



OPINION

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{ OUR TAKE }

The new great game in Af-Pak

The Moscow Format statement shines light on the emerging power relations in the region

The 10 nations involved in the Russia-backed Moscow Format consultations have opposed any deployment of foreign military infrastructure in Afghanistan at a time when US president Donald Trump has spoken about taking over Bagram airbase. This is one of the rare occasions when even India and Pakistan have shown unanimity on a regional issue, and the joint statement issued by the Moscow Format group is significant in many ways, revealing a lot about the feverish diplomatic activity in the Af-Pak region. The development is also significant because the Taliban foreign minister Amir Khan Muttaqi participated in the Moscow Format consultations as an official delegate for the first time, and the regime in Kabul has urged those with “covetous ambitions” to study the history of the US occupation.

Besides India and Pakistan, the signatories to the joint statement include Russia, China, and Iran. This is, perhaps, the largest endorsement of a Taliban stance in the region in recent times. From New Delhi’s perspective, the development came days before a visit by Muttaqi, the first Taliban government functionary to travel to India since the group returned to power in Kabul in August 2021. The joint statement also represents a convergence of positions in the region against American attempts to re-enter Afghanistan militarily. The Taliban have already made it clear that they are willing to do business with the US, but are unwilling to allow any military presence.

However, Pakistan’s endorsement reveals a contradiction in its diplomatic positions as it tries to play ball with China and the US, with army chief Asim Munir having found a new benefactor in Trump. The Moscow Format’s joint statement speaks against any US military infrastructure, not just in Afghanistan, but even in neighbouring countries. The same Pakistan reportedly has offered to allow the US to develop the Pasni port to gain access to the mineral wealth of Balochistan. Pasni is located a short distance from Gwadar port, a major investment project for China, and the border with Iran. Pakistan clearly believes it can play all these countries for its diplomatic salience.

The Trump administration, which is seeking client regimes in the region, and the hybrid government in Pakistan are both transactional in their approach rather than working to build enduring ties based on shared values and geopolitical interests. In the long run, these contradictions are sure to spill over, with significant ramifications for what is already unsettled region.

Trade headwinds to economic growth

The Indian economy will grow at 6.5% in 2025-26 and 6.3% in 2026-27, the World Bank said in its latest South Asia Development Update released on Tuesday. The latest forecasts are 20 basis points — one basis point is one hundredth of a percentage point — higher and lower than the respective June projections. The upward revision in the 2025-26 forecast has been attributed to domestic conditions, particularly agricultural output, rural wage growth and the recent GST reforms.

The downward revision in the next fiscal year’s forecast is on account of the 50% tariffs imposed by the US, which accounts for one-fifth of India’s merchandise exports. “India had been expected to face lower US tariffs than its competitors in April, but as of the end of August, it faces considerably higher tariffs”, the report says, clearly suggesting that the higher tariffs would hurt India’s export competitiveness and therefore, economic activity.

To be sure, the World Bank’s forecasts are only one among the many institutional forecasts about India’s economic growth. The 2025-26 number released by the Bank is slightly lower than what the Reserve Bank of India expects it to be at 6.8%. What is therefore more important about the Bank’s latest prognosis is not the number per se but the fact that the US’s tariff escalation vis-à-vis India will actually have a tangible impact on the Indian economy’s prospects, and the ability of domestic factors to compensate for the loss will dissipate in the slightly longer term.

This underlines the importance of policy focus to undo the damage on the external growth front due to the adverse developments in the Indo-US relationship. It should ideally take the form of a trade détente with the US. The second-best scenario can be opening up or widening other export markets to compensate for the loss in the US markets. Either way, this is an important policy challenge.

Next chapter of India-UK partnership in science

The partnership in science and technology is strong and can now pivot to take on new responsibilities for sustainable development of the two countries

The visit of UK Prime Minister (PM) Keir Starmer to India signifies an acceleration of the bilateral relationship, moving beyond traditional cooperation toward a formalised, high-stakes alignment. This trajectory is rooted in the India-UK Vision 2035, a document that sets ambitious goals aimed at delivering “transformative opportunities and tangible benefits” for both nations, which was announced during PM Narendra Modi’s June 2025 visit to the UK.

Structured scientific collaboration between the two countries began at the 1st UK-India Science & Innovation Task Force in 2014. These initial agreements formed the basis for targeted funding mechanisms, such as the Newton Bhabha programme, which drives foundational research. Core pillars were later established under the India-UK Technology Security Initiative (TSI) of 2024.

The operationalisation of the TSI, which is jointly monitored by the national security advisers of both countries and undergoes biannual reviews, demonstrates that technol-

ical collaboration is now inextricably linked to national security and economic resilience. This high level of scrutiny and integration ensures that cooperation in key and emerging technologies — from Artificial Intelligence (AI) to critical minerals — is prioritised for immediate, tangible early-harvest results. The cooperation extends to advanced technologies through initiatives such as the Electric Propulsion Capability Partnership (EPCP) and Jet Engine Advanced Core Technologies (JEACT). The India-UK relationship has also established a deep foundation for facilitating long-term joint R&D in areas such as semiconductors, quantum computing, biotechnology, and advanced materials.

The collaboration during the Covid-19 pandemic exemplifies our collaboration. The rapid and massive effort involving Oxford University, AstraZeneca, and the Serum Institute of India (SII) resulted in the swift production and distribution of vaccines, saving lives and critically mitigating the global spread of the virus. Now, the partnership is naturally positioned to move into cutting-edge fields such as cell and gene therapy, and genomic medicine discovery, which aligns directly with India’s new strategic thrust into biomanufacturing and biofoundry capabilities through the Biotechnology Research Innovation and Entrepreneurship Development (Bio-

RIDE) scheme. Here, the Indian department of biotechnology’s long partnership with the Wellcome Trust has laid the foundations of high-quality biomedical research and is now entering its third phase.

Quantum computing, AI, and biotechnology are globally transformative technologies, and bilateral collaboration must ensure their applications serve the global public good. A prime example of this co-creation model is the research tie-up between Imperial

College London and IIT Bombay. This initiative is pioneering the use of quantum computing and biotechnology to help farmers develop stronger crops that are more resilient to the challenges posed by climate change. Both nations also prioritise AI. Plans are under-

way to establish a joint AI centre under the TSI. Future efforts must focus not only on R&D but also on the ethical and safe governance of AI. While these areas offer great opportunities and rapid growth, their unregulated expansion can pose significant security and societal risks. Here, India and the UK have the opportunity to conduct periodic, rigorous scientific reviews of developments in these areas and to influence regulatory policies and their compliance.

Future collaboration is driven by the convergence of both nations’ domestic scientific and technological priorities, ensuring that bilateral fund-



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Future collaboration is driven by the convergence of the domestic scientific and technological priorities of both nations.

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ing directly serves strategic economic objectives. India is aggressively pursuing technological advancement through a mission-mode approach. Initiatives include the launch of the National Quantum Mission, the India AI Mission, the National Green Hydrogen Mission, and the Deep Ocean Mission. The Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF) has been operationalised with a mandate to enhance participation from the private sector and promote interdisciplinary research aligned with national priorities. The UK maintains similarly clear and long-term R&D priorities supported by substantial public expenditure.

The TSI explicitly defines collaboration across seven core technological pillars: AI, quantum computing, biotechnology, critical minerals, telecommunications, advanced materials, and semiconductors. By focusing on these high-stakes sectors, the partnership ensures that R&D directly contributes to mutual economic growth, security, and supply-chain resilience, as outlined in Vision 2035.

The partnership’s next phase must prioritise “science for our peoples”

by targeting collaboration in cutting-edge fields that generate societal value and security benefits. Indian founders are increasingly regarding the UK as a strategic “proving ground”, valuing the maturity of its frameworks and the confidence it inspires in investment. This perception facilitates a critical shift, enabling Indian companies to move from merely exporting talent to launching sophisticated, compliance-ready global companies.

The UK-India strategic technological partnership must move with speed and urgency. By aligning the scientific genius of India and the UK, the two nations possess the collective capability not only to achieve shared economic goals but also to decisively address existential global challenges, opportunities and threats, delivering cleaner air, healthier populations, and resilient economies worldwide.

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Engaging with China: The road that India must take

America’s imposition of sharp tariff hikes on Indian exports has led to an unexpected rapprochement between India and China, one that has momentous global geopolitical and geo-economic implications. Against the backdrop of a rather unexpected disorder in trade relations between India and the US, this provides significant tailwinds to a Global South agenda where two of its most populous stakeholders are looking to find ways of working together as the multilateral order suffers serious fractures.

India’s strategy of engagement with China must provide the policy space for both countries to achieve shared goals and impart resilience to a Global South agenda that can navigate the realities of the disrupted global order. There are three key realities that need to be factored in.

China’s approach to the Global South has revolved around a strategy of financial investments and loans through State and private actors. This has done reasonably well in reducing the receiving countries’ dependence on Western finance, especially in the infrastructure and energy sectors. This has given China a geopolitical stature that serves its interests well. However, the Chinese-financing approach has limited utility in a pragmatic strategy of engagement with India, a democratic country with its own geopolitical needs and ambitions and its suspicions regarding the China Pakistan Economic Corridor and the Chinese adventures around the Belt and Road Initiative.

India’s own ability to attract global finance is significant. The country has been making tremendous infrastructure and energy investments over the last decade and has a robust capital market of its own. This provides limited avenues for absorbing Chinese finance through pathways deployed in other Global South arenas. Therefore, Chinese financing must evolve beyond the strategy of infrastructure and energy investments to create the necessary policy space for coherent engagement between these countries.

A strategy of engagement between India and China must also understand the moment in India’s trajectory of structural transformation. Over the last few years, there has been a consolidation of conviction at the highest levels of the Indian government on pursuing a manufacturing-led trajectory of structural transformation, one that focuses on addressing India’s rapidly expanding consumption needs and developing an export-strategy that imparts resilience to its macro-economic stability. From Make in India to Production Linked Incentives to the upcoming National Manufacturing Mission, the government couldn’t make its manufacturing ambitions clearer. India and China must engage with each other in a way that centres the potential of manufacturing on achieving shared goals.

Manufacturing across sectors provides

significant potential. This includes green energy where China’s advantage, particularly in solar, wind, electric vehicles (EVs), and batteries, is absolute. Engagement between India and China must centre the ability of firms across the two countries on finding ways to work together and building productive capacity. Chinese firms are at a technological frontier that is aspirational for a large number of Indian firms. By creating the policy space where Indian and Chinese firms can work together to address shared goals, both India and China can solve a first-order problem that has often plagued the ability of Indian firms to leverage their core competencies. This has often revolved around their inability to address bottlenecks in supply chains, work-force training, and technology transfers. A certain kind of inertia and political wariness on both sides has only exacerbated these constraints in scaling up a partnership.

This wariness has significant negative spillovers on the ability of Chinese firms, especially in the green sector, to make inroads into building manufacturing capacity in India. While Chinese EV-maker BYD’s attempts at participating in India’s growing EV market through actual investment commitments on productive capacity in India have been cold shouldered, Tesla, on the other hand, has received a red carpet without any immediate plans of production in the country. The divergent experience of Tesla and BYD in India has key lessons on how engagement-strategies must address suspicions.

But there are also examples that show tremendous possibilities of joint projects. JSW (Jindal Steel Works) recently entered into a joint venture with the Chinese State-owned automobile manufacturer SAIC Motor to make inroads into India’s EV market. The joint venture between SAIC Motor, a global leader in EV battery manufacturing, and JSW, to sell EVs in India under the MG brand has significantly disrupted the market in India, with MG Windsor becoming India’s fastest-selling EV. This must be seen as the kind of Schumpeterianism that can energise India’s EV market and create possibilities of supply-chain coordination and technology transfers — moving India up the technology ladder and expanding the basket and quality of EVs for Indian consumers.

The ball seems to have been set in motion already. The recently announced collaboration between Ashok Leyland, one of India’s premier commercial vehicle companies, and CALB, a Chinese battery manufacturer, for developing and manufacturing next-generation batteries in India is welcome. Similar strategies of joint ventures and collaborations between Indian and Chinese firms need to be deployed across sectors and at scale.

China must see its unparalleled technological frontier as a source of synergy with India. India, on the other hand, must find ways to allow these synergies to unfold. If the elephant is to indeed dance with the dragon and achieve shared goals and impart resilience and agency to a Global South mandate, India and China must build on this moment of unexpected opportunity.



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{ DOUGLAS ALEXANDER }

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SCOTLAND

The historic trade deal the UK struck with India this year is great news for Scotland ... but having secured the deal, our challenge now is to put this deal into action

A resilient judiciary will help realise Viksit Bharat

During its early years, in the 1950s, the Supreme Court of India convened infrequently — sitting only a few days annually and for just a few hours at a time. A modest start for what would become the nation’s highest judicial authority.

Much has changed since then. Now the Court functions for a minimum of seven hours a day for more than 190 days in a year. Saturdays too, and special benches during court vacations. This demanding schedule has shrunk the time needed for intellectual resuscitation, which is indispensable for all officers of the court. And judges need it the most.

Recently, Sanjeev Sanyal, member, Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister, sparked debate by suggesting that the judiciary is “the single biggest hurdle” to India becoming Viksit Bharat. His rhetoric criticised judicial vacations and formal court protocols such as addressing judges as “my lord”, describing them as colonial holdovers that contribute to delays. His remarks prompted swift reactions with some calling for contempt proceedings, while social media responses reflected a mix of criticism and support.

While Sanyal’s concerns may resonate with a public tired of case backlogs and procedural delays, the broad strokes of his critique oversimplify a complex institution. In reality, a strong, independent judiciary is essential for investor confidence, contract enforcement, social justice, and the protection of fundamental rights. Framing economic development and constitutionalism as being at odds creates a false binary. It not only misrepresents the judiciary’s role, but also risks undermining institutional trust at a time when it is most needed.

Further, such rhetoric misses the larger picture. The Supreme Court is currently grappling with a crushing caseload of over 80,000 cases, with subordinate courts under even greater strain. In several high courts, the speed at which new cases are filed far exceed the acceptable band of the rate of case disposal.

Judicial vacations, too, have been misunderstood. The courts do not shut down; vacation benches continue hearing urgent matters. Delays in the system stem from multiple factors — insufficient judges, delays unrelated to legal issues, procedural errors, lack of locus standi, and limited use of alternative dispute resolution methods.

Drawing inferences based on limited but observable information while overlooking what is unobservable but is indisputably occurring leads to incomplete conclusions. The judgments of the Supreme Court are not AI generated. Because beyond legal reasoning, they demand an understanding of ethics, empathy,

temperament, integrity, patience and impartiality. These skills and attributes need to be exercised simultaneously and articulated with clarity both verbally and in writing.

Despite — or perhaps in response to — these pressures, there have been reforms. Since the pandemic, automation in filing, use of AI in case management, online streaming, defect analysis in petitions, tools for bunching of similar cases and translation in vernacular languages are some of the initiatives taken to improve procedural efficiency and reduce pendency.

In *Salem Bar Association v Union of India* (2010), the Supreme Court affirmed that it is the judiciary’s constitutional duty to make justice delivery faster, more efficient, and accessible. Against this backdrop, blaming the judiciary for the nation not being able to meet GDP growth targets and pace of economic development emerges as statistically spurious and unwarranted Machiavellian adventurism.

Despite shortcomings, a principled judiciary is the *bête noire* of all populist governments. Delayed justice undoubtedly shakes public trust in the judiciary. Yet, it is concerning when technocrats and policy experts draw misleading conclusions.

True reform requires collaboration between all arms of government and all pillars of democracy. The executive must strengthen the judiciary through improved infrastructure, timely appointments, digital tools, and better court facilities. The judiciary, for its part, must examine its own processes, ensure consistency, and embrace transparency. The government must reduce routine litigation by its own bodies, which account for almost half of all pending cases. The government is currently the biggest contributor to case pendency. As Justice Nagarathna recently noted, state agencies must reconsider their reflex to litigate, especially in cases with little chance of success, opting instead for mediation.

Now, as the verdict is awaited in *Rejanish K.V. v K. Deepa*, in which a five-judge SC Bench will decide if practising advocates who, after serving as court officers for a certain period of time, can be directly recruited to the position of a district judge, we are reminded that building resilient institutions requires commitment from all stakeholders.

India’s journey to becoming Viksit Bharat will be shaped not by vilification of its institutions, but by strengthening them with conviction, commitment, and constitutional fidelity. Let us reform with reason — not rhetoric.



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Editor's
TAKE

An assault on judiciary

An attempt to hurl a shoe at the CJI in the Supreme Court is a grave affront to judicial dignity. The assailant's claim of "divine will" makes it even worse

The tolerance in the society is waning fast. People in disagreement do not mind showing their anger or assaulting the person they do not agree with. Lately the public life has become a risky business with ink thrown on the face to slap to hurling a shoe, the rogue elements are at fore and do not mind even if they are admonished for it; they are unapologetic (which gives them conviction), some do it for hogging limelight others out of their convictions but the effect is same – the civility in public life is tossed out of the window.

In a blatant attack on the sanctity of India's highest Court, an advocate attempted to hurl a shoe at Chief Justice B R Gavai during a hearing. The act, followed by the assailant's refusal to apologise and his claim of a "divine will," sad as well disturbing. The advocate was disturbed because CJI had said things in Mauritius which were not to his liking and he felt that CJI had hurt his 'Sanatan' sentiments

This is an act which must be condemned by one and all but unfortunately there is a section which is supporting his actions. No matter what your religious or political inclinations are, this kind of dissent is not permissible in a civilized society. The condemnation is a constitutional imperative. The courtroom is a space of reason, not aggression. Judges must be free to perform their duties without fear of personal attack. Equally, dissenters have the right to question judgments and institutions – but through lawful, reasoned expression.

The hurling of footwear is not dissent, it is intimidation. It seeks not to argue, but to insult and coerce – a direct assault on the judiciary's dignity and moral authority. When an individual attacks a judge, it is not only a personal affront but a symbolic strike at the root of the system. Treating such actions as harmless theatrics risks normalising hostility toward the courts and undermines the fragile fabric of institutional respect that sustains democracy.The attacker's justification – that he acted in defence of Sanatan Dharma – reveals a more insidious challenge. Whether or not he belongs to an organised Hindutva group, his language mirrors an ideological climate that increasingly seeks to subordinate institutions to "religious sentiment." When faith becomes a justification for violence, dissent morphs into coercion. The moment ideology demands submission instead of dialogue, democracy begins to decay. The right to protest does not include the right to intimidate.

Acts like this one threaten to convert disagreement into mob justice – a path that endangers not only judges but every citizen's right to impartial adjudication. The response must therefore be firm and clear. Legal action – for contempt, criminal assault, and professional misconduct – is essential. At the same time, the judiciary and Bar must strengthen courtroom security without alienating public access. Civil society and political leaders must reaffirm that violence, even when cloaked in faith, is incompatible with the Indian ethos of tolerance and debate.

Global climate crisis intensifies

As vulnerable nations face existential threats, the upcoming UN CoP 30 summit in Belem confronts the critical question: can global leaders finally rise to the climate challenge, or will inadequate commitments continue to imperil humanity?



B K SINGH

Frequent and destructive climate events from heat waves to wildfires to drought to heavy downpours causing landslides and flooding across the countries in recent months have disrupted lives and livelihoods resulting in loss of GDP growth everywhere. World leaders have rolled out some actions against Trump's tariff imposition on imports, but none have come up with proper action against his attack on environment. Top economists Catherine L Kling, Stephen Polasky and Kathleen Segerson have called peers around the World to push back against Trump's consistent attack on environmental laws by educating public through local, national and international NGOs. Environmental catastrophes are on course to reduce economic efficiency and are threat to people all round including Americans.

Some of the key reversals by Trump are — withdrawal from Paris climate accord, removing well established effects of climate breakdown on public welfare in any consideration in federal policy, ending research funding on environment and climate, executive order "drill baby drill" prioritising fossil fuel energy, reducing investments and regulations that tackles presence of lead and other chemicals in drinking water.

His 24th September speech in UNGA, "Climate change is the biggest con job ever", "Renewables are a joke, they don't work" did not match with the views of many World leaders in the audience. Reacting to Trump's observation in UN GA Ilana Seid, an ambassador from island nation Palau said that she did not expect anything better from Trump and warned that not acting on climate change will "be a betrayal of the most vulnerable".

Trump called coal as 'clean' in his address, "Never use the word coal, and only use the words, 'clean, beautiful coal'. Sounds much better, doesn't it?" He also called carbon footprint 'a hoax made up by people with evil intention'. Responding to this observation Texas A&M University climate scientist Andrew Dessler said that the term was coined by Oil companies and it may have been designed to shift the responsibility for combating climate change away from corporations to individuals. After Trump reentered White House, Rhodium group forecast reveals that US emission cuts is slowed down by half the rate achieved in last two decades, and is projected to mis Paris targets.

China, the highest emitter of greenhouse gases, in UNGA address during recent discussion on climate crisis has also announced its future plan to cut emission. The country has planned to cut emissions between 7 per cent and 10 per cent by 2035, whereas it is feasible to achieve at least 30



percent cut that is also absolutely necessary to slow down warming of the planet. Experts have made scathing response to this and said that the planet cannot stay within relatively safe temperature bounds, and climatic catastrophes and Sea level rise would continue to threaten the humanity.

However, Xi Jinping in his oblique reference to US said, "Some countries were not rising to the climate challenge. The international community should stay focused in the right direction. [Countries] must live up to their responsibilities. The rights of developing countries must be fully respected."

China's enormous power has come from willingness to go for polluting industries (Silicon wafers, rare earths etc), which form the bed rock of modern industry and economy. AI, computers, mobiles, EVs, missiles, defense equipments etc all depend on product of polluting industries. If some of these are unavoidable, burning of fossil fuel must be avoided. If the two largest economies America and China compete with them in not decarbonising themselves, the vulnerable countries like global south and island nations are under threat to vanish from the face of the earth.

Kaysie Brown, associate director for climate diplomacy and governance at E3G think-tank said, "China's 2035 target falls critically short of what is needed. It's neither aligned with China's economic decarbonisation, not its own 2060 carbon neutrality goal. Without stronger near term ambition, China risks undermining its claim to upholding multilateralism and its clean economy leadership, and sending mixed signals to global markets."

Year on year basis Chinese coal consumption has been surging. In 2024 the country's coal consumption has been 4.2 billion tons and this year it is on course to reach 4.5 billion tons. Coal sector in China enjoys strong political support within Xi's government. New coal fired power plants are still being developed, despite a promise made

in Glasgow CoP 26 in 2021 to 'phase down' fossil fuels. Of course the resolution "phase down" of CoP 26 was modified to "transitioning away from fossil fuel" at Sharm El Sheikh in CoP 27 in 2022.

European and Middle East countries are at war. Ukraine and Russia have been targeting at each other's energy infrastructures. Refineries, oil & gas pipelines, nuclear power plants and coal-fired plants are targeted, leading to additional greenhouse gas emissions.

If oil & gas stocks are hit by drones and missiles, it comes under flame and obnoxious gases are released that increases the concentration of CO2 in the atmosphere. Both Iran and Russia have to run their war machine by selling oil and gas and when the stocks go in flame, they have to drill more to meet the demand.

The economy of the countries involved in war including America and European Union are based on war. A sizable portion of the GDP is from defence manufacturing and sale of fossil fuels. These are highly polluting industries and more

the wars prolong, warmer is the planet that brings frequent and destructive climatic catastrophes. Can World leaders put their might to stop wars to restrict warming of the planet?

Annual climate summit of United Nations, CoP 30 is scheduled in Belem, a Brazilian city on Pacific coast in mid November. UN climate chief Simon Stiell has been frank enough to admit that the commitments to be made in Belem will fall short of emission cuts needed to contain global warming within 1.5 degree Celsius above pre-industrial levels that has been committed ten years ago in 2015 in Paris.

The task before CoP 30 would be to show how those inadequate national targets can be stepped up to ensure that Paris agreement is fulfilled. Further, CoP 29 at Baku failed, as developed countries did not commit adequate finance for adaptation and climate resilience in global south. Can leaders be more considerate this time?

CHINA'S ENORMOUS POWER HAS COME FROM WILLINGNESS TO GO FOR POLLUTING INDUSTRIES (SILICON WAFERS, RARE EARTHS ETC), WHICH FORM THE BED ROCK OF MODERN INDUSTRY AND ECONOMY

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Caste, conscience, and the forgotten spirit of equality



RAJYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR NIKUNJJI

2ND OPINION

The Indian caste system has historically been one of the key dimensions through which society in India has been differentiated — alongside class, religion, region, tribe, gender, and language. To counter such divisions, Indian laws and the Constitution repeatedly emphasize justice and equality, often using the phrase "without any discrimination based on race, colour, caste, creed, sex, or religious belief." This phrase appears in several Articles and statutory provisions that affirm the ideal of social equality. Similarly, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, employs this language with additions such as "property, birth, national origin, or distinction of any kind."

However, the word "caste" does not appear in Article 2

of the UDHR, as caste-based stratification is a unique feature of Indian society and not a global phenomenon.

Article 1 of the UDHR declares that "all human beings are endowed with reason and conscience" and should "act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood." Its Preamble reaffirms "faith in the dignity and worth of the human person." Together, these principles express a profound spiritual truth — that every human being possesses inherent worth and conscience because each is, at the core, a soul. Only when we recognise the spiritual essence of humanity can we treat one another as brothers and sisters.

Thus, human rights and laws that uphold justice are not merely legal constructs but are rooted in a spiritual foundation. They ask us to rise above bodily distinctions of race, colour, gender, nationality, or birth, reminding us that these are external features of the body, not of the soul. In essence, law teaches that true equality lies in recognising the soul within every person. Unfortunately, this deeper spiritual understanding has faded over time.

The idea of "non-discrimination" has become a mere formality, often repeated but rarely internalised. The decline in moral and ethical standards in modern society can be traced to this loss of spiritual consciousness.

We have become more concerned with external identity and less connected to the values that sustain

humanity. Every society is governed not only by legal systems but also by moral and ethical laws that shape human relationships. These moral principles — honesty, integrity, compassion, and respect — form the foundation of happiness and harmony. When we follow them, we enrich our lives; when we violate them, we invite unrest, tension, and suffering.

Today's widespread social unrest and emotional emptiness are consequences of neglecting these values. We have become efficient in knowledge, technology, and management, yet deficient in kindness, sincerity, and empathy. Science and technology themselves are not the cause of moral decay; rather, it is the erosion of moral integrity that prevents us from using these tools for genuine well-being. Many people desire to live morally upright lives but lack the spiritual understanding and inner discipline needed to sustain those values.

Meditation and self-awareness can help individuals reconnect with their inner peace, strength, and moral clarity. What society urgently needs today is a collective awakening — a renewed commitment to values like tolerance, humility, and mutual respect. Only by restoring these spiritual foundations can we build a world rooted in peace, happiness, and harmony.

The writer is a spiritual teacher & popular columnist

PIC TALK



Indian Air Force personnel during a parade on the 93rd Indian Air Force Day, at Hindon Air Force Station, in Ghaziabad PHOTO: PTI

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WHEN FAITH, LAW, AND RESPONSIBILITY COLLIDE

The recent incident of a senior Supreme Court advocate attempting to hurl a shoe at the Chief Justice has shocked the nation, exposing the fragile intersection of law, religion, and public sentiment. While the act itself is inexcusable and deeply shameful, it also forces reflection on the responsibilities of those in positions of authority. Comments by senior judicial officers on matters touching upon religion, even inadvertently, can inflame passions and contribute to unrest.

Equally, the role of media—both print and digital—cannot be ignored. Sensationalizing sensitive issues often magnifies tensions rather than fostering understanding. Citizens, regardless of education or legal knowledge, respond not only to actions but also to narratives that frame those actions. This episode

underlines the urgent need for heightened caution and sensitivity around religious sentiments in public discourse, judicial pronouncements, and media reporting.

Establishing an autonomous body to monitor, guide, and mediate such matters could help prevent escalation and ensure accountability. Law, order, and faith must coexist responsibly; when any one is disregarded, the delicate balance of a diverse society is threatened.

This incident is a stark reminder that responsibility, sensitivity, and restraint are essential across all spheres—judiciary, media, and public discourse. Law, faith, and public order must coexist carefully to preserve the delicate balance of a diverse nation.

NAVNEET SETH | TALWANDI SABOO

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

The growing menace of child labour

The recent incident in Uttarakhand, where students at a Government Primary School were seen performing manual labour, carrying sand and soil, is deeply disturbing. The suspension of the head teacher, Anju Manaduli, is a necessary step, but this issue runs deeper than one individual. It is appalling that children, whose sole focus should be education, are being forced into what the suspension letter itself termed "manual labour."

This is a clear violation of their right to a safe and nurturing learning environment. A rigorous, swift enquiry must not only punish those responsible but also investigate how such practices became normalized within the state's education system. We must safeguard our children's dignity and uphold the sanctity of their schools. The incident underscores the urgent need for responsibility and sensitivity across all sectors—judiciary, media, and public discourse. Actions or remarks that touch upon religious sentiments must be measured to prevent inflaming passions. Media narratives should inform rather than sensationalize. Establishing an independent body to guide and monitor such issues can help maintain accountability. Only by balancing law, faith, and public order can we safeguard societal harmony and uphold the trust and cohesion of a diverse nation.

NADEEM | DHAKIA

Celebrating 150 Years of Vande Mataram

The Ministry of Culture recently highlighted the significance of Vande Mataram, India's National Song, on the occasion of its 150th anniversary. Recognised as a pivotal anthem of India's freedom struggle, the song continues to inspire generations. Officials emphasized that youth and students, many of whom are unfamiliar with its historical roots, should participate in nationwide celebrations to honor the original sentiment of the song. When asked whether the celebration would extend to madrasas, the ministry responded, "Sabko jochna chahiye"—everyone should take part.

Composed by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay in 1875 and featured in his 1882 novel Anandamath, Vande Mataram literally means "I bow to thee, Mother." Its modern rendition is credited to V. D. Paluskar, founder of Gandharva Mahavidyalaya. The song, in Sanskrit and Bengali, played a key role in mobilizing the freedom movement and was first sung at the Indian National Congress session in 1896. Dr. Rajendra Prasad declared in 1950 that it should be honored alongside Jana Gana Mana.

Over decades, it has appeared in literature, political journals, and films, embedding itself in the nation's cultural consciousness. This celebration should embrace its inclusive spirit, not be approached with a narrow mind.

YASH PAL RALHAN | JALANDHAR

Rising unemployment rate

According to recent data, the unemployment rate in India is 7.6 per cent (CMIE report – September 2025). In cities, it is 8.9 per cent, in villages 7.1 per cent, and among young people aged 18–29, it is over 12 per cent. Every year, around 11 million young people enter the job market, but only 7 million jobs are available.

With such a serious problem, what is the government doing? Programs like Skill India, Start-Up India, and Make in India are being promoted, but where are their results? Every year, the same question arises. How can educated young people survive if they cannot find work? The youth are the future of India, but delays and ineffective government programs are destroying their dreams. This cannot be tolerated. The government must take immediate steps to create real job opportunities.

The 150th anniversary of Vande Mataram is an opportunity to honor not just its words, but its spirit of unity, patriotism, and inspiration. Celebrations should be inclusive, embracing all communities and educational spaces, ensuring the message transcends divisions. By focusing on its essence rather than form, the nation can reaffirm its shared heritage and collective identity.

KAVYA | TUMAKURU

When brands speak culture and the world listens

When advertising transcends commerce, it becomes culture. From Gap's KATSEYE campaign to India's Amul and Cadbury classics, the power lies in representation, emotion and belonging — reminding us that the most persuasive brands don't just sell products, they tell human stories that unite

FIRST
Column



CHAITANYA
K PRASAD

When Gap dropped its “Better in Denim” campaign with KATSEYE earlier this year, it felt less like an ad and more like a cultural phenomenon. A brand that had slipped off the radar suddenly pulled the world back in with six women, a riot of denim and colour, and choreography that made you want to get up and move. But beyond the surface, something deeper was happening: this wasn't just about jeans. It was about who gets seen, how they're seen, and what that visibility means in a world where culture itself is a form of power.

Advertising has always been about symbols. Every choice, casting, colour palette, lighting, posture, is a loaded message. Who is front and centre? Who is allowed to take up space? KATSEYE, a group built out of multiple countries and cultures, gave Gap the perfect answer. Put simply, they looked like the world. Each member styled in denim but in her own way, dancing not with forced precision but with joy. It was a visual declaration: identity is strength, diversity is beautiful, and this brand wants to be the backdrop to that celebration.

Colour itself carried weight here. Denim's deep indigo has long symbolised utility, toughness and working-class authenticity. But paired with KATSEYE's choreography and kaleidoscopic staging, it transformed into a metaphor for universality. The backdrop's bursts of vibrancy, the way lighting picked up the shades of skin and fabric, all made the ad feel like a living painting. It wasn't sterile fashion marketing; it was colour as cultural language, signalling vibrancy, inclusivity and modernity. That kind of visual grammar is what gives advertising its real persuasive power, audiences may not consciously notice, but they feel it.

The impact was immediate and staggering. Within days, the commercial had broken records across TikTok and Instagram. People weren't just watching, they were walking into stores, some admitting they didn't even need jeans but felt compelled to buy a pair. That's when you know an ad has crossed into soft power territory. It stops being about the fabric or the cut and starts being about the feeling. When audiences see women of different ethnicities dancing without apology,



they see themselves. And when they feel seen, they buy in, literally.

The ripple effects were global. Articles described it as a “cultural takeover,” fans across continents recreated the choreography, and TikTok was flooded with denim dance challenges. In Seoul, London, São Paulo and Mumbai, Gap suddenly became relevant again. This wasn't a local campaign; it was a soft-power broadcast where the product became secondary to the collective mood. Gap harnessed KATSEYE's global fandom, but also the universal language of joy, movement and representation. It's a reminder that in an age of fragmented media, one well-executed ad can still cut through borders and build a shared cultural moment.

This is soft power in action. Not the coercion of states or the bluntness of politics, but the quieter persuasion of attraction. A campaign like Gap × KATSEYE tells a

SURF EXCEL'S “DAAG ACHHE HAIN” SERIES REFRAMED DIRT NOT AS MESS BUT AS PROOF OF LOVE, SACRIFICE AND PLAY, A POWERFUL CULTURAL RESET THAT CELEBRATED EMPATHY RATHER THAN PERFECTION. TANISHQ'S WEDDING CAMPAIGNS, FEATURING PUSHED BACK AGAINST RIGID NORMS AND QUIETLY SPOKE TO INDIA'S PLURALISM

global audience: we see you, you belong here. And in that moment, a clothing brand steps into the role of cultural diplomat. It blurs the lines between commerce and international relations, between corporate branding and the idea of national or communal identity.

India, of course, has always known this instinct. Think back to the Cadbury Dairy Milk ad that showed a girl running onto a cricket field when her team won, the unrestrained joy, the little act of breaking boundaries, the way it etched itself into our collective memory. Or the more recent Cadbury spot where a Tamil-speaking woman feels left out of a Hindi conversation until someone switches to English, bridging the gap with kindness. That wasn't just chocolate; it was an ode to the multicultural, multilingual heart of India.

Equally significant is Amul, which has

practically written the textbook on advertising as soft power. Everyone knows the cheeky Amul girl, but perhaps the most powerful moment came when Amul leaned into Shyam Benegal's Manthan. That 1976 film, funded by half a million farmers each contributing two rupees, told the story of India's White Revolution. When Amul later used clips from the film in its ads, it blurred the line between cinema, social movement and brand. Those images of villagers, women carrying milk, the collective struggle and triumph, they didn't feel like staged commercials. They felt like lived truth. In that sense, Amul wasn't selling butter. It was selling an idea of India: cooperative, resilient, modern yet rooted. And people bought it, not just because they liked the product, but because they believed in the story.

Other Indian brands have tapped into similar veins. Surf Excel's “Daag Achhe Hain” series reframed dirt not as mess but as proof of love, sacrifice and play, a powerful cultural reset that celebrated empathy rather than perfection. Tanishq's wedding campaigns, featuring intergenerational and interfaith stories, pushed back against rigid norms and quietly spoke to India's pluralism. These weren't just ads; they became talking points, cultural signals that made people stop and reflect. Like Gap with KATSEYE, they worked because they were anchored in authenticity and struck at something society was already grappling with.

What Gap pulled off with KATSEYE taps into the same current. When advertising gets it right, it becomes bigger than itself. It tells us who we are, or who we want to be. It makes us feel part of a shared celebration. Yes, there will always be debates about tokenism or surface-level diversity, but authenticity has a way of cutting through. With KATSEYE, it worked because the group itself is genuinely global. With Cadbury, it worked because the awkwardness of language barriers is something millions of Indians live every day. With Amul, it worked because Manthan was our own story reflected back to us, unsentimental yet moving.

The truth is, the best ads don't just sell products. They become mirrors in which societies catch glimpses of themselves. The Gap × KATSEYE campaign showed denim, sure, but what the world really bought was the feeling of belonging. That is soft power at its finest — not loud, not forced, but undeniable



Internships: Building future-ready youth for a digital India



T SENTHIL SIVA
SUBRAMANIAN

In the 21st century, India's guiding mantra “Digital First” — has become much more than a technological aspiration. It represents a transformative vision that integrates education, innovation, and governance to empower the nation's youth. At the heart of this transformation lies a vital tool — the internship. Once seen as a brief work experience, internships today stand as structured platforms for cultivating employability, creativity, and adaptability, preparing students to thrive in a fast-evolving global economy.

Anchored in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 [Sections 4.26, 11.8, and 17.8], internships are no longer peripheral add-ons to academic learning; they are an integral part of India's education framework. They blend theoretical instruction with practical exposure, ensuring that graduates enter the workforce not only with knowledge but with the skills, confidence, and mindset to apply it meaningfully. The preparation for effective internships begins from the very first year of undergraduate education. Institutions across the country have established innovation hubs such as the AICTE IDEA Labs, which allow students to explore emerging technologies hands-on. Here, they learn to experiment, design, and make prototypes.

Students also participate in national-level competitions like the Smart India Hackathon, MSME Hackathon, and Startup India Challenge, where they develop practical solutions to real-world problems. These experiences not only refine their technical skills but also foster teamwork, communication, and leadership abilities.

Complementing these are workshops, seminars, and research-based projects that deepen understanding. Through student clubs, professional societies such as IEEE, ISTE, and IETE, and entrepreneurship cells, learners gain multidisciplinary exposure. Field visits to industries, rural communities, and research organisations further expand their perspectives, helping them relate classroom concepts to real-life challenges.

By the time students step into formal internships, they are ready to transform knowledge into competence. Working with start-ups, corporations, research institutions, or NGOs, they learn about organisational culture, project management, and the value of collaboration. They are encouraged to analyse their strengths, reflect through Statements of Purpose (SOPs) and apply design thinking to complex problems.

Beyond technical growth, internships nurture soft skills and ethics — empathy, integrity, teamwork, and professionalism. These are the qualities that employers today value as much as academic merit. The internship experience thus becomes a process of holistic learning — of discovering not only how to work but also how to think, communicate, and lead.

Objectives and Broader Impact

The central goal of internships is to extend learning beyond classroom walls. They promote experiential and hybrid learning, enabling students to engage with industrial, research, and community ecosystems. In doing so, they help learners develop entrepreneurial mindsets and become lifelong learners capable of adapting to future disruptions. Internships also strengthen the nation's STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) capabilities. Students engage in technical presentations, group discussions, and hands-on experimentation, enhancing analytical and creative thinking.

Many internships also align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), motivating students to contribute to sustainable innovations and social responsibility. Through exposure to design thinking, simulation tools, and real-time data, students move from theoretical exercises to developing and testing prototypes. They observe how different departments — R&D, marketing, production, and quality assurance — interact within an organisation. Many conduct market research, gather data using tools like SPSS, JASP, and R, and propose actionable solutions that address real consumer or community needs.

Skilling Through Internships

In a skill-driven economy like India's, internships serve as the cornerstone of employability. National flagship programmes are actively bridging academia and industry. The Pradhan Mantri Internship Scheme connects students with over 500 partner organisations — including Maharatna, Navratna, and Miniratna companies — facilitating project-based learning across key sectors.

The Digital India Internship Programme takes this further, offering placements in frontier technologies such as cybersecurity, cloud computing, blockchain, quantum technology, and digital forensics. These immersive experiences ensure that graduates are equipped with globally relevant competencies.

For women in STEM, initiatives like Vigyan Vidushi — a collaboration between the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research and the Homi Bhabha Centre for Science Education — provide specialised research internships for women pursuing physics and related fields. This is helping bridge gender gaps in advanced sci-

entific research. Covering fields such as digital manufacturing and PLC programming, these short-term modules integrate theory with practice under expert mentorship. Certified by NCVET and aligned with the National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF), they often serve as precursors to full-scale internships — enhancing employability and future job readiness.

Internships are now seamlessly integrated into higher education through the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) system, allowing students to earn academic credits for their practical experiences. This alignment ensures that internships contribute directly to degree completion while offering valuable industry exposure. Many institutions encourage students to extend their internship work into capstone projects or research studies with start-ups, MSMEs, or academic labs. Such initiatives lead to tangible outcomes — research publications, prototypes, and even intellectual property filings. This culture of innovation not only boosts student confidence but also strengthens India's knowledge economy.

Case Studies

Across India, numerous initiatives exemplify the growing depth of the internship ecosystem:

- NIELIT Digital University, under the Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY), offers over 100 digital courses in AI, Cybersecurity, Cloud Computing, and Semiconductor Design, partnering with global leaders like Microsoft and Dixon to bridge academia and industry.
- Chip to Startup (C2S), another MeitY initiative, encourages students to design indigenous semiconductor chips, supporting India's vision of technological self-reliance.
- The National Career Service (NCS), in collaboration with Microsoft, provides digital skills and career support under its DigiSaksham initiative, particularly benefiting women and differently-abled job seekers.

Towards a Skilled India

India's internship ecosystem is the bedrock of a future-ready workforce. By merging theoretical learning with real-world problem-solving, internships transform students into innovators, researchers, and entrepreneurs. As the nation advances towards Viksit Bharat@2047, these initiatives are steering India toward global leadership in skill development, research, and digital innovation. The synergy between education, industry, and governance is nurturing a generation of professionals who are not only employable but future capable — ready to build a self-reliant, knowledge-driven India.

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RAHUL
JAIN

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his address to the nation on 21 September, urged the people to promote swadeshi and buy indigenous goods. Prime Minister Modi's appeal came amidst tariff tensions with the United States and growing challenges for India's small and medium enterprises. In fact, India's micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) have a very important role to play in strengthening local manufacturing and driving self-reliance in the wake of these challenges.

The most important issue is to have an empowered small and medium enterprises sector because that's where the true strength of this country lies. There are over 7.34 crore MSMEs operational in India, employing approximately 26 crore individuals. If the entire sector is empowered and becomes a powerhouse, nobody can stop “Make in India”. The majority of MSMEs focus on selling in India, consuming material from India, and providing employment for India.

If we need to make “Atmanirbhar Bharat” a success and create a developed India by 2047, then this sector needs to be upskilled. This sector has the potential to generate employment for millions of unemployed youth in India. According to some estimates, the national youth unemployment rate in the 15-29 years category between April and June 2025 stood at 14.6 per cent. MSMEs account for over 90 per cent of all enterprises in the country and contribute nearly one-third of India's GDP, along with around 44 per cent of exports. Yet, despite their significance, many MSMEs struggle when it comes to growth. The challenge they face is that they often do not know how to run their business. They try different ways to achieve their goals, but due to lack of proper training or guidance in many instances, this progress is slow. There is not enough attention on them, and we need to train these people. If they become strong, the country becomes strong.

The government has launched several initiatives to support MSMEs. The Udyam Registration Portal of the government has simplified the process of registration for small enterprises, thus making it easier for them to avail various facilities. Initiatives such as the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY), PM Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP), and the Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTMSE) offer the MSMEs the much-needed funds, along with credit insurance and



subsidies, which are very important for their growth. The government is also motivating the MSMEs to update and implement new technology and programmes such as the Credit Linked Capital Subsidy Scheme (CLCSS) and MSME Sustainable (ZED) Certification are helping in this regard. To help these businesses increase business and reach out to overseas markets, the government has started schemes such as the Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme and the Market Access Initiative (MAI).

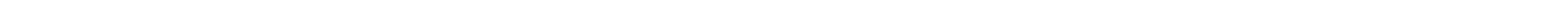
However, there is a need to increase the outreach to these MSMEs and create awareness among them about the benefits of these schemes, especially in rural areas. In addition to the central government, the state governments also have an important role, providing grants, skill development initiatives, and helping them build market linkages. The government has taken various steps in successive budgets to ensure small businesses are able to avail themselves of higher credit limits, quicker loans, and access to digital tools.

With proper training and upgrading of their skills, these small and medium businesses can be empowered to grow exponentially. As I work closely with the SME sector, I am certain when I say, in majority of instances, they are not even aware of how to grow themselves.

They have the potential, but they need to be guided in the right direction, along with providing them with training and entrepreneurship development skills. The MSME sector is the backbone of India's economy and key to achieving the goals of Make in India and a self-reliant economy.

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Discordant notes

The Tata trustees must resolve the rift quickly as it threatens institutional credibility

THE TATA GROUP is rarely in the headlines for the wrong reasons. Unfortunately it is now in the spotlight for an internecine conflict, involving Tata Trusts Chairman Noel Tata and a clutch of other trustees. The fact that the government has been requested to intervene in the matter suggests the rift may have snowballed into a major problem. What else could explain the Tata top brass flying to Delhi to meet Union ministers Amit Shah and Nirmala Sitharaman late Wednesday? While the nature of the discussions is not officially known, they ostensibly put forward their point of view on the differences that have cropped up between four of the trustees—Mehli Mistry, Jehangir HC Jehangir, Darius Khambata, and Pramit Jhaveri—on one side, and Noel Tata and Venu Srinivasan, vice chairman of Tata Trusts, on the other.

The fact is that the crisis is no mere boardroom spat: it threatens institutional credibility and the legacy of what has long been seen as India's benchmark for principled business. The Trusts must resolve this rift quickly—and, critically—without further recourse to government mediation. The internal crisis within Tata Trusts is also a test of Tata's institutional maturity as coherence, clarity, and trust must guide its internal processes. Since he is the chairman of Tata Trusts, which holds 66% stake in Tata Sons and has a substantial say in its operations, Noel should have been able to douse the fires in Bombay House himself, instead of seeking the government's help.

To be sure, Noel has extra large shoes to fill as his predecessor Ratan Tata had a larger than life image and his authority—both over Tata Trusts and Tata Sons—was total. Nevertheless, one would have expected him to have sorted out the differences quietly without letting the tensions simmer. The Mistry camp is apparently miffed at not being privy to details of key decisions taken by Tata Sons. That is curious as Mistry himself was a close confidante of Ratan Tata for several years and in the past, Tata Sons didn't share such information with all trustees on the grounds that it is competitive and could be price-sensitive. What prompted Mistry to suddenly become so conscious about his rights is curious.

The Mistry camp is also reportedly unhappy that the Trusts' nominee directors on the Tata Sons board are not co-operating with them. In fact, this appears to have been the reason for the removal of Vijay Singh from the Tata Sons board. The Mistry camp is also apparently not comfortable with Noel's idea to have a deputy MD at Tata Sons. In turn, Noel Tata is believed to have stalled Mistry's appointment to the board of Tata Sons. Whether or not these grievances are justified is for the trustees to answer, but one thing is clear: both camps must meet halfway. Rather than letting the matter drag on, both camps should be willing to give and take—the only course to reach a consensus.

Foremost for the trustees should be the group's business interests. There are also other pressing matters such as the listing of Tata Sons, which is linked to the purchase of the shares held by the Shapoorji Palonji Mistry family. Noel must be his own troubleshooter just like Ratan Tata was. The faster the rift is bridged—on the Trusts' own terms—the better for Tata's legacy, its corporate entities, and for India's broader discourse on governance.

Musk's cheap Teslas are the wrong kind of cheap

THIS HAS NOT been a vintage year for Tesla Inc. product launches. This summer, it launched a long-delayed robotaxi service that came with a free human. Now, it has unveiled two long-awaited cheaper electric vehicles that are most definitely not the game-changers once promised. But are they enough to do the job? It depends on what that job is.

If the job is to turn around Tesla's EV sales, these "standard" iterations of the Models Y and 3 aren't likely to be up to the task. Yes, they are cheaper than the prior base models before subsidies. But the cuts of around \$5,000 are less than the lost \$7,500 tax credit and leaves them closer to \$40,000 than \$30,000. More importantly, the price cuts aren't a reflection of some game-changing manufacturing process. That plan was shoved aside in favour of boosting utilisation on Tesla's existing assembly lines. Instead, Tesla's famously spare interiors will get sparer in these versions, as a number of features are removed or downgraded: shorter range, fewer speakers and touchscreens, textile seats, manual steering, fewer colour choices, and so on.

There's nothing wrong per se with a less whizz-bang trim on a vehicle aimed at enticing more customers. That's especially so when the political party your chief executive backed has yanked away the tax credit buoying sales and rivals are releasing a range of competing EVs into a domestic market poised to shrink. The US needs cheaper vehicles.

But this is Tesla, pioneer of EVs, now releasing lower-content versions of models that debuted before the pandemic. Contrast that with Ford Motor Co.'s project to reimagine the EV assembly line for a brand-new \$30,000 truck—execution pending, of course—or China's ongoing redefinition of what's possible. Even Tesla's nomenclature, "standard", sounds half-hearted for the company that forced terms like "gigafactory" and "robotaxi" into the vernacular.

In a sense, rather than promising to turn around Tesla's EV sales in the US, these new vehicles can just as easily be seen as totemic of where the company and the sector now find themselves: Namely, competing on price in a market under siege from Washington. Tesla's last genuinely new model, the Cybertruck, was touted by Elon Musk as "the future" but has sold slower than the Ford Edsel. It at least looks, you know, different. The models—or rather, trims, since they aren't new vehicles—unveiled on Tuesday are about taking away, not adding. They reek of a company holding the line, not moving it forward.

To be fair, Musk has been shifting Tesla's strategic focus away from the core EV business for a while, although it still generates most of the company's revenue and profits. After ditching the really cheap EV project, Tesla pivoted hard to robotaxis and robots. Hopes for those now account for the vast majority of Tesla's roughly \$1.5 trillion valuation and offer the board's primary justification for Musk's proposed trillion-dollar pay package.

The latter will be voted on in 30 days, and there has been a steady drumbeat of positive Tesla news since the shareholder proxy containing the compensation vote came out. This includes includes Musk buying a nominal amount of shares, pulled-forward third quarter EV sales, the first big update of the Full Self Driving software since 2024, and now these new trims—despite signalling enervation rather than innovation. It is here that Tesla's latest additions may do the job even if they don't light up the forecourt.

IDLE DEPOSITS

RBI'S INCENTIVE-BASED APPROACH MAY SUCCEED IN MINIMISING STOCK AND FLOW TO ITS FUND

Claiming unclaimed funds

ON SEPTEMBER 30, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) took a bold step for reducing the substantial unclaimed deposits and flows in/to its Depositor Education and Awareness (DEA) Fund). It launched a year-long (October 1-September 30, 2026) incentive plan (Scheme for Facilitating Accelerated Payout—Inoperative Accounts and Unclaimed Deposits) for banks. Payments will be in the range of 5-7.5% of the amount in the inoperative/unclaimed account settled, subject to ceiling in the range of ₹5,000-25,000 based on the duration of the account's non-operation. This unconventional regulatory activism follows a September 26 RBI notification simplifying and harmonising the settlement of deceased persons' accounts to their nominees or successors.

On October 4, the finance minister launched a nationwide awareness campaign titled "Your Money, Your Right", emphasising three As—awareness, accessibility, and action—and urging savers/investors to claim their own money aggregating to the tune of ₹1.84 lakh crore that is lying in specified funds or entities. "Your money, your right" is the right assertion, increasingly being forgotten by money managers (banks, insurance, provident fund, securities), especially as the investors' money is placed with them in a fiduciary capacity.

On September 9, the Investor Education and Protection Fund (IEPF) Authority celebrated its ninth foundation day on the theme "Claiming the Unclaimed: Unlocking the Potential of Idle Financial Assets in India". Reportedly, India's largest provident fund manager, the Employees' Provident Funds Organisation, is gearing up to launch its new tech-platform, Version 3.0. It is expected to remove the several glitches haunting its current system—with severe consequences for its eight-crore plus contributors, mostly underprivileged workers—

thereby making access to their funds, withdrawals, and final settlement easy. The reason for these clarion calls and urgency in returning the funds to their owners, their nominees, or successors is obvious. According to available estimates, there are large amounts of unclaimed funds/securities—DEA Fund has ₹75,000 crore, IEPF has ₹1.1 lakh crore (₹9,000 crore dividend and the rest as securities), Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (Bima Bharosa Portal) has ₹20,062 crore, and mutual funds have ₹3,200 crore. Data on the amount of idle funds vary according to sources and/or reporting periods.

In any case, the numbers are the idle funds/securities in the dedicated funds. However, the pipelines of flows to these funds are very long—10 years from the banks and insurance companies and seven years from companies. The idle funds between these years of pipeline would also be equally large. For instance, the annual addition to DEA Fund had been in the range of ₹6,000-22,000 crore during 2021-2024, given that it grew from ~₹31,000-78,000 crore. If funds in these long pipelines are added, the size of idle funds would jump rapidly. Though estimates of idle funds in the pipeline are not available, it may not be far off to put that figure at the same size as the amount already transferred

to the dedicated funds. That would take the total idle funds—in the pipeline and in the dedicated funds together—to about ₹3.7 lakh crore (as against the ₹1.84 lakh crore)—more than 1% of India's GDP. If released, it could do wonders with overall consumption, investment, and growth apart from helping claimants improve their financial position.

Policy-/regulator-level awareness about the substantive and growing unclaimed funds is not new. The RBI issued a circular on June 25, 2005, simplifying the process of claiming funds within the account of the deceased. After more than 20 years, the September 26 notification is only a granular version of the 2005 circular, directing the banks to scrupulously follow directions, indicating that the earlier guidelines were not followed properly. When the amounts with the banks grew, the RBI set up the DEA Fund in 2014, directing banks to transfer funds unclaimed for more than 10 years. Further, the RBI launched an integrated portal, Unified Database for Unclaimed Deposits, in August 2023 with the motto "100 days 100 pay-outs" from every bank branch. However, the DEA Fund continued to grow.

Similarly, companies are mandated to give out the unclaimed securities and dividends to owners/nominees both under the Companies Act/Rules and

CKG NAIR

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The gap between policy/regulatory objectives and ground-level implementation is too wide. A large number of claimants fall into it every day

Spot the bot, stop the rot



SANDEEP KURIAKOSE
R CHANDRA MOULI

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The very traits that make bots helpful—speed, scale, and tireless repetition—are the same traits that get repurposed for abuse

IN ASCENDANCE from *The Wizard of Oz*, Glinda asks Dorothy: "Are you a good witch, or a bad witch?" Swap "witch" for "bot" and the question writes itself. Or let's take a Bollywood example: In the film *Nayakan*, a child asks Kamal Hassan playing the title role of don Velu Nayakkar: "Are you a good person or a bad person?"

Likewise, the question we need to ask in the digital world: Is it a good bot or a bad bot? Strange but true, just as in humans the complexities of good and evil are embedded in every bot, which by design mimic humans.

Bot, short for robot, emerged with the development of software programmes designed to perform automated, repetitive tasks. The first chatbot, ELIZA, was developed in 1966 at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, US, to imitate human conversation. In the present day, we are familiar with advanced conversational bots such as ChatGPT. We also have chatbots integrated into websites, messaging apps, social media platforms, and voice assistants (example Alexa).

Bots are as interactive as humans, and therefore an asset to voice-led services such as call centres. For example, customers could converse with a chatbot to change passwords, request a balance on an account, or schedule an appointment—scenarios relegated to science fiction a few years earlier and dependent on human interface until recently.

The very traits that make bots helpful—speed, scale, and tireless repetition—are the same traits that get repurposed for abuse.

While a bot welcomes you as you log into a portal, there are others at work elsewhere in the digital world with an intent to mislead and misrepresent. Let's say you are the CEO/CTO/CMO of a company active in online sales, an advertising agency that launches digital campaigns, or the state or central government communicating to citizens. Bots can dilute what you do and bring benefit to third parties.

Here's a real-life example (all details are first-hand from a CMO). A campaign for a household brand was humming along, the reach graph perfectly smooth, the clicks eerily regular, even the scroll depth politely consistent. The CMO felt this pattern was unnatural. She pinged her agency lead, who woke a data scientist, who in turn called a publisher. By dawn, the list of "users" behind those immaculate curves read like a cast of shadows: devices that never slept, browsers that never twitched, audiences that reacted faster than thumbs could move. Bad bots had taken the place of good ones.

This brings us to marketers grinning from ear to ear at dashboard reports that claim exemplary outcomes for campaigns they had approved. Imperva, a company that helps protect customers from cyberattacks, says in its 2025 Bad Bot Report: "Automated traffic has surpassed human activity for the first time in a decade, reaching 51% of all internet traffic, with bad bots comprising 37% of that figure. Key sectors like financial services, healthcare, and e-commerce are prime targets for AI-powered bot attacks aimed at data scraping, fraud, and account hijacking."

Draining your ad budget

Investigations unveiled CycloneBot, a scheme capable of spoofing about 1.5 million devices daily and generating up to 250 million falsified ad requests. ShadowBot faked 35 million mobile and CTV devices. Human Security, a firm dealing with fraud and bot activity, discovered in 2022 a scam they later named Vastflux. The scammers pumped more than 12 billion fraudulent ad requests per day, infecting nearly 11 million devices.

The scammers modified the ad before placing it in the acquired ad space. Malicious JavaScript code was added, containing instructions on which applications to spoof. An additional piece of code was added to digital advertising creations, enabling fraudsters to play up to 25 video ads at once, one under the other, and thus record up to 25 ad impressions instead of one that was visible to the recipient.

Forensics...to detect cyber fraud

Closer home, an Indian media house syndicating OTT programmes through telecom companies saw a surge in affiliate-driven sign-ups. Each registration passed OTP verification against a mobile number, yet a material share of users later denied initiating the purchase. The situation triggered penalties and claw-backs. Our forensics team was called in to investigate. We flagged server-origin traffic from data-centre autonomous system numbers, headless browser signatures, uniform viewport stacks, and near-fixed inter-event timings (keypress -> mouse-move -> click) with minimal variance. Our team recommended corrective measures, much to the relief of the media house.

As an advertiser, you must prevent bots from eating into your ad budget. Fortunately, the same class of models that create a counterfeited audience can also light a trail to it. Our own work in Mumbai has leaned into that symmetry, using graph analysis on bidstreams, sequence models that study dwell and scroll, and cross-referenced device intelligence to separate theatre from attention.

How to stop the rot

Just like the preamble, the headline writes itself on days like these: Spot the bot. Stop the rot. Continue to be watchful 24x7. You are in a theatre where the cast list refreshes by the hour, and the curtain never quite falls.

Views are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Flashy growth

Apropos of "90-day treadmill" (*FE*, October 8), the debate over quarterly reporting highlights how modern markets have become captive to short-term thinking. The fixation on every 90-day result reflects an economy wired for instant gratification—fund managers chase quarterly targets, executives polish numbers for optics, and minor

earnings shifts become breaking news. This cycle rewards appearances over achievement and volatility over vision. Extending the reporting gap alone won't change this mindset. We must redefine success—it must prize innovation, endurance, and genuine value creation over the illusion of quick gains. Real growth is measured not by the quarter, but by the quality and resilience of progress over time. —A Myilsami, Coimbatore

Utilising excess premium

Apropos of "RBI must reform deposit insurance rates" (*FE*, October 8), the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) proposal for a reform in deposit insurance rates by linking the premium to the banks' risk profile is most welcome. This will replace the current flat rate premium for all banks. The probability of public sector bank failures is less and the RBI has enough tools to reset private

banks in need of a bailout. The surplus premium collected over the claims could be utilised for increasing the capital adequacy of commercial banks by issuing non-convertible preference shares. The excess regulatory cost on high premium could be passed on to depositors and empower competitive banking. —NR Nagarajan, Sivakasi

●Write to us at feletters@expressindia.com



Vote of confidence

Bihar election will be a test case for the neutrality and the efficiency of the ECI

Bihar will vote in two phases, on November 6 and 11, to elect a new Assembly, with counting on November 14. The Bihar Assembly election of 2025 is important not only for political reasons but also for the reasons of electoral integrity in India, which is facing a crisis. The Election Commission of India (ECI) is cognisant of the high stakes in Bihar, and for good measure, the Chief Election Commissioner, Gyanesh Kumar, described it as the ‘mother of all elections’. The ECI also listed 17 measures, beginning with Bihar, that could improve voter participation and public trust in the process. The average number of eligible voters in a polling station will be 819, and the highest number of voters in a booth will now be 1,200 compared to 1,500 earlier. The ECI has also taken into account concerns raised by political parties and other observers about the electoral process. Counting of postal ballots will be complete before the last two rounds of Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) and Voter-Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) counting. If there is a mismatch between the Form 17C and EVM data, and wherever mock poll data had not been erased, the counting of VVPAT slips will be mandatory. Among other measures are mobile phone deposit facilities at polling stations, and a one-stop digital platform named ECINet, for real-time voter turnout updates. Surprising turns in turnout data have been a matter of serious concern in recent elections, and this measure could help clear the air. Live feed from all booths will be available for monitoring purposes.

The Bihar election has gained a special national significance this time, with the ECI’s abrupt announcement of a Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the electoral rolls which began in June. The ECI sees the process as a “purification” of electoral rolls, with plans to have it across the country. In Bihar’s final list, roughly 69 lakh names were removed for reasons such as deaths, unproven citizenship, duplicate entries, or permanent migration to other States. Bihar will be critical for the BJP, the Congress, the RJD and the JD(U), with each party hoping to turn a corner in their journeys. The ruling National Democratic Alliance is at the crossroads with an aging Chief Minister Nitish Kumar who is completing nearly 20 years in office. The BJP may want to formally take over the alliance’s reins but it will have to gauge how this might impact the social dynamics. For the Congress, Bihar will be a test case of its key planks – electoral integrity and social justice. All said, this is one election in which the ECI has the highest stakes, and all those invested in Indian democracy hope to see it come out with flying colours.

Infinite boxes

The Chemistry Nobel laureates established a new grammar of matter

It would not be an overstatement to say that metal-organic frameworks (MOFs) have re-defined what materials can do for society. These porous crystalline structures are built from metal ions coordinated to organic linker molecules and offer gigantic amounts of internal surface area. Their cavities can be tuned to trap greenhouse gases, harvest drinking water from air, and store hydrogen or methane as clean fuels. As industries confront climate change and scarce resources, MOFs exemplify chemistry’s power to reimagine sustainability, atom by atom. The roots of this year’s Chemistry Nobel Prize, awarded to the developers of MOFs, go back to the 1980s, when Richard Robson, then at the University of Melbourne, wondered whether molecular architectures could be designed rather than found. Inspired by a ball-and-stick model used for teaching, he combined copper ions with an organic molecule whose four ends bore nitrile groups. Contrary to expectations, the ingredients self-assembled into an ordered, diamond-like crystal loaded with empty cavities. Susumu Kitagawa, working in Japan, picked up on the same spirit and made a breakthrough in 1997 when he built a 3D framework of cobalt, nickel or zinc ions linked by bipyridine molecules. When drained of water, the framework remained intact, allowing the gaps between its atoms to hold and release gases as required. In 1998, he also proposed that MOFs could be made of soft solids that ‘breathed’ as other molecules moved in and out.

Meanwhile in the U.S., Omar Yaghi was dissatisfied with the trial-and-error of conventional reactions and pioneered reticular chemistry, with which he assembled predetermined building blocks into ordered networks. His first frameworks, reported in 1995, were robust two-dimensional nets. By 1999 he unveiled MOF-5, a zinc-based cubic lattice with extraordinary stability and surface area. A few grams contained the internal area of an entire football field. His approach allowed entire families of related MOFs to be designed systematically. Thus, Robson, Kitagawa and Yaghi established a new grammar of matter that allowed others to create thousands of MOFs, some of which moved from prototypes to industrial reactors and semiconductor manufacturing lines. The road ahead is even more promising but also exacting. Researchers are still working to make MOFs more durable in real-world conditions and cheaper to produce at scale. Integrating them into batteries and catalytic filters, for instance, requires engineering as finely tuned as their chemistry. For all these achievements, however, the vision honoured this year transcends any single material. By showing that chemistry can design empty space as precisely as solid matter, the laureates built room not only for molecules but for imagination itself.

Articles 22(3) - (7), which constitutionalised preventive detention, are the Bermuda Triangle in India’s constitutional Atlantic where fundamental rights such as liberty, equality and due process vanish without a trace.

In June this year, while setting aside a preventive detention order under the Kerala Anti-Social Activities (Prevention) Act, 2007 (KAAPA) in *Dhanya M. vs State of Kerala* (2025 INSC 809), the Supreme Court of India underscored that the extraordinary power of preventive detention must be exercised sparingly and strictly in accordance with constitutional safeguards. Reaffirming the principle that individual liberty cannot be curtailed lightly, the Court highlighted the vital distinction between “public order” and “law and order” and clarified that preventive detention cannot be used as a substitute for criminal prosecution or as a means to circumvent bail orders.

Similarly, in *S.K. Nazneen vs State of Telangana* (2023), the Court held that preventive detention was not justified when the case pertained to a mere law and order issue rather than a public order concern.

However, such judicial assertions appear increasingly inconsistent with the operation of laws such as KAAPA, which envelop the entire Milky Way of “law and order” rather than confining themselves to the solar system of “public order”, due to their broad definitions of “goonda” and “rowdy”.

The judgment in *Dhanya M.* referenced *Rekha vs State of Tamil Nadu*, where the Court held that the power of preventive detention is an exception to Article 21 and must be treated as such – an exceptional measure to be employed only in rare circumstances. Likewise, in *Banka Sneha Sheela vs State of Telangana* (2021), the Court reiterated that any action involving preventive detention must be tested against the standards of Article 21. These rulings offer a faint glimmer of light at the end of a tunnel, yet executive overreach continues unchecked in the domain of preventive detention.

A constitutional abyss

Preventive detention in India has a long lineage, dating back to the Bengal Regulations of 1818, devised by the British to maintain colonial control. The Government of India Act, 1935, empowered provincial legislatures to enact preventive detention laws in the interest of “public order”. Although Britain employed such measures only during wartime, independent India inherited and retained this colonial relic with astonishing zeal.

In *The Indian Constitution: A Conversation with Power*, Gautam Bhatia says: “Occupying an ambiguous zone between the (formally) extraordinary and the (practically) ordinary, preventive detention was thoroughly embedded into the Indian legal landscape at the time of Independence: so much so that, facing a situation



Faisal C.K.

is Deputy Law Secretary to the Government of Kerala

The preventive detention regime needs reform; it should not be used as a routine administrative tool

of communal tensions, communist uprisings, and the Partition, it turned into a public order tool under the newly independent federal and provincial governments.”

Preventive detention was fiercely debated in the Constituent Assembly. The prevailing communal unrest lent it some legitimacy. Gautam Bhatia astutely observes that “Article 22 was framed as a Janus-faced provision – incorporating elements of due process, and then excluding them from the scope of preventive detention laws.”

The case of *A.K. Gopalan vs State of Madras* (1950) became a litmus test for the nascent republic’s commitment to the constitutional citizen’s right to life and liberty. Gopalan, a communist leader, was detained under a colonial law, later revalidated by the Preventive Detention Act, 1950. He challenged his detention under Article 21, citing the absence of “procedure established by law”, and under Article 19, alleging a violation of his freedoms of movement and speech. The Court, however, rejected his claims, holding that preventive detention could only be tested on the basis of Articles 22(3)-(7).

Thus, Article 22 became an “authoritarian penal colony” or a “Devil’s Island” in India’s constitutional geography – isolated from the ocean of fundamental rights. Parliament was empowered to enact laws that could even dispense with the advisory board review required under Article 22(4), by merely invoking special “circumstances” or “classes of persons”. Somnath Lahiri rightly warned that such provisions rendered the Indian Constitution a “Police-Constable Constitution.”

When the golden triangle eclipses

Subsequent judgments fortified this constitutional Devil’s Island. The top court ruled that even when the grounds of detention directly implicated a fundamental right, it was sufficient for authorities to comply with the procedures in Article 22 – there was no requirement to meet the substantive restrictions applicable to fundamental rights. This position endured despite the Court’s revolutionary judgment in *Maneka Gandhi vs Union of India* (1978), which held that “procedure established by law” must mean fair, just and reasonable due process, and that fundamental rights must be read as a unified whole.

Yet, in *A.K. Roy vs Union of India* (1982), the Court fell back on pre-*Maneka* reasoning to assert that preventive detention laws could not be challenged for violating Articles 14, 19, or even the enriched interpretation of Article 21. The Court also refused to subject such laws to the doctrine of proportionality, which had become a central tenet of constitutional review elsewhere in the rights framework. Thus, a person ensnared in this Bermuda Triangle of Article 22 is effectively cut off from the Golden Triangle of Articles 14, 19, and 21, and is plunged into legal darkness.

Granville Austin, in *Working a Democratic*

Constitution: A History of the Indian Experience (1999), prophetically observed: “Preventive detention had had seductive charms for the executive branch, as the former Chief Justices’ letter [to the President and Prime Minister in 1966] had pointed out. Although perhaps a ‘necessary evil’ in some situations – such as witness intimidation – it easily became a crutch whose overuse produced not only injustice to individuals but also atrophy in police investigatory and prosecutorial skills. These hazards would only intensify over time.”

Dilemma of the pre-crime

Steven Spielberg’s *Minority Report* (2002) – based on Philip K. Dick’s 1956 short story – powerfully dramatises the jurisprudential dilemmas of preventive detention, particularly in liberal democracies. In the film, a special police unit called PreCrime uses precognitive humans (Precogs) and advanced technology to prevent murders before they occur. The protagonist is apprehended for a murder he has not yet committed. He is presumed guilty, denied a fair trial, and offered no opportunity to be heard.

This mirrors the legal logic of preventive detention, which bypasses fundamental principles such as *audi alteram partem*, the presumption of innocence and judicial scrutiny. Although science fiction, the film offers a striking metaphor for the ethical and legal perils that accompany the logic of preventive incarceration.

In the film, alternative futures – or “minority reports” – reveal that the Precogs are not infallible. This echoes the inherent uncertainty in predicting human behaviour, which is the Achilles’ heel of preventive detention regimes. In India, courts have repeatedly acknowledged that the “subjective satisfaction” of the detaining authority is susceptible to misuse, especially in cases that involve dissent, protest or political opposition.

In this metaphorical ecosystem, the sponsoring authority, detaining authority, and even the advisory board function as India’s equivalent of the Precogs – issuing decisions based on perceptions and probabilities rather than proof and procedure. With weak procedural safeguards and limited judicial review, preventive detention in India presents the very dangers that Minority Report sought to warn us against.

In light of the top court’s recent observations in *Dhanya M.*, there is an urgent need to re-examine the constitutional propriety of *A.K. Gopalan* and *A.K. Roy*, and to reform the preventive detention regime. At the very least, such extraordinary powers should be confined strictly to combating grave threats such as terrorism and transnational drug cartels, and not used as a routine administrative tool. Unless checked, India’s pre-crime framework will continue to undermine the very constitutional values that it purports to protect.

The views expressed are personal

An anchor for India-U.K. ties, economic partnership

Relations between India and the United Kingdom witnessed a major step-up with the signing of the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) in July 2025. The meeting of the Indian and U.K. Prime Ministers this week in Mumbai signals a deep commitment on both sides to scale up bilateral relations and become true partners in progress.

The visit of the British Prime Minister Keir Starmer will anchor India-U.K. ties in a period marked by shifting trade regimes, geopolitical realignments and intensifying competition for technology, capital and talent.

While awaiting ratification, CETA is already being positioned as a strategic foundation for the bilateral relationship, promising to expand trade, investment and cooperation across a spectrum of sectors. The significance of Mr. Starmer’s visit lies in consolidating these commitments and in situating the partnership within a rapidly changing global economic landscape.

The backdrop to this visit is India’s expanding web of economic partnerships. On October 1, India’s Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) with the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) came into effect. This is India’s first agreement where market access is explicitly tied to investment commitments, with EFTA countries pledging \$100 billion of investment over 15 years. Parallely, negotiations with the European Union, India’s second largest trading partner in goods, with bilateral trade of \$136.5 billion in 2024-25, are advancing well.

Building on CETA

At the heart of the October discussions will be the CETA. It is expected to double bilateral commerce by 2030. For India, the pact promises lower tariffs on its exports – from textiles and agricultural goods to pharmaceuticals – while the U.K. secures reduced duties on Scotch whisky, automobiles and other high-value exports. More importantly, the agreement signals a willingness



Harsha Vardhan Agarwal

is President, the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI)

The British Prime Minister’s India visit will strengthen ties with India across a spectrum of sectors

on both sides to blend market access with broader strategic alignment.

Complementing the CETA is the Double Contributions Convention (DCC), which exempts employers of Indian professionals in the U.K. from double social security contributions for up to three years. This will ease mobility for skilled workers and reduce costs for businesses, particularly in services sectors where Indian professionals have played a transformative role.

The ongoing negotiations of a bilateral investment treaty between India and the U.K., alongside the CETA, promise to boost the U.K.’s investments in India. The U.K. is the sixth largest investor, accounting for nearly 5% of India’s foreign direct investment, and these inflows have a potential to increase across sectors, in manufacturing and services. Tariff elimination on a large number of products, regulatory cooperation, and talent mobility provisions will make cross-border operations even more competitive and efficient for British companies and U.K. companies can leverage India as a hub for production and global exports. Indian firms stand to gain through technology partnerships, adoption of global standards and easier access to European markets.

Beyond commerce, strategic road maps

Mr. Starmer’s visit will also provide an opportunity to review progress under the Vision 2035 road map for India-U.K. relations. This framework envisages deeper cooperation in defence, technology, climate action, education and mobility. The Defence Industrial Road map, unveiled in July, is expected to feature prominently, with an emphasis on joint development and co-production of advanced platforms.

Equally significant is the Technology Security Initiative (TSI) launched in 2024, which brings together the National Security Advisers of the two countries to drive collaboration in sensitive

technologies – artificial intelligence, quantum computing, semiconductors, critical minerals, and advanced materials. This reflects the growing recognition that economic and security domains are now inseparable.

Cooperation in challenging times

The true salience of Mr. Starmer’s visit lies in timing and trajectory. The world economy is fragmenting into regional trading blocs even as global value chains are being restructured around resilience and security. The CETA provides an opportunity for both sides to enhance their economic cooperation and contribute to economic growth.

For Britain, India offers access to a vast and growing market, opportunities for collaboration in green finance and digital innovation, and a geopolitical partner in the Indo-Pacific. For India, the U.K. relationship provides advanced technology, investment flows, defence partnerships and expanded opportunities for its services and skilled workforce.

It is time to set contours of a next-generation India-U.K. partnership: one that combines trade liberalisation with joint investments in sustainability; tariff reductions with mobility frameworks for talent; and defence procurement with co-development of critical technologies.

For Indian industry, this is an opportunity to highlight sectors where synergies can be rapidly scaled – renewables, electric mobility, digital finance, aerospace and higher education. For policymakers, it is a moment to align regulatory frameworks, reduce barriers, and ensure that CETA’s benefits are widely realised.

Ultimately, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Mr. Starmer will be looking to send a signal that transcends the bilateral. By deepening their partnership, India and the U.K. can position themselves not only as trusted economic partners but also as co-architects of a more resilient, open, and technology-driven global order.

U.K.-India ties

The visit of the British Prime Minister, Keir Starmer, to India has been described as the dawn of a new era in bilateral relations. Trade, technology and defence cooperation are on the table. Yet, the shadow of history still looms large.

Revisiting non-violence

October 2, celebrated as Gandhi Jayanti, reminds us of Mahatma Gandhi’s enduring principles of truth and non-violence. Yet, just days later, October 7 marked two years of the Israel-Gaza war – a conflict that reflects how distant the

world remains from those ideals. With over 67,000 lives lost in Gaza and Israel’s military actions extending to neighbouring countries, its goals of disbanding Hamas and rescuing hostages remain unmet. In attempting to destroy Gaza, Israel has lost much of its

global support, while the vision of a secure West Asia, once strengthened through groupings such as I2U2 and the IMEEC corridor, now seems far from reality. This situation underscores the relevance of Gandhi’s message. War can never be a conclusive solution to

moral or political disputes. It is only a contest of destruction watched by a weary global audience. Choosing war over peace and outrage over Satyagraha will never be a sane or sustainable choice. **Suchhanda Banerjee**, Chanddananagar, West Bengal

Can two nations once bound by colonial chains truly build a partnership of equals? As Britain seeks allies beyond Europe, will it see India as a partner of strength or only as a market of convenience? **Hasnain Rabbani**, Mumbai

Names that speak volumes

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Men assaulted while transporting cattle in Maharashtra

7 In Maharashtra's Jalna district men were assaulted by a group accusing them of transporting cattle for slaughter. The victims said they were moving 21 bulls for agricultural purposes with valid documents when attacked with sticks and logs. Police rescued the injured men and seized the cattle. PTI

Children rescued by RPF from Eastern railway stations

13 The Railway Protection Force (RPF) rescued 13 children, including eight minors allegedly being trafficked, from various stations under the Eastern Railway. One suspected trafficker was arrested at Sahibganj railway station while attempting to take the children to Delhi for labour work. PTI

Number of road repair projects launched by the Delhi PWD

153 The Delhi Public Works Department (PWD) will undertake these projects under the Central Road and Infrastructure Fund before winter to improve road quality. The ₹803-crore plan, approved by the Centre, covers 65 roads in the east, 33 in the north, and 55 in the south zones. PTI

Fine imposed by DGCA on IndiGo over lapse in pilot training

20 In ₹ lakh. The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has imposed a ₹20 lakh penalty on IndiGo for allegedly failing to use qualified simulators for pilot training at Category C aerodromes. The airline's parent company, InterGlobe Aviation Ltd, said it is contesting the order. ANI

The value of banned tobacco seized in Palghar

13.99 In ₹ lakh. The confiscated items included scented paan masala and other prohibited tobacco products. An FIR has been filed under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and Food Safety and Standards regulations. PTI

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Are workers' rights being eroded?

What happened at the Sigachi Industries chemical factory in Telangana when a chemical reactor burst? What has the International Labour Organization (ILO) said about industrial accidents? What laws are in place in India that protect workers' rights?

EXPLAINER

Gautam Mody

The story so far:

In June 30, at the Sigachi Industries chemical factory in Telangana, 40 workers were killed when a chemical reactor burst. Countless others were injured. Barely a day later, on July 1, eight workers were killed in an explosion at Gokulesh Fireworks in Sivakasi, Tamil Nadu. And yet again on September 30, nine workers died when a 10-metre-high coal-handling plant collapsed at Chennai's Ennore Thermal Power Station. The British Safety Council estimates that one in four fatal workplace accidents worldwide occur in India. This is a conservative figure, given the widespread underreporting of workplace injuries and deaths, especially among contract and informal workers whose employment is neither registered nor protected by law.

Why do workplace accidents occur?

Accidents occur not because they are inevitable but because employers fail to prevent them. Prevention means eliminating hazards through proper workplace design, equipment maintenance, safety systems, and by enforcing protective procedures and training all workers and supervisors exposed to risk.

The Telangana explosion is a case in point. The reactor was operating at twice the permissible temperature. No alarms went off, and no safety officer intervened. The machinery was outdated, maintenance was ignored, and repeated worker complaints were dismissed. When the blast occurred, workers jumped factory walls to save themselves. The required on-site ambulance was missing, and the injured were taken to the hospital in a damaged company bus. Even after a week, authorities could not determine how many were "missing" which is clear evidence that unregistered workers were



In ruins: Scaffolding came crashing down at the Ennore plant, Chennai on September 30. FILE PHOTO

working in a highly hazardous plant with no entry or exit records. The Ennore collapse also followed the same pattern. The coal-handling structure fell likely due to faulty design, poor-quality scaffolding, or inadequate anchoring.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) has confirmed that industrial accidents are rarely random. They occur because managements cut corners, underinvesting in safety to reduce costs and maximise profit. Even when employers blame "human error," the real causes lie in employer practices: long working hours, inadequate rest, excessive work pressure, or wages so low that workers are forced to take double shifts.

What are the laws in place in India?

Workers have fought for safer workplaces since the dawn of the industrial age. The first Factories Act in India was enacted in 1881. After Independence, the Factories Act, 1948 became the cornerstone of

labour regulation. It governed everything from factory licensing and machinery maintenance to working hours, rest breaks, canteens, and crèches based on the principle that decent working conditions and safety go hand in hand. The Act also saw amendments in 1976 and 1987, the latter prompted by the Bhopal Gas Tragedy. These laws were enforced through licensing and inspection, and a combination of scheduled and surprise checks. Though imperfect, this allowed workers, especially unionised ones, to file complaints and compel employers to act. But the Bhopal tragedy exposed its limits – inspections could be bribed away, records falsified, and violations ignored.

India's mechanisms to compensate injured or deceased workers – the Workmen's Compensation Act, 1923 and Employees' State Insurance Act, 1948 – recognise compensation for loss of earnings, including lifetime income. However, in practice, such compensation

remains meagre.

More importantly, these laws do not hold employers criminally accountable. When such accidents draw media attention, governments announce ex gratia payments from public funds. This turns compensation into charity and absolves employers of responsibility.

What is the situation now?

Since the 1990s, labour protections have been systematically dismantled. Employers demand "flexibility" including freedom to hire, fire, and extract work without oversight. Governments have obliged by weakening inspections, diluting laws, and branding safety regulations as "obstacles to business." For example, in 2015, the Maharashtra government allowed employers to "self-certify" compliance with labour laws. And the BJP government's 'Ease of Doing Business' campaign has pushed other States to follow.

The Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions (OSHC) Code, 2020, which seeks to replace the Factories Act, epitomises this shift. Though currently in abeyance, once enforced it will move health and safety from being a statutory right to executive discretion. What was once a worker's right will become government generosity. At the same time, States have increased their working hours, a practice started during the COVID pandemic, which is a major blow to safety. In 2023, Karnataka made this permanent, increasing daily limits and reducing rest periods.

It is well established that safe workplaces enhance productivity and profits. Yet India's dominant business culture is not about sustainable profits but extracting the maximum from labour with minimal responsibility. Until the state restores workplace safety as a right, reinstates inspection as enforcement, and holds employers criminally liable for preventable deaths, workers' lives will always hang in the balance.

Gautam Mody is General Secretary of the New Trade Union Initiative.

THE GIST

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▼ It is well established that safe workplaces enhance productivity and profits. Yet India's dominant business culture is not about sustainable profits but extracting the maximum from labour with minimal responsibility.

What was behind the 'I Love Muhammad' movement?

How did the protests spread to other cities and States? How have Muslim bodies and political parties reacted?

Ziya Us Salam

The story so far:

In September 4, in Kanpur's Rawatpur area, a few young men put up a lightboard at the entrance of a lane in Syed Nagar on the procession route with the words, 'I Love Muhammad', written in English. It was put up as part of celebrations around the Prophet's birthday. Some Hindu groups claimed it was in contravention of rules of religious processions in the State. A scuffle ensued and after FIRs were filed against 15 unidentified people and nine identified persons, the row spread to other cities of Uttar Pradesh before brimming over to other States. It soon developed into a debate on the right to freedom of religion.

What happened?

While Kanpur witnessed little violence, Bareilly saw protests as well as the use of

bulldozers on the private properties of some of those allegedly involved in the violence, including the son-in-law of Ittehad-e-Millat Council chief Maulana Tauqeer Raza Khan, on whose call a thousand Muslims had gathered at Islamia grounds on September 26, to protest against the State's alleged high-handedness in Kanpur. The police, after initially permitting the protest, withdrew it shortly before the prayers. Though Mr. Khan made a belated appeal to followers to disperse following the denial of police permission, many people had already gathered. The police resorted to lathi-charge to disperse the protestors. Next day, private properties of Mr. Khan's relatives and a doctor said to be close to him were destroyed.

Residents of Unnao too, found themselves in similar hot waters with local Muslim youth organising processions holding 'I Love Muhammad' placards and chanting religious slogans.

Clashes were reported as the police objected to the use of boards with the said slogan. It led to eight FIRs and arrests of five individuals. Meanwhile, in Maharajganj, police did not give permission for a procession leading to further alienation of local residents who read in the police action a denial of their right to freedom of religion. The police action did, however, thwart the possibility of any violence.

What about other States?

In the neighbouring State of Uttarakhand, Muslim residents alleged that police response was disproportionate to a peaceful march where the protestors held up placards with 'I Love Muhammad' written on them and called for the cancellation of FIRs in Kanpur.

Soon the row spread to Gujarat, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh before hitting Telangana, the first non-BJP-ruled State to report a problem around the

slogan. By then, 'I Love Muhammad' posters had spread across the country with people using the slogan as part of their social media handles. It is being seen as the Muslim community's response to the allegedly excessive use of force first by the U.P. police followed by its counterparts in other States.

What lies ahead?

What began as a localised dispute in Kanpur grew into a nationwide debate on freedom of expression, right to equality and freedom of religion. The Association for Protection of Civil Rights, which investigated the controversy, found that 21 FIRs were lodged, over 1,324 individuals from the Muslim community booked, and 38 people arrested in Uttar Pradesh and other States.

The Jamaat-e-Islami Hind has called for the cancellation of FIRs against members of the community and dubbed the criminalisation of the 'I Love Muhammad' slogan *ultra vires* as it went against Articles 19, 21 and 25 of the Constitution. Meanwhile, the All India Muslim Personal Board called for the immediate release of Mr. Khan and others. A delegation led by the Leader of the Opposition in Uttar Pradesh, Mata Prasad Pandey, was restrained from reaching Bareilly. The Samajwadi Party MP Iqra Hasan was also detained by the police and Sambhal MP Ziaur Rehman Barq was placed under house arrest.

THE GIST

▼ On September 4, in Kanpur's Rawatpur area, a few young men put up a lightboard with the words, 'I Love Muhammad', written in English.

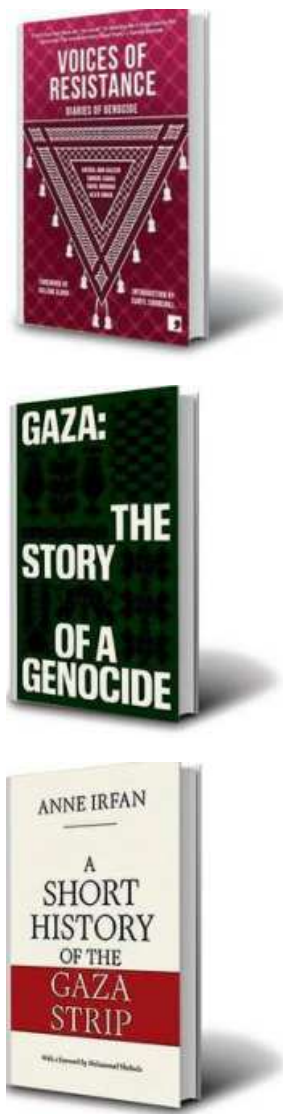
▼ While Kanpur witnessed little violence, Bareilly saw protests as well as the use of bulldozers on the private properties of some of those allegedly involved in the violence.

▼ The Jamaat-e-Islami Hind has called for the cancellation of FIRs against members of the community and dubbed the criminalisation of the 'I Love Muhammad' slogan *ultra vires* as it went against Articles 19, 21 and 25 of the Constitution

BIBLIOGRAPHY



Quiet resistance: Palestinian pupils attend a school set up by the Mayasem Association for Culture with UNICEF, at a displacement camp in the Gaza Strip on October 7. AFP



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

S. Uppendran

“I’m going to see a movie tomorrow. Can you guess which one?”
“The movie that millions of people all over the world have seen! *The Titanic*, I suppose?”
“Good guess. But tell me, what does ‘titanic’ mean?”
“It means ‘gigantic, immense’. For example, a titanic effort is needed if we are to rid our city of crime.”
“It would take a titanic effort to get our streets clean.”
“The two soft drink companies are locked in a titanic struggle for control of the Indian market.”
“Can I say, Gandhi was a titanic figure during our struggle for independence?”
“You certainly can! Do you know where the word ‘titanic’ comes from?”
“I have no idea.”
“It comes from the word ‘titan’.”
“From the watch?”
“No, no, not the watch! You see, the ‘Titans’ were giants with enormous strength who fought against the Greek god, Zeus.”
“That’s interesting. Since the Titans were giants, I suppose when you call someone a ‘titan’ it means he/she is a giant.”

“That’s right. The person doesn’t have to be a giant physically. He/she can be a giant intellectually as well. He/she can be a person of some importance. For example, many people believe that my neighbour is a financial titan.”
“Amitabh Bachchan is one of the titans of the film industry. Can I say that?”
“You certainly can. Ever since we exploded the nuclear bombs, world opinion has been against us. We must stand up like titans against the so-called developed nations.”
“You sound really patriotic today! What’s got into you?”
“I am just happy that the rest of the world has finally taken notice of India.”
“While you are in this happy mood, tell me, how do you pronounce n.e.e.r..d?”
“It rhymes with the words ‘bird’, ‘heard’, and ‘curd’. Any idea what ‘nerd’ means?”
“No, I don’t. I came across the word in a newspaper article recently.”
“A nerd is an unattractive and clumsy person. It is also used to refer to someone who is very studious.”
“You mean an intellectual?”
“Something like that. For example, my friend Raja was a nerd in school.”
“I don’t have the reputation of being a nerd.”
“I don’t think you ever will get that kind of a reputation. I understand that my boss’ son, Venkatesh, is a computer nerd.”
“A computer nerd?”
“A computer nerd is someone who spends a lot of time sitting in front of the computer. It’s his passion. You may even call it his obsession.”
“So a computer nerd is someone who is addicted to the computer!”
“That’s right.”
Published in The Hindu on May 26, 1998.

Anatomy of a genocide: how it feels to live amid death and ruins in Gaza

In two years of Israel’s assault on Gaza after Hamas’ attack on October 7, 2023, more than 65,000 Palestinians have been killed, many of them women and children, and thousands displaced. While two books collect testimonies, another explains the conflict in Gaza, providing a historical context

Sudipta Datta

Months before a United Nations Commission of Inquiry concluded in September 2025 that Israel has committed genocide in Gaza, Fatima Bhutto and Sonia Faleiro had begun work to record the human toll of Israel’s relentless attack on the narrow strip since October 2023 following Hamas’ assault on Israel. In *Gaza: The Story of a Genocide* (Verso), a volume which both of them edited, they write in the Preface that the collection of testimonies is “a way to ensure that neither the violence nor its many victims are forgotten.” At least 65,000 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza in 23 months, many of them women and children.

Established writers and new voices share their stories with writer and poet Mosab Abu Toha using the verb ‘genocided’ to describe the widespread destruction in his Introduction. “Whether or not we reported on each story, the killing machine never failed to find something to finish off,” he writes. Even as bombs fell, many in Gaza wrote stories, poems, posted videos and photos. Many of these chroniclers were killed – at least 230 journalists and scores of doctors and aid workers lost their lives targeted by drones and bombs – leading Mosab Abu Toha to ask: “How many stories do we need to write? How many poems? How many places? How many paintings? How many short movies? How many tears? What can we do to bring life to Gaza?”

Even though Gazans have been broadcasting their destruction in

real-time, why is it that the world has failed to act? The questions are impossible to answer in the face of gruesome facts like this: “Gaza now bears the grim distinction of having the largest population of child amputees,” as Yara Hawari notes in the essay, ‘On Israeli Settler Colonialism’, providing an overview on how things came to such a pass. Most of Gaza lies in ruins, with hospitals, schools, sewage systems, and desalination plants destroyed. The majority of homes have been levelled, displacing families in several waves, and hunger stalks Gaza with Israel reluctant to allow adequate aid and “everyone withering away from a lack of food.”

Articles on Hamas (Tareq Baconi) and the footage of the death and destruction shared by Israeli defence forces (Mary Turfah) foreground historical and ground realities. Mariam Barghouti writes about what is going on parallely in the West Bank and how “Israel does not value Palestinian life.... For Palestinians, Israel’s message is clear: be displaced or die.”

‘Cradle to grave’
Dr. Tanya Haj-Hassan narrates her experience at Al-Aqsa Hospital to Bhutto, noting that the “diversity of patients and the sheer scale of suffering was overwhelming” with mass casualties bringing in dozens, sometimes hundreds, of patients. As a paediatric intensive care doctor, she primarily treated children, who seemed to make up a large proportion of the injured. The demographic was “cradle to grave,” including patients of all ages – infants, toddlers, children, adults and the elderly.

In *Voices of Resistance* (Comma Press), four women, Batool Abu Akleen, Sondos Sabra, Nahil Mohana and Ala’a Obaid share their diaries written between October 7, 2023, the day of the Hamas attack, and March 2025. In her Foreword, Gillian Slovo underscores the horrific situation on the ground: “Their diaries take us to a place where the dropping off of Wi-Fi signal is a sign that tanks are closing in; where people have developed a whole new vocabulary for describing the sounds of different bombs; and where it becomes normal for an eight-year-old to casually ask her aunt how she would like to die.”

For Gazan children, life has always been difficult, for as Sabra points out, alongside learning “the alphabet of letters, we learn the alphabet of wars.”

With her own eyes, Sabra sees the remnants of missiles and bombs marked ‘Made in America’ and ‘Made in India’. “Has the entire world united to kill us?,” she wonders. During a brief ceasefire in March 2025, the main focus of discussion were the things Gazans will do once it comes into effect. “The list of overheard wishes is long,” writes Mohana, “We shall say goodbye to queues at the baker’s,” is one entry, another says this: “I will bury my son who remains under the rubble of the house.”

History of oppression
In *A Short History of the Gaza Strip* (Simon & Schuster), historian Anne Irfan explains the history of Gaza through six episodes from 1948 to the 2020s. Even before 2023, Gaza had “long been in a state of crisis,” – the majority of Palestinians in Gaza today

are refugees who were expelled and displaced across the country in 1948, says Irfan. She highlights the point that for 75 years, Palestinian people had endured dispossession, displacement, occupation, impoverishment, collective punishment and ethnic cleansing – with those in Gaza often bearing the brunt of it. “After Hamas took over power in 2007, Israel imposed a total blockade on the Gaza Strip that made it near-impossible for anyone to get in or out. As a result, many from Gaza’s younger generations have never left its 141 square miles.”

Faint hope?
U.S. President Donald Trump recently announced a ceasefire plan but Israel is yet to end its bombardment of Gaza. “This war destroyed everything” has become a haunting refrain on the tongues of the Palestinians in Gaza, says Laila Al-Arian in her essay (Gaza: The Story of a Genocide). Omar Barghouti, human rights activist and co-founder of the Palestinian-led Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement and a recipient of the 2017 Gandhi Peace Award, tells Bhutto that it is crucial to remember that Palestinians have never given up hope even in the face of “Israel’s ruthless regime of oppression.”

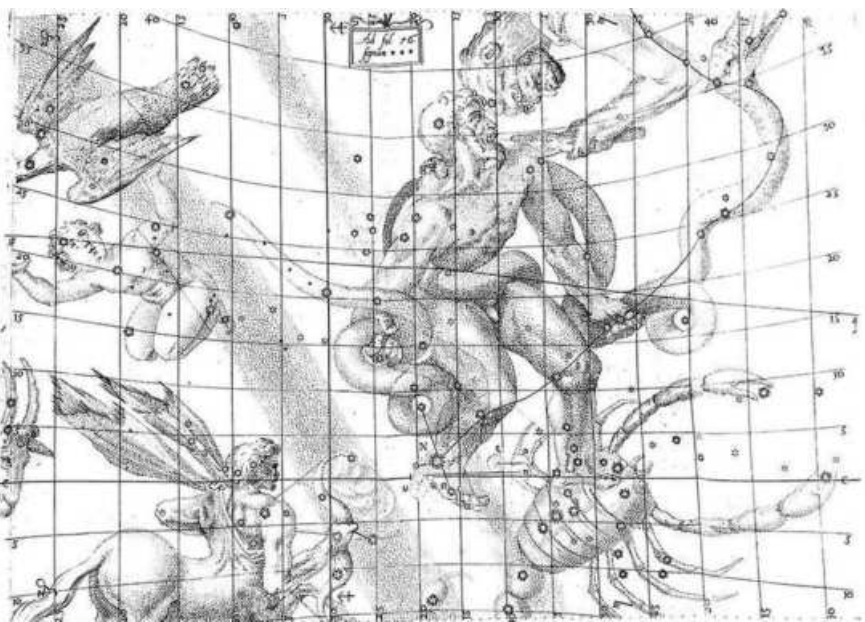
In the meantime, poet and activist Refaat Alareer’s poem ‘If I Must Die’, written just weeks before his assassination in an Israeli airstrike, has become “a symbol of Palestinian resilience and resistance.” Recalling Emily Dickinson’s ‘If I Should Die’, his poem opens with the lines: If I must die,/ you must live/ to tell my story.

THE DAILY QUIZ

A quiz on Kepler’s Supernova, one of the most studied stellar explosions in history

Prathmesh Kher

- QUESTION 1**
In which constellation did Kepler’s Supernova (SN 1604) occur?
- QUESTION 2**
What type of supernova was SN 1604 classified as?
- QUESTION 3**
What is the title of Kepler’s 1606 book detailing his observations of the supernova?
- QUESTION 4**
What was the maximum duration for which SN 1604 remained visible to the naked eye?
- QUESTION 5**
What was the primary composition of the progenitor star of SN 1604?
- QUESTION 6**
Although it is popularly known as ‘Kepler’s Supernova’, who was the first person to record an observation of SN 1604?



Visual question: Identify this drawing. ARCHIVES, CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

- Questions and Answers to the previous day’s daily quiz:** 1. Vladimir Putin served Russia in this major capacity as well. **Ans: Prime Minister**
2. The name of the security agency for which Mr. Putin first worked as a foreign intelligence officer. **Ans: KGB**
3. In March 2023, the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for Mr. Putin for mainly this war crime. **Ans: Illegal child abductions during a war**
4. Mr. Putin’s grandfather was a personal cook to these Russian revolutionaries. **Ans: Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin**
5. In May 2024, Putin was inaugurated as president of Russia for the ____ time. **Ans: Fifth**
Visual: Identify this Russian politician. **Ans: Boris Yeltsin. Mr. Putin was his successor**
Early Birds: Tamal Biswas| Bharath Viswanathan| Rajib Ganguly| Suchit Narottam| Prashansa Lohumi

Please send in your answers to
dailyquiz@thehindu.co.in

Word of the day

Prosaic:
not fanciful or imaginative; lacking wit or imagination; not challenging; dull and lacking excitement

Synonyms: earthbound, pedestrian, commonplace, humdrum, unglamorous, matter-of-fact

Usage: *It was a prosaic and unimaginative essay.*

Pronunciation: newsth.live/prosaicpro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /pɹəʊˈzeɪ.ɪk/

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

Killer syrup

Cough syrup deaths, and the lessons not learnt

About 22 children so far, 20 in the Chhindwara region of Madhya Pradesh according to reports and some children in Rajasthan, have lost their lives by consuming toxic cough syrup. This marks a grim throwback to the deaths of at least 12 children in December 2019-January 2020 under similar circumstances in Jammu and Kashmir. About 70 children died in The Gambia in 2022 due to Indian cough syrup; an equal number of deaths in Uzbekistan in 2022 and 2023 has been linked to Indian medication.



While the regulators have tightened the rules after these tragedies, the recent deaths suggest that callous operators continue to have their way. The firm in the news for the wrong reasons is Tamil Nadu’s Sresan Pharmaceuticals, whose supplies have been linked to the deaths in MP. Kaysons Pharma in Rajasthan too is under scrutiny. The investigation needs to take stock of how shocking lapses have occurred, despite recently framed regulations with respect to cough syrup toxins. The Central Drugs Standards Control Organisation in May 2023 laid out a testing protocol for exportable cough syrups in designated laboratories. The Commerce Ministry at the same time required exporters to provide a certificate of analysis. In July 2024, over 5 per cent of 7,087 batches of cough syrup from 100 companies were tested and found to be sub-standard and banned from export. In a nutshell, 18 State drug control authorities have basically spelt out that manufacturers should upload reports to show that the solvents used (propylene glycol, glycerin, sorbitol) are free of diethylene glycol and ethylene glycol, used in industrial processes. The reports should pertain to the supplies of the solvents as well as the final product.

Yet, it has now come to light that recent samples of Coldrif syrup manufactured by Sresan Pharma had 48.6 per cent DEP, against the permissible level of 0.1 per cent (ideally zero). DEP causes acute kidney failure and death in infants. Ongoing investigations should look into how the TN drug controller’s office has slipped up. Hypothetically, the firm could have been uploading false or incomplete reports, no reports, or correct reports of which the authorities took no notice. Be that as it may, ongoing investigations should lead to swift penal action. Vacancies in drug controller’s offices must be filled with competent staff, while an ecosystem of accredited labs must be created. With over 10,000 pharma factories and 3,000 companies, decentralised regulation through an SRO may be considered.

The Health Ministry has rightly issued an advisory advocating “rational use” of syrups, avoiding irrational combinations and generally staying away from such medication, as most coughs are self limiting and do not require treatment. A crackdown on irrational combinations is called for. But before that, a review of manufacturing licences that have not been accompanied by subsequent inspections, as has been shown up in the case of Sresan, is needed — with relevant authorities taken to task.

POCKET



Pioneer of creative capitalism

October 9 marks the first death anniversary of Ratan Tata. He visualised the power of technology in lifting millions out of poverty



A year after his death, Ratan Tata remains a force to remember. The spontaneous outpouring of grief that was witnessed across the nation a year ago has not quite faded from our memory. It was a heartfelt farewell for an exceptional man who touched the nation’s conscience in many ways. Ratan Tata’s corporate life and journey often overlapped India’s growth story. When Ratan took over the reins of the Tata Group in 1991, the Indian economy was on a transformation moment. The historic reforms of 1991 under Prime Minister Narasimha Rao and Finance Minister Manmohan Singh saw a shift of the economy from State control to a largely market driven one. What followed was the opening of the economy to large scale private sector participation and closer integration with the global economy. The reforms unleashed the hidden energy and resilience of the economy and led to a reservoir of hope and self confidence in the nation. India emerged as an economic powerhouse with free flowing supply of goods and services.

WEALTH CREATORS
The big change has been in the growing

recognition of business as a force for good. Businessmen were seen as nation builders as much as wealth creators. The guilt complex associated with making money has long since disappeared from the nation’s conscience. A good deal of business captured the imagination of the average citizen. A public issue, a trade agreement, the launch of a new product, the rise of a corporate brand, a collaboration all became big news. Indian stock markets entered an explosive phase of growth fuelled by investments, significantly, from young professionals and millennials. The 1991 reforms advanced the belief that business should have a deeper involvement with the society. Tatas were on the forefront of adding a social agenda to their corporate vision and to build the Group’s business as a pillar for a care and compassionate society. Ratan often talked of balancing the Group’s business priorities with its social objectives. It was not a zero sum game. Philanthropy and corporate charity have now become a part of many large corporations in India as a way for business to give back to society. Ratan Tata often saw the world beyond the corporate horizon. He felt Ratan often talked of balancing the Group’s business priorities with its social objectives. It was not a zero sum game



deeply on the moral vacuum of our unequal world and saw the need for an alternate vision, a new value system that will shift the focus of our economic activities from products to people, growth to social justice and ultimately create a society that is more inclusive and less uneven. A new kind of business philosophy was on the rise — Creative Capitalism. A reformed version of capitalism that brings market forces and technology to come together and lift millions of people out of poverty and create a better life for them. Bill Gates emerged as the most visible face of the movement. In a widely read article in the TIME magazine of August 11, 2008, Gates wrote, “It is mainly corporations that have the skills to make technological innovations work for the benefit of the poor in scale, depth and precision”. While he welcomed philanthropy as a valuable contribution to society, Ratan Tata believed that humanising corporate culture must begin from within. When operations in TELCO’s Pune factory were crippled in 1989 and police were called in to end the strike, he told the journalists “perhaps, we took our workers for granted. We assumed that we were doing all we could to them, when probably we were not. Unless workers were protected against major shocks of life like illness, old age and lay offs, we cannot expect them to give their best attention to their work”. Workers’ lives and the welfare of their families were of utmost concern to Ratan Tata. A satisfied workforce, Ratan

believed, was an important part of the growth and success of any business enterprise. CULT FIGURE A tech savvy new generation saw Ratan Tata as a cult figure. Most of them were young professionals in twenties and thirties. They were all born after 1991 and have only heard of an India where millions lived without a telephone or a television. They also shared a distaste for India’s contentious, noisy politics. “Technology, not ideology” was their slogan. Ratan in one of his speeches spoke on the promise of India’s young population. “Youth is emerging as India’s new soft power. They can see a door where the older generation saw a wall”. It is this faith on India’s youth that made Ratan invest in several tech driven new age start-ups through his investment company RNT Capital Advisers. Many of them have emerged as well known brands like Ola Electric, Paytm, Snapdeal, Lenskart and Zivami. Corporate India has been one of the great success stories of the post reform Indian economy. It thrived on exclusivity, upmarket products and high-end marketing. Instead Ratan Tata believed that Corporate India should emerge as a growth engine for India’s mass markets and generate large scale employment opportunities. India must await that revolution.

The writer is Senior Fellow, London School of Economics; Former Director, Indo-Australian Chamber of Commerce

H-1B visa: Where America’s Left and Right agree

The fee hike has set alarm bells ringing in both the US and Indian IT sectors. The Big Tech costs in the US will likely rise

Atanu Biswas

The “American Dream” for many Indians looks hazy, as the US tech sector — and India too — was rocked by the Trump administration’s new H-1B visa policy, which requires new applicants to pay a one-time \$100,000 fee. With an annual cap of 85,000, the H-1B visa enables US employers to sponsor foreign workers with specialised talents to work in the US, initially for three years but extendable to six. The H-1B programme “has been deliberately exploited to replace, rather than supplement, American workers with lower-paid, lower-skilled labor,” Trump’s executive order said. Interestingly, the debate over H-1B visas has somewhat brought the Left and Right in America together. In early January 2025, even Bernie Sanders emphasised that the US needs a skilled workforce, arguing that investing in education and hiring qualified Americans is more effective than relying on cheap labour from abroad, as the H-1B visa programme replaces “good-paying American jobs with low-wage indentured servants from abroad.” “Cheaper the labor they hire, the more money the billionaires make,” Sanders said. One may recall that the H-1B visa programme was also fiercely debated during the 2016 presidential election, where both Trump and Hillary Clinton

criticised it. Trump issued an executive order early in his first term in 2017 that increased scrutiny of H-1B applications. Clearly, for years, the H-1B visa has been one rare issue where America’s Left and Right agree, and together they are against the tech billionaires. The tech entrepreneurs might have their reasons too. An old video of Bill Gates recently became viral where Gates recalls how 15 IIT graduates from India transformed Microsoft. Elon Musk, Trump’s erstwhile ally, who has previously held an H-1B visa, has cautioned against targeting H-1B visas, claiming that the US lacks sufficient domestic talent to fill critical tech sector job openings. “The reason I’m in America along with so many critical people who built SpaceX, Tesla and hundreds of other companies that made America strong is because of H-1B,” Musk stated. Vivek Ramaswami, who was the DOGE boss initially, jointly with Musk, was also vocally supportive of the H-1B visa. But Trump’s support base — the MAGA world – is clearly against immigration — and H-1B visas too. For example, in December 2024, in his popular podcast War Room, Steve Bannon, a prominent strategist during Trump’s first term, called H-1B visas a “scam” by Silicon Valley titans. There was controversy in Trumpworld prior to his second inauguration since H-1B visas made for a strange contradiction. Trump had stated his support for the



H1-B. Unresolved questions GETTY IMAGES

programme at that time; crucially, Elon Musk was much closer to him at the time. The new fees might make it more difficult for the US to attract the best talent from around the globe and would significantly limit its capacity to innovate and expand the economy, thereby reducing its competitiveness in the tech sector and across all industries. And US companies will undoubtedly have to pay a lot more for recruiting Americans instead.

BIG TECH IMPACT As a result, Big Tech costs in the US will rise regardless. Will they face harder competition globally? Will a number of cheaper regional giants emerge in various parts of the world? For example, amidst recent changes to the H-1B visa

programme, Germany is actively inviting skilled Indian professionals to work in the country. The stalwarts who have made an indelible mark in the US after obtaining an H-1B visa include Sundar Pichai and Satya Nadella as well. Given that Indians receive approximately three-quarters of the H-1B visas granted annually, India is naturally quite concerned. For years, there has been much discussion about the economic impact of H-1B. Milton Friedman was quoted by Paul Donnelly in a 2002 Computerworld paper as saying that the H-1B programme serves as a corporate subsidy. Several studies revealed that H-1B visas increased production efficiency, reduced the cost of IT products, increased their output, and significantly increased profits for IT companies while maintaining lower earnings and employment for US computer scientists. According to JP Morgan economists, the H-1B visa fee hike could cut 5,500 jobs each month, mostly Indian talent. Companies may pass 30-70 per cent of the H-1B visa fee hike to clients, says Crisil. Will the techies be offered lower salaries as a result? Also, the newly proposed ‘weighted selection process’ aims to prioritise the allocation of H-1B visas to higher-skilled and higher-paid foreign workers. There are many unresolved questions.

The writer is Professor of Statistics, Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata

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

Tragic deaths The deaths of at least 20 children in Madhya Pradesh and in Rajasthan after consuming a contaminated cough syrup (Coldrif syrup) have shone an unflattering light on the Indian pharmaceutical industry and the systemic regulatory collapse. The Indian pharmaceutical industry has positioned itself as the pharmacy of the world by supplying more than 40 per cent of generics used in the US and more than 90 per cent of medicines in several African nations. However, the grim reality is that its regulatory mechanisms fail to do justice to this billing. Moreover, while pharma units are required to

maintain a database on manufacturing practices and inspection results to alert manufacturers and doctors about the history of a brand, state regulators lack autonomy and resources to carry out their mandate of ensuring the safety and efficacy of drugs. Strengthening vigilance while making the regulatory oversight mechanism more robust is the need of the hour. M Jeyaram Sholavandan (TN) Bihar voters’ dilemma This refers to the Editorial “Battle for Bihar” (October 8). The Bihar

electorate is faced with a Hobson’s choice. Bihar, once the best-administered state in the country, is now a laggard in many key indicators of social and economic development. Voters have to choose between an honest veteran with rich experience but much less vigour and a youngster without a clear vision and a clean reputation as the leader. Both groups are too busy finding faults with the rivals during their election campaign, with neither offering a clear vision for the State’s future. In this, the entry of a new party led by Prashant Kishor is likely to be a spoiler. Bihar will probably vote for the Least Unacceptable Alternative in

the absence of No Other Alternative. YG Chouksey Pune For financial stability This refers to article ‘RBI goes for major growth push’ (October 8). Cost-effective, liberalised, and fast credit dispensation is critical for boosting growth. However, it is also essential for banks to adhere to the banking regulations. Banks and NBFCs diverging from the RBI regulations end up with dud assets, impacting the health of the financial sector. Trump tariffs are pushing India to expand its foreign trade with other

countries. The government and RBI policies need to be in sync to ensure that the interest, inflation, and capital formation rates are supportive. Financial inclusion with financial discipline is essential for inclusive growth and therefore banks being drivers of growth need to be disciplined and proactive. Economic growth with financial stability is crucial for achieving the goal of transforming Bharat into a developed nation by 2047, and for elevating the economy among the top three. VSK Pillai Changanacherry

Organic ties with Australia

Exchanges in sustainability practices will help India

Ganesh Valiachi

The signing of the Mutual Recognition Arrangement (MRA) for organic products between India and Australia marks a transformative step in the evolving trade landscape of the two nations. Anchored in the spirit of the India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Arrangement (ECTA), the MRA harmonises organic standards and certification systems, thereby reducing barriers and opening new opportunities in a sector that directly links trade with sustainability.

India and Australia already share a robust trade relationship, with bilateral merchandise trade rising from about \$12.2 billion in FY 2020-21 to nearly \$26 billion in FY 2022-23, before settling at around \$24 billion in FY 2023-24. This growth reflects the strengthening economic ties under the India-Australia ECTA. Australia has the world's largest organic farmland, over 53 million hectares, while India is among the top 10 global exporters of organic produce. India's organic exports stood at \$1.5 billion in FY 2023-24, with the US and the European Union as leading destinations. The inclusion of Australia through this MRA adds depth and diversification, especially crucial during times of shifting global tariff regimes when India needs trusted allies to expand its organic basket.

MARKET ACCESS

The MRA simplifies compliance by covering unprocessed plant products, processed foods of plant origin, and wine, ensuring that once certified in one country, products are accepted in the other. For Indian exporters, this means smoother access to Australia's high-value organic market. In FY 2024-25, India's organic exports to Australia reached \$8.96 million (2,781.58 tonnes), led by psyllium husk, coconut milk, and rice. With organic produce commanding 30-40 per cent higher prices, farmers are expected to see significant income benefits.

Organic agriculture is more than a market trend; it is central to sustainability. Practices such as chemical-free farming, biodiversity protection, and soil regeneration align closely with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This partnership directly contributes to SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and



COCONUT MILK. A key export

Production), SDG 13 (Climate Action), and SDG 15 (Life on Land). By embedding sustainability in trade, the India-Australia MRA demonstrates how economic cooperation can advance global development commitments.

Among the various categories, millets stand out as a high-potential area. India, having led the International Year of Millets 2023, has positioned millets as climate-resilient, nutritious, and globally relevant. Their inclusion in organic exports strengthens India's food diplomacy while meeting Australia's rising demand for healthy and sustainable grains. Co-developing millet value chains can create shared benefits, reinforcing both trade and sustainability goals.

The MRA not only opens the door for expansion of organic trade into spices, cereals, tea, beverages, and wines but also provides a framework for capacity building, farmer training, traceability, and certification integrity. Ensuring strict separation of organic and non-organic supply chains will be vital to maintain consumer trust, as emphasised by India's Commerce Secretary. With the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) as implementing agencies, smooth execution and monitoring will be key. This arrangement also offers a model for broader trade cooperation. For India, which aspires to become the "Organic Food Basket of the World," success with Australia could pave the way for similar MRAs with other developed economies. This would not only diversify export destinations but also strengthen India's role as a trusted supplier in organic agriculture, adding momentum to its vision of sustainable trade growth.

The writer is an Assistant Professor at Symbiosis Institute of International Business (SIIB), Pune. Views are personal



HARISH BHAT

Today, October 9, 2025, marks one year since the demise of Ratan Tata. The outpouring of love and respect that we witnessed when he passed away was both special and rare. Millions of Indians felt a sense of personal loss. He was an icon for people across age groups. What lay at the heart of his leadership, that endeared him to an entire nation?

Over the past year, I have interviewed many people who worked closely with Ratan Tata, in an attempt to answer this question. I have discovered that a single powerful theme cut through various facets of his life — his urge and resolve to do what is right.

Ratan Tata was a pioneer who took the Tata group into new and uncharted areas, including passenger cars and onto the global stage. He was an outstanding industrialist who steered the rapid and profitable growth of the Tata group. He was a philanthropist who led the country's fight against cancer through the Tata Trusts, and contributed significantly to many other urgent social causes across the country. He was a big supporter of young start-ups in India. Across all these facets, he was constantly obsessed with doing the right thing.

Doing the right thing meant many things to Ratan Tata, including serving as a true custodian of the Tata legacy of nation building, leading with integrity and fostering fairness in everything that he did. Yet there is one aspect which came right on top of everything else — his care, compassion and respect for people. Virtually everyone who has worked closely with him spoke about how he felt a deep sense of responsibility towards people, and how he would inevitably prioritise their needs.

CARE FOR PEOPLE

In January 2021, a news report about Ratan Tata suddenly went viral. This report had nothing to do with the Tata group's businesses. It merely said that Ratan Tata had travelled all the way to the Friends Society in Pune to spend some time with a former employee who had been unwell for two years. This was a private visit, and would have gone completely unnoticed, except for a post on LinkedIn written by a person who got to know about the visit. This small episode brought alive one of the defining characteristics of the man — his care for people who worked with him.

In moments of crisis, he was first and foremost a caring human being and only then a corporate leader. On November 26, 2008, when the city of Mumbai, including the Taj Mahal Hotel, was attacked by armed terrorists, Ratan Tata



A leader who put people first

Care, compassion and respect for people were at the heart of Ratan Tata's leadership

stood outside the Taj for nearly three days, "sharing the agony, helpless yet determined to endure and to extend a helping hand." Immediately thereafter, he established the Taj Public Service Welfare Trust, to provide help to all victims of the terror attacks — including the public, police, firemen, security forces and employees of the Taj. This Trust played a key role in efforts towards relief and rehabilitation.

Ratan Tata's care and compassion went beyond human beings — his love and care for stray dogs and animals is well known. Apart from the personal care that he displayed towards dogs, he

Everyone who has worked closely with him spoke about how he felt a deep sense of responsibility towards people, and how he would inevitably prioritise their needs

was keen to create institutional facilities for the proper care of animals. One such dream came true towards the end of his life, when the Tata Trusts' Small Animals Hospital officially opened its doors in Mumbai during July 2024. Ratan Tata had personally championed this project.

Another aspect of Ratan Tata's respect for people came alive in how he interacted with people. Ishaat Hussain, retired Director of Tata Sons, who worked closely with Ratan Tata, has told me: "He believed in human dignity. One of the things he would say very often to us was — never impinge on a person's dignity. It was this belief that led to his very courteous and humble demeanour."

RESPECT AND ADMIRATION

Senior Tata executives have narrated to me interesting stories of episodes where they had unfortunately got late to a meeting with Ratan Tata, or had a difference of view with him on some specific business proposal. These instances caused them great anxiety, but the exemplary manner in which Ratan

Tata responded to them in each of these cases strengthened the bond of respect and admiration that they had for him.

Ratan Tata's respect for people also extended to meeting every commitment that he made to others. Atul Bhide, a development sector professional, has described to me how Ratan Tata went out of his way to keep a commitment he had made to recording an audio foreword for a book. In fact, when Ratan Tata had to postpone this appointment, he wrote a personal note apologizing for the delay.

These are simple human stories. Yet, when I heard them, they stirred so many emotions within me. Because care, compassion and respect for people is at the heart of truly great leadership. This is why Ratan Tata touched a chord with the entire nation. Today, we remember him and pay a fond tribute.

The writer is a marketer and author. He was previously the Brand Custodian, Tata Sons. His new book, 'Doing the right thing — learnings from Ratan Tata', will be published later this month by Penguin Random House

thehindubusinessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

October 9, 2005

Mittal Steel signs MoU with Jharkhand for ₹40,000-cr plant

Mineral-rich Jharkhand added another feather to its industrial cap with global steel major Mittal Steel Company NV signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the State Government for setting up a 12-million-tonnesper-annum (mtpa) steel plant in the State at an estimated investment of ₹40,000 crore (\$9.3 billion).

Interest rates may harden, say bankers

Bankers and analysts expect interest rates to go up at least by 50 basis points, in the current fiscal, in view of the expected eight per cent growth in GDP, and the hardening trend in global interest rates. According to them, a healthy credit growth in corporate and retail sectors coupled with inflation that is inching up are the factors that could lead to hardening of rates.

BP to sell petrochem unit to Ineos for \$9 b

BP Plc (BP) has agreed to sell Innovene, its largest petrochemicals unit, to Ineos Plc for \$9 billion, rather than divest the business through an initial public offering. The privately-held, UK based chemicals company Ineos said the acquisition would make it the world's fourth largest independent petrochemicals company behind Dow Chemical Co, El DuPont and BASF AG.

Monetary policy calls for robust risk management

K Srinivasa Rao

The wider autonomy granted to banks is a remarkable feature of the new policy. Additional measures aimed at boosting the resilience and competitiveness of the banking sector include improving credit flow, promoting ease of doing business, simplifying foreign exchange management, enhancing consumer satisfaction, and internationalizing the rupee.

Some significant, long-term additional measures include the rollout of the Expected Credit Loss (ECL) framework, effective from April 1, 2027, which offers a transition period until March 31, 2031. The updated Basel III standards for the capital adequacy ratio will take effect starting April 1, 2027. Additionally, a draft of the Standardised Approach to Credit Risk will be introduced, which is expected to lower overall capital requirements for lending to MSMEs and residential real estate, including home loans.

A tectonic shift is the introduction of risk-based deposit insurance premi-

ums, replacing the current flat rate. The differential pricing of deposit premiums must be well-balanced to ensure that the higher cost of deposit insurance for smaller banks does not exacerbate liquidity and interest rate risk. Credit growth-centric measures included expanding the scope of capital market lending by providing a framework for banks to finance acquisitions by Indian corporates. It is proposed to remove the regulatory ceiling on lending against listed debt securities. The lending limits for banks against shares have been increased from ₹20 lakh to ₹1 crore, and for IPOs, the lending limit has been raised from ₹10 lakh to ₹25 lakh.

LOWER RISK WEIGHTS

To reduce the cost of providing loans to infrastructure through NBFCs, risk weights will be lowered. Licensing to establish urban cooperative banks, which have been on hold since 2004, will be reopened to expand the sector. Through digital banking services, banks should offer a bouquet of services sim-



LENDERS. Greater exposure to risk

ilar to those provided for the basic savings bank deposit (BSBD) account, eliminating the minimum balance requirement and associated charges. It can allow banks to offer separate 'digital-only deposit accounts' for the young, tech-savvy target group with low transaction costs. The RBI Ombudsman Scheme will be extended to cover rural cooperative banks.

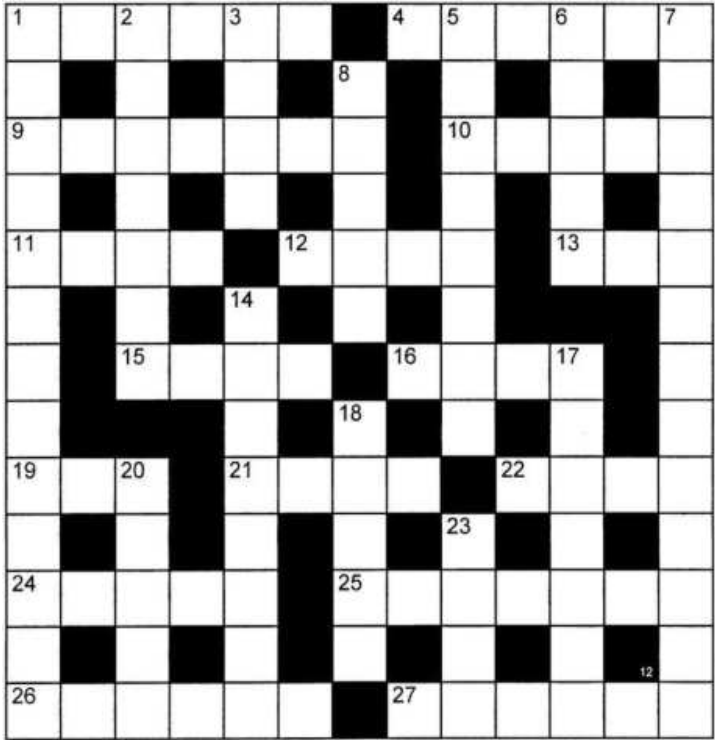
The expanded operational space places a heavy responsibility on REs to establish internal micro-prudential norms and enhance risk management practices. Banks need to analyse their

existing detailed operational data to identify current risks, set a revised risk appetite considering internal SWOT analyses to explore new business opportunities, and develop a suitable business model for the next 4-5 years. They should align their risk appetite with their internal capacity for expansion and avoid taking on an excessive scale of risks.

Forecasting expected credit losses (ECL) may involve incorporating authentic data on the probability of default (PD), loss given default (LGD), and exposure at default (EAD), along with information on special mention accounts (SMA). The glide path until March 31, 2031, provides banks with the transition. In a nutshell, lenders will be exposed to a significantly higher level of risk. It requires aligning data requirements, strengthening IT infrastructure, upgrading risk management skills, and maintaining higher compliance standards.

The writer is Adjunct Professor, Institute of Insurance and Risk Management, Hyderabad. Views are personal

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2799



EASY

ACROSS

- One taking prisoner (6)
- Hospital outpatients' session (6)
- Treatment for tired, painful muscles (7)
- God overthrown by Zeus; giant (5)
- Carriageway (4)
- Massive breakwater (4)
- A lady's (3)
- Rim (4)
- Nearest following (4)
- No goals (3)
- Bellow, bawl (4)
- Of animals (4)
- Fire, fireplace (5)
- Wash the hair (7)
- Gained as clear profit (6)
- Spanish fortified wine (6)

DOWN

- Power of mind to understand (13)
- Corridor, lobby (7)
- Egg-shaped (4)
- With rubbish lying around (8)
- Indentation, nick (5)
- Saying opposite things (13)
- Storehouse (5)
- To pain or injure (8)
- Private cavalry soldier (7)
- Produce, bring about (5)
- Lamp (5)
- Cleanse (4)

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

- Top car used by one taking prisoners (6)
- Geriatric in Ilchester get partial backing in treatment centre (6)
- Work on muscles as games are played (7)
- Giant bird given an ending (5)
- It goes from place to place and will do a right turn (4)
- Animal that burrows - what a sauce! (4)
- A lady's appearance in 27 (3)
- On which one will nervously move to one side (4)
- By the side of 26, halved when about ten (4)
- In return left nothing on the board (3)
- Loud bellow from right man in boat (4)
- Ounce put back in charge of the animals (4)
- At home, with broken leg, beside the fire (5)
- Bogus, endlessly poor hair-wash (7)
- Got clear profit from fish caught like this (6)
- That drink of hers, rarely empty (6)

DOWN

- Understanding of crimes on phone perhaps (13)
- Bit from book suitable for voyage? (7)
- Where Surrey plays its egg-shaped (4)
- Let it turn embarrassed-looking if it's strewn with rubbish (8)
- Nick is not to go to church (5)
- Inconsistent doctor can try one out (13)
- Regimental HQ will send one out of the country right away (5)
- It will distress one to mourn after silver (8)
- Report containing nothing about a cavalry soldier (7)
- Be the reason for making sauce (5)
- A clue to set a match to (5)
- Light application of colour in the laundry (4)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2798

ACROSS 1. Marriage 7. Peels 8. Tilling 9. Gesture 10. Oral 12. Evident 14. Present 17. Hoof 18. Repulse 21. Brittle 22. Swiss 23. Festered
DOWN 1. Mutton 2. Reliable 3. Iris 4. Giggle 5. Peru 6. Assent 7. Passing 11. Trellis 13. Exporter 14. Perish 15. Treble 16. Offend 19. Pain 20. Mint



The IndianEXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA
BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

STRATEGIC AUTONOMY

Minister Jaishankar underlines its objective: To use relations with all major powers to accelerate India's rise

IN A COUPLE of speeches this week on Delhi's diplomatic challenges, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar elaborated on several essential concepts that are being debated amid a sense of greater uncertainty in India's foreign policy, thanks to the new difficulties in ties with the US. Jaishankar seeks to define India's much-vaunted "strategic autonomy" not as an abstract ambition or as an end in itself. He sees it as a pragmatic methodology for India's engagement with the major powers at a time of significant change in the inter-se relations of the US, Europe, Russia, and China. He reminds us that Delhi did not align with any one power even when India was much weaker in the early decades after Independence. As India has become stronger, its emphasis on seeking freedom of choice is not a slogan but intrinsic to its great power relations. He insists that the objective of strategic autonomy is to use relations with all the major powers to accelerate India's rise and emerge as an important pole in the international system.

Jaishankar underlines that strategic autonomy is not automatic. It is linked deeply to India's adaptability and resilience. He argues that "handling change continuously... means you have to keep revising, keep refreshing, keep adjusting, keep recalculating... and you can't do that if you are tied to somebody else". Put simply, the methodology of strategic autonomy depends on active and dynamic assessment of the external environment. Jaishankar cautions against conflating strategic autonomy with indecision. In the recent past, India had often paralysed itself in addressing the new strategic opportunities. According to Jaishankar, the more fractured the world becomes, the stronger the case for strategic autonomy — India must avoid "sitting on the fence", but also resist being coerced into taking sides simply for the sake of alignment.

Jaishankar addressed the growing concern in foreign policy circles about the emerging "re-hyphenation" with Pakistan. Over the last two decades, India had successfully separated itself from the Pakistan factor. The unanticipated warmth between the Trump Administration and Pakistan in the last few weeks, and the US President's claims about brokering peace between India and Pakistan in the four-day conflict in May, have been at the source of this anxiety. Jaishankar underlines the importance of crafting foreign policy without being boxed in by adversarial neighbours or externally imposed equivalences. Citing historical comparisons made between India and Pakistan in the 1970s, he notes that such equivalences have dissipated primarily thanks to India's growth and international salience. As he put it, "The best way of de-hyphenation is to outstrip the other party in terms of power and capability." With India's economy now 10 times larger than Pakistan's, any talk of hyphenation is meaningless. Yet it is the Pakistan obsession of the ruling party — including the politicisation of cricket matches — that is producing Delhi's self-induced hyphenation with Islamabad. The drumbeat of anti-Pakistan rhetoric in Delhi signals a lack of political self-assurance, and worse still, it provides political oxygen at home and abroad to an army-led government that captured power through a rigged election in Islamabad. Separating the Pakistan policy from the domestic political calculus of the ruling party is the best guarantor of preventing India's re-hyphenation with Pakistan.

WOMEN UNBOWED

Faced with a bully, participants of Miss Rishikesh refused to fold away their aspirations, asserted their right to choose

ON OCTOBER 3, when Raghvendra Bhatnagar, president of the Rashtriya Hindu Shakti Sangathan, barged into the venue where rehearsals for the Miss Rishikesh pageant were taking place, demanding that the event be cancelled because it went against Uttarakhand's "sanskriti", the scene could have unfolded in a dispiritingly familiar way. It has, after all, happened many times before: Self-appointed guardians of morality muscle into spaces that they believe are the sites of violation of an imagined code. Those attacked, believing they have little choice, give in. What sets the Rishikesh incident apart is the heartening response of the pageant contestants.

Faced with a bully, they stood tall, refusing to fold away their aspirations and insisting on their right to choose their way. The would-be disruptor was forced to abandon his campaign, the event proceeded as planned the next day and a new Miss Rishikesh was crowned. The victory is small, but all the sweeter for coming at a time when there has been an intensification of the push to impose a monolithic view of Indian history and culture, targeting individuals who stray beyond arbitrarily drawn lines, and seeking to clamp down on films, books and art. The refusal to be daunted in Rishikesh signals that the voices of those who are pushed to the corners will, slowly but surely, rise over the clamour of the bullies in the room. They will speak forcefully — as the young women in Rishikesh did — of and for their right to be free, and to choose.

The story in Rishikesh is also about the irresistible rise of India's women, their pursuit of independence and fulfilment. Women have long been policed and forced to shrink to fit mandated roles. Their movements have been monitored and their lives controlled, in the name of upholding morality and also, insidiously, for the "protection" of the women themselves. Things are changing, as women occupy a little more space in the public sphere every day, as they fill up classrooms and set up companies. By standing up to the bully, the young women in Rishikesh have made the load a little lighter for others like them.

SHAPING THE VOID

Nobel Prize in Chemistry recognises work that re-engineers molecular spaces and offers solutions to environmental crises

OVER FIVE DECADES ago, Richard Robson was building molecular models out of wooden balls and rods at the University of Melbourne. Each hole had to be drilled with precision to reflect the geometry of atomic bonding. But as the models came together, Robson had an epiphany: The placement of the holes — not the connections themselves — determined the overall structure. What if, he wondered, atoms could be coaxied into forming larger architectures, guided by their own geometric preferences? When Robson combined copper ions with multi-armed molecules, they self-organised into a crystalline framework with large cavities. In 1989, Robson suggested such materials could possess novel properties. The work would lay the structural foundation "for the development of metal-organic frameworks" that has won Robson, Susumu Kitagawa, and Omar M Yaghi the 2025 Nobel Prize in Chemistry.

The very idea of engineering empty space — to design the voids in which molecules may wander, interact or be captured — stands as a conceptual turn, especially in an era beset by climate-induced crises. In championing the re-engineering of molecular space as crucial to environmental and technological redress, the award signals a pivot. As tools for carbon sequestration, pollutant removal, and water extraction from air, metal-organic frameworks built from metals and organic (carbon-based) molecules hold out promise for "new opportunities for solving some of the challenges we face".

Kitagawa, with his history of innovation in hybrid coordination compounds, has pushed the boundary of how porous materials can respond to stimuli; Robson remains a pioneer in coordination polymers; while Yaghi, considered the architect of reticular design, has shepherded theory into experiments and then into applications. Their combined oeuvre underscores an intellectual lineage that comes together in a lattice of curiosity, collaboration and iteration, each insight threading into the next, refracting through time and transforming chemistry into a discipline not only of matter but of possibility.

The Pete Hegseth Show

US Secretary of War still hasn't figured it out:
His office isn't a TV studio



MANOJ K CHANNAN

THE ONCE-SACROSANCT balance between America's military establishment and its civilian political leadership seems to be breaking down under the weight of populism, insecurity, and narcissism.

When the Secretary of Defence, or as he now calls himself, the "Secretary of War", is more focused on television theatrics than strategy, it sends a disturbing signal to the officer corps, adversaries, and allies alike. That is what former Marine combat aviator Amy McGrath sharply highlighted when she challenged Pete Hegseth and Donald Trump's bizarre spectacle at Quantico. Her words resonated deeply, not because they were partisan, but because they were rooted in professional integrity, a virtue notably absent from the current group of political appointees, who seem more interested in acting out their "warrior fantasies" on national television than in leading the military with professionalism.

A blustering Secretary of War berated generals and admirals in front of television cameras, evoking the image of a court-martial combined with a talk show, except the accused were the very custodians of American security.

Hegseth's shift from cable news commentator to the Pentagon's top civilian office illustrates what happens when populism displaces professionalism. The American military, despite its internal politics and bureaucratic complexities, has long taken pride in the clarity of its warrior ethos and the competence of its command structure. That understanding between political authority and military efficiency works only when each side respects its boundaries: The politician provides guidance, and the soldier achieves results within lawful limits. But at Quantico, those boundaries were erased.

Hegseth's speech, filled with talk about "male standards", "firing fat soldiers", and "ending woke culture", revealed more about his insecurities than his understanding of the military profession. For someone whose battlefield experience mainly involved serving as a National Guard officer and discussing it on television, his attempt to impose his idea of "discipline" on the professionals who actually execute war plans was almost comical.

The secretary's obsession with enforcing "male standards" reveals a profound misunderstanding of modern warfare. Today's con-

licts are no longer about brute strength or physical size. Cyber warfare, drone operations, intelligence analysis, and precision strikes depend on intellect, discipline, and training, not testosterone. Reducing combat effectiveness to gender or waistline is not only outdated but also dangerous. It sends a message to America's adversaries that the leadership is dysfunctional, confirming what Beijing and Moscow already believe: That America's military unity is breaking down amid internal cultural conflicts.

A central doctrine in any functioning democracy is the principle of civilian control over the military. However, this assumes that civilian leaders understand the institutions they oversee. Effective political oversight requires strategic vision, not sensationalism. Hegseth's grandstanding and Trump's incoherent rambling before senior officers served neither good. Instead, they humiliated a disciplined fraternity that thrives on respect, mutual trust, and professionalism.

Leadership competence in this environment is essential. It should serve as the foundation of national resilience. The world is witnessing a significant reordering of global power dynamics. The Russia-China alliance is not just a tactical partnership; it signifies a deliberate effort to reshape the rules of international interaction, weaken Western dominance in technology, and offer an alternative to Western military orthodoxy. For the United States to respond effectively, it needs a professional, empowered, and politically insulated military leadership that is free to think, plan, and act in accordance with strategic realities, not political illusions.

Hegseth's pompous display at Quantico has the opposite effect. It signals division when unity is most needed. It indicates to every strategic partner, from London to Tokyo, that defence policy is hostage to populist moods. It also provides adversaries with valuable propaganda material: Images of generals being publicly scolded by politicians who lack the gravitas and respect to handle the tools of war responsibly.

The Trump-Hegseth duo has turned warfare into an extension of political branding. "Winning" no longer signifies strategic advantage; it signifies applause. "Strength" no longer signifies capability; it signifies conformity. The greatest danger is not Hegseth's ignorance of

military standards but his ability to enforce that ignorance through executive authority. When mediocrity is empowered, excellence quietly retreats — the same quiet dismay seen among those generals at Quantico.

The silence of the generals in the Quantico audience was not due to cowardice; it was a matter of discipline. They endured humiliation rather than politicising their uniforms. But silence has its limits. When military ethics are consistently mocked and operational coherence is eroded by political posturing, the institution faces a crisis of legitimacy. Soldiers cannot fight for a hierarchy they do not respect. Nor can the world respect a superpower whose soldiers are forced to sit through lectures on body weight and gender while rival nations deploy hypersonic weapons and quantum warfare technologies.

If Trump and Hegseth wish to transform the Department of Defence into a "Department of War", they should first understand what wars are really about. Wars are not television segments. They are the result of national psychology, institutional strength, and strategic purpose. The dangerous irony is that while Hegseth preaches about eliminating weakness, he and his mentor embody it. Their inability to separate service from submissiveness, discipline from obedience, and leadership from domination is precisely what allows geopolitical adversaries to exploit America's fractures.

For allies like India, Japan, and Israel, nations watching this unfolding spectacle with a mix of disbelief and concern, the implications are profound. A distracted, demoralised, and politicised Pentagon weakens not only US command capability but also the credibility of deterrence itself. In a world defined by coercive diplomacy, energy warfare, and grey-zone conflicts, credibility is the ultimate weapon, and it is being squandered at an alarming pace.

In a time when the world is polarised between authoritarian assertiveness and democratic uncertainty, a nation's strength depends not on how loudly its leaders speak, but on how wisely they lead. Wisdom in military affairs begins with humility, a trait that people like Hegseth have yet to master.

The writer, a retired lieutenant colonel, is a defence analyst

MISREADING A VERDICT

SC's stay on some clauses of the Waqf (Amendment) Act is not enough



ANMOL JAIN

A RECENT EDITORIAL in this newspaper ('A welcome pause', IE, September 16), analyses the Supreme Court's interim order on the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025. It lauds the Court's intervention as a crucial step, but with a caution to the government: To "pay scrupulous attention to due process" in complex matters of religious importance.

However, the interim order sends a very different message. The Court has largely cleared the government's proposed scheme on the future regulation of waqf properties and has not restrained its implementation to any extent. The few stays ordered must be read with nuance and in light of their actual implications. While the stays may appear to be small victories for the petitioners, in reality, these are almost nothing, in contrast to what has passed without scrutiny. Once adopted, they could pave the way for the successful implementation of the amendment and might even contribute to avoiding further judicial scrutiny during the final hearing. Once we go beyond the much-celebrated "stays", the question of why the Court did not consider many of the core provisions of the amendment to be manifestly arbitrary becomes important.

First, the "prospective" removal of the concept of waqf by user. There is a legitimate debate over the government's power to recognise and derecognise waqfs, and its impact on citizens' right to freely practice their religion.

DEAR EDITOR, I DISAGREE

A column in which readers tell us why, when they differ with the editorial positions or news coverage of 'The Indian Express'

As experienced in the cases over the CAA, the law on the appointments of election commissioners, and electoral bonds, judicial delay often ends up supporting questionable governmental action in the interim. Even a favourable ruling later may provide little relief to those already affected.

But this could only be addressed at the stage of the final hearing. What must have merited the Court's attention at the interim stage, however, was the amendment to the registration provision that arbitrarily curtails citizens' rights. While the Solicitor General noted that the concept of waqf by user would be abolished only prospectively, the amended section 36(4), read with section 36(1A) in an act of legislative sleight, mandates that each registration application must include a waqf deed, which is absent in the cases of waqf by user. This effectively derecognises every unregistered waqf by user, applying "retrospectively", while deed-based waqfs remain registrable.

Second, section 3C allows the derecognition of any waqf property, even if registered by the government and recorded by the government-formed State Waqf Boards, if it is later identified as governmental property. This raises serious questions about the government's accountability for properties it registered earlier after following its due processes. The Court remains blind to this concern.

Third, while the interim order did reintroduce the tribunal in the adjudication process, the appointment process of the three-member tribunal is controlled by the executive. It would be interesting to recall the criticisms of Foreigners Tribunals — their members are appointed by the executive — from different quarters. Additionally, by directing a freeze on the

status of the waqf while the executive-led inquiry is pending, the Court has left the benefits of the waqfs to the whims of the executive.

Beyond the treatment of individual provisions of the Amendment, there are also concerns about the way the Court approached the case. A reading of the order shows reasoning that, at times, seems to be based on conjecture, with the government's claims accepted as fact and folded into the Court's rationale.

Finally, as the government's scheme remains operational under the Court's interim approval, the ground realities and the status of many waqf properties may change materially before the final judgment. As experienced in the cases over the CAA, the law on the appointments of election commissioners, and electoral bonds, judicial delay often ends up supporting questionable governmental action in the interim. Even a favourable ruling later may provide little relief to those already affected.

For these reasons, I disagree with the editorial. There are far more reasons to be critical of the Court's order than to adopt a celebratory tone, as the order effectively enables the government's waqf scheme while projecting the appearance of restraint.

The writer teaches law at Jindal Global Law School. He was the 2023-24 Fox International Fellow at Yale University and Melbourne Law School

OCTOBER 9, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

PALESTINIAN HIJACK

PALESTINIAN GUERRILLAS DEMANDING the release of compatriots held in Israel hijacked an Italian cruise liner in the Mediterranean, taking about 450 people hostage. The hijackers later claimed they killed two Americans aboard the ship, a Western diplomat said in Damascus. The ship, which had earlier arrived off the Syrian coast, began sailing west a little later towards Cyprus, he said.

SEVENTH PLAN

THE DRAFT SEVENTH Plan (1985-90), which envisages a public sector outlay of

Rs 1,80,000 crore, was approved by the Union cabinet here in New Delhi. A new chapter has been added to the plan at the instance of the Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, dealing with a long-term perspective plan spanning 15-20 years, which will take India into the 20th century.

PM ON PACTS

THE PRIME MINISTER, Rajiv Gandhi, asserted that "purely military" proposals such as the "no-war pact" were not adequate to defuse tension in the Subcontinent. What India was seeking with Pakistan "is not mere detente but entente", Gandhi said, addressing the

National Defence College. What we really need is people-to-people contact, the friendliest of governmental relations and truly cordial and friendly relations on the basis of daily interaction, Gandhi added.

BARNALA TALKS TO PM

THE PUNJAB CHIEF Minister, Surjit Singh Barnala, has told the Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, that both the Centre and the state had to tackle jointly the problem of frustration among the Punjab youths who had been shabbily treated in the past. Barnala met Gandhi for about half an hour to discuss the state. This was his first meeting with Gandhi after assuming office.

THE IDEAS PAGE

Centrism can be radical

India is too complex to be governed by ideological rigidities. A reimagined politics can draw on the strengths of Left and Right without succumbing to their excesses



THAROOR
BY SHASHI THAROOR

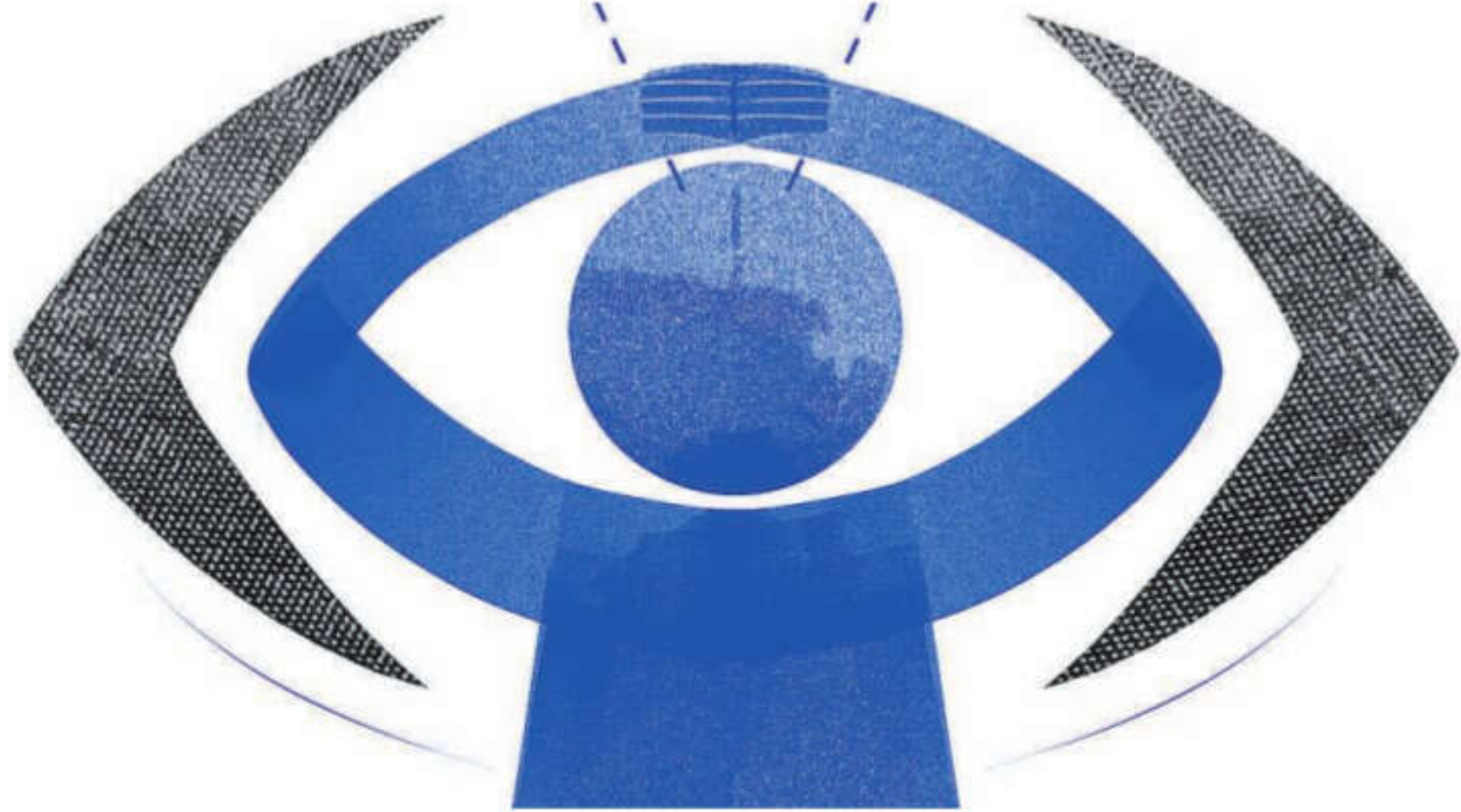
IN RECENT YEARS, the Indian political landscape has increasingly come to resemble a tug-of-war between two ideological extremes. This has been reflected in the columns of *The Indian Express*: On one side stands the New Left, championed by thinkers like Yogendra Yadav, who argue for a politics rooted in the grievances of underprivileged castes and classes. On the other, the cultural nationalism of the Right, articulated by voices like Ram Madhav, seeks to anchor India's identity in Hindutva values and civilisational pride. Both camps offer compelling narratives — but is India condemned to oscillate between these poles? Or, is there space for a third path: A radical centrism that draws from the strengths of both without succumbing to their excesses?

Radical centrism is not a tepid compromise. It is a bold reimagining of Indian politics — one that embraces pluralism without erasing identity, that pursues growth without abandoning equity, that honours our civilisation without resisting openness, and that seeks unity without enforcing uniformity. It is a politics that refuses to choose between Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Patel, between 'Rajaji' C Rajagopalachari and B R Ambedkar, between the moral clarity of the Left and the cultural confidence of the Right. Instead, it seeks to synthesise their virtues into a coherent, future-facing vision.

At the heart of radical centrism lies a commitment to Indian pluralism — not as a passive tolerance of difference, but as an active celebration of it. Nehru's vision of India as a secular, inclusive democracy remains foundational. But radical centrism must go further: It must recognise that pluralism is not merely about religion or language — it is about lived realities across caste, gender, region, and class. This means rejecting both the homogenising impulse of cultural nationalism and the fragmenting impulse of identity politics. It means building coalitions that transcend narrow vote banks and speak to a shared Indian destiny. It means affirming that a Dalit woman in Bihar and a tribal farmer in Chhattisgarh are not just symbols of marginalisation — they are central to the Indian story.

Radical centrism must also reclaim nationalism from the clutches of exclusion. Sardar Patel's robust nationalism was rooted in pragmatism and unity, not in cultural supremacy. India needs a nationalism that binds rather than blinds — a patriotism that is confident but not chauvinistic. This nationalism, as I argued in my book *The Battle of Belonging*, must be civic, not ethno-religious. It must honour the Constitution as the ultimate expression of Indian values. It must see dissent not as betrayal, but as a sign of democratic health. And it must recognise that the idea of India is not static — it is a living, evolving conversation.

Economic liberalism, as championed by Rajaji and implemented by Manmohan Singh, has lifted millions out of poverty. But it has also deepened inequalities and alienated large



C R Sasikumar

swathes of the population. Radical centrism must embrace markets without worshipping them. It must pursue growth with a moral compass. This means investing in public goods — education, healthcare, infrastructure — while encouraging entrepreneurship and innovation through incentives to invest and by slashing regulatory red tape. It means reforming welfare to be targeted and efficient, not populist and wasteful. And it means recognising that economic dignity is as vital as economic opportunity.

In an era of polarisation, consensus-building is often dismissed as weakness. But Atal Bihari Vajpayee showed that consensus can be a source of strength. His ability to bring together diverse voices — within his party and beyond — was not just political skill; it was democratic wisdom. In our bitterly polarised politics, radical centrism must revive this spirit. It must prioritise dialogue over dogma, negotiation over noise. It must build institutions that are resilient and responsive. And it must recognise that governance is not a zero-sum game — it is a shared endeavour.

Finally, radical centrism must place social justice at its core. Ambedkar's passionate advocacy for the rights of the oppressed was not a sectional demand — it was a universal call for dignity. His vision of constitutional morality must guide our politics. This means confronting caste discrimination not just in rhetoric but in policy. It means ensuring representation in institutions, access to opportunity, and protection under law. It means recognising that justice is not a favour — it is a foundational promise.

What would a radical centrist agenda look like in practice? The promotion of constitutional pluralism is fundamental: Defend secularism, federalism, and minority rights while promoting cultural dialogue and mutual respect. Inclusive growth must follow: Combine market reforms with targeted social investment, especially in education, health, and digital infrastructure. Bat strongly for our civic nationalism: Promote a shared Indian identity rooted in constitutional values, not religious or ethnic exclusivity, but simultaneously stand for a robust defence and a vigorous foreign policy that effectively promotes Indian inter-

Radical centrism must also reclaim nationalism from the clutches of exclusion. Sardar Patel's robust nationalism was rooted in pragmatism and unity, not in cultural supremacy. India needs a nationalism that binds rather than blinds — a patriotism that is confident but not chauvinistic. This nationalism, as I argued in my book 'The Battle of Belonging', must be civic, not ethno-religious. It must honour the Constitution as the ultimate expression of Indian values. It must see dissent not as betrayal, but as a sign of democratic health. And it must recognise that the idea of India is not static — it is a living, evolving conversation.

ests around the globe. Institutional reform is essential: Strengthen the independence and capacity of democratic institutions — from the judiciary to the Election Commission. Encourage the free press and civil society to reflect the concerns of the aam aadmi between elections, serving as an essential safety valve for the political pressure-cooker. For this, participatory governance is vital: Encourage citizen engagement, decentralisation, and transparency in policymaking.

This is not a utopian wishlist. It is the set of convictions I have held since I came into politics, that I have articulated in political forums, declaimed from public platforms and advocated in my writings. I believe it constitutes a pragmatic roadmap for a politics that is principled, inclusive, and future-ready. And it does not seek power for its own sake — it seeks purpose.

India's political discourse has increasingly been trapped in a binary: The Left versus the Right, secularism versus nationalism, Hindutva versus minorities, redistribution versus growth. But this binary is both reductive and corrosive. It forces citizens to choose sides when they would rather choose solutions.

I have often been attacked for seeing merit in some positions of the "other side". But for me, the only side I have been consistently on is India's. India is too complex, too diverse, and too dynamic to be governed by ideological rigidity. Its challenges require a politics that is agile, inclusive, and visionary.

To me, radical centrism is not the middle of the road — it is the high road. It is not about splitting the difference — it is about redefining the difference. And it is not about avoiding extremes — it is about integrating their insights into a coherent whole. As India marches towards 2047, let us ask: Can we build a politics that reflects the best of our traditions and the boldest of our dreams? Can we move beyond the binary and embrace the possibility of radical centrism?

The answer, perhaps, lies not in choosing sides — but in choosing India.

The writer is the fourth-term Congress MP for Thiruvananthapuram (Lok Sabha)

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

“Once again without a prime minister or a draft budget, President Emmanuel Macron finds himself mired in a major crisis. One he set in motion, but to which every political party has contributed.”
— LE MONDE, FRANCE

A leader like Ratan Tata

He took over Tata group when it was facing a crisis and shepherded it through economic reforms



B MUTHURAMAN

IT HAS BEEN a year since Ratan Tata passed away, yet his personality continues to impact us in several ways, owing to all he did over the course of his tenure as chairman of Tata Sons and the de facto chairman of all Tata Trusts. He touched the lives of millions, uplifted families, set standards, and contributed to societal and nation-building like no other industrialist with the possible exception of the founder of the group, Jamsetji Tata. With great distinction, he helmed the group during the toughest phase encountered by the conglomerate, and he was a vanguard for the nation in its endeavour to adapt to change in a competitive world.

The sterling manner in which he shepherded the group through India's 1991 economic reforms surpassed virtually everyone's imagination. When he took over the reins of the group, Tata companies faced challenges that seemed insurmountable, though not many truly understood the depth of the crises.

The companies that flourished under a protective environment were thrown into the vortex of a competitive environment made more perilous by the entry of multinationals, which looked to snap up storied Indian companies. Combined with this looming danger was the urgent need to prepare companies unused to fierce competition, pull up their socks and set their house in order.

Even the group's flagship enterprise, TISCO, later Tata Steel, was waging a war of survival that not many understood, save Tata lifers. When Ratan Tata took over as chairman of TISCO in 1993, the company was facing quarterly losses. It was faced with obsolescence of equipment, scant product spread, and a bloated workforce so large that foreign observers taunted that the company itself was unaware of the number of employees it had on its rolls. Many, including some globally reputed consultants like McKinsey, found reasons to write the steel giant's epitaph.

The state of almost all other Tata companies was not very different. Each had its unique set of problems. Besides, there were no retirement policies for the chairman or directors, and MDs of companies virtually worked until ill-health forced them to step down, pushing most enterprises into myriad problems. The "satraps", as they were also known, acted as if they were private owners of the companies they were running.

They were very unhappy that Ratan Tata, seen as a greenhorn, had upstaged them in the race to become chairman, Tata Sons. He faced problems across several areas.

Amongst the most serious was the issue of Tata Sons' low holding in its promoted companies. The stakes were so low that a foreign multinational did not have to muster huge resources to snap up the Tata companies because of the low holdings of the promoter in them. For instance, the Birla group held more shares in Tata Steel than Tata Sons.

The underestimation of Ratan Tata worked to his advantage. The reticent, soft-speaking chairman evolved a series of strategies to address the general problems of transformation and efficiency, and dealt with company-specific issues with equal determination. He had a plan for each issue.

At the group level, his main policies involved scaling up, modernisation, increased employment of technology, customer satisfaction, and workers' welfare and safety. He consolidated the group, gave it a unified identity, and provided for cross-company technology and experience sharing, breaking the existing model of excellence in silos, using, for instance, the JRDOV excellence award to make companies compete with each other to improve performance and scale up efficiency. He was the first to understand the need to expand overseas, both to hedge risks and achieve inorganic growth through the acquisition of large foreign companies.

He challenged the workforce to think big and do the impossible, declaring that they should never rest on their laurels. But in all his efforts to get the group its mojo back, Ratan Tata never upbraided anyone and was never unpleasant to employees. He had the magic to tease out the best from everyone. They worked as if he were the general for whom they would lay down their lives.

The impact on the companies and group was stupendous. Under his leadership, Tata Steel, from being a moribund enterprise, became one of the lowest-cost steel producers in the world and became the first steel company outside Japan to win the coveted Deming Grand Prize. His achievements, too, were on a grand scale. He had taken the top line of the group from over \$5 billion to \$100 billion when he stepped down — an achievement unmatched anywhere in the world.

The unusual thing about Ratan Tata was that he was very reluctant to talk about his achievements. Very few outside the group of Tata lifers were aware of his achievements. It was his biographer, Thomas Mathew, who revealed for the first time the complicated personal life of this giant, how he overcame it, and his enormous professional achievements. As his first death anniversary was drawing near, I read the biography again. It reinforced my belief that through interviews with over 133 people across the world and a deep examination of the primary documents that only he had access to, the author has produced an outstanding work that brings out the personality of an Indian giant in all its dimensions. Ratan Tata's life should be an inspiration to the youth for generations to come.

The writer was vice-chairman, Tata Steel



KESHAV KUMAR AND NIKITA OPAL

Needs more than the regulator

Busting spurious drug rackets requires a multi-agency approach

OFTEN CALLED THE "pharmacy of the world," India's pharmaceutical industry faces a growing crisis that threatens both public health and national credibility — the unchecked proliferation of counterfeit and substandard drugs. The tragic deaths of children in multiple states due to adulterated cough syrups are not isolated accidents but symptoms of a systemic failure. India's investigative and prosecutorial machinery remains ill-equipped to combat the complex, organised networks behind counterfeit medicines.

The conviction rate for counterfeit drug cases in India is 5.9 per cent, and after procedural adjustments, the effective conviction rate rarely exceeds 3 per cent. This statistic exposes the inadequacy of investigative processes under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 (D&C Act), a law ill-suited to tackling modern transnational crimes. The absence of data analytics, forensic mapping, and inter-agency intelligence has created an environment where counterfeiters flourish with near impunity.

A significant procedural impediment stems from the SC's *Ashok Kumar* (2020) verdict, which limited the registration of offences under the D&C Act exclusively to drug control officers. While this decision aimed to prevent the misuse of police powers, it inadvertently paralysed law-enforcement capability. Excluding the police from directly registering cases under the Act created an enforcement vacuum that is exploited by counterfeiters.

The Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance (IPA) has challenged this restriction through a Public Interest Litigation (PIL), which is pending be-

fore the Supreme Court. Drug control officers are knowledgeable about regulatory compliance, but they lack the field intelligence and forensic tools needed to unearth large-scale counterfeit networks. Consequently, most investigations remain confined to seizures without uncovering the criminal ecosystems.

A careful legal reading, however, reveals that the police are not entirely powerless. The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) provides avenues for initiating police investigations under general criminal provisions such as Section 318 (cheating) and Sections 336–338 (forgery and falsification of records). The sale of spurious medicines inherently involves deception of consumers, while forged labels, invoices, and manufacturing licences amount to forgery.

The police can, therefore, register cases under these BNS provisions. This strategy has shown promise: In Meerut, Agra, Delhi, and Dehradun, coordinated efforts between the IPA and local police led to the successful registration of FIRs and allowed investigations to proceed under both regulatory and criminal statutes. The Delhi High Court has affirmed this dual approach, holding that cases involving cheating and forgery can indeed be probed by police even when the predicate offence arises under the D&C Act.

Joint investigations by the Drug Control Department and the police would enable simultaneous enforcement of specific legislation (D&C Act) and general criminal laws (BNS, PMLA, IPC-equivalents), creating a dual layer of accountability. This framework not only broadens the scope of investigation but

also enhances the admissibility of evidence in court through scientific validation and multi-agency corroboration.

Counterfeit medicine networks are intertwined with money laundering, tax evasion, and organised syndicates. The fight must expand beyond drug inspectors to include financial and enforcement authorities. The Enforcement Directorate (ED) can invoke the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) to track and freeze assets derived from the counterfeit drug trade. The Income Tax Department and GST authorities can investigate shell entities and fake billing structures used to legitimise illegal profits. By targeting the financial backbone of counterfeiters, the government can neutralise their operational capacity. This approach ensures counterfeit medicine rackets are permanently dismantled.

A robust forensic framework is the backbone of successful prosecution. Every counterfeit medicine case must transition from mere seizure of the spurious drugs to scientific evidence collection. Modern tools such as chemical and toxicological analysis, packaging and ink forensics, digital footprint mapping, and Call Detail Record (CDR) analysis provide irrefutable evidence chains.

These methods allow investigators to identify entire distribution networks and international linkages. A forensic-driven system enhances credibility in court and ensures higher conviction rates. India's Forensic Science Laboratories (FSLs) and the National Forensic Sciences University (NFSU) can play a central role in capacity building, laboratory

certification, and expert witness support.

Section 111 of the BNS provides the statutory foundation for declaring large-scale counterfeit medicine operations to be organised criminal enterprises. So, Special Investigation Teams that include officers from the police, drug control department, ED, and forensic units can be constituted to fight medical crime.

India's counterfeit drug challenge is both a law-enforcement crisis and a legislative gap. The solution lies not in replacing one system with another but in integrating regulatory specialisation with criminal investigation. The following needs to be done to achieve synergy between the D&C Act and the BNS and PMLA:

One, amend the D&C Act to permit joint jurisdiction between Drug Control Officers and police. Two, constitute national and state-level SITs to probe counterfeit medicine crimes. Three, mandate forensic analysis in every major counterfeit drug case.

Four, enable financial probes through ED, Income Tax, and GST units. Five, institutionalise training for inter-agency cooperation and forensic awareness.

The fight against counterfeit drugs requires the best of both worlds — the precision of science and the power of law. A coordinated, forensic-led, multi-agency investigation model anchored in legislative reform will transform India's reactive enforcement into a proactive shield for public health.

Kumar is a retired IPS officer and advisor to Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance, Mumbai, and Opal is an advocate

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

ATTACK ON CJI

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'The assault' (*IE*, October 8). The recent attack on the Chief Justice of India inside the Supreme Court is deeply shocking and unacceptable. It is not just an assault on an individual but on the dignity of the judiciary and the values of democracy. Such acts show how intolerance is growing in our society, where disagreement is met with anger instead of respect. The attacker's claim that the Chief Justice of India "hurt Hindu sentiments" is a worrying sign of how religion is being used to justify aggression. It is even more painful that the Chief Justice, a Dalit who represents progress and equality, was targeted in this way.

Charu Sharma, Hoshiarpur

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'The assault' (*IE*, October 8). The attack on the Chief Justice of India (CJI), allegedly over comments that were misinterpreted as insulting Hinduism, signals a breakdown of democratic civility. The widespread condemnation, both from the Bharatiya Janata Party, which is the party in power at the Centre (along with Prime Minister Modi's tweet), and the Opposition, highlights the attacker's disrespect towards the judiciary and the Constitution. The attack is also indicative of a growing intolerance where "hurt Hindu sentiments" justify transgressions. The editorial rightly calls for a stronger collective effort to address the growing political and religious polarisation that undermines democracy and freedom of expression.

Sarjearo Elnath Narwade, Sangli

GAZA, TWO YEARS ON

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Two years on, a flicker' (*IE*, October 8). The time has come for the global community to seriously work towards a two-state solution for Palestine and Israel. These deals being proposed are just a treatment of symptoms and not the permanent cure that is needed. Israel just can't say that it would keep Palestinians ghettoised, isolated, unemployed, starved, and poor for eternity and commit mass-killings on the side. Several countries have recognised the Palestinian state, but it is only symbolic. Israel is still occupying Gaza. Israelis must summon their conscience and ask if they want to inflict the same pain on the Palestinians as the Nazis inflicted on innocent Jews.

Gurnoor Grewal, Chandigarh

PREVENTING DISASTER

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'The same disaster' (*IE*, October 8). There is a need to adopt preventive strategies that are designed with the objective of limiting the occurrence and magnitude of fires and delaying their spread in medical facilities. One of the primary considerations in preventing hospital fires is to design facilities in consonance with proper building codes and guidelines for fire prevention. Combustible components, both structural and non-structural, like ceilings, fixtures, façades, insulation, mechanical and electrical conduits, should have adequate fire-resistance ratings to withstand a fire at a specific maximum temperature before losing their integrity.

Vaibhav Goyal, Chandigarh



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

Making ‘room’ for new uses of Chemistry

The 3 Chemistry Nobel laureates have been honoured for creating Metal-Organic Frameworks, whose use cases have seen significant growth in recent times

AMITABH SINHA
NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 8

IN MOST materials, atoms and molecules are packed tightly together, leaving little or no empty space between them. This year's Nobel Prize in Chemistry has been awarded to three scientists who created novel materials in which atoms and molecules are linked in a way that leaves large, neatly arranged open spaces inside the molecular structure.

These spaces are extremely useful for storing or trapping other substances, making these materials — called Metal-Organic Frameworks, or MOFs — highly valuable in many situations.

The Nobel Prize in Chemistry, announced on Wednesday, recognises the work of Susumu Kitagawa, Richard Robson, and Omar Yaghi in creating these special molecular constructions, made by linking metal atoms with carbon-containing molecules.

Different kinds of MOFs can be used for

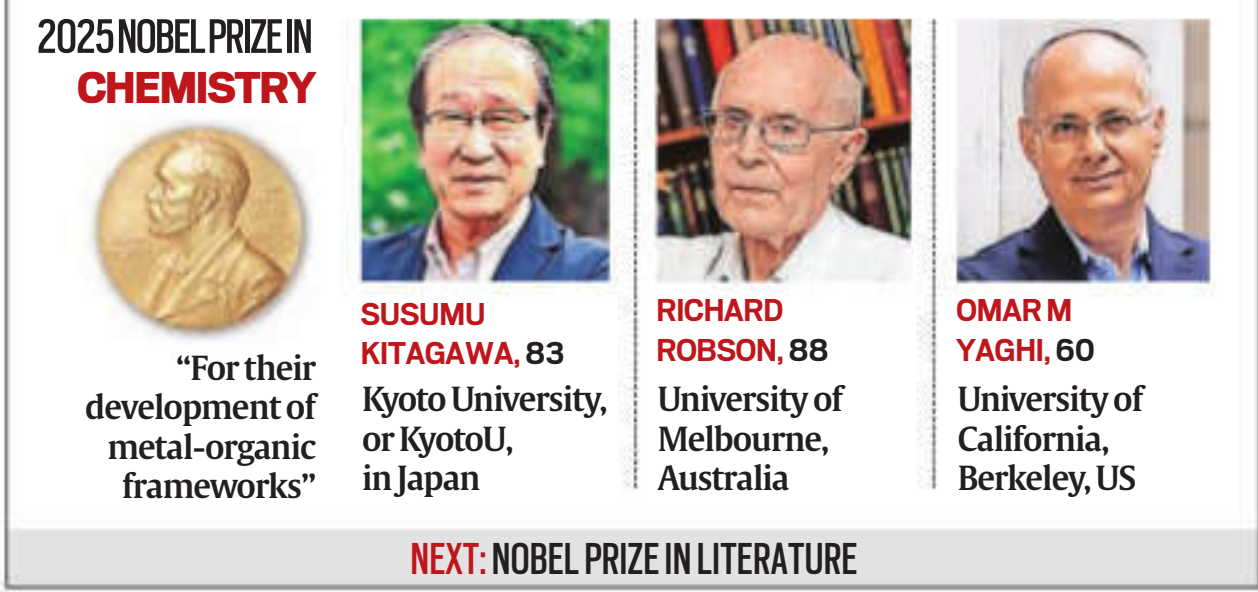
applications like harvesting water from desert air, capturing carbon dioxide, or storing toxic gases. The great utility of MOFs lies in their ability to temporarily hold other substances in the empty spaces they contain, like a foam or sponge is able to hold air or water, and release it when needed.

“Thanks to the laureates’ work, chemists have been able to design tens of thousands of different MOFs, facilitating new chemical wonders,” the Nobel Prize committee said.

Frameworks

The difference between most normal compounds and the MOFs is similar to that between a building with very tiny rooms and many solid brick walls and one comprising only pillars and beams and no walls. MOFs, thus, contain very large empty spaces confined within their molecular structures.

It was Robson, teaching at the University of Melbourne in the 1970s, who first thought of the idea while engaged in the standard exercise of making classroom models of mole-



cules using wooden spheres and sticks. He wondered if he could link the atoms, represented by spheres, with molecules instead of other atoms, and form new molecules.

He took several years to try out his idea, but was indeed successful in creating new molecules that were spread out and could

contain other substances in the empty spaces. Some of the first molecules he created were relatively unstable, and not of much use beyond being novel.

But his idea did find a few other takers, notably Kitagawa — whom the Nobel Prize committee described as someone with the

knack of trying out ‘the usefulness of useless’ — and sometime later, Omar Yaghi, a native of Jordan who had moved to the United States as a teenager for his studies.

Working separately, they created many different MOFs, and slowly their utilities became evident.

Special properties

“There is no dearth of porous materials, either naturally occurring or created. Think of bread or biscuit, for example, or sponge. These can also hold water inside them. But there is an important difference between these and MOFs. In bread or biscuit molecules, the pores are randomly arranged. There is no control over where these spaces would occur, or how much water they would absorb. The beauty of MOFs is that they can be customised to a very fine detail. And that is why they can be tailor-made for specific purposes,” said Rahul Banerjee, a professor of Chemistry at the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER) Kolkata.

Banerjee added that with MOFs, everything can be pre-designed, from the kind of material it would absorb or store, the shape and size of the empty space needed for that, and the chemistry of the MOF that would achieve the goal. “One of the most sought-after uses of MOFs these days is to try and capture carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. This is very important from the climate change perspective. These MOFs can selectively attract CO2 molecules from the air, ignoring others,” Banerjee, who did his post-doctoral research with Omar Yaghi, and works in precisely the same area now, a branch of chemistry called reticular chemistry, said.

He said it was this versatility of MOFs that was getting acknowledged through the Nobel Prize. “The work on MOFs is now four decades old. But it is being used for a very wide variety of purposes now. The technique is extremely versatile and very useful. I hope this Nobel Prize draws the attention of the government and the private sector towards research in this field in India as well,” he said.

EXPLAINED SCIENCE

ARE THE ‘DRUMS’ OF SENECA JUST BURPS? RESEARCHERS STUDY A LAKE

AMONG THE many legends native to New York state is that of the “Seneca Guns” and “Seneca Drums”: intermittent and inexplicable booms that people living near Seneca Lake have reported hearing for centuries.

While these noises have been well documented, their origin is shrouded in lore. The native Seneca people attribute the sounds to a deity furious with a warrior who had violated sacred hunting grounds. American folklore attributes the booms to the drumbeat of a ghost of a lost Revolutionary War soldier.

The mystery may now finally have been solved by researchers who last month plumbed the depths of Seneca to test for methane and other geological gases. Their conclusion? The lake is burping.

Prevailing theory

In 1934, Herman Fairchild, a co-founder of the Geological Society of America, suggested in an article titled ‘Silencing the ‘Guns’ of Seneca Lake’ in the *Science* journal that bubbles of natural gas buried in the earth were escaping through the lake bed into the water.

“The inevitable explosion at the surface, along with the reaction of the displaced water, would produce the low-pitch, dull sound heard infrequently in the southern part of the Seneca Valley,” he wrote. However, the hypothesis was never tested, partly because no one knew where to begin searching, because of the randomness of the booms.

They sound only periodically and from no discernible location on the lake. Many people who claim to have experienced the booms say they’ve only heard them once in their lifetime.

Cratered lake bed

A sonar survey of Seneca Lake last year revealed a lake bed resembling the



Seneca Lake in New York *The New York Times*

cratered surface of the moon, shocking the scientific community. The survey, an initiative of several state agencies that sought to map the lake and capture high-resolution images of shipwrecks, found that the lake floor was dotted with 144 craters that stretched for miles at the southern end of the lake.

The mission, as explained by the agencies, is to “study recently discovered holes in the bottom of Seneca Lake to determine if they’re releasing methane and other chemicals that might explain the mysterious booming sounds heard on the lake for centuries.”

“They were a surprise,” said Tim Morin, associate professor at the State University of New York’s College of Environmental Science and Forestry. “But if these craters, or what we call pockmarks, are formed like we think, methane or other geologic gases are penetrating the ground surface and bursting like a big pimple.”

Morin was among scientists from the SUNY school and Cornell University who, in late September, took water samples from the vicinity of 15 craters, hundreds of feet below the lake surface. The researchers said it could be months before they can analyse the data from their water samples and draw a conclusion.

THE NYT

ALIND CHAUHAN
NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 8

LAST MONTH, US President Donald Trump called climate change the “greatest ‘con job’ ever.” [...] [The] predictions made by the United Nations and many others...were wrong. They were made by stupid people that have cost their countries fortunes...” he said at the UN General Assembly on September 23.

The predictions Trump was alluding to are usually made using climate models — computer programs that help scientists understand how the climate changed in the past, how it is changing now, and how it might change in the future. How do these work? And how accurate are they?

What are climate models?

A climate model is a computer simulation that uses mathematical formulae and algorithms to replicate how the Earth’s climate system works.

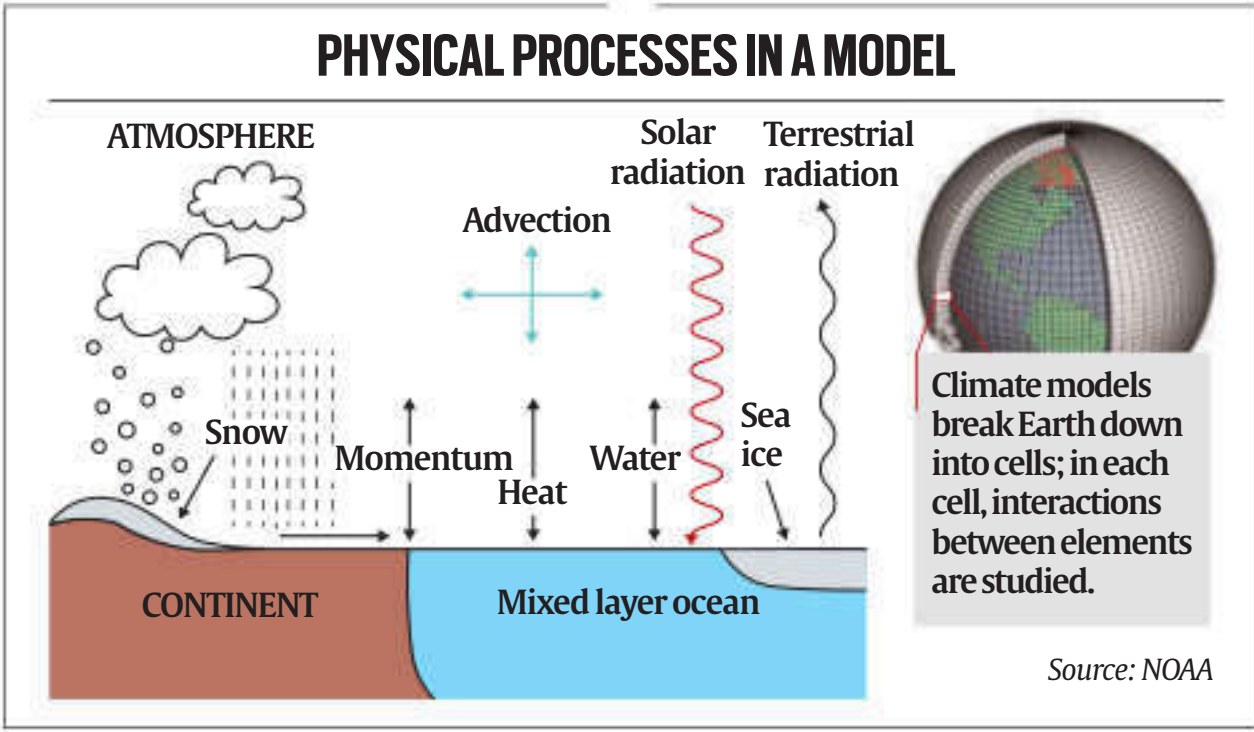
Vidya S, senior associate at the Centre of Science, Technology and Policy (CSTEP), a Bengaluru-based think tank, told *The Indian Express* over email, “These models are built on the principles of physics, chemistry, and biology, and are designed to simulate or mimic the interactions between the atmosphere, oceans, land surface, and ice.”

Climate models can forecast how variables such as temperature and humidity will change over time under different scenarios, like increased greenhouse gas emissions or changes in land use. They allow scientists to test hypotheses and draw conclusions on past and future climate systems, and help them to determine if abnormal weather events like extreme heavy rainfall are a result of changes in climate or just part of routine climate variation.

How do climate models work?

A modern climate model first divides the Earth into a three-dimensional grid, with cells extending across the planet’s surface, up into the atmosphere, and down into the ocean. Each cell is represented by mathematical equations that describe the materials in it, and the way energy moves through it.

Scientists feed input data from observations, for example, of greenhouse gases or



ocean conditions, and have the model solve equations to determine how the weather will change within each cell, what impacts those changes will have on adjacent cells, and so on.

The output from the model can include “projected changes in temperature and precipitation patterns, sea-level rise, ocean circulation, frequency and intensity of extreme weather events (such as heatwaves, droughts, and storms), and shifts in snow and ice cover,” Vidya said.

How have climate models evolved over the years?

■ The earliest form of climate models, known as the Energy Balance Models (EBMs), emerged in the 1960s. These only determine surface temperature by considering the balance between the energy entering the Earth’s atmosphere from the Sun, and the heat released back out to space.

■ Then came Radiative Convective Models (RCMs), which are more complex and simulate the transfer of energy through the height of the atmosphere. They estimate both surface temperature and the temperature variation with elevation.

■ Subsequently, General Circulation Models (GCMs), also called Global Climate Models, emerged. They are the most sophisticated and precise models for understanding climate systems and predicting climate change. GCMs simulate Earth’s atmosphere, oceans, land, and ice to represent large-scale climate processes over time, including the

movement of energy and matter.

■ There are also Regional Climate Models (RCMs) that do a similar job as GCMs, but offer more precise local forecasts and concentrate on smaller regions, such as a country or a continent.

How accurate are climate models?

Vaibhav Chaturvedi, senior fellow at the Delhi-based Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) told *The Indian Express*, “With climate models or statistical sciences, the objective is not to achieve accurate or precise outcomes. The objective is to see what trends these models are showing, what insights they are giving, and if they are reliable or not.”

Researchers say that modern climate models are fairly reliable when it comes to capturing large-scale patterns and long-term changes, particularly at the global level, such as sea-level rise and polar ice loss.

One way scientists check the reliability of models is by using past events. If the model correctly predicts past events that scientists know occurred, then it should also be able to reliably predict future events.

That said, current climate models are not perfect, and there is always a degree of uncertainty with their predictions. This is because of imperfect, incomplete, or unavailable data on complex, dynamic processes such as the nature of clouds, the climatic effects of sudden geophysical events like a volcanic eruption, or natural phenomena such as El Niño events.

Chaturvedi said, “There will always be uncertainty, for example, when models make projections regarding climate sensitivity [the estimated amount of future global warming for an increase in atmospheric carbon dioxide concentration]. That is because there is a non-linear relationship between rise in emissions concentration and increase in temperature.

There is also uncertainty when it comes to projecting climate impacts as they have a non-linear relationship with temperature increase. There is also a lack of data regarding attributing climate change to specific impacts.”

Climate models also overlook regional specifics such as intense rain in rural areas, flooding in urban areas, or heat in towns, as they view the Earth in broad sections, typically ranging from 100 to 250 kilometres (the size of each cell of the three-dimensional grid).

The most glaring shortcoming of these models is that they tend to be less accurate in the Global South because of inadequate ground data, and complex, poorly represented regional climate patterns, such as the Indian monsoon.

Vidya said, “Most climate models were initially created in North America and Europe... Because the Global North has more accurate and detailed observational records, climate models are frequently calibrated and validated using data from this region.”

Nonetheless, climate models are still one of the best ways to understand general climate patterns and make policy decisions to mitigate the adverse effects of climate change. A 2020 study, published in the journal *Geophysical Research Letters*, looked at 17 climate models which were developed between 1970 and 2007 and found that 14 of them quite accurately projected Earth’s future global average surface temperatures.

Govindasamy Bala, a professor at the Centre for Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences, at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), told *The Indian Express*, “Climate models are just like any other tools. And like every tool, they have certain limitations... It is all about asking the right questions... These models are built for giving projections for national & continental spatial scales... Climate, by definition, is the average of weather over 20 or 30-year periods... Therefore, it does not make sense to ask climate modelers to provide accurate climate change information for the next decade.”

From Washington to London: A new economic consensus for 21st century



HARISH DAMODARAN

IN 1990, THE English economist John Williamson published a paper titled ‘What Washington Means by Policy Reform’. It listed 10 “economic policy instruments” for sustainable growth. The so-called ‘Ten Commandments’ required governments to:

- reduce their borrowing needs by cutting spending and raising tax revenues;
- redirect spending from subsidies, and on covering losses of state-owned enterprises, towards education, health and infrastructure;
- broaden the tax base, ensure moderate rates and remove exemptions;
- decontrol interest rates, making these

market-determined;

- move away from overvalued domestic currencies that discourage exports to market-driven exchange rates;
- eliminate quantitative restrictions and reduce tariffs on imports;
- abolish barriers to foreign direct investment;
- privatise state-owned enterprises;
- promote competition by scrapping regulations preventing new firms from entering the marketplace; and
- grant and uphold property rights through secure legal ownership of assets.

These became standard prescription that had the backing of experts at Washington’s global financial institutions, especially the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. They pushed these as conditionalities to be implemented by countries receiving financial assistance.

Frayed consensus

The “Washington Consensus”, a term that Williamson himself coined, gained wide credibility and traction, especially af-

ter the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the fall of communism in Eastern Europe. During the two decades from the 1990s, it contributed hugely to the “hyper-globalisation” of the world economy.

That consensus has, however, unravelled since the global financial crisis of 2008 and the rise of China as an economic power. The backlash has, ironically, come from the very countries whose policymakers and think tanks were the strongest proponents of Williamson’s manifesto.

Globalisation, earlier considered an unalloyed force for good, is now seen to have benefited the likes of China, Vietnam, Mexico and India. These economies integrated themselves into global value chains, turning into manufacturing and services export powerhouses, while engendering factory closures and job losses in the West.

In May 2023, a group of 55 scholars met at the London School of Economics (LSE) to share their thoughts and work towards forging a “new economic consensus for the 21st century”.

‘London Consensus’

Williamson’s prescriptions were precise, one-size-fits-all and easily understood.

The authors of the “London Consensus” — one of them, Andrés Velasco, a former finance minister of Chile and currently Dean of LSE’s School of Public Policy, was an invited speaker at the Kautilya Economic Conclave in the national capital on Friday — are more measured by comparison.

Instead of clearcut commandments, they offer five “core principles” to guide policymaking, particularly in the light of the new economic challenges arising from climate change, the rise of artificial intelligence, authoritarian populism and waning support for liberal democracy in the West.

The principles are:

Focus on wellbeing: That goes beyond GDP and money incomes to incorporate self-worth, social status, cohesion and other non-materialistic conceptions of wellbeing.

Make growth matter: Citizens trust their governments more when they deliver a growing economy. But the emphasis

should be on where and how growth is happening — whether it is creating sufficient jobs and benefiting not just a select few.

Build resilience: Governments should act as insurer of last resort to counter volatility, including at the household level, from shocks such as the Covid-19 pandemic or Trump’s tariffs which can lead to people losing jobs, becoming sick or disabled, and running out of savings.

Put politics first: Advocates of the Washington Consensus viewed politicians as constraints preventing benevolent technocrats from implementing the “right” economic policies. The authors of the London Consensus disagree. Today, there is an increasing risk of politics itself becoming the source of economic shocks. Hence the need to get the politics “right” and viewing it as an enabler, rather than fixing the economy and hoping for politics to get sorted along the way.

Invest in state capacity: A functional market economy requires an array of supporting legal and regulatory institutions. These provide a stable framework in which private agents can enter into legally binding

contracts and do business with confidence. Such state capacity-building is essential for not only providing policing, defence or basic education and health services, but also creating confidence among investors.

The limitations

The London Consensus makes for good reading. It is well-intentioned and timely, given that the earlier consensus underpinning globalisation no longer has adherents even in Washington.

But unlike the Washington Consensus, it does not offer much by way of concrete actionable directions for policymakers. Its authors have argued against “one-size-fits-all recipes” that tend to be “too rigid or too ideological”. Instead, the authors say that using their five principles, “each nation can decide which policies are best, given its unique history and circumstances”. How useful that approach is — and whether it would have backers of the sort the Washington Consensus had in its heyday — remains to be seen.

LONGER VERSION ON
indianexpress.com/explained

Rendered irrelevant

US consent was all that kept multilateral institutions going

Does the multilateral system still have something to offer the world? For all its holes and inefficiencies, till relatively recently it still remained the mechanism through which major issues of global significance could be addressed. But holes were created in the system by the United States (US) breaking norms during the decades in which it remained unchallenged, and the problems were further expanded by the rise of China as a disruptive power. Now that, during the second administration of President Donald Trump, the US has actively turned against the notion of multilateralism, it seems that major outstanding issues — from macroeconomic stability to trade management to security disputes — are no longer being dealt with through the multilateral system.

On macroeconomic stability, for example, the post-War system has depended upon the International Monetary Fund (IMF). It is the IMF that has bailed out Argentina multiple times in the past decades. The Latin American country has, alongside Pakistan, been one of the most frequent recipients of the IMF's support. It is once again facing a crisis, born of incomplete reforms and political instability. But on this occasion, the US treasury has stepped in on its own to protect the country's stability. Last week, US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said that America and Argentina were in talks for a \$20 billion package. The peso rallied in consequence. Mr Bessent has subsequently said the US will do "whatever it takes" to keep Argentina from crisis. The fact is that the IMF has the capacity to build such a lending programme and to identify the accountability mechanisms that could keep it from going off the rails. The US treasury does not; but it has political heft, which the IMF fails to bring.

Mr Trump has repeatedly claimed an ability to end wars, and has named several conflicts that his mediation has brought to an end. Even last week, he issued a new peace plan for the Gaza war. Whether or not Mr Trump is correct in all his claims is not the issue. The point is that he has sought to do this himself, using the power of the US and his claimed personal deal-making abilities. The United Nations, including the Security Council, has no role in the process. Nor is that the only multilateral organisation that his actions have rendered useless. He has also focused on new trade deals, many of which are designed to give an exceptional role in nations' trade and tariff policies for the US. This violates the fundamental principle of the most favoured nation, or MFN, upon which the World Trade Organization (WTO) is based. The WTO has been already defanged as a location for dispute settlement. Now its very foundation, that all members should be treated similarly in trade policy, has been brought to an end.

The post-War multilateral order was meant to constrain power as far as possible. In the bipolar world of the Cold War, it had some utility, particularly in giving voice to new and decolonised nations. In the decades of unipolarity, it served to constrain at least some of the US actions. But now that the US has taken a disruptive path, it is very clear that the system has no power of its own. It always had just as much power as the superpower was willing to lend it. Now that the White House thinks it can solve problems on its own, the multilateral system has nothing much left to do.

Seamless lending

Credit on UPI can be transformative

Over 40 per cent of Indians are estimated to have limited or no access to formal credit. National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), which operates the Unified Payments Interface (UPI), launched the Credit Line on UPI (Clou) in 2023 to help bridge this gap. This had been designed to make credit as frictionless as digital payments, allowing users to access a pre-approved credit line directly through their UPI app. As reported by this newspaper, nearly two years later, the adoption has remained limited because banks and fintech companies remain uncertain about its treatment and reporting requirements. Without course correction, this innovation could stall. The experience of UPI offers valuable lessons on how Clou can evolve into a truly inclusive credit system. A recent paper, published by the National Bureau of Economic Research, "Breaking Barriers to Financial Access", by Shashwat Alok of the Indian School of Business and others, provides strong evidence on how public digital infrastructure can reshape credit markets. It shows that between 2015 and 2019, credit increased rapidly, and fintech loans in the subprime and new-to-credit segment witnessed a 10-fold increase. In the aggregate, a 1 per cent increase in UPI transactions was associated with a remarkable 0.73 per cent increase in credit.

Importantly, this expansion did not lead to higher defaults, suggesting that UPI-enabled digital footprints helped lenders identify underserved but credit-worthy borrowers. The cross-platform payment infrastructure allows prospective borrowers to create alternative data in the form of verifiable digital-transaction trails, which lenders can use to assess borrower creditworthiness. Such infrastructure could reduce information asymmetries, lower loan-origination costs, and expand access to underserved households. Clou has the potential to build on this foundation. But to succeed, it must overcome regulatory ambiguity, uneven technological readiness among banks, and limited awareness among borrowers. Research suggests that complementarities such as an affordable internet and the Jan Dhan Yojana bank account drive amplified UPI's impact. Areas that had both a low-cost internet and widespread bank-account access saw the strongest credit growth. For Clou, similar ecosystem support will be crucial — from robust credit-information systems to interoperable tech platforms that enable small lenders to participate effectively.

However, regulatory ambiguity persists over how Clou loans are to be classified and monitored — whether as personal loans or credit-card loans. Many small lenders also lack the technical infrastructure to integrate with UPI's real-time systems. Without coordinated policy action, Clou risks joining the list of promising but underused innovations. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and NPCI need to issue unified operational guidelines, clearly defining how Clou loans are to be classified and reported. A standardised data-sharing and consent framework will build trust between lenders and borrowers. Support for smaller banks through shared cloud-based infrastructure or partnerships with fintechs can reduce the digital divide in credit delivery. India's experience with UPI showed that when digital infrastructure is open, interoperable, and affordable, it can transform financial access at scale. Clou can do the same for credit access.



Economy needs more than resilience

India's stability amid global turmoil is remarkable, but hard-nosed reforms are essential to sustain growth

Speaking at the Kautilya Economic Conclave in Delhi, the Union finance minister is reported to have alluded to the enormous resilience the Indian economy has acquired in the face of global turmoil by firmly anchoring economic growth in domestic consumption. This was re-emphasised by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) governor, who stated that the country has settled well into a resilient growth equilibrium, defying all odds to provide stability in a volatile global environment.

Surely, these statements infuse a lot of confidence, particularly in the wake of enormous uncertainty caused on the external front by global conflicts and the Trump tariffs. However, we need a reality check. Complacency about our ability to accelerate growth to reach a developed country status by relying solely on domestic consumption to anchor the process is misplaced. Rather than taking the current developments as a given, it is necessary to see the challenge posed by the prevailing situation as an opportunity and respond effectively to make the economy competitive.

Indeed, dependence should not be allowed to turn into compulsion, but the solution lies in engaging actively with the world by acquiring enough strength. This is necessary not only to earn global respect as an economic power to be reckoned with, but also to enhance the welfare of the people of the country.

Surely, India has, over the years, acquired resilience against both external shocks and internal uncertainties. Externally, it has traversed far from being grouped among the "fragile five" to achieving

health and a stable economic environment, and is now counted among the fastest-growing large economies. It has successfully anchored uncertainties caused by international conflicts, including volatility in commodity prices, shortages of essential raw materials, and supply chain disruptions. With a strong and stable financial system, the country has acquired sufficient immunity from global financial uncertainties. Even domestically, the economy is no longer susceptible to the vicissitudes of monsoon failures and supply shortages. Growth and stability have been a hallmark of India even when the global environment has been turbulent.

Not surprisingly, the RBI has upgraded the growth estimate for 2025-26 to 6.8 per cent from the previous forecast of 6.5 per cent. This is on the back of an accelerated growth estimate for the first quarter at 7.8 per cent, compared to 6.5 per cent recorded in the first quarter of the last financial year and 7.4 per cent in the previous quarter. In the remaining three quarters, gross domestic product (GDP) growth is estimated at 7 per cent, 6.4 per cent, and 6.2 per cent, respectively. Thus, even as there was a certain apprehension about the growth prospects after the imposition of tariffs, used as a weapon by the United States, the upward revision in the growth estimate reaffirms the resilience of the economy.

However, the concern with growth trends during the last few years is that their main anchor has been domestic consumption demand. Even as the government has tried to increase capital expenditure with



POLICY PILLARS
M GOVINDA RAO

Swadeshi is past its sell-by date

WhatsApp uncles have been out in force after the Prime Minister's clarion calls to buy swadeshi. Sorry, maybe we should call them Arattai uncles after a domestically developed messaging and calling app that they are urging on members of WhatsApp groups. The reaction of the other members of one group is telling:

WhatsApp/Arattai Uncle — out of the blue: "Hello All, can we shift this group from WhatsApp to Arattai. Thanks."

Respondent 1: GOOD (preceded by a large thumbs up emoji)

Respondent 2: What are the benefits!

Respondent 1 sends a long list of Indian equivalents of US-branded apps. Mostly, they offer domestic equivalents of Chrome, Gmail, MS Word, PowerPoint, and so on.

Respondent 2 repeats: Benefits?

Respondent 1: Swadeshi

After that, all is silence.

That's no surprise. The concept of Swadeshi in all its many-splendored variations has moved a long way from its original historical roots in the colonial struggle. Today, it remains an issue feverishly debated in the realm of politics and competition-averse Indian business. Immediately after economic liberalisation in 1991, it had been mobilised by a Bharatiya Janata Party, wrong-footed by the initial swiftness of economic reform, and the Left bastion, viscerally opposed to any policy that loosened state control. Both entities earned grateful contributions from businesses struggling to cope with the mild winds of globalisation that blew across India's shores. Indeed, as long as the Left opposed foreign investment in retail, it received generous funding until the entry of the online giants rendered the issue moot.



SWOT
KANIKA DATTA

But the purchasing middle class? It couldn't care less about these rarefied doubts and never did. Suddenly exposed to choice and variety like never before, the Indian consumer, whether of saffron political persuasion or otherwise, lapped up Samsung, Hitachi, Sony, Whirlpool, Hyundai, Mercedes, BMW, Black & Decker blithely forgetting all about Onida, Ambassador, Premier Padmini, Videocon and even popular brands by so-called "Indian" multinationals (ie: those foreign conglomerates that had been operating in India for yonks.)

When new-age businesses such as mobile telephony opened up, no consumer stopped to ask about Indian mobile phones or Indian service providers.

Instead, Nokia, Apple, Samsung or Motorola led the stakes. Some Indian brands such as Lava and Micromax made gallant stands, cheaply assembling phones from China until the Chinese themselves overtook everyone with their value-for-money Vivo, Oppo, and Xiaomi. When India and China had a confrontation in Ladakh in 2020, the occasional looney decided to burn Chinese-made TVs by way of a patriotic tantrum. A commentator on social media wryly pointed out that, unfortunately, there were no Indian TV brands to replace the Chinese ones.

Now, five years later, China has edged away from forward positions in the glacial north, but Vivo, Oppo and Xiaomi still bestride the mobile handset market like colossi. And the inconvenient truth is that China remains one of India's top two trading partners, less out of policy choice than sheer competitiveness. Indian exports to China are roughly a tenth of China's exports to India.

Indian consumers are not the only ones unconsciously opting for foreign/Chinese options. Even

the hope of crowding in private investment, the trend in private investment demand continues to remain subdued. Rather than investing within the country, there has been a surge in overseas direct investment by Indian companies. According to RBI data, Indian corporate overseas investment grew by 40 per cent in 2024-25 to reach \$36 billion.

Sole reliance on domestic private consumption cannot provide a durable solution to growth acceleration, and it is important to ease the constraints on other engines of growth. This requires policy introspection.

There is a lurking fear that domestic consumption and the turbulent, often offensive, international environment could push India towards an autarchic economic policy regime, which would be disastrous. We cannot continue to live in the comfort zone, content with 6.5 per cent growth if we have to reach the aspirational target of achieving developed-country status in the next two decades. We may advance the rhetoric about "Atmanirbhar Bharat", but we should remember that no country in the world has succeeded in maintaining high growth over long periods by shielding itself from global competition. The use of tariffs as a weapon by the US administration is likely to do considerable harm, particularly to labour-intensive industries, and it is not easy to diversify trade in the short term. Hopefully, this is a passing phase, and trade negotiations will help settle a more reasonable outcome. Nevertheless, policymakers should take this as a wakeup call and treat the challenge it poses as an opportunity to reform.

Further acceleration in growth requires an increase in investment and its productivity. Gross domestic capital formation has virtually been stagnant at 30-31 per cent of GDP, and there is no evidence of a reduction in the capital-output ratio either. An increase in productivity is important not only to enhance the global competitiveness of the Indian economy but also to provide quality products to domestic consumers. We should realise that protectionism is a tax not only on exporters but also on domestic consumers. The only ones to gain by taking "Atmanirbhar Bharat" to the extreme are inefficient domestic producers, who will dish out inferior products to consumers under the protective umbrella. It is appealing to indulge in rhetoric and raise emotions, but the real challenge is to introspect deeply to ensure that efficiency does not suffer.

As I have mentioned in my previous columns, India must take the challenges presented by the international environment as an opportunity to initiate reforms. The reforms should not merely scratch the surface but be more fundamental. The core policy interventions needed involve reforms to labour and land markets. Fiscal consolidation will have to continue to reduce the cost of capital, as the household sector's net financial saving is just about 5.1 per cent. Public investments will have to be sustained by financing them through a revival of the disinvestment and privatisation programme. More importantly, public administration reform is crucial to ensure the rule of law, protect property rights, and enforce contracts in an expeditious manner. While we can continue to talk about self-reliance, we should not shy away from hard-nosed reforms.

The author is chairman, Karnataka Regional Imbalances Redressal Committee. He was a member of the Fourteenth Finance Commission, and a former director, NIPFP. The views are personal

Youth movements in authoritarian Asia



GUNJAN SINGH

In this concise work, historian Jeffrey Wasserstrom focuses on protests across Hong Kong, Burma and Thailand between 2014 and 2024, a phase of major waves of student and youth protests across the world. "This book explores the sense of connection across geographical, cultural, and linguistic divides," he writes.

Though there is no formal "Milk Tea Alliance" — the idea is rooted in the notion of the type of tea preferred in these regions, in opposition to the kind of tea

common in China — the label builds a notional connection among students and youth participating in the uprisings. "The Milk Tea alliance is a loose, decentralised network of companions among hundreds or even thousands of activists," Mr Wasserstrom explains. The alliance is built as groups across regions learn from and employ each other's methods of protest. "They adopt tactics from one another and share tools and songs," he adds.

The book focuses on three major activists: Agnes Chow from Hong Kong, Netiwit Chotiphatphaisal from Thailand and Ye Myint Win (Nickey Diamond) from Burma. Mr Wasserstrom writes that, "... the experiences of Chow, Netiwit, Diamond encapsulate the challenges faced by countless others within the movement." All three of them share one major common idea, which is of hope, even after being persecuted and arrested. For Netiwit, it's a fight against the

"military-capitalist-monarchical establishment" which he sees as an impediment in the development of Thailand and a challenge to a functioning democracy.

For Chow, it is the push from Beijing to control the way of life in Hong Kong and break the promise to the Basic Law, including the indoctrination in schools and control of the media.

For Diamond, it was the oppression under the military junta and the discrimination against the minorities and ethnicities in Burma. According to Diamond, "...Burma has become a place in which the military ran everything, operating as an elite class above all others. The only way for anyone to get ahead was to be a part of it or collaborate with it." The oppression of the Rohingyas is also an important challenge.

The book explores how popular culture influences these movements too — such as incorporating the three-finger

salute from the *Hunger Games* and references to Harry Potter as a way of protest. These also help them gain connections across the borders. "The use of the salute cast the authorities [whom] the youths challenged into the role of the tyrant," Mr Wasserstrom writes.

But, as Mr Wasserstrom points out, the "activists do not engage extensively with the questions of governance post-revolution, instead maintaining a narrower focus on opposing authoritarianism and countering the global, bullying influence of the Chinese Communist Party."

In that context, the book briefly touches on the idea of how China is playing a role in its neighbourhood — such as the Thai government's recent decision to hand over Uyghurs' seeking refuge to China. The Chinese government has been increasingly making inroads in the domestic politics of Burma. Diamond argues that China has been a "bad neigh-

bour". He draws similarities between "the way Beijing treated the Uyghurs and the way Burmese junta treated the Rohingyas".

But a deeper discussion on Beijing's role in these protests would perhaps have been warranted. It is increasingly apparent that a powerful China has managed to impact the domestic politics of its neighbours, especially Thailand and Burma. It is this new-found assertiveness that dictates China's policies towards Hong Kong. But the author does not delve into this. Given the title of the book, one expected a little more discussion on China and its role.

In the last chapter titled "Beginnings," Mr Wasserstrom reminisces on the role of Hibiya Park in Japan and its connection to Sun Yat-sen. Sun Yat-sen is different from today's activist but he too did struggle against the Qing Dynasty and



The Milk Tea Alliance: Inside Asia's Struggle Against Autocracy and Beijing
by Jeffrey Wasserstrom
Published by Columbia Global Reports
104 pages ₹1,971

became the provisional president of the short-lived Republic of China in 1912. This is similar to most of the activists today who won political positions, but the victories have been short.

Such stories provide hope and underscore the idea that student/youth resistance movements have a long history and are interconnected. As for the long-term impact of these protests, the author injects a note of hope right at the start: "It is too soon to tell if historians of the future will see the ten-year period that began in 2014 and is ending in 2024 the way many now see the 1960s: as a period defined by

dizzily wide array of struggles in which young people played central roles. This is, though, a very real possibility".

The reviewer is associate professor, O P Jindal Global University

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Communal violence

Odisha must rein in troublemakers

CUTTACK, a city renowned for its tradition of *bhaichara* (brotherhood), is limping back to normalcy days after it was rocked by communal violence. Clashes broke out in Odisha's cultural capital when a procession was heading towards a river to immerse Durga idols. There was more trouble later when the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) accused the police of failing to take action against rioters and took out a motorcycle rally — allegedly in defiance of the administration's orders. Protesting bikers clashed with the police when they were stopped from entering a communally sensitive area, even as arson attacks were carried out at several places. It was a shock for residents to watch their peaceful city being sullied by the communal virus, which has sparked tensions during festivals in several parts of the country in recent years.

The disturbing incidents have shown the year-old BJP government in a very poor light. The authorities should have been well prepared for such an eventuality, considering what had happened in Balasore soon after Mohan Charan Majhi took oath as CM in June 2024. Clashes had erupted over rumours of mass cow slaughter on the occasion of Id-ul-Azha, leading to the imposition of curfew and an Internet shutdown. Maintaining law and order continues to be a huge challenge for the Majhi government, with several cases of violence by cow vigilantes being reported. There have also been attacks on Christians in the state where a mob led by a Bajrang Dal activist had burnt alive Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two sons in 1999. A convict in this case was released from jail earlier this year on the grounds of "good behaviour", prompting the VHP to welcome the government's decision.

Good governance during the past two decades has made Odisha an enviable role model for other states. The ruling BJP needs to ensure that those involved in stoking communal fires, no matter which party or religion they belong to, are not spared. This is a must to consolidate the phenomenal gains made by Odisha.

A tragic loss

SC's road safety deadline must not be missed

THE tragic death of promising Punjabi actor and singer Rajvir Jawanda at just 35, days after a horrific road accident, is a reminder that even precautions like wearing a helmet can sometimes prove inadequate when road safety is neglected all around. Reports say he was wearing a helmet, yet succumbed to serious injuries after his bike skidded on a road in Himachal Pradesh. His death has reignited public anguish over India's dismal road-safety record. Incidentally, this concern was echoed by the Supreme Court on Tuesday, which has directed all states and union territories to frame comprehensive road-safety rules within six months. India accounts for nearly 13 per cent of global road-accident deaths. Every hour, 17 people die on roads. The causes are familiar: poor enforcement, badly maintained highways, reckless driving, and the indifference of both motorists and authorities. Helmets and seat belts help, but they cannot offset the risks created by potholes, speeding and the absence of emergency care. The 'chalta hai' attitude on roads continues to kill commuters.

The SC intervention is timely. Despite the existence of a National Road Safety Policy since 2010 and the amended Motor Vehicles Act of 2019, enforcement remains patchy. States have failed to set up dedicated road-safety authorities or pedestrian-protection rules. Implementation cannot wait for another tragedy. Helmets, reflector, and fines make news; safe roads and accountability save lives.

Rajvir's loss should not fade into another statistic. Mere tributes to the late singer by the Chief Minister and other leaders are not enough. They must ensure that road-safety rules are swiftly framed, implemented and enforced in letter and spirit. His accident must push governments to act — to make roads safer, to ensure medical help within the 'golden hour' and to treat road safety as a public-health emergency, not a traffic issue.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, FRIDAY, OCTOBER 9, 1925

Appeal for cooperation

OPINION may differ regarding Sir Mahomed Shafi's statement in the speech he made at the first farewell banquet given in honour of the Earl of Reading at Simla, over which he presided, that "the great achievement for which credit was due to His Excellency was that he had persuaded the Baldwin Government to commit itself to an earlier revision of the Act, provided cooperation was forthcoming in India." However, there will be no difference of opinion regarding his statement that "the Swarajists are fully cooperating in the Central Legislature, while the Liberals have always believed in Indo-British cooperation," and that, therefore, "this is the psychological moment for a generous gesture" which he wished might come before the Viceroy left India. It has been our lot to differ from Sir Shafi in many matters and on most occasions; and even in the present case, we do differ from him as regards much that he said. It gives us all the greater pleasure, therefore, to record our agreement with him regarding this vital matter. Lord Reading's own speech on the occasion is chiefly notable as an illustration of the difficulty which even hard-headed statesmen feel in resisting the temptation of dwelling upon what might have been. "I sometimes wonder," he said, "that the political sagacity of India has not rushed to grasp the hand held out. Indians could have said, 'we still hold to our opinion, but as progress must depend on cooperation and goodwill, we are prepared to accept the offer.'" His Excellency will perhaps admit that this dwelling upon the might-have-been is a game at which two can play.

Cash doles set the tone for Bihar polls

Monetary transfers and mega projects are a post-dated cheque on a crashing Bihari bank



IN the run-up to the Bihar Assembly elections, there is a flurry of cash transfers to poor and vulnerable Biharis and the announcement of mega projects, the likes of which the state has not witnessed in a long time. There is also an intense downward messaging about corruption through Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's Voter Adhikar Yatra and Jan Suraj Party founder Prashant Kishor's tirade against Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary and JD(U) minister Ashok Choudhary.

Will this insistence on electoral fair play and the exposé of alleged corruption by two key ministers end the two-decade-old duopoly of the JD(U) and the BJP? What portents of political change do Kishor's press conferences hold? For the ruling coalition, will the double-engine cash transfer efface the ground reality of household grief and distress? That lack of work opportunities, quality education and healthcare does not matter any longer — and in lieu of that, money matters? Will the poor vote in silence once more to help the incumbents retain power?

First, some observations on the new model of hands-off development: Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced mega projects worth Rs 62,000 crore last week, a few days before the announcement of the poll schedule and the enforcement of the model code of conduct. Leaders of many Opposition-ruled states, especially Punjab and others that had witnessed the fury of natural disasters, were not



TRIO: Bihar CM Nitish Kumar (centre) with his deputies Samrat Choudhary (left) and Vijay Kumar Sinha. Will the poor vote once more to help the incumbents retain power? ANI

among the recipients of such largesse from the Centre. The writing was on the wall when the Union Budget 2025 announced a Makhana board to be set up in Bihar with an initial allocation of Rs 100 crore to support the farming of fox nuts in ponds — a highly skilled activity in which mostly poor women from the Mallah community are engaged. Bihar will also have new airports, many more trains and special ones running during the Chhath festival to bring home Bihari labourers. Last year, the Bharat Ratna was conferred on legendary political leader and former Bihar CM Karpoori Thakur, and now a skill university named after him has been opened.

Both PM Modi and CM Nitish Kumar are promoting an agenda-less developmentalism with cash doles. In his speeches, the PM emphasised *shram* (labour) and *humar* (skill) but did not talk about setting up world-class universities or research institutions. Several cash schemes and proj-

Will the insistence on fair play and the exposé of alleged corruption by two key ministers end the two-decade-old duopoly of the JD(U) and the BJP?

ects have been announced by the CM. Nitish posted on X on Wednesday that over 11 lakh anganwadi women workers would receive an enhanced *maandey* (honorarium) of Rs 9,000 each. He also praised their role in improving the nourishment and wellbeing of children and pregnant women. Cooperative federalism was at play in the Mukhyamantri Mahi-

la Rojgar Yojana under which the PM transferred Rs 7,500 crore to 75 lakh women in September and the CM gave Rs 2,500 crore to 25 lakh women this month, a 75:25 ratio of Centre-state cooperation through clean direct cash transfers to women who will be engaged in self-employment with this money.

The mega cash transfers and large projects in the pipeline are a post-dated cheque on a crashing Bihari bank which now only has a large reserve of labour and a vote bank that matters. Nitish, who once saw to it that girl students went to school on cycles, is now content with holding meetings in his office, surrounded by Deputy CMs and officers, and ensures that cash is transferred by the push of a button.

He had set up fast-track courts to punish mighty *netas* such as Anand Mohan Singh, a convict in the murder of upright IAS officer G Krishnaiah. In 2023, the state government secured Anand Mohan's release; he is needed to bag votes, especially

in north Bihar where the BJP has its best chance.

Nitish was also seen as the spearhead for ensuring a corruption-free bureaucracy as he had announced a scheme for seizing disproportionate assets of *babus*. Surprisingly, Kishor has not raked up this scheme or its success/failure. His exposé is largely a social media event, an instant *pudiya* of political *khulaasa* that the poor Bihari watches on small morsels of free data.

Within the BJP, a votary of incorruptible politics, retired IAS officer and former Home Secretary RK Singh, stands isolated. In a riposte to Kishor's allegations, Singh asked Samrat Choudhary and other leaders to come clean. The BJP's response has been to push RK Singh to the sidelines and promote singer Pawan Singh, a Rajput whose candidature from Asansol in the 2024 General Election had to be withdrawn (the seat was won by 'Bihari Babu' Shastrughan Sinha of the Trinamool Congress). The BJP has also brought folk singer Maithili Thakur into the party fold.

This election, Biharis will be treated to raunchy Bhojpuri songs for which Pawan Singh is known and devotional Maithili music for which Thakur is famous. Male voters are likely to be wooed by illicit liquor that Kishor claims is abundantly available right at the doorstep. It is anticipated that women voters will be tethered to the cash doles and devotional music dedicated to Sita *Maiya* (Bihar's daughter) and Lord Rama.

The upcoming elections are set to offer opportunities to young political leaders, even as sunset beckons the old guard — Nitish and ex-CM Lalu Prasad Yadav. Meanwhile, Kishor is making his arguments cogently and his popularity rating has gone up. However, it is not known why he questions only some members of the duopoly, but none from among the monopolists who exemplify the interplay of power and money in Indian polity.

“ It is as hard and severe a thing to be a true politician as to be truly moral. —Francis Bacon ”

Falling leaves, rising dreams

TANYA SINGH

WHEN I first landed in Buffalo last year, the United States stretched before me like a book whose pages I had yet to turn. Everything felt enormous — the sky, the streets, the silence. I had left home with two suitcases, a restless heart and a head full of questions. They say the beginning is the most important part of your work, but beginnings are rarely easy. Mine came with anxiety and wonder: how do you build a life in a place that does not yet know your name?

Autumn was my first chapter. Back home, 'fall' was just a word in novels, but here it was alive, trees turned gold and crimson, leaves crunching underfoot, the air crisp with nostalgia and possibility. In my bare apartment, I realised that home isn't found; it's built, with taped photos, shared laughter and late-night coffee after long days. That fall also meant school, new classes, nervous smiles and group projects that turned strangers into friends. We don't grow when things are easy. We grow when we face challenges — that became my quiet prayer as assignments piled up and life tested me.

Then winter arrived, abrupt and unapologetic. Buffalo's cold doesn't just greet you, it engulfs you. Snow blanketed everything in silence, beautiful at first, then harsh as it froze into ice. Walking to class felt like a battle. Yet inside classrooms and libraries, warmth bloomed, friends sharing notes, pizzas and study hours. I learned discipline the hard way. Some days exhaustion whispered, "Is it worth it?" But as Kahlil Gibran wrote, "Out of suffering have emerged the strongest souls." Winter became my teacher in resilience, reminding me that even in stillness, growth happens quietly.

By spring, I could feel myself changing with the world outside. Trees, once skeletal, bloomed with stubborn joy, and I, too, felt something reawaken. The heaviness of winter lifted, replaced by laughter in classrooms and walks under cherry blossoms. Exams came and went, not without struggle, but with pride. Friendship — the kind born in late-night study sessions — steadied me when everything else felt uncertain.

Summer arrived like a long-awaited exhale. The days stretched, the light softened and graduation loomed, the milestone I had carried in my heart since boarding that plane. When the moment came, cap and gown in place, I stood with pride words couldn't capture. It wasn't just a degree. It was proof of every shift, every tear, every quiet courage that carried me forward.

And now, as the leaves turn golden again, I realise I've come full circle. A year of firsts, of struggles, of quiet triumphs. This city, once foreign, now feels stitched with pieces of me. I began as a girl stepping into the unknown, my heart full of fear. I stand now, not fully settled, not entirely certain, but undeniably changed, stronger, softer, braver. And as the wind scatters golden leaves around me, I know this story is still being written.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

IAF delivered with less resources

Refer to 'IAF at 93: Balancing power, technology & reform'; efforts at *Atmanirbharta* may continue but operational preparedness cannot be compromised. The fighter aircraft squadron strength (29) is a little more than just half of the authorised strength of 42. The procurement of fighter aircrafts to make up for the shortage has been delayed by bureaucratic hurdles. HAL has never adhered to the promised timeline for delivery of aircraft or weapon systems. Operations like Balakot and Sindoor cannot wait for indigenous productions. The Indian Air Force has shown the world that even with the available resources, it can strike at will and with precision.

WG CDR JS MINHAS (RETD), MOHALI

Right to vote must be protected

Refer to 'Confusion over voters'; after running from pillar to post, the common man finally knocked at the doors of the apex court for the protection of their fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution. No citizen of India should be deprived of his right to vote. We earned this right to elect our own governments at the state and Central levels because we waged a long freedom struggle against the British rule. The rural people, migrant workers and landless agriculture workers in huge numbers expect the Supreme Court Judges to defend and protect their constitutional right to vote.

RAJ BAHADUR YADAV, FATEHABAD

Surplus teachers in urban schools

Reference to 'No more VIP postings'; the Punjab government has rightly decided to end the long-existing culture of arbitrary choice postings in state-run schools. This would remove the anomaly of inadequate staff strength in schools in rural and remote areas that impacts students' learning, examination performance and careers. It would also tackle the problem of surplus teachers in urban schools, decreased student engagement and wastage of public funds meant for fulfilling necessary educational needs. It would improve the overall standard of education in the state.

PARVAAN SINGH, HOSHIARPUR

Remote areas face teacher crunch

Refer to 'No more VIP postings'; the Punjab government's decision to end choice posting for teachers is a step in the right direction. Most of the teachers manipulate urban postings in connivance with political and administrative bosses. As a result, rural schools reel under staff shortage. The same is true of Himachal Pradesh where most of the teachers do not want to be posted to schools in remote areas. This has a direct bearing on the future of the students studying in rural schools who lag behind their counterparts studying in urban schools.

MD SHARMA, SHIMLA

Humour is a form of rebellion

Apropos of 'Khushwant Singh's humour lives on'; reading about the reputed author's unapologetic wit, fearless satire and ability to laugh at himself reminds us that humour is not mere entertainment; it is a gentle rebellion against rigidity. In a world increasingly burdened with seriousness, humour acts as a life jacket helping us stay afloat above stress. It diffuses bitterness, questions authority without aggression and connects people beyond divisions. In literature too, humour is a powerful device. It makes truth more palatable and criticism more acceptable. Writers like RK Narayan, Premchand and Khushwant Singh used laughter not to mock, but to heal. Good humour does not insult; it reflects. It forces us to laugh at our follies before pointing fingers at others. It teaches humility, tolerance and resilience. Today, when outrage at workplaces, in institutions, and especially on social media is at its peak, we need humour more than ever before — not as sarcasm but as sanity.

ASHOK SINGH GULERIA, HAMIRPUR

He lived life his own way

Khushwant Singh was a rare breed of individuals. He lived his life his way. Very few people do that. He is remembered for his jokes, his love for fine whiskey, his generous encouragement and, most of all, frankness. Singh was among the few people who took his own phone calls back then, had no malice towards anyone and was honest with his feedback. The magic in his words and writings will always be spoken about with love.

SANJAY CHOPRA, MOHALI

From handshakes to hard lines – and no laddoos



VIVEK KATJU
FORMER SECRETARY, MINISTRY
OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

THE conduct of the Indian and Pakistani players during the recently held Asia Cup and the two countries' women's teams in the World Cup match, either on their own or on instructions of those who control cricket in the two countries, reveals a change in the public culture in India and Pakistan.

The decision of Mohsin Naqvi, head of the Asian Cricket Council and Pakistan's Interior Minister, that the victorious Indian team could receive that championship trophy from his hands alone confirms that these cultural changes impact cricket too — a game that occupies a massive place in the psyche of the two countries.

The days of the old elites steeped in the civilities of the Indo-Persianate culture have long gone. The norms that both countries had inherited from the public culture of the British — stretching from parliamentary practices and the neutrality of constitutional institutions to the

sports arena — have all undergone changes.

Of course, the British public culture is also not static — no public culture is. The end of the empire and Britain's struggle to find a place in the world with a society rapidly becoming multi-racial is changing Britain's public culture. At the same time, some people in that country still yearn for the era of imperial Britain.

In Pakistan, the military takeover in 1958 and the evolution of the country founded on the two-nation theory dealt a body blow to parliamentary processes and control, from which it has not recovered. Its shift to more extreme Islamic interpretations (*mazhabs*), especially beginning with Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and going forward with greater vigour under General Zia-ul-Haq, required a public adherence to austere Islamic norms derived from the Arabian peninsula.

In India, while the constitutional system has endured, its practices have undergone vast changes. Indeed, there is a disdain for keeping to the norms of the old elites. Interestingly, the erudite Minister of External Affairs, S Jaishankar, who is ironically a part of the old elites (or in the vocabulary of the Sangh Parivar, of which he is now a part, Macaulay's child) himself considers them as not fully authentic Indians.

The emphasis of the pres-



BITTER: In the Asia Cup and Women's World Cup, universal norms were abandoned. PFI

ent governing class is on the glories of ancient India and the pursuit of pure Indian culture, whatever that may be. Naturally, cultural purity increases proportionately with the practice of Hindutva ideals.

If there was one area where universal norms were generally followed hitherto, it was sports, including cricket. In the Asia Cup and the Women's World Cup, they were abandoned in matches against Pakistan.

Pakistan has pursued terrorism against India for over three decades, but in the past, the bitterness generated by its terrorist actions was not allowed to come into

The emphasis of the present governing class is the pursuit of pure Indian culture. Naturally, cultural purity increases proportionately with the practice of Hindutva ideals.

the arena of sports. India had decided to stop all bilateral sports engagement with Pakistan over the past few years, but the teams of the two countries played against each other in multilateral competitions. And, in these, the mores of the particular sport were observed by the Indian players.

Before the beginning of the Asia Cup, there was a demand in some quarters that the communal and barbaric nature of the Pahal-gam attack warranted India's refusal to play against Pakistan in multilateral cricket tournaments like the Asia Cup.

However, the government

allowed the BCCI to continue with the tradition of not playing Pakistan bilaterally while playing against it in multilateral tournaments. Clearly, its decision was not liked by a vast number of Sangh Parivar supporters.

This can be discerned from their reaction to the normal gesture shown by T20 team captain Suryakumar Yadav in shaking Mohsin Naqvi's hand after a photograph was taken of Naqvi along with all the captains of the participating teams. Naqvi shook every captain's hand and Yadav went along with them. He cannot be faulted for having done so.

The response to the Yadav-Naqvi handshake led to the decision to move away from the traditional handshake of the captains at the time of the toss in all three games and at the end of the three matches.

After India's victory in the first match, Yadav expressed his solidarity with the families of the victims of the Pahalgam terrorist attack and dedicated it to the Indian armed forces.

The Pakistanis were furious at his remarks, for, according to them, it violated the ICC rule of keeping politics out of cricket. Instead of seeking to calm the matter, they decided to complain against the match referee and Yadav. They also decided to respond aggressively against the Indian team on the field.

As if all this was not enough, Naqvi insisted that he alone had the right to give the trophy to the Indian captain. But Yadav was refusing to accept it from him.

There was an alternative, though it may have been too subtle in these 'in-your-face times'. While accepting the trophy, Yadav could have told Naqvi that he felt a special joy in the Pakistani minister giving it to him and that it had made India's victory all the more sweeter. Perhaps, the team could have kept a box of 'laddoos' and offering one to Naqvi. Yadav could have said "Aap bhi mooh mitha kariye."

What would have Naqvi done if this tactic was employed? Refused the 'laddoos' by making excuses or been forced to eat one? In either case, the photographs would have gone viral across the two countries and in many parts of the world. And, the Indian team would have made its point!

A 'laddoo' gesture would have been the response — if one was considered necessary — in keeping with the traditions of the old public culture. These days, adhering to it cannot be considered, for the responses have to be muscular, not understated. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's tweet congratulating the Indian team was in keeping with the temper of our times and the present public culture.

India needs to bridge huge trade deficit with Russia



SUSHMA RAMACHANDRAN
SENIOR FINANCIAL
JOURNALIST

THE enduring relationship between India and Russia has come under increasing pressure from the United States in recent months. New Delhi's consistent, though low-key, support for its long-time friend since the onset of the Ukraine conflict has been a matter of concern for western countries but did not raise any major red flags.

Even when India persisted in abstaining from the UN resolutions condemning Russia's aggression in Ukraine, there were only muted diplomatic exchanges expressing disappointment.

The situation has now changed dramatically, with the US taking an offensive posture against India's purchases of Russian oil, terming it an act of support for Russia's war. It has gone further to levy a punitive 25 per cent tariff on exports for this reason on top of the 25 per cent tariff imposed earlier.

These measures have to be viewed in the backdrop of the fact that no such tariffs have been imposed on China,

which imports far larger quantities of oil from Russia. The convoluted logic given by US officials for the imbalance is that China was already buying considerable oil from its neighbour while India's purchases shot up only after the conflict began.

India's reaction to US pressure has been to continue steadily buying Russian oil, though there has been some diversification of sourcing. Even so, it continues to account for around 34 per cent of the total purchases by India in September, according to a trade analytics agency, Kpler.

The other outcome of the Trump administration's tirade on the oil issue has been a strengthening and deepening of the relationship with Russia. Reports flow in of increased defence imports even as economic ties are expanding rapidly. Defence purchases, which include the S-400 air defence systems, may not be linked to the volatility in Indo-US ties and are likely a consequence of the performance of Russian equipment during Operation Sindoor.

But the widening economic engagement is a direct outcome of Trump's tariff adventures. India is continuing to buy Russian oil despite the US demand to stop such purchases. It has not backed down despite the prospect of a 50 per cent levy hurting a big chunk of exports to the world's biggest market. On the contrary, it looks as if India-Russia bilat-



SANDEEP JOSHI

eral trade is set to increase substantially from the current level of \$68 billion.

The process began at the recent Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit in Tianjin, where Prime Minister Narendra Modi's bonhomie with Chinese Premier Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin was flashed around the world.

More important, however, were the visuals of Putin being accompanied by Modi in his vehicle at the summit. The message of renewed friendship between the two countries was unmistakably conveyed to the US.

The symbolism is now being translated into action with Putin offering to buy a

Putin is offering to buy a wide range of goods from India to offset our loss of the US market.

wide range of goods from India to offset the loss of the US market.

Recognising the huge imbalance in trade with India's purchases of crude rising steeply, he has declared that Russia would be prepared to import agricultural and pharmaceutical products to bridge the trade gap. These comments came shortly after the announcement of the Russian President's visit to India in December.

The mention of agricultural goods is significant since this is an area in which the US is seeking to enter the Indian market. Even though trade negotiators have declared that agriculture and dairy are among the red lines for any

trade deal, US officials have continued to seek market access in these areas. In fact, there has been criticism over the failure of India to buy from the US soya bean or corn — commodities bought earlier in large volumes by China. Trump's tariff hikes have prompted China to seek other suppliers like Brazil, leaving US farmers in the lurch.

In sharp contrast, Russia has found easier access for farm goods in this country. Agricultural imports, especially pulses and edible oils, have risen in recent years. It has become the fifth largest supplier of farm products to this country. As for exports, these mainly comprise rice, tea, coffee, spices and marine products. Most areas have potential for growth as supplies from western sources to Russia have reduced after the war began in 2022.

Prospects are bright for the supply of pharmaceutical goods as well, given the sanctions imposed by European nations. This is an opportunity for Indian pharma producers who are facing a threat of higher tariffs in the US market. Though tariff hikes have been announced, they have not been implemented, probably due to a recognition that higher prices would hurt consumers.

Yet the reality is that it may not be so easy to bridge the huge trade deficit with Russia. Of the total \$68 billion of bilateral trade, India only accounts for about \$5 billion of exports.

It will need a tremendous effort to make up this gap.

The process could be accelerated if Putin's government follows his directive to find ways to rectify this imbalance. He also highlighted the need to resolve challenges like financing, logistics and payment systems. This includes hurdles linked to rupee payment systems, which have arisen in the last few years.

These are complicated by the existence of western sanctions on Russian financial transactions and the resulting caution of Indian banks. Such issues need to be resolved fast, else bridging the trade deficit speedily will be a difficult task.

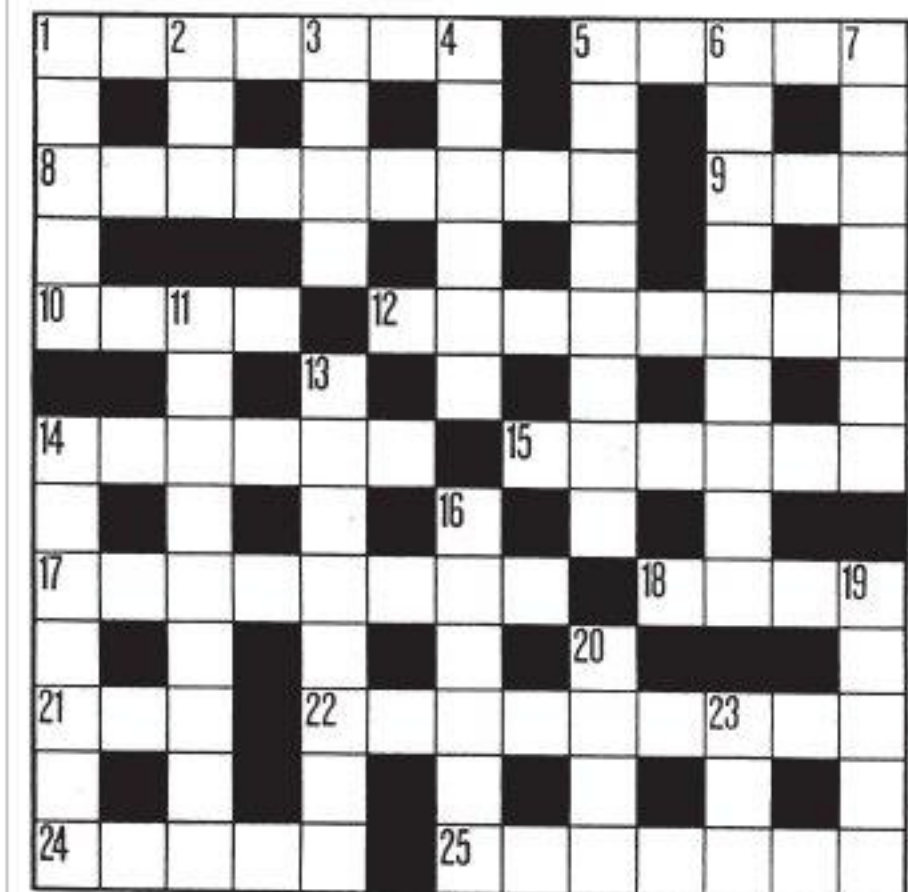
Russian investments in this country may also be on the anvil, especially in the heavy engineering, defence and infrastructure sectors.

A joint venture is already underway for manufacturing railway wagons both for the domestic market and for supply to Russia. This could be the template for future investments involving collaboration with both public and private sector companies.

In other words, economic relations with Russia are set to expand more quickly than ever in the past. India is now looking at Russia as an alternative market.

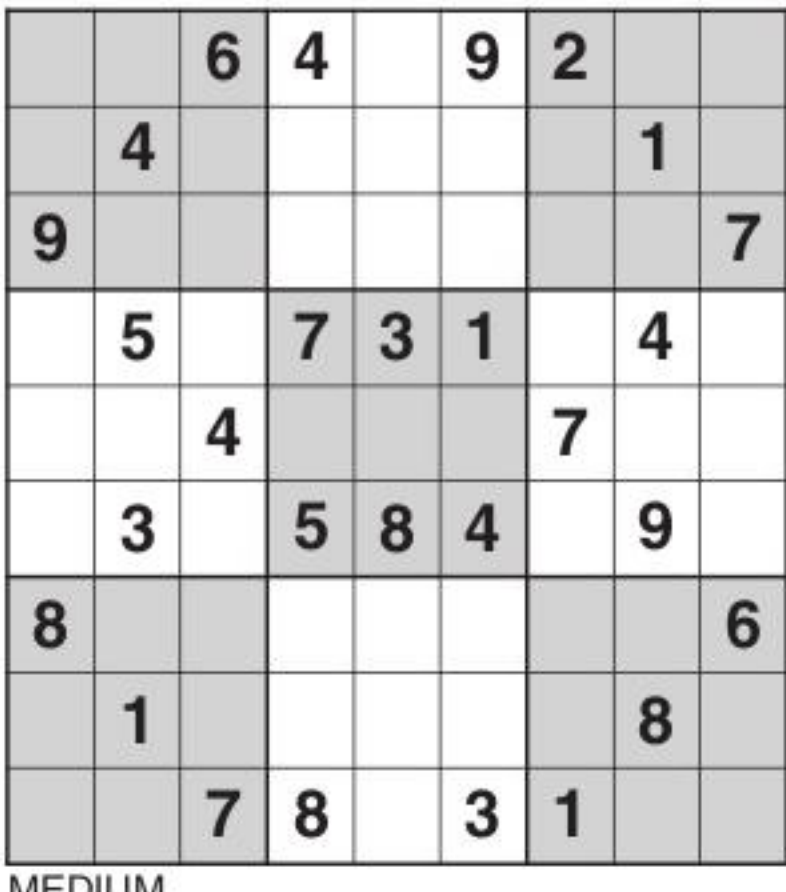
It may not replace the US but there is no doubt that Vladimir Putin's visit in December will mark the launch of a new era of economic engagement between the two countries.

QUICK CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**
- 1 Word of opposite meaning (7)
 - 5 Husks of threshed corn (5)
 - 8 Useless (2,2,5)
 - 9 Note acknowledging debt (3)
 - 10 Minor quarrel (4)
 - 12 Made money (8)
 - 14 Readily memorable (6)
 - 15 Elder (6)
 - 17 Strong Holland gin (8)
 - 18 Slide on slippery surface (4)
 - 21 Confess (3)
 - 22 Consequently (2,1,6)
 - 24 Navy (5)
 - 25 To swell (7)
- DOWN**
- 1 Roughly (5)
 - 2 A silvery metal (3)
 - 3 Cleverly executed (4)
 - 4 Deficient in quality (6)
 - 5 Loss of nerve (4,4)
 - 6 Unreasonable (1,3,5)
 - 7 Come to grief (7)
 - 11 Little or no prospect (3,6)
 - 13 A game bird (8)
 - 14 Release boat from moorings (4,3)
 - 16 Rising (6)
 - 19 Obsolescent (5)
 - 20 Greek equivalent of Jupiter (4)
 - 23 Employment (3)
- Yesterday's solution**
- Across:** 1 Passport, 5 Skew, 9 Khaki, 10 Scandal, 11 All systems go, 13 Mettle, 14 Topple, 17 Little wonder, 20 Coronet, 21 Poise, 22 Tuba, 23 Beggarly.
- Down:** 1 Pike, 2 Shallot, 3 Plimsoll line, 4 Resist, 6 Kudos, 7 Walkover, 8 Take down a peg, 12 Implicit, 15 Premier, 16 Swathe, 18 Throb, 19 Rely.

SU DO KU



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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

CALENDAR

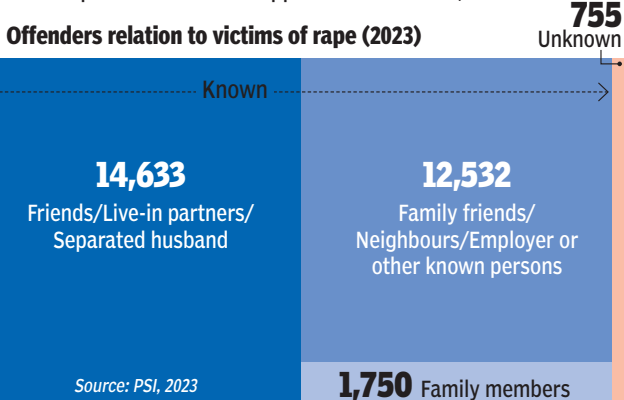
OCTOBER 9, 2025, THURSDAY	
■ Shaka Samvat	1947
■ Aashwin Shaka	17
■ Aashwin Parvishite	24
■ Hijari	1447
■ Krishna Paksha Tithi 3, up to 10:55 pm	
■ Vajra Yoga up to 9:32 pm	
■ Bhumi Nakshatra up to 8:03 pm	
■ Moon enters Taurus sign 1:24 am	

FORECAST

CITY	THURSDAY FRI		17:58 HRS 06:21 HRS	
	MAX	MIN	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	28	19		
New Delhi	32	20		
Amritsar	30	19		
Bathinda	30	19		
Jalandhar	30	19		
Ludhiana	30	19		
Bhiwani	30	20		
Hisar	30	20		
Sirsa	30	19		
Dharamsala	26	13		
Manali	13	08		
Shimla	17	08		
Srinagar	22	07		
Jammu	31	15		
Kargil	08	01		
Leh	15	0		
Dehradun	31	19		
Mussoorie	19	11		

**AMIT SHAH BEHAVING LIKE 'ACTING PRIME MINISTER' OF COUNTRY, MODI SHOULD BE CAUTIOUS: MAMATA****AKHILESH MEETS AZAM KHAN, SAYS NO POLITICAL FAMILY HAS BEEN HARASSED AS MUCH AS HIS****STATISTICS** A slice of life in numbers**97% of rape offenders are known to victims**

In rape cases filed under Section 376 of IPC, 97.5% of offenders were known to the survivors. Friends, live-in partners, or separated husbands topped the list with 14,633 cases

**Tension in Miraj over exchange of communal barbs between youths**

Kolhapur: As many as 150 people were booked for violating prohibitory orders by gathering and marching towards the Miraj city police station on Tuesday evening, demanding action against a youth for allegedly hurting religious sentiments. Miraj city, in Sangli, which has a history of communal strife, was yet again on the

brink of a communal clash. However, cops foiled the attempt.

The incident began with two youths from the same locality, Nadvies, who, while discussing a matter, exchanged communal slurs. One of them, along with some other men, beat up the other youth and pelted stones at his house. This enraged the other community. TNN

Vidarbha OBC groups to hold rally in Nagpur tomorrow**Lakhs Expected, Will Seek Sept 2 GR Withdrawal**

Vaibhav Ganjapure & Piyush Patil | TNN

Nagpur: The Sakal OBC Samaj, an umbrella organization representing various castes within the Other Backward Class (OBC) category in Maharashtra, has called for a massive protest march in Nagpur on Friday, asserting that their rightful share in reservation is being compromised by the govt's recent decision. "We fully support Maharashtra community's demand for independent reservation, but any attempt to dilute the OBC quota will not be tolerated," OBC leader and MLA Vijay Wadettiwar, who is heading the rally, told the media. He stressed that the movement was not against any community but for safeguarding OBC rights.

The controversy stems from the govt resolution (GR) issued on September 2, which omitted the word 'eligible' from the earlier directive.



OBC leader & MLA Vijay Wadettiwar said that Friday's rally was not against any community but to safeguard OBC rights

OBC organisations claim this change could allow Maharashtra community to avail benefits under OBC quota, thereby affecting existing entitlements. The move, they said, triggered unrest and insecurity among OBC communities across Maharashtra, with several protests and meetings held at various places including Gondia, Bhandara, Chandrapur, Gadchiroli, and Nagpur in East Vidarbha, and Amravati, Akola, Yavatmal, Washim, Buldhana, and Wardha in the west.

Earlier, on September 21, OBC groups in Gondia organised an Aakrosh Mochla to oppose the GR.

In various parts of the state, OBC workers staged de-

Govt to build OBC hostels in all districts

The Maharashtra govt has expedited its plan to construct hostels, offices, and study centres for students from Other Backward Classes (OBC) community in every district. The govt has also approved setting up two separate hostels — one in Nagpur city and another in Nagpur rural — to accommodate the region's growing student population. Revenue minister Chandrashekar Bawankule directed all district collectors to immediately identify suitable govt land and submit final proposals before October 28, when the next review meeting is scheduled. The decision was taken during a key meeting held at Mantralaya under the 'Babu Jagjivan Ram Chhatra Awas Yojana' on Wednesday. TNN

monstrations, warning the govt against succumbing to pressure from a community.

"The Nagpur morchha will be a warning to the govt that OBCs cannot be ignored," Wadettiwar, who is also Congress legislative party leader, said. Preparations are in full swing across Vidarbha, with organisations mobilising people from all districts. OBC leaders said the protest would remain apolitical and peaceful, focusing solely on protecting the constitutional rights of the OBC community. "This struggle is not against anyone but for our future generations," Wadettiwar added, appealing for massive participation. Meanwhile, few OBC or-

ganisations, including OBC Mukti Morcha, have decided to stay away from the October 10 morchha.

A senior functionary of OBC Mukti Morcha told TOI they would not participate since the rally is being led by a political leader from a major party. "Such leaders should raise their voice in the legislative assembly, which has the power to make laws, instead of protesting on the streets," he said. "Why aren't they pressing the govt to convene a special session of the legislature on OBC issues, as Maharashtra leaders did? We have already filed a petition in the Nagpur bench of the Bombay HC challenging the 2 GRs," he added.

4 women among 7 killed in Andhra cracker unit blast

Umamaheswara Rao | timesofindia.com

Visakhapatnam: Seven people were killed and three others seriously wounded in a massive explosion at a fireworks unit in Dr BR Ambedkar Konaseema district of Andhra Pradesh on Wednesday.

The deceased included four women and the 65-year-old owner of the firecracker manufacturing and retail unit, Yelugubantla Satyanarayana, while the identity of one victim was yet to be ascertained. At the time of the explosion, around 40 workers were present in the Sri Ganapati Grand Fireworks factory at V Savaram village.

The explosion caused the walls of the shed to collapse, posing a challenge for emergency responders to simultaneously contain the blaze and rescue those trapped under the debris. The injured have been



Among those killed in the explosion was the 65-year-old owner of the factory

admitted to Kakinada govt hospital for advanced treatment. According to initial accounts from the injured workers, the accident occurred while they were handling electrical wiring.

Officials suspect a spark ignited near the explosive materials triggered the blast.

Andhra Pradesh chief minister Chandrababu Naidu expressed shock over the blast, and spoke to district officials to obtain detailed information about the mishap, rescue and relief measures and medical support to the injured.

23 FIRs for fraud on celebrity hairstylist Jawed Habib, family

Rahul.Singhi | timesofindia.com

Meerut: Police have registered 23 FIRs against celebrity hairstylist Jawed Habib, his family members, and close associates for allegedly defrauding over 400 people in western Uttar Pradesh through a multi-crore cryptocurrency investment scheme. Police issued a lookout notice after the company at the centre of the case shut operations and those named in the complaint could not be contacted. The Habib family has denied any involvement with the company concerned.

Investigators said the case dates back to 2023 when Jawed, his son Anas, and firm head Saifullah Khan attended a promotional event at a hotel in Sambhal's Sarayatara area. The event was organised to attract investors to a firm na-

med Follicle Global Company (FLC), where they were promised returns ranging from 50% to 75% on investments. Police said hundreds of people were persuaded to invest amounts ranging from Rs 5 lakh to Rs 7

lakh, often through cryptocurrency exchange platforms.

Sambhal SP Krishan Kumar Bishnoi said, "Within

months, the company's offices shut down, and Habib family disappeared. When investors sought repayment, Saifullah allegedly threatened and intimidated them. The company was a family-run operation, with Habib's wife listed as its founder."

He added, "A lookout notice has been issued against family, their bank accounts and properties are being scrutinised. 23 FIRs have been lodged under IPC sections 420 (cheating) and 506 (criminal intimidation)."

Terrorist gets life term in '02 murder case

Jammu: A sessions court in Bhandarwah on Wednesday awarded life imprisonment to a terrorist involved in the murder of a sarpanch in J&K's Doda district in July 2002, reports Sanjay Khajuria.

The convict, Irfan Ali from Doda, was sentenced under IPC Sections 302 (murder) and 34 (common intention), and Section 7/27 of Arms Act, police said. Irfan and his associates had killed Sher Mohammad, sarpanch of Changa, Gandoh, and fled following the crime, police said.

Gandoh PS registered a case on July 4, 2002. A 17-year-long investigation — led by then-SHO Gandoh — culminated in the filing of a challan before the court of the principal sessions judge, Bhandarwah, on May 28, 2019, following which Irfan was sent to judicial custody, where he since remained. After a six-year-long trial, the court convicted Irfan on Wednesday.

NORTH WESTERN RAILWAY**E-TENDER NOTICE**

Sr. Divisional Electrical Engineer/TRD, North Western Railway, Bikaner for & on behalf of the President of India, invites E-tenders for the following work:
1. Complete details of tenders can be seen on Website No.: <http://www.irops.gov.in>
2. Date & time of closing of e-tenders : 31.10.2025 at 15.00 hours.
3. Date & time of opening of e-tenders : After 15.00 Hrs on 31.10.2025
Tender Notice No. 24-TRD-BKN-ETENDER-25-26
Name of work : TRD modification work in c/w Track related works of Engineering in various sections of Bikaner Division. Approx Cost of the work : 1,15,76,512.3 EMD/SD (Rupees) : 2,07,900.00
1291-CR/25
Follow us on [Facebook](#) [Twitter](#) [LinkedIn](#) [WhatsApp](#)

CENTRAL RAILWAY**REPLACEMENT AND REHABILITATION WORKS**

Divisional Railway Manager (S&T), 1st Floor, Parcel Office Building, above P.F.No.14 & 15, Central Railway, Mumbai CST 400 001, for and on behalf of the President of India Invites Open tenders from the reputed contractors.
Name of work : Replacement of overaged ATFTs at Bhandup, Mulund and Parsik stations and Mid life rehabilitation of Axle counters in Mumbai division of Central Railway.
TENDER NOTICE NO.CR/BB/S&T/South/2025/57
Approximate Cost: Rs. 15,40/- Crore.
Date of Opening: 06/11/2025
EMD: Rs. 920300/-
Validity: 60 days
Completion Period: 12 Months
This tender complies with Public Procurement Policy (Make in India) Order 2017, dated 15/06/2017
Complete details of tenders are available at Central Railway. Official website www.irops.gov.in in the complete tender documents can be downloaded from the website. The complete details of tenders are also available in the "Notice Board" of the Divisional Railway Manager (S&T)'s Office, Mumbai CST. [530]
अनाधिकृत रूप से रेल लाइन को पार करना दंडनीय अपराध है।

CENTRAL RAILWAY**IMPLEMENTATION OF ROOFTOP**

TENDER NOTICE No. 28/2025 OF 06.10.2025 For and on behalf of the President of India, Senior Divisional Electrical Engineer (General) Mumbai CSMT invites Request for Qualification (RFQ) through manual tender from the reputed firms/Agencies having adequate experience, capacity & required establishment for the following work on the prescribed format as mentioned in manual tender:-
1. RFQ No.: BB.LG.W.CSMT.2024.02.R/R/FQ dated 06.10.2025
2. Name of work with its location: Implementation of Rooftop on Grid Solar PV System project of 710 KWP capacity on PPA (Power Purchase Agreement) Mode, through Public-Private Partnership (PPP) on Design, Build, Finance, Operate and Transfer (The "DBFOT") basis at different service buildings of Mumbai Division.
3. Approx. cost of work: Rs. 5.68 Crore
4. Period of completion of work: As per agreement.
5. Cost of RFQ document: Rs. 10,000 (Ten Thousand) only. Non-refundable should be paid in the form of DEMAND DRAFT in favour of Sr.DFM, Central Railway Mumbai CSMT issued by scheduled/Nationalized bank.
6. Advertisement period: 06.10.2025 to 20.11.2025 (upto 15.00 Hrs.)
7. Pre Bid conference: At 15.00 Hrs. on date 27.10.2025 in the office of Sr. DEE (G), First Floor, Annex Building, CSMT Mumbai - 400001.
8. Tender box/address of office from where the RFQ document can be purchased etc.: Tender Box will be available at the office of the Sr. DEE(G), First Floor, Annex Building, CSMT Mumbai-400001.
9. Date and time of closing of RFQ: 20.11.2025 till 15:00 hrs. 10. Date and time of opening of RFQ: 20.11.2025 at 15:30 hrs. at office of Sr.DEE(G) Mumbai CSMT
11. Website particulars: The RFQ Document will be available on the website <http://www.c.r.indianrailways.gov.in> after advertisement.
12. Eligible criteria: Technical Capacity/ Financial Capacity with term and condition, other details to be given in tender document (RFQ) as well as on Railway website as above.
13. Important note: The tenders may note update/corrigendum / revised date of opening if any upto date of opening on above website only and notice board in this office.
14. Announcement of short list bidders: 30 days from date of opening of RFQ. [529]
अनाधिकृत रूप से रेल लाइन को पार करना दंडनीय अपराध है।

EAST CENTRAL RAILWAY**E-TENDER NOTICE**

e-tender is invited on behalf of the President of India for the under mentioned work :-
e-tender No.: ECR-CAO-C-S-EP-02-25-26
Name of work : RFP for Construction of Viaducts, ROR/RFO, Major Bridges, Minor Bridges, Animal Underpass, Animal Overpass, ROB, RUB/LHS, Earthwork, Blanketing, Buildings etc and other associated works for construction of new Double Line track for DFCC loading from Ch.157.920 to Ch.184 (except tunnels) in Koderma Detour section in Sonargarh-Andal 3rd and 4th line project on EPC Mode in Dhanbad Division of East Central Railway. Approx. cost of the work in (Rs.) ₹29,98,93,39,324.87, Cost of tender form in (Rs.) : ₹0.00, Earnest Money in (Rs.) : ₹2,00,00,000/-, Period of work completion : 1280 days. Date and time for closing of tender: 12.01.2026 at 12.00 hrs.
Any e-tenders which is sent by Post/Courier/ Fax or by hand will not be accepted. All such manual submission of tender even if it is on firm's letter pad or received in time will not be accepted. The above e-tender document alongwith full information is available on website <http://www.irops.gov.in>. Note: In case of any discrepancies found in tender notice, English version will be final. Tenderers are requested to visit the website <http://www.irops.gov.in> atleast 15 days before last date of closing, for latest corrigendum/corrections etc. in connection with this e-tender.
Any change/addendum/corrigendum will be published on IREPS website only.
CAO/Con/South ECR/Mahendraghat, Patna PR/1103/CON/S/MHX/CONST/17/25-26/48

B-585**GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA, "e"-PROCUREMENT NOTICE****WORKS DEPARTMENT**

E-mail: ceworldbankprojects@gmail.com
Bid Identification No. CE-BRIDGES - 06/2025-26
1. The Chief Engineer (Bridges), Odisha on behalf of Governor of Odisha invites percentage rate bid in double cover system in ONLINE MODE from eligible contractors for construction of Road & Bridge work as detailed below:
2. Nature of work : Bridge/Road works
3. No. of work : 04 no.
4. Tender paper cost : Rs.10,000.00 (on-line)
5. Class of Contractor : A/ Special Class Contractor
6. Available of bid document : From 10.00 AM of 14.10.2025 to 5.00 PM of 06.11.2025 in the website
7. Date of opening of Bid : Dt. 07.11.2025 at 11.30 AM
8. The Bidders have to participate in ONLINE bidding only. Further details can be seen from the website: <https://tenderodisha.gov.in>. Any addendum / corrigendum / cancellation of tender can also be seen in the said website.

Sd/- Chief Engineer, Bridges
Odisha, Bhubaneswar
OIPR-34174/11/0050/25-26

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER INDORE PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT, INDORE
Opp. Gayatri Mandir, Old Palasia Indore-452001
Email: cepdwest@mp.nic.in Phone: 0731-2491825

NIT No. 09/Gen/40/2025-26 Indore, dated : 04/10/2025

"Notice Inviting Tender"

Online tender in three envelope system are hereby invited for the following work. Details of works can be seen on the website <http://mptenders.gov.in>

No.	Porta No.	District	Name of work	Probable amount of Contract (In Lacs)	Amount of EMD (In Rs.)	Cost of Tender form (In Rs.)	Time allowed for completion
1.	2025_PWDRB_455880	Indore	Work of Pot Hole Filling of Various Road Under Indore Zone with Jet Patcher/Velocity Patcher Machine with a Citizen Engagement Model for Registration of Complaints by Citizen and Time Bound Resolution (LOK-PATH App.) in (District - Indore, Dhar, Khandwa, Khargone, Burhanpur) Total Length of Roads 900.00km.	2700.00	1350000/-	50000/-	36 Month's including rainy Season
2.	2025_PWDRB_455881	Alirajpur	Construction of Alirajpur Road/Road Thodisindhi to Walpur Road Length 22.24km. i/c Electric Pole Shifting Work. (2 nd Called)	5173.42	2586710/-	50000/-	24 Month's including rainy Season
3.	2025_PWDRB_455882	Alirajpur	Construction of Walpur Nichla Faliya To Behadwa Via Kukadiya Road Length 07.00km. i/c Electric Pole Shifting Work.	855.26	855260/-	20000/-	12 Month's including rainy Season
4.	2025_PWDRB_455883	Alirajpur	Construction of Bicholi Hatipatti Faliya To Kakadwai Silota Road Length 06.70km. i/c Electric Pole Shifting Work.	863.83	863830/-	20000/-	12 Month's including rainy Season
5.	2025_PWDRB_455884	Jhabua	Construction of Kardawad Kesharpura Road Length 03.50km. i/c Electric Pole Shifting Work. (2 nd Called)	524.44	524440/-	20000/-	12 Month's including rainy Season
Total-				10116.95 Lacs			

The document can only be purchased online from the above website after making online payment. The last date and time for purchase of document and bid submission online is dated 22.10.2025 up to 17:30. Detailed NIT and other details can be viewed on the above-mentioned portal.

Amendments to NIT, if any would be published on website only, and not in newspaper. Submit all the mandatory documents online on above mentioned website. Do not submit any physical document in the office.

Sd/- Chief Engineer
P.W.D. Indore, Zone Indore
G-19722/25

WEST CENTRAL RAILWAY**Electrical (General) Branch Open Tender**

The Divisional Railway Manager (Electrical) General, West Central Railway, Jabalpur for and on behalf of the President of India invites applications on prescribed tender form for the following works. Tender No. : JBPL/T. No./21/2025R. Dated: 03.10.2025.
Name of work with location: Electrical Works in Jabalpur division (i) Improvement of lighting arrangement by providing octagonal pole, Highmast with replacement of LT Supply panel including prepaid meter in JBP Div. (ii) Upgradation of Power supply Underground Cable (iii) Modification Upgradation of substation at JBP.
Approx. cost of the work (In lakhs) : Rs. 299,29,483.45, Cost of tender from (In Rs.): 0.00. Address of the office from where the tender form can be purchased : Sr. DEE/Genl./Jabalpur, Earnest money (In Rs.): Rs. 299,700.00, Completion period (In years) : 12 Months, Date & Time for submission of tender (Up to 15.00 hrs. on): 27.10.2025, Date & Time for opening of Tender (at 15.30 hrs. on): 27.10.2025, Complete details of tender notice available on the Railway Website www.irops.gov.in. Complete tender form can also be downloaded from above website.

SD,
Sr. Divisional Elect. Engineer (Genl.),
West Central Railway, Jabalpur

स्वच्छ भारत अभियान
एक कदम स्वच्छता की ओर

CENTRAL RAILWAY**CORRIGENDUM NO. 1**

Tender No. CR-BB-SNT-P-TELE-2025-56 Corrigendum No 1 is been issued for tender no CR-BB-SNT-P-TELE-2025-56 1. Item deleted – Tender document. 2. New Tender document is uploaded. 3. New document is uploaded with document description as 'Reply to Prebid queries' Details can be viewed on Website at www.irops.gov.in Rest all other terms and conditions remain the same. This tender complies with Public Procurement Policy Order 2017/dated 15.06.2017 [524]
अनाधिकृत रूप से रेल लाइन को पार करना दंडनीय अपराध है।

PARADIP PORT AUTHORITY**Tender No.ENG/PIQ/1744/BAHUDAPORT/2025/296, Dt.25.09.2025**

Preparation of Techno-Economic Feasibility Report (TEFR) and Detailed Project Report (DPR) for New Port near Bahuda Muhan, Ganjam District of Odisha State. Paradip Port Authority (PPA) invites applications from interested Applicants in accordance with the RFQ document which may be downloaded from the CPP Portal (<https://ppasecure.gov.in/procurement>). Last date and time of submission of Bid Document is 10.11.2025 till 1715 hours. Executive Engineer (C) Project Implementation Office, PPA, PPA/PR/46/2025-2026, dt.07/10/2025

GOVERNMENT OF TAMILNADU**HIGHWAYS DEPARTMENT****THANJAVUR (H)****CONSTRUCTION & MAINTENANCE CIRCLE****TENDER NOTICE**

T. N.No. 38/2025-26 / HDO/DATED:07.10.2025

For and on behalf of the Governor of Tamil Nadu,

Percentage tender through online under Two Cover

System will be received up to 27.11.2025, 12.30 hours

(server time) by the Superintending Engineer (H),

C&M, Thanjavur Circle for CRIDP 2025-26 One work

(TNJ-102) Pertaining to Thiruvavur (H) C&M Division.

Details of works, approximate value of works, EMD (EMD

through online payment Gateway of the Portal only) availability

of tender document and all other details are available

from 17.10.2025 onwards in the Government website

<https://tntenders.gov.in>. If any Changes / Corrections in

the tender, it will be published in the above Government

website only

SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER (H),

C&M CIRCLE, THANJAVUR

DIPR/5583/TENDER/2025

A-688**GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA****DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES****OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER & BASIN MANAGER****TEL BASIN, BHAWANIPATNA**

E-mail ID: ceetelbasinbhp@gmail.com / Phone No: 06670-230209

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

E-Procurement Notice No: CE&BM, TEL -P1 02/2025-26

Bid Identification No: CETEL-BID-02/2025-26

The Chief Engineer & Basin Manager, Tel Basin, Bhawanipatna on behalf of Governor of Odisha invites on-line percentage rate tender (P-1) through e-procurement in double cover system for execution of work.

Table - 1: Details of Critical Dates, details of work, Bid Security

Pkg. No.	Name of works	Approx. Tender Cost	Class of Contractor	Bid Security/ EMD (online) (IN INR)	Cost of tender document (online) (IN INR)	Period of Completion
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Protection to scoured bank on Tel left from Ratakhandi to Amadah RD 00 m to 2000 m.	Rs. 5,12,82,981.00/- (Excluding G.S.T)	'A' Class	Rs. 5,12,830,00/-	Rs. 10,000/-	12 (Twelve) Calendar Months

Table-2: e-Procurement Details

Procurement Officer Bid Identification No. Availability of Tender on-line for bidding From To Date of Seeking tender clarification Technical Bid Financial Bid Place of opening

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Chief Engineer & Basin Manager, Tel Basin, Bhawanipatna CETEL-BID 02/2025-26 Dt. 13.10.2025 at 10.00 hours Dt. 02.11.2025 up to 17.00 hours Dt. 13.10.2025 to 25.10.2025 at Office during office hours Dt. 03.11.2025 at 11.00 Hours To be intimated after evaluation of Technical Bid. Office of Chief Engineer & Basin Manager, Tel Basin, Bhawanipatna

Further details can be seen from the Govt. Website www.tendersodisha.gov.in
* Other Terms & conditions can be seen from the Government website www.tendersodisha.gov.in
* The Corrigendum/cancellation of Tender, if any, will be uploaded and can be seen from the above website only.

Chief Engineer & Basin Manager
Tel Basin, Bhawanipatna
OIPR-32317/11/0013/25-26

CENTRAL RAILWAY**ELECTRIFICATION WORKS**

OPEN E-TENDER NOTICE No. 28, 27/2025 OF 03.10.2025 For and on behalf of the President of India invites open E-tender through website www.irops.gov.in from reputed contractors. Sr. No. 1. NAME OF WORK: Electrification of ROB works in lieu of LC 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25, 26, 27 & 34 in KYN-LNL section & 69 in KYN-IGP section. Tender Notice No.26/2025 (BB.LG.W.KYN.2025.03)
Approximate Cost of the Work: Rs. 4,11,45,612/- Bid Security: Rs.3,55,700/- Validity: 60 Days Completion Period: 09 Months (C) Sr. No. 2. NAME OF WORK: Rewiring of Machine Shop at S&T Workshop, Bicyulla. Tender Notice No.27/2025 (BB.LG.W.BY.2025.01) Approximate Cost of the Work: Rs. 36,90,668/- Bid Security: Rs.73,800/- Validity: 60 Days Completion Period: 06 Months (C) Instruction: 1. Tender closing date & time of aforesaid tender: Upto 13.00 hours of 27.10.2025 and will be opened after 13.00 hrs. 2. The prospective tenderers are requested to visit the website www.irops.gov.in for complete details of tenders & corrigendum, if any. 3. Tenderer may participate in above e-tender electronically through website www.irops.gov.in only & submission of manual offers against e-tender are not allowed. Manually, if submitted shall neither be opened nor considered. 4. For further enquiry, may contact: Senior Divisional Electrical Engineer (General Service), Annex Bldg., 1st floor, Central Railway, Mumbai CSMT. 5. This tender complies with Public Procurement Policy Order 2017 dated 15.06.2017. [521]
अनाधिकृत रूप से रेल लाइन को प



A thought for today

If we rightly consider, every green tree is far more glorious than if it were made of gold and silver

MARTIN LUTHER

Shine Language

Investors spooked by Trump's policies have sought safety in gold, but expecting an endless rally would be a mistake

Gold crossed the \$4,000 per ounce milestone this week. That's over ₹1.2L per 10g in Indian market terms, an all-time record. The world's 7.2L centenarians will remember a time when an ounce – 28.3g – used to be worth \$20.7. In fact, this rate largely held steady for a century from 1834 to 1934, when it was *raised to \$35 and maintained* for the next 34 years. Gold was a stable commodity then, and a stabilising influence on the global economy. Now, it's a hedge, which explains why its price soars at the first sign of trouble.

That sign this year is Trump – born in the \$35 era and now going on 80. Gold was at \$2,700 on the day he was sworn in eight months ago, so it's gained about 50% already. It hit \$3,000 in March when Trumpamped up talk of tariffs and spread uncertainty, and has crossed \$4,000 now amid delayed US financial data and a US govt shutdown. Goldman Sachs sees it hitting \$4,900 by Dec next year – over ₹1.5L per 10g.

Of course, predictions are based on assumptions and shouldn't guide action. When gold went from \$38 per ounce in 1972 to \$850 in 1980, financial advisers would have egged you on to buy more of it. But by 1999, it had crashed to \$251. In 2022, gold tumbled from \$2,000 to \$1,600. What Trump does next will certainly determine gold's trajectory, but unexpected events can overtake him and the rest of us. Gold crossed \$1,000 amid the 2008 financial crisis, and \$2,000 during the pandemic. Both times, fears of inflation from massive govt stimulus spending – over \$20tn in the first five months of the pandemic – started the dash for the safety of gold.

Larry Summers, US treasury secretary under Clinton, said investors rush to gold “when they don't have confidence in the people who are managing the country”. But Trump's ad hoc policy-making is affecting confidence beyond US borders. That's why central banks have been lapping up gold too. As savers and investors, the thing to remember is that the surge in gold's price isn't organic. Gold is a haven, yes, but this mad rush could end in a stampede.

Stranger Things

Indians are racing to new weight loss drugs like they did to processed foods. Who's telling them it's a vicious circle?

Evidently, it's not just the celebrities. Past months have seen many of them shed the kilos so dramatically that they just can't convince peeps that it's not because of the new weight loss drugs (WLDs), no matter how much they deny it. *Yeh jo public hai ye sab janti hai*, as the song goes. Now it seems that a lot of this speculation may be informed by first-hand experience. So briskly have Indians taken to Mounjaro that this injectable weight loss therapy has seen 42% and 60% kind of m-o-m growth since its March launch. It's now looking set to displace our pharma market's long-standing market leaders (an antibiotic and an anti-diabetic). But this WLD, starting at an average monthly cost of ₹14,000, is a pricey fad. Also a worrying one.

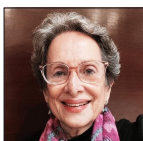
Indians have acquired mass obesity within a generation. Its core explanation is no different than America's, although we have shortened their timeline on this just as we seem to be doing with the WLDs. As Johann Hari writes in his sobering *Magic Pill*, we began to eat foods that didn't exist before – “designed by the food industry to be maximally addictive, pumped full of just the right proportions of sugar and salt and starch to keep us chomping”. Only, alongside embracing America's chips and colas, it feels like India's now eating more samosas and jalebis in a day than previous generations got in a year. Ideally, the magic pills, which are actually weekly injections, should be carefully prescribed to patients who really need them to battle diabetes, heart disease, or other serious cousins of obesity. Instead, reports make it clear that the doctors are shilling these WLDs with little care or caution.

Next year, when the patent for semaglutide, the active ingredient in major WLDs, expires in India, and their prices accordingly do a generic drop, their uptake may shoot up abnormally. Shouldn't doctors and regulators be ready for that? Not just all the nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, constipation, loss of muscle mass that we already know about, but also the side-effects that we don't yet know. In the face of a titanic drug industry plug, public health advice shouldn't go AWOL.

Infra-redlight

Fly to the moon, but the road's still cratered

Bachi Karkaria



Mumbai got a new airport yesterday at Navi Mumbai. All nice-nice, *chakachak*. Delhi too will get a second one at month-end. That *hawai adda* is not at any Naya NOIDA, but *ki farak paida*? With both we'll soar into global aviation's stratosphere. Provided we don't miss the flight thanks to down-to-earth jams. Fancy new infra gets jilted by plain old truth: What the big print giveth, the small print taketh away.

Last week Shri Eknath Shinde was 'in conversation' with Shekhar Gupta. Hon Dy CM, Maharashtra, listed the goodies laid on and to be laid on by his Mahayuti govt. He still has clout even though he's no longer CM, but plays half-second fiddle, along with Ajit Pawar, to his former DCM, now-CM, Devendra Fadnavis. This arrangement looks as convoluted as our daily detours thanks to these projects which will make our *rashtra maha* again. MMGA.

So what if every big-small road looks like it has committed *hara-kiri*, making it suicidal to get anywhere? *Bhau, bund kar re kitkit*. Means, it's because so much infra is in the pipeline. Yes, yes, I know this also means a dash to that new airport could be a pipe dream.

Shinde-*saheb* told us it will take just 40 minutes to get from South Bombay to the new airport via the 21.8km Atal Setu. No, our DCM wasn't spinning a yarn. So Bo-ites can certainly zip to this transharbour bridge via our other engineering marvels like Coastal Road, Sea Link and under-construction Worli-Sewri Connector. But, they still swear it out at bottlenecks choking the entry and exit of first two, and godknows when third will be complete. Dilliwalas will suffer same. Last month weren't they stuck forever on clogged NOIDA expressway?

So close I'm living to Atal Setu means I can reach Navi Mumbai in minutes only. *Pann bhau*, my work is all in *purani* Mumbai, and that ride takes over an hour because of long-long jams and no buttered zipways! Maybe I should go only where new airport will fly me.

Alec Smart said: “Has SIR set the Bihar test paper?”



America: A Big Bet On AI

All the growth in consumer spend & half the total comes from the richest 10% of Americans. They're also investing heavily in AI. If AI doesn't deliver, it could be real bad news for world's largest economy

Ruchir Sharma



Despite the growing list of threats to US's economy – from high tariffs to collapsing immigration, eroding institutions, rising debt and sticky inflation – large companies and investors seem unfazed. They're increasingly confident that AI is snowballing into a force large enough to counter all these challenges.

Lately, this optimism has become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Hundreds of billions of dollars that companies are investing in AI now account for an astonishing 40% share of US GDP growth this year, and that's a conservative estimate. Some analysts believe it doesn't fully capture the spending on AI, so the real share could be even higher.

AI companies also have accounted for 80% of the gains in US stock market so far in 2025. That is helping to fund and drive US economic growth, as the AI-driven stock market draws in money from all over the world, and feeds a boom in consumer spending by the rich.

Since the wealthiest 10% of the population own 85% of US stocks, they enjoy the largest wealth effect when it goes up. Little wonder then that the latest data shows America's 'two track' consumer economy rests largely on one rail – spending by the wealthy. The top 10% of Americans by income now account for virtually all the growth in consumer spending, and half of the total – which is the highest share on record since the data begins.

But without all the excitement around AI, the US economy might be stalling out, given the multiple threats. No nation has seen an immigration boom-bust cycle near the scale of the one roiling America. Net immigration to US rose nearly fourfold after 2020 to peak at well over 3mn in 2023. Then came Trump-led political backlash and the number of net new arrivals has plummeted. It is now expected to finish this year at around 400,000, and that trickle could be the trend in the coming years. This hit to labour force growth would reduce

America's potential GDP growth rate by more than a fifth, again according to conservative estimates. Yet increasingly the response to this demographic challenge is another shrug. AI is going to make human labour less necessary anyway, so why worry?

Likewise, govt deficits and debt are increasing faster in US than in other developed markets. At around 100% of GDP, US govt debt is near its WWII peak and on its current trajectory, that burden could keep rising. Unless, of course, AI saves the day by generating an economic boom. In that happy scenario, US debt burden stabilises.

Global markets appear to be counting on the happy scenario. Bond investors have lately punished countries



Image: AI

running significantly lower deficits than US, including Japan, France and UK. All these countries have seen sell-offs in their govt bonds, leading to a spike in yields. US, alone among them and despite its more dire fiscal situation, has seen a drop in its 10-year govt bond yield this year.

The main reason AI is seen as a magic fix for so many different threats is that it is expected to deliver a significant boost to productivity growth, especially in US.

‘India, UK Should Embrace Their Cultural Band, Baaja, Baaraat’

Starmer's trip should take people-to-people exchanges, the bedrock of bilateral ties, to a new level. Think dhokla-n-chips and more Shakespeare in sari, writes former director of Nehru Centre, London

Amish Tripathi



If you've ever gone on a family holiday, you know what happens at the airport. Too much baggage, arguments about whose suitcase busted the weight limit, but eventually, there's always someone cracking a joke to lighten the mood. To me, the relationship between India and UK is exactly that – old baggage, new laughs, plenty of drama, but, ultimately, the joy of reaching a destination together.

As PM Keir Starmer begins his India visit, the past is impossible to ignore – centuries of entanglement, empire, economics, and Shashi Tharoor's legendary speeches making sure the British never forget their “historic receipts”. But you know what makes all that lighter? Culture. Culture is the lime pickle to the British blandness and the mint chutney to our curry – brings out the flavour, even if it makes you sweat a little!

Living in London: From chaat to crumpets

London was my home for over four years – when I served there as an Indian diplomat. I became an expert on surviving with very little sun – extremely difficult for us Indians. And even developed a taste for British arts and scones (though I maintain – nothing on earth beats paani-puri at Shivaji Park). What I realised is this: the British fascination with India is real. I've been grilled about the Mahabharat in lecture rooms, invited to Diwali parties in English homes, and yes, watched my Mayfair neighbours struggle bravely with *Naatu Naatu* dance steps. Those moments showed me that curiosity isn't a one-way street – we're all waving at each other from both sides.

The real living bridge

Of course, there's one thing even more solid than the London Bridge: the Indian diaspora. Nearly two million Indians call UK home. PM often calls them the

“Living Bridge” between our countries. Whether it's in Parliament, NHS, on BBC comedy shows, or the corner curry shop, they've built real connections. Their children effortlessly switch between English sarcasm and Indian drama, their parents keep Diwali alive alongside Christmas. I say, that's cultural fusion at its best.

Beating the dhol: What's worked so far

Don't get me wrong – this isn't Day 1 of the India-UK culture party. We've had electric moments together. Who can forget the India-UK Year of Culture in 2017? Over 400 events with everyone joining the dance, from



Shakespeare in sari to Bollywood at the British Library. The British Council keeps bringing Indian artists to UK galleries; the Jaipur Literature Festival has as many Brits as Indians on its stage these days. Museums in both countries keep exchanging treasures (these days, consensually).

Fire up the curry – 2027 could be spicier!

But, my friends, why tiptoe when you can *bhangra*? It's time to crank up the music for 2027 – the 80th year of Indian independence. Imagine an even grander India-UK Year of Culture: extra loud, extra inclusive. Visualise the upcoming Yuge Yugeen Museum in Delhi

housing an India-UK Friendship Wing. The British Museum, V&A, and others could share priceless Indian heritage – on long loan, of course – and we reciprocate with British Raj era and modern Indian art for their galleries. Let antiquities travel, like all good stories should.

We don't need to stop there. How about resident artist exchanges – send an English sculptor to Bengal, a desi playwright to Manchester? Launch a fusion sports festival: cricket meets football (imagine the on-field arguments!). Let our chefs create next-level fusion dishes – dhokla-n-chips, anyone? Kids on both sides can do virtual museum days, WhatsApp storytelling, or history quizzes with prizes of British biscuits and Indian laddoos.

The digital masala

Let's not forget – the world's gone digital. Last year, India and UK signed a Programme of Cultural Cooperation focusing on digital platforms, AI-powered archives, virtual exhibitions, and sustainability. This means that very soon, anyone in Birmingham or Bengaluru can debate the best chaat or Shakespeare scene over a midnight Zoom call. Culture isn't stuck in museums anymore – it's knocking on your phone, arguing for attention!

Let there be light!

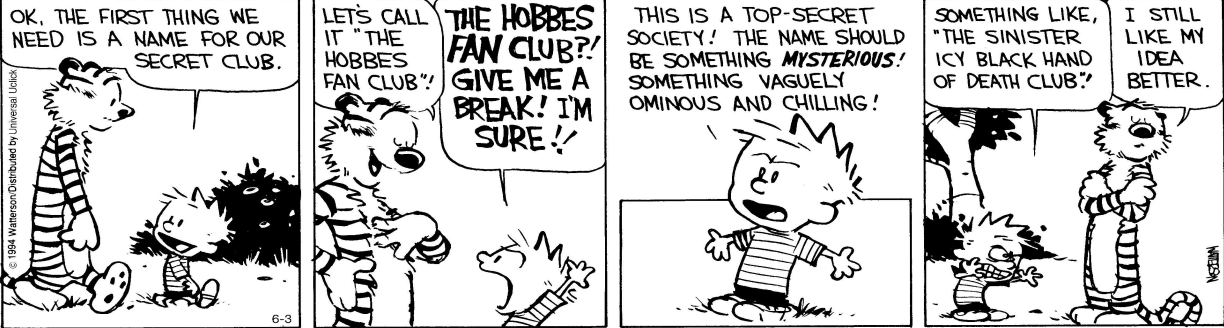
Now, the elephantine rock in the room: the Koh-i-Noor, that legendary Mountain of Light. This is not going to be resolved anytime soon. But here's an idea – why not build a mountain of shared stories, songs, jokes, and meals, one so dazzling that even the Koh-i-Noor will need shades? In a world divided by politics, it's culture that makes room for laughter and learning.

So as Starmer lands in India, let's keep the samosas warm and the conversation open. Our histories are mixed up, our future can be too – if we remember that in the end, the party's much more fun when everyone's invited.

Jai Ho, Cheers, and keep that extra suitcase for the memories!

Tripathi is an author & former diplomat

Calvin & Hobbes



Swami Achyutananda

Every day we go through three states: waking, dreaming, and deep sleep. Every one of us knows these three states. In the dream state, we see many incidents, all of which are created by our mind. The dreamer and his world are both created by the mind. On waking up, we come to know that dreams we saw are unreal. Similarly, in waking state, the world we see around us, and its seer, are both created by our minds.

The mind comprises *manas*, *buddhi*, *chitt*, and *ahamkar*. Manas, mind, is where *sankalp*, determination, and *vikalp*, doubt, arise. The combination of *sankalp* and *vikalp* is *manas*. Then comes *buddhi*, intellect, which is the decision-maker. Decisions are made by the intellect. Chitt, memory, is that segment of the mind where thoughts

are stored. Thoughts come to our mind from memory, just like an artist arrives on stage from the green room.

Finally, *ahamkar*, ego, is coordinator of the mind. We always say, ‘i do’, ‘i see’, ‘i eat’. This ‘i’ is the small or unripe I. After destroying this i, we will discover the ripe I, consciousness.

Once, King Janak had a dream. He saw that an enemy king attacked his kingdom. Even though he fought with all his strength, he was defeated and thrown out of his own kingdom. He found himself seriously wounded, bleeding, trembling, and very hungry. On the streets, he found a place where food was being distributed. He joined the queue. When his turn came, the food was almost over. He got a small portion; however, a bird swooped on it,

and food fell to the ground. King Janak cried out in despair.

Once awake, a soldier enquired, “King, what happened to you?” In a confused state, Janak asked, “Was that true or is this true?” The soldier, unsure what to say, called the queen. Janak repeated the question. In the courtyard, the king was sitting with all ministers and advisers. A bill was presented before him for his signature. Again, Janak asked the same question: “Is that true or is this true?”

Meanwhile, news of King Janak's state reached Ashtavakra, who visited him. He asked, “What happened to you?” Janak asked the same question to Ashtavakra. The rishi responded, “You saw many things in the dream; are they present now?” The king said, “No!” The rishi continued, “Whatever you are



THE SPEAKING TREE

Sacred space



Most people believe the mind to be a mirror, more or less accurately reflecting the world outside them, not realising on the contrary that the mind is itself the principal element of creation.

Rabindranath Tagore

Is This True Or Is That True

seeing right now, was it present in the dream?” The king said, “No!” The rishi then explained, “Neither that was true, nor this is true. However, the dream was experienced by you, and the waking state is also experienced by you. So, in both states, you were present, and you are present. Therefore, you are true.”

On the ocean of consciousness, the mind dances like a wave. This wave prevents us from realising our true nature. Therefore, we must stop this wave, overcome the mind, and then we can understand our true nature.

Our true nature is existence, consciousness, and bliss, but we believe ourselves to be limited by body and mind. Suffering starts from here. This body-mind complex is the root cause of all suffering. Overcome this complex and become free from bondage. Try and feel – ‘i am Satchidanand’.

OUR VIEW



Cheaper gas would help India reduce emissions

India's economy must find an optimal path to its net-zero goal. An expected decline in global prices would make gas affordable enough to enlarge its role in carbon reduction

It is not often that geopolitical events make space for greater economic efficiency. As trade turmoil snaps and re-links supply chains across the globe, with costs rising more than ebbing along the way, the gas market deserves attention. The dynamics of this commodity are exposed to geopolitics in their very own way. After Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Europe's dependence on Russian piped gas has tapered. This year alone, Europe's imports of liquefied natural gas (LNG) are up 20%, over half of it from the US. Not surprisingly, Russia is scouting for new markets in friendly countries. As *Mint* reported this week, its state-run Gazprom is looking to set up an LNG terminal in India. To the extent greater gas usage can help us decarbonize our economy, such projects are welcome.

Our challenge lies in gas absorption. Lately, LNG prices have hovered around \$11 per unit (of a million British thermal units), pricing it out of bulk usage categories like transport and electricity. But we can expect US gas production to rise after the White House lifted its lid on capacity expansion, reversing a decision taken by its previous occupant. As US firms work at a feverish pace to expand, landed LNG could get more affordable. As for local demand, China's case is instructive. It imports most of its supply, and yet, most of its trucking fleet has switched from diesel to cleaner LNG, which spews out less carbon. Piped gas from Russia, Myanmar and Turkmenistan, which works out cheaper than seaborne LNG, has helped China make that switch. In India, half the gas we consume is imported (in LNG form), while 60% of domestic supplies are priced about 40% lower than global levels. Gas, how-

ever, remains a modest 6.7% or so of our overall energy mix. Given its advantages, the government aims for 15% by 2030, but this has been a struggle so far. Many of our LNG terminals languish; on average, they use only half their capacity. If gas imports get cheaper, it would enable greater LNG adoption for the haulage of cargo by road. This can help bridge our transition from fossil fuels to clean energy. While electric trucks enjoy policy support, perhaps fiscal incentives could also be used to nudge transporters—small enterprises, mostly—to switch from diesel to LNG carriers, which are costlier to acquire. Cheaper gas would also help deepen the penetration of piped supply for cooking, helping take homes off LPG cylinders that pollute more.

Meanwhile, a carbon market that's emerging in India could catalyse the use of gas as a middle path in our net-zero journey. This market would get energy users to optimize usage in the specific context of their own constraints, by buying or selling carbon permits or credits, even as gradually tightened emission caps push the country to converge on its climate goals. Broadly, the key to its success lies in high-integrity emission verification, which would ensure that carbon credits are valued properly and work as envisaged. LNG, supported by import terminals along our long coastline, could grow its share of our energy mix as the market begins to account for its edge on emissions over other fossil fuels. Oil is a rival fuel that offers a cheaper alternative in LPG as Saudi Arabia continues to raise its crude output, but we would be better off using the cleaner option wherever possible. Gas doesn't take carbon out of the mix. But it offers India an opportunity all the same. Let's seize it.

MY VIEW | MYTHS AND MANTRAS

Competitive exams in India: Are we testing the right parameters?

Their focus is on skills that often have nothing to do with requirements of the actual roles on offer



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As the adage goes, "Whatever gets measured gets managed." This principle is evident in education, professional recruitment and performance evaluations worldwide. The metrics we prioritize influence how individuals prepare, perform, and are judged.

Every management consultant will tell you this. Ironically, management education is one area where we have never stopped to ask whether we are testing the right skills. The Common Admission Test (CAT) and similar entrance exams for management institutes test for two areas of competency: *One*, English vocabulary and comprehension. *Two*, solving arithmetic and logic problems. In both, the latter especially, the test is mostly of speed. At best, it is like an IQ test.

But is speed really the requirement? It is almost the last skill required in the field of management. I cannot think of a single business where the critical difference between success and failure is a gap of a few minutes in the speed of decision-making.

Business leadership demands strategic thinking, emotional intelligence, collaboration, calculated risk-taking, long-term vision and even street smarts. None of these has any correlation with the ability to solve arithmetic problems within a few seconds.

Possibly, that is why most successful entrepreneurs do not have formal man-

agement education. Those of another generation like Dhirubhai Ambani or Richard Branson never even completed college. Even contemporary entrepreneurs, from Vijay Shekhar Sharma of Paytm to Ritesh Agarwal of Oyo, did not opt for management education.

Another exam with such a disconnect is for the civil services held by the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC). Think of that whole system objectively, shorn of its halo and glory, and you will realize how flawed and absurd it is. It tests candidates' ability to memorize reams of information across subjects like history, geography and current affairs, alongside some analytical skills.

The first problem is that it serves as a single gateway to a wide array of careers: Indian Administrative Service (IAS), Indian Police Service (IPS), Indian Foreign Service (IFS), Indian Revenue Service (IRS), etc, each requiring distinct skills and aptitudes. Which service successful candidates end up in is simply a function of their ranks in the exam. And they can't afford to give up a job because it does not fit their aptitude or interest, as there is no guarantee that they would be able to qualify again.

This leads to bizarre mismatches. A candidate with a background in literature and no interest in finance could be assigned to the IRS, tasked with handling complex tax policies, or the Indian Audit and Accounts service to face a lifetime of numbers. Similarly, someone with no aptitude for outdoor work might end up in the IPS, where fieldwork and crisis management are key. Someone may join the IFS and become a diplomat despite struggling with public speaking and cross-cultural communication—skills essential for diplomacy. Such mismatches can lead to inefficiency, frustration and suboptimal outcomes for the country.

IAS officers, often considered the backbone of India's bureaucracy, are frequently rotated across unrelated domains: labour one year, agriculture the next, and finance thereafter. It ends

up becoming a power game where little knowledge or subject matter-related skills are required to do a good job. Also, higher-ranked officers with little domain knowledge could even try to sabotage the career of juniors who have better skills and may outshine them.

In certain surveys, IAS officers have themselves expressed how they felt underprepared for technical roles due to a lack of domain-specific training. With fast changing technologies, this skill gap has become even more glaring. On the other hand, the IAS lobby is very power- and hierarchy-conscious, and will not let go of posts that have traditionally been held by IAS officers.

In contrast, most countries tailor their recruitment processes to specific job requirements. In the US, federal agencies like the Internal Revenue Service or State Department conduct targeted hiring, assessing candidates for skills relevant to the role. For example, accounting for tax officials and diplomatic aptitude for foreign service. Singapore's civil service, renowned for its efficiency, uses a combination of aptitude tests, interviews and role-specific assessments. These systems prioritize individual fit over a one-size-fits-all approach, resulting in better governance. I have been told by people who have represented India in global forums that Indian officers often come across as less competent mainly because they lack specific expertise.

India's current system, rooted in colonial-era practices, puts learning by rote and general knowledge over practical skills. The British designed the Indian Civil Service to produce loyal administrators, not specialists, and the UPSC exam retains this legacy.

Coaching institutes thrive by training students to 'crack' the CAT or UPSC through short-cuts and rote, not by fostering critical thinking or leadership. That is how incentives work. As I write this, I have little hope that the system will change for the better. Entrenched interests are likely to prove too strong.



THEIR VIEW

Fraudsters will mourn the end of UPI payment requests

MEGHA JAIN & VANYAA GUPTA



are, respectively, assistant professor, Shyam Lal College, University of Delhi, and senior visiting fellow, PIF, and a Delhi-based technocrat.

The National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) has phased out a major feature of the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) that has long made peer-to-peer (P2P) transactions both convenient and risky. From 1 October, the "collect request" option for P2P transactions has been withdrawn. This is a decisive step to combat a surge in financial fraud within India's digital payments ecosystem.

UPI has revolutionized the way Indians transfer money, making payments instant, secure and cashless. Yet, the "collect request" or "pull transaction" option, which would let a UPI user request money from another user, proved to be a double-edged sword. Unlike conventional 'push' transactions, where the payer initiates and authorizes a bank transfer, 'pull' transactions require the recipient to send a request and the payer to approve it via a UPI PIN code. The feature had promised UPI users convenience, but it also opened the door to exploitation by fraudsters who prey on human psy-

chology, trust and digital inexperience.

Scammers had perfected numerous tactics to exploit that vulnerability. Sellers in online marketplaces would be duped by people posing as buyers and sending them collect requests disguised as payments, tricking them into entering their PIN codes and inadvertently transferring money out of their accounts. Prize and lottery scams had begun to abound: victims were told they had won large sums but needed to verify their account by responding to small-value collect requests. Once fraudsters found a responsive victim, they would double down on their deceit. These scams were designed to manipulate perceptions, exploiting the subtle difference between UPI's mechanisms to send and request money, often done by crafting notifications that mimic legitimate payment confirmations.

Even digitally savvy users fell victim to it. Fraudsters have shown a knack for creating a false sense of urgency through messages of expiring offers, limited-time deals or immediate verification requirements that pressure individuals into approving requests without scrutiny. In a society that values speed and convenience, this psychological manipulation has proven remarkably effective, leaving thousands of users distressed.

In 2019, NPCI attempted to limit abuse by capping pull transactions at ₹2,000. But fraudsters adapted quickly, proving that partial restrictions were insufficient. The decision to eliminate the feature altogether has now placed full control back in the hands of payers. By ensuring that a UPI PIN is only required when money is being sent, the security framework of digital payments has been significantly strengthened. This move reflects a broader principle: in digital finance, control over money must never leave the hands of its owner.

The impact of NPCI's decision extends beyond fraud prevention. Businesses, digital platforms and fintech firms will need to redesign workflows that once depended on collect requests, while consumers will need to grow more familiar with initiating push transactions for every payment. This recalibration also highlights the urgency of financial literacy in a rapidly digitizing economy to ensure that users understand transaction flows and risks.

For ordinary UPI users, the loss of convenience is outweighed by the gain in security. Push transactions are inherently safer, requiring deliberate action by the payer and minimizing the risk of falling prey to scams framed as incoming payments. This platform's structural shift supports the broader national vision of a robust and fraud-resistant financial ecosystem that fosters trust while enabling innovation.

UPI is not just a payment mechanism; it has become an economic enabler across India, powering small businesses, supporting gig workers and aiding the government's cashless economy initiatives. However, as with any technology at scale, features built for convenience can be turned into tools of exploitation. NPCI had done well to address this.

The story of UPI pull transactions illustrates how fraud is about human psychology no less than technology. Fraudsters exploit urgency, trust and misconceptions, luring their victims into making costly errors. A

redesign of the system to eliminate this weak link not only protects UPI users, but also encourages healthy digital habits. In the digital age, safety is the foundation on which trust is fostered and growth pursued.

The move also highlights the evolving role of regulators in shaping the digital economy. Financial innovation must be balanced with safeguards and NPCI's decision demonstrates that India is willing to make the trade-offs needed to secure user trust. Internationally, regulators will watch the move's impact closely as other countries grappling with digital payment fraud consider similar steps. NPCI's initiative could well set a global precedent.

As for UPI users, with the feature now withdrawn, they should update their understanding of UPI interactions and ensure that every payment they make is consciously initiated. For regulators and innovators alike, the shift in how this platform works underscores the need for technology and policy to evolve together to safeguard financial integrity. The sun has finally set on pull transactions, leaving us with a more secure UPI landscape. If fraud levels drop, as expected, it will reinforce India's reputation as a global leader in using technology to ease and improve the lives of large numbers.

NPCI has ended this feature to prevent UPI users from being tricked into sending money

THEIR VIEW

Our lacklustre market: The fault, dear investor, is not in our stars

Foreign investors have rational and opportunistic reasons to pull money out but the India Story must refresh its appeal too



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The contrast couldn't be starker. India's macro fundamentals are running at great—nay, near-ideal—levels. Retail inflation is low and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has just lowered its forecast for this financial year. The current account deficit (CAD) is holding at a comfortable 1% of GDP. The fisc is in good shape, with bond issuance for this year's second half announced recently that confirms the government's commitment towards its glide path of fiscal consolidation. A recent sovereign rating upgrade by S&P seems like a grudging acknowledgement of a tautology by the rating agency, rather than a big achievement.

Yet, global investors don't seem to be impressed. Foreign portfolio investor (FPI) flows into equities stand at a negative \$13 billion in 2025 so far. In the last five years, twice (in 2022-23 and 2024-25) have FPI outflows been at all-time-high levels. There is both a rationale and an opportunistic trigger for this.

The opportunistic trigger is very clear. Of all emerging market (EM) assets, one of the most liquid—indeed, perhaps the most liquid—are listed Indian equities. Thanks to burgeoning retail flows into stocks, both directly and via mutual funds (MFs), India's capital markets are among the busiest in the world. The wall of liquidity engendered by Indian retail investors lets FPIs (and to be fair, even Indian promoters) exit profitable-but-richly-valued Indian positions and rotate funds into other avenues with better price-value equations.

The rationale is clear too. Indian listed equities trade at price-earning multiples that are among the highest in the world, at par with US equities (with the Nifty index trading at about 20-21 times annual earnings). Over the last five-six quarters, earnings growth has stopped supporting such valuations. During this period, broader market earnings have averaged only single digits. In comparison, US markets have continued delivering mid- to high-teens earnings growth in dollar terms. Further, China, delivering near-US type earnings growth, has stocks trading at just 12-13 times earnings. For a long while, India's valuation premium over EMs in general and China in particular have been justified by better capital efficiency, more stable growth and higher corporate earnings growth. In the last few years though, others (including China) have started catching up on capital efficiency markers. Which leaves India's relative attractiveness down to a single variable—growth. As earnings growth flags, foreigners take their money out.

India at a crossroads: Structurally, India faces tough questions on its growth profile.

One, IT outsourcing, the single-biggest driver of growth for the last three decades, is under increasing threat. From being the largest provider of high-paying jobs, this sector is now shedding



jobs in order to deal with the AI threat. In the past, some 300,000-400,000 graduates hired by the IT industry every year would fuel a consumption boom. As AI structurally reduces the sector's demand for a medium-skilled workforce, millions of India's educated might now be hard pressed to find alternative avenues of well-paid employment.

Two, India lags other countries in the AI race. At least for now. Large language model (LLM) initiatives are still in their infancy, not mature enough to raise the sort of capital being invested in the US and China. India is also just about starting off in its drive to manufacture semiconductors at home.

Three, conservative government finances have been matched by equally conservative private corporate investment. Consequently, fixed capital formation, the single biggest driver of economic growth, has remained anemic at an aggregate level for around a decade now. To break this deadlock, something has to give. But as of now, there don't seem to be too many ideas on the table.

A new geo-economic challenge that would make Hobson proud: While US President Donald Trump's second term in power has kept the world at large on edge, the ease with which the wheels have come off India-US relations this year suggests that "hesitations of history" were based on India's general lack of all-round leverage.

Today, our geo-economic dilemmas are coming to a head. Even if India's Russian oil trade was the real reason for the extra 25% tariff imposed by the US, switching import sources would be a tough swap. The discount on Russian oil, averaging \$10-12 per barrel, results in annual savings of about

\$6 billion. More than half of it accrues to public-sector refiners, a windfall that partly helps finance an energy subsidy (primarily on cooking gas) that is not always financed fully by the Union budget. Further, a portion of our Russian oil purchases—placed at \$40-50 billion annually—is settled in rupees, reducing friction costs and creating a buffer for our external account. Most importantly, if India boycotts Russian oil, it could send global crude prices higher. This would put the world at risk of stagflation, which is hardly a better option than a global slowdown.

Our Russian oil trade, however, is very likely a red herring. America's real rationale for the extra 25% tariff very likely differs from the stated reasons and offers India little comfort over prospects of a quick resolution. Access to India's agricultural market seems like the top ask of American trade negotiators, but this is also the reddest of all trade red lines for the Indian political establishment. Acceptance of any US mediation in an India-Pakistan conflict, which appears to be another big ask by the US, is an equally deep-set political red line for New Delhi.

We need new ideas as old ones have run their course: FPIs seem to be exercising a cyclical pause that coincides with India's need for new ideas. This cycle will play itself out and an equity market upswing will surely occur at some point. But India must find a new path for the future. If mistakes are made, they should be new ones, instead of trying the same things and making the same old mistakes. Foreign investors are merely canaries in this mine.

These are the author's personal views.

GUEST VIEW

AI's impact on fair competition: Test first, legislate later

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Artificial Intelligence (AI) has moved from the laboratory into the heart of commerce, with algorithms setting cab fares, recommending films to watch and increasingly determining prices in online marketplaces. For antitrust agencies, this raises a key question: Are existing tools enough, or do we need a new AI-specific competition law? On Monday, the Competition Commission of India (CCI) released the report of a study designed to identify harms that AI may cause and evaluate whether the Competition Act of 2002 can address them. Its findings may shape our regulatory path.

Unlike the EU, which has passed the world's first AI law, India does not have an AI statute. Instead, authorities are exploring AI in a sectoral and thematic way. The ministry of electronics and information technology (MeitY) has issued a National Strategy on Artificial Intelligence '#AIforAll,' and is discussing a broader AI framework, with a role in policy coordination for the IndiaAI platform. The Niti Aayog has published a paper

on 'Responsible AI' and the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act of 2023 introduces obligations that intersect with AI-driven markets. These suggest India prefers an incremental, evidence-based approach.

The CCI has focused specifically on AI's risks to fair competition. The key is to strike a balance: i.e., mitigate risks without stifling innovation or overreaching into areas better handled by privacy, intellectual property (IP) or sectoral regulators. So, what are the risks of AI to fair competition?

Algorithmic collusion: Unlike classic cartels, pricing algorithms can tacitly align on prices without human intervention. Traditional antitrust law hinges on proving an 'agreement.' If machines independently converge on higher prices, the legal concept of conspiracy becomes harder to apply.

Data concentration: Control over large data-sets is akin to controlling an essential facility, making it near-impossible for small players to compete. A few global tech firms have amassed user data, creating 'AI gatekeepers' that reinforce themselves through unending network effects, raising entry barriers and entrenchment risks.

Regulatory overlap: AI cuts across competition, privacy, consumer protection, IP and cybersecurity. Proving collusion might

require access to user-level data or algorithmic logs, which are subject to restrictions under the DPDP Act. Without cooperation mechanisms among regulators, enforcement risks inconsistency and legal conflicts.

India should test, not legislate: The EU's AI Act is a bold law and provides a useful play-book. Its risk-tiered approach—mandating technical documentation and logbooks for high-risk AI systems—is conceptually similar to India's DPDP Act's periodic audit requirements for 'significant data fiduciaries.'

India's regulatory philosophy has long been pragmatic. Sandbox models used by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), for instance, illustrate how regulators can allow innovation while learning from controlled experimentation. By running targeted pilots and tests, the CCI too can build its technical expertise, signal industry direction and gather evidence to shape future reforms.

CCI recommendations: The CCI's market study broadly suggests two areas for inter-

vention. **First,** it proposes rigorous AI audits. These would mandate documenting algorithms, testing for collusive behaviour and reviewing pricing practices to prevent unfair market outcomes. **Second,** it stresses the need to remove entry barriers and calls for improved access to essential AI infrastruc-

ture, data and computing power. The aim is to level the playing field so that startups and smaller players can compete effectively with market incumbents. To ensure responsible and competitive AI growth in India overall, the CCI hopes to foster fair competition and greater market transparency, while protecting innovation incentives. For this, it plans to launch advocacy workshops, establish a think-tank on AI markets, strengthen its technical capacity and coordinate with other regulators.

Diversify the solution toolkit: While the CCI has made a good start, its report could have offered a more holistic set of solutions. For example, it could have launched a competition sandbox modelled on RBI's provi-

sion for fintech. The CCI could have firms submit algorithms for simulated market tests. This would offer a safe environment for them to demonstrate compliance with the competition law as well as visibility on potential anti-competitive dynamics. The regulator could also review AI acquisitions. India's deal-value threshold for CCI clearance is a step forward, but it needs qualitative triggers—like acquisitions involving unique data-sets, critical AI intellectual property or top-tier research talent.

Heavy-handed regulation could deter investment and stifle startups, while too little oversight risks favouring global AI gatekeepers. The CCI study makes it clear that intervention is needed, but its scope and form must remain flexible. Given the rapid pace of AI innovation, rigid rules risk addressing outdated problems. Instead, proposals such as a self-audit framework highlight the need for experimentation. India should run pilots to test audit models and early-warning systems. This will reveal what works, where risks lie and how governance can support innovation. The key takeaway from the CCI's study is clear: for a technology as dynamic as AI, India must test first, learn fast and legislate later.

These are the author's personal views.

MINT CURATOR

America should think before it slams its door on immigration

The benefits of it are subtle but compelling enough to keep it going



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Immigration has played a big role in the economic pre-eminence of the US. REUTERS

The economics of immigration has a lot in common with the economics of trade. Lower barriers to imports raise growth and living standards in the aggregate, but may harm particular people and places. Lower barriers to immigration do the same. Politicians struggle to understand this trade-off, let alone manage it wisely. Of the two, the case for more immigrants might be harder to grasp—because the aggregate gains are more subtle.

Until recently, the case for liberal commerce was mostly taken for granted. As Americans are now discovering, high tariffs make many of the things they want to buy more expensive. That will depress consumers' real incomes and make almost everybody worse off. The gains from trade are widely shared and, given time, obvious. The gains from immigration, by contrast, go disproportionately to immigrants themselves. Natives might see that as no reason to welcome them, especially if it also means higher taxes, fewer jobs and lower wages for those who were there first.

There's no denying that immigration is good for migrants. Yet, trade-offs notwithstanding, it's a fallacy to think their gains impose a net cost on everybody else. Overall, the hosts gain too, and not just a little. Squeezing immigration will probably harm the US even more than taxing imports.

Many governments worry these days about worsening demographic pressures. If the naive case against immigration were correct, shrinking proportions of workers to dependents should be celebrated. Fewer workers would mean a tighter labour market and push wages higher. Workers' living standards would rise as their numbers decline: The fewer workers, the better.

Why is this wrong? Because adding workers generates an economic surplus for other workers and for the economy as a whole. Immigrants tend to be disproportionately of working age, so they reduce the ratio of dependents to workers, which eases what would otherwise be a growing fiscal burden. Far more important, immigrants tend to be disproportionately hard-working, enterprising, adaptable, mobile and ambitious. (If they weren't, they'd stay put.) Get this right, and the gains that follow are colossal: Just reflect on the economic pre-eminence of the US, and the role that immigration has played in its history. Increasingly, economists are showing exactly why and how much this source of economic advantage matters.

The connection between immigration and innovation is crucial. In country after country, skilled immigrants have driven

more innovation and faster growth in productivity. One notable study found that between 1990 and 2010, US immigrants with H-1B (skilled worker) visas accounted for between 30% and 50% of the country's productivity growth. Michael Clemens, one of America's most eminent migration scholars, reports that skilled immigrants cause more patenting of new inventions and start more fast-growing businesses, leading to more high-paying jobs for native workers, skilled and unskilled alike.

The Trump administration has announced that H-B visas will now be subject to a \$100,000 tax per worker. No question, this programme is a mess and needs reform: It's subject to an arbitrary cap and lets employers game the system in ways that diminish its benefits. The new tax solves neither problem. It makes as much sense as it would to tax innovation directly. Here's an idea: Throttle long-term productivity and shrink the economy to prop up some wages and raise short-term revenue.

To tout the benefits of immigration is not to argue for 'open borders.' Borders should be secured and immigration orderly and controlled. Blurring the line between refugees and economic migrants, as migrants' advocates tend to, is a mistake; different considerations should guide policy in each case—ethical demands in the first, the economic self-interest of natives in the second. Abrupt increases in immigration can burden communities and be needlessly disruptive. Even well-managed immigration can dampen the wages of competing native workers and pose fiscal challenges by adding to demand for local public services. Permission to immigrate, even temporarily, is indeed a privilege and should come with strings attached.

The main thing is to understand that, for natives and not just migrants, immigration is an enormously valuable economic opportunity. At the same time, it can impose costs on some places and people. As with trade, labour-saving automation and 'creative destruction' in general, governments shouldn't deny the losses and should do more to help the losers.

But a political system fit for purpose would put the emphasis where it belongs—on promoting citizens' opportunities and economic security, and not on blocking economic growth. ©BLOOMBERG



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

— Rammath Goenka

PUNISH THE GUILTY IN LETHAL DRUG CASE, FIX THE SYSTEM

NEARLY four decades after 14 patients in Mumbai died of kidney failure from cough syrup tainted with diethylene glycol (DEG), the same poison has struck again. At least 20 children in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan have now died after consuming syrup laced with the same toxic chemical. In 2019, a dozen children in Jammu and Kashmir met a similar fate. This time, the culprit is Coldrif, a cough syrup made by Sresan Pharmaceuticals. Tests confirmed that one batch contained lethal levels of DEG—an industrial solvent poisonous to humans even in trace amounts. Inspectors found more than 350 violations at the company's Tamil Nadu plant. Several states have banned the product, but fresh cases are emerging across the country.

Why are so many of our medicines unsafe? It is an appalling question for any nation to face—and an indictment of one that calls itself the “world’s pharmacy”. Since 2023, Indian cough syrup exports have required extra testing after over 140 children in Gambia, Uzbekistan and Cameroon died from contaminated Indian products. Yet domestic consumers remain unprotected. Once again, lax oversight and regulatory complacency have turned preventable negligence into a public health disaster. Despite repeated WHO warnings, India’s drug authorities have failed to strengthen surveillance, plug supply-chain gaps, or weed out substandard medicines. That Sresan was allowed to manufacture Coldrif for over a decade is nothing short of scandalous.

India’s pharmaceutical success story is being sullied by a handful of reckless manufacturers and distributors chasing unethical profits. Over-the-counter sales and the over-prescription habits of some doctors make it easier for such operators to thrive. Greed keeps dangerous, substandard products on the shelves. While a doctor who prescribed the syrup has been arrested for negligence, Sresan’s owner is still at large. The investigation must go beyond the usual scapegoats and fix accountability on those who gave the company a clean regulatory chit. The central government must order an independent probe into the systemic collapse of drug regulation in India. Each death is a reminder that weak enforcement kills. It is time to punish the guilty—and ensure no parent has to fear a medicine bottle again.

LAWS NOT PLUGGING EXAM PAPER LEAKS, ACTION MUST

A crucial recruitment drive by Odisha Police has ended with a massive scam and a huge embarrassment for the state government. The now-cancelled Combined Police Services Examination aimed to recruit, among others positions, sub-inspectors. However, on September 30, days before the written test, Berhampur police intercepted three buses and arrested 114 aspirants and three middlemen who were allegedly on their way to Vizianagaram to get access to the test questions for ₹15-25 lakh. A week and much political uproar later, the crime branch has taken over investigation and started looking for the kingpin of an inter-state crime syndicate believed to be behind the scam.

Two consequential aspects must be borne in mind. First, the recruitment of entry-level police officers was up for sale, pointing at the chain of corruption the scam, if it went undetected, could have triggered. Second, the bust has exposed the casual manner in which the recruitment process was being conducted. The Odisha Police Recruitment Board had awarded the contract to conduct the all-important exam to ITI, the central public sector undertaking, which in turn sub-contracted two private firms in the state. After the scam was unearthed, the two local firms have come under the scanner. According to an intelligence report, the promoter of one of them even has a criminal record. A due diligence of the two companies would have spared the blushes for Odisha Police and the state government. Instead, more allegations of collusion are being aired.

What’s even more worrying is that the same examination was postponed in March over similar allegations; clearly, no lessons were learnt. Paper leaks in several states led to the enactment of the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024 at the national level. Odisha, too, has its own law. However, the menace refuses to relent. The state government must ensure that those behind the current scam are exposed and taken to task without delay. It must also put in place a strong oversight mechanism and fix responsibility on the state agencies. Lakhs of youngsters look forward to government jobs every year, and any compromise on the integrity of the recruitment process will lead to a huge trust deficit in the system. That should not be an option.

QUICK TAKE

KING CANNOT BE DENIED

ONE of the bestselling authors of our times has turned out to be the most banned in Trump’s America. PEN America’s *Banned in the USA* report states that out of the more than 6,800 books temporarily or permanently pulled for the 2024-25 school year, Stephen King’s works featured 206 times. To be sure, King is no friend of MAGA acolytes. This August, the Bram Stoker award winner tweeted, “Can you possibly trust a president who can’t spell?” Thankfully for American adolescents, King also happens to hold the record for most film adaptations. It would not be the same pleasure, but those denied the tingle of turning the pages of a King book can always scream at a screen.

DONALD Trump is learning that you cannot have the cake and eat it too. His lesson comes from America’s longtime ally, South Korea. It will be one of the most important lessons of Trump’s second presidency, although faraway South Korea is only about 10 percent of the size of the United States.

India and South Korea were both equal victims of Trump’s bullying soon after he moved into the White House for the second time. The Trump administration threatened 25 percent tariff on South Korean exports to the US, the same as India. If India is “tariff king” in Trump’s words, South Korea is not way behind because of its non-tariff barriers to imports and its ‘red lines’ on rice and beef imports from America. Last year, Seoul notched up a record surplus in excess of \$50 billion in trade with the US. But on the eve of Trump’s August 1 deadline for trade agreements, South Korea reached a deal that fixed a highly favourable 15 percent duty on most of its exports to the US. A beaming Trump called it a “full and complete trade deal”. At the same time, tariffs on India soared to 50 percent.

There are lessons for India from South Korea’s trade deal with the US, which is yet to be on paper and has many rough edges. But then, that is the case with many of the deals the US has agreed to with its trade partners around the world. South Korea offered to invest \$350 billion in the US to get Trump to reduce duties on its exports to America by 10 percent.

India could have done something similar by taking along India Inc when Prime Minister Narendra Modi called on Trump at the White House in February. The Ambanis, Tatas, Mahindras and other corporate leaders who have prior investments in the US could have gone to the Oval Office with Modi and told Trump that they would invest big in America. India is a much bigger economy than South Korea, which is only the 13th largest in the world. Any declaration on White House grounds that India Inc would pour—or rain—money on America would have been touted by Trump on his Truth Social microblogging site as yet another feather in his cap.

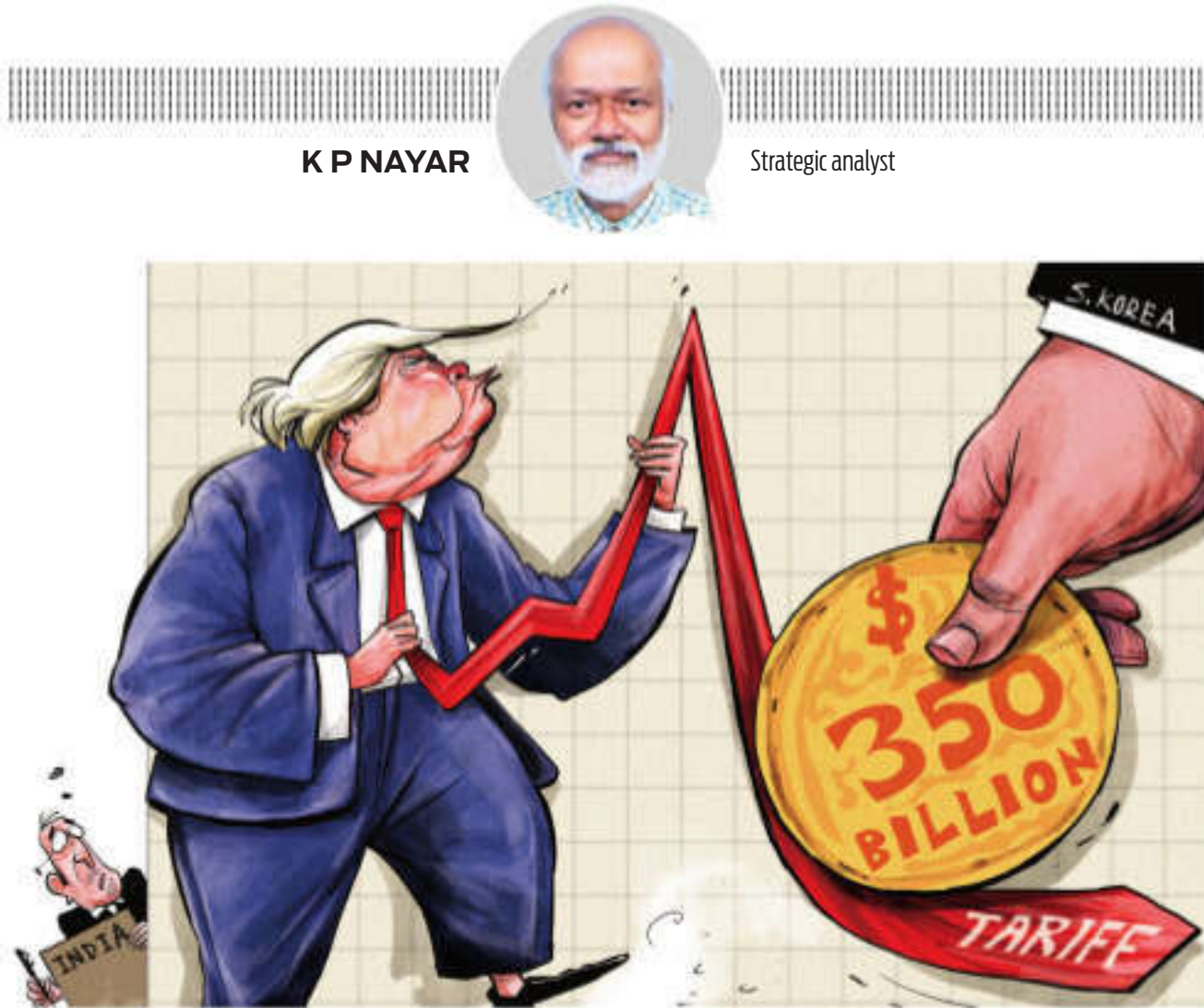
After all, that is what Trump wants, not concrete results. His most trumpeted promise of a border wall with Mexico in the 2016 election is yet to be fulfilled. Trump needs frequent shots of adrenaline that will boost his

Like India, South Korea is facing Trump’s tariff threats and investment demands. At such a time, the East Asian nation is trying to get economically closer to India

K-POP TRACKS TO TUNE OUT TARIFF TINNITUS

K P NAYAR

Strategic analyst



SOURAV ROY

limitless ego and vanity. Historically, only 12-15 percent of declared intentions to invest are finally realised worldwide. Words are cheap. India’s corporate leaders could have gotten away with words, which would have been music to the ears of the 47th US president, and later done precious little about it in the three years that are left before the US elects another occupant of the White House.

Such gimmicks made Trump a friend of India in his first presidential term. Bilateral relations were smooth. Now India has abandoned its own textbooks from Trump’s 2017-21 stint and is paying a big price for this omission. It is true that other countries like the United Kingdom and Japan have creditably taken leaves out of India’s book this year. New Delhi could have

more than matched them. Perhaps India came to falsely believe that Trump is a friend of this country.

India will regret that it gave up on flattering Trump and offering him lollipops like an invitation for the Republic Day parade. It is a fair certainty that Trump would not have the patience to sit through three hours of a parade along the national capital’s Kartavya Path, but the invitation would have pleased him. Like the invitation from King Charles of Britain for a state visit, which helped the UK to strike a trade deal early.

The cake that South Korea promised the White House in \$350-billion investments was, it now turns out, beyond the East Asian country’s means. But Seoul needed the tariff concessions it got from Trump in exchange—South

RETURN OF THE ROLL CALL DEBATE

JOHN J KENNEDY

Former Professor and Dean, Christ (Deemed) University, Bengaluru



much of their academic behaviour.

Removing compulsory attendance may expose the fragile scaffolding on which many students—especially first-generation learners and those from under-resourced backgrounds—depend. For such students, classrooms provide content, structure, peer learning, and a sense of accountability. Autonomy without support, in this context, risks turning into abandonment.

The Delhi High Court and many educationists have cautioned against such blanket reforms. Courses like clinical training require in-person practice, while attendance also underpins scholarships, stipends and hostel discipline. IIT Dhanbad has sensibly retained it for such cases to avoid chaos. The court had rightly urged a differentiated approach: flexibility for lecture-based courses and mandated hours of attendance.



IIT Dhanbad

IIT Dhanbad’s decision to abolish compulsory attendance revisits the question whether such freedom can make more responsible adults out of students. Studies support the claim, but Indian colleges need to evaluate courses and support students who need in-person help before scrapping such a ritual

Mental health adds another layer. Strict attendance rules have been tied to anxiety, distress, and even suicides. Loosening them can ease pressure and create healthier spaces. However, freedom can also overwhelm students who lack time-management skills or juggle jobs, money worries, and family duties. What is needed is guidance in self-directed learning, mentoring, recorded lectures,

and small assessments that keep students engaged. Without such support, freedom will not turn into responsibility.

Of all obstacles, the cultural hurdle is likely the most formidable. Indian education, shaped by hierarchy and parental expectations, has long treated attendance as a stand-in for seriousness. For many parents, being in class means learning; for teachers, empty seats often feel like disrespect. So a sudden shift is bound to draw resistance. However, this very discomfort is also the reason change is needed. If graduates are to face the uncertainties of today’s world, higher education has to move from compliance to responsibility, from control to trust. With proper support, freedom itself can become the best teacher of accountability.

The path forward is neither to romanticise autonomy nor to cling to compulsion. A phased, evidence-based approach is wiser: Initiate reforms, evaluate impact on learning outcomes, retention, mental health, and then adapt. Differentiate between professional and non-professional courses, undergraduates just transitioning from school, and postgraduates already socialised in academic responsibility. Above all, autonomy itself should be treated as an educational objective—explicitly teaching time management, metacognition, and self-regulation.

Let’s remember that IIT Dhanbad’s move and the Delhi High Court’s intervention are not ends in themselves, but opportunities. They invite Indian higher education to confront a difficult truth—genuine learning cannot be coerced, and freedom without preparation can collapse into neglect. This reform could become a milestone if universities are willing to do the harder work of scaffolding autonomy, training responsibility, and designing pedagogy that values outcomes over rituals.

If not, it may be remembered as a well-intentioned, but poorly executed gamble. In the long run, the question is not whether Indian students are ‘ready’ for such freedom, but whether institutions are ready to teach them how to use it.

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

You know your children are growing up when they stop asking you where they came from and refuse to tell you where they’re going

P J O'Rourke

Korea was America’s seventh largest trading partner in 2024, according to the US government’s Bureau of Economic Analysis. Trump, however, wanted to eat the cake too. That had more than just shades of fantasy. The ‘Make America Great Again’ President is now in the cross-hairs of this fantasy of his own making. If Trump wanted the huge South Korean investments, he should have reined in his immigration officials or at least stopped them from releasing photos of workers at a Hyundai factory in Georgia in shackles for alleged visa violations, just like India’s undocumented citizens were deported on US military planes to Punjab in chains.

India did nothing about it, unlike South Korea. Its wealthy *chaebol* conglomerates are now reluctant to fork out much of the investments they had offered Trump. Yet, President Lee Jae Myung has cleverly avoided burning bridges with Trump by giving him the benefit of doubt. He told *Reuters* in a wide-ranging interview last month that the raid was not on Trump’s orders, but was the result of overzealous immigration enforcement. Lee knows how Trump’s mind works, something the Modi government appears to have forgotten.

Meanwhile, realising that the US is no longer a trusted strategic ally or reliable economic partner, South Korea is developing a second wing of its economy overseas. Like Singapore sparked off an ‘India fever’ on the island nation in the early 1990s with a famous declaration on its National Day 32 years ago, in tandem with India’s nascent economic reforms then.

India is South Korea’s partner of choice in this effort to diversify its international economic footprint. LG Electronics announced a week ago that India will be one of its global manufacturing hubs and is investing \$600 million on a new factory in Andhra Pradesh. Along with another *chaebol*, Hyundai, South Korea is the first country to respond to India’s efforts to diminish the damage from Trump’s tariffs by extensively reducing goods and services tax rates. The Korea Investment Corporation, the country’s sovereign fund, recently opened an office in Mumbai. Seoul says its investments in India shot up 83.2 percent in the first quarter of 2025 over the same period last year. India’s response to these initiatives will indicate the future course of this bilateral business relationship. (Views are personal)

MAILBAG

WRITE TO: letters@newindianexpress.com

Bihar bargaining

Ref: *State calculus pitched* (Oct 8). The fissures in both the alliances and smaller parties’ optimism could be the deciding factors in Bihar elections. The fringe parties have realised their potential of upsetting the apple cart. They will bargain hard and not hesitate to cross over.

Rajarao Kumar, Bengaluru

Deter barbarity

Ref: *Improve conviction rate* (Oct 8). The statistics clearly show that deterrence for crimes against women is weak. Any wrongful act should be dealt with the harshest punishment, irrespective of its degree. The public fury extinguished after the Nirbhaya case. The nation has witnessed more diabolical crimes since then.

Sanath Kumar T S, Thrissur

Quantum era

Ref: *No quantum solace* (Oct 8). It’s fascinating that even after a century, quantum mechanics continue to surprise us with new discoveries. The century-old theory remains vital and inspiring, forming the backbone of contemporary digital technologies that define our era.

Muralika K V, Kasargod

Beyond binary

Ref: *Trading to narrow gender gap* (Oct 8). While trade can be a strong tool for women’s empowerment, it’s equally important to recognise that gender is fluid and not restricted to a binary framework. True inclusivity must create opportunities for all gender identities. Policies and programmes should reflect this reality, ensuring that economic growth benefits every individual.

Anila S Prakash, Kannur

Democratic ideals

Ref: *The drying up of democratic imagination* (Oct 8). Democracy needs upkeep and must be allowed to germinate. Adjustments to incorporate changing values is a practical approach to it. India has a robust and enduring democratic setup that distinguishes us, putting us in an elevated position.

Sachidananda Satpathy, Sambalpur

Interpreting history

Ref: *The great Indian retelling* (Oct 6). It’s very unfortunate that many of regionally-celebrated warriors like Velu Thambi Dalawa and Thacholi Othenan are not part of mainstream knowledge. Practically, it’s not possible for curriculums to include all, but in the process, our history always gets altered through interpretations of researchers.

Sreenivasan Raman, Bengaluru

Cough syrup deaths: A systemic problem that needs a solution

THE official reaction to the terrible mishap in Madhya Pradesh, resulting in the death of 19 children, is as knee-jerk as it is absurd. The deaths were allegedly caused by the consumption of Coldrif, a cough syrup whose samples contained diethylene glycol (DEG), an industrial toxic chemical that severely damages the kidneys. Two drug inspectors and a deputy director of the Food & Drug Administration have been suspended, the state's drug controller transferred, a Special Investigation Team (SIT) constituted, and a Chhindwara-based pediatrician Dr Praveen Soni, arrested for alleged negligence. Meanwhile, the Tamil Nadu-based manufacturer of the syrup has been booked. Several states have banned Coldrif. Given the nature of the sordid episode, the

state government's action against the culpable has been mired in controversy. The Indian Medical Association (IMA) has opposed the arrest of the doctor, blaming pharma company and government lapses instead for the lapses. The IMA has a point: the doctor can only prescribe what is available at a government hospital; they can't ensure the quality of medicines in the pharmacies at these hospitals. Besides, the severity of the action against the doctor also raises questions; whereas those responsible for supplying government hospitals have only been suspended, the pediatrician has been arrested. The unvarnished truth is that the official reaction is necessarily inadequate because the problem is essentially systemic, and those running the system—

politicians—are little bothered about the plight of people. The recurring pattern points to the failure of the regulatory ecosystem, not isolated negligence. State drug control departments are chronically understaffed, underfunded, and riddled with political interference. Quality checks are infrequent and often reduced to paperwork. Laboratories lack modern testing equipment. Many small and medium-scale drug manufacturers cut corners, confident that oversight is lax and penalties are minimal. Even when tragedy strikes, accountability rarely climbs the chain of command. The low-level functionaries are disciplined, while the political leadership—which controls the budgets, appointments, and regulatory priorities—escapes scrutiny, let alone penalty. The bureaucratic instinct

is to demonstrate "quick action," not deep reform. This explains the swiftness with which Dr Soni was arrested. It is much easier to produce a culprit in a white coat than to confront the uncomfortable truths about how the government's procurement and quality assurance mechanism functions. The doctor becomes the face of the tragedy—a convenient distraction from the failures of the state, the scapegoat for all practical purposes. The reaction also exposes a dangerous mindset within Indian governance—the belief that public anger can be doused with symbolic punishment. But each time the state responds this way, it corrodes public trust a little more. For families who lost their children, the arrests and suspensions bring no solace. They need assurance that such a catastrophe

will never happen again—and that can only come from genuine systemic reform. What would such reform look like? First, drug regulation must be professionalised and depoliticised. State and Central drug control agencies require both autonomy and resources to function effectively. Second, procurement systems in public hospitals must be overhauled. Medicines must go through mandatory batch testing by accredited labs. Third, manufacturers must face swift and severe penalties for violations. Fourth, whistleblower protections within the pharmaceutical and regulatory ecosystem should be strengthened. And, finally, political accountability must be enforced. Until and unless the country's leaders are made accountable, it will be difficult to avoid such tragedies.

MEDLEY



LETTERS

A salute to our air warriors

On the proud occasion of Indian Air Force Day (October 8), we salute the brave air warriors who protect our nation's skies. Ever since 1932, the Indian Air Force (IAF) has become synonymous with courage, commitment and sacrifice. From the 1947, 1965 and 1971 wars to Kargil and Balakot, IAF warriors have written glorious chapters of victory and pride. The motto 'Touch the Sky with Glory' reflects the fearless spirit of our Air Force. Let us all honour their dedication and remember their service with gratitude not only today but for eternity.

Md Hammad, Mumbai

Streamline I-T practices of traders

THE reports about I-T raids uncovering a ₹300 crore dal trade scam in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh is just a tip of the iceberg. This is because we have dal and seeds traders across all states. As such, the overall tax evasion could be over ₹25,000 crore. This is a colossal loss to the exchequer. The I-T raids are justified given that dal and seeds traders are minting money with their tax evasion tactics. They exposed themselves by filing I-T and GST returns that have glaring discrepancies. Indian businesses and trade circles are adept at circumventing the rules with impunity, as they believe that everything has a price in our country, including cores of political leaders who are ever willing to rescue tax evaders. It is because of such a network that the officials-politicians-traders nexus thrives. Ever since the NDA assumed power in 2014, there has been a steady effort to collect taxes, albeit at a snail's pace. I suggest that there should be a foolproof system to assess the value of trade and thereby estimate the tax to be collected every year.

Govardhana Myneedu, Vijayawada

Govt must prioritise filling up job vacancies

THIS has reference to the article by Venata Narayana and Revathi on 'State needs to address employability'. It is true that every parent is concerned about the education of the wards, their jobs and marriages. However, our country has the maximum number of illiterates, and daily wagers. Irrespective of their economic status, parents invariably focus on their children's education. Meanwhile, all educational institutions must concentrate on development of skills and communication in all children. The government and the private sector need to fill vacancies in time. Similarly, completing all pending projects can boost job prospects.

G Murali Mohan Rao, Secunderabad-11

Ponnam's remarks unsavoury

THE unsavoury remarks made by BC welfare Minister Ponnam Prabhakar against his cabinet colleague, SC and ST welfare Minister Adluri Lakshman Kumar is quite deplorable and unwarranted. It is very unfortunate for the party as such comments were made when it was gearing up for the local body elections and Jubilee Hills by-election. Lakshman's decision to take the issue to the notice of the high command, including the Chief Minister, is not surprising. Prabhakar should have maintained restraint when Lakshman arrived late for the crucial meeting. After all, he is a seasoned politician. People in public life must always carry affable behaviour in terms of language, sense of style and punctuality, among other such factors.

Pratapa Reddy Yaramala, Tiruvuru (AP)

Heavy rains aftermath haunts Hyderabadis

IT'S truly frustrating to see the situation in Hyderabad after the heavy rainfall, as detailed in your report "IMD forecasts continued showers until October 11. This will further add to the worry of residents. The description of roads being 'paralysed due to severe waterlogging' and commuters facing 'long delays' during peak hours is too nightmarish. Imagine being stuck at a Metro station and being unable to get home because the roads have turned into rivers. The very thought is dreadful. I sincerely hope that the authorities will spring to life after such IMD forecasts and alerts and address all civic and drainage issues on a war-footing.

Jessica, Bangalore

thehansreader@gmail.com

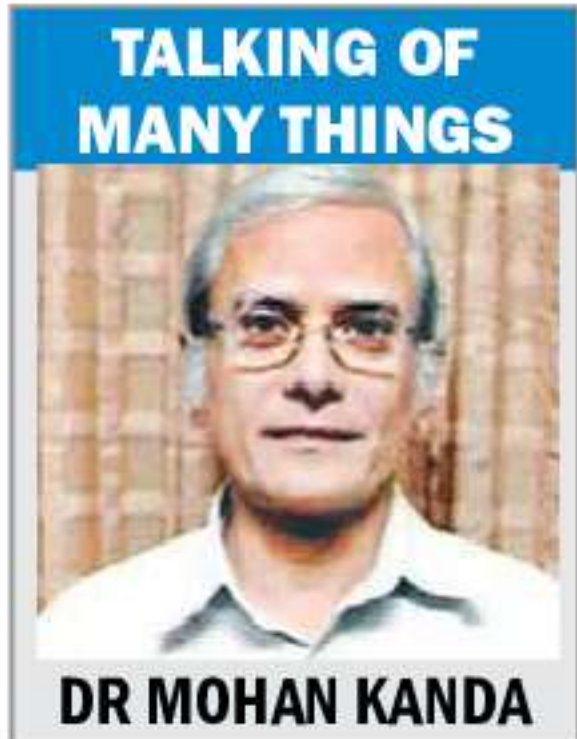
BENGALURU ONLINE

Army partners with IndyASTRA to boost drone capabilities using AI

BENGALURU: The 515 Army Base Workshop (ABW) has signed a landmark agreement with IndyASTRA Technologies Pvt. Ltd. to accelerate the Indian Army's drone capabilities through artificial intelligence (AI). The deal was executed on behalf of the Army Headquarters by the Directors of Electronics and Mechanical Engineering at 515 ABW. The collaboration focuses on integrating AI-based Flight Control Systems (FCS) with Standard Drone Operating Platforms (SDOP), enabling advanced operational readiness and aligning with India's vision of self-reliance in defence technologies. Under the partnership, 515 ABW will coordinate the programme while leveraging AI to enhance drone performance for military applications. IndyASTRA will provide technical consultancy for a comprehensive assessment of drone technologies, covering subsystem evaluations, integration readiness, and compliance with Army standards.

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

Non-verbal gestures like smile and even silence can also convey it all



THE urge to communicate is probably the most powerful emotion all living beings experience. It arises due to several causes like a pain or ache to be attended to, a pleasant experience to be shared, the need to warn others about the likelihood of imminent danger, or, very often, as an entertaining pastime. And a human being, described as a "...gregarious animal, living in society..." by Greek philosopher Aristotle in his book 'Politics', naturally seeks the company of others and desires to belong to social groups for emotional support and cultural development.

While the written word, in the shape of notes, letters or books is one of the most common means of communication, there is another whole world of communication, where other forms play a significant role, such as spoken words, gestures or signals.

The regime of non-verbal communication presents a wide variety of interesting alternatives such as facial expressions, body posture,

eye contact, touch, the use of space and appearance. A smile or a frown, a wave or a thumbs-up, crossed arms, gazing at someone or looking away, a handshake, sitting or standing close to someone and the choice of clothes are all such forms, which express emotions, enable conversation, convey impressions, and indicate the nature of relationships, without the need for the spoken word.

Famous historical gestures include Winston Churchill's "V for Victory" sign, Angela Merkel's distinctive "Merkel-Raute" hand rhombus, and the use of the "Shaka sign" or "hang loose" gesture for its positive connotations. The context of the gesture is crucial to its meaning.

Handshakes can also be of different types and can signal weakness, aggression, dominance or submission.

Expressions using different parts of the face are effective in conveying various feelings, such as anger, disgust, sadness, happiness, surprise, fear or contempt. Of particular value are expressions of eyes, such as a wink, a roll or a blank stare, can mean mischief, disbelief, or a total lack of interest.

In addition, a furrowed brow can, for example, stand for disapproval, a genuine smile for a sincere greeting, a wave for a hello or a goodbye and thumbs-up for approval. Looking someone in the eye, likewise, can show confidence, while looking



away indicates uncertainty or discomfort.

A smile, accompanied by crinkling of the eyes, indicates genuine affection, while an artificial smile, as sported by receptionists or airhostesses is usually a gesture devoid of emotion, and stands for nothing in particular, being merely a professional requirement.

Belonging to the same category of smiles are other forms like a wry, a sneer, a shy smile or a sheepish grin. Famous smiles in history include Mona Lisa's enigmatic smile.

I remember how, sometime in 2002, my wife Usha and I, while on a visit to Paris, visited Musée du Louvre, the Louvre Museum in Paris, braving rain, in order to take a look at the famed Mona Lisa painting. The special quality of the Mona Lisa smile is in its elusive and ambiguous nature, a spectacular product of Leonardo da Vinci's masterful use of the light and shadow effect and the way the human eye perceives it.

The non-verbal communication forms also include smoke signals, used by indigenous people to share messages over long distances.

Signals also have a particularly significant role to play in the realm of transport. Lighthouse signal is very important for ships at sea, with colours and patterns serving to identify specific lighthouses. The identity of a lighthouse is often indicated by horns or bells, with a unique code of sound. Radio beacons are also used to transmit signals helpful for navigation, using the Morse code. Ships are also known to use horn signals which are sounds with specific meanings for communication in the high seas, especially in low visibility.

Similarly, aircraft blink their landing lights at each other at night, especially when flying in opposite directions, as a means of friendly acknowledgement of each other's presence and to increase situational awareness.

Famous historical gestures include Winston Churchill's "V for Victory" sign, Angela Merkel's distinctive "Merkel-Raute" hand rhombus, and the use of the "Shaka sign" or "hang loose" gesture for its positive connotations. The context of the gesture is crucial to its meaning. Handshakes can also be of different types and can signal weakness, aggression, dominance or submission

Also, belonging to the realm of signals, but in an altogether different context, are the gestures and sounds which animals make.

It is believed, for instance, that horses, among other animals, can sense environmental changes before an earthquake and may exhibit signs of distress, such as stomping their hooves. Frantic and sharp chirping of birds in a forest is a means of warning, both in order to alert members of their flock, as well as confuse the predator. Silence also serves as a powerful, deliberate tool for communication, conveying meanings such as agreement, tension, empathy, or disapproval, and can be as impactful as spoken words. Its effectiveness depends on context, the speaker's non-verbal cues like eye contact, and cultural understanding, as interpretations of silence vary significantly.

Going even further, New York Times bestselling author Mandy Hale, creator of the social media movement 'The Single Woman', who cuts to the heart of single life with her inspirational, straight-talking, witty takes on life and love, says "Don't

waste your words on people who deserve your silence. Sometimes the most powerful thing you can say is nothing at all."

By way of ending this piece on a humorous note, here is a story that I heard, and which best illustrates the situation. There was this man who had just returned home after having paid a visit to his hair dressing salon. His wife observed that it was a good haircut the man had had. The man corrected his wife saying that he actually had his hair dressed. One thing led to another, and soon the difference in opinion led to a violent quarrel, resulting in the man dragging his wife forcibly to the canal just outside the village and drowning her. When the man angrily asked his wife, what she would now say, the stubborn and resolute woman, completely inside the water, put both her arms out and, using only the fingers of her palms, made a scissors like gesture, indicating that she was firm that it was a haircut which the man had had!

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

Vizianagaram dynasty's royal bond with the Mahatma

NOMULA SRINIVAS RAO

THE historic city of Vizianagaram holds a special place in the annals of India's freedom struggle. It was here, during his nationwide tours, that Mahatma Gandhi found a warm and steadfast ally in the royal family of Vizianagaram.

Gandhi visited Vizianagaram on three historic occasions:

The Rolls-Royce drive:

During his 1933 visit, Gandhi was driven in Maharani's Rolls-Royce car for his journey from Vizianagaram to Anakapalli. This striking act of a royal family—symbols of privilege and power—providing transport to an ascetic who had renounced all worldly comforts, was a powerful visual of unity and shared vision of a free India.

The Maharani's contribution:

Maharani Vidyavathi Devi, embodying compassion and commitment to the national cause, made a liberal contribution of Rs one lakh to the freedom struggle fund, which she sent directly to Mahatma Gandhi. This act of generosity highlighted the royal family's deep involvement in the freedom movement.



The Vizianagaram connection: The freedom struggle of India was not just shaped by the mass movements led by Mahatma Gandhi but also by the sacrifices and contributions of princely families who stood for the national cause.

One such remarkable association was between Mahatma Gandhi and the Vizianagaram dynasty, represented by Sir Vizzy (Maharajkumar of Vizianagaram), who despite his royal background, extended his support to the nationalist movement.

In a personal letter dated July

22, 1947, written from New Delhi, Mahatma Gandhi addressed Vizzy with warmth and appreciation:

I am glad you have given up your knighthood. Hope you have also given up your cold. Love to you all-Bapu

This short yet powerful letter reflects Gandhi's approval of Sir Vizzy's gesture of renouncing colonial honours. It highlighted the transformation of the Indian elite, who gave up British privileges in favour of national pride and independence.

The Vizianagaram dynasty's

association with Gandhiji adds a shining chapter to Andhra Pradesh's contribution to India's freedom struggle.

A legacy of partnership and progress:

The association between the royal family and the Mahatma stands as a testament to how different segments of society came together for the freedom movement. It reminds us of a time when the boundaries of status and privilege blurred in the service of a higher ideal. These selfless acts

During his 1933 visit, Gandhi was driven in Maharani's Rolls-Royce car for his journey from Vizianagaram to Anakapalli. This striking act of a royal family—symbols of privilege and power—providing transport to an ascetic who had renounced all worldly comforts, was a powerful visual of unity and shared vision of a free India

continue to inspire all successive generations.

Strength does not come from physical capacity. It comes from an indomitable will-Mahatma Gandhi