













{ 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

The 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 checkpoint, 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 governments 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 tradition.

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 war.

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 crime.”

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 conflagration, 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

The 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 Elusive Woman*. But once you have read it, you feel you know the author intimately.

Born to an American father, Christie was the surname she got from her first husband. Her only child, Rosalind, was

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 Egypt. Worsley reveals she financed much 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 in 2021.

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 front page.

Agatha lived to be 86 and Worsley 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 marriage with Christie was teetering, she disappeared for ten days. A massive man-hunt 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!

But she could be quite careless. Worsley 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 books.

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

Poor, 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 para-veterinarians comes as a story of 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 decision-making 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.

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 pre-

ventive 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 be freed from some household responsibilities if they are to make more money. Responsibility 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 Sawhney 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 sakh*i 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

In 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-beat.

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 India.

Then, Kargil happened. A Pakistan general thought he could finally end the drought and get a win to his name. After every brief spell of normalcy, the Pakistan army tries a “terror adventure”, a health supplement for its continued relevance.

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. HT PHOTO

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

{ 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

### Need for sensitive handling

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

Abhilasha Gupta

### II.


The Allahabad HC granting bail to a rape accused, 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.

Sanjay Chopra

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Across  
THE AISLE



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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

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...

	U.S.	China	World
Exports	86.51 bn	14.25 bn	437.42 bn
Imports	45.3 bn	113.45 bn	720.24 bn
surplus/ deficit	+ 41.21 bn	-99.20 bn	- 282.82 bn

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 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

problem. India has a huge and mounting *deficit* 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 stuck at 13-14 per cent of GDP — India will remain China-dependent.

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.

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

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## 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 the 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 Pahalagam. 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 Pahalagam, 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 Pahalagam 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 Pahalagam 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 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 jihadi 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

### How to RAISE A BOY

APARNA VAIDIK

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 videogames. 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 on-line 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 contravenes 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)*

### History HEADLINE

CHAKSHUROY

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 Pahalagam, 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

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



(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 buffalo-driven 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 parliamentarians 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 pro-tester "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

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 yet 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*



# Opinion

SUNDAY, APRIL 27, 2025



Golfer Phil Mickelson's infamous 72nd hole meltdown at the 2006 US Open at Winged Foot, New York, was a rollercoaster of branches, bunkers, and a double-bogey that cost him the title

REUTERS

ACROSS THE AISLE

P Chidambaram

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 US vanished thanks to Mr Trump's tariffs and the trade deficit with China grew larger, it will worsen the situation for India

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

FIFTH COLUMN

TAVLEEN SINGH

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



US President Donald Trump at the White House in Washington

AP

## 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 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 stuck at 13-14% of GDP — India will remain China-dependent.

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.

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 US 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 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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## 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

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.

FAIRWAY FILES

Rahil Gangjee

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 at the 1999 Open Championship in Carnoustie. All he needed was a double-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 the 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 not-so-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 following through, 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

the building. Mental toughness? On that hole, I had the mental fortitude of a soggy biscuit.

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 caddy 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 trophies on Sunday.

Training the mind like a muscle

The good news? You can train your brain. Sports psychologists talk about visualisation, positive self-talk, breathing 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 sideways 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. Something predictable. For me, it's adjusting my glove, looking at the target, one practice swing, step in, and go. If I find myself taking five waggles and blinking like I'm communicating with Morse code, I know I've gone off-script.

When the mind wins the day

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 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 you're fearless—it's that you've made peace with the fear. Tiger Woods, the mental giant of our sport, once said: "*Winning solves everything*." But I think what he really meant was that winning starts long before Sunday. It starts with how you handle the pressure, the missed fairway, the bad bounce, and that voice in your head asking if you're good enough. Spoiler: You are.

Final thoughts (and they better be positive!)

Whether you're chasing a trophy or just trying to break 90, remember that golf isn't just about swing mechanics and launch angles. It's about staying centered when everything around you feels like it's unravelling. It's about hitting that putt on the 18th knowing that no matter what happens, you've got the mental game to show up again tomorrow. 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 sometimes, how you laugh about it afterward.

Rahil Gangjee is a professional golfer, sharing through this column what life on a golf course is like



## TRUMP AND 100 DAYS OF VICISSITUDE

DONALD 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 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. Unsurprisingly, 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**

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IN 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 pump-priming, 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 metal-lurgy. 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 per cent 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, a 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 jewellery, valued at ₹24-25 trillion. This trove dwarfs the reserves of the US (8,000 tonnes), Germany (3,300 tonnes), Italy (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 Mumbai-based 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 the sleek penthouses of Mumbai, women orchestrate this golden symphony. Envision a matriarch, her sari shimmering 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.



SOURAV ROY

## THE INNOCENT FURY OF ADOLESCENT DRAMA



### OPINION

**NAMRATA JOSHI**

Consulting Editor

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IF 13-year-old Jamie Miller in Philip Barantini’s celebrated Netflix series *Adolescence* had a soul brother, it could well be the soon-to-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-of-age stories, about teenage crushes and proms, *Kes*, *Sweet Sixteen* and *Adolescence* 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 Mi-

nato? 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-ineleuntu 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 Battistère**, 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



**MAILBAG** WRITE TO letters@newindianexpress.com

### Apologise publicly

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 Pahalagam 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

### United front

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 deci-

sion, 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

### Continue efforts

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.

**Tharcus 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 Vaitathanathan**, Madurai