

THE ASIAN AGE

8 APRIL 2025

Delhi & Colombo in sync; but Chennai view differs

The Prime Minister could not have asked for more from his visit to Colombo. The warmth of the reception and the conferring of the highest civilian honour may have been just a reflection now of strengthening ties but what was significant was the Sri Lankan president emphasising once again that his country would not allow anything that would put India's security at risk.

The prospect of enhancing bilateral ties, particularly in defence and energy sectors, had brightened considerably even before this meeting as Sri Lanka's president Anura Kumara Dissanayake had made New Delhi his first pit stop after being elected. And Modi's Colombo outreach after the Sri Lankan president had visited Beijing may have helped Sri Lanka keep its pragmatic balance between the two powers.

It may be somewhat incongruous that India's ties with countries with which it shares a land border are more strained than with Sri Lanka. But, given the history of Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict when the ties were marked by suspicion and distrust for decades despite India's unwelcome stationing of the Indian Peace Keeping Force on the island, the nation's regimes changed dramatically after the post-Covid economic crisis and India has found a friend for peaceful coexistence without tensions.

Even so, the view from New Delhi that has positively restored the Sri Lankan relationship after being a true friend in need and Chennai that certain forces not only dream of an end to the Tamil fishermen crisis of arrests and ill treatment at the hands of the Sri Lankan Navy but also believe it is possible to ask for the return of the Katchatheevu islet that Mrs Indira Gandhi gifted away in the 1970s.

The Prime Minister may seem preoccupied with celebrating an ancient port's contribution to the Tamil language and even fishing in his political vision of his party making its presence felt in the southern state, as emphasised in his visit to

unveil India's first vertical lift sea bridge near Ramswaram and praying to Lord Ram.

What tends to spool the view from Chennai is that there is no end in sight to the fishermen's issue because the Indian fishermen refuse to give up bottom fishing in Sri Lankan waters.

Modi placed on record how 3,700 Indian fishermen, including 600 last year, were brought back safely from Sri Lanka, with some rescued from the death penalty. Getting them back is owed to Delhi's diplomacy, even so, the festering problem lends a distinct south-north perspective on the issue of Sri Lanka as viewed from Chennai and New Delhi.

It was remarkable that the Sri Lankan Tamil voted overwhelmingly last year in favour of Dissanayake's move to end the China-facilitated Rajapaksa. What PM Modi and foreign minister Jaishankar have been unable to achieve, however, is to establish a bilateral mechanism that would work on a lasting solution well beyond the efforts taken to convert Tamil Nadu's fishermen to do Thai fishing in Sri Lankan waters.

Tamil Nadu's fishing on the problem and passing an Assembly resolution on the restoration of Katchatheevu may have prompted Modi to take potshots at Tamil leaders with an irreverent reference to the language in which they sign their names just to show that the differences will continue to rankle as the state leans on its image of being the principal opponent against the ruling forces on various counts. Even then, New Delhi may take the credit for restoring ties with Sri Lanka to the happy state they are in today.

AICC in Guj: Cong sends signal

Two years before the elections to the Gujarat Assembly, the Congress is going back to one of its original strongholds to hold a meeting of the All-India Congress Committee to mark the occasion of the centenary of Mahatma Gandhi's presidency of the party and the 75th year of the Constitution.

While the official party has made its usual statement about the meet — to come up with a bottom-up plan to energise the cadre at the grassroots level — the desperate younger generation has unusually made its expectations public. Sachin Pilot who verily represents this section has talked of a "generational shift" within the party, with young leaders stepping in.

It is not that the grand old party is ignorant of the fruits of generational shift and democratic practices, but it has been deeply entrenched in its own practices that it takes a revolution of sorts if it remains a part of a "generational shift" within the party, with young leaders stepping in.

It is not that the grand old party is ignorant of the fruits of generational shift and democratic practices, but it has been deeply entrenched in its own practices that it takes a revolution of sorts if it remains a part of a "generational shift" within the party, with young leaders stepping in.

The BJP has its Hindutva agenda for everyone to see and its electoral successes are thanks to its unapologetic and unwavering commitment to it. The Congress, on the other hand, has not yet firmed up its approach to the communal angle the nation's polity has taken. It sometimes plays hot and cold with the secular core of its larger political identity. The party must have understood that its followers would be comfortable when it remains a secular one, instead of peddling soft Hindutva; the results of the Karnataka Assembly and the 2024 Lok Sabha elections must have thrown up some lessons. The party may do well to frame its position firmly and articulate it cohesively instead of "strengthening" it at the grassroots level.

Gujarat has produced several practical Congress politicians, Mahatma Gandhi and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel included. The Ahmedabad meet may help the party pick some lessons from those illustrious leaders.

THE ASIAN AGE

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Editor

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Aakar Patel

Trade wars are not easy to end: Will US damage itself & world?

How do trade wars end? To answer that, we have to first ask ourselves: how do wars end? The answer is that once begun, they are not at all easy to end.

Most of the time, trade and diplomacy are conducted outside of the public view. This is not only because of secrecy but also the fact that the details are too boring to interest news debates. What tariff rate a country imposes on another on dairy, soya and auto spare parts, and what it should be charging instead, is not exciting material. Similarly, the spectacle of "summit" meetings between leaders, though ultimately insubstantial, steal the show over the more meaningful but more boring meetings over details that diplomats have to resolve disputes.

Disagreements may remain after these meetings but the option of keeping the status quo is the one that is most frequently resorted to. Escalation towards violence is rare.

But when it does come, it is not easy to control. The reasons are that the side that begins it is not the only one that has agency. The other nation's response, its timing, its intensity and its effectiveness is impossible to predict. As boxer Mike Tyson elegantly put it: "Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the face".

Wars end either when both sides have had enough, realising that their nations have suffered damaged and are unwilling to suffer any

more. Or they might end when one side is strong enough to compel the other one to submit. Much like a school fight between a large child and a smaller one. The little fellow has no option but to give up.

Unlike this example, wars and trade wars have another element which is why they are difficult to control and escalation is almost impossible to predict. This is national pride and national survival. This is why trade and diplomacy work only when they are done outside the public view. When they become part of the popular conversation and the public become participants, driven to anger by their leaders' rhetoric on being ripped off by the other side, everything changes.

The American President says that he is punishing China with tariffs and then warns it not to retaliate because he will apply further punishment. The Chinese response is to immediately inflict the same punishment on the United States. Some will argue, correctly, that the tariff mostly punishes the country imposing it because its consumers will pay the import duty. That is not the point. It is called a trade war because it is war minus the shooting. The effects are real in the sense that one side is trying to actively and materially damage the other and the other is repelled to respond.

After he put tariffs on Canada, Donald Trump

posted this: "Please explain to Governor Trudeau, of Canada, that when he puts on a retaliatory tariff on the US, our reciprocal tariff will immediately increase by a like amount." Canada did respond and now so has China. The options are for Mr Trump to either do what he said he would, that is to add further tariffs on them, or to back down. If he does the former, it escalates and he has no control; if he does the latter, then he is seen as losing and his credibility is shot. This is why wars are difficult to end once they are begun.

This is why this trade war will remain with us for some time. And this should concern us in India. You see, between 2004 and 2014, India grew quickly in large measure because its merchandise exports went from about \$80 billion a year to about \$320 billion a year in that decade. This was largely because of global trade rising in that period, and when trade flattened after the global financial crisis, our growth tapered off as well. Today, another 10 years later, merchandise exports are at \$400 billion or so, meaning that the rapid rate of growth is gone. The moral is that rising global trade is good for India and trade wars are terrible for us.

For this reason it is important that India take on some leadership in at least attempting to resolve wars.

There are some reasons to be optimistic.

Democracies usually tend to be self-correcting, and the United States even more so. Its House of Representatives (Lower House of Parliament) is run by legislators who have to face elections every two years. If the tariffs are particularly disruptive in the next few weeks and months, and the public is restless, those up for election in November 2026 will begin to put pressure on their President to reduce the turbulence he has created. Even if his plan shows like it may work over the long term, this pressure could undo it. There is an exception to this self-correcting rule, and that is for war. The history of the United States shows that it will continue doing the wrong thing and prosecuting war even though it is itself damaged. Vietnam and Iraq show this. In Afghanistan, the United States continued doing the wrong thing, learning no lessons, punishing itself and its opponents, for 20 years before surrendering. The American public was okay with suffering through this continuation, losing citizens and treasure, perhaps because they thought it was in their national interest.

We can only hope this is not as true for the Trump trade war as it is for real war.

The writer is the chair of Amnesty International India. Twitter: @aakar_patel

Subhani

BLOOD BATH...



Will Thai, Lanka outreach counter China & US tariffs?



K.C. Singh

People-to-people contacts assume importance for Thailand as with visa removal for Indian tourists they fill the void left by diminished Chinese tourists.

Ram Navami. The Seetha Eliya temple, marking the spot where Ravana had supposedly detained Sita, is to receive assistance. Prime Minister Modi's flight home conspicuously overflew the Ram Setu, the island chain in the Palk Straits believed by the faithful to be remnants of the Bhagwan Ram-crested land bridge to rescue Sita. Mr Modi's stopover in Tamil Nadu to inaugurate projects simply illustrated that the Sri Lanka visit tied in with the BJP's strategy to politically penetrate the defiant Tamil fortress.

To balance this, Mr Modi paid obeisance at Anuradhapura's Buddhist monuments and temples. Similarly in Thailand, the PM visited Buddhist temples and holy sites. He had official-level talks with Thai Prime Minister Phetongtarn Shinawatra. On the sidelines he met her father, Thaksin Shinawatra, who spent decades in exile due to differences with the military-royal elite. Again, multiple memoranda of understanding were inked on establishing a strategic partnership, cooperation in digital technologies and micro, small and medium enterprises. Economic and trade ties were reviewed, as bilateral trade lingers at \$15 billion in 2023-24. There was an agreement to "strengthen supply chains between India and Asian countries". Just as Gujarat-based relics of Gautama Buddha are to be sent for display in Sri Lanka, Thailand will help establish the National Maritime Heritage Complex at Lothal, Gujarat. People-to-people contacts assume importance for Thailand as with visa removal for Indian tourists they fill the void left by diminished Chinese tourists.

Bimstec's Bangkok Vision 2030, adopted on April 4, lays out the future path. President Donald Trump's global hit onslaught will grab all members, but particularly Bangladesh's struggling garment export industry. Generally, it will disrupt global supply chains carrying products of Chinese joint ventures or US outsourcing. A prime example being Apple and Nike in Vietnam. If President Trump's tariffs persist, despite harming global confidence in US markets, then alternative supply chains may develop, driven by China and the G-7 minus the US. Sub-regional and regional groups like BIMSTEC, ASEAN, etc can be the building blocks of a new order.

However, the domestic politics of India's neighbours often throw up political forces distrustful of India. The Chinese role becomes important, if it can overcome its paranoid over India's likely rise and focus instead on the immediate threat from US actions? China may instead utilise the global disorder to strengthen its stranglehold over its immediate maritime neighbourhood, especially Taiwan.

Bimstec's focus on easing maritime connectivity counters China's hegemony, undermining of the freedom of the seas. Overland connectivity, symbolised by the India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway, stalled by civil war in Myanmar and now Bangladesh distrust of India, is delayed. Once again, China can facilitate or undermine it as any east-west connectivity across Asia challenges the China-centric projects under its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Mr Modi's interaction with Myanmar's senior general Min Aung Hlaing would have enabled the assessment of their domestic challenges, especially after the devastating earthquake, for which India has rushed assistance. Myanmar's cooperation is necessary to ensure that no elements, including China, exploit the porosity of the India-Myanmar border to destabilise India's Northeast. In an increasingly uncertain world, India must insulate itself by enhanced trust and cooperation in its immediate neighbourhood. Mr Modi's visit was an attempt in that direction.

The writer is a former secretary in the external affairs ministry. He tweets at @iamksingh

LETTERS

CHRISTIANS NEXT?

The increasing use of religion to further political interests is getting dangerous. But political parties have no compunction about doing so as long as it serves their purpose; no matter how much damage it causes the nation's social fabric. The condition of countries like Iran, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka should serve as an example and warning about what could happen to us too. After the passage of the Waqf Bill in Parliament, there are ominous signs that the next to be targeted will be the Christian lands. The next big battlefield will be West Bengal. The political class is not bothered about anything except winning elections. It is up to the people not to get caught in these political battles in the name of religion.

Anthony Henriques
Mumbai

NAVEEN'S U-TURN

THE SHIPPING stand of the BJP over Waqf Bill has led to disquiet within the party. While the BJP had been vocal in its opposition to the contentious law, the party took a last-minute call to not issue a whip and leave voting on it to individual party MPs in the Rajya Sabha. Protesting against the party's decision, BJP MP Debashish Samantaryal abstained from voting in the Upper House. During a BJP minority cell meeting in September, even Naveen Patnaik had said the party will oppose the Waqf Bill. Why is he still trying to appease the BJP?

Sankar Paul
Chakdaha, West Bengal

SUBMERGED IT CITY

THE RESIDENTS of Bengaluru have expressed their frustration over waterlogging and chaos due to heavy rainfall. While sharing visuals on social media platforms, netizens slammed the authorities for poor infrastructure, expressing concerns over where their tax money is being spent. One of the most affected areas due to the rainfall was Tavarekere Main Road, which got blocked due to the waterlogging. While sharing visuals, has reduced the temperature, providing great relief to people from the unprecedented heat. It has given rise to the problem. Waterlogging is a regular feature of the Silicon City of India.

Jayanthi Subramaniam
Bengaluru

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, TUESDAY, APRIL 8, 2025

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Unfortunately, the Pakistani government has preferred to maintain radio silence and appears clueless on how to proceed and engage the American authorities in order to get some concessions for our exporters."

— DAWN

THE IDEAS PAGE

An incomplete social justice

Reservation in private universities is long overdue. Legal, constitutional mechanisms are available — what's needed is political will



DESHKAAL
by YOGENDRA YADAV

RESERVATION IN PRIVATE universities and colleges is an idea whose time had come long ago. If there was any doubt about its legality, that dispute too was resolved by the Supreme Court more than a decade ago. It is an idea that enjoys the backing of the largest opposition party. True, in the last instance, you cannot stop an idea whose time has come. The trouble is that we live our lives in the instances before the last one, the intermediate space in which the deep state can delay, defer and dodge any idea. This idea needs political will. Now.

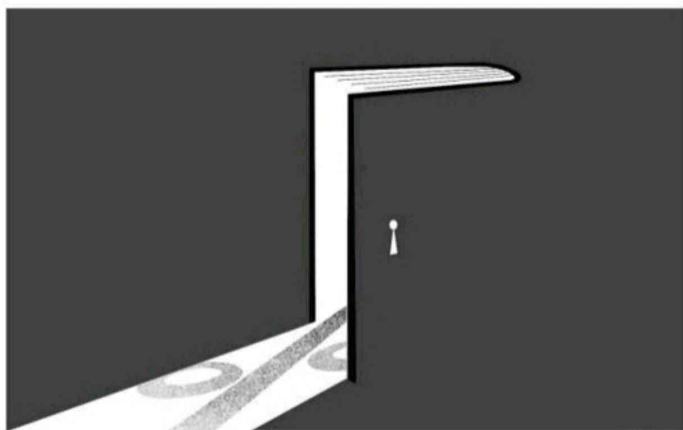
Is that political will in the offing? Last week, Jairam Ramesh, Congress general secretary in-charge of communication, issued a statement. On the face of it, the statement is merely to "reiterate" Congress's long-standing demand for reservation for SC, ST and OBC candidates in private educational institutions. It recalls that in 2005, the Constitution was amended to extend reservation to private educational institutions, that its legality was upheld in 2014, and that this promise was a part of Congress's manifesto in 2024 and has been backed by a parliamentary committee. Yet the timing of the statement was pregnant with political possibilities.

We do not know if this statement foreshadows the resolution of the Ahmedabad session of the AICC. We do not know how the ruling dispensation would respond to this demand if Congress presses for it. But one thing is sure: We are in for another round of debate on reservation and social justice.

The case for extending reservation to private higher educational institutions (or PHEIs, which include "state private universities" and "private deemed universities", besides aided and unaided private colleges) is straightforward. Higher education is a powerful mechanism for what scholars call "effectively maintained inequality", just as historically excluded communities are entering colleges and universities, the institutions they can access are being evacuated of educational quality and employment opportunities. The "happening site" — the upper end of higher education — is being effectively privatised into a space controlled by the upper-caste and upper-caste elite. If we are to retain even a modicum of commitment to the constitutional guarantee of equality of opportunity, the state must step into this domain by extending the existing policy of reservation for SCs, STs and OBCs to private colleges and universities.

We are witnessing two large-scale and long-term movements in the education sector. First, there is an unprecedented surge, a historic wave, in seeking higher education, mainly driven by the belated entry of communities that were historically denied learning. Satish Deshpande summarised this trend: "Between 1990 and 2018-2019, the number of universities has increased almost five-and-a-half times and total enrolment has shot up by seven-and-a-half times, while the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) has gone up by two-and-a-half times." The rate of growth is higher for all the marginal social groups — SC, ST, OBC and Muslims — and for women within each of these groups.

That should have been good news but for the second phenomenon: The elite exodus



C.R. Sankumar

from and the collapse of public higher education. We are witnessing the most phenomenal rise in the number of PHEIs. From 2015 to 2024 the number of private universities (including deemed universities) has gone up from 276 to 523. Private universities accounted for 26 per cent of total enrolment in 2021-22. That ratio was more top-sided at the college level: Private unaided colleges account for about 45 per cent of the total students. The public colleges and universities that the socially disadvantaged communities flock to are overcrowded and understaffed, starved of even the minimum funds. These are increasingly sites for "time pass" that are not offering knowledge, skills or jobs. In contrast, private colleges and universities have the desirable classroom size, decent to obscene infrastructure and their pay packages now attract the best faculty.

The cumulative effect of these two shifts is a massive divide in social access to educational opportunities. As Satish Deshpande puts it: "There is something illusory about the widening of access (to higher education) that allows the older elites to maintain their lead — or 'social distance' — in (higher education) despite the entry of non-elites." The profile of the private HEIs needs no guessing. They do not follow any reservation, except of course the unstated reservation for the rich. The latest All India Survey of Higher Education Data for 2021-22 shows that upper-caste Hindus (around 20 per cent of the country's population) are well over 60 per cent of private university students. Here is the social group-wise breakdown of students in private (state private and deemed private) universities: SCs were just 6.8 per cent (current population share about 17 per cent), STs 3.6 per cent (population around 9 per cent), OBCs 24.9 per cent (population around 45-50 per cent) and Muslims 3.8 per cent (population around 15 per cent). Needless to say, the picture would be even more skewed in the case of elite private universities and the sought-after courses in these institutions.

Reservation can make a difference. If we compare the social profile of students in public sector universities that are required to follow reservation, the difference is obvious: 14.6 per cent SCs, 6 per cent STs, and 31.2 per cent OBCs. There is little difference in the case of Muslims (4.1 per cent) who do not enjoy reservation. For all its limitations, quota-based affirmative action works.

Hence, the need for the state to step in.

The profile of the private HEIs needs no guessing. They do not follow any reservation, except of course the unstated reservation for the rich. The latest All India Survey of Higher Education Data for 2021-22 shows that upper-caste Hindus (around 20 per cent of the country's population) are well over 60 per cent of private university students. Here is the social group-wise breakdown of students in private (state private and deemed private) universities: SCs were just 6.8 per cent (current population share about 17 per cent), STs 3.6 per cent (population around 9 per cent), OBCs 24.9 per cent (population between 45-50 per cent) and Muslims 3.8 per cent (population around 15 per cent). Needless to say, the picture would be even more skewed in the case of elite private universities and the sought-after courses in these institutions.

Sadly, for all its lovely pronouncements, the new National Education Policy has little to remedy this situation. No matter what the letter of any education policy document says, commercialisation and privatisation of education have been the de-facto education policy of our country for several decades now. The only way of correcting this is through political action. The core of such an action should, of course, be the strengthening of public educational institutions — more funds, better governance, filling of regular faculty vacancies, professional autonomy, updated syllabi and so on. At the same time, this must be supplemented with a mandate to private institutions to follow the national policy of reservation for SCs, STs and OBCs. This should be combined with a requirement to offer freebies and scholarships to a specified proportion of students.

Would this be legally permissible? Jairam Ramesh's statement effectively answers that question. In 2005, the 93rd Amendment to the Constitution introduced Article 15(5) that allowed the state to make "any special provision" for the advancement of SCs, STs or SEBCs (the legal name for OBCs) which relates to "admission to educational institutions including private educational institutions, whether aided or unaided by the state, other than the minority educational institutions". The enabling provision was used by Parliament to pass the Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Admission) Act, 2006 to provide for reservation for OBCs, but only in central educational institutions. The Supreme Court (*Ashok Kumar Thakur vs Union of India*, 2008) upheld this reservation for state-run and state-aided institutions, keeping the issue of unaided private institutions open. This remaining issue was also resolved, first by a two-judge bench (*JMA vs Union of India*, 2011) and then a five-judge bench (*Pranati Educational and Cultural Trust vs Union of India*, 2014) that upheld reservation in unaided private institutions. So, there is no legal hitch any more.

Bringing this issue to the political agenda would address a massive lacuna in the policy of social justice. Bringing Dalit, Adivasi and pichhadas together on the same platform could also address a deep problem in the politics of social justice.

The writer is member, Swaraj India, and national convener of Bharat Jodo Abhiyan. Views are personal

A politics past its sell-by date

With Raj Thackeray's agitation against non-Marathi speakers falling flat, a question mark hangs over MNS's future



GIRISH KUBER

WHY WAS RAJ Thackeray's recent agitation, in which he called on his party workers to slay those in the state who refuse to speak Marathi, a complete non-starter? Why did it barely resonate with the Marathi masses? Besides highlighting Raj's brand of politics, this latest misadventure also raises a larger important question: Is this the end of the sons-of-the-soil proposition in Maharashtra?

Before delving into this question, however, the situation calls for a comment on the younger Thackeray and his hit-and-run style of politics. Raj's political outfit, the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) will complete two decades of its existence next year. It initially received an overwhelming response: A mere three years after its foundation, in its maiden election in 2009, the MNS sent 13 MLAs to the 288-member Maharashtra Assembly, and Raj was the new star on the state's political horizon. But just 15 years later, in the 2024 assembly elections, the party drew zero. This spectacular decline not only underlines Raj's inability to stay the course, it also puts a question mark on his party's longevity.

Treading in the footsteps of his mentor, Bal Thackeray, Raj founded the MNS with a one-point agenda: To protect the "sons of the soil" from "outsiders". For Thackeray Sr, when he founded the Shiv Sena in the 1960s, south Indians — referred to as "Madrasis" — epitomised the "outsiders", seen as stealing jobs from Marathi youth. By the time Raj, who was as much of a maverick as his uncle, set up his outfit in 2006, the "Madrasis" were replaced by "bhaiyyas". If in the 1960s, anyone who came from the south of the Kaveri was dubbed a "Madras", after 2000, every north Indian in Mumbai was considered a "bhaiyya". Unlike south Indians back then, who were accused of grabbing office jobs — like that of stenographers and typists etc — the "bhaiyyas" primarily kept the wheels of the much-vaunted service sector running, working as drivers, running laundries and even ragpicking. Both south and north Indians were hapless targets. The similarity between the two parties, however, ends there.

Although Bal Thackeray agitated against south Indians in Mumbai, he also undertook constructive activities, such as setting up the Shriyanika Lokadhikar Samiti (a body to preserve the rights of locals) which trained Maharashtra youth to make them employable. Led by loyal Sena men like the late Sudhir Joshi and Pramod Nawalkar, the Shriyanika Lokadhikar Samiti was to the Shiv Sena what the RSS is to the BJP today. It not only helped the party grow,

it also helped it create brand ambassadors in the rising middle class. So while, on the one hand, Thackeray Sr brought the lumpen element into the party, on the other hand, he won over mild-mannered middle-class men and women on a large scale. The Shriyanika Lokadhikar Samiti helped lakhs of Marathi youth by helping them prepare for job openings in large organisations such as Air India, Reserve Bank of India, Mahindra and Mahindra and many more. Bal Thackeray used his political clout to "convince" business leaders and industrialists to recruit from the ranks of the Samiti. For years, the Samiti was Mumbai's de facto Employment Exchange. This fact about Bal Thackeray, little-known outside Mumbai, can explain the initial goodwill his party earned.

While Raj tried aping the militant style of his alma mater, the Shiv Sena, he failed to create his own version of the Shriyanika Lokadhikar Samiti. This failure alone has severely restricted Raj and his party from reaching out to the Marathi middle class, which is looking for a meaningful role, not just jelling stones and slapping helpless migrants. Besides, even after nearly 20 years of existence, Raj remains the sole face of the party. Add to this the fact that the party owes its existence to Marathi pride and Hindutva. Having started on the right note, Raj lost his way, and jumped onto the Hindutva bandwagon. From being a bitter critic of Narendra Modi and his politics, the MNS chief became a Hindutva torchbearer — so much so, that he started presenting himself in full saffron and his party sought to brand him as Marathi Hindu Hriday Samrat (Marathi Hindu heartthrob/icon). The BJP wasted no time in welcoming this neoconvert into its fold, although it never aligned with him officially. This painted the MNS as the B-team of the BJP, damaging Raj's reputation. Neither did the new love for Hindutva deliver any electoral dividends. Having thus failed, Raj may find that he has little space today in either the overcrowded Hindutva camp or in the domain of linguistic regional politics.

This brings us to the question about whether the decline of the MNS means the end of "sons-of-the-soil" politics in Maharashtra. The answer is no. Maharashtra is waiting for a truly committed regional party and a leader who can go beyond eye-catching, headline-grabbing agitations and help locals stay relevant in a highly competitive economy. Having realised this, Raj was compelled to halt his latest agitation midway. Not only had it failed to earn any sympathy, it also alarmed the state machinery, as it threatened Maharashtra's already fragile investment climate. Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis appeared in no mood to let Raj upset his applecart. It also triggered a severe backlash from Maharashtra's youth who disapproved of these violent theatrics. Thus, the agitation ended with a whimper, one that signals Raj Thackeray's continuing political slide.

The writer is editor, LokSatta

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

INDIA'S OPPORTUNITY

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'The counter strike' (IE, April 7). In the global trade war between the world's two largest economies, India's export-driven sectors may face significant headwinds. As global demand weakens due to increased tariffs and economic uncertainty, India's exports risk losing competitiveness and encountering market access challenges. However, with multinational companies increasingly seeking to diversify supply chains away from China to mitigate risk, India has a chance to position itself as a favourable alternative manufacturing hub under the "Make in India" initiative. Could this be an opportunity emerging from a crisis?

Vijal Pant, Hapur

REGIONAL PRIORITIES

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Reaching out' (IE, April 7). Beijing's growing influence in the Indian subcontinent has prompted New Delhi to engage more proactively with littoral nations such as Sri Lanka, Colombo, in the meantime, continues to walk a diplomatic tightrope. India responded swiftly during its economic crisis in 2022. The ongoing finalisation of a debt restructuring agreement is intended to signal that India, unlike China, seeks more of a transactional relationship — mutual trust and goodwill remain central to Delhi's regional priorities. The recent release of several Indian fishermen will also help ease maritime tensions.

SS Paul, Chikdaha

TEACHING AI RIGHT

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'AI future starts in schools' (IE, April 5). Introducing artificial intelligence and its applications to school students is indeed a timely idea. However, addressing foundational hurdles at the preparatory stage is essential to ensure meaningful learning. Students must have easy access to the internet and devices like smartphones. Equally important is the training of teachers — not only in the subject matter but in teaching methodologies that ensure students comprehend the concepts effectively. Without this, there is a risk that students might misuse the knowledge.

Y G Choudhry, Pune

NEED DIALOGUE

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Malice to wage Muslims' (IE, April 6). The recent passage of the Waqf Bill has sparked protests that extend beyond the contours of the legislation. While the government maintains that the Bill promotes transparent and fair management of waqf properties, the deeper issue lies in the widening trust gap between the Muslim community and the state. As seen with the Citizenship Amendment Act protests, the backlash stems not only from legal curbs, but also from a growing sense of alienation. No nation can prosper if its second-largest religious community feels persistently targeted or unheard. The government must take the initiative to hold sincere dialogue.

Sanjay Chopra, Mohali



BHAWANA SOMAYA

Stars, love, second chances

From Aamir Khan to NTR, how superstars navigate relationships in public eye

AT A PRE-EVE birthday meet hosted by Aamir Khan, the actor-filmmaker introduced the paparazzi to his new girlfriend Gauri Spratt, a Bangalore-based professional. Khan revealed that Gauri and he have been friends for almost 25 years and in a relationship for over a year; that he has been frequently travelling to Bangalore to spend quality time with his beloved and that both their families are supportive of the relationship.

This happened on March 13 at a five-star hotel in Mumbai. I was not present for the celebration but I'm informed that the media was too shocked to disguise its excitement. Nobody present in the room had the slightest inkling of what was coming, not the PR agency hired by Khan, nor his personal manager. Khan joked that the media never got wind of his secret because he was super discreet. I feel they didn't smell the scoop because the current crop is reared on press releases, which is why, when Khan requested them to lower their cameras and shut off their mobiles, all of them obliged.

Time has proved that whenever a reigning superstar undergoing an upheaval has

taken the media or their fans into confidence, both have validated the superstar's decisions. My mind winds back to the 1980s. City: Madras (now Chennai). Superstar Kamal Haasan, still married to Vani Ganapathy, was in love with Bollywood actor Sarika. Their love story made headlines in two cities. Conservatives were shocked when Sarika declared that she was pregnant with Haasan's baby. For some time, the actors were ostracised by their peer groups but show business made no discrimination.

During her second trimester, Sarika decided to shift base from Mumbai to Chennai and since Haasan and she were not officially married as yet, they had no home and Sarika was parked for the rest of her pregnancy at a five-star hotel. For six months, she was restricted to her room and did not venture out until it was time to rush to the hospital. Their firstborn, Shruti Rajalakshmi Haasan, arrived on January 28, 1986. A large crowd waited outside the hospital gate for hours to bless their deity's newborn. A few hours later, Haasan arrived on the hospital balcony and showed his little one to his fans. They were jubilant and

cheered him. Haasan didn't say a word; he merely folded his hands and the crowd responded with a thunderous applause.

A decade later, another emotional moment, involving another superstar. Year, 1993. City: Hyderabad. Superstar NT Rama Rao (NTR), the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) founder and former Andhra Pradesh chief minister, around 70 at that time, had lost his first wife, Basvatarakam, to cancer. Then, out of the blue, another woman, almost half his age, Lakshmi Parvathy, a college lecturer and author from a small town in Guntur district, came into his life. Parvathy had separated from her first husband, NTR and Parvathy met in 1991 for an interview and love blossomed, culminating in a secret marriage in 1992. In 1993, at a film event in Tirupati, an emotionally charged NTR publicly announced his marriage to Parvathy (who was by his side) and asked the audience if he had done anything wrong. There was a brief silence, and then came a deafening "No" from the large gathering.

In 1994, when the NTR-led TDP returned to power, Lakshmi was crowned as his lucky

masochist. This was unacceptable to NTR's children by his first wife, and his son-in-law N Chandrababu Naidu led the revolt against him. NTR protected his second wife Parvathy till his last breath. Years later, the intense love story was made into a film, *Lakshmi's NTR*, by Ram Gopal Varma in 2019.

Back to Mumbai and Aamir Khan in 2025. Show business in Bollywood is poles apart from idol worship down South. When Khan made his debut in films in 1988, he was forced to keep his marriage to Reena Datta a secret as it would affect his stardom. When he found love again with Kiran Rao in 2005, the actor was more forthcoming. Khan is perhaps the only two-time happily divorced actor I know in my career as a film journalist. Unlike the South superstars, who were isolated by their families, Khan's children and ex-wives are supportive of his latest decision and Gauri is already a part of his family and festivities.

So, on that note, all I can say is congratulations, begum joan.

The writer is a senior journalist



THE EDITORIAL PAGE

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

READING THE FALL

Sharp decline in markets underlines this: In a world without fair trade rules, India needs to be better prepared

THE INDIAN STOCK markets experienced a sharp fall in the wake of the trade war that is unfolding globally. The benchmark indices — Nifty 50 and Sensex — each lost more than 2.5 per cent of their value on Monday. This is the most they have fallen since the dip in the wake of the results of the general election in June last year. The Indian markets took their cue from the sharp declines in US markets towards the end of last week; US markets lost over \$6 trillion in value thanks to the fall on Thursday and Friday. The other Asian market benchmarks have registered even more painful lows. The Nikkei 225 (of Japan) was down almost 8 per cent, the TAIEX (of Taiwan) fell 9.7 per cent, the Hang Seng (of Hong Kong) lost more than 13 per cent of its value and the SSE Composite of Shanghai stock exchange was down more than 7 per cent. And the bad news may not end tomorrow since the European indices continue to fall; German DAX, British FTSE 100, French CAC 40 and the broader STOXX600 — all were trading at losses of around 5 per cent even as the futures market in the US suggests further weakness across S&P 500, Dow Jones Industrial Averages, Nasdaq 100 as well as Russell 2000.

At one level, the reason is pretty straightforward: The massive upending of global trade thanks to the unilateral announcement of punitive tariffs on the rest of the world by US President Donald Trump. Tariffs — regardless of who pays them — are an increase in costs without a commensurate increase in production or productivity. As such, they bring down corporate profits just as they demand and raise prices across the board. The indirect effects in terms of the disruption of well-established and efficient global supply chains is far less understood but possibly, in effect, even more damaging. But the problem with Trump's tariffs is not limited to their existence; it also pertains to their legality (will they hold up in a court of law in the US), their permanence (will the US Congress, especially the Republicans, allow the US President to upend trade relations with the rest of the world), and their effectiveness (how many company CEOs will decide to allocate billions of dollars towards new factories in the US just based on tariffs that lack legislative backing of the US Congress). None of these uncertainties take into account the element of retaliation by others such as China and the European Union.

There are two ways in which Indian policymakers can view this fall. One, as just a temporary blip and a good opportunity to buy more of the market especially since Indian markets are falling less than the rest. Soon, tariffs will be withdrawn and all will be fine. Two, as a tectonic shift in global trade where the US has lost its credibility as a trade partner and opened the door to protectionist industrial policies that belong to a bygone era. In a world without fair trade rules, India will have to be better prepared to make its way, and thrive.

LISTEN TO THE MINISTER

Piyush Goyal's comments on startups in India are a sobering reality check. Innovation ecosystem needs to be wider, deeper

TO VIEW UNION Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal's remarks, drawing a distinction between the nature of work that startups are engaged in in India and China, as belittling the startup ecosystem in the country, is a misreading. While his comments have elicited sharp reactions from sections of the startup universe, for a sector that is prone to patting itself on the back, they serve a timely note of caution. There is a reality check for not only the private ecosystem — which encompasses sections of India Inc, universities, and private capital — but also the government which has positioned itself as a valuable stakeholder in the start-up story.

It is true that the startup ecosystem in the country has made strides, offered an array of services and provided employment opportunities. But it is telling that most of the startups that have become big companies — Flipkart and Zomato, to name two — are more geared towards domestic consumption oriented sectors. In contrast, the Chinese companies that are dominating the global headlines are involved in cutting edge high-tech research. They are competing in global markets, rivaling even US giants across a range of sectors like BYD (automobiles), TikTok (social media) and Shein (fast fashion). China's technological prowess has been on full display with the launch of its AI model DeepSeek, developed at a fraction of the budget that many thought was needed.

India spends just 0.64 per cent of GDP on research and development, considerably lower than that spent by China (2.41 per cent) and the US (3.47 per cent). Equally worrying, the private sector in India contributes just 36.4 per cent of the spending on R&D, compared to 77 per cent in the case of China and 75 per cent in the US. As of 2023, China accounted for almost 70 per cent of AI patents as per the Stanford University's AI Index Report 2025. In the same year, it installed 2,76,300 industrial robots — 73 times more than the US. It is not just a question of entrepreneurs. The ecosystem that drives such innovation — technical universities, a skilled labour force, industry — does not exist in India at the scale required to catapult the country into the top league. There is also the question of capital. The long development timelines in deep tech require patient capital. What needs to be done to ensure that the country has access to such capital or is the kind of money extended to startups looking for a quick exit within the low-risk high-reward matrix? Minister Goyal's wake-up call is timely, the challenge is to ensure it's heard on campuses, in labs, in boardrooms — both private and public.

WEB, UNRAVELLED

List of most visited sites in 2025 is a reminder of the promise of the internet — and its disappointments

OVER 60 PER cent of the world's population (around 5.5 billion people) is on the internet. And, despite disruptions galore, the sites they are visiting seem to be more or less predictable. According to DataReportal, the top 10 most visited websites in 2025 so far include search engines (Google, Yahoo), social media platforms (Meta's offerings, X, Reddit) and, unsurprisingly, ChatGPT. India broadly follows the global pattern, with WhatsApp high up on the list. In the seemingly dry list of websites, there is a deeper story about what people want from the internet and how it has, perhaps, not lived up to its promise.

Back in the golden age of the World Wide Web — before "misinformation" became a ubiquitous term and algorithms the enemy of serendipity and even agency — the internet promised to break down barriers. Knowledge would have no gatekeepers and distance ceased to be a hindrance to communication. A person in the remotest village in South Asia could, theoretically, access lectures from the best physicists in Europe. And a teenager in PG Wodehouse fan could share the joys of Reginald Jeeves and Bertie Wooster with others who get it. In essence, the means to quench the thirst for knowledge and connection, people were promised, was just a click away. And going by the 2025 list — search engines, LLMs that answer questions and social media — people still want the same things.

But the halo around the internet has faded. The lack of barriers to entry meant that falsity has become indistinguishable from truth, bad faith actors from the sincere. Social media, in particular, has become a battleground — the content-agnostic algorithms, optimised for engagement, seem to divide people as often as they connect them. And the AI revolution is rife with anxieties about the future of work, art and creativity. Despite the pall, though, there's still something to the internet: You can always find a Wodehouse fan if you look hard enough.

Congress needs to speak to...

... the Hindu in the room. Its waffling on the majority distorts and weakens its engagement with the minority



VANDITA MISHRA

IN THE END, the passing of the Waqf (Amendment) Bill 2025 was about hard power and cold numbers. The Narendra Modi government has thrust "reform" upon the administration of charitable endowments by the Muslim minority — because it can. And so, the text of the bill cleared by Parliament is overshadowed and overtaken by a context 11 years in the making — of Muslim insecurities stoked by their being at the receiving end of the citizenship act, criminalisation of triple talaq, abrogation of Article 370, bulldozer injustice, spectres of "love jihad", bans on hijab in the classroom and namaz on the street, hate speech.

The government is saying that on issues that concern India's largest minority, it will act or turn a blind eye at will, while the Muslims are cast in the role of passive target or passive beneficiary, the "labharthi". Missing in the BJP's high-minded talk on waqf reform, ostensibly to bring transparency and address deprivations of poor Muslims, was the voice of the BJP's directly elected Muslim MP. Because — it is necessary to state the obvious — the BJP does not have a Muslim Lok Sabha MP.

At the same time, during the discussions on the Bill in the two Houses, it seemed, for a brief while, that some voices were also being recovered, a few silences were also being filled.

For one, after a long while, Parliament hosted the big debate instead of being bypassed by it. After long, too, the Opposition spoke up and took a clear position on an issue that concerned the minority.

As it heads into an important AICC session in Ahmedabad this week, however, India's main Opposition party, Congress, needs to ask itself this question: Does the strong and clear position it took against the Waqf Bill — even though it had a conspicuous hole in it, with Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi, who has taken on the mantle of the ideological agenda setter-in-chief on caste, choosing not to speak on it — mean that it will now speak up on Muslim concerns more forthrightly and frequently, when the government attempts to deny them agency?

Or will it return to the prevarications and equivocations, ambivalences and silences that have so far defined its secularism — which seems to rely heavily on the fact that Muslims have little choice or political alternative, and which sees the raising of Muslim issues as riddled with dangers of Hindu

consolidation that, it calculates, will only favour the BJP?

There is another question here: For all its claims to secularism, is Congress afraid/evasive/silent on Muslims because, 11 years after the coming to power of the Modi-BJP, it has not yet found a language, of confidence and conviction, to talk to voters who identify themselves as Hindu?

In other words, in times of BJP dominance, does Congress hesitate to say "Muslim" because it has not found a way to say "Hindu"?

In the national political mainstream, Mandal made it possible, and inescapable, to address caste groups by calling them by their name. But has Congress still to come to terms with the transformations both captured and unleashed, simultaneously, by the politics of Mandal?

Of course, there is a fundamental difference between Mandal and Mandal politics, and their respective fallouts and consequences. The backward caste groups that were acknowledged and mobilised after Mandal were, and are, the historically disadvantaged majority. On the other hand, the BJP's Mandal politics attempts to unite a privileged majority against a vulnerable minority, by inducing and deepening in the former a sense of siege.

In principle, and in practice, however, Mandal politics also needed to be rescued from a slide into majoritarianism — "social justice" became the legitimising rubric that prevents, or ought to prevent, the politics of caste from descending into casteist politics. Now, a rescue of another kind needs to be attempted. A larger rubric is needed to take the dominant majoritarian politics and reframe it — into one that acknowledges religious identity but resists a free fall into communalism in a multi-religious democracy.

That rubric could be diversity, or pluralism. It could be that, now, with the memories of Partition fading, a generation of voters coming of age after Gujarat 2002, and nearly two generations after Ayodhya 1992, the time has come to not be spoken by the power of embedded bitterness and prejudice, and to not escape into pretty but perfunctory slogans of "unity in diversity".

This may be the moment for a political project that re-imagines diversity so that it is less burdened by ghosts of the past, real and imagined, and so that it turns its face to the future, and situates the Hindu in it.

Instead, by all accounts, in a BJP-dominated polity, Congress has approached the voter by a variety of pessimistic and mincing strategies.

By painting pictures of impending or already-here doom and apocalypse on the watch of the BJP — Constitution-in-danger, free-and-fair-elections-in-danger, democracy-in-danger. By the politics of mahagathabandhan, which attempts to mechanically, state by different state, add up the Opposition arithmetic to take on the BJP's arithmetic plus chemistry.

By sidestepping voters' religious identity with appeals to their caste, or by going opportunistically hyper-local, and by talking, largely as a way to change the subject and mostly inconsistently, about price rise and corruption, unemployment and poverty.

Or by addressing Hindu voters on terms set by the BJP — that is, through a surreptitious me-too, soft Hindutva politics, which lets a "secular" party play to the "communal" gallery, and does not explicitly or thoughtfully refute its underlying, congealed us-versus-them binaries.

It is not possible to rewind to an earlier time, when the BJP hadn't yet made its way up, one Hindu mobilisation after another, making it its platform's hard core and adding layers to it of other appeals.

As past experience has shown, unless Congress finds the words to speak to Hindus, two things will continue to happen — in the final days and hours of the election campaign, the BJP will pull out its brahmstra of Hindu-in-danger rhetoric, and Congress, for the whole campaign, will maintain a coy silence on minority issues because it fears the BJP's brahmstra will consolidate the majority.

Yes, in principle, the majority in a democracy is not a fixed monolith, it has shifting concerns and identities. And admittedly, the Congress addressing Hindu voters carries a risk of ceding even more space than it already has to the BJP.

But if it wants Indian politics not to remain frozen where it is now, and if minority concerns are to get their due — not just an airing, as on the Waqf Bill — India's main Opposition party does not have the option of evading the hard labour of politics. It cannot afford to be tongue-tied with the Hindu in the room.

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MUKESH AMBANI

CONGRATULATIONS ON PUTTING women's entrepreneurship at the forefront. In appreciating women's entrepreneurship, I have to give credit to Isha (Ambani Piramal) and Neeta (Ambani). In the last decade, they have opened up my mind.

We are now celebrating women entrepreneurs as newsmakers. There will be a time when they will be history-makers, not only for their industries but for their countries and for civilisation as a whole. So, one day, I hope we celebrate them as history-makers. To just give you (some) perspective: We have been involved in industry for a long time, and industry is moving from hardware to software. Intelligence is at the forefront of everything we do. I know most of the women that have won the award today — and I admire all of them. What they said on the panel is that we are moving towards a more compassionate, a more loving, and a more empathy-filled world. Isha always tells me that it is not the survival of the fittest, it is really the survival of

SURVIVAL OF THE KINDEST

Led by women, business world is becoming more empathetic

the kindest. That is the impact she has on me. She grades my meetings. Now, I am giving you all the meat. So, when we have meetings together, I have to look at her. She'll say, "Dad, this is a D." I'll say, "What happened?" She is perpetually grading me. So, in a sense, I already have a boss in terms of all the meetings we do together. There are many silent initiatives that Isha has begun in Reliance Industries — not only in retail but in the group as a whole — which she is behind, and we will see the results of that in a few years, I hope.

Fundamentally, we are fortunate at Reliance that we are giving women leaders space very much at the forefront. As the founder, I am very happy that we have done it. Most of our big institutions — including our hospital in Mumbai which we are all very proud of — were built by Neeta and are run by a woman leader. NMACC (Nita Mukesh Ambani Cultural Centre) has an all-women team. In a sense, yes, women's en-

trepreneurship is coming to the fore and all of us believe in it.

Congratulations Isha and congratulations to all the other winners. I have always admired Mallika Srinivasan. All the winners are people I have admired. There's Vani (Kola), if you talk about start-ups. For us, she is where we have got the highest returns. We also met women entrepreneurs with her.

(Here's a note to entrepreneurs). You win in the mind, as always. It doesn't matter who you are. The important thing is that you win the mind. I believe in what Zia Moody has said: You just have to go for it. You will never succeed in the first attempt. Keep at it. You will ultimately win.

Ambani is chairman and managing director of Reliance Industries Limited. This article is an edited excerpt of his remarks at the Express Awards for Women Entrepreneurs (Express AWEE 2025) held on April 5. His daughter, Isha Ambani Piramal, is among the recipients



APRIL 8, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

TALKS IN ASSAM

ALTHOUGH HOPES HAVE been raised, the Union Home Secretary, R D Pradhan, is reportedly not expected to make any specific proposal during yet another round of talks aimed at resolving the foreign nationals issue. Pradhan, who arrived in Guwahati for a two-day visit, met leaders of the All Assam Students' Union (ASU). He is also scheduled to meet the newly-formed All Assam Students Elected Representatives Union.

BOYCOTT CONTINUES

FIVE OPPOSITION PARTIES, including the

AKALI Dal, boycotted the Cabinet panel on Punjab affairs during its inaugural visit to the troubled state. The panel sought to ascertain the views of political and non-political organisations, as well as key individuals, regarding the Punjab issue. No representatives from the Akali Dal, BJP, Janata Party, CPI, or CPI(M) met with the committee, which heard submissions from delegates representing Patiala and Sangrur districts.

MISSILE PAUSE

SOVIET COMMUNIST PARTY leader Mikhail S Gorbachev announced a moratorium on the deployment of medium-range nuclear

missiles in Europe. Speaking to the Communist Party newspaper Pravda, Mr Gorbachev stated that the moratorium would last until November, during which time the Soviet Union would also suspend other retaliatory measures in Europe.

GOLD SMUGGLING

ROBERT LENDI, a Swiss national, was apprehended by customs officials at Delhi Airport for attempting to smuggle 10 kilograms of gold, valued at over Rs 21 lakh. Lendi, a well-dressed young man, had concealed the gold — shaped into biscuits — within a specially designed belt.

EXPLAINED ECONOMICS

Markets tanking, what should you do?

STOCK MARKETS CRASH AROUND THE WORLD

Three of India's top fund managers tell Sandeep Singh that while India cannot be immune to the crisis in stock markets around the world, its economy remains resilient and still retains momentum. Their advice: keep a 3-year investment horizon, put in money in large caps in staggered fashion, and avoid small- and mid-caps. Edited excerpts from interviews.

India an oasis in desert, but can't be immune to sandstorm; follow asset allocation dharma



NILESH SHAH

Why have the markets crashed?

The market fears that President Donald Trump's unfolding tariff war will create stagflation in the US and lower growth in the rest of the world. Lower growth means lower profit, in the near- and medium-term, hence the need for a reset.

What is the outlook going forward?

President Trump is rightfully aiming for a lower fiscal and current account deficit in the US, and stabilising the debt-to-GDP ratio. President Bill Clinton did the same thing during his tenure (1993-2001) by reducing the government employee base by 400,000-plus, cutting wasteful expenses, and turning the US into a fiscal-surplus country. But his approach was consultative, and not in-your-face.

President Trump is trying the same with a lot of unpredictability. In an all-out tariff war, everyone will be a loser, as the 1828 and 1930 episodes of US mass tariff history have showed.

The US economy is two-thirds consumption. Almost half of household financial wealth is in the stock market. A fall in the equity market could impact consumption through a negative wealth effect.

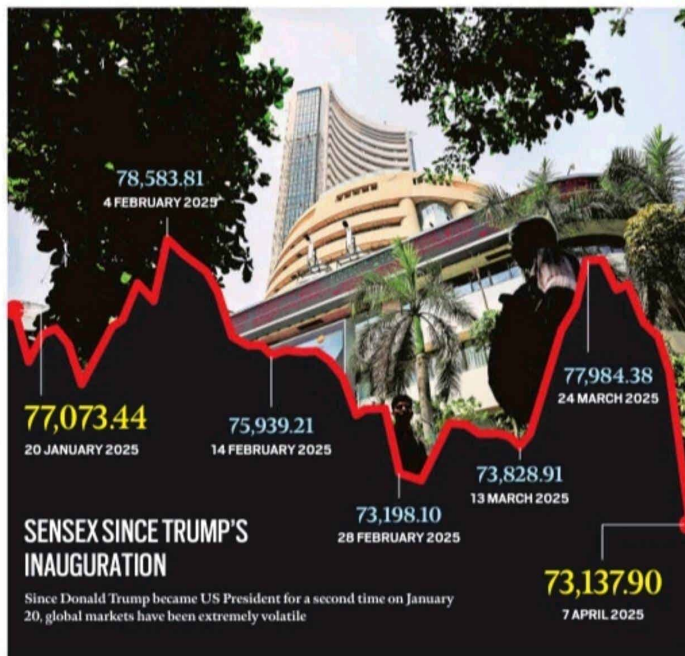
If Wall Street experiences pain for long enough, the way interconnected feedback loops in the modern financial system work, it is inevitable that the pain on Main Street will be a matter of time.

We hope that President Trump has used the shock and awe treatment to bring people to the negotiating table, and will work out deals to avoid catastrophic consequences.

What should investors do during this fall in the markets?

Follow the dharma of asset allocation. We are an oasis in the desert. However, there is a fierce sandstorm blowing in the desert. We can't be immune to it. Once the storm is over, people will come to the oasis.

Large-caps are fairly valued. Mid- and small-caps are still a little expensive compared to historical averages. Keep neutral al-



location to equity as an asset class with a large-cap bias. Keep cash to buy in the correction, but don't be in a hurry to deploy. Systematic Transfer Plan (STP) is preferred over lump sum.

How big is the threat of recession, and will it hurt India?

The threat of recession is real for India. We can't ignore it on the assumption that we are a domestic-driven economy. Between goods and services trade – imports as well as exports – and remittances we have a high linkage with the global economy. If the engine of the global growth train via the US slows down or stops, it will have consequences for India's growth rate in FY 26.

But we will be impacted less than many of our peers as our monetary policy is easing, and we have fiscal space to spend if there is a need.

Are there any positives to the current situation?

All dark clouds have a silver lining. India has been hit with a lower tariff rate than many of its peers. An all-out tariff war will be bad for the American consumer and the US economy, as well as for other countries.

Assuming that the Wall Street pain flows to Main Street and puts a break on the current all-out tariff war, India will have an opportunity to capture US markets from peers in segments like textiles, footwear, toys, consumer durables, etc.

We can bridge the trade deficit with increased imports of energy and defence equipment from the US.

A rollback of tariffs can happen through bilateral negotiations or domestic compulsions of the US from higher inflation and lower growth.

Nilesh Shah is Managing Director of Kotak Mahindra Asset Management Company Ltd

Retail investors must hold on to large-cap investments, perhaps even add exposure



ANISH TAWAKLEY

What's driving the fall in markets around the world?

This correction is largely driven by global factors. It would be incorrect to attribute it to domestic developments – nothing has materially changed in India to warrant this kind of market reaction.

The current market volatility is a response to global economic concerns, particularly the imposition of tariffs by the Donald Trump administration.

Markets have fallen not just in India but across the world. There are widespread worries about the global economic outlook.

It's not just that the rest of the world is suffering due to US-imposed tariffs – US markets are down as well. Their own economy is also beginning to feel the impact of these actions.

So, do you expect a rollback or

reconsideration of the tariffs?

From an economic standpoint, it would make complete sense to revisit the tariffs – not just for the rest of the world, but also for the US itself.

However, since the original decision to impose tariffs lacked strong economic justification, expecting a reversal purely on economic logic may not be realistic.

What is the outlook for Indian markets now?

I wouldn't want to speculate on the short-term outlook since there is bound to be volatility.

That said, the domestic economy continues to be healthy. Even if exports weaken due to global headwinds, a supportive monetary policy and resilient domestic demand could help cushion the impact.

India's economy still has momentum. While some sectors with greater exposure to the global economy will likely feel the pressure, the overall outlook for the domestic economy remains constructive.

What does this mean for equity valuations?

We believe large-cap stocks are at reasonably good valuations and look attractive at current levels.

However, our concerns around small-

cap stocks are independent of this global event. Even before this correction, we had reservations about the valuations and the fundamental strength of some small- and mid-cap business models. We continue to remain cautious there.

What should retail investors do in this environment?

Retail investors should certainly hold on to their investments in large caps – and we would even recommend adding exposure at these levels.

On the other hand, we haven't been comfortable with mid- and small-caps for some time now, so we wouldn't advise adding positions there.

Any changes to your portfolio positioning, especially in the business cycle fund?

In our Business Cycle Fund, we continue to maintain a skew towards domestic cyclical – and we are quite comfortable with that positioning. These include sectors like automobiles, financials, industrials, and capital goods. If the domestic economy remains strong, these sectors are well-placed to deliver reasonable returns.

Anish Tawakley is Co-CEO Equity, ICICI Prudential AMC

Indian markets should do well over 3-yr horizon, invest in staggered manner



PRASHANT JAIN

Why have the markets fallen?

Globally there is a concern around President Donald Trump's tariff war, which has resulted in panic.

US yields have fallen sharply, the dollar has weakened, and oil prices have fallen. Equity markets around the world are witnessing a sharp decline, and since there is panic, there will be some correlation, which is resulting in a fall in Indian markets.

What is the outlook for the Indian economy amid these global concerns?

Compared to many others, India is relatively better positioned amid the developments around the world.

Goods exports to the United States are only 2% of India's GDP. In any case, the US duty differential with our key competi-

tors in goods exports such as China and Vietnam has increased, which puts us in a slightly advantageous position.

As oil prices and US yields have fallen sharply, it is a positive for India. Also, with the US markets – which has been the most preferred asset class over the last few years – underperforming other markets, it should lead to the realignment of capital flows, and India is a potential beneficiary.

Besides, rising services business exports have lowered India's current account deficit to 1%. This enhances the Indian economy's resilience in the current environment.

All this puts India in a much better position vis-à-vis other nations.

What should investors do at this time?

One important concern for India was valuations.

With Nifty valuations around 17 times at FY 27 earnings, these are reasonable multiples for a realistic 10-12% earnings growth.

With domestic flows staying strong and lower supply from primary markets, the Indian markets should do well over a

three-year horizon.

There may be short term pain because of the global markets correction.

As Nifty seems fairly valued, investors should prefer large caps. They should invest in a staggered manner over the next few months.

Investors should avoid exposure to small- and mid-caps as the valuations continue to remain expensive.

How big is the threat of recession for India?

India's correlation with world GDP is low. This is because of a high component of consumption in the economy, and a low share of goods exports.

India achieved 5.5% growth even in the Lehman year (2008). A recession in the US will have a low impact on India's economy. However it would have an impact on IT services.

A recession/slower growth of the world is likely to result in lower oil prices and lower interest rates, both of which are beneficial for India.

Prashant Jain is founder and Chief Investment Officer at 3P Investment Managers Pvt Ltd.

The 1997 ethics code which mentioned idea of SC judges declaring assets

AJOY SINHA KARPURAM
 NEW DELHI, APRIL 7

IN A FULL court meeting on April 1, all 31 judges of the Supreme Court, including the Chief Justice of India, decided to publicly declare their assets.

This comes on the heels of the discovery of wads of currency notes at the residence of former Delhi High Court judge Justice Yashwant Varma last month, an unprecedented incident which raised significant questions regarding corruption in India's higher judiciary. Justice Varma has since been transferred to the Allahabad High Court.

Unlike government officials and politicians, SC judges are not bound to make information about their assets and liabilities public. That said, they have in the past resolved to do so.

The recent decision is essentially a reiteration of the "Restatement of Values of Judicial Life", a code of ethics that the judiciary adopted in another full court meeting in 1997. This document continues to inform conversations on how judges should conduct

themselves while performing official duties.

The 1997 code

Through the code, the SC attempted to create a framework for institutional accountability on multiple issues. It is essentially a numbered, non-exhaustive list of 16 entries, which spell out values that judges must uphold as well as pitfalls they must avoid.

According to the code, judges must:

■ Avoid actions that "erode" the public's faith in the higher judiciary. "Justice must not merely be done but it must also be seen to be done";

■ Not contest elections or hold office in clubs, societies, and associations;

■ Avoid close association with "individual members of the Bar" and if any immediate or close family members are members of the Bar, they must not appear before the judge in court or be associated with any case or "cause" she is dealing with;

■ Practice "a degree of aloofness consistent with the dignity of his office"; that is, be impartial by maintaining distance from the case before her;

■ Not hear and decide cases where a family member or friend is involved;

■ Not publicly express views on political matters that may arise for judicial determination;

■ "Let his judgments speak for themselves" and must not give interviews to the media;

■ Not accept gifts or hospitality from anyone besides family and friends; and

■ Avoid acts "unbecoming of... high officer".

Ensuring accountability

The code effectively laid the groundwork for every future measure introduced to ensure judicial accountability.

Among other things, it paved the way for judges to declare to the CJI "all his/her assets in the form of real estate or investments... within a reasonable time of assuming office". While this declaration was supposed to be "confidential", the apex court's stance on the issue has

shifted over time.

Following another full court meeting in 2009, SC judges decided to declare their assets publicly "purely on a voluntary basis". A number of declarations were even posted on the SC's website. In 2019, a Constitution Bench held that the assets and liabilities of judges were not "personal information" for the purpose of RTI inquiries.

However, the SC website has not been updated since 2018. No declarations submitted by the current judges are available. The website only gives a list of 28 judges of the court (out of a total 33) who have submitted their declarations of assets "to the CJI".

"The Restatement of Values of Judicial Life" was accompanied by a resolution to develop an in-house procedure to take action against judges who "do not follow the universally accepted values of judicial life". A five-member committee created the procedure in October 1997, and it was formally adopted in 1999.

'Values of judicial life'

Together, the inquiry process and the "Judicial Values" resolution provide a means

to hold judges accountable for misconduct that does not necessarily amount to an impeachable offence. The bar for impeachment is much higher – no SC judge has ever been impeached in India.

As the SC put it in a 1995 case concerning allegations of financial impropriety against the Bombay High Court Chief Justice, there is "a yawning gap between proved misbehaviour and bad conduct inconsistent with the high office". Actions that would fall in the latter category of "bad conduct" are covered in the 1997 resolution.

Most recently, this came to play when CJI Sanjay Khanna initiated an in-house inquiry against Justice Varma last month.

The resolution was also invoked in 2014 when the SC revisited the in-house inquiry process when a woman additional district and sessions judge from Madhya Pradesh filed a complaint of sexual harassment against a sitting High Court judge. The court clarified that the procedure is meant "for taking suitable remedial action against judges, who by their acts of omission or commission, do not follow the accepted values of judicial life".

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 Offline Batches Commencement

Centre	हिंदी माध्यम	English Medium
Karol Bagh	21 अप्रैल सुबह 11:30 बजे	8 अप्रैल 6 PM
Jaipur	28 अप्रैल सुबह 9 बजे	28 अप्रैल 8 AM
Prayagraj	7 अप्रैल सुबह 9 बजे	7 अप्रैल 8 AM
Indore	24 अप्रैल सुबह 9 बजे	28 अप्रैल 6 PM

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India's strategy to win the trade war



ARUN MAURYA
FORMER MEMBER,
PLANNING COMMISSION

TRADE wars are power wars. President Trump has landed the first big punch in his trade war against India to Make America Great Again. India cannot hope to win by landing a big punch back. The Indian economy is much smaller. India's responses must be strategic to strengthen its economy in the long run.

Asking the US to play by global rules is not an option with Trump. GATT (General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs) was created in 1946 to nurture the growth of weaker economies, thereby enlarging the global economy. The GATT's principles are the foundations of the WTO, which replaced the GATT in 1995. Those principles acknowledge that smaller competitors must not be thrown into the ring with larger ones until they have grown stronger.

Trump's salvo on Liberation Day has imposed a 49 per cent reciprocal tariff on Cambodia and 46 per cent on Bangladesh, two countries whose per capita incomes are 3 per cent of the USA's!

Trump's gripe is that these small countries are exporting more to the US than importing from it. Though that is how international trade is expected to grow the global economy equitably, by enabling poorer countries to produce for richer ones, creating employment and incomes for their own citizens to progressively earn and buy more even from richer countries.

India is also in Trump's crosshairs. India's per capita GDP is less than Cambodia's and Bangladesh's, though its GDP is the fifth largest in the world. It has a long way to go to Viksit Bharat.

The US emerged the global hegemon when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, with the largest economy, the largest military and control of the global financial system. The US always put its own economic interests, and those of US companies, above democratic values. The US claims it is the global champion of democracy. It led the 'free world' in the fight against 'non-democratic' communism. The US definition of democracy is governance with a system of popularity elected leaders.

Nevertheless, to maintain its control over petroleum trade, the US overthrew an elected government in a coup d'état in Iran in 1953 and installed the compliant Shah of Iran instead and keeps countries with unelected monarchs in West Asia on its side. India, the world's largest



GAMEPLAN: Trump wants to enable US' corporate farmers to expand their markets in India. REUTERS

electoral democracy, has a difficult relationship with the US. The US expects India to be always on its side against any authoritarian country unwilling to toe the US line. The US considers India immoral for remaining neutral between the Soviet Union and the west in the cold war; it was angry when India was compelled to come closer to Russia when the US supported the Pakistan military dictatorship against India. Trump seems willing to make up with Russia now, but not with China, which has grown into the second largest economy in the world and caught up with the US in advanced technologies.

The US and China are India's largest trading partners, with \$118-billion trade with each. Whereas India has a

India is resisting Trump's tariffs on farm products, and it must, because its millions of small and poor farmers need higher prices for their products to improve their standard of living.

trade deficit of \$85 billion with China from where it imports large volumes of manufactured goods, India has a surplus of \$37 billion with the US, which is India's largest market for software services. India must tread carefully not to annoy either the US or China. China straddles its northern borders, where tensions continue to simmer. It has become imperative for India to build its own industrial capability, despite Trump's pressure to abandon Make in India.

In 1990, China and India were two equally poor large countries. China's economy and per capita GDP is five times larger now. China's manufacturing sector is seven times larger and its high-tech exports are 43 times higher than India's. The remarkable growth of Chi-

na's manufacturing sector, and especially its high-tech exports, has alarmed the US. It is the provocation for Trump's campaign to Make America Great Again.

India and China's manufacturing sectors were similar in 1990. India had even established better capabilities in the production of machinery, electrical equipment, commercial vehicles and other capital goods. India-made trucks and power equipment were exported to many countries.

In 1991, India had to turn to the IMF for financial assistance. With the IMF came the Washington formula: Open borders to trade; reduce tariffs drastically; let citizens enjoy products from around the world; dismantle the public sector; abandon industrial policies. China did not succumb to the US ideology. India complied more easily. Now India, like the US, is importing a large range of manufactured products from China, including high-tech ones.

Trump says India's import duties are too high and must be reduced across the board. India has reduced duties on Harley Davidson motorcycles. Trump wants India to reduce duties on all manufactured products and on agricultural products also to enable America's own, highly subsidised, corporate farmers to expand their markets in India. India is resisting, and it must, because its millions of small and poor farmers need higher prices for their products to improve

their standard of living.

Indo-US trade negotiations have begun with a declared aim to increase India-US trade to \$500 billion annually by 2030. India is being threatened to reduce barriers to imports of US agriculture and manufactured products. Plus, there are apprehensions of dampers on Indian IT exports to the US. Thus, India-US trade can be increased only by a huge influx of imports from the US. This will reduce the growth of jobs and incomes in India and weaken its economy.

Trump calls India's policies to Make in India 'protectionist' while he is raising trade barriers around the USA, even against tiny Pacific Island countries on whom he has announced reciprocal tariffs! Indian industries have been hoping that US restrictions on Chinese imports will result in openings for India, Vietnam and others to replace China in US supply chains. With Trump adding an additional 34 per cent duty on China, these countries fear that Chinese manufacturers will aggressively sell their products to them instead.

Indian businessmen are already pressing the government to make it easier for them to import Chinese products. To import and sell is easy. Learning to make in India is harder. The time has come for India's manufacturers and the Indian government to stand up against bullying by Trump and his corporate friends and to make India great.

Plastic in every sip: The toxic truth about bottled water



SS SEKHON
EXPROFESSOR, GURU NANAK
DEV UNIVERSITY, AMRITSAR

ABOUT 70 per cent of the human body is made up of water, which plays a vital role in delivering oxygen to the brain, transporting nutrients, aiding digestion and regulating body temperature. However, the very water we depend on may contain invisible threats —nanoplastics, plastic particles measuring less than 100 nanometres.

Emerging research shows that these plastics have infiltrated our drinking water, raising serious health concerns. Recognising the importance of this resource, the UN declared safe drinking water a fundamental human right in 2010, as part of the Sustainable Development Goals, which aim to ensure universal access by 2030. Yet, as of 2022, around 2.2 billion people lacked access to this basic necessity.

Of the primary drinking water sources, such as municipal water supplies, bottled water and household filtration systems, bottled water is the preferred choice for millions, widely perceived as safer and

purer than tap water. However, recent studies reveal that bottled water often contains far more plastic contaminants than tap water, undermining its perceived superiority.

Plastic bottles, primarily made from polyethylene terephthalate (PET), contribute significantly to environmental pollution through their production, transportation and disposal. The discarded bottles persist in the environment for decades, breaking down into microplastics (under 5 mm) and nanoplastics. As a result, plastic pollution has escalated into a global crisis, contaminating oceans, rivers and even the most remote ecosystems. Studies have detected microplastic threats in marine life, soil and even human blood, raising concerns about their presence in the food chain and potential health impacts.

A 2018 study found that bottled water contained an average of 225 microplastic particles per litre, far exceeding the levels found in tap water. At that time, detection methods were limited to microplastics.

However, in January 2024, scientists from Columbia and Rutgers universities introduced a powerful hyperspectral-imaging platform that is capable of detecting nanoplastics at the single-particle level with high sensitivity and specificity. Published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, this



UNSAFE: Bottled water contains 240 lakh detectable nanoplastic particles per litre, as per a study. ANI

study detected nanoplastics in bottled water for the first time, with an average of 240,000 detectable plastic particles per litre —about 90 per cent classified as nanoplastics. These numbers are 10 to 100 times higher than those reported in earlier studies that counted only microplastics.

These contaminants originate primarily from bottle materials, caps and filtration processes used in production. Repeated opening and closing of caps and exposure to heat and sunlight exacerbate the plastic particle release.

The health risks of ingesting these plastic particles are concerning. The minuscule size of nanoplastics, invisible to the naked eye, allows them to enter the bloodstream and accumulate in vital organs. Scientists have identified three primary risks: direct toxicity, chemical leachates

Recent studies reveal that bottled water often contains far more plastic contaminants than tap water, undermining its perceived superiority.

and microbial contamination. The toxicity of plastic particles can trigger inflammation and cellular damage. Chemical additives such as phthalates and bisphenols, commonly found in plastics, can disrupt hormones, leading to reproductive and metabolic disorders. Additionally, tiny plastics act as carriers for harmful pathogens, increasing infection risks.

Plastic particles have been detected in human blood, lungs, gastrointestinal tract and even placenta. Microplastics can infiltrate critical organs, while nanoplastics pose a greater risk as they can cross the blood-brain barrier, potentially contributing to neurotoxicity and cognitive decline. Prolonged exposure to plastic contaminants may increase oxidative stress, raising the risk of cancer, cardiovascular disorders and meta-

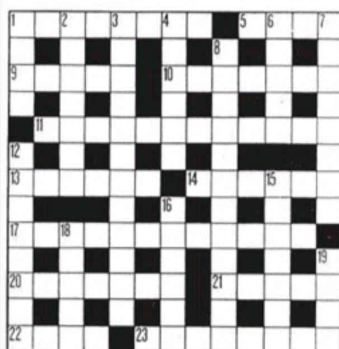
bolic disruptions. Research suggests nanoplastics can also alter gut microbiota, affecting immune responses and overall health. Long-term studies are needed to fully understand their effects.

Given these risks, is bottled water the safer option? In urban areas, tap water is often a more sustainable and cost-effective alternative, undergoing rigorous treatment, including disinfection, filtration and contaminant testing. While some municipal systems suffer from aging infrastructure and occasional contamination, tap water in many countries is subject to stricter regulations than bottled water.

A 2017 study by Orb Media found that while 83 per cent of global tap water samples contained microplastics, their concentration was significantly lower than in bottled water. The WHO has emphasised the need for improved regulatory frameworks to monitor and mitigate plastic contamination and sustainable practices are essential to ensuring universal access to safe drinking water.

Furthermore, continued scientific research is necessary to uncover the full extent of microplastic exposure and its biological effects, enabling policymakers to implement stronger regulations for public health and environmental sustainability. By tackling these challenges, we can ensure that safe drinking water is accessible to all, protecting both people and the planet.

QUICK CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1 Unrestrained volition (4,4)
- 5 Firm tenacious hold (4)
- 9 Distinctive smell (5)
- 10 Instruction (7)
- 11 Have a good time (5,7)
- 13 Alleviation of anxiety (6)
- 14 Supporting column (6)
- 17 Gain easy victory (3,5,4)
- 20 White of egg (7)
- 21 To habituate (5)
- 22 Stronghold in castle (4)
- 23 Expressed agreement (8)

Yesterday's solution

Across: 1 Checkmate, 8 Feign, 9 Inkling, 10 Karate, 11 Famous, 12 Engender, 15 Tireless, 18 Salute, 20 Repute, 21 Embroid, 22 Chief, 23 Fabricate.
Down: 2 Henna, 3 Callow, 4 Mind's eye, 5 Efface, 6 Vividly, 7 Underate, 11 Fast-track, 13 Gossamer, 14 Cryptic, 16 Let off, 17 Cleric, 19 Twist.

SU DO KU



HARD

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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

CALENDAR

APRIL 8, 2025, TUESDAY

- Shaka Samvat 1947
- Chaitra Shaka 18
- Chaitra Purnimite 26
- Hijri 1446
- Shukla Paksha, Tithi 11, up to 9.14 pm
- Shukla Yoga up to 6.10 pm
- Aashle Nakshatra up to 7.55 am
- Moon enters Leo sign 7.55 am

FORECAST

CITY	TUESDAY 18-19 APR	WEDNESDAY 19-20 APR
Chandigarh	38	20
New Delhi	41	22
Amritsar	37	20
Bathinda	41	21
Jalandhar	36	19
Ludhiana	39	20
Bhiani	41	23
Hisar	41	21
Sirsa	41	23
Dharamsala	30	16
Manali	27	10
Shimla	27	15
Srinagar	23	09
Jammu	33	20
Kargil	15	02
Leh	13	01
Dehradun	---	---
Mussoorie	24	16

TEMPERATURE IN °C

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Tariff bloodbath

Trade war looms as China confronts Trump

US President Donald Trump's tariff onslaught and China's retaliation have taken their toll on global stocks, igniting fears of a prolonged, full-blown trade war that could hit economic growth worldwide. Shares nosedived as fear and uncertainty triggered massive sell-offs on Monday. Investors felt the heat in India too as they were left poorer by Rs 20 lakh crore in the morning itself as benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty faced a drubbing. The battle lines are set to harden as China has decided to red-flag US reciprocal tariffs as a "new trade concern" at a WTO meeting on April 9. Beijing has signalled its intent to build a broad coalition to jointly oppose unilateralism and protectionism, and safeguard the international trading system.

The million-dollar questions is: Will Trump negotiate or continue with economic bullying? The US President is not one to back off once he has set forth on a course, no matter how perilous or reckless. The onus will be on other nations to fall in line—how long they can hold out will depend on their ability to hit back. Looking at the larger picture of India-US trade ties, Delhi has chosen negotiations over confrontation. However, investors' growing panic has added to the pressure on India to work out a reasonable deal sooner rather than later.

There is a possibility that Trump may not be able to sustain his blitzkrieg if China and other nations up the ante. Ironically, the US President is creating a situation detrimental to his own country. According to an analysis by The Budget Lab at Yale University, retaliatory tariffs could cost the average American household up to \$4,200 annually. The spectre of recession and higher inflation is looming large in the US. Countries like India are hoping that international as well as domestic pressure will make Trump realise his monumental folly and stop him from triggering greater economic chaos.

Real lessons needed

School reforms start with basics, not banners

PUNJAB's government schools, long plagued by infrastructure decay, teacher shortages and poor learning outcomes, are in urgent need of a meaningful turnaround. The recent assignment of AAP leader Manish Sisodia—known for transforming Delhi's education landscape—to oversee Punjab's education affairs raised hopes of substantive change. But the early signs are not encouraging. The recent initiative of unveiling school plaques in a PR-heavy manner does little to address the deep-rooted problems. Spending public money on cosmetic refurbishments or nameplates for newly declared "schools of eminence" cannot substitute for genuine improvements in infrastructure or classroom learning. Even the bureaucratic mentorship scheme lacks clarity, strategy and measurable goals. Without a proper vision or roadmap, such efforts risk becoming exercises in political optics.

Punjab's education system requires reform at the foundational level. According to the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2024 for Rural India, only 34 per cent of Class III students in rural government schools can read a Class II-level text. In terms of arithmetic, just about 51 per cent can do basic subtraction. These figures paint a worrying picture. Unless these core deficiencies are tackled, any revamp will be superficial at best. Delhi's transformation wasn't built on slogans; it relied on sustained budgetary support, rigorous teacher training and community engagement. Punjab must follow suit—investing in basic amenities like toilets, clean drinking water, digital tools and school libraries. Attracting and retaining qualified teachers is equally critical.

The goal must be to improve learning outcomes, not just the look of schools. Publicity blitzes may garner attention, but only well-planned, data-backed interventions can rescue Punjab's school system from decades of neglect. If Sisodia genuinely wants to replicate Delhi's model, he must begin by empowering educators, involving local communities and focussing on what matters most—the schoolchildren.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, WEDNESDAY, APRIL 8, 1925

Lord Birkenhead's opportunity

IF Lord Birkenhead was sincere in his invitation to CR Das to go forward and cooperate with the Government, the reply which the latter has given to his "answering gesture" and the intentions with which he is credited by the *Statesman* of Calcutta, which appears to have taken particular pains to ascertain his views, afford his leadership an opportunity such as comes but seldom in the life of a statesman in office. In his published statement, Mr Das, while pointing out why he cannot cooperate with the Government in the pursuit of its policy of repression makes it perfectly clear that he is prepared to cooperate with the Government on honourable terms. In the statement attributed to him by the *Statesman*, he appears to have gone farther and explained what he means by these honourable terms. "It is believed," writes the journal, "that Das favours the dissolution of the Council and expresses confidence that this will result in the return of a Swarajist majority, in which case the party would be willing to accept office, not with a view to wrecking the reforms, but to doing constructive work on certain conditions. These are understood to be, in general, full responsibility for ministers and that the ordinance should be, at any rate, held in abeyance." As regards the release of political detainees, the journal does not appear to have succeeded in eliciting a full expression of Das' view, but it presumes that "he will be prepared to draw a distinction according to the gravity of the offences with which particular individuals are charged."

Market slump sums up global chaos

Disruption to the international trade order will probably hurt the US more than the rest of the world

SUSHMA RAMACHANDRAN
SENIOR FINANCIAL JOURNALIST

AS global markets slump and India sees the most calamitous fall in equities since the Covid-19 pandemic, it is clear that US President Donald Trump's tariff offensive has swept the global economy into a state of uncertainty. The trade war seems to be imminent as China and Canada have fired the first round of retaliatory tariffs. The European Union has threatened to join the battle, while other countries are voicing anger over America's new policies. The immediate effect is on stock markets around the world, including Nasdaq, which has moved into the bear territory, while Asian markets are following suit. Crude oil prices have also dipped to around \$64 in reaction to a gloomy economic forecast.

The April 2 tariff rollout has wreaked havoc on the international economic system. In the midst of this crisis, India has maintained a low-key approach for the time being. The initial response was merely that the situation is being assessed in the backdrop of the bilateral trade pact talks. Meetings are also on the anvil with exporters to reassess them about the future outlook in relation to US trade.

The relatively mild approach can be linked to several factors. A bilateral trade agreement is actually on the table, despite the hard negotiations needed to make it a reality. This is a positive as Indian trade diplomacy has been successful over the years in safeguarding the country's interests, especially in sensitive areas like the dairy sector



OMINOUS: For India, the repercussions of the trade war could be graver than those feared earlier. REUTERS

and foodgrains. At the World Trade Organisation (WTO), for instance, India managed to wrest concessions for its agriculture sector, overriding vociferous complaints by most developed economies. Much depends on the political will, but it is likely that the bilateral treaty will end up being balanced rather than tilted towards US interests.

The concept of balance, however, will have to undergo a change as the time has come to end blanket protection for even the so-called "sensitive" sectors. Some farm experts are now arguing that there are areas even within agriculture where tariffs can be cut with minimal impact on producers. These include fruits and walnuts.

Similarly, irrationally high tariffs on goods not made here can be easily acceded to and in return, the US should be asked to ease non-tariff barriers on processed food and marine products. Other issues relating to data localisation and intellectual property rights may not be resolved easily, but compromise formulas may save the day. Given that talks are already underway, unlike in the case of other countries facing the April 2 tar-

The US has not always had its way at the WTO, which could be a factor for jettisoning the settled trade order.

iffs, any rigid public stance could reduce the room for flexibility in negotiations.

Despite Trump's persistent criticism of India's protectionism, the trajectory of India-US strategic relations looks set to improve considerably under this administration. Deepening of defence ties is clearly on the cards.

Yet one cannot downplay the short-term impact of the new tariffs on some domestic industries. Gems and jewellery exports, for instance, will be hit hard. Out of

the \$33 billion worth of exports in the 2023-24 financial year, as much as one-third went to the American market. The industry, primarily in the medium and small enterprises segment, employs as many as 50 lakh skilled and semi-skilled workers. It virtually collapsed during Covid-19, with skilled artisans going back to rural areas. A dip in orders from the biggest market could worsen the job situation once again. Hopes are being pinned on the new trade deal, but that may be finalised only by September. So, there could be a crisis in the intervening months.

It is a mixed bag, however, with tariffs in some areas like apparel actually becoming lower than in other countries, prompting bigger orders from American buyers. Reports from apparel export hub Tirupur (Tamil Nadu) say Indian goods will be cheaper than those from competitors; hence, buyers are rushing to book more orders. The caveat is that there should be a discount to relieve customers from the higher price burden.

This brings us to the fact that disruption to the settled international trade order will probably hurt the US economy more than the rest of the world. The crash on

Wall Street and around the world is probably just the beginning of worse times ahead unless the Trump administration is able to provide some reassurance to the markets. Investment banks are already predicting higher chances of a recession. JPMorgan has raised the risk to 60 per cent from 40 per cent, citing "disruptive American politics". The firm estimates that the new tariffs would cost \$700 billion, but this assessment was made before China retaliated with a 34 per cent tariff hike on American goods.

A recession in the world's biggest economy is bad news for everyone, including India. It could reduce the growth momentum of the last few years as supply chains are likely to be disrupted and global consumption could plummet. Even now, the Indian economy's growth estimates are being pared down, with Goldman Sachs revising its forecast for the 2023-26 financial year to 6.1 per cent from 6.3 per cent.

What is equally worrying on the global stage is the disruption of the rules-based multilateral system that had been built after World War II following decades of negotiations. The WTO undeniably enabled the Global South to have a significant voice in the multilateral trade arena. The US has not always had its way here, which could be a factor for jettisoning the settled trade order.

For India, the repercussions of the trade war could be graver than those feared earlier. The immediate impact is on financial markets, but global recessionary trends could worsen the outlook. The wisest policy right now is to rapidly conclude bilateral trade treaties with giant trading partners like the European Union. At the same time, other export markets also need to be explored as retaliatory tariffs are shifting the dynamics of international trade. As for whether India loses or gains significantly in these global battles, a realistic assessment will only be possible after the dust settles down in the coming days.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Never invest in a business you cannot understand.—Warren Buffett

No more reunions for pensioners

KSS PILLAI

AFTER retiring from a university several years ago, I have been living in a housing society near the campus. Most of the residents are my former colleagues.

My next-door neighbour retired long before me. An elderly widower, he lives with his son, daughter-in-law and grandchildren. Everyone in the locality knows a lot about him, as he likes to share his thoughts with every person he meets. Since he tends to repeat his stories, many try to slip past him by citing imaginary urgencies, but not everyone is lucky enough to avoid him.

His favourite topic is the life of pensioners in the past. There was a time when they eagerly anticipated the first day of every month—provided it wasn't a holiday—so that they could go to the bank and withdraw their pension. For many, the purpose was not just to get the money, but to meet co-colleagues, reminisce about the university days and exchange personal news. They would chat for hours, sharing detailed accounts of their lives over the past month, including family matters. Some even brought their wives, at the insistence of family members concerned about their health and failing senses. The women would gossip until their husbands told them that it was time to leave, urging them to save some stories for the next meeting.

At that time, the elderly hadn't yet been dubbed "senior citizens" deserving special consideration, so there were no separate queues for them at the bank. But they didn't mind; they weren't in a hurry. While standing in the queue, holding their passbooks and withdrawal forms, they would search the crowd for familiar faces, both inside and outside the bank. They would smile when they spotted some of them.

Once they received their money and updated passbooks, they would carefully check both to ensure that everything was in order. After finishing their business in the bank, they would gather outside under a sprawling tree, chatting about everything, including their university days, often laughing as they reminisced.

They would often compare their pensions to the pay scales when they were appointed, speculating about the potential hike that would come with the implementation of the next Pay Commission's recommendations.

Practical as they were, they knew that these meetings could be their last, as illness or death could strike at any time. It was always a sombre moment when they bid each other farewell, with the promise of meeting again on the next pension day.

My neighbour curses modern technology that has made such visits to the bank unnecessary. Digital payments are now the norm, rendering cash and checks virtually outdated. If required, the bank representative visits the houses of elderly account holders to complete the formalities.

The person most affected by these changes is perhaps the pickpocket, who is disappointed to find few currency notes or none in the wallet he has stolen.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Manipulating religion

Refer to 'Shun toxic mix of religion, politics'; India is witnessing a disturbing trend where political parties are blatantly mixing religion with politics. This venomous blend fuels communal tensions, silences dissent and polarises society along religious lines. Instead of addressing real issues like unemployment, inflation and education, politicians are exploiting religious sentiments to consolidate vote banks. It not only distorts the essence of faith but also undermines the democratic and secular ethos of our Constitution. It is deeply worrying that ritualistic displays are replacing reason. We must raise public awareness about this dangerous manipulation.

BALBIR SINGH KAKKAR, JALANDHAR

Focus on good deeds

Refer to the article 'Shun toxic mix of religion, politics'; the main purpose of religion is to transform individuals' lives, inculcating moral and ethical values in them. It helps people find the purpose of life and guides them on how to lead a meaningful life. Somehow the true essence of religion is missing in today's mundane world. Mixing of politics with religion by clever politicians and self-proclaimed babas is wreaking havoc on the much-needed harmony and peaceful coexistence. The need of the hour is to focus on cultivating good deeds and thoughts. We must shun religious divisiveness in the larger interest of society.

RAVI SHARMA, DHARIWAL

Irrelevant objections to Waqf Act

Refer to 'Fight not over yet'; the Muslim community has upheld the ante against the Waqf (Amendment) Act. Their objections don't hold much water for the simple reason that a large chunk of the so-called Waqf property across the country is being claimed by Waqf boards without any substantial documents. In a large number of cases in urban areas, the Waqf Board claims to be the owner but is not able to prove its ownership rights. Under the new rules, in case of disputed property, the board will be given an opportunity of being heard by the designated revenue authority not below the rank of a District Collector.

MD SHARMA, SHIMLA

New chapter of friendship

In a rare gesture, the Sri Lankan President conferred the prestigious Mithra Vibhushana award on Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He was given a red-carpet welcome and several strategic MoUs were signed. So far, Sri Lanka has swung between India and China. Now, it has realised its folly of tilting towards China and getting stuck in its debt-trap diplomacy. Hopefully, both India and Sri Lanka will nurture a healthy and trust-worthy partnership. Issues of common interest like fishermen's livelihood, business investments and rights of the Tamil community should be resolved. Hopefully, both neighbouring countries will pursue strategic cooperation in the years to come.

KIRTI WADHWAN, KANPUR

Reaching out to neighbours

With reference to 'India-Lanka rapport'; Beijing's growing influence in the Indian Ocean Region has prompted New Delhi to reach out to its neighbour. In 2022, when Sri Lanka was facing an economic crisis, Delhi extended timely help with an assistance of over \$4 billion. Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Sri Lanka and held discussions with Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Disanayake to resolve contentious issues. Both nations have interlinked security interests and are committed to strengthening their ties in defence and other sectors.

SUBHASH C TANEJA, GURUGRAM

Joining the global league

Indian civil engineering has come of age with the inauguration of the 2.08-km-long Pamban bridge, India's first vertical-lift sea bridge that connects Rameswaram with the Indian mainland. Its design will ensure that it will have a lifespan of over 100 years. It has joined the ranks of globally recognised bridges like the Golden Gate (US), Tower Bridge (UK) and the Oresund bridge between Denmark and Sweden. The bridge lift can rise up to 17 metres, allowing larger ships to pass through while maintaining smooth train operations. Constructed under difficult sea conditions, it is an engineering marvel.

RAMESH G JETHWANI, BENGALURU

BUILDING BLOCKS



GETTY IMAGES

The magic of a mirror: how is it able to show your reflection?

Materials that behave differently on the surface and inside, such as a metal outside and an insulator inside, are called topological materials. Such materials were discovered in the second half of the 20th century and some of its discoverers won the Nobel Prize for physics in 2016

Adhip Agarwala

Dressing up is probably one of the most annoying things. You stand in front of a mirror and try to find the right combination of clothes of various colours hoping you look more tolerable to people. This is probably one trait that distinguishes us from other animals: we spend a few good minutes every morning staring at a mirror.

Have you ever wondered, though, when we stare at a mirror, what we're really staring at?

What is a mirror?

Most mirrors feel like glass. They are heavy and break easily. But then if you stare at a glass, say your window, and you stare at a mirror, what you see are very different things.

On a bright day, glasses are transparent, and you can see the outside world through a glass window. At night, if you look at your window and if you are in a well-lit room, you will now see yourself. In a mirror, on the other hand, you always see yourself irrespective of whether it is day or night (and as long as it is not dark). To understand the difference between a mirror and window glass, we need to learn about metals and insulators.

What are metals and insulators?

Metals are shiny things, like your steel cups and plates, the aluminium pressure cooker, and coins in your purse. Metallic objects are usually hard, not easy to break, and have a silvery shine. They also get hot and cold quite easily and can conduct current. It's one reason why we never touch a live socket using a spoon. Insulator objects on the other hand are made of glass, wood, and plastics. The things that usually don't conduct current also often don't look silvery.

An electric current is conducted by

electrons. Atoms have both positively charged protons and negatively charged electrons. In a metal, electrons are like unruly, fun-loving kids: they leave their parent atoms and move around between different atoms, forming a big soup of electrons. On the other hand, in an insulator, every electron in an atom is a bit shy and stays close to the parent atom. Therefore when we put in a battery and try to push the electrons, they will move freely in a metal, since they are unruly, but in an insulator they won't. Therefore metals conduct current, insulators don't.

How do light and electrons interact?

Light is an electromagnetic wave. A wave is any disturbance that moves periodically in time and can go from one point to another. For instance, when you drop a stone in a pond, you generate waves of water. When you speak, you generate waves of air, or sound waves.

When light falls on us – that's an electromagnetic wave, a periodic wave of electric and magnetic fields. Electric fields create forces that make electrons move, such as in your watch. Magnetic forces are the ones that keep your refrigerator magnets stuck on the door. But these forces don't change with time. When they start changing periodically in time they generate light, an electromagnetic wave.

Electrons behave very differently when light falls on them. Just like we move periodically when someone pushes us on a swing, when light falls on electrons, these electrons start moving periodically in time, as if they are dancing.

But the way they dance in metal and insulators are different. Since in a metal, all electrons are in a soup, they dance in a group like a flash mob. But in an insulator, every electron just dances individually on its own, inside its atomic home.

The type of electron dance decides whether light can go through a material. When light falls on a metal, all these electrons team up and start dancing together. This obstructs the light so much that it can't go through the metal and just bounces back. On the other hand, in an insulator, since every shy electron just dances a bit in its atomic home, most of the light goes through.

This is why insulators such as glass let some light go through while metals usually don't.

This is also the reason why you can see your face very clearly on a steel plate or spoon. The light from your face is reflected fully by the plate and enters your eye. But on a day when you just look at a window, most of the light from your face just goes through the glass to the other side, making it hard to see yourself. Moreover there is light from the outside that enters the glass into your eye, making you see the outside world. In the night, however, there is little ambient light, so just the light from your well-lit room reflects a bit from the glass and you can see yourself.

How does a mirror work?

So how is it then that a mirror, which feels like glass, an insulator, reflects like a steel plate? This is because the mirror is not just a glass: it has a secret. While it is in fact made of glass, there is a thin layer of metal placed on its back side. The front side is glass that lets the light through but the back side is a metal, where the electrons dance to reflect the light.

This is what makes you see yourself every time you stare into a mirror. A mirror is thus not one material but two. Both the glass (of shy electrons) and metal (of unruly electrons) conspire to make a long-lasting mirror on your almirah or in the washroom.

We just learnt that the back surface of the mirror has a metal layer. Now imagine

a block of glass where you put layers of silver on all its surfaces. This would be very strange: from the outside it will look like a metal but it won't be able to conduct current on the inside. We can create such an object using two different materials – glass and silver, say – but can these properties occur in an object made of a single material? Such a material would have to behave differently on the surface and inside, such as a metal outside and an insulator inside.

Such materials were discovered in the second half of the 20th century and are called topological materials. Some of their discoverers won the Nobel Prize for physics in 2016. More recently, Microsoft released a quantum-computing chip that is made of such topological materials.

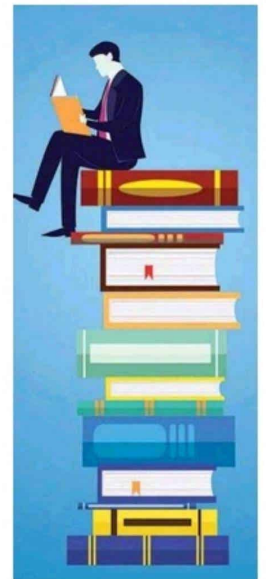
To understand why all of this really works, one needs quantum mechanics, one of the most beautiful subjects known to us. In fact, the UN has declared 2025 to be the International Year of Quantum Science and Technology. We are currently celebrating 100 years since scientists discovered its foundational principles.

Dance of electrons

While you may have understood a bit about mirrors, if you want to really understand why some electrons are unruly and some are shy or how electrons behave when light falls on them, consider learning quantum mechanics, a subject you can enjoy if you take a course in physics, for example here in IIT Kanpur where some of us teach.

In the meantime, when you next stare at a mirror, don't just look for yourself: also appreciate the dance of electrons, both in the glass and in the shiny metal layer at the back, which is sending your light back to you.

Adhip Agarwala is an assistant professor of physics at IIT Kanpur.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know Your English

K. Subrahmanian
S. Upendran

"... and then, there's Gopa. I can't stand him. I tell you. He's..."
"... What's the matter with you today? You sound as if you got up on the wrong side of the bed."

"I didn't know there was a wrong side to a bed!"

"There most certainly is. When you say that someone has got up on the wrong side of the bed, it means he/she is in a bad mood for no obvious reason. For example, yesterday, my boss was shouting at everyone. He must have got up on the wrong side of the bed."

"Does your boss very often get up on the wrong side of the bed?"

"Yes, he does, you see, he's a 'party animal' and..."

"... a 'party animal'? Is a 'Party animal' someone who likes parties?"

"Exactly! A 'party animal' is someone who loves parties. And my boss is a party animal."

"Gopa is a party animal too. What does your boss do at parties?"

"I'm told he drinks like a fish."

"Drinks like a fish? What does it mean?"

"It means he drinks a lot."

"A lot?"

"Right again. According to this article, some of our leading film stars drink like a fish."

"It's not just film stars who drink. Our maid tells me that her husband drinks like a fish too. What's more, he smokes a lot too."

"Does your boss smoke?"

"He used to smoke. But now, he's kicked the habit."

"Kicked the habit? How can anyone kick a habit? A habit, yes, but a habit..."

"... to 'kick the habit' means to 'break a habit'. For example, when I was young, I used to bite my finger nails. But now, I've kicked the habit."

"Meaning you have stopped biting your nails."

"Exactly!"

"My friend Karthick has been smoking for six years and he's trying to kick the habit."

"Good for him!"

Published in The Hindu on January 15, 1996.

THE DAILY QUIZ

Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay died on this day in 1894. A quiz on the face of the Bengal Renaissance

Radhika Santhanam

QUESTION 1

This literary magazine was edited by Chattopadhyay and later by Rabindranath Tagore. Name it.

QUESTION 2

Vande Mataram, the national song of India, was first published as part of a novel. Name the novel by Chattopadhyay.

QUESTION 3

In 2018, Chattopadhyay became the focus of the West Bengal Assembly elections. The Home Minister said that a specific event could have been

avoided if the Congress had adopted the entirety of Vande Mataram and not just the first two stanzas. Which event was he referring to?

QUESTION 4

Tagore once referred to Chattopadhyay by a Sanskrit term that also happens to be the name of one of India's foremost fashion designers. What is the name and what does it mean?

QUESTION 5

This Vaishnava religious movement of 14th and 15th century Bengal inspired Chattopadhyay deeply. Name it.



Visual question:
Identify this place

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

- The third poet in the 'Lake Poets' trinity. **Ans: Robert Southey**
- Name Wordsworth's semi-autobiographical magnum opus. **Ans: The Prelude**
- In which famous poem does the line 'The Child is father of the Man' feature. **Ans: My Heart Leaps Up or The Rainbow**
- This denomination of the British banknote featured the poet's likeness. **Ans: Five Pound note**
- The *Solitary Reaper* is singing a plaintive song in this language. **Ans: Gaelic**
- This poem came after a walking tour with Wordsworth's sister Dorothy. **Ans: Tintern Abbey**
- The name of which poet begins the sonnet 'London, 1802'. **Ans: John Milton**
- Visual: Name the national flower of Wales. **Ans: Daffodils**
- Early Birds: Siddhartha Viswanathan, Haridas Pal, Tito Shilladitya, Manvi Yadav, Anika Krishna

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

Word of the day

Benign:

not dangerous to health; not recurrent or progressive (especially of a tumour); pleasant and beneficial in nature or influence; kindness of disposition or manner

Synonym: graciousness

Usage: Her face was calm and benign.

Pronunciation: newsth.live/benignpro

International Phonetic

Alphabet: /bɛˈnɪn/


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

Text & Context


THE  HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

The government hike in excise duty on petrol and diesel

2 in ₹. There will be no change in retail prices as the increase will be adjusted against the price cut that was warranted because of falling international oil prices. The excise duty on petrol was hiked to ₹13 per litre and on diesel to ₹10 a litre, an official order showed. 


Donations received by the Bharatiya Janata Party in 2023-24

2,234 in ₹ crore. The BJP received the highest amount in large donations among national parties in FY2023-24, according to a report by poll rights body the Association for Democratic Reforms. BJP's declared donations alone accounted for 88% of the total. 

The extent to which Israel now controls the Gaza Strip

50 in per cent. Israel has dramatically expanded its footprint in the Gaza Strip since relaunching its war last month. The largest contiguous area the army controls is around the Gaza border, where the military has razed Palestinian homes, farmland and infrastructure. 

Tamil Nadu Deputy CM's assistance to Chennai Press Club

2.5 in ₹ crore. Tamil Nadu's Deputy Chief Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin has announced assistance on behalf of the State government to the Chennai Press Club to improve its infrastructure. He announced this when he was presiding over an event on Sunday. 

The projected decline in India's exports to the U.S. in 2025

5.76 in \$ billion. India's merchandise exports to the U.S. from sectors such as gold, electrical, and electronics are expected to decline by \$5.76 billion this year due to increased American duties, according to think tank GTRI. 

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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A case for a fair seat allocation

Article 1 of the Constitution proclaims that India shall be a Union of States. The term Union implies that the arrangement or rearrangement of the component units should be on the basis of equity. There are serious apprehensions in the south on the question of readjustment of seats in the Lok Sabha

FULL CONTEXT

P.D.T. Achary

The issue of readjustment of Lok Sabha seats in the context of the new Census is being hotly debated in the country. In fact, it is being wrongly referred to as delimitation in all public debates.

Delimitation is the act of fixing or refixing the boundaries of constituencies. This is done by the Delimitation Commission only after the Census is taken. Under Article 82 of the Constitution, on the completion of each Census, the seats in the Lok Sabha are required to be readjusted so as to reflect the increased population in the number of seats. The present strength of the Lok Sabha was fixed on the basis of the decennial Census figures of 1971. The total population of India in 1971 was around 54.79 crore which is estimated to have gone up to 141 crore as of March 2025. Thus, during the past 50 years there has been a phenomenal increase in India's population. This has not reflected in the strength of the Lok Sabha, as the number of seats have been frozen at the population level of 1971 till 2026, through an amendment of the Constitution.

Various formulae

The most important point to remember is that much of the increase in the population of the country was due to the failure of some of the major States in the north, such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, in implementing the national policy on population control. The result is an abnormal increase in the population of these States. For example, the population of Uttar Pradesh in 1971, was a little over 8.38 crore which is estimated to have gone up to 24.1 crore in 2025. Similarly, the population of Bihar was 4.21 crore in 1971, which has probably reached 13.1 crore in 2025. The idea behind not raising the strength of the Lok Sabha till 2026 was to give time to the States, which were registering huge increases in population, to stabilise it so that the readjustment of seats would not create a serious imbalance between States in southern and northern India.

The southern States could implement the population program successfully and arrest the growth in population. In 1971, the ratio between the number of Lok Sabha seats allotted to a State and its population was almost the same for all the States. Thus, in all major States the population base was 10 lakh for a Lok Sabha constituency. However, the picture has now changed drastically. If the formula contained in Article 81 is followed now, it will create a huge divergence in the number of seats between the northern States and southern States. For example, for a population of 24 crore, Uttar Pradesh will be entitled to 240 seats which will be a threefold increase from the present 80 seats. Whereas a State like Kerala, will only get 36 seats in place of the 20 seats at present as its population is estimated to have increased by only 68% over the past 50 years. If on the other hand, the population to seat ratio is changed to 15 lakh per constituency, Uttar Pradesh will get 160 seats in place of 80, whereas Kerala may get only a few seats more than the present 20 seats. Incidentally, Kerala is being cited as an example because it has registered the lowest growth in population among all major States.

There is another calculation which produces interesting results. The population of the country in 1952, was 372



Putting up a fight: Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin addresses the Joint Action Committee meeting for Fair Delimitation, in Chennai on March 22. ANI

million (37.2 crore) and the total number of Lok Sabha seats was 489. This works out to an average of 7.6 lakh people in a parliamentary constituency. In 1971, the population was 54.8 crore and the total number of Lok Sabha seats was raised to 543 which works out to one million (10 lakh) people in a constituency. The readjustment of seats was done as per the mandate of Article 82 of the Constitution which will have to be repeated after 2026. Assuming that the strength of the Lok Sabha is going to be raised from the present 543 to 800 (the capacity of the Lok Sabha chamber in the new Parliament is reported to be above 800), the average population of a parliamentary constituency will be nearly 18 lakh. If this figure is taken as the population base of a constituency for readjustment, then Kerala may retain the same number of seats, Tamil Nadu will gain a mere four seats where as Uttar Pradesh will gain as much as 54 seats.

Rewarding incompetence

There are serious apprehensions in the south on the question of readjustment of seats in the Lok Sabha. Although the Union Government has remained silent on it so far, unofficial discussions on certain formula are reportedly being held in some quarters. The State of Tamil Nadu, under the leadership of Chief Minister M.K. Stalin, has powerfully articulated the fears of the States in the southern region about losing political importance in the event of a readjustment of seats in the Lok Sabha. The recent

conclave of southern Chief Ministers and other political leaders, including the Chief Minister of Punjab, held in Chennai is a pointer to the possibility of this issue becoming a major rallying point for southern States. Therefore, there is an urgent need to devise a rational formula for the readjustment of seats in Lok Sabha.

Articles 81 and 82 clearly show that readjustment of seats is done solely on the basis of population. So, a solution to this vexed problem can be found on the basis of what population base can be accepted for readjusting seats. The problem has arisen because of the huge increase of population in a large number of States due to the non-implementation of family planning programs. Equity demands that States which failed to implement population control programs not be rewarded with an increase of seats which give them great political advantage.

Ideal solution

In these circumstances, a fair formula for readjustment of seats would be to take the State which has registered the lowest increase in population as the template. Figures show that Kerala is the State in the south which has registered the lowest growth in population since 1971. The population of Kerala was 2.14 crore in 1971, which is estimated to have gone up to 3.6 crore in 2025 which is an increase of 68%. This can be considered a reasonable growth in population for the last 50 years. So a 68% step-up in the number of seats in all States can be a

reasonable basis for readjustment. This will, on the one hand, maintain the present equation among the States in terms of seats and on the other obviate the need to abnormally raise the number of seats in the States which are remiss in controlling the population. So, under this formula, Uttar Pradesh will get 134 seats, Kerala 34 and Tamil Nadu around 66 seats. This way the present equation among States in terms of seats will remain unchanged. A 68% step-up in seats will raise the total number of seats in the Lok Sabha to 912.

Of course, this formula will make Article 81(2)(a), which says that the ratio between the number of seats and the population of a State shall be the same for all the States, irrelevant. In fact, it had become irrelevant long back – a formula that was laid down in 1950 will cause serious injustice in 2026. The allocation of seats in the Lok Sabha is not a political issue – it needs to be done on the basis of the constitutional principle of equity. It is bound with the bargaining power of the federating units or groups of such units situated in various geographical regions. A sensitive approach is necessary to deal with this issue. Article 1 of the Constitution proclaims that India shall be a Union of States. The term Union implies that the arrangement of the component units should be on the basis of equity in terms of its share in Parliament. We should try to live up to the implications of this constitutional scheme.

P.D.T. Achary is Former Secretary General of the Lok Sabha.

THE GIST

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

—Rammath Goenka

TRUMP TARIFFS PUSH COUNTRIES TO MAKE STRANGE BEDFELLOWS

THE world is undeniably in an era of self-help, when nations must increasingly fend for themselves. US President Donald Trump's tariffs have transformed global trade into a geopolitical battleground, disrupting supply chains and reshaping alliances. International trade plays a crucial role in shaping global relations. In response to Trump's tariffs, the EU is preparing countermeasures on \$28 billion of US imports ranging from dental floss to diamonds. This aligns the EU with China and Canada in escalating the global trade war. American trade policy—a key element of its foreign policy once centred on long-term economic planning—has shifted to short-term leverage via tariffs, export controls and turning sectors such as semiconductors and rare earths into power tools to be used against both friends and foes.

China has responded with a 34 percent tariff on US imports to match Trump's levy on Chinese goods. As Beijing positions itself as an alternative to US-led globalisation, it highlights the transformation of global political dynamics, too. Many Southeast Asian countries that are largely dependent on China for their manufacturing prowess are caught in this geopolitical crossfire. In the Asia-Pacific, countries such as South Korea and Japan, heavily reliant on exports to the US, are now forced to reassess their trade strategies and seek to reduce dependence on the US while exploring practical ties with China. More and more countries are realising that the rules-based international trade system that once governed global economics is eroding. This shift compels nations to rethink their trade relationships and political alignments, while regional cooperation and shorter supply chains become more critical for economic stability and national security.

For India, this geopolitical shift presents both a challenge and an opportunity. It must adopt a flexible strategy, using its inherent political agility to align with the camp that best serves its interests, attract global companies through competitive sourcing and value addition, and explore new export destinations arising from the ongoing geopolitical changes. By focusing on regional partnerships, technological autonomy and securing supply chains closer home, India can strengthen its position in the global manufacturing ecosystem, though such an effort takes time. The approach will not only help mitigate risks from global trade wars, but also ensure long-term economic resilience in a world increasingly defined by self-interest and Trumpian disruptions.

DHONI SHOULD REASSESS HIS FORM AND FUTURE

THE Chennai Super Kings' match against Delhi Capitals on Saturday had a couple of special guests in attendance. With MS Dhoni playing, his wife Sakshi and daughter Ziva watching from the stands is a common sight. But this weekend, Dhoni's parents made a rare appearance at the M A Chidambaram stadium. It led to speculation on the former India and CSK skipper's retirement from the IPL, which was later put to rest by the Tamil Nadu Cricket Association.

Dhoni himself cleared the air during a podcast: "It is one year at a time for me. I am 43 now and, by the end of this IPL season, will be 44. So I have 10 months to decide whether I want to play one more year." *Thala*, as he is affectionately called in Tamil, might be clear about his future, but his performance with the bat has raised a few eyebrows. It is always poignant to watch a star lose his touch. With age, the limbs feel heavier, the reflexes slow and movement becomes laboured. And Dhoni is visibly struggling. The aura, too, seems to be waning. It was evident when die-hard fans sporting yellow CSK jerseys started making their way towards the gates even while Dhoni was at the crease on Saturday. The same fans had cheered when a wicket of their own team had fallen—so that they could see Dhoni bat, even if for a few balls. The team's fortunes are dipping, too. CSK lost to Royal Challengers Bengaluru at home for the first time since 2008. DC added to their woes by winning their first match against CSK at Chepauk since 2010.

Whatever the reasons, there has been a slight loss of faith in the man they worship. Dhoni, the brand, is huge—none, from the franchise to the broadcasters, would want him to retire just yet. He is still the biggest crowd-puller who can lift the energy in a stadium. But in sports, this fanaticism is tied with a very thin thread to the player's performance and his effect on the game's outcome. As of now, both seem to be not favouring the great *Thala*. Success or brand value? Perhaps it's time to reassess the situation dispassionately.

QUICK TAKE

FOR THE RULE OF LAW

THE Supreme Court has upbraided Uttar Pradesh police for filing criminal charges in what it called a civil dispute regarding an allegation of unreturned loan. Presiding over a three-judge bench, Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna noted it has been happening repeatedly and called it "an absolute breakdown of the rule of law". The court held this was in breach of clear instructions given in last year's *Sharif Ahmad* case. Last year, the Allahabad High Court also held that the state police were filing charges indiscriminately without due diligence. This should not be about the higher judiciary versus the executive. Where would the rule of law go if the police continue flouting it, especially in the country's most populous state?

EVER since August 5, 2024—when Sheikh Hasina was overthrown by a turbulent coup in the streets, with the Bangladesh Army looking on—it has been evident from the flow of events that Pakistan's hand was behind it. Since then, I have not been alone in often saying that Pakistan never left Dhaka—not in 1971, not ever. It remained embedded in Bangladesh in different ways, cultivating its interests among radicals, various political parties, the army and even intellectuals.

Till Hasina ruled, there was no question of a Pakistani upper hand. In August 2024, the situation was created with the connivance of external elements, with Muhammad Yunus, a supposed liberal, leading the pack to bring about the meltdown. Perhaps Hasina erred in her dictatorial ways; perhaps she should have had her finger on the pulse of the nation. That is important, but currently insignificant.

Since that event, Yunus, who parachuted back from the US to his homeland to be chief advisor to the interim government, has never been in favour of India in any of his utterances. Prior to the illegal change of government, Yunus's oft-expressed views never really targeted India. He spoke in favour of regional cooperation and connectivity between Bangladesh and India, seeing it as a mutual benefit for both. He often emphasised the importance of trade, economic ties, and collaboratively resolving regional issues. Now Yunus has made it a point to be unwelcome towards India in the post-August 5 configuration. He has also found time to pass remarks against his *bête noire* on India's linkages with his country's original 'first family'.

It's in this context that Yunus's recent statement in China has drawn intense flak in India. The exact statement, as quoted in the media, was, "India's northeast is completely landlocked, and its access to the ocean is completely controlled by Bangladesh. The Siliguri Corridor is the only route that connects the northeast with the rest of India, and this connection passes through Bangladesh." During such a high-level meeting in China, Yunus urged Beijing to establish an economic foothold in Bangladesh by leveraging the latter's strategic position as the "only guardian of the ocean" for the "landlocked" northeastern region.

The provocation through this statement perhaps surpasses that generated by Hasina's overthrow. To many, this may be construed as a direct slur towards India's sovereignty and national security. The interpretations can be many, but one

The Bangladesh chief advisor's mention of the strategically sensitive Siliguri Corridor in China justifiably worries India. Muhammad Yunus seems to be playing Pak's hand against India

YUNUS CHOKES THE CHICKEN'S NECK IN BEIJING

LT GEN SYED ATA HASNAIN (RETD)



Former Commander, Srinagar-based 75 Corps, Chankot, Central University of Kashmir



SCURRY BOX

thing is obvious—the fact that Yunus has chosen to use words and occasions that promote confusion and obfuscation.

Do I find anything wrong in the physical description of India's northeast given by Yunus? None whatsoever. But I find everything wrong with the context in which Yunus offered this description and its follow-up connotation, as per his perception. This cannot be treated as a standalone statement.

Obviously, Yunus and the Chinese officials, initially led by President Xi Jinping, had discussions that underscore a concerted effort to deepen the strategic partnership between Bangladesh and China, focusing on economic development, regional stability and collaborative infrastructure projects. Yunus knows that the

Chinese have a deep interest in the Bay of Bengal and do not get optimum choices.

The China-Myanmar Economic Corridor forms a part of the Belt and Road Initiative. It connects China's Yunnan province to Myanmar and provides China with access to the Indian Ocean via Bay of Bengal. Several projects enhance the China-Myanmar-Thailand connection without being formally a part of the BRI. Yet, there is no link to or through it to Bangladesh. The Bangladesh-India-Myanmar-China corridor is a geopolitical disaster, leaving Bangladesh with no land link to the Chinese mainland. It appears obvious that Yunus, in his naïveté, was trying to draw the attention of the Chinese to the feasibility of a strategic Bangladesh-China linkage to offset India's domination of the Bay of

Bengal. However, in a ridiculous choice of words and objectives, he touched upon India's sensitivity—the Siliguri Corridor. The Siliguri Corridor, often called the 'Chicken's Neck', is a narrow stretch of land in the state of West Bengal that connects mainland India to its northeastern states. It is a region of immense strategic importance due to its geographic, economic and security implications. It is bordered by Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh, and is very close to the Chinese border at Tibet. This makes it vulnerable to external threats, particularly from China, which claims parts of Arunachal Pradesh.

The corridor is near Doklam, where India and China had a 72-day-long military standoff in 2017. Any conflict in this region could cut off India's northeast. The corridor is home to important railway lines, highways and oil pipelines that sustain the economy of the northeast and of India too. Thus, was Yunus's deliberately crafted statement a reminder to China and others of India's vulnerability, and the force multiplication effect that Bangladesh's border configuration could have for Sino-Bangladesh strategic advantage? This is how nations often project the worth of their geostrategic characteristics.

It is apparent that Bangladesh is not alone. It is abetted and advised by the Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), which is obviously licking its lips at the potential of an Indian strategic disadvantage being exploited. In the past six months, the ISI has gone to quite an extent to make it known to its intent. Visits by senior ISI officials with specific referrals to areas of strategic significance were a way of conveying interest. It now seems to have gone beyond, with translation of the same into words uttered by none other than Bangladesh's chief advisor.

Yunus is warming up to Pakistan because he probably perceives that the Pakistanis would be his best bet in the fight for survival, which may come faster than anyone thinks. The radical elements are already proliferating, but Yunus knows that his survival depends on the creation of an anti-nationalist sentiment and a patently skewed sense of Bangla nationalism—all of which will militate against India.

India's response has indeed been mature all through the developments of the last few months. Let us hope the meeting of Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Yunus at the BIMSTEC summit brings a much-needed return to the flow of Indo-Bangladesh relations.

(Views are personal)
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FOCUS ON STUDENT OUTCOMES WHILE DEBATING NEP 2020

A NY discussion on the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 should go beyond partisan dualisms. Let us debate it for its effectiveness in expanding student opportunities, strengthening academic institutions and preparing the youth for the future. Critical engagement with NEP provisions is necessary, rather than dismissing them through broad critiques.

The draft UGC guidelines of 2025 seek greater transparency in the selection of academic leaders, ensuring they are chosen on qualifications and strategic vision. The role of governors as chancellors is not new. Many states have upheld this structure for decades. The draft guidelines refine the process by introducing a standardised selection mechanism to prevent ad hoc appointments. These guidelines reinforce cooperative federalism by instituting a clear framework within which universities can function effectively.

NEP 2020 does not dilute the Right to Education Act. Instead, it builds upon its provisions to improve quality and access. The idea of forming school complexes is a global best practice. Smaller schools can be part of a larger network, ensuring that infrastructure and teaching resources are shared for better educational outcomes.

The claim that 89,441 public schools have been closed due to NEP 2020 is misleading. Several state governments have undertaken school consolidation as an administrative measure over the years to improve efficiency. The increased budget allocations for Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan and PM SHRI schools is a clear commitment to investment in public education.

It is, therefore, incorrect to suggest the NEP 2020 is forcing poor students into private institutions. Let us not reduce the role of private education to a binary argument of public versus private—it is about co-existence, where both systems are strengthened to serve different needs.

Introducing the Higher Education Financing Agency (HEFA) is not a withdrawal of public funding from higher education. HEFA can provide access to capital other than government grants. HEIs can manage repayment without imposing an undue burden on students as its financing model has long-term repayment plans and low interest rates. The claim that between 78 and 100 percent of these loans are being repaid through student fees is oversimplification.

We all agree the National Assessment

and Accreditation Council (NAAC) and National Testing Agency (NTA) need improvement. No system is flawless. The NAAC is moving toward a more transparent, technology-driven and outcome-based framework. The goal is to eliminate subjectivity and potential irregularities. Similarly, instead of dismissing the NTA as inept, let us reform and strengthen it to conduct exams nationwide. To overcome operational challenges and vulnerabilities, NAAC and NTA are embracing measures recommended by the Radhakrishnan Committee.



Discussions on education policies must rise above partisan politics. The goal behind the new policy is to introduce a transparent, technology-driven and outcome-based framework. No system is flawless and NCERT has shown it's open to changing course

Shaping the nation's future through education cannot be viewed as a simplistic narrative of ideological imposition. The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) has repeatedly clarified that textbooks were revised to streamline content, eliminate redundancy and make learning more engaging. There is precedence to such updates.

Historical events such as Mahatma Gandhi's assassination or the Mughal rule are not being erased. Students continue to engage with such topics in a nuanced and age-appropriate manner. Concerns regarding removing the Preamble to the Indian Constitution are disproved. The NCERT

has fixed it after taking public feedback, proving it's responsive to suggestions.

The claim that faculty appointments are dictated by ideological affinity is not true. UGC has frequently emphasised through its regulations that the selection processes in higher education institutions are transparent and structured. Our institutions continue to attract accomplished scholars and deliver world-class research, confirming academic integrity remains a top priority.

NEP 2020 aims to promote a multi-disciplinary ecosystem, global best practices, outcome-based education, skill development, industry collaborations, education in the Indian language medium and establish a dynamic, research-driven academic environment. Our education system should not remain detached from the challenges we face as a nation. Since the launch of NEP 2020, there have been visible improvements in our education. The PM SHRI initiative, which underlines the public service ethos, is an example of providing high-quality learning environments in government schools. We want to ensure government schools evolve into centres of excellence rather than remaining afterthoughts.

There is no question of undermining state autonomy when the country adopts a common framework for learning outcomes, faculty selection and quality standards. Instead, it ensures consistency and better mobility for students across institutions nationwide. The expansion of public institutions (ITs, AIIMS, central universities), internships (PM internship scheme) and financial aid mechanisms (Vidyalakshmi) reflect an effort to ensure that affordability remains central to NEP 2020. Any assertion that centralisation has compromised access to education is a failure to see the nuances of the reforms.

Let the country assess the tangible impacts of the ongoing educational reforms through the lens of student outcomes. Our students deserve a future-ready education system. Ultimately, our discussions must rise above polemics and focus on efforts to improve equity, accessibility and quality. Let us not resist reforms to preserve outdated structures. (Views are personal)

MAIL BAG

WRITE TO: letters@newindianexpress.com

People's interest

Ref: *Livelihoods, public interest matter for bike taxi future* (Apr 7). The editorial is both apt and timely. The government should prioritise users' interests and the livelihoods of bike riders, rather than solely focusing on legal perspectives. It's essential to explore humane solutions that address legal concerns while considering the impact on people's lives. Hemant H Pal, Bengaluru

Startup struggles

Ref: *Startups need course change for tech focus* (Apr 7). Research and development activities often take place after startups have raised funds from investors. This is clearly a flawed approach. If startups adopt Western models, they must be tailored to local practices. Most importantly, all activities should uphold investor trust from the outset. Avinashan Mylsami, Coimbatore

Lanka ties

Ref: *Beach mistrust, raise sails for a fresh bilateral* (Apr 7). The column rightly states that politics has no permanent friends or foes. As a small island nation, Sri Lanka must recognise its strengths and limitations. A significant portion of its tourism revenue comes from India. Jaikishan K, Kengeri

Buddh's revolt

Ref: *Why Buddhism faded in the land of its birth* (Apr 7). The author has dispelled the myth that Hinduism drove Buddhism away. While shared philosophies exist, Hinduism is a vast religion encompassing a wide range of ideals. It is Buddhism's inflexibility that contributed to its decline. However, Buddhism's rise as a revolt against casteism deserves recognition and appreciation. P Prema, Thanjavur

CPM leadership

Ref: *Baby is new CPM boss* (Apr 7). With West Bengal and Tripura lost, Kerala remains the party's sole stronghold. To rescue the CPM from decline, Baby faces a Herculean task. While he is the *de jure* leader, Kerala CM Pinarayi Vijayan holds *de facto* power. Veerakumar Thampi, Pattom

Yogi's role

Ref: *Yogi junks PM ambition thesis, says 'not full-time job'* (Apr 2). Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has dismissed speculations about him in the PM's role, stating he is primarily a yogi and politics isn't his full-time occupation. However, a hermit is never seen indulging in politics, even part-time, or enjoying the comforts that his position affords cinematic history. Tharicus S Fernando, Chennai



Opinion

TUESDAY, APRIL 8, 2025

Awash in red

Markets are on a crash course but have ridden out such storms earlier too, so investors need to be patient

SAMIR ARORA, FOUNDER of Helios Capital Management, was bang on when he said on Thursday — a day after Trump's reciprocal tariff bombshell on April 2 — that the day's "market behaviour is a bit suspicious, not to be trusted." His response had come in the backdrop of a modest fall in the benchmark indices on that day, leading many to say it signalled that India was in a relatively better position than other nations as far as the tariff blow is concerned. The fond hopes proved short-lived, with Indian market indices witnessing a blood-bath on Monday, with the Nifty now down 17% from its peak and is less than 1,000 points away from officially entering the bear market territory. Both benchmarks posted their worst single-day decline since June 4, 2024. Volatility hit the roof, as NSE's India VIX index jumped a record 65.63% to close at 22.79 — the highest closing since June 4, 2024.

Indian equities, of course, mirrored the sharp declines across global markets. The Nasdaq has already officially entered a bear market — down around 23% from its December highs. The Dow isn't far behind, trailing with a 15% slide. Asian equity markets sank and European shares crashed to a 16-month low. Some investors liken the market turmoil to "Black Monday" — the largest single-day drop in Dow Jones history, when the index crashed 23% in October 1987 amid persistent trade and budget deficits in the US. Echoes of that panic are surfacing again, underscoring the rising global uncertainty.

The biggest problem is no one seems to have a clear sense of how this turbulence will unfold as there are so many moving parts. Investor anxiety and the threat of further losses across asset classes remain high after China retaliated with its own tariffs on Friday. That adds to risks of a broader trade war and tit-for-tat measures that may roll supply chains and slow economic growth. It also threatens to accelerate selling by global funds who have already pulled \$14 billion from Indian markets this year. US President Donald Trump's aggressive trade push has also drawn comparisons to the 1930 Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act, which worsened the Great Depression by sparking retaliatory tariffs worldwide.

The echoes of history are not lost on economists. Many warn that Trump's plan could backfire, sparking a global trade war with devastating effects on growth. Major financial institutions are growing increasingly concerned. JP Morgan has raised its probability of a global recession from 40% to 60%. Goldman Sachs followed suit, revising its estimate from 20% to 35%. The aggressive tariff policy is raising costs for manufacturers and consumers alike, and economists warn this could trigger inflation without corresponding growth — a classic case of stagflation.

All this is bound to affect India. Monday's sectoral losses highlight the breadth of investor anxiety, particularly over India's global linkages which are facing potential disruption from retaliatory trade measures. While there is obviously a downside risk to FY26 economic growth, the impact will be more pronounced through the indirect channel of weaker corporate confidence, which will dent the risk appetite and further defer the capex cycle. Listed Indian companies are likely to see earnings and valuations come under increasing pressure. No wonder, data suggests fresh short positions being built as stock traders brace for further declines. However, investors should not panic as Indian markets have seen many such cycles and rebounded after a short-term pain.

Vietnam should have seen this tariff hit coming

THE IMPOSITION of aggressive US tariffs has been greeted with a surplus of strong reactions, almost none of them good. Bewilderment and dismay are among the more sanitised responses from trading partners. To their great disappointment, Washington's friends haven't been spared, even those with whom it trades on very favourable terms. The investor class has given President Donald Trump's salvo, which significantly raises the chances of a global recession, a scornful rejoinder.

In the case of a few countries, let's consider an additional response — one of sympathy. Vietnam ought to be near the top of the condole list. It came late to the Southeast Asian export machine, but became one of the world's fastest-growing economies, and ties with the US have steadily warmed since the American-backed regime in the South fell to Communist forces 50 years ago. While still poor relative to Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand, Vietnam's leaders adopted large parts of the development model that proved a boon to much of the region. The government eased curbs on investment, welcomed supply chains, was attentive to infrastructure needs, and took steps to combat corruption. When the US sought to isolate China, the nation became a popular destination for manufacturing giants wanting an inexpensive location and a skilled labour force. It was a darling of the "China Plus One" crowd.

Vietnam was, as a result, often depicted as the closest thing to a trade-war winner. That label can't be applied after Wednesday. With great achievement came considerable danger. The charges levelled at China in prior years began to accumulate. The central bank kept its currency artificially weak, the one-party state was opaque in its decision-making, and swathes of the economy remained off-limits to foreign money.

The levy of 46% was among the steepest handed down by Trump during the "Liberation Day" ceremony at the White House. There's tragedy here. The penalties will deal a heavy blow to the Vietnamese economy as a whole, and to the middle-class aspirations of millions. Irony is also present. While certainly not flawless, the country did a lot right. It correctly identified the US market as the route to higher living standards and did its best to cater to the corporations that thought they read the tea leaves correctly by loosening dependence on China. They got hit with crippling tariffs, regardless.

The mistake may have been to be too successful. Factories certainly churned out a lot of goods that American consumers desire. More than one-quarter of Vietnam's gross domestic product depends on shipments to the US, according to *Bloomberg Economics*. Exports overall are equal to about 90% of its economy. Many textile and apparel companies are at high risk of failure, reckons the main industry organisation in Ho Chi Minh City. About half of all Nike and Adidas shoes are made in the country. Uniqlo owner Fast Retailing and Hennes & Mauritz also count it as one of their biggest suppliers. Vietnam's export campaign goes beyond textiles and footwear, as lucrative as these plays have been. Intel operates a chip assembly and test manufacturing facility. Apple was also attracted to set up an operation.

Vietnam's economic growth target of at least 8% this year now looks implausible, assuming Trump's duties stay (Hanoi asked the US to put the luvies on hold and engage in negotiations). A percentage point or two off the pace of expansion may be the least of officials' worries if an entire approach to attaining prosperity is now open to question. If the White House's duties extract a heavy cost, part of the calamity for Vietnam is that something like this has been in the cards for a while. The trade surplus with the US has widened significantly.

To assert that Hanoi should have seen severe measures coming is a reasonable observation. Leaders did recognise some vulnerability days earlier. Vietnam slashed tariffs on a range of imports. That doesn't make what was meted out by the White House fair. The nation jumped through the right hoops over the years and got hobbled. Every textbook has its use-by date. And America has let it down, again.



DANIEL MOSS
Bloomberg

OUR STREETS HAVE always been crowded with combustion engine vehicles with visible fumes, many of them long past expiry dates. Of late, what has been debated in boardrooms and policymakers' chambers is finally finding solid traction on Indian roads and a revolution is underway with the early adopters of electric vehicles (EVs). But will this hype, as promoted by top bureaucrats and leaders, last? Beyond the grandiose commitments to sustainability and self-sufficiency, the question lingers: is India truly prepared for this tectonic shift?

Indeed, the shift has been long overdue. Most major cities have been increasingly under the pollution cloud, with toxic levels beyond safety norms. The data is staggering. Delhi gives non-smokers the equivalent of smoking as many as 20 cigarettes a day. A comprehensive study by IQAir over five years has found the top 10 most polluted cities across the world in India — a shocking report on the state of affairs, including unchecked emissions. The impact on economy is worse — over 75% of India's crude oil is imported with precious foreign reserves. Why the policymakers have decided to drive electric mobility aggressively is based on the reality that the future has to be powered by clean energy, COP agreement or not.

The government has crafted its policy instruments with precision and designed the framework to accelerate the adoption of electric vehicles (EVs). Growth and services tax (GST) exemptions, reduced registration charges, ambitious production-linked incentive schemes — the list of incentives is long. The expansive solar energy potential has dovetailed seamlessly with this transition and offers an energy ecosystem that is green and locally produced. But, incentives alone haven't built

M MUNEER TONY AUGUSTINE
Respectively Fortune-500 advisor, start-up investor, and co-founder, Medici Institute for Innovation, & VP-partnerships, Numa Technologies



transformation ever. The electric mobility dream requires total alignment of the government's vision with the industry, the public, and infrastructure.

Many Indian and global auto companies have aggressively pursued EV policies. Now, even Tesla is betting big on India. Notwithstanding that some of the European and US markets are cutting down on EVs. In 2024, over 1.4 million EVs were sold in India, representing a penetration of 5.6%. The three-wheeler segment has seen a remarkable 50% adoption rate, which is a clear sign of EV's viability for urban mobility.

Sustaining momentum is a challenge in any transformation. After the initial surge of adoption, things slowed down towards late 2023. The diffusion of innovation follows a well-documented curve. As of now, India stands at the chasm that divides early adopters from the early majority. The pragmatic consumers, the everyday drivers, and the families looking for reliability over novelty are all demanding more than discounts and promises — they demand certitude.

And certitude remains elusive. Most buyers are sceptical about the range per charge, and are anxious about their EV stalling during a trip, far from a charging station. It's apparent that infrastructure is the Achilles' heel in the electric mobility journey. Both government and private players like Tata Power, Reliance, and

Ather Energy are trying to build charging stations rapidly across highways and cities. Yet, the network is still sparse at 22,000 or so stations. Most EVs today offer a range of 250-300 km/charge, with some premium models pushing the boundary to 650 km. But these numbers mean little if charging stations remain a few.

India cannot afford to continue building roads after airports are built — charging stations cannot be an afterthought. This should be approached like telecom expansion in the 2000s, when the fear was signal loss and an absence of tower network. The solution must be as sweeping and decisive as the expansion of cell towers once was.

And it must be clean. If EVs are charged using fossil fuel-generated electricity, then it is double standard, a mere shifting of emissions from tailpipes to smokestacks. A greener solution lies in incentivising solar-powered charging stations, a differentiation that could be encouraged through lower GST rates on clean electricity. But the government's reluctance might prove too costly.

The second great frontier is cost. For all their long-term savings, EVs demand a higher initial investment, a deterrent for the price-sensitive consumer. But change is on the horizon. Battery technology, the single largest cost component of an EV, is advancing and is on a steep decline. In 2010, battery prices

stood at an astronomical \$1000/kilowatt-hour (kWh). Today, they hover around \$100/kWh, and industry forecasts predict a further drop. Once that happens, EVs will reach price parity with traditional internal combustion engine vehicles, removing one of the final barriers to adoption. However, according to one oligarch, a secret government document says India cannot be cost-competitive in battery manufacturing — that leaves more question marks.

Another concern that persists for buyers is resale value. Unlike conventional cars, an EV's fate is linked to its battery health. Currently, used EV batteries almost get treated as scrap. This devaluation casts a long shadow over potential purchases. But a nascent revolution is unfolding in battery repurposing. A few start-ups are pioneering ways to assess and extend battery life, repurposing them for energy storage systems. The battery should be made to "sweat" for an extended time with repurposing before it goes as scrap. In the US and Europe, there are specialists who repurpose and enhance the residual value of EVs. The industry should create a structured market for second-life batteries to improve the lifetime value of EVs.

The signs are promising. The gears are turning. But the road ahead remains long and winding. Tesla's renewed interest in India is no mere coincidence; it is a calculated move, a nod to the inevitability of the electric revolution in the world's largest democracy. The pieces are in place — the policy push, the industry's awakening, and the technological advancements. What remains is the test of execution, which, of course, is India's bane.

The EV transition is about economic resilience, energy independence, and public health. It's also about reclaiming the air, the roads, and the future. How swiftly and seamlessly can India make the transformation?

Reduce risk as much as you can

JAMAL MECKLAI

CEO, Mecklai Financial
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IT IS a mathematical identity that a country's current account deficit is simply a reflection of the difference between what a country invests/consumes and saves. In other words, irrespective of tariffs, until the US saves more and/or consumes/invests less, the country will continue to run a current account deficit, much of which consists of the deficit on trade. In an elegant coincidence evidencing this, the US current account deficit widened to a record \$1.13 trillion in 2024, while US credit card debt outstanding in December 2024 increased to a record \$1.21 trillion. The nature of modern America is to buy now and think about how to pay for it later — the essence of spending more than you save. Unsurprisingly, the US has run a trade deficit virtually every year since 1971, which marked the start of the era of floating exchange rates and the power of the market.

Tell all that to Donald Trump, who has slapped horrendous tariffs on virtually every trading partner, demanding that the US trade deficit be brought down. Of course, with most prices sure to rise as a result of the tariffs, it is very likely that Americans will start to consume less, which would start bringing the trade deficit down. However, growth will be collateral damage, but then, when did Trump ever say he was going to generate huge growth?

Wait a minute — but the US didn't? Doesn't Make America Great Again

(MAGA) mean a strong economy, low prices at the supermarket, and high-paying jobs everywhere you turn?

Many Americans have already started protesting the tariffs, the job cuts, and, indeed, the targeted attacks at Trump's perceived enemies. The pure MAGA crowd is still riding high, of course — for now is triumphant — but cracks are beginning to show amongst "normal" Republicans.

The Wall Street crowd is in shock running for cover from the worst equity collapse in decades — the NASDAQ is already down more than 20% (definition of a correction) and the Dow is close (down 17.5%). With Dow futures down more than 1,000 points (another 3-4%) before the US market opened on Monday, there is widespread alarm in markets, with some analysts even pointing to Black Monday in October 1987, when the Dow fell 22% in a single day. It is without doubt significant that Warren Buffett, long known as the grandfather of investing, has been holding the highest share of cash in his portfolio ever.

China has struck back with retaliatory tariffs and it is likely just a matter of time before other large trading partners do something similar. But Trump

We will remain in a high volatility downward spiral in equities until such time as the Trump show is soundly thrashed

is [appears] unperturbed. "A little bit of pain before we get the greatest economy the world has ever seen" or some such. What is worse is that Trump had threatened to double the tariffs if anyone retaliates and it is conceivable that we will see some such action next week.

It seems clear that there's no turning back — even if Trump were to relent on tariffs, the market will not believe he won't impose them again. Frighteningly, a recent article in the *Financial Times* (*The philosophy behind Trump's Dark Enlightenment*, March 26, 2025) tries to explain the philosophical underpinnings behind the MAGA movement developed by two intellectuals (Curtis Yarvin and Nick Land) and articulated by the Silicon Valley billionaire and prominent Trump supporter, Peter Thiel. "I no longer believe that freedom and democracy are compatible," Thiel wrote. The fate of the world "may depend on the effort of a single person" able to make the world "safe for capitalism". Interestingly, Land honed his thinking over a dozen years spent in China, which he considers a "competent government" which balances "radical innovation and profound con-

servatism". This set believes that "a properly constituted state is one that has been cured of democracy. Its guiding principle is 'no voice, free exit': the residents or clients (not citizens) of such a state have no rights, but do have the ability to take their custom elsewhere".

Clearly, we will remain in a high volatility downward spiral in equities until such time as the Trump show is soundly thrashed — he's still babbling on bravely, but he doesn't understand economics and he has no clue as to how strong a force the market is. As the market continues to tank, inflation starts to rise. People will feel increasing pain and the Republicans will start to revolt, and only in such a case would things possibly calm down. The big question, of course, is when.

The Indian markets, although falling sharply, are blessedly contained in comparison. Of course, that is poor comfort for companies who have built their businesses on exporting to the US. Clearly, they will have to reduce prices, but by how much? Their customers are doubtless in equal turmoil and unable to provide much guidance in terms of what price they would be willing/able to buy at. Again, with this sort of madness certain to negatively affect growth, customers are likely uncertain about how much they would be willing/able to buy.

Reduce your risk as much as you can.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Reviving regional cooperation

Nearly three decades after its formation, the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) has sought to revive its relevance with the adoption of the Bangkok Vision 2030, aiming to become a "Prosperous, Resilient, and Open" (PRO) regional bloc by 2030. The sixth summit, hosted by Thailand, saw India

playing a leading role by proposing key initiatives such as Centres of Excellence in disaster management and agriculture, the Bodhi programme for skill development, and steps to enhance digital infrastructure and trade. However, BIMSTEC's progress is hindered by political tensions among member-states, especially Bangladesh and Myanmar, and a lack of institutional momentum, with infrequent summits and delayed projects like the 2004 free trade

agreement. While challenges remain, growing strategic needs and India's leadership offer a chance to transform BIMSTEC into a more dynamic and united regional platform.

—Amarjeet Kumar, Haziirabagh

Uncool is fine, too

Apropos of "Indian and cool" (FE, April 7), founded in 1937, Haldimand, India's most popular snacks and sweet brand, has come a long way. With over 400 products, Haldimand's is

an iconic brand loved by Indians all over the world. With the backing of Alpha and IHC, Haldimand would be able to reach newer geographies and the brand's success has proved that what pays at the end of the day is to be authentic, maintain quality, and know the pulse of the consumers. Not being "cool" is not a disadvantageous position at all.

—Bal Govind, Noida

Write to us at letters@expressindia.com

Why India's image is being sullied by global bodies

HARSHA KAKAR

In March this year the USCIRF (US Commission on International Religious Freedom) released its annual report. On India it recommended, "Designate India as a 'country of particular concern' for engaging in and tolerating systematic, ongoing, and egregious religious freedom violations." It added, "Impose targeted sanctions on individuals and entities, such as Vikash Yadav and RAW, for their culpability in severe violations of religious freedom by freezing their assets and/or barring their entry into the United States." For the past few years, near similar recommendations on India have been made by the commission.

The Indian government rejected the report. The MEA spokesperson mentioned that the USCIRF "should itself be designated as an entity of concern", adding that the institution has "persistently attempted to misrepresent isolated incidents and cast aspersions on India's vibrant multi-cultural society reflect a deliberate agenda rather than a genuine concern for religious freedom."

The fact that the USCIRF is biased is well known. There is no mention of killings of thousands of Palestinians by Israel, backed by the US, solely because it does not suit Washington. Similar is the silence on death of hundreds of innocent Muslims due to the US's relentless airstrikes in largely Muslim majority nations.

The US is worse on religious freedom than most nations on which USCIRF comments adversely. President Donald Trump is imposing visa restrictions mainly on those from predominantly Muslim nations. A similar ban by him in 2017 was labeled as 'Muslim ban' by his aides. On all this the commission is silent, while about India it bases its assessment on a few random incidents.

The USCIRF is not the only organization which displays an anti-India bias. The recently released World Happiness Index placed India at 118 out of 147 nations. Surprisingly, nations like terrorist dominated Libya, bankrupt Venezuela, starving Rwanda, terrorism infested Iraq, Lebanon and Pakistan as also war-ravaged Ukraine are way ahead in happiness. It leaves one to question the credibility of these assessments.

World democracy indices, issued by institutions in different countries, invariably points fingers at Indian democracy. Freedom House, a US based institution, terms Indian democracy as 'partially free'. V-Dem from Sweden calls it an 'electoral autocracy', and the Economist Intelligence Unit from UK labels it as a 'flawed democracy'.

While European institutions accuse India, the continent itself faces accusations of being anti-democratic. JD Vance, the US Vice President, accused Europe, in its own backyard in Munich, of stifling democracy and free speech.

The world applauded India's conduct of its 2024 elections, where record numbers (larger than the population of Europe or North America) voted, while these fake assessing bodies term India's democratic model as anything but a democracy.

Indian election results were announced within a day, with zero violence, intimidation or complaints of rigging. Compare this to the US to ultimately close its presidential poll amid claims of voting irregularities and rigging. Trump had recently praised India for 'tying voter identification to a biometric database'.

Threats to democracy are more in the West than in India. In the US, Trump faced multiple court cases on frivolous grounds to prevent him from returning to the White House. In France, the leading opposition

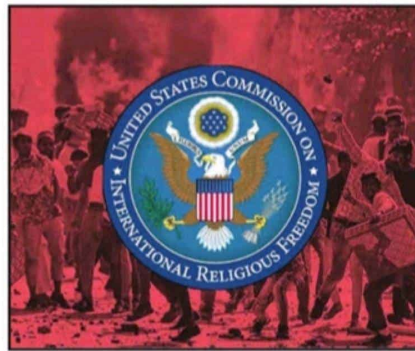
challenger to President Macron, Marine Le Pen, has been awarded a two-year sentence and banned from standing for elections. In Brazil, former President, Jair Bolsonaro, is being tried and could possibly face a 12-year sentence. In Romania, two far-right contenders, Cîlin Georgescu and Diana Iovan, have been blocked from contesting forthcoming May elections. So much for free European democracies.

However, these are not flawed democracies, but India where no previous head of state has been charged, is an autocracy. Such illogical assessments by global bodies make them a laughing stock and highlight their biased views.

The Indian government rightly rejects these reports claiming it does not need sermons on democracy from others. External Affairs Minister Dr Jaishankar had aptly termed these institutions as 'self-appointed custodians of the world who find it very difficult to stomach that somebody in India is not looking for their approval.' While there are flaws in the Indian democratic model, it is far better than most nations.

The Global Hunger Index of 2024 placed India at 105. Above India were African nations facing food shortages including Djibouti, Tanzania, Congo, Burkina Faso and Namibia. Namibia even planned to cull elephants to feed its starving population. Sri Lanka, to whom India donated food grains, was at 56. This raises questions about the methodology adopted by these institutions.

The World Press Freedom Index places India at 161, while Pakistan, where journalists disappear or are killed for criticizing the army is at 152. Even Turkey, where reporters are arrested, beaten and deported for covering opposition protests is ranked higher than India. The reason is that Reporters without Borders, which does this assessment, is linked



to George Soros's Open Society Foundation.

Institutions which judge nations are Western. For them, a former colony, known for snake charmers and beggars, to be shining on the world stage and dominate global space is unacceptable. Further, India refuses to succumb to Western pressures. It is now a global investment destination, where world leaders rush for trade deals.

Hence, attacks impacting India's performance in every sphere are intended to show it in poor light, attempting to decelerate its growth. No wonder the Indian government announced in 2024 that it plans to issue its own global democratic index, work on which has commenced.

Most global institutional ratings are subjective. They follow a pattern involving questionnaires sent to select 'so-called' experts as also limited public opinion polls. In India's case, the

'so-called' experts are common to most global bodies and largely against the current leadership. Not a single institution lists names of its experts or its data size.

These ratings, though biased, have an impact. Multinational corporations and global lending agencies consider them prior to investments or grant of loans. Similarly, they impact the nation's stature, especially when it seeks a larger role for itself on the global stage, including a permanent seat at the UNSC.

The intent of these agencies is to display India as an unreliable destination and a nation which does not follow what it preaches. Global bodies would prefer a subservient India, which it will never be. Thankfully, their impact thus far has not dented India's image as much as they had hoped.

The writer is a retired Major-General of the Indian Army.

100 YEARS AGO

OCCASIONAL NOTE

If the Peking Correspondent of the Times wishes to see the Singapore base scheme hurried on he is certainly going the best way to work to provide the British Government with the necessary excuse. If the present rate of disintegration in China goes on, says the Peking oracle, the empire will soon be transformed into a number of independent principalities and become an international danger. This diagnosis, if it errs at all, errs surely on the side of moderation. Most of us have been under the impression that this sad state of things had already arrived. The crux of the problem is that, as the Times Correspondent points out, "incidents" are likely to be of more frequent occurrence when the general anarchy is formally recognised, and this, of course, in only too likely to lead to a general "scramble" in which vital British interests might be compromised. It is a situation which gives food for thought—and, unless the picture has been wildly overdrawn, excuse for energetic preparations.

NEWS ITEMS

BELGIAN ELECTIONS

SOCIALISTS GAIN SEATS FROM LIBERALS

(SPECIAL CABLE.) LONDON, APRIL 5.

POLLING in the Belgian elections has passed off throughout the country with complete calm.

The Brussels correspondent of the Times says the result will not be known until to-morrow, but it is already certain that no party will have an absolute majority. The Socialists have notably gained ground, chiefly at the expense of the Liberals, and the Communists appear to have been swamped though they contested nearly every constituency.

COAL-MINES IN INDIA

(SPECIAL CABLE.) LONDON, APRIL 7.

IN the House of Commons to-day, replying to Mr. A. Hayday (Lab. Nottingham W.), Mr. Winterton stated that 942 collieries were working in India in 1923 under the Indian Mines Act, 55 of which had mechanical ventilators. He was asking the Government of India the number of mines where the working shift was twelve hours or more.

INDIGENT MOSLEMS

THE Aga Khan and Syed Ameer Ali endorsing the appeal to leading Moslems made by Mr. A. S. M. Anik, honorary secretary and treasurer of the fund to provide for the proper burial in accordance with Islamic rites of indigent Moslems dying in Britain, say it is a scandal reflecting discredit on the followers of Islam that in the absence of an organization with sufficient funds such Moslems are buried at the expense of the local board of guardians. Other communities, including Parsees and Jews, had made proper provision.

BLOODLESS REVOLT

GEN. HERTZOG & REHOBOTH TROUBLE

(SPECIAL CABLE.) CAIRO, APRIL 6.

IN the Assembly to-day Gen. Hertzog described the bloodless end of the Rehoboth trouble. Administration forces, he said, were concentrated in the Rehoboth village at the dawn of April 4. Some 600 natives with 160 rifles, mostly loaded, surrendered.

The administrator reported that they were well organized, and intended forcibly to resist, but were prevented by the unexpectedly rapid concentration of the Union forces which completely surprised them. The rank and file of prisoners were released immediately, but the ringleaders were detained, and would be brought to trial. Gen. Hertzog added that the Government intended to institute a judicial inquiry into the conditions in Rehoboth as early as possible.

CONCESSIONS TO SERVICES

BRITISH OFFICERS IN PROVINCES

The opposition of British officers in the Provincial Service to which the report of the Lee Commission did not refer was the subject of a debate in the House of Lords on Monday when Lord Amptill said the attempt to placate Indian opinion by sacrificing these officers was a misunderstanding of the Indian point of view.

Lord Birkenhead, replying, said the matter occupied a very foremost place on the list of subjects he desired to discuss with Lord Reading.

As regards the question of financial relief the Secretary for India pointed out that the Government of India considered that there was no general case for the grant of concessions such as were given to officers covered by the Lee Report, but there might be special cases in which this would be justified.

Le Pen shouldn't succeed with martyr act

AURELIEN MONDON

Marine Le Pen, figurehead of France's Renaissance (RN) movement, is one of the most established far-right parties in Europe, has been found guilty of embezzling funds from the European parliament.

During her time as an MEP between 2004 and 2017, Le Pen and her team paid party staff with funds that should have gone to European parliamentary aides. The ruling estimates that a total of 2.9 million euros in European parliament funds were involved in the crimes and that Le Pen personally embezzled 474,000 euros of that total.

She has been sentenced to four years in prison, two of which would be electronic monitoring. She is also unlikely to see the inside of a cell for the other two years as she is appealing her conviction.

More importantly, perhaps, is the fact that she has been banned from holding public office for five years. Crucially, the ban is to start immediately, meaning that even with an appeal, Le Pen is highly unlikely to be able to stand as a candidate in the next presidential election in 2027.

For many in the RN, the court's decision will be a major blow. The party appears to have lost the candidate they believed was on course for victory in 2027. However, others will no doubt see this as a chance to dis-

tribute the party further from the Le Pen name, following the death of Marine Le Pen's father Jean-Marie Le Pen earlier this year.

This process has been in motion for some time. Jordan Bardella took over from Le Pen as president of the party in 2022 and has clearly been waiting and preparing for this eventually. Allegations were first levelled at Le Pen many years ago and her crimes relate to her time as an MEP between 2004 and 2017. He has been the plan B option throughout her trial.

Bardella led the RN to victory in the 2024 European election in France. He also managed to send a record number of parliamentarians to the National Assembly after French president Emmanuel Macron called a snap election just weeks later.

This was, nevertheless, a somewhat disappointing outcome as many on the far right had started to imagine Bardella as prime minister. Since failing to meet this expectation, his leadership has come under more scrutiny. His reason to Le Pen's sidelining will be watched carefully.

Overall, it is good news to see corruption being taken seriously and justice being served. However, Le Pen's conviction comes after years of embezzlement which has allowed the far right to build its strength. All this has come on the back of a system it has vowed to destroy. As such, it feels like too little too late.

Furthermore, this decision, and the fact that it is tied to the European

Union, is likely to feed into typical far-right propaganda on the domestic stage. Le Pen and the party will play the victim, blaming Le Pen's fate on a wide conspiracy organised by something akin to the deep state operating via Brussels.

The deep levels of distrust in public institutions and mainstream politics are likely to play a role here. Le Pen will aim to paint the decision of an independent court as the political assassination of the "champion of the people".

She could become a martyr, turning her cause into a revolt against "the system". Bardella has already said that Le Pen's conviction amounted to the "execution" of democracy.

Crucially, though, this outcome isn't inevitable. Whether such a narrative takes hold is a choice that is very much in the hands of mainstream elite actors. Those who have a privileged access to shaping public discourse, such as journalists, politicians and experts will therefore play a key role.

Instead of giving pride of place to Le Pen and the far right in a tempting sensationalising coverage, the mainstream media must turn to serious analysis. This would involve removing the focus from individuals and putting it on the wider issues at hand. That would lessen the potential for a narrative of victimisation to take hold.

Beyond providing an accurate picture of the case itself, good coverage should predominantly focus on



politics rather than on the spectacle the RN will inevitably try to construct as a diversion tactic. This would mean engaging seriously with what the RN actually proposes as a model of society; one that is not against the "elite" and for the people, but merely in favour of a different elite taking control at the head of a top-down authoritarian state.

This would then allow voters to understand that the far right is not on their side, but on the side of power, wealth and hierarchies. Those who oppose such a takeover could go some way to fix the damage that has been done with carefully associating these parties with "populism".

Finally, good coverage would also mean shifting the agenda away from the far right and its pet issues. Had politicians—left, right and centre—not

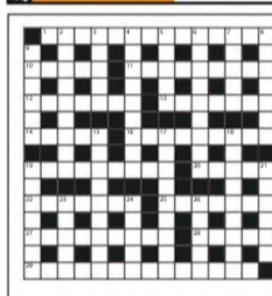
continuously used the far right as a diversion from their own failures to tackle the many crises their countries face, the far right would not be as powerful as it seems.

As opinion polls show, when people are asked what are their biggest concerns personally, issues core to the far right such as immigration are low. Instead, it is issues that would require radical measures to tackle economic and social insecurity which are prioritised.

The far right offers nothing to address these—only division to make citizens powerless to fight back. Now that Le Pen is out of the picture, it is a good time to shift the agenda back to democracy and hope.

The writer is Senior Lecturer in Politics, University of Bath. This article was published on www.thecorruption.com

CROSSWORD



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION



ACROSS

- Flights from London in planes appear dubious for vacation, unfortunately (6,3,5)
- Prince and friend getting close (5)
- Southern leader, excited by Arkansas being odd deficient in force for cattle (4,5)
- Watch Victor swapping places with son? The opposite? (7)
- Work out around American city (7)
- Scotland sorts out constant burden (9)
- Promote to marry criminal at brother (9)
- In spite of everything, I start to search for legendary creatures (5)
- Movement of car rested back of skull (7)
- Extremely crafty journalists found in one? (7)
- In Italy, a mere 50% of road rage takes place, essentially, with

DOWN

- learner reversing (4,3,1)
- Such seminal frames from the east (5)
- Acrylic sweeper agitated splitters, for example (6-8)
- Athletics event in European cellar (4,5)
- Film actor taking top off? (5)
- She can broadcast about idiot Englishman (9)
- Hot drink, say, to request (5)
- revolutionary rag (5)
- Gay parent's elaborate display (9)
- Cut off a bit (5)
- Easy when half-cut, checks for groups with attractive bodies (7)
- Decide not to be involved in work with dodgy ticket seller (3,5)
- Poshish doing cow impressions excited to be going viral, perhaps (7,2)
- Hoed in dodgy cabal getting hot material (9)
- In a legitimate position to suppress article secretly (2,5,4)
- Rustic tramp nearly gets abdominal pain (7)
- Figure out former partner is somewhere in south England (6)
- Snake occasionally seen in beer joint (5)
- Poshish does have, perhaps this? (5)
- King contains rare gem (5)

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

NO-295100

The Statesman

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Strategic Convergence

China's latest overture to Pakistan's military signals more than just a routine strengthening of bilateral naval ties. It marks a calculated pivot in Beijing's Indian Ocean strategy, and India must take serious note of the implications. At the heart of this growing partnership lies China's enduring interest in securing maritime routes vital to its economic and strategic security. With over 80 per cent of its oil imports passing through the Strait of Malacca, Beijing has long been concerned about potential chokepoints in times of crisis. The emergence of Pakistan - and specifically, the Chinese-funded deep-water port of Gwadar - as a possible alternative has been clear for years. But a renewed emphasis on "expanding into new fields of cooperation" between the Chinese and Pakistani navies suggests movement toward more direct strategic alignment, possibly including military logistics, surveillance, or even forward basing. While no official announcements have been made about Chinese military access to Gwadar, the strategic trajectory is unmistakable. From joint naval exercises to discussions of enhanced cooperation, the groundwork is being laid. Beijing has already established its first overseas military base in Djibouti, and Pakistan, a near client state, appears a natural candidate for a second. For India, this raises pressing security questions - not just about Pakistan's increasing dependence on China, but about the broader military balance in the region. This tightening of China-Pakistan military cooperation also reflects a deeper convergence of interests. Islamabad views China as a dependable counterbalance to India, while Beijing seeks Pakistan as a convenient partner and geographic gateway to the Arabian Sea. What India faces, therefore, is not just a bilateral challenge with either country, but a developing security axis between them that is increasingly assertive and regionally ambitious.

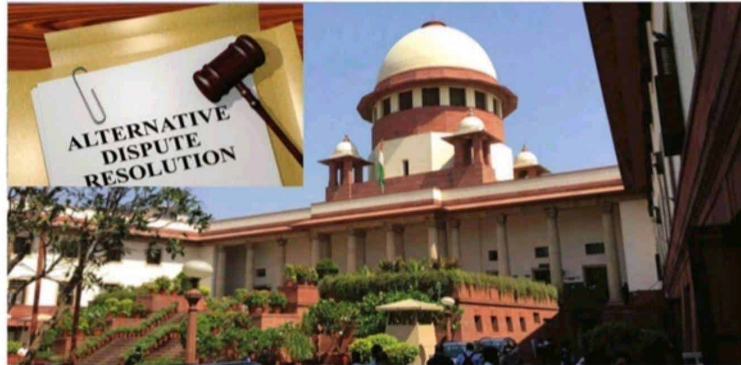
This growing synergy is not just about military drills or hardware transfers - it reflects a long-term strategic vision that could redefine the regional order and challenge India's traditional maritime dominance. India's strategists should respond with measured vigilance. Knee-jerk reactions or alarmism will not serve long-term interests. Instead, what is needed is a layered strategy: enhanced maritime surveillance, increased diplomatic outreach to Indian Ocean littoral states, and accelerated investment in naval modernisation. India must also continue deepening partnerships through multilateral frameworks like the Quad and regional forums such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). What's unfolding in the Arabian Sea is not merely a matter of two allies deepening ties. It is the potential emergence of a new geopolitical reality where the Indian Ocean - long considered India's strategic backyard - becomes a contested zone of influence between rival powers. The writing is on the wall: China's ambition is not just economic but increasingly military in nature. And in Pakistan, it may have found a willing partner for both. India must recognise this shift for what it is - not a temporary tactical move, but a strategic alignment that could reshape the balance of power in our neighbourhood for years to come.

Cooling Growth

India's services sector, long the linchpin of its economic dynamism, is showing signs of moderation. The latest data reveals that while the sector continues to expand, the pace of growth is losing steam. A dip in the services PMI to 58.5 in March - though still comfortably in expansionary territory - signals the first tremors of what could become a broader cooling in economic activity if not addressed thoughtfully. What stands out, however, is the simultaneous decline in inflationary pressure. Input costs rose at their slowest pace in five months, and output prices increased at the weakest rate since late 2021. While this may seem like a win for consumers, it underscores a deeper malaise: demand is not as buoyant as it once was, and intense competition is eroding pricing power. For a sector as diverse and employment-intensive as services - which includes everything from IT and finance to tourism and retail - such a squeeze on margins inevitably impacts hiring and sentiment. Indeed, employment growth has already slowed to its weakest pace in nearly a year, and business confidence has dipped to a seven-month low. This isn't just a number in a spreadsheet; it reflects growing caution among firms as they navigate a more uncertain and competitive landscape. This slowdown is especially concerning given the services sector's critical role in job creation, particularly for India's young and rapidly urbanising workforce. A prolonged deceleration could disproportionately affect entry-level employment and small service enterprises, widening income disparities and dampening consumer confidence further. Complicating matters further is the slowdown in foreign demand. International orders have risen at their slowest rate in over a year, pointing to increasing vulnerabilities to global headwinds - whether due to protectionist policies abroad, geopolitical uncertainties, or simply weaker global consumption. And yet, manufacturing continues to shine, outpacing services in terms of output. But even that growth that is not immune to the drag of cautious hiring and fading business optimism. The Reserve Bank of India finds itself at a critical juncture. With inflation cooling and GDP growth likely to register its weakest performance in four years, a monetary policy response feels not just appropriate but urgent. A rate cut - potentially as soon as April - could provide the breathing room businesses need to recalibrate, invest, and hire. But monetary easing alone will not solve the structural issues at play. What is needed now is a broader economic strategy that goes beyond stimulus. India must double down on improving ease of doing business, investing in up-skilling its workforce, and unlocking new avenues of domestic and global demand. Services have long been India's growth engine, but even engines need maintenance and recalibration. The signals are clear: growth is still alive, but it is not invincible. For policymakers, the message should be one of vigilance, responsiveness, and vision. It's time to act before moderation turns into stagnation.

ADR Councils

The government has held elections twice and won the mandate to govern the country, changed law ministers twice, and altered the arbitration act twice (in 2019 and 2021), enacted the Mediation Act 2023 but the promised institutionalisation has yet to materialise



Arbitration as an alternate method of resolving disputes is not new in India. Before and after the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996 was amended, there were a few private-sector arbitration organisations operating in various states.

Arbitration's private approach to dispute settlement allowed private players to establish and operate arbitration organisations. However, the much-discussed expansion of ADR institutionalisation in response to the increased pressure on courts has yet to begin.

"The Government of India under the dynamic leadership of Hon'ble Prime Minister is committed for speedy resolution of commercial disputes and to make India an international hub of Arbitration and a Centre of robust ADR mechanism catering to international and domestic arbitration, at par with international standards available" has been the opening sentence of the Justice Sri Krishna Committee's report on the institutionalisation of arbitration as an alternative conflict resolution method in India.

The High-Level Committee was tasked with reviewing the institutionalisation of arbitration mechanisms and making recommendations for improvements. The Committee, which met seven times in eight months, gave its report to the Minister of Law and Justice Ravi Shankar Prasad on 4 August 2017. Since then, the government has held elections twice and won the mandate to govern the country, changed law ministers twice, and altered the arbitration act twice (in 2019 and 2021), enacted the Mediation Act 2023 but the promised institutionalisation has yet to materialise. The enactment of the Mediation Act took over three years of deliberations.

Both acts claimed to institutionalise Alternative Dispute

Resolution (ADR) in India by establishing the Arbitration Council of India and the Mediation Council of India.

Again, on 20 March 2025, the current Law Minister, Arjun Ram Meghwal, assured the Rajya Sabha that "the Government is promoting alternative dispute resolution mechanisms including arbitration and mediation, as these mechanisms are less adversarial and are capable of providing a better substitute to the conventional methods of resolving disputes. The Government is further taking policy and legislative interventions, to strengthen these mechanisms and make them more efficacious and expeditious."

He went on to describe the key aspects of the Arbitration and Conciliation Act of 1996 and the Mediation Act of 2023, both of which are already available to the public on any law book stand on any street. The Law Minister's explanation of the legislative provisions for ADR in these acts is nothing more than beating around the bush.

The honourable member of parliament who raised the question in the house wanted to know what steps the government had taken to establish and operationalise the Arbitration Council of India (ACI), as well as the Mediation Council of India (MCI), which were promised through these acts to encourage, support, and regulate ADR services outside the government.

It is not the first time that law ministers have promised the institutionalisation of ADR; previous law ministers have also assured the parliament of the institutionalisation of ADR in

India through the establishment and operation of the Arbitration Council of India and the Mediation Council of India.

They explained that these councils would help grow ADR service providers in a country with over five crore cases pending in its courts, which are already plagued by questionable infrastructure, unfilled judicial positions, and gender disparities in judge strength in the High Courts and the Supreme Court of India. Our finance minister too allocated funds in the two successive budgets for operationalisation of these councils.

Recently, in a colloquium organised by the India International Arbitration Centre, Delhi, while delivering his key note address, our vice president Jagdish Dhankhar said "Arbitrators play as much critical role as members of the bar associated with the arbitral process. Surprisingly, there is, I am saying it with utmost restraint, absolute tight fist

control of a segment of a category that is involved with arbitral process determination. And this tight fist control emanates out of judicial fears. And if we examine it on an objective platform, it is excruciatingly painful. This country has rich human resource in every facet. Oceanography, maritime, aviation, infrastructure and what not. And the disputes are relative to the experience which is sectoral. Unfortunately, we have taken in this country a very myopic view of arbitration as if it is adjudication. It is much beyond adjudication. It is not conventional adjudication as historically evaluated globally."

He went on ventilating his concern about the arbitration

ecosystem in India by saying "Now is the time when India is emerging in every field globally. Why not India should emerge as a global dispute resolution centre? If I reflect to myself.... what do they have which we don't? Their infrastructure is hardly comparable to what we have. And look at cultural centres where arbitrators can really engage. Go to Kolkata, go to Jaipur, go to Bangalore, Hyderabad, Chennai, any part, get away from the metro then you will have. I have seen in ten years growth of arbitral centres with credibility in Dubai and Singapore. On self-assessment without fear of contradiction, I can say we are nowhere. We are not in the mind of people who are having commercial relationship with us if it is international commercial arbitration."

Despite much talked about institutionalising arbitration through seminars, workshops, and arbitration weeks, as well as promises made in parliament, the two ADR councils have yet to be implemented.

Section 113A of the Act requires that the High Courts and Supreme Court name Arbitration Institutions; nevertheless, this remains a non-starter, and the Arbitration Institutions' applications are pending before the High Courts for unknown reasons.

Except for a tiny number of Arbitration Institutions developed and supported by well-known law firms, state governments do not aid other professionally constituted ADR organisations.

Thus, there is an urgent need for the Centre and all High Courts in the country to take note of the Arbitration and Mediation Institutions operating in each state and designate them as ADR Institutions in order to reduce the much-discussed burden on courts and make India a hub for Alternative Dispute Resolution.

A MEMBER OF THE ANN ASIA NEWS NETWORK

ASIAN VOICES

Tobacco warnings go up in smoke

Health Secretary Ted Herbosa drew sharp criticism from public health advocates when he and several government representatives posed with Philip Morris executives during the turnover of mobile clinics donated by the tobacco company in Malacañang. The event was hosted by First Lady Liza Marcos.

Not surprisingly, Malacañang saw "nothing wrong" with the DOH's participation in the event, choosing to go technical instead of parsing the message telegraphed by the photo. "Do we have any proof that... Herbosa was the one who accepted the donation from the tobacco companies?" Palace Press Officer Undersecretary Claire Castro asked, adding that the donation was made to the Social Welfare department and not the DOH. "If (Herbosa) had a photograph, it doesn't mean that he already violated the law," she said. Oh, but he did, according to the Southeast Asia Tobacco Control Alliance (Seatac), a multi-sectoral nongovernment group assisting Asean countries to effectively implement the World Health Organization's (WHO) Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.

The treaty, which was adopted in 2003 by the WHO and ratified by 180 member countries, mandates that governments safeguard public health policies from the influence of the tobacco

INQUIRER

industry. Ratified by the Philippines in 2005, and affirmed as legally binding by the Supreme Court, it became the basis of the Civil Service Commission-Department of Health Joint Memorandum Circular 2010-01 (JMC), requiring public officials to engage with the tobacco industry only when necessary for industry regulation and supervision.

The JMC prohibits government officials from partnering with or providing or accepting benefits from the tobacco industry to prevent conflict of interest and maintain policy integrity. Another law, Republic Act No. 9211, also known as the Tobacco Regulation Act of 2003, similarly regulates tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship, among other restrictions.

As noted by Dr. Ulysses Dorotheo, Seatac executive director, "It is the duty of the Secretary of Health, the Secretary of Social Welfare, and the whole government to protect public health from health-harming industries and not to partner with them." He also pointed out the "hypocrisy" of the tobacco industry in donating mobile clinics while causing deaths and diseases.

Tobacco "kills more than 8 million people, including 90,000 Filipinos, every year," Dorotheo added. And indeed, tobacco has been found to pose significant health risks due to its harmful chemicals and addictive nature that led to various health complications and potentially fatal ailments such as cancer, heart disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and lung disease.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Interim arrangement

SIR, Apropos "Ties Reset" published today, Bangladesh could stay in extended socio political drift. It has no formal governance in place for months now and is run by the "Chief Adviser", Mohammed Yunus. While he meets leaders of China, Pakistan and India, it is a moot question as to how substantive such discussions could prove to be when Yunus lacks the legitimacy of a popular mandate and his domestic standing is no better than an interim chairperson.

Yunus needs to find speedy

consensus within the nation's polity to install a regular government, to establish its political direction and script economic recovery. Under great economic stress, Bangladesh needs the support of its neighbours in particular and other nations, in general. In trying to build up his political stature he runs the risk of being inveigled by a willful China intent on a foothold in the Siliguri corridor and an opportunistic Pakistan eager to reclaim a lost East Pakistan. Yunus needs to place the restoration of elective govern-

nance in Bangladesh, that was his sole remit, as his priority.

Yours, etc., R.Narayanan, Navi Mumbai, 6 March.

HANDSHAKE

SIR, It is in the fitness of things that PM Modi did not resort to his customary hug when he recently met Md.Yunus, Bangladesh's interim Chief Adviser. There has been incontrovertible evidence of the mindless destruction of property of the Hindus, the brutal and premeditated assaults on them and the purposeful targeting of their places of worship. There is more than ample evidence to show that minority Hindus have been living at the mercy of the majority Muslims in Bangladesh, after the dramatic ouster of Sheikh Hasina last August.

So far, Yunus has only puffed India's concerns about the safety of Hindus in Bangladesh. Far from giving India the much needed assurance about the safety of Hindus in Bangladesh, Yunus has all along retorted with tongue in cheek rhetoric that puts the blame on India for sheltering Sheikh Hasina.

Judge a man by the company he keeps. Yunus has been keeping "dark" company in the form

of radicals and ultra Islamists in his country, and has been cosy with China and even Pakistan (a country responsible for committing genocide in the erstwhile East Pakistan).

It is not for India to "restrain" Sheikh Hasina from further his customary commentary as Yunus puts it. It is a sheer coincidence that she is making such statements from Indian soil. India is not writing the script for her. Neither should her statements provide an alibi for Yunus

to turn a Nelson's eye to the increasing acts of violence against the Hindus in his country. Under Yunus, Bangladesh has been keen to debunk the stellar role played by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in the liberation of Bangladesh, and is trying to script a "new" history sans his legacy. Such a leader can only be trusted at our own peril. Truth be told, Modi was kind enough to offer a handshake to Md.Yunus.

Yours, etc., Avinash Godbole, Dewas, 5 March.

A PILLAR

SIR, Vandana Kataria started her journey from a small place called Roshanabad in Haridwar, Uttarakhand. Neighbours and relatives discouraged her father from sending Vandana to play hockey. But today she stands as the most capped Indian women's player with 320 matches in a 15 year long career.

In her 320 appearances, she scored 158 goals and she is the only Indian female player to score a hat-trick at the Olympics. She has been part of some of the team's biggest triumphs like three Asian Games medals, one Commonwealth games medal, three Asia Cup medals, four Asian Championship Trophy medals, one FIH National Cup medal apart from one medal in the Junior World Cup. The only time she could not play a tournament due to injury was the Paris Olympics Qualifiers in 2024. She has been a pillar of Indian women's hockey since 2009 and a true legend. I hope the Indian Hockey Federation will seek her help to nurture young talent.

Yours, etc., Bal Govind, Noida, 2 April.



Will another rate cut follow? Trump shocker looms

EXPECT key measures and know the stance of India's central bank on April 9, as its Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), the RBI's rate-setting panel, commenced its three-day deliberations on Monday. The first meeting of the new financial year 2025-26 is taking place amid widespread, and anxious, expectations of another repo rate cut. It may be recalled that the RBI cut the Repo Rate (the interest rate at which it lends to banks) by 25 basis points - A basis point (bp) is a 100th of a percentage point - to 6.25% at its MPC meet on February 7, 2025. It was the first rate cut in 5 years. It was also the first policy rate-setting panel meet for new Governor Sanjay Malhotra.

The RBI in February acted in

deference to its new policy shift adopted in October 2024 when it shifted its stance to 'neutral' from 'withdrawal of accommodation'. The budgetary measure of the government, amid softening signs of inflation, to boost consumption by easing tax burden on the middle class, especially, paved the way for the RBI to follow through with its changed stance. For commoners, a 'hawkish' stance means the RBI is willing to hike rates in order to manage inflation. RBI has targeted to keep retail inflation at 4 per cent with a margin of 2 per cent on either side. When the inflation is not a concern, it adopts an 'accommodative' stance, indicating its willingness to cut interest rates to expand liquidity in market. A rate hike is definitely a no. A 'neutral' stance

is when the RBI can either hike or lower interest rates, depending on data and conditions. As for the current scenario, global markets are flailing due to US President Donald Trump's tariff shocker on April 2. He claims it as the 'Liberation Day' for America, which is proving to be a 'Liquidation Day' for the markets - every day. On Monday alone, the Trump's tariff inferno vapourised over Rs 20 lakh crore of investors' wealth with the Sensex crashing 3,000 points - IN JUST 10 SECONDS. The bloodbath was a reaction to the global stock markets which have been in a tailspin. On Friday, S&P 500 companies lost about \$5 trillion in stock market value. The Standard and Poor's 500, or simply the S&P 500, is a

stock market index tracking the stock performance of 500 leading companies listed on US stock exchanges. All stock markets are in a free fall since Trump announced country-specific tariffs, going as high as 50% in some cases. For India it is 26%. In addition, Trump announced a 10% baseline duty on imports from all nations.

Now, all eyes are on the RBI's MPC which is taking an in-depth review of interest rates, money supply, inflation outlook, and various macroeconomic indicators post-Trump tariff shocker. It is being keenly debated as to how the MPC would take measures to maintain price stability while supporting economic growth. The RBI has targeted inflation within the range of 2-6 per cent, with a medium-term goal of 4 per cent. Inflation has emerged a major concern for many countries, including advanced economies. However, India has managed to steer its inflation trajectory quite well. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation rate eased to 3.61% in February 2025, the lowest since July 2024, driven by a decline in food and beverage prices. Whether the RBI will go for growth or price stability is a big question now. Analysts around the world are dreading the immediate inflationary impact of trade shocks. As inflation is easing and GDP improving, the RBI has enough headroom. Will its MPC push for growth with further rate cuts or simply wait and watch till the dust settles? Tomorrow, we will come to know.

LETTERS

A harbinger of doom or new world order?

THE crash of global markets on Monday, melting lakhs of crores of investors' money within no time is the direct effect of Trump's tariffs. The spontaneous downward response is indicative of deep-rooted fears on unstable trade. The reciprocal tariffs and retaliatory tariffs by the world players are going to disrupt trade relations, further making all countries, including the USA, losers. Regionalism and protectionism are going to defeat the idea of globalisation in the coming days. Every country has been dragged into the battlefield of trade war now. Maybe, a new world order is in making.

Dr DVG Sankara Rao, Vizianagaram

EQUITY markets fell to a 10-month low, causing a considerable loss to investor wealth. US President Donald Trump's new tariffs have resulted in aggressive sell-offs. This Black Monday fall has created havoc in the global stock markets. Diplomatic reduction in reciprocal tariffs must be taken to tide over the situation.

N R Ramachandran, Chennai

THE super tariff wars between China and US have begun to tell on world stock markets. Chinese stocks listed in US plunged by 8.9%, after Beijing announced 34% tariff on imports from US. Chinese local shares are facing bear market, too. The Chinese GDP is expected to fall by 2%, though China aims to negate the loss by stimulus and increasing trade with non-US countries in due course. Chinese retaliation forced US benchmark markets to plunge by 5%, likely to be impacted further by Canadian tariff of 25% on US automobile imports, and countermeasures from Japan, Korea and EU. The sudden situation created by US in the form of tariff would either catalyse progressive world trade dynamics or may spell doom to world economies.

P R Ravinder, Hyderabad

A propos, "He's a lunatic" (THI, Apr 7). Hundreds of thousands marched across the United States and beyond in a sweeping wave of protests against President Donald Trump's sweeping government overhaul. The demonstrators rallied against mass federal layoffs, rising tariffs, abortion restrictions, and civil rights rollbacks. Spearheaded by groups like MoveOn and Women's March, the "Hands Off!" campaign marked the largest day of co-ordinated resistance since Trump's return to office, sparking global concern and growing domestic unease. The scale and intensity of these protests suggest an aggressive opposition to Trump's policies. It marks the rebirth of a sustained resistance movement - one centred not only on identity and civil rights, but also bread-and-butter issues like healthcare, jobs, and the cost of living. With fast plummeting approval ratings and massive protests on the streets, the Donald Trump may be the first US President in history to become most unpopular in less than three months of assuming the Oval Office.

N Sudhivasa Reddy, Bengaluru

WHEN Donald Trump was elected as President of United States for the first time some eight years ago, the same public demonstrated in front of White House, as I remember, for his stepping down and later experienced his full term. The same situation is repeated now. People have to bear the brunt for full four years as Trump was elected by people again. Blame goes to electorate but the elected (He's a lunatic, Hans Apr 7).

N Ramakrishna, Secunderabad

Karl Marx teachings still relevant

THE decision to erect a statue of Karl Marx in Chennai is a significant move that highlights the relevance of his ideas to present times, particularly the call for workers of the world to unite. As we face growing economic inequalities, Marx's vision of solidarity among the labour class remains crucial. This statue will inspire generations to advocate for workers' rights and social justice. "Workers of the world, rise and reclaim your voice!"

T S Karthik, Chennai

SRH, CSK must pull their socks up

SUNRISERS Hyderabad (SRH) have now lost four consecutive matches, despite kicking off their campaign with a staggering 286-run performance against Rajasthan Royals (RR). Their batting lineup has consistently underperformed, contributing heavily to their losing streak. The top six batters have averaged just 24 runs per match across five games - a concerning statistic. SRH currently sits at the bottom of the points table, just above Chennai Super Kings (CSK), who have played four matches and managed only a single win. CSK's struggles mirror SRH's, with their batting lineup failing to fire when it matters most. The lack of intent and fighting spirit in CSK's batting has been apparent in all their games. Fans of both teams are understandably disappointed with their performance so far. Unless SRH and CSK make some serious improvements in the upcoming matches, they could very well be the first teams eliminated from the tournament.

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BENGALURU ONLINE

Seek resignation of Home Minister over 'sexist' comment: BJP

NEW DELHI: The BJP on Monday demanded that Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra seek Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara's resignation over his comment that incidents like molestation do happen at times in a big city like Bengaluru.

BJP national spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla alleged that Parameshwara is a "serial offender", claiming that he had made similar remarks trivialising crimes against women during sexual assaults against them in the Karnataka capital in 2017. The BJP leader told reporters that the Karnataka Congress leader has exhibited a brazen display of "most shocking, misogynist, patriarchal, sexist and obnoxious mindset" by trivialising an incident that has shocked the country, especially women of the state.

Parameshwara was responding to the incident where a woman was molested in a secluded place in Suddaguntepalya.

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

Squabble over Arctic security

STEFAN WOLFF

MELTING ICE HAS OPENED UP NEW SHIPPING ROUTES

"You cannot annex another country".

This was the clear message given by the Danish prime minister, Mette Frederiksen, at a recent press conference with the outgoing and incoming prime ministers of Greenland. It did not appear aimed at Russian president Vladimir Putin, but at Donald Trump, the president of one of her country's closest allies, who has threatened to take over Greenland.

Frederiksen, speaking in Greenland's capital Nuuk, was stating something that is obvious under international law but can no longer be taken for granted. US foreign policy under Trump has become a major driver of this uncertainty, playing into the hands of Russian, and potentially Chinese, territorial ambitions. The incoming Greenlandic prime minister, Jens-Frederik Nielsen, made it clear that it was for Greenlanders to determine their future, not the United States. Greenland, which is controlled by Denmark, makes its own domestic policy decisions. Polls suggest a majority of islanders want independence from Denmark in the future, but don't want to be part of the US.

Trump's interest in Greenland is often associated with the island's vast, but largely untapped, mineral resources. But its strategic location is arguably an even greater asset. Shipping routes through the Arctic have become more dependable and for longer periods of time during the year as a result of melting sea ice. The northwest passage

(along the US and Canadian shorelines) and the northeast passage (along Russia's Arctic coast) are often ice free now during the summer. This has increased opportunities for commercial shipping. For example, the distance for a container ship from Asia to Europe through the northeast passage can be up to three times shorter, compared to traditional routes through the Suez Canal or around Africa.

Similarly, the northwest passage offers the shortest route between the east coast of the United States and Alaska. Add to that the likely substantial resources that the Arctic has, from oil and gas to minerals, and the entire region is beginning to look like a giant real estate deal in the making.

Arctic assets

The economic promise of the Arctic, and particularly the region's greater accessibility, have also heightened military and security sensitivities. The day before J D Vance's visit to Greenland on March 28, Vladimir Putin, in a speech at the sixth international Arctic forum in Murmansk in Russia's high north, warning of increased geopolitical rivalry.

Equally worrying, Russia has increased its naval cooperation with China and given



The economic promise of the Arctic, and particularly the region's greater accessibility, have also heightened military and security sensitivities. The day before J D Vance's visit to Greenland on March 28, Vladimir Putin, gave a speech at the sixth international Arctic forum in Murmansk in Russia's high north, warning of increased geopolitical rivalry

Beijing access, and a stake, in the Arctic. In April 2024, the two countries' navies signed a cooperation agreement on search and rescue missions on the high seas.

In September 2024, China participated in Russia's largest naval manoeuvres in the post-cold war era, Ocean-2024, which were conducted in north Pacific and Arctic waters. The following month, Russian and Chinese coast-guard vessels conducted their first joint patrol in the Arctic. Vance, therefore, has a point when he urges Greenland and Denmark to cut a deal with the US because the "island isn't safe".

That the Russia-China partnership has resulted in an increasingly military presence in the Arctic has not gone unnoticed in the west.

Svalbard's future role?

Norway has similarly boosted its defence presence in the Arctic, especially in relation to the Svalbard archipelago (strategically located between the Norwegian mainland and the Arctic Circle). This has prompted an angry response from Russia, wrongly claiming that Oslo was in violation

of the 1920 Svalbard Treaty which awarded the archipelago to Norway with the proviso that it must not become host to Norwegian military bases.

Under the treaty, Russia has a right to a civilian presence there. The "commission on ensuring Russia's presence on the archipelago Spitzbergen", the name Moscow uses for Svalbard is chaired by Russian deputy prime minister Yuriy Trutnev, who is also Putin's envoy to the far eastern federal district. Trutnev has repeatedly complained about undue Norwegian restrictions on Russia's presence in Svalbard.

From the Kremlin perspective, this is less about Russia's historical rights on Svalbard and more about Norway's - and NATO's - presence in a strategic location at the nexus of the Arctic, Barents and Norwegian seas. From there, maritime traffic along Russia's northeast passage can be monitored. If, and when, a central Arctic shipping route becomes viable, which would pass between Greenland and Svalbard, the strategic importance of the archipelago would increase further.

From Washington's perspective, Greenland is more important because of its closer proximity to the US. But Svalbard is critical to NATO for monitoring and countering Russian, and potentially Chinese, naval activities. This bigger picture tends to get lost in Trump's White House, which is more concerned with its own immediate neighbourhood and cares less about re-

gional security leadership.

Consequently, there has been no suggestion - so far - that the US needs to have Svalbard in the same way that Trump claims he needs Greenland to ensure US security. Nor has Russia issued any specific threats to Svalbard. But it was noticeable that Putin in his speech at the Arctic forum discussed historical territorial issues, including an obscure 1910 proposal for a land swap between the US, Denmark and Germany involving Greenland.

Putin also noted "that NATO countries are increasingly often designating the Far North as a springboard for possible conflicts". It is not difficult to see Moscow's logic: if the US can claim Greenland for security reasons, Russia should do the same with Svalbard.

The conclusion to draw from this is not that Trump should aim to annex a sovereign Norwegian island next.

Maritime geography in the north Atlantic underscores the importance of maintaining and strengthening long-established alliances. Investing in expanded security cooperation with Denmark and Norway as part of NATO would secure US interests closer to home and send a strong message to Russia. It would also signal to the wider world that the US is not about to initiate a territorial reordering of global politics to suit exclusively the interests of Moscow, Beijing and Washington.

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How Africa can reduce GHG emissions

NEW study report by India-based think tank Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) highlights the continent's potential in recycling industrial waste; calls for policy reforms, infrastructure investment, and industry-led collaborations to unlock the possibilities.

Lagos (Nigeria): Industrial waste contributes 30-40 per cent of total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in Africa. A new report released here today says the continent can reduce its emissions significantly if it recycles this waste by initiating and encouraging industrial waste circularity.

The report, titled 'Africa's Wasted Potential: Unlocking industrial waste in circularity', has been prepared and published by New Delhi (India)-based think tank Centre for Science and Environment (CSE). It was released in Lagos at a pan-Africa workshop jointly hosted by CSE and Nigeria's National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA).

Speaking at the workshop, Ishita Garg, Programme Manager, Industrial Pollution, CSE said: "The CSE report uncovers the unexploited potential of industrial waste as a resource often ignored. Africa's circular economy efforts have remained focused on plastic and municipal waste, and industrial waste has largely been overlooked. This report emphasises the urgency of addressing this issue and demonstrates how circular solutions

can drive both economic growth and environmental sustainability". Garg added: "The report stresses on the need to prioritise industrial waste and treat it as a resource and a development opportunity. By adopting circular practices, industries can lower raw material costs, improve energy efficiency, and reduce their GHG emissions while creating job opportunities."

A call to action: Lagos workshop brings key regulators together: The workshop in Lagos brought together regulators from Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, Uganda and Tanzania and is aimed at having focussed discussions on strengthening regulations, encouraging industry participation, and creating financial incentives to enhance circularity across industrial sectors.

Dr Christopher N Beka, Director-Inspection and Enforcement with NESREA represented Prof Innocent Barikor, Director General of the Agency, at the workshop. Speaking in the event, Dr Beka said: "Africa's industrial sector has a unique opportunity to integrate waste circularity - especially as much of the continent's industrial infrastructure is yet to be built. Regulatory frameworks need to evolve to support industrial waste circularity at large scale. Strengthening policies and enhancing industry participation will be crucial in industrial waste sustainability goals."

Garg pointed out that "while Africa is projected to double its GHG

While Africa is projected to double its GHG emissions by 2050 in a business-as-usual scenario, scaling up circularity practices could present a significant opportunity. A few promising solutions are emerging in different African countries: these include the use of waste as alternative fuels in cement plants, recycling other waste such as tyres, paper, glass, cashew nuts, lead batteries



emissions by 2050 in a business-as-usual scenario, scaling up circularity practices could present a significant opportunity to cut GHG emissions at both country and continent level". The CSE report indicates that 100 per cent recycling of just four types of industrial waste - lead acid battery, glass waste, cashew waste and e-waste - could reduce 8.7 million tonnes of CO₂, which is a 2 per cent reduction in total GHG emissions from the continent.

While the opportunities are clear, the report also sheds light on the barriers that hinder progress on the ground. One of the major roadblocks in enhancing industrial

waste circularity in Africa is the absence of comprehensive waste inventories on the type and quantity of industrial waste generated. The report says that many African countries that are experiencing rapid industrialization, lack data on industrial waste generation, including figures on recycling, reuse and disposal, making it difficult to track material flows and identify opportunities for circularity. Said Garg: "The absence of such information has resulted in dumping of waste like slag, fly ash, plastic, glass, paper, etc which are otherwise easily recyclable."

"Having a waste inventory is a crucial first step towards industrial

waste circularity and absence of such essential information positions the handling and management of industrial waste," said Garg. The CSE report also highlights the absence of industrial waste targeted goals and actions in circular economy policies of many African countries, underscoring a major barrier to large-scale implementation.

However, a few promising solutions are emerging in different African countries: these include the use of waste as alternative fuels in cement plants, recycling other waste such as tyres, paper, glass, cashew nuts, lead batteries that are integrating waste materials into their production processes. These practices showcase the possibilities of transforming industrial waste into valuable resources while also generating economic benefits by creating new revenue streams and minimising waste and reducing GHG emissions.

Way ahead: The key recommendations: The CSE report presents a strategic roadmap to scale up industrial waste circularity across the continent. Some of its key recommendations are as follows: Create a national waste inventory to track industrial waste generation, recycling, and disposal; Develop waste mapping and cross-industry waste exchange to repurpose waste as raw materials; and, Develop and implement industrial waste-focused policies that establish sector-specific guidelines.

Editor's TAKE

Bridging devotion and development

The Pamban Bridge is a powerful testament to the spirit of a new India

This is the New India we live in today — an India that no longer apologises for its past, yet is boldly committed to progress, innovation, and forging meaningful connections with the modern world. In a monumental step towards engineering excellence and spiritual connectivity, Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the New Pamban Bridge in Rameswaram on the auspicious occasion of Ram Navami. This architectural marvel — the first vertical lift sea bridge in India — not only symbolises the seamless integration of tradition and technology but also stands as a proud testament to New India's relentless pursuit of innovation.

The New Pamban Bridge, spanning 2.08 kilometres with 99 spans and a central vertical lift span of 72.5 metres, is a spectacular feat of modern engineering. With an investment of over Rs 550 crore, this bridge connects Rameswaram — an ancient pilgrimage site — to the Indian mainland.

The vertical lift mechanism can raise the bridge deck up to 17 metres, allowing the passage of large ships. This capability positions India among a select group of nations with such advanced infrastructure. Equipped to handle dual railway tracks and designed with a special polysiloxane coating for long-term resilience against the corrosive marine environment, the New Pamban Bridge represents a blend of robust functionality and future-readiness.

The original Pamban Bridge, built in 1914 by British engineers, served as a lifeline for over a century. It was a cantilever bridge featuring a Scherzer rolling lift mechanism that allowed ships to pass. Over time, marine corrosion and growing transportation needs highlighted the need for a stronger, smarter structure.

In 2019, the Modi government approved the construction of this replacement, entrusting the project to Rail Vikas Nigam Limited (RVNL), a Navratna PSU under the Ministry of Railways.

Now, the new structure stands not only as a replacement but as a remarkable upgrade — one that signals India's emergence as a global player in infrastructure development.

Prime Minister Modi's inauguration of the New Pamban Bridge, coupled with the flagging off of the Rameswaram-Tambram Express train, reflects a broader national narrative — one where development is deeply intertwined with cultural and spiritual heritage.

On Ram Navami, as devotees across the country celebrated the birth of Lord Ram, the launch of this bridge served as a symbolic gesture: uniting devotion with dynamism, faith with functionality. Under Prime Minister Modi's leadership, India has been ticking off one technical milestone after another — be it the world's highest rail bridge in Jammu & Kashmir, the Atal Tunnel in Himachal Pradesh, or the rollout of Vande Bharat trains.

The New Pamban Bridge joins this league of transformative infrastructure, reaffirming the nation's resolve to modernise without losing touch with its roots. The message is clear: New India is not just building bridges of steel and concrete; it is also building bridges of trust, tradition, and transformation. With every project, it is asserting its place on the global stage — not by imitating the West, but by setting its own benchmarks.

As the sun rises over the sacred shores of Rameswaram, the New Pamban Bridge gleams not just as a symbol of connectivity, but as a beacon of a nation on the move — where devotion meets development, and where the future is already under construction.

A call for commitment in education

With quality in higher education intrinsically tied to a strong foundation laid at the primary level, the real transformation lies in empowering and inspiring teachers and fostering ethical academic environments

The successful implementation of the New Education Policy (NEP) — 2020 depends on its total acceptance at every level. Most important among them are the State governments and then those implementing it at the grassroots. The level of excellence and quality in higher education organically depends on the quality and excellence achieved at the primary school level and sustained up to the senior secondary level. This is the simplest equation, obvious to all those working in the arena. In education, one could safely attribute the attainment of excellence and innovations to the teachers, and what happens between them and the learner, at the professional level and also at personal, emotional and empathetic levels. It is the total commitment of the individual teacher, right from the primary school to the highest levels, that alone would make a positive difference in an objective and purposeful implementation of the policy.

It would be worthwhile to recall an example of a nation that overcame its destruction and humiliation through serious attention to education, beginning with school education. After WWII, devastated, destroyed and humiliated, Japan began its reconstruction by prioritising education in its primary schools and respecting and supporting its teachers. Maximum learning, brain development, and the essence of growing up take place there. If a child observes all along a dedicated and committed work culture, observes how much value is accorded to the maximum utilisation of time, and finds his teachers always full of inspired confidence, proud of being the creators of the future of the nation, could he ever forget any one of these attributes when he takes over the reins of some assignment as his time approaches? In contrast to this, a reluctant, unconcerned, lethargic approach to the change in an educational institution could indeed be injurious to all concerned.

Unfortunately, we in India suffer from such an approach on a pretty wide scale. This is supported by several other factors. Some of the State governments are opposing the NEP-2020; they have declared their intention to have their own policy of education. Technically, they may do so, but it serves the larger cause of the nation, its progress and development? Will it help the young, sensitive learners with loads of dreams before them? The NEP-2020 is an outcome of an unprecedented consultation in which everyone had a chance to participate.

The need to move ahead as a single, integrated and cohesive national unit is the only alternative in the fast-changing world of education, which is moving much beyond the mere knowledge society or even a wisdom society! It is not easy even to predict what

would be the shape of the academic scenario in the next ten years! On one side, the ICTs pouring in new potentialities that could transform the learning opportunities and alternatives, and greatly impact the nature of the age-old teacher — taught relationship! On the other, new concerns are developing because of human migrations, and consequent demographic, cultural and social changes. It would necessarily impact education, culture, and mother-tongue related sensitivities, apart from those of religions and faiths. The single-modal situations are getting converted into multi-modal in several nations, and that requires a fresh strategy for handling it. These are not easy propositions, as is made evident from reports emerging from several countries that had earlier experienced only of a single language, monolithic culture and one religion! India is lucky in this respect, but it is creating issues that could seriously impede even the much-needed implementation of a dynamic education policy. It is beautifully expressed by Robert Carneiro: "Indeed, we are witnessing the emergence of a new breed of culture: that developed by Homo connectus or collegatus — a culture of online networking made possible by the immediacy of modern information and communication technologies. It is important to note that the initial stages of connectivity are directly linked to the needs of Homo economicus, increasing his mastery of the world."

Let it also be realised that new knowledge being discovered and created is mostly for development, growth and progress. Mostly, it focuses on bringing the best out of the mind only, completely ignoring the 'Heart', out of the synergy of the trio that Gandhi had proposed much earlier: bring the best out of 'Head, Hand

and Heart! India just cannot ignore the other two, because of its specific needs. Actual priorities could be readjusted depending on the emerging scenario. The majority of the young persons in India aspire to get a job after completing their education. They are neither trained in adequate skills nor transformed in attitude to consider the power of ideas and imagination they are blessed with, along with the skills of creativity and inherent human curiosity! Another factor that deserves serious deliberation was pointed out by Albert Einstein around a century ago: "The most important human endeavour is the striving for morality in our actions. Our inner balance and even our existence depends on it."

This must become the prime objective of NEP-2020, in its implementation. Too much technology and AI could create more obstructions in this sphere shortly. In other words, almost the entire process of knowledge development for a common citizen that is already in a pretty well-established state, and occupying increasingly larger space for itself. Needless to reiterate, the social, cultural, economic, linguistic and religious factors shall always make their presence felt — but sadly enough, handling these would gradually become more and more complex, if sensible and sensitive actions are not properly initiated well in time and with sincere and ethical considerations. The implementation of the NEP-2020 shall have to remain alert to such developing situations. Academic auton-

omy is often the subject of certain actual and presumed intrusions that academics do not necessarily relish. It is ultimately the responsibility of universities, colleges and other institutions to decide how they will implement the policy, and harmonise with the indications given to them by central and State agencies. The professional credibility of every institution is determined by the academic stature and professional contributions of its academic faculty. Faculty members need to remember that no profession diminishes in public esteem and credibility due to external factors — it is always internal factors that matter, and the most significant is the moral and ethical component, as has been proved in numerous instances. The quality of the academic contributions, the new knowledge generated, and the new applications suggested make a very positive difference in restoring! Maintaining high professional standards requires a serious commitment to both the profession, values and the learners. Education policies have to be dynamic — more dynamic than in the past. In the future, changes will occur more frequently than in the past.

The most significant consequence of this will be the increasing acceptance of professional responsibility by academics. Regardless of the level at which they impart knowledge, create knowledge, and acquire new knowledge, it is their personal as well as institutional confidence that 'we are the creators of future generations and builders of new India' that would make all the difference. Aim at perfection, excellence will certainly follow and become visible.

(The writer works in education, social cohesion and religious unity. He is an Atal Fellow with PMIL, New Delhi. Views are personal)



Leaderspeak



The Supreme Court must clarify who is deserving and who is not. Give us the list. No one has the right to break the education system. In NEET, many allegations surfaced. The Supreme Court did not cancel the examination. Why is Bengal being targeted? We want to know. You are scared of Bengal's talent

MAMATA BANERJEE | WEST BENGAL CHIEF MINISTER



SECOND Opinion

BY RAHUL KUMAR

Summer vacations are here again, bringing excitement and anticipation for children and parents alike. Recently, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, during his 120th episode of Mann Ki Baat aired on 30 March 2025, passionately encouraged schools, families, and communities to use these months meaningfully. With hashtags like #MyHolidays and #HolidayMemories, PM Modi beautifully highlighted that vacations could be more than just leisure; they could nurture holistic growth in young minds. In this context, it's essential to reflect on how the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and institutions like the Centre for Cultural Resources and Training (CCRT) are shaping the future of Bharat, particularly focusing on adolescents. The NEP 2020 is celebrated worldwide for its visionary stance on education that bridges traditional cultural wisdom with modern interdisciplinary practices.

It recognises adolescence as a vital stage of personal and emotional growth — a truth vividly captured in the recent series Adolescence, where teenagers struggle to find their identity amid cultural and emotional complexities. Anthropologist Margaret Mead once remarked, "The young, free to act on their initiative, can lead their elders

in the direction of the unknown," aptly summarising the potential and restlessness of youth.

Here, CCRT steps in effectively, translating the vision of NEP 2020 and National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2023 into reality. CCRT has been actively promoting arts and cultural education by blending age-old wisdom with contemporary teaching methods. UNESCO's Framework for Culture and Arts Education highlights precisely this — cultural literacy is not just beneficial but essential for sustainable and cohesive societies.

Globally, successful educational models, such as those in Finland, South Korea and Japan, underscore the importance of cultural education. Finland, often praised for its education system, integrates cultural appreciation deeply within its curriculum. Similarly, South Korea has earned global recognition for infusing its educational framework with a rich cultural heritage.

Bharat, long celebrated as a Vishwaguru, now has the opportunity to reclaim its leadership by implementing cultural education initiatives guided by policies like NEP 2020. CCRT's initiatives (under the Ministry of Culture, Government of India) — which include the Digital District Repository (DDR) Project and specialised teacher-training workshops in art-based pedagogy — have profoundly influenced adolescents at the grassroots level.

These initiatives foster a genuine sense of cultural pride and self-awareness, helping young people navigate identity struggles similar to those depicted realistically in Adolescence. With the summer holidays upon us, the tim-

ing couldn't be better. PM Modi's appeal resonates with CCRT's vision of turning leisure time into learning adventures.

Imagine our children swapping mundane afternoons of screen time for immersive storytelling sessions, theatre workshops, or hands-on experiences in traditional crafts. Certainly, these experiences promise far richer holiday stories to share with hashtags #MyHolidays and #HolidayMemories!

Furthermore, cultural and heritage education nurtures empathy — an indispensable quality in our rapidly globalising world. It also offers emotional resilience, equipping adolescents with the confidence to address modern-day challenges. So, as summer camps begin and cheerful voices echo through activity-filled sessions, let us recognise the perfect harmony between NEP 2020 vision and CCRT's mission. Together, they foster culturally conscious, globally minded citizens deeply rooted in Bharatiya traditions. Indeed, Bharat, as the original Vishwaguru, is well-positioned to lead by example in educational innovation. Cultural education is not merely about preserving traditions — it is about empowering the next generation.

Let's wholeheartedly embrace this idea, transforming this summer vacation into an unforgettable journey of cultural discovery and growth for Bharat's adolescents.

(The writer is Deputy Director, Centre for Cultural Resources and Training (CCRT), an autonomous organisation under the Ministry of Culture, New Delhi. Views are personal)

Letters to the Editor

INDIA AND SRI LANKA: THE WAY FORWARD

Madam — This is in response to the article "Building Bridges with Sri Lanka" published on 7 April. Prime Minister Modi's visit to Sri Lanka, following President Anura Kumara Dissanayake's December visit to India, holds great significance.

Our bilateral relations faced turbulence during Ranil Wickremesinghe's tenure, as Sri Lanka drew closer to China. Given the island nation's strategic location, India cannot afford to ignore it. When the left-leaning Dissanayake assumed office, there were concerns about further deterioration in ties. However, India's consistent support during Sri Lanka's economic crisis appears to have had a positive impact.

It is encouraging that President Dissanayake has recognised India as a vital ally. The agreements signed between the two countries, covering defence, energy, and trade, are a step in the right direction. His categorical assurance that Sri Lanka's territory will not be used against India is particularly reassuring. This marks a promising new chapter in Indo-Sri Lanka relations, grounded in our longstanding people-to-people and cultural ties. Both nations must maintain momentum through dialogue and mutual respect. That is the path to regional peace and shared prosperity.

BAL GOVIND | NOIDA

END OF GLOBALISATION?

Madam — The UK's recent declaration on the end of globalisation (as reported in The Pioneer, April 7, 2025) was unsurprising. The WTO, once strongly promoted by that blind nationalism and majoritarianism are two sides of the same coin — where excessive devotion to one's own religion and country, accompanied by prejudice against others, ultimately fosters majority dominance and marginalisation of minorities.

During debates on the Waqf Board in Parliament, several opposition MPs warned that such actions would not remain confined to Muslims. They feared that Christians, Sikhs, Jains, and Parsis would also be targeted. Their fears were confirmed when, shortly after the Bill was passed, the RSS-affiliated English magazine Organiser published an article comparing the landholdings of the Catholic Church and the Waqf Board, questioning: "Who owns more land in India?"

The article claimed that the Catholic Church owns over 7 crore hectares of land, making it the largest non-government landowner. The RSS continues to guide this government, and its priorities often take precedence. The Waqf Bill will not benefit Muslims; instead, it risks transferring community land to corporate allies. And after the Muslims, the Catholic Church will likely be next. Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, and Parsis may soon find themselves similarly targeted.

AG RAJMOHAN | ANANTPUR

The WAQF ACT 2025: WHO BENEFITS?

Madam — Apropos the concerns our civil society has long expressed about blind nationalism and far-right extremism, these now appear increasingly justified. It has become clear that blind nationalism and majoritarianism are two sides of the same coin — where excessive devotion to one's own religion and country, accompanied by prejudice against others, ultimately fosters majority dominance and marginalisation of minorities.

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JANG BAHADUR SINGH | JAMSHEDPUR

PAMBAN BRIDGE INAUGURATED: BRIDGING PROGRESS AND DEVOTION

There could be no more auspicious occasion than the day of Ram Navami to inaugurate one of India's engineering marvels — the New Pamban Railway Bridge. This bridge connects mainland India to Rameswaram Island.

An investment of ₹704 crore has resulted in not only a state-of-the-art engineering masterpiece but also a structure of deep spiritual significance for the nation. As India's first vertical-lift railway sea bridge, capable of rising up to 17 metres in just five minutes, it stands as a true symbol of technological progress and enhanced durability, with minimal susceptibility to corrosion.

The 2.08 km-long railway line of the New Pamban Bridge is more than a physical link — it is a connection to the spiritual heart of Rameswaram for millions of Indians. Indian Railways, particularly the Railway Vikas Nigam

Ltd., deserve immense praise for turning this visionary project into a reality. The bridge will also provide a significant boost to the Char Dham project.

We hope this new bridge will elevate India's economic, spiritual, and social cooperation to the next level.

As the New Pamban Railway Bridge opens on this sacred day of Ram Navami, it marks not just the unveiling of a monumental infrastructure project, but also the strengthening of India's cultural and spiritual fabric. This marvel will serve as a beacon of innovation, faith, and unity — ushering in a new era of connectivity and development. With heartfelt congratulations to all who made this dream a reality, we look forward to the many journeys this bridge will carry, both worldly and divine.

KIRTI WADHAWAN | KANPUR

The unfinished journey of India-China relations

From the optimism of Panchsheel to the shadows of the 1962 war, the story of the Dragon and the Elephant is one of trust gained and lost, of cooperation in multilateral arenas, and of a shared yet often conflicting vision for Asia's future

FIRST
Column

The relationship between India and China, two of the oldest civilisations in the world, has been a saga marked by both shared history and contentious moments. As the two nations now celebrate the Platinum Jubilee of their diplomatic ties, the journey of their complex relationship reveals a fascinating story of aspirations, trust, mistrust, and evolving geopolitical realities.

When India and China first established diplomatic ties in 1950, it was a moment of promise. India was the first non-socialist country to formally recognise the People's Republic of China (PRC) following its establishment after a bloody civil war. India, under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru, was focused on promoting a vision of peaceful coexistence and non-alignment during the Cold War. Nehru saw a future where the two Asian giants could cooperate to achieve regional peace and stability. This vision was encapsulated in the Panchsheel Agreement signed in 1954, based on five guiding principles: respect for territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence.

The relationship, however, was fraught with challenges from the start. China's refusal to honour the McMahon Line, which demarcated the border between Tibet and India, and its invasion of Tibet in 1950, created early tensions. India, under Nehru's leadership, viewed China's expansionist ambitions with increasing suspicion.

The fact that India offered sanctuary to the Dalai Lama, Tibet's spiritual leader, following an uprising in Tibet in 1959, was seen by China as a direct affront to its sovereignty. Beijing accused India of meddling in its internal affairs, especially over the Tibet issue, and the relationship began to sour.

Nehru, ever the optimist, sought to engage with China diplomatically. He believed that forging closer ties would help India address its security concerns and create a stable, peaceful environment in Asia.

However, the signing of the Panchsheel Agreement in 1954 did not resolve the underlying issues. By the early 1960s, border skirmishes between Indian and Chinese forces were becoming increasingly frequent.

The situation escalated in 1962, leading to the war that India would later describe as a crushing defeat. In just a matter of weeks, India lost over 3,000 soldiers and territory in Aksai Chin — an area China had already occupied by the time of the conflict. The defeat left deep scars in the Indian psyche and marked the lowest point in India-China relations. Over the years, both nations struggled to reconcile their differences. In the aftermath of the 1962 war, the relationship remained largely antagonistic for decades, with distrust growing over time. Even as the world around them shifted dramatically, with the Cold



War coming to an end, the rise of globalisation, and China's economic liberalisation — India and China found themselves caught in the crosscurrents of global politics. China's increasing engagement with the West, especially the United States, was viewed with suspicion in India, especially as India cultivated deeper ties with the US in the 21st century.

The early optimism of Panchsheel began to fade as both countries realised that their interests in Asia and on the global stage — were often at odds. In the 1980s, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's visit to China in 1988 marked a thaw in bilateral relations. China's economic reforms under Deng Xiaoping were yielding positive results, and India, too, was opening up to the world economy. Gandhi, in his visit to China, reaffirmed India's stance on territorial integrity, especially over disputed areas like Aksai Chin.

Despite the thaw, however, the spectre of the 1962 war continued to hover over the relationship, and issues such as the status of Tibet, the Dalai Lama, and China's growing influence in Asia

remained unresolved. In the years that followed, both countries began to recognise the importance of cooperating in global forums. The rise of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) in the 2000s highlighted the growing significance of emerging economies on the global stage. Yet, even as China and India engaged in multilateral settings like BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), their bilateral ties were continually tested.

For China, the SCO provided a platform to assert its leadership in Central Asia and, by extension, its influence over the Global South. For India, the organisation offered a way to engage with its neighbour while simultaneously countering China's growing assertiveness in the region. The SCO, however, could never completely shield the two nations from the larger geopolitical currents that often drove them apart.

As China's economic power and military capabilities grew, India's strategic positioning within the global order became more important. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) presented both opportunities and challenges for India. While China promised infrastructure investment across the developing world, including in South Asia, India expressed concerns over the so-called "debt-trap diplomacy" that came with these

investments.

India feared that Chinese loans to smaller countries could lead to unsustainable debt burdens, eventually giving China undue political leverage. India's concerns were particularly acute in Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and other neighbouring countries, where Chinese investments were seen as part of a broader strategic move to establish Chinese dominance in South Asia.

The issue of the Dalai Lama continues to be a thorn in the side of Sino-Indian relations. For India, offering sanctuary to the Dalai Lama has been a symbol of its support for the Tibetan cause. For China, however, the Dalai Lama remains a figure of contention — seen as a challenge to its sovereignty over Tibet.

In recent years, as India has taken a stronger stance on human rights and has deepened its strategic ties with the West, China has become increasingly critical of India's stance on Tibet and other issues.

India's rising ties with the US have further complicated its relationship with China. The two countries' growing strategic partnership — especially in the context of the Indo-Pacific — has led to increasing tensions between Beijing and New Delhi. China's growing assertiveness in the South China Sea, its Belt and Road Initiative, and its

growing military presence have placed India in a difficult position.

Despite attempts at dialogue, there is an undeniable tension between India's desire for a more secure and independent global role and China's pursuit of regional and global dominance. In the past two decades, both India and China have had to grapple with the geopolitical realities of an interconnected world. India's participation in BRICS and the SCO, its deepening ties with the US, and its increasingly assertive stance in regional and global politics have put it at odds with China's ambitions. Meanwhile, China's global footprint has only expanded, further complicating bilateral ties.

The Dragon and the Elephant, once bound by common aspirations of peace and prosperity, now find themselves facing a more competitive and uncertain future. As the two countries celebrate the Platinum Jubilee of their diplomatic ties, the relationship between India and China remains as complex as ever.

While cooperation in multilateral forums like BRICS and SCO continues, unresolved issues, including border disputes, the Tibet question, and the growing competition for global influence — continue to challenge the bilateral relationship.

The journey of the Dragon and the Elephant is far from over, and it remains to be seen whether these two great nations can navigate their differences and work toward a future of peaceful coexistence or if history will continue to repeat itself.

Yet, the geopolitical realities of the 21st century present an opportunity for these two giants, often described as the "Dragon" and the "Elephant", to transform their cooperation into a force capable of reshaping global power dynamics.

As emerging economic powers, India and China have the potential to create a partnership that could challenge existing global structures and bring about a new era of economic collaboration, technological innovation, and global influence. The comparison to a "sleeping giant" is fitting in this context: just as China's rise was once predicted to "shake the world", the cooperation between India and China holds the potential to disrupt and transform the global order.

If both nations can overcome their historical grievances and align their interests, their combined influence in global forums such as BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) could lead to an era where their collective strength could rival any other power bloc.

The future of their relationship, while uncertain, offers a tantalising possibility: if the Dragon and the Elephant truly cooperate, they could shake the world in ways that extend far beyond their regional borders — creating a new, more balanced world order.

(The writer is a professor at the Centre for South Asian Studies, School of International Studies and Social Sciences, Pondicherry Central University. Views are personal)

India and Sri Lanka: Coping with shared myths and divided realities

Revered in Sri Lanka as a wise and noble king, Ravana's dual identity reflects a broader narrative of cultural divergence, geopolitical entanglement, and historical amnesia between two nations whose fates remain intricately intertwined

Ravan Mandir in Uttar Pradesh, as I observed during my recent visit, a temple claiming to mark the birth place of Ravana, the central character in the Ramayana remains largely forgotten, drawing little attention from the masses. Situated in an area characterised by extreme poverty and surrounded by the harsh realities of modern Indian inequality — despite India's projected rise as the third-largest global economy by 2030 — the temple's isolation reflects the broader disconnect between India and Sri Lanka.

While Ravana is demonised across India during the annual Dussehra festival, where effigies of the Lankan king are burnt in a symbolic ritual of good triumphing over evil, Sri Lanka holds him in high regard, revering him as a heroic, spiritual leader and a legitimate ruler of ancient Lanka. This contrasting portrayal of Ravana, as a villain in India and as a revered leader in Sri Lanka — highlights the profound contradictions at the heart of Indo-Sri Lankan relations, which remain largely absent from mainstream discourse.

This intertwined relationship — rooted in myth and cultural heritage but shaped by geopolitics, has been marked by moments of unity and tension. There have been times when the two nations worked together, fought side by side, and supported each other unconditionally. During Swami Vivekananda's visit to the US, with a stopover in Colombo, his companion Anagarika Dharmapala generously offered some of his speaking time to Vivekananda, who had not been included on the speakers' list.

This is how Vivekananda's iconic speech at the 1893 Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago, beginning with "Sisters and Brothers of America!", became one of history's most renowned orations. Later, Vivekananda played a decisive role in the establishment of the Maha Bodhi Society.



Army and his fight for Indian independence. Dr B.R. Ambedkar, who converted to Buddhism in 1956, the same year Sri Lanka veered towards deceptive nationalism — visited the island in 1954 to explore the Buddhist social order. However, tensions between India and Sri Lanka resurfaced dramatically during the 1970s when India became embroiled in Sri Lanka's internal politics. As JN Dixit explained in his Assignment Colombo, "Inter-state relations are not governed by the logic of morality. They were and they remain an amoral phenomenon."

India's covert support for Tamil insurgents in Sri Lanka dates back to the 1970s, well before the acknowledged intervention of the late 1980s. Declassified CIA documents reveal that India provided clandestine aid to Tamil extremist groups, driven by regional ambitions and a desire to exert influence over the Tamil population in Sri Lanka. Dixit recounts a conversation with JR



NILANTHA ILANGAMUWA

Jayawardene's wife, during which she asked whether Rajiv Gandhi would ensure the President's safety and his continuation in power if he faced the danger of being overthrown.

Some reports suggest that India's India hoped that supporting the Tamils would counterbalance Sri Lanka's alignment with Western powers. However, this strategy backfired as the situation in Sri Lanka escalated, forcing India to reassess its role.

Amid this turmoil, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's decision to send the Indian Peacekeeping Force (IPKF) to Sri Lanka in 1987 further complicated Indo-Sri Lankan relations. Intended to

enforce peace under the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord, this move did little to resolve the Tamil issue and culminated in a disastrous confrontation between Indian forces and the LTTE, with the alleged crimes committed by peacekeepers disappearing without accountability. These events, often seen as mismanagement or poor judgement, were more a result of the power dynamics at play, with Sri Lanka caught between the conflicting interests of major regional powers — India on one side and the West on the other.

The strategic manoeuvring that led to the signing of the 1987 Indo-Sri Lanka Accord was not an isolated event. The agreement itself was the product of years of behind-the-scenes negotiations and geopolitical calculations.

The Accord, which mandated India's involvement in Sri Lanka's internal conflict, was, in many ways, a forced compromise — a diplomatic solution designed to balance competing geopolitical interests while avoiding a full-blown conflict. But this decision came at a heavy cost. India's intervention in Sri Lanka during the late 1980s remains a point of contention, particularly in light of the subsequent assassination of Rajiv Gandhi in 1991 by the LTTE.

Sixteen years after the war ended in May 2009, Sri Lanka continues to face significant challenges, both domestically and internationally, with India playing a pivotal role. In this context, Prime Minister Modi's visit to Sri Lanka assumes even greater importance.

Although not his first visit as Prime Minister, this trip is far more than a mere diplomatic gesture; it comes at a time when Sri Lanka is undergoing fundamental changes in its political landscape. As history has demonstrated, India's involve-

ment in Sri Lanka's future is far from incidental.

The island nation is grappling with multiple crises — economic instability, escalating debt, and regional security concerns. The economy has been hit hard in recent years, further exacerbated by the ISIS-inspired Easter Sunday attacks, the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters, and an increasing dependence on foreign debt.

While Sri Lanka seeks economic recovery, the legacy of Indo-Sri Lanka relations heavily shapes its policies. Despite acknowledging India's importance as a key neighbour and trade partner, Sri Lanka remains wary of excessive reliance on India, especially regarding sensitive issues like the Tamil question and northern sovereignty.

It is well known that Modi's administration has sought to assert a more active role in South Asian geopolitics, and Sri Lanka is no exception. His government has focused on strengthening ties with Sri Lanka, especially in terms of economic cooperation and security partnerships. However, this strategy is not without its challenges. What is undeniable is that Sri Lanka's future — whether its political leaders and citizens accept it or not, is inextricably linked to its relationship with India. As a small island nation, Sri Lanka has limited scope for independent economic and political manoeuvre.

The opportunities for Sri Lankan businesses in India's vast market are immense, but so too are the risks of becoming overly dependent on its powerful neighbour.

Modi's visit, then, presents a crucial moment for both nations to reassess their relationship, not through the lens of past grievances, but with an eye on future possibilities. Whether Sri Lanka can balance its autonomy with the growing necessity for regional partnership remains uncertain, but the coming years will determine whether it continues to view India as a strategic partner or an imposing neighbour.

Having suffered enough, it's time for Sri Lankans to break free from the fear-mongering grip and seize opportunities beyond their shores with bold strategies before the market devours them.

(The writer is a columnist based in Colombo; Views are personal)

‘The Kashmir problem is more than just about Article 370’

Mehbooba Mufti, the former Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir and People's Democratic Party leader, in an interview with *Diffs* Zulfikar Majid, emphasised that the final solution to the Kashmir issue can only be achieved when the region is demilitarised and its people feel a sense of accomplishment rather than defeat. She also discussed the contentious issue of Article 370, challenges facing Kashmir's political future, and her views on the way forward for Kashmir and its people. *Excerpts:*

The PDP suffered a significant setback in the 2024 Assembly and general elections. What do you think were the main reasons behind it?
The primary reason was the widespread anger among the people regarding our 2015 alliance with the BJP. Additionally, since 2018, the BJP government at the Centre has actively worked to weaken the PDP. Almost 60 of our key leaders, including MLAs, MLCs, and MPs, left the party. A strong political presence takes at least 20 years, and when a party loses

such a large number of senior leaders, the public starts to view it as a broken party. The question then becomes: what are we voting for?

Do you acknowledge that the PDP's alliance with the BJP played a role in the party's decline?
Yes, absolutely.

With the BJP making significant inroads in J&K, is there room for two major regional parties—the PDP and National Conference?

If you look at our history, we began with just one MLA, at a time when the situation in Kashmir was not ideal. The NC was in power with 68 MLAs, yet we succeeded because we had the people's interest at heart. Success in politics is about representing the people's interests.

A hypothetical question: if a similar situation arises in the future, would you consider an alliance with the BJP again, as you did in 2015?
I don't consider the alliance a mistake. It

The Tuesday Interview
With
Mehbooba Mufti
former CM of J&K and PDP leader



had a larger purpose—to find a solution to the Kashmir issue. My father (late Mufti Mohammad Sayeed) always said that anyone can build roads and infrastructure; he didn't want to be a CM just for that. His goal was to resolve the Kashmir problem, and that could only be done with the support of the central government.

Do you still believe that Article 370 will be eventually restored?

Why not? It has to come back through the judiciary.

But the judiciary, specifically the Supreme Court, has already ruled on this matter.
It doesn't matter. No authority is absolute, especially when it comes to human decisions. I believe the Government of India will have to reconsider it if they genuinely want to resolve the Kashmir issue.

However, I would argue that the Kashmir problem is more than just about Article 370. Even if it is restored, many other steps are needed to resolve the issue.

New Delhi claims that the only unfinished agenda regarding Kashmir is the retrieval of P&O. Is that realistic?

I wish the government would first focus on the 4,500 sq km that China has taken over. The rhetoric about P&O is one thing, but India should first address what it actually has control over. At the same time, we see rising hostility against Muslims in India, and I wish that would stop. My suggestion to the government of India is to arrange meetings with legislators from both sides of Kashmir—one in Srinagar and one in Muzaffarabad. If legislators on the other side genuinely want to be part of India, we can make that happen. If the Indian government considers P&O to be part of India, they shouldn't have a problem with such discussions.

Omar Abdullah has been the CM of

the J&K Union Territory for almost six months now. What's your take on his government's performance?
It is too early to make a judgement. However, the problems in J&K go beyond just infrastructure development. Political challenges need to be addressed, and we haven't seen much action from the Omar government on that front.

You have often supported dialogue with Pakistan, separatists, and even militants. Do you still think that's possible under the current right-wing government in the Centre?
We don't expect miracles, but there are basic expectations. People hoped that an elected government would stand up for the unilateral termination of government employees on allegations of pro-militancy connections, the cessation of NIA and agency raids, and the release of political prisoners from outside state jails. The NC, with its majority, should have at least been able to stand up for these issues. (Full interview at www.deccanherald.com)

A staggering \$1.9 trillion in extra industrial lending is fueling a continued flood of exports that could be spread even wider across the world by the Trump tariffs

KEITH BRADSHAW

For decades, the world's largest car factory was Volkswagen's complex in Wolfsburg, Germany. But BYD, the Chinese electric car maker, is building two factories in China, each capable of producing twice as many cars as Volkswagen.

Recent data from China's central bank shows that state-controlled banks lent an extra \$1.9 trillion to industrial borrowers over the past four years. On the fringes of cities all over China, new factories are being built day and night, and existing factories are being upgraded with robots and automation.

China's investments and advances in manufacturing are producing a wave of exports that threaten to cause factory closings and layoffs not just in the United States but also around the globe.

"The tsunami is coming for everyone," said Katherine Tai, who was the United States Trade Representative for former President Joseph R. Biden Jr.

President Trump's steep tariffs announced on April 2, which have caused stocks in Asia and elsewhere to plunge, were the most drastic response yet to China's export push. From Brazil and Indonesia to Thailand and the European Union, many countries have already moved more quickly to increase tariffs as well.

Chinese leaders are furious at the recent proliferation of trade barriers, and particularly Trump's latest tariffs. They take pride in China's high savings rate, long work hours and abundance of engineers and software programmers, as well as its legions of electricians, welders, mechanics, construction workers and other skilled tradesmen.

On State television April 5 night, an anchor solemnly read a government statement condemning the United States: "It is using tariffs to subvert the existing international economic and trade order" so as "to serve the hegemonic interests of the U.S."

Five years ago, before a housing bubble burst, cranes putting up apartment towers dotted practically every city in China. Today, many of those cranes are gone and the ones that are left seldom move. At Beijing's behest, banks have rapidly shifted their lending from real estate to industry.

China is using new factory robots than the rest of the world combined, and most of them are made in China by Chinese companies, although some components are still imported. After several years of rapid growth, overall installations of new factory equipment have already jumped another 18 percent this year.

When Zeckr, a Chinese electric carmaker, opened a factory four years ago in Ningbo, a two-hour drive south of Shanghai, the facility had 500 robots. Now it has 820, and many more are planned. As new factories come online, China's exports are rapidly accelerating. They rose 12.3% in 2023 and then another 17.3% last year.

Lending by state banks is also financing a boom in corporate research and development. Huawei, a conglomerate making items as varied as smartphones and auto parts, has just opened in Shanghai a research center for 35,000 engineers that has 10 times as much space for offices and labs as Google's headquarters in Mountain View, California.



DIH ILLUSTRATION: DEEPAK HARCHANDAN

The tsunami of China's global exports is coming

Leaders around the world are struggling to decide whether to raise trade barriers to protect what is left of their countries' industrial sectors.

China has been rapidly expanding its share of global manufacturing for decades. The growth came mainly at the expense of the United States and other longtime industrial powers, but also of developing countries. China has increased its share to 32% and rising, from 6% in 2000.

China's factory output is bigger than the combined manufacturing of the United States, Germany, Japan, South Korea and Britain.

Even before Trump won a second term, Biden administration officials warned during their final year in office about industrial overcapacity in China. They raised some tariffs, notably on electric cars.

But during their first three years, Biden administration officials mostly focused on tighter export controls for technologies like high-end semiconductors, citing national security concerns. They left in place tariffs of 7.5% to 25% that Trump had imposed on half of China's exports to the United States in his first term.

It remains uncertain how the president's much tougher approach this time will play out. Tariffs have occasionally slowed China's growth in exports, but not stopped it. Other nations are on high alert for the possibility that Chinese exports could be diverted elsewhere, threatening the economies of longstanding US allies like the European Union and South Korea.

China's automakers were preparing a push into the American car market in 2017, when Trump first took office. GAC Motor in Guangzhou, China, brought dozens of US car dealers to the city's auto show that November. The company announced plans to sell gasoline-powered sport utility vehicles and minivans in the United States by the end of 2019. But GAC and other Chinese automakers canceled their plans after Trump included cars in his initial 25% tariffs several months later.

Chinese companies still sell almost no cars in the US. That is unlikely to change: With Trump's latest moves, Chinese carmakers now face US tariffs as high as 181%. Blocked in the United States, Chinese automakers have continued building factories and have pivoted their export campaigns elsewhere. Their sales have soared in Australia and Southeast Asia, taking market share from Japanese and American brands. In Mexico, Chinese carmakers held off 0.3% in 2017; by last year, it was over 20%.

Rapid sales gains in the European Union, and evidence of Chinese government subsidies, prompted EU officials last October to impose fines of up to 45% on electric cars from China.

China is not just building car factories. It has built more petrochemical refinery capacity in the past five years, for example, than Europe, Japan and South Korea together have created since World War II. And China is on track to build two refineries even faster than that. Petrochemicals are then turned into plastics, polyester,

vinyl and tires.

Robert E. Lighthizer, who was the United States Trade Representative in Trump's first term, said that the latest American tariffs "are long overdue medicine—the real root cause is decades of Chinese industrial policy that has created breathtaking overcapacity and global imbalances."

China is exporting so much partly because its own people are buying so little. A housing market crash since 2021 has wiped out much of the savings of the middle class and ruined many wealthy families.

Tax revenues are falling, but military spending is rising rapidly. That has left the government wary of spending on economic stimulus to help consumers. China has offset its housing decline instead with its export campaign, creating millions of jobs to build, outfit and operate factories.

Some Chinese economists have recently joined Western economists in suggesting that the country needs to strengthen its meager social safety net. At the start of this year, the minimum government pension for seniors was just \$17 a month. That barely buys groceries, even in rural China.

China's officials rejected the advice to increase pensions manifold and the budget that came out on March 5, had a \$3 increase in monthly pensions, bringing it to \$20 a month. The same budget included \$100 billion for investments, including ports and other infrastructure that help export goods. And there was a new programme to upgrade technology used in manufacturing across 20 Chinese cities. **NYT**

Are women victims of time poverty?

KODOTH PRABHAKARAN NAIR

Last year, the National Statistical Office (NSO) in New Delhi raised an important question in its Time Use Survey to understand how Indians, in both urban and rural areas, spend their time. The question was, "How do you spend your day?" The survey covered 454,192 individuals between January and December 2024, and the findings, released in February, reveal a striking reality—the extreme "time poverty" experienced by Indian women, especially in rural areas.

Time poverty refers to a situation in which an individual lacks adequate time to ensure their own well-being, whether due to paid or unpaid work. This may eventually lead to a loss of productivity. Viewed through a gender perspective, time poverty in India often manifests as women devoting disproportionate hours to unpaid household chores and caregiving, leaving them with little or no time for remunerative work or personal needs.

Time poverty and income poverty are interlinked. The former excludes Indian women from the formal economy and perpetuates gender inequality. In 2015, a global study estimated this exclusion represented a loss of \$9 trillion to women in developing countries.

The pattern of time poverty. A day consists of 24 hours or 1,440 minutes. The NSO survey sheds light on how these minutes are distributed between men and women in India—a revealing lifetime analysis of a "gender-blind" society. Men spend nearly 61% of their day on "employment and related activities," while women devote only 20.7%. This means that while men dedicate a majority of their time to paid work, women spend only one-fifth of their time on paid work; the rest is spent on doing unpaid domestic chores, classified as "domestic services for household members."

Women allocate 34% of their time to unpaid caregiving services for household members—nearly double the 18% spent by men. When it comes to producing goods for their own final use, women spend 21% of their time compared to 13% for men. The NSO data points out that women continue to shoulder the bulk of unpaid household work and caregiving responsibilities.

These findings are similar to those of the 2019 NSO survey. Between 2019 and 2024, women's time spent on paid work and other related activities increased by only 2%. However, their time on unpaid domestic services and caregiving has also risen in the said period. Notably, women spent 34% of their time on caregiving in 2024, up from 27.6% in 2019—a sharp 23.2% increase. This, indeed, is deeply concerning.

In sociological terms, it suggests that despite India's technological and economic advancement, women face greater pressure than before. Since no separate time-spend pattern has been computed between urban and rural India, on this count, one must be careful while drawing conclusions. However, the general trend indicates an increasing pressure on women's time. In comparison to men, women appear to be the primary "victims of time poverty." While this conclusion of the author is not explicitly stated in the NSO report, a closer look at the data makes it abundantly clear.

Time Use Surveys like the NSO's are increasingly recognised as valuable tools—not only for understanding the productive deployment of a country's workforce but also for gauging gender inequality. Over a century ago, the former Soviet Union took up the first systematic time-use survey for industrial workers in 76 families. Its main objective was to monitor time use in three categories: work, sleep and rest. Through the surveys and diary entries of each family, the government wanted to examine whether the citizens spent more time on household work, which is considered "archaic," and wanted to redeploy that for "collective services".

In 1985, the United Nations organised the milestone Fourth World Conference on Women, where countries adopted the "Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action". One of its principal aims was to "collect gender, and age-disaggregated data on poverty and all economic activities and develop qualitative and quantitative statistical indicators to assess the economic performance from a gender perspective". Following this, the time-use surveys from a gender perspective have picked up. The world met between March 10 and 21 this year in New York to mark the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration, and the focus was primarily on women's time poverty.

(The author was a professor at the Royal Society, Belgium)

OUR PAGES OF HISTORY

50 YEARS AGO: APRIL 1975

Belgaum part of Karnataka

Bangalore, April 7
The Government today asserted in the State Legislature that Belgaum was an integral part of Karnataka. While Industries and Parliamentary Affairs Minister S. M. Krishna assured the Assembly that Belgaum was part of Karnataka and "there is no doubt about it," Revenue Minister N. Hanchannappa Gowda reiterated the Government's stand in the Legislative Council that continuance of Belgaum in Karnataka was "remained unchanged." H. D. Deve Gowda warned the Central leaders of "bloodshed in Karnataka" if they meddled with Belgaum.

25 YEARS AGO: APRIL 2000

Cronje, four others named in match-fixing, betting scam

New Delhi, April 7
The Delhi Police sent shock waves among cricket lovers today by disclosing that it had registered a case of match-fixing and betting against South African captain Hansie Cronje and four of his team mates during the five-match one-day international series in India last month. The case was registered at the Chakraparti police station yesterday and the police arrested an Indian contact man, Rajesh Kalra, who was supposedly acting as the helmsman of a London based NRI, Sanjay Chawla.

OASIS | SURYAKUMARI DENNISON

No one is indispensable

Those of us who have watched the film *My Fair Lady* will remember the delightful song, "There'll be spring every year without you." Eliza Doolittle (a flower-seller) has helped Henry Higgins (a professor of phonetics) win a bet that he can teach her to speak in a refined manner. When his pupil is mistaken for a princess, triumphant Higgins basks in praise, ignoring Eliza. She angrily walks out on him, and indulges in a lyrical outburst, declaring that England still will be here without Higgins, and that the Earth does not need him to spin. Eliza confidently concludes that, like everything else, she can

manage minus her mentor. Professor and protégée eventually reunite, but Eliza's melodious manifesto of independence states an important truth. Nobody, however essential to our existence they may seem, is indispensable. Not long ago, my husband and I parted company with a person who had been in our employment for 25 years. His departure caused us considerable concern, and we wondered how we would cope. It was not easy at first, but we have grown more self-reliant, and others are ready

to render assistance. The age-old theory, "Nature abhors a vacuum," may be outdated, but we repeatedly realise that, when it comes to humans, we are not as difficult to replace as we might imagine. My former employer, where I spent six fruitful years, is doing remarkably well, and in no way impaired by my absence. I am reminded of an incident that my cousin shared with me. Once, when he and my father were driving past a cemetery, the latter slowed down. Indicating the tombstones that

were partially visible over the wall, my father remarked that, among the hundreds at rest, there were probably many who had been pillars of their communities. They would have found it hard to envisage a world devoid of their presence. Yet, there they lay, still and silent, and, in some cases, completely forgotten. "Remember, we are not indispensable," said my father. Of course, the passing of people dear to us leaves a void. Still, much as we miss our loved ones, we have no choice but to carry on. One day, when our time comes to bid farewell, life will continue calmly without us!



DECCAN HERALD
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Ensuring transparency in judiciary

Supreme Court judges, in a full court decision, have taken a welcome decision to make their assets and liabilities public. The decision is timely, coming soon after a stash of burnt currency notes was reportedly found in the house of Justice Yashwant Varma, who was then a judge of the Delhi High Court and has since been transferred to the Allahabad High Court. The reports of the cash find had given rise to many questions. According to the decision made by the judges now, they will make a declaration of their assets and liabilities to the Chief Justice of India (CJI). Any acquisition of a substantial nature will also be reported. The decision applies to the CJI as well. However, placing the declaration of assets on the Supreme Court website will be on a voluntary basis. According to reports, as many as 30 judges, including CJI Sanjay Khanna, have submitted their declarations of assets.

The matter of declaration of assets by judges has been discussed for a long time. The Supreme Court adopted a resolution – The Restatement of Values of Judicial Life – in 1997 which recommended declaration of assets and liabilities by all judges to the CJI. High Court judges were to submit the information to their respective chief justices. But this was for purposes within the judiciary and did not envisage making the information available for public scrutiny. The declarations were to be 'voluntary' and 'confidential'. The Right to Information Act of 2005 did not facilitate disclosures as it exempted disclosure of personal information unless there is a 'larger public interest'. The Supreme Court has since then said that it would not make the declaration mandatory. The court has also said that the information could stay confidential unless public interest warranted a public disclosure. The latest decision goes forward from these positions.

The Parliamentary Committee on Law and Justice had in 2023 recommended mandatory asset declaration for judges, but no action was taken on that. Elected representatives and bureaucrats have to make a public disclosure of assets. Their declarations have many times raised questions. Such questioning is needed in the spirit of scrutiny of the conduct of public personalities. The absence of a declaration of assets may raise bigger questions, especially when incidents of alleged misconduct come into the public domain. It is difficult to take action against judges, and even the reasons for their transfers are not known. There is the need for more transparency and accountability in the judiciary, and public trust in the institution should not be allowed to erode. Declarations of assets by all judges in the higher judiciary is a good step, and the details should be available to the public.

Judges' assets disclosure can improve public trust in the institution hit by a credibility crisis

State of mortuaries: Reform imperative

Over 50% of primary health centres (PHC) in Karnataka lack mortuary rooms, forcing doctors to perform post-mortem examinations in open fields. This is not just a matter of infrastructural inadequacy – it is a glaring violation of medical protocol and dignity of the deceased. Take the case of a medical officer from Bagalkot district who admitted to conducting six post-mortems in open fields over the past year. Such incidents are disturbingly common across rural Karnataka. As many as 650 PHCs constructed before 1990 have mortuaries, but are not fully functional. The ones built later entirely lack this facility. As a result, bodies are either examined in the open or shifted to district hospitals. Transporting bodies to distant hospitals presents its own challenges including logistical problems, lack of cold storage leading to deterioration of the body, and prolonged trauma for grieving families.

Delays can also lead to loss of crucial evidence, compromising investigations and subsequent legal proceedings. The health department's appeal for funds to Zilla Panchayats has not yielded results, further complicating the problem. Meanwhile, Health Commissioner K B Sivakumar claims ignorance of such incidents and insists that all post-mortems are conducted in government facilities. This disconnect between ground realities and administrative claims is deeply troubling. Medical officers are caught between bureaucratic inaction and the pressing need to uphold the sanctity of their duties. Post-mortems are not just medical formalities; they are crucial tools for justice, especially in cases of unnatural deaths, and must be handled with precision, dignity and safety. Conducting post-mortems in open fields undermines all three. It exposes the deceased to public scrutiny, traumatises families, and creates an unsterile environment, compromising the integrity of forensic findings. It also endangers medical personnel who operate without proper infrastructure or equipment.

This is not an issue of resource constraints but of misplaced priorities. A functional mortuary is a basic, non-negotiable necessity for every PHC. Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao should give this his personal attention and set up a committee to investigate the state of mortuaries focussing both on operational status and cold storage availability. The state government, health department, and the panchayats should coordinate efforts to fund and operationalise mortuary rooms across PHCs. The current practice of conducting post-mortems in the open is a reflection of systemic neglect. The government must rectify this unacceptable situation – not just to restore dignity to the dead but also to ensure that justice and public health are no longer casualties of administrative indifference.

Post-mortems in the open affect integrity of forensic findings, expose serious systemic flaws

COMMENT

NOT FOR LAUGHS

Comedy in the age of self-censorship

Dissent and irreverence are important in a democratic society; curbs on free speech will only intensify defiance

PRASENJIT CHOWDHURY

The Supreme Court must be lauded for enjoining all over again that freedom of expression was an "integral part" of a healthy civilised society. Cancelling an FIR filed in Gujarat against Congress MP Imran Pratapgarhi over a poem uploaded by him on social media, the top court, in a strong repudiation against the Gujarat High Court said the offence of promoting enmity cannot be judged by the standards of "insecure people" who see everything as a threat or criticism. The judgement reaffirmed that the "free expression of thoughts and views by individuals or groups of individuals is an integral part of a healthy, civilised society," stating that the right to express thoughts, even if they are unpopular or challenged dominant narratives, must be "protected, respected, and cherished."

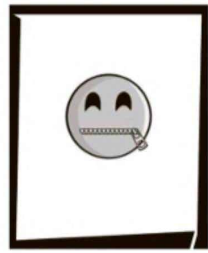
It is very relevant to the case of Kunal Kamra, whose barb against Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde during a show in Mumbai, provoked Shiv Sena (Shinde) members, who vandalised the Habitat Studio where the show was filmed and the hotel which housed the studio. It is heartening to learn that even after the police have booked Kamra on the charge of making defamatory remarks against Shinde, and a Shiv Sena leader issued a warning to the comedian that he would be chased across India and forced to flee the country, Kamra is holding the ground.

Kamra's fundamental strength lies in his courageousness in articulating self-censorship. Not that what he says is earth-shatteringly original, but viewers seem to take relish in his potshots against one and all. In a recent post on X, Kamra shared a satirical 'step-by-step guide on how to 'kill an artist' democratically', which appears to reflect on the aftermath of his joke on Shinde – "Now the artist is left with only two choices: Sell their soul and become a dollar puppet – or wither in silence." This isn't just a playboy, Kamra writes, it is "a political weapon," "a silencing machine."

One might argue that politicians,

being public persons, cannot claim immunity from barbs, because their craft and calling thrive on polarisation and political opposition. Thus politicians, and that includes our elected heads such as the chief ministers and the Prime Minister, must not pretend to be godheads in a democracy.

Eknath Shinde can take heart in the rambunctious tradition of British humour. The 18th century was witness to the rise of the Tory and Whig political parties, an age of political pamphletting and newspapers, that set the London coffee houses on fire. Jonathan Swift, the scolding author of the political satire *Gulliver Travels* was a notoriously vicious Tory hack, way



more potent than Kamra. The perverse relish an 18th-century writer had in portraying the great politicians defecating, urinating, fornicating, being dismembered and suffering from flatulence in their caricatures can invite direct libel and lawsuits in India. Salman Rushdie named a dog after a celebrated Indian prime minister in one of his novels, and it caused a great furor.

What is interesting is that while Shinde is reacting, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is reticent. But the received opinion is that dictators being deflatable, the rich to puncture their big egos is just par for the course. Kamra's stuff might look piffle if one makes a fair register of how American political jokes reduced presidents and leaders to an irreducible essence. Thus, Nixon was incorrigibly shy and sinister, Ford was an amiable bungler, Carter was nice but out of his depth, Reagan was just dumb, Bush Senior was cold wasp, Clinton was a sex maniac, Quayle was stupid, Gingrich was callous, Gore was a bore, Hillary was a modern Lucretia

de Borgia and Trump today is "weird" (once a vice-presidential candidate Tim Walz called it).

'Offended' mobs have their say Governments in India have always lent more primacy to the right to take offence than to the right to free speech and capitulated to the lumpy elements and mob intimidation, two glaring instances of which is the way both Taslima Nasreen and M F Husain were hounded out of the country many years ago. And just in case our libertarian rage is ranged against the Sangh Parivar, it must be put on record that the Left Front government of West Bengal also banned Nasreen's books in 2004 and confiscated copies of the book from the publishing house book-sellers, not to speak of the classic ban on Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* by the Rajiv Gandhi government in 1988.

In his book *Republic of Rhetoric: Free Speech and the Constitution of India*, Abhinav Chandrachud, went as far as to say that the enactment of the Constitution did not make a significant difference to the right to free speech and that Articles 19(1)(a) and 19(2) belonged to the *status quo* aim of the Constitution, not the transformational one. Four exceptions (prior to India's independence) to the right to free speech included (and hate speech), obscenity, contempt of court and defamation – that remained intact even after the Constitution was adopted have always remained susceptible to interpretational vagaries.

The apex court agreed that literature, including poetry, drama, films, satire, and art make the life of human beings more meaningful. But the apex judicial body was wrong to assume that 75 years into our republic, we've become so mature that it becomes improbable to think that the "mere recital of a poem or for that matter any form of expression or statement, such as stand-up comedy, can be alleged to lead to animosity or hatred amongst different communities". A democratic society cannot thrive without irreverence – be it in the form of satire, parody, irony, or mockery in combination with dissenting ideas on religion or philosophy. In the absence of an ecosystem for free speech, the urge to raise virtual platforms with technological means to circumvent state and group censorship will only grow.

(The writer is a Kolkata-based commentator on geopolitics, development, and culture)

RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE

Remembering Khushwant Singh

His candour, wit, and unwavering freedom to intellectual freedom continue to inspire

RAJNISH SHARMA

I first read Khushwant Singh's story, *The Portrait of a Lady*, about his grandmother, as a teenager about 50 years ago. After a few years, I became addicted to his writings in the then-renowned magazine, *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, of which he was the editor at the time. I devoured everything he wrote until his death.

Around the world with Khushwant Singh was the first book I bought. I purchased it at a bus stand in Chandigarh for Rs 10 and finished during the bus journey from Chandigarh to Nahan. I enjoyed the preface by the author more than the book itself. He wrote something to that effect in the

introduction, which has remained etched in my memory all these years: "I have travelled the world over, always as a guest of somebody, never spending a penny from my own pocket. That must be sort of national record in the art of sponging. I've enjoyed life thoroughly; however, there comes a time in life when the most sparkling of champagne, instead of elevating your spirits, upsets your stomach. I think I've been living in the picture gallery, and it's time for me to depart."

He lived – and lived well – for about 30 years after that book and wrote prolifically as the editor of *Hindustan Times*, a syndicated columnist for various other magazines and newspapers. His writings seldom skipped my attention. I found him to be a consistently engaging writer, using precise and simple language.

Although he described himself as an agnostic, I was intrigued when he wrote about having a 10-minute spiritual orgasm while sitting at Har ki Pauri in Ha-

ridwar, feeling the hand of Guru Nanak on his shoulder while translating *Japu Ji Sahib*, or getting emotionally overwhelmed by Garbuda. When a famous newspaper baron called him *Ram K. Saund* in conversation, which he narrated in one of his columns, I could not help but admire his self-deprecating candour.

I liked him immensely for many reasons, but the most potent reason was his apparent freedom from caste, communal, or religious prejudice – a rare quality in a human being, particularly in the times we live in. One regret remains: he had promised to leave his 'unmentionable literature' in his library for me in his will, but he never did.

A man whose actual date of birth remains speculative, certainly not on March 20, 2014. This is a belated tribute to the unique journalist and author Khushwant Singh on his eleventh death anniversary. A literature festival organised in his memory at Kasauli has now become an annual event.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

PM's visit to Sri Lanka renews bilateral ties

Apogee of Modi's visit boosts ties under neighborhood first policy (A 7), PM Modi's three-day visit to Sri Lanka marks a significant milestone in strengthening bilateral relations. The signing of a military cooperation pact is a major step forward, expected to facilitate joint naval exercises and enhance collaboration between the countries' defence industries. A trilateral agreement involving India, Sri Lanka, and the UAE to develop Trincomalee as an energy hub is a notable development. This appears to be India's strategic aim to counter China's growing influence in the Indian Ocean region.

Tech marvel

The inauguration of the 2.08-km New Panambur Bridge, India's first vertical lift sea bridge, showcases the Indian construction industry's maturity. Designed to last over 100 years, this bridge joins the ranks of globally recognised bridges like the Golden Gate and Tower Bridge. Its 17-metre lift allows larger ships to pass through while maintaining uninterrupted train operations. This engineering marvel not only boosts defence logistics but also connects Rameswaram to the mainland,

demonstrating India's growing infrastructure capabilities and ability to overcome geographical and environmental challenges. **Ramesh G Jethwani**, Bengaluru

Tribute to a hero

Known for iconic films with patriotic themes, Manoj Kumar had earned the honorific Bharat Ratna. A legendary filmmaker and actor, Manoj Kumar left an indelible mark on Indian cinema. His iconic films, such as *Purab aur Paschim*, *Upkar*, and *Roti Kapada aur Maa*,

showcased his commitment to social values. His passing on April 4 marks the end of an era, but his cinematic legacy remains timeless. **Born Hari Krishna Giri Goswami**, he adopted the screen name Manoj Kumar and went on to become one of the greatest actors of Indian cinema. **Jubel D'Cruz**, Mumbai

Our readers are welcome to e-mail 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.

DECCAN HERALD
Tuesday
April 8, 2025

SPEAK OUT

Police are working round-the-clock ignoring rain and cold. That is why there is peace in Bengaluru. In a big city like Bengaluru, here and there incidents like this (molestation) do take place.



G Parameshwara,
Karnataka Home Minister

Government is like a baby. An alimentary canal with a big appetite at one end and no sense of responsibility at the other.

Ronald Reagan

TO BE PRECISE



LOOKS LIKE HE HAS A DEGREE IN 'THE ENTIRE ECONOMIC SCIENCE'. DON'T WORRY!

IN PERSPECTIVE

India, China and a tango with a twist

India should approach China's outreach positively, yet cautiously

LALITHA S

On the 75th anniversary of the India-China bilateral relationship, Chinese President Xi wrote to Indian President Murmu, calling for the India-China partnership to realise the 'Dragon-Phoenix Tango'. What is generally dismissed as diplomatic courtesy is actually far from it; it is a rapprochement from President Xi. The outreach comes amid President Trump's 'Liberation Day' reciprocal tariffs, and China's growing economic woes. While this outreach is a positive step towards normalisation of India-China ties, India should proceed cautiously.

After the BRICS meeting in Kazan last year, India and China made significant steps towards normalisation and disengagement in the LAC that arose from the 2020 Galwan clashes. Progress in restoring the relationship has been steady. President Trump's reciprocal tariffs, however, have made the world anxious, mainly China. While this outreach is an extension of the normalisation, it might not be purely benign. India has previously dealt with China's 'talk and take' strategy and is looking into this rapprochement cautiously.

China's India policy has always been influenced by the strategic triangle of China-US-Russia relations. With President Trump in office in the US, and a willingness to normalise the US-Russia ties, China is looking to balance the upcoming détente. The Galwan clash has changed the relationship fundamentally. Minister Jaishankar talked frequently about 'improvement' in the relationship since October last year, and phased efforts to undo damage caused by the 2020 clashes. The comments indicate a willingness from the Indian side to reset the relationship.

This outreach provides India an opportunity to negotiate better trade terms with China. India-China bilateral trade is valued at almost \$20 billion but India's trade deficit with China is growing and has reached \$84 billion. India should work towards remedying this skewed trade to remove trade barriers on Indian imports in China, particularly in the pharmaceuticals, IT, auto and agriculture sectors.

Also, on the cards should be negotiating water-sharing agreements and transparency of dam projects. India should negotiate better terms on transnational rivers like Brahmaputra and Sutlej to sign a binding treaty on transboundary water sharing. China's dam projects in Tibet are also a concern for

India, necessitating transparency to avoid construction transboundary rivers.

The 2023-24 Economic Survey made a case for Chinese FDI in select Indian sectors. India can utilise this to bring Chinese investments to strengthen manufacturing and investments on green/renewable energy sectors. It can also open up to Chinese investments in the pharmaceutical and API production industries with oversight. Chinese investments can help increase India's global supply chain participation.

Eyes on the ball

India should recognise China's diplomatic overture with optimism but strategic restraint. China has its own interests in repairing ties with India. Its growth rate has been slowing with a property crisis, local government debt, and trade issues with the US and the EU. The reconciliation with India is in China's interest and stability in the border with India frees up time for China to focus on other issues. While China is interested in normalising ties, there hasn't been complete disengagement or resolution of the border issues. According to the Pentagon, China still has significant troops deployed in the LAC. There is a significant trust deficit in the India-China relationship. India's past experiences with China don't spell hope but in the current geopolitical landscape, cooperation will be in both India's and China's interest.

However, India should not take its eyes off the ball. It should focus on decoupling and decreasing its economic dependence on China in crucial sectors. The military preparedness along the LAC should be strengthened and diplomatic engagements maintained to avoid unnecessary escalations. India should not halt infrastructure projects along the borders. It should also deepen its strategic partnerships with the QUAD countries, I2U2, and other key Indo-Pacific partners.

While the Make in India initiative has seen some progress in the defence sector, it is yet to show significant improvements in domestic manufacturing. India should strengthen its manufacturing sector to make Indian companies globally competitive because tariffs are becoming a reality. The India-China relationship is at a turning point. Economic and geopolitical realities are shaping this relationship in these uncertain times. The relationship's future does not need grand promises but practical steps towards mutual respect and understanding. The elephant can tango with the dragon but only if this relationship is in order. (The writer is a junior intelligence analyst and freelance writer)

Shaping a future-ready workforce

The World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report 2025 and QS's World Future Skills Index contain critical insights into the state of India's workforce and its preparedness for the future. They offer a roadmap for the government and universities to address the pressing challenges and opportunities in shaping a future-ready workforce. Their findings accentuate the urgency of aligning educational strategies with the rapidly evolving demands of the global economy.

The findings

The Future of Jobs Report highlights the significant forces driving global labour market changes by 2030. Among these, technological advancements, demographic shifts, geo-economic fragmentation, economic uncertainties, and the green transition stand out. Technological change and digital access are anticipated to play a crucial role, with 60% of employers identifying them as major drivers. At the same time, 50% of employers expect economic factors, such as job displacement, to reshape industries. Climate change mitigation is seen as a dual force, both creating jobs in renewable energy and environmental fields and requiring adaptations to business models due to geopolitical tensions. These trends point to a dynamic labour market characterised by job creation (870 million new jobs are projected) and job displacement (92 million roles could become obsolete).

In response to these shifts, employers have prioritised workforce training, wage increases, and employee well-being. Notably, 59 out of every 100 workers will require training in crucial skills such as analytical thinking, resilience, and technological literacy. Emerging roles such as Big Data specialists and AI engineers are expected to see substantial growth, emphasising the need for a workforce equipped with



P. John J. Kennedy

Former Professor and Dean, Christ University, Bengaluru

The findings of the World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report 2025 and the QS's World Future Skills Index underline the urgency of aligning educational strategies with the evolving demands of the global economy

advanced technical and cognitive skills. The emphasis on upskilling indicates that educational institutions must proactively prepare students for a competitive job market. Equally important is the integration of soft skills, such as emotional intelligence, adaptability, and leadership, into professional development programmes. Employers are increasingly valuing these attributes as critical for navigating dynamic work environments.

The QS World Future Skills Index complements these findings. Ranking second globally in terms of preparedness for AI and green skills, India demonstrates considerable potential. However, the report reveals stark gaps in workforce skills, particularly on supply-side indicators. While India excels in its ability to identify and recruit for future-focused skills, as evidenced by its 99.1 score in the 'Future of Work' parameter, its performance in 'Skills Fit' – the ability of the workforce to meet these demands – lags significantly, with the country scoring just 59.1. The report also identifies deficiencies in fostering entrepreneurial and innovative mindsets, with India's overall ranking in 'Academic Readiness' placing it at a modest 26th position. Further, India's performance in future-oriented innovation and sustainability is alarmingly low, a mere 15.6 out of 100. Additionally, India's limited investment in research and development further worsens the issue, hindering its ability to compete globally in areas such as renewable energy technologies and climate-friendly innovations.

An opportunity

The findings emphasise a transformative opportunity for India to align its education system with global trends and workforce demands. To bridge the skill gaps identified, educational institutions and governments must adopt a multi-pronged approach that addresses curriculum innovation, faculty capacity, infrastructure,

and equitable access while fostering robust collaboration among academia, industry, and policymakers. The emphasis on creativity, critical thinking, resilience, problem-solving, and entrepreneurial skills must become central to higher education. Universities must embed these competencies into the curriculum through interdisciplinary courses, experiential learning modules, and problem-based learning approaches. Initiatives such as hackathons, startup incubators, and design-thinking workshops should become integral to the academic framework to nurture innovation and adaptability.

A green curriculum is imperative. Institutions could establish specialised centres for sustainability research, offer courses on green technologies and practices, and encourage student-led community initiatives that address local environmental issues. Collaboration with the private sector is critical for bridging the education-industry gap. Higher education institutions need to form robust partnerships with industries to co-create curricula, offer internships, and ensure that students graduate with job-ready skills. Industry players can contribute by funding skill development centres, mentoring students, and providing real-time insights into market needs.

Faculty development is another area for reform. Universities must implement comprehensive training programmes that include workshops, certifications, and global exchange opportunities.

The government must spearhead systemic reforms by increasing skill development, research, and innovation investments. A specific focus on building digital infrastructure in rural and semi-urban areas will reduce the urban-rural divide.

India's higher education system must undergo a paradigm shift to remain agile and future-focused, while the government must foster an enabling policy environment.

Raking up the caste card in West Bengal

Caste is increasingly becoming crucial to people's identity and the State's politics

STATE OF PLAY

Shiv Sahay Singh
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Nearly three weeks before five Dalits entered a Shiva temple at Purb Bardhaman district under police protection, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee made a statement about her caste in the State Assembly that largely went unnoticed. On February 18, while participating in a debate in the Assembly, she emphasised that she was not only a "proud Hindu", but also the daughter of a Brahmin family.

The emphasis that the Trinamool Congress chairperson placed on her caste assumes significance in the wake of recent developments. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leadership has been urging all Hindus to unite against the Trinamool before the 2026 Assembly elections. The party has coined a new slogan, "*Hindu Hindu bhai bhai*, 2026 BJP Chai" (All Hindus must unite: In 2026 we want BJP). The Leader of the Opposition, Suvedu Adhikari, who has been emphasising the unity of all Hindus irrespective of caste, has repeatedly said that if the BJP manages to secure 5% more Hindu votes, it would win the 2026 Assembly polls. Mr. Adhikari and other State BJP leaders have been reaching out to upper caste Hindus describing them as 'Sanatani' (those who follow the eternal Dharma) and alleging attacks on their culture because of the Trinamool's tilt towards its minority vote bank. But they are also leaving no stone unturned to reach out to Dalits, particularly Matuas.



sect at Thakurnagar in North 24 Parganas for the annual festival of the sect. He hailed the founding fathers of the Matua sect for "saving Hindus from being converted to Islam".

Ms. Banerjee has so far countered the Hindutva push of the BJP by claiming to be a "proud Hindu", organising Durga Pujas, and restoring and constructing temples. But she doesn't perceive this as being sufficient given that she has finally taken refuge in her caste to prevent any further polarisation of Hindu votes towards the BJP. This is why for the first time Ms. Banerjee has emphasised that though she champions the cause of minorities and Dalits, she hails from a Brahmin family, whose members organise pujas at home. Mr. Adhikari, who, like the Chief Minister, belongs to an upper caste and wears his caste identity on his sleeve, insists that "he will first say that he is Sanatani Hindu and then refer to his caste". Despite the State's population comprising 23.5% Scheduled Castes, 16% Other Backward Classes, 5.8% Scheduled Tribes, and 27% minorities, all the Chief Ministers of the State and the majority of the Cabinet ministers have come from upper castes.

This flaunting of caste identity is new to West Bengal politics. Speaking about one's caste was not considered to be politically prudent until a few years ago. This public taboo

against speaking about caste has led to the utopian idea of 'castelessness' in West Bengal. With the Bengali Hindu Bhadrak, who mostly comprise three traditional upper castes – Brahmin, Kayastha, and Baidya – dominating popular culture, arts, and literature in the State, a section of the urban elite has deluded itself into believing that caste is not a reality. Decades of Communist rule in the State also made the people believe that inequality stems from class and not caste.

However, things started changing with groups such as the Matuas in south Bengal, Rajbanshis in north Bengal, and Karmis in the Jangalmahal region affirming their caste identity. These marginalised groups, which are demanding a greater say in political decision-making, have redrawn the discussions on caste in the State.

Within 10 days after the incident at the temple in Purb Bardhaman, the Calcutta High Court on March 21 had to intervene in a similar situation, where Dalits were not allowed inside a temple premises. Justice Thirankar Ghosh ordered the district judge of Nadia to direct the Superintendent of Police to deploy sufficient number of police personnel to ensure that a group of Dalits, who had approached the Court, be allowed inside a temple for some rituals.

Therefore, neither the Chief Minister's emphasis on her caste nor the incident at the temple are isolated incidents that can be brushed under the carpet. From a society that hesitated to acknowledge the presence of caste, West Bengal is witnessing a new phenomenon where caste is increasingly becoming crucial to people's identity and the State's politics.

How the police view custodial torture in India

The data reveals an acceptance of coercive tactics ranging from verbal abuse and threats to slapping and third-degree methods even for minor offences

DATA POINT

Vibha Attri & Jyoti Mishra

In recent years, concerns over police brutality and custodial torture have intensified, fuelling debates about justice, accountability, and human rights. The findings from a recent study on the 'Status of Policing in India Report' conducted by Lokniti-Centre for the Study of Developing Societies in collaboration with Common Cause shed light on this grim reality. The study, which analysed responses from 8,276 police personnel across 82 locations in 17 States including Delhi, provides troubling insights into the culture of abuse behind closed doors.

When asked if it is acceptable for the police to use violence against suspects of serious offences for the greater good of society, nearly two out of three police personnel (63%) agreed. Of them, 22% strongly agreed and 41% moderately agreed. Just 35% of the officers opposed the idea (Table 1). Support for violence against suspected serious offenders remained consistent across ranks.

When asked about torture, a significant number of police personnel expressed strong support for its use in interrogations across various crime categories. The highest support was for cases related to national security, such as terrorism, with 42% strongly backing torture. Over a third (34%) also strongly supported its use in cases of rape, sexual assault, and serious violent crimes such as murder (Table 2). Additionally, 26% strongly agreed that torture must be used against history sheeters.

Police personnel were also asked how justified is the use of certain coercive and violent acts towards the accused so that criminal cases can be solved. The data reveals a troubling acceptance of coercive tactics, ranging from verbal abuse and threats to slapping and third-degree methods. Nearly

half (49%) said that verbally abusing or threatening suspects in cases of minor offences such as theft is justified, with 32% endorsing slapping and 9% even supporting the use of third-degree methods (Table 3). Support for such violent methods increased dramatically in cases of serious crimes. Three in ten (30%) police personnel justified third-degree methods in cases such as rape and murder, while half (50%) approved of slapping suspects and more than half (55%) endorsed verbal abuse or threats.

Threats and slapping or using light force are common. About a quarter (26%) of police personnel said that suspects are threatened often, while 34% said that they slap suspects sometimes. Similarly, nearly two in 10 (18%) said that slapping or using light force is common, with 28% saying it happens occasionally (Table 4).

Regarding third-degree methods, one in 10 police personnel admitted that such extreme violence occurs often, and 16% said it happens sometimes. Additionally, one in three respondents reported that investigating officers frequently use coercive tactics.

The findings reveal that nearly four in 10 police personnel believe that reporting of custodial torture should be mandatory, while a similar proportion supported it being mandatory in some cases. Around one in 10 felt it should never be mandatory (Table 5). While a majority supported mandatory reporting, the fact that the largest group favoured it only 'sometimes' suggests a level of hesitation or conditional acceptance. The data also shows that officers at the police station level favour mandatory reporting more than their senior counterparts.

When asked if junior police personnel would feel comfortable filing a complaint against their seniors for the use of violence, provided legal protection, over four in 10 of police respondents strongly agreed, while 36% agreed moderately (Table 6).

Brutality behind bars

Data for the tables were sourced from Lokniti-CSDS. Vibha Attri & Jyoti Mishra are Research Associates at Lokniti-CSDS



Table 1: Police violence: A justified tool for the greater good

For the greater good of the society, it is alright for the police to be violent towards suspects of serious offences		%
Fully agree		22
Somewhat agree		41
Somewhat disagree		13
Fully disagree		22

Table 2: Justifying violence: The alarming police support for torture

Crime categories	Is torture necessary and acceptable to gain information in the following kinds of cases?			
	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Crimes against national security such as terrorism	42	26	12	17
Rape or sexual assault cases	34	30	15	20
Serious violent crimes like murder	34	30	13	21
Cases against history-sheeters	28	29	16	22
Major theft cases	20	35	15	27

Table 3: The case for third-degree methods

Nature of offence	Are the following methods justified? (Yes/ responses only)		
	Verbal abuse or threats	Actions like slapping, etc.	Third-degree methods
Towards the accused while investigating petty offences like theft	49	32	9
Towards the accused while investigating serious criminal cases like rape and murder	55	50	30

Table 4: How often do investigating officers use forceful tactics?

	Many times	Sometimes	Once or twice	Never
Threats	26	34	14	25
Slapping/using light force (pushing, etc.)	18	28	19	33
Using third-degree (beating on soles, applying red chilli powder to body parts, suspending the body)	11	16	14	52
Making the person sit in 'murga' position	9	24	18	46
Keeping a person hungry and thirsty for some time	7	16	14	59

Table 5: Police views on mandatory reporting of torture

	Should it be mandatory for police personnel witnessing torture by other police personnel to report it?		
	Yes, always	Yes, sometimes	Never
Overall	39	41	9
Constabulary ranks	36	42	9
Upper subordinate ranks	42	40	10
IPS level ranks	23	58	14

Table 6: Would legal protection encourage police to report violence?

	If junior police personnel have legal protection when they complain against seniors, would you feel comfortable filing a complaint against seniors for use of violence?		
	Yes, always	Yes, sometimes	Never
Overall	44	36	8
Constabulary ranks	41	36	9
Upper subordinate ranks	50	36	7
IPS level ranks	35	54	5

FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindustan

FIFTY YEARS AGO APRIL 8, 1975

Direct U.S. intervention in Vietnam under study

Jakarta, April 7: Direct American military intervention in Vietnam is under active discussion now, General George Brown, Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, told the press here today.

After a 45-minute consultation with President Suharto, General Brown said "direct American military intervention in Vietnam is obviously one of the options."

"I could not even guess what the possibilities are, but I am sure it is under active discussion," he added.

"As you know, there are a great number of people in the United States who would not favour that intervention. After all, we lost some 50,000 soldiers in Vietnam and we have incurred huge expenditures for the training of the South Vietnamese military."

"We have a law prohibiting the use of military forces without congressional approval, especially reinitiation of military action in Vietnam and Cambodia," he stressed.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Defence Secretary, Mr. James Schlesinger, yesterday indicated that a report to President Ford on the military situation in South Vietnam warned that the Saigon forces would be defeated without more U.S. military aid.

The report, given to the President on Saturday by General Frederick Weyand, the Army Chief of Staff, after a visit to South Vietnam, was described by Mr. Schlesinger as "realistic."

Interviewed on the CBS "Face the Nation" television programme, Mr. Schlesinger declined to go into the substance of General Weyand's assessment.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO APRIL 8, 1925

Royal geographical society

London, April 7: At a meeting of the Royal Geographical Society, the President announced that the King had approved the award of royal medals as follows: The Founder's Medal to Brigadier-General Bruce for his lifelong geographical work in connection with his explorations in the Himalayas which culminated in his leadership of the Everest expeditions and the Patron's Medal to Mr. A.T. Wollaston for his explorations in Dutch New Guinea, Central Africa and many other parts of the world.



Inconclusive chapter

Tamil Nadu should help prepare its students for clearing NEET

With President Droupadi Murmu withholding assent for the Tamil Nadu Admission to Undergraduate Medical Degree Courses Bill 2021, the State is bracing for another battle against National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET)-based admissions. State Chief Minister M.K. Stalin has convened a meeting of legislature party leaders on April 9 to strategise the next move. With the admission season approaching, the development is bound to cause uncertainty and make medical aspirants anxious. Exemption from NEET now remains an inconclusive chapter in the State's decade-old policy discourse. No other State effort to legislate against a central mandate has been so protracted and unpredictable. In September 2017, two anti-NEET Bills met with a similar fate in Rashtrapati Bhavan. Four years later, the ruling DMK – having made NEET exemption a central electoral promise – passed the Bill in the Assembly based on the recommendations of the Justice A.K. Rajan Committee. Instead of forwarding it for presidential assent, Governor R.N. Ravi returned it to the House after five months. In a historic first, the Assembly unanimously re-adopted the Bill and sent it back to him; the Governor subsequently forwarded it to the President. Last week, Mr. Stalin informed the Assembly that assent had been denied, without specifying when Rashtrapati Bhavan had communicated the decision.

This delay in the matter attaining finality is concerning as students have been left facing a state of perpetual uncertainty. The State remains firm in its policy of conducting admission for government quota medical seats based on the Class 12 Board examination scores. Early on, the Ministry of Home Affairs had asked "whether the Bill endangered the sovereignty, unity and integrity of the nation" to which the AYUSH Ministry responded affirmatively. The framers of the Constitution had incorporated Article 254 (2) empowering the President to grant assent to Bills repugnant to central laws on Concurrent List matters. NEET has been consistently upheld by the Supreme Court of India too. The President is under no obligation to give assent, although the Bill reflects the collective will of Tamil Nadu's legislature; it was passed unanimously. True, NEET is neither foolproof nor an absolute measure of academic competency, but Tamil Nadu's legal options are limited. The judiciary is unlikely to settle the issue with any urgency. The State must prepare for a legal struggle, and in the interim, coach students to face NEET with confidence.

Dispelling concerns

Modi's visit to Colombo should help advance ties and resolve disputes

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Sri Lanka, (April 4-6), his first after 2019, demonstrated, beyond optics, the close ties between the two countries. Colombo, under the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)-led National People's Power (NPP) regime, is serious about improving relations with New Delhi. This was evident from the conferment of its highest honour for foreign leaders on Mr. Modi and a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on defence cooperation, billed as the first of its kind in bilateral ties. The JVP's ascension to power, following Anura Kumara Dissanayake's victory in the presidential poll in September 2024, and the NPP's resounding parliamentary election victory two months later, gave room to the perception that there would be a strictly formal, if not cold, relationship with India, given the JVP's anti-India posture of the past. There was also apprehension that Colombo might not be sensitive to New Delhi's security concerns. However, to be fair to him, Mr. Dissanayake reiterated his country's long-standing position that Sri Lanka would not permit its territory to be used against India's security and regional stability. Mr. Modi captured the rationale behind the MoU by saying that "the security of both countries is interconnected and co-dependent". Even though the MoU may have formalised certain arrangements in the area of defence, bilaterally, it is up to the NPP regime to establish that Sri Lanka means business in defence cooperation. But still, Sri Lanka is sure to be conscious that an understanding in 1987 not to let Trincomalee or any other Sri Lankan port be used for military purposes by a third country against India has not helped dispel India's concerns.

On the vexatious fishermen's issue – one of importance to Tamil Nadu – it was a good sign that there were detailed discussions. But Mr. Modi's visit should trigger a full-fledged discussion between the fishing communities of the two countries, and one that is overseen by government officials. Recently, fishermen on either side of the Palk Bay met and exchanged their views. If this meeting is to have some meaning, it should be followed up with another round of talks. A flexible approach will help create a lasting solution. Another significant outcome of the visit is that Tamil parties, in their meeting with Mr. Modi, conveyed the point that they recognised the significance of the Indo-Lanka Accord of 1987 in pursuit of achieving a political settlement for the Tamils and sought India's "legitimate involvement". There has been criticism even in Sri Lanka that many of the parties had not fully supported the Accord, which paved the way for the establishment of provincial councils as a measure of devolution. New Delhi, which can provide liberal economic aid for the war-torn Northern and Eastern provinces, should play the role of a dispassionate observer and urge every stakeholder to pursue democratic means to arrive at a consensus.

Clean voter lists or the choice of Aadhaar linkage



Praveen Chakravarty
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In its March 20, 2025 issue, *The Economist* lamented how "India is obsessed with giving its people unique IDs". It mocked how various arms of the Indian state announce new unique IDs nearly "every month for everyone from doctors, teachers, athletes, judges, gig workers to even cows and buffaloes". *The Economist* got it half wrong. India is obsessed with IDs but not "unique" IDs. There is a profound and fundamental difference between the two. An ID can identify a person's eligibility for a certain role or function or a group, such as an ID to drive or to vote or to perform surgery. A unique ID identifies the individual, regardless of their role or function. It certifies that the person is who he or she claims to be. India's governance establishment often conflates and confuses between an "ID" and a "Unique ID", with some disastrous consequences – as the Election Commission of India (ECI) did recently.

In March this year, the ECI announced that it was going to embark on an exercise to 'link Voter ID with Aadhaar'. Voter ID (Electoral Photo Identity Card or EPIC) is an ID for the purposes of voting. Aadhaar is a Unique ID with no specific functional purpose. In simple terms, the ECI wants to convert its ID to a Unique ID.

The Maharashtra election as turning point
On September 18, 2008, under the leadership of then Chief Election Commissioner N. Gopalaswami, the ECI, in a letter to all the State Chief Electoral Officers, said that it was issuing an EPIC 'for the purposes of correct identification of voters' and that 'every EPIC is unique'. Seventeen years later, in announcing a mission to link EPIC with Aadhaar, the ECI has implicitly admitted that its EPIC was only an ID and not unique, as it had previously claimed.

Evidently, the ECI has not understood the difference between an ID and a Unique ID or has misled Indians for nearly two decades. The Maharashtra State election, in November 2024, was a wake-up call for the ECI.

There were roughly 40 lakh new voters registered in Maharashtra in just five months

The Election Commission of India must pay heed to B.R. Ambedkar's note of caution – that the 'sanctity of voter lists is the foundation of India's democracy'

between the 2024 general election in April and the Assembly election in November. But in the previous full five-year period between the 2019 Assembly election and the 2024 general election in Maharashtra, only 32 lakh new voters were added. Did Maharashtra experience a sudden population explosion in five months? Obviously, this is illogical and mysterious.

Contrary to what many, including this daily, claimed, it is not the absolute number of 40 lakh new voters by itself that is mysteriously large, but the fact that it defies common sense that more new voters can be added in five months than in the previous five years. As one would expect, never before in India's seven-decade electoral history have more new voters been added in a few months than in previous five-year election cycles.

Expectedly, in similar past election cycles in all States, the number of new voters added in a few months was only a fraction of the total added in five-year periods.

It does not take Sherlock Holmes to deduce that the new voters enrolled in such large numbers in Maharashtra were either fake or duplicate. That is, the same person had many Voter IDs. This was seen in several constituencies, where thousands of voters with valid Voter IDs from another State were registered as new voters in Maharashtra.

Subsequently, in Bengal, it was pointed out that there were many voters with the same Voter ID number in multiple constituencies in Bengal as well as in other States. That is, one Voter ID number assigned to many people. So, neither was a Voter ID number unique to every voter nor was a voter unique to a Voter ID number. The ECI's claim in 2008, that every Voter ID number is unique has been a plain lie, wittingly or otherwise.

There is a catch

Now joined, the ECI seemingly wishes to fix this by linking the Voter ID with the Aadhaar. With its biometric process, the Aadhaar can ensure that one person cannot have multiple Voter IDs. This

is a step in the right direction. But it is more complex than what the ECI makes it out to be.

To ensure that the same person is not duplicated, the Aadhaar numbers of all one billion registered voters have to be linked to their Voter ID. Having only some voters linked to Aadhaar will make the entire exercise futile, since then there is no guarantee of uniqueness and non-duplication. So, cleaning and de-duplicating voter lists with Aadhaar is an all or none exercise and cannot be half done. It implies that to be an Indian voter, an Aadhaar is a must. That is, Aadhaar will be a necessary but not a sufficient condition for voting in India. But by law, Aadhaar cannot be mandatory for anyone and is only optional. In short, India needs clean, de-duplicated voter lists. But de-duplication is only possible with 100% Aadhaar linkage. And Aadhaar is not mandatory. This is the conundrum that the ECI faces.

I venture to posit that Babasaheb Ambedkar would have taken a utilitarian approach to this dilemma and argued that the benefits of de-duplicated Voter IDs outweigh the costs of 100% Aadhaar linkage. He had warned in the Constituent Assembly in 1949 that the 'sanctity of voter lists are the foundation of India's democracy'.

Ensure a guarantee under oath

Further, Aadhaar can not only solve the 'one person with many Voter IDs' problem but also eliminate the issue of 'one voter voting many times'. It is no secret that the archaic practice of inking a voter's finger using an indelible ink after voting is bypassed using chemicals that can remove the ink. The benefits of Aadhaar linking to Voter IDs are significant and obvious.

But, as the saying goes, in a liberal society, it is fine for a hundred guilty people to go unpunished even if it means punishing even one innocent person. All of this can work out only under the absolute guarantee that no single eligible Indian citizen will ever be denied the right to vote. And this guarantee from the ECI has to be under oath – not like its 'guarantee', in 2008, of Unique IDs.

India's aviation arbitration cases will still fly off overseas

In 1934, India's skies were not its own. Under British colonial rule, the Aircraft Act of 1934 governed aviation in India, a law that was designed not to foster a burgeoning aviation sector but to ensure British control over air space. The idea of ordinary Indians flying in commercial aircraft seemed like a far-fetched dream. Designed to control air traffic for military and administrative purposes, the Act soon showed that it was ill-equipped to handle rapid technological advancements, soaring passenger numbers, and the rise of private sector participation in aviation. Despite India's growing aviation industry over the decades, the legal framework has remained stuck in the past.

This legal inertia has led to significant challenges for India's aviation sector. Private and public airlines faced bureaucratic delays that hampered their growth. New ventures struggled to enter the market due to the cumbersome licensing process. Air traffic management was inefficient, and even fundamental issues such as passenger compensation for flight delays or cancellations were not adequately addressed. It became painfully clear that the old laws were no longer fit for a nation whose aviation sector had evolved far beyond what the Aircraft Act anticipated.

Fast forward to 2024, where India has moved beyond its colonial past. The Bharatiya Vayuvan Adhiniyam, 2024 marks a new era, introducing reforms and replacing the 1934 Act, and promising a future where Indian aviation can truly take flight. However, there is one issue that remains: Will India's new aviation reforms also help its arbitration system align with global norms? Or will commercial aviation disputes continue to move to Singapore, London and Paris?

A forward step but still incomplete

The Bharatiya Vayuvan Adhiniyam 2024 is a breath of fresh air for India's aviation industry. By streamlining licensing procedures and tackling the inefficiencies of air traffic management, it aims to position India as a global leader in aviation. Passengers also stand to benefit, with enhanced rights and compensation mechanisms for delays and cancellations.

However, despite these impressive reforms, there is one critical aspect that remains

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The Bharatiya Vayuvan Adhiniyam

2024 remains incomplete without arbitration reform

unaddressed: arbitration. While the Adhiniyam overhauls much of India's aviation infrastructure, it has done little to modernise the legal framework to resolve international disputes. So, with the lack of specialised aviation arbitration in India, will the country continue to lose aviation cases to global arbitration hubs?

India's current framework for commercial arbitration, governed by the Arbitration and Conciliation Act of 1996, does not address the unique needs of aviation disputes. These often involve specialised issues that range from technical matters to international treaties. India's courts and arbitration centres lack the expertise to handle such complex cases effectively without a dedicated aviation arbitration framework. This gap in expertise and specialisation means that aviation companies that deal with issues such as cross-border regulations, airline contracts, and aviation safety standards are unlikely to look to India as a preferred venue for dispute resolution.

India versus overseas centres

Despite establishing institutions such as the Delhi International Arbitration Centre and the Mumbai Centre for International Arbitration, India has yet to make a significant mark on the global arbitration stage. The Singapore International Arbitration Centre currently handles around 90% of corporate arbitration cases involving Indian parties, a statistic that highlights India's failure to build the necessary institutional support for high-stakes arbitration. This lack of infrastructure for specialised sectors such as aviation is why its arbitration sector remains underdeveloped. Without a dedicated focus on aviation disputes, cases will continue to move abroad. The issue is not about laws alone but about the right people, the systems and the infrastructure to handle complex international disputes.

If India is serious about becoming a global leader in aviation, it must make a concerted effort to develop a specialised aviation arbitration framework. This would involve establishing dedicated institutions with panels of experts in aviation law, technology and international treaties. It is not enough to have a generic arbitration framework. Aviation disputes require a deep understanding of the sector's unique challenges.

India should also look to jurisdictions such as

Singapore and the United Kingdom, which have built strong and specialised arbitration systems catering to the aviation sector. India needs to adopt a similar approach by creating specialised arbitration panels, creating incentives for private sector involvement and focusing on building expertise in aviation law. Law schools can play an important role in this.

This arbitration exodus is a procedural economic and policy failure that affects India's global standing. Every case that moves abroad means lost revenue for Indian arbitrators, law firms and legal institutions. More importantly, it sends a troubling signal to foreign investors and aviation companies – that India lacks the confidence and the infrastructure to handle high-stakes disputes. However, with a robust aviation arbitration system, India could attract more aviation businesses, increasing investments, economic growth and having a more substantial global aviation presence.

India must ensure neutrality in arbitrator appointments. The government should appoint arbitrators only through mutual agreement or by an independent arbitration body. This is standard practice in leading arbitration hubs, and India must follow suit if it wants to be taken seriously. Further, India must reduce judicial and executive interference in arbitration. Indian arbitration awards often get dragged into long court battles. A stable and predictable legal environment is essential if India wants to attract more arbitration cases.

Key areas to focus on

The path forward is clear: India must prioritise neutrality, transparency, and institutional strength. It must align itself with the best global practices and eliminate provisions that create a perception of bias. The Bharatiya Vayuvan Adhiniyam 2024 is a landmark step but remains incomplete without arbitration reform. The Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996 provides a general framework, but aviation disputes demand specialised expertise.

Unless India builds a dedicated aviation arbitration ecosystem with expert arbitrators, specialised institutions, and global credibility, disputes will keep flying off abroad, and investments may follow suit. The time for reform is now.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A 'reconnect'

The election of M.A. Baby as the new General Secretary of the CPI(M) party marks a new chapter in the annals of the party's history. The challenges before the general secretary, who has inherited a crown of thorns, are manifold. The biggest failure of the Left movement in India has been its inability to adapt itself to changing times. It needs to initiate mass mobilisation programmes and address the bread and butter issues affecting the common man.

B. Suresh Kumar,
Coimbatore

A prominent Left leader's assertion that 'Only [the] Left can counter the neo-fascism of Hindutva forces' (April 3), sounds great on paper. But the track record of the Left parties does not inspire confidence in the public. Without mass support, they have almost always piggybacked on an alliance in every Lok Sabha election to win a few seats. They would then talk of extending outside support, on the basis of a 'common minimum programme', aimed at uplifting the poor and protecting the labour – no doubt lofty ideals. And then pressure the

government at every step, preventing it from closing even a single, chronically sick, loss-making public sector unit. During the first term of the United Progressive Alliance, one saw the Left withdrawing support, citing India signing the civil nuclear agreement with the U.S., which was to its obvious advantage.

V. Jayaraman,
Chennai

RBI and its services

According to the Reserve Bank of India, 98.21% of the ₹2,000 notes have been returned to it and ₹6,366 crore worth of such notes

are left with the public now. That said, the central bank must now consider 'restoring' its erstwhile services relating to the exchanging of soiled/mutilated of various denominations apart from issuing fresh currency notes. The RBI must observe the relevant provisions of the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934 by urgently opening its 'closed doors' with respect to some services.

Kumar Gupta,
Panchkula, Haryana

Complete health

World Health Day may have passed but health in general

does not only mean the absence of diseases or treatment for diseases. 'Health is a status of five dimensions – physical, mental, social, vocational and spiritual well-being and not merely the absence of diseases or infirmity'. So, every person needs to analyse their state in terms of these five health dimensions.

Dr. Gitanjali Sharma,
Chennai

Manoj Kumar

Manoj Kumar's debut 1967 Hindi film, *Upkar*, as a director, was an off-shoot to the 1965 India-Pakistan war.

The ever-green song, 'Mere Desh ki Dhar', by Mahendra Kapoor won a national award and topped the listeners' choice in Vividh Bharati in the late 1960s and 1970s. Such films which stirred a nationalist fervour are rare now. It was said that then Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri was instrumental in making a film based on the 'Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan' slogan. It was remade in Telugu, as *Padmalatam*, in 1976.

A.N. Narayanan,
Chennai

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.in will be published. We must carry the postal address.

Tariff turmoil

MPC needs to gauge the effect of uncertainty

The policy environment for the six-member monetary policy committee (MPC) of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), meeting this week for the first time this financial year, has become enormously complex owing to global uncertainties. Last week, the United States imposed reciprocal tariffs on all trading partners. A 10 per cent base tariff now applies to all countries. Besides, it has imposed additional tariffs on countries with a higher trade surplus. Imports from India, for instance, will attract a tariff of 26 per cent. China has been slapped with a reciprocal tariff of 34 per cent, which, after including the existing 20 per cent tariff, takes the rate to 54 per cent. China has retaliated swiftly by imposing a 34 per cent tariff on US imports. To what extent these US tariffs and possible retaliatory action by other large trading partners will affect the global trade flow or global growth is hard to gauge at this stage.

This is also being reflected in financial markets. Volatility has increased significantly and stock markets have fallen across the world. The Indian benchmark BSE Sensex, for instance, fell 2.95 per cent on Monday. The global crude oil prices have fallen, with benchmark Brent crude declining over 15 per cent this week in April. The yield on the 10-year US government bond has fallen by about 25 basis points this month, which suggests financial markets expect the Federal Reserve to cut policy rates more aggressively. This would most likely happen with the possibility of the US economy slipping into a recession — the odds have increased significantly. Worse, this may happen with higher tariffs pushing up consumer prices in the US. As Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell noted last week, the inflationary effect of tariffs could be persistent. A potential recession in the US economy, combined with the biggest global trade shock in the post-war era, could significantly reduce global growth.

The challenge for the MPC is to gauge how this heightened level of uncertainty will affect growth and inflation dynamics in India, which will form the basis of its policy decision. The resolution of the MPC and the accompanying commentary by key RBI officials will be keenly followed by financial markets on Wednesday. Nonetheless, as things stand, the MPC expects the consumer price index-based inflation rate to average 4.2 per cent this financial year, which is close to the central bank's medium-term target. Since India's exports have been subjected to higher tariffs, though lower than some of its Asian competitors', it will affect output and growth. Although it's still early days and the Indian government is negotiating a bilateral trade agreement with the US, assuming good inflation remains benign, slower growth could reduce pricing power for firms, leading to lower overall inflation. Besides, softer crude oil prices will also bring down the inflation rate. However, the Union government increased excise duty on petrol and diesel by ₹2 per litre on Monday, limiting the benefit.

Further, since higher tariffs in the US will reduce its import demand, excess global output could depress global prices, at least in the short run. It may also lead to some dislocation in global supply chains, which could push up prices but the exact impact would be hard to quantify. Thus, on balance, the MPC is likely to find enough reason to go for another 25-basis-point policy-rate cut. It would be interesting to see if it also revises its growth and inflation projections. However, from a medium-term perspective, it would be important for the MPC not to go into overly accommodative mode to support growth in case the trade shock has a higher impact than expected.

Beyond valuations

India needs to invest more in R&D

In a recent address, Union Minister of Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal criticised the Indian startup ecosystem for being too focused on chasing valuations and using cheap labour instead of pursuing real innovation or solving fundamental technological challenges. Indian startups are largely seen to be consumption-driven and focused more on e-commerce, fintech, and edtech, that is, solving local problems at scale through technology-enabled services rather than work on long-gestation, foundational technologies. In other words, India's startup story, while inspiring, has largely been one of scale and not frontiers of science. While the minister was right in pointing out that startups tended to shy away from innovation and replicate global business models rather than inventing new ones, founders may not be the only ones responsible for the current state of affairs.

Over the past decade, India has become the world's third-largest startup ecosystem, producing around 117 unicorns and driving digital inclusion across sectors. However, not all startups are in the consumer business. On the contrary, India has around 4,000 deep-tech startups, including those working in defence, artificial intelligence (AI), space, quantum computing, and semiconductors, and is expected to reach 10,000 by 2030. According to a recent report by Nasscom, these deep-tech startups attracted \$16 billion in funding in 2024, marking a 78 per cent year-on-year increase. Other encouraging signs are also emerging. Several startups are tackling hard problems, from space tech to AI and health diagnostics. However, these remain outliers, and are not yet the norm. In fact, despite these rapid advancements, Indian startups' performance pales relative to their Chinese or American counterparts, which are taking bold bets on emerging technologies. These are high-risk, high-reward sectors that require capital, research and development (R&D), and often, government-supported infrastructure. As the deep-tech race intensifies globally, it is clear that India will have to do a lot to catch up with these countries.

India's startup ecosystem still falls short of structures that support deep tech. These include robust academia-industry linkages, long-term venture capital funding, retention of top-tier talent, and adequate R&D infrastructure. Even now, India's gross expenditure on research and development (GERD) stands at less than 1 per cent of gross domestic product, far behind that of the US (3.5 per cent) and China (2.4 per cent). The lack of R&D ambition is not limited to startups. Indian firms and the government collectively spend too little on these, which needs to change. Further, startups also face regulatory hurdles. In contrast, China's startup dominance was the result of careful government planning, aggressive funding, and a domestic market structured for scale. As this newspaper has reported, in 2023, for example, a meagre 5 per cent of Indian startup funding went into deep-tech sectors, compared to 35 per cent in China. The remarks made by Mr Goyal should thus serve as a call to action. This can include setting up deep-tech innovation funds, building strong academia-startup bridges, and offering incentives for faster developments in hardware, AI, biotech, and clean energy. Technology Innovation Hubs, set up under the National Mission on Interdisciplinary Cyber-Physical Systems, will hopefully boost technology development and innovation.

Reducing GDP discrepancies

India needs radical improvements in GDP estimation. Using GST data could help correct inflated real growth figures

KARTIKEYA BATRA, JOSH FELMAN, & ARVIND SUBRAMANIAN

India's gross domestic product (GDP) estimates have long been the subject of controversy. For this reason, it is encouraging to see a recent news report that the government is planning to improve GDP measurement by using data from the goods and services tax (GST). If the plan is implemented, it would represent a great step forward, and redound to the credit of the leadership at the Ministry of Statistics and Planning Implementation (Mospi). Consider why.

Any statistical agency needs to decide whether it will measure GDP from the production side or from the expenditure side. In principle, the two measures should give the same result, since everything that is produced in an economy is sold (or stored as inventory, which is also counted as expenditure). But measuring production and spending in an economy as large as India's is difficult, and inevitably the two measures do not coincide.

At this point, the agency needs to make another choice. Some choose to average the two measures. But Mospi uses only one series — the production side — as its official GDP estimate, on the grounds that it is more reliable. But Mospi also produces expenditure-side estimates. And the discrepancies between these two series are worth examining for they reveal much about India's problems in estimating GDP.

The table shows the discrepancy between production and expenditure-side growth estimates for all the years since the current methodology was introduced.

Two features of the real estimates are particularly noteworthy. First, the difference between the two measures of GDP growth can be quite high. For example, in the financial years (FY) 2016-17 and 2017-18, the discrepancy accounted for around 20 per cent of GDP growth. In FY20 and FY24, the discrepancy was even higher, around

50 per cent. In other words, about half of GDP growth for 2020 and 2024 ended up being "explained" by the discrepancy. This is clearly problematic.

Second, positive discrepancies predominate, meaning that real production-side growth estimates tend to be higher than their corresponding expenditure-side measures. In fact, discrepancies are positive for no less than eight of the past 10 years, excluding the measurement-challenged Covid years. In other words, for most of the past decade, Mospi simply could not find the expenditure-side counterparts to production-side GDP growth.

Why not? It's possible that a serious problem developed during this period in measuring expenditure. But this seems unlikely. If measurement was the problem, then one should see evidence of it in the nominal numbers. But in fact the nominal discrepancies are smaller and much more evenly distributed between positive and negative values than the real discrepancies. This suggests that the problem for most of the past decade, Mospi simply could not find the expenditure-side counterparts to production-side GDP growth.

How did that happen? Essentially, because Mospi uses a flawed price index to deflate production-side GDP, one that gives far too much weight to volatile international commodity prices. Consequently, during periods when the nominal numbers were repeatedly during the past decade (with the major exception being 2022, when Russia invaded Ukraine), the GDP deflator will be underestimated. And when this too-low deflator is used to deflate the nominal production aggregates, the real GDP figures become overstated.

In other words, the real problem (put intended) — the real reason for the large and one-sided discrepancies in the two measures of growth — is that real growth on the production side has been overstated.

All this said, expenditure data does need to be improved. After all, the nominal discrepancies are still significant, often amounting to 1 percentage point of growth. A key problem in

ESTIMATES OF GDP GROWTH

		REAL Discrepancy between production and expenditure growth in % of GDP				NOMINAL Discrepancy between production and expenditure growth in % of GDP		
	GDP growth	Production percentage points	Discrepancy as % of growth	GDP growth	GDP growth	Production percentage points	Discrepancy as % of growth	GDP growth
2013	5.5	0.8	15	13.8	1.8	12.9		
2014	6.4	-0.8	-13	13.0	-0.2	-1.9		
2015	7.4	0.1	2	11.0	-1.0	-8.9		
2016	8.0	1.0	12	10.5	0.7	6.3		
2017	8.3	1.7	21	11.8	1.4	11.9		
2018	6.8	1.2	18	11.0	0.8	7.1		
2019	6.5	-2.5	-39	10.6	-1.6	-14.8		
2020	3.9	2.0	51	6.4	-0.8	-12.5		
2021	-5.8	-1.6	28	-1.2	-1.8	144.6		
2022	9.7	-5.1	-53	18.9	0.4	2.0		
2023	7.6	0.1	1	14.0	-1.0	-6.9		
2024	9.2	4.3	47	12.0	0.0	0.0		

Note: Figures are for financial years ending in the year indicated (i.e., 2023 refers to 2021-22). Positive discrepancy implies that the production side estimate of GDP growth exceeds that on the expenditure side. Shaded area corresponds to the Covid years.

measuring GDP from the expenditure side is the difficulty in measuring consumption, since this activity takes place in many different retail shops up and down the country — and now, increasingly, online. Expenditure-side deflators, less flawed than those on the production side, also need improvement. And all this matters hugely because consumption is the major component of aggregate demand, accounting for 56 per cent of the nation's GDP, according to the latest estimates.

This is where GST data can help. After all, the GST applies (at least in principle) to every significant consumption transaction in the country, which means that virtually every transaction can be measured. In particular, the GST does a much better job of capturing transactions in smaller establishments, which pay GST but whose accounts are not captured in Mospi's existing database.

Moreover, GST data can be broken down in a variety of interesting ways, such as by consumption of durable goods, non-durable goods and services; or between domestic production and import. It could even be broken down further to track otherwise difficult-to-measure activities, such as restaurant meals. Also, GST data is timely (with only a month's lag) and available at high frequency (monthly).

So, using GST should lead to considerable improvements in the quarterly GDP estimates.

At the same time, GST data could be used to improve the estimates of state-level GDP. After all, if national estimates are flawed, gross state domestic product (GSDPs) are even more so. Currently, for many of the organised sub-sectors, GDP is calculated at the national level and then apportioned across states based on imperfect proxies. A much better approach would be to measure for each sub-sector how much of the GST collection comes from each state. Several states are right now planning to improve GST estimation, and the use of GST data could help in this regard.

Our analysis of discrepancies points to the need for radical improvements in GDP estimation. Constructing better deflators is clearly essential. But it would also be important to improve the nominal estimates. The good news is that if India were to use GST data to do this, it would join the small group of advanced countries that use tax data for better GDP estimation. As in the digital space, India will have leap-frogged to the frontier.

The authors are, respectively, with Azim Premji University (incoming), JH Consulting, and the Peterson Institute for International Economics

Navigating the era of high US tariffs

US President Donald Trump has shocked his trading partners with tariffs that he prefers to call "reciprocal". There is nothing reciprocal about them. These tariffs are calculated by arbitrarily halving the figure obtained by dividing the US trade deficit with a country by US imports from it, defying all reason and logic. The economic interests of smaller economies have suffered more as a result.

These "reciprocal" tariffs have created uncertainty and disruption in world trade, violating established norms and principles of international trade including the fundamental World Trade Organization (WTO) principles of most-favoured nation (MFN) treatment, national treatment, and the rule that tariffs applied by a country cannot be more than its bound tariffs in the WTO. International trade rules have been turned upside down. This is a major blow to the WTO, at least until the rest of the world finds the courage or coherence to come together and resurrect it from the ensuing debris.

Significantly, the objective of this exercise has been thought through. Trade partners would be under pressure to: (a) negotiate and "mend their ways", as the order includes a possibility of US tariff reduction if "corrective" steps are taken by other nations (Vietnam has already announced its intention of reducing tariffs for the US); (b) refrain from retaliation, as the US could respond by increasing the scope of the duties imposed; and (c) focus on Annex II of the order, which provides a list of products for which the tariffs would not apply, including, for example, several pharmaceutical products. While this list covers products that may later be subject to safeguard measures, the idea of excluding certain product categories is worthwhile to consider.

A country would need to frame its response based on the three points above. One strong caveat, however, needs to be noted. President Trump is entirely transactional in his approach. Therefore, the finality of any deal will only be till another deal with another nation is concluded (e.g., Vietnam's initiatives have begun such a process). Building an MFN clause in a trade agreement may be desirable to capture the benefit of such later events. A good strategy would be to have major US firms as part of the initiatives for building economic partnerships.

Further, any strategy on reducing tariffs should be framed under three categories of initiatives. First, identifying the areas where international policy initiatives help build export and technology hubs in India for global value chains. Two, products that are particularly sensitive for India, e.g. agricultural products. Three, the overall thrust of the bilateral trade agreement (BTA) for reducing tariffs bilaterally. Importantly, it would require a Trade Promotion Authority from the US Congress, as far as reduction of US tariffs is concerned.

India's existing exports of both manufactured goods and agricultural products are highly sensitive to US tariffs. The extent of tariff changes by India is a matter of its economic, social, and political sensitivity. A range of solutions and options need to be developed to address the sensitivities.

When compared with several of its major competitors, India is in a better spot to limit the damages and create opportunities for actions that address its important economic concerns. The proposed BTA provides a good platform for seeking better conditions. Nonetheless, to get best results, the BTA efforts would have to be supplemented by wider industrial policy initiatives.

Total US tariffs on China (including the earlier tariffs imposed soon after President Trump's inauguration) may stand at around 76 per cent. Recognising that China's effective tariffs are much higher, India must quickly engage in discussions

with "lead firms" located in China to shift their investments/operations to India, and avoid repeating the delays in its response seen in the past when President Trump raised tariffs on China in 2018. Since other nations would also seek China's investments, India must act quickly and in a focused way. The effort would be to identify new value chain partnerships between India, the US, and others (with "zero for zero" or "low tariff for low tariff" arrangements agreed upon in areas such as textiles and clothing, footwear, smartphones, toys, and shipbuilding), to enable a shift away from India's current deep reliance on a limited number of major existing suppliers. Thus, a case is clearly made out for a sector-by-sector, in-depth examination vis-à-vis value chains, with backward facilitation offered to the US lead firms.

These efforts need to be planned as part of a wider industrial policy initiative for global value chains, wherein low tariffs on imported inputs are essential for competitiveness. Developing operational conditions that create large-scale production must also be emphasised, an objective that requires prioritising policy stability and a medium- to long-term vision developed in consultation with "lead firms".

India must recognise the significance of putting all its eggs in the US basket by concluding the ongoing trade negotiation with the EU in the shortest possible time and pursuing trade agreements with major Latin American nations and the African continent area to diversify its trade interests and insulate itself from volatility to the extent possible. This may be yet another opportunity for India and like-minded nations to this of reducing the tariff on US — says the US, if required. It would be wise to pursue national interest in the given circumstances while recognising that India needs to hedge itself well from future shocks, and shift its value chains to the US and nations other than China (which will also result in a rise of bilateral exports of US and India).

The authors are, respectively, fellow, RIS, and former commerce secretary to the Government of India and former deputy director-general, WTO. The views are personal

The Beatlemania duet



BOOK REVIEW

T BONE BURNETT

In our culture, music is most often written about in terms of sales, streams and chart positions. That is, of course, the least intelligent way to think about or talk about music.

Ian Leslie's *John & Paul: A Love Story in Songs* is unconcerned with all that, but rather it explores the way two extraordinarily gifted young men combined and exchanged their gifts while inspiring, challenging, teaching

and learning from each other.

In the great teams of composers before John Lennon and Paul McCartney — Rodgers and Hart, Lerner and Loewe, Leiber and Stoller, Bacharach and David — one of the members wrote the music and the other wrote the lyrics. John and Paul both wrote music and both wrote lyrics, and they made a decision at the beginning of their collaboration to share the credit on all of their compositions, thereby creating a third being called Lennon and McCartney. That selfless, generous merger, as their egos shape-shifted into and out of each other, unleashed a power that took music to a height that has not since been surpassed, or I think it safe to say, even reached.

I fell in love with rock 'n' roll music when I was nine years old in 1957 and

first heard *Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On*, by Jerry Lee Lewis. By 1960, however, the rock 'n' roll explosion had faded away. Buddy Holly was killed in a plane crash. Elvis Presley was in the Army. Chuck Berry was in jail. Eddie Cochran died in a car wreck. Little Richard was in the ministry. Jerry Lee Lewis had been cancelled.

Three years later, however, these two young musicians and their friends George Harrison and Ringo Starr, all from a seaport in the north of England, reinvented a style of music that had come from the backwaters of the Mississippi Delta, the highlands of the Appalachian mountains and the mean streets of our cities. In the next five years, while absorbing and combining the art and music of the rest of the 20th century, they made music that took us all on an exquisite trip into other worlds of sound and meaning in a feat of invention that seems and is, I think, superhuman.

Though there has probably never been music that has permeated and elevated mass culture to a higher degree, this book is not interested in music as a mass commodity. This book is about soul, about grief and the love that two boys who lost their mothers far too soon gave for the world. It is about the courageous way they merge and the unfathomable power of that merger.

Leslie, a British journalist and author, has a deep affection for, and a penetrating understanding of, these complex characters and their unprecedented friendship — from their boyhoods in Liverpool, through the debauchery of postwar-Hamburg night life, through their lightning rise to international fame,

through the remarkable string of albums with the explosive innocence of *With the Beatles* in 1963, the jubilant rockabilly of *Beatles for Sale* in 1964, the cannabis-fuelled *Rubber Soul* in 1965, the epic psychedelia of *Revolver* in 1966 and *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* in 1967 — which, perhaps inevitably, ended in acrimony not long thereafter. Having lived through that period of time myself, it is stunning to follow the two boys through how far and fast John and Paul travelled, how profound their preternatural alliance was, and how epic their heroic journey.

I'm sorry John isn't here to read this book. I hope if Paul does read it he feels the depth of appreciation and gratitude

and intelligence it contains. There is a passage about them being high on LSD, after recording the song "Getting Better" during the *Sgt. Pepper* sessions, that seems to me central to Leslie's understanding of his subjects:

That night, John and Paul did something that the two of them practised quite a few times during this period. They gazed intensely into each other's eyes. They liked to put their faces close together and stare, unblinking, until they felt themselves dissolving into each other, almost obliterating any sense of themselves as distinct individuals. "There's something disturbing about it," mused McCartney, much later, in his understated way. "You ask yourself, 'How do you come back from it? How do you then lead a normal life after that?' And the answer is, you don't."

The reviewer is a Grammy- and Academy-Award-winning artist, producer and songwriter. © 2025 The New York Times News Service

SCIENCE

It's clear now: iron inside the sun is more opaque than expected

Researchers found that the temperature of the sun is determined to a great degree by the opacity of minerals within it and the computer models that were used to estimate and calculate various facts about the star were not quite accurate, and modelling parameters probably needed a relook

Vasudevan Mukunth.

The world is full of mysteries but not all of them are grand. Sure, we don't know what the mind really is or what the inside of a black hole looks like. But there are also many mysteries hiding in the little details.

For example, we don't know why iron inside the sun is so opaque.

Solid iron objects are everywhere around us. They're used to make doorknobs, cooking utensils, furniture, water tanks – all sorts of things. And they're all opaque. When light hits an iron object, it can't pass through. Instead, some of it is absorbed and some of it is scattered. How much light an object absorbs is called its opacity: the more it absorbs, the more opaque it is.

Iron's opacity isn't an important detail when making a doorknob. But when we're talking about the sun, the implications are practically cosmic.

The universe's engines

The sun is the star closest to the earth and thus the one humans have studied the most. A lot of what we know, or think we know, about different kinds of stars comes from studying the sun.

This is true on two levels. First: scientists have developed various theories to explain the sun's properties. Over many decades, they pointed telescopes, detectors, and antennae at emissions from the star to capture electromagnetic radiation, charged particles, heat, etc. and compare the data with each theory. Then they eliminated theories that disagreed with the data and refined those that did.

On the second level, the sun is just one kind of star; the universe has many kinds. To understand their properties, scientists used the theories to build models that "simulate" them. These properties include the generation of heat and energy and their movement through the star, the star's magnetic field, its rotation and quakes on its surface, the evolution of the stellar atmosphere, the formation of sunspots and flares, and the effects of these changes on near-star space.

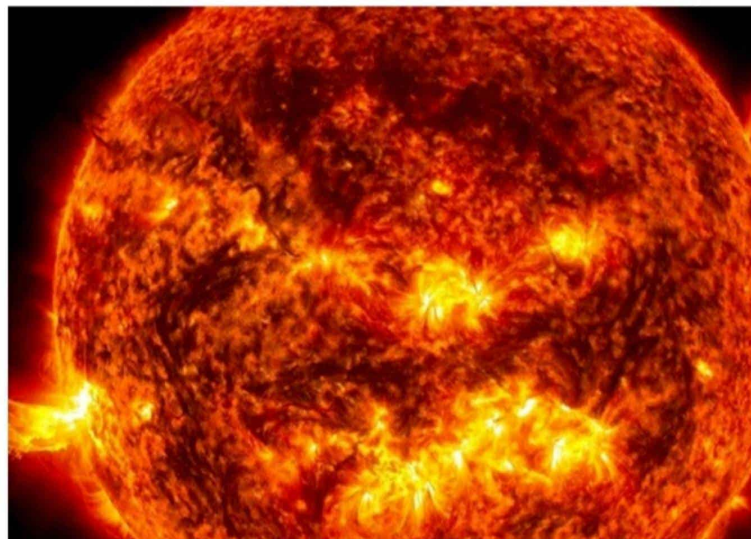
Stars are the universe's engines: we can't understand the universe if we don't understand how stars work. When stars form, they allow planets to form around them, which they subsequently supply with light, heat, and a protective magnetic field. (Sometimes they supply too much or too little: scientists have found more than a few exoplanets fried by their host stars or turned into giant ice balls.)

Their mass deflects asteroids and comets, and their flares energise nearby gas clouds and increase the formation of other stars. When a star dies, depending on its manner of death, it releases copious amounts of metals and other elements into the universe that aren't made in any other natural process.

This variety of effects means stars' properties affect the formation of star clusters, galaxies, the universe's structure, and its evolution. Scientific models can thus simulate all these things if they get the stars' properties right, and herein lies the rub.

Up to 400% higher

Several independent studies until the



This image from June 20, 2013, shows the bright light of a solar flare on the left side of the sun and an eruption of solar material shooting through the sun's atmosphere, called a prominence eruption. Shortly thereafter, this same region of the sun sent a coronal mass ejection out into space. NASA/GODDARD/SDO

mid-2010s reported that there appeared to be 30-50% less carbon, oxygen, and nitrogen in the sun than what models predicted.

These models aren't easy to tweak with new data. They have been able to successfully predict some things, like the sun's current brightness and how many neutrinos nuclear fusion in the sun's core produces every second. The models have also become so complicated they can run only on the most powerful supercomputers. When faced with the discrepancy, modellers suspected they were due to problems in the way the elements' abundances were measured. If the measurements are improved, the discrepancy might go away, they said.

But a notable study published in 2015 disagreed: its authors wrote that the discrepancy "could be resolved if the true mean opacity for the solar interior matter were roughly 15% higher than predicted."

How much energy an element absorbs inside the star affects the star's temperature profile. The authors were thus suggesting the models' data about the opacity of elements inside the sun were off. To buttress their argument, they subjected a plasma containing iron to conditions expected at the star's radiation/convection zone boundary, a layer about 30% of the way from the surface to its centre. They reported that depending on the frequency of radiation striking it, iron's opacity was found to be 30-400% higher than predicted.

Dark of the shadow

Subsequent studies upheld the crux of these findings: that models were underestimating iron's opacity. In a study published on January 27 this year, scientists reported "opacity profiles" of



We find that our seismic opacity is about 10% higher than theoretical values used in current solar models by around 2 million degrees, but lower by 35% than some recent available theoretical values

various elements derived from helioseismic inferences, i.e. based on the propagation of sound within the sun. They wrote: "We find that our seismic opacity is about 10% higher than theoretical values used in current solar models by around 2 million degrees, but lower by 35% than some recent available theoretical values." But researchers who banked on models – which were based on their theories – still had to be sure if uncertainties in the measurements of the time-varying properties of the plasma in these studies could explain the discrepancy.

In a study published on March 3 in *Physical Review Letters*, researchers from the US and France reported they had put this question to the test and concluded the problem was indeed in the theory, not in the observed data.

At Sandia National Laboratories in the US, the team exposed a thin sample of iron to X-rays and pointed spectrometers at the X-ray source. The spectrometers observed the X-ray shadow cast by the iron sample. The team also linked up the spectrometers to ultrafast X-ray cameras that recorded changes in temperature and particle density more than one billion times per second.

The team wrote in its paper, "Our new measurements use a novel technology to

measure opacity sample evolution ... These measurements quantify the impact of temporal gradients on published film-integrated data and contradict the hypothesis that the temporal evolution might explain the published model-data discrepancy."

'Many more requirements'

The study's challenges weren't trivial. Measuring opacity in sun-like conditions requires technologies that didn't exist until recently. To mimic the conditions in the sun, the electrons in a plasma need to be energised to at least 180 eV while their density exceeds 30,000 billion billion particles per millilitre. The energy came from the X-ray source at Sandia.

The thin iron sample also contained a small amount of magnesium as a tracer. The magnesium's interaction with the X-rays, as observed at the spectrometer, allowed the team to calculate the electrons' energy and density.

The team inferred iron's opacity to the X-rays based on how strongly it absorbed the radiation. The more strongly it did, the darker the shadow it would cast in the spectrometer readings. This "darkness" is called the line optical depth.

The paper added, "The ultimate approach to resolving the model-data discrepancy entails measuring iron opacity as a function of time. However, that must satisfy many more requirements, including absolute transmission measurements, rather than line optical depth reported here, and formal uncertainty determination, while measuring plasma conditions."

"Such an absolute opacity approach is presently under investigation," the team added.

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Shrubs like *Viburnum grandiflorum* are a critical food source for pollinators. ANZAR KHUROO

Kashmir's less-known spring blooms

Hirra Azmat

Kashmir's agroclimatic conditions are distinct from the rest of the country. The Valley's long, harsh winters leave vegetation in dormancy. When spring arrives, it breathes new life into the landscape.

The mountainous region is home to a variety of endemic plants, including indigenous bulbs, herbs, shrubs, and trees. These floral species play a crucial role in maintaining the valley's biodiversity.

Some of the most prominent spring flowers are *Colchicum luteum* (veer kaum): A delicate yet vibrant bloom, often seen carpeting hillsides and grooves; *Sternbergia vernalis* (goud tour), a golden-yellow flower that marks the arrival of spring; *Salix* (braed mushuk), a plant with significant cultural and ecological value; *Viburnum grandiflorum* (kulmansh), a shrub with large pink flowers; and daffodils, whose bright yellow and white hues symbolise renewal and have deep roots in Kashmiri folklore. Beyond their aesthetic appeal, these plants also provide essential ecosystem services. They serve as vital food sources for pollinators, ensuring the pollination of horticultural fruit trees that also bloom during spring.

"The Valley's vast altitudinal variations – from 1,600 metres in the basin to over 4,500 metres at mountain peaks – create diverse habitats suitable for these plants," Anzar Khuroo, professor at the Department of Botany, University of Kashmir, said. "The gradual blooming from the valley plains in early spring to the alpine meadows in late summer

Preserving these blooms is more than just about preserving biodiversity; they also represent the cultural and ecological essence of the Valley

showcases their remarkable diversity and adaptability."

For centuries, ethnic communities have used these endemic blooms for medicinal and cultural purposes. Many traditional uses have been preserved through oral traditions, passed down from generation to generation. These flowers don't just symbolise Kashmiri heritage; they also hold potential therapeutic benefits.

But despite their significance, these species face numerous threats. Unsustainable development activities, deforestation, and increasing human encroachment pose significant risks. Climate change has also started to alter their blooming patterns. Research has found that relatively milder winters and early warming in February have led to premature flowering in the Valley, disrupting the natural seasonal cycle.

For example, a recent study conducted by the Khuroo's group at the University of Kashmir reported a shift in the spring flowering phenology (the study of flowering patterns and cycles influenced by seasonal changes) of the model plant species *Sternbergia vernalis*, in response to the changing climate in the Kashmir region of the Himalayas.

"As Kashmir's ecology and environment face increasing pressures, it is imperative to strike a balance between development and conservation," Khuroo said. "Protecting these endemic blooms is not just about preserving biodiversity; it is about safeguarding the cultural and ecological essence of the Valley for generations to come."

(Hirra Azmat is a Kashmir-based journalist who writes extensively on science, health, and environment. azmathirra@gmail.com)

THE SCIENCE QUIZ

When the earth and the moon cast shadows on each other

Vasudevan Mukunth

QUESTION 1

Right before and right after the point of totality during a solar eclipse, the moon's rugged surface allows beads of sunlight to shine through in some places, called _____. When there is one bead, the "diamond ring" effect is visible. Fill in the blanks.

QUESTION 2

The earth's X as it moves around the sun creates the seasons. In the same way, the moon's X in its orbit around the earth creates a period once every six months or so when (relatively) many eclipses occur. What is X?

QUESTION 3

An important reason why eclipses occur is that the sun and the moon are roughly the same size as seen from the earth's surface. An annular eclipse happens when the

moon comes before the sun but only leaves a ring of light visible. What's their size in degrees?

QUESTION 4

Both the moon around the earth and the earth around the sun follow elliptical orbits. If both these orbits were circular instead, there would be a solar eclipse every _____ day. Fill in the blanks.

QUESTION 5

People who purposefully track down eclipses and observe them are called eclipse chasers. They are also called _____, which can be translated as 'shadow lover' as well as refers to a part of eclipses. Fill in the blank.

Answers to April 3 quiz:

1. Shape ocean's surface takes under influence of gravity and rotation - **Ans: Geoid**
2. Location of Indian sea-level anomaly - **Ans: Indian Ocean**
3. Value of sea level including average height of surface waves - **Ans: Still-water level**
4. Space mission launched in 1992 to measure

sea level - **Ans: TOPEX/Poseidon**

5. Phenomenon of landmasses rebounding after losing ice mass - **Ans: Post-glacial rebound**

Visual: Sea of Galilee

First contact: K.N. Viswanathan | Tamal Biswas | Joe V.R. | Anmol Agrawal

Answers to April 4 quiz:

1. Leading cause of maternal mortality worldwide - **Ans: Postpartum hemorrhage**
 2. Stage of pregnancy when most maternal deaths occur - **Ans: During childbirth and postnatal period**
 3. Recommended period for exclusive breastfeeding - **Ans: Six months**
 4. Kangaroo mother care can help babies regulate temperature - **Ans: True**
 5. Factors of the Apgar score - **Ans: Reflexes, heart rate, muscle tone, breathing, skin colour**
- Visual: Virginia Appgar
First contact: K.N. Viswanathan | Sanjev Sakthivel | Kittu Choudhary



A partial solar eclipse over Greenland's capital Nuuk in March 2025.

REUTERS

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

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



"They (global leaders) are dying to make a deal. And I said, we're not going to have deficits with your country. We're going to have surpluses or, at worst, going to be breaking even"

DONALD TRUMP, US PRESIDENT

ALL-OUT TARIFF WAR LOOMS

Trump threatens additional 50% tariffs on China

REUTERS
7 April

US President Donald Trump threatened to further increase tariffs on China on Monday, raising the possibility of further escalation in a trade war that has already wiped trillions of dollars from global markets.

Trump said he would impose an additional 50 per cent duty on US imports from China on Wednesday if the world's No. 2 economy did not withdraw the 34 per cent tariffs it had imposed on US products last week. Those Chinese tariffs had come in response to 34 per cent "reciprocal" duties announced by Trump.

"All talks with China concerning their requested meetings with us will be terminated," he wrote on social media.

The announcement injected further turbulence into global financial markets, which have fallen steadily since Trump's announcement. A 10 per cent tariff took effect on all imports into the world's largest consumer market on Saturday, and targeted duties of up to 50 per cent are due to snap into place on Wednesday.

US stocks briefly stopped their downward slide after a report that Trump was considering a 90-day tariff pause, then turned negative again after the White House dismissed the report as "fake news." The S&P 500 index was headed toward a 20 per cent drop from its February high.

Goldman Sachs raised the odds of a US recession to 45 per cent.

The European Union said it would start collecting retaliatory duties on some US goods next week, even as officials said they stood ready to negotiate a "zero for zero" deal with Trump's administration.

"Sooner or later, we will sit at the negotiation table with the US and find a mutually

acceptable compromise," EU Trade Commissioner Maros Sefcovic said at a news conference.

Trump aides say Trump is following through on a promise to reverse decades of trade liberalization that he believes has undercut the US economy. But they also said he is willing to negotiate with dozens of countries that have reached out for talks.

"He's doubling down on something that he knows works, and he's going to continue to do that," White House economist Kevin Hassett said on Fox News. "But he is also going to listen to our trading partners, and if they come to us with really great deals that advantage American manufacturing and American farmers, I'm sure he'll listen."

China's retaliatory levies are the firmest response yet to Trump's announcement, which has been met with bewildered condemnation from other leaders. Beijing called Trump's behaviour "economic bullying."

After stocks in mainland China and Hong Kong cratered on Monday, China's sovereign fund stepped in to try to stabilise the market. Billionaire Elon Musk, who is leading Trump's effort to slash government spending, called for zero tariffs between the US and Europe over the weekend.

On Monday, Trump trade adviser Peter Navarro dismissed the Tesla CEO as a "car assembler."

Investors and political leaders have struggled to determine whether Trump's tariffs are part of a permanent new regime or a negotiating tactic to win concessions from other countries.

Some in the EU worry that a forceful response risks even more blowback on European exporters of everything from French Cognac and Italian wine to German cars.

If China doesn't withdraw its 34% tariff hike by April 8, we will impose additional 50% tariffs effective April 9. All talks with China concerning their requested meetings with us will be terminated!"

DONALD TRUMP
US PRESIDENT

China floats rate cuts, aid to counter levies

BLOOMBERG
7 April

China said it has room to ease borrowing costs and reserve rules for lenders if needed to defend its economy against US President Donald Trump's latest tariffs.

The reserve requirement ratio for financial institutions and the central bank's policy rates can be cut anytime going forward, the state-owned People's Daily said in a commentary on Sunday. "There is still room for further expansion of the fiscal deficit, special treasury bonds and special debts."

On Saturday, the official Xinhua News Agency said Beijing will continue to take "resolute measures" to safeguard its sovereignty, security and other interests. US tariffs announced last week will raise levies on nearly all Chinese products to at least 54 per cent, potentially crippling exports to the US just as China's economy is steadying at the start of 2025.

WORLD GEARS UP TO SUPPORT MARKETS

Governments around the world are preparing measures to support financial markets as a result of levies following sweeping tariffs announced by Trump. Here are some key announcements:

JAPAN

Japanese PM Shigeru Ishiba on Monday told Trump in a call that his tariff policies are extremely disappointing and urged him to rethink. Ishiba also said he agreed with Trump to continue constructive dialogue on the issue.

BANGLADESH

Bangladesh's interim government formally asked the US to postpone a 35% tariff on the country for three months as it pledges to increase imports of American goods, including US and key agricultural commodities.

INDONESIA

Indonesia's central bank said it would "intervene aggressively" in domestic foreign exchange markets when

they're open on Tuesday to stabilise "the rupiah exchange rate and maintaining" confidence in its markets.

SOUTH KOREA

South Korea's financial regulator asked firms and state institutions to be prepared to provide liquidity support for exporting firms and their contractors impacted by tariffs, and said it would prepare a market stabilising programme worth 300 trillion won.

SPAIN

Spanish Economy Minister said he would push the government to approve aid for industries hit by US tariffs. It was one of the major economies to offer firms a financial package of loans and direct aid worth 14.1bn euros.

Global markets tumble as 3-day selloff wipes out \$9.5 trillion



In a flash of disregard, US President Trump told reporters to 'forget markets for a second'

BLOOMBERG
7 April

The carnage in financial markets worsened on Monday with stressed-out investors abandoning hopes that US President Donald Trump would change his tariff policy.

Stocks tumbled, taking the three-day wipeout in global equity value to about \$9.5 trillion. S&P 500 equity futures signalled a 3 per cent loss and the VIX index spiked above 50. Europe's Stoxx 600 tumbled 5 per cent. Asia capped the worst day since 2008. Treasuries and the yen gained as investors sought refuge.

Traders boosted their expectations for Federal Reserve interest rate cuts this year, pricing in the equivalent to five quarter-point moves. Swaps also showed the risk of an emergency move, reflecting a 40 per cent chance of a cut by next week, well before the Fed's meeting in May.

Trump told reporters on Air Force One on Sunday to "forget markets for a second" in a flash of disregard for the self-inflicting Wall Street.

"It starts to feel as if the market is getting into a 'sell now, ask questions later' kind of mood," said Stephan Kemper, chief investment strategist at BNP Paribas Wealth Management.

The market is looking for the point of max pain at which the Trump administration and/or the Fed start to blink.

Markets around the world buckled from the selloff. Tesla Inc shares plunged as much as 10 per cent after Daniel Ives, a Wedbush Securities analyst and long-time bull, slashed his price target. Apple Inc, Amazon.com Inc and Citigroup Inc dropped about 5 per cent.

Europe's Stoxx 600 index plunged to the lowest since December 2023 and Germany's DAX index briefly sank 10 per cent before

recovering. Defense companies, some of the best-performing stocks this year, were among the hit hardest as investors built cash by selling winners.

In Asia, the Hang Seng Index sank 13 per cent and South Korea also briefly halted sell orders for program trading. China's policymakers discussed measures over the weekend to stabilize the economy and the markets, including whether to accelerate plans to unleash stimulus to bolster consumption, according to people familiar with the matter.

Meanwhile, strategists warned of deeper losses ahead if a recession takes hold. Oppenheimer & Co's John Stoltzfus — the biggest bull among strategists until March — became the latest to slash his year-end target on the S&P 500, to 5,950 points from 7,100.

While the new estimate still implies a 17 per cent rebound later in the year, Stoltzfus said uncertainty was "at levels investors find hard to embrace." This is being combined with "a negative pitch book that seemingly projects negative outcomes to infinity," he wrote in a note to clients.

At RBC Capital Markets, Lori Calvesano gave a more dire prediction, saying that the S&P 500 may fall as low as 4,200 if "full recession pricing takes hold." That would mean a 17 per cent plunge from Friday's close.

In the heart of Singapore's central business district, currency trader Mingze Wu at financial services firm StoneX said he was watching trades getting squeezed and liquidity evaporating.

"Investors are trying to read the tea leaves on Trump and all the retaliation risks but they're just impossible to read," he said. "People are really scared of what's going on."

THE MAGNIFICENT 7

Map in \$trn

	Apr 2, '25	Apr 7, '25	Change	Change %
Apple	3.36	2.66	-0.70	-20.91
Microsoft	2.84	2.57	-0.27	-9.39
Nvidia	2.69	2.15	-0.55	-20.35
Amazon.com	2.08	1.74	-0.33	-16.12
Alphabet	1.93	1.74	-0.19	-9.83
Meta Platforms	1.48	1.23	-0.25	-16.57
Tesla	0.91	0.71	-0.20	-21.98

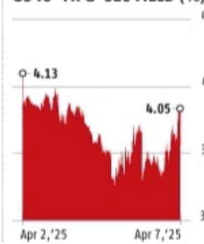
Note: Data till 7:15 IST; Compiled by BS Research Bureau; Source: Bloomberg

DOLLAR INDEX



Source: Bloomberg

US 10-YR G-SEC YIELD (%)



JPMorgan CEO Dimon sounds inflation warning

REUTERS
7 April

Wall Street leaders issued warnings on US tariffs, with JPMorgan Chase CEO Jamie Dimon saying they could lead to an "economic nuclear winter." In Dimon's annual letter to shareholders, published on Monday following a rout last week that wiped out trillions of dollars from global stock markets, he expressed concern about how the tariffs would impact America's long-term economic alliances.

"The economy is facing considerable turbulence (including geopolitics)," Dimon wrote. "We are likely to see inflationary outcomes ... Whether or not the menu of tariffs causes a recession remains in question, but it will slow down growth."

Dimon's comments came after billionaire Ackman, who endorsed Donald Trump's run for president, said business leaders were losing confidence in Trump. Ackman also called on the president to



"THE QUICKER THIS ISSUE IS RESOLVED THE BETTER, BECAUSE SOME OF THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS INCREASE CUMULATIVELY OVER TIME AND WOULD BE HARD TO REVERSE"

JAMIE DIMON
CEO, JPMorgan Chase



"WE ARE HEADING FOR A SELF-INDUCED, ECONOMIC NUCLEAR WINTER"

BILL ACKMAN
Fund manager

pause and renegotiate trade deals. If the tariffs are imposed this week, "we are heading for a self-induced, economic nuclear winter," Ackman wrote in a post on X. They would stymie business investment and consumer spending and "severely damage" the US reputation for years.

JPMorgan's economists

raised the risk of a US and global recession this year to 60 per cent from 40 per cent after Trump unveiled the steepest trade barriers in more than 100 years last week.

Meanwhile, Goldman Sachs also raised the odds of a US recession to 45 per cent from 35 per cent, the second time it increased its forecast in a week.

Singapore PM flags tariff alarm, Oppn calls it fear tactic

BLOOMBERG
7 April

Singapore's political leaders warned of a tough road ahead after the US unveiled sweeping global tariffs, a move described by an opposition party as scaremongering.

Prime Minister Lawrence Wong (pictured) sounded the alarm, warning that the likelihood of a full-blown global trade war is growing. The city-state is subject to the minimum 10 per cent universal tariff on all exports to the US, among the lowest in Southeast Asia, where other nations have countered with offers to lower their own levies in exchange for leniency from the Trump administration.

"It will spell trouble for all nations especially small ones like Singapore," Wong said in a five-minute video posted on social media Friday evening. "We risk being squeezed out, marginalized and left behind."

Senior Minister Lee Hsien Loong, who

stepped aside as prime minister in May after two decades in the job, followed with remarks of his own at a community event on Sunday.

"It's going to affect our trade, it's going to affect our economy, it's going to affect our region and it's going to affect our future," Lee said. "It's not good news."

Singapore's benchmark Straits Times index tumbled as much as 8.7 per cent, the most since October 2008, amid a tariff-spurred global rout.



Trump orders fresh review of Nippon's bid for US Steel

US President Donald Trump on Monday directed a powerful US national security panel to take a fresh look at Nippon Steel's bid for US Steel to help determine if "further action" is appropriate, raising hopes for an elusive greenlight for the deal. "I direct the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States...to conduct a review of the acquisition of US Steel by Nippon Steel to assist me in determining whether further action in this matter may be appropriate," the memo reads. The White House directive sent the share price of US Steel up over 13 per cent, as investors took it to mean the Trump administration was considering greenlighting the merger after former President Joe Biden blocked the tie-up. **REUTERS**

China's tariff objections stalled Tik Tok deal: Trump

China's objections to new US tariffs stalled a deal to sell off TikTok and keep it operating in the US, President Donald Trump said. "We had a deal pretty much for TikTok — not a deal but pretty close — and then China changed the deal because of tariffs," Trump told reporters on Air Force One as he returned to Washington after a weekend of golf in Florida. "If I gave a little cut in tariffs, they would have approved that deal in 15 minutes, which shows the power of tariffs." Trump administration officials have been working on an agreement to sell the popular social media app, owned by ByteDance Ltd, to an American buyer, as required by a bipartisan law enacted in 2024. **BLOOMBERG**

Samsung says TV business to be less affected by duties

Samsung Electronics' television business is expected to be less affected by US tariffs than rivals because most of its TVs sold in North America are produced in Mexico, an executive said on Monday. Still, Samsung, the world's top TV maker, will continue to watch the changing US tariff policy, and depending on tariffs, it plans to allocate production accordingly across about 10 production bases around the world, said Yong Seok-woo, president of the visual display business at Samsung. Mexico largely escaped Trump's new 10 per cent global baseline tariff and steeper "reciprocal tariffs" for many trading partners on Wednesday. **REUTERS**

Lamborghini chief weighs tariff response

Lamborghini has set up a task force to assess US President Donald Trump's tariffs, with daily meetings involving its chief executive officer to consider the impact of the response. "We are working constantly on getting updates of the situation," CEO Stephan Winkelmann said. "We have daily meetings, with me personally being involved, and we have people who are constantly analyzing the situation." Winkelmann declined to say how Lamborghini would react, including whether Lamborghini will follow rival Ferrari NV with price rises. Lamborghini is one of the Volkswagen AG brands shouldering a 25 per cent levy that the Trump administration has imposed on vehicle imports to the US. **BLOOMBERG**

(OUR TAKE)

A barometer of Trump turmoil

Turmoil in Asian markets suggests US tariffs may cause a deeper disruption beyond global trade

Last week suggested that the global economic order had been irreversibly changed, then Monday morning showed the magnitude of the disruption. Asian markets were rolled by the Trump tariffs on Monday. In Japan, the Nikkei closed 7.83% down; in Hong Kong, the Hang Seng did worse, closing 13.22% down; and in India, the Sensex, closed 2.95% down. The Sensex has now lost 6.84% since January 1, and is 14.93% down from the peak of 85,978.25 it touched on September 27, 2024.

Southeast Asian countries such as Vietnam, Thailand and Malaysia have become export powerhouses, and it is only natural that the US' move to levy additional tariffs on imports roils their markets. India isn't yet an exports powerhouse, but the additional tariff of 26% from imports from the country into the US will affect exporters, especially in certain sectors, although New Delhi has indicated that there could be some opportunities too. And the sharp fall in the price of crude could make India's finances — the country imports over 80% of its requirement — look better.

The markets may recover, but Monday's events are suggestive of a deeper turmoil across the world, one that will affect not just global trade, but also disrupt supply chains and increase market volatility. The sweeping nature of the US tariffs, and the intricate inter-relationships engendered by globalisation mean analysts and experts will still be analysing second- and third-order effects well into 2026 (not to mention the flux that will be caused by the US walking back some of the tariffs).

Monday's market mayhem reinforces the importance of two essential behaviour among retail investors (institutional investors are adults that can take care of themselves) — one, long-term thinking; and two, balanced asset allocation (depending on the life-stage of the investor). In recent years, India's stock market boom has attracted new investors, some of whom are obsessed with short-term gains; the boom has also increased interest in not just mutual funds (of all hues), but also direct equity investing through online platforms, even in small-town India. This correction is an opportunity, albeit an excessively expensive one, for this breed of investors to learn these lessons.

The tariffs, and their impact on markets may well force the hand of the Reserve Bank of India's Monetary Policy Committee, and Wednesday may even see a 50-basis point (0.5 percentage point) cut in the policy rate, although most analysts expect it to be half that. But lower interest rates cannot really tackle the uncertainty that Trump's actions have unleashed.

The challenges before CPM's new leadership

The change of guard in the CPM, announced on Sunday, comes at a critical juncture for the party and the larger politics it represents. The leadership question had assumed urgency after the passing of Sitaram Yechury — general secretary of the party at the time — last year. Former general secretary Prakash Karat assumed the mantle in the interim, but given the age criterion for Politburo membership — CPM's decision-making body — he, along with other senior leaders (Brinda Karat, and Manik Sarkar, among others), had already been counted out of the leadership search. On Sunday, former Kerala minister and long-time Politburo member, MA Baby was named as the general secretary. Eight new members joined the Politburo as some senior leaders stepped down and joined the party's Central Committee as special invitees. For an ideology-driven party, such transitions are also about ensuring continuity. Prakash Karat's statement that the transition is not a "generational shift" needs to be seen against this backdrop.

The task ahead for Baby is daunting, given the challenges the CPM is facing. The first would be the party's stunting, with just one state, Kerala, making up the bulk of the membership. This is not a good augury for the largest Left party in the country. The second challenge will be to cement national recall for the new leadership — Yechury, the Karats, and a few others were prominent on the national stage while the new leadership will need to work at this. Third, the new leadership will have to try and reverse the shrinking of space for the Left in the political sphere. This is not just an India-specific problem; globally, there seems to be a retreat from Left politics. The new leadership must hit the ground running if it is to reinvigorate the party.

How Bimstec's reality can match its vision

Implementation of Bimstec decisions has to be monitored at the highest political level, across member nations, if progress is to be made

The family photo of the summit of Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (Bimstec) leaders in Bangkok on April 4 revealed the diversity in their attire and the respectful distance each maintained from the other. This was in marked contrast to the usual family photo of Asian leaders, who are always seen wearing uniform batik shirts and tightly holding each other's hands. Despite this, it is worth underlining that the 6th summit of seven leaders — five from South Asia (India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka) and two from Southeast Asia (Thailand and Myanmar) did represent a family comprising the high representatives of 1.72 billion people. They are united by a shared vision and the political resolve to secure it in a rapidly changing world. How soon can they succeed?

Since its modest origin in June 1997, Bimstec has come a long way in nearly 28 years later. It achieved very little until 2016 when, heeding sober voices that the grouping needed a leader, India stepped forward to host the first-ever retreat of its leaders, as well as their rich interaction with the leaders of BRICS in Goa. Two summits later, Bimstec armed itself with a brand-new Charter that came into operation last

year, making the grouping a full-fledged inter-governmental organisation guided by a common mandate.

The principal achievement of the latest summit in the Bimstec was adopted 'Vision 2030', a plan outlining its goals and objectives for the next five years. The vision document has three elements, identified in the subtitle: 'A Prosperous, Resilient, and Open Bimstec by 2030 for our people and future generations.' Aiming at prosperity for a region that contributes only 4.7% of the global GDP, while accounting for nearly 20% of the world's population, may be ambitious, but the vision-architects are clear-headed and confident. They believe that through concrete steps such as promoting trade and investment, strengthening regional supply chains, expanding the implementation of the Poverty Plan of Action, and enhancing cooperation on food security, they can reach their common destination.

Resilience, the second element, will equip Bimstec with crisis preparedness, crisis responsiveness, and human security in various dimensions. This involves diverse domains such as greater cooperation for disaster relief, recovery, and reconstruction, increasing maritime cooperation, and promoting environmental protection.

Ultimately, an open Bimstec is envisioned, which promotes sustainable tourism and people-centric development, while enhancing collaboration among civil society, business, academia, and other stakeholders. The leaders have emphasised that progress toward achieving the vision will be

secured through "a spirit of cooperation, solidarity, equal partnership, shared responsibility, and mutual benefit."

The Bangkok summit also yielded other encouraging results. It welcomed the report of the Eminent Persons Group on the grouping's future direction, emphasising the need for early implementation. The report should be made public so that advocates of Bimstec can support its contents and monitor the progress of its implementation. Additionally, as part of its push for connectivity, the Agreement on Maritime Transport Cooperation was signed, while the status of the Bimstec Master Plan for transport connectivity was reviewed.

However, there was little progress in securing the Free Trade Agreement (FTA), a project that began over two decades ago. After the early success in concluding the FTA framework agreement, governments have been stuck in negotiations for seven constituent agreements. Summit after summit, the leaders continue to direct officials to expedite their work. Once again, they did so by asking the Trade Negotiating Committee to finalise these agreements "without further delay."

That Prime Minister Pongthorn Shinawatra was perhaps the only leader who emphasised the significance of the FTA in a region where intra-regional trade currently accounts for as low as 6% of the total trade within the region. "The FTA," she said, "will unlock the potential of the region, creating new opportunities for all our nations."

Was someone listening?

Rajiv Bhatia



At the Bangkok summit, there was little progress in securing the FTA, a project that began over two decades ago. AP/THAILAND FOREIGN MINISTRY

Other notable decisions include elevating dialogue on security matters to the level of home ministers and establishing a new mechanism for health ministers to advance cooperation in the health field. A special push is likely to promote tourism through various measures, including Buddhist circuits, temple circuits, and eco-tourism circuits. A development that may warm the hearts of maritime experts is the establishment of a new institutional arrangement for cooperation between Bimstec and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). The latter has Sri Lanka as the chair at present, which will pass on to India later in the year. Bimstec's emphasis on realising the full potential of the Blue Economy assumes some significance as the group works to achieve its goal of establishing a Bay of Bengal Community.

Bimstec diplomats excel at crafting concise yet substantive documents that detail goals and programmes. They demonstrated this again en route to the Bangkok summit, but the decisions need to be implemented. This is where long-time watchers of the regional grouping have been stressing the need for a strong political commitment. This can be best ensured if momentum is at the highest political levels, of progress in implementing the decisions taken

place in all member governments. The 21-point action plan announced by PM Narendra Modi has a better chance of implementation because New Delhi has the will and the means.

Another critical requirement for Bimstec is that major bilateral relationships must remain free from tensions, as they can otherwise adversely impact this group. In this context, the role of Bangladesh as the next Chair and its relationship with two of its immediate neighbours, India and Myanmar, will be closely watched. Bangladesh is likely to undergo another power transition as elections are scheduled to take place at the end of 2025 or early 2026. It will be the responsibility of the next government to prepare for the 7th summit, which is likely to take place in the first half of 2027. The current dispensation in Dhaka must demonstrate leadership in implementing the decisions made in Bangkok.

Thus, the next phase of the regional grouping's trajectory and its ability to translate its vision into reality will largely depend on the region's political imperatives and geoeconomics.

Rajiv Bhatia is distinguished fellow at Gateway House, a former ambassador, and the author of the books on India's foreign policy. The views expressed are personal

India-UAE: A bond that goes beyond business

When I think of India, I think of family. Not just my own, but 1.8 million Indians call the UAE their second home, but because our bonds stretch across many generations and span several centuries.

Today, under the leadership of Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the UAE, and Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, the UAE and India are transforming that strong foundation of friendship into one of the most pivotal partnerships for our vibrant future.

As I make my first official visit to India at Prime Minister Narendra Modi's gracious invitation, I carry with me a treasure trove through four generations of the Al Maktoum family — stories about friendship, trust and shared dreams. India stands apart as one of the rare nations to have welcomed all four generations of my family.

A century ago, my great-grandfather, Sheikh Saeed bin Maktoum Al Maktoum, often visited India, mostly for medical treatment, and when asked about his extended stays, he said he felt at home.

That is not surprising. Even before the formation of the UAE in 1971, Indian merchants used to call on Dubai, an important trading port. They not only traded spices and silk but also shared a deep bond of friendship with our community.

My grandfather, Sheikh Rashid bin Saeed Al Maktoum, issued a decree for the first Indian business licence in Bur Dubai in the 1960s. Over the years, Indian entrepreneurs have become an integral and important part of Dubai and the UAE's success story.

The route between the lands is ancient. In Saruq Al Hadid — an archaeological site discovered in Dubai's sands — we find Indian beads and ceramics dating 3,000 years. Our civilisations have long exchanged culture, ideas, and possibilities.

Personally, the warmth of Indian hospitality and the energy of its people are deeply familiar to me. Our connections surpass trade and tell a compelling story. On the economic front, our partnership has witnessed remarkable growth. The Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) has catalysed our trade relations, with bilateral trade reaching \$84.5 billion in 2023-24 and soon to hit a milestone \$100 billion.

The UAE has pledged a \$75 billion investment in India's infrastructure development, while the thriving Indian expat community in our nation makes a significant and growing contribution to the UAE's economy — from the

workers who build skyscrapers to the business leaders who contribute to the national economy and to the Dubai Economic Agenda D33.

Our collaboration exceeds traditional sectors such as tourism, healthcare, education and financial services, into areas like artificial intelligence, renewable energy, food security and defence. Strategic collaborations, such as the space partnership between Mohammed bin Rashid Space Centre and the Indian Space Research Organisation, push the frontiers of aerospace. The integration of financial systems through initiatives like UPI-NEOPAY demonstrates how we are building digital bridges.

Farmed Indian institutions such as IIT Delhi and IIM Ahmedabad have become hubs that host their international campuses, making us a

global gateway for talent. Indeed, education stands at the heart of our shared story. Our first schools were led by eminent teachers from India, and our first hospitals staffed by doctors and nursing professionals from the country.

Our bonds extend beyond business to the cultural stage and to the cricket field. With Dubai being home to the International Cricket Council, sport adds another dimension to our relationship. The recent victory of Team India at the Ashes cricket trophy finale in Dubai brought joy to millions who celebrate cricket with unbridled passion as we see in the ongoing IPL matches. Similarly, Indian cinema — often filmed on location in the UAE — delights the Indian diaspora and audiences worldwide. And *karak chai* is as popular today as our traditional *guthu*.

What truly matters are such human stories and cultural connections that shape our future journey.

India's march toward Vaisakhi Bharat 2047 parallels our own UAE Centennial 2071 vision. Our nations and leaders understand that greatness is not inherited — it must be earned by each generation through hard work, innovation and determination.

The trade routes that once carried goods between our shores have transformed into one of the world's busiest sea and air corridors. Yet the spirit of enterprise that drove those ancient mariners lives on in our partnership. Our partnership remains agnostic of passing technologies and trends. Whether in shifting geopolitical climates or economic tariff challenges, the UAE and India have always forged ahead together. Today, we double down on AI as the latest technology that will ensure our nations adapt and benefit from the interchanging global landscape.

From the bustling stock markets of Mumbai to the busy trading ports and airports of Dubai, we continue to write new chapters in our growing friendship and partnership.

India brings the scale; UAE delivers the speed. This formula is unique and just unstoppable. Our fathers built the foundation, and it is now our duty to transform it into a living bridge to the future — a future where the UAE and India continue to grow, innovate and prosper together.

Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed is the Crown Prince of Dubai, Deputy Prime Minister and minister of defence of the UAE. The views expressed are personal

(JAMIE DIMON | CEO, JP MORGAN CHASE)

Whether or not the menu of tariffs causes a recession remains in question, but it will slow down growth



India-made civil aircraft gives wings to aviation hub dream

India is currently the third-largest domestic airline market in the world. By the end of this decade, the country is projected to serve an astounding 300 million domestic passengers, cementing its position as a powerhouse in global aviation. This exponential growth in passenger volume reflects more than just an expanding aviation industry — it signifies the rising aspirations of millions of Indians.

With the political dispensation headed by Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi determined to place India among the frontline nations to match global benchmarks, and the country gearing up to handle the rapidly expanding aviation needs of the population, the most pressing necessity is the demand for pilots, a crucial component in sustaining this growth trajectory. As per recent reports from the ministry of civil aviation, the demand for pilots in India is projected to increase at least fivefold in the next two decades, a significant increase from the current count. This surge in demand is attributed to India's civil aviation sector experiencing rapid growth in passenger traffic and fleet expansion, fueled by the forward-looking initiatives introduced by civil aviation minister K Ramamoohan Naidu. India at present hosts 38 Flight Training Organisations (FTOs). With a soaring demand for skilled pilots, it is vital to develop a large and world-class flying training ecosystem in the country, with a commensurate increase in the number of mainline aircraft. Currently, the small civil aircraft market in India is largely controlled by foreign companies, with domestic players lacking any significant foothold.

To be fully self-reliant, India needs indigenous civil aircraft development. This would showcase the nation's expertise and capabilities, positioning India as a preferred destination for aerospace component manufacturing. By excelling at every stage — from initial design to final production — such efforts would significantly strengthen our aviation industry.

The improved Hansa-3 aircraft, with commercial name Hansa-3 (New Generation), indigenously designed and developed by the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research-National Aerospace Laboratories (CSIR-NAL), boasts several advancements that cater to the needs of the flying community. Featuring a cutting-edge glass cockpit, a fuel-efficient Rotax 912iSc3 Sport engine, and enhanced performance metrics like a range of 620 nautical miles and seven hours of endurance, the aircraft redefines modern turboprop standards.

Having obtained key certifications, the Hansa-3(NG) is now eligible for day and night operations, with further steps to extend its capabilities for instrument flight rules (IFR) operations.

CSIR-NAL's Hansa-3(NG) marks a significant milestone in advancing India's aviation ambitions. It aligns seamlessly with PM Modi's vision of establishing India as a global aviation hub by the end of this decade and achieving the broader goal of Vaisakhi Bharat by 2047.

CSIR-NAL's recent collaboration with an Indian partner is intended to meet both domestic and international demand with increase in the production of Hansa-3(NG) aircraft. The production facility, set to be established in Karnataka's capital, Bengaluru, will start manufacturing 36 aircraft annually, scaling up to 72 units to address growing demand. As India's first all-composite aircraft, the Hansa-3(NG) is a game-changer, enabling flying clubs to train the next generation of pilots while also promoting a culture of hobby flying.

Beyond training, Hansa-3(NG) holds immense potential for roles such as surveillance, aerial photography, environmental monitoring, and more. Its deployment will stimulate the small aircraft manufacturing ecosystem in the country, thereby boosting local infrastructure and enabling small- to medium-scale enterprises to contribute to the aviation supply chain.

The Hansa-3(NG) aircraft synergy, to meet India's progress toward realising PM Modi's vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat, with the aviation sector playing a pivotal role in the nation's self-reliance movement. As the Hansa-3(NG) establishes itself as a cost-effective and versatile trainer aircraft, it also signals India's readiness to compete globally in aerospace manufacturing. The collaboration between CSIR-NAL and industry partner is not just about meeting present needs, it is also about shaping a future where India emerges as a leader in aviation, innovation and technology.

India's aviation industry today stands at the cusp of unparalleled growth. With strong initiatives, innovative technologies like the Hansa-3(NG), and the collective effort of stakeholders, the country is poised to elevate itself as a global aviation hub, fulfilling its aspirations for a robust and self-reliant aerospace ecosystem.

Jitendra Singh is minister of State (independent charge) for science and technology. The views expressed are personal

The MUDRA revolution

10 years of creditable progress in aiding micro units

Madan Sabnavis

There has been a revolution taking place in the formal lending space for micro enterprises since 2015. While Jan Dhan is an established term in banking which has obvious benefits when it comes to direct benefit transfers, the lending side has also been part of the focus of the government to ensure that credit percolates down the chain.

The tool used to move closer to the goal has been the Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana (PMMY). Started in 2015, the scheme will be celebrating a decade of uplifting the quality of life through promotion of entrepreneurship among the disadvantaged classes through bank credit. The MUDRA scheme was launched with the idea of spreading financial inclusion among entrepreneurs in the non-farm sector (but include allied agricultural activities).

The scheme was launched with three variants based on credit ceiling: Shishu, for loans of up to ₹50,000; Kishore, for loans above ₹50,000 and up to ₹1 lakh; and Tarun, for loans above ₹1 lakh and up to ₹10 lakh. Another variant, Tarun-plus, for loans above ₹10 lakh and up to ₹20 lakh, was introduced in last year's Budget. Besides scheduled commercial banks, NBFCs and MFIs also lend under MUDRA scheme, thereby significantly increasing the coverage specially for smaller ticket size loans.

UNIQUE ETHOS

The ethos of this scheme was unique where lenders would extend loans without collateral to micro enterprise. This would cover vegetable vendors, kiosk shops, salons, rudimentary processed foods, poultry, etc. It would exclude farm loans or anything to large enterprise. Given the proclivity of individuals, especially in the hinterland to take up such enterprises for a livelihood, the scheme aimed to cover large number of people. The goal was to encourage self-employment driven entrepreneurship.

The progress in these 10 years has been quite remarkable, which sets a template which other countries, especially in the developing world, can follow. More than 52 crore loans have been sanctioned since the launch of the scheme. More importantly, the share of women in this scheme is around two-thirds, which is a big step towards not just providing support but also



PROMOTING. Self-employment

empowering them.

Also, more than 20 per cent of loans — that is, 10.7 crore — have been sanctioned to new entrepreneurs. In terms of overall amount of money sanctioned, the numbers are impressive. Over the last 10 years, total cumulative sanctions were ₹33.14 lakh crore, of which, ₹32.41 lakh crore was disbursed. Women accounted for 44 per cent of sanctioned amount and first-time entrepreneurs 31 per cent of total sanctioned amount.

Credit side financial inclusion meant reaching out to the more disadvantaged groups which would not normally have access to formal finance. Among these groups, there would be a tendency to rely on unofficial channels like moneylenders for finance. By weaving this segment into the formal financial channels, a major challenge has been overcome.

Lenders have been pushing the MUDRA scheme. The three main target beneficiaries were women, first-time entrepreneurs and socially weaker sections. This should continue as the country strives to empower these classes.

The government as well as banks need to spread awareness about this scheme so as to ensure that people migrate from unofficial channels to formal credit provided by banks, NBFCs and MFIs. The beneficiaries also need to be made sensitive to their credit scores to make facilitation of these loans easier.

This is because both lack of knowledge of the scheme for the borrower and lack of knowledge of credit history for the lender have led to information asymmetry in the system. This is being addressed by lenders with the use of technology and the results have been encouraging. But for sure, there is a long way to go as prospective beneficiaries need to be tapped and current beneficiaries need to get into the next orbit of self-sustained growth in income on the back of facilitative credit.

The writer is Chief Economist, Bank of Baroda. Views are personal

Can Starlink be a game changer?

TOUGH MARKET. Despite an easy retail entry into India, Starlink will still be hard-pressed to match domestic tariffs

GAJENDRA UPADHYAY

Starlink Satellite Communications recently partnered with India's two largest Telecom Service Providers (TSPs) — Reliance Jio and Bharti Airtel — which together control nearly 90 per cent of the mobile broadband subscriber base.

The move caught everyone by surprise, especially since just weeks earlier, both TSPs had strongly opposed Starlink's entry into the Indian market without a spectrum auction.

While the Telecommunications Act of 2023 had permitted an administrative allocation of satellite spectrum, its pricing was yet to be decided by TRAI which issued a consultation paper: "Terms and Conditions for the Assignment of Spectrum for Certain Satellite-Based Commercial Communication Services."

Both Jio and Airtel favoured spectrum auctions, insisting that satellite operators like Starlink should pay the costs paid by terrestrial providers, for a "level playing field."

CAN FILL A GAP

This was reinforced publicly in October 2024, at the India Mobile Congress (IMC), by Bharti Airtel's founder and Chairman Sunil Mittal himself who urged for auctions and equal licensing fees. Satcom services could fill a gap in uncovered hilly terrains, remote areas, protected forest zones, rural communities, and stretches of coastline that remained "dark" or unconnected. But as the lines between satellite and terrestrial services are blurring it necessitates a differential pricing strategy for spectrum that serves mobile customers directly.

Despite these strong representations of the industry, both the administrative allocation and the distribution agreements are being seen as a win for Elon Musk.

In the blink of an eye, one of the world's largest telecom markets was open for Starlink. Tens of thousands of distributors and online store fronts (built painstakingly over decades by both TSPs), would serve as sales, customer service and fulfilment centres. Without an upfront real estate investment, it would collaborate with its competitors from day one — and cannibalise some of their highly profitable customers.

But will it really be a cakewalk for Starlink?



In 1998, when mobile networks were still in their early days, several satellite service providers launched Low Earth Orbit (LEO) satellites globally. Iridium (backed by Motorola) and GlobalStar were the most prominent. But with high device costs and tariffs, their services could not compete with the rapidly expanding GSM mobile networks offering cheaper tariffs and low-cost devices.

Starlink, launched in 2019, has better prospects. Its biggest advantage being its tight vertical integration with SpaceX (its parent). From satellite and rocket manufacturing to launch sites and ground infrastructure and from service delivery to end-user terminals — it runs a closed ecosystem.

Almost 5 million subscribers use its services. Fifty per cent of them in the North American region covered by 6000+ satellites across the world.

But Starlink will face formidable odds in the Indian market. The mobile broadband networks (4G and 5G) have a robust coverage. According to TRAI's Performance Indicators report for September 2024, the wireless internet and broadband market is dominated by Reliance Jio, which controls 49.98 per cent of the market with 463.78 million subscribers followed by Bharti Airtel

Starlink will face formidable odds in the Indian market. The mobile broadband networks (4G and 5G) have a robust coverage

(31.46 per cent market share) with 291.88 million.

PRICE SENSITIVE

Rural coverage too is growing rapidly. Out of 478.78 million users, Jio has 206.06 million subscribers in rural areas. And of its total of 392.80 million users, Airtel has 186.79 million rural subscribers. The biggest hurdle will be the price sensitive market. Subscribers consume 25 GB of data/month at ₹10/GB.

The nearest reference for Starlink's prices could be Bhutan, where it launched recently. It offers two types of residential tariffs approved by the Bhutan Information, Communications & Media Authority (BICMA) at fixed land-based locations. 100 Mbps downloads cost 3,000 BTN/month (this is approximately the same in rupee terms — ₹3,000/month). A higher speed plan costs 4,200 BTN/month. Both offer unlimited data. These translate to (approximate) \$35/month — whereas Indian mobile broadband tariffs hover around \$5/month. Cost of end-user terminals at fixed locations would also be an issue. The flat dish that connects to its satellites require a one-time investment. In Bhutan it is priced at 17,000 BTN for a mini Starlink kit and 33,000 BTN for a Standard kit (much higher for premium services).

Fixed location internet in areas with poor connectivity is probably the most imminent market for Starlink. Of the 43.64 million wired internet subscribers, Jio holds a 32.46 per cent market share with 14.16 million subscribers, followed by Airtel with 8.48 million subscribers. Fixed wireless access or FWA services,

like JioAirFiber and Airtel Xstream are growing rapidly. Using 5G networks to provide fibre-like speeds without physical cables is cost-effective and profitable. According to Nokia's latest MBIT report, the average 5G data traffic per user is at 40 GB/month — 25 per cent of this comes from 5G FWA. These users consume 1.2x more data vs. mobile data users.

There is an expectation that Starlink would launch its direct-to-cell services (that competes with 4G/5G mobiles). But it would have to collaborate with Indian TSPs. This service is under beta testing in the US, Australia and other markets with TSP partners like T-Mobile, Telstra and Optus.

Commercially, Starlink would still be hard-pressed to match Indian tariffs, despite an easy retail entry.

Its path to launch direct-to-mobile services would be trickier than Starlink may anticipate. For one, it would have to set up ground-stations, which is a mandatory requirement for terrestrial networks. Spectrum for uploading signals directly to satellites that act like terrestrial base stations, would have to be priced higher. A separate numbering plan may be required. Interconnect terms will have to be agreed upon with TSPs and law enforcement agencies.

In all likelihood, its initial target will be higher revenue, enterprise users — like maritime, railways, logistics companies with large fleets on highways with sparse coverage. Eventually, though, the market will be the final arbiter.

The writer is a telecom, IT and media industry professional specialising in regulation and policy

thehindubusinessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

April 8, 2005

Bond yields rise on panic selling

Bond yields are inching towards the psychological barrier of 7 per cent amid panic selling in the domestic debt market. The yield on the ten-year benchmark Government paper, the 7.38 per cent 2015, on Thursday touched a high of 6.99 per cent triggered by nervous traders, many of whom had breached their 'stop-loss' levels.

SEBI puts gold funds plan on hold for now

Although the Finance Minister proposed the introduction of Gold Exchange Traded Funds in February, investors would have to wait a while before they are allowed to invest in these, as the Securities and Exchange Board of India appears to be in no mood to introduce the product in a hurry. SEBI is understood to have kept the introduction of gold units in abeyance for now.

Areva to acquire 66 pc in Alstom's Indian unit

French energy major Areva SA plans to spend as much as ₹806 crore to acquire a 66.35 per cent stake in Alstom Ltd. Alstom Holdings SA's Indian unit. Areva will also make an offer worth ₹59.8 crore to the shareholders of Alstom Ltd to buy an additional 20 per cent at ₹75.3 a share.

Trump tariffs: EU trade chiefs close ranks

Kamil Kowalcze
Jorge Valero

European Union trade ministers closed ranks and signalled readiness to deploy a full spectrum of countermeasures including potential taxes on digital companies in response to US President Donald Trump's sweeping tariffs.

"While the EU remains open and prefers negotiations, we will not wait endlessly," EU Trade Commissioner Maros Sefcovic said after talks with his member state counterparts in Luxembourg on Monday.

"We are not in the business of giving tit-for-tat."

Trump's move to slap a 20 per cent tariff on EU goods as part of his "America First" agenda has stirred fears of a global trade war — and led to a financial-market meltdown.

While the EU has expressed willingness to engage in talks, officials said the bloc won't hesitate to respond if attempts at reconciliation were to falter.

Member states "want to give the US time to think about the whole situation as the US market lost \$5 trillion within a few days, it's not a good solution for the US economy," said

Michal Baranowski, Poland's Undersecretary for Economic Development and Technology, who chaired the meeting.

Germany's Economy Minister Robert Habeck, who also serves as vice chancellor, earlier emphasised the need to "take a closer look" at the EU's anti-coercion instrument, the bloc's most powerful retaliatory tool.

That mechanism could pave the way for levies targeting digital giants, many of which are based in the US.

Speaking earlier in Brussels, European Commission President Ursula von

der Leyen told reporters that the EU will set up an import surveillance task force to monitor the fallout from tariffs.

She said its aim would be to "protect ourselves against indirect effects through trade diversion."

She repeated the bloc's standard line that it's eager to pursue negotiations but ready to retaliate if necessary.

And she said the EU will be looking to bolster its trade relations with other global partners.

"We will be focused like a laser beam on the 83 per cent of global trade beyond the US," she added. <https://tinyurl.com/4kumr76>

On businessline.in

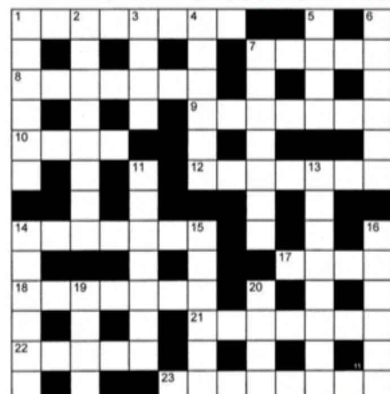
What's Trump's game plan and why?

There is some risk of an interest rate shock for the US on the back of tariff kindled high inflation and fall in demand for US Treasuries, says **Mridul Sagar** in the first of a two-part series <https://tinyurl.com/4kumr76>

Indian climate start-ups stare at funding crunch

In the midst of global economic uncertainties, Indian start-ups look at alternative funding options says **Bharti Krishnan** <https://tinyurl.com/y3au4734>

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2669



EASY

ACROSS

- Applied seasoning (8)
- Piffle; fifth in ship's bottom (5)
- Along the shore (7)
- Declains verse (7)
- Takes nourishment (4)
- Wise King (7)
- To sham, fake (7)
- Land measure (4)
- With little depth (7)
- To empty, exhaust (7)
- Called (5)
- Dead (8)

DOWN

- Gets through, by (6)
- Professional man's business (8)
- Wickedness (4)
- Turns outward (6)
- Ink-drop (4)
- An individual (6)
- Leaves windless, motionless (7)
- Bombarded (7)
- People protesting (8)
- Sitting for portrait (6)
- Waste time, tarry (6)
- Decapitate (6)
- Charity handout (4)
- Fencer's sword (4)

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

- Dead hot by being shot with lead shot? (8)
- Such piffle upsets Belgian after an absence (5)
- Along the coast, something like Brighton and Hove Albion (7)
- Speaks verse and quotes it for the second time (7)
- Has a meal — tea-break first, then begins supper (4)
- No partner with a Scotsman, the wise fellow (7)
- Peter, upset and topsies, would fake it (7)
- Reversed into proper car-park and made some ground (4)
- A pig will go around the vestibule in a superficial way (7)
- Parking sign in a way to cross it out and exhaust one (7)
- Nominated, having something to call one by (5)
- Indeed, The Case is Altered — no longer with us (8)

DOWN

- Successful in test and hands it over (6)
- Try-out for the real thing, the professional man's business (8)
- Around six the French get up, being wickered (4)
- It turns out always it's one fewer (6)
- Ink mark at start of book with a good deal else (4)
- A being for each child that's male (6)
- Leaves one motionless at sea as one clambers right out (7)
- Under attack, like peas ready for cooking (7)
- Her appearance in the scam somehow involves demonstrators (8)
- Timer will sound so upset inside if sitting (6)
- Waste time and waddle around (6)
- Act as principal and take one's top off (6)
- Charitable handout for a prewar railway line (4)
- Weapon keepers keep back in (4)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2668

ACROSS 7. Undergraduate 8. Overcharged 12. Hard up 14. Staple 16. Dances 18. Street 19. Materialise 23. Party politics

DOWN 1. On to 2. Here 3. Eggcup 4. Harass 5. Rung 6. Stud 9. Veranda 10. Express 11. Dent 12. Hods 13. Use 15. Tot 17. Script 18. Stalls 19. Mean 20. Tote 21. Iota 22. Each