

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

The increase in gross GST collections in the month of May

16.4 In per cent. Gross GST collections rose to over ₹2.01 lakh crore in May, as per government data released on Sunday. This comes after a record-high Goods and Services Tax (GST) collection in April, when revenues reached an all-time high of ₹2.37 lakh crore. AP

Number of migrants who crossed the Channel on Saturday

1,194 More than a 1,000 migrants arrived in the U.K. after crossing the Channel in small boats, according to the British government, while French coastal authorities rescued 200 more. It is the highest number of migrants making the crossing in a day this year. AP

The dip in power consumption in May compared to last year

4 In per cent. India's power consumption dipped over 4% to 148.71 billion units (BU) in May, compared to a year-ago period, mainly due to unseasonal rains and early arrival of monsoon. Power consumption was recorded at 155.15 BU in May 2024, according to official data. AP

Number of penalties imposed by the RBI during FY25

353 The Reserve Bank of India took enforcement action against regulated entities (REs) and imposed 353 penalties aggregating to ₹54.78 crore in the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025, for contraventions/non-compliance of provisions of statutes. AP

Number of people arrested in France during celebrations

559 Two people were reported dead and 192 injured during the Champions League final celebrations in France. The interior ministry's assessment as of Sunday was that 559 people had been arrested, including 491 in Paris. AP

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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Is India the world's fourth largest economy?

The GDP of a country tells us very little about how its people live and work, how healthy or educated its people are, and how unequally its aggregate income is distributed. A much better way of comparing countries might be a set of indicators that help us meaningfully measure economic performance and social progress

ECONOMIC NOTES

R. Ramakumar

Over the past week, much media space was devoted to discussions around the size of India's economy relative to other economies of the world. These discussions were based on the new estimates of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of various countries for 2024 by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and its annual projections from 2025 till 2030. As per these projections, India's GDP in 2025 was likely to be \$4,187.03 billion, which will be marginally higher than the GDP of Japan at \$4,186.43 billion. Thus, in all probability, India will be the fourth largest economy of the world in 2025 after the U.S., China and Germany.

These discussions have stirred the political pot as well. Government sources attributed the improved rank to the leadership capabilities of the Prime Minister. It was also argued that India could grow to be the third largest economy of the world in 2028, and a high-income, developed country (*viksit bharat*) by 2047.

The many GDPs

The GDP of a country tells us very little about how its people live and work, how healthy or educated its people are, and how unequally its aggregate income is distributed. GDP estimates also miss out on measuring several crucial aspects of economic activity that are not covered by markets, such as the unpaid work of women. Hence, there have been repeated calls to revise national account systems, end to the predominant use of GDP to assess everything, and use other indicators that allow us to study socio-economic achievements better. Yet, the dominant use of GDP has continued in global and domestic discourse.

In recent years, the politicisation of statistical systems has clouded any objective assessment of India's economic status. The discussions around India's rank in GDP size are just an example. Comparison of GDP sizes across countries is a complex effort. International organisations and economists have spent decades trying to perfect a robust methodology for these comparisons. Consequently, there is no single GDP estimate for countries. There are several GDP estimates based on different methodologies and units.

The methodology of estimating GDP in different countries is largely standardised even as there are variations in the quality of data collection. But these estimates are available only in the national currencies of each country. So, how does one compare the GDP size of India and, say, the U.S.? To compare, one needs the GDP estimates of all countries to be in one common unit. This common unit is the U.S. dollar.

On determining the GDP

But problems remain. There are two ways of converting a GDP estimate in a national currency to a GDP estimate in U.S. dollars. First, one may use market exchange rates from the foreign exchange markets. At the time of writing this article, one dollar was valued at ₹85.69. One may simply divide India's nominal GDP by ₹85.69 to get a GDP estimate in U.S. dollars, and then repeat that for all other countries and rank them.

According to the GDP estimates based on market exchange rates, India was ranked the fifth largest economy from 2021 (Table 1 and Figure 1). Taken

Measuring the economy

Comparison of GDP sizes across countries is a complex effort. International organisations and economists have spent decades trying to perfect a robust methodology for these comparisons. Consequently, there is no single GDP estimate for countries but several, based on different methodologies and units

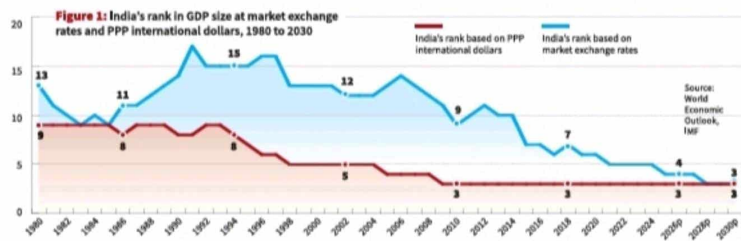
Table 1: Ranks of the top 10 economies in nominal GDP at market exchange rates, 1990 to 2030, in U.S. dollars

Country	1990	2000	2009	2024	2025p	2030p
United States	1	1	1	1	1	1
China	11	6	3	2	2	2
Germany	3	3	4	3	3	4
Japan	2	2	2	4	5	5
India	14	13	11	9	4	3
United Kingdom	5	4	6	6	6	6
France	4	5	5	7	7	7
Italy	6	7	7	8	8	9
Canada	7	8	10	9	9	8
Brazil	10	10	8	10	10	10

Table 2: Ranks of the top 10 economies in nominal GDP at PPP exchange rates, 1990 to 2030

Country	1990	2000	2009	2024	2025p	2030p
China	7	3	2	1	1	1
United States	1	1	1	2	2	2
India	8	5	3	3	3	3
Russian Federation	-	9	6	4	4	4
Japan	2	2	4	5	5	5
Germany	3	4	5	6	6	6
Brazil	9	10	8	7	8	8
Indonesia	13	14	12	8	7	7
France	5	7	7	9	9	10
United Kingdom	6	8	9	10	10	9

Note: Figures till 2024 are estimates, and afterwards are projections.



forward, the IMF projects that India will be the fourth largest economy in 2025 and the third largest economy in 2028. The U.S. is ranked first, and China is ranked second.

But is this the only method to compare GDP sizes? It is globally accepted that conversions based on market exchange rates are robust only when the outcomes are closely linked to the prevailing exchange rates. Transactions in the "current account" of an economy are a case in point, which involves the flow of financial resources across countries. For example, how much did each country export in value terms? How much remittances did international migrants from each country send back home?

The PPP comparison

When we try to compare GDP sizes across countries and time, market exchange rates deliver poorly. This is primarily because first, market exchange rates are highly volatile, which creates problems for stable temporal comparisons (see the fluctuations in Figure 1). Secondly, market exchange rates do not work well when "purchasing powers" of people are different between countries. For example, the price of a beer in New York may be \$5 but only about ₹150 in Mumbai (or \$1.80). The price of a Big Mac meal in McDonald's may be \$12 in New York but only about ₹385 (or \$4.50) in Mumbai. Thirdly, the prices of non-traded goods tend to be far cheaper than traded goods in developing countries than in developed countries. For example, the monthly rent for a one-bedroom apartment may be about \$4,000 in New York but only about ₹70,000 (or \$824) in Mumbai. The price of a haircut in New York may be \$30, but only about ₹200 (or \$2.40) in Mumbai.

These differences across countries arise primarily because wages (and hence prices) are lower, and many non-traded sectors are labour-intensive, in developing countries than in the developed countries. If analysts ignore these differences, they will be underestimating the purchasing power of people in developing countries, and, hence,

depressing their GDP estimates. This is why a second method is used to convert national currencies into dollars – "PPP exchange rates", where PPP stands for Purchasing Power Parity. Here, the exchange rates used equate the cost of a "typical" basket of goods across countries. When converted to international dollars based on PPP exchange rates, the estimates of GDP for developing countries, where prices are relatively low, would rise. In 2024, the GDP of the U.S. was 7.5 times higher than India's GDP if the market exchange rates method was used. But it was only 1.8 times higher than India's GDP if the PPP exchange rates method was used.

If PPP-based GDP estimates are used to compare GDP sizes, an interesting finding emerges (see Table 2). India had already become the world's third largest economy in 2009 and has retained that rank for the past 16 years (see Figure 1). Also, IMF's PPP-based projections do not show any improvement in India's rank between 2024 and 2030. It turns out that the government has chosen to project and celebrate India's rank in GDP size based on market exchange rates – and not PPP exchange rates – only because the outcome suits its favoured political narrative.

Improving the comparisons

There is no doubt that the PPP method allows for a better comparison of GDP sizes than the market exchange rates method. However, the PPP method needs to be employed carefully so as to avoid misleading inferences. PPPs are used precisely because developing countries have lower wages, and hence lower prices and incomes, than in the developed countries. To cite an instance, about 76% of India's casual workers in agriculture and about 70% of India's casual workers in construction do not obtain even the prescribed minimum wages (as per ILO's India Employment Report 2024). In addition, countries like India have a large informal sector, which is marked by severe underemployment, and large numbers of unpaid female workers.

In other words, the poorer and the more underdeveloped a country is, the larger will be its "inflation" of GDP via the PPP route. Consequently, the fact that India was the world's third largest economy from 2009 itself must not delude anyone into believing that its GDP differentials with, say, the U.S. are rapidly narrowing, or that its GDP size is larger than that of Japan or Germany. An excellent example of such a misconception is the claim by Suman Berry, the Vice-Chairperson of the Niti Aayog, that India's GDP had already reached \$15,000 billion (or \$15 trillion) in PPP terms, which is more than three times its GDP size at market exchange rates and constitutes half the size of the U.S. GDP.

India has a large GDP size, but it is also the world's largest population. One can boast about its GDP size only until someone sits down and divides the GDP by the population. The per capita GDP in India was \$2,711 in 2024 in current dollar terms, which placed it at the lower end of the list of "lower middle-income countries". In the same year, the per capita GDP in Sri Lanka was \$4,325, and in Bhutan was \$3,913. In 1991, India had a higher per capita GDP at \$304 than in Vietnam at \$141. But by 2024, Vietnam's per capita GDP had grown to \$4,536 while India's per capita GDP languished at \$2,711. In terms of market exchange rates, India's rank in per capita GDP in 2024 was 144th among 196 countries. Even in terms of PPP international dollars, India's rank in per capita GDP in 2024 was 127th among 196 countries. Either way, we are faced with a "big economy illusion": India's large GDP size has very little to do with the well-being of its people.

A much better way of knowing if India is more developed or less developed than the U.S., China, Japan or Germany might be to compare a set of indicators across them that help us meaningfully measure economic performance and social progress – indicators that signify fundamental elements of life and work that citizens care about.

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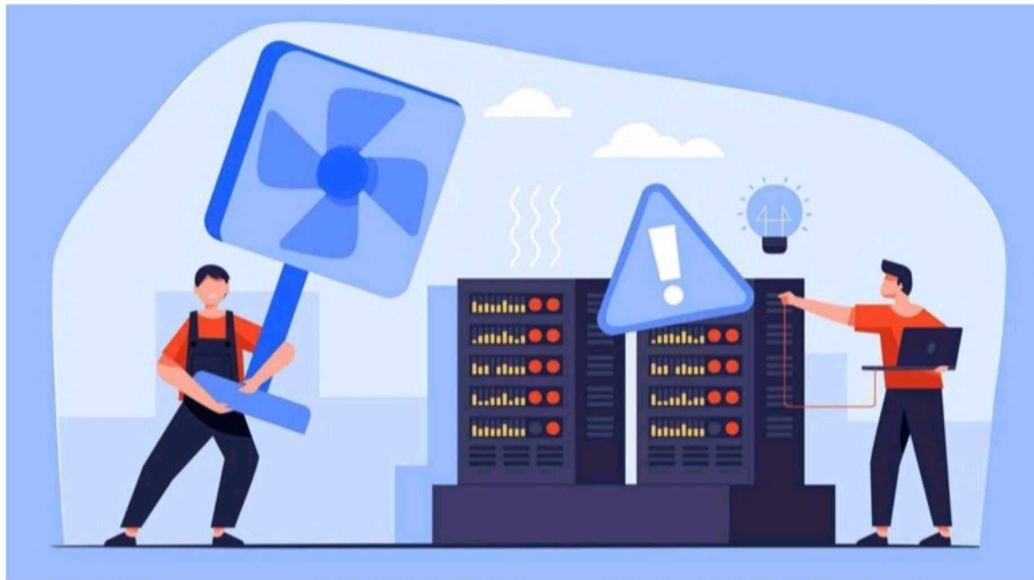
THE GIST

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CACHE



ISTOCKPHOTO

How the technology industry is trying to meet its climate goals

Electronics heat up very quickly. If the chips get too hot, they may malfunction or altogether fail. Cooling keeps them running smoothly and ensures a longer lifespan. However, in data centres, cooling consumes nearly as much power as computing

T.V.Venkateswaran

A team of researchers from Microsoft and WSP Global has published a groundbreaking study in *Nature* demonstrating that advanced cooling methods like cold plates and immersion cooling can cut data centre emissions by 15-21%, energy use by 15-20%, and water consumption by 31-52% compared to traditional air cooling.

The life cycle assessment, led by Husam Alissa of Microsoft, Mukunth Natarajan, and Praneet Arshi of WSP, among others, also provided actionable insights to help the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) industry meet its climate goals. "Our [life cycle assessment] has shown that reducing data centre energy use through advanced liquid-cooling technologies will lead to marked reductions in data centre environmental impacts," the authors wrote in their paper.

Electronics versus rising temperatures

Electronics heat up like crowded kitchens: billions of microscopic switches (transistors) are like cooks working nonstop, bumping into each other while flipping electrical dosas (data). The tighter they are packed – that is smaller the chips are – or the more tasks they handle, the more they collide and create heat, just like a packed kitchen gets hotter, needing fans and ACs to cool down. A laptop is like a kitchen with one burner: a simple fan suffices. A data centre is like a thousand laptops working at full speed in a single room, generating heat like a massive bonfire compared to a single candle.

Without cooling, the intense heat will melt the hardware in minutes.

Heat slows down electrons, like runners in thick mud. If the chips get too hot, they may malfunction or altogether fail. Cooling keeps them running smoothly, ensures a longer lifespan and fast and reliable performance, and prevents heat damage. Just like an athlete needs water to stay sharp in a race, electronics need efficient heat removal.

Race to cut emissions

In data centres, cooling consumes nearly as much power as computing, like an AC fighting over heat in a busy kitchen. To curb climate change, the ICT industry needs to cut emissions by 42% by 2030 (from its 2015 levels). Data centres need greener designs that use less energy and water, and have lower greenhouse gas emissions to help meet global climate goals and keep warming below 1.5°C. Urgent upgrades to energy, efficiency, and cooling are critical.

Chips are also getting smaller, faster, and more energy-efficient, like upgrading your phone every year without draining the battery faster. As the demand for cloud services increases, so must data centre capacities and heat mitigation strategies.

Ice packs and oil baths

Two prominent cooling techniques have emerged as viable alternatives. Cold plates, also known as direct-to-chip cooling, are small heat exchange modules equipped with microchannels to enhance heat transfer. Think of a cold plate like an ice pack strapped to a feverish forehead, but for computer chips. It sits directly on hot components, with small coolant-filled

channels absorbing heat into tiny channels filled with coolant.

When it becomes warmer, the coolant – such as 25% polyethylene glycol and 75% water – flows away and dumps the heat outside, while fresh coolant entering the veins keeps the cycle going. This method is more efficient than fans the same way swapping a handheld fan for an ice-cold bath is better. In a cold-plate system, the liquid-to-air heat transfer ratio ranges from 50% to 80%, sometimes more.

The second technique, immersion cooling, is like dunking a hot frying pan into a pool of heat-hungry oil instead of blowing air on it. The oil, which is good at dissipating heat within itself, soaks up 100% of the pan's heat and keeps it from overheating. In the one-phase cooling method, like swirling cold water around the pan, the oil stays liquid but carries heat away. In two-phase cooling, the technique works the way water cools in a mud pot: the coolant fluid bubbles into vapour at a low temperature, rises into a cooling coil, condenses, drips back down, and repeats. "These techs cut corrosion, boost reliability, and slash carbon footprint – all while running silent without fans," the researchers wrote.

Pioneers like Microsoft and Alibaba are already deploying these systems at scale.

Green or just less dirty?

To truly lower the carbon footprint of cooling technologies, scientists, policymakers, and lawmakers need to weigh its full impact. While the new solutions are innovative, they face hurdles. Coolant fluids involve different regulations, and complex designs delay deployment. Using them is like swapping

plastic straws for paper: they are greener, but not without trade-offs. The world could end up trading one ecological problem for a different, even worse, one.

If the electricity for an electric car comes from a coal power plant, the car's carbon footprint is still high. Similarly, cooling gains can backfire if pollution is merely shifted elsewhere.

The study team's cradle-to-grave life cycle assessment evaluated air-cooled, cold-plate, and immersion cooling across emissions, energy, and water use, proving that sustainability demands systemic thinking, not isolated fixes.

Two engines of a green data centre

The assessment revealed that with grid electricity, cold plates and immersion cooling cut greenhouse gas emissions by more than 15%, energy use by more than 15%, and water consumption by more than 31% – making them superior to conventional cooling technologies in use today. With 100% renewable energy, the team found the cuts could jump to 13% for emissions, 15% for energy, and 50% for water.

"Switching to renewables slashes emissions by 85-90%, energy use by 6-7%, and water demand by 55-85%, regardless of cooling tech," the researchers wrote.

Thus, life cycle assessments can reveal sustainability trade-offs either within the same cooling technology or when comparing different technologies. Ultimately, the calculus is clear: ICT's climate future hinges on tackling how the industry cools its data centres.

T.V. Venkateswaran is a science communicator and visiting faculty member at the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, Mohali.



KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

His debut film was a horror-thriller

He put his thumb on the scale and told the men that he won't get arrested even if they complain

S. Upendran

What is the difference between a 'widow' and 'spinster'? (S. Sumalatha, Erode)
The word 'widow' is normally used to refer to a woman whose husband is no more; she was married, but has lost her partner. A widow may be a young woman or she may be old. According to some scholars, the word is related to our Sanskrit 'vidhwa'. A man who has lost his wife, is called 'widower'.

The young widow worked hard to keep her company running.

The word 'spinster', as you can probably guess, comes from the word 'spin'. In the past, the term was used to refer to a woman who earned her living by spinning yarn and thread. Since most people in this occupation were single and either middle aged or old, with the passage of time, the word acquired the meaning, an unmarried woman who is beyond her prime. Today, it is considered offensive to call a woman 'spinster'.

What is the correct pronunciation of the word 'debut'? (R. Parthasarathy)
The word 'debut' consists of two syllables. The first is pronounced like the word 'day', and the second rhymes with the words 'few', 'view' and 'new'. The British pronounce the word 'DAY-byu' with the stress on the first syllable. Americans, on the other hand, put the stress on the second syllable – day-BYU. The word can be used as a noun and a verb, and in everyday conversation, it is used nowadays to mean to make one's 'first appearance in public or society'.

The son of the famous rock star will be making his debut at next month's concert.

What is the meaning of 'put a thumb on the scale'? (John Varghese, Kochi)
When you put your thumb on the scale, what you are trying to do is influence the outcome of an event. For example, during election time, there are many things that politicians and political parties do to win. One of the tricks they resort to is to try and bribe the voter in different ways – they buy the potential votes either by giving people money or by giving them some sort of freebie: TV, stove, mixer, gas connection, etc. By giving them these things, the candidate is attempting to unfairly influence the electorate; he is bribing them into voting for him. He is deliberately cheating or using underhand means to win.

My boss always put his thumb on the scale when it came to hiring new people. Nobody else had a say in the matter.

The 'scale' in the expression refers to the balance that butchers and fruit vendors used in the past to weigh their produce. When they wished to cheat their customer, the vendors secretly placed their thumb on the scale – this created the illusion that the produce weighed a lot more than it actually did!

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THE DAILY QUIZ

A quiz on movies which are centred around health subjects. If you are a movie buff and health buff, see how comfortable you are with the following questions

Ramya Kannan

QUESTION 1

The highly successful and entertaining movie *Patch Adams* starring Robin Williams in the eponymous character, which has its own Indian versions in *MunnaBhai MBBS* and *Vasoolojai MBBS*, was based on a true story. The real Patch Adams is believed to be the architect of a certain kind of therapy that is now popular in hospital wards across the globe. What is it?

QUESTION 2

In *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, Brad Pitt essays the role of a man ageing in reverse. What is the actual health condition cinematically portrayed in *Benjamin Button*?

QUESTION 3

30 years ago, this movie starring Dustin Hoffman outlined the damage a particular

fast-spreading, fictional virus was wreaking, portraying emergency health and containment scenarios we are now familiar with, post pandemic. That virus was said to manifest as hemorrhagic fever, causing organs to liquefy and blood to stream from sores. What was the name of this fictional virus in the 1995 movie?

QUESTION 4

In *Hickki*, the main character played by Rani Mukerjee suffers from a condition that causes uncontrollable tics and sounds, a huge barrier to her getting a job. What is the condition called?

QUESTION 5

Retrograde amnesia is the inability to recall memories from before a traumatic event or injury, and the opposite is a condition whereby the ability to form new memories after the event is affected. This is depicted in a Christopher Nolan-inspired flick, made in two Indian languages – Tamil and Hindi. What is the condition and what are the titles of the movies?



Visual question:

In another movie starring Robin Williams, a psychiatrist finds himself in a ward full of inexplicably catatonic patients. The image above is from an OTT series which features the same medical condition. What was the epidemic called and what is the Netflix series on the same?

Questions and Answers to the May 30 edition of the daily quiz: 1. The State where the south-west monsoon arrives first. **Ans: Kerala**

2. This region has the highest average rainfall. **Ans: Mawsynram**

3. This mobile app, created to provide crop advisories to farmers based on weather information, is named after an epic poem. **Ans: Meghdoot**

4. If 10 cm of rainfall is received over a small area at a station in one hour, this phenomenon is called _____. **Ans: Cloud burst**

5. This flow of air attains maximum strength in July and gives rise to a strong monsoon in peninsular India. **Ans: Somali jet**

6. X was established in 1875 in Calcutta. **Ans: India Meteorological Department**

Visual: Name this astronomer. **Ans: Edmund Halley**

Early Birds: Dodo Jayaditya| Ahad Chachiyal| Atul Kumar Shukla| Atul Kumar| Erfanally Oosmany

Word of the day

Homing:

orienting or directing homeward or to a destination

Usage:

The plane was brought down by a homing missile.

Pronunciation: newsth.live/homingpro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /həʊmɪŋ/

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

MAHARASHTRA

17 women
look up to
the sky

Super Dimona motorised gliders fly past after the 148th convocation ceremony held at National Defence Academy. EHMAMUL YOGINI

Seventeen women cadets graduated from Pune's National Defence Academy on May 30, making them the first batch to participate in a joint training institution for the Indian Army, Navy, and Air Force.

Snehal Mutha reports on the experiences of the cadets who took on concerns around physical training and a system that was forced to adapt itself to the needs and aspirations of women

In May 29, Jasmine, 21, is dressed in her white uniform and stands with her parents on the steps of the National Defence Academy's (NDA) Sudan Block. Behind her, flanking the entrance, are gold tri-service emblems with the words 'Service before self'. In front of her is the rest of her life, which she will likely spend serving India in one of the three defence forces. Hugging her mother, she says with joy, "I did it."

Jasmine is one of 17 – the first batch of women to graduate from the military's joint-services training institute in Khadakwasla, Maharashtra. It took 148 courses, 70 years, and a Supreme Court verdict for policies to change, so women could enter the academy. She graduates with over 300 men, who will all join as officers in the Army, Air Force, and Navy.

In September 2021, Jasmine came across a notification on the government's Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) website inviting women to appear for the entrance exams. The Supreme Court had ruled in favour of this just the month before, based on a petition. The petition had argued that the NDA had been violating women's right to equality and the right to practise the profession of their choice.

This decision came after three decades of women serving in the armed forces through Short-Service Commission, where they could serve for 10 years, with an extension. However, women have always been a part of the medical, educational, legal and other services of the military in non-combatant roles. Women fighter pilots have been inducted into the Air Force since 2016. However, the Army still does not permit women in the fighting arms like the infantry.

With the entrance exam on November 14, there were just 70 days to prepare. The first batch of 19 female cadets joined the NDA in August 2022. Two withdrew from the course for personal reasons, according to NDA officials. Since 2022, when women were inducted into the NDA, there have been 126 cadets across courses.

Jasmine comes from Charkhi Dadri town in Haryana, where her parents, Jeevan Ram, 42, and Sarita, 42, are farmers. "We might be from a village, but our thinking has never been regressive," says Sarita, her eyes filled with pride. There are two others from the same town, all from non-military backgrounds.

Of the 17, nine cadets will join the Army, three will join the Navy, and five will join the Air Force. Jasmine will join the Navy and go to Hyderabad for further training. Most of the women are from Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, and Uttarakhand. Currently, the defence forces have 11,414 women officers, as per officials.

Stepping up

They stand on the steps of Sudan Block, and photos are taken, frozen as a memory and a part of history. The block is located at the heart of the NDA's 7,000-acre campus, set in the foothills of the Western Ghats, 17 km from Pune city. It is a

IWe had to climb a hill bearing weight... Everyone was exhausted... My course-mate Srishiti Singh started singing and we kept climbing. The next thing we knew, the hill was conquered

ISHITA SANGWAN
NDA graduate

central point for ceremonial functions, where parents, instructors, cadets, and officers meet and greet after the convocation, held on May 29.

As the Super Dimona motorised gliders fly overhead, saluting the 148th course cadets for graduating, Srishiti Chaudhary, 21, and Harsimran Kaur, 21, stand in Sudan Block's garden looking at the sky. Both were preparing for the Joint Entrance Examination (JEE), a national-level exam for engineering programmes, before turning to the NDA.

"I had 40 days to prepare and took online classes for initial coaching," says Srishiti, who hails from Muzaffarnagar, Uttar Pradesh, and will be serving in the Navy. Harsimran, whose father is in the Army, had plans to enter via the Short-Service Commission route, until NDA opened its doors to women. Ishita Sangwan, 21, who is also from Charkhi Dadri, was deciding between the JEE and the Civil Services.

The cadets – both male and female – go through a gruelling selection process, starting with a written examination conducted by the UPSC, followed by an interview process under the Services Selection Board. There are medical tests to be cleared and for those aspiring to join the Air Force, a Computerized Pilot Selection System (CPSS) test must be taken.

"You have to have clear priorities before joining the NDA," says Ishita, who is joining the Air Force. Overwhelmed, she hugs her instructor, repeatedly saying thank you with tears rolling down her face.

Ishita remembers a phone call from her father, who is a school principal. "He told me the NDA was open for women candidates. We discussed it and I decided to take the exams," she added.

After three years of rigorous physical training and academic courses, cadets will go for further training for at least a year. Army cadets will go to Dehradun's Indian Military Academy (IMA), Air Force cadets will be trained at the Air Force Academy (AFA) at Dundigal, and naval cadets at Indian Naval Academy (INA) at Ezhimala, Kerala.

Game of endurance

Physical training is one of the major elements of the NDA's three-year course and is often considered its toughest component. Daily training includes obstacle courses, route marches, swimming, horse riding, rope climbing, sprinting, field tactics, weapon handling, and more.

During the petition hearing in the Supreme Court, the Centre had opposed the enrolment of women over biological differences. Now, the NDA spokesperson says all training was the same, but physical standards were adjusted to address biological differences. The women say it was a matter of mental strength and endurance. Ishita remembers her toughest moments: "We had to climb a hill bearing weight as a part of Camp Rovers. Everyone was exhausted because it extends for five days. We hadn't slept properly for three or four nights and I felt like giving up. But my course-mate Srishiti Singh started singing, and we kept climbing. The next thing we knew the hill was conquered."

One of the toughest challenges was the 40 km Josh Camp, conducted at the end of the sixth term, say the women. All 18 squadrons competed

with each other and performed various tasks, including map reading and running day and night. Ishita's squadron, which included male counterparts, started at 9:30 p.m. and finished at 11:30 the next morning.

NDA Commandant Vice-Admiral Gurcharan Singh called the inclusion of women a "progressive process". Initially, the female cadets' living arrangements were separate as that is the way it is done at the Officers Training Academy in Chennai, which has been open to women since 1992, with Short-Service Commission. This was changed in the NDA to build camaraderie among members of a squadron. "We ensured they played, lived, trained, together, to achieve gender neutrality," says Gurcharan, adding that barriers need to come down from the start, so there is no difference in times of conflict or battle.

Mothers and others

On May 30, Geeta Dhaka, 45, watched with pride as her daughter Shanan Dhaka, 21, participated in the passing out parade. The women and men are dressed alike, their hair cropped short, and from a distance, there is no difference. Shanan's sister is currently training at the Armed Forces Medical College (AFMC).

"Today, I feel really proud as my daughter has endured the toughest defence course. Since childhood, my children had wanted to join the defence, like my husband. This shift from a *fauji* wife to a *fauji* maa is emotional and painful too," she says, understanding that in case of a war-like situation, her husband and daughter may both be called up. The Dhaka family is from Chandigarh, but currently resides in Rohtak.

Division Cadet Captain (DCC) Shriti Daksh, who was put into a leadership position, follows in her father's footsteps. Wing Commander Yogesh Daksh (ret.) is proud: "Shriti scored 97% in Class 10 and 99% in Class 12. She has always been good academically, and seeing her top the arts course makes me a happy father."

Her mother was worried about the intense physical training, but says, "It goes to show that if you put your mind to something, it will pay off." Their other daughter is serving in the Air Force as a Flying Officer, and the family hails from Haryana, but is currently based in Noida.

Academy Cadet Captain Udayveer Singh Negi of the 'G' Squadron, who commanded this Spring term parade (two batches pass out each year from NDA), waited as Shriti celebrated with others informally in the parking area, between cars. Amid the loud cheers of *beti ya date hi rahe, beti ya jeet gayi* (Daughter keep going, daughter won), Udayveer says, "Most of the time we forget that they are women. We trained with each other, shoulder to shoulder. In a few tasks like map reading and field tactics, they outdid us. We felt equal, and gender was never a restriction."

The cadets' parents would visit their children at the end of each term of six months, meeting each other too. After the parade, mothers hugged each other and clicked selfies. Srishiti's mother, Priyanka, says, "Our children have become friends, but we parents also share bonds. We became each other's support systems through the course."

Cadet Harsimran Kaur from Punjab points out: "Our bond has grown beyond that during these three years. These friendships are for life."

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NDA's first batch of female cadets pose for a photograph after the 148th convocation ceremony held at the defence academy. EHMAMUL YOGINI

Whose mountain is it, anyway?

On May 18, five people from the National Institute of Mountaineering and Adventure Sports (NIMAS) scaled Mt Khangchendzonga from the Nepal side, prompting expressions of concern and protest by civil society groups and Sikkim Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang. Sikkim's native population holds the mountain sacred and the State government disallows attempts to climb it or scale its peak from the Indian side. One side of Mt Khangchendzonga faces Nepal, a country that hasn't instituted a similar ban and which the NIMAS team took advantage of.



Yasudevan Mukunth

Tensions over mountains

There has been a resurgence of the assertion of spiritual beliefs over mountains of late. Mountains are important sources of water, which is increasingly becoming a strategic resource. They straddle geo-dynamic features we need to know to understand the land we live on. But in a world grappling with the effects of climate change, mountain ecosystems worldwide also rank among the most vulnerable. This renders the stewardship provided by indigenous communities important, especially in the form of indigenous knowledge that allowed people to coexist sustainably with their environs for centuries. Of course, there are other reasons to respect indigenous communities' beliefs, including building resilient societies and redressing historical injustice.

In parallel, there is still a need to understand mountains from scientific and military points of view, and physical access often yields the best data. The resulting tensions have become more pronounced in the last two decades or so. As the recent incident illustrates, the key has always been stakeholder involvement and scientists and military personnel being okay with hearing the word 'no'.

This is why work on the

There has been a resurgence of spiritual beliefs over mountains of late

Thirty-Meter Telescope (of which India is a government-level member) was stalled from 2014 after the Kankana Maoli community protested its construction on their sacred Mauna Kea. Native Hawaiians have also opposed the U.S. Space Forces AMOS-STAR project on the Haleakala shield volcano on similar grounds. Atacameño communities in Chile have warned of "spiritual" loss over the construction of telescopes in Cerro Armazones and Cerro Paranal.

In many instances, governments presume scientific and defence needs should override indigenous rights. Surveys to assess eco-spiritual rights are often conducted after indigenous groups have mounted large protests, and not before the project is commissioned. The India-based Neutrino Observatory (INO) faced similar opposition over locals' inability to access a temple located near the planned project site thanks to the presence of police personnel. While the INO scientists have said the police shouldn't have been present, much less denying access to the area, the incident only illustrates the sort of heavy-handedness large and expensive projects open the door to while denying indigenous communities their rights.

Sharper legal instruments

Fortunately, however, thanks to the initiative of civil society groups led by youth, the election of indigenous individuals to government positions, technological advances, and the pressures of climate adaptation and sustainability, the legal instruments available to assert indigenous rights are becoming sharper. The UN principle of 'free prior and informed consent' of indigenous peoples is bolstered by its Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and convention 169 of the International Labour Organisation. Sikkim's notifications consecrating Mt Khangchendzonga were under the

Places of Worship Act, 1991.

Overall, it is becoming clearer both in monetary and extra-monetary ways (including the risk of reputational harm) to consult first than to litigate later. Heavy-handedness still prevails but there is progress, and governments need to be part of it, including in the arena of military action. As Article 30 of the UNDRIP says, "States shall undertake effective consultations with the indigenous peoples concerned... prior to using their lands... for military activities."

Consultative actions that account for political variables can also ensure neither indigenous groups nor governments resort to heavy-handedness of their own. For example, a volcanology programme in 2014 involved the governments of North Korea, China, and the U.K. to study the revered Paektu mountain on the North Korea-China border to understand when it might erupt next. On the flip side, after protests in Bhutan over foreign expeditions to the Gangkhar Puensum peak, the government banned attempts to climb more than 6,000 m above sea level in 1994 and altogether banned mountaineering in 2003.

NIMAS is an autonomous institute under India's Ministry of Defence. The NIMAS team's endeavour on May 18 was part of the Indian Army's 'Har Shikhar Tiranga' campaign to plant the Indian flag on the highest point of each State. Even if this wasn't explicit military action, its purpose was to stoke national pride and build support for India's war rhetoric. By sidestepping local support for its ascent and planting the Indian flag on the mountain from the Nepal side, the NIMAS team has cheapened the struggles of native peoples to lower the cost of consulting them. If it had consulted them and they had refused access, the NIMAS team could still have achieved its goal by planting the flag at another spot. National integrity is also important for national security.

A sinking feeling for 'Brand Bengaluru'

Little thought is being given to the problems that arose from the city's 'growth'

STATE OF PLAY

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For long-time residents of Bengaluru, it is beginning to feel like there is too much happening all at once. There are talks of extending Namma Metro to neighbouring cities. Work has started for a suburban rail network. The State government is busy pushing for a contentious network of tunnel roads to connect traffic-choked ends. And the civic body, the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP), is being split into multiple corporations with the hope that they will manage the city better.

Ironically, while these projects are being planned keeping the city's future in mind, there is little thought being given to existing problems, which arose out of Bengaluru's "growth". All it takes is for the sky to open up a few times for all that lies beneath the shine of 'Brand Bengaluru' to be exposed. For the motorists caught on dangerously waterlogged roads, the residents of layouts that are inundated after a few spells of rain, and the families of those who lost their lives in a flooded underpass or a tree fall, the statements of ministers promising removal of encroachments only provide a sense of déjà vu.

The Chief Minister's Office said in a recent statement that the pre-monsoon rains in 2025 were the highest recorded during the season and in the month of May in the last 125 years. The rainfall recorded in the pre-monsoon period (March 1 to May 31) was 286 mm against the normal 115 mm. The actual rainfall was 219 mm against the normal 74 mm for May. The India Mete-



orological Department, Bengaluru, said the city received a record 307.9 mm of rainfall between May 1 and May 26 (till 11.30 a.m.). Bengaluru received a staggering 105.5 mm of rainfall in the 24-hour period between 8.30 a.m. on May 18 and 8.30 a.m. on May 19 – the second highest since 2011. This caught the authorities, who were still preparing for the monsoon, off guard.

High-impact weather events have been occurring more frequently and with greater intensity globally. Many parts of Bengaluru were under water during the monsoon and post-monsoon seasons in 2015, 2017, 2020, and 2022. In 2023, Karnataka was hit by drought, which led to a water crisis in many parts of the State in 2024.

Why, then, have the civic authorities not learned any lessons? Bengaluru was once famed for its network of lakes. These served as flood management tools by harvesting rainwater and storing excess water. As the city grew, the government focused on providing piped water supply from the Cauvery river. It ignored lakes to the point where hundreds of them disappeared, making way for real estate, stadiums, and bus stands. Rivers that originate or flow through the city, such as the Vrushabhavathi, continue to be in a state of neglect.

During the 2024 summer water crisis, the Bangalore

Water Supply and Sewerage Board came up with a knee-jerk response. It filled up a few lakes with treated water to push up groundwater levels. This year, 63 of the 183 lakes under the BBMP have already reached full capacity before the monsoon season, raising questions about how important flood-mitigation barriers have been compromised.

Citizen activists and experts have also repeatedly pointed to the reduced carrying capacity of drains due to the build-up of silt and flow of sewage. This has caused rainwater to overflow into the streets, leading to severe water-logging.

The Karnataka Lokayukta, which took up a suo motu case about flooding in Bengaluru after the recent episode, said that the main reasons for flooding were negligence of officials and lack of coordination between various agencies. Justice B.S. Patil also directed officials to speed up de-silting work of drains, ensure a gradient to facilitate flow of water in them, and remove all encroachments on drains.

Bengaluru is in the throes of an administrative transformation as the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) will replace the BBMP, which came into being in 2007, as the city's primary governing body. The GBA aims to bring all the major agencies working in Bengaluru under one structure, which will be headed by the Chief Minister of Karnataka. Some civic activists fear this will result in centralisation of administration and power.

Will this lead to a more cohesive and comprehensive approach to managing the city, especially in the light of extreme weather events? Or will the residents continue to suffer the same problems as the focus remains on extravagant projects? It is too early to tell.

India's rise to 4th largest economy belies per capita reality

Comparisons based solely on absolute GDP offer limited insight into the lived realities of people

DATA POINT

Nitika Francis
Vignesh Radhakrishnan

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) recently projected that India will edge past Japan to become the world's fourth largest economy in 2025. While this marks a notable milestone, comparisons based solely on absolute Gross Domestic Product (GDP) offer limited insight into the lived realities of people.

Absolute GDP figures are useful for understanding the size of an economy, but they do not capture how wealth is distributed, how developed a country is, or how its citizens are faring. They mask disparities in population size, cost of living, and income inequality. A country may have a large economy overall, but that doesn't necessarily translate into prosperity or improved living standards for its people.

For instance, as Chart 1A shows, India's absolute GDP (in \$ billion) is estimated to have risen from \$468.4 billion in 2000 to \$4,187 billion in 2025, narrowly surpassing Japan's figures in the process. However, as Chart 1B shows, India's GDP per capita is 12 times lower than Japan's in 2025.

To drive home the point, let us add Poland to the comparison – a country often cited for its quick transition from a lower middle-income to a high-income economy. As seen in Chart 1A, Poland's total GDP is around four times smaller than India's, but as Chart 1B shows, its GDP per capita is nearly nine times higher.

While economic growth is an important marker of a country's progress, it is equally vital to assess the strides made in social, educational, health, and democratic indicators, as advancements in these areas offer a more meaningful measure of true prosperity. The following paragraphs present indicators related to these dimensions,

comparing India, Poland, and Japan across two time periods – the latest available data and figures from roughly two decades ago.

First, consider the nature of employment. As shown in Charts 2A, 2B, and 2C, as of 2023, nearly 45% of India's workforce was still employed in agriculture. In contrast, the share in both Poland and Japan had fallen below 10%, with a corresponding rise in employment in the industrial and services sectors.

On the regular employment front, the share of wage and salaried workers – those with formal employment contracts – was just 23.9% in India in 2023, compared to 91% in Japan and 80.1% in Poland (Chart 3).

The gross enrolment rate in college-level education, after completion of secondary school, was 32.7% in India in 2023, compared to close to 65% and 75% in Japan and Poland, respectively (Chart 4).

On the health front, the life expectancy of a person was 72 years for an average Indian in 2023, compared to 84 years in Japan and 78.5 years in Poland (Chart 5). Access to adequate healthcare is also reflected in a country's Infant Mortality Rate (IMR), or the number of deaths per 1,000 live births of children under one year of age. While the IMR of all the mentioned countries halved between 2000 and 2023, India's IMR remains at 24.5, while Japan and Poland both record less than five such deaths per 1,000 births.

Put together, these reflect in the measure of the Human Development Index in these countries. The HDI is a composite measure that assesses a country's overall achievement in health, education, and standard of living. The HDI is expressed as a number between 0 and 1, with 1 indicating high human development. India's HDI of 0.685 in 2023 shows 'medium development', while the HDIs of Japan and Poland crossed the 0.9 mark, pointing to very high human development (Chart 6).

A detailed picture

The data for the charts were sourced from the International Monetary Fund's "World Economic Outlook (April 2025)", the World Bank's indicator database, International Labour Organization Statistics, and Our World in Data

With inputs from Bharat A. Ramana, who is intermingling with the data team

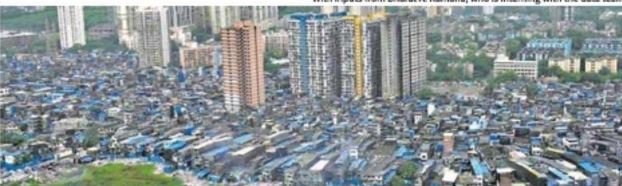


Chart 1A: The absolute Gross Domestic Product (in \$ billion) of select countries in 2000 and 2025

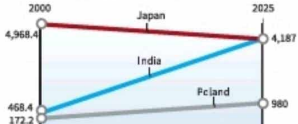


Chart 1B: The GDP per capita (in U.S. \$) of select countries in 2000 and 2025

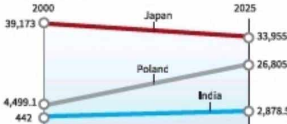


Chart 2A: The share of employment in the agriculture sector in select countries in 2000 and 2023 (in %)

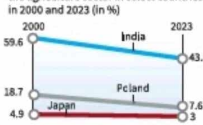


Chart 2B: The share of employment in the industrial sector in select countries in 2000 and 2023 (in %)

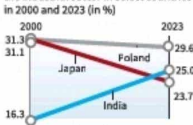


Chart 2C: The share of employment in the service sector in select countries in 2000 and 2023 (in %)

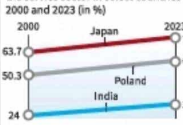


Chart 3: The share of wage and salaried workers out of the total employed population in select countries in 2000 and 2023 (in %)

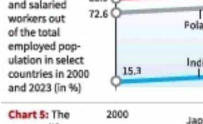


Chart 5: The average life expectancy of a person from select countries in 2000 and 2023 (in years)



Chart 4: The gross enrolment rate in college-level education in select countries in 1995 and 2023 (in %)

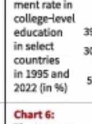


Chart 6: The Human Development Index of select countries in 2000 and 2023



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO JUNE 2, 1975

Space programme not hit by snags in Aryabhata

Madras, June 1: The Indian space satellite programme would not be affected because of the difficulties experienced in the functioning of Aryabhata, Prof. Satish Dhawan, Chairman, Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), said here today.

Prof. Dhawan said that the malfunctioning of some of the equipment on board the Aryabhata was due to the failure of the "power transistor" system. The fault was detected by the ISRO scientists after careful scrutiny of the material received by Mission Control at Bangalore.

These scientists were now working round the clock studying the possibility of reviving the experiments. Even such "drastic steps" like sending electronic pulses to activate the instruments aboard the satellite were being considered. But it was too early to say whether "we will succeed in this task," Prof. Dhawan said.

Tracing the initial difficulties encountered by the satellite immediately after it was launched, he said even after a few orbits, it started "tumbling" and did not "spin" as expected. The satellite was made of non-magnetic material but even then there was some drag on it, thereby slowing it down. The latest information was that it was normal and "orbiting according to the programme," he said.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JUNE 2, 1925

Mettur project

Ootacamund, June 2: The preliminary work and arrangements in connection with the construction of the Mettur Dam, I am informed, have now reached an advanced stage and the Chief Engineer is making a preliminary call for tenders for the mass work in the Dam and the subsidiary works. Arrangements are also being made, it is said, for the purchase of the necessary plant. It is proposed with a view to shorten the time of construction and effect economy, that the most modern plant should be used in the construction of the dam. The materials will be handled by the most modern type of transporters designed to land materials on the works - direct with the minimum of intermediate handling. It is probable that an electric driver will be used for much of the machinery and this point is under consideration.

10



THE INDIAN EXPRESS, MONDAY, JUNE 2, 2025

THE EDITORIAL PAGE

WORDLY WISE

NO ONE LEAVES HOME UNLESS HOME IS THE MOUTH
OF A SHARK
— WARSAW SHIRE

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

PUSHING BACK

Crackdown against illegal immigrants has to follow due process. Security imperative must be insulated from politics

IN THE WAKE of the brutal terrorist attack on Pahalgam, the government has done the right thing by heightening security across the country. It has intensified operations against terrorists and given greater urgency to increasing surveillance along the borders. Last month, the Union Minister of Home Affairs issued an order asking states and Union Territories to detect and deport foreigners, especially people from Bangladesh and Myanmar, living illegally in the country. The Centre's instructions have prompted several states to intensify their ongoing operations against suspected illegal immigrants. From the West Bengal government's allegation, earlier this year, of BJP's laxity against Bangladeshi "infiltrators" to Delhi's erstwhile AAP government's drive against "illegal Bangladeshi" students to Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's frequent diatribes against immigrants from India's eastern neighbour, the issue of illegal immigration has raised its head time and again in the heat and dust of Indian politics. The Centre and state governments must understand that the current moment has a far more compelling imperative than polarising politics — the two should be kept scrupulously apart. However, reports in this newspaper shine a light on the disquieting tendency among authorities to ignore court proceedings — and take the short cut bypassing due process. Among the people caught in the net is the man's land between India and Bangladesh is an Assam school teacher whose citizenship case is being heard by the Supreme Court. And, days ago, a 50-year-old woman was pushed into Bangladesh and then brought back after her lawyer flagged that she was legally in the clear.

In Assam and several other regions of the Northeast, the movement of people across the porous border across Bangladesh is an immensely sensitive and fraught issue. On the one hand, the movement of people across regions has a long history that predates Partition. On the other hand, the anti-outside sentiment was the major trigger for the Assam agitation and has often led to violence in the state. In recent years, the state's BJP government has stoked anxieties around identity and demography by framing the narrative in communal terms. The state government's aggressive use of the Foreigner's Tribunal — it sets March 25, 1971, as the cut-off date for citizenship in Assam — has left thousands with an uncertain future. The onus is almost always on the accused to prove their citizenship. Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma has cited a Supreme Court directive of February in support of the latest anti-immigration drive. However, Sarma's past pronouncements — especially his use of dog whistles, "land jihad" and "blood jihad" — to refer to the migrant problem — do not inspire confidence. The Assam CM has said that the recent drive does not target people who have appealed to the courts after the revocation of their nationality by a tribunal. Last week, however, the Gauhati High Court had to intervene on behalf of two such people, whose families fear that they may be "pushed out" to Bangladesh.

That Myanmar and Bangladesh are in political turmoil today doesn't make the task any easier. That should not, however, be the rationale for rounding off suspected illegal migrants and pushing them across borders. On immigration crackdown, the short-cut will always be more expedient — most of the victims are vulnerable and without adequate representation — but due process, even if it is a long haul, needs to be followed and seen to be followed. Only then will it engender a security that endures.

A HEAVY BURDEN

AIIMS study flags rising childhood obesity in Delhi, highlights urgent need for coordinated action to ensure healthier futures

A STUDY BY the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) has sounded a warning on an escalating health emergency among school children in the national capital. Of nearly 4,000 students in the six-19 years age group surveyed across Delhi's public and private schools, 13.4 per cent were found to be obese, and 7.4 per cent suffering from hypertension. The data draws an even more sobering contrast when viewed through the lens of socioeconomic status — 24 per cent private-school students were classified as obese, compared to 4.5 per cent in government schools. Students in private-school were also found to be twice as likely to have elevated blood sugar and three times more likely to exhibit metabolic syndrome — a dangerous cluster of conditions that includes hypertension, abnormal cholesterol, and insulin resistance. Left unchecked, these significantly increase the risk of early-onset cardiovascular diseases, musculoskeletal disorders, psychological stress, and Type 2 diabetes.

The Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey (2016-18) had already shown that 15.35 per cent of school-age children and 16.18 per cent of adolescents in India are pre-diabetic. Together with the AIIMS study, the implications are troubling. Once grappling with malnutrition, India now faces a dual burden: For urban and affluent children, prosperity has paradoxically become a vector of poor health. Lancet's 2024 Global Burden of Disease Study reported that the number of obese children in India has ballooned from 0.4 million in 1990 to 12.5 million in 2022. This staggering increase is a fallout of rapid urbanisation, the ubiquity of high-calorie, nutrient-poor diet — often involving ultra-processed foods and sugary drinks masquerading as child friendly and healthy — surging screen time, and diminishing physical activity.

The AIIMS report signals that student health needs equal and immediate attention alongside academics. The CBSE's recent directive to set up sugar boards in affiliated schools to reinforce the dangers of excessive sugar consumption is a welcome move in that direction. Physical education must be made non-negotiable and junk food driven out of school canteens with the same urgency that was once reserved for tobacco. Parents must re-evaluate lifestyle choices at home. Policy, too, has a vital role. National guidelines on childhood obesity must move from paper to practice. A concerted public-health push that combines regulation, education, and community action to stem children toward healthier futures is vital to stem the crisis. Otherwise, India's demographic dividend stands to carry with it a long and costly health burden.

FREEZE FRAME

E P UNNY



NEWS: Rising BP among students.



DHARMAKIRTI JOSHI

THE NATIONAL STATISTICS Office's (NSO) provisional estimates peg India's gross domestic product (GDP) growth at 6.5 per cent for 2024-25, with the fourth quarter growing at a blistering 7.4 per cent. The first and second advance estimates, which were based on limited data, had projected 6.4 per cent and 6.5 per cent, respectively.

The positive surprises in GDP revisions seen in the past three fiscals may end here, at least for now. The economy seems to be re-aligning with its long-term trend growth. The decadal average growth before the Covid-19 pandemic was 6.6 per cent.

For 2023-24, the first advance estimates had pinned growth at 7.3 per cent, the provisional estimates revised that to 8.2 per cent and then to 9.2 per cent. In India's GDP reporting framework, provisional estimates are more reliable and enduring than the two preceding advance estimates. The next GDP estimate for fiscal 2025 will be released in early 2026. Until then, these estimates provide a more stable basis for forecasting GDP amid a wall of global uncertainty.

India's nominal GDP, which factors in the inflation rate, grew 9.8 per cent in fiscal 2025. Put another way, the size of the absolute economy reached \$3.91 trillion from \$3.6 trillion in fiscal 2024.

Private consumption grew a good 7.2 per cent on rural demand even as urban stayed subdued. That said, consumption growth did slow to 6 per cent in the fourth quarter. Government consumption expenditure, too, was restrained, growing 2.3 per cent for the full fiscal year and dropping to 1.8 per cent in the fourth quarter. Government investments picked up sharply in the fourth quarter, helping investment growth outpace GDP. Central government capex exceeded the revised estimates for the full fiscal.

On the supply side, agriculture and services performed well, but manufacturing was a laggard, growing 4.5 per cent — slower than agriculture. Merchandise exports were nearly flat at \$437.41 billion (\$437.07 billion in fiscal 2024). Labour-intensive construction ratcheting up 9.4 per cent over the double-digit growth last fiscal augurs well for employment.

The economic outlook for fiscal 2026 will be shaped by the interplay of global tariff

Reforms that address structural bottlenecks are crucial for India's attractiveness as an investment destination

shocks and the buffers and policy levers India has. While our economy is primarily driven by domestic factors, growing ties with developed nations through trade and capital flows means it cannot be fully insulated from adverse global events.

The external environment has undergone a dramatic shift this year following the imposition of reciprocal tariffs by the US and ongoing escalation and de-escalation. This can impact India via both direct and indirect channels. The direct impact is felt through the effects on the US economy and the increased tariffs that hinder our competitiveness. With US growth expected to slow to 1.5 per cent in calendar 2025 from 2.8 per cent in 2024, demand for Indian exports to the US will decrease. The full impact will only become clear once the India-US trade deal is concluded.

The indirect or collateral impact will play out via slowing growth in other export markets for India, such as the European Union and Asia. S&P Global expects global growth to slip to 2.7 per cent in 2025 from 3.3 per cent in 2024. The elevated tariffs on Chinese goods will exacerbate China's overcapacity and deflationary pressures, prompting it to divert excess supply to other markets, including India. The recent thaw in US-China trade tensions saw both countries agreeing to reduce tariffs by 15 per cent for a 90-day period. However, this provides only a temporary relief, and uncertainty looms over what will follow the 90-day window.

The persistent uncertainty is delaying private investment decisions and remains a concern for volatility in capital flows, financial markets and currency exchange rates. India has some buffers, and positive developments will support economic activity this fiscal. The composition of India's exports provides some resilience, as services exports, which now account for nearly half of the country's exports, are less vulnerable to global trade cycles than goods exports. According to the World Trade Organisation, global goods trade will contract 0.2 per cent in calendar 2025, while services trade will grow at 4 per cent. Although services exports will slow, it will do so at a slower pace than goods exports, providing some buffer on the trade front.

A low current account deficit, moderate

government external debt and healthy forex reserves (at \$686 billion currently) reduce India's vulnerability to global shocks, but do not provide complete insulation.

A record wheat harvest and strong pulses output, as per the second advance estimates, along with a favourable monsoon forecast for the upcoming kharif season, are expected to boost agricultural production and control food inflation. Moreover, we expect crude prices to average a low around \$65 per barrel this fiscal. These factors provide the RBI with more elbow room to support growth. We anticipate two more rate cuts of 25 basis points this fiscal.

Essential items such as food and fuel account for a larger share of the consumption basket for lower-income households. Thus, low food inflation will improve discretionary spending for lower-income groups in both urban and rural areas. Urban consumption will be further supported by low interest rates and income tax cuts announced in the budget, which will take effect this fiscal. This, in turn, will complement healthy rural consumption.

Unlike the previous fiscal year, the central government seems to be prioritising capital expenditure at the outset this year. In April, capex reached Rs 1.59 lakh crores, accounting for 14.3 per cent of the budget target.

Despite tepid domestic private investment prospects and the government's limited ability to fuel public investment due to fiscal considerations, India is benefitting from global supply-chain shifts. Apple plans to manufacture most iPhones for the US market in India, and a Vietnamese electric vehicle manufacturer is set to open an Indian plant in June, with product launches expected this year.

The persistent uncertainty is delaying private investment decisions and remains a concern for volatility in capital flows, financial markets and currency exchange rates. India has some buffers, and positive developments will support economic activity this fiscal. The composition of India's exports provides some resilience, as services exports, which now account for nearly half of the country's exports, are less vulnerable to global trade cycles than goods exports. According to the World Trade Organisation, global goods trade will contract 0.2 per cent in calendar 2025, while services trade will grow at 4 per cent. Although services exports will slow, it will do so at a slower pace than goods exports, providing some buffer on the trade front.

A low current account deficit, moderate

The writer is Chief Economist, CRISIL.

UNLOCKING THE UNIVERSE

Scientist, visionary, and storyteller — Jayant Narlikar brought the stars closer to India



NARESH DADHICH

Some people do not come in through the door but rather jump through the roof. Jayant Narlikar was one of them. In 1964, when Fred Hoyle and he announced in Cambridge University their new theory of gravity, suddenly Jawaharlal Nehru's modern India found a hero in science. It is therefore no surprise that Narlikar became a household name overnight in a country seeking its bearings in the world of science and technology.

He passed away peacefully in his sleep, just two months short of his 87th birthday on July 19, marking the end of an era. He doesn't leave behind a vacuum but a thriving world-class institute in the Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics (IUCAA); a galaxy of young women and men inspired by his work and books; and millions of admirers all over the globe. He has "carved" a special place for himself in "time". That would be the right way to remember him and a fitting tribute.

Today, we should celebrate the life of a great human being, committed to science and its propagation, a man who personified excellence in whatever he indulged in. It is a matter of great privilege for some of us who had the opportunity to work with him at various levels. He had the uncanny knack of getting the best out of everyone by sharing and involving them in things.

Narlikar was an outstanding student at Cambridge, winning laurels, including the coveted Adams Prize, which he shared with

Roger Penrose, who went on to become a Nobel Laureate.

He was among the front-rank researchers of his time. The Hoyle-Narlikar theory was developed in support of the steady state theory of cosmology, which proposed that the universe looks the same from every point in space and at all times, and that it has no beginning or end. However, this theory eventually fell out of favour as astronomical observations provided strong evidence that the universe had a definite beginning, marked by a massive explosion known as the Big Bang. The term "Big Bang" was actually coined by Hoyle — ironically, one of the main proponents of the steady state theory. Narlikar was, in fact, among the last prominent supporters of the steady state model.

He was a brilliant researcher and had the conviction and courage to ride against the tide and still be held in the highest esteem even by his academic opponents. The distinguished visitors to IUCAA, including Nobel laureates, bear testimony to this fact.

IUCAA was his greatest gift to science and the nation. He wanted to facilitate research in astronomy in universities. It is gratifying to see university students and faculty doing pathbreaking research and publishing their work in front-ranking journals. This is what would have pleased him the most. The thing that stands out most is his missionary zeal to communicate science and its method to young students and ordinary people through his innumerable public lectures and science-fiction books. It would be no exaggeration to say that it is this aspect that strongly endeared him to people. There are many renowned scientists in the country, but none have attained his kind of popularity and respect.

To this end, let me recall an incident from 1997 when he had organised Penrose's lecture in Pune's Balgandharva Theatre. Such was the demand to listen to him that there was nearly a riot-like situation with people who could not get in shouting and banging at the gates, and, from the other side, Shriram Lagoo was pacifying them, saying that it was their very own Narlikar's event.

The ultimate value of one's work and contribution is how far and how well it is remembered. Besides his scientific work, the two things that will keep his memory alive will be the institute, IUCAA, and his popular writings and science fiction. I am sure that even after 50 years or more, one would certainly even find people who had been motivated by him.

Let me end on a personal note. In 1965, three of us travelled from Vallabh Vidyanagar to Ahmedabad to listen to Narlikar's lecture in the Atira hall. Little did I know then that I would end up spending over half a century intimately interacting and working with him. That is something I will always treasure.

The writer, a former director of IUCAA, was Narlikar's colleague for five decades

JUNE 2, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

PATIL RESIGNS AS CM

MAHARASHTRA CHIEF MINISTER Vasant Rao Patil resigned following the party high command's decision to appoint Prabhakar Rao as the MPCC (I) chief. When asked about his successor, Patil said it was for the high command to decide. The four AICC (I) observers failed to dissuade him from submitting his resignation. Patil maintained that he could not work with Rao, who had criticised Indira Gandhi.

'BLUESTAR WEEK'

PRAYERS AND 'AKHAND' paths held in gurdwaras by the Akali Dal to observe 'Operation

Bluestar Week' passed off peacefully on the first day in Punjab, Haryana and Chandigarh amid tight security arrangements. Three jawans — two of the Punjab Armed Police and one of the CRPF — were injured in an exchange of fire between them at Ferozepur, while the Amritsar police arrested three Pakistani nationals in three different places in border areas.

PAK ATTACKS LADAKH

PAKISTANI TROOPS HAVE renewed their attacks on Indian positions in the north of the Nubra Valley in Ladakh. According to sources, the Indian security forces, guarding the strategic glacial region,

have repulsed the Pakistani attacks. Pakistani air force planes also repeatedly intruded into the area but they were chased away.

TORNADO IN US

AT LEAST 84 people were killed and more than 30 reported missing after tornadoes yesterday swept across Pennsylvania, Ohio, and northwestern New York state. At least 18 others died in Canada and hundreds were wounded, according to an incomplete count by officials in Ontario. With winds blowing up to 150 km per hour, the twister razed thousands of homes, crushing buildings in the debris and flattening entire villages.

A woman army chief? Why path is easier now

17 women cadets graduated from the National Defence Academy on Friday. This is a major milestone in the long quest for gender equality in the armed forces

SUSHANT KULKARNI
PUNE, JUNE 1

THE 148TH batch of the National Defence Academy (NDA), Khadawasla, which graduated on Friday, had 17 women cadets. This is a watershed moment for the armed forces, one which opens a realistic path for women to reach the highest echelons of the Indian military in the coming decades.

Long journey to NDA

In 1888, the British established the Military Nursing Service, officially opening up the military for women in India. In 1958, the Indian Army Medical Corps began granting regular commissions to women doctors.

Non-medical roles remained off-limits till 1992, when the Women Special Entry Scheme was introduced to induct women in select non-combat streams — such as the Army Education Corps (AEC), Corps of Signals, Intelligence Corps, and Corps of Engineers — as Short Service Commission (SSC) officers. Permanent Commission (PC) remained

EXPLAINED DEFENCE

out of reach for women until 2008, when women SSC officers in the Judge Advocate General department and the AEC became eligible. The government allowed women PC officers into eight other non-combat streams in 2019, but not in command appointments.

The fight for PC and just terms of service had reached the courts in the 2000s. The Supreme Court delivered a landmark verdict in 2020, ruling that women officers were eligible for PC and command roles across 10 streams, and could not be denied “based on sex stereotypes... which discriminate against women”.

In 2021, the apex court ordered the NDA to admit its first batch of women cadets. The court was hearing a plea seeking directions to allow eligible women to appear in the NDA and Naval Academy entrance examinations conducted by the Union Public Service Commission. The 17 women who graduated on Friday were admitted to the premier defence academy a year later.

Integration into squadrons

The NDA has admitted 126 women



Women cadets at the NDA convocation ceremony in Pune. Anil Horion

cadets till date.

When admitting its first women cadets in 2022, the NDA had said that training would be conducted in “an absolutely gender-neutral manner” with “minimum changes to the existing curriculum”.

Most training activities are conducted jointly — along with male cadets — keeping the cadets’ employability in mind, specifically the fact that women officers would be

required to take up command roles in the future, the NDA says. The academy has a dedicated support staff to train women cadets.

For its first women cadets, the NDA borrowed from training methodologies and regimens already in place in other Pre-Commissioning Training Academies such as the Officers Training Academy Chennai, Indian Naval Academy Ezhimala, and the Air Force Academy Dundigal. Women SSC officers have been graduating from these academies since 1992.

Women cadets were initially provided separate accommodation on the NDA campus. But they have since been integrated into the existing 18 squadrons of the academy. This milestone was achieved earlier this year.

The NDA’s 18 squadrons are the foundational units of the academy’s organisation, effectively acting as cadets’ families during their time in the academy. The integration of women cadets into the squadrons means that they live and train like any of their male counterparts, going through the entire daily routine together.

On Friday, the women cadets marched shoulder to shoulder with the men, wearing

the same uniforms, and completely indistinguishable from their male counterparts to the average watcher.

A momentous occasion

In October 2021, after the Supreme Court had ordered the NDA to admit women, then Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Manoj Mukund Naravane had said: “I think 30 to 40 years down the line, a woman could be standing where I am standing.”

This was echoed by former COAS and current Mizoram Governor Gen V K Singh (Retd), who was the Reviewing Officer for the passing out parade of the NDA’s 148th batch on Friday. “I envision a future not far from now when one of these young women may rise to the highest echelons of the service they go to,” he said.

This is what makes Friday’s milestone such a momentous one. Previously, women joined the military via SSC or direct entry routes into select branches. They had neither the opportunity to take up command roles nor a viable long-term path to rise up the ranks.

The NDA offers great early career training, leadership grooming, and exposure,

which only male officers had access to so far. A woman cadet graduating from the NDA can start young, and potentially build a 35- to 40-year-long career that is essentially a prerequisite to becoming a service chief.

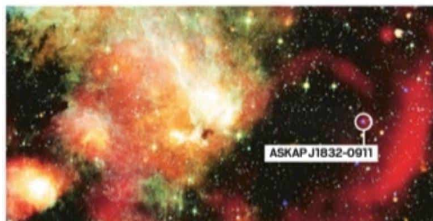
Command roles, especially in combat arms like infantry, artillery, navy warships, or fighter squadrons, are also crucial for career advancement. Women cadets graduating from the NDA will have the opportunity to reach these positions.

“The recent developments are certainly encouraging,” a retired Indian Air Force (IAF) Air Marshal told *The Indian Express*. “However, a deeper cultural shift within the armed forces is necessary. A change that would normalise having women in leadership [positions],” he added.

Some streams remain out of bounds for women, meaning decisions will have to be taken to change that situation, the retired IAF officer said. “Armed forces will also have to make further efforts on work-life infrastructure and mechanisms for maternity policy, childcare support, spousal postings. The criteria for promotion boards and evaluation, command postings will need upgrades,” he said.

EXPLAINED SCIENCE

WHY HAS A NEWLY DISCOVERED STAR TAKEN SCIENTISTS BY SURPRISE?



A wide field image of ASKAP J1832 in X-ray, radio, and infrared light. NASA

ASTRONOMERS HAVE spotted a star acting unlike any other ever observed. It unleashes a curious combination of radio waves and X-rays, making it an exotic member of a class of celestial objects first identified only three years ago.

The star, known as ASKAP J1832-0911, is located in the Milky Way galaxy about 15,000 light-years from Earth in the direction of the constellation Scutum, flashing every 44 minutes in both radio waves and X-ray emissions. A light-year is the distance light travels in a year, 5.9 trillion miles (9.5 trillion km).

The researchers described their findings in the study, “Detection of X-ray Emission from a Bright Long-Period Radio Transient,” published on May 28 in the journal *Nature*.

For their analysis, they used data from NASA’s orbiting Chandra X-ray Observatory, the ASKAP telescope in Australia and other telescopes.

Long-period radio transients

The researchers said ASKAP J1832-0911 belongs to a class of objects called “long-period radio transients,” known for bright bursts of radio waves that appear every few minutes to several hours.

This is much longer than the rapid pulses in radio waves typically detected from pulsars — a type of speedily rotating neutron star, the dense collapsed core of a massive star after its death. Pulsars appear, as viewed from Earth, to be blinking on and off on timescales of milliseconds to seconds.

“What these objects are and how they generate their unusual signals remain a mystery,” said astronomer Ziteng Wang of Curtin University in Australia, lead author of the study.

The findings

While the emission of radio waves from the newly identified object is similar to the approximately 10 other known examples of this class, it is the only one sending out X-rays, according to astrophysicist and study co-author Nanda Rea of the Institute of Space Sciences in Barcelona.

The researchers have some hypotheses about the nature of this star. They said it may be a magnetar, a spinning neutron star with an extreme magnetic field, or perhaps a white dwarf, a highly compact stellar ember, with a close and quick orbit around a small companion star in what is called a binary system.

“However, neither of them could explain all observational features we saw,” Wang said.

Stars with up-to-eight times the mass of our Sun appear destined to end up as white dwarfs. They eventually burn up all the hydrogen they use as fuel. Gravity then causes them to collapse and blow off their outer layers in a “red giant” stage, eventually leaving behind a compact core roughly the diameter of Earth.

The observed radio waves potentially could have been generated by the interaction between the white dwarf and the hypothesised companion star, the researchers said.

“The radio brightness of the object varies a lot. We saw no radio emission from the object before November 2023. And in February 2024, we saw it become extremely bright. Fewer than 30 objects in the sky have ever reached such brightness in radio waves. Remarkably, at the same time, we also detected X-ray pulses from the object. We can still detect it on the radio, but much fainter,” Wang said.

REUTERS

EXPLAINED INTERVIEW

JONATHAN FOWLER

AT LEAST 32 Palestinians were killed and 200 injured in Rafah over the last week, after thousands of them, desperate for food, swarmed aid distribution sites operated by Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF), an NGO backed by the US and Israel.

Gaza had been under a total blockade for almost three months until last week. The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has said it cannot work with the GHF. Jake Wood, head of GHF, quit on May 25, saying its work was not in accordance with “humanitarian principles”.

Is famine imminent in Gaza?

Since the assessment of the [UN-backed] Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) came out [on May 12], the situation has worsened every day. There is a human-made hunger crisis in Gaza. Our colleagues there tell us that if a mother manages to get a piece of bread, she breaks it in half to give some to the children, and saves the rest for tomorrow.

Even before the [January 19 to March 18] ceasefire [between Hamas and Israel], there were famine-like conditions in pockets of Gaza as the amount of aid that was allowed to enter was pitiful compared to the needs.

The ceasefire allowed international organisations and NGOs to scale up aid to the minimum required level, which helped stave off hunger in the initial days.

But as soon as the blockade began [on March 21] and the ceasefire collapsed, these organisations began to ration the aid. No aid was allowed for nearly 11 weeks, which led to food insecurity.

This is against international humanitarian law. One cannot starve populations as part of a military goal (Article 54 of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions). Israel cannot use food as leverage to get hostages released.

On May 26, Israel said 665 aid trucks had entered Gaza. The head of the UN’s World Food Programme said this was a “drop in the bucket”. What is the minimum aid that Gaza needs?

ACUTE FOOD INSECURITY IN GAZA

Percentage of population by level of food insecurity, May 11 to Sep 30 projection

Region	Crisis	Emergency	Catastrophe*	Population
Gaza Strip	24%	54%	22%	2,100,000
North Gaza	10%	60%	30%	400,000
Gaza	25%	50%	25%	740,000
Deir al-Balah	30%	55%	15%	620,000
Khan Younis	25%	55%	20%	310,000
Rafah	15%	60%	25%	30,000

Source: Integrated Food Security Phase Classification analysis, April 2025

*Extreme critical levels of acute malnutrition and mortality

The minimum number of trucks required in Gaza for survival needs is 500 to 600 per day. There is a lot of uncertainty around the actual numbers of trucks that have reached the Strip in recent days. Before the ceasefire, the Israeli forces for inspection were that trucks had to arrive half-empty in Gaza. I am not saying that is what is happening right now, but this is a possibility.

Why have the UN and other aid agencies refused to work with GHF?

Under the new distribution system, pockets have been created where people can come to collect aid. This is incompatible with the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence. Aid has to go to people who need it, wherever they may be. Otherwise it would exclude people who have disabilities, who are injured, or are unable to move easily.

Limiting aid distribution to restricted collection points also risks augmenting the forced displacement of the population. People in Gaza have already been displaced once a month on average since the start of the war. They are being squeezed into supposed safe zones, which are not safe at all.

What is the situation like for aid workers in Gaza now?

Gaza is currently the most dangerous place in the world for aid workers. Our staff, who are overwhelmingly Palestinian, have been dying regularly since the beginning of this war. (More than 400 aid workers, including more than 300 UNRWA staffers, have been killed so far.) There is no precedent for such a high number of UN staff being killed in any conflict since the organisation was formed in 1945.

We have repeatedly seen the failure of proportionality. International humanitarian law says decisions must be based on the proportional potential impact on non-combatants. One cannot bomb a camp full of displaced people to kill five combatants, or target aid workers, hospitals, schools.

Aid workers are also facing the hunger crisis in Gaza. They too are losing their relatives. Our colleagues have pulled the bodies of their children from under the rubble; some have been unable to even retrieve the bodies.

How has Israel’s ban on UNRWA’s operations impacted its work?

The two laws passed in October 2024 came into effect at the end of January. The first prohibited UNRWA from operating in Israel’s sovereign territory. This impacted UNRWA’s operations in East Jerusalem, which is an occupied territory in the eyes of international law.

Visas of international UNRWA staff were curtailed; they had to vacate the organisation’s facility in East Jerusalem. Israeli authorities forcibly closed UNRWA schools in East Jerusalem, denying around 800 students their right to education.

There is a fear that UNRWA clinics, on which some 70,000 Palestinians depend, will be shut down.

The second law, which barred contact between UNRWA and Israeli officials, has severely impacted operations in the West Bank and Gaza. UNRWA had a formal line of communication with the Israeli military, which helped in certain situations such as when children needed to be evacuated from a school in case of a nearby military operation. This does not happen now.

What is UNRWA’s role currently in Gaza?

UNRWA is not banned from operating in Gaza as the law prohibits operations only in Israel’s sovereign territories. UNRWA is the largest humanitarian agency working in the Strip; it has 12,000 members there; the rest of the UN system has 300.

It also has a large logistical network including several warehouses for aid. It has set up mobile healthcare points, its staff go from tent to tent to treat patients.

More than 20,000 children are part of UNRWA’s “Back to Learning” initiative, which has play activities, psychosocial social support, basic literacy, numeracy, etc. UNRWA’s sanitation labourers collect trash and clean refugee camps. UNRWA does not run these camps, only provides facilities and services in them.

UNRWA “as a whole” has been accused of being “a haven for Hamas’ radical ideology”. How does it ensure that its operations and staff remain neutral?

There are solid mechanisms to deal with people who breach UNRWA’s neutrality rules. Whenever allegations have emerged, staff have been sanctioned depending on the nature of breaches of neutrality.

If there are allegations against a dozen staff members or even 50, they are not representative of the entire organisation, which has 30,000 people.

Last year, the Israelis made allegations against 19 staff members. UNRWA immediately moved to suspend them, and handed over investigations to the UN’s Office of Internal Oversight Services. The Office struggled to get any evidence from the Israeli authorities. In nine cases, it was felt that there was a sufficient balance of probability that the staff may have been involved in some unspecified breaches of neutrality. Their termination was upheld.

What role can countries like India play in the crisis in Gaza?

Any country that believes in the importance of multilateralism needs to advocate for international law, and decisions of the International Court of Justice and UN General Assembly to be upheld in Gaza. Multilateralism is not perfect, but it is the best system that currently exists. If it is destroyed, the world will become much more dangerous.

Jonathan Fowler is Senior Communications Manager, UNRWA. He spoke on Zoom with *Alind Chaudhary*. The transcript has been edited for length and clarity.

Trump’s visa crackdown on Chinese students: history, potential impact

SONAL GUPTA
MUMBAI, JUNE 1

FOR NEARLY a half century, Chinese students have gone to American universities. Now, a visa crackdown under President Donald Trump threatens the flow.

On May 28, Secretary of State Marco Rubio announced the US will “aggressively” revoke visas for Chinese students, including those with connections to the Chinese Communist Party or studying in critical fields. He did not clarify how the administration would determine the connection to China’s ruling party, which has around 100 million members, or what fields of study would be targeted.

China has “firmly opposed” the decision, calling it “fully unjustified”.

Trump’s distrust of Chinese students goes back to his first term.

Why is Trump targeting Chinese students?

During Trump’s first term (2017-2021), his administration targeted Chinese students for alleged threats to national security, and in order to safeguard US technology and intellectual property.

In May 2020, Trump issued a Presidential Proclamation saying, “The PRC’s (People’s Republic of China) acquisition of sensitive United States technologies and intellectual property to modernize its military is a threat to our Nation,” and that the Chinese government was using “some Chinese students, mostly post-graduate students and post-doctorate researchers, to operate as non-traditional collectors of in-

tellectual property”.

Later that year, the visas of more than 1,000 Chinese nationals were revoked. Subsequently, the Joe Biden administration used the proclamation to deny Chinese nationals visas.

The Trump administration also put Confucius Institutes — Chinese government-subsidised centres for the promotion of Chinese culture and language — under scrutiny. Most Confucius Institutes have since shut down.

In 2018, the Justice Department launched the “China Initiative” to investigate alleged Chinese economic espionage. Among other things, it targeted Chinese and Chinese-American researchers for allegedly concealing ties to the Chinese government and military. The program ended in 2022

over criticism that it promoted discrimination against Asian-Americans.

How many Chinese students are enrolled in American universities?

Formal academic ties between China and the US date back to 1978, when the two countries decided to “normalise” diplomatic relations. China’s then leader Deng Xiaoping requested permission for 5,000 students to study in the US as part of a broader cultural exchange.

That milestone was crossed in 2009-10, according to data from the Open Doors project of the US State Department. Between 2010 and 2019, China was the biggest source of international students globally in

terms of total numbers.

The number of Chinese students studying abroad fell dramatically in 2020 due to the pandemic. Even after that, the same peaks were not reached again, probably due to growing geopolitical tensions between China and the West, as well as enhanced domestic opportunities within China. Data also suggest a shifting preference among Chinese students from the US to the United Kingdom.

As of 2023-24, 2,77,308 Chinese nationals were studying in the US. This was a 25% decline in the number of Chinese students studying in the US in the last five years. Still, students from China constitute almost a quarter of all international students in the US, behind only India at 29%.

In 2023, Chinese students contributed \$14.29 billion to the US economy, including

tuition fees, accommodation, and expenditure. This was higher than the \$11.8 billion that Indian students contributed.

What could the impact be?

Critics of the administration’s decision have said that membership in the CCP cannot be the sole ground for suspicion. For Chinese citizens, joining the most powerful organisation in the country, one that controls most private and public activity, opens up job and business opportunities. It is also a means of upward social mobility, and doesn’t necessarily indicate total ideological alignment.

The visa crackdown threatens to upend recent improvements in US-China relations. Just weeks ago, the US and China climbed down from the steep tariffs they had imposed on each other.

EXPLAINED GLOBAL



Growing pains

India needs to grow faster to transition as a developed economy

The data on India's economic performance in 2024-25, released on Friday, have something for everybody. Those with an optimistic outlook can rejoice at the seemingly robust growth in the fourth quarter. Pessimists can despair over the four-year low annual growth figure. The realist's assessment, however, is that there is cause for some restrained celebration, and more than a healthy dose of disappointment. The Q4 growth of 7.4% was considerably higher than what was expected for the quarter, and the fastest seen in an otherwise dismal financial year. The main drivers were the construction sector returning to double-digit growth, and the agriculture sector posting a strong showing. These are also two major employment drivers. Services, too, continued their steady and strong growth. The manufacturing sector, on the other hand, grew at just 4.8%, down from 11.3% in Q4 of the previous year. There is a reality check hiding in the aggregate numbers, as well. The GDP growth rate of 7.4% was achieved in large part due to a 12.7% growth in net taxes. This bump in tax collections provided a statistical boost without which growth in actual economic activity would have been at around 6.8%. The much-hyped 'Maha Kumbh effect' on consumption expenditure also does not seem to have materialised. Growth in Private Final Consumption Expenditure in Q4 – the Kumbh quarter – came in at 6%, the slowest in five quarters. Capital formation, however, grew a robust 9.4% as the government finally sped up its sluggish capital investments.

Government officials and Union Ministers have expressed their satisfaction at the 6.5% growth in 2024-25, the slowest since the pandemic, saying it is still the fastest among major economies, and not bad in the context of a "growth-scarce" global environment. All of this is true. Yet, 'not bad' is not nearly good enough for India. The race is not with the rest of the world, but is an effort to keep pace with the country's growing requirements. The Modi government, with its sights set on a 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047, must be held to a higher standard in line with its aspirations. If, as the Economic Survey points out, 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047 requires 'sustained economic growth of close to 8% every year for at least a decade', then India is decidedly moving very slowly, even if in the right direction. In his press conference, Chief Economic Adviser V. Anantha Nageswaran said India was entering a phase of low inflation and stable growth. Stability can be good, since it implies lower chances of growth slowing. Yet, it also implies growth is unlikely to accelerate significantly either. The government needs to consider whether this is truly a satisfactory situation for a transitioning economy.

Wrong call

Assam government's decision to arm civilians goes against law enforcement

The decision by the Bharatya Janata Party-led Assam government to issue arms licences to "eligible" indigenous communities in remote and vulnerable areas in the State is fraught with danger. The State government seems to suggest that indigenous communities living in the border areas abutting Bangladesh are vulnerable and that armed licences would be a deterrent and improve their personal safety and confidence. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has also insisted that these grants would not be for people near inter-State borders in Assam. But these caveats still do not take away from the fact that arming specific civilian groups is liable to be rampantly misused for acts such as vigilantism and inter-community rivalry, as the lines between law enforcement – which carries legal authority and has a monopoly over armed instruments – and private citizens are blurred. In a State that has been beset with insurgent violence and where the threat from groups such as the ULFA (Independent) remains, introducing more arms into civilian hands risks propagating further violence and arms proliferation rather than ensuring enhanced security. Instead of arming civilians, ostensibly for self-defence – a move akin to abdicating its core responsibility – the State government has the clear alternative of enhancing its own law enforcement and security presence in these "vulnerable areas".

It is well understood that in modern states, the monopoly over instruments of violence will remain with the government and its law enforcement agencies. In India, arms licences are issued in a restricted manner as a delegated and a limited right to self-preservation to select individuals through a stringent licensing process under the Arms Act, 1959 and the Arms Rules, 2006. These rules under the law preclude the provision of such licences to larger, identified groups – where identification itself could be fraught with the risk of conflicts – as they not only present administrative challenges but also make it difficult for the government to license, monitor and recover firearms as the law requires it to. Arming civilian groups, even with an intention to do so with some stringent implementation, runs the risks of having these weapons entering grey markets and falling into the wrong hands, besides designating those groups with an authority that could backfire on the state. This was evident when security forces in Chhattisgarh arming civilian groups for protection against the Maoist threat – in the Salwa Judum campaign in the late 2000s – led to severe human rights violations and lawlessness, before the Supreme Court of India intervened to deem the policy to be illegal. Considering these problems, Assam must reverse its decision.

The university under attack, universities undermined



Arun Kumar

is a retired Professor of Economics from Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), a former President of the JNU Teachers' Association (JNUTA) and Founding President of the Coordination Committee of Teachers' Associations of Delhi (CCCTAD). He is also the author of 'Indian Economy since Independence: Persisting Colonial Disruption' (2023)

Universities are facing an unprecedented challenge. While in India the challenge has been growing over the last three decades, in the United States, it has erupted since President Donald Trump took office in January 2025. The challenge has been growing elsewhere too as society's expectations from universities are changing.

The Trump administration is freezing \$3.2 billion of Harvard University's grants and contracts. There is a move to revoke Harvard's tax-exempt status which will cost it a few hundred million dollars. Harvard's President Alan M. Garber has said that political disagreements could pose an existential threat to educational institutions. Because a cut in funds is being used to coerce universities to change their policies regarding student admissions, protests on campus, faculty recruitment, and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programmes.

In India, the control of institutions of higher learning has increasingly slipped out of the hands of academics to the bureaucrats in the Ministries of Education and the University Grants Commission over the last 40 years. Academics in India are facing growing challenges related to teaching and research. The institutions they work in do not come to their defence, as seen in a recent case of a prestigious private university. All this represents a shift in the fine balance in the societal role of institutions of higher learning. The U.S. system was a model to emulate and even that is being dismantled.

The inherent tension

There is an inherent tension in the social role of universities. On one side they are required to generate socially relevant knowledge to meet the evolving challenges society faces while on the other, they are expected to reproduce the existing societal structures.

To fulfil their creative role, academia requires autonomy. The heart and soul of creativity is what makes societies dynamic. Unfortunately, rulers while paying lip service to this are hollowing it out in practice.

Autonomy enables academics to take a long-term view of emerging social challenges, even anticipating them. Given the accelerating pace of change, by the time society becomes aware of the change, it becomes too late to tackle it. For instance, developments in Artificial Intelligence and social media are leading to challenges for employment, the issue of fake news and the nature of war.

Autonomy enables current orthodoxy to be challenged and facilitates the generation of new knowledge. Without Galileo challenging the Church our understanding of the universe would not have advanced. Further, dynamism comes when academics who are aware of their own assumptions question them.

Academics are a product of a time-consuming

Autonomy and an anti-establishment character are now anathema to regimes across the world with a narrow agenda

process. We do not know how to produce a Mahalanobis. He emerged out of an environment of freedom of thought that a university provides. In a shotgun approach, the system produces original thinkers who change the course of their discipline and give society new leads. The wider the catchment area, the higher the chance of producing excellence.

Autonomy is needed all the way down the line. Universities need autonomy from vested interests to shield individual academics who generate new knowledge. Autonomy is not just for a vice chancellor or a director of an institute but it must be embedded in the structure of the institutions to enable the autonomy of functioning to individual academics.

Autonomy enables academics to develop their own view of their discipline which guides their research and teaching and which helps them resist orthodoxy and imposition so that originality flowers. Challenging orthodoxy ought to be the second nature of academics which includes their own institutions. While that slows down decision making in institutions, it results in more robust decisions. Authorities running these institutions have to accept this and function democratically. Dissent is essential and not a malaise to be eliminated. A bureaucrat or a bureaucratised academic would not understand this and that is why such people are most often not suited to head a university.

Challenging orthodoxy produces the tension between 'what universities ought to be' and 'what rulers expect' of them. Heads of institutions of higher learning have to negotiate this tension and academics are better suited for it than those with bureaucratised mindset.

Cultivating dissent makes universities anti-establishment while the rulers expect them to promote their agenda and reproduce the existing social relations. A feudal system would not like the birthright of the rulers to be challenged and a capitalist system would want docile labour rather than aware workers who challenge the notion of 'dollar vote' that undermines democracy.

Autonomy as impediment?

The anti-establishment character is anathema to regimes with a narrow agenda and lacking in confidence. They limit autonomy to help push their agenda. They neither need new ideas nor value them, thereby downgrading the role of universities and their social status. This forces academics to become status quoist.

Both rapid technical change and marketisation create a mist of the future resulting in short termism and a stultified view of society's future and the past. Complex ideas are neither understood nor valued and are turned into a caricature. An ahistorical view of society is propagated to fit the agenda of the rulers. Existing divides among people are exploited to

further a narrow agenda and propagate conservatism by caricaturing an increasingly complex society. 'Democratization' via the Internet is helping the process by propagating instant ideas and opinions so that the imaginary is perceived to be the reality. This helps the rulers push their agenda.

The U.S. and China have operated with a long-term agenda which has enabled them to dominate the fast globalising world which is witnessing a rapid evolution of technology and ideas. For this, the U.S. created a huge system of independent universities and research institutes and attracted talent from all over the world. This is now being undermined by the attack on U.S. universities and their faculty.

Funding and autonomy

Columbia buckled under pressure but Harvard has stood firm and challenged the government in court. It has received support from academics and over 150 universities. But why are private universities with big endowments dependent on government funding?

Education and research are expensive. The faculty of universities need funds for projects across the board – in science and technology, social science and art and culture. Science and technology is crucial for development. But so is the social environment in which it flourishes. Creativity is multi-dimensional and requires a holistic view of research.

Funds for higher education ought to be free of strings to preserve autonomy. Private sector funding tends to be largely linked to the profit motive and affords limited autonomy. The burden then falls on public funding. This has been the case not only in India but also in the U.S. Only a liberal ruling regime can consider providing unfettered funds.

In India, since the private sector spends little on research, public funding is crucial. Post 1991, public funding in India declined in per capita terms and starved institutions of higher education. This has enabled the state to not only curb autonomy but also push its agenda by appointing people of its own proclivity as the heads of these institutions and also allowing them limited autonomy.

The key role of institutions of higher learning is to generate socially relevant knowledge. This requires autonomy to challenge orthodoxy, which makes them appear to be anti-establishment. This is the social tension in their role as reproducers of societal structures and generators of new knowledge. Creeping short termism has led to a simplistic understanding of society and growing conservatism. Often the imaginary masquerades as new knowledge. All this undermines the value of universities in society and they get hollowed out while retaining the facade and none is left to defend their autonomy. This is what Harvard's Dr. Garber pointed out.

Regulating India's virtual digital assets revolution



Urvil Pathak

is a lawyer working at the intersection of competition law and technology

India continues to lead in grassroots crypto adoption, for the second consecutive year in the 'Geography of Crypto' report by Chainalysis (2024). A National Association of Software and Service Companies (NASSCOM) report finds that Indian retail investors poured \$6.6 billion into crypto assets and predicts the industry could create over eight lakh jobs by 2030. India also boasts one of the largest and fastest-growing web3 developer cohorts.

This vibrancy may seem surprising, given the rocky journey of crypto, known as 'Virtual Digital Assets' (VDA), in India, within the domestic regulatory and policy landscape. In May 2025, the Supreme Court of India questioned the absence of comprehensive and clear crypto regulation in India, with a remark, "Banning may be shutting your eyes to ground reality". This observation highlights the dissonance between VDA reality and VDA policy which has created significant challenges for regulators and market players.

Navigating India's VDA regulatory gaps

India, as a country of strict capital controls and tightly regulated payment systems, has found it difficult to reconcile these frameworks with the decentralised nature of VDAs. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI), as the domestic regulator of monetary policy, began expressing concerns about the potential threats of crypto as early as 2013, highlighting the risks associated with their lack of authorisation from any central bank or monetary authority. Despite this warning, the market saw unassailed growth in India, leading the RBI to issue a second circular in 2018, barring financial institutions from dealing with VDA-related entities. This restriction proved short-lived, with the Court overturning the circular in 2020.

The government then turned to prohibitive taxation policies as a stop-gap measure while appropriate regulations were formulated. In 2022, India implemented two key tax policies for

There is a wide gap between reality and policy, creating challenges for regulators and market players

VDAs under the Income Tax Act: a 1% tax deducted at source (TDS) on VDA transactions exceeding ₹10,000 under Section 194S and a 30% capital gains tax under Section 115BHH which disallows loss offsetting. Although these measures were designed to enhance transparency and curb speculation, their effectiveness has been limited.

Estimates by various industry reports and think tanks show that between July 2022 and December 2023, Indians traded over ₹1.03 trillion worth of VDAs on non-compliant platforms, with only 9% of the estimated ₹1.12 trillion in VDAs held on domestic exchanges. Offshore trading resulted in a loss of ₹2,488 crore in uncollected VDA tax revenue for India. Between December 2023 and October 2024, Indians traded over ₹2.63 trillion on offshore platforms. The cumulative uncollected TDS from offshore exchanges since July 2022 is estimated to exceed ₹60 billion, with the nine blocked exchanges accounting for over 60% of this trading volume. Efforts to block access to non-compliant platforms, such as URL blocking, had limited success. Trade volumes on blocked exchanges rebounded after temporary declines, and web traffic to these platforms rose by 57%. Users continued to bypass restrictions using virtual private networks (VPN), mirror platforms or servers, and by migrating to other non-compliant exchanges.

Role of VASPs

Guidelines by global standard-setting bodies, such as the International Monetary Fund, Financial Stability Board, and the Financial Action Task Force, converge in favour of comprehensive and risk-based regulation that is harmonised with international standards (a process that is underway). However, these frameworks and regulations rely on domestic, compliant intermediaries or Virtual Asset Service Providers (VASP) that act as the bridge and eyes for regulators. These intermediaries facilitate the

alignment of the VDA industry with existing laws and enforcement of policies, and enhance visibility over the ecosystem, while providing crucial inputs concerning on-ground issues.

In contrast, India's existing policy regime, which inadvertently pushes VDA users to offshore, non-compliant platforms, erodes the country's ability to mitigate the risks presented by VDAs, as well as tax revenues that may have otherwise been collected.

In comparison, Indian VASP platforms are sharpening their teeth and maturing rapidly, having shown a willingness to comply with regulations and act in good faith. For example, their collaboration with the Financial Intelligence Unit-India has been instrumental in strengthening anti-money laundering and counter-terror financing controls, earning positive feedback from the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). The aftermath of the devastating hack in 2024, which wiped out \$230 million, further showcased proactive measures by Indian exchanges. Many stepped up efforts such as enhancing cyber security measures, setting up dedicated insurance funds in case of future thefts, and uniting to develop and enforce industry-wide cybersecurity guidelines.

Need for a framework

These possibilities signal the critical role played by VASPs towards a safer digital asset ecosystem. Combined with their contributions to national value creation and economic growth, these platforms present a more viable and constructive channel for funds to flow through under the oversight of Indian regulators. To move beyond the current policy status – where tax is levied without meaningful regulation – a balanced, pragmatic and future-proof regulatory framework is necessary. India must take decisive action to create the comprehensive legislation that the crypto industry requires while mitigating associated risks.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CDS statement, fog clears

The Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan's statement, that an unspecified number of India's fighter jets were downed during the hostilities with Pakistan in May, is sure to give ammunition to the Opposition parties and their earlier claims (Page 1, June

1). The Government could have avoided this embarrassing situation had it functioned transparently. When losses are a part of any combat scenario, one wonders why the government was so reluctant to brief the nation on the subject. **Kuhirasagara Balaji Rao, Hyderabad**

The CDS has put an end to the attempts at obfuscation by the Government about losses during Operation Sindoor. When the demand was raised by some Opposition parties and the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, the news that he tried to confuse the country and, worse, labelled the Opposition as

anti-national. The Centre has no fig leaf now to block the demand by the Opposition to hold a special session of Parliament. **Ayyasari Ravendranath, Aramula, Kerala**

The CDS's silence on the extent of India's losses raises more questions than answers. It is clear that

India lost something significant on the first day of its confrontation with Pakistan. The people have the right to know the extent of these 'losses in the air'. **S. Ramakrishnasayee, Chennai**

Valmik Thapar
The passing of naturalist Valmik Thapar is a loss for

wildlife management too. His bond with Ranthambore and his deep study and works are invaluable contributions to the conservation of India's pride, the tiger. **Monita Satherson, Nagercoil, Tamil Nadu**

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



THEIR VIEW

MINT CURATOR

GDP tunnel-vision could prove costly: Let's redefine prosperity

This measure doesn't capture inequality and its maximization often rewards activities that hurt democracy and the planet



KAUSHIK BASU
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In mainstream economics, description is routinely treated as secondary to analysis. Labelling a work as 'purely descriptive' conveys dismissiveness. Yet, as Nobel laureate economist Amartya Sen observed in a seminal 1980 paper, every act of description involves choices. Whether we are describing a historical event, an individual or a country, what we choose to include and what we leave out can be critical. Description shapes perception. And perception, in turn, can profoundly influence behaviour.

Describing the state of a country's economy is a complicated task. In the past, scholars wrote lengthy volumes debating whether one country was doing better than another. But over time, globally, a single measure has come to dominate the conversation: gross domestic product, or GDP for short, which represents the value of all goods and services produced within a country in a given year. With some adjustments, it also approximates the population's total income. It is an astonishingly concise metric, often used as shorthand for economic well-being.

As Diane Coyle noted in her 2014 book on the history of GDP, its emergence marked a watershed moment in economic policymaking. Developed by Simon Kuznets in the early 1930s, GDP has brought much-needed rigour to policy debates. Politicians could no longer simply point to tall buildings as evidence of progress (though many still do). Today, assessing a country's economic performance over time means tracking the growth of its GDP.

To be sure, there are other ways to assess national well-being, such as the United Nations Human Development Index and the World Bank's shared prosperity indicator. But when it comes to determining whether one economy is outperforming another, GDP or GDP per capita remains the default benchmark.

While GDP has undoubtedly played a valuable role in modern economics, its limitations are increasingly difficult to ignore.

Over time, it has become an end in itself, enabling politicians to use growth figures as a convenient distraction from persistent social and economic fractures. Growing unease with GDP-centric policy thinking was powerfully articulated in UN Secretary-General António Guterres's 2021 report *Our Common Agenda*, which urged global policymakers to embrace a broader set of progress indicators.

As an economic indicator, GDP has three key weaknesses.

First, by focusing solely on a country's total income, it can create the illusion of widespread prosperity, even when inequality is rising. GDP per capita can rise even as a majority becomes worse off. As Joseph E. Stiglitz put it in his 2010



book *Freefall*, "A larger pie does not mean everyone—or even most people—gets a larger slice." But most people may celebrate GDP growth nonetheless—much like they cheer their country's Olympic medal count—without questioning who actually benefits.

This concern was highlighted by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress, which was established in 2008 by then-French President Nicolas Sarkozy and included Joseph Stiglitz, Amartya Sen and other prominent economists. Its final report called for incorporating measures like income distribution and inequality into GDP.

The second weakness of GDP is that its maximization often rewards activities that undermine democratic governance. Being super-rich, after all, involves more than just owning more cars, mansions, planes and yachts. Extreme wealth, especially in the age of social media and AI, also means having a louder voice and disproportionate influence over how people think.

In traditional societies, when a feudal lord entered a village council meeting, ordinary people who may have been arguing and pleading for

change just moments earlier would fall silent. That same dynamic is now playing out on a global scale.

As wealth becomes concentrated in fewer hands, and as a handful of online platforms shape what billions of internet users see and hear, many are discovering that they are losing their voice—the most essential instrument of democracy.

Clearly, the time has come to develop new measures of national progress that do not strengthen the forces threatening democracy. As US Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis famously warned, "We can have democracy in this country, or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we can't have both."

Lastly, GDP can be inflated at the expense of future generations. We can and do boost GDP growth by engaging in activities that damage the environment and accelerate climate change, leaving our descendants with a scorched earth. Given this, merely acknowledging the urgency of climate action is no longer enough.

To ensure a sustainable future, we must reform our most prominent measure of economic welfare so that sustainability is central to how we define prosperity.

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The success of AI gadgets will depend on how they ease lives

These gizmos have been overhyped so far but that could change



CATHERINE THORBECKE
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Can Jonathan Ive and OpenAI help flip the fortunes of AI hardware?

Where are all the artificial intelligence (AI) consumer gadgets? Even a year ago, it seemed tech companies were working to incorporate the technology into every physical device, from coffee makers to vacuum cleaners, making 'AI-powered' hardware seem like it would soon be as ubiquitous as 'battery-powered' electronics.

Typically, tech conferences offer a glimmer of these futuristic toys. Not all of them end up hitting the market, but it's where we can dream a little about new pocket devices or household robots taking on a greater role in our lives.

So it was a little disappointing last week at Asia's biggest artificial intelligence conference, Taiwan's Computex, to find hardly any mention of consumer-facing tech. Most keynotes focused on enterprise applications of AI, such as agents or automated manufacturing. Walking around the exhibitors' hall, the only thing that caught my eye were wireless computer mice shaped like cats.

A few things seem to have changed. For starters, there's the reality that hardware engineering presents an entirely different set of physical challenges compared to tinkering with AI software. And a global trade war also makes it a risky time to launch a new gadget when it's unclear if consumers are interested. Companies also may be starting to pick up on the fact that while Wall Street is awash with global hype on an AI boom, it isn't exactly a selling point on Main Street.

If anything, some of the executives speaking at the conference threw cold water on the next generations of these AI-first consumer products.

Asustek Computer co-chief executive officer Samson Iu told *Bloomberg News* that it will take another year or more for AI-powered PCs to go mainstream because the technology isn't quite there yet and macroeconomic uncertainty is impacting people's spending. There have been few compelling use cases for AI PCs so far, despite the mountain of promotion.

Meanwhile, the graveyard of AI hardware that was supposed to transform our lives is already growing. The Humane AI Pin wearable device—launched last year to much hype about how it was going to replace the smartphone—got brutal reviews and turned out to be a fire hazard. The startup, run by two former Apple employees, stopped selling its AI Pin earlier this year and was sold for parts.

The Rabbit R1 assistant (a stand-alone hand-held AI assistant device) is another

cautionary tale of the false promises of these gadgets.

But that doesn't mean the future of AI consumer products is not on its way. OpenAI made a major announcement last week that it is working with legendary iPhone designer, Jony Ive, to launch something that takes AI into the physical realm for consumers. But even the night of OpenAI's technology and Ive's design prowess make whatever it is they have in mind a far-from-certain bet.

There were perhaps some lessons for the future of such devices from the gathering in Taiwan. During his keynote speech, Qualcomm CEO Cristiano Amon said that AI computers are at a phase where they will require the work of outside developers to make them appeal to consumers. The iPhone, for example, didn't take off right after it was launched. But it became essential to so many people because of the myriad apps developers built on top of it that we now use to hail taxis, order food or move around new cities. "Really, the developer ecosystem is going to make this shift to AI PCs," Amon said. He's right, and the same is true beyond just AI computers.

For any revolutionary AI hardware device, especially a smartphone killer, the more that global developers lead the charge to meet peoples' needs and solve small everyday problems, the more likely they are to succeed.

In this economy, maybe that doesn't mean repackaging the same old gadgets with shiny new AI labels. It means iterating and perfecting real use cases that incorporate the buzzy technology into devices and make our lives easier. And this will inevitably be a collective effort.

AI is already transforming our world in small ways. I find asking ChatGPT to quickly translate phrases for me while on the go a lifesaver when I need to navigate a new country. But I hardly want to shell out money to carry around a new device simply to access ChatGPT.

The more the tech industry tries to slap AI onto everything and market it as a panacea for all our problems, the more I get a snake-oil salesman's kick.

The future of AI hardware won't come in a magical new gadget, it will be built by tackling these tasks one-by-one and not all at once.

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MY VIEW | GENERAL DISEQUILIBRIUM

Our growth and urban planning: On different planets

RAJRISHI SINGHAL



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Metro stations in Athens are like archaeological museums, featuring pottery shards and other artefacts discovered during excavations. Moscow's subway stops are like art galleries, grandiose and distinctive, adorned with ornate chandeliers and striking murals. Mumbai's recently inaugurated mid-town metro station, in contrast, turned into a water-world on 26 May, with the season's first downpour flooding its concourse and platforms. This embarrassing incident symbolizes problems with India's haphazard urbanization and its official approach to infrastructure build-up. More critically, it highlights laxity in recognizing the effects of climate change.

What made the incident doubly disconcerting were proclamations by Niti Aayog CEO B.V.R. Subrahmanyam that the Indian economy had become the world's fourth-largest. The incongruity between that statement and the lived experience of Mumbai commuters and Indians coping with sub-par infrastructure elsewhere was striking.

Yet, there was a common link between that statement and the flooding episode: Subrahmanyam seemed to have jumped the gun (we'll know if the Indian economy has overtaken Japan's only once the current year is over), a precipitate action like the metro station being pressed into service before it was made rain-proof. The episode also underscored the death of irony: officials attributed the flood to untimely monsoon downpours despite common knowledge that a coastal city like Mumbai witnesses heavy rainfall for four months every year.

But it is not just Mumbai. The previous day saw Delhi reeling under the season's first cloudburst, with streets and underpasses flooded. A few days earlier, unseasonal May rainfall flooded large parts of Bengaluru's extended city, damaging property and causing large-scale economic losses. City after city in India suffers from the same problems every year, and yet the political or administrative classes seem either helpless in solving such well-known problems or incapable of preventing their recurrence.

It is also a fact that climate change has altered weather patterns, but authorities do not seem to have taken this into their calculations. Mumbai's monsoons, for example, are getting increasingly erratic in terms of

both timing and precipitation. Yet, infrastructure projects—whether it is roads or metro station walls—routinely fail to take this into account.

This anomaly sits uneasily with India's growing urbanization: about 40% of the population lives in urban areas, with many experts claiming that the number may be closer to 50% or even higher. This data uncertainty has arisen because a large section of the urban population resides in informal shelters, invisible to the formal gaze but most vulnerable to urban failures. Every city depends on this section for the delivery of multiple services, but is typically blind to their income, education, housing or health needs. Worse, they are not covered by any labour laws and usually do not have any rights. In the triangulation between various interest groups in an urban settlement—the entrepreneurial class and those employed in the formal sector, the political class, bureaucrats, municipal authorities and real estate developers—

this section usually gets the short end of the stick. With little or no access to waste collection mechanisms, modern sanitation systems or health facilities, this cohort suffers the harshest impact of climate change and extreme weather events. Yet, the country's big-budget urban build-up seems to ignore their needs.

Every monsoon is a reminder of the divergence between what cities need and their build-up of infrastructure

A Niti Aayog report titled *Urban Planning Capacity in India* ascribes the continuing urbanization crisis to a lack of urban planning. "For this reason, as the state and city governments continue to solve urban issues in a firefighting mode, urban areas struggle to achieve 'basic services for all'... India's urban story may be lauded globally or suffer irreversible damages in the next 10-15 years depending on corrective policy measures and actions taken at the beginning of this decade." Written in September 2021, the lack of any remedial action since then is already manifesting itself across multiple malfunctions, collapses and avoidable disasters.

The report also points to a lack of qualified urban planners in the state planning machinery: against 12,000 town planners required at all levels then, there were less than 4,000 sanctioned posts, with half of those lying vacant. What the report fails to mention, though, is that state governments have largely outsourced urban planning to real-estate developers and infrastructure contractors. Projects are designed, finalized and executed based on interests divergent from user interests. This was amply evident in Mumbai over the past 36 months after the city's municipal corporation, under guidance from the state government instead of formal urban governance structures, unleashed multiple construction projects that choked city traffic and worsened air quality.

The Smart Cities mission was conceived about 10 years ago, though there is still little clarity about what makes cities 'smart' and whether any city has actually become any smarter. Problems of urbanization in India have also been well documented along with solutions. The smart thing would be to implement some of those suggestions immediately, especially those that will make cities not only more empathetic, but also more resilient to economic downturns and extreme weather events.

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[OUR TAKE]

Projecting the right message

CDS's comments on Operation Sindoor point to need for a nuanced communication strategy

Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan's comments on tactical mistakes that led to the loss of an undisclosed number of fighter jets during Operation Sindoor — India's strikes on terror and military installations in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) following the terror strikes at Pahalgam — are significant. That's because of the communication strategy, or the lack of one, that is evident in the comments. It is not clear why the first explicit admission of fighter jet losses had to come in an interview given overseas to two foreign news agencies.

From the first briefing, the messaging from India has been that all the pilots were safe, which suggested that reports of jet losses were not untrue. That jets would be lost is understandable in a conflict of this nature — one where the Indian Air Force (IAF) took on the challenge of taking out targets deep inside Pakistan. It was assumed that once the heat and the dust of the battle was over, IAF would share details of how many jets were lost, and how.

Instead, in response to a question that he and his handlers must have known would be coming, the CDS spoke not just of jet losses, but also tactical mistakes that were corrected in subsequent strikes. Again, it is not clear why this admission had to be made now, and to foreign news agencies. Everyone, including international experts who have pored over detailed satellite imagery, admit that India was the clear winner in the battle, and inflicted significant damage on key Pakistani military installations. That is the only message that needs amplification.

New Delhi has also sought to take the high moral ground after — sending outreach teams to various corners of the world to share its position on what Pakistan-sponsored terrorism necessitated Operation Sindoor, and how it is difficult for India to discuss anything else with that country, including water sharing, as long as it continues to foster, encourage, support and sponsor terror groups targeting India. To admit to tactical mistakes — even if only to make the point that they were corrected and India went on to inflict more damage on Pakistani military installations — at this stage seems to be not just a case of bad timing, but also poor communication.

"History," says a quote attributed to several people, most notably Winston Churchill, "is written by the victors". But in this day and age, they are not going to be able to do that without getting their communication strategy right.

A train of hope, from Jammu to Mumbai

In any other context, a train carrying produce from one region to another may make for humdrum imagery, but when it is one from Jammu and Kashmir, carrying cherries to Maharashtra, it evokes expectations centred on multiple possibilities. One, it opens up the market for horticulture farmers from the Union Territory, not just in fruits such as cherries, apples, apricots, and even Ladakh's sea buckthorn berries, but also for a wide variety of flowers. For a region whose horticulture potential has not been fully tapped due to lack of market access — despite linkages that have come up in the past couple of decades — access to new markets through railways is a significant boost, and one that hastens its integration with the economic mainstream. Two, it drastically reduces transport time — from J&K to Mumbai in less than 35 hours compared to the six to seven days taken by road transport — facilitating less deterioration in the quality of perishables, and thereby, better realisation of prices. This is especially significant given the cold storage capacity in the UT is a small fraction of just its annual apple production, let alone other fruit. Three, it takes a significant load off the highways and city roads, freeing these up for other traffic.

There are, of course, much broader implications for the UT. With the tertiary sector of its economy — it contributes over 60% to its gross domestic product — being largely tourism-driven, there is an urgent need to diversify. Horticulture already contributes close to 10% of the UT's GDP and the potential for expansion, especially exotic vegetables besides fruits such as apricots, plums, and cherries, is immense. With the railways set to connect the Kashmir Valley with the rest of India soon, the cargo train transporting produce from Jammu to Mumbai is, hopefully, the harbinger of things to come. Economic integration with easy market access will boost J&K's political integration with the rest of India.

Transforming India's innovation ecosystem

The building blocks are clear — world-class talent, robust infrastructure, strong industry-academia linkages, and catalytic public procurement

Classical growth models treated technology as an exogenous factor that drives development. However, modern growth theory suggests technology is an endogenous factor, a product of investments in education, innovation, and ideas. This has not yet fully leveraged our innovation potential.

India's research and development (R&D) expenditure, as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP), remains around 0.7% — in comparison, it is 5.2% for South Korea, 2.6% for China, and 3.6% for the US. To bridge this gap, the 41 lakh crore R&D fund announced in July 2024 and the fund of funds for deep tech announced in February 2025 must be operationalised at the earliest.

While we are granting more patents than ever — over 100,000 granted in 2023-24 — most of them remain uncommercialised. A study by the Fraunhofer Institute reveals that, over the last decade, payments for intellectual property rights (IPR) have increased from \$4.8 billion to \$14 billion.

The number of IPR receipts have doubled from 0.7 to 1.5 billion. Thus, there is a wide gap between patents and receipts.

At the same time, global dynamics are shifting. Advanced economies are cutting funding for research departments and universities. In the US, tensions are escalating between Harvard University and the Trump administration. Norms on student visas are also becoming stricter in developed countries. This is an opportune time for India to make a strategic leap forward in building our innovation ecosystem. We need to attract and retain talent, and we need the infrastructure.

Existing schemes, such as the Visiting Advanced Joint Research Faculty (VAJRF) and the Global Initiative for Academic Networks (GIAN), are extremely limited in scope. We need to think big and bring the best Indian minds back to India.

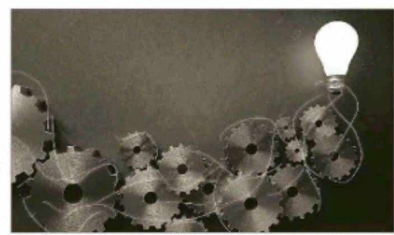
A dedicated national programme with two tracks can help do this. Under Track 1, we should aim to invite 500 top academics from the world's top 100 universities. These researchers should be required to spend six months of the year in India for the next five years. A startup grant of \$1 million can be provided to set up research labs or projects. The goal should be to build local capacity. Track 2 can focus on offering sabbaticals to faculty from the top 200 universities. These sabbaticals can be supported by grants of \$100,000, with annual top-ups. These researchers should be required to engage and mentor students, ensuring knowledge transfer and ecosystem development.

We also need to build the requisite infrastructure for an innovation ecosystem. We need world-class innovation infrastructure, not just for design, but also for prototyping and testing — crucial for product development. Common prototyping labs and design studios in our academic institutes are one avenue. Advanced testing facilities and labs across sectors should be established, in and around clusters. In partnership with educational institutes.

Our experience with digital public infrastructure (DPI) and open-access data provides a solid foundation. Take, for instance, the compute clusters being provided under the IndiaAI Mission. Similar models can be explored in deep tech areas.

If we are to become a product nation, then the gap between academic and industrial research needs to be bridged. There are several successful models worldwide. The Warwick Manufacturing Group (WMG) is a pioneering example. Based at the University of Warwick, it brings together researchers and industry, innovating across sectors such as auto, health care, and batteries, among others. Not just industrial research, but the centre offers academic degrees at all levels, degree internships, and hosts a skills-centre. This can serve as a potential model for India to emulate in leading institutes or Institutes of Eminence.

Each year, hundreds of thousands of



The gap between academic and industrial research needs to be bridged. There are several successful models worldwide.

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our students go abroad to study in countries such as the US, the UK, Australia, and Canada. Increasingly, we are seeing countries tighten norms on student visas. Immigration routes are also becoming stricter post-education. While we spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on education, an alternative could be to invite these global universities to set up campuses in India. Monash University in Australia and the University of Nottingham in the UK, for instance, have set up campuses in Malaysia, New York University (NYU) set up campuses in Abu Dhabi and Shanghai. These universities collaborated with the government, industry, and existing academic institutes to establish and scale up operations. This would allow India to retain talent first, but also attract students from the Global South.

Apart from playing an enabling role, governments worldwide have also given a boost to the innovation ecosystem by becoming key buyers of technology. The US Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) is a pertinent example. DARPA catalysed breakthroughs like the internet and GPS, for instance. The Union government can play a similar role, catalysing innovations into real-world solutions, especially in the socio-economic

sphere. Our socio-economic challenges require innovative solutions with a public purpose. India can take the lead in the technologies that will define the future — AI, quantum computing, green hydrogen, and semiconductors — through this approach. Grand challenges can play a catalytic role in this aspect. With outcome-based tenders and phased grants with buy-back commitments, the government can send strong market signals and reduce technology adoption risk.

To emerge as a true innovation leader, India must act with urgency and ambition. The building blocks are clear — world-class talent, robust infrastructure, strong industry-academia linkages, and catalytic public procurement. These steps will help India transition from being a consumer of global technologies to a developer of frontier solutions. Transforming India's innovation ecosystem needs both direction from government policy and participation of private enterprise. This is not a time for incrementalism. We need to act boldly, and private enterprise must be at the heart of this transformation.

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

[STRAIGHTFORWARD]

Shashi Shekhar



India's development story and the PM's contribution

‘Chin ki zindagi jio, roti kha warna meri goli to hai hi (Live peacefully, eat your bread or I am ready with bullets).’

These words uttered by Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi in a live broadcast from the border district of Bhuj were viral throughout the country and the globe. His detractors may insist that the discourse resembled Hindi film dialogues, but messages like these fill a large section of Indians with pride.

Was it a coincidence that it was the day PM Modi completed 11 years in office in Delhi? He will complete the first year of his third term next week. Last June 8, when he assumed office, his opponents were gloating. They felt a golden opportunity was just around the corner to snatch the crutches the NDA allies provided to the BJP that was short of a simple majority in the Lok Sabha. A year later, that idea seems hollow and distant. Consider the Waqf bill.

Despite reluctance from the NDA allies, the Janata Dal (United) and Telugu Desam Party, the BJP neither backed down nor toned down its aggressive stance. Modi has crafted his communication and administrative style assiduously and with great patience.

If you have any doubts, please look at his years in power since 2014 to date. He has kept using a language that establishes him as a straight-shooting and strong leader among his voters. Traditionalists may frown on his style, but in a democracy, voters decide what's acceptable or not. What can be a bigger stamp of approval than that Modi hasn't lost a single election to date?

But don't be under any illusion that Modi succeeds merely through self-protection. As a PM, he has made some landmark moves. He has convinced the citizens that he is committed to their welfare round the clock by initiating the world's largest food distribution scheme, a phenomenally expanded road and railway network, the indigenisation of armament production, Gati Shakti, Ayushman schemes and many others. He has given special attention to women and the deprived sections of society. Naming a military action as Operation Sindoor was perfect messaging, conveying the task and its import while touching women's hearts. This is the first time that we have used a language that establishes security policy, and on the domestic front, Maoism is being dealt a final body blow.

As far as the security on our border and integrity of our nation is concerned, Modi is the first PM who has shown remarkable acuity in expanding the road and railway network near the sensitive Sino-Indian border. I would like to mention a headline that appeared last week. Mizoram's capital, Aizawl, is now connected by rail. Till now, four out of seven state capitals in the Northeast are connected with the railway. In Uttarakhand, work to extend the railway line to Badrinath is moving at a fast pace. Some of these plans were conceived by the earlier governments. But the present government showed a willingness and tendency to complete them. It's a unique blend of holistic development and security.

Modi has his own theory to cut slack in

governance.

While working as an RSS pracharak and later as a BJP functionary, he always felt there was a serious lack of coordination between the organisation, government, and the bureaucracy. During the Bhuj earthquake in 2001 on January 26, there was widespread destruction and chaos. Realising that things were getting out of hand, PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee and the home minister, LK Advani, made Modi the state chief minister as he was a veteran of the state party unit and had vast experience working in the state.

Till then, Modi wasn't even a legislator and had no experience in governance. Yet his priorities and focus were clear. He devoted his entire energies to rebuilding and rehabilitation of the devastated areas. Resources were summoned, the distracted and dissipated energies of the state bureaucracy were channelled, and the victims of the tragedy were taken on board.

If you visit Dholavira, 136 kilometres from the district headquarters of Bhuj, you will find tarred roads amidst white sands of the desert, tanks for water supply, schools, and electricity. Even in the remote desert areas of Kutch, soldiers are provided with tap water, which was once considered impossible.

Modi brought the same work culture to the seat of the central government in Delhi. Before him, the regional leaders would try to mould themselves to the standards of urbanity and etiquette set by the British-influenced Lutyens Delhi elite. Modi was a stark contrast, presenting himself as a symbol of Indianity and has been steadfast in his approach. We can debate that Vajpayee and Deve Gowda too maintained an Indian ethos. However, they failed to project the requisite energy. Modi's style connects with Indians and creates a unique people internationally.

Here, a question arises: Did former PMs do any good? Sure, many major landmark actions have been achieved, but never have so many people been enamoured of a leader for so long. Modi knows it is necessary to show a report card to the citizens periodically to maintain their morale. The Mann Ki Baar outreach programme on the radio was one such experiment that maintained his constant connect with the masses.

However, there are many grossities and initiatives that come under heavy criticism. He's accused of many other things, too, but in a democracy, there is no harm if development and debate coexist. Recently, news appeared that India became the fourth largest economy in the world, leaving behind Japan; now it has to go past Germany to become the third largest economy. Some experts think that it would take some more time before we go past Japan's economy, but does this nit-picking matter? The fact is, as the last week's Reserve Bank of India (RBI) report indicates, we remain one of the fastest growing large economies in the world.

It's clear that India's development story is on course despite many challenges, and we can't deny Modi's role in it.

Shashi Shekhar is editor-in-chief, Hindustan. The views expressed are personal

[ZHANG XIAOGANG | DEFENCE MINISTRY SPOKESPERSON, CHINA]

China's armed forces will work with other countries in the region to oppose hegemonism harming the Asia-Pacific region

In response to US defence secretary Pete Hegseth's comments at the Shangri-La Dialogues



India's cities deserve more than token decentralisation

The 74th Constitutional Amendment Act (CAA) that came into force on June 1, 1993, promised to institutionalise democratic decentralisation in India's cities. When the Bill was presented in Parliament in 1991, the statement of objects acknowledged that many Urban Local Governments (ULGs) had become weak and ineffective due to irregular elections, prolonged suppression, and inadequate devolution of powers.

India's municipal governance journey dates back to 1857 with the formation of the first municipal corporation in Madras (now Chennai). The 74th CAA promised empowered, accountable, and participatory city governments by granting them constitutional status and establishing a national governance. Over three decades later, that promise remains fulfilled more in letter than in spirit.

In hindsight, the 74th Amendment addressed a historic backlog more than it offered a forward-looking blueprint. It fell short of anticipating the institutional demands of large cities in a liberalising economy.

India has witnessed unprecedented economic growth and urbanisation from 1991-92 to 2024-25. The GDP has grown 15-fold from \$270 billion to over \$3.7 trillion. The Union government's urban development rose from \$600 crore to \$82.56 crore. The urban population surged from 217 million to an estimated 520 million. India ranks second globally in urbanisation, with nearly 37% of its population living in 8,500 urban centres, including more than 4,800 statutory towns and 53 metropolitan areas. By 2030, urban areas are expected to contribute 75% of the GDP. Several states have also invested significantly in urban infrastructure over the past decade. Yet, local governance reforms have lagged behind this development push. Without empowered, accountable city governments, India's aspiration to become a developed nation by 2047 will remain elusive.

A landmark audit on the implementation of the 74th CAA across 18 states by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India found that, on average, only four of the 18 (22%) functions mandated under the Constitution have been fully devolved to ULGs. Over 60% of ULGs lacked elected councils. State Finance Commissions were delayed by 412 days on average. ULGs face a 66% shortfall in per capita spending, and a 42% resource-expenditure gap. Citizen engagement in planning and budgeting is minimal, with committees largely defunct. Meanwhile, Union and state governments continue to dominate urban development through schemes and parastatals, bypassing elected councils; 72% of

urban infrastructure is financed by Union and state governments. ULGs lack control over core functions like planning, water supply, sanitation, housing, and transport. In many cities, even Group D staff appointments require higher-level approval. ULGs have been reduced to extensions of state governments. The consequences are visible: Water shortages, crumbling streets, flooded neighbourhoods, choked roads, overcrowded transport, and a deteriorating environment.

India can no longer afford a business-as-usual approach to urban governance. To change the status quo, we must move beyond token acknowledgements of the 74th Amendment's limited achievements. A reform strategy must be structured around three components: Measure, Map, and Mandate.

Measure: The Union ministry of housing and urban affairs (MoHUA) lacks a comprehensive assessment of urban decentralisation. Until the CAG audits began in 2020, there was no authoritative data of the 74th Amendment implementation. In contrast, the ministry of Panchayati Raj has conducted seven assessments since the 73rd CAA and tracks panchayat performance via Panchayat Development Index. MoHUA and state Urban Development Departments (UDDs) must build capacity to measure and monitor decentralisation in real-time, linking data to reform-oriented grants and programmes.

Map: Roles and responsibilities across all levels of government and civic agencies must be clearly mapped and harmonised. States must relinquish excessive control and empower ULGs with policy, finance, knowledge and human resources. Elected councils and mayors must have democratic oversight over all agencies operating in their cities.

Mandate: The Centre must initiate a second wave of constitutional reforms to strengthen the 74th CAA — closing existing loopholes and future-proofing decentralisation. This includes differentiated governance models for metros, and emerging and small cities; guaranteed devolution of functions; time-bound elections; empowered ward committees and area sabhas; and fiscal decentralisation through stable revenue streams and formula-based transfers. The amendment must specify mayoral tenure, delimitation and reservation timelines, revenue entitlements, and citizen forums definitively.

The 74th Amendment was a constitutional promise. It's time we honour it.

Santosh Nargund is head of participatory governance at Janagraha Centre for Citizenship and Democracy. The views expressed are personal

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Aircraft losses

Govt should take a cue from CDS's admission

CHIEF of Defence Staff (CDS) Gen Anil Chauhan has indicated that Operation Sindoor was not a smooth, flawless affair. India did suffer aircraft losses, even though the country's political leadership has remained evasive. According to the CDS, "we were able to understand the tactical mistakes" and do course correction quickly. His honest admission takes nothing away from the success of Operation Sindoor. In fact, it shows that India's armed forces were not at all rattled by early reversals; instead, they regrouped in no time to strike deep inside Pakistani territory and inflict heavy damage. Gen Chauhan has stopped short of specifying how many Indian jets were downed, though he has described Pakistan's claim of shooting down six as "absolutely incorrect".

The Opposition, particularly the Congress, has been urging the government to clear the air on this contentious issue, but to no avail. At a media briefing on May 11, the day after the ceasefire was announced, the Indian Air Force's Director General of Air Operations, Air Marshal AK Bharti, acknowledged that "losses are a part of combat" and all IAF pilots had returned home safely. He left it at that, thus keeping the veil of secrecy intact. It is apparent that the government is not keen on making these details public, perhaps fearing that this would take the shine off India's fierce response to the Pahalgalam terror attack.

There is no quarrel with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's argument that Operation Sindoor is the biggest and most successful anti-terror operation in the nation's history. However, brushing an uncomfortable fact under the carpet betrays a disturbing disregard for transparency. The government must tell the nation about the losses in no uncertain terms and set up a probe committee to figure out how and why things went wrong. This will surely help the armed forces learn lessons and avoid a repeat.

Covid surge

Calm vigilance needed, not panic

THE sudden 1,200 per cent surge in Covid-19 cases in India over the past week — rising from just 257 to over 3,385 active cases — and the death of a few patients in this period call for more than a passing glance. While the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and World Health Organisation (WHO) stress that the current wave, driven by Omicron sub-variants LF7, XFG, JN.1, and NB.1.8.1, remains mostly mild, the spike across Kerala, Maharashtra and Delhi cannot be ignored. Despite reassurances, experience has taught us the price of underestimating early indicators. Mild symptoms can mutate. Immunity may wane. And healthcare, especially in rural pockets, remains vulnerable. While there is no need to panic, the complacency that has crept into the public psyche with masks and testing nearly forgotten, is risky.

What is reassuring is that both the ICMR and the WHO confirm that the existing vaccines remain effective against the newer strains. Notably, the WHO has classified LF7 and NB.1.8.1 as "variants under monitoring", adding that the current data does not show increased severity of infections. But science can only go so far without community cooperation. The response must now focus on ramping up surveillance under the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme, intensifying genome-sequencing and making testing accessible again. Punjab's decision to increase testing is a welcome step, especially as past trends suggest surges in Delhi often precede those in the neighbouring regions. Other states must follow suit rather than wait for the numbers to climb.

Let this serve as a reminder: vigilance need not be alarmist, but silence in the face of spikes is carelessness. India has time to respond judiciously if it acts now. A mask, a test, a jab — these are still our best defence.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, TUESDAY, JUNE 2, 1925

Commonwealth of India Bill

IT is not surprising to learn that the Commonwealth of India Bill has already been accepted in principle at several public meetings both in Bombay and elsewhere. The principles of this Bill are for the most part common ground among all political parties in this country, among all who believe in dominion self-government as the goal of our political endeavour in the present conditions, and in peaceful constitutional agitation as the means by which that goal is to be attained. The most important of these principles is that India is to have such a Constitution that she may never again have to go to Westminster for anything she desires in the shape of political reform or progress. Practically, the only powers which for the present are to be withheld from the responsible part of the Government and reserved to the Viceroy as the representative of the British Government are as regards defence, and provision is made in the Bill for the automatic transfer of these powers to the responsible part of the Government without any further reference to the British Government or Parliament. There is to be a Defence Commission with a majority of Indians thereon, every five years, to be appointed by the Viceroy in consultation with the Cabinet, which is to recommend a minimum of non-votable expenditure for the defence forces and also report on the progress of the Indianisation of those forces. In case of disagreement, the Viceroy will have the power to secure the minimum which, in his opinion, is necessary for the defence forces, provided that no revenue of India is to be spent on any branch of the forces in which Indians are ineligible for holding commissioned ranks.

More misses than hits for Congress

The party has been raising pertinent questions, but has failed to wrest the initiative

AJAY K MEHRA
POLITICAL SCIENTIST

IT was inevitable that the Pahalgalam terror attack and Operation Sindoor would trigger a political slugfest between the Centre and the main Opposition party, the Congress. While the Modi government rightly took retaliatory measures, the Opposition got an opportunity to raise several pertinent questions, even as it initially showed solidarity with the government in national interest. The Congress did well to draw the nation's attention to possible security lapses that led to the loss of 26 innocent lives, besides the purported loss of jets during the May 7-10 operation. Following Chief of Defence Staff Gen Anil Chauhan's admission of aircraft losses, the Congress has become more vocal about its demand for holding a special session of Parliament.

The party has also been asking questions regarding the "sudden" ceasefire and US President Donald Trump's claim that he facilitated the truce by issuing "no trade" threats to both India and Pakistan. The government has been on the defensive over this issue.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi nonetheless took a smart step by deciding to send multi-party delegations to various countries to expose Pakistan and explain the Indian position. The government asked various parties to recommend names of leaders to be included in the delegations.

Each party has its own internal dynamics that would have influenced this exercise. The Congress sent a list of four leaders — Anand Sharma,

GLOBAL OUTREACH: Rahul Gandhi and Mallikarjun Kharge should have welcomed the selection of Congress leaders for the multi-party delegations. *see*

Gaurav Gogoi, Syed Naseer Hussain and Amarinder Singh Raja Warring. Looking to embarrass the Congress, the BJP retained only Sharma's name. It also chose four other Congress leaders — Shashi Tharoor, Amar Singh, Manish Tewari and Salman Khurshid. And adding insult to the party's injury, Tharoor was made the leader of a delegation.

Visibly irked, the Congress faltered in reacting to this development. First, it made its annoyance apparent, which sent a wrong message both to delegation members as well as the government. Second, soon after this episode, Rahul Gandhi unleashed a direct attack on External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, addressing him as "JJ" and accusing him of tipping off Pakistan about Operation Sindoor.

One of the most articulate and erudite Congress leaders today, Tharoor did not miss the chance to further annoy Rahul and the party by concurring with the Prime Minister and

be found wanting."

The Congress' confusion was clear as its communications incharge Jai Ram Ramesh said, "...the party recommended four names after Kiren Rijiju spoke with Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and Leader of the Opposition (LoP) in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi." He did not elaborate why those four were recommended and why the name of a leader like Tharoor was omitted.

Attacking the government for ignoring the official party list and Tharoor for accepting the invitation without the party's consent, Ramesh said, "Congress mein kaha aur Congress ka hona mein zameen-aasmaan ka antar hai (There is a huge difference between being in the Congress and being loyal to the Congress). To compound the folly, party leader Udit Raj targeted Tharoor for his remarks in Panama that India had breached the Line of Control for the first time during the 2016 surgical strike.

This begs the question: What should the Congress and

Rahul have done? First, Rahul should have welcomed the inclusion of Tharoor and others by saying that the party is full of competent leaders, which makes selection difficult. He should have commended the selection and extended support to the government as he did during Operation Sindoor. All Congress leaders who were part of the delegations should have been invited by Kharge and Rahul, and felicitated. The opportunity should also have been used to discuss the non-partisan stance the delegation members should take during their foreign tour.

Indeed, their stance could not have been drastically different from the official one. Tharoor, in fact, did well in making it clear at the outset that even though he was leading a delegation, he was not from the ruling party. Announcing his political affiliation, he stated that given the circumstances, all parties had a common stance on matters of national security. This could also have precluded statements from Congress leaders that are now being considered against the party's programmes and policies.

Overall, the Congress has a mountain to climb to re-establish itself as an alternative at the national level. Along with party-building, it needs to finalise a roadmap so that it can convince the electorate to vote against the BJP which is always battle-ready to win elections.

The rift between the top two Congress leaders in Karnataka, for example, shows that the grand old party continues to be a loose assemblage of leaders and members. The Congress and its leaders must display far-sightedness in strengthening party solidarity. For now, the Congress' focus must be on upping the ante against the government once the outreach delegations return home.

The Congress has a mountain to climb to re-establish itself as an alternative at the national level.

expressing his gratitude to being included in the delegation. His post on X read: "I am honoured by the invitation of the government of India to lead an all-party delegation to five key capitals to present our nation's point of view on recent events. When national interest is involved, and my services are required, I will not

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

In a democracy, the Opposition must be maintained because it is indispensable. —Walter Lippmann

When a second opinion saved the day

GURBRINDER SINGH ANAND

RECENTLY, there was a nasty voltage fluctuation in my house. Lights flickered, fans stuttered, and one by one, the circuit-breakers started tripping. I quickly unplugged most of the appliances, but the fridge — poor fellow — was packed with groceries, leftovers and essentials. I thought, "Let it run. What's the worst that could happen?"

Well, the worst did happen. The next morning, I noticed the fridge wasn't cooling. Panic set in. The milk had turned sour, vegetables were "sweating" and frozen items were beginning to thaw. I did what most of us do in such moments of crisis — I called the "fridge doctor".

A seasoned-looking technician arrived, complete with his toolkit, tester and yes, even a mechanic's stethoscope — his version of a magical wand. After poking around for a while and muttering a few things under his breath, he stood up and made his grim diagnosis.

"The compressor is gone," he declared solemnly. "Oh no! What now?" I asked.

"We'll have to replace the compressor — the heart of the fridge — and inject gas into it. Fresh blood, you can say," he told me. "Kharab kissein?" I asked hesitantly.

"Around Rs 9,000," he replied, almost casually, as if it were spare change.

My heart sank. Nine thousand bucks? And for a 10-year-old fridge? I had already started browsing e-commerce sites for a new one by the time he packed up.

But something didn't sit right with me. Maybe it was my gut feeling or just plain stinginess, but I decided to get a second opinion. It was summer, and all AC and refrigeration guys were either booked or overbooked. The second technician made me wait a full day. Meanwhile, the fridge contents were turning into compost.

After multiple follow-ups and reminders, the new guy finally arrived. He looked like someone who knew his job but didn't have the airs of the first mechanic.

I explained, "The compressor hums, but there's no cooling." Without much fuss, he went straight to the back, pulled out the relay switch, gave it a few shakes and replaced it with a new one. Two minutes later, the fridge was alive and humming back to life, cooling better than ever!

"How much do I owe you?" I asked, bracing myself.

"Rs 600, sir," he said with a smile.

That's it. Rs 600. I almost did a dance in my kitchen. Not only had I saved my fridge, but I had also saved at least Rs 75,000, which I was all set to blow on a new one.

The lesson? Always take a second opinion, whether it's for an appliance, your car or even a health issue. The world today is full of overconfident "experts" ready to make a quick buck. One honest technician saved me thousands, and more importantly, restored my belief that good professionals still exist.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Delhi-centric Punjab politics

Apropos of BJP's baffling silence in Ludhiana West' (*The Great Game*): Delhi-based political parties have been playing games in Punjab, but they have failed. The ruling party in the state is being dictated by its political masters in the Capital. AAP can play a major role in the state only if it is able to shed the heavy burden of its central leadership. The BJP and the Shiromani Akali Dal will have to join hands in a bid to regain power. The Congress, with a lot of internal rivalries, can do better if its leaders forget their differences and work in unison. It is surprising that the top brass of the Congress and the BJP are not serious about Punjab affairs and the central leadership of AAP has become a liability for the state government.

ONKAR SINGH PARMAR, LUDHIANA

BJP's disconnect with Punjab

Refer to 'BJP's baffling silence in Ludhiana West', despite the saffron party's nationwide momentum, its apathy towards the upcoming bypoll in Punjab is perplexing. The resignation of state unit president Samir Jaiswal months ago, coupled with the cultural disconnect of Telugu-speaking RSS leader Manish Srivastava, underscores a leadership vacuum. However, the BJP's over-reliance on the Akali Dal and the inability to penetrate Sikh-dominated villages should be a matter of concern for the party. Punjab's historical scepticism towards central authority compounds its aversion to the BJP. If the saffron party aspires to be pan-Indian, it must genuinely connect with Punjabis to earn their trust and support.

CHANCHAL S. MANN, UNA

Follow defence timelines strictly

Refer to 'Delivery delays', the Air Force Chief is not known to mince his words and it is not the first time he has raked up the issue of missed deadlines. We not only need to catch up with hostile neighbours like China but remain a few steps ahead. The Ministry of Defence should facilitate Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd in ramping up and removing all the bottlenecks in production and seek the help of private players. Following timelines strictly is in the best interest of the nation.

BAL GOVIND, NOIDA

Strong measures for border areas

Refer to 'Balm for Poonch'; long-term solutions are needed for people living in our frontline border areas. They deserve early warning systems, protective bunkers and regular emergency drills. Critical infrastructure such as schools, hospitals and transportation networks needs to be made safer to withstand potential conflict. Evacuation plans should be clear, community-driven and routinely practised. Compensation should be hassle-free and treated as a rightful entitlement. Standard insurance policies often do not cover war and war-like risks; therefore, the state must step in to bridge the gap.

K KUMAR, PANCHKULA

Remembering Valmik Thapar

The passing away of Valmik Thapar, a well-known wildlife conservationist, marks the end of an era in India's conservation movement. As one of the country's most passionate and respected wildlife experts, Thapar dedicated his life to protecting India's natural heritage, particularly its tigers. His demise is a profound loss not just to the conservation community, but to the whole nation. Through his writings and documentaries, Thapar brought the plight of India's forests and endangered species into public consciousness. He was never afraid to challenge policies, question inefficiencies or demand accountability in the management of our natural resources.

RUKMA SHARMA, JALANDHAR

No religious bias in the military

Apropos of 'HC upholds Army's decision to sack officer who objected to attend religious parades', the Delhi High Court has rightly upheld the dismissal of Army officer Samuel Kamakasan for refusing to take part in the weekly religious parade because of his Christian faith. Unity in the defence forces comes from the spirit of wearing the same uniform and working together. It does not behove a senior officer to behave in a communal manner. Individual perceptions cannot be allowed to prevail in the armed forces.

UPENDRA SHARMA, BY MAIL

Indian summers are getting hotter, but have we lost the ability to adapt?

Indians once knew how to live with heat. From mud homes to sandstone courtyards, people designed spaces that cooled by default. Work began at sunrise, paused during peak heat, and resumed in the evening. In cities, water-cooled courtyards, stepwells, and screens created microclimates

Ajay Singh Nagpure

Every summer, a familiar question surfaces across India, echoing from homes to newsrooms: is it genuinely hotter, or have we simply become more sensitive? This isn't just some nostalgic lament or biological quirk. The evidence is clear and uncompromising: India's heat is intensifying, creeping in earlier, stretching longer, and striking deeper than ever before.

What's happening isn't a trick of perception. It's real. Heat waves, once occasional and brief, have become persistent forces reshaping daily life and work. According to the India Meteorological Department, a heat wave is declared when the temperature reaches at least 40 degrees Celsius in the plains or 30 degrees Celsius in the hills, with a deviation of 4.5 degrees Celsius or more above normal for at least two consecutive days. These thresholds, once rare, are quickly becoming the standard during summer months. In states like Odisha and Rajasthan, what used to be brief seasonal heat spikes now stretch into longer, more frequent episodes, cumulatively spanning months. Between June 2010 and the summer of 2024, cumulative heat wave days soared from roughly 177 to 536 – a staggering increase of over 200%.

Heat wave days count the total number of days on which heat wave conditions are recorded across all affected regions. Since heat waves strike different places at different times, these days are summed nationally, so the total may surpass the length of the summer season in any single location.

Excess mortality analysis

Despite the increasing severity of heat waves, official data likely underrepresents their true impact. Various government departments collect and report heat-related deaths using different methods and sources, which can lead to variations in the numbers presented. Between 2000 and 2020, India recorded 20,615 heatstroke deaths, according to government records. However, many heat-related fatalities occur outside hospitals – at homes, construction sites, or village farms, for example – where medical assistance and formal death certification may not always be accessible. As a result, deaths triggered by heat are often recorded under broader causes like cardiac arrest or respiratory failure.

The absence of standardised, mandatory heat-related death reporting and real-time surveillance means many such deaths remain uncounted, creating challenges for public health planning and response. Independent researchers and organisations have sought to address this gap using excess mortality analysis: comparing actual deaths during heatwave periods with long-term seasonal averages.

While some critics question the accuracy of these estimates and the methods used, excess mortality analysis remains a widely accepted and robust epidemiological tool. It captures both direct and indirect deaths related to heat, including those misclassified under other causes such as cardiac arrest or kidney failure, which are often missed in official counts.

For instance, the Global Burden of Disease study estimated approximately 155,937 heat-related deaths in India in 2021, encompassing fatalities from heat waves, prolonged exposure to high temperatures, and heat-aggravated conditions. Given the known underreporting in official data, such model-based estimates provide a more comprehensive and realistic picture of the true human toll of extreme heat.

Living with heat

The human toll of heat waves is paralleled by significant economic damage. The 2022 heatwave reduced wheat yields in key producing regions by approximately 4.5%, with some districts experiencing losses up to 15%. This disruption contributed to inflationary pressures on food commodities worldwide.

Simultaneously, the heatwave triggered a power crisis as electricity demand surged to an all-time high of 207 GW, straining the grid and causing blackouts in some areas. Labour productivity in outdoor sectors such as construction and agriculture suffered dramatically, as workers faced an impossible choice between enduring hazardous heat exposure or forfeiting income.

According to the McKinsey Global Institute, heat-related productivity losses could jeopardise between 2.5% and 4.5% of India's annual Gross Domestic Product by 2030, underscoring the urgent need for adaptive policies.



Many heat-related fatalities occur outside hospitals – homes, construction sites, or village farms – where medical aid and death certification may not be accessible. ANI

Ironically, India once knew how to live with heat. From the mud homes of Odisha to the sandstone courtyards of Rajasthan, generations designed spaces to cool without electricity. Rural routines followed solar rhythms: work began at sunrise, paused during peak heat, and resumed in the evening. Architecture used breathable materials like lime, thatch, and mud, keeping homes cooler than today's concrete structures. In cities, water-cooled courtyards, shaded alleys, stepwells (baoli), and perforated stone screens (jaali) created microclimates. These systems weren't folklore; they were practical responses to climatic conditions, embedded in culture and community.

A vivid example of this traditional wisdom is Navtapa, meaning "nine days of heat." Observed from May 25 to June 2, it marks the sun's entry into Rohini Nakshatra and was considered the most intense stretch of the summer. While rooted in astrology, Navtapa aligns closely with modern heat wave data. In this time, communities avoided heavy meals, rested during the midday, drank hydrating mixes like buttermilk and *sattu*, and provided shade and water for livestock. These practices, while culturally grounded, reflect sound physiological and environmental sense, and are today supported by modern science.

Why did these traditions wane? Not because they were ineffective but because modern development models evolved differently. Post-liberalisation planning favoured speed and scale, often overlooking climate sensitivity. Glass façades and concrete homes replaced breathable structures. Labour shifted from flexible agricultural cycles to more rigid, outdoor, informal urban jobs. Planning codes like the National Building Code don't mandate passive cooling. Real-estate finance rarely supports traditional materials. Without institutional support or economic incentives, these practices couldn't be sustained or scaled.

Invisible deaths

Meanwhile, India's formal response to heat is gradually evolving. Notably, Ahmedabad's heat action plan, implemented in 2014, has been associated with a significant reduction in heat-related mortality in the city, with an estimated 1,190 deaths avoided annually in its initial years.

Cities such as Bhubaneswar and Nagpur have initiated efforts to increase green cover and promote rooftop measures aimed at reducing heat absorption. However, many heat action plans remain largely advisory, often lacking binding mandates, dedicated

Real transformation demands holistic efforts. Building codes must evolve, and urban and rural designs should be inclusive by default. Clear roles for weather, disaster management, and local bodies are essential. Coordination lets India shift from scrambling through heat emergencies to managing them with resilience

budgets, or clear accountability mechanisms.

Only a few cities have appointed trained climate officers or integrated heat considerations into their urban master plans. Public cooling shelters are limited in number, and awareness campaigns frequently rely on digital platforms that may not effectively reach regional language speakers, migrants, daily wage workers, and non-literate populations.

The rural landscape tells a tougher story. Despite most heat-vulnerable populations residing there, India still lacks a solid rural heat governance framework. Key programmes – including the Gram Panchayat Development Plans, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, and the National Health Mission – barely touch on heat issues. Unlike cities, villages have no counterpart to urban heat action plans. Panchayats often struggle with limited funding, staffing, and training, leaving them ill-equipped to set up cooling measures or modify work timings. Age-old water bodies, tree cover, and stepwells fade away, unsupported and overlooked. Many rural deaths remain invisible, depriving policymakers of crucial data.

Communicating heat risk

Beyond the bricks and mortar, a deeper gap persists: a disconnect between science and how people actually experience heat. Most don't grasp the "feels like" temperature, which factors in humidity, solar radiation, and wind along with air temperature. So when the thermometer says 42 degrees Celsius, the body might be battling conditions closer to 50 degrees Celsius. That hidden burden, far beyond mere numbers, causes dehydration, heat exhaustion, and heatstroke. Public health messages rarely translate this into everyday terms, leaving too many unaware and vulnerable to the real dangers.

Equally important is how heat alerts are communicated. In many parts of India, advisories are issued in Hindi or

English, shared via apps and social media that assume literacy, smartphone access, and digital fluency. This approach may exclude millions, especially the rural poor, migrants, and older citizens. Heat warnings should not be confined to digital platforms. They must be delivered through oral announcements, local radio, posters, community workers, and trusted institutions in regional languages.

Inclusive communication must reach every corner, every community. Otherwise, awareness remains partial and fragmented. India stands at a crossroads with a chance to harness the wisdom and experience already woven into its fabric. Immediately, districts – urban and rural alike – can start rolling out heat action plans tailored to their realities, guided by the Disaster Management Act 2005. These won't be abstract policies but grounded actions: pinpointing heat hotspots, setting up shaded rest spots, ensuring water access, and sending alerts that people trust and understand.

Looking beyond the immediate, national programmes like the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, and the National Health Mission offer a canvas to embed climate sensitivity. Think reflective rooftops, more trees, and natural ventilation: elements that cool homes and livelihoods alike. With financial channels like the Fifteenth Finance Commission and District Mineral Funds, local governments gain the muscle to scale these interventions fairly and effectively.

Down the line, real transformation demands more than isolated efforts. Building codes must evolve to favour passive cooling, urban and rural designs should be inclusive by default, and institutions must learn to speak the same language. Clear roles for the India Meteorological Department, National Disaster Management Authority, the State Disaster Management Authorities, municipal bodies, and village Panchayats are essential. Such coordination lets India shift from scrambling through heat emergencies to anticipating and managing them with resilience.

Knowledge isn't the bottleneck. India's heritage of traditional practices alongside modern science forms a rich foundation. The challenge lies in blending these, backed by political will and cohesive policy, to ready India for its hottest years ahead.

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Musk plans 2,000 launches in two years. REUTERS

Musk retains plan to fly Starship to Mars in 2026 despite setbacks

Reuters

Two days after the latest in a string of test-flight setbacks for his big new Mars spacecraft, Starship, Elon Musk said on May 29 he foresees the futuristic vehicle making its first uncrewed voyage to the red planet at the end of next year.

Mr. Musk presented a detailed Starship development timeline in a video posted online by his Los Angeles area-based rocket company, SpaceX, a day after saying he was departing the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump as head of a tumultuous campaign to slash government bureaucracy.

The billionaire entrepreneur had said earlier that he was planning to scale back his role in government to focus greater attention on his various businesses, including SpaceX and electric car and battery maker Tesla.

Mr. Musk acknowledged that his latest timeline for reaching Mars hinged on whether Starship can accomplish a number of challenging technical feats during its flight-test development, particularly a post-launch refuelling manoeuvre in earth orbit.

The end of 2026 would coincide with a slim window that occurs once every two years when Mars and the earth align around the sun for the closest trip between the two planets, which would take seven to nine months to transit by

Musk envisions launching 1,000 to 2,000 Starships to Mars every two years to man a permanent human settlement. NASA is to use Starship to return humans to the moon around 2027

spacecraft.

Mr. Musk gave his company a 50% chance of meeting that deadline. If Starship weren't ready by that time, SpaceX would wait another two years before trying again, he suggested in the video.

The first flight to Mars would carry a simulated crew consisting of one or more robots of the Tesla-built humanoid Optimus design, with the first human crews following in the second or third landings. Mr. Musk said he envisioned eventually launching 1,000 to 2,000 ships to Mars every two years to quickly establish a self-sustaining permanent human settlement.

NASA is currently aiming to return humans to the surface of the moon aboard Starship around 2027, more than 50 years after its last manned lunar landings of the Apollo era, as a stepping stone to ultimately launching astronauts to Mars sometime in the 2030s.

Mr. Musk has previously said he was aiming to send an uncrewed SpaceX vehicle to the red planet by 2018 and was targeting 2024 to launch a first crewed mission there.

The SpaceX founder was scheduled to deliver a livestream from the company's Texas launch site on May 27 night, following a ninth test flight of Starship that evening.

But the webcast was canceled without notice after Starship spun out of control and disintegrated in a fireball about 30 minutes after launch without achieving some of its most important test goals. Two test flights in January and March failed in more spectacular fashion, with the spacecraft blowing to pieces on ascent moments after liftoff.

Mr. Musk shrugged off the latest mishap, saying it produced a lot of "good data to review," and promised a faster launch cadence for the next several test flights.

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Cautious optimism

Positive growth prospects despite global headwinds

The GDP data released last weekend sends out a broad message — the domestic economy is quite robust, but there are global headwinds to contend with. The figures for both FY25 as a whole (provisional) as well as the last quarter are both encouraging and sobering. If a growth rate of 6.5 per cent in FY25, buoyed by a Q4 growth of 7.4 per cent seems underwhelming at first glance as the lowest growth in four years, it should be kept in mind that India has outperformed the rest of the world in the post-Covid period.

Looking ahead, India looks set to arrive at about 6.5 per cent growth this fiscal. This would be an achievement at a time when the US is busy overturning the global trade order, which will shrink world trade and output, and possibly India's exports as well. India's consumption-driven growth engine looks in good shape, having grown 7.2 per cent in FY25, against 5.6 per cent the previous fiscal. There is every reason to believe that consumption, particularly rural, will be robust this fiscal as the monsoon is shaping up well. The key question is whether the other demand-side drivers — investment, exports and government spending — will have an impact. Gross fixed capital formation growth fell to 7.1 per cent in FY25, against 8.8 per cent in FY24.

According to the government's capex survey released late April covering over 2,000 enterprises which responded, their capex is expected to dip from ₹6.6 lakh crore in FY25 to ₹4.9 lakh crore in FY26. If exports too take a hit on account of global turbulence (which will shrink imports to an extent as well), it would mean that private consumption would emerge even more so as the singular driving force of the economy (it contributes to 61.4 per cent of the GDP at current prices). The role of domestic demand in keeping investment going cannot be overemphasised.

Notwithstanding the high consumption growth, high frequency indicators are a mixed bag. According to the May bulletin of the Reserve Bank of India, e-way bill volumes have been growing at over 20 per cent in 2025, but passenger and commercial vehicles sales growth have been tepid, at below 5 per cent and 2 per cent, respectively in recent months. Tractor sales have been robust, though. Indeed, agriculture (4.6 per cent) and construction (9.4 per cent) from the supply side have been the top growth drivers in FY24, while manufacturing (4.5 per cent) has been a laggard. Slow manufacturing growth has now emerged as a serious structural constraint, and it is well that the Centre has been focusing on this issue. Services growth remains steady at over 7 per cent, but it is vulnerable to external shocks. Since the Centre and States are fiscally constrained, with the public debt to GDP ratio at over 80 per cent, there are limits to the government stimulating the economy, notwithstanding the concerted capex push. The onus is, therefore, on monetary policy to be accommodative in times to come.

POCKET

RAVIKANTH



LINE& LENGTH.

TCA SRINIVASA RAGHAVAN

All wars claim what General Colin Powell — who commanded the US invasion of Iraq — called collateral damage. It would seem that the collateral damage of Donald Trump's tariff war is macroeconomics.

For the last few months, the world has been in a state of utter intellectual confusion and bewilderment.

But this is only the culmination of what's been happening since at least 2000. It was, however, a gradual increase in dismay until Donald Trump caused a huge tsunami.

Macroeconomics is, or should be, the most affected by it.

But so far only intellectual hand wringing, lamentations and nostalgia for the past are to be seen.

So now, at the end of the first quarter of the 21st century, we are entitled to ask which bits of received wisdom in economics have survived or will survive. In my view, the best way of answering this question, as Don Patinkin, an Israeli economist, said 60 years ago, is through the labour market, the money market and the product market.

Let us look at how these are different today from 2000, individually and in interactions with each other.

THREE BIG CHANGES

The first principle of markets is flexibility, which means the speed with which prices adjust to changed conditions. The higher this speed, the more quickly prices adjust, the better outcomes we get. So that's where the first difference is: while the money and product markets are almost entirely flexible, thanks to politicians the labour market isn't — even though it is far more flexible today than it was in 2000. But it still has a long way to go before getting close to the flexibility of the other two markets.

The second big change is the convergence in the money and technology markets.

That is, capital accumulation today is not in an 80:20 proportion of money and technology. It is now more like 50:50. This has had a direct impact on productivity.

One other notable feature is that while the financial markets are highly competitive, the technology markets are highly monopolistic. Money has therefore flowed into technology.

The massive social and political endorsement of the idea that incomes, even if they don't increase, must not fall has led to the delinking of incomes from productivity

monopolies and avoided competitive product markets except when there are large oligopolies.

The third change therefore in the last 25 years, arising out of the two changes above, is the massive social and political endorsement of the idea that incomes, even if they don't increase, must not fall. This was always the holy grail but after the Atlantic financial crisis of 2008, its pursuit has become frantic and frenetic.

What this strong political preference for the present compared to the future has done is to delink incomes from productivity.

Now you get paid even if productivity is zero or even negative, in both cash and kind.

The consequence is that a huge premium on productivity has developed leading to a worsening of income inequality. That is, productive people are in short supply.

To put it differently, while the product and money markets have turned right, the labour market has turned left. Economics, the poor thing, has no answers for this because it was never based on compassion, which is now a political need.

In economics jargon, it is strongly preferred to commercial need which is weakly preferred.

NO INTEGRATED ANALYSIS
I have been looking for an integrated analysis by economists of these three features.

But so far I haven't found any. It was

exactly like this during the first quarter of the 20th century. It wasn't until 1936 that John Maynard Keynes came up with his bible of modern macroeconomics, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*.

His big insight and policy prescription was that when one of the three markets was out of sync, the government had to step in to bring it in line.

But he never said it had to delink productivity and incomes. But in the last two decades that's what his advice has come to mean.

Let me put it another way. The limits to government fiscal intervention, traditional Keynesian or more recent varieties of direct income support, have now been reached. The debts and deficits of different countries are proof.

The IMF says global debt could be more than global GDP by 2030.

Despite this huge challenge economics has not been able to give policymakers something to work with. That is, if Keynes assigned the role of a white knight to the government, and if that white knight is now dead, what or who will replace her?

In symbols, if in the Keynesian identity C, I, X, M and G are also non-functional, what's to happen to the left hand side of the identity, GDP? At first it grows slowly and then stops growing altogether and then becomes negative.

I hope some economists are thinking about this problem and outside this now deceased identity.

Strong domestic demand powers FY25 growth

Emphasis on government capex, along with healthy growth in consumption, appears to be leading the growth push

DK Srivastava

The NSO's provisional estimates of national accounts for 2024-25 and Q4 2024-25 and the CGA data reveal that the Indian economy is well poised for a healthy growth in the short to medium-term while maintaining its momentum towards fiscal consolidation.

It is private final consumption expenditure (PFCE) which has led India's growth story in 2024-25. The PFCE growth at 7.2 per cent in 2024-25 has contributed 4 per cent points of the overall GDP growth of 6.5 per cent.

Investment growth, as measured by gross fixed capital formation (GFCF), growing at 7.1 per cent has contributed 2.4 per cent points, points to overall growth.

As compared to 2023-24, PFCE growth has picked up from 5.6 per cent whereas investment growth has fallen from 8.8 per cent.

Net exports to real GDP growth which has turned positive at 2.3 per cent points as compared to (-) 2.8 per cent points in 2023-24, which is significant.

Exports grew by 6.3 per cent which is a tangible improvement over the 2.2 per cent growth in the previous year.

On the output side, real GVA growth is also robust at 6.4 per cent with

agriculture showing a healthy growth of 4.6 per cent along with construction at 9.4 per cent and public administration, defence etc. at 8.9 per cent. Only manufacturing growth which has languished at 4.3 per cent.

While the services sector grew by 7.2 per cent, trade, hotels, transport etc. al. sector has lagged behind at 6.1 per cent.

Nominal GDP growth in 2024-25 is estimated at 9.8 per cent which marginally exceeds the assumption of 9.7 per cent for 2024-25 as given in the revised estimates. The implicit price deflator (IPD)-based inflation is estimated at 3.1 per cent.

QUARTERLY GROWTH

The robust annual growth outcome has been predicated on the Q4 2024-25 growth of GDP and GVA showing a significant upsurge at 7.4 per cent and 6.8 per cent (6.4 per cent and 6.5 per cent in Q3 FY25).

Among sectors that carry relatively larger weight in the GVA, it is construction followed by manufacturing and financial, real estate etc. al. sectors which have shown the largest improvement in growth in Q4 2024-25 as compared to Q3 2024-25.

From the viewpoint of aggregate demand, the highest growth is seen in GFCF at 9.4 per cent followed by PFCE at 6.0 per cent. The negative



INDIA STORY. Robust growth

government final consumption expenditure is partly due to fiscal reforms aimed at reducing government revenue expenditures.

INTERFACE WITH FISCAL AGGREGATES

CGA's data for 2024-25 indicate that the fiscal deficit target of 4.8 per cent of GDP as per the revised estimates has been met.

With continued reduction in revenue expenditures, the ratio of revenue deficit to fiscal deficit stands at 36 per cent in 2024-25 which at its recent peak was 80 per cent in 2020-21.

Tax revenues have grown by 9.5 per cent (direct tax — 12.9 per cent and indirect tax — 4.2 per cent).

It is the personal income tax which is

the mainstay of tax revenue growth in 2024-25 at 17.0 per cent. In contrast, growth in corporate income tax is 8.3 per cent and that in GST is 7.2 per cent. The revenues from urban excise duties and customs duties have continued to contract.

In the context of government expenditures, revenue expenditure growth has been limited to 3.1 per cent. Capital expenditure growth which was only 0.8 per cent in the first 11 months of 2024-25 could show an annual growth of 10.8 per cent because of a massive growth of 67.2 per cent in the month of March 2025.

Although a growth of 10.8 per cent is lower than the average growth rate of government capital expenditure at 29.7 per cent during 2020-21 to 2023-24, the restoration of its growth momentum is welcome for India's overall growth story. In April 2025, Govt's capex increased by 61 per cent.

India's medium-term growth prospects appear to be robust with sound fiscal management.

Emphasis on government capital expenditure appears to be leading the growth story from the policy side with a healthy supporting growth in PFCE.

The writer is Chief Policy Advisor, EY India, Ragni Thakur, Senior Manager, Tax and Economic Policy Group, contributed to the article. Views are personal

BELOW THE LINE



YELLOW PEAS. No import duties

Friday night fever

The Centre yet again made two key decisions on Friday. First, it cut the duty on crude palm, soya and sunflower oils by 10 percentage points. The global edible oil trade, however, was expecting it.

Although some question the decision, the government's move appears to discourage imports of

refined palm oil, as Malaysia and Indonesia impose export taxes on crude palm oil shipments.

The second decision is to extend the duty-free import of yellow peas. This has not gone down well with the trade. Yellow peas are seen as solely responsible for the current bearish trend in pulses.

A little bird says the duty cut on oil may be to silence the US during the tariff talks. The decision on yellow peas may be to humour Russia.

Russia has currently emerged as a strong competitor in yellow peas, displacing Canada as the top exporter.

Fake job offers

Fake job offers have long been a concern for both corporates and government agencies. With the rise of social media, this issue has

intensified as several scam job posts have been observed.

In recent times, one of India Inc's top CEOs has been actively flagging fake job posts and urging job seekers to apply only through official company channels. The CEO has also been commenting directly on misleading posts and instructing relevant teams to take swift action in getting them removed.

The CEO has also been leveraging social media to highlight company's initiatives as well as applaud the achievements of employees. Known for personally acknowledging team members' successes, the top honcho has set an example of leadership and engagement.

Bankers go organic

Indian Overseas Bank (IOB), Anul and Richplus came together recently

for an initiative to promote organic farming techniques. Even as most of the questions from media persons were about the adoption of organic produce and the baggage it carries of being for the privileged few, the IOB MD spoke about how they as a large public sector bank, were trying to break this myth.

"We are starting from within and trying to create a culture within our system," he said.

The bank is in the process of integrating organic products for their own employees' use and hopes to scale this programme. If only every enterprise could practice what they preach!

Solving CAPTCHAs

At a recent panel discussion on use of AI in education, one of the panelists pointed out to a funny yet

Our Bureaus

Shangri-La Dialogue not a front against China



VAPPALA BALACHANDRAN
FORMER SPECIAL SECRETARY,
CABINET SECRETARIAT

A MISTAKEN impression that the Shangri-La Dialogue is meant to be a common front against China might emerge from the speeches delivered by French President Emmanuel Macron and US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth on May 31 in Singapore. While Hegseth warned that the threat from China was "real and potentially imminent", Macron called on "key allies in Asia" to increase military spending as the NATO members had done, "thanks to President Trump".

However, the annual Shangri-La Dialogue, which is held at the iconic hotel in Singapore, was not started as a front against China. It was envisaged in 2001-2002 when the US policy towards the People's Republic of China (PRC) was a combination of "Pacific military rebalance" and "invitation to China into a far different, but equally successful, multilateral security network," as the late Ashton Carter, former US Secretary of Defence (2015-2017) had said in an article for the Belfer Center of Harvard Kennedy School in October 2018.

This is because American leaders had, over the years, detected two strands of Chinese strategic thinking: one which valued partnership and increased integration with global security structures, and the other leaning towards unilateral action, refusing to acknowledge global norms which "inhibit" China's interests. Hence, a brief history of US-China relations is relevant.

After the Jimmy Carter-Deng Xiaoping bonhomie in the 1970s, US institutions started debating over a new policy towards the PRC, examining whether military ties might advance US security interests during the Cold War. The groundwork for a relationship with the People's Liberation Army (PLA) started through strategic dialogue, reciprocal exchanges in functional areas and arms sales during the 1980 visit of Defence Secretary Harold Brown to Beijing after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.

In 1981, President Ronald Reagan formally removed the ban on arms sales to China. In 1983, US Defence Secretary Casper Weinberger visited Beijing. This was followed by direct military sales and military technological cooperation. However, all these were stopped when the PLA cracked down on students at the Tiananmen Square in 1989.

The recovery of relations started in October 1994 during the Bill Clinton presidency when William J. Perry became the first US Secretary of Defence to visit China



IMPORTANT FORUM: The annual Shangri-La Dialogue is held at the iconic hotel in Singapore. *aw*

after the 1989 crisis. Perry, as a Pentagon official, had visited Beijing during Carter's regime to sell American military technology to China to contain Soviet military power. He was accompanied by two powerful US Senators Sam Nunn (Democrat) and John Warner (Republican). Following this, Perry gave a keynote address on February 13, 1996 at the National Defence University (NDU) in Washington DC, calling for regular meetings between the defence chiefs of China, Japan, the US and other Asia-Pacific nations under the auspices of a regional forum like the Europe's Partnership for Peace, which promotes western military alliances without formal security guarantees.

Perry also said that if China felt that it was encircled by a

The overall global impression is that the Shangri-La Dialogue has served its purpose as a forum for 'multilateral, bilateral, trilateral and other small-scale defence diplomacy'.

US containment policy, it would not cooperate with America's vital security objectives in Asia and containment could create security problems for the US. During this period, various incidents creating bilateral friction with China took place, like the 1995-1996 Taiwan Strait crisis, mistaken NATO bombing of the PRC embassy in Yugoslavia in 1999 and the EP-3 aircraft collision crisis in 2001.

The 2001 incident, on April 1, was when a PLA Navy F-8 fighter collided with a US Navy EP-3 reconnaissance plane over the South China Sea. The EP-3's crew made an emergency landing on China's Hainan Island. The PLA detained the 24 US Navy personnel for 11 days. That was the beginning of a period of bilateral friction.

Although bilateral visits and military-to-military relations continued, it was felt that the US should "rebalance" its presence in Asia-Pacific, while continuing its dialogue with the PRC. In 2012, President Obama and Defence Secretary Leon Panetta issued a "Defence Strategic Guidance" on how to maintain US military superiority and to "rebalance" priorities, posture and presence to stress attention to Asia as well as West Asia.

It was decided to adopt a 'whole Government approach', which was a comprehensive policy that included diplomatic, defence and economic subjects, which also meant a 'constructive relationship with China and its PLA.' This was because the mere military-to-military relationship earlier had led to a situation where America experienced "miscalculations and misperceptions, while dealing with repeated cycles in which the PLA suspends contacts and then leverages the timing when it chooses to resume talks."

Thus, the objective was to "shape China's rise as a peaceful, responsible, and rules-based power through engagement and more mature relationship." A similar idea was proposed by Thai Defence Minister Chawari Yong Chaiy, who felt that the ASEAN conferences were dominated by diplomats and not defence leaders.

This idea was carried forward in 2002 by John Chipman, president and CEO of

the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), in London, after noting that Asian officials were unable to speak on their problems at the annual Munich Security Conference.

China, always suspicious, sent only lower-level military officials till 2007 when Zhang Qinsong, then Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Chinese People's Liberation Army, attended. Qinsong gave a speech titled 'Strengthening Dialogue and Cooperation to Maintain Peace and Prosperity'. In 2011, for the first time, China sent Liang Guanglie, its Defence Minister, to participate as the conference had set up a special agenda for China.

Since then, China has been regular in attending the conference, although with delegations at varying official hierarchies, as it feels that it is an important forum to explain its security and defence policies to Asian countries and rebut accusations against it.

In June 2010, US Defence Secretary Robert Gates, who attended the conference, had chastised China, like Pete Hegseth in 2025, declaring that America would remain a power in the Pacific and South China Seas to ensure freedom of navigation.

Thus, the overall global impression is that the Shangri-La Dialogue has served its purpose as a forum for "multilateral, bilateral, trilateral and other small-scale defence diplomacy."

Views are personal

What is blocking Punjab's economic growth trajectory



KESAR SINGH BHANGU
FORMER DEAN, PUNJAB
UNIVERSITY, PATIALA

PUNJAB had one of India's most robust state economies during the pre-reforms era, particularly following the Green Revolution. As a result, it earned a reputation as the country's most dynamic and prosperous state. For an extended period, Punjab consistently ranked first in per capita income and various other socio-economic indicators.

After the initiation of the neo-liberal policy regime, the state lost its economic glory and slipped behind many states in most of the economic parameters that it was leading in earlier.

Over the years, a debate on the issue has been taking place in academic and policy-making circles to pinpoint the causes and factors responsible for the below-par performance and the existing economic scenario of Punjab. The debate has been concentrated around two lines of thought: first, that Punjab itself is responsible for its below-potential performance and the present economic crisis; second, that the policies of the state and Central governments, along with some social, economic, geographical and federal factors, have led to the dismal performance of the state.

Regarding the first line of thought, there is no denying that the policies of successive state governments during the neo-liberal regime have remained dysfunctional and ineffective. Consequently, the fiscal and developmental policies of the state government were in disarray, which led to the collapse of investment and employment-generation. Due to some vested interests, many people and reports try to brand the hard realities that Punjab has faced and is facing as myths. Further, they attempt to compare the incomparable and mislead the people of the country. Such reports and line of thinking have disappointed the academicians who advocate the cause of Punjab.

It seems that the campaigners of the first line of thought are attempting to weaken the pressure generated by the believers of the second line of thought on the



NEEDED: An investment revival package has been proposed for the transformation of Punjab from an agrarian to an industrialised economy. *reuters*

Centre for granting an investment revival package to Punjab.

Regarding the second line of thought, the policy issues that emerge are that if Punjab wants to regain its lost economic glory, diversification and a structural transformation of its economy are required. Punjab's economy has been facing a chronic shortage of investment in capital formation as the investment-state domestic product (SDP) ratio has remained below 20 per cent, which is 15 percentage points lower than the all-India ratio

The policies of successive state governments during the neo-liberal regime have remained dysfunctional and ineffective.

and the lowest among the 14 major states of India.

Further, investment in the agrarian economy of Punjab has been declining as the investment-agriculture state domestic product ratio has reached an all-time low of 8.9 per cent, according to the latest available estimates. The state's fiscal policy must be revamped and aim to raise the tax-GDP ratio of 7.9 per cent to 12-13 per cent. This is possible by increasing tax compliance, eliminating tax evasion and imposing new taxes.

The universal approach to

subsidies and freebies should be eschewed immediately. Subsidies should be provided for building the capabilities of the deprived sections for a limited time period, based on the principle of social justice. Freebies based on political considerations and vote-bank politics should be immediately done away with.

While the rejuvenation of the economic development process remains the fundamental responsibility of the state government, major and dynamic policy instruments that affect the state's growth momentum, such as the monetary policy, are under the Centre's control.

The Centre's neo-liberal policies with regard to the external sector, decontrol of prices, tax restructuring and many more have, in fact, played havoc with the economic growth momentum of the state. Therefore, it is suggested that the tendencies of the federal structure which are becoming more and more unitary need to be curbed as soon as possible.

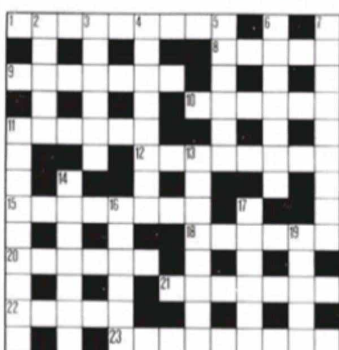
Since Punjab has been substantially contributing to the food security of the nation and will continue to do so and also due to its strategic location from the point of view of national security, the revival and rejuvenation of its economy is in

the interest of both the nation and the state.

Pertinently, the constraints of economic development encountered by Punjab's economy are partly under the purview of the state government and partly under the Centre. Thus, joint efforts of both governments are needed to remove the constraints that are blocking Punjab's potential of economic growth. At this juncture, the Centre's initiatives will go a long way in setting things right. To tide over the unprecedented crisis, Punjab's economy needs, deserves and demands from the Centre not only the long-pending debt relief package but also a capability-building investment revival package. This package must at least cover the investment deficiency gap between the Punjab and Indian economies, based on the difference of the investment-gross domestic product ratio.

The proposed investment revival package of Rs 20,000 crore per annum for five years will rejuvenate Punjab's economy. It will also lay the roadmap for the state's long-awaited structural transformation from an agrarian to an industrialised economy, along with ensuring food safety and security of the national economy.

QUICK CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1 Without emotion (9)
- 8 No more or less than (5)
- 9 Sign of something's existence (7)
- 10 A void (6)
- 11 Assign to particular duty (6)
- 12 Run-down and abandoned (8)
- 15 An arborescent rodent (8)
- 18 Hotel sitting room (6)
- 20 Dedicate (6)
- 21 Biased (7)
- 22 Falter (5)
- 23 Very difficult assignment (4,5)

Saturday's solution

Across: 1 Suggest, 4 Perch, 7 Acid, 8 Truthful, 10 Full of life, 12 Racket, 13 In fact, 15 Smothering, 18 Cracking, 19 Maim, 20 Later, 21 Evident.

Down: 1 Scarf, 2 Gridlock, 3 Turtle, 4 Pathfinder, 5 Rifle, 6 Halfwit, 9 Money-maker, 11 Badging, 12 Radical, 14 Atonce, 16 Gamut, 17 Bait.

DOWN

- 2 Perchance (5)
- 3 Seem attractive (6)
- 4 Take responsibility for (8)
- 5 Get completely free of (6)
- 6 Gigantic Californian conifer (7)
- 7 Peak period in TV viewing (5,4)
- 11 To scold (5,4)
- 13 Name-check of those present (4,4)
- 14 Remain in existence (7)
- 16 Inclusive reply (6)
- 17 Popular stringed instrument (6)
- 19 Degree of quality (5)

SU DO KU



SATURDAY'S SOLUTION

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

CALENDAR

JUNE 02, 2025, MONDAY

- Shukla Samvat 1947
- Jyesthina Shukla 12
- Jyesthina Parvathi 20
- Hajar 1446
- Shukla Paksha Tithi 7, up to 8.36 pm
- Vysargha Yoga up to 8.20 am
- Magha Nakshatra up to 10.56 pm
- Moon in Leo sign
- Gandmoola up to 10.56 pm

FORECAST

CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	38	24
New Delhi	37	28
Amritsar	38	28
Bathinda	40	24
Jalandhar	39	24
Ludhiana	39	29
Bhiwani	40	25
Hisar	39	26
Sirsa	41	26
Dharamsala	32	20
Manali	23	13
Shimla	25	14
Srinagar	20	10
Jammu	36	22
Kargil	23	09
Leh	20	08
Dehradun	34	22
Mussoorie	23	15

Source: IMD



Poverty should never be a barrier to life-saving care...the goal is to create a healthy citizenry, which would, in turn, lead to a healthy society and ultimately result in a healthy nation



Being 'future-ready'

India's focus on indigenisation of arms production is laudable, but on-time delivery is a priority

AIR FORCE CHIEF AP Singh's concerns over the delays in the procurement of critical military platforms, and the futility of signing defence contracts without being sure of timely delivery of the equipment need addressing. Over the last decade, the country has made rapid strides in its military strength and defence preparedness, both by capital acquisition and bolstering home-grown capabilities. Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday highlighted how the Operation Sindoor showcased the might of the indigenous BrahMos missile and gave the enemy 'sleepless nights'. There are other shining examples of locally developed weaponry, including the anti-submarine torpedoes which reinforced the country's underwater defence capabilities. But the procurement process, as Singh pointed out, is far from satisfactory, and often gets vitiated. While stating that "not a single project is completed on time", Singh might have been alluding also to the fact that state-run Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) is yet to deliver the 83 light combat aircraft Tejas Mk 1A, even though the contract was signed in 2021. It also remains uncertain whether the 70 HTT-40 basic trainer aircraft from HAL could be inducted into the Indian Air Force by September this year, as was planned.

To be sure, the government has been laying a lot of emphasis on national security. Local defence manufacturing has received a big boost from private-sector participation, and helped calibrate the Centre's defence budget. While the foreign direct investment (FDI) limit in defence business is 74% and approvals are under the automatic route, even 100% FDI is permitted through the government route if it leads to access to modern technology. The country's defence production stood at ₹1.27 lakh crore in FY24, and is believed to have reached ₹1.75 lakh crore in FY25. The target is to take this to ₹3 lakh crore by 2029, and make India a global hub for defence manufacturing, with exports to the tune of ₹50,000 crore by then. However, for these plans to materialise, it is important to accord much more sanctity to enforcement of contracts.

This is important, as of the record 193 contracts worth over ₹2 lakh crore signed in 2024-25, over 90% is awarded to local defence manufacturers which need to learn from their more experienced global counterparts how project schedules are adhered to, and manufacturing processes are aligned with the actual needs of the armed forces. Also, for indigenous manufacturing capacity to be strong enough to meet the aspiration of self-reliance, upstream activities like design and development ought to be given equal emphasis. The Defence Research and Development Organisation and the major corporate players would need to enhance their collaboration and make it more seamless. Overseas defence purchase deals must aim for technology assimilation to the extent possible, with more diversified sourcing destinations.

India's defence budget has grown 2.6 times to ₹6.81 lakh crore between FY14 and FY26 (Budget Estimate). This indeed reflects an expenditure priority the sector is entitled to, but also shows that the indigenisation process has helped cut costs. For perspective, the Centre's overall budget size has grown 3.2 times between FY14 and FY26. Having two enemies in the neighbourhood — Pakistan and China — India must guard against its focus on defence indigenisation resulting in any lapse in meeting the immediate needs of the forces. The Air Chief is bang on when he said, "We have to now be ready to be future-ready. That is the concern."

Harvard's commencement showed a united university

A YEAR CAN make a transformational difference in the life of an institution. That's what has happened at Harvard, where students and faculty gave President Alan Garber a standing ovation at commencement last week — just a year after protests disrupted graduation ceremonies when hundreds of students walked out. A year ago, student speakers denounced the university's administration and its trustees, who were sitting behind them. Last week, the speakers expressed pride in that same leadership for sticking to the university's principles and standing up for free inquiry and free expression.

What happened in between? The answer is, at least partly, Donald Trump. In the 16 months following the Hamas attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, Harvard was embroiled in internal conflicts over Gaza, Israel, Palestine and the boundaries of campus free speech. Then on April 11, 2025, the Trump administration sent the school a list of outrageous demands, threatening to end billions in federal research funding if it failed to comply. In response, the university made the only decision possible to protect its academic freedom and integrity: It sued and became the de facto leading institution in resisting executive overreach.

That action fundamentally changed the narrative about Harvard — from a university rolled in conflict to one united in its defense of the pursuit of truth.

I want to be clear: I am not an outside observer in this story. I've been a professor at the university for 17 years; I went to college at Harvard, and I was a postdoctoral fellow here. I love the university as much as it's possible to love an institution not known for its warm, personal qualities.

More than that, I believe in the purpose of the university, captured in its motto, Veritas. The idea is not that there is a single path to truth, rather, the purpose of a university is to pursue the truth from every angle — without limitation, fear or assumption. The motto also means that the university should pursue the truth for as long as it takes — which is to say, forever.

An attack from outside always has a galvanizing effect — provided it doesn't destroy the institution. The effect of the Trump administration's assault on Harvard has been to close the many gaps that exist within a university on questions of politics and priorities. Harvard students, faculty and staff have been given the gift of being challenged — and we have responded by explaining to ourselves as much as to the outside world why we all participate in the common enterprise of the university.

The answer that has emerged is that we are here to study, to learn, to teach and to improve people's lives.

The other issue Harvard has had to confront internally is its privilege. So far, Trump has decided to target two groups: the most vulnerable, like undocumented immigrants, and the most privileged, such as elite universities and large law firms. The president's sustained efforts to strip the university of funding and of its international students — not to mention the proposal in the House budget bill to tax its endowment at 21% — have reminded the university that the only moral justification for its privilege and its wealth is to strive for excellence in the pursuit of truth. Prestige and cultural power don't automatically make a great university. But having them means that Harvard has a fundamental duty to be the best that it possibly can be, and to create and discover knowledge that helps those who don't enjoy the same privilege.

Harvard's commencement gathers not only graduates but their families as well. Many of these family members have never attended a university. To see their joy at their children's accomplishments and promise is to feel the promise of America itself. It's common to see them trying to get a graduate's robe for pictures as if to say that the graduation isn't just the accomplishment of the student but of each and every person in the lineage. The image's deeper meaning is that Harvard is — and will continue to be — a vehicle for taking some of the world's most promising students and launching them into lives of productivity and contribution. If it took Donald Trump to remind us of what we're here for, his attacks will have been worth it.



NOAH FELDMAN

Bloomberg

RBI MUST APPROACH MONETARY EASING GRADUALLY TO BALANCE RISKS FROM A VOLATILE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT

On the monetary easing path

THE MONETARY POLICY Committee (MPC) meeting this month comes against the backdrop of a relatively more stable global environment compared to the previous policy as countries attempt to strike trade deals with the US, with the country's administration willing to provide flexibility in terms of timings and tariff rates. Having said that, the global outlook remains delicate as policy uncertainty and trade frictions continue.

While the adversities on the global front may have eased lately, the high-frequency indicators in India remain mixed. Data on auto sales, infrastructure sector, steel, cement, core exports, index of industrial production, etc. suggest an early weakening trend, while travel/freight indicators appear to be robust. The tariff-led uncertainty is further expected to delay a revival in the private capex cycle. On the other hand, we expect a normal monsoon, higher rural wages, lower inflation and cost of borrowing, along with a partial impact of income tax cuts to provide some cushion to the consumption demand. Overall, we expect the FY26 GDP estimates to be around 6-6.2% as the global risks unfold. Notably, the fiscal headroom to address softness in growth remains limited. The Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) higher-than-budgeted dividend to the government along with higher revenues led by excise duty hike are expected to offset the downside risks on direct tax collections.

The inflation outlook, meanwhile, remains fairly benign, promising to average around 3.5% in FY26 and around 4% through most of FY27. While untimely rains may pose some upside to vegetable prices in the near term, the predictions of normal rains signal robust kharif sowing and contained food prices, capping any sustained upside to non-perishable food



UPASNA BHARDWAJ

Chief economist, Kotak Mahindra Bank

prices. While core inflation is expected to trend higher, much of the increase is expected on account of the surge in gold prices along with the adverse base effect. Furthermore, the soft global commodity price cycle is expected to keep the wholesale price index inflation significantly muted. Given the low crude prices, the oil marketing companies' gross marketing margins on petrol and diesel are currently around ₹13/litre each. This is likely to provide a policy lever to the government to either manage inflation or fiscal slippage risk, if any, through additional excise duty hikes.

Overall, the slowing economy along with benign inflation trends provide adequate room for the MPC to continue its monetary easing path. In the upcoming policy, we therefore expect 25 basis points (bps) of rate cut along with a continued dovish guidance.

To ensure an adequate and smooth transmission, the RBI has caused stealth easing of 75 bps (despite a repo rate cut of 50 bps) through aggressive liquidity easing measures, allowing the overnight rates to drop closer to the lower end of the corridor (5.75% currently compared to the repo rate of 6%). The RBI has infused durable liquidity to the tune of ₹8.1 lakh crore in the form of cash reserve ratio cut, open market operation purchases, and FX (foreign) swaps between

December 2024 and May. Core liquidity has surged to ₹6.5 trillion currently, aided by a record RBI dividend transfer to the government. Meanwhile, the banking system's liquidity remains comfortable but significantly lower at around ₹2 lakh crore.

We expect the divergence between the core liquidity and banking system liquidity to persist through at least the next three-four months before government spending picks up to narrow the gap.

Nevertheless, our estimates suggest that the banking system liquidity should remain comfortable at around 0.8-1.2% of net demand and time liabilities through the rest of H1FY26, not warranting any immediate liquidity easing measures. While the winding down of the heavy short-forward book of the RBI (worth \$64 billion in FY26) will weigh on liquidity, tepid currency leakage and government spending should help keep the banking system liquidity conditions comfortable. However, in H2FY26 the pick-up in currency in circulation could necessitate some further liquidity easing measures given that the balance of payment is broadly expected to remain near-neutral.

Beyond the near term, we see the continued negative output creating slack in the economy, with global uncertainties further clouding the outlook.

Current bond yield differentials are more a reflection of India's robust macro position versus a relatively more precarious US debt position

Slackening corporate governance



MANISH SINGHAL

Secretary general, ASSOCHAM

THE COLLAPSE of BluSmart, the electric vehicle taxi service, has not only dampened business sentiments, but also had a debilitating impact on a section of the population which had seen a reliable and clean mode of transport emerge like a breath of fresh air. What BluSmart managed to achieve in a short span of time was commendable — a great brand, creating value for the customer, and earning their hard-earned trust.

In a competitive market like India, it is extremely tough for new offerings to endear themselves to consumers, especially in case of consumer-facing services. Pricing, market coverage capabilities, and the ability to consistently deliver services are factors which help a company stand out, and BluSmart seemed to tick all the boxes.

Unfortunately, it has also unravelled like Kingfisher Airlines and Jet Airways — both brands which were able to carve a distinctive identity due to their exemplary services during the peak of their operations.

Obviously, these companies are not the only ones whose fall has been due to lack or complete ignorance of strong governance standards. The list is long and the way things have panned out in India Inc in the past decade in this metric, it is a matter of grave concern that some companies seem to be ignoring the basic conception on which robust and thriving business corporations are built.

Cascading impact on ecosystem

Besides the lack of robust corporate governance standards, another major connection between the above-mentioned companies was that they were able to endear themselves to the public due to the high efficiency in their services. The fact that there has always been a public outcry when the shenanigans in these companies were exposed reveals how sudden collapse not only adversely impacts the internal stakeholders, but also a significant chunk of consumers and other stakeholders including employees and vendors.

A major repercussion from the BluSmart episode will be the unintended spotlight on how entrepreneurs go about raising money and are functioning with seemingly scant regard for regulatory compliances.

These unfortunate incidents can mar a sector's future growth prospects as investors, especially foreign, may become cagey about believing in the vision of an entrepreneur, leading to overall dampened sentiments, and dithering over greeninglighting new and exciting ventures.

This demonstrates how deeply interwoven the success of a company can be

Incidents like BluSmart collapse mar a sector's growth prospects and add to a growing list of companies ignoring governance standards

with the satisfaction and reliance of its consumer base, making eventual failure a matter of widespread public concern.

Build institutions, not companies

A common call among companies has been that they aspire to be "employers of choice". It is easier said than done, and to achieve that goal organisations need to invest in the processes and prioritise compliance strictness. This is important to foster an environment which does not give preferential treatment to either the promoter or the honchos.

Becoming an employer of choice in today's dynamic and discerning talent landscape demands a holistic and deeply embedded organisational philosophy. It necessitates a strategic commitment to fostering a genuinely equitable, inclusive, and purpose-driven culture. This goes beyond the superficial treatment and delves into actively cultivating an environment where every individual feels valued, respected, and empowered to contribute their best.

Focus on culture at the outset

Employee satisfaction, longevity, and enduring brand value are the three pillars on which an organisation can aspire to build an ideal workplace. With a sharp focus on stability, transparency, and sustained performance, enterprises can look forward to build a culture which provides these three aspects to employees.

The important point to remember in this case is that a company's culture is implemented at the beginning, not in the middle or after any incident which exposes the lack of necessary guardrails. Enterprises must internalise that stability, transparency, and sustained performance aren't mere buzzwords — they are the lifeblood of any organisation which aspires to create a lasting legacy.

These values, when embedded into a company's DNA from its inception, foster a culture that prioritises ethical conduct, ensures employee satisfaction and longevity, and cultivates enduring brand value. This cannot be a crisis management strategy to be implemented after a scandal erupts. It is the very foundational bedrock upon which the entire enterprise is built. It needs to be seen from the prism of immutable laws of physics that govern whether a structure stands or falls. Neglecting these principles from the outset is not just short-sighted, but a gamble with the organisation's very existence. To put it bluntly, it is a gamble where the odds are heavily stacked against long-term success.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Respectable numbers

Apropos of "Slow but steady" (FE, May 31), the robust and unexpected Q4 GDP numbers at 7.4% have come as welcome news, succeeding in lifting the year's GDP to a respectable 6.5%, above the lowest in four years. The imposition of US tariffs will affect the competitiveness of our exports, and its effect on our GDP remains to be seen. Demand is just not picking up. The only hope is that the tax cuts

for salaried employees will put some money in the hands of the people to spend and create demand. Though not as important as before, a good monsoon could improve spending, especially in the rural areas.

—Anthony Henriques, Maharashtra

Steady growth

The GDP figures highlight India's continuing economic resilience amid a challenging global environment. That the economy expanded at 6.5%

in FY25 and grew at an impressive 7.4% in the March quarter owe to our sound macroeconomic framework. While the numbers exceed forecasts, a deeper look suggests the trajectory remains largely in line with estimates. It is encouraging to see private consumption gaining pace, driven in part by supportive fiscal measures like tax reforms and easing monetary policy. This indicates improving household sentiment. However, the slowdown in capital formation and

public expenditure growth warrants attention, especially as global headwinds persist. Private sector investment remains a critical area. Despite a stable policy environment, businesses appear cautious. Unleashing this potential requires more than just incentives. It demands sustained confidence in domestic demand and global stability.

—Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

Write to us at feletters@expressindia.com



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

— Ramnath Goenka

INDIA'S 5TH-GEN AMCA NEEDS MISSION MODE TO MEET DEADLINES

OVER a year after the Cabinet Committee on Security gave its nod for India's first 5th-generation fighter aircraft, the Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA), the Defence Ministry on May 27 cleared the way for the Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA) under the Defence Research & Development Organisation as the nodal agency to commence work on the design and development of its execution model.

The development is welcome, although it's a case of better late than never, considering that India's not-so-friendly neighbourhood already has 5th-generation fighter aircraft among its squadrons. China reportedly has an operational fleet of 180 5th-generation fighter jets, and, according to unconfirmed reports, it unveiled its 6th-generation fighter, the Chengdu J-36, in January. Its all-weather ally Pakistan is said to be procuring 40 more of their 5th-gen fighters.

AMCA's first of the five planned prototypes is expected to be unveiled in three years, and its maiden flight is likely to take off no earlier than 2028. Its operational roll-out can be expected only by 2035. The initial prototypes may cost approximately ₹1,720 crore each, but this could be reduced to ₹860 crore when production scales up. The overall project has been allocated ₹15,000 crore. This presents a time span with possible cost escalations, during which equations about air power balance with neighbours may likely turn to India's disadvantage. This must be viewed against the backdrop of the Indian Air Force already being stretched thin, with the squadron strength down to 31 against the authorised 42.

The AMCA is an ambitious project planned to be indigenous, involving the private or public sector, either independently or in collaboration. As a 5th-generation fighter jet, it will require key features such as a stealthy airframe, internal carriage of smart weapons, a low-probability-of-intercept radar, advanced sensors with data fusion, super-cruise performance, advanced avionics features, and highly integrated computer systems to enable its pilots to have a comprehensive understanding of the in-combat scenario.

With the Centre green-lighting the project, ADA is due to issue an Expression of Interest for the AMCA development phase. While the execution model is expected to lay the groundwork for how the project will unfold in stages to achieve its goals, it is essential to maintain tight deadlines so that the AMCA takes flight at the earliest.

APTNESS OF CIVILIANS TO BEAR ARMS IS REAL ISSUE

ASSAM Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma recently announced that the State's "original inhabitants and indigenous communities" can get licences to buy firearms to protect themselves in the face of insecurity over infiltration and life threats in areas bordering Bangladesh where government presence is minimal. The Opposition has pointed out that the decision would show the security infrastructure along the international border in a poor light and even give a fillip to gun culture. In a usually sensitive Assam, where Assembly elections are due early next year, the announcement has sparked a debate.

The policy raises some eyebrows. The government did not say if it had first considered strengthening border forces before announcing the policy. Protecting people's lives is a core function of the State, and the policy could be misinterpreted as ineffective governance and policing in the border areas. Secondly, vetting licence seekers to exclude the unoriginal and the non-indigenous could fuel fresh confusion in Assam amid official attempts to weed out illegal Bangladeshi immigrants. Thirdly, the stringent police verification process for granting licences to "genuine" citizens could raise allegations of discrimination. Fourthly, many people in these areas still struggle to access basic amenities, and it's unrealistic to expect them to afford an expensive firearm, undergo training, and acquire the cognitive skills necessary to understand the rules of self-defence. The well-off among them would easily bear arms, even creating an "armed elite" within society.

It's not the first time a state in India is arming its citizens. The government trained civilians as Village Defence Guards in J&K. The scheme was disbanded after a scandal involving licence and firearm misuse. Punjab once trained civilians as Special Police Officers. Chhattisgarh gave firearms to tribal youth, forming a vigilante group, Salwa Judum. In 2006 to combat the Naxal insurgency, The Supreme Court declared it unconstitutional after mass recovery of illegal firearms and human rights violations. The Court's verdict observed: "The creation of such a miasmatic environment of dehumanisation of youngsters of the deprived segments of our population, in which guns are given to them rather than books, to stand as guards for the rapine, plunder and loot in our forests, would be to lay the road to national destruction." The spirit behind the apex court's pronouncement is applicable in Assam's case as well.

QUICK TAKE

UNIQUE LIFE-SAVER

JAPANESE researchers are on the verge of a breakthrough: artificial blood for use by patients of any blood type. Clinical trials are currently on. Made from expired donor blood, the lab substitute replicates the oxygen-carrying red blood cells—carrying oxygen and aiding blood clot. Unlike the original, it lasts over a year at room temperature. The innovation can revolutionise emergency healthcare worldwide because artificial blood can be available anywhere, from hospitals to crash sites to conflict zones, ready for instant use without the need for compatibility tests or refrigeration. Indian researchers are not far behind in experimenting with artificial red blood cells, artificial blood vessels and even lab-made haemoglobin.

IN early May Sri Lankans voted for a third time in a series—this time to elect members to the local authorities. The ruling National People's Power (NPP) secured a majority of seats in 286 out of 341 local bodies in an election considered a popularity test for the incumbency. The NPP secured 43.26 per cent of the vote, recording a dent in popularity, also reflective of the fragmented nature of votes at the local level.

Into its seventh month in office, the NPP appears tight-lipped on matters of policy and plans, preferring to avoid discussion and instead offering combative television performances by junior ranks on public concerns that beg answers. The May 6 vote can be best considered a quiet reprimand from the people, impatient with the slow delivery. While the government has a five-year term, it still needs to manage public expectations and prevent public outrage.

The brewing dissent is partly of the government's making. The NPP, while indulging in rhetorical condemnation of corruption as the only reason for economic collapse, did not adequately explain to the public the severity of Sri Lanka's economic situation. The NPP sometimes made it appear a management problem, which only the NPP could address. People still trust the government to have integrity but question its ability to fix the economy without passing further burden on to them.

The government is now saddled with the Herculean task of managing an economy that successive governments have mismanaged. It has also inherited a much-maligned reform agenda via the International Monetary Fund (IMF), from which there is no easy departure. The administration is naturally finding it challenging to explain that things are not as easy as they appeared to be when it was in opposition. Barring the occasional protest, it is unlikely that public outrage can be prevented from spilling onto the streets in some form soon if the administration does not take action to move the economy forward without compromising public trust. Sri Lanka is currently attempting to negotiate the hefty 44 per cent reciprocal tariff announced by US President Donald Trump. The surprise ruling by an American trade court blocking steel tariffs may offer the island some respite, but it calls for prudent handling. The island's bulk exports head to the US, and the proposed tariff poses a serious threat to the country's export earnings. How Sri Lanka negotiates and plans to use the small window of opportunity will depend on solid foreign poli-

Lack of policy coherence prevents Sri Lanka from moving forward and making strategic partnerships that can help the country overcome its economic woes

PATCH ECONOMY, MEND BILATERALS, SOOTHE CITIZENS

DILRUKSHI HANDUNNETTI



Award-winning journalist and lawyer. She is a founder and director of the Colombo-based Center for Investigative Reporting (CIR)



WANDER PAGESAR

icy and trade negotiating capacity.

This questions the current dispensation of the foreign policy, which is often unclear and, at times, raises doubts about strategy. Take, for example, how India's neighbours have moved away despite its "Neighbourhood First" policy. Some have looked to the West, while others towards China. Colombo could use the opportunity to consolidate its trade partnerships with India in a manner that bolsters the economy and maximises its geostrategic benefits. During the economic crisis, India played a crucial role, although it was often viewed with misgivings due to its chequered past. As economists note, it may be a window of opportunity to collaborate with India to gain a better foothold in negotiating with the US, given the close economic ties between the two countries. In doing so, Co-

lombo should overlook long-term loyalties that have remained steadfast in their friendship or ignore China, Sri Lanka's largest bilateral creditor.

This calls for a foreign policy that is rooted in economic, trade and geostrategic interests. In short, Colombo should work with all these powers to deliver the best results at home. Sri Lanka needs a well-crafted balancing act. The Dissanayake administration should learn from the Rajapaksa regime that playing one against the other does not yield long-term beneficial results. The singularly pro-China approach led the island into deeper debt, which eventually brought the economy to a grinding halt and created powerful enemies.

In short, the government must learn to balance the Neighbourhood First with Belt and Road. It also needs to strategi-

cally involve partners to resolve the US reciprocal tariff matter, which could otherwise deliver a deadly blow to an economy that has lost its shock absorbers. Now, it is a matter of carefully managing competing geopolitical interests to secure economic advancement. In this regard, there are lessons to learn from countries that maximised their geostrategic locations and others who repositioned themselves to meet new economic challenges.

It is this lack of policy coherence that prevents the country from moving forward and making strategic partnerships that can help Sri Lanka overcome its economic woes. Beyond bold action, it is now that the island requires innovative policy approaches that do not make choices that harm.

The NPP has been prudent in not abandoning the IMF formula despite firm election pledges to the contrary. This is essential for economic recovery and for maintaining a semblance of normalcy. It is equally important to prioritise strategy over old affiliations or political ideology, as challenging as it may be.

The reform agenda is quite unpopular among many, but it now appears to be the only available antidote to the island's problems. Having opposed it before the polls, the government now finds it difficult to convince the people of additional tax revisions and other controls that pass the burden to them.

In addition, the government should avoid walking back on previous plans to restructure loss-making and underperforming state-run enterprises. As challenging as it may be, the government must reduce the massive public sector workforce, which exceeds 1.3 million, a political dumping ground where successive governments created jobs for political gain. What the country has also not seen is a move toward increasing productivity.

All the strategies in the world and partnerships cannot deliver Sri Lanka's economy unless strategic attempts are made to improve productivity. Despite the stated policies, there remains significant confusion about how the administration intends to fix the island's flagging economy. This, too, becomes a matter of policy intricately linked to foreign policy.

Meanwhile, time is running out, slowly but surely, for an administration brought to office with great expectations. Along with that, public patience, too, is on the wane. For President Anura Kumara Dissanayake and his brigade, it is a wake-up call to review policies and adopt a pragmatic, geostrategically prudent foreign policy and economic approach if Sri Lanka is to move forward.

(Views are personal)

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A SYNCRETIC VISION TO HEAL OUR DIVIDED WORLD



RENUKA NARAYANAN

FAITHLINE

THIS week, I felt the urge to revisit a Sufi bridge-builder between Hinduism and Islam just to see if I still felt hopeful about his syncretic ideas. Bulle Shah (1680-1735) was born into a noble family of Syeds at Qasur, now in Pakistan. As a child, Bulle Shah, colloquially known as "Bulle" and "Bulleya" in Punjab, was reportedly lost in thought frequently, which worried his family.

In the course of his restless youth, Bulle was tormented by inchoate spiritual longings while urged by his concerned family to live his life as a nobleman with all its attendant pleasures and privileges. One day, he went on a long ride to clear his head and get away from home for a bit. He happened to notice a line of ants diligently carrying grain to their anthill. He paused, his attention caught, and wondered, "All that industry just to feed oneself? Why was every living creature, from insects to birds, animals and human beings, relentlessly driven by the same mission—to find food, to sustain life, to perpetuate its species? The mystery of Creation beckoned strongly to him, and he set out to find a spiritual guide.

Bulle found his spiritual master by chance in a vegetable garden of all places. His name was Inayat Qadiri, from the Qadiri order of Sufis. It was a Qadiri Sufi who had taught Prince Dara Shikoh and led him to explore attempts to syncretise Hinduism and Islam—as in the work *Majma ul-Bahrain*, meaning *The Mingling of Oceans*. However, that well-meant book had not reached the ordinary people; it had stayed in high-class circles, where it had little or no influence. It was not for the hot polloi, just as albums of miniature paintings were not for ordinary folk those days, but were expensive collectables for kings, nobles and wealthy merchants.

Bulle's noble family was outraged that he should so adore a lowly market gardener, but he was not to be dissuaded. His youth and early adulthood coincided with the last harsh years of Aurangzeb's reign. This unpleasant legacy may have further influenced his preference to follow Dara's syncretic path rather than Aurangzeb's divisive and intolerant road. Dara was the 'mughal' have-been, the last prince who would ever formalise an attempt at Hindu-Muslim amity. Somebody would have to articulate the Qadiri vision to the common folk, and Bulle took it upon himself to do so.

Bulle Shah wrote highly romantic poetry

in Punjabi, allegorising God on the pattern of Krishna Bhakti. He drew on the popular Punjabi imagery of the folkloric heroine, Heer, pining for her lover, Ranjha, which also resonated with Advaita philosophy—specifically the concept of the *jivatma*, or individual soul, seeking to merge into the *Paramatma*, the Universal Soul.

Bulle's poems soon caught on in Punjabi circles, like the heartfelt "*Masjid dhaade, masjid dhaade! Dhaade jo kash dhaade! Ik kis da dil na dhaavni! Rab dilanai chhredha*." This translates as, "Break the mosque and break the temple, break what can be broken; but do not break the human heart, within which God abides."



ILLUSTRATION BY NIKHIL K.

Bulle Shah challenged religious orthodoxy through romantic poetry, using everyday imagery to celebrate love, unity, and spiritual freedom. He became a bridge between divided communities and a lasting voice for interfaith harmony. Today, we must consider his ideas for the sake of national interest

This did not go down well with conservative clerics, and Bulle faced considerable resistance, but he was determined to express his thoughts and have his say. Typically, he answered in verse, with "*Mullah, maar nabolayan: Sansnuapayay rihavan de: Kanjri bannayan meri ijt na ghat di! Mughlanachkeyaarananavan de*" means, "Mullah, call me not to prayer! Let

me please my Beloved! Though I become a dancing girl, I lose no honour! Let me win him over with my dances." According to Bulle, the objective of social unity was a worthwhile goal, and its secret lay in realising that "God is One". This short, illuminating verse struck a chord with several people: "*Ji jitu margawani! Hun tuhaar fakira! Jitte da muladhi kashira! Haare da mulhira*."

The literal, if bumpy, translation of that is, "Life has slipped by chasing victory! Now learn to lose, o seeker! Victory's worth but half a grain. While 'defeat' is a diamond." Its message to everyday folk was to let their inner moral and spiritual convictions triumph and not surrender to the forceful rules of orthodoxy.

Bulle got more noticed in the second half of the 20th century, thanks to Bollywood. His first airing outside Punjab was in the film *Bobby* in 1973. His verse, "*Masjid dhaade, masjid dhaade*", was translated in Hindi as the song *Beshar madir-masjid to do*. His lyrics scored another hit through AR Rahman's *Tere ishq nachaya chhaiya-chhaiya* (Your love set me dancing) in the movie *Dil Se* back in 1998. Bulle's verses were even transposed to the classical realms of Kathak, wherein "Sufi Kathak" was quite the vogue in Delhi in the 1990s. But it is as a political message his words carry significance today for communal relations.

They seem to urge a deeper sense of nationhood through uniting the God-seeking impulses of differing religions. Another verse that highlights his syncretic mission is addressed straight to "God" as Bulle wished to see him: "*Bindrabarun gaucharave, Lanka chadkarnaad bajave! Makhe da bann Haji aave! Wah-wah rang usatide! Hun kirti ap chhugaida*." Meaning, "You appeared as Krishna, Rama, and the Pilgrim of Mecca, showing so many colours; Where do You hide now?"

Are Bulle's ideas remotely doable today? It's likely that many will not buy his fuzzy love. Deep differences exist in both theory and practice despite sporadic inter-faith initiatives. But maybe, just maybe, we can "take it till we make it" for the sake of national interest.

(Views are personal)

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MAILBAG

WRITE TO: letters@newindianexpress.com

Flood crisis

Al: Cities drowning in greed's flood (June 1). Cities like Delhi, Mumbai and Bengaluru face repeated flooding due to outdated drainage and over-concretisation. Current systems can't handle rainfall. The government should adopt global best practices and avoid reclaiming wetlands. Haribandhu Panigrahi Tarbha

Balance needed

Ref: Needed soon: Switch to life-work balance (June 1). The author suggests valuing the skills of retired people by shifting from a work-life to a life-work balance. Reducing long hours for the youth and involving retired people can help build a more inclusive, creative, healthy, and fulfilling society. Jayaraman CP, Chalakudi

AI Limitations

Ref: AI bloodbath in white collar jobs, and slower hiring (June 1). When the computer was first introduced, there was an outcry that it would lead to large-scale unemployment. Yet nothing drastic occurred, and work was completed more quickly and efficiently. The human brain is unique and can never be perfectly replicated by AI. R Sampath, Chennai

Sindoor losses

Ref: Suffered initial losses during Op Sindoor: CDS (June 1). CDS General Anil Chauhan's admission of initial losses in Operation Sindoor clarifies that Indian jets were hit. Though India struck back effectively, the belief that it emerged unscathed is now proven incorrect, despite heavier casualties on the Pakistani side. CV Arvind, Bengaluru

Covid surge

Ref: Covid cases cross 3K, 26 deaths (June 1). A new Covid-19 wave in India has caused 3,000 cases, mostly in Maharashtra, Delhi and Kerala. Experts are not worried yet, but if it worsens as in 2020, people must be ready to protect themselves. Gulam Rabbani, Haveli

Highway failure

Ref: Concessionaire failed to improve ground's bearing capacity: NHAI (June 1). Serious damage to National Highway 66 at Kooriyad, Kerala, due to design faults and unsuitable elevated embankment has drawn national attention. NHAI's handling is unacceptable, blaming the concessionaire unfairly. Contract awards and bid documents must be urgently reviewed. Jiji Panicker K, Chengannur

Op Sindoor should not be used to derive political mileage

THE political class will do better if it stops desisting from trying to derive electoral mileage from the highly successful Operation Sindoor that was executed recently. The military aspects of the operation have been largely praised (even by objective western experts), but the political aftermath has proven far more complex. The ruling party has come under scrutiny for allegedly using the operation's success to enhance its nationalistic image ostensibly for electoral gains. On its part, the Opposition has done little better. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge called for a special parliamentary session to discuss the operation in detail. He raised concerns about inconsistencies in official narratives, particularly surrounding reports regarding the number of

Indian aircraft lost during the strikes. He also accused the government of 'misleading the nation'. His statement came after the Chief of Defence Staff Gen Anil Chauhan acknowledged the loss of some Indian aircraft but emphasised that the armed forces had adapted quickly to changing tactical scenarios, ultimately achieving the mission objectives. Chauhan categorically refuted Pakistan's assertions of shooting down multiple Indian jets, labelling them as propaganda meant to distort facts. His remarks highlighted the critical role of clear and truthful communication in sustaining public trust and countering misinformation.

The political discourse triggered by Operation Sindoor reflects a broader tension between safeguarding national

security and navigating partisan interests. While it is natural for political parties to discuss significant national developments, it is imperative that such dialogues remain constructive and rooted in the national interest. Exploiting military operations for electoral advantage not only undermines the integrity of the armed forces but also erodes public confidence in the nation's democratic institutions. As India continues to assess the long-term implications of Operation Sindoor, there is a pressing need for political maturity and a unified stance on issues of national security. Recognising and honouring the courage and competence of the armed forces should transcend political divides. National security must remain above the realm of party politics, treated with

the seriousness and dignity it deserves. Also, our political leaders must come to terms with a sobering reality: Operation Sindoor, while tactically successful and symbolically significant, was not a war that we won—not even a full-scale battle. At best, it was a well-executed skirmish, a calibrated military response to the horrifying Pahalgam terror attack that claimed 26 innocent lives.

Its importance lies not in territorial gains or dramatic military victories, but in the message it has sent loud and clear: Pakistan will have to pay a heavy price for supporting and harbouring terrorist outfits. Precision strikes on terrorist camps disrupted their operations and showcased India's strategic capabilities. However, this operation must not be mistaken for closure. The

war on terror is a long and evolving struggle, requiring constant vigilance, strategic foresight, and, above all, national unity. True victory will come not with a single strike, but through sustained efforts to dismantle the networks of extremism to be assured of lasting peace and security. Operation Sindoor stands as a testament to India's strategic capability and resolve in the face of terrorism. However, legacy will be defined not just by military precision but by the manner the nation's political leadership chooses to engage with it. By fostering transparency, encouraging responsible dialogue, and prioritising unity, India can ensure that such operations serve their true purpose—protection and security of all its citizens.

LETTERS

Cheers to the humane side of the new Miss World

SUCHATA Chaugrui, the 21-year-old Thai beauty standing tall at 180 cm, has made history by winning the 72nd Miss World title. Her remarkable blend of elegance, intelligence, and compassion has brought immense pride to Thailand placing Phuket in the global spotlight. This victory is expected to boost tourism, media attention, and the hospitality industry in the region. Her advocacy for breast cancer awareness through the 'Opal for Her' initiative showcases how beauty queens can drive meaningful social change and inspire increased community engagement and philanthropy thereby strengthening Phuket's pageant legacy. With India as a neighbouring country, enhanced accessibility and cultural affinity may lead to a rise in cross-border tourism and better relations.

RS Narula, Patiala

Real beauty with a beautiful mind

I wish to congratulate the winner of the 72nd Miss World-2025 Crown Opal Suchata Chaugrui for emerging as the first beauty queen from Thailand to scale the pinnacle. The reply that clinched the issue in her favour "being the person who all of the people in our lives look up to and lead with the gracefulness in your actions" demonstrates that she is a "real beauty with a beautiful mind". After all, every human being must be endowed with such qualities.

Sreelekha PS, Boudhnagar, Secunderabad-61

Opal Suchata is a deserving winner

NEARLY a month-long celebration marking the 72nd Miss World pageant concluded on a grand note with Opal Suchata Chaugrui of Thailand taking the crown. It was unfortunate that the Indian contestant Nandini Gupta could not even make it to the top eight stage. Opal Suchata, who underwent surgery for breast cancer, displayed her grit while answering a question, while maintaining "whatever ailment you are suffering from, you should not worry about it nor stop your journey". Meanwhile, the Revanth Reddy government showed its organisational acumen while using the mega event to showcase Telangana culture and promote tourism in a big way. Taking the contestants on specially conducted tours was a masterstroke, which also helped local vendors to flourish.

Pratap Reddy Yaramala, Tiruvuru (AP)

Miss World organisers handled controversy quite well

OPAL Suchata Chaugrui's achievement at the Miss World 2025 was a stupendous effort and deserves the best of applause because Thailand finally got its world beauty. Though India's Nandini Gupta disappointed the local crowd, Suchata made Asia proud by winning the crown. Meanwhile, her feat will spur the cosmetics businesses, especially in the continent. Though the pageant was marred when one of the contenders Miss England Milla Magee walked out in a huff, the organisers weathered the storm rather well and conducted the pageant in a manner that was befitting the extravaganza. Some orthodox organisations and Leftist groups also tried to disturb the proceedings as it is their worst but the security cover for the event thwarted bids to cause mischief.

Govardhana Mymedhi, MG Road, Vijayawada

Win AI race but with a clear conscience

INDIA'S AI ambitions are no longer a distant dream. With the recent 10,000 crore India AI Mission, the spotlight is on local language models, infrastructure and homegrown startups like Sarvam AI. The partnership between Microsoft and Yotta to launch India's largest AI cloud cluster marks a significant leap. Amidst this digital gold rush, are we pausing to think? AI without regulation is a double-edged sword. What good is innovation if it widens inequality, automates prejudice, or compromises privacy? The digital divide is still real—can India's village benefits from AI when they still struggle for basic internet? We must build smart and fair. Data ethics, local inclusion, and algorithmic accountability should not be afterthoughts. Our AI must reflect our democracy—not just our ambition. India may win the AI race. But will it win it with conscience?

Mohammad Hasnain, Muzaffarpur

Curb AI-generated deepfake scams

THE increasing misuse of AI to create deepfake videos and audio clips is a serious threat to public trust and safety. Recently, several innocent people were scammed through AI-generated voices mimicking their loved ones or trusted celebrities. What once seemed like futuristic fiction is now a dangerous reality. There is an urgent need for awareness and stricter regulations to detect and punish such acts. Tech platforms must also take responsibility in flagging and removing deepfake content before it causes damage. If unchecked, these scams could erode trust in the media and relationships. Let's act before AI becomes a weapon in the hands of mischief-makers.

Muhammad Arshad, Chagalammari

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BENGALURU ONLINE

Kharge asks PM to stop 'self-praise'

BENGALURU: Commenting on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's public speeches after Operation Sindoor, Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge urged him to 'Focus on the enemy instead of self-boasting' and to 'recuse himself from election campaign'. "I don't like reacting to all his (Modi's) statements," Kharge said while addressing reporters in Bengaluru. "But my only request to him is that those in power should sometimes keep their mouth shut." Kharge questioned the Prime Minister's recent public statements and political activities, suggesting that Modi should temporarily step back from electoral campaigning. "Modi should recuse himself from elections and focus on the country. He should understand whatever has happened in the country and speak," he remarked. "I am saying without any political differences that he (Modi) should focus on the enemy instead of self-boasting that no one except for him would have done it. Our full support is with the Armed Forces," he said. Referring to ongoing developments linked to Operation Sindoor, Kharge noted that multi-party delegations visiting several countries to explain India's position.

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

APOLOGIST



CR SUKUMAR

► India-Japan: The two economies make for a study in contrasts

► Don't just grow bigger, grow better

into everyday life? And how does it compare to Japan, a nation celebrated for its high living standards, equitable wealth distribution, and efficient society?

INDIA and Japan occupied the global news headlines of late when India achieved the monumental feat of surpassing Japan to claim the title of the world's fourth-largest economy with a nominal GDP of \$4.187 trillion, narrowly ahead of Japan's \$4.186 trillion.

India and Japan represent two fascinating, yet contrasting, economic stories on the global landscape.

One is a rapidly growing, populous emerging market with a youthful demographic, while the other is a mature, technologically advanced economy grappling with demographic challenges. This tale of two economies highlights their unique strengths, challenges, and forward paths.

Often hailed as the 'world's fastest-growing major economy', India has been on a remarkable trajectory. The milestone of surpassing Japan marks its ascent as a global economic powerhouse, driven by a youthful population, booming tech and manufacturing sectors, and bold infrastructure initiatives.

Yet, for millions of Indians—from tech workers in Bengaluru to farmers in Bihar—this headline masks a deeper question: how does this growth translate

India's economic ascent to the world's fourth-largest economy is a point of national pride. Yet, beneath this headline lies a troubling reality: One per cent of Indians control nearly 40 per cent of the nation's wealth, according to recent reports. This extreme concentration of wealth underscores an alarming widening of the gap between the haves and have-nots, threatening social cohesion and sustainable growth.

An economy's size is measured by its Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the total value of goods and services produced annually. India's \$4.187 trillion GDP in 2025 places it behind only the United States of America, China, and Germany, fuelled by a population of 1.45 billion.

However, GDP per capita reveals a stark divide. India's per capita income is roughly \$2,900, while Japan's is \$39,000, over 13 times higher. With Japan's population at 125 million, its wealth is more evenly distributed, ensuring better living standards. For the average Indian, this means national prosperity doesn't yet translate into personal wealth. Japan's edge lies in higher living standards, better infrastructure, and equitable wealth distribution, despite a smaller economy.



Emulating Japan's focus on equitable systems while leveraging India's youthful demographic advantage could transform this tale of inequality into one of shared prosperity. To rival Japan's quality of life, India must prioritise equitable growth, skilling, and infrastructure.

Japan's Gini coefficient (a measure of inequality) is among the lowest globally, while India's is high, reflecting greater disparity. Its model shows that equitable growth can enhance stability, a model that India can look to emulate.

India's economic surge is reshaping lives, but the benefits are uneven, and challenges persist. Its economic growth brings opportunities but doesn't automatically translate into immediate improvements for everyone. In total economic size, India has overtaken Japan, but in daily life metrics, Japan remains far ahead due to various factors pointed above.

India's unemployment rate in April 2025 was 5.1 per cent, higher than Japan's impressive 2.5 per cent. Urban youth face a steep 17.2 per cent unemployment rate. A skills mismatch—65.7 per cent of India's unemployed are educated but

lack training for high-tech roles—remains a hurdle. Income inequality and regional disparities persist, with rural areas lagging in infrastructure and access to services. The informal sector, which employs a large portion of the workforce, lacks social security and stability. India's 250-million-strong middle class is fueling a consumer boom, from smartphones to 5G streaming. Digital payments, like UPI at village shops, are transforming even rural areas. In contrast, Japan's \$39,000 per capita income ensures most citizens enjoy modern homes, reliable public transport, and leisure like dining out or bullet train travel. While India's middle class will expand, its 140th global rank in per capita income underscores that the poorest won't see quick gains.

India's Universal Health Coverage Index has improved, with

schemes like Ayushman Bharat providing free care to millions. Yet, 35.5 per cent of under-5 children face malnutrition, and rural healthcare is inconsistent. Economic growth is expanding hospitals, but high out-of-pocket costs burden families.

Japan's universal healthcare ensures near-total coverage with advanced facilities. India's low per capita income limits such access.

The concentration of around 40 per cent of India's wealth in the hands of one per cent of its population has far-reaching consequences such as economic instability, social tensions, political influences and youth frustration, among others.

Extreme inequality can stifle growth. The poorest 43 per cent, who struggled for food in 2022, have limited purchasing power, slowing consumer-driven economic expansion. India's 140th global rank in per capita income (\$2,900) reflects this skewed distribution.

Rising inequality fuels resentment, as seen in urban-rural divides and protests over job scarcity. The urban middle class enjoys the systems while G, while rural families face malnutrition (35.5 per cent of under-five children) and inadequate healthcare.

The wealthy one per cent wields disproportionate influence, potentially shaping policies that perpetuate their advantage. These risk undermining democratic fairness and public trust.

With urban youth unemployment at 17.2 per cent, educated young Indians feel excluded from the wealth boom, leading to disillusionment and

potential unrest.

To address its wealth gap, India requires bold and inclusive policies like progressive taxation, skilling and education, rural investment, and social safety nets, among others.

Strengthening wealth and inheritance taxes could redistribute resources. Closing loopholes and improving tax compliance would ensure that the rich contribute fairly. Expanding access to quality education and vocational training, especially in rural areas, can bridge the skills mismatch. Boosting agriculture, rural infrastructure, and healthcare (such as expanding Ayushman Bharat) would lift the poorest, reducing the urban-rural divide.

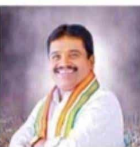
Strengthening welfare programs, like food subsidies and unemployment benefits, can support the have-nots, thereby reducing poverty's grip. India's economic milestone is a moment of pride, but true success lies in improving daily life. The challenge is to ensure that its economic boom lifts all boats, not just the yachts of the elite. Emulating Japan's focus on equitable systems while leveraging India's youthful demographic advantage could transform this tale of inequality into one of shared prosperity.

To rival Japan's quality of life, India must prioritise equitable growth, skilling, and infrastructure.

The economic race should be one—not just to grow bigger, but to grow better.

(The author is former Senior Editor, The Economic Times, and currently practicing as an Advocate in Telangana High Court)

Congress - The true custodian of Telangana's aspirations



RACHAMALLA SIDDESHWAR

TELANGANNA'S journey towards statehood is intrinsically intertwined with the relentless commitment of the Indian National Congress (INC). As the state commemorates its Formation Day on June 2, it is only fitting that we reflect upon the pivotal role played by the Congress party and its towering leader Sonia Gandhi in transforming the dream of millions into a constitutional reality.

For decades, people from all walks of life in Telangana voiced their demand for self-determination and regional justice. Despite immense political challenges and calculated resistance, it was Sonia Gandhi who, moved by the genuine aspirations and struggles of the region's populace, took an unwavering stand to realise their long-cherished dream. Her decision to support the formation of Telangana was not borne out of political expediency but out of a principled belief in justice, federalism, and regional equity.

One cannot speak of Telangana without honouring the courage and statesmanship of Sonia Gandhi. She understood the historical, cultural, and emotional context of the Telangana movement. At the 2004 rally in Karimnagar, she pledged to deliver a separate state. In keeping with that promise, on December 9, 2009, the UPA Government, under her leadership, initiated the formal process of Telangana state's creation. Despite intense opposition and political pressure, she stood her ground, coordinating with alliance partners to ensure the passage of the Telangana Bill in Parliament. Ultimately, in 2014, the 29th state of the Indian Union was born through a democratic, constitutional, and transparent process. Importantly, Sonia Gandhi did not ignore the concerns of people from Seemadhara. With genuine concern for all regions, she extended assurances of special status to Andhra Pradesh, sanctioned financial packages for backward areas, and promised national project status for Polavaram.

Ultimately, in 2014, the 29th state of the Indian Union was born through a democratic, constitutional, and transparent process. Importantly, Sonia Gandhi did not ignore the concerns of the people from Seemadhara.

With genuine concern for all regions, she extended assurances of special status to Andhra Pradesh, sanctioned financial packages for backward areas, and promised national project status for Polavaram.

twelfth year of existence, a look back at the last decade reveals a sobering truth. While the Congress sowed the seeds of its birth, others reaped the political fruits.

The BRS government, led by K. Chandrababbar Naidu, who assumed power capitalising on emotional rhetoric, failed to live up to its lofty promises. The pledge to appoint a Dalit Chief Minister remained unfulfilled. The promise of three acres of land for Dalits became a cruel joke.

Government jobs for every household were replaced with political office for family members. Despite inheriting a revenue-surplus state in 2014, its 10-year rule left Telangana deeply mired in debt. Public sector employees, marginalised communities, farmers, and youth found themselves betrayed by a regime more interested in dynastic entrenchment than democratic empo-

werment. Against this backdrop, the return of Congress in the 2023 elections marked the dawn of a new chapter, one shaped by responsibility, inclusivity, and governance grounded in the vision of 'Indiramma Rajyam'.

Under the dynamic leadership of Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy, the Congress government has swiftly rolled out welfare and development schemes with unwavering commitment. Women's empowerment has become a cornerstone of governance. Through the Mahalakshmi Scheme, free bus travel for women across RTC services now benefits over 30 lakh women daily. Free electricity up to 200 units is easing the financial burden of over 50 lakh households. The ₹500 crore cylinder subsidy has brought substantial relief to 40 lakh families. Enhanced Aarogya coverage of 810 lakh ensures the poorest of the poor

receive life-saving medical care. Housing and food security are also being prioritised. The construction of 4.5 lakh Indramma houses and the issuance of over 40 lakh ration cards are underway.

Meanwhile, the Indira Mahila Shakti programme aims to economically empower one crore women, positioning Telangana as a model for gender-responsive governance. The Congress government has been equally sensitive to the plight of farmers on annadatas. Loan waivers worth ₹21,000 crore; ₹12,000 annual income support under Rythu Bhaaram; and a ₹500 per quintal bonus on paddy have infused confidence among farmers. Tenant farmers, often ignored, now receive ₹20,000 annually a policy unparalleled anywhere in India.

A significant reform was the scrapping of the problematic Dharani land portal. The Congress introduced 'Boobharthi', a citizen-friendly land record system that has already become a benchmark for other states. Over 60,000 new government jobs have been created, while schemes like Rajiv Yuva Vikas have disbursed ₹100 crore to five lakh young entrepreneurs.

Telangana's resurgence is also visible on the global stage. Investments worth ₹1.78 lakh crore secured at the Davos summit are a testament to the state's growing appeal under

the Congress administration. Social justice is no longer a slogan but an implemented policy. Congress has undertaken a scientific caste census and ensured 42 per cent reservation for backward classes in local bodies. By completing SC sub-categorisation and extending legal backing to reservations, the Revanth Reddy government is setting a national precedent.

It is ironic that while BRS reduced BC reservation from 34 per cent to 23 per cent, the BJP-led Union Government continues to delay legislation for implementing the 42 per cent quota.

The Congress party's commitment to Telangana remains unmatched from Sonia Gandhi's principled stand for statehood to Revanth Reddy's proactive governance. The people of Telangana have once again reaffirmed their trust in a party that keeps its word. The contrast is stark while BRS presided over lost opportunities, the Congress is scripting a new era of hope, dignity, and inclusive growth. Telangana was given by Congress; Telangana is being nurtured by Congress. Indeed, for the people of this state, Congress remains the unwavering 'Abhya Hastam' (Hand of Protection).

(Rachamalla Siddeshwar is the Chairman of Rajiv Gandhi Panchayati Raj Sangathan, Telangana)



OUR VIEW



Customs must not let its green channel turn red

Catching evaders of customs duty at airports shouldn't add friction to the process of entering India. Refrain from policy overreach and reform rules that are relics of a closed economy

As reported, the government is working on a strategy to take down an illicit but sophisticated network of 'import carriers' at Indian air and seaports—a gang of smugglers, i.e., masquerading as regular tourists. Of late, there have been many reports of duty-evasion cases. Among those that caught public attention, a Kannada actor was stopped at Bengaluru airport allegedly trying to smuggle in more than 14kg of gold in March. Authorities not only have the usual suspects under watch, but also people with 'special privileges' at airports. 'Import carriers' are suspected of sneaking in illegal quantities of gold, electronic gadgets and even Chinese toys, which face high tariff and quality barriers. So far, so usual. No one wants smugglers running rings around customs and police, who must enforce the law. But it would help to know exactly how widespread this problem is. Data should be made public so that sporadic slip-throughs do not become a basis for tighter policy.

The measures being discussed reportedly include making customs declarations more detailed, placing a cap on how often passengers—especially frequent flyers from trade hubs like Dubai, Hong Kong and Guangzhou—can avail annual duty-free allowances and tweaking the Atithi app's declaration system for stricter tracking and 'AI-based profiling'. Even if well intended, some of it sounds like a throwback to the days before India's economy was opened up. Back then, our duties were sky-high and airports were notorious for nosy and corrupt officials at customs, whose 'leave us a bottle' demand was so customary that it often went unstated, making a stop at the duty-free shop a ritual of passage. Rules began being eased in the

1980s. As arrival numbers rose, the opening of a walk-through green channel marked a big moment: those with nothing to declare could pass without their bags being opened for scrutiny. What's puzzling is why so many outdated rules persist. There's a limit of about \$50,000 on the value of goods an Indian resident can bring in free of duty from most countries. This is absurd, given that a single iPhone can cost twice that much. Bizarrely, this allowance varies by various criteria. Such caps should be uniform and set significantly higher if the idea is to keep commercial imports out and block a route that can be used to dodge duties.

As the green channel's spirit of trust-based regulation is the current government's stated approach, it would be odd if customs clearance were to get more cumbersome. But then, we have not entirely escaped our long history of protectionism. India's 150% duty on Scotch whisky remains a globally cited example, though a free trade pact with the UK is expected to lower it. Other such agreements could ease other import barriers. If we agree in principle that imports are best eased for larger trade gains, then no policy tweaks should be made that will make it harder for common travellers to comply with our rules. Airports need to welcome arrivals, not daunt them. Indian customs declaration forms, whether on paper or digital, look like an anachronism for their complexity. They are a reminder of the closed economy we once had, when packing one's personal stuff would risk flying into a customs web in India. None of this is an argument for authorities to drop their guard against smuggling. Wilful evaders of customs duty need to be nabbed, but let's also keep overreach in check. Don't let the green channel start turning red.

MY VIEW | MODERN TIMES

Why Trump is right about student activism in the US

MANU JOSEPH



is a journalist, novelist, and the creator of the Netflix series, 'Decoupled'

The US wants my business, but not so much that it would make it easy for me to buy its most popular product. I have been willing to give away a portion of my savings to send my child to America as a customer of American college education. I am not a great admirer of college education anywhere. But I am an incurable admirer of the West, and of young people escaping India, even if only briefly. But now, America is too risky for foreign students.

Even if they gain admission somehow, find the money somehow, are granted a visa somehow, there is no guarantee their welcome will not be revoked. The US government has stated that it will revoke student visas for sloppy attendance. Students fear that a misdemeanour—like getting involved in a scuffle—could annul their visa. At the time of writing, the US government has announced a global pause on all student visa interviews. This, it says, is to allow officials

more time to screen applicants more thoroughly, including social media scans. As a result, for the first time in decades, the young in all developing nations have been denied their American dream.

President Donald Trump wants a closer look at international students before letting them enter the US because he does not want agitators. He does have a point.

As US secretary of state Marco Rubio said, "If you apply for a visa to enter the United States and... you want to participate in movements that are involved in doing things like vandalizing universities, harassing students, taking over buildings, creating a ruckus—we're not going to give you a visa."

Like activism in general, student activism is not the moral force its noble themes of struggle may suggest.

There is something absurd about foreign students from developing nations protesting for democracy and other human values in the US. Many can afford an American education because they are beneficiaries of inequality. Some of that wealth is probably from corruption and oligarchies. A few student activists admit such 'contradictions' in their lives. Their hyper-morality often has the quality of a luxury product that seems to fill a void in their lives. Often, it is also an

extension of a right-wing agenda. What is conservatism in one region, such as Arab nationalism, may appear to be a liberal struggle in another. For instance, on an American campus, it could be expressed as humanitarian outrage on behalf of Palestinians. The cause is also dear to many student activists who are neither Arab nor Muslim, because it can be a thrill to back the weak, Israel's great PR problem has always been that it is a prosperous, formidable nation—a place that makes for bad photojournalism.

The liberal arts outrage against Israel on American campuses is decades old and an important part of the Palestinian movement. In fact, it was probably part of the calculations of Hamas in its terror strikes against Israel. Not surprisingly, just hours after Hamas massacred over 1,000 Israelis on 7 October 2023, there were mass student 'protests' in America against Israel. In the past, such protests have often been effective in controlling Israeli retribution. This time, they failed.

There is a Jewish view that student movements against Israel are a form of anti-semitism. You may think this is excessive extrapolation. But they have a point.

At least a strand of the Palestinian movement in America may be interpreted as anti-Jewish. A shade of anti-semitism seems to

persist in the US even today, with envy of Jewish prosperity and influence mixed with an old religious prejudice that has lasted for centuries. So, Jews are not wrong in classifying a strand of the Palestinian movement as an expression of anti-semitism.

Also, students might be too young and naive to see how they may be getting used as a political instrument by unseen handlers.

Most street movements appear to be righteous battles waged by the oppressed or on behalf of them. But behind the scenes, activism is usually a clash between two unseen elites, somewhere, who need to recruit the naive to fight for them.

In some cases, it appears, activism could also be a magnet for people with depression.

Their conditions could be made worse in a pit of ceaseless bad news, as wars produce. Through the strife of the wronged across the world, some activists may thus be seeking a grander purpose for personal dejection. In that way, their unnameable sorrow finds a name.

There is also something amusing about student protests for democracy in America. For decades, the US exported student activism to other nations, apparently to create favourable chaos as part of a larger project to control those regions. Student activism, though central to US political life when practised by US citizens, was also in some ways a foreign-policy strategy. That is one reason the American right-wing takes it seriously. They know it can work. It can create chaos.

The Trump administration does not want a particular kind of migrant, and to achieve that objective, it has changed how America is perceived by non-Americans, especially students.

There are other advanced economies that have excellent colleges, like the UK. But those nations are mostly in limbo, or the slow decay of old money. None of them has the vibrant promise of America. Yet, the American dream might be over for the Indian student.

How to dissuade Pakistan from stoking terrorism against India

India should employ a multipronged diplomatic and security strategy to get the outcomes it needs



NITIN PAI
is co-founder and director of The Takshashila Institution, an independent centre for research and education in public policy

Now here's the point: the existence of nuclear deterrence does not mean other types of conflict are also deterred. Since the mid-1980s, Pakistan believed—and convinced many foreign strategists—that it could use its nuclear weapons to deter a conventional military attack. This emboldened its leaders to pursue a proxy war first in Punjab and later in Jammu and Kashmir with impunity. The calculation was that nuclear weapons not only neutralized India's stronger conventional forces, but also afforded Pakistan space to promote terrorism and insurgency.

The post-Uri surgical strikes, the Balakot operation and now Operation Sindoor have shown that Pakistan can no longer assume that it can deter India at the conventional level. Operation Sindoor, particularly, demonstrated New Delhi's willingness and capacity to hit Pakistani targets along the entire length of the border.

Contrary to subsequent media hype, the targets were chosen to keep the nuclear angle out of the picture. The message was clear: nuclear weapons will not deter India from engaging in conventional warfare with a punitive intensity.

India, for its part, had never been able to deter Pakistan from using terrorism. The bad news is that despite the military response, it will remain nearly impossible to do so in the future. As I have argued in recent columns, India has over the past three decades raised Pakistan's costs, leading to a reduction in the frequency and intensity of terror attacks.

Operation Sindoor has managed to ratchet up those costs significantly. It is possible to raise them further, but, unfortunately, never to a level that is prohibitive to the other side. So, it is a matter of time before another Pakistani general is tempted to take another—albeit more expensive—shot at the country's old game. Operation Sindoor is, thus, about dissuasion, discouragement and disincentivization.

Contrary to intuition, the fact that India is prepared to suffer damage in order to punish Pakistan makes this strategy all the more credible.

The Pahalgalam attacks are a reminder that the task of dissuasion is a reminder and multipronged. It starts with policies that reduce the impact of terrorism. It is obvious that the Pakistani establishment uses terror attacks not only to trigger a disproportionate security response that alienates the local population in Kashmir, but also to spark communal tensions across the country. To the extent that Indian society is united, harmonious and at peace with itself, even a big terror attack will only have a small political impact.

Second, India should continue to systematically engage Pakistan's key foreign partners and persuade them that terrorism being fuelled by Pakistan is not in their interests. Over the past three decades, Indian diplomacy has been successful in getting the United States, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates to stop rewarding Rawalpindi's capers. There should be no let up on this front and it is a job for India's professional diplomats.

Third, intelligence capabilities and the security architecture need constant attention. This is all the more challenging because the restoration of democratic politics and normal life in Jammu and Kashmir requires a relaxation of security arrangements. It is not surprising that the Pahalgalam attack took place in a period of transition.

Finally, the military balance must overwhelmingly be in India's favour across the Line of Control as well as the border. This is a corollary of the post-Sindoor normal. It is not just a comparison of troop numbers and arsenals, but a matter of the size of the qualitative edge. There are indications that China's support for Pakistani military operations went beyond supplying equipment. This ought to change our calculations of the military balance required to dissuade Rawalpindi's generals.

10 YEARS AGO



JUST A THOUGHT

If you cut off imports by imposing tariffs or quotas, you simply increase the incentive for smuggling and for corruption.

MILTON FRIEDMAN

Supporting growth

External environment will pose risks

The national accounts data, released last week, surprised most economists positively. Gross domestic product (GDP) in the fourth quarter of 2024-25 grew 7.4 per cent, taking the full-year growth rate in real terms to 6.5 per cent, as was projected by the National Statistics Office in its second advance estimates. A sharp drop in the second-quarter growth rate to a sub-6 per cent level had raised concern. However, the economy recovered in the second half of the year, particularly in the last quarter. Growth in gross value added, at 6.8 per cent during the quarter, was driven by sectors like agriculture, construction, and services. The manufacturing sector remained a drag, growing only 4.8 per cent during the quarter. On the demand side, for the full year, private final consumption expenditure increased 7.2 per cent as against 5.6 per cent in the previous year, while investment expanded 7.1 per cent compared to 8.8 per cent in the previous financial year. The year began with sluggish investment activity, but it gained momentum in the second half.

Even though growth came in at 6.5 per cent, it is worth noting that this marked a sharp deceleration from the 9.2 per cent recorded in 2023-24. Besides, the year witnessed the slowest pace of expansion since the recovery from the pandemic began in 2021-22. Several economists had argued during the year that growth had returned to its normal level after recovering from the pandemic shock. For the current year, the agricultural sector is expected to perform well. The monsoon has arrived early and it is projected to be above normal. Higher agricultural production will not only directly contribute to growth but also boost rural incomes, which in turn will support demand. Overall, although private consumption showed signs of revival, its sustainability remains to be tested. Nonetheless, higher agricultural output and lower food inflation will allow the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) to ease policy.

Analysts expect the MPC to reduce the policy interest rate by another 50 to 100 basis points in this cycle. Reduction will depend on how the MPC expects inflation conditions to evolve in the coming quarters and its assessment of the potential growth. If inflation outcomes remain close to the target, the MPC may want to push growth with policy accommodation. However, a lot will depend on how the external environment unfolds. Higher bond yields in the United States (US) and elsewhere may also influence the MPC's choices. In fact, external financial and economic uncertainties will affect the Indian economy in multiple ways. A US court has ruled to block higher tariffs imposed by the Donald Trump administration under emergency powers. However, another court has given it temporary relief. Meanwhile, Mr Trump has announced a doubling of tariffs on steel and aluminium.

The global trade and economic uncertainties unleashed by the Trump administration are likely to persist, even as countries negotiate trade agreements with the US. It is unlikely that Mr Trump will give up his tariff plans, and the legal complications will only add to the uncertainty. In such a situation, exports and investment could be affected, with implications for growth. Last week's data also showed that the government met its fiscal deficit target for last financial year. It will be expected to do the same this year. Higher allocation for capital expenditure should continue to support growth this year too. Thus, the biggest risks to growth in the current year will be external. How India navigates this environment and implements reforms to improve the business climate will shape its medium-term growth trajectory.

Precise predictions

The new system will improve weather preparedness

At a time when climate change has upended historical weather patterns and increased the frequency of extreme weather events, India's proactive stride in modernising its meteorological capabilities remains critical. The Ministry of Earth Sciences' recent launch of the Bharat Forecast System (BFS) is a welcome step in this direction. Capable of predicting weather at a granular 6-kilometre grid resolution, the BFS harnesses more powerful supercomputing facilities and is a significant improvement over current weather-forecast models, which generate predictions over gridded squares of 12 km sides or an area as big as 144 sq km. Additionally, instead of breaking the globe into equal-sized grids, the BFS uses the triangular-cubic octahedral grid structure, which generates more grids, and thus higher resolution, over the tropics than the poles.

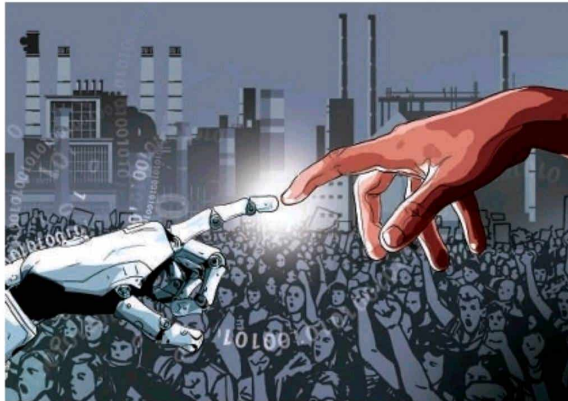
The new forecast model promises to improve the way the country prepares for and responds to climatic challenges, especially at localised level. India's vast and varied geography makes it particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Thus, the ability to generate localised, high-resolution forecasts will greatly enable accurate weather predictions down to the level of villages, radically improving the country's disaster preparedness and agricultural planning. Small and marginal farmers, who constitute the majority of India's agrarian workforce, often lack the resources to withstand weather shocks. With improved accuracy in forecasting, the new system can empower farmers to make better planting and harvesting decisions, thus reducing crop losses and increasing productivity. The system's capabilities also extend beyond agriculture. With enhanced predictions of floods, heatwaves, and cyclones, state governments and emergency services will be in a position to act swiftly to mitigate damage. Relief materials can be pre-positioned, vulnerable populations evacuated, and infrastructure safeguarded. This landmark development is further bolstered by Mission Mausam, which was launched last year with a Budget allocation of ₹2,000 crore. With a focus on upgrading India's climate-forecasting infrastructure, the mission will complement the new forecasting system through the deployment of Doppler radars, cloud-seeding facilities, and integrating artificial intelligence to refine forecast models. The BFS will be made operational by the India Meteorological Department from the current monsoon season.

The launch of the BFS aligns with the IMD's Vision Document 2047, which sets out clearly defined targets, including a 100 per cent detection of all types of severe weather at village and household levels, zero error in forecast up to three days, 90 per cent forecast accuracy up to five days, 80 per cent forecast accuracy up to seven days, and 70 per cent forecast accuracy up to 10 days. But technology alone is not enough. The success of these initiatives will hinge on the timely dissemination of forecasts, community awareness, and robust last-mile connectivity. Public trust in forecasts and the capacity of local institutions to act on them must be strengthened through training, investment, and inclusive communication strategies. The ability to rapidly interpret and disseminate accurate forecast information will also have international implications, allowing India to contribute more effectively to global climate-monitoring networks and regional disaster-management frameworks.

The truth behind tech revolutions

It may be time to rewrite history

ILLUSTRATION BY AJAYA MOHANTY



One of the enduring mysteries in my life has been trying to understand why the Industrial Revolution, which started in England in the mid-18th century and introduced spinning and weaving machines, did not first happen in India. After all, India was producing most of the world's cotton thread and cloth at that time. Whenever I ask this, I get the answer: "Indian labour costs were so low that nobody needed to invent machines to spin or weave."

The term "Industrial Revolution" was popularised by the English economic historian Arnold Toynbee in an 1882 lecture at Oxford University to describe how the use of spinning and weaving machines transformed England — they brought about a shift from the "domestic system" of production, where work was done in homes or small workshops, to the new "factory system", driven by machinery and organised for mass production. He used the word "revolution" because he saw the changes being as profound, rapid, and disruptive to society as a significant political revolution. In other words, he stated that it was not just the use of machines but rather a fundamental restructuring of the economy, society, and human relationships that qualified to be a "revolution".

I wish I had been there in the audience to stand up and say: "Great marketing of Britain, Mr Toynbee!"

And before you wonder why I am so rebellious, dear reader, here are some facts.

It has been a widely held proposition that the use of these machines by British cotton manufacturers enabled them to produce their cloth so economically that they could not only end all cotton cloth imports from India but also wipe out its spinning and weaving industries.

However, the truth is that it is not mentioned in this telling is that to get the Manchester-based spinning and weaving manufacturers up and running, the British government passed laws in 1700 to impose heavy import duties, ranging from 15 per cent to 75 per cent (depending on the type of fabric) on all imported Indian cotton cloth (called calico because the British imported it from Kerala's Calicut port). Since this didn't produce the desired effect of reducing demand, a second law was passed in 1720 to ban the import of all Indian cotton entirely. This law also provided that consumers wearing imported cotton could be fined 15 pounds and that people who stocked or sold such cloth could be fined 200 pounds. When even this failed, British workers protested by attacking women wearing calico, tearing their clothes, and even throwing acid at them.

Perhaps the most carefully hidden secret behind

the Industrial Revolution story was what gave British cotton manufacturers the final edge to compete with Indian handloom spinners and weavers. The secret, of course, was that from around 1800, Britain imported most of its cotton from the American South, which had been turned into a vast forced labour camp with tens of thousands of enslaved Africans, who provided them raw cotton at an unimaginably low price and in massive quantities.

Once I unearthed these facts, I sank into a deep depression: Is it possible that humanity can stay ignorant of such facts and be deluded to believe for the past 200-plus years that the phrase "Industrial Revolution" can be used to justify actions which otherwise would perhaps be termed "colonial exploitation"? And even more worrisome are phrases like "technology-driven growth" or "technological revolution" being invoked to describe actions that are in fact a combination of various initiatives, with the technological component being a minor one. In other words, do we need to re-examine the several "technological revolutions" we have known using a "political economy" lens? That is to say, use a diverse set of tools and methods drawn from economics, political science, and sociology, and not just engineering, to re-examine the several technological revolutions we all believe have happened.

The First Industrial Revolution (18th-19th centuries) introduced machines powered by steam, which began to replace hand-made production. The Second Industrial Revolution (late 19th-early 20th centuries) brought electricity and mass-production techniques, like assembly lines. The Third Industrial Revolution, also known as the Digital Revolution, leveraged computers and the Internet to automate factories and integrate systems. The Fourth Industrial Revolution (late 20th-early 21st centuries) brought artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics — working together in connected, intelligent systems. Now, the Fifth Industrial Revolution is emerging...

Maybe it is time to revisit what Mahatma Gandhi said during the Swaraj movement: "The craze is for what they call labour-saving machinery. Men go on 'saving labour' till thousands are without work and thrown on the open streets to die of starvation. I want to save time and labour, not for a fraction of mankind, but for all; I want the concentration of wealth, not in the hands of a few, but in the hands of all. Today, machinery merely helps a few to ride on the backs of millions. The impetus behind it is not the philanthropy to save labour, but greed... It is not that we do not want machinery, but we want it in its proper place. We will not have it before it has been simplified and made available to all."

Is this the next movement we all have to embrace, and which may be as vital today as the Swaraj movement was in Gandhi's time?

The author (ajitb@rediffmail.com) is devoting his life to unravelling the connections between technology and society

The China question

Rajiv Bajaj, chairman of Bajaj Auto, sounded the alarm last week: If China were to restrict exports of rare earth metals — crucial for magnets in electric vehicles — India's nascent electric-vehicle (EV) industry could grind to a halt. His anxiety is not unwarranted. As geopolitical tensions rise and trade wars simmer, headlines like these expose uncomfortable truths: The world remains deeply dependent on Chinese supply dominance, and India is no exception. In domain after domain — artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, green energy, and defence — China's ascendancy is no longer a prediction but a reality. Its stronghold is not accidental; it is the result of sustained state ambition, disciplined execution, and an unparalleled mobilisation of resources.

This has strategic ramifications, particularly in South Asia. During a brief flareup between India and Pakistan last month, independent analysts suggested Chinese-supplied military technology might have given Islamabad a temporary edge. More than 80 per cent of Pakistan's defence imports now come from China. While New Delhi and Islamabad traded blows and narratives, the real winner sat silently to the north — its influence perhaps subtly reconfiguring the region's balance of power. Last week India was celebrating its ascent to the position of the world's fourth-largest economy, overtaking Japan. But such pointless milestones belie deeper imbalances. Trade with China, for instance, remains embarrassingly one-sided. Indian exports to China fell nearly 15 per cent in the first 10 months of last financial year to \$11.5 billion. In contrast, Chinese exports to India rose 3.3 per cent, reaching \$10.7 billion. That China is India's largest trading partner — and simultaneously a strategic adversary — is a painful paradox New Delhi will increasingly have to reckon with.

For years, China was viewed as a cheap manufacturing hub. No longer. When Xi Jinping assumed power in 2012, he made no secret of his intention to move China up the value chain. The "Made in China 2025" blueprint, launched in 2015, prioritised a few strategic sectors, from aerospace and semiconductors to clean energy and biotech. While many dismissed it as aspirational, China quietly got to work. The results are now visible, and formidable. In many cutting-edge sectors, China is not catching up but leading. It produces the majority of the world's EVs, solar panels, wind turbines, and drones. It controls 60 per cent of rare earth processing and supplies 40 per cent of the world's bulk drugs. It is home to the world's largest high-speed rail network and installs more industrial robots annually than the rest of the world combined. According to the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, by 2030 China may account for 45 per cent of global manufacturing, up from 30 per cent today and just 6 per cent in 2000. Even areas of relative weakness are being aggressively addressed. Semiconductor fabrication remains a challenge, but Huawei is reportedly developing an indigenous chip supply chain to circumvent Western restrictions, according to the *Financial Times*.

In AI, Chinese firms are narrowing the gap. Earlier this year, Chinese startup DeepSeek launched an AI model rivaling OpenAI's, at a fraction of the price, while other tech giants followed suit. Without pausing for breath, Beijing is also laying the groundwork for future supremacy. In March, it announced a \$138 billion venture capital fund to invest in frontier technologies such as quantum computing and robotics. Research and development spending continues to climb. The Belt and Road Initiative has expanded China's influence across South and Central Asia, to be joined later by Manmohan Singh. An active member of the UN's Group of 77 and the IMF's Group of 24, he advocated the New International Economic Order proposals, adopted by the UN in 1977, proposing fairer terms of trade for primary producers, transfer of technology and greater voice for the Global South. He helmed the World Bank-supported Global Development Network which, sadly, remained stillborn.

Manmohan Singh stood apart from the Apostles. Unlike them he came from a family of modest means and spent his time at Cambridge studying, rather than socialising or in debating clubs. He chose to apply economic theory to government policy in India. In contrast to the pursuit of academics by Bhagwati and Sen, global economic diplomacy by Haq and Jayawardene and grassroots activism by Rehman, Singh represented a synthesis between the headline liberalisation and trade deregulation of Bhag-

wati — who cheered India's 1991 liberalising economic reforms — and the social consciousness of Sen — who cheered the rights legislation extending access to information, food and work passed by Singh's government. Attuned to the virtues of moderation he honed his ability to tweak the minutiae of reforms to enhance political acceptability. Whilst political fortunes are independent of professional excellence, he was as much a consummate politician as he was a fine economist. As finance minister (1991-96) and Prime Minister of India (2004-14) he was definitive in implementing growth-enhancing liberalisation and reforms with a human face.

The Apostles still with us, there are few intersections between them and age-related constraints on all. The good news: the evolution of energy of economics is creating such intersections, as macroeconomic rigidity bends to micro-economic creativity, and pervasive state action to dispersed economic initiatives by autonomous, frequently private, actors. All of this augurs well for sustainable growth and human development.

The reviewer is distinguished fellow at the Chintan Research Foundation and was in the IAS and World Bank

Economics with a human face



SANJEEV AHLUWALIA

David C. Engerman, an accomplished historian of contemporary economic development, is no stranger to South Asia. His 2018 book titled *The Price of Aid*, documents how India used the leverage provided by Cold War rivalries to manage the flow of foreign aid in line with its needs. The chosen entry point for this book is six eminent South Asian economists, all of whom graduated from Cambridge University. The term "Apostles" is a riff on a 19th century secret society — the Cambridge Apostles. John Maynard Keynes was a member and Lal Jayawardene from Sri Lanka followed. The other five Apostles are Nobel

Laureate Amartya Sen, Jagdish Bhagwati and Manmohan Singh from India, Mahbub ul Haq of Pakistan, and Sobhan Rehman of Bangladesh.

The 19th century neoclassical reliance on markets for efficient allocation of resources was challenged by the great depression of the 1930s when markets did not self-correct. In response, Keynesianism advocated government activism to smooth market fluctuations through taxes and social spending. Under the watchful eye of the redoubtable Joan Robinson this became the dominant economic philosophy the Apostles encountered in the late 1930s. Amartya Sen became the protagonist for state activism in education and health and for investing in human development — an approach that was implemented by Haq, who embedded basic human needs as a building block for development in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and later connected the human development index.

In the early 1970s a seminal joint pub-

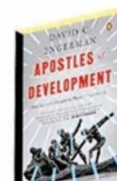
lication of the World Bank and the Institute of Development Studies, Sussex, titled "Redistribution with Growth", drew on work by the International Labour Organisation on unemployment, to collate "state of the art" research for designing policies that would use growth dividends for financing development, even as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) structural adjustment programmes sought to keep fiscal deficits, public debt and inflation in check through liberalised and deregulated industrial production and trade.

Only three Apostles are with us. There is Amartya Sen, whose body of work and philosophy, puts human development and equity as the purpose of economic growth. Then there is the feisty, United States-based Bhagwati, an indefatigable exponent of growth-boosting liberalisation, deregulation, globalisation, and international trade. And Rehman, the only Apostle who received his first degree in economics at Cambridge and the only one to never pursue a doctorate. His early socialist convictions and the

economic marginalisation of East Pakistan, before its liberation in 1971, shaped his view that economic discrimination is a primary constraint on development. He was president in "plumbing" the micro-economy, now the dominant trend, as non-government partners proliferate while rigidities constrain state capacity reform.

Haq was Pakistan's finance minister twice, in 1966 and 1988. The most entrepreneurial Apostle, he excelled in embedding evolving economic theory into multilateral programme implementation. He evangelised the measurement of human well-being, beyond economic metrics, to ensure that economic growth also meets basic human needs by devising the human development index in 1990 for the UNDP. Sadly, he was the first to pass on in 1998.

Lal Jayawardene, scion of a storied Sri Lankan family, was a founding staff member of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development in 1964



Apostles of Development: Six Economists and the World They Made
By David C. Engerman
Published by Penguin Random House
560 pages ₹624

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ANDHRA PRADESH



Water woes: File picture of a tribal woman fetching drinking water at Buriga hamlet of Ananthagiri mandal in ASR district. Somila Appalaraju, a ward member in Rompelli panchayat, says Buriga and China Konela hamlets of the mandal reported a few cases of malaria. V RAJU

Diseases haunt A.P.'s verdant hills

As monsoon clouds gather over the picturesque hills of ASR district, tribespeople cross their fingers, for in their hamlets, where even paracetamol is hard to come by, seasonal illnesses can kill. **B Madhu Gopal** finds out how systemic problems leave a community at the mercy of ailments long conquered in other parts of the State

As tribal couple Pangli Rama Rao and Pangli Sita began getting ready for work in the morning of May 19, they touched the forehead of their seven-year-old daughter Pangli Estheru. The girl, the fourth of their six daughters, was still running a high temperature, though almost a week had elapsed since the fever first appeared, going once and then returning.

Rama Rao and Sita usually take their young daughters with them, so they could play or do menial tasks as they toiled in the fields downhill at Jajulabandha of Koyyuru mandal in Alluri Sitharama Raju (ASR) district. That day, however, Sita decided stay back to tend to her ailing daughter while Rama Rao left for work.

But as the day progressed, Estheru's condition deteriorated and by evening, she was gone. When news of the child's death spread, five more cases of children suffering from fever in the hamlet came to light. Fortunately, all five have since recovered from the illness.

However, this was not the first time that fever and seasonal diseases had ravaged tribal hamlets on the hill slopes of the picturesque ASR district. In this corner, where even paracetamol is said to be in short supply, a fever can kill.

Decay beneath a paradise

A walk along the winding paths and lanes between houses lays bare the life of the tribespeople in this hamlet. Most houses, thatched or tiled, have a cattle shed sitting cheek by jowl, with its pools of urine and dung slush providing a perfect breeding ground for disease-spreading mosquitoes.

According to CPI(M) district secretariat member K. Govinda Rao, who has been organising protests demanding better facilities for the tribespeople, though water taps had been provided at the hilltop village, which borders Anakapalli district, no water tank was constructed, and the sole water pump remains defunct. This forces the villagers to fetch water from the 'gedda' (stream) about half a kilometre away. According to the villagers, this water often causes diseases.

According to sources in the Health Department, the first five months of this year witnessed a significant spike in malaria cases compared to the corresponding period last year. A total of 1,122 cases of malaria were detected in 11 of the 22 mandals in ASR district between January and May (till May 28). The total number of malaria cases for the corresponding period in 2024 is 791.

What officials say

Officials from the Medical and Health Department says there is no malaria case in Jajulabandha. "Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM) N. Satyavathi screened 28 people for malaria, including Pangli Estheru, on May 15. All tested 'negative' in the test results obtained on May 17," says C. Jamal



An ANM screened 28 people for malaria, including Pangli Estheru, on May 15. All tested 'negative' in the results obtained on May 17.

C. JAMAL
RASHA
DM&HO, ASR
district

Basha, DM&HO of ASR district. The officials attribute Estheru's death to complications from a home remedy for stomach ache and vomiting.

However, Marri Kameswara Rao, a relative of Rama Rao and also a resident of Jajulabandha, says no camp was held in their village before the child's death. "The health camp in our village was held on the day following Estheru's death. Two of her sisters are still suffering from fever; they have been tested, and the reports are awaited," he adds.

Left to their own devices

Carrying patients in a 'doli' is still a common sight in the Agency area as many hamlets are yet to be connected by road. As for Jajulabandha, the nearest Primary Health Centre (PHC) is at Dornuru, around 30 km away. But since the hamlet lacks a road, patients need to be carried in doli for 2 km till Pitrigedda, till which a road has been laid.

According to Kameswara Rao, when Estheru condition worsened, her mother called a doctor, who, however, could not reach the hamlet as it lacked a road. She also could not take her daughter to the PHC alone because at least two persons are needed to carry the doli, he added.

Somila Appalaraju, a ward member in Rompelli panchayat, says Buriga and China Konela hamlets of Ananthagiri mandal have a few cases of malaria. "Though there is no proper road to our

hamlets from Kasipatnam side, a few weeks ago, a road was laid towards Vanija village of Mentada mandal in Vizianagaram district on the other side of the hill. The patients visited labs in Vizianagaram, and they have tested positive for malaria," adds Somila Appalaraju.

"Malaria tests are done in medical camps held at Buriga and China Konela, but the health staff don't have any medicines! What use are the camps if they don't have any medicine?" he asks.

Easy target for diseases

According to sources, a lack of awareness about diseases; low consumption of nutritious food; dearth of motorable roads; dependence on streams and springs for drinking water; and a shortage of medicines and staff at health centres leave tribespeople particularly vulnerable to diseases.

"There are indeed fever cases in tribal areas, but fewer this year so far. Roads have been laid to many tribal hamlets, including the interior hill-top ones, but not to all," says N. Satyanarayana, general secretary of Girijana Vikasa Samstha, an organisation working for the welfare of tribespeople in Chintapalli, G.K. Veedhi, Gudum, G. Madugula and Koyyuru mandals.



During the sowing of paddy, tribal farmers are frequently exposed to rains. When they catch fever, they fail to get treated in time, believing it will subside on its own.

N. SATYANARAYANA
general secretary of Girijana Vikasa Samstha

"During the sowing of paddy, tribal farmers are frequently exposed to rains and catch fever. However, they fail to get treated in time, believing the fever will subside on its own. This leads to a spread of viral fevers," he adds.

"Moreover, a new trend is emerging in tribal areas: an increase in lifestyle diseases such as diabetes, hypertension and heart problems. This is probably owing to urbanisation, changes in lifestyle and dietary habits of the tribespeople. Sickle cell anaemia cases are also rampant in the areas," Satyanarayana adds.

T. Kameswara Rao, general secretary of Praja

Arogya Vedika, which has been working in tribal areas for the past several years, highlighted the vacancies of 'health volunteers' and ANMs in over 200 'Sachivalayams' in various mandals across ASR district.

"Fever cases are being reported in the border areas of Ananthagiri, Paderu and Chintapalli mandals. However, there is a shortage of common medicines such as paracetamol. Also, Artesunate, an anti-malarial drug, seems to be in short supply; it is being given only when malaria cases are confirmed," says Kameswara Rao.

"Seasonal weather changes almost always result in fever cases in tribal areas. During our survey at a tribal school in Araku, we also found that girls were anaemic owing to poor nutrition. The government is spending a just ₹48 on each tribal student, towards the cost of breakfast, lunch and dinner," he says.

The rains are here

Meanwhile, the Southwest monsoon reached A.P. on May 28, over two weeks in advance. The monsoon brings with it seasonal fevers such as malaria, viral fevers and water-borne diseases, and their impact is severe in the Agency areas.

Residents of tribal hamlets allege that the health department wakes up only after an outbreak and do little in the form of preventive measures. Stagnation of rainwater, contamination of drinking water sources like streams and a lack of piped water remain major problems yet to be effectively tackled in tribal areas. According to sources, larvicide spraying has just begun in some mandals of the Agency, but this could be hampered by the onset of rains.

There is a district hospital at Paderu, two area hospitals (one each at Araku and Munchingput) and a Community Health Centre at Chintapalli in the II Agency mandals of erstwhile Visakhapatnam district. "The area hospital at Araku gets 300 OP cases on an average a day. A majority of the patients come from Ananthagiri, Araku, Paderu and Koyyuru mandals. Most of the cases pertain to viral fever," says Kameswara Rao.

"The incidence of viral fevers is expected to increase further from June. Anti-larval operations and spraying should be expedited, and monitoring of the operations is necessary to check the spread of seasonal diseases," he adds.



File picture of a woman being carried on a doli at a tribal village in ASR district; (above) tribal farmers harvesting turmeric near Araku in Alluri Sitharama Raju district. The community still practices Podu cultivation. K.R. DEPAK

13 IDEA EXCHANGE

NEWSMAKERS IN THE NEWSROOM

Devendra Pandey: You had taken seven wickets against England the last time you played them in Dharamshala. There are different conditions now but you must be confident?

Yes, I remember. Those were batting-friendly tracks and the games went to fourth or fifth days. The conditions will be different in England this time. We have to adapt quickly, considering how England players bat. I feel spinners will be in the game there.

Nihal Koshie: You have bowled against Joel Root, arguably the best Test batsman of this era. What are the challenges and plans?

It is challenging to bowl against him. I feel his batting, especially against spinners, is very good. He has great control and is a very important player in the England Test line-up. The field positioning is very crucial. I have planned how to bowl to him. He is a complete player, and has the sweep, slog-sweep, paddle, and reverse. He is in great control of his hands.

Devendra Pandey: There have been retirements of Ravichandran Ashwin and then Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli. Were you surprised?

I had an inkling that Ash bhai might retire due to his body. We used to have a lot of chats and once I remember, he put his hand on me and said, 'You will have to take responsibility in the future. You have to manage'. I used to feel a bit concerned that he doesn't leave and go. I was shocked when Rohit bhai and Virat bhai retired. You want your senior players to stay for big series such as this.

The responsibility is taken by the seniors and the youngsters feel free. That's how I used to feel. I'd approach them in case of any doubts. I have spent a lot of time with Ash bhai, discussing bowling and even field settings; we used to sit and talk. His exit is shocking to me as I was learning a lot from him. He would keep feeding me ideas.

Sandeep G: You played most of your career with Rohit, Virat and Ashwin. How has your experience been with them?

I had a great understanding and bond with Rohit bhai. He used to look after me like an elder brother, even off the field. When bowling, he used to tell me clearly what he expected from me and whether I was delivering it or not. If he found that I was lagging somewhere, he used to tell me to put more effort on that aspect. He would clearly tell me the role he expected from me, and sometimes he used to scold me as well — little things that always lifted me in bad times and took great care of me.

I made my Test debut under Virat Kohli. He did not play the match (in 2017 against Australia in Dharamshala) but he handed me the cap. At that time, I was raw and not mature, but he handled me wonderfully, gave me the belief that I could be good in this format. He always supported me and I always enjoyed playing with him.

I played and learned a lot with Ashwin. He supported me a lot in the last three-four years during the comeback. He would keep telling me how I should bowl in a particular situation, plus about pace, revs and run-up — we used to talk about everything in terms of bowling.

Sandeep G: In 2018, you played as the lone spinner at Lord's. Seven years later, how would you handle such a responsibility?

At that time I did not have much idea. When you are not mature, you keep going through the motions. Now I have become much better in controlling the game, setting up batsmen and approaching a particular situation. That time I had belief in my bowling that I could bowl the wrong'un and the skidder etc, but I did not have the understanding about how to bowl differently to each batsman, how I should set the field for different batsmen. Now I read batsmen much better and know where and how to bowl and what field to set.

Venkata Krishna B: In the time you led the spin attack in limited-overs cricket, you have been waiting patiently in Tests. Now you enter the WTC cycle as the lead spinner. Is there added pressure?

I'm not thinking that way. In our team, we have (Ravindra) Jadeja as well. He has been playing since 2010 and he has got more experience than me. But in terms of leading the spin attack, I don't think it makes a huge difference. It doesn't create extra pressure. It is just normal. Whenever we play two spinners, it doesn't feel like 'this fellow is my senior'. Whenever I've played with Jadeja and Ash, we never thought someone is senior.

Venkata Krishna B: Your idol Shane Warne loved bowling with the Dukes ball. Having played just one Test with it before, how are you preparing for it ahead of the England tour?

I've started bowling with it. I've got the Dukes ball at home and I'm planning a couple of sessions. We also have two weeks before the series, so there is enough time to prepare. I don't think it will make a huge difference. It is just a change of ball.

IDEA
EXCHANGE
KULDEEP YADAV
CRICKETER

WHY KULDEEP YADAV

After Ravichandran Ashwin's retirement in the middle of the Australia tour late last year and Ravindra Jadeja getting on in years, Kuldeep Yadav has all of a sudden been thrust into the role of India's lead spinner, at least in overseas conditions. As the team embarks on a five-Test tour of England, a place not known to be too favourable to tweakers, his role would be crucial as English batsmen have historically struggled against bowlers of his ilk



that will help me the next time.'

Sandeep Dwivedi: How do you react when you are hit for a six in T20 cricket? Do you delete that memory from your mind or remember that stroke and plan your next ball?

What is important to know is on which delivery you have been hit for sixes. In case you bowl an overpitched ball or a short ball, you get hit for a six. That one can't do much. In case the batsman is stepping out and hitting you, that means he has hit a good ball for a six. You need to think and understand if he is hitting you straight for a six or he is slog-sweeping for a six. If he is hitting a slog-sweep six, I will bowl a ball wide outside off-stump or inside out to him to cramp him. In case he is hitting straight, I will turn the ball and pull the length back. If you are starting as a young spinner, you need to look to spin the ball, give it more revs so that you get dip on the ball. If you look at the top spinners over the years, this is what they have been doing.

Mayank Chaudhary: Ravindra Jadeja recently spoke about captaincy in Test cricket. He said a captain only needs to change two to three fielders, and it's not that complicated compared to T20s. Do you feel the same?

A T20 is a bit more challenging when it comes to captaining a team. You always have time to make a comeback in Test cricket. In T20 cricket, if you change something — or you don't — or if you are, let's say, one or two overs late in making a change, the whole outlook of the game can change. A T20 game is very fast, just like football. I'm sure Jadeja must have said the same thing in that context. In Tests, even if you have one bad day, you can lift the team with a better performance the next day.

Obviously, he (Jadeja) has played over 70-75 Tests and has experience leading a group. I'm still new to these things... I've played only about 15 Tests.

Mayank Chaudhary: How seriously do you take your batting?

I try to contribute as much as I can, but not all my focus is on my batting. If I'm playing, I'll play as a bowler. No one will pick me for my batting. I've played as a genuine wicket-taker. Batting is just a plus.

Devendra Pandey: They say a person's identity is known by the city he comes from. You are from Kanpur; have its 'smart, shrewd, chatur' traits been imbibed by you?

It has helped a lot. If you are game-smart, it helps. A smart cricketer makes better decisions. You know how to escape being hit in bowling! But there have been a lot more 'street-smart' people than me here. *Bahut tez (sharp) log jo insaan ko bech bhi dete hai (People who can even sell people!)* I am not that *chalaak (clever)*! I used to move with some kids in U-15 and U-19 days jo coach ko hi bech dete (fool or scare coaches). I remember a player who was upset with the coach for not giving sufficient attention to him during training. During our U-15 days, a chap changed the way he looked, camouflaged himself, and covered himself in a bedsheet and blanket and stood outside the coach's room for half an hour. He waited for the coach to get up, see him, get scared and run for his life — which is exactly what happened. A lot of such incidents. If you survive here, *wohi dhanya hai!* (That itself is a blessing!)

Devendra Pandey: How do you handle your finances?

My father takes care of those things and I am just free to play. There are marriage talks of course and I guess it will happen soon. Not too soon as I have time. We plan to start a sports complex in Kanpur. The work has started where we will set up a cricket academy, football... and other sports as well. Hopefully, it will be ready in two-three years. Kids can have a future in sports, apart from cricket. I don't drive cars in Kanpur as it's one of the more dangerous places. Driving is difficult here. You will get 500 abuses in five minutes. I don't feel like driving here. A couple of years ago, I got a Mercedes. But I have driven it just once. *Koi fayda nahi hai (no use)*. The roads aren't great either, potholes galore. When I come home, I just feel like relaxing at home.

Devendra Pandey: You come across as a happy, cheerful person. Did you get into fights growing up in Kanpur?

One should be happy. Keep expectations to your game; not from life in general. I am content, not greedy. Got to be peaceful. I don't fight. As a kid, I remember a boy who used to sit next to me at school, he used to fight with me and *bahut maara bhi hai mujhe (has hit me a lot too)*.

Sriram Veera: Tell us about your banter with Rinku Singh that earned you a lot of criticism.

Oh yes. Rinku is *ghar ka ladka*. He has stayed at my home a lot. He is like a younger brother. He has been with me from U-16 days. People saw on camera that I hit him but let me tell you he is a *kalakar (character)*. What can't I tell them about our relationship? People don't understand, and I can't keep explaining these things.

'I was shocked when Rohit & Virat bhai retired. You want the seniors to stay for the big series'

Indian star spinner Kuldeep Yadav on the upcoming India-England Test series, playing under Shubman Gill's captaincy and Delhi Capitals' inadequate performance in this season's IPL. The session was moderated by Devendra Pandey, Deputy Associate Editor, *The Indian Express*

Obviously, the Dukes ball is a lot harder compared to the SG and the Kookaburra. Shape-wise, it is similar to SG. It will take two to three days to adjust, but I will definitely be alright by the time the Test series begins.

Tushar Bhaduri: Delhi Capitals had a great start to the IPL season. Why did

where there are 10 good teams, if you make one or two mistakes, you quickly start going downhill. Momentum is like a wave. If you can ride it, things can go in your favour. But if you get on the wrong side, you can start losing games and close matches go against you.

Tushar Bhaduri: Shubman Gill is the new Test captain. What are your expectations as a bowler when a new captain takes over?

He should support me and include me in the XI for all matches, what else? A new captain has a lot of challenges and a lot on his mind. I don't have any expectations from a captain. My expectations are from myself. If I am playing, I should prepare myself thoroughly and give my best. He would have a lot of pressure on him, but there is no pressure on him from my side. He should lead the team with a free mind.

Sandeep Dwivedi: As the country's leading spinner, you have stood out with the white ball. How difficult has that been with bats getting bulkier, pitches

dead and some batsmen just training to hit sixes?

The problem is we tend to get rid of our basics very quickly, more so when it comes to the T20 format. A bowler tends to quickly change his plans once a batsman starts attacking. They tend to start bowling faster or fuller. Basically they are thinking how they can avoid getting hit. This can work once in a while but not in the long run. The important thing in this format is to read the batsman's mind. Try to see what he expects you to bowl next and what shot he can try. The other important thing for a bowler in this format is the length. If you stick to the good-length area, it works. Once you have settled into a good length, you keep changing the line by reading the batsman. If you can do that, the format isn't that difficult for a bowler. This is a format where runs will be scored. But one should look to take wickets. This can create pressure on the batsmen. Like the ground in Delhi, where one needs to be aggressive and not bowl with the intention of not getting hit for a six. Attacking mindset, reading the batsman, keeping in mind his scoring areas — if

these things are in focus, the load on a bowler's mind comes down.

Sandeep Dwivedi: Since reading the mind is important, you need to extensively prepare before a game. What's your process? Do you sit with the analyst for long before a game?

ON EXPECTATIONS FROM THE NEW INDIAN TEST CAPTAIN
A NEW CAPTAIN HAS A LOT OF CHALLENGES AND A LOT ON HIS MIND. I DON'T HAVE ANY EXPECTATIONS FROM A CAPTAIN. MY EXPECTATIONS ARE FROM MYSELF. IF I AM PLAYING, I SHOULD PREPARE MYSELF THOROUGHLY AND GIVE MY BEST

I don't like meetings. I feel no one should play with my mind. No one should tell me too many things or give me ideas. Then I'm not able to bowl like I do. I always want to do things my way. I have understood that even if I fail in a game, I would have collected some learnings. Earlier, I would think that I should not fail. But now, I am not afraid of failing. I tell myself 'it's okay, he has played well and so he will score'. But my takeaway would be 'now I know how this batsman scores, and

ON ACQUIRING CONTROL AS A BOWLER

WHEN YOU ARE NOT MATURE, YOU KEEP GOING THROUGH THE MOTIONS. NOW I HAVE BECOME MUCH BETTER IN CONTROLLING THE GAME. NOW I READ BATSMEN MUCH BETTER AND KNOW WHERE AND HOW TO BOWL AND WHAT FIELD TO SET

things go wrong thereafter?

All the facets of the game need to click in this format. Sometimes our batting collapsed and sometimes our bowling didn't do well. Both sides never performed together. When we had to score big, we didn't do so. We scored 160 on the Delhi wicket. We also lost close matches, like the one against Mumbai. We lost momentum, some matches were affected by rain, and the game at Dharamshala was stopped midway. In this competition

THE IDEAS PAGE

A rain check for our cities

Floods cannot be wished away. But their intensity can be reduced by better drain design, improving groundwater recharge and reviving water bodies



ASHVANI KUMAR GOSAIN

ONE MIGHT WONDER why our urban centres — Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Hyderabad, and several other cities — are getting flooded more often in the recent past. The reasons are many, ranging from inefficient drainage systems to the implications of climate change.

Historically, when cities were developed, artificial drains were designed to carry the stormwater from rooftops, streets, and roads to natural drains or water bodies so as to avoid flooding of local areas. It is important to understand that the volume of runoff that is generated in an area depends on land use. Another important aspect to understand is that drainage systems are designed for a specific magnitude of rain. In case a city experiences more than the estimated rainfall, some areas will inevitably be flooded. In our country, the return period for drain design with respect to flooding has traditionally been one in two years — this means that inundation of some areas in a city is inevitable every alternate year. The extent of flooding would depend on how much the actual rainfall exceeds the estimates made while designing the drainage system.

Another important fact is that traditionally our cities had a large area which was capable of absorbing a considerable part of the runoff. But over the years, every city has, by design or illegally, allowed more area to be paved, concretised, or consolidated. This has resulted in the generation of more stormwater than what was factored in while designing drains — this strains the capacity of drains and results in flooding.

Other than the estimated magnitude of the rain, a drain's capacity is decided according to its catchment area — the land from which the runoff flows into it. The bigger the catchment area, the greater the volume of the stormwater and the bigger the size of the drain that is required to pass this water safely to the next level drain. As water moves from multiple small drains of the network to join the next level drain, its volume and the flow rate keeps on increasing. A bigger cross-section is, thus, required for this water to pass, without overflowing.

Usually, stormwater flows from a higher elevation to a lower one. However, at times, conditions are not conducive for storm water to flow under gravity — this is especially so in underpasses or some low-lying areas. This leaves no option but to deploy pumps to evacuate this water. This requires scientific handling. Storm drains are thus designed according to the size and population of a city and its longitudinal slope. This implies that no part of the city should be flooded if the rainfall is less than or equal to what was factored in while designing the drainage systems.

Over time, all of these conditions are violated — the city expands, its population increases, land use changes. This is what lies at the core of the flooding problem. Drains tend to get clogged when silt, moving with the stormwater, settles and when solid waste is dumped into them. This ends up reducing the carrying capacity of the drains to evacuate stormwater.

Another major issue is that stormwater drains invariably carry sewage in a majority of our cities, including Delhi. This is largely



C.R. Sankar

due to poorly managed sewerage systems, and also because some parts of the city are outside the sewerage networks. For a drainage system to work well, at least for the estimated rainfall, the drains must be clean. The ground reality is that in almost every city, desilting is not done properly. Moreover, large stretches are permanently covered and, therefore, virtually impossible to desilt. It is important that access should be created in such drains to ensure effective desilting.

Over the past two decades, the effects of climate change have added to the flooding woes. One of the main implications of climate change in India has been the increase in magnitude and intensity of rainstorms. Rainstorms today are of much greater intensity and have rendered the existing drainage infrastructure completely ineffective. This was factored in the framing of the Manual on "Stormwater Drainage Systems" for the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs in 2015. It was suggested that cities should consider one in five years or a higher return period for designing or remodelling their storm drainage network to deal with the vagaries of climate change. But the storms that are being experienced recently are of much higher magnitude and intensity. They end up overwhelming the infrastructure, and every city experiences an increased magnitude of flooding.

This problem needs dedicated and con-

tinuous attention and use of scientific tools — the simulation framework on a GIS platform, for instance. It simulates the movement of the run-off and tries to attune drainage systems to changes in population and land use. Such a framework was provided to the Government of Delhi and is capable of providing solutions to Delhi's flooding.

Stormwater drains invariably carry sewage in a majority of our cities, including Delhi. This is largely due to poorly managed sewerage systems, and also because some parts of the city are outside the sewerage networks. For a drainage system to work well, at least for the estimated rainfall, the drains must be clean. The ground reality is that in almost every city, desilting is not done properly. Moreover, large stretches are permanently covered and, therefore, virtually impossible to desilt. It is important that access should be created in such drains to ensure effective desilting.

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It is equally important to understand that it is not possible to wish away flooding because storms today are bigger than what was factored in while designing the drainage system. However, it is possible to reduce the severity of floods by taking a series of actions. One simple strategy that can work well is to reduce the magnitude of stormwater by taking multiple measures such as enhancing groundwater recharge, creating underground storage to retain/detain water, rejuvenating waterbodies and stopping their encroachment. There are examples of cities creating rooftop gardens to retain part of the rainwater. Some developed countries are also installing big stormwater tunnels to carry the stormwater from the city and release it into a nearby river or water body. However, such solutions are very expensive. Anyway, they require basic street-level drainage infrastructure.

The writer is former professor, IIT Delhi, and founder director, INRM Consultants, an IIT Delhi incubate company

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The political bullying of international students... is not only a blatant violation of individual rights and a betrayal of the spirit of contract, but also a fundamental attack on the principles of international scientific and educational cooperation"

— GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA

When Ngugi met Tagore

Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o redefined what it means to write back to empire — with a little help from the Indian polymath



BISHAN SAMADDAR

THE FIRST THING that Ngugi wa Thiong'o — who died on May 28 in the United States — asked for when he met us in Kolkata in February 2018 was to visit the ancestral home of Rabindranath Tagore. Not an unusual request from a writer, but for him, it was deeply personal. I had worked as an editor on a collection of his essays, which Seagull Books had published a few years earlier, so the honour of accompanying him to north Kolkata's Jorasanko Thakurbari fell to me. As we stepped into the compound of the house — a veritable 18th-century palace — Ngugi's jaw dropped, quite literally. "This is Tagore's house? So massive?" I still remember the blend of shock and amusement on the 80-year-old writer's face.

During the car ride to north Kolkata, Ngugi told me how he'd grown up outside a small Kenyan town under British colonial rule, in a hut made of mud, wood and straw. His early educational tools consisted of a single slate and some chalk, shared with his many siblings — a sharp contrast to Tagore's privileged upbringing. But Ngugi's father believed in "good" education, which, then as now, meant an English one. While some of his siblings got mixed in Kenya's violent struggle for independence, Ngugi enrolled in the British-run high school designed to shape Africans in the image of their colonisers. As East Africa threw off British rule in the early 1960s, Ngugi began writing. His first novels, written in English, used the coloniser's language to tell the stories of the colonised, which seemed like a rebellion in itself. Novel after novel drew widespread acclaim and established Ngugi as a leading African writer. But by the 1970s, a profound shift was taking root in him.

As we wandered through the grand corridors of Jorasanko, moving slowly from one vast room to the next, Ngugi explained why he had wanted to visit Tagore's house. Kenya had overthrown colonial rule only to fall under a homegrown dictatorship. In 1977, Ngugi co-wrote a play whose bold critique of the regime angered the authorities, who responded by locking him up in a maximum-security prison. It was there, Ngugi told me, that he stumbled upon a newspaper article that summed up a key idea of Tagore's: "You may learn a lot of languages, but unless you speak and write in your mother tongue, nothing is of value." That idea was a lightning bolt. It forged Ngugi's commitment to uphold indigenous African languages. He began writing in his

mother tongue Gikuyu, starting with a novel composed on prison-issued toilet paper, which he managed to smuggle out. He understood the reach of English, though, so he translated his own Gikuyu works, beginning with the prison novel later published as *Devil on the Cross* (1980) — a practice he continued for the rest of his life.

Ngugi became a language warrior, tirelessly championing indigenous African languages, advocating not only for their literatures but also for translations, not just into English or French so the wider world could listen, but also between African languages, too. Translation, he believed, allowed languages to speak to one another, breaking down the colonial hierarchy of tongues. In his book *The Language of Languages* (2023), Ngugi writes: "There are two ways by which two different languages and cultures can relate to one another: As hierarchies of unequal power relationships (the imperial way), or as a network of equal give-and-take (the democratic way)." Unlike most of his contemporaries, Ngugi rejected the idea that English could be considered an indigenous language by its non-native speakers: "The colonised trying to claim the coloniser's language is the sign of the success of enslavement," he said in a recent interview to *The Guardian*.

But his critique of colonial systems was not limited to language. At an event at Seagull Books in Kolkata, when a delegation of Adivasi activists from Jharkhand came to meet him, his first question was: "Scheduled Tribes they call you — what do you think of this word tribe?" In his book *Secure the Base* (2016), he notes: "A group of 3,000,000 Icelanders constitutes a nation while 30 million Ibo make up a tribe. And yet... a tribe fulfils all the criteria of shared history, geography, economic life, language and culture that are used to define a nation." That day, the Adivasi activists and Ngugi reached a shared conclusion: India's indigenous people are nothing less than "a non-sovereign nation".

Working in the English-language publishing world in India, I've had the honour of meeting countless authors. Too often, the conversations revolve around comparisons — who's published in London or New York, whose advance is bigger, who's invited to which festival, what kind of hotel rooms they're given — an eternal picnic of vanities. In this world so steeped in hierarchies, it is both comforting and reassuring to meet writers like Ngugi, whose sole allegiance was to telling the good story, and the right story. Greatness and humility are uneasy companions. Will there be great writers in the future? Certainly. Will they be as humble as Ngugi wa Thiong'o? That's a harder question.

Samaddar is an editor at Seagull Books, Kolkata

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

BANDUNG FANTASY

THIS REFERS TO the article, "Drifting far from Bandung" (IE, May 30). Lamentations about India's drift in foreign policy are based on mistaken notions of self-worth. Politics everywhere is driven by ideological nostalgia. Donald Trump's MAGA, Narendra Modi's yearning to be "Vishwaguru" and Vladimir Putin's search for a mighty Russia are all based on this. Historically speaking, the notions of non-alignment or India's moral authority in the post-colonial world were castles in the air, as were boasts about sovereignty, peaceful co-existence or equality. China trampled under India's sovereignty in 1962. Non-aligned India cried hoarse about Vietnam but pretended as if the USSR never went into Afghanistan. The author's charge about the personalisation of power seems bogus when he pretends it started with Modi and did not exist in Nehru's time. The faster India drifts away from the hypocrisy of this Bandung spirit, the better it will serve the national interest.

HN Bhagwat, Chiplun

THE PACE OF REFORM

THIS REFERS TO the article "The deregulation we need" (IE, May 30). To facilitate deregulation, process reforms — where you do not change the system's structure but change certain clauses and thereby improve efficiency — must take place at a faster pace. This idea, popularised by EAC-PM member Sanjeev Samal, goes well with the author's theme.

Devnag Thorar, via email

A PAUSE FOR TALK

THIS REFERS TO the report, "As US court blocks most Trump tariffs, breather for

India ahead of trade talks" (IE, May 30). The ruling may open up an opportunity for the Modi government to reassess the ongoing bilateral trade agreement discussions with America. The Indian government has been pushing for an interim trade agreement by the end of June to get a full exemption from the reciprocal tariff. With America, India had a trade surplus of \$41.18 billion in goods in 2024-25. The US is concerned over this widening trade deficit. Experts suggest that India must bargain harder.

SS Paul, Nadia

CROSSING RED LINES

THIS REFERS TO the editorial "Congress vs Congress" (IE, May 30). Shashi Tharoor may be an intellectual but that doesn't mean that he need not adhere to party discipline and the expectations of Congress, which has made him what he is today in Indian politics. His latest salvo against the UPA was his declaration overseas that India crossed the LoC to teach Pakistan a lesson only in 2016 — read, "after Narendra Modi became PM". This is not the first time he has crossed the "Lakshman Rekha" and it's natural that his behaviour has rattled Congress's leaders and cadres.

Tharicus S Fernando, Chennai

GROWTH STORY

THIS REFERS TO the editorial "Decoding GDP" (IE, May 31). That the economy expanded 7.4 per cent in FY 2024-25 and posted 7.4 per cent growth in the March quarter is a testament to the soundness of India's macroeconomic framework. The fundamentals are strong, and that provides a solid base for future growth.

Sanjay Chopra, Mohali



ADITI NARAYANI PASWAN

THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT has always been a land of flourishing science, arts, and culture. The foreign rule, however, reshaped our politics, epistemology and narratives. It colonised us to such an extent that we started undermining our own cultural traditions. This uncritical engagement with colonisers' knowledge system produced a sense of inferiority. Anything Indian was considered less significant. Against this backdrop, it is essential to critically look at our colonial past to restore the ancient civilisational wisdom and decolonise our consciousness.

The British depicted our past as savage and uncivilised. Often, they questioned the status of women in our society without knowing our civilisational legacy of having women across spheres — goddesses, philosophers, rulers and extraordinary women leaders. Celebrating these women's courage, valour, and ethical wisdom is one of the ways to reclaim Indian epistemology — a step towards achieving Viksit Bharat.

If women figures like Maitreyi and Lopamudra marked our history in the Vedic age, in medieval India, there were devotees like Mirabai, and in the British period, there were revolutionaries like Jhalkaribai, Uda Devi, and Rani Abbakka Chowta. Devi

Decolonising the past

Celebrating Rani Ahilyabai Holkar gives us an opportunity to reclaim our history

Ahilyabai Holkar was also one such icon. Her political consciousness, spiritual nationalism, sense of duty, service, and wisdom made her an icon. Born on May 31, 1725, in Chondi village of Maharashtra, Rani Holkar ruled Malwa territory (a major part of which is now in Madhya Pradesh) from 1767 to 1795. The Holkar dynasty under the Maratha Empire achieved its peak during her tenure. Rooted in the civilisational ethos of samajik samastar — a philosophical vision that aims to foster an equitable and dignified society — her policies addressed disadvantaged groups, specifically the Bhis, Gond, and Dalits. Her efforts to bring the marginalised to the mainstream were evident in the implementation of Bhiswadi taxes that brought Bhis and Gond tribes into the administrative fold.

Holkar's unequivocal defence of rights of widows over their deceased husbands' properties was way ahead of its time. Her transport routes in Malwa, along with various social and public infrastructure, like temples, dharamshalas, water tanks, bathing ghats and comparable facilities within the region and at distant sacred sites — including Varanasi, Dwarka and Rameshwaram — still testify to her excellence. These infrastructural developments

helped bridge the distance between different territories and their people. Her leadership established Maheshwar as a prominent textile production hub, giving rise to the Maheshwari handloom industry. Her administration supported artisans with resources and training to improve their skills. She also implemented balanced trade practices, developed markets, and established quality standards.

Nari shakti is one of the key concepts in Bharatiya darshan shastra (Indian philosophy). Rani Holkar showed how women could be both compassionate, nurturing, and, at the same time, strong and decisive. The strand of modern feminism that speaks of embracing femininity instead of conceiving masculine traits to be superior was a defining feature of her leadership. She was a feminist much before feminism was conceptualised in the West. Her spiritual nationalism was manifested in the reconstruction of several religious structures allegedly desecrated by foreign invaders. The works of social reformers Aurobindo Ghosh and Deendayad Upadhyay on spiritual nationalism and antyodaya (marginalised) echo the foundational ethos and culture of Bharat that Rani Holkar upheld throughout her life.

The post-colonial idea of secularism represents the Western understanding. However, the separation of church and state — it mostly defines Western secularism — is an alien concept for our ancient civilisation. In India, the concept of religion has been so fluid that to confine it within a proto-theistic paradigm of the West would be anachronistic. For us, "dharma" goes much beyond religion and manifests itself in duties, responsibilities and conduct. It is a concept that transcends the monotheistic limits of understanding. Our basic philosophical concept is not right-based; rather, it is duty-based. For Holkar, dharma was an important element to bring everyone together. Her notions of sewa, nyaya and dharma are also evident in the work of PM Narendra Modi, who upholds an inclusive cultural narrative: Sabka saath sabka vikas.

Holkar's life, contribution, and philosophy need more engagement from our scholars, activists and common people. Only the knowledge of the past can help us understand the present and reclaim history.

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