

[OUR TAKE]

The opportunity beyond the SCO

PM Modi's meetings with Xi and Putin have more substantial takeaways than the SCO outcomes

China rolled out the red carpet for the leaders of India, Iran and Russia at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit in Tianjin, with some quarters even casting the meeting as Beijing's effort to project itself as a force of economic stability at a time when the global trade order has been upended by the tariff policies of the US administration. The shadow of US President Donald Trump loomed large over the event, with questions swirling whether it would lead to realignment of international politics to cope with the uncertainty unleashed by the American leader's whimsical decisions. Chinese President Xi Jinping raised the "chaotic and intertwined" nature of the international scenario, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi emphasised the need for reform to rise to the challenge of global economic uncertainties. At their bilateral meeting on Sunday, the two leaders also concurred on the role the Indian and Chinese economies can play in stabilising world trade. All of these are references to the US recent tariff actions that have roiled the world.

But the SCO's membership and the interests of its constituents are too diverse for it to emerge as an alternative to the western order, and this was reflected in the joint declaration at the conclusion of the summit in Tianjin. There was condemnation of the Pahalgaon terror attack and a denunciation of two other terror attacks in Pakistan's Balochistan province. It was in this context that Modi said SCO members should question support for terrorism by some countries and the double standards in fighting the menace. India also opted out of backing China's Belt and Road Initiative. It is unrealistic in these circumstances to think the SCO summit will lead to some major diplomatic realignment, though there is bound to be closer coordination between players such as India, China, Russia, and Iran — all targets of US tariffs and sanctions — to chart a way forward in the economic sphere.

The SCO summit provided Modi an opportunity to meet the leaders of China and Russia to take stock of bilateral ties. In the case of China, the focus was on driving the process of rebuilding ties, which began with the end of the military standoff on the border, and ensuring fair trade with predictable policies. The meeting with President Vladimir Putin allowed both sides to focus on insulating India-Russia ties from the US's punitive measures and to prepare for an annual summit. Both outcomes are far more substantial than any of the takeaways from the SCO summit.

Signalling health in packaged food space

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) will reportedly mandate front of the pack warning labels (FOP) for packaged foods, prompted by a Supreme Court order earlier this year on transparent warnings. This will make high sugar, salt, and fat content of packaged foods explicit, with their levels displayed prominently. It can prove a significant driver of healthier food choices if it nudges consumers to act on easily digestible nutritional information. The gains for the country — already the diabetes capital of the world and set to see more than a doubling of obesity incidence, from 180 million in 2021 to 449 million by 2050 — are not too hard to imagine.

FOP warnings can be an easy-to-understand guide on the potential harm from packaged food items for consumers. The large pictorial warning regime for cigarette packets, which came into effect in 2016, offers a glimpse of such behavioural change. Compliance by tobacco companies has helped push down smoking in India — according to an analysis by the Global State of Tobacco Harm Reduction, the prevalence of adult daily smoking fell from 8.6% in 2017 to 7.1% in 2022. In the case of foods, feedback from informed consumption (following the warnings) could prompt manufacturers to reformulate products and make them healthier.

The efficacy of an FOP regime will depend on two factors. One, the labelling has to be easy to understand and widely popularised for the average consumer to be aware of what a particular warning label indicates. To that end, the FSSAI must conduct information campaigns prior to rolling out FOP. Two, to encourage healthier eating choices, there has to be awareness generated about the health effects of harmful foods. Children present the perfect catchment for this, given they are a large consumer segment for packaged foods, and schools can be harnessed to educate them about avoiding unhealthy foods.

India, China & US: Need for calibrated closeness

The SCO summit and Modi-Xi meeting add momentum to the improvement of Sino-Indian ties. But India must keep an eye on how the US-China relationship evolves

The Narendra Modi-Xi Jinping meeting in Tianjin on August 31, 2025, on the sidelines of the 25th summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), has drawn international attention because it comes in the wake of India's plummeting relations with the US. The improvement in India-China relations has been taking place since Prime Minister Modi and Chinese President Xi met in Kazan, Russia, in October 2024, on the sidelines of the previous SCO summit — their first meeting since the serious clashes between Indian and Chinese forces in Galwan in eastern Ladakh in 2020.

The worsening of India-US relations has imparted a significant momentum to the ongoing Sino-Indian rapprochement. The summit did not announce any steps towards de-escalation and de-induction of the more than 50,000 troops ranged on each side of the border in eastern Ladakh. Modi welcomed the steady improvement of the border situation, but to re-establish peace and tranquility,

much more needs to follow. The Chinese military alliance with Pakistan remains a major security concern for India. China finds Pakistan a most useful proxy to keep India tethered in the subcontinent and will do whatever is necessary to enable Pakistan to play that role effectively. China has, in the past, supported Pakistan with military hardware and even enabled it to acquire nuclear weapons capability in the 1980s. During the recent Operation Sindoor, China went beyond hard support to play a critical operational role, providing locational information and intelligence. The SCO declaration explicitly condemns the terrorist attack on Pahalgaon, and this is clearly a gesture on the part of China. While this is being celebrated as a win for India, China's "iron brother" relationship with Pakistan is unlikely to change. Both India and China swear by a multipolar order, but India's insistence that this must be based on a multipolar Asia is no longer a priority. There are reports from the US, not yet confirmed officially, that Trump is unlikely to attend the Quad summit (which comprises India, Australia, Japan, and the US), which India will host later this year. He may be willing to sacrifice Quad if that is the price to pay for his "big deal" with China. The clear winner from all these geopolitical shifts is China, whose power and influence will increase. That cannot be welcome for India. India is most comfortable with its relations with the US and China are better than their relations with each other.

India has been alert to these possibilities. This was apparent in Modi's visit to Japan in advance of the SCO summit. The strengthening of India-

die among the leaders of the three countries in the corridors as a visual substitute.

There is another parallel development that should worry India. US President Donald Trump continues to talk about having very good relations with China and his own friendly relationship with Xi. After expressing concerns about Chinese students flooding American universities, he suddenly declared that he would welcome 600,000 students from China. He paused higher tariffs on China and declared repeatedly that he aims to do a "big deal with China".

Whether this happens or not, Trump is signalling that the US's Indo-Pacific strategy, designed to counter Chinese domination of Asia, is no longer a priority. There are reports from the US, not yet confirmed officially, that Trump is unlikely to attend the Quad summit (which comprises India, Australia, Japan, and the US), which India will host later this year. He may be willing to sacrifice Quad if that is the price to pay for his "big deal" with China. The clear winner from all these geopolitical shifts is China, whose power and influence will increase. That cannot be welcome for India. India is most comfortable with its relations with the US and China are better than their relations with each other.

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Shyam Saran



Both India and China swear by a multipolar order, but India's insistence that this must be based on a multipolar Asia found no echo from China. AP/PH

Japan defence relations, the common declaration of closer cooperation in ensuring security in the Indo-Pacific region, and a significant commitment to both countries hedging against the US downscaling its Indo-Pacific strategy, are all welcome. India needs to watch these developments closely. Just as it has doubled down on its partnership with Japan, India should actively pursue similar expanded relations with Australia, whether Quad survives or not. India could take the lead in ensuring that a "trilateral" succeeds the quadrilateral and become the kernel of a

broader network of countries in East and Southeast Asia. Any prospect of collusion between the US and China would be as worrisome to the countries of the region as it would be to India. This includes Russia. For India to become a major player in the region, it will need to pursue closer economic and commercial relations with its eastern flank. The economic pillar is as important as the security pillar.

There are important components of the India-US partnership that have not been affected by the turmoil at the top. These include technology, defence, and counterterrorism. This could change. Our effort should be to keep this practical cooperation intact, given its importance to India's development objectives.

Within these limits, Tianjin marks a modest success in India's efforts to cope with an adversarial US.

Shyam Saran is a former foreign secretary. The views expressed are personal

What has prevented another World War

World War II began on September 1, 1939. Eighty-seven years later, the global landscape shows eerily similar geopolitical fault lines, yet with some crucial differences that have, so far, prevented another World War. Let us first look at how WWI broke out. On September 1, 1939, Germany, under Adolf Hitler, attacked Poland to regain claimed territories, expand eastward for "Lebensraum" (living space), and assert dominance in Europe. The Nazi ideology viewed the Slavs as an inferior people, and Poland was seen as an obstacle to Germany's imperial ambitions. Despite signing a non-aggression pact with Poland in 1934, Hitler violated it, using a false flag operation at Gleiwitz to justify the invasion. The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (August 23, 1939) between Nazi Germany and the erstwhile Soviet Union secretly agreed to divide Poland, enabling Germany to attack without fearing Soviet resistance.

The conflict expanded when, on September 3, the UK and France declared war on Germany, honouring their alliance with Poland. The Soviet Union invaded Poland from the east on September 17, as per the pact with Germany. By October, Poland was defeated. In 1940-41, Hitler overran much of Western Europe (France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Norway). The euphoria of success made Hitler over-ambitious, following which he broke the pact with the Soviet Union in 1941 and invaded it (Operation Barbarossa), expanding the war into the East. Japan was already at war against China since 1937 and it became part of the Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy in 1940, formally joining the Axis Powers. Reacting to the sanctions by the US, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor (Hawaii) on December 7, 1941, to cripple the US Pacific Fleet and prevent American interference in its expansion across Southeast Asia and the Pacific. Japan also attacked the Philippines, Malaysia, and other Allied positions — formally jumping into WWII. This encouraged Germany and Italy to declare war on the US as well, making the conflict fully global. The Japanese miscalculated their attack as they failed to destroy US aircraft carriers, which were not in port that day. The US industrial and military response was swift and overwhelming, eventually leading to Japan's defeat with the dropping of atom bombs.

The trigger for WWI was the personality of a few leaders such as Hitler, and their aggression driven by expansionist and racist ideology. Hitler reflected charisma, authoritarianism, fanaticism, and paranoia — making him a uniquely dangerous leader. His ability to manipulate, paired with an extreme ideology and moral detachment, allowed him to orchestrate one of the most brutal periods. Against the backdrop of the current geopolitical landscape, it is natural to examine whether similar conditions are being shaped by rising authoritarianism. Just as fascist regimes rose in the 1930s, today, we see the rise of assertive authoritarian powers challenging the post-WWII international order. Territorial disputes, as in 1939, are showing up in the war in Ukraine. China's aggressive designs in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait, and the constant border tensions in other regions (Armenia-Azerbaijan, Israel-Herzliya, among others),

The world is facing heightened economic nationalism with the trade and tariff wars triggered by US President Donald Trump and his Make America Great Again ideology. This has put global trade under strain, where supply chains are being weaponised and many nations are turning inward, paralleling the protectionist and post-Depression sentiments of the 1930s.

Another important similarity between conditions then and now is the weakening of global institutions: just as the League of Nations failed to prevent war, institutions such as the UN and WTO are being increasingly seen as ineffective, often paralysed by great power rivalries. One notices the deep polarisation and antagonism being formed such as in pre-WWII. Today, one sees a fragmented global order with formations like NATO, Quad, Brics, China-Russia-Iran trilateral ties and some proxy alliances that suggest a move towards bloc politics.

All this said, what is preventing another World War? Nuclear deterrence is the biggest game-changer. The doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) keeps nuclear States in check since nuclear escalation comes with existential risks. There is also a significant global economic interdependence — this deep interlinking of global economies, especially with China, makes total war economically catastrophic for all major powers.

Today, because of technology one can get real-time intelligence, ensuring transparency, unlike the conditions in 1939. Modern surveillance (satellites, open-source intelligence or OSINT, AI-based analysis, etc.) makes surprise invasions and deception much harder, which, of course, deters large-scale aggression.

While large-scale conventional forces would be difficult to assemble under the full gaze of technology, cyber and hybrid warfare would substitute the three dimensions with major powers waging wars in cyber, information, and economic domains rather than getting locked in an open conflict. Proxy wars and grey-zone tactics have replaced conventional wars.

Heightened public awareness and anti-war sentiment across the globe that keep alive the memories of the mass destruction of global wars, act as a moderating pressure points against war, supported by civil resistance movements.

There is a chance that public pressure would not allow authoritarian regimes to bring the catastrophe of war to humanity — even though some leaders could defy such opinions using their charisma to turn public opinion.

While we may seem to be on the brink today, there are guardrails such as those discussed here. Yet, the system remains fragile. If diplomacy fails, or if accidental nuclear occurs (like a miscalculated strike or even an AI-based decision error), another World War may not seem completely ruled out — there are deterrence, the threat has not been eliminated. The key lies in resuscitating and reinforcing global norms and multilateral cooperation before the similarities between pre-WWII conditions and those today grow sharper.

Lieutenant General PJS Pannu (retired) is former deputy chief, Integrated Defence Services. The views expressed are personal



PJS Pannu

ANDRÉ CORRÊA DO LAGO | PRESIDENT, COP30

Science tells us we have very little time. The world risks running out of time to act on climate change without cooperation between developed and developing countries



Mandal, market, migration: The story of Bihar's long exile

The collective memory of modern Bihar is richly layered, shaped by the heroism of the freedom struggle, the defiance of the JP movement, and the dignity assertions of the Mandal era. Memory, however, is never static. For the older, it is a ledger of struggle and aspiration. For the youth, it carries the weight of scarcity. The upcoming Bihar elections emerge as a crucible where memories contend with one another, suspended between the gravity of the past and the horizon of uncharted aspiration.

At the core of this paradox is migration — Bihar's most enduring story. No other Indian state has woven migration so deeply into the warp and weft of its economy, identity, and politics as Bihar. Yet the state curiously remains indifferent to the condition of its migrants. This is remarkable given the scale. Nearly one in three Biharis is a migrant worker. The state records the highest out-migration rate in India in successive censuses. The 2011 census found that over 8.3 million people from Bihar lived outside the state, a figure that has only grown in the last decade and a half. NSSO surveys estimate that close to 10% of Bihar's population resides elsewhere for work. In electoral discourse, however, migration is normalised as inevitable, even romanticised as proof of the hard-working Bihar.

Migration from Bihar fractures into two departments. One is chosen, the other compelled. The erstwhile "made it" families, left decades ago for education or work, built new lives in Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, even Dubai or New Jersey. For them, migration was reinvention — success at the cost of severance. Bihar survives in memory for these migrants — Chhatri in balconies, donations to village schools, Bhupuri lullabies for their children. But for them, return is unthinkable. Why abandon lives won through hardship and resilience despite ridicule for a home that offers zero opportunities? The others — farmers, daily wage labourers, and those who "made it" because hunger leaves them no choice. Their migration is a compulsion and a weary cycle. They come back when paddy ripens, when Chhatri calls, or when ballots beckon, only to leave again. They remain tethered to the land, though the land no longer feeds them.

This exile-within-belonging is history sedimented in political choices. The 1990s, dominated by the Mandal moment, marked a watershed in dignity politics. The revo of the backward classes against entrenched upper-caste dominance was both just and necessary, reshaping Bihar's democratic landscape. But

the Mandal revolution prioritised representation over economic reimagining. At this very moment, India is taking its great leap through liberalisation, privatisation, and globalisation — unleashing markets, attracting capital, and redrawing its economic destiny. While Gujarat, Maharashtra, and even Odisha embraced calibrated liberalisation, Bihar chose caution — treating private capital as antithetical to social justice. The result was stark. Between 1993 and 2005, Bihar's average annual per capita income growth was barely 2%, half the national rate. Even when the state registered a spurt in construction-led growth, its per capita GDP in 2022-23 was just ₹54,000 — just 36% of the national average and the lowest among all Indian states. Poverty remained structurally entrenched. While multidimensional poverty declined in Bihar between 2005 and 2020, over 34% of its population still lives below the poverty line, compared to 11% nationally.

Migration became the state's largest export, with workers from the state forming the backbone of construction, transport, and low-skilled urban service economies in Delhi, Punjab, Maharashtra, and the Gulf. The remittances they send back — estimated at over ₹60,000 crore annually — constitute a parallel welfare system sustaining rural households. But they also mask the state's structural incapacity to generate meaningful livelihoods at home. With more than 57% of Bihar's population under 25, the digitally connected and geographically mobile Bihar youth demand skills and jobs. Meeting this demand requires an economic reimagining rooted in Bihar's historical and geographic strengths. The state's fertile alluvial plains could power an agro-industrial revolution, turning sugarcane, maize and makhana into high-value exports. Its young population — 65% are under the age of 35 — become a workforce for IT-enabled services, manufacturing, and logistics if given skills and infrastructure. The Ganga could be revived as a logistics corridor integrating Bihar into eastern India's trade routes.

Bihar cannot afford to linger in the shadows of politics that redistributes poverty instead of creating prosperity. The time has come to move beyond the rhetoric of scarcity and claim the dignity of abundance. The state that once gave India its moral compass through the Champaran satyagraha and the JP movement must now chart an economic compass for the 21st century.

Shubhrastha is co-author of *The Last Bustle of Saragruha: The Story of the BJP's Rise in the North-east*. The views expressed are personal



Shubhrastha

CACHE

Can an AI image-to-video feature put children at risk?

New Generative AI tools have made it easy to turn your photos into videos with just a tap of the finger, meaning it is easier for children's images to be morphed and misused

Sahana Venugopal

On June 22, Reddit co-founder Alexis Ohanian posted a childhood photo of his mother and himself. In the picture, both are wearing red sweaters while hugging each other against a mountain backdrop.

Alongside the image, Mr. Ohanian posted an AI-generated video that brought the picture to life: the mother and child cuddle each other as the wind ruffles their hair.

"Damn, I wasn't ready for how this would feel. We didn't have a camcorder, so there's no video of me with my mom," posted Ohanian on X (formerly Twitter). "I dropped one of my favourite photos of us in midjourney as 'starting frame for an AI video' and wow... This is how she hugged me. I've rewatched it 50 times."

The post quickly went viral, and garnered well over 20 million views. While many empathised with Mr. Ohanian's act of turning a cherished family photo into a video, he was also severely criticised. Many X users accused him of creating "false" memories, damaging his ability to grieve his mother in a healthy way, or seeking comfort in an interaction that he manufactured.

The capacity to turn images into videos is not limited to tools like Midjourney. In recent weeks, multi-billionaire Elon Musk announced 'Grok Imagine' for users to generate short videos from text/image prompts. Google, in July, rolled out 'Create' mode in its Photos app to transform photos into short videos for U.S.-based users. There are also other, smaller platforms that offer to turn users' photos into AI videos.

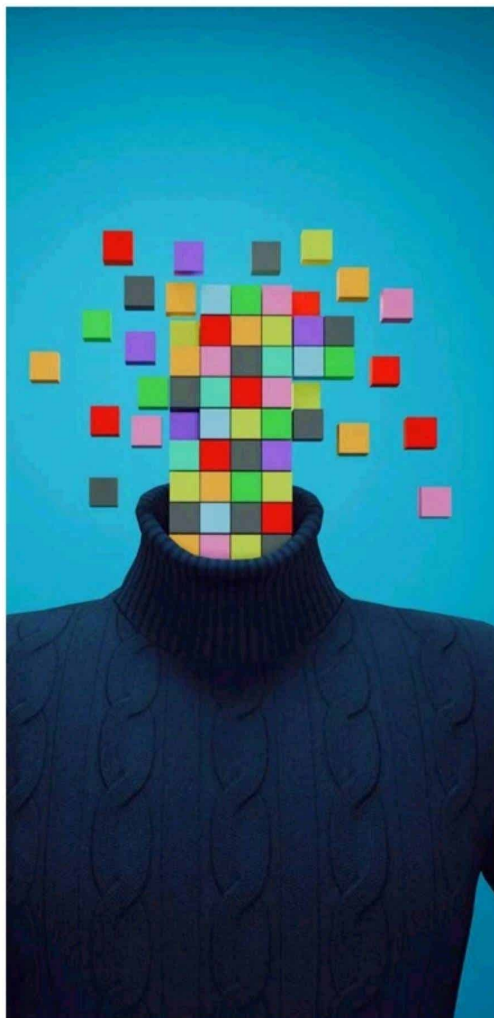
AI tools have been used for years to enhance old media through a process called AI upscaling: removing blurred parts, pixelation, and grain to deliver better output. While GenAI has made this process faster and easier, it also allows users to morph and manipulate images with advanced tools that can remove objects and fill in missing spaces.

The jump in technology comes with legal questions to consider, as permission is usually required before making any significant edits to a copyrighted creation. Furthermore, ethical conundrums also arise when a person manipulates a photo featuring someone who is no longer alive. Significantly, more users need to consider the impact on the photo's most vulnerable subjects — children.

Children's rights and safety at risk
For instance, cybercriminals can now rapidly create realistic AI videos of minors by using their publicly available photos with ease. In the past, criminals have targeted minors by generating synthetic nude photos of them to extort money. One such case in the U.S. led to a teenager dying by suicide. His family was not aware that the child was being harassed.

Data protection lawyer and AI specialist Kleantih Sardeli, who works with the Vienna-based NGO noyb and advocates for consumers' digital rights, said that turning still images into video clips could be done for innocent reasons but that there are "serious implications" to consider as well.

"The lower the barriers to creating realistic content, the more we also need



GETTY IMAGES

to think about ethics, consent and context. A photo can be turned into a convincing video without the knowledge or consent of the person depicted, increasing the risk of deepfakes, defamation and abuse," said Ms. Sardeli, adding that the risks multiplied when photos of children were involved.

She explained that under the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) laws, children cannot legally consent to such use of their personal data, including their image, until they

turn 16 years old.

Though experts and lawmakers have called on AI companies to enforce strong guardrails to prevent AI chatbots from generating highly pornographic media, the reality is that many chatbots easily churn out sexual content. What's more, AI firms and their bosses are aggressively promoting their service. For instance, one specific video Mr. Musk shared that promoted Grok Imagine's capability depicted a fantasy-style clip of a winged woman wearing very little clothing.

Across the internet, meanwhile, websites lure users with morphed porn videos, featuring celebrities, and invite users to digitally undress victims of their choice. "Beyond obvious dangers such as CSAM (Child Sexual Abuse Material), less malicious uses, such as animating a child's photo for advertising or entertainment purposes, can also jeopardise children's privacy, dignity and autonomy," said Ms. Sardeli.

Gatekeepers and guardrails

The Hindu reached out to both Google and xAI about the safeguards in place on these platforms to restrict users from turning photos of children into videos, and whether there are content filters to stop photos from being turned into pornographic content or child abuse material. A Google spokesperson said that the company took child safety online seriously and that the photo-to-video capability in Google Photos could be used with only two prompts: "Subtle movements" and "I'm feeling lucky". Furthermore, these videos would include an invisible SynthID digital watermark, as well as a visual watermark, the company said.

"Our safety measures include extensive 'red teaming' to proactively identify and address potential issues, as well as thorough evaluations to understand how features can be used and prevent misuse. We also welcome user feedback on issues, which we use to make ongoing improvements to our safety measures and overall experience. We have clear policies and Terms of Service on what kinds of content we allow and don't allow, and build guardrails to prevent abuse," said the Google spokesperson.

"Google Photos is a place to store your memories and we want our users to be able to use its fun creative tools on photos of their friends and family, including their kids, while also prioritising safety," the company said.

xAI did not respond to a request for a statement.

In the U.S., the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) has highlighted that it is "deeply concerned" about how Generative AI was being used to sexually exploit children.

"Over the past two years, NCMEC's CyberTipline has received more than 7,000 child sexual exploitation reports involving GAI (Gen AI), and the numbers are expected to grow as we continue to track these trends," stated the organisation on its website.

Meanwhile, Ms. Sardeli noted that existing laws in the EU provided some safeguards but were not specifically designed with AI content in mind. This means EU child protection laws clearly prohibit explicit material, but they are less clear when it comes to synthetic media that is not overtly illegal but is still exploitative or harmful, according to her.

In India, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEITY) has issued advisories that require platforms to remove morphed content (including AI deepfakes), and especially if the content is graphic or sexually abusive. Furthermore, platforms such as Meta, Google, and X have appointed grievance officers in India to handle complaints raised by affected users.

"AI providers are beginning to build in safeguards, like detection systems and content filters, but these are uneven across platforms and not always effective. The law is lagging behind the technology. In particular, there is no comprehensive global framework that addresses the misuse of children's likenesses in GenAI," explained Ms. Sardeli.

"Stronger rules around consent, transparency, and accountability are needed, along with technical standards that make it harder to misuse children's photos."



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

K. Subrahmanian
S. Upendran

"You're late again! Where have you been?"

"I went to meet Gopa. I needed some money."

"You went to borrow money from that tightwad! You must be joking."

"A tight what?"

"A tightwad. The 'a' in the second syllable was pronounced like the 'o' in words like cot, pot and lot."

"I see. But who or what is a tightwad?"

"Do you know what wad means?"

"No, I don't."

"Well, a tight bundle of cloth, paper or bank notes is usually referred to as a wad."

"So, can I say my father gave me a wad of paper?"

"You certainly can. I am sure you would have been much happier if he had given you a wad of bank notes."

"You mean a wad of money? I would have been ecstatic."

"I am sure you would have been. Now that you know what wad means, can you guess what tightwad means?"

"Let me see now. Wad obviously refers to money. So the word tightwad refers to someone who holds on to money tightly. Does the word mean a stingy person?"

"That's right! A tightwad is a miser. For example, I can say, my boss is a real tightwad."

"My father says that most businessmen are tightwads."

"Maybe that's true. Oh, by the way, the word tightwad is commonly used in the U.S., not in Britain."

"That's good to know. Tell me, is there a difference between for ever and forever?"

"Yes, there is. When used as two words, it means for all time, eternally. For example, I will love my wife for ever."

"That's easy for you to say. You're not even married! Can I say, I will remember this day for ever?"

"You certainly can. The English thought that their Empire would last for ever."

"Nothing lasts for ever. Now tell me what forever means?"

"Forever means persistently. For example, I can say, my cousin is forever saying that he will retire when he turns 40."

"Can I say, our teacher is forever late to class?"

"You certainly can. You are forever asking questions."

"No, I don't. I was..."

"Relax. I was making use of the word forever in a sentence, that's all."

"Oh, I was..."

"...one thing you have to remember. Nowadays, not many people make a distinction between for ever and forever."

"What do you mean?"

"Most people tend to use both as one word, forever. So, they tend to write, I'll love you forever, instead of I'll love you for ever."

"Is it wrong to use it as one word?"

"Not really. It's becoming quite common these days to use it as one word."

Published in The Hindu on November 18, 1997.

THE DAILY QUIZ

Though the Asia Cup cricket tournament has been held 16 times before, only twice has it been held in the T20 format. Here is a quiz on the Asia Cup held in T20 format

Soorya Prakash N

QUESTION 1

There has been only one occasion where a team has scored 200 or more runs in a match. Which team is it?

QUESTION 2

Who has scored the most runs in the two editions played in T20 format?

QUESTION 3

There have been only two centuries in the Asia Cup played in T20 format. Who scored the first hundred?

QUESTION 4

Who scored the most runs

in the 2022 edition?

QUESTION 5

There has only been one occasion when a bowler has taken five or more wickets in an innings. Which bowler holds this distinction?

QUESTION 6

Who took the most wickets in the 2016 edition?

QUESTION 7

Only one Indian pair has posted a century partnership in the Asia Cup T20 format. Who are they?



Visual question:

This field umpire has officiated most of the matches in the Asia Cup played in the T20 format. Name him.

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz:

1. The Titanic wreck was found about 370 miles off the coast of this place in Canada. **Ans: Newfoundland**

2. Name the two institutions involved in the discovery mission. **Ans: U.S.'s Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution and the French Research Institute for Exploration of the Sea**

3. Name the submarine that made the discovery. The images of this part of the ship was sent across first. **Ans: Argo; the giant boilers.**

4. The name given by scientists to iron-eating microorganisms. **Ans: Halomonas titanicae commonly called Rusticles**

5. Scientists have attributed this reason as well to the sinking. **Ans: Low-quality steel or weak rivets**

6. Name the company that was granted permission to retrieve artifacts from the wreckage. **Ans: Titanic Ventures, Inc. (later renamed R.M.S. Titanic, Inc.)**

7. In 2024, this bronze statuette was located on the ocean floor. **Ans: Diana**

Visual: Identify this noted American explorer. **Ans: Dr. Robert Ballard**

Early Birds: Sonali Das| Tito Shiladitya| Sudhir Thapa| Arun Kumar Singh| Vikash Kumar

Word of the day

Salacious:

suggestive or of tending to moral looseness; characterised by lust

Synonyms:

lustful, lewd, obscene, raunchy

Usage:

Do not indulge in such salacious gossip.

Pronunciation:

newsh.live/salaciouspro

International Phonetic

Alphabet: /sə'leɪ.ʃəs/

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

The Statesman

Incorporating and directly descended from
the Friends of India - founded 1818

Uneasy Reboot

India's export engines have been jolted by the sudden spike in American tariffs, a move that threatens both diamond polishers in Surat and seafood exporters along the coast. For a government that has anchored its economic ambitions on trade-driven growth, the blow is sharp. Yet, it is not India alone that feels the heat. China too is struggling with a slowing domestic economy and the heavy drag of Washington's tariff wall.

Against this backdrop, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's decision to engage Beijing acquires new weight. The encounter does not suggest a grand reconciliation; the memories of Ladhakh and the bloody Galwan clash remain raw. But what it does signal is that both nations are willing, however cautiously, to explore space for pragmatic cooperation in the shadow of American pressure.

The logic is economic. India's growth prospects remain robust, but its industrial base depends heavily on Chinese inputs - from raw materials to electronic components. For China, a shrinking US market and saturated Southeast Asian outlets make India's 1.45 billion consumers a tempting prize. Even limited easing - such as faster visa approvals, resumption of direct flights, or selective trade relaxations - would be small but significant wins for two countries that claim civilizational kinship but remain locked in suspicion.

But let us not mistake this for a personal setback being the structural rivalry persists. The unresolved Himalayan frontier, questions over Tibet, anxieties about China's projects on trans-boundary rivers, and Beijing's embrace of Pakistan are enduring flashpoints. For New Delhi, the wounds from app bans, stalled investments, and delayed infrastructure projects remain close to the surface. For Beijing, India's tilt toward the Quad and its insistence on "strategic autonomy" remain irritants.

Still, in a world where the United States weaponises tariffs and Russia reorients energy markets, Delhi and Beijing may find selective alignment useful, even if larger issues remain unresolved.

Platforms like the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation or BRICS offer optics of solidarity and a chance to speak the language of multi-polarity. For India, showing flexibility in such forums also sends an unmistakable signal to Washington: New Delhi has other doors to knock on if the costs of American friendship outweigh its benefits.

The real test lies in whether the two Asian giants can move beyond optics to tangible outcomes. Manufacturing partnerships, supply-chain coordination, and a more balanced approach to market access would be concrete steps forward. None of this erases geopolitical rivalries, but it reflects an important truth: economic pragmatism sometimes demands cooperation even among adversaries.

For India, this is not about abandoning old partners or embracing new ones. It is about hedging in a world where alignments are shifting, tariffs are wielded as weapons, and growth ambitions cannot be held hostage to diplomatic spats. A careful reboot with China may be less about trust and more about survival - and in today's fracturing global economy, survival itself can be strategic victory.

Dynasty Undone

Thailand has once again been thrust into political turbulence with the abrupt removal of Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra. Her dismissal over a leaked phone call is more than a personal setback; being the latest episode in a long saga of judicial interventions, contested legitimacy, and deep mistrust that have defined the country's democratic experiment for nearly two decades.

The central controversy was not about corruption or misuse of office, but about perception. In a private conversation with Cambodia's former leader Hun Sen, Ms Paetongtarn was heard using language that critics interpreted as aligning with a foreign power at a time of heightened border tensions. The court concluded that her words cast doubt on her loyalty to national interests, even though she insisted her intention was to prevent conflict and save lives.

The verdict underscores how easily political careers in Thailand can be undone by interpretations of conduct rather than evidence of concrete wrongdoing.

For the Shinawatra family, this decision carries the weight of history. Mr Thaksin was ousted in a coup in 2006, Ms Yingluck was removed by court in 2014, and now Ms Paetongtarn has been dismissed in a similar fashion. Three successive leaders from the same dynasty have been denied the chance to serve out their full terms. This pattern reflects not only the polarising nature of the Shinawatra name but also the enduring distrust between the country's conservative establishment and a populist movement that continues to command a strong electoral base.

The immediate beneficiaries of this turmoil are the conservative forces that have long resisted Shinawatra dominance. Within hours of Ms Paetongtarn's dismissal, her coalition partner shifted allegiances, paving the way for a new government led by a rival bloc.

This swift realignment shows the fluidity of alliances in Thai politics, where loyalty often bends under pressure and where power transitions are engineered less by voters than by courts and political bargains.

Beyond the drama of personalities and dynasties, what stands exposed is the structural fragility of Thailand's democracy. Institutions are weaponised in political battles, leaving little space for consensus or continuity.

Each judicial intervention may be justified on technical grounds, but collectively they reinforce a cycle in which elected leaders are repeatedly removed before policies can take root. In the long run, this erodes faith in democratic processes and strengthens the argument of those who prefer authoritarian stability over fragile representation.

Ms Paetongtarn's downfall, therefore, is not just the story of one leader's misstep. It is a reflection of a country caught between competing visions of legitimacy: one rooted in mass electoral support, the other in elite-defined guardianship of the state. Until Thailand resolves this tension, its politics will remain prone to abrupt shocks, and its citizens will continue to see their choices undone in courtrooms rather than contested in Parliaments.

Quad and India

For India, maintaining a peaceful border with China is critical, as overt conflict could strain its military resources and weaken its position in the Quad. This is particularly relevant given that India is the sole Quad member with a direct land border with China, rendering it uniquely vulnerable to military escalations. The recent disengagement allows India to focus on strengthening its maritime security in the Indo-Pacific through the Quad and Small Islands, rather than being drawn into a prolonged military standoff on its northern border.

The contours of global relations have changed beyond recognition since India joined the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, a strategic partnership between India, the United States, Japan and Australia (QUAD), formally in 2007. Things have turned southwards particularly following the border clashes with China and, more recently, due to India's deteriorating relations with the United States. The Quad underwent significant transformations in recent years to become a central pillar of India's foreign policy in the Indo-Pacific. It evolved into a strategic partnership focused on ensuring regional security and stability, particularly in response to China's growing influence. It serves as a counterpoint to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which has been instrumental in expanding Beijing's influence through the financing of infrastructure projects across Asia, Africa and Latin America.

As the Quad continues to expand its scope, developments at the 2024 Quad Summit and India's well-negotiated disengagement with China along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) illustrate how New Delhi must adeptly balance its national interests.

These developments demonstrate how the Quad has evolved beyond a loose coalition of like-minded democracies to become a platform for tangible regional projects. This shift is crucial for India, as it enables New Delhi to contribute to regional security without explicitly engaging in direct military confrontations with China. While the Quad



has become a valuable platform for India, its strategic calculus is complicated by its relationship with China.

India and China have a protracted history of border disputes, which culminated in a lethal confrontation in the Galwan Valley in 2020. However, recent disengagement efforts along the LAC indicate a potential de-escalation, though the relationship remains fraught with tension. This disengagement is significant as it influences India's engagement with the Quad and its positioning vis-à-vis China.

For India, maintaining a peaceful border with China is critical, as overt conflict could strain its military resources and weaken its position in the Quad. This is particularly relevant given that India is the sole Quad member with a direct land border with China, rendering it uniquely vulnerable to military escalations. The recent disengagement allows India to focus on strengthening its maritime security in the Indo-Pacific through the Quad and Small Islands, rather than being drawn into a prolonged military standoff on its northern border. However, this disengagement does not imply that India can afford to relax its vigilance. China's ongoing investments in India's neighbouring countries, such as Pakistan and Sri Lanka, through the BRI continue to encircle India strategically.

The expanded character of the Quad has instigated concern over the Quad's potential to become an anti-Chinese coalition likened to an Asian NATO. Although both frameworks were ostensibly created to counter collective national security threats from the USSR (Russia) or the People's Republic of China, their fundamental differences render a direct comparison between the QUAD and NATO inappropriate.

Thus, India's involvement in the Quad remains crucial to counterbalance China's influence in the region. By focusing on non-traditional security issues, such as

infrastructure, digital connectivity and capacity building, India can engage with the Quad in a manner that does not provoke overt military conflict with China but safeguards its strategic interests nevertheless.

One of the challenges India faces in the Quad is the differing strategic priorities of its partners. While the USA, Japan and Australia are primarily focused on the Western Pacific and countering Chinese influence in areas like the South China Sea, India's primary focus remains the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). Hence, first and foremost, India seeks to secure the IOR from the dragon's influence in its Asian backyard while maintaining a limited hedge in the Pacific.

India's strategic autonomy has been a fundamental principle of its foreign policy and its involvement in the Quad must be analysed through this perspective. India has historically exercised caution regarding close alignment with any single military alliance and the Quad is no exception. While the grouping does not constitute a formal military alliance, increased military cooperation within the Quad - such as the Malabar naval exercises - represents an emerging trend. Experts believe that India must recalibrate its military moves as positioning the Quad too closely with Indo-Pacific strategies may inadvertently provoke China into escalating tensions in the eastern IOR. It could lead to a strategic shift, potentially opening a new front in maritime rivalry that India would prefer to avoid.

India has enhanced its defence ties with all Quad members through bilateral agreements. It maintains a cautious approach regarding the escalation of tensions with China. The recent disengagement at the LAC enables India to concentrate on developing military interoperability in the maritime domain, rather than becoming involved in land and maritime conflicts.

This strategic decision allows India to contribute to the Quad's security objectives without overcommitting to direct military confrontations, which could potentially compromise its economic and diplomatic interests in the region. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is breathing new life into the concept of Indo-Pacific security. It is focused on the vigorous pursuit of political influence through regional maritime powers. Heightened security cooperation with Japan, Australia and the United States is the prime indicator of the new doctrine.

Shinzo Abe, the former Japanese Prime Minister was the first to underscore the rising significance and linkages between the Indian and the Pacific Oceans. During his visit to India, Prime Minister Abe had commented that the prime influence of the two seas would draw together Asia's two wealthiest democracies. Modi's evolving doctrine in the Indo-Pacific is also being largely encouraged by the regional institutions seeking a greater role for New Delhi. In the east, the rhetoric has been that India has so far failed to play its role as a security partner in the region.

India's participation in the Quad presents both opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, the Quad offers India a platform to counterbalance China's influence in the Indo-Pacific, particularly through initiatives in infrastructure, technology, and maritime security. On the other hand, India's unique geographic and strategic position - bordering China - necessitates careful navigation of its relationship with Beijing to avoid military escalation. The recent disengagement on the LAC affords India the opportunity to focus on the Quad's broader strategic objectives without the distraction of border tensions.

As the Quad continues to evolve, India is likely to assume a more prominent role in shaping its agenda. However, India's engagement will remain pragmatic, ensuring that it can secure its national interests while maintaining its strategic autonomy in an increasingly multipolar world.

In this hedging act, India stands to derive significant benefits from its active participation in the Quad, provided it can continue to navigate the complexities of its relationship with China and the differing priorities of its Quad partners. The future of India's role in the Indo-Pacific will depend on its ability to leverage the Quad's growing influence while safeguarding its own strategic and economic imperatives.

Yours, etc., Dr. Jitesh Mori,
Kutch, 28 August.

The Island

A mission tainted with hypocrisy

Minister Bimal Rathnayake has said Ranil Wickremesinghe should have been arrested four decades ago over the Batalanda torture chamber, the 1983 racial violence, etc. The former has also flayed the latter for the Treasury bond scams (2015).

It is now up to the judiciary to scrutinise charges against Wickremesinghe, arrested and remanded for alleged misuse of state funds, and determine whether he is guilty or not. Those who are keen to have corruption and misuse/abuse of state funds eliminated rejoice when politicians and state officials are prosecuted for such offences - and understandably so.

Their concerns should be appreciated and their call for stringent action against the corrupt heeded. But the question is whether the JVP/NPP are any better than those who are keen to have corruption and misuse/abuse of state funds eliminated rejoice when politicians and state officials are prosecuted for such offences - and understandably so.

Minister Rathnayake may not have realised that it was self-defeating for him to refer to what happened 40 years or so ago. He has unwittingly reminded the public of the JVP's wanton destruction of state assets in the late 1980s. The JVP burnt 553 SLTB buses, 15 SLTB depots

and workshops, 16 trains, 24 railway stations, and countless transformers and pylons belonging to the CEB, according to media reports published during that period. The human cost of the JVP's mindless terror and the UNP's savage counterterror was incalculable.

Maitripala Sirisena, whom the JVP backed in the 2015 presidential election, has revealed that the JVP destroyed 245 out of the country's 545 agrarian service centres and the warehouses of the Paddy Marketing Board with paddy stocks in them.

If those crimes had been properly investigated and criminal proceedings instituted against the perpetrators, many of the present-day JVP leaders would have been thrown behind bars. As for the Batalanda torture chamber, will the JVP-led government explain why the second part of the parliamentary debate on the Batalanda Commission report has not taken place yet.

The first part of the debate was held in April. It is because the report reveals numerous crimes the JVP committed during its reign of terror in the late 1980s?

If the JVP is so concerned about the Treasury bond scams will it explain why it honeycombed with Wickremesinghe's UNP from 2015 to 2019? During that period, 'constitutional coup' when President Sirisena tried to sack Prime Minister Wickremesinghe, the JVP leaders were among those who scuttled that move both legally and politically.

Why didn't issues like the Batalanda torture chamber and the Treasury bond scams cause any concern to the JVP at that time? When the UNP-led Yahapalana government, together with the JVP had politically motivated probes conducted against their rivals, we warned that they were setting a very bad precedent. The then Prime Minister Wickremesinghe, JVP leader Anura Kumara Dissanayake and other JVP stalwarts were on very intimate terms at the time.

The JVP vilified the leaders of the previous UPFA government and raised questions in Parliament about allegations against them thereby preparing the ground for their arrests. Some courts were kept open until midnight for the suspects to be remanded. The JVP was represented in the powerful National Executive Council

of the Yahapalana government and its leaders frequented Temple Trees, where the Anti-Corruption Secretariat was located. The members of the UPFA government were no doubt corrupt and had to be brought to justice, but the Yahapalana government and the JVP set about the task of doing so the wrong way to gain political mileage. They turned the arrests of their rivals into political circus.

All the cases filed in a hurry at their behest collapsed, and the Rajapaksa played the victim card, regaining public sympathy and made a stunning comeback. The Yahapalana government, just like its predecessors, had the Attorney General's Department and the CID on a string, with SSP Shani Abeyskera as the CID Director.

Today, the JVP/NPP has gone a step ahead: it has pulled Abeyskera out of retirement and appointed him CID director. Abeyskera and ex-SDG (CID) Ravi Senewiratne joined the NPP and actively took part in its election campaigns as key members of the NPP's Retired Police Collective.

Senewiratne is the incumbent Secretary to the Ministry of Public Security. The CID has been reduced to a mere appendage of the ruling JVP/NPP.

Letters To The Editor | editor@thestatesman.com

A healthy nation

Sir, In these times, health is considered the greatest wealth of any nation. In a country like ours, with a population of more than 1.4 billion, ensuring that every citizen remains healthy is a major challenge. Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as diabetes, heart disease, various types of cancer, obesity, and lifestyle-related diseases are rapidly increasing. India is moving towards becoming a global hub of such non-communicable diseases, which is a matter of concern. Various surveys reveal that about 65 per cent of all deaths

in the country are caused by NCDs. Take diabetes as an example: nearly 90 million people in India suffer from this disease, and the number is expected to rise to 110 million by 2030.

Every year, its direct and indirect treatment costs the nation approximately Rs 15 lakh crore. Additionally, cervical cancer alone causes the death of nearly 75,000 women annually.

These figures are not just alarming but also point to the fact that treatment alone is not enough - preventing diseases before they occur is essential.

According to the World Health Organization, if developing countries invest just \$1 in preventive healthcare,

they can gain nearly \$7 worth of economic benefit in terms of reduced healthcare costs. But are we taking the necessary steps to prevent these diseases? Sadly, the answer is often discouraging, and negative.

However, by making lifestyle changes such as 45 minutes of regular exercise or walking, avoiding harmful foods, getting enough sleep, and staying away from

additions, we can keep our bodies healthy in the long run. We must not forget that healthy citizens are the foundation of a healthy society and a strong nation. Instead of spending billions on treatment, if every citizen brings small changes into their daily lives

through health awareness, many diseases can be prevented. Yours, etc., Dr. Jitesh Mori,
Kutch, 28 August.

Cloud over AIFF

Sir, The All India Football Federation (AIFF) is in danger of being suspended for the second time in three years if it fails to get its constitution ratified by October 31, according to a recent letter from FIFA, the governing body for world football, and the Asian Football Confederation (AFC).

This is disturbing. FIFA had suspended India on 16 August 2022, for third-party influence because a Supreme Court-appointed

committee of administrators was running the federation. The ban was lifted ten days later, paving the way for elections where Kalyan Chaudhary was elected as president.

Notably, FIFA and AFC have given AIFF a deadline of October 30 to secure a definitive order from the Supreme Court approving the revised AIFF constitution, ensure full alignment with mandatory provisions of FIFA and AFC statutes and regulations, and obtain formal ratification of the constitution at the next AIFF general body meeting. This should be a warning to India's football body.

Yours, etc., Khokan Das,
Kolkata, 28 August.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Number of people affected by Punjab floods in one month

2.56 lakh. Twelve out of the 23 districts in the State have been hit, in the one month starting August 1, in what the State government has called one of the worst flood disasters to hit Punjab in decades. The flood worsened due to heavy rainfall in many parts of the State. PHOTO BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

Volume of UPI transactions in the month of August

20 billion. According to the NPCI, UPI transaction amount registered a growth of 21% at ₹24.85 lakh crore as compared to ₹20.60 lakh crore in the same month a year ago. In volume terms, the growth was 34% to 20.01 billion as against 14.9 billion in August 2024. PHOTO BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

The increase in gross GST collection in the month of August

6.5 per cent. Gross GST collection increased 6.5% to over ₹1.86 lakh crore in August on higher domestic revenues, as per government data released on Monday. The gross GST mop-up was ₹1.75 lakh crore in August 2024. Last month, the collection was ₹1.96 lakh crore. PHOTO BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

The death toll from an earthquake which hit eastern Afghanistan

800 Desperate Afghans clawed through rubble in the dead of the night in search of missing loved ones after a strong earthquake killed some 800 people and injured more than 2,500 in eastern Afghanistan, according to figures provided by the Taliban government. PHOTO BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

Departmental action cases pending against CBI personnel

60 Of these cases, 22 were pending for more than four years. As of December 31, 2024, as many as 39 departmental cases against Group 'A' officers and 21 cases against Group 'B' and 'C' officials of the CBI were pending at various stages. PHOTO BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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A dissent to safeguard the future

The dissent from the lone woman Supreme Court judge on the elevation of Justice Pancholi is multi-faceted. It did not merely focus on the point that there were other senior women High Court judges. Her reservations touched upon the criteria the Collegium had to consider while assessing a candidate for elevation

LETTER & SPIRIT

Krishnadas Rajagopal

The dissent by Supreme Court judge, Justice B.V. Nagarathna, against a proposal to elevate Justice Vipul Manubhai Pancholi to the top court was an appeal to protect the future of the court and credibility of the Collegium system of judicial appointments.

Justice Nagarathna, in her note, urged Chief Justice of India (CJI) B.R. Gavai to keep in mind, as the head of the Supreme Court Collegium and pater familias of the judicial fraternity, that decisions taken in the present would have ramifications on the future administration of justice. Her dissent drew strength from the court's own principle that judicial appointments must be free of fear of other power centres. Executive interference in judicial appointments, as Justice Madan B. Lokur wrote in the *National Judicial Appointments Commission* judgment, would cripple justice administration, for the government was "unashamedly the biggest litigant in the country".

The dissent indicated the bar, while recommending judges who could become Chief Justices of India, must be set "really high" as they become protectors of the independence of the judiciary in posterity. Justice Pancholi, who was sworn in as a Supreme Court judge on August 29, is in line to be CJI in 2031.

Lone voice

The dissent from the lone woman Supreme Court judge is multi-faceted. It did not merely focus on the point that there were other women High Court judges senior to Justice Pancholi. Her reservations touched upon the criteria the Collegium had to consider while assessing a candidate for elevation. A Collegium resolution of July 11, 2024 listed these as criteria for the judges under consideration — merit as demonstrated by the judgments authored by the judges and



Standing tall: Justice B.V. Nagarathna in Bengaluru in 2024. K. BHAGYA PRAKASH

performance; integrity; the need to ensure diversity in terms of region, gender and community; and the need for inclusion of the marginalised and backward segments of the community.

The train of events leading to the 41 division in the Collegium harked back to May 25, 2025 when Chief Justice Gavai broached the subject of the candidacy of Justice Pancholi to the top court. Justice Nagarathna is said to have expressed her oral dissent. It appeared that Justice Vikram Nath, formerly a Gujarat High Court Chief Justice, too had objected to the proposal. Justice Anjaria, who was senior to Justice Pancholi in the Gujarat High Court, was recommended the next day. Justice Anjaria had fulfilled the criteria of both seniority and regional representation in May 2025. But the proposal to elevate Justice Pancholi, who

had been Patna Chief Justice since July 21 this year, to the top court came up again in August. This time, Justice Nagarathna reportedly put in a written dissent requesting the CJI and her other Collegium colleagues to consider the "serious and grave concerns" that led the Collegium to transfer Justice Pancholi from Gujarat to Patna High Court in July 2023. Justice Nagarathna is noted to have said the decision to transfer was made after due deliberation following consultations with Justices M.R. Shah, Nath, J.B. Pardiwala and Aravind Kumar.

Justice Nagarathna requested the Collegium to call for and peruse the minutes of the meeting recommending the transfer in 2023. She asked why a lawyers' delegation had met the then Chief Justice of India, Justice D.Y. Chandrachud (now retired), in the

presence of Justice Shah, and pleaded for the transfer. Justice Nagarathna sought reasons that led Justice Nath to reprimand Justice Pancholi while the former was the Gujarat High Court Justice.

Counter-productive to justice

The Supreme Court judge, in her dissent, ostensibly noted that Justice Pardiwala's (former Gujarat High Court judge) opinion was not sought for the proposal to elevate Justice Pancholi as Patna High Court Chief Justice. A section of a 41-page document posted online by the Supreme Court titled, 'Appointment of High Court Judges', has a section called the 'The Role of the Supreme Court Collegium' in which the first tenet is that "the Chief Justice of India seeks views of the judges of the Supreme Court, outside the Collegium, who are conversant with the affairs of the concerned High Court".

She reportedly objected to the elevation of Justice Pancholi, who was ranked 57 in the all-India seniority, to the Supreme Court, citing that it would prove "counter-productive" to the administration of justice and risk the credibility of the Collegium. Justice Nagarathna, who is herself in line to be the first woman Chief Justice of India in 2027, raised doubts about whether Justice Pancholi's prospective Chief Justiceship from October 3, 2031 to May 27, 2033 would be in the interest of the institution.

Justice Nagarathna also presumably asked whether there was a requirement for a third judge from the Gujarat High Court with Justice Pardiwala, who is in the running for Chief Justiceship, and Justice Anjaria already on the Supreme Court Bench. She raised the point that several High Courts were not represented or had inadequate representation in the top court. The High Courts without representation include Jammu and Kashmir, Orissa, Jharkhand, Sikkim, Meghalaya, Tripura and Uttarakhand. The dissent note is said to have argued that there were several meritorious judges senior to Justice Pancholi the Collegium could recommend for the top court.

THE GIST

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What is CEREBO, the brain tool developed indigenously?

How are traumatic brain injuries caused? Why would the tool be particularly useful in rural areas?

Bindu Shajan Perappadan

The story so far:

CEREBO is a novel hand-held, portable non-invasive brain injury diagnostic tool, developed through a collaboration between the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), the Medical Device & Diagnostics Mission Secretariat (MDMS), AIMS Bhopal, NIMHANS Bengaluru, and Bioscan Research. The device is to be used for Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBIs) and can detect intracranial bleeding and edema within a minute. It is safe for infants and pregnant women, and can be used by paramedic staff as well as unskilled personnel.

Why is this device important?

Offered as an option in settings where advanced diagnostic tools like CT or MRI scans are inaccessible or delayed, CEREBO provides colour-coded,

radiation-free, and cost-effective results. The device is designed for deployment in ambulances, trauma centres, rural clinics, and disaster response units and is aimed at enhancing early TBI detection and patient outcomes. According to the ICMR, CEREBO has undergone clinical validation, regulatory approvals, and feasibility studies, paving the way for global adoption in emergency and military healthcare systems.

ICMR added that multi-centre clinical performance evaluation and utility trials were conducted at leading trauma care and neurosurgical centres to generate prospective evidence on diagnostic accuracy, time-to-decision benefits, and integration feasibility within emergency care pathways. Post-market surveillance supported by ICMR-MDMS further confirmed its role in user adoption as a tool for effectively triaging patients for further neurological assessments. Health technology assessments also

recommended the adoption of the device in tertiary care to accelerate CT scans, optimise triage, and reduce imaging costs.

What is TBI?

TBIs are a significant public health challenge, particularly in emergency settings, rural areas, and underserved populations. Traditional diagnostic methods, such as the Glasgow Coma Scale (GCS), are prone to errors and subjective interpretations, while imaging techniques require specialised infrastructure, trained personnel, and are cost-intensive. It is to address this issue that CEREBO has been developed using advanced near-infrared spectroscopy technology powered by machine learning.

TBI is a condition caused by a sudden trauma or injury to the head, which disrupts normal brain function. This injury can range from mild (concussion) to severe, often resulting in long-term physical, cognitive, emotional, and

behavioural impairments. The severity of TBI depends on factors such as the force of impact, the location of the injury, and the individual's overall health. According to an article titled, 'Epidemiology of traumatic brain injuries: Indian scenario', TBIs are a leading cause of morbidity, mortality, disability and socio-economic losses in India and other developing countries. It is estimated that nearly 1.5 to 2 million persons are injured and one million succumb to death every year in India. Road traffic injuries are the leading cause (60%) of TBIs followed by falls (20%-25%) and violence (10%).

It is possible for a TBI to go undiagnosed initially, especially if symptoms are mild or if there are no visible signs of injury. A TBI can cause permanent brain damage in some cases, particularly if the injury is severe or if there are complications such as bleeding or swelling in the brain. Patients with mild TBIs (concussions) may only require monitoring and observation to ensure symptoms do not worsen. "Close monitoring of neurological status, vital signs, and cognitive function is important, especially in the first 24 to 48 hours after injury," it adds. Long-term consequences of TBI include cognitive impairments (such as memory problems), emotional and behavioural changes (such as depression, anxiety), physical disabilities, and increased risk of neurodegenerative diseases later in life, say experts.

THE GIST

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Rethinking carbon pricing and taxes

India's free trade agreement (FTA) with the U.K., heralded as the gold standard by the Minister for Commerce and Industry, Piyush Goyal, has a lot going for it. Yet, it does not address the one imminent policy instrument that is likely to significantly upend its possible benefits for India.

The U.K.'s Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (UKCBAM), similar in principle to the European Union (EU)'s CBAM, will be implemented from January 2027. It covers both direct and indirect emissions for hard-to-abate sectors such as steel and aluminium, including the electricity used in their production. CBAM's scope will later be expanded to other products.

Mr. Goyal noted that India would retaliate against any harmful impacts of CBAM. However, any prospective action may not provide the desired relief for the imminent cost impact. This is an issue that needs to be addressed upfront in a bilateral agreement. For instance, in the recently announced U.S.-EU trade agreement, the EU has agreed to address U.S. concerns on CBAM and other rules relating to corporate sustainability, through flexibilities.

CBAM effect on India's exports
Before the FTA, the U.K.'s MFN rates for aluminium and iron and steel were in the range of 0-6%. Under the India-U.K. FTA, these duties will be reduced to zero for Indian exports. At first glance, this appears beneficial for India. But from January 2027, aluminium and steel imports will need to match the U.K.'s carbon price, which, as of now, is approximately \$66/tCO₂, translating to a cost increase of at least 20% to 40% for exporters.

The U.K.'s CBAM permits deductions for carbon pricing in exporting countries, including carbon taxes or prices paid under emissions trading schemes. While Indian industry pays levies such as coal cess, bears costs under the



Prachi Priya
Mumbai-based economist. Views are personal.



R.V. Anuradha
Partner, Clarus Law Associates, New Delhi. Views are personal.

In an era of rising tariff and non-tariff barriers, we cannot risk fragmented carbon pricing turning into massive compliance costs

renewable purchase obligation, and now an explicit carbon price under the recently announced Carbon Credit Trading Scheme (CCTS), it is unclear whether the U.K. will allow deductions beyond the CCTS. Even with respect to the CCTS, a major challenge is the large gap between India's projected carbon price, estimated by the Bureau of Energy Efficiency at around \$8-10 per tonne of CO₂, and the U.K.'s carbon price, currently at \$66 per tonne.

As with the EU's CBAM, the U.K.'s approach is focused on levying a charge on exports into the U.K. to match the embedded carbon price paid by domestic producers. By levying the same price as paid by U.K. producers in specific sectors where the U.K. perceives a competitive disadvantage, the unilateral setting of carbon price upends multilateral commitments on emission reductions under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement.

There can never be a singular carbon price across economies as emissions vary across countries based on energy mix, industry structure, and technological availability and viability. A joint report by multilateral institutions in October 2024 urged greater coordination on carbon markets, warning that fragmented systems cause distortions, leakage, and undermine net-zero goals.

Fragmented markets will only raise compliance costs, disrupt supply chains, and hinder both growth and climate goals. A global carbon pricing agreement is essential to align methods for measuring emissions, streamline reporting requirements, and ensure support for green tech transfer. The International Monetary Fund in 2021 proposed an International Carbon Price Floor (ICPF) with tiered pricing: \$25 for low-income, \$50 for middle-income, and \$75 for high-income countries. Building on this, the World Economic Forum proposed a three-phased

approach to facilitate a smooth transition to global carbon pricing, starting with minimum standards for pricing and reporting, and linking this to regional systems and harmonising monitoring and verification processes. It also proposed linking regional carbon markets (EU, China, India, other parts of Asia) to reduce fragmentation and move towards a unified global system.

It is important for the Indian government to assess whether this model would work and explore synergies with like-minded developing countries. In an era of rising tariff and non-tariff barriers, we cannot risk fragmented carbon pricing turning into massive compliance costs.

National action
Amidst rising protectionist global consensus is unlikely in the short term. Hence Indian industry must view clean technologies as tools for efficiency and competitiveness, and not just as export compliance. The government needs to act as an enabler by streamlining various implicit carbon taxes into a unified carbon market framework. Implementing stricter emission reduction targets under a single explicit carbon tax through the CCTS, instead of multiple taxes on carbon-intensive sectors, will improve carbon price discovery, simplify compliance and monitoring, and preserve our competitiveness. It would position India to build a stronger carbon pricing system, capable of joining a cohesive global carbon market in the future. Revenues from these carbon taxes should be ploughed back for industrial

decarbonisation. The draft climate finance taxonomy developed by the Ministry of Finance, is another initiative that will enable investors to boost clean tech investment.

In a world where multilateral rules are being undermined, and bilateral free trade deals are failing to secure equity, proactive action between government and industry within the country is the only answer.

The need to recognise women drug users

There is no gender-sensitive infrastructure for drug users in J&K

STATE OF PLAY

Bilal Gani

Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) is in the grip of a drug crisis. Data from the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment found that in 2022, around 1.08 lakh men and 36,000 women in J&K reported using cannabis in 2022. About 5.34 lakh men and 8,000 women consumed opioids, 1.6 lakh men and 8,000 women used sedatives, and 1.27 lakh men and 7,000 women were addicted to inhalants.

While there is growing alarm over male addiction, women remain overlooked. While many women bear the brunt of drug use among male family members, a much smaller share of them — 7% of drug users in J&K in 2023, or roughly 62,000 individuals — have also turned to drugs for different reasons: due to acute anxiety and other mental health difficulties during periods of political unrest, losing husbands, sons, and brothers during conflicts; sustained periods of unemployment; marital issues; and gender-based pressures. Some women are reportedly used for drug peddling and are abused, sometimes sexually. Some are also introduced to drugs by their male friends and family members.

As women drug users are considered to be bringing shame and dishonour to their families, many of them are segregated in their communities. Further, there is no gender-sensitive infrastructure to support women drug users. According to the Ministry, out of the 46 addiction treatment facilities across India, only 10 are in J&K, and out of 340 rehabilitation centres nation-



wide, J&K has only one such centre. There is no women-only rehabilitation centre in the region. There are very few female counsellors — a crisis that is especially grave when we consider the stories of abuse. There is also no public space for women to speak openly about addiction. Where then will women seek help or even share their stories with one another?

The shame associated with being a drug user, compounded by the psychological toll of substance use, invisibilises women. Their trauma remains untreated because of social stigma and an indifferent system. This neglect is not accidental; it reflects a structural failure to recognise women as part of the addiction crisis and as having separate gender-based requirements during treatment and rehabilitation.

The growing trend of heroin addiction among the youth, particularly women, has been made possible by the unhindered supply of drugs from States in northern India and from across the border. Drug mafias have a close nexus with local dealers, which has precipitated the easy flow of drugs to addicts in the Valley. The government could break this nexus by increasing vigil on the highway at places such as Udhampur.

The government has attached properties worth crores belonging to drug peddlers as a deterrent to disman-

tle the drug supply network in the region. However, confiscating the properties of drug suppliers may condemn them to remain criminals forever. While it is imperative for the government to act tough against peddlers, seizing their properties, including homes, could have serious repercussions on their social and psychological well-being. Rehabilitation must be compassionate and grounded in humanitarian care.

The unique character of the region has long sidelined women's agency. The stigma surrounding women's drug addiction has only deepened their misery.

We need public awareness campaigns that present drug addiction as a disease — specifically as a chronic, relapsing brain disorder — rather than as a moral failure. Building women's support groups within villages can help replace stigma with trust and solidarity. More gender-sensitive infrastructure is the need of the hour. J&K needs centres where female users are treated with privacy and empathy so that more women come forward for treatment. Rehabilitation facilities need proper funding and staffing to be effective centres of care and rehabilitation.

But for all of this to happen, it is crucial that the J&K government first recognises that drug addiction is a public health emergency that requires both government and community engagement. And that women drug users need proper and separate rehabilitation, including therapy, counselling, and a fair opportunity to recover and live a normal and dignified life.

Bilal Gani is faculty of Political Studies, Government Degree College Baramulla, J&K

India-U.S. relationship: trust defines partnership, not tariffs

Sweeping tariff hikes may sting, but the India-U.S. relationship is anchored in resilience, strategic convergence, and people-to-people ties

DATA POINT

Mehnaz Ansari

The U.S.'s decision to sharply raise tariffs on Indian exports — doubling duties to 50% on a wide range of products — has caused deep concern and disappointment in India. After decades of building a mature, multifaceted relationship, the imposition of such sweeping trade measures feels like a setback. The economic impact is significant. In 2024, India exported goods worth \$87.3 billion to the U.S., its single largest trading partner. Of this, nearly \$48.55 billion worth of merchandise is directly at risk. The heaviest blows fall on labour-intensive, job-creating sectors (Chart 1):

- Gems and jewellery (about \$10 billion annually): The U.S. is India's largest market, buying more than a quarter of its diamond and jewellery exports.
- Textiles and apparel (about \$8 billion): Around 70% of India's U.S.-bound exports are now caught under the tariff net.
- Agriculture (about \$6 billion): Exports of rice, spices, seafood, and niche agri-products may lose ground.
- Leather and footwear (about \$3 billion): Traditional export strengths are at risk of losing market share to other low-cost suppliers. Just weeks before the tariffs came into force, exporters rushed to meet orders. In July 2025, gems and jewellery exports surged 16%, with lab-grown diamonds leaping 27.6%. This urgency reflected both adaptability and anxiety about the trade ahead.

Balanced trade that endures
Yet, it would be a mistake to view U.S.-India ties solely through the lens of tariffs. A large share of bilateral trade remains unaffected — and continues to thrive (Chart 2):

- Pharmaceuticals (about \$50 billion industry): \$3.7 billion exports in H1 2025; Exempt from ta-

iffs, India supplies 40% of America's generic drug demand.

- Services and IT (\$387.5 billion in FY 2024-25; \$33.2 billion to U.S.): IT services, BFSI, and consulting remain robust, with Indian firms powering Fortune 500 companies and U.S. tech majors expanding in India.
- Energy and clean tech: LNG imports, renewable energy partnerships, and joint work on decarbonisation continue to deepen.
- Aviation and aerospace: Boeing aircraft orders, airport modernisation, and CNS/ATM collaborations are unaffected.
- Defence: Under the 2+2 dialogue, co-production projects, technology transfer, and joint military exercises are strengthening ties.
- Space and innovation: NASA-ISRO cooperation and digital innovation partnerships represent the future of collaboration. This dual reality — tariffs hurting traditional exports, while services and strategic sectors thrive — shows the depth and diversity of the relationship.

Real strength of ties
The most enduring anchor is not trade alone, but people-to-people ties. If trade and diplomacy are the "hardware," people are the "software" that keeps the partnership running.

- Diaspora: The 4.8 million-strong Indian diaspora in the U.S. excels across medicine, law, business, and politics. Over 150 Indian-origin CEOs now lead global corporations, shaping boardrooms as much as trade flows.
- Students: With more than 2,00,000 Indian students enrolled in U.S. universities, the talent pipeline is shaping innovation ecosystems in both countries.
- Professionals: Indian IT engineers drive Silicon Valley, while U.S. entrepreneurs are investing in Bengaluru's start-up ecosystem.
- Cultural exchange: Indian Americans serve in Congress, state legislatures, and local leadership,

while festivals like Deepavali are celebrated at the White House. They are trust-based bonds cultivated over decades, making the relationship structural and resilient.

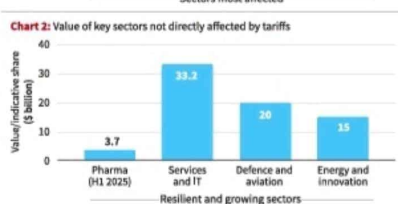
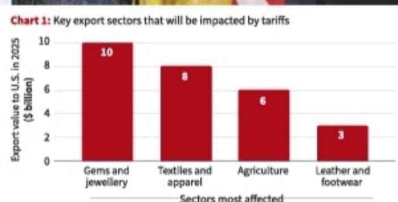
Strategic collaborations

Equally important, the U.S.-India partnership extends well beyond trade disputes.

Mehnaz Ansari is a former U.S. Government Official and Global Trade Expert and founder of Aerostratix

Relationship beyond tariffs

The data for the charts were sourced from Reuters; the U.S. Trade Representative; the Indian Ministries of Commerce, Education, and Defence; the U.S. Census, and pharma industry reports



Tariffs may disrupt markets, unsettle industries, and dominate headlines, but they do not define destiny. The U.S.-India relationship has survived Cold War suspicion, sanctions, and past trade disputes before — and every time, it has emerged stronger

FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO SEPTEMBER 2, 1975

China's recognition of Bangla a 'hopeful move'

New Delhi, Sept. 1: Despite its persisting differences with China over various issues, India is prepared to look upon Peking's belated recognition of Bangladesh as a hopeful development in the belief that the very logic of the subcontinental situation would sooner or later compel China to adopt a more realistic attitude to the problems of the region. China has at last extended de jure recognition although it has been dealing with Bangladesh on a de facto basis for quite some time by reconciling itself to the reality of the break-up of old Pakistan. The recent events in Bangladesh have, no doubt, hastened the Chinese recognition, but the moves for the establishment of diplomatic relations were set in a motion a year ago after Bangladesh's admission to the United Nations. From then on it was only a question of time and tactics on China's part to choose a politically advantageous moment for announcing the recognition. After an absence of nearly four years, the Chinese will be re-establishing their presence in Dacca soon. It remains to be seen whether they will be descending on the scene determined to make their presence felt by creating difficulties or lending a helping hand in consolidating Bangladesh's hard-won freedom. The Chinese had placed themselves in such an unenviable position by initially supporting the Pakistan savagery and later on refusing to accept the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent nation that the recent events had provided the hard-headed men in Peking with an excellent opportunity to extricate themselves from this embarrassing position with the pretence of some tactical gain in the long run.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO FROM THE ISSUE DATED SEPTEMBER 1, 1925 AS THERE WAS NO ISSUE DATED SEPTEMBER 2, 1925

Indians in Australia

Mr. Bihore, in answer to Mr. Sarfraz Khan, announced that the Australian Government had given effect to the hopes held out to Mr. Sastri by introducing a Bill, which had already been passed by the Senate and when passed by the House of Representatives would give Indians State and Commonwealth franchise throughout Australia, except in Queensland and in Western Australia, where Indians had no suffrage in respect of election for the Lower House.



Another chance

Allowing objections beyond deadline may help wrongly excluded voters

The Supreme Court of India's September 1 order on Bihar's Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise offers a crucial lifeline to voters who found themselves wrongfully excluded from the draft electoral rolls. The Court's ruling and the Election Commission of India's (ECI) clarification that claims and objections can continue to be filed even after the deadline, represent a welcome move in an exercise that has raised questions about transparency and fairness. The ECI has confirmed that applications submitted after September 1 will be considered after the electoral roll is finalised, with the process continuing until the last date for filing of nominations. This ensures that inclusions and exclusions can be integrated into the final roll, providing excluded voters with a meaningful opportunity for redress through their Aadhaar card. However, the ECI's numbers raise a curious question. While over 15 lakh new voters registered using Form 6, only around 33,000 claims were filed for re-inclusion of the approximately 65 lakh excluded names. This large difference becomes even more concerning when one considers that both categories use Form 6, potentially leading to conflation in the data presented to the Court. This data confusion feeds into a broader dispute between the ECI and political parties. While the ECI claims, using its daily data reports, that parties failed to assist excluded voters, parties contend that they did raise claims, but these were not properly processed by Block Level Officers.

Recognising these challenges, the Court has wisely directed that the Bihar State Legal Services Authority use para-legal volunteers to assist voters and political parties. The Court's intervention appears to reflect concerns that mirror data-driven investigations, including by *The Hindu*, which have identified unusual patterns in the exclusion lists, pointing to anomalies. Ground reports further validate these findings, underscoring the need for robust corrective measures. The onus is on political parties to rise above narrow self-interest and actively assist genuinely excluded voters. The democratic process demands such civic responsibility from all stakeholders. For the next steps, the ECI must recognise Aadhaar as a valid standalone document to prevent unfair exclusions among the 99.5% of those in the draft roll who have already submitted documentation and the rest. Given that Aadhaar serves as sufficient proof for the excluded to file claims, it should logically suffice for those already on the draft roll. The Bihar SIR experience offers lessons for future electoral roll revisions. The ECI must abandon its technocratic, short deadline-driven approach in favour of intensive revisions spread over longer periods, allowing thorough door-to-door verification. A clean electoral roll cannot be achieved through hurried exercises that prioritise administrative convenience over voter rights.

Questionable cheer

The government might find it difficult to meet its fiscal deficit targets

The GDP growth numbers released on Friday, showing that growth in Q1 of this financial year stood at 7.8%, came as a pleasant surprise at a time when most of the commentary has been about the factors holding growth back. For instance, even the Reserve Bank of India, as recently as August 6, had predicted that growth would be at 6.5% in Q1. It was off by a significant 1.3 percentage points less than a month before the data came out, something it must introspect about. Within the data, the strong manufacturing sector growth, of 7.7%, was especially heartening given that it came on a relatively high base of 7.6% in Q1 of last year. Some commentators have said that this is because companies were ramping up production and exports ahead of the August tariff deadline by the U.S. However, given that merchandise exports grew just 1.6% in Q1, the more likely reason is that companies were catering to domestic demand. However, the numbers released by the government do not provide much clarity here. The manufacturing sector, as measured by the Index of Industrial Production, grew at 3.3% in Q1, slower than the 4.3% seen in Q1 last year. Steel consumption was drastically slower in Q1 this year than last year. Both private and commercial vehicle sales actually contracted 5.4% and 0.6%, respectively, in Q1. Railway freight traffic grew by 2.5% versus 5% last year, while air freight grew by 5.4% compared to 13.9% last year. Two-wheeler vehicle sales contracted 6.2% while three-wheeler sales were flat at 0.1% growth. Diverse data show that the core and consumer sectors were slowing, and the pickup in the manufacturing sector is worth a deep examination. The strong performance by the services sector is welcome, and shows how dependent the Indian economy is on this sector.

Chief Economic Adviser V. Anantha Nageswaran has said that the government was retaining its 6.3%-6.8% growth prediction for the year. This means that, with 7.8% in Q1, the government expects growth to significantly slow down in the remaining three quarters, despite its statements about the limited impact of the U.S. tariffs. The data also call into question the robustness of the statistical system, since a nominal GDP growth of 8.8% assumes that inflation was just 1% in Q1. Clearly, price levels are not being captured adequately. A relatively low nominal growth rate also makes it more challenging for the government to meet its fiscal deficit targets, especially at a time when it expects a revenue hit due to the upcoming GST rate cuts. Overall, the GDP numbers have brought cheer, but also several questions.

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A minimal definition of universal health care (UHC) is that quality health care should be guaranteed to "all members of the community irrespective of their ability to pay" — as the Bhoré Committee report put it as early as 1946. Nearly eight decades later, India is nowhere near this basic goal of human development, even as many other countries, rich and poor, have achieved it in substantial measure.

An illusion is being created today that UHC can be achieved by expanding health insurance. In the last 10 years, State-sponsored health insurance schemes have grown by leaps and bounds. The Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY), launched in 2018 under Aayushman Bharat, is one landmark in this regard. Alongside PM-JAY, every major State has its own State Health Insurance Programme (SHIP). Most SHIPs are modelled on PM-JAY, with a maximum cover of ₹5 lakh a household a year. All these insurance schemes are restricted to in-patient care, with patients making a choice from a list of empanelled hospitals, public and private (roughly half-half). In 2023-24, PM-JAY covered 58.8 crore individuals with an annual budget of about ₹12,000 crore (assuming that States contributed 40% of the total, as prescribed). Taken together, SHIPs covered a similar number and had a combined budget of at least ₹16,000 crore. The grand total of ₹28,000 crore or so is still a relatively small portion of public expenditure on health, but it is growing fast. In Gujarat, Kerala and Maharashtra, States for which relevant data are available, we found that the SHIP budget had grown at 8% to 25% a year in real terms between 2018-19 and 2023-24.

The faultlines can deepen

There is no doubt that the PM-JAY and SHIPs provide some relief to poor patients when public facilities are overcrowded or substandard, by giving them wider options at reduced cost. However, these schemes are no substitute for a sound UHC framework. And they have major defects, some of which could worsen the fault lines of India's health-care system.

First, health insurance promotes for-profit medicine. About two-thirds of PM-JAY budget is spent on private, mainly profit-oriented hospitals (corresponding figures for SHIPs are not available). A recent study of PM-JAY in six major States found that the scheme made little difference to hospitalisation rates, but increased the utilisation of private hospitals. As is well understood in economics, the profit motive in health care is highly problematic. If profit-seeking



Anifaz Abdul Yabab

is an independent researcher



Jean Drèze

is a Visiting Professor at the Department of Economics, Ranchi University, Jharkhand

private providers are allowed at all, they must be tightly regulated. India's health-care system, however, is dominated by poorly-regulated profit providers. Health insurance reinforces this bias rather than correcting it.

Second, health insurance also tilts the health-care system towards hospitalisation, when investments in primary and outpatient care may be more urgent. Strengthening primary care would not only ensure accessible treatment but also reduce unnecessary hospital visits and their financial burden. The ongoing inclusion of all elderly citizens (aged 70 years and above) in PM-JAY, along with the rapid ageing of the population, involves a risk that expensive tertiary care will absorb a growing share of public health expenditure, even as many basic health services continue to fall short.

Third, there appear to be serious utilisation problems. Official figures suggest that the combined coverage of PM-JAY and SHIPs is as high as 80% of the population. However, many people do not seem to know about the scheme or how to use it even if they are nominally enrolled. As a recent analysis of the 2022-23 Household Consumption Expenditure Survey shows, only 35% of insured hospital patients in that year were able to use their insurance. Other studies also report serious utilisation hurdles, especially among disadvantaged groups. Perhaps this is one reason why there is no strong evidence linking PM-JAY or SHIPs with a substantial reduction in out-of-pocket health expenditure.

Hospitals and discrimination

Fourth, targeted health insurance schemes create issues of discrimination between insured and uninsured patients. Private hospitals prefer an uninsured patient since commercial charges for health care are usually higher, often much higher than the insurance reimbursement rates. One plausible reason why insurance utilisation is so low is that private hospitals discourage it in one way or another. Public hospitals, for their part, prefer insured patients since they get some money for their treatment. This creates its own problems, such as discriminatory treatment and pressure to enrol for insurance on the spot.

Fifth, health-care providers have their own complaints about health insurance, including low reimbursement rates and long delays. The first complaint may or may not be fair (one would expect to hear it), but the second is hard to dismiss. Indeed, the National Health Authority (NHA) itself revealed a few months ago that pending dues under PM-JAY alone added up to ₹12,161 crore, more than the scheme's entire

annual budget. Many reports have emerged of private hospitals suspending services to patients under PM-JAY or even withdrawing from the scheme, as bills remain unpaid for months. According to a recent statement of the Health Ministry, in the Lok Sabha, 609 hospitals have opted out of PM-JAY since its inception.

Last but not the least, health insurance schemes are prone to corruption and abuse. The NHA recently recommended action against 3,200 hospitals for fraudulent activities under PM-JAY. There are also regular media reports of irregularities from across the country. These include eligible patients being denied treatment, private providers charging insured patients, and unnecessary procedures being performed to milk the scheme. These irregularities defeat the purpose of health insurance by exposing patients to serious financial and health risks.

Tight monitoring and a battery of audits are supposed to prevent irregularities, but there is little evidence that these safeguards are effective. We were unable to find any trace of audit reports on the scheme portals. This is one symptom, among others, of a pervasive lack of transparency in health insurance.

The system is profit driven

In short, India's health insurance schemes are a very poor way of arranging health care, especially for people who find it difficult to navigate the system. They cannot make up for India's persistent failure to expand and improve public health facilities. No country has achieved UHC on this sort of foundation.

This is not to deny that social health insurance is a part of the UHC framework in some countries. Canada and Thailand are two examples. But PM-JAY and SHIPs lack important features of social health insurance, such as universal coverage, and more importantly, a strong focus on non-profit health-care providers.

India's profit-driven health-care system reflects decades of severe under-investment in public health facilities — few countries beat India in this regard. According to the World Bank's latest World Development Indicators, public expenditure on health was still as low as 1.3% of GDP in India in 2022, compared with a world average of 6.1%. UHC cannot be achieved without a serious effort to address this deficit and transform health-care standards in the public sector. Some Indian States are moving in that direction, with encouraging results, but immense gaps remain. Health insurance is little more than a pain killer for a system that needs proper healing.

Noise pollution is rising but policy is falling silent

Urban noise pollution has quietly emerged as one of the most neglected public health crises of our time. Across Indian cities, decibel levels routinely exceed permissible limits, especially near schools, hospitals and residential zones, eroding the constitutional promise of peace and dignity.

In 2011, the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) launched the National Ambient Noise Monitoring Network (NANMN), which was envisioned as a real-time data platform. A decade later, the network functions less as a tool for reform and more as a passive repository. Data are scattered across dashboards, but meaningful enforcement remains elusive.

The problem lies not only in flawed sensor placement (many are mounted 25 to 30 feet high, in violation of the CPCB's 2015 guidelines) — but in a deeper absence of accountability. Whether biased or incomplete, the available data remains politically and administratively inert. Contrast this with Europe, where noise-induced illnesses and mortality statistics actively shape policy. The European Environment Agency recently pegged the annual economic cost of urban noise pollution at €100 billion, prompting redesigns in speed zones and zoning frameworks. India, by contrast, suffers from regulatory fragmentation and institutional silence. Right to Information queries go unanswered; State Pollution Control Boards operate in silos; and even in States such as Uttar Pradesh, first-quarter 2025 data remains unavailable to the public.

Apathy, neglect, serious questions

This is not merely environmental apathy. It borders on constitutional neglect. Article 21 guarantees the right to life with dignity, encompassing mental and environmental well-being. Article 48A mandates proactive environmental protection. When "silence zones" become epicentres of noise, it raises serious questions about state capacity and civic respect.

The Noise Pollution (Regulation and Control) Rules, 2000 offer a robust legal framework, but



Rohan Singh

is an independent journalist covering urban environmental governance and public health

enforcement has remained largely symbolic. According to the World Health Organization, safe limits in silent zones are 50 dB(A) by day and 40 dB(A) by night. Yet, in cities such as Delhi and Bengaluru, readings near sensitive institutions often reach 65 dB(A)-70 dB(A).

Infrastructure expansion and logistics-driven traffic have exacerbated the crisis. Late-night drilling and crane operations continue despite regulatory restrictions. In 2024, the Supreme Court of India reaffirmed that environmental disruptions — including excessive noise — can infringe upon the fundamental right to life and dignity under Article 21. In Noise Pollution (V), in Re, the Court recognised that unchecked urban noise poses a serious threat to mental well-being and civic freedom (The case dates back to 2005, and was referenced and interpreted again by the Court in 2024, in the context of renewed concerns over urban noise and its impact on fundamental rights).

The ecological cost is no less troubling. A 2025 study by the University of Auckland found that urban noise and artificial light disrupted the sleep and song patterns of common mynas after just one night. The birds sang less and with reduced complexity, impairing their social signalling. This is not merely an avian concern; it signals a breakdown in ecological communication systems. When biodiversity loses its voice, it reflects a deeper erosion of urban environmental ethics.

Civic fatigue and the politics of silence

Urban noise is not just a technical issue, it is deeply political. The absence of sustained public outrage stems from a normalisation of sonic aggression. Honking, drilling and loudspeakers have become ambient irritants, tolerated rather than challenged. This civic fatigue is compounded by the invisibility of noise as a pollutant. Unlike smog or garbage, sound leaves no residue, no visible stain — only a frayed mind and a disturbed sleep cycle. The result is a quiet erosion of public health, especially among children, the elderly, and those with pre-existing

conditions.

India's legal framework, while robust on paper, suffers from fragmented execution. The Noise Pollution Rules, 2000 are rarely updated to reflect urban realities. There is little coordination between municipal bodies, traffic police and pollution control boards. A national acoustic policy akin to the National Ambient Air Quality Standards is urgently needed. Such a framework must define permissible decibel levels across zones, mandate regular audits, and empower local grievance redress mechanisms. Without inter-agency synergy, enforcement will remain sporadic and symbolic.

Adopt a culture of 'sonic empathy'

Ultimately, the fight against urban noise is not just regulatory, it is cultural. Cities must cultivate a shared ethic of sonic empathy. Public campaigns should move beyond slogans to immersive education, in schools, driver training programmes and community spaces. Just as seatbelt usage became a norm through sustained messaging, honking reduction and noise sensitivity can be socially internalised. Silence is not the absence of sound, but the presence of care.

Where, then, must reform begin? First, decentralise NANMN — grant local bodies access to real-time noise data and the responsibility to act.

Second, link monitoring to enforcement — without penalties, zoning compliance or construction curbs, data remains performativity. Third, institutionalise awareness — initiatives such as "No Honking Day" must evolve into sustained behavioural campaigns.

Fourth, embed acoustic resilience in urban planning — cities must be designed not just for speed and expansion, but for sonic civility.

Silence must not be imposed and must be enabled through design, governance and democratic will. Unless India adopts a rights-based lens to urban noise, its smart cities may remain unliveable at the level of sound.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

On China, Indian diplomacy

Though one cannot read its mind, China's extremely guarded approach, when it comes to ties with India, may be with a view to take different stands based on the contingencies that may arise. The souring relationship between India and the U.S. may be a prime reason. It is unfortunate that China continues to be a thorn in India's flesh, and India's close relationship with

Russia, in this context, assumes critical importance. Mr. Modi's meeting with the Chinese President Xi Jinping has resulted in no improved bonhomie between the two countries. A routine red carpet welcome was accorded to Mr. Modi followed by smiles and handshakes with nothing worthwhile achieved. Whatever has been agreed upon is of little consequence both to

Indians and India (Front page, September 1).
V. Lakshmanan,
Tirupur, Tamil Nadu

With China, a guarded engagement is essential — managing borders, deterring aggression, and de-risking dependencies. With Russia, pragmatic preservation matters: securing energy and defence cooperation without slipping into over-reliance. With the U.S.,

a future-oriented partnership in trade, technology, and defence must deepen, while safeguarding India's independent voice.
N.S. Reddy,
Hyderabad

Magsaysay award
The conferment of the Ramon Magsaysay Award 2025 on Educate Girls, a non-profit organisation, underscores the power of grassroots innovation in

driving long-lasting social change and educational equity. It is heartening that the NGO aims to reach 10 million learners, ensuring last-mile access to education for girls.
R. Sivakumar,
Chennai

Worthy too
On September 5, India remembers Dr. Sarvepalli S. Radhakrishnan, the President, who added lustre and glory to the highest

office he helmed. But I am at a loss to comprehend why another great Indian, Rt. Hon. V.S. Srinivasa Sastri, has been left out. He was a dazzling speaker donning many caps. Perhaps there needs to be another Teachers' Day, on September 22, the birthday of VSSS.
Mani Nataraajan,
Chennai
Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the postal address.

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SCIENCE

Geographers uncover why some rivers stay single while others split

Single-thread and multi-thread rivers feature different flood and erosion risks and ecosystem services. These attributes are becoming more relevant as people cope with more powerful water weather events. As a result, the mechanism that dictates threading has been becoming a research focus

G.B.S.N.P. Varma

Some rivers split up as they flow while some others don't. This riverine phenomenon has intrigued researchers for decades. What determines whether a river flows as a single thread or develops into a multi-threaded system? The question may sound simple but it has become a fundamental issue in river geomorphology, straddling concepts across geology, geography, ecology, and engineering.

Now, geographers at the University of California Santa Barbara (UCSB) have reported in a paper published in *Science* that they have solved the mystery.

By analysing the dynamics of 84 rivers over 36 years using satellite imagery and a novel image processing technique called particle image velocimetry, they say they have discovered the physical mechanism that causes there to be two types of rivers.

"We found that single-thread rivers are characterised by equilibrium between bank erosion and bar accretion – essentially, material lost from one bank is balanced by the material deposited on the other, maintaining a stable width," the study's senior author and an associate professor of geography at UCSB Vamsi Ganti said.

In contrast, he continued, multi-thread rivers consistently exhibit higher rates of erosion relative to the deposition on the opposite banks, leading to the channel widening and eventually splitting. This imbalance, per the work, is the driving force behind multithreaded rivers.

That is, erosion is what drives the phenomenon of flow splitting in rivers.

'Growing recognition'

The two main types of rivers, also feature different flood and erosion risks, ecosystem services, and water resources. These hazards and features are becoming more relevant as people and governments cope with more frequent and more intense water weather events. As a result, the physical mechanism that dictates single- versus multi-threading has been becoming a more important subject of research.

While previous research mostly examined where different types of rivers could be found, Mr. Ganti said, they also focused on how these rivers changed over time.

Many models that try to predict flooding risk assume that the rivers are flowing in streams of a fixed depth and width. This is not the case, and the new study has revealed the consequences of this assumption.

"There is growing recognition that many rivers have historically transitioned from multi-channel to single-channel after human interference," the study's lead author and UCSB Earth Research Institute postdoc Austin Chadwick wrote in an email.

Human interference includes damming, diking, sediment mining, clearing and snagging, and agricultural development.

Vector map

To understand why some rivers flow in a single channel while others split into many threads, the researchers turned to



The Karnali River (known as Ghaghara in India) bifurcates in Nepal. SHERPABLA (CC BY-SA)

satellites. They studied 36 years of global Landsat images, covering the period from 1985 to 2021. From a worldwide survey of nearly 400 river sections, they chose 84 that were wide enough and moved at a speed suitable for their analysis. These included both single-thread and multithread rivers across different climates, slopes, and water flows.

They used a computer technique called particle image velocimetry, which tracked small changes in images from year to year, letting scientists measure how much a riverbank eroded and how much material accreted on the opposite side. To do this, they converted the satellite pictures into maps showing where land was dry and where it was covered by water.

Then, by comparing weather data of cross-sections of the rivers over time, they generated millions of small vectors that recorded the directions and speeds of erosion and accretion.

Finally, they combined all this data – more than four lakh measurements of erosion versus accretion – to test whether the two processes balanced out. This allowed them to discover the patterns that caused single or multithread rivers.

Plants have a say

For many decades, scientists have believed that single-channelled, meandering rivers needed vegetated banks to form and that plants and meandering rivers coevolved. But in an analysis published recently in *Science*, Stanford University researchers reported that that idea is based on a misinterpretation of the sedimentary record.

"We show that vegetated river bends move in a different direction than unvegetated river bends, relative to the down-slope direction that the entire river flows," Michael Hasson, the study's lead author and a PhD scholar at Stanford, said.

This renders the sedimentary deposits that unvegetated meandering rivers



There is growing recognition that many rivers have historically transitioned from multi-channel to single-channel after human interference

AUSTIN CHADWICK
UCSB EARTH RESEARCH INSTITUTE

produce fundamentally different from the deposits of vegetated meandering rivers, even though they have the same form.

While the Chadwick et al. study focused on why rivers became meandering or braided, Hasson et al. examined meandering rivers.

Given a straight valley, Mr. Hasson added, they found vegetated river bends will move outwards toward the sides of the valley whereas unvegetated river bends will move down the valley, without moving sideways.

"Our interpretation is that vegetation causes this difference in river movement mainly because it causes levees to form, which indirectly limits the sinuosity, a measure of how indirect a river's path is, of the river," Mr. Hasson said. "In turn, sinuosity controls how and where bends migrate."

Insights for India

Chadwick et al. considered three stretches of the Ganga, near Patna, Farakka, and Paksey (Bangladesh). For the Brahmaputra, they examined stretches near Bahadurabad (Bangladesh), Pandu (India), Pasighat (India), and one further upstream in the Himalaya.

The Brahmaputra is a classical braided river, Mr. Ganti said. The team also found that the Brahmaputra's threads eroded their banks fast.

"The shape of their channels is fundamentally unstable," Mr. Chadwick said of these threads. "The subchannels are prone to widen and split over years

and decades, because the flow laterally erodes riverbanks faster than it deposits along them."

The find went against the conventional wisdom that erosion and deposition are in equilibrium.

"It is very surprising and intriguing that multi-thread rivers laterally erode faster than they deposit," Mr. Chadwick said.

In sum, the study has unravelled "a new sort of way that rivers can maintain their form, which is fuelled not by equilibrium but instead cycles of instability as sub-channels repeatedly widen and split over time."

"This fundamental instability is an important consideration for river management."

Reducing flood risk

Mr. Chadwick also said that along multi-thread rivers like the Ganga and the Brahmaputra, the rating curves used to measure river flows must be updated more frequently in order as the channels change their shape.

The problem in India is that in many parts, braided river sections have been artificially confined to single channels using built embankments, Akshay Kadu, a hydrologist at Stantec, a global engineering design and consulting company, said. He wasn't involved in the studies.

Another implication of the findings is that multi-channel rivers require significantly less space and time to return to their natural state, leading to lower restoration costs.

So, Mr. Kadu added, nature-based solutions such as removing artificial embankments, restoring the river's connection with its natural floodplains, creating vegetated buffer zones along riverbanks, reactivating abandoned channels, and building wetlands in braided sections can significantly lower the risk of flooding in adjacent areas.

(G.B.S.N.P. Varma is a freelance science journalist. varma.gbsnp@gmail.com.)



India Gate is enveloped by smog after Delhi's air quality worsened due to air pollution in November 2024. REUTERS

All of India breathes bad air, AQLI 2025 report says

Priyali Prakash

While north Indian cities such as Delhi, Ghaziabad, and Kanpur are notorious for their air pollution, almost everyone living in India breathes air dirtier than what the World Health Organisation (WHO) has deemed safe.

According to the Air Quality Life Index (AQLI) 2025 annual update, all of India lives in areas where the annual average particulate pollution level (PM_{2.5}) exceeds the WHO annual average limit of 5 µg/m³.

The country's northern plains, however, remain the greater offenders, exposing an estimated 544.4 million people to bad air.

The AQLI report is based on global pollution data from 2023. Atmospheric pollution levels rose planetwide in 2023 following two relatively quiescent years due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The report was put together by the Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago. The air quality in India is also bad by its own standards, which are more lenient than those of the WHO. According to the report, 46% of India's people live in areas where the national annual PM_{2.5} standard of 40 µg/m³ has been breached.

The report also said Delhi will experience the greatest benefit among India's cities by lowering particulate pollution to the WHO's recommendation, adding 8.2 years to life expectancy. Because the whole country currently breathes subpar air, even those in the

Air quality in India is bad by its own standards, which are more lenient. According to the report, 46% of Indians live in areas where the PM_{2.5} standard of 40 µg/m³ has been breached

cleanest areas could live 9.4 months more if their air is cleaned up, the report found.

The problem transcends borders, of course. Emissions from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Pakistan have together blanketed a big swath of South Asia with polluted air.

Bangladesh in particular has consistently been the most polluted country in the region for years. In 2023, the country's air had 12x greater PM_{2.5} concentration than the WHO guidelines – and improving it could add 5.5 years on average to resident Bangladeshis' lives. The report estimated the potential gain to be highest in Gazipur, where residents could live 7.1 years longer.

China noted a consistent decrease in pollution over the last decade. China, however, has been somewhat of a notable exception: while the concentration of harmful particles in its air grew by 2.8% in 2023, the air quality has been improving for a decade.

This is not accidental. Even with the 2.8% increase in 2023, the particulate concentration was still 40.8% lower than what it was in 2014. Among other policies, the country has restricted the number of cars on the roads in large cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou; cut its iron- and steel-making capacity; banned new coal plants in specific regions; and replaced coal-based home heating solutions with gas or electric heaters, the AQLI report noted. Then again, a lot remains to be done. Even if China's air is cleaner than India's, the people of China are also exposed to more PM_{2.5} levels than the WHO's threshold.

Worldwide, the global PM_{2.5} concentration in 2023 was 1.5% higher than in 2022 and almost 5x times over the WHO limit. Indeed, the report identified particulate pollution as the "greatest external threat to human life expectancy" in 2023.

priyali.prakash@thehindu.co.in

For feedback and suggestions for Science, please write to science@thehindu.co.in with the subject 'Daily page'

THE SCIENCE QUIZ

That September 1, 1939, paper

Vasudevan Mukundh

QUESTION 1

On September 1, 1939, J. Robert Oppenheimer and X published a paper describing how an object of extreme mass would collapse into a black hole. The paper is considered one of the most important in the history of physics. Name X.

QUESTION 2

Also in 1939, Oppenheimer, Richard Tolman, Robert Serber, and George Volkoff obtained the limit named after them when studying _____. Above this limit, these objects collapse into black holes. Fill in the blanks.

QUESTION 3

The American theoretical physicist Y coined the term "black hole" in 1967 after spending the 1950s being opposed to their possibility. In particular, Y thought Oppenheimer and X (from Q1) had neglected the properties of real stars. Name Y.

QUESTION 4

The shape of spacetime around an uncharged black hole that isn't rotating is described by Schwarzschild geometry. What's the name of the spacetime geometry that describes spacetime around an uncharged black hole that is rotating?

QUESTION 5

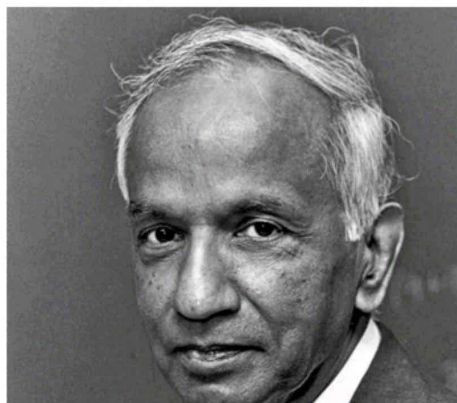
The September 1, 1939, described a boundary called the event horizon, beyond which even light couldn't

escape the black hole's pull. If a black hole is rotating, there's another surface above the event horizon called Z, which coincides with the event horizon at the black hole's poles. Name Z.

Answers to August 26 quiz:

1. Principle aeroplanes use to produce lift – **Ans: Bernoulli's principle**
 2. Angle between wing's chord line and oncoming airflow – **Ans: Attack**
 3. Quantity whose conservation facilitates aircraft propulsion – **Ans: Momentum**
 4. Movable parts that act like an aeroplane's muscles – **Ans: Control surface**
 5. Skin of air that hugs an aeroplane's outer frame – **Ans: Boundary layer**
- First contact: K.N. Viswanathan | Tamal Biswas | Anmol Agrawal | Saurav Ambastha | Naimisha Pasupuleti

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



Visual: Name this physicist for whom the maximum mass limit of a white dwarf is named. AIP EMILIO SEGRE VISUAL ARCHIVES



Opinion

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 2, 2025

The FPI flight

Too many uncertainties are likely to keep foreign equity investors away for long

TO SAY THAT foreign portfolio investors (FPI) are not enamoured of Indian equities would be an understatement. Going by the net sales of \$15 billion between January and end-August, they clearly prefer other markets both in the neighbourhood and elsewhere. That's also evident from the allocations. As of August 27, the MSCI benchmark weighting (ex-Japan) for India was 15.8% compared with 29.3% for China and 18.6% for Taiwan. Indeed, as experts at Morgan Stanley point out, FPI portfolio positioning is at its weakest since 2000 when it started looking at the data.

There are several reasons for this. The first is FPIs' discomfort with valuations; they feel stocks are simply too pricey relative to potential earnings growth and that other markets offer better buys. Disappointing corporate profits, both in FY25 and in the first quarter of FY26, have only served to reinforce this view. Following the downgrades after the earnings season, net profits for the Nifty 50 are now estimated to grow by about 10% in FY26 and about 17.5-18% in FY27. This comes off the very low growth of just about 6.5% at 24,625, the Nifty currently trades at a price/earnings multiple of 22.5x estimated FY26 earnings and around 19x estimated FY27 earnings. These multiples are, in themselves, not unreasonable. However, the concern is that there are downside risks to the earnings estimates since the economy is expected to slow on the back of both global and local issues. While the GDP growth of 7.8% year-on-year in Q1 FY26 has been stunning, economists point out it has been amplified by very low deflators and some one-off factors. They draw attention to the very modest trends in high-frequency indicators which don't reflect the buoyancy of the GDP numbers. Importantly, unless the tariff issues with the US are sorted out, exports to the tune of \$50 billion could be hit, impacting the GDP by about 50-80 basis points or even more.

Slowing exports could also weigh on the currency. Already, the depreciation of the rupee, which has lost 3% against the dollar in 2025 so far, has been a bit of a dampener for FPIs. Against this backdrop, with the US Fed expected to cut rates as early as September 16-17, foreign players believe there may be more promise, not just in other emerging markets that are cheaper but also in US equities. The sales by FPIs have resulted in a lengthy time correction for the market as the Nifty is more or less where it was in September last year. If the markets have held up without a serious price correction, it is thanks to the whopping \$59 billion invested by local wholesale investors who are flush with funds; monthly equity flows into mutual funds have been averaging ₹40,000 crore.

The strong retail flows, which have acted as a buffer against the relentless selling by foreign players, are unlikely to taper off. Importantly, retail investors appear convinced about the India growth story and believe equities are the best way to save. And they seem willing to wait it out. While there is merit in this school of thought, they might have to wait awhile to make decent money. For their part, FPIs, save a few, are unwilling to take any bets on India now. They would rather wait for more certainty even if it means buying into a more expensive market.

NTBCL CASE HIGHLIGHTS IMPORTANCE OF LEGAL ARCHITECTURE THAT KEEPS PACE WITH INFRA FINANCING NEEDS

A moment for reflection

AS INDIA MOVES steadily toward its 2047 development goals, building resilient and modern infrastructure remains a critical foundation for inclusive economic growth. Given the sheer scale of investment required, this development hinges significantly on long-term financing outside of the public sector. Over the past two decades, public-private partnerships (PPPs) have emerged as a key instrument to mobilise such capital, enabling transformative projects across roads, airports, ports, and municipal infrastructure. A key ingredient supporting this momentum has been the legal and institutional consistency that underpins investor trust. This legal and institutional alignment has served to strengthen and reinforce the overall credibility of the PPP model.

In December 2024, the Supreme Court's judgment in *Noida Toll Bridge Company Ltd v Federation of Noida Residents Welfare Association* brought fresh attention to the legal framework governing PPPs. The court held that where a private concessionaire builds infrastructure on land granted by a government agency, the developer is entitled to recover the cost of construction and a "reasonable return", understood with reference to prevailing bank interest rates at the time of signing the contract. Beyond this point, toll collection or user fees must cease, irrespective of the original concession duration.

This interpretation invites a broader discussion. At its core, infrastructure financing requires a stable and predictable framework that assures investors and lenders of enforceable contracts, providing clarity on recovery of capital and sustainable returns over an extended period of life. Such confidence is essential to mobilise both domestic and international capital at scale. For example, the National Highways Authority of India is pursuing an ambitious monetisation programme using infrastructure investment trusts, aiming to raise ₹3.5 lakh crore in the coming

AMIT KAPOOR AMITABH KANT

Respectively chair, Institute for Competitiveness, and former G20 Sherpa & CEO, NITI Aayog

five years. These vehicles aggregate toll revenues across road assets, thereby enabling long-term investment based on anticipated user charges and traffic growth over the project lifespan. This structure is premised not only on recovery of construction costs, but also on the continued level of user fees that remain competitive with returns from other financial instruments and alternative asset classes. Importantly, this principle is not confined to

lashed policy frameworks and government guidelines. This could, in practice, create hesitation among private developers and financial institutions who generally rely on a consistent interpretation of contractual norms when committing resources to large, multi-decade projects. It may be useful here to revisit how Indian jurisprudence has evolved in this domain. Since the 1990s, courts have recognised the distinct nature of PPP contracts in

There may be merit in exploring mechanisms that improve alignment across the judiciary, executive, and legislature

volving private risk-taking, long-term financing, and investment. In the *Nandini Infrastructure Corporation case* (1998), the ROOT (build-operate-transfer) model was upheld as a valid mechanism, even where land was also provided for township development. In 2006, challenges to airport concessions were not entertained, with the court not

ing that judicial review does not extend to re-evaluating policy decisions taken by government committees with technical expertise. Similarly, courts have often acknowledged that the balance between public interest and commercial viability requires careful consideration, leaving space for executive agencies to frame flexible solutions tailored to sectoral requirements. In the *GIFT City and Production Sharing Contract* cases (2013), the court observed that economic policy decisions must be viewed in their administrative context and not judged solely through the lens of audit observations or procedural formality. This general trajectory of judi-

cial deference to executive discretion in economic matters was reaffirmed in 2022, in the *Bullet Train Project* case, where the court noted that international funding arrangements, such as those by the Japan International Cooperation Agency, should not automatically trigger judicial interference. In this light, the Noida Toll Bridge Company Ltd (NTBCL) decision appears to take a somewhat different approach. It applies provisions of the 1851 Indian Tolls Act, a law designed for projects funded by the government to privately financed concessions. It frames the grant of land as a form of public largesse and characterises the collection of user fees as a quasi-fiscal act. These legal characterisations may not align with how PPPs function in practice, especially when the private partner bears substantial capital risk.

While judicial oversight remains a cornerstone of democratic accountability, given the scale of India's infrastructure ambition and the role of private capital in delivering it, there may be merit in exploring mechanisms that improve alignment across the judiciary, executive, and legislature. The NTBCL case presents an important opportunity for reflection. It underscores the importance of coherent and forward-looking legal architecture that keeps pace with India's infrastructure financing needs. While the judgment is now part of the legal landscape, it also opens space for constructive discussion on how best to support the long-term goals of Viksit Bharat. Its implications for investment, financing structures, and institutional reform merit deeper examination; questions that will likely continue to shape the discourse in the months ahead. This is particularly relevant for emerging mega projects such as the Jewar airport, which hinge on robust revenue projections and land-based concessions. How such ventures navigate legal interpretations of risk, return, and public benefit will be watched closely.

This is the first of a two-part series

KPop Demon Hunters' success is no surprise

THE SUMMER SMASH-HIT movie that caught everyone off-guard turned out to be an animated musical about demon-fighting Korean pop stars. It's the latest example of how South Korea's soft power shines global trends. Seoul must now ensure it benefits from this unique storytelling as much as Netflix Inc.

KPop Demon Hunters has become Netflix's most-watched original film of all time. Its two-day theatrical run topped the US box office, and it became the first soundtrack to have four songs in the Billboard Hot 100's top 10. The breakout popularity among children and preteens has many comparing the franchise potential to *Frozen*, which is estimated to have made Walt Disney Co. billions of dollars. Analysts clearly see the potential. On an earnings call last week for US retailer Five Below Inc., one asked bluntly about merchandise: "Three words: *KPop Demon Hunters*."

Netflix thought it was making a movie for the K-pop and anime audience. In an increasingly interconnected world, these lines are more blurred than ever.

Political rhetoric and a trade war instigated by Washington may make it seem like the age of globalism is dying. But young people continuously show an appetite for a multicultural world. The film was set in Seoul, centres around a K-pop girl group, and takes inspiration from Korean mythology and demonology. While the dialogue is in English, it's far from a White-washed narrative for an American audience. And it's not just the Korean diaspora celebrating the film's Asian representation.

Hollywood has no reason to be surprised anymore when seemingly "foreign" content becomes mainstream mega-hits. The Korean Wave has long been driving global pop culture trends. An International Monetary Fund report last year identified South Korea as having the highest level of "soft power". Netflix's most popular non-English show of all times is *Squid Games*. The streaming platform said last year that more than 80% of global subscribers have watched K-content on the platform.

Led by Netflix, global tech giants have accelerated, and profited from, the massive popularity of Korea's cultural exports. Platforms like TikTok and Instagram have helped everything from K-beauty brands to Samsung's Galaxy Z Fold 5. The cultural exchanges are a good thing. Co-director Maggie Kang, a Korean-Canadian filmmaker, recalled in an interview how her elementary schoolteacher could not even point to South Korea on the map. During a screening in Seoul, Kang said her advice to aspiring local-content creators was never to try to cater to the opinions of others. "That's the only way K-content can reach an even broader audience—show our culture exactly as it is, with confidence," she said.

South Korea must now ensure that it's not just Western companies that profit from its coolness. Much debate in the US has centred around whether Netflix left money on the table when it limited the theatrical release of the film, or failed to forecast the skyrocketing demand for merchandise. (Not to mention Sony Pictures Animation's pandemic-era decision to sell the movie rights to the streaming service for what, in retrospect, was a very low-ball figure.) But this discourse is missing a broader issue. At a time when global demand for K-content is growing, ensuring Korean companies maintain the IP rights for global franchises like *Demon Hunters* is an important place to start.

For platforms trying to capitalise on South Korea's soft power, there's a lesson: Not everything has to be culturally watered-down for an American audience. The team behind the film went to great lengths to make sure that the story maintained its authenticity in representing Korea to the world. The efforts have clearly paid off. Netflix should be commended for recognising the international appeal of Korean storytelling and investing in it early. But it's now time South Korea guards and profits from its cultural franchises.

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BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

TUTORIAL FROM TIANJIN

India-China-Russia warmth masks gaps and contradictions. Delhi-Washington chill overshadows reality of shared interests

INDIA'S DELICATE diplomatic manoeuvre to accelerate the normalisation of relations with China — under the shadow of a trade crisis with the US — should not be misinterpreted at home and misunderstood abroad as a rupture in India's ties with America. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's hour-long meeting with Chinese leader Xi Jinping in Tianjin on the margins of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit did not, and could not have, overcome the structural challenges that have hobbled bilateral ties between the two Asian giants for seven decades. Nor does the current contretemps with the Trump administration over Russian oil purchases imply a breakdown in the strategic partnership with the US that Delhi and Washington have painstakingly built over the last three decades.

It is unfortunate that the rhetoric surrounding India's engagement with China — "partners, not rivals", Asian solidarity, Global South, strategic autonomy — continues to mask the persistent gap between Delhi's aspiration for good relations with Beijing and the historic inability to achieve it. Similarly, the noisy public argumentation between Delhi and Washington often overshadows the reality of shared interests with America. In a persistent paradox, Delhi's foreign policy elite has tended to overestimate the possibilities with China and underestimate those with the US. The breathless TV coverage in India of Modi's meeting with Xi suggests that not much has changed. Living next to China, India needs not only peaceful coexistence but also good neighbourly relations. But the effort to build such a relationship in the 1950s collapsed in the war of 1962. A renewed attempt in the late 1980s unravelled over the last decade. Military clashes in 2013, 2014, 2017, and 2020 exposed China's growing assertiveness on the disputed border. A recurring annual trade deficit of around \$100 billion underscores the massive imbalance in China's favour. Beijing's all-weather partnership with Pakistan — most recently underlined by its military assistance to Rawalpindi in May — has been a constant feature of India's strategic environment for six decades. None of these issues has or will melt away because Modi had a "good meeting" with Xi. The PM is right to seek a peaceful border, an early resolution of the boundary dispute, and a more balanced trade relationship. But these will take time. Meanwhile, Delhi made it clear in Modi's statement to the SCO that India would not dilute its longstanding positions to placate Xi. It continues to oppose China's Belt and Road Initiative, maintains reservations about the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, and rejects Beijing's reluctance to confront Pakistan's sponsorship of cross-border terrorism.

Unlike China, the US is not sitting on Indian territory. It is also the largest destination for Indian exports and a natural partner in science and technology. India cannot realise its ambition of a multipolar Asia without American cooperation; equally, Washington cannot build a stable Asian and global order without India. Yet the focus today is on trade disputes. Here, too, the situation is different from China: India runs a surplus of \$40 billion in goods trade with the US. This is an eminently negotiable issue. But the Trump Administration's public pressure campaign — especially on Delhi's Russian oil purchases — has made it difficult to pursue quiet, constructive talks. Much as India has remained open to patient negotiation with China on far tougher issues, Delhi has done well to keep the door open for dialogue with Washington. Watch this space.

WHAT PUNJAB NEEDS

Immediately, relief and rehabilitation. But floods also pose a bigger challenge: Compensation for farmers, rebuilding lives

PUNJAB IS FACING one of its worst floods in decades, with over three lakh acres under water, 29 lives lost, dams flowing above the danger mark, and rains showing no signs of abating. Until late August, the state was basking in a bountiful monsoon, buoyed by the promise of a rich paddy harvest. Then, almost overnight, came the deluge. The border belt of Malwa, adjoining Pakistan, has been the worst hit. The swollen Ravi, which flows from the Himalaya into Punjab before winding its way into Pakistan, has ravaged hundreds of villages in the border districts. Such was the ferocity of the river that two floodgates of the Madhopur barrage built in the 19th century gave way, taking one life, with 40 others barely escaping death. The Sutlej, Beas and Ghaggar, too, are in spate; dams receiving water from Himachal Pradesh have been overflowing. Last week, the Ranjit Sagar and Pong dams breached the danger level. Now, the Bhakra dam stands perilously close to spilling over.

The question is: Could this tragedy have been averted, especially when Punjab had faced floods in 2019 and 2023 as well? The annual flood-preparedness meeting, usually held in February, was delayed till June this year. In February, the ruling Aam Aadmi Party seemed much too preoccupied with the Delhi Assembly elections; few MLAs were even in the state. June brought the Ludhiana bypolls. Much of May was spent sparring with the Bhakra Beas Management Board (BBMB) and the Haryana government over releasing excess water to the neighbouring state. Punjab's irrigation department has been pointing fingers at the BBMB for failing to release water earlier. Experts point to chronic inefficiencies of the floods and irrigation department.

For now, the immediate priority is relief and rehabilitation. Civil society has stepped in, sending food and medicines. But a bigger challenge looms: Of compensation for farmers and the rebuilding of lives. Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, asking for the release of Rs 60,000 crore, calling it "Punjab's funds withheld by the Centre" in this hour of crisis. Silence from the top brass in Delhi has only deepened the resentments of those who point out that there has been a message of solidarity from the highest echelons. A silver lining is villagers sending aid and Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini promising support from neighbouring Haryana. It is high time the Union government, too, reached out. Punjab's farmers, the backbone of the nation's food security, deserve more than token sympathy when fields are under water and futures are on the verge of being washed away.

RETURNS TO HAUNT

Resurgence of horror films reflects zeitgeist, anxiety of the times

In April, Ryan Coogler's *Sinners* used the classic trope of vampirism to explore what would appear to be a familiar cinematic theme: The White man's exploitation of Black communities. Only Coogler chose to do it unusually. He bet big on the big screen in the age of OTT (the film was shot on 70 mm film) and told the story of the power imbalance through horror. The film grossed over \$350 million and became the latest rendition of "elevated horror" — films featuring supernatural antagonists and signature jump scares along with subtle highlights social and political faultlines.

You only have to turn to Zach Cregger's *Weapons*, which tells the story of an America struggling with unchecked gun violence, Danny and Michael Philippou's *Bringing Back Rukh*, on childhood abuse, or, in India, films like Karan Kandhari's *Sister Midnight*, Rahul Sadashiv's *Brumayugam*, and the *Stree* series to know that horror is the new romance. In a world wracked by war, climate change and unprecedented technological churn, horror pushes the audience to the depths of darkness and danger to viscerally experience the trials of the time — rollick of dark-won rights; deepening exclusion and divisive politics. In this context, these films offer release, connection and recognition.

Contrary to popular imagination of the genre being merely about contrived scenarios and blood and gore, the subversive storytelling of the current crop of films pushes the envelope on creativity. Often, in horror, this is achieved at significantly lower budgets than mainstream big-budget films. For example, *The Black Witch Project* (1999) — shot in eight days with a budget of \$60,000 — went on to break box-office records and forever change how horror films are made. Given the creative lush that has plagued film industries across the world in the last few years, they would do well to take this moment and run with it — and away from the ghosts of uninspired cinema.



PANKAJ SARAN

PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA Modi's first visit to China since 2018 is a reminder that, in international relations, change is the only constant. The story of India-China ties is a feast for foreign policy aficionados. Even in the distant past, when both countries had relatively less salience in the international system, their relations had significance that went beyond the purely bilateral. External factors and developments impact the relationship. Today, those linkages are far more acute and consequential. The lessons of history are invaluable. In this case, they suggest that sharp swings to either end of the spectrum occur, but do not endure. The search to find and then maintain an equilibrium that is both stable and predictable has informed India's China policy over the decades. This is perhaps the best way to make sense of the Tianjin summit.

Prime Minister Modi's visit was part of a process to repair the damage the relationship suffered after China decided to amass several thousands of troops and military hardware in eastern Ladakh in 2020, leading to the Galwan clashes. Both countries had their own reasons to defreeze their relations in 2024, not the least of which was the impending political change in Washington. The test of seriousness was the breakthrough on the last two border friction points in Demchok and Depsang in October 2024, on which India had held firm. Since then, there has been a quiet but steady rebuilding of the relationship, culminating in the bold decisions announced during the visit of Foreign Minister and Special Representative Wang Yi to India in August, spanning the full canvas, including the border.

Notably, the rebuilding process has been navigated through two major exogenous developments: The headlines of the Pahalgam terrorist attack and China's military and intelligence backtracking of Pakistan during Operation Sindoor, and the tailwinds of US President Donald Trump's trade war against India. China has seen with equal bewilderment

Modi, Xi have spoken of a partnership. But there are no ideal relationships, especially between major powers

The invocation of the Panchsheel principles by President Xi Jinping in his meeting with Prime Minister Modi is most interesting. It reflects a leap of faith and a certain Chinese assessment of the current historical stage of the relationship. Unfortunately, for India, the Panchsheel era is synonymous with betrayal. On balance, the Tianjin summit has consolidated the process that began in Kazan and set the stage for stabilisation in the India-China relationship.

the abnormal and forced courting of Field Marshal Asim Munir personally and of Pakistan generally by the US. The view that the Trump administration has succeeded in pushing India into China's arms despite Beijing's role during Operation Sindoor is not without foundation but is somewhat of an exaggeration, given the complexities of the India-China relationship. It is perhaps more accurate to say that the rapprochement has been accelerated and fast-tracked. The uncertainty about the likely shape and form of a US-China relationship under an unpredictable US President may have also contributed.

India has to find that delicate balance between short and long-term interests, economic and strategic calculations, and between China's vision of the world and India's. PM Modi made sure that his road to Tianjin went via Tokyo. The significant economic and security announcements made during his visit to Japan are a message to Beijing, and to Washington, of the breadth of economic choices India will retain and successfully exercise on the global stage. China's periphery is as much fair game for India as India's is for China, except that Pakistan is not Japan. India is not about to simply hand over Asia to China. Trust in the relationship will require much greater transparency in the policies both countries pursue in their common neighbourhood.

The terms of trade, and the larger economic relationship between India and China, have steadily worsened for India. There is nothing really "bilateral" about India's trade with China. Almost 90 per cent of total trade is unilateral, in one direction: China's exports to India. If the current trend continues, India will have succeeded in outsourcing its manufacturing future to China, and worse, becoming an economic subsidiary of China. American economic punishment should be more worried about India earning dollars off American consumers and spending them in China rather than their meltdown over India

using US dollars to supposedly fund Putin's war in Ukraine.

Meanwhile, China is getting good at the "weaponisation of dependencies" game. In addition, it is sitting on surplus capital and excess capacity. Its export of both to India in the form of FDI as against goods will be accompanied with technology choices which by nature are irreversible, and often involve strategic sectors. It is not without design that India has chosen, for example, Japanese bullet train technology, or taken the more difficult route to develop indigenous 5G and 6G technologies in the face of ready availability of both from China.

The invocation of the Panchsheel principles by President Xi Jinping in his meeting with Prime Minister Modi is most interesting. It reflects a leap of faith and a certain Chinese assessment of the current historical stage of the relationship. Unfortunately, for India, the Panchsheel era is synonymous with betrayal.

On balance, the Tianjin summit has consolidated the process that began in Kazan and set the stage for stabilisation in the India-China relationship. Both leaders have referred to being partners. This is to be welcomed. There are no ideal relationships. All, especially those involving major powers, have imperfections. Major powers by definition are wired to first and foremost safeguard their interests, and ensure they retain their status. The proposition that India will have smoother sailing in the choppy waters of international politics by aligning with one or the other alliance system or set of countries is contestable and fraught with risk, as it is now appearing with the sudden turn of events in the US attitude towards India. Europe is learning this the hard way — it has not allowed its transatlantic alliance to come in the way of a massive economic relationship with China.

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



QURATULAIN MUSHTAQE

I HAVE ALWAYS considered Delhi my forever temporary home. My parents moved here in 1998, three years after my birth, and I grew up in a string of houses — two owned, the rest rented. What has stayed with me through all those moves is the quiet art of my mother, Rabia, of building bonds that last far longer than any tenancy agreement.

My life and work have allowed me the joy and company of many neighbours in different cities, but the neighbours of what I call home — Delhi — are familiar to me only because of my mother. In a city that left her feeling lonely when her husband and children left for work and school each day, she built her own community with the people sharing our walls, windows, and balconies. A delicate girl married into a tough household, Rabia had to shuffle and shuttle between homes and mindsets. A dutiful wife, she followed her husband's decisions to change residences — dictated by financial needs — without complaint. For her, each move meant starting over. For the rest of us, there was continuity in our schools and jobs; for her, there was only a quiet reinvention.

But strangeness never scared her. She faced the indifference of a city that treats migrants as outsiders and still managed to carve out a space for herself. She has always been the first to open her doors to neighbours. Often, I would come home to find her sipping tea with new neighbours. "This is Saima aunty, from Deoband. Her daughters are Yumna, Aamna, and Razia. Say your salam," she would say, like a careful archivist of relationships. Over time, she would map the invisible geography of our lanes for us —

OVER SALAAMS AND CHAI

That's how my mother taught me the importance of building community

who lived where, who was also from our hometown in Bihar, what their stories were, how to greet them, what mattered to them.

Her network of meticulously maintained relationships has saved us in ways big and small: From a steady supply of utensils and freezer space during Eid to spare bedding and even an extra room to isolate in during the Covid pandemic. India is a congested country, where space is always tight, and neighbours become extensions of family. It is a truth summed up in the phrase *chahai-chahai ka pyaar*. But this pyaar transcends the binaries of coupledom. It resides in the quiet camaraderie and lively gatherings of women who bring the ethos of a *griha* to their roofs and balconies — the only public space that most housewives in urban settings are allowed by the politics of space. While managing a household that rarely left her time to comb her hair, my mother created a sisterhood that supported her through financial struggles, endless domestic routines, and the quiet loneliness of a full house.

During school breaks, when chores eased a little, I would watch her lean over the balcony, chatting with other women in voices that carried down the street. We would scold her, "Kya poore mohalle ko sunana hai?" without realising that she belonged to that mohalla in a way we never would. We were visitors in our own neighbourhood. She was the linchpin, the heart people knew and loved.

Sometimes I think of these bonds as invisible threads connecting generations of women in migrant families, especially in Delhi, a city of arrivals. Partition survivors in Old Delhi, traders from small towns, nurses from the

South, young brides like Rabia from far-off villages and small towns, and families like ours pulled here by work. In a city that prides itself on ambition but often forgets kindness, these women have turned neighbourliness into a way of survival. My mother is part of that long, quiet history — the kind rarely found in archives but written in tea stains on balcony ledges and the soft "salaams" exchanged on stairwells.

We have moved again to another rental home, but her ties remain. Calls still come from old neighbours, missing her and eager for her return. Knowing my neighbours through my mother has been my quiet training in community — how to show up for people and hold space for them, even when the city refuses to make space for you.

It is this quiet training I carried with me when I moved to Oxford for higher education, where I became the neighbour who gathered people at 25 Wellington Square for chai and dinner *dawats*. Over *adrah* chai and steaming bowls of biryani, we would trade stories of home, discovering unexpected commonalities, like pieces cut from the same cloth. Now, back in the world of my mother's *mohallas*, I am proud to carry my relationships beyond the validity of my visa. The friends I shared sorrows and laughter with over endless cups of chai are now family. These gatherings taught me that community isn't about geography or permanence; it's about the simple, generous act of opening your door and saying, "Come in."

The writer is a development sector professional who works on social and economic empowerment for women

SEPTEMBER 2, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

AKALI LIST

THE UNITED AKALI DAL split following a formal decision by supporters of Jagdev Singh Talwandi to contest the coming Punjab elections. Announcing the decision after a two-hour-long meeting, Randhir Singh Cheema and Jawinder Singh Brar, former ministers and relatives of Talwandi, told UNI that supporters of Talwandi had been asked to file their nominations for both the assembly and Lok Sabha polls. They said the list of candidates would be finalised in Ludhiana on September 4.

DUSU POLLS

AFTER MORE THAN a decade, the National Students' Union of India, student wing of the

Congress (I), gained three-fourths control over the Delhi University Students Union when its candidates for three top posts were declared elected. The NSUI candidate, Ajay Malen, a nephew of the late Lalit Malen, was declared elected president of DUSU, defeating his near-rival, Janita Vidhyarthi Morcha candidate Viender Kumar, by a margin of 4,892 votes.

LONGOWAL TRIBUTE

GLOWING TRIBUTES WERE paid to Harchand Singh Longowal for his mission of peace at the *bhog* ceremony of the assassinated Akali Dal president. It was attended by lakhs of people in Sangrur. Several national personalities were among the speakers who lauded Longowal's mission, for which he fell

a martyr to the assassins' bullets.

SRI LANKA TALKS

THE SRI LANKAN cabinet will examine the new Indo-Lankan draft agreement proposing the devolution of power for Tamils, said Minister of State Anandasatya de Aweis. Also serving as the official government spokesman, he told DPA that there would be "full and frank discussions" on these new drafts worked out by a Sri Lankan delegation headed by Hector Jayewardene and Indian officials in New Delhi. The New Delhi discussions followed the collapse of peace talks in Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan, when Tamil groups walked out alleging government troops had violated a ceasefire with Tamil guerrillas in Sri Lanka.



THE IDEAS PAGE

A bridge called SCO

To confine the aspirations of the Global South to outdated frameworks is to deny justice to future generations. The SCO can play a guiding role in promoting multilateralism and an inclusive world order



FOR THE RECORD
NARENDRA MODI

I am pleased to participate in the 25th SCO summit. I extend my sincere gratitude to President Xi for the warm welcome and gracious hospitality.

Today marks Uzbekistan's Independence Day, and yesterday was the National Day of Kyrgyzstan. On this occasion, I extend my congratulations and best wishes to both leaders.

Over the past 24 years, the SCO has played a vital role in connecting the extended family across the Eurasian region. As an active member, India has always contributed in a constructive and positive manner.

India's vision and policy towards the SCO are built on three key pillars: S — Security. C — Connectivity. O — Opportunity.

On the first pillar, I would like to emphasise that security, peace, and stability form the foundation of any nation's development. However, terrorism, separatism, and extremism remain major challenges along this path.

Terrorism is not only a threat to the security of individual nations, but a shared challenge to all of humanity. No country, no society, no citizen can consider themselves completely safe from it. That is why India has consistently stressed the importance of unity in the fight against terrorism.

The SCO-RATS has played a very significant role in this regard. This year, while leading the Joint Information Operation, India undertook an initiative to counter al-Qaeda and its affiliated terrorist organisations. We have also proposed enhanced coordination, and joint measures against radicalisation.

We have raised our voice firmly against terror financing, and I sincerely thank all of you for the support extended in this effort.

For the past four decades, India has been bearing the grave scars of ruthless terrorism. Countless mothers have lost their children, and innumerable children have been left orphaned.

Recently, we witnessed the most heinous face of terrorism in Pahalgam. I express my deep gratitude to all the friendly nations that stood by us during this moment of grief. This attack was not only an assault on the conscience of India, but also an open challenge to every nation, and every individual who believes in humanity.

In such circumstances, it is natural to ask: Can the open support for terrorism by certain countries ever be acceptable to us?

We must state it clearly and in one voice: Double standards on terrorism are unacceptable. Together, we must oppose terrorism in every form and manifestation. This is our responsibility towards humanity.

I would now like to share my thoughts on the second pillar, connectivity. India has always believed that strong connectivity does not merely facilitate trade but also opens the doors to trust and development.

It is with this vision that we are working on initiatives such as the Chabahar Port and the International North-South Transport Corridor. Through these, we can enhance our linkages with Afghanistan and Central Asia.

We believe that every effort towards connectivity must uphold the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity. This is also enshrined in the core principles of the SCO charter.

Connectivity that bypasses sovereignty ultimately loses both trust and meaning. The third pillar is opportunity — opportu-



CR Sasikumar

nity for cooperation and reform.

In 2023, under India's presidency, the SCO witnessed fresh energy and ideas. New areas of cooperation were introduced, including start-ups and innovation, traditional medicine, youth empowerment, digital inclusion, and our shared Buddhist heritage.

Our effort was to take the SCO beyond governments. To connect people, young scientists, scholars, and start-ups as well.

Today, I would like to propose another step to strengthen our people-to-people ties: The creation of a civilisational dialogue forum under the SCO. Such a platform will allow us to share the richness of our ancient civilisations, art, literature, and traditions on a global stage.

Today, India is advancing with the motto of Reform, Perform, and Transform. From the Covid crisis to global economic uncertainties, we have endeavoured to convert challenges into opportunities.

We are consistently pursuing wide-ranging reforms, which are creating new opportunities for both national development and international cooperation. I warmly invite you all to be a part of India's development journey.

It is a matter of great satisfaction that the

For the past four decades, India has been bearing the grave scars of ruthless terrorism. Countless mothers have lost their children, and innumerable children have been left orphaned. Recently, we witnessed the most heinous face of terrorism in Pahalgam. I express my deep gratitude to all the friendly nations that stood by us during this moment of grief. This attack was not only an assault on the conscience of India, but also an open challenge to every nation, and every individual who believes in humanity. In such circumstances, it is natural to ask: Can the open support for terrorism by certain countries ever be acceptable to us?

SCO is evolving with time. Four new centres are being established to address contemporary challenges such as organised crime, drug trafficking, and cybersecurity. We welcome this reform-oriented approach.

SCO members can increase mutual cooperation for reforms in global institutions. On the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the United Nations, we can unanimously call for UN reform.

To confine the aspirations of the Global South to outdated frameworks is to deny justice to future generations. The colourful dreams of the new generation cannot be displayed on a black-and-white screen. It is time to change the screen.

The SCO can play a guiding role in promoting multilateralism and an inclusive world order. I welcome the issuance of a statement on this important subject today.

We are moving forward in close coordination and cooperation with all partners. I extend my best wishes to the next Chairman of the SCO, the President of Kyrgyzstan, and my friend, President Japarov.

Thank you very much.

The writer is Prime Minister of India.

This is the English translation of his statement during the 25th SCO summit

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Macron is right on all counts. A normal government would have welcomed initiatives that promote peace and held friends such as France in high esteem. But, alas, we are dealing with Netanyahu's Israel." — HAARETZ, ISRAEL

On China, let's do a reality check

Galwan should remain the anchor of India's China policy, not the ghost we forget in the name of pragmatism



MANAV SACHDEVA

THE PROSPECT is seductive: Troops pulled back, ties thawing, business restarting, business humming, leaders smiling. But beneath the ribbon-cutting optics lies a potential reset that drives India's leverage downward. Here's why each comforting claim about India and China against the backdrop of the Tianjin summit collapses on contact with the facts — and what India must do instead.

The first and loudest claim of a reset is that the border is stable again. After years of tension following Galwan in 2020, officials say disengagement has been completed at Pangong Tso, Gogra, and Hot Springs. In late 2024, agreements on Depsang and Demchok were trumpeted as breakthroughs. In August 2025, leaders solemnly reaffirmed "peace and tranquillity" along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

But peel back the rhetoric, and the hard facts show. What India has accepted are buffer zones — no-patrol areas carved into territory we once accessed freely. Indian patrols that for decades went up to our perceived LAC now stop short. Patrols that were once unilateral are now "coordinated" with Chinese consent, subject to advance notification. The status quo ante has not been restored.

Meanwhile, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has entrenched itself. It has built dual-use villages, heliports, all-weather roads, and hardened runways across the Tibetan plateau. Bases at Hotan and Ngari have expanded, cutting mobilisation times dramatically. This is not de-escalation. What we are witnessing is strategic shrinkage dressed up as stability.

The second plank of the reset is economics. Direct flights are resuming after five years. Indian tourist visas for Chinese nationals are being reissued. Beijing has lifted certain export restrictions on rare earths and fertilisers. Bilateral trade has climbed to a record \$131.84 billion in FY 2024–25.

Yet, these developments only underline the asymmetry. India's trade deficit with China has simultaneously ballooned to a record \$99.2 billion. In critical sectors — pharmaceuticals, electronics, solar modules — Indian supply chains remain dangerously exposed. Nearly 70 per cent of bulk drug ingredients are still sourced from China. In advanced technologies like batteries and semiconductors, we continue to lean heavily on Beijing.

When China "eases curbs", it is not making concessions. It is loosening valves it had itself tightened. The message is clear: Your dependencies are levers in our hands. Today they are open; tomorrow they can be closed. Indeed, new restrictions on specialty fertilisers are already in the pipeline for October.

The third argument for the reset is political symbolism. After a seven-year freeze, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping met in Tianjin and declared India and China to be "partners, not rivals". They spoke of "mutual respect, trust and sensitivity". The Russia-India-China trilateral format is being revived; BRICS and SCO meetings are

framed as proof of renewed cooperation. But slogans do not demilitarise runways. Even as leaders smiled for cameras, satellite imagery shows PLA bases in Tibet hardening further with fortified logistics hubs and fresh heliports. In the Indian Ocean, Chinese submarine forays continue. In Islamabad, Chinese arms deliveries deepen Pakistan's military edge. At the UN, Beijing blocks or dilutes India's initiatives on counter-terrorism.

For India, the danger is reputational: Our credibility with partners in Washington, Tokyo, Canberra, and Brussels rests on the assumption that we are the democratic counterweight to Beijing. By proclaiming partnership with China, we blur that premise, weaken allied trust, and dilute our bargaining power.

The defenders of a reset end with a modest claim: This is not capitulation, they say, but incremental confidence-building. Small steps today, trust tomorrow. But confidence-building is only real when it reduces the adversary's capacity or intent to coerce. Here, neither has changed. PLA infrastructure has grown, not shrunk. Indian dependencies have widened, not narrowed. Chinese ties with Pakistan remain intimate, not frayed. Beijing's Indo-Pacific ambitions remain expansionist, not restrained. What the reset delivers, in practice, is time for Beijing — to consolidate gains, harden infrastructure, and deepen our dependencies, while India relaxes into false calm.

Beyond the tactical flaws lies a deeper danger: National amnesia. By embracing the reset narrative, India risks erasing the memory of Galwan, where 20 of our soldiers died in 2020. The sacrifice was not for buffer zones and slogans. It was for sovereignty.

History shows that aggression unpunished is aggression repeated. If Beijing concludes that India will accept salami-sliced losses in exchange for summits and trade, then the next crisis is not a matter of if but when. And the next time, India may be more dependent, less trusted, and less prepared. Galwan should remain the anchor of our China policy, not the ghost we politely forget in the name of pragmatism.

Rejecting the reset does not mean rejecting dialogue. Geography ensures India must engage with China. But engagement must be transactional, conditional, and paired with capability-building. India must demand intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, all-weather logistics, and denial capabilities. Send the clear signal that talks are welcome but preparedness is permanent.

On supply-chain diversification, incentive domestic champions in APIs, semiconductors, and renewables. Forge sourcing partnerships with allies ranging from Australia to the US to Africa. Beijing should not hold our critical inputs hostage. Retain and strengthen FDI restrictions in critical sectors. Strategic technology must remain insulated from coercion.

Finally, this debate is not just about troops and trade. It is about who India chooses to be. The world looks to India today not just as a market or a military counterweight, but as the largest democracy — a civilisational state rooted in pluralism and openness. To clasp hands too tightly with Beijing, even as it represses Uyghurs, silences Tibet, and dismantles Hong Kong's freedoms, is to dim our moral capital.

History is unkind to nations that mistake capitulation for strategy. India cannot afford to be one of them.

The writer serves as Global Goodwill Ambassador for Ukraine

For future's sake

Magsaysay for Educate Girls draws attention to India's unfinished revolution



UJWAL THAKAR

EVERY YEAR, the Ramon Magsaysay Award reminds us that individuals and ideas can shift the destiny of nations. This year's award to Educate Girls shines a much-needed light on the rural girl child and her education. As the world applauds the laureates, India must pause to reflect on a transformation still incomplete within its borders. Ensuring that every rural girl goes to school, stays there, and learns well.

India has one of the largest school systems in the world, with over 250 million children enrolled. But millions of girls, especially in villages, still drop out before completing secondary school. The reasons are familiar: Poverty, patriarchy, household chores, early marriage, lack of nearby schools, and sometimes, something as basic as the absence of a toilet.

The costs of this exclusion are immense. Every additional year of schooling raises a girl's income by 10–20 per cent. If all girls completed 12 years of education, India's GDP could rise by nearly 10 per cent over the next

decade. An educated girl delays marriage, has healthier children, earns more, and invests more in her family and community. Denying her education is not just unjust, it is a self-inflicted national wound.

One inspiring example of change is Educate Girls, founded by Safena Husain. From 50 villages in Rajasthan, the organisation has expanded to over 30,000 villages, mobilising more than 1.4 million girls into schools.

Their model is simple but powerful: Train young women and men as local champions who go door to door, convincing families that daughters belong in classrooms. Safena's work has been recognised globally, most recently with the WISE Prize for Education, making her the first Indian woman to win the award. Her leadership shows what can happen when persistence, data, and community partnership come together. Girls once invisible now read, write, and dream of futures their mothers never imagined.

The movement for the education of girls is not civil society's burden alone. The Indian government has shown serious intent. The Right to Education Act brought near-universal enrolment at the primary level. The Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao campaign has worked to shift mindsets, while Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas provide residential schooling for vulnerable girls. States have innovated, too: Bihar's bicycle scheme for schoolgirls famously cut dropouts and inspired similar efforts across India.

The story of girls' education, therefore, is one of convergence — government laying the foundation, and organisations like Educate Girls delivering last-mile solutions. And yet, the task is unfinished. Rural India still holds the deepest gender gaps in education. Millions of young women aged between 15 and 30 dropped out years ago due to poverty, patriarchy, or early marriage.

For them, hope lies in second-chance education. Educate Girls' new programme,

Pragati, offers adolescent girls and young women the chance to return to learning through camps that prepare them to earn Class X and Class XII credentials via the open schooling system. Expanding this will require vibrant state-level open schooling ecosystems, built on the strong base of the National Institute of Open Schooling. Encouragingly, progressive state governments are beginning to partner in this effort.

The Magsaysay Award has always honoured leaders whose courage uplifts the marginalised. By recognising Educate Girls, it has drawn global attention to India's unfinished revolution — educating the rural girl child. This task is not charity. It is not welfare. It is the single most powerful investment India can make in its future.

The question history will ask of us is simple: Did we have the will to finish this revolution?

The writer is board chair, Educate Girls

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SPEAK UP, INDIA

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'A war like no other' (IE, September 1). The devastation in Gaza is not just a humanitarian tragedy but also a moral test for the global community. As Shama Mohamed observes, silence in the face of mass civilian casualties amounts to complicity. While Israel cites security concerns, international law is clear: Collective punishment violates human rights. Reports by UN agencies show Gaza's destruction surpasses conflicts in Ukraine and Syria. India, with its historic commitment to non-alignment and moral diplomacy, cannot afford selective silence today. It must unequivocally call for a ceasefire.

Zainab Ishaq, Pune

COLLAPSE OF FAITH

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Outside the classroom' (IE, August 29). The normalisation of private tuition reflects a profound collapse of faith in our public education system. The commodification of

learning is not merely an economic burden, it is a psychological one. Coaching centres fill a systemic vacuum, but their dominance signals a failure of inclusive schooling. Unless we redefine success beyond test scores and urgently invest in equitable, meaningful education, we risk raising a generation that excels on paper but falters in purpose.

Vijaykumar H K, Raichur

TARIFF RULING

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Under cover of trade deficit' (IE, September 1). The ruling of a federal appeals court that the US President had no legal right to impose sweeping tariffs on countries like India has, no doubt, kindled hope of a reprieve for exporters. The court's ruling will come into effect only in the second week of October, giving Donald Trump time to build a protectionist wall around the American economy. We should also not forget that damage has already been done to consignments already in transit and goods ready for shipment to the US.

Tharicus S Fernando, Chennai

16th EXPLAINED

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 2, 2025

Understanding the high April-June GDP growth numbers

SIDDHARTH UPASANI
NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 1

THE INDIAN economy recorded a higher-than-expected GDP growth rate of 7.8% in April-June, marking an improvement over the equally unexpected 7.4% in January-March.

What explains these headlines? Is the upward trend likely to continue?

The inflation factor

The GDP growth rate is driven by two factors: one, the magnitude of economic activity, and two, the rate at which prices are increasing, which is inflation.

The figures usually cited in headlines are derived after adjusting for inflation to arrive at the "real" GDP growth. This number is more relevant for determining the economy's health, as it allows for comparisons across years and with other countries.

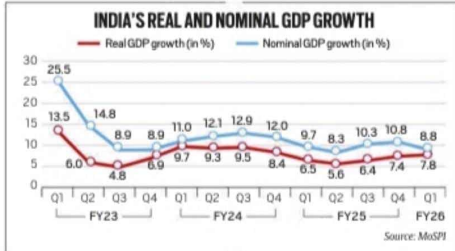
However, data released last week by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) warrants a look at the number without adjusting for inflation, or the "nominal" GDP growth. While the real growth rate, at 7.8%, was the highest in five

quarters, the nominal GDP growth rate in April-June was at a three-quarter low of 8.8%. GDP data are collected in "current prices", or the prices prevailing today. In April-June, the GDP at current prices was Rs 86.05 lakh crore. To arrive at the real growth rate, the ministry 'deflates' the nominal GDP by a combination of wholesale and retail inflation, with the former playing a significantly larger role. The real GDP in April-June was Rs 47.89 lakh crore.

In April-June, Wholesale Price Index (WPI) inflation in India averaged less than 0.3%, the lowest since the first quarter of 2024. Meanwhile, Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation averaged 2.7%, the lowest in more than six years. As a result, the 'GDP deflator' was just 0.9% — roughly a six-year low. The smaller the deflator, the narrower the difference between the real and nominal growth rates.

Why the 'deflator' matters

According to economists at ICI Securities Primary Dealership, the April-June real GDP growth rate has been lifted by certain "shortcomings" in how the MoSPI deflates the nominal GDP. "Most of the upside surprise in the quarter has stemmed from



segments where the very soft deflator value could have buoyed the real growth estimate. Importantly, nominal growth was quite lackluster and may well become the more suitable metric to track this year to assess the direction of growth," they economists, led by A Prasanna, said in a note on August 31.

Take the services sector, whose real growth rate in April-June was at an eight-quarter high of 9.3%. However, without adjusting for inflation, the sector expanded by 11.3%, not too far from the 11.2% growth in October-December 2024. The deflator was roughly 1.9%.

However, economists argue this is far lower than what it should have been. "India's services sector GDP deflator aligns more with goods-oriented WPI inflation than with CPI services inflation. Another way of saying this is that it has much more manufacturing in it than it should. This is particularly a problem

when manufacturing inflation is falling because of softer commodity prices. It ends up deflating services inadequately, leading to exaggerated real growth," HSBC economists Pranjal Bhandari, Aayushi Chaudhary, and Priya Mehrotra said in a note on August 29.

Single versus double

At the root of the problem is how MoSPI deflates the nominal GDP. In 'agriculture' and 'mining and quarrying', different deflators are used for inputs and outputs — or a double-deflation method. For the rest, the same deflator is used for both input and output prices — or single deflation. The latter, economists worry, is problematic.

"It is very likely that the statistics office has not suitably deflated the rise in profit margin that is stemming from weaker input prices, rather than stronger volume growth," ICI Securities Primary Dealership said, adding that if MoSPI had "more appropriately followed a double deflation approach", then the growth in real value added by the manufacturing sector may have been "much less" than 7.8% in April-June.

According to HSBC, manufacturing sector growth in April-June may have been overestimated by around 150 basis points (bps), with

the headline real GDP growth number exaggerated by around 20 bps just due to this.

The opposite holds true when commodity prices are on the rise — when WPI inflation is high and above CPI inflation, it can lead to real growth being understated due to the single-deflation method being used, leading to lower real manufacturing growth on paper that may not reflect any actual weakness in activity.

More of the same

So, will the GDP numbers for July-September and for the rest of the year suffer from the same problem? The short answer is yes. WPI inflation dropped to -0.13% in June — the first time in 20 months that it came in negative territory — indicating wholesale prices were lower than last year. In July, prices fell further. CPI inflation, meanwhile, fell to an eight-year low of 1.55% in July. While it may rise from here, the RBI expects CPI inflation to average 3.1% in 2025-26, 150 bps lower than the average for 2024-25.

As such, the GDP deflator may remain low and possibly fall further, meaning that the "disconnect" between real GDP and high frequency data is likely to continue," according to Nomura economists Sonal Varma and Aurodeep Nandi.

EXPLAINED ECONOMICS

EXPLAINED SCIENCE

WHY EARTHQUAKES OCCUR, WHY AFGHANISTAN IS SO VULNERABLE

AN EARTHQUAKE of 6.0 magnitude struck north-east Afghanistan on Sunday night, killing more than 800 people and injuring at least 2,000. The epicentre was 27 km northeast of Jalalabad in Nangarhar province, and its depth was just 8 km.

Afghanistan is particularly vulnerable to earthquakes. In 2023, the country's Herat province experienced three major earthquakes, which killed almost 1,300 people and injured around 1,700. In 2022, a 5.9-magnitude quake killed at least 1,300 people in the country's southeast.



Kunar province in Afghanistan was impacted by Sunday's quake. AP

What causes an earthquake?

An earthquake is an intense shaking of the ground caused by movement under the Earth's surface. It happens when two blocks of the Earth slip past one another, which releases stored 'elastic strain' energy in the form of seismic waves.

The Earth's crust is fragmented into tectonic plates, whose edges, called plate boundaries, constitute faults, or zones of fractures between blocks of rock. The tectonic plates move slowly, sliding past and bumping into one another. An earthquake occurs when a plate has moved far enough and its rough edge, stuck on a fault, ultimately overcomes friction and slips. The point below the Earth's surface where an earthquake starts is called the hypocentre, and the location directly above it on the surface is called epicentre.

Why does a quake's depth matter?

Shallow quakes — of depth up to 70 km — are generally more dangerous as they carry more energy when they emerge to the surface, compared to quakes that occur deeper underground. Deeper quakes spread farther as seismic waves move radially upwards to the surface, but the waves lose energy while travelling greater distances.

Apart from depth, the magnitude of an earthquake determines how destruc-

tive it could be. Magnitude is how big the seismic waves are, while strength refers to the energy they carry. Seismic waves produced by a magnitude 6 earthquake have 10 times higher amplitude than the ones produced by a magnitude 5 earthquake. The energy difference is even higher: 32 times for every change of 1 in magnitude.

Why does Afghanistan experience earthquakes frequently?

Afghanistan lies on a number of fault lines where the Indian and Eurasian plates meet. These plates collide often, leading to significant tectonic activity. Brian Baptie, a seismologist at the British Geological Survey, told Science Media Centre, "With India moving towards Eurasia at around 45 mm each year, this collision zone is one of the most seismically active regions on Earth, accounting for around 15% of all seismic energy released around the world each year. This is an area of very high seismic hazard, with regular earthquake activity spreading across complex fault systems." The Hindu Kush region has seen 12 quakes of magnitude greater than 7 since 1900, according to Baptie.

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

EXPLAINED HEALTH

What India's cancer map shows

A recent study has identified key trends in the incidence of cancer in India. These include a higher incidence of the malady among women, rise in oral cancer cases, and high disease burden in the Northeast

ANONNA DUTT
NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 1

ANALYSIS of data from 43 cancer registries revealed that the lifetime risk of developing cancer in India stood at 11%, with an estimated 15.6 lakh cancer cases and 8.74 lakh cancer deaths occurring in 2024.

Population-based cancer registries collect data on new cancer cases, deaths and trends in specific geographical areas. India's current registries cover 10% to 18% of the population from 23 states and Union Territories. Based on these registries' data from 2015-19, researchers have identified key trends on the incidence of cancer with significant policy implications.

The trends

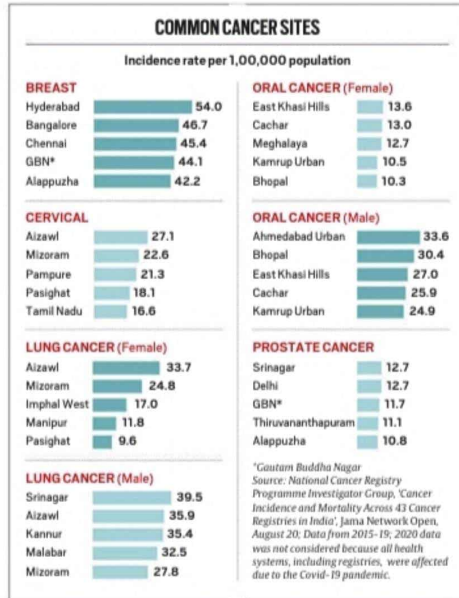
■ Women accounted for a higher proportion of the total cancer cases (51.1%) recorded in the registries but a lower proportion of deaths (45%). "This apparent disparity between cases and deaths can largely be explained by the types of cancers most common in women," Dr Prashant Mathur, director of ICMR-National Centre for Disease Informatics and Research which coordinates the country's cancer registry, told The Indian Express.

Breast and cervical cancers, which together account for 40% of cases in women, are easier to detect early and have better outcomes. In contrast, Dr Abhishek Shankar, oncologist at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), said that "commonly occurring cancers in men such as lung and gastric cancers are more difficult to treat." "Breast cancer is easier to detect early as women may feel the lump themselves. Lung cancer, in comparison, does not have such easily identifiable symptoms which would lead someone to seek care," he said.

■ There has been an increase in the incidence of oral cancer in the country. In fact, the data show that oral cancer has overtaken lung cancer as the most common cancer in men.

This is despite tobacco consumption, the most important risk factor for oral cancer, going down in India. The proportion of adults consuming tobacco decreased from 34.6% to 28.6% between 2009-10 and 2016-17, the Global Adult Tobacco Survey found.

The finding can likely be explained by the long latency period after the first exposure to a carcinogen like tobacco, and other, less ap-



phi, and Human papillomavirus (HPV) which are also high in the region," he said.

■ There is much variation in cancer incidence across India. The highest lifetime risk of cancer was found to be in Mizoram, where it stood at 21.1% for men and 18.9% for women, higher than the 11% rate nationally. The accompanying table shows cities/regions/states with the highest incidence of oral, breast, cervical, lung, and prostate cancers.

Significance of findings

This data can help the Centre and states effectively plan their cancer care programs, from screening programs in primary health centres and specially organised camps to treatment of cancer in tertiary centres under the Centre's flagship Ayushman Bharat programme.

Talking about the Northeast, Dr Mathur said that "addressing the cancer burden in this region requires a comprehensive approach that includes strengthening health-care infrastructure, increasing community involvement, promoting socio-behavioural changes (such as tobacco cessation, dietary and lifestyle modifications), spreading awareness, and enhancing screening and early detection programs targeted at regionally common cancers."

The data also show the importance of activities such as awareness campaigns, screening, and public health initiatives such as vaccination against HPV. Breast cancer alone contributes 30% of cases, which can be detected early in screening programs.

Dr Mathur said cervical cancer incidence is below 4 per 100,000 in only two registries, emphasising the need to strengthen cervical cancer screening, HPV vaccination, and cancer awareness.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), "between 30% and 50% of cancers can currently be prevented by avoiding risk factors and implementing existing evidence-based prevention strategies." This burden can be further reduced through early detection of cancer and appropriate treatment and care of patients who develop cancer. "Many cancers have a high chance of cure if diagnosed early and treated appropriately," the WHO's cancer fact sheet states.

Analyses such as these can help reduce cancer incidence and mortality, and improve overall health outcomes.

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Jaipur	27 अगस्त सुबह 8:00 बजे	27 अगस्त 8:00 AM	
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11-yr-old in Class 9? What courts have said about super-intelligent kids

ANAND MOHAN J
BHOPAL, SEPTEMBER 1

THE MADHYA Pradesh High Court has allowed an exceptionally bright 11-year-old to study in Class 9, setting aside technical objections that he was too young to be admitted to that class under the rules.

"Right to Education cannot be curtailed by imposing a condition regarding age limit," Justice Vishal Mishra said in his order passed on August 19.

What were the grounds of objection to the child's promotion to Class 9?

According to the order, "From the inception of his studies, the petitioner was a bright student scoring always excellent marks" and studied from Class 1 to Class 8 "without any hindrance" in his school. But when he reached Class 9, "his registration was not done by the authorities citing age issue and... [he] was asked to either amend

the date of birth in the Transfer Certificate or to obtain TC from the school."

The child's mother pleaded unsuccessfully for "special permission for registration of the petitioner", who has a high intelligence quotient (IQ).

The order noted that "The reasons assigned by the authorities for rejection is the norms that provides for particular age seeking admission in Class IX. As the petitioner has not satisfied the requirement of the age limit as determined by the State/Union Territory Government, therefore, the application was rejected."

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) argued that Clause 4.1 of the National Education Policy, 2020, which deals with curriculum and pedagogy in schools, provides for a "particular age limit, which the boy did not meet." CBSE also produced its "Examination Bye-laws", Clause 6.1(a)(ii) of which says a student would be eligible for admission to a particular class only if she "satisfies the re-

quirements of age limits (minimum and maximum) as determined by the State/UT. Government and applicable to the place where the School is located."

It was also argued that there is no provision for the grant of any relaxation in the age limit.

What do the relevant provisions of the NEP 2020 say?

Subsection 1 of Clause 4 ("Curriculum and Pedagogy in Schools; Learning Should be Holistic, Integrated, Enjoyable, and Engaging") says, "The curricular and pedagogical structure and the curricular framework for school education will... be guided by a 5+3+3+4 design" to serve the "needs and interests of learners at different stages of their development, corresponding to the age ranges of 3-8, 8-11, 11-14, and 14-18 years."

Under the 5+3+3+4 formula, school education will be divided into four stages:

■ Foundational Stage (ages 3-8) of five years, including three years in anganwadi or pre-school, and two years in primary school (Grades 1-2);

■ Preparatory Stage (ages 8-11), in Grades 3-5;

■ Middle Stage (ages 11-14), in Grades 6-8; and

■ Secondary Stage (ages 14-18), split into two parts — Grades 9-10 and 11-12.

In this case, the child was not yet of the age at which he could enter the Secondary Stage in school (Grade 9).

Have courts passed any similar judgments earlier?

Questions similar to the present case have come up before courts earlier. ■ In its judgment dated January 11, 2024, Patna HC asked an underage candidate to submit a representation to the CBSE chairman "along with all the relevant papers/ results", and directed the chairman to

consider the representation.

In that case, the petitioner was a 10-year-old boy with an exceptional academic record who wanted to sit for the Class 10 examination in 2025.

The court took note of the CBSE bylaws under which a student at the time of admission in Class 1 could not be younger than 5 years, but ruled that the relevant section of the Bihar Education Code, 1961, dealing with "admission for the first time", starts with the word "ordinarily", and as such, the age prescribed is meant for normal circumstances.

■ In March 2022, the Himachal Pradesh HC allowed an 8-year-old child to study in Class 8 after a medical board in Shimla assessed her IQ at 128, just below the minimum level that is considered the IQ of a genius.

The court allowed the child to be provisionally admitted to Class 8. ■ In September 2021, the Madras HC dealt with the case of a 16-year-old who was not allowed to sit for that year's NEET examination for admission to undergraduate

medical courses because she was too young.

The student had an exceptional IQ of 143, and had been granted a double promotion from Class 7 to Class 9, and was allowed to sit for her Class 10 and Class 12 examinations despite being underage.

The court held that when she was allowed by the CBSE to appear for her Class 12 board exam, then "there may be no justification" to "reject her request for age relaxation".

What is the problem if an exceptional student is promoted to a senior class meant for older students?

Dr Latika Gupta of the Department of Education, Delhi University, cautioned against equating high IQ with readiness for higher classes. "The theory of IQ, in itself, should not be the basis for such decisions. Child development is relative, school is not just about academics, it is also a setting where students interact with peers of the same age group," she said.

EXPLAINED LAW

From rivals to partners

Sino-Indian relations see a cautious reset

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's first visit to China in seven years — this time to attend the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit — offered the first signals of "positive momentum" in relations, which have been under the shadow of the border standoff in Ladakh. After a meeting with President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the summit in Tianjin, the language deployed in the statements by the two sides reflected a notable change in tone. Building on the goodwill accruing since the two leaders met in the Russian city of Kazan last year, both statements spoke of India and China as "development partners, not rivals" and underlined that differences should not turn into disputes. The fact that an article on the Xi-Modi meet, titled "Partnership seen as key to Sino-Indian relations", appeared on the front page of the *China Daily*, the Chinese Communist Party's mouthpiece, suggests a significant shift in Beijing's outlook. Both statements referred to the need to pursue "strategic autonomy", with Modi adding that relations should not be viewed through a "third country lens", an oblique reference that Beijing should not view India as a United States-allied card-rigger in Asia.

Equally, with a hug, handshake and a 45-minute car-side meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Mr Modi also sought to underline India's disinclination to respond to American President Donald Trump's demand to stop buying Russian oil as a condition for lifting part of the punitive 50 per cent tariff on India. These shifts, however welcome, must be viewed against the backdrop of attempts at rebalancing power alignments across the globe as a result of the erratic policies of the current White House incumbent. Indeed, Mr Xi had little secret of his objective of heralding a China-led reconfiguration of global alliances via the pagantry of the SCO summit, with 20 leaders attending, including Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who is seeking to raise awareness of United States-supported Israeli atrocities in Gaza. His opening summit remarks on "an equal and orderly multipolar world" and "inclusive globalisation" emphasised the effort at shifting equilibria.

Given this, the choreographed bonhomie between Mr Modi and Mr Xi must be tempered by a realistic understanding of the geopolitical compulsions driving relations. This much is evident in some critical differences between the Indian and Chinese readouts of the Xi-Modi meet. On the border issue, for instance, the Indian statement spoke of "fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable resolution of the boundary question processing from the political perspective of... overall bilateral relations". The Chinese statement implied that the border issue should not define overall China-India relations. It stated that both sides should "handle China-India relations from a strategic and long-term perspective" and "further elevate them through the Tianjin summit". The Chinese readout also invoked Jawaharlal Nehru's "Panchsheel Policy" underlining that "the five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, advocated by the older generation of leaders of China and India over 70 years ago, must be cherished and promoted". Panchsheel finds no mention in the Indian statement. Further, where China spoke of a joint leadership of the Global South, the Indian statement was silent. In the current climate of self-interested cooperation, these divergences may be kept in abeyance. But they reflect a fundamental difference in outlook, which could become consequential if geopolitical circumstances change.

Safety with affordability

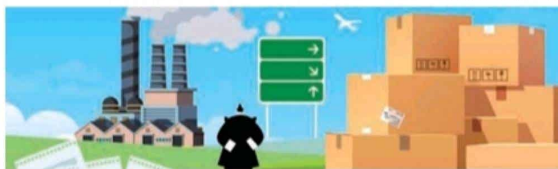
New rules on medical devices should balance them

An interdepartmental high-level committee of the central government is reported to have begun discussion on framing rules to regulate the entry of refurbished medical devices into India. The pre-owned equipment market, valued at about ₹1,500 crore, accounts for nearly 10 per cent of India's medical-device sector. These machines help hospitals in small cities keep costs down, but at present, the Medical Devices Rules, 2017, do not differentiate between new and refurbished devices. Nearly 75 per cent of medical devices in India are imported, and shortages of MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) machines, CT (computerised tomography) scanners, ventilators, and dialysis equipment remain widespread. The challenge is a real tradeoff. If import is allowed without adequate checks, unsafe or old machines could slip in, endangering patients. If import is blocked altogether, many hospitals will be forced to face upgrades and diagnostic tests will become more expensive.

Refurbished medical devices are well regulated in many countries. The European Union's Medical Device Regulation applies the same strict standards to refurbished devices as to new ones, requiring manufacturers or authorised partners to ensure traceability, safety testing, and post-market surveillance. In the United States, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) draws a clear line between routine "servicing" and "remanufacturing". If refurbishment alters the device's performance or intended use, the refurbisher must meet full regulatory obligations like registration, quality system compliance, and safety reporting.

A balanced framework in India could combine these lessons with the country's own needs. Imports should be restricted to original manufacturers or certified partners, while devices that are too old or have exceeded usage thresholds should be barred. Every refurbished machine could carry a unique ID, which would be accompanied by radiation and safety-test reports, and come with at least a one-year warranty. A public registry of refurbished devices and their compliance record would add transparency. At the same time, building certified refurbishment labs and testing facilities in India would not only help in regular safety checks but also generate skilled jobs and help create a credible domestic refurbishment ecosystem. Yet, one of the key hurdles in moving towards such a framework could be the shortage of trained technicians for calibration, radiation-safety checks, and quality audits. Investing in this workforce is as important as writing the rules, because patient safety depends on the rigour of testing and maintenance.

Setting up refurbishment units in India can lower costs for hospitals, create jobs, and build a reliable local base for safe devices. If refurbishment is added to the ongoing schemes such as the Promotion of Medical Devices Parks, it can help overcome this hurdle, build a strong domestic base for safe devices, and reduce dependence on imports. In the end, the refurbished-device debate is not about old machines versus new ones; it is about affordability, accessibility, and safety. A transparent, safety-first but affordability-conscious framework is the way forward. Done right, refurbished machines need not be stopgap measures; they can anchor a resilient health care system that expands diagnostics and treatment to underserved regions.



Cost-cutting path to competitiveness

High costs of manufacturing could wipe out India's gains from ease of doing business reforms and trade agreements

What should we do to address the tariff challenge? The problem is a symptom of a deeper underlying issue: Our farms and firms are simply not productive enough, and the cost of business is not low enough for global markets. Solve this problem, and others will become redundant.

Post-tariffs, a slew of reforms have been proposed by many commentators, and indeed almost all of those would be welcome. A range of global trading agreements, whether bilateral or regional, have also been proposed and these are welcome as well. But how would the government address the underlying problem — that of lower productivity and higher costs? This problem causes the government to take a defensive stance in global interactions, protecting our productive entities rather than promoting them globally. If we don't solve this, make Indian producers competitive, all global agreements will eventually become quite pointless.

So what should the policymaker do? First, recognise that we can't do everything at once. Policy needs to be focused, achieve early successes, build momentum, and then expand its scope. I would start with strengthening the firms that are the most productive and globally competitive — these happen to be the exporting firms and also the ones most impacted by Trump tariffs. Second, I would focus on a few sectors where early gains are possible. Interestingly, most of these sectors are highly labour-intensive. And finally, the hard part of reforms will be done. But even then, we would achieve greater success by focusing on a few elements rather than attempting systemic reforms all at once.

There can be no doubt that with the 50 per cent additional tariffs, many businesses are going to see an immediate fall in orders, and even those that have long-term contracts will be unable to meet the tariff requirements. Revenues will fall and many production lines will need to be paused, and some units will be forced to close down. Bankers will resort to tightening credit and working capital allocations to

the impacted sectors. What makes it more unfortunate is that the firms most hurt will be the ones that are more efficient, export more, and are better able to compete globally.

There are a few micro and macro mechanisms for these exporting firms, including lower or no tariff on their imports, and loan repayment holidays. Another option could be for the government to absorb the US tariffs on a time-bound basis, until firms are able to find alternative markets. Taken together, the hit on the exchequer cannot be more than \$20 billion. Make these benefits available for a year and you have given the best of Indian businesses breathing space to do what they do best — compete in global markets.

Having taken care of the immediate, adopt a focused approach to sectoral policy for the medium term. Among the sectors worst hit by the tariffs are apparel, jewellery, shrimp farming — perhaps fisheries in general — footwear, light engineering, furniture, handicrafts, and a few others. Almost all are highly labour-intensive, and it is encouraging that at least some Indian firms in these domains are efficient enough to compete globally.

How would we support these sectors? Ensure that the exporting sector's inputs are free of tariffs. Remember the firms that are competing against in global markets are receiving these same inputs at low duties and with few government hurdles. Second, in interactions with the United States, Russia, China, the European Union, and developing countries such as Brazil, Indonesia, I would open up Indian markets in areas where India is less competitive. Note that all geo-economic negotiations today are as much about imports as they are about exports, and imports can be a powerful negotiation tool, as Donald Trump has just taught the world. If India does need to import, it is better to import products where Indian firms are relatively less productive. This will help support the downstream units be more competitive in global markets.



LAVEESH BHANDARI

Domestic champions, global laggards

Though the Trump tariffs represent unilateral action by the United States and do not adhere to the global trade principles of the World Trade Organization, they have also spurred much soul-searching in India about what the country can do to become more globally competitive.

Industrial associations, corporate leaders, and senior economists have all called for major next-generation reforms in areas including land acquisition, power costs, taxes, compliance red tape, and labour laws — all of which have become a lead to a substantial improvement in the ease of doing business, while also enhancing the basic competitiveness of Indian companies.

Meanwhile, policymakers have their own views. Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal observed that India's 1.4-billion-strong domestic market has become a cosy comfort zone, providing good profits to Indian businesses — and they do not feel the need to venture out in search of opportunities abroad the globe.

Mr Goyal's observation should not be dismissed as mere pique. To a large extent, it is true that large Indian manufacturing businesses have become more comfortable expanding into multiple industries and playing in the domestic market rather than seriously making a big export effort. While many Indian brands are well known, none can be called a true global champion.

In some ways, this has to do with business policies before economic reforms of 1991. Until then, the government, for all its practical purposes, decided how much you could produce. At its worst, the government also decided which areas you could get into, how many players per sector, and even the prices at which you could sell the finished product. While there were periods of less government interference,

big Indian business houses got accustomed to managing licenses and had no incentive to build competitive businesses. Anything they produced was tapped up by consumers because of a lack of options.

This partially explains why we have so many Indian conglomerates instead of huge corporations that specialise in one or two areas. General Motors or Ford grew big making cars and ancillaries — they rarely tried to get into multiple, unrelated areas. Sure, there were conglomerates even in the US, but they were found to be unsustainable in most cases.

On the other hand, India gave rise to big conglomerates — the Tatas, the Birlas, the Godrejs, the Mahindras and others. Even those who initially focused on one area to build size found comfort in expanding to new, unrelated sectors, and that seems to be the case even now. You can see this in the expansion plans of Reliance and the Adani group, though, to be fair, the latter is trying to be a global player in ports at least.

Even after 1991, while conditions began to improve for corporations, many pain points remained. Big conglomerates and the difficulty of accessing capital at competitive costs, only a select few businesses that knew how to thrive under such conditions grew — while many other entrepreneurs remained small and uncompetitive. A few sectors bucked the trend — auto ancillaries and generic pharma are examples — but even here, globally renowned champions are rare.

There have been some honourable attempts in the past and even now. Royal Enfield, for example, is trying to build a global brand in classic motorcycles. While some blame can be placed on big Indian corporations, which preferred to manage the domestic system rather than aim to become global conquerors

Third, the cost of business is high in India and this needs to be addressed. One way to reduce the value of the rupee enough to price away India's inherent inefficiencies. This will mean rupee devaluation. The problem with devaluation is that the advantage remains only for a little while. Eventually the inefficiencies will eliminate that benefit. Another option is to provide targeted subsidies with a sunset clause, similar to the production-linked incentive (PLI). But how many products can the government support this way, and for how long? PLI appears to work better for units with a single product; therefore, it may not be as effective for items such as garments and jewellery, where products are highly varied.

The most difficult, and yet the most powerful part of India's focused approach will be costs. Over the past decade, the government has made many all-round efforts at creating a better business climate. Yet manufacturing investment has been found wanting. The ease-of-doing-business (EoDB) effort dealt with many parameters and sub-parameters. Yet more remains to be done. Take any representation from industry, and the checklists of what is required run into hundreds of items. This strategy towards greater EoDB is clearly not going to work for what India needs. In the long run, India has to work on the cost of doing business (CoDB) by reducing both direct costs and business uncertainties. What might these include?

One, on labour: India has to empower businesses by eliminating the Industrial Development and Regulation Act (IDRA), especially the part constraining owners from rationalising workers, and replace it with unemployment insurance. Protect the workers' consumption, not their job.

Two, on land: Land is expensive in India, large parcels are difficult to access, and facilitative infrastructure is mostly missing. An industrial parks (IP) policy is critical, where land costs are absorbed by the government but industrial parks compete with one another on the services they provide to their units. Currently, most are run by government departments, this asset needs to be unlocked and new IPs need to be created near major demand and service centres for MSMEs to become low-cost productive powerhouses.

Three, legal delays: In India, they significantly ramp up the cost of doing businesses. Such delays should not be acceptable in any civilised society. While we need three times more judges and courtrooms, we also need the judiciary to take responsibility and give far fewer adjournments, and avoid frivolous cases, reducing them at least by a factor of four.

Four, electricity costs: India needs to let everyone pay the actual cost, rather than overcharging manufacturing and subsidising other sectors, including households.

And finally on cost of capital: Why do banks have such margins? Why do start-ups go for overboard on remunerations? Why would take responsibility over the cost build-up because of these?

In sum, India needs to focus on a few things and clean up the clutter that stands in the way of productive low-cost farms and firms. If we cannot do that, then high costs will eventually negate all the good that ease of doing business or international trade agreements can potentially bring.

The author heads CSEP Research Foundation. The views are personal

PROSAIC VIEW

PROSENIT DATTA

begin to improve for corporations, many pain points remained. Big conglomerates and the difficulty of accessing capital at competitive costs, only a select few businesses that knew how to thrive under such conditions grew — while many other entrepreneurs remained small and uncompetitive. A few sectors bucked the trend — auto ancillaries and generic pharma are examples — but even here, globally renowned champions are rare.

There have been some honourable attempts in the past and even now. Royal Enfield, for example, is trying to build a global brand in classic motorcycles. While some blame can be placed on big Indian corporations, which preferred to manage the domestic system rather than aim to become global conquerors

despite their size and resources, the government too needs to reflect on where its policies went wrong.

While a lot gets written about labour, compliance, land acquisition, and other problems — all of which are genuine — what is often brushed under the carpet is that successive Indian governments made no effort to increase competition and quality, or to reduce costs for consumers in the domestic market. Even where we export, the quality sold abroad is often higher, while the Indian consumer pays more for the same product — but settles for lower quality — at home. From steel to cement, automobiles to packaged food, Indian consumers get the short shrift. This creates perverse incentives. Even global companies operating in India often distinguish between the quality of what they sell abroad and what they offer in the domestic market.

Why didn't China experience this problem when it was reforming its economy in the 1980s? One reason is that China promoted enormous domestic competition and also kept raising the quality bar. This was a survival of the fittest in a truly competitive market. This led to global levels of quality while focusing on reducing production costs. The government helped with some policies to protect and incentivise domestic players — but also let them to be globally and domestically competitive.

Perhaps Indian policymakers should debate this too. Would an environment that focuses on consumers — irrespective of whether they are domestic or global — insist on high quality and low costs, and promotes a high degree of domestic competition work better than having a few national champions or domestic monopolies that are rarely recognised as global majors in their industries?

The author is former editor *Business Today* and *Businessworld*, and founder of Prosaic View, an editorial consultancy

Pandemics: The lessons we never learn



NEHA BHATT

The collective wisdom of past plagues reveals much about the state of the world: its fault lines, its interconnectedness, its vulnerabilities. But as veteran journalist and former *New York Times* science and health reporter Donald G. McNeil Jr. observes in *The Wisdom of Plagues*, while societies today are well-armed to remain on guard against military threats, aided by elaborate detection mechanisms, our disease-alert systems remain far less sophisticated with "inherent flaws". In practice, the WHO's systems have not

worked very well. I can't think of a single serious outbreak I learned of first from them," he writes.

When Mr McNeil first saw a notice on a disease-alert service on December 31, 2019, about unexplained pneumonia cases linked to a seafood market in Wuhan, he thought it sounded suspiciously like the way SARS began. At first distracted by other deadlines, McNeil writes he quickly sensed a public health crisis looming well before political leaders believed it, and recounts his furious email exchanges with colleagues and editors to warn them of what may lie ahead. Yet through his career, covering public health, epidemics and infectious disease across 60 countries, he has often wrestled with the question of whether he was too alarmist, or not alarmist enough.

Now that we have something of a healthy distance from the Covid-19 pandemic, examinations of our response

to it are finally taking different forms. As a prominent media voice during the Covid-19 pandemic, Mr McNeil offers a reporter's perspective that's both intriguing and expansive. He draws readers into the newsroom and in the field, and behind the scenes of the stories he wrote covering pandemics for over 25 years — including those that made the front page, those buried in the inside pages, and those dropped. At its heart, the book asks: What saves the most lives? It delivers a series of hard answers that can sometimes feel uncomfortable. He doesn't try to walk the politically correct line or pandar to ideals.

By placing Covid-19 within the larger history of other plagues such as AIDS, Ebola, SARS, and MERS, McNeil explores how each outbreak foreshadowed the next in terms of patterns, responses and impacts. In one of the early chapters, he compares the American response to AIDS to Cuba's. "In the 1980s, as the

United States protected civil liberties at all costs, health officials confidently predicted a vaccine and a cure within three years. Cuba, by contrast, chose the iron fist.... Forty years later, there is still no vaccine and no cure.... During those five years, more than 750,000 Americans died of AIDS. Fewer than 5,000 Cubans did."

In his view, "the Western focus on personal liberty" and poor leadership cost the United States hundreds of thousands of more lives, whereas countries like Germany and Canada fared far better because their political leaders took the threats seriously from day one. The author acknowledges that his perspective on dealing with such outbreaks, including one of his articles that called for a "medieval" approach to fight Covid-19



The Wisdom of Plagues
by Donald G. McNeil Jr.
Published by Simon & Schuster India
312 pages ₹699

makes him unpopular in some circles. It was "the saddest epidemics I've ever covered," because his country not only ignored ways to control the virus, but also rejected the vaccines in millions, he writes.

The book avoids medical and academic jargon, opting for a more conversational, at times exasperated tone as he recalls the stories behind the headlines. Through the many layers of news gathering and joining the dots, the author explores the social, psychological, and cultural forces, along with the political and medical structures, that dictate how pandemics move through populations. While Part One is a more informal reflection on pandemics, Part Two looks at the tangled roots of such diseases, and how they change society. Part Three goes deeper into the ways they spread globally, including in India, and the role of understanding

crowd psychology in controlling them. McNeil also turns his attention inward, with an insider account of "Media's Forced Errors", and the sometimes insidious synergy between media outlets, public health agencies and the issue of "sources deceiving reporters", such as when he believes a group of scientists misled him early in the Covid-19 pandemic.

The last part of the book is largely prescriptive, with suggestions on ways to reform the pandemic response, including reforms like reducing global poverty, building a pentagon for disease, better surveillance, cheaper medicines, stricter mandates and a ban on religious exemptions.

The book doesn't offer new data or research, but what it does successfully is offer journalistic context and a sharp perspective on a valuable subject, written with a fair dose of candour, without "trying to please anyone".

The reviewer is a Delhi-based freelance journalist who writes on policy, development, public health, gender and culture

the hindu businessline.

TUESDAY - SEPTEMBER 2, 2025

Tianjin tango

Modi-Putin-Xi dynamics sends strong message

The bonhomie and good cheer, even if only for the cameras, was unmistakable. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) that held its summit in Tianjin in China over the last two days was eclipsed by the Modi-Xi and Modi-Putin meetings. The three leaders have left no one in any doubt that they intend to present a united front to President Trump, if not necessarily the US.



The US President, who had set out to take on Presidents Putin and Xi, has ended up taking on Prime Minister Modi — who has responded by making common cause with the first two. By coming together, the three leaders have sent out a powerful signal to Trump, even if concrete on-ground moves flowing from the meetings will have to be awaited. The Indian signalling, via no less than a visit by the Prime Minister, has been so strong that the US embassy in India put out tweets on Monday morning saying how good India-US relations are and how the relationship is growing in strength. This surely comes as a surprise, after the remarkable and sustained belligerence from the White House and its close aides in recent weeks. Even so, it would be naive to assume that India has moved closer to China, or that its ties with the US have been ruptured beyond repair. As for Russia, as this newspaper had noted earlier, bilateral relations have been cordial, notwithstanding some predictable ups and downs. Russia has stood by India economically, diplomatically and militarily for 70 years. India has reciprocated to the extent it can.

It's the relationship with China, however, that is a problem. There are two major sticking points. One is, of course, the boundary question. The other is China's strategy of using Pakistan as a counter to India. The former has remained unresolved for 70 years. The latter started in 1965 when Pakistan attacked India. Given this, it must be a matter of deep satisfaction to the Indian delegation that the SCO summit acknowledged terrorism and the attack in Pahalgal by Pakistani terrorists. At the SCO Defence Ministers meeting in June, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh had refused to endorse the joint declaration as it failed to mention the Pahalgal attack.

As to the boundary question it has always been China's stand that it should be delimited from trade and investment between the two countries. By 2010 India had accepted this but in 2018 it was China that reignited the boundary issues. It has now decided to revert to the pre-2018 position. This is also a very positive outcome for India. But what happens next is not clear. Much will depend on whether China lifts its embargo on the sale of items that are important to Indian industry such as rare earth minerals, tunnel boring machines and fertilizers. Even if it does, its tendency to use trade as a weapon of coercion has a long history, as countries like Japan and Australia can testify. In sum, so far so good because Trump has been put on notice that India has other options. That badly needed to be done. Meanwhile, an interesting set of optics, engaging India no doubt, will unfold on the global stage in the near future.

POCKET

RAVINKANTH



ASHIMA GOYAL

Indian exports affected by US double tariffs are less than 1 per cent of GDP because of a low aggregate value of about 2 per cent of GDP as well as exempt categories. Therefore, India can resist being pushed. Strategic autonomy is important. Even so, the US is one of the very few countries we have a trade surplus with and employment intensive MSMEs are disproportionately affected. But we know what to do. Timely but time limited support for MSMEs worked very well post-pandemic and needs to be made available again. Liquidity on easy terms, allowing lenders to roll over loans without declaring them as NPAs for a year, credit warranties and interest subsidies from the government will give firms time to find other buyers without having to close down or lay off workers. Sunset clauses prevent moral hazard. Budgetary impact was minimal as a robust recovery set in for eligible firms. Very little of the warranties and restructuring help made available was actually required. Therefore such help is consistent with the continued fiscal consolidation that is already reducing interest spreads and borrowing costs.

GOVT HAS MAJOR ROLE

Domestic diversity helped the economy do well after the pandemic. This has to be built into trade also, diversifying engagement across many countries, without excluding the US. The government has a major role in enabling this. Doing business and creating common interests will help reduce other disagreements. And not being overly dependent on any one country reduces its ability to force concessions.

Our size and growth give us bargaining power, but it rises with domestic capabilities and strength. Reform, therefore, must focus on enhancing these. Removing irritants for business just at the central level is inadequate. All tiers of government have to reform — and everyone becomes more willing to pull together under an unfair external threat. While regulatory power is minimal at the third tier, multiple agencies with overlapping powers and obstructive political demands are common.

Perhaps operating procedures and task-mappings in municipalities that work well could be more broadly publicised and adopted. China gave incentives to local leaders, encouraging decentralised initiatives and competition. In our system of many parties it is possible to reward corporators if their area meets objective criteria? That voters now want results makes it a political target.

Stellar 7.8 per cent growth in Q1 shows that liquidity infusion and revival



How to respond to external shocks

COUNTERING TARIFFS. Diversify trade across many countries, provide credit warranties and interest subsidies to firms, allow lenders to roll over loans

of government investment were able to reverse the cyclic slowdown that set in Q3 last year. That private consumption grew at 7 per cent despite slowing credit card and MFI lending as risk weights rose, suggests consumption growth is not debt driven but a result of employment and income rising after a period of sustained growth. Rural wages have also risen for the past few quarters.

These data points underline again the importance of protecting growth from shocks. Core inflation is likely to remain soft as more export surplus finds its way into the domestic markets. There are signs growing competition from regional players is restraining MNC profit margins. Monetary policy still has space that it must use to support the counter-cyclical stimulus. Interest rates work with a lag and real rates are still above equilibrium because expected trend inflation, looking through base effects, is running at below 4 per cent.

Trend inflation below target implies output below potential. While reforms raise potential output, monetary policy has to help output to reach that potential, especially in view of shocks to export demand

While reforms raise potential output, monetary policy has to help output to reach that potential, especially in view of shocks to export demand

export demand. Government attempts to raise potential output are nullified if monetary policy remains restrictive. This may force the government to reverse consolidation. Markets already fear this. Tight monetary and loose fiscal policy are not optimal in Indian conditions.

MARKET INTERPRETATION

Markets have interpreted a neutral stance to indicate that there will be no more cuts and partly as a result the 10-year G-Secs yield has risen above 6.5 per cent in end-August. Long rates are the ones that matter for the real sector so this steepening of the yield curve reduces monetary pass through. A rate cut in October would underline that a neutral stance means a data-based response in either direction as required.

Another possible reason for rising long-term yields is a rise in risk perceptions with excess volatility in exchange rates. While the rupee is market determined, the RBI has long successfully intervened against perception driven excess volatility that can cause persistent real misalignment. In the early 2010s when the RBI said forex markets are too large to intervene, the rupee sank. Such misperceptions must be avoided.

There is a view that surplus liquidity provides more stimulus than rate cuts would. But inflation targeting mandates the RBI to keep its short rate instrument at the repo. It has the tools to do so, even

with excess liquidity. While liquidity is better somewhat in excess in Indian conditions, too much leads to uncertainty and perverse incentives for markets. NBFs have the temptation to borrow at low short rates and lend long creating asset-liability mismatches. Banks may lower lending standards to place loans. Excess liquidity infusions should be self-limiting as they were post-pandemic.

In all economies, as in India, high growth raises corporate profits, cash balances and savings. China could direct this into investment. Sustained infrastructure investment supported their steady catch-up growth.

Here corporate physical investment and R&D expenditure remain inadequate. Carrots as well as sticks are required in India. Such a package can be designed. For example, firms may be given three options, of which they can choose anyone or a mix: First: Invest or spend 10 per cent of PBT on R&D. Second: Put it in designated infrastructure bonds or funds. If neither, then the default option: It goes as tax to the government to build a platform for a pipeline of ready Central/State infrastructure projects.

The initiative could be called corporates for the future. They have to get future ready and helping the country to do well also help them. This is the time for everyone to pull together.

The writer is Emeritus Professor, IGDR

Decoding the new income tax law

Updated rules on deductions, marginal relief, and pre-construction interest come into effect from April 2026

bl.explainer

Nishanth Gopalakrishnan

The Income Tax Bill, 2025 — popularly known as the 'new I-T Bill' — has been passed by both Houses of Parliament and received the President's assent on August 21, officially making it an Act. It is all set to come into force from April 1, 2026. This is the second draft of the Bill that has been passed, following the withdrawal of an earlier draft by the Finance Ministry to make changes recommended by a Select Committee of the Lok Sabha. Amidst the ringerole, taxpayers seem to have certain questions regarding the new legislation.

Why was the initial draft of the I-T Bill withdrawn?

According to Neeraj Agarwal, Partner, Nangia & Co LLP, "The new Income Tax Bill was initially withdrawn to correct drafting inconsistencies and to carefully consider the feedback received from various stakeholders. For example, in the first draft, taxpayers were required to file their return on or before the due date of original filing, in order to claim refund. While it did allow filing a belated

return, this condition was considered restrictive when compared to the provisions under the existing Income Tax Act, 1961 (ITA). To address such issues, the draft was sent back for revision, and the Parliamentary Select Committee recommended several changes that were subsequently incorporated into the new version."

What are the key changes proposed in the revised version?

According to Agarwal, "Among the important modifications was the treatment of pre-construction interest deduction. The earlier draft permitted this deduction only for self-occupied property, whereas the ITA extends the benefits to both self-occupied and let-out properties. The revised version has incorporated this anomaly."

Another important correction relates to the rebate under Section 87A. Under the ITA, marginal relief is available to resident individuals under the new tax regime if their total income exceeds ₹12 lakh. This safeguard was missing in the initial draft but has been reinstated.

Similarly, the ITA provided taxpayers with the facility to obtain both lower TDS and nil-TDS certificates, albeit for specified receipts. The first draft of the



NEW AVATAR. Drafting inconsistencies corrected, feedback considered

Bill failed to explicitly recognise nil-TDS certificates, which has now been addressed.

How does advance nil-TDS certification help?

"An advance nil-TDS certificate helps a taxpayer by preventing unnecessary tax deductions at source when the income is either exempt from tax or the total tax liability is expected to be nil. Without such a certificate, the payers are obligated to withhold TDS, often creating a situation where the taxpayer has to claim a refund while filing the return, leading to cash flow issues. "By obtaining a nil-TDS certificate in

advance, the taxpayer ensures that no tax is deducted at source, thereby improving liquidity, and aligning the actual tax deducted with their final liability," says Agarwal.

What are the changes proposed in commuted pensions or lumpsum pension payments received by some individuals?

In fact, there are no changes proposed in this regard. The new law just presents the earlier provisions in a table within Section 19, for better comprehension. Commuted pension received by Central and State government employees or a corporation established by a Central Act or State Act remain exempt. For other employees, such as employees serving a private organisation, commuted pension remains taxable with a deduction from the actual amount, as earlier. For those who are in receipt of gratuity, the deduction is one-third of the commuted pension. Further, commuted pension from a pension scheme with an IRDAI-approved insurer remains outside taxation ambit, as it has been earlier.

On businessline.in

Q1 GDP surge masks structural issues

There's a troubling disconnect between macro aggregates and microeconomic realities. Industrial output remains subdued, urban consumption is tepid, and private investment lacks momentum, says Dhananjay Sinha

Swadeshi banking: Renewed relevance of a legacy

The current policy framework on banking ownership and governance needs urgent review. Without intervention, Indian banking risks passing irrevocably into foreign hands, points out S Adikesavan

Power of Jan Dhan Yojana

It has helped Nabard expand its schemes

Shaji KV

The Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) stands out as a foundational reform that has redefined financial inclusion and laid the groundwork for rural prosperity.

From the perspective of the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (Nabard), PMJDY is not just a banking scheme but a catalyst for empowerment, resilience, and inclusive growth.

Launched in August 2014 to bank the unbanked and serve underserved areas, PMJDY has covered over 56 crore beneficiaries as of July 2025. The aggregate deposit balance stands at ₹2.6 lakh crore, with 66.7 per cent of accounts located in rural and semi-urban areas. This scale and reach have made PMJDY one of the largest financial inclusion programmes globally.

The PMJDY has allowed Nabard to expand the reach of its programmes, whether through Self Help Groups (SHGs), Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs), or cooperative banks, by ensuring that every participant has a secure and accessible financial identity.

DBT: A GAME CHANGER

One of the most transformative outcomes of PMJDY has been its role in facilitating Direct Benefit Transfers (DBTs) for a wide range of schemes like PM-KISAN, MGNREGA, PMAY, Ujjwala etc ensuring that subsidies, wages, and entitlements reach beneficiaries directly, transparently, and efficiently.

One of the most profound impacts of PMJDY has been its role in empowering rural women. With over 29 crore women beneficiaries, PMJDY has become a gateway to financial autonomy and social inclusion.

By ensuring that every SHG member has an individual bank account, PMJDY has enabled direct benefit transfers (DBTs) into women's accounts, a lifeline that became particularly critical during emergencies such as the Covid pandemic.

The government's JAM trinity — Jan Dhan, Aadhaar, and Mobile — has created a robust platform for delivering services, verifying identities, and enabling digital payments.

Nabard has built on this foundation to structure a pilot of Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) for tenant farmers in Andhra Pradesh and Odisha. Furthermore, Nabard is



BANKING. For the unbanked

building on this foundation through new-generation initiatives, deploying multilingual AI voice agents in cooperative banks to serve non-literate and digitally excluded populations. These agents, powered by PMJDY-linked data, will allow rural customers to check balances, apply for loans, and receive alerts in their native languages.

To take financial inclusion to the next level under PMJDY, the government is driving end-to-end computerisation of Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS) and has facilitated setting up of Sahakar Sarathi Private Limited (SSPL) to equip Rural Cooperative Banks with modern, centralized digital solutions.

Despite its success, PMJDY faces certain challenges. 16 per cent of accounts are inactive, and India still has one of the largest populations of unbanked adults due to its size. Further only a small share of rural India is cyber-aware with just 12.6 per cent of individuals aged 15 and above know how to report a cybercrime. This glaring gap underlines the urgent need for digital safety awareness and capacity building in villages.

Nabard, under the guidance of the Department of Financial Services, is actively tackling these challenges through a mix of capacity-building initiatives, financial literacy campaigns, and innovative partnerships with fintechs and civil society organizations.

Nabard's vision for the next phase includes Jan Dhan 2.0, which would integrate savings, credit, insurance, and pensions into a single, unified rural financial product. It also envisions Jan Dhan for Enterprises, extending the successful model to rural MSMEs and Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs).

The power of PMJDY lies not just in numbers, but in the lives it touches and the futures it shapes.

The writer is Chairman, Nabard

Traversing the trade minefield

Thanks to Trump tariffs, there is now a thaw in India-China ties. But the trade imbalance can be a spoiler

MACROSCAN.



CP CHANDRASHEKHAR, JAYATI GHOSH

Trump's tariff aggression and the imposition of tariffs aggregating 50 per cent on most imports from India, have had one significant outcome. Neighbours India and China are now willing to talk to each other, pointing to a thaw in the relationship following the clashes in the Galwan Valley in 2020.

In the new environment, not only have talks between the two countries revived, but Prime Minister Modi has chosen to travel to the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit and meet with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

There are two factors that seem to play a role in driving India's stance of compromise and dialogue with a country considered for long as the primary 'enemy'. One is the desire to send out a signal to the Trump administration, through rapprochement with a 'rising' China, in the hope that this will force the US to rethink the punitive tariffs it has imposed on the country. The other is to seek in China the alternative market for the Indian goods that the tariff hikes will definitely keep out of the US, so as to prevent any deterioration of India's balance of payments.

If the post-tariff hike decline in India's exports to the US is to be compensated with exports to other regions, a large part of that increase would have to be directed at the largest of these markets, which is China. India's effort at improving relations with China is clearly motivated by that objective. But that objective is not easy to realise.

India's exports to China principally consisted of minimally processed primary products, excepting for organic chemicals while its imports are dominated by heavy machinery and electronics



TRADE MATTERS. India's trade balance is heavily skewed in favour of China

History provides some lessons. The evolution of trade relations between India and China suggest that relative competitiveness has been shifting in China's favour. This is reflected in the fact that while India's dependence on imports for imports from China has increased over time, it has not been able to make inroads into China's markets.

TRADE DYNAMICS

As Chart 1 shows, over the last two decades the share of imports from China in India's total imports has risen significantly. On the other hand, the

share of India's exports directed to China has stagnated for some time and then declined. The "strengthening" of trade relations between the countries has mainly been driven by rising imports from China into India.

The result has been a long-term rise in India's deficit in trade with China (Chart 2). While that deficit appeared to be on the decline just before and after the Covid years, it has, interestingly, spiked after clashes between troops of the two countries in the Galwan Valley in 2020, which otherwise worsened relations between the two countries.

CHART 1

Import surge

China's share of India's exports and imports (%)

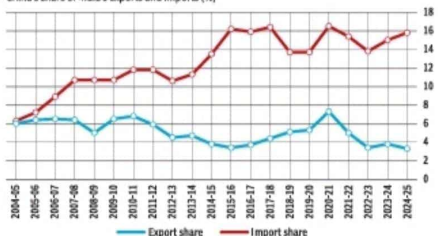


CHART 2

Deficit gulf

India's trade deficit with China (\$ mn)

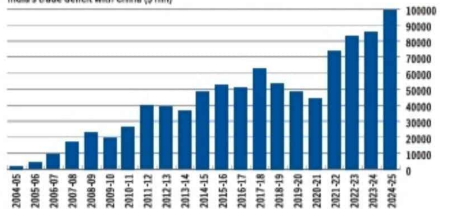


CHART 3

Export profile

Shares in total of India's principal exports to China (%)

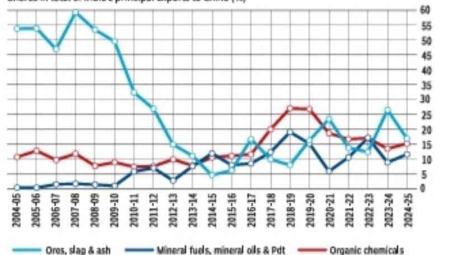


CHART 3

Advantage China

China's contribution to India's trade deficit (%)

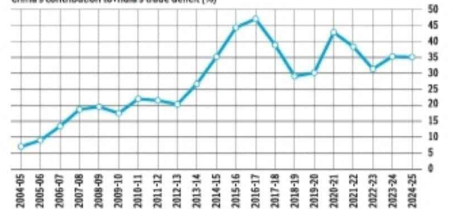
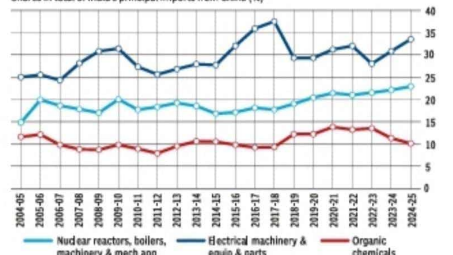


CHART 5

Import profile

Shares in total of India's principal imports from China (%)



thehindubusinessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

September 2, 2005

Govt to tighten disclosure norms for company deposits

In its continued efforts to protect the interests of investors and dissuade companies from defaulting on repayment of deposits, the Ministry of Company Affairs (MCA) proposes to tighten the disclosure norms for acceptance of deposits.

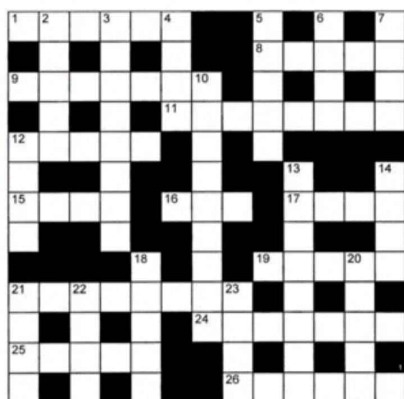
IOC, Caliaik to submit bid for 51% stake in Turkish firm

An Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) team is set to furnish its bid for a 51 per cent stake in Turkish Petroleum Refineries Corporation (Tupras), the Turkish oil refining company, on Friday. According to senior IOC officials, a sub-committee of the IOC board is in Turkey to submit the bid. IOC had submitted an expression of interest for acquisition of 51 per cent stake on June 14.

TCS, Infosys clinch deals worth \$400 m from ABN Amro

In one of the biggest global IT outsourcing deals in recent times, Indian vendors Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) and Infosys Technologies have clinched a total of just over euro 300 million (\$400 million) worth of business from Dutch financial powerhouse ABN Amro.

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2773



EASY

ACROSS

01. Putting a question (6)
08. Country house (5)
09. Take part in contest (7)
11. Having as a final position (6,2)
12. Mirror (5)
15. Fiddling emperor (4)
16. Joining-word (3)
17. Spanning feature (4)
19. Bedeck, embellish (5)
21. Ridge vegetable (8)
24. Different, various (7)
25. Rainbow fish (5)
26. Modest, affectingly so (6)

DOWN

02. Damage, mar (5)
03. One making false claim (8)
04. Confute to college (4)
05. Take advantage of opportunity (5)
06. Ensign (4)
07. Freshwater fish (4)
10. In an intricate muddle (9)
12. Dinner summons (4)
13. Muse whilst awake (8)
14. Have nothing to do with (4)
18. Deliver mighty blow (5)
20. Upright part of stair (5)
21. Children's beds (4)
22. Chef (4)
23. Skin of melon (4)

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

01. It is like a monarch issuing an invitation (6)
08. House it's a misfortune to have in Virginia (5)
09. How might cop meet with difficulty, yet take part? (7)
11. Pending to turn, is at last finishing like this (6,2)
12. Tumbler will begin gymnastics with a girl (5)
15. Fiddler who got the right one wrong (4)
16. Conjunction has returned the building-block of life (3)
17. Supreme way to put one's back up (4)
19. Add embellishment and/or a mixture of it (5)
21. Cool as copper twice has to be when Mister is around (8)
24. Deep-sea operatives going east: that's different (7)
25. Tank-top and trouser-bottom, dismissed by a swimmer (5)
26. Modest of me to make a comeback in rude assembly (6)

DOWN

02. Quietly sunk in the earth, it will ruin things (5)
03. I am to get a job with gold, but I am not who I say (8)
04. Get a different sort of people paying to see match (4)
05. What's the use of a Valentine if one is included in it? (5)
06. It may have its day, Jack! (4)
07. Be giggling when criticising a swimmer (4)
10. Net torn as one fished and got all wound up in it (9)
12. Going to lose heart if medal is awarded (4)
13. Have a waking vision of Mary, dead though she might be (8)
14. Call for attention which one will ignore (4)
18. Deliver blow that will leave it in an endless sort of mess (5)
20. He gets up this part of the stair (5)
21. Second half of the fruit beds (4)
22. Fiddle the books and perhaps put it on back-burner (4)
23. Outside of bacon is right in the end of the lard (4)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2772

ACROSS 1. Doyen 4. Boredom 8. Fruit machines 10. Vista 11. Ebon 12. Hair 16. House 17. Authorisation 19. Earnest 20. Sults

DOWN 1. Differentiate 2. You 3. Native 4. Brassy 5. Reheat 6. Dance-band 7. Misapprehends 9. Projector 13. Throne 14. Quint 15. Repays 18. Ill

Despite US tariffs India is the nation in limelight

HARSHA KAKAR

With the passage of time Donald Trump's Alaska summit appears to not only have failed but also to have displayed a changing world order. Sanctions on India for procuring Russian oil and thereby funding their war machinery were aimed at pressuring India into switching alliances. India refused to budge. Trump, in his desperation to display proximity to Vladimir Putin, and hoping he would accept direct talks with Ukraine's President Zelenskyy, made European leaders wait while he spoke to him. This too failed. Trump's dream of a Nobel is fading. While Putin has not commented on Trump's summit request, his foreign minister Sergei Lavrov made the Russian position clear. He debunked most of what Trump and his European allies had suggested. On security guarantees he mentioned that a group of nations, including UNSC members, should be guarantors of Ukraine's security. These would automatically include Russia and China. He added that non-UNSC members being part of guarantors must be 'neutral, non-aligned with any military bloc and non-nuclear,' implying almost no NATO role. He added that NATO membership was unacceptable, and that protection for Russian speakers in Ukraine and territorial realignment need to be accepted.

Finally on Putin-Zelenskyy summit, Lavrov mentioned, "Putin is ready to meet with Zelenskyy when the agenda is ready for a summit, and this agenda is not ready at all." Generally, leaders' summits are photo-ops, with most preparations done by diplomats in advance. A meeting without pre-set

agendas or approved agreements has little chance of success.

Lavrov's comments came after he met Indian EAM S. Jaishankar, implying India was on board with the Russian view. Putin, like most heads of state, would prefer issues being discussed and finalized between diplomats, with limited refinement at the summit.

At Alaska, Trump went in promising a ceasefire, but ended up singing Putin's tune of peace. Trump also made no mention of additional sanctions on Russia. What was more embarrassing was his subsequent meeting with European leaders in Washington, where he bulldozed his views on ending the conflict. However, Russia refused to play ball.

Meanwhile the war continues. Drone and missile strikes are being launched by both sides. While Russia targets new regions, Ukraine targeted a Russian nuclear power plant. The West fears a fresh Russian offensive could be disastrous for Ukraine.

Trump, defending his decision on the US not funding Ukraine, mentioned that it is NATO which is procuring US armaments for delivery to Kiev, implying US companies are earning from the conflict. Leaders from Europe continue streaming into Ukraine offering support. The latest to visit Kiev or speak to Zelenskyy include Canada's PM, the NATO Secretary General, the German Vice-Chancellor and the Norwegian PM.

The Russian economy may be slowing down but is nowhere near levels which could compel Putin to change his stance. India, whom the US targeted with additional sanctions, has refused to bend, despite sanctions having some impact on the economy and employment. China, already under 55 per cent tariffs, remains

firm. The leaders of the three nations met over the weekend on the sidelines of the SCO summit at Tianjin in China. Putin had already briefed PM Modi on the outcome of the Alaska summit.

The manner in which European leaders rushed to the US to display solidarity with Ukraine and possibly project a united front turned out to be an embarrassment. Images released by the White House displayed them being treated as errant schoolchildren by Trump.

This is primarily because for decades Europe ignored its defence and remained dependent on the US for security. This has enabled Washington to override their views. Plans to increase defence spending to 5 per cent over the next decade will have limited impact for the present. Europe is no longer the power it once was.

With Europe largely left to fend Ukraine and prepare for future hostile scenarios, it cannot afford to be involved in trade conflicts on America's demands. It has thus far refused to respond to Washington's requests to impose sanctions on India. Talks on a free trade agreement are in an advanced stage. This benefits India.

Military and economic power is rising in Asia. India and China are two major powers in the region. Russia is closely associated to both. The Russia-India-China triad can be an economic and military powerhouse in the future, provided India and China overcome their trust deficit and resolve their border issues. The recent visit of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi indicated change. It is to be seen whether it will hold true.

A media report in a German newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine



Zeitung mentioned that Trump had attempted to call PM Modi on a number of occasions but failed. Though dates have not been mentioned, it is likely to be recent. Possible reasons for PM Modi avoiding conversation with Trump include his determination not to open India's agricultural sector, refusal to stop procurement of Russian oil and to prevent Trump from exploiting the call to reiterate his claims of brokering peace.

Today India is the nation to watch. It is being wooed by China with promises to resolve pending issues and by Russia which seeks that it remains a partner, while the US assumes that bullying on trade can compel India to change its position. Peter Navarro, the US trade advisor, has never given so many interviews on a single subject as he has done on US sanctions on India, nor has Trump discussed the Russo-Ukraine war as many times as brokering the Indo-Pak ceasefire.

India is willing to stand up to US bullying and the nation stands behind the government. The Trump administration's attempts to justify sanctions may not get New Delhi to bend but rather compel it to alter its trade and financial policies to absorb a part of the losses from US sanctions. Meanwhile the US-India two plus two dialogue was held indicating that there are signs of normalization.

India will be on firmer ground provided its relations with China, which also faces high tariffs, mend. With Europe in decline and bullied by Trump, it is Asian giants and Russia standing up to it. At some stage, Trump will need to reassess his current strategy towards India if the US seeks to contain China's rise. This may possibly flow from a summit this month on the sidelines of the UNGA session, in case PM Modi visits New York. Details have yet to be released. Till then, India will stand firm.

(The writer is a retired Shapa General of the Indian Army.)

100 Years Ago

OCCASIONAL NOTE

Disappointment must be felt that when the European Association devotes an evening meeting to the discussion of the opening of the Malden to Sunday games so few of the young men engaged in shops and offices, for whom the facilities are sought, deem it worth while to attend the gathering. The debate on Friday evening would have been more effective had the would-be players themselves taken part in it. Even as it was the advocates of Sunday games had matters very much their own way and most outnumbered the opponents. There is, in fact, very little effective public opinion against the use of the Malden on Sundays. What is wanted is the demonstration of a demand sufficiently strong to overcome the inertia of authority. To that demand the European Association has even a lead: it is for those who are actually interested to make the agitation for change effective.

News Items

MISS BILLINGTON

DEATH OF NOTED WOMAN JOURNALIST

London

The death has occurred of the women journalist, Mary Frances Billington.—Reuters Special Service.

FIGHTING CANCER

BRITISH SCIENTIST'S FUTURE EXPERIMENTS

(Special Cable).

London.

The method of research leading to the recent discovery of the germ believed to be the cause of cancer was explained by Scientist J. E. Bernard to the British Association. A photograph showing the organism itself taken by a new combined method of microscopy and ultra-violet rays, enabling magnification three thousand diameters and revealing organizing one-third of the size previously revealed by the best microscopes was also exhibited. The scientists' researches in conjunction with Doctor Gye are at present directed towards cancer, but they hope to catch the microbes of whooping cough, measles, scarlet fever, and other filter-passing viruses.—Copyright.

NO CAUSE FOR ALARM

VIEWS OF THE FRENCH PRESS

(Special Cable).

Sydney, Aug.

J. Paddon and Major Goodsell have been matched to scull for the World's championship and £200 a side to take place in Australia on the Paramatta River on September 26. Goodsell at present holds the championship owing to Paddon relinquishing it last year.—Copyright.

AIR COLLISION IN ENGLAND

THREE OFFICERS KILLED

London

Three officers of the Royal Air Force were killed and one officer injured in a collision between two aeroplanes near Cambridge.—Reuters.

ESCORT FOR MAILS

R. A. F. CO-OPERATION FROM BAGDAD

Bagdad

British mails which should have left Bagdad yesterday for Damascus by the trans-desert route, to connect with the P. and O. steamer Egypt but were delayed owing to Wednesday's attack on a motor convoy near Damascus, left Bagdad to-day for Cairo in two big Royal Air Force machines. The R.A.F. co-operation is greatly appreciated. Although the cross-desert overland route has been officially closed, pending the receipt of further information regarding the extent of the upheaval in Syria, one Naim passenger convoy will leave Damascus for Bagdad on Saturday with mails, escorted for a hundred miles from Damascus by French armoured cars. The latter will meet the passenger convoy which left Bagdad to-day, with which the French escort will return to Damascus.—Reuters.

State now a part of US capitalism

H SAMI KAKARA

Is the Trump administration trying to reshape American capitalism? Recent moves by Washington, such as taking a 10 per cent share of semiconductor maker Intel, point to a shift in that direction. For decades, Washington has supported free-market capitalism. Today, the government appears to be supporting a new direction—state-directed capitalism.

As a professor at the Questrom School of Business who studies different economic systems, I find this reversal striking. My research is supported by the Ravi K. Mehrotra Institute, which is trying to understand how business, markets and society interact. My previous research—finding, for example, that U.S. news coverage of capitalism was far more negative in the 1940s than it is now—suggests capitalism isn't in retreat but is rather evolving.

In what direction is the Trump administration pushing it? While many people bandy around the term 'capitalism,' it actually comes in many different forms. The most basic definition of capitalism is when the means of production—such as factories, farms and offices—are owned by private individuals.

Capitalism is driven by profit. Some of the earliest descriptions of the profit motive that drives the whole system come from Adam Smith. As he wrote in 1776, "It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer or the baker that we expect our dinner,

but from their regard to their own interest."

Who gets the profits and who controls the means of production determine the specific forms of capitalism. While there are many types, I want to focus on three of the most important.

Free-market capitalism, also called laissez faire capitalism, is when the government takes a hands-off approach to the economy. The U.S. after the Civil War is a good example of free-market capitalism. During the late 1800s, the federal government imposed few regulations on businesses.

State-guided capitalism is when the government chooses industries or companies to support. Favored sectors are given money and face looser regulations than non-favored sectors. China today is an example of state-guided capitalism, where the state provides support for industries such as shipbuilding, steel and AI.

Oligarchic capitalism is when a very small part of the population owns key industries and controls the economy. Russia today is an example of this type of capitalism.

Each form of capitalism has its strengths and weaknesses. For example, free-market capitalism provides the most incentives to grow the economy, but the lack of rules often leads businesses to run roughshod over consumers. U.S. historians describe the late 1800s as the era of robber barons.

State-guided capitalism can dramatically boost the output of favoured industries. However, if the

government invests in the wrong industries, huge amounts of money can be wasted propping up dying firms.

Oligarchic capitalism can rapidly invest in new areas and shift resources, but the profits enrich only a tiny elite.

The U.S. currently appears to be operating under a hybrid model of capitalism, blending free-market principles with elements of state capitalism.

One of the most recent changes is the Trump administration's decision to take a 10 per cent stake in Intel. Congress passed the multibillion-dollar CHIPS and Science Act in 2022 to bolster U.S. computer chipmakers. Intel is slated to receive US\$1.1 billion in grants from the programme and other government funding. The current administration has converted that public support into a 10 per cent ownership of the semiconductor maker.

Intel isn't alone. The government has recently become a shareholder in other companies it views as strategically important—a trend that seems likely to continue and possibly result in the creation of a "sovereign wealth fund." In July 2025, the Department of Defense agreed to buy \$400 million of convertible preferred stock in MP Materials. MP Materials is the only U.S. rare-earth minerals mine with integrated production capacity. The company said the Department of Defense would be positioned to become its largest shareholder. The government is also requiring a share of revenue from large computer chip manufacturers.



Nvidia and AMD will have to remit 15 per cent of revenue from certain chip sales to China as a condition for export licenses.

The CHIPS and Science Act has already funnelled billions into U.S. semiconductor manufacturing via grants, tax credits and R&D support. MP Materials and Intel could serve as pilot models for further strategic intervention. However, the U.S. government spends trillions each year, and the amounts invested in American industries and companies represent only a small percentage of total spending.

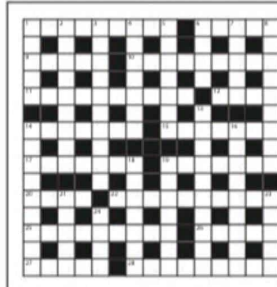
While the CHIPS and Science Act was passed in 2022 under the Biden administration, the implementation relied on traditional tools of industrial policy such as grants, tax credits and milestone-based funding. In contrast, the Trump administration has converted

these grants into equity arrangements, with officials stating the government should get a return on its investment.

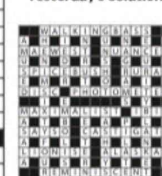
This shift from an incentive-based approach to a direct ownership model represents one of the most fascinating experiments in modern American capitalism. The real question is what happens if—or when—this strategy expands. The government could become more involved in energy, biotech and AI, or any place where markets show signs of lagging or supply chains are geopolitically fragile. The U.S. isn't rejecting capitalism but recalibrating its boundaries. The next few years will show exactly how Washington's interventions will reshape U.S. capitalism.

(The writer is Professor of Business Analytics, Questrom School of Business, Boston University. This article was published on www.bostonherald.com.)

Crossword No. 29320



Yesterday's Solution



ACROSS

- 1 Soldier and sailor returning after leave (6,5)
- 6 Die for soft rugs from the east (5)
- 9 Get maintaining it's indispensable (5)
- 10 Breast feeding Polish queen becoming abrasive perhaps (9)
- 11 Handy to have tin for cash (5,5)
- 12 Suffer when exposed in speech (4)
- 14 Points is taken in by girl's facial expression of disgust (7)

DOWN

- 15 Went to protect my back in advance (7)
- 17 Tolerant fellow and striking girl doing a bunk (7)
- 19 Artist's mother to pose for painters around the London area (7)
- 20 Supporter finding witty remark after Sunak's first to resign (4)
- 22 Eccentric talent shown by Bill in race abroad (10)
- 23 Happen to be right about anger following answer by Penny (5)
- 24 On up then near the centre of (5)

ACROSS

- 26 What Madame Defarge does fools king in the beginning (5)
- 27 Grant makes a profit (5,2)
- 28 Officer extremely lucky as a rule (5)

DOWN

- 1 Daughter having too much port (5)
- 2 Office suit annoyed by legal proceedings about to be dismissed (9)
- 3 Barely messed up by experts in team events (5,3)
- 4 On up then near the centre of (5)

ACROSS

- 14 Bravery of girl soldier captured in Lowell's opening lines (9)
- 16 In distress it's seen by almost everybody as absolutely necessary (9)
- 18 Rotation is good after shock at home (7)
- 19 Ponder over trace of ergot on popular plant (7)
- 21 Let loose at the outset then relax (5)
- 23 Attempt to speak in support of drugs (5)
- 24 Employed by some pious educators (4)

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



Editor's TAKE

Modi, Xi meet amid tariff turmoil

India and China edge closer after years of hostility, as Narendra Modi meets Xi in Tianjin amid Trump's tariff shocks, reshaping Delhi's foreign policy choices

India and China are coming closer by every passing day. After the 2020 border clashes, the two countries had taken strong positions against each other, and India had tilted towards the US as China frowned upon the growing Indian affinity towards the US. Now the tables have turned — India is moving closer to China as the US President frowns and his administration is out to discredit India's new foreign policy choices. But the irony is that it is Trump who is responsible for pushing India towards China and Russia. When Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi landed in Tianjin for the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit, it was more than just a routine diplomatic engagement. His meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping has come at a time when global economic turbulence — especially from the Trump administration's tariff strikes — has redrawn the calculus of India's foreign policy.

Earlier, the 2020 border clashes had cast a long shadow, and Beijing's continued support to Pakistan's military which raised doubts in Delhi about the viability of long-term cooperation.

But now the situation has changed drastically. For Modi, craving in to American demands would have meant abandoning a trusted ally in Moscow and undermining his strongman image at home. Instead, he has chosen to assert himself by diversifying his partnerships. And there is no bigger partner in sight than China — the world's second-largest economy and India's immediate neighbour. The Modi-Xi meeting in Tianjin reflected this pragmatism. There is a discernible change in the air: resumption of direct flights, simplification of visa processes, and some other goodwill gestures. These are modest but symbolic steps, signalling intent to mend ties. For Modi, the visit is an opportunity to reset relations that he once personally invested in with great zeal. Between 2014 and 2018, he visited China five times. That momentum was derailed by the bloody border clashes of 2020, which left both sides wary.

The SCO platform now offers a stage for cautious re-engagement. For Xi, too, there is incentive. China's slowing economy, increasing strategic rivalry with the US, and a need for stable regional ties make improved relations with India desirable. However, challenges remain: Border disputes, mistrust over Pakistan, and competing ambitions in the Indo-Pacific are formidable roadblocks. Yet the current global environment, where old alliances appear shaky and protectionist impulses run high, has created a window for India and China to rediscover pragmatism.

By putting India under economic pressure, Washington has inadvertently accelerated Delhi's search for alternatives — making Beijing a necessary, if uneasy, partner. The Tianjin meeting may not have produced dramatic breakthroughs, but it has restarted a stalled conversation.

For Modi and Xi, both seasoned leaders with strong domestic mandates, the coming months will test whether they can translate gestures into substance. And on their decisions rests the future of Asia.

India's Growth Shows Resilience

A growing workforce with rising incomes provides not just near-term support for consumption but also long-term confidence in India's demographic dividend



ROUHIN DEB

The month of August has delivered a resounding message from India — one that stands out amid the turbulence of the global economy. The recently released GDP data for the first quarter of FY 2025-26 confirms what many had intuited but few expected to see so strongly: India's economy is resilient, reform-oriented, and ready for renewed growth.

Data from MOSPI shows that India's real GDP grew at 7.8 per cent in April-June 2025, far exceeding analyst expectations and marking a five-quarter high. This performance makes India not only the fastest-growing major economy but also one that is steadily widening its lead over peers.

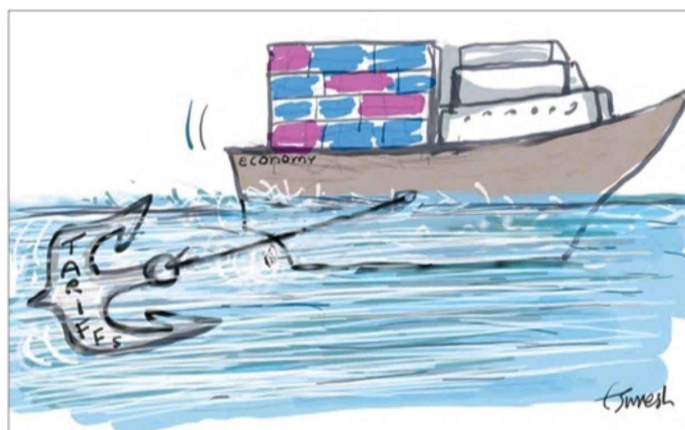
The numbers are encouraging not merely for their scale but for what they signify about the underlying health of the economy. Supply-side drivers — manufacturing, construction, and services — recorded strong expansion, reflecting broad-based momentum.

On the demand side, robust private consumption and investment provided the bedrock of growth. Private Final Consumption Expenditure (PFCE) grew by 7 per cent, pushing its share of GDP to 60.3 per cent — the highest first-quarter level in 15 years.

Several recent policy steps have buoyed household sentiment: Income tax relief announced in the Union Budget, a 100 basis point cut in the repo rate, and healthy progress in Kharif sowing, each of which has amplified disposable incomes and eased financial conditions. Meanwhile, Gross Fixed Capital Formation (GFCF) grew by 7.8 per cent, underpinned by a surge in both public and private investments. The Government's capital expenditure in Q1 was 30.1 per cent higher than the average for the same quarter in the past three years, reflecting its continued focus on infrastructure.

The private sector, too, showed renewed confidence, with new investment announcements rising 3.3 times year-on-year. With RBI data showing that capacity utilisation has risen both sequentially and year-on-year, the manufacturing sector appears poised for further expansion.

Equally heartening is the macroeconomic stability accompanying this growth. Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation eased to an eight-year low in July 2025, giving households greater spending power and businesses more predictable cost structures. The Union government's fiscal deficit-to-GDP ratio is expected to moderate further to 4.4 per cent in 2025-26, showing steady consolidation from the pandemic-fuelled high reached in FY 2020-21. The labour market



The Pioneer SINCE 1865

THE IMPOSITION OF FRESH US TARIFFS HAS UNSETTLED EXPORTERS, AND THE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT REMAINS FRAUGHT WITH GEOPOLITICAL

Rouhin Deb is the Chief Economist, Chief Minister's Secretariat, Government of Assam
@dailyPioneer
@TheDailyPioneer
The Pioneer

is showing encouraging signs. Formal sector job creation in Q1 FY26 was 1.6 times higher than a year ago. Urban unemployment remains well below pre-pandemic levels, while hiring activity has stayed buoyant — the Naukri JobSpeak index points to continued recruitment momentum.

A growing workforce with rising incomes provides not just near-term support for consumption but also long-term confidence in India's demographic dividend.

Concerns about the deflator being low are also unfounded. Converting nominal GDP (valued at current prices) into real GDP (valued at constant prices) by applying an inflation indicator is a longstanding and globally accepted practice. A small gap between real and nominal GDP growth is simply a statistical reflection of the prevailing low-inflation environment, not a data anomaly.

The GDP deflator covers the full spectrum of goods and services in the economy, unlike CPI (limited to household consumption) or WPI (which excludes services). One of the former Chief Statisticians has even noted that the GDP deflator is "possibly the most accurate measure of inflation." If inflation is low, the deflator will naturally also be low. This is precisely the case in Q1 FY 2025-26.

Beyond the numbers, August brought a symbolic milestone. S&P upgraded India's long-term sovereign credit rating to 'BBB' from 'BBB-', the first upgrade in 18 years. The recognition was underpinned by strong economic growth,

enhanced monetary policy credibility, and a clear government commitment to fiscal consolidation.

For India, this upgrade holds real economic consequences. Lower borrowing costs, higher investor confidence, and increased foreign capital inflows are likely to follow. Of course, India is not immune to global headwinds. The imposition of fresh US tariffs has unsettled exporters, and the external environment remains fraught with geopolitical uncertainty and shifting trade alignments.

Yet, the government and industry appear to be preparing themselves for the brace, with reports of constant engagement between them. Growth may moderate in the quarters ahead as the base effect wanes, but the baseline is now higher.

With reforms deepening, investment gathering pace, and macroeconomic stability intact, India looks to sustain growth well above global averages. India's Q1 FY26 print is, however, not a finish line. The recovery is broadening, but sustaining higher growth will depend on further reforms, keeping inflation expectations anchored, and raising productivity.

With the GST Council due this week, locking in GST rationalisation with a stable, lower-rate structure becomes important. If both steady macro anchors from the Centre and a competitive reform push from all the states move in lockstep, India can convert resilience into a higher, more stable growth path.

PIC TALK



"Garba" dance group rehearses in Ahmedabad ahead of the nine-day Navratri festival. PHOTO: PTI

DIGITAL EXPERIENCE

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COACHING CULTURE ERODING EDUCATION AND FAMILIES

The fast-expanding trend of coaching has ruined parents' budgets. Coaching is increasingly being accepted as a requirement for students. According to a recent Government of India survey, almost one in every four schoolchildren in the country receives private coaching. Overall, 27 per cent of the students in the country take private coaching. This percentage is higher in cities, where it was found to be around 31 per cent. In rural areas, it is about 25 per cent less than in urban areas.

The survey also shows that 56 per cent of students in the country are studying in Government schools. In such a situation, the growing prevalence of coaching is more a sign of systemic weakness than

of aspirations. Due to lack of proper teaching in classes, the attention and money of students are being diverted to coaching centres that run parallel to schools. These coaching centres, whose sole aim is to earn profit, are creating an artificial competition in society. Instead of focusing on holistic learning, students are being driven into a race for marks. Parents, under pressure, are forced to spend beyond their means. Unless the education system itself is strengthened, this trend will only deepen inequality. Unless schools regain their central role in quality learning, coaching will continue to thrive at the cost of both students and parents.

ABHIRAM J. RAMSHEDPUR

Rediscovering the Art of Restful Sleep



RAVI VALLURI

2ND OPINION

There are four sources of energy which ensure our sustenance on planet Earth. These include food, breath, rest or sleep, besides a calm and meditative state of mind. These virtues are dealt with extensively in various programmes of the Art of Living. Unfortunately, humans generally pay scant attention to this sagacious advice at their own peril. Consequently, they suffer from various physical and psychological disorders.

On account of the modern-day lifestyle, we are popping sleeping pills. Because of deprived sleep, one feels enervated, not refreshed, which interferes with working and maintaining social contacts. Excessive sleep results in grogginess, headaches, mood swings, obesity, diabetes, and even back problems. Zen teachings advi-

cate that sleep is remaining in the present and not permitting the mind to wander into the past or future. Aeon ago, a tutee asked a Zen master how to achieve peace of mind. The master replied: "When I eat, I eat. When I walk, I walk. When I sleep, I sleep." The postulant pointed out that everyone does those things. The master explained that a majority of people eat while thinking or walking, they sleep while thinking about eating or other things. The monk learned to stop combing the wind by observing the bamboo grow. The bamboo, while bending and swaying, did not resist the wind.

The core message in these stories is that true sleep, like true mindfulness, involves living in the present and not dwelling on thoughts, but rather allowing the mind to settle into stillness.

Adequate sleep is extremely important due to the impact it has on our health. Appropriate sleep is salutary for our mental focus and memory, for combating stress, maintaining proper body weight, boosting the immune system, and a host of other wellness needs. It is interesting that infants and young children require 12-16 hours, depending on their age. Teenagers invariably need 8-10 hours of sleep. On the other hand, adults between the ages of 18 and 64 are refreshed with 7-9 hours of sleep. Lastly, those aged 65 years and above feel rejuvenated with around seven hours of sleep. Some

golden rules to enhance sleep quality include regular physical exercise. Merely walking 10,000 steps is not enough. It should be accompanied by practices like Surya Namaskars, Padmasadhana, pranayama, Sudarshan Kriya, and meditation.

Equally important is maintaining fixed sleeping timings daily. Avoid smoking, alcohol, and caffeine before bedtime. The stomach should be light, as a heavy meal often causes restlessness and impairs sleep. A short walk before sleeping aids digestion and relaxation, as it disrupts alignment, heightens agitation, and hampers sleep. West is said to favour professionals and leaders, fostering stability and financial well-being.

"Sleep is the golden chain that ties health and our bodies together." — Thomas Dekker

The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

India China relations wary

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Sunday meeting with President Xi Jinping in China is less a breakthrough than a tactical necessity.

India and China may talk, but mistrust runs deep. Just three months ago, Indian officials accused Beijing of supplying Pakistan with intelligence and weapons during the May clashes — a reminder that China never hesitates to arm India's enemies while preaching "friendship." In Tianjin, Modi chose restraint, citing fragile calm after years of Chinese provocation between 2020 and 2024. But his silence was strategic, not trusting. Xi's claim that friendship is the "right choice" rings hollow when set against Beijing's record of border incursions, shielding terrorists, and expanding influence in the Indian Ocean. China speaks of cooperation while practicing coercion.

For India, engagement with Beijing is less optimism than compulsion, driven by Donald Trump's tariff shocks and shifting global alignments. New Delhi's caution is visible: The Agni V missile test on August 20, and Modi's refusal to attend Xi's September 3 World War II parade, are deliberate signals. This is not reconciliation, but a wary handshake with an adversary India cannot afford to trust.

War journalism's heavy price

Reporting from a war zone is never easy. Many courageous journalists risk their lives to bring news from such places. People often assume that they are provided with safety measures, but in reality, most of the time no such protection exists.

Journalists take responsibility for their own safety while reporting the hardships and struggles that ordinary people face.

Al Shifa is a well-known hospital in Gaza. Outside this hospital, a tent accommodates many foreign journalists, as Al Shifa has become the most significant reporting centre in Gaza. Since the war between Hamas and Israel began, hundreds have been killed or injured, with most of them brought here.

The serious issue is that around 200 journalists covering the war have already lost their lives. To understand the intensity of the conflict and to communicate it to the world, Al Shifa hospital has become a vital hub. Both local and foreign journalists gather here, risking their lives in the line of duty.

The work of these journalists is no less dangerous than that of soldiers — in fact, sometimes the risk is greater. The death of nearly 200 journalists is indeed a tragic and alarming reality.



India's silent disaster: Road accidents demand urgent action

Road accidents remain outside the ambit of India's disaster management framework, weakening the urgency of response. It is time to treat road safety as a national priority, anchored in science, governance reforms, and adhering to principles of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction

FIRST Column



SATENDRA SINGH



TANUSHREE

India has been struggling with the menace of road accidents for a long time, an issue that has grown into one of the most serious public health and development crises of our time. A recent news item, published in *The Pioneer* on August 29, 2025, titled India Tops Global Road Accident Deaths, highlighted that in 2023 alone, India witnessed over 4.8 lakh road accidents, resulting in more than 1.72 lakh fatalities—an alarming average of 20 deaths every hour. This amounts to an average of twenty fatalities every hour. Even more concerning is that nearly two-thirds of the victims were aged between 18 and 45—the most active segment of society and often the breadwinners for their households.

The information depicts a bleak scenario. India, representing roughly 1 per cent of the global vehicle count, is responsible for nearly 11 per cent of worldwide road fatalities, positioning its roads among the most perilous globally. Reasons are diverse—reckless driving, excessive speed, driving under the influence, inadequate road design, weak enforcement of traffic regulations, insufficient emergency response, and lack of public awareness. Included in this are systemic issues like insufficient coordination between agencies, absence of data-informed planning, and inadequate incorporation of technology.

These events are not merely unfortunate occurrences; they represent the most severe type of human-induced disaster in India. They seize young lives, destroy families, hinder livelihoods, and diminish national productivity. Nevertheless, (ironically, road accidents are not distinctly classified as disasters according to the regulations of the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA).

Due to their scale, frequency, and impact on people, this oversight diminishes the urgency of tackling them in the national disaster management system. It is crucial to reshape road safety as a key focus for disaster risk reduction, and the most effective method to do this is by coordinating India's



EXCESSIVE SPEED ON BADLY DESIGNED HIGHWAYS, ABSENCE OF PEDESTRIAN AMENITIES, POOR SIGNAGE, AND INADEQUATE LIGHTING INHERENTLY RENDER INDIAN ROADS UNSAFE

Satendra Singh is former Executive Director of the National Institute of Disaster Management and Tanushree is Doctoral Fellow, Amity University

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approach with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR). The SFDRR, supported by the United Nations, highlights four priority areas that can act as the foundation of an all-encompassing strategy to lower road accident hazards.

Understanding Disaster Risk

The foundation of any strategy is rooted in understanding the extent and characteristics of the problem. Ensuring road safety demands strong, immediate, and evidence-based data gathering. India should progress past antiquated records and disjointed statistics to create a unified road safety data system that incorporates information from police, hospitals, transport departments, and local agencies. In this context, tools such as Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and remote sensing can accurately identify accident hotspots. By overlaying traffic patterns, road conditions, land use, and population data, officials can pinpoint high-risk areas and prioritise measures.

Public awareness is equally crucial. Campaigns must be consistent, data-informed, and focused, especially on young audiences, rather than being seasonal or merely symbolic.

Disaster Risk Governance

A major obstacle in India is the fragmented management of road safety. Responsibilities are dispersed among transport departments, law enforcement, local authorities, and the healthcare sector, often leading to unclear account-

ability. Effective risk reduction requires organisational cohesion and strong legal backing.

Establishing a National Road Safety Authority, legally authorised and responsible for results, could provide essential integration. Governance should also encompass state and district levels, with disaster management agencies considering road accidents as a fundamental responsibility.

Here again, technology can strengthen governance. AI-driven traffic surveillance systems can detect violations in real time—whether it is speeding, lane violations, or running red lights—and initiate automatic fines. This diminishes corruption, guarantees consistent implementation, and fosters deterrence. Likewise, a blockchain-based system can improve transparency in vehicle registration and licensing, reducing fraudulent activities.

Global instances emphasise the significance of robust governance. Sweden's Vision Zero succeeded not solely due to technology but because the government dedicated itself to the principle that "no loss of life is acceptable" as a national principle.

Disaster Risk Reduction

A significant factor contributing to road accidents in India is the hazardous design of roads and vehicles. Excessive speed on badly designed highways, absence of pedestrian amenities, poor signage, and inadequate lighting inherently render Indian roads unsafe. Consequently, invest-

ment in sensitive risk infrastructure is vital.

Roads should be designed with safety prioritised—segregating traffic flows, ensuring secure pedestrian crossings, and implementing intelligent traffic management systems (ITMS) that adjust to traffic and weather changes. GIS and remote sensing aid in road design by considering terrain, land use, and environmental hazards.

Simultaneously, there is a pressing need to enhance emergency response systems. Numerous accident victims perish not because of the accident itself, but due to holdups in receiving medical care—the "golden hour" is missed. India should allocate funds for AI-driven emergency call systems, automated accident detection in vehicles, and real-time tracking of ambulances. Drone technology can be utilised to swiftly evaluate accident sites in isolated or crowded locations, guaranteeing quicker triage.

Investments must prioritise public transportation and non-motorised movement, decreasing reliance on dangerous two-wheelers that lead to most road fatalities in India.

Preparedness for Effective Response

Preparedness extends beyond emergency response. It involves enhancing the capabilities of communities, institutions, and systems to foresee and handle road safety hazards efficiently. Educational programmes should incorporate road safety instruction from a young age, cultivating

a generation of mindful road users. Programmes for workplace safety should also focus on employees, particularly within the transport and logistics sectors.

Technology once more provides creative avenues. Simulators that utilise AI can aid in driver training, allowing individuals to encounter realistic situations prior to driving. Applications offering instantaneous traffic and hazard notifications can enable travellers to make more secure decisions.

The concept of "Build Back Better" is equally relevant to road safety. Following each accident, insights must inform design enhancements—such as redesigning dangerous intersections, improving signage, or implementing more rigorous testing protocols for drivers. Community involvement is essential in this context, as nearby residents frequently understand their hazardous areas better than remote planners do. Worldwide, use of AI-driven traffic monitoring and Sweden's strategic changes under Vision Zero demonstrate that readiness ought to be proactive, data-driven, and flexible.

Road Safety Driven by Science

Road accidents in India are more than mere figures—they symbolise a quiet catastrophe that takes more lives each year than numerous natural disasters together. However, in contrast to cyclones or earthquakes, this calamity can be avoided. By categorising road accidents as a form of disaster and implementing the four priorities of the Sendai Framework systematically, India can develop a strong, science-based, and compassionate approach.

Science and technology—ranging from GIS mapping and AI monitoring to drone evaluations and predictive analysis—have the potential to change how we plan, oversee, and utilise roads.

However, technology by itself is not enough. It must be integrated into governance reforms, legal structures, cultural transformations, and ongoing investments. Japan's implementation of AI for live traffic monitoring demonstrates the strength of creativity. India possesses the necessity and ability to carve its own route towards safer roads, driven by its demographic dividend and digital transformation.

The time has come to declare that no life lost on this road is acceptable. Only then can India truly transform its highways from death traps into lifelines of progress.

India-Russia nuclear partnership offers a blueprint for the Global South energy future

Building the future of Indian healthcare with preventive care

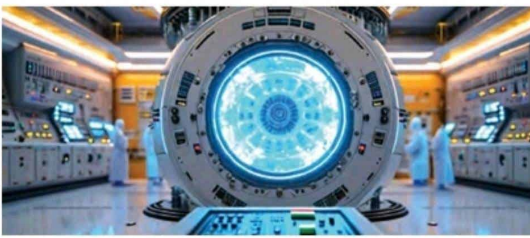


SITAKANTA MISHRA

The India-Russia nuclear partnership represents a significant case study in global energy cooperation, offering a replicable template for developing economies. In the context of unprecedented energy demand driven by demographic shifts in the Global South and the exponential growth of artificial intelligence (AI), this collaboration provides a model for achieving energy security, promoting technological transfer, and advancing climate objectives.

The future of global energy consumption is disproportionately tied to emerging and developing economies. According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), these nations account for over 80 per cent of the increase in global energy demand. Specifically, India and China are forecast to drive 60 per cent of the global electricity consumption increase between 2025 and 2026. This surge is not merely a consequence of population growth but is fundamentally linked to rapid industrialisation, urbanisation, and rising living standards. India's per capita electricity consumption, which reached 1,395 kWh in 2023-24, demonstrates a clear upward trajectory as millions of citizens join the middle class and integrate into the digital economy. This baseline growth is compounded by the burgeoning energy requirements of emerging technologies, most notably AI. Data centres, the physical infrastructure of the digital age and the core of AI operations, are projected to more than double their electricity demand by 2030, reaching approximately 945 TWh—an amount comparable to the current electricity consumption of Japan. While projections vary, some estimates suggest that by 2027, servers dedicated to AI could alone consume between 85 and 134 TWh of electricity annually.

This presents a critical challenge for developing nations: to meet this colossal, non-negotiable power demand while simultaneously decarbonising their energy mix to meet global climate commitments. In this environment of soaring demand and climate pressure, nuclear energy emerges as a strategic, high-capacity solution. Nuclear power offers a high capacity factor (often exceeding 90 per cent), providing consistent, baseload power 24/7. This stability is critical for industrial processes and, most importantly, for powering energy-intensive data centres that cannot tolerate interruptions. From a cost perspective, the Levelised Cost



of Electricity (LCOE) for advanced nuclear power was estimated at approximately \$10/kWh in 2023, according to the US Energy Information Administration (EIA).

This is higher than the LCOE for utility-scale solar PV, which was estimated at around \$55/MWh in the same year.

However, LCOE models often fail to account for the "value" of dispatchable power—the ability to generate electricity on demand—which is a key attribute of nuclear energy. The reliability and stability provided by nuclear plants justify a higher LCOE, particularly for nations seeking energy independence and robust industrial growth. For developing economies, nuclear power is about providing the foundational energy security required for sustained economic and technological development. The India-Russia nuclear partnership, centred on the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant (KNPP), serves as a robust blueprint for this model. Unlike traditional arrangements where a foreign vendor simply sells a reactor to a client nation, this partnership is defined by a deep, long-term commitment to technology transfer and capacity building. The formal collaboration began with an intergovernmental agreement in 1988 for the construction of two 1,000 MWe reactors. This foundational agreement was later formalised with a 1998 intergovernmental agreement and a subsequent 2010 framework agreement on additional nuclear power plant units at Kudankulam and new sites.

This sustained, multi-decade timeline of agreements underscores a commitment that transcends short-term political fluctuations. The KNPP project in Tamil Nadu, India, is the most tangible outcome of this partnership. The project utilises Russian-designed VVER-1000 pressurised water reactors. Crucially, the collaboration extended beyond the physical construction. Russian state-owned company Rosatom worked directly with India's Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL). This joint endeavour facilitated significant technology

transfer, allowing Indian engineers and scientists to gain first-hand exposure to advanced light water reactor technology.

This process was not about simply operating a foreign-built plant, but about developing the indigenous expertise required to design, construct, and operate a complex nuclear programme independently.

The partnership also included Russian support in strengthening India's nuclear safety and regulatory frameworks, ensuring compliance with international standards set by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The Russian side benefited from knowledge of construction in a tropical monsoon climate. This co-development model differentiates the India-Russia partnership from a one-way vendor-client transaction. The success and structure of this partnership have already been applied elsewhere. The Rosatom Nuclear Power Plant in Bangladesh is a direct example, featuring two VVER-1000 reactors with a total capacity of 2,400 MWe. A significant portion of the project is funded by a Russian loan, with India providing technical and operational support. This tripartite arrangement, with Russia as the primary technology provider and India as a trusted partner, validates the model as a blueprint for other nations in the Global South seeking nuclear energy programmes. India, having absorbed knowledge from this partnership, is leveraging its enhanced capabilities to pursue ambitious energy goals. The Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) aims to nearly triple installed nuclear capacity from 8,180 MW to 22,480 MW by 2031-2032. The co-development approach equips India with strategic autonomy, enabling it to meet surging domestic energy needs and participate in the global nuclear energy market.

The author is Dean, School of Liberal Studies, Pandit Deendayal Education University, Gujarat

daily_pioneer
@TheDailyPioneer
The Pioneer



SHARAN SHIVARAJ PATIL

The Indian healthcare system is currently standing at a pivotal moment. With the continuous rise in expectations, rapid urbanisation of people, and increasing disease burden, hospitals should go beyond traditional treatment to stay relevant to the community they serve. Healthcare should be community-centric, technology-driven, and future-ready as well.

Healthcare is not only based on treatment; it is also about belonging. In India, rapid urbanisation of people, taking place, and communities are too diverse, dynamic, and evolving as well. Understanding these demographics helps us shape care delivery models that feel personal and inclusive. For instance, when residents come from different states and cultures, the environment of the hospital—ranging from diversity of staff to simple details like food menus—must all reflect that inclusivity. Nowadays, the modern hospital must be more than just a treatment centre. It must be a super-specialty ecosystem.

A variety of advanced services ranging across cardiology, liver, kidney and lung transplants, robotic joint replacements, paediatrics, obstetrics and oncology must exist alongside a strong preventive and primary care system. All these integrations ensure that hospitals can serve both routine needs and highly complex cases, creating continuity of care which provides benefits to patients throughout their life journey.

At Sparsh Hospitals, this philosophy is already in practice at all our eight units, including the recently launched Hennur Road unit, which has established itself as a hub for advanced, multi-specialty care. The upcoming Sarjapur unit continues this vision, bringing together comprehensive specialties under one roof to ensure patients experience seamless care—from routine consultations to the most complex surgeries. Technology is the backbone and foundation of the new healthcare system. Paperless hospitals with interoperable patient records provide seamless access across all branches. Efficiency can be improved through command centres and real-time monitoring, while AI tools and applications—from predicting patient flow to supporting clinical decisions—make care more precise.

Digital apps also empower patients through registration, payments, consultations, and even emergency services at the tap of a screen. In combination, all these elements form a transparent, data-driven ecosystem that prioritises safety and



As cities grow, accessibility automatically becomes a challenge. Telemedicine outreach centres or residential and corporate campuses are transforming how healthcare is delivered to the public. Patients can also consult with specialists through virtual means while the local staff can manage diagnostics and prescriptions, reducing the need to visit the hospital frequently. By making healthcare accessible in the areas where people live and work, telemedicine reduces the gap between high-quality expertise and community-level delivery. The rising burden of non-communicable diseases makes early detection more critical than ever. Prevention and prediction supported by large-scale screening and data analytics are the way forward. Government should also take initiatives to lead mass preventive programmes, while private hospitals should regularly bring advanced diagnostics and treatment. These varied models of India reflect this philosophy, such as predictive and preventive care; curative care with advanced interventions and surgeries; and rehabilitation, palliation through recovery, long-term support, and dignity in end-of-life care.

India is currently standing on the threshold of becoming a global leader in the healthcare sector, just in the same way it did in IT. The availability of skilled professionals, well-maintained patient data, and innovative care models is unmatched. The missing link is research and innovation investment. Through the innovation of affordable, indigenous solutions tailored to Indian needs, we can create models that will grab the attention of the world. The future of healthcare belongs to those who combine affordability with innovation, the relevance of community with global standards, and prevention with cure—and India is ready to lead that future.

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The writer is Chief Orthopaedic Surgeon and Chairman of SPARSH Group of Hospitals

daily_pioneer
@TheDailyPioneer
The Pioneer



I firmly believe it is essential for the peoples of India and China to walk together on the world stage in order to make this a truly Asian century

Pranab Mukherjee

newindianexpress.com

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

—Rannath Goenka

CHINA MUST EARN INDIA'S TRUST, NOT MERELY MENTION IT

THE bilateral meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping, held on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit in Tianjin, marked a rare moment of diplomatic realism and strategic recalibration between two Asian giants navigating an increasingly fractured global order. At a time when the US is weaponising trade, evident in the recent 50 percent tariffs on key Indian exports, India and China have signalled the intent to decouple their bilateral trajectory from third-party pressures. Both Modi and Xi emphasised "strategic autonomy", a phrase that, in this context, served as a rejection of the zero-sum geopolitics shaping today's multi-polar world. Modi's assertion that India-China relations "must be grounded in mutual trust, respect, and sensitivity" and "not viewed through the lens of a third country" was timely and pointed. Xi's metaphor that "the dragon and the elephant must come together" framed the ties in civilisational terms, but did not shy away from contemporary imperatives.

Substantively, the meeting tackled two core tensions: terrorism and trade. Modi highlighted cross-border terrorism as a priority, drawing attention to the shared vulnerability both countries face. Foreign Secretary Vikram Misra's statement that China has shown "understanding and cooperation" is a welcome, if cautiously optimistic signal, particularly given Pakistan's presence in the SCO and Beijing's complex ties with Islamabad. The second area of friction, trade, saw both leaders acknowledge the pressing need to address India's ballooning deficit with China. Misra was forthright in recognising that narrowing this gap "will contribute to a change in perception in the relationship". The agreement to deepen trade and investment while boosting policy predictability and direct flights adds a layer of economic practicality to the diplomatic symbolism.

Importantly, both leaders reaffirmed that they are "partners, not rivals". With global supply chains rattled, and the Global South seeking a stronger voice, India and China, despite deep-rooted differences, seem aware that durable cooperation serves their national and regional interests. Yet, trust must be earned, not merely declared. Peace on the border remains a precondition for any lasting breakthrough. Resumption of the Kalash Mansarovar Yatra and direct flights are steps towards rebuilding people-to-people trust. This meeting may not transform the relationship overnight, but it has helped place it back on a more constructive—albeit cautiously optimistic—forward-looking path.

SHUTTLERS PUT UP FIGHT, HAVE A LONG WAY TO GO

AFTER being in the wilderness for almost all season, the Indian shuttlers breathed fresh life into their game in the last seven days or so, offering new hope ahead of the marquee continental event—the Asian Games—next year. After missing out on a medal at the Olympics and struggling in both singles and doubles at top BWF Tour events, India finally managed to win a medal at the BWF World Championships in Paris last week. Once again, it was the versatile duo of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty who showed they are still India's best. P V Sindhu displayed compelling signs of retracing her old steps even while falling short of a historic sixth world championship medal. However, it was enough to show that even at 30 she can bring her big-game mentality to the elite level. Her game against World No 2 Wang Yizhi had glimpses of the vintage Sindhu. However, it is a big concern that she was the only Indian representative in women's singles. Another spark was the mixed doubles combination of Dhruv Kapila and Tanisha Crasto, making their championship debut, who narrowly missed out on a medal. The fact that the duo came close to challenging a podium finish could act as a springboard for better results.

In the end, it was Satwik and Chirag who shone the brightest during the championships with some mind-bending tricks and flicks. What can be termed poetic is that at the very venue where they crashed out in the Olympics quarterfinals—the Adidas Arena—they avenged their defeat against A Chia and W Y Soh. Yet, they were no match for the Chinese duo of Y Lu and B Chen. The form of Lakshya Sen is a worrying factor. This time, India's top singles player's game lasted just 54 minutes against World No 1 Shi Yu Qi, who went on to win the title.

Despite the signs of improvement, what would bother India is their lack of bench strength. No young, up-and-coming player is even close to the level Sindhu was at that stage of her career. India will be hosting the world championships next year. For the game to grow, the nation needs results and new heroes. As of now, that seems elusive.

QUICK TAKE

GILDED AGE 20

WHITE House trade advisor Peter Navarro's remark about 'Brahmins' profiteering in India off Russian oil exposes at least two things. This, coming not long after he called India a 'laundromat for the Kremlin', shows that the motormouth has taken up the job of taunting India with unkind cuts. It also shows the 19th-century mindset of some in Trump's inner circle. The reference to 'Brahmins' harkens to the Boston Brahmins, early colonisers in the New World who made money from their links with the Old World and looked unkindly down the immigration ladder. Combine this with the recent gilded age of the White House—covering every trimming with gilt—that has been noted by many, and we have another danted Gilded Age of America. The joke is on the US, not us.

WARS are no longer fought only on land, at sea, or in the air. They are also fought in the invisible domain of information—where speed, precision and narrative shape outcomes even before a shot is fired. This has triggered a subtler, equally potent dimension: deterrence by information. A nation well-networked, agile in managing narratives, and proficient in handling information can create such a perception of dominance that adversaries hesitate to act.

The 1991 Gulf War was a revelation. The US stunned the world by fusing space-based intelligence, precision-guided munitions, real-time surveillance and live command networks into a seamless war machine. Iraqi forces were paralysed not only by physical destruction, but also by the overwhelming information superiority of the coalition forces. For the first time, 'embedded journalism' was relayed from the heart of the battlefield.

China was the keenest observer. It saw not just advanced weapons, but the systemic integration of sensors, shooters and decision-makers into a cohesive information grid. This was not a traditional war—it was warfare under informationised conditions. By 1993, the Chinese People's Liberation Army enshrined this as a doctrine. By 2003, it progressed to the innovation of the 'Three Warfares'—media, psychological and legal.

Media warfare meant controlling domestic and international narratives, influencing how conflicts were reported and shaping global perception of legitimacy. Chinese state media used these as strategic weapons. Psychological warfare was about sowing doubt, fear or hesitation in adversaries; while bolstering confidence of the allied audiences. Legal warfare created justifications for territorial claims and delegitimised adversary positions.

Crucially, China never saw these domains as separate from military power. Instead, as complementing the traditional force, and preparing the ground for kinetic operations. The effectiveness of China's approach became visible during regional confrontations. In Doklam (2017), and more starkly during the Galwan standoff and broader Ladakh tensions in 2020, the PLA demonstrated tight control over strategic communication—a deliberate media blackout, carefully curated leaks, and a disciplined presence.

Pakistan, too, has long understood the role of information in conflict. As early as 1949, it established the Inter-Services Public Relations, recognising information as a weapon system. Over decades, ISPR has

China formally embedded information warfare in its military doctrine decades ago. Learning from the recent past, India needs a whole-nation approach to wield messaging as a force multiplier

INDIA MUST USE LESSONS CHINA LEARNT LONG AGO



LT GEN SYED ATA HASNAIN (RETD)

Former Commander, Srinagar-based 15 Corps; Chancellor, Central University of Kashmir

evolved into a formidable narrative machine, blending military messaging with media engagement and international outreach. In 2023, during Operation Sindoor, Pakistan attempted to showcase its narrative-management capabilities following the Chinese template.

Rivals, not necessarily adversaries, may employ information offensively when it suits their strategic purpose. The current downturn in India-US relations is a case in point. Donald Trump's repeated claims that India is "profiteering" from discounted Russian oil, or that the Indian economy is "dead" are targeted messages intended to shape global perception and pressurise India. Trump's advisor Peter Navarro even called the Ukraine conflict "Modi's war". More recently, Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent dismissed the rupee's potential as a reserve currency. The idea here is to create narratives that deter India's strategic choices. It underlines that information

dominance is not only a weapon of adversaries, but can be used by friends and partners, too.

For India, the challenge has been both doctrinal and structural. The Shimla Agreement of 1972, to which India adheres strictly, insists that the issue of J&K must be resolved bilaterally. In theory, this has limited India's ability to internationalise its narrative, while Pakistan has worked relentlessly to globalise its propaganda.

Pakistan has, for decades, flooded international forums, think tanks, media houses and diaspora networks with narratives of victimhood, delegitimising India's position. Meanwhile, India's engagement has often been cautious, episodic and reactive. This gap became glaring in moments of crisis, especially after terrorist attacks orchestrated by Pakistani state or proxy actors, when India's counter-narratives lack prior insti-

THE MANY SHADES OF PATRIOTISM

SOME years ago, I was briefly in the Netherlands. The taxi from the airport was a faded green Mercedes. The driver, in a suit and skull cap, was a burly man with a white, flowing beard. He turned out to be a Pakistani and hummed a Dilip Kumar-Vijayanthimala song: "Teri huss ki kya tareef karun." He said he was happy—happier than he had ever been in Pakistan. He had been in his adopted country for 22 years and had no intention of going back to the land he once loved enough to flee. He was content to prefer the Netherlands because, as he put it, his two children's education was free, he had community housing, the state covered his medical bills, and, when he retired, he would be the state's responsibility. "Why would I not love this country?" he asked.

In his latest work, *Why the Poor Don't Kill Us*, Manu Joseph fixes in his crosshairs the latent psychological contract that sustains inequality—an unspoken pact in which the marginalised refrain from revolt, thereby protecting the privileged. He examines how the fragile order of the privileged is not built on justice but on tacit understandings and carefully staged illusions. The poor, he argues, abide by this unwritten contract, suppressing anger and rebellion—at great moral cost. The question he poses is not 'why they don't rise up', but 'what keeps the oppressive structure intact?'

To my mind, it's the idea of life's insignificance—a very Indian instinct. From birth, we are told this life is secondary to the one after. The here-and-now cannot be helped. You could call it tolerance, or a resignation so deep it borders on a quiet despair. We call it 'fate'. And who can fight fate?

To get the perspective right on the fate of being an Indian, we must invert the patriotic cliché. The question should not be what you have done for your country, but what your country has done for you. One lives for oneself first, then for one's family. The country is only a means to safeguard these two objectives.

Migration is India's truest referendum. According to UN data, over 18 million Indians live abroad—the largest diaspora in the world. Every year, nearly 750,000 Indians give up their citizenship to become Americans, Canadians, Australians, or Europeans. What does



C P SURENDRAN

Past, novelist and screenplay writer whose latest novel is *One Love and the Many Lives of Chappi*

this really mean? Surely, it points to the State's failure to care for its people. If India were a corporation, its shareholders would have long sold their stock.

Even for the well-to-do, 'loving' the country becomes problematic the moment they step outdoors. Delhi's Air Quality Index last winter crossed 500—the scale's upper limit; anything above 300 is hazardous. Mumbai's AQI hovers around 300 on most days. Compare this with London, where the average AQI is 35, or New York, at around 45. Breathing here is a form of dyine. Why on Earth should anyone love such killing cities? It is a kind of abuse of the self.



If migration is a referendum on our patriotism, consider that at over 18 million, Indians form the largest diaspora in the world. The true measure is not how large the economy is, but how anxiety-free and pollution-free each citizen can be

Every political party, Right or Left, scrambles to establish its love for India. Prime Minister Narendra Modi leads the chorus on the Right. On the Left, Rahul Gandhi never misses a chance to wave the Constitution like an exorcist banishing the Bible at the devil. Night after night, TV channels go into spasms of patriotic fervour. One recurring chorus is that India is "poised to become" the world's third-largest economy. But this is a paradoxical achievement, because the pervasiveness of poverty is everywhere. The Netherlands is the

17th largest economy in the world, yet its happiness ranking is fifth. The size of the economy represents little to the poor. A few billionaires getting richer means little to the countless Indians who live scrounging about on the fringe. Which is why there should be room to be neutral about one's country—unless there is an emergency, say, a war.

It is not for India that we must fight, but for Indians. What is a land without its people? The true question is not whether we are the second, third, or fourth largest economy, but how secure and anxiety-free the citizen is. As of 2023, India's nominal GDP per capita is approximately \$2,878, ranking 136th globally out of 189 countries. And the Indian citizen is among the least prized of nationalities. India ranks 77th globally in the Henley Passport Index 2025. Surely you would want to 'love' a passport that guarantees no long clearance lines at international airports?

As jingoism becomes fashionable, freedom to dissent from the manufactured mainstream grows dangerous. At no point in post-independence history—except perhaps during the Emergency—have more Indians been charged with sedition. Between 2014 and 2020, there were 399 cases under Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code (Section 152 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita). The rechristening itself might be read as another ritualistic display of patriotism. But the arbitrariness of its use is clear from the conviction rate, less than 10 convicted.

Citizenship is an accident. You did not choose to be born in a particular country, or into a religion, or under a god. Yet it is on behalf of these accidents that people fight, kill, and die. More people live and die for fiction than for fact. Perhaps these fictions, these narratives, are necessary because they give us identity. But why must one 'love' an accident—the accident of the country of birth. If one must relate to it, wars and all, why not 'like' it without being forced to love it?

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

MAILBAG

WRITE TO: letters@newindianexpress.com

Japanese commitment

Ref: India-Japan alliance factions future on trust and technology (Sep 1). The emerging economic partnership between India and Japan ignites new hopes for the future. The strategic alliance comes in the backdrop of sustained peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific. Japan's investment commitment is pathbreaking for our growth. **Rajaro Kumar, Bengaluru**

Anti-dowry campaigns

Ref: Empower daughters to live, stop dowry (Sep 1). While law exists, they follow when displays at weddings. A strong way forward would be to build social campaigns that celebrate dowry-free marriages. Mindsets change when communities publicly honour families who reject dowry and treat such choices as aspirational. **Deus Pavonis, Nellore**

Boom doom

Ref: Crazie calculus (Sep 1). Politicians tend to promote, rather persuade, people to avail of the state's assured benefits, giving little thought to the actual, procedural development. The 'baby boom' generation will not provide security; instead, it will contribute to the world's destruction. **Sundareswara Pandeyan, Tiruvallur**

Humour's limits

Ref: Comedy, free speech, and the law (Sep 1). There is a need to stay on the right side of the law by maintaining a fine balance between humour and abuse. Vilifying luminaries just to raise a few giggles should be tolerated. Cheap popularity does little to the nation. **CV Aravind, Chennai**

Diamond's view

Ref: Finding grace in the heartland (Sep 1). When you write about the impact of invasions, I recall Jared Diamond's writing. He writes that the countries that progressed, invested part of their resources in a group of persons to prepare plans for progress, while the others invested their entire resources in arming and defending themselves. **Kalliasnath Radhakrishnan, email**

Reactive alignments

Ref: Strategic autonomy guides ties (Sep 1). Thanks to the US's tariff levy, there is a reshuffle in the world order. With the three giants meeting to formulate a new alignment formula, it's certain that the impacts that generate will trigger a chain reaction across the globe. **Bijumon PN, Idukki**

Can core reform measures override politicking in civic administration?

CIVIC bodies in major Indian cities have had a different image build-up and a seemingly recalibrated approach on how well they can serve the taxpayer. This has been the trend that has been noticed across major cities in the last three decades when city life was rapidly under siege from various inefficient utility service providers like municipal water supply, drainage, power and waste management, among other such civic facilities. Coming under increasing pressure from civil society activists and a concerned lot of residents who wanted their worries to be redressed under a consensual, cooperative model of governance, Bengaluru came up with a 'Janagraha' scheme. Elsewhere in India, while keeping

the reins of power with them and conceding some public-private partnership space, some other municipal bodies provided a way to the stakeholders to keep the model in working condition and meet the eligibility criteria for increased funding from multilateral institutions. Under NDA rule at the Centre, a renewed attempt on improving public hygiene and cleanliness has led to cities being ranked on various parameters and one has seen how Indore has remained the cleanest city in the country with many southern cities playing catch up with some cities who were not supposed to have been among the top slots in the first place.

In this context, the recent

8900-report on the alleged irregularities of Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) seems an elaborate, structured attempt to once again reform the wretched municipal administration model which has plagued the Garden City for decades now. Political critics may not miss out on the timeline of the study made by Justice H N Nagamoham Das, as it touches on the period when Karnataka was under the BJP rule. Yet, the news reports circulating about the methodology implemented for undertaking it makes it interesting. The inquiry, according to media reports, covered 761 completed reports, 528 selected through random sampling and 233 others identified for scrutiny. The methodology included file

inspections, on-site verification of works, and financial audits. As per its findings, several projects showed procedural lapses, discrepancies in expenditure, and execution shortfalls. The report, now in the hands of the state government, is expected to form the basis of further action. Of course, it would be keenly watched as to how Chief Minister Siddaramaiah would use this study to both hammer out a workable solution and use it interminably to silence his saffron political critics, whose earlier tenure was not exactly a remarkable one to speak of.

With the state encountering a recurrent set of problems on the municipal peace front and the standard accusations and coun-

ter accusations on its model of governance and its outcome, the incumbent government may have just got something heavy to enable it roll on reform measures and counter criticisms about the recent changes it has brought about to streamline municipal administration. Bengaluru has had continuity in a few vital sectors, irrespective of the party in power and that has been to maintain its lead in the IT sector and its ever-increasing role in public life. If it can also eschew politicking and focus on serving the public, who deserve better for the taxes they pay, to sustain the administration machinery, then it would herald a new beginning in India, like in many other fields.

Nara Chandrababu Naidu: A three-decade journey of reform

SHYAM SUNDAR MATHAM

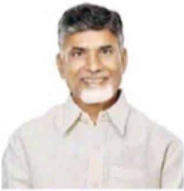
CHIEF Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, who at the age of 45 years took office as the youngest Chief Minister of a unified Andhra Pradesh in 1995, marks three decades of service on Monday. Having served four times as Chief Minister, Naidu is known for his visionary approach to governance, focusing on economic uplift and holistic development.

His administration has prioritised economic reforms, attracting significant investments. Over the last year alone, Andhra Pradesh has secured investments worth Rs 9.34 lakh crore, with investors citing the state's industry-friendly policies. Indeed, his focus on creating a conducive business environment has been the cornerstone of his economic strategy.

A key part of his vision is the 'One Family, One Entrepreneur' initiative, which aims to foster economic development for all sections of society. This builds on his earlier policy of promoting 'one techie for each family', a strategy that contributed to Hyderabad's growth as a major IT hub.

Now, he is determined to develop Amaravati as a 'Quantum Valley', a hub for quantum computing and advanced technology. A strong advocate of infrastructure development, Naidu is committed to completing the Polavaram project, which he deems as the 'lifeline of Andhra Pradesh', by 2027-end.

He has also championed river linking, a vision he believes will bring prosperity to all regions. The Pattiseema left irrigation scheme, commissioned in



In the agricultural sector, Naidu is encouraging farmers to adopt natural farming practices to meet global standards. These efforts have yielded results, with the state attracting investments of Rs 9,000 crore in the food processing sector last year. The Chief Minister has a history of introducing groundbreaking reforms.

2018, stands as a testament to his successful linking Godavari and Krishna rivers.

In the agricultural sector, Naidu is encouraging farmers to adopt natural farming practices to meet global standards. These efforts have yielded results, with the state attracting investments of Rs 9,000 crore in the food processing sector last year. The Chief Minister has a history of introducing groundbreaking reforms. He launched DWCRAs groups, an early form of self-help groups that have since been replicated nationwide. His administration also brought services to the public's doorstep through initiatives like Prajala Yoddha Palana and Janambhoomi, which encouraged community involvement in village development.

The current government also utilises technology for public service delivery, offering 700 public services through the WhatsApp-based 'Mama Mitra' platform.

Naidu's commitment to social welfare is evident in his focus on the Backward Classes (BC), Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and mi-

norities, with schemes aimed at their educational and economic uplift. He has also ensured representation for women and BCs in local administration through reservations in local bodies.

Under Naidu's leadership, the state has become a power-super state. His bold reforms in the power sector have increased the state's power generation capacity from 5,634 MW to 10,695 MW, a 90 per cent growth. He is now promoting solar and wind energy to advance green energy initiatives.

Looking ahead, Naidu is steering Andhra Pradesh toward Swarnabhara 2047, a vision to transform the state into a \$2.4 trillion economy and make it poverty-free by 2047, aligning with the national Viksit Bharat 2047 goal. He also plans to leverage the state's 1,000-km-long coastline to develop it into a logistics hub by focusing on ports and airports.

Naidu, often seen as a brand for IT and development, is prioritising education and skill development to transform Andhra Pradesh into a knowledge economy state.

Drug abuse among students: A deepening crisis that needs immediate attention

PROF M RAMULU

THE rising incidences of drug use among students in higher education institutions across India, particularly in Telangana, has emerged as a matter of serious concern. A drug racket that was busted recently at a reputed university in Hyderabad is not an isolated case but a glaring example of a trend that can no longer be ignored.

Many factors have contributed to this disturbing development, affluence without accountability; erosion of academic rigour; weakening of moral and cultural values, and a dearth of guidance and counselling. Collectively, these symptoms point to a deeper malaise—a fractured higher education ecosystem.

Caught in such an environment, students often lose motivation, discipline and direction, leading to dereliction of their promising futures. There was a time when educational institutions were strongholds of moral instruction, intellectual development and cultural values. Today, however, many campuses offer a vastly different environment, one that compromises not just academic outcomes but the very character of young individuals.

For parents, the consequences are deeply painful. Despite investing lakhs or even crores in tuition and related expenses, what they often receive in return is not quality education but their wards getting exposed to a morally compromised campus culture. For society, the stakes are even higher. A generation that should be steering India toward progress is increasingly lost to addiction, indiscipline, and unemployment.

The way forward: This crisis demands urgent and coordinated intervention. The University



Grants Commission (UGC) and the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) must step up and enforce strict oversight. Educational institutions must be held accountable not only for academic standards but also for maintaining campus safety, discipline, and cultural integrity. Parents, too, must make informed choices. Admissions should not be driven by brand value, glittery infrastructure or foreign affiliations alone. What matters most is the character of the institution, its commitment to nurturing responsible, values-driven individuals.

If the spread of drug culture in universities and colleges is left unchecked, it will not only destroy individual lives but also weaken the very fabric of the country's higher education system. Education must serve as a ladder to success and not a trapdoor into self-destruction. As India aspires to become a developed nation (Viksit Bharat) by 2047, its youth will play a defining role in shaping that future. Higher educational institutions must recognise this responsibility. They must take urgent steps to combat substance abuse and foster a campus culture rooted in discipline, moral values, and academic seriousness. It is only then can India truly unlock the potential of its next generation and ensure that its educational institutions are places of growth, not gateways to ruin.

(The writer is Chairperson, Board of Studies, Department of Economics, OU, Hyderabad)

LETTERS

A landmark step towards social justice

THE Telangana Assembly's unanimous passage of the Bills to remove the 50 per cent ceiling on reservations for local body elections is a watershed moment in the long struggle for social justice and equitable representation for Backward Classes. For too long, the arbitrary 50 per cent cap has been a significant impediment to ensuring that BC communities, who constitute a substantial portion of our state's population, receive political representation commensurate with their numbers. The previous government's decision to codify this limit, as rightly pointed out by Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy, acted as a barrier to BC empowerment rather than being a facilitator. This move by the state government is commendable as it is based on the comprehensive socio-economic and caste survey, aiming to implement a more scientifically determined 42 per cent quota. It is a decision that prioritizes substantive equality over procedural technicalities. However, the real test lies ahead. Social justice should transcend political rivalry. It is imperative that all parties, including the BRS and the BJP, unite to support this crucial legislation in New Delhi.

Yashavi M, Hyderabad

Beyond the 50% Cap: A welcome decision

I commend the recent unanimous passing of the Telangana Panchayat Raj (Third Amendment) Bill, 2025 and the Telangana Municipalities (Third Amendment) Bill, 2025, effectively lifting the 50 per cent cap on reservations for Backward Classes in local bodies. This bold move is not merely a legislative milestone but an affirmation of Telangana's commitment to inclusive governance. Grassroots democracy thrives when representation mirrors societal diversity. By ensuring BCs can finally occupy their constitutionally valid share in local institutions, the state has taken a vital step toward empowering communities that have long been marginalized. I urge that this legislative intent is reflected in transparent implementation. While awaiting presidential assent, it is essential for civic bodies and political parties to collaborate, not politicize, the change. Focus should remain on building inclusive governance, not partisan advantage. This is the moment to transform legislative promise into visible grassroots impact.

Aditi Ras, Hyderabad

Transition in Parliament

FURTHER to your article, 'New generation politics taking center stage in Parliament' (TH Sept 1), one must remember that there were three democratic successions of one dynasty, and every transition was seamless. Every decade saw such a transition of generations in Parliament, particularly in the Lok Sabha. A member had to earn his existence in the House by understanding of subject matter, better logic and articulation of speech. Blaming the Gandhi family dynamic rule is no longer valid as we have many MPs on either side coming from the same families. The new generation parliamentarians are tech-savvy, well-informed, have better oratory skills and are endowed with thorough knowledge of parliamentary processes. Today's young Turks are capable of leading the nation to greater glory.

Buddha Jagdish Rao, Visakhapatnam

SCO summit is a game changer

THE bilateral meeting between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping at the SCO summit in Tianjin seems to have made some headway towards a rapprochement between India and China. Good neighbourly relations between the two countries that together make up 2.8 billion people can serve as an anchor of international stability. It is in their own and the world's interest that the 'elephant and the dragon' come together. The relationship must be built on shared interest and values more than on the necessity to cope with the consequences of US President Donald Trump's global tariff war. Both New Delhi and Beijing must move forward on an equal footing without either being 'aggressive' or 'spineless'. A fair and mutually acceptable resolution of the border issue will be a giant step towards normalizing relations. The loud and clear message from Tianjin is that the US may be the most powerful nation in the world, but it cannot bulldoze its way to global economic dominance. By sharing whatever benefits accruing from the import of Russian oil with the Russian impoverished multitudes, New Delhi can take the sting out of Washington's allegation that India's upper castes alone benefit from the purchase of Russian oil. Meanwhile, the pro-BJP media outlets would do well not to make much of Modi's bonhomie with Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin, especially after what happened to the bonhomie between Modi and Trump.

G. David Milton, Maruthanadu (TN)

thehansreader@gmail.com

BENGALURU ONLINE

'Historic' Raj Bhavan to be open for public tours

BENGALURU: After recently allowing citizens to tour the iconic Vidhana Soudha, the government is now preparing to throw open the gates of another landmark — the Raj Bhavan. For the first time, the public will be able to step inside and explore the 19th-century heritage building that serves as the official residence of the Governor of Karnataka.

Built between 1840 and 1842 by Sir Mark Cubbon, Raj Bhavan was originally constructed as a residence for British Commissioners and was known as the 'Residency'. Over time, it became a premier guest house hosting global dignitaries, including India's first President Dr. Rajendra Prasad and U.S. First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. Following Independence, the residence was transformed into the Raj Bhavan, the official residence of the Governor.

The Karnataka State Tourism Development Corporation (KSTDC) is designing a guided walking tour of the estate, which has received formal approval from Governor Thawar Chand Gehlot, according to media reports. KSTDC General Manager Srinath K.S. said that officials are currently reviewing visitor-friendly areas, tour routes, and timings to ensure a smooth experience.

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

DPDP Act: Journalists' have every right to seek Centre's clarifications

The Digital Personal Data Privacy Act is evolving into a monster, if not a devil



DR M SRIDHAR
ACHARYULU

Ever since freedom of expression was part of the Constitutional foundation for citizens, the media has been protecting democracy braving oppression of the government and extra-social organisations. The development of the law of privacy into an enactment as passed by Parliament recently, the conflict with the press is felt as a painful performance of the duty of journalists and now media personalities.

The Digital Personal Data Privacy (DPDP) Act is evolving into a monster, if not a devil. Now in the form of serious concern, as its 'evolution' is demonstrated by the Press Club of India (PCI) and the Indian Women Press Corps (IWPC). They have submitted 35 questions to the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY).

It can be understood in the form of FAQs sought by the ministry's secretary S. Krishnan during a meeting he had with representatives of the PCI, IWPC, DIGIPUB, and Editors Guild of India on July 28.

The delegation wanted a journalistic exemption

from DPDP law. They are perceived as a threat. They wanted to meet MeitY Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw while submitting to him through the principal director general of the Press Information Bureau (PIB) a joint memorandum with 21 other elected press bodies from across the country and over one thousand journalists expressing their deep concern about the Act not having a journalistic exemption.

Here is the question relates to the balance (if possible) between freedom of the press, public interest journalism, and individual privacy, especially considering the Digital Personal Data Protection Act (DPDP) Act 2023, Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005, and Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution of India.

It is a very complicated legal question but totally affects the journalistic activities of entire nation. If a person involved in journalistic activity is working on a story on denial of ration cards to people of a certain region due to mismatch with Aadhaar data and collects personal data of the affected people such as name, age, and place for identifying the extent of the problems.

This situation raises two questions:



If the media person is using the data strictly for public interest journalism, such as exposing systemic flaws in the Aadhaar system causing denial of ration, and Personal Identifiers are anonymised or not disclosed, or are used only to support systemic analysis, then explicit individual consent may not be required under the journalistic exemption.

Is the individual involved in journalistic activity required to take "informed consent" from everyone for processing this raw data and using it in a coherent tabular format in an article to highlight the systemic problem in the public interest?

Informed consent:

Problem No. 1: Is the individual involved in journalistic activity required to take "informed consent" from everyone for processing this raw data and using it in a coherent tabular format in an article to highlight the systemic problem in the public interest?

Under normal and common situations, it means: No, not necessarily, provided that certain conditions are met. Based on Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 (DPDP Act).

Processing for journalistic purposes:

(a) The DPDP Act applies to the processing of personal data. Consent is a general requirement unless an exemption applies. One key exemption (Section 7 of the Act) is

"Processing for journalistic purposes", provided that it is in public interest and subject to reasonable expectations of privacy.

Hence, if the media person is using the data for public interest journalism, such as exposing systemic flaws in the Aadhaar system causing denial of ration, and Personal Identifiers are anonymised or not disclosed, or are used only to support systemic analysis, then explicit individual consent may not be required under the journalistic exemption.

The right to access information: (b) Under the RTI Act, 2005: RTI gives citizens the right to access information held by the state — not necessarily applicable to journalists' collecting data from individuals directly. However, the spirit of the RTI Act promotes transparency and accountability and supports access to information of public interest.

Freedom of speech and expression: (c) As understood through Article 19(1)(a) Freedom of Speech and Expression: Includes the freedom of the press, as the

Courts have consistently held that public interest journalism is protected. The Supreme Court in PUCI v. Union of India recognized the right to food as part of Article 21, and journalistic efforts to uncover denial of such rights strengthen democracy and public accountability.

Thus, we can conclude that the Informed consent is not strictly required, provided: The data is used for journalistic/public interest purposes. The information is minimally intrusive, used responsibly, and potentially anonymized. There's no malafide use or commercial exploitation. But 'freedom of the journalist' totally depends on the malafide and commercial exploitation as used by the Government, their ministry and bureaucracy.

Second point

Since, this situation involves flaws that are inbuilt and baked into the Aadhaar architecture, does the person involved in journalistic activity needs "informed consent" of the concerned

official of UIDAI before highlighting how Aadhaar-based ration cards are responsible for denial of food?

Problem No. 2: Does the person involved in journalistic activity need "informed consent" of the concerned official of UIDAI before highlighting how Aadhaar-based ration cards are responsible for denial of food?

The answer is 'not'. Because the people have (a) Freedom of Press under Article 19(1)(a): There is no legal obligation to seek consent from public officials to report on government systems, schemes, or failures. Holding public authorities accountable is a core function of journalism.

RTI and Aadhaar: (b) under the RTI Act is based on the principle that government actions are open to scrutiny. Information about how UIDAI functions, systemic issues in Aadhaar, and its impact on welfare schemes is not protected from public discourse. Unless it falls

We can summarise as:

Question	Is informed consent required?	Legal basis
Collecting and using personal data of ration cardholders to expose systemic flaws in the Aadhaar system	Not strictly required, if for public interest journalism and used responsibly	DPDP Act, Section 7(1)(a)
Collecting Aadhaar system details without explicit official consent	Not required	Article 19(1)(a) - Freedom of Press

Yes, in principle, these answers are sufficient, but in the dynamics of journalistic situations, especially in conflict governmental activities, will they not seriously affect freedom of speech.

(The writer is Professor, School of Law, Mahindra University, Hyderabad)



THE GOAN EVERYDAY

A person who won't read has no advantage over one who can't read.
Mark Twain

Double track, coal and 'double engine'

The commissioning of the 312 km Hospet-Londa-Tinaihat-Vasco Da Gama railway line doubling project has once again sparked debate on enhanced coal transportation and its adverse impact on Goa's environment. The Union Railway Ministry explicitly mentions that this project will expedite the transport of coal, and this is where the primary worry centres around, because the people's worst fears appear to be coming true.

The assertions made by the Railway Ministry are based on the belief that this initiative will improve cargo handling capabilities, with terminal capacities at berths 5A, 6A, 8, and 9 anticipated to rise substantially — reaching up to 19.5 million tonnes per annum following redevelopment. The enlargement of handling capacity at Mormugao Port Authority (MPA) has already been granted environmental approvals. The writing is on the wall.

Coal handling at the port has remained steady at around 9.5 million tonnes between 2018 and 2023, and assurances by Chief Minister Pramod Sawant in 2020 to cap it at 50 per cent have failed. The worry, however, is Mormugao Port's projected coal handling of 42.1 million tonnes by 2035. The approved expansion plans by the Ministry of Environment, Forests, and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) have encountered legal challenges and public protests, emphasising the environmental hazards of increased coal dust pollution and harmful emissions. The ongoing petition at the Bombay High Court in Goa reflects fears that the port's expansion would jeopardise the delicate ecological balance and threaten public health. That seems to be the last line of defence.

Opponents assert that official guarantees — such as Chief Minister Pramod Sawant's assertion that coal handling will remain within permissible limits — ring hollow in light of the developments on the ground. The port's capacity has already seen a significant increase, a fact that has been admitted on the floor of the recently concluded Assembly session. The expansion in coal logistics suggests a future increase, and the project's connection to the railway expansion inherently points to a rise in coal movement, and hence the apprehensions are well-founded.

The opposition's doubts are exacerbated by the Supreme Court's 2022 ruling, which annulled prior environmental clearances due to insufficient impact evaluations and the potential for ecological damage. The court had mandated a re-examination of the project, stressing the necessity for thorough assessments of biodiversity, particularly in protected regions such as Bhagwan Mahaveer Wildlife Sanctuary and Mollem National Park. This legal framework highlights the ongoing environmental vulnerability and the threat of irreversible harm.

Moreover, the political dialogue reflects a fundamental worry that the project is motivated by vested commercial interests — particularly those of corporations related to coal and port expansions — rather than the developmental needs of the region. Allegations of "selling out" and betrayal of local communities resonate with critics, who perceive the project as a means to transform Goa into a "coal corridor," jeopardising its tourism and ecological preservation.

The pledges of development and boosting tourism pale out when one sees the broader picture. The economic expansion and regional connectivity become secondary, and the potential of the project to worsen pollution and threaten biodiversity takes the spotlight. Mere assurances will not help because it is the "front engine" that decides the course. So, stop promising and start engaging. There is no reason to disbelieve the Union Railway Ministry's statement that double tracking will speed coal transportation.

OPEN SPACE >>

Gas pipeline leakage can cause major fire

Panic reportedly gripped residents near Taleigao football ground after fire erupted from the ground at several spots, believed to have been triggered by an underground gas pipeline leakage. The Panaji fire team rushed to the site and swiftly brought the situation under control. Locals expressed concern over the potential danger of such leaks in residential areas. Gas pipeline leakage has been occurring in the state at a disturbing frequency. Last month quick response by Old Goa Fire Services prevented a major fire at Old Goa, after a gas pipeline leak was reported. In November 2024, the natural gas pipeline laid at Zuarinagar was damaged by workers prompting authorities to shut down the pipeline and undertake emergency repairs. In February 2025 a major disaster was averted in Bhanulim after a gas pipeline was allegedly damaged by some workers. Regular inspections and maintenance using methods like pressure testing and fiber optic sensing is necessary to detect and address potential issues early. Electromagnetic fields can be used to identify structural changes in the pipeline that suggest a leak. Mapping of underground pipelines should be made available before carrying out digging.

ADELMO FERNANDES, Vasco

When someone quotes you...

Some prominent journalists were accused of winning awards after basing their work on what some local, 'small time' journalist had dug up



FREDERICK NORONHA

Frederick Noronha, besides writing, also publishes books

Over the weekend, a discussion caught my attention. One writer who had written a book related to Goa (way back in 2007) had recently been quoted by another upcoming writer, who might be prominent sometime soon. The writer doing the quoting was Sam Dalrymple, whose recent work 'Shattered Lands: Five Partitions and the Making of Modern Asia' (2025) is drawing quite some attention.

I was happy for Yvonne Vaz-Ezdani, though not because her first book on the Burma-Goans was a work that kicked off my own publishing endeavour so many moons ago. (That work of hers was followed up by a book on the Burma-Indians, brought out from the Metropole of Delhi, and obviously much more noticed.)

Yvonne mentioned that many quotes from her book had been cited and duly credited by Sam Dalrymple, the historical son of the widely known William Dalrymple (and artist Olivia Fraser). It's seldom that writing from Goa gets noticed the way it should.

Yet, when it happens, it's sometimes easy to have rather mixed feelings on the same. Sad but true: writing from Goa needs to be accepted and acknowledged by writers and publishers in big cities (like Delhi) before the work is adequately appreciated locally. Even then, it might not be.

So are we saying that Goan writing has little or no value until it is validated by metropolitan centres of power? Or those who are acknowledged by such centres of power?

This way of thinking creates a hierarchy that feels almost colonial. Writing from smaller places like Goa is often ignored unless it first gets a stamp of approval from the big centres.

It downplays the originality and talent of local writers, making them seem dependent on outside recognition instead of being valued on their own terms.

Goan voices are often noticed late, not at all — or even misunderstood — because their work is filtered through publishers and critics in metropolitan hubs, rather than being celebrated as part of Goa's own vibrant literary life.

And, are those doing the quoting ap-

preciating the work of the author, or just buttressing their own work?

In the world of ideas, information and knowledge, someone quoting you can be a mixed blessing. Over the years of being a journalist, I've quoted hundreds of persons. But when it comes to my own turn to be quoted, it's scary...

There's the chance of being misquoted. To avoid this, make your point in writing. Sometimes, you just don't wish to be quoted... at least not on a particular subject.

Unfair ways of dealing with the work of others include copying ideas or text without acknowledgement (plagiarism), selectively citing only sources that support one's argument while ignoring others, misquoting or taking material out of context to distort meaning.

Then, there's also giving undue credit to influential names while sidelining more original (but less prominent) contributors. Or presenting secondhand references as if one has directly consulted the original. At times, people lift ideas, or borrow some information, without acknowledgement.

It also depends where one is writing. When looking back on our earlier days in journalism, it strikes me that we often cited very loosely. On the other hand, academia expects (on paper) one to be more strict in what one is citing.

Journalists and authors from a bigger centre often swoop down on information collated by their colleagues in smaller towns, and freely help themselves to it. As journalists working for outstation publications, we were guilty of this ourselves too at times.

Some prominent journalists were also accused of winning awards after basing their work on what some local, "small time" journalist had dug up.

Not every casual discussion — especially in informal spaces like WhatsApp groups — requires the rigour of ac-

ademic citations. People often share generic opinions shaped by common knowledge, their experience or widely available information. It would be unrealistic to demand formal references for every such exchange.

Copyright law is a different cup of tea though. Copyright law protects the expression of an idea (the specific words, images, or form), but not the idea itself. So rephrasing in different words may avoid copyright infringement.

Plagiarism, meanwhile, is about intellectual honesty and requires acknowledging the source of ideas, not just words. With AI, the boundaries blur further. Generated text may draw on countless unseen sources without attribution. This makes it harder to trace origins or ensure proper acknowledgement.

Somewhere along the way, you realise that copyright helped a number of Western scholars to collate information from across the seas (in the 16th century and later) without acknowledging where it came from, or respecting its origins.

It is a fact that early modern European scholars often gathered knowledge or texts and ideas from colonised or distant regions and published them under their own names. They offered little or no acknowledgement of local sources.

Copyright, developed in Europe from the 16th-18th centuries, largely enabled publishers and authors with continuing such work, not the communities or traditions from which knowledge was drawn. It would not be wrong to say it helped consolidate Western ownership over global knowledge flows while sidelining or erasing non-European contributors, with few exceptions.

Once more, we see a conflict between technology and the law. Now, technology is moving ahead of what copyright envisaged. Let's see how the change goes.

THE INBOX >>

Abhorrent about turn in foreign policy

Our foreign policy is without vision or direction. To aid the government's propaganda, the media and the BJP troll army was used to vilify other countries. Now that US tariffs have kicked in and we are desperately in need of trade partners, we run back to these countries. We are now doing business with Turkey, romancing with China and playing cricket with Pakistan. Complete lack of pragmatism and direction. In Hindi there is a saying 'thook kay chaatra', ie. first spit then lick what you spat out. Another masterpiece by the Mahapurush! Now expect a rash of programmes on TV explaining to us the benefits of doing this egregious about turn.

REKHA SARIN TREHAN, Benaulim

Excellence in production key to business survival

In the face of cut throat competition, surviving in the market is far challenging than entering it, timely supply of quality product and consistent excellence in quality care are critical to survive. I can recall the case of the Bhilai steel plant, which in 1980s was the sole supplier of rails to Indian Railways. One fine day, the railways rejected a large consignment, citing quality issues. They turned to imports from the UK, Canada and elsewhere. Rails were Bhilai's only major product, so the news hit hard. The management introduced the ICS - Internal Customer Satisfaction - model under which every department took more emphasis and ensured customer top quality output. Within a year Bhilai was once again producing rails which met the standards of the Indian Railways. Today the Bhilai Steel plant is proud of its achievements and stands tall as one of India's 'Navratna' companies. The government needs to change their

Demarcate shipping routes, underwater hazards

On August 26 a barge loaded with iron ore pellets sank in the Mormugao Port Authority (MPA) waters after hitting a submerged shipwreck. The crew were saved but the barge is underwater along with tonnes of iron pellets that were to be loaded onto a ship docked at the port (TGE August 27). Reportedly, near the port area two large ships had sunk in the past, of which one has been cleared while the other which is still underwater has caused several accidents. Would the insurance company compensate the affected party for no fault of theirs? It is critical that the position of a sunken vessel or a sand bar is marked on the bathymetry maps/hydrographic charts to help other vessels to avoid the site. Additionally, flags, warning lights, floaters and buoys can be used as markers in the vicinity of any sunken vessel and sand bar. These devices serve to warn and caution the vessel operators to avoid the route. The stakeholders (owners of barges, fishing boats and trawlers) need to take up the matter with the appropriate authorities, before they suffer more losses of men and materials.

SRIIDHAR D'YER, Canacona

Forest, Panchayat, Transport, Water Resources, Civil Supplies, Planning, Statistics & Evaluation, Block Development Office Tiswadi, Consumer Redressal Forum, Civil Registrar cum Sub Registrar and others. Even some of the buildings like Social Welfare department, etc, have continued to be at risk of collapse, exposed to the vagaries of nature. The public buildings have suffered from neglect, lack of regular maintenance and clear responsibility. PMO are supposed to check bridges before and after the monsoon, but these checks are often poorly done. It seems like Goa's PWD is facing challenges in finding qualified engineers and staff.

KG VILOP, Chorao

Irony just died a thousand deaths

A man who is a bachelor by choice is telling Hindus that they should sire at least three children. I am sure Hindus would be more than willing to do this provided: 1. RSS pays for the education of the child from KG to Post Graduation. 2. RSS pays at least 1,00,000 per child per year for his/her food and clothing. With an escalation of 6% (inflation) every year till the child is able to find a job. 3. RSS ensures that once the child is suitably educated, he/she finds a job commensurate with his/her education. Failing which RSS pays a basic amount of Rs 25,000 of today's value inflation adjusted till the start of the earning period. 4. RSS pays for medical expenses of the child till he starts earning on his own. Once these have been assured, I am sure every Hindu will be more than willing to not only produce three children but even more. On this nonsensical advice by a bachelor holding no political post but wielding immense authority, irony just died a thousand deaths.

VINAY DWIVEDI, Benaulim

policy of allotment of business to few business houses. More stress must be laid on small scale industries which is the backbone of industry and Indian economy will scale greater heights.

DIOMEDES PEREIRA, Corlim

Govt offices facing lack of suitable buildings

Many government offices are indeed being relocated to older buildings and quarters due to a shortage of suitable, modern buildings. An example is iconic Junta House building which is facing demolition to make way for modern redevelopment. It is obvious that the reason for demolishing the building is that it was not maintained. So what was the PWD with so many engineers doing all this time? Even today many government quarters maintained by the PWD are in poor condition. Over the years, some of the departments that were housed at Junta House were



Send your letters to us at editor@thegoan.net. Letters must be 150-200 words and mention the writer's name and location

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Tianjin Declaration

SCO mentions Pahalgal but not Pakistan

PAHALGAM terror attack has been strongly condemned by the member states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), vindicating India's tough stand on terrorism. The Tianjin Declaration, adopted at the end of the SCO summit hosted by China, has stressed that the perpetrators, organisers and sponsors of such attacks must be brought to justice. This is a significant diplomatic win for New Delhi, considering that the joint statement at the SCO Defence Ministers' meeting in China two months ago had made no mention of the Pahalgal carnage. India had rightly refused to sign that document, which had instead taken note of militant activities in Pakistan's strife-torn Balochistan. The 10-member SCO includes Pakistan as well as its close allies China and Turkey, which had staunchly backed it during Operation Sindoor in May.

What's disappointing for India is that the declaration stops short of naming Pakistan, which has been a notorious sponsor of cross-border terrorism for decades. Operation Mahadev, in which the security forces killed three terrorists on the outskirts of Srinagar on July 28, had buttressed the National Investigation Agency's finding that the Pahalgal attackers were from Pakistan. However, the China-helmed SCO has chosen to overlook the obvious; moreover, it has made no reference to India's retaliatory operation that targeted terror sites in Pakistan. An organisation that has reaffirmed its 'firm commitment' to the fight against terrorism should have lauded India's measured, non-escalatory action.

It is apparent that Beijing won't let the upswing in its ties with Delhi impact its time-tested relationship with Islamabad. No wonder the declaration has condemned terror strikes on Pakistani territory, including the Jaffer Express bombing and the Khuzdar attack, thus portraying a terror perpetrator as a victim. This is unacceptable to India, which has repeatedly said that there should be no double standards on terrorism. Despite this reversal, Delhi must continue to exert pressure on the SCO to hold nations that support cross-border terrorism accountable.

Open the purse

Flood-hit North India needs Centre's hand

NORTH India is drowning — literally — yet the Centre's response risks sounding like a routine file-pushing exercise. Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, and Jammu & Kashmir are in the grip of devastating floods that have destroyed crops, flattened homes and snipped utility infrastructure. Entire communities are marooned, livelihoods washed away. At a time when citizens expect empathy and decisive action, what they cannot afford is bureaucratic lethargy and token announcements. Punjab, still staggering under farm distress, has seen vast stretches of fertile land ruined by floodwaters. Haryana's villages are cut off, cattle swept away, and roads rendered impassable. Declared disaster-hit, Himachal Pradesh, already battered last year, is once again grappling with landslides, collapsed bridges and stranded tourists. Its fragile hill economy is hanging by a thread. In J&K, flooding has displaced thousands, aggravating its fragile social and economic fabric.

The Central government cannot reduce disaster relief to an annual ritual of ex gratia cheques and high-sounding statements. The scale of destruction demands urgent and substantial intervention: a special relief package, fast-tracked release of disaster funds and direct financial transfers to affected families. Anything less would be a betrayal. Equally, New Delhi must shed its tendency to centralise credit while shifting responsibility to the states.

While the Punjab government has sought financial aid from the Central Government in this time of crisis, both the governments need to bridge the communication gap between them. It's important that they are on the same page over helping the flood-hit. The two must talk to each other in this calamitous hour, keeping their political bickering and one-upmanship aside. There should be no hurdles in the way of the Centre opening the purse strings for the flood-hit urgently. Funds are needed for their rehabilitation, for their swift evacuation as also robust coordination with state governments and NGOs.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 2, 1925

Bombay Liberal Conference

It was only to be expected that the failure of the non-cooperation programme, and particularly its more ambitious and aggressive items, would embolden the forces of Liberalism in India. It was equally to be expected that this tendency would be particularly strong in those provinces which at one time were the strongholds of Liberalism, and which are still the home of Liberal leaders of acknowledged authority and influence. It was thus that Bengal under the leadership of Surendranath Banerjee was the first province in India in which Liberalism made a serious effort to recover its lost influence and prestige. It was a soul-elevating sight to see this old man of 77 actually return to the fighting line, take up the editorship of the journal which he had a quarter of a century before made a power in the land, and address himself to his self-imposed task with an energy and vigour such as no other Indian of his age has ever exhibited in a public cause in recent times. With the death of Banerjee, the scene has naturally shifted to other provinces, and of these, Bombay easily takes the lead, both because it is the adopted home of Sinivas Sastri, undoubtedly the most influential of all living Liberal leaders. It was, therefore, with interest mingled with expectancy that the public over India had looked forward to the session of the Bombay Provincial Conference which opened at Poona on Saturday.



LT GEN SS MEHTA (RETD)
EX-WESTERN ARMY COMMANDER
AND FOUNDER TRUSTEE, PUNE
INTERNATIONAL CENTRE

MUCH of India's policy language still describes service pensions as a "burden." This is a misnomer. What is called liability is, in fact, deferred recognition; what is dismissed as cost is, in truth, the Republic's second dividend. From Kurukshetra to Op Sindoor, fidelity has been India's continuum, and it does not expire at the age of 40.

Op Sindoor was the most recent proof: 22 minutes of precision, 88 hours of vigilance, and conflict stopped cold. Few nations in today's fractured order can claim such discipline at scale. Fidelity is not new. It carried tanks across the Meghna river in 1971; it carried precision across an unseen frontier in 2023. Fidelity is India's greatest strategic inheritance.

The Pension Misnomer

The British never designed pensions as recognition. They were a leash, enough to tether loyalty, never enough to grant independence. Free India inherited this design without recasting its purpose, and economists reinforced the mistake, treating pensions as deficit and drain.

But what our ledgers call "pension burden" is in fact renewable capital: 70,000 trained leaders a year, released into the economy with no plan for reuse. Each rupee carries decades of skill, judgment and endurance, capital no other nation discards so lightly.

Our Blind Spot

As Pratap Bhanu Mehta noted in *The Indian Express*: "Business leaders often complain of weak human capital. Yet they were historically unwilling to invest in building it."



When talking takes a break

RS DALAL

I was floored when my old college friend texted me that his ENT specialist had prescribed a whole month of silence. "No way can you pull that off?" I fired back. "What choice do I have?" Docs say my vocal cords are strained and need a break," he replied. The words betrayed his unease. Of course, I was worried about his throat — but even more about his ability to stay quiet. I've known him since our college days, and he could never hold his tongue for even a minute. He was pursuing MA in English, a highly coveted field of study at the time. At the slightest opportunity, he would launch into eloquent recitations from classic English literature, and that too in his roaring voice, and we would find ourselves scrambling to rein him in.

English literature was all Greek to us, but his voice — oh, that booming voice — was loud enough to rattle the windows. That resonant voice is a distinctive trait of people from the erstwhile undivided Rohtak district of Haryana, which once included Sonapat and Hajar. Hailing from the same region, I've often been ticked off by seniors to soften my tone, and, of course, endlessly coached by my wife.

He began his career as a probationary officer at a leading bank around the time that I joined the Indian Police Service. It is only after our retirement that we came into regular touch. Over the years, he has lost neither his passion for English literature nor the booming voice that once defined him. Recently, he sent me a gift through Amazon — a hefty tome, *The Life of Samuel Johnson* by James Boswell, running into more than a thousand pages — and he is already pressing me to read it.

My most immediate concern, however, was how to lift his spirits. The doctor's rather stern prescription — an enforced silence — was, for a person who loves to talk, a cruel punishment.

It reminded me of a teacher from my junior school who had a simple cure for noisy children: he would make them stand at the back of the classroom with a finger pressed against their lips. It was enough to quieten even the most restless among us.

"Couldn't the doctor give you a course of steroids?" I asked. "No," he replied. "Herbivores in a conservative line of treatment." That got me thinking about our own traditions. In Indian scriptures, the practice of *Moun Vrat* — a vow of silence — is held in the highest regard. Far from being a punishment, it's a path to spiritual growth and self-realisation. This enforced silence could actually be a blessing in disguise.

"Imagine," I said, "this could help you connect with your inner self, master your emotions and touch a deeper peace within. Silence, after all, doesn't just withhold words; it unlocks possibilities."

"So cheer up, my friend," I added, hoping that he would see the silence not as a burden but as a gift.

Uniform to unicorn

From battlefield to startup floor, fidelity is India's greatest untapped resource



LEGACY STRENGTH: Our future is Atmanirbhar — timeless, indivisible and OUR OWN. TRIBUNE PHOTO

Meanwhile, every year the Republic treats its most disciplined, mission-ready talent as surplus while spending billions to import or retrain in the same domains. This is not inefficiency; it is industrial blindness, policy can correct.

Commitment versus Contract

India understands enduring trust; it is written into memory. Yet in policy language, that trust is too often flattened into employment. In a democracy where jobs are shortcuts to power, pensions are miscounted as entitlements, and truncated schemes recast service as exposure, covenant as contract.

Short-service schemes have value: they widen intake and bring youthful energy. Many who leave carry discipline into society. But a contract, by design, prepares for exit even at entry. The second dividend rests on long service, where commitment matures into judgment and then into capital; it then links experience to renewal, where startups find their seed.

Steadfastness arises only when the soldier can claim the uniform as home, honour, and, in many cases, legacy.

Contrast Abroad

Where India misnames fidelity as burden, others have abandoned it altogether. Russia and

The second dividend rests on long service, where commitment matures into judgment and then into capital.

Ukraine fall back on mass conscription — trading experience for numbers, youth for attrition. West Asia fragments into militias where loyalty is bought, not earned. The result is conflict without closure, wars that drag on for years, measured only in ledgers and casualties.

India, by contrast, has within reach a discipline dividend of veterans — not new recruits, not hired guns, but men and women at the height of skill and judgment.

The Missed Dividend at Home

Thousands of soldiers join the veteran category each year at the height of their professional ability — leaders, engineers, logisticians, medics, communicators. The Republic spends decades shaping this capital, then discards it with little plan for reuse. A logistics officer could transform fragile supply chains. A nursing assistant trained in field

hospitals could extend primary care to villages. A technician skilled on advanced systems is too often reduced to guard duty at a bank, stick in hand.

Even a reimagined Territorial Army with urban and rural components, could bridge gaps in security and civic resilience. These are dividends awaiting reinvestment.

From Service Skills to Unicorns

The Republic already forges soldierly skills that mirror the most sought-after capabilities of a startup economy: judgment under stress, logistics at scale, technology in the field, endurance in adversity, and the ability to lead teams in uncertain terrain.

These are not abstractions; they are the DNA of unicorn creation. A second dividend policy could deliberately match veterans with sectors crying out for precisely these abilities — cyber, artificial intelligence (AI), healthcare, supply chains, clean energy. What India now discards as surplus is the raw material of its next wave of trillion-dollar enterprises.

Global Proof

Western veterans have founded unicorns in cybersecurity, logistics and AI, turning battlefield problem-solving into billion-dollar creation. In South Korea, compulsory service has pro-

duced leaders in shipbuilding, electronics and gaming, the anchors of its economy. Israel has turned its veterans into the bedrock of its startup ecosystem.

India has its own proof. Naval officer Aranyassami Paulraj's work on sonar led to MIMO (multiple input and multiple output) technology, which underpins modern wireless networks. Billions of devices depend on his breakthrough, yet India captured little of that return, letting one soldier's genius benefit the world but not the nation that trained him.

Changing Character of Warfare

The characteristics of warfare today are no longer defined by numbers and firepower alone. Abroad, the best deployable hardware is on display, yet wars drag into their fourth year without resolution.

During Op Sindoor, we saw something different: affordable imports and smart indigenous hardware, steered by experienced and deeply trained cognitive "sukimars." Twenty-two minutes and 88 hours to conflict termination, followed by the political grand strategy of restraint.

This is a discipline-driven, unbreakable combination for any adversary — today, tomorrow, whenever.

Providence and the Pivot

Every conflict we witness abroad is a trial by fire, costly for others, instructive for us. It exposes the limits of contract, and reminds us of what endures. The lesson is clear: India's second dividend is waiting at home, to serve in uniform and to build unicorns when the spurs are hung.

Our Recipe for Deterrence

Affordable and smart hardware. Unicorns, supported by the second dividend. Fidelity that never retires. Legacy strength as our spine, spread across the nation.

It worked in 1971. It worked in 2023. It will work again. This is the continuum.

Our covenant is fidelity, carried through generations. Our inheritance is strength, tempered by restraint.

Our future is Atmanirbhar — timeless, indivisible and our own.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Nothing is more noble, nothing more venerable than fidelity. — Marcus Tullius Cicero

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Need to be firm with China

Refer to 'Modi-Xi bonhomie'; amid the turbulence created by Donald Trump's tariff wars, India has resisted pressure, maintained its energy ties with Russia and refused to be drawn into transactional politics. This same principle should now guide our China engagement. China, too, is recalibrating. A careful but firm reset is in India's interest. While New Delhi continues to strengthen defences along the LAC, it must also pragmatically seek opportunities in trade and investment. Resumption of supplies of critical inputs like rare earth minerals, coupled with carefully regulated Chinese FDI, could provide both countries with economic elbow room in a disrupted global economic order.

SANJAY CHOPRA, MOHALI

Deep-seated contradictions

It is a welcome sign that India and China are trying to join hands in adversity, though the deep-seated contradictions and festering issues raise doubts about the sustainability of this bonhomie. China has been illegally occupying over 38,000 sq km of Indian territory after the 1962 war. It still lays claim to many areas in Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh and disputes the McMahon Line itself. The most vexatious issue for India is that China has never openly condemned Pakistan for sponsoring terrorism against India. In the economic sphere, India rues China's hegemonic stance and ruthless trade policies. Likewise, India's pro-independence stand on Taiwan is also unacceptable to Beijing, as is the refuge given to Dalai Lama. However, every opportunity to patch up must be grabbed.

VIKRAM CHADHA, AMRITSAR

SC judges didn't support Naxalism

Refer to 'Misreading the Salwa Judum verdict'; in the said judgment, which was delivered in 2011, the Supreme Court Bench had said that the state-sponsored militia Salwa Judum was no match for the Naxals, who were well trained in guerrilla warfare. No motive can be attributed to the SC judges to support Naxalism. Amit Shah has crossed the line by criticising Justice Reddy for what the SC Bench did while

discharging its judicial duties. Such unpalatable remarks are bound to erode public faith in the justice delivery system.

MD SHARMA, SHIMLA

Punjab govt's laxity

With reference to the Punjab floods, the government failed to draw lessons from a similar situation in 2023. The first failure is that the government and the administration failed to ensure reinforcement of riverbanks. Second, small quantities of water were not released from dams earlier, which are otherwise released into drains in order to maintain the flow. Third, the capacity of the drains carrying stormwater should have been increased by digging them deeper. The authorities, who were not well prepared, must be held accountable. They should have framed a strong preventive policy prior to the monsoon.

HARISHRANVIR SINGH, PATIALA

Border state is suffering

Punjab has made a substantial contribution to nation-building. The Sikh community stands like a rock with sufferers whenever there is a calamity in any part of the country. Now, Punjab is itself passing through the agony of unprecedented suffering attributable to unpreparedness and gross mismanagement of the authorities. Interestingly, the political leaders noted for their high-decibel and vacuous rhetoric are conspicuous by their absence. Kudos to NGOs, the armed forces and the public which are rendering help to people in distress.

GURPREET SINGH BAKSHI, JALANDHAR

Inept heads of institutions

The appointment of incompetent principals in higher education institutions in Punjab is a matter of concern. It undermines academic standards, demoralises qualified educators and compromises the future of students. Such practices reflect systemic loopholes, nepotism and disregard for merit. Transparent selection processes, strict adherence to UGC norms and accountability are essential to restore credibility and ensure that competent people head key institutions.

PARVINDER SINGH, MOHALI

Beyond photo-ops: Realities of India-China ties



GAUTAM BAMBAWALE
FORMER HIGH COMMISSIONER
TO PAKISTAN

THE summit meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in Tianjin, China, has caught the attention of the world, with pictures of India's PM Modi, Russia's President Putin and China's President Xi smiling together splashed across newspapers, magazines and TV screens around the globe. In contrast to the manner in which the US has dealt in the recent past, particularly with its allies, friends and partners, including levying differential tariffs on each of them, the photographs from Tianjin convey bonhomie, partnership and trust.

India has always placed emphasis on multi-alignment policy, expanding and strengthening partnerships with a swathe of nations. We have been a founder-member of the BRICS grouping and also a long-time member of the SCO. While it was Russia which was pushing

for and keen that India join the SCO, New Delhi saw it as a vehicle to build stronger relations with the central Asian republics, while at the same time accommodating our long-time partner Moscow.

Among India, China and Russia, the weakest link in this chain is the India-China relationship. The most recent downturn started in the summer of 2020 when the Chinese PLA moved large numbers of troops to Eastern Ladakh in an attempt to change the status quo on the Line of Actual Control (LAC). This led to the Galwan incident, in which several Indian and Chinese troops lost their lives. This dealt a serious setback to India-China relations, which has lasted almost five years.

India has argued that if there is no peace on the borders, it will negatively impact bilateral ties. That is exactly what happened after Galwan. On the contrary, China has been saying that the border issue should be de-linked from the rest of the relationship so that it is not adversely affected if there are border incidents.

The press releases from Beijing and New Delhi after the Tianjin bilateral talks continue to maintain these positions, depicting how far apart



BONHOMIE: Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin in Tianjin on September 1. ANI

the two countries remain on this subject and how serious their differences are.

Over the past year and more, India and China have worked overtime to disengage troops from close confrontation situations in Eastern Ladakh. This has been done successfully, enabling PM Modi to visit Tianjin.

However, large numbers of troops continue to be present at high-altitude locations, indicating that de-escalation has not yet happened. In other words, these troops have not returned to their peacetime locations, hinting that tensions

It is time for quiet backroom discussions and negotiations between India and China, rather than the daily dose of media-relayed adjectives.

continue and troop build-up at the LAC could happen in short time frames.

During Politburo Member and Foreign Minister Wang Yi's recent visit to New Delhi, both sides agreed to discuss this problem. Hopefully, solutions will be found soon.

The two Special Representatives on the boundary issue, Ajit Doval and Wang Yi, have also agreed to establish a working group to study the possibility of an early harvest in boundary negotiations. This implies the Sikkim sector of the India-China boundary,

which was formally delimited by an 1890 agreement between British India and the Qing dynasty China. Since 1947, independent India as well as Communist China have broadly recognised and stuck to the parameters of that British-era agreement.

The current proposal is to abide by that boundary line in Sikkim, but in the form of a new agreement between the Republic of India and the People's Republic of China. Even if such an agreement were not to be signed immediately, but done together with the entire boundary resolution, including the Eastern, Middle and Western Sectors (wherever that happens), the idea is to settle the LAC in the Sikkim sector by having both sides abide by the 1890 Convention.

The only problem in this sector will be the tri-junctions between India-China-Nepal and India-China-Bhutan since that would involve trilateral discussions and negotiations with other sovereign states.

The outstanding boundary question between India and China puts limitations on how much India-China relations can improve. As Galwan proved, any upheaval on the border impacts the relationship immediately.

The other complicating factor today is the close alliance-type relationship between China and Pakistan. Operation Sindoor clearly proved how close their military ties are today — with China providing Pakistan with real-time intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance inputs.

Thus, it is not merely the large amounts of defence equipment China sells to Pakistan but also the close military operational linkages which are problematic for New Delhi.

So, from the geopolitical and geo-political angles, even though India-US ties have soured due to the current tensions, the basis for a strong partnership between New Delhi and Washington DC is clear for all to see. It is time for quiet backroom discussions and negotiations between the two, rather than the daily dose of media-relayed adjectives which we have been treated to.

This does not mean that India will succumb to US pressure on a possible trade deal. We have to stand our ground and even be prepared for short-term pain. We must stand by our conviction that geopolitical realities will reassess themselves sooner rather than later, restoring equilibrium in the India-US partnership.

The case for a single-theatre defence model in India



AIR MARSHAL AMIT TIWARI (RETD)
FORMER AOC-IN-CENTRAL
AIR COMMAND

ON August 26, the Chief of Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal AP Singh, cautioned against rushing into the formation of theatre commands, stating, 'India should not be inspired by US'. As part of the ongoing defence reforms, India is seeking to improve operational efficiency by the theatreisation of its armed forces. However, even after 10 years, there remains a difference of opinion among the three services regarding the structure of integrated theatre commands.

The template for the Indian theatre command is based on the US theatre command. In the US, the reforms were implemented by the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986 in response to the shortcomings noticed in operations.

Conversely, India is striving to enhance the efficiency of a system that has thus far performed reasonably well in all the wars. Given the limited defence budget and the constant threat of a two-front war, it would be prudent for India to not replicate the US system, which has given mixed results so far and is

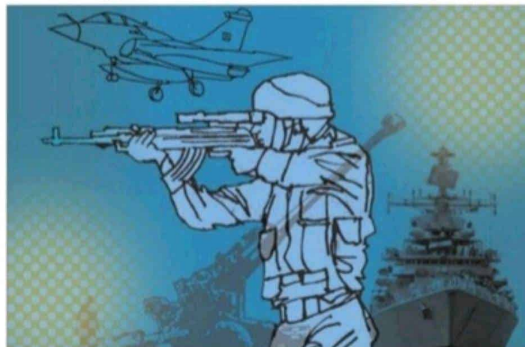
still evolving. During the 1970s and 1980s, the US was involved in various military operations. In many operations, poor inter-service coordination, fragmented command structures and inter-service rivalry were observed. The shortcomings were particularly glaring during the Vietnam War, Iran hostage rescue attempt and Grenada invasion. The Iran mission collapsed due to the lack of a unified command, poor planning and inadequate coordination of assets.

To address these shortcomings, the US Congress debated the issue for over four years and passed The Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defence Reorganisation Act of 1986. The Act created three separate command structures with the intention of ending inter-service rivalries and fighting the wars under a single theatre commander. The reforms included the following:

- Combatant or theatre commanders were given full operational control of the forces and they reported directly to the President.
- Service chiefs lost operational authority and were only responsible for training, equipping and doctrine development.
- The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff was designated as the principal military adviser to strengthen joint planning, but didn't have control over operations or training.

However, these reforms couldn't end the inter-service rivalry. The competition merely shifted from operations to budgets, doctrines and resource allocations. Moreover, the reforms created a new disconnect. The services, responsible for training and doctrines, were not accountable for actual war-fighting. On the other hand, the combatant commanders in charge of conducting operations had minimal influence over training, doctrine and force development. Additionally, because of the limited tenure of combatant commanders, they were not concerned with the long-term development of the forces.

This mismatch created capability gaps between what the forces were trained for and what the combat demanded. The system is under review.



TRUE JOINTNESS: It does not require the creation of another layer over the existing ones. SANKUJ JOSHI

the US could absorb these shortcomings because there was no threat to its territorial integrity and it had substantial resources to tolerate duplications and inefficiencies. But, India cannot afford such luxuries. With immediate threats and limited depth, it cannot risk similar inefficiencies.

Firstly, India has a limited defence budget, which is barely sufficient for the maintenance and modernisation of the forces. Creating multiple integrated commands, over and above the existing geographical commands, risks spreading the budget too thin.

Secondly, unlike the US, India faces two nuclear-armed adversaries and any dilution of combat efficiency may prove disastrous.

Furthermore, while the US

Given the limited defence budget and the constant threat of a two-front war, it would be prudent for India to not replicate the US system, which has given mixed results.

theatre commands are located far apart and are separated by oceans, India's combat commands, geographical commands and headquarters will all be co-located. This arrangement would simply add an extra bureaucratic layer to the existing structure. Even for a short skirmish of four days, the IAF had to pool resources from multiple regional commands to meet operational objectives. Dividing the limited resources in a piecemeal manner may reduce their effectiveness.

Another often-quoted advantage of the theatre command is that the political leadership will be able to obtain a comprehensive status of operations from a single source, which would help it in taking a timely and informed decision. It is possible for the US, where the theatres are far apart and operations in one theatre don't affect the others.

In India, the theatres are small and contiguous. With the threat of a two-front war, any operation in one theatre is likely to affect adjacent theatres also. The political leadership will have to talk to all theatre commanders before deciding on operations, thereby defeating the basic concept. True jointness can be achieved by common training, interoperable equipment and joint planning; not by creating another layer over the existing ones.

Instead of replicating the US system, which has multiple theatre commands because of the expeditionary requirement across the globe,

India could adopt a single-theatre model, reflecting its defensive nature, geography, resource limits and threat profiles. The entire country may be considered as a single theatre so that there is a flexibility to shift forces between the fronts, as per the requirement.

The theatre may be headed by the CDS, responsible for strategy, and a single point of contact for the government. It should have the authority for planning, prioritisation in modernisation and wartime co-operation. The chiefs of the Army, Navy and Air Force could be component commanders, directly accountable for the employment and performance of their forces. The regional commands could fight the war under a single theatre, as per their domain expertise. Such a structure would ensure an effective and efficient asset utilisation, without duplication or bureaucratic layers. In future, if the country acquires sufficient resources and defence budget, the option of multiple theatre commands may be revisited.

In conclusion, India must avoid repeating the US mistakes. For India, with adversaries on its borders and limited resources, the safest path is a single-theatre model, led by the CDS, with the service chiefs as component commanders. This will ensure jointness without additional bureaucracy, maximise the availability of source resources and ensure the unity of effort in the face of real and immediate threats.

QUICK CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- Depressive influence (6)
- Wriggle (6)
- Hatchback (7)
- Land (5)
- Inexpensive (5)
- After all that has happened (4,3)
- Not hesitate (4,2,5)
- Empty threats (7)
- Advantage (5)
- Make sense (3,2)
- Farthest (7)
- Pour scorn on (6)
- Incautious (6)

Yesterday's solution

Across: 1 Rostrum, 5 Pupil, 8 Out on one's feet, 9 Tense, 10 Curtail, 11 Schism, 12 Shrimp, 15 Inferno, 17 Reach, 19 Mint condition, 20 Clear, 21 Romania.

Down: 1 Roost, 2 Sit on the fence, 3 Runners, 4 Menace, 5 Poser, 6 Prevarication, 7 Let slip, 11 Seismic, 13 Heroism, 14 Sooner, 16 Recur, 18 Henna.

DOWN

- Disfigure (6)
- Combine (5)
- Punishment as warning to others (7)
- A waiting line (5)
- Showing strong feeling (7)
- Country formerly Nyasaland (6)
- Meet with disaster (4,2,5)
- Into parts (7)
- At tedious length (2,3,2)
- On a ship (6)
- Peremptorily (6)
- Slightly warm (5)
- Pleasant smell (5)

SU DO KU



V. EASY

FORECAST

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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

CALENDAR

SEPTEMBER 2, 2025, TUESDAY

- Shaka Samrat 1947
- Shadbad Shaka 11
- Shadbad Panyasha 18
- Hijri 1447
- Shukla Paksha Tithi 10, up to 3:53 am
- Purnima up to 4:30 pm
- Mool Nakshatra up to 9:51 pm
- Moon in Sagittarius
- Gandmoola up to 9:51 pm

CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	26	23
New Delhi	31	22
Amritsar	26	22
Bathinda	28	23
Jalandhar	26	22
Ludhiana	27	22
Bhiwani	28	23
Hisar	28	23
Sirsa	28	25
Dharamsala	25	17
Manali	21	14
Shimla	20	15
Srinagar	25	18
Jammu	30	24
Kargil	21	10
Leh	15	09
Dehradun	29	21
Mussoorie	19	14

OUR VIEW



How to choreograph an elephant-dragon dance

To ensure that vital interests are neither trampled nor scorched, our steps must retain a stiff security vigil while during a few elegant moves aimed at a world less vulnerable to US whim

When elephants make love, the grass gets trampled too, observed Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew, riffing off a Kenyan saying that the grass gets trampled when elephants fight. When India and China declared their readiness to cooperate at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit at Tianjin, imagery was evoked of an elephant and dragon getting ready to dance. If such an implied transformation of our bilateral relationship takes place, it could well work in favour of businesses in both countries. While the leaders of both exchanged warm words, differences remain—especially over our mutual border. According to China's Xi Jinping, we should not wait for the settlement of territorial disputes to jointly address major development challenges, including those arising from trade uncertainty. Prime Minister Narendra Modi did not dispute this, but made it clear that an unsettled border cannot but cast its shadow over common efforts. Another area of divergence is terror. While Modi stressed the need for the SCO to clearly disavow and combat terror, China's backing of Pakistan could be taken as a lack of commitment on Beijing's part.

Still, there is much that India, China and the world stand to gain from the two Asian giants working together, not just bilaterally but alongside other Brics members. Once we have a reasonable assurance of stability at the border, both New Delhi and Beijing could ease norms for bilateral trade and investment. While prospects of gains may tempt visions of an economic tango, we must not have our toes stepped upon or key interests scorched. We cannot expose our vital infrastructure to the risk of sabotage

that may arise if we use Chinese equipment and software in our power grid, financial network, health system, database management and dashboards that control everything from traffic lights and railway signals to air traffic and water sluice gates. For full safety, we must indigenize all this. That would still leave large swathes of economic activity for expanded trade, investment and tech cooperation among various entities in both countries. Several buzzy fields could be identified for closer commercial ties, joint ventures included.

Moves in world affairs would call for both sides to be especially nimble. An agenda could conceivably emerge from a shared view of challenges arising from the US giving up its post-World War II role as the under-pinner of global security, trade and financial arrangements. As a champion of the Global South, Brics could work to preserve the multilateral trade system, complete with a device to resolve disputes, now that the US has chosen to secede from it. The policies of US President Donald Trump have shaken the dollar's credibility as a global currency. While its hegemony may endure, Brics could promote a stablecoin pegged to the value of the IMF's unit of account, the SDR, backed by holdings of dollar, euro, yen and other assets to satisfy US norms under its new law for digital currencies. This could be used for intra-Brics settlements to begin with. Together with a Brics reinsurance arm and clearing house, this framework could offer the world a useful option. Even if the West stays suspicious of anything with China behind it, proposals backed by India might appeal not just to the Global South, but also to US allies reeling under the shock of a White House that doesn't seem to have the word 'cooperation' in its dictionary.

THEIR VIEW

Account Aggregators: All set now to multiply our digital dividends

This digital public infrastructure enables affordable microcredit and should turbocharge lending



Y. ANANTHA NAGESWARAN & KAMYA CHANDRA
are, respectively, chief economic advisor to the Government of India, and co-founder and chief strategy officer at the Centre for Digital Public Infrastructure, IIT, Bengaluru.

Change happens slowly, and then all at once. And so it will be with the way a billion Indians access loans and, by extension, the way Indians access opportunity.

In 2009, such a change was unimaginable. Formal loans at scale were a quixotic moonshot—80% of adults didn't even have a bank account, let alone access to credit. Yet, quietly, the Lego blocks of a solution were laid. First, via Aadhaar's eKYC, identity verification became universally available digitally, and India opened half a billion new accounts. Then Aadhaar eSign was launched, allowing any loan agreement to be signed digitally via a mobile phone. By 2015, DigiLocker had been introduced; it became a single window for multiple KYC affirmations and underwriting of documents (Aadhaar, PAN, Udyam and state-wise vehicle/land credentials).

The slow-burn effect of these interventions on GDP growth wouldn't catch eyeballs until years later. In 2016, a new growth was introduced. In December, the Prime Minister announced the facility to pay anyone with just a mobile phone and QR code, across any account, using any app. It worked. Seemingly overnight, Indians went from dealing in cash to transacting digitally via UPI. Within two years, we added Bharat Bill Payments (BBPS), for-

malizing payments across a staggering array of bills (utilities, telecom, fees and loans). Then 2020 saw the launch of UPI Autopay, a low-cost loan repayment mechanism.

A decade on, India was still far from enabling universally accessible formal loans. But a powerful change was silently at play. Bank statements started filling up with granular cash flow movements: a house-hold's salary, a kirana's seasonal income or a farmer's steady electricity bill payments. Indians could now prove what and when they were earning as employees or entrepreneurs. They could prove they were worth betting on.

Then, at all once, change became inevitable on 2 September 2021—Account Aggregator Foundation Day—with the ability to share your financial statements seamlessly with consent. The logic was simple: Every loan in the country—across ticket sizes, borrower types or categories—requires income verification. Across personal loans, MSME loans, auto loans, business loans and every other conceivable type of credit, a lender can only lend based on data indicating the borrower's financial flows. The ability to do only one thing well at scale—move financial information instantly at low cost and directly from its source—makes India's open finance Account Aggregator (AA) network an axiomatic piece of digital infrastructure for access to credit.

Yet, AA is not a magic bullet. It is merely the last block that completes a bridge under construction for 15 years—one that allows Indians to cross from being un-lendable to creditworthy by using a combination of digital public infrastructure blocks.

Indians can now comply with a lender's KYC requirements via DigiLocker and Aadhaar, use an AA to share their granular financial history formalized via UPI and BBPS, set up UPI Autopay for repayments, enable AA for ongoing loan monitoring, and eSign a loan contract—all of it by means of a mobile phone in a few minutes.

It wasn't easy for this approach to be adopted across all four financial regulators—RBI, Sebi, IRDAI, and PFRDA. But a historic move coordinated by the Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC), led by the finance minister, prevented fracturing of the AA network, ensuring that it drives not just credit but also offers a unified view of citizens' finances, covering savings, investments, insurance and pensions. The commercial model took a year of negotiations, but it is finally ready. RBI has evaluated prospective AAs over the years to give out 16 high-provenance licences. To address banks' challenges in working with all licensed players, the network facilitator Sahamati built a router and filed an ecosystem self-regulatory organisation (SRO) application. More than 700 regulated entities—banks, investors, AAs and insurers—are tightening the screws and building safeguards on data pipes for the world's largest rollout of open finance.

Change is coming. 280 million data sharing transactions, growing at 213% annually, have already facilitated ₹16.7 billion of credit disbursement, mostly to small ticket and first-time borrowers. Beyond credit, AA has enabled over 20 million Indians to access superior financial management, investments and life insurance. If AA adoption continues, conservative models indicate India could double formal small business credit and turbocharge progress towards solving a historically intractable problem: inclusive access to affordable credit for a billion Indians. With India's credit growth in flux and shifting geopolitical realities making domestic economic growth drivers essential, cross-functional digital infrastructure like AA is necessary. Just as with the now-household names that rode stormy seas to stay on the UPI boat, the financial institutions that make the most of the AA wave will be the ones we'll remember for unlocking affordable credit in the decades to come.

These are the authors' personal views.

10 YEARS AGO



JUST A THOUGHT

The interests of 2.8 billion people of both countries are linked to our cooperation. This will also pave the way for the welfare of the [entirety] of humanity.

NARENDRA MODI

THEIR VIEW

Global food security holds the key to sustainable peace

ARCHANA DATTA



is a former director general, Doordarshan and All India Radio, and former press secretary to the President of India.

Famine is now a reality in Gaza after Israel's 22-month war on the Palestinian territory, as confirmed by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), a UN-backed agency. "Food has been used as a weapon," according to the UN's emergency relief and humanitarian affairs head, who pointed to "systematic obstruction of humanitarian aid deliveries." Separately, the UN's secretary general called the Gaza crisis "a man-made disaster." The IPC has sounded a famine alert multiple times, and every instance has been directly linked to an armed conflict.

The year 2024 witnessed a record number of armed conflicts since World War II and over 295 million people experienced acute hunger across 53 conflict-ravaged countries. The *Global Report on Food Crises* by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) reveals that 2024 marked the sixth consecutive annual increase of people facing acute food insecurity, up 13.7 million from 2023. An immediate impact of conflict

is on agriculture and food production, as it destroys crops, livestock and infrastructure, disrupting food supply chains. In an environment of uncertainty, resource scarcity and risk, farmers tend to shy away from long-term investment and shift towards quick-harvest crops that limit their income. This weakens prospects of agricultural development and economic stability.

The repercussions of conflict extend from farms to broad socioeconomic and environmental systems. The world's eight worst food crises—in Yemen, Congo, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Syria, Sudan, South Sudan and Nigeria—have been linked to both conflict and climate shocks (WHO). Higher temperatures and changing humidity often favour the spread of pests and diseases that harm crops and livestock. Elevated carbon levels reduce the nutritional value of crops, hurting human health and food security. Scarce resources generate tensions among different user groups such as farmers and herders, or between various communities, potentially triggering social unrest. In such a feedback loop, the effects of climate change exacerbate conflict, undermine climate mitigation efforts and create a vicious cycle in which instability and environmental degradation further worsen food insecurity.

In the 1991 Gulf War, when over 700 of Kuwait's oil fields were set ablaze, a massive oil slick in the Gulf and 300 inland lakes severely contaminated the soil, apart from groundwater and irrigation systems, all of which made farming a challenge. In Syria, the FAO conducted a damage and loss assessment (DaLA) study in 2016-17, five years after the crisis of 2011, and found that the agricultural sector suffered harm to the tune of \$16 billion, equivalent to one-third of the country's GDP in 2016. Syria, once self-sufficient in food, is now a significant food importer. Meanwhile, the Russia-Ukraine war—both countries are major exporters of farm commodities—has significantly disrupted food production and the global foodgrain trade. In 2022, a DaLA study in Ukraine revealed that rural households, livestock keepers, fishermen and aquaculturists suffered losses of nearly \$2.3 billion. In 2023, the collapse of the Kakhovka Dam and the Dnipro River system led to potential desertification of

tile lands in southern Ukraine, causing losses of around \$1.5 billion in grain and oilseed production. In Gaza, years of conflict have destroyed key Mediterranean crops like olives, vines, legumes, wheat, barley and maize, with adverse roles played by prolonged droughts and increased heat stress.

As of 1 September 2024, 67.8% of Gaza's cropland, 71.2% of orchards and other trees, 67.1% of field crops and 58.5% of vegetables have been damaged, almost 95% of cattle have died and nearly all calves have been slaughtered. The Interim Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment of January in Gaza and the West Bank estimated losses of about \$1.3 billion in agriculture and food systems. In August 2024, in the aftermath of the 20-month long conflict, famine was detected in Sudan's Zamzam IDP camp in North Darfur, which spread across the country, affecting half its population.

Now, nearly half the world's population is exposed to conflict and an estimated 21,000 people are dying each day from conflict-

fueled hunger (Oxfam). In such a dire situation, the need for humanitarian aid and protection has more than doubled. In 2025, relief missions aimed to help around 305 million people in 72 countries, with a total funding requirement of \$44.18 billion, representing less than 2% of the world's military spending. But, till recently, only \$5.96 billion (or 13.5%) had been mobilized. Unfortunately, humanitarian plans have been chronically underfunded. In 2023 and 2024, less than half of the financial requests were met (*Global Humanitarian Overview*, 2025).

The fight against hunger has slowed considerably. At this pace, the goal of zero hunger by 2030, or even low hunger, won't be reached until 2160. That is a wait too long for the world's conscience to allow. But then, conflicts themselves are unconscionable. Today, warring countries continue to flagrantly violate the International Humanitarian Law that prohibits the targeting of civilians, food and water sources. Starvation is used as a war weapon with impunity. In the face of common global challenges like climate change, geopolitical instability and acute hunger, the world must abide by its humanitarian commitments. Only an equitable, sustainable and resilient food system can usher in a stable and peaceful world.

The world must make starvation history but war famines persist. Gaza is a glaring example. There are many others



THEIR VIEW

It's game open on AI regulation: A fine balance is yet to be struck

Symbiotic interaction between US laissez-faire and EU caution over risks may provide a balance but that's far from assured



RAGHURAM G. RAJAN

is a professor of finance at the University of Chicago Booth School of Business, former governor of RBI and co-author of 'Breaking the Mold: India's Untraveled Path to Prosperity'

The problem with European regulators, a German businessman recently told me, is that they are too scared of downside risks. "In any innovative new business sector, they overregulate and stifle any upside potential." In contrast, he argued, Americans care more about the upside potential, and thus hold off on regulation until they know far more about the consequences. "Not surprisingly, the United States has much more of a presence in innovative industries."

Artificial intelligence (AI) is a case in point. The EU enacted the world's first comprehensive AI regulation in August 2024, establishing safeguards against risks such as discrimination, disinformation, privacy violations and AI systems that could endanger human life or threaten social stability. The European law also assigns AI systems different risk levels, with different treatments for each. While AI-driven social scoring systems are banned outright, higher-risk systems are heavily regulated and supervised, with a list of fines for non-compliance.

But Europe has little presence in the burgeoning AI industry, especially relative to the US or China. Those leading the charge in generative AI are US-based firms such as OpenAI, Anthropic and Google; no European firm meets the mark. Such a glaring gap seems to speak for itself. For now, the Donald Trump administration's AI Action Plan for the US, which seeks to limit red tape and regulation in AI, looks like the better approach.

The problem with the European way is that it burdens fledgling firms with the costs of regulatory compliance before the technology's potential has become clear. A chatbot that spreads falsehoods or discriminates against certain ethnic groups is certainly not desirable, but there must be some tolerance for such errors in the early stages of a system's development.

Moreover, when developers can explore a system's positive possibilities more freely, they also have time (and possibly resources generated from successful but error-prone launches) to figure out cost-effective ways to address issues that undermine the system's reliability. Demanding near-perfection from the outset does not safeguard society so much as stifle the trial-and-error process through which breakthroughs emerge.

Of course, errors such as racial discrimination can be extremely costly, especially if made by chatbots that interact with millions of people. Recognizing this risk, some regulators allow new products to be tested only in tightly controlled settings. Innovators can experiment with a limited group of users and always under the regulator's watchful eye. This 'sandbox' approach helps to contain any harms from spilling over to the broader public—Europe's main concern. But sandboxes might also



limit what can go right.

Trials with small, restricted groups cannot capture the benefits of network effects, whereby products become more valuable as more people use them. Nor can they reveal unexpected breakthroughs that come when the 'wrong' people adopt a product (for example, online pornography drove early innovations in web technology). In short, sandbox trials may keep disasters at bay, but they also risk stifling discovery. They are better than outright bans, but they may still cause innovators to bury too many promising ideas before they can scale.

What then are the costs of the *laissez-faire* American approach? Most obviously, the system can blow up because of rogue products, as happened with subprime mortgage-backed securities before the 2008 global financial crisis. Today, one hears similar fears about generative AI and the crypto industry (with FTX's implosion cited as an early warning signal).

Historically, the US, with its deep fiscal pockets, may have been more willing to take such risks, while the fragmented EU may have been more cautious. But with fiscal space shrinking in the US, a rethink may be in the offing.

Even if the US wants to regulate more, though, can the authorities really pull it off? The American way is to wait until an industry is large enough to matter. But by that point, the industry will have grown powerful enough to shape any rules meant to rein it in. Consider crypto, flush with cash, armed with lobbyists and laser-focused on its interests, it has proven adept at swaying politicians—and public opinion—in its favour. The con-

sequence invariably is under-regulation, even when risks to the public are glaring.

Risk-averse Europe, by contrast, steps in early, when an innovative sector is still small and its voice barely audible. At this stage, it is the incumbents—the banks threatened by crypto, for example—who dominate the debate. Their influence pushes the needle toward excessive caution and heavy-handed rules. The US tends to regulate too little, too late, whereas Europe does too much, too soon. Neither gets the balance quite right.

Even though there is a case for each side moving towards the other, it is worth emphasizing that regulation does not stop at national borders. In fact, the world may benefit from having somewhat different approaches. US chatbots can thrive in a relatively unregulated environment, experimenting and scaling quickly. But once they seek a global presence, they will run into Europe's stricter standards. With sufficient resources and strong incentives, they will find creative low-cost ways to comply, and those risk-reduction strategies may eventually flow back into the US, leaving the world with more and safer innovation.

That is the ideal scenario. Reality is likely to be messier. American firms could cause global harm before European regulators catch up. Europe may continue discouraging innovation before it starts, leaving the world with too little. But perhaps the greatest danger is if regulators on either side of the Atlantic export their own rulebook, forcing the other to fall in line.

The world may be best served if American and European regulators keep seeing regulations differently.

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MINT CURATOR

If it's broken, fix it: Let troops repair the military kit they use

An insistence on manufacturer-authorized repairs is too restrictive



MICHAEL R. BLOOMBERG

is the founder and majority owner of Bloomberg LP, the parent company of Bloomberg News.



American soldiers should be able to use their battlefield ingenuity. BLOOMBERG

Here's something that US Democrats and Republicans ought to be able to agree on: Americans serving in the military and majority owners of the military and each other should not be strangled by red tape that prevents them from fixing broken weapons and tools. Yet, that is exactly the danger they currently face.

If a war broke out tomorrow, US troops may struggle to repair and maintain the assets they need to defend themselves and defeat the enemy—not because they aren't capable of making those repairs or hiring a third party who can, but because they are contractually forbidden from doing it.

Currently, many Department of Defense contracts reserve repairs for manufacturer-authorized personnel. Such restrictions can apply to everything from backup generators to F-35 fighters. Lacking access to the necessary data, tools, parts and training, troops in the field must either ship broken gear back home or fly out contractors tied to manufacturers—raising costs and imposing potentially dangerous delays.

Believe it or not, military members have actually been told that they can't cobble parts together or do their own repairs. This flies in the face of one of our most prized strengths: American ingenuity. America is a country of fixers. When something is broken, we roll up our sleeves, figure out the problem and get to work fixing it. If we hit a roadblock, we bring in someone as fast as possible to help. It's part of our spirit and character—yet it's being denied to those tasked with protecting and defending us.

Troops report having to send malfunctioning drones that could have been fixed with a drop of glue back to the manufacturer at a cost of \$26,000 apiece. A Pentagon investigation last year discovered the Air Force had accepted a markup of 7.94% on spare lavatory soap dispensers for Boeing C-17 cargo planes. On a recent visit, Navy Secretary John Phelan found six of eight ovens, meant to produce over 15,000 meals a day, awaiting manufacturer-approved repairs. It's bureaucracy at its most frustrating—and exorbitantly expensive.

The US Government Accountability Office has estimated that around 70% of the total life-cycle costs of weapons systems goes to operating and support. That's one reason it has recommended the military take over more sustainment activities for the \$1.7 trillion F-35 programme. Depending on where they're located, contractors tied to manufacturers are often more expensive than civilian Pentagon employees. This isn't just about cost. It's also about combat readiness. Currently

there are lengthy maintenance delays that harm US readiness—and that's during peacetime. Imagine if war breaks out. The stakes will be even higher. In the midst of battle, troops are not going to be able to ship broken gear back to the US, or even to large bases in the region (most of which would be immediate targets). Troops forbidden to do maintenance and repairs in peacetime, and lacking the necessary spares and tools, will struggle to do it under fire. Relying too much on manufacturers creates unacceptable risks and the problem has been growing since the 1990s, as industry consolidation has boosted the leverage of big defence companies. Of course, firms have a legitimate interest in protecting their intellectual property, but they also have a responsibility not to hamstring the very people they are supposed to be supporting. Plus, competition is healthy. Allowing the military to pursue the fastest, cheapest and best possible solutions will encourage greater efficiency.

As the former chair of the Defense Innovation Board, this was an issue that we examined and highlighted. And the good news is Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth recognizes the problem and has begun addressing it. In April, he directed the Army to mandate right-to-repair clauses in all new contracts and seek to add them to old ones. Leaders of other services have said they support taking on the issue, too.

A draft of the Senate's 2026 National Defense Authorization Act requires manufacturers to provide instructions for maintaining covered equipment. In effect, companies would have to allow access to the same manuals, procedures, tools and equipment they use themselves or offer to authorized service providers, either as part of the initial contract or as a negotiated price option. During wartime and combat preparation, the military would have authority and latitude to repair as it sees fit.

Enshrining this in US law deserves bipartisan support. It would expand the Army's new policy to all services and make it harder for industry lobbies to reverse it in the future. It would give the military more options—like continuing to have contractors perform complicated repairs as needed—increasing transparency and resiliency and bring down costs. The sooner it happens, the better.

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MY VIEW | IT MATTERS

OpenAI's India launch will steepen its learning curve

SIDDHARTH PAI



is co-founder of Sana Capital, a venture fund manager.

When OpenAI announced recently that ChatGPT would be formally available in India at \$399 a month, it was significant because that small fee grants access to a tool seen as cutting-edge but somewhat out of reach for daily users. What was a curiosity is now a regular fixture in Indian digital life.

This is not just a pricing move—it's a strategic shift that opens the gates to one of the world's most dynamic internet user bases. With nearly 800 million users online, India ranks second only to China, but it differs in one critical respect: it is wide open to global platforms. There are no Great Firewall or mandated domestic clones. Instead, international apps and services compete openly.

For OpenAI, India represents both scale and complexity—two ingredients essential to push the limits of any AI model. India's linguistic diversity is especially instructive. While Hindi commands large numbers, it is only one among many languages with tens of millions of speakers. Add hybrid forms

and you get a digital environment that can stretch the adaptability of any language model. It is a natural test-bed, where users don't just consume AI outputs, they interrogate, correct and argue with them.

This is exactly the kind of organic feedback loop that AI companies pay good money to simulate. Training and refining a language model is an expensive, compute-intensive process. But just as important is real-world human feedback—the stream of nudges, corrections and clarifications that help fine-tune the model. In the US, AI firms hire teams of annotators to provide this kind of oversight. In India, OpenAI is creating the conditions for natural access to such feedback at scale. Even better, the company will be paid to receive it.

Consider this: ChatGPT misuses a Tamil expression. A user points it out, perhaps with a bit of sarcasm. The model learns. Another user catches a factual error in its cricket statistics. Correction logged. Over time, such corrections help the model grow more local, culturally aware and accurate. From OpenAI's perspective, it's a win-win.

The \$399 subscription creates a paying customer base, but also a self-updating model improvement engine. What was once a cost centre becomes a revenue-generating

stream of valuable training data. This is economics of scale meeting the psychology of participation. Brilliant move.

The upside for Indian users is substantial too. At this price, ChatGPT undercuts many conventional learning and productivity tools. There's also a cultural alignment. India places a premium on intellectual ability—the ability to absorb, process and apply information quickly. It wants not just answers, but conversations. Unlike static sources like textbooks or websites, the tool encourages iterative questioning, back-and-forth reasoning and curiosity.

That said, the rollout of AI tools always comes with its fair share of hype, especially in software development. For media and startup founders have touted the promise of Generative AI replacing coders or dramatically enhancing their productivity. Many developers shared positive anecdotes: Copilot wrote 30% of their code; ChatGPT helped unblock a tough problem, etc. The impression grew that coders would

soon be managers of AI rather than makers of software. I have also heard that view.

But then a reality check arrived. On 10 July 2025, METR (Model Evaluation and Transparency Reports), an independent research organization, published findings that question those claims (shorturl.at/CC49R). According to its analysis, there is no consistent evidence that Generative AI tools significantly reduce the time that experienced developers spend on complex coding tasks. While these tools can offer useful scaffolding—boilerplate code, syntax suggestions, simple debugging—they fall short when it comes to deeper tasks like architecture, optimization or interpreting nuanced business logic.

Worse, over-reliance on AI tools can sometimes introduce subtle errors that take time to detect. What starts as a quick shortcut can turn into a lengthy detour. METR's report warns that while AI can assist with routine coding tasks, it cannot think like a programmer. It can mimic logic, but not create it.

So, where does that leave the story of the AI-assisted coder? Still valuable, but not as revolutionary as some expected. Developers like using these tools; many feel more confident and creative with them. Yet, it's a big jump to say that these tools can replace real expertise. Like calculators and spreadsheets in earlier times, improvement in the ease of working is real, but limited. Productivity increases are there, but mostly for repetitive, obvious or well-understood tasks.

In India, this distinction will become clear quickly. Developers, engineers and students will test these tools not just in theory, but in daily tasks. They'll expect results and identify flaws. If the tool proves useful, it will succeed. If not, it will be fixed, criticized or discarded—sometimes all three.

That is both a challenge and an opportunity. OpenAI has entered a country that is vast, demanding and deeply committed to technological progress. The "cheap" \$399 subscription is actually a bet that Indian users will help shape AI. Given our history with mobile, fintech and digital services, it's a solid bet. But even in an AI-driven future, it seems that some jobs like providing context, critiques and corrections remain uniquely human. And India has no shortage of smart human beings.

ChatGPT's low cost service gives it a vast test market of diverse and argumentative chatbot users