

How new Waqf law undermines Muslim rights



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THE waqf (plural of Waqf) represent endowments made by individual Muslims of private land for public, religious and charitable purposes. Waqf in India has a chequered history dating back to the Sultanate period, though its modern legal framework is more closely rooted in the colonial era. The British feared that any kind of economic autonomy could make Muslims dangerous. There are, generally, two kinds of waqf—one for the upkeep of relatives and children (*Waqf alal-Aulad*) and the other in the names of god (*Waqf alal-Allah*)—though both are, ultimately, for public, religious and charitable works.

Once a Waqf is declared, it cannot be alienated in any form. The British thought that Waqf, particularly for children, was a 'perpetuity of the worst and the most pernicious kind' in order to circumvent property laws, while forgetting the old adage that charity begins at home.

However, the Mussalman Waqf Validating Act of 1913 enshrined the Waqf law recognising *Waqf alal-Aulad*. The management of waqf

should be an internal matter for the Muslim community as long as it does not violate the law of the land. But like the British, the Government of India also sought to regulate the waqf through the 1954 Act and subsequent central and state acts and amendments, including the current and most pernicious one.

Section 2 of the Waqf Amendment Bill, 2025 has substituted the word 'Waqf' from the 1955 Act with the phrase 'Unified Waqf Management, Empowerment, Efficiency and Development'. The acronym is almost UMWED, which means hope in Urdu, and therein lies the sadistic rub. Kiren Rijju, who tabled the Bill, claimed that it represents 'a new hope, a new dawn'.

But who is this UMWED for? For a community that has been the target of vigilantism and moblynchings? For those who have remained silent despite provocations, while prominent BJP members spew hatred? For those whose homes are bulldozed without due process and whose mosques are covered in funeral shrouds during Hindu religious festivals? For those journalists, students, lawyers, doctors and others who dare to question the government?

For those shopkeepers and small businessmen who have to change their shop's location or its name if it is not clearly written that it's a 'Muslim-owned' business? For those who were blackbanded during prayers to protest the amended Act and were subsequently arrested while Rs 2-lakh bonds were demanded from them?



BULLDOZED: The marathon sessions in Parliament were mere illusions of due process. PH

The amended Act is nothing less than a cruel legal act—no, a bulldozer—to demolish any remaining hope that Muslims have in the courts, laws and institutions of India. Perhaps, due to the BJP's relatively weaker mandate, the Waqf Amendment Bill was put through a joint parliamentary committee. However, most of the counterpoints given by the opposition and Muslim individuals and organisations were ignored. The marathon sessions in both Houses of Parliament were nothing more than illusions of due process.

Leading up to the tabling of the Bill and in its aftermath, people have been debating the sublime to the absurd. Is this a masterstroke of coalition politics? Is the Bill a much-needed correction to massive corruption in the waqf? Does the Waqf find precedent in the Quran and are those *ahadith* or statements of the Prophet that support the creation of waqf

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reliable or weak namings? Are waqf religious in their nature? Are the main waqfs—those who endow the trusts—mostly elite 'ashraf' male Muslims and, so, is this a much-needed corrective to restore balance to women and OBC and SC Muslims? Should the post of *mukhtasib* or managers of the trusts be abolished and does endowing a Waqf for relatives and family constitute charity?

In any other circumstances, these would be important questions, but they all detract from and obscure fundamental issues. They assume that the BJP's intent is to uplift the lot of Muslims. As a number of MPs pointed out, the fact that the BJP does not have even a single Muslim MP speaks volumes about its intention. Sections 10 and 12 of the new Act which amend Sections 9 and 14 of the 1955 Act illustrate the BJP's mala fides and hypocrisy.

The unamended Act stipulated that four people of

national eminence in the fields of administration and management, financial management, engineering or architecture or medicine, two members of the Lower House of Parliament and one member of the Upper House, retired judges of the Supreme Court or high courts and an advocate of national eminence all be Muslim in order to be members of the Central Waqf Council and also the board. In other words, it was assumed that Muslims would be well represented in all of these spheres of life.

In the amended Act, the only Muslims who are included in the council are representatives of Muslim organisations, chairpersons of boards—though CEOs can now be non-Muslims—a person to represent high value waqf with an income of over Rs 5 lakh per annum and three scholars of Muslim personal law and theology. That is, the BJP has even done away with representation in organisations that fall under Articles 25 and 26 of the Constitution, which permit communities to set up and administer their own religious and educational organisations.

Does the BJP envisage a future where there will be no highly qualified Muslims or Muslim specialists in various fields, including politics? Or, does it think that even they cannot be trusted to administer waqf by the mere fact of their being Muslim?

Of the more absurd amendments is the requirement in Section 4 sub-clause ix that only those Muslims who have been practising for over five years can endow a Waqf. Earlier, any person, irrespective

of religion, could endow one.

The question of what constitutes a practising Muslim has not been resolved amongst Muslims for over a millennia. Almost 1,200 years ago, for example, Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal disagreed with Imam Abu Hanifa about whether lapsed prayers, for instance, make a person non-Muslim or not. Imam Abu Hanifa's jurisprudence is followed by the majority of Muslims in South Asia, who call themselves Hanafi Sunnis. Now, this question will be decided by the district collector with inputs from police, local intelligence units, politicians and perhaps noisy neighbours.

During the parliamentary debates, Anurag Thakur belatedly: "We will not allow a second partition in the name of land jihad. India needs freedom from the fear of the Waqf board." Online and in the media, the BJP has been promoting the Waqf Bill as saving India from land-grabbing Muslims and not as a move for the uplift of the community.

The reality is that the paternalistic and frankly humiliating amendments made by the government point to the simple reality that Muslims must not be allowed autonomy in any aspect of their private or public. The amended Waqf Act is yet another instance of the shift from marginalisation to the exclusion of Muslims that is taking place in the political, legal, economic, cultural and social spheres.

Munshair marne pe ho ja ki umid/No-umid us ki dekhni chahiye (He whose hope depends on dying/His hopelessness must be seen).

Haryana's rising debt set to catch up with Punjab



SHER SINGH SANGWAN
EX-PROFESSOR OF SBI CHAIR,
CRRI, CHANDIGARH

THE Budgets of 2025-26 for Haryana and Punjab were presented in March, with outlays of Rs 2,05,017 crore and Rs 2,36,080 crore, respectively. Haryana shows an increase of 13.7 per cent compared to 8.38 per cent in the previous year's revised estimate (RE). On the other hand, Punjab shows an increase of 4.8 per cent compared to 15.05 per cent the previous year.

The Haryana Budget speech created a buzz with the announcement of a new Department of Future, a hub for innovation and entrepreneurship and a Sankalp Authority to control the drug menace. Comparatively, the Punjab Budget emphasises eradicating the drug menace on a war footing, support for sports, health and education.

However, no substantive measures have been proposed to improve fiscal health or strengthen govern-

ance in both states.

The department-wise budget in Haryana is skewed in favour of industries and commerce, with increases in allocation by more than twofold, followed by a 39 per cent increase for town and country planning, 36 per cent for agriculture allied activities, 30 per cent for panchayats and rural development and 28 per cent for social welfare. Health, education and police have got moderate increases from 7 to 12 per cent. The allocation for the public health and public works departments remains almost unchanged, while it has decreased for energy by about 25 per cent.

The Punjab Budget is not explicit in department-wise allocation but gives bifurcation for main items like salary, pension and devolution for local rural and urban bodies.

The major concern in the Haryana Budget is that repayment of interest, salaries, pensions, devolution to rural and urban bodies, and power subsidies together account for 65 per cent of total revenue expenditure (RE)—or 76 per cent of revenue receipts (RR). Besides, as much as 15 per cent of the RRs is used in social security pensions. The remaining revenue expenditure is managed by only 10 per cent of RRs and a revenue deficit (RD) of Rs 20,600 crore.

Further, the implementation of the Lado Lakshmi Yojana of Rs 2,100 per month for women is still looming large on the state budget.



MANAGEMENT: The debt repayment of Punjab is about half of Haryana, \$100K.

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In Punjab, the above five items of expenditure account for about 82 per cent of the total RE or 99 per cent of the RRs. The remaining RE, including social security pensions, is managed by 1 per cent of the RRs and the RD of Rs 23,957 crore. The Rs 1,000 support to housewives is still a headache for Punjab.

The projected capital expenditure (CE) in Haryana is Rs 20,812 crore, which will come from borrowings net of RD and repayment of debt instalments of Rs 35,788 crore in 2025-26.

Similarly, in Punjab, the CE

The methodology and norms applied in the estimation of GSDP in Haryana need to be probed.

of Rs 10,302 crore during 2025-26 will be from the borrowings net of RD and debt repayment to the extent of Rs 18,199 crore.

Surprisingly, the debt repayment of Punjab is about half of Haryana despite its higher outstanding debt. Even the interest payment by Haryana is more than that of Punjab. One of the reasons may be that the loans availed of by Punjab may be long-term ones compared to the recent short-duration loans by Haryana. This fact has been kept under the veneer by Haryana's lower debt to GSDP (Gross State Domestic Product) ratio, as discussed next. It indicates the need to probe debt management by Haryana.

The debts of Punjab and Haryana are Rs 3,82,955 crore and Rs 3,17,257 crore, respectively, as of March 31, 2025. From March 2015 to March 2025, Punjab's debt increased by about 3.4 times compared to the rise by 4.5 times in Haryana. This means Punjab has tried to check the debt, but its increase is still unchecked in Haryana. However, it is camouflaged in terms of the lower debt-GSDP of Haryana at 26 per cent than the 31.1 per cent allowed under the FRBM (Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management) Act, whereas Punjab's debt-GSDP ratio is about 45 per cent.

It is to be noted that this illusion has been created due to a 2.78 times increase in the GSDP of Haryana at current prices compared to just 2.2 times in Punjab during the above period. Those familiar with the economy of Haryana may have observed some green spots in Gurugram and along the GT Road, but the rest of Haryana's economy is static, especially in industry.

The Haryana Government is well aware of its debt problem, that is why the FM-cum-CM tried to defend the fiscal situation in the eight initial pages of the Budget speech. It combats with a saying of the local Bazar area, 'taakar uasla ut poleh ki karhata hai' (a camel with a knee problem cries before sitting).

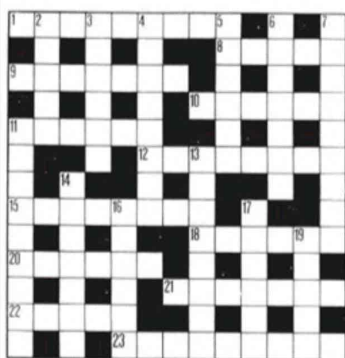
The comparison of the budgets of Punjab and Haryana brings out that repayment instalment by latter is almost double of the former. The rate of increase in debt of Haryana has been higher than Punjab over the last few years; hence their absolute amount of debt may synchronise in the next two years.

However, the much higher increase in Haryana's GSDP is enabling its compliance with the FRBM Act. The higher increase in its GSDP is not substantiated by subdued non-farm activities in the state except in Gurugram and along the GT Road. It indicates the need for a study to probe the methodology and norms applied in the estimation of GSDP in Haryana.

Punjab has a wider economic base but its Directorate of Economics, like that of Haryana, may put its GSDP data in a better perspective. It must also target the electricity subsidy for domestic and agricultural consumers for rationalisation. A betterment cess on employees and credit-worthy citizens may be considered in both the states.

In fact, at the all-India level, the Supreme Court should ban cash support to one section of society in any state with a revenue deficit as it puts an unwarranted debt burden on the other sections.

QUICK CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1 Complete defeat (9)
- 8 Simulate (5)
- 9 Vague notion (7)
- 10 Form of unarmed combat (6)
- 11 Renowned (6)
- 12 Bring about (8)
- 15 Indefatigable (8)
- 18 Greet (6)
- 20 An attributed character (6)
- 21 Involve in difficulties (7)
- 22 Principal (5)
- 23 Deceive falsely (9)

Saturday's solution

Across: 1 Calous, 4 Plump, 7 Rosy, 8 Intrigue, 10 Soft option, 12 Backer, 13 Acoust, 15 New Orleans, 18 Fiendish, 19 Daze, 20 Tepid, 21 Perusal.

Down: 1 Ceres, 2 Lose face, 3 Sanity, 4 Port of call, 5 Urge, 6 Predict, 9 Boneheaded, 11 Nowadays, 12 Benefit, 14 Toss-up, 16 Spell, 17 Reap.

DOWN

- 2 Reddish hair dye (5)
- 3 Immature (6)
- 4 Visual imagination (5,3)
- 5 Rub out (6)
- 6 Composer of The Four Seasons (7)
- 7 Have too low an opinion of (9)
- 11 Speed up processing of (4,5)
- 13 Filmy substance of cobwebs (8)
- 14 Obscure in meaning (7)
- 16 Not punish (3,3)
- 17 An ordained Christian minister (6)
- 19 Unexpected turn of events (5)

SU DO KU



SATURDAY'S SOLUTION

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

CALENDAR

APRIL 7, 2025, MONDAY

- Shukla Sarnvat
- Chaitra Shukla
- Chaitra Purnasht
- Hijri
- Shukla Paksha Tithi 10, up to 8.01 pm
- Dhruv Yoga up to 6.19 pm
- Pushya Nakshatra up to 6.25 am
- Moon in Cancer sign
- Gandmoola start 6.25 am

FORECAST

SUNSET: 18:06 HRS
SUNRISE: 06:04 HRS

CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	38	19
New Delhi	41	21
Amritsar	36	19
Bathinda	40	19
Jalandhar	35	18
Ludhiana	38	20
Bhiwani	40	21
Hisar	40	19
Sirsa	40	21
Dharamsala	30	14
Manali	24	09
Shimla	25	15
Strinagar	23	08
Jammu	33	18
Kargil	13	-02
Leh	11	-02
Dehradun	—	—
Mussoorie	24	14

CONTINUED ON 10

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

India-Lanka rapport

PM's visit signals a strong push for closer ties

A key takeaway from Prime Minister Narendra Modi's three-day visit to Sri Lanka is that the two neighbours have interlinked security interests and are committed to strengthening their ties in defence and other sectors. The signing of a pact to institutionalise military cooperation is a major step forward; it is expected to provide for more joint naval exercises and facilitate greater collaboration between their defence industries. No less important is a trilateral agreement — involving India, Sri Lanka and the UAE — for developing Trincomalee as an energy hub. This is apparently a bid by India to counter China, whose state energy firm Sinopec signed a deal earlier this year to build an oil refinery in Sri Lanka's southern port city of Hambantota.

Beijing's growing influence in the Indian Ocean Region has prompted New Delhi to reach out to littoral nations such as Sri Lanka. Meanwhile, Colombo has been walking a deft tightrope, eager not to antagonise both Asian giants. India acted as the first responder when the island-nation was rocked by an economic crisis of 2022. The current firming up of a debt restructuring agreement is intended to impress upon Sri Lanka that India, unlike China, is not keen on a transactional relationship — mutual trust and goodwill are Delhi's avowed priorities.

PM Modi and Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake have also made headway in resolving the contentious issue of Indian fishermen. Hundreds of them from Tamil Nadu have been arrested over the years by the Sri Lankan authorities for inadvertently fishing in that nation's waters. The release of several Indian fishermen on Sunday will help in easing maritime tensions. The PM has also urged the Dissanayake government to fulfil the aspirations of the Tamil community and conduct provincial council elections. These pro-Tamil initiatives are significant as the BJP is looking to make big inroads into Tamil Nadu, which goes to the polls next year.

Fight not over yet

Muslims launch protest against Waqf law

THE Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025, has sparked a storm of protest from Muslim organisations across the country. The All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) has called the Act unconstitutional, vowing to challenge it legally in the Supreme Court and launch a nationwide agitation to seek a repeal of the Act. At the heart of the opposition lies the inclusion of non-Muslim members in Waqf boards and the Central Waqf Council — seen as a dilution of Muslim control over religious endowments. More troubling, however, is the provision empowering the government to determine the ownership of Waqf properties in the absence of documents, raising fears of arbitrary takeover of historical religious sites.

The board is especially critical of political parties like the JD(U), TDP and LJP (Ramvilas), which, despite their secular claims, voted for the Bill. The AIMPLB also sees the legislation as a deliberate move to weaken Muslim institutions under the guise of reform. It plans to fight it legally and politically, through street-level campaigns and democratic mobilisation. A phased agitation will involve outreach to minority bodies, jurists, Opposition parties and the public at large.

However, the government maintains the changes are aimed at transparency and curbing corruption. Minority Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju has defended the move as necessary reform. But many in the Muslim community fear it is part of a broader strategy to erode autonomy of their religious affairs. With Muslims forming 14 per cent of the population, the law has struck a nerve, potentially stoking communal resentment. If the government does not engage in inclusive dialogue, the confrontation could deepen societal divides. The fight, clearly, is not over yet. And this time, it's not just about property. It's about rights, representation and respect.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune

LAHORE, TUESDAY, APRIL 7, 1925

Convincing reply by CR Das

CR Das has given as sincere, and subject to one reservation, as cogent and well-reasoned an answer, as convincing a reply to Lord Birkenhead's answering "goshim" as it was possible for anyone to give. "I invite Mr Das," said Lord Birkenhead in his speech in the House of Lords in reply to Das' statement on the subject of revolutionary violence, "to take a further step. He has publicly dissociated himself from political assassination and violence in any form. I ask him to go forward and cooperate with the Government in repressing the violence he deprecates." Das, in his reply, gives conclusive reasons why he cannot accept Lord Birkenhead's invitation. "My answer to his lordship's invitation," he says, "is this: If I were satisfied that the Bengal Act would finally eradicate the evil which is eating into our national system, I would unhesitatingly support the Government. I am not so satisfied. It is not because I would not prevent political crimes, even if I could do so; but because I entertain a deep-rooted conviction that without the Government meeting us more than half-way, all my efforts in this direction will fail to achieve their object; and though I think that a favourable atmosphere has been created for further discussion, I am unable to cooperate with the Government in its present policy of repression." If one were so minded, one might here point out that Das is really going farther than he might or, indeed, ought to have done. None of us believes at the present time in the supposed Jesuitical doctrine — a doctrine, by the way, which the Jesuits themselves have again and again indignantly repudiated — of the end justifying the means.

Shun toxic mix of religion, politics

One need not be a 'Hindu' or 'Muslim' to experience religiosity that's free from dictates of priestcraft

AVIJIT PATHAK
SOCIOLOGIST

I am getting increasingly afraid of what is generally being perceived as religion. Whenever there is a religious festival, be it Eid or Ram Navami, I become terribly nervous. I begin to fear that this festive moment might be turned into its opposite with communal violence, hate speech, cleverly designed political engineering and stimulation of toxic militant identities. Likewise, I fear whenever some politicians remind us that 'our religion is in danger', and it must be protected from our 'enemies'.

In fact, I fear that what we perceive as religion, far from broadening our horizons and making us kind and compassionate, might spread hatred, division and violence. Am I then anti-religion? Or, don't I have any religiosity of life? I assume that there are many who are asking these questions. Let us, therefore, go deeper.

To begin with, it is important to accept the fact that, for most of us, the way we practise religion is essentially an imitative group behaviour. Because of the 'accident' of birth in a particular community, most of us are socialised in a way that we are conditioned to think and act like Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Jains, Buddhists, etc.

We hardly choose our religion. The acceptance of this conditioning as something 'natural' leads us to imitate what other members of our religious community do. We follow the dictates of priestcraft almost blindly; we quote the scriptures mechanically; and we become ritualistic; and we



RITUALISTIC: Religion as a sort of imitative mass behaviour gives us a sense of psychic security, renews

think that ours is the only way.

This conditioning has two dangers. First, it is inherently divisive and violent. I am a 'Hindu'; you are a 'Muslim'; and hence, our paths can never meet! Second, we tend to surrender our own quest, or our own creative agency. We tend to accept — almost blindly and mechanically — what our community members regard as 'normal'. In a way, we are compelled to follow the same rituals, quote the same scriptures and visit the same 'holy' sites! Well, religion as some sort of imitative mass behaviour gives us a sense of psychic security — the pleasure of a "we feeling". However, it also creates the ground for communal violence: the hatred towards the 'other'.

It is, therefore, not surprising that the mass sentiment associated with this sort of religion can easily be used and manipulated for what we are witnessing in our times — the politics of hyper-nationalism and religious fundamentalism. If we think deeply, we realise that

We need to initiate a meaningful conversation with young minds so that they can see through the politics of organised religions.

there is no deeper quest in this sort of heavily politicised religion: there is no peace or warmth. Instead, this sort of religion asks us to be perpetually angry, find our 'enemies' everywhere and erect huge walls of separation.

Isn't it sad that in the land of Buddha, Kabir and Guru Nanak, we are witnessing the

ugly manifestation of this sort of politicised and toxic religion? While a group of politicians promotes it, there are self-proclaimed bobas and gurus who legitimise it. And this sort of unholy alliance between religion and politics creates an environment conducive to the growth of potentially authoritarian or fascist personalities.

We tend to believe that kindness or cross-religious conversations are a sort of weakness; and it is only a hyper-masculine or authoritarian leader who can 'protect' the 'purity' of our religion, and save us from the 'enemies' we have constructed.

It is equally important to realise that this discomfort with what is being perceived or practised as religion in our times does not mean that our existence has to be merely a dry, technical or mathematical enterprise. Yes, there is mystery; there is wonder; there is uncertainty; and there is a longing for something that transcends our embodied existence.

Isn't it a matter of wonder that a tiny blue flower blooms

in silence, or the sun's rays illumine the amazingly beautiful Himalayan peak? Possibly, our religiosity is about this poetic wonder — this realisation that we find ourselves amid this beauty. Possibly, with this wonder and gratitude, a poet like Walt Whitman wrote: "To me every hour of the light and dark is a miracle."

Or, think of what we, irrespective of our social/economic position, experience every day — the transitory nature of everything. There is sunrise, and there is sunset. There is youthfulness, and there is aging. There is life, and there is death. Nothing remains the same forever. If we truly realise and internalise it, how is it possible to retain our egotistic pride?

Possibly, the realisation of impermanence leads to the lightness of being. This is humility or humbleness. In a way, our existence is teaching us that the religiosity of life is about wonder, mystery, gratitude, humility, love and compassion. And from this realisation, I assume, emanates our finest prayers: the prayers that inspire us to overcome the trap of the egotistic pride, acknowledge that not everything is under our control, and we are not the masters of the universe.

Call it whatever you like — poetic, divine or spiritual. The fact is that this sort of experiential religiosity is refreshingly free from the dictates of priestcraft, or the boundaries of organised religions. One need not be a 'Hindu' or a 'Muslim' to experience it. One just needs to decondition one's mind and look at the universe with openness.

As a teacher/educator, I have always felt that we need to initiate a meaningful conversation with young minds so that they can cultivate their critical faculty, see through the politics of organised religions as well as soulless scientism, and experience the rhythm of life and death with love, humility and gratitude.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Religion is to do right. It is to love, it is to serve, it is to think, it is to be humble. — Ralph Waldo Emerson

Simple joys & toys of childhood

NJ RAVI CHANDER

THE games we played in our childhood are unknown to kids today. Our first toys were folded-paper aeroplanes. We propelled them into space with our hands. The 'aircraft' had no fuel, but our skills determined how far it flew.

With the right design and a little muscle power, paper planes can glide like a bird. As youngsters, we competed to see whose plane flew the farthest. Cheers would erupt as the craft soared and landed smoothly on its belly, but there was sheer disappointment when it didn't. Interestingly, the iconic Wright brothers also used paper to build models of their first aeroplanes.

We also made boats with scraps of paper. The monsoon was the best time to make them as they sailed in the ditches and streams overflowing with water. We enjoyed watching the boats wade through the swirling waters cluttered with debris. We followed their course with excitement and raced ahead to clear any obstacle in their path. Unfortunately, at the voyage's end, the boats filled with water and grime would disappear to the bottom of the stream.

It was no less thrilling to play the role of a 'kite runner' — chasing kites felled in aerial duels or sprinting to pick up colourful pamphlets dropped from gliders advertising the arrival of a new circus in town. Tragically, a teenage boy was mowed down by a train while chasing a kite. Losing their only son sent the parents into depression.

Discarded cycle tyres became playthings as we navigated them on the streets with a stick or used them to play hula-hoop. We also played games with discarded cigarette packs, fruit seeds and matchbox labels. Chatting on the matchbox telephone, flattening coins on railway tracks, bringing down fruits with a catapult, riding piggyback, playing cricket with a clipboard and paper ball, building sandcastles and going trigger-happy with our toy guns were life's little pleasures that provided hours of undiluted joy. The evenings during vacations came alive with board games.

On weekends, we rented bicycles and explored the wilderness beyond the town. With a new game to play every day, there was never a dull moment. We lived in a magical world!

In the pre-television era, girls dabbled in hopscotch. Throwing or catching discs, rings and balls were other popular games. They got their creative juices flowing by making dolls out of coconut leaves, hay and straws. The male figure with the body draped in white cloth and head adorned with a turban reminded me of voodoo dolls, while the female ones had colourful fabric wrapped around them.

Girls would also spread their miniature toy stoves, pots and pans on the floor and pretend to rustle up a treat. They also had ingeniously made wooden dolls and spent hours decking or pretending to feed them. Today's mass-produced electronic or mechanical playthings are poor cousins to the simple toys of yesteryear.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Strategic recalibration needed

Refer to 'When Modi met Yunus in Bangkok' (The Great Game); the article aptly captures the shifting sands in Dhaka — from Yunus' provocative remarks in Beijing to the quiet re-entry of the ISI and signs of US orchestration. His growing alignment with both China and the West should compel India to shed illusions of loyalty and adopt a clear-eyed, strategic posture. New Delhi must deepen economic and defence ties with Bangladesh, while expanding cultural diplomacy and connectivity through the North-East. Rather than reacting with outrage, India should respond with measured steps. This is not a moment for noise, but for strategic, steady and patient recalibration of power.

CHANCHAL S MANN, UNA

Modi-Yunus meeting

Apocryph of 'When Modi met Yunus in Bangkok'; the meeting, shadowed by incendiary rhetoric and geopolitical tremors, underscores an eternal truth — geography binds, but history reminds. Yunus' cavalier 'dismissal' of India's North-East has reopened old wounds. Yet, Delhi's calibrated response mirrors maturity, not muscle. The Bay of Bengal, our shared cradle, demands collaboration, not condescension. As Dhaka flirts with forces seeking to undermine the hard-won liberation of 1971, let wisdom prevail — trust, not truculence, builds bridges.

GURDEV SINGH, MOHALI

'Explainer' engaging, insightful

The recently introduced 'Explainer' section in The Tribune is a highly commendable initiative. By breaking down complex current affairs into clear, accessible narratives, it serves as a valuable resource for readers — especially students and those preparing for major competitive exams. The clarity, relevance and structured presentation of topics make it significantly easier to grasp both national and international developments. This section not only fosters informed public discourse, but also enhances general awareness. It is both engaging and insightful. Given its positive reception, the section should have a full page devoted to it.

PARDEEP SINGH, BATHINDA

Litmus test for Punjab's governance

The Punjab episode involving Col Pushpinder Bath is a litmus test for justice, accountability and governance in Punjab. If the state proceeds with disciplinary action against Col Bath for allegedly bypassing procedural norms, it would reflect not only institutional failure, but also a betrayal of those who serve with honour. His decision to approach the Punjab & Haryana High Court without prior military approval may appear procedurally irregular to his superiors, but it reflects a deeper malaise — a desperate quest for justice when internal systems fail to respond. In stark contrast, an IPS officer entrusted with upholding the laws reported to have subverted it. This misuse of authority not only erodes public trust but also makes a mockery of the rule of law.

LT COL GURPARKASH SINGH VIRK (RETD), BY MAIL

Crucial deterrent to corruption

Refer to 'Judges' assets'; making it mandatory for judges to disclose their assets deserves unequivocal support from every citizen of the world's largest democracy, as transparency is a crucial deterrent to corruption. The judiciary stands as the strongest pillar of democracy because its decisions are guided by objectivity, free from the political compulsions that often influence the executive and legislative branches. If the virus of corruption were to infect the judiciary, it could lead to the dangerous prospect of judicial pronouncements being reduced to commodities.

AP SINGH, LUDHIANA

Ghibli trend raises red flags

The growing popularity of AI-generated Ghibli art has sparked a quiet storm — raising unsettling questions about privacy, ownership and the role of human creativity in a rapidly automating world. What began as a harmless trend — turning selfies into dreamy portraits — has caught the attention of privacy advocates, cybersecurity experts and artists alike. At the heart of the issue lies the way these AI models are 'trained'. Many rely on original Ghibli artwork lifted from the Internet without permission. Besides, generating AI images often involves analysing user inputs — typed prompts and uploaded photos — which may be stored, reused or exposed to third parties.

CAPT AMAR JEET (RETD), KHARAR

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

The share of faculty posts vacant in AIIMS-Delhi

35 In per cent. Responding to a query under the RTI Act, the administrative officer of the faculty cell of AIIMS-Delhi said 430 faculty seats were vacant at the institute against a sanctioned strength of 1,235. There were no recruitments for regular faculty posts in 2020, 2023, 2024. ANI

The share of bank accounts owned by women in India

39.2 In per cent. According to the latest edition of "Women and Men in India 2024: Selected Indicators and Data" released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, women own 39.2% of bank accounts. The proportion is even higher at 42.2% in rural areas. ANI

Claimed number of new BJP members in Maharashtra

1.51 crore. At least 1.51 crore people took primary membership of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Maharashtra during a recent campaign, the party's State president Chandrashekhar Bawankule said. Mr. Bawankule was addressing party workers at a function. ANI

Days for which BJP is protesting against price rise, reservation

16 The Karnataka BJP will launch a 16-day movement against price rise and 4% reservation for Muslims in government contracts. The first phase of the *Janoakrosha Yatra* will cover Mysuru, Mandya, Hassan, Kodagu, Mangaluru, Udupi, Chikkamagaluru, Shivamogga and Uttara Kannada. ANI

Number of people killed due to Israeli strikes on Gaza

15 Israeli strikes on the Gaza Strip killed at least 15 people, including 10 women and children, overnight and into Sunday, according to local health officials. The latest strikes hit a tent and a house in the southern city of Khan Younis. AP

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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Can the U.S. President serve a third term?

What does 22nd Amendment to the U.S. Constitution state? How is U.S. President Donald Trump trying to circumvent the 22nd Amendment and serve one more term as President? Are there circumstances through which the U.S. Speaker could become U.S. President? What are the rules in other nations?

EXPLAINER

Kartikey Singh

The story so far:

In March 30, the 78-year-old U.S. President Donald Trump said he's "not joking" about serving a third term in the White House. He further claimed that a legal loophole could make it possible.

Does the U.S. Constitution allow it?

The 22nd Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, ratified on February 27, 1951, limits U.S. Presidents to two elected terms. It was brought in response to Franklin D. Roosevelt's unprecedented 'four-term' Presidency (1933-1945), which broke the 'two-term' unwritten precedent set by the nation's first President, George Washington, who voluntarily declined a third term in 1796.

The Amendment prohibits anyone from being elected President more than twice, and if someone has served as President for more than two years of another's term (for example, a Vice President who became President due to the President's death or resignation), they can only be elected once. Thus, effectively, the maximum U.S. Presidential tenure can be 10 years (two years as a successor plus two full terms). For Mr. Trump, elected in 2016 and 2024, the 22nd Amendment unequivocally bars a third term, due to his two elected terms (2017-2021 and 2025-2029), regardless of their 'non-consecutive' nature.

What is the 'VP loophole'?

Despite the 22nd Amendment's clarity, Mr. Trump has suggested ways to circumvent it. One idea he proposed involves J.D. Vance running for President in 2028 with Mr. Trump as Vice President (VP). If elected, Mr. Vance would resign, allowing Trump to assume the Presidency. However, the 12th Amendment blocks this strategy, stating: "No person constitutionally ineligible to



New rules: A protest against the policies of U.S. President Donald Trump in California, on April 5. AP

the office of President shall be eligible to that of Vice-President of the United States." Since the 22nd Amendment bars Mr. Trump from another term, he cannot serve as VP either.

While the VP route is blocked, another theoretical path exists through 'succession', as explained by Professor Bruce G. Peabody in his paper. The 22nd Amendment prohibits a person from being "elected" to the Presidency more than twice but does not bar "serving" beyond two terms. In other words, a twice-elected President could ascend to the Oval Office via the line of succession, such as by becoming Speaker of the House, who is elected by members of the House and need not himself be a member of Congress, if the President and VP become unavailable.

A third pathway – repealing the 22nd

Amendment – is highly unlikely. Under Article V, this requires either a two-thirds vote in both the House and the Senate or a 'constitutional convention' – a process never used – called for by two-thirds (34) of State legislatures, followed by ratification by three-fourths (38) of the 50 States. Given the current U.S. political landscape, the likelihood of Mr. Trump securing a constitutional amendment, which has not been done in the past 33 years, is virtually non-existent.

Which world leaders have extended their tenure?

Leaders all over the world have skillfully extended their rule by reshaping constitutional limits. For instance, Vladimir Putin, after two terms as Russia's President (2004-2008), hit the 'consecutive' two-term limit under Article

81(3) of the 1993 Constitution. To circumvent this limit, he then became Prime Minister (2008-2012) as his ally Dmitry Medvedev took the Presidency and extended the Presidential term from four to six years. Returning as President in 2012 and 2018, Mr. Putin, with a 2020 amendment backed by a loyal Duma and judiciary, reset his term count, potentially holding power until 2036.

Türkiye's Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Prime Minister (2003-2014), turned President, axed term limits via a 2017 referendum, and reshaped Türkiye's system into a Presidential one. Similarly, China's Xi Jinping eliminated the two-term cap in 2018. This change allowed Mr. Xi to rule indefinitely, cementing his hold over the party and the State.

Yet, some leaders thrive without rewriting the rules. In Germany, where chancellors face no 'term limits' but need 'Parliamentary support', Angela Merkel ruled for 16 years. Similarly, Prime Ministers in Canada and Britain, unbound by fixed terms, can lead indefinitely, sustained by 'party confidence'.

Why doesn't India have term limits?

Unlike the U.S. Presidential framework, India's Parliamentary system imposes no term limits on its Prime Minister, as tenure depends on retaining the Lok Sabha's confidence (Article 75(3)). This design ensures 'voter sovereignty', 'democratic flexibility', and 'parliamentary accountability', allowing leaders who sustain public trust to serve extended periods. For instance, current Prime Minister Narendra Modi could serve 15 years by 2029. However, the system also includes checks like the "no-confidence" motion, which has historically ended tenures – such as those of V.P. Singh (1990), H.D. Deve Gowda (1997) and Atal Bihari Vajpayee (1999). Moreover, regular elections, coalition dynamics, floor debates, judicial oversight, and a free press ensure a robust democratic balance.

Kartikey Singh is a final year student at RGNUL, Patiala, Punjab.

THE GIST

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Why were students protesting over Kancha Gachibowli?

What is the ownership status of the 400-acre land parcel known as Kancha Gachibowli? Why did the government decide to auction the land? Why were environmentalists worried?

Swathi Vadamudi

The story so far:

The students of the University of Hyderabad at Gachibowli have been protesting ever since the news of the auction of a 400-acre land parcel known as Kancha Gachibowli within campus premises broke. The battle has now reached the Supreme Court, which has acknowledged the destruction of greenery and the existence of wildlife in the area, before taking it up *suo motu*. Three PILs have already been filed in the Telangana High Court against the auction.

Why were there protests?

Students state that the land is part of the university, a claim which has been vehemently denied by the government. The land was part of the 2,324 acres granted to the University of Hyderabad at

the time of its establishment in 1974, as part of the six-point formula proposed by the then Congress government to assuage regional sentiments stoked by the Telangana movement of 1969. However, the land allocation was not formalised through title transfer. Subsequently, large tracts of land, unused by the university, were taken up by the government for various purposes including establishing the Indian Institute of Information Technology, the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, and the Sports Authority of Andhra Pradesh to name a few. By 2010, more than 800 acres of land was taken away in 22 such instances.

What do documents say?

The 400 acres of land which is now under conflict was part of such diversions in 2004, under the then Telugu Desam Party (TDP) government. An MoU was signed with the University of Hyderabad, for the

transfer of 534 acres, in lieu of 396 acres allocated at another location. The land formed part of 850 acres allocated to IMG Academies Bharata for developing sports facilities. A sale deed was subsequently signed, just before Legislative Assembly elections in which the TDP was routed by the Congress. After winning the elections, the then Chief Minister cancelled the land transfer, leading to a long drawn out legal battle. The top court dismissed the Special Leave Petition, allowing the present government under Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy to take up the land.

What are environmentalists saying?

Undisturbed for more than 20 years, the land has become home to a rich variety of native flora and fauna. Several migratory birds also visit the area. A recent compendium of biodiversity collated from the campus mentions 233 bird species, which is higher than the avian numbers in

the KBR National Park and the Mrugavani National Park. It also cited *Murricia hyderabadensis*, a unique spider, which is endemic to the Kancha Gachibowli forest, and found nowhere else. The document also lists at least three reptiles, and 27 bird species which are mentioned in Schedule-I of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, indicating their vulnerability and need for highest protection, besides 72 species of tree diversity.

Why did the govt. decide to auction?

The Congress government in the joint State of Andhra Pradesh under the leadership of Y. S. Rajasekhara Reddy was the first to begin the monetisation of government lands through open auctions, which was decried and denounced by many concerned citizens and political parties. However, such auctions have become the unstated State policy of all subsequent governments in Telangana, irrespective of the party in power.

The Congress party, which won the 2023 assembly elections inherited a State debt of nearly ₹4 lakh crore, which is set to cross ₹5 lakh crore by the end of FY 2025-26. Mr. Reddy's recent admission that he had no funds for capital expenditure reflects the true state of State coffers. The judgment about the ownership Kancha Gachibowli came just in time as a respite for the government, which decided to garner funds for welfare measures through auctioning the land.

THE GIST

▼ The students of the University of Hyderabad at Gachibowli have been protesting ever since the news of the auction of a 400-acre land parcel known as Kancha Gachibowli within campus premises broke.

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thehindubusinessline.

MONDAY • APRIL 7, 2025

Bargain, with pragmatism

India must be firm, yet pragmatic in US FTA talks

Having been slapped with a 27 per cent levy on goods exports to the US, India needs to arrive at some clarity on its negotiating stance in bilateral FTA talks. The Trump administration is using levies as a tool to browbeat major trade partners into submission. The US has also upped the ante by listing out a litany of complaints in its recent National Trade Estimate report, prepared by the office of the US Trade Representative. This wishlist, comprising perennial demands where differences will inevitably remain, will probably find its way to the negotiating table.



India should be firm, and yet pragmatic where feasible — resisting US attempts to set the pace for an early harvest deal by this autumn. It should refute the US 'tariff king' argument. India's weighted average tariffs, according to WTO data, are about 12 per cent, whereas the US cites a misleading simple average tariff of 17 per cent (WTO data), against its own 3.3 per cent. As America seeks to wipe out its trade deficit with India (\$45 billion, and less than 3 per cent of its overall imports), it wants to drive a hard bargain in key areas. The US is particularly keen as the world's second largest farm trader to sell more to India. It seeks to prise open the Indian market for wheat, corn, rice, soyabean, pulses, meat and dairy products and a variety of fruit, which are subject to protective rates.

The USTR report has protested non-tariff curbs on drugs and medical devices, under which refurbished ones come under scrutiny, as well as standards on the GM content in food products or an inquiry into animal feed. The Americans also seem to have squarely told India to wind down its purchases of Russian oil. On the imports side, the US will be training its guns on electronics and the pharma industry. President Trump has said that he plans to slap tariffs on pharma 'that have never been seen before'. India's \$9-10 billion pharma exports of generics (in about \$87 billion of total exports to US) are under a cloud.

Agriculture and dairy tariffs are justified for livelihood reasons and allowed under WTO rules. It is unfair for the US to cavil at India's farm duties, when its farming is cleverly subsidised to evade WTO scrutiny. Nor can food safety standards be wished away. The US has for long pursued the relaxation of intellectual property rights, specifically Section 3 (d) of the Patents Act that restricts evergreening. There is no case now for relenting on their terms. Enforcing standards on medical devices is borne out by the recent history of faulty hip transplants. India could, however, buy a reasonable sum of oil and gas and cut levies on less consequential products such as alcohol and some exotic fruits. The auto sector, which has matured under protection for long, can bear a duty cut. India needs to play for time in these talks, amidst huge protests that have broken out against the Trump government. Whether the US relents on its tariffs and other steps, amidst global and local retaliation, remains to be seen.

OTHER VOICES.

The Guardian

Donald Trump's tariff ultimatum

When Donald Trump stood before union auto workers in the Rose Garden he declared "Liberation Day", promising to stand up for Main Street. Whether that pledge will be fulfilled is moot. He will declare victory either way. What the US president offered was not just an economic programme, but an imperial one. Mr Trump's logic, if it exists, lies in the 397-page report on "foreign trade barriers" he bristled on Wednesday. Its message is brutally simple: you may sell your goods to Walmart shoppers, but only if you let US cloud services hover over your data, US media flood your screens and US tech monopolies operate on their terms — not yours. TikTok is the test case for Trump's platform nationalism: only US firms may mine data, reap profits and rule the digital empire. A one-week ultimatum and a fabricated national emergency lay bare the theatrics driving Mr Trump's agenda. www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/apr/06/trump-tariff-ultimatum

讀賣新聞

THE YOMIURI SHIMBUN

Outrageous Move Will Destroy Free Trade System

This is an outrageous move that will destroy the free trade system that has been the driving force behind the development of the global economy since the end of World War II. U.S. President Donald Trump's high-tariff policy, which focuses solely on his own country's interests, is completely unacceptable. Japan must work with the European Union and other countries and regions to strongly demand the United States withdraw the policy. Since the end of World War II, the United States has led the free trade system, taking the initiative by lowering tariffs to help develop the global economy and also playing a role in having democratic rule take root. This is an astonishing situation in which Washington will deliberately overturn that policy. www.yomiuri.co.jp

The certainty of 'uncertainty'

World trade is likely to shrug off the Trump tariff tremors and find a new equilibrium. But when is the big question

LINE & LENGTH.



TCA SRINIVASA RAGHAVAN

The Big Bang has come and gone. The uncertainty is over. Actually, however, there was none because everyone knew an increase in American customs duties was coming. Everyone also knew it would be by whatever amount each country was charging imports from the US, you know, that reciprocal thing Trump had announced.

Hence my question: if everyone knows 95 per cent of everything that's going to happen, where's the uncertainty? So uncertainty was a big bogey. It was like knowing you'd get wet if water was poured over you.

As things have turned out, the import duties have increased but not by as much as was anticipated under that reciprocal formula. In terms of consumer theory, that's the equivalent of 'consumer surplus'. It accrues when you pay less for something than you'd been willing to pay.

The big question now is by how much American demand will shrink as a direct consequence of the higher import duties. Arguably this is the uncertainty that everyone was worried about.

But even this is not correct. Whether or not demand shrinks depends on both price and income elasticities of different things. We know this from our direct experience in India since 2014 because the Modi government has done exactly what the Trump government has, namely, increased import duties. The difference is India has done it gradually and America has done it in one stroke.

Have higher import duties reduced Indian demand? Not that you'd notice. And in spite of income growth having been slow.

Have they caused higher inflation? Definitely not because there are other far more powerful drivers of inflation. The contribution of higher duties is negligible.

A NEW EQUILIBRIUM

What is certain, I would say therefore, is that world trade will shrug off this whole episode and find a new equilibrium that's not very different from the old one. Higher import costs will get



LABOUR ISSUE. The US' lack of semi-skilled workers will hit Trump's plans of a manufacturing boom

compensated for by higher efficiencies because global trade now is simply too big. Even margins will recover. But as always in economics, while you can work out the what, you can't work out the when.

There is a very strong reason for this: import substitution doesn't work if a country won't make structural changes quickly. Again, India knows this from its experience since 1957 when it started its import substituting policies and failed to make structural adjustments to the financial and labour markets. It still hasn't.

As far as America is concerned, it has two structural problems that go back at

America has plenty of both skilled and unskilled labour but hardly any semi-skilled labour that large scale manufacturing needs. Import substitution via higher tariffs isn't going to solve this problem

least 75 years. One is an abundance of technology-embedded capital which is not accompanied by the required increases in semi-skilled labour.

This has pushed up its wage bills and sent manufacturing investment outwards. China has also seen this happen in recent years but unlike the US it hasn't been constrained by the value of its currency. It's been able to offset higher wages in China by keeping its currency undervalued in dollar terms. Not by as much as it used to a decade ago but quite a bit undervalued nevertheless.

THE STRUCTURAL ISSUE

The other problem stems from what economists knew but has forgotten: the 1953 Leontief Paradox, which said that despite being a labour scarce country, America was exporting labour intensive things.

This finding was later refined — or refuted if you like — by saying highly skilled labour was capital! Defence equipment is a good example of this. There are many others.

In the labour market context, America has plenty of both skilled and unskilled labour but hardly any semi-skilled

labour that large scale manufacturing needs. Import substitution via higher tariffs isn't going to solve this problem.

So why would anyone invest in America if the right kind of semi-skilled labour isn't there? I mean, isn't this what has happened to India? We started this *atmanirbhar* thing without fixing the labour supply aspect and it simply hasn't taken off.

Let me say this differently. Regardless of how much you fiddle with things like taxes, tariffs, subsidies and so on, in the end, you have to fix your labour market. Can America do it? Not without importing semi-skilled labour.

GLOBAL MEANS WHAT?

The western hemisphere has, for nearly 200 years, thought its problems are global problems. The same thing is being projected again now. But in today's world will a recession in the US lead to global output shrinking? It hasn't for the last 40 years.

To sum up, Trump's protectionist foreign trade policy won't result in more investment and jobs in the US and a recession there won't be as horrible as is being made out. This isn't the 1930s.

FY26 may see indifferent credit, deposit growth

An ambience of US-induced global turmoil is likely to impact credit and deposits, giving rise to some challenges

Manas R Das

Two events that have occurred recently can potentially influence the Indian banks' business during 2025-26.

First, on April 2, the Trump Administration unleashed the so-called 'trade war' across the world.

Second, many commercial banks have either reduced their deposit rates or annulled their 'special' deposit schemes of the previous year, even before April 9 when the RBI's Monetary Policy Committee is scheduled to announce their decisions on the policy rates. The elevated rates were reportedly compressing the banks' Net Interest Margin (NIM).

Deposit growth considerably decelerated during 2024-25, despite interest rates remaining high compared to the preceding years. This led banks to tap the Certificates of Deposit (CDs) as also (infrastructure) bonds markets.

One of the positive factors that would shape the deposit growth trajectory in 2025-26 include rising per capita 'disposable' income, consequent upon substantial income tax relief provided in this year's Budget. Add to this the hikes effected in Dearness Allowance/Dearness Relief for the central government employees/pensioners.

Further, banks are expanding their physical network and amending their

mistake of relying on walk-in deposits. Many bank CEOs have started exhorting their staff to mobilise deposits.

There will be some competition from the government's small savings schemes to bank deposits, as the government has kept interest rates on the former unchanged at least for 2025-26 Q1.

Despite the stock market turbulence, the continuing faith of the middle classes, especially via Systematic Investment Plans (SIPs), would compete with bank deposits. In fact, a large section of the middle class has got used to the current market volatility, which they believe is more due to external factors.

But inflation, if not controlled, would play a role as it erodes not only the savings capacity but also the 'real' return from bank deposits.

Among other negative factors, unemployment may worsen as many IT and IT-enabled services have already announced layoffs during 2025-26. 'Trump tariff' may also exacerbate the unemployment situation.

According to the RBI's survey on inward remittances for 2023-24, US emigrants as the topmost source of remittances to India. However, consequent upon massive layoffs and other problems in US, remittances may reduce in 2025-26. On the contrary, probably, many parents, whose wards are studying in US but wouldn't be able to pursue Optional Practical Training or internship during vacations, have to



BANKS. Credit-Deposit issues

remit money to them. The same would happen if inflation in US worsens.

Banks may have to meet the retail deposit shortfalls from such factors through wholesale deposits like CDs, as observed in 2024-25. While the former is low-cost and stable, the latter isn't.

Therefore, the RBI may consider removing deposit insurance coverage for CDs as recommended by the RBI Report on Deposit Insurance Reforms (1999), and the premium saved therefrom be given as additional interest to retail depositors.

Thus, we expect deposit growth to increase in 2025-26, albeit modestly.

CREDIT GROWTH

In general, uncertainties surround the credit demand during 2025-26 due to the global tariff imbroglio. So long as the situation doesn't stabilise not only

between India and US but also between India and other jurisdictions with which India is negotiating Free or Bilateral Trade Agreements, one cannot say which industries will be affected and which not, besides to what extent.

Trade credit, both for exports and imports, will likely be hit.

However, the 'personal' loans segment will remain resilient due to increased 'disposable' income. The March 2025 revisions in the Priority Sector Loans guidelines by the RBI would increase credit flow to housing and renewable energy sectors.

Despite ascension of gold price, the demand for gold as a safe haven asset would continue, along with gold loans demand.

Demand for educational loans will depend on two opposing factors. Due to the uncertainty in US, the demand for 'overseas' educational loans will dampen. However, since these students will now study in India, the demand for 'domestic' educational loans will correspondingly rise. Non-performing assets in the educational loans portfolio of banks may aggravate.

We expect loans growth to be modest, and this, in turn, may discourage banks to accelerate their deposit growth, given no systemic liquidity tightness.

The credit-deposit ratio may remain unchanged in 2025-26

The writer is a former senior economist, SBI. Views expressed are personal

● BELOW THE LINE



DONALD TRUMP. More to come?

Tariff trailer

While there was no dearth of experts' opinion and reaction on Trump tariff, Nilesh Shah, Managing Director of Kotak Mahindra Asset Management Company, by far had the best cryptic comment. "Picture Abhi Baki hai" (picture has not finished yet). Will the tariff

impact the US more than the other countries? Only time will tell.

When greed rules

NPC officials recently conducted an awareness session around digital financial frauds at Chennai, and the team shared a very interesting case that they encountered recently. A young lady along with her 60+ years old father visited the NPC officials in Mumbai recently.

The lady requested the company officials to convince her father that the 'attractive investment scheme' that he had been informed about on WhatsApp and was being asked to send money to, was too good to be true. But the father did not seem to even trust the officials who work on countering such UPI-related scams.

The man was convinced that his daughter was too naive and missing out on a chance for good returns. As they say, looks like greed is often the biggest cause of people getting scammed.

AI trouble for Cong govt

Of late, the Congress government is facing challenges from students, retired employees, farmers, and the Opposition parties. But the most unlikely challenge has come from Generative AI. During the thick of protests against the controversial plan to auction the 400 acres at Kancha Gachibowli, about the IT hub, a photo with a flock of peacocks running for cover in the area as excavators ravage the vegetation in the background,

started doing the rounds. The image went viral, shaking the conscience of environment lovers in Telangana. Scores of social media handles shared it and blamed the Revanth Reddy government for destroying the 'lung space' of Hyderabad.

Even before Congress activists and the government realised that it's generated by AI, the 'damage' had been done. No amount of explanation stopped people from sharing it. Even after the Supreme Court stepped in to stop all the land development there, the photo continues to be shared and reshared on social media. Do the ruling parties now have a brand new opponent to confront?

Who's next?

Senior BJP leader Nainar Nagendran, an MLA from Tirunelveli, has emerged as the top contender for the post of Tamil Nadu BJP president. This comes after the current president K Annamalai stated that he was not in the race for the post.

Hailing from the Thevar community, in 2017 Nagendran left the AIADMK to join the BJP. Since then, his rise in the party has been steep. Some of the other names doing the rounds for the top post include Varathi Srinivasan, and former president L. Murugan. A decision is likely to be taken next week on who will lead the BJP in Tamil Nadu.

Our Bureau

Making It a Bit More American, Apple's Pie

But outcomes intended by Trump less likely

Apple may have beaten Trump-tariffs for a few months by cranking up production in Asia. It reportedly shipped five planeloads of iPhones and other products from India to the US late last March to avoid new tariffs. But Apple's next moves will be closely watched. The tech giant has large manufacturing bases in countries hit hardest by 'Liberation Day' and its reciprocal tariffs, such as China (54%), Vietnam (46%), and India (26%). Impact of US tariffs on China alone could squeeze the company's gross margin by around 9%, reckons global investment bank Citi. The iPhone-maker, however, has a few options to lessen the impact. It could lobby Trump Inc for the exemption it enjoyed when Trump 1.0 had imposed tariffs on China. This course may be difficult now that Trump-tariffs are directed at a larger group of US trading partners.

Apple could also move its production among countries that secure preferential terms in negotiations with the US. The issue with this approach is it involves a high degree of uncertainty over how trade negotiations progress. Besides, Apple's supply chains in Asia are not at similar stages of development. It will require extra effort to disengage from Chinese vendors. Alternatively, Apple can commit, as it has done, to additional investment in the US. It has demonstrated its ability to scale up production in overseas bases and can reasonably be expected to post similar gains with domestic manufacturing. The constraint here would be supply of low-skilled labour in the US as it rattles up the drive against (illegal) immigration.

Apple will probably exercise a combo of options available to it, lessening the likelihood of outcomes intended by Trump. China will remain a significant manufacturing base for the tech giant. Emerging bases like India will fare according to how well their governments negotiate concessions from reciprocal US tariffs. Apple will also raise US investment in design and marketing, the high-value buckets in its production chain. Net result would trim the share of offshore contract manufacturing.

In the face of implications of Trump-tariffs yet to be known, MPC should preferably 'do nothing'

RBI, Keep Your Powder Dry



Mythili Bhusnurmath

In Mahabharata, Dhritrashtra's charioteer Sanjaya was granted 'divya drishti' (divine sight), the ability to see what was happening on the Kurukshetra battlefield far away. Today, as his 21st-century namesake RBI governor Sanjay Malhotra presides over the MPC's 3-day meet this week, one hopes that he, too, is blessed with divya drishti. But, of a different sort that allows him to see distant events — distant in time, rather than space — as he mulls over the future course of monetary policy.

Does growth need more support? Or should RBI's MPC train its guns on inflation? He knows that growth, by its very nature, favours the haves over the have-nots, while price stability helps the poor, without hurting the rich.

In a country like India, where the number of the poor is still large, though declining, the choice for any MPC faced with a growth-inflation trade-off should be clear. In a country like India, where the number of the poor is still large, though declining, the choice for any MPC faced with a growth-inflation trade-off should be clear.

So, faced with the uncertainty unleashed by Trump's 'Liberation Day' tariffs raised across the globe, what should MPC do? The straight answer, for now, do nothing. The MPC meet comes less than a week after Trump's announcement, when the implications, on both inflation and growth, are largely in the realm of conjecture.



No need to change tracks

It will take a couple of months before the full impact of Trump's kind reciprocal tariffs is known. Are these 'negotiating tactics' that will be reversed once the opponents blink? Or are they intended to remain in place for the long haul? Either case, their immediate impact will be inflationary. Growth will slow down, too, but over the medium to long term.

No wonder central banks of advanced economies like US Fed, Bank of England, Bank of Japan and People's Bank of China opted to mark time at their latest rate-setting meetings. To be sure, Fed chair Jerome Powell is on record that the inflationary impact of tariffs is likely to be 'transitory'. Despite that, the Fed chose to stay put on rates at its last meeting.

Also, remember, the Fed chair had repeatedly termed post-Covid price rise as 'transitory', though it proved to be anything but. Unfortunately, many

central banks, including RBI, bought into his story with the result that the world had to contend with one of the fastest and sharpest rate hikes in recent history to get prices back under control.

Should MPC fall into the same trap as before and see the price impact of tariff hikes as 'transitory', knowing full well the summer months always see an uptick in inflation? Should it allow itself to be led by equity markets calling for a rate cut — ostensibly on the grounds that good news needs to be leg up, but truth be told, only to ensure markets get a liquidity-induced bump-up? Or should it, like a responsible central bank, set the tone and have markets follow?

Yes, going by the latest number for March 25, inflation is lower. But this overlooks the fact that the main driver of inflation in India — food inflation —

is always higher in summer, and so retail inflation will move up in the coming months. Add to that the inflationary impact of retaliatory tariffs — about which there is no doubt — and both core and food inflation will rise.

For MPC, the governor and his newly appointed deputy governor Poonam Gupta, staying put on rates should be a wee bit easier, since — barring a brief period in November 2024, when both the FM and commerce minister called out RBI for not cutting rates — God has (rightly) maintained a studious silence on interest rates in recent months.

This is quite unlike the US, where Trump has been repeatedly badgering the Fed to lower rates. But to the Fed's credit, Powell held his ground and kept interest rates steady at its last meeting

Should MPC see the price impact of tariff hikes as 'transitory', knowing full well the summer months always see an uptick in inflation?

In late March. For the second time in a row, too.

Sure, there is a view that higher tariffs constitute a one-off supply shock, and monetary policy authorities should 'look through' them. But the reality is, we don't know as yet. RBI has already cut rates at its last meeting in February and has gone the extra mile, stuffing the system with liquidity.

In such a scenario, Malhotra could take a leaf out of Powell's book and respond as the Fed chair did when quizzed about not cutting rates: 'When there are so many cross-currents, I think there's a level of inertia where you just say: "Maybe I'll stay where I am."'

That makes eminent sense. RBI, too, should keep its powder dry. Wait and watch, and act only when the fog lifts. Remember that old saying, 'Act in haste, repent at leisure'?

In BIMSTEC, India's A Bigger Stakeholder

India has stepped up. The Bangkok Bimstec summit last week signalled the beginning of a new relationship for Bay of Bengal countries. As the region's largest economy, India has an important role to make Bimstec work. A year after the charter came into force, focus is on connectivity, security and trade. New Delhi has rolled up its sleeves, announcing 20 initiatives. This suggests it'll do its part to ensure Bimstec is not just another regional BRICS in the wall.

India is committed to its strategic involvement in the Indo-Pacific region, of which Bay of Bengal countries are key. Its presence in Bangkok, swift post-earthquake assistance to Myanmar, bilaterals with Thailand and Sri Lanka, and conversations on the sidelines with Bangladesh and Myanmar — including the deft handling of Muhammad Yunus' controversial remarks on India's northeast states — underscores that India has matured to play prime, but not overbearing, convener. China is the elephant in the room — especially given geopolitical volatility. Beijing's continued forays in the neighbourhood, and provocative efforts to present China-India as a zero-sum game. This is more than focused engagement and well-meaning high-minded talk. Zeroing in on digital and energy connectivity for regional development, enhancing physical connectivity, maritime focus for security and openness of the Indian Ocean, connecting UPI and payment systems of member states, exploring local currency trade... India is finally upping its game. Defence, energy and other agreements with Sri Lanka also underscore this. Its efforts in South Asia, the wider Bay of Bengal region and, earlier, in Southeast Asia give a new impetus to its 'Neighbourhood First' and 'Act East' policies. Reassuring, indeed.

JUST IN JEST In 2025, are we quarrelling over whether the law should be selectively applied?

'Wakf Ne Kiya, Kya Haseen Sitam..'

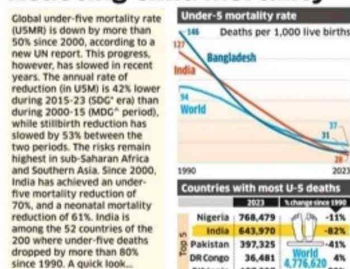
One great thing about 2047 is that it's 22 years away. While we can be intuitively sure that, in that period, Bharat will be so vibrant that jaws slack now will drop in awe of the transformation, we are still quarrelling over something as futuristic as streamlining management and governance of religious properties. On Saturday, after the president gave her assent to the Mussalman Wakf (Repeal) Bill and made it law, it officially became the latest political piñata. Critics are swinging wildly, claiming it's unconstitutional, anti-Muslim and a 'bulldozer' of minority rights. In the new law's provisions — streamlining wakf property management and introducing audits — they find draconian measures. Yes, transparency and efficiency can be problematic. But hang on, it's so tight from organisations of other religions too!

OK, so the new provision of having non-Muslims on wakf boards can be a problem — especially when governments of the Centre and many states are perceived to have an 'anti-Muslim' agenda. But like the repeal of 'instant triple talaq', isn't bringing religious properties in the ambit of the law of the land a vilest idea — instead of using 'personal' religious practices as a shutter? A nice, friendly campaign that dispels mistrust at least among the Muslim citizenry — never mind the knee-jerking politicians — could come in handy now.

ChatGPT SHAIRI OF THE DAY

In the States, student dreams hit the floor, visas yanked as they walked through the door. From lab bench to chalk, they're blocked by red tape shock. Now, they're Googling, 'Study options offshore'.

Reducing Child Mortality



MEME'S THE WORD



Healthy to Get Personal



Naresh Trehan

Tailoring healthcare to an individual's unique biological makeup, lifestyle and environment is emerging as a transformative force. While genetic testing plays a role, the future lies in integrating health records, diagnostics and clinical insights to offer more precise and proactive interventions. This isn't just about treating disease. It's about predicting and preventing it.

Get personal! Heart disease risk can now be predicted using a combination of technologies such as a polygenic risk score — genetic test that indicates predisposition to coronary artery disease — imaging data like coronary calcium scoring, clinical markers and lab investigations. When these tools are used together, doctors can identify high-risk individuals before any symptoms appear. Once identified, risk factors like cholesterol and BP can be aggressively managed.

India's growing adoption of digital health and innovative health policy is enabling healthcare providers to track, and act upon, individual health indicators in real time. This personalised approach enhances not only treatment efficacy but also the patient's overall engagement with their health. But for this to succeed, India must be built on a strong foundation of prevention.

Efforts must be made to democratise personalised healthcare by integrating these technologies into public health systems, including primary health centres and government-funded programmes. Mobile health units, community health workers and AI-driven diagnostics must be adapted for underserved populations.

Preventive healthcare offers a scalable and cost-effective solution. Specific measures being taken to strengthen infrastructure include upgrading of primary health centres (PHCs), expanding Ayushman Bharat health and wellness centres, and leveraging telemedicine to reach remote

communities. Efforts are underway to enhance training for frontline health workers and improve supply chains for diagnostics and medications. Mobile vans, telemedicine platforms and door-to-door awareness campaigns must become the norm. Ayushman Bharat, Fit India Movement and Swasth Bharat Yatra emphasise preventive health and wellness. Also, the recent focus on climate-sensitive diseases and mental health in national health records — flag abnormalities and predict disease trends.

Precisely While genetics has played a key role in this shift, precision medicine today extends far beyond DNA. Lifestyle data, environmental exposures and digital health records are now being used to create personalised care pathways. Gene testing is also helping predict future risk, allowing for timely intervention. Tests like BRCA1 and BRCA2 for breast and ovarian cancer risk, and tests such as PSA (prostate-specific antigen) and other tumour markers that have been in use for decades that aid in early detection across various cancer types, improve survival rates.

Dr AI Advancements in diagnostics, powered by AI, are central to precision healthcare. AI algorithms can process massive volumes of patient data — from lab tests and imaging to electronic health records — flag abnormalities and predict disease trends. Take AI-powered radiology. These tools are already helping radiologists detect early-stage cancers with a higher degree

of accuracy. By recognising subtle patterns in scans that may be missed by the human eye, they alert doctors to conditions long before symptoms manifest. Likewise, AI chatbots and triage systems are helping to assess symptoms and suggest possible causes in real time, reducing the burden on doctors.

But health outcomes still hinge on everyday choices. Personalised medicine emphasises lifestyle as a key determinant of health. This includes precision nutrition based on gut health and metabolic profiling, tailored fitness plans and mental health tools that adapt to sleep and stress patterns. These interventions must be designed for the broader population, ensuring accessibility and affordability.

Government policies and collaborations with private sector will be instrumental in scaling personalised and preventive care. Initiatives such as the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission have already begun integrating patient data through health IDs. Newer initiatives like National Health Stack and Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Mission are setting the stage for robust digital and physical infra to support long-term transformation.

One foot in the future

The writer is chairman-MD, Medanta

MELODY FOR MONDAY

Chariots of Fire

Greek composer Vangelis' music has been described as otherworldly. His finest works are, indeed, goosebumps inducing. And the finest example of his 'electronic classical' has to be his title track for the 1981 sports drama 'Chariots of Fire'. It is nothing short of a modern masterpiece.

His synth-driven melodies were groundbreaking, fusing classical motifs with modern electronic innovation. It begins with gentle, pulsing strings that gradually build up into an uplifting and inspiring crescendo. Images of perseverance, unity and the sheer joy of striving against all odds — the theme of the historical sports drama — are bound to seep through while listening to the track.

Vangelis employs the Yamaha CS-40 synthesiser, known for its rich tonal quality and expressive capabilities. This instrument allowed him to blend orchestral textures with electronic timbres, creating a sound that felt both modern and timeless.

Working in his own studio allowed Vangelis freedom to experiment with different effects, reverb and mixing techniques to achieve the precise sound he envisioned. But his genius lies in his mastery of layering. He used multi-track recording to layer different synth sounds, giving the title tune a lush, immersive quality.

THE SPEAKING TREE

To Know Ram, Know Self

ULLHAS PATEY

In the cacophony of modern life, where moral compasses often waver, Ramnavmi illuminates the path of dharma, the cosmic order that sustains the universe.

The story of Ram is a metaphysical blueprint for living a life of integrity. His exile to the forest is a masterpiece in art of detachment. His unwavering adherence to his father's word is a testament to sanctity of promise. Sita's abduction by Ravan symbolises theft of the soul's purity by forces of ego, desire and ignorance. Ram's triumph over Ravan is the ultimate righteousness that will always prevail no matter how beleaguered.

Ramnavmi is also a celebration of the divine feminine, embodied by her consort Sita in the Ashoka grove, unwavering faith in Ram, and eventual triumph by fire are testaments to the indomitable spirit of womanhood. Sita's story exerts us to recognise and honour the divine feminine in the cosmic dance of creation, preservation and destruction.

The spiritual essence of Ramnavmi lies in its ability to inspire introspection and transformation. It invites us to look within and align our lives with principles of truth, compassion and selflessness. Ram's life is a testament to the idea that true fulfillment lies not in accumulating external possessions but in cultivating inner virtues.

In the words of Tukides, 'To know Ram is to know the Self, to love Ram is to love the Self, and to serve Ram is to serve the Self.'

Chat Room

Best Worstseller: Mein Trumpf

Apropos the news report, 'US Firms Starting Gun, Implements 10% Tariff', the fears created by Trump-tariffs have been well articulated by Singapore PM on behalf of small states. Everything at the moment is in a flux. Assuming multiple tariff wars go off, they would get settled in about 6 months through mechanisms such as bilateral treaties, etc. Hopefully in the interim, the US would not move into a deep recession. Those talking about India's insularity have not done their homework. Already India's trade deficit with China is large, and the recent warning up of China needs to be read in the context of Trump-tariffs on China. India needs to watch its step with both the economic powerhouses, the US and China. Angara Venkata Girija Kumar Chennai

It seems we are going to experience a global trade war without an anchor, as was experienced in 1930. It may be recalled that, in 1930, the then US president had raised tariffs in a very aggressive manner under the Smoot-Hawley Act 1930 that converted the ongoing global recession into the Great Depression of 1932. The serious problem is that Trump has a team of advisers who do not have the courage to question his decisions. On the contrary, they are vehemently endorsing them. Whether Trump is able to make America great again remains to be seen, but by announcing aggressive tariff measures in such a hurried manner, he will surely bring stagnation in the US economy. Mahesh Nataraj Indore



Mahesh Nataraj

Indore

Can We Work on The Positives?

This refers to the Edit, 'Hindi Chini, How to Be Good Friends' (Apr 5). First, strengthen the basic relations between India and China. Both countries should enhance bilateral trade by reducing tariffs, simplifying customs procedures and promoting cross-investment. For mutual safety and security, regular military-to-military talks can enhance trust and understanding. Also, promote tourism between the countries by easing visa regulations and developing tourist infrastructure. These measures can help New Delhi and Beijing to strengthen mutual relationship for peace, stability, prosperity. Aniraj Kamble Kalyanagiri, Karnataka

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CONTRAPUNTO

What's so bad about America putting tariffs on countries who have tariffs on America? If tariffs are so bad why do they have them on us?

—JOEY MANNARINO

Who'll Grab Apple Pie

Will India or Vietnam make the best of an iconic American company's supply chain woes?

Bloodbath. For US stock after stock, that was the commonest fate on Liberation Day. Apple, the world's most valuable company, saw its shares slide 16% over Thursday and Friday. The April 2 tariffs have it in a pincer grip. China, which still assembles about 80% of the about 220mm iPhones sold in a year, has been hit with a 54% tariff. Analysts say this could mean a whopping 40% rise in iPhone prices. They are still lifting their jaws off the ground after watching Trump knocking out American icons like this. Apple has to deal with this blow in a flattening smartphone market. In its woes is the story of all businesses scrambling to rejoin their global supply chain in the stormy new tariffverse.

As **TOI** reported yesterday, the company has already made "unusually high" number of shipments to US, from factories in India and China. So it may be able to hold off a retail price hike for a bit. India, which assembles around 15% of iPhones, has been hit with a 26% tariff. This is lower than China's but way more than companies planned for when they started diversifying here, impelled by Trump's first term and then by Covid. India, however, saw limited benefits from this China Plus strategy compared to countries like Vietnam. Factors ranging from simplifying tax laws to proactively signing FTAs helped the others pull ahead of us in expanding their export shares. This time around, the stakes are even higher.

China's now throwing retaliatory tariffs into the ring. "They panicked — the one thing they cannot afford to do," Trump said. But our columnist today suggests that Washington will not be engaging in tariff negotiations with China anyway. Between them things are bound to get worse. Other countries hope to get a happier hearing. Vietnam, hit with a 49% tariff, has talked to Trump already, offering to pull down its own tariff wall altogether in exchange for US softening. Vietnam has a \$123.46bn trade surplus with US, compared to India's \$45.66bn. They will both do what it takes to benefit from the strategic decoupling of US from China. If the April 2 tariffs stay sticky, it should be advantage India. But the ifs are infinite. One thing that's certain is that any smartphone manufacturing that moves to US is less likely to be done by Americans — than by their robots.



IT'S NOT ABOUT WAQF

Protests are actually not about the new law at all. They are about a complete breakdown in trust between govt and Muslims. GOI must take the initiative to rebuild trust, no law is up to this task

R Jagannathan



Last week, the Waqf Amendment Bill 2023 was passed after two marathon days of debate in both houses of Parliament. There are now protests by some Muslim organisations in different parts of the country. Most opposition parties are backing these protests, and some opposition MPs have already petitioned the Supreme Court against the Bill. It is possible that these protests will fade out, but it is equally possible that they will linger on like the protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act.

Protesters say this legislation is unconstitutional since it tinkers with the rights guaranteed under Article 26 of the Constitution, which gives any religious group or denomination the right to "establish and maintain institutions for religious and charitable purposes; to manage its own affairs in matters of religion; to own and acquire movable and immovable property; and to administer such property in accordance with law".

GOI justification for making changes to the existing Waqf Act is that waqf boards work non-transparently, which has led to many legal tangles, especially since boards could claim almost any property as waqf land. Religious and other properties belonging to non-Muslims were also at stake. Plus the Bill had support from segments of the Catholic community too.

A press release posted by the minority affairs ministry says: "While Waqf properties serve religious and charitable purposes, their management involves legal, financial, and administrative responsibilities that require structured governance. The role of waqf boards and Central Waqf Council (CWC) is not religious but regulatory, ensuring legal compliance and safeguarding public interest. By introducing checks and balances, empowering stakeholders, and improving governance, the Bill sets a progressive and fair framework for waqf administration in India."

But the real issue is not the Bill at all. It is the near-complete breakdown of trust between GOI and India's second-largest religious community. Question is, how is it possible for a govt to govern and maintain social harmony when this trust breaks down?

Remember CAA was not about Muslims in India either, but managed to rile them anyway. Today, whether or not the Waqf Bill improves the governance of waqf boards and CWC, large sections of Muslims are convinced that govt is out to get them. And no token gesture, like the Saut-e-Milli kits given to minorities

for Eid, is going to end this mistrust.

This mistrust is being fanned by opposition parties, which want to reap a block vote from the minorities in future elections. But this is no different from saying that BJP wants block votes from Hindus. If there is mistrust, it must be addressed. Tokenism is not going to change anything.



The untrusting state of affairs cannot be ended without moves towards a broader dialogue with Muslims (and Christians). But one must note that the underlying mistrust is between Hindus and minorities. GOI alone cannot end it, even though it is widely presumed that it is battling only for Hindu interests.

Consider the petitions asking for the release of Hindu temples from state control, especially in the

south, which the Supreme Court sat on for more than a decade, and then lobbed back to high courts — Modi govt's lawyer backed the idea. But perceptions cannot be changed that easily.

For starters, GOI should open a dialogue with organisations protesting the Waqf Bill. It can promise to incorporate any genuine demand that does not impact other communities or allow a waqf to release into misgovernance.

But what must follow is a broader dialogue between Hindu and Muslim organisations, where each community lays out its grievances and red lines more clearly. Agreements can be reached on the basis of give and take. Issues can range from cow protection to control of lynch mobs, recognition of Islamic iconoclasm, namaz on the streets, and the ethical limits to religious conversion activities. It is pointless to believe that law alone is enough to deal with a breakdown of trust when so many issues remain unresolved and the wounds of partition remain unhealed.

There is also a need for Muslims to introspect about why the community is so resistant to reform. Why does a community of more than 200m — the third largest in the world — see itself as a victim in any and every situation?

Additionally, Muslims in India cannot presume that what happens to minorities in India matters; their support for minorities in two neighbouring countries also matters. Many Hindus did not appreciate Muslim opposition to CAA. The Nehru-Liaquat pact was indirectly about ensuring this cross-country support to minorities. How can pluralism be protected in India, if the same cannot be protected in Pakistan, Bangladesh or even Kashmir Valley?

More importantly, if demography is changing in many states (Assam, Kerala, parts of Bengal and UP), it is the emerging Muslim majority in these regions that needs to reassure Hindus and other minorities about safety and security.

In India, majorities are legally decided state-wise. But the average district in India has over 2m population, and the largest district had a population of more than 1m. There, now bifurcated, in 2011. Legal determination of majority and minority becomes irrelevant in areas where all communities feel unsafe.

The issue, to repeat, is not the Waqf Bill. It is the growing mistrust between two communities. And the process of healing this rift must begin with GOI taking the initiative. Ultimately, the two communities concerned must work out a way to live in amity on the basis of compromise and goodwill. Mistrust cannot be left only to the law to fix.

Corridor Of Death

Trump, Arab sheikhs and Hamas don't care about what Bibi's doing to Gazan Palestinians

As Netanyahu meets Trump today — their second meeting since Trump returned to the White House — the situation in Gaza continues to be near-catastrophic, with more than 50,000 dead. Israel has resumed military operations in the Strip since Jan 18, breaking a phase I ceasefire that had been in place since March 19. That was a day before Trump took office. Since then Tel Aviv has wanted to change the terms of the temporary truce according to which Israel had to completely withdraw from Gaza and end the war in exchange for Hamas releasing all remaining hostages. But Israel now wants Hamas to continue releasing hostages without any commitments to ending the conflict.

It's likely that Trump's return has emboldened Netanyahu, who now feels he has a blank cheque from Washington to do as he pleases in Gaza. And the conflict has certainly provided political capital to Netanyahu, helping him blunt his domestic challenges and legal problems. Of course, Trump feels he has to back the Israeli right-wing gut because that is what his core MAGA base wants, and because of the Jewish lobby's influence in American politics. But Hamas isn't blameless either. It would have known that its Oct 7, 2023 attack on Israel would have elicited a massive response against ordinary Palestinians in Gaza. Yet it went ahead with the slaughter, most likely with a green signal from its patrons, like those in Tehran.

Meanwhile, the Arab states, which now see Iran as a bigger problem, appear to be half-heartedly concerned about the fate of Palestinians. Therefore, neither Trump nor the Arab states are putting credible restraints on Netanyahu. The end result means Tel Aviv could even start sitting UK MPs who had come to Israel to witness aid projects in the West Bank. As no one speaks for ordinary Palestinians, Gaza is turned into a corridor of death.



Columnist based in Tokyo

Trump to soften the tariffs.

But the US-China trade war, in particular, has sharply accelerated. In Feb, US imposed 10% tariff on all products imported from China. In March, it added another 10%. China had responded to this by raising 15% tariff on coal and LNG from US, and 10% on American oil, agricultural and farm machinery, and large-engine cars. In March, China also raised 10-15% tariffs on agricultural products from US.

But things erupted into a full-blown trade war last week when US imposed 34% tariff on China, bringing the total tariff hit on Chinese products to a whopping 54%. China hit back by imposing its own 34% tariff on US exports.

The trade war escalation between US and China was bound to happen. For, in US, competition is the main factor organising society. Such competition culture is also reflected in US diplomacy. And over the last 250 years, US has won all competitions and not allowed any of its rivals, including Germany, Japan, and the erstwhile Soviet Union, to survive. This reinforced US pre-eminence in the global order.

But today, US is worried about losing its superpower status. From a competition perspective, other countries, including China, have been growing faster than US under the global free trade regime. Therefore, Washington believes if US continues with the same policies, in the near future, it will lose its leading status as the only

superpower in the world. So what should US do? It needs to change the current global free trade regime now. And this is what is being reflected in the Trump administration's MAGA program.

Instead of a multinational framework to protect global free trade, Trump's diplomatic style is bilateral negotiations to seek a deal by using intimidation. And as last week's reciprocal tariffs showed, almost no country is safe.

However, even within this framework, China is a special case. Because China is the only country that has the potential to win the competition with US. Therefore, the Trump administration is using two types of



tariffs. One for China and one for the rest of the world. For example, the White House initially increased tariffs on Canada, Mexico and China for the same reason and at the same time. Then, it postponed imposing tariffs on Canada and Mexico in Feb because it was negotiating with these two countries. This means that tariffs on Canada and Mexico are negotiating tools.

However, at that time the Trump administration increased tariffs on China even though it postponed increasing tariffs on Canada and Mexico. In March, US

resumed tariffs on Canada and Mexico, but it increased tariffs on China again.

Indeed, in the case of China, the same situation played out several times when Trump was president from 2016 to 2020. From this perspective, tariffs on China and tariffs on other countries are different. Tariffs on China are non-negotiable, and tariffs on other countries are a negotiating tool. This may also explain why China was US only in the domestic market to counter the impact. Tokyo hopes this will be an effective way to persuade

China to soften the tariffs. But the US-China trade war, in particular, has sharply accelerated. In Feb, US imposed 10% tariff on all products imported from China. In March, it added another 10%. China had responded to this by raising 15% tariff on coal and LNG from US, and 10% on American oil, agricultural and farm machinery, and large-engine cars. In March, China also raised 10-15% tariffs on agricultural products from US.

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Brothers Karma-zov

Bigger must have bigger stick, na?

Bachi Karkaria



Consider this land whose creeds, ethnicities and nose-shapes were as multitudinous as the streams that enriched its mighty rivers which then merged with humanity's boundless ocean. Its family had lived harmoniously for countless generations. Owner's Pride, Neighbour's Envy. But this exemplary brotherhood was coming increasingly unstuck. Instead of 'We are the world' it was more 'Things fall apart, the centre cannot hold'. In fact, centre often didn't want to.

Thus encouraged, Biggest Brother to start bossing over smaller siblings. Yes! It, traditionally, even legally, he had greater rights to property and decision-making. But so far he'd been congenial, and not merely for the sake of familial unity. He was actually a big hearted guy, more like all-embracing philosophy than rigid religion. But to quote Yeats again, 'All this has changed, changed utterly'.

First, Biggest Brother put his foot down when a sibling wanted to marry a man of her own choice. Only because he'd quite baselessly decided that that one *pyar-syar*, but impurely ulterior motives had ensnared naive *behna*. His cohorts ganged up and hounded the hapless couple to death.

Then he dictated what everyone should eat. Or not eat. Since the larger family had diverse likes, this deprived some members of their regular food, and occasionally even livelihood.

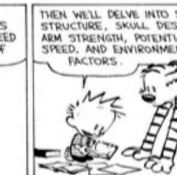
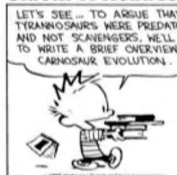
Eat, love, so of course pray was pushed on the ban-wagon. One Mumbai Christmas, 'midnight mass' lost its *daison d'etre* by being shifted to 10pm. Another brother has been most affected. This March 11, his holy month coincided with Biggest Bhैया's bolsters festival. So in UP and elsewhere, Smaller played safe and postponed *jumma* prayers till Biggest finished playing Holi.

Last week saw two onslaughts. An uncharitable bill on most put upon brother's charities. And, double festive-spiller whammy. Eid namaz was forced out of its public spaces, and meat out of big *imam* in Biggest Brother states. Since his 'pure veg' festival had begun, 'No slaughter within 500 metres of place of worship'. This amounted to blanket ban since every corner now boasts a shrine.

As it must, no? Doesn't everyone believe that God must be everywhere?

Alec Smart said: "Tariff pe tariff. Trade justice denied."

Calvin & Hobbes



Ram Accepted Everyone Equally

B Purushartha

The idea of Ram is unparalleled in its character, contribution, and impact. Ram has been understood in multiple ways. For many, Ram is a historical man, but for some, Ram means good qualities, and the Ram-Ravan war is an inner war between good and evil.

Ram is so ingrained in Indian life and culture that we all accept him. He is *lobhita* for believers of a personal god (like Tulsi) but also dear to believers of an impersonal god (like Kabir).

Ram-Rajya is synonymous with the ideal rule, and Ram-Rajya is the most desirable rule. 'Ram' is the most used sign of the oppressed. He is an ideal son, brother and friend. While questions are raised about Ram as a husband, Ram and Sita are considered

to be the perfect couple. In the Hindi belt, majority of marriage songs are based on Ram. Ram is a common name for many people, and Ram-Ram is a standard greeting in rural and semi-rural setups. Ram is such an integral part of our daily life that our everyday discourse cannot be without using the word 'ram'.

Ram is not limited to elite class but worshipped by innumerable *dev-dhaki* people, including those outside brahmanical order. "Jo gati jag birag jatan karu nahin pavat (Jo gati det gith Shabri kahan prabhu bahut jiya jani) — Ram easily gives that to the downtrodden which is unattainable by high priests.

His religion cutting across caste, creed, polity and geographical

boundaries is a puzzle for many who wish to see India through a narrow lens. But how did Ram attain such status and importance? Not just because he is an avatar. Ram is in a different league. This importance comes from the sacrifice and progressive outlook exemplified by him. Ram's sacrifice is unparalleled, and tapasya is long and painful. Despite being worthy and powerful, he shuns the crown for a simple life, being truthful to his vow, he never took comfort from royal patronage during vanavas. He accepted everyone equally and empowered them by him. Ram led people to achieve a new life.

Many felt sorry for Ahilya, but only Ram worked for her social reacceptance. Only Ram wept for his wife. For setting the new maryada, he

fought with the high and mighty Ravan, Indira, Jayant and Bali. Ram's fight was not only for his wife, but it was for the oppressed. He avowed in Atri Muni Ashram to rid the world of oppressors.

While many cultures and civilisations assign the gift-giving role to the wealthy and powerful, India assigns this role to the wise and tapasya, who are beyond material pursuits. Ram is the ideal person to be made for the role, and he ensures that he does so while remaining a lifelong tapasya — Ram *tapasya* raja. That is why Allama Iqbal writes: "Hai Ram ke wajood pe Hindostan ko nazam! Ahi-e-nazar samajhte hain ko Imam-e-Hind" — India is proud of Ram, wise consider him spiritual guide of India.

The writer is joint secretary, DEA, Ministry of Finance, GOI. Views are personal.



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**Editor's
TAKE**

Building Bridges with Sri Lanka

Prime Minister Modi's landmark visit to Sri Lanka signals new era in bilateral ties

India and Sri Lanka share a common history and geography. The two nations are intertwined through their cultures and economies. After a brief period of full, they are once again enjoying good relations. This was evident during Prime Minister Modi's recent visit to the island nation. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's three-day visit to Sri Lanka from April 4 to 6 has marked a significant milestone in Indo-Lanka relations, as both nations inked key agreements across defence, energy, and economic sectors, laying a robust foundation for deeper regional cooperation and mutual growth.

Modi's visit comes at a crucial time for Sri Lanka, which is still grappling with the aftershocks of its 2022 economic crisis. In a strong message of regional solidarity, India announced fresh grant assistance worth LKR 2.4 billion for developmental projects in Sri Lanka's eastern provinces. The Prime Minister also reaffirmed India's steadfast commitment to supporting Colombo's economic recovery. Prime Minister Modi, in a joint statement with Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, said that India has converted loans worth \$100 million into grants, and that the India-Sri Lanka bilateral debt-restructuring agreement will give relief and immediate help to the people of Sri Lanka.

One of the most notable outcomes of the visit is the first-ever comprehensive defence cooperation agreement between the two countries. The landmark deal will see enhanced military collaboration, including structured knowledge exchange programmes, tri-services training, high-level dialogues, and joint research in defence technology. India already provides specialised training to around 750 Sri Lankan military personnel annually, and both nations frequently engage in joint exercises. The new agreement formalises this longstanding cooperation, signalling a strategic realignment in the Indian Ocean Region. Given the historical backdrop of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) operations in Sri Lanka during the late 1980s, the agreement reflects a mutual willingness to move forward and foster trust through collaboration.

A second major highlight of the visit was the signing of an agreement to connect the electricity grids of India and Sri Lanka, enabling energy trade between the two countries. This is set to be a game changer for energy security and integration in the region. Further strengthening trilateral cooperation, a strategic agreement between India, Sri Lanka, and the United Arab Emirates was signed to develop Trincomalee as a regional energy hub. This initiative aligns with India's broader "MAHASAGAR" vision, which seeks to ensure peace, prosperity, and partnership across the Indian Ocean Region. India's role in co-chairing the Official Creditors Committee for Sri Lanka, coupled with its \$4 billion lifeline during the height of the island's crisis, has been instrumental in paving the way for IMF support. Modi's announcement of reduced interest rates on Sri Lankan debt and the conversion of previous loans into grants highlights a commitment not just to recovery, but to long-term economic stability.

Strategic concerns also featured in the discussions between the two leaders. Modi expressed gratitude to President Dissanayake for respecting India's security interests — especially in light of previous tensions over the docking of Chinese research vessels at Sri Lankan ports. The moratorium imposed in December 2023 on such visits has contributed to easing bilateral strains. PM Modi was conferred the 'Sri Lanka Mitra Vibushana', one of Sri Lanka's highest civilian honours for foreign dignitaries. He becomes only the fourth international leader and the first in over a decade — to receive the award. With strategic partnerships deepening and mutual trust building, Indo-Sri Lankan relations are poised for a transformative phase.

The cultural reckoning of a nation

As India rises on the global stage, it is beginning to confront and reclaim narratives long buried by post-independence consensus. This is not regression — it is renewal

In an increasingly polarised media landscape, especially outside India, it has become routine to portray cultural productions such as *Chhaava* — the recent historical about the torture and execution of Maratha leader Chhatrapati Shambhaji Maharaj at the hands of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, as tools of political messaging. Yet to reduce such works to mere propaganda is to misunderstand a far more complex and necessary civilisational shift. To accuse Prime Minister Narendra Modi of stoking divisiveness each time history is revisited is not only simplistic — it is a refusal to engage with the deeper process underway in India: a long-deferred reckoning with its past. This is not a distortion of historical memory but a release of long-suppressed narratives. Far from being a cultural regression, it reflects the growing maturity of a democracy that is learning to look itself in the mirror, however uncomfortable the image may be.

For decades, certain episodes of India's history, many of them documented, studied, and preserved through folklore and regional traditions — were curiously marginalised in mainstream discourse. The reasons were often political: the forging of national unity in the wake of Partition demanded a careful, often sanitised story of the past. But this came at the cost of clarity. The spiritual resistance of Sikh gurus, the armed struggle of Maratha warriors, the contributions of revolutionaries such as Veer Savarkar, and even the traumas of India's wars and internal displacements were frequently consigned to footnotes.

Chhaava is only the latest in a line of films *Uri*, *The Kashmir Files*, to name a few, that challenge this selective remembering. None of these films present new "facts". Rather, they give voice to chapters that were absent from cultural and institutional platforms for decades. Predictably, the sudden presence of these suppressed truths in the public square has unsettled some sections of society. But this discomfort speaks less to historical inaccuracy and more to an ideological dissonance — the shock of losing monopoly over historical interpretation.

To argue that this is the majority "asserting its narrative" misses a more vital point: must the pain of the majority always be dismissed as majoritarianism? India, with its civilisational ethos of resilience and coexistence, once mistook acceptance for passivity. Not any more. As the country ascends towards great power status, it is beginning to shed these reflexes.

The process requires clarity, not confusion; memory, not myth. It will test not only India's



democratic institutions but also its emotional and historical intelligence.

PM Modi's declaration of 14 August as Partition Horrors Remembrance Day is emblematic of this new posture. It was not a call to vengeance but to reflection — a national gesture honouring the millions displaced or killed during Partition and a reminder that social divisions must be confronted, not buried. As the Prime Minister himself stated, the day is meant to "remove the poison of social divisions, disharmony, and further strengthen the spirit of oneness". That such a move is viewed as politically motivated in some circles reveals more about entrenched biases than about the act itself.

The criticism, then, needs to be reframed. Why did it take India more than seventy years to allow mainstream films on such episodes? Why were imperial invaders like the Mughals consistently romanticised while the resistance they faced from native dynasties was downplayed? Why, until very recently, did Indian cinema steer clear of stories that showed the armed forces in active combat, or acknowledge that India fought four wars over Kashmir between 1947 and 1999?

The idea that India is sliding into cultural intolerance because certain stories are now being told is ironic, especially when one considers the long-standing stereotyping of Sindhis, Parsis, Sikhs, and others in Indian films of the 1950s through the 1990s. If anything, today's cinema is less caricatured, more

layered, and finally courageous enough to explore civilisational complexity without being hemmed in by post-independence dogma.

There is also a geopolitical dimension to this debate. In contrast to authoritarian states like China, where historical memory is tightly controlled by the state, India remains a democratic and open society. Its cultural

expression — however noisy or chaotic — is a sign of institutional resilience. India is not perfect, but it is plural. It is not uniform, but it is unafraid to debate. And that very openness, while a source of domestic contestation, is what makes India a more viable long-term partner for the democratic world.

Some argue that this cultural assertiveness will make India less tolerant. But the greater risk lies in suppressing civilisational memory in favour of a bland, borrowed consensus. As India becomes more geopolitically important, economically, strategically, and demographically, it will naturally also face more pressure to conform to global narratives shaped elsewhere. Expecting the world order to let a rising India be is naive. These very tools — cinema, media, social debate — will be used to push back against its rise.

But the country is now more aware than ever that strength must come from a sense of historical rootedness, not denial.

In this context, *Chhaava* is not a piece of political theatre. It is part of a larger moment — an opening up of the cultural space where India's diverse past can be re-examined with courage and complexity. It is not about stoking communalism.

It is about recognising that trauma, when acknowledged honestly, need not lead to vengeance; it can lead to reconciliation. The global tendency to interpret India's cultural debates through the prism of immediate electoral politics misses the scale of what is happening. India is not just changing Governments. It is rediscovering itself.

The next fifty years will be critical. If India is to fulfil its potential as a stabilising power in the multipolar world, it must continue on this path of self-clarification.

Not all truths will be comfortable. But no democracy, especially one as large and diverse as India — can afford to run from them. Cinema may not be a constitutional tool, but it is a cultural one.

And if it becomes the vehicle through which India finally tells the whole story of itself, the world should not fear it. It should listen.

(The writer is the author of Dark Star: The Loneliness of Being Rajesh Khanna and The Midway Battle: Modi's Ruiter Disaster Second Term. Views expressed are personal)



GAUTAM CHINTAMANI

Phishing: How scamsters trick you

SECOND Opinion

BY SHANTY SHARMA

Imagine waking up to an urgent email with the subject line, "Immediate Action Required: Your Bank Account Has Been Suspended!" or "Your Streaming Subscription Has Been Terminated: Update Your Payment Details Now!" The message no doubt looks official, with the bank's or the streaming service's logo and a professional tone, warning that your account has been compromised or your payment details need to be updated immediately.

Panic sets in. You don't want to lose access to your hard-earned money or favourite shows. Without thinking twice, you click the link in the email, which takes you to what appears to be the official website. It prompts you to enter your login credentials, bank details or National Insurance number. The urgency of the message makes you act fast — until you realise, too late, that you've just handed over your sensitive information to cybercriminals.

With a single click, all your accounts, confidentiality, and finances could be at risk. Phishing is a cyber-attack technique where hackers attempt to trick people into sharing sensitive information, such as usernames, passwords, and financial details, by using fake websites, emails, or messages to steal data such as credit or debit card details and login credentials. This form of social engineering exploits human psychology

rather than technical vulnerabilities, making it a persistent and evolving threat in the digital age. There are numerous types of phishing attacks, such as:

a) Whaling: A specialised type of spear phishing aimed at high-profile individuals like CEOs or government officials, often involving sophisticated social engineering tactics.

b) E-mail Phishing: The most common form, where attackers send fraudulent emails pretending to be reputable entities, such as banks or online services, urging recipients to click on malicious links or download harmful attachments.

c) Spear Phishing: A targeted attack where hackers gather personal information about their victims to create personalised, convincing messages that appear legitimate.

d) Smishing and Vishing: Smishing (SMS phishing) uses fraudulent text messages to lure victims, while vishing (voice phishing) involves phone calls from attackers impersonating trustworthy organisations.

e) Clone Phishing: Attackers replicate legitimate emails, replacing attachments or links with malicious versions to deceive recipients.

f) Website Spoofing: Fraudsters create fake websites that closely resemble legitimate ones to trick users into entering sensitive credentials.

The first and foremost way to prevent yourself from being a victim is to enable multi-factor authentication (MFA), even if credentials are compromised — for it adds an extra layer of security. Organisations should conduct regular cybersecurity training to raise awareness about phishing tactics for their employees.

Even the Indian Government has taken several initiatives, such as the Cyber Surakshit Bharat Initiative and the Digital India Campaign, to raise awareness about phishing and enhance cybersecurity among citizens.

The Indian Government regularly posts cybersecurity tips and scam alerts through platforms like Twitter (@Cyberdost) and Facebook, and the Cyber Crime Helpline — 1930 allows victims to report phishing attacks quickly. These are a few initiatives that aim to guide users on how to detect and avoid phishing attacks.

As a safety concern, it would be beneficial to install and update antivirus and anti-phishing tools to detect malicious content. Before entering any personal information, one must ensure the website's URL begins with "https://" and is authentic, as attackers often use slight variations of legitimate domains. It is crucial to look for red flags such as poor grammar, urgent requests, and generic greetings that indicate phishing attempts.

i) If you fall victim immediately turn off your Wi-Fi. Report the attack to the relevant authorities or IT departments.

ii) If you entered your login credentials on a phishing site, then change the password of the compromised account immediately, followed by updating other accounts that use the same or similar passwords.

iii) If you entered banking details or made a payment, then call your bank immediately, explain the situation, and request to block or freeze your account if necessary.

(The writer is an educator. Views are personal)

Leaderspeak



...Offered prayers at the sacred Jaya Sri Maha Bodhi in Anuradhapura with President Dissanayake. It's a deeply humbling moment to be at one of the most revered sites in Buddhism. May His blessings always remain upon us. It is a living symbol of peace, enlightenment, and spiritual continuity. May the teachings of Lord Buddha always guide us.

PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI

Letters to the Editor

DEALING WITH THE US TARIFFS

Madam — No one knows exactly how far the US tariff war will go. Several global institutions are anticipating a potential recession in the US. It is evident that the US is targeting China in response to China's expansionist and protectionist policies. China's hostile actions toward Japan, Taiwan, the Philippines, and India regarding territorial claims have stirred strong sentiments in these countries. China has also strategically targeted the US, as well as India. Its imposition of 34 per cent reciprocal tariffs on the US could further disrupt American industries. The narrative circulating in the media, suggesting that India align with China to counterbalance US tariffs, is premature. The Indian industry remains wary of a renewed influx of dumped Chinese goods, as was the case in the past. To grow into the third-largest economy and beyond, India must pursue long-term strategic goals and nurture large-scale corporations capable of competing with American, European, and Chinese manufacturers and exporters. India must strengthen its trade alliances, diversify its export base, and invest in innovation-driven infrastructure. A calibrated and independent economic strategy will safeguard national interests while enabling India to become a formidable global economic power, resilient, self-reliant and forward-looking in an increasingly multipolar world.

VINOD JOHRI | DELHI

NEED STRICT LAWS FOR FIRECRACKER UNITS

Madam — The tragic blast at an illegal firecracker godown-cum-factory in Deesa GIDEC, North Gujarat, which claimed the lives of 21 workers from Harda, Madhya Pradesh, has raised serious concerns about a deeper, possibly well-connected illegal network. The explosion cannot be treated as a mere tragic accident, but behind it there exists a larger nexus between the operators of the ill-fated Harda firecracker factory — where a similar explosion killed 13 and injured 200 in December last year. Investigations have revealed a potential Ahmedabad connection in the illegal operation. According to sources close to the investigation, aluminum powder — a key component in firecracker production, was being supplied by an individual from Narol, Ahmedabad. This material was allegedly being used to manufacture firecrackers without any government authorisation. There must be strict penalties for violations, coupled with a robust legal framework that supports swift and decisive action against miscreants. This includes cracking down on the illegal sale and distribution of firecrackers and ensuring that those who flout the ban face significant consequences.

RANGANATHAN SIVAKUMAR | CHENNAI

ATROCITIES ON DALITS MUST END

Madam — Apropos "Teacher breaks Dalit student's fingers for touching water bottle", published on April 2, here is my response. A 15-year-old Dalit, Class 11 student, went to Narendra Pratap Singh Higher Secondary School in Haripur Catholic village, Uttar Pradesh, on March 29 and he picked up a water bottle placed on a table. This enraged the Biology teacher, who reportedly hurled casteist slurs and said, "How dare you touch the bottle? Now it has become untouchable. Who will drink from it?" It appears that the Science teacher practises untouchability. It is intriguing that he, with utmost unscientific temper, teaches at the higher secondary level a science subject — that too, Biology — which says all living human beings are relatives and have originated from one woman. But the Biology teacher is not alone. As per a study, he is one among every four Indians. According to the India Human Development Survey (IHDS-2) in 2011-12, 27 per cent of the respondents across India said that they had been following the practice of untouchability. As was the teacher, so were the police. When the student and his family went to Kishani police station to lodge a complaint, the police allegedly refused to take action. They moved the Superintendent of Police. The SP, however, assured an investigation and action against the accused teacher.

SUJIT DE | KOLKATA

PRIME MINISTER MODI CONFERRED MITHRA VIBHUSHAN AWARD

In a rare gesture, the Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake conferred the prestigious Mithra Vibhushan award to the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. To the surprise of all, the award from the littoral southern neighbour nation of India is a ray of hope for India — that Sri Lanka, for whom India has played the role of Big Brother history, is its true deserving partner — one who has zero vested interest against Sri Lanka, unlike China. The award was conferred in recognition of Prime Minister Modi's exceptional efforts in strengthening bilateral relations and promoting the cultural and spiritual heritage of the two nations. So far, Sri Lanka has swung for years between India and China. But the way Sri Lanka has conferred the honour, rolled out the red carpet, and signed multiple strategic MoUs for combined growth is

appreciable. Indians are extremely happy back at home — that finally, Sri Lanka has realised its blunder of tilting towards China and getting stuck in its Debt-Trap Diplomacy. As Prime Minister Modi said after receiving this honour, the award from Sri Lanka is the honour of 1.4 billion Indians. We hope that in the days to come, both India and Sri Lanka will nurture a healthy and trustworthy partnership like true brothers. We will resolve our common interest issues — like fishermen's rights, bottom trawling concerns, Indian investments in Sri Lankan ports, and the issues of Tamils — on mutual ground. Just as Sri Lanka, for the first time, conferred such a highest honour of her nation to an Indian leader, hopefully both India-Sri Lanka will together write a new chapter of friendship and strategic cooperation in the years to come.

KIRTI WADHAWAN | KANPUR

Please send your letter to the letterstopioneer@gmail.com. In not more than 400 words. We appreciate your feedback.



Strong verdict against UP's 'bulldozer justice'

The Supreme Court has shown, by ordering the Prayagraj Development Authority (PDA) to pay Rs 10 lakh each to those affected by the demolitions it carried out in 2021, that it is serious about the implementation of its directives. On a number of times, the court has spoken out against the injustice of bulldozer action being used by state governments and municipal bodies against persons accused of offences. Even last week, the court issued strictures against it and specifically mentioned the Prayagraj demolitions. In its latest order, the court said: "These cases shock our conscience. Residential premises of the appellants have been high-handedly demolished... Carrying out demolitions in such a manner shows insensitivity on the part of the statutory development authority." The court made a special mention of the video of an eight-year-old girl clutching her books and running away as a bulldozer razed her hut.

The court also questioned the UP government's claim that notices had been served in time. Very often, demolitions are done with the claim that the structures—homes, shops and other premises—are illegally constructed. The court stipulated last year that proper notices should be served before the demolitions are undertaken.

This was not done in the Prayagraj case, and in many other cases. In Prayagraj, the demolition was done within 24 hours of the occupants being wrongly notified that their homes were located on land linked to a gangster. Even after the court laid down guidelines on demolitions, governments have continued to undertake them. In some cases, even backdated notices have been issued. Uttar Pradesh has pioneered the practice of bulldozer action and some other states have followed it. Justifying it, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has said that sometimes people need to be told certain things in a 'language' they understand.

The court described the Prayagraj demolitions as "illegal and inhuman." That is also the case with other demolitions, often directed at members of the minorities and marginalised and weaker sections, and carried out on flimsy or non-existent grounds. Basic principles of law and justice are violated in such actions. The norm that no one should be punished without due process of law is given the go-by when instant justice is meted out. Very often, it is the families or the associates of the accused who end up being punished. There can be no justification for that. The court's penalty in the Prayagraj case will hopefully send out a message. The fine of Rs 10 lakh, the court said, is meant to ensure that the Prayagraj authorities "will always remember to follow due process". There should be zero tolerance of such illegal and motivated demolitions.

Bengaluru flooding is largely preventable

Just a few spells of pre-monsoon showers, and they again expose the sorry state of Bengaluru's civic preparedness. The city, touted as the IT capital of India, turns into a watery maze every time it rains. Homes are flooded, roads disappear under knee-deep water, and traffic comes to a halt. The only relief the rains offer is from the heat, but that comes at the cost of widespread chaos and property damage. This time also, several parts of the city, including prominent places like Richmond Road, Indiranagar's Krishna Temple Road, and Anil Kumble Circle on MG Road, were submerged, disrupting daily life. This is not an isolated incident but a recurring annual ordeal. The Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike claims that necessary flood prevention measures have been taken in 166 of 209 flood-prone areas. But the situation on the ground tells a different story. Meanwhile, the traffic police have identified 180 water-logging zones on major roads.

What makes Bengaluru's flooding particularly frustrating is that much of it is preventable. Clogged drains, poor debris management, and ill-planned drainage systems reflect sheer administrative apathy. However, the larger issues lie in unchecked concretisation, destruction of natural water flow patterns, and rampant encroachment of lakes and buffer zones. The city's undulating terrain, once an advantage for natural water drainage, has been disrupted by haphazard construction. Tragically, these mistakes are not confined to older parts of the city but are being replicated in newly developed areas as well. This is not just a matter of administrative oversight, but also a reflection of chronic systemic failure. While some damage is irreversible, mitigation is still possible with the summer offering a critical window for the authorities to desilt drains, clear encroachments and reinforce stormwater channels.

Bengaluru's flooding is not a natural calamity. It is a human-made disaster born out of neglect, greed and lack of foresight. Even the best-planned global cities face weather-related challenges, but here the misery is largely self-inflicted. It is high time the authorities took concrete steps, looking beyond just patchwork fixes, to address the root causes. Bengaluru's flooding is a stark reminder that urban development should not come at the cost of sustainability. Beyond Bengaluru, the government must proactively identify flood-prone zones across the state, improve early warning systems, and ensure timely evacuations in vulnerable areas. With climate change amplifying rainfall unpredictability, disaster preparedness should be a year-round priority, and not just a seasonal afterthought. The solutions are clear, but they need political will and public accountability.

Put an end to lake and drain encroachments and check destruction of natural water flow patterns

Decoding the noise around Greater Bengaluru bill

What the city needs is not a separate Act but a reimagined master plan and a functional metropolitan planning committee

ANJALI KAROL MOHAN

Attempts to restructure the governance of Bengaluru through the Greater Bengaluru Governance Bill (GBGB), 2024, have currently been stalled with the governor withholding his assent. Pressure from civil society played a substantive role.

Newspapers carried articles by and interviews with the members of the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP)—the erstwhile BBMP Restructuring Committee) defending the bill as a 'savior of hope over the status quo'. Conspicuous by its absence is the voice of the planning community, a massive miss that merits a separate discussion.

Debates around the relevance of the GBGB are gaining momentum amid several misinterpretations bordering on flawed understanding, especially of the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act (CAA), 1992, manifesting in wrong narratives. Below is an attempt at clarifying the issue.

Bengaluru has seen a slew of Acts and Bills, premised on the argument that the city's governance challenges are unique and therefore need a dedicated Act. The first is the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike Act, 2020, an independent legislation that seeks to improve decentralisation, integrate public participation in municipal governance and ensure efficient decision making by the BBMP. The Act claims that the provisions of the Karnataka Municipal Corporations Act, 1976, are inadequate to govern Bengaluru.

Next came the Greater Bengaluru Governance Bill (GBGB), in multiple versions by the BBMP and tabled in a tweaked form by the Karnataka government. This bill, too, is premised on the argument that the BBMP Act does not institute any systems or processes that address the specific challenges that Bengaluru faces.

Bengaluru's governance challenges—increasing inequality, unbridled urbanisation, multiplicity of organisations and a lack of coordination amongst others—are not unique to the city.

Rather, these issues plague most rapidly urbanising cities in the state (and the country). Thus, the argument that the city needs a separate Act does not hold water. Urbanisation in Karnataka is skewed, led by the

primacy of Bengaluru.

The GBGB, 2024, seeks to split the BBMP into multiple corporations, cumulatively referred to as the Greater Bengaluru Area.

Currently, the municipal area of 716 sq km administered by the BBMP. The BDA plans for the metropolitan area of 1,270-odd sq km, including the municipal area. Notably, Bengaluru is amongst the first in the country to have a defined region—the Bengaluru metropolitan region—of 8,003 sq km that has been planned by the BMRDA.

The role of the GBA, especially in relation to the Metropolitan Planning Committee (MPC), is perhaps the



loudest contestation between the civil society and the government. The bill positions the Greater Bengaluru Authority as coordinating between the BBMP and parastatals like the BWSSB, Bescom, etc., and as a supervising body for the Greater Bengaluru Area, a role that is envisaged for the MPC by the CAA.

Additionally, there is a lack of clarity on the GBA's jurisdiction. It emerges as an extra layer of governance (and presumably jurisdiction) that is larger than the corporations, yet not that of the Bengaluru metropolitan region. Whether this is coterminous with the Bengaluru metropolitan area is not clear. The bill vests planning powers with the GBA. In that case, what happens to the BDA?

Historically, planning and administration stood divided between the parastatals (urban development authority) and the elected government (municipality).

Premised on the principle of subsidiarity and democratic decentralisation, the CAA seeks to combine these two functions, and rightly so. The municipality (and not the MPC) is responsible for planning and management of the urban areas through its ward committees.

The CAA mandates the devolution of planning to the municipalities, town planning being one of them.

In this process, the CAA envisages a three-tier governance comprising the

MPC—municipality-ward committee, with the third tier being the ward. This is vastly different from the three-tier governance structure pushed by the bill—GBA—multiple corporations-ward committees. The MPC is an elected body while the GBA is not.

Dysfunctional ward committees and MPC

Currently, the BBMP is split into 198 wards with dysfunctional ward committees and an equally dysfunctional MPC. The latter is notified for the Bengaluru metropolitan area.

As per the CAA, the "Metropolitan Planning Committee shall, in preparing the draft development plan, have regard to, (i) the plans prepared by local authorities in the metropolitan area; (ii) matters of common interest between the local authorities including coordinated spatial planning of the area, sharing of water and other physical and natural resources, the integrated development of infrastructure and environmental conservation".

In its current jurisdiction, there is only one planning authority i.e. the BDA. Hence, the MPC will have no role to play in coordinating or consolidating plans from multiple authorities.

More importantly, the main role of an MPC is to lay out the frameworks for regional level concerns such as "sharing of water and other physical and natural resources, the integrated development of infrastructure and environmental conservation".

Thus, the civil society's claim (and echoed by the BBC) that the MPC is the plan-making body is flawed. To ensure that the MPC performs its function in spirit and in letter, its notification at the regional scale covering 8,006 sq km is the first corrective measure—a recommendation that was reiterated by the BBC, although it finds no mention in the bills cleared by the Assembly.

Notably, the BMRDA Act, 1985, is a strong Act—it provides for the BMRDA to be a coordinating agency in the region with the act of coordination to be facilitated through an inter-departmental Executive Committee (uj/6). The BMRDA as the planning wing of the MPC is the way forward.

In this tug-of-war between the civil society on the one hand and the government and the BBC on the other, several critical requirements are forgotten.

At the minimum, the city requires a reimagined master plan derived from ward plans. It requires a functional MPC. All this requires an elected and empowered city government, which in turn requires the effective devolution of the 18 functions to the corporations, including urban planning.

(The writer is an urban and regional planner)

RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE

The metro 'carma'

Traffic jams are no laughing matter. They are a test of patience and positivity

AMBUJA NARAYAN

"Think positive", as the wise say. This *maha mantra*, which we must practise every day of our lives, is easier said than done, especially when stuck in massive traffic jams in our metros. These jams are an acid test of our patience, as the pilgrims to Prayagraj will perhaps testify. We psych ourselves into believing that we're washing away our sins in the holy city of Triveni and return home with sacred Ganga water for our loved ones. However, the patience and positivity often don't prevail for long once reality sets in.

Is our 'car-ma' on the roads? Is this how it feels when the gods give up? If only Maa Ganga could help by washing

away that part of our karma—of waiting in endless traffic jams, life would be blissful in our city dwellings. With no solace and sight, we are left to focus on the positive side of traffic jams.

To make matters a bit lighter, we decided to attend a stand-up comedy show with family and friends. The topic was 'traffic jams', and the artist attempted to engage the audience with jokes about 'jam-booree' in Bengaluru. He said Bengaluru is an ideal city for slow-motion car races. He started off with his wisecracks by questioning the crowd. Why is a traffic jam like a giraffe's neck? Why did the traffic jam become a lawyer? The audience, however, remained unamused, and the artist had to resort to self-deprecation. After all, for Bengaluru, traffic jams are hardly a laughing matter. He would not give up easily, though.

A 12-year-old boy seated near the stage was then invited on stage. The child enthusiastically stepped up. The

atmosphere thawed slightly when he was asked, "What's the best exercise while stuck in a traffic jam?" The boy's quick reply, "Oh, a car-dio!" finally elicited laughter from the audience.

Jokes aside, for regular commuters, their four-wheelers are an extension of their personality—a second home, wardrobe, pantry, private shrine where *shlokas* are chanted and *pranayama* is practised, a valentine nook, and entertainment centre where family *antaksharis* unravel or even an old library.

But as we age or face physical disabilities, our homes become our only comfort zone. This is a harsh reality faced by seniors and the physically challenged in our country. When even ambulances are often held up in traffic snarls, we know we have reached the dead end of the unsolved problem. Inspirational quotes about old age and disabilities offer temporary relief, but the problem remains unsolved.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Neglecting the elderly: A growing concern

The article 'Ageing alone: India's elderly face a crisis...' (Apr 6) sheds light on a pressing issue and serves as an eye-opener for India's younger generations. In many Indian households, the elderly are neglected, considered a liability by their own. Children often view their parents' sacrifices as a duty, forgetting that their current status is a direct result of their parents' physical and financial efforts.

Restore integrity

I refer to 'Cash row: Justice Varma takes oath as Allahabad HC judge' (Apr 6). The recent oath-taking ceremony of Justice Yashwant Varma as a judge of the Allahabad High Court raises several questions about the judiciary's credibility. Despite facing a Supreme Court-monitored probe, Justice Varma took oath in a clandestine manner, sparking concerns.

Traditionally, such oath-taking ceremonies are conducted in open court, making this undue haste unjustifiable. The judiciary, as a custodian of the constitution and protector of people's rights, must maintain its pristine position. Enough is enough; sanity must prevail to restore the judiciary's integrity. **M Basavaraj, Davangere**

Address placement issue

Appropos 'Placement drop calls for new approach' (Apr 5), India has witnessed an alarming decline in campus hiring, which has historically played a crucial role in connecting fresh graduates with industry opportunities. This decline can be attributed to factors like economic slowdown, dynamic hiring practices,

and concerns about graduate quality. The rise of digital education, changing hiring practices and regulatory changes also play a role. To address this, a comprehensive strategy involving educational institutions, policymakers, and industry experts is necessary to revamp curricula and provide adequate skill development facilities. **S S Paul, Nadia (West Bengal)**

Our readers are welcome to email letters to: letters@deccanherald.com (only letters emailed—not handwritten—will be accepted). All letters must carry the sender's postal address and phone number.

SPEAK OUT

Under the leadership of PM Narendra Modi, prosperity and progress are going hand in hand... Our government made multiple announcements for religious places in the budget...



Bhajanlal Sharma, Rajastan CM

In politics, the truth is often less important than what politicians can make people believe.

Walter Cronkite

TO BE PRECISE

CPI(M) elects a new general secretary.



IN PERSPECTIVE

A cash stash and a judiciary in crisis

The discovery of cash at Justice Varma's house has raised questions about the judicial appointment process

BRIJESH KALAPPA

The media went into a frenzy following the discovery of a "large stash" of money in the out-house of Justice Yashwant Varma, a sitting judge of the Delhi High Court. Predictably, all hell broke loose, with questions being raised about the process by which judges are appointed. The National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) Bill was struck down by a 4:1 majority of Supreme Court judges in 2015. The government is sparing no efforts to reintroduce the provisions of NJAC, with Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar taking the lead in the matter.

In 2003, the Delhi High Court encountered a similar situation when Justice Shamit Mukherjee, a sitting judge of the court, was taken into custody for a week by the CBI under the Prevention of Corruption Act. The agency raided his residence in Delhi and found "incriminating documents" and two locker keys while investigating the multi-crime scam involving the Delhi Development Authority (DDA). It transpired that during the CBI's extensive probe, about 20 Delhi High Court files were recovered from the house of Dharamveer Khatri, a middleman and a key suspect. Transcripts of Khatri's telephone conversations revealed details of "illegal grafting" demanded by Shamit Mukherjee in return for judicial favours, the CBI alleged. The issue blew over when Justice Mukherjee resigned. He had not been confirmed as a Permanent Judge when these events occurred. The CBI took him into custody immediately thereafter.

But Justice Varma is a senior judge and was perhaps in line to become the Chief Justice of India. Once confirmed, a judge can only be removed from office by impeachment initiated under Article 124 read with 218 of the Constitution. The Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968, regulates the procedure for investigating and proving the misbehaviour or incapacity of a judge.

Chief Justice of India Sanjay Khanna has been criticised for some quarters for appointing a three-judge committee to conduct a "fact-finding inquiry" into the allegations. This follows the established procedure, with the Supreme Court's 2015 ruling stating that such an inquiry will be a fact-finding process where the judge involved is given the opportunity to present his side of the story. The Chief Justice of India

and the remaining four members of the collegium have a grueling schedule. They decide cases while sitting on the judicial side, read related papers and books, handle administrative issues and perform their collegium-related duties. How much time does this leave for addressing infractions of judges like Justice Shekar Yadav of the Allahabad High Court and the present embarrassment caused by the cash seizure at Justice Varma's residence? It is high time that the Chief Justice of India considers evolving a permanent mechanism to thoroughly look into contraventions by members of the higher judiciary and ensure that offenders are brought to book. It must be borne in mind that the disclosure of assets by judges of the Supreme Court is being seen as too little, too late.

While senior journalists have suggested that the fact-finding inquiry ought to have comprised members of civil society with an impeccable public record, the truth is that involving laymen in the process could put too much pressure on both the judiciary and the person concerned, potentially compromising the integrity of the institution. The question is: Why is the judiciary not involving retired judges? Some retired judges have more than proven themselves by their outstanding record and rectitude. Why doesn't the CJI think it fit to press some of them into action? Retired judges are not bound by judicial protocol, some of them command enormous public confidence and fully understand the implications of their actions. What's more, they have time on their hands!

Sure, some naysayers might call them the judicial equivalent of the Margdarshak Mandal, but it is also more than true that Indian judges retire far too early. While Supreme Court judges in the USA and Aruba serve for a lifetime, those in Brazil and Chile superannuate at the age of 75. Indian judges, on the other hand, retire at 62 in the high courts and 65 in the Supreme Court.

CJI Khanna finds himself caught between the devil and the deep sea. This incident has shaken public confidence in the judiciary and he would be damned if he adopted full disclosure and not equally damned if he didn't disclose enough since the entire system is at stake in how deftly he handles this crisis. But equally enough, it does present an opportunity for the judiciary to improve into a better version of itself. (The writer is a Supreme Court advocate and former legal advisor to the Government of Karnataka, with the rank of minister)

Tale of two realities: Indians helped make America great but face prejudice

A RAVINDRA

Till recently, India was taking pride in what was considered its most valuable export — human talent to MAGA (Make America Great Again), a phrase popularised by Donald Trump. Undoubtedly, Indians have added more economic value to the United States than most other immigrant groups. To illustrate: every fifth immigrant who has founded a unicorn is of Indian origin. 3% of doctors in the US are Indians, and several major multinationals (Google, Microsoft, IBM, and Adobe, among others) are led by people of Indian origin, with hundreds more in key positions and thousands employed in highly skilled jobs.

Adding to the glittering list of American Nobel laureates are persons of Indian origin, such as scientists Raj Chandra Varma, S Chandrasekhar, V Ramakrishnan, and economist Abhijit Banerjee. Many other eminent intellectuals—scientists, economists and scholars in various disciplines—serve in American universities. Indian-origin persons have also held prominent positions in American politics: Kamala Harris, former vice president and a pres-

idential contender; Vivek Ramaswamy, part of the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) and now a candidate for governor of Ohio; Kash Patel, director of the FBI; and Tulsi Gabbard, director of National Intelligence.

In spite of the immense contributions of Indians across diverse fields, why did Trump choose to deport Indian illegal immigrants in such a humiliating manner, bound in chains? According to the Migration Policy Institute, there are 11.5 million unauthorised immigrants in the US, of whom Indians constitute just 3% (around 375,000). The puzzling question remains: Why was such inhuman treatment meted out to Indian deportees but not those from other countries like China and Pakistan? Can one surmise that Trump is unable to tolerate a democratic Asian country? Or is he targeting Indian leaders across the globe?

It is not as if the deportation of illegal immigrants is new. Between 2009 and 2016, about 6,000 Indians were deported during the Obama administration; during Trump's first term (2017-2021), around 1,550 were deported annually; and under Biden, the number has been around 900. None of

this attracted major headlines. India, as a matter of policy, has not supported illegal immigration and has always cooperated in bringing its citizens back. When Sushma Swaraj was Minister for External Affairs, she successfully brought back over 90,000 Indians, ensuring their dignified return.

Has the Ministry of External Affairs failed in this instance—despite being headed by a highly knowledgeable and efficient minister—even after Trump explicitly stated that deportation would be a top priority? Or was this a case of quiet diplomacy, choosing not to raise the issue while Prime Minister Narendra Modi was engaged in discussions with Trump at the White House?

Historically, migration has occurred for centuries—within countries and across borders—through military conquests or the spread of religion and culture. India has long been shaped by waves of migrants: from the Greek invasion by Alexander the Great to the Kushans, Hunas, Muslim rulers, and Western colonial powers, including the Portuguese, Dutch, French and British. These invasions led not only to colonial domination but also contributed to India's diversity. In recent years, however, interna-

tional migration has new forms—emigration, immigration, and refugees—and has emerged as a complex issue. India too faces challenges with cross-border immigrants, particularly from Bangladesh.

A valid question arises: why do Indians migrate to the US in such large numbers? Interestingly, most of them come from three relatively prosperous northern states. Among the first group of 104 deportees who arrived in Anirban, 33 were from Gujarat, 33 from Haryana and 30 from Punjab—largely from business communities and white-collar professionals. Clearly, it is not merely financial insecurity or job scarcity that drives them.

According to Krishnamurthy Subramanian, former Chief Economic Advisor to the Government of India and currently India's Executive Director at the IMF, although India offers "unparalleled economic opportunities", professionals are reluctant to return because of "poor urban infrastructure, long commutes, and air pollution." One might also add poor governance. Many highly skilled Indians are reconsidering whether to return home. To truly benefit from its opportunities, In-

dia must invest in enhancing quality of life—"quality of life is the clinching factor".

Quality of life is not just about infrastructure and physical amenities but good governance—and this is where India significantly lags, especially at the state and city levels. There is a lack of transparency and delays in service delivery—such as water and electricity connections, building permits, trade licences, and land conversions—compounded by high levels of corruption. The regulatory regime remains rigid, whether in business or urban planning.

In the domain of higher education, where the US excels, India suffers from multiple shortcomings. Over one million international students study in the US, contributing billions to its economy. Most of the top positions in global university rankings are held by American institutions, while no Indian university features in the top 100. Public universities in India, particularly in states, are mired in problems—from delays in appointing vice chancellors and faculty vacancies to inadequate funding, administrative inefficiency, and corruption.

Improving quality of life, urban infrastructure and governance is essential, but

takes time. In the short term, how should India respond to the Trump-era immigration policies? Indian diplomacy must work proactively to ensure fair treatment of Indian nationals in the US. In the case of illegal immigrants, a phased and humane repatriation process can be negotiated. Those with valid visas and green cards must ensure their protection from arbitrary action, as appears to be the case now.

Migration must also be viewed from a long-term perspective. Despite the cent trends of deglobalisation and rising nationalism, migration is likely to continue. For many in poor and insecure regions, migration remains the only hope.

Climate change, which may render some parts of the world uninhabitable, will also drive future migration. The question is: where will migrants go?

In 2018, governments agreed to a "Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration" under the auspices of the UN for improved international cooperation on cross-border migration. Unsurprisingly, the US rejected the Compact.

(The writer is a former chief secretary, Government of Karnataka)

The rise and fall of Yoon Suk Yeol exposed a vulnerability in South Korean democracy, but also a resilience. Its people were always ready to fight for it

CHOE SANG-HUN

When Yoon Suk Yeol was running for president, he had the word "king" written on his palm. South Koreans dismissed—and ridiculed—it as a shamistic ritual that reflected his desire for top government office.

But after his inauguration in May 2022, it didn't take long for them to see an authoritarian streak in Yoon.

On short notice, he moved the presidential office from the graceful Blue House to a drab military building. When he turned 63 in December 2023, his security team sang songs honouring him as "a president sent from heaven" and describing his "845,280 minutes" in office so far as "a time blessed." Two months later, a college student who protested Yoon's decision to cut government budgets for scientific research was gagged and dragged out by the president's bodyguards. When journalists published what he called "fake news", prosecutors raided their homes and newsrooms to collect evidence.

Yoon kept pushing the envelope, until he made his fatal mistake. On December 3, he declared martial law, threatening a deeply cherished part of South Korean life: democracy.

To South Koreans, democracy has never been something given; it was fought for and won through decades of struggle against authoritarian leaders at the cost of torture, imprisonment and bloodshed. All major political milestones in South Korea—an end to dictatorship, the introduction of free elections, the ouster of abusive leaders—were achieved after citizens took to the streets.

So when people saw troops sent by Yoon storming the National Assembly to seize the legislature by force, their response was immediate. But unlike those who fought government repression in the 1950s through the '80s, South Koreans protesting in recent months had democratic institutions on their side.

The current constitution, written in 1987 after a huge pro-democracy uprising, gave the National Assembly the power to vote down martial law and impeach presidents. The Constitutional Court, created under that constitution, got to decide whether to remove or reinstate an impeached president. And leaders democratically elected under that constitution imprisoned those who had earlier taken power by military force.

Younger generations, including the parliamentarians Yoon sent to seize the Assembly in December, grew up learning of that history through box office-hit movies and novels such as *Nobel laureate Han Kang*. On December 3, the troops hesitated before angry citizens blocking them with bare hands, allowing time for lawmakers, including some members of Yoon's own party, to gather and vote to lift his martial law decree. The Assembly then impeached him, on December 14.

And on April 4, the Constitutional Court's eight justices, including those appointed by Yoon or his party, unanimously upheld that impeachment, putting an end to his military rebellion.

To one observer, these events were a vic-



A woman reacts as she and other anti-Yoon protesters attend a rally outside Gyeongbokgung Palace in the rain, celebrating the removal from office of disgraced ex-president Yoon Suk Yeol. Yoon was ousted on April 4 after his botched martial law declaration on December 3, 2024. AFP

How South Korea's democracy prevailed

tory for the democratic institutions created in the late 1980s. "The response to Yoon's attempted coup d'état displayed the maturity of Korean democracy—first of all, the resilience of civil society, which reacted immediately and massively to oppose the coup, most notably with the passion of Korean youth who were not alive in the 1980s and experienced the dangers of a return to autocratic rule for the first time," said Daniel Schneider, a former journalist who covered South Korea back then and is now a lecturer at Stanford University.

"The fact that it was a unanimous decision of the Constitutional Court, with conservative appointees joining the decision, was a very important expression of not only the clarity of the case, but also the ability to overcome ideological polarization," Schneider said.

Yoon's power grab also exposed the vulnerability of democracy in South Korea. If such a thing can happen in a nation long considered an exemplary case of democratisation in Asia, scholars warned, it can happen elsewhere, too.

Despite his removal, the deep polarization that led up to Yoon's declaration of martial law persists. The partisan struggle between the left and right is likely to intensify in the next two months as the country lurches toward a presidential election.

But the past four months have also shown the resilience of South Korean democracy.

Until Yoon came along, few South Koreans thought that a return to military rule was possible in their country, a peaceful democracy known globally for its cars, smartphones and K-dramas. Many of those who joined protests calling for Yoon's ouster in recent weeks said they had been proud of their democracy that had been their cultural exports including the boy band BTS or the Netflix hit *Squid Game*.

When Yoon took that pride, he picked a fight he couldn't win. During rallies, people shared a video clip of former President Kim Dae-jang, an iconic figure in South Korea's democratisation struggle.

"Democracy is not free," Kim said in the clip. "You must shed blood, sweat and tears for it."

If the Constitutional Court had voted to reinstate Yoon, South Korea would have seen a "second wave of democratisation movement" and "a second Gwangju," said Cho Gab-ye, a prominent South Korean journalist who has covered the nation's political evolution since 1971, referring to the brutally suppressed uprising against martial law in the southern city of Gwangju in 1980.

"We had our share of martial law, but Yoon Suk Yeol was the first president to send armed troops into parliament," Cho said.

Yoon was once a hero among South Koreans. He built his national image as an uncompromising prosecutor when he

helped imprison two former presidents for corruption. But he proved disastrous as a politician—unable to engage in the give and take of compromise with the opposition, which controlled the National Assembly. He was accused of filling his presidential staff with officials too timid to speak up. He was nicknamed "Mr. 59 Minutes," because that was how long he was said to speak during an hour-long meeting. He rarely apologized for his wife's scandals or even for deadly disasters. He used his veto power to pit opposition bills. The opposition slashed his budgets and impeached an unprecedented number of political appointees in his government.

"A player busy playing on the field doesn't look at the electronic scoreboard," Yoon once said when asked about his dismal approval ratings.

Such an attitude allowed him to push unpopular efforts, such as improving ties with Japan and drastically increasing the number of doctors. But even many who sympathized with his struggle against the opposition didn't see martial law coming. "Koreans do not want the 1980s option, when martial law and tear gas made forcibly disappeared people painful to so many families," said Alexis Dudden, a professor of history at the University of Connecticut. "Yoon and his advisers missed the mark of reading today's South Korea in many obvious ways."

The New York Times

Politics of night traffic ban

PANDURANG HEGDE

The controversy over the lifting of the ban on vehicles plying between Kerala and Karnataka has erupted once again. Public pressure is mounting on both sides—Kerala is demanding that the ban be lifted, while Karnataka insists on its continuation.

The night traffic ban was first imposed in 2009 by the deputy commissioner of Channarayana to protect wildlife in the Bandipur Tiger Reserve, where two national highways—NH 181 (Mysuru to Ooty) and NH 766 (Kollegal to Kozhikode)—pass. The ban, in effect from 9pm to 6am, was limited to nine hours each night.

Though the Karnataka government initially challenged the ban, the High Court upheld it in 2010. The Kerala government then approached the Supreme Court, arguing that lifting the ban was essential for the free movement of goods and people between the two states.

Meanwhile, wildlife researchers conducted a comprehensive study after the ban was implemented. Rigorous fieldwork and data collection showed a dramatic reduction in roadkills, facilitating freer movement of wildlife across the region. This evidence was submitted to the SC.

Taking this into account, the SC in 2019 upheld the ban, noting its significant role in reducing roadkill accidents and enhancing wildlife well-being along both highways.

For nearly 16 years, wildlife—particularly tigers, leopards, and elephants—have adapted to the relative quiet of the nights, using the corridor without fear of speeding vehicles or the noise, which had previously increased their stress levels.

Calls to lift the ban gained momentum after the Wayanad bypoll results were announced, with Priyanka Gandhi Vadra declared the winner. Rahul Gandhi had earlier assured lifting the ban during his term as MP. Now, support from Congress leadership appears to have emboldened those seeking to reopen the roads at night.

The renewed push is closely linked to the changing political landscape in Kerala and Karnataka. Local politicians from Wayanad are at the forefront of this campaign, arguing that lifting the ban benefits people in both states. But it is clear that vested interests may be driving the demand—interests that could endanger wildlife and encourage illegal activities under cover of darkness.

What is intriguing is the possibility that the newly elected MP from Wayanad may influence the Congress-led Karnataka government to reconsider lifting the ban. In 2015, after a series of high-level discussions between the CMs of both states, then Chief Minister Siddaramaiah stood firm in support of the ban. Coincidentally, he is back in office, but will he once again stand up to his party's leadership?

Minister of Forest, Ecology, and Environment Edwar Khan, rushed to Delhi to discuss the issue with the party high command. He has argued that the matter should be viewed from a humanitarian perspective. However, he is well aware that exceptions exist—for instance, emergency ambulances are permitted to breach the curfew. A complete lifting of the ban is unnecessary.

Moreover, this is not the only road connecting Karnataka and Kerala. The road via Kutta in Coorg, which remains open at night, provides an alternative, albeit 35 km longer than the Bandipur route.

In 1960, under Jawaharlal Nehru's leadership, the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act was passed, reflecting a sense of compassion towards other creatures. In 1981, Indira Gandhi prevailed upon the Kerala government to stop the construction of a hydel dam in Silent Valley to save biodiversity and the endangered lion-tailed macaque. It now appears the fourth-generation leaders of the Gandhi family—Priyanka and Rahul—are ready to jettison this legacy to appease short-sighted political interests in their constituency.

Even more shocking is the willingness of Karnataka ministers to ignore the larger interest of conserving the fragile ecology and wildlife habitat to please their political bosses.

It is time for both Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra to demonstrate their statesmanship instead of yielding to narrow vote-bank politics.

The Earth belongs to all—humans and non-human life forms alike. Unlike other species, humans have the ability to think and act rationally. That capacity confers a responsibility to protect wildlife and preserve forests. Instead of abiding by this duty, we often act out of entitlement, destroying habitats of wildlife.

The basic question is: will our politicians show compassion for voiceless wild animals, or will they sacrifice them to satisfy petty political interests?

(The writer is a farmer and Uttara Kannada-based environmentalist)

OUR PAGES OF HISTORY

50 YEARS AGO: APRIL 1975

Dissidents form parallel Muslim League

Kozhikode, April 6

The Kerala unit of the Indian Union Muslim League formally split into two today when at a meeting of the "State Council." A new set of "office-bearers" was elected voting out the official group leaders, including the President, Mr. P. M. S. A. Pookoya Thangal. The meeting held at Tellicherry, about 70 km from Kozhikode, was presided over by Mr. Hamid Ali Shamsud, MP, and General Secretary of the State unit. He retains his office in the new set up also. Mr. M. K. Haji, till now the Treasurer of the League, was elected the new President.

25 YEARS AGO: APRIL 2000

Nawaz Sharif gets life sentence

Karachi, April 6 (PTI)

Six months after being toppled by the army, Pakistan's deposed prime minister Nawaz Sharif was today spared the death penalty but awarded life imprisonment for 25 years on being held guilty of hijacking and terrorism by a special court in a verdict he described as "engineered." Judge Rehman Hussain Jaffri of anti-terrorism court also ordered confiscation of entire property of the ousted premier, who heard the verdict in the jam-packed court room and later told his weeping relatives, including his wife Kulsoom and two daughters, to have faith in god.

"The greatness of a community is most accurately measured by the compassionate actions of its members," said Coretta Scott King—author, activist, civil rights leader and wife of Martin Luther King. Today, we live in a world where we often forget that we are part of a community and that compassion and civility towards fellows are some of the basic acts of kindness that a human being can display to fellows.

Recently the neighbour of a good friend undertook some demolition and renovation of his building, which was bang next door to the friend's. As walls were broken and iron grills cut through, a massive cloud of dust

enveloped my friend's home. Not only were the family at risk for respiratory ailments and the flaring up of asthmatic conditions, but their living spaces, plants, furniture, artefacts, *et al* were laden with fine dust. The noise was deafening. No tarpaulin was used, and workers too had no protective gear. A few other residents urged the man responsible to take due precautions. No action was taken. Finally, a complaint had to be lodged with the relevant authorities for corrective action.

While this is one instance, emptying

trash and rubble in front of a neighbour's house or youngsters speeding down their cars with music blaring and honking madly in the dead of night are other ways in which members of a community can be insensitively treated.

As residents of one locality or a larger state, we are all interconnected and, in many ways, dependent on each other. Right from looking out for each other's families, being mindful of their safety and pitching in during emergencies, thoughtful behaviour—even if only virtually in the social media group—will go a long

way in fostering a sense of oneness. Something that many of us learnt during the pandemic. In an era of lachry children and nuclear families, it does take a village to raise a child. Neither can we forget the benefits of community policing. That said, if by chance you find yourself in the circle of a difficult neighbour, just being civil is half the battle won.

What we need to realise is that there is a lot to gain from enjoying a harmonious relationship with neighbours and much to lose from doing the opposite. The world will be a better place and the home the sanctuary it is meant to be.



Spiralling downwards

Govt must make its moves carefully

Global reactions to American President Donald Trump's announcement of a new tariff structure for the United States (US) on "Liberation Day", April 2, are now beginning to be seen. They vary widely. In what was a major negative signal for markets, China took a strong stance, tariffing US imports at 34 per cent to match the additional levy that Mr Trump had imposed on its exports. This was a straightforward tit for tat — unlike the US administration's ersatz country-specific formula, which, in spite of claims, had nothing "reciprocal" to it. Beijing can perhaps take the risk of a strong line because it is now less dependent on direct exports to the US than it has been in the past — its producers are at the heart of a supply chain that spans multiple countries which have been hit with different tariff rates. Some of those have signalled a desperate willingness for a deal: Cambodia, heavily dependent on textile exports, faces a ruinous 49 per cent tariff and has voluntarily cut import tariffs to 5 per cent in response to the US action. Vietnam has similarly offered duty-free access to its markets to the US. It is far from certain that Mr Trump will respond positively — though many US-based companies dependent on its factory floors, such as shoe maker Nike, would dearly hope that he does.

The markets displayed deep concern at Beijing's strong and swift retaliation because the outcome of such cascading confrontation over trade actions is well known. Economist Charles Kindleberger produced a famous graph, known as the "Kindleberger Spiral", which traced out how world trade spiralled down, month after month, in the years after the 1929 stock-market crash and subsequent protectionist measures. Almost two-thirds of world trade was wiped out till then US President Franklin D Roosevelt announced that the US would reduce tariffs on any trading partner that would do so as well. While it is unlikely that world trade will fall to the same degree this time around, the danger of a severe dip and associated uncertainties cannot be ignored. Much depends on how other large trading powers, particularly the European Union (EU), respond. If they choose not to limit their reaction merely to retaliatory tariffs on merchandise trade and also to services, in which trade the US enjoys a surplus of €100 billion with the EU, then an additional spiral of escalation opens up.

India is in a difficult position at this point. Some take heart from the fact that the country's relative underperformance in exports means that it has been hit with a much lower rate than, say, Vietnam. But that will not assist existing exporters, who are already receiving demands for 15-20 per cent discounts on US orders that had already been settled. The exact proportions of how the additional costs will be managed — how much will be paid by consumers, by the US-based importer, and by the India-based exporter — will be decided by negotiations. The question is whether the financial system in India will be agile enough to provide the working capital required for any transition period. The government must also pay attention, at the macro level, to the US administration's attitude on deal-making, and what it expects. Certainly, India must offer to drop unnecessary regulatory restrictions on imports, such as quality-control orders and other non-tariff barriers. The government would do well to push for an early conclusion of the bilateral-trade agreement. It must also move swiftly on its free-trade negotiations with the EU and Britain. There is work to be done to stave off catastrophe.

Bloc development

Bimstec needs to move faster

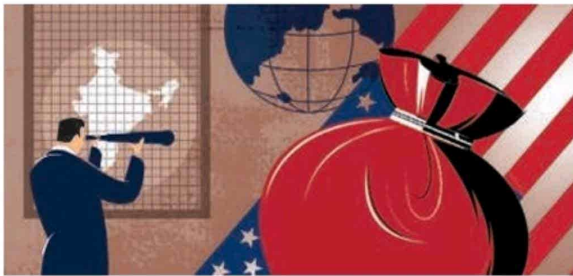
Twenty-eight years after its inception, member-countries of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation, or Bimstec, appear to have attempted to instil a greater sense of purpose by adopting a Bangkok Vision 2030, outlining a road map for regional prosperity. The aim is to build a "prosperous, resilient and open" or "PRO" Bimstec by 2030 and create a zone of peace, stability, and economic sustainability in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and Thailand's bio circular-green economic model, which focuses on creating a low-carbon ecosystem. This sixth summit, hosted by Thailand under its chairmanship, saw some energetic interventions by India as part of the "PRO" agenda. The initiatives unveiled by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Bangkok ranged from Bimstec Centres of Excellence, focusing on disaster management, sustainable maritime transport, traditional medicine, and agri-research, to a "Bodhi Programme" for skill development, a pilot study for digital public infrastructure, a Bimstec chamber of commerce and greater people-to-people linkages.

India's drive for greater strategic cohesion within a group comprising Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand aligns with New Delhi's "Act East" policy, balance growing Chinese influence in the Bay of Bengal and to act as a counter balance to the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc), which tensions with Pakistan have rendered virtually moribund. The question is whether Bimstec can fulfil these multiple agendas. First, intra group political tensions have expanded. Indo-Bangladesh ties have weakened. Though the summit offered Mr Modi and Bangladesh Chief Advisor Mohammad Yunus an opportunity to exchange views on issues of mutual concern on the sidelines, it is far from clear that the agendas correspond to each other. Bangladesh has problematic relations with Myanmar since it hosts over 900,000 Rohingya refugees. Myanmar's civil war, where the military has lost its grip on most of the country, means it can make little productive contribution to the grouping.

Second, the grouping has been characterised by inertia. Bimstec meetings were supposed to take place every two years but there have been only six summits so far. A secretariat in Dhaka was established in 2014 but remains chronically under-resourced. A charter, outlining an institutional framework for the organisation, was adopted in the fifth summit in 2022. Bimstec appears to be galvanised whenever Saarc fails, while Thailand and Myanmar have been focused on the more dynamic (Association of Southeast Asian Nations). Part of the reason for inactivity under Bimstec is its wide-ranging agenda covering 14 areas — from trade and investment to health, climate change, tourism, counter-terrorism, among others — that dissipates energies towards a meaningful alliance. A free-trade agreement, which was agreed on in 2004, has made no headway. Meanwhile, infrastructure and connectivity via coastal shipping, road transport, and an intra regional energy grid — all of which have the potential to transform the region — are largely incomplete, the major obstacles here being finalising legal agreements. Much of this can change if Bimstec injects greater dynamism into its functioning. No doubt the growing power of China in the region and the need to build greater intra group economic ties following the US tariffs are concentrating minds in seven regional capitals now. As the largest economy in the bloc, much will depend on how India manages the process of cooperation.

A new world in the making

ILLUSTRATION: AJAYA MOHANTY



Is it time for a radical rethink of India's economic strategies and prepare accordingly?

"Sir, please don't say this openly... we will lose half our revenue if our key clients hear that!" This was the anguished response from a friend who had started a software company in the 1990s, when I suggested that I could help design an algorithm to perform marketing analysis in one-tenth the time it was taking at that time. His business was then to conduct marketing analysis, a service that his company provided to blue-chip clients in India and the United States (US). His revenue was generated by charging clients in accordance with the number of hours spent by his team on this analysis, as well as the number of people employed to perform it.

This incident from a time nearly three decades ago comes rushing to my mind, in effect telling me that banking on cheap Indian labour, which I had apprehensions about even in the 1990s, may soon come to haunt us and more so when I see the current headlines flooding the world media:

"More than 130,000 IT employees have lost their jobs so far this year as the tech industry continues to lay off workers".

Or, more shocking to me, "Work for designers and photographers in their 30s drying up..."

Then, when I dig a little deeper, I am led to believe that these problems in India seem to originate in problems with the US economy:

"The US could run short of money to pay its bills by August this year..."

When I see these reports about the US situation stating that the US spends more than it collects in taxes

and, to cover the gap, the government borrows money through treasury bonds and then the cumulative borrowing over decades has resulted in its national debt exceeding \$34 trillion as of early 2023, I can't help but feel shaken.

The US is home to massive and world-dominating private tech companies, such as Google (Alphabet), Microsoft, Amazon, OpenAI (ChatGPT), Meta, and Apple, yet the country as a whole is struggling neck-deep in debt. The simple answer often given is that these giants are private corporations, not government-owned, and their profits are all distributed to shareholders, founders, and executives. The US government receives almost no share in these profits in the form of taxes. So, while these companies are American and lead the world in innovation, this does not translate into government revenue.

This is a puzzle that all deep thinkers in the US and around the world are trying to solve, primarily because if the present trend of deficits in the US continues and, God forbid, leads to a default by the US, the world will be thrown into chaos. Countries like China, Japan, the United Kingdom, India, and Saudi Arabia hold their reserves in US dollars, and a US default would result in losses on those holdings and panic in currency markets. It could also lead to supply-chain disruption, resulting in a crash in US demand and a reduction in global exports, particularly in Asia. It would also mean that tech orders, services outsourcing, and raw material



AJIT BALAKRISHNAN

US tariffs: Running blind on a tightrope

Last week, American President Donald Trump set the global trading system ablaze by imposing massive tariffs on countries/geographical regions with large trade surpluses with the United States (US), such as China, Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, India, and the European Union. The repercussions are mind-boggling. A month ago, I suggested: "Unless something changes, Trump is a huge threat right now, which is perhaps not being fully recognised." In fact, way back in mid-November, I wrote: "It would be suicidal to assume that his promised actions would be tempered... Even if a part of Trumponomics is implemented, it will hit the rest of the world like a tidal wave." This has now happened. As economists, policymakers, and businesses scramble to chart a dangerous and unpredictable future, they are first trying to discover a method in Mr Trump's madness. What is he trying to achieve? Here is the logic from Trump apologists.

The supposed method

1. Force yields lower: The biggest problem for the US is its massive national debt of \$36 trillion, of which \$9.2 trillion must be refinanced in 2025. The only short-term fix for this is lower yields, which would mean lower interest payments. How can Mr Trump drive yields down or induce a massive buying of US bonds, especially when inflation rates are not low? By playing the madman, which creates tremendous uncertainty. Abnormally large tariffs create panic and a risk-off scenario, where investors exit stocks and buy US treasuries, thus lowering yields. What would help additionally is the US Federal Reserve cutting interest rates. This is why Mr Trump was yelling at Jerome Powell, chairman of the US Fed, to cut interest rates during the Fed's press conference on Friday.

2. Cut deficits: A lower yield will do nothing to reduce debt. Therefore, the second plank of Mr Trump's strategy is to cut the deficit by apparently eliminating "waste and fraud" from the US Federal Budget. This is the work of Doge (Department of Government Efficiency),

overseen by Elon Musk. Doge aims to slash \$2 trillion from the US Federal Budget, which totals over \$6.75 trillion.

3. Tariff revenues: The third plank of the strategy is to raise revenues. For Mr Trump, the most obvious revenue source is tariffs. According to the Trump camp, tariffs could generate \$600-700 billion annually.

4. Geostategy: The next part of the strategy is supposedly to force negotiations with Europe, Japan, Australia, South Korea, and Taiwan — countries that depend on the US for their security — in a way that benefits US trade and investment. This is why the Trump team went after these long-standing allies first.

5. Reshoring: The final plank of this strategy is to force exporters to make their products in the US. While there are no estimates on how much investment and how many jobs this will create, there are only a few pledges — from companies like Taiwan Semiconductor, Hyundai Motors, Nvidia, and Apple.

What if the plan fails?

Even assuming this is all well thought out, it is an extremely risky strategy, akin to running blind on a tightrope. For one, tariffs come into effect immediately and are so huge that significant costs will be passed on to US consumers and businesses. This could lead to an inflation spike and job losses. If inflation rates remain high, the Fed may raise rates, and the "lower yield" plan will fail. The Fed can cut rates during a recession, but that would also lead to massive job losses and lower tax revenues. The savings effected by Doge could fall far short of target while causing massive disruption in US society. Mr Trump cannot have trade deals, tariffs, jobs, and reshoring all at the same time. If trade deals are struck, there will be no need for reshoring. Reshoring will take years. As the Alcoa chairman has said, the company makes large investment decisions based on a 20- to 30-year outlook, not on months and years. Why would anyone commit to long-term investment in the US based on a presidential



DEBASHIS BASU

IRRATIONAL CHOICE

dilettant when the presidency itself lasts just four years?

The biggest issue is the assumption that while Mr Trump upends the existing order at his own will, "all other things will remain equal". They will not. China, which is ruled with an iron hand, has an enormous capacity to endure pain, which most democracies don't. It has retaliated with a 34 per cent increase in tariffs on US imports, sanctions on select US companies, and a ban on some rare earth exports that the US electronics industry depends on. China, the world's largest holder of US treasuries, can even force yields up by dumping US debt. The People's Bank of China has announced the digital cross-border settlement system will be fully connected to the 10 members of Asean (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and six West Asian countries, which means that 38 per cent of the world's trade volume will bypass the SWIFT (Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication) system, dominated by the US dollar. Bankers say that SWIFT clears cross-border payments in three-five days while the Chinese system has a clearing speed of just seven seconds, possibly leading to a massive shift away from the dollar.

It will be messy

Countries will attempt to work out deals with the US, but deals will be messy, long-drawn-out, and likely to be capriciously altered. As the world learns of these negotiations in real time from Mr Trump's social media handles, strategies will have to be drawn and redrawn, buffeted by mercurial shifts in his imperious demands, backed by outright falsehoods. The most likely outcome is higher tariffs, but at lower rates than the current ones, along with lower economic growth across the board — perhaps leading to a recession, lower US tax revenues, new trade alliances with China, the centre, and continued uncertainty. Not since Covid has the world faced such a dire threat to growth and stability. Equity markets, which are derivatives of business and economy, will react with extreme volatility to each twist and turn. Buckle up.

The writer is editor of www.moneylife.in and a trustee of the MoneyLife Foundation; @MoneyLife

Nvidia: From videogames to the AI revolution



BOOK REVIEW

KATIE NOTOPOULOS

A challenge of writing a book on the tech industry, especially something as rapidly evolving as artificial intelligence (AI), is that the story will be slightly out of date in the few months between the final draft being turned in and the hardback hitting the shelves.

For example, Stephen Witt's *The Thinking Machine*, a lively biography of the CEO Jensen Huang, whose company Nvidia makes microchips that power AI systems like ChatGPT, recounts events only up to a mid-2024 climactic showdown between the author and his subject over the possibility of AI destroying humanity, which means that a line that appears in an earlier chapter — about how Elon Musk

differs from Huang in temperament — mentions that the Tesla CEO has "at least" 11 children. That doesn't seem newsworthy. By most estimates, he's up to 14.

It also means Witt's account doesn't include the recent drama that arose after the release of a new AI chatbot from the Chinese company DeepSeek. Arrivals to ChatGPT, the Chinese chatbot was alleged to beat a fraction of the cost, with fewer fancy features, and connectivity via coastal shipping, road transport, and an intra regional energy grid — all of which have the potential to transform the region — are largely incomplete, the major obstacles here being finalising legal agreements. Much of this can change if Bimstec injects greater dynamism into its functioning. No doubt the growing power of China in the region and the need to build greater intra group economic ties following the US tariffs are concentrating minds in seven regional capitals now. As the largest economy in the bloc, much will depend on how India manages the process of cooperation.

Before that fall, however, there was an astonishing rise. The story of how Nvidia became the world's most valuable company Street and a household name is fascinating because its trajectory differs significantly from that of its Big Tech peers.

For most of the time that companies like Apple, Meta and Amazon have been around, regular people used their products and services every day. But, unless you

were a hard-core gamer, you probably hadn't heard of Nvidia until recently.

Huang doesn't offer the author much on how his upbringing may have led to his current status as a technology apex predator ("I try not to analyse myself in that way," he tells Witt), but there are early glimpses of his incredible drive and focus. In 1973, at 10 years old, he immigrated to the United States from Thailand and eventually landed in Oregon, where, between homework and shifts at Denny's, he played competitive Ping-Pong at the national level.

By the early nineties, popular video games like Myst and Doom were coming out and the industry around personal computing was ramping up. In 1993, instead of trying to compete against giants like Intel and Sun in the generalist PC chip space, Huang co-founded Nvidia, a company focused specifically on PC video games; their chips were robust enough to process the immersive visuals that the new games were creating.

For much of Nvidia's history, success was far from assured. Over 30 years, the

company had ups and downs, nearly facing bankruptcy and fighting off activist investors. Huang's tolerance for risk pulled his company through again and again.

Huang was also notorious for his management style: his trademark technique is rage and yelling. In 2008, one of the company's new graphics chips had a design flaw that caused mass customer returns and a plunge in stock price. In front of a large group in the company cafeteria, including more than a hundred executives, Huang reamed out the chip architect responsible for the error.

These screaming sessions seem at odds with other, kinder aspects of Huang's personality — his friends from his personal life said they didn't even witness any blowups. And somehow he's retained

many long-time loyal employees, even people from the early days when it wasn't obvious that working at a gaming chip tech — not the most glamorous part of the tech industry — was a golden ticket to enormous wealth. He's also a loyal boss. The guy from the cafeteria wasn't fired after the showdown.

Over and over, Huang made decisions that worked out. He hired well, he saw opportunities around corners. The smartest risk Huang took was listening to a mid-level researcher who, in 2013, pitched him on a technology called "neural nets," then a fringe area being explored by a handful of academic researchers. Huang saw the potential and set Nvidia on a path that would make his chips the premier tool for today's AI revolution.

The arc of Nvidia's rise to dominance can't really be built out of explosive interpersonal moments at the office or reflections on its founder's stranger

personality traits, as entertaining as those things are. Instead, the drama most naturally arises from a series of technical achievements where Huang and his gang pulled ahead of the competition by sheer feats of computer engineering. Thankfully, Witt does a decent job at drawing the reader into those moments.

It's hard not to compare Huang with Zuckerberg, Bezos and Musk and see him as a kinder, less evil version of his tech overlords.

For all his verbal abuse, he hasn't attempted to reshape global society or exploit low-wage workers. So the big questions about how AI will change humanity are left unanswered. When Witt tries to ask Huang about these things, the CEO brushes him off, saying, "I feel like you're interviewing Elon right now, and I'm just not that guy," before getting irate and yelling.

In the end, *The Thinking Machine* keeps us aware of the author's vision of the future. Huang is someone who dreamed of beating Intel in Q2 sales numbers, not of ushering in a new technological age. It just so happens that by achieving the first goal, he also ended up doing the latter.

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Editorial



The missing middle

No legislation finds bipartisan support in Parliament

The Budget session of Parliament was notable for reasons both good and bad. The sittings of the two Houses stretched beyond midnight to clear the Waqf (Amendment) Bill 2025. The debates reflected the significant divergence of opinion on the management of Waqf properties, but were held in a convivial atmosphere. The Chairs of both Houses were elated to preside over a productive session and the ruling BJP was content to find allies strongly on its side, particularly on the Waqf law amendment. Parliament also approved President's Rule in Manipur, following debates held past midnight. The Opposition was buoyant that it got to have its say. It had its constituents holding together, and it even attracted some fence-sitters on select issues during the session. The BJP not only managed to steer the legislative agenda but also played to the gallery to please its political constituency. It was, however, not all good news. Off the floor of Parliament, business advisory committee meetings of the two Houses saw sharp exchanges, in one instance prompting Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar to walk out. The stand-off between the Congress and Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, on the Lok Sabha Leader of the Opposition, Rahul Gandhi, not being given adequate opportunities to speak, remained unresolved.

The vote on the Waqf Bill exposed the differences within the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) as well as the divergence between prospective allies, the BJP and the AIADMK. The BJD's decision not to issue a whip ruled many within the party, more so considering BJD patriarch Naveen Patnaik's clear stance against the Waqf Bill. One of the reasons for the AIADMK-BJP split in 2023, was the regional party's fear of losing its minority voter base. The AIADMK voted against the Waqf Bill, underscoring its reservations about the BJP's agenda. While the YSRCP, the AIADMK and the BJD showed an eagerness to keep a distance from the BJP, the JDU and the TDP ended up in an embrace of their dominant ally. The merits of the Waqf amendments may be debatable but the government's refusal to take the Muslim community into confidence on an important piece of legislation is a classic sign of majoritarianism. Barring a nominated member in the upper House, no Muslim MP supported the amendments. The Waqf debate also highlighted the fact that the ruling alliance does not have a single elected member from the community in Parliament. Beyond the veneer of efficient outcomes, the session sharpened political and communal polarisation. Discussions should ideally expand the common ground, but this session failed on that count.

Tragedy of a commons

Courts and the state must not throttle free flow of information

While ordering the Wikimedia Foundation to undo changes on the Wikipedia page on Asian News International (ANI), the Delhi High Court said "people at large have a tendency to accept statements made on [Wikipedia's] web pages... as gospel truth". In the hearing of the delisting suit that ANI had filed in 2024, the court had taken some questionable positions. For example, it sought the identities of the volunteers who edited the ANI page, whose anonymity the platform allows to protect them from retaliation. When the Foundation sought more time, the court observed: "We will close your business transactions here... We will ask the government to block Wikipedia... If you don't like India, please don't work in India." The Foundation had appealed for its right to safe harbour under the Information Technology Act 2000, but the court concluded in favour of the plaintiff because, it observed, "statements on the page pertaining to the plaintiff are all sourced from... editorials and opinionated pages". Wikipedia is written and maintained by volunteers who are expected to follow the platform's guidelines. Unlike newspapers or scientific journals, the encyclopedia does not purport to publish new information; volunteers are instead expected to repeat with attribution or reproduce with references, information originally published elsewhere, with a preference for reputable sources. In this light, the court order is problematic.

Elements of truth today are often mistaken to be someone's opinions and vice versa. Politicians and government agencies have punished members of civil society for repeating an allegedly offensive claim rather than address the original claim itself. Opinions are rejected even as data is withheld to deny those who express their opportunities to align them with verifiable facts. In this case, the court had expressed concern for ANI's credibility, whether volunteers who edited the ANI page had followed the platform's guidelines in letter and spirit, and whether the opinion as expressed on the page could be allowed to stand. In the process, it established that the Foundation's ability to maintain the democratic structure that has allowed Wikipedia to become so popular and reliable is limited for India's users: to the extent of public tolerance for certain opinions. Ultimately, the aforementioned "people's tendency" and the state's ability to influence it put Wikipedia and similar decentralised collaborations at risk. That is a tragedy. These collaborations adopted their designs to sidestep the sort of centralised information control that some countries, including India, have sought. Courts and the state would do well to accommodate these collaborative efforts rather than treat them with contempt – and the people should engage with these efforts and their guidelines as well.

Prescribe preventive medicine for a healthy India

India stands at the cusp of economic glory, aspiring to become a \$5 trillion economy and a global powerhouse. However, there is a "silent epidemic" of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) that threatens our economic and developmental ambitions. Today, NCDs are the leading cause of death in the country, accounting for roughly two-thirds of all deaths. To secure a healthy and prosperous future, India must urgently embrace a preventive health-care mindset – one that can avert before there is a need to heal.

The rising tide of NCDs, their economic toll
Over the past few decades, India has undergone an epidemiological transition. Communicable diseases such as infections have come under control but have been overtaken by NCDs. Chronic conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, cancers, chronic lung diseases, and stroke kill an estimated five million to six million Indians each year. What is particularly alarming is that NCDs are striking Indians at younger ages.

India's working-age population is increasingly affected – a disturbing trend when its GDP target relies on the youthful demographic dividend. In fact, 22% of Indians over 30 years are at risk of dying from an NCD before they hit the age of 70. We see this mirror in our hospitals every month with 30- to 40-year olds with heart ailments or in need of dialysis due to diabetic complications.

Beyond the human cost, the economic impact of NCDs is staggering due to the resulting loss of productivity and reduced workforce participation. Studies estimate that NCDs may already be costing India around 50% of its GDP. A World Economic Forum (and Harvard School of Public Health) study projected that between 2012 and 2030, NCDs would inflict a loss of around \$3.5 trillion-\$4 trillion on the Indian economy. Hence, an investment in preventive health care is not an expense but an economic strategy. Prevention is our best insurance policy for sustainable development.

The good news is that most NCDs are largely preventable. Sedentary lifestyles, unhealthy diets, tobacco and alcohol use, pollution, and genetic predisposition are some of the key culprits. By modifying these, we can significantly reduce NCD risk. It is estimated that about 80% of



Dr. Prathap C. Reddy

is Chairman, Apollo Hospitals

With India facing a growing epidemic of non-communicable diseases, there needs to be awareness that 'one can heal before there is a need to heal'

premature heart disease, stroke, and diabetes cases can be prevented by addressing lifestyle factors.

Today, around 22%-23% of adults are overweight, and there is an urgent need to tackle obesity. We must make physical activity a part of one's daily routine with at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise a day, be it in the form of walking, yoga, or sports. A healthy diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and proteins, and lower in sugar, salt, and unhealthy fats is a must.

Air pollution is a health emergency directly impacting rates of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), lung cancer, and even heart attacks. We must view pollution control as part of preventive medicine.

Finally, the most important measure is regular health screenings. Detecting these conditions early, through screenings starting at the age of 40 years or earlier if there is family history, can literally be a lifesaver. Early detection means timely intervention – controlling blood pressure before it causes a stroke, or removing a precancerous polyp before it turns into colon cancer. Screening such as mammograms for breast cancer or HPV tests for cervical cancer can find early, curable stages of disease.

Technology can transform prevention

Digital health technology – from smartphone apps and wearables to big data analytics – is a game changer. India has over 750 million smartphone users, which means we have the ability to deliver health advice, reminders, and risk assessments in the palm of everyone's hand. Wearable devices and health trackers allow individuals to keep an eye on their health status. The integration of such real-time data into preventive care plans is an exciting new frontier.

Most transformative is the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in predictive health modelling. AI algorithms can analyse vast datasets to predict an individual's risk for various NCDs with remarkable accuracy. AI tools can analyse an individual's profile and generate a "health risk score" that forecasts the likelihood of, say, a cardiac event or developing diabetes over the next decade. AI also helps in early diagnostics –

for instance, machine learning models can scan chest X-rays or computed tomography (CT) scans to detect early lung nodules or early signs of fatty liver that a human might miss, enabling pre-emptive action.

However, preventive medicine, augmented by AI, should always remain humane, compassionate, and patient-centric. Used responsibly, digital health and AI will be our greatest allies in making preventive care more proactive, precise, and accessible.



Fostering a 'preventive mindset'

Preventive medicine is not just a set of services but a mindset. I envision a future where every individual, community, corporate and government thinks "health-first" in every action and policy. Individuals must become the champions of their own health. I urge every reader to schedule that check-up you have been postponing and make small daily changes such as taking the stairs or cutting down on sugar to protect your well-being. Corporates and workplaces play a pivotal role by investing in employee wellness programmes – from annual health checks to in-house counsellors and fitness sessions.

Health-care providers must pivot from a reactive cure model to a preventive care model. The government's role is extremely important and initiatives such as the National Programme for Prevention and Control of NCDs and the establishment of Health and Wellness Centres that focus on screening and prevention are stellar steps. Beyond this, public policies should also be health-oriented: urban planning should create green spaces for exercise; education curricula should include health and nutrition, and food industry regulations should encourage reduced salt and sugar.

In the years that I have striven to make preventive care accessible and impactful, I have seen thousands of lives transformed because a disease was caught early or a risk factor was managed in time. Every individual has the power to make choices that guard their health. And those choices, scaled across 1.4 billion Indians, can help define our nation's health and happiness and ensure we reach our economic goals too.

Health and sanitation as the pillars of a healthy India

On this World Health Day (April 7), as nations reflect on the foundation of human well-being, India stands tall with a transformative lesson: health and sanitation are not separate pursuits, but are two sides of a coin. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India has undertaken a sanitation and water revolution that has not only changed the way we live but also how we thrive.

Rural missions that made a difference

The story of modern India cannot be told without acknowledging the contribution of the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) Grameen and the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM). These programmes are not just about toilets and tap water alone. They represent a shift in the soul of the nation. These rural missions symbolise dignity, equity, and, above all, health.

When the Prime Minister launched the SBM from the ramparts of the Red Fort in 2014, he ignited a movement that has touched every Indian household, making it a people's movement – a Jan Andolan that was anchored in behavioural change and inter-generational equity. By 2019, India had declared itself Open Defecation Free (ODF) and taken significant steps towards achieving SDG 6.2 (it focuses on achieving access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all by 2030) and also ending open defecation, 11 years ahead of time.

The SBM has been a powerful public health intervention. A World Health Organization (WHO) report estimated from 2014 to 2019, through the sanitation mission, over three lakh diarrhoeal deaths were averted. The Gates Foundation reported in 2017 that there were 58% higher cases of wasting among children in non-ODF areas. A UNICEF study (2017) found that 93% of women felt safer after getting a toilet at home and ODF families saved ₹50,000 annually in health-care costs, ensuring higher savings. The SBM has improved environmental outcomes. Groundwater contamination in ODF villages is 12.7 times less likely, ensuring long-term health resilience in rural communities. A (2024) Nature study estimated that 60,000 to 70,000 child deaths are prevented every year due to improved sanitation access. These outcomes are not incidental, they



Swati Meena Naik

is Joint Secretary, National Jal Jeevan Mission (NJJM)

The story of modern India is connected to every link in the sanitation chain that results in a healthier and safer society

are the result of sustained political commitment, inter-ministerial coordination, and community ownership.

In 2019, the Jal Jeevan Mission was launched to ensure every rural household receives clean drinking water through a tap connection. This is more than infrastructure. It is an investment in human potential with far-reaching socio-economic impact. Research by Nobel Laureate Dr. Michael Kremer has shown that nearly 30% infant deaths can be reduced if safe water is made available to families for drinking and 1.36 lakh child deaths (under five years) can be prevented with universal tap coverage. WHO estimates suggest that the JJM could avert four lakh diarrhoeal deaths with safe drinking water supply at home. And, 5.5 crore hours are saved every day, mostly by women, who had earlier spent time fetching water. State Bank of India research finds that the availability of water within premises led to increased participation by women in agriculture and allied activities.

The Sujal and Swachh Gaon campaign, launched to integrate water, sanitation, and hygiene at the village level, has further galvanised communities. Thousands of villages have been declared Swachh Sujal, which is an important marker of holistic public health transformation. Improved water and sanitation systems are also leading to reduced out-of-pocket expenditure for rural households, reinforcing the preventive health-care model.

On the ground

Sanitation and water are the first line of defence in public health. They are the invisible shield that protects communities from disease, women from indignity, and children from lost opportunity. A healthy nation is a productive nation. A clean nation is a resilient one.

Today, more than 80% of India's rural households have tap water connections. Over 96% villages have been declared as ODF Plus, more than 5.07 lakh villages have solid waste management systems, and 5.23 lakh villages have liquid waste management systems in place.

Women are not just beneficiaries, they are also water testers, sanitation entrepreneurs, and local leaders. Over 2.48 million women have been trained to test water quality, and women-led

Self-Help Groups are managing sanitation assets, recycling centres, and even sanitary napkin production. This is the vision of a Viksit Bharat where no child misses school because of a lack of water, no woman walks miles with a pot on her head, and no family loses a loved one to preventable illness.

The journey to health is the journey to dignity. A toilet brings privacy. Clean water brings opportunity. Waste management protects the environment. Each link in the sanitation chain connects directly to a healthier, safer society. The lessons we have learnt highlight the importance of inter-ministerial collaboration which is non-negotiable.

It is about convergence

Since, health is not the concern of one Ministry alone, it is the outcome of converged action across water, sanitation, nutrition, education, and rural development. We must recognise that India's model is not insular, it is global. Our innovations, community-led models, and use of technology whether through real-time dashboards, Galvanizing Organic Bio-Agro Resources Dhan (or GOBARdhan) biogas plants, or plastic waste management units are blueprints for the world, especially the Global South. Lastly, we must continue to work through a mutual understanding that every rupee invested in Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) yields manifold returns in health, productivity, gender equity, and environmental sustainability.

India is committed towards progressing forward on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and this World Health Day, we need to acknowledge and remember that good health begins not in hospitals, but in homes with access to clean water, safe sanitation, and a shared resolve. As we move forward, India remains committed to sharing its journey, collaborating globally, and co-creating a cleaner, healthier, and more resilient world.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Bill and debate

I see the path taken, though individually, by some Members of Parliament, in challenging the Parliament-voted and approved Waqf (Amendment) Bill in the Supreme Court of India, as the rule of law. It is also reported that more parties are set to follow the route. If the allegation of there having been a violation of the Constitution is true, it is for the Court to hear and make a final judgment. Such scrutiny by the judiciary is as per law. It

should also be conceded that if such provisions are or the whole Bill is found to be against the Constitution, a procedure to amend the Constitution also exists. Nobody can question the validity of such procedures being followed by the Houses. Now for the other issue. Some parties have plans to take the issue to the streets. Political parties that are a part of parliamentary proceedings have no moral right to do so, disturbing the normal life of citizens. Street protests may be left

to non-political groups. The present Opposition should also remember that it too would face the same situation if and when the INDIA bloc comes to power. The most unacceptable allegation is that from a senior party leader who found the Bill "passed by force". Surely, parliamentary proceedings often have stories of disruptions and the passage of Bills without debates. But this time, it was not so. Both Houses of Parliament engaged in long debates. And there was also

a vote in both Houses. No element of force was visible. **P.R.V. Raja,** Pandalam, Kerala

The article in the *Organiser* does cause some apprehension (Inside pages, "Organiser withdraws article after Cong. questions its 'motive,'" April 6). The line in the magazine about the extent of the properties owned by the Catholic Church appears to be ominous. United struggles by all those who believe in the constitutionally guaranteed freedoms alone

will thwart the right-wing's plans. **G. David Milton,** Maruthancode, Tamil Nadu

It is heartening that our elected representatives respected the sanctity of democracy by engaging in constructive debate in the temple of democracy. All this while, the country has been a mute spectator to the loss of money as a result of frequent disruptions and adjournments in Parliament. In the end, only democracy emerged the

winner in the debate. **S. Seshadri,** Chennai

'*Little Super Kings*' CSK losing on its home turf? The lions on the throne have become mice under it at Chepak. Two losses at home on the trot is shocking. The team has to make amends and revive its fortunes to be contention for the playoffs.

K. Pradeep, Chennai

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



The Indian EXPRESS

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BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

REACHING OUT

BIMSTEC summit was an opportunity that India seized to lend substance to its Act East Policy

IN ELEVATING INDIA'S bilateral ties with Thailand to a strategic level and giving a fresh impetus to the Bay of Bengal regional forum, the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multilateral Technical and Economic Cooperation or BIMSTEC, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has strengthened the Act East policy and deepened India's regionalism. The summit also provided a valuable opportunity to engage with leaders of two important neighbours — Bangladesh and Myanmar. Although Thailand is next door to the east of India, and the two countries are bound by historical and civilisational ties, Bangkok did not acquire the strategic profile it deserves in Delhi's foreign policy map. Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and, more recently, the Philippines, have dominated India's mind space. Thailand is the second largest economy in Southeast Asia but only the fourth largest trading partner for India.

Modi's brief sojourn in Bangkok, the first bilateral visit in more than a decade, has helped consolidate the efforts in the last few years in advancing bilateral ties. Thanks to Bangkok's decision on visa-free travel for India, Thailand has become a major destination of leisure travel for the Indian middle classes. Meanwhile, there is growing cooperation between the security establishments of the two countries and the two sides have now agreed to intensify defence and advanced technology cooperation, especially in outer space. India's deepening bilateral cooperation with Thailand also augurs well for revivifying the BIMSTEC forum that brings together five countries in South Asia (Bhutan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka) and two in South East Asia (Myanmar and Thailand). Launched in 1997, the forum has limped along without major advances in regionalism. The Modi government has invested additional energies in rebooting BIMSTEC after it was clear at the 2014 Kathmandu summit of SAARC that Pakistan was not going to allow any steps towards the regional economic integration of the Subcontinent. India's efforts paved the way for greater institutionalisation of BIMSTEC in the form of a charter and more specific cooperation in a broad range of areas. The Bangkok summit saw the conclusion of a maritime transport cooperation agreement and adoption of a vision document for the forum.

On the margins of the BIMSTEC summit, PM Modi met with the Senior General Min Aung Hlaing of Myanmar and offered assistance for the country to cope with the massive earthquake that has killed thousands and shaken a country already in deep crises. Growing instability in Myanmar marked by an intensifying civil war threatens to undo the very conception of BIMSTEC as a bridge between South and South East Asia. Myanmar's increasing international isolation only makes matters worse. Modi's meeting with Muhammad Yunus, the chief adviser of the interim government in Bangladesh, is a welcome first step in defusing the tensions between Delhi and Dhaka that had escalated since the ouster of Sheikh Hasina from power last August. While expressing India's concerns on the violence against the Hindu minority in Bangladesh, the hostile rhetoric emanating from the new government, and the growing number of incidents on the border, the PM has highlighted India's desire "to forge a positive and constructive relationship with Bangladesh based on pragmatism". Delhi has a strong incentive in sustaining the progress in bilateral ties during the Hasina years. It is also aware that without productive engagement with Dhaka, there is no way of building the BIMSTEC as a credible regional forum.

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THE COUNTER STRIKE

China's retaliation to Trump tariffs adds fuel to a global trade war, whose main belligerents are the world's top two economies

THE SLAPPING OF a 34 per cent duty by China on all goods imported from the US is striking for how fast it came — just two days after US President Donald Trump, on April 2, unveiled his so-called reciprocal tariff policy. While that policy supposedly addresses what the US President terms as "asymmetries in trade relationships" with other countries, it follows and reinforces his earlier actions explicitly aimed at China. Trump had, in early February, imposed a 10 per cent blanket additional tariff on Chinese imports, which was doubled to 20 per cent a month later. Adding the latest 34 per cent reciprocal tariff takes the total duty on Chinese goods entering the US to 54 per cent. Chinese retaliation was swift, even as the world was digesting Trump's country-specific reciprocal tariffs.

That China is at Trump's receiving end is also apparent from the high tariffs (46-49 per cent) he has levied on Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, besides Indonesia (32 per cent), Bangladesh (37 per cent) and Sri Lanka (44 per cent). These are countries where Chinese firms have established manufacturing facilities, for leveraging their lower labour costs as well as rerouting exports to circumvent US tariffs. A lot of the increased exports from Vietnam to the US have come from Chinese companies, which had relocated production there after Trump hit China with tariffs during his first term in 2018. This time around, he hasn't stopped at China, but has targeted Beijing's extended supply chain and made it virtually impossible to get around his tariffs by using other countries as conduits. This has added fuel to a global trade war, whose belligerents happen to be the world's top two economies.

Things could worsen if China were to make up for the loss of its merchandise exports to the US (\$438.9 billion out of a total \$3.6 trillion in 2024) through currency devaluation or dumping in other markets. Others too — be it the export-dependent southeast Asian economies or even the US, shut out of the Chinese market — may adopt similar beggar-thy-neighbour measures. One hopes better sense will prevail and all sides — especially Trump and Chinese president Xi Jinping — sit at the negotiating table soon. For India, however, hope cannot be a strategy. It should definitely not be a party to any trade war or revert to protectionism. On the contrary, rationalising and simplifying its import tariffs — the various additional customs duties and cesses must go — would attract global companies to make in India through competitive sourcing of intermediate inputs and adding value. In an unstable world, India can offer itself as a beacon of purposive reform, macro-economic prudence and policy stability.

FREEZE FRAME

EP UNNY



PRAKASH SINGH

COMMON CAUSE. A reputed NGO, in collaboration with the Lokniti Programme of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), released a comprehensive report on police torture and (un)accountability on March 26. It explores the nature, causes and factors that contribute to the perpetuation of police violence and torture in India. The study is based on interactions with 8,276 police personnel of different ranks across 17 states and union territories. The findings brought out some very disturbing features. There are, however, some redeeming features as well.

Torture has been defined in the UN Convention (1984) as "any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity." India signed the UN Convention against Torture (UNCAT) in 1997 but has not ratified it, which means it is legally not binding on India.

The report brings out that 20 per cent of the police personnel feel that it is "very important" for the police to use "tough methods" to create fear amongst the public and another 35 per cent think it is "somewhat important." In other words, 55 per cent of police personnel favour tough methods to some degree. Significantly, they have not talked of torture. What these tough methods are and at what stage they assume the dimensions of torture have not been clarified in the report.

In cases involving sexual harassment and child lifting, one in four police personnel justify mob violence, implying that they do not mind mobs acting as the judge, jury and executioner in such cases. Another disturbing finding is that 22 per cent of police personnel believe that killing "dangerous criminals" is better than giving them a legal trial. But, it is also a fact that 74 per cent police personnel are of the view that "no matter how dangerous a criminal is, the police should try to catch them and try to follow proper legal procedure."

A study on torture by police brings out disturbing patterns. We need a law against use of these methods

The Common Cause report brings out that 20 per cent of the police personnel feel that it is 'very important' for the police to use 'tough methods' to create fear amongst the public and another 35 per cent think it is 'somewhat important.' In other words, 55 per cent of police personnel favour tough methods to some degree. Significantly, they have not talked of torture. What these tough methods are and at what stage they assume the dimensions of torture have not been clarified in the report.

dures." In matters of arrest, although 41 per cent police personnel said that the procedures are "always" adhered to, 24 per cent said that they are "rarely or never" adhered to. Kerala, where 94 per cent said "always", reported the highest compliance.

On the use of third-degree methods, 30 per cent of police personnel said that these are justified towards persons accused in serious criminal cases. Surprisingly, 9 per cent justified these methods even in petty offences. The victims of torture are, unfortunately, mostly from poor and marginalised communities. The groups generally targeted are Adivasis, Dalits and Muslims, people who cannot read and write, and slum dwellers.

Custodial deaths showed discrepancies in figures furnished by different agencies. Thus, in the year 2020, the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) reported 76 cases, while the National Human Rights Commission reported 70 cases. The National Campaign Against Torture (NCAT), a civil society initiative, documented 111 cases. It was a shocking revelation that during 2018-22 there were zero convictions for deaths in police custody.

An encouraging part of the report is where the researchers found that an overwhelming 79 per cent of police personnel favour training in human rights, 71 per cent recommended prevention of torture and 79 per cent supported evidence-based interrogation techniques.

The report says that there was consensus among lawyers and judges that confessions to the police should never be made inadmissible. It is worthwhile placing on the record that the Malimath Committee had suggested that confessions made before a senior police officer of the rank of Superintendent or above should be admissible in evidence with safeguards to prevent coercion. The Law Commission of India had also, in its 69th Report (1977), proposed introducing Section 26A in the Indian Evidence Act to make confessions before senior police officers admissible.

The study included in-depth interviews with doctors, lawyers and judges also whose jobs involve interacting with the police and those in custody. It was "very rare" to see magistrates interacting with arrested persons. In fact, one lawyer described magis-

trates as "silent spectators" who "do not record anything or ask where and when they were arrested." The doctors pointed out that medical examinations of arrested persons were often done by doctors without expertise in forensic medicine; there were instances of such examinations being done by an eye specialist or anesthesiologist.

The study, in fact, found fault with all the concerned agencies for incidents of torture. The police are, of course, the main culprit. The magistrates contribute by playing a passive role; the doctors by not deputising specialists who could identify signs of torture. The National Human Rights Commission has been criticised for not defining torture and for its "coloured attitude" towards the victims of torture.

A serious lacuna in the report is that it has not made any observations on the factors that contribute to the use of torture in the Indian context. Very briefly, these are: A continuation of the colonial police culture, for which there is no justification, the near absence of accountability, pressure from the political masters and even senior officers for quick results, inadequate training, and public support for short-cut solutions because of the failure of the criminal justice system to deliver within a time-frame.

Torture is, sadly, practised by police forces across the world. The most sophisticated and brutal techniques are used by the police in the US. Guantanamo Bay gained worldwide notoriety for its inhuman torture of detainees. Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison highlighted the brutal methods used in the interrogation of terror suspects. About Russia, China and Pakistan, the less said, the better.

This is, however, not to justify the use of torture under any circumstances. India must enact a law against torture, ratify the UN Convention, and take effective steps to insulate the police from external pressures as mandated by the Supreme Court. Such measures will lead to police becoming humane and professional, upholding the rule of law, respecting human rights and winning over the trust and confidence of the people.

The writer, a retired police chief, has been campaigning for police reforms for nearly three decades

ON RARE DISEASES, FALLING SHORT

Despite court verdicts, life-saving drugs remain inaccessible for many



HARIS BEERAN

THREE DECADES HAVE passed since the Supreme Court held that the right to health and medical care is a fundamental right under Article 21 of the Constitution. The Directive Principle of State Policy enshrined in Article 41 mandates public assistance in cases of sickness and disablement. However, the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), in its approach to the treatment of rare diseases, falls short of ensuring this basic right.

According to a reply in Parliament, 13,479 patients have registered in the National Registry for Rare and Other Inherited Disorders. The Delhi High Court observed while deciding on a petition filed by patients of rare diseases that in "a country like India, where thousands, if not lakhs, of patients suffer from rare diseases, cannot adopt a helpless approach. Courts also cannot be mere spectators. There are several registered patients, but there may be many more unregistered individuals suffering from rare diseases." The small number of cases should help the government take focused action. The experience of the patients shows that the government has not taken its responsibility seriously. It required the intervention of the Delhi High Court for the MoHFW to approve the National Policy for Rare Diseases 2021 (NPRD) on March 30, 2021. In May 2023, the Delhi HC directed the formation of a five-member committee to oversee the implementation of the policy.

Given India's manufacturing capabilities, these drugs can be produced at a fraction of the current prices if patent encumbrances are addressed. Patent monopolies are a significant barrier to local production. After securing patents, their holders often exploit the monopoly by refusing to market life-saving medicines in India. The government need not be a mute spectator in the face of such strategies.

mentation of the policy.

The challenge that the patients face is the high cost of treatment. Take Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA). The annual cost of treatment using risdiplam is upward of Rs 72 lakh. The financial support offered under the NPRD has a limit of Rs 50 lakh per patient. This gets exhausted soon, and as a result, many patients cannot continue the treatment. The ministry told the Supreme Court that it could not extend assistance beyond Rs 50 lakh per patient due to a lack of funds.

A patient who had exhausted the funds approached the Kerala HC for a direction to the Union government to continue treatment. The High Court issued the direction, but the ministry went to the Supreme Court and obtained an interim stay. The Supreme Court had left it open to the ministry to take appropriate policy measures to address the patient's request, which it has not done. And instead of examining the range of policy options suggested by the Delhi High Court, the ministry also obtained a stay from the Supreme Court on this order.

Paragraph 11 of the NPRD implementation strategy directs the MoHFW to approach the Department of Pharmaceuticals or the Department of Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade to facilitate the local production of medicines for rare diseases. Many such medicines, particularly small molecules like risdiplam and trikafta for the treatment of

SMA and cystic fibrosis respectively, can be manufactured locally. The first generic version of a drug is launched at a price 90-95 per cent lower than the originator's price.

Given India's manufacturing capabilities, these drugs can be produced at a fraction of current prices if patent encumbrances are addressed. Patent monopolies are a significant barrier to local production. After securing patents, their holders often exploit the monopoly by refusing to market life-saving medicines in India. The government need not be a mute spectator in the face of such strategies.

Despite the NPRD's intention to support rare disease patients, delays and funding restrictions are leaving hundreds — including children — without access to life-saving treatment. The ministry's refusal to provide additional funds, and its reluctance to invoke legal and policy measures mentioned in the NPRD or suggested by the Delhi High Court to ensure affordable access to life-saving therapies, raise legal and ethical concerns. As a member of the consultative committee of the health ministry, I have raised these issues and I hope they will be addressed with alacrity. No family should endure the heartbreak of watching their child suffer from a treatable disease simply because life-saving medicines remain inaccessible due to high costs.

The writer is a Rajya Sabha MP, the Indian Union Muslim League

APRIL 7, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

TALKS WITH PAKISTAN

THE INITIATIVE TAKEN by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in sending the foreign secretary, Romesh Bhandari to Islamabad to initiate a fresh dialogue has partly succeeded in that the two countries have agreed to reactivate the joint ministerial commission. An announcement to that effect is expected to be made when the Pakistan Foreign Minister Yakub Khan visits Delhi next week to attend the non-aligned ministerial meeting.

COUP IN SUDAN

SUDAN'S ARMY CHIEF seized control of the

country and sacked President Jaafar Nimeiri and all his aides and ministers from their posts, Egypt's Middle East News Agency (MENA) reported from Khartoum. Quoting the official Sudanese news agency Suna, it said army Commander-in-Chief Abdul Rahman Swarieddhab had also declared emergency, closed the country's borders and would keep the airport shut.

IRAQ STRIKES IRAN

IRAQ FIRED FOUR missiles into three Iranian cities and bombed Tehran, raising the death toll to at least 42 in overnight raids and Iranian jets retaliated by pounding military and in-

dustrial installations in Iraq, reports from the two countries said. A communiqué by the Iraqi news agency said its jets "carried out a destructive air strike on Tehran".

PM SKIPS BANDUNG

PRIME MINISTER RAJIV Gandhi is not going to Indonesia to attend the 30th anniversary of the Bandung conference being held in Jakarta later this month. India will be represented by the Minister of State for Tourism Khursheed Alam Khan. Other members of the Indian delegation are yet to be chosen. Recently, the Indonesian Foreign Minister visited Delhi and extended his Government's invitation to Rajiv Gandhi.



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[OUR TAKE]

Goodwill pays off in Colombo

PM Modi's visit has helped counterbalance China's expanding footprint in the region

Measures to deepen defence and energy ties were front and centre during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Sri Lanka, and the agreements finalised in these spheres by the two sides reflect their intention to add strategic heft to their partnership. It was also significant that these agreements were concluded by a Sri Lankan leader whose party has been known for its historic anti-India stance, and at a time when India's relations with several of its immediate neighbours are under considerable stress.

A growing recognition of the interlinked nature of the national security of India and Sri Lanka paved the way for the agreement on defence cooperation, which creates a structured framework for increasing military exchanges and joint exercises. At his meeting with Modi on Saturday, President Anura Kumara Dissanayake repeated his assurance that he would not allow Sri Lankan soil to be used against Indian interests and made it clear that this would also apply to the waters around the island nation. This is especially significant in view of India's concerns about increasing forays into the Indian Ocean by China's so-called research vessels, which are nothing more than sophisticated surveillance platforms capable of snooping on Indian defences and satellite launches, after Beijing gained a foothold through the long-term lease of Hambantota port.

India's prompt financial assistance during Sri Lanka's financial crisis of 2022 appears to have influenced a perceptible shift in the public mood in Colombo, which was also reflected in Sri Lanka going ahead with the agreement on defence cooperation despite protests by some nationalist parties. India's agreement on debt restructuring and the reduction of interest rates will help build on this goodwill while simultaneously strengthening Sri Lanka's economic recovery, but it will be unrealistic to assume that Colombo will always be able to stand up to sustained pressure from Beijing.

Greater economic integration, especially through efforts such as the tripartite agreement involving the United Arab Emirates for developing an energy hub in Trincomalee and the move to connect the electricity grids of India and Sri Lanka, are a better way to wean neighbours away from China's sphere of influence and to enable them to benefit from India's economic growth and digitalisation efforts. Modi's visit has helped counterbalance China's expanding footprint in the region, and New Delhi and Colombo must now move quickly to build on the momentum created by the new agreements and chart a more collaborative approach to their relations.

CSK must tackle its MS Dhoni problem

Mahendra Singh Dhoni has been around long enough to know when the writing is on the wall. For much of his time with the India national team and the Chennai Super Kings (CSK), his game sense was his greatest strength — he somehow always knew who to back and when, how to time the chase, even when to come up the order. No one else did it like him. And the results showed it.

But the current IPL season is showing us a different picture of the man. He looks like a player who has reached his limit but refuses to acknowledge it. If it was an individual sport, one could not really say much, but in a team sport such as cricket, he seems to be dragging his team down along with him.

Sure, five-time champions CSK have always found ways to defy the odds. They usually follow a different gameplan, back experience over youth and prefer continuity over change. Thus far this year, though, they have adopted a Dhoni-first, instead of a team-first approach and that is hurting them. The usually faithful fans are starting to turn on them and even on Dhoni.

For now, Dhoni and the team are taking the silent route but his 26-ball 30 against the Delhi Capitals on Saturday only served to highlight the problem. There are plenty of financial advantages to having Dhoni in the CSK team off-field but on the field, he is now a liability. His knees are shot, he doesn't play any competitive cricket between two IPLs and one must wonder if a younger player can do a better job for the team. CSK must take a route different from the team trodden so far to preserve both their own legacy and Dhoni's.

The new Waqf law is a much-needed reform

The Bill doesn't target any religious group. Rather, it aligns Waqf governance with the principles applied to other religious trusts

The Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2024 is designed to usher in much-needed transparency, accountability and fairness in the governance of Waqf properties across India. I am aware of the fears being expressed by the Muslim community, including those regarding the erosion of institutional autonomy, potential encroachment on Waqf property rights, the dilution of Waqf Board authority and the perceived risk of excessive bureaucratic control. These sentiments deserve to be acknowledged with seriousness and sensitivity. At the same time, it is important to recognise that several Opposition parties have sought to exploit these concerns through misinformation, fear-mongering and divisive rhetoric. While genuine concerns must be addressed thoughtfully, it is equally necessary to counter false narratives that mislead the public and derail important reforms.

The unchecked functioning of the Waqf Boards has, in the past, led to arbitrary land claims, causing anguish not only to members of other communities but to Muslims as well. It is this opaque system that the current legislation seeks to reform.

With Parliament passing the Bill, long-standing imbalances can be corrected and justice in matters related to land and property can be restored.

Unlike previous administrations that shied away from addressing this sensitive issue due to political expediency, the government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has taken a courageous and necessary decision in the public interest.

The Bill is not, as is being made out, against the Muslim community. Rather it ensures that Waqf properties are managed lawfully, while preventing wrongful acquisitions. For years, the Waqf Board had the power to declare lands as Waqf properties without any legal scrutiny. Consequently, it led to instances where people lost homes, businesses, and even places of worship overnight. The infamous case in Tamil Nadu, where a 500-year-old Hindu temple and an entire village were declared Waqf property, stands as a shocking example of this misuse.

Such arbitrary claims created fear among non-Muslims and even some sections of the Muslim community. Unlike Hindu and Sikh religious trusts, which operate under government supervision, Waqf properties had no external checks, allowing corruption and mismanagement to thrive. The new amendment rectifies this and ensures that every property claim follows a legal and just process. One of the most critical reforms in the Bill is the removal of the "Waqf by user" provision, which previously allowed any land used by the Muslim community for a certain period to be declared as Waqf property, even without legal documentation.

This loophole led to numerous cases where private properties, government lands, and even temples were taken over. With this provision eliminated,

Waqf claims will now require concrete proof, like any other legal claim. Over the years, there have been thousands of disputed cases where non-Muslims lost their properties due to the exploitation of this provision, leading to serious communal tensions. With this loophole closed, the long-standing belief that "once a Waqf, always a Waqf" has finally been laid to rest. Another significant change is placing the authority over Waqf surveys in the hands of district collectors instead of Waqf-appointed survey commissioners.

This ensures property records are aligned with state revenue laws and prevents wrongful land acquisitions. The Bill explicitly states that any government land mistakenly recorded as Waqf will be restored to the government, safeguarding public resources from unwarranted claims. If a dispute arises, the final decision will rest with the district collector, removing unilateral decision-making powers from Waqf Boards. A major step toward inclusivity is the introduction of non-Muslim members in Waqf governance. The Central Waqf Council will now include two non-Muslim representatives, while state Waqf Boards will have at least two non-Muslim members. Moreover, representation from different Muslim sects such as Sunnis, Shias, Bohras, and Ahl-e-Sunnat will be ensured, breaking the monopoly of any single group over Waqf management.

This change promotes balanced decision-making. To curb corruption, independent audits will be conducted by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) or designated officials. Previously, Waqf properties were managed without any government audits.



Syed Zafar Islam

[STRAIGHTFORWARD]

Shashi Shekhar

Glimpses of RSS's ways in 'Kashi, Mathura' revival

In the winter of 1989, a cold breeze blew as the evening arrived early — a usual for those months. I was sitting in my office in Agra when the phone rang. The Mathura Correspondent was on the line. He informed me that the police had roughed up some kar sevaks at the police station on the bypass road. The kar sevaks had been stopped from going to Ayodhya. I instructed him to immediately visit the spot with a photographer immediately. What the correspondent and the photographer saw took a few hours to reach me as those were pre-mobile phone days.

According to the Mathura team, a bus from Maharashtra packed with kar sevaks was heading towards Ayodhya. The police informed the correspondent that when the bus was stopped for checking, the kar sevaks started chanting the slogan "Ayodhya is just the beginning, Mathura and Kashi remain". It led to a heated argument, resulting in the police using force. The kar sevaks had a completely opposite view. While covering the incident in Mathura, we couldn't foresee that, one day, Mathura and Kashi would become as important focal points as Ayodhya was in 1980s and 1990s. The Ayodhya movement was reaching a crescendo, but most people were convinced that the law enforcement agencies would be able to maintain order. Babri Masjid, termed a disputed structure by Lal Krishna Advani, would remain safe.

On December 6, 1992, that veneer of belief lay in tatters. Even then, no one had imagined that within a span of 32 years, a grand temple would be erected on the same site. This was the logical culmination of a protracted legal and social battle. As the foundations of the Ram temple were being laid, questions popped up as to whether Mathura or Kashi were still on the RSS agenda. Leaders of the RSS and the BJP shied away from offering a clear answer.

You may remember the controversy that broke out over the Gyanpur Mosque adjacent to the Kashi Vishwanath temple. The movement was gathering steam when the RSS chief, Mohan Bhagwat, said there was no need for Ram Mandir-style movements anymore. Bhagwat also said that targeting new sites and hate-mongering were unacceptable. It seemed that the movement died down, but last week, RSS general secretary Dattatreya Hosabale's comments shook the headlines once again. He said that the RSS had no objection to the workers joining the temple in Kashi and Mathura. To add weight to his argument, he referred to the Dharm Sansad organised by the Hindu Mahasabha. In 1984, the sadhus organised a religious conference called Dharm Sansad demanding the liberation of temples in Ayodhya as well as Kashi and Mathura.

Please don't waste time finding discrepancies and apparent tussles between various RSS leaders. The RSS desisted from openly joining the Ram Mandir Movement until its sister organisation, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, created a critical mass of support and momentum for it.



Shashi Shekhar



While genuine concerns must be addressed thoughtfully, it is equally necessary to counter false narratives that mislead the public

leading to financial mismanagement and misuse of funds. With these audits in place, the process will become transparent and accountable, much like other charitable and religious trusts. Additionally, the amendment shifts legal oversight of Waqf disputes from Waqf tribunals to district courts, ensuring fair and unbiased adjudication. Any appeals can now be made directly to the High Court within 90 days, providing a faster and more transparent legal remedy. One of the most transformative aspects of the Bill lies in two crucial provisions that deserve far greater attention. First, the Bill ensures complete protection of tribal lands by explicitly prohibiting the declaration of any tribal land as Waqf property.

Such encroachments have threatened the rights and livelihood of indigenous communities in states such as Jharkhand. For the first time, their ancestral land is shielded by law from arbitrary Waqf claims.

Second, the Bill protects India's rich historical legacy by prohibiting the declaration of any Archaeological Society of India (ASI) protected monument or any other archaeological site as Waqf property. Moreover, it revokes the Waqf status of all such sites wrongly claimed in the past, including monuments such as Delhi's Purana Qila, Qutub Minar, Safdarjung's Tomb, Humayun's Tomb, Tipu Sultan's tomb in Karnataka, the grave of Aurangzeb's

wife, and Gulbarga Fort — nearly 200 in total across the country. The Bill is prospective in effect and won't have any bearing on past Waqf declarations or disputes, affirming the government's commitment to preserving national heritage and preventing any misuse to distort or appropriate historical sites.

The message is clear: India's monuments belong to every Indian, not to any one group or institution. This Bill addresses the long-standing concerns of Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, and even some Muslim sects who have suffered due to unfair Waqf claims.

Even within the Muslim community, reformists have long demanded transparency in Waqf management. The inclusion of diverse Muslim sects and mandatory audits ensure that funds meant for community welfare are not misused.

This Bill is not about targeting any religious group; rather, it establishes a fair system where Waqf governance aligns with the same principles applied to other religious trusts. Indeed, it is a step toward rectifying past injustices and ensuring that Waqf properties are managed transparently and lawfully.

Syed Zafar Islam is a national spokesperson of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and a former member, Rajya Sabha. The views expressed are personal

[VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY | PRESIDENT, UKRAINE]

The pressure on Russia is still insufficient, and the daily Russian strikes on Ukraine prove it



Trump tariffs hold pain and promise for India's IT sector

India's relationship with the US in terms of IT has long been symbiotic. The largest share of India's trade surplus with the US comes from IT services exports, and American tech companies view India as a high-potential market. This mutual dependence now faces an uncertain future because of US President Donald Trump's aggressive tariffs on merchandise imports and the undercurrents of global recessionary headwinds linked to it. We must remain alert to the possible disruption in our IT exports, despite Washington's current focus on the goods markets.

A key dimension of Trump's tariffs is the indirect but potentially very large shock they may produce for all parts of the global economy — and by extension, Indian IT. Trump's tariffs are likely to suppress consumer demand in the US, because they will make most things costlier, at least in the medium run. Trump has called upon the Federal Reserve to lower rates in order to make borrowing cheaper, hoping to bolster consumer spending. However, Federal Reserve chair Jerome Powell has signalled resistance, underscoring that central banking independence remains a cornerstone of institutional maturity in the US economy.

Rising inflation could mean that Americans — businesses included — must tighten their belts. For Indian IT, reduced US consumption would translate to delayed digital transformation projects and cost-cutting by enterprise clients. This should prompt our IT industry to re-evaluate its cost-optimisation model and ask how we can move higher up the value chain. The growing role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and advanced software threatens to disrupt low-end IT services, so Indian industry may plot towards creating more resilient IT services and know-how. The time for moving up the engineering ladder is now.

American companies could also come under greater political pressure to onshore IT jobs rather than send them to India. Initiatives like Global Capability Centres (GCCs) illustrate the growing depth of our value proposition to US corporations. These centres are increasingly involved in R&D and value-added tasks. They showcase a shift from back-office tasks toward complex, analytical ones, fuelled in large part by enterprise demand in the US.

Yet the momentum behind American offshoring to India could stall if protectionist sentiment runs high. We must move more than after the fact and create jobs, tax cuts, and incentives to ensure US companies remain committed over the long haul. Linking markets

access or government procurement to job creation and skill development might be a pragmatic path. If the government were to tie such incentives to hiring targets, firms would be motivated to build enduring ecosystems here. Avenues for business expansion would also give American companies greater impetus to make India's case back home.

Perhaps the bigger concern is how Trump's tariffs will fuel calls for digital sovereignty laws and specialised digital regulation as leverage to do so. While Europe's protective instincts may be aimed at American and even Chinese tech giants, they offer no cause for celebration for Indian IT that also seeks to service European demand.

The US, on the other hand, has always assumed that partner growth markets like India would remain open to its tech juggernaut. Indeed, India has not erected impenetrable firewalls yet. American firms such as Google, Facebook, and Amazon enjoy broad access to India. But as each market seeks to change global conditions, India could also be tempted to deepen barriers like data localisation, security testing, and content controls.

This is where Trump's overtures might paradoxically be good news for India. His administration seems intent on forging a bilateral trade deal, bypassing the complexities of multilateral negotiations. If Europe grows more insular, India and the US could strike a reciprocal arrangement that not only safeguards the existing flow of IT services, but also opens fresh tech market frontiers. Indian companies should, in turn, look to serve American consumers more actively with their own apps and services.

The challenge before India is twofold. First, an eye on the long-term: re-evaluating our headwinds, supply-chain uncertainty, and onshoring pressures that may erode service exports. Second, proactively reinforce our longer-term value proposition: a pool of highly skilled talent, an innovative tech ecosystem that goes beyond cost advantages, and a large, rule-of-law-driven domestic market that US companies find appealing. If we play our cards right, Indian IT can weather this storm and emerge better for it.

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Vivian Sharan



There are things known and there are things unknown, and in between are the doors of perception

Aldous Huxley

epaper.morningstandard.in

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

— Ramnath Goenka

LIVELIHOODS, PUBLIC INTEREST MUST MATTER FOR BIKE TAXI FUTURE

BIKE taxis have had a bumpy ride in Karnataka and now face an existential problem. They may be off the roads in Karnataka in about six weeks following a High Court order prohibiting them unless the state government frames guidelines for their operation under the Motor Vehicles Act. That is a setback to Rapido, Ola, Uber, and lakhs of bike-taxi captains who have just over a month to find work in a sluggish job market. The government's main contention is that operators use bikes with white board registration instead of yellow commercial boards, which it deemed illegal. It also cited the safety of women using electric bikes, though this is a debatable point, considering that harassment is as likely, if not more, in a cab or auto. Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy has said the government will work out the issue, while homegrown startup Rapido is looking at legal remedies.

Since their advent in 2016, bike taxis have had a chequered history in Karnataka, running into opposition from auto and cab unions hit by this affordable and swift transport. Protests, run-ins and violence between auto drivers and Rapido captains were commonplace. Caught between them were the authorities, who would seize bike taxis to maintain peace. Adding a twist, the government introduced the Karnataka Electric Bike Taxi Scheme in 2021, allowing only electric vehicles to operate as bike taxis. However, it withdrew it in 2024, citing violations.

In Goa, bike taxis are a popular mode of transport. The state has managed to regulate 'pilots' and kept fares at an economical ₹20 for the first kilometre and ₹10 for each additional kilometre. Karnataka could study the Goa model, as the issue is as much about the drivers' livelihood as the transport choice. Instead of bowing to powerful lobbies, the authorities should consider the people's interests and allow workable economic models to flourish. With Metro fares up and auto drivers charging excessively and refusing rides, bike taxis offer a less complicated alternative. Two-wheeler safety issues are not complex to address, and operations can be streamlined. What is important is the government bearing in mind the home and hearth of bike taxi captains before it ventures to lid down the very concept of cheap commutes.

STARTUPS NEED COURSE CHANGE FOR TECH FOCUS

PYUSH Goyal stirred a heated debate when he exhorted Indian startups to come up with ideas that can stand apart in the fast-changing world of business. The Union commerce and industry minister's concern isn't new, but the context has changed in recent weeks. India not only needs to future-proof its economy, but for now it needs weapons to fight a global trade war: China, Europe and many other top trading entities offer, at competitive prices, goods and services the world cannot do without. What is India's world-beating offering?

So, the minister understandably wants Indian startups to pivot towards high-tech industries like semiconductors, machine learning, robotics and artificial intelligence. The problem is layered—it's not just about regulatory and bureaucratic bottlenecks, as many startup bosses have pointed out since Goyal's speech. One prime problem, for which industry is as much culpable as the government, is the lack of focus on research and development. Indian startups continue to avoid spending on deep tech, which has long gestation periods.

The most successful Indian startups have copied thriving business ideas from the West: Flipkart borrowed from the Amazon model, Ola from Uber, and Oyo is an AirBNB look-alike. Zomato, India's first listed food-tech company, expanded to food delivery inspired by DoorDash and other food delivery apps overseas. Many of these startups had the first mover's advantage, they attracted funding from investors, survived competition from later entrants and lived to see the light of the day. They must be complimented for their success and maturation as viable businesses. Slushed with easy liquidity in the post-Covid era due to benign central bank monetary policies, many startups with no actual work or problem-solving abilities received funding at higher valuations. The bubble burst and many fell by the wayside.

It is time for the Indian startup apparatus to revire for the next maturation phase. Chinese startups also began by copying the Americans, but quickly adapted, innovated and filed their own patents. For Indian startups to revise their strategy, mainly investing in R&D and the latest tech-enabled solutions, support must come from the government, big business and other investors. Investing heavily in foundational technologies that can become building blocks for later-stage innovations would be a start. For India to achieve this, the change in approach must happen at all levels—founders, investors and policymakers.

QUICK TAKE

TECHNICITY TROUBLE

DELHI High Court has acquitted a person who lost control of a car at high speed and fatally hit two pedestrians. The court reasoned that over-speeding does not necessarily amount to rash and negligent driving. Other high courts have ruled similarly in matching instances. However, it is undisputed that the barreling car hit two people who died. That's punishable, rash and negligent driving adds to the gravity of the crime. The confusion arises because over-speeding falls under rash and negligent driving in penal laws. The two need to separate as jointly and severally, they endanger human life. A protocol can explain the technical differences for registering a case.

INDIAN Prime Minister Narendra Modi has just concluded his fourth visit to Sri Lanka, precisely two years after the Indian Ocean island went bankrupt and its economy collapsed like a pack of cards.

As the economic crisis unfolded in April 2022, the worst ever in post-independence Sri Lanka, Delhi stepped in quickly to assist Colombo with financial and humanitarian assistance. Promptly, it provided \$4 billion in financial aid and, a year later, supported the \$3 billion IMF bailout program for Sri Lanka.

Two years later, on April 5, the visiting leader announced the completion of debt restructuring with Sri Lanka at significantly low interest rates, emphasising India's position as Colombo's ally. Sri Lanka owes nearly \$1,400 million to both the Exim Bank of India and the State Bank of India. The timing of this announcement is noteworthy. Sri Lanka is again in a tailspin and is bracing itself for another hit to its fragile economy following US President Donald Trump imposing a 44% tariff on Sri Lankan goods, making it one of the most impacted countries.

During the three-day visit, which concluded on Sunday, Modi and Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake signed several bilateral agreements on energy cooperation, health, digitalisation, and multi-sectoral assistance. They also virtually witnessed several joint projects launched, such as the controversial Sampur solar power plant, an agricultural warehouse in Dambulla, and the supply of solar rooftop systems for 5,000 religious institutions islandwide.

Thus, the Indian leader's visit came at a critical time and holds geopolitical implications reflecting the complex political history of the two nations. Despite some murmurs of protests, Sri Lankans, by and large, are grateful to the Modi administration for the critical role it played in April 2022, and Dissanayake conferring the title Sri Lanka Mitra Vibhushana on Prime Minister Modi is an acknowledgement of India's continued support to the neighbouring island.

Despite this recent history and the bonhomie in front of shutterbugs apart, both leaders have some repairing work to do. A trust deficit makes Sri Lankans view India with suspicion and question its motives. Not even the well-meaning and timely humanitarian assistance at a critical time and the consistent support has dulled the underlying mistrust of India's wish to exercise greater influence over Sri Lanka. On the other hand, Colombo's

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit is also a clear statement of India's interest in deepening ties with Sri Lanka and not relinquishing its role as the South Asian superpower

BEACH MISTRUST, RAISE SAILS FOR A FRESH BILATERAL

DILRUKSHI HANDUNNETTI

Award-winning journalist and lawyer, founder and director of the Colombo-based Center for Investigative Reporting (CIR)



SOURABH ROY

left-leaning new administration has a bitter and blood-soaked history with India. The main constituent of the NPP government, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), launched a second bloody insurrection in 1967-1989, demanding the withdrawal of Indian peacekeepers and pose the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, which resulted in the creation of provincial councils in Sri Lanka. The armed insurrection is considered the strongest expression of anti-India sentiments. The JVP has always viewed India through the prism of pursuing a geostrategic foothold on Sri Lanka, including strategic investments in the island. The arming and training of Tamil youth to eventually demand a separate homeland in the island's north and east only added to the weight

of this historical baggage. As much as Colombo finds it difficult to be genuinely friendly towards Delhi, the Indian administration, too, has to deal with the discomfort of trying to work with a government that has historically considered India to be expansionist and undermining the island's interests, geographical, political and economic.

New Delhi is concerned about China's growing influence on the island, which drives fears around maritime security and economic interest. The visit is also a genuine reminder of India's critically beneficial role two years ago in helping resurrect the island economy; reinforces the idea of India's importance in Sri Lankan affairs, and offers a counterbalance to other external influences.

WHY BUDDHISM FADED IN THE LAND OF ITS BIRTH

RENUKA NARAYANAN

FAITHLINE

considered lucky in Southeast Asian Buddhism, representing salvation from suffering and fertility.

Buddhists and Hindus can freely marry each other in India without religious or legal restrictions. In ancient times, families often followed different Dharma religions—Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism—evident from household shrines in a single home.



Hinduism's focus on joy and God contrasted with Buddhism's austere practices and lack of a personal deity. Additionally, Buddhism's monastic demands disrupted societal structures, making it impractical.

Later, Sikhism and Hinduism shared deep mutualism and interconnectedness.

The most famous ancient example of this Indian religious biodiversity is Ilango Adigal, the Jain prince who authored the Tamil epic *Silappadikaram* in the 2nd century CE. His friend, Shattan or Sattanar, authored *Manimekalai*, a sequel to *Silappadikaram* that was essentially Buddhist propaganda. And who was the patron of both authors but Ilango Adigal's elder brother, the Hindu king Cheran Senguttuvan?

Buddhism's two routes around Asia developed distinct sectarian characteristics—left Buddhism and so-called Theravada. However, one needs to do some plain speaking on the theory that "Hindus drove Buddhism away." This is nonsense. It was

certainly a turf war for royal and public patronage between Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism in those days. But let's look at the facts on the ground.

Due to his unnaturally protected early life, the Buddha suffered a severe shock when he first saw an old man, a sick man, and a dead man. He parlayed his gut reaction as his credo—that 'all is suffering, all is momentary': *sarvam dukhamdukkham, sarvam kshanicam kshanicam*. This lost its impact over the years because it is opposed to the driving principle of Hinduism, which is Ananda, joy.

Hindus consider human birth a golden chance to escape rebirth and dissolve into the light of God. A Hindu's spiritual goal is *Sat Chit Ananda*, usually translated as 'truth-consciousness-bliss', the transcending joy of realising God's presence in everything. *Ananda* is why Indians are so celebratory, always singing, dancing, and feasting. But there is no music or dance in sober traditional Buddhism, only chanting. This went against the inherent Indian cultural grain.

Secondly, the visceral human need to love a 'Face' was not satisfied in Buddhism, which lacked Ishwara. As Tulsidas later had Bharata tell Kaikeyi, '*Janani, main na jayoon bin Ram*', Mother; I cannot live without Rama, expressing popular sentiment. The third and perhaps most critical reason was that although one could be a lay Buddhist, Buddhism also wanted to remove able-bodied men in their prime from society; to turn them into monks who lived on the dole. Who was supposed to do the work, then? Who was left to protect the family? It was dangerous and impractical for society. And so, Buddhism gradually faded in the land of its birth.

Buddhist missionaries learnt from this and softened their approach abroad. They led good, helpful lives and attracted the public by example, which is how Buddhism took root and flourished across Asia. They often combined other faiths with the Dhamma and the Sangha. That's how our prime minister saw the *Ramayan* dance and received the *Tiptika* in Thailand.

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MAILBAG

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Modi's statecraft

Ref: The world is Modi's oyster (Apr 6). The title of the column aptly captures Prime Minister Narendra Modi's statecraft. He has surpassed Manmohan Singh's record in international diplomacy and politics. His focus on showcasing Indian culture, technology, and diplomacy, alongside strategic outreach and partnerships, sustains his popularity and global approval ratings. Katragadda Sarveswara Rao, Bhubaneswar

Crypto trap

Ref: Cryptocurrencies emerge from the fringe (Apr 6). Cryptocurrency is not regulated by any country or central bank. It differs vastly from traditional currency. In India, millions of people have suffered financial losses investing in it. With no legal protection for crypto payments and no recognition from the RBI, people should avoid such risky investments until regulations are clear. Victor Selvaraj, Palayamkottai

Waqf reform

Ref: Waqf must hold up promise of development (Apr 6). The Waqf Board now has the potential to become a genuine instrument of development. However, it is unfortunate that for a long time, many poor Muslims were unaware of the existence or purpose of Waqf Boards, as these institutions remained largely in the hands of elite sections. Now, awareness will increase. Maniklal Chakraborty, email

Landmark agreement

Ref: India, Sri Lanka ink 1st ever defence agreement (Apr 6). The defence cooperation pact signed with Sri Lanka during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit marks a major stride in bolstering regional security. Strategic partnerships like this are vital for peace and stability in the Indian Ocean region. JBhargava, Vijayawada

Good initiative

Ref: Eco-friendly benches made of 9L recycled bottles (Apr 6). The story on Uttarakhand sports minister Rekha Arya's initiative to collect and recycle empty water bottles used by athletes and attendees made for an interesting read. This attitude must reach every nook and corner of the country. HP Murli, Bengaluru

Comparing debt

Ref: Showing a mirror to the state (Apr 6). Kerala, despite strong social development, faces mounting debt, while fiscally prudent Odisha still lags in key indicators. This underscores the need to look beyond GDP when comparing debt and growth across states. Anjali Haridas, Tiruppurthura

Bridging gaps, building resilience

World Health Day, celebrated on April 7, serves as a global call to action for accessible and fair healthcare. The theme for 2025, 'Healthy Beginnings, Hopeful Futures', emphasises the critical role of maternal and newborn health, a particularly pertinent issue for India, which has a population exceeding 1.4 billion. India has made notable progress through programmes such as Ayushman Bharat, especially the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana, which offers financial protection to more than 500 million beneficiaries. Health and Wellness Centres are designed to improve primary care, yet challenges such as staff shortages, inadequate diagnostic facilities, and irregular medicine supplies continue to exist. Although 70% of the population resides in rural areas, 35-40% of healthcare infrastructure is located there. To address disparities, India needs to invest more in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities and encourage medical professionals to work in underserved regions. Policy support, enhanced infrastructure, and digital innovations like telemedicine are crucial for decentralising healthcare services.

Addressing disease burden India faces a dual burden of persistent infectious diseases and rising non-communicable diseases, which now account for over 65% of all deaths. Sedentary lifestyles, poor diets, and tobacco use are driving conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, and cancer. The 2024 International Diabetes Federation reported 101 million Indians with diabetes. Air pollution accounted for 1.6 million deaths in 2019, according to *The Lancet*, further underscoring the urgency of environmental health measures. According to NFHS-5, 35% of children under five are stunted, and 57% of women aged 15-49 are anemic. These indicators reflect broader socioeconomic challenges – poverty, lack of



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education, poor sanitation, and gender inequality. Government efforts such as Poshan Abhiyaan and the Integrated Child Development Services target malnutrition but require stronger data tracking, community engagement, and multi-sectoral coordination to be truly effective. While there has been progress, public health funding is still low. In the 2025-26 Union Budget, ₹99,858.56 crore (1.97% of the total Budget) was allocated to the Health Ministry. Moreover, high out-of-pocket spending continues to push 55 million Indians into poverty each year. A shift towards preventive healthcare – through screenings, school-based health programmes, and public health campaigns – is essential.

Harnessing digital health India is experiencing significant progress in the realm of digital health. Programmes such as the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission and eSanjeevani have collectively facilitated over 10 crore teleconsultations. Nonetheless, the advantages of digital healthcare are not evenly spread. A mere 37% of rural households have Internet connectivity, and numerous patients and healthcare workers lack the digital skills necessary to effectively use telehealth services. If this digital divide is not addressed, technology could exacerbate healthcare disparities. Additionally, concerns about cybersecurity and the lack of strong data privacy laws might undermine public confidence. To fully realise the potential of digital health, India needs to invest in rural Internet infrastructure, provide training for front line workers, and implement comprehensive data protection regulations. Emerging technologies such as AI diagnostics, wearables, and remote monitoring hold

transformative promise for early detection and disease management. These innovations must be adopted in a responsible and inclusive manner, ensuring that they benefit all communities, not just those in urban areas with tech-savvy populations.

Building resilience India's health objectives are in line with Sustainable Development Goal 3, which emphasises good health and well-being. Developed nations focus on public health infrastructure, universal

insurance, and early childhood interventions – areas where India needs to make rapid progress. By capitalising on its youthful population, digital infrastructure, and pharmaceutical sector, India has the potential to emerge as a global health leader. India's G20 presidency in 2023 served as a platform to demonstrate leadership in vaccine equity, digital public goods, and health diplomacy. Aligning domestic initiatives with global frameworks such as the International Health Regulations and the Global Health Security Agenda will bolster pandemic preparedness and international collaboration. Mental health and climate resilience are equally pressing issues. The Tele-MANAS helpline and the National Action Plan on Climate Change and Human Health are worthy initiatives.

However, a 2023 NIMHANS study revealed that 14% of Indians suffer from some form of mental disorder, underscoring the need for increased investment and awareness. India must perceive health not merely as a social obligation but as a strategic investment. A cohesive, inclusive, and well-funded health system – rooted in innovation, equity, and resilience – is essential for achieving developed nation status. Through coordinated efforts across government, civil society, and private sectors, India can fulfil its vision of 'Health for All'.



WORLD HEALTH DAY

A paradigm shift in mental health policy

Institutional responses to suicides are often individualistic and reductionist

Sudarshan R. Kottai

On March 24, the Supreme Court of India formed a National Task Force to prevent the increasing deaths by suicide of students on campuses. It also directed the Delhi Police to register an FIR on the complaints of the family members of two students who had died by suicide while studying at IIT Delhi in 2023. That year, following a spate of deaths by suicide, the IIT Council led by the Education Minister directed IITs to ensure 'zero tolerance' to discrimination and provide a robust support system to students.

The institutional response to suicide is often individualistic and reductionist – it is almost always to appoint more psychologists on campuses. The socio-structural determinants of mental health, such as discrimination and biased institutional policies, are almost always left unattended. Even though counselling centres are active at all IITs, with the goals ranging from "creating a suicide-free campus", "creating a stigma-free and empathetic environment for issues related to mental health" to "creating a campus conducive to happiness and peace of mind for its residents", psychologists refrain from calling attention to the biased institutional policies that impact mental health.

For example, none of the official websites of the counselling centres at the 23 IITs employ the phrase "queer affirmative" or use trans-inclusive personal gender pronouns. Language is not just a collection of words; it is action. Gender identities, sexualities, and inclusive practices are areas of human experience and action in which language, knowledge,

and power intertwine. The way language is employed strongly influences thinking, which, in turn, affects the way people act, bringing power in to the equation.

The gender-sexuality exclusionary language points towards non-compliance with the existing legal frameworks and Supreme Court rulings. For example, official forms where gender by default has only two options – male and female – violates equal rights for representation of gender non-binary people that was granted by the Supreme Court in the 2014 NALSA judgment. In 2023, the Supreme Court launched the Handbook on Combating Gender Stereotypes, recognising the need to use unbiased language, which not only reflects the judge's interpretation of the law, but also their perception of society.

Research has shown that pronouns are crucial linguistic resources for supporting trans and non-binary students and suggests strategies for a trans-affirming pedagogy such as collecting pronoun information and dealing with pronoun misuse. The deployment of gender pronouns signals identity-safety and promotes the perception that the institution is procedurally fair for sexual and gender diverse people. Using gender-inclusive pronouns and establishing inclusive frameworks and anti-discrimination policies are preventive public mental health care interventions that need to be prioritised as they de-escalate mental distress.

"Teachers talk only about grades. A grade is the parameter by which students are judged as good or bad," a student said. This is antithetical

to the ethic of care that honours and respects the value of just being human. The objective of the classroom should not only be confined to producing intellectual scholarship but also to cultivating compassionate, non-judgemental, and empathetic communities.

Fragile attendance policies implemented idiosyncratically by teachers pose serious challenges to mental health. In order to cultivate cultural safety and empathy in the classroom, it is important that teachers and students interact regularly. In the context of documented institutional discrimination and its fatal mental health impact, classrooms are to be nurtured as safe, kind, and democratic spaces. The current policies on mental health, limited to increasing mental health services, need a paradigm shift to a bottom-up approach focused on the classroom that maps various experiences and nurtures sensitivity to contexts and diversities. Teachers are pivotal in this regard.

It is a major crisis in public mental health ethics that psychologists align with counter therapeutic institutional policies that violate existing constitutional and statutory safeguards. Counselling centres have to mobilise all possible resources at multiple levels so that care becomes the central value. Similarly, embedding ethics of care into institutional policies to respond to avoidable mental distress to make every human life meaningful is more important than landing a human on the moon.

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WORLD HEALTH DAY

Three billion people cannot afford a healthy diet

A healthy, nutritious diet is much more expensive than a calorie sufficient one. As a result, three billion people cannot afford a healthy diet

DATA POINT

Hannah Ritchie & Pablo Rosado

A healthy diet is about much more than calories: we need a wide range of nutrients – dense foods to get all the vitamins and minerals that are essential for good health. In this piece, we look at the costs of diets around the world. Healthy diets are expensive – more than four times the cost of a basic, calorie-sufficient one. This is true in every country in the world. As a result, three billion people cannot afford a healthy diet, even if they spend most of their income on food.

Being able to eat a healthy, nutritious diet is one of our most basic human needs. Yet billions of people go without it; they suffer from 'hidden hunger', micronutrient deficiencies such as too little iron, calcium, vitamin A, or iodine.

There are many reasons why someone might not eat a nutritious diet. Often it's because people cannot afford to. First, consider the most basic requirement: getting enough calories. These could come in any form, but the cheapest option in most countries is starchy foods and cereals. Living on this 'energy sufficient' diet would mean eating only maize flour or rice for every meal, a diet that is severely lacking in other important nutrients. In terms of diets in poor countries, people get most of their calories from starchy foods.

A person can eat an energy sufficient diet on less than \$1 a day, as per a study for the Food and Agricultural Organization's 'The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World' report. What does this mean for the affordability of a calorie sufficient diet? A diet is considered "unaffordable" when the diet cost plus expenditures for basic non-food needs are higher than incomes per person. In each country, food prices were measured at retail marketplaces specific to the local context. Non-food expenses

in each country are estimated by looking at how much low-income people typically spend on things like housing and transportation. By comparing the cost of diets with income distributions across the world, researchers estimated that 1.1 billion people could not afford the most basic energy sufficient diet in 2021 (Map 1). That's 14% of the global population. These are the very worst-off in terms of nutrition.

An important question is how subsistence farmers fit in. They are included in these numbers: the income measure used to calculate the affordability of diets does take the value of subsistence farming (i.e. home production) into account. When the FAO report states that these smallholder farmers cannot afford a calorie-sufficient diet, it means they cannot produce one.

What people really need is a diverse and nutritious diet. Getting enough calories is important, but it is not sufficient to live a healthy and productive life. Eating only cereals and starchy foods will leave you deficient in protein, essential fats, and the wide range of micronutrients that our bodies need to function optimally.

Most countries develop 'food-based dietary guidelines' which provide recommendations on what a 'healthy diet' would look like. This includes guidelines on what balance of foods across the major groups – cereals, fruits, vegetables, legumes, meat and dairy – is considered best for long-term health.

The researchers also looked at the lowest-cost options to meet these national food-based dietary guidelines. Of course, there is no universal 'healthy diet', particularly when we consider the strong cultural differences in what people eat. So, the researchers selected dietary guidelines which were regionally representative: this means that we are not expecting

that people in India or Japan will adopt the national dietary guidelines of the U.S., or vice versa.

Unsurprisingly, a diverse, healthy diet is much more expensive than a calorie-sufficient one. The researchers found that the average cost across the world was \$3.67 per day.

When we put these prices in the context of affordability, we find that almost three billion people cannot afford a healthy diet. In many of the world's poorest countries – particularly across Sub-Saharan Africa – it's unaffordable (or not producible) for most of the population. This is shown in Map 2 which gives these figures as a percentage of the total population. In many countries, a healthy diet is out-of-reach for more than 80%.

A useful way to bring context to food prices is to compare the cost of a healthy diet with the median income of countries across the world. In the poorest countries, the cost of a healthy diet is higher than the median income. Even if the average person in these countries spent all of their money on food, a healthy diet would be unaffordable. In some countries – India is the largest among them – dietary costs would be roughly equal to the median income. There, people would need to spend all of their income on food to afford a healthy diet.

In rich countries, median incomes are much higher than dietary costs. In these countries the median income earner can afford a healthy diet with a relatively small fraction of their income. The average person in France could spend just 6% of their income on food and in Denmark, just 5%.

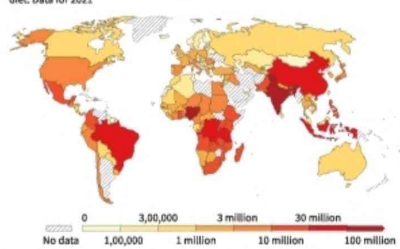
What this comparison shows is how far most of the world is from being able to afford a healthy diet. We cannot spend all, or even most, of our income on food. We would have very little to spend on other essentials.

Two square meals

The maps were sourced from Our World in Data. Hannah Ritchie is the Deputy Editor and Pablo Rosado is the Principal Data Scientist at Our World in Data



Map 1: The map shows the number of people who cannot afford a calorie sufficient diet. Data for 2021.



Map 2: The map shows the share of population that cannot afford a healthy diet. Data for 2022.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu.

FIFTY YEARS AGO APRIL 7, 1975

Selective price control on drug formulations suggested

New Delhi, April 6: The Hathi Committee on drugs and pharmaceuticals has recommended a selective price control on drug formulations under a new formula instead of the present price control system which covers each and every formulation.

In its final report presented to the Petroleum and Chemicals Minister, Mr. K.D. Malaviya today, the 15-member committee, headed by Mr. Jaisukhlal Hathi, MP, has recommended lifting of price control on units having an annual turnover of less than Rs. one crore. At present units with an annual turnover of up to Rs. 50 lakhs are exempted from price regulation.

It has further suggested that formulations based on 13 essential drugs as identified by the committee for abolition of brand names should also be exempted from price control. In the case of bulk drugs, the committee has favoured exemption from price control on items in which there are no imports and which in terms of total sales and basic drugs do not exceed Rs. 25 lakhs annually.

In respect of other bulk drugs, the committee has suggested that the system of price regulation based on detailed cost examination should continue, subject to the price being so fixed that an efficient manufacturer is able to get a return on his capital which is a little higher than that available on formulations for the industry as a whole.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO APRIL 7, 1925

Doctors and journalism

The London correspondent of "The Manchester Guardian" writes: I do not think there has been much notice in what the scientific papers call "the lay press" of the interesting compromise which the British Medical Association Council has arrived at on the delicate question of what they call "indirect methods of advertising." In the recent discussion of the B.M.A. the authorities did not go so far as to prohibit doctors from writing in the lay press, but there was a strong deprecation of "undesirable journalistic methods." It was suggested that doctors who write for the papers should make it a condition with the editors that there should be no laudatory comment of their achievements or headlines relating to their professional status, and photographs were gravely disapproved of.

WEST BENGAL



Women affected by the Belgachia land subsidence stage a protest seeking help from the authorities for restoration of water and electricity. DEBASISH BHADURI

The roof overhead and the ground beneath their feet, crumbled

Land subsidence at a dumping ground in Howrah district's Belgachia area in West Bengal broke water pipes and cut electric cables, leaving hundreds of families without water, electricity and a clear future. **Shrabana Chatterjee** and **Moyurie Som** speak to the people who survive by scrounging through the garbage in the area

There's a creak on a dilapidated shelf that's frozen in time: 8.10 a.m. It was about that time on March 21 that hundreds of families in Howrah district's Belgachia slum area, felt the ground slip away from under their feet.

Belgachia *bhagar* is a garbage dumping ground across 100 acres of land. Here, mountains of trash, almost 150 meters high, tower to the height of a 15-storey building. About 20 km from Kolkata, the area smells of rot, a cocktail of decay and chemicals. It bears the load of the 550-600 tons of waste generated daily by Howrah, a city on the banks of the Hooghly river.

On the morning of March 21, the mountain of waste crumbled under its own weight. In the process, it burst water pipes and cut electric lines. Many residents of the slum were left without water and electricity for almost two weeks. About 100-150 families bore the brunt as their homes developed major cracks.

On the street

A few metres away from the dumping ground, Deepak Yadav, 32, lies on the pavement under a scorching midday sun trying to get some shade. Like the others around him, he has made a makeshift bed out of rags from the dump. Beside him is his single-storey house, its walls collapsed into each other. In the only room that is intact, two family photographs hang from the wall, askew. Stuffed toys, a child's bicycle, and a rag lie on the floor. Deepak stares into the fractured room and within a second, collapses into tears.

"My children have been begging me to preserve their toys. This house is only two years old. It was my dream to build my own house. I shed blood, sweat, and tears for it. I took a loan of ₹1.5 lakh from different sources. But we became homeless before I could even repay it," he says.

In the colony, the men sleep in makeshift beds outside their homes, guarding what is left. The women, children, and the elderly are at a relief camp in a school nearby. Disjointed pieces of furniture lie in the sun; the families had taken them out of their crumbling houses for safekeeping.

"Our houses still make rumbling sounds. New cracks appear every day," Deepak says. He adds that when they hear their houses rumbling, they run a distance and come back again.

Twice a day, Deepak and the others fill their water bottles from tankers sent by the Howrah Municipal Corporation (HMC). They rely on community kitchens for their meals. "There are so many people. Some days, the food and water get over before we can reach," Deepak says.

He recalls March 20, when the ragpickers' colony adjoining the landfill woke up to dry taps. "Every day, the water flow starts at 6 in the morning. When we woke up, we realised our taps had no water. We were told it was because the pipeline had broken the previous night, but we were not too worried because it had happened before," he says. Deepak and his neighbours had anticipated that, like other times, the water would resume in a few hours. The next day, just past 8 a.m., the soft soil around Belgachia *bhagar* began to crack, then the roads, then the houses, all in quick succession. Then, the mountain of garbage developed cracks. People ran out of their houses. It was like an earthquake, residents say. Mahesh Shaw, 39, sits outside his broken home, wondering if he can pick up the pieces

Q The men can relieve themselves anywhere in extreme situations. What about us? If this continues, we can catch an infection at any time
DIPA SINGH
Resident,
Belgachia *bhagar*

and put his life together. He wipes his tears and sighs amidst the stench of the waste. "We are known as people who gather garbage. No one wants to rent out their homes to us even if we want to shift from here," Mahesh says. He makes ₹100-400 a day and pays ₹1,200 every month as rent for a one-room house. Landlords elsewhere ask for a deposit of ₹10,000-20,000 for a room. Neither Mahesh nor his neighbours can afford that.

Moving mountains

In the light of what has happened, a meeting was convened on March 25. It was attended by Ministers, including Firhad Hakim, West Bengal Minister for Urban Development, Municipal Affairs and Housing; high-ranking police officers; and civic body and district officials from Kolkata and Howrah. They decided to relocate the waste to a stable location. Dhapa, a landfill near Kolkata; and Arupara, in Howrah, were shortlisted. There is also an empty ground close to the current garbage mountain in Belgachia which was to be a temporary fix.

On March 26, when earth movers began relocating the waste from the Belgachia landfill to Arupara, they were met with protests. "We do not want a new landfill here. We did not agree to live beside a dump when we bought our properties," a protesting resident said angrily to the TV cameras pointed at him.

The Belgachia community is worried about their future. "This dump, which has ruined our homes, is also our only source of income. What will we do now?" Mahesh says. After the ground subsidence, the rag pickers are not allowed to enter the landfill. "Now our work is also at stake because the dumping ground is off limits for us. No one will give us any other work," Mahesh adds.

The other side of the garbage dump

For over two weeks, residents on the other side of the garbage dump have been locked into their houses, because the earthquake-like situation has pushed out a sludge they must walk through. A sluggish, tar-like liquid, thick with oily residues, floating dead birds, and rodents has flooded the area. There are no cracks in houses here, because the residents are relatively economically better off than the ragpicker community.

Rina Das, 48, is recovering from breast cancer. At the doorstep of her one-room home is the knee-deep black water. She struggles to keep the family running with only two buckets of water supplied by the HMC. "We are not able to cook or bathe in this heat for over a week. How will we survive?" Rina says.

Dipa Singh, 20, talks about her mother's struggles through her menstrual cycle. "The men can relieve themselves anywhere in extreme situations. What about us? If this continues, we can catch an infection at any time," Dipa says.

A mother-son duo roll up their pants and walk through the water, trying to get home. The mother says their skin burns after having walked through the filth for weeks. She instructs her young son to wash his feet with antiseptic solution after they reach home.

Amid the chaos, a bucket seller has found a moment of soaring business. With his pants folded up, his head and shoulders laden with about 10 buckets, he hawks his wares loudly.

Politics over civic apathy

Since March 21, leaders from different political parties have been visiting Belgachia. Leader of the Opposition Suvendu Adhikari came on March 24, but had an altercation with the police. "Today, I went to meet the affected families, but the Mamata Police (Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee) tried to obstruct my path and even started a skirmish on the spot to deter me from meeting them," Adhikari said to the media.

Subhankar Sarkar, the Congress West Bengal State president, visited the area too. The local Trinamool Congress MLA Manoj Tiwary gave some families ₹10,000 and ₹15,000. For the people affected by the situation, the visits bring little succor. Locals have staged protests stating that the authorities had repeatedly failed to take cognizance of the situation for years.

The HMC has not elected members or councillors for the last six years. The locals have no one to hold accountable for the mismanagement. Bapi Manna, a board member of the HMC, says he understands that people are in distress, but, "this is a natural disaster which no one had a hand in". He is overseeing work on an alternative water pipeline.

The affected residents have been offered tem-

porary accommodation in seven 20-foot shipping containers in a field adjoining the Chattri Milan Sangha club office in Belgachia, at least 5 km away from the landfill. Workers carve out windows and doors in the shipping containers, sectioning off 8x8 foot 'rooms' in each box.

On March 26, at a meeting at the Urban Development and Municipal Affairs office in Kolkata, Hakim said 96 families affected by the ground subsidence would be given new homes, under West Bengal's Banglar Bari government scheme. The families would be given possession of these houses in the next year and a half, he said.

Gita Sau, 35, who lives next to the landfill and is one of the prospective beneficiaries of the compensatory housing, says life in "tin boxes" is hard. "The weather is already boiling. The summer months will be worse. Is it possible to live in tin houses in such heat? We (the residents) went and saw the arrangements, and we decided to stay where we are, even if that means living outside our broken homes," she says.

For Aarti Paswan, 30, the water being provided by the municipality's tankers "looks murky" and "is not fit for drinking". She says it is taking a toll on their digestive systems. "We drink it because there is no water in our taps, and we cannot afford to buy bottled water. The sellers have also hiked the price of bottled water since demand surged," she says.

A water tanker pulls up next to her house. As an elderly woman hunches over to fill her bucket, Aarti warns her, "Be careful, Ma. The water is not good." Aarti says she hasn't had a drop of water to drink through the day.

Experts point to an impending disaster

Partha Pratim Biswas, professor of construction engineering at Jadavpur University, believes that this could happen at any dumping ground if waste is not managed before it reaches the brink. He and his colleagues have been monitoring the situation to file an expert committee report about an impending disaster.

"The base soil has a carrying capacity, which has been exceeded here. There should be a restriction on the height and weight of the dump," Biswas says. He explains that every landfill has a slope. "The stability of the slope depends on its waste composition. Here, biodegradable waste is over 40%, inert waste is around 35%, which can make the slope unstable if it gains too much height." He says recycling most of the waste is the best solution to avoid such disasters; keeping the height and slope in constant check is also important. The capacity of the soil can be calculated through simple mathematical methods to mitigate mishaps. He says underground cracks can cause further chaos, especially because they are unseen.

For Gita, survival is a daily negotiation. With a bag of prescriptions in hand, she clings to the little she has left — a meagre income from washing dishes at homes nearby and the belief that her son's education will lead to a future beyond this existence of hardship. Her husband, who worked at a nearby factory, was fired after he failed to show up during the crisis.

An elderly man sits next to Aarti with tears running down his wrinkled cheeks. "Why wasn't I buried in the debris when my house collapsed?" moyurie.som@thehindu.co.in
shrabana.chatterjee@thehindu.co.in

Sludge-like water has seeped above the ground after the events of March 21 in Belgachia. DEBASISH BHADURI



Why UGC will issue equivalence certificates for foreign degrees

ABHINAVA HARIGOVIND
NEW DELHI, APRIL 6

THE UNIVERSITY Grants Commission (Recognition and Grant of Equivalence to Qualifications Obtained from Foreign Educational Institutions) Regulations 2025 were notified on Friday.

These regulations specify the procedure for obtaining equivalence certificates, which are documents certifying that a qualification obtained in an educational institution abroad (like a degree or diploma) is equivalent to a comparable qualification in India.

The UGC made a draft of these regulations public in 2023. The regulations have now been notified after considering the feedback.

What do these regulations apply to?

With some exceptions, the equivalence certificates will be valid for all academic institutions under the UGC, for higher education and research, and for employment in

cases where a qualification recognised by the UGC is essential.

Disciplines like medicine, pharmacy, nursing, law, and architecture, and "other qualifications regulated by the norms of respective Statutory Councils in India" will not be covered under the regulations.

They will, however, be applicable for qualifications obtained via distance or on-line learning modes, contrary to what the draft regulations said. This change was made due to feedback received. UGC chairman M Jagadeesh Kumar told *The Indian Express*.

Equivalence certificates will not be required for qualifications obtained from foreign institutions that have collaborations with Indian institutions under UGC regulations for twinning/joint/dual degree programmes, or for setting up foreign institutions in India.

What are the conditions for granting equivalence?

A qualification — a certificate, diploma,

or degree — from a foreign institution can be recognised for grant of an equivalence certificate if:

■ It was awarded by a foreign institution that is recognised under the laws in its home country;

■ The entry-level requirements (like minimum credit requirements, or requirements of a thesis or internship) for admission to the programme are similar to a programme of that sort offered in India; and

■ If the student has pursued the programme as per the norms and standards specified by the foreign institution.

Qualifications obtained from off-shore campuses of foreign institutions can also be granted an equivalence certificate, provided that the academic programme complies with requirements in the country where the campus is located and in the country of origin of the institution.

The regulations will apply to school qualifications obtained by a student from abroad,

in case they want to apply for admission to an undergraduate programme in India. For this, the student needs to have completed at least 12 years of school education.

What is the process for granting equivalence?

The UGC will maintain an online portal to receive applications for equivalence certificates. Applications will be considered by a standing committee with experts in the field of education. The committee will recommend that an application be accepted or rejected within 10 working days.

The UGC will communicate its decision to the applicant within 15 days of receiving the application. Equivalence certificates will be made available on the portal. In case of rejection, the applicant can apply for a review, which will be considered by a committee constituted by the UGC.

How has equivalence been determined

thus far?

Instead of the UGC, at the moment, the Association of Indian Universities (AIU) issues equivalence certificates for degrees from foreign universities, for higher education and employment in India (except for professional qualifications in disciplines like medicine, pharmacy, law, nursing, and architecture).

The AIU is a registered society with several universities, public and private, as its members. It also issues equivalence certificates for students who completed school examinations from foreign boards.

UGC chairman Kumar said that the AIU's system will be replaced by the UGC's, adding that this is the first time that the UGC has notified a dedicated regulatory framework for recognising foreign qualifications.

Why have the regulations been issued?

"This move is in tune with the thrust of National Education Policy 2020 on the internationalisation of higher education, and the need to provide clarity and consistency in

recognition. These regulations aim to offer students and institutions a structured, transparent, and fair system aligned with global best practices," Kumar said.

He said that the regulations are "intended to formalise and streamline the qualification recognition process under a statutory framework," adding that they are "designed to enhance transparency, consistency, and accessibility in recognising foreign qualifications by laying down clear, publicly notified criteria".

The regulations too refer to the "internationalisation of the Indian education system" in the wake of the NEP 2020. "If Indian institutions are to attract international students, we must ensure fair recognition of degrees earned abroad," Kumar said.

He added: "Many students return with international qualifications to seamlessly integrate into India's higher education system or workforce. Such students need a structured procedure to evaluate foreign credentials without unpredictable delays and procedural ambiguity."

EXPLAINED GLOBAL

WHAT IS 'QATARGATE,' THE LATEST FURORE AROUND NETANYAHU?

FOR YEARS, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel has been standing trial for corruption, even as he oversees conflicts in the Gaza Strip, Lebanon and Syria. Now, he is locked in a separate standoff with Israel's law enforcement authorities — a police investigation that has renewed calls for his resignation.

Known as "Qatargate," the case hinges on the claim that Netanyahu's media advisers were paid by a representative of Qatar to promote Qatari interests in the Israeli news media.

That claim has angered many Israelis because for years, Qatar has hosted leaders of Hamas. Netanyahu's recent efforts to fire the head of the Shin Bet, the Israeli internal security agency, have compounded the furor. The Shin Bet first instigated the probe into Netanyahu's aides.

Netanyahu has dismissed the case as a "political manhunt". The Qatari government said in a statement that the allegations were baseless.

What are the allegations?

According to court records, police officers are investigating whether Jonathan Urlich and Eli Feldstein, two aides to Netanyahu, tried to promote a favourable image of Qatar in the Israeli news media. They are said to have worked alongside a third person not named in the records.

Both Egypt and Qatar have mediated between Hamas and Israel since late 2023, but they have not always worked in lock-step. The court records say the three men are suspected of trying to foster the idea that Qatar played a more important role than Egypt in diplomatic efforts to secure a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. Urlich and Feldstein were arrested on March 31.

Who are the advisers?

Urlich is a former media officer for the Israeli military who has become one of Netanyahu's most trusted strategists.

Feldstein is also a former military press officer, and he began working as a liaison between military correspondents and the Prime Minister's office at the start of the war. He was arrested in a separate case in late Feb, on suspicion he leaked classified



Netanyahu has termed the case a 'political manhunt'. Reuters

information to a foreign newspaper.

What is Qatar's role?

The court records do not suggest that Qatar worked directly with Netanyahu's aides. Instead, the records state that the aides were directed by ThirdCircle, a US-based lobbying group that represents Qatar in various countries, including the United States. Court records show that ThirdCircle paid Feldstein via an Israeli intermediary. The records do not clarify if or how Urlich was compensated.

How is Netanyahu involved?

The Prime Minister is not a suspect in the case, but he was questioned by police officers for more than an hour on March 31. To make that meeting, Netanyahu was forced to depart early from his separate corruption trial. In that case, he is accused of granting regulatory favours to businesspeople and media executives in exchange for bribes and positive coverage.

Why has the case touched a nerve?

For years, Qatar has hosted senior members of Hamas. Since 2018, Qatar has also sent more than \$1 billion in aid money to civilians in Gaza. US officials quickly supported the first arrangement and the Israeli government directly requested the second.

Still, Netanyahu's opponents are furious that officials privy to Israeli state secrets might simultaneously represent a country that works so closely with an Israeli enemy.

THE NEW YORK TIMES

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The pink bollworm is ravaging India's cotton production. While some seed firms have developed new genetically modified hybrids resistant to the insect pest, regulatory barriers hinder commercialisation



HARISH DAMODARAN

INDIA'S COTTON economy isn't in great shape.

This, despite the advantage the country has as a producer of the natural fibre and its textile exports facing only 27% duty — as against China's 54%, Vietnam's 46%, Bangladesh's 37%, Indonesia's 32% and Sri Lanka's 44% — under US President Donald Trump's "reciprocal tariff" policy.

The cause for concern is production. India's cotton output in the 2024-25 marketing year (October-September) is projected at just over 294 lakh bales (lb; 1 lb=170 kg), the lowest since the 290 lb of 2008-09. Production has been on a decline since the peak of 398 lb in 2013-14 (see chart 1). A fall from almost 400 lb to under 300 lb can be termed catastrophic.

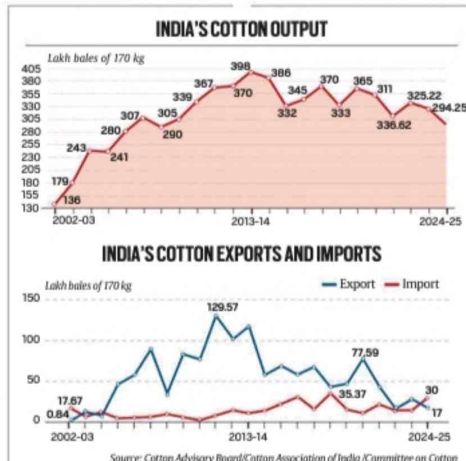
The cultivation of genetically modified (GM) cotton hybrids — incorporating alien genes isolated from a soil bacterium, *Bacillus thuringiensis* or Bt — had led to not only a near-trebling of production (from 136 lb to 398 lb), but also a 139-fold jump in exports (from 0.8 lb to 117 lb) between 2002-03 and 2013-14. Subsequently, however, exports have dipped even as imports have risen. India's cotton imports this year, at 30 lb, are slated to surpass its exports of 17 lb (chart 2).

A different bollworm

The production slide, and India turning from a large cotton exporter to a net importer, is mainly courtesy of the pink bollworm (PBW). This is an insect pest, whose larvae bore into the bolls (fruits) of the cotton plant. The bolls contain seeds from which the white fluffy cotton fibres or lint grow. The PBW caterpillars feed on the developing seeds and the lint, causing yield loss as well as lint discoloration.

The GM cotton now grown in India have two Bt proteins, 'cry1Ac' and 'cry2Ab', coding for proteins toxic to the American bollworm, spotted bollworm and cotton leafworm pests. The double-gene hybrids initially provided some protection against the PBW too, but that effectiveness has dissipated over time.

The reason is that the PBW is a monophagous pest, feeding exclusively on



Join FREE Whatsapp Channel <https://whatsapp.com/channel/0029av2v8b6g8GJK3HooBd0f> Punjab) growing zones. Not for nothing that all-India per-hectare cotton lint yields, which increased from an average of 302 kg in 2002-03 to 566 kg in 2013-14, have plunged to 436-437 kg in the last two years.

Deploying new genes

Leading Indian seed companies have developed GM cotton hybrids deploying new genes from Bt, which they claim confer resistance to PBW.

The Hyderabad-based Bioseed Research India, a division of DCM Shriram Ltd, is conducting confined field trials of hybrids based on its proprietary BtCo2K24A1 transgenic technology/event expressing the 'cry8Ea' gene found in Bt.

The Ministry of Environment's Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC) had, in late-July 2024, permitted Bioseed to undertake Biosafety Research Level-10 (BRL-1) trials of its event at six locations in MP, Karnataka and AP. The trials, in isolated plots of not more than one-acre size each, are meant to evaluate the expression of the new alien genes and the agronomic performance of the hybrids/lines into which they are introduced. BRL trials also

entail generation of data on food and feed toxicity and environmental safety (residue analysis, pollen flow studies, etc.).

Bioseed is seeking the GEAC's go-ahead for a second year of BRL-1 trials during the 2025 kharif season at more locations across the south, central and north zones.

Rasi Seeds Pvt Ltd has also applied to the GEAC for conducting BRL-1 trials (first year) of its PBW-resistant GM cotton hybrids in the upcoming planting season. The Coimbatore-based company's transgenic events express a synthetic 'cry1c' gene, also derived from Bt. The Nagpur-headquartered Ankur Seeds is working on commercialising cotton hybrids resistant to PBW. It has entered into an agreement with the National Botanical Research Institute (NBRI) at Lucknow for sourcing the latter's GM cotton lines expressing a 'chimeric' Bt protein (a chimeric gene is created by combining segments of different Bt genes. The resultant new gene encodes a protein with enhanced or novel insecticidal properties). Ankur Seeds will soon approach the Department of Biotechnology's Review Committee on Genetic Manipulation to undertake first-year BRL-1 trials for NBRI's Event 519.

The GEAC, in its meeting on July 25 last year, had allowed a preliminary 'event selection' trial for five GM cotton lines (ASCO101 to 105) of the Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar-based Ajeet Seeds Pvt Ltd, expressing a PBW-resistant 'cry2Aa' gene from Bt.

Regulatory hurdles

All these trials, in addition to carrying out the initial genetic transformations and testing in contained laboratory or greenhouse/net-house conditions — take time for the results to reach farmers' fields.

The regulatory barriers, plus opposition from environmental groups and the need to obtain state government concurrence for field trials, have ensured that no new GM crop has been commercialised in India after Monsanto's Bollgard-2 Bt cotton in May 2006.

The seed industry's hope is that the havoc wreaked by PBW may prompt the Centre to adopt a more proactive approach to new GM hybrid events. This is possible especially in cotton, which isn't seen as a food crop.

In her 2025-26 Budget speech, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced a "Mission for Cotton Productivity". It aims to provide "the best of science & technology support" to farmers and a "steady supply of quality cotton" for the Indian textile industry.

That agency may have got added impetus from the threat posed to the country's cotton production by PBW and the opportunity opened up for its textile exports from Trump's reciprocal tariffs.

Nintendo's story: from handcrafting playing cards to ruling video game industry

ALIND CHAUHAN
NEW DELHI, APRIL 6

THE MUKHI-avaired Switch 2 will be released on June 5, Nintendo announced last week. This is the latest offering from the Japanese video game giant, which once made hand-crafted playing cards.

Humble beginnings

As far as tech companies go, Nintendo had the unlikely of beginnings. The business was founded by Fusajiro Yamauchi in 1889 as a tiny street side shop in Kyoto, which sold beautifully decorated hand-made playing cards, known as Hanafuda.

As his cards' popularity grew across Japan, so did Yamauchi's business. Hanafuda soon became associated with the Yakuza, Japanese crime syndicates involved

in a number of illegal activities, including gambling.

By the 1960s, the cards began to fall out of favour. This forced the company, now under Fusajiro's grandson Hiroshi, to change direction.

But success was hard to come by. Nintendo's foray into instant rice — perhaps inspired by the success of instant noodles — was a failure. As was its foray into 'love hotels'. A taxi service and robotic vacuum cleaner business did not fare much better.

Entry into video games

The company struck gold in the 1970s after it made investments in a fast-emerging technology: video games. By 1978, Nintendo was able to produce an electronic game version of the popular board game Othello.



Switch 2 will release in June. Reuters

It was with the arcade video game Donkey Kong that Nintendo in 1981 got its first international hit. The game featured a giant gorilla as the villain who had kid-

napped the girlfriend of his owner, an Italian plumber called Mario.

"It (Donkey Kong) was also a milestone in video game history: the first of the so-called platform games, and one of the first to have a substantial narrative, along with a sense of humour," according to an article in the Time magazine.

Nintendo created other popular games such as Donkey Kong Jr, The Legend of Zelda, and Super Mario Bros.

Advent of console era

The company launched a new home game console in 1983. This was introduced to the US two years later, under the name Nintendo Entertainment System (NES). Nintendo sold almost 62 million units of NES worldwide.

In 1989, the company released its first handheld game console, the Game Boy. This was a milestone in gaming history, and be-

came very popular due to its unique design, affordability, and long battery life.

Nintendo's most-selling console to date — the Nintendo DS — came in 2004. Its distinct dual-screen design (with one touch screen) revolutionised handheld gaming by "allow[ing] for new forms of gameplay and interaction", as per a report by TechInsight. Nintendo sold around 154 million units of the console, making it the second best-selling console in history (after Sony's PlayStation 2).

Wii, released in 2006, was another path-breaking console. It came with a slim wand (resembling a TV remote) equipped with an innovative motion sensor. Though its 2012 successor Wii U did not do well, the company recovered in five years, with the Switch.

This boasted a unique hybrid design, meaning it could be used as a traditional home console when connected to a monitor, or a portable handheld console. This was a raging success. Nintendo has sold some

150 million units of the Switch till date.

Secret to success

Nintendo's enduring success stems from its ability to extract the most possible "fun" out of relatively modest hardware. Florent Gorges, a French author who has written books on the company's history, told *France24*: "The Switch perfectly respects Nintendo's DNA, which is 'lateral thinking with wretched technology'. This means to succeed in making something new out of something old."

Nintendo also has a great appetite for experimenting. Crucially, it does not fire executives and revamp its strategy after failure. As Chris Kohler, author of *Power-Up: How Japanese Video Games Gave the World an Extra Life* (2005), told *The Guardian*, "Nintendo has been great at growing and retaining talent and ensuring that continuity of game design know-how".

TELANGANA



The Supreme Court's 2001 ruling mandated strict anti-ragging committees, while the University Grants Commission's 2009 regulations require students and parents to submit affidavits warning of expulsion for involvement in ragging. NAGARA GOPAL

A rite of passage or a lifetime of scars?

Despite anti-ragging laws, medical colleges in Telangana remain hotspots for hazing. From verbal humiliation to physical abuse, first-year students endure unspoken harassment, fearing retaliation and institutional indifference. Weak enforcement, deep-rooted power dynamics and poor mental health support keep the vicious cycle alive. **Siddharth Kumar Singh** investigates why ragging persists despite policies meant to end it

Vikram (name changed) was just another first-year MBBS student at the Government Medical College Khammam in Telangana, trying to find his way through the maze of lectures, labs and late-night study sessions. On November 12 last year, as he walked back to his hostel, he ran a hand over his freshly trimmed hair. It was nothing drastic; just a routine cut, or so he thought until he stepped into the hostel. The laughter came first – loud, mocking, floating down the corridor from the floor above.

"Nice haircut. Looks like you are trying to copy the Chinese," a senior sneered. Another voice chimed in, the mocking tone sharper: "Maybe go for something more Indian next time?" The jeers echoed, followed by a chorus of laughter.

Vikram felt a slow burn of embarrassment creep up his spine. He lowered his gaze and hurried into his room. His roommate glanced up, but said nothing. Vikram studied his reflection in the mirror. The more he stared, the more he doubted himself. Maybe if he trimmed a little more, the jokes would stop. Scissors in hand, he made small, hesitant cuts. But the damage had already been done, far beyond his hair.

Humiliated, he decided to seek help. He turned to the college's anti-ragging officer, assistant professor Rahman expecting support, perhaps even action against the seniors. Instead, the professor eyed him for a moment and said, "Let's fix this."

Vikram did not quite understand what it meant, not until he found himself in a salon chair outside the campus. Rahman spoke to the barber in hushed tones and then, clippers buzzed to life. A strip of his hair fell to the floor. Then another. Then another. Within minutes, his head had been shaved.

A lump formed in Vikram's throat. The humiliation he had tried so hard to escape had come a full circle – not from his seniors this time, but from someone supposed to protect him. That night, sleep eluded him. The whispers in the hostel, the stolen glances, the barely concealed smirks were all inescapable.

By morning, his resolve had hardened. With his heart pounding and mind still reeling, he walked into the principal's office and filed a complaint. The matter quickly escalated to the Director of Medical Education (DME), and within days, Rahman was suspended.

But the shame clung to Vikram. The helplessness and the fear refused to fade. What should have been the beginning of his medical journey had turned into something else entirely: a brutal introduction to the unspoken realities of life in a medical college.

Rahman's suspension lasted only two months before it was revoked. The authorities deemed a transfer to Mulugu, a remote area in Telangana, as 'punishment' – a mere slap on the wrist. This was no isolated incident. While ragging



Medical students are at a critical stage of emotional development. When they experience intense humiliation, they may struggle to process it, leading to long-term mental health issues.

DIANA MONTEIRO,
Counselling psychologist

has largely been reined in across undergraduate and engineering colleges, medical institutions in Telangana continue to wrestle with its deeply entrenched culture.

Trial by fear

In March this year, another instance of ragging surfaced, this time at the Government Medical College Nagarkurnool. A first-year student there was subjected to abuse and humiliation by three seniors over a seemingly trivial matter.

The ordeal began with a simple errand – a senior student instructed a junior to fetch a water mug from another senior's room. Unaware that the occupant was asleep, the junior knocked on the door, unintentionally waking him. The senior's annoyance quickly spiralled into aggression.

Along with another student, he dragged the junior into their room and forced him into an "air chair" position, a stress posture meant to inflict discomfort. As the junior struggled to hold it, the seniors seized his phone and demanded his UPI PIN.

"When he refused to share his banking details, one of the seniors allegedly hit him with a belt multiple times and slapped him too," says college principal Kamadevi. Unable to bear the abuse, the shaken student reached out to a relative, who happened to be a police officer.

This incident and Vikram's ordeal are not mere exceptions. Despite policies, committees and legal mandates, ragging remains embedded in the culture of medical colleges, as seniors blatantly exert their dominance, turning routine interactions with juniors and freshers into opportunities for harassment.

The 'State of Ragging in India 2022-24' report by the Society Against Violence in Education (SAVE) highlights this disturbing trend. Medical colleges, though representing just 1.1% of India's student population, account for 38.6% of total ragging complaints, 35.4% of serious cases, and a staggering 45.1% of ragging-related deaths. In Telangana, the Kaloji Narayana Rao University of Health Sciences alone recorded 25 complaints between 2022 and 2024, states the report.

These numbers stand in stark contrast to the measures supposedly in place. The Supreme Court's 2001 ruling mandated strict anti-ragging committees, while the University Grants Commission (UGC)'s 2009 regulations required students and parents to submit affidavits warning of expulsion for involvement in ragging. The National Medical Commission (NMC) has its own set of protocols, yet institutions often prefer to handle cases internally rather than reporting them.

For many students, this silence is the real betrayal. Ragging in medical colleges is not just about hierarchy; it is about unchecked power, institutional complicity and a system that too often fails those it claims to protect.

Medical colleges in urban areas like Hydera-

bad have seen some progress in recent years, students say. A student from Osmania Medical College, Hyderabad, recalls how, when she joined MBBS in 2018, senior female students reprimanded her for wearing a sleeveless outfit and freshers were barred from the college canteen.

Reading rooms, where students often spend 10 to 12 hours a day preparing for exams, were not always free from judgment either. "When my friends and I were studying there, a few senior boys commented, 'How are we supposed to focus when you are wearing sleeveless,'" she says. While such regressive views were common back then, she notes her batch has made a conscious decision not to subject juniors to the same treatment.

"Another reason behind the lower incidence of ragging in older, well-established medical colleges is the structured hostel set-up. Institutions like Gandhi, Osmania, and Kakatiya medical colleges have separate hostel blocks for seniors and juniors, minimising interactions between them. However, newly established medical colleges follow a floor-wise hostel division, making it easier for seniors and juniors to cross paths and increasing the chances of ragging," says a student of Government Medical College, Khammam.

Persistence despite policies

A senior health official acknowledges that despite ongoing efforts, ragging remains a persistent issue in Telangana's medical colleges but disciplinary action is taken when complaints arise. "The problem exists at the level of individual institutions. Whenever a complaint is lodged, necessary action is taken," he says.

However, he underscores that institutional measures alone cannot eliminate ragging. "Real change must come from the students themselves.

Parents, too, have a role in shaping their children's attitude. Without that, the problem will persist," the official adds.

He points out that the UGC regularly monitors ragging complaints and forward them to institutions, with Telangana's medical colleges receiving three to four

cases annually. However, he admits that the actual number could be higher: "Unless students come forward with complaints, we cannot fully gauge the scale of the problem. But in every reported case, action has been taken."

With medical seats now being filled through the all-India quota, students from diverse States and cultural backgrounds often face challenges adapting to unfamiliar environments. While this diversity enriches the learning experience, the official notes that initial cultural differences sometimes lead to misunderstandings among students.

To tackle ragging, colleges are implementing awareness programmes and involving law enforcement. "At the time of admission, we hold sessions where local police officers, including the district Superintendent of Police, issue strict warnings to students," he says. Despite these efforts, he admits that some incidents persist.

Beyond administrative interventions

Despite institutional measures and disciplinary action, the persistence of ragging points to deeper psychological and social dynamics at play. Experts argue that addressing the issue effectively requires looking beyond administrative interven-

tions and understanding the motivations behind ragging from the perspectives of both the perpetrators and victims.

Diana Monteiro, a counselling psychologist based in Hyderabad, explains that ragging operates on two levels – one that appears harmless and playful, and another that is rooted in power and control. While some seniors view it as a way to build camaraderie, it can quickly escalate into abuse when those seeking dominance use it to assert authority over juniors.

"Ragging works like bullying. It often starts with humiliation but escalates when seniors realise they can control juniors through fear. Over time, some begin to see it as a 'tradition' they must continue, turning past victims into future perpetrators," she says.

The psychological damage for victims can be severe, leading to shame, embarrassment, and, in extreme cases, trauma that leads to anxiety, depression or even suicidal thoughts. "Medical students are at a critical stage of emotional development. When they experience intense humiliation, they may struggle to process it, leading to long-term mental health issues," she warns.

The silence surrounding ragging remains one of its most troubling aspects. Fear of retaliation and the normalisation of this culture in institutions often prevent victims from speaking out. "Many colleges fail to provide effective mental health support, despite court mandates requiring counsellors on campuses. This lack of resources leaves students with nowhere to turn, deepening their trauma," Monteiro points out.

Ragging also perpetuates a vicious cycle. Victims who once felt powerless may later become perpetrators themselves. "It is similar to patterns seen in other forms of abuse. Some juniors, after enduring ragging, later inflict the same abuse on others as a way to reclaim a sense of control. For individuals with sadistic tendencies, this cycle becomes even more dangerous," she warns.

Awareness and enforcement

Breaking this pattern requires a proactive, top-down approach. Monteiro emphasises that awareness alone is not enough; strict enforcement of anti-ragging policies is essential.

"Education is key, not just for students, but also for faculty, wardens and hostel staff. Consistent messaging from college management, along with strict consequences for violations, can shift campus culture. Enforcement works, but enforcement without education won't lead to lasting change," she adds.

Medical colleges are meant to shape the doctors of tomorrow, yet for many students, the first lesson is not about healing but survival. While institutions claim to act on complaints, the silence of countless victims suggests that fear still outweighs trust in the system.

Telangana Director of Medical Education Narendra Kumar acknowledges that ragging remains a persistent issue in medical colleges despite preventive measures. He details the steps taken to curb the issue, including the formation of anti-ragging committees in every institution. These committees include representatives from the police, legal experts and social activists to ensure a multi-faceted approach.

"Senior students undergo counselling sessions, and faculty members, particularly assistant professors, are assigned night duty in hostels as most incidents occur after dark. Posters detailing legal consequences of ragging are displayed across campuses and booklets outlining punishments are distributed to students," he explains.

Despite these efforts, Kumar admits incidents still occur: "When such cases arise, parents are informed immediately and an anti-ragging committee meeting is convened to decide the next course of action, whether it be counselling, temporary suspension or expulsion."

Indian and cool

If the likes of Temasek, Alpha Wave, and IHC want a bite of Haldiram's, it has surely got the recipe right

HALDIRAM'S HAS DONE what few Indian legacy brands have managed — stay deeply Indian at heart while building a business that's operationally modern and globally scalable. The Temasek, IHC (International Holding Company), and Alpha Wave Global deal last week doesn't really surprise. If anything, it is a validation of something one knew intuitively — you don't need to westernise to globalise. Of course, there are more than a handful of Indian brands that have withstood international competition. If in soaps you have a Santoor, you have a Campa in soft drinks, and Biseri in packaged water and so on. For its part, Haldiram's spotted an opportunity to move consumers from commodities or unbranded snacks to a brand that is sold in hygienic and attractive packaging. Brands like Balaji and Bikaji have also managed to score over the PepsiCos of the world by being nimble and cost-competitive, a strategy that Nirma had used quite effectively against HUL in the 1970s.

The thing is, India is not just the world's most populated country; it is also a market that offers the maximum potential for segmentation. The \$2.4-trillion (2024, Edelweiss Mutual Fund report) consumer market can be sliced by many cuts depending on what a brand offers and at what price; it is a rare market where international shampoos sell millions of sachets, and where home-grown apparel brands command a premium. And Indians are hungry for good quality food — Statista estimates the revenue in the food market at \$888 billion in 2025, and expects it to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 6.66% (2025-30). There isn't another international brand competing with Haldiram's in this huge market though many have tried to add indigenous flavours to western foods. Haldiram's spells comfort and familiarity, and a cultural grounding that global formats often struggle to replicate.

Indeed, no multinational muscle can flex like this — from shelf space in international supermarkets to modern mithai cafes in Indian malls, Haldiram's has built a presence across formats without losing brand coherence. It mixes nostalgia with a sleek, modern vibe, owning the table with a range that sings to every palate. Its restaurants serve everything from north Indian chhole bhature to the south staple dosa and vada, not to mention the ubiquitous French fries, made a household basic by McDonald's. On top of this, it added ready-to-eat foods for an emerging class of consumers across India and in some other countries too. It is hugely popular at home and among the Indian diaspora abroad because it understood the consumer, priced its products at a point that made it affordable for a large chunk and aspirational for many more, and ensured that even as its range and distribution grew quality did not drop. There may be a segment that will sneer at the idea of a Haldiram's chocolate, but there will also be twice that number who love it.

It can be hard to establish a brand's value to its audience, and when deep-pocketed competitors are constantly threatening to swamp it, a bold move is almost always necessary. Temasek, IHC, and Alpha Wave moved in just in time — backing a brand that is IPO-ready and also ready to expand its global footprint. Obviously not every brand gets to be cool; Haldiram's is proof it's not very difficult to achieve success without chasing cool.

Don't sell out British kids as tariff bargaining chip

WILLKEIR STARMER'S government sell out the safety of UK teens in a deal to mitigate Donald Trump's tariff apocalypse?

That's the question parents' groups are asking as the UK, along with every other country, searches for ways to persuade Washington to dial down its new aggressive tariff regime and avert a full-scale trade war.

Saddled with "only" the 10% baseline charge, Britain got off lighter than many, including its recent partners in the European Union, and will feel the pinch of the additional US tariffs on its car and steel sectors. More concerning, Britain's finances are in such a dire state that the Office for Budget Responsibility has warned the wafer thin headroom Chancellor Rachel Reeves set aside to avoid breaching her fiscal rules will be blown out of the water by Trump's tariffs.

In response, Starmer's government is continuing the keep calm and carry on playbook it adopted on Trump's return to office. There will be no angry invective or swift retaliation along the lines of that seen in capitals from Ottawa to Canberra, Beijing and Brussels. Instead, officials led by Trade Secretary Jonathan Reynolds are working on a plan to ameliorate the impact of the tariffs. In language Trump understands, they want to make him a deal.

And that's what's worrying parents — specifically those such as members of the Molly Russell Foundation, set up in the name of a 14-year-old London girl who took her life after viewing videos of suicide and self-harm on her phone — who campaign for greater online protection for young people.

Reynolds has dropped hints that the UK could nix a 2% digital services tax worth around \$800 million (\$1.04 billion) a year, which Americans complain hits the US tech sector. In recent days, there have been additional reports that the draft transatlantic trade agreement also includes a pledge to review the Online Safety Act, the landmark legislation requiring providers to shield under-18s from harmful content. That would be a betrayal of parents not just in the UK but those around the world who are relying on Britain to take a lead in this area.

The row exposes a schism in the British government. On the one hand, Starmer himself has vowed to clean up the internet, and is personally involved in tackling the toxicity kids are daily exposed to, having been moved by watching the Netflix show *Adolescence* with his own teenagers.

On the other, Britain is keen to carve out a role post-Brexit that offers a more welcoming environment to tech companies out of which they see as the over-regulatory approach of the European Union, in order to drive the growth the Labour government needs to patch a hole in its finances.

But when it comes to online safety, the Act cannot be the price to pay to wriggle out of Trump's tariffs.

We can do so much more to clean up what youngsters view online. In part that means active parenting: Delaying phones until children are approaching secondary school, reserving social media for older teens and monitoring what they view online. Teachers are beginning to play a part too, with most now insisting phones are switched off during school hours.

But in the absence of any sign of proactive measures, the major tech companies must be forced to play their part and introduce basic steps to keep safe the kids who make them billions — with age verification, the swift removal of illegal and dangerous content, adjustments to settings to allow law enforcement to pursue predators, and more.

Let's hope the brave parents we saw suing to try to force the firms to clean up their acts are successful. With US politicians largely deaf to the issue, it falls to Britain to show some mettle. Starmer should do what he knows to be right and maintain the pressure on Big Tech to keep kids safe.



ROSA PRINCE

Bloomberg

INDO-CHINA DIPLOMACY

75 YEARS ON, CREDIBILITY OF CHINA'S ASSURANCES REMAINS BIGGEST VARIABLE IN BILATERAL TIES

Stand-off to cautious optimism

THIS YEAR MARKS the 75th anniversary of India and China establishing diplomatic relations. While India was the first non-socialist nation to recognise China, the relationship has been marred by several ups and downs. The unsettled boundary dispute has been a source of friction, culminating in the 1962 war, but despite that the Line of Actual Control (LAC) remained largely peaceful. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's visit to Beijing to meet China's paramount leader Deng Xiaoping in 1988 paved the way for a new approach. The Rajiv-Deng accord in effect meant that future generations would resolve the border row, but both nations would build trade and people-to-people ties. The thawed to the border pacts of the 1990s that many in the Indian leadership wishfully saw as an effective guarantee of peace.

This calm was shattered by the clashes in June 2020 at Galwan that led to the deaths of Indian and Chinese troops. China's unprovoked bid to unilaterally change the status quo remains an important turning point between the two Asian powers. Bilateral ties went into a deep freeze since 2020. But military and diplomatic negotiations led India and China to agree to a patrolling agreement in October 2024 following which Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping met in Russia last year.

Foreign secretary Vikram Misra visited China in January to chart the contours of New Delhi's cautious opening up to Beijing. Both sides resolved to dedicate the year to promoting greater public diplomacy to restore trust and public confidence, which has given the Chinese leadership an opportunity to present an amiable face. In their messages to Xi, President Xi proposed the dragon-elephant tango and his deputy Premier Li Qiang reinforced it by stating that China is ready to work with India and enhance strategic mutual trust.

This ebullient Chinese outlook stands in contrast to a sombre assessment among the Indian leadership. PM Modi

**HARSH V PANT
KALPIT A MANKIKAR**

Respectively vice-president for studies and fellow, China studies, ORF



has suggested that restoring ties was a work in progress, underlining much spade work had to be done as the relationship was in a deep freeze during the last five years, in a clear reference to the military stand-off that began in 2020. Earlier this month, Misra attended an official function held by the Chinese embassy to mark the 75th anniversary. During the intervening period since 2020, a comparatively lower-ranking official had usually showed up at the event. These developments indicate an earnest initiative by India to normalise relations amid cautious optimism, although Misra acknowledged that the path to get ties back on track would be a "difficult one".

The biggest variable in this dynamic remains the credibility of China's assurances. For that, we need to analyse the pressure points that could be shaping China's motivations to hold out an olive branch. First, Donald Trump's escalating trade war has taken tariffs on Chinese products to nearly 54%, coupled with a downturn in its realty market, and low consumer confidence. If factory owners choose to shift units outside China, it could lead to job losses which may have implications for Xi's hold on power. Second, Beijing's overtures to New Delhi form part of its outreach to the periphery, as Xi embarks on a diplomatic mission to Hanoi, Phnom Penh, and Kuala Lumpur. His trip to Vietnam, Cambodia, and Malaysia will be his first overseas this year. China has robust trade with Southeast Asian nations but juggling overlapping

claims remain in the South China Sea. Besides in the light of US-China tensions, it makes sense to build bridges with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, especially when Malaysia holds the chair. Malaysian PM Anwar Ibrahim is counted as Beijing's friend, given that he visited China three times assuming office in 2022. Third, the notion of "Reverse Nixon" gaining traction in the West could have influenced the outreach to neighbours. Until recently, the Western alliance under Joe Biden's administration was aiming to defeat Moscow, and had tried to make Russian President Vladimir Putin an international pariah. China now sees the tide turning with President Trump willing to figuratively break bread with Putin, and the Kremlin responding with a proposal to jointly extract rare materials in Russia.

The chief of Russia's sovereign wealth fund, Kirill Dmitriev, recently disclosed that talks between Moscow and Washington had begun on mineral cooperation, and some firms had evinced interest. Curiously, this development comes at a time when China is trying to constrict the flow of critical elements to hurt technology supply chains, in retaliation for the West blocking its access to advanced know-how. Lastly, there seem to have been strains between the Communist Party of China and the People's Liberation Army with disappearances and purges of senior officials from the Central Military Commission that oversees the latter. This apparent discord has surfaced at a time when Taiwan has raised alarm about sub-

versive activities, exhorting China as a "foreign hostile force". Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te publicly called out the threat posed to the island's sovereignty, Beijing's renewed efforts to infiltrate its defence forces, and an agenda to erode national identity. Beijing responded by ordering "Strait Thunder 2025A", firing rockets into the straits from Fujian. This indicates that dealing with Taiwan, the military, and the economy may be increasingly occupying Xi's bandwidth. Amid such pressing issues, it suits China to send smoke signals to India of seeking to make amends.

The Chinese leadership has laid emphasis on promoting exchanges and pursuing cooperation in various fields, while "properly handling the boundary question". This is essentially harkening back to the Rajiv-Deng compact. Unless China agrees to find a lasting solution to the structural issue — the LAC — its intent to seek rapprochement will always be suspect. In a recent interview to a Chinese media outlet, the Chinese ambassador to India dangled the blandishments of greater market access and economic cooperation. The envoy did not even refer to the border row once, playing it down as mere obstacles and disruptions. Thus, the conceptualisation of "elephant-dragon tango" belies China's design of brushing the dispute aside. The "elephant-dragon tango" is nothing by an updated version of the chimera of "Ch-India" (the simultaneous rise of China and India) that some in India still harbour. This soporific words should not beguile New Delhi, since as recently as in January, India's army chief cautioned that the situation on the LAC was stable yet sensitive, and there remained some "degree of a stand-off". Lastly, even its metaphor of elephant for India reeks of condescension. In the last few years, India has moved away from the lagged and derivative categorisation of "Hindu growth rate" to being the fastest-growing major economy. China will have to remove its blinkers to see that India is no longer a land of elephants and snake charmers.

Should we fear this trade war?



VISHWAPRASAD ALVA

Founder and managing director, Skanray Technologies

THE MEDIA, TRADE bodies, industry, and economists are busy discussing the impact of tariffs, reciprocal duties, and reversal of globalisation. The Ponzi scheme of uncontrolled globalisation has come to its dead end. Like any pyramid scheme — real estate, stock market speculations, or Bitcoin — the bubble must burst someday.

Europe and the US taught and forced the world to adopt a free market economy. Russia's Mikhail Gorbachev and his grandson/peers took the bait in the 80s and moved away from communism, and the country is still struggling to come to terms with it. It lost control over its economy, people, and territory, and didn't get much out of the western open economy. China, on the other hand, quickly jumped into controlled globalisation in its signature style. It leveraged the US and Europe to the limit and is now paying back in the same coin.

India, with its much-prized democracy, an electoral system with a huge ignorant, freebie-driven voter base, lost out on decision-making, economic and social reforms, infrastructure, and industrialisation. Here we are now endlessly debating trade tariffs, and fence-sitting in our true non-aligned deadlock.

Will this tariff war last long? No. The world is interdependent and interlinked like never before. If the US levies penalty on Chinese goods, China will ration rare metals and minerals vital to US existence. It can also create consumer goods scarcity,

high inflation, and social unrest in a US obsessed with wasteful buying. Semiconductors, fossil fuels, rare metals, super computers, satellites, airplanes, critical medical equipment, in-land security and defence technology, food — all of these are bargaining points where no one can win. This war won't last beyond a year. If automatic countries hold on tight irrespective of social turmoil, it may last five years or until an election.

Is the EU-European Union (EU) reciprocal tariff a big blow to India? I don't think so. Where India has built its ecosystem, the competitive advantage it has is significant and can't be impacted quickly. What if India levies to reducing customs duties to find a trade balance with the EU and US? Food security, agrotech, defence, pharma, and automobile sectors, the rest are either too small, strong enough or resilient to bounce back with alternatives.

What is the real fear then? It is the routing and dumping of cheap foreign goods through the US/EU by local retailers or to identify subject matter experts. Like their politician bosses, the officials are at the mercy of industry bodies, associations, and individuals seeking favour in exchange for praise

The routing and dumping of cheap foreign goods through the US/EU by local traders and corporates are a real concern

and media endorsements. Most people we know in the industry want our PM to get two more terms to fulfil his noble dream for the nation, but don't want to speak the bitter truth about policy gaps. Today most of the media is polarised over matter leaving minuscule few who are neutral, do deep research and function as constructive critics. Our PM must cultivate people who are unconditionally his friends, nationalistic, selfless, and have the freedom and courage to speak the truth.

China is our natural partner and must be dealt with uniquely to contain its expansionist ambitions. Perhaps one day, India, China, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, and even Pakistan and Bangladesh can come together to create an Asian union with open borders and a common digital currency. It will be more than 50% of the world population and 80% of the new global economy. But there should be stability and peace first. Cross-border terror must be dealt with firmly. Religion, race, and cult-based nationalism should go.

There is also the old Swadeshi economic alternative with minimalist living and eccentric vegan lifestyle to choose from. Nothing can be ruled out. Sacrificing this generation for the good of the next is not a great idea. Each is equally important. Whatever ensures happiness and equality is the best option.

Perhaps one day, India, China, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, and even Pakistan and Bangladesh can form an Asian union

Many ministers are 24x7 into electoral politics due to unending elections. Bureaucrats get top policy defining roles at the fag end of their careers. They can't take risks and lose everything they earned in their lifetime. Bureaucrats are changed frequently, have no grip on the sector, and lack the patience or humility to listen to or identify subject matter experts. Like their politician bosses, the officials are at the mercy of industry bodies, associations, and individuals seeking favour in exchange for praise

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dark days ahead?

Not satisfied with the chaos and disruption unleashed, Donald Trump has promised, rather threatened, a second round of the same. China has immediately levied a retaliatory tariff of 34% and in all likelihood, other nations too will follow suit in different measures. In this scenario, it is likely to be the US against the world. Except for Israel, there is no nation siding with

the US in this trade war. In a complex and interconnected world, no nation can afford to be isolated, however powerful it may be and the US will realise this sooner than later. If this trade war does not sustain and Trump has to eat humble pie, the US' pre-eminent position in world affairs will be in danger from China. This would be a bitter pill to swallow for Trump and the US.

—Anthony Henriques, Maharashtra

Anticipating rate cuts

Apologies of "Expect more monetary easing" (FE, April 5), the market may expect a rate cut by 25 basis points, justified by the slowing inflation, strong rupee, and a moderate growth recovery. The demand is for the Monetary Policy Committee to lift the "neutral" stance and shift towards being "accommodative". But at this juncture of global slowdown, with

tariff turmoil and US growth-inflation being high, India could keep to the status quo on repo rate changes and leave no room for changing the neutral stance. In the current scenario of abundant headline and durable liquidity, the central bank could improve monetary policy transmission rather than repo rate easing.

—N R Nagarajan, Sivakasi

Write to us at letters@expressindia.com

THE IDEAS PAGE

The world trade disorder

But having been slow to open up its economy, the impact of Trump tariffs for India will be lower than for some other countries



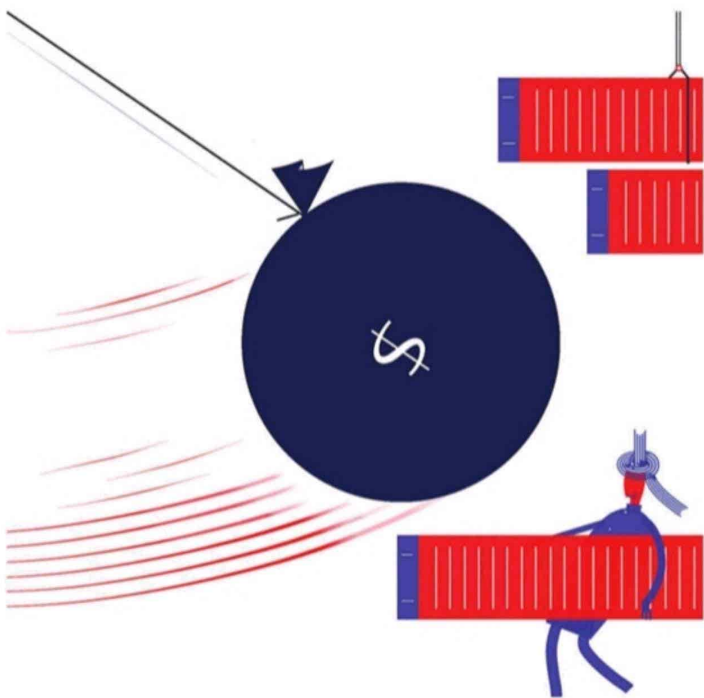
NIRVIKAR SINGH

US PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP clearly believes in the slogan "Make America Great Again". The problems with this vision include the flaws in his idea of "greatness", other (less noble) goals for which the slogan is a cover, and the inhumane and chaotic implementation of his programme. Compared to attacks on democracy and human rights, the new tariff policies announced on April 2 may seem relatively benign. After all, the US, as a global leader in economic openness, has regularly struggled to get other economies to reciprocate fully. Some of the asymmetries in openness were built into the rules governing the world trading system, making allowances for the US's dominant economic position at the end of World War II. The challenges of global rules for trade in an unequal world were reflected in the fact that, while the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank began operating soon after the end of the war, the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the third pillar of the post-war global order, had to wait for five decades.

As other countries recovered from the war's devastation or achieved developed country status for the first time, the US has been regularly frustrated with unequal market access. This is at the heart of Trump's claims of unfairness—the US no longer dominates the global economy as in 1945 but is expected to live with a system that gives the rest of the world an advantage in market access. As the global economy has grown, other countries have developed capabilities in manufacturing and areas of comparative advantage that they previously lacked. In 1950, Japan barely had an automobile industry, but by the 1980s it was a global leader, only to be forced by the US to implement "voluntary" export restraints.

Changes like this, along with trade openness, have moved manufacturing jobs out of the US, and to other countries. Economic growth in those countries has partly come at the expense of American workers, and the US has not done enough to mitigate those impacts, even through millions of new jobs in services were created. The heart of industrial America became the "Rust Belt", and an important part of Trump's voter base.

Unfortunately, Trump-style tariffs are not going to solve this problem of structural change, driven by growth, technology and trade. The baseline US tariff rate of 10 per cent, announced on April 2, could potentially raise USD 200 billion, but this will mostly be paid by US households, as a regressive consumption tax. The impact on US manufacturing and jobs will be very small. The Trump tariffs are much higher for countries that have been singled out as having high trade barriers. In the case of India, the announcement claimed that India's average tariff is 52 per cent, and the "reciprocal" tariff that will be imposed will be 26 per cent. However, the formula used to derive these numbers lacks a proper conceptual foundation, using proportional deficits and not rates at all. In contrast, on March 31, the US Trade Representative (USTR) issued a 400-page report on trade barriers, country by country, in which India's overall average applied tariff rate is



C R Sankumar

stated to be 17 per cent and 39 per cent for agricultural goods.

In any case, the numbers are mainly aggressive starting points for a negotiation process that will proceed bilaterally. An optimistic view might be that the result will be lower trade barriers overall, as countries open up market access to American goods that have up to now been kept out by tariffs or other trade barriers. Certainly, India has made a head start on this process of negotiation. Interestingly, despite over three decades of economic liberalisation, India has been reluctant to open up trade. The USTR report states that India's tariffs are the highest of all major economies. Regarding agricultural goods, protecting its farmers has been an important political motivation. But often India has not been particularly rational in its tariff policies, and its management of those policies for the growth of "infant industries" has been notoriously ineffective. India has shielded away from multilateral free trade agreements within the WTO framework and preferred piecemeal, bilateral approaches. So maybe its trade negotiators are well-equipped to respond to the Trump tariff approach. They must respond robustly since the US is India's top export destination. But they will now be operating under duress, and the American side may be overwhelmed by negotiations with many different countries and trading blocs. The European Union and China may be priorities for them, more than India. Countries like China, due to their

The Trump approach undermines institutions, and it undermines trust. The US may gain some market access and ultimately lower some tariffs or trade barriers on its exports but in the least efficient manner possible. Meanwhile, retaliatory tariffs and trade disruptions will reduce economic growth around the globe, and that will have negative consequences for India.

relatively strong bargaining position, are not backing down, imposing retaliatory tariffs and trade restrictions.

The Trump tariffs increase transaction costs, and they increase uncertainty. Both will damage the global economy, something already reflected in the steep falls in stock markets. International trade will be reduced, and some will simply be diverted, with a messy scramble to adjust throughout various supply chains or production networks. The Trump approach undermines institutions, and it undermines trust. The US may gain some market access and ultimately lower some tariffs or trade barriers on its exports but in the least efficient manner possible. Meanwhile, retaliatory tariffs and trade disruptions will reduce economic growth around the globe, and that will have negative consequences for India.

Nevertheless, having been slow to open up its economy, the impact for India will be lower than for some other countries. One prediction has China's short-term growth being cut in half by the Trump tariffs. Dealing with the Trump tariffs adds an important wrinkle, but only a wrinkle, to a possible trade strategy for India—one which continues to focus on bilateral trade deals, on promoting foreign investment and access to foreign know-how from multiple sources, and on integrating into global production networks.

The writer is Professor of Economics, University of California, Santa Cruz

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"By wielding tariffs like a sword against itself, American companies will bear the brunt of supply chain disruptions." —GLOBAL TIMES, CHINA

Living with debt

Not only are more households taking on debt, they are also taking on more debt than before. This speaks of structural defects in the economy



ISHAN BAKSHI

IN THE PREVIOUS decade, it was the twin balance sheet problem—of an over-leveraged corporate sector and a banking system plagued by bad loans—that was holding back private investments. The question now is whether high household debt is holding back private consumption.

Household debt has surged dramatically in the years after the pandemic—rising from 36.6 per cent of GDP in June 2021 to 40.2 per cent by December 2023 and further to 42.9 per cent as of June 2024. To put this in perspective—it had averaged around 33 per cent between 2015-19. This credit surge, post Covid, has not just been concentrated in a particular segment of the population, but has been more widespread in nature. The increase can be seen in the flow of credit to households across the entire income distribution.

Take a look at the numbers. Between March 26, 2021 and March 22, 2024, personal loans by the banking sector grew by 75 per cent. Over the same period, retail credit extended by non-banking finance companies and housing finance companies grew by 70 per cent, while loans from microfinance institutions rose by 67 per cent. In comparison, during this period, household disposable income grew by 43 per cent and consumption by 49 per cent.

Had it not been for this surge in debt, and if household borrowings over these years had been in line with past trends, then private consumption would have been lower by around 2 percentage points of GDP or savings would have fallen. This would have had knock-on effects on the entire economy. Put differently, household incomes have simply not grown at a pace to sustain consumption and savings at such levels.

In itself, borrowing is not a bad thing. But it is a matter of concern when more and more loans are taken for consumption purposes, and not for investment. These consumption loans are also largely unsecured.

Between March 26, 2021 and March 22, 2024, the unsecured personal loan book of banks (personal loans, credit cards and consumer durables) rose by 82 per cent, while that of NBFCs grew by roughly 130 per cent. Such loans tend to dominate the borrowings of the less well-off—as per the RBI, generally those with less than Rs 5 lakh per annum in income. This only indicates that, post the pandemic, the less well-off went on a credit binge to support their consumption, while the more affluent, who also borrowed heavily, did so to accumulate assets like houses and cars.

But not only are more households taking on debt, they are also taking on more debt than before. As per the RBI, 11 per cent of borrowers with a personal loan of less than Rs 50,000 had an overdue personal

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loan. In the second quarter of 2024-25, nearly three-fifths of customers who have availed of a personal loan had more than three live loans. In the case of microfinance, the share of borrowers availing loans from four or more lenders was at almost 6 per cent in September 2024.

Greater indebtedness implies that loan repayment will account for a bigger portion of household disposable income. And unless incomes grow rapidly, the burden of repayment will eat into disposable incomes, impacting spending capacity.

It is not as if this credit binge went unnoticed. In November 2023, the RBI introduced various measures—increasing the risk weights on banks' exposure to NBFCs and on consumer credit for some segments—to slow down credit growth. However, with growth slowing down sharply—the hit to consumption reflects in the commentary from India Inc—the central bank has now reversed its stance partially. The RBI seems to believe that by lowering the risk weights on lending, cutting interest rates and flooding the system with liquidity, it can spur private consumption. However, this view is based on the assumption that the weakness in the economy is largely a consequence of policy tightening.

Lower rates—perhaps a 50 basis points cut in this meeting and a 100 basis points cut over this entire cycle, along with the easing of the liquidity situation, bringing down the real rate below the repo rate, should ideally help spur consumption. But the question is: Considering current debt levels and sluggish income growth, to what extent can already over-leveraged households take on more debt to boost consumption? After all, the existing debt has to be repaid. And subdued income growth makes it difficult for households to take on more debt. More so, when there are already signs of stress, of some households having difficulty paying back their loans.

Take NBFCs. Loans that are overdue for more than 90 days are estimated to be inching upwards. Delinquencies are increasing in gold loans, and asset concerns are arising in the personal and consumer finance segment, and also in the passenger vehicle and two-wheeler segments. In the case of MFIs, loans that are due for 31-180 days have risen considerably in recent months. Banks have also been steadily writing off unsecured retail loans, indicating a worsening of asset quality.

Moreover, with lenders themselves becoming more cautious, to what extent will they be comfortable lending to already overextended households? As of January 25, 2025, the personal loan book of banks was roughly a third of all credit extended. It is greater than loans to the services sector, industry and agriculture individually. In the case of NBFCs and HFCs, retail loans are more than half of the entire loan book.

This surge in household debt is a reflection of the underlying problems in the economy. It is a consequence of structural issues, of inadequate job creation and subdued income growth. The policy response should be appropriately crafted.

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A continuing abdication

Parliament's hasty ratification of President's rule in Manipur is telling



PATRICIA MUKHIM

IN THE EARLY hours of Thursday, just before calling it a day, Lok Sabha discussed the imposition of President's Rule in Manipur. It took less than an hour to ratify the government's decision. Throughout the Budget session, the state received scant attention. To those who have observed the government's neglect of the state in the past two years, the short shrift to Manipur in Parliament wasn't surprising. In the second week of March, a spirited outburst by Outer Manipur MP, Alfred Arthur Kannang, had drawn attention to the state's budget, which had made no attempts to bridge the imbalance between the Imphal Valley and the hills—a major reason for the ethnic strife.

By all accounts, scarcely any government relief is going to the Kuki-inhabited areas of Kangpokpi and Churachandpur. May 3 should be three years since the ethnic violence broke out. People have not just lost their homes but their careers and education have been disrupted. The Centre has made very little attempt to apply any healing touch. It hasn't tried to address the mental trauma of the people forced to live in relief camps.

After belatedly imposing President's Rule in Manipur on February 16, the Centre now wants to restore places of worship in

the state. But what about restoring the hundreds of homes of the Kuki-Zo people in the Imphal valley? And what about the homes of Meiteis in Churachandpur and Moreh that were razed after May 3, 2023? When an area is rolled by ethnic strife, there are victims and perpetrators on both sides of the divide. What about recovering the arms that were looted by militant outfits in the Imphal Valley and hills? Of late, there has been some progress on this front. But a large cache continues to be in the possession of insurgents.

In the past few weeks, the government has often said that the situation is returning to "normal". But a lot needs to be done. Homes will need to be rebuilt. The Kuki-Zos who fled the Imphal Valley left behind important documents such as academic certificates and voter identity cards. They will need these documents to resume their lives. Most importantly, their confidence in the state's ability to protect them will need to be restored. It is the same with the Meiteis who had to flee from the hills. The Kuki-Zo people seem to have no faith in Manipur Police—a majority of police personnel are Meitei. At the same time, the Assam Rifles is seen as partisan to the tribal communities. It's clear that the government will need to bridge the trust deficit. Many people, in-

cluding children, who have witnessed the gruesome violence are mentally scarred. Has the government thought of reaching out to such people? The psychological impact will last longer if we pretend that we have solutions to the crisis from far off. Governor Ajay Bhalla will be keenly watched in how he handles these challenges.

Wounds have festered in the state for far too long. The Meiteis, who constitute about 43 per cent of Manipur's population, live in only one-tenth of the state's area. At the same time, land is a precious resource for the hill communities. The Meiteis cannot buy land in the hills while Kukis and Nagas can do so in the Valley. This state of affairs is a carryover from colonial times. But the failure to resolve the problem in a manner acceptable to all speaks of the short shrift given to the Northeast after independence.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has often spoken of the Northeast as the Ashtrakshmi—the eight forms of Goddess Lakshmi. Yet, it's a mystery why he has chosen to stay away from Manipur in the past two years. In fact, he visited neighbouring Assam as late as February 24. Why does PM Modi need the Opposition's criticism to spur him to speak on a vital part of the Ashtrakshmi?

The coinage, Ashtrakshmi, was part of

the Act East Policy—an initiative which the people of the North East thought was going to open up economic opportunities for them. But, over time, it appears that the strategic concern—stopping China from monopolising the Indo-Pacific route—seems to have overtaken the economic imperative. India's Northeast is encircled by countries in turmoil—Myanmar to the east and Bangladesh to the south. The India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway envisaged by the Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led NDA government is virtually forgotten today. This 1,360 km highway connecting Moreh in Manipur to Mae Sot in Thailand was intended to improve trade relations with Southeast Asia. The Kaladan multi-modal transport link linking Mizoram to Kolkata and then to Sitlwa in the Rakhine State of Myanmar, too, hasn't been completed. Internal connectivity within the Northeast has improved to an extent. Even then, at times, travelling from one state to another takes much longer than flying to other parts of the country.

And yet, another Parliament session has gone by without a meaningful discussion on the difficulties of the region's people.

The writer is editor, Shillong Times

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

TRUMP'S TARIFFS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'After the tariffs' (IE, April 4). The recent increase in tariffs on certain goods by the Trump administration has cast a shadow due to concerns over its detrimental impact on many economies. Although India has been spared the full brunt of this imposition—thanks to a degree of leeway from the Trump administration—it will inevitably affect India's trade relations with the US and other countries, significantly curtailing its export potential. India should recalibrate its export-import strategy in response to these challenges and adopt a diplomatic approach to negotiations with the US.

Ravi Mathur, Noida

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'After the Tariffs' (IE, 4 April). If global leaders stay composed, the spectre of American tariffs can be dispelled. The first step would be to abandon the mindset that the US is the axis of the world. By panicking, we are merely reinforcing the illusion that Americans are *primus inter pares*. Today, the world is far too interdependent and interconnected to be derailed by Trump's erratic policies and coercive tactics. The most effective response is to strengthen trade among all nations.

Manish Mishra, Bhopal

RELIGION AND STATE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Not about Waqf' (IE, 4 April). Unlike in recent times, when controversial Bills

have been passed without full participation from MPs, the debate on the Waqf Bill saw meaningful engagement from all political parties. While the trust deficit between the BJP and the existing Muslim leadership may continue, it remains to be seen how the Muslim community perceives the government's intentions. Furthermore, just as the BJP's lack of a single Muslim MP is regrettable, the Muslim community itself lacks a national leader of stature who can effectively advocate for and safeguard its interests. If the spirit of inclusive participation that emerged during this debate continues in future legislative discussions, it will be a valuable and significant outcome of the Bill.

YG Choudhary, Pune

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'The law as correction' (IE, 4 April). The NDA government has undermined a number of well-established principles—and even the Constitution—with the Waqf Bill. This constitutes an unwarranted interference in the administration of a religious minority in the country, particularly by restricting the right to donated property as Waqf solely to individuals who have practised Islam for at least five years. The new amendment also mandates the inclusion of non-Muslims in Waqf boards on the questionable premise that it would enhance efficiency. It remains to be seen whether this resolves more disputes than it might potentially create.

SS Paul, Noida

THE ASIAN AGE

7 APRIL 2025

Modi's hard talk with Yunus on minorities, China needed

It was a stern Narendra Modi that Bangladesh ran into at the Binmo summit. This was bound to be as the country that targeted the minorities at a time of turmoil is also being pushed into the orbit of China's geopolitical influence. While that may have been an expected outcome after India stepped in to give the fleeing Sheikh Hasina asylum, the steep dive that has come about in the neighbouring country under the interim rule of chief adviser Muhammad Yunus is a cause for worry in the subcontinent.

In telling Mr Yunus off regarding the treatment that the minorities received when student protests snowballed into a movement which was helped along by external forces eager to thrust regime change in Bangladesh, Mr Modi was only speaking the stark truth. Also, the interim head of government may have been overstepping his brief in dealing with foreign affairs in a major way on his visit to Beijing to meet Chinese president Xi Jinping.

Realistically, India has a problem on its eastern front too now and it recognises that even as Mr Yunus is leading his nation into further disorder with the garment industry that was propping up the economy floundering and order yet to stabilise even to allow normal functioning of business and industry, it was in Bangladesh's interest to be reminded about where it is headed. Given the debt trap experience of countries in the China orbit, Mr Yunus may not be doing his country a favour by steering it firmly into China's sphere of influence.

Realistically, India has a problem on its eastern front too now and it recognises that even as Mr Yunus is leading his nation into further disorder with the garment industry that was propping up the economy floundering

Mr Modi's comment about the need to avoid rhetoric that could vitiate the environment, was a definitive reference to Mr Yunus' reference to the landlocked Chittagong's Neck region that is the umbilical cord to the northeast. For a person accused at home of favouring cronies from his old days as microfinance banker and who is holding a strictly temporary position as virtual head of government, it was imprudent to air his views on strategic matters that are strictly India's business.

True, Bangladesh has issues with India regarding the extradition it seeks of Sheikh Hasina, her statements on social media that the regime there considered unwelcome deaths of Bangladeshis at the India border and the pending Teesta water sharing agreement. But such issues can be addressed only when a legitimate Bangladesh government is in place after elections are held. Regardless of how polls to let the people choose a democratic government may pan out, India must keep seeking a way to restore ties while addressing the trust deficit that has built up since the events that took place leading to Sheikh Hasina's ouster. India was not being gracious, just diplomatic, in entertaining the Bangladesh request to hold a bilateral meeting with an interim head. It stands to reason that to keep avenues open, Mr Yunus may have been attempting to get something out of the meeting he sought with Prime Minister Modi, including asking that Sheikh Hasina refrain from making statements seen to disrupt harmony in her country. But the fact that Mr Yunus acknowledged India's role in freeing them from Pakistan's cruel regime may have emphasised that the point of no return has not been reached in India-Bangladesh ties.

Saffron 'sharks' eye Church land?

The RSS turning its attention to the wealth owned by the Catholic church in India does not appear to square not only with the measurements in hectares it propounds but also with the constitutional rights religious denominations enjoy in this country and, with the saffron camp's aggressive outreach efforts with the Christians, who make up the second largest minority community in the country. That it comes close on the heels of the RSS-affiliated Union government getting Parliament to enact a law which sought to end the Muslim economic boycott triggered speculation that the larger parivar plan is to pit the minority communities as aggressors as part of its divide-and-rule strategy.

As per an article in RSS mouthpiece *Organiser*, since withdrawn, the Catholic church owns about seven crore hectares of land which works out to be about 21 per cent of the country's total land area of 32.87 crore hectares. It also lists the number of institutions including those in the medical and educational fields which, too, appear to be at variance with fact. For example, it says the church runs five engineering colleges, a gross underestimation. The imputation in the article is that the church, which acquired the assets through questionable means, especially during the British raj, uses it for conversion.

The RSS and the governments that it controls must use legal means to end the illegal occupation of properties, if any, and its misuse for illegal purposes including for religious conversion, if so. Sending out dogwhistles to the Hindutva brigade out there on the streets to target the assets of any community is not the best way to accomplish this.

The BJP leadership, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has been making all-out efforts to woo the Christian community with an eye on winning a dent in Kerala politics where it still lingers on the margins. The party has made some gains in the last three Lok Sabha elections and a push from the Christian community which makes up 18 per cent of the state's population could yield substantial electoral dividends. But the Sangh Parivar must make its position clear, instead of waffling with the bare bones of a handshake and bound. Mere withdrawal of the article cannot conceal the inherent polemic in the saffron camp's approach to the minority communities.

THE ASIAN AGE

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Devi Kar

How ethics is now evolving: Are there new rules & norms to suit our times?

Ethics should govern all institutions and organisations, including schools. They ensure fairness, respect and accountability. Some issues of right and wrong are of course perennial. Nevertheless, each successive generation complains of the sharp decline of ethical standards and erosion of values since their times. We should perhaps halt and introspect to discover where we are headed; whether we have compromised our principles for personal gain or whether we have a new ethical framework to suit our times.

Ethics governing teachers and students in school have largely remained intact. Honesty, fairness, justice, impartiality are definitely valued. Cheating, plagiarism, bullying, lying and stealing are still frowned upon. However, I find that the finer ethical issues are often ignored. Should question-paper setters tutor pupils or write textbooks for board examinations? Should powerful people get schools to admit their candidates ahead of other deserving ones? I remember how proudly the smiling driving school instructor assured me my daughter would definitely get her driving licence as he knew the authorities well. He didn't realise I wasn't happy. If my daughter was indeed unfit to drive, giving her a licence would result in risking her own life and that of others.

On plagiarism, I understand our school examiners don't penalise students for reproducing verbatim from textbooks. The concept of plagiarism is thus not

reinforced except by schools that follow certain international board mandates.

School leaders usually ensure the faculty are well-versed in the set of ethics their school follows. Grey areas are always there but an individual usually has her own moral compass within the school-mandated ethical structure. Yet at times, I am taken aback by the way people rationalise their actions which would be generally considered "wrong". I suppose this is the normal thing to address the discomfort of cognitive and emotional dissonance within one.

Just as some manners are a demonstration of consideration for others, certain ethical principles are a matter of sensitivity. For example, singling out groups (perhaps financially-aided ones or financially privileged ones whose families have given large donations to the institution) may not be considered an ethical practice if the school believes in equity and uniform dealings. "Diversity" is becoming a bad word in Donald Trump's America, once considered a virtue. In Narendrabhai Modi's India too, many Hindus feel that at last their superiority or status is being officially recognised.

In the teacher's manual or handbook, there are all kinds of instructions comprising rules, school practices, ethics (related to work and morality) and professional duties such as regular attendance, punctuality, respectful working relations with colleagues and seniors, unbiased dealings with students, appropriate interaction with parents, and so on. So, an

aspect of professionalism too is associated with ethics.

Schools made to ally teachers whose primary role is known to the public which schools indulge in underhand activities. Some schools use their "legacy" or "reputation" as a coveted school to extract enormous amounts of money under the table to admit a child.

A word must be included about the dubious annual awards given by publications and various bodies. In some cases, the purpose is the publicity earned by the award givers and in others, it is the substantial revenue that is derived from fees that are charged for featuring the individual awardee or school in the publication. Are these awards truly deserved?

It is a pity that in the medical profession, the unethical practice of "poaching" as good, qualified teachers are hard to come by. I have seen how shamelessly and relentlessly a school uses its head-hunters to lure school leaders as well as teachers with money, perks and fancy designations. But I have also heard people remark on the tenacity and admirable initiative that the school is demonstrating in this competitive world. I feel differently. Perhaps the feeling can be likened to that of a neighbour whose private home-beds is being offered all kinds of financial and other allurements by an NRI family to work for them. What happens is that the economic structure and delicate balance in the system gets upset when people who earn in dollars throw their money around to get what they

want. The impact on teachers is disgraceful to some of us but seems justifiable to others. When a job offer is made to any teacher, the first thing she or he says now is: "In this industry (sic) the norm is a 20-30 per cent hike over your current salary if you make a change". I know of a teacher who signed on the dotted line and didn't turn up and I heard (but did not verify) that the teacher who signed that the gentleman in question used the offer letter as a bargaining tool in another school. I wonder why anyone should employ someone who does not know the meaning of "commitment". In hindsight, I wish we had sued the person in question. It is not right to let people get away so easily after such a serious breach of a written contract.

Having given a graphic description of the behaviour, attitude and practices of today's teachers and schools, it is for the reader to decide whether these have been driven by the times and whether it is fair to sit in judgment of those who are demonstrating such conduct and attitude. After all, they are focused on their goals – the commercialised schools on the bottom line (above all other factors) and individuals on their aspirations (road "career paths" or "earnings"). The question that remains to be answered is: Do some of us try to stem the tide or do we just accept what is happening as "the signs of the times"?

The writer is a veteran school educator based in Kolkata

Subhani



Short-sighted politics has unintended consequences



Shikha Mukerjee

The public displays of righteous indignation by the parties opposed to Mamata Banerjee's government in West Bengal, all of whom revelled in triumphant glee after the Supreme Court ruled that all 25,733 teachers and staff recruited by the West Bengal government through an examination to assess eligibility must be sacked, has shocked and distressed voters. Not all of them are committed to either Mamata Banerjee or the Trinamool Congress that she leads.

The primary concern of the upset voter is the eligible and the meritorious as well as the ineligible have been left stranded, after the verdict sacking all recruited teachers. Had the Opposition been a little less blinkered and short-sighted, it would have taken pre-emptive action and unveiled a well-considered rescue plan in anticipation of the Supreme Court's decision, which only confirms the Calcutta high court's decision in 2021.

Instead of rejoicing that Mamata Banerjee's government has been publicly branded as corrupt and hoping the blow to her image will be the last straw to break the almost tenuous bond that ties her to West Bengal's electorate, the Opposition should have thought one step ahead. And that is where the Opposition, comprising the BJP, CPI(M) and Congress, as parties waiting to swoop the next election and seize power, seem to have failed the trust test with potential voters.

By ignoring the unintended consequences of the Supreme Court's sack verdict because the selection examinations were "vitiated" by manipulation and "fraud", without having plans in place on how to resolve the problems that must follow, these parties

If each of the parties in Opposition — BJP and CPI(M) — prepared separate plans of corrective action in anticipation of the Supreme Court verdict, then Ms Banerjee would have been under pressure

have revealed themselves to be incompetent, insensitive and not credible as reliable alternatives to Mamata Banerjee's government, with all its flaws and tarnished record. Failure to have a corrective plan proposal to demonstrate to the victims and beneficiaries of the scam that the Opposition is capable of functioning as an alternative, a "shadow government" as it is described in the British parliamentary system, implies that the Opposition doesn't have any responsibility for clearing up the mess that is of Mamata Banerjee's making, as they allege.

The failure opens up a terrifying prospect, that the Opposition doesn't have a detailed better governance map to offer voters, which includes rectification of the so-called "system" and the legacy of misrule. Instead, parties in the Opposition have assurances on offer based on which voters will have to decide which one sounds the least incredible, because by its very nature, assurances are not a credible basis for making risk assessment and choices.

The gap opens up an even more scary prospect: elections are like pigs in a poke, a confidence game where the buyer has no way of knowing before-hand whether she will purchase. That argument extends beyond the turbulent borders of West Bengal to other states in the country, where the Opposition offers itself as an alternative based on assurances of good governance and a track record in some other time and in some other place. That is why it makes sense when the BJP campaigns consistently that its "double-engine sarkar" model is best, and the Congress, equally consistently, talks about its past glory days, and the CPI(M) invokes the Jyoti Basu

was built, layer upon layer upon layer, missing are the following: one, about 23 lakh young people, mostly in their 20s, sat the recruitment test; two, just over 11 per cent were listed as eligible; three, how many of the young hopefuls actually paid to be recruited; and, four, how many ineligible, that is lacking in merit, candidates were recruited, like chaff hidden in the wheat.

The lack of political imagination and inability to adapt to evolving situations is why the Opposition in West Bengal as it is true of the parties in Opposition in other states. The result is a loop every time a crisis occurs. That is as true of the parties in Opposition in West Bengal as it is true of the parties in Opposition to the Narendra Modi government at the Centre and the parties in Opposition in other states. The result is a loop every time a crisis occurs. That is as true of the parties in Opposition in West Bengal as it is true of the parties in Opposition to the Narendra Modi government at the Centre and the parties in Opposition in other states. The result is a loop every time a crisis occurs.

There have been moments when voters have taken the plunge, as in Delhi when they ousted the 14-year-old CPI(M) government in favour of Mamata Banerjee, and in 1984 when N.T. Rama Rao exploded on the Indian political scene via a spectacular win in then undivided Andhra Pradesh.

Each of these new leaders of new parties made specific promises to get some things done. Instead of doing voters with the same old spiel of riddling corruption and vague assurances of better governance. There is a larger lesson in the West Bengal experience: the Opposition, be it the member parties of the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance, or the BJP or any of its National Democratic Alliance partners needs to give voters specifics to fire up jaded and jaundiced voters, fed a repetitive diet of polarising identity politics — *"Hindus Khate Ma Hain"* versus *"Khatre Ma Hain"* kind.

Shikha Mukerjee is a senior journalist based in Kolkata

LETTERS EUROPE RISING

While protests against Donald Trump are occurring across the United States, he has not condemned Russia's missile strike on Kryvyi Rih, the hometown of Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Meanwhile, European leaders spearheaded by Emmanuel Macron and Keir Starmer are working to finalise a coordinated strategy to help Zelenskyy after he was marginalised by Trump regarding the potential deployment of a multinational peacekeeping force to Ukraine. This force would serve both as primary line of defense for them and as a potential "reassurance force", positioned behind the front lines.

R.S. Narula
Patiala

CRACKER NETWORK

THE TRAGIC BLAST at an illegal firecracker godown-cum-factory in Dacca GPO, near Gujrat, which claimed the lives of 21 workers from Haryana Pradesh, has raised serious concerns about a deeper, well-connected network. The explosion cannot be treated as a mere accident. Aluminium powder, a key component in firecracker production, was being supplied by an individual from Noida, Ahmedabad. This material was allegedly being used to manufacture firecrackers without any government authorisation. There must be strict penalties for violations.

R. Sivakumar
Chennai

THERE WILL BE BLOOD

JP MORGAN has raised the probability of a US recession in 2025 to 60 per cent, citing growing economic risks stemming from Morgan warns of rising inflation, slowing economic growth and increasing unemployment, a "significant macroeconomic shock", in its report, "There Will Be Blood".

Amrjeet Kumar
HazariBagh

\$500 for the best letter of the week goes to Anthony Henriques (April 3). Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

13 IDEA EXCHANGE

NEWSMAKERS IN THE NEWSROOM

Vinayakk Mohanarangan: What were your conversations with the Punjab Kings owners like, before you took this role up?

The owners have been terrific from the start. We did hours and hours of preparation leading up to the auction, spent three or four days in Riyadh, and had two good days at the auction table. Everything I've asked for around the team, including training camps and management people, has happened. We brought in a new bowling coach, James Hopes, who worked with me in Delhi for a long time. I made it clear to the owners and they made it clear to me too, that this is my team, and we will run it the way I want, in conjunction with the owners' inputs. At the end of the day, it is their team, but as far as cricket goes, I wanted it to be my team. I'm responsible for the wins and losses. Everyone's buying into it and the players have been terrific. Shreyas Iyer has added a lot with his experience and leadership qualities, which was important for me.

Sriram Veera: If you were a captain, how much involvement would you want a coach to have? How much do you think is being done with the football manager style we see now?

I may have made it sound like the whole team is all about me. It's certainly not. I'm the head coach and responsible for wins and losses, but once the game starts, the team is handed over to the captain. The coach can then do very little. It was pretty clear with what we did at the auction by bringing Shreyas to this franchise, it was clear to me and the owners that we wanted the best possible Indian captain. We got our man. He's been terrific around the group.

And I don't think a cricket team coach has the same impact as a football team manager. I like to share my thoughts and ideas with the captain and a few senior players. We don't necessarily include everyone in all tactical decisions, but the relationship between the captain and the coach must be as strong as possible. That's why I went for Shreyas in the auction. I've worked with him for a long time in Delhi. He's one of the great players and great people I've worked with and is an IPL-winning captain. We have a terrific relationship, respecting each other's roles.

Sriram Veera: With inexperienced captains or even in general, is there anything wrong with cricket going the football manager way — with more frequent inputs even after the toss?

Absolutely not. It's rare that an on-field captain doesn't seek advice from the dugout. Dhoni may be the only one in IPL who doesn't do that. Even in our first game, there was a lot of advice going to Shreyas, and he was asking questions about what the game needed. A prime example is how we used our impact player in the first game with Vyshak (Vijaykumar) coming in as late as he did. There was a lot of tactical planning behind that. We had three guys ready: two spin bowlers and Vyshak. We waited for the right time to bring our impact player into play. It depended on what Gujarat Titans were doing as well. We kept an eye on their dugout, waiting to see if they'd use (Sherfane) Rutherford or Glenn Phillips as their impact player. Once they made their choice, it was clear to us which way we should go. Even with timeouts in the IPL, you have a chance to talk to your captain or senior players.

Sriram Veera: Kagiso Rabada said we might as well name the sport batting instead of cricket if there is no balance between bat and ball. What are the changes you would like to see in cricket to balance it?

I think a lot of it comes down to the approach of the batters. The impact player has definitely made a difference in how batsmen approach their innings. We have high-quality all-rounders in our starting 11, which was by design in the auction. The batsmen can go from the first ball to the end of the 20th over without much concern about being left short of quality batting.

The change is partly in batting skill. Speaking as a batsman, it has undoubtedly become harder for bowlers. Batting skill has evolved more than bowling over the last 18 years of IPL cricket. How many guys bowl consistently good yorkers like Bumrah or like Malunga used to deliver? There aren't many of those bowlers around, so what's stopping them from executing four to five yorkers in an over? We saw what Vyshak did the other night with a slightly different tactic with the wide stuff. Where are the bowlers who can do that consistently? The length of the pitch hasn't changed, a good yorker is still a good yorker. Yet, we're seeing that skill dying off a little bit. Yes, the game favours batsmen now because of the impact rule. However, we used the impact rule to our advantage with a bowler who had the right skills for the situation. The evolution of bowlers still needs to happen and improve.

Sandeep Dwivedi: One thing we've observed about you from your playing days to coaching is the confidence that you carry, how did

ON BUILDING THE TEAM

THE OWNERS HAVE BEEN TERRIFIC FROM THE START. WE DID HOURS OF PREPARATION LEADING TO THE AUCTION... EVERYTHING I'VE ASKED FOR AROUND THE TEAM, INCLUDING TRAINING CAMPS AND MANAGEMENT PEOPLE, HAS HAPPENED

'Dhoni may be the only one in IPL who doesn't seek advice from the dugout'

Former Australia captain Ricky Ponting has taken up a new coaching gig in the IPL with Punjab Kings. He discusses working with Shreyas Iyer, building a squad from the ground up, and the state of the global game. The session was moderated by Vinayakk Mohanarangan, Senior Assistant Editor, *The Indian Express*

that come about?

It all comes down to how you prepare. If you're well-prepared, there's no reason that you shouldn't be confident. A great example of that right now is Shreyas. You saw him walk out to bat the other day, he walked out with a certain amount of swagger about him because he's confident. He knows if he does his little things right, then he can't fail. That's the thing I always tell the players: if you prepare as well as you can and if you go out and

with freedom, I've had conversations with younger Indian players for these three weeks. I have told them, 'You let me know how you want to be coached and the preparation you want and I'll make sure it gets done every single day.'

Sandeep Dwivedi: You once advised Rahul Dravid not to retire, and he went on to have a good series after that. How do you know when a player's time is up, especially in India right now with debates about Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma after the Australia series?

Regarding Dravid, it was a series against us. We could all see he was battling and there was a lot of media talk, and it was all wearing him down. Rahul and I have always got along really well. We were fierce competitors, both No.3 batters for our countries for a long time. For players like that, the class and quality don't leave. It sometimes gets buried under a lot of other stuff, and certain people can find their way out of those holes. I just had a chat with him and said, 'Look, forget about all the external stuff, believe in yourself, and go back to the things that have made you a good player. If you focus on that and not worry about the little

things, I am sure you can finish off your career on a strong note.' That's all I said. He went away and did that and guess what? When I was at the end of my career, I got the same message back from him. We was the first on the phone and made me aware of the things I had said to him.

I have been on record about Virat to say: 'You can't write off quality players.' They're champions for a reason and always find a way to come good. Different times in the last couple of years, Virat has been able to do that when he is getting in a hole. He is a high-quality player and maybe Rohit is a bit the same. Test cricket is the thing that is becoming harder for them right now. Rohit has made it clear he's going nowhere in the 50-over game. Virat is the best white-ball player ever. I will never write those guys off. Whether or not I am going to send them the same message I sent Rahul Dravid, at the start of an IPL is a different question, but I love those guys when they play international cricket, and hopefully, they can play for years to come.

Nihal Koshie: In the Champions Trophy, we saw Indian spinners restrict most batsmen. The pitches were slow but I

can't imagine players like you, Kevin Pietersen or Mohammad Azharuddin being so tied down. Do you think batsmen's skills are deteriorating against spinners?

The rhythm and tempo of one-day batting is not like it used to be because of how much T20 cricket is being played. In the 50-over game now, teams are trying to play it like a longer T20 game. And England is the best example. They have no idea how to put to-

ON HOW IDEAL AUCTION PICKS HAVE CHANGED

THERE'S LESS FOCUS ON JUST NUMBERS FOR PLAYERS. NUMBERS TELL PART OF THE STORY, BUT OUR AUCTION STRATEGY THIS YEAR WAS DIFFERENT. WE HAD MORE SPOTS TO FILL, BUILDING FROM THE GROUND UP WITH THE BEST EXPERIENCED INDIAN PLAYERS

gether a batting innings in 50-over cricket. They were dreadful in the 50-over World Cup, they were dreadful in the Champions Trophy. As soon as the spinners come on now, you think you have to take them for 20 runs in an over and in the right conditions, you can't do it. You have to find a way to score 80-90-100 runs per hundred balls without taking too many big risks and getting out. Maybe some of that skill with strike rotation, hitting gaps, running hard between wickets... the stuff that

made the best 50-over players what they were, maybe some of that has gone.

Think of the best 50-over players now. It is Virat, Smith, Williamson and Root. They are not the out-and-out power players, they are the skillful players. They rotate the strike, they pick up a lot of runs without the excessive amount of sizes a lot of other players hit. Some of the skills needed to manipulate fields against spin bowling have gone out of the window.

Nihal Koshie: Only about 49 percent of players see Test cricket as the primary form as per a World Cricketers' Association study. This is down from around 80 percent about five years ago. Does this worry you?

It is a worrying trend but I am not surprised. If you surveyed just Australians, Englishmen, Indians, South Africans and Kiwis, I think the percentage would likely be higher than 49. It would be interesting to see what the survey says about the 50-over game as well.

Yes, I'm worried about Test cricket's health. The World Test Championship has added context to every Test match. I'm not a fan of the two-tier system that I have been hearing about. Test cricket will remain reasonably strong. But the bigger worry I have always had is how the 50-over game is going to fit in, in 10 years.

ON DIFFERENT FORMATS

I'M PROBABLY TOO MUCH OF A TRADITIONALIST WITH THE INTERNATIONAL GAME. I WANT TO SEE TEST CRICKET PROSPER, AND ONE-DAY CRICKET IMPROVE. I THINK THERE'S STILL A PLACE FOR ALL THESE COMPETITIONS TO SURVIVE AND PROSPER

Sandeep Dwivedi: You fielded in various positions brilliantly. How did you develop this versatility?

Just because I really wanted to. Being a good fielder is all about attitude. If you want to be a good fielder, you can. With time and effort, anyone can be. As a batsman, you spend a lot of time in the field. If you're good at it, you'll enjoy it more. I tried to be a good fielder to impact games and help my team. I've seen stats since retiring

and know I have one of the highest catches in Test cricket history. I also have many direct-hit runouts because I wanted to impact the game for my team. Anytime I trained with the Australian team, I'd practise with the best fielders like Mark Waugh, Greg Blewett and trained until I was better than them. I'd stay till I hit the stumps more often, took more catches.

Mihir Vasavda: Would the future of T20 cricket be four Grand Slam-like tournaments?

I'm probably too much of a traditionalist with the international game. I want to see Test cricket prosper, and one-day cricket improve. I think there's still a place for all these competitions to survive and prosper. But at some point, cannibalisation will happen. We can't expect every cricket game, whether a Test match, one-day international or T20, to be at its optimum all the time. I feel for one-day cricket because it's generally played around T20 tournaments. Fans want to watch T20s more than the one-day game now, so the one-day game suffers. But when we've seen bigger events, like the 50-over World Cup in India, it was an incredible spectacle. I don't want to see that go away. Is it inevitable? Maybe it is, but I'm holding on, hoping it doesn't go that way.

Lalith Kalidas: How has the idea of an ideal auction pick changed since you last played?

There's less focus on just numbers for players. Numbers tell part of the story, but our auction strategy this year was different. We had more spots to fill, building from the ground up with the best experienced Indian players. I watched many videos of young players. What I look for is ball-striking talent, like Priyansh Arya. He's an out-and-out clean ball striker. Technically, he looks a bit unorthodox, but I guarantee he's going to make a serious mark on this IPL. Suryansh (Shedje) is another standout talent. His numbers for Mumbai at the end of the domestic season were outstanding. Since joining us, his ball striking has been elite, as expected. Mumbai Indians have someone like Bevon Jacobs, an unknown player with an X-factor due to his sheer ball striking. And then everyone is exploring different bowling actions and mystery spin. These aspects have evolved over the last 15 years. Our scouts did a terrific job finding these guys and sending videos to me. It doesn't take long for me to assess the quality of bowling, batting and ball striking.

Devendra Pandey: Dhoni batting at No.9, if you were the CSK coach, would you ask him to bat higher? And do you ever see him retiring?

Well, his keeping is not getting any worse, that's for sure; he's not missing many standings against the spinners, as good as ever. Look, you are not going to argue with anything CSK ever do, they are one of the most successful teams in IPL history. They have had consistent coaching for a long time and generally make the right decisions. With the impact player rule now, Dhoni bats after other serious ball strikers within their own right. He's played a slightly diminished role in the last couple of years, just coming in for the last 10-12 balls for a big impact. Dhoni is still dangerous in the IPL. Will he play forever? It might just depend on how this season goes. If he can have a real impact with the bat, he will keep playing. If his batting output drops, he might consider retiring. He's been a terrific player for a long time.

Illustration: Sangeetha Day

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

The share of faculty posts vacant in AIIMS-Delhi

35 In per cent. Responding to a query under the RTI Act, the administrative officer of the faculty cell of AIIMS-Delhi said 430 faculty seats were vacant at the institute against a sanctioned strength of 1,235. There were no recruitments for regular faculty posts in 2020, 2023, 2024. **PH**

The share of bank accounts owned by women in India

39.2 In per cent. According to the latest edition of "Women and Men in India 2024: Selected Indicators and Data" released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, women own 39.2% of bank accounts. The proportion is even higher at 42.2% in rural areas. **PH**

Claimed number of new BJP members in Maharashtra

1.51 crore. At least 1.51 crore people took primary membership of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Maharashtra during a recent campaign, the party's State president Chandrashekhar Bawankule said. Mr. Bawankule was addressing party workers at a function. **PH**

Days for which BJP is protesting against price rise, reservation

16 The Karnataka BJP will launch a 16-day movement against price rise and 4% reservation for Muslims in government contracts. The first phase of the *Janoakasha Yatra* will cover Mysuru, Mandya, Hassan, Kodagu, Mangaluru, Udipi, Chikkamagaluru, Shivamogga and Uttara Kannada. **PH**

Number of people killed due to Israeli strikes on Gaza

15 Israeli strikes on the Gaza Strip killed at least 15 people, including 10 women and children, overnight and into Sunday, according to local health officials. The latest strikes hit a tent and a house in the southern city of Khan Younis. **AP**

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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Can the U.S. President serve a third term?

What does 22nd Amendment to the U.S. Constitution state? How is U.S. President Donald Trump trying to circumvent the 22nd Amendment and serve one more term as President? Are there circumstances through which the U.S. Speaker could become U.S. President? What are the rules in other nations?

EXPLAINER

Kartik Singh

The story so far:

In March 30, the 78-year-old U.S. President Donald Trump said he's "not joking" about serving a third term in the White House. He further claimed that a legal loophole could make it possible.

Does the U.S. Constitution allow it?

The 22nd Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, ratified on February 27, 1951, limits U.S. Presidents to two elected terms. It was brought in response to Franklin D. Roosevelt's unprecedented 'four-term' Presidency (1933-1945), which broke the 'two-term' unwritten precedent set by the nation's first President, George Washington, who voluntarily declined a third term in 1796.

The Amendment prohibits anyone from being elected President more than twice, and if someone has served as President for more than two years of another's term (for example, a Vice President who became President due to the President's death or resignation), they can only be elected once. Thus, effectively, the maximum U.S. Presidential tenure can be 10 years (two years as a successor plus two full terms). For Mr. Trump, elected in 2016 and 2024, the 22nd Amendment unequivocally bars a third term, due to his two elected tenures (2017-2021 and 2025-2029), regardless of their 'non-consecutive' nature.

What is the 'VP loophole'?

Despite the 22nd Amendment's clarity, Mr. Trump has suggested ways to circumvent it. One idea he proposed involves J.D. Vance running for President in 2028 with Mr. Trump as Vice President (VP). If elected, Mr. Vance would resign, allowing Trump to assume the Presidency. However, the 12th Amendment blocks this strategy, stating: "No person constitutionally ineligible to join FREE Telegram Channel <https://t.me/+Bu7enHqQhJODg1>



New rules: A protest against the policies of U.S. President Donald Trump in California, on April 5. **AP**

Join FREE Whatsapp Channel <https://whatsapp.com/channel/0029Van2VRbRGJOKH6oBd0F> the office of President shall be eligible to that of Vice-President of the United States." Since the 22nd Amendment bars Mr. Trump from another term, he cannot serve as VP either.

While the VP route is blocked, another theoretical path exists through 'succession', as explained by Professor Bruce G. Peabody in his paper. The 22nd Amendment prohibits a person from being "elected" to the Presidency more than twice but does not bar "serving" beyond two terms. In other words, a twice-elected President could ascend to the Oval Office via the line of succession, such as by becoming Speaker of the House, who is elected by members of the House and need not himself be a member of Congress, if the President and VP become unavailable.

A third pathway – repealing the 22nd

Amendment – is highly unlikely. Under Article V, this requires either a two-thirds vote in both the House and the Senate or a 'constitutional convention' – a process never used – called for by two-thirds (34) of State legislatures, followed by ratification by three-fourths (38) of the 50 States. Given the current U.S. political landscape, the likelihood of Mr. Trump securing a constitutional amendment, which has not been done in the past 33 years, is virtually non-existent.

Which world leaders have extended their tenure?

Leaders all over the world have skillfully extended their rule by reshaping constitutional limits. For instance, Vladimir Putin, after two terms as Russia's President (2000-2008), hit the 'consecutive' two-term limit under Article

81(3) of the 1993 Constitution. To circumvent this limit, he then became Prime Minister (2008-2012) as his ally Dmitry Medvedev took the Presidency and extended the Presidential term from four to six years. Returning as President in 2012 and 2018, Mr. Putin, with a 2020 amendment backed by a loyal Duma and judiciary, reset his term count, potentially holding power until 2036.

Türkiye's Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Prime Minister (2003-2014), turned President, axed term limits via a 2017 referendum, and reshaped Türkiye's system into a Presidential one. Similarly, China's Xi Jinping eliminated the two-term cap in 2018. This change allowed Mr. Xi to rule indefinitely, cementing his hold over the party and the State.

Yet, some leaders thrive without rewriting the rules. In Germany, where chancellors face no 'term limits' but need 'Parliamentary support', Angela Merkel ruled for 16 years. Similarly, Prime Ministers in Canada and Britain, unbound by fixed terms, can lead indefinitely, sustained by 'party confidence'.

Why doesn't India have term limits?

Unlike the U.S. Presidential framework, India's Parliamentary system imposes no term limits on its Prime Minister, as tenure depends on retaining the Lok Sabha's confidence (Article 75(3)). This design ensures 'voter sovereignty', 'democratic flexibility', and 'parliamentary accountability', allowing leaders who sustain public trust to serve extended periods. For instance, current Prime Minister Narendra Modi could serve 15 years by 2029. However, the system also includes checks like the "no-confidence" motion, which has historically ended tenures – such as those of V.P. Singh (1990), H.D. Deve Gowda (1997) and Atal Bihari Vajpayee (1999). Moreover, regular elections, coalition dynamics, floor debates, judicial oversight, and a free press ensure a robust democratic balance.

Kartik Singh is a final year student at RGNUL, Patiala, Punjab.

THE GIST

▼ The 22nd Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, ratified on February 27, 1951, limits U.S. Presidents to two elected terms.

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Why were students protesting over Kancha Gachibowli?

What is the ownership status of the 400-acre land parcel known as Kancha Gachibowli? Why did the government decide to auction the land? Why were environmentalists worried?

Swathi Vadlamudi

The story so far:

The students of the University of Hyderabad at Gachibowli have been protesting ever since the news of the auction of a 400-acre land parcel known as Kancha Gachibowli within campus premises broke. The battle has now reached the Supreme Court, which has acknowledged the destruction of greenery and the existence of wildlife in the area, before taking it up *suo motu*. Three PILs have already been filed in the Telangana High Court against the auction.

Why were there protests?

Students state that the land is part of the university, a claim which has been vehemently denied by the government. The land was part of the 2,324 acres granted to the University of Hyderabad at

the time of its establishment in 1974, as part of the six-point formula proposed by the then Congress government to assuage regional sentiments stoked by the Telangana movement of 1969. However, the land allocation was not formalised through title transfer. Subsequently, large tracts of land, unused by the university, were taken up by the government for various purposes including establishing the Indian Institute of Information Technology, the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, and the Sports Authority of Andhra Pradesh to name a few. By 2010, more than 800 acres of land was taken away in 22 such instances.

What do documents say?

The 400 acres of land which is now under conflict was part of such diversions in 2004, under the then Telegu Desam Party (TDP) government. An MoU was signed with the University of Hyderabad, for the

transfer of 534 acres, in lieu of 396 acres allocated at another location. The land formed part of 850 acres allocated to IMG Academies Bharata for developing sports facilities. A sale deed was subsequently signed, just before Legislative Assembly elections in which the TDP was routed by the Congress. After winning the elections, the then Chief Minister cancelled the land transfer, leading to a long drawn out legal battle. The top court dismissed the Special Leave Petition, allowing the present government under Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy to take up the land.

What are environmentalists saying?

Undisturbed for more than 20 years, the land has become home to a rich variety of native flora and fauna. Several migratory birds also visit the area. A recent compendium of biodiversity collated from the campus mentions 233 bird species, which is higher than the avian numbers in

the KBR National Park and the Mrugavani National Park. It also cited *Murricia hyderabadensis*, a unique spider, which is endemic to the Kancha Gachibowli forest, and found nowhere else. The document also lists at least three reptiles, and 27 bird species which are mentioned in Schedule-I of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, indicating their vulnerability and need for highest protection, besides 72 species of tree diversity.

Why did the govt. decide to auction?

The Congress government in the Joint State of Andhra Pradesh under the leadership of Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy was the first to begin the monetisation of government lands through open auctions, which was decried and denounced by many concerned citizens and political parties. However, such auctions have become the unstated State policy of all subsequent governments in Telangana, irrespective of the party in power.

The Congress party, which won the 2023 assembly elections inherited a State debt of nearly ₹4 lakh crore, which is set to cross ₹5 lakh crore by the end of FY 2025-26. Mr. Reddy's recent admission that he had no funds for capital expenditure reflects the true state of State coffers. The judgement about the ownership Kancha gachibowli came just in time as a respite for the government, which decided to garner funds for welfare measures through auctioning the land.

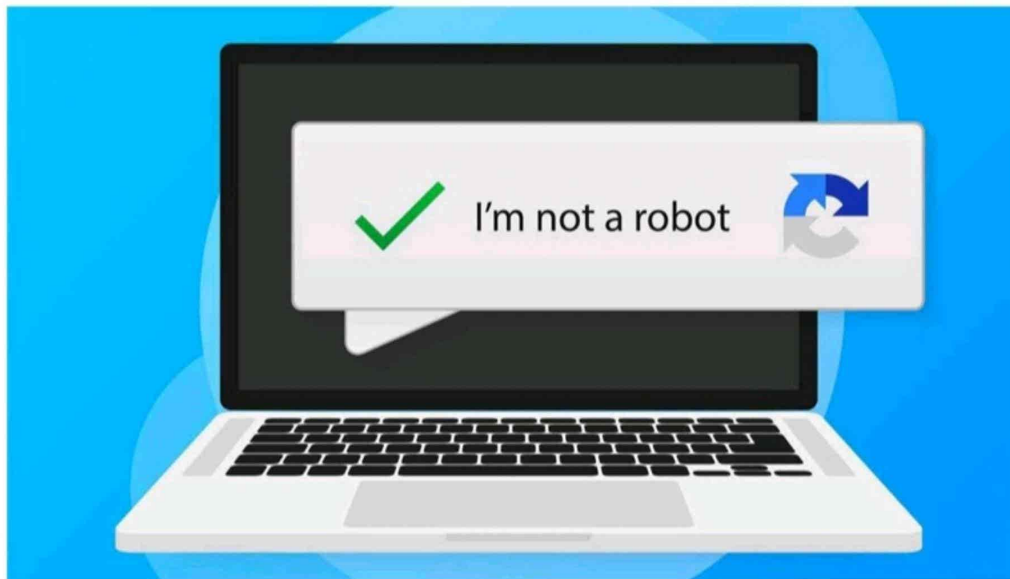
THE GIST

▼ The students of the University of Hyderabad at Gachibowli have been protesting ever since the news of the auction of a 400-acre land parcel known as Kancha Gachibowli within campus premises broke.

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BUILDING BLOCKS



ISTOCKPHOTO

CAPTCHA: a digital border between humans and bots

CAPTCHA has changed the way websites keep user accounts safe and their data protected. From simple text-based challenges to the advanced reCAPTCHA systems we use today, CAPTCHA has made a big difference in online security

John Xavier

In the ever-changing world of Internet technology, keeping users safe and verifying their identities is important. One of the most important security systems for this is CAPTCHA (Completely Automated Public Turing test to tell Computers and Humans Apart). It's like a puzzle that is easy for us to solve but hard for machines.

CAPTCHA was introduced in the early 2000s when the internet was flooded with automated bots. These bots made fake accounts, spammed websites, and stole data. Computer scientists Luis von Ahn, Manuel Blum, Nicholas J. Hopper, and John Langford wanted to create a system that could tell humans from machines, even as bots got smarter and more advanced.

In 2003, von Ahn and his team filed the first patent for CAPTCHA. Back then, users had to solve distorted text or characters that bots struggled to understand. These challenges often involved recognising letters, numbers, or symbols that were deliberately messed up so that machines couldn't parse them but humans could.

CAPTCHA helps keep websites safe from automated attacks and makes online services more user-friendly. The challenge was simple, but its impact was huge. It stopped bots from getting into users' sensitive data.

How does CAPTCHA work?

CAPTCHA is a clever way to tell if you're a real person or a robot. It's like a brain teaser that only humans can solve.

Imagine you're trying to figure out what's written in a distorted picture. It's tricky for computers, but it's easy for us. Over time, CAPTCHA has gotten smarter and started to include other challenges to verify humans. Now, you might have to pick an image with a specific object in it, like a car or a traffic light. These challenges are even harder for computers/bots to solve.

CAPTCHA is based on an idea called the Turing test. This was proposed by British mathematician Alan Turing back in the 1950s. The idea was to create a test that could tell if a machine could act like a human. CAPTCHA does just that by making sure that tasks are easy for humans but hard for computers.

How has CAPTCHA changed over time?

At first, CAPTCHA mostly used distorted text to check if a user is a real person. But as computers got better and bots became more advanced, CAPTCHA had to adapt. Now, it has a variety of different challenges to keep us safe.

In 2009, a new way to check if you're a real person called reCAPTCHA came along. It used words from scanned books to verify users. This was a new idea as it not only stopped bots from taking over, but it also helped digitise printed texts. When you solved a reCAPTCHA challenge, you were actually helping to digitise books by typing out words that the computer couldn't recognise. This idea showed how users could come together to help improve digitisation of the world's books.

As CAPTCHA got better, more

advanced versions came out. In 2014, Google introduced 'Invisible reCAPTCHA', which used users' mouse movements to tell if they were human. It was designed to be less annoying while still stopping bot attacks. Today, CAPTCHA is still very important for keeping the internet safe, but it's part of a bigger set of security tools.

How does CAPTCHA help keep the internet safe?

CAPTCHA is everywhere on the internet, used in many different places. Businesses and organisations use CAPTCHA to protect themselves from bots. Business websites use CAPTCHA in contact forms, comment sections, and registration pages to stop bots from spamming. This ensures that only real people can submit forms or leave comments. Many financial and e-commerce websites use this verification technique as an extra layer of security when users sign up for an account, log in, or make a purchase. It helps stop automated bots from stealing credit cards or their personal data.

Another way to think of CAPTCHA is like a secret code that helps keep a user's accounts safe. It's used when they want to recover their accounts, making sure only real people can take control, not bots. It's also used in online surveys and polls, where bots can sometimes try to trick websites. CAPTCHA helps make sure the results are from real people, not bots.

However, even though CAPTCHA is great, it's not perfect.

What are its limitations?

CAPTCHA is everywhere, but it has some

downsides. As bots get smarter, they can sometimes trick CAPTCHA. And for people with disabilities, like those who are blind, CAPTCHA can be a real challenge. Even with audio CAPTCHA, it can be hard for people with hearing problems.

While CAPTCHA is great at stopping bots, it does add an extra step to our interactions with websites. This extra step can be annoying, especially on mobile devices, where completing CAPTCHA can be a pain and take a long time. Some CAPTCHA tests can also be really tough, and make people frustrated. If the characters are hard to see or the instructions are unclear, it can be hard for people to finish the task. This can scare away people who just want to use the website.

Moreover, as bots get better, they can sometimes bypass even the best CAPTCHA systems. Machine learning algorithms are getting better at solving complex CAPTCHA, and many websites are using even more complicated verification methods to stay ahead.

What lies ahead?

CAPTCHA has changed the way websites keep user accounts safe and their data protected. From simple text-based challenges to the advanced reCAPTCHA systems we use today, CAPTCHA has made a big difference in online security. But as bots keep getting smarter and people have different expectations, CAPTCHA needs to figure out how to be more accessible and easier to use for humans, and effective to stay important in the world of digital security.



KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

Stop playing possum and do your work!

I am not on speaking terms with her ever since that incident where she lied to me

S. Upendran

What is the meaning of 'play possum'? (Ajay Kumar, Bengaluru) 'Possum' consists of two syllables; the vowel in the first, sounds like the 'o' in 'pot', 'not' and 'cot', while the vowel in the second, is like the 'a' in 'china'. The word is pronounced 'PO-səm' with the stress on the first syllable. A possum is a nocturnal animal found mostly in America. It is slow moving, and whenever it senses the presence of a predator nearby, instead of running away, it lies down and pretends to be dead. To ensure that the predator believes that it is dead, the possum emits a foul smell. It does all this in the hope that the predator loses interest in the foul-smelling carcass, and just moves on.

It is not just the possum which plays possum, even we human beings do so every now and then. For example, when someone that you do not like rings the doorbell, what do you do? Usually, you keep quiet, you do not open the door. You hope that the person goes away. Another way of playing possum is by pretending to be asleep. Nowadays, the expression is used to mean 'pretending not to understand'. When you play possum, you use all kinds of tricks in the hope that people will leave you alone.

Stop playing possum. We know that you're a fluent speaker of English.

Is it okay to say, 'I'm not on talking terms with Sneha'? (Satyam Singh)

Everyone in India will understand what it is you are trying to say – chances are, a native speaker of English will not have a problem either. But the expression 'talking terms' is Indian; a native speaker would say, 'speaking terms'. When you say that you are not on speaking terms with Sneha, you mean you are not on friendly terms with her. As a result, the two of you do not talk to each other. The opposite is 'be on speaking terms'.

I have not been on speaking terms with him for over 20 years now.

How is the word 'adolescent' pronounced? (Ankit, Mumbai)

The word has four syllables; the 'o' and the final 'e' are pronounced like the 'a' in 'china'. The 'a' in the first syllable sounds like the 'a' in 'cat', 'bat' and 'hat'; while the 'e' in the third is like the 'e' in 'set', 'bet' and 'yet'. The word is pronounced 'a-de-LES-ent' with the stress on the third syllable. It comes from the Latin 'adolescens' meaning young man or woman. Nowadays, the word is mostly used to refer to the stage between childhood and adulthood – one's teenage years are frequently referred to as the adolescent years/period.

When you use the word to refer to an adult, what you are suggesting is that the individual's behaviour is rather immature – the person is behaving rather childishly. upendranke@gmail.com

THE DAILY QUIZ

A quiz on the famous poet William Wordsworth on his 255th birth anniversary

V.V. Ramanan

QUESTION 1

Apart from Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who is part of the 'Lake Poets' trinity?

QUESTION 2

Name Wordsworth's semi-autobiographical magnum opus, published posthumously, that contains 14 books and traces the 'growth of a poet's mind'.

QUESTION 3

In which famous poem does the line 'The Child is father of the Man' feature?

feature?

QUESTION 4

Which denomination of the British banknote featured the famous poet's likeness?

QUESTION 5

In which language is the *The Solitary Reaper*, a poem published in 1807, singing a plaintive song?

QUESTION 6

Which celebrated poem came about after a walking tour with his sister Dorothy in the Wye Valley on July 13, 1798?

QUESTION 7

The name of which celebrated poet, whom Wordsworth admired, begins the sonnet 'London, 1802'?



Visual question:

Name this national flower of Wales about which Wordsworth wrote one of his most celebrated poems. WIKIPEDIA COMMONS

Questions and Answers to the April 4 edition of the daily quiz:

1. The construction of the ... in 1961 tested the strength of the alliance between European countries and the U.S. **Ans: Berlin Wall**
2. One of NATO's more controversial actions was its bombing of the Federal Republic of X in 1999, with heavy civilian casualties. **Ans: Yugoslavia**
3. A specific event in the early 2000s, known popularly as X, caused NATO to invoke Article 5 of its charter for the first and so far the last time in its history. Article 5 defines Y. **Ans: X = 9/11 attacks; Y = casus foederis**
4. In 2012, the prime minister of which country considered invoking NATO's Article 5 owing to spillover of conflict from the Syrian civil war. **Ans: Turkey**
5. Name the country that, while being a founding member of NATO, disallows permanent peacetime bases and nuclear warheads on its territory. **Ans: Denmark**
- Visual: Identify this Roman historian. **Ans: Sallust**
- Early Birds: Nobody got all the answers correct.

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

Word of the day

Flaxen:

of hair color; pale yellowish to yellowish brown

Synonym: sandy

Usage: With her flaxen hair and green eyes, she looks exactly like her mother.

Pronunciation: newsth.live/flaxenpro

International Phonetic

Alphabet: /f.læksən/

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

West Africa chimps are losing their culture, in another human legacy

In new research, scientists reported four dialects that male wild chimpanzees use in the Tai National Park to find mates. But after documenting the chimpanzees' lives for more than a generation, the scientists also reported these apes are 'forgetting' parts of the dialect thanks to human influences

Madhurima Pattanayak

Culture is what we learn from others and pass on to successive generations by practising it over and over. Scientists have found cultural traditions among humans as well as animals, the latter in the way they forage, socialise, use tools, care for themselves, and mate.

Among these traditions, the characteristic patterns of behaviour that involve communication are called dialects.

In new research published in the journal *Cell*, scientists with the Tai Chimpanzee Project in West Africa reported four dialects that male wild chimpanzees (*Pan troglodytes verus*) use in the Tai National Park to find mates to copulate with.

Unfortunately, after documenting the chimpanzees' lives for more than a generation, the scientists also reported these apes are 'forgetting' parts of the dialect thanks to human influences.

"Cultural behaviours are crucial for survival," Catherine Crookford, a scientist leading the project and researcher at the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, Germany, and ISC Marc Jeannerod, France, said.

"Illegal hunting or logging may not only be killing individual chimpanzees but also destroying their cultures, which could threaten the survival of the remaining chimpanzees." Chimpanzees are also poached for use as pets or for bushmeat.

'Secretly ask females for sex'

Researchers once believed culture separated humans from other animals. But in the last seven decades, research has revealed cultural practices in many animals. Even so, community-specific dialects in non-human primates such as chimpanzees, orangutans, and bonobos have been rare.

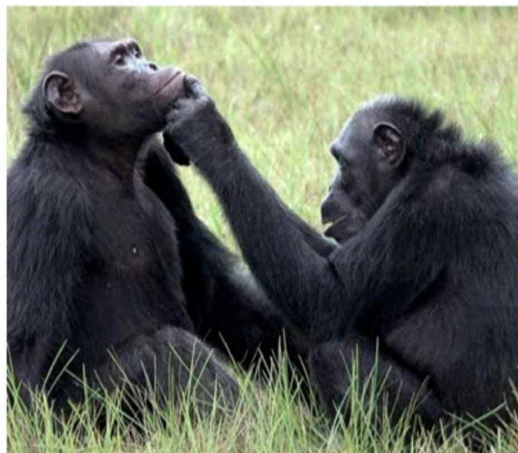
The scientists with the Tai Chimpanzee Project reported four distinct types of dialects that male West Africa chimpanzees used to find mates: heel-kick, knuckle-knock, leaf-clip, and branch-shake.

In a heel-kick, the chimpanzees lifted their feet and kicked against a hard surface to make noise. The knuckle-knock involved repeatedly, but somewhat quietly, knocking their knuckles against hard surfaces.

Likewise, in the leaf-clip, chimpanzees bite a leaf and strip it into pieces without eating it, creating a ripping sound. The branch-shake is self-explanatory.

"It is amusing to watch how young subordinate males try to secretly ask

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A female chimpanzee grooms an adult male in Loango National Park, Gabon. West African chimpanzees are a subspecies found in western Africa, including Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Guinea-Bissau, and Ghana. AFP Join FREE Whatsapp Channel <https://whatsapp.com/channel/0029Vn2VRb6RGJOKH6oBd0F>

females for sex without the dominant males knowing," Ms. Crookford said.

"This is the main function of these more subtle gestures".

The team documented heel-kicks among the North, South, Northeast, and East chimpanzee communities; knuckle-knocking in the Northeast community; and leaf-clip and branch-shake among the North, South, and Northeast communities.

A dangerous demographic shift

The knuckle-knock gesture is restricted to the Northeast community. It was previously among adult males of the North community as well, but since 1999, it has suffered significant population loss.

The problem became so bad that between 2004 and 2011, the North group didn't have two adult males existing at the same time. Put another way, any adult male didn't have to compete with other adult males and thus had no use for the knuckle-knock dialect.

Researchers understand that demography plays a crucial role in shaping culture and keeping it alive across generations. A systematic data collection effort concluded in 2019 that no members of the North group had used knuckle-knock in 20 years.

Significant changes in a population, in this case the near-complete loss of an entire demographic (adult males), can



Cultures emerge over generations. Cultural behaviours — such as the use of specialised toolkits, nut-cracking with stone hammers or digging out underground bee nests with different-sized sticks — are crucial for survival

thus have a long-lasting impact on the preservation or loss of cultural traditions. Restoring them isn't easy. For example, with the help of ecologists and the Côte d'Ivoire government, the North group has had four adult males since 2016 but the knuckle-knock gesture hasn't reemerged among them.

"While establishing absence is challenging, our observations demonstrate a shift away from knuckle-knock gesture usage," the researchers wrote in their paper.

Their own language

To further understand the origins of the chimpanzees' culture, the team compared mating solicitation gestures involving the use of tools between Tai chimpanzees and Sonso chimpanzees at the Budongo Forest Reserve in Uganda.

Whereas the Tai chimpanzees preferred

the knuckle-knock, the Sonso chimpanzees used the object-slap: moving the arm from the shoulder to slap an object with an open palm.

Likewise, the Sonso chimpanzees frequently used leaf-clipping to express their interest in mating but the Tai chimpanzees didn't.

Chimpanzees have genetically inherited certain gestures across subspecies but individuals have been known to express only a subset. But within a closed group, multiple individuals use the same set of gestures over time and can even differ from the gestures used in a neighbouring group.

The Budongo Forest Reserve is about 4,160 km from the habitat of the Tai chimpanzees of Côte d'Ivoire. "We can rule out that the different signals used in each community have a genetic origin. Given they live in a similar forest environment, we can also rule out environmental influences on culture," Ms. Crookford said.

"This leaves us with the most likely option: that different signals in neighbouring communities arise through social learning."

Bringing conservation to culture

"Cultures emerge over generations. Cultural behaviours — such as the use of specialised toolkits, nut-cracking with stone hammers or digging out underground bee nests with different-sized sticks — are crucial for survival," Ms. Crookford said.

According to her, the preservation of animal culture is a relatively new concept. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) recently included it among the metrics it uses to prepare its 'Red List of Endangered Species'. The message seems to be that chimpanzees should be protected as well as their cultures.

But the IUCN's job isn't done. In a November 2024 paper in *Science*, researchers reported that the deaths of a species' elders are disproportionately more harmful than the deaths of other members.

This is because the elders possess important cultural knowledge: where to find the best watering holes in particular weather, the ways to respond to different predators, caring for the young when the parents can't, and so on.

One of the authors of this study wrote then that the "loss of old individuals is not yet recognised by the IUCN as a means of listing threatened species."

(Madhurima Pattanayak is a freelance science writer and journalist based in Kolkata. madhurima.pattanayak@gmail.com)

THE GIST

Cultural behaviours are crucial for survival. Illegal hunting or logging may not only be killing chimpanzees but also destroying their cultures, which could threaten the survival of the remaining chimpanzees

Researchers once believed culture separated humans from other animals. But research has revealed cultural practices in many animals. Even so, community-specific dialects in non-human primates such as chimpanzees, orangutans, and bonobos have been rare

A study concluded in 2019 that no members of a chimpanzee group being studied had used knuckle-knock — a typical mating behaviour in 20 years. This was due to the near-complete loss of adult males in the community

BIG SHOT



Scientists perform a necropsy on a baby mammoth at the North-Eastern Federal University in Yakutsk, Russia, on March 27. The carcass was dug up in 2024 in icy Yakutia. It weighs 180 kg, is 120 cm tall and 200 cm long. They found it lived and died more than 130,000 years ago after analysing the permafrost where she was found. AFP

WHAT IS IT?

Hadean protocrust: hot and hellish

The Hindu Bureau

The Hadean protocrust is the name for the earth's crust — its outermost layer — when it first formed. The 'Hadean' prefix refers to the planet's first geologic eon. At this time, within 200 million years of its genesis, the earth's surface was partially molten and almost constantly bombarded by rocks from space. As many volcanoes also raged, the surface was very hot and hellish.

As parts of the magma ocean cooled, the first pieces of the crust began to take shape. It was still somewhat flaky, with some parts sloughing off and new parts solidifying. The thicker parts of the crust slowly formed the first continents, which moved like plates on the asthenospheric mantle, a layer of hot, gooey rock going 400 km down.

The plates soon began drifting into each other, sometimes sliding over, sometimes diving under. Such plate tectonics have left unique chemical signatures in the crust over millennia. In fact, scientists have understood the history of plate tectonics by studying these signatures.



A representative illustration of the earth's Hadean protocrust as it took shape. IMAGE CREATED WITH CHATGPT

A new study by an international team of researchers led by Macquarie University in Australia has now called this assumption into question. The researchers have reported that the signatures scientists have associated with plate tectonics actually existed in the Hadean protocrust, before the plates began to subduct, calling an important tenet of geology into question.

The study, which used a combination of models and lab studies, will have to be validated by independent research.

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

Bridging gaps, building resilience

World Health Day, celebrated on April 7, serves as a global call to action for accessible and fair healthcare. The theme for 2025, 'Healthy Beginnings, Hopeful Futures', emphasises the critical role of maternal and newborn health, a particularly pertinent issue for India, which has a population exceeding 1.4 billion. India has made notable progress through programmes such as Ayushman Bharat, especially the Pradhan Mantri-Jan Arogya Yojana, which offers financial protection to more than 500 million beneficiaries. Health and Wellness Centres are designed to improve primary care, yet challenges such as staff shortages, inadequate diagnostic facilities, and irregular medicine supplies continue to exist. Although 70% of the population resides in rural areas, 35-40% of healthcare infrastructure is located there. To address disparities, India needs to invest more in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities and encourage medical professionals to work in underserved regions. Policy support, enhanced infrastructure, and digital innovations like telemedicine are crucial for decentralising healthcare services.

Addressing disease burden
India faces a dual burden of persistent infectious diseases and rising non-communicable diseases, which now account for over 65% of all deaths. Sedentary lifestyles, poor diets, and tobacco use are driving conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, and cancer. The 2024 International Diabetes Federation reported 101 million Indians with diabetes. Air pollution accounted for 1.6 million deaths in 2019, according to *The Lancet*, further underscoring the urgency of environmental health measures. According to NFHS-5, 35% of children under five are stunted, and 57% of women aged 15-49 are anemic. These indicators reflect broader socioeconomic challenges – poverty, lack of



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A cohesive, inclusive, and well-funded health system is essential for achieving developed nation status

education, poor sanitation, and gender inequality. Government efforts such as Poshan Abhiyaan and the Integrated Child Development Services target malnutrition but require stronger data tracking, community engagement, and multi-sectoral coordination to be truly effective. While there has been progress, public health funding is still low. In the 2025-26 Union Budget, ₹99,858.56 crore (1.97% of the total Budget) was allocated to the Health Ministry. Moreover, high out-of-pocket spending continues to push 55 million Indians into poverty each year. A shift towards preventive healthcare – through screenings, school-based health programmes, and public health campaigns – is essential.

Harnessing digital health
India is experiencing significant progress in the realm of digital health. Programmes such as the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission and eSanjeevani have collectively facilitated over 10 crore teleconsultations. Nonetheless, the advantages of digital healthcare are not evenly spread. A mere 37% of rural households have internet connectivity, and numerous patients and healthcare workers lack the digital skills necessary to effectively use telehealth services. If this digital divide is not addressed, technology could exacerbate healthcare disparities. Additionally, concerns about cybersecurity and the lack of strong data privacy laws might undermine public confidence. To fully realise the potential of digital health, India needs to invest in rural internet infrastructure, provide training for front line workers, and implement comprehensive data protection regulations. Emerging technologies such as AI diagnostics, wearables, and remote monitoring hold

transformative promise for early detection and disease management. These innovations must be adopted in a responsible and inclusive manner, ensuring that they benefit all communities, not just those in urban areas with tech-savvy populations.



Building resilience
India's health objectives are in line with Sustainable Development Goal 3, which emphasises good health and well-being. Developed nations focus on public health infrastructure, universal

insurance, and early childhood interventions – areas where India needs to make rapid progress. By capitalising on its youthful population, digital infrastructure, and pharmaceutical sector, India has the potential to emerge as a global health leader. India's G20 presidency in 2023 served as a platform to demonstrate leadership in vaccine equity, digital public goods, and health diplomacy. Aligning domestic initiatives with global frameworks such as the International Health Regulations and the Global Health Security Agenda will bolster pandemic preparedness and international collaboration. Mental health and climate resilience are equally pressing issues. The Tele-MANAS helpline and the National Action Plan on Climate Change and Health are worthy initiatives.

However, a 2023 NIMHANS study revealed that 14% of Indians suffer from some form of mental disorder, underscoring the need for increased investment and awareness. India must perceive health not merely as a social obligation but as a strategic investment. A cohesive, inclusive, and well-funded health system – rooted in innovation, equity, and resilience – is essential for achieving developed nation status. Through coordinated efforts across government, civil society, and private sectors, India can fulfil its vision of 'Health for All'.

A paradigm shift in mental health policy

Institutional responses to suicides are often individualistic and reductionist

Sudarshan R. Kottai

On March 24, the Supreme Court of India formed a National Task Force to prevent the increasing deaths by suicide of students on campuses. It also directed the Delhi Police to register an FIR on the complaints of the family members of two students who had died by suicide while studying at IIT Delhi in 2023. That year, following a spate of deaths by suicide, the IIT Council led by the Education Minister directed IITs to ensure 'zero tolerance' to discrimination and provide a robust support system to students.

The institutional response to suicide is often individualistic and reductionist – it is almost always to appoint more psychologists on campuses. The socio-structural determinants of mental health, such as discrimination and biased institutional policies, are almost always left unattended. Even though counselling centres are active at all IITs, with the goals ranging from "creating a suicide-free campus", "creating a stigma-free and empathetic environment for issues related to mental health" to "creating a campus conducive to happiness and peace of mind for its residents", psychologists refrain from calling attention to the biased institutional policies that impact mental health.

For example, none of the official websites of the counselling centres at the 23 IITs employ the phrase "queer affirmative" or use trans-inclusive personal gender pronouns. Language is not just a collection of words; it is action. Gender identities, sexualities, and inclusive practices are areas of human experience and action in which language, knowledge,

and power intertwine. The way language is employed strongly influences thinking, which, in turn, affects the way people act, bringing power in to the equation.

The gender-sexuality exclusionary language points towards non-compliance with the existing legal frameworks and Supreme Court rulings. For example, official forms where gender by default has only two options – male and female – violates equal rights for representation of gender non-binary people that was granted by the Supreme Court in the 2014 NALSA judgment. In 2023, the Supreme Court launched the Handbook on Combating Gender Stereotypes, recognising the need to use unbiased language, which not only reflects the judge's interpretation of the law, but also their perception of society.

Research has shown that pronouns are crucial linguistic resources for supporting trans and non-binary students and suggests strategies for a trans-affirming pedagogy such as collecting pronoun information and dealing with pronoun misuse. The deployment of gender pronouns signals identity-safety and promotes the perception that the institution is procedurally fair for sexual and gender diverse people. Using gender-inclusive pronouns and establishing inclusive frameworks and anti-discrimination policies are preventive public mental health care interventions that need to be prioritised as they de-escalate mental distress.

Teachers talk only about grades. A grade is the parameter by which students are judged as good or bad," a student said. This is antithetical

to the ethic of care that honours and respects the value of just being human. The objective of the classroom should not only be confined to producing intellectual scholarship but also to cultivating compassionate, non-judgemental, and empathetic communities.

Fragile attendance policies implemented idiosyncratically by teachers pose serious challenges to mental health. In order to cultivate cultural safety and empathy in the classroom, it is important that teachers and students interact regularly. In the classroom, institutional discrimination and its fatal mental health impact, classrooms are to be nurtured as safe, kind, and democratic spaces. The current policies on mental health, limited to increasing mental health services, need a paradigm shift to a bottom-up approach focused on the classroom that maps various experiences and nurtures sensitivity to contexts and diversities. Teachers are pivotal in this regard.

It is a major crisis in public mental health ethics that psychologists align with counter therapeutic institutional policies that violate existing constitutional and documentary safeguards. Counselling centres have to mobilise all possible resources at multiple levels so that care becomes the central value. Similarly, embedding ethics of care into institutional policies to respond to avoidable mental distress to make every human life meaningful is more important than landing a human on the moon.

Sudarshan R. Kottai is Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Palakkad

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Three billion people cannot afford a healthy diet

A healthy, nutritious diet is much more expensive than a calorie sufficient one. As a result, three billion people cannot afford a healthy diet

DATA POINT

Hannah Ritchie & Pablo Rosado

A healthy diet is about much more than calories: we need a wide range of nutrient-dense foods to get all the vitamins and minerals that are essential for good health. In this piece, we look at the costs of diets around the world. Healthy diets are expensive – more than four times the cost of a basic, calorie-sufficient one. This is true in every country in the world. As a result, three billion people cannot afford a healthy diet, even if they spend most of their income on food.

Being able to eat a healthy, nutritious diet is one of our most basic human needs. Yet billions of people go without it; they suffer from 'hidden hunger', micronutrient deficiencies such as too little iron, calcium, vitamin A, or iodine.

There are many reasons why someone might not eat a nutritious diet. Often it's because people cannot afford to. First, consider the most basic requirement: getting enough calories. These could come in any form, but the cheapest option in most countries is starchy foods and cereals. Living on this 'energy sufficient' diet would mean eating only maize flour or rice for every meal, a diet that is severely lacking all other important nutrients. In terms of diets in poor countries, people get most of their calories from starchy foods.

A person can eat an energy sufficient diet on less than \$1 a day, as per a study for the Food and Agricultural Organization's 'The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World' report. What does this mean for the affordability of a calorie sufficient diet? A diet is considered 'unaffordable' when the diet cost plus expenditures for basic non-food needs are higher than incomes per person. In each country, food prices were measured at retail marketplaces specific to the local context. Non-food expenses

in each country are estimated by looking at how much low-income people typically spend on things like housing and transportation.

By comparing the cost of diets with income distributions across the world, researchers estimated that 1.1 billion people could not afford the most basic energy sufficient diet in 2021 (Map 1). That's 14% of the global population. These are the very worst-off in terms of nutrition.

An important question is how subsistence farmers fit in. They are included in these numbers: the income measure used to calculate the affordability of diets does take the value of subsistence farming (i.e. home production) into account. When the FAO report states that these smallholder farmers cannot afford a calorie-sufficient diet, it means they cannot produce one.

What people really need is a diverse and nutritious diet. Getting enough calories is important, but it is not sufficient to live a healthy and productive life. Eating only cereals and starchy foods will leave you deficient in protein, essential fats, and the wide range of micronutrients that our bodies need to function optimally.

Most countries develop 'food-based dietary guidelines' which provide recommendations on what a 'healthy diet' would look like. This includes guidelines on what balance of foods across the major groups – cereals, fruits, vegetables, legumes, meat and dairy – is considered best for long-term health.

The researchers also looked at the lowest-cost options to meet these national food-based dietary guidelines. Of course, there is no universal 'healthy diet', particularly when we consider the strong cultural differences in what people eat. So, the researchers selected dietary guidelines which were regionally representative; this means that we are not expecting

that people in India or Japan will adopt the national dietary guidelines of the U.S., or vice versa.

Unsurprisingly, a diverse, healthy diet is much more expensive than a calorie-sufficient one. The researchers found that the average cost across the world was \$3.67 per day.

When we put these prices in the context of affordability, we find that almost three billion people cannot afford a healthy diet. In many of the world's poorest countries – particularly across Sub-Saharan Africa – it's unaffordable (or not productive) for most of the population. This is shown in Map 2 which gives these figures as a percentage of the total population. In many countries, a healthy diet is out-of-reach for more than 80%.

A useful way to bring context to food prices is to compare the cost of a healthy diet with the median income of countries across the world. In the poorest countries, the cost of a healthy diet is higher than the median income. Even if the average person in these countries spent all of their money on food, a healthy diet would be unaffordable. In some countries – India is the largest among them – dietary costs would be roughly equal to the median income. There, people would need to spend all of their income on food to afford a healthy diet.

In rich countries, median incomes are much higher than dietary costs. In these countries the median income earner can afford a healthy diet with a relatively small fraction of their income. The average person in France could spend just 6% of their income on food and in Denmark, just 5%.

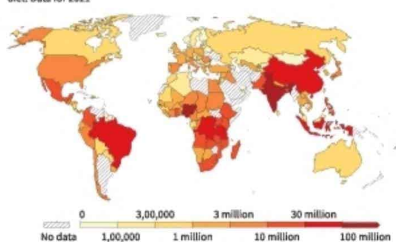
What this comparison shows is how far most of the world is from being able to afford a healthy diet. We cannot spend all, or even most, of our income on food. We would have very little to spend on other essentials.

Two square meals

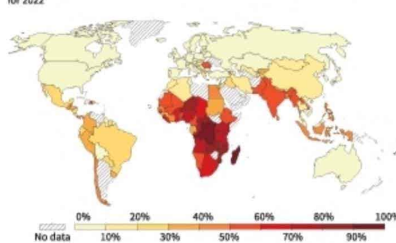
The maps were sourced from Our World in Data. Hannah Ritchie is the Deputy Editor and Pablo Rosado is the Principal Data Scientist at Our World in Data



Map 1: The map shows the number of people who cannot afford a calorie sufficient diet. Data for 2021.



Map 2: The map shows the share of population that cannot afford a healthy diet. Data for 2022.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu.

FIFTY YEARS AGO APRIL 7, 1975

Selective price control on drug formulations suggested

New Delhi, April 6: The Hathi Committee on drugs and pharmaceuticals has recommended a selective price control on drug formulations under a new formula instead of the present price control system which covers each and every formulation.

In its final report presented to the Petroleum and Chemicals Minister, Mr. K.D. Malaviya to-day, the 15-member committee, headed by Mr. Jaishankar Hathi, MP, has recommended lifting of price control on units having an annual turnover of less than Rs. one crore. At present units with an annual turnover of upto Rs. 50 lakhs are exempted from price regulation.

It has further suggested that formulations based on 13 essential drugs as identified by the committee for abolition of brand names should also be exempted from price control. In the case of bulk drugs, the committee has favoured exemption from price control on items in which there are no imports and which in terms of total sales and basic drugs do not exceed Rs. 25 lakhs annually.

In respect of other bulk drugs, the committee has suggested that the system of price regulation based on detailed cost examination should continue, subject to the price being so fixed that an efficient manufacturer is able to get a return on his capital which is a little higher than that available on formulations for the industry as a whole.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO APRIL 7, 1925

Doctors and journalism

The London correspondent of "The Manchester Guardian" writes: I do not think there has been much notice in what the scientific papers call "the lay press" of the interesting compromise which the British Medical Association Council has arrived at on the delicate question of what they call "indirect methods of advertising." In the recent discussion of the B.M.A. the authorities did not go so far as to prohibit doctors from writing in the lay press, but there was a strong deprecation of "undesirable journalistic methods." It was suggested that doctors who write for the papers should make it a condition with the editors that there should be no laudatory comment of their achievements or headlines relating to their professional status, and photographs were gravely disapproved of.

UNMASKING CLIMATE CHANGE DENIAL



**Dr
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Mohapatra**

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Research Associate at
NCAER



CHALLENGES GALORE

In India, the frequency of extreme weather events such as floods, cyclones, and droughts has increased significantly, affecting millions of lives and causing billions of dollars in damages annually. The reality of climate change poses the most fundamental threat facing our planet.

We must unite as a global collective to demand major action now, as our very survival depends on it. The evidence and long-term analysis of the drivers of climate change clearly show the inevitable fate of our planet if we remain passive. While the issues surrounding climate change can be complex and overwhelming, immediate action is imperative.

Despite the visible reality of climate change, many professional "climate deniers" persist in spreading misinformation. Let's contrast several common myths with the scientific reality.

One pervasive myth claims that global warming is a hoax and there is no climate change. Yet, the surface of the Earth, including the atmosphere, oceans, and land, is warming rapidly, accompanied by numerous changes in the climate. In India, average temperatures have risen by around 0.7 degrees Celsius between 1901 and 2018, leading to more intense heatwaves and changing monsoon patterns, which affect millions of people.

Another myth argues that CO₂ is not the cause of climate change. True, the climate has experienced warming periods before, but each instance was driven by excess greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, such as CO₂, methane, and sulfur dioxide. Periods like the Eocene, with very high CO₂ levels, saw landscapes evolve over millions of years, with oceans and forests gradually absorbing these gases to maintain equilibrium. However, sudden spikes in CO₂ from events like volcanic eruptions led to devastation. The end-Permian event, which wiped out over 90% of known species, mirrors the warming and ocean acidity trends we see today, but this time, the CO₂ increase stems from human activities, mainly fossil fuel burning. In India,



Climate-related impacts are often tied to extreme events, not average climate conditions. Small changes in average temperatures can lead to significant increases in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events. In India, even a 2-degree Celsius rise in temperature could result in severe heatwaves, reducing crop yields by up to 25 per cent and threatening food security for millions of people.

CO₂ emissions have grown from 1.2 billion tonnes in 1990 to 2.6 billion tonnes in 2019, largely due to industrial growth and increased energy consumption.

A third myth downplays the significance of a 2- or 3-degree Celsius increase in temperature, suggesting that because we cope with larger daily and seasonal temperature variations, this should be manageable. However, climate-related impacts are often tied to extreme events, not average climate conditions. Small changes in average temperatures can lead to significant increases in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events. In India, even a 2-degree Celsius rise in temperature could result in severe heatwaves, reducing crop yields by up to 25 per cent and threatening food security for millions of people.

Some sceptics argue that cutting greenhouse gas emissions won't significantly affect the climate by 2020 or even 2030, so there is no point in trying. But this is the critical decade for taking effective action to reduce emissions.

Immediate steps are essential to mitigate long-term damage and ensure a livable future. In India, renewable energy capacity has increased significantly, from 39 gigawatts in 2015 to over 136 gigawatts in 2021, showing that proactive measures can make a substantial difference.

Another common myth is that climate change is just natural variability, akin to the Earth's historical cold and warm cycles. However, evidence from basic physics to climate system observations strongly indicates that human activities, particularly the emission of carbon dioxide from burning fossil fuels, are the main drivers of the warming observed since the mid-20th century. In India, the frequency of extreme weather events such as floods, cyclones, and droughts has increased significantly, affecting millions of lives and causing billions of dollars in damages annually.

The reality of climate change poses the most fundamental threat facing our planet. We must unite as a global collective to demand major action now, as

our very survival depends on it. The evidence and long-term analysis of the drivers of climate change clearly show the inevitable fate of our planet if we remain passive. While the issues surrounding climate change can be complex and overwhelming, immediate action is imperative. This is not a localized problem but a global crisis.

The Pentagon has identified climate change as a national security issue, highlighting the urgency of the matter. A staggering 97 per cent of scientists agree that climate change is real and accelerated by human activity. We are on the brink of the largest mass extinction since the disappearance of the dinosaurs, an event that has only occurred five times in the last 500 million years. By 2100, one in six species could go extinct if we do not take action now.

This narrative is not merely a description of long-term climatic trends but a call to understand the dynamics and variations of these changes. Further studies focused on the cause-and-effect relationships are crucial for accurately predicting climate change. Only with such understanding can we hope to address this global challenge effectively.

Our time for complacency has passed. Our survival hinges on immediate, sustained action to combat climate change. The future of our planet and generations to come depends on our response to this urgent crisis. Let's rise to the challenge and secure a livable future for all.

THE VIEWS EXPRESSED BY THE AUTHOR ARE PERSONAL

IN-DEPTH

SUPREME COURT'S WELCOME MOVE ON JUDGES' ASSETS

The Supreme Court's advisory to judges to declare their assets is a positive move towards transparency in the judiciary. At a time when public trust in institutions is under scrutiny after alleged recovery of cash from Justice Yashwant Varma's bungalow, this gesture can help reinforce the integrity of the higher judiciary and set an example for other branches of governance.

However, asset declaration alone may not be enough. The experience with bureaucrats shows that while many do file their disclosures, allegations of benami holdings and disproportionate wealth persist. Without a mechanism for independent verification, such declarations risk becoming token gestures rather than instruments of accountability. Transparency must go hand-in-hand with institutional checks. A periodic audit, a publicly accessible registry, and clear consequences for misreporting could give this initiative real teeth. Judicial accountability is essential in a democracy, and while this move is a step in the right direction, it must be part of a broader effort to uphold public confidence in the judiciary.

CHIMERA OF UNITY IN OPPN CAMP



The recent display of unity by Opposition parties against the Waqf Repeal Bill in Parliament was a significant political moment. Parties with divergent ideological leanings came together to question the manner in which the government attempted to push through legislation that affects minority communities without adequate debate or consultation. Their coordinated stand, particularly in the Rajya Sabha, forced the government to hold back the bill for the time being. This rare alignment suggests that the Opposition is capable of setting aside differences when key constitutional or community interests are at stake.

However, it would be premature to see this as a marker of sustained unity. The Waqf Bill issue presented a clear, emotive, and politically sensitive cause that could easily draw Opposition support. The real challenge will lie in coordinating electoral strategies, seat-sharing agreements, and leadership questions across states where regional aspirations and political compulsions, like in Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, differ widely. The failure of the INDIA bloc to capitalise on the momentum built last year is a reminder that episodic coordination in Parliament does not automatically translate into on-ground unity during elections.

Moreover, voters will look beyond tactical alignments and expect the Opposition to present a coherent alternative vision without a clash of egos. Unity, if not based on shared principles and a compelling narrative, may not yield results. While resistance to a contentious legislation like the waqf bill is important, it must be followed by groundwork, messaging, and trust-building. The real test of Opposition unity will be in the booths, not just in the well of the House.



The failure of the INDIA bloc to capitalise on the momentum built last year is a reminder that episodic coordination in Parliament does not automatically translate into on-ground unity during elections.

TOP TWEETS



Deeply grateful to President Dissanayake, the people and Government of Sri Lanka for the warmth extended during my visit. Be it in Colombo or Anuradhapura, this visit has reaffirmed the deep cultural, spiritual and civilisational ties between our two nations. It will surely add momentum to our bilateral relations. @anuradisnayake.

Narendra Modi
@narendramodi



The Bharatiya Janata Party took forward Integral Humanism and under the leadership of the Honorable Prime Minister Shri @narendramodiji, Antyodaya was taken forward in the form of "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Prayas, Sabka Vishwas".

Jagat Prakash Nadda
@JPNadda

SPIRITUAL SPEAK

Abandon all varieties of religion and just surrender unto Me. I shall deliver you from all sinful reaction. Do not fear.

BHAGWAD GITA



THEIR VIEW

MINT CURATOR

From US tariffs to a trade deal: What are our strategic options?

India should not rush into a pact but instead watch how various scenarios might unfold while accelerating domestic reforms



ARPITA MUKHERJEE
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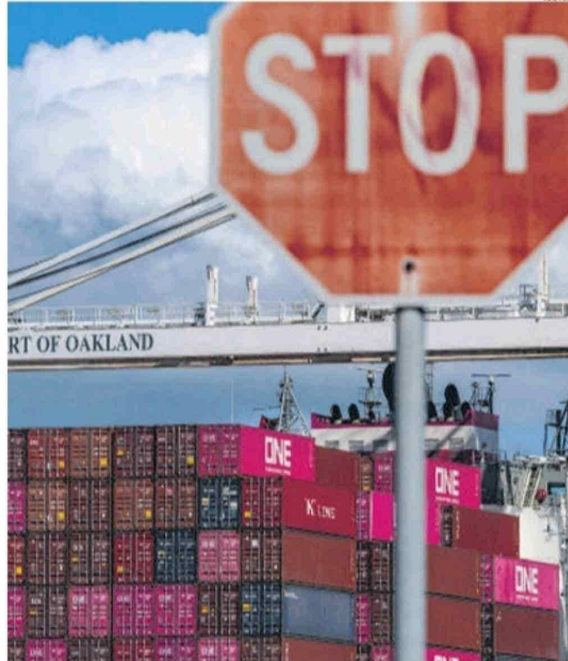
In the India-US Joint Statement of 13 February 2025, both sides set a target of \$500 billion in bilateral trade by 2030. During the visit of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) to New Delhi (26-29 March 2025), the two sides agreed to discuss a mutually beneficial, multi-sector bilateral trade agreement (BTA), with the goal of finalizing its first tranche by the fall of 2025. This announcement came amid some perplexity among Indian policymakers and trade experts, who were busy trying to decipher exactly what US President Donald Trump meant by the "reciprocal tariffs" he had promised to levy. Most experts felt that since India had high tariffs compared to the US, product-specific tariffs in areas of American export interest, along with some kind of tariff equivalent of non-tariff measures imposed by India, may constitute "reciprocal tariffs." If that were so, the USTR's *National Trade Estimate Report on Foreign Trade Barriers* (NTE 2025), would have helped identify US pain points, some of which could be addressed through a BTA.

The 2 April tariff announcements by Trump confused everyone because "reciprocal tariffs" appeared to cover US trade imbalances with other countries rather than their tariff and non-tariff measures. Free trade agreement (FTA) partners of the US, like Vietnam and Japan, faced a high "reciprocal tariff" on account of their positive trade balance with the US. Vietnam faced a reciprocal tariff of 46%, despite its comprehensive agreement with the US, and Japan with a limited trade deal faced 24%. None of America's FTA partners has been spared. So, trade agreements, irrespective of their scope and coverage, do not guarantee trade certainty with the US.

Compared to many other Asian countries, India did much better, faced with a reciprocal tariff rate of 26%, without any trade agreement. Therefore, will a trade deal with the US really help?

The reason that the US targeted its FTA partners with high reciprocal tariffs is its trade imbalance with them. The USTR has come up with a unique formula to calculate reciprocal tariffs, which is tilted towards trade deficits rather than barriers to American exports.

In this situation, even if a developing country like India or Vietnam goes for zero-for-zero import duties for American goods in their FTAs, it may not be able to address its trade gap with the US. How much domestic demand can be generated in a developing country for American products like apples, corn, motorcycles, automobiles, flowers, coffee, raisins, walnuts and alcoholic beverages? On the contrary, if we get zero duty, we can export a lot more products to the US. So, in the case of Vietnam, our trade surplus with the US could enlarge after a BTA. Would that make India a



target for higher reciprocal tariffs in the future?

So far, things have been in our favour. This is primarily because our policymakers have taken the right decisions. With America's growing hostility with China, US companies need a large market, which we offer. But we cannot be relaxed or happy with the 26% tariff announced on 2 April as new sector-specific tariffs may unfold on 9 April.

In any case, will a tariff that is lower than our Asian competitors give us a competitive edge in the US market? There are many scenarios and possibilities. Let us consider four.

Scenario 1: If our price competitiveness *ris-à-vis* competing countries increases on account of lower tariffs, then we can export more to the US, but that could worsen the latter's negative trade balance with us. So, while we may have a short-term gain, in the future, an enlarged trade deficit with the US may engender the risk of higher tariffs imposed on our exports, while our competitors may face lower tariffs as their exports might decline, leading to better balanced trade with the US.

Scenario 2: If both India and the US reduce tariffs to zero, the latter's negative trade balance may remain, or even grow. But if we reduce tariffs for products that are considered sensitive by New Delhi, like dairy items or cotton, there may be a domestic backlash. In such cases, different lobby groups are likely to behave differently. For example, if our import duties on cotton from the US are zero, farmers may be unhappy, but our textile

industry may be happy.

Scenario 3: Companies may start changing their sourcing hubs and making use of trans-shipment hubs. For example, they may export goods through the UAE or Singapore, which face lower tariffs, rather than directly to the US market. So, there could be changes in the way products are routed.

Scenario 4: Some of our competing countries may bring down tariffs to zero for US exports, as Vietnam is reportedly considering, while others, like China and Canada, may impose reciprocal tariffs. Some countries may quietly and smartly subsidize their exports and others may play with exchange rates to absorb the high tariff impact.

All these scenarios may work together and there could be more scenarios that we have not thought about. Therefore, we should not be in a rush to sign a BTA, but wait and watch as the situation unfolds.

This is the right time for India to implement domestic reforms, including lower tariffs, to attract investment and improve industry competitiveness, especially of our micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs). Tariff reductions should be done to support 'Make in India' in general and not to support any specific industry. We should closely monitor what competing countries are doing and how supply chains are changing, even as we diversify and de-risk our own supply chains and continue to smartly engage with the US to ensure some stability and predictability in our bilateral trade in an uncertain situation.

Chinese history shows what a closed economy may result in

The Middle Kingdom erred greatly by giving up on foreign trade



DAVID FICKLING
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From a certain angle, US President Donald Trump's tariff blitz looks like nothing so much as a chronic case of China envy. Look at the losers' list announced last week in the season finale of this all-too-real reality show: Every sign points towards a desire to Make America China Again, from the obsession with trade deficits to the promise to bring back manufacturing jobs from abroad. Think of a continent-sized economy with a persistent trade surplus and a booming factory sector, and the most obvious candidate is China.

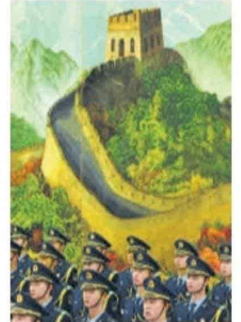
If Trump is borrowing an economic lesson from China, though, it's not the one that drove its economic rise over the past two-and-a-half decades. That episode followed a sharp reduction in trade barriers and decades of reforms to reduce the role of the state and provide a stable investment environment, pretty much the opposite of what the US is doing right now.

Instead, Trump's model could be drawn from an earlier episode: the Ming Dynasty's bans on foreign trade from the 14th century onward. Far from making China great, that isolationist policy paved the way for centuries of decline and eventual humiliation by foreign powers. An America that wasn't able to reverse the curbs on commerce imposed by Trump 1.0 should reflect on how much worse things may get now. The US has imposed a 34% tariff hike on most Chinese products, adding to the 20% tariffs that took effect earlier this year, bringing total levies to at least 54%.

Like 21st century America, 13th century China was one of the world's great powers. The development seafaring around 1,000 CE fostered lively commerce, with Chinese ceramics and textiles traded for Indian and Southeast Asian spices and commodities. The existence of paper money backed by the imperial treasury's reserves of silver, and the development of steelmaking and coal mining, fostered similar conditions to those seen in Britain at the dawn of the Industrial Revolution.

Isolationism put an end to that golden age. For the next five centuries, Chinese governments imposed stricter and stricter controls on foreign trade, blocking ports, banning ship-building and conducting military expeditions against merchants who the government saw as pirates.

The reasons for its *shanghai* (sea ban) policy have long been debated. Perhaps China wanted trade under tighter control, reducing freewheeling commerce with tribute missions. Perhaps it was concerned about silver disappearing into foreign merchants' coffers and undermining the base of its fiat



Ming China lost its economic strength after making a sharp inward turn

money system, risking the hyperinflation that plagued the era. Perhaps it was just about power, with many officials quietly profiting from illegal voyages.

As with Trump's tariffs, the attempt to hold back the economic tide prompted more extreme measures. Consider the biggest victims: Countries like Vietnam, Thailand, Taiwan and Malaysia that had been expanding trade with the US in recent years as back-door conduits to China in response to Trump 1.0's attempt to decouple the two economies. The Ming sea bans, similarly, had limited success in shutting off commerce, prompting ever-more-extreme measures. At its most reactionary, the government depopulated whole swathes of the country's coastal regions.

The effect was devastating. With trade seen as a threat rather than a boon, China found itself cut off from the wider world, and fell further behind. Despite worldly officials and a bustling class of brokers in the few ports where trade was permitted who could see the benefits of trade, the system stayed largely in place until the mid-19th century, when the Opium Wars saw British and other colonial forces forcing its market open.

Nothing of that level is going to happen to the US any time soon. Even so, Trump's measures are world-historical in scale, as they lift tariff barriers to their highest levels since the 19th century, by some estimates. Like China, America is a continental economy that needs the world much less than the world needs it. As a share of gross domestic product, only Cuba, Sudan, Ethiopia, Bermuda and Guam exchange less merchandise with other nations. These measures will be painful for Americans, but even more painful for other nations.

Therein lies the danger. Trade restrictions cushioned Ming China against the shock of its relative decline as the Age of Sail put Europe in control of the world. A similar policy may provide some psychological comfort to a 21st century America unable to come to terms with the similar rise of China, and of India after that.

Like muskies that atrophy from lack of use, however, a country closed off from international commerce will gradually weaken. If Trump wants America to be great again, a retreat into isolationism is the worst path to follow. **©BLOOMBERG**

MY VIEW | GENERAL DISEQUILIBRIUM

Why banks got a knuckle rap for their awry retail focus

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Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Sanjay Malhotra does not seem to believe in slow starts. Soon after assuming office, he has shot multiple arrows from his regulatory bow. This has met with the customary scepticism, but a central bank governor's words have weight and can work through multiple regulatory channels.

It is, therefore, remarkable that he has chosen to address the issue of power hierarchies and asymmetries in the financial system, especially the disadvantageous position of individuals in the banking system. A little over three months into his tenure, he has decided to address the banking system's aversion to addressing customer grievances. Quoting official data, he said that the number of complaints received under RBI's Integrated Ombudsman Scheme increased at a compounded average rate of almost 50% per year over the past two years to reach 934,000 in 2023-24.

Malhotra also declared the banking system's deliberate attempts to sweep grievan-

ces under the carpet: "I would also like to draw your attention to the misclassification of complaints as requests, queries and disputes by the regulated entities. This results in the complainants' grievances remaining unaddressed. Moreover, this is also a gross regulatory violation." This indicates that banks either lack the capacity to address the rising tide of complaints or deliberately ignore customer grievances, allowing complaints to get bumped around.

This also demonstrates how the organizational structure of most banks is fundamentally misaligned with the retail business. As an individual, suppose you get a wrong message about your credit card dues or a missed payment. If you try to get the bank to admit its mistake, you are in for a rough ride. It will first throw its entire bureaucracy at you. If you persist, it will reward your doggedness by lining up its legal machinery. For a resource-constrained individual, this becomes a soul-sapping event. Even if one were to disregard the lack of moral and ethical values in these actions, imagine the administrative time and cost that banks are willing to incur to avoid saying sorry.

Data from RBI's 2023-24 annual report of the Ombudsman Scheme makes for interesting reading. Over 80% of the complaints

received originated from individuals, significantly the banking industry's systemic inability to deal with retail customers. The complaints were largely against public sector banks (58.32%) and private banks (34.39%). Interestingly, while complaints against public sector banks increased by only 10.27% between March 2023 and March 2024, those against private banks grew 37%.

This is significant given the larger footprint enjoyed by public sector banks in terms of both branches and market share of assets. Non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) were third (14.33%), ahead of other institutional categories. The top three categories alone accounted for over 87% of all complaints, reflecting the aggressive drive during 2023-24 to grow their loan books. The annual report also shows that the highest number of complaints (29%) pertained to loans and advances.

There are other instances where bank processes and rates are antagonistic towards individuals. In the event of a missed interest

payment, the bank is expected to communicate the event to credit bureaus, which as a matter of routine take the bank's word on face value and downgrade the individual's credit rating. Now, many banks have started sending out automated missed-payment notices to customers. Like all programmed

bots, many of these have bugs and communicate missed-payment notices to customers even when there are no defaults. However, credit bureaus do not reach out to affected customers to check the veracity of the information. It is odd that credit bureaus exhibit such remarkable alacrity in downgrading individual credit ratings, especially in a financial system where most institutions are known to make mistakes, have yawning gaps in their systems that allow information slippages and have failed to achieve the ideal human-machine configuration. A reason could be their dependence on institutions, and not individuals, for fees and incomes.

There is a dispute-resolution route availa-

ble in case of mistakes in the credit score or credit report. However, very few borrowers know about this. In any case, dispute resolution by the bureaus takes anywhere between 30 and 45 days. No wonder that the ombudsman annual report shows a rising number of complaints against these organizations.

The presence of other anomalies also indicates the banking industry's struggle with retail-facing operations. For example, in the previous two years, banks indulged in an unsecured retail lending binge to make up for otherwise lacklustre credit growth. The rates charged on these loans ranged between 10% and 15%. But their rates on credit card dues, which is another unsecured form of retail borrowing, are usurious and range anywhere between 30% and 36%. Even RBI's regulatory framework may need a retail check. Incidentally, RBI's introduction of organisations (SROs) for many emerging sectors (such as fintech) marks a fundamental shift in its regulatory approach. But the movement seems to have bypassed the banking system. The Indian Banks' Association has been around for about 80 years and is also considered an SRO. But, unfortunately, its functioning has no resemblance to that of an SRO. Change can start here.

DECODING TRUMP'S 'LIBERATION DAY' TARIFFS

As the dust settles on Trump's new tariff wall, *Mint* explains the implications—for the US, India and rest of the world

N Madhavan
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CHENNAI

In 1947, the US led 23 nations into signing the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). The effort was to lower trade and tariff barriers among nations. Over the next 48 years, it took eight rounds of painstaking negotiations before GATT could evolve into the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995.

On 2 April, in a speech that lasted 48 minutes, US President Donald Trump effectively shredded this multilateral trading system and signalled a fundamental shift in US trade policy.

Speaking from the White House Rose Garden, Trump levied what he called reciprocal tariffs on all trading partners. The quantum of tariffs stunned the world. He announced a universal tariff of 10% on all imports. But countries which enjoyed a trade surplus with the US were hit with much higher tariffs. No trade partner, big or small, was spared. China was slapped with a 34% duty but if one added the 20% tariff imposed earlier, it totalled 54%. Vietnam got 46%; India 26% and the European Union 20%. These duties are over and above what various countries were charged earlier.

Even remote uninhabited islands such as Heard and McDonalds Islands, located 4,100km from Western Australia and home to penguins and seals, were hit with a 10% tariff. Australian territories such as Norfolk Island, Cocos Islands and Christmas Island with an aggregate population of 4,236 people were tariffed too. So was Diego Garcia, a British territory in the Indian Ocean with no permanent population. It just houses a joint US-UK military base.

A few countries did not feature in the 2 April list—Canada, Mexico, Russia, North Korea, Cuba and Belarus. Canada and Mexico were spared because Trump had already levied a 25% tariff on all imports from the two nations excluding those items that fall under the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA). Russia, Cuba, North Korea and Belarus were excluded as they are heavily sanctioned and have no 'meaningful trade' with the US.

These measures, including the 25% duty imposed earlier on all automobile and auto parts imports, take US weighted average tariffs to a staggering 24%. It was around 3% in December last year.

According to Fitch Ratings, this would be the highest tariff wall the US has erected since 1909. And Trump has just ignited a global trade war—China has retaliated by imposing a 34% tariff on American exports; other countries are weighing their options. Stock markets across the world have swooned since his announcement.

'LOOTED, PILLAGED'

"My fellow Americans, this is liberation day. April 2, 2025, will be forever remembered as the day American industry was reborn, the day America's destiny was reclaimed and the day we began to make America wealthy again," Trump said, explaining the rationale behind the tariffs.

"For decades, the US has been looted, pillaged, raped and plundered by nations near and far, both friend and foe alike...destroying the beautiful American dream," he added. "It will not happen anymore."

His anger was singularly directed at the large trade deficit the US shares with its trade partners. In 2024, it ran up to \$1.2 trillion. For years, he has considered the trade deficit as the main cause of America's decline.

He and his officials have conveniently ignored the fact that the US was the biggest beneficiary of the post-Second World War multilateral trading system, his critics have pointed out. It made America very rich and gave it the status of a superpower—economically and militarily.

Through higher tariffs, Trump hopes to not only erase the trade deficit but restore American manufacturing to its past glory. He has said that his tariff measures will increase foreign investments as more factories are built in the US. He also hopes to raise substantial resources through tariffs, estimated at \$100 billion, to fund his proposed tax breaks.

JOBS GAINED, JOBS LOST

Few agree with his strategy. Writing in the newspaper *The Hill*, Macabe Keliher, associate professor at Southern Methodist University, Dallas, and an expert on East Asian economic development, argued that tariffs alone cannot rebuild

American manufacturing. In 1940, iron ore and rubber entered one end of Ford's River Rouge complex and completed cars rolled out of the other. Today, a vehicle crosses the US-Canada border multiple times during production to make the manufacturing process efficient. The supply chain that once existed, he wrote, is completely eroded.

In the 1950s, the share of manufacturing in US gross domestic product (GDP) was 29%. Today, it is 10%. Higher wages and production costs had moved manufacturing to low-cost economies like China first and then to countries such as Thailand, Mexico and India. According to data from the US Labour Department, factory jobs accounted for 33% of the total workforce in the 1950s. In 2024, it was just 8.4%. Manufacturing left the US as the global

supply chain brought in efficiencies by taking advantage of the lowest available cost across the world.

Replicating the supply chain in the US will be costly and inefficient. Experts are not sure how many companies will set up their manufacturing units fearing the tariffs. Setting up factories is expensive and most large players have invested in capacities in countries such as Vietnam, Mexico, India and elsewhere fairly recently—after the US-China trade war surfaced during Trump 1.0 and during the covid-19 pandemic.

Some companies such as Hyundai, Honda, Apple, Volvo, Audi and Mercedes-Benz have said they will increase production in the US. Even if they do, the production lines would be heavily automated. They are unlikely to create a huge number of jobs, as Trump expects.

Tariffs in the past have not revived factory jobs. According to a Federal Reserve study, when Trump imposed steel tariffs during his first term, the

increase in jobs in the steel sector was far less than those lost elsewhere on account of higher prices the tariffs caused. A similar scenario is set to play out again, on a larger scale. It is expected that the tariffs will, at best, create 1.5 million manufacturing jobs. But according to Moody's Analytics, the economy will lose 3.5 million jobs if the US heads into a recession because of the tariffs.

RECESSION IS COMING

In the middle of all this uncertainty, one thing is certain—an economic fallout. Trump's actions have further hit consumer sentiment. This will hold them back from spending. With 70% of US GDP growth dependent on consumer spending, such a scenario will cause growth to slow down. Moody's Analytics expects GDP growth to reduce by 2% and the unemployment rate to increase to 7.5% from the current 4.1%. Worse, the risk of a recession has increased. JP Morgan, an investment bank, says the odds of a US

recession by year-end has risen to 60%.

Inflation is also expected to rise. Jerome Powell, the Federal Reserve chairman, warned that the tariffs will accelerate inflation and dampen economic growth. "We are well positioned to wait for greater clarity before considering any adjustments to our policy stance," he said speaking to business journalists in Virginia on Friday. Consulting firm EY has said that consumer prices will increase by 1% by year-end, pushing inflation to 4% levels. It was 2.8% in February. The impact on low-income households will be \$1,000 annually, it added.

If the US, the world's largest economy, slows down, global growth will be hit too. International Monetary Fund (IMF) chief Kristalina Georgieva warned that Trump's tariffs pose a significant threat to the already sluggish global economy. The IMF, in January, projected the world

economy to grow at 3.3%. Its next update may see a downward revision. The WTO has said that in 2025 global trade will contract by 1% due to the trade war.

COLLATERAL DAMAGE

Trump's tariffs, experts believe, will have less impact on India compared to its peers. This is because it has been slapped with a lower tariff relative to others. This should give India a competitive advantage when it comes to sectors such as textiles, leather and auto components. Also, its major export sectors, pharmaceuticals and information technology, have been spared, at least for now.

But India cannot completely escape the impact. As the US and global economy slow down, India's exports will decline. Also, other countries that have been slapped with higher duties such as China and Vietnam will flood their goods at lower cost, potentially pricing Indian exporters out of many markets.

For 2025-26, the Reserve Bank of India has estimated GDP growth at 6.7%. This now appears challenging. Goldman Sachs has lowered the forecast by 20 basis points. Morgan Stanley has pegged 30 to 60 basis points reduction in growth.

The biggest worry for India will be in protecting the domestic industry. Low or predatorily priced imports are set to flood the country from China, which is sitting on excess capacity. China's domestic demand is weak and the inability to export to the US worsens this situation. A price-conscious market such as India is a big opportunity for China. Data suggests that imports from China have already seen a sharp increase in recent times. Indian industry has been urging the government to tighten its defences.

The Indian government, meanwhile, is negotiating a bilateral trade agreement with the US. The two nations are looking to more than double their trade to \$500 billion. The industry is hoping for a quick deal that could end the reciprocal tariffs.

ACUTE PAIN?

The biggest question in everyone's mind is whether Trump will roll back the tariffs. In the last six months, the S&P 500, a gauge of large-cap US equities, has crashed nearly 12%. Investors in the US have lost as much as \$9 trillion since Trump took office. Economists have warned of economic troubles ahead. The president has said that he is prepared to suffer 'temporary' pain.

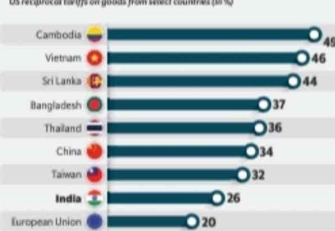
Stock markets do not bother him as they did in his first term. He expects countries that depend on the US market to rush in and strike deals. Vietnam has already reached out. Others, he believes, will come too.

Nonetheless, Trump, and his advisers, may need to revisit history lessons. In 1930, President Herbert Hoover signed the Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act, a protectionist trade measure that imposed a 25% duty on all imports. Major trading partners Canada and Europe retaliated. US exports fell sharply, and the measure worsened the Great Depression. In 1934, President Franklin Roosevelt had to repeal the tariffs. "The world is 'flatter' now with countries more deeply coupled. In 1930, imports accounted for just 3% of US GDP. Today it is 14%. The pain the country has to bear could be more acute."



Trump hasn't spared any trading partner.

US reciprocal tariffs on goods from select countries (in %)



Source: The US White House

Trillion dollar angst

The aggregate trade deficit of US' top 10 trading partners exceeds \$1 trillion.

US trade deficit with top trading partners (in \$ billion)



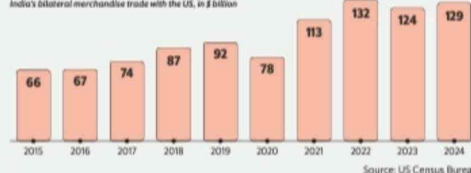
Note: Data is for merchandise trade deficit in 2024

Source: US Census Bureau

The catalyst

Can tariffs increase India-US bilateral trade?

India's bilateral merchandise trade with the US, in \$ billion

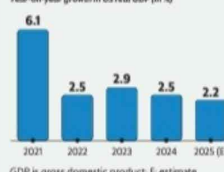


Source: US Census Bureau

The risk

Reciprocal tariffs could push the US economy into a recession.

Year-on-year growth in US real GDP (in %)



GDP is gross domestic product, E: estimate

Source: World Bank

Sitting duck

Chinese imports into India have risen sharply in recent years.

China's imports to India, in \$ billion



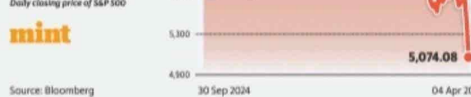
*Data for April-December 2024

Source: Commerce ministry

The dive

In the last six months, S&P 500, a gauge of large-cap US equities, has crashed nearly 12%.

Daily closing price of S&P 500



Source: Bloomberg

SATISH KUMAR/MINT



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OUR VIEW

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Are startups failing us? Look at the big picture

Piyush Goyal's unflattering contrast of their business disposition with Chinese innovation has stirred a debate that must both widen and deepen for India to credibly play catch-up

India's commerce and industry minister Piyush Goyal has faced a lot of flak online for the disdain he recently articulated for the relative reluctance of Indian startups to take on challenges in deep-tech sectors—be it artificial intelligence (AI), semiconductor design, building chip fabs or electric-vehicle and battery technology—and their preference for consumer-facing businesses that might make money but do not address the nation's strategic challenges. He praised the performance of Chinese startups, which are innovating at the cutting edge of technology. The backlash has come from successful startup leaders and venture investors. Much of their response is valid, clothed though it is in disappointment that the minister overlooked the vital roles they've played in job creation, organizing rural supply chains, using tech for efficiency and so on. These protests, however, obscure a kernel of truth in Goyal's concern. We do need startups to help solve some of the problems we face in our quest for strategic autonomy. To that end, we require innovation in defence modernization and indigenization, space capabilities and advanced materials, computing and communication technologies, plus more.

What the minister could have avoided was an implication that the contrast with China is simply a matter of startup choice, independent of the ecosystem in which our businesses operate. Overall, India spends just 0.65% of GDP on research and development (R&D), according to World Bank data, narrowly ahead of Gambia and South Africa, but trailing Tunisia, Morocco and the UAE, not to speak of the US (3.46%), China (2.43%), South Korea (4.93%) and Israel (5.56%). Blame India Inc and the government first for this abysmal state of affairs, in which the

research outlay of a single mega-corp like Amazon outstrips the combined R&D spend of India, public and private sectors combined. The Australian Strategic Policy Institute's critical-technology tracker finds that China is the global leader today in 57 of 64 critical technologies, having displaced the US. This is thanks to Beijing's policy focus and investment in quality education at all levels, apart from its push for research capacity and publication of substantive findings. In fact, this is what explains its AI success. Indian researchers do publish, but are rarely cited since their research aims tend to tick the right boxes for career gains rather than advancing the frontiers of knowledge. Startups will routinely be able to tackle hard tech if and only if they can draw on a talent pool that's large and diverse enough. Indian political leaders, on their part, would help if they hark less on ancient glory as part of their politics and promote scientific attitudes driven by evidence.

Then there is the question of our business culture and funding. Risk-taking, by and large, remains the preserve of a section of society that has traditionally been in business. Others often find it hard to raise capital again if their startups end up failing. Meanwhile, scholarly pursuits have not broadened to involve all social segments and knowledge creation rarely ever commands the premium it should. Small ventures that take off often struggle for funds to scale up. Venture funding in India comes mostly from abroad. Should a thin slice of the enormous pool of retirement savings in the Employees' Provident Fund and National Pension System not be channelled to startups? Why should the government drag its feet on the R&D corpus announced in the Union budget years ago? The answer is with the government, not startups.

Fiscal federalism and economic freedom can drive our prosperity

A trade war must not distract India from pursuing a clear domestic agenda for economic success



NITIN PAI
is co-founder and director of The Takshashila Institution, an independent centre for research and education in public policy

Imagine there was no other country but India. The subcontinent was all the landmass that there was on the planet, with oceans all around. And all 1.5 billion people in the world were Indians. The Indian national economy would be the global economy. There would be no such things as international trade, foreign investment and immigration. The Indian economy would be an autarchy. By definition, it would be self-sufficient.

Now think how such an economy could also be prosperous. The immediate order of business—as Bhishma teaches us in the Mahabharata's *Shanti Parva*—would be to establish the rule of law, protect property rights, govern justly and ensure that people live peaceful lives where they can enjoy the fruits of their labour.

The next task would be to ensure economic integration of the vast subcontinent, where goods, services, people, ideas and capital can move freely from one place to another.

Now that basic political and economic integration has been achieved, let us look at economic policy. What will we do for energy? There is very little oil we can pump out of the ground. There are no foreign countries that we can buy it from.

So we will have to rely on solar, wind and hydro-electric sources. We will have to use the coal that we have and

invest in nuclear power plants. This might not cover all our requirements. So we will have to economize on the use of energy. Electricity cannot be provided free of cost to anyone, not even farmers.

That brings us to food. Without petroleum imports, we will have to figure out how to make fertilizer. In addition to chemical methods, closed loop biological methods that convert human and animal waste into manure will be an obvious choice. Farmers will have to change their cropping patterns and farming methods.

Indeed, because electricity will not be free, it will no longer be possible to pump out ground water and use it to grow crops inappropriate to those soil conditions. Indian farmers will no longer grow water-intensive crops in water-deficient areas on the back of subsidized electricity. Many farmers will have to change their farming methods. Quite a number of them will have to stop farming and find other livelihoods. India will have to enable this transition.

The idea that people are better off doing what they can do more efficiently is called 'comparative advantage'. It is the single biggest idea that can make our self-sufficient closed economy a prosperous one. When people, firms and regions do what they are most efficient at doing, they specialize and become more productive. They then trade with others who are better at other things. Some places specialize in software technology, some in manufacturing, some in agricultural products, some in tourism, and so on. Indeed, comparative advantage is not an imposition. People specialize because they have reasons and the freedom to do so.

By extension, we can see that prosperity requires the political system to be federal. States and regions should have the autonomy to engage in activities of their choice. The Union government can through the Finance Com-

mission ensure that all citizens get enough resources for there to be broad parity. However, it should not use fiscal policy to determine the pattern of economic activity. It shouldn't be in the business of choosing who produces what, where and at what prices. Indeed, a self-sufficient India cannot be prosperous without political and fiscal federalism, all the way down to the level of local governments.

There is nowhere to import technology from. So a lot of public investment will have to go into scientific research and development (R&D) as well as education. Again, comparative advantage suggests that the government should finance firms and institutions that can do this efficiently, without insisting that those doing state-funded R&D also be government employees.

The backbone of the economy will need a financial system that can gather savings and surplus capital and put it into the hands of those who can make the best use of it.

I could go on, but the upshot is that if you want India to be self-sufficient and prosperous, the government's economic role must shrink and change. It should abandon striving for 'even development' and stop trying to redistribute money and economic activity.

Let's bring this thought experiment to an end. Even as you worry about tariffs and trade wars, note that a lot of what we must do to be prosperous is a matter of domestic policy. Of course, international trade is very desirable. It will make us more prosperous, faster and at lower cost. It will open up wider possibilities.

We should hope that a mindless trade war doesn't start (or at least ends quickly). India is a big country with a diverse geography and a large as well as young population. Our domestic economy is capable of weathering this storm. It is a good time to break down the constraints we have imposed on ourselves and unleash the awesome energy of the national economy.

10 YEARS AGO



JUST A THOUGHT

I believe in innovation and that the way you get innovation is you fund research and you learn the basic facts.

BILL GATES

MY VIEW | MODERN TIMES

How to reform your son after you watched a TV show

MANU JOSEPH



is a journalist, novelist, and the creator of the Netflix series, 'Decoupled'

My dear son, I'm watching *Adolescence* on Netflix, and I need to over-act my limited understanding of human nature using terminology from therapy and gender studies. If you wish to be a modern man, you must talk about your feelings; talk, talk, talk. Not podcast: the world doesn't need another podcast from a male. Talk to people who love you, and since they would be very few, also talk to under-employed friends who love to gossip. You are showing some toxic signs already, or at least they seem toxic. For instance, you spend hours alone because you love it. Your love for sports demonstrates a clear need for aggression and ambition. You have never picked a single flower, which is disturbing. You don't read made-up drama.

To reform you, I must force you to watch *Adolescence*, which is about a boy of 13 who is suspected of murdering a girl his age. You will suffer chiefly because it is slow. It's a show on adolescence for adults, like one of those films made in India for foreigners.

You have a problem; it is a toxic substance called testosterone inside you. It builds muscle, improves oxygen delivery in the blood, reduces inflammation, enhances spatial problem-solving and memory, and influences fat distribution. It also triggers sexual desire. Most of what some feminists think is caused by testosterone in men of their age is probably caused by morning cortisol; even so, testosterone influences the development of those dangerous things called muscles from where the ill-gotten powers of men arise. You have many times the level of this hormone than a girl your age, and that is worrisome.

I am told by reformers of men that there is something called a 'manosphere', which is a devious world on the internet that belongs to men, though it is hard to tell what about this world does not belong to men. Let us say the 'manosphere' is a lot worse than the world that belongs to men. It is also filled with stuff that boys might be interested in, like videos by fitness instructors on making muscles. Fitness is a lure through which young boys are radicalized.

Why are you building your muscles when you can do something better, like stretching exercises or sitting in a lotus position with eyes shut? Nobody knows what meditation

means, but it sounds like something good. Also, you should read literary fiction. All men should read it. This is the life-altering advice of all knowledgeable reformers of men, which includes men who are probably blessed with low testosterone levels.

In a work of literary fiction, you will find delicate men who notice the colour of curtains. Like: 'Grant caught sight of two layers of front-window curtains, both blue, one sheer and one silky, a matching blue sofa and a daunting blue pale and a daunting blue carpet...' See, that is a new way to be. Men who read literary fiction are appealing and safe, unlike muscular men. Even women who don't read find men who read appealing.

My darling son, as you can see, the objective of your life should be to be more like women, but without their bone density.

You should start expressing your emotions more. You may argue that any fool who has watched sports will know that men express their emotions freely. But some-

how that is not the same. You should express emotions in ways that are interesting to people who do not find sports interesting. Though it was very moving to watch Roger Federer cry. Men should cry more. Your future girlfriend will hate you for it because ideally men should cry only when they win a grand slam, or something as rare, but she may not be able to admit it in public. What matters is what reformers of men say in public, which is that you must cry more.

Reformers of men are asking boys to watch 'Adolescence' in the hope that it will prove educative

You need to keep talking about your mental health, especially. A strange way of the world is that you will never hear diabetics give sermons on physical health; but much of the articulation of mental health is by people who say they are not mentally healthy. What can go wrong? Nothing, apparently. So you must sit and listen to them talk about themselves.

You will observe in *Adolescence* how the show's female characters are constantly 'regulating' the emotions of men. This

means that when a muscular guy in deep sorrow is getting angry with the world, flailing his arms and expressing himself in a negative way (even though he is never cross with his wife and daughter, whom he keeps referring to as 'love'), he is calmed by the women who let him vent. This aspect of the series has reminded several reformers of men that all peace in a family is a contribution of women because they 'regulate the emotions of men.'

Look, you may not fully understand this complex explanation from a 'science of the humanities,' which by the way I forbid you to follow as you must seek a more lucrative career. What matters in life is not understanding all the good stuff, just knowing the synopsis of all the good stuff.

When we sit to watch *Adolescence*, you will notice a big flaw. We don't see the point of view of the dead girl. Now that is because the creators of the series are men and may have indulged in something called the 'male gaze,' which is a horrible device by which male artists express only what they know. You should, of course, condemn it.

Men who call other men 'misogynists' are often frauds, but it is an excellent way to defame your competition. Be smart, dear son, be modern.

China wanted to negotiate with Trump. Now it's arming for another trade war.

Communication between Washington and Beijing is at a standstill, raising the prospects of a long cycle of tariff retaliation

Lingling Wei
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Beijing spent the first months of President Trump's second term trying—and failing—to figure out the new administration's approach to China. Officials hoping to build lines of communication with Washington had no luck.

With Trump's latest tariff action, the magnitude of his trade assault hit home and Beijing's hope for dialogue melted into frustration and anger.

Until now its response had been restrained. On Friday, Beijing matched Trump's 34% additional tariffs and for the first time it hit all U.S. products, no exceptions. It also restricted exports of certain rare-earth minerals, added U.S. companies to trade blacklists and aimed an antitrust probe at the China operations of U.S. chemicals and materials company DuPont.

Trump's response to its retaliation suggested things would get worse. In a social-media post, Trump wrote, "CHINA PLAYED IT WRONG! THEY PANICKED—THE ONE THING THEY CANNOT AFFORD TO DO!"

The lack of communication between the two sides shows no signs of letting up. What lies ahead is likely to be a cycle of tit-for-tat retaliation, making it hard to even start negotiations in the near term. Beijing had been cautiously optimistic in the Trump administration's first days. Xi Jinping dispatched a top envoy to attend Trump's inauguration, a move that was seen as an opening for fruitful communication. While Trump had threatened to hit China with tariffs when campaigning for president, he held off on Day One. His only mention of China in his inaugural speech, about wresting the Panama Canal from Chinese control, raised no alarms.

Trump had indicated that he was open to a deal with China, and Beijing hoped to explore one centered on what China was willing to offer, such as more Chinese purchases of American products and more Chinese investment in the U.S.

But in the following weeks, wherever senior Chinese officials tried to engage the new administration,

they found only closed doors. Foreign Minister Wang Yi sought a meeting with Trump's national-security adviser Mike Waltz in February while he was in the U.S. for a United Nations meeting, according to people who consult with senior Chinese officials. Wang, who had hoped to revive a line of communication he had had with Waltz's predecessor, Jake Sullivan, got nowhere with the Trump team.

The full-blown trade war during Trump's first term had strengthened Xi's resolve to fortify China against a new Trump-like assault. And yet, in the absence of contacts with the Trump team, Washington's most formidable adversary settled on a wait-and-see approach.

Gone was the swagger Xi's team often projected in interactions with Biden officials. When Trump set 10% tariffs on Chinese goods in two separate rounds, China's retaliation was cautious.

Then came the shock of the extra 34% tariffs Trump slapped on China on Wednesday. This brings the average U.S. import levies on Chinese products to 26%, figuring in the previous 20% tariffs and levies that predate Trump's second term, according to Chad Brown, a senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics—more than 20 times what it was before Trump launched his first trade war against China in 2018.

"That amounts to a declaration of 'strategic decoupling' with China," said a senior economist in Beijing, using a term from Trump's first-term trade czar, Robert Lighthizer. "Can we find a pathway toward negotiations under such maximum pressure? The lack of communication between the two sides might make it difficult."

Some policy advisers in Beijing described the stunned reaction within the Chinese system over Trump's latest tariff increases. That, the advisers said, raises questions about whether Beijing has the ability to effectively negotiate with Trump to alleviate pressure on the Chinese economy—and prevent a deeper decoupling with the U.S.

"The Trump administration is driving the agenda," said Ryan Hass, a former national-security official in the Obama administration and now director of the China



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Center at the Brookings Institution in Washington. "Beijing is almost entirely in a reactive posture."

Some foreign-policy and trade analysts say Trump was smart to wait it out as Trump has also significantly bumped up import levies on traditional allies and other big trading partners, raising the specter of a global backlash against the U.S. that could come in the "not too distant future." But given the heightened pressure from the U.S., Chinese officials have indicated to U.S. executives that Xi is unlikely to visit the U.S. soon.

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Other U.S. business leaders, such as Wall Street financiers that Chinese leaders have often turned to in periods of trouble, now see little upside in acting as a go-between for Beijing. "Who wants that role?" said a senior American executive. "No one."

Beijing's inability to think beyond formal diplomatic protocol has proven to be a mismatch with a Trump team willing to engage only with those closest to Xi. People close to Beijing's thinking say that when Trump's people have suggested Xi top aides they would like to talk to—such as Xi's chief of staff, Cai Qi—Beijing has recoiled, seeing the political risk from such improvisation as unacceptable.

Meanwhile, China's Commerce Minister Wang Wentao had no luck with February letters to Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick and U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer. Instead, in late March, Greer held an introductory video call with Vice Premier He Lifeng, Wang's superior and a trusted Xi aide.

"The wrong side"

Leaders rely heavily on established ways to engage with the outside world, including through back-channeling with advisers.

During Trump's first term, Beijing's then-ambassador to Washington, Cui Tiankai, built connections with Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner that helped facilitate negotiations between the two capitals. With the new Trump team, no such channel has been established.

The current Chinese ambassador to Washington, He Feng, has tried in vain to engage with Trump adviser Elon Musk, according to the

The fact that China didn't appear to figure as a primary focus for Trump in his first two months was unnerving to senior Chinese officials who had expected negotiations between the two sides to begin almost right away.

When Trump in his first two months raised China tariffs by 20%, citing China's role in the fentanyl crisis in the U.S., senior Chinese officials considered the fentanyl issue as a pretext intended to pressure Beijing, according to the people who consult with Chinese officials. The Xi leadership didn't rush to talk to Trump or offer him any concessions on the issue like leaders from Canada and Mexico did.

Adding to Beijing's wait-and-see approach was its belief that tariff hikes threatened to push up inflation in the U.S. and tank the U.S. markets, prospects officials thought might force Trump to back down, the people said.

When U.S. markets started losing ground this year, some Chinese commentators seized on the rise in China's own stock markets, riding the sudden flame of Chinese artificial-intelligence startup DeepSeek, to revive a Xi adage that "the East is rising and the West is in decline."

"Within the Chinese government, the view is that the U.S. is taking measures to alienate itself," said Craig Allen, a senior adviser to Washington-based consulting firm Cohen Group, who attended a high-level economic forum in Beijing in late March. "They think the U.S. is on the wrong side and China is on the right side."

Trump's sweeping tariffs could be an opportunity for China to attempt to capitalize on anger against Washington, especially among the U.S.'s traditional allies and trading partners.

There are big challenges. With the new U.S. tariffs, even more Chinese goods will be rerouted to countries in Europe and Asia, where leaders are already concerned about a flood of Chinese products that have jeopardized jobs.

In addition, Beijing has deeply antagonized Europe with its support for Moscow during Russia's three-year-long invasion of Ukraine.

Leverage lost

Despite Trump's warning to

China over the Panama Canal in his inaugural address, leaders were caught off guard when Hong Kong's CK Hutchison announced a deal to sell its Panama ports to a U.S. investment group led by BlackRock. Trump's statement that China was operating the waterway and that the U.S. was taking it back was barely discussed among senior leaders, according to the people who consult with Chinese officials. No one thought to reach out to CK Hutchison to pre-empt a sale, they said.

If anything, the Xi leadership thought it could use the Panama port issue as a bargaining chip in negotiations with the Trump administration, which they expected to start soon.

Now China is in a no-win situation, trying to regain leverage with an antitrust review of the CK Hutchison transaction. But any move to interfere with the deal could give ammunition to Trump's charge that China controls the canal.

Officials are eager to not repeat the mistake and give up any leverage it might have with Washington over TikTok as Trump weighs proposals for divesting the app's U.S. operations from Chinese parent ByteDance.

In recent meetings, according to people familiar with the matter, Chinese officials have indicated to visiting U.S. business leaders that Beijing is firm against any form of what they called "commercial robbery" and in particular, against any sale that would involve China losing control over TikTok's algorithm, the app's secret formula for steering content to users.

For now, the people said, no negotiation over TikTok, or any trade or economic matters, has yet taken place between the Trump administration and the Chinese government. China will expect an off-ramp to enter into any form of compromise, or even talks, one of the people said—for instance, if Trump finds himself forced to pull back on tariffs. After his sweeping action, markets fell around the world, but hardest in the U.S.

For now, whoever is in the driver's seat of U.S.-China relations, it's not Beijing.

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Inside Elon Musk's shock-and-awe months in the White House

Josh Dawsey, Annie Linskey
Brian Schwartz &
Dana Mattiot
WASHINGTON

In the end, all it took to oust Postmaster General Louis DeJoy, whom President Trump appointed in his first term, was a nudge from Elon Musk.

During a Friday meeting last month at Trump's Bedminster, N.J., club, Musk complained to the president that DeJoy was resisting his cost-cutting efforts at the U.S. Postal Service, according to people briefed on the conversation.

Trump had grown annoyed with DeJoy already, and wanted the postal service private and profitable, so he planned to fire him the following week, the people said. By Monday, DeJoy announced his resignation, effective immediately.

In the months since Trump took office, Musk has alienated some Trump aides with his chaotic approach to his role. Worried Republicans are concerned his unpopularity could cost them future elections, as it did in Wisconsin this week. Through it all, Musk has retained his status as among the most influential advisers in Trump's White House—producing shock-and-awe, for a shock-and-awe president—and using his unpaid perch to reshape the federal bureaucracy, punish critics and serve as key interlocutor to Trump.

Aides expect Musk to leave his