinks that I have written about earlier.

One is the near-constant endeavour by low-fare airlines to maximise the number of

EVEN THOUGH FLYING TODAY IS MUCH SAFER THAN FIVE OR SIX DECADES AGO, THE ENTIRE ECOSYSTEM NOW SEEMS SET TO A FRANTIC PACE, MAKING THE WHOLE EXPERIENCE MORE TENSE.

fast-delivery agents skipping red lights on the roads, risking their lives. Civility is the first casualty when a passenger is delayed for some unavoidable reason. Being on-time is great, but if it comes at the cost of customer experience and frayed nerves, one is not sure if that is worth it.

This is not to say all passengers are always easy, but the constant drumming of the “late is a four-letter word” message in the ears of ground staff has led to paranoia about performance and apathy towards the flier creeping in. Civility is one of the factors that distinguishes Indian airlines from most American and European carriers, a quality worth preserving. Do we really want to be brusque or even rude with elderly passengers, or refuse to accommodate someone who has a disability or is otherwise slow for some reason? Surely, we don’t need to ape the West in their worst practices?


Another point is that commanders and crew are pressured by operations control and flight dispatchers on on-time take-off and reducing aircraft weight regardless of whether or not they are comfortable with the minimum equipment list (MEL) or even the fuelling requirements for the flight.

A former Jet captain who is now with one of the low-fare carriers says that at his former airline, he often had to point out that the aircraft was “over-fuelled”, and even a small query on the MEL ensured prompt redressal. In his present airline, fuel is often at bare minimum, and dispatch is almost hounding the crew to take off on time, dismissive of MEL concerns. Caution, he argues, is being thrown to the winds.

This is a consequence of the low-fare philosophy of maximising profits — which *per se* is fine. But it can’t come at any cost, overriding all other considerations, including safety. Ask any flier, and they would swear by the “better late than never” adage.

Anjali Bhargava writes about governance, infrastructure and the social sector. The views expressed are personal

{ LUIZ INÁCIO LULA DA SILVA } PRESIDENT, BRAZIL



The day my intuition says Trump is ready to talk, I won’t hesitate to call him. But today my intuition says he doesn’t want to talk. And I won’t humiliate myself.

On the resumption of trade talks with the US

Ground may be shifting in India-China relations

During a visit to China in early July, this author had the opportunity to engage a wide spectrum of Chinese interlocutors to gauge the mood in Beijing towards India. It also provided a glimpse into China’s outlook towards the US in the Trump 2.0 era.

A general view among Chinese scholars and intellectuals was that Trump’s policies have created great uncertainty, with a retrograde push towards de-globalisation. The core of US-China competition is technology. Cyber technologies and AI are adding to the complexity.

The mood in Beijing was more confident and combative towards the US than during the Biden administration. There was widespread conviction that the US was in decline. Ironically, Chinese interlocutors viewed Trump’s tariff wars and his proclivity for “deals” as an opportunity to secure China’s interests.

The view in Beijing of China’s global leadership currently borders on a zero-sum approach, with “the inevitable decline of the US and the ineluctable rise of China as the global leader”. Bitterness and a serves-them-right attitude towards the US was unmistakable and all pervasive. Chinese scholars and experts appeared to be convinced that the world stands divided into two camps led by the US and China respectively, and that the current moment provided India an opportunity to join hands with China.

As for their outlook on India-China ties, there was a general consensus that relations have improved since the meeting between Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping in October last. However, ties are at a sensitive juncture, and remain fragile. They felt that the key task is to preserve the gains made and work towards normalisation. Several Chinese interlocutors felt that, despite outstanding issues and differences, both sides should advance cooperation in diverse sectors. They reiterated the Chinese view that bilateral relations should not be subject to “third-country considerations”.

They recommended that China and India should deepen economic ties. They spoke of the potential of a “twin-engine” partnership in AI. Xi had launched the Global AI Governance Initiative in October 2023. More recently, China has announced an initiative to set up the World Artificial Intelligence Cooperation Organization, headquartered in Shanghai. Outer space is another area where the two sides could cooperate, they maintained. Chinese experts appeared keen on advancing bilateral cooperation



Sujan Chinoy

through the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and Brics platforms. There are reports that PM Modi is likely to visit China to attend the SCO Summit in late August.

Mutual perceptions were discussed. Chinese interlocutors acknowledged that the gulf had widened recently. Apart from the vexatious boundary dispute, China’s growing tandem with Pakistan, quite evident during Operation Sindoor, has consolidated the negative perceptions in India. They reasoned that rivalry should not become our permanent destiny. They stated that the current geopolitical flux provides opportunities for India and China to work together. Some Chinese experts felt that India’s industrial growth stands to benefit from a deeper economic partnership with China as compared to any other country. China, they said, can help India to leapfrog in EPC (engineering, procurement, and construction). Until the downturn in relations following the bloodletting in Galwan in 2020, China had a well-established presence in India in many infrastructure projects, ports, telecom, even in rare earths and aluminium refinement.

Potential energy co-operation, including in third countries, was emphasised, as was transfer of technology to the Global South.

On the whole, the outlook in Beijing towards India appeared positive, yet tentative. The strategic community in Beijing appeared keen to smoothen ruffled feathers without giving in on any core issue in China’s dealings with India. While extolling the principle of equality, some betrayed hubris. There was more than a hint that India should acknowledge China’s global pre-eminence. There was also a view, tinged with a degree of exasperation, that India did not have the right to question or thwart the visits of Chinese naval and research vessels to the Indian Ocean, which Beijing regards as normal activity in keeping with China’s growing engagement and interests.

Taking the viewpoints expressed in Beijing into account, there is no gainsaying that Track-2 dialogues are useful, particularly when relations with both the US and China stand severely tested. India would do well to explore a new *modus vivendi* with both to guard its national interests, without heightened expectations of either.

Sujan Chinoy, a former ambassador to Japan, is currently the director general of the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses. The views expressed are personal

India's response to Trump's bombast must be strong

WHEN politics or, worse, rhetoric eclipses prudence, the consequences are usually unpleasant. With his unconventional approach to politics and policy implementation, US President Donald Trump has embarked on a course that is sometimes charted more by bombast and impulse rather than facts and reason. His announcement of 25 per cent tariffs on Indian goods a few days ago was a function of Trumpian peculiarity.

And more peculiar was his announcement on Wednesday to double the tariff to 50 per cent, citing India's oil imports from Russia. Interestingly, the US tariff on Chinese imports was a lot less. While the initial 25 per cent tariff on Indian imports has come into effect on Thursday, the additional tariff will be levied three weeks later.

These tariff announcements were rash because they did not take into account the multifarious nature of deep and growing ties be-

tween the world's two largest democracies. New Delhi's reaction has been measured. It was only when the Trump administration's statements and actions became intolerable that the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) issued a strong statement, saying the targeting of India was "unfair, unjustified and unreasonable." It went on to say that India would take all actions necessary to protect its national interests.

Recently, the MEA also exposed the hypocrisy of the US and the European Union over ties with Russia. "The European Union in 2024 had a bilateral trade of Euro 67.5 billion in goods with Russia. In addition, it had trade in services estimated at Euro 17.2 billion in 2023. This is significantly more than India's total trade with Russia that year or subsequently," it said. Also, the US "continues to import from Russia uranium hexafluoride for its nuclear industry, palladium for its EV industry, fertilisers as well as chemicals."

Thus, the Narendra Modi government has not only convincingly refuted Trump's allegations but also exposed the doublespeak of the developed world. Still better, it has done so without indulging in pomposity, which was the characteristic feature of foreign policy in the past. The government must continue that tone and tenor.

To be sure, there are elements, both within the ruling dispensation and without, that would urge the government to up the ante. Such anti-American and anti-West activists and organisations are both on the Right and the Left, not to forget those in between. Recently, RSS affiliate Swadeshi Jagran Manch, which is doctrinally opposed to America and capitalism, castigated Trump for his "coercive tactics" of threatening penalties against India for trade ties with Russia. "If Washington believes that such coercive tactics can sway India's decisions, it must recognise that today's India is not the India of a

decade ago," Manch co-convenor Ashwani Mahajan said in a statement, obliquely crediting Modi with bold leadership.

And, of course, the Congress party, which for decades followed anti-America policies (some of which still extant), gleefully said that the "country is now bearing the cost of Narendra Modi's 'friendship'." It was referring to the 'Howdy, Modi!' event in Texas in September 2019.

On Thursday, Prime Minister Modi said that India would never compromise on the interest of farmers, fishermen and dairy sector. He went on to say that he was prepared to bear a significant personal cost if necessary. This statement came a day after Trump doubled tariffs on Indian imports. However, Modi must ensure that goading by professional anti-US activists and taunts by opponents do not colour his government's foreign policy. But our response to Trump's bombast must be measured and at the same time, strong.



LETTERS

High on handlooms

THE handloom sector played a vital role in India's freedom movement. The Swadeshi Movement, launched on August 7, 1905, championed indigenous industries, especially handlooms, as a form of economic resistance to colonial rule. In honor of this legacy, August 7 was declared National Handloom Day in 2015.

India's handloom sector is known for its wide range of fabrics, including cotton, khadi, jute, linen, and rare fibers like Himalayan nettle. It also produces distinctive silk varieties like Tusar, Mashruf, Mulberry, Eri, Muga and Ahimsa, along with woolen weaves like Pashmina, Shantosh and Cashmere. Every region in India has developed its unique handloom style.

National Handloom Day is a heartfelt celebration of India's weaving traditions and the people who keep them alive. The government also runs several other significant initiatives to promote the handloom industry, like marketing assistance, certification of handloom products, skill upgradation, etc.

Jayanthy Subramaniam, Mumbai

Remembering Rabindranath Tagore

RICH tributes are due to Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore on his 84th death anniversary, the legendary poet, author and philosopher for his timeless contributions to India's cultural and intellectual heritage who penned India's national anthem. His progressive views and contributions to various arts continue to inspire millions. On his death anniversary, we honour the poet whose ideas still shape our thoughts and dreams.

Rabindranath Tagore, born on 7 May 1861, passed away on 7 August 1941, at the age of 80 due to complications from uraemia and a blocked urinary bladder. Fondly remembered as the "Bard of Bengal," he remains a towering figure in Indian literature, music, and philosophy. In 1913, Tagore became the first non-European to be awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for his collection 'Gitanjali', which introduced Indian spiritual and poetic thought to the Western world.

Bhagwan Thadani, Mumbai

Enigmatic judgements

OF late, judgements from the courts of law are seen, acquitting all the accused in a few murder cases, thereby throwing the public at large into a quandary about the nature of the crimes themselves. Whether they took place at all and if at all it did, are they so bewildered as to fail to find out whodunit?

Seshagiri Row Karry, Hyderabad

People have trust deficit on Congress

Senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi claimed that a Congress investigation found massive voter fraud in the elections in Karnataka Lok Sabha segment and Maharashtra assembly elections where more voters were added in five months than in five years. He had alleged votes theft. He had furnished party's expectations and general allegations like voters name in multiple places, no voters in the address etc., Did such things not happen in Telangana, Karnataka, Kerala, West Bengal and Punjab state assembly elections where their alliance won the state elections. When Congress won 100 Lok Sabha seats there were no such allegations. Frustration of defeat in the forthcoming state assembly elections and 2029 general elections baseless allegations are levelled against the constitutional body. Congress has lost faith of the people by the hallow rhetoric speeches of its leaders. It should work hard to regain the lost image. It should speaking precisely with proper proof.

Sravana Ramachandran, Chennai

Ecological imbalance calamitous

EVERY time natural calamities occur in hilly regions with naturally flowing rivers, nature is sending a warning signal to those responsible for safeguarding it. In the name of providing easy access to certain places of worship—especially those where the deity is believed to have manifested on its own, known as "Swayambhu"—we are tampering with fragile ecosystems. The government must understand that some places of worship, created by humans centuries ago, are located in areas where infrastructure like roads is feasible. In contrast, shrines believed to have emerged on their own are often found in remote, difficult terrain, meant to be reached only by those who can endure the hardships of the journey.

Not every divine abode is meant to be made easily accessible. There must be a balance between human desire and nature's sanctity. Sadly present for reasons well known are turning pilgrimage as tourism and they're facing consequence.

N Nagarajan, Hyderabad

thehansreader@gmail.com



BENGALURU ONLINE

Tensions escalate again as transport workers slam govt over dues and suspensions

BENGALURU: The state transport sector is once again witnessing unrest as employees protest the government's failure to clear long-pending salary arrears and initiate salary revisions. Transport workers had earlier demanded the release of 38 months of pending dues and salary revision effective from January 1, 2024. A formal strike notice was issued to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on July 16, warning of a state-wide strike from August 5 if their demands were not met. In response, the Chief Minister called for a meeting with union leaders on August 4, where he proposed releasing 14 months of arrears instead of 38, while offering to discuss salary revision at a later stage. Dissatisfied with the partial offer, transport workers proceeded with the strike on August 5, bringing thousands of buses to a halt across the state. However, following a directive from the High Court to withdraw the strike, employees returned to duty. Despite this, transport corporations have issued notices via WhatsApp to thousands of staff who participated in the protest, warning of suspensions or termination starting from August 7.

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

SURGICAL STRIKE



K. KRISHNA SAGAR RAO

A teenager returns home drunk at 3 a.m. from a pub. Another wakes up at noon. One young person is buried in a screen till dawn, not acknowledging even the parents at home. Another yells at his grandparents to stop offering advice. One teen is addicted to alcohol and drugs and has become a menace to society. Another suffers from serious mental health issues and has lost herself completely. One commits suicide after a parental reprimand. Another kills his parents in a fit of rage. This is not a rebellious phase. It is not a generational quirk, and it is far from harmless. This is the outcome of something much deeper, much darker - Reckless Parenting. It is silently dismantling the emotional, cultural, and moral fabric of our society. This callous irresponsibility is not just a family issue anymore, it is a national disaster in slow motion.

A crisis of conscious parenting

Over the years, I have witnessed a sharp decline in conscious and responsible parenting, especially in urban and semi-urban India. Many parents today are either too busy, too distracted, or too indifferent. They outsource their most sacred responsibility to gadgets, schools, or social trends they neither understand nor question. In the process, they are raising a generation that is confused, disconnected, and dangerously disengaged. The consequences are not private, they are public, social, and eventually national. When parents fail, society pays the price.

The collapse of presence

Let us begin with a simple

question, how many parents today are truly present in their children's lives? Not just physically, but emotionally and intellectually. Are they listening to their children? Observing behaviour? Aware of who their children are becoming?

In many households, both parents are working. That is understandable. What is not acceptable is the complete withdrawal from their role as moral and emotional anchors. Screens have replaced stories. Convenience has replaced connection. Children are growing up without real conversations, without value systems, without guidance on ethics or emotional hygiene.

Parenting is not a part-time role. It is a full-time responsibility with lifelong consequences. If parents cannot spare even an hour of focused attention, they are not just neglecting their child, they are inviting future crisis into their own home.

Gadget addiction begins at home

Every second parent complains about screen addiction. But if you observe closely, children are simply mirroring their parents. It is now normal to see families sitting in the same house, isolated in different rooms, each glued to a device. This is not connection, it is emotional isolation.

Children as young as four are handed mobile phones to stay quiet. TVs become babysitters. Tabs are treated as toys. Parents fail to realize that gadgets are not neutral, they come embedded with addictive algorithms, values, and behaviour triggers.

If a parent is swiping through social media all day, what moral authority do they have to lecture a child about screen time? Children learn more from the eyes than from the ears. Modern parenting has become passive and digitally distracted. The cost is a generation disconnected from human interaction. "Children learn more through eyes than ears."

When discipline dies, decay begins

Modern parenting often confuses discipline with oppression. In the race to be seen as liberal or progressive, many parents have completely abdicated the responsibility of creating boundaries. They allow late-night parties, casual dating, provocative dressing that lacks cultural grounding, unfiltered media, and even alcohol or drug experimentation — all under the excuse of "freedom".

This is not parenting, this is negligence in disguise. Freedom without values creates chaos, not character.

"Indulgence is not love. Structure is."

Discipline is not punishment. It is structure, safety, and sanity. Children crave boundaries. They thrive when they know where the lines are. If those lines are not drawn at home, society will draw them later, but much more harshly.

The disrespect at home

There was a time when looking into someone's eyes meant respect. Today, many children barely acknowledge the presence of parents, grandparents, or guests. Conversations are cut off, elders are dismissed, and cultural rituals are treated as outdated burdens.

This erosion of respect is not natural. It is a direct result of what is modelled at home. If a child sees a parent being rude to elders, mocking traditions, or shouting in anger, they will internalize that behaviour as acceptable.

"Your child's moral compass is calibrated at home, not at school." Respect is taught, lived, and reinforced, not demanded. It must be planted early, nurtured daily, and protected fiercely.

Death of family dialogue

The dinner table, once a sacred space for stories and connection, has become a digital battlefield of silence. No greetings, no conversations, just cutlery clinking and glowing screens.

This emotional silence is deeply damaging. It numbs empathy, shrinks emotional vocabulary, and kills bond-



In many households, both parents are working. That is understandable. What is not acceptable is the complete withdrawal from their role as moral and emotional anchors. Screens have replaced stories. Convenience has replaced connection. Children are growing up without real conversations, without value systems, without guidance on ethics or emotional hygiene

ing. Without conversation, children do not learn to listen, express, or resolve. They do not learn how to be human.

"Modern parenting must be conscious, not convenient." Reclaim the dinner table. Make it sacred again. Just 30 minutes of real conversation can change the emotional climate of the family.

The sleep-deprived, goal-deprived generation

Teenagers sleeping at 3 a.m., bingeing on content, and waking up at noon is a new norm. With distorted biological clocks and no clear direction, many young people are sleep-deprived and goal-deprived.

This is not a youth issue, it is a parenting failure. When parents allow children to dictate sleep, diet, exercise, and routine, they are sur-

rendering their leadership. "Careful parenting means enforcing structure without apology." Success is built on habits. Habits are built at home.

The social cost of dysfunctional homes

What begins at home flows into society. A child who grows up without boundaries becomes an adult who breaks rules. A child who is never held accountable becomes a partner who avoids responsibility, a citizen who disrespects law, and a professional who cannot collaborate.

We are already seeing the cost from teen violence to poor civic behavior, from mental health breakdowns to workplace dysfunction. The home is the foundation of the nation. If it crumbles, everything else follows. "Parenting isn't a private affair.

It's a public consequence."

"This generation is like this only" – The great escape

One of the most dangerous lies in modern discourse is this — "This generation is like this only." It is lazy, false, and damaging. No generation is born disrespectful, distracted, or disinterested. These are not genetic traits. They are parental outcomes. "Unseen children become unpredictable adults."

By hiding behind this excuse, parents avoid responsibility. They normalize dysfunction and surrender moral leadership.

Parenting – The first institution of society Before school, religion, or government, comes the parent. The family is the first institution, and parents are its first leaders. If that institution collapses, all others are weakened. "Parenting is not about being liked, it's about being right."

We cannot expect ethical citizens without ethical homes. We cannot expect nation-building without character-building at home. Parenting is the most powerful leadership role one can ever play.

Conclusion: If not parents, then who?

India stands at a crossroads, not just politically or economically, but morally and culturally. The next generation is watching. They are absorbing. They are becoming. And they are becoming what we show them. "If parents are not the architects of the nation's future, who else will be?"

Let us not be passive spectators to the emotional erosion of our children. Let us rise to the role only we can play — that of mentors, moral compasses, and protectors. Because when parenting fails, no policy or institution can save the society. And when parenting thrives, everything else follows.

(Author is the Chairman for Nation Building Foundation, Expert in Emotional Intelligence, Chief Spokesperson of BJP, and a Harvard Business School certified Strategist.)

How letting your mind wander can reset your brain

ANNA KENYON

EVERY day, we're faced with constant opportunities for stimulation. With 24/7 access to news feeds, emails and social media, many of us find ourselves scrolling endlessly, chasing our next hit of dopamine. But these habits are fuelling our stress — and our brains are begging for a break.

What our brains really need is some much needed time off from concentrating. By not consciously focusing on anything and allowing the mind to drift, this can reduce stress and improve cognitive sharpness. This can often be easier said than done. But attention restoration theory (Art) can help you learn to give your brain space to drift.

While this might sound like a fancy name for doing nothing, the theory is supported by neuroscience. Attention restoration theory was first put forward by psychologists Rachel and Stephen Kaplan in 1989. They theorised that spending time in nature can help to restore focus and attention. They proposed there are two distinct types of at-

tention: directed attention and undirected attention.

Directed attention refers to deliberate concentration — such as studying, navigating through a busy place or posting on social media. Basically, it's any activity where our brain's attention is being directed at a specific task. Undirected attention is when we're not consciously trying to focus on anything — instead allowing things to gently capture our attention without trying. Think listening to chirping birds or watching leaves gently rustling in the breeze.

In these instances, your attention naturally drifts without having to force your focus. Without time for undirected attention, it's thought that we experience "attentional fatigue".

This can make it increasingly difficult to focus and concentrate, while distractions become more likely to grab our attention.

In the past, we encountered many situations in our daily lives that we might classify as "boring". Moments such as waiting for the bus or standing in the supermarket queue.



But these dull moments also gave our minds a chance to switch off. Now, our smartphones give us the opportunity for constant entertainment.

Being able to constantly expose ourselves to intense, gripping stimuli offers little mental space for our overworked brains to recover. But attention restoration theory shows us how important it is to create space for moments that allow our brains to "reset".

Neuroimaging has shown that activity in the amygdala — the part of the brain associated with stress and anxiety — was reduced when people were exposed to natural environments. But when exposed to urban environments, this activity was not reduced. Numerous studies have also since backed up Kaplan and Kaplan's theory that time in nature can help to restore attention and wellbeing.

Research has even shown that as little as ten minutes of undirected attention can result in a measurable uptick in performance on cognitive tests, as well as a reduction in attentional fatigue. Even simply walking on a treadmill while looking at a nature scene can produce this cognitive effect.

Whether you're watching a ladybird crawl across your desk or visiting a vast expanse of nature, allow your attention to be undirected. It's not laziness, it's neurological maintenance.

(The writer is with University of Lancashire - The Conversation)

Opportunity in crisis

Trump’s tariff shocker should prompt India to push ahead on big-ticket reforms

There is a massive churn underway in the global economic environment as the rules-based trading order is being upended by the US President Donald Trump’s tariff disruption. Coercive diplomacy is in play against all countries, including India which has just been slapped with additional duties of 25%—besides the 25% on India’s goods to the US—for importing Russian oil as sanctions on Moscow are imminent for its continued war with Ukraine. The big question is whether India should yield to Trump’s bullying or face the consequences being tariffed at 50%. India has rightly responded that the additional levy of 25% is “unfair, unjustified, and unreasonable” and that it would take all actions necessary to protect its national interests. There is no doubt that 50% tariffs would adversely impact more than half of India’s exports to the US. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has firmly stated that the country is willing to pay a heavy price for protecting the interests of farmers and fishermen as shrimp farmers in Andhra Pradesh, diamond cutters from Gujarat, and textile and apparel exporters from Tiruppur will get hit by the 50% duty.

The additional 25% duty on India for buying Russian oil threatens India’s energy security interests as the availability of deeply discounted crude oil eased pressure on our external accounts. Since 2023, Moscow has provided 36% of our requirements of five million barrels of oil a day. Trump berates India for being the largest buyer when everyone wants Russia to stop the killing in Ukraine. Ironically, it was the previous Joseph Biden administration that encouraged India to source its requirements from Moscow as long as it remained below the cap of \$60 a barrel set by the Group of 7 nations. India has, again, forcefully questioned this change of US’s stance while highlighting that western nations who are criticising India are themselves indulging in such trade with Moscow. If India were to stop such purchases, where would it readily find two million barrels of oil a day? Although Trump is convinced that a lower price of oil will bring Russia’s war to an end, his tariffs on India will only result in a tightness of the global oil market and raise prices.

The global churn represents both a crisis and opportunity for India. While there is transitional pain ahead for us, it is also a good time to get our act together on the reforms front so that we engage with the world from a position of strength. Anand Mahindra, chairman of the Mahindra Group, has eloquently suggested that India should seize this moment like it did in 1991 so that today’s churn over tariffs yields some *amrit* or nectar for the country. For starters, India must improve the ease of doing business in the states to attract global capital. Secondly, the power of tourism must be unleashed not only as an engine of growth but also to earn foreign exchange and create more employment. Land and labour reforms must be implemented. To bolster its energy security, India must make determined efforts to boost domestic oil production that has been steadily declining. This has been falling for various reasons including low investment due to obstructive regulations, high taxation, and declining output from old and marginal fields. A more facilitative tax regime is necessary to promote exploration and drilling that will improve relative self-sufficiency over the medium term.

Tourist sites, flash floods are on a collision course

IT’S ONE OF the world’s fastest-growing tourist sites, attracting more visitors than the Statue of Liberty, the Tower of London, or Pompeii. It’s also one of the locations most at risk from devastating natural disasters as our planet warms. The Chota Char Dham, a circuit of four of the most sacred Hindu sites in the foothills of the Himalayas, has grown in recent years to become one of the biggest annual pilgrimages. With more than four million visitors every year, it attracts about 10 times as many religious tourists as Spain’s Camino de Santiago, and roughly twice as many as the Hajj in Mecca.

It’s also become the site of a grimmer spectacle: Flash flooding and landslides, as unchecked development in rapidly-thawing mountain valleys turns ever-intensifying rainstorms into avalanches of mud, rock, and water. In the state of Uttarakhand, at least four have died and dozens more are feared trapped or lost after one such cloud-burst this week swept away much of the village of Dharali.

There’s a horrible inevitability about the location. The Chota Char Dham is considered sacred because it takes pilgrims to shrines associated with the many tributaries of the Ganges, which rises in Gangotri, just upstream from this week’s disaster. Those waters in turn are fed by steep-sided river valleys, and ultimately by glaciers that have shrunk about 40% since pre-industrial times.

Those local conditions and the unchecked development from a soaring tourist trade are fast making the region synonymous with catastrophes.

Flash floods in 2013 killed more than 6,000 people after a glacier above the pilgrimage town of Kedarnath gawaway. In 2021, another flood near Badrinath, another town on the circuit, left more than 200 dead. Slow-moving subsidence in Joshimath, a gateway to Badrinath, has left about a fifth of buildings uninhabitable since ground fissures started opening in 2023.

More pilgrims were killed by a landslide on the Kedarnath route the same year, while a total of 246 died during pilgrimage in 2024, according to state government data. With less than 1% of India’s population, Uttarakhand consistently uses up about 10% of the country’s budget for natural disaster relief.

The pilgrimage only really exists in its current form thanks to concrete and asphalt. The isolated mountain shrines were little visited until the 1962 war between China and India, after which New Delhi started building more roads to improve military access to a disputed border just 30 kilometres (19 miles) or so from this week’s disaster site.

Visitor numbers have since soared as growing incomes and better transport links have improved access. That’s been turbocharged by Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s intensely personal and religious association with the pilgrimage. He’s visited the mountain shrines multiple times and thrown his weight behind ₹860 billion (\$9.8 billion) of road and railway projects linking the four towns.

All this work is damaging a desperately fragile mountain landscape. Building roads, railways, hotels, restaurants, and shops to serve the booming tourist trade results in deforestation and the dumping of excavated earth into river valleys. That speeds the path of rainfall from the clouds into the narrow channels that carry it away downstream, increasing the risk of damaging floods.

Uttarakhand lost about 0.8% of its forest cover in the decade through 2023. Cutting roadways into slopes without extensive engineering to stabilise the soil also leaves them vulnerable to landslides. Nearly a quarter of the state is at high to very high risk of natural disasters, according to a study in June by academics at Shiv Nadar University in Uttar Pradesh.

There are ways to limit this damage, but they’re not the paths the government is pursuing. The highway is being built in the interests of military planners, on a tight budget. Cutting corners, however, increases the chances of floods and landslides. Illegal construction work, which is rife as tourist ruppees pour in, can be prevented by satellite monitoring—so long as officials aren’t getting kickbacks to turn a blind eye.

Most of all, though, India needs to limit visitor numbers, as is done at other environmentally fragile sites such as Machu Picchu and Mount Fuji. Pushing back against religious tourism isn’t a move Modi likes to make—as we saw in 2021, when he ignored the risks that the Kumbh Mela pilgrimage in the Uttarakhand city of Haridwar would turn into a Covid superspreader event. If New Delhi really cares about the lives of religious devotees, however, it’s going to have to start turning back pilgrims for their own safety.

TRADE TENSIONS

THE ASPIRING GLOBAL POWER COULD HAVE PLAYED ITS CARDS BETTER WITH TRUMP'S AMERICA

Why India, US are at odds

ANITA INDER SINGH

Founding professor, Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution, New Delhi

not have offended the US and EU. That might have helped India to avoid the penalties Trump wants to impose over and above the tariffs he intends to levy on India’s exports to America. But Delhi ignored diplomatic urging by a friendlier President Joe Biden and West European democracies to take a stronger stand against Russia’s attempted conquest of Ukraine in the name of India’s national interest. It is entitled to do that. However, now that national interest has come into open conflict with Trump’s wish to stop India from propping up Russia’s war economy and to prevent Moscow from extinguishing Ukraine’s statehood.

Furthermore, India’s weakness as an economic player is evidenced by its refusal to join Asia’s Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership in 2019. India has also lost global ground by labelling Russia’s invasion of Ukraine as Europe’s war. Many countries, including Trump’s America, have not supported India’s stance on Pakistan’s terror attack in Pahalgam. The logic is that if Ukraine is Europe’s war, then the recent Indo-Pak air war, representing a territorial-cum-ideological feud which dates back to the partition of British India in 1947, is an

Indo-Pak problem. Unfortunately, this implies that Delhi has failed to overcome the international hyphenation of India and Pakistan despite its claim that India is a global actor.

Trump—and Delhi—have dealt with the Indo-Pak conflict in ways that are highly disadvantageous to India. His many assertions that he prevailed upon India and Pakistan to cease fire have been vociferously denied by Delhi. This implied Trump was lying, while Trump’s insistence that he persuaded Delhi and Islamabad usher in a ceasefire implied that India was lying.

In contrast, Pakistan’s army chief, Asim Munir, complimented Trump by offering to nominate him for the Nobel Peace Prize because of his “leadership and proactive role” in facilitating the ceasefire. Trump then invited Munir to the White House. He blasted the “dead-end economies” of Russia and India—and delivered the biggest blow to Delhi by announcing that America would help Pakistan to develop its oil reserves and adding that India would soon be buying oil from Pakistan. To Indians generally, the idea that they should be dependent on an economically weaker Pakistan, which India

Where India fits into Trump 2.0's calculations is a mystery. Delhi must clarify where it stands with the US—which is the largest single buyer (18%) of Indian exports

Red lines beyond agriculture

ABHIJIT DAS

The writer is an international trade expert

The govt must ensure access to affordable medicine, India’s digital future, and policy flexibility to boost manufacturing are not compromised through the India-US trade deal

AFTER US PRESIDENT Donald Trump’s announcement of imposing a 25% penalty tariff on India for its trade relations with Russia, India’s exports to the US will face a 50% illegal import duty over and above World Trade Organization (WTO)-consistent tariffs. Trump’s latest salvo comes at the time when negotiators from the two sides are scheduled to meet within a few days for resolving the negotiating deadlock.

India’s negotiators have their task cut out. While protecting India’s agriculture from subsidised imports coming from the US is clearly a red line in the trade negotiations, certain other issues of core national interest also deserve attention of the negotiators. What are these issues? What could be the implications of agreeing to the US’s demands for India?

Apart from agriculture, there are at least five other issues that should constitute India’s core national interest in the bilateral negotiations. First, in respect of intellectual property, India is likely to be under pressure to make changes to its domestic patent laws for facilitating evergreening patents on pharmaceutical products. This could destroy India’s generic medicine industry, thereby resulting in a sharp increase in the cost of healthcare among the sick and poor. It is reassuring that the government has clearly spelt out its opposition to concessions in trade agreements that could result in evergreening of patents. However, it is also important that the government does not fall prey to the narrative being spun by some think tanks that to

become an innovation-driven economy, India must make changes to its intellectual property and align its laws with those prevailing in the developed countries.

Second, in the digital arena, the US is likely to seek a commitment from India not to impose taxes on the exports of US digital products. In addition, India may be required to allow unrestricted cross-border data flows and implement mandatory sharing of government public data with US entities. These commitments would foreclose the possibility of generating revenue from the most vibrant economic sector and also compromise India’s ability to create domestic digital champions, especially in the artificial intelligence segment. Further, the government must not accept the simplistic opinion being promoted by some lobby groups and experts that accepting the US demand for a permanent moratorium on customs duties on electronic transmissions would boost India’s information technology (IT) and IT-enabled service exports. This is a technically complex and multi-dimensional issue. India’s negotiators must also remain mindful that bilateral concessions to the US would undermine our ability to protect patent legislation from legal challenges at the WTO.

Third, the US may demand that India provide a firm commitment to purchase

defence equipment, aircraft, and energy products from it. It may not be prudent to purchase some of these products from the US if India is able to secure better terms and conditions from reliable non-US sources. This would also reduce our dependence on the US. Reducing its trade surplus with the US must not become India’s priority in the bilateral trade negotiations.

Fourth, India could also be required to open up its government procurement market for US suppliers on terms more favourable than what India has finalised with the UK under the recently-concluded free trade agreement. Expansive commitment to provide non-discriminatory treatment to US suppliers in India’s government procurement market would erode the government’s ability to utilise this policy instrument for boosting domestic manufacturing, especially in the micro, small, and medium enterprise sector. This would also strike a debilitating blow to some of the government’s flagship schemes, including Make In India and Aatmanirbhar Bharat.

Fifth, the US may demand that India give a firm commitment to invest in the US—concessions that the US wrested from Japan and the European Union. When India is trying to attract domestic and foreign investment, it would be unreasonable on Trump’s part to expect the

country to commit to investing in the US.

In addition to the above, the “trade agreement” with the US may require India to provide concessions unrelated to international trade—the commitment not to purchase Russian oil being one such example. There is no mistaking the reality that even after an India-US trade deal, the US will continue to use the threat of tariffs to ensure that the Indian government’s policy decisions and other actions promote the economic and political interests of the US.

India’s red lines in respect of agriculture issues have been well-recognised by the government. However, it is not certain whether the risks arising from granting concessions to the US on other core issues mentioned above have been fully grasped by the trade negotiators, experts, and other stakeholders. Unlike agriculture, most of these core issues lack an organised and influential voice to advocate for their interests. It is for the government to ensure that access to affordable medicine, India’s digital future, and policy flexibility to give a boost to domestic manufacturing are not compromised through the India-US trade deal. India’s interests will be best served by being resolute and firm at the negotiating table, as has been demonstrated so far by the government, and keeping our long-term economic prospects in mind. The country must also be prepared to face the 50% tariffs in case the US’s demands prove to be too onerous. In the long term, this may be a small price to pay for protecting core national interests.

are all contributory factors to the man-made devastation. Until development is guided by science, sustainability, and respect for nature, the cycle of destruction will continue and worsen with climate change. While higher turnout of pilgrims would support the tourism economy, the associated construction activity is damaging the Himalayas beyond repair. —Gregory Fernandes, Mumbai

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Now, a court’s measure of Indianness

The criticism by a Supreme Court bench of Rahul Gandhi over his alleged comments about the Chinese occupation of 2,000 sq km of Indian land is unfortunate. The court’s remark that “a true Indian” won’t make such comments came while it was hearing an appeal challenging an Allahabad High Court judgement that refused to stay defamation proceedings against Rahul Gandhi. The petitioner contended that the Leader of the Opposition defamed the Indian Army with his comment. The Congress leader’s comment came during his Bharat Jodo Yatra, while he was talking about the 2020 Galwan Valley clash between Indian and Chinese soldiers.

The issue before the Court was defamation and the request for a stay on proceedings in a lower court. It had nothing to do with Rahul Gandhi’s Indianness, why he made the comment on social media and not in parliament, or how a responsible LoP should have talked on the matter. These are statements with no judicial force but create unwarranted impressions and opinions. When the Court says that a true Indian would not say this, the suggestion is that the person who said it is not a true Indian. That is unfair – the Court should not make judgements on the Indianness or patriotism of individuals in the limited context of a defamation case. The comment is particularly unfortunate because it would be seen as vindicating the campaign by the ruling party and its supporters, who question Rahul Gandhi’s patriotism.

The comment made by the LoP was not against the Army. There have been questions about the effectiveness of the surgical strike on Balakot, in Pakistan, in 2019. Questions have also been raised about Operation Sindoor, particularly about the Indian losses in combat. The government’s position on the situation in the Galwan Valley was questioned at the time. These questions are directed to the government and not against the country’s armed forces. The Opposition has the right to ask them in a democracy, and that should not be dubbed as words not right for a “true Indian”. These are questions a true Indian should be asking. The logic of asking Rahul Gandhi why he did not make his statement in parliament is also flawed. Top national leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, make statements in social media. That does not make them any worse. It is not Gandhi’s position as the LoP or an MP that should shield him, but his right as a citizen of this country.

SC’s prescription of patriotism for Rahul Gandhi, in the context of a defamation case, is problematic

Floods and a few lost lessons

An angry nature has again unleashed itself on Uttarakhand, taking lives and destroying property. A massive cloudburst and flash floods that wreaked havoc at Dharali in Uttarkashi on Tuesday have killed at least five people and marooned many others. Much of the village has been buried under mud and slush, and landslides have blocked the roads, impeding the rescue missions. Huge waves could be seen roaring down the slopes, reviving memories of the 2013 floods in the Kedarnath region, which destroyed many villages and killed about 5,000 people. Several Indian Army personnel are feared trapped. Some parts of the district had experienced heavy and incessant rain in the early part of the week, but the cloudburst caused the sudden deluge. There are warnings of more rain in the coming days.

It was only a year ago that a severe landslide in Kerala’s Wayanad district led to the loss of hundreds of lives and caused much damage. There have been other extreme climate events and manifestations of resistance from nature to the assaults made on it in different parts of the country. Last week, the Supreme Court warned that if the ecological balance in Himachal Pradesh continued to deteriorate, the state could vanish. That might sound like exaggeration, but the warning could come true in the long run. Entire villages disappeared in the Kedarnath floods and the Wayanad landslide. A glacial lake outburst laid to ruin the Chamoli region in 2021, and many places in the Joshimath town and the nearby areas subsided with houses and other buildings in 2023. Dharali might not survive the flooding as a village. All this can happen on a much bigger scale.

Extreme climate events are increasing in number and intensity amid extensive deforestation and construction activities. Global warming has made weather patterns unpredictable and intensified heat and rainfall. Developmental activities, including the construction of dams, roads, and buildings, and deforestation, have put pressure on the ecology of the region. The Himalayas are the world’s youngest mountain ranges and are still forming. They remain fragile and vulnerable to external shocks and pressure. The governments have continued to promote religious and other forms of tourism and allowed unrestricted traffic in the Himalayan states for political and economic reasons, without giving heed to counsel from the courts, experts, and the people. Dharali is on the religious tourism route and is known for its scenic beauty. Now, it lies under rubble, and the lesson should not be lost.

Construction activities and deforestation have put ecology in the Himalayan states under stress

Playing both sides is a high-risk game, but the fallout of past actions have not led to a policy shift

LT GEN BHOPINDER SINGH (RETD)

The subcontinental word *bichauli-ya* could be translated to a mediator at best, or a wheeler-dealer, at worst. In the nativist sense, it is afforded the perception of an insincere salesman who curries favour both ways. For long, Pakistan has played this unique role of a middleman amongst the unlikely and the warring lot. But it is also a sovereign skillset that naturally elicits duplicity as a collateral perception. It runs the risk of getting viewed suspiciously, as an oddity that can run with the hare and hunt with the hound, seamlessly. Pakistan’s complicated relationship with terrorism – both as a perpetrator and a victim – is one example of the consequences of playing the dangerous game of the middleman.

The double-gaming abilities of Pakistan came to the fore in the early 1960s when, as a member of avowedly anti-communist alliances like CENTO and SEATO, Islamabad was separately able to stitch the Sino-Pakistan Agreement in 1963. Despite being a firm US ally, Pakistan surrendered over 5,000 km of claimed territory to China and made a strategic common cause against India. The US also didn’t make much of the Pakistani largesse towards the Chinese, as Washington had little love lost for Delhi during the Cold War era. The settlement of borders between China and Pakistan also helped build the Chinese narrative of supposed Indian intransigence with regard to its territorial disputes with China, as also, sully the Kashmir territorial issue by recognising the areas that were parts of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir as belonging to Pakistan.

India-wariness became the principal bind for the unnatural “all-weather” friendship that ensued between Islamabad and Beijing, as it had no civilisational, cultural, or ideology-based rationale attached to it. Despite the local tumult, upheavals, and intrigues within the domestic politics of Pakistan or in the ranks of the Chinese Communist Party, the reciprocal bonhomie towards each other remained rock-solid.

Leveraging the schism between China and the USSR, the redoubtable US Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, in-

A COVERT ALLY

Pakistan as the perennial middleman

voked the intermediary services of Pakistan in the ‘Ping Pong Diplomacy’ to engage with China. As part of the moral compromise, Kissinger accepted Pakistani excesses in East Pakistan (later, Bangladesh) as the price for its midwifing services: “To condemn these violations publicly would have destroyed the Pakistani channel, which would be needed for months to complete the opening to China.” It was a knowingly amoral and transactional approach from both sides, where the Pakistan-extended a middleman service and were paid back with strategic support, however unscrupulous.

This template of Pakistani middlemen was perfected by the covert role it played along with the US through the



1980s in Afghanistan. ‘Operation Cyclone’ was amongst the largest operations launched by the CIA along with the Pakistani ISI, to arm, train, and finance the mujahideen movement in bleeding the then Soviet Union. Pakistani dictator General Zia-ul-Haq was knowingly supported as he provided invaluable conduit services. That these Pakistani middleman services were to ultimately breed the sort of toxic religious extremism and terror nurseries that continue to haunt the region is often forgotten. The injection of religiosity (later morphing into the Taliban phenomenon), the rise of uncontrollable militant groups, and triggering armed insurgency in the Kashmir valley can be traced to Pakistan’s middleman services on behalf of the US and rich Sheikdoms. Later, as one of the rare nations to legitimise the Taliban government in its first hustling (1996-2001), Pakistan gave away its hand in shaping the narrative.

Fickle friendship

Forever the unreliable and fickle partner to any side, Pakistan incredulously

joined the War on Terror against its own protégé regime in Kabul. George Bush’s threat, “You are either with us or against them”, led to yet another flurry of military weaponry, aid, debt relief, and diplomatic support *a la* the 1980s, and yet again, Pakistan was willingly the middleman the US used to control the Afghan mujahideen. As always, the Pakistanis were less than sincere and often frustrated the US with their double-speak.

The discovery of Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad became an example of how each side distrusted the other, but retained the transactional façade of necessity to ensure that things seemed as normal as realistically possible with Pakistan. Optics of the DG-ISI rushing to Kabul on the abandonment of the US forces from Afghanistan and sipping tea with the ragtag Taliban militia became the picture of the double-game wherein the Pakistanis always kept multiple channels open with the so-called “friends” and the “enemies” alike, as such nomenclatures were always interchangeable for Islamabad.

Donald Trump, in his first tenure, had openly tweeted about the Pakistanis, “They have given us nothing but lies & deceit, thinking of our leaders as fools. They give safe haven to the terrorists we hunt in Afghanistan, with little help. No more!” He had even tightened the support whilst courting India on the rebound. But like the Pakistanis, Trump himself is an incorrigibly unreliable leader who can stoop to any level of transactional bargain (read, bullying or coercion) to have his way, even with so-called “friends”.

After his supposed overtures to India, the president has had no qualms in imposing a 50% tariff on Indian exports whilst showing an unbelievable sense of accommodation and compromise on trade with Pakistan, simultaneously. The “middleman” attraction of Pakistan may have been secured for its stated commitment to keep the troublesome likes of the anti-US Imran Khan incarcerated, or more importantly, for potentially opening the back-channels of communication with the latest nemesis, i.e., Iran. Yet again, the middleman utility with Iran (or even Afghanistan) is dangled by the Pakistanis, and Trump has no qualms in dropping its equation with India as *quid pro quo*. It is a dangerous appeal because it is need-based. Pakistan has been used and abused many times before, but for now, it holds the middleman advantage.

(The writer is a former Lt Governor of Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Puducherry)

RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE

The enchanting Kunchukkuttan

There is immense joy in tending to the needs of this little one

G MOHAN PRASAD

Pranav, the treasured Nonu of Amma, the esteemed Kuttu of Papa, and the beloved Kunchu of Appuppa (grandfather), is a mere one and a half years old—a cherished jewel to his mother, a delightful gem to his father, and a revered grandchild to his grandfather. Pranav’s father, who was raised in the serene surroundings of Kerala and now works in Bengaluru, sought to marry someone from Hissar (Haryana), and together they settled in Bengaluru. In due time, the young cherub shall be welcomed into a play school, where he will mingle with companions fluent in Kannada, Tamil, and a plethora of other youthful tongues. As a grandfather and an educator by vocation, I find myself somewhat perplexed about the linguistic trajectory the child

is destined to embark upon.

At the break of each morning, he eagerly rushes to my chamber, gently rousing me from slumber to retrieve the morning newspaper. Though he has yet to master speech fully, he articulates the initials of the *Deccan Herald* with surprising accuracy, proudly identifying the bold ‘D’ and ‘H’ on the front page. Perched upon my lap, he studies the vivid illustrations adorning its pages, then bounds through the house, a joyous whirlwind of energy.

While his mother attends to his nourishment, he fixates on the television, captivated by certain cinematic tunes from Tamil (such as *Kurukku Sirithavale*), Malayalam (*Unnikale Oru Katha Parayam*), and Hindi films (*Deewana Hai Ye Mann*), alongside Punjabi melodies (*Morni Banke*). At approximately 10:30 am, following a period of playful interaction with his toys, he is given a bath. Subsequently, we proceed to the car park, where I place him lovingly in his stroller. On every occasion that we go outdoors, he consistently retrieves his shoes on his own. I am perpetually

amazed by his remarkable aptitude for operating technology, be it the computer, television, or mobile devices. On occasion, he extends his reach to communicate via WhatsApp with his ‘ammai’ (pappa’s sister) residing in Australia. One might assert, without exaggeration, that he has even sent a photograph of himself, saved on my mobile, to one of my contacts—perhaps knowingly, perhaps not.

In the serene evenings, his mother—an enforcement officer currently on childcare leave—escorts him to the nearby park, where he joyfully plays with others of his age. Upon returning home, he takes a refreshing bath, enjoys a wholesome meal, and shares playful moments with his father—an inspector in the income-tax department—before peacefully drifting off to sleep.

Thus unfolds the picturesque day for a young lad. As a retired gentleman and a widower, this little one brings me profound solace, and I derive immense joy from tending to his needs; the thought of existence devoid of his presence is truly unimaginable.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A stain on the current world order

Apropos ‘In Gaza, hunger as a weapon of war’ (Aug 7), the humanitarian catastrophe unfolding in Gaza is sparking global outrage. Despite killing over 61,000 Palestinians and razing the enclave with relentless air and military strikes, Israel continues to escalate its actions, forcing frequent mass relocations. The deliberate restriction of international relief supplies has put people at risk of starvation. Moreover, hospitals treating the sick and injured,

particularly women and children, have not been spared. The images of innocent toddlers suffering from hunger and malnutrition are a stain on the current world order. The United States, a champion of human rights, has failed to halt the collective and unjustified punishment of the people. Unless it acts swiftly, the death toll in Gaza could surpass what the war has caused so far. **Kamal Laddha**, Bengaluru

Economic necessity

Apropos ‘Trump hikes tariff to 50%, unfair says India’ (Aug 7), India’s oil imports from Russia are driven by economic necessity rather than ideological alignment. Notably, the US also procures Russian commodities for its nuclear and automobile industries, despite the apparent rapport between Mr Trump and Narendra Modi. To mitigate the economic impact of the tariff penalties, India should expand

trade agreements that respect mutual interests rather than hegemony. Furthermore, India must strengthen its voice in multilateral forums to counter arbitrary trade actions. **S S Paul**, Nadia (WB)

Meet their demands

The KSRTC employees’ strike over pay hikes and arrears was temporarily withdrawn following the High Court’s stay order. The strike was

in response to the government’s failure to meet their demands, citing financial constraints. The KSRTC employees’ work benefits the public, and their wages and benefits should be increased accordingly. **K R Jayaprakash Rao**, Mysuru

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

Rahul Gandhi has insulted the people of Bangalore Central, especially thousands of Hindus who voted for the BJP. To him, any minority-heavy seat must belong to Congress.



The problem is not fraud. The problem is the verdict. **P C Mohan**, BJP MP (on Rahul Gandhi questioning his 2024 victory from Bangalore Central constituency)

Divide and rule, weaken and conquer, love and enslave, these are three tenets of politics.

Bangambiki Habyarimana

TO BE PRECISE



IN PERSPECTIVE

Calling conscious technologists

India’s manufacturing sector needs a reboot. Its new workforce must balance skill with sustainability

GAURI TRIVEDI

India’s manufacturing has historically lagged regional competitors like China despite starting from similar economic baselines in the 1980s. For many years, attempts to revitalise manufacturing in India yielded limited successes, with its share of GDP stagnating between 15% and 16%. ‘Make in India’, launched in 2014, along with several other business-friendly policies, has helped it rise to 17%. India’s ambitious target of 25% GDP growth from manufacturing is a distant goal, even as the country maintains a strong and steadily growing economy.

Global trade is in deep water as the era of multilateralism is fading fast, leaving only bilateral and free-trade-agreement (FTA) routes open. With the Trump administration’s imposition of hefty tariffs, India’s exports to the US are expected to receive a jolt.

Strengthening India’s manufacturing base is not just a driver of domestic growth towards a Viksit Bharat by 2047, but also a buffer against external shocks and a pillar of long-term economic security. India needs to reboot its manufacturing sector if it is to achieve its 2047 target. Its economy must grow from the current \$3 trillion to \$18 to \$20 trillion; it needs to increase per capita income from \$3,000 to \$12,000 and create jobs for 600 million Indians. At the same time, India must ensure that growth is sustainable in line with the stated objective of achieving net zero by 2070. The manufacturing sector must create a multiplier effect on the growth of the services sector and absorb excess agricultural labour.

Within the manufacturing sector, India exhibits varying levels of global competitiveness across 10-11 value chains. While India is better off in global competitiveness in skills-intensive sectors, such as automotive and capital goods, it has a long way to go to catch up in raw-materials-intensive sectors, including pharmaceuticals, chemicals, metals and mining, apparel and textiles, furniture, leather, and rubber. It has a negligible presence in technology-intensive sectors, such as semiconductors, aerospace and defence, and renewable energy.

India’s robust manufacturing base can capitalise on shifting global trade flows resulting from emerging geopolitics. Nearly 30% of the Indian population is young, making it one of the youngest large economies in the world. This demographic dividend window of opportunity will remain open until 2040. This must be juxtaposed with the fact that large parts of the

developed world are ageing. India is a global leader in software services. The time is ripe to integrate the IT and manufacturing sectors, taking the lead in creating the next level of smart, sustainable manufacturing that serves both domestic and global markets.

However, problems exist. Youth in India lack the required know-how, which in turn affects their employability. This calls for a heightened education and training ecosystem. The knowledge and skill gap among engineers joining manufacturing companies is wide. The current curriculum in engineering colleges requires substantial revision to align with industry needs. The gap is widening as automation increases in large manufacturing companies across the country. Students often lack a clear understanding of Industry 4.0 technologies and the importance of sustainability, which is crucial for the growth of the manufacturing sector. If we think of the education system as an enterprise, it will mean an enterprise that produces 35% completely irreparable goods.

Home-grown excellence

India needs to create its workforce development framework by drawing insights from Germany’s industry-integrated education, Japan’s process-driven skill development, South Korea’s government-industry-academia collaboration, and China’s large-scale upskilling initiatives. A strong emphasis on hands-on training, advanced manufacturing technologies, and industry participation in education will be essential.

Educational institutions must enhance the quality and employability of their students, enabling them to become world-class engineering professionals capable of working globally. Once we achieve parity between what the global academic best are doing and what the industry needs, we can build our models of excellence. We need to make manufacturing exciting, aspirational, and rewarding. The Making culture is not so prevalent in India. At school levels, Atal Tinkering Labs-like initiatives are key to generating interest among students in making and STEM careers.

Awareness campaigns on the manufacturing sector and the global career opportunities it offers are imperative. It is no longer sweat and grime on a shop floor. The apt name for this sector, I believe, is Manufacturing, Engineering, and Technology (MET) – a new-age sector where the digital and physical domains merge. Digital manufacturing, including automation, robotics, and AI, is the way forward. We need to create what we call conscious technologists – professionals who are skilled in cutting-edge manufacturing technologies but also mindful of sustainability, efficiency, and the ethical use of technology.

(The writer is a former IAS officer)

'Bengaluru is a synonym in Germany for R&D in digital world'

Philipp Ackermann has been serving in the German foreign service since 1993. With a PhD in art history, he has spent six years in India and recently visited Bengaluru for the inauguration of SAP Labs' India Innovation Park in Devanahalli, the company's largest research hub outside Germany. He is particularly fond of Bengaluru's modern outlook, its can-do spirit, tech talent, and pleasant year-round weather, which draws him to the city three to four times annually. Ackermann shares his insights on the Indo-German partnership across various sectors, including science, technology, and defence, and German immigration policy. Excerpts:

What will be the big milestones for India-Germany relations in the next five years?

You will find Indo-German cooperation on basically every level of society, be that academia, business, climate change, cultural cooperation... And this partnership is at an all-time high right now, and we'll see more of it in the coming years.

First of all, business... We have about 2,200 German companies which set up shop in India, and one to two medium-sized companies from Germany a week that come to India to explore whether and how to set up

Philipp Ackermann,
Ambassador of Germany
to India, in conversation with
Muthi-Ur-Rahman Siddiqui



shop in India.

Another thing would be with regard to climate change and sustainability. Germany and India have concluded the Indo-German Green and Sustainable Development Partnership (GSPP), one of whose aims is making urban living more sustainable and greener in India.

A third priority is certainly migration. Germany is in dire need of skilled labour migration... Many understaffed

sectors are very actively looking for talented people from India. Then there is the defence sector, where Germany and India are trying to develop new ways of cooperation.

Which German companies are investing in Bengaluru, and why?

Bengaluru, for us, is the R&D centre par excellence in India. When you see German business here, it's mostly R&D. SAP has more engineers in India than in Germany. You see Mercedes with 8,000 engineers doing autonomous driving experiments and working on brakes. You have Bosch, which is more than 100 years old. You have Festo, also a car supplier. And Siemens Healthineers is building the biggest campus outside Germany here in Bengaluru.

Bengaluru is a synonym in Germany for R&D in the digital world. The city of Berlin, which is a full-fledged German state, will open an office here in Bengaluru next year in order to link the start-up scenes from here to the one in Berlin.

German investment bank KfW has financed the Bengaluru Metro project. It is also providing 500 million euros for the Bengaluru Suburban Railway Project. Do you regularly monitor the progress of

these projects?

We do collaborate with authorities, and it is monitored very thoroughly. Of course, we are not the engineers; we support the financing. We offer favourable interest rates, so we are very keen on observing the progress.

Is the fund release tied to the progress of the project?

The fund release is meticulously laid down in a contract between the organisation and KfW. There, all the steps have been laid out on how to monitor and at which speed to proceed.

How many skilled workers would Germany require in the next five years?

About 4 lakh a year. That's not only from India; it is from all over the world. Germany has had very good experience with the three lakh Indians that are in Germany already. We know that some professions, like caregivers and nurses but also IT personnel, are particularly sought after. The average salary of the 300,000 Indians in Germany is higher than the average salary of a German in Germany.

What specific challenges do Indians face in Germany?

Our immigration law is Europe's most

modern. We recently introduced what we call the opportunity card; you can come to Germany without having a job offer. The idea is that you come to search for a job.

In the big cities and if you are in the IT sector, English is completely sufficient, but I would encourage everybody who moves to Germany to learn German to a certain level. And when you go into professions like caregiving or nursing, then German proficiency is a must.

You will see the Germans are a little reserved, but many Indians experience the German living a little stiff, but once they open up, they like it a lot. We are not the best communicators actually. But once you have somebody invited over to your place, he will be your friend forever.

In Germany, you have excellent technical universities and old traditional schools that offer good training for free.

And also, we do not monitor your social media accounts for your visa application. We have

50,000 Indian students in Germany. It is the biggest non-German group of students in Germany. Once you graduate, you have 18 months to find a job.

We have had very good experiences with Indian students, but I say don't trust your agent. They try to push you to private universities that charge fees. You have 2,500 master's degrees in public universities that charge only small administrative fees. Students can visit the DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) website and check for courses in public universities. Its biggest India office is in Bengaluru.

How does Germany's growing need for skilled workers align with the rise of far-right political parties?

We want fair and legal migration. We've been exposed to two waves of immigration because of our geographic situation, from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and recently Ukraine.

That is one reason why far-right political parties have grown so much.

But these parties are not against migration per se.



Placing an atomic energy source on the lunar surface is "not science fiction," experts say, but does pose technical challenges

KENNETH CHANG

Nuclear reactors have been generating power on Earth for more than 70 years. How hard would it be to place one on the moon to provide copious, continuous energy? And could that be accomplished in an five years? Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy, who is now also NASA's administrator, called for just that last week: a reactor producing 100 kilowatts of power — enough to power about 80 homes in the United States — that could be launched to the moon before 2030.

Put a nuclear reactor in space?

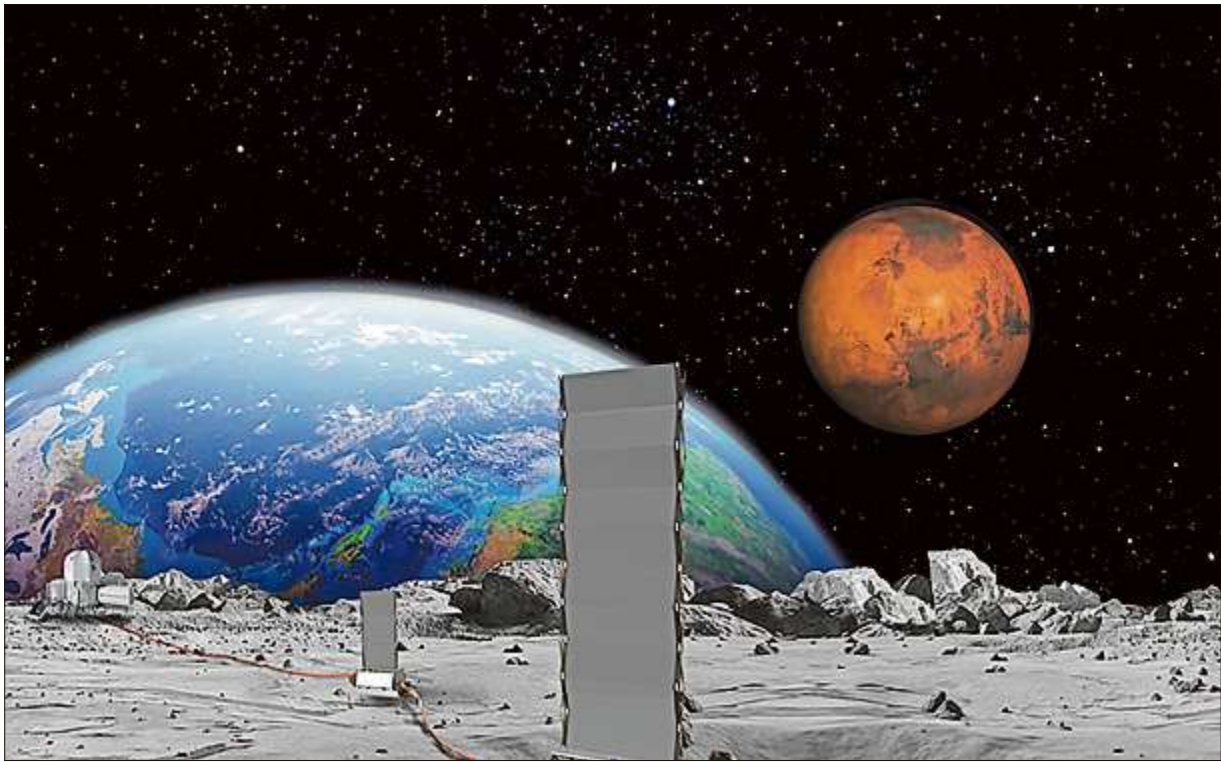
A nuclear reactor technology would transcend the ability of humanity to travel and explore the solar system. Many of NASA's current spacecraft today operate at power equivalent to what a few incandescent light bulbs consume. That limits what scientific instruments can be put on board. The International Space Station gets its power from swaths of solar panels, but that's not practical for human habitats on the moon, where the cold, dark night lasts two weeks, or on Mars, where the sun is farther and dimmer.

Nuclear reactors would also enable faster and more efficient propulsion systems. Generating radioactive energy sources in space is not unusual. The Voyager 1 and Voyager 2 probes, which are still operating after launching in 1977, are powered by plutonium, with the heat of natural radioactive decay turned into electricity. The plutonium heat initially generated 470 watts. Decades since, the power output has declined to about 225 watts. The plutonium power sources on the rovers are more like batteries than nuclear power plants on Earth. Fission — the reaction splitting of atoms like uranium — releases much more energy than fusion, and the power sources on the rovers. This is what Duffy's order aims to achieve.

The secretary has made it very clear in his role as acting administrator that we want to go bigger and bolder than what we did with Apollo," said a senior NASA official, speaking on the condition of anonymity to avoid the background of Duffy's directive. "Everything needs power," the official said, and a kilogram of uranium could be able to produce "as much energy as eight train full of coal," said Bhavya, a former associate administrator for policy, policy, and strategy at NASA. Recently wrote a white paper that argued for a demonstration of a nuclear reactor in space by 2030 with Roger Myers, senior executive at Aerojet Rocketdyne, changes the paradigm.

Would a nuclear reactor on the moon work?

A reactor on the moon would not operate in the same way as one on Earth.



In an undated rendering from NASA, a concept image of a lunar surface nuclear reactor. Sean Duffy, the acting administrator of NASA, has issued a directive to fast-track efforts to put a nuclear reactor on the moon. THE NEW YORK TIMES

NASA getting fired up about a nuclear reactor on the moon

For one, it has to be small enough and light enough to fit inside a rocket. Safety precautions would include not turning the reactor on until it reached the moon.

On the moon, there is also no water or air. The surface swings between 250 degrees Fahrenheit during the day and minus 400 degrees at night. Those make it more difficult to manage the reactor's temperature to keep it operating efficiently. Proposed designs of lunar reactors typically include large radiators to dissipate heat.

Kevin Au, the vice president of lunar exploration at Lockheed Martin, said the biggest challenge of a higher-power reactor would be developing materials that could survive hotter temperatures for use in the conversion of heat to electricity.

Still, experts say building such a power source falls within what is realistically possible. "It's not science fiction," said Sebastian Corbisiero, a senior program manager at Idaho National Laboratory who leads the Energy Department's space reactor program. "This is very doable."

How feasible is the lunar reactor plan?

However, building a reactor and launching it by 2030 seems unrealistic to some outside experts. They also call it somewhat perplexing because NASA is not currently planning

anything on the lunar surface that would require a reactor there that soon.

"It's just a very aggressive, frankly unrealistic timeline for something that is good and should happen," said Kathryn Huff, a former nuclear energy official at the Department of Energy who is now a professor of nuclear, plasma and radiological engineering at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. "My understanding is that its intent was to power an outpost. So it feels a little silly to do so without an outpost."

Beyond the necessary work to design and build a lunar reactor, navigating the regulatory approvals for launching one would take a couple of years, Huff said.

The NASA official said the 2030 date aims to provide focus and motivation.

"Urgency is the name of the game," the official said. "If we put it too far in the future, we're not going to achieve it, right?"

Duffy's directive also cites plans by China and Russia to build a nuclear reactor for a lunar base near the moon's south pole. The fear is that a keep-out zone around the reactor could limit what the United States could do on the moon. The official declined to say how much money would be devoted to the program, but said it could be in the hundreds of millions of dollars, or more than \$1 billion.

Who might build a nuclear reactor for NASA?

In 2022, NASA, along with the Idaho laboratory, awarded contracts for initial design studies for a lunar reactor that would produce 40 kilowatts. Those small-scale efforts were led by Lockheed Martin, which has built many of NASA's spacecraft; Westinghouse, a heavyweight in the nuclear power industry; and a collaboration between two startups, Intuitive Machines and X-energy. All three studies failed to fit their reactor designs within the goal of weighing less than 6 metric tons.

A fission system producing 100 kilowatts would probably be more massive. For the reactor itself, "it's not that huge of a change," said John Kennedy, who leads the space nuclear program at X-energy.

But other pieces like the radiation shielding and the apparatus for converting heat to electricity would have to be larger, Kennedy said. Duffy's directive, however, says the lander taking the reactor to the surface would have a payload capacity of 15 metric tons. No such spacecraft currently exists, but cargo versions of the two landers that are being developed to take astronauts to the moon's surface — SpaceX's Starship and Blue Origin's Blue Moon — would meet that requirement. **NYT**

How suicides reflect a systemic failure

BHAVANA C J

The recent suicide of a NEET aspirant casts yet another grim shadow on our collective conscience. A young life, full of potential, lost to a system that offers little support. As with many before, outrage flared online, hashtags trended, opinions flooded in — and then silence returned. This is far from an isolated headline. India is witnessing a disturbing rise in youth suicides, particularly among students. More alarming than the numbers is our growing indifference. With every scroll, even death fades into background noise. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), over 13,000 student suicides were reported in 2022 — 7.6% of all suicides that year. Over 2,200 were directly linked to exam failure. These are not just statistics; they are stories of young people who saw no way out.

In one recent case, a newlywed woman drove to a remote location and ended her life after leaving clear instructions about her possessions. In another, a 19-year-old from Delhi left a suicide note and travelled far from home before ending her life. These were not impulsive acts. They were meticulously planned, shaped by sleepless nights and internal battles. When a teenager stands at the edge of suicide, it is rarely due to a single setback. It is the culmination of prolonged emotional anguish, worsened by a culture that allows little room for failure or vulnerability.

The rigidity of our systems — schools, families, society — often drives already distressed individuals to the brink. A common thread runs through many of these deaths: emotional stuckness. It is a state of cognitive and emotional freeze where a person sees no way forward.

They are stuck, not physically but mentally, caught in a pseudo-perception that happiness, success, and freedom depend solely on external circumstances. Their thinking becomes binary: success or death. In a society where failure is shameful and mental illness is poorly understood, this mindset can be fatal. These rigid mental patterns are shaped by several forces: overpowering parental aspirations, relentless peer pressure, hyper-competitive institutions, and a cultural obsession with

success. For teens, a momentary failure often feels like a permanent flaw.

This crisis is compounded by an insidious change in our social fabric. India once valued communal identity and mutual support, but is increasingly moving towards a performance-based, neoliberal, individualist culture, fuelled by social media and consumerism. Yet, our innate desire for belonging — for a community to hold us during adversity — remains unmet. The result is a generation that feels isolated, and unable to find help when drowning in despair.

A collectivist society can act as "suicide counters" — offering buffers like economic security, religious or spiritual beliefs, family support, community integration, and ethical principles. But when these buffers are weakened or absent, as they increasingly are in contemporary urban living, many are left dangerously exposed.

In response to this crisis, the Supreme Court of India, on July 26, issued 15 interim guidelines in Sukdeb Sahas v. State of Andhra Pradesh. Citing a "systemic failure" in the education system, the Court directed schools and coaching centres nationwide to implement measures like appointing mental health counsellors, training teachers to spot distress, setting up grievance redressal mechanisms, and conducting regular mental health workshops.

While these steps are overdue, real change requires more than policy. We need a cultural shift — one that redefines success, values emotional well-being, and encourages empathy over silence. Families must listen without judgement, teachers must recognise warning signs, and society must ensure that vulnerability is met with support, not stigma.

Our growing desensitisation to youth suicide signals a deep societal decay. Each loss should shake us, enrage us, and move us to act, but instead, we scroll past. And with every scroll, the unthinkable becomes normalised. These young lives aren't lost to failure; they're lost to a world that leaves no space for vulnerability. A system that prizes marks over mental health, ranks over relationships, and outcomes over well-being.

(The writer is pursuing a master's degree in clinical psychology at Christ Deemed to be University)

OUR PAGES OF HISTORY

YEARS AGO: AUGUST 1975

ection to 4 high offices yond court scrutiny

NEW DELHI
The Lok Sabha today passed a Constitution Amendment Bill to take beyond challenge in courts the election to Parliament of a person holding the office of Prime Minister or speaker and the election of President and Vice President. The Bill — the 39th Amendment to the Constitution — also protects from challenge in courts several pieces of legislation, including electoral laws, the MISA, and reform measures of States and some economic measures.

25 YEARS AGO: AUGUST 2000

Nijalingappa is dead

BANGALORE
The architect of Karnataka's unification, a revered former chief minister and one of the last titans of the Gandhian era, Mr S Nijalingappa, died at his residence 'Vinaya' in Chitradurga. He was 98. Mr Nijalingappa, whose health deteriorated after he had a fall and a leg fracture last month, was treated at the Government Bowring and Lady Curzon hospital in Bangalore for some time. On July 27 he was shifted to Chitradurga from the hospital in a critical condition honouring his last wish to return home.

Once the great ten-headed mighty Ravana, who as a demon-tyrant controlled even the gods, demi-gods and celestial beings, asked a flower bud to bloom instantly. When the worlds were shaking in fear of him, this tiny bud fearlessly replied it seems, "I am the daughter of nature, I have a natural blueprint to follow, only when the time is right for me, I shall bloom" don't play with natural laws", the bud warned him. But what happened in the end to that haughty Ravana who went completely against rules, is a well-known story.

Man can never outwit nature - bottom line. Only by respecting her

status, by enjoying the bliss of her haven, by listening to her poetry in pictures, by savouring her eternal visual beauty, by appreciating her selfless acts of giving, by feeling blessed by her generosity, by accepting her seniority and her primeval superiority, that man can remain like a man.

He may create neon lights, LED lights, incandescent lights, sodium vapour lights, mercury vapour lights - so on and so forth, but with that 'artificial light' in hand, can he do away with the Sun? Can he



proclaim victory over the natural life-sustaining light and warmth of the Sun? No!

Man may produce different types of fans -- ceiling fans, pedestal fans, exhaust fans, portable fans, window fans, whole house fans, and what have you -- but can he wave a goodbye to natural air that fill his life-breath? No!

Man with all his passion, intelligence and fervour, may produce umpteen brands of perfumes, colognes, body splashes, body butters, heady scents, et al, but can he fill the natural sweet fragrance in

a flower? Leave alone the fragrance, can he create a small petal of a small flower with all its natural splendour, soft and supple as it is, replicating the nature? No!

With artificial intelligence, customising lives has become the trendy mode of man. Body morphing has become assumed unrealistic proportion.

There are several cases of reported misuse of the technology. We must remember that we are but a product of nature and should not meddle with it lest our doings come back to bite us! We can perhaps create a few things... but can never become God!

DECCAN Chronicle

8 AUGUST 2025

Will China, Russia shape India's tariff response?

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be in Tianjin for the Shanghai Cooperation Summit (SCO) that is to be hosted by the Chinese President Xi Jinping. There is a strong likelihood that the Russian President Vladimir Putin will also be there on August 31-September 1. The meetings with the Chinese and Russian Presidents will be rich in optics, especially given the circumstances in which global trade has been turned topsy-turvy by Trump's tariffs that took effect against imports from 69 countries on Thursday at various rates, including the highest slab of 50 per cent-plus reserved for Brazil and India.

While Russia remains in focus because of its oil trade with two of its biggest customers in China and India (Europe, a big buyer of Russia's LNG, being another), it is time for India to shed its old complex about China, negotiating with which was perceived as a sign of historical weakness. Having been driven into a corner by Trump's tariff plus penalty, it is imperative for India to show that it has other pastures to look at, specifically China which remains the largest exporter of goods into India.

At a time when what was arguably the most important relationship for India in the new millennium has soured thanks to Trump's jaundiced views and his tariff tantrum, India must go beyond the optics of a diplomatic bilateral meeting and facilitate ministerial-level dialogues to suss out the possibility to China buying more from India even as India diverts some of its US imports to China.

It would be in India's interest to hold deeper trade and political conversations with China now that the border situation is somewhat satisfactory after the last meeting between Prime Minister Modi and President Xi that took place in Kazan, Russia. It cannot be easy to open the heart out to China so soon after it had played a role in helping the Pakistani armed forces in the drone, missile and fighter jet battles of May 2025. But to separate security issues and look at trade is an imperative now.

The opportunity is not just to show to the US that the friend it is spurning now has other options. Truth to tell, India may not have handled Trump too well in harping on the role that it says Trump did not play in ending hostilities with Pakistan in the wake of the Pahalgam attack by Pakistani terrorists and the consequent Operation Sindoor. It also did not butter him up by nominating him for the Nobel Peace Prize, nor invest in his family's cryptocurrency business.

In standing up to the US, Mr Modi has declared that protecting the country's 700 million agriculture and dairy farmers, fishermen and the people they employ is too crucial a national priority. This is incontestable even if credible arguments can be made against the high tariffs India employs while protecting most of its domestic market and hence is unable to move into a more advanced phase of openness after the economic reforms of the 1990s.

Russian oil may be the trump card for the US President to finesse India, but the demand to open the dairy and agriculture sectors may have become the trigger that the US may have used as it looks at options to tax imports and increase exports. Self-sufficiency is a noble concept but the road to it is long. To find a balanced response to the good, the bad and the ugly is the immediate challenge and the meetings with the Chinese and Russian Presidents may give it a better shape.

TN gov defies SC ruling again

Tamil Nadu governor R.N. Ravi has done it again. The man who was sworn in to "preserve, protect and defend the Constitution and the law" and to devote himself "to the service and well-being of the people of Tamil Nadu" has thrown it all to the wind by sending a bill passed by the state Assembly unanimously to set up a university to the consideration of the President after sitting on it for more than three months, in defiance of the Constitution, and the law as laid down by the Supreme Court of India.

There is no grey area in the Constitution with respect to the powers of a governor when dealing with bills passed by a state Assembly. He can either give his assent to it, or return it to the Assembly with his points of disagreement in writing for it to consider, or else send it to the President of India if the bill falls in certain well-defined areas.

The Supreme Court had, in a landmark judgment last year, ruled that a governor cannot sit on the bills passed by a state Assembly for a period of his choosing and a decision has to come from him within a maximum period of three months. This limit is applicable even to the President when considering giving their assent to a bill sent by a governor.

It may be noted that the Supreme Court had specifically mentioned that a governor cannot send all bills to the President for her consideration and that there cannot be no "extraneous or irrelevant considerations" while doing so. Setting up a university falls within the legislative powers of the Assembly which need no concurrence from the President or the Union government.

The present occupant of the Chennai Raj Bhavan has proved repeatedly that he has no plans to respect the Constitution, the law and the orders of the Supreme Court. It is time that the Union government replaced him with a person who is inclined to do justice to the oath he takes when assuming the responsibilities of his job.

KAUSHIK MITTER
Editor

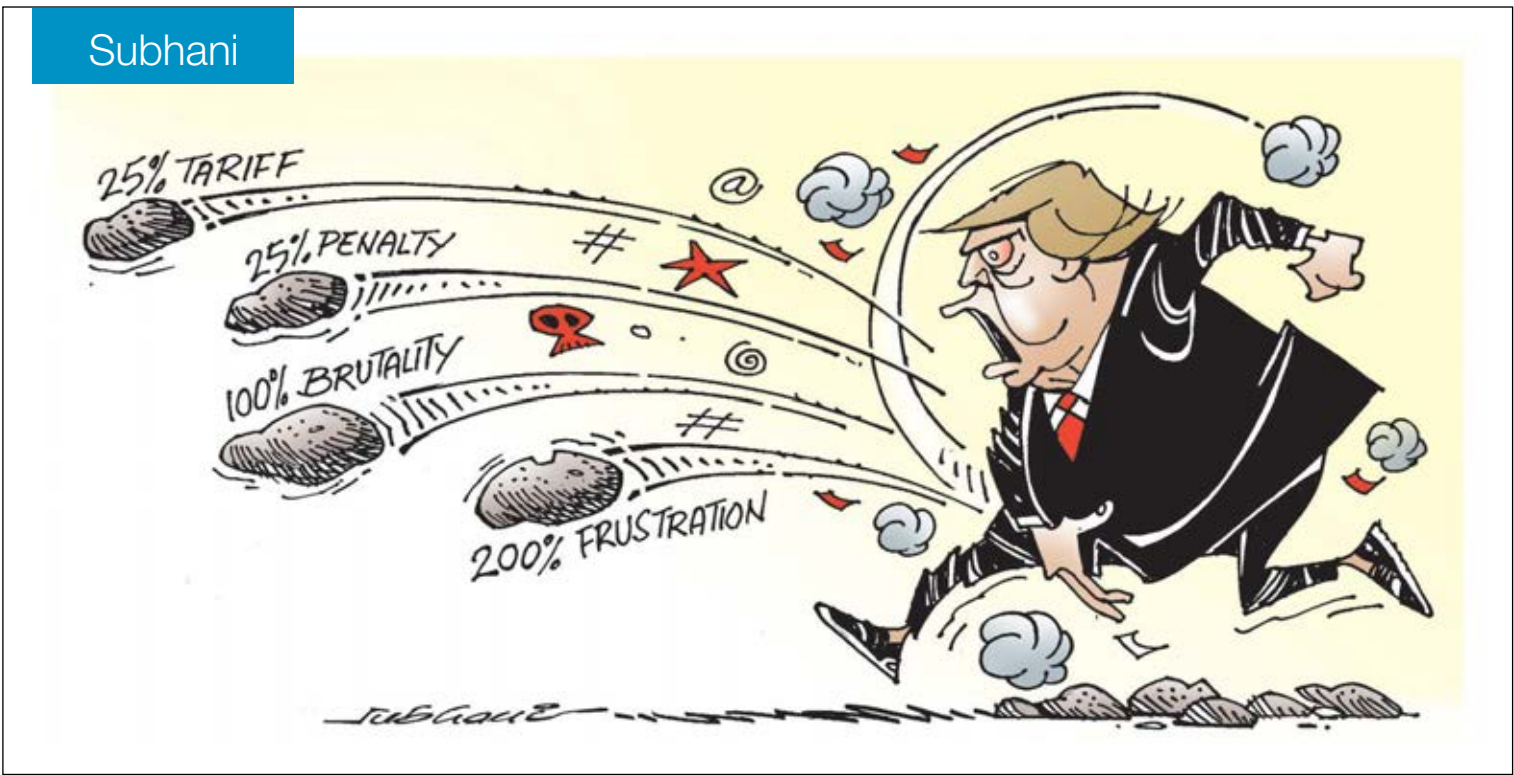
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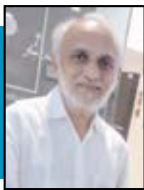
R. MOHAN
Resident Editor

DECCAN CHRONICLE offices are located at:
Chennai: SP 3 Developed Plot, Industrial Estate, Guindy, Chennai 600032. Phones: (044) 22254750, 22254751
Coimbatore: No. 2/22 Sengalipalayam Road, N.G.G.O. Colony Post, Kurudampalayam Village, Coimbatore-641022. Phone: (0422) 2231255, 2231256
Hyderabad: 36, Sarojini Devi Road, Secunderabad 500 003. Phone: (040) 27803930-4. Fax: (040) 27805256.
Visakhapatnam: Survey No. 1/3A Beach Road, Near Kailasagiri Ropeway, Sector-9 MVP Colony, Visakhapatnam - 530 017. Phones: (0891) 2552333/2552334, Fax (0891) 2755285
Vijayawada: No. C 3 & 4, Patamata, Industrial Estate, Auto Nagar, Vijayawada (A.P.). Phones: (0866) 255284/ 2555287, Fax (0866) 2555234
Rajahmundry: Vemagiri, Dhawleswaram Rd, Rajahmundry 533125. Phones: (0883) 2417208, 2417618
Anantapur: Thapovan Colony, Bangalore Bye-Pass Road, Anantapur 515004. Phones: (08554) 276903, Fax: 08554-276904
Nellore: Survey No. 527/2, Burrampur Village, Venkatachalam (M), Chemudugunta Panchayat, Nellore. Phone: (0861) 2348581/ 82, Telefax (0861) 2348580
Karimnagar: H.No. 1-21-12/1, Cheralabhutkur Road, Mugudhumpur Village, Karim Nagar - 505186 Phone : 9121181123

Subhani



Could drones, missiles alone fight wars today, tomorrow?



Parsa Venkateshwar Rao Jr

One of the teasing questions that crops up with regard to the recent India-Pakistan clash following India's Operation Sindoor is Pakistan's use of drones to attack Indian military installations with drones imported from Turkey and fighter jets, J-35, imported from China. According to information given by the Indian official teams, the Indian radar systems have repelled the drone attacks through jamming.

The Indian side has not yet specified how many Pakistani drones have been destroyed. It is also not clear how the Indian Air Force tackled J-35s. The Indian side has admitted that India has lost planes. The number has not been specified, nor which of the fighters, especially the French Rafales, which had been inducted in this decade.

The question is whether India has been tracking the acquisition of arms by Pakistan, including the drones from Turkey, and if so, what was the assessment of India's military establishment of the role of drones in a war scenario. The use of drones as an attacking weapon had come to light when Russia used drones imported from Iran in the war with Ukraine. The United States and the European Union had taken up cudgels with Iran for the military exports to Russia and threatened it with further sanctions. Iran had clarified that it has sold the drones to Russia much before the war had begun. It indicates the drones have been pressed into military offensive for quite some time.

There has not been much talk of Turkey mak-

ing and exporting military drones. Experts argue, and rightly so, that there is nothing new about the use of drones for military purposes. The unmanned aerial vehicle is a drone in a manner of speaking. The development of drones can be traced back to UAVs, but the development of drones has a trajectory of its own. Drones have started off as a civilian curiosity with a potential to be used in various modes. One of them was aerial photography, especially of crowds. Then it was suggested that as a way to deliver goods to customers from shops to homes instead of using delivery boys. There have been reports in the Indian media that drones have been inducted into the Indian Army for transportation purposes.

The debate is on in India, among the military folk, as to the nature of 21st century warfare. The late Gen. Bipin Rawat, India's first Chief of Defence Staff, had his own views. He thought that with the extensive use of missiles, the role of bombers and fighter planes could be reduced. However, traditional IAF officers, especially those who have now retired, felt that no Air Force worth its name could do without fighter planes. Sometime recently, the present Chief of Defence Staff, Gen. Anil Chauhan, said that it was not possible to fight wars with imported weapon systems, and that it was "not possible to fight today's wars with yesterday's weapons", and that as a matter of fact one should be "fighting today's wars with tomorrow's weapons". It is a logical view of war and national security. That is why the absence

The late Gen. Bipin Rawat, India's first Chief of Defence Staff, had his own views. He thought that with the extensive use of missiles, the role of bombers and fighter planes could be reduced.

of a debate in India on use of drones in today's warfare seems to be odd. The use of drones as a weapon of attack had first come to light in the Ukraine war. There is a discussion that the drones are indeed cheap to produce and the technology is simple. This is perhaps the reason that Iran and Turkey are engaged in producing military drones. Military planners in India must be considering the drone option, and they may not want to talk about it.

According to Indian media reports, meanwhile, Pakistan has been using drones as a means of smuggling drugs into India, and the police in Punjab has confiscated many of those drone droppings. It does not seem to have attracted significant public attention. It is quite strange that Pakistan's smuggling forays into India across the border in Punjab should not have made it to the news arena in a prominent way.

The drones are then a major example of a dual-use technology, where it can function as a means in the civilian field, including aerial photography, and as an offensive weapon in the battlefield. This can lead to futurist fantasies of robotics taking over the means of waging wars, and where the armed forces will become redundant. Of course, the prime motive that lies behind wars will not be complete without harming people, killing them, maiming them, destroying homes, factories, schools, hospitals, farms, bridges. The war of disinformation through

cyber-attacks is the beginning of computer wars. The idea of extending mechanised wars, which began in an elementary fashion with the introduction of tanks and planes in the First World War in the early part of the last century, will likely move into the arena of fighting wars through machines. The end idea, however, would be to kill human beings because it is humans who are fighting and they would not be content with bombing out the enemy's machines.

What is of importance at the moment is the fact that the Indian military's thinking is moving rather slowly, and India's political and diplomatic leadership is also moving in conventional grooves. The decision to suspend the Indus Water Treaty with Pakistan in the wake of the April 22 Pahalgam terrorist attack smacks of old-fashioned thinking. Surgical strikes on terrorist infrastructure in Pakistan through the use of missiles is good, but may not be too effective in targeting terrorists.

The Indian military's top brass has made it clear that the loss of a few planes is no big deal, and that it is the success of the mission that is of importance. It is the right point of view too. But losses and setbacks should be scrutinised, and defence experts must be doing it. The use of attack drones by Pakistan, however ineffective, must have drawn the attention of the experts as well. There is, however, the need to reckon with drones as vehicles of carrying bombs to target terrorist bases across the border because the drones are now part of Pakistan's war machinery. From all accounts now available to the public, India has successfully shot down and jammed the drones. It will not be impossible to envisage radar-eluding drones carrying heavy bombs over medium-range distances.

The writer is a Delhi-based commentator and analyst

LETTERS

TRUMP TARIFF TANTRUM

Your editorial "India must stand up to Trump's Tariff Tantrum" is spot on. And you have clearly narrated Trump's recent eccentric activities, especially against India, with irrefutable exemplary examples. It won't be out of place if I quote the X Post of Nickey Haley who also threw her hat into the ring as a Republican party candidate for the recent election of American President along with Donald Trump. She didn't mince words while criticising Trump for his inconceivable stand in imposing unimaginable trade restrictions. Haley said, "India should not be buying oil from Russia. But China, an adversary and the number one buyer of Russian and Iranian oil, got a 90-day tariff pause. Don't give China a pass and burn a relationship with a strong ally like India."

S. Vaithianathan
Madurai

PALESTINIANS' PLIGHT

The war between Palestinians and Israelites has been going on for over 77 years. Palestinian men, women, children and aged people have been prevented from living in their homeland in peace. The primary aim of the UN is to promote peace and security at the international level. The UN is also bound to foster international cooperation and to promote human values. Sadly, the UN has not achieved any one of these to reduce the bloodshed of hapless Palestinians. Further the US is fuelling Israel to intensify hatred towards Palestinians.

M L . Raghavan
Tirupur

FLAWED JUSTICE

The Madras High Court's quashing of the Goondas Act detention of 17 accused in BSP leader Armstrong's murder case raises serious concerns about procedural integrity. The Court questioned how the Police Commissioner could have meaningfully reviewed 14,000 pages in a single day — an impossible feat that points to a rubber-stamp approach to preventive detention. The sequence of rushed detention, judicial reprimand, and an unexplained encounter demands an impartial probe and urgent reforms in police accountability. Law enforcement cannot be allowed to function on optics and overreach. When due process becomes optional, justice becomes accidental.

Gopalaswamy J
Chennai

Mail your letters to
chennaiDesk@deccanmail.com

Bhubaneswar Kalita and Dalbir Singh



Early detection & collective will can help India to eradicate TB

A bright coloured van rolling into a quiet village may not seem like a big deal — but across India, such sights are fast becoming symbols of a new, determined push against tuberculosis (TB). Take the example of the Aarogya Rath in Assam: a mobile diagnostic unit equipped with handheld X-rays and state-of-the-art diagnostic tools, is changing the way communities think about TB.

The Aarogya Rath represents more than a mobile lab. It embodies a new approach to public health — one that is proactive, inclusive, and deeply rooted in the principle of early detection and community outreach. By making TB testing visible, accessible and immediate, it is transforming how people engage with care and how we as a country are approaching our goal of a "TB-Mukt Bharat".

India's campaign against TB stands today on a robust foundation of unprecedented commitment, progress and reinvigorated drive. The World Health Organisation's Global TB Report 2024 underlines how far we have come, with India recording a sustained decline in both TB incidence and mortality — a testament to the relentless efforts of our health system, dedicated frontline workers and communities across the country. These achievements are further echoed in the milestones shared by Union health minister J.P. Nadda during the World TB Day 2025 summit, where he reaffirmed the nation's commitment to building a "TB-Mukt Bharat" through a "whole of the society" and "whole of the govern-

ment" approach.

Indeed, over the last year alone, India has demonstrated what is possible when communities, governments and elected leaders join forces. The 100-Day Intensified TB Mukt Bharat Abhiyaan stands out as a powerful example. In just over three months, nearly 13 crore people were screened, leading to the detection of more than seven lakh TB patients — including approximately 2.85 lakh asymptomatic patients who might have otherwise gone undiagnosed.

More than 13 lakh Nikshay Shivirs — local screening and awareness camps — brought TB services directly to people's doorsteps, bridging gaps especially in remote and underserved areas. It is also heartening that more than 30,000 elected representatives actively participated in the Abhiyaan, showing how the political leadership at every level can drive health outcomes. This synergy between community action and political stewardship is one of the most compelling features of India's TB elimination journey. The Nikshay Mitra initiative has drawn thousands of compassionate individuals, institutions and local bodies to adopt TB patients, providing nutritional support and personal encouragement, helping patients complete treatment with dignity.

Yet, even as we celebrate these achievements, we must remain vigilant and adaptive to emerging evidence. TB continues to be one of our most stubborn public health challenges, striking hardest among the poor, the undernourished, and those with co-morbidities.

The key to bending the curve further lies in early detection. Far too often, TB is diagnosed late — after the disease has advanced, weakened the patient and spread to others. Studies have shown that many TB patients visit multiple doctors, before getting a correct diagnosis, losing precious weeks or months. At each stop, they may be prescribed different tests or treatments that do not always follow the national guidelines. Not only does this delay cure, it increases the risk of spreading TB to family members and neighbours and raises the chances of developing drug-resistant forms of the disease.

This is why our efforts today are rightly focused on finding and treating cases early. Through the intensified screening campaign, we have seen the power of systematically reaching out to vulnerable groups — household contacts of TB patients, people living with diabetes or HIV, those with a history of TB — and identifying cases before they progress or spread.

New technologies have become indispensable allies in this effort. During the 100-day campaign, handheld X-ray units with artificial intelligence support, mobile labs mounted on Nikshay Vahans, and even RT-PCR machines repurposed from the Covid-19 pandemic, have helped shatter geographical barriers, reducing diagnostic delays and bringing state-of-the-art testing closer to communities. Indigenous multiplex kits now allow multiple tests at once, lowering costs and expediting diagnosis. The health ministry's decision to scale up these efforts nationwide, building on a

proven blueprint, offers tremendous hope.

To sustain this momentum, political leaders must continue to champion the cause. Elected representatives are uniquely placed to keep TB high on local and national agendas — by reviewing programme data, mobilising communities, and pushing for adoption of newer technologies in our districts. The active involvement of MPs, MLAs and panchayati raj institutions has demonstrated how leadership can foster local accountability and dismantle stigma, making it easier for people to come forward for screening and treatment.

Today, as India prepares to expand proven approaches to every district, our collective responsibility grows even more critical. This is not merely a health programme — it is a nationwide movement affirming our dedication to social justice and human dignity.

As we move forward, we must keep the spirit of "Yes! We Can End TB: Commit, Invest, Deliver" alive in every village and ward, every state capital and national forum. With communities empowered, frontline workers supported, innovative technologies embraced, and political resolve unwavering, we have no doubt that India can transform its vision of a TB-free nation into reality — setting an inspiring example for the entire world.

Bhubaneswar Kalita, MP, is chairperson of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Science and Technology, and Dr Dalbir Singh is president, Global Coalition Against TB

Unfair and unwarranted

US action will result in undesirable outcomes

Even before the 25 per cent tariff on Indian exports to the United States (US) took effect on August 7, US President Donald Trump signed an executive order imposing an additional 25 per cent ad valorem duty as penalty for importing Russian crude oil. This additional tariff will come into effect on August 27. Put together, Mr Trump has pushed India to an extremely difficult spot for reasons that are difficult to explain rationally. The reasoning is that India's purchase of Russian oil is helping Russia fund the Ukraine war. Put differently, if India stopped buying Russian oil, it would help end the war.

At the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the US and its Western allies seized Russia's foreign-exchange reserves, cut it off from the international payments system, and imposed all kinds of sanctions. None of this stopped Russia. Despite the full support of the US and its European allies to Ukraine, Russia was not deterred. Yet, the US now appears to believe that imposing additional tariffs on India will be effective in this regard. The move is essentially to please Mr Trump's base and to be seen as doing something to stop the war that he had assured he would end. The Government of India has rightly called the move "unfair, unjustified, and unreasonable".

The initial imposition of a higher 25 per cent tariff last week was also devoid of economic logic. Mr Trump has repeatedly said that India has higher tariffs and it is difficult to do business here. Granted, India has been unduly pessimistic about trade, and it should be more open in its interest. Nevertheless, it's also true that India has consistently run a current-account deficit, which means that it imports more goods and services from the rest of the world than it exports. India ran a trade deficit worth nearly \$100 billion with China last financial year. In fact, in 2024-25, India ran a merchandise trade deficit of over \$280 billion. Thus, there are countries like China with which India runs a deficit and countries like the US where it has a surplus. This is how trade works. However, in Mr Trump's view, a trade deficit reflects unfair trade policies. To be fair, the whole world is now grappling with the misplaced ideas of the US administration.

Be that as it may, now that India has been boxed into a corner as one of the countries facing the highest tariffs, it is important to discuss possible options. India was one of the first countries to start negotiating with the Trump administration on trade. On several occasions, it appeared that both sides would reach a mutually beneficial deal, and Mr Trump himself announced such possibilities. However, India ended up with relatively high tariffs. The additional 25 per cent tariff will virtually push most Indian exporters out of the US market. Pharma and electronics are not covered under these tariffs, but it is a matter of time before they are also brought within some tariff net. Given the linkages between the two countries, which go beyond trade, the outcomes of what the US is doing will not be desirable. India should thus continue to engage with the US. It can propose a gradual reduction in Russian oil imports, though India should not be expected to disengage from Russia for strategic reasons. At a broader level, India should use this phase to launch a comprehensive drive to boost competitiveness and explore new markets. Delaying action on this front is no longer an option.

Weighty issues

India's rush to make weight-loss drugs demands user caution

Indian pharmaceutical companies are preparing for weighty gains when the patent for semaglutide, the active pharmaceutical ingredient (API) used in drugs for weight loss and the treatment of diabetes, lapses in 2026 in 100 countries, including India, Canada, and Brazil. Sold by Novo Nordisk under the brand names Ozempic and Wegovy, the drugs have proven to be blockbuster for the Danish pharma major, generating \$25 billion in revenues in 2024 alone. No surprise, then, that Indian drugmakers have spotted a huge opportunity and are preparing to launch significantly cheaper generic versions of semaglutide. All the major names of the domestic industry — Dr Reddy's, Biocon, Sun Pharma, Cipla, Lupin, and Aurobindo Pharma — are reported to be ramping up in-house and contract manufacturing capabilities to produce injectable and oral formulations. Though both the market opportunities and the benefits for consumers from the availability of cheaper generics are significant, they need to be weighed against the risks.

The global market for weight-loss drugs is estimated at \$100 billion by the end of the decade. In India alone, the market has seen a fivefold increase over the past five years and is valued at \$73 million. The rapidly expanding proportion of diabetic and overweight people is likely to power this growth for some time. According to the International Diabetes Federation, India has a "significant diabetes epidemic"; one in four people with diabetes globally comes from India. Obesity, too, is reaching epidemic levels, thanks to rising prosperity, sedentary lifestyles, carb- and fat-rich diets, and increasing junk food consumption. The prospect of generics that could be 80 or 90 per cent cheaper could, therefore, see a sustained boom for generic manufacturers.

The road to this prosperity may be paved with hurdles. Novo Nordisk could well resort to the time-honoured practice of evergreening to extend the life of the semaglutide patent, blocking the entry of generics. It is currently suing Dr Reddy's and Bengaluru-based OneSource Specialty Pharma in the Delhi High Court for marketing semaglutide, citing patent infringement. Elli Lilly, which sells its diabetes and weight-management drugs under the brand names Mounjaro and Zepbound, respectively, is reportedly exploring follow-on patents for the API tirzepatide, which expires in 2036, focused on delivery devices, formulations, and methods of treatment.

At the same time, the rapid expansion of contract manufacturing to service the market without adequate safety checks is a critical hazard for domestic majors — the recent scandals over children's cough medication made in franchised units offer a cautionary tale. User caution is another potential problem. Both drugs need to be taken under strict medical supervision and in tandem with a dietary and exercise regimen. Without this, patients can suffer serious side-effects — from reduced kidney functioning to chronic gastrointestinal issues. In a country where prescription drugs are readily available over the counter and the proclivity for self-medication widely practised, the chances of weight-loss drugs being consumed without a doctor's recommendation are high. This is especially so among affluent Indians, who could indiscriminately consume these drugs as a panacea for obesity without following the vital dietary restrictions and falling prey to serious related ailments. It is critical, therefore, for the drug regulator to monitor the manufacture and distribution of these off-patent drugs to ensure that they do not spark a secondary health emergency.

Trump is winning the tariff war hands down

His tariffs are bringing in higher revenues, shielding American industry — and the markets remain unshaken



ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA

India is smarting from the tariff announced by United States President Donald Trump recently. It now faces a tariff of 25 per cent, plus an additional 25 per cent penalty for importing oil from Russia. Coming soon: Punitive tariffs on all pharmaceutical exports to the US, something that will bite Indian pharma companies.

Nearly 70 countries have been hit by tariffs on top of the universal 10 per cent levy. The tariffs are not just about reducing America's current account deficit. Mr Trump has weaponised them to make a political point — or even a personal one.

After announcing the 25 per cent tariff on India, Mr Trump added insult to injury by calling India a dead economy. He flaunted the deal to explore oil reserves in Pakistan and hinted at Pakistan selling oil to India down the road, clearly a poke in the eye for New Delhi.

India is not alone in being penalised and humiliated by Mr Trump for reasons other than trade. Canada faces a tariff of 35 per cent for not curbing the flow of fentanyl and other drugs. Mr Trump made it plain that Canada's plan to recognise Palestine as a state is an aggravation.

Switzerland has been hit with a tariff of 39 per cent, the highest for any European country. Mr Trump is irritated by the high prices Swiss pharmaceutical companies charge for their drug exports to the US. South African exports face a tariff of 30 per cent for "genocide" against whites. Brazil's exports will be charged a tariff of 50 per cent, the same as India's, because Mr Trump believes that his friend, the former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, is being falsely prosecuted for political reasons.

People everywhere are outraged by Mr Trump's whimsical ways. Commentators fulminate against his actions. But here's the bad news for Mr Trump's detractors: Mr Trump is winning the tariff

war hands down. When he announced "reciprocal" tariffs on April 2, pundits forecast a trade war in which other nations would retaliate by imposing tariffs on US exports. Everybody would be worse off as happened with the infamous Smoot-Hawley tariffs in the US of 1930, which led on to the Great Depression.

Nothing of the sort has happened. The United Kingdom, Japan, Vietnam, South Korean, Indonesia and the Philippines have all caved in meekly to Mr Trump's dictates and signed one-sided trade deals. The European Union (EU), the second-largest economy in the world in terms of gross domestic product (GDP), too capitulated — and how.

EU chief Ursula von der Leyen, flew to Mr Trump's golf course in Scotland to work out a trade deal. Mr Trump kept her waiting until he and his son had finished their second round of golf. Thereafter, he took her on a tour of his mansion where he bragged about the magnificence of his ballroom. Ms Leyen sought to flatter the American President. "You're known as a tough negotiator and dealmaker", she said. "But fair", said the US President. "But fair", the EU head dutifully echoed.

There followed the announcement of a US-EU trade deal. EU exports to the US would be subject to a 15 per cent tariff while the EU would remove all tariffs on US industrial goods. The tariff of 50 per cent on the EU's exports of steel, aluminium and copper would stay. Further, the EU has committed to buy \$750 billion of US energy over the next three years and to invest \$600 billion in the US over President Trump's term. In the phraseology of the Second World War, it was "unconditional surrender".

Mr Trump's detractors had warned of the dire effects of his brand of protectionism. The US would face higher inflation and lower growth. Equity and bond markets would tumble. The glo-



FINGER ON THE PULSE
T T RAM MOHAN

Navigating the GPS-denied battlefield

Recent conflicts have highlighted the rise of remote warfare, where jets, missiles, and drones dominate without the need for mass troop deployment. Targeting from a distance relies on precise navigation enabled by satellite systems such as GPS (United States), Glonass (Russia), Galileo (European Union), and BeiDou (China), which guide across long distances. Given the critical role of satellite navigation in remote warfare, disrupting it has become a key tactic. Modern conflicts increasingly feature methods like jamming (flooding receivers with noise), spoofing (sending false location data), and meaconing (rebroadcasting delayed or altered signals). Other techniques include electromagnetic shielding, signal masking, and the use of radar-absorbent materials. Natural phenomena like solar flares or ionospheric disturbances can also degrade satellite signals, affecting navigation accuracy.

From Ukraine to West Asia and South Asia, jamming, spoofing, and cyberattacks have become commonplace, exposing the need for robust, multi-modal navigation in Global Positioning System or GPS-denied environments. Alternatives such as Inertial Navigation Systems (INS), terrain contour matching (Tercom), image-based guidance, encrypted satellite signals, and artificial intelligence or AI-based corrections have been used — but each has its limitations. INS drifts over time and requires periodic satellite updates. Tercom struggles in poor visibility or flat terrain and depends on detailed, up-to-date maps. Encrypted signals can still be jammed in high-threat zones. AI algorithms may misjudge unfamiliar scenarios or fail due to limited training data. No single solution is foolproof, underscoring the need for integrated, adaptive navigation systems.

It is in this context that Quantum Magnetic Navigation System (QMNS) is gaining traction. It uses quantum sensors to detect Earth's magnetic field variations — without relying on GPS or satellite signals. QMNS combines ultra-sensitive quantum magnetometers — sensors that measure tiny variations in the Earth's magnetic field using the quantum properties of atoms — with magnetic anomaly maps, which are

detailed representations of the Earth's natural magnetic "fingerprints" created by variations in the planet's crust, and an inertial navigation system to enhance precision. By comparing local magnetic measurements with these maps, the system can pinpoint location even when GPS is jammed or denied.

QMNS is expected to become highly valuable in the coming years for both remote air warfare and underwater operations — where conventional satellite-based navigation like GPS is unavailable. For military submarines, unmanned underwater vehicles (UUVs), and deep-sea reconnaissance platforms, QMNS offers precise, drift-free navigation. Beyond defence, this capability is equally valuable for economic activities such as undersea mining, oil exploration, and subsea cable inspection — enabling accurate positioning and navigation in complex underwater terrains. As the race for ocean resources and maritime security intensifies, QMNS is emerging as a key enabler of autonomous undersea operations.

Interest in quantum magnetic sensing surged in the late 1990s with the development of spin-exchange relaxation-free magnetometers, which could detect extremely small magnetic fields with far greater precision than earlier sensors. By the mid-2010s, defence agencies in the US and China began investing in adapting quantum magnetometers for military use — particularly for submarines and GPS-denied environments. Since the early 2020s, compact prototypes have undergone field testing and are being integrated into next-generation inertial and underwater navigation systems. The US Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency is expected to deploy field-ready systems for submarine and stealth drone navigation post-2027. Recent US trials showed that AQNav (a combination of quantum navigation and AI) enabled real-time aircraft positioning without GPS, even surpassing commercial navigation accuracy standards. Other tests have shown that QMNS can outperform GPS in precision.

Several countries are rapidly advancing QMNS development, recognising its strategic importance. China, for instance, demonstrated high-sensitivity

bal economy would come crashing down.

None of these forecasts has come true. In its July 2025 update for the world economy, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) raised its forecast for 2025 by 0.2 percentage points to 3 per cent, relative to its April 2025 forecast. That's the rate at which the world economy has grown since 2011. As for the US economy, the IMF has revised its forecast for the US upwards to 1.9 per cent, from 1.5 per cent in its April forecast. That doesn't look at all as if the US economy is hurting from Mr Trump's policies.

The American equity market is close to its record levels of the past five years. Yields on government bonds are below those in January 2025 when Mr Trump took over, and broadly in line with bond yields in 2023 and 2024. Inflation rose to 2.7 per cent in June, hardly the terrifying level it was projected to reach.

Analysts are now trying to tell us why things have panned out very differently. Inflation staying low? American importers stockpiled goods in anticipation of higher tariffs, so the tariff increases are yet to translate into higher inflation. That may be true of current inflation, but why have forward-looking bond yields not moved up? Mr Trump's critics conveniently ignore the role of oil prices in containing inflation. Brent crude oil prices are at least \$8 below those a year ago — and Mr Trump is keen to drive them down even further.

Financial markets not rattled? That's because markets had expected much higher levels of tariffs and are relieved at the levels at which these have settled. Well, the present level of tariffs is seven times the level before Mr Trump took office! Stock prices are sky-high? That's because of the Artificial Intelligence (AI) frenzy. But the AI frenzy was known when commentators were warning us that Mr Trump's tariffs would cause a meltdown in equity prices.

The Economist has been at the forefront of those castigating Mr Trump for his wayward ways and warning of the terrible consequences that will follow. It has now come up with an explanation for why the apocalypse hasn't happened yet.

The world economy, it contends, has a better capacity to absorb shocks today for a variety of reasons. Supply chains have become more efficient and resilient; changes in oil prices are less unsettling because a more diverse supply of energy is available; firms have become more adept at dealing with shocks; the services economy is less susceptible to shocks than an industrial economy; and governments are quick to take measures to cushion the economy from shocks. Capitalism has produced a "telson economy". The analysis begs the question: If the global economy is so resilient, why has *The Economist* got worked up about the disruptive effect of Mr Trump at all?

As far as Mr Trump is concerned, his tariffs are bringing him higher revenues while protecting American industry and getting foreign firms to invest and manufacture in the US. All this without destabilising the financial markets. It's no surprise that the torrent of criticism Mr Trump faces has left him unfazed. Mr Trump sees himself as a winner, not a whiner — and that's not a minor difference.

ttrammohan28@gmail.com

Looking at a bot-besotted world



SNEHA PATHAK

The subtitle of Nicholas Carr's *Superbloom: How Technologies of Connection Tear Us Apart* is a pithy expression of the book's central tenet. Mr Carr borrows the metaphor of superbloom from the phenomenon of excessive blooming of poppies in the Temescal Mountains, California in 2019. This phenomenon went on to become an internet sensation through #superbloom, and Mr Carr uses it as a metaphor for the era of excessive information, connectivity and communication in

which we live. Then, with the help of history, he sets out to prove that beliefs like more communication is good communication don't always hold true.

Superbloom has three parts. In the first, Mr Carr provides a detailed history of the development of mass communication services from a mostly American perspective, offering his readers a sweeping view of how the laws also changed and evolved in keeping with the rapidly evolving means of communication — at least in the beginning. He begins with the era of radio, moves on to the age of digital computers, followed by personal computers and the internet. This last era, he tells readers, presented a challenge before the lawmakers who were unable to fathom its power and the changes it will bring about in a very short span of time.

The second part begins with the ubiquity of email as it gradually comes to

replace the traditional mail and discusses how instant messaging changed not only the language of communication but also what communication looked like for an entire generation. Mr Carr moves on to social media and argues against its "democratisation fallacy", the belief that in giving everybody a voice and doing away with the difference between those who created and those who consumed information, internet and social media acted as great levellers and created spaces where everyone had equal power. In the third part, Mr Carr discusses artificial intelligence (AI) and large language models (LLMs) among other things, along with their probable impact as they become smarter.

Underlying all three parts of the book is the idea that not all communication is good communication. By referring to the works of various thinkers, researchers, and philosophers such as

Charles Horton Cooley, Jean Baudrillard, Margaret Mead and others, Mr Carr goes on to show how excessive

communication can have the opposite effect of what its supporters claim. He cites various researches and studies that prove how it's easy for misinformation to spread faster than truth, how knowing too much about someone tends to foster animosity more than friendship, and how being always on display and peeping into lives of others through social media increases envy and reduces our capability to feel empathy as well as our self-awareness. Describing social media as a "neurosis machine" and comparing it to a bad parent or a cruel lover, Mr Carr points out that social media not only creates angst, but it also makes angst "cool". When it comes to AI, Mr Carr's

approach feels balanced and at a distance from the fear-mongering that pervades contemporary popular culture. For Mr

Carr, the threat of AI and LLMs lies not in the fact that they might take away a lot of jobs or in an AI uprising, but in how big corporations will use them to generate an unlimited loop of content tailor-made to everyone's smallest requirements, thus chaining people to their devices more than ever. A future world might very well become a "bot besotted world" where all actions and all assistance will be delegated to bots made to suit all our needs based on the data that we might have already provided to these big companies.

Mr Carr is very clear about identifying the blame for our predicament. While he blames the companies for exploiting the psychological chinks in the human

makeup for their own benefits, he doesn't let users go scot-free either. He refutes the idea of users being mere victims and suggests that our manipulation is "secondary to and dependent upon the pleasure" that we derive from social media. Mr Carr is unable to give readers a concrete solution, though; perhaps in a rapidly evolving world, it would be too much to demand of him. He concludes his book with simple, perhaps even simplistic, advice but it makes sense. Only "wilful acts of excommunication," he says, can help us if we don't want to live by someone else's code.

Superbloom makes use of many theories and researches to drive home its point. This gives it gravitas and makes it more than just a long opinion piece. Though by no means a breezy read, the tone and writing style make *Superbloom* readable and engaging by providing readers a glimpse of what the future might look like, and urging due caution.

The reviewer is an independent writer and translator

Quota issues

The 35 per cent retail quota in IPOs can stay

With stock markets proving resilient, India’s Initial Public Offer (IPO) pipeline is expanding. After raising ₹2.1 lakh crore in FY25, Indian firms are reportedly readying to raise another ₹2 lakh crore this fiscal. Companies and merchant bankers are apprehensive whether this large supply of paper can be absorbed. This is perhaps why the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) recently mooted changes to the IPO allocation process to facilitate ease of doing business.

Some of the changes proposed will facilitate easier fund-raising. But trimming the retail quota in IPOs may prove to be an unpopular move; it is also not necessary to facilitate IPO subscriptions. Currently, ICDR (Issue of Capital and Disclosure Requirements) regulations prescribe a cap between two and 15 on the number of anchor applications that an issuer can accept; this is pegged to IPO sizes of ₹10 crore to ₹250 crore. With the average IPO size now at over ₹4,000 crore, these caps have become redundant. Therefore, SEBI is seeking to significantly relax them. A ₹5,000 crore IPO will be allowed to accept 90 anchor investors instead of 65, a ₹10,000 crore IPO 180 investors instead of 125, and so on. This change is welcome.

The paper also suggests allowing domestic institutions such as insurance companies and pension funds to bid in the anchor category at the pre-IPO stage, which is currently restricted to mutual funds. This is again a good move to broaden institutional participation in offers. However, the third idea of trimming the 35 per cent reserved quota for retail investors in book-built IPOs needs a rethink. The paper notes that large IPOs such as Hyundai Motor, Hexaware Technologies and Delhivery struggled to fill their retail quotas in recent times, as they needed nearly seven to eight lakh retail applications to make up their retail portion. To solve this, it suggests a slab-based system for ₹5,000 crore plus IPOs, which will reduce the 35 per cent retail quota to 25 per cent in a graded manner, while raising institutional allocations proportionately. SEBI has argued that with these changes, retail investors will still get to participate in IPOs indirectly through the MF route.

This argument is rather weak as retail investors have no guarantee that the MFs they have invested in will bid in the IPOs that they like. MFs also hold diversified portfolios. It is also unlikely that returns that MFs reap from IPOs will match what retail investors can make from direct bidding. It is true that IPOs are risky. Investors can lose out by punting on them for listing gains. But the retail fascination for derivatives, unlisted stocks and crypto-currency suggests that speculation runs deep, and no regulation can curb it. IPOs, with their elaborate disclosures and SEBI vetting, are less risky than these alternatives. SEBI can resolve the under-subscription problem by allowing over-subscription in the non-retail quota of IPOs to spill over to the retail portion, when the latter sees tepid response.



Should UPI data be used to track GST evaders?

Many UPI users believe that digital payments are akin to cash transactions. Ambushing these naïve users may not be fair



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LOKESHWARRI SK

Recently, the writer was involved in arranging a close family wedding. Large sums had to be paid to a long list of vendors providing services including lights, decorations, flowers, video, photo, catering, wedding gifts, and so on. What was surprising was that all these vendors preferred receiving money through UPI. With growing digitisation of payments, no one likes handling large amounts of cash any more. But it was also obvious that these vendors were under the misconception that receiving money through UPI was akin to receiving cash payments — no trail, no questions asked.

The small traders in Karnataka who are up in arms against tax authorities appear to have been harbouring similar erroneous ideas. The Karnataka Department of Commercial Taxes had mined UPI data for the period between 2022 and 2025 to identify small businesses receiving UPI payments above the GST exemption threshold. A flurry of notices were sent to thousands of small vendors, including flower, vegetable and fruit vendors, renewing protests about ‘tax terrorism’ and harassment of poor vendors.

The possibility of tax officials using UPI data to identify tax evaders has been present for some time. Given that over ₹80,000 crore of UPI transactions are put through every day, tax officials now have access to a treasure trove of data. But it is also true that the usage of UPI has recorded stellar growth because many seem to think that it leaves no trail. Once they become aware of this,

usage of UPI can drop. To use or not to use the UPI data, that’s the quandary before the government.

GROWING UPI SHARE
Adoption of UPI by the masses is one of the great success stories of recent times. The value of UPI transactions made by retail customers was ₹1.09 lakh crore in FY18, accounting for just 0.38 per cent of total retail payments. This has improved dramatically in the last seven years, with ₹260 lakh crore of transactions, accounting for 28 per cent of retail payments being put through in FY25.

Interestingly, the share of NEFT has reduced from 61 per cent of retail payments in FY18 to 48 per cent now, implying that instead of making large money transfers through bank accounts, clients are now using UPI for peer-to-peer transaction (P2P).

If we look at the break-up of UPI transactions, 70 per cent are P2P and 30 per cent, P2M (payments to merchants in the point of sale). With many vendors now wanting large payments transferred through UPI, it is possible that business transactions are also being included in the P2P segment.

Of the total UPI payments of ₹260 lakh crore in FY25, even if 5 per cent is for taxable goods and services not reported to tax authorities, the revenue possibility is immense. Tax collection can increase by at least ₹1.5 lakh crore at 12 per cent tax rate is considered.

PLIGHT OF SMALL VENDORS
The GST system grants exemption to small businesses with turnover up to ₹40 lakh a year for goods and ₹20 lakh a year for services from registering or filing returns. Further, many goods and services such as unfrozen and unprocessed fruits, vegetables, fish, meat, spices, milk, etc., are on the

exempt list of GST. Most street vendors would therefore not be liable to pay GST. But they will become liable to pay GST if they sell other taxable goods alongside fruits and vegetables such as ready-to-eat packaged food, beverages, etc. Small businesses can also opt to pay GST under the composition scheme if their annual turnover is less than ₹1.5 crore. Here the compliance burden is very less, and tax can be paid at a much lower rate, but without availing input tax credit. With most customers wanting to pay through digital means, vendors have also installed QR codes for accepting the payments. The commercial tax department of Karnataka is not wrong in analysing the data from UPI payments for flagging unregistered vendors who are evading tax. But the department should have spent some more time weeding out vendors dealing in exempt goods, differentiating between business and personal receipts, and so on.

A vegetable vendor from Haveri, was reported to have received notice demanding ₹29 lakh in GST dues, based on the sum of more than ₹1.60 crore being credited to his bank account through UPI in three years. While the system can flag a list of possible evaders based on receipt, some manual scrutiny is needed before such notices are sent.

TO USE OR NOT
UPI has been growing at a breakneck speed in the last eight years and this

An awareness campaign on the linkage between UPI and the banking system needs to be run. This may lead to a drop in UPI’s growth, but that’s okay

Expect an extended pause in rates

With inflation expected to remain elevated in FY27, there’s little headroom for further rate cuts

Karthik Srinivasan



INTEREST RATES. Transmission yet to fully play out istock

The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of Reserve Bank of India (RBI) unanimously decided to keep the benchmark rates unchanged following the higher-than-expected cut in the previous policy action. The MPC also simultaneously decided to keep the policy stance “neutral”. The decision to hold the rates seem driven more by the RBI retaining its GDP growth forecast of 6.5 per cent for FY26 and 6.6 per cent for Q1FY27, and the likely increase in core inflation indicators by the end of the fiscal despite the recent softening of the headline inflation.

Despite the moderation in industrial growth and uncertainty related to the external sector, the MPC highlighted resilience in the services sector and consumer demand in the rural segment, with expectations of revival in urban consumer demand driven by the impact of past measures.

Even as core inflation remains steady at 4.1-4.2 per cent, the MPC has revised its inflation estimates for FY26 to 3.1 per cent from its earlier forecast of 3.7 per cent due to negative food inflation. The forecast for Q1FY27 is however as high as 4.9 per cent, given the adverse base effect. With repo rate at 5.5 per cent, the projected inflation rate for Q1 FY27

leaves a little headroom for further rate cuts, unless the growth materially slows down from the current estimate.

With inflation for the subsequent quarters of FY27 expected to remain elevated, an extended pause is likely going forward. The neutral policy stance will provide flexibility to the MPC to take data dependent rate actions on either side depending on domestic or external developments.

TRANSMISSION OF RATE CUT
On the back of various liquidity infusion measures since February 2025 and slower bank credit growth, the daily average surplus liquidity doubled to ₹3.1 lakh crore in July 2025 from ₹1.5 lakh crore in April 2025. However, the transmission is yet to fully play out on

bank deposit and lending rates as the drop is significantly lower than the decline witnessed in market instruments.

With the commencement of a 100-basis point cut in cash reserve ratio (CRR) from September 2025 onwards and fully implemented by end-November, the liquidity position shall remain in surplus and improve transmission in banks’ lending and deposit rates. The deposit base of banks is likely to reprice downwards in H2FY26 and continue in FY27. This shall support continued transmission in lending rate of banks on fresh as well as earlier loans.

While the transmission of rate cuts has been swift in the money market and short-term debt instruments amid surplus liquidity conditions, the transmission has been limited in the medium- or longer-term bond yields. The 5-year and 10-year G-sec yield declined by 63 bps and 28 bps, respectively, since February 2025. Over the same period, 5-year AAA corporate bond yields declined by just 56 bps.

Despite the 50-bps cut in repo rate in June 2025, the yield on 10-year G-Sec is higher at 6.39 per cent compared to 6.18 per cent prior to the policy announcement. Further, the bond yields have risen as the expectations of any rate cuts in the upcoming MPC meetings

appear to be low, given the outlook on inflation for Q1FY27.

Nonetheless, the yields on highly rated corporate bonds remain lower than the lending rates of the banks, which shall continue to drive corporate bond issuances in the near-term. Notably, the corporate bond issuances had touched an all-time high for any quarter during Q1FY26 and stood at ₹3.5 lakh crore.

With credit growth slowing to 10 per cent YoY as on July 11, 2025, as compared to 13.9 per cent as on July 12, 2024, the status quo on rates would be a breather for banks as it saves them from another downward pricing of their loan books linked to external benchmarks. The faster transmission of rates in the capital markets meant that the competition posed by corporate bonds and money markets instruments like CP continue to weigh on the credit growth of banks. The credit growth should start improving in H2FY26 and grow at 10.4-11.2 per cent for FY26, similar to that in FY2025.

However, global developments amidst the tariff-related uncertainties may prevent a sharper acceleration in credit growth despite the RBI’s steps to revive growth.

The writer is Senior Vice President, Group Head - Financial Sector Ratings, ICRA

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Self-reliant EV ecosystem
This is with regard to the ‘Automobile OEMs to switch to rare-earth magnet alternatives’ (August 7). The growing scarcity of rare-earth magnets and China’s restrictions underscore the urgent need for India to find alternatives and invest in developing a self-reliant EV ecosystem. While OEMs are exploring alternatives, there’s need for a national strategy for incentivising R&D in magnet-free technologies and building supply chain partnership beyond China. Although India has the third-largest rare-earth reserves, the lack of private investment hinders progress, which can be addressed through

public-private collaboration.
Ardra Mani
Pathanamthitta, Kerala

Capex in agriculture
Apropos ‘Farm sector needs capex’ (August 7), the writer has rightly observed that public investment in agriculture remains heavily focused on input subsidies, neglecting long-term capital formation. Much of the allocated funds go towards providing farm inputs such as seeds and fertilizers at highly subsidised rates. The agricultural sector needs to get more or less the same quantum of capex that national highways get, in order to liberally investment in precision farming, water efficient

technologies and in climate resilient crop varieties.
RV Baskaran
Pune

MPC rises to the occasion
This refers to ‘MPC’s call to pause rates almost seemed inevitable’ (August 7). The edit is spot on in observing that “beyond a point, opening the spigots alone cannot spur credit growth, unless demand picks up.” Hats off to the MPC for unanimously deciding to maintain status quo in respect of the repo rate amid the latest US tariff hikes, wilfully targetted at India. Mind you, Trump coming out with unrealistic/imprudent tariff threats each passing day, may also end up

with hitting some self-goals in the process.
Kumar Gupta
Panchkula, Haryana

Tariff tyranny
India has the guts and gumption to withstand the US tariff onslaught. The reason ascribed for levying higher tariffs is unacceptable to any country which believes in international conventions and covenants India’s trade and diplomatic relationship with Russia have been consistent and always marked with mutual trust and cooperation. We should not bow before the bullying tactics of Trump.
Devadas K Nair
Kunnamkulam, Kerala

India-China ties
This is with reference to ‘After 7 years, Modi to visit China, as trade tensions with US surge’ (August 7). With the US imposing draconian tariffs, the Asian giants, namely, India and China should put to rest their border disputes and cooperate with each other to teach the US a lesson. China and India should not give any chance to other neighbouring countries/super powers (read the US) to take advantage of the border dispute. This is particularly important as India and China as friends can help each other in developing their economies and challenge other super powers.
Veena Shenoy
Thane

Biodiversity crisis

Crop burning destroys earthworms, birds, bees

AG Adeeth Cariappa
Ashiq Parambil-Peedika
Vijesh V. Krishna

Each winter, North India's air turns nearly unbreathable. While the exact contribution of crop residue burning to the region's toxic smog remains debated, it is widely acknowledged as a major driver of air pollution. Much of the public and policy discourse has focused on emissions and health hazards. But an equally serious, and often overlooked, consequence is the erosion of agroecosystem biodiversity.

Our recent global review, published in *Science of the Total Environment*, synthesises findings from 250 scientific studies to show that residue burning is not just an environmental nuisance; it is an ecological crisis. Yet, current agricultural and environmental policies fail to account for their devastating impact on agrobiodiversity. With paddy already sown on 12.4 million hectares this season (as of July 11) — a 10 per cent rise from last year — the scale of post-harvest burning is set to grow. The time to act is now.

Conservation agriculture, an approach that minimises soil disturbance, retains residues, and promotes crop diversity, is one of several sustainable alternatives to crop residue burning. Other options include composting, mulching, bioenergy, fodder, and biochar, depending on the local context.

Yet adoption of these alternatives remains low. Why? Because the incentives just do not add up. Farmers do not find non-burning activities profitable enough. True, emerging mechanisms like carbon markets offer payments for avoided greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, but legal bans on burning make such projects ineligible, and where eligible, the returns are too modest: \$10 per carbon credit.

The answer lies in recognising and valuing the broader ecological benefits of not burning residues, especially for biodiversity. Not burning residues offers food and shelter for beneficial organisms that support sustainable farming through ecosystem services: earthworms that aerate soil, microbes that fix nitrogen, beetles and birds that control pests, and pollinators that help crops thrive. These hidden allies are essential to farming resilience but are often ignored in both policy and practice.

Our review found that 40 per



RESIDUE BURNING.
Biodiversity hazard

cent of all observed biodiversity traits respond negatively to burning. Natural predators and soil organisms suffer, while pests like rodents and parasitic nematodes often thrive after a fire. Insectivorous birds and pollinators like bees are hit hard, but there is surprisingly little direct research on how burning affects these species. Most studies on air pollution and biodiversity are from the Global North, while residue burning is concentrated in South Asia, particularly India.

The implications are clear: policies that focus only on air pollution and GHG emissions miss the bigger picture. If we want farmers to stop burning, we need to make it worthwhile, not just financially, but by recognising the ecological value of their actions. Carbon markets that reward only GHG emissions reductions are insufficient. However, when certified biodiversity co-benefits are included, carbon credit prices can be over 30 per cent higher.

We propose a three-pronged shift. First, residue management policies must broaden their scope to include biodiversity as a core objective, not an afterthought. Second, the Indian carbon market should explicitly value biodiversity benefits. This will require new MMRV (measurement, monitoring, reporting, and verification) systems to measure and verify not just GHG emissions, but also pollinators, pest predators, and soil life. Third, bundle incentives: combine carbon payments with biodiversity premiums. Together, these can make conservation agriculture more attractive to farmers. This is not about romanticizing biodiversity; it is about recognising that ecological health is central to resilient farming.

Cariappa and Krishna are with the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT), Hyderabad. Parambil-Peedika is with the Sálím Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History, South India Centre of Wildlife Institute of India, Coimbatore

Currency dominance in the digital age

TRUST FACTOR. The currencies that dominate tomorrow's international system will be those whose digital ecosystems inspire the deepest trust



HÉLÈNE REY

For more than 80 years, the US dollar has enjoyed unrivalled supremacy in world trade and finance, thanks to America's unique combination of economic scale, credible institutions, deep and liquid financial markets, and geopolitical might, as well as, crucially, network effects. But a new variable is poised to reshape the global monetary order: data integrity.

As digital technologies increasingly act as the rails upon which money moves — through stablecoins, tokenised assets, and central bank digital currencies — the resilience and credibility of currency networks increasingly hinge not only on macroeconomic fundamentals, but also on the technological strength and security of the relevant infrastructure. Of course, macroeconomic fundamentals still matter, and digital currencies raise some conventional macro challenges. In particular, by privatising seigniorage and facilitating tax evasion, stablecoins could shrink countries' fiscal revenues.

Moreover, if a stablecoin breaks its peg — say, because its liquidity buffers prove insufficient — its credibility could collapse, triggering a run. If the stablecoin's interconnections with other assets is sufficiently dense, this may have systemic consequences. A disorderly run on US dollar stablecoins — privately issued digital tokens that are backed significantly by US Treasuries and can theoretically be exchanged one-for-one with dollars — could prove particularly disruptive. Opacity in reporting and auditing, and insufficient regulations in

some jurisdictions, compound the risks.

But such "classic" credibility issues are just the beginning. The world could also face a new kind of "cyber" run, triggered by weaknesses in the technological infrastructure underpinning digital assets. Mitigating this risk will not be easy: as the National Institute of Standards and Technology of the US Department of Commerce warned in 2016, quantum computers may soon be able to break many of the public-key cryptosystems currently in use. In other words, infrastructure that appears robust today may turn out to be flimsy tomorrow.

EXORBITANT PRIVILEGE

The implications for the global monetary order are far-reaching. As the issuer of the dominant international currency, the US has long enjoyed an "exorbitant privilege," which includes the ability to borrow at low interest rates even in times of economic stress and run persistently large trade deficits. President Donald Trump's administration seems to be betting that the US will be able to retain this privilege, as the dollar's existing global status translates into demand for US dollar stablecoins and, in turn, US Treasuries, thereby lowering the US Treasury's financing costs.

The currency that is best protected from cyber threats — not necessarily the one backed by the most powerful economy or the most credible central bank — becomes the most attractive

Ultimately, America's exorbitant privilege is based on trust in its institutions, legal frameworks, and fiscal capacity. In a world where money circulates on programmable platforms, however, the credibility and integrity of the code, the quality of cryptographic standards, and the resistance of systems to hacking are as important as any of these factors. This fundamentally changes the logic of monetary competition: if the technological gap is large enough, the currency that is best protected from cyber threats — not necessarily the one backed by the most powerful economy or the most credible central bank — becomes the most attractive.

As stablecoins are being used for a growing share of cross-border payments, and as an on- and off-ramp for speculative crypto investments, much about their security and governance remains unknown. Regulators and citizens should thus be asking questions. Who is responsible for governing the ledger? To what extent is the system protected from malicious actors? What happens if a currency's cryptographic backbone is compromised by developments in quantum computing?

Answering these questions satisfactorily is a matter of national and international monetary stability. If policymakers fail to act accordingly, we might find ourselves with the kind of volatile and fragmented monetary system that characterised the nineteenth century, when the unfettered issuance of private money opened the way for panics, runs, manipulation, and collapse.

MULTIPOLAR MONETARY SYSTEM

In any case, we may be headed towards a multipolar monetary system, in which some currencies — and their associated digital ecosystems — command an

"integrity premium," based on their ability to minimise their "attack surface" and maximise data verifiability. The most successful currencies will offer a very robust financial architecture, which covers every step, from the validation of transactions to the protection of user identities and transaction histories.

So, a currency backed by a government with weak cyber defences or opaque technological standards could lose ground, and a technologically sophisticated currency zone with high integrity standards could punch above its weight.

This new technological landscape could have significant geopolitical consequences. Just as naval supremacy once translated into trade dominance, control over payments infrastructure could increasingly determine economic sovereignty. The strategic value of payments data — not only for monetary policy, but also for surveillance, enforcement, and sanctions — means that digital currencies are not neutral technologies; they are contested spaces of power. The currencies that dominate tomorrow's international system will be those whose digital ecosystems inspire the deepest trust — both in their institutions and in their code.

Preserving international monetary stability in such a landscape will require more than technological innovation. Global coordination on standards for tokenisation, cryptographic interoperability, data privacy, and post-quantum resilience will be essential. The alternative — the proliferation of balkanised networks governed by conflicting rules and exposed to systemic shocks — is a recipe for instability.

The writer is Professor of Economics at the London Business School. Copyright: Project Syndicate, 2025. www.project-syndicate.org

Trump's attack on wind, solar numbs industry

Mark Chediak
Jennifer A Dlouhy
Ari Natter

US President Donald Trump is escalating his attacks on wind and solar power from the rhetorical to the tangible, mounting a rapid-fire campaign that exceeds the industries' worst fears.

In just the past few weeks, the Trump administration instituted permitting reviews that threaten US wind and solar developments. It imposed standards that would essentially prevent new developments on federal land. It rescinded Biden-era decisions earmarking coastal waters for future wind turbines. And on Wednesday it yanked approval for a massive planned wind farm in Idaho.

The pace and range of strikes against renewables — alongside several other actions that serve to prop up fossil fuels and nuclear power — have whipsawed wind and solar developers that had grown accustomed to federal support. The policies have already helped contribute to the cancellation or



UNDER PRESSURE. Renewable energy/ISTOCKPHOTO

delay of more than \$22 billion worth of clean energy projects since January and the loss of thousands of jobs, a majority in Republican states, according to an analysis from the E2 advocacy group. The actions have struck deeper than even some hardened industry players and observers anticipated — mirroring Trump's more aggressive approach on an array of fronts during his second term. Timothy Fox, managing director of ClearView Energy Partners, once believed the incoming administration might merely refocus government efforts to prioritize power from coal and gas instead of taking

aim at renewables. But that "refocus" path is now in the rearview. Instead, Fox said, "we're in the retaliative scenario."

Trump has repeatedly called green energy a "scam" while also touting his focus on "energy dominance" by relying on domestic sources of oil, natural gas and coal. Beyond the words, the actual crackdown on wind and solar comes at a precarious time in the US. Electricity demand is rising quickly because of data centers and climbing use of artificial intelligence, contributing to bigger bills for Americans still stung by broader inflation. Meantime, there's a backlog in natural-gas turbines and new nuclear power is many years away. Some studies predict the attacks on renewables will shrink potential power generation and lead to higher energy costs.

Trump administration officials say the moves are justified to ensure the US has an abundance of always-on power sources. Previous presidents gave too much preferential treatment to wind and solar ventures, Interior Secretary Doug Burgum said. BLOOMBERG

thehindubusinessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

August 8, 2005

IPOs: Separate books for institutional, retail buyers

In what could lead to a major change in the book-building process for IPOs, the Ministry of Finance and the SEBI are considering a proposal to have separate books for qualified institutional buyers (QIBs) on one hand and non-institutional investors (NIIs) and retail individual investors (RIIs) on the other.

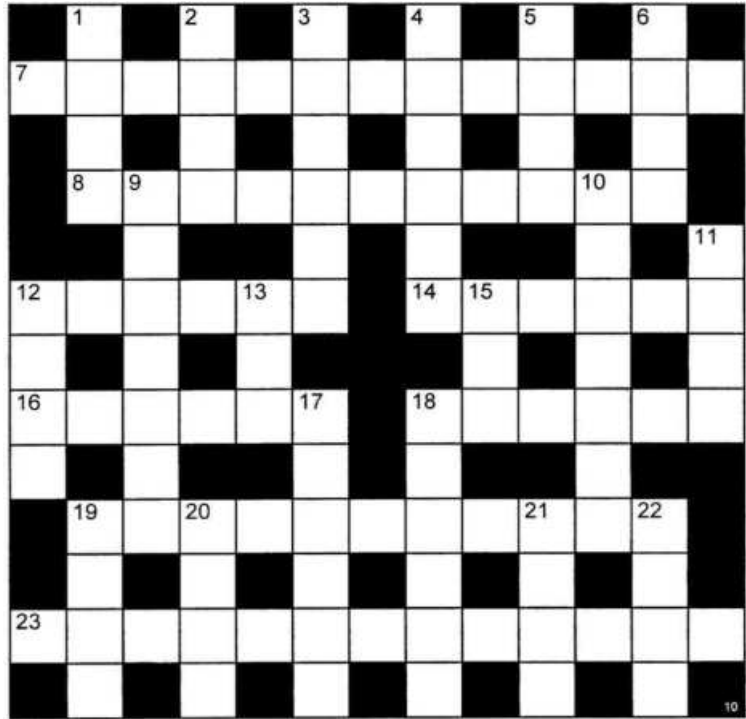
Reliance holds Rs 12,000 cr worth of its own stock

About 17 crore shares of Reliance Industries worth Rs 12,000 crore in value are held by certain entities, according to the company, for the collective benefit of the shareholders. These entities would not, however, be receiving shares that would be issued consequent to the demerger of the company's investments in telecom, energy and financial services businesses.

AI may name financial advisor for IPO today

Air India is expected to announce the financial advisor for its IPO on Monday. The airline had in July shortlisted six merchant bankers, namely, DSP Merrill Lynch, JM Morgan Stanley, Kotak Investment Banking, SBI Capital Markets, HSBC, Enam Financial Consultants, and Citibank, for this purpose. The IPO is expected to open by the year-end.

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2757



EASY

ACROSS

07. One with consanguinity (5,8)
08. Something of prime importance (6,5)
12. Assert, adduce (6)
14. Hollow in cheek, chin (6)
16. Chubby-faced child (6)
18. Follow-up to story (6)
19. Hard taskmaster (5,6)
23. One absent and untraced (7,6)

DOWN

01. Combination of nations with common purpose (4)
02. Impoverished (4)
03. Light wind (6)
04. Shut (6)
05. Boy's name; damask rose oil (4)
06. Sharpen on stone (4)
09. Fuel rig (3,4)
10. Marine deity (7)
11. Ringing instrument (4)
12. Part of foot (4)
13. African antelope (3)
15. Rage, keen resentment (3)
17. Slimy fish (6)
18. Peels everything off (6)
19. A hide (4)
20. Church recess behind choir (4)
21. Ring the changes (4)
22. Top of vehicle (4)

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

07. Brood left for right recital by one in the family (5,8)
08. Go round the bend, set on change vital to construction (6,5)
12. Claim everything, say, will start to expand (6)
14. Hollow laugh? No - but it may come with a smile (6)
16. Dear little fellow, Little Bear, embracing the girl (6)
18. Non-u queues forming at Lyceum opening, and this follows (6)
19. He oppresses his staff, having worked hard on the Thames (5,6)
23. He can't be found to impress, nosing about (7,6)

DOWN

01. Don't quite veto this combination of nations (4)
02. Work over the gold if hard up (4)
03. Furnace refuse used in building what blows (6)
04. Went in to fight the enemy when shut up (6)
05. Fragrant oil to go up and down (4)
06. One given the initial aspiration to make it sharp (4)
09. Fuel supply to lubricate thoroughly (3,4)
10. Trident-bearer turned writer, with a melody (7)
11. Sound simile heard at start of last lap (4)
12. Supreme bridge-builder will put it across (4)
13. Soundly had it in mind it was an antelope (3)
15. Keen resentment starts in rubbishing egotists (3)
17. Fish will almost merge in with the Big Apple (6)
18. Completely removes the cartoons in newspapers (6)
19. Integument, various kinds of which may be revealed (4)
20. Behind the choir it will lose head in fall from faith (4)
21. Make changes on the Virginia railway (4)
22. Cover for turn has nothing in it (4)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2756

ACROSS 1. Nondescript 7. Treason 9. Cash 11. Chair 12. Porter 14. Impersonate 18. Recent 20. Error 22. Data 23. Cutting 24. Fair-weather

DOWN 2. Overarm 3. Send 4. Plant 5. Stuck 6. Charm 8. Sergeant 10. Downbeat 13. Use 15. Termite 16. Bride 17. Drags 19. Cotta 21. Acre