

Assessing temperature-related deaths in urban heat islands

The Hindu Bureau

Cities having higher ambient temperatures than rural surroundings (known as the urban heat island effect) could offset some of the negative effects of increased heat-related mortality by reducing the number of deaths associated with cold exposure in some global cities, according to a study in Nature Climate Change.

These findings highlight the importance of developing region- and seasonspecific strategies to mitigate the urban heat island

Dual impact

The urban heat island effect contributes to an increase in human heat exposure and subsequent death globally during hotter seasons. However, this phenomenon could also impact the rate of cold-related deaths in cooler conditions. This dual impact could vary across regions and seasons, but previous research has often focused on the effect at the local scale. In the context of climate change and rapid urbanisation, it is important to understand the broader impact of the urban heat island effect on both heatand cold-related deaths for urban heat mitigation strategies.

Dr. Wenfeng Zhan from Nanjing University, Nanjing, China and others analysed multiple data sourcincluding remote

sensing data and climate and socioeconomic factors (such as Gross Domestic Product), to establish mortality-temperature relationships across more than 3,000 cities worldwide. They found that the reduction in cold-related mortality under the urban heat island effect is 4.4 times greater than the increase in heat-related mortality in

The authors further observed that cities at high latitudes saw an even higher reduction – Moscow, for example, saw a reduction in cold-related deaths that was 11.5 times greater than those associated with heat. The authors further analysed the role of increasing vegetation and the reflectivity of buildings (albedo), which are current strategies to mitigate the urban heat island effect.

They found that these strategies could result in an increase in cold-related deaths that surpasses heatrelated deaths globally depending on the magnitude of the intervention and the season in which it is implemented.

The authors emphasise that their findings should not be interpreted as downplaying the negative health outcomes of the urban heat island effect but instead offer crucial insights into the specifics of its impact across seasons. They further suggest that cities must take a seasonal approach to mitigating the urban heat island effect.

Telangana had more preventable C-sections among southern States

At 3.1%, Kerala had the lowest number of preventable C-sections, while Telangana had the highest at 8.4%. Preventable C-sections were 5.4% for Andhra Pradesh, 6.2% for Karnataka, and 7% for Tamil Nadu

The Hindu Bureau

study found that preventable Caesarean sections or C-sections constitute between 3.1% and 8.4% of all deliveries in the southern States of Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Telangana. Among the 21,499 women studied, the percentage of preventable C-sections was 6.2%, and the percentage of C-sections was 44.3%. The percentage of preventable Csections among overall Csection deliveries was

At 3.1%, Kerala had the lowest number of preventable C-sections, while Telangana had the highest at 8.4%. Preventable C-sections were 5.4% for Andhra Pradesh, 6.2% for Karnataka, and 7% for Tamil Nadu. Preventable C-section was defined as a C-section delivery that was not planned prior to the onset of labour, conducted at full term, and done without any intrapartum complications such as breech presentation transverse lie prolonged labour, and excessive bleeding.

The classification was based on gestational age, mode of delivery, timing of the decision, and absence intrapartum complications.

Besides high out-ofpocket expenses, preventable C-sections result in "inefficient use of health system resources, intraoperative risk, and post-operative complications that impact the mother's and child's future health", notes the study.



Health impact: There are intraoperative risk and post-operative complications with C-section deliveries.

- Among the 21,499 women in the 15-49 years age group studied, the percentage of preventable C-sections was 6.2% and the percentage of C-sections was 44.3%
- Preventable C-section is one that is not planned prior to the onset of labour, conducted at full term, and done without any intrapartum complications

The study included

21,499 women in the age

group 15-49 years who had

given birth within the last

five years. Data from the

National Family Health

Survey-5 was used in this

study. The study was pu-

blished on April 23, 2025 in

At 96.5%, institutional

eliveries are indeed high

in the southern States and

comparable with some of

the countries in Western

Europe and North Ameri-

ca. These States also have

substantially higher per-

centage of C-section deliv-

eries - 31.5% to 60.7% -

possibly due to high per-

centage of institutional

In Kerala, 73.26% of C-

section deliveries were

planned prior to the onset

of labour and were the

highest among the five

States studied. While de-

ciding on C-sections before

deliveries.

the journal PLOS ONE.

the onset of labour does inthe risk of post-partum dicate access to high-quality antenatal care, it might also reflect that a signifisence of antenatal care.

elective C-section. Compared with Kerala, around 45% of C-section deliveries in Karnataka were decided after the onset of labour, the study carried out by Population Council Consulting, New Delhi, AIIMS Delhi, and

cant proportion of moth-

ers might be opting for an

TISS, Mumbai found. The most common delivery complication among C-section deliveries in Kerala (34.97%) was breech presentation, while prolonged labour and excessive bleeding were the most common complications in other States. Excessive bleeding was the most common complication observed in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

According to the study,

haemorrhage is strongly associated with the ab-

Around 45% of C-section

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The most common delivery

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mothers aged 25-34 years

The proportion of C-section The proportion of a call deliveries and preventable

C-section deliveries were higher in

Preventable C-section deliveries

were higher among first-time

complication among C-section

The study found that the proportion of C-section deliveries, as well as preventable C-section deliveries, was higher in mothers aged 25-34 years.

"Mothers with higher ducation primary schooling and above have at least a 30% greater chance of undergoing a preventable C-section compared to those without education," they write. "Higher prevalence was found among uninsured, richer, and unemployed women, and higher preventable C-sections were found to occur with increased antenatal care visits and in private health care facilities."

It also found that primimothers (first-time mothers or mothers who are pregnant with their first child) had higher odds of preventable C-section deliveries. In the five States, 37% of all mothers were primi-mothers, and at least 18% of primi-mothers had opted for C-section deliveries. "Given that a previous C-section is an indication for C-section in future pregnancies, special attention is required to avoid preventable C-section among primi-mothers," the authors write.

One reason for higher preventable C-sections could be because mothers are coupling sterilisation and C-section deliveries. Among the 21,499 women studied, sterilisation rates ranged between 27.1% and 50.1% across the five

As per the NFHS-4 data, sterilisation rates among women aged 15-49 years was 37% in India. High Csection rates reported in NFHS-5 could be due to high preventable C-section rates among primi-mothers and those combining Csection with sterilisation when it is last-order births, they say

The mothers who delivered in private healthcare facilities were nearly three times more likely to opt for preventable C-sections compared with mothers who delivered in a public healthcare facility. As per the study, private facilities account for 29.6% of all institutional deliveries, and 48% of all deliveries in the private sector were C-section deliveries.

Compared with NFHS-4, C-section deliveries in private hospitals increased by 17% in NFHS-5.



Study identifies how malaria can lead to childhood cancer

New data has uncovered the role of Plasmodium falciparum infection (malaria) in the development of Burkitt lymphoma (BL), the most common childhood cancer in equatorial Africa and New Guinea. The study found significant elevated expression of an enzyme called AID (activation-induced cytidine deaminase) in B cells during P. falciparum malaria in children, which points to the direct role of P. falciparum malaria in BL due to the role of the enzyme in the development of Burkitt lymphoma.



Birds hold remarkable clues to fighting human infections

Researchers have uncovered an evolutionary adaptation in birds that could hold vital clues for combating avian flu and respiratory infections in humans. The molecular evolution of specific types of proteins (CL-10 and CL-11) in bird lungs has a role in recognising and neutralising harmful microbes. These ancient proteins appear to compensate for the evolutionary loss of the surfactant protein D (SP-D), a key immune component in humans and other mammals that helps protect the lungs from airborne pathogens.



Daily doses of peanuts tackle allergic reactions in adults

The first clinical trial to test whether adults allergic to peanuts can be desensitised has shown great success with two-thirds of the cohort consuming the equivalent of five peanuts without reacting. Participants of the trial then could consume peanuts every day at home to remain desensitised. Although peanut immunotherapy is known to be effective in children, this trial provides preliminary evidence that adults can also be desensitised.

No phenotype details in GenomeIndia's proposal call

R. Prasad

On January 9, 2025, the Department of Biotechnology (DBT) called for proposals on 'Translational research using genomeIndia data' from scientists based in India. On February 20, eight days before the February 28 deadline for submitting proposals, DBT extended the deadline till March 31, 2025.

The 10,000 human genome project had collected blood samples and associated phenotype data from over 20,000 individuals representing 83 population groups – 30 tribal and 53 non-tribal populations – spread across India. The preliminary findings based on the genetic information of 9,772 individuals were published in the journal Nature Genetics as a Comment on April 8.

The Comment article clearly listed the phenotype data collected from over 20,000 people, including height, weight, hip circumference, circumference and



Oversight: DBT has completed the proposal call without disclosing what phenotype data are available. ISTОСКРНОТО

blood pressure. From blood samples collected, complete blood counts as well as biochemistry data such as glucose measurements, lipid profiles, and liver and kidney function tests were measured and are available along with genome data of 9,772 individuals. Surprisingly, neither the first proposal call nor the addendum extending the deadline for submitting the proposals listed what phenotype data were available to researchers. Even the GenomeIndia website does not have that information. The first time that information became public was when the Comment article was published on April 8. But the deadline for submitting the proposals was March 31.

"The anthropometric and blood biochemistry data were only collected to ensure that the samples covered under the GenomeIndia project were from healthy individuals," says a DBT spokesperson in an email to *The Hindu*.

"The GenomeIndia project has not published a data dictionary nor released detailed information on the available

phenotype metadata of the genotyped samples in the project. A Commentary in the Nature Genetics journal has been the first and only public communication about the details of phenotype metadata in the project, till date. Even before the publication of this article, DBT has completed a proposal inviting researchers for utilising the GenomeIndia data," says Dr. Padmanaban V., Assistant Professor in the Department of Biochemistry at CMC Vellore. Incidentally, the adden-

dum published on February 20 extending the deadline to March 31 noted that DBT had "received many queries regarding the type of data that will be released". Despite saying "relevant phenotype data (as per request)" will be provided under Controlled (Managed) Access, what phenotype data that were available was not provided. "Despite admitting that there have been many queries related to the data, there still wasn't any information on the list of available phenotypes that researchers can request even in this document," says Dr. Padmanaban.

Also, the Comment piece published in the journal, which is the only place the phenotype data collected and available, was mentioned, is behind a paywall.

The spokesperson points out that the One Nation One Subscription scheme will provide access to research articles and journal publications to students, faculty and researchers. However, the One Nation One Subscription scheme currently provides free access to journal papers to researchers and students only from public institutions.

While researchers from 20 institutions involved in the GenomeIndia project would be aware of the phenotype data available, others would be unaware of it. "Researchers who were not part of the GenomeIndia project team did not have information on the available phenotype metadata till the call for proposal deadline," says Dr. Padmanaban.



Question Corner

Oldest ant

A hell ant species that lived

Which is the oldest ant ever discovered?

113 million years ago in northeastern Brazil was recently discovered. The hell ant, which was preserved as a rock impression in limestone, is a member of Haidomyrmecinae, an extinct subfamily that only lived during the Cretaceous period. These ants had highly specialised, scythe-like jaws that they likely used to pin or impale prey. The existence of hell ant in Brazil shows that ants were already widely distributed and diversified early in their evolution. These ants had specialised features.

Unlike modern ants with laterally moving mandibles, this species possessed mandibles that ran forward parallel to the head and facial projection anterior to the eyes. The intricate morphology suggests that even these earliest ants had already evolved sophisticated predatory strategies. While the ant species provides the most complete evidence for the early evolution of ants in the fossil record, the specialised feature also raises broader questions about the evolutionary pressures.

Readers may send their questions /

Why is UPI seeing frequent downtimes?

What are regulators doing about it? How does the Unified Payments Interface work?

Aroon Deep

The story so far:

n March and April, the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) system went down three times, causing significant disruptions in payments on apps like GPay and PhonePe, which rely on the system. One of the downtimes was caused by individual banks flooding the National Payments Corporation of India's (NPCI) systems with transaction status checks.

How does UPI work?

UPI payments work based on an architecture that was inherited from the Immediate Payment Service (IMPS). For UPI payments to work, a bank is required to join the UPI system and allow users to access their own accounts through a linked phone number, on a Payment Service Provider (PSP)'s app, like PhonePe or GPay. Practically every commercial bank, public or private, is on the UPI system.

UPI is designed as an interoperable system, allowing any bank's account holders to sign up for the service on any app, and even multiple apps at the same time. This resembles a peer-to-peer system, where individual banks are all talking to each other, but in reality, practically every transaction is routed through the systems of the NPCI. "The NPCI is essential in this process," said Srikanth Lakshmanan, a member of the Cashless Consumer project, as it

UPI is designed as an interoperable system, allowing any bank's account holders to sign up for the service on any app, and even multiple apps. Every transaction is routed through the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI)

encrypts the PIN information which only the bank knows - and sends the payment information forward to a payer's bank, which then executes the transaction. "So if there's a downtime in the NPCI, there's no way your bank

would get your PIN. This is where it is a single

point of failure."

Why did the NPCI have several outages?

The NPCI as an organisation is structured as a collective of banks, with public sector banks holding the bulk of its shareholding. This, Mr. Lakshmanan said, is because of the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007, which mandates that organisations involved in clearing transactions in bulk have to be majority-owned by public sector banks. Led as it is by banks, the plementation too is largely left to them though the NPCI has played a big role in designing and presiding over the UPI system. In the last few weeks, individual banks reportedly flooded the UPI system with "check transaction" requests, which payer banks use to verify that a payment has been completed. That hit the single point of failure at NPCI, and took the system offline briefly. To reduce the impact of downtime like this, the NPCI has created something called UPI Lite, which allows users to set aside up to ₹2,000 for payments without having to punch in a PIN. But even such payments go through the NPCI's systems. "You don't do a PIN authentication, but other communication still goes through NPCI," Mr. Lakshmanan said. "The NPCI has to say this transaction originated from your device and so on. This is why even though UPI Lite doesn't involve the PIN entry and decryption, it is still routed through NPCI since it's fundamentally an interoperable system. While UPI Lite is light, it still requires NPCI to be in the middle."

Why are banks peeved?

Banks have historically had a rocky relationship with UPI. While the system has revolutionised payments in India – just on Friday, there were over 58 crore transactions worth over ₹73,000 crore – they are largely unable to collect any significant fees on transactions, even though there are costs attached to each of these.

The RBI estimated that banks incur a cost of ₹0.80 per transaction, due to SMS notification costs (which telecom operators collect for commercial messages), and the costs incurred in maintaining and updating records of each payment. However, they are not able to charge a Merchant Discount Rate (MDR) for these services, leaving them with few incentives to keep to rigorous uptime standards. Individual banks go down far more frequently than the NPCI as a whole, and these outages result in increased payment decline events. System-wide downtimes are far fewer and shorter on commercial card networks like MasterCard and Visa, Mr. Lakshmanan said, as there is robust monitoring and service level agreements to enforce performance standards.

However, he said, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology has tried a "carrot and stick" approach, with its annual UPI incentive programme for banks, which comes attached with conditions that penalise banks whose performance suffers over the course of a year. The subsidy scheme compensates banks for their current inability to charge an MDR. "If you're at the bottom [in terms of uptime], you get nothing," Mr. Lakshmanan said.

How did WHO nations strike a pandemic deal?

What are the highlights of the new agreement? Why was it long overdue? What challenges did countries face during negotiations? How will it impact global cooperation and equity in the next pandemic? Has a balance been struck between global equity and market-based innovation?

— even in a

fragmented

geopolitical

environ-

ment'

Athira Elssa Johnson

The story so far:

fter more than three years of intense negotiations involving over 190 countries, the World Health Organization (WHO) has finalised a historic pandemic accord aimed at preventing and responding to future global health crises. The agreement was reached during a marathon session at the WHO headquarters in Geneva and concluded in the early hours of April 16, 2025.

Why was it needed?

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO director-general, called it "a significant milestone in our shared journey towards a safer world," emphasising the importance of global solidarity in facing health emergencies. The agreement comes five years after the outbreak of COVID-19, a pandemic that laid bare the vulnerabilities of international health systems. With the growing threat of infectious diseases such as H5N1 bird flu, mpox, measles, and Ebola, the sense of urgency among negotiators

The centrepiece of the newly adopted agreement is the proposed Pathogen Access and Benefit-Sharing System (PABS), which is designed to facilitate the swift sharing of pathogen data among nations and with pharmaceutical companies. This data-sharing mechanism is expected to play a critical role in accelerating the development of vaccines, diagnostics, and treatments during future pandemics. The agreement outlines a system where cooperation becomes not just ideal, but operationally necessary, enabling scientific collaboration at an unprecedented pace. It also



Historic feat: WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus smiling after a consensus was reached at the WHO headquarters on April 16. AFP

This accord includes provisions to ensure fair and equitable access to pandemic-related health products. shows that particularly for low- and middle-income global multicountries that were left behind during the lateralism is COVID-19 response. still possible The COVID crisis had seen wealthier nations

securing vast supplies of vaccines, testing kits, and protective equipment, while many poorer countries struggled with shortages and delays. The new deal directly addresses these imbalances by introducing guidelines aimed at preventing such inequities from recurring.

Technology transfer was one of the most debated aspects of the agreement. Developing countries pushed for language that would mandate the sharing of critical health technologies during pandemics. However, countries with powerful pharmaceutical industries resisted such mandatory provisions, citing concerns about intellectual property rights and innovation incentives. A compromise was eventually reached, with the final text stating that any technology transfer must be "mutually agreed," a clause designed to balance the needs of global equity with the business realities of pharmaceutical innovation. The 32-page document was marked entirely in green, indicating complete consensus among the participating countries.

What gaps did the pandemic expose?

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed serious gaps in the world's ability to mount a coordinated response to global health emergencies. These gaps included fragmented and delayed data sharing, unequal access to vaccines and other medical tools, lack of standardised protocols, and limited international accountability. Many nations acted in isolation, often hoarding resources or closing borders in panic, which hindered collective efforts and prolonged the pandemic's impact. Although initiatives like COVAX attempted to create more equitable access to vaccines, they were hampered by underfunding, supply chain challenges, and a lack of global cooperation.

Public health experts have long warned that without a globally accepted and legally grounded framework, the world risks repeating the same mistakes in the face of future outbreaks. In an increasingly interconnected world, where viruses can cross borders in hours, pandemics are no longer national crises – they are shared threats.

What were the key challenges?

Negotiations were deeply complex and often stalled due to diverging national interests. Article 11 of the agreement, which deals with the transfer of pandemic-related technologies, became a major sticking point. Low- and middle-income countries argued that equitable access to life-saving innovations like vaccines, antivirals, and diagnostics could not be guaranteed unless there was a mechanism for sharing intellectual property and manufacturing know-how. On the other hand, nations with large pharmaceutical industries, particularly in Europe, opposed any language that would make such transfers obligatory. They contended that mandatory provisions could undermine the financial incentives needed for rapid pharmaceutical innovation and would interfere with existing international trade laws. The compromise to allow "mutually agreed" transfers reflects a diplomatic middle ground, though some critics argue it lacks enforceability and may not protect vulnerable populations.

Will it shape global cooperation?

One of the crucial aspects of the agreement is its strong emphasis on equity. The WHO chief highlighted that the text reflects a broader commitment to fairness in access, especially for countries that often bear the brunt of health crises without the resources to respond adequately. The agreement acknowledges that pandemic preparedness is not just about stockpiling vaccines or hospital beds; it's about establishing a framework for transparency, trust, and timely action. For lower-income countries, the agreement promises capacity building and international support to strengthen health infrastructure and logistics. Although equity is central to the agreement's language, its realisation will depend heavily on political will and practical implementation. Helen Clark, former Prime Minister of New Zealand and co-chair of the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response, noted that this accord shows that global multilateralism is still possible – even in a fragmented geopolitical environment. David Reddy, director-general of the International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers and Associations (IFPMA) remarked that while the agreement is a useful starting point, certain conditions must be met to maintain industry participation in pandemic preparedness. He emphasised the need for legal certainty and protection of intellectual property if companies are to continue investing in the research and development of high-risk, high-cost medical solutions. The industry fears that poorly designed policy interventions could discourage innovation or delay crucial products.

What lies ahead?

While the agreement has been finalised, member states will be expected to integrate its principles into national laws, establish financing mechanisms, and develop monitoring systems that ensure compliance. The agreement will be presented for formal adoption at the WHO's annual assembly.

What's the reason for targeting Simla Pact?

Why is Pakistan threatening to hold the 1972 agreement in abevance? What are the implications? Haven't both sides reneged on the terms they had agreed on? What will happen to the Line of Control? What are the other agreements that could be put on hold?

Suhasini Haidar

The story so far:

n response to India's decision to suspend the 1960 Indus Waters Treaty in the aftermath of the Pahalgam terror attack, . Pakistan's government said it could hold the 1972 Simla Agreement and "all other bilateral agreements with India" in abeyance.

What does the Simla Agreement entail?

The agreement was signed in Shimla on July 2, 1972 after three days of talks between Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, victorious from the 1971 Bangladesh War, and Pakistan Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto who had suffered a crushing defeat and the division of Pakistan in the war. The talks, for which the Soviet Union did much of the preparatory discussions through Indian and Pakistani envoys in Moscow, focused on two major issues. First, the future of post-war ties between India and Pakistan, including the return of more than 93,000 Pakistan prisoners of war; second, the resolution of the dispute over Jammu and Kashmir, where they agreed to "settle their differences by peaceful means through bilateral negotiations or by any other peaceful means mutually agreed upon between them". In addition, the Simla agreement saw the

Pakistan has violated the agreement many times, by funding terror groups in Kashmir and sending troops across the LoC

first formal recognition of Bangladesh as a sovereign entity in a bilateral treaty.

What was the reaction in both countries?

The Simla Agreement led to severe criticism of Mrs. Gandhi in India, for not forcing Pakistan to make the ceasefire line the International Border, instead renaming it the Line of Control (LoC); and of Mr. Bhutto in Pakistan for agreeing to resolve the dispute peacefully and without recourse to the United Nations or other third-party mediators. In Srinagar, Sheikh Abdullah's criticisms stemmed from the fact that neither side had consulted the Kashmiri people.

How has Pakistan violated the pact?

In the years that followed, Pakistan violated the agreement many times, by funding and arming terror groups in Kashmir as well as sending troops across the LoC that led to the Kargil conflict in 1999. It has approached the UN and other countries over the issue, which is a breach of the terms both sides had agreed upon. The Indian Parliament's declaration in 1994 that all of Kashmir including Pakistan Occupied Kashmir, was an integral part of India, and the 2019 amendment of Article 370, had made the Simla agreement quite irrelevant. Former diplomat Avtar Singh Bhasin, who profiled the agreement in his book, Negotiating India's Landmark Agreements, says the impact of the announcement will be "minimal or nothing on both sides". He says that "the Simla Agreement was not meant as a long-standing agreement and most of it – return of [Pakistani] POWs, restoration of trade, transport, telecommunication linkages were meant to happen immediately after," and calls the paragraphs on J&K "essentially symbolic".

What will be the impact?

It should be noted that the statement issued by the Pakistan PMO on April 24 said that "Pakistan shall exercise the right to hold all bilateral agreements with India including but not limited to Simla Agreement in abeyance", leaving it unclear whether Islamabad had issued any formal notification on the issue. India has not received any letter from Pakistan on the matter.

The immediate impact would be seen in terms of its meaning for the Jammu and Kashmir dispute, and whether Pakistan will now also disavow the LoC that was first named in the Simla accord. Analysts suggest that if Pakistan attempts to cross it, India could also then disregard the LoC and launch operations to claim parts of Pakistan occupied Kashmir.

What are the 'other agreements' that Pakistan referred to that could be affected?

While Pakistan did not name any other agreement by name, the Shehbaz Sharif government's reference to "all other" bilateral agreements could refer to a number of different accords the two countries have signed over the years after being in armed conflict several times from the first Kashmir war in 1948 to Kargil in 1999. The Nehru-Liaguat pact signed in 1950 relates to the treatment of minorities in their respective countries. The Bilateral Protocol on Visits to Religious Pilgrimages signed in 1974 facilitates hundreds of Hindu and Sikh pilgrims to 15 temples and gurdwaras in Pakistan, as well as Muslim pilgrims to five mosques and shrines in India. For the moment, both sides have indicated that the Kartarpur corridor agreement in 2019 between the Narendra Modi and Imran Khan governments will remain in place.

Other agreements, that relate to confidence-building measures and information sharing could also be affected. In 1988, India and Pakistan signed an agreement to inform each other of their nuclear installations and facilities every year on January 1. In 1991, they signed an agreement for the pre-notification of flight testing of all ballistic missiles, as well as an agreement on preventing airspace violations. Since February 2021, India and Pakistan have a ceasefire agreement in place, that was first agreed to in 2003. Any military operation by India on terror camps or other locations in Pakistan, to which Pakistan has threatened to retaliate, could see the ceasefire agreement collapse. In addition, India's decision to suspend the Indus Waters treaty could also have a follow-on effect, with Pakistan threatening to take India to international courts and calling the stoppage of any water an "act of war". While India is an upper riparian state to Pakistan and Bangladesh, it is also a lower riparian state to China, that has on occasion withheld cooperation with India on the Brahmaputra and other rivers. All three neighbouring countries will follow India's actions on the Indus closely.



Breaking ties: Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and Pakistan President Z.A. Bhutto signing the Simla Agreement on July 2, 1972. THE HINDU ARCHIVES

Storm beneath the waters

Indus Waters Treaty

The 1960 agreement, which India has put in 'abeyance' after the Pahalgam terror attack, had started showing signs of decay in recent years with New Delhi demanding a bilateral modification of the treaty

Kallol Bhattacherjee

n November 30 1960, the Lok Sabha witnessed an extraordinary debate. The debate was initiated by Congress MP Iqbal Singh from Punjab as Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru looked on. Within seconds, the exchange took a curious turn as several members from the ruling Congress party, who were present in the hall to debate the newly signed Indus Waters Treaty (IWT), began to criticise the Nehru government.

Most surprisingly, during the 150-minutes long discussion, the strongest criticism to the treaty came from the Congress MPs from Punjab and Rajasthan – the two States that were part of the Indus-waters network. H.C. Mathur of the Congress took to the floor and gave out the bitterest criticism, saying the treaty would adversely affect Rajasthan. Iqbal Singh, who started the debate, argued that the treaty would affect food production in Indian Punjab. As Prime Minister Nehru waited for his chance to rise to the defence of the treaty that was signed by him and Gen. Ayub Khan of Pakistan on September 19, 1960, members termed the Indus Waters Treaty "appeasement and surrender to Pakistan". Asoka Mehta of the Congress argued that the country had been betrayed by those who were supposed to defend its

The members of the ruling party that had been overseeing nearly 12-year long river water dispute that began soon after Partition of British India, were upset about the fact that Pakistan would get ₹83 crore in foreign exchange (to be financed by the World Bank) as part of the execution of the treaty. Rising to the defence of the treaty, Nehru described the critics as "narrow-minded" and said, the agreement was arrived at after "long and bitter negotiation" between the two sides mediated by the World Bank. Three weeks later, the Indian Parliament ratified the IWT.

The IWT did not have an exit clause. Article XII (3) and (4) provide for modification of treaty provisions through a "duly ratified treaty", which



will replace the present one with the condition that it cannot be abrogated unilaterally. The main treaty provisions were that India has the exclusive rights over the eastern rivers (Ravi, Beas and Sutlej) with a combined average annual discharge of 33.8 million Acre Feet (MAF) and Pakistan has exclusive rights over the three western rivers (Indus, Jhelum and Chenab) with annual discharge of 135.6 MAF. As per the treaty, India has the right to store a volume of 3.6 MAF of water.

The "long and bitter negotiation" that Nehru referred to began soon after the Partition of India that led to several lasting problems between the two countries. The problem first flared up in 1947-48 in the backdrop of the first India-Pakistan conflict over Kashmir. While the war over Kashmir was the main focus in the first year of the existence of two newly separated entities, the sub-text of this conflict was visible in the clashing narrative over sharing of the waters of the Indus through the canal system built in Punjab during the British colonial period. Water historians say when India halted water of the Indus, Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan arrived in New Delhi, leading to the 1948 agreement. The water dispute, however, did not disappear, and played out as part of the larger network of issues that defined the India-Pakistan relationship ever since.

While starting from 1951-52 India became a parliamentary democracy with a stable political leadership, Pakistan began a tentative journey towards the future plagued by language problem, rivalry between the West and the East Pakistan and lack of participatory democracy at home. These power rivalries exploded on the surface in the late 1950s when East Pakistan-origin Gen. Isqander Mirza became the President of the struggling

World Bank mediation

Mirza scrapped the constitutional dream of Pakistan and prohibited political parties only to be deposed weeks later by Gen. Ayub Khan. The Pakistan that came to the table to conclude the Indus Waters Agreement under the mediation of World Bank chief Eugene Black was therefore a military-ruled state that was in a hurry

to prove its domestic critics wrong by resolving certain congenital problems that its political leaders had failed to solve in the previous decade. A settlement of the Indus dispute suited the Nehru government politically as that would remove one of the major festering problems with Pakistan and prove Nehru's critics wrong. A solution suited the Pakistani general as well as the scholarly Indian PM.

Ayub Khan threw a grand welcome for the Indian team and put up a show of internal normalcy at the time of the signing ceremony in Karachi. Nehru travelled across Pakistan and visited Murree, Nathiagali, Rawalpindi and Lahore and both leaders agreed that eradication of poverty was the common goal of both sides. Yet, within weeks of signing the IWT, Gen. Ayub Khan delivered a provocative speech in Muzaffarabad saying, Indo-Pakistan relation would not stabilise "till the Kashmir issue is resolved".

The second test of the IWT came during 1965 Indo-Pak. war when the focus was on Kashmir. Following the Tashkent Accord, Ayub Khan sprang a surprise with the construction of the Mangla dam, the world's largest

earthen dam that was inaugurated in 1967 promising to supply water to more than 3 million acres of land and generate 600,000 KW of electricity. One problem with the Mangla dam was that the major part of the project fell in the Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. In effect, the dam would not violate the sovereignty of India as envisioned in the IWT but in reality it trampled on India's sovereignty in Kashmir. The Parliament in India took up the construction of Mangla dam and Prime Minister Indira Gandhi responded that India's sovereign rights over Pakistan-occupied Kashmir were not diminished by the construction of the Mangla dam.

Water a weapon

In the twenty-first century, China's move to build mega dams in the Himalayas, which revived the prospects of use of water as a weapon among riparian states and the spike in cross-border terrorism from Pakistan, triggered talks of a review of the treaty. In the backdrop of the 2016 arrest of former Indian navy official Kulbhushan Jadhav on charges of supporting terrorism in Balochistan and the cross-border terror attacks in Pathankot and Uri in January and September 2016, India completed the Kishanganga dam in Kashmir and pushed ahead with the Ratle hydel power project on the Chenab despite Pakistan's displeasure. The matter could not be resolved by the World

In 2023, India invoked the relevant treaty provisions to request a bilateral modification of the treaty that Pakistan declined. Before putting the Indus Waters Treaty 'in abeyance' on April 23, 2025, India in 2024 had indicated that its patience over the IWT was fast running out when it called off all meetings of the Permanent Indus Commission demanding that teams from both sides should meet and discuss the 2023 proposal for modification of the treaty. Post-Pahalgam attack, Indian declaration on holding the treaty 'in abeyance', however, has turned the clock back to where it began – a broken India-Pakistan relation as it was in the late 1940s.

THE GIST

Within weeks of signing the Indus Waters Treaty in September 1960, Ayub Khan delivered a provocative speech in Muzaffarabad saying, Indo-Pak. relation would not stabilise "till the Kashmir issue is resolved"

After 1965 Indo-Pak. war, Ayub Khan sprang a surprise with the construction of the Mangla dam in the Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, which India protested as a breach of its sovereignty

In 2023, India invoked the relevant treaty provisions to request a bilateral modification of the treaty that Pakistan declined

New face of terror

The Resistance Front

The group, which emerged on the militancy landscape of Jammu and Kashmir in 2019, has a well-trained cadre that has carried out targeted killings in the Valley

Peerzada Ashiq

he killings of 25 tourists, including one Nepali, and a local pony operator by a group of terrorists trained in jungle warfare in a meadow of Pahalgam's Baisaran in south Kashmir's Anantnag district on April 22 shook the entire nation. It turned the spotlight on The Resistance Front (TRF), an outfit that initially claimed responsibility (a claim it later withdrew) for the attack.

Security agencies in Kashmir see the TRF as an offshoot of the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT). The nomenclature, many security experts in Kashmir believe, was aimed at presenting itself as a "new-age ideological force" and distancing itself from other Islamist groups such as al-Qaeda and Jaish-e-Muhammad.

The TRF emerged on the militancy landscape of Jammu and Kashmir after the Centre abrogated the provisions of Article 370 in 2019. Kashmir has seen around two dozen militant outfits active since the militancy started in the 1990s. Many smaller groups have eventually vanished from the scene. The TRF came into the crosshairs of the security agencies in April 2020 when a group of terrorists engaged security forces in a firefight for four days close to the Line of Control (LoC) in Kupwara's Keran Sector in snow-filled mountain passes. The killing of five elite commandos of the Army in extreme weather conditions in Keran signalled the changing tack and tactics of terrorists in Kashmir.

One senior police official said the major shift the TRF brought was a higher level of training, online propaganda and high-end weaponry and body cameras to film the attacks live and stream them online. The outfit operates on social media platforms "to promote their cause and lure unemployed youth to carry out terror activities", according to the National Investigation Agency's (NIA) probe.

Urban militancy

Around 200 TRF cadres have been killed since 2019 in Kashmir. At present, the TRF, which was mandated by its handlers across the border to revive militancy in urban pockets in Kashmir, remains a faceless outfit. The killing of Muhammad Abbas Sheikh, a resident of Kulgam, in 2021 and Basit Dar, also from Kulgam, in May 2024 left the outfit faceless. According to the police records, Sheikh, who was active since 1996, was the brain behind the TRF's actions and revival of militancy in Srinagar. Dar, who joined the TRF in 2021, was involved in 18 FIRs before being killed in Kulgam in a chance encounter, officials

Departing from attacking security forces' patrols and installations, the TRF in 2021 started a series of targeted killings of the members of minorities, including a well-known chemist, Makhan Lal Pandita, and a school principal, Supinder Kaur. Several nonlocal labourers were targeted by the group. These killings resulted in mass migration of Kashmiri Pandits from the Kashmir Val-

ley that year. So far, the NIA has zeroed in on a Pakistani national Habibullah Malik alias Saiid Iutt, from Kasur district in Pakistan's Punjab as the TRF's main handler. Malik is seen as the brain behind the expansion of the TRF operations from the Kashmir Valley into the Pir Panjal Valley in the Jammu region. He is accused of "motivating vulnerable Kashmiri youth to join the TRF for carrying out terrorist activities in J&K".

The TRF first attributed the attack on tourists in Pahalgam to the increasing number of domicile certificates issued to outsiders in J&K. With pressure mounting globally over the massacre, the TRF in an online statement distanced itself from the attack, saying the outfit "unequivocally denies any involvement in the Pahalgam incident". "Any attribution of this act to the TRF is false, hasty, and part of an orchestrated campaign to malign the Kashmiri resistance". It termed the release of the earlier statement online as "a result of a coordinated cyber intrusion".

As security agencies claim the TRF support structure stands dismantled in the Kashmir Valley, the latest attack only shows how delicate peace remains in Kashmir with challenges being posed by such organisations as the TRF with new tactics and targets.

Man on a mission

Nainar Nagenthran

The BJP's new president in Tamil Nadu, an old AIADMK hand, seeks to build on the momentum his predecessor, Annamalai, created

N. Sai Charan

n April 11, the BJP ensured a smooth transition in its State leadership in Tamil Nadu. Nainar Nagenthran, a three-time MLA from Tirunelveli who also served as a Minister in Javalalithaa's Cabinet, was unanimously elected as the State unit president of the party. The next day, he took over the reins from K. Annamalai, a former IPS officer who galvanised the party through his aggressive

style of functioning. Mr. Nagenthran's elevation from the post of vicepresident of the State unit was seen as a strategic move by the BJP's high command to strengthen its with relations AIADMK, which revived its ties with the national party earlier this month.

The political career of Mr. Nagenthran has seen both successes and setbacks. Born in 1960 at Vadiveeswaram in Nagercoil, in Tamil Nadu's southernmost Kanniyakumari district, Mr. Nagenthran traces his roots to Panagudi, a village nestled in the neighbouring Tirunelveli district. With an early interest in the natural sciences, he pursued a Bachelor's degree in Botany from Arignar Anna College in Kanniyakumari. He later enrolled in MDT Hindu

College in Tirunelveli, for a



Master's in Tamil literature, a course he eventually discontinued to focus on agriculture and his family's business ventures. A staunch admirer of le-

gendary actor and former Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran, he was drawn to politics in his college days, inspired by MGR's charisma and ideology. He joined the AIADMK and quickly became active in its students' wing. When MGR passed away in 1987 and the AIADMK faced a turbulent split, Mr. Nagenthran threw his weight behind the Jayalalithaa-led faction, cementing his place in her

While Mr. Nagenthran, who belongs to the influential Thevar community in southern Tamil Nadu, had long been a dedicated party functionary, it was in 2001 that a major break came his way – a foray into electoral politics. Recognising his years of grassroots work, Jayalalithaa handpicked him as the party's candidate for the Tiru-

Assembly nelveli constituency.

Despite a favourable wave for the AIADMK-led alliance in the 2001 elections, Mr. Nagenthran could only scrape through with a narrow win. To his surprise, Jayalalithaa inducted him into her Cabinet and entrusted him with

the Transport portfolio. In the 2006 elections, the DMK came to power, and Mr. Nagenthran narrowly lost the Tirunelveli seat by just 606 votes. The same year, the Directorate of Vigilance and Anti-Corruption filed a case against him for allegedly amassing wealth disproportionate to his known sources of income. He made a strong comeback in the 2011 Assembly elections, winning Tirunelveli by over 38,000

Joining BJP

Following Jayalalithaa's death in December 2016, he joined the BJP in August 2017 in the presence of the then national president

Amit Shah, citing inspiration from Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership. Shortly thereafter, he was appointed vice-president of the BIP's Tamil Nadu unit.

In 2018, he sparked a controversy by reportedly threatening Tamil lyricist Vairamuthu in a protest over the latter's alleged remarks on Andal, one among the 12 Alwars (Vaishnavite minstrels). A case was filed against him. In the 2019 general elections, Mr. Nagenthran contested from the Ramanathapuram Lok constituency but lost by nearly 1.2 lakh votes.

In the 2021 Assembly elections, he won the Tirunelveli seat as a BIP candidate. As the senior-most among the four elected BJP MLAs – three of whom were first-timers – he was appointed the legislature party leader. In both the 2019 and 2021 elections, the BJP contested in alliance with the AIADMK.

Even as the legislature party leader, Mr. Nagenthran continued to maintain a composed demeanour in the Assembly during fiery debates. With his recent elevation to the State BJP's top post, it remains to be seen whether Mr. Nagenthran would be able to sustain the momentum built by Mr. Annamalai and lead the party to new electoral successes.

HT TO THE TOP THE TOP

{ INCIDENTALLY } Gopalkrishna Gandhi



After Pahalgam, a nation united in battling terror

Trusting the government of India to do the right thing with all its might and maturity, we must assist it by resisting giving in to communal passions, the "second wave of terror" that the perpetrators of the attack want unleashed

he Indian State has to be saluted for the reflexive maturity shown by it to the Pahalgam carnage. Prime Minister Narendra Modi cutting short his visit to Saudi Arabia, directing the Union home minister to visit Kashmir and take stock of the situation immediately, and the swift identification of immediate retaliatory steps against Pakistan from where the terrorists obviously crept into Kashmir, are exactly what can be expected of a self-respecting government. The scrapping of visa facilities, the sealing of the Attari checkpost, the expulsion of a certain number of Pakistan officials from its High Commission in India, and the suspension of the Indus Water Treaty (IWT) are actions that no ruling dispensation in India could have failed to consider and execute. And we can be sure that plans that cannot be revealed for reasons of security and intelligence are underway to give the masterminds of the attack the lesson they deserve.

But there is no doubt that the terrorists have heard from India the resounding message: "Jumhuriyat-e-Hind ke sath jurrat agar karoge, to khabardar, na tum bachoge na tumhare neech iraade!" (Those who have the gall to trifle with the Republic of India, beware! Neither will you survive nor your base plans.)

The unmistakable clarity of this message has been strengthened by the unambiguous support India has got from two of the world's most powerful nations: Russia and the US, besides support from other govern-ments across the world, including Saudi Arabia, with all of whom New Delhi has been in constructive engagement.

It is one of the most remarkable features of our country — and of us, its citizens – that when calamity strikes, all differences stand paused and the nation thinks and acts as one. This is no ordinary achievement or talent, given our differences are great and greatly agitate us in what may be called democracy's "normal times"

And so, it has been in this hour of grief and anger. We have all pledged our solidarity and support, accompanied by spontaneous outpourings of material participation. We are not a wealthy populace, but we are a people rich with giving and sharing instincts. The Union government and the government of Jammu & Kashmir can be sure that India stands rock-solid with them in whatever they need to do at this juncture. Civilian aid for national defence has been, in India, a time-honoured practice and tradi-

Does this amount to acknowledging that we, the people of India, must now be ready for war breaking out between the two countries? Let us know this: Such a possibility is real. Not just because we have been outraged and will not take Pakistan's jurrat (audacity) in Pahalgam lying down, but because a counter-narrative in Pakistan needs to be heard in real-time. Given the audacity of the Pahalgam attack, Pakistan cannot but go into defensive rhetoric which often strays into offensive vocabulary. That country knows what it has brought upon itself by brazen acts of omission, if not commission, at the very least. So, any step India takes in terms of military options will be met by matching steps for

If things do come to that pass, we, the people of India, must and will say, "So be it, so be it. We will face that 'match' and will emerge stronger for it; terrorism won't be allowed to get away with such a heinous

There is something very important in this preparedness we must remind ourselves at all times: Readiness for war is one thing, the mongering of war quite another. The exactions of war are always painful, and those of war between two countries with nuclear arsenals can be apocalyptic. India is a nuclear power with a tradition of nuclear wisdom and a history of active advocacies for nuclear restraints and disarmament. Is Pakistan's record in that direction the same? The history of its nuclear weaponisation speaks for itself.

India can, and will, calibrate its military



While preparing for the possibility of war, we must do so without allowing terrorism to infect us with a craving for the same. HINDUSTAN TIMES

options with maturity.

As a people, we must not only be part of that maturity but also do something else. Terrorists of the type that Pahalgam saw, given their vileness, are understood to have three aims: First, on-the-spot bloodletting and carnage; second, the spreading of sectarian hate and inflaming of communal passions; and third, provoking a larger confla-

gration, namely, war.

Totally and unreservedly trusting the government of India to do the right thing with all its might and maturity, we must assist it by saying a roaring "No!" to any communal passions we may harbour, which others may try to stir. "Do your worst," we must say to terrorism, "and you will pay for every such act. But don't think for a moment it will poison our lives and our souls with your venom. Your cowardly, face-hidden, murdering of peace, harmony, and trust, we hold in contempt. The narrative of Two Nations may have won a separate nation, but we are not going to allow your narrative of hating nations divide our

One Nation, which is home to Hindus, Muslims, and Sikh alike. India that is Bharat is a seat of values your fiendish minds can't comprehend.'

And we must tell ourselves that the blood spilt on the gentle dales of Pahalgam on April 22 — like that spilt on the dew-laden grass of Tees January Marg on January 30, 1948 — proclaims our faith in humanity even as it exposes the evil of bullets and bombs targeted at humanity. We, as India's civilian force, must offer our

unified solidarity to our armed forces, without a drop of blood being allowed to be spilt amongst ourselves by the "second wave of terror", namely, inflamed communal passions. And while preparing for the possibility of war, we must do so without allowing terrorism to infect us with its craving for the same.

While terrorists and terrorism have, we know, echo chambers galore in Pakistan, that country also has persons with sagacity and maturity enough to despise violence and abhor hatred. Pakistan (and Bangladesh) have been carved out from India

They have much more than a few people and opinion-makers who would be horrified by what happened in Pahalgam. We do not know of them as well as we should. We must hope they will say the same roaring "No!" to the wholesalers and retailers of communalism there. The great Guru Nanak joined the elements in Kartarpur which fate has decreed to lie in Pakistan — we must pray, for the good of humanity on both sides

of the Radcliffe Line. Harking to the call given to us by that great Indian, Lal Bahadur Shastri, we must wish the Indian State every strength and success in meeting this challenge, and say "Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan", adding to it "Jai Insaan". Our creed is *insaniyat* (humanity), we must say to the gutless gun-toters at Pahalgam, not haivaniyat (evil). Once again, "Khabardar, don't you trifle with India and its insaniyat!'

Gopalkrishna Gandhi, a former administrator, is a student of modern Indian history The views expressed are personal

{ SUNDAY SENTIMENTS }

Karan Thapar



Revealed: The mystery that Agatha Christie was

he abiding memory of my teenage years is reading Agatha Christie. On holiday from school, I would spend hot summer afternoons stretched out on a sofa under a furiously whirling fan, absorbed in her murder mysteries. It was mainly Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple. Of Tommy and Tuppence Beresford, Parker Pyne and Harley Quin, I knew nothing. But I was dimly aware that she had written 66 detective novels, which sold over 2 billion copies. an amount surpassed only by the Bible and Shakespeare and translated into over a hundred languages.

However, of Agatha Christie herself. I knew precious little. That has now been filled in by Lucy Worsley's fascinating biography, which I chanced upon recently. It is rightly subtitled A Very Elu-

was the surname she got from her first husband. Her only child, Rosalind, was

sive Woman. But once you have read it, you feel you know the author intimately. Born to an American father, Christie from this marriage. It lasted from 1914 till 1928, when Archibald Christie's infidelity led to a painful divorce.

Two years later Agatha married an archaeologist over a decade younger. It was on his digs in the Middle East that she got to know Iraq (Mesopotamia) and of her husband's work. In return, she wrote Death on the Nile, Murder in Mesopotamia, and Murder on the Orient Express.

She was a devoted if somewhat jealous wife. A portable toilet was built for her so she could accompany her husband, Max Mallowan, to his archaeological sites. Worsley says it was, in fact, "a tea chest with a brass-hinged mahogany seat".

Most of you probably know Agatha as an author of thrillers. But there was a lot more to her. Writing as Mary Westmacott, she authored six romantic novels. She was also an accomplished playwright. Two of her most famous plays are The Mousetrap and Witness for the Prosecu-

tion. The former ran continuously in a London West End theatre from 1952 till 2020, when it had to be temporarily discontinued because of Covid. It reopened

Poirot is by far her most famous creation but, in fact, she thought he was "rather insufferable". Following his last appearance in *Curtain* in 1975, the *New* York Times published his obituary on its

Agatha lived to be 86 and Worslev reveals she was writing well into her 80s. When she died "her last notebooks still contain ideas for yet another novel. It was to feature an entirely new idea, about two students who murder a boy purely as an experiment.

Not surprisingly, mystery surrounded Agatha's own life. In 1926, when her marappeared for ten days. A massive manhunt was conducted but no one knew where she was. Worsley says her critics considered her "a manipulative minx", determined to seek revenge on her adulterous husband. But it seems she was going through a mental breakdown. Worsley inclines to that view.

However, the joy of Worsley's book is not just the broad sweep of the story she tells but also the small little nuggets she reveals. They surprise, like little gifts on a treasure hunt.

Agatha's great career stumbled at its very start. Her first book, The Mysterious Affair at Styles, was rejected by two publishers before The Bodley Head took it on.

MOST PROBABLY KNOW AGATHA AS AN AUTHOR OF THRILLERS. BUT THERE WAS A LOT MORE TO HER. WRITING AS MARY WESTMACOTT, SHE AUTHORED SIX ROMANTIC NOVELS. SHE WAS ALSO A SKILLED **PLAYWRIGHT**

At 36, she weighed 11 stone. That went up to 13 in later years. She was certainly a big woman. And Agatha loved houses. She

owned eight! ley points out that Poirot lives in Whitehaven Mansions except when he lives at Whitehouse Mansions. In Sleeping Murder, a clerk, a receptionist and a train passenger are all accidentally given the same name. Narracott, which is also the name of a chambermaid, a boatman and a policeman in three completely different

After a heart attack in 1974, Agatha was asked how she'd like to be remembered. "A rather good writer of detective stories, was her reply. I would never disagree.

> Karan Thapar is the author of Devil's Advocate: The Untold Story The views expressed are personal

{ ENGENDER } Lalita Panicker





In Bihar, women script a story of empowerment

oor, marginalised women in India lack the tools needed for economic empowerment, especially in states such as Bihar. So, a project in the state that has provided crucial livelihood support to women in the form of livestock management -- in this case, goats -- by raising a cohort of nara-veterinarians comes as hope. Small livestock is an important economic asset for small and marginal farming households, with women playing a key role in care and upkeep. The Bihar project demonstrates how this can transform women's lives through planning and skill development.

Project Mesha, implemented by the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) and supported by the Gates Foundation, has made goat rearing a key pathway for women's economic and social empowerment. Studies show that when given control of finances, women not only improve their status within homes, but also have a greater say in decisions and increased power to improve the quality of life for themselves and their families.

The project supports the development and training of women pashu sakhis (friends of animals): Fee-based health service workers for small ruminants providing vaccinations, de-worming, castration, and other services. Technical training apart, the women receive gender sensitisation and capacity building focused on enhancing agency, access, and control over productive resources and resulting income, as well as mobility and decisionmaking at the household and community levels. Today, 87% of women in the project solely decide how to spend their earnings. In 2021, Project Mesha, in partnership with the state rural livelihoods mission (JEEViKA), scaled up across 20 districts (out of Bihar's 38), benefiting over 700,000 women.

 $\bar{\text{Using}}$ the SHG forum established by JEEViKA, the programme trains women on how to vaccinate, deworm, and provide other preventive care to goats. It has created a cadre of women para-veterinarians dedicated to preventive animal health services, improving the

productivity of goat flocks. The success of such projects, not just in Bihar but across rural India, lies in enabling women with deep ties with the community to steer the change. Project Mesha also involved building male champions for pashu sakhis by explaining to them that women need to freed from some household responsibilities if they are to make more money. Responsibil ity distribution was gamified in the project: Men and women place an equal-sized stone for every task done throughout the day on a weighing scale. This demonstrates how much work a woman does. This facilitates discussions on the unequal work burden of women and how men can support change. AKF CEO Tinni Sawhnev says, "This exercise brings to light the invisible, without even having to speak about gender norms." There are 6,085 pashu sakhis reaching over 700,000 households across 20 districts of the state.

In Muzaffarpur, where the project was initiated in 2016, almost 60% of pashu sakhis have gone from zero income to ₹3,000-12,000 per month. In 2023, the women-led and women-managed Mesha Mahila Bakri Palak Producer Company was set up to ensure the sustainability of interventions and support collective input procurement and goat sale.

AKF and JEEViKA plan to support the establishment of a cadre of 10,000 pashu sakhis across Bihar. There are plans to adopt a climate-adaptation lens: Pashu sakhis will help communities build resilience against the climate crisis. Focusing on disease prevention. Mesha minimises the use of antibiotics in goat flocks. Pilots for fodder also focus on hydroponics and fodder silage strengthening climate resilience. Ragini Devi, a pashu sakhi from the first cohort trained, proudly states, "We have made our homes stronger and we know that our work will also make our communities stronger".

The views expressed are personal

Across the border: An army's rising desperation

n the 1990s, my father — a middle manager in an Indian company — was posted in a city in Bihar named after a revenue officer named Muzaffar Khan in the 1800s. It was a town with open drains and non-communal corruption, which kept people of all religions equally poor. Khan was long dead, his revenue collections long spent, but his sewage system stayed the same. The city had great litchis, though.

It was a winter day, and when my school-term exams ended at noon, I stood outside the gates, clutching my exam-notepad. My father picked me up on his Rajdoot, and after a short ride, we were at his office. An old building in an old part of the town, with large iron gates, it was a 4-BHK set-up. The building-owner lived a floor above. Mr Ansari took pride in playing landlord to a large Indian corporation — it did ensure uninterrupted

rental cash-flow and community pride. That day, upon seeing a kid sitting on his father's Rajdoot, he came downstairs. After some small talk, he figured I was waiting out my father's shift and generously invited me upstairs. A bowl of *sevaiyya* (sweet vermicelli) was summoned, to which I happily helped myself. Assured I was taken care of he sat beside his landline phone and made a call. Someone at the other end, in Karachi, picked up. He inquired about someone's health, and after some small talk, disconnected the call. I was a bit shocked. How could someone make an international call in

the daytime? Even for an STD call, I used to go late in the night to a PCO, with eyes firmly on the meter. As it flashed the price, it synchronised with our collective familial heart-

Many Biharis had migrated to Sindh at

the time of partition. At least one member stayed back in India to look after whatever property they had. And hence, there were several families, divided by the border but actively in touch. Remember, this

was the 1990s — a time of cricket teams touring each other's countries and Ghulam Ali concerts in Then, Kargil happened. A Pakistan general thought he could

finally end the drought and get a Asthana win to his name. After every brief

Abhishek

spell of normalcy, the Pakistan army tries a "terror adventure", a health supplement for its continued rele-

Sadly, the only thing it has ever won is rounds of popular elections in Pakistan. It is the operating system of the country, which hosts various apps (the country's political parties), installing and uninstalling them at will. A country forever between successive IMF bailouts, Pakistan is barely of any concern to India now — other than Indian corporates using its cricket matches to sell more shampoo and some funny YouTube content-creators, who self-flagellate to earn a few Indian ad-dollars more. The world has

de-hyphenated us long back. There was a time when, at UN meetings,



 $The \ Pakistani\ army's\ entire\ equity\ is\ the\ fear\ it\ commands\ domestically.$

speakers of both nations would exchange sharp words about Kashmir, addressing empty seats. "We brought up the Kashmir issue"— that was considered an achievement across the border. But now, India is not known for the Kashmir conflict, but as a place where 20% of iPhones are made. It is known as a possible counterweight to China. How successful we are is debatable, but we are in that race. India is now known for exporting tech CEOs, politicians, and professionals worthy enough to take American jobs. We may be hated or loved, but we

have moved on from indifference. Pakistan is still fighting ghosts. The only thing going for it, and why it is still dangerous, is that its army is suicidal. It has no concern for the lives of its citizens, let alone its soldiers. Hence, it is unhinged and can risk anything. The Pakistan army doesn't care about the morale of its people as it isn't going to face elections. It is like a local gunda, whose entire equity is the fear that it commands. And it will go to any extent to

preserve it — for example, not even claiming the bodies of its soldiers killed in conflict, trying to revive the discredited Two Nation theory, and by segregating tourists and asking them to drop their pants.

Dealing with such a force is tricky for a democracy. The Cold War is over. Americans are no longer in Afghanistan, so there is no rent to seek. Nobody cares if it shoots itself now, so it is using the same gun to shoot innocents — and wait for more civilians to be killed in retaliation. Then, its army can sit on the throne of fear, convincing the non-dead population that it is their only saviour.

All the elderly in Pakistan that Mr Ansari inquired about in the 1990s must be dead now. One of his kids is a surgeon and the other works for a tech MNC. No phone calls are made now.

> Abhishek Asthana is a tech and media entrepreneur and tweets as @gabbbarsingh. The views expressed are personal

Need for sensitive handling

{ SUNDAY LETTERS }

Ancient calendars lost with time This is with reference to

"Science behind Indic calendar and time-cycle by Pavan K Varma (April 20). The lamentation that our textbooks don't mention our ancient mastery of time-cycles is certainly valid. But avoid exalting everything "ancient", imagined and real; academic interest should suffice

Sukriti Rathore

The Allahabad HC granting bail to a rape accused,

the code of conduct, keeping in mind the sanctity of the Constitution and the dignity of the victim Abhilasha Gupta

saying the victim "invited trouble," is deeply disturbing.

It promotes victim-blaming and shifts attention from

the accused's actions to the survivor's behaviour.

Undermining consent weakens social progress.

This is with reference to "In rape cases, stop blaming the victim, morality talk" by Namita Bhandare (April

20). Judges adjudicating rape cases should adhere to

Sanjay Chopra

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PCHIDAMBARAM

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The trade deficit with China exacerbates India's current account deficit and is a ticking bomb. The surplus with the United States has, to an extent, compensated the deficit with China. If the trade surplus with the U.S. vanished thanks to Mr Trump's tariffs and the trade deficit with China grew larger, it will worsen the

situation for India

Between Scylla and Charybdis

IN CHOOSING the title with obscure names I do not intend to flaunt my knowledge of English idioms; I am playing safe. The more familiar idiom 'between the devil and the deep sea' would have immediately raised the question 'which is the devil and which is the deep sea'? In the present tariff war that started on April 2, 2025, India faces challenges from two countries: United States and China. One is the obscure Scylla and the other the obscure Charybdis. Both, in the current context, are unpleasant alternatives.

ONE SIDE OF PROBLEM...

India's merchandise trade with the United States and China in 2024-25 was China World U.S. 437.42 bn Exports 86.51 bn 14.25 bn 113.45 bn 720.24 bn Imports 45.3 bn surplus/ +41.21bn -99.20bn -282.82bn deficit

India, therefore, faces two diametrically opposite challenges when dealing with the two largest economies of the

With the United States, we have a surplus in the trade account. Our major exports to the U.S. are gems and jewellery, pharmaceuticals, engineering goods, electronic goods and some agricultural products. Except quality pharmaceuticals at competitive prices, other items are goods that the U.S. can do without or im-

port from other countries. But each item of export is the source of livelihood for thousands of men and women in India. The surplus in the trade account is threatened by Mr Trump's intention to impose tariffs. While there is a 'pause', and pharmaceuticals are temporarily exempt, the tariff sword hangs over India's head. If tariffs are imposed, it will gravely affect exporters, jobs, the foreign exchange earnings and the current account balance. It is in India's interest to negotiate with the U.S. and avoid stiff tariffs.

The U.S. will also not gain by halting

Indian goods, and Mr Trump knows that. He will find a way to allow the imports, but will exact a price. He will insist on India buying more from the U.S. and 'balancing' trade. My guess is he will insist on India buying more military equipment and aircraft — both of which are high priced. India may import its other needs such as iron & steel, organic chemicals, plastics, mineral fuels, and oil & petroleum products from other countries of the world but may, prudently, choose American goods. The big question is how much more can India afford to spend on high-cost American military equipment and aircraft (and now nuclear reactors)? Mr Modi has tolerated American provocations and excesses without protest, and may be forced to conclude a deal with Mr Trump.

...AND THE OTHER SIDE With China, India has the opposite

<u>deficit</u> in the merchandise trade account: it is a humongous USD 100 billion dollars. Indian industry has become very China-dependent for electrical and electronic equipment, machinery, organic chemicals, plastics, and iron and steel because prices of Chinese goods are lower (sometimes amounting to 'dumping'). India has few alternative sources at matching prices and delivery-time. Until India expands and upgrades its domestic manufacturing sector — the share is

problem. India has a huge and mounting

India's exports to China are mainly consumer goods, mineral- and petroleum-based fuels, marine foods, cotton yarn and some agricultural products. Apparently, there are few value-added goods that India can export to China that China cannot produce domestically or source from other countries. India's plight is the result of the Modi government's neglect of the manufacturing sector. China has expressed its willingness to import more goods from India but whether India can take advantage of the offer is debatable.

stuck at 13-14 per cent of GDP — India

will remain China-dependent.

The trade deficit with China exacerbates India's current account deficit and is a ticking bomb. The surplus with the United States has, to an extent, compensated the deficit with China. If the trade surplus with the U.S. vanished thanks to Mr Trump's tariffs and the trade deficit with China grew larger, it will worsen the situation for India.

WHITHER QUAD?

There is a game-spoiler: QUAD, or the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. The strategic priorities of the U.S., Japan and Australia are significantly different from the strategic priorities of India. The United States would like QUAD to become a bulwark against China's expansionism. India would like to restrict QUAD to maritime safety, digital connectivity, emerging technologies, etc. and is wary of turning QUAD into an anti-China group. Moreover, China has warned the world that any country concluding a deal with the U.S. that is inimical to China's interests will pay a price. India must maintain a balance between the United States (which is the major source of capital and technology) and China (which is the major source of intermediate and capital goods). Besides, China is a hostile neighbour occupying Indian territory. So far, India's participation in QUAD has been calibrated and pragmatic but there is the danger of right-wing influencers (in India and the U.S.) pushing India into a confrontation with China.

There is another interesting factor: President Trump will be gone on January 20, 2029 but President Xi can stay in office as long as he likes and is in control. Mr Trump is brash and blunt, Mr Xi is subtle and crafty. Mr Trump's misadventure has called out Mr Modi's misguided protectionist policies. Mr Modi must beat a retreat. He will be well-advised to be more open, consultative, and avoid treating Opposition parties as enemies.

Fifth COLUMN **TAVLEEN SINGH** Twitter@tavleen_singh

Whispers of war

THIS HAS been a hard piece to write. Every time I sat down to write the first sentence, images of horror from that sunny, mountainous meadow distracted me. Images of the bodies of young men, images of women weeping for dead male relatives, images of terrified children. Of all these images, the one that has become deeply etched in my head is that of the desolate young bride sitting beside the body of the Naval officer she married just days before coming to Pahalgam. What kind of men can deprive a newly married couple of happiness? What kind of men can kill husbands in front of their wives, fathers before children simply because they do not like their religion? Only one kind. Those so filled with hatred that their victims stop being human in their eyes.

As someone who knows Pakistan well, believe me when I tell you that every Pakistani child is brought up on hatred of Hindus and India. The reason they are taught in their school textbooks to hate India is supposedly Kashmir. And the truth is that I have never met a Pakistani either in the drawing rooms of Lahore and Karachi, or in the streets of these cities who did not bring up Kashmir as the main reason for his hatred of India. Some have come to India and been bedazzled but the only thing that changes is that they say that if the 'Kashmir problem' was solved there would be peace with India. Their solution is that India hand Kashmir over to Pakistan. When I have dug deeper, I have found that Kashmir is only part of the problem. The real problem is that they want to think of themselves as Arabs and Persians, and not Indians. That is how deep the hatred goes.

The Pakistani Army Chief is the first high-level Pakistani official who has articulated that deeper reason so clearly. Days before the massacre in Pahalgam, General Asim Munir addressed a group of overseas Pakistanis in Islamabad. He told them that it was their duty to tell their children 'The story of Pakistan'. Tell them, he said, how we fought and sacrificed to create this country because we knew that we could not live with Hindus. They are different in every way to us, he said, their culture is different their religion is different, they have different goals and ambitions. It was only at the end of this speech, that he reminded his audience that 'Kashmir is

Pakistan's jugular vein'.

Were the murderous fanatics who came to Pahalgam inspired by this speech? Possibly. What is clear as daylight is that they were the spawn of the Pakistani Army. After losing more than one war, the military men and mad mullahs who are the real rulers of Pakistan appear to have concluded that the only way to fight India is through jihadist terrorism. This time, as they did in Mumbai on November 26, 2008, they went too far because they killed civilians and not soldiers or paramilitaries. There is not an Indian I have spoken to in the past week who does

not now want war. The Prime Minister, when he spoke about Pahalgam in his speech at a public rally in Bihar last week, did not mention Pakistan. He talked only of tracking and punishing 'terrorists and their backers', and perhaps this was for strategic reasons. But the decision to suspend the Indus Water Treaty and to close the border suggests that he knows exactly who is to blame for what happened. Most Indians know that Pakistan is nearly always behind acts of jihadi terrorism in India and most Indians would like to see India do what Israel

Iihadi terrorism is the most hideous kind of terrorism because the violence is totally inspired by religion. If Pakistan has become a country in which the worst kind of violent iihadis find shelter and support. it is because the groundwork for hating idol worshippers like us is done in school before children know the meaning of religion. Inevitable, since the only reason why Pakistan exists is because its founding fathers believed that it was simply not possible for Muslims to live along with us proud infidels.

does when it is attacked.

ing on the Line of Control and the homes of at least two suspected Kashmiri terrorists have been destroyed by our security forces. The good news from the Kashmir Valley is that local Kashmiris who have in the past given succor and refuge to the jihadi groups seem now to have come out against them. Unsurprising really, since in the five years that have followed the abrogation of Article 370, the Valley has seen peace and prosperity of the kind that existed before the insurgency began in the 1980s. If the Prime Minister declares war on

So, what happens next? It is hard to say. There has already been some shoot-

Pakistan, he will have the whole country behind him. If he does nothing, he will lose everyone's support because most Indians feel that our leaders have too often in the past done nothing after a jihadist attack from Pakistan. I count myself among them and have no hesitation in admitting that I was ashamed that our Prime Minister did nothing other than send Pakistan's generals dossiers of proof after the 26/11 attack. This was taken as a sign of India's weakness not strength.

Talking to my two kids about porn, trust and connections



THE JURY is still out on my parenting. I am not a parent who has triumphed against all odds to raise feminist boys. Our two adolescent home-learners can make omelettes, roll chapatis and bake cakes. They know how to set a table, do laundry, clean toilets and make their beds with some nagging. They are made to live in artificial poverty, expected to share and take public transport. They don't have personal devices, and make do with a landline and our smartphones. They are friends with several septuagenarians in the colony. Sometimes, I feel as if we have cracked the code, but on most days, I ask myself in despair - can any of this truly guarantee that the boys become socially responsible

adults? The hard truth is no, it won't.

Why do I think so? As parents, we are tasked with raising a generation of digital citizens — an undertaking which most of us neither accounted for nor are prepared for. It keeps us in the throes of "not-enoughness". Parenting strategies such as boys learning by osmosis with the same-sex parent setting an example, having older female relatives draw boundaries, and having queer and female friends are all great, but not enough. It can be said that previous generations had similar parenting challenges, say, with the coming of TV and video games. But digital culture is different. Here, parents and children are equally involved. Parents use screens for personal stuff, work, and for parenting. The challenges of this technology are not limited to a segment of population but shaping the social experience of all It informs the way we do relationships now - ghosting, phubbing, cyberstalking, flaming, sexting, having FOMO/ JOMO and

scrolling people in and out of our lives. What triggered my deep dive into the world of male locker-room chats, incel culture and age-inappropriate exposure to online porn was when I heard a therapist present a case of a 10-year-old porn addict, to discuss how to work with socially withdrawn clients. The fact that this digital content is highly persuasive and comes coded in a language unavailable to parents took me by surprise. I began to ask other parents what they were doing about it. Most pleaded ignorance or told me not to make

too much of it, "it's a passing phase" or "we also saw porn". According to some, the problem was with liberal parenting and absence of religious guardrails. The parental dismissal was equally alarming.

But here is how digital culture is shaping today's adolescents: It can make them believe sex is about domination. It runs the risk of dissolving social taboos where all women around them, mothers included, may be seen as sexual objects. It informs their body image — the need to have a ripped torso. And it is aggressively shaping their language — what cannot be done physically can be done through their words. Combine this with caste, class, neurotypical, able-bodied, gender conforming privileges or the lack of them, and the all-round hypermasculine political discourse they are immersed in. In all, the adolescents' social context is surreptitiously normalising misogynist drivel and social-disconnectedness. The plea is that everyone is doing it and therefore it is okay. Here I am not making a call to eliminate devices, although we can certainly limit them, or to ban porn, as any kind of censorship controverts the feminist anti-censorship stance. Rather, I am asking, how do I respond as a parent?

A few weeks ago, we had a difficult conversation about this with the boys. They alternated between deflecting, deeply listening and being defensive. We talked about how sex is about mutual pleasure and respect; masturbation is natural; how they are free to watch porn but that they need to remember it's "not real"; how easily I and other women could become sexual objects for them; how language that we use reflects how we unconsciously perceive reality; and that they were free to make choices different from those made by their friends. As we talked, I could see that the boys had not accounted for any of this — my having this conversation with them, for my knowing about this, or for how it could possibly shape them. My younger one sat with his mouth open and the older one had his head tucked in his chest. At the end of the conversation, we agreed that we needed to have a working alliance. The next day, I asked them how they were feeling about our conversation. The younger one said: "I need to remember not to break my connection with you". It was a reassuring moment where I felt enough as a parent. Mutual trust is really the assurance that we can keep having these much-needed hard conversations without losing connection with each other.

The writer is a historian and a therapist (How to Raise a Boy is a fortnightly column)





Red carpet, red scare: When another US V-P came to India

DURING HIS just concluded four-day tour of India, US Vice-President (V-P) James David Vance and his family visited the Akshardham temple, met Prime Minister Narendra Modi and visited Jaipur, where the 40-year-old V-P gave a public lecture. The visit ended with a family photograph before the Taj Mahal — and coincided with a terror attack in Pahalgam, J&K.

The first US V-P to visit India was another 40-year-old, Richard Nixon. In 1953, Republican candidate Dwight D Eisenhower became the US President, and his running mate, Nixon, became the V-P. In the US system, the V-P is the Senate's presiding officer and, other than that, only holds a ceremonial position. However, Eisenhower carved out a greater diplomatic role for Nixon. He gave Nixon the responsibility of spreading the American sphere of influence in Asia and sent him on a two-month, 16-country goodwill tour. As part of this tour, Nixon reached India at the end of November 1953.

The catalyst for his visit was the US government's apprehension of India coming close to Communist powers. A year earlier, the US Ambassador to India sent a top-secret communication to President Harry Truman. He wrote, "Recent Communist successes in South India indicate how rapidly political and economic situation here could disintegrate. Failure of Indian democracy would in all probability result in disaster more substantial than Communist victory in China since Southeast Asia and Middle East would become impossible to hold once India is lost. Communist sweep in Asia would gravely undermine our position in Europe and convince hundreds of millions of our friends all over the world that they are betting on the wrong horse."

On November 29, 1953, Nixon, his wife Pat and the American delegation flew into Bangalore from Sri Lanka (then Ceylon). The visit took place at a time when there was news that America was planning to supply arms to Pakistan. But despite this sourness, the V-P received a rousing welcome. The American Ambassador described Nixon's reception as "unprecedented ... with most of the city's populace lining streets and cheering on way from airport". Travelling in an open-top car, the V-P and his wife stopped at crowded intersections to shake hands with people.

The meatier part of the visit started two days later when Nixon reached Delhi. He engaged with President Rajendra



(From left) Vice-President S Radhakrishnan, US Vice-President Richard Nixon, President Rajendra Prasad, Nixon's wife Pat and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru at Rashtrapati Bhavan in 1953. X/@RBArchive

Prasad, Vice-President S Radhakrishnan and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Then, there were the classic photo opportunities: The V-P and the second lady interacting with villagers, Nixon using a shovel to dig a ditch and steer a buffalodriven plough, Pat Nixon making chapatis, visiting an orphanage and finally, a photograph in front of the Taj Mahal.

But the trip's highlight was when Nixon spoke to Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha MPs in the Central Hall of the circular Parliament building. Till then, no visiting dignitary had given a speech to MPs, and Nixon was the first. The idea of inviting Nixon to address MPs originated because Prime Minister Nehru had addressed both Houses of the United States Congress during his visit in 1949. Our Parliament had formed an "Indian Parliamentary Group", and one of its objectives was to arrange lectures from distinguished persons. During Nixon's visit, Parliament was meeting for its winter session, making it convenient for parlia-

mentarians to hear from the V-P formally. Nixon's speech was scheduled in the evening after both Houses had adjourned for the day. In the Central Hall, the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, Dr S Radhakrishnan, introduced Nixon. During his half-hour speech, Nixon applauded India, saying, "The air you breathe here is free; there is tolerance of religion, freedom of speech, press, justice under law and dedication to the way of peace." He went on to make three broad points.

First, India would play a decisive role in the future of Asia and the world, and America was interested in seeing India

succeed. Second, the US foreign policy was non-aggressive, non-imperialist, non-colonial and non-isolationist. "The USA desires nothing in the world today from any other people or country except their friendship." And finally, the totalitarian system headed by Communist leaders was the only force that threatened the peace of the world.

The American Ambassador considered the visit a success. In a cable to the State Department, he reported, "The Vice President's private talks with Indian leaders ... have all been frank and cordial. India and US points of difference remain, but I do not believe we could hope for any more beneficial results to be obtained from a single visit."

Nixon's Asia goodwill tour mostly went according to plan. However, five years later, in 1958, during Eisenhower and Nixon's second term, a similar goodwill tour was an unmitigated disaster. This time, Nixon was touring independent Latin American countries. First, there were the occasional Communist protests. Then things escalated in Peru when a protester "let fly a wad of spit", which landed full on Nixon's face. In his book Six Crises, Nixon describes the incident and says that he wanted to tear off the spitter's face, but his security detail stopped him. He had to contend with landing "a healthy kick" on the spitter's shins. A couple of days later, in Venezuela, hundreds of communist protestors rained spit on the V-P and his entourage.

> The writer looks at issues through a legislative lens and works at PRS Legislative Research

She **SAID SOUMIDAS**

TO PASS time during my daily commute, I often watch reels of, for and by women, who cook up a feast every day for their husband's or children's lunch boxes. Whether elaborate or simple, what struck me is the care and devotion lavished on this seemingly mundane task, that entails thorough preparation, skill and, needless to say, time and patience.

Quite a few women have become household names, thanks to their reel recipes and presentation or what is called "content". The recipes, mostly traditional, include juices or drinks like chhaas or

Dabba cartel: a woman's lunchbox

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lassi, a range of theplas, rotis, dosas or rice as the main course served with fresh sabzi and a dessert or cut fruit. However. it is mostly women doing the cooking and then the packing.

What about working women, cooking and packing their own lunches? And aren't all women "working women"? I am vet to come across "content" where a woman cooks solely for herself and relishes the food she cooks. Many women in our country work long arduous hours and not all workplaces have good, hygienic canteens that serve nutritious food.

As a commuter, I have often seen women unwrap the previous night's rotis rolled with pickle or vegetable as a quick bite on the morning rush-hour commute. Women stopping by to grab a patty (aloo pattice) and a tiny bottle of flavoured milk at the Mother Dairy outlet are a common sight, even as early as 6.30 or 7 am at the busy Kashmere Gate Metro Station, where several Delhi Metro lines intersect.

Women's nutritional needs are important and become the key to good health at different phases of their lives, from puberty to pregnancy to menopause to old age. Calcium and iron deficiencies are more of a norm than an exception in our country. However, in an age of influencers and YouTube or Insta reels, women planning and packing their own food, enjoying an unhur-

ried meal, whether at home or at work, is a sight that is not very common. Of course, I would be happy to be proven wrong.

As the mother is a role model for children, what is the message being passed on to the next generation? A woman's nutritional needs are not as important as those of others, husbands, children, or male relatives or elders. What is the next generation internalising? Who packs the dabba, who eats from it, is a study of power equations on the home front. Families working together, of course, have a different vibe, sharing the chopping board, dishes in the kitchen sink, as well as the packed meals go a long way to establish egalitarian set-ups and work

ethos at home and the world.

In Odisha, it is believed that Lord Jagannath himself created a sweet made of cottage cheese and sugar syrup, that later came to be known as the rasgulla, to appease Goddess Lakshmi, and the sweet won not just the Goddess's but everyone's hearts. Do we need divine inspiration to realise that food cooked and offered with love not only satiates, but also heals, is a need not only of the body, but also the magic ingredient that creates strong bonds among families, friends, communities.

The author, who belongs to Jharkhand, teaches English at a school in Delhi National Editor Shalini Langer curates the fortnightly 'She Said' column **FE SUNDAY** WWW.FINANCIALEXPRESS.COM

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Winged Foot, New York, was a rollercoaster of branches, bunkers, and a double-bogey that cost him the title

Between the ears

It's not always about swing speed or ball flight but what's going on inside the head on the 72nd hole

the building. Mental toughness? On that

hole, I had the mental fortitude of a

Golf: The ultimate mind game

Let's be real. Golf is a sport where

you have too much time to think. In football, you're reacting. In tennis, you're running. In golf, you hit... and

then you walk. And while you walk,

your brain starts whispering: "Hey,

remember that time you four-putted

from here?" or "What if this one goes

OB and you have to explain it to your

caddie and your dog back home?" It's

like being stuck in traffic with your

inner critic in the passenger seat.

That's why mental toughness is so

critical. Everyone's got the game. But

the ones who can *quiet the noise*—

those are the players you see holding

Training the mind like a muscle

brain. Sports psychologists talk about

visualisation, positive self-talk, breath-

ing exercises, routines—the works. I

used to think all that was fluffy until I

started actually doing it. Now, before

every round, I visualise my shots. Not

just the good ones, but

the ones that go side-

ways and how will I

respond. I also tell

myself things like,

"You're a boss, you're

dialed in, you've got

this,"instead of my old

classic: "Please don't

screw this up."

Having a routine also helps. Some-

thing predictable. For me, it's adjusting

my glove, looking at the target, one prac-

tice swing, step in, and go. If I find myself

taking five waggles and blinking like I'm

communicating with Morse code, I

And then, there are those magical

days when everything clicks. When

you're in what they call "the zone." It's

like golf becomes effortless. The swing

centered when everything around you

feels like it's unravelling. It's about hit-

ting that putt on the 18th knowing that

no matterwhat happens, you've got the

mental game to show up again tomor-

row. So the next time you step up to a

pressure shot, take a breath, smile, and

tell yourself: "I've got this. And if I don't...

well, at least it'll make for a great story

later." Because in golf, as in life, it's all

about how you bounce back—and some-

times, how you laugh about it afterward.

golfer, sharing through this column

Rahil Gangjee is a professional

what life on a golf course is like

When the mind wins the day

know I've gone off-script.

The good news? You can train your

trophies on Sunday.

Whether you're

chasing a trophy or trying

to break 90, remember

that golf isn't just about

swing mechanics and

launch angles

soggy biscuit.





THEY SAY GOLF is a game played on a five-inch course—the distance between your ears. Personally, I feel that is an understatement. I'd say it's more like a chaotic circus tent set up between your ears, with your brain acting like a clown juggling confidence, anxiety, doubt, and hope — all while you are trying to putt for par. Trust me, I have been there.

If you have ever wondered what separates the winner lifting the trophy from the guy signing autographs near the portable toilets, it's not always swing speed, ball flight, or short-game wizardry. It's what's going on inside their head on the 72nd hole. At the pro level, everyone hits it a mile, spins wedges, and sinks putts on the practice green. But under pressure? Ah, that's when the circus music starts playing.

When golf turns into Greek tragedy

Take Jean van de Velde, for instance. The poor man was one hole away from a career-defining victory

the 1999 Open Championship in Carnoustie. All he needed was a dou-

ble-bogey on the 18th. A double-bogey. In his sleep, he could probably make a double with a cricket bat.

But on that day? He turned into golf's version of Shakespearean drama. One poor decision after another. A shot off the grandstand, a swim in the Barry Burn, a failed barefoot rescue attempt he basically gave a TED Talk on how not to finish a major. I wasn't even on tour then, but I watched in disbelief, feeling both horror and comfort—comfort because, let's be honest, we've all had our Van de Velde moments... just without the cameras.

Then there's Phil Mickelson's infamous 72nd hole meltdown at the 2006 US Open at Winged Foot. Leading by one, Phil took out a driver—because apparently, hitting a fairway was *too* mainstream. What followed was a rollercoaster of branches, bunkers, and a double-bogey that cost him the title. Later, he famously said, "I am such an idiot." Phil, if you ever read this—thank you. That line has comforted millions of weekend warriors.

My own brain freeze moment

Now, I'd love to say I've never lost it mentally on the golf course—but then I'd have to lie. One of my finest (or notso-finest) meltdowns happened back when I was in contention in an Asian Tour event. Final round. I'd just made birdie, riding high, feeling invincible. Then I stood over a routine par putt just four feet.

Somewhere between my brain issuing the command and my hands followingthrough, something went wrong. My grip pressure could've cracked a coconut. I jabbed it like I was trying to kill a spider. Missed. Then missed the comeback.And just like that, I lost two shots. I walked off the green pretending to look for a ball marker in my pocket, but in reality, I was checking if my soul had left



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IN CHOOSING THE title with obscure names I do not intend to flaunt my knowledge of English idioms; I am playing safe. The more familiar idiom 'between the devil and the deep sea'would have immediately raised the question 'which is the devil and which is the deep sea'? In the present tariff war that started on April 2, 2025, India faces challenges from two countries: United States and China. One is the obscure Scylla and the other the obscure Charybdis. Both, in the current context, are unpleasant alternatives.

One side of problem...

India's merchandise trade with the United States and China in 2024-25 was

(in bn)	US	China	World
Exports	86.51	14.25	437.42
Imports	45.3	113.45	720.24
surplus/ deficit	+41.21	-99.20	-282.82

India, therefore, faces two diametrically opposite challenges when dealing with the two largest economies of the world.

With the United States, we have a *surplus* in the trade account. Our major exports to the US are gems and jewellery, pharmaceuticals, engineering goods, electronic goods and some agricultural products. Except quality pharmaceuticals at competitive prices, other items are goods that the US can do without or import from



Between Scylla and Charybdis

other countries. But each item of export is the source of livelihood for thousands of men and women in India. The surplus in the trade account is threatened by Mr Trump's intention to impose tariffs. While there is a 'pause', and pharmaceuticals are temporarily exempt, the tariff sword hangs over India's head. If tariffs are imposed, it will gravely affect exporters, jobs, the foreign exchange earnings and the current account balance. It is in India's interest to negotiate with the US and avoid stiff tariffs.

The US will also not gain by halting Indian goods, and Mr Trump knows that. He will find a way to allow the imports, but will exact a price. He will insist on India buying more from the US and 'balancing' trade. My guess is he will insist on India buying more military equipment and aircraft — both of which are high priced. India may import its other needs such as iron & steel, organic chemicals, plastics, mineral fuels, and oil & petroleum products from other countries of the world but may, prudently, choose American goods. The big question is how much more can India afford to spend on high-cost American military equipment and aircraft (and now nuclear reactors)? Mr Modi has tolerated American provocations and excesses without protest, and may be forced to conclude a deal with Mr Trump.

...and the other side

With China, India has the opposite problem. India has a huge and mounting *deficit* in the merchandise trade account:

it is a humongous \$100 billion dollars. Indian industry has become very Chinadependent for electrical and electronic equipment, machinery, organic chemicals, plastics, and iron and steel because prices of Chinese goods are lower (sometimes amounting to 'dumping'). India has few alternative sources at matching prices and delivery-time. Until India expands and upgrades its domestic manufacturing sector — the share is stuck at 13-14% of GDP — India will remain China-dependent.

India's exports to China are mainly consumer goods, mineral- and petroleumbased fuels, marine foods, cotton yarn and some agricultural products. Apparently, there are few value-added goods that India can export to China that China cannot produce domestically or source from other countries. India's plight is the result of the Modi government's neglect of the manufacturing sector. China has expressed its willingness to import more goods from India but whether India can take advantage of the offer is debatable. The trade deficit with China exacer-

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Whither Quad?

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strategic priorities of the US, Japan and Australia are significantly different from the strategic priorities of India. The United States would like QUAD to become a bulwark against China's expansionism. India would like to restrict QUAD to maritime safety, digital connectivity, emerging technologies, etc. and is wary of turning QUAD into an anti-China group. Moreover, China has warned the world that any country concluding a deal with the US that is inimical to China's interests will pay a price. India must maintain a balance between the United States (which is the major source of capital and technology) and China (which is the major source of intermediate and capital goods). Besides, China is a hostile neighbour occupying Indian territory. So far, India's participation in QUAD has been calibrated and pragmatic but there is the danger of right-wing influencers (in India and the US) pushing India into a confrontation with China.

There is another interesting factor: President Trump will be gone on January 20,2029 but President Xi can stay in office as long as he likes and is in control. Mr Trump is brash and blunt, Mr Xi is subtle and crafty. Mr Trump's misadventure has called out Mr Modi's misguided protectionist policies. Mr Modi must beat a retreat. He will be well-advised to be more open, consultative, and avoid treating Opposition parties as enemies.



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flows, the putts drop, the thoughts are still. You're just... playing. I've had a few of those, and they're addictive. It's not that **THIS HAS BEEN** a hard piece to write. Every time I sat down to write the first you're fearless—it's that you've made sentence, images of horror from that peace with the fear. Tiger Woods, the mental giant of our sport, once said: sunny, mountainous meadow dis-"Winning solves everything." But I think tracted me. Images of the bodies of what he really meant was that winning young men, images of women weepstarts long before Sunday. It starts with ing for dead male relatives, images of howyou handle the pressure, the missed terrified children. Of all these images, the one that has become deeply fairway, the bad bounce, and that voice in your head asking if you're good etched in my head is that of the desolate young bride sitting beside the enough. Spoiler: You are. body of the Naval officer she married Final thoughts (and they just days before coming to Pahalgam. better be positive!) What kind of men can deprive a newly Whether you're chasing a trophy or married couple of happiness? What just trying to break 90, remember that kind of men can kill husbands in front golf isn't just about swing mechanics of their wives, fathers before children and launch angles. It's about staying simply because they do not like their

> being human in their eyes. As someone who knows Pakistan well, believe me when I tell you that every Pakistani child is brought up on hatred of Hindus and India. The reason they are taught in their school textbooks to hate India is supposedly Kashmir. And the truth is that I have never met a Pakistani, either in the drawing rooms of Lahore and Karachi, or in the streets of these cities who did not bring up Kashmir as the main reason for his hatred of India. Some have

religion? Only one kind. Those so filled

with hatred that their victims stop

Whispers of war

come to India and been bedazzled but the only thing that changes is that they say that if the 'Kashmir problem' was solved there would be peace with India. Their solution is that India hand Kashmir over to Pakistan. When I have dug deeper, I have found that Kashmir is only part of the problem. The real problem is that they want to think of themselves as Arabs and Persians, and not Indians. That is how deep the hatred goes.

The Pakistani Army Chief is the first high-level Pakistani official who has articulated that deeper reason so clearly. Days before the massacre in Pahalgam, General Asim Munir addressed a group of overseas Pakistanis in Islamabad. He told them that it was their duty to tell their children 'The story of Pakistan'. Tell them, he said, how we fought and sacrificed to create this country because we knew that we could not live with Hindus. They are different in every way to us, he said, their culture is different, their religion is different, they have different goals and ambitions. It was only at the end of this speech, that he reminded his audience that 'Kashmir is Pakistan's jugular vein'.

Were the murderous fanatics who came to Pahalgam inspired by this speech? Possibly. What is clear as daylight is that they were the spawn of the Pakistani Army. After losing more than one war, the military men and mad mullahs who are the real rulers of Pakistan appear to have concluded that the only way to fight India is through jihadist terrorism. This time, as they did in Mumbai on November 26, 2008, they went too far because they killed civilians and not soldiers or paramilitaries. There is not an Indian I have spoken to in the past week who does not now want war.

The Prime Minister, when he spoke about Pahalgam in his speech at a public rally in Bihar last week, did not mention Pakistan. He talked only of tracking and punishing 'terrorists and their backers', and perhaps this was for strategic reasons. But the decision to suspend the Indus Water Treaty and to close the border suggests that he knows exactly who is to blame for what happened. Most Indians know that Pakistan is nearly always behind acts of jihadi terrorism in India and most Indians would like to see India do what Israel does when it is attacked.

Jihadi terrorism is the most hideous kind of terrorism because the violence is totally inspired by religion. If Pakistan has become a country in which the worst kind of violent jihadis find shelter and support, it is because the groundwork for hating

New Delhi

idol worshippers like us is done in school, before children know the meaning of religion. Inevitable, since the only reason why Pakistan exists is because its founding fathers believed that it was simply not possible for Muslims to live along with us

proud infidels. So, what happens next? It is hard to say. There has already been some shooting on the Line of Control and the homes of at least two suspected Kashmiri terrorists have been destroyed by our security forces. The good news from the Kashmir Valley is that local Kashmiris who have in the past given succor and refuge to the jihadi groups seem now to have come out against them. Unsurprising really, since in the five years that have followed the abrogation of Article 370, the Valley has seen peace and prosperity of the kind that existed before the insurgency began in the 1980s.

If the Prime Minister declares war on Pakistan, he will have the whole country behind him. If he does nothing, he will lose everyone's support because most Indians feel that our leaders have too often in the past done nothing after a jihadist attack from Pakistan. I count myself among them and have no hesitation in admitting that I was ashamed that our Prime Minister did nothing other than send Pakistan's generals dossiers of proof after the 26/11 attack. This was taken as a sign of India's weakness not strength.

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evil in that which is good. Pledge yourself to neither side, but vow instead to preserve the balance between the two

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TRUMP AND 100 DAYS OF VICISSITUDE

ONALD J Trump completes 100 days in office—a benchmark imposed by history—this week. Trump has enshrined uncertainty in global discourse. In a blitzkrieg of actions—executive orders, declarations of emergency and a flurry of directives—the US president has wedged the world between incertitude and vicissitude, between chaos and the promise of a new order.

The cosy comfort of the status quo of the past decades is unravelling—within the US and world over. Global trade is in suspended animation following his yo-yo on tariffs, the imposition and the 90-day pause. In its recent forecast, the IMF has trimmed global growth to sub-3 percent and warned of worse if uncertainty persists.

Stock indices tanked and rallied, but the benchmark S&P500 trailed its highs by over 500 points and investors lost billions the world over. Barring Warren Buffet, each of the top 10 on Bloomberg Billionaires Index lost money. Mood music in America's consumption corridors—University of Michigan's consumer sentiment survey—is at a nervous 52, way below December's 74. Public opinion is split, with less than half of US voters approving of Trump's performance. And yes, the price of eggs is higher.

Trump is not the apprentice he seemed to be in 2016. He arrived with executive smarts and a submissive legislative party. Unconstrained by convention, DJT issued 139 executive orders and deployed national emergency powers. Definitions matter. While 12



THE THIRD EYE SHANKKAR AIYAR Author of *The Gated Republic, Aadhaai* A Biometric History of India's 12 Digit Revolution, and Accidental India

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states have gone to court, a study by Brennan Center shows Trump can access 137 laws to propel his agenda and that standby powers do not expressly require a declaration of war.

The US president is unruffled. He has declared a national emergency on energy for exploration, refining, production and generation capacity. Invocation of the Alien Enemies Act has had a chilling effect on migration. Use of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act for imposing tariffs on most countries and an island of penguins has upended global supply chains. Unsurprising-

ly, corporate America is either lowering guidance or ditching them altogether as companies pull back investments.

The response to his actions is, predictably, binary. Trump is doing everything he said he would. Indeed, he recently observed in an interview, "What I'm doing is exactly what I've campaigned on." That has not muffled the gasps or dampened the shocks. To paraphrase Daniel Kahneman, the ability to predict the future trajectory of Trump 2.0 is undermined by the ease with which the navigation of Trump 1.0 is explained.

Of course, not everything has panned out as he promised. On the campaign trail, he claimed he would end the Russia-Ukraine war in 24 hours. It is now 97 days. Russia has rejected his peace proposal, which his friend Boris Johnson trashed this week. Meanwhile, Russia continues to bomb Kyiv, forcing him to post "Vladimir, STOP!" on his Truth Social platform.

Peace in Gaza is elusive as he urges Israel to allow more humanitarian aid into the devastated strip. Greenland has rebuffed the Trumpian idea. On Canada, Trump told *Time* that he is "not trolling. I say the only way this thing really works is for Canada to become a state". The assertion helped Liberals led by Mark Carney ahead of the Conservatives in the ongoing campaign.

The tariffs plan itself is wobbling astride whims and worries. The imagery is less reflective of the art of the deal and more about the art of the spiel—about bombastic claims. Yes, there is talk about deals with India, Japan and Korea—these are most likely agreements of understanding, as Bessent puts it, which is a euphemism for agreeing to meet again. The theme of encircling China is sputtering. China has warned its trading partners and countries are wary of the costs of choosing between the two largest economies.

The US-China standoff is verily a ping-pong of claims and denials. Trump said he talked with Xi about tariffs; China denied the talks took place. The truth may well be between the assertion and denial. On Tuesday, Trump told reporters in the Oval Office that tariffs on China will "come down substantially". This could be interpreted as the olive branch and/or a response to warnings by big-box retailers such as Walmart that high tariffs could result in higher prices and empty shelves. Trump is at the intersection of dilemmas. The reality of import dependence and tempestuous

markets is challenging his gambit. Trump does care about the economy and the markets, but make no mistake, Trump 2.0 is about geopolitics. This is manifest in his desire to acquire Greenland, reiteration of Canada as the 51st State, vacating Gaza, the push for mineral rights in Ukraine and the takeover of the Panama Canal. The sensitivity about markets is visible in some of the pivots—for instance, on sacking US Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell, apparently on the advice of Treasury Secretary Bessent, who is now seen by many as 'the voice'. There is no guarantee, however, that Bessent will be heard the next time. Or that Trump will temper his belief of tariffs as the weapon for a geopolitical reset.

In his inaugural address, Trump underlined his quest for a legacy. He said the US will once again consider itself as a growing nation that increases its wealth and "expands our territory". The old trope—'should he be taken literally or seriously'—followed him into office. Trump wants to be taken both literally and seriously. Events will determine if the world agrees.

INDIAN WOMEN'S WEALTH WIZARDRY



POWER & POLITICS **PRABHU CHAWLA** prabhuchawla@newindianexpress.com

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N the kaleidoscopic arena of global finance, where markets pirouette with the frenzy of a cosmic storm, a luminous truth gleams like a celestial beacon—Indian women, the unsung architects of prosperity, have woven gold into an empire of enduring splendour.

Uday Kotak, titan of Kotak Mahindra Bank, has crowned them 'the smartest fund managers', a proclamation that resounds like a temple bell. On April 22, he posted on X: "The performance of gold over time highlights that the Indian housewife is the smartest fund manager in the world. Governments, central banks, economists who support pumppriming, high deficit funding, may need to take a leaf from India, a net importer of store of value forever!'

Harsh Goenka, sagacious chairman of RPG Group, amplified this ode with a wry anecdote: "Ten years ago, I bought a car for ₹8L. She bought gold for ₹8L. Today—car's worth ₹1.5L. Her gold? ₹32L. I said, 'Let's skip gold, go on a vacation?' She said, 'Vacation lasts 5 days. Gold lasts 5 generations.' Moral: Wives are smarter." These financial colossuses bow before the unerring wisdom of women, whose golden gambits outshine Wall Street's sharpest oracles. The better halves are turning out to be the finest financial mentors.

Gold in India transcends mere metallurgy. It's a sacred saga, a divine force shaped by women who wield it with the precision of poets and the foresight of seers. Once dismissed as a "non-productive asset"—a critique Kotak himself voiced in 2019, citing its strain on In-

dia's current account deficit—gold has soared like a mythic phoenix. Its 26 percent surge in 2025 alone has silenced sceptics, transforming heirlooms into a financial juggernaut that humbles stocks and bonds. This is not mere investment, but alchemy—a miracle forged by women whose steadfast belief in gold's lustre has turned cultural reverence into economic triumph.

To grasp gold's sanctity, one must delve into India's soul, where it is less a commodity than a covenant. It is the bangle adorning a bride's wrist, the coin tucked beneath a mattress, a shield against life's tempests. A Delhi-based cultural historian observes, "Gold is not just wealth; it is the pulse of lineage, a silent vow of security woven into India's fabric."

Unlike in the West, for Indian women, gold is both talisman and treasury, a bulwark against inflation's erosion and

currency's caprice. Socially, it binds generations, gleaming thread in the tapestry of kinship. Economically, it underpins nearly 40 percent of India's GDP, a testament to its reign as the nation's sovereign asset. Indian households, guided by women's deft hands, hold a staggering 24,000-25,000 tonnes of gold—11 percent of the world's jewel-

lery, valued at ₹24-25 trillion. This trove the sleek penthouses of Mumbai, womdwarfs the reserves of the US (8,000 tonnes), Germany (3,300 tonnes), Italy Envision a matriarch, her sari shim-(2,450 tonnes), France (2,400 tonnes), and Russia (1,900 tonnes) combined. Western households, by contrast, possess a mere 2,000-3,000 tonnes, mostly in bars and coins. Europe's gold slumbers in central bank vaults.

This disparity reflects a profound cultural divide. In India, gold is a vibrant emblem of security and status, worn with the pride of a warrior's crest. In the West, wealth pulses through intangible stocks and bonds, abstract and

fleeting. Indian women, with their intuitive brilliance, have crafted a legacy that eclipses the cold calculus of global markets. Their gold collection is a living testament to wisdom that spans eras and empires.

Why has gold, once a passive relic, ascended to such stratospheric heights? A confluence of global and domestic currents provides the answer. Geopolitical turbulence—like the escalating US-China tensions and murmurs of a US economic slowdown—has driven investors to safe havens. "Gold thrives amid uncertainty, its lustre untouched by the tempests of global markets," a Mumbaibased analyst notes.

Domestically, gold's role has evolved from static store to dynamic hedge. A 2025 financial report states, "Over the past decade, gold stocks have quadrupled, consistently outpacing inflation." From ₹25,000 per 10 grams in 2015 to

> ₹98,420 in 2025, gold's 300 percent climb overshadows the BSE Sensex's 200 percent rise from 28,000 to 80,000. With an annualised return of about 15 percent, gold is no longer a dormant asset, but a comet whose trajectory is propelled by women's foresight.

In the bustling bazaars of Chennai, the winding alleys of Old Delhi, and

en orchestrate this golden symphony. mering like a Himalayan dawn, negotiating with a jeweller whose scales tremble under her gaze. Her purchase—a necklace, a coin—is no impulse, but a calculated act blending sentiment with strategy. These women are not mere consumers but high priestesses, their homes sanctuaries where bangles whisper tales of resilience.

In villages, gold is a farmer's wife's armour against drought. In urban enclaves, it is an executive's shield against

market volatility. Digital gold, summoned with a smartphone's swipe, bears their mark, marrying ancestral wisdom with modern innovation. From gold exchange-traded funds to sovereign bonds, women have stormed financial frontiers, their acumen reshaping India's economic landscape with an audacity that humbles tycoons.

Yet, gold's brilliance casts complex shadows. The dowry system, though declining, still tethers women to burdensome expectations. Mining's environmental scars and sourcing's ethical dilemmas loom large. But Indian women, ever pragmatic, confront these challenges with clarity. They champion recycled gold, advocate for sustainable practices, and push for reforms to ease tradition's weight. Their devotion is not dogmatic but discerning, a dance of reverence and reinvention that keeps gold's flame burning bright.

As India weathers economic storms, gold remains its lodestar, guided by women whose wisdom rivals the grandest hedge funds. They have not merely preserved wealth but amplified it, their golden acumen a beacon in a turbulent world. Kotak and Goenka, giants of industry, stand in awe of these queens of carats. Their natural instincts have outwitted algorithmic models. Gold's ascent challenges the orthodoxy of modern finance, proving that wisdom need not wear a suit or wield a spreadsheet. It dons a sari, a salwar kameez, a smile, and a bangle aglow with ancestral dreams.

Ultimately, Bharatiya naris are the true alchemists, transforming a metal forged in Earth's crucible into a legacy of resilience and foresight. To call their affinity for gold an obsession is to miss the profundity. They do not chase gold; gold seeks them, striving to match their radiant pace. In their hands, gold is not just wealth but wit, not just tradition but revolution. The greatest treasure lies not in the metal they hold, but in the women themselves. Their vision is a currency no market could ever rival. They are the new social entrepreneurs who know how to survive and thrive. And mint more money without market manipulations.

THE INNOCENT FURY OF ADOLESCENT DRAMA



OPINION NAMRATA JOSHI Consulting Editor Follow her on X @Namrata_Joshi

F 13-year-old Jamie Miller in Philip Barantini's celebrated Netflix series *Adolescence* had a soul brother, it could well be the soonto-turn-16 Liam in Ken Loach's Sweet Sixteen (2002) and, well before that, the 15-year-old Billy

Casper in his 1969 masterpiece Kes. All three adolescents have one significant thing in common: their roots in the working class that was disempowered back then, and has perhaps been pushed even farther to the margins now. None of them can quite escape how his place in the social stratum defines and confines his life and fosters a profound restlessness and bottomless angst. The world of social and economic inequities fuels an inner rage, which is as much their own as it is an inheritance down the generations and takes shape in the lap of

families that are far from perfect. Billy finds a speck of hope in falconry and the possibility of a vocation that the education system would otherwise deny him but it's all too short-lived an option

as the future remains a question mark. Having dropped out of school, Liam drifts aimlessly, selling untaxed cigarettes and illegal drugs, dreaming of starting life afresh in a caravan with his jailed mother once she gets released, little realising that his 16th birthday implies that he can now be tried as an adult for his crimes and misdemeanours. The caravan, like Billy's falconry, remains an illusion—very near and yet so far.

Similarly, Jamie, accused of murdering his classmate Katie, can't escape his fate. The pent-up working class fury gets unleashed in all its agony in the epic third episode as he, a plumber's son whose home door can be callously broken by the cops and van insensitively defiled by strangers—takes on his posh psychiatrist. A case of wreaking violence with words in return for the wounds of the heart, mind and soul inflicted by the uncaring privileged.

Jamie's rage in *Adolescence* gets magnified with the intrusion of the internet and social media. The virtual world that the young men like him seem to inhabit more than the real and the concomitant expectations it imposes on them in the face of phenomenons like the toxic manosphere, misogynistic influencers, online radicalisation and incel (involuntary celibate) culture.

In the sea of films and series—both from the West and India—about adolescents, that have largely been coming-ofage stories, about teenage crushes and proms, Kes, Sweet Sixteen and Adoles*cence* stand out by focusing on the more complex explorations of troubled teen

psyches where innocence is accompanied with malevolence.

"As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods; they kill us for their sport," wrote Shakespeare in *King Lear* to underscore god's irrational ways in dealing with humans. Hur Jin-ho's 2023 South Korean film A Normal Family is an acute exploration of a similar illogicality of vio-



Teenagers in Philip Barantini's new series *Adolescence* and Ken Loach's old films indulge in feckless violence. In India, Rima Das, Prithvi Konanur and Nagraj Manjule have turned the lens on angsty teenagers

lence among teenagers and the darkness that seems to reside deep within their hearts. However, unlike Jamie, Liam and Billy, Hye-yoon and Si-ho are affluent. In fact, it's the safety net provided by wealth that turns the kids into monsters and their sense of entitlement desensitises them to violence. A Normal Family questions parenting, society, morality and the legal system in creating this macabre ecosystem of feckless brutality among the young.

Hirokazu Kore-eda's *Monster* (2023) tries to find answers for crimes of innocence. What is driving the behavioural changes in its young protagonist, the elementary school student Mugino Minato? Why is he bullying his classmate? Kore-eda looks at adolescent violence that emerges from not being able to belong, in being an outlier when it comes to issues of identity and sexuality.

Rima Das from Assam is perhaps the most consistent Indian filmmaker when it comes to dealing with adolescence, be it in her Village Rockstars 1 and 2, or Bulbul Can Sing. The latter is where her vision gets darker, with her carefree pubescent protagonists, Bulbul, Bonnie and Suman, having to contend with the violence of patriarchy and moral policing.

Prithvi Konanur's Kannada film *Had*inelentu 17/18 (Seventeeners, 2022) looks at the dangers of the virtual world for the young with an intimate video of two 12th graders going viral online. But what's even more subtly threatening is the caste system that they have challenged—Deepa is a Dalit while Hari is a Brahmin.

In the light of this societal stratification, the closest Jamie, Liam and Billy's anger depicted in Indian cinema could well be the righteous rage of Jabya in Nagraj Manjule's powerful Marathi debut feature, Fandry (2013). Belonging to a family of pig-catchers living on the margins of the society, his forbidden love for the high-caste classmate Shalu fires his dreams and desires.

But can his adolescent love be adequately disruptive and erase the caste differences? A stone hurled in anger by him is not just an act of defiance in love, but a metaphor for the larger resistance of the disempowered against centuries of prejudice and oppression.

QUOTE CORNER

They want to directly review who we hire on our faculty... they also want to be able to tell us who we need to fire, and they also want to intervene in our admissions processes. That's what we're objecting to.

Alan Garber, president of Harvard, in his first interview since the university sued the Trump administration over frozen federal research funding

It is significant that Pope Francis's first journey was to Lampedusa. an island that symbolises the tragedy of immigration, with thousands of people drowning at sea.

Giovanni Battistere, dean of the College of Cardinals at the Vatican in his homily at Pope Francis's requiem mass

I have been here so long that I truly thought it would never end.

Jamie Vardy, 38, on leaving Leicester City after 13 years at the club, during which he became the oldest player to win the Premier League's Golden Boot

MAII DAC WRITERO MAILBAU letters@newindianexpress.com

Apologise publicly

United front

Ref: Special session of parliament likely (Apr 26). I am an octogenarian, and over the years, I have heard of many incidents of violence and thievery. But the Pahalgam tragedy has shaken me to the core. It raises a pressing question: why was there no adequate security for the tourists, who are taxpayers and contribute significantly to the economy? Ironically, the money they pay is used to ensure round-the-clock security for VIPs. Those responsible for this glaring security lapse must not only apologise to the public, but also face appropriate consequences.

S N Agrawal, Bengaluru

Ref: Will not let a drop of water flow into Pak (Apr 26). The move to stop the flow of water from Indian rivers into Pakistan is a step in the right direction. The J&K government welcomed the Centre's decision, saying that the treaty is the 'most unfair document' for the people of Kashmir. In a rare gesture, worshippers at the Friday prayers in Srinagar's Jamia Masjid not only observed a minute's silence in memory of the victims, but condemned the attack on innocent tourists. It showed that the Kashmiri locals wholeheartedly support the Centre's action against terrorism.

D Sethuraman, Chennai

Power separation

Ref: An unhappy conversation continues (Apr 26). The legislature makes laws based on the democratic principle, the executive's responsibility is to enforce them, and the judiciary interprets the laws and ensure their application. Balance of power demands that each branch functions independent of the others. The constitution gives the judiciary the power to pronounce a verdict without consulting the executive and the legislature. To have a well-functioning government, the checks and balances need to be active and based on the democratic principle.

Ravi Nair, Palakkad

Ref: Jamia's residential coaching academy helps 32 students clear UPSC (Apr 25). Congratulations to the students who succeeded, and also to those who participated but couldn't succeed. They should remember that success is not a final thing and failure is not fatal. It is the courage to continue that counts. One thing is universal, success doesn't come easy it demands hard work, patience and sincerity in efforts. It isn't a destination, but a journey filled with challenges.

Shahzad Alam Nadwi, Rampur

Raag variations

Ref: Hitting the perfect pitch (Apr 26). I have not heard the 'Shiva Stuti' referred to in the short editorial, but I am sure a music director of A R Rahman's calibre could not have copied the tune as a clean extract. If songs are set in the same raag, their resemblance could be close. But that alone would not amount to copying. Malayalam music director G Devarajan Master did more than 30 film songs on raag Mohanam, but none of those songs could be said to be an absolute copy of another. The genius handled the raag to reach wonderful dimensions. Sanath Kumar T S, Thrissur

VC conference

Ref: Governor Ravi vindicating constitutional oath by holding VC conference: VP (Apr 26). The governor has exhibited a disregard for the Supreme Court's verdict by conducting a conference of vice-chancellors of Tamil Nadu universities. The irony is that he invited the vice president and later made a pungent remark. We feel sorry for VP Dhankhar.

Tharcius S Fernando, Chennai

Safe swimming

Ref: Three Chennai college students drown in river (Apr 26). It has almost become daily news students on a sightseeing tour meet their end while taking a dip in rivers, lakes, seas and other water bodies. People who do not know swimming should desist from such misadventures, as lives are too precious to be lost so tragically.

S Vaithianathan, Madurai

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