



Tighten the process

The ECI must address legitimate concerns about voter rolls, transparency

The Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, has raised troubling questions about the conduct of elections based on what transpired in the 2024 Assembly elections in Maharashtra. There are specific issues: the abnormal increase in voters listed in electoral rolls between the general election and Assembly elections, higher turnout numbers after 5 p.m. on voting day, and the Centre amending the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961 to restrict access to CCTV footage of the polling process. Mr. Gandhi has also questioned the process of appointing Election Commissioners, with the Union government refusing to implement a Supreme Court judgment in 2023 that recommended having the Chief Justice of India as a part of the selection panel. While political parties, including the BJP and the Congress, have raised complaints about Electronic Voting Machines in the past, many did not stand scrutiny considering the administrative and technological safeguards. The Congress has now focused on the electoral process, raising more fundamental issues that need to be unpacked separately.

A preliminary analysis by *The Hindu* of registered voters in States where the general election and Assembly elections were proximate showed that there were precedents of sharp increases in the electorate before Assembly elections. While the number of new voters added before the Assembly elections was high – more than 39 lakh voters in just six months following the general election – similar increases were observed in 2014 as well. The increase of nearly four million voters is a large number and the ECI should proactively release machine-readable data on the rolls for verification. Regarding the allegation that turnout increases were abnormal after 5 p.m., the argument does not hold water. This is based on provisional turnout figures, and Election Commission of India (ECI) data show that there was no significant increase in voting after 5 p.m. in Maharashtra. Provisional turnout figures shared via an app by the ECI are not entirely accurate as these are dependent on the manual entry of numbers during elections and may have discrepancies when compared to the accurate machine count. As final figures via Form 7C data from each booth are released only after a lag, it would be incorrect to rely on provisional turnout figures. However, there is another contention that merits the ECI's response: retaining CCTV footage and providing parties and their nominees access to it to scrutinise complaints. The process of updating electoral rolls must be more transparent and involve political parties for scrutiny and verification. It is also incumbent upon parties to show alacrity during this process than cry foul after the results are out. Ultimately, the onus lies on the ECI to enhance transparency in the electoral process and, specifically, in providing electoral rolls and retaining CCTV footage for scrutiny.

History lessons

The top layer in men's and women's tennis now sports a settled look

The yearning for historical greatness is common among sports fans. Contemporary success and genius notwithstanding, there is often a tendency to hark back to the past and lament that present-day virtuosi are not a patch on the older ones. In tennis, this storyline was expected to unfold in the immediate aftermath of the 'Big Three' era as Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal exited, and Novak Djokovic started displaying his waning powers. It is to Carlos Alcaraz and Jannik Sinner's credit that they have allowed none of this talk to surface. Sunday's fascinating five-set French Open final was the latest piece of evidence as the Spaniard outlasted the World No. 1 over five hours and 29 minutes of intense, scintillating action. The victory brought Alcaraz his fifth Grand Slam trophy, and the World No. 2 became only the third man after Gustavo Kuerten and Nadal to defend titles at Roland-Garros this millennium. Alcaraz and Sinner have now swept the last six Majors and eight of the previous 11. They are firmly perched at the top of tennis' current totem pole, and going by the 12th act of their engrossing play in Paris, there is little doubt that it is their rivalry that will prove era-defining for the men's game.

Leading in, it was Sinner who had been more clinical, with the highlight being the ruthless dismantling of 24-time Major winner Djokovic in the semifinal. The 23-year-old had won 29 straight sets at Slams this year, and when he won 31 by pocketing the first two against Alcaraz, a third straight Major – fourth overall – loomed. But Alcaraz, who came in after triumphs in Monte Carlo and Rome, found a higher gear when threatened – erasing three match points in the fourth set, breaking Sinner when the Italian was serving for the championship and overcoming his own disappointment of failing to serve it in the fifth stanza to turn the tables fully. Saturday's women's final between No. 1 Aryna Sabalenka and No. 2 Coco Gauff was as dramatic and capricious, but alternated between middling and glorious. In the end, it was Gauff who proved steadier, overcoming some treacherous conditions and her erratic opponent in two hours and 38 minutes. Sabalenka, in fact, was the favourite, having also ousted three-time defending champion Iga Swiatek en route. But her power-packed game crumbled in the face of Gauff's restrained art as the American left her nursing consecutive defeats in Slam finals. For Gauff, 21, it was her second Major, and with a technique that is gradually improving, she is sure to rise further.

The Census and the remaking of a people

A population is a group of inhabitants in a particular place. A people, as in 'We the People', in the preamble of the Constitution, is a political community. The counting and the labelling of the population under multiple categories, i.e., a census, is not merely a technical exercise. It mediates the transformation of the population to a people in a significant manner. The people – a political community – have a shared view of how they govern themselves and allocate their resources. The 2027 Census will so impact the notion of people that it is going to be a centennial event, like the COVID-19 pandemic that delayed the decadal census that was to happen in 2021.

A census counts the total population, and under various categories and qualities – rural and urban, Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST), economic activity, literacy and education, housing and household amenities, migration, fertility and mortality. It also enumerates the latest administrative map of the country. A census, technically speaking, only captures the reality that exists. But the very act of capturing it under definitive categories alters and creates realities. There are organic, natural demographic trends which are underway, whether you document them or not. For instance, we know that more people in Chennai or Mumbai speak Hindi today than 20 years ago. In the same time period, we know that Kerala received and sent out a large number of migrants, but we do not know the exact numbers. These patterns of birth, death, migration, languages, and economic activity will have political implications; their recording itself is an influence of that process. The study of this link, between demography and politics (political demography), is an underdeveloped field the world over.

Issue of parliamentary representation
After half a century, India's parliamentary representation will be redistributed between the States. Article 81 of the Constitution mandates that the next inter-State redistribution of representation according to population will be done after "the relevant figures for the first census taken after the year 2026 have been published". The Census of 2021 was delayed due to the pandemic, but it could have been done much earlier than now. In normal course, the first Census after 2026 would have been in 2031, with the new delimitation exercise after that. The delay in the 2021 Census has advanced delimitation by at least five years. This is going to be the first census in which all data will be captured digitally, and its processing can be much faster than previous ones which took up to three years.

The work of past Delimitation Commissions took years, but that too will be much quicker in the next round. All things considered, it is



Varghese K. George

possible, and even likely, that the general election in 2029 can be conducted on the basis of a new parliamentary map of India.

What happens if the distribution of population becomes the sole criteria for the redistribution of parliamentary seats? Some States have grown faster population-wise and slower economy-wise; for some States, the inverse holds true. People are moving from where there are more of them to where there are fewer of them such as from the north and central regions of the country to the west and southern regions, and also to Delhi NCR which is in the heartland. This movement is linked to demography and the economy. People are moving in search of better opportunities, and, in many cases, to escape distress. Regions of higher economic growth attract people from elsewhere, while their native populations age. If relative population remains the only and sole criteria for an inter-State reallocation of parliamentary representation, political power will move from regions with a 'stronger economy-low birth rate' combination to regions that have a 'weaker economy-high birth rate' combination. The Centre has said that the demand for fair delimitation from States that fear a reduction in their political representation will be discussed at the appropriate time, but there is no clarity as yet on its thoughts on this issue.

Factors of caste, revenue sharing

There are other adjacent factors that are inherent and contingent upon Census 2027, which will be determinants in this remaking of the people. For the first time since Independence, all castes will be counted separately as against the counting of only SCs and STs now. The caste census since 1931, during British rule, triggered multiple claims and resultant politics. It will be difficult to predict the political impact of a new caste census, but it is certain that the clamour for removal of the 50% ceiling on quotas will get louder. The next delimitation will allocate one third of the seats in Parliament and Assemblies for women. The Centre has made it clear that it will push for simultaneous elections to Parliament and the State Assemblies.

The individual citizen is considered to constitute the elementary unit of people, in liberal democracy. But a simple reading of the relevant provisions of the Constitution makes it clear how group identities were accepted in the constitutional scheme of things – before that in the national movement, and later in governance. National unity of modern Republic of India was designed in three dimensions – unity of religions, castes and regions as highlighted in an article in this daily, "National unity, a three-dimensional view" (Editorial page, October 6, 2023). That contract of unity is now being renegotiated to make place for the changes and the learnings of at least 50 years. Census 2027 is a

milestone in this ongoing process and will unleash unpredictable forces.

There is also a simultaneous development that is also relevant in this context. The Sixteenth Finance Commission (tasked with making recommendations for revenue sharing across States and between the Centre and the State for five years and commencing its work from April 1, 2026), is in deliberations with stakeholders. It is required to make its recommendations available by October 31, 2025. The mechanism devised by the previous Finance Commission for revenue sharing remains a source of grievance for many States. The Sixteenth Finance Commission's report will have the additional import of its timing, coming as it does on the cusp of a dramatic realignment of political power across social groups and regions.

From a population to a people, the transition is achieved by administrative measures and politics. Census categories have been a key determinant in Indian identities. The first Census of 1881, under the colonial administration, had rigid religious and caste categories of its Indian subjects – which have remained key determinants of politics since then. All politics in India has been about various attempts to slice and dice and aggregate and disaggregate these categories. Population management involves the absolute numbers of people, their spatial distribution and their quality through health care and education. None of this is apolitical; education is a particularly notable field.

Integral to political strategies

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) seeks to achieve its goal of national consolidation through a change in thinking of how Indians see themselves as a people. It is not a disinterested actor in this emerging scenario of a demographic transition. A population-based inter-State delimitation will shift political power to its strongholds and weaken its political opponents. Gender and caste are national categories. By introducing these factors, the BJP can shift the delimitation debate beyond the conflicting demands of regions, and create new political constituencies. The Congress and the Left too are theoretically national formations, which require them to balance regional aspirations and national requirements. The Congress is trying to reclaim some space in heartland politics by joining the caste debate, but it remains to be seen how its contest with the BJP will progress on this count. The BJP has a totalising vision of national identity, and a population-based delimitation is a tempting route for it to follow. Alternatively, if it wants to emerge as a truly national party which reassures interests across castes, regions and religions, then this is a good opportunity for it.

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Empowering women in agriculture for food security

The United Nations General Assembly has declared 2026 as the International Year of the Woman Farmer, garnering the support of over 100 co-sponsors. The resolution celebrates the essential role of women in global agriculture while raising awareness of their challenges, which include property rights and market access.

This article highlights insights from a symposium on women in agriculture organised by the Royal Norwegian Embassy and the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) in India (with participation and guidance from the Government of India). It distils the discussions over six months, with 200 participants from diverse fields and backgrounds coming together to address the challenges women in agriculture face.

Some of the observations here also stem from a collaborative project called ENACT, or Enhancing Climate Adaptation of Vulnerable Communities through Nature-based Solutions and Gender Transformative Approaches, in Assam, implemented by the WFP in partnership with the Government of Assam, in Nagaon. The project aims to empower smallholder farmers, particularly women, to access climate-related information and make informed decisions to enhance their resilience. The project is financed by the Government of Norway under its strategy to promote self-sufficiency in food production and strengthen women's rights and their role in food production.

Ownership, control and access

Nearly half the global food supply is made possible by the contributions of women, who are responsible for 60% to 80% of food production in developing countries and account for 39% of the agricultural labour in South Asia. These figures highlight the vital role of women in agriculture, who face barriers and inequalities.

In India, the percentage of women who own agricultural land is significantly lower than that of men, despite women constituting a substantial part of the farm workforce. Approximately 80% of economically active women are employed in agriculture. Yet, only 14% of landowners are women. According to the latest National Family



May-Elin Stener
is the Ambassador of Norway to India



Elisabeth Faure
is the Representative and Country Director of the United Nations World Food Programme in India

Health Survey, female land ownership is even lower, at 8.3%.

Women farmers in India report that their lack of land ownership makes it difficult to obtain credit and limits their access to financial institutions. Regular access to information on agricultural planning and advisory is essential for farmers, but women have more limited access to technology, such as mobile phones. These obstacles hinder investments, technology adoption and improvements in livelihoods. While microfinance and self-help groups provide some access, such loans are often insufficient for significant investments.

The Government of India supports small women farmers to enhance skills and promote sustainable agriculture. The Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana upgrades skills and increases resource access for women, while the Sub-Mission on Agricultural Mechanisation offers 50% to 80% subsidies for machinery. Additionally, 30% of the National Food Security Mission's budget is allocated for women farmers in a number of States and Union Territories.

Empowerment for resilience

Climate change disproportionately affects women farmers by increasing their domestic responsibilities and elevating their exposure to agricultural risks. "Our area has been witnessing rapid weather changes. The variety introduced by the project is designed to resist flood damage, and the crops can survive underwater. We are hoping for a better harvest," says Nirmali Bora Hazarika from Roha village in Nagaon.

By engaging with women farmers, it is possible to develop replicable models of climate adaptation at the village and community levels.

The women in agriculture symposium generated forward-looking ideas. The ENACT project primarily connects women farmers with experts through information technology, providing actionable agricultural and climate advisories weekly via their phones to over 300 farmers in 17 villages of Nagaon district.

Additionally, the Climate Adaptation Information Centres facilitate video conferencing and meetings, informing women farmers about

agriculture and livelihoods. This shows how scalable impact can be achieved by combining technical expertise, diversification through farm-based livelihoods, information and weather advisories, use of technologies and social behaviour change interventions.

The project is leveraging partnerships with State and district administrations, which include the Department of Agriculture, the State Rural Livelihoods Mission, and the Departments of Meteorology and Environment. The technology partners include agricultural universities, institutions for sourcing climate-resilient crop varieties.

Rural ecosystems and dependent livelihoods are vulnerable. Responses to risks should reflect community needs and capabilities. The ENACT-project emphasises the promotion of flood-resistant rice varieties, livelihood diversification, and market linkages to mitigate crop damage from flooding and promote the cultivation of nutritious local varieties. Women's farmer groups engage in a community-based smart seed production system to enhance sustainability.

Steps to take

Policy design and implementation should take into account the unique needs of women farmers. Granular data with a gender lens are needed to develop solutions tailored to women's needs. These could range from rethinking farming tools to financial needs and practices around saving or credit.

There should be a strong focus on agri-value chains that support women farmers and are managed by women. Part of this could be to enhance women's access to financing mechanisms and information while supporting their collective action and networks, such as women's self-help groups.

We have a historic opportunity to mark 2026 as the International Year of the Woman Farmer, to promote resilient agricultural development and gender equality by recognising, supporting, and enhancing the role of women in ensuring food security, fostering economic prosperity, and promoting sustainability.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Ships and Kerala coast

The back-to-back shipping accidents off the Kerala coast raise serious environmental, regulatory and security concerns. The silence around the origin, inspection records and

cargo manifests of these ships points to gaps in international shipping oversight. Port authority accountability and marine environment safety enforcement are seen missing. This is a coastline

that is one of India's most ecologically sensitive and densely populated. Have environmental norms been compromised in favour of corporate convenience or under-the-table arrangements? Kerala

deserves nothing less than full disclosure and strict preventive measures.

K.A. Solaman,
S.L. Puram, Alappuzha, Kerala

French Open
It will be a million dollar

question why Jannik Sinner was unable to convert one of the three championship points in the fourth set which led to his defeat. Carlos Alcaraz was tenacious as if to prove the signage in Court Philippe

Chatrini: 'Victory belongs to the most tenacious'.

V. Lakshmanan
Trirupur, Tamil Nadu

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THE ASIAN AGE

10 JUNE 2025

Restore trust in Manipur; address all issues fairly

It appears it's time for the chicken to come home to roost in Manipur. The long-delayed and ad hoc measures the Union government has taken have pushed the trouble-torn state into complete lawlessness, as is reflected in the widespread violence it has witnessed where the police took into custody the leader of a majority Meitei rebel group and his followers for alleged crimes including the abduction of senior police officer. The government was forced to clamp curfew in some districts along with internet shutdown. That the rebels have called for a 10-day shut down in retaliation reflects the perilous law and order situation in the state.

The perpetrators of crimes the state has witnessed in the last two years and more must be brought to book, and that must be the first priority of the administration which is now under the President's rule. It is not clear what forced the government to go after a militant organisation which was allegedly actively involved in the communal clashes in the state.

Singh, the man in question, is a police constable under suspension and is the main suspect in the attack on the house of the additional superintendent of police and his subsequent kidnapping in February 2024. It will be a welcome departure from the past under former chief minister Harendra Singh if the arrest is part of a programme to systematically apprehend all the troublemakers and bring them before the law. If it is indeed the case, the governor and the administration must stay their course and ensure that everyone is answerable before the law. If it is an arbitrary and ad hoc measure, as has been the experience of the past, it will only aggravate the precarious position in the state.

The governor and the administration, however, have to answer a question whether they had no clues about the potential trouble when they arrested the rebel leader and his followers. Governments and law-enforcement agencies normally take precautions when they go out and take such drastic steps. The state has a failed intelligence machinery as was evidenced by the breaking out of clashes on May 3, 2024; it could neither anticipate the trouble nor help the state stop its spread. An excuse can be that it was working under a chief minister who was acting in a partisan manner. Now that he is gone, and a governor with a mandate to nurse the state back to its health in a democratic way is at the helm, the administration must endeavour to strengthen its network at the grass roots level.

The members of Parliament from the state have regularly communicated to the Houses, and through them to the rest of the country and the Union government, about the sense of alienation of the people of Manipur have been made to feel. A member recently reminded the government that the Prime Minister of India does not require a visa to visit the state, but the obligation of referring to the refusal of Narendra Modi to visit the state in the last two years. It defies logic and democratic propriety. The Union government must ponder over the steps that can restore the people's trust in the democratic institutions, including the office of the Prime Minister. If it wants the state to be back to normal, it is time that a comprehensive strategy that can address the woes of all sections of the people of the state is prepared and acted upon.

Alcaraz's great escape in epic final

It was only the first major final between Carlos Alcaraz and Jannik Sinner and yet it set the tennis world alight with stunning brilliance in record duration to provide a result in a grand finale at the Roland Garros in favour of the younger Alcaraz, who won his fifth grand slam title at the age of 22, the same as compatriot and tennis legend Rafael Nadal.

The two contestants, who had been in a long and arduous battle, both greats are going to be all the rage in men's tennis that has been lamenting the departure of two of three legends in Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal and the diminishing returns for the third, Novak Djokovic.

The final between the two generational talents, both born in the new millennium, was an epic for the ages that defied known norms in terms of court coverage, recovery shots, physical endurance and sheer intensity of exchanges at an incredible pace in a match in which fortunes swung halfway as Alcaraz staged off three championship points on route to winning the final set tie-breaker in style.

The 5-her 29-minute final was much more than a match of endurance as the pair jostled, stroke for stroke in dramatic style with Alcaraz dominating the long rallies while a cool Sinner seemed happier if he could kill the rallies quickly enough on the red shale. And yet Sinner also came back to get to the brink of victory again before Alcaraz snatched his win from the very jaws of defeat.

It is almost a cliché to say now that this is the dawn of a new era of men's tennis as the two decades of the 'Big Three' are over with an ageing Djokovic unable to further his hunt for grand slam title to add to his 24. And between them, Alcaraz and Sinner have won seven of the last eight slams while Alcaraz keeps his record of never losing a slam final in five even as Sinner was denied his quest for a third slam in a row.

Understandably, the crowd was solidly behind Alcaraz, maybe more so because Sinner is yet to shed his controversial doping test failure and subsequent ban, which at 3 months, was a mere pat on the knuckles.

On the distasteful side, another generational talent squeezed through to win as Coco Gauff prevailed over Aryna Sabalenka and promptly brought race into it as she said this was a win for "people like me" even as her opponent deprecated the win saying she made mistakes. The clash of colour and culture there was obvious.

THE ASIAN AGE

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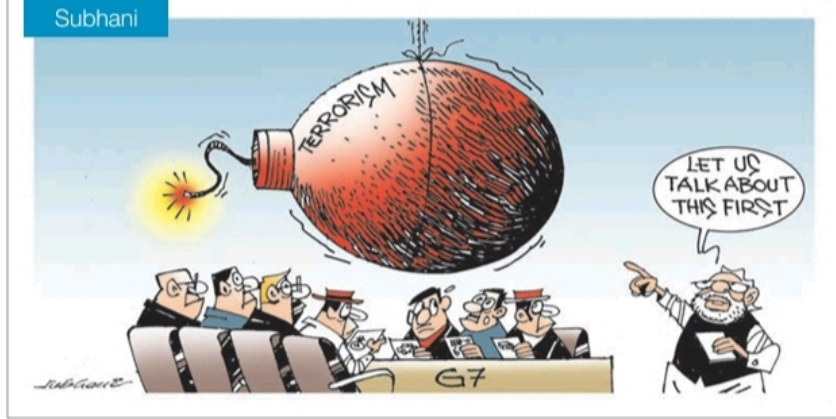
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Subhani



Modi's G-7 test: Handling Trump, reset with Canada

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At present India-Canada relations are strained, with diplomatic representation downgraded, following the withdrawal of high commissioners.

key supporter of the Trudeau minority government, removes one obstacle.

The South Asian diaspora constitutes 7.1 per cent of the Canadian population, numbering 40 million today.

Interestingly, of these Sikhs and Hindus are 2.3 per cent and 2.1 per cent respectively.

Thus, unlike in India, where Sikhs are minuscule compared to the majority Hindu community, in Canada the numbers are heavily concentrated in some provinces like British Columbia and Ontario.

That provides electoral clout, as reflected in the Sikh holding important political posts, in provincial and federal governments.

The Khalistan issue, lingering for decades, was poorly handled by the Narendra Modi government. The farmers' protests against the Union government's farm laws created unnecessary confrontation between Punjab's farmers, mainly Sikh, and a Hinduva-inspired Union government.

This communalisation of an issue affecting rural economies across India only energised existing, though marginal and misguided, pro-Khalistan lobbies in the Anglophone Western nations. Their hold is greater in Canada because of the rural socio-economic profile of both Sikh immigrants.

The inability of governments in both India and Canada to understand this complex interplay of electoral, religious and economic factors in each other's country has frayed relations over the last decade. Canada, under its new Prime Minister Mark Carney, envisages closer economic and commercial engagements beyond the US. He supports joining the European Union's defence strategy of self-dependence without America. India-Canada relations since 1947 have undulated between

intense close engagement and disruption either over India's nuclear pro-

gramme or escalating Khalistan activities. President Donald Trump, by savagely targeting Canada despite an existing economic framework, may have created the economic and commercial opening that India and Canada have repeatedly missed in the past, due to collateral factors. For instance, in 2007 a CEO Round Table envisioned goods trade to cross \$10 billion, with matching services' trade. Almost two decades later, the numbers are below that mark.

However, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will face a challenging scenario. His handling of President Trump will be closely watched, having been repeatedly embarrassed by Trumpian claims of "mediation" to achieve the India-Pakistan ceasefire. Also under scrutiny will be his ability to reset relations with Canada.

Mr. Modi's propensity to address the diaspora needs to be calibrated. Gathering felix predominance of any faith and adopting an Indian election-rally narrative merely riles the communal divide there and worsens political discord at home. He should meet community leaders at a smaller gathering, avoiding divisive political narrative. Pro-Khalistan elements are unfortunately already marshalling forces to disrupt his functions. Prime Minister Mark Carney has listed the core missions for the G-7 summit. One, peace and security and countering foreign interference and transnational crime. Two, building energy security and accelerating digital transition. Three, securing partnerships with the private sector for creating infrastructure and remunerative jobs. Though unstated, the G-7 members will likely urge President Trump to address their economic and geopolitical concerns. One example being his unwillingness to confront Russian President Vladimir Putin over Ukraine. Trade disruption will undoubtedly figure too.

This G-7 summit will be quite unlike earlier ones. The enemy is not without, but amidst them. The world will await whether President Donald Trump can be capbled to abandon his disruptive and isolationist vision.

The writer is a former secretary in the external affairs ministry. He resides at Giamhasth.

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LETTERS

INDIA'S GLOBAL ROLE

India's emergence as the world's fourth-largest economy and a key player in supply chains, digital infrastructure and energy security has cemented its role in global policymaking. At the upcoming G-7 summit hosted by Canada set to be held on June 15-17, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's invitation, despite the political push-back, reflects strong international recognition of India's strategic importance. With growing influence in forums like the G-20 and Brics and leadership on Global South priorities such as food security, climate action and digital inclusion (via UPI and ONDC), India is seen as a vital force in shaping global trade, sustainability and geopolitical stability.

Amarjeet Kumar Hazaribagh

SELECTIVE OUTRAGE?

RAHUL GANDHI'S continuous allegations against the Election Commission over alleged rigging in Maharashtra appears to be a desperate attempt to discredit the democratic process when his party and its allies fail to secure a mandate. His selective criticism highlights a clear double standard: celebrating democracy when victorious, but questioning its integrity in defeat. Such inconsistent narratives risk undermining public faith in key institutions. With Bihar set to go to the polls soon, this pattern suggests a possible pre-emptive excuse for future electoral setbacks. Instead of conveying the image of a constructive Opposition, these tactics reflect political insecurity and a reluctance to accept the people's verdict gracefully.

N. Sachin Reddy Bengaluru

HOSPITAL HORROR

THIS HARROWING incident shakes the conscience of humanity - a 32-year-old woman was allegedly raped by the nursing staff in the ICU of a hospital in Rajasthan after being sedated. When spaces meant for healing and saving lives turn into sites of such grave violations, it is not merely a failure of the law but a staggering blow to ethics, trust and the social fabric. The time has come not only to express outrage or sorrow but to awaken institutions, society and the justice system. Every individual deserves to live in a safe and respectful environment. Silence in the face of such brutality is nothing short of complicity. We must become the voice that demands justice.

Md Asad Mumbai

Aakar Patel

Doomsday Clock is ticking... Is the world facing most dangerous times?



The Doomsday Clock is a visual tool designed to warn the public about how close humans are to destroying our world with dangerous technologies. The time on the clock is set by experts to reflect how far away from annihilation (midnight) we are, and if it is accurate we are currently the closest we have ever been to the end.

The clock was created in 1947, the year of India's independence, when the great global threat was of course that of nuclear weapons. The bombs had gone off over Hiroshima and Nagasaki only two years before that, and the Soviet Union was developing its own nuclear weapons. They achieved this in 1949, then Britain went nuclear in 1952, France in 1960 and the People's Republic of China in 1964. India weaponised its programme in 1974, and then in the 1990s Pakistan also demonstrated its capability. Israel tested the world's first nuclear warhead in 1985. The clock is set to reflect how far away from annihilation the weapons and it is likely only a matter of time before Iran acquires them.

In the 1990s, when I was a student in the United States, the most important recent element was something called the Strategic Defence Initiative, nicknamed "Star Wars". Under it, the Ronald Reagan administration was developing a system that would allow the US to shoot down incoming missiles while retaining its own offensive capability. This likely sent the Doomsday Clock forward.

After the Soviet Union perished, the Doomsday

Clock was moved back to 17 minutes to midnight in 1991, the farthest it has ever been. The threat of nuclear weapons appeared to have abated to a large extent. At least this was how the news reported it. There were many more reports, analysis, civil society groups (like Pugwash) then and more activism on nuclear weapons before 1991 than is visible today.

Currently, the setters of the clock, according to its website, are 18 individuals, including three of South Asian origin (one is a professor at IIT Delhi).

Two decades ago, the Doomsday Clock had begun to include other threats, including climate change, and now it has to accommodate further new ones, like artificial intelligence. Humankind is accelerating the invention of all sorts of new ways to destroy itself. At the beginning of this year, on January 28, they voted the following justification for concluding that in 2025 we were closer to annihilation than in 1947.

"Closer than ever: It is now 89 seconds to mid- night. In 2024, humanity edged ever closer to catastrophe. Trends that have deeply concerned the Science and Security Board continued, and despite unmistakable signs of danger, national leaders and their societies have failed to do what is needed to change course. Consequently, we now move the Doomsday Clock from 90 seconds to 89 seconds to midnight - the closest it has ever been to catastro-

phe. Our fervent hope is that leaders will recognise the world's existential predicament and take bold action to reduce the threats posed by nuclear weapons, climate change, and the potential misuse of biological science and a variety of emerging technologies."

Since that day in January, much has happened. A drone attack on Russian air bases, taking out a chunk of its nuclear arsenal, escalated the conflict with Ukraine war. The Israeli genocide in Gaza has continued and now its government is starving the Palestinians, with open conflicts against nations as close as Lebanon and as far away as Yemen. The United States has come under the guardianship of a particularly unpredictable leader. The tension in the US, against China on matters ranging from trade to Taiwan, has escalated. And of course, only a few weeks ago, India fought in a conflict with Pakistan that the US President has repeatedly claimed faced the danger of going nuclear.

And to all of the above, we must add threats from the impact of climate change and artificial intelligence. In the second of these areas, things are proceeding at such a rapid pace that there is no real understanding of how near the threat is, or even of how the nature of the danger will be. Those closest to the technology are both the most fearful (in this case academics) and the most dismissive (if they happen to be corporations profiting from the

development of AI), and so it is not easy for us on the outside to judge.

In any case, given that this is now a race in the corporate sector of the US and China, as opposed to the state-managed nuclear arms race, it is likely impossible to control. We will know whether the end result is disaster or windfall if and when it arrives. The role of AI in disinformation on social media and in military applications such as drones already gives us hints that the bad is likely to outweigh the good. Notice that we have not even discussed the possibility of another pandemic. Or the chaos and turbulence that will come soon in a world containing a handful of trillions and billions of these who are poor.

The Doomsday Clock seeks to raise awareness and encourage action to reduce existential risks. But in my view, it largely fails in this task. If we consider what sort of news is consumed nightly around the world, including in India, we can conclude that mankind is more troubled by other events. To some these events might be trivial in comparison with the far graver things that we are sliding the planet into. However, we must concede that they are important enough for most of mankind to be kept entertained while the clock is ticking.

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



If you really look closely, most overnight successes took a long time.

Steve Jobs

newindianexpress.com

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

— Ramnath Goenka

SINCARAZ: GEN Z RIVALRY DECLARES ITS INTENT FROM ROLAND-GARROS

BORG-MCENROE. Sampras-Agassi. Federer-Nadal. A dyadic rivalry between the best two racquetors is the most satisfying modern translation of the medieval duel: a protracted war (minus the shooting) between two supremely talented and driven personages. On Sunday, the Law of Eternal Recurrence brought us the latest edition: Carlos Alcaraz and Jannik Sinner, whose rivalry is already branded as 'Sincaraz'. Many had wondered if tennis would lose its charm after the high-profile departures of the likes of Rafa Nadal, Roger Federer and Serena Williams. Like with all end-of-era doomsaying, they need not have bothered. The sport's next era is upon us. While Novak Djokovic ground his way to yet another Slam semifinal, 'Sincaraz' have portended much more than the fate of a single tournament. From early 2024, the Italian and the Spaniard have split the six Majors. On Paris's iconic red dirt, they etched out the reasons in longform—in fact, in the longest French Open final in history; a duel that blazed in white heat, like a littoral sun at high noon, with the clock on pause. One could see why Alcaraz, who only turned 22 last week, has been compared to the likes of Nadal. At one point in the final, the Spaniard was down three match points. But he summoned his will and ran himself through a brick wall to beat the Italian in five sets. Alcaraz already owns five Majors. You could say History is among them.

The Italian, 23, is harder to bracket, but he too has an array of weapons at his disposal. His shot-making from beyond the baseline is dazzling, while his serve is a valuable weapon. It is to Alcaraz's credit that he has dominated this rivalry, at least in recent times. The H2H is 8-4 for the latter, five of the eight wins in the last 18 months. When Wimbledon starts in less than three weeks, Alcaraz expects to add a sixth Major, as he hasn't lost at SW19 since a fourth-round exit in 2022. Conversely, Wimbledon is the only Grand Slam where the Italian has yet to make the final. For tennis fans, though, the sport is in safe hands—this most primal of racquet games thrives on personalities, historic matchups, and the drama of individual contests. Expect more from Sincaraz.

RIGHTS OF ALL CONSENTING ADULTS NOT UP FOR DEBATE

WHEN does an adult become an adult, free to make their own decisions and choose their own love, life, and future? India allows its youth to decide its political future from the age of 18, and yet family, society and the state too often infantilise and deny the same adults their rights and their agency. A recent case in point is a Madras High Court ruling on a habeas corpus petition. The female petitioner was the partner of a young woman in her 20s who was allegedly illegally confined by her parents. Complaints to the police about her fate had gone in vain. Finally, at court, the woman's mother told the judges that the petitioner had led her daughter astray. The court, noting that every parent cannot be like the late Justice Leila Seth, who openly accepted and advocated for her gay son (celebrated writer Vikram Seth), allowed the woman to go with the petitioner just as she had preferred. In handling the case, the court relied on Supreme Court guidelines from only last year in dealing with habeas petitions and pleas for police protection. Those guidelines also came from a similar case; only there, the Kerala High Court, instead of going by the preference of the woman detained by her parents, sent her for counselling.

It is not only in cases of LGBTQIA+ couples that matters have devolved into parental confinement and adults have had to turn to the courts for respite. The famous Hadiya case is one example of how the agency and rights of young people, especially women, are denied at the altar of parental preferences and societal compulsions.

The Madras High Court rightly pointed out that couples, cisgender heterosexual or otherwise, have the right to form their own families even outside the scope of traditional marriages. Yet, in India, gender, sexuality, caste and religion are grounds on which families and societies keep consenting adults apart, often violently and fatally. Worse, however, is the willingness of police and even the judiciary to back these antiquated notions and support errant parents rather than upholding the rights of consenting adults as guaranteed by the Constitution. Until that changes, judgments can set free individuals to live and love fully, only one at a time.

QUICK TAKE

THE SKEETER SCOURGE

MOSQUITOES have killed more people than any other cause. Billions worldwide are at risk from the bacteria and viruses they transmit. Scientists are developing gene-editing tools to make the species extinct. It involves using gene mutation to make females of the malaria-causing genus Anopheles be born without ovaries. The idea is the gene spreads through mating until no fertile females are left, and they all perish. However, ethics is involved here: can humans tinker with life or explore alternative methods? For instance, Indian scientists are experimenting with genetic engineering on mosquitoes to stop the growth of malaria-causing parasites in their guts. Should they disappear or buzz around without the bite?

FOR decades, the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir has served as the visible boundary between war and peace, infiltration and prevention, terror and counter-terror. It has also been the default focal point of Indian military strategy and Pakistan's proxy hybrid war, primarily kinetic. However, in 2025, the paradigm is shifting quite drastically. The LoC, while still active, and the kinetic domain in general, may no longer be the main front in the battle for Kashmir's stability. Instead, the new war fronts are dispersed, amorphous, and dangerously embedded within the digital, psychological, and ideological landscape. This is the classic grey zone strategy that has been long expected to manifest.

At the heart of this shift lies a question with major implications for India's internal security calculus: Does Pakistan still hold remote control over Kashmir's terrorism? Recent indicators suggest that Pakistan's ability to infiltrate terrorists across the LoC physically has been severely degraded. Better fencing, aggressive patrolling, a robust counter-infiltration posture, and enhanced surveillance capabilities—both aerial and electronic—have reduced large-scale infiltration to a trickle. The classical model of launching fideyean squads, guiding them across the Pir Panjal, and sustaining them with local overground workers is not easily feasible in most sectors. Yet, this does not mean that the threat has receded. Instead, the theatre has simply moved.

The Pakistani deep state, ever adaptive, has invested in non-kinetic warfare to offset its reduced kinetic options, fully aware that shifting to a counter-kinetic mode is never easy for India. Drone drops of weapons and narcotics in Punjab and Jammu have now become regular events. Encrypted digital communication for recruiting and guiding local youth without the need for physical handlers is on the rise; intercepting this is proving a major challenge in the current cycle of technology infusion. Deepfake videos and AI-generated propaganda blend religious messaging with disinformation about the Indian state and its security forces through social media. This shift signifies a new logic: if territory is difficult to breach, minds become the next terrain of war.

One of the most notable post-2019 developments was the emergence of hybrid terrorists—local youth with no prior record, recruited via encrypted apps and trained online to act as lone-wolf attackers. They don't cross the LoC. They don't train in Pakistani camps. They rarely operate in groups. Yet their actions serve the same end as those of their predecessors: psychological destabilisation and turbulence.

The Pakistani deep state has invested in non-kinetic warfare. This shift signifies a new logic: if territory is difficult to breach, minds become the next terrain of war

NEW FRONTLINES OF TERRORISM AND THE PAKISTAN EQUATION

LT GEN SYED ATA HASNAIN (RETD)



Former Commander, Srinagar-based 15 Corps; Chancellor, Central University of Kashmir



In many cases, the "handler" is virtual, sitting in a safe house in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK), Rawalpindi, or sometimes even third countries like the UAE or the UK. Intelligence intercepts suggest that while physical guidance has reduced, ideological remote control remains very much in Pakistan's hands. However, that control is not absolute. Several factors have diluted Islamabad's influence.

First, Pakistan's economic crisis and internal fragmentation have weakened the focus and capacity of its security establishment. The Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) threat, rising sectarian violence, and civil-military friction have forced the Pakistan Army to look inward. The events following Operation Sindoor—India's massive retaliation after the Pahalgam attack—acted as a sobering moment, exposing the limits of Pakistan's escalation.

Second, international pressure has mounted. The FATF grey-listing (from which Pakistan only recently emerged), coupled with increased global scrutiny of terror financing and radical clerics, has made the old methods harder to sustain. Third, there is growing resentment within parts of the Kashmiri population—not widespread, but perceptible—about being used as pawns in a conflict that increasingly lacks moral, political, or even theological legitimacy. The local support base for militancy has eroded, particularly as development projects and normalisation measures following the repeal of Article 370 gain traction.

Yet, despite all this, Pakistan retains two dangerous levers: ideological resonance and technological asymmetry; both in the irregular warfare mode. While Pakistan may no longer guide every terrorist operation, it is heavily invested in shaping the narratives.

BUSINESS CAN BRING INDIA, CHINA CLOSER

R GOPALAKRISHNAN



Author whose latest book, *Jamshed Tata: Powerful Learnings for Corporate Success*, is co-authored with Harish Bhut

BUILDING BUSINESSES

na. Both nations now appear to desire longer-term ties, although the terms have yet to be developed. Their foreign ministers met in Kazan, Russia, in 2024. The meeting was reported as "a tactical thaw rather than a strategic shift away from Sino-Indian rivalry" by Tanvi Madan of the Brookings Institution. Over the past thirty years, despite border tensions, trade between India and China has grown from \$0.25 billion in the 1990s to over \$120 billion in 2024, albeit in an unbalanced manner. Between 1990 and 2040, China published twenty-seven books based on Gandhi and Gandhism. When the Government of



At a time when both India and China are marching towards regaining their past strength, there is immense potential for mutual benefit if both can collaborate through business

Dean of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy and Professor Riaz Shah of Hult International Business School refined it.

As per the UN World Population Prospects, an estimated 4.2 billion people live within the circle, compared to 3.8 billion outside. However, the land area accounts for only 15 percent of the planet's total area. Imagine the density. Tightly packed people of China and India must either adjust to live peacefully or fight to extinction. The choice is obvious. Both nations are culturally strong and are aware of their cultural heritage. Both are economically marching towards regaining their past strength, albeit at different stages and with varying outcomes. China has been quiet but strong in discipline and pragmatism. India has been both noisy and strong in creativity and ideas.

Like China, India must also invest heavily in R&D to bring this opportunity to life. Consider that since 2000, China's investment in research has increased by 18 times, reaching over \$750 billion. No wonder China has become highly competent in new technologies and research. Chinese technology joint ventures in India, spanning electronics, automobiles, pharmaceuticals, financial services, and artificial intelligence, are promising. This can work only if China too wants it, and policies must change in this regard. China developed rapidly by combining Western technology with Chinese manufacturing. India could combine Chinese technology with Indian manufacturing, initially producing for India but later for export.

There is a role for business leaders and government through promoting travel, thoughts, and trade. Studies by university students, tourism initiatives, joint ventures, and other endeavours, rather than just short-term trades, all contribute to this effort. They are proven instruments in geopolitics. Circumstances make allies of nations. Will it happen in the short term? Probably not. Some leaders must shift from a competitive to a collaborative mentality. The good news is there are signs that leaders are thinking along these lines. It would be desirable if India and China brought Chanakya and Sun Tzu together. (Views are personal) (rgopalakrishnan@india.com)

MAIL BAG

WRITE TO: letters@newindianexpress.com

Counter action

Ref: India ignores Pak calls on IWT (June 9). The commendable response by the Government of India will be a blow to Pakistan. This move will help the power and agriculture sector in India. Not answering Pakistan's requests establishes silence as the best killer. Adinarayan Prabhukhot, e-mail

Take stock

Ref: Retain to train (June 9). Premier academic institutions like IIT along with the concerned authorities must put any brain drain from India in check. At-home talents like IIT students are assets to the nation and must be further trained and utilised for indigenous developments matching global standards. Jiji Panicker K, Alappuzha

Next leap

Ref: Axiom-4 space missions will boost ISRO's future crew trips (June 9). Group Captain Shubhash Shukla's expression of honor is not only a personal milestone but also a tribute to India's rising prominence in global space exploration. His participation in something "far greater" highlights humanity's drive to explore beyond itself. As'ad Kabir Nagari, e-mail

Historic battle

Ref: Don Carlos: Back from brink (June 9). The finalised logic, physics, and every ounce of expectation. The battle will live forever in Roland-Garros' folklore. The seismic nature of the titans' successive encounters confirm the rising presence of a captivating new era in men's tennis. R Sivakumar, Chennai

Shields up

Ref: Renewed infiltration efforts by ISI in J&K (June 9). ISI reports reveal Pakistan's use of drones for real-time surveillance to aid border infiltration. Drones expose patrol gaps and terrain advantages. The Pahalgam massacre proves Operation Sindoor is far from over. India must remain vigilant and adapt to such tactics. R S Narula, Patiala

Spiritual read

Ref: Rediscovering Vaimiki Ramayana (June 9). The Valmiki Ramayana must be studied with deep love and respect for Rama, Sita, Hanuman, and other revered figures. Their qualities and its impact on society is paramount. It is one of the classical literatures that have been truly embraced by our hearts and thoughts. R Pichumani, Kumbakonam

TN remains an enigma for the saffron lobby

As NDA 3.0 completes its first anniversary today, the perennially in election mode apparatus of the alliance must already be working overtime for the state for the later part of the year. Bihar, one of the states readying for the Assembly elections, is slowly but surely seeing changes, ostensibly in favour of an overwhelming saffron win at present. Whatever that may be, the 2026 elections must be making the war rooms of various political parties working with a different game plan as it is where the INDIA bloc sees its chances. Tamil Nadu, by this time, next year would have had a new government in place. The

question is, which party will get to run the state which is now seeing aggressive posturing by NDA and counter attacks by the DMK government. Once a formal alliance was sealed by the Centre with the principal Opposition party and old ally, the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), the BJP must have felt relieved that it has made the first move, well.

Given that the MGR-founded party is facing an identity and existential crisis in its 53rd year of existence, the cobbling together of the alliance with smaller parties being wooed establishes the fact that the saffron party is happy

to ride piggyback on the Dravidian big brother this time around. Amit Shah's latest statement that the new alliance will sweep the 2026 polls has not entirely been rejected by the political pundits and as expected, pooh poohed by the DMK leaders. Its top-rung icons say that if the Dravidian ideology resonates with the people, it is high impossible for the BJP to set its foot in Tamil Nadu. While a few still consider the earlier elections and the 2024 Lok Sabha polls as a 'lost opportunity' for the BJP to have made inroads into the Tamil psyche, the highly unpopular way the administration has gone about its business has made

the average public take a critical look at the goings-on in the State. Dynastic politics - that of Udayanidhi being groomed to take over from the present CM, M K Stalin - is still being helplessly accepted by the party machinery and followers as a 'natural' progression of the first family in retaining power. What is not left unnoticed is the increased presence of Karunanidhi's daughter and the CM's step-sister Kanimozhi in the centre scene of things, Stalin's blow hot blow cold with Modi government and the stench of corruption in the governance of the State which has been allowed to grow (the TASMAC case, for

one), for a surgical strike later by the central machinery, closer to the poll dates. It is surely a work in progress for the non-DMK formation, but it is a known fact that the DMK has till date never managed a second successive stint in office. Will they break the jinx this time or will a currently docile anti-DMK alliance spring a surprise? If it is the final chance for the AIADMK to retain its political relevance, it is also the best-ever opportunity for the BJP in nearly five decades to make its presence felt in the state's corridors of power. Whether they can make or mar will be in the hands of the Tamil electorate.

LETTERS

US stares at crisis of conscience

SCENES of personnel from the National Guard patrolling the streets of Los Angeles over immigration protests come across as a chilling image. Is this law enforcement or intimidation? These protests aren't random—they are desperate cries for dignity and reform. Clamping down may silence voices but not solve the crisis. Isn't America, the land of immigrants, turning against its roots? Borders need policies, not boots. Protesters demand humanity, not handcuffs. But will Washington ever listen without reaching for weapons first?

Hassain Rabbani, Mumbai

Depositors bearing the repo cut brunt

THE 0.50 bps repo rate cut by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has forced banks to cut the deposit rates, including savings bank rates, by 0.50 per cent would render more harm to the depositors, especially the senior citizens who depend more on the interest earned on their deposits for their monthly expenses. This is a very harsh step on the part of banks. Depositors are denied more benefits and additional liability to pay taxes on the income earned. This should be removed. It will be in the fits of things if senior citizens are provided a 10 or 11 per cent unchanged rate that is not linked to the open bank rate cuts. The lesser margin on interest earned on advances and interest paid to depositors is not the only reason for reduction of interest earned on advances. There are serious other factors—NPA's, which do not earn interest income, and loss of heavy interest income in the case of compromise proposals. Take the recent case of Bhushan Steel company wherein the lender lost a huge income loss because of a recent Supreme Court judgement. Another factor is write-offs, which on average runs into lakhs of crores of rupees every year, which, at the end of the day is loss of income. It is a tad unfortunate that instead of setting right the lacunae, banks are reducing the already low interest rates on deposits. One hopes that there would be a stable rate of interest to senior citizens and help them live happily.

TSN Rao, Manager (Retd) Indian Bank, AS Rao nagar branch, Hyderabad

Rate cut and growth

THE generous rate cut by the RBI may cheer the stock markets for some time but on the ground the growth prospects of the manufacturing sector may not pick up momentum due to the inadequate credit resources. We need to spur domestic demand first by focusing on employment generation in labour intensive sectors to counter job loss. Employment has taken a beating due to mechanization both in manufacturing and agriculture, which necessitates that we discourage monopolies. We also must promote proactive non-farm-based rural employment in village clusters.

Brij B Goyal, Ludhiana

Law for loudspeaker use should be equal for all

IF loudspeakers must be discontinued for Azaan in India, the same should apply for festivals like Ganesh Chaturthi and Navratri. During these two festivals, loud music is played during the week hours, which disturbs the sleep of patients and old people. I hope the court and the police department take note of this.

Jubel D'Cruz, Mumbai

India's rare earth supply crisis

CHINA'S rare earth export restrictions, imposed in April have disrupted India's supply chains, particularly affecting neodymium-iron-boron (NdFeB) magnets, which are vital for electric vehicle (EV) motors, defence systems, and aerospace applications. India, despite holding 6.9 million tonnes of rare earth reserves, remains 100 per cent import-dependent for most critical minerals, making the transition to self-reliance a long-term challenge. The auto industry, warned by the Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM), faces potential production halts by late June while the electronics sector including smartphones and wireless earbuds, is bracing for shortages and price hikes. The defence sector, reliant on rare earths for missile guidance systems and radar technologies, is also vulnerable. With China controlling 90 per cent of global rare earth processing, India's strategic response includes securing alternative supplies from Vietnam, the US, and Australia, alongside domestic initiatives to boost rare earth magnet production. To counter these disruptions, India is accelerating domestic rare earth processing and drafting a fiscal incentive scheme to bridge the cost gap between local and Chinese-made magnets. Apart from Midwest Advanced Materials Private Ltd's commencement of commercial production within six months, the National Critical Mineral Mission, launched in April, underscores India's commitment to achieving self-reliance in strategic minerals. However, sustained investment and policy support will be crucial for success. While these initiatives mark significant progress, India's transition away from Chinese dependence will take time, requiring a combination of government intervention, private sector investment, and international collaborations to secure a stable supply chain.

Amareet Kumar, Hazaribagh

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BENGALURU ONLINE

Tumakuru may be included under Greater Bengaluru Authority: HM

BENGALURU: Home Minister G Parameshwara on Monday said that a proposal will soon be submitted to the government to include Tumakuru under the Greater Bengaluru Authority. He also said that the Tumakuru which is located around 70 km from Bengaluru is growing rapidly. "We have developed an industrial hub (at Tumakuru) in an area of 20,000 acres. Many are demanding that Tumakuru should be expanded. A study is being conducted on this. If Tumakuru is included in Greater Bengaluru, it will benefit us in terms of development. We will submit a proposal regarding the same," he told reporters here. He said that the Karnataka government will also take a call on extending metro services to Tumakuru. Parameshwara, who is also in-charge minister for the Tumakuru district, said, "We are proposing to build an arch on the National Highway in Tumakuru and have requested Union Minister Somnappa to get a permission from National Highway Authority."

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



DR MADARBHUSH SRIDHAR ACHARYULU

RECENTLY, former Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud led the majority (8:1) and wrote: "India's economic trajectory has shifted from socialism to liberalization and market reforms. The Constitution does not endorse any single economic ideology." He added that calling all private property "material resources" forces a rigid socialist theory, which no longer reflects India's democratic economic reality.

Are there any limits on power of the government over private property? Can the government seize any private property by calling it a "material resource of the community" under Article 39(b) of the Indian Constitution?

On 5 November 2024, a nine-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court of India delivered a historic verdict in the Property Owners Association v. State of Maharashtra case. The ruling settled a long-standing constitutional question: It answered with a clear no, thereby reaffirming individual property rights and limiting government power. This judgment has brought clarity to the conflict between Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSPs) and Fundamental Rights, and overruled earlier judgments that adopted a broad socialist interpretation of Article 39(b).

Ignoring the Directive Principles

Article 39(b) is part of the Di-

rective Principles of State Policy in Part IV of the Constitution. It says:

"The State shall, in particular, direct its policy towards securing that the ownership and control of the material resources of the community are so distributed as best to subserve the common good." It encourages laws for equitable distribution of wealth and resources, but DPSPs are not legally enforceable—they are only guiding principles.

Do we have any Property Rights?

Before 1978, right to property was a Fundamental Right under Article 19(1)(f) and Article 31. However, due to frequent land reforms, bank nationalization, and other socialist welfare measures, the Parliament passed the 25th Constitutional Amendment (1971). Introduced Article 31C to protect laws under Article 39(b) and (c) from being challenged for violating Fundamental Rights like Articles 14, 19, and 31. 42nd Constitutional Amendment (1976): Further expanded Article 31C to cover all Directive Principles, not just 39(b) and (c). But in Minerva Mills (1980), the Supreme Court struck down this wider protection, ruling that only Article 39(b) and (c) could remain shielded.

Where Article 31C was upheld:

In the famous Kesavananda Bharati case (1973), the Supreme Court upheld Article 31C, but with a caveat — laws passed under it must still pass judicial review. This was to prevent misuse of DPSPs to undermine basic structure principles like judicial independence or fundamental rights. Thus, the Court permitted limited curtailment of property rights, but only in pursuit of the common good as envisaged in Articles 39(b) and (c), and not at the

cost of the basic structure of the Constitution.

A 32-year fight for justice:

Though justice is upheld in some cases, delay is the biggest problem. The current verdict comes from a petition filed by the Property Owners Association (POA) in Mumbai, challenging Chapter VIIIA of the Maharashtra Housing and Area Development Act (MHADA), 1976, which permitted the government to acquire "cessed properties" (old private buildings) for restoration. The POA argued this violated their right to property, and that Article 39(b) had been wrongly used to justify taking over all private property. The case spanned decades and multiple bench references, eventually resulting in this nine-judge bench being formed.

Govt cannot acquire private property per se:

The Court ruled that not every private property can be called a "material resource of the community." Article 39(b) does not give the government a blanket power to seize all private assets for the "common good."

Material resources—Limited, not universal:

The court clarified that "material resources" must meet specific criteria such as belonging in public trust; Having community impact; being scarce or capable of causing harm by monopoly and possessing intrinsic public value like water and minerals, among others. Thus, private homes or businesses do not automatically qualify.

Balanced approach to 'distribution'

The term "distribution" under Article 39(b) includes: Government acquisition and redistribution to private parties — only when it benefits the common good. So, laws under 39(b) must meet both public interest



The judgment allows for some private resources to be used for the public good under Article 39(b) while preserving individuals' property rights, supporting India's economic growth within a democratic framework. The court emphasized that DPSPs are not enforceable laws. The government must balance social welfare goals with citizens' rights.

and proportionality tests.

Survival of Article 31C:

The Court confirmed Article 31C still protects laws made under Article 39(b) and (c) from Fundamental Rights challenges, but not from judicial review. This limits the misuse of Article 31C as a shield.

The court recognized the dramatic shifts like private property, from traditional assets to data and space exploration. The judgment emphasizes the need to respect evolving market realities. Are we reinforcing a market-oriented economic model? It is interpreted that this judgment offers protection for marginalized communities against unjust acquisition of their small farms and forest lands while promoting responsible management of essential public resources.

The judgment allows for some private resources to be used for the public good under Article 39(b) while preserving individuals' property rights, supporting India's economic growth within a democratic framework. The court emphasized that DPSPs are not enforceable laws. The government must balance social welfare goals with citizens' rights. Justice Krishna's opinion was relied on by subsequent Constitution Benches in Sanjeev

now home to a new cultural quarter that includes arts and fashion colleges, a dance theatre and another V&A branch, due to open next year.

The Storehouse has hired dozens of young people from the surrounding area, which includes some of London's most deprived districts. Designed by Diller, Scofidio and Renfro, the firm behind New York's High Line Park, the building has space to show off objects too big to have been displayed very often before, including a 17th-century Mughal colonnade from India, a 1930s modernist office designed by Frank Lloyd Wright and a Pablo Picasso-designed stage curtain for a 1924 ballet, some 10 metres high

Elton John on his 1981 world tour and two silk kimonos laid out ready for a visit.

Parsons said there has been a "phenomenal response" from the public since the building opened at the end of May. Visitors have ranged from people seeking inspiration for their weddings to art students and "someone last week who was using equipment to measure the thread count of an 1850 dress."

She says strangers who have come to view different objects often strike up conversations. "It's just wonderful," Parsons said. "You never quite know... We have this entirely new

A new cultural district:

The V&A's flagship museum in London's affluent South Kensington district, founded in the 1850s, is one of Britain's biggest tourist attractions. The Storehouse is across town in the Olympic Park, a post-industrial swath of east London that hosted the 2012 summer games. As part of post-Olympic regeneration, the area is

to open at the Storehouse in September. Museums seek transparency. One aim of the Storehouse is to expose the museum's inner workings, through displays delving into all aspects of the conservators' job — from the eternal battle against insects to the numbering system for museum contents — and a viewing gallery to watch staff at work. The increased openness comes as museums in the UK are under increasing scrutiny over the origins of their collections. They face pressure to return objects acquired in sometimes contested circumstances during the days of the British Empire. Senior curator Georgia Haseldine led the V&A is adopting a policy of transparency, "so that we can talk very openly about where things have come from, how they ended up in the V&A's collection, and also make sure that researchers, as well as local people and people visiting from all around the world, have free and equitable access to these objects." On average, museums have one to five percent of their collections on show," she said. "What we're doing here is saying, No, this whole collection belongs to all of us. This is a national collection and you should have access to it." That is our fundamental principle."

V&A Storehouse Museum reignites 5000-year-old creative spark

A museum is like an iceberg. Most of it is out of sight. Most big collections have only a fraction of their items on display, with the rest locked away in storage.

But not at the new V&A East Storehouse, where London's Victoria and Albert Museum has thrown open its storerooms for visitors to view — and in many cases touch — the items within. The 16,000-square-metre building, bigger than 30 basketball courts, holds more than 250,000 objects, 350,000 books and 1,000 archives. Wandering its huge, three-story collections hall feels like a trip to IKEA, with treasures at every turn.

The V&A is Britain's national museum of design, performance and applied arts, and the storehouse holds aside after side of open shelves lined with everything from ancient Egyptian shoes to Roman pottery, ancient Indian sculptures, Japanese armour, Modernist furniture, a Piaggio scooter and a brightly painted garbage can

from the Glastonbury Festival. "It's 5,000 years of creativity," said Kate Parsons, the museum's director of collection care and access. It took more than a year, and 379 truckloads, to move the objects from the museum's former storage facility in west London to the site.

Get up close to objects. In the museum's biggest innovation, anyone can book a one-on-one appointment with any object, from a Vivienne Westwood mohair sweater to a tiny Japanese netsuke figurine. Most of the items can even be handled, with exceptions for hazardous materials, such as Victorian wallpaper that contains arsenic.

The Order an Object service offers "a behind-the-scenes, very personal, close interaction" with the collection, Parsons said as she showed off one of the most requested items so far: a 1954 pink silk taffeta Balenciaga evening gown. Nearby in one of the study rooms was a Bob Mackie-designed military tunic worn by

Designed by Diller, Scofidio and Renfro, the firm behind New York's High Line Park, the building has space to show off objects too big to have been displayed very often before, including a 17th-century Mughal colonnade from India, a 1930s modernist office designed by Frank Lloyd Wright and a Pablo Picasso-designed stage curtain for a 1924 ballet, some 10 metres high



Opinion

TUESDAY, JUNE 10, 2025

ROAD MAP

Union minister of road transport and highways
Nitin Gadkari

The projects in the pipeline are progressing rapidly. In another two years, you will be able to see that Indian road infrastructure will be similar to that of America



SHIFTING POLICY

RBI'S UNANTICIPATED SURPRISE CAME WITH CLEAR, TRANSPARENT FORWARD GUIDANCE OF A CHANGE IN STANCE

Reimagining Robert Lucas

SOUMYA KANTI GHOSH

Member, Chief Finance Commission, and group
chief economic adviser, State Bank of India



etary policy always affected nominal variables like inflation, even if fully anticipated.

Now fast-forward to present. While the RBI threw up an unanticipated surprise, it came with a clear and transparent forward guidance of a change in stance. This was actually reimagining Robert Lucas in the current-day monetary policy paradigm.

Why the change in policy stance from accommodative to neutral? If one has been following the RBI's monetary policy actions diligently, we must remember that post-pandemic, it has introduced "state-based" and "time-based" forward guidance — the change in stance in the June policy merely reflects the changing priorities.

The "time-based" forward guidance was explicitly used in the April policy, signalling a commitment to keep the accommodative stance in force and indicating rate cuts or pause in the only option. The June policy has effectively shifted from "time-based" guidance to "state-based" guidance. There is nothing unusual about it, as in the past also (2021), the RBI had shifted the guidance.

While the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) occasionally used "state-based" forward guidance in the pre-

Covid period, after the pandemic it started to offer "time-based" forward guidance. To quote from the RBI minutes in its February 2021 policy: "The commitment to keep accommodative stance is reflective of a time-based guidance; whereas on the other hand, the expression 'to revive growth on a durable basis' characterises a state-based guidance; i.e.,

guidance contingent on the state of the economy?" Time-based guidance is more explicit, while state-based is more implicit. For example, growth on a durable basis is not quantifiable but merely an implicit guidance on the state of the economy.

Interestingly, the RBI has also given a guidance of a guaranteed liquidity in the secondary market. Such assured liquidity support is a clear resemblance to developed market central banks (the CRR cut announced in advance). We thus find a clear synergy in consonance with the RBI's desired objective of supporting growth; hence, the change in stance.

But what is the reason for the staggered cut in CRR? There is possibly a justification to this, apart from it enhancing liquidity in the busy season. There is no denying of the fact that

reserve money growth has slowed down since the pandemic. From 18.8% in the pandemic year of FY21, it decelerated to 4.3% in FY25 (currently at 6.1%), of which ~70% because of the decline in currency in circulation apart from the cut in CRR.

The cut in CRR, along with the increasing digitisation, augments the money multiplier. In fact, the money multiplier tends to increase when the reserve ratio is cut and lower currency leakage, indicating higher multiple expansion in broad money on account of bank deposits. With deposit rates being cut, such an increase in money multiplier will clearly act as a buffer. We estimate the money multiplier can actually increase by 20-30 bps exclusively because of the CRR cut.

Thus, a lower expansion in reserve money can coexist with a stable M3 growth with a jump in the money multiplier making the relation of base money and money supply agnostic. This is important in an inflation targeting regime where money supply growth is endogenous.

Thus, clearly, the change in stance and the cut in CRR have been well thought off and the markets must understand the logic before jumping to frothy conclusions.

Before we conclude, here are two things to remember. First, central bank communication is important for all of us to learn, listen, and understand. Second, continuous interaction with market (social media included) and all stakeholders is the best strategy for policy effectiveness and helps deflect threats to central bank credibility. The RBI must be commended for patiently listening to almost all market participants before every policy in the most rigorous manner.

Views are personal

The challenge begins now

In its first year, Modi 3.0 has done well, but navigating an uncertain world needs a strategic economic direction

THE FIRST anniversary of its third term, the Narendra Modi-led government has reasons to look back with some satisfaction — both politically as well as economically. The numerical setback in the Lok Sabha elections did force the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to go back to the drawing board to recraft its political and governance outreach, but it didn't take much time for the party to regain momentum by notching up surprisingly big wins in a string of Assembly polls. If the BJP turned the tide in Haryana and Maharashtra, two states where it suffered reverses in the Lok Sabha polls, it also finally wrested Delhi after 26 years. True, the government's coalition partners have extracted sundry promises and largesse but even they know they are in no position to do anything but toe the BJP's line.

In any case, they were small favours considering the political returns. Consider how the coalition partners supported the Waqf (Amendment) Bill in Parliament, despite initial concern among them over its provisions. The government has also gone ahead with the push to its "One Nation One Election" Bill, despite lacking the two-thirds majority required for the approval of the constitutional amendment measure. There have been some smart political moves as well, witnessed in the decision to include caste enumeration data along with the decadal census, though one may argue this is a classic example of political opportunism as the decision is a sharp reversal of the BJP's stance in the 2024 election campaign.

On the economic front, one of the significant achievements has been the sharp fall in India's poverty ratio. Though it comes with a lag, the ratio has fallen sharply from 9.5% in 2022-23 to 4.9% in 2023-24. Better still, experts like former Reserve Bank of India Governor C Rangarajan has said GDP growth seems to have been a major contributor to the fall. Admittedly, economic growth may not sustain at the pace (6.9%) seen in the second half of the last fiscal, but there are enough and more tailwinds which should support growth momentum in FY26 closer to last year's pace. This, of course, isn't enough but needs to be seen in the context of an uncertain global environment. There is every reason to believe that consumption, particularly rural, will be robust but the key question is whether the other demand-side drivers — investment, exports, and government spending — will have an impact.

The challenges, no doubt, are too many. While our economy is primarily driven by domestic factors, growing ties with developed nations through trade and capital flows means it cannot be fully insulated from adverse global events. The domestic headwinds are all too familiar: stubbornly indifferent private capex, weak urban consumption, patchy rural recovery, some indications of household balance sheet stress, and a negative credit impulse. The International Monetary Fund recently projected that India will edge past Japan to become the world's fourth largest economy in 2025. While this marks a notable milestone, in per capita terms, India is still near the bottom of the global league tables: 136 in nominal GDP and 119 in purchasing power parity terms. Besides, slow manufacturing growth has now emerged as a serious structural constraint. Therefore, reforms that address structural bottlenecks remain crucial to raise India's attractiveness as an investment destination and unlock its growth potential. In the remaining years of his third term, the Modi government would do well to craft an evidence-based, analytically-grounded strategic economic direction.

Canada's last-minute G-7 invite to PM signals thaw

AS LAST-MINUTE INVITATIONS go, this one went down to the wire. After an initial snub, India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi confirmed Canada has invited him to the upcoming Group of Seven summit. President Donald Trump's trade war is bringing the two nations, whose relations have been strained in recent years, closer together.

India isn't a member of the G-7 — a grouping of the world's richest countries comprising the US, UK, Germany, France, Italy, Canada, and Japan. But it has been a regular attendee. This will be the nation's 12th time participating and Modi's sixth consecutive invitation. Ottawa had originally decided to leave him off the list, a move that raised questions about India's credibility in the international arena.

But newly elected Canadian leader Mark Carney has likely made an important calculation: Getting India inside is crucial as he tries to show that democracies can still function collaboratively, even in a fragmented world order. This comes despite Freedom House classifying the South Asian giant as only partly free, noting that the government led by Modi and the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party has presided over discriminatory policies and a rise in persecution affecting Muslims.

Ties between Ottawa and New Delhi deteriorated sharply in recent years, hitting fresh lows after former Prime Minister Justin Trudeau accused India's government of orchestrating the 2023 killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a prominent Sikh leader, outside a temple in British Columbia. Many Sikhs in the Canadian diaspora want a separate homeland within India for followers of the faith — an ambition that worries security authorities, who have outlawed the movement and view it as a terrorist threat.

New Delhi denied it was involved in Nijjar's death, alleging that Ottawa has harboured Sikh separatists. The public spat led to a series of diplomatic expulsions and a freeze in high-level engagements. Hopes of a thaw were raised after Carney was elected in April as the country's new prime minister. He's expressed interest in rebuilding ties with "like-minded countries" as he tries to navigate a difficult relationship with Trump and deal with the fallout from his trade war. That's led to some positive developments, including discussions about a reset in relations and a recent friendly telephone call between the two leaders.

For Carney, this is an opportunity to stabilise relations with an increasingly influential New Delhi. He may be signalling a desire to prioritise trade, tech, and climate cooperation over continued isolation. But it's also a chance to balance Trump's disruption to the world order, preventing him from dominating the economic narrative.

Regardless of the underlying motivations, Canada's decision to include India in this gathering is eminently sensible. In an era marked by fractures in the global order, sustaining engagement should be a priority. Modi can seize this opportunity to strengthen bilateral ties, while remembering that influence extends beyond economic size. It hinges on relationships, credibility, and trust — in short supply in today's volatile political arena. Setting aside differences to collaborate is not just a positive step, it's essential.

For Modi, who has long positioned himself as the natural leader of the Global South, the late inclusion will be embarrassing, but one he will survive. Domestically he has received both praise and criticism over the handling of recent hostilities with Pakistan. Diplomats have been on a global charm offensive to build international support for a headline military approach to Islamabad. Images of him mingling with global heads of state will benefit his standing at home and abroad, feeding into the narrative that he's respected globally.

Proponents of "The meaning of guarantee" (FE, June 9), the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme is acknowledged as one of the best for the poor. It allows rural households at least a minimum livelihood access in the non-farming days. But the ruling dispensation's aversion to this scheme is reflected in the lack of budgetary increases. The outlay in the last five years was

FOR MANY CLUED-IN on technology directions, Gartner's top strategic technology trends are a signpost. Not surprisingly, the very first trend they talk about for 2025 is agentic artificial intelligence (AI). In their words, "Agentic AI has the potential to perform as a highly competent teammate by providing insights from derivative entities that are often not visible to human teammates."

To elaborate, with the ubiquitous use of generative AI, the first level was singular querying, wherein natural language processing (NLP) is used for replies. Now, we are seeing the shift to the next level — of solving more complex problems autonomously. And this, aka agentic AI, involves deep, iterative reasoning and multiple steps. For instance, a major Indian bank has announced its intent to use agentic AI for customer service automation. The system, going beyond straightforward question answering, could potentially check the outstanding balance and recommend which accounts to pay off, and then complete transactions based on the client's response. Or it could be relating to autonomous fraud detection, triggered by an unusual login or non-typical behaviours, resulting in an instant customer alert, or quick remediation like freezing the account. This could involve behavioural biometrics and predictive forecasts leveraging financial crime databases.

Agentic AI in logistics could involve

tracking inventory, predicting stock levels and automating replenishment, precluding over- or understocking. Full-blown, it could include optimised routing, identifying potential disruptions, proactive solutions, smart warehousing, and instant customer updates.

In healthcare, agentic AI could be about matching patient needs and preferences with the availability of medical experts, smart scheduling to minimise wait times, retrieval and analysis of reports, monitoring vital signs like heart rate or sugar levels, alerting healthcare providers to prevent catastrophes, and claim processing. Doctors can use agentic AI to analyse vast amounts of data, both medical and patient-related, cut critical information, capture clinical notes, and create custom treatment plans, greatly enhancing efficiency.

The underlying process involves gathering relevant data from a variety of sources, including sensors, the internet, or databases. Then, leveraging a large language model to get specialised models to generate content or recommendations, followed by execution, utilising external tools via APIs (application programming interfaces).

And acting within predefined guardrails, while learning continuously through a feedback loop.

The foundational elements of agentic AI are systems that carry data from past ticks, agents that aggregate data from varied sources, workflow agents that execute across applications with the right APIs in the right sequence to ensure flawless fulfilment, and agents that assist. The strength of the system is the orchestration of these AI agents with each other, incorporating external ones seamlessly as necessary, enabling innovation and vastly superior outcomes.

Not long ago, hyper-automation was trending. It involves processes like robotic process automation and workflow automation, which are excellent for repetitive, compliance-driven, rule-based tasks but struggle with context-dependent, unstructured, evolving scenarios. That's exactly where agentic AI comes into play, a transformative layer on top of hyper-automation, bringing adaptive decisioning into play.

The demand for such solutions is accompanied by the need for professionals. Leading consulting firms say there are currently fewer than 100,000 agentic AI professionals, whereas the need is double that number by 2026. This includes agentic AI actors, AI framework architects, solution engineers, and system perfor-

mance testers, not to speak of new titles for emerging needs.

While AI autonomy creates immense opportunity for efficiency and the best outcomes, risks around control and accountability can't be ignored.

When you look at AI accountability, especially of the agentic kind, the user's role obviously ends with prompts. AI developers must embed safeguards and ethical principles, and provide for audit oversight. Deploying organisations who may well be considered ultimately responsible must, however, set clear boundary conditions, monitor skillfully, and intervene intelligently and speedily.

Laws and regulations often can't keep pace with technology development and the subtle changes it brings into play. India has a number of laws like the Information Technology Act, 2000, and the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, which will eventually lead to AI-specific legislation — which must directly address bias, discrimination, privacy, misinformation, accountability, and liability concerns. Only then will it drive growth and progress, and prevent weaponisation of a potent technology in a borderless world. Evidently, as AI becomes smarter and more autonomous, humans must remain stewards of their power.

It promises to get even more interesting if and when AI gets recognised as legal entity with its own rights and responsibilities.

job loss and underemployment due to mechanisation, both in manufacturing and agriculture, and discourage monopolies. We also have to proactively promote non-farm-based rural employment in clusters of villages. Good economics for India also requires consistent relationships with other nations in order to explore rewarding export opportunities. —Bijl Goyal, Ludhiana

Write to us at feletters@expressindia.com



KARISHMA VASWANI

Bloomberg



ANIL NAIR

Founder, ThinkStreet

While AI autonomy creates immense opportunity for efficiency and the best outcomes, risks around control and accountability can't be ignored

Evidently, as AI becomes smarter and more autonomous, humans must remain stewards of their power

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Fulfil job guarantee

Apologies of "The meaning of guarantee" (FE, June 9), the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme is acknowledged as one of the best for the poor. It allows rural households at least a minimum livelihood access in the non-farming days. But the ruling dispensation's aversion to this scheme is reflected in the lack of budgetary increases. The outlay in the last five years was

reduced from ₹1.1 lakh crore to around ₹8500 crore. Suggestions to increase the work days from 100 to 150 and the daily wage from ₹261 to ₹400 also haven't been heeded, while states have grievances about the quantum and timely payment of funds by the Centre. Poor wage, delayed payment, and denial of work under some pretext or the other are reasons for the rural poor migrating to cities. Allocation of substantially more funds, besides extending the scheme to

cities, will go a long way in infusing vibrancy to the rural economy.

—AG Rajmohan, Anantapur

Rate cut and growth

The generous rate cut by the Reserve Bank of India may cheer the stock markets for some time, but manufacturing growth may not pick up soon due to inadequate credit. We must spur domestic demand first by focusing on employment generation in labour-intensive sectors to counter

Main Editorial

Pakistan's Escalating Economic Struggles

Pakistan's economic situation continues to deteriorate, with new foreign loans being taken one after the other. Recently, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) released a report revealing that Pakistan's growth rate is a meager 2.6%. A combination of political instability, rising inflation, and a deteriorating foreign debt situation is continuously undermining the country's economy. In this context, Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed a rally, stating that India has now become the world's fourth-largest economy, while Pakistan is in a dire state. Modi warned Pakistan, saying that if it continues to export terrorism to India, it will face economic destruction.

His rhetoric comes at a time when Pakistan is reeling from the aftereffects of Operation Sindoor. India, using a strategy of water diplomacy, economic pressure, and economic sanctions, is pushing Pakistan towards further economic collapse. A key point in this strategy has been India's decision to suspend the Indus Water Treaty, following the terror attack in Pahalgaon on April 23. India has also strategically halted the flow of water through the Chenab River via the Baglihar Dam and plans to implement similar measures on the Jhelum River via the Kishenganga Dam. This action has created significant unrest in Pakistan, with politicians and military officials alike expressing concern. Pakistani parliamentarian Syed Ali Zafar stated in the national assembly that if Pakistan does not resolve the water issue, it could face famine, as 90% of the country's agriculture depends on the Indus River. The looming water crisis is akin to a "water bomb" ticking away in Pakistan. The 21st century, unlike the oil wars of the 20th century, may see water becoming the central

geopolitical resource. Pakistan, already one of the countries facing severe water shortages, is in a precarious position. In response to these developments, Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, during a press conference in Tehran on May 27, expressed Pakistan's willingness to engage in talks with India on the Indus Water Treaty. However, Prime Minister Modi's recent remarks echoed a firm stance: water and blood cannot flow together. Modi emphasized that India will no longer compromise on its rightful share of water from the Indus River, making it clear that India's water policies will be shaped according to its own needs. The World Bank's role in mediating the Indus Water Treaty has also come under scrutiny. Ajay Banga, the President of the World Bank, stated that the institution's role is limited to mediation and will not intervene if India chooses to suspend the treaty. This lack of support from international bodies adds further strain on Pakistan, which has been scrambling to negotiate with India and the World Bank to ease the situation. Since the suspension of the treaty, Pakistan has written four letters to India,

requesting reconsideration of the decision, but India has made it clear that it will not resume the treaty until Pakistan curtails cross-border terrorism. Beyond water disputes, economic pressure on Pakistan continues to mount. India is taking steps to place Pakistan back on the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) gray list. Recently, India submitted detailed dossiers to FATF, including evidence of Pakistan's involvement in money laundering and financing terrorism. This move, if successful, would add significant international economic pressure on Pakistan, especially as the country grapples with rising inflation and debt. The economic effects of India's strategic decisions are already visible. On May 3, India completely halted all forms of trade with Pakistan, including the import of goods from Pakistan and the export of Indian goods to Pakistan. This decision has disrupted trade, particularly affecting Pakistan's economy, which heavily relies on exports. Furthermore, the closure of the Atari Land-Transit Post, a key trade route, has made it even more difficult for Pakistan to engage in cross-border trade with India. As trade between the

two nations dwindles, Pakistan's economy, already struggling with a high debt load, has seen inflation spiral out of control. Essential items like wheat, pulses, sugar, and oil have become increasingly expensive, with the prices of fruits and vegetables soaring. In contrast, India has not been significantly impacted by the trade restrictions and has witnessed a decline in inflation in recent months. India's continued pressure on Pakistan, through economic sanctions, water diplomacy, and FATF actions, shows no sign of abating. Following Operation Sindoor, India's strategic approach appears to be working, as Pakistan finds itself more isolated and economically weakened. In conclusion, Pakistan's economy is facing multiple crises, both internal and external. India's firm stance on water rights, combined with economic pressure and international diplomatic strategies, seems to be pushing Pakistan into a corner. The coming months will be crucial in determining whether Pakistan can overcome these challenges or whether it will continue its descent into economic turmoil.

The Monster of Addiction: Causes and Solutions

Often, we hear news reports about how bad company leads to drug addiction, to the point where some children in families end up selling household items to feed their habit.

Drug addiction among the youth has become an increasingly severe problem in Himachal Pradesh, reflecting a troubling national trend. Reports frequently highlight how bad company can lead young people to develop a drug addiction, sometimes to the extent of selling household items to sustain their habit. This growing problem is particularly concerning since 35.25% of Himachal Pradesh's population is young, which is higher than the national average of 34.80%. The youth are the future of any society, and their addiction threatens not only their individual futures but also the broader prosperity of the region. Drug addiction often stems from a combination of factors such as an inactive lifestyle, lack of parental attention, family conflict, depression, peer pressure, and easy access to drugs. In the past, the state had an active rural lifestyle where people engaged in daily activities like farming and caring for animals, which kept them physically occupied and away from harmful habits. Today's youth, however, lacks such engagement, with many becoming drawn to social media and a sedentary lifestyle, which leaves them vulnerable to the temptations of drugs. Moreover, the rise of social media contributes to addiction by releasing dopamine, a chemical that creates feelings of pleasure, similarly to how drugs affect the brain. Parents often fail to recognize the signs of addiction in their children, attributing behavior changes to supernatural forces or divine anger, thus neglecting the true psychological causes. This neglect allows children to fall deeper into addiction without the proper intervention. The easy availability of drugs through online platforms also plays a significant role, with illegal drug markets flourishing on the dark web. The influence of bad company, peer pressure, and a lack of real-world struggles contribute further to the problem, as some parents overindulge their children without teaching them the value of hard work, leading them to seek solace in drugs. Additionally, the modern pressures of academic and social expectations increase stress among children, making them more susceptible to addiction as a coping mechanism. To tackle this crisis, the government of Himachal Pradesh is spearheading the "Nasha Mukti Himachal" (Drug-Free Himachal) campaign, aiming to create awareness, crack down on drug dealers, and dismantle their networks. Ultimately, addressing drug addiction requires a multifaceted approach, including promoting active lifestyles, guiding parents, educating the youth, and combating bad company. Only through these collective efforts can we hope to eliminate the scourge of addiction and secure a healthier future for the youth of Himachal Pradesh.



For decades, citizens residing within India's military cantonment areas have been caught in a paradoxical existence—living in civil spaces yet under stringent military oversight. These cantonments, established primarily during the British colonial period, continue to operate under a governance model that prioritizes military discipline and control over the civil liberties and administrative freedoms of their inhabitants. Despite India's independence over seven decades ago, these areas have largely remained islands of archaic regulations, where civic rights are limited, development is stifled, and democratic participation remains a distant dream. Historically, cantonment zones were designed to serve strategic military needs, with boundaries often demarcated by high walls, checkpoints, and various restrictions on movement and commerce. These physical and bureaucratic barriers translated into social and economic constraints for the local population. The governance structure, dominated by defense authorities, often sidelined civilian needs, limiting access to quality infrastructure, healthcare, education, and basic urban services. Over time, these restrictions became a serious impediment, turning cantonment residents into second-class citizens struggling to reconcile their identity within a military-dominated environment. Now, a significant and transformative shift is unfolding across the country. Over the next few months, the government has announced that 36 cantonment areas will be gradually released from this rigid military framework. This transition signals a new chapter—one that promises greater autonomy for residents through integration with local self-governance bodies such as municipal corporations, town councils, or panchayats. The state of Himachal Pradesh is already at the forefront of this change. The Yulwa cantonment has set a precedent by bidding farewell to its military-centric adminis-

Liberation of Citizens from Military Cantonments: A New Dawn for Civic Freedoms



trative model. Soon, six other cantonments—Subathu, Dagshal, Kasauli, Dalhousie, Bakloh, and Jatog—will follow suit, embracing a governance model that seeks to empower civilian populations with greater freedom and civic responsibility. This change is not merely administrative—it reflects the deeper democratic aspirations of the citizens. People living in these cantonment areas are eager to exercise full rights as residents, actively participate in local governance, and demand better civic amenities. Unlike the military-run cantonment boards, which have suffered from limited budgets, lack of technical expertise, and isolation from state-level development schemes, local municipal bodies promise a more inclusive and accountable form of governance. Residents expect improvements in essential services such as water supply, sanitation, waste management, traffic regulation, and urban planning, which are fundamental to their quality of life. However, this transition is complex and presents a unique set of challenges. The military's strict discipline and structured maintenance systems, which once ensured cleanliness and order, risk being compromised when civilian bodies take

over. The example of Yulwa cantonment is instructive: after the military withdrew many of its administrative functions, the area experienced increased garbage accumulation and poor sanitation in adjoining zones. Such issues underscore the critical need for a carefully managed and well-coordinated handover process to prevent service disruption and environmental degradation. Experts argue that to safeguard sustainable development and maintain high standards of living, these former cantonment areas must be incorporated under the jurisdiction of established urban local bodies. This inclusion will ensure that they benefit from the technical, financial, and administrative capacities of municipal corporations or councils. For instance, residents of Jatog and Yulwa could be integrated with the Shimla and Dharamshala municipal corporations, respectively, while smaller cantonments might be better managed under municipal councils or town committees. This alignment would also facilitate better planning and coordination with neighboring urban areas, promoting regional development and resource sharing. Beyond administrative concerns, this process represents a piv-

otal moment in India's democratic evolution. The release of cantonment residents from colonial-era restrictions symbolizes the country's commitment to equality, empowerment, and decentralized governance. It is an opportunity to dismantle entrenched colonial legacies and strengthen democratic institutions at the grassroots level. Yet, success will depend heavily on the state's ability to ensure adequate funding, provide technical support, and engage the community actively in governance processes. Moreover, public awareness campaigns and participatory governance models must be prioritized to educate residents about their new roles and responsibilities within municipal frameworks. This will empower citizens to hold local officials accountable and contribute meaningfully to decision-making, thus fostering a culture of transparency and responsiveness. Finally, this transition invites a reimagining of urban planning and development in these areas. Authorities must balance the need for modernization with environmental sustainability, ensuring that growth respects green spaces, minimizes pollution, and promotes inclusive economic opportunities.

The Courtroom Monkey: A Satire on Disorder, Power, and Justice

No one can say what inspired the monkey to settle in the court premises, but once he did, he made himself at home like a king reigning over a kingdom without law or order. He entered through open windows, roamed freely, and caused havoc in a place meant to uphold justice and fairness. The irony is almost bitter: in the very courthouse where rules and authority should prevail, this monkey enjoyed absolute freedom, unchecked and unruly. This "courtroom monkey" was no ordinary animal. He terrorized those who came to seek justice, ripping apart affidavits and legal documents for his amusement. His presence instilled fear among litigants, who dreaded the possibility of encountering him during their hearings. The monkey had, surprisingly, gained power and influence far beyond his own kind. Even among the city's monkeys, his word was law; many monkeys began to imitate him, elevating themselves to a status beyond mere street creatures. The story of this monkey is both humorous and grim, serving as a powerful allegory for the dysfunction in our justice system and the broader social order. The monkey

The courtroom monkey's reign exposes the unchecked disorder within institutions meant to uphold law. His mischievous acts reflect the fear and helplessness of litigants facing more than just legal battles. The monkey's influence extends beyond the court, symbolizing how power can corrupt even the simplest social order.

symbolizes the unchecked mischief and abuse of power that often plague public institutions. The fact that he could tear up affidavits with impunity mirrors the disregard for truth and due process sometimes witnessed in courts. One day, a follower of this courtroom monkey brazenly stole an apple from a vegetable vendor. The vendor didn't protest. Who could he complain to? After all, the city was rife with petty corruption—police officers stationed at intersections regularly pocketed goods under the pretense of enforcing rules for "someone above." This apathy and helplessness of the common man reveal the everyday struggles faced by citizens under corrupt and inefficient governance. The stolen apple did not sit well with the stray dogs of the neighborhood. They gave chase, barking furiously, but

the monkey held on tight to his prize. Following his mentor's advice, the monkey cunningly threw a small piece of the apple to one dog. Instantly, the dogs turned on the one that received the treat, fighting among themselves while the monkey laughed from a nearby tree. This episode, where the monkey manipulates his rivals and remains unscathed, illustrates how cunning and manipulation often triumph over brute force in society. This courtroom monkey had grown so influential that every Sunday, all the city monkeys would gather for his counsel. In one such meeting, a pressing question arose: "Your Honor, how long must we continue to steal from poor vendors and scavengers, or dig through dustbins for food? Even the bananas from the Hanuman temple are no longer available. Should we

move to the Chief Minister's residence? The Secretary? Or hide in the Assembly hall?" The monkey promised to consider this dilemma but asked for more time. Meetings went on with no resolution. Meanwhile, the monkey began to observe the workings of the court more closely. He realized a harsh truth: if the arguments were clever and the lawyers skillful, anyone could win a case, regardless of the facts. Within a few months, even the Hanuman temple monkeys had joined the court premises. They began to "tax" the visitors, and slowly, those attending court proceedings started bringing offerings to appease the monkeys. The image of monkeys hopping on rooftops of every courtroom became a regular sight—these creatures had become unwilling witnesses to the justice process. The satirical apex of this tale is the case of

the sweet-maker accused of selling adulterated sweets. The food inspector's lawyer tried to prove that the sweets contained fake ghee, sugar, and khoya. The case dragged on, with allegations leading to summons of the sugarcane farmer and ultimately the cow that produced the milk, along with her owner. In a bizarre twist, the cow had the support of all the monkeys and, before being questioned, left dung and urine across the court premises. The case now transcended mere legal proceedings—it had become a matter involving the sacred "Gomata" (holy cow). The court faced a dilemma: if it proceeded against the cow or its owner, it risked offending religious sentiments. But ignoring the mess would be a disregard for law and order. The monkeys, wiser in their way, understood that animals often outsmart humans in such convoluted situations. Eventually, the court ordered the municipal authorities to clean the premises and to provide fodder for the cow, preventing her from roaming as a stray. The sweet-maker was acquitted, but as soon as he stepped out, the monkeys surrounded him, seizing bananas from his bag and even the lawyer's fee.

THE IDEAS PAGE

The illiberal liberal arts

The debate on making universities expansive and tolerant should cast a wider net beyond the founders and administrators of one private institution



DESHKAAL
BY YOGENDRA YADAV

IF WE MUST turn to AI for answers to any and every question, can we not get AI to help us ask the right question? That was the first thought that crossed my mind as I read Sanjeev Bikhchandani's now-public letter to the Ashoka University community.

I read him with sympathy, notwithstanding sharp differences with his public utterances. Ashoka founders who gave time, energy and money to build a first-rate liberal arts university that is truly not-for-profit deserve respect, especially from parents like me whose children have benefited from it. Building and sustaining an institution is a painful and thankless task in the best of times. The challenge is even more difficult under the current dispensation.

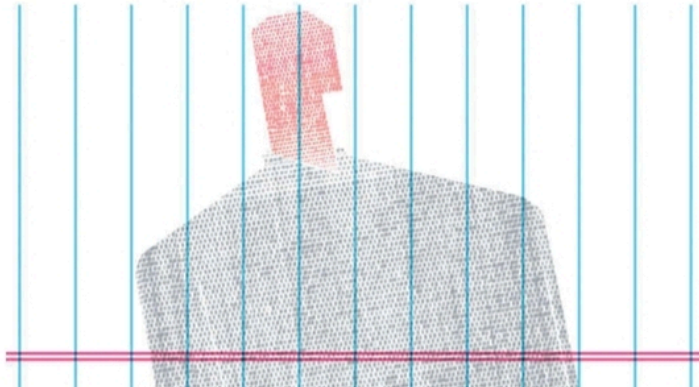
I was sad, therefore, that Bikhchandani chose to ask a poor, strawman question: "Are all liberal arts universities activist in nature?" The only possible answer can be no. How can all the universities be alike? Why should the way other universities are be the norm for Ashoka? At any rate, what does it mean for the university to be activist in nature? Would it not be ridiculous to expect the university as an institution to turn activist? I was also embarrassed that Bikhchandani chose to ask this question of a chatbot and not the hundreds of teachers — among the best in the country — at the university of which he is a trustee.

The questions Bikhchandani should have asked are: Does liberal arts education by its very nature foster some form of activism? If so, how should a university that imparts liberal arts education deal with it? Should an active engagement with issues of our time be emphasised in the syllabi and pedagogy of the university? Should this be encouraged in the campus culture? And should such an engagement by the faculty, students and staff — on campus and off campus — be allowed, if not respected?

Many of these are general questions for any institution, certainly for any educational institution. Any good education — arts, science or whatever — must inculcate among the students a spirit of inquiry. It must develop critical thinking by training the students to interrogate received wisdom and question authority. As Paulo Freire reminded us, education is inherently subversive.

Liberals takes it a step further. It invites the students to apply this critical thinking to their own society and their lives. This leads them to question their prejudices and privileges. Even more so for teachers and students of Political Science (such as Professor Ali Khan Mahmudabad), who must interrogate the claims of political authority all the time. As Kartikeya Bhatnagar, an alumnus of Ashoka, puts it in a sharp indictment (published in ThePrint) of the university's role in the recent episode: "Liberal arts education — by its very structure — cultivates critical thinking, dissent, and moral inquiry. So yes, activism may not be mandatory, but it is certainly not alien to the tradition."

In a sense, the question for a liberal arts university boils down to this: How should it deal with the preconditions and consequences of what it teaches? Quality liberal ed-



C.R. Sasikumar

ucation requires that those who impart this education should be able to think critically and that the institution should foster a culture of free exchange of ideas. The outcome of a good "humanities" education should be that it produces humans capable of independent judgement, who would wish to act on their convictions in real life. So, can any university, least of all a liberal arts university, fulfil its educational mission without permitting, respecting and fostering active engagement with real-life questions of its time? Such active engagement deserves to be celebrated as a civic virtue. If this activism, then liberal arts education and activism are connected by an umbilical cord.

This is not to say that a university should get into the business of promoting one kind of partisanship or another. It must ensure that all competing visions and ideologies get a fair space. The political convictions of a teacher like Mahmudabad do not impede education, as long as they are known and up for discussion. The real danger of indoctrination comes from partisanship that remains unacknowledged or passed off as common sense. And yes, there is a need for rules for any such engagement. The university may need to draw some boundaries on what types and modes of action may not be encouraged or permitted within the institutional spaces. But a fiat that seeks to decouple critical thinking and civic action would frustrate the very point of liberal arts education.

This foundational debate must not distract from the rather narrow question in Mahmudabad's case, a question Bikhchandani does not address. No one asked the university to own up to every social media post, or academic article for that matter, written by the faculty or students and defend it in a court of law. The real question was simply this: Should an institution, university or otherwise, stand by a member of its community in the face of a politically motivated witch-hunt? Or abandon and virtually disown him at the first hint of a controversy? Even if the institution could not offer legal support, could it not offer moral support? Or at the very least, have kept quiet?

Sadly, on this score, Ashoka University's response left a lot to be desired. The very first response, even before Mahmudabad's arrest, gave in to the insinuation that his post was against the armed forces. Post his arrest, like the media and the government, the univer-

We do not know the constraints under which the university administrators function. Running a liberal university under an illiberal regime may be a contradiction in terms. The founders might just feel that they cannot take it any more, that they cannot defend their dream without endangering the very existence of the institution, or their business interests. That would be legitimate. But then it need not be couched in high moral terms. The victim you cannot defend need not be put in the dock.

sity, too, presumed that he was in the dock. And now Bikhchandani's letter leaves nothing to the imagination. Mahmudabad stands accused of "institutional capture and selfishness" and hijacking Ashoka's platform for his political agenda, something the university should guard against by framing a policy against a "Politically Exposed Person".

This is not the first time Ashoka has faced issues of how liberal it is in dealing with dissenting faculty. With every instance (including that of freedom to publish academic research as in the case of Sabyasachi Das), the university seems to be leaning in the illiberal direction. If Bikhchandani's letter is to be read as a message from the founders, there is a finality about the signals: The message is loud and chilling.

We do not know the constraints under which the university administrators function. Running a liberal university under an illiberal regime may be a contradiction in terms. The founders might just feel that they cannot take it any more, that they cannot defend their dream without endangering the very existence of the institution, or their business interests. That would be understandable. But then it need not be couched in high moral terms. The victim you cannot defend need not be put in the dock.

One final thought. Should this debate not move beyond Ashoka's administrators and its founders, to the Ashoka community, including the faculty, students, parents and alumni? After all, the defence of liberal education in that institution must involve them all. And should this debate not cast its net wider than the best-known and elite institutions like Ashoka? After all, the real tragedy of liberal education in the country is not what has happened at Ashoka, but the manner in which all the major public universities known for liberal education — Jawaharlal Nehru University, Central University of Hyderabad, University of Delhi and Tata Institute of Social Science, to name a few — have been dismantled. In the last instance, activism will not be defended by elite institutions and their well-heeled donors. Activism must be defended by the public. We don't need a chatbot to tell us that.

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

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The biggest challenge posed by Mr Trump federalising the National Guard is this: What's the limiting principle?... And ultimately, who and what is the US military in service to — the American public or the President's political agenda?"

— THE NEW YORK TIMES

Chasing glory, building Bharat

The last 11 years have seen a transformation in sports infrastructure, ensuring transparency and outstanding performances on the global stage



MANSUKH MANDAVIYA

AS WE EMBARK on our journey to become Viksit Bharat by 2047, one of the most powerful forces shaping this vision is the rise of Indian sports. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Indian sports is scaling new heights on the global stage.

Recently, Indian athletes once again made the nation beam with pride through extraordinary performances on the global stage. At the Asian Athletics Championships 2025, the Indian contingent delivered a commanding performance, clinching 24 medals and smashing multiple national records along the way. Our women wrestlers scripted a golden chapter in history, returning from the Ulaanbaatar Open in Mongolia with a record-breaking 21 medals, their best-ever haul at a Ranking Series event. This success didn't come overnight. India won only 26 Olympic medals in the first 23 editions (including before independence). But in the last three editions alone — 2016, 2020 and 2024 — India bagged 15 medals. In the Paralympics, from just eight medals before 1968 and 2012, India has now won 52 medals in the last three editions, including a record 29 medals in Paris 2024.

These achievements are the result of a performance-driven ecosystem built over the last 11 years. PM Modi has brought a clear and focused vision that every athlete, regardless of background, deserves access to world-class training, infrastructure, financial support, athlete-centric governance, and a transparent system to thrive.

At the heart of these reforms is the Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS), launched in 2014 to identify and support top athletes. What began with 75 athletes has now grown to support 213 sportspersons for the Los Angeles 2028 cycle, including 52 para-athletes and 112 athletes under the development category. New schemes have also been introduced to support athletes in disciplines that have traditionally received less attention. The Target Asian Games Group (TAGG), introduced this year, supports 40 medal prospects in 10 disciplines such as fencing, cycling, equestrian, sailing, kayaking and canoeing, judo, taekwondo, tennis, table tennis, and wrestling.

Driving this performance is a significant financial commitment. The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports budget has more than tripled in the last decade, from Rs 1,219 crore in 2013-14 to Rs 3,794 crore in 2025-26. The Khelo India Scheme, launched in 2017 to develop grassroots infrastructure and promote year-round competition, has seen its budget increase to Rs 1,000 crore this year. National sports federations have also received unprecedented support. Financial assistance for hosting international tournaments and national championships has nearly doubled. Coaches' support has been revised upward by 50 per cent. Athlete dietary allowances have been increased to meet the demands of high-performance training.

One of the most impactful reforms has been the emphasis on transparency. All fed-

erations must video record selection trials and publish selection criteria for major events two years in advance. This ensures fairness, builds trust among athletes, and keeps the system merit-based. Sports certificates are now issued through DigLocker and linked to the National Sports Repository System, ensuring tamper-proof documentation. The Draft National Sports Policy 2024, along with the Draft National Sports Governance Bill, aim to strengthen the sports ecosystem and bring athletic welfare to the centre of policy making. Age fraud is being tackled through new medical checks and stricter penalties. Federations are also required to appoint Integrity Officers to ensure compliance.

In addition to Olympic sports, traditional Indian sports like mallaikamb, kalaripayattu, yogasana, gatka and thang-ta are being revived and promoted through the Khelo India Games. Indigenous sports like Kabaddi and Kho-Kho are now receiving international recognition.

The push for gender equity has also been significant. The ASMITA League (Achieving Sports Milestones by Inspiring Women Through Action), launched to promote women's participation in sports, has expanded rapidly: From just 840 women athletes in 2021-22, over 60,000 women across 26 sports participated in 2024-25. The ASMITA League connects these athletes to the Khelo India pathway.

India's sports infrastructure has also expanded at an unprecedented scale in the last 11 years. From just 38 infrastructure projects before 2014, the number has now risen to 350. The Sports Authority of India currently runs 23 national centres of excellence, training elite athletes under TOPS and Khelo India. Additionally, 34 state centres of excellence have been established.

The Khelo India Games have evolved into a national movement. Nineteen editions have been held so far — including Youth, University, Para, Winter, and Beach Games — with more than 56,000 athletes participating. The Khelo India Para Games, in particular, have been game-changing, with many athletes from these competitions going on to win medals at the Paralympics. Looking ahead, India is preparing for a potential bid to host the 2030 Commonwealth Games and the 2036 Olympic Games. To support this vision, new verticals under Khelo India such as the School Games, Tribal Games, Northeast Games, Water Games, Martial Arts Games, and Swadeshi Games are being launched. The upcoming Khelo India School Games will play a pivotal role in bringing fresh talent into the sporting ecosystem.

PM Modi's vision is for India to be among the top 10 sporting nations when we host the Olympics in 2036 and among the top five by the time we mark 100 years of Independence in 2047. Much has been done to fulfil this vision, but a lot remains to be achieved.

India's sporting revolution today is a story of vision, resolve, and inclusive growth. With our youth at the heart of this transformation, and under the dynamic leadership of PM Modi, India is rising as a global sporting powerhouse. From medals to mindsets, the change is visible and the journey to Viksit Bharat is being powered by the spirit of sport.

The writer is Union Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports and Labour and Employment

The communication front

CDS's remarks on Op Sindoor underline the need to win the 'story war'



C. UDAY BHASKAR

THE INTERVIEW GIVEN by Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore on May 31 to a foreign news agency about Operation Sindoor has generated considerable interest and comment, both in India and abroad. It has also raised a few concerns — all for valid reasons. In response to a question about claims being made by Pakistan about India losing combat aircraft in the early stages of Op Sindoor, the CDS stated, "What is important is not the jet being down, but why they were being downed."

While General Chauhan did not go into any specifics about the number of platforms lost in combat, he asserted that India had swiftly rectified its "tactical mistakes" and resumed high-precision strikes at the designated targets, some deep within Pakistan. He added, "What mistakes were made — those are important. Numbers are not important. The good part is that we were able to understand the tactical mistake which we made, remedy it, rectify it, and then implement it again after two days and flew our jets again, targeting at long range."

This has been interpreted as the first confirmation by the military leadership at the highest level that India lost some aircraft in Op Sindoor. It may be recalled that at the military briefing on May 11, conducted in Delhi

soon after cessation of hostilities, the Air Force representative, Air Marshal AK Bharti, had responded to a similar question regarding fighter aircraft losses saying, "We are in a combat scenario, losses are a part of combat. The question you must ask us is: Have we achieved our objective of decimating the terrorist camps? And the answer is a thumping yes."

Against this backdrop, the response of the CDS is pertinent and provides more tactical insights into the conduct of Op Sindoor. A reference was also made by General Chauhan to the nuclear threshold and how this was handled by Delhi. Any light shed on the role of the CDS in Op Sindoor would have been very valuable but this thread was not pursued.

Professionals will study these remarks carefully, for Op Sindoor has many strands related to the conduct of a high-intensity conflict between two nuclear-weapon-capable states, both by way of strategic signalling and the narrative campaign that has acquired its own autonomy in the modern age. The global tenet now is that more than winning the war in the combat domain, the "story war" must also be won. Perceptions have to be shaped in a favourable manner both in the domestic and international arena. Here, India has been put on the back foot: the CDS's remarks in Singapore have drawn attention to this vital component of national security.

During combat, no nation divulges detailed tactical information, particularly about platform damage or loss. Indeed, while there was intense speculation about how many Rafale aircraft had been lost by India during Op Sindoor, the government kept silent. However it allowed some sections of the audio-visual media to engage in shallit triumphalism and ugly majoritarian nationalism, and to this was added some embroidered assessments by foreign sources. The net result was a further erosion of the credibility of the Indian media. A professional attribute that a nation ought to acknowledge and nurture with integrity is media credibility. The May 11 military briefing was professional and the question about the loss of fighters had been addressed in a tangential manner. If the government wanted to confirm the fact that India had indeed lost some platforms, why was this not done in Delhi soon after the first briefing? The delay added to the speculation and was avoidable.

And if the CDS was identified as the senior-most military officer to do so, then why in Singapore, and why to a foreign news agency and not an Indian one such as PTI? In my view, a professional briefing at a three-star level was adequate and further details could have been provided in Parliament, as is the norm in democracies. The sharing of some factual tactical details is desirable to enhance credibility

and be better positioned in the narrative battle. India has not been able to rise to this challenge and many questions have been asked, both on social media and by the Opposition parties, as to why such details were not provided in Parliament or by the Defence Minister. This leads one to infer that perhaps the CDS's remarks were not part of any script but spontaneous. If so, this is even more disappointing with respect to India's strategic communication campaign.

The Pahalgaon massacre took place on April 22 and Operation Sindoor was launched on May 7. Delhi, with its much vaunted Narendra Modi-led communication capabilities both in India and abroad, was aware that the Shangri-La Dialogue would take place in Singapore at the end of May. Was there a suitable strat com plan in place? The remarks of the CDS would suggest otherwise.

Operation Sindoor is in pause mode and the narrative battle continues. US President Donald Trump's assertions regarding brokering a ceasefire have quelled the pitch for Delhi. Fidelity to facts and transparency as behoves a democracy are critical in dealing with national security challenges. Galwan 2020 and Op Sindoor 2025 have many embedded lessons.

The writer is director, Society for Policy Studies

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SIGNIFICANT DROP

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Figures of hope' (IE, June 9). The recent World Bank India Poverty and Equity Brief (April 2025) paints a remarkable picture of India's success in combating extreme poverty. This progress is due in large part to targeted welfare schemes, expanded rural infrastructure, and direct benefit transfers that have bolstered household incomes and improved living conditions. However, this positive narrative coexists with a sobering reality: inequality continues to widen. As noted in the World Inequality Report 2022, the top 1 per cent of India's population controls around 40 per cent of the national wealth, underscoring a lopsided growth trajectory.

Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

ELECTION INTEGRITY

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Match-fixing Maharashtra' (IE, June 7). It reinforces many concerns that have been rising in the minds of people across the country. Rahul Gandhi has raised pertinent questions, using statistics to buttress his arguments. The article is aimed not just at the Election

Commission of India but at the broader public. Amendments to the procedure for appointing the Election Commissioner, an incredible increase in the number of voters in the voter list, voting figures at specific polling stations after the voting time has ended, the disparity in the number of voters during the Parliament and Assembly elections, multiple EPICs of the same number, etc, are issues that will catch the interest of several politically minded Indians.

Momin Faheem, Bhiwandi

LACK OF STRATEGY

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'When ecstacy becomes agony' (IE, June 7). Swinging into action only after a tragedy is a sad practice, all too common in India. The June 4 Bengaluru stampede could have been avoided, had there been a well-thought-out plan that accounted for contingencies in place. It was a consequence of carelessness and lack of planning on the part of the local authorities that turned an occasion of celebration into one of mourning. Coordination between the different wings of the state government and cricket administrators was missing.

SH Quadri, Bikaner

thehindubusinessline.
TUESDAY • JUNE 10, 2025

Fiscal challenges

Revenue stress should not translate into capex cut

Recent data released by the Controller General of Accounts reveals that the Centre has managed to meet the revised target for fiscal deficit for FY25, retaining it at 4.8 per cent of GDP. But achieving this target was obviously not a cakewalk, given the dip in corporate profitability and weakness in several segments of the economy in FY25. This is evident in provisional tax revenue falling short by 2.3 per cent compared to the revised estimates.

While income tax collection in FY25 was 17 per cent higher than in FY24, corporate tax collection grew at just 8.3 per cent as sectors including IT, banking and auto decelerated. Customs and excise duty collections were marginally lower due to policy changes and a weaker domestic and external environment. The Centre was able to reduce the fiscal gap last year with the help of lower revenue expenditure and surplus transfer from the RBI. Revenue expenditure, which accounts for over three-fourths of the Budget expenditure, was 2.6 per cent lower than revised estimates in FY25, indicating that the Centre trimmed expenses to meet its deficit target.

It is well that the Centre is mindful of the mounting debt caused by these deficits and is now determined to control it. It had laid out a path for fiscal consolidation in the recent Budget, aiming to bring the debt-to-GDP ratio down to around 50 per cent by March 2031. But staying on course may prove challenging going ahead. The ongoing tariff war is likely to disrupt global supply chains, hurting the external sector. The uncertainty is making companies postpone fresh projects, impeding capital investments. Meeting the fiscal deficit target of 4.4 per cent of GDP for FY26 may be a challenge given the assumption of nominal GDP growth at 10.1 per cent in the Union Budget. With inflation projected to fall, nominal growth could be lower than what was budgeted for. The record high RBI dividend of ₹2.68 lakh crore for 2024-25, which is higher than the ₹2.56 lakh crore budgeted as receipts from the RBI and the dividend receipts from public sector banks, could help shore up the fiscal situation this year.

The impact of the large cuts in income tax rates for individuals is yet to be known. If it translates into better compliance and greater consumption, tax collections can remain strong. If consumers fail to spend the extra money in their hands, the Centre's bet on both tax collections and GDP growth could come unstuck. Meanwhile, the Centre will have to ensure that it does not cut down its budgeted capital expenditure of ₹11.2 lakh crore this year, given the risks to growth. It is comforting to note that the actual capital expenditure for FY25 was 3.3 per cent higher than the revised estimate. Clearly, it does appear that the heavy-lifting will yet again have to be done by the Centre this fiscal year.

POCKET

India must
reframe
US trade talks

NARROW THE SCOPE. India should cut tariffs on 90% of US exports to India, but exclude agriculture and autos



AJAY SRIVASTAVA

On February 13, 2025, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Donald Trump launched formal talks for a Free Trade Agreement (FTA). Now, as the negotiations reach final stages, India must pause and introspect: Does this deal even qualify as an FTA? Is it a rushed deal that risks giving away too much for too little in return?

Worldwide, over 375 FTAs are currently in force. Under these agreements, all partner countries reduce their Most-Favoured-Nation (MFN) tariffs on a significant portion of their trade, as mandated by Article XXIV of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) under WTO rules. MFN tariffs are the standard customs duties a country applies equally to all WTO members unless lower preferential rates are offered through an FTA. The India-US deal will not meet this criterion. While India plans to reduce its MFN tariffs to benefit thousands of US products, the US is not offering MFN tariff cuts. Instead of cutting standard MFN tariffs, the US may only reduce its special "Liberation Day" tariffs on Indian goods. These were country-specific duties it imposed on April 2 across 57 nations. For India, that tariff was set at 26 per cent.

The extra "Liberation Day" tariffs the US added on top of its MFN tariffs go beyond the WTO-bound rates — the maximum duty levels the US promised not to exceed. This makes the "Liberation Day" tariffs a clear breach of the US's WTO commitments.

Trump paused these extra tariffs on April 9 for 90 days (until July 8) to pressure countries into making quick concessions. However, even after the US tariff cut, Indian goods will still face an additional 10 per cent tariff on top of the regular US MFN tariffs. This kind of arrangement does not qualify as an FTA under WTO rules. But incompatibility with WTO rules is not the only issue — the "Liberation Day" tariffs also break US law. Trump invoked the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), a law

TABLE 1
India's trade with US
FY2025 (\$ billion)

Category	Exports	Imports	Balance	Total
Goods	86.5	45.3	41.2	131.8
Services	28.7	25.5	3.2	54.2
Total trade	115.2	70.8	44.4	186

Data source: Goods - DGCIAS
Services - Estimates based on past data

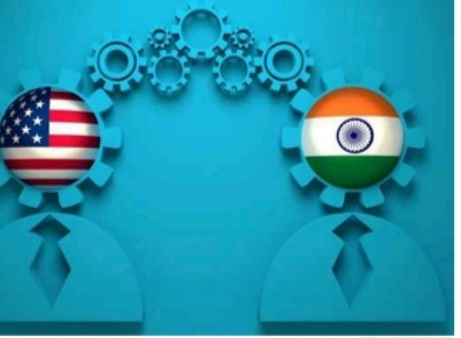
meant for national security emergencies, to impose the "Liberation Day" tariffs. However, on May 28, the US Court of International Trade ruled them illegal, finding that trade deficits are just an economic issue — not an "unusual and extraordinary threat" that justifies using IEEPA. In short, Trump overstepped the powers granted to him by Congress.

Although the US Court of Appeals has paused the ruling and given the administration until June 30 to respond, the signal is clear: the "Liberation Day" tariffs breach WTO rules and are likely to collapse under US law. Yet, Washington is using the promise of lifting these likely illegal tariffs to pressure India and others into making swift, permanent trade concessions — racing to secure deals before the tariffs' legal shelf-life runs out.

The US-UK trade deal signed on May 8 provides a sobering perspective. Under that agreement, the UK slashed tariffs on over 2,500 US products, removed duties on American ethanol, and increased purchases of Boeing aircraft — while the US offered tariff cuts on fewer than 100 British products, most capped at 10 per cent. It was not a balanced FTA. Was this done hurriedly to pressure other countries to follow suit?

India must challenge the misleading US narrative that frames the bilateral trade relationship solely through the lens of goods trade deficits. While India

US quietly earns \$80-85 billion annually from India through education exports, financial services, intellectual property royalties, digital operations, and arms sales.

TABLE 2
US earnings from India other than trade

Source	Estimated annual amount (\$ billion)
Indian student spending in US higher education	25 (tuition + living expenses)
Revenues of US tech giants (Google, Meta, Apple, Microsoft)	15-20 (ads, cloud, software)
Revenues of US banks and consulting firms (Citibank, JPMorgan, McKinsey, BCG, Deloitte, PwC, KPMG)	15-20 (financial services, corporate advisory)
Profits of Global Capability Centers (Deloitte, IBM, Cisco, Morgan Stanley)	15-20
Revenues from US pharma and auto companies (Pfizer, Merck, Ford, GM)	2.3-3.2 (patents, licensing)
Hollywood and US streaming income (including Netflix)	1-1.5 (box office, subscriptions)
US defence equipment	Confidential
Total estimated US earnings from India	80-85+ annually

GTM estimates

ran a trade surplus of \$44.4 billion with the US in FY2025 (Table 1), US quietly earns \$80-85 billion (Table 2) annually from India through education exports, financial services, intellectual property royalties, digital operations, and arms sales. When these flows are included, the US enjoys a \$35-40 billion surplus vis-à-vis India — hardly the picture of a disadvantaged partner.

RUSHING TO APPEASE

Yet, rather than assert this reality, India has rushed to appease. Since January, India has unilaterally cut import duties on bourbon whiskey, fish feed, motorcycles, satellite parts, and mobile components. It has removed a 6 per cent digital tax on US tech giants and is preparing to revise its nuclear liability law to facilitate the sale of US reactors. This pattern of concessions without reciprocal gains has emboldened Washington's negotiating stance.

Reports suggest that New Delhi is preparing to cut tariffs on sensitive sectors, such as autos and agriculture, open its government procurement market, ease intellectual property and data rules to favour US tech and pharmaceutical companies, and clear foreign access for players like Elon Musk's Starlink. These shifts would have wide-reaching effects across India's economy.

The risks of going too far are real. India's recent agreement with the UK, for example, included an unprecedented cut in car import tariffs from 100 per cent to 10 per cent, even covering

electric and hybrid vehicles where India is just starting to build capacity. Such moves when followed in FTAs with the US and EU could discourage foreign investment in local manufacturing, as global firms may export directly rather than set up factories in India.

India's best bet is to reframe the negotiation. Instead of a broad FTA covering goods, services, digital trade, and regulations, India should propose a narrow, goods-only "zero-for-zero" deal: cut tariffs on 90 per cent of US exports to India but exclude sensitive sectors such as agriculture and autos. This would meet Washington's primary demand on tariffs, deliver clear wins for US exporters, and protect India's regulatory space. It would also mirror the approach taken by the EU, which has proposed zero-for-zero tariff deals on industrial goods with the US.

If India accepts US terms, the cost will be heavy. One-sided tariff cuts, rule changes, and market openings would give US exporters long-term benefits, while the temporary "Liberation Day" tariffs would vanish on their own. These US tariffs won't last, but India's concessions would. Instead of rushing into an unequal deal, India should aim for a narrow, fair agreement focused on industrial goods to protect its core economic and strategic interests. If the US won't agree to fair, reciprocal terms, India should walk away. No deal is better than a bad deal — and right now, what's on offer is a bad deal.

The writer is founder of GTM

Impeachment raises troubling questions

The proposed move against Justice Varma should be marked by fairplay and an effort to pursue the truth

RK Raghavan

There are reports that the Union government has decided to bring a resolution in Parliament shortly to impeach Justice Yashwant Varma (formerly of Delhi High Court and currently in the Allahabad High Court) who has been accused of financial impropriety in his official conduct while functioning in Delhi.

The last time such a motion was brought before Parliament was in May 1993 against Justice V Ramaswami of the Punjab and Haryana High Court. That motion failed ultimately for a variety of reasons, one of which was that the issue had become highly politicised.

The Varma case should cause anguish to all citizens because of the denuded confidence in most of the other organs of government and the current public dependence almost wholly on the judiciary for obtaining justice against executive arbitrariness. The Supreme

Court of India itself must have been embarrassed. There are some who complain that the highest court of the land did not display the kind of outrage and expeditiousness that the matter demanded. This is possibly unfair because the Chief Justice of India had quickly ordered an internal enquiry close on the heels of a preliminary finding by the Delhi Police and also got the accused judge transferred to the Allahabad High Court. The Allahabad Bar rightly protested against this move because it believed that their court had become a sort of dumping ground for tainted judges.

As a citizen one is worried that the matter may be buried if Justice Varma, finding the heat too much to take, opts to resign. In such an eventuality he should be prosecuted in a court of law like an ordinary citizen. This will not smack of any vindictiveness. It will be merely the upholding of an old tenet that no one is above the law. Also such prosecution will strengthen the belief



JUDICIARY. Public confidence must remain strong

that the judiciary will not condone misdeeds by one of its members. Above all, in fairness to Justice Varma himself, we will get a good opportunity in court to establish his innocence. We should not condemn him without affording him the chance to prove he had been wronged. He has continuously claimed that he is blameless and that all the campaign against him was on mere suspicion and not based on solid

evidence. If he stands trial the prosecution should select a competent and untainted lawyer who will not be swayed by any extraneous consideration.

Thanks to the Varma case the SC has made clear its resolve not to allow any member of the judiciary to go scot-free if he or she is found guilty of misconduct. Will Parliament do the same? That is the big question that should agitate every honest citizen.

We do not yet know what the SC proposes to do in the future to monitor standards of integrity at all levels in the judiciary. What we should be most worried about is the level of integrity at lower formations, such as district judges and magistrates. We often hear reports that are greatly disturbing. Appointment of honest persons to the judiciary does not suffice. Marked improvement in their living and working conditions and a substantial salary raise could help.

The writer is a former CBI Director

On businessline.in

Will the monetary bazooka lift growth trajectory?



https://tinyurl.com/3a8b8rhc

The front-loaded action has increased risks in the system by cringing on future policy options, argues **Mridul Sagar**

The dangers of an expansive monetary policy

The aggressive rate cut may end up fanning the flames of inflation, says **Gurbachan Singh**



https://tinyurl.com/388b8r9f

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Rate cut will hurt

Apropos, Banks may cut savings, deposit rates again to guard margins (June 9). The Reserve Bank of India's 50 basis points cut in the repo rate is set to trigger a reduction in interest rates on savings accounts and fixed deposits by commercial banks. While the move is aimed at boosting credit flow and stimulating economic growth, it adversely affects senior citizens and individuals who depend on interest income for sustenance. With already low returns on traditional savings instruments, this further decline will strain the financial stability of retirees and risk-averse investors. In light of this, there is an urgent need for banks and policymakers to consider supportive measures, such as special deposit schemes or preferential

rates for the elderly, to shield them from the negative effects of falling interest rates.

Nashadhasa Reddy
Bengaluru

Sustaining FII Inflows

It is five years since RBI introduced Fully Accessible Route (FAR), a framework that allowed non-residents (FPIs, NRIs and OCIs) to invest in specified securities by removing caps on foreign investments. It needed the inclusion in FIMBI (emerging market bond index) of JP Morgan in June 2024, and Bloomberg's Emerging Market Local Govt Index to induce FII inflows in FY25. While it is self-evident that higher interest rates of Indian bond market are an attraction, what is required to keep FPIs

hooked is to check foreign exchange volatility.

Angara Venkata Girija Kumar
Chennai

Insects in diet

This refers to "insects: A nutrition powerhouse with a planet-friendly reputation" (June 9). Despite the enormity of research, the larger question is the acceptability of the new food culture in traditional Indian conditions. Moreover, the rampant use of chemical derivatives in farming has already caused the extinction of several useful insects which are deemed as farmer's friends.

Rajiv Maqal
Halekere Village, Karnataka

Pharma opportunity

The sector can gain from negotiations with US

P Saravanan
A Paul Williams

The reciprocal tariffs imposed by the Trump administration, has introduced a complex layer of challenges to the global trade landscape, with notable ramifications for India.

But pharmaceuticals, a crucial component of India's export basket to the US, have largely received exemptions.

India plays a crucial role in supplying affordable medicines to both developed and developing nations.

The sector boasts a substantial market size, estimated at around \$50 billion in 2024, and is projected to reach \$130 billion by 2030, showcasing a remarkable growth trajectory.

India is the third-largest producer of pharmaceuticals by volume globally and accounts for approximately 20 per cent of global generic drug exports. This prominence is underpinned by a strong network of over 3,000 drug companies and more than 10,500 manufacturing units. The industry's contribution to the Indian economy is significant, providing employment to millions and driving innovation in drug development and manufacturing processes.

PHARMA EXCEPTION

While several sectors, including steel, auto components, and textiles, have been directly impacted by these tariffs, the pharmaceutical sector, particularly for India, has largely been spared. This exemption is a significant development, underscoring the critical role that Indian pharmaceutical manufacturers play in the US healthcare system.

The US is a major export destination for Indian pharmaceuticals, accounting for approximately 30 per cent of India's total drug exports, valued at over \$9 billion in 2024. This robust trade relationship is built on India's ability to supply high-quality, affordable generic drugs, which are essential for managing healthcare costs in the US.

Generic drugs constitute a significant portion of pharma exports, accounting for nearly 40 per cent of the generic drugs consumed in the US. Indian companies have a strong presence in the US generic market, with several firms holding a significant market share for various essential medicines.



PHARMA. Time to capitalise
(JYOTIRAM)

The trade in pharmaceuticals between India and the US is substantial and mutually beneficial.

The fact that pharmaceuticals have been excluded from the reciprocal tariffs suggests a recognition by the US of this interdependence and the potential disruption that tariffs on Indian drugs could cause to its domestic healthcare market, potentially leading to increased drug prices and supply chain vulnerabilities.

WAY FORWARD

To capitalise on the current situation and navigate the evolving global trade landscape, the Indian pharmaceutical sector and regulators need to adopt a proactive and strategic approach. Continued engagement with the US on trade policies is crucial to ensure the sustained exemption of pharmaceuticals from any future tariff actions.

The government needs to focus on strengthening the regulatory framework to maintain high quality standards and build greater confidence in Indian-made drugs globally. Investing in research and development, particularly in innovative areas like biosimilars and novel drug delivery systems, will enhance the sector's long-term competitiveness.

Furthermore, fostering collaborations between domestic pharmaceutical companies and international research institutions can accelerate innovation and the development of new therapies.

By focusing on quality, innovation, and market diversification, the Indian pharmaceutical sector can not only weather the current global trade uncertainties but also further solidify its position as a global leader in the supply of affordable and high-quality medicines.

Saravanan is Professor of Finance and Accounting at IIM Tiruchirappalli, Williams is Head of India at Sernova Financial

FDI reversal and the message

Outward FDI and the LRS scheme, which take out domestic savings, can have adverse consequences

MACROSCAN.



In a surprise turn, India (which had been receiving consistent FDI inflows even in years when foreign portfolio inflows were volatile) experienced a close to 100 per cent decline in net FDI investment in the country to \$354 million in 2024-25 (Chart 1). It is still true that gross FDI inflows have risen from \$71.3 billion in 2023-24 (and more or less the same level in 2022-23) to \$81 billion in 2024-25.

But FDI outflows, resulting either from retrenchment of assets by incumbent foreign direct investors (Chart 2), or investment abroad by resident firms (Chart 3), also rose to \$29.2 billion in 2024-25 from \$16.7 billion in 2023-24. This is by not a sudden and possibly transient shift.

As compared with \$4.0 billion in 2015-16, outward investment, while displaying considerable year-to-year variation, rose to \$14.0 billion in 2022-23, and spiked to \$29.2 billion in 2024-25.

THREE FACTORS

There appear to be three factors underlying the collapse of net FDI.

First, despite the rise in 2024-25, gross FDI inflow peaked in 2021-22 at \$84.8 billion, fell sharply in the next year, and despite the 2024-25 rise remained below the previous peak level.

Second, there has been a rise in repatriation of investments made by incumbent foreign direct investors, which rose from \$29.3 billion in 2022-23 to \$51.5 billion in 2024-25. Most of that repatriation (\$27.1 billion in 2022-23 and \$49.5 billion in 2024-25) occurred through the divestment of equity.

Third, as noted there has been a sharp increase in overseas FDI by resident investors. That was the result of both new equity outflows and investment of retained earnings, with unusual increases in particular years such as 2021-22 and 2024-25.

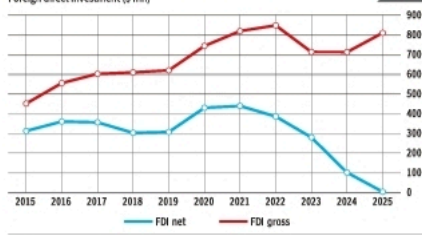
The dampening of gross flows of FDI may be partly explained by sluggishness in domestic demand and uncertainty regarding profits. But to fully understand the behaviour of foreign investors, both in terms of delivering new gross FDI and repatriating past investment through reduction in equity holding, it may be useful to turn to the definition of foreign direct investment that has become pervasive since the 1980s when countries adopted the IMF definition.

That definition treats any inflow from a single investor that leads to the acquisition of more than 10 per cent of the equity of the target firm or entity as direct investment.

This marks a departure from the "conceptual" distinction between foreign direct and foreign portfolio investment, with the former seen as

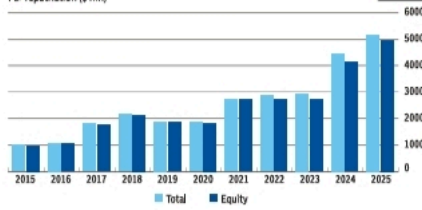
Net decline

Foreign direct investment (\$ mn)



Rising outflows

FDI repatriation (\$ mn)



Investing abroad

Outward FDI from India (\$ mn)



undertaken by investors with a long-term interest and commitment seeking to earn profits from production, whereas the latter are seen as investors looking to make investments for the short term with returns expected mainly from appreciation of capital values.

The 10 per cent figure is in principle meant to provide an arbitrarily chosen empirical boundary to statistically separate out the two kinds of investment.

The dampening of gross flows of FDI may be partly explained by sluggishness in domestic demand and uncertainty regarding profits

In practice, however, as the volume of purely financial capital moving into less developed countries with limited quantities of traded financial actively increased, it led to inflation in stock prices in the recipient country and a degree of stability (or even appreciation) of the exchange rate of that country.

As a result, speculative portfolio investors were willing to buy into chunks of equity in individual firms in excess of 10 per cent. This, like portfolio investment, was footloose capital, which tends to exit in a context of uncertainty or falling returns.

VOLATILE FLOWS

Recent years have seen considerable volatility with negative net flows of

investments from foreign institutional investors to the tune of \$14.1 billion in 2021-22, \$4.8 billion in 2022-23, and positive inflows of \$44.6 billion in 2023-24 and \$2.4 billion in 2024-25. This volatility is possibly what partly explains outflows from those portfolio investors, whose investment gets recorded as direct investment because of the arbitrary empirical distinction between the two.

The instability in net FDI inflow trends, in a context in which there has been a substantial accumulation of footloose portfolio foreign capital in Indian markets, increases the danger of capital flight if developments abroad or domestically affect the so-called "confidence" of investors. The government has subjected India's economy and society to external financial fragility by liberalising capital controls. That fragility has considerably increased because in a world dominated by finance, even foreign direct investment flows are not free of volatility.

The presumption that this poses no danger because of India's large foreign exchange reserves is completely misplaced. Those reserves are built by taking on liabilities and are not free stocks generated through current account surpluses. They cannot be expended for other purposes without increasing vulnerability.

But riding on those reserves, the government has liberalised access to foreign currency, opening up other routes of enhanced outflow of foreign exchange. One such route contributes to the fall in net FDI inflows, through an increase in outward foreign direct investment from India.

The concentration of capital and profits has increased hugely in recent years and left a few leading Indian business groups cash rich. With easy access to foreign exchange given the large portfolio capital inflows in recent years, as well as easy access to credit, Indian firms have decided to move out of relatively saturated domestic markets to acquire assets and invest abroad.

According to one semi-official source, between April 2024 and February 2025, overseas direct investments from India amounted to \$20.6 billion, which is a substantial share of the \$29.2 billion recorded in official statistics for financial year 2024-25.

There are also reasons to believe that flows of 'direct investment' to destinations such as Mauritius and even Singapore may be reflective of a round tripping exercise which too appears to be on the rise.

Just as rich Indians are exploiting the liberalised remittance scheme, that allows transfer of sums of \$250,000 a year per person for a wide range of permissible transactions, to take their excess savings abroad, corporates are taking their domestic currency surpluses to foreign destinations. That reduces the quantity of net FDI. And both outward FDI and the LRS scheme are a drain of foreign exchange.

thehindubusinessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

June 10, 2005

Govt plans merger of small steel PSUs with SAIL

The Government is considering a plan to merge the small state-owned steel companies with Steel Authority of India Ltd (SAIL), according to the Steel Minister, Mr Ram Vilas Paswan. Speaking at a news conference, he said: "After a complete study of all operational aspects, the proposals to merge the companies, if found feasible, will be implemented in a time-bound manner."

TRAI asks mobile operators to restrict services within circle

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has asked mobile operators to restrict their operations within the boundaries of the licensed area. The move comes after it was brought to the notice of the telecom regulator that some operators were offering services in cities adjoining their licensed area.

Banks told to simplify claims on death of depositors

The Reserve Bank of India has directed banks to simplify the procedure to facilitate speedy and easy settlement of claims following the death of depositors. The central bank has also told the Indian Banks' Association (IBA) to formulate a model operational procedure for the settlement of such claims.

China's May exports slow, deflation deepens

Reuters

China's export growth slowed to a three-month low in May as US tariffs slammed shipments, while factory-gate deflation deepened to its worst level in two years, heaping pressure on the world's second-largest economy on both the domestic and external fronts.

US President Donald Trump's global trade war and the swings in Sino-US trade ties have in the past two months sent Chinese exporters, along with

their business partners across the Pacific, on a roller coaster ride and hobbled world growth.

Undercutting the US tariff impact on shipments, customs data showed that China's exports to the US plunged 34.5 per cent year-on-year in May in value terms, the sharpest drop since February 2020, when the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic upended global trade.

Total exports from the Asian economic giant expanded 4.8 per cent year-on-year in value terms last month,

slowing from the 8.1 per cent jump in April and missing the 5.0 per cent growth expected in a Reuters poll, customs data showed on Monday, despite a lowering of US tariffs on Chinese goods which had taken effect in early April. "It's likely that the May data continued to be weighed down by the peak tariff period," said Lynn Song, chief economist for Greater China at ING.

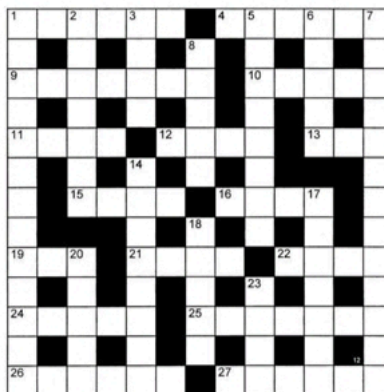
Song said there was still front-loading of shipments due to the tariff risks, while acceleration of sales

to regions other than the United States helped to underpin China's exports.

Imports dropped 3.4 per cent year-on-year, deepening from the 0.2 per cent decline in April and worse than the 0.9 per cent downturn expected in the Reuters poll.

Exports had surged 12.4 per cent year-on-year and 8.1 per cent in March and April, respectively, as factories rushed shipments to the US and other overseas manufacturers to avoid Trump's hefty levies on China and the rest of the world.

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2714



EASY

ACROSS

01. The scene of some event (6)
04. Shining, full of light (7)
09. Yellow gum-resin (7)
10. Bad mark (5)
11. Captured (4)
12. Grape-juice unfermented; new wine (4)
13. Owed, that ought to be paid (3)
15. Half-run (4)
16. Fluent and plausible (4)
19. Adhesive (3)
21. A corner, recess (4)
22. Welfare payment (4)
24. (Spanish) liar (5)
25. Hungarian dance (7)
26. Act, move very slowly (6)
27. Cordial (6)

DOWN

01. Liable to steal (5,8)
02. Easy living (7)
03. Line doubling back (4)
05. Look like (8)
06. Structure such as thyroid (5)
07. In a way giving rise to biased opinion (13)
08. Small-minded (5)
14. Failure, humiliation (8)
17. A drinking spree (7)
18. Pocket-like structure (5)
20. Cat's cry (5)
23. Vapour, mist (4)

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

01. It gave Belloc a lead to the scene of the event (6)
04. Is shining with intelligence (6)
09. Around a morass the hunted animals are yellow (7)
10. It's an awkward way to dye (5)
11. One accepted that graft was successful (4)
12. New wine must be shaken (4)
13. Is expected not to finish the four-handed version (3)
15. Bustle about with a Communist of a sort (4)
16. Smooth-spoken Latin one finds in the British Isles (4)
19. Something chewed by what chewers are set in (3)
21. Hasn't got the go-ahead for such a secluded retreat (4)
22. Welfare cheque will disappear if Inland Revenue's involved (4)
24. What Spanish cowboy would use a sort of tiara? (5)
25. Crass ad put out about a dance in Hungary (7)
26. Will not be in a hurry to wed like this (6)
27. They may have a right to be robust (6)

DOWN

01. Not being heavy-handed is one's attitude to theft (5,8)
02. Give solace, from being upset in bed (7)
03. Kitty taken up on sort of line that returns (4)
05. Might look like rebels - me included (8)
06. Secreting structure in a sort of nut (5)
07. Controversially yielded to Sun ten versions of it (13)
08. Time to type it out for the contemptible (5)
14. Collapse of lad flown out for it (8)
17. He doesn't want one to see such a drinking-spre (7)
18. Kangaroo needs it to hop around University College (5)
20. Aim to turn up nothing worse, at first, than a catcall (5)
23. Mistiness he found going around Arizona (4)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2713

ACROSS 1. Supplant 2. Diode 8. Respond 9. Digress 10. Pile 12. Drifter 14. Preface 17. Spot 18. Rake-off 21. Elation 22. Annoy 23. Strength

DOWN 1. Scrape 2. Postlude 3. Loos 4. Nodded 5. Bone 6. Censer 7. Dignity 11. Amatory 13. Tipping 14. Parish 15. Effect 16. Stench 19. Kind 20. Kale

The IndianEXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA
BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL



NIRUPAMA RAO

THE TERROR ATTACK in Pahalgam and the subsequent Indian military response, Operation Sindoor, have once again brought into sharp focus a reality that many in the Global South live with daily: Terrorism is not just an isolated security threat, it is an ongoing war by other means. While India showcased military precision and diplomatic discipline during the crisis, the global response to its actions also exposed gaps in the current international system's ability to credibly and swiftly respond to terror. From these developments emerges a compelling case for a new platform, an India-led initiative: The T20 — Twenty Against Terrorism.

The Pahalgam terror attack, audacious in its planning and brutal in its execution, sparked public outrage and political consensus within India. Operation Sindoor, a swift, targeted military campaign in response, reaffirmed India's doctrine of proactive defence. Yet, while the operation achieved its tactical goals, the international diplomatic terrain proved more complex. While allies like the United States, France, and Israel tacitly or overtly supported India, other global institutions such as the United Nations and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) defaulted to calls for "restraint" and "dialogue" without assigning responsibility. China, predictably, shielded Pakistan diplomatically. Russia, once a reliable strategic partner, chose calibrated silence.

This pattern is familiar and frustrating. The international architecture for counter-terrorism — including the UN, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), and the Global Counterterrorism Forum — either lacks teeth, is entangled in geopolitical rivalries, or remains anchored in a Western security paradigm that does not fully reflect the lived realities of terrorism in South Asia, Africa, or the Middle East.

The idea of T20 — Twenty Against Terrorism — stems from this chronic mismatch between global terror frameworks

As West-led institutions falter, a Global South-first bloc led by India could reset compass in war on terror

The idea of T20 — Twenty Against Terrorism — stems from this chronic mismatch between global terror frameworks and the regional intensity of the threat. It proposes a dedicated alliance of 20 countries, led by India, comprising nations from the Global South who face frequent, asymmetrical, and politically complex terror threats. These include Indonesia, Nigeria, Kenya, Egypt, Mali, Fiji, the Philippines, and others — countries that, like India, often find themselves battling both state-sponsored and ideologically driven terrorist violence without adequate global support.

and the regional intensity of the threat. It proposes a dedicated alliance of 20 countries, led by India, comprising nations from the Global South who face frequent, asymmetrical, and politically complex terror threats. These include Indonesia, Nigeria, Kenya, Egypt, Mali, Fiji, the Philippines, and others — countries that, like India, often find themselves battling both state-sponsored and ideologically driven terrorist violence without adequate global support.

The mandate of T20 would not be to duplicate existing institutions but to supplement them with agility, real-time coordination, and a Global South-first perspective. It would focus on intelligence sharing through a joint task force; capacity building and counter-radicalisation programmes; joint diplomatic statements to name and shame state sponsors of terrorism; a permanent platform to address emerging threats like cyber-terrorism, drone-based warfare, and crypto-financing of extremism.

Having dealt with decades of cross-border terror, India has both the experience and the credibility to lead such an initiative. Unlike the West, which often views terrorism through the lens of episodic attacks or homeland security, countries in the Global South confront it as a continuous, multi-generational battle. Moreover, unlike Western coalitions that are often seen as politically selective or militarily interventionist, a T20 rooted in the Global South would command moral legitimacy and operational relevance.

The timing also matters. As multilateralism falters under the weight of big-power rivalries, smaller groupings are proving more nimble and effective — be it the Quad, I2U2, or ASEAN-led security platforms. T20 fits this trend and fills a glaring institutional gap: the absence of a platform focused specifically on terror from the perspective of its most frequent victims.

Importantly, the T20 would not seek to

replace the UN or the FATF but to operate as a conscience-keeper and action-accelerator. It would bring in countries often left on the sidelines of global security debates. It would lend weight to bilateral diplomacy by providing collective legitimacy. And it would foster collaboration beyond the militaristic models of the past, emphasising data, digital tools, community resilience, and development-linked de-radicalisation. The moral case for T20 lies in its inclusivity. Countries like Ethiopia, Kazakhstan, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam may not dominate global headlines, but they, too, have faced acts of terror that scarred their national psyche. A platform where their voices matter — where their intelligence inputs are valued, their pain recognised — would be a radical departure from the hierarchical nature of most global institutions.

Strategically, India also benefits. T20 would provide it with leadership stature without the baggage of military entanglement. It affirms its image as a responsible, proactive power and strengthens its positioning as the voice of the Global South. With its experience, digital capacity, and diplomatic network, India is well-placed to host the T20 secretariat, offer training hubs, and shape the global counter-terror narrative from New Delhi.

Operation Sindoor was India's immediate answer to a proximate threat. But the deeper lesson is that reactive strikes, however precise, are not enough. What is needed is a shift from episodic response to permanent institutional architecture. T20 answers that call. It is an idea whose time has come, and whose urgency is underscored by every fresh act of terror that rocks cities from Srinagar to Surabaya.

India must now take the next step — not just to defend itself, but to offer leadership to all those who, like it, stand on the frontline of an undecimated global war.

The writer is a former foreign secretary

CALIBRATING AFRESH

Updating economic indicators with new data sources is a much-needed exercise. Methodology should be transparent

THE GOVERNMENT PERIODICALLY revises the base year for key economic indicators such as the consumer price index (CPI), the index of industrial production (IIP) and gross domestic product (GDP). These revisions are meant to reflect the changing profile of consumption and production in the country and incorporate newer data sources. For instance, in 2015, the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation released the new series of national accounts, revising the base year from 2004-05 to 2011-12. Also in 2015, the base year for CPI was revised to 2012 from 2010. And in May 2017, the base year for the IIP was revised from 2004-05 to 2011-12. Continuing with this practice, the next year is likely to witness the release of new data series for several indicators.

In an interview to this paper, MoSPI secretary Saurabh Garg has said that the new GDP series, with 2022-23 as the base year, is scheduled to be released on February 27, 2026. The new IIP series, with 2022-23 as the likely base, is expected to be released from 2026-27 onwards, and the CPI series, with the base year of 2024, is likely to be released from the first quarter of 2026. This exercise is likely to involve the use of several new datasets. For instance, in the computation of the GDP estimates, the use of GST and UPI transaction data is being explored. Neither dataset was available the last time around. Similarly, for the new CPI series, MoSPI is exploring new data sources such as online platforms for air and rail fare and price data from e-commerce websites. For CPI, the government has now decided to draw on the latest round of the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey of 2023-24 to figure out the items and the weights. Such regular updating of economic indicators using newer sources of information not only helps to improve their accuracy but also aids policymaking. For instance, the current base year for CPI, which forms the basis of the RBI's inflation-targeting framework, is 2012. But the household consumption basket has changed dramatically over the years. For example, cereals accounted for 10.69 per cent of the consumption basket in rural areas in 2011-12. This had declined to 4.97 per cent by 2023-24. For urban areas, the comparable estimates are 6.61 per cent and 3.74 per cent. Reweighting the items of consumption based on the latest data could thus impact headline inflation and possibly have policy implications.

These base year revisions are, however, not without controversy. For instance, the release of the GDP 2011-12 series was followed by questions over whether it captured the state of the economy accurately. Questions were raised over the quality of some of the data as well as the deflators used. To avoid a repeat, the government should ensure that all the data sources, along with a detailed account of the methodologies used in the process, are publicly disclosed. This could help users understand the estimation process and address concerns.

A FIRM HAND

In Manipur, government must send a clear message — it will not tolerate intimidation by militias such as Arambai Tenggel

MANIPUR HAS A long and complex history of insurgency rooted in issues of ethnic identity. Historical grievances have led to the formation of militant groups within both the Meitei and the Kuki communities, like the United National Liberation Front, the People's Liberation Army, the Kuki National Army and the Zomi Revolutionary Army. The National Socialist Council of Nagaland has a significant presence in northern Manipur. When ethnic violence erupted in May 2023, these networks of militancy were reactivated. The failure of the Centre and the state government to bring the situation under control has, in many areas, entrenched the hold of these groups. This was evident in the recent protests in Imphal over the arrest of a top leader of the Arambai Tenggel (AT) by the CBI. Asem Kanan Singh, the self-styled "army chief" of the AT, was picked up by security forces along with four other members of the outfit for involvement in "various criminal activities related to Manipur violence in 2023".

Originally framed as a "socio-religious" body — founded by BJP MP and titular king of Manipur Leishemba Sanajaoba — the AT now operates as an armed militia. Its proclivity for violence, extortion and intimidation is well documented. In what was a chilling demonstration of its power, the AT infamously "summoned" all the elected Meitei legislators in the state, including ministers, to a meeting at the Kangla Fort in January 2024. Congress leader Jairam Ramesh had alleged back then that the Manipur Pradesh Congress Committee president, K Meghachandra, was assaulted in this meeting. The state government, led by N Biren Singh, was either unable or unwilling to crack down on this group.

Manipur's descent into militia-fuelled politics underscores the urgent need for the state to reassert its authority. It must reclaim its role as the mediator between Meiteis and Kukis — a task that demands political leadership with credibility across ethnic lines. Following Singh's resignation and the imposition of President's Rule in February, the Centre has attempted to stabilise the situation, even as some MLAs (none of them Kuki) push to restore a popular government. It must do more. The Centre must send an unequivocal message: Unlawful activities by groups like the AT will face zero tolerance. The threat is not one-sided. Around the same time as Asem Kanan Singh's arrest, the NIA arrested three Kuki insurgents accused of attacking a police post and killing two commandos in Moreh in January 2024. The state must convince all communities that peace and prosperity cannot be sacrificed at the altar of ethnic rivalry.

FRAMED IN EMPATHY

In German Chancellor's gift to Donald Trump, a story of a cross-generational ambition that the US increasingly has little room for

MOST PEOPLE, PUSHED far enough to defend an absolute moral principle, end up either in hypocrisy or irony and absurdity. Take Immanuel Kant, an extremist when it came to the universality of ethical principles. His categorical imperative would, taken to its logical conclusion, leave no room for any form of lie (even, for example, to protect a person hiding from a murderer) or violence (self-defence). But Kant has nothing on Donald Trump, who can wear, without a qualm, contradictions and hypocrisy on his sleeve.

The White House meeting between the US President and German Chancellor Friedrich Merz was warm, unlike those with the Ukrainian and South African presidents. Merz gifted the American President his grandfather, Frederick Trump's, birth certificate. Trump, visibly moved, thanked him profusely. This scene played out as Trump's government imposed travel bans on several Muslim countries, and just before the National Guard was deployed in California to quell protests against the detention of migrants suspected of being "illegal".

No country can allow completely open borders, and 1885 (when the President's grandfather migrated to the US) is not 2025. But that doesn't mean there is no room for empathy. America, under Trump, is closing its universities and its borders even to those already in. The harsh anti-migrant rhetoric that paints those searching for a better life with the same brush as criminals, and student protesters as security threats, seems to have forgotten that almost every American, except for the marginalised Native Americans, has roots elsewhere. Trump can appreciate his grandfather's journey and has had the advantage of the fortune that Frederick built. He can be sentimental about a birth certificate because it represents a cross-generational ambition for prosperity and success — if only that came with a measure of understanding for those who want to repeat that tale.



HARSH PATI SINGHANIA

AT A GDP of \$4.2 trillion, India is on the threshold of becoming the fourth-largest economy, surpassing Japan, and is expected to overtake Germany to be the third-largest in the next few years. This is underpinned by a significant transformation across various dimensions under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the past 11 years. Average growth since 2014 has been 6.4 per cent, accelerating to 7.4 per cent in the latest quarter. This demonstrates resilience and sustained momentum in the Indian economy. Inflation management improved markedly — it has come down from 9.4 per cent in 2013-14 to 4.6 per cent today, providing much-needed stability for households and businesses alike.

India's infrastructure development has been one of the most visible symbols of the country's economic transformation. National highways expanded from 91,287 km in 2014 to 1,46,204 km in 2024, and the speed of construction has increased from 12 km/day to 34 km/day. The emphasis on last-mile connectivity has resulted in nearly four lakh km of rural roads being built, bringing 99 per cent of rural India into the national network — this has gone a long way in supporting rural mobility and enhancing economic inclusion.

India's railway network has seen unprecedented expansion over the past decade. A total of 25,871 route kilometres (RKM) of new tracks were laid, significantly higher than the 14,985 RKM added in the previous decade. India now leads the world in locomotive manufacturing, producing 1,681 locomotives in 2024-25. This is more than the combined output of the US, Europe, and Japan. Freight movement has also surged, with Indian Railways becoming the world's second-

POISED TO TAKE OFF

With progress of past 11 years, India's imprint on global economy is set to expand

largest cargo transporter, handling 1,617 million tonnes annually. Notably, railway connectivity has now reached the northeastern states — a key step towards enhancing regional integration. Its wider reach now enables Indian Railways to serve over 30 million passengers daily — a testament to its scale and efficiency. The ongoing development of dedicated freight corridors is another transformative step and is expected to significantly boost efficiency in cargo movement and reduce congestion on passenger routes.

Similarly, air travel has seen rapid democratisation. The number of operational airports has grown from 74 to 160 between 2014 and 2025, with the UDAN scheme bringing air connectivity to remote towns. The government's vision of expanding to 300 airports by 2047 underlines its continued focus on logistics and accessibility.

Urban transformation has continued through the Smart Cities Mission, with over 8,000 projects and investments worth Rs 1.64 lakh crore. Urban transport has also advanced, with the Delhi Metro expanding into one of the largest and most efficient metro systems globally, setting benchmarks for mass rapid transit in the country, which now reaches 15 Indian cities.

India's progress on the clean energy front is equally commendable. Solar capacity has grown from 2.82 GW in 2014 to over 105 GW, with total clean energy capacity now at 228.28 GW. This positions India as the third-largest solar and fourth-largest wind energy producer globally.

One of the major success stories of the past decade has been the exponential growth of India's digital public infrastruc-

ture (DPI). Led by platforms like UPI and Aadhaar, this public-first approach has enabled real-time payments, direct transfers, and expanded rural banking through Jan Dhan and digital access points. DPI is projected to reach about 3-4 per cent by 2030. As the World Bank has recognised, DPI has accomplished in six years what would typically take decades. India's DPI has now been adopted in over 12 countries.

All this has led to social development as well as significant poverty reduction. Official data show that 17.1 crore people have been lifted out of poverty during this decade. The poverty rate has fallen from 20.17 per cent in 2013-14 to 11.28 per cent in 2022-23, and further declines are now being reported.

As India approaches the centenary of its independence, it is now setting an agenda for global development. India's progress and resilience are evident through key reforms like GST, simplification of regulations, and removal of legal redundancies. Yet, more needs to be done to improve ease of doing business, reduce compliance burdens, enhance competitiveness, and integrate more deeply into global supply chains.

Strategic investments, governance reforms, and inclusive growth have built a strong foundation. Going forward, agility in policymaking, focus on sustainability, and deeper integration into global supply chains through improved manufacturing and skilling will be key. India's development journey, rooted in economic strength and digital progress, is now aiming at long-term impact.

The writer is chairman and managing director, JK Paper Limited and director, JK Organisation

JUNE 10 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

18 KILLED IN GUJARAT

IN A GRUESOME orgy of violence, at least eight persons, including three women and two children, were burnt alive in their houses and six others were killed in Army firing in the curfew-bound Dariapur-Kalupur area of Ahmedabad. The day's toll in Gujarat was 18. Violence flared up in the Dariapur-Kalupur area under Army control when a mob blocked doors of some houses and set them on fire.

Gujarat government decided to maintain the status quo on the two quotas of reservation for socially and educationally backward communities. The state cabinet also decided to institute a judicial inquiry into the disturbances related to the agitation. It has also conceded the demand for the release of two students held under the National Security Act.

AKALIS REJECT TALKS

AKALI DAL (L) leaders at a huge gathering in Amritsar declared that they would hold no negotiations with an "evil and dishonest" government till it assures the dignity and self-respect of all Sikhs. "Our aim is justice,"

Harchand Singh Longowal told newsmen soon after the convention "and to work towards fruition of the Anandpur Sahib Resolution". Once successful, it will assure a stronger state and consequently, a stronger nation, he said.

FOR TAMIL EELAM

A COMBINED ARMY of Tamil Eelam will soon wage a full-fledged war against the Sri Lankan army and the government, chief of People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam K M Maheswaran has said. Efforts were on to bring together the six major organisations now fighting separately for Tamil Eelam.



Always Emerging, Never Emerged?

Domestic consumption must plug shortfall in EMs

Donald Trump's efforts to set right the US' trade balance with the rest of the world will impact global capital flows. Here's how it works now: the US runs up trade deficits with emerging markets (EMs), which then park their export surpluses in US equity and debt. The size of the US economy and the proclivity of its governments to over-spend corner an oversized slice of global capital. Driving global growth, EMs tend to get by on less capital than they need. This might change if Trump manages to wean EMs off their export addiction. A US economy less dependent on imports would not allow EM trade surpluses to balloon, and would not need matching capital flows to maintain its BoP. EMs, on their part, will have to raise their domestic consumption to keep growing faster than advanced economies.

BRICS has acquired a reasonable economic heft in relation to G7 and, tellingly, has quite a way to go in reaching the latter's consumption levels. An economic structure that requires EMs to focus on domestic demand also frees up global capital for that specific purpose. Faster-growing EMs should build their capacity to absorb capital, as Morgan Stanley's Gokul Laroia said in an interview to this paper.

Otherwise, they will remain stranded in slower-moving advanced economies. This becomes a drag when EMs pull in better metrics on indebtedness than their rich cousins.

This economic reset will not be painless, though. EMs may have to confront difficult choices over slower export growth, without a guarantee of a faster rise in living standards. Turning economies inward also imposes productivity costs and may potentially affect momentum. Capital-chasing EM growth could be rerouted. These are tough calls for EM governments, but they have no choice but adapt to the new limits being set for globalisation. Trump's reciprocal tariffs should shake EMs out of their complacency over rising trade surpluses. His trade rebalancing effort is, however, likely to be drawn out, providing EMs some space to adjust policy.

Not Just Spaced-Out, Make Science Go Pop

If all things go space-shipshape, Shubhanshu Shukla will script history later this week as the second Indian to go to space. 41 years after Rakesh Sharma's 1994 mission as part of the Soviet Interkosmos programme, Shukla's Axiom Mission-4 journey to International Space Station (ISS) has reignited public interest in science and space. This is an ideal moment to channel that curiosity and excitement, and turn it into a full-blown trend. Making science exciting — more 'preky', less 'syllabus-y' — is key to building generational 'STEM cells'. The newly revamped Hall of Nuclear Power at Delhi's National Science Centre, for instance, uses motion sensors, AI exhibits, 3D walkthroughs and interactive games to make complex ideas cool. India has only 26 science museums, a scandalous number for a country of its size. It's not just numbers. Sci-zones must be more interactive, immersive, seductive.

Some progress is visible. Gokul-fund National Council of Science Museums (NCSM) is building science cities, digital planetariums and innovation hubs. Digital pace and focus need to quicken. States, too, must step up, expanding and modernising science centres and fests. Models such as the EuroScience Open Forum's 'Science in the City' offer valuable lessons in decentralising and democratising science communication. Not to mention well-produced, well-narrated science shows on streaming and cable TV that focus more on science than on Indian science per se.

Pop science must thrive in dynamic public spaces, segueing into incubation centres and knowledge zones. Both brick-and-mortar and online modes should nudge youngsters towards the sheer thrill of 'knowing doing' science. That way, we can have Shubhanshu Shuklas sent off 'up there' from our own backyard.

JUST IN JEST
Using a veg diet as a strategy to con is highly non-vegetarian

When Momo is Less Than It Seems

If there's one myth about India that refuses to go away it's the one about us being a nation of 'leaf eaters'. The truth is far juicier. Multiple surveys show that over 70% of Indians enjoy their succulent mutton tikkas and artery-clogging fish orris. Add to that the quiet carnivores who eat non-veg on the sly but would never squeal. Yet, the illusion lives on, fueling food fights both literal and legal. Two residents of Dadar recently hailed a popular momo chain to the Mumbai Suburban District Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission — a mouthful, if there ever was one — claiming they were served chicken momos instead of veg ones. Their religious sentiments, they said, were deeply hurt — as was an 'upcoming' puja that, conveniently, had no fixed date, no deity or pandit to back it up. For their troubles, they sought ₹6 lakh in damages, hoping to make a serious point about respecting beliefs.

The commission wasn't chewing it. The invoice clearly said that they had ordered non-veg momos, and their 'evidence' — a few fuzzy photos and a sob story — didn't cut the chutney. The panel did wonder why, if they were 'that strict', they did not stick to a 'pure-veg' joint? Even if there was a mix-up, it all sounded highly suspicious. In a land where garlic divides families, may be just read the bill — before chasing moksha, or compensation.

GLOBESPOTTING India needs a new playbook for Naya America that needs careful handling

It Won't Be Easy, Yeh Rosti



Indrani Bagchi

Pakistan lost the last bout with India, but gained a field marshal, a renewed presence in Washington, and the possibility of getting Donald Trump in its corner. India achieved military dominance in Op Sindoor, but with the grim realisation that China is now an active participant in India-Pak hostilities, including sharing real-time satellite intelligence and advanced weaponry with Rawalpindi.

Somewhere in this, the India-US relationship acquired wrinkles that just weren't there. In 2020, Trump had reached out to help India when China encroached across the LoC. This time, Trump appeared to be standing with a state sponsor of terrorism and nuclear proliferator.

India's nose was put out of joint by POTUS inserting himself into an India-Pak crisis.

Trump is presiding over an administration with postage stamp-level India expertise. He was doing real estate-type 'price discovery' negotiations with India and Pakistan, and the prospect of 'stopping nuclear war' was too inviting to resist, even though the prospect wasn't actually real.

Since then, Indians have alternately sulked and ranted against American perfidy, with officially inspired and spiralling social media vitriol now threatening to become counterproductive to Indian interests. Multiparty delegations and authoritative statements by CDS Anil Chauhan have recovered a lot of ground. Nevertheless, there are certain new realities at play India has to be mindful of.

► India has to continue to raise costs for Pakistan. It's the only way it can raise costs of misadventure for China, which is targeting India in a two-front context.

► The world doesn't actually care about India-Pakistan in the way it used to. India had a



First, get the cards

free hand to respond to Pahalgaon and did a creditable job — until US 'spread the rails'.

► India needs a new playbook for the US — there is a 'Naya America'. The US is not the enemy, but needs careful handling.

Earlier, India did business with official America and leveraged its diaspora for, well, brownie points. We did yoda days, celebrated Indian Americans at the helm of corporate America, and strategised with the US to counter an expansionist China via 'soft-seize' arrangements like Quad. India now has to deal with several Americas: Official America, where India remains the 'most consistent partner' of the '21st Century'; Tech Wall Street America, where the India play is much thinner; and Mar-a-Lago America, where the 'diplomatic' holds sway.

The US-China competition is real. But it doesn't follow a comforting linear pattern any longer. The unpredictable Trump landscape means that some-

times things look that they're going away. New Delhi's natural caution will not need nerves of steel.

In the foreign policy space, the traditional tussle between National Security Council and State Department may be reeling itself in favour of the latter, as Marco Rubio quietly consolidates his position. Similarly, power balances are still shifting in trade, finance, tech and defence spaces. What does the Indian do to list look like?

► The ITBA is priority. And, reportedly, it should happen before the July deadline. That was actually one of the smartest things India did.

► Open the floodgates for more dependable and stable power by amending the nuclear liability law. This will enable Indian private sector to enter and flourish in nuclear energy and power data centres, and leapfrog with AI in manufacturing. The US knows in the business of energy abundance, less in energy efficiency. India is in both spaces. So, we have to craft our own path here. Gol has promised to move amendments to nuclear laws in the monsoon session. Let's do it.

► Put defence manufacturing and procurement in top gear. Pakistan may so on be negotiating a critical minerals deal with Trump. Islamabad's newly minted minister for strategic, Bilal bin Saqib, has promised a strategic bitcoin

reserve. He assured White House's crypto czar, Robert F. Hines, that India will stress Pakistan would dedicate 2,000 MW to power blockchain-based financial infra. This is clearly a way to leverage the Mar-a-Lago elite of trumping India by getting into the US president's personal business space.

► Indian governments regularly trot out official pride about the diaspora being 'modi chod' — high achievers, clean noses... Move over, Satya Nadella! The old-fashioned solidness of the Indian immigrant — wealthy professionals, techies, doctors, scientists — is no longer the flavour of the season. Indian diaspora may no longer be 'preferred' in MAGA America.

New Indian sounding stars in the Trump era are people like Delhi-based digital co-founder-president Anil Lulla, and software engineer Venkatesh Choudhary who are big holders of Trump crypto. Not too long ago, governments were thinking like governments. The world is changing, and so is its currencies.

Inversion is the name of the game. Putin's spokesperson gave Trump cre-

dit for stopping the 'India-Pak war'. Sergey Lavrov is pushing a Russia-India-China summit before a Quad summit later this year, bringing a gleam to Indian eyes. Chinese components are all over Russian weaponry — just in case we want to teach the West a lesson. On the other hand, Russia's space system is increasingly wary of Chinese infiltration. But Russia is now too deep in with China to pull the rug from the enemy against a friend is poor strategy. The logic of US-India convergence remains as strong today as it was before May 11.

India must be careful with its international strategies — it's our Kool Aid, it's not for us to drink — and remain wary of foreign policy promiscuity. Our geopolitical and technology choices have become the same thing.

The writer is CEO, Ananta Centre



Old-fashioned solidness of the Indian immigrant — wealthy professionals, techies, doctors — is no longer the flavour of the season in MAGA America.

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ChatGPT SHAIROF THE DAY

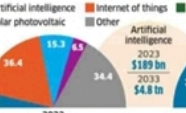
In Delhi, July turned to ice. A freak freeze that would have felt nice.

But not one soul knew — Not one person, not a clue — 'Cause it lasted one second at midnight, precise.

The AI Market

The global artificial intelligence (AI) market will soar from \$189 billion in 2023 to \$4.8 trillion by 2033 — a 25-fold increase in just a decade, according to a recent UNCTAD report. By 2033, AI could quadruple its share of the global frontier technology market, rising from 7% to 29% and emerging as the sector's dominant force. There is a big global divide as AI infrastructure and expertise remain concentrated in a few economies.

Estimated frontier technology market size and share of selected technologies, 2023 and 2033



Note: Market size data capture the revenue generated by the sales of products and services. The charts show the top four of 17 frontier technologies by market share for each year. The remaining 13 are grouped under 'other'.

Source: Technology and Innovation Report 2023

Bell Curves

Begin with the miracle, so we may listen to your sermon sipping the wine!



Begin with the miracle, so we may listen to your sermon sipping the wine!

The writer is researcher, Centre for New Economic Dialogue, ORF

Engines Spooled, Now Soar



Arya Roy Bardhan

On the tarmac, India looks unstoppable. Delhi's fourth runway and twin elevated taxiways are designed to raise the Capital's throughput to a staggering 109m passengers a year — higher than the tally of Atlanta, the world's busiest airport. Two new megahubs — New Mumbai, built to accommodate 60-90m travellers, and Noida's Jewar airport, planned for 70m — are racing towards mid-decade openings. Meanwhile, domestic carriers have ordered 1,359 jets, led by IndiGo's record 300-plane Airbus deal and Air India's 470-aircraft shopping spree. Yet, all this hardware boom hangs a policy bottleneck: 16-air service agreements (ASAs) that New Delhi has signed, dictating the terms of air operations with different nations.

While ASAs are meant to facilitate trade between nations, their lack of dynamism leads to exhaustion of capacity and demand pile-up. For instance, the Mumbai-India bilateral still caps each side at 65,000 weekly seats, a limit last adjusted in 2014, which is now almost sold out.

It is not just the bilateral with Dubai but individual MoUs with the Emirates (Abu Dhabi), Sharjah and Ras Al Khaimah that are holding back Indian aviation growth — considering the strong 40 lakh Indian diaspora in the UAE. The result: fares surge during holiday seasons, middle-class families detour through Doha or Riyadh, and India's new terminals risk turning into gleaming domestic halls attached to half-stir international doors.

The stakes are macroeconomic, not merely logistical.

► GDP boost IATA research finds that every 10% rise in a country's air connectivity index lifts labour productivity by about 0.07%. For an economy approaching \$4.1 tn, even a modest 10% connectivity bump could add \$2.5 tn to annual output.

Aviation supports 7.7m jobs and contributes \$36.6 bn, or 1.5% of GDP. Applying the same ratios suggests that closing the connectivity gap could create about 4.0m additional jobs across airlines, airports, logistics and supply chains.

► Namaste India! Gold data shows forex earnings from tourists hit \$2,327 cr (\$38 bn) from \$1.52m foreign tourist arrivals in 2023. A single extra million inbound travellers — plausible once fares drop and seats open — would pump close to \$1 bn more into hotels, restaurants and heritage sites.

An ORF study 'Combined Skies: Unlocking the Benefits of UAE-India Aviation Liberalisation for Indian Travelers' indicates that each 1% rise in India-UAE passenger volume trims average fares by about 0.2%.

► Consumer is king Granting Dubai the 50,000 weekly seats — roughly a 75% capacity jump — could shave 10-15% off typical ticket prices, delivering an annual consumer surplus windfall well north of \$100 m. Gradual liberalisation in UAE-India air services can generate benefits for Indian consumers

upwards of \$1 bn.

Keeping bilateral quotas frozen while airport and fleet capacity explode is the economic equivalent of building an eight-lane expressway and barricading four lanes at the toll booth.

Gulf and Southeast Asian hubs are only too happy to harvest the spillover: roughly 30% of India's international traffic now flies to or through the UAE, clogging overseas runways that could just as well be India's transfer points.

The protectionist argument — foreign mega-carriers will cannibalise home airlines — does not hold up against regional evidence. Ascent's phased Single Aviation Market lifted third, fourth- and fifth-freedom restrictions during the 2000s and saw passenger volumes and low-cost carrier penetration soar without extinguishing national champions.

India's carriers need open markets more than shelter; the freeze on routes hurts their ability to sweat those shiny new A320neo and 737 MAXs across profitable international routes.

The debate over air services liberalisation is no longer a niche quarrel between airline CEOs and aviation bureaucrats. It is a strategic lever for growth, jobs and global stature. India has runways, terminals, aircraft and, critically, the demand. What it lacks is the regulatory clearance to knit these assets into a seamless Indo-Pacific air-logistics network.

Liberalising bilateral — starting with a transparent, time-bound schedule of 15-20% annual seat increases between India and the UAE — would align policy with infra, slash fares, lift GDP, and propel millions of tourists directly into India's burgeoning hospitality economy.

The writer is researcher, Centre for New Economic Dialogue, ORF

THE SPEAKING TREE

A Superior Species?

NARAYANI GANESH

To overthrow colonisers, people of the subjugated country or territory either go to war to beat back the invader, or start a freedom movement if the invader is more subtle and is spread over decades. The latter may involve widespread protests, loss of lives, consistent media coverage and long-drawn-out negotiations. We're talking of humans colonising other humans. We fight for human rights even as we wear patriotism on our sleeves, singing rousing songs in our fight for independence. What do other species do, when humans colonise their habitats? They migrate, wander into human habitats, or simply die out. Fish, trees, and pollinating water, air and soil, have been going on for so long that this kind of exploitation is viewed as something humans are entitled to, as it is believed that human beings are superior species.

Scientific research and spiritual insights have revealed that all species have consciousness, intelligence and emotions, in varying degrees — some less, others more, and a few, with minimal such attributes. If humans are the most evolved in these terms, it follows that the so-called superior species will show evidence of being mindful, with compassion, loving kindness, care, equity, justice, non-possessive, non-exploitative and non-wasteful. Wherever these are present in a person, we could concede that he is at least above the rest. But the number of those who have these qualities is abysmally low, as is this the only explanation for the rampant and continuing degradation of our global home that nurtures all species, regardless.

The writer is CEO, Ananta Centre

Chat Room

Civilisation As a Mob

Apropos 'Far From Madling Crossed by Kinn Karmik (Jun 9), the nation's high population density and extreme urban congestion are a reality. Stampedes are not caused by crowd but by poor planning in the face of mass con-gregations. Until tackled at policy and grassroots levels, tragedies like in Bengaluru will keep recurring. Countries like India, despite being densely populated, have far fewer human tragedies because of rigid systems and disciplined planning. We lack the mandatory crowd control protocols at public events. No set capacity limits or metered entry systems. Use of tech-assisted surveillance is unknown, as would be AI-assisted crowd modelling. We are yet to graduate from our long ingrained village mala crowd. Thus, neither the police nor public education about calm psychology, nor are we earnest on public education about calm psychology and safety exits.

R Narayanan
Navi Mumbai

Time Saved is Money Wasted

Apropos the Edit, 'Quick is Good, But Not at All Costs' (Jun 9), in the age of instant gratification, quick is good. Look at the cricket grounds in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and England. The boundary fence is barely 3 ft high.

Here, it is 10 ft high, and looks like a prisoner of war camp fencing. Only we don't have barbed wire and lookout towers with machine guns. When they fence come down to 3 ft, we can claim to be civilised. What about economic parameters? Surely, it should be possible to remove the chain from the cricket ground's fence. When these two events happen, we can claim to be civilised.

T R Ramaswami
Mumbai

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Here, it is 10 ft high, and looks like a prisoner of war camp fencing. Only we don't have barbed wire and lookout towers with machine guns. When they fence come down to 3 ft, we can claim to be civilised. What about economic parameters? Surely, it should be possible to remove the chain from the cricket ground's fence. When these two events happen, we can claim to be civilised.

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Mumbai

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Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Number of drones launched by Russia on Ukraine on Sunday

479 Apart from drones, 20 missiles of various types were fired at different parts of Ukraine, according to the air force, which said the barrage targeted mainly central and western areas of Ukraine. Ukraine's air defences destroyed 277 drones and 19 missiles in mid-flight. **AP**

The decrease in China's exports to the U.S. in May

35 In per cent. China's exports rose 4.8% last month, slowing from an 8.1% year-on-year increase in April. Imports declined 3.4% year-on-year, leaving a trade surplus of \$103.2 billion. China exported \$28.8 billion worth of goods to U.S. in May, compared with \$44 billion a year earlier. **AP**

Number of Nepali nationals deported by the U.S. on Sunday

37 This is the largest number of Nepalis deported by the U.S. in a single day. Anjan Neupane, spokesperson for the Immigration Office at Tribhuvan Airport, said that with Sunday's deportation, 177 Nepali nationals staying illegally in the U.S. had been sent back since President Trump assumed office. **AP**

The increase in Taiwanese shipments to the U.S. in May

87.4 In per cent. Taiwan's exports to the U.S. hit a record high in May as the self-ruled island seeks to strike a deal with Washington to avoid hefty tariffs. Taiwanese shipments to the U.S. soared 87.4% in May from a year ago to \$15.5 billion, finance ministry data showed. **AP**

The growth in Saudi Arabia's GDP in the first quarter

3.4 In per cent. Saudi Arabia's economy grew by more than expected in the first quarter of 2025, according to government data estimates, with lower oil prices impacting the economy less than previously forecast. Oil GDP shrank by 0.5%. **REUTERS**

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How drones are the new face of warfare

The ubiquitous drone is rapidly becoming the weapon of choice in active combat, serving as a force multiplier to achieve strategic objectives while blurring the distinctions between military-grade and commercial technologies

WORLD INSIGHT

Pushan Das

India's Operation Sindoor in the wake of the Pahalgam terror attack has marked a notable shift in the country's adoption of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) in combat. In combination with standoff weapons, India's use of UAVs in active combat represents a tactical shift in military doctrine – part of a global playbook. Ukraine's Operation Spider Web also marks a turning point in how low-cost, improvised unmanned systems can be employed with strategic impact.

Global precedents

The ubiquitous drone is rapidly becoming the weapon of choice serving as a force multiplier to achieve strategic objectives while blurring the distinctions between military-grade and commercial technologies. Building resilience in drone warfare requires India to build modularity and redundancy in mass produced drones, and nurture a responsive defence production base.

The Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020 provided one of the first demonstrations of how drones can change the nature of aerial warfare with new capabilities. Azerbaijan's success hinged on the use of loitering munitions or Kamikaze drones, like the Israeli-made Harop drones, in destroying air defences.

Additionally, the war in Ukraine has emerged as a real-world laboratory for drone technology, with rapid innovation and counter innovation cycles defining modern warfare. However, Ukraine's most obvious innovation was the country's ability to produce and deploy a wide variety of drones. In Myanmar also, rebel groups are deploying 3D-printed drones against a better-equipped military, levelling the playing field.

As India continues to reform and modernise its military, learning and applying the right lessons from recent conflicts, including Operation Sindoor, is key. Among New Delhi's adversaries, China already has a large and diverse fleet of unmanned systems, which could provide it with an edge in a potential war along the Line of Actual Control (LAC). Pakistan too has bolstered its unmanned weapons capabilities through collaborations with China and Türkiye.

Drone resilience

Drones are vulnerable to many countermeasures such as electronic warfare, guns and air defences. The impact of drones, therefore, depends on its ability to evade or overwhelm defences against them.

Countermeasures against drones in the form of air defences come with limitations and vulnerabilities and can be defeated through a range of technologies and tactics, making innovation and counter-innovation a critical part of drone warfare. India's counter-drone systems include multilayered sensors and weapon systems, as well as indigenously developed soft- and hard-kill counter-UAV systems. Both played a crucial role in thwarting Pakistan's drone and missile attacks in the recent flareup of hostilities.

To evade such systems, drones can, with advanced navigation, be made to adjust flights. Similarly, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and frequency hopping can be used to overcome jamming and spoofing autonomously. For instance, Ukraine has incorporated machine vision algorithms and pre-loaded terrain data to navigate complex routes in order to avoid



New modes of combat: An Indian soldier pictured with a drone at the Akhnor sector near the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu on May 19. **AP**

air defences. By operating at low altitudes, drones can exploit gaps in radar coverage and reduce the likelihood of detection.

Some drones are also designed with electronic warfare features, allowing them to jam or spoof enemy radar and communication systems. These capabilities enhance their survivability and effectiveness in contested environments. Ukrainian developers came up with a simpler solution – tethering a drone to a fibre-optic cable for guidance.

Alternatively, employing a large number of drones and decoys to fly in mass can overwhelm and confuse air defence and surveillance systems. Russia's drone campaign, for instance, makes use of Shahed drones to saturate Ukrainian air defences. It causes dilemmas on the rate of attrition of limited air defence assets, and creates openings for precision strikes.

India's air defence systems tied together under the Integrated Air Command and Control System (IACCS) performed well against numerous Pakistani drones and missile attacks. Boosting procurement and domestic production of munition stocks for its air defence systems (S-400, MR-SAM, Akash, etc) will be key to building magazine depth in any protracted conflict. With regard to the offence debate, given the low survivability rate of current drones, India will need to invest in building volume in its drone and loitering munitions toolkit.

The military-commercial crossover Ukraine's Operation Spider Web demonstrated that low-cost UAV's combined with accessible technologies and innovative employment strategies can have strategic impact deep into enemy lines. The operation targeted four air bases inflicting damage to Russia's long-range bomber fleet.

The fact that almost any drone can be used and modified to become an offensive weapon, coupled with the widespread use and accessibility of drones, has blurred the distinctions between

military-grade and commercial drone systems. Moreover, the indiscriminate use of the term "drones" obscures distinctions in capabilities, intended uses and public perception.

While advanced military-grade drones offer greater capabilities, they also come with higher costs and logistical challenges. Easily available commercial systems, open-source software, and modular engineering have lowered the entry barrier for the adoption of drone technologies. There is a trade-off between adding capabilities to drones and an increase in cost, size, and complexity. For example, drones such as China's Wing Loong, Iran's Shahed, or Turkey's TB-2 incorporate low-cost and dual-use technologies.

Innovation in technology has not been the only novelty in drone use, for manufacturing has also changed. 3D printing is rapidly becoming a key multiplier. For instance, in conflict zones such as Ukraine (Titan Falcon) and Myanmar (The Liberator MK1 and MK2) 3D printers provide alternate sources to mitigate manufacturing shortages. The adaptive employment of off-the-shelf drone technologies by non-state actors is providing states with valuable lessons in asymmetric and low cost aerial capabilities. For example, the U.S. and the U.K. are exploring commercial 3D printing ventures to mass produce drones at scale in order to manufacture bespoke components of weapons systems, thereby bypassing complex, expensive and often slow moving logistics supply chains.

India needs to prepare for the inevitability of easily weaponised commercial drones being used by terrorist organisations and non-state actors against its strategic and civil infrastructure. Counter-drone systems and tactics cannot be the purview of the military alone and should also be prioritised by internal security agencies.

Implications for India

The widespread adoption of drones in warfare signifies a shift in military strategy and operations. By deploying standoff

weapons along with drones during Operation Sindoor, India has introduced a layer of strategic ambiguity – one that expands its toolkit vis-a-vis Pakistan in the space between conventional and nuclear. Meanwhile, China's export of drones, among other platforms, to Pakistan adds a layer of complexity to India's security challenge.

China's own drone capabilities are rapidly advancing as significant investments have been made in building up a diverse fleet of drones, including long-range systems like the Soaring Dragon, BZK-005, TB-001, and Wing Loong II alongside affordable kamikaze drones, like the CH-901, designed to overwhelm enemy defences through swarm tactics. This poses a significant and evolving military threat to India along the LAC.

For India, drones complement other weapons and can partially offset capability gaps as part of an asymmetric defence strategy vis-a-vis China. However, India needs to view the wars in Ukraine, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Myanmar as cautionary tales for the need to mass produce an affordable mix of drones.

Of the many lessons from the ongoing war in Ukraine, one stands out – the importance of a defence industrial base that can keep pace with the high-intensity of modern conflict. To fully realise India's drone potential, the Ministry of Defence (MoD) needs to support the defence industrial base to be able to scale production and create surge capacity. The ability to reconstitute and quickly replace drones, loitering munitions after losses, and surface-to-air missiles will make India more resilient.

India's anaemic procurement of systems has generally discouraged industry from ramping up its production capacity.

Addressing underlying structural issues that lead to uncertain demand is key in order to incentivise industry to ramp up production capacity and innovation in defence.

Pushan Das is a strategic affairs analyst who writes on defence and foreign policy.

THE GIST

▼ The war in Ukraine has emerged as a real-world laboratory for drone technology, with rapid innovation and counter innovation cycles defining modern warfare.

▼ For India, drones complement other weapons and can partially offset capability gaps as part of an asymmetric defence strategy vis-a-vis China.

▼ Of the many lessons from the ongoing war in Ukraine, one stands out – the importance of a defence industrial base that can keep pace with the high-intensity of modern conflict.

When triumph turned into tragedy

On June 3, Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) claimed its maiden Indian Premier League (IPL) title at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad. When Virat Kohli announced that night that celebrations would extend to Bengaluru the next day, the atmosphere turned electric. Fans in Bengaluru celebrated with gusto the entire night, with firecrackers and full-throated chants and slogans. The wait for the title for 18 long years led to a burst of emotions and joy. What added to this excitement and the hurry to celebrate immediately was the imminent departure of Kohli the next day to London.



Yashovardhan Azad, IPS officer (retd.), is former Central Information Commissioner; former Special Director, Intelligence Bureau; and former Secretary, Security, Government of India

Unheeded advice

What was missing in this tremendous build-up to the victory parade was a calm and rational response from the administrative arm of the government. Amid the frenzy, according to reports, the Police Commissioner, B. Dayananda, rightly advised restraint and suggested that the celebrations be held a few days later. But the government allegedly did not listen to his advice. There is no clarity yet on why this was the case. It is well known that any State government would like to cash in on such an event for political gains. This government was clearly no different.

A Police Commissioner can directly talk to top hierarchy of the government. He should have got a clear 'yes' or 'no' from the Chief Minister. If the Chief Minister wanted to go ahead with the function, the police would have had no choice but to make the arrangements. What actually seems to have happened is that no one took a clear decision. Thus the celebrations in the crowded metropolises were ill-conceived and the messaging unclear, which became a recipe for disaster.

It was clear that the State government made the event look like a State function. Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar went to

The celebrations in Bengaluru were ill-conceived and the messaging unclear, which became a recipe for disaster

the airport to receive the champions. The government invited the team to Vidhana Soudha, the seat of State Legislature and Secretariat. There, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Governor Thawarchand Gehlot congratulated the team. Another function was held for fans at the Chinnaswamy Stadium and Mr. Shivakumar was present at that event. The function at Vidhana Soudha gave the public adequate time to throng the stadium. More than 2 lakh people reportedly congregated at the gates, leading to the stampede that claimed 11 lives.

The police were clearly overwhelmed by the sheer numbers and the lack of medical and other facilities. According to reports, the passes or tickets that were to be given to fans to go inside the stadium were to be given near the gates. Communication completely collapsed. It was claimed that news of the stampede did not reach the venue of the function. The celebrations inside the stadium happened even after tragedy unfolded outside.

Where were the officials?

It was surprising that Mr. Dayananda was finally suspended. After all, he was the one who had apparently warned the government against holding the function at such short notice. After being out on the streets the entire night of June 3-4, the police force was hardly in a position to make arrangements for a massive victory parade of the RCB team. It is also surprising that the Chief Minister did not have the correct picture of the potential consequences of holding such massive celebrations the next day. The Intelligence chief is mandated to give such information and assessment beforehand. In this case, a massive crowd at the stadium was expected. What were the Home Secretary and Chief Secretary doing? They too must have been aware of the impending law-and-order situation surely?

And what about the head of the force – the Director General of Police? Should he not have taken a stand? So, is the Police Commissioner the fall guy? Support has been pouring in for him on social media for advising the government correctly. Not one Minister has been able to give a justifiable, logical argument as to why this happened or how it was allowed to happen.

We also need to ask why the government chose to be associated with this programme. This is not the Karnataka Ranji Team. It is a cricket league run by a private franchise. During the IPL, a couple of cricket teams owned by rich people select players through an auction. Money pours in from advertisers and sponsors because the public loves to see sizes flying all over the stadium. Yet the cricket mania seems to have gripped politicians too. By holding a State function and having politicians meet the players elevated this championship victory to a much higher status.

The RCB management and the Karnataka State Cricket Association clearly took advantage of the government's indecision and went ahead with their plans to glorify themselves and market their achievements. The police have said that they did not grant permission for a victory parade, but the RCB management took to social media on the morning of June 4 and announced a victory parade nevertheless. The State government ignored the advice of the key official and joined in the premature celebrations. Worse, instead of owning up to it and asking one of its own to resign, it suspended the Police Commissioner, holding him solely responsible for the tragedy.

As usual, the government has constituted a one-man judicial commission to probe the tragedy. As the commission goes about its work, the real issues – the unforgeable lapses in administration – will remain obscured and slowly get buried in the sands of time.

Foreign aid and financial woes

The stand-off between the Kerala government and the Centre continues

STATE OF PLAY

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When reports last week stated that the Chief Minister's Relief Fund of Maharashtra had been allowed to receive foreign contributions under the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA), the CPI(M)-led Left government in Kerala was quick to depict this as yet another act of discrimination against the southern State by the Centre. It recalled that the Centre had declined the Kerala government's plea for accepting foreign aid in the days following the 2018 floods – a catastrophe that left large-scale destruction in its wake.

Kerala Finance Minister K.N. Balagopal said that while his State welcomed the approval for Maharashtra, it believed that it was unbecoming of the Central government to indulge in "political bias" in moments of great crisis. He stressed that it is important that the Centre treats every State equally. He added that it was unfortunate that politics, and not the scale of disasters, had become the yardstick in such matters. This was an apparent reference to the fact that the BJP-led Mahayuti coalition governs Maharashtra.

In the aftermath of the floods, the Centre had sparked a controversy by declining permission for Kerala to accept foreign aid, including a reported ₹700 crore offer from the UAE.

Kerala's discomfiture with the foreign aid nod to Maharashtra is the latest episode in a protracted stand-off between the State and Centre. Kerala believes that it is being discriminated against, and de-

nied its fair share of financial resources by the Centre. It has repeatedly complained about drastic cuts in financial allocations to it, and the "unfair limits" placed on its fiscal space. The Kerala government had taken the battle over restrictions on its borrowing capacity to the Supreme Court.

On the political front, the CPI(M)-led Left Democratic Front (LDF) has consistently accused the Centre of attempting to "financially choke" Kerala. It has blamed the Centre's skewed policies for the State's financial woes. The State government believes that recent Union Budgets have also caused disappointment to the State, as they have ignored pressing demands on the financial front. For instance, Kerala's plea for a ₹24,000 crore economic package to prop up its finances were not mentioned in the 2024-25 and 2025-26 Union Budgets. More recently, the government slammed the Union Finance Ministry for cutting a little over ₹3,300 crore from its borrowing limit for the 2025-26 fiscal year under the pretext of the Guarantee Redemption Fund.

The foreign aid nod to Maharashtra also presented the LDF government an opportunity to reiterate its dismay over the Centre's approach to the deadly July 30, 2024, landslides in Wayanad district. In the aftermath of the tragedy, the Kerala government had announced plans for a structured rehabilitation pro-

gramme, which included the building of townships with amenities for survivors. Mr. Balagopal said that the people of Kerala had, on two instances, expected Prime Minister Narendra Modi to announce special aid to Wayanad: first, when he visited that district in August last year; and second, when he visited Thiruvananthapuram to inaugurate the seaport at Vizhinjam. On both occasions, their hopes were dashed, he said.

Time and again, Kerala has accused the BJP government of paying scant regard to cooperative federalism – the driving spirit of Centre-State relations. It is evident that the trust deficit between the two entities on financial matters persists, notwithstanding the much-discussed breakfast meeting that Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan hosted for Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman at New Delhi in March. It remains to be seen how Kerala's financial grievances concerning Union government policies will be addressed, as the southern State inches closer to a frenetic election season. The by-election in the Nilambur Assembly constituency in Malappuram district is scheduled to take place on June 19; elections to the rural and urban local bodies are scheduled to take place towards the end of 2025; and the Legislative Assembly polls are set to take place in the first half of 2026.

In matters of State finances, Kerala will be keenly watching the recommendations made by the 16th Finance Commission led by Arvind Panagariya later this year. The State has sought a higher share of resources, arguing that its share of the divisible pool was brought down to 1.92% under the 15th Commission from 3.88% under the 10th.

Delimiting by electors rather than population offers a fairer approach

The principle of 'one person, one vote, one value' is more closely aligned with the number of electors than population

DATA POINT

Anish Gupta

Several recent articles in the mainstream media suggest that a delimitation exercise – if carried out with population as the primary criterion for allocating parliamentary constituencies (PCs) – would disproportionately disadvantage the southern States. Proponents of this view argue that the southern States, having adhered more rigorously to family planning norms than their northern counterparts, would either receive comparatively fewer PCs or could even be left with less seats than what they have currently.

But the broader question that has not been adequately discussed is: what is the most rational criterion for allocation of PCs: population or the number of electors?

Electors in a constituency are not always a subset of the population. Many electors may live outside their registered PCs, or may have failed to register. Census records are sensitive to migration, as they are based merely on a stay of six months or more (or even an intention to stay), without even requiring any proof of residence or registration in the voter list. Migrants also generally avoid/delay transferring their voter registration for various reasons. Furthermore, variations in the age structure – such as a higher proportion of under-18s – may also lead to large differences in elector numbers between PCs with similar populations. Importantly, the principle of 'one person, one vote, one value' aligns more closely with electors than the population. Using elector data avoids the wait for a Census and offers a more accurate measure of representation.

Moreover, among the five largest and five smallest PCs (excluding hill/UTs/north-east) in terms of electors, four in each group are from the southern States. The value of a vote in Idukki is 4.5 times higher than in Malkajgiri and 2.6 times higher than in Bangalore North. This indicates that rationalisation of PCs is more needed in the southern States.

Rajya Sabha representation

According to the elector data for 2024, the southern States account for just 22.45% of India's electors, yet they hold 23.8% of Lok Sabha seats. Their representation in the Rajya Sabha is even more skewed, at 24.4%, exceeding both their share of electors and their Lok Sabha seat share. The pattern is reversed for the other States. Although they comprise 71.2% of India's electors, they hold only 67.4%

of Lok Sabha seats and just 64.4% of Rajya Sabha seats. In particular, Tamil Nadu has 39 Lok Sabha seats which is lower than Bihar's 40 or West Bengal's 42; but it has 18 Rajya Sabha seats, which is more than the 16 seats allotted to both Bihar and West Bengal.

The fairer approach is to allocate seats based on electors. In the table, column 4 shows the proposed PC seats if the total number of seats is raised to 800. To avoid penalising smaller States and UTs, their current seat count is preserved, which results in a total of 810. The table shows that among the large States, Rajasthan (76%), Karnataka (60.7%), and Telangana (58.8%) would see the highest percentage gains in seats.

The current narratives – that PCs are allocated solely on the basis of population, and that the potential reduction in seats in southern States is primarily due to their strict adherence to family planning policies – are not entirely accurate. First, constituency allocation has never been based purely on population. Other considerations, i.e., geographical challenges and minimum representation, have always played a role. Second, linking political representation to population control sets a dangerous precedent. By that logic, similar claims could be made for representation based on religion or caste. For instance, Jains, among all religious groups, and upper castes, among all social groups, have the highest adherence to population control, while Muslims and Scheduled Tribes have comparatively higher fertility rates. Third, when the criterion of using population for the formation of PCs was originally adopted, the consequences of the population enumeration method and the impact of large-scale migration were not anticipated. Therefore, the principle of 'one person, one vote, one value' in a true sense is more closely aligned with the number of electors rather than the population across PCs.

An alternative choice

The data is based on the author's calculations using the 2024 electoral list
Table: The proposed number of Parliamentary Constituencies (PCs) based on the number of electors

States/UTs (S)	Current seats (2)	Electors (S)	Proposed seats (4)	Adjusted seats ** (S)	% Increase (6)
Andhra	25	4,14,01,887	33.9	34	36
Karnataka	28	5,47,72,332	44.8	45	60.7
Kerala	20	2,78,07,008	22.7	23	15
Tamil Nadu	39	6,24,04,947	51	51	30.8
Telangana	17	3,32,32,318	27.2	27	58.8
Bihar	40	7,72,59,579	63.2	63	57.5
Chhattisgarh	11	2,06,78,667	16.9	17	54.5
Gujarat	26	4,80,09,945	39.3	39	50
Haryana	10	2,01,87,911	16.5	17	70
Jharkhand	14	2,58,77,892	21.2	21	50
Madhya Pradesh	29	5,66,68,852	46.4	46	58.6
Maharashtra	48	9,30,61,760	76.1	76	58.3
Delhi	7	1,52,14,638	12.4	13	85.7
Odisha	21	3,37,16,965	27.6	28	33.3
Punjab	13	2,15,67,196	17.6	18	38.5
Rajasthan	25	5,35,08,010	43.8	44	76
Uttar Pradesh	80	15,44,03,112	126.3	126	57.5
West Bengal	42	7,61,24,780	62.3	62	47.6
AA&N Islands	1	3,15,745	0.3	1	0
Arunachal	2	8,98,442	0.7	2	0
Assam	14	2,45,72,114	20.1	20	42.9
Chandigarh	1	6,60,552	0.5	1	0
DNH & DD*	2	4,17,236	0.3	2	0
Goa	2	11,79,644	1	2	0
Himachal	4	57,11,369	4.7	5	25
Jammu & Kashmir	5	88,02,348	7.2	7	40
Ladakh	1	1,90,576	0.2	1	0
Lakshadweep	1	57,953	0	1	0
Manipur	2	20,51,357	1.7	2	0
Meghalaya	2	2,230,451	1.8	2	0
Mizoram	1	8,61,327	0.7	1	0
Nagaland	1	13,25,983	1.1	1	0
Puducherry	1	10,24,024	0.8	1	0
Sikkim	1	4,66,643	0.4	1	0
Tripura	2	28,70,896	2.3	3	50
Uttarakhand	5	84,31,101	6.9	7	40
All India	543	97,79,65,560	800	810	49.2

**Rounded off and without any decrease in the existing number of seats for the smaller States/UTs | *Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu

Anish Gupta teaches Economics at Delhi School of Economics, Juliana from IEDS, Noida, helped in data entry

FROM THE ARCHIVES

The **Hindu**

FIFTY YEARS AGO JUNE 10, 1975

Govt. considering action on U.K. restrictions on Indian doctors

New Delhi, June 9: The Health Ministry is expected to come out soon with the steps proposed to be taken in the wake of the decision of the General Medical Council of Britain to place curbs on registration of Indian doctors.

The Director-General of Health Services, Dr. J.P. Shrivatsava, to-day had a meeting with the Secretary of the Medical Council of India, Dr. Krishnan, and representatives of the Indian Medical Association and discussed the various issues arising from the British decision.

Dr. Shrivatsava, who had met the Indian High Commissioner and Indian doctors in London on his way back home from Geneva after attending the WHO session last week, is reported to have apprised the meeting to-day of his talks in London.

Although the British Medical Council has attributed its decision to its inability to monitor the standard of medical education in India, the feeling in official circles here is that the decision is motivated by a desire to reduce the number of overseas doctors, particularly from non-European countries.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JUNE 10, 1925

Mahatma in Bengal

Siliguri, June 9: Long before the arrival of Mahatma Gandhi the hill people mustered strong at all principal stations of the cart road running from Siliguri to Darjeeling. It was 11 in the morning. The weather was not clear and a thick mist kept hanging on the hills. A good number of hillmen had assembled at the Kurseong Railway Station to welcome the Mahatma. The Mahatma, who arrived in a motor car, was greeted with thundering roars of "Mahatma Gandhi ki jai" from all sides. The hill-men were so moved that not a few eyes were well up with tears. Any one who had the opportunity of touching the feet of the Mahatma thought that he was absolved of all sins.

Mahatma's car made its way slowly through the ever increasing crowd of human beings and it took almost an hour to cover a distance of half a mile. Men clung to the car like ship-wrecked sailors.

ABSTRACT



New methods: Garnierite, a greenish nickel ore, on the bank of a river in Indonesia on April 16. AP

How extracting and producing nickel can be made more sustainable

Nickel is an important metal used in several clean energy technologies, especially electric vehicles. The demand for it is expected to surpass six million tonnes a year by 2040. However, producing just one tonne of nickel can result in more than 20 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions

Hirra Azmat

Manzoor, U., Mujica Roncery, L., Raabe, D. et al, 'Sustainable nickel enabled by hydrogen-based reduction', *Nature* 641, 365-373 (2025).
doi.org/10.1038/s41586-025-08901-7

Nickel powers everything, from gadgets to green technologies. But getting it currently involves a far from green, in fact, a dirty process. However, a new study has revealed what its authors have said is a game-changing and sustainable method to extract nickel from low-grade ores using hydrogen plasma instead of carbon. It's a one-step process free of carbon dioxide that reportedly saves both energy and time.

Nickel is an important metal used in several clean energy technologies, especially Electric Vehicles (EVs), and the demand for it is expected to surpass six million tonnes a year by 2040. While EVs are seen as a cleaner alternative to traditional fossil fuel-powered vehicles, there are hidden environmental costs associated with their production, especially in the manufacturing of lithium-ion batteries.

A major component in these batteries is nickel and its extraction is highly carbon-intensive. Producing just one tonne of nickel can result in more than 20 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions. So while EVs reduce emissions during operation, the process of sourcing materials like nickel simply shifts the pollution burden from the transportation sector to the mining and processing sector, among others.

The methodology

The study, published in *Nature* on April 30, was conducted by researchers at the Max Planck Institute for Sustainable

Materials in Düsseldorf, Germany. In the study, the researchers bypassed the traditional multistep process to extract nickel – which includes calcination, smelting, reduction, and refining – and developed a single metallurgical step conducted in one furnace. "The proposed method has the potential to be up to about 18% more energy efficient while cutting direct carbon dioxide emissions by up to 84% compared with the current practice," the paper wrote.

Ubaid Manzoor, a researcher at the Max Planck Institute and lead author of the study, said, "Traditional nickel extraction is multi-step, energy-intensive and relies on carbon. Nickel oxide is heated with carbon, which removes the oxygen, producing pure nickel, along with carbon dioxide emissions." The researchers have proposed replacing carbon with hydrogen as the reducing agent and using electricity as the energy source, specifically through an electric arc furnace.

"In our method, we use hydrogen plasma. Hydrogen gas, when subjected to high-energy electrons in an electric arc, splits into high-energy ions, entering a plasma state – the extremely hot and reactive fourth state of matter. It is distinct from solids, liquids, and gases. This hydrogen plasma rapidly reduces the metal oxides. From a thermodynamic perspective, the process is not only cleaner but significantly faster," Mr. Manzoor said. He added that the method is kinetically superior – meaning the chemical reaction is more energetically favoured – thanks to the highly reactive and unstable nature of plasma.

"The end product of hydrogen reacting with oxygen is water, not carbon dioxide. Therefore, the entire process is carbon-free, using only electricity, hydrogen, and yielding water as a byproduct," he added.

Enabling sustainable production

The study focused on laterite ores, a type of soil-rich rocks that contain metals like nickel. They form in hot, tropical regions when rain and heat break down rocks over time, leaving behind metal-rich layers. They are abundant but tough to process. "While sulphide ores are found deeper underground and are easier to process, they're rapidly depleting. The new method used in the study works efficiently on laterites, making it key to future nickel production," Mr. Manzoor said.

India has substantial nickel laterite reserves, particularly in Odisha's Sukinda region. "These deposits, containing 0.4-0.9% nickel as nickeliferous limonite in chromite mine overburden, are often overlooked because traditional methods require higher-grade ores. But [the team's method] excels at extracting value from these lower-grade resources," Dierk Raabe, professor and director of the Max Planck Institute and co-author of the study, said. He added that the technology could play a major role as the demand for sustainably produced materials continues to grow.

"Without such innovations, the sustainability revolution – whether in electrification, renewables, or green infrastructure – risks merely shifting the carbon dioxide and energy burdens from one sector to another. In other words, we might build a 'greener' world through EVs, solar panels, and high-performance magnets while still relying on carbon-intensive methods to mine and refine the critical metals ... that make all of it possible," he said.

The inescapable demand for nickel in multiple industries and its traditionally carbon-intensive production pose "a particular challenge for countries like India, where rapid industrial growth is essential for economic development.

India must simultaneously meet ambitious climate goals and leverage market opportunities in the green economy," Mr. Raabe added.

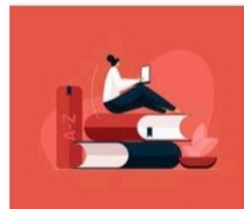
He continued that the technology aligns well with India's dual goals – to accelerate industrialisation and infrastructure development while staying committed to the goal of achieving net-zero emissions by 2070. It also reduces the need to import high-grade ores and maximises the potential of domestic, underutilised mineral assets, he added.

Some challenges

Pratik Kumar, assistant professor in the Department of Civil Engineering at IIT Jammu and who wasn't associated with the new study, said this research could be a very appropriate method for nickel extraction from an ore, especially when the world is thinking critically in the direction of carbon neutrality. The method produces high-purity ferronickel – an alloy with which stainless steel can be made – eliminating the need for extensive refining steps and making the overall process more sustainable on paper. "However, the scalability of the mentioned study to an industrial production would involve certain challenges, including a high initial investment in infrastructure and renewable energy and limitations in ore applicability. Also, further in-depth study on thermodynamic kinetics may be required along with a demand for continuous free oxygen species supply at the arc-melt interface," Mr. Kumar cautioned.

"Despite these hurdles, the study offers a promising, sustainable alternative to conventional nickel extraction methods."

Hirra Azmat is a Kashmir-based journalist who writes on science, health, and environment.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

K. Subrahmanian
S. Upendran

"...the waiter brought us some soup. That's when we had the big argument."
"What was the argument about?"
"Well, Mala said one 'drinks' one's soup and I argued that one 'eats' one's soup. Who is right – Me or Mala?"
"You're both right. You can either drink or eat your soup depending upon the kind of soup it is. If it is a thick soup, with lots of chunks of vegetables in it, then you could eat your soup."
"But if the soup is watery..."
"...not watery, but thin."
"O.K., thin. If it is thin and doesn't contain chunks of meat or vegetables in it, then you drink it, I suppose."
"That's right. So, did you drink or eat your soup?"
"Well, I ate mine and Mala drank hers."
"I see. Did she show you the paper she'd written after you had finished the soup?"

"Yes, she did. But it was illegible."
"Was her handwriting that bad?"
"No, her handwriting was great. It's just that I didn't understand anything."
"Well, in that case, it wasn't 'illegible', but 'unreadable'."

"What's the difference between unreadable and illegible?"
"When you say someone's handwriting is 'illegible', it means it is so unclear that you cannot see what the letters or numbers are. For example, as people get older their handwriting becomes illegible."

"You don't have to grow old for your handwriting to become illegible, I can assure you. You should see some of my classmates' handwriting!"

"That's true. Most doctors' handwriting is illegible. Only the person at the medical store can read it."
"At least we think they are able to read it! Tell me, what does 'unreadable' mean?"

"When you say that a book or paper is 'unreadable' it means it is very difficult or unpleasant to read, especially because it is dull or complicated."

"I see. So when something is unreadable, the handwriting is clear, but it is difficult to understand the contents?"

"Well, yes. For example, most scholarly papers are unreadable."

"What about law documents? They are definitely unreadable. Even a person with a PhD in English can't make sense of them."

"That's true. I find some of the bestsellers unreadable."

"A large amount of those books are unreadable."

"Not a 'large amount', but a 'large number'. You use 'large amount' only with uncountable nouns. For example, we had a large amount of rain this year."

"My father bought a large amount of ghee today. My mother is planning to make a large amount of laddus tomorrow."

"Not 'a large amount of laddus', but 'a large number of laddus'. Laddu is a countable noun, so you say 'a large number of.'"

Published in *The Hindu* on November 5, 1996.

THE DAILY QUIZ

The Indian cricket team will start its Test series in England from June 20. A quiz on the performance of India and its cricketers in their previous tours to the Old Blighty

Soorva Prakash, N

QUESTION 1

This is the 20th Test series for India in England including the one-off test held in June 1932 which marked the debut of India in Test cricket. How many series has India won playing in England so far?

QUESTION 2

India has won only nine out of the 64 tests that it has played in England so far. Which is its most successful ground?

QUESTION 3

Who has scored the most runs for India playing in England?

QUESTION 4

Who are the two batsmen to score a

double 100 on English soil?

QUESTION 5

Which bowler took five wickets in the very first innings in the debut test played by India in 1932?

QUESTION 6

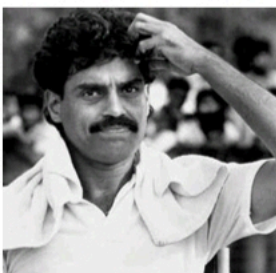
Who is the only bowler to have taken 10 wickets or more in a Test match in England?

QUESTION 7

Who is the only wicket keeper to effect five or more dismissals in an innings?

QUESTION 8

The third Test played at the Edgbaston, Birmingham in July 1967 is etched in Indian cricket history as four bowlers scalped 18 out of the 20 English wickets amongst them. This is the only Test that these famous four cricketers played together. Who are they?



Visual question:

This is the only non-English cricketer to score the most hundreds at Lords's which is touted to be the Mecca of cricket. Name him. THE HINDU PHOTO ARCHIVES

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

1. Name the railway stations on the Jammu-Baramulla line between which the Chenab bridge is located. **Ans: Kauri and Bakkal**

2. The Ponte Vecchio and Bridge of Sighs is located here. **Ans: Florence**

3. A bundle of hay must be suspended when work is happening on this bridge. **Ans: Tower Bridge in London**

4. This bridge holds the record for the tallest bridge in the world. **Ans: Millau Viaduct**

5. The distinct paint for this iconic bridge is currently supplied by Sherwin Williams. **Ans: Golden Gate Bridge**

6. This bridge connecting Denmark and Sweden runs for 8 kilometres before transitioning into an underwater tunnel for 4 kilometres. **Ans: Øresund Bridge**

Visual: The State where one can see 'living root' bridges. **Ans: Meghalaya**

Early Birds: Erfanally Oosmany| Arun Kumar Singh| Arvind Tiliway| Pranab Biswas| Dashleen Kaur

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

Word of the day

Besmirch:

charge falsely or with malicious intent; attack the good name and reputation of someone; smear so as to make dirty or stained

Synonyms: defame, denigrate, slander, smear, smut

Usage: their reputations were besmirched by that news report.

Pronunciation: newsth.live/besmirchpro

International Phonetic

Alphabet: /brsmrtʃ/

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

The
Hindustan Times
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

[OUR TAKE]

A critical test
for institutions

An early resolution is called for in the hate speech allegations against Justice Shekhar Kumar Yadav

The Supreme Court stopped short of instituting an internal probe into the conduct of Justice Shekhar Kumar Yadav, a sitting judge of the Allahabad High Court, following a March letter from the Rajya Sabha secretariat raising issues of jurisdiction, this newspaper reported Monday.

The letter reiterated the process as referred to by Rajya Sabha chairperson and Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar previously in February in Parliament—that only Parliament and the President have the jurisdiction to proceed against the judge, who is in the dock for alleged hate speech against Muslims delivered in December 2024. Even as the Supreme Court took note of that speech, a group of 55 opposition MPs filed a notice in the Rajya Sabha seeking Justice Yadav's impeachment for "grave violation of judicial ethics". As per the law, the removal of a high court or Supreme Court judge for "proved misbehaviour or incapacity" must go through Parliament. The chairperson will now have to decide on the admissibility of the motion and if an inquiry needs to be held.

The Rajya Sabha chairperson, who has been vocal about judicial integrity and institutional probity, should ensure that the complaint against the judge is now processed in a transparent manner and concluded before the judicial officer retires in April next year. A timely closure in the matter is necessary to ensure that there is no reputational damage to the judiciary, Parliament, or the concerned judge, in case he is found innocent of the alleged hate speech.

Interestingly, while Justice Yadav, reportedly, regretted his conduct and assured the Supreme Court collegium that he will render a public apology in a closed-door meeting with it in December, he has not issued one and instead defended his speech, delivered in a meeting of Vishwa Hindu Parishad activists in Prayagraj, as reflecting India's cultural ethos. A judge is bound by oath to protect constitutional values, not articulate majoritarian sentiments or populist views, even if they are part of some perceived cultural ethos. Any deviation is a violation of the oath and compromises the integrity of the judiciary.

The Justice Yadav case presents a critical test. It is not merely about the conduct of one judge but will have wider implications for the principle of separation of powers and commitment of public institutions to constitutional ideals. How this matter is now handled by the Rajya Sabha will set an important precedent for the future of India's democratic institutions.

In Madurai, the BJP's
pitch to win Tamil Nadu

Tamil Nadu's assembly elections are due only in April next year. However, the BJP has already sounded the poll bugle. Union home minister Amit Shah addressed a public meeting in Madurai on Sunday, where he accused the ruling DMK of running a corrupt government. He also flagged Operation Sindoor and reminded the audience that Prime Minister Modi had installed the *senigol* (sceptre) at the new Parliament premises. With an alliance with the AIADMK, the chief opposition party, almost in place, the BJP seems to have readied its arsenal to launch a poll battle in Tamil Nadu.

That Shah chose to launch the BJP's campaign in Madurai is not at all surprising. Madurai is both the state's cultural capital and the gateway to southern Tamil Nadu, a region where the BJP has made significant inroads since the 1980s. But can the BJP translate these gains into electoral wins? Shah's speech suggests that the party is likely to rely on nationalism, corruption allegations and faith to tide over the formidable political alliance that the DMK leads. In recent years, the DMK has doubled down on its Dravidian legacy, also in a bid to corner the BJP on charges of promoting a Hindi-Hindu nationalism, which it claims is against the political and cultural ethos of Tamil Nadu. The BJP has also embraced local symbols (*senigol*, for instance) and faith traditions to appeal to the faithful in the state. Shah pointedly spoke about the Murugan conference that Madurai is set to host later this month. Five years ago, the party had held a *Vel* (spear) Yatra to appeal to followers of this popular Tamil deity. Considering the competitive nature of Tamil politics, with multiple fronts likely to be in the fray, any incremental gains in vote share can make a difference to the outcome. The BJP is aware of it.

India's stakes in the
coming Arctic Rush

India must stay invested in the polar region, which has rich energy sources and hosts two shipping routes that will open up in the coming years

In March, Russian ambassador to India Denis Alipov addressed a conference on the somewhat arcane topic of 'Uniting North and South for Sustainable Development in the Arctic' in New Delhi. Jointly organised by Russia's Northern Forum and the Vivekananda International Foundation, the conference was attended by representatives of government agencies, as well as scientific and academic institutions. Also represented was the Republic of Yakutia, the largest Russian/Siberian province with an Arctic Sea coast.

Highlighting the favourable prospects for Indo-Russian cooperation in the development of the Arctic regions, including collaboration in energy exploration and exploiting the potential of Arctic sea routes, the ambassador expressed concern over the "growing militarisation of the Arctic". According to him, collaboration with India in research on multiple polar scientific disciplines, including Arctic influences on monsoon dynamics, would be mutually beneficial.

This diplomatic outreach needs to be viewed in the light of rapidly deepening China-Russia cooperation in the Arctic, driven by a convergence of economic and strategic interests, particu-

larly in the context of Western sanctions on Russia and China's future Polar Silk Road initiative. Observers have noted that the theme of Arctic collaboration has become a recurring agenda point in every Putin-Xi Jinping meeting since 2022.

In India, while the polar regions may not figure prominently in popular imagination, India's scientific community—with full political support—has been engaged in polar research since 1981. Reflecting the growing commitment to understanding the atmospheric sciences, the climate crisis, glaciology, and polar biology, the Goa-based National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research has been implementing India's policy for polar studies.

India established its first research base in Antarctica at Dakshin Gangotri, in 1983-84, with Maitri and Indira being constructed later. In the Arctic, India's scientific endeavours began in 2008 with the establishment of the research station, Himadri, in Ny-Alesund in Norway's Svalbard archipelago. India subsequently became an observer in the Arctic Council, an inter-governmental body, comprising the eight Arctic nations, including Canada, Denmark, Norway, Russia, the US, Sweden, Finland, and Iceland. The significance of India's early and active interest in polar affairs is best understood vis-à-vis the approach adopted by other nations.

In August 2007, Russia had dispatched a research ship to the North Pole, where a mini-submarine made a record-breaking dive to 13,000 feet below the ice and planted a titanium Russian flag on the seabed. Apart from the scientific and technological significance of this venture, Russia's objective was to stake an early claim to the Arctic's continental shelf with its embedded hydrocarbon and mineral wealth.

China, identifying itself as a near-Arctic State, has been undertaking scientific exploration for many years and has also acquired observer status in the Arctic Council. While eyeing the Arctic as a potential source of valuable natural resources, China looks forward to the future establishment of a shorter trade route through these waters. China's ambitious programme to build ice-breakers, ships essential for cutting a safe path through polar ice, for merchant shipping, is an indication of its Arctic ambitions.

The Arctic is the smallest and shallowest of the world's water bodies recognised as an ocean with two main outlets—one is into the Atlantic through the Greenland-Iceland-UK (GI-UK) gap, and the other through the Bering Strait that separates America from Russia. The Arctic Ocean is covered with a thick layer of sea ice, whose abrupt fluctuations seasonally, making navigation in these waters hazardous.

For centuries, polar waters had remained off-limits except for scientific expeditions. The advent of ballistic missile nuclear submarines (SSBN) invested them with strategic significance during the Cold War. Since an inter-continental missile launched from the Arctic would have the short-

est time of flight to the continental US as well as the Russian heartland, the Soviets had established naval bastions for SSBNs, which NATO maritime forces sought to keep under continuous surveillance. But now, intense jockeying has commenced, not only by the Arctic nations but also by others seeking to exploit nature's last frontier for its resources. Conflicting claims seek access to what geologists believe are a quarter of the globe's unexploited oil and gas reserves as well as other natural/mineral resources.

Given its techno-economic resurgence, India will soon be the world's second-largest energy consumer after China. With limited hydrocarbon resources, and plans for nuclear and renewable energy resources having long gestations, it will need other options. Under these circumstances, collaboration with Russia, which has been engaged in developing advanced technologies for polar exploration, would be a logical decision.

A second area of intense interest to seafaring and trade-dependent nations is access to two potential sea routes that run across the Arctic, connecting the Pacific to the Atlantic. One is called the North-West Passage, which runs through the Canadian Arctic Archipelago along the coast of North America, and the other is the Northern Sea Route

(NSR), which runs along the Siberian coast between the GI-UK Gap and the Bering Strait. So far, both routes have been available only during summer and require the use of ice-breakers. However, with the Arctic ice pack dwindling, it is expected that shipping traffic will be able to use this waterway more freely in the future. Ice-breakers may, however, still be required.

The adoption of this new route by merchant ships would obviate transit through the Suez and Panama Canal bottlenecks and cut down distances between Europe, the west coast of America, Asia and the Far East by as much as 5,000-6,000 km or 15-20 days of sailing, slashing shipping costs. For India, an open NSR would not only bolster energy security but also reinforce its strategic autonomy, by countering, on one hand, China's influence and strengthening, on the other, ties with Russia, via Arctic cooperation.

If US President Donald Trump's obsession with acquiring Greenland is any indicator, an Arctic Gold Rush is in the offing. This is an opportune moment for India to readily grasp the Russian ambassador's invitation to become "a strategic partner in the joint development of the Arctic area".

Arun Prakash is a former chief of naval staff. The views expressed are personal



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Building a resilient, globally
respected, self-reliant India

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership over the past 11 years has redefined India's governance, establishing a new normal marked by transparency, decisiveness and inclusivity. Operation Sindoor, which neutralised nine terror camps and 11 bases in Pakistan, epitomised this shift, treating terrorism as an act of war and dismissing Pakistan's nuclear bluff. As Modi 3.0 marks its first year, this decade-plus of reform has transformed India's trajectory across security, economy, gender empowerment, and social welfare. This vision is encapsulated in two acronyms: RAM (rashtra, suraksha, arth, vyavastha and amantranbhartha, mahila empowerment and middle-class relief) and GITA (global positioning, infrastructure, technology, alleviating poverty).

Rashtra (national security): Since 2014, India has adopted a zero-tolerance stance on terrorism, moving from appeasement to assertive deterrence. Operations like the surgical strikes, Balakot airstrike, and Operation Sindoor reflect a policy that imposes punitive costs on terrorists and their state sponsors, rejecting Posters for decisive response. The 2019 abrogation of Article 370 fully integrated Jammu and Kashmir, ensuring one flag and one constitution nationwide. Maoist-affected districts have dropped from 106 in 2015 to 18 in 2025, blending development and security operations. Home Minister Amit Shah has pledged a Maoist-free India by March 2026. Defence self-reliance has surged, with 5,000 items on indigenous lists and 75% of the FY 2025-26 defence modernisation budget allocated to domestic production. Defence exports reached \$2,622 crore in 2024-25, marking a new era of strategic autonomy and strength.

Arth (economy and self-reliance): India has transformed from one of the 'Tangle Five' to the world's fifth-largest economy, with projected growth of 6.3% to 6.8% in 2025-26, poised to become the third-largest soon. Economic reforms have driven confidence, with foreign direct investment crossing \$1 trillion in six Aprils, including a 26% jump in FY FY 2024-25. Exports hit record \$825 billion last year. Inflation, averaging 8.2% under the UPA government and often hitting double digits, has been moderated to 4% to 5.5% despite global crises such as Covid and the Ukraine-Russia war. The push for self-reliance extends beyond defence, with policies fostering innovation, manufacturing, and global competitiveness, positioning India as an investment hub.

Mahila (women's empowerment and middle-class relief): Women-led development is a cornerstone of Modi 3.0. The sex ratio has improved to 1,020 women per 1,000 men. Over ₹18,500 crore has been disbursed to 4 crore pregnant and lactating mothers under PMMVY, while 10.31 crore smoke-free kitchens have enhanced women's health. Women received 68% of Mudra loans (₹14.72 lakh crore) and own 73% of PM Awas-Gramin homes. Initiatives like toilets in schools and tap water connections prioritise women's health, and education laws against triple talaq, the Uniform Civil Code, and the Women's Reservation Act promote gender equity. Operation Sindoor's serene briefings, led by women officers, colonel Shikha (Queen) and wing commander Veerika Singh, inspire young girls to join the armed forces,

showcasing women's leadership.

The middle-class benefits from tax rebates up to ₹12.75 lakh and controlled inflation, easing financial burdens. Over 15,000 Jan Aushadhi Kendras offer generic medicines at ₹0-82% discounts. Aayushman Bharat's ₹5 lakh health cover for 50 crore Indians, now including seniors over 70, has saved ₹1 lakh crore in health care expenses. Metro services in 23 cities, 136 Vande Bharat trains, and modernised airports enhance connectivity. Digital India thrives with 46 crore UPI users, 52 crore DigLocker users, and a 97% drop in data costs, making the middle class more connected and aspirational.

Global positioning: India's foreign policy balances strength and compassion. The G20 presidency showcased leadership in amplifying Global South concerns. Vaccine Maitri delivered over 30 crore vaccine doses to 100-plus countries, cementing India's role in global solidarity. India engages both Russia and Ukraine, supports Israel against Hamas, and strengthens ties with West Asia and the Gulf. Shifting from non-alignment to an all-aligned approach, India has earned global trust, evident in support from Poland, Italy, France, and Germany. UPI reversing past isolation at the UN.

Infrastructure: Infrastructure has seen unprecedented growth. Highway construction has risen from 11 km/day to 34 km/day, backed by a 570% budget increase. Rural road connectivity is near 99%, with 3.96 lakh km built. The railway budget has grown ninefold, with 136 Vande Bharat trains operational. Metro networks span 1,013 km across 23 cities, and 100 new airports are functional. The PM Gati Shakti initiative aims to reduce logistics costs from ₹9 lakh crore annually to 8-9% of GDP, boosting competitiveness through multimodal connectivity and streamlined coordination.

Technology: Digital penetration has soared with 116 crore mobile subscribers and a 28% rise in internet users. BharatNet's 6.93 lakh km of optical fibre connects 214 lakh gram panchayats, and 5.76 lakh common service centres deliver services. UPI handles a record of global real-time payments, with ₹24 lakh crore in transactions in April 2025. Startups, 51% from tier 2 and 3 cities, thrive alongside platforms like GeM (₹13.41 lakh crore in orders). Direct benefit transfers (₹44 lakh crore) have eliminated welfare leakages, ensuring benefits reach the needy directly.

Alleviating poverty: Poverty has plummeted, with the rate dropping from 27.1% in 2011-12 to 5.3% in 2022-23 (World Bank). Multidimensional poverty fell from 20.1% to 12.8% (NITI Aayog). Lifting 25 crore people, schemes like PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana, Jai Jeevan Mission, PM Ujjwala Yojana, and PM Jan Dhan Yojana prioritise dignity, self-reliance, and access to food, water, and finance, empowering millions to rise above poverty.

Modi 3.0's first year builds on a decade of bold reforms, redefining India's governance through security, economic growth, women's empowerment, and poverty alleviation. The global and GITA franchises, UPI, a resilient, self-reliant, and globally respected India, poised for inclusive progress and a redefined destiny.

Shehzad Poonawalla is spokesperson, BJP. The views expressed are personal

[RAFAEL GROSSI] CHIEF, IAEA

We could determine ... that documents that belong to IAEA were in the hands of Iranian authorities ... this is not compatible with the spirit of cooperation

In the context of Iran acquiring confidential IAEA documents

HT

Bengaluru stampede: Some
questions for Karnataka govt

The magnitude of the recent tragedy at Bengaluru's Chinnaywamy stadium defies words. Many young lives were snuffed out during the ghastly events that occurred during the public celebration of the Indian Premier League (IPL) winner, Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB). The horror could have been averted if all those who held public office in the city and were responsible for upholding citizen safety had displayed professionalism instead of getting involved in a dubious electioneering exercise.

IPL is a big money-laden spectacle that has an intoxicating effect on the young and old. At the Bengaluru carnival, one powerful VIP was pictured holding the trophy and hosting it sky high as if he had himself scored runs and taken wickets to help RCB win the cup. This was typical of many of our bigwigs who do not miss any photo-op to project themselves as heroes and grab the honour from those who deserved it. It doesn't matter if their antics disrupt public life and inconvenience the community at large. I am more than convinced that if RCB's well-deserved triumph had not been so unabashedly politicised, the tragedy would not have happened.

What is appalling is the manner in which the State administration has acted to distance themselves from the horrific happening and pass the buck on to those who cannot protest. In a knee-jerk reaction, the government has suspended the commissioner of police and a host of other policemen.

It is not as if Karnataka alone is guilty of this senseless display of power. Many other state governments have been equally foolish and ridiculous in the past to pin down the blame on the police as if they were guilty of causing a stampede. Inefficiency and negligence on the part of any government agency has to be punished, no doubt. There is no room for any charity here. But the fairness demands that a simple and credible

WHAT IS APPALLING IS THE MANNER IN WHICH THE STATE ADMINISTRATION HAS ACTED TO DISTANCE THEMSELVES FROM THE HORRIFIC HAPPENING AND PASS THE BUCK

procedure has to precede any harsh action like suspension. As head of government, the chief minister should remember that such peremptory action only damages his image and reduces his credibility. More than this, the suspension of a high police official demoralises the whole force and makes it less effective in a crisis.

There are several questions which call for answers from the Karnataka government. Did the city police refuse to give the nod to the holding of the event? Were there reports that suggest the city commissioner was against the celebrations being held at such short notice. If so, why was he overruled? The bane of our democracy is that the politician is omniscient and is considered superior in wisdom to any professional civil servant, such as the commissioner of police with years of field experience. Our system endows the ballot box with undeserved wisdom in some places. Let me add that the replaced commissioner enjoyed a good reputation and seems to be a victim of unfortunate circumstances.

Were the chief secretary and the director general of police consulted before acting against the policeman concerned? If the answer is in the affirmative, what advice did they give? I cannot believe they would have endorsed the thoughtless action which was obviously more for optics than for any real reason of promoting administrative norms or efficiency. My hunch is that the State action was for appeasing enraged public opinion. This is the usual way governments adopt when caught napping.

If any harsh action against a civil servant such as suspension should appear credible, it has to be preceded by a quick and preliminary inquiry. Without that any punitive action such as suspension is unwarranted and bad in law. Suspension of a government official, whatever be the rank, without application of mind on the part of the head of administration smacks of arbitrariness and vindictiveness.

The suspended policemen were not common criminals who deserved to be hanged without a hearing. They could have been withdrawn from the field temporarily and made to await the outcome of internal enquiry. The haste with which they were suspended is disgraceful.

RK Raghavan is a former CBI director. The views expressed are personal

Progress on poverty

India needs fresh official estimates

There is little doubt that the prevalence of absolute poverty in India has fallen considerably over the last two decades. However, the exact measurement of poverty has been somewhat hampered by the absence of official poverty estimates. These had become problematic and controversial in the past because of some disagreement over what constituted an accurate and fair poverty line. In the absence of an internal consensus in the Indian establishment over this question, many have used the poverty line set out by the World Bank for countries in India's income class. The World Bank's line was introduced in 1990 as a "dollar a day", and has been updated since in 2001, 2008, 2015, and 2022. It has now produced a fresh estimate of its poverty markers, and has set the line for low income at \$3 worth of consumption a day, up from \$2.15. For lower middle-income countries, the cutoff has been increased to \$4.20 from \$3.65.

This provides a possible entry point into estimating India's progress in eradicating poverty. The number of people living in extreme poverty, under the \$3 a day line, is now only 5.3 per cent of the population, compared to 27.1 per cent in 2011-12. Under \$4.20 a day, the proportion has reduced from 57.7 per cent to 23.9 per cent in the same period. This progress should not be understood because it represents a substantial increase in human welfare. It reflects a combination of overall economic growth and targeted poverty-alleviation programmes. This broad reformist consensus has been more successful at reducing poverty in India than any other policy mix, and must continue to be followed.

However, that does not mean that there are no geographical and other disparities in poverty reduction that must be addressed. The data used by the World Bank suggests, for example, that poverty rates in rural areas are still considerably higher than in urban areas. It might be argued that this difference is exaggerated because of the different price levels between the two zones. If so, that argument must be substantiated through consumer and other surveys. The essential problem here for India is that although consumption surveys have now resumed, with two back-to-back surveys being conducted, there is still no effort to create a clear set of poverty estimates. The last such exercise was carried out a decade ago. Now that data is available for two back-to-back household consumption surveys, India must revisit the process to arrive at fresh estimates.

An updated poverty line is essential for India as it moves towards eliminating absolute poverty. The last mile in this effort is usually the toughest, and it will require a clear sense of where and what remain problem areas. It is also important to not give in to triumphalism. As the experience of the pandemic showed, the emergence of many from poverty is fragile, and they can fall back into destitution in the face of various economic shocks. Some will also, while acknowledging the importance of the welfare state, will question how only a quarter of the country can be poor when such a large proportion of it qualifies for free food under government schemes. It is also worth finding out to what extent such programmes are helping in reducing poverty. These questions can best be answered by data. Indian policy should not be dependent on multilateral poverty estimates.

Special zones

SEZ policy demands all-round reform

Recent policy relaxations to encourage the manufacturing of hi-tech items such as semiconductors and electronic components in special economic zones (SEZs) mark yet another effort by the Union government to strengthen a nearly two-decade-old effort to encourage exports of manufactured products. The new rules have reduced the minimum land requirement for SEZs from 50 hectares to 10 hectares, offered concessions in net foreign exchange calculations, allowed the sourcing of capital, raw materials, and components from domestic markets from the earlier provision of imports only, and eased stipulations for the movement of finished goods. These new rules, which came into effect recently, represent a proactive strategy to boost the four-year-old Indian Semiconductor Mission, which aims to develop a robust semiconductor and display ecosystem and position India as a global hub for electronics manufacturing and design. It is an open question, however, whether the SEZ policy relaxations can be a game changer for the sector.

In theory, the SEZ environment would be ideal for the requirements of semiconductor manufacture, which requires stable power, clean water, and access to a skilled workforce. The problem, however, is that the objective of creating SEZs that would follow the highly successful Chinese model and act as the dynamo for manufacturing and exports has not worked out. India has 276 operational SEZs with an investment of around ₹7 trillion. But in almost two decades, these units have managed to generate employment for just about 3 million people — far less than the 5.4 million employed in the information-technology (IT) and IT-enabled services businesses in India and far below the requirements of the workforce. In China, the mammoth SEZs account for 60 per cent of exports; in India, they account for just about a fifth, and the ratio has barely changed for years. Nor is manufacturing the main driver in India; instead, IT and IT-related services account for 60 per cent of SEZ exports. The gradual shrinking of minimum land size stipulations also reflects a critical infirmity for any mega-project in India — land acquisition. This factor alone has proven a major hurdle in SEZ development, which includes obtaining necessary permits and developing the world class infrastructure necessary to sustain streamlined manufacturing operations.

There is also the question of policy discrepancies, with poor coordination between government departments causing delays in the application of incentives. The poor response prompted the government to introduce a Development of Enterprise and Service Hubs (DESH) Bill in 2022 to encourage companies to produce both for global and domestic markets. This, too, has gone nowhere, as the government has shelved the DESH Bill. The prospect of poor connectivity, social infrastructure, and other support services in India's more rural regions has meant that SEZs tend to be located near areas that are already developed. If SEZs are to develop beyond a lucrative real estate play for developers, they need an enabling ecosystem — from transport and internet connectivity to flawless infrastructure, world-class housing, security services, schools, and hospitals. That implies envisaging these units as integrated socioeconomic structures, as they are in China, rather than as hubs insulated from the various vicissitudes of India. Solving the age-old structural problems in the investment environment rather than frequent policy shifts would be the best bet for India's faltering SEZ policy.

Beating China's mineral dominance

Removing bottlenecks alone won't create the conditions for firms to invest in mining and processing

ILLUSTRATION BY BINAY SINHA



Stealth aircraft, drones, computer chips, electric motors, batteries, surveillance equipment, and mobile phones all rely on a class of minerals we now call critical minerals. Unfortunately, India has limited domestic critical mineral resources and processing expertise; together, these gaps compromise the realisation of our manufacturing ambitions.

The challenge is not a small one, for it will affect almost every part of the economy — manufacturing, services, and even agriculture. Take, for instance, our path towards greater electrification of the economy, where combustion-based energy steadily gives way to electricity. This requires greater electricity storage, both for utilities and for mobility. Therefore, be it automobiles, drones, robots, shipping & aircraft, or utility-scale power storage, batteries and motors will become central to the Indian economy. Given current trends, lithium, cobalt, nickel, manganese, and a few others will steadily become more important.

Or take the move towards greater computing and digitalisation, the growth-trend of surveillance and monitoring, the artificial intelligence revolution, and possibly quantum computing, etc. All are intimately dependent on a variety of electronic products. Given their criticality — and China's proclivity to put up export controls — India is rightly attempting to enhance its manufacturing prowess in these areas. A range of minerals will therefore need to be accessed, ranging from gallium, germanium and indium for image sensors and optical equipment, to tantalum, niobium for chips, and to rare earths like europium, yttrium and terbium for magnets, etc.

And we must also consider defence needs. Within a short period, and with a distinct change in government policy, a dynamic military-industrial complex has taken root in India. The manufacture of missiles, guns, aircraft, submarines, among others, is only expected to grow. Minerals like titanium and

tungsten have been used for some time, but with the increasing use of space equipment and missiles, beryllium and rare earths, among others, will be needed at significant levels.

This is where I would be expected to write about what the government is doing. And indeed, there is much. Critical minerals have been identified for India; mineral resources are being tied up globally through its joint venture KABIL; incentives for building mineral processing capacities have been proposed; private participation in critical mineral blocks is being encouraged; and international efforts appear to be yielding fruit, with a Critical Minerals Partnership involving like-minded countries, including the United States, Japan, and Australia.

So then, why am I penning this essay? Rightfully, the Indian government is shifting its approach to a more ecosystemic level. However, the government's current reduce-the-bottlenecks strategy does not by itself create the right conditions for firms to invest — whether in mining or in processing. But since the future of Indian manufacturing — and consequently the economy — rests on the mining and processing of critical minerals, we cannot afford to get it wrong.

The underlying problem here is the time mismatch in creating the critical minerals value chain. To simplify: It takes about a decade and a half for a mineral to be identified and for a mine to become fully operational. On the processing side, it takes five to 10 years to obtain permissions, align the factors of production, and put up a unit, whereas, on the manufacturing side, a unit typically takes around three years — give or take a bit.

The time is, to set up a facility, upstream mining takes the longest, midstream processing takes less time, and downstream manufacturing takes the least. There is a time mismatch: No upstream unit can be planned properly without a sufficiently large domestic

market, and downstream units' viability is compromised in the absence of a domestic supply of critical inputs. In other words, the temporal mismatch within the value chain causes a market failure that prevents the spontaneous growth of the sector, and this necessitates some government intervention.

Government policy, therefore, needs to address this market failure emanating from the differing time horizons of mining, processing, and manufacturing units in the critical minerals value chain. Merely facilitating licenses or subsidising investment or enabling research & development (R&D), for that matter, will be too little for something that is, literally, so critical.

Policy can work on two fronts simultaneously. If mining and processing are better aligned, then the overall risk is reduced, and the elements of market failure diminish. First, it would do well to address the mismatch in time horizons. One possibility is to work around the manufacture of some items until the requisite processing capacity arises. So, for instance, it could (hypothetically) delay the growth of some types of defence equipment and rely on imports until the rare earth value chain is ready. Or it could reduce the time horizon in mining, facilitating pre-clearance of various permissions and licences that would otherwise take many years. This would reduce the time required to operationalise mines, lower costs, and mitigate risks for processors.

Second, it can directly enter the critical minerals value chain in the midstream segment, that is, at the processing stage. The objective would be to (a) ensure critical minerals are available on tap for downstream manufacturers, and (b) the domestic upstream mining and processing industry gets the right environment to grow through a readily available market for their products. Many possibilities exist on how such an intervention may be structured.

One method could resemble the minimum price-Food Corporation of India-public distribution system approach, where the government announces a purchase price, buys and stores the processed minerals and sells on demand. An alternative is the MATC-plus-price-stabilisation approach, where a critical minerals trading entity is mandated to purchase first from domestic processing units, and then sell to domestic firms, adjusting for surpluses and shortages through global market interventions. The key here is the mandate: The responsibility to ensure processed minerals are available lies squarely with this entity. Yet another approach would involve the government identifying a few "chosen" private players, but regulating them strictly. After all, oligopolies in critical sectors often tend towards profiteering.

The larger objective is to ensure price and quantity stability in the critical minerals supply for manufacturing to prosper in key product lines. Recall that the Western world had dominance in this space at one point, but its dependence on profit at every stage of the value chain forced it to shut down its facilities. It yielded to China, which achieved global dominance because it focused on the benefits downstream in manufacturing and not on upstream mining or processing.

The author is an economist. The views are personal



LAVESH BHANDARI

New warriors of language streaming

Eken Babu is an unlikely detective. The rotund, balding character was created in 1991 by the late author Sujan Dasgupta for Bengali magazine *Anandamela*. Eken Babu became a web series on Hoichoi, a Bengali streaming service, in 2018. The show is now in its eighth season. *Eken Babu's* popularity prompted Hoichoi's parent, SKV Entertainment, a major studio and distributor based in Kolkata, to produce a film featuring the character in 2023. This may saw the release of the third film in the franchise, *Eken: Benarus e Bibhishika*. Hoichoi, a subscription-based service, which launched in 2017, now makes a small profit on its ₹100 crore top line (FY 2024-25).

In Hyderabad, Aha, a Telugu streaming app birthed by real estate major, My Home Group, and Alu Aravin's Ceetha Arts, will break even this year on its ₹60 crore top line. It has 25 million subscribers. Stage, another OTT, just rounded off ₹100 crore in a Series B funding round as it tries to scale from its claimed 4.4 million subscribers to 70-80 million. It offers programming in Haryanvi, Bhojpuri, and Rajasthani with plans to add 18 more dialects/languages, including Mathli, Bundeli, Awadhi, and Marathi.

The numbers seem small. In 2024, streaming video generated ₹35,600 crore in advertising and pay revenues from 125 million subscribers, according to Media Partners Asia. So a couple of million subscribers and a few hundred crore in top line doesn't seem much.

It is for two reasons — history and profitability. Take history. Streaming is following the same growth trajectory as television. Private television

broadcasting took off in India in 1991 with the entry of Star TV and CNN. Zee entered the scene in 1992, and soon after came the first Tamil channel, Kalanithi Maran's Sun TV. In 1993, Ramoji Rao's Eenaadu TV (Telugu) launched in 1995. Zee Marathi, Asianet (Malayalam), Maa TV (Telugu), and many others followed. Except for Zee, none of the big broadcasters got into non-Hindi immediately.

That is because, in both value and volume, Hindi is the largest part of the media and entertainment pie, given it is spoken in large swathes of India. Its creative ecosystem was better developed, thanks to cinema and Doordarshan. *Buniyad* or *Katha Sagar*, among other popular shows from the '80s, were made by people making films. Telugu, Tamil and Malayalam were the other languages with well-developed creative ecosystems — with writers, filmmakers, technicians — who could create for a new audience on television. So those languages took off after Hindi.

Tamil, Telugu and Malayalam were limited by the fact that each of those languages is spoken by only 5-10 per cent of the people who speak Hindi. But finally, enough, Sun TV was the most-watched channel in India across languages for decades. Just after the pandemic, Dangal TV displaced it. Sun, Maa TV, and a bunch of others routinely feature in the top 10 most-watched TV channels in India. This is because many Northern states never managed the 80-90 per cent cable TV penetration that Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh (including Telugu) had. On TV, those three languages are reaching almost their entire audience — Hindi isn't.



VANITA KOHLI-KHANDEKAR

Consider other languages. Punjabi, Bhojpuri, Bengali or Marathi audiences are bilingual. Hindi with its sharper production values is an easy substitute in these markets. To match the aesthetic of Hindi means pushing costs from, say, ₹1 lakh per episode to ₹10-15 lakh per episode. The ad and pay revenues in these markets couldn't support those costs. That explains why attempts by both independent and large networks in these languages simply didn't work while investment into South Indian languages did. Star, Viacom18, and Zee did get into Punjabi and Gujarati, among other languages, but with limited success.

That brings this to the second reason why the slow, steady march of a Hoichoi or Aha is interesting. They are profitable businesses, at a scale a non-Hindi language business can be, and they are sustainable by virtue of being part of a bigger entity. For instance, Hoichoi's parent, SKV, has been focused on Bengali cinema and television for 30 years now, much like Sun TV has been in Tamil or Eenaadu was in Telugu. Think of this — in 2025, Netflix has a slate of 26 shows and films from India; Hoichoi has 25 only for Bengali.

By the turn of the millennium, many large broadcasters scaled and expanded their language offering by buying strongly entrenched local players. Star bought both Asianet (2009) and Maa TV (2015). Today, non-Hindi languages typically bring close to 25-30 per cent of the total revenue for most broadcasters. If the growth of language television is anything to go by, then at some point in the future, brands like Hoichoi and Aha could become highly valued takeover targets when the big platforms try to bulk up revenues and get their non-Hindi businesses going. History, as they say, repeats itself.

<https://x.com/vanitakohli>

Pride, prejudices, and the nine lives of Musk



PROSENJIT DATTA

Elon Musk's life and business shenanigans make for highly readable books. Apart from becoming staggeringly rich — and at one point the world's richest man — he is eccentric, utterly arrogant, super confident in his own abilities, extremely inconsistent and, finally, given to impulsive decisions. He has built a legion of followers who swear by him and are willing to go to war against his perceived enemies after a single post by him on X (earlier Twitter). His per-

sonal life and beliefs are even more colourful. And the number of mistakes he has made and wrong gambles he has taken should have made him bankrupt many times over.

Often overlooked is his ability to take the hardest of decisions — and still come out ahead. This has happened far too many times in his career. If this is luck, then he would be one of the luckiest people on earth (and maybe eventually on Mars if he manages to turn it into a habitable colony for billionaires as is his stated ambition). More likely, despite his eccentricities and hubris, he hides a shrewd business brain and the ability to manipulate public officials, investors, and even customers. He can sell outrageous dreams and make a large number of people believe only he can fulfil them.

He has been the subject of many books. The book under review is *Hubs*

Maximus, but in the past year, this reviewer had the pleasure of reading *The Founders: The Inside Story of PayPal* by Jimmy Soni and Character Limit: *How Elon Musk Destroyed Twitter* by Kate Conger and Ryan Mac. This is, of course, apart from the constant bombardment of news and feature articles about him in almost every publication tracking Silicon Valley and its tech moguls.

Faiz Siddiqui is a technology journalist with *The Washington Post* and has covered and broken many stories about Musk, Tesla and even the Twitter takeover. He is an excellent investigative reporter and an accomplished storyteller. This book would have been very difficult to put together for Mr Siddiqui. Apart from the fact that Musk doesn't like any article or story that portrays his business or actions negatively, he suspects that Mr Siddiqui has been put to work on making him look bad by

his rival tech tycoon Jeff Bezos, the owner of *The Washington Post*.

The volume is deeply researched and focuses on parts of Mr Musk's business in the past couple of decades. Mr Siddiqui spends a good portion of the book on the ups and downs of Tesla's self-driving software, the errors and accidents that took several lives — while Mr Musk managed to cook a snook at the safety agencies. It looks at the cult-like following that Mr Musk has developed that often manifests itself in legions of followers trolling and threatening even senior public officials of safety agencies at the slightest perceived signal from Mr Musk. It also looks at his ability to come out unscathed despite his outrageous tweets and statements. He got past the infamous "Funding Secured" tweet, which should ideally have been considered market manipulation. He managed to get away with no punishment despite calling a British engineer

who rescued children from a tsunami in Thailand a pedophile. And he tried to wriggle his way out of his Twitter deal. The book also looks at how he has managed to get away with thumbing his nose at elected representatives and senior US government officials. It traces his cynical politics — first as a Democrat funder and follower before shifting allegiances to the Republican Party.

Though a good part of *Hubs* *Maximus* has been covered in great detail in other articles and books, notably *Character Limit*, the book is a race read. I have some minor quibbles. The narration sometimes jumps back and forth, making some parts feel repetitive. Also, the secret sauce that makes Mr Musk so successful time and again when people have written him off



Hubs: The Inside Story of PayPal
by Faiz Siddiqui
Published by HarperCollins
268 pages ₹599

is not explored. (To be fair, it has not been explored by other books this reviewer has read either).

The book ends with Mr Trump's victory and Mr Musk's role as czar of the Department of Government Efficiency. Now, Mr Musk and Mr Trump are working openly and the US President's recent moves could prove fatal to Mr Musk's Tesla and SpaceX businesses. Of course, Mr Musk may prove that he has not exhausted his nine lives yet. For people with an interest in colourful business tycoons, most books on Mr Musk are a must-read — though the final chapter on the definitive story of Elon Musk will not be written for a few decades at least.

The reviewer is former editor of *Business Today* and *BusinessWorld*, and founder of Prosciview, an editorial consultancy

EXPLAINED SPACE

'REALISING THE RETURN': HOW AN INDIAN BECAME PART OF AXIOM-4



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with US President Joe Biden during a State Dinner at the White House in Washington on June 22, 2023. *The New York Times*

ANNONA DUTT & AMITABH SINHA
NEW DELHI, JUNE 9

IN JUNE 2023, during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's state visit to Washington, India and the US announced a decision to finalise a strategic framework for human spaceflight cooperation. It was also revealed that Indian and American space agencies, Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), would mount a joint effort to enable an Indian astronaut to travel to the International Space Station (ISS) by 2024.

The announcement came as a surprise. Till then, it was understood that the first Indians to travel to space after Rakesh Sharma's historic flight in 1984 would ride the Gaganyaan mission which ISRO had been preparing for since 2018, when Modi unveiled India's ambition to send humans into space by 2022. The 2022 timeline could not be adhered to. But astronauts had been selected and trained, and systems were under development and being tested.

The 2023 announcement offered India an opportunity to get real-life experience for one of its astronauts ahead of the Gaganyaan mission. Only three nations — the US, Russia and China — have a human spaceflight programme of their own. Shubhanshu Shukla's flight, which came about on the back of the 2023 announcement, is thus being seen as another preparatory step ahead of the Gaganyaan mission.

A growing partnership
It has since emerged that the 2023 announcement was the result of at least a few years of discussions between India and the US. Their space agencies have been working on a joint NISAR (NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar) mission for over a decade now, enabling a closer, than-ever partnership. That mission is finally ready now, and likely to be launched in the next few weeks from Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh.

The need to further strengthen their partnership, possibly through a joint human spaceflight programme, had been broached several times during these interactions. This took place particularly after ISRO demonstrated its advanced

Why Axiom-4 matters

When the first Indian went to space, India's space program did not have the capability to make productive use of the experience. This will not be the case with Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla's space flight

EXPERT EXPLAINS

SOMAK RAYCHAUDHURY

THE TRAVEL of Indian astronaut Shubhanshu Shukla to the International Space Station (ISS) on the Axiom-4 mission on Wednesday marks the beginning of a new era in Indian space. In the last few years, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has carried out a number of important missions that have placed India in a very small group of countries with cutting-edge space capabilities. The Moon-landing that ISRO achieved with the Chandrayaan-3 was the highlight of these efforts.

With Shukla's flight, we are moving into the next gear. This might still not be our own human spaceflight mission, which is supposed to happen very soon, but it is not as though we are just hitching a ride on someone else's mission. The Axiom-4 mission is closely integrated with our own space plans, and will provide some critical inputs to the Gaganyaan mission and other missions to follow.

Rakesh Sharma to Shubhanshu Shukla, India's space story

I remember how excited people of my generation were when Rakesh Sharma went into space on a Russian mission in 1984. It was a very big event. It showed where we wanted to be, and what our aspirations were.

But that event happened when India's space program was still in its very early stages. We did not have the infrastructure and the capability to make productive use of Sharma's achievement. We also did not have a definitive plan or roadmap for the future: a human spaceflight was not on the horizon. Sharma's achievement became an isolated event of sorts.

This is where Shukla's flight is fundamentally different. Sharma's flight had huge symbolic and inspirational value. Shukla's flight will have practical uses as well. ISRO has, in the intervening years, emerged as one of the leading space agencies of the world with the ability to execute very complex missions. Human spaceflight is one of the few remaining frontiers that ISRO still has to conquer.

In fact, if Gaganyaan had followed its original schedule in 2022, was a very ambitious deadline — we would already have sent humans into space by now. But it is just as well that the Axiom-4 mission is happening before that. We will benefit from Shukla's experience and learnings.

Gaganyaan ahead, importance of Shukla's critical inputs

Human spaceflight missions are extremely challenging, more so when you are doing it for the first time. They are maybe a couple of orders of magnitude more complex than uncrewed missions because of the safety protocols that have to be integrated. This is the challenge that ISRO faces with the Gaganyaan mission. And every bit of additional input that reduces the risk and increases the safety of the mission is invaluable.

That is why Shukla's experience with the Axiom-4 mission is important. He will bring real-life exposure that can be utilised in Gaganyaan. Shukla is the designated pilot of the Axiom-4 mission. He will learn a lot and gain in many ways during this mission.

Although a lot of the spacecraft is automated, it does require human intervention. It is not a point-to-point travel. The spacecraft has to follow a complicated orbit to reach the ISS, which is a moving target in space. The pilot will be required to take a number of decisions, and initiate several processes, during the flight to the destination.

This kind of experience will be critical for the other Indian astronauts who would be going on the Gaganyaan mission. Real-life experience is very different from training and simulations. Right now, we only have Rakesh Sharma with this experience, and the technologies during his time were very different. Countries that have a human spaceflight program benefit a great deal from astronauts transferring their knowledge and experience to the next generation.

Also, Shukla will be the first Indian to go to the ISS. He will have an opportunity to see how the ISS functions and operates. ISRO's next big project, after Gaganyaan, is to build its own space station. That is a massive infrastructural endeavour. After his two-week stay on the ISS, Shukla would be in a position to offer critical inputs here as well.



1. SLAWOSZ UZNANSKI-WISNIEWSKI
Mission Specialist, Polish
Scientist and engineer, was member of European Space Agency's Astronaut Reserve Class of 2022. Has made significant contributions at the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) in Geneva, where he served as a reliability expert and project lead. From 2018 to 2020, was Engineer in Charge for the Large Hadron Collider (LHC), overseeing its round-the-clock operations.

2. PEGGY WHITSON
Commander, American
Most experienced American astronaut with more than 38 years of experience. Three previous missions to ISS; holds record among US astronauts & among women for spending the most time in space, 675 days. Trailblazer: first female commander of ISS; only woman to serve as ISS commander twice; first female commander of a private space mission (Axiom 2); most spacewalks by a woman (10 walks, 60 hours).

3. SHUBHANSHU SHUKLA
Pilot, Indian
Group Captain Shukla was commissioned into IAF's fighter wing in June 2006; has 2,000 hours of flight experience across a range of aircraft. Will pilot Axiom 4 mission to the ISS. Named on February 27, 2024, as one of four elite astronauts for Gaganyaan, India's maiden human spaceflight mission.

4. TIBOR KAPU
Mission Specialist, Hungarian
Mechanical engineer, specialist in polymer technology, has contributed to pharma and logistical industries. In 2022-23, he focused on space radiation protection at an aerospace technology company. In 2023, was selected as one of four Hungarians for the Hungarian to Orbit (HUNOR) Astronaut Program.

WHAT ASTRONAUTS WILL DO

- More than 60 scientific studies and activities scheduled to take place aboard the ISS
- This will be the most research and science-related activities conducted on an Axiom Space mission aboard the ISS to date
- Thirty-one countries involved in these studies, including the US, India, Poland, Hungary, Saudi Arabia, Brazil, Nigeria
- ISRO has designed 10 experiments. These include: growing crops in space; examining tardigrades in space; investigating muscle loss in astronauts in space; and analysing impact of gazing at computer screens in microgravity
- Astronauts will also engage in scientific outreach activities such as addressing students and people from the space industry

Source: Axiom Space

ISRO's zero-gravity environment gets rid of the weight factor and allows the study of changes in muscles purely due to natural reasons, which can lead to breakthroughs in the understanding of human health.

The experiments on sprouts, specifically on mung dal, on the micro-slab, and others are all very interesting, and tailored to Indian requirements. Participation in the Axiom-4 mission has given India an opportunity to carry out these experiments in space. These can be followed up with a new set of experiments on the Gaganyaan mission.

Boosting space economy and attracting new talent

Shukla's flight is the beginning of a series of steps that will lead up to the human Moon landing that ISRO has planned to undertake by 2040. An important prerequisite for that is

the creation of a strong ecosystem for space activities that would also involve the participation of the private sector.

Space is a costly endeavour, and the sector can benefit hugely from private-sector participation. It will also make the sector more vibrant, facilitate innovation, expedite technology development, and attract new, young talent. It can also boost economic growth.

Globally, the space market is worth about \$500 billion, and is expected to double by the year 2030. India, despite being a major space-faring nation, accounts for a just 2% share of this market. We have the ambition of increasing our share to at least 10% in the coming years. Shukla's flight, and similar events, can make an important contribution towards this. School children will be witnessing this — it is the kind of event that is likely to dominate their imagination and, at least in some cases, shape their careers and future. Unlike 40 years ago, these children have the opportunity and the ecosystem to turn their dreams into reality.

the creation of a strong ecosystem for space activities that would also involve the participation of the private sector.

Space is a costly endeavour, and the sector can benefit hugely from private-sector participation. It will also make the sector more vibrant, facilitate innovation, expedite technology development, and attract new, young talent. It can also boost economic growth.

Globally, the space market is worth about \$500 billion, and is expected to double by the year 2030. India, despite being a major space-faring nation, accounts for a just 2% share of this market. We have the ambition of increasing our share to at least 10% in the coming years. Shukla's flight, and similar events, can make an important contribution towards this. School children will be witnessing this — it is the kind of event that is likely to dominate their imagination and, at least in some cases, shape their careers and future. Unlike 40 years ago, these children have the opportunity and the ecosystem to turn their dreams into reality.

Somak Raychaudhury is an astrophysicist and Vice Chancellor and Professor of Physics at Ashoka University. He spoke to **Amitabh Sinha**

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Why scientists study tardigrades, tiny eight-legged 'water bears', in space

ALIND CHAUHAN
NEW DELHI, JUNE 9

AMONG THE scientific experiments astronaut Shubhanshu Shukla will undertake during his two week stay at the International Space Station (ISS) is one that will examine the revival, survival, and reproduction of tardigrades in space.

What is the Voyager Tardigrades experiment? And why do scientists study these microscopic, eight-legged organisms?

First, what are tardigrades?
Tardigrades, also known as "water bears", are robust aquatic animals that have been around for roughly 600 million years, 400 million years before dinosaurs walked the planet. They have survived all the five major mass extinction events to have taken place thus far, and scientists believe they could be around long after humanity has died out. Typically about 0.5 mm long when fully

grown, tardigrades have four pairs of legs, with 4-6 claws on each foot. They also have a specialised mouth which helps them suck nutrients from plant cells, algae, and other small invertebrates.

Tardigrades can be found almost everywhere — from the highest mountains to the deepest oceans. Their most common habitat, however, is the thin film of water found on mosses and lichens, which bestows upon them the nickname of "moss piglets".

Why do scientists study tardigrades?
Although these micro-animals were discovered in 1773 by German zoologist Johann August Ephraim Goetze, they have become a subject of intensive research in the past few decades.

This is because tardigrades are remarkably resilient creatures, known to survive in the harshest of conditions. Water bears have been known to withstand temperatures as low as minus 272.95 degrees Celsius or as high as 150 degrees Celsius; endure ul-



Tardigrades are also called water bears and moss piglets. *Wikimedia Commons*

traviolet radiation of space and pressures of 40,000 kilopascals (equivalent to what can be experienced at a depth of 4 km under the ocean's surface); and live after being stored in a freezer for 30 years, according to a report by *Front Line Genetics*.

A better understanding of tardigrades' survival mechanisms can potentially have several applications: from helping scientists

develop more resilient crops to creating advanced sunscreens to preserving human tissues and organs for transplantation.

Why are tardigrades so resilient?

Siddharth Pandey, an affiliate research scientist with US-based Blue Marble Space Institute of Science, told *The Indian Express* that tardigrades owe their incredible resilience to cryptobiosis, a state in which organisms bring their metabolism to a near-complete standstill in the face of adverse environmental conditions. Tardigrades can reduce their metabolism to less than 0.01% of normal, and drop their water levels by more than 95%, a state called anhydrobiosis.

Both anhydrobiosis and cryptobiosis result in the emergence of a durable shrunken state, called tun, in which tardigrades are able to withstand extreme conditions.

Also, these animals produce unique proteins such as cytoplasmic-abundant heat soluble (CAHS) proteins which are key to their resilience. "These [proteins] form a gel-like matrix within their cells, vitrifying and protecting essential cellular components

from destruction. This allows them to withstand extreme temperatures, radiation, and the vacuum of space," Pandey said.

What does the Voyager Tardigrades experiment seek to do?

Scientists will take tardigrades to the ISS in a state of tun, before reviving them and examining the effects of space radiation and microgravity on their biological processes.

The primary objective of the experiment is to identify the genes that are responsible for making these animals resilient. In other words, scientists hope to pinpoint the specific molecular machinery that enables tardigrades' survival and DNA repair in space.

This will help scientists develop strategies to protect astronauts during long-duration space missions, and preserve biological materials for extended space travel.

For instance, the survival mechanisms of tardigrades can be used to come up with strategies that better shield astronauts from space radiation, or contract muscle and bone density loss experienced during lengthy space stays.

Have tardigrades been taken to space before?

Tardigrades have been a part of space missions since 2007, when some 3,000 moss piglets hitched a ride to space aboard the European Space Agency's Foton-M3 mission.

The tardigrades, in a state of tun, were kept in a little round box on the side of the spacecraft whose lid was opened in space. Upon returning to Earth, they were rehydrated and examined. The German and Swedish scientists undertaking the experiment found that not only did many water bears survive the harsh space environment, some were also able to reproduce successfully.

"While exposure to UV radiation did cause some damage and reduce survival rates slightly, the experiment confirmed that the vacuum of space alone was not a barrier to their survival, solidifying their status as one of Earth's most durable organisms," Pandey said.

The experiment also made tardigrades the first animal to survive exposure to space. Before water bears, animals had only survived space in the safety of a spaceship or space suit.