

Supply crunch

India needs a strategy for rare earths

Like many other countries, India is suffering collateral damage in the United States-China trade war. In April, responding to various trade restrictions and tariff impositions from American President Donald Trump, Beijing announced that certain heavy and medium rare earths and related magnets would be subject to export licences. Given the difficulty of obtaining licences and the complexity of demonstrating the end use of any particular shipment, this has in many cases amounted to an effective ban, which has affected Indian manufacturing. Beijing controls about 50 per cent of officially recognised reserves, 70 per cent of extraction capability, and 90 per cent of processing capacity. The minerals, in turn, are vital for products ranging from automobiles to solar panels. Thus, a large number of Indian sectors have to look elsewhere.

It is unfortunate that Indian industry is in this position, given that China's weaponisation of this supply chain was inevitable. In fact, it has been done before — supply was cut off to Japan and Japanese companies more than a decade ago during a period of mutual tension between Japan and China. Since then, Japan has built up a strategic stock of minerals to allow it to ride out temporary disruption and also set up alternative supply chains, including through the Philippines and Australia. India should have been similarly preparing — at least since 2020, when relations with its northern neighbour deteriorated following the clashes at Galwan. That said, the beginnings of an effort, even if uncoordinated, can be discerned in recent moves by the Indian government and private sector. The government has set up a public-sector company called KABIL, which is supposed to intervene in the supply chain of rare earths to achieve economic security. Meanwhile, some large players, such as Vedanta, as well as relatively small concerns — such as Hyderabad-based Midwest Advanced Materials — have begun to make substantial investment in this supply chain.

None of this, however, amounts to a real strategy, which would target both extraction and processing within the supply chain, and work in coordination with both the public and private sectors, as well as trustworthy foreign partners like Japan. The problem with New Delhi's strategic thinking is often that it focuses solely on internal markets and thus has insufficient vision and scope. There is no reason why Indian companies cannot become leading players in the processing and extraction industry, while Indian engineers provide the human capital required for scaling up processing. But this would require the appropriate signals and coordination from the government. It would also require a suitably pragmatic approach to foreign policy. For example, much of the mineral wealth that is supposedly extracted in China is actually imported from northern Myanmar, which is a hotbed of resource extraction. India has chosen to ignore the potential on its very doorstep, while China has not. India must also recognise that future value chains for critical minerals will be constructed, taking into account the demands of the host nations. Indonesia might well demand that processing be built in that country, not in India. This should be acceptable to New Delhi, given the purpose of any strategy is primarily derisking the supply chain. Finally, a strategy should take into account that India be part of a broader supply chain that includes other countries dependent on China. A Japan seeking to derisk, for example, can be a source of financial investment for Indian efforts to participate in this supply chain.

Mission Space

Isro will gain immensely from Axiom-4

Group Captain Shubhash Shukla's piloting of the Axiom-4 mission to the International Space Station (ISS) will enable India's first Gaganaut to gain hands-on experience of handling a spacecraft and spending a long sojourn in space. Group Captain Shukla will pilot the Falcon spacecraft, which has been designed and built by SpaceX. Axiom-4, which runs under the aegis of the foundation Axiom Space, features a four-person team from India, Poland, Hungary, and the United States (US). It will carry out over 60 scientific experiments, devised by scientists from 31 countries, including the US, India, Poland, Hungary, Saudi Arabia, and several European nations. Group Captain Shukla's experience will provide important data for the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), which has its own plans to set up a space station. Indeed, given that the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) faces uncertainty about its budgeting during the Donald Trump presidency, Isro may be hoping to pick up the slack when it comes to space exploration.

Isro trained Group Captain Shukla for the ISS mission and this is important since it has never run a manned mission (India's first man in space, back in 1984, was trained in the Soviet cosmonaut programme). India's agency has ambitious plans for manned missions undertaken on its own, even though it is a NASA partner and signatory to the Artemis Accords, which enables it to participate in NASA programmes and missions. Under the Gaganyaan programme, Isro intends to launch a manned spacecraft into orbit as soon as next year if all goes according to schedule. After that, it intends to set up a permanently occupied space station in the low-earth orbit. While Isro has developed many impressive technological capabilities over the decades, manned missions will require it to develop a host of new competencies. There is no error margin since an error could cost lives.

Keeping humans safe, healthy, and sane in space for extended periods and retrieving them safely are tasks many times more difficult than unmanned missions. The hazards include vacuum, high radiation, extreme temperatures, stresses caused by high acceleration and sharp braking, coping with zero gravity and high gravity and so on. Designing space habitats to protect against these is challenging. Research into this has led to enormous advances in medicine and telemedicine. Much more modern gym and hospital equipment has evolved from studying the effects of space on the human body and figuring out how to keep people healthy during long stays in space.

One of the experiments Isro designed for Axiom-4 relates to the study of muscle behaviour in space, for example. Another interesting issue is that of diet — while food is carried to the ISS, it is obviously desirable to know how to grow food in zero gravity. On the engineering side, Isro must also learn to design and solve challenges like docking and undocking spacecraft. Humans are carried to a space station, which moves at a speed of about 28,000 km per hour. When they arrive, their craft must synchronise speeds to dock, and it must undock when they leave. Gaganauts must learn how to carry out and oversee such manoeuvres. Isro has already started experimenting with crewless missions, which are testing designs. By debriefing Group Captain Shukla and studying the results of the Axiom-4 experiments, Isro will add considerably to its understanding of what it needs to do to make Gaganyaan a success.

Perils of overestimates

Fiscal discipline is not just about meeting deficit targets — it is also about getting the estimates right

ILLUSTRATION BY BINAY SINGHA



Is there a sense of déjà vu in the recently released provisional actual numbers for the Union Budget for 2024-25? These numbers were made public at the end of last month. A quick comparison of these provisional actual numbers with the revised estimate (RE) for 2024-25 shows that the problem of revenue over-estimation has resurfaced — after a welcome break of four years.

Note that the RE of the Union Budget for a financial year is released about two months before that year ends. This release coincides with the presentation of the following year's Budget. Thus, the RE of the Budget for 2024-25 was available on February 1, 2025, when the Budget for 2025-26 was presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. Even though the RE is an estimate for the year, it should not vary by a large margin from the provisional actual numbers made available by the end of May later that year. Ideally, an overestimation of revenue collections should be avoided, just as an underestimation of expenditure could cause problems for managing government finances.

Among the Budgets MS Sitharaman has presented over the past six years, revenue over-estimation was a big problem in the Budget for 2019-20, her maiden exercise. The magnitude of this problem was much smaller than what was seen in the previous year's Budget, but it nevertheless troubled her first Budget. Thus, the actual collection of net tax revenue in 2019-20 (the Covid lockdown was declared only in the third week of March 2020) turned out to be 13.6 per cent lower than what was given out in the RE. With non-tax revenues as per actuals also falling by over 5 per cent over the RE, and with only a marginal change in expenditure, the actual fiscal deficit in 2019-20 widened to 4.6 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP), compared to 3.8 per cent mentioned in the RE. Covid must have been a factor, but the finance ministry's

tendency towards revenue overestimation was equally responsible for the huge variance.

Commendable restraint in preparing the RE was shown by MS Sitharaman and her team at the finance ministry in the following four years. Instead of the problem of revenue overestimation, there was revenue underestimation! The actual numbers in those four years — from 2020-21 to 2023-24 — turned out to be higher than the RE provided earlier. The extent of increase in net tax revenue ranged from 0.13 per cent to over 6 per cent during this period. With expenditure broadly under control, the actual amount of

fiscal deficit was lower than what was given out in the RE for these four years.

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That trend has changed, as last month's numbers revealed. The provisional actual number for net tax revenue in 2024-25 was 2.3 per cent lower than the RE. Interestingly, the biggest change was seen in personal income-tax collections, where the provisional actual numbers were about 6 per cent lower than the RE for 2024-25. In the last six years, the share of personal income-tax receipts in gross tax collections has risen from about a fourth to just under a third. Why personal income-tax collections would have to be revised downwards by about ₹74,000 crore in just four months is a cause for concern, and the reasons behind this should be investigated. Was that a blip or does that have a message for the pattern of personal income-tax collections growth that the government can expect in the current financial year?

The sharp downward revision in personal income-tax collections for 2024-25 was perhaps one of the main reasons for the government applying the brakes on its revenue expenditure. Against the budget estimate (BE) of ₹3.71 trillion for 2024-25, the RE for revenue expenditure placed it at ₹36.98 trillion. But four months later, the provisional actual number for revenue expenditure last year is placed

lower at ₹36.03 trillion.

The only silver lining in these changed numbers is an improvement in the quality of expenditure — the provisional actual number for capital expenditure showed a rise, just as that for revenue expenditure was lower. And if the fiscal deficit as a percentage of GDP remained largely unchanged, it was because the nominal size of the Indian economy was revised upwards during this period. As a result, the deficit stayed at 4.8 per cent of GDP.

Why should the finance ministry try to keep the changes between the RE and the provisional actual numbers to a minimum? Apart from sending out misleading signals on the state of government finances, large variations force the central ministries to go in for undesirable options. Since the government is committed to the idea of bringing down the fiscal deficit to a targeted level, any overestimation of revenue numbers in the RE forces the central ministries to curtail their expenditure in the final months of the year in a bid to stick to the deficit target. Such last-minute expenditure chopping often leads to fiscally unhealthy outcomes. This may also lead to imaginative expenditure budgeting, resulting in the transfer of spending liabilities to state-owned entities or seeking recourse to off-budget borrowings — a practice that was ended a few years ago.

There is yet another reason why such revenue overestimation should be examined closely. Actual numbers falling short of the revenue mentioned in the RE is also an early sign of weaknesses in the pace of economic activity. The sharp overestimation of revenue in 2019-20 was an indication of slowing economic growth. Similarly, the underestimation of revenue in the RE for the four years from 2020-21 to 2023-24 coincided with a gradual but smart recovery in the pace of GDP growth.

India's economic growth slowed to 6.5 per cent in 2024-25, compared to 9.2 per cent in 2023-24. The resurfacing of the problem of revenue overestimation in the RE for 2024-25 could therefore be a sign of weakening growth impulses in the Indian economy. Shortfalls in provisional actual revenue collections for personal income tax, excise and Customs, compared to the numbers mentioned in the RE for 2024-25, should be a wake-up call for those managing the Indian economy.

With external sector uncertainties rising, the challenges before the Indian economy and government finances will only become more formidable. Moreover, fiscal discipline is not just about meeting deficit targets but also about getting the revenue and expenditure estimates right. To begin with, therefore, government efforts should now be focused on examining the reasons behind the slowing actual revenue collections compared with those in the RE.

Reimagining India's quality mandate

India's economic ambitions are bold — and rightly so. From a \$4 trillion economy today to a targeted \$30 trillion by 2047, the journey demands far more than just capital or scale — it demands trust in Indian products. Quality, therefore, must not be seen as an afterthought but as core infrastructure. In this context, the expansion of India's decision to gradually expand mandatory Quality Control Orders (QCOs) across products is both significant and consequential.

Yet, the QCO regime today finds itself mired in controversy. A policy instrument designed to assure quality and prevent the inflow of sub-standard goods is increasingly seen as a double-edged sword — welcomed by some, resisted by others, and internally contested within departments of the same government.

As someone who has served as chairman of the National Accreditation Board for Certification Bodies (NABCB) under the Quality Council of India (QCI), I have witnessed firsthand how quality frameworks — when well-calibrated — can empower both producers and consumers. But for QCOs to be truly transformative, India needs to course-correct. Not to retreat, but to reframe the mission with clarity, capability, and global alignment.

India's quality control framework, administered largely through the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS), has traditionally been voluntary. However, in recent years, the government has expanded the scope of mandatory QCOs across critical sectors such as steel, polymers, electronics, and toys.

As of today, out of approximately 23,000 BIS standards, only 187 QCOs covering 769 products have been notified. This suggests that while the momentum is rising, the journey is far from complete.

Importantly, QCOs are not mere administrative notifications — they are enforceable legal instruments requiring producers, including foreign manufacturers, to certify their products through the BIS. Non-compliance can lead to seizure, penalties, or import blocks.

The implementation of QCOs has revealed several fault lines:

1. Domestic industrial divide: Producers of intermediate goods such as steel and petrochemicals often

welcome QCOs as tools to prevent dumping. Their downstream consumers — such as automotive and appliance manufacturers — worry about price escalation and supply disruptions.

2. International pushback: Major trade partners like the United States, the European Union, and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) have flagged India's QCO regime in their trade barrier reports. A prominent example is the United States Trade Representative's (USTR's) concern over polyethylene QCOs, where the US has urged India to accept international lab certifications or self-declarations instead of BIS-exclusive conformity.

3. Intra-governmental dissonance: Even senior government officials have publicly questioned the wisdom of applying QCOs to industrial raw materials, leading to deferrals and delays in implementation.

QCOs are undeniably effective in curbing the inflow of sub-standard imports, especially from nations with a track record of dumping. But if that becomes their primary lens, we risk forgetting a critical function: Enabling Indian manufacturers to access global markets with confidence.

India's quality aspirations are not new. On August 15, 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged Indian industry to adopt "Zero Defect, Zero Effect" (ZED) manufacturing — products that are flawless and environmentally sustainable.

This vision remains deeply relevant. But are we staying true to it? The answer lies in whether QCOs are being designed to encourage conformance through support and guidance — or merely enforcing through coercion and penalties.

One of the core criticisms of the QCO process lies in conformity assessment. At present, the BIS holds exclusive authority to conduct inspections, process applications, and issue certifications. This creates capacity overload, long processing times, and bottlenecks for both domestic and foreign applicants.

A pragmatic alternative exists. India has a robust ecosystem of certification bodies accredited by the NABCB. Allowing these conformity assessment bodies (CABs) to handle low- and medium-

risk products could:

- Reduce BIS overload;
- Improve turnaround time for certifications;
- Lower costs for MSMEs;
- Enhance the overall ease of doing business.

While India faces pushback from developed economies over non-acceptance of foreign lab results, the irony is not lost: The very countries do not accept Indian certification either, particularly in regulated sectors.

Rather than treating this as a reason for unilateral retreat, India should use bilateral and multilateral trade negotiations to push for sector-specific mutual recognition agreements (MRAs) — even if starting with limited scopes. That would bring us one step closer to full integration into global value chains.

To reboot the QCO agenda with balance and purpose, I propose a three-pillar road map:

1. Export promotion: Help Indian products compete globally by incentivising certifications aligned with global standards (example, International Organisation for Standardisation or ISO and Conformance Européenne or CE).

2. Dumping prevention: Curb low-quality imports by enforcing QCOs in vulnerable sectors with transition windows.

3. Consumer safety: Maintain stringent enforcement for public-facing goods to ensure safety.

In addition, a product-specific vertical approach is far superior to a one-size-fits-all model. Different sectors need different timetables, standards, and handholding. India's future as a manufacturing powerhouse hinges on how the world perceives our quality. QCOs are not just regulations — they are statements of intent. But for them to succeed, they must be intelligent, inclusive, and internationally aware.

We cannot afford to stall the quality movement — but neither can we rush it blindly. If implemented with foresight, QCOs can be the foundation for "Brand India" — trusted, compliant, and world-class. In that vision, export promotion, import protection, and consumer safety are not trade-offs. They are co-travellers on the same road — leading India towards its rightful place in the global economic order.

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Preparing the perfect marketing cocktail



SIDHESH JOGLEKAR

In a business-reading landscape awash with jargon-laden tomes and MBA-speak, *Marketing Mixology: Four Essential Ingredients for Marketing Success* is refreshingly unpretentious. The author, Ambi Parmeswaran, a veteran marketer whose career straddles consumer staples, pharmaceuticals and tech, has produced a guide that feels more like a hands-on workshop than an exposition

reader through the usual catechism of STP (segmentation, targeting, positioning). Instead, each chapter opens with a problem drawn from the industry trenches and closes with a practical tool you could carry straight into Monday's team huddle.

Almost every concept in the book is introduced with a relatable case that will imprint on the reader's mind the concept to be grasped. Each idea is anchored by a real-world situation. A bungled launch, an unexplored opportunity, an over-engineered presentation, a tone-deaf meme. This approach keeps the reader honest; you cannot skim a page without confronting a familiar real-life situation. By comparing steps to understand consumers taken by a range of organisations — from large fast-moving consumer goods companies to direct-to-consumer

same insight, cast in a different light, can transform a strategy from myopic to breakthrough.

This makes it a good read for everyone. The book is a useful and absorbing read whether you are a recent graduate, a mid-career professional or a business leader. For a rookie graduate, the book will provide foundational knowledge with contemporary insights for a digital First World. For a mid-career professional looking to transition from tactical execution to strategic leadership, this book can address the competency gaps that emerge at this stage of a career. For business leaders, this mixology will be an essential toolkit to make informed strategic decisions even if marketing isn't their primary area of expertise.

In fact, for practicing professionals, *Mixology* is an excellent refresher on

ance" marketers are often given sales targets, this book is a reality check. The section on myths about branding is especially relevant for new age startups and entrepreneurs. The author impresses upon the reader the importance of branding but goes one step further. He lays down a road map on the steps to master branding right from brand appraisal to brand expansion. As we go through the chapter, you realise that branding need not be a substitute but should complement all the digital spends that brands are doing almost like clockwork these days. The quote, "If you can't measure it, you can't manage it", may not be found in many branding books, but *Marketing Mixology* explains it with elan.

Another feature of this book is the number of pages. At less than 200 pages,

tings. This book is not a tome, yet it does a wonderful job of fulfilling readers' needs. You can read this in four sittings of 30 to 45 minutes just before you sleep, or even on a Delhi-Mumbai flight. The chapters on customers and branding are fast-paced and you will find that you revisit these often at work or even at a B-school.

For me, the highlight of the book was the section on sales and negotiation. We are entering an era where every marketer is part of sales conversations and vice-versa. Common sales techniques have been "reframed" in a fun way — in this case the explanation on how a mother could cut slices of pizza among siblings is an apt example.



Marketing Mixology: Four Essential Ingredients for Marketing Success
by Ambi Parmeswaran
Published by Westland
172 pages ₹350

To start with, this is not the book for optimising your "click throughs" or for lowering your "cost per lead" — not in the short term, at least. This book has many digital era connotations, but in the larger context of 2025 marketing, these are canons, not starting roles. But the book does a great job of doing what it proposes, which is to talk about the "four essential ingredients of marketing success".

For those new to marketing or from a non-marketing background, I would recommend this book as their first read on the subject. It's a gateway to the world of marketing that isn't intimidating but fun. Kudos to the author and the publisher for keeping it uncomplicated.

The reviewer is a marketing

The endgame in the Russia-Ukraine war

On June 1, Ukraine executed 'Operation Spiderweb' drone strikes on Russian bases. They seek shock waves just ahead of the second round of peace talks in Istanbul and NATO's Eastern Flank summit in Vilnius.

As the Russia-Ukraine war is in its fourth year, with mounting human and economic costs and rising global pressure for a diplomatic resolution, an endgame is in place. The revival of the Istanbul peace process and renewed engagement by key international players have reoriented attention towards diplomacy. Yet major questions persist: Will Ukraine's audacious strikes shift the war's trajectory? Can Ukraine endure the prolonged conflict? And can the main actors — Ukraine, Russia, the U.S., NATO, and the European Union — overcome entrenched divisions to forge a durable peace?

The return of diplomacy

As peace talks stalled under U.S. President Donald Trump, the Istanbul peace process was cautiously revived by Russian President Vladimir Putin. Two rounds of talks on May 16 and June 1 saw prisoner swaps and draft ceasefire terms exchanged. However, deep divisions remain, with both sides presenting largely irreconcilable conditions that hinder meaningful progress.

Russia's 'Special Military Operation' could have ended in Istanbul negotiations in 2022, but a possible peace deal failed as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy walked away from it. Ukraine chose to continue fighting as it hoped for NATO membership and Western leaders pledged funding, weapons, and training. U.S. President Donald Trump, prioritising his 'America First' and 'Make America Great Again' agenda, views the Ukraine war as a complex foreign policy challenge and seeks a swift end to it. His envoy, Keith Kellogg, and Secretary of State Marco Rubio acknowledged it as a dangerous "proxy war between nuclear



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Diplomacy must be bold, realistic, and inclusive, addressing deep security fears and historical grievances. Without this, peace will be fleeting

powers — the United States, helping Ukraine, and Russia", and began Russia-Ukraine talks in February 2025. Mr. Trump sees no common ground or trust between Russia, Europe, and Ukraine, making an end to the Russia-NATO proxy war difficult. Acting as both participant and mediator, he believes a breakthrough is urgently needed.

Mr. Trump's three months of shuttle diplomacy have sparked hope for peace. The peace framework addresses both sides' concerns. Ukraine won't join NATO, will gain security guarantees, accept a ceasefire, and territorial concessions. Sanctions on Russia will be lifted, and the present frontline will be frozen.

Ukraine-Europe peace terms include a permanent ceasefire, no limits on Ukraine's military, and a U.S.-backed security guarantee akin to NATO's Article 5. Sanctions would ease gradually after achieving lasting peace, while occupied territories remain unrecognised. European leaders' 'Coalition of the Willing' meetings, led by the U.K. and France, seek a 'reassurance force' to monitor the peace accord's implementation.

Russia demands addressing the war's root causes, Ukrainian neutrality, NATO-membership ban, demilitarisation, denazification, and troop withdrawals. It also seeks ceasefire guarantees that Ukraine won't regroup and receive Western munitions. If the West does not accept these terms, Mr. Putin warns of imposing terms militarily.

In February, Mr. Trump proposed to initiate denuclearisation talks with Russia and China, considering the Ukraine war's potential for nuclear escalation and the expiry of the NEW START Treaty with Russia in 2026. Russian experts see this as a honey trap, reminiscent of former U.S. President Ronald Reagan's trick with the Soviet Union's President Mikhail Gorbachev. Kremlin remains sceptical of Western intentions and views Russia's nuclear power as a necessary deterrent.

The broader Western posture is to continue supporting Ukraine until Russia is strategically defeated. In 2022, the European Parliament and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly designated Russia a 'state sponsor of terrorism', complicating direct diplomatic engagement, while former U.S. President Joe Biden said 'no' to such a 'terrorist' label for Russia.

Mr. Trump's interest in ending the war is due to avoiding damage to America's reputation. He wants to deal with China and engage in the West Asian and Indo-Pacific region. The Ukraine war tests Europe's global autonomy, but its Russophobic stance hampers dialogue by framing Russia as an existential threat and exposing racism and militarisation.

The West is waging a proxy war in Ukraine and, as is the case with any proxy in history, Ukraine's agency to decide the course of war is limited. Escalation risks are rising as Ukrainian drones allegedly targeted Mr. Putin's convoy in Kursk on May 20, 2025. Earlier incidents included bridge bombings in Kursk, drone attacks near Moscow, and a threat to the Victory Day parade. In response, Russia has escalated its military campaign, aiming to create a 'security buffer zone' along the Ukraine border. Mr. Putin warned that rejecting current peace terms would make any future peace "more painful."

A fragile endgame

Ukraine's deep strikes into Russia, likely aided by Western intelligence, risk escalation. Under its nuclear doctrine, Russia may retaliate if sovereignty is threatened. Operation Spiderweb escalates Russia's 'Special Military Operation' into a full-scale war. Though humiliated, Russia's engagement in peace talks signals a real interest in ending the conflict. In such a scenario, diplomacy must be bold, realistic, and inclusive, addressing deep security fears and historical grievances. Without this, peace will be fleeting.

The difficult task of keeping everyone happy

The Congress's commitment to social justice comes with challenges

STATE OF PLAY

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The recent Cabinet expansion in Telangana reflects the Congress's promised commitment to social justice. By inducting three Ministers — Gaddam Vivek and Aduri Laxman from the Scheduled Caste (SC) group and Vakti Srihari from the Backward Classes (BC) group — as well as leaders from socially and economically backward communities for various posts, the party has attempted to realign its power structure to better represent historically marginalised groups. However, this has not come without friction, particularly from the dominant Reddy community, which feels ignored despite its numerical and political clout in the Assembly.

Of the seven BC MLAs in the Congress, three have been given Cabinet posts and two have been appointed as chief whip and whip. Among Ministers, Ponnamp Prabhakar is from the Goud community, Konda Surekha belongs to the Padmashali community (with her husband hailing from the Munnuru Kapu community), and Vakti Srihari comes from the Mudiraj caste. Pradesh Congress Committee chief A. Mahesh Kumar Goud is a Goud from the BC community. BCs enjoy more representation not just in the Cabinet, but also in key political roles.

Additionally, with the inclusion of Mr. Vivek and Mr. Laxman, the number of SC leaders in the Cabinet has increased to four. They are split equally between the Mala and Madiga sub-groups. This balance is critical in a State where internal divisions within SC communities have influenced political equations,



particularly the Madiga Reservation Porata Samiti. Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka, a Mala, holds the Finance portfolio, while former Deputy Chief Minister D. Aduri Laxman holds the Health portfolio.

Dissatisfaction

Despite this progressive outlook, Congress has triggered dissatisfaction within its largest and historically most influential support base, the Reddy community. In the 119-member Assembly, 43 MLAs are from the Reddy community. Within the Congress, 26 of the 64 MLAs are from the Reddy community.

Those who have been left out include strong aspirants such as Komatreddy Rajagopal Reddy, P. Sudarshan Reddy, T. Rammohan Reddy, and Malreddy Ranga Reddy.

Mr. Rajagopal Reddy, who played a key role in boosting the Congress's prospects by jumping ship from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) before the elections, feels particularly aggrieved, especially since his political ally, Vivek Venkatswamy, was inducted into the Cabinet. Both leaders were promised a berth. When Mr. Rajagopal Reddy, Mr. Venkatswamy, and Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy from the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) entered the Congress at around the same time, it created the perception that the BJP was losing ground and that the Congress was the only alternative to the BRS.

No one can deny impact of these leaders on the overall performance of the party even though Revanth Reddy, who was then PCC chief, strongly built an anti-BRS narrative. The BJP, which was looking strong, lost steam when Mr. Rajagopal Reddy and Mr. Venkatswamy exited the party at a crucial juncture. Mr. Rajagopal Reddy's brother, Komatreddy Venkata Reddy, is a Minister and hails from Nalgonda — a Reddy bastion. While being progressive in its politics, the Congress would also do well in ensuring that its traditional support base, the Reddy community, is kept happy.

Issues to be addressed

While the Congress's caste arithmetic may have worked, the representation of regional and minority members leaves much to be desired. Key districts such as Hyderabad, Rangareddy, and Nizamabad have gone not represented in the Cabinet. Muslims, and Lambadas among the tribal communities, have also been left out.

There is no Muslim MLA in the Congress fold. The party has only one Muslim MLC, Amer Ali Khan. To bridge this gap, Congress is considering fielding a Muslim candidate from Jubilee Hills in the coming by-election. The names of Mohd Azharuddin, a cricketer, and Faheem Qureshi, a confidante of the Chief Minister, are being floated.

To compensate for the absence of the Lambada community, the Chief Minister nominated Ram Chander Naik, an MLA from Dornakal, as Deputy Speaker. This complements the appointment of Gaddam Prasad Kumar, a Dalit, as Speaker. As a result, in Telangana, both the presiding officers of the Assembly belong to the SC and ST communities, respectively.

Why the Alcaraz-Sinner final is among the most epic battles

Lasting an extraordinary 5 hours and 29 minutes, the match is the second-longest Grand Slam final in the Open Era

DATA POINT

Vignesh Radhakrishnan

Grand Slam finals carry an unmistakable aura. When a Slam final stretches into a five-setter, it signifies an enthralling contest between evenly matched rivals. Add multiple tie-breakers into the mix, and the sense of parity intensifies, turning the match into an absorbing duel between superior equals. These epic battles become historic.

No fan can forget two such memorable men's tennis finals from the recent past. The longest Grand Slam final ever in the Open Era — a gruelling 5-hour, 53-minute battle between Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal at the 2012 Australian Open — remains unmatched to this day. Djokovic's celebration, during which he tore off his shirt, remains etched in every tennis fan's memory. Equally unforgettable is the memory of both the players, their legs trembling, at the trophy presentation, until someone brought them chairs.

The 2019 Wimbledon final between Djokovic and Roger Federer stood out for different reasons. Lasting 4 hours and 57 minutes, it became the first Slam final to feature three tie-breaks in the Open Era. The sight of Djokovic squatting on Centre Court and eating grass in triumph signalled not just victory, but also a poignant end to Federer's legendary pursuit.

Sunday's showdown at Roland Garros between World No. 1 Jannik Sinner and World No. 2 Carlos Alcaraz has earned its place among the greatest Slam finals. Lasting 5 hours and 29 minutes, it is the second-longest Grand Slam final in the Open Era (Chart 1).

The gripping encounter also featured three tie-break sets — only the second time in Open Era Grand Slam finals (Chart 2A). However, the number of tie-breaks should be viewed with caution, as

rules have varied across years and Grand Slams.

What truly stood out on Sunday was Alcaraz's extraordinary comeback from being two sets down. To underscore just how rare this feat is: Sinner had only once before lost a match after winning the first two sets since 2021; that was against Djokovic at Wimbledon 2022. Indeed, in the Open Era, the number of times a player who was two sets behind and then went on to become the champion in a Grand Slam final is only eight (Table 3).

Incredibly, the most recent occurrence before this was by Sinner himself, who fought back to win the 2024 Australian Open after trailing Daniil Medvedev by two sets. Medvedev, unfortunately, has experienced this twice — previously it was in 2022, against Nadal, in the Australian Open final.

On three defining measures — a marathon encounter, multiple tie-break drama, and an unforgettable comeback — the latest Roland Garros final emphatically earns its place among the greatest championship matches ever played.

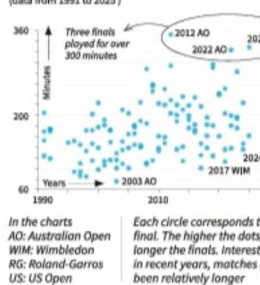
With 38-year-old Djokovic's last Slam win happening in 2023, and Nadal and Federer now retired, tennis fans are eagerly turning their gaze towards Sinner and Alcaraz — the emerging rivals still in their 20s. Since 2024, Sinner has dominated the tour, winning 91 out of 99 matches (a 92% win rate), while Alcaraz, during the same period, has managed to win 91 out of 109 matches (a win rate relatively lower at 83%).

Yet there's a twist. Since 2024, Alcaraz and Sinner have faced off five times — including three finals — and each time the Spaniard has emerged victorious. Sinner reached 12 finals in this period, winning all nine in which his opponent wasn't Alcaraz (Table 4). While few have managed to solve the Sinner puzzle, Alcaraz, despite faltering against others, has maintained a flawless record against the Italian in the last 18 months.

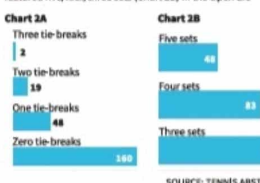


When the going gets tough, the tough get going

Chart 1: The length in minutes for 122 Grand Slam Finals (data from 1991 to 2025)



Charts 2A & 2B: The number of finals that featured three/two/one/zero tie-break sets (Chart 2A) and the number of finals that featured five/four/three sets (Chart 2B) in the Open Era



SOURCE: TENNIS ABSTRACT

Table 3: The eight other Grand Slam finals in the Open Era in which a player lost the first two sets, but eventually won

Year	Slam	Winner	Loser	Score
1974	Roland Garros	Bjorn Borg	Manuel Orantes	2-6 6-7(4) 6-0 6-1 6-1
1984	Roland Garros	Ivan Lendl	John McEnroe	3-6 2-6 6-4 7-5 7-5
1999	Roland Garros	Andre Agassi	Andre Medvedev	1-6 2-6 6-4 6-3 6-4
2004	Roland Garros	Gaston Gaudio	Guillermo Coria	0-6 3-6 6-4 6-1 6-6
2020	US Open	Dominic Thiem	Alexander Zverev	2-6 4-6 6-4 6-3 7-6(6)
2021	Roland Garros	Novak Djokovic	Stefanos Tsitsipas	6-7(8) 6-2 6-3 6-2 6-4
2022	Australian Open	Rafael Nadal	Daniil Medvedev	2-6 6-7(5) 6-4 6-4 7-5
2024	Australian Open	Jannik Sinner	Daniil Medvedev	3-6 3-6 6-4 6-4 6-3

Table 4: The 12 finals that Jannik Sinner reached since 2024, with the winners and losers mentioned

Date	Tournament	Winner	Loser
26-May-2025	Roland Garros	Carlos Alcaraz	Sinner
7-May-2025	Rome Masters	Carlos Alcaraz	Sinner
13-Jun-2025	Australian Open	Sinner	Alexander Zverev
11-Nov-2024	Tour Finals	Sinner	Taylor Fritz
2-Oct-2024	Shanghai Masters	Sinner	Novak Djokovic
26-Sep-2024	Beijing	Carlos Alcaraz	Sinner
26-Aug-2024	US Open	Sinner	Taylor Fritz
12-Aug-2024	Cincinnati Masters	Sinner	Frances Tiafoe
17-Jun-2024	Halle	Sinner	Hubert Hurkacz
18-Mar-2024	Miami Masters	Sinner	Grigor Dimitrov
12-Feb-2024	Rotterdam	Sinner	Alex De Minaur
15-Jan-2024	Australian Open	Sinner	Daniil Medvedev

FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindustani

FIFTY YEARS AGO JUNE 11, 1975

Regular looting of rail wagons at Waltair

Visakhapatnam, June 10: Railway wagon parts, coal and pig iron are the major articles stolen from wagons stationed at the marshalling yard in Waltair.

At Kancharapalem, behind every alternate hut one can find heaps of coal and iron. The two km. stretch of the marshalling yard between Kancharapalem and NAD Colony is the vulnerable area for the miscreants. Some residents say the looters carry the booty unchecked by the Railway Protection Force both during night and day.

In recent raids conducted by the railway authorities, five lorry-loads of iron and steel were recovered from some of the local rolling mills. The detection of stolen property or the apprehension of miscreants has its own hazards. In one incident, an Assistant Security Officer, was surrounded by a gang of 40 men armed with sticks and knives. The timely arrival of the RPF men saved him. Instances have been narrated of how some of the loyal employees, who tried to prevent wagon-looting, were beaten up by the looters while the co-employees remained silent spectators. Top officials do not rule out the possibility that some of the employees are accomplices to the looting.

The Chief Commercial Superintendent South-Eastern Railway held discussions here on May 31 with the local and South Central Railway officials on the looting of wagons and decided to intensify the patrolling of the yard and trains. It was resolved to run block trains with full wagon-loads of iron and steel and arrange for escort till the train reached the destination.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JUNE 11, 1925

A hospital for Europeans?

"The Madras Mail", the representative organ of the European community in Madras, in the course of a leading article under the caption "Mystery of a Madras hospital", denies the truth of the rumour that the Royapettah Hospital is to be converted into one for Europeans. "It is preposterous," it says, "that with all the beauty spots of Madras open to it, with the glorious official bungalows on the Adyar walking to be seized, this party (of Europeans) should have chosen a place so dusty and noisy for the housing of the European sick."

THE ASIAN AGE

11 JUNE 2025

T'gana Cabinet reijg may set Cong's 2029 roadmap

The Cabinet expansion and party organisational reshuffle undertaken by the Indian National Congress in Telangana mark not just a political adjustment but a calculated move with wider implications for the party nationally. At the core of this political realignment is the reorganisation of social justice, which the party has often used as rhetoric rather than in tangible deliverables. In Telangana, however, the Congress appears to be experimenting with a model that could become the blueprint for its pan-India electoral strategy in the run-up to the 2029 general elections.

The selection of ministers — one from the Backward Classes, and two from the Scheduled Castes community — in the expanded Cabinet, and the appointment of a legislator from the Scheduled Tribes as deputy speaker of the Assembly reflects a deliberate attempt to balance caste equations. The party followed a similar format for the appointment of vice-presidents and general secretaries. Of the 27 vice-presidents, eight are from the SC community, five from ST, two from ST, and three minorities, making up a combined 67 per cent of all appointments — signalling the party's promise to raise the Supreme Court-fixed cap on reservations.

The two developments show that chief minister A. Revanth Reddy — backed by the Congress central leadership — has made a conscious effort to ensure that the state's power structure reflects the social composition of the electorate. This approach has strong echoes of the social engineering model perfected by regional parties in several states. Apart from prioritising underrepresented groups and younger leaders in both government and party, the Congress is trying to rebuild a loyal voter base in a state where it was almost written off just a year ago.

By conducting a caste census and immediately following it up with a law increasing reservation for BC, as well as completing the sub-categorisation of SC groups, the Congress has demonstrated its seriousness about social justice through higher levels of affirmative action. This strategy forced Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led NDA government to announce the nationwide caste census, and showcased Telangana as a political laboratory for the Congress.

Though strategy is plausible, its implementation requires more than mere symbolism. The distribution of benefits — be it in education, employment, welfare distribution, or land rights — must transparently reach people. If the people from marginalised communities do not perceive any improvement in their lives, the appointment of leaders from those sections will not benefit the party in either creating a loyal support base or transforming itself into a formidable force in the state.

The biggest drawback of the Congress is internal factionalism, which has historically crippled the party and scuttled its prospects when it faces a strong rival. The Congress portrays the internal dissent as a mark of internal democracy. However, it must remain conscious of the fact that the nature of elections has changed in India and unless a party works as one unit, it cannot fight highly centralised parties like the BJP or regional parties.

The social justice plank gives an agenda and ideological left to the Congress, which for long remained a default ruling party in the country and benefited immensely from the "There is No Alternative" (TINA) factor with it. After the BJP has got itself entrenched in the country's power structure, the Congress needs to reinvent itself to remain relevant in politics, and Telangana shows how India's Grand Old Party wants to repurpose itself.

Upgrade urban transport infra

The tragedy of four people, most of them youngsters, falling to their death from a suburban train in Mumbai on Monday is a stark reminder of the inadequate urban infrastructure people have to live with despite the Indian government boasting about the so-called demographic dividend India is said to be reaping.

The Mumbai suburban train service is a miracle in itself. It operates about 2,500 services and carries more than 7.5 million commuters every day on a network spread over 450 kilometres. Reports suggest that seven passengers lose their lives daily on the network. It is time the authorities seriously looked at improving the safety mechanism in the network.

But that alone is not enough. The population of India almost doubles every 32 years, according to studies, but the country has hardly seen facilities, including transport infrastructure, keeping pace with it. After the Delhi Metro that was commissioned two decades ago, and the launch of limited Metro rail services in some major cities, no planned development has happened in the country to make densens' life easier.

The best parallel India can have is China, again a populous country, which has revolutionised urban infrastructure as its economy progressed. Studies say the number of cities in China has increased from 193 to 650 between 1978 and 2015, a growth of over three-fold. India, on the other hand, saw no development of new cities except those which had an organic growth. The NDA government had talked of 100 smart cities across India when it came to power in 2014 but the project has made no substantial progress.

India has been investing in road infrastructure in a planned mode for the last three decades, starting with the Golden Quadrilateral project way back in the late 1990s. This has offered connectivity between cities and given rural areas an access to the national network. It is time the government noticed the massive requirement of urban infrastructure as it aims to see India as a developed country by 2047.

THE ASIAN AGE

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Subhani



Is the 'zing' missing? Modi might need strategy reset



Shikha Mukerjee

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is a mesmerising speaker. His mastery over the message has the masses enthralled. His high-voltage calls in praise of the motherland, *Bharat Mata Ki Jai*, prompts his audience to respond, usually, with a roar of support. Following his speech in Bihar's Nalanda, after Operation Sindoor, where he declared that "sindoor" (vermillion powder) run in his veins and Pakistan would be inflicted with unimaginable punishment, his recent speeches are strangely devoid of that spark that ignites the popular imagination.

It is a puzzle. Mr Modi sounds dull and lackluster. Or else, the masses and we have grown jaded, listening to him speak over the past 11 years. Or, there are reasons why the spark is missing and we have not a clue as to why.

The optics are all there; but the messaging is flat. In Kashmir, there are images of the PM waving an enormous Indian flag to launch the all-weather rail link from Katra to Srinagar, open the world's highest railway arch bridge and send the first of Vande Bharat trains rolling in the Valley. The J&K trip was historic for two reasons: it was Mr Modi's first visit to the region after the Pahalgam killings by terrorists, who, incidentally, have not yet been found and neutralised.

Down in the plains, the PM has been seen flagging off EV buses in New Delhi, and planting a sindoor (Bixa orellana) sapling in his official residence's garden, flagging off trains and opening, in one go, a total of 103 refurbished Amrit Bharat railway stations, to signal that all is well.

With the invitation now obtained for the G-7 summit, thanks to Canada's Prime Minister Mark Carney, who came under fire for reaching out to Mr Modi, there cannot be many reasons why he sounds so off colour. If the yardstick of rationality is applied, he should have no reason to be this way. Canada was right in saying that as the world's "fifth" (or fourth) India is now in focus, surpassing Japan's largest economy, Mr Modi couldn't be missing from the table.

Mr Modi has even better reasons to be happy: the World Bank has just certified that India's extreme poverty rate has fallen in the last 10 years, under the PM's watch, to 5.3 per cent from 27.1 per cent in 2012. As the PM has repeatedly pointed out, India has a free food programme to keep people out of extreme poverty, covering 80 crore individuals. Clearly, his efforts at keeping extreme poverty under control have worked; the economy is moving up and his vision of inclusive development, *Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikaas*, has succeeded.

The only reason Mr Modi has to be down is that the BJP is in a minority in the Lok Sabha after the 2024 general election. He has cause to be satisfied that the NDA has a majority, is in a stable equilibrium, to keep him in power till 2029. Is it that the cost of maintaining the equilibrium is proving to be a drag? From the looks of it, probably not, despite being a minority government, the BJP has successfully pushed through its agenda of passing the highly controversial (if the Opposition is to be believed, unconstitutional) Waqf Amendment Act. It has rolled out the

It is a puzzle. Mr Modi sounds dull and lackluster. Or else, the masses and we have grown jaded, listening to him speak over the past 11 years. Or, there are reasons why the spark is missing.

overhauled criminal and civil code with the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita coming into effect from July 1, 2024.

It has pulled off a great political finesse by announcing that the caste census would be done simultaneously with the regular Census, a demand which the Congress and the Opposition has been clamouring. The start date for the Census and caste census has been announced. The probability is high that the delimitation of constituencies will follow after the numbers are tallied and women will get one-third of the seats in the Lok Sabha and state Assemblies at the same time.

With the optics all good, a stable coalition in place and a government that appears to be running like a well-oiled machine, giving the PM time to plant trees (even if this is the wrong time of year to do so) and wave off EV buses to celebrate World Environment Day, the zing is missing. Is it because the BJP is missing the gruelling labour needed to fight to win in challenging elections?

Are the months between now and the Bihar election, to be followed soon after with Assembly elections in Assam, West Bengal, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, a sort of hiatus, when he is in suspended motion? Is it because the BJP is not inclusive, in its ability to represent a nation as diverse as India, now kicked in? Or in order to ensure that the delegations

to represent India overseas included enough Muslim leaders of substance, the Modi government had to depend on its sworn political adversaries. The seven delegations India sent out to represent the nation's unity and display to the world were representative of the differences that exist in India's democracy. The differences include the Muslim minority that the BJP, a political party has assiduously denied representation in their lists of candidates for the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections. The Opposition has done him a huge favour and he knows that there are no free lunches. Rahul Gandhi and the Congress may be Mr Modi's favourite punching bag in election season and out of it, but the Congress and other Opposition parties have supplied the diversity that the Modi government needed to be credible to the world as a democracy with diversity.

Having indulged in name calling, branding Rahul Gandhi and multiple Opposition leaders as anti-nationals, working on an agenda taken out of Jimshankar's playbook on communalising and dividing the nation, declaring that the "mangalsutra" worn by married women would be snatched if the Congress won the elections, describing the Congress as a den of "Urban Naxals", the Modi government could end up sounding terribly ungrateful if it continues to use the same playbook to trash the competition.

The Opposition, weak, fragmented and fractious as it is, should be able to extract a political price from the solidarity it has demonstrated to bail out the Modi government in a moment of national crisis.

That could be why Mr Modi, as the BJP's star campaigner and the person who leads a Hindu majority nation, is looking and sounding so different from his usual abrasive-aggressive self.

Shikha Mukerjee is a senior journalist in Kolkata

LETTERS CHINESE CHECKERS

A leaked report from Russia's Federal Security Service, quoted by NTV, reveals a surprising contradiction to the image of an unbreakable Moscow-Beijing alliance. Beijing has been recruiting Russian scientists and intelligence officers, especially those in vulnerable positions. Chinese research institutions and mining companies are being used as covers, targeting the Arctic and Russian Far East, including Vladivostok. There are also concerns that China is laying the ideological groundwork for future territorial claims. FSB has launched a counterintelligence operation, "Entente-4", aimed at curbing Chinese infiltration.

Amarjeet Kumar Hazaribagh

SKY GAMES

INDIA is poised to script a remarkable chapter in its space journey as Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla leads the Axiom-4 mission to the International Space Station. More than a scientific venture, this launch symbolises India's growing global stature, scientific ambition and readiness for long-duration human spaceflight. With ISRO's active support and the Indian Air Force's proud endorsement, it marks a historic return to space by an Indian after four decades. The mission's research will not only advance space science but also lay vital groundwork for India's Gaganyaan programme.

Ms Asad Mumbai

2 EXAMS BAD IDEA

UNION EDUCATION minister Dharmendra Pradhan's statement that two Board exams will de-stress students may not be correct. Even one Board exam puts a lot of pressure on students. In India, the moment one enters Class X, one is reminded constantly by parents, teachers and even relatives that they will have to take the Boards. They are given a long list of do's and don'ts by everyone. Two exams will add to the pressure instead of reducing it, and earlier even. Hence, the ministry should reconsider its idea. If at all it is implemented, the first exam should be optional.

D.B. Madan New Delhi

Jyoti Chhikara



Beyond medicine: The unspoken link that connects grief and cancer care...

Using my father to lung cancer was a defining moment in my life — one that pushed me into the depths of understanding disease as something far more than a physical ailment. It was not just a loss; it was a tangle of emotions, a complex web of grief, fear, and hope. I had learned in textbooks. My father was a man of few words but vast emotions, strongly built, headstrong, resilient, one who would carry the weight of personal struggles with a smile. And so, when he developed lung cancer, I couldn't understand the reason.

I wanted to dig into the invisible — how grief and suppressed emotions carved their imprints, sometimes so deeply that they manifested as disease because cancer does occur in people who do not smoke or drink alcohol. During my research, I came across Dr. Ryke Geerd Hamer's German New Medicine (GNM) — a concept that resonated with my own experiences. Dr. Hamer, following the tragic loss of his son, discovered a startling connection that the body does not develop cancer randomly; rather, it is a biological response to unresolved emotional shocks, which he termed "biological conflicts" — conflicts that leave traces in the brain and trigger corresponding changes in the body. This perspective struck a deep chord within me. Could it be that my father's lung cancer was not just about mutations in the cell, but an embodiment of the unspoken internal conflicts that lingered in his head as he cared too much?

Grief is not merely an emotion as studies have shown that prolonged grief increases inflamma-

tory markers, weakens immune function, and disrupts hormonal balance.

When emotional pain is buried rather than expressed, it embeds itself within the body, creating vulnerabilities that, over time, may manifest as chronic illnesses, including cancer. This understanding was reinforced when I met a 77-year-old woman diagnosed with non-Hodgkin lymphoma. She was undergoing chemotherapy, but her emotional landscape told a parallel story. She had shared a profound bond with her grandchild, who had recently moved abroad, leaving her feeling abandoned. Simultaneously, her family shifted homes, which left her displaced. Her disease was grief echoing through her lymphatic system, as feelings of abandonment often manifest in this form in circulation. After starting homeopathic therapy, her PET CT showed a positive outcome, with about 50 per cent recovery in just four months.

Another case was of an 86-year-old man, a towering figure of humility and success, known for his accomplishments, who had always put his family first. Yet, first seen in the noise of expectations and responsibilities, his own voice had quietly faded. When he first came to me, he was afraid to eat, having lost trust in his own body. Food, once a source of joy, had become a source of fear. He had already undergone proton therapy and hormonal treatment for prostate cancer. As per GNM, prostate cancer often arises from territorial or identity conflicts — when one's position, dignity, or role within the family or society has been challenged. And a deeper sense

of unease remained as his platelets were constantly elevated, a rare form of blood cancer named essential thrombocythemia, which GNM relates to self-devaluation, particularly when one feels emotionally displaced. With homeopathy, his journey began to shift. He gradually began eating again, feeling safer in his body. His platelet counts, once chronically elevated, normalised. Over time, his thyroid levels and blood sugar came under better control, and, more importantly, he became more confident in handling his daily challenges.

Medicine once understood this connection. Before the 1900s, physical health was seen as inseparable from emotional and spiritual well-being. Somewhere this was lost in favour of treating symptoms without understanding their root cause. Only in recent decades has modern medicine started to revisit the psychosomatic nature of diseases, yet the response remains largely pharmaceutical.

Homeopathy continues to honour that connection as it focuses on the patient, not just the diagnosis. It acknowledges that deep-seated emotions shape disease patterns, and thus, true healing cannot occur without addressing these. I remember a 48-year-old woman diagnosed with left-sided breast cancer. Rather than examining her tumour, I explored her story. She had lost her mother a year earlier and carried an immense guilt for not doing more. Sensitive, dutiful, self-sacrificing, she fits the archetype of someone who suppresses her emotions to meet external expectations. Through homeopathy,

meditation and emotional processing, her tumour reduced by 30 per cent in six months — without chemotherapy.

Dr. Joseph Murphy, in his bestseller *The Power of Your Subconscious Mind*, shared his own journey of overcoming skin cancer by tapping into the healing potential of the mind. He believed that faith, affirmations, and the resolution of inner conflicts could transform health outcomes, something I have witnessed first-hand in my own practice.

As a physician, I am not against any form of treatment that saves lives. But I believe the future of healing lies in integrating the understanding of medicine's ability to address inherent tendencies offering a powerful roadmap to healing. Looking back, my father's battle with cancer was not just a medical mutation. It was a testament to the mind-body connection, a reminder that what remains unspoken within can shape our biology. Today, as I continue to explore these dimensions, I hope to contribute to a world where healing is not just about battling disease but about transforming lives from the inside out.

For those diagnosed with cancer, the question should not only be "how do I treat this?", but also "what is my body trying to tell me?". The answer to that might just be the key to healing itself.

Dr. Jyoti Chhikara is a homeopathic physician and researcher based in New Delhi who is passionate about holistic wellness and preventive care.



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

—Rammath Goenka

TRUMP-MUSK FARCE: EGOS CAN CHIP AWAY AT AMERICAN ENTERPRISE

THE feud between US President Donald Trump and billionaire Elon Musk reads like a reality show gone rogue—absurd in tone, dangerously real in consequence. While it may appear to be a personal spat between two egotists—one the world's most powerful politician, the other its richest man—the fallout could reshape the intersection of business, politics, and national infrastructure in deeply troubling ways. Once thick allies in politics, finance, and strategy, Trump and Musk now appear locked in a spiral of mutually hurting threats. The US president claimed Musk "lost his mind," and Musk fired back on X: "Trump has 3.5 years left as president, but I will be around for 40-plus years."

Behind the bravado lies real power: Musk's companies, including SpaceX, Tesla, and Starlink, have benefited enormously from government contracts—SpaceX alone has received over \$20 billion since 2008. A fuming Trump threatened to terminate these deals to save "billions." Musk impulsively countered, saying he would decommission the Dragon spacecraft that transports astronauts and supplies to the International Space Station. Though he quickly backtracked, the message was clear: he is willing to use public services as leverage in a personal feud. This is where the drama turns truly dangerous. That a single billionaire can disrupt America's space programme or potentially affect national defence operations reveals just how fragile this public-private dependency has become.

What once were collective public endeavours—space travel, defence, innovation—are now at the mercy of erratic personalities. The US has no near-term replacement for SpaceX's Falcon 9 or Dragon capsules, and Musk knows it more than anyone else. The political stakes are no smaller: Musk has donated nearly \$300 million to Republicans in the past year, money the party will sorely miss if he withdraws or, worse, turns it against them. Trump's inner circle remains tied to regulatory agencies investigating Musk's companies, from Tesla's driverless taxis to labour practices. With both men capable of inflicting institutional damage, their unravelling alliance is already spilling beyond rhetoric. This isn't just an elite squabble. It's a warning. When two men with oversized egos and overlapping empires fall out, it's the public that pays the price. The Trump-Musk drama may play out on social media, but its consequences are real and dangerously far-reaching.

MUMBAIKARS DON'T NEED THIS RUSH-HOUR NEMESIS

MUMBAI's local or suburban rail network is the teeming city's lifeline. The vital yet perilous tracks bear their dark side on Monday in a tragic accident between Mumbai and Diva. Thirteen people, hanging on the footboards, fell off two passing trains. Four of them died. The accident happened on a curve that narrowed the gap between the trains and the commuters collided. A mainly north-south, 450-kilometre rail network, one of the oldest and busiest in the world, it ferries 7.5 million commuters daily squeezed like sardines in unbearably hot and sweaty compartments. The more adventurous hang on for dear life riding to work on the footboards. That's why it is also among the deadliest networks. From 2005 to 2024, an estimated 51,802 lives were lost—an average of seven deaths every single day. These are not mere numbers but people, delivery workers, office clerks, electricians, and lakhs of others who keep the city running. They leave home every morning not knowing if they will return safely.

The Railway Board immediately announced that Mumbai's suburban rakes will now be fitted with automatic closing doors. It's the case of closing the stable doors after the horses have bolted. Automatic closing doors have been promised earlier, too. A few air-conditioned locals already serve the network, but the overwhelming rakes are non-AC. Officials have always trotted out the excuse that converting non-AC rakes to ones with automatic doors runs the risk of suffocating commuters. If they are good enough for other cities and modern rail systems, why not for Mumbai? Now, pushed against the wall, the Railways are toying with louvers for the doors and high-pressure fans on the ceiling to pump in the air.

The blame also lies with the city's growing spatial inequality. Mumbai's unaffordable real estate prices explain the high suburban commuter traffic. People live on the outskirts where home prices pinch less. The downside is they spend long hours commuting. It is the tragedy of these millions that turns the wheels of the city. Commuter organisations have been demanding more rakes, a four-track system between Kurla and Kalyan where the commuter load is the heaviest and a special authority for Mumbai's suburban railway. It is time for officialdom to wake up and stop deaths on the tracks.

QUICK TAKE

FAIRAI EDUCATION

SEVERAL states have begun teaching AI in schools, but India needs a national teaching framework to integrate AI into education. China, for instance, has made AI mandatory in schools from this September. Its national policy specifies syllabi, taught hours and required infrastructure. Its standardised curriculum and teaching apparatus target a uniform AI literacy level. India has got the theories right, not the implementation. An official paper highlights fundamental challenges: half of the schools lack internet access and uninterrupted power, and half of the teachers are inadequately trained in computer use, with the percentage abysmally low at the primary level. Fill these gaps to ensure AI education is equitable and consistent.

OPERATION Spiderweb, the June 1 attack on Russia's nuclear force in which Moscow detects NATO's footprint—M16, in particular—was an inflection point in the Ukraine conflict that could disrupt peace talks, compel President Donald Trump to disengage from President Vladimir Putin and derail US-Russia normalisation, but in the 11 days that followed, nothing of the sort happened.

Diplomacy will continue, Trump remains engaged with Putin, and he shows no enthusiasm for 'Biden's war.' A face-to-face meeting at the Oval Office on June 5 between Trump and visiting German Chancellor Friedrich Merz could only paper over their differences. Merz later said he told Trump privately that "he is the key person in the world who can really do that [bringing peace]—by putting pressure on Russia". However, Trump was unmoved.

New facts on the ground will keep shaping diplomacy: a phenomenon endemic to major wars (e.g., Korea or Vietnam). Last weekend, a Russian tank division entered Dnipropetrovsk province in the direction of the Dnieper River for the first time in the war, while a northern thrust is rapidly advancing toward the strategic city of Sumy, which is now only 25 km from the frontline—and 200 km from Kiev.

Ukraine and its Western supporters, sensing the imbalance vis-a-vis Russian weaponry and firepower, vulnerability to large-scale Russian missile attacks, and acute shortage of trained fighters, face the spectre of a World War I implosion sooner or later. This grim scenario breeds desperate acts of asymmetrical war in the estimation of *The Washington Post* columnist David Ignatius, who is wired into the US security establishment. "Ukraine will depend more than ever on its intelligence services... covert operations could expand into a 'dirty war' beyond the front, with more targeted killings, sabotage, and strikes... Operation Spiderweb was a bold Ukrainian attempt to reset the table... Other sophisticated operations are in the works, intelligence sources tell me."

What did Operation Spiderweb achieve? In military terms, nothing. Russians assert that no strategic bomber was destroyed and the damaged aircraft number only half a dozen. The global strategic balance has not tilted against Russia. Indeed, there is shock and awe in the strategic community, including in the US, that the START treaty, which was negotiated painstakingly by the US and Russia, has been violated with the attack on the nuclear triad and the mutual understanding that the nuclear bombers of the two great

Ukraine and its Western supporters, sensing the imbalance vis-a-vis Russian weaponry and firepower, face the spectre of a World War I implosion sooner or later

OP SPIDERWEB FAILS TO 'TRUMP-PROOF' THE UKRAINE WAR

M K BHADRAKUMAR

Former diplomat



SHARMA

powers shall be parked at all times in open space visible to satellites has been upset.

Beyond a doubt, without Western intelligence's real-time satellite data and expertise, Ukraine simply couldn't have undertaken such a sophisticated operation with mathematical precision across Russia's vast expanse spanning 11 time zones.

These are times fraught with peril. The US has withdrawn from Cold War-era arms control treaties, especially the pivotal Treaty on Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces in 1987, and fresh negotiations are impossible without a settlement in Ukraine. Meanwhile, Europe's rearmament is an emergent reality, and Russia's border with NATO has just doubled in size after the Biden administration cajoled Finland to join the alliance. New

NATO sub-groupings, such as the Nordic-Baltic axis, are surfacing in Russia's northern Arctic tier, characterised by a high degree of military capacity and deeply hostile attitudes toward Moscow.

Suffice it to say, nuclear decapitation scenarios and hair-trigger warning times are returning, as the US is scheduled to deploy new intermediate-range missiles in Germany next year, and the political pressure to pair them with nuclear warheads will be enormous. Germany's new right-wing leadership is toying with the idea of their own nuclear weapons! Merz is on record that he would like talks with France and Britain about sharing their nuclear weapons.

It is against such a complex backdrop of European / Eurasian security that Putin's full-spectrum response to Operation

BROUGHT TO BAY IN DANDAKARANYA

R K VU

Former IPS officer

HE general secretary of the proscribed CPI(Maoist), Nambala Keshava Rao alias Basavaraju, was killed in an exchange of fire with the Chhattisgarh police on May 21 in the Indravati area of Abujmahud (the unknown hills). Not less than 26 members of his security posse/compartment, widely known as CC (central committee) protection company (Company No. 7 of People's Liberation Guerrilla Army—PLGA), also got killed in the firefight, which continued for over three days. One Jawan of district Narayanpur was martyred in the first burst of bullets from the Maoists. This operation was conducted exclusively by the District Reserve Guards (DRG) of Narayanpur, Bijapur, and Dantewada. The operation was planned and executed under the supervision of Prabhat Kumar, Superintendent of Police, Narayanpur, of the 2019 IPS batch.

In yet another tough operation, 31 Maoists were killed in a 21-day joint operation conducted by the CRPF and DRG (and STF) on the steep Karagundi hills (spread over about 50 km x 10 km), which separate district Bijapur (of Chhattisgarh) from Telangana.

As these hills were of great strategic importance for the Maoists, they planted a large number of IEDs (over 400 detected and diffused) to deter security forces from approaching them. The humidity was so intense that some jawans had to be evacuated by air due to exhaustion. The Superintendent of Police, Bijapur, Jitendra Yadav, from the 2018 IPS batch, demonstrated his capabilities in the successful execution of the operation and ensured proper coordination among the forces. One can gauge the importance of the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) by the fact that over 50 battalions of them are deployed in Chhattisgarh, and they occupy the most forward posts.

Records show that Maoist violence has declined over the past many years. The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) reduced the number of districts under its security-related expenditure (SRE) scheme from 72 in 10 states in 2021 to 58 (with 38 designated as LWE-affected) in eight states during a review in March 2024. In another review in April 2025, this number further reduced from 38 in eight states to 18 in seven states. The number of LWE-affected districts in Chhattisgarh reduced from 15 to 7 in the same period. While it does not seem the Maoist organisations have disappeared from the unclassified districts, their mass base and violence have surely declined.

Over 420 Maoists (including some central committee and state committee members) tribals familiar with the hilly and forested terrain, which is considered conducive for waging a guerrilla war. The DRG also has a sprinkling of surrendered cadres who have been inducted into the force (after completing regular training conducted by the police department) under the State's rehabilitation policy. It is a sanctioned regular force that has evolved. The Bastar fighters force (2,100 strong), sanctioned during the previous Congress government for the entire Bastar range and Rajnandgaon, further enhanced the capacity to fight and launch independent operations. These sons of the soil have turned the tables in Bastar:

Thirdly, the use of drones for surveillance and digital wireless sets for secure communication has reduced casualties among forces. While there has been no improvement in the technology used for detecting IEDs, the installation of mobile towers in remote areas has improved actionable intelligence. Technology has improved operational efficiency. Thus, while the strong political will of the Centre and the State has generated synergy among the forces, the strengthening of the security infrastructure has given teeth to the anti-Maoist operations.

The Maoists, who entered Dandakaranya in 1980 and continued to expand, gaining strength militarily until 2010, admitted in the central committee (CC) review of December 2020 that their mass base has been diluting, desertion has been increasing, and their area of influence has been shrinking since 2011. Still, they did not change their central agenda of converting Dandakaranya and Bihar-Jharkhand into a base area, the PLGA into PLA, and the guerrilla war into a mobile war, using their three magic weapons: the party, the army, and the united front. However, more recently, in August 2024, the Politburo of the CPI(Maoist) said they were in a state of temporary setback and had retreated across the entire country. They decided to avoid the security forces encircling them (their leadership and cadres) by breaking up their formations into smaller units. Still, they resolved to attack the security forces wherever they were weak.

The Maoists have been continuously asking the government to create an atmosphere for initiating peace talks and stop operations. The CC members have not been able to meet and decide their future strategy disclosed one of the DK special zonal committee (DKSZC) members, Rupesh alias Satish. However, the governments are not ready to budge from their deadline of eliminating Maoists by March 2026. They want Maoists to surrender unconditionally and join the mainstream. However, the killing of the Maoist's general secretary has given them a big jolt. We have to wait for their next strategy after they elevate a CC member to the post of secretary general. They probably have two options: either to continue the war for some time and incur losses or unilaterally withdraw and seek a peaceful solution. (Views are personal)

Spiderweb will unfold. Russia has high stakes in the wheel of diplomacy turning. He is not under pressure, as Moscow concluded that the M16 operation on June 1 neither dented Russia's nuclear deterrent capability nor impacted the military balance in the war. Russia has previously also repaired strategic bombers. But Putin is furious about such a feeble attempt by Western intelligence to undermine the peace talks.

There is no reason to doubt top Russian pundit Fyodor Lukyanov's prognosis in government daily *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*: "A response from Russia to Sunday's... attacks is inevitable. It will likely be proportional to the scale of Ukraine's strikes. Importantly, this response will not be aimed solely at Kiev. It will be a message to all involved parties—including the United States and Western Europe. Russia's reply must reflect the multifaceted nature of the conflict and its many audiences."

In the final analysis, Putin's stance is vindicated, namely, no ceasefire is possible without a basic agreement on the terms of a future settlement, and meanwhile, military force to create new facts on the ground remains the key negotiating tool. The talks so far have proceeded on Russia's terms, viz., no ultimatums, no artificial deadlines, and a carefully staged approach to dialogue. The process, therefore, should continue, especially as Trump, who also wants talks, is a vital player and will inevitably remain so, as real conversations to shape a European security architecture are yet to begin. The "root causes of the conflict" must be tackled, too, and changing conditions on the ground in an attritional war almost always soften even the most rigid positions.

Trump has quietly signalled his intention to remain engaged with Putin by inviting him to mediate with Iran on the nuclear issue, which is a foreign policy priority Putin agreed and is travelling to Tehran in the coming weeks. There are other signals, too. Trump is reportedly counselling lawmakers to go slow on a bill by Senator Lindsey Graham calling for "bone-breaking" sanctions on Russia. Trump will most likely water down the G-7 statement after the summit in Canada on June 15-17. The NATO Summit (June 24-25) in The Hague is trimming its Ukraine-related part of the agenda.

Europeans are furious. French President Emmanuel Macron vents his anger by visiting Greenland on June 15, en route to the G-7 Summit, in a show of support for the territory coveted by Trump. (Views are personal)

MAIL BAG

WRITE TO: letters@newindianexpress.com

Change attitude

Ref: Rights of all consenting adults not up for debate (June 10). Young adults are capable of shaping India's political future. However, adults are often denied their agency and rights. Occasionally, inspiring judgements do address individual cases, but not the broader issue. Societal attitudes must change. Sridevi Tejaswani K, Hyderabad

Houdini comeback

Ref: Alcaraz and Sinner kick off enduring rivalry for future (June 10). Watching Alcaraz's French Open win after being two sets down and saving three championship match points against Sinner in five hours was pulsating. Truly witnessed a Houdini-styled comeback magi. Devadas V, Kannur

Prioritise foundations

Ref: Crush hour: 6 killed after falling off moving trains (June 10). Railways showcase gross neglect towards everyday local train drivers after showcasing engineering marvels like the Chashidra bridge. Cores are spent on speed and show, while basic safety is ignored. Preventive measures must take priority over post-tragedy responses. N Nagarajan, Secunderabad

Dual blow

Ref: Container vessel on fire off Kerala coast (June 10). The explosion in a container ship off the Kerala coast is to be investigated deeply in the light of Ukraine's attack on Russia by smuggling drones in wooden containers. The government should take swift action and pay adequate compensation to the fishermen. PG Moorthy, Thiruvananthapuram

Undignified violations

Ref: Ill treatment: Indian student pinned to floor (June 10). The Ministry of External Affairs should take up the issue with their US counterparts on what charges the young Indian student was being treated so inhumanly. The incident is shocking, and it is made more so through diplomatic channels that it is not repeated. L Parashuram, Bengaluru

Vulnerable venerable

Ref: Silent elderly crisis amid rapid demographic shift (June 10). It is deeply distressing that a major section of the aged in our society are feeling isolated and gutted at the flag end of their lives. Much more needs to be done by organisations and authorities to assuage their griefs. Bijoy Mathew, e-mail



OUR VIEW

MY VIEW | CAFE ECONOMICS



A privacy shield should not end up as a barrier

Websites must adopt new consent protocols while AI chatbots grab web traffic. Sites taking a user-friendly approach could keep users engaged and resist AI dominance of the internet

The internet's interface with users has been jostled over all the way from its early days of web browsers to today's handy mobile apps. Now tools of artificial intelligence (AI) have entered the fray, just as India's online privacy law is about to kick in. Together, they could alter the dynamics of internet usage. First, consider the rise of AI chatbots since the launch of OpenAI's ChatGPT in late 2022. According to Mary Seeker's report on AI trends cited by Plain Facts in *Mint*, India has more users of ChatGPT's mobile app than any other country; April data shows that we account for 13.5% of this chatbot's global user base, with the US share of 8.9% placing its home market second. The concept has clearly caught on, which explains why search engines like Google and Bing now offer similar AI features. Some seekers of information have begun to see AI-generated snapshots as sufficient, which means they often do not visit source websites even when chatbots present them a set of links. This suggests significant tolerance of AI's hallucinatory risks. Meanwhile, all 'data fiduciaries' that operate in India, such as sites that ask for our identity and other details, may soon have to meet new user-consent norms under the Digital Personal Data Protection Act of 2023 (once final rules are notified). Not only must they obtain our explicit opt-in consent for each purpose they plan to use our data for—be it to set the site right for us, pool our files in for a meta-data analysis, aim personalized ads at us, or whatever—they must also let us flip past choices and delete data accordingly. If the mandatory protocols for all this prove too chunky, they could get in the way of website access just as AI begins to impact web traffic.

To be sure, India's privacy law offers a valuable shield against the misuse of our personal data. The battle for this law was hard-fought, and while it's imperfect, it serves as a vital piece of armour. Its rules need to be implemented without ado. The worry lies elsewhere—in user behaviour. In part, the privacy law is designed to solve this problem of signing away rights without realizing what it might imply. Yet, while the law clearly aims to ensure that users know exactly what they are getting into, whether they'll view point-by-point consent tick-boxes as a hurdle is yet to be tested. This assumes salience in the context of behavioural patterns that place a premium on speed. Web users who want to find out something fast, for example, are often content to consult a chatbot and save time on a deeper delve. If visiting a new site involves a consent ringer, even more web traffic may flock towards chatbots and stay there. Conceivably, this trend may concentrate power in a handful of AI market leaders that own a popular interface. It's not just about information. Versatile tools of Agentic AI offering to execute odd tasks for us could come next to impact websites driven by interactivity.

While it is unclear if AI bots could fill up online consent forms on our behalf (via, say, a digital power-of-attorney device), it's clear that any such concentration of power would pose antitrust risks. To resist AI dominance, sundry websites must keep users engaged directly. And to that end, they will need to keep their privacy protocols as user-friendly as possible. A shield should not end up as a barrier.

China risks overplaying its hand by restricting rare earth exports

Export restrictions tend to encourage innovations aimed at reduced dependence on such shipments



NIRANJAN RAJADHYAKSHA
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China has once again weaponized its dominant position in the supply of rare earth minerals. It has imposed stringent export curbs on these elements that are critical inputs in a range of industries from automobiles to aerospace and defence. The move comes as a response to US restrictions on the export of semiconductor technology to China.

These battles are being waged against the backdrop of a broader truce in the once-escalating trade war between the world's two largest national economies.

The Chinese chokehold on the supply of rare earth minerals has sent a jolt through many industries in other parts of the world, including India. For example, there are fears that assembly lines in the automobile industry will grind to a halt in the coming weeks unless China starts exporting rare earth minerals again.

This is not the first time that Beijing has restricted the flow of rare earth minerals across its borders. It did so in 2010 after a dispute with Japan on the high seas, and was forced to roll back its export curbs by the World Trade Organization in 2015.

Even though China's export ban was targeted at Japan, other countries naturally saw it as a signal of what could happen in the years ahead.

The effectiveness of any export restriction depends on three factors.

First, how important the input is in the production structure of the country's economy. Second, how easy or difficult it is to increase the production of that input in response to higher prices that naturally follow restricted supplies. Third, how concentrated the production of that input is in one country or in a small cartel of countries.

Rare earth minerals are needed in many important industries, their supplies are inelastic and China has a massive share in their production. That suggests that the rest of the world will be at the mercy of China.

However, such events create incentives for governments as well as private companies to respond strategically. There is perhaps a lesson to be learnt here from what happened after the first oil shock to hit the world in 1973. The oil embargo that year brought many economies to their knees, but it also led to a search for new energy supplies as well as incentivized companies in sectors such as automobiles to build more fuel-efficient products.

Can that happen in the case of rare earth minerals as well?

In a recent paper titled 'Trade and Industrial Policy in Supply Chains: Directed Technological Change in Rare Earths', National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper, four economists have taken a closer look at the broader consequences of the earlier supply squeeze. Laura Alfaro, Harald Fadinger, Jan S. Schymik and Gele Viramanda have shown that export restrictions on rare earth minerals imposed by China in 2010 triggered a surge elsewhere in technological innovations as well as exports in sectors that used rare earth minerals as inputs.

More specifically, they found a surge in patents in downstream industries that use rare earth minerals, both in terms of using them more efficiently as well as developing alternatives. This increase in patents in countries outside China exceeded the overall rise in patents in industries that use rare earth

minerals. Productivity, as proxied by exports growth, also improved. In other words, technological dynamism helped the rest of the world adapt to Chinese monopoly power in rare earth minerals.

This is a more general lesson, Jensen Huang, the head of chip-maker Nvidia, said at a recent technology industry event in Taipei that firm attempts by successive US administrations to deny China access to advanced technology have actually spurred rather than hindered Chinese innovation. "The local companies are very, very talented and very determined, and the export control gave them the spirit, the energy and the government support to accelerate their development," Huang was quoted as saying by *The Guardian*.

Parsing his statement provides two lessons. First, that there needs to be a private sector innovation ecosystem that has the ability to respond to either higher prices or restricted supplies. Second, there have to be at least some additional government incentives as well as policy clarity for innovators. They complement each other.

The point is not to tell a sanguine story about how all will be well in the long run. It is instead to point out that dynamic economies adapt to changing circumstances. "In capitalist reality as distinguished from its textbook picture, it is not (traditional) competition that counts but competition from the new commodity, the new technology, the new source of supply, the new type of organisation," wrote the prophet of innovation, Joseph Schumpeter, in *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, his classic work.

The Chinese dominance in rare earths is undoubtedly a strategic lever that Beijing will use to increase its geopolitical heft in an unsettled world. However, the overuse of such power will create strong incentives for others to adapt by innovation—as everyone from West Asians to Americans have learnt over the years.

10 YEARS AGO



JUST A THOUGHT

I think data protection is one of the most important issues of the 21st century.

TIM COOK

MY VIEW | EX MACHINA

Digipin will displace workarounds to getting around

RAHUL MATTHAN



is a partner at Trilegal and the author of 'The Third Way: India's Revolutionary Approach to Data Governance'. His X handle is @matthan.

Whenever I order something online, I've learnt to provide as much location information as I can at checkout. As with most parts of India, the houses on my street are numbered somewhat at random (mine is 22) and my immediate neighbour's is 13, and there is no way anyone relying solely on GPS can find me without help. So they call, I explain, they get lost anyway, and we repeat this dance till somehow, with persistence and a lot of patience, the package finally reaches me. This is a story that repeats itself millions of times a day across the length and breadth of the country. Our addressing system is so broken that delivery agents have taken to calling even before they set out. Despite India being a top-five economy, we still navigate like medieval merchants, using directions like 'turn left at the *paan* shop.'

This is somewhat ironic considering that India has one of the world's most extensive postal networks. With 155,000 offices and 80% rural coverage, India Post can reach vir-

tually every person in the country. But the challenge isn't reaching them, it is reaching them on time. In a world where next-day delivery is the norm and 10 minutes is fast becoming an expectation, our postal service is just not up to the task.

So we've turned to logistics companies and their armies of delivery agents who zip around following turn-by-turn directions on mobile phones strapped to their handlebars to get parcels to us. And even if the miracles of modern technology get them close to us, the last mile often defeats them.

Last week, the Department of Posts launched Digipin, a brand new digital addressing system that might be an answer to this problem. By dividing all of India into millions of tiny squares (about the size of a parking space), each with a unique 10-character name, all you would need to do is find the Digipin square that corresponds to the exact location of your doorstep and share the ten characters that define it with whoever needs to reach you.

Unlike proprietary pinpoint systems like What3Words, Digipin is India's latest block of digital public infrastructure (DPI). Free, open and designed for national scale, it offers a foundation for addressing-as-a-service. Since its specifications are open source

and easily accessible on GitHub, all it takes is a few API calls for applications to integrate with it. Which means that we no longer need to go through endless cycles of 'turn left at the temple, then right after the blue house,' for deliveries to reach us.

The real challenge will be adoption. Digipin names are unintelligible alphanumeric phrases like 'G4J-9R4-7L1P' that are hard to remember. If this is what we have to memorize to use it, we will get even more lost than we do today. What's needed is a way to translate these alphanumeric phrases into something we can recall.

This is a problem that's already been solved. Internet websites are identified by 12-digit URLs that no one remembers. However, since all URLs are mapped to domain names that are easy to recall, we simply type those names into a browser for domain name servers (DNS) to translate into URLs that a computer can understand.

Just as DNS unlocked the web for billions by translating forgettable URLs into names

we could remember, a similar alias layer could unlock Digipin's mass adoption. Once we have this, I will be able to register a phrase like 'valuable mathan home' and map it to the precise Digipin coordinates of my front doorstep. Then all I need to do is share it with the delivery agent, who will then be able to navigate directly to my front door.

Public location infrastructure that digitally covers all of India will lead people right up to our doorsteps

everything we rely on, from mobile networks to power grids. At this fractions time in global geopolitics, we should ensure that our digital location services rely on our own network of geo-positioning satellites.

According to MIT Media Lab, India loses over 0.5% of its GDP annually because 80%

of its addresses are described in relation to landmarks that lie anywhere between 50 and 1,500 metres away from their actual location. For an economy that wants to grow to \$5 trillion by 2027, precision addressing isn't a luxury—it's a necessity.

As with every other DPI, the role of the government should be catalytic, not operational. Digipin's breakthrough moment will come when someone builds the addressing equivalent of Google Pay or PhonePe—with an interface so intuitive that using landmark-based directions feels like antiquated as paying with cash. Early adopters will, no doubt, be delivery-heavy businesses, but I'm far more keen to see the second-order effects: How precise addressing will reshape social coordination in ways that we have yet to imagine.

Some 30 years ago, we couldn't imagine needing the internet; 20 years ago, mobile phones seemed like a luxury; 10 years ago, digital payments felt optional. Today, precise addressing feels like a nice-to-have, but tomorrow, we probably won't remember how we managed without it.

For too long, we've been finding workarounds to getting around. Digipin is our chance to finally address our addressing challenge.

The Indian EXPRESS

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RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

BORDER VIGILS

Assam government's decision to use 1950 Act against immigrants raises questions about institutional checks

THE ASSAM GOVERNMENT'S decision to operationalise the Immigrants (Expulsion from Assam) Act, 1950, to deport individuals identified as "foreigners" by district collectors — without reference to Foreigners Tribunals (FTs) — raises urgent questions about the rule of law, institutional checks, and the rights of the vulnerable. While Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has referred to the Supreme Court's October 2024 judgment upholding Section 6A of the Citizenship Act to justify the move, citing legality cannot mask the moral and constitutional peril of bypassing due process. Illegal immigration poses a clear and present danger. But as Opposition MLAs have rightly pointed out, the state government's move risks arbitrariness and the possibility of communal profiling, bracketing innocent people, especially those from vulnerable communities, alongside the undocumented.

In recent weeks, Assam has, by Sarma's own estimate, deported 330 people to Bangladesh. The resurrection of the 1950 Act would, the CM said, aid in scaling up his government's pushback against outsiders in the state. The SC's 2024 judgment did affirm that the 1950 Act could be read alongside Section 6A to strengthen the identification of and action against illegal immigrants. But it did so within the architecture of existing laws and procedures. It did not dismantle the existing framework of FTs, nor did it authorise summary expulsions on the basis of a bureaucrat's suspicions, even if the person is listed in the NRC. This distinction is crucial because any other interpretation reduces justice to executive discretion and threatens the foundational right of every individual to be heard. The Northeast, particularly Assam, sits at the heart of a complex and emotionally charged border history. Since Partition and the subsequent creation of Bangladesh, waves of migration have triggered identity anxieties and fuelled political movements, including the Assam agitation of the 1980s. The porous border has served as a conduit not only for desperate people fleeing hardship and persecution, but also for elements that threaten security and communal harmony. These realities, however, demand vigilance, and should be addressed with deliberation, not shortcuts. Even with the institutional mechanism of FTs, there have been disquieting stories of administrative failures. Sarma's polarising rhetoric of flood jihad and land jihad in reference to the migrant crisis, too, has often served to deepen communal divides. With elections coming up in Assam in a year's time, it becomes even more imperative to ensure that deportation is not wielded for ideological or electoral ends.

Security threats, whether from foreign or domestic elements or geopolitical pressures, remain a priority that must be addressed with due seriousness. The Union Ministry of Home Affairs' order to crack down on undocumented foreigners, especially those from Bangladesh and Myanmar, has seen heightened action across several parts of the country. But in a region scarred by displacement, suspicion, and historical trauma, the government must distinguish between genuine security action and sweeping administrative moves that could serve political narratives more than public safety. The rule of law demands that the vulnerable — those without voice, power, or access to legal recourse — not be made collateral damage in the name of internal security.

TRUMP UNCHECKED

In Los Angeles, the US President is escalating a crisis of his own making

LOS ANGELES, In America's largest blue state where over one-third of the population is born outside the country, is no stranger to protest. During the 2006 immigration reform demonstrations, more than 500,000 people marched in LA alone. In 1992, violent unrest erupted after a jury acquitted four LAPD officers charged with using excessive force against Rodney King, an African American man. The Watts Riots of 1965 were similarly rooted in longstanding racism and poverty faced by African Americans. The city's residents have once again taken to the streets — this time in response to a wave of brutal crackdowns on immigrant communities by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). In response to the protests, President Donald Trump initially deployed 2,000 California National Guard troops to the city. On Monday, he authorised an additional 2,000 troops, along with 700 Marines mobilised by Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth.

Trump invoked Title 10 of the US Code, which permits the President to federalise National Guard units if the country is invaded, if there is a "rebellion or danger of rebellion", or if the President is "unable with the regular forces to execute the laws of the US". There is, however, little evidence of such an emergency. By bypassing California's Governor Gavin Newsom, Trump's move constitutes an unprecedented federal overreach. The friction between Trump and Newsom is well known — earlier this year, when California sought federal assistance during the devastating wildfires, the President turned it into a political standoff. Now, California has sued the Trump administration over what it calls the unlawful deployment of the National Guard.

Trump's claims — LA "has been invaded and occupied by illegal aliens and criminals", and is being overruled by "violent, insurrectionist mobs" — are not supported by facts. The US is currently seeing the lowest levels of undocumented border crossings in decades, and violent crime has declined nationwide, including in California and LA. To project himself as tough on immigration, Trump is escalating a crisis of his own making. ICE has reportedly been given a daily arrest quota of 3,000 — a figure with no clear justification. This is not the first time Trump has resorted to the National Guard. In 2020, he deployed troops against demonstrators during the George Floyd protests in Washington, DC. Now, Trump hasn't ruled out invoking the Insurrection Act, which would provide him unchecked emergency powers. The US President would do well to douse the fire instead of stoking it.

MASTER OF PRECISION

With meticulous attention to detail, Frederick Forsyth revealed a world chaotic, yet orderly

SPIES, MERCENARIES, ASSASSINS, Nazi war criminals, radical left wingers — most of Frederick Forsyth's characters were embedded in geopolitics. Forsyth, who died on Monday aged 86, had a stint with the Royal Air Force and then sought "adventure" in journalism — experiences that greatly influenced his arc as a writer of best-selling thrillers. As a correspondent for Reuters in 1962, he covered the attempted assassination of Charles de Gaulle by right-wing extremists. This provided the inspiration for his first novel, *The Day of the Jackal*. It was replete with actual details of the episode, and fictional characters shared space with public figures. The book, which brought a new realism to the thriller genre, became a runaway hit.

Forsyth belonged to a generation of writers whose attention to detail was infectious. *The Day of the Jackal* goes into the specifics of how a gun is designed. Other details from the novel were borrowed by Forsyth's peers as well as film scriptwriters — the use of a dead person's birth certificate to assume a fake identity, for instance. For his second novel, *The Odessa Files*, Forsyth consulted former Nazis as well as the Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal. His pursuit of accuracy was never always appreciated. *The Odessa Files* was criticised for exploiting a painful period in history to spring "quick thrills". But Forsyth was clear: The novel wasn't pop fiction — it was about Nazis "living among us".

Forsyth's books sold more than 70 million copies. But he maintained that he wrote thrillers to make money, and reporting was his first love. His forte wasn't drama, but facts assembled with care to show that though the world might seem chaotic, it's ruled by order.

RAJA MANDALA
C RAJA MOHAN

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS MINISTER Subrahmanya Jaishankar's visit to Europe this week and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's travel to Europe for the G7 summit present an opportunity to engage with the growing divergence within the West in the Trump era. Modi is also visiting Cyprus and Croatia, highlighting India's growing interest in Mediterranean Europe.

Delhi's new focus on Europe acknowledges the old continent's emerging role as a potential swing state in the shifting dynamic among major powers — the US, Russia, and China. Equally significant are the new possibilities for deeper India-Europe strategic cooperation. Jaishankar's visit aims to accelerate strategic dialogue with the EU while reinforcing the longstanding partnership with France and strengthening ties with Belgium. Modi's G7 summit attendance goes beyond resetting troubled bilateral ties with Canada — it offers a chance to recalibrate relations with a Western world experiencing a rare upheaval.

The G7 has long been the voice of the collective West, establishing norms for global economic governance, security, and political values. This elite club of industrial democracies — the US, Canada, the UK, Germany, France, Italy, and Japan — has arguably been far more consequential than the UNSC. The 2025 summit convenes amid deepening divisions within the G7. Since the last summit hosted by Canada in 2018, when his European colleagues confronted a defiant Donald Trump, these divisions have intensified. Unlike his predecessor Joe Biden, who emphasised alliances and partnerships, Trump views allies as "free riders" who benefit from US security commitments but do not pay their fair share of the West's collective defence burden. He also believes allies have exploited America through unfair trade practices.

India needs to put Trump's equivocation in its recent conflict with Pakistan in perspective. Trump dismisses NATO — which America established in 1949 after spending much blood and treasure in the World Wars — and shows little regard for the Five Eyes, the historically close-knit Anglo-American alliance that pre-dates NATO. His suggestion that Canada be-

Old continent rising

Trump-era volatility has drawn India and Europe closer, enhancing prospects of a multipolar world

come a US state exemplifies how he has belittled Western unity and challenged long-held alliances. It should not be a surprise if he sets aside the precedent for Washington's de-hyphenation of Delhi and Islamabad.

Trump's return to the White House has thrown the G7 into disarray. While the US remains central to the group, its leadership of the West has come under a cloud. Trump's reluctance to defend Ukraine's sovereignty and eagerness to deal with Russian leader Vladimir Putin have alarmed European allies — particularly Germany, France, and the UK — creating a fundamental rift within the G7.

As the summit host in 2025, Canada has assumed a broader diplomatic role following its unresolved political tensions with Trump. Ottawa must now reconsider its strategic calculations, historically tied to the US. Prime Minister Mark Carney's invitation to Modi is part of a new effort to diversify Canada's international relations. So is his courtship of Europe. Ottawa is negotiating a landmark defence agreement with the EU to reduce its dependence on US security guarantees. Through the EU's Readiness 2030 initiative and advocacy for joint critical mineral strategies, Canada is developing a transatlantic identity more aligned with Europe than ever.

Under Keir Starmer, the UK — once the champion of transatlanticism — is reorienting toward Europe. While Brexit aimed to revitalise the Anglosphere, the 2025 UK-EU defence pact acknowledges Germany's strategic importance for Britain. Under Friedrich Merz, Germany has ended decades of strategic passivity. Constitutional debt brake reforms now enable massive defence and infrastructure investment, positioning Germany for European security leadership. Berlin's dual strategy — reaffirming NATO commitments while advocating European strategic autonomy — demonstrates both realism and ambition. Emmanuel Macron's well-known promotion of European "strategic autonomy" has acquired a new edge in Trump's second presidency. France is offering to extend its nuclear umbrella over European partners and wants to expand Europe's defence capabilities in partnership with Germany.

Recovering from the Trump shock and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the UK, France, and Germany have intensified security collaboration. Rising Poland is now among Europe's leading powers. The Weimar Triangle of France, Germany and Poland is emerging as a powerful force in central Europe. Even as they take greater responsibility for European security, Britain, France, Germany, and Poland seek an expanded presence in Asia and the Indo-Pacific. Japan, the G7's sole Asian member, has long advocated for European engagement in Asian security amid China's assertiveness. Despite its ambivalence toward China, Europe is spreading its bets with deeper ties to ASEAN, Australia, India, Japan, and South Korea.

The India-Europe relationship has begun to move from the margins to the centre of major-power relations for both Delhi and Brussels. Europe's push for strategic autonomy aligns with India's worldview. The once-improbable India-Europe Free Trade Agreement now looks within reach. The proposed India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor aims to reshape Eurasian connectivity and secure alternative supply chains amid the US-China rivalry. The EU-India Trade and Technology Council (TTC), established in 2023, advances cooperation in AI, quantum computing, outer space, and green technologies.

Europe's ReArm Plan (2025), targeting €800 billion for defence modernisation by 2030, creates opportunities for security collaboration with India. India's participation in EU defence mechanisms marks a shift from transactional arms deals to co-development.

For Europe, India has become an important part of its economic and military diversification strategy. For Delhi, Europe offers a much-needed depth to India's great-power relations. Together, they can enhance the prospects for a multipolar global order amid increasing signs of a bipolar domination by the US and China. India and Europe also have their task cut out as America turns inwards and unpredictable.

The writer is a distinguished fellow at the Council for Strategic and Defence Research and a contributing editor on international affairs for The Indian Express



SUPRIYA SULE

IN THE POST-TRUTH era, where stories can be fabricated in hours, the presentation of facts is as important as the facts themselves. When 26 precious lives were lost in the Palghat attack, India faced not only a security challenge but a diplomatic imperative: To document, demonstrate, and deliver irrefutable evidence of Pakistan's state-sponsored terrorism to important international stakeholders before disinformation could blur judgement.

Our delegation's May 24-June 4 mission was conceived as a result of this strategic imperative. The choice of Qatar, South Africa, Ethiopia and Egypt as our ports of call was the result of considered geopolitical calculations. These countries are voices whose endorsement amplifies India's stand. Qatar's presence in the mediation efforts of the Gulf lent Middle Eastern credibility. South Africa's ethical standing, based on the anti-Apartheid campaign and personified through the Gandhi-Mandela legacy, conferred Global South legitimacy. Ethiopia, hosting the African Union headquarters, and Egypt, bridging Africa and the Arab world while anchoring the Arab League, guaranteed broader regional impact.

Our delegation, comprising Rajiv Pratap Rudy (BJP), Anand Sharma (INC), V Muraleedharan (BJP), Manish Tewari (INC), Anurag Singh Thakur (BJP), Vikramjit Singh Sahney (AAP), Lavu Sri Krishna Devarajulu (TDP), and Syed Akbaruddin (ex-permanent representative to the UN), bore doers' documenting Pakistan's role in Palghat and its policy of state terrorism. I must commend

Foreign Secretary Vikram Mishi for his tireless efforts, and Colonel Sofiya Qureshi and Wing Commander Vyoma Singh for outstanding media briefings.

Our reception was telling. The bipartisan composition, with four cabinet ministers, brought authenticity to the mission. From Deputy Speaker Hamdani, Hassan Ali Sulaihi and Minister Mohamed bin Abdulaziz Al Khulaifi in Doha to Arab League Secretary General Ahmed Aboul Gheit in Cairo, the presentation of evidence found great resonance. In South Africa, our interactions with Deputy Chairman Les Gxowa, Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee Supra, Obakeng Ramoetshe, Mahumapelo, and Democratic Alliance Leader John Steenhuisen re-emphasised commitment to fact over propaganda.

In South Africa, the common inheritance of non-violent resistance gave moral context to India's response. Interactions with the diaspora demonstrated how historical connections translate into modern diplomatic capital. The same was true in Ethiopia. Both former prime minister Hailemariam Desalegn and Deputy Chairperson of the Prosperity Party Adem Farah, conveyed profound gratitude for India's diplomatic continuity. The meeting with Tadesse Chalo, Speaker of the House of People's Representatives of Ethiopia, who graduated from Aligarh Muslim University, was a classic example of India's soft power dividend.

Operation Sindoor embodied India's non-escalation doctrine: Proportionate, targeted, and designed to deter rather than destroy. This

approach, refined across decades, from Jawaharlal Nehru's emphasis on regional peace, India Gandhi's courageous leadership and Manmohan Singh's goodwill to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's charismatic diplomacy, has become India's signature response to terror. Each nation we visited formally endorsed India's position, recognising our legitimate right to defend against terrorism while appreciating our commitment to proportionality. The support transcended specific incidents, extending to our broader approach.

But in the new landscape of information warfare, Pakistan tries to spin state-sponsored terrorism as isolated acts. Our campaign made sure stakeholders were provided with information before competing narratives could find footholds. Its greatest achievement was consensus on core principles: Growth over grievance, development over destruction.

As the mission concluded, the results were both immediate and enduring. Four nations provided formal support, dozens of bilateral cooperation areas were identified, and countless assurances of solidarity were received. Most importantly, this mission enhanced India's image as a country that marries strength with sagacity, capability with restraint. India opts for growth, partnership, and truth, and the world has responded with respect, assistance, and solidarity.

The writer is MP and national working president, NCP (Shrotheadhara Pawar). She led the seventh all-party delegation

MAKING THE CASE FOR INDIA

All-party delegations laid out facts, world responded with solidarity

In the new landscape of information warfare, Pakistan tries to spin state-sponsored terrorism as isolated acts. Our campaign made sure stakeholders were provided with information before competing narratives could find footholds. Its greatest achievement was consensus on core principles: Growth over grievance, development over destruction.

JUNE 11, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

PEACOCKS POISONED

AROUND 100 PEACOCKS — the protected national bird — died en masse due to suspected pesticide poisoning in a tribal village in Jabua district in western Madhya Pradesh recently. The birds met with a tragic end after feeding on a vegetable farm that had just been sprinkled with a heavy dose of pesticide. The police have arrested three farmers under the Wildlife Protection Act because they suspect it to be a case of deliberate poisoning.

POLICE FORCES CLASH

AT LEAST 25 police personnel were killed and

several injured in a continuous exchange of fire for the past three days between Assam and Nagaland police at Merapangi on the inter-state border. Assam Chief Minister Hiteswar Saikia has rushed to Dimapur to meet his Nagaland counterpart in a bid to end the west-over-border clash between the two states.

PROGRESS ON PUNJAB

PRIME MINISTER RAJIV Gandhi said there were signs of the Alkal Dal wanting a political solution to the Punjab tangle within the framework of the Indian Constitution. "We have extended our hand in friendship and acceded to the Alkal Dal's demands of removing the ban on the All

India Sikh Students' Federation, releasing those detained and instituting an inquiry into the November Delhi riots," he said.

INDIRA MURDER CASE

CHIEF PUBLIC PROSECUTOR K. Arora submitted before additional sessions judge Mahesh Chandra that there was sufficient material on court record to charge Satwant Singh, Balbir Singh and Kehar Singh with the murder of Indira Gandhi. In his 90-minute presentation of the prosecution case, Arora said there was direct evidence against Satwant Singh, who, along with Beant Singh (since deceased) had fired several shots at Indira Gandhi.

Statistical reboot

There is a need to use alternative data sources

Prasu Jain

India has a proud history of statistical innovation. From Mahalanobis's large sample survey methods to today's vast crop-cutting experiments, the system has always aimed to balance scientific rigour with policy relevance. But today's economy is more complex, more digitised, and more real-time than ever before. Traditional survey-based methods, though still crucial, are no longer enough.

A recent national workshop hosted by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) discussed how alternative data sources — from mobile data to scanner records — could help strengthen and modernise official statistics.

At the workshop, officials, statisticians, global experts, and industry representatives discussed how sources like geo-spatial data, administrative records, mobile-generated data, and scanner data can supplement official efforts. These sources already exist in abundance — what's needed is a roadmap for integrating them thoughtfully and ethically.

Mobile phone data, for instance, can offer insights into internal migration, mobility, and digital access. Geo-spatial tools can improve how we track urban sampling frames. Administrative records — from school enrolments to electricity usage — can add frequency and coverage. Scanner data, gathered at retail billing counters, has the potential to improve how we track consumption and price changes in modern retail spaces.

The Secretary of the Ministry, speaking at the event, said with over 80 per cent of households using smartphones and nearly 90 per cent of individuals online, there was a strong foundation for digital data capture.

A unified system of unique identifiers, he said, would help connect datasets across departments and platforms. He highlighted MoSPI's ongoing work under the National Metadata Structure, and welcomed the launch of EnviStats 2025, which uses satellite and environmental data for more sustainable statistical practices.

PURPOSEFUL DATA

Vice-Chairperson of NITI Aayog spoke about the evolving nature of data and its purpose. He cautioned that having access to more data does not automatically lead to better outcomes. The key, he said,



STATISTICS. Expanding data sources (iStock.com)

lies in knowing what we want to measure and why. Drawing from his experience with the Aspirational Districts Programme, he explained how statistics can help not just monitor development but shape it.

He also made a strong case for combining multiple sources of information — traditional surveys, digital signals, and administrative records — to form a fuller picture of the country's development.

The workshop also stressed the importance of strengthening traditional statistical foundations. Expanding CPI market coverage, improving rural representation, and wider adoption of Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) tools were seen as necessary steps. New data can only complement — not replace — the depth and detail offered by well-run surveys.

Perhaps the most important shift reflected in the workshop was the government's willingness to collaborate. Many of the new data streams — scanner data, mobile records, digital transactions — are not owned by the state. Public-private partnerships, data-sharing protocols, and clear legal standards will be essential to building a robust and ethical system.

Fulfilling the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047 will need a statistical system that is modern, inclusive, and responsive. Policymaking in the coming years will demand not just more data, but better, smarter data. That means building systems that can respond to the pace of change, reflect the diversity of the country, and speak to the needs of both planners and citizens.

Better data leads to better decisions. If our statistics reflect the real economy, then our policies can serve the real needs of the people. That's a future worth investing in.

The writer is Deputy Director, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation

Contextualising Stanley Fischer

THE CRUX. Fischer was instrumental in bringing about a synthesis between monetarism and Keynesianism



MADAN SABHARWAL

Almost all students of economics would have encountered a 'must read' book by Dornbusch and Fischer on macroeconomics, which was on the reading list for post-graduate courses. One of the authors, Stanley Fischer, who died recently, will be remembered as an academic who also worked with the multilateral lending agencies besides having a stint with Citi Bank. He topped it as Governor of Bank of Israel.

The fact that an academician was able to work across diverse organisations, including a central bank bears testimony to his contributions.

Fischer's most well-known academic work was in monetary economics in the seventies. This was the time when the debate over Keynesian economics was revived. Keynes had said that when an economy was in a low equilibrium trap, a way out was to have a fiscal stimulus.

This meant spending more by increasing the size of the budget deficit and putting money in the hands of people by creating more jobs. This was followed by most countries till the beginning of the seventies.

CHICAGO SCHOOL

The seventies also saw the resurgence of Freshwater economists from Chicago School led by Milton Friedman. It was the time when monetarism came to the fore especially after the first oil price shock. The oil shock shattered the belief that high inflation could not co-exist with high unemployment and low growth.

High crude oil prices led to supply side inflation and lower growth leading to a recession. Governments used fiscal expansion to get out of the recession, but this only added to inflation. This, said critics, was the failure of Keynesian economics, and monetarism took over. Friedman said that inflation almost always was a monetary phenomenon and



GETTY IMAGES

expanding money supply to prop up the economy will only lead to higher inflation.

Rational expectations proponents such as Robert Lucas, Thomas Sargent and JP Muth expounded the famous hypothesis which assumed that once people are 'rational' and information is available to all then all policy consequences are anticipated in advance and decisions taken accordingly. As a corollary policies have little impact.

So to make policies effective, governments have to 'fool the public' by doing something different from the announced policies. In short, all policies are anticipated and would be ineffective.

Fischer was a leading proponent of the new Keynesian school that argued that under some conditions higher spending can spur growth without inflation rising

It was in this context that Fischer became a leading proponent of the new Keynesian economics. Here it was argued that in such situations spending by government can spur economic activity and would not be inflationary, provided certain conditions are met. The reason for this shift was that wages did not react the way monetarists had hypothesized. Monetarism would argue that as money supply increased so would wages and prices.

Edmund Phelps also spoke of a natural rate of unemployment which an economy would always revert to. In Fischer's words "because the money stock is changed by the monetary authority more frequently than labour contracts are renegotiated, and — given the assumed form of the labour contracts — monetary policy has the ability to affect the short-run behaviour of output, though it has no effects on long-run output behaviour".

TIME LAGS

So, there were time lags between stimulus and wage increases, and hence

inflation was not an assumed outcome. Therefore, central banks could lower rates or follow an expansionary monetary policy to revive growth. Hence Fischer did, in a way, bring about a synthesis of monetarism and Keynes' economics. This was a reconciliation of neoclassical economics under the assumptions of rational agents with an understanding that markets were not always competitive.

The crux of his hypothesis was that monetary policy can help balance out short-term fluctuations, but it cannot push the economy beyond its long-run potential. This is pertinent now even in our context, when there is a clarion call for a rate cut which is supposed to push up growth.

If Fischer were right, then the limits to stimulus through monetary policy will be restricted by the overall long run potential. Is potential growth 7-8 per cent is the question. The potential output given the capital structure and technology in the Indian economy is around 7 per cent which means there is still an output gap of around half percent. To this extent a case can be made for rate cut to achieve potential growth. The MPC can debate this issue.

If one were to stretch the Fischer argument further, it can be asked whether such rate cuts would be enough to push potential growth beyond the 7 per cent mark. The answer is probably not, because there are limits to which low interest rates can propel the economy. In fact, the monetarist view would come in once the potential is reached. If overall investment does not increase, then further monetary expansion would have inflationary potential which is not the case in the current situation.

Therefore, there is need for a calibrated approach to monetary policy as inflation, though low today due to food prices, can be provoked on the 'core' side if potential output does not increase in the face of monetary easing through repo cuts and liquidity infusion. Fischer and his contribution to economics will stay forever.

The writer is Chief Economist, Bank of Baroda. Views expressed are personal

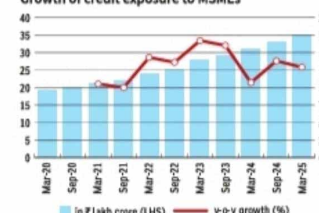
STATISTALK.

Compiled by Niranjan NY, Item | Graphic: KS Gunesekar

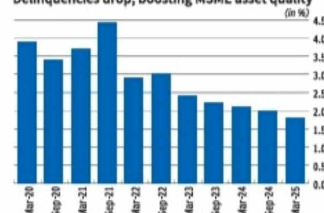
Enduring growth of the MSME credit landscape

According to the recent MSME Pulse Report by TransUnion CIBIL and SDBI, the total credit exposure to MSMEs increased by 13% y-o-y in Mar-25, indicating steady portfolio expansion. New-to-Credit (NTC) borrowers, who made up 47% of new originations, drove an 11% y-o-y increase in credit demand. Delinquencies have declined, indicating a considerable improvement in asset quality.

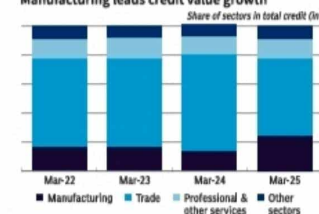
Growth of credit exposure to MSMEs



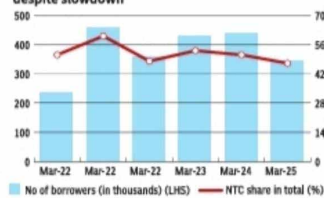
Delinquencies drop, boosting MSME asset quality



Manufacturing leads credit value growth



First-time borrowers still hold strong share despite slowdown



Source: MSME Pulse Report by TransUnion CIBIL and SDBI - May 2025

thehindu businessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

June 11, 2005

Farmers seeking cover against shortfall in rain

Increasingly farmers are seeking cover against the vagaries of monsoon. This is evident from the number of farmers going in for insurance against shortfall in rain. Agriculture Insurance Company of India Ltd (AIC) hopes to cover over two lakh farmers under "Varsha Bima-2005", its new insurance scheme against low rainfall.

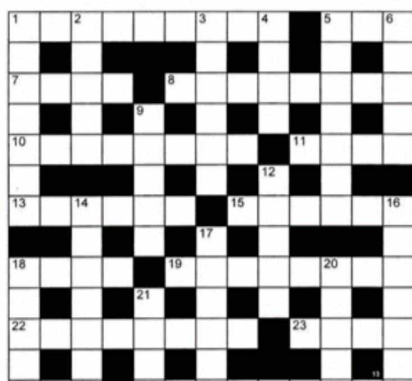
Lufthansa, Karstadt to sell stake in Thomas Cook?

Despite public protestations to the contrary, German airline Lufthansa and troubled retailer KarstadtQuelle are preparing to sell their combined travel and tourism venture Thomas Cook, the Financial Times Deutschland reported on Friday. Besides, the preparations were further advanced than previously thought, the newspaper said, quoting sources close to the negotiations.

Drug-coated stents need licence: Maharashtra FDA

The use of illegal drug-coated stents on heart patients has forced the Maharashtra Food and Drugs Administration (FDA) to instruct manufacturers and importers to get a drug licence from the Drug Controller General of India before resuming sales of this medical device.

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2715



EASY

ACROSS

01. Wandering in search of plunder (9)
05. Hit ball high (3)
07. Black bird (4)
08. Thin piece of detached wood (8)
10. Money earned by capital (8)
11. Exploit, achievement (4)
13. An earring (6)
15. Remained (6)
16. State pay to the unemployed (4)
19. Farm area; type of fowl (8)
22. Rehearsal (8)
23. String of pearls (4)
24. Pass quickly over one's way (3)
25. Bravery, intrepidity (9)

DOWN

01. Engine (7)
02. Perch, as bird, for the night (5)
03. Set as a burden or task (6)
04. Smile widely (4)
05. Ticket gamble (7)
06. Explode (5)
09. Small stream (5)
12. Inhibit growth (5)
14. Let free (7)
16. Infern, shaky with age (7)
17. Cross off (6)
18. Profundity (5)
20. Roughly (5)
21. Male deer (4)

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

01. Being out after plunder of a drug, am in a mess (9)
05. Throw it by the vestibule (3)
07. One bird will sound exultant over another (4)
08. Break-away group coming out of the wood (8)
10. Premium on borrowed money may concern one deeply (8)
11. An exploit arising from a twist of fate (4)
13. How can boar be depicted in a piece of jewellery? (6)
15. Was supported if one didn't leave (6)
18. It was pain and grief to pay to the unemployed (4)
19. Area outside store for this sort of fowl (8)
22. It makes perfect business for a professional, they say (8)
23. Old line it's easy to get money for (4)
24. Quickly make one's way out of Bath, I expect (3)
25. Chivalrous remark about tall, angry characters (9)

DOWN

01. An engine endlessly repaired by mechanic (7)
02. What birds come home to may be nothing of the sort (5)
03. To be a burden of poem is possible (6)
04. Look pleased to have spirit that's about right (4)
05. To let Tory loose may be a gamble (7)
06. Turbo's dropped nothing, but might go off (5)
09. Bishop and castle may endure (5)
12. Check development of such a tricky performance (5)
14. Let one go and see Lear for a change (7)
16. The odd dyer may become uneasy with age (7)
17. Don't let it stand being caught with broken lance (6)
18. How far it is to the bottom of an explosive charge (5)
20. Here and there it's going on the opposite tack (5)
21. To play the stock market thus is only for the boys (4)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2714

the hindu businessline.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 11, 2025

Low gear

EV manufacturing scheme has too many caveats

The Union Government recently said that it would start accepting applications from global electric car manufacturers for setting up factories in India. This follows a Scheme to Promote Manufacturing of Electric Passenger Cars in India, announced on March 15, 2024. There is little to ponder over the motivation behind the scheme. India's automotive market — about ₹12.5 lakh crore (\$150 billion) big — is expected to double by 2030.



This boom will see a sharp rise in electric vehicles — electric mobility being a climate action imperative. Though two-wheelers and three-wheelers are sure to contribute the most to e-mobility, passenger car sales will also rise — 9-11 per cent of total vehicle sales (from 2.5 per cent today), according to the government's think-tank, NITI Aayog. If a large number of electric passenger cars are to be sold in India, why not get them produced within the country? This is the premise on which the scheme stands. But the question is: Is the scheme good enough to attract a flood of investments in electric passenger car manufacturing in the country? A closer look at the scheme does not leave one convinced of its attractiveness.

The scheme offers no incentives such as tax breaks, direct capital grants or even sops such as low-cost land allotment or energy subsidies. The only sweetener is the opportunity for an investor to import a certain number of fully built, high value (\$35,000) electric cars at a reduced customs duty of 15 per cent, for five years — against the regular duty of 110 per cent. Even this sop is bound by two constraints. First, a maximum of 8,000 cars per year can be imported. The revenue foregone on account of the concessional duty rate on such imports shall be only as much as the capital investment made by the car manufacturer, but not more than ₹6,484 crore. Second, there is also a minimum investment threshold of ₹4,150 crore and domestic value addition requirements of 25 per cent by the third year and 50 per cent by the fifth. India's scheme compares poorly with those in other developing countries, such as Thailand and Mexico.

Furthermore, all this is to be read in conjunction with the fact that Chinese manufacturers are to be kept out — which means the world's largest electric car manufacturer, BYD, cannot set shop in India. Tesla, according to the Heavy Industries Minister, HD Kumaraswamy, is not interested in coming to India — it seems to prefer to pay the full customs duty, open showrooms and be content with a tiny sliver of the market. VinFast, the Vietnamese e-car manufacturer, is already setting up a plant in India. Minister Kumaraswamy said at a press conference that car majors such as Mercedes, Skoda and Volkswagen are interested in building their factories in India, but it is difficult to believe that the scheme mattered in their decision. It appears that the scheme is about form over substance, seemingly supporting domestic car manufacturers such as Tata Motors, Mahindra, Maruti and Hyundai.

POCKET

RAVICHANDRAN



"I respect this market economy! It taught us to lead a simple life even while spending a lot of money!"



MRUDUL SAGAR

The growth-supporting activism that began in February seems to have culminated in an unusual big bazooka action that conservative central bankers ordinarily reserve for shocks like the global financial crisis or the pandemic. What the RBI delivered was a monetary policy surprise accompanied by reduced monetary policy uncertainty.

The surprise was twin packed — a 50 basis point (bps) policy rate cut with a front-loaded announcement of a back-loaded 100 bps reduction in CRR, but it came with a change in stance from accommodative to neutral in a bid to reduce uncertainty. In this case, monetary space could get squandered with less arsenal left in armoury.

Sadly, transparency has its limits. Financial markets are forward-looking and when due to change in stance they see no further rate cuts coming, they have no appetite left for bonds. Consequently, the yield curve steepened (see Table). We can note that yield spread (30-year G-sec minus 91-day T-Bill yield) has already widened by 37 bps since the policy. If this trend is not corrected through market operations such as Operation Twist, it could erode the intended outcome. In this case, monetary space could get squandered with less arsenal left in armoury.

MONETARY EXPERIMENT

On the other hand, if it does succeed in shoring aggregate demand and lifting this year's growth to around 7.5 per cent in a non-inflationary manner, the great risky experiment of this policy action will prompt a rethink in conservative central bankers.

Monetary transmission operates with long and variable lags and the central bank had missed the turning point of the business cycle, both in its last tightening and current easing cycle.

Now, RBI sensed and seized the opportunity afforded by headline inflation being markedly below the 4 per cent inflation target. Last October, a similar opportunity arose before the previous MPC, but it chose patience over valour that left it behind the curve.

It has now caught the turning point of the business cycle, but has it also got the quantum of action and its communication, right? Does the big bazooka it now used carries any 'back blast' risks, or are we confident it will not recoil? The answer will lie in what it does to growth. It seems this is not just a countercyclical measure but is packaged with a new regulatory outlook and thinking about re-fixing CRR as a mix of monetary, liquidity and regulatory tool to affect structural growth.

Despite the capacity utilisation rates hovering marginally above its long-term average for the last 12-quarters,

Will monetary bazooka work?

POLICY SPACE.

MPC's front-loaded action has increased risks in the system by reducing future policy options



Yield movement

Closing yields	June 5	June 6	June 9	June 10	Change since June 5
Treasury Bills Repurchase	5.66	5.29	5.2	5.19	-0.47
91-day Treasury Bill	5.55	5.3	5.38	5.33	-0.22
364-day Treasury Bill	5.56	5.4	5.52	5.41	-0.15
5-year G-sec	5.88	5.89	5.88	5.96	0.08
7-year G-sec	6.06	6.09	6.16	6.21	0.15
Old 10-year benchmark G-sec	6.25	6.29	6.35	6.36	0.12
New 10-year benchmark G-sec	6.2	6.24	6.28	6.3	0.1
30-year G-sec	6.83	6.9	6.96	6.98	0.15

TREPS rate is weighted average for the day. Rest are closing yields

corporate investments are unlikely to kick off. The monetary bazooka can transitively and modestly increase mortgage lending.

PARADOXICAL QUESTIONS

The judgment on the quantum of action will get tested over time. A few questions do arise in one's mind. First, if growth projections haven't changed since April policy, the only two reasons for such strong monetary action can be: (i) larger than anticipated decline in near term inflation that gives central bank elbow room to act under the inflation targeting; and (ii) a decline in uncertainties that may be holding action from the central bank.

The April policy was framed on the back of Liberation-Day tariffs. Since then, "TACO trades" have given added

If this trend of stiffening yields is not corrected through market operations such as Operation Twist, it could erode the intended outcome.

confidence that markets are withstanding the rolled back Trump tariffs. But was it prudent to use nearly all its left-out ammunition in one go? Are we done with geopolitical uncertainties in Ukraine, Middle East and in our own sub-continent? The near-term inflation decline does not appear durable. RBI's average Q4 inflation projection of 4.4 per cent does not factor the action in this policy that could take inflation projections north of 4.5 per cent by the year-end. So, was the front-loaded action the best course? Only time will tell if moving away from conservative central banking was the right course.

NEUTRAL STANCE

Second, how do we interpret a change in stance over two consecutive policies? To my mind it is not an issue so long as forward guidance is not misleading. This will get tested in August when inflation prints might even test sub-3 per cent mark if there are no weather disruptions, raising clarion calls for another rate cut. It is important to understand that with a neutral rate of 1.65 per cent (mid-point of the RBI range of 1.4-1.9 per cent), a policy rate of 5.5 per cent that may remain unchanged till at least the December policy would

with Q4 projected inflation mean a real policy rate of 1.1 per cent. Unless VRRR auctions siphon off excess liquidity, rates can get anchored to SDF rate and real policy rate will drop to 0.85 per cent.

This means monetary policy is quite accommodative notwithstanding the neutral stance which merely indicates that policy rates can move in any direction in future.

THE RISKS HAVE GONE UP

At this juncture, there does not appear to be a grave problem as real lending rates have softened but remain in positive terrain. However, if inflation rises, it can erode savings with net household financial saving already at a low of around 5 per cent of GDP for the last two years. So, the RBI should be prepared to act in either direction if conditions change and warrant some tightening. Neutral stance affords that option.

The RBI has chosen to flush the markets. System durable liquidity had already moved up from ₹1.3 lakh crore at the time of April policy to ₹3.5 lakh crore now. Government spending on the back of RBI surplus transfer bonanza will add to this. It might have been preferable to take CRR action in August with better grip on liquidity requirements to better time unwinding of the forward

positions. The front-loaded action now has increased risks in the system by reducing future policy options. While central banks do give forward guidance which now are part of unconventional monetary policy toolkit, they are used sparingly to deal with sudden large shocks. It is hardly the job of the central bank to commit forward monetary policy actions that go beyond forward guidance.

The writer is currently Professor at IIM Kozhikode and formerly RBI Executive Director and MPC member. Views are personal

Plastics pollution can no longer be ignored

Marine ecosystems are the worst hit. High polluters must be encouraged to go for eco-friendly alternatives to reverse the tide

Ganesh Valliachi

Plastic is now embedded in nearly every aspect of modern life — from packaging and construction to transportation and textiles. Yet, while our dependency has grown, our systems for managing plastic waste have not kept pace. Research by Geyer et al (2017) shows that global plastic production soared from 2 million tonnes in 1950 to 9.49 billion tonnes by 2019. Alarmingly, over 65 per cent of all plastic ever made was produced in the past two decades alone.

This growth is primarily driven by industrial expansion and global consumerism. In 2019 alone, packaging waste accounted for 142.6 million tonnes — 37 per cent of total plastic waste. The building and construction industry followed with 76.9 million tonnes, then transportation (62.2 million), consumer products (46.7 million), and textiles (43.9 million). Even marginal sectors like marine coatings and personal care — contribute significantly. Tackling plastic pollution, therefore, requires targeted,

industry-specific interventions with an emphasis on high-impact sectors like packaging and construction.

OCEANS ON THE BRINK

Nowhere are the consequences more devastating than in the oceans. Marine ecosystems are being overwhelmed by mismanaged plastic waste. OECD data shows the disparities across regions. In Africa, the average mismanaged plastic waste per capita is 0.06 kg annually, though countries like Liberia (0.53 kg) and Cameroon (0.41 kg) highlight local vulnerabilities.

Asia presents a more serious situation, averaging 0.17 kg per capita. The Philippines (3.30 kg) and Malaysia (2.29 kg) rank among the highest global contributors due to coastal populations, weak waste systems, and rapid urbanisation. North America, with an average of 0.12 kg, sees significant leakage in the Caribbean — Trinidad and Tobago (2.55 kg) and Panama (1.23 kg). Europe, in contrast, averages just 0.0078 kg, reflecting robust waste management. Globally, the average annual mismanaged plastic entering oceans stands at 0.127 kg per capita. This isn't



PLASTIC WASTE. Driven by industrial expansion and global consumerism

just an ecological problem — it's an equity issue, where poorer and developing nations bear the brunt of plastic pollution.

Addressing the crisis requires action on several fronts. High-income nations, while generating less mismanaged waste per capita, must help build waste infrastructure in vulnerable countries. Small Island Developing States (SIDS) need targeted support — both financial and technological — to mitigate marine plastic pollution.

Industries like packaging, textiles, and

construction must be guided by regulations or incentives towards biodegradable and recyclable alternatives. Tools like Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), circular economy frameworks, and single-use plastic bans must move from theory to enforceable global standards.

Public awareness is key — but guilt-driven messaging is insufficient. We need education and civic engagement to drive lasting behavioural change. Policy must go hand-in-hand. Trade frameworks like the EU's CBAM (Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism) should evolve beyond mere carbon tariffs.

To be effective, global strategies must incorporate not just carbon pricing but enforceable standards for plastic production, waste management, and pollution accountability. Technology transfers and international cooperation are essential so that environmental burdens are not shifted across borders but collectively reduced.

The writer is an Assistant Professor at the Symbiosis Institute of International Business, Pune. Views are personal

✉ **LETTERS TO EDITOR** Send your letters by email to bleditor@thehindu.co.in or by post to 'Letters to the Editor', The Hindu Business Line, Kasturji Buildings, 859-860, Anna Salai, Chennai 600002.

Fiscal discipline

This refers to 'Fiscal challenges' (June 10). Consolidating the fiscal deficit target of 4.8 per cent of GDP will indeed be challenging, not just due to domestic constraints but also owing to external headwinds including geopolitical uncertainties and potential retaliatory tariffs from the US. Maintaining the debt-to-GDP ratio at sustainable levels is essential to safeguard India's sovereign credit ratings. One way to utilise the RBI's surplus gainfully could be through bond-switch operations replacing

short-term securities with longer-term ones to smoothen the redemption profile and reduce interest outflows in the near term. For this strategy to yield results, the government must ensure sustained growth in GDP and tax revenues; a strong commitment to fiscal consolidation; and a conducive interest rate environment to mitigate refinancing risks. Equally important is the cooperation of State governments in achieving their respective fiscal targets.
Srinivasan Velamuri
Chennai

Fillip to women workers

This refers to 'Royal Enfield's Cheygar plant to be all-women unit' (June 10). After Tata Motors, Pune and Ashok Leyland's Hosur plant, Royal Enfield's Cheygar plant is also going to be an all-women plant. It is women empowerment in the truest sense. Royal Enfield should be credited for increasing its women workforce from 5 per cent to 20 per cent now. Expecting women employees to be part of management and business roles is also going to be an all-women plant floors and master welding and

assembling then it sends a significantly positive message to the other OEMs in particular and Indian Inc. in general. Hope other auto OEMs follow the suit and bring more equality in their workforce.
Bal Govind
Hosur

Need for IT regulator

This refers to 'Saas companies see India revenues growing' (June 10). As India aspires to be a global digital leader, ensuring justice, fairness, and ethical governance in the IT sector becomes indispensable. The

unchecked power and sometimes significantly behaviour of IT service providers threaten to erode client trust, stifle innovation, and create systemic vulnerabilities. Establishing an Information Technology Regulatory Authority is an inevitable step to build a resilient, equitable, and client-friendly digital economy in the country. By acting now, India can lead by example in demonstrating that digital growth and digital rights can and must go hand in hand.
PD Sankaranarayanan
Kamarajapuram PO, Kerala

Of Doors & Deaths

Mumbai train network won't improve with patchwork solutions. Commuters need more trains

June 26, 2019 was an unusual day for Mumbai's trainspotters. Nobody died on the city's suburban railway network that day. In a transport system that has claimed over 51,000 lives over 20 years – averaging seven a day – death does not shock easily. But it did on Monday, when four passengers died after falling off two passing trains. Details are still emerging, but it seems both trains were bursting at the seams with passengers, which is not unusual at 9.10am, Mumbai's rush hour. People were hanging out of doors with barely a toehold. As the trains passed 6.5ft apart at Mumbai, the backpicks of some passengers probably collided, throwing eight on the ballast-covered ground. Even railway officials have termed it an "unheard of incident in the history of Mumbai's suburban system", and promised change.

The plan is to have automatic doors on all new non-AC coaches, and retrofit old coaches with such doors. However, a prototype won't be ready until Nov. After that, around 3,400 coaches will need retrofitting. Railways' Jan 2026 timeline seems ambitious, but say they do it, that still leaves eight months. Last year, 570 passengers died after falling off Mumbai locals – at that rate, there could be 380 more such deaths. There's a bigger issue. Over 350 passengers are packed in each coach during rush hour – what about risks of suffocation when doors are shut?

Closing coaches, or reducing seats – which railways did in 2015 – does not address the root of the problem, which is that Mumbai does not have enough trains and buses to move its people. Its costly metro is underperforming – as late as Feb this year the fully operational metro lines were running at 33% capacity. The newest one was averaging 100 passengers per trip in trains with a capacity of 2,500. Besides, closed trains won't save the roughly 1,150 pedestrians who are killed every year while crossing Mumbai's suburban tracks. A 2015 railway report blamed this on the shortage of overbridges. So, when it comes to suburban transport, Mumbai, and also other metropolises, need a lot more than patchwork. While nets love to talk up pod taxis, monorail and metro, there's no substitute for commuter trains and buses. The real solution is to invest more in basic urban infra.

Without MalICE

Trump can't Make America Great Again without immigrants powering the country

Trump's crackdown against anti-ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) protesters in Los Angeles, California, appears to be inflaming an already polarised America, split down the middle over immigration. National Guard and marines have been called up for what is essentially a domestic law and order problem. ICE raids have become tougher since Trump came to office. And while it is perfectly within the remit of any govt to take action to stop illegal immigration, Trump admin's approach appears to be allergic to immigration overall. Case in point, admin officials have been accused of gutting specific programmes tied to helping lawful, permanent US residents obtain citizenship. Never mind that all this is counterproductive, given the hugely productive role immigrants have played in US.

The saying that "immigrants have built America" may sound like cliché, but it's an undeniable fact. That US remains the world's largest and most dynamic economy is in large part due to immigrants. According to a study by the Immigration Research Initiative, immigrants account for 17% of US GDP. A key reason for this is immigrants are mostly concentrated in the working-age population, comprising around 18% of the American labour force. On top of this, immigrants – including undocumented migrants – pay around \$525bn annually in federal, state and local US taxes.

Besides, there's a strategic argument for US to adhere to a liberal approach to immigration. US simply can't grow its workforce without immigrants who help fill gaps in certain critical sectors. Healthcare being a clear example. But also, at a time US is locked in an economic-security tussle with China, the one advantage America has is its ability to attract immigrants. China's non-existent immigration and shrinking local working-age demographic are creating all sorts of problems for Beijing. Xi Jinping will be relishing the polarisation over immigration in US. Trump is committed to 'Make America Great Again'. But that just can't happen without immigrants.

Hyphen-hype

The weaponisation of a commonly used mark of punctuation, and how best to counter it

The minister of Punctuation, Propaganda, and Fake News was addressing his aides and assorted flunkies. There is good news and there is bad news, said the minister. First, the good news. The good news is that our Operation Hyphen worked even better than we anticipated.

The terror attack we masterminded triggered an inevitable response from The Adversary who promptly launched multiple strikes against the terrorist training camps we've established.

So far so good, said the minister, while his aides and assorted flunkies nodded in obsequious agreement.

With the escalation of hostilities which we so cunningly had provoked, international attention, not to mention alarm, got focused on the off-beat between us and the adversary; as we had planned, said the minister.

This was the good news, he continued. Our Operation Hyphen was crowned with success because in the eyes of the international community we and the adversary got re-hyphenated.

Or, to be more precise, clarified the minister, we and the adversary got re-de-hyphenated.

The hyphen, explained the minister, which is not to be confused with the N dash or the M dash, or the minus sign which it resembles, is one lack of a punctuation mark. Its name derives from the Greek 'hyphen', which in late Latin became 'hyphen' and means 'together'.

The first recorded use of the hyphen to join two words, and by implication, give them equal value or status was by Dionysius Thrax, the great Greek grammarian (170-90BC), pronounced the minister.

Thanks to the hyphen we got equalised with The Adversary, even though we are a bankrupt military dictatorship and The Adversary is the world's most populous democracy and the fifth-largest economy too, he gloated.

That's good news, he said. Unfortunately, he continued, the bad news is that The Adversary has made it abundantly clear to all concerned that to counter our hyphen, if necessary it is ready to come up with an even bigger juju of a punctuation mark: the Full Stop...

Modi: 11 Years, 11 Big Changes

His PMship has decisively altered polity, including BJP. The transformation ranges from religious/cultural assertion to nationalism becoming a primary political factor. Also, economic reform has lost steam

R Jagannathan

BJP's celebration of Modi's completion of its 11th year in power at Centre is a good time to take stock of what has changed in our polity and politics. At no other time post-1947 has one man been in power continuously this long barring Nehru. Although Congress has held office at Centre for over five decades cumulatively, either on its own or in coalition, BJP's rise since 2014 has been qualitatively different in several ways.

Eleven things that have changed under 11 years of BJP-Modi's tenure.

● First, BJP too has changed. It is the new broad tent of the kind Congress was under Nehru, with a mild sprinkling of Hindutva as differentiator. Barring Nehru himself, who had no time for indulging religious activity, his party at the state level acted as a Hindu party that offered political protection to minorities. Under Modi, BJP is offering the same mix of cultural Hinduism and some form of recognition of Muslim interests, though minorities are currently against BJP.

● Second, the polity is now in a decisive phase of religious and identity assertion, as BJP has made Hindu vote and caste coalition count. This has led to consolidation of minorities that lean towards non-BJP parties. But this may not last as BJP itself has taken on coalition partners who retain their base that include minorities.

BJP itself is moving to a softer Hindutva stand. Measures such as Waqf amendment act are meant to send two messages – one to the party faithful that Hindutva isn't over the other to minorities that voting against BJP isn't in their interest. BJP has signalled that the Muslim vote will not work so it is best for minorities to move back to neutrality on politics.

● Third, for the first time, BJP has shown a political party can be run on corporate lines, with a CEO on top and a powerful cadre of workers at the core and a larger

number of ordinary people as party members. Politics is now run like a PMCG campaign with both above the line and below the line promotions.

● Fourth, Modi's power has pushed all parties towards a freebie culture. Rivals see no option but to counter PM's popularity with cash and other doles to the electorate. BJP too has accepted doles as an essential ingredient for electoral success.

● Fifth, economic and political reforms have gotten

assembly elections 2026, he is one grassroots leader who can shake up the Dravidian political ecosystem. Even in other states, a new BJP second line is emerging.

● Seventh, under Modi, nationalism has re-emerged as a factor in politics, and the country increasingly demands robust responses not only to perfidious Pakistan but also China. Never before has a decisive shift towards a more aggressive stance towards enhancing national power been more strong than now. Surgical strikes, Balakot and Op Sindoor have now made the polity more inclined to enable a stronger defence and projection of national power outside India.

● Eighth, having a powerful and popular leader has empowered the top brass in bureaucracy. Modi's PMO is probably the most powerful one after Indira Gandhi's. The downside is that investing so much power in PMO means cutting off the power centre from crucial political feedback from party and citizens. This could be one reason why BJP did not do so well in 2024, but it seems to have gotten its act together since then by using the Sangh as foil.

● Ninth, Modi-Shah duet suggests that successful govt need at least two powerful politicians at the top, one managing govt and the other the party and politics. Nehru and Sardar Patel, Vajpayee and LK Advani, and Manmohan Singh and Sonia Gandhi are references that come to mind.

Truth, the polity has moved so decisively to the left with freebies galore, that govt are finding it tougher to deregulate and make life easier for businesses. Any change or reform favouring business is now being interpreted as cronyism, making it tougher to pass and implement laws making for ease of business.

● Finally the treating trend remains: jobs. Modi's tenure has not done enough to make this happen, and one party domination makes political consensus almost impossible to achieve. The only way to break this logjam is for Modi to use his own considerable political capital to build a consensus, but for that he must play better politics and not operate in isolation from it.

India Has Too Much Summer, Too Little Water

Every year, cities see dry reservoirs & fractious queues next to water tankers. This will keep worsening. Govts have to come up with smarter policies. But urban Indians must learn to use water conservatively

Anil Nair

India's experiencing its annual summer crucible. This means scorching heat and thirsty longing for the monsoon, and constant threat of the two tipping over into awful social friction. Not surprisingly, WFP has identified water shortage as the most severe risk confronting India in the period 2023-27.

Across the world, water availability is influenced by climate and population but also by water management practices. In other words, India's water table levels are connected not only to its population growth and global warming but also to what it's doing with industrial contamination and other waste and its green cover.

Cape Town in South Africa came dangerously close to Day Zero (when all taps would've run dry) in 2018. Dramatic measures at conservation saved the day then. Mexico City faced such a crisis in mid-2024. In Jakarta, most households lack access to adequate drinking water.

WFP estimates that 1.1bn people lack access to water globally and 2.4bn suffer from inadequate sanitation, resulting in cholera, typhoid, diarrhoea and other water-borne diseases. Depletion of the water table also makes the land surface infirm – both being more a consequence of human behaviours than natural phenomena.

Several Indian cities also face acute water shortages from time to time. The WFP list of 100 cities that face 'grave water risk' by 2030 includes 30 Indian cities – Jaipur, Indore, Vadodra, Srinagar, Rajkot, Kota, Nashik, Lucknow, Kolkata, Ahmedabad, Jabalpur, Amritsar, Visakhapatnam, Dhanbad, Kannur and Pune, among them. World Bank finds India a water-stressed nation, with 18% of the world's population and just 4% of its water. Nile Anoyog warns that 21 Indian cities could run out of groundwater as early as 2030.

Last summer, when the national capital suffered soaring temperatures, it had depleted access even to clean drinking water. Queues, tankers, illegal connections and private borewells were the order of the day. This year, the focus is on streamlining water distribution, monitoring supply with GPS-fitted tankers, revamping infrastructure, checking theft, improving sewer and waste

management, and stricter supervision of reservoirs. Chennai suffered its Day Zero in 2019, when all reservoirs ran dry. This prompted quick completion of overdue measures like establishing tertiary treatment and indirect potable buffers, enabling reuse of 10% of collected wastewater.

In Mumbai, its municipal corporation invoked the Disaster Management Act 2005 for the first time recently when water suppliers went on strike against the more stringent compliance demanded by the central groundwater authority. This underlined that emergencies can be man-made too.



Cities across the board are taking steps to ensure there are fewer water supply disruptions – building desalination plants to treat and use seawater, making rainwater harvesting mandatory, rejuvenating lakes and water bodies, increasing their capacity by desilting them, creating new reservoirs, even utilising abandoned quarries for water storage. However, given our large population and wide-spread water-wasteful practices, the demand-supply gap isn't going to disappear from our cities any time soon.

Technology use is still suboptimal. One underexplored area for example is purity enhancement and reclamation. Membrane bioreactor solutions for biological water treatment; ultrafiltration by using a pressure-driven barrier; reverse osmosis for desalination and flushing out bacteria, pathogens and pesticides; electrodialysis is reversal for treating turbid wastewater – so many solutions are just waiting to be deployed. What's truly fascinating is that the energy content in waste is far greater than the energy needed for its treatment.

Digital interventions are critical. Sensors can detect leaks, monitor flow, and regulate water pressure, thus extending infra lifespan. Remote sensing can help create early warning systems that will help in pre-emptive emergency response. Digital twins can help with diverse what-if scenarios.

Advanced infra projects and locating new water sources are eye-catching initiatives. But under the radar initiatives are equally important. Like resolving issues pertaining to land use and subsidence (sinking of earth's surface), wastewater management and re-use. Improving groundwater recharge is tied to preservation of wetlands, forests and rivers. Basically, policy and governance need to operate interconnectively with the entire water ecosystem.

But the most critical issue is definitively reducing demand. This means consuming groups taking appropriate actions at the ground level. For instance, at the level of housing societies.

Such groups could form a resident task force for sustainability, run awareness campaigns, fit sensors in water outlet pipes, eliminate leakages, and expand treated STP water usage for watering plants, gardens and for washing public spaces, balconies and cars. The agenda could also include voluntary water cuts, use of pressure reducing valves, retrofitting low flow fixtures, deploying smart meters, ensuring that recycling capacity is enhanced, and preventing illegal water tapping of any kind.

With our per capita freshwater availability approaching scarcity levels well below the international threshold of 1,700 cubic metres annually, curbing consumption is the only way. It's how humans can mitigate their past excesses.

The writer is Founder, ThinkStreet

Calvin & Hobbes



The Oldest, Most Enduring Relationship

Narayani Ganesh

If you're guessing that the world's oldest, most enduring relationship is the one with mother earth, you are absolutely right – Mother Earth. The human-environment interface begins the moment you are born and continues till you die and perhaps even after death as your remains – whether buried or reduced to ashes – are returned to earth and get regenerated. It is this positive, loving relationship or one that is troubled, fraught with contradictions and exploitation that it is a powerful one.

Media platforms carpet bomb doom news of environmental degradation due to human activity and greed. Everything is now polluted; species are going extinct, potable water is in short supply; glaciers are melting, sea levels are rising, the drought list is very long. But here is another view that echoes a completely different sentiment, that humanity does not merely destroy nature, we have also enhanced it. So

reports ecology and archaeology scholar Stefani Crabtree in the Temple Foundation's newsletter, saying that when we call an ecosystem as being pristine, untouched by humans, we could be wrong. The truth is, when human beings ventured out of Africa and into different parts of the world, we populated every possible ecosystem on earth – some places early on and others, much later. She writes, "There is no ecosystem on earth today that is not shaped by human presence."

Human presence has not always had a negative effect. Like other fauna and flora, we, too, are an intrinsic part of nature. Nature created us. To leave humans out of nature in order to conserve it, can be misleading, even harmful. "As European-American pioneers moved west, they often encountered seemingly uninhabited landscapes. What they didn't see were the effects of disease, displacement and forced reloca-

tion that had reduced or removed indigenous population from those lands. The prairies they crossed were not untouched, they were actively managed landscapes, shaped by millennia of indigenous stewardship," says Crabtree. In the Great Plains, when settlers noticed forests creeping into former prairie lands, they were witnessing the ecological consequences of a disrupted human-environment relationship. Indigenous peoples had long used controlled burning to maintain grasslands, promoting biodiversity and reducing wildfire risk.

Crabtree points out that without these traditional practices, the ecosystem began to shift, losing its fire-dependent species and becoming less resilient to environmental stressors. Yes, humans have been disrupting ecosystems, but they have also played a part in shaping the natural world as stewards and enablers. The use of fire not only helped humans settle down but also

created grasslands and savannahs for grazing animals and growth of new plant species.

There are other species besides humans who have been altering the environment for good purposes. Like beavers who build dams and ponds, helping recharge groundwater and controlling floods. Like birds, bees and butterflies, humans too aid in seed dispersal, biodiversity propagation, soil regeneration, and domestication of animals for tilling the soil, keeping predator populations in check. The negative impact seems to have overtaken the positive ones; we need to re-establish a healthy relationship that will allow all of us to grow and regenerate without stepping on one another's toes.

Ecological engineering is not a one-way path to destruction. It could also be a foundation for abundances," points out Crabtree. People could be catalysts for ecological health, and not just agents of extraction.

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Jug Suraiya



second opinion

The minister of Punctuation, Propaganda, and Fake News was addressing his aides and assorted flunkies. There is good news and there is bad news, said the minister. First, the good news. The good news is that our Operation Hyphen worked even better than we anticipated.



THEIR VIEW

MINT CURATOR

Trump's policies assure China an edge in the race for AI dominance

America's research funding cuts, immigration curbs and trade barriers could easily combine to make China great again



QIYUAN XU & WANG YAQIANG are, respectively, a senior fellow and deputy director of the Institute of World Economics and Politics at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences; and a scholar at the National University of Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy.

Their tariff war may be facing a stalemate, but the competition for technological supremacy between the US and China is shifting into high gear. As the two countries battle for dominance in artificial intelligence (AI)—with productivity and geopolitical gains expected—one question looms large. Will China's AI capabilities catch up with or even surpass those of the US? Driving this trend is a series of policies introduced by US President Donald Trump's administration. Trump's presidency marks a dramatic break from the commitment to openness that has underpinned America's technological leadership for decades. Measures intended to bring innovation back to the US may be boomeranging and end up paving the way for China's dominance.

The evolution of the digital economy may provide some insight into how today's AI race will play out in the wake of Trump's policies. In the 1990s, the US led the internet revolution, dominating the pivotal 'zero to one' phase by quickly moving innovations from lab to market. This fuelled what many lauded as the 'new economy', characterized by rapid growth, strong productivity gains and low inflation. China, initially a follower, later injected remarkable dynamism into its digital economy by scaling its own innovative technologies.

China's digital development unfolded in three stages. The first was copy-and-follow: from the mid-1990s to the early 2000s, Chinese firms mirrored US models, launching web portals and online services that drove explosive user growth. The second stage was localization and improvement. As China's digital ecosystem matured between 2005 and 2015, Chinese tech companies began to leverage their deep understanding of domestic users and market conditions to fine-tune their services. Platforms like WeChat and Taobao not only adapted US concepts, but also built on them, eventually surpassing Western counterparts such as WhatsApp and eBay in the Chinese market. The third stage was breakthrough innovation. Over the past decade, Chinese tech companies have shifted from imitation to innovation, pioneering new digital models and even overtaking foreign competitors. The most strikingly successful example is ByteDance's TikTok, which positioned China at the forefront of online culture, reshaped social media, and forced US firms like Meta to play catch-up.

This dynamic is already evident in fields like renewable energy and electric vehicles (EVs). AI will be no exception. Following the launch of ChatGPT in late 2022, marking AI's transition into



its mass-adoption era, China quickly demonstrated its ability to copy Western models.

The release of DeepSeek in January signalled China's entry into the localization and improvement stage, as the company's R1 model was 30-50 times cheaper to use than that of OpenAI. By February, the performance gap between the best Chinese and US models had narrowed to 1.7%, down from 9.3% in 2024. And while it took ChatGPT two months to reach 100 million active users, DeepSeek reached that mark in seven days.

One of China's key advantages is its deep pool of engineering talent. The country produces four times as many STEM graduates annually as the US. Beyond sheer size, this 'engineer dividend' reflects a strong work ethic and a pragmatic mindset geared toward complex, hands-on optimization, as demonstrated by DeepSeek's system architecture.

With more than 1 billion internet users and a diverse industrial base, China also offers unparalleled conditions for deploying, testing and refining AI applications. China accounts for nearly 30% of global manufacturing output, generating vast amounts of data. In 2019 alone, its manufacturing sector produced 1.812 petabytes of data and we estimate that figure reached 2.435 PB in 2024. Energy is another critical factor. In 2023, China generated approximately 9,456 terawatt-hours of electricity—32% of the global total and more than double the US output of 4,178 TWh—giving it a major advantage in powering the large-scale data centres essential to widespread AI adoption.

America's position in the AI race is further undermined by Trump's cuts to research funding and immigration restrictions. In February, 170 employees were laid off, including AI experts, at

the National Science Foundation. The agency's budget faces a cut of more than 50%.

These cuts—together with the National Institutes of Health's delayed funding allocations and the freezing of roughly \$2.2 billion in federal grants to Harvard University—risk stalling foundational research and impeding AI innovation. Meanwhile, restrictive immigration policies will likely make it harder for the US to attract and retain global talent, potentially triggering a reverse brain drain as skilled Chinese tech workers return home to take up well-paid positions in a growing sector.

While the Trump administration has backed massive infrastructure initiatives like StarGate—a proposed \$500 billion AI data centre to be built by OpenAI, Oracle and SoftBank—such projects risk reinforcing Big Tech's dominance and stifling the innovation needed to achieve transformative technological breakthroughs.

But the deeper issue lies in America's shift away from economic openness. As US companies like OpenAI become increasingly closed, Chinese firms are embracing open-source strategies. And while Trump's trade and immigration policies drive away global talent and international collaborators, China is actively marketing its low-cost AI models to its trade partners.

No doubt, China faces internal challenges, compounded by US trade restrictions that have limited its access to advanced semiconductors. Domestically, Chinese policymakers must strike a delicate balance between encouraging innovation and enforcing strict data controls. But while neither side has an easy path to AI dominance, Trump's MAGA agenda may inadvertently help make China great again.

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Bold foreign money is filling an Indian gap in private credit

Many of India's private lenders suspect they are mispricing risks



ANDY MUKHERJEE is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist covering industrial companies and financial services in Asia.



The collateral of a Shapoorji Pallonji deal has generated much talk.

India is a sizzling market for private credit, though some participants are wondering if in their eagerness to close deals, investors are shutting their eyes to risks, especially the legal minefields around collateral and bankruptcy.

A decade ago, India's banks were struggling with the world's biggest load of sourced corporate loans. At about \$200 billion, the write-offs on that exposure have been large. Deposit-taking institutions that tried to recover the debt via insolvency proceedings have had to accept harsh haircuts. Traditional lenders are so scared by that experience that personal credit, which was less than half of banks' advances to industry 10 years ago, is now 1.5 times as large and growing nearly twice as fast.

Credit demand and supply have changed in other ways, too. Large firms, traditionally the heaviest users of bank financing, seem the least interested in project finance. They are borrowing selectively to fund acquisitions and refinance existing debt rather than to create new capacity.

Startups and their founders are far more eager to raise debt, though that's mostly because venture capital funds have become stingy. Initial public offerings are being delayed in a slowing economy, and equity valuations for many unlisted firms are cooling off. Non-bank financiers, too, are starved for funding. Banks have turned cautious about these firms' exposure to overleveraged households.

This is a perfect scenario for non-traditional lenders—global insurers, asset managers and sovereign wealth funds—to fill in the void left by banks and pocket a cool 18-20% return. Vardé Partners, Oaktree Capital Management and Davidson Kempner are among the most aggressive, though everyone from BlackRock to Allianz Global Investors is participating enthusiastically in the deal-making.

Local players appear quite miffed. Even though they're in on many small loans, the foreign money deluge is cutting them out of marquee transactions. Domestic private-credit ventures, especially those affiliated with banks, are also keen to earn high rates of return on capital. But they're more interested in the return of capital. Some of them have struggled to raise funds because they aren't seen as bold enough.

Their foreign rivals, meanwhile, lack neither capital nor courage. As a few prominent Mumbai financiers told me, overseas institutions may be mispricing the true credit risk, which won't be well. Greed may hurt foreign investors, who will then cry that it's hard to get repaid in India.

Some already are. In 2021, US lenders gave \$1.2 billion to Indian entrepreneur Byju Raveendran for his eponymous online education venture, then the country's most valuable startup. Now Byju's has collapsed and the money is largely gone. Creditors will be lucky to get even a few cents on the dollar from bankruptcy proceedings in India.

And yet, Byju's is no longer a cautionary tale in a gung-ho market. Creditors are chasing special situations, such as a nephew who needs a hefty loan to buy out an uncle. The other opportunity is in restructuring. Last month, Shapoorji Pallonji Group, a real-estate and construction conglomerate, raised \$3.4 billion from Deutsche Bank and other investors to refinance previous high-cost debt.

This deal, a new record for India's private-credit market, has raised eyebrows. Although repayment is due in three years, the yield on the zero-coupon bond is as high as 19.75%. The collateral is also tricky. The deal is reportedly backed by about \$3.6 billion of real estate and investments in oil and gas. The crown jewel is a 9.2% stake in Tata Sons, valued at roughly \$18.6 billion.

But how will value from the holding company of Tata Group, whose listed units are worth \$325 billion, ever be realized? Shares in privately held Tata Sons aren't freely transferable. That's the official position of the charitable trusts that are its majority shareholders. Maybe investors are betting that the trusts will eventually relent or that they will buy out Shapoorji, the largest minority shareholder. Neither outcome can be predicted with any degree of certainty. The bold bet shines a light on the buccannering spirit that has taken over India's nascent private-credit industry.

Policymakers would want to see more risk-taking in creation of new assets. India's new central bank chief has slashed interest rates, reducing the repo rate by a more-than-expected half-percentage point on Friday. He has also flooded the financial system with liquidity. But given the cloudy outlook for global trade and local consumption, corporate investment isn't India Inc's priority. Swapping assets among one another is. As for the money, there are enough private lenders willing to write checks of \$100 million or more. And if they don't, someone else will. **©BLOOMBERG**

THEIR VIEW

Agentic payments: Why India needs a rupee stablecoin

PRIYA KARNIK



is the founder and CEO of Pay3.

As the founder of a global payment solutions company, I have a sense of pride when I speak about India's payment systems to our global customers. India has offered 24/7 settlements for all types of payments for years and many nations are only now catching up with it. Our Unified Payments Interface (UPI) stands as a world-class example. In order to retain this leadership position, India needs to be nimble about a new paradigm that is emerging in the global payments landscape: programmable payments.

These refer to a type of financial transaction where the execution and conditions of the payment are directly embedded in the software code associated with it. This means pre-set rules that dictate when, how and to whom a payment should be made without requiring manual intervention for each such programmed transaction.

This shift towards programmable payments, driven by advancements in blockchain technology, artificial intelligence (AI)

and smart contracts, allows for automated transactions triggered by predefined conditions, auditable payments and much else that we cannot fully fathom today. While India has been a trailblazer in real-time payments, we must embrace the opportunity presented by the rise of programmable money to retain our hard-won leadership. India has already taken initial steps in this direction. The ongoing pilot project of a Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC)—a digital blockchain-based form of a country's official currency issued and regulated by its central bank, representing a direct liability of this monetary authority, like physical banknotes and coins—has programmable features on its test agenda. Further, the National Payments Corporation of India's (NPCI) e-RUPI initiative has demonstrated an ability to issue payments for specific predefined use cases. India is also participating in a global effort by central banks to streamline cross-border payments.

However, the global landscape is evolving at a blistering pace. Fuelled by innovations initially explored within blockchain and cryptocurrency ecosystems, countries like the US are now rapidly pursuing the widespread adoption of programmable money. They are leapfrogging ahead by leveraging

the functionality and flexibility offered by stablecoins—a type of blockchain-based digital asset designed to peg its value to that of a relatively stable-value asset, like a government issued fiat currency. Simultaneously, experiments in tokenization—creating 'digital twins' of real-world assets for these to be managed, transferred and traded more efficiently and transparently—are paving the way for efficiencies in asset ownership and transfer. While the two operate independently today, the convergence of tokenization with programmable payments in the future promises to unlock a truly advanced financial services system. This convergence will enable highly automated, conditional and transparent financial transactions, revolutionizing everything from supply-chain finance to personalized lending.

Countries are exploring diverse models for handling the emergence of stablecoins. The models have ranged from light-touch regulation to heavy oversight and span both

private and banking-sector issuances of stablecoins. India needs to discern and adopt the model that best suits our financial and regulatory environment.

The CBDC is an excellent instrument for some applications, like reducing cash usage and facilitating offline payments. But it may not be the optimal vehicle for enabling a broad-based transition to programmable money. To maintain our leadership position and enable consumers and businesses to fully embrace the potential of programmable money, we must expand our efforts beyond the CBDC's current scope, fostering a wider ecosystem of innovation and adoption. The country needs a stablecoin based on the Indian rupee issued by regulated participants.

India's framework of capital controls presents a challenge and an opportunity as we make this leap into programmable payments. Capital controls create a complex set of constraints in implementing such a transformative programme. At the same time, the

architecture of programmable payments can streamline compliance, enhance real-time monitoring capabilities and enable better enforcement of our capital controls with substantially lesser friction.

The transition to programmable money will require substantial investment from commercial banks to upgrade their existing infrastructure. This investment dovetails well with the underlying shift to a world dominated by artificial intelligence. The emerging 'agentic world', where autonomous AI agents will increasingly manage tasks and transactions, will demand 'agentic payments'—transfers that are not merely small, fast and low-cost, but intelligent, conditional and capable of being executed autonomously by these task-oriented AI bots. This symbiotic relationship underscores the urgency and strategic importance of broad-based our efforts in the field of programmable money.

The future of finance is being written by tokenization and AI with programmable money as a foundational element. If India is to maintain and fortify its leadership in the global payments landscape, we must think and act swiftly to enable an Indian rupee-based stablecoin and facilitate the adoption of programmable payments.

Opinion

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 11, 2025

Fuselages for Rafales

Manufacturing for global OEMs will help strengthen the local ecosystem

TATAADVANCED SYSTEMS Limited's (TASL) contract from Dassault Aviation to build fuselages for the Rafale fighter jet exemplifies the progress India has made in establishing a modern aerospace manufacturing ecosystem. Catering to the demanding requirements of global original equipment manufacturers (OEM) in the defence space is a harbinger of possibilities in the not-so-distant future of domestically assembling fighter aircraft. Rafales are almost entirely manufactured in France, barring some non-sensitive imported components. Five components are sourced from Dassault Reliance Aerospace as part of offset obligations when India bought 36 Rafale jets through an inter-governmental agreement (IGA) with France nine years ago. In April, another IGA was inked to procure 26 Rafale-Marine fighter jets—one of the costliest-ever defence deals—that will operate from the Indian Navy's two aircraft carriers. This is the first time that Rafale fuselages—which is the main body or trunk of an aircraft—will be produced outside France and is intended both for the domestic and global market. TASL will set up a state-of-the-art facility in Hyderabad to deliver two fuselages a month that will roll off the assembly line in FY28.

TASL is no stranger to making fuselages, as it has delivered 300 of these in March for Pilatus Aircraft, a Swiss aerospace company. But the company is more than just a supplier to global OEMs, as it has set up a facility in Vadodra in partnership with Airbus to manufacture C-295 medium-lift tactical transport aircraft for the Indian Air Force. A certain number of aircraft will be purchased in a flyaway condition and the rest will be assembled domestically, the first of which is expected in September 2026. Airbus also inked an agreement with the Tata Group to manufacture the best-selling H125 helicopter from its civilian range. India, in fact, is the sixth location where Airbus will operate its final assembly lines besides France, Germany, US, Canada, and China. The collaborative efforts on the C-295 military aircraft, civilian helicopters and now making fuselages for the Rafale have the potential to propel India into the final assembly of fighter aircraft. Clearly, this is perhaps an idea whose time has come, as there is an enabling ecosystem.

However, there are several imponderables that need to be realistically taken into account. The most important of these pertain to our inability to deliver military projects on time—as was rightly underscored by the chief of the Indian Air Force at a Confederation of Indian Industry business summit. Perhaps he was alluding to Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd's (HAL) poor track record in delivering 83 light combat aircraft Tejas Mark 1A, although the contract was signed in 2021. Further progress on deepening Dassault's footprint in the country is predicated on domestic manufacture of critical components for the M88 engine that powers the Rafale. Safran makes those engines and has a joint venture with HAL specialising in the manufacture of components for LEAP engines for civilian aircraft as well as the M88.

A Make in India initiative to make critical components for the M88 obviously depends on Safran's willingness to transfer proprietary technologies to HAL and other potential Indian partners to make single-crystal turbines and advanced cooling systems needed for high performance engines. If that happens, it would indeed be a game-changer for India's ambitions to be not just supplier of fuselages but also to make the latest fighter aircraft in the country.

Musk is the \$350 billion rocket man who fell to earth

THE POPCORN EMOJI is out in force as the world's richest person feuds with its most powerful leader. Even Thierry Breton, the European regulator who was a frequent target of Elon Musk's ire, is at it. Still, as entertaining as the billionaire's spat with Donald Trump may be, it also carries costly lessons for a \$630-billion space economy dominated by Musk's Space Exploration Technologies Corp.—such is the danger of co-dependence between de facto monopolies and increasingly protectionist states.

This danger wasn't high on the agenda at the peak of Trump's bromance with Musk, when the President-elect described SpaceX's reusable rocket revolution in the way a Renaissance monarch might have praised a successful colonial expedition—with a mix of national pride, geopolitical influence, and financial potential. "I called Elon, I said, 'Elon, we're launching a moon mission,'" he said. "Yes, it was," I said. "Can Russia do it?" "No. Can China do it?" "No." "Can the United States do it, other than you?" "No, nobody can do that." "That's why I love you, Elon."

Since then, the love has turned to standstill as the contradictions inherent in Musk's \$350-billion space empire spill over. The hypocrisy of a billionaire pitching himself as "dark MAGA" and taking a chainsaw to government spending while SpaceX (and Tesla Inc.) benefits from \$22 billion worth of government contracts is exacerbating the clash of egos, with Musk threatening to withdraw taxpayer support. Meanwhile, Musk's casual threat—to quickly withdrawn—to halt the Dragon capsule upon which NASA relies to ferry astronauts echoed the geopolitical blackmail exerted on the battlefield in Ukraine, where the billionaire has in the past halted attacks against Russia via SpaceX Starlink. These are high-stakes threats with huge societal costs.

We are no longer in the realm of enterprising conquistadors but conflicted taxpayer-backed trade empires. Even if Musk deserves credit for his part in SpaceX's domination in both rocket launches and satellite communications, with 80% market share in the former and over 8,000 Starlink satellites in orbit, the feud's weaponisation of space suggests innovation has taken a backseat to favouritism. SpaceX's successes this year have not been on the launchpad but rather inside the corridors of power, where its market share looks like a lever for rent extraction instead of exploration. Rule changes to high-speed internet subsidies have opened the door to Starlink awards, as has the prospect of a defence "Golden Dome." Trump's tariff bullying against other countries has been reportedly accompanied by a push for regulatory approvals for Starlink. And putting a Musk ally atop NASA appears to have been a last straw for the Make America Great Again (MAGA) movement.

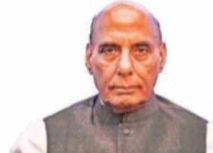
While NASA and the Pentagon remain heavily reliant on SpaceX, the silver lining to all this is that Musk's competitors must get the message and step up their game. US commercial space companies including Jeff Bezos's Blue Origin have been contacted by government officials about rocket readiness, according to the *Washington Post* (owned by Bezos). Over in the EU, which is desperately trying to not miss another technological revolution, governments are getting serious about renegeing legacy players like Eutelsat Communications SA, which is in talks to raise €1.5 billion (\$1.7 billion) that would double the French state's stake to 30%. The continent is also eyeing its first "hop" test of a reusable booster project called Themis, which it glimpsed while on a recent tour of Airbus SE and Safran SA's ArianeSpace SAS manufacturing facility near Paris.

But one gloomy possibility is that a prolonged MAGA-Musk war makes space a chiller place for everyone. NASA is already facing hefty budget cuts, maples inside and turns driven by personal rivalries won't inspire confidence. And Europeans have a huge gap to close: A report by think tank Institut Montaigne notes that its military space spending is one-fifth the US, while Bloomberg Intelligence's John Davies estimates Eutelsat's OneWeb network requires an extra €4 billion or more of capital spending by 2030.

More mergers and more state meddling are likely in a de-Muskworld—though hopefully with some lessons learned ahead of time.



LIONEL LAURENT
Bloomberg



INDIA'S DEFENCE PROGRESS

Union defence minister Rajnath Singh

Today, India is not only protecting its borders, but is also creating a system which is making us strategically, economically, and technically strong. Earlier, we were completely dependent on foreign defence equipment, but today India is rapidly becoming *aatmanirbhar* in defence

REAL POLITICS

MODI 3.0 IS MARKED BY MANY SIGNIFICANT DECISIONS WITH LONG-LASTING IMPACT

A continuum of progress

MAHATMA GANDHI FAMOUSLY said that our development-oriented work should uplift the last man standing in the queue. Recently, I met such a 'last man' of our society—Ramdhani, belonging to the Musahar community and living in a village near Phulpur in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh. He gave me his evaluation of the development work that has happened in the last decade which impacted his life, saying, "Pukka ghar mila, bijuri lagi, nalha laga ba, raashan patayi milat ba, jeevan ka dukh door ho gaya ba. Ab hanka ka chahi? Bachawan ke borigari chhuda, padhai karuwan" (I got a pucca house, electricity, water supply, and food. What else do I aspire for? I will ensure my children don't fall into unemployment and send them to school. For me, it is the account of a last man during the 11 years of governance under the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) regime led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. This hope for a future and growing capacity of upward mobility among the marginalised is one of the big achievements of the Modi government.

The Modi-led NDA government completed the first year of its third term on June 9, making it the ideal time to discuss the progress of the country in the past year. In my view, it is not easy to segregate this one year from the impact of PM Modi's governance. The goal of his governance, since the last 11 years, has been 'Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat' (One India, best India). This *Shreshtha Bharat* mission is evolving phase-wise. The first phase is to achieve the goal of *Viksit Bharat* in 2047. So, for some policy analysts and social scientists, the Modi government is evolving in a continuation of its first phase, which started in 2014. There is no rupture or break in the continuity of missions and goals of

BADRI NARAYAN
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the NDA government. Even then, action-wise, as well as considering major policy decisions and their implications, this year was remarkable in the history of Indian governance.

This year of Modi 3.0 will be remembered for strong policy decisions while maintaining balance with ally parties, equipping governance with new technological advancements such as artificial intelligence, and responding to the terrorist attack of Pahalgam through Operation Sindoor.

In this regime, the NDA government announced a national census with caste enumeration. This decision is perceived as something which will influence Indian society and polity deeply in the long term. This decision has various risks—opinion conflict within the party and alliance, the rise and growth of social conflict, and various political polarisations, full of possibilities of political gains and losses. It was a bold decision taken to strengthen social justice measures for the empowerment of marginal and backward communities. It was also politically important because of reasons—first, it is going to generate data for various castes which may help us in reviewing the distribution of developmental resources in society, as well as in understanding the trends of distribution of social justice resources.

Second, it will weaken mobilisation politics around caste, which the opposition has been trying to cultivate around the caste census issue. Persuading party members, leaders, and cadres for the same and obtaining a consensus among NDA's political parties were big challenges on the path of this decision. However, all this was overcome as not only did the Modi government announce its decision for holding national census with caste enumeration, it also announced a timeline for the same.

Another important and impactful decision was passing the Waqf Board Bill. This decision caused a significant reaction among people of the Islamic faith and the Supreme Court was approached against the same. However, a section of the Pamandara community, with some others, supported it. This decision may have far-reaching political impact. The people of a certain community may be polarised in the upcoming elections against the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP), but it is believed by some political analysts that such a decision may help in the proper utilisation of religious resources and help in equal distribution among the marginal members of this community.

As observed, PM Modi is trying to digitalise India and, by extension, its governance. In this first year of his

With remarkable success in infrastructure development, the Modi government has been working to achieve better indicators in human development



JAMAL MECKLAI
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VOLATILITY, PARTICULARLY when it is high and rising sharply, feels almost physical—talk to any trader and indeed, to companies that have to plan their businesses in the face of high uncertainty. The pain can get pretty intense over a period of time, after which, in general, the market itself gets exhausted and things calm down.

Before that, the volatility of the DXY has suffered four sharp peaks since 2002, lasting an average of 253 trading sessions (289, 102, 240, 381), after which, in all cases, it came down, sometimes sharply, and occasionally steadily. Today, the volatility of the DXY has been rising for 261 trading days (since May last year), suggesting it may be coming close to a turning point. However, with Donald Trump becoming increasingly unable to always get what he wants, his petulance will continue to jerk markets (and businesses) around, sustaining this insane volatility pattern beyond "normal" timelines.

Thus, it seems to me that high volatility will likely last till at least the end of his term and perhaps longer, since even at the end of his term, global systems—both geopolitical and economic—will likely still be unstable. Mental health issues will rise, people will burn out faster, and companies

will have to contend with seriously fluctuating results, unless, of course, they have risk management systems in place that can deliver at least reasonable results over the medium to long term.

In the short term though, this continuing pressure could trigger a collapse in global markets, and I suspect it may be sooner rather than later. US treasuries, which are the bellwether for the financial health of the world, could be where things start coming apart—it is already hugely nervous and has to contend with any number of possible triggers. Leading the pack is Trump's Big Beautiful Bill, which is expected to be passed by the US Senate right before the Independence Day holiday on July 4. Since it is a party bill, I could see the storm clouds gather in the market in the weeks before that, particularly with the other outlandish events battering sentiment—Elon Musk v/s Trump, for example, and the July 9 deadline for Trump's tariffs, and, far worse, the escalating Palestinian genocide and the Russia/Ukraine war. Be even more careful than usual.

Back at the farm, though, things

The time to be extra cautious is now, as Trump's tariff turbulence will affect the market till the end of his tenure

In the short term, continuing pressure could trigger a collapse in global markets, and it may be sooner rather than later

look a tad better. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has stepped up to the monetary easing plate aggressively and delivered a slightly surprising 50 bps cut AND reduced the cash reserve ratio (CRR) by 100 bps; it did, however, change its stance to neutral, suggesting that it was done with intentions to cut rates in the near term. The forward premiums, which were already shifting downwards in anticipation of a 25 bps cut, could slip further.

Some exporters, who had been increasing hedging—to protect against the crazy volatility, may slow down dollar sales, since with very low premiums, they may believe it makes more sense to bet on catching an attractive spot rate. However, we note that since April, the intra-day high-low spread has averaged more than 40 paise, which is higher than the current three-month premium, and trying to catch an attractive spot rate dumps you into the volatility pit—not a pleasant place for anyone. A slowdown in exporter selling, if it materialises, could push the rupee higher, but on the other hand, lower rates could increase outflows from the debt market—already in this

financial year, debt outflows have exceeded \$3 billion—pushing the rupee in the opposite direction. Clearly, we are likely to see continued high rupee volatility as well.

More than ever, companies should get out of the zero hedge approach. Some companies—large, professionally managed ones amongst them—believe that the rupee always falls more than the premiums, so they take a punt and ALWAYS stay unhedged. To my mind, this is dangerous and plain wrong. Over the last five years, simply staying unhedged on 12-month exposures has outperformed hedging on Day 1 by—hold your breath—a pathetic 0.1%. Given that, it would make more sense to hedge all exposures on Day 1, since then, at least you know your realisations and, importantly, you are carrying ZERO RISK.

Of course, it is difficult for companies to hedge 100% on Day 1 for business reasons, since hedging is not perfect (particularly today), transactions may be cancelled, etc. Thus, it is important for companies to have a strategy that enables them to keep only some part of their exposure unhedged—reducing risk from the zero-hedge approach—while following a rule-based model to ensure that they are not trapped in wild volatility trying to guess or time the market.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A year of Modi 3.0

Apropos of 'The challenge begins now' (PE, June 10), the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) has successfully completed its first decade of ruling. Undoubtedly, the economy and the country are growing. However, challenges are equally mounting. The ongoing trade talks on tariff rates will have a visible impact on the country's import and export policies, compelling experts to

spend more time and energy in realigning them. Ample scope exists for the economy to beat Japan in real terms of GDP. However, India needs to strive more towards the reduction of poverty ratio. The NDA needs to gear up on the agronomy by tapping capacity building in logistics, especially the road sector. Equally, the investments on irrigation needs to be aggressively hiked to cover the unirrigated regions, which will enable to reap the twin benefits of poverty

alleviation and better agri production. —RV Baskaran, Chennai

A last minute invite to G7

Though it is a last minute invitation to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for attending the G7 summit in Canada as a guest, he must attend. He could engage in diplomatic discussions leading to new collaborations and agreements. Since India is the fourth largest economy in the world and playing an increased role in global

governance, the member countries invited Modi despite the opposition from Canadian Sikh organisations. Modi must participate in discussions pertaining to global trade policies, security and defence cooperation, and energy and climate change policies. Despite a late invitation, Modi must come back with constructive outcomes. —NR Nagarajan, Sivakasi

Write to us at letters@expressindia.com

Editor's TAKE

Impactful eleven years of Modi Government

From bold reforms to welfare breakthroughs, the Modi era has redefined the narrative of governance

As Prime Minister Narendra Modi completes 11 years in office, the occasion marks a significant chapter in India's political and developmental journey. Over the past decade, the Modi Government has overseen a broad transformation — economically, socially, and ideologically — ushering in what can be termed as a new era of governance focused on performance, accountability, and national pride. BJP President JP Nadda has also emphasised key achievements of the Government ranging from social-economic to political achievements of the Modi Government.

Under Modi's leadership, India has risen from the 10th to the 4th largest economy globally. Welfare schemes targeting the poor, such as Jan Dhan, Aayushman Bharat, Ujjwala Yojana and housing initiatives, have lifted an estimated 25 crore people out of poverty, reflecting what the Government calls its "gareeb kalyan" model of development.

A strong push for women-led development has seen the expansion of maternity leave, the rise of self-help groups like 'Lakhpati Didis', and women making major strides in sectors ranging from grassroots entrepreneurship to space exploration. The Government also claims credit for shifting Indian politics from identity-based appeasement to a results-oriented model, where report cards, not rhetoric, define public leadership. One of the most testing periods of Modi's tenure was the COVID-19 pandemic, during which India conducted the world's largest free vaccination drive, delivering over 220 crore doses. This was accompanied by swift emergency operations like Vaccine Maitri and Operation Ganga, enhancing India's stature as a responsible global actor. In Jammu and Kashmir, the Government's decision to abrogate Article 370 marked a turning point in India's internal integration efforts. The move, followed by record voter turnout in local elections, is presented as proof of deeper democratic normalisation in the region.

Infrastructure too has been a defining pillar, with the long-pending Chenab Bridge project finally completed and inaugurated this year. Other headline reforms over the years include the abolition of Triple Talaq, the Citizenship Amendment Act, and changes to Waqf laws, all aimed, according to the Government, at correcting long-standing social imbalances.

The Modi Government continues to project the vision of a "Viksit Bharat" by 2047, guided by the principle of "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas, Sabka Prayas." While critics point to concerns over democratic freedoms and centralisation of power, even detractors acknowledge the sweeping nature of the changes witnessed under Modi's leadership.

At the end of 11 years, Narendra Modi's tenure has not only redefined governance in India but has also reshaped the expectations citizens have from their leaders. Whether viewed as transformational or polarising, the Modi era has left an unmistakable imprint on the nation's political and developmental psyche.

Debate on India's defence doctrine

The larger question looms: Can India afford costly engagements with transient outcomes, without a comprehensive reimagining of its military doctrine, defence spending and national security policy?

CDS Gen Anil Chauhan has made the startling comment that costs don't matter, outcomes do. He was answering questions from Bloomberg in Singapore about the number of Indian jets downed in Op Sindoor. Some previous combat losses: World War II — Allies 91,105 aircraft; Axis Powers 70,900 aircraft. In 1965, IAF 59 aircraft, and Pakistan Air Force (PAF) 43 aircraft in 22 days.

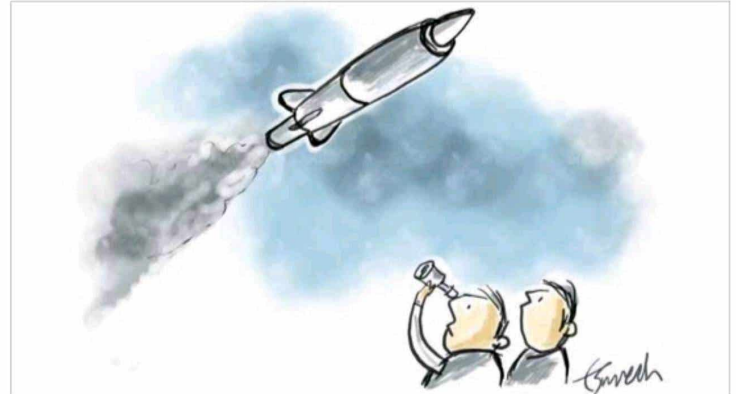
At Balakot both sides incurred the loss of one aircraft each while India also lost a helicopter due to friendly fire, all within 48 hours. There are other examples of air assets lost. But all these engagements were contact wars, some spread over years. Op Sindoor was an 88-hour non-contact, Beyond Visual Range (BVR) conflict.

For India, a developing economy and aspiring to be a developed nation by 2047, the cost of conflict and resultant homeland instability impinge negatively on development, especially when the outcome is non-decisive and deterrence only transitory. Pakistan will not cease to wage war, skirmishes and proxy wars as it has for the last 80 years.

Delhi failed to terminate war decisively because of not appreciating the strength of military power and the use of force. Hard power is built over time with costs and investments. The muscular counter-terrorism policy the BJP Government has adopted for over a decade was built on rhetoric, spending less than 2 per cent of GDP on defence. The absence of credible deterrence, erratic use of force and the unresolved issue of Kashmir led to the Pahalgam carnage and other terrorist incidents in Kashmir. Had a more serious view been taken of comprehensive national power, Pakistan would not have dared to bait India periodically. Op Sindoor, its tactical successes and strategic flaws necessitate an immediate defence review encompassing the entire span of the current BJP rule.

Since the appointment of CDS and Department of Military Affairs and the centrality of National Security Adviser and the Defence Planning Committee he leads, strategic thinking ought to have led to the enunciation of defence and security doctrines in turn could have facilitated the formation of Integrated Theatre Commands, still waiting to happen. The domination of air power will rejuvenate the debate on the indivisibility of air assets and put a spoke in the wheel of the early fruition of Theatre Commands.

First salvos in this regard have already been fired by IAF veterans. No longer is the IAF a support arm as late CDS Gen Bipin Rawat had forcefully averred. After Op



ASHOK K MEHTA

Sindoor, it emerged as the sword arm, persuading Army Chief Gen Upendra Dwivedi to skip the CII Military Partnership Summit, Delhi for blessings from the Rajguru of Chitrakoot temple who sought from Army Chief PoK as Guru Dakshina. While Air Chief Marshal AP Singh modestly stole the limelight at the summit following the stand-off

campaign of attrition of Pakistan Air Force air and land assets, Gen Dwivedi kept alive the relevance of land forces in the territorial conquest of PoK and in capturing and holding ground. Returning to reforms, the Government must immediately commit to higher defence spending, which is the manifest trend the world over following the Ukraine war entering its fourth year, the Gaza outrage in its third year, compound instabilities in West Asia and turbulence in the Indo-Pacific, especially the South China Sea. President Trump is telling NATO and Indo-Pacific allies to spend more on defence — 5 per cent for NATO and substantial but unspecified increases for Japan and South Korea. Earlier this month, Prime Minister Keir Starmer

announced his Government's first Strategic Defence Review and an increase from 2 to 2.5 per cent of GDP by 2027 and ultimately, targeting 3 per cent by 2034. He said these are not aspirational but achievable targets. He announced an immediate increase in defence spending of GBP 15 bn, saying additional capabilities will deter conflict, naming Russia (and China) as the main threat.

As India is afraid to name China as a threat, it does not have a written national security policy. Imagine Prime Minister Modi making similar announcements in his Mann ki Baat or an interview with ANI like Starmer did on BBC. He outlined the key ingredients of defence preparedness — the type of equipment the UK would build for its strategic and conventional deterrence and its focus on NATO First. NATO and Europe have three nuclear-armed nations to deter Russia and China.

The other two original nuclear-armed powers all together constitute the P5 in the UN Security Council. India's defence forces, on the other hand, have been hollowed out over time due to inadequate funding and lethargic procurement procedures. While Aatm-nirbharta is an undeniable great virtue, Delhi's dependence on Russia, France, the US, Israel, the UK and Germany for niche technologies makes self-reliance somewhat suspect.

Immediate injection of resources, especially in R&D, is imperative if the new normal

of enhanced thresholds of non-contact and hot war under the nuclear overhang is to be sustained. Business Standard's AK Bhattacharya, a long-term advocate of higher defence spending, recently suggested that there were two ways to do this: first, to break the limit on fiscal deficit; and the other to reduce capex to transfer funds to defence.

As this will affect growth, he said, accepting a higher fiscal deficit was the better option. There is a third way too. Past Finance Commissions have tossed ideas but the Government has not shown political courage to make the right choices as those will hurt its welfare schemes and impose a fresh burden on the taxpayer.

Periodic clashes with Pakistan have created uncertainties and instabilities that will deter FDI and discourage shifting supply chains to India. Delhi's import reliance on China is increasing phenomenally; in 2023-24 to USD 110 bn, which is almost twice India's defence budget. China remains the primary challenge, rival and competitor. Enhanced defence allocation will have meaning if defence acquisition processes are streamlined to ensure full utilisation of funds by the end of the fiscal. For too long, modernisation funds have had to be surrendered. Costs matter as much as outcomes.

(The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka, and a founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff. Views are personal)

PIC TALK



A young boy plays Rabaab on a Shikara in Dal Lake as weather remains pleasant in Kashmir Valley. PTI

India needs a smarter approach to crowd management

SECOND Opinion

In India, large gatherings are not rare disruptions. They are the norm. Cricket victories, political rallies, religious festivals, celebrity appearances, airport inaugurations — each can summon thousands, sometimes hundreds of thousands, into open public spaces, often with little formal planning. These crowds reflect India's energy and scale.

But they also present a persistent challenge: how to manage such gatherings safely, predictably, and without incident.

Recent tragedies have highlighted the cost of poor crowd management. But the solution lies not in stricter enforcement or post-incident inquiry; it lies in something India's governance structures too often overlook: systemic planning. Crowds in India are changing. They no longer assemble only for annual religious rituals or pre-scheduled political events. Instead, many now form spontaneously — mobilised in minutes via social media, often in semi-urban spaces not designed to handle them.

They are less hierarchical, more mobile, and more complex to anticipate. Policing such crowds with traditional methods — barricades, loudhailers, baton units — is both inefficient and increasingly inadequate. Frontline officers are experienced but often under-resourced. What is needed is not better policing, but better governance. India would benefit from codifying its

approach to mass gatherings into a National Framework for Crowd Management. This would not be a one-size-fits-all mandate but a flexible, tiered system of planning protocols — classified by crowd size, event type, and infrastructure profile.

Such a framework could formalise practices that are currently ad hoc. Risk assessments, exit planning, inter-agency co-ordination, and deployment checklists should be standard procedures, not left to individual discretion. Crowd safety should be integrated into disaster management plans and urban planning policies, rather than remaining solely the responsibility of district police officers. At the district level, the introduction of Joint Operations Centres (JOCs) — multi-agency units that co-ordinate planning and response during significant events — could vastly improve efficiency. Police, health services, fire departments, transportation authorities, and municipal bodies should work from a shared playbook with clear lines of authority and command. Technology can also do more of the heavy lifting. Many Indian cities are now equipped with CCTV networks and drone units.

These assets, combined with crowd-modelling software and AI-based density tracking, can provide real-time alerts and enable pre-emptive responses. In high-risk events, AI heatmaps can help guide crowd dispersal, monitor entry flows, and identify potential pressure points before they escalate into dangerous situations. However, few police units have access to this technology in a usable, integrated form.



OP SINGH

The Ministry of Home Affairs could bridge this gap by funding state-level pilot projects through the Modernisation of Police Forces scheme. Partnerships with Indian research institutions and private tech firms could yield homegrown solutions suited to India's unique conditions. Physical infrastructure often determines whether a crowd flows or clogs. India's urban spaces frequently lack adequate signage, multiple exits, or directional guidance for mass movement. Cities should be encouraged, through innovative city programmes or urban development grants, to incorporate crowd-conscious design into their routine infrastructure upgrades. For recurring high-density events, such as pilgrimages or local festivals, temporary modular infrastructure (barricades, elevated walkways, digital signage, and mobile medical units) can be deployed.

No system of control is complete without public co-operation. In moments of panic, communication — fast, accurate, and trusted — is critical. Police forces should develop public messaging strategies tailored to event type and local language, using both digital platforms and community networks. In areas with recurring gatherings, citizen engagement, through resident welfare associations, local leaders, and panchayats, can enhance both awareness and compliance. India's police forces learn constantly, but often in isolation. A national repository of After-Action Reports — brief, structured analyses of crowd events — could be maintained by the Bureau of Police Research and Development. Accountability, too, must evolve.

(The author is DGP and Head, Haryana State Narcotics Control Bureau. Views are personal)

Letters to the Editor

PM Modi to attend G7 summit

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's invitation to the upcoming G7 outreach meeting in Canada next week is seen as a precondition for Modi's participation in the day-long meeting, which follows the G7 Summit, amid ongoing tensions over the Hardeep Singh Nijjar killing. Carney had placed "conditions" on the invitation to the Indian Prime Minister, and Modi asked for time to decide on whether to accept the conditions or not.

Carney, facing domestic criticism for inviting Modi so soon after the RCMP accused Indian agents of involvement in Nijjar's murder. The G7 summit, scheduled for June 15-17 in Kananaskis, Alberta, will focus on "strengthening peace and security, countering foreign interference as well as transnational crime and improving joint responses to wildfires," according to Carney.

A Call for Balanced Governance

On the occasion of completing the first year of his third term the Prime Minister has appreciated himself for achieving the country's economy to grow to be the fourth largest in the world. His colleagues are also falling in line. No doubt, it deserves appreciation. India is also producing more billionaires than any other countries. But it is one part of the story. But equally important other part also needs to be considered. India is holding 105th place in Global Hunger Index in the list of 127 countries.

India is put on 'serious' category in the hunger list. In the Corruption Perception Index India is placed in 96th place with 38 points in the list of 180 countries. The country's place in World Happiness Report is 118 in the list of 147. Education policy and standard of education stand exposed for producing unemployable youth. Unemployment, especially among the educated youth, is growing to a staggering level. Above all 81 crore people are still depending on free ration. Manipur and Kashmir are yet to see peace and normal life. States are crying foul against the fading federal spirit and discriminatory treatments. The judiciary is forced to intervene to maintain the supremacy of the constitution. Attending these woes is also the duty of this Government, which the leaders are reminded of to attend to them with equal concern to ensure comprehensive development that benefits all.

Vande Bharat reaches Kashmir valley

The Vande Bharat Express, being put into service on the Jammu-Srinagar route, is specifically engineered to withstand severe winter conditions in the Himalayan region. It can improve connectivity and trade and commerce. Firstly, it reduces the travel time between the Jammu region, the Kashmir Valley, and the rest of the country.

The Vande Bharat train comes into play especially when inclement weather plays spoilsport, making roads and air travel congested or delayed. This special train, being put into service on the Jammu-Srinagar route, is specifically engineered to withstand severe winter conditions in the Himalayan region. It can improve connectivity and trade and commerce. It should boost the tourism sector, a key contributor to Jammu and Kashmir's economy, especially when we consider that horticulture is the breadwinner for a significant portion of the populace. It can greatly reduce travel time for products such as apples, plums, or cherries, thereby generating extra income for the natives. It can be said to a certain extent that railways have had a transformative effect on the cultural landscape of India. So, the recently launched Vande Bharat train can be seen as a harbinger of goodwill that should bridge cultural divides, especially in sensitive zones. This initiative holds immense potential to not only enhance economic prosperity but also foster greater national integration in the region.

INDUS WATER TREATY SUSPENSION IS IRREVERSIBLE

As proposed of the front-page news (June 9) on India's snub on the Indus Water Treaty 1960, post-Pahalgam massacre and Operation Sindoor, the reversal of the suspension of the treaty looks politically improbable fearing an outrage in India. The infrastructure plans for diverting Indus river tributaries to water-deficient regions of Jammu-Kashmir, Punjab, Haryana, and Rajasthan are under implementation. The intervention by any country or the World Bank is ruled out as they have no stakes, and the pressure tactics of the 1960s will not work. But Pakistan is itself responsible for this suspension. Until now, its leaders and Ministers had been threatening India on the Indus and its tributaries in a violent tone, but in vain. Pakistan has discriminated on water against certain states and on budgeting against Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa besides oppressive rules. Its allies in the past and present had only empowered it

with arms and ammunition, and army bases for their strategic gains, eyeing India. But Pakistan chose to play their tunes instead of strengthening itself with its most friendly neighbour, India, whose support for its sustenance economically and geographically was not just immensely invaluable but indispensable.

Most significantly, the partition itself was unviable, as it proves now beyond doubt, and the calls from PoK across the border resonate it. Such disruptive and secessionist political scenarios also look irreversible still their army supersedes the elected Governments. Pakistan still fails to see its future and seeks compensation in the name of grants and aids from the IMF, World Bank, and other countries, which comes at a heavy cost. The IWT is a more potential factor for Pakistan than any supplies of arms and ammunition. The friends and allies of Pakistan are in fact its worst enemies.

VINOD JONHAI (DELHI)

13 THE IDEAS PAGE

Bridging the chasm in Kashmir

Chenab Bridge is a statement of political will, a break from era of token gestures. But Kashmiris need empathy, not just infrastructure



AMITABH MATTOO

BRIDGES ARE NOT just made of steel. They are built of intent, of imagination, and will. The Chenab Bridge, the world's highest railway arch, unveiled last week in Jammu and Kashmir by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, is a triumph of engineering. But it is also something more: A national statement, that India will connect, invite, include—even in the face of terror, trauma and turbulence.

The Valley is no stranger to moments of hope disrupted by violence. The recent terrorism in Pahalgam was not just an act of brutality, it was a message. The timing was no accident. Terror knows when to strike; just when peace feels plausible.

But this time, India did not blink. Operation Sindoor was a firm military reply. Historians will analyse its long-term impact. Yet, the more out-of-the-box response came through words. A parliamentary delegation travelled to western Jammu with a simple truth: The violence was not a cry of grievance, but a campaign of subversion—designed, funded, and fuelled from across the border.

Yes, the diplomacy was choreographed, and the jury may still be out about how well it worked. But in today's world, choreography is power. If India does not write its own script, someone else will—often with distortion, sometimes with malice.

Pakistan's game is unchanged—public declarations of peace, private sponsorship of terror. Perpetual instability is its goal, not for the sake of the people of Kashmir, but for the politics of Rawalpindi. And in that game, every moment of progress in the Valley is a threat to Pakistan's script of victimhood. It thrives on narratives of woundedness, not healed communities.

And yet, against all odds, India builds. The Chenab Bridge is not just a rail link. It is a civilisational message. That we will connect where others exclude. That we will include where others exclude. That we will invest where others instigate. It is a span of steel, but also of sovereignty and solidarity. A bridge that pierces terror and cynicism alike. It rises not only from Earth but from a resolve to redeem. Much like Adi Shankara, who travelled to Kashmir in the eighth century to debate, learn and unify philosophical traditions, this bridge represents a modern yatra, not of conquest, but of connection.

PM Modi's approach to Kashmir is often flattened into a single frame: Security. That framing is not only outdated, it is inaccurate. Yes, his government has responded firmly to terror. But it has also poured unprecedented investment into the region's long-neglected civic infrastructure. In just a few years, thousands of kilometres of rural roads have been built. Electricity has reached villages long resigned to kerosene. Schools and health centres have seen real, visible upgrades. Tourism, once in freefall, was, before Pahalgam hap-



C.R. Sankumar

pened, witnessing an unprecedented revival.

The Chenab Bridge crystallises this vision. A structure that was once dismissed as impossible is now not just real, it is operational. That is not just governance. It is political will translated into steel. This marks a break from the era of token gestures and annual visits. Development is no longer an addendum to security—it is a strategy in itself. The goal is not just to pacify, but to empower. Not just to integrate, but to inspire. In Kashmir, that change matters. Because promises have been made before. What is different now is execution and expectation.

Still, let us not deceive ourselves. Steel can bind mountains, but only trust can bind people. What Kashmir needs is not just infrastructure. It needs empathy. It needs restoration. It needs a political imagination that moves from managing resentment to enabling partnership. From surveillance to self-worth. From control to confidence.

Let us speak honestly. Kashmiris have been let down, by militants who promised *azadi* and delivered ashes, by political leaders who ruled like feudal custodians, and by an administration that often confused governance with control. And yet, the people endure.

The teacher in Badgam who walks miles to open a one-room schoolhouse. The farmer in Baramulla coaxing apples from stubborn soil. The university professor in Ganderbal working through internet cuts and security alerts. The real reporter who writes what she sees, not what she's told. The shawl weavers of Kanthama who live to produce their art. The Pandit who stayed behind, despite the threats, because the Valley is her soul's address. These are not just vignettes. They are the warp and weft of Kashmir's dignity.

These individuals do not speak in slogans. They live real lives. They want peace, yes, but also justice, jobs, and agency. They do not need to be managed; they need to be trusted. It is they who must be the centre of any sustainable strategy, not as passive recipients, but as active agents of renewal.

Kashmir is not only about its grand nar-

Kashmir is not only about its grand nar-

ratives; it is about its quiet continuities. It is time policy recognised this reality. This year's Kheer Bhawani Mela, though muted, still whispered of a pluralism not yet extinguished. That flicker, of coexistence, of faiths entwined, must not be allowed to die. It is what makes Kashmir not just a conflict, but a civilisational crossroads. The spirit of Lal Ded, who sang in mystic verse of truth beyond division, still echoes in the Valley—a voice that united Muslim and Hindu, scholar and shepherd, in a language of shared humanity.

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India must not, however, make the mistake of assuming that silence is acceptance. That the absence of bullets means the presence of peace. A secure Kashmir is not a subdued Kashmir. It is a Kashmir that speaks, votes, disagrees, dreams.

Pakistan will try again. It will send men, money, misinformation. It will exploit every gap, every grievance. That is why this is a moment of reckoning.

We can retreat, once again, into a familiar cycle of grief, blame, and bureaucracy. Or we can build. Slowly, steadily, with steel and with soul.

Let the Chenab Bridge remind us: No chasm is too wide if we dare to span it. As someone whose life has been shaped by this land, as a scholar, a resident, a son of the Valley, I say this: Do not reduce Kashmir to security jargon or poetic cliché. It deserves more. It demands more. It is time to restore its place, not on the margins, but at the heart of the Indian idea.

The Valley stands today between a tragedy in Pahalgam and a triumph in Chenab. One reveals our vulnerabilities. The other, our possibilities.

Let us choose wisely.

The writer is professor and dean of the School of International Studies at Jawahar Institute of Management, New Delhi, and honorary professor at the University of Melbourne, Australia

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"It is a mark of Americans' pride in their capacity for self-government that federal troops intervene in what should be local matters only in the rarest of circumstances. This did not need to be one of them."
—THE WASHINGTON POST

From dreams to deeds

Eleven years of inclusive growth have taken people beyond subsidies and services—and given them a firm belief in a better future



ASHWINI VAISHNAV

A NEW BHARAT is taking shape—where progress is measured not only in GDP, but in dignity and opportunity. Annam Lakshmi Bhavani, a homemaker from Kadapa, secures the Mudra loan to start a successful jute bag manufacturing unit. Jagdev Singh in Jaryana makes decisions related to his crops using an AI app. And Meera Manjhi gets an LPG connection under Ujjwala, ensuring a smokeless kitchen and more quality time with her children. These are everyday realities of villages, towns, and cities across Bharat. These transformations stem from structural reforms and a leadership that believes in empowering the last citizen.

From the very beginning, our guiding philosophy has been antyodh—uplifting people at the bottom of the pyramid. This vision, guided by the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, is based on four simple yet powerful pillars. Building infrastructure that connects, growth that is inclusive, manufacturing that creates jobs, and simplifying systems that empower.

Capital expenditure has grown significantly in the past 11 years, reaching Rs 11.2 lakh crore in 2025-26. This surge in public investment is most visible in India's infrastructure—physical, digital, and social. Over the past 11 years, nearly 59,000 km of highways have been built, and over 37,500 km of railway tracks laid. Recently, the Chenab and Anji bridges were inaugurated—symbols of a modern Bharat. For the people of Kashmir, the arrival of Vande Bharat through these bridges felt like a dream.

This spirit of connectivity goes beyond railways to digital highways. India's digital public infrastructure (DPI) has become a global benchmark. UPI, Aadhaar, and DigiLocker are now studied globally for their scale and inclusiveness. Over 141 crore Aadhaar registrations and 60 crore UPI transactions every day signify their reach and acceptance. The idea behind this is simple: Democratic technology.

The same vision drives the IndiaAI Mission. Over 34,000 high-speed computer chips, known as GPUs, are now available to all at just one-third the global cost. These chips are needed as part of AI development. To support this further, the AIKsha platform offers over 370 datasets and 200 ready-to-use AI models for learning and innovation.

This focus on accessibility extends beyond tech to education, healthcare, and basic services. Over the past 11 years, the number of medical colleges has grown from 387 to 780, and AIIMS institutions from seven to 23. MBBS and PG seats have also more than doubled. Over 530 million Jan Dhan accounts have been opened—more than the population of Europe. Forty million homes have been built, 120 million toilets constructed, and 100 million families now cook with clean LPG instead of wood fire. Tapwater connections have also reached 140 million households under "Har Ghar Jal". Health insurance under Ayushman Bharat covers

350 million people, and 110 million farmers now receive direct income support through PM-KISAN. These numbers come alive through the stories of people like Meera Manjhi, the 100-millionth Ujjwala beneficiary. She mentions how Rs 2.5 lakh was credited directly to her bank account without any middleman. She now has tap water, free rations every month, and a smokeless kitchen under Ujjwala. This is inclusive growth at a magnitude not seen during any period in our recent history.

In 2015, we launched Make in India to create jobs and revive industrial growth. Today, electronics manufacturing has increased six times to cross Rs 12 lakh crore. Electronics exports have increased eight times to cross Rs 3 lakh crore to become among the top exported goods. Bharat is now the second largest mobile phone producer. We are now deepening the manufacturing value chain by producing electronic components under the new Electronic Components Manufacturing Scheme.

Simultaneously, India's semiconductor mission is moving from blueprint to breakthrough. The country's first commercial lab is under construction; five OSAT units are underway; over 20 chips with indigenous IP have been designed by students and engineers in India. We have onboarded 270 universities with world-class EDA tools. This is the foundation for a semiconductor talent pipeline the world can rely on.

A silent revolution of the past decade has been in governance. Over 1,500 local laws were repealed; 40,000-plus compliances removed. New laws like the Telecom Act and DPDP Act are built on trust and simplicity, treating citizens with dignity, not suspicion. This has encouraged investment, innovation, and formalisation, creating a virtuous growth cycle.

Bharat's approach to terror, too, has changed. From surgical strikes to air strikes and now Operation Sindoor, Bharat has shown clarity and courage in its fight against terror. Each response reflects a swift, decisive action—on our own terms. This new way of responding to terror attacks is part of the Modi doctrine. It is based on three pillars. Decisive retaliation on Bharat's terms, zero tolerance for nuclear blackmail, and no distinction between terrorists, their sponsors. What made our response this time even more significant was the use of indigenous technologies and capabilities. Announcing aspiring to become *viksit* must not only define its people but do so with *atmanirbharta*—and Bharat did exactly that.

In 2004, at the end of Atal (Bihari Vajpayee) ji's tenure, India was the 11th largest economy in the world. Between 2004 and 2014, India remained at the 11th position, reflecting a decade of missed momentum. In the past decade, Bharat regained momentum due to the reformist policies of PM Modi. Today, we are firmly on the path to become the third-largest economy in the world.

Under the leadership of PM Modi, these 11 years of inclusive growth have given people something more valuable than subsidies or services. They've given them a belief. And a firm belief in a better future is what keeps the nation going.

The author is Union Minister for Railways, Electronics & Information Technology, and Information & Broadcasting



D S HOODA

The new normal post-Sindoor

Military and diplomatic responses must be proactive, not crisis-driven

A MONTH AFTER the launch of Operation Sindoor, it is an opportune moment to step back and assess the broader strategic insights emerging from this short but intense conflict. Much of the public conversation so far has remained fixated on tactical details such as counting destroyed targets, comparing aircraft losses, and evaluating the performance of weapon systems.

While such tactical assessments are necessary for refining military operations and capability development, they offer only a limited view. The real value lies in strategic takeaways and insights that can help us anticipate the contours of the next India-Pakistan crisis and shape our national response.

For India, the operation validated the new strategic doctrine of punitive military response to major terror attacks. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has stated that India will not distinguish between governments sponsoring terrorism and terrorist masterminds. This means that India will impose direct costs on the Pakistan military for acts of terrorism. In Operation Sindoor, while the initial targets were terrorist camps, the conflict rapidly escalated with strikes on military targets deep within Pakistan.

The use of military force in responding to terror attacks has risen sharply from the 2016 surgical strikes and the 2019 Balakot airstrikes to the current operation. It is now clear that cost-imposition has become a fundamental part of India's counter-terrorism strategy. Pakistan understands that its nuclear posturing is no longer a deterrent for India to use military force, albeit in a limited man-

ner. However, that does not mean that its nuclear forces have lost their utility. While there was no overt nuclear signalling in this crisis, it is possible that Pakistan raised the nuclear bogey with the US, which led to a flurry of calls between Washington, New Delhi, and Islamabad one day before the ceasefire was announced.

In the future, Pakistan may possibly lean even more heavily on its nuclear deterrent, seeking to constrain India's conventional options to a level Islamabad believes it can absorb without catastrophic losses. Although India has decisively won this round, the damage to Pakistan's military infrastructure is not so crippling that it would be prohibited from retaliating swiftly to any Indian future military strike.

Notions of victory and defeat are now not defined by material losses but by dominating the war of narratives. Both sides have declared victory—India in targeting terror camps and winning the escalation battle, and Pakistan in responding decisively to Indian aggression and causing aircraft losses. A flood of fake news and misinformation obscures facts, and wins could be scored irrespective of the facts on the ground. By cherry-picking metrics that define success, it is easy to sell your own story to a domestic public audience.

Drones, missiles, and standoff precision weapons are now the favoured weapons of war. While neither the air forces nor ground troops crossed into each other's territory, significant damage was caused to Pakistan's military infrastructure by BrahMos missiles and air-launched SCALP and Hammer munitions.

Pakistan claimed to have shot down Indian fighter jets using beyond-visual-range air-to-air missiles while remaining in their airspace.

There is an attractiveness to the use of unmanned and long-range systems as they minimise human losses and appear almost risk-free. It has been reported that the Indian military is now shopping for kamikaze drones, loitering munitions, missiles, and counter-drone systems. Pakistan is also exploring purchasing additional armed drones from China and Turkey.

Based on the lessons internalised by both sides, how could the next India-Pakistan crisis unfold? It would likely be more technologically advanced, faster-paced, and potentially broader in scope.

The 2025 clash has been dubbed by some analysts as South Asia's first drone war. However, it was limited in scale and scope compared to the Ukraine conflict, where drones occupy a dominant space on the battlefield. In a possible conflict, swarms of armed drones, guided by AI and real-time data, could be used to overwhelm air defences and strike military installations. The side that masters drone warfare and counter-drone measures will have a significant edge. Additionally, precision-guided munitions will be ubiquitous, increasing lethality and the speed at which critical targets are destroyed. We could possibly also expect the geography of the conflict to expand.

The expansion of geography will also move to the digital realm. There will be an attempt by both sides to dominate the information domain by shaping the narrative

from the very start of the conflict. India needs to start putting in place an effective information warfare strategy to deal with fake news and disinformation that would immediately flood social media at the start of the crisis. There could also be more disruptive cyberattacks on critical infrastructure.

Despite both sides accepting that limited military action under a nuclear overhang is possible, the nuclear shadow will still loom large. Pakistan could start its nuclear signalling very early in the conflict by bringing in international mediation before India brings its conventional superiority to bear. India has warned that Pakistan's nuclear blackmail does not deter it and is unlikely to halt operations unless it has some clear results to show that it has dominated the conflict. If misread, the conflicting signals from both sides could lead to a rapid escalation.

As India sharpens its military response to cross-border terrorism, its diplomatic posture must evolve in parallel. Indian diplomacy should not remain reactive or solely crisis-driven. Instead, it must proactively shape the strategic environment by building international consensus on Pakistan's role in sponsoring terrorism and ensuring that global powers are not blindsided when the next crisis erupts. The seamless alignment of clear political objectives, military strength and diplomatic finesse will define India's ability to shape the outcomes.

The writer retired as General Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the Indian Army's Northern Command

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

TOOTHLESS T20

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'A new T20 for the win' (IE, June 10). To support the idea of forming a 'Twenty Against Terrorism' coalition led by India, the author has cited the effectiveness of other small multinational groupings. However, two of those referenced—the Quad and I2U2—contain one or more powerful nations, whereas the proposed T20 bloc would consist of less powerful countries. The third example, ASEAN, is a group to promote socio-cultural and economic development, not counter terrorism. The T20 is unlikely to be effective due to a lack of teeth.

Rajinder Kumar Popli, New Delhi

READY AND STEADY

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'The communication front' (IE, June 10). What Operation Sindoor has done is enough. The CDS has confirmed that the Air Force sustained losses in the opening exchanges. The armed forces demonstrated an ability to absorb initial losses, adapt rapidly, and respond in a forceful yet measured manner. The Indian government's declaration that any future attacks will be met with decisive military response implies a standing readiness that will now require persistent operational vigilance, particularly from the Air Force and intelligence services.

SS Paul, Nadia

LEGACY OF NEGLECT

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Chasing glory, building Bharat' (IE, June 10). With the world's largest population, India ranked 71st at the Paris Olympics, well below far less populous nations. Major hurdles include underinvestment in sports, failure to develop talent from a young age, sending fewer athletes and support staff to games, health challenges and socio-cultural barriers. Although India is taking measures, overcoming the legacy of historical neglect, cultural biases and policy failures will require persistent planning and strong political will.

Vaibhav Goyal, Chandigarh

Devang Ganesh Thosar, New Delhi

How astronauts reach International Space Station

It will take around 28 hours for Indian astronaut Shubhanshu Shukla to reach the ISS from a launchpad in Florida. Here's a look at what his journey will entail

ALIND CHAUHAN
NEW DELHI, JUNE 10

THE AXIOM-4 Mission to the International Space Station (ISS) will launch from the Kennedy Space Centre in Cape Canaveral, Florida, on Wednesday.

The mission will take a crew of four astronauts — American Peggy Whitson, Indian Shubhanshu Shukla, Polish Sławosław Uznanski-Wisniewski, and Hungarian Tibor Kapu — to the ISS aboard SpaceX's Crew Dragon spacecraft which will be launched by the company's Falcon 9 rocket. Shukla is set to become only the second Indian to venture into space.

What will his journey to the ISS look like? How much time will it take to reach the space station? And once there, how will the Dragon capsule dock with the ISS?

Planning the flight

Before launching any mission to space, scientists first have to select a launch window, that is, a time slot in which the spacecraft must be launched so it can reach its intended destination, be it a space station like the ISS or a celestial body like the Moon or Mars.

EXPLAINED SPACE

Since everything in space — including the ISS — is in constant motion, it is not viable for a mission to be launched at just any time. Celestial alignment is essential for any mission to be viable. Scientists make complex calculations to ensure that the trajectory of the spacecraft aligns with the trajectory of the intended destination.

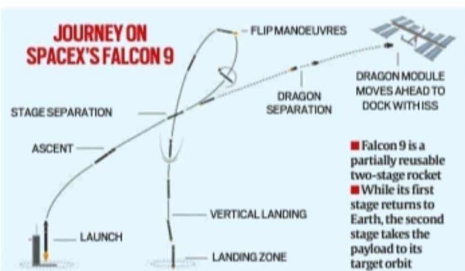
In case of missions to the ISS, spacecraft orbit around Earth multiple times to align with the orbit of the space station. Such a trajectory also makes any mission viable in terms of the fuel needed.

If a spacecraft were to travel to its destination in a straight trajectory, it would have to continuously accelerate to counteract gravitational forces, which would be inefficient in terms of the fuel needed.

Spacecraft usually travel in a curved trajectory upon reaching a certain altitude and velocity, which minimises the energy they need to expend to counteract the force of gravity.

The rocket & capsule

Falcon 9 is a partially reusable rocket designed and manufactured by Elon Musk-owned SpaceX. It is used to transport satellites, cargo and the Dragon spacecraft to low



Earth orbit (an altitude of 2,000 km or less) and beyond.

The rocket has two stages. The first stage or booster stage comprises nine Merlin engines (a family of rocket engines developed by SpaceX), and aluminium-lithium alloy tanks containing liquid oxygen and rocket-grade kerosene propellant. The second stage consists of a single Merlin engine.

After the lift-off, as Falcon-9 reaches the

edge of the atmosphere, it typically cuts off its main engines. Once the rocket is beyond the atmosphere, the first stage separates from the second stage.

While the first stage re-enters the atmosphere and lands vertically, the second stage continues its journey towards the targeted orbit with the help of its Merlin engine. Soon after, the Dragon capsule separates from the second stage.

Dragon's path to the ISS

Given that the ISS is 400 km above Earth and is a moving target at the speed of about 28,000 kph, the Dragon spacecraft has to raise its altitude gradually, and align its trajectory with the space station.

The spacecraft does so by performing a series of phasing manoeuvres — they enable the Dragon to change its orbit — with the help of 16 Draco thrusters. Each thruster is capable of generating 90 pounds of force in the vacuum of space.

Note that while the Dragon spacecraft typically takes 28 hours to reach from the launchpad to the ISS, other spacecraft such as Russia's Soyuz take up to just eight hours to cover the same journey.

One of the reasons why the Dragon is slower is that it is a relatively newer spacecraft (it was first launched in 2012) compared to, let's say, Soyuz, which has a long and proven flight history. SpaceX is still in the process of developing mathematical models for optimal start time and phasing manoeuvres.

Due to this, astronauts aboard the Dragon conduct multiple tests of all the spacecraft's systems and collect and transmit data about its operation to Earth which makes its rendezvous time longer.

The docking

When the Dragon capsule gets close enough to the ISS, it establishes communication with the space station and performs its final phase manoeuvre. Then, the spacecraft enters an imaginary 200 metres bubble around the ISS known as the "keep-out sphere", and aligns with the space station's docking port. At this point, the Dragon capsule initiates its autonomous docking system and slowly moves towards the ISS to finally dock with it. This happens while both are moving at great speeds but are almost at rest relative to each other.

The spacecraft carries out autonomous docking with the help of GPS sensors, cameras and imaging sensors such as Lidar (laser ranging) on its nosecone. All these sensors feed data back to the flight computer which then uses algorithms that determine — based on this information — how to fire the thrusters to most effectively get to the docking target. If needed, the astronauts on board can also take over manual control of the spacecraft.

After the docking is done, it takes between one and two hours for the spacecraft to stabilise and carry out safety checks. Subsequently, transfer gates are opened, and astronauts enter the ISS.

EXPLAINED WILDLIFE

WHY KERALA WANTS WILDLIFE ACT AMENDED TO KILL SOME ANIMALS



Bonnet macaques (a monkey species) have forced farmers to abandon agricultural land in Kerala. Wikimedia Commons

SHAJU PHILIP

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, JUNE 10

KERALA HAS sought the Union government's nod to kill wild animals that pose a threat to human life and property. The state wants the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 amended to allow the killing of certain wild animals that foray into human habitats.

The problem

Wildlife attacks have emerged as a major issue in Kerala, with the government identifying 273 of the 941 village local bodies as hotspots. Mainly, the tiger, leopard, elephant, lion, wild boar, bonnet macaque and peafowl have led to problems in human habitations.

Although bonnet macaque (a monkey species) and peafowl do not pose a threat to life, their repeated raids have forced farmers to abandon vast tracts of agricultural land.

As many as 919 people were killed and 8,967 others injured in wildlife attacks in the state from 2016-17 to 2024-25 (till January 31), according to government data.

The factors

As is the case in other regions of India, deforestation for expanding residential areas and infrastructure has cut into the spaces for the wildlife population. Animals are then forced to move out of forests as the quality of their habitats declines. Additionally, increased grazing of domestic cattle in forest areas also brings them in closer contact with humans and livestock.

Notably, the increase in the population of wild pigs and various species of monkeys is of concern in Kerala.

The laws

The existing legal framework puts several constraints on taking timely action in emergencies, officials said, especially in the case of animals protected under Schedule I of the 1972 Act.

Before ordering the killing of dangerous wild animals, the state chief wildlife warden should be convinced that the animal cannot be captured, tranquillised or shifted to another place. Captured animals should not be held in confinement. The government also has to follow advisories of the Tiger Conservation Authority and the Project Elephant Scheme while dealing with human-wildlife conflict.

While the district collector can issue orders for the removal of a public nuisance, courts order prevent the invocation of these powers in case of wild animals.

State Forest Minister A K Saseendran said, "We are not looking for powers for the indiscriminate killing of wild animals. Culling of animals posing a threat to life and cultivation should be allowed for a certain period... All preventive measures, such as fencing, have failed to stop animal attacks."

The minister added that in the case of wild boars, the wild boar control system (in which licensed shooters are allowed to kill crop-raiding animals) has failed. "Before shooting a wild boar, one has to examine whether it is pregnant or not. Such impractical guidelines have failed to serve the purpose," he added.

The state wants wild boars to be declared as vermin for a certain period under section 62 of the Act.

Kerala also wants to address the threat posed by bonnet macaques by removing them from the category of Schedule I, which it entered in 2022.

ARJUN SENGUPTA
NEW DELHI, JUNE 10

INDIAN AIR FORCE officer Shubhanshu Shukla on Wednesday will become only the second Indian to travel to space. The first was Rakesh Sharma, whose Soyuz T-11 spacecraft lifted off from Baikonur Cosmodrome in Soviet Kazakhstan on April 3, 1984 — exactly 15,044 days ago. Here's the story.

Milestone in Indo-Soviet ties

Sharma's voyage was a part of the Soviet Interkosmos programme which sent 17 non-Soviet cosmonauts to space between 1978 and 1991. First mooted in the 1960s, "those behind [Interkosmos] described it as a means of establishing mutually beneficial relations with Eastern Bloc countries through unmanned and manned space ventures," wrote Colin Burgess and Bert Vis in *Interkosmos: The Eastern Bloc's Early Space Programme* (2016).

Although technically non-aligned, India had drifted towards the Soviet Union since the late 1960s. Among other things, this led to significant cooperation in the space sector. The Soviets provided equipment and technical assistance, apart from facilitating the launch of India's earliest satellites Aryabhata (1975), Bhaskara I (1979) and Bhaskara II (1981).

Sharma's spaceflight in 1984 was the pinnacle of Indo-Soviet cooperation in space. First envisaged in 1979, Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev suggested a joint Indo-Soviet space mission to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi during his visit to India in 1980. The mission received official confirmation a year later.

The IAF was tasked with selecting two pilots who would be given cosmonaut training by the Soviets. Its eventual choice: Sharma and Ravish Malhotra, both accomplished IAF test pilots.

(Test pilots, adept at handling and analysing performance of all kinds of aircraft, are often considered to be the *crème de la crème* of pilots. This makes them ideal for manning spacecraft: historically many astronauts/cosmonauts — including Neil Armstrong, the first man to step on the Moon — have been test pilots. Shukla is also a test pilot.)

From September 1982, Sharma and Malhotra underwent rigorous training, primarily at the Yuri Gagarin Centre in Star City, some 50 km from Moscow.



Boris Volynov, the senior administrator at the cosmonaut training centre, said of the two trainees: "They are goal-oriented people. Ravish and Rakesh came to us with no knowledge of Russian. Within a short time they not only learned it, but developed a good command of it; they take their lecture notes, read documents and take exams — all in Russian" (as per a report in *Soviet Weekly* on April 21, 1983).

Sharma was eventually chosen to be a part of the three-member crew — along with veteran Soviet cosmonauts Yuriy Malyshev and Gennady Strekalov — which would travel to the Salyut 7 orbital station in 1984. Malhotra was a part of the backup crew.

Sharma's stay in space

The Soyuz T-11 spacecraft perched atop a 14-storey rocket lifted off from Baikonur at 6.38 pm IST on April 3, 1984. "The lift-off was an awe-some spectacle as the rocket streaked into a clear sky with its tail of flame filling the space with crimson glow and the roar of its mighty engine shaking the earth for miles around," this newspaper's April 4, 1984 edition reported.

Nine minutes after the launch, the spacecraft entered its pre-determined orbit around Earth, making Sharma the first Indian, and 138th person overall, to voyage into space. India became only the 14th nation to send a person to space.

On April 4, 25 hours after lift-off, the Soyuz T-11 spacecraft docked with the Salyut 7 space station. The crew spent the next



(Top) April 4, 1984, edition of *The Indian Express*. (Left) Rakesh Sharma received the Ashoka Chakra from then President Giani Zail Singh at the Rashtrapati Bhavan in Delhi in May 1984. Archive

week conducting various scientific experiments aboard the station, which orbited Earth at an altitude of more than 200 km. "There was so much hectic activity on board the spaceship, so many things that each of us had to do, that we literally had no time to sit around and stare into space..." Sharma later said in an interview (as quoted by Burgess and Vis).

One of the most important scientific objectives of the mission was the Terra experiment for which Sharma and co piloted a series of pictures of India from space in order to "study the natural resources of the subcontinent and adjacent areas of the Indian Ocean".

The cosmonauts "photographed the Nicobar and Andaman islands with a view to detecting shoals that might yield oil and gas, inspected the forested areas and tree plantations in the central part of the subcontinent, the Ganges River basin, the glacial and snow cover of the Himalayas, and individual ocean areas in order to determine their biological productivity," Burgess and Vis wrote.

The crew also carried out several material science experiments exploring the possibility of exploiting conditions of microgravity to produce special forms of metallic materials which are impervious to radiation, high temperatures and aggressive media.

Then there were a bunch of medical experiments geared towards learning more about the effects of microgravity on human physiology, including muscles and the cardiovascular system. One experiment actually

began three months before lift-off, with Sharma and Malhotra switching from the Soviet fitness regimen to a one based on yoga.

The idea was to "assess whether yoga might assist space travellers to cope better with weightlessness, and even overcome... 'space sickness' that impaired the performance of some astronauts and cosmonauts during their first few days in space". Sharma even practised yoga — a set of five pre-determined asanas — daily on the space station, tethered to some gym equipment for support in the microgravity environment of space.

A hugely symbolic event

Rakesh Sharma went to space at a time when India's own space programme was in its infancy, and the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) was decades away from even contemplating sending an Indian to space. As such, the mission had limited practical benefits for the Indian space programme.

Sharma, humble as ever, has repeatedly underplayed his personal achievement, calling the mission "a hugely symbolic event" more than anything else. Of course, that does not make it any less important.

Apart from being a major milestone in Indo-Soviet relations — Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on the day of the launch said the mission "was yet another outstanding example of constructive cooperation for the good of our two peoples" — for millions of Indians, Sharma's flight was an inspirational moment, one that evoked national pride.

Planners were very much conscious of the mission's symbolic importance. Sharma was sent to space with a small amount of soil from Raj Ghat, and portraits of Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, President Zail Singh, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, and then Defence Minister (later President) R Venkataraman, as well as "fresh mangoes and other Indian foods for all the crew to consume aboard the Salyut-7 station", Burgess and Vis wrote.

During the stay, Sharma had a televised conversation with Prime Minister Gandhi which was broadcast to millions of Indians on Doordarshan. The cosmonaut's prompt reply to her asking him how India looked from space is today the stuff of legend. "Sare jahan se achha (Better than the entire world)," said Sharma, quoting Iqbal's iconic patriotic poem.

The crew made a triumphant return to Earth on April 11, 1984.

AI lag shadow over design updates, is Apple headed the Nokia way?

ANIL SASI

NEW DELHI, JUNE 10

APPLE ON Monday announced iOS 26, the biggest redesign of its software backend in years. Laggard behind in Big Tech's Artificial Intelligence (AI) race, the question for Apple was whether it would redeem itself at its annual Worldwide Developers Conference (WWDC), a pre-summer event that draws developers in droves to its Cupertino headquarters in California. The answer may be a resounding no.

Beyond some snazzy updates on its 'Liquid Glass' display and some whitening around the edges to improve the backend operating system, Apple does not seem to have come up with a real breakthrough at WWDC25.

EXPLAINED TECH

Issues with Apple Intelligence

In 2023, Apple unveiled a mixed-reality headset that has been little more than a niche product. Last year's WWDC heralded its first major foray into the AI space, with a range of new software features accompanied by the promise of a smarter Siri. This was all part of what the company called Apple Intelligence. Apple's stock surged by more than \$200 billion the following day — one of the biggest single-day gains of any company in American history.

The showing at this year's WWDC is clearly more underwhelming.

Analysts are pointing to the potential mistake of Apple persisting with attempts to basically build on Siri, rather than starting from scratch in the way that some others have.

Microsoft, for instance, invested early in Perplexity, an AI-powered search engine.

It is now reaping the benefits of ChatGPT-driven Copilot being integrated into Microsoft systems. Apple Intelligence is not a patch on other voice-activated AI assistance bots such as Google's Gemini.

Despite the fact that it was one of the early movers in the backend chip design business, and given that the company has the resources to spend on R&D, Apple is seen as falling considerably behind in the software pivot. So much so that comparisons are being drawn to Finnish telecoms major Nokia, a market leader in handsets that was disrupted by Apple itself in the mid-2000s.

New opportunity in wearables

To be fair, Apple has acknowledged that its hardware bestseller, the smartphone, could be a thing of the past in less than a decade. Apple's rivals have been faster off the block to explore new use cases, with both

Google and Meta betting on AI-infused smart glasses, alongside Chinese competitors including Xiaomi and Baidu. OpenAI, the developer of ChatGPT where Microsoft has a stake, has meanwhile announced a software-to-hardware pivot, after it recently announced a \$6.4-billion deal to buy a firm created by Jony Ive, Apple's former chief designer for more than 25 years, to build an AI device.

While Apple has a product of the future in its Vision Pro headset, that is still a big chunky device compared with the new Meta glasses. And now, as it works with OpenAI, the collaboration could include wearables, meaning Apple could have another big problem on its hands.

Leveraging data

Apple does have a billion phones out there, and most of the world's premium users to boot. But Apple's unwillingness to Hoover

up customers' individual information, however creditable that might be from a privacy point of view, makes it harder for the company to train personalised AI models.

As part of its 'differential privacy' policy, Apple uses collective insights, rather than the granular data scraped up by companies such as Google. Also, according to *The Economist*, privacy has encouraged Apple to prioritise AI that runs on its own devices, rather than in the cloud infrastructure, even as chatbots have advanced more rapidly in the cloud because the models can be much bigger in scale. The result is that Apple has had to offer some users of Apple Intelligence an opt-in to ChatGPT — clearly a compromise of sorts.

Apple's struggle on the AI front is also being compared to its previous shortcomings: the Apple TV project and the Apple car, both of which never materialised despite years of backend work.

iOS 26's biggest changes

Not that iOS 26 is all fluff. The big change this year is the customer interface redesign. 'Liquid Glass' is a new translucent interface that makes the OS look like the glass look. Popular apps like Safari and the camera have also been redesigned to make the screen look and feel bigger. CarPlay has been tweaked.

Also, there is now an automatic call screening facility that jumps in to answer a call from an unknown number, prompting the caller to say who they are. Once the caller shares their name and the reason for their call, only then does the phone ring. There is hold assist, which detects hold music. The phone sits on hold for the user and alerts them when a human has come on the line.

But in all of this, the company is merely playing catch up to Google and Samsung. Apple needs its bite back.

India's aviation sector set for exponential growth

THE airports of tomorrow are embracing cutting-edge technology to enhance the entire travel experience. Facial recognition, biometric scans, and AI-driven security checks will become the norm, making the journey from check-in to boarding gate smoother and reducing passenger queuing time by 30-40 per cent. India's remarkable aviation trajectory—now the world's third-largest domestic market, contributes 1.5 per cent to the national GDP and supports 7.7 million jobs. Over the last decade, more than 85 airports have been developed, with a roadmap to scale that number to 350 by 2047 in line with the Viksit Bharat goal. Strengthening digital ecosystems to manage rising cybersecurity risks has also been identified as a crucial area

of focus. With over \$12 billion already invested in air transport infrastructure, India is setting its sights on capturing a \$4 billion share of the global Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul (MRO) market by 2031, with the aim of establishing itself as a self-reliant aviation hub. Integrated multi-modal transport systems, Artificial Intelligence (AI)-powered digital initiatives and net zero terminal cores are pivotal for creating globally benchmarked, passenger-centric infrastructure.

By adopting AI, Machine Learning (ML), RFID, and advanced passenger information systems, India's aviation sector can shift from manual checks to smarter, targeted interventions. This transformation will make the aviation infrastructure more secure and passen-

ger-friendly, which are both essential for the future of the country's aviation. However, there is a need to build infrastructure that is resilient, adaptive and efficient. Greenfield airports offer the luxury of blank canvas while brownfield sites may face constraints for unique, smart and adaptive design solutions. It is said that the future lies in modular construction, digital first terminal cores that centralize operations, passenger movement and energy management. For that, early-stage collaborations are critical. Further, drawing insights from operations, policy shifts, and tech trends helps avoid costly course corrections. There is also a need for a terminal design language rooted in sustainability, with built-in readiness for climate volatility, aging

demographics, rapid digital changes and hybrid spaces that can handle intensity and downtime with equal ease. Aligning this vision with financial models that attract private investment is the key to delivering aviation infrastructure that is future-ready and locally responsive.

On the workforce front, India is fast emerging as a global aviation talent hub. But it still faces a significant manpower gap. While pilot eligibility has widened, training for cabin crew and ground staff remains limited to in-house airline programmes. Opening this up to universities and private institutes is the key to scaling talent and meeting both domestic and international demand. With inclusive frameworks and the right incentives, India

can not only bridge its local workforce shortage but also position itself as a global training destination, strengthening the country's role in the international aviation ecosystem. Furthermore, given the market dynamics, the aviation sector in India is set for rapid expansion. With under 10 per cent of the population currently flying, the sector needs to prepare for exponential growth by scaling up operations with smart, cost-efficient technologies. The rapid pace of innovation in this space is not only enhancing domestic operations but creating airport solutions the world is now adopting. India has a real opportunity to transform its aviation ecosystem by 2047 when the country celebrates its 100 years of Independence.

LETTERS

Handcuffing incident exposes arrogance of US administration

THE handcuffing incident exposes the arrogance of U.S. administration, especially while dealing with India and its citizens. The hapless Indian student did not commit any treason, but is facing deportation, for which, he need not be handcuffed. I don't know why parents from India want their children to pursue higher studies in the United States, which has ceased to be an 'Eldorado'. In fact, it is gripped with internal strife, rising violence and racial discrimination. USA may be a superpower, but its administration must not ignore the fact that India is an 'emerging superpower'.

R J Janardhana Rao, Gudimalkapur road, Hyderabad-28.

An in human act

THE disturbing incident at Newark has expectedly sparked widespread outrage. Handcuffing an Indian student and pinning him to the ground prior to his deportation is an 'inhuman' act. Unfortunately, such incidents have been occurring with an alarming frequency. The Modi-Trump friendship should have at least ensured a dignified deportation, rather than treating the student like a criminal or a terrorist. It's imperative that the Indian Government uses its good offices to facilitate smooth deportations of students, without subjecting them to a traumatic treatment that may haunt them all through their life.

Ganti Venkata Sudhir, Secunderabad

Railways should invest in technology upgrade

AFTER every train accident, the railway minister and administrators come up with their versions about how and what led to the mishap. Compensation is released to families of victims immediately. I suggest that the railways should invest more on technology upgrade to ensure safety of drivers, passengers and trains. All engines shall have display screens with aural and visual warning generators. The display screens have to indicate the track ahead, gauges, signals and the train ahead along with the speed, acceleration and vibration levels. Audio and visual warnings alert at least one of the drivers and they can work out corrective actions. Moreover, drivers shall be provided with both internal and external communication facilities. Using an internal system, they can update passengers and the guard about the actual facts.

Gudipati Anirudh, New Bowenpalli, Secunderabad-11

India returns to space

INDIA is poised to script a remarkable chapter in its space journey as Group Captain Subhash Shukla leads the Axiom 4 mission to the International Space Station. More than a scientific venture, this launch symbolises India's growing global stature, scientific ambition, and readiness for long-duration human spaceflight. With ISRO's active support and the Indian Air Force's proud endorsement, it marks a historic return to space by an Indian after four decades. The mission's research will not only advance space science but also lay vital groundwork for India's Gaganyaan program. This is a proud moment—where technology, vision, and national aspirations go beyond the sky.

Mohammad Asad, Mumbai

Axiom 4 Mission

Heariest congratulations to Group Captain Subhash Shukla for his space journey, following in the footsteps of Wing Commander Rakesh Sharma, who ventured into space in 1994. The entire nation is proud of you and supports the team in conducting a series of scientific experiments aimed at enhancing knowledge in microgravity, life sciences, and material sciences, in collaboration with scientists from over 30 countries.

N S K Prasad, Saket Colony, Hyderabad-62

High five on AI

THE present era can truly be called the age of artificial intelligence (AI), which is making deep inroads into every aspect of our daily lives—from education to healthcare and from business to industry. In this context, it has become essential for individuals from all walks of life—students, professionals, entrepreneurs, and educators—to understand the appropriate and ethical use of AI. However, the reality is that there are now numerous accessible platforms available to learn the fundamentals and practical applications of AI—such as online courses, webinars, e-learning platforms, and various training programs. Importantly, the knowledge of AI is not limited to technologists alone. It has become an essential skill for students from arts, commerce, and science streams, as well as for working professionals and entrepreneurs. The more people understand and responsibly apply AI, the more it can simplify life, save time, and enhance productivity. We the media to give greater importance to spreading awareness about this transformative technology so that the society can stay informed and empowered, while at the same time removing the misconceptions that exist.

Jayanthi Subramaniam, Skon East, Mumbai-22

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BENGALURU ONLINE

Bengaluru-Mangaluru High-Speed Corridor Takes Off DPR work begins

MANGALURU: In a major boost to Karnataka's infrastructure ambitions, the much-anticipated high-speed expressway between Bengaluru and Mangaluru is one step closer to reality, with the Detailed Project Report (DPR) preparation now officially underway.

Dakshina Kannada MP Capt. Brijesh Chowta announced that the tendering process for the DPR has been completed by the Union Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, and the DPR work commenced as of April 30. The project is expected to take around 18 months to complete. "This is a transformative step for the region," said Chowta, who has been lobbying for the project over the past year. "Once realised, this corridor will not only reduce travel time between Bengaluru and Mangaluru drastically but also give a fillip to trade, tourism, and economic activity across southern Karnataka."

The expressway, envisioned as a four-to-eight-lane high-speed road, is expected to run via Hassan District. When completed, it will slash travel time—currently 7 to 8 hours by road—into under 5 hours, depending on the final alignment and engineering specifications.

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

Kashmir's rail revolution is a tribute to govt resolve and grit



JAYA VARMA SINHA

On a clear June day, draped in marigold flowers and national pride, the Vande Bharat Express began its maiden journey from Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra to Srinagar. Flagged off by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the moment marked more than just the launch of a high-speed train. It was the culmination of a century-old dream—one forged in steel, vision, and unstinting resolve. The rail unification of Kashmir with the rest of India is that resolve.

A train to Kashmir with an ultra-modern travel experience runs on the solid foundation of our engineers. Cutting the travel time short, Vande Bharat trains run twice a day, six times a week from both sides. They are not only bringing in the much-needed push for the local economic development in the valley but are emerging as a boon for tourists from all over.

For decades, Kashmir's story has been told through the lens of conflict and remoteness. It's heartening to see it being rewritten in the language of infrastructure—bridges, tunnels, and rail lines threading their way through the mountains. Coming on the eve of the 11 years of Modi's governance at the Centre, the special trains and the connecting link are all set

to change the destiny of locals in Kashmir.

In its 172-year history of service to the nation, Indian Railways has crossed many important milestones. Generations of dedicated railway men and women have toiled to make connectivity and carriage an everyday reality. But to paraphrase a line from an iconic Indian advertisement: Indian Railways doesn't just build tracks—it also knits the fabric of national unity!

From isolation to integration

Historically, Kashmir's isolation was more than metaphorical—it was geographic and punishingly real. Tucked high in the Himalayas and routinely cut off by snow for days together, the region remained distant not just in reach but even experience. Roads were often treacherous, air travel limited, and full rail connectivity a mirage.

A British-era proposal for a Kashmir rail link remained on the drawing board for decades, hindered by complex geopolitical challenges. After countless rounds of deliberations, feasibility studies, technical evaluations, and consultations with both domestic and international experts, the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link (USBRL) was officially sanctioned in 1994.

While the northern and southern sections progressed steadily and were eventually completed within a decade, the central stretch—from Katra to Banihal—posed an engineering and security challenge of Himalayan proportions.

For years, the rail line lingered as two disconnected segments—like outstretched hands reaching across a



chasm of mountains. But that chasm symbolized more than just physical terrain. The final push to complete the USBRL project came when the government declared it a national priority. With a firm resolve and cutting-edge technology working in tandem, the project finally saw light at the end of the tunnel—quite literally. As Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw aptly remarked, this was far more than a transportation initiative; it was a nation-building effort.

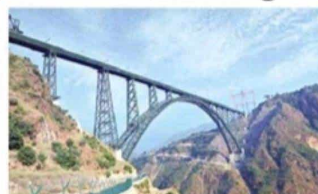
Where steel defies the sky

The USBRL project may well be the most ambitious rail initiative since Independence. The 272-km stretch between Udhampur and Baramulla snakes through 40 tunnels and over 900 bridges. And at the center of it all is the record-breaking Chenab Bridge—the tallest railway bridge in the world, standing 359 meters above the riverbed. This engineering marvel is capable of withstanding

wind speeds of up to 260 kmph and tremors of seismic zone-V. Beside it stands the Anji Khad Bridge, the country's first cable-stayed railway bridge, stretching asymmetrically across a valley, anchored by a single pylon and supported by six cables.

Tunnels, including the 11-kilometer-long T-80 (Banihal - Qazigund) tunnel through the Pir Panjal range, have been carved through fragile rock with a mix of dynamite and human grit. Physical surveys were done on horseback, while drones and satellite imaging provided aerial support. Workers labored through harsh winters, sudden landslides, and the looming threat of Pak-sponsored terrorist attacks.

Today, more than 190 km of tunnels and thousands of tons of steel later, the line stands complete—a feat that combines precision engineering with a certain audacity of vision, linking the valley to



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the rest of the nation in a way that is profoundly symbolic.

A train called hope

In many ways, the Vande Bharat Express is not just a train, it is a metaphor. It glides quietly through meadows and valleys, bridging distances both physical and psychological, proclaiming that Kashmir is no longer distant! It has reduced travel time between Srinagar and Katra to just over three hours, down from nearly six. What was once a treacherous road journey through landslide-prone hairpin bends and unpredictable weather, is now a smooth ride through tunnels and bridges that defy belief.

It connects not only cities, but lives. Children in far-off villages are now talking about universities in Jammu and Delhi. Local artisans, apple growers, and carpet weavers now see their goods reaching markets beyond the valley—fresher, faster, further.

"Where there were checkpoints and delays. There is now the sound of a train. It

feels like we're no longer waiting for the rest of the country to arrive, we are moving with it," said a young shopkeeper in Srinagar.

A new journey unfolds

This is not to suggest that one train will solve Kashmir's complex problems. Infrastructure cannot erase history or immediately heal wounds—security concerns will need addressing yet. But it can open doors—both literally and symbolically. And it can lay the groundwork for integration that is economic, social, and, ultimately, emotional.

What began as a dream on drawing boards in colonial offices has become a reality on steel rails blending with Himalayan rock. The rail line to Kashmir is the story of a country that refused to be daunted by terrain, terror, or time. From mountain shadows to sunlit stations, a new journey has begun!

(The writer is former CEO and Chairman Railway Board)

Livestock growth and decline of animal populations needs rethink

CLIVE PHILLIPS

As a teenager in the 1970s, I worked on a dairy farm in England. Fifty cows grazed on lush pastures most mornings, each producing about 12 litres of milk daily. They were loved and cared for by two herdsmen. About 50 years later, I visited a dairy farm in China. There, 30,000 cows lived indoors. Most of these selectively bred animals were out after two or three years of producing 30-40 litres of milk every day, after which they were unceremoniously killed. The workers rarely had contact with the cows. Instead, they sat in offices, programming machines which managed them. This speaks to a huge and very recent shift in how we treat animals. Over the last half century, the human population has soared—and so has our demand for meat, milk and many other animal products.

As a result, livestock populations have ballooned while living conditions for animals permanently kept inside have dramatically worsened. Even as farmed animals have multiplied, populations of wild animals have crashed. The two trends are deeply connected.

Humans convert wildlife habitat into pastures and farms, expanding living space for farm animals at the expense of many other animals. This cannot continue. Humans must reckon with how we treat the myriad other species on the planet, whether we rely on them or not. As I argue in my new open access book, the growing scarcity of animal species should make us grasp our responsibility towards the welfare of all animal species on the planet, not just those in farms.

Efforts to enshrine rights for animals is not enough. The focus must be on our responsibilities to them, ensuring they lead good lives in our care—or are left alone if they are not.

Should we care? In the last 50 years, two-

thirds of all wild animal populations have been lost. The main cause is habitat loss, as native forage is felled to grow grass for cattle or corn and soya for livestock. By weight, the world's farm animals and humans now dwarf the rest of wild animals. Farm animals weigh 630 million tonnes and humans 390 million tonnes, while wild land mammals now weigh just 20 million tonnes and marine mammals 40 million tonnes. Wildlife numbers have fallen off a cliff across many kingdoms of life. Three quarters of flying insects are gone from monitored areas of Western Europe. One in eight bird species is threatened with extinction worldwide.

On animal welfare, philosophers have long argued one of two positions. The first is known as "utilitarianism". This approach argues for minimising the bad things in the world and maximising the good things, regardless of who benefits from them, humans or other animals. This theory-based approach does little to restore our relationship with wild animals because of the difficulties in deciding what is good and bad for animals.

The second has more to recommend it. This is the view that animals have the right to be looked after well. This approach has also been used to give rights to rivers, nature and even the atmosphere. But this doesn't recognise the fact that only humans can attribute such rights to animals, who themselves do not have any concept of "rights". It also doesn't tackle the issue that most humans would not accord the same rights to a blue whale and an insect. A better approach might be to recognise our responsibilities to animals, rather than attribute rights to them.

This would acknowledge the increasing rarity of animal species on Earth and the fact that—as far as we know—they're unique in the universe. So far, no reliable signs have been found indicating life evolved on any other planets. Earth

MAIN THREATS TO SPECIES



Some evidence suggests simple animal life began just 400 million years later. The evolution of complex multicellular life on earth probably only happened once when a single celled organism—one of the ancient archaea, perhaps—engulfed a bacterium without digesting it. Instead, it found something better: putting it to work as an internal energy factory as the first mitochondrion. After that came life's great flowering.

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But now we're currently losing between 0.01-0.1 per cent of all species each year. If we use an average species loss rate of 0.05 per cent and assume human pressures remain similar, life on Earth could have only 2,000 years left. Do we have the responsibility to care for something just because it's rare? Not always. But life is beautiful. We marvel when we can connect

with wildlife. Other social animals also appear to derive pleasure from such relationships.

If we destroy wild animal life, we could undermine the natural systems humans depend on. Ecosystems are essential for orcharding, water protection, pest control and produce clean drinking water and predators prevent herbivore populations from soaring out of control and destroying crops. As wilder areas shrink, the chance of another animal virus spillover into humans increases.

For almost all human history, livestock herds were small enough that people could build relationships with the animals they depended on. But in only a couple of human generations, we've turned farm animal production into a factory process with billions of animals. For centuries, farm animals were walked to market. That, too, has changed. In 2005, I was undertaking research on a livestock ship alongside 80,000 sheep being transported from Australia to the Middle East.

Hundreds of sheep die from the stress of these journeys, while many survivors arrive exhausted and terrified. These changes have made it possible for humans all around the globe to eat meat or dairy products at every meal. But it has come at a real cost to livestock and wild animals. Correcting this will not be easy.

We must learn to eat fewer animals or preferably none, restore habitat for wildlife and curb our consumption of the world's natural resources. It's not too late to restore animal habitat. Rewilding efforts are drawing back long-missing wild animals. There are hopeful signs for farm animal welfare too. The live export of Australian sheep will end in 2024. Battery cage production of eggs is dying out. These are big issues.

But to paraphrase a quote reputedly by Confucius: "The man who asks big questions is a fool for a moment. The man who does not ask, is a fool for life."

Punish real culprits, retired top cops tell CM in open letter

Hon'ble Chief Minister,

We are writing this letter to convey our heartfelt condolences at the unfortunate death of eleven cricket fans at the Chinnaswamy Cricket Stadium in Bengaluru on the fateful afternoon of June 4, 2025.

It transpires from public statements and available information that the Royal Challengers Bengaluru, Karnataka State Cricket Association, their event managers and other cohorts wanted a grand celebration of RCB's victory after 18 years in the IPL. 2025. A letter to this purpose was perhaps sent by the organisers to the Government of Karnataka (Secretary of Personnel), seeking permission to host the felicitation in the august presence of the heads of the state government at the Vidhana Soudha on June 4, 2025.

The RCB management, through their social media handles, at the same time invited fans to the Chinnaswamy Stadium for another celebratory function and ex-

horted their fans to join and witness the victory parade.

It is also learnt that the RCB management was insistent on hosting the function's within hours of their victory in the final played at Ahmedabad because their foreign players and some local players had their travel plans, which could not be altered.

As you are aware, Sir, the IPL is a commercial sporting event where the best cricketers in the limited over format are acquired in auction for the season's by paying them astronomical sums. The franchisees may be named after some city or state depending on the location of the franchise, but the team assembled on the basis of auctions in no way represents the city or the state. In fact, these franchisees have no standing in the domestic cricketing calendar. Their only concern is revenue, TRP, and profits.

The local police, to the best of our knowledge, right from SHO Cubban Park to DCP Vidhana Soudha and the

Commissioner Police Bengaluru, had expressed their reservations on the request for celebrations owing to lack of time to prepare for the humongous crowds that were bound to turn up for the function's and the road show.

The police officials had conveyed in writing and otherwise about the danger of according to the request of the RCB/KSCA to organise the functions within hours after the final match. They advised the government and also the organisers to defer the programme to the coming Sunday (June 8), by which time appropriate arrangements could have been made in consultation with all the stakeholders.

However, that was not to be. It appears that no written directions were given to the police overruling their objections. The organisers meanwhile kept inviting their fans to participate in the functions in large numbers, offering them free tickets/passes.

In short, the professional advice of the police officers was not heeded and the

organisers went ahead with the arrangements, presumably with the tacit support of the government. The consequences of disregarding professional police advice and going ahead with celebrations are there for anyone to see.

In your initial statements, Sir, you had rightly stated that the sudden surge of two/three lakh people at the venue, which could accommodate only 35,000 people, was the reason for the stampede. However, senior police officers including the Commissioner of Police, Bengaluru, who has an unblemished record of service and integrity, have been suspended. They were made the fall guys. There is a general impression that the police officers have been victimised while those, whose haste, over-enthusiasm, and reluctance to take a stand, contributed to the tragedy have managed to get away.

Sir, you have immense administrative experience. Action should actually be taken against those who bulldozed the police and insisted on holding the celebrations.

Adequate costs should also be imposed on the profit-oriented bodies who played with the lives of innocent fans without bothering about the detailed arrangements required for the occasion.

Meanwhile, we would humbly request you to revoke the suspensions of police officers. The judicial inquiry is to be completed within a month. It would be fair and proper to take any action against the police officers only after the findings of the judicial inquiry are known.

With regards, Yours truly,

Prakash Singh, former DGP UP and Asam and DG RPF; DR Karthikyan, former Director CBI and DG NHRC; Somesh Goyal, former DGP Himachal Pradesh; KP Jain, former DGP Tamil Nadu; GBS Siddhu, former Special Secretary, Cabinet Secretariat, Govt. of India; Sanjay Singh, former DGP Tripura; SBS Tumar, former SPl Secretary, Cabinet Secretariat; V. Rajagopal, former SPl Director, IB; Dipak Mishra, SPl DG CRPF.

Govt. Himanshu Kumar, former DG SSB; Ramavtar Yadav, former DGP Andhra Pradesh; DP Sinha, former Secretary (Security) Cabinet Secretariat, Govt. of India; Sanjay Kumar, former Vigilance Commissioner, CVC; BC Nayak, former Special Director, Intelligence Bureau; KM Singh, former DG CISE and Member NDMA, Govt. of India; Ajay Aggarwal, former DG Prisons, Bihar; New Delhi; Shanti Kumar Jain, former Member Public Grievances Commission; Satish Sahney, former CP Mumbai; Reddy, former Director SPG and Secretary (Security) Govt. of India; V. Rajagopal, former SPl Director, IB; Dipak Mishra, SPl DG CRPF.

Disinformation spreading on social media platforms has distorted the scale of violence, stoking an already tense situation

STEVEN LEE MYERS

Misleading photographs, videos and text have spread widely on social media as protests against immigrant raids have unfolded in Los Angeles, rehabilitating old conspiracy theories and expressing support for President Donald Trump's actions. The flood of falsehoods online appeared intended to stoke outrage toward immigrants and political leaders, principally Democrats.

They also added to the confusion over what exactly was happening on the streets, which was portrayed in digital and social media through starkly divergent ideological lenses. Many posts created the false impression that the entire city was engulfed in violence, when the clashes were limited to only a small part.

There were numerous scenes of protesters throwing rocks or other objects at law enforcement officers and setting cars ablaze, including a number of self-driving Waymo taxis. At the same time, false images spread to revive old conspiracy theories that the protests were a planned provocation, not a spontaneous response to the immigration raids.

The confrontation escalated Monday as new protests occurred and Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth announced — on the social platform X — that he was mobilising 700 Marines from a base near Los Angeles to guard federal buildings. They were expected to join 2,000 members of the California National Guard whom Trump ordered deployed without the authorisation of the state's governor, Gavin Newsom, who normally has command of the troops.

The latest deployments prompted a new wave of misleading images to spread — some purporting to show Marines in the military service's weapons in action. One was a still from *Blue Thunder*, a 1983 action-thriller about a conspiracy to deprive residents of Los Angeles of their civil rights. It features a climactic dogfight over the city's downtown. Darren I. Linnell, a researcher at Clemson University's Media Forensics Hub, said conservatives online were "building up the riots in a performative way" to help bolster Trump's claims that Los Angeles had been taken over by "violent, insurrectionist mobs."

Linnell said the posts were also "a bit self-fulfilling." "As they direct attention to it," he said, "more protesters will show up."

James Woods, the actor who has become known for spreading conspiracy theories, used his account on X to rail against the state's elected officials, especially Newsom, a Democrat. He also reposted a fabricated quote, attributed to former President Barack Obama, discussing a secret plot to impose socialism on the country, as well as a video of burning police cars that was from 2020. An innocuous photograph of a pallet of bricks, actually posted on the website of a building materials wholesaler in Malaysia, was cited as proof that the protests were organised by non-profit organisations supported by George Soros, the financier who, to the feverish conspiratorial right, has become a mastermind of global disorder.

"It's Civil War," an account on X wrote on Saturday, claiming that the bricks had been placed near the offices of Immigration and Customs Enforcement for "Democrat militants." X posted a Community Note



Protesters demonstrate while members of law enforcement operate during a protest against federal immigration sweeps, in Los Angeles, California, US. Disinformation about the events has circulated online. REUTERS

Conspiracy theories, fake news swirl around LA protests

Other US states join in

pointing out that the photograph had nothing to do with the protests, but it still was seen more than 800,000 times. It was also widely reposted, including by several seemingly authentic accounts in Chinese.

The online trope dates at least to the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020. It reappeared in 2022 after a conspiratorial post by Rep Lauren Boebert, a Republican, who suggested that bricks for a paving project near Capitol Hill were intended for violent protests after the Supreme Court overturned *Roe vs Wade*.

"These days, it feels like every time there's a protest, the old cliché 'pallets of bricks' hoax shows up right on cue," the Social Media Lab, a research centre at the Toronto Metropolitan University, wrote on Bluesky. "You know the one, photos or videos of bricks supposedly left out to encourage rioting. It's camp for right-wing agitators and grifters." It also fits into the narrative that protests against government policies are somehow inauthentic. On his own platform, Truth Social, Trump also suggested that the protesters were "Paid Insurrectionists".

Numerous posts echoed unsubstantiated claims that the protests were the work of Soros as well as local non-government organisations or Democratic elected officials, including the mayor of Los Angeles, Karen Bass. Some posts disparaging the protests were shared by accounts with deceptive handles that closely resembled those of official government sources or news organisations.

Mike Benz, a conspiracy-minded influencer on X who last year claimed that the Pentagon used popstar Taylor Swift as part

of a psychological operation to undercut Trump, advanced an outlandish theory that the mayor had links to the CIA and had helped start riots in the city where she lives. He based that simply on Bass' role as a board member for the National Endowment for Democracy, the congressionally mandated organisation formed during the Reagan administration to promote democratic governance around the world.

The theme was echoed by accounts across social media linked to Russia, which often amplifies content that discredits the US. The Kremlin and its supporters have long accused Soros or the US government of covertly sponsoring "colour revolutions" to overthrow governments.

The New York Times

southeast of downtown Los Angeles, threw rocks, bottles and fireworks, and were met by federal agents using tear gas, pepper balls and rubber bullets, the officials said. Bill Essayli, the Trump administration's top law enforcement official in Southern California, requested help from the Santa Ana Police Department "because federal agents were being overrun," the city said in a statement on social media.

In downtown Austin, Texas, hundreds of demonstrators marched to the Capitol building, waving signs and flags and chanting "No more ICE," according to video footage published by local news media. Later, law enforcement used tear gas and pepper spray to disperse protesters, the Austin American-Statesman reported. The Austin Police Department did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

In Dallas, about 400 protesters gathered on the edge of downtown, *The Dallas Morning News* reported.

NTV

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The New York Times

The courage to dissent

L K ATHEEQ

I first met Banu Mushtaq, the 2025 International Booker Prize winner, in the revenue court of the deputy commissioner, Hassan. I was presiding over it, and she, the lawyer, was appearing for the clients. We became family friends. What was remarkable about her was she always appeared for the poor and the indigent clients, mostly women.

Women carry a disproportionate burden of religion, culture, and tradition. They live in a world of norms and traditions created by men. And any dissent, a minor rebellion, is put down with force, and the justification for such repression is often found in religion, culture, and tradition. The norms, mores, and traditions, said to be steeped in religion, are written by men, advocated by men, and interpreted by men, sitting as maulvis, pandits, or priests. It therefore takes extraordinary courage for women to speak their mind and beg to differ.

Banu Mushtaq has given voice to the women who, differently rebel, and dare to dream but suffer in doing so. Mehrun, the protagonist in the story *Edeya Hanate* (the title of the book in English, *Heart Lamp*, for which the prize was given), decides not to put up with the insult and indignity of an affair her husband was having with a younger woman. She walks out of her husband's house in Chikkamagaluru and travels to Hassan, to her father's house. She had great pride in the strength of her brothers, and she expected empathy from the home where she was born. Instead, she receives a hostile reception and is promptly taken back to her husband's house. The men—her father and her brothers—turn out to be not so brave after all. Life, society, and tradition have made them cowards. They worry about their reputation. One brother says, "Why didn't you die by burning yourself before dishonouring our family by walking out on your husband?" This classic contradiction between social norms and individual freedom of the women characters is a recurring theme in most of Banu's stories.

Banu Mushtaq, a member of the Bandaya Sahitya movement, had the courage to write the stories of Muslim women carrying the burden of religion, tradition, and notions of honour that men create. Muslim women who dare to dream, dare to think differ-

ently, and try to act on their thoughts and dreams. Stories of women whose dreams are ultimately crushed by a society that calls for a sacrifice from women and lets the men go scot-free.

These stories may have come out of Banu Mushtaq's interaction with her society and the experiences of being a lawyer to poor, underprivileged clients—she represented the poor before the courts of law. But these are stories with universal appeal—stories that people of various cultures and religions around the world can relate to, connect with, and empathise with. It is therefore a significant milestone that such experiences, born out of Muslim households and written in one of the world's oldest languages, have now received a global platform, thanks to the International Booker Prize.

Things can change if we shine light on them. Banu Mushtaq has given voice and now a global platform to the Mehruns, Hasinas, and Jameelas of Muslim societies. But make no mistake; the plight of these women is not unique to the Muslim community; they are universal, and we can find such stories in all societies; patriarchy is the monopoly of no single religion. The patriarchal judgements delivered by the maulvis in *Jamane*, for example, are not very different from those at the *khat panchayats* or similar forums of other communities.

What is significant is that Banu Mushtaq, a woman and a Muslim living in a conservative Muslim society, has dared to write stories that challenge traditional norms and the interpretation of religion by maulvis, who are schooled to uphold patriarchy. Her work focuses on individual women's rights to emancipation, autonomy, and control over their bodies and eventually their destinies.

Literature is not merely stories that some write and others read at their leisure. It can be an act of rebellion and dissent; it is a search for truth. As Milan Kundera, the Czech Nobel Prize-winning novelist, said, "To be a writer does not mean to preach a truth; it means to discover a truth." Banu Mushtaq, through her literature, has uncovered the truth of women's lives in conservative, patriarchal societies.

(The writer is former ACS to chief minister of Karnataka)

OUR PAGES OF HISTORY

50 YEARS AGO: JUNE 1975

No need for undue alarm: PVN

Bangalore, June 10
ICC General Secretary P.V. Narasimha Rao admitted here today that the "personal equations" between Chief Minister Devanur Urs and PCC President K.H. Pail had happened to be a matter of concern to the High Command, but his assessment of the situation was that "there is no need for undue alarm." At the same time there was no room for complacency. Mr. Narasimha Rao, who talked to an endless stream of party members throughout his two-day stay here, told newsmen: "I am sure that all the difficulties can be ironed out."

25 YEARS AGO: JUNE 2000

Jaswant to help revive Lanka peace process

New Delhi, June 10
External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh will visit Sri Lanka for two days from Sunday to engage the Sri Lankan leadership in a bid to encourage creation of a favourable atmosphere for early cessation of hostilities, end of terrorist violence and revival of peace process to evolve a negotiated settlement of the island's ethnic problem. Mr. Singh is scheduled to hold wide-ranging discussions with President Chandrika Kumaratunga, and Leader of the Opposition in the Lankan Parliament Ranil Wickremesinghe.

OASIS | MIRLE KARTHIK

Effort never goes waste

Establishing control over the mind is the first step in achieving not only worldly success, but success also in the spiritual realm wherein the aspirant aims at achieving the realization of the divine presence in his being, says the Bhagavad Gita in its chapter on the Yoga of meditation. Before achieving this control over the mind, it is essential to establish control over the senses organs. Because it is the senses that tend to lead man astray, creating turbulence and agitation in his mind, thereby distracting man from his goal of achieving spiritual growth. The Gita clearly says that one who does not achieve control over his senses cannot

achieve anything in this world, spiritual or otherwise. This calls for effort. Not just effort, but the right kind of effort, clarifies the Gita. As revered Swami Chinmayananda puts it, the Gita nowhere prohibits man from enjoying the pleasures of this world, provided they are attained in the right manner. But "do not become a slave to your senses. Make the right kind of effort so that the senses are subservient to you, not the other way round. Just by avoiding relaxing pastimes like watching a movie or playing games, a student will not pass in the exami-

nation. Knowing when and what and how to study and when to relax by apportioning time suitably will bring success". The Gita significantly points out that man simply fritters away his physical and intellectual energies in pursuits that bring neither worldly success nor spiritual emancipation.

The same energy, if invested judiciously in activities that enhance not only his material progress, but his spiritual progress also will aid in his inner emotional development. From the perspective of Vedanta, this is one step forward in the soul's journey towards reaching the divine consciousness that abides in all beings. This is the 'Yoga' which the Gita talks of.

Here, the Gita makes a noteworthy point. "You are bound to falter in your efforts. Because the very nature of the mind is instability, restlessness and fickleness. It will lure and drag you towards seemingly attractive enjoyments. If you succumb to its tricks, you will be like a cloud that is pushed hither and thither by the wind, tattered and directionless. Firmly, consciously, resist the temptations and steadfastly work towards your goal. Success will be yours, sooner or later. Your effort will never be in vain" assures the Gita.



Train to Kashmir, track of hope

The launch of the Vande Bharat Express between Katra and Srinagar, connecting the Kashmir Valley with the rest of India, is rich in symbolism and substance. A month and a half after the Pahalgam terror attack, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has launched big-ticket railway projects in Kashmir which have been long in the works. The Prime Minister described the newly completed Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Railway Link as a "recognition of India's new strength and a proclamation of India's new strength". It is an engineering marvel that can positively influence the economy of Kashmir and the lives of its people through improved trade and tourism. The project comes above the Chenab River, the first cable-stayed bridge of the railways, and the country's longest transport tunnel. The train takes just three hours to reach Srinagar from Katra while a road journey in good weather takes at least six hours.

The rail link facilitates hassle-free travel during all the months of the year. The people of Kashmir travel frequently from the Valley to Jammu and other parts of the country and return during change of seasons—now, this travel has become cheaper, safer, and more reliable. This provides a major boost to the economy of Kashmir as transport of goods can be done without delays and at lower costs. Tourism, a major contributor to Kashmir's economy, will also benefit substantially from the rail link. Other modes of travel remain prone to disruption and cost escalation because of the vagaries of weather. It is important to accord maximum security to the new lines and trains to ensure passenger safety.

Another key benefit will be in the form of increased people-to-people contact. Trains have traditionally linked people, reducing distances and enhancing communication. If the scrapping of Article 370 was intended to help Kashmir integrate with the country, the new rail link may be seen as an extension of that move. While the building of physical infrastructure in Kashmir and improving connectivity is important, attention must also be paid to integration at the level of the people. This should happen at the political, social, and emotional levels. The government must fulfill the promises made to the people of Kashmir, including the restoration of statehood. That is what former chief minister Farooq Abdullah probably meant when he said that the train is the first step, and more efforts are needed to reduce the *dil ki doori* and *Delhi ki doori*.

Teeth to domestic violence law

The Supreme Court has taken another step to curb domestic violence by directing all the states and Union Territories to identify officers in the Department of Women and Child Development at the district and taluka levels and designate them as protection officers. These officers will be responsible to ensure the safety and well-being of victims of domestic violence. They will have to create public awareness about the provisions of the Domestic Violence Act and the rights of women it entails and ensure coordination of the services under the Act. The Court's directive that the exercise has to be completed within six weeks is significant. The bench of Justices B V Nagarathna and Satish Chandra Sharma also directed the National Legal Services Authority to instruct the state legal services authorities to make women aware of their right to free legal aid and advice under the Act.

The court issued the order on a plea filed by an NGO, We the Women of India, which said there were problems in the implementation of the law even 15 years after its enactment. It was pointed out that domestic violence remained the most common crime against women; the NGO sought legal aid for survivors and shelter homes for those who needed them. According to a study, over 31% of women aged 15-49 have reported experiencing some form of domestic violence, including physical, emotional, and sexual assault. The National Women's Commission receives thousands of complaints every year. The National Crimes Records Bureau (NCRB), however, reports only a few hundred cases every year. It should be clear that the number of complaints or cases does not reflect the seriousness of the issue.

There are social, economic, and other factors that are at the root of domestic violence. They also influence the responses to the violence, including the decision of women to seek legal aid and relief, and the reactions of the family and the community. Few women are able to resist violence and deal with it, legally or in other ways. There are variations among states in the incidence of the problem but the comparative figures may not be entirely reliable. According to some of these reports, Karnataka has a high incidence of domestic violence. Strict implementation of the law is the only way forward. The Supreme Court and other courts have repeatedly addressed the issue and the latest directive is another intervention that emphasises the urgency for a resolution.

SC's directive on appointing protection officers can help improve awareness of rights, enforcement

India primes for endgame in fight against Maoists

Cadre depletion and leadership vacuum have hit the insurgents but the security forces cannot drop guard

M P NATHANAL

A series of successful operations by the security forces against the Maoists and a spate of surrenders during the last few months have dealt a severe blow to the insurgent movement which had turned into a serious security threat over the past several decades. While Basavaraju, the general secretary of CPI (Maoist), was killed along with 26 others on May 21 in the dense forests near Boter village in Abujmarg in Chhattisgarh, Sudhakar alias Gautam—a prominent member of the outfit's Central Committee—was killed on June 5 in Bijapur. Earlier, 31 Maoists were killed in Karagutta Hills straddling the Telangana-Chhattisgarh border in the three-week-long Black Forest operation which concluded on May 11.

The security forces—Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), CoBRA (Commando Battalion for Resolute Action), an elite commando outfit of CRPF, the Bastariya Battalion, also of CRPF, the Border Security Force (BSF), the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), the District Reserve Guard (DRG), the Bastar Fighter Force (BFF) of Chhattisgarh Police, the Chhattisgarh Armed Police (CAP), and the Chhattisgarh Police—had over the years suffered serious setbacks largely due to the distinct advantage the Maoists enjoyed in the region.

Popular support gained by the Maoists through threats or persuasion, their deep knowledge of the terrain, inaccessible forests that served as a safe sanctuary, and operational hurdles faced by the forces worked to the advantage of the Maoists who inflicted heavy casualties on the security personnel from time to time. The Maoists have opposed development in the region—the poverty of the villagers has helped the insurgents subjugate them and propagate their ideology of mass revolution. The absence of paved roads forced the security forces to cover long distances on foot. Taking advantage of their exhaustion, the Maoists have executed deadly attacks on the per-

sonnel on their way back to their bases.

Contractors and workers who dared to venture into the construction of roads were threatened and some were killed. Attempts to provide security to the workers were foiled when the Maoists ambushed security patrols. The Border Roads Organisation (BRO) took up the challenge under the CRPF's protection and began work. After BRO left, civil contractors took over the task under the supervision of CRPF personnel and connected villages with several kilometres of roads. The efforts are still on.

The laying of roads has made most villages easily accessible to the security forces, so much so that Abujmarg, an area covering nearly 4,000 sq km and



considered impenetrable, is now largely under the occupation of the CRPF. With nearly 200 Forward Operating Bases (FOB) established in the area, the bastion of the Maoists has fallen in the face of aggressive and incessant operations launched by the security forces.

Recently, 86 Maoists disillusioned by their ideology surrendered before Kothagudem Police, and another 11 surrendered before Alluri Sitaram Raju Police. Since nine of the 16 Maoists who laid down their arms before the CRPF on June 2 in Sukma hailed from Karlapenda, the village was declared Maoist-free and earned a reward of Rs 1 crore for its development. While 928 Maoists surrendered last year, 718 surrendered before the authorities till May 31 this year which includes 571 from the Bastar division. The spate of surrenders continues largely due to the threat of death in encounters and disaffection

among the Maoist ranks.

Vigil must continue

The deaths of top leaders such as Raji Reddy, Hargopal, Renuka, Jagdeesh, Basavaraju, and Sudhakar—due to ailments or in encounters—have crushed the leadership. Nearly 180 Maoists have been killed till May this year as against 280 last year. Left rudderless, many have chosen to surrender. The rehabilitation policy initiated by the Chhattisgarh government is bound to draw more Maoists to the mainstream.

Kerala and Karnataka have declared themselves Maoist-free; the latter is considering the conversion of its Anti-Naxal Force into an Anti-Communal Force to suppress communal disturbances. It may not be prudent to disband this well-trained force.

While the intelligence setup should maintain constant surveillance, the security forces need to guard against casualties by Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). There were 43 incidents of IED blasts in 2024 and over 30 incidents till May this year. This method facilitates easy escape after inflicting casualties on the forces. In the Karagutta Hills, the Maoists had planted over 400 IEDs and six personnel including a CoBRA Assistant Commandant suffered injuries when they stepped on the pressure mines. The officer's leg had to be amputated.

The looting of 4,000 kg of explosives by Maoists from a truck in the Sundargarh district of Odisha, close to the Serenda forests in Jharkhand, on May 27, portends a grave situation. While some of it has been recovered by the CoBRA personnel, a large quantity remains with the Maoists. All-out efforts need to be made to recover the remaining explosives.

Though the Maoists are pleading for ceasefire and peace talks, the government has done well to ignore these calls as they could be a strategy to recruit, regroup and replenish their armoury. That they had killed three to five hundred commandos in the Mahagad district of Telangana on May 8 cannot be overlooked.

In the interest of national security, the pressure on the Maoists must be maintained till the movement is entirely wiped out, well ahead of the deadline of March 31, 2026 set by Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

(The writer is a retired Inspector General of Police, CRPF)

RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE

Lessons from Rajeev Taranath

A tribute to a teacher who shaped minds and inspired a lifetime of learning

S BHASHYAM

Pandit Rajeev Taranath taught English in Regional Engineering College, Tiruchirappalli, for two years in the late 1960s. I was one of his lucky students. I still remember the informal discussions we used to have in his room. "Sit down, Bhashyam," he would boom in his deep voice. He would then regale me on myriad subjects, starting from the politics of the day to the latest MGR movie playing in town. He was a die-hard MGR fan and would praise the actor for his earthy political messaging!

I kept pestering him to write an article for the students' monthly magazine we ran, and he kept putting it off. One day he relented and said, "Okay, can you write it down while I dictate?" He

then rattled off a full article running to almost a thousand words on democracy as it was being practiced in India, titled, *Are the elections a picnic?* I had trouble keeping pace but did as best as I could and later went back to my room to make a fair copy for his approval.

On another occasion I wrote out a long poem in what I thought was free verse and took it to him for his comments. It was a poem of roughly twenty lines about moving through a crowd of people I knew, with a fixed artificial smile on my face. He read through the lines and then intoned,

"The poet has said it in one sentence. To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet." Why waste 20 lines in saying the same thing?

With that, my poem had been summarily dismissed! It was much later that I realised that "The Poet" was none other than TS Eliot.

In later years I would visit him on and off in his house in Saraswathi Purnam, Mysuru. His matter-of-fact style

and very sense of humour never left him. On one occasion, he told me that once when he was visiting Delhi, he was invited by the great sarod player Sharan Rani to her house for lunch. He went with great expectation, looking forward to an authentic Awadhi-style spread, an expectation that turned to disappointment when she told him, "Knowing you are a South Indian, I have made idli-sambhar specially for you!"

I last met him when he was lying in hospital grimacing in pain after having broken his hip bone. Seeing me, he switched into Tamil, and although his voice was down to a hoarse whisper, he sang an iconic song from one of MGR's films, the lines of which, loosely translated, mean, "If I were to command, and it were to happen, then the poor would no longer drown in an ocean of tears." He then pronounced with the air of finality that MGR had built the foundation for what Tamil Nadu is today.

A few weeks later he was gone.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A step towards building a healthier generation

Appropos 'Healthy eating: Start at the schools' (Jun 10), CBSE's decision to include sugar boards in all affiliated schools is a commendable step towards promoting healthy eating habits among students. Junk food and sugary snacks have become increasingly appealing to children, leading to obesity and other health complications. By raising awareness about the dangers of excessive sugar consumption, the board is taking a proactive approach to safeguarding students' well-being. This initiative not only educates children about the importance of a balanced diet but also encourages schools to provide healthier food op-

tions. Integrating lessons on nutrition into the curriculum would further reinforce healthy habits, ensuring long-term benefits. With childhood obesity on the rise, such measures are crucial in shaping a healthier future generation. This proactive approach by the CBSE sets a strong precedent, recognising that schools play a vital role not just in academic education, but in fostering lifelong wellness and combating preventable lifestyle diseases from a young age. It is a significant stride towards building a healthier future generation.

N Sathish Reddy, Bengaluru

Extend 'sugar boards'

The editorial, "Healthy eating: start at the school" (Jun 10), was both impressive and hopeful. It is commendable that CBSE schools are taking the lead in promoting healthy eating habits, and this initiative should be extended to all schools nationwide. To counter the rise in obesity and diabetes, displaying calorie and sugar information in eateries and restaurants would empower people to make healthier choices. Expanding the "Sugar Board" system to hotels and eateries would be a timely step towards building a healthier nation.

Muthumani Nannan, Bengaluru

Revoke suspension

Appropos 'Govt. to HC: RCB posts led to large gathering, stampede' (Jun 10), the recent stampede at the cricket stadium has led to a blame game, with the state government, event organisers, franchise owners and police passing the buck. It is unrealistic to expect the police to plan and implement crowd-control measures at short notice. Suspending top police officers is a knee-jerk reaction and the government should revoke these suspensions until the inquiry reports are received. B Dayanand, IPS, is one of the finest police officers.

Prabhu Harie, Bengaluru

Eco-friendly

Appropos 'India's list: BAMUL tests bio-degradable milk packets' (Jun 10), it is good news for environmentalists. If the field trials yield positive results, it could pave the way for widespread adoption in the dairy sector. Issues like high production costs and the need for suitable recycling and composting infrastructure need to be addressed concurrently.

Kamal Laddha, Bengaluru

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

SPEAK OUT

...The Chief Minister speaks the same language which is spoken by Pakistan. The speech she made today will be published in Pakistani newspaper, Dawn, tomorrow. Mamata Banerjee is Pakistan's spokesperson... Agnimitra Paul, BJP MLA

If tyranny and oppression come to this land, it will be in the guise of fighting a foreign enemy.

James Madison

TO BE PRECISE



IN PERSPECTIVE

Judiciary and the case for reform

The presence of the Law Minister and LoP in NJAC can ensure a broad-based approach to judicial appointments

ROHINI PANDURANGI

The government's decision to move an impeachment motion against Justice Yashwant Varma in the monsoon session of the Parliament is a rare instance of such punitive action initiated against a judge. The case involving the Allahabad High Court judge has raised questions about judicial integrity and the collegium system. The Supreme Court, through the three judges cases, formulated the collegium system to eliminate executive interference in judicial appointments. The move, no doubt, asserted judicial independence but made it liable to the criticism that the system was made unaccountable and non-transparent. These arguments have gained traction with Justice Varma's case and how it was dealt with initially by the apex court.

Any democracy stands on three pillars—the executive, the legislature, and the judiciary. It would not be an overstatement to say that the judiciary is pivotal here. This is for two reasons. First, it is the guardian of fundamental rights and second, it is the defender of the interests of the State. Therefore, it needs to be independent so that it can function without fear or favour. But it is equally important in a democracy that each organ is kept in check by the other two so that a balance is maintained. The Indian Constitution also follows this principle. It is here that the collegium system becomes problematic.

Although it succeeds in maintaining the independence of the judiciary, it fails to uphold the checks and balances principle. There have been attempts to set this right by constituting a National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) which would consist of the CJI, two senior judges of the SC, the Union Law Minister, and two eminent members. The NJAC Act was passed by the parliament in 2014 was struck down by the apex court as unconstitutional, reiterating that interference by the executive would undermine the independence of the judiciary.

In light of recent events, it has become apparent that the current system needs some change if the faith in the judiciary has to be reinstated. It should be noted here that in the United

States, the President has the power to nominate the members of the Supreme Court, but the candidature has to be confirmed by the Senate. In the UK, judicial appointments to the Supreme Court are made by an independent selection commission whose members are drawn from the UK Supreme Court and the Judicial Appointments Commission of the UK and Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland, who make their recommendations based on consultations with senior politicians and judges. These recommendations will have to be approved by the Lord Chancellor who then sends them for formal approval by the Prime Minister and the Crown. The mechanisms in both countries involve members from the other branches of the government, making them broad-based.

Independence vs accountability

The Chief Justice of India B R Gavai, while speaking at a round table in the Supreme Court of the UK on June 3, said, "Such occurrences (instances of corruption) inevitably have a negative impact on public confidence, potentially eroding the faith in the integrity of the system as a whole." He, however, defended the collegium system and said, "There may be criticisms of the collegium system, but any solution must not come at the cost of judicial independence. Judges must be free from external control."

Judicial independence is, no doubt, the sine qua non of democracy, but accountability and transparency cannot be done away with. As long as the judiciary is its own appointing authority, doubts will always be cast on the way it functions. The judiciary's credibility now also hinges on its willingness to reform from within. Rather than the executive, the judiciary can itself take the initiative here. The NJAC could include the Law Minister who will serve as a link between the government and the judiciary and the Leader of Opposition can be the representative of the legislature in the Commission. The appointments could be made based on consensus.

India is one of the few developing countries in the world that can claim to be a stable and successful democracy. This has been made possible by an ever-vigilant judiciary which has consistently thwarted attempts to undermine the Constitution of India. The people of the land have always reposed their faith in the judiciary, and it is important that it lives up to that faith.

(The writer is an independent researcher)

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Amount of sugar exported by India till June 6 this year

5.16 In lakh tonnes. Of the total exports so far, maximum shipments have been to Somalia at 1,18,553 tonnes, followed by Sri Lanka at 76,401 tonnes, Afghanistan at 72,833 tonnes, and Djibouti at 69,609 tonnes. White sugar exports were at 4.09 lakh tonnes. PH

Indians who think finances limit reproductive freedom

38 In per cent. UNFPA's 2025 State of World Population Report, The Real Fertility Crisis, is a poll conducted across 14 countries, with 14,000 respondents, out of whom 1,048 were from India. Job insecurity and the lack of reliable childcare is making parenthood feel out of reach. PH

Number of countries that ratified the High Seas Treaty

49 Eighteen more countries ratified the High Seas Treaty on Monday, bringing the total to 49 – just 11 short of the 60 needed for the ocean agreement to enter into force. This surge in support adds momentum to what could become a historic shift in how the world governs the open ocean. AP

Expelled party members charged with spying in Taiwan

4 The defendants were among five people expelled from Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) last month for suspected espionage. The four people have been charged with violating the Classified National Security Information Protection Act and National Security Act. APF

Cases registered under NDPS Act in Haryana from January-April

1,130 During this period, 1,801 offenders were arrested, including 332 for possession or trafficking of commercial quantities of drugs under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act. PH

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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Erdogan's neo-Ottoman foreign policy

Under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Ankara has pursued an Islamist-leaning foreign policy aimed at building stronger ties with Muslim-majority countries. However, being aware of Türkiye's limitations, he has mixed Islamist ideology with pragmatism

WORLD INSIGHT

Stanly Johny

Türkiye, a long-standing Cold War ally of the West, has significantly expanded its presence and influence across West Asia and the Caucasus in recent years. Under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Ankara has pursued an Islamist-leaning foreign policy aimed at building stronger ties with Muslim-majority countries and repositioning Türkiye as a regional power – all while maintaining its alliance with the Western bloc. The rise to power of the Islamist Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) in Syria has helped Ankara expand its reach close to the Israeli border. Türkiye already maintains a military presence in Qatar, the rich Sunni Gulf kingdom, underscoring its growing strategic footprint in the region.

During the recent flare-up between India and Pakistan, Türkiye stood by Islamabad. Is this blend of Islamism with a pro-Western tint helping Türkiye remake itself in a volatile world?

Erdogan's era

When the Republic of Turkey was established in 1923 on the remains of the Ottoman Empire, the country's new rulers adopted sweeping reforms aimed at democratising polity, secularising society and conciliating foreign policy. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, founder of modern Türkiye, adopted a 'peace at home, peace in the world' foreign policy. After the Second World War, Türkiye joined the western bloc. Its geographical location as a Black Sea basin country with access to West Asia, the Mediterranean and the Caucasus made Türkiye a strategically important ally for NATO. All Turkish leaders, both military dictators and elected leaders, followed this establishment consensus on foreign policy – until the rise of the Islamists.

Mr. Erdogan's AK Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) that came to power in 2002 also followed this path in the initial years. The AKP came to power after years of political and economic instability, and Mr. Erdogan's immediate focus was to stabilise the economy. Mr. Erdogan, then Prime Minister, sought close cooperation with the U.S. and integration with the European Union. In the immediate aftermath of the U.S.'s illegal invasion of Iraq in March 2003, Mr. Erdogan wrote in *The Wall Street Journal* that "My country is your faithful ally and friend".

Türkiye would take a more ambitious foreign policy turn in the early 2010s – with the onset of the Arab Spring protests to be precise.

Ideological and historical roots

Ittihad-i Islam (Unity of Islam) was a declared foreign policy doctrine of the Ottoman Sultan Hamid II who reigned from 1876-1909. During this period, Constantinople sought Muslim unity against enemies in the West. The Islamists in Kemal's Türkiye, who were more or less politically marginalised until the rise of the AKP, had always advocated for stronger ties with Muslim nations. Before Mr. Erdogan's rise, perhaps the most influential Islamist voice in Türkiye's politics was that of Necmettin Erbakan (1926-2011). Erbakan, who had served as Prime Minister briefly in 1996-97 and was later banned from politics by the Constitutional Court for violating the country's secular laws, argued that Türkiye should protect its religious values, build closer relations with Muslim



A different path: Türkiye President Tayyip Erdogan at a news conference in Ankara, in 2021. REUTERS

countries and combat western imperialism. For him, the European Union was "a Christian club". Erbakan formed different political parties (of which the Welfare Party was the most prominent one) but never managed to break through Türkiye's political and foreign policy consensus.

When the Welfare Party was banned, Islamist politicians formed the Virtue Party in 1997. One of the leaders of the Virtue Party was Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The AKP was formed in 2001 after the Virtue Party was found unconstitutional. In the 2002 election, Mr. Erdogan did what Erbakan couldn't – he brought the Islamists to power. It was only a matter of time before the AKP turned to Erbakan's foreign policy doctrine.

From theory to practice

"The people's calls and their most humane demands" must be paid attention to, Mr. Erdogan said in February 2011 amid a mass uprising in Egypt against the rule of Hosni Mubarak. By openly backing the protesters, Mr. Erdogan risked unsettling Türkiye's relationship with Arab countries. But when the Mubarak regime fell, Türkiye suddenly found strategic depth in its new approach, and it started seeing street protests in Arab countries as a vehicle for ititihad-i Islam. Then Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu put this policy tilt in a historical perspective in March 2011, saying the mass protests could break "the template drawn by Sykes-Picot" (the Sykes-Picot Agreement was a treaty between the U.K. and France in 1916 where it was decided to divide the territories of the Ottoman Empire following World War I and bring power to the parties "that truly represent the people" of the region. Türkiye started backing these parties, hoping that their revolutionary ascent could open corridors of influence for Ankara in a region which

was ruled by the Ottomans for hundreds of years.

When the Muslim Brotherhood, another Islamist party with which the AKP shares ideological and political similarities, came to power in Egypt, Mr. Erdogan's doctrine was put to practice. When protests broke out in Syria in 2011 against the regime of President Bashar al-Assad, Türkiye backed anti-Assad groups – first the Free Syrian Army and then different Islamist outfits. In Libya, which was divided between two governments – one based in Tripoli in the west and the other in Tobruk in the east – Türkiye supported the Tripoli government dominated by Islamist groups, including the Muslim Brotherhood, after the Gaddafi regime was toppled by a NATO invasion in 2011.

Assertive yet pragmatic

Mr. Erdogan did not blindly follow ititihad-i Islam. He mixed his Islamist ideology with pragmatism. He was aware of Türkiye's limitations.

It is no longer the Caliphate and doesn't enjoy any politico-religious command over the Muslim world. Geographically, it is only a fraction of what used to be the Ottoman Empire. It is also a treaty ally of NATO. It hosts several Western military bases, including U.S. nuclear weapons at Incirlik. While Mr. Erdogan was ready to risk some friction in Türkiye's ties with the West, he was cautious not to lead those frictions to a break. At the same time, he saw Türkiye's support for Islamist groups as an opportunity to rebuild the country's influence in the Islamic world.

Syria is a case in point. When Mr. Assad, backed by Russia and Iran, started turning the tide of the civil war in 2016, Türkiye offered protection to the HTS, the anti-Assad Islamist group that had taken over Idlib. HTS was formerly Syria's al-Qaeda branch. But Türkiye strongly

opposed any military action against HTS. It entered into an agreement with Russia to maintain order on the Turkish-Syrian border. It carved territories on the border, creating a buffer between the Turkish Kurdish regions and the Syrian Kurdish province. And in November 2024, when the Syrian regime was reeling under repeated Israeli strikes, HTS launched an offensive and captured Damascus within 12 days. This further raised Türkiye's profile in West Asia.

Azerbaijan is yet another example. When Armenia and Azerbaijan went to war in 2023, Türkiye backed Azerbaijan against Armenia, a Russian treaty ally. When Russia, preoccupied with its own war in Ukraine, was unable to help Armenia, Azerbaijan, with Turkish support and Turkish-made drones, made quick gains. Türkiye supplied drones to Ukraine, but refused to enforce sanctions on Russia. Its decision to buy Russia's S-400 missile defence system had irked Washington. But Mr. Erdogan managed to reset ties and extract concessions from the U.S. when he supported the accession of Sweden and Finland into NATO.

Mr. Erdogan has thus been playing a tricky game – balancing between the West and its rivals through traditional diplomacy, while at the same time reasserting itself in the Muslim world using Islamist foreign policy.

Formidable challenges

While Türkiye's geographical location, its membership in NATO and its Islamist foreign policy allow the country to portray itself as a major force, its Achilles heel is the economy. Mr. Erdogan, who delivered on the economic front in the first decade of his rule, has ever since struggled to keep the ship afloat. Türkiye has experienced a prolonged period of hyperinflation, and the Turkish lira has depreciated significantly in recent years. Amid high inflation and high unemployment, social unrest has spread, frequently leading to violent crackdowns. Mr. Erdogan, who changed the Constitution turning Türkiye's political system into an executive presidency from parliamentary democracy, has amassed huge powers in his own hands. He has suppressed political opponents, independent media, and other voices of dissent. Earlier this year, Turkish authorities arrested Ekrem Imamoglu, the popular Mayor of Istanbul, who is the opposition's candidate for the 2028 presidential election, which Mr. Erdogan can't contest under the current Constitution.

While on the foreign policy front, Mr. Erdogan's bets have paid tactical results as of now, it is to be seen how Türkiye is going to build on these gains for long-term strategic dividends. True, the regime change in Syria is a huge advantage for Ankara, but Syria is far from being stable. So is Libya, where violence resurfaces frequently. In the Gulf, Qatar is Türkiye's powerhouse partner. While Ankara has improved ties with Saudi Arabia and the UAE in recent years, old mistrust still lingers. And in the Caucasus and the Black Sea, Türkiye will have to take Western and Russian sensitivities into consideration in its foreign policy decisions. Its support for Pakistan provides Ankara some legroom in South Asia, but Türkiye remains an insignificant player in the subcontinent.

While Türkiye seeks to expand its strategic footprint in different directions, with a neo-Ottoman tilt and within the framework of the western security umbrella, it also risks turning itself into an authoritarian Islamist regime with a weak economy and political instability.

THE GIST

Ititihad-i Islam (Unity of Islam) was a declared foreign policy doctrine of the Ottoman Sultan Hamid II who reigned from 1876-1909. During this period, Constantinople sought Muslim unity against enemies in the West.

Mr. Erdogan did not blindly follow ititihad-i Islam. He was aware that Türkiye is longer the Caliphate and doesn't enjoy any politico-religious command over the Muslim world. Geographically, it is only a fraction of what used to be the Ottoman Empire. It is also a treaty ally of NATO.

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Free food scheme is inherently prone to misuse

As the Government continues to provide free foodgrain to over 800 million people, a closer look reveals troubling patterns of misuse, policy distortion, and an urgent need for reform. The question now is not whether food should reach the poor — but how best to do it without enriching the corrupt

FIRST Column

Last year, the Indian Council For Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER) released a study titled 'Rationalising Public Distribution System in India' saying there was grain leakage under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) of 20 million tons entailing an estimated annual fiscal cost of around ₹70,000 crore to the central exchequer.

Under the PMGKAY, the Union Government asks the Food Corporation of India (FCI) and other state agencies to procure food from the farmers at MSP (minimum support price) and organise its distribution to around 820 million people for free. This is done through a network of fair-price shops under the Public Distribution System (PDS). The entire cost i.e. MSP paid to farmers plus handling and distribution cost (HDC) is reimbursed to the FCI/other state agencies as a subsidy.

While, the PMGKAY has been in force since January 1, 2023, before that, the Centre was giving food to 820 million persons at a heavily subsidised price of ₹23/1 per kg for wheat/rice/coarse cereals under the National Food Security Act or NFSA. In addition, since April 2020, it has given 5 kg of food per person per month for 'free' to all 820 million beneficiaries under PMGKAY to mitigate the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic.

From January 1, 2023, they have been getting free food under the PMGKAY. Uptempo ground reports corroborate the substantial leakage of cereals from the PDS. The most recent revelation is from Uttar Pradesh's Bareilly, Agra and Meerut divisions where between 2015 and 2018, the heavily subsidised food at ₹23/1 per kg for wheat/rice/coarse cereals under the NFSA was given to 'ineligible persons' thereby depriving the real beneficiaries of their due.

Last year, there were reports of a massive scam in West Bengal where rice meant for distribution through the PDS made its way to privately owned rice mills who after re-milling (polishing) sold in the open market raking in a moolah.

The scale of diversion can be gauged from the fact that the Enforcement Directorate (ED) — currently investigating — estimates the proceeds of crime to be ₹9,00,00,000 crore. The leakage has continued for more than a decade.

In 2016, there were reports of the disappearance of a significant amount of food grain stocks from godowns in Punjab raising concerns about potential losses and the financial implications for banks involved in the state's food borrowing program.



UTTAM GUPTA



Under directions from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), banks were forced to make provisions for such losses estimated to be around ₹12,000 crore. This was even as the Central Government didn't allow this loss to be absorbed under the 'food subsidy' budget.

There could be other numerous instances of leaks hidden from public glare. All put together, these could be denting the state exchequer by colossal amounts. So, when we talk of the ever-increasing food subsidy bill of the Centre (over ₹200,000 crore during FY 2024-25), it includes a sizeable portion towards the leak.

Its root cause has to do with how food subsidy is administered. Under the extant system, the subsidy is built into the price which under this Scheme is Zero; even under regular NFSA from 2013 till December 2022, the price was close to zero at ₹23/1 per kg.

Compare this with the cost of supply (MSP plus HDC) which is currently around ₹27 per kg for wheat and ₹39 per kg for rice. The availability of a mammoth stock of around 55 million tons (the quantity distributed through the PDS) in the supply chain with zero price tag is an open invitation to

dubious stakeholders to derive unintended gains.

Fundamentally, subsidised food is meant for the poor. The number of poor isn't more than 15-20 per cent of India's population. Yet, the current number of beneficiaries is 59 per cent of the population. Even as per the Shanta Kumar Committee (2015), the beneficiary number under the then NFSA shouldn't be more than 40 per cent. Furthermore, according to Niti Aayog, since 2015, 250 million persons have come out of poverty. This should have led to a corresponding reduction in the number of beneficiaries. But, this was not to be.

Even as millions of 'undeserving' people refuse to exit, the Supreme Court (SC) has directed the Central Government to update the list of beneficiaries to take into account the population during 2021 (the existing list is based on 2011 Census estimates). On this basis, the latter will need to give free food to an additional 100 million. With no deletion, the Scheme will have to cater to 920 million.

The NFSA legislation enacted in 2013 required beneficiaries to pay ₹23/1 per kg for wheat/rice/coarse cereals. It froze these rates for

6
LAST YEAR, THERE WERE REPORTS OF A MASSIVE SCAM IN WEST BENGAL WHERE RICE MEANT FOR DISTRIBUTION THROUGH THE PDS MADE ITS WAY TO PRIVATELY OWNED RICE MILLS WHO AFTER RE-MILLING (POLISHING) SOLD IN THE OPEN MARKET RAKING IN A MOOLAH

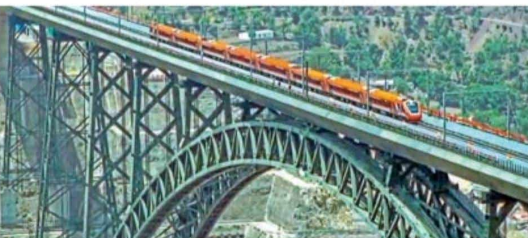
Indian Rail Reaches Kashmir Heights: A Marvel of Indian Engineering

On a clear day, draped in marigold flowers and national pride, the Vande Bharat Express began its maiden journey from Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra to Srinagar. Flagged off by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the moment marked more than the launch of a high-speed train. It was the culmination of a century-old dream — one forged in steel, vision, and unyielding resolve. The rail unification of Kashmir with the rest of India is that resolve. It is evident on the happy faces of the people travelling on the train. Train to Kashmir with an ultra-modern travel experience runs on the solid foundation of our engineers. Cutting short the travel time, high-speed Vande Bharat trains are running twice a day, six times a week from both sides. They are not only bringing much-needed push for the local economic development in the valley but are also proving to be a boon for the tourists from across the country. The picturesque journey with ultra-modern comforts in such a short time of three hours via a road journey of six to seven hours has truly unified hilly Kashmir with the rest of India in all weathers for us. For decades, Kashmir's story has been told through the lens of conflict and remoteness. It's heartening to see it being rewritten in the language of infrastructure — bridges, tunnels, and rail lines threading their way through the mountains. Coming on the eve of 11 years of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's governance at the centre, the special trains and the connecting link are all set to change the destiny of locals in Kashmir.

In its 172-year history of service to the nation, Indian Railways has proudly crossed many important milestones. Generations of dedicated railway men and women have toiled to make connectivity and carriage a daily reality. But to paraphrase a line from an iconic Indian advertisement: Indian Railways doesn't just build tracks; it also knits the fabric of national unity.

From isolation to integration Historically, Kashmir's isolation was more than metaphorical — it was geographic and punishingly real. Tucked high in the Himalayas and routinely cut off by snow for days, the region remained distant not just in reach but even in experience. Roads were often treacherous, air travel limited, and full rail connectivity a mirage long promised.

A British-era proposal for a Kashmir rail link remained on the drawing board for decades, hindered by complex geopolitical challenges. After countless rounds of deliberations, feasibility studies, technical evaluations, and consultations with both domestic and international experts, the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link (USBRL) was officially sanctioned in 1994. While the northern and southern sections progressed



steadily and were effectively completed within a decade, the central stretch — from Katra to Banihal — posed an engineering and security challenge of Himalayan proportions. For years, the rail line lingered as two disconnected segments — like outstretched hands reaching across a chasm of mountains. But that chasm symbolised more than just physical terrain. The final push to complete the USBRL project came when the Government declared it a national priority. With firm resolve and cutting-edge technology working in tandem, the project finally saw light at the end of the tunnel — quite literally. As Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw aptly remarked, this was far more than a transportation initiative; it was a nation-building effort.

Where Steel Defies the Sky The USBRL project may well be the most ambitious rail initiative since Independence. The 272-km stretch between Udhampur and Baramulla snakes through 40 tunnels and over 900 bridges. And at the centre of it all is the record-breaking Chenab Bridge — the tallest railway bridge in the world, standing 359 metres above the riverbed.

This marvel of engineering is capable of withstanding wind speeds up to 260 kmph and tremors of seismic zone V. Beside it stands the Anji Khad Bridge, India's first cable-stayed railway bridge, stretching asymmetrically across a valley, anchored by a single pylon and supported by 96 cables.

Tunnels, including the 11-kilometre-long T-80 (Banihal-Qazigund) tunnel through the Pir Panjal range, have been carved through fragile rock with a mix of dynamite and human grit. Physical surveys were done on horseback, while drones and satellite imaging provided aerial support. Workers laboured through harsh winters, sudden landslides, and the looming threat of PDS-sponsored terrorist attacks.

Today, more than 190 km of tunnels and thousands of tonnes of steel later, the line stands com-

plete — a feat that combines precision engineering with a certain audacity of vision, linking the Valley to the rest of the nation in a way that is profoundly symbolic.

A Train Called Hope

In many ways, the Vande Bharat Express is not just a train — it is a metaphor. It glides quietly through meadows and valleys, bridging distances both physical and psychological, proclaiming that Kashmir is no longer distant. It has reduced travel time between Srinagar and Katra to just over three hours, down from nearly six. What was once a treacherous road journey through landslide-prone hairpin bends and unpredictable weather, is now a smooth ride through tunnels and bridges that defy belief. It connects not only cities, but lives. Children in far-off villages are now talking about universities in Jammu and Delhi. Local artisans, apple growers, and carpet weavers now see their goods reaching markets beyond the valley — fresher, faster, further. "Where there were once checkpoints and delays," said a young shopkeeper in Srinagar, "there is now the sound of a train. It feels like we're no longer waiting for the rest of the country to arrive — we are moving with it."

A New Journey, Still Unfolding

This is not to suggest that one train will solve Kashmir's complex problems. Infrastructure cannot erase history or immediately heal wounds — security concerns will need addressing yet. But it can open doors — both literal and symbolic. And it can lay the groundwork for integration that is economic, social, and, ultimately, emotional.

What began as a dream on drawing boards in colonial offices has become a reality on steel rails blending with Himalayan rock. The rail line to Kashmir is the story of a country that refused to be daunted by terrain, terror, or time. From mountain shadows to sunlit stations, a new journey has begun!

(The writer is Ex-CEO & Chairman of the Railway Board. Views expressed are personal)

COVID-19 cases rise again: What's driving the surge and how to stay safe

After months of relative calm, COVID-19 cases are once again climbing in India and many parts of the world. As of early June 2025, several states have reported a noticeable uptick in daily infections, with urban clusters seeing a higher positivity rate. While the numbers are not yet alarming compared to previous waves, the increase has reignited public concern and drawn the attention of health authorities. So what is driving this latest rise, how is it different from earlier waves, and what should people do now?

What's Causing the Spike?

Experts attribute the current surge to a mix of factors. One of the key drivers is the emergence of new variants, particularly FLIRT variants such as KP2 and KP3, sub-lineages of Omicron that have evolved with mutations helping them partially evade immunity from previous infections or vaccinations. These variants are not necessarily more severe, but they are more transmissible.

Another contributor is seasonal behaviour. Just like flu tends to peak during certain times of the year, COVID-19 now appears to show a seasonal trend, especially with the monsoon approaching in India. People are spending more time indoors, increasing the likelihood of airborne transmission in poorly ventilated spaces.

Increased travel, public gatherings, and a general sense of pandemic fatigue — where people have relaxed masking and distancing norms — also play a role. Many no longer adhere to precautions like wearing masks in crowded spaces or staying home when symptomatic, which adds fuel to the spread.

Are the Symptoms Any Different This Time?

According to doctors, the symptoms seen in the current wave are broadly similar to those in previous Omicron-driven surges. Patients typically report mild to moderate symptoms such as fever, sore throat, nasal congestion, fatigue, and cough. Some also experience body aches, headaches, and gastrointestinal symptoms like nausea or diarrhoea.

What's different, however, is that most cases are milder, especially among vaccinated individuals. Hospitalisations and ICU admissions remain low, with a majority of patients recovering at home. Those most at risk continue to be the elderly, people with weakened immunity, and those with underlying conditions such as diabetes or lung disease.

Despite the lower severity, public health experts caution that a mild virus can still pose a threat at the population level if it spreads unchecked. Even a small percentage of severe cases from a large infected population can strain healthcare resources.

Mortality Rate and Serious Illness

As of now, the mortality rate remains low, though isolated deaths have been reported, often in individuals with comorbidities or advanced age. It's impor-

tant to note that COVID-19, while less deadly now than in the early pandemic years, still carries a risk of serious complications, including long-term COVID-19 — an umbrella term for persistent symptoms that can affect the lungs, brain, heart, and more.

India reported a few recent deaths in individuals who tested positive for COVID-19, but health officials are cautious about linking the deaths directly to the virus without deeper investigation. COVID likely acted as an aggravating factor in people already unwell from other causes.

Vaccination: Is There a Need for a Booster Now? India had seen impressive uptake for the first two vaccine doses, but booster coverage remains low, particularly among younger adults. Many took their last dose more than a year ago. While vaccine — induced immunity does wane over time, it still offers substantial protection against severe disease.

Globally, updated vaccines targeting newer variants are being developed, but in India, the availability of such formulations is still limited. Current vaccines — primarily Covishield and Covaxin — do still offer partial protection. At this point, experts are not recommending universal re-vaccination, but those who are elderly, immunocompromised, or have underlying illnesses may benefit from a booster in consultation with their doctors and in accordance with Government guidelines. The concept of herd immunity also needs to be revisited. With the virus evolving and immunity waning, the population's collective defence is not as robust as once assumed. Hence, periodic vaccination or updated boosters may become a seasonal norm much like the flu shot in the future.

Should We Be Worried? This is not a situation that calls for panic, but complacency is also dangerous. The rise in cases is a reminder that COVID-19 has not disappeared. Instead, it's transitioning into an endemic pattern — present in the population at lower, fluctuating levels. So far, no alarming red flags have been raised. However, given India's large and dense population, authorities remain cautious and are urging people to report symptoms and get tested if necessary.

What Precautions Should People Take? The tools to stay safe remain the same, and they are simple but effective: Wear a mask in crowded indoor spaces or when the population is at lower, fluctuating levels. So far, no alarming red flags have been raised. However, given India's large and dense population, authorities remain cautious and are urging people to report symptoms and get tested if necessary.

Wash your hands regularly and avoid touching your face unnecessarily. Do not ignore symptoms like persistent fever, chest discomfort, or shortness of breath — seek medical help early. Community awareness campaigns must be revived to prevent the false sense of safety that can lead to sudden spikes.

(The writer is a policy analyst. Views expressed are personal)



TUSHAR TAYAL

This is not a situation that calls for panic, but complacency is also dangerous. The rise in cases is a reminder that COVID-19 has not disappeared. Instead, it's transitioning into an endemic pattern — present in the population at lower, fluctuating levels. So far, no alarming red flags have been raised. However, given India's large and dense population, authorities remain cautious and are urging people to report symptoms and get tested if necessary.

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(The writer is consultant at CK Birla Hospital and is a seasoned internal medicine specialist. Views expressed are personal)

KEYWORD

Thirdspace: how spaces are experienced and remade

Thirdspace tells us that space is not just something we live in; it's something that lives in us. It's where everyday lives play out in all its contradictions. It is also where marginalised communities resist dominant narratives

Rebecca Rose Varghese

Have you noticed how in cities, we see places like Chinatown, Afghan Street, or Bengali corners? These are not the official names of those places, but the moment you enter them, you notice how different they are from the formal city around them. They are culturally vibrant and largely built by and for communities that don't belong to the region or country where the city exists. Such spaces, rich with life and meaning but unaccounted for in maps, are best understood through the concept of Thirdspace.

Thirdspace tells us that space is not just something we live in; it's something that lives in us. Shaped by emotion, identity, power, and resistance, it urges us to see how places such as street corners or protest sites are far more than physical locations. They are lived, remembered, and remade.

This concept was introduced by Edward Soja in his book *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (1996), which builds on the influential work of French philosopher Henri Lefebvre in *The Production of Space* (1974). Soja expands Lefebvre's idea of spatial triad into what he calls the triad of spatiality – a way of seeing space through three interrelated dimensions: Firstspace, Secondspace, and Thirdspace.

Triad of spatiality

A city can be measured by its buildings or population density. That's one kind of spatial understanding. But if you think about who planned the city, where certain communities live, and how zoning laws shape who belongs where, you're entering another kind of understanding. Finally, if you ask people how they live, remember, or resist in those places, you will have, yet again, a different understanding of space.

Firstspace (the perceived physical space) refers to the material space we can touch, measure, and map. It includes roads, buildings, parks, rivers, and railway tracks; everything you can record with data. While it seems neutral or objective, it is anything but. The physical placement of slums at city margins or the clustering of communities by religion or caste reflects histories of power and inequality. Firstspace is the focus of statistics, maps, and urban planning. And while it tells us what is there, it doesn't always explain why or for whom it was built.

Secondspace (the conceived ideological space) is how space is imagined and controlled by those with power, including urban planners, governments, and developers. This space is created in blueprints, master plans, zoning laws, and design philosophies. It reflects ideological visions about what space should be. For example, a city plan may declare a neighbourhood as a "commercial zone" or mark certain areas as "unsuitable." These decisions are not just technical; they reflect values, biases, and priorities. Colonial maps, gentrification projects, and housing segregation are all examples of Secondspace at work.

Thirdspace (the lived and experienced space) is where people actually live, remember, resist, and build meaning. It



GETTY IMAGES

blends the physical (Firstspace) and the imagined (Secondspace) and goes beyond them. It's not something you can fully map or plan. Think of a government-assigned refugee colony, perhaps originally called First Main Street, where Afghan migrants live. It was not designed to be anything more than a housing zone. But over time, it transforms into a cultural hub – for instance, a street market during Eid, a place of music, food, and memory. The community itself brings meaning to the place and transforms it. That transformation, that layering of emotion, identity, and politics, is Thirdspace.

Space and identity

Thirdspace resists easy definition because it's always changing. It's where everyday lives play out in all its contradictions. It is also where marginalised communities, women, and migrants resist dominant narratives.

Thirdspace gains even more significance when we add the lens of

identity, particularly race, class, and gender. Feminist thinkers like Bell Hooks, Doreen Massey, and others have shown us how space is gendered and politicised. Who is allowed in public parks after dark? Why are urban layouts often built around male mobility and safety?

Bell Hooks speaks of the margin not as a place of exclusion, but as a space of resistance and imagination. Feminist perspectives stress intersectionality, urging us to see how gender, race, and class interact within lived experience. Through this lens, Thirdspace becomes a powerful way to understand not just how space is used, but who is erased or included in that usage.

Space in the urban

Although Soja focused primarily on urban contexts, Thirdspace is not exclusive to cities. It can be found wherever people live, resist, and negotiate meaning. A village square, for instance, may serve as a physical space for gatherings (Firstspace), a symbolic centre of tradition

and hierarchy (Secondspace), and a site where local customs, gender roles, generational conflicts, and collective memory intersect (Thirdspace). Here, people meet not just to conduct rituals, but also to contest them, reinterpret them, and forge new relationships.

However, Soja emphasises urban contexts because cities are not only where tensions between the three spatialities become the most visible, it is also where they are most resisted. Urban spaces are sites of intense planning, regulation, surveillance, and segregation, making them ideal grounds to study how the "experience" of space often diverges from its physical form. Cities are also where diverse populations collide, informal economies thrive, and where protest and public culture becomes visible. These layered realities are precisely what Thirdspace seeks to capture.

Think of Greenwich Village in New York. On one level, the village has an 18th-century street pattern and is designated as a historical district, which imposes strict regulations on renovation and physical alterations (Firstspace). It is also home to two major colleges, and urban planners and architects could have long imagined it as a historical and educational hub (Secondspace). Finally, with the presence of the Stonewall Inn, widely recognised as the birthplace of the LGBTQ+ rights movement, the area carries deep emotional, symbolic, and cultural significance. It is associated with hipster culture, Pride, and histories of resistance. (Thirdspace).

Urban theory often leans too heavily on what can be mapped. What Thirdspace brings in is experience. It asks urban planners to understand how space is felt, not just designed. It values murals, street protests, informal markets, things that don't show up in satellite images but define the urban experience.

Resisting non-places

To understand Thirdspace better, it helps to compare it with Marc Augé's idea of "non-places." Non-places are the product of supermodernity – airports, malls, highways, and hotel rooms. These are spaces designed for functionality and transience. You pass through them, but they do not become part of your identity. There is no memory or belonging. They feel sterile, interchangeable, and emotionally vacant. In an airport lounge, no one asks your name. In a hotel lobby, the furniture looks identical regardless of the hotel being in Kochi or New York. These spaces are designed for movement, not memory; they value efficiency over attachment.

Soja's Thirdspace is in many ways a resistance to this flattening. It insists that even in the most alienating environments, people bring meaning. A shopping mall may be a non-place, but when local youth gather there to hang out, share music, or protest against a brand store that funds genocide, it becomes a Thirdspace. Their presence adds friction to the flow, subverts the design, and fills the space with memory, identity, and sometimes, dissent. Thus, Thirdspace not only becomes a critique of non-places but also presents itself as their potential antidote.

Thirdspace remains relevant wherever space is lived, contested, and remade, as it allows us to see beyond binaries. In a time of migration, digitalisation, and polarisation, it offers a lens to see how we build belonging, memory, and resistance, perhaps in the most unexpected of places. It reminds us that space is never neutral. It is made and remade, and that while it may be planned by the powerful, it is lived and reshaped by the people who live, remember and resist within it. And in that living, there lies the possibility of transformation.

Rebecca Rose Varghese is a freelance journalist.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

K. Subrahmanian
S. Upendran

"...so what you have to do is ... Are you listening to me? Or is your mind woolgathering?"
"Woolgathering? How can you..."
"...if you don't know what it means..."
"...I know what it means. It means 'daydreaming'..."
"Good for you. So, were you woolgathering?"

"I was not woolgathering! But tell me, what is the connection between gathering wool and daydreaming?"

"Good question. I believe in the good old days sheep farmers used to hire women and children to gather wool."
"So they used to remove wool from the sheep. Is that what you're saying?"

"No. These women and children used to remove wool from trees and bushes!"
"Remove wool from trees and bushes! You're joking, right?"

"I'm not. You see, when sheep graze they go into bushes, rub their backs against the trees..."

"But what is the connection..."

"...patience, my friend. When they go into the bushes, some of the wool gets caught in the bushes. And it was the job of the women and children to collect this wool."

"You mean they used to go from bush to bush and from tree to tree to see if there was any wool stuck to the branches?"

"That's right. And if there was any wool, they used to gather it."

"Going from one bush to another to gather wool! What a boring job!"

"True. All you did was to move from bush to bush. Sometimes you found wool, sometimes you didn't. It was a pretty monotonous job."

"A job where you didn't have to think at all."

"Exactly! These people didn't have to use their head at all. It didn't matter at all if they let their minds wander."

"And I suppose many of the woolgatherers daydreamed quite a bit to avoid boredom?"

"They probably did. That's why woolgathering is associated with daydreaming."

"It makes sense. While we are on the subject of animals, is your boss buying the farm that you looked at last week?"

"For some reason he did a complete flip-flop on that."

"A flip-flop? What does it mean?"

"When you 'flip-flop' on something, you completely change your opinion or belief in it. It's a reversal of your earlier belief or policy."

"It sounds like something that our politicians do very often."

"Exactly! In many countries politicians do flip-flops on issues after hearing from the people."

"In our country, politicians do flip-flops after talking to multinational!"

"And they become multimillionaires after that. Here's another example. The workers accused the management of flip-flopping."

Published in *The Hindu* on November 12, 1996.

THE DAILY QUIZ

A quiz on ICC Hall of Famers on the occasion of Dhoni's induction this year

V.V. Ramanan

QUESTION 1

The Hall of Fame was launched in 2009 in association with which body as part of the ICC's centenary year celebrations?

QUESTION 2

There were three Indians in the initial intake of 55 inductees named in the FICA Hall of Fame, which ran between 1999 and 2003. One was Sunil Gavaskar. Name the other two.

QUESTION 3

Of the 11 Indians in the elite list, two are women cricketers. Name both.

QUESTION 4

The inductees all receive a special commemorative cap. Who was the first to receive his special cap?

QUESTION 5

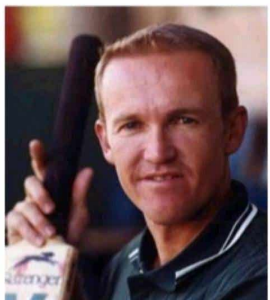
Who are the only siblings to get this coveted honour?

QUESTION 6

Apart from the latest Test playing nations Ireland and Afghanistan, which other Test nation has no inductees as yet?

QUESTION 7

As per the ICC website, how many players have been inducted into the Hall of Fame?



Visual question:

Name this legend, the only one from his country to make the Hall of Fame. FILE PHOTO

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz: 1. The number of series India has won playing in England so far. **Ans: Three, in 1971, 1986 and 2007**

2. India's most successful ground in England. **Ans: Lord's**

3. This player has scored the most runs for India playing in England. **Ans: Sachin Tendulkar – 1,575 runs in 17 tests**

4. The two batsmen to score a double hundred on English soil. **Ans: Sunil Gavaskar (221) and Rahul Dravid (217)**

5. This bowler took five wickets in the very first innings in the debut test played by India in 1932. **Ans: Mohammad Nissar**

6. The only bowler to have taken 10 wickets or more in a Test match in England. **Ans: Chetan Sharma – 10/188 in 1986**

7. The only wicket keeper to effect 5 or more dismissals in an innings. **Ans: Rishabh Pant in his very first Test match in England at Trent Bridge, Nottingham in 2018**

8. The only test that these famous four cricketers played together. **Ans: Bishan Bedi, B.S. Chandrasekhar, EAS Prasanna and S. Venkataraghavan**

Visual: The only non-English cricketer to score most hundreds at Lord's. **Ans: Three centuries by Dilip Vengsarkar – 103 in 1979, 157 in 1982, 126 in 1986**

Early Birds: Tito Shiladitya (Tamil Biswas) Piyali Tuli (Sunil Madhavan) Arjun Debnath

In the answers to the quiz published on June 9, 'Venice' was also part of the answer to Question 2 which was missed out in the June 10 edition. The error is regretted.

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

Word of the day

Unctuous:

unpleasantly and excessively suave or ingratiating in manner or speech

Synonyms:

buttery, fulsome, oily, smarmy, soapy

Usage: He seemed anxious to make an impact but not in an unctuous way.

Pronunciation: newth.live/unctuouspro

International Phonetic

Alphabet: ˈʌŋk(t)ʃəs/, ˈtʃʊəs/

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

Sensitive German experiment sets new limit on maximum neutrino mass

KATRIN closely observes the disintegration of tritium to estimate neutrino mass; it focuses on maximum energies of electrons emitted; these energies carry information on mass value to set the latest constraint; KATRIN collected data from 36 million electrons; the experiment is the latest in a long history of similar attempts which began in 1991

Nirmal Raj

The city of Deggendorf in Germany is about 350 km by road from Karlsruhe. Yet when the spectrometer of the Karlsruhe Tritium Neutrino Experiment (KATRIN) was constructed in Deggendorf in 2006, it took an 8,600-km detour to Karlsruhe. Of this, only 7 km was by land, transported on a truck with great care and police protection.

For the rest of its journey, it floated on the Danube, the Black Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, the Atlantic Ocean, and the Rhine. Such elaborate measures had to be taken because the spectrometer – the core instrument of the experiment – was a 200-tonne affair, making land transport dangerous.

Why make such a massive detector? For that is what it takes to attempt to determine the mass of the hardest-to-detect subatomic particle in the universe: the neutrino. Recently, the KATRIN collaboration published an upper limit on the sum of the masses of the three known neutrino types using 259 days of measurements recorded across five data-taking runs between March 2019 and June 2021.

The collaboration said that this sum couldn't exceed 8.8×10^{-2} times the heft of the electron – a 2x improvement on the previous best constraint. This is a significant feat.

One puzzle after another

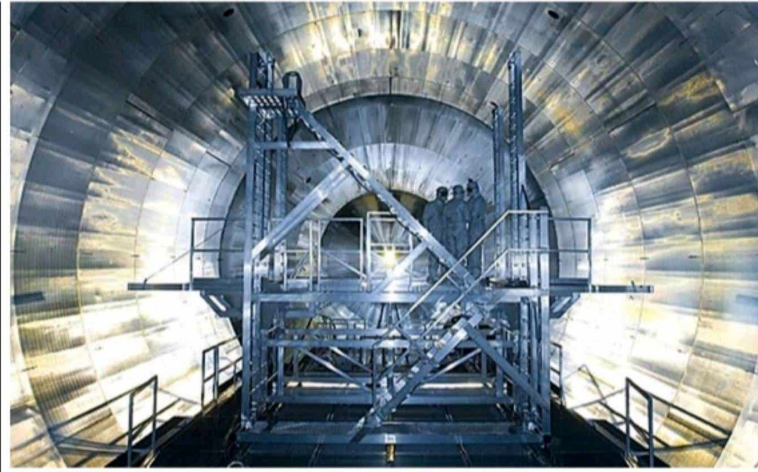
Physicists are so keen to study neutrinos because since their discovery in 1938, these particles have confronted them with one puzzle after another about nature. Here are some central questions pertaining to neutrinos' masses that drive research today.

1. How much does a neutrino weigh? Neutrinos come in three types. It has been established, through a phenomenon called particle oscillations, that at least two types of neutrinos have more than zero mass. It was an experimental triumph so intricate with profound theoretical implications that the physicists who led the discovery teams won the 2015 Nobel Prize for physics for making such a seemingly diminutive observation.

Unfortunately, particle oscillations can only measure the differences in the squares of the neutrino masses, not the masses themselves.

Measuring the actual masses is more challenging. This is what sophisticated devices like KATRIN are designed to attempt.

2. A neutrino's mass is so small that in almost every situation it travels nearly at the speed of light (a particle that does



When the spectrometer for KATRIN was constructed in Deggendorf in 2006, it took an 8,600-km detour to Karlsruhe. KATRIN COLLABORATION/INTEU

travel at the speed of light, the photon, is massless). It is this unbearable lightness that makes their weight difficult to pinpoint in an experiment. Also, physicists don't understand why neutrinos are so light.

3. In the Standard Model – the current best framework scientists have to explain the ways particles interact with each other – there is no way to theoretically confer masses to neutrinos. Said differently, neutrinos are predicted as massless, in conflict with the Nobel-winning oscillation data. This implies the presence of new, hitherto unseen forces and particle species in Nature – the clearest ink yet that something lurks beyond the Standard Model. What is that something?

4. Are neutrinos their own antiparticles? They certainly fit the bill. The antiparticle of a particle type carries opposite charge, so the first criterion for a self-conjugate particle is that it must be electrically neutral – which neutrinos are. As far as physicists can tell, it's also an elementary particle. This is unlike, say, a neutron, which is electrically neutral but composed of charged quarks. As antiquarks are distinct from quarks, an antineutrino is distinct from a neutrino.

To seal the deal, physicists need to confirm a third requirement: whether the neutrino has a Majorana mass or a Dirac mass. These terms refer to the

Cosmologists use the fact that neutrinos are key actors in shaping galaxies to set a tighter upper limit on the sum of the neutrino masses at 1.4×10^{-2} times the electron mass. This however relies on assumptions about the evolution of the early universe that are hard to test

mechanism by which a neutrino gets its mass: if it follows the Majorana process, then a neutrino would be confirmed to be its own antiparticle. To settle this, physicists are looking for a very delicate natural process called neutrinoless double beta decay: one way that it can occur requires two neutrinos to mutually annihilate themselves.

However, a neutrino is dreadfully hard to catch. Any material used as a detector would be nearly transparent to it. It takes, for instance, a light year's length of metal to stop a single neutrino emitted by the sun. Such elusiveness is why the neutrino took so long to be discovered.

A significant achievement

KATRIN itself closely observes the disintegration of molecular tritium to estimate the neutrino mass. In particular, it focuses on the maximum energies of electrons emitted when tritium decays;

these energies carry information on the mass of the neutrino. To set the latest constraint, KATRIN collected data from no fewer than 36 million electrons.

The experiment's feat is also the latest in a long history of similar attempts – beginning in 1991 in Los Alamos in the US and Tokyo, which set a cap on the neutrino mass that was about 20-times weaker than the new KATRIN result.

KATRIN is also not the sole player in the game. For example, observational cosmologists use the fact that neutrinos are key actors in shaping the structure of galaxies to set a tighter upper limit on the sum of the neutrino masses at 1.4×10^{-2} times the electron mass. This limit, however, relies on assumptions about the evolution of the early universe that are hard to test, weakening the validity of the conclusions drawn.

Another kind of experiment that can make a statement on neutrino masses makes use of the neutrinoless double beta decay – but this experiment also assumes neutrinos are self-conjugate at the outset.

The KATRIN result, on the other hand, is robust because it rides on no such assumptions. That is a significant achievement to savour in the face of an opponent as formidable as the neutrino.

(Nirmal Raj is an assistant professor of theoretical physics at the Centre for High Energy Physics in the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru. nraj@iisc.ac.in)

THE GIST

The KATRIN collaboration has published an upper limit on the sum of the masses of the three known neutrino types using 259 days of measurements. It said that this couldn't exceed 8.8×10^{-2} times the heft of the electron – a 2x improvement on the previous best constraint

A neutrino's mass is so small that in almost every situation it travels nearly at the speed of light. It is this unbearable lightness that makes their weight difficult to pinpoint in an experiment. Also, physicists don't understand why neutrinos are so light

Physicists need to confirm if the neutrino has a Majorana mass or a Dirac. However, a neutrino is dreadfully hard to catch. Any material used as a detector would be nearly transparent to it. Such elusiveness is why it took so long to discover

BIG SHOT



Archeologists Murat Turkteki (L) and Deniz Sari with a 5,000-year-old piece of Kulluoba bread found in Eskisehir province in Turkey and being exhibited at a museum on May 23, 2025. Since May 22, the local municipality has been reproducing it using the original recipe and plans to revive cultivation of ancient wheat, which is better suited to drought. AFP

QUESTION CORNER

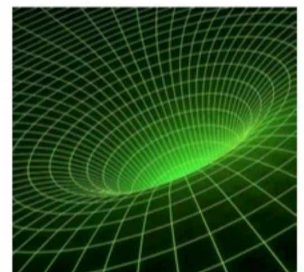
A question of gravitas

The Hindu Bureau

Q What is the origin of gravity?

A: For a long time, people wondered what makes the planets go around the sun and why anything thrown up comes down. The English scientist Isaac Newton probed the origins of this mysterious force and came up with the laws of gravitation.

According to these laws, which we would have learnt in school, the force acting between two objects depends on their masses and the distance between them. The mathematics of the laws suggested that the origin of gravity was the object itself. That is, by virtue of its own mass any object may have an influence on another (massive) object. But in his final analysis Newton concluded that massive bodies gravitated at all because god had deemed it so. It wasn't until Albert Einstein published his general theory of relativity that scientists acquired a clearer picture of gravity's origins. According to this theory, gravity is a property of space and time taken together (to be exact, of four-dimensional spacetime). It isn't technically a force that



Gravity is a property of spacetime. JOHNSON MARTIN/UNSPASH

causes objects to move one way or another.

Instead, the presence of energy and momentum in a region of spacetime has the effect of deforming spacetime there (like when you lay your head on a pillow). Objects moving there may seem to have been deflected from their straight path by a force. This is gravity. First published on August 29, 1996; updated today.

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



Maximum Mumbai

The city needs long-term solutions to its transportation needs

The railways have proposed automatic sliding doors with ventilation louvers in all Mumbai suburban trains by next year in response to the Mumbai train tragedy on Monday – four people died and nearly a dozen others were injured. Sliding doors could potentially force people inside and prevent footboard travel, a factor in the accident. They could ensure that passengers do not get down at unscheduled stops and put themselves in danger of being moved down by passing trains. The proposed vestibules connecting the coaches may also help to evenly distribute the crowds. As in Japan, each station may then need a few enforcers who could shove the crowds in so that the doors could shut and the trains move. While footboard travel is indeed a dangerous safety issue, it is only an outcome of the dangerous overcrowding in Mumbai trains. For vast numbers of people, the trains offer the least expensive travel option. Not too long ago, the dangers of overcrowding resulted in the infamous stampede at the Elphinstone Road station bridge in 2017. Multiple deaths are common along the three arteries that are the lifelines of Mumbai – the Central, Harbour and Western railway lines. Many are hit by trains while crossing tracks instead of using roads or bridges. While rail safety is an immediate issue that needs to be addressed, it is also time city leaders engineer inexpensive, alternative travel options to the trains.

Mumbai's trains have been seen as an inevitable part of the extreme urbanisation that the city represents and romanticised by literature. But they are simply not humane modes of transport. The suburban train system has undergone little change over the decades though the city has boosted its roads and enabled more vehicular traffic. Two-wheelers that were a rarity a few decades ago are now common. While the Metro promises to decongest the city to an extent, these services price out the lower classes. Bus services could be enhanced for routes connecting shorter distances. Along with doubling efforts to change the structuring of the city from a north-south network with commuter movements dictated by times, planners should consider expanding ferry transport – a cheaper and possibly more eco-friendly mode of transport to a city bound by the sea. Broadly speaking though, stampedes such as the one in Bengaluru, fire accidents in congested areas, and train tragedies such as the Mumbai one only highlight how unprepared India is to handle the consequences of urbanisation and the thrust to overturn the engagement of the vast majority of the people with agriculture.

Polarised Poland

Pro-European liberals and populist conservatives are at war

When Donald Trump's diverse coalition came to power in Poland in 2023, ending the eight-year rule of the right-wing Law and Justice Party (PiS), the veteran centrist promised "to chase away the darkness". Two years on, with the Tusk government still struggling to deliver on key reforms, Polish voters have elected a conservative backed by PiS as the country's next President. Karol Nawrocki, a 42-year-old historian and former boxer with little political experience, won the June 1 presidential run-off with 50.89% votes, narrowly defeating the Liberal Mayor of Warsaw, Rafał Trzaskowski, who secured 49.11%. Mr. Nawrocki, endorsed by Donald Trump and his MAGA movement, presented himself as an outsider populist, and promised a "Poland first" approach that echoed Trumpian rhetoric. During its rule (2015-23), the PiS had implemented sweeping reforms that were aimed at tightening its control over state institutions and media, and recasting the Polish society along its ideological lines. It curbed abortion rights, overhauled education and filled the judiciary with party loyalists, often clashing with the European Union. Mr. Tusk attempted to roll back some of these measures, but met with strong opposition from the outgoing President, Andrzej Duda, also a PiS ally. As legislative logjam derailed Mr. Tusk's reform agenda, Mr. Nawrocki capitalised on public resentment, attacking the Polish establishment and Brussels.

While Poland's presidency is largely ceremonial, Mr. Nawrocki's victory could significantly impact its politics. First, the President can veto laws passed by Parliament or send them to the constitutional court, now packed with judges appointed by the PiS government. In a post-election rally, Mr. Nawrocki said the Tusk government was trying to achieve a "monopoly" of power and vowed to prevent it, in a sign of what is to come. As the government does not have the three-fifths majority in Parliament to override presidential vetoes, Mr. Tusk could face further gridlock. Second, Mr. Nawrocki's victory is a morale boost for Poland's Eurosceptic right and may strengthen the alliance between the populist movements across the Atlantic. Despite his campaign rhetoric to oppose Ukraine joining NATO, he is unlikely to change Poland's foreign policy core – be it its political and security alliance with the West or its opposition to Russia. But on social and economic policies, he is likely to follow the PiS's right-wing conservatism. Third, the election result could exacerbate internal tensions within Mr. Tusk's ideologically broad coalition which threaten to reduce Mr. Tusk to being a lame duck Prime Minister. All this points to a turbulent path for Poland, where a politically polarised and socially divided nation braces for a prolonged tug of war between the pro-European centrists and ascendant populist conservatives.

The hazards of going global on India-Pakistan issues

Operation Sindoor and subsequent events thereafter have, once again, highlighted the futility of bilateral and multilateral diplomacy in resolving differences between India and Pakistan. An entangled web of frozen ideas has enveloped the situation making it impossible to separate the different strands. The developments following the Second World War and the evolution of the Cold War have also impacted heavily on the situation. Thus, any initiative, however sincere and logical it may be, will be hampered by the existing literature formulated by the United Nations and other international bodies, not to speak of Pakistan's stubborn position that Kashmir is the core issue. It is for this reason that Pakistan finds the smokescreen of resolutions and concepts relating to Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), terrorism, self-determination, non-proliferation and peaceful settlement of disputes spread over the last 70 years or more.

For instance, in the briefing given to India's seven teams of special envoys sent out to various countries after Operation Sindoor, the very first point they were asked to assert was that J&K is an integral part of India. Most countries, particularly those which do not follow developments closely, would look up the literature and the UN maps and find that there is an inscription on UN maps depicting the India-Pakistan border, particularly in the region of J&K. The inscription says, "Dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties." Sometimes, there is a more general disclaimer regarding boundaries on the map such as: "the boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations." Therefore, most countries would not make a commitment on the question of borders. At best, they would tell us that a bilateral solution, as envisaged in the Simla Agreement, would be desirable.

India's stand on terror

Equally complex is India's position on terrorism. More than 30 years ago, India introduced in the UN General Assembly, a draft for a Comprehensive Convention against Terrorism, which was dismissed as an anti-Pakistan move in



T.P. Sreenivasan
is a former Ambassador of India, who has specialised in multilateral diplomacy. He is the only Indian diplomat who has served at the Ambassadorial level at the United Nations in New York, Vienna and Nairobi and headed the UN Division in the Ministry of External Affairs

Several controversial concepts in the United Nations can weaken India's push to fight terror being fostered across its borders

which others were not interested. A one man department against terrorism in Vienna was nothing more than a research post. It did not even define terrorism because of the dictum that one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter. The support that India had given to fighters in Africa and Sri Lanka was pointed out as an example of the difficulty in defining terrorism. The only thing that the UN could do was to keep the definition of terrorism as vague as possible.

The shocking events of 9/11 (2001) brought terrorism, which was considered to be confined to West Asia and South Asia, centre stage in the United States and Europe and it appeared that decisive action would be taken to deal with the menace globally. But after hectic activity in the political and legal bodies of the UN to finalise binding laws, the focus shifted to U.S. military action in Afghanistan, which resulted in the ouster of the Taliban government. The war in Afghanistan was meant to root out terrorism, but after decades of conflict, the U.S. fled the country, leaving the Taliban in power.

The UN's approach

The UN Security Council has established several mechanisms to combat international terrorism, that are primarily centred around the various resolutions. Under these all member-states are obliged to take various economic and security measures to prevent the commission of terrorist acts. The Counter-Terrorism Committee of the Security Council was authorised to monitor the implementation of the overall plan. As for action against terrorists, this can be covered under Article 51 of the UN Charter, which recognises the inherent right of self defence if an armed attack occurs against a member-state. Though the application of this right in the case of terrorist attacks is complicated, it can provide a basis for a state to take action against terrorist groups that have attacked it. India's position about surgical strikes on terrorist infrastructure will be judged as to whether such action is proportionate and in accordance with international humanitarian law.

The Security Council's approach to counter-terrorism recognises that it requires a comprehensive "whole-of-society" approach that respects human rights and the rule of law. It emphasises international cooperation, the importance of addressing the conditions

conducive to terrorism, and the need to prevent and counter violent extremism. In these circumstances, it will be hard for India to get a clear endorsement of its actions against terrorism. India does bring up terrorist attacks to the Security Council, but the Counter Terrorism Committee has not taken a clear position on the right of nations to treat a terrorist attack as an act of war – the new doctrine advanced by India.

The ceasefire along the Line of Control (LoC) and India's restraint in crossing the LoC even in conflict situations are the other factors which are likely to come into play in any discussion in the Security Council or other international fora on India's strategic strikes. India's special envoys may have faced these questions in discussions even with friendly countries.

The issue of hyphenation

When India took the issue of Pakistan's invasion of Kashmir to the UN, it was a pure case of aggression which should have been considered under Chapter VII of the Charter. But as it happened, the issue was discussed under Article VI on Pacific Settlement of Disputes.

Consequently, several extraneous ideas were incorporated in the agenda, leading to western countries hyphenating India and Pakistan on every issue. When Pakistan and India acquired nuclear weapons, Kashmir was considered a nuclear hot spot. India has a non-first use doctrine, while Pakistan threatens to multiply its conventional military capability.

India has an established position that any bilateral discussion would only be on terrorism and the status of Pakistan Occupied Kashmir. Therefore, diplomacy at the bilateral level or multilateral level is unlikely to be effective.

Pakistan will continue to internationalise the Kashmir issue, but India should refrain from seeking international intervention or support. The reports of the special envoys will indicate, if anything, that such efforts are futile, given the history of the evolution of "the India-Pakistan question" in the Security Council.

India has nothing to gain by raising its concerns internationally as its narrative has got entangled in several controversial concepts in the UN. India's only option is to ensure its security by appropriate military action as long as Pakistan continues its policy of inflicting a thousand cuts on India to gain Indian territory.

India's legal bridge is one of reciprocity, not roadblocks

In May this year, the Bar Council of India (BCI) implemented the Bar Council of India Rules for Registration and Regulation of Foreign Lawyers and Foreign Law Firms in India (hereinafter "rules"). While many within the legal profession lauded the rules, a few law firms based in the United States have voiced strong objections, calling the rules a "non-trade barrier" and a "deliberate move to exclude or freeze out" U.S. law firms from engaging with the Indian legal ecosystem.

However, such criticism reflects a limited appreciation of the statutory mandate of the BCI and an inadequate understanding of India's comprehensive regulatory framework governing its legal affairs. On the contrary, the rules strike a balance by facilitating the entry of foreign practitioners and firms while upholding professional standards and safeguarding the interests of stakeholders within the Indian legal profession.

The criticism

First, it is contended that the rules create a "non-tariff trade barrier" by imposing procedural restrictions on U.S.-based law firms and legal professionals, thereby attempting to "freeze out" their entry into the Indian legal landscape. Second, it is alleged that the interests of the U.S. were overlooked during global consultations preceding the framing of the rules, making it difficult for U.S. law firms and professionals to comply with the stipulated mandates. Third, the requirement to disclose details such as the "nature of legal work" and "client identity" is said to conflict with the American Bar Association (ABA) Model Rules on client confidentiality. Fourth, the regulations governing fly-in, fly-out provisions have been criticised for being inconsistent with the principle of reciprocity, as they impose duration-based, disclosure-based restrictions not similarly applied to Indian counterparts operating in the U.S. Fifth, the



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Criticism of the Bar Council of India Rules for Registration and Regulation of Foreign Lawyers and Foreign Law Firms in India is unfair

contention is that the rules have been introduced as a surprise move, providing no transition period for adjustment, thereby placing U.S. firms and professionals at a disadvantage. Finally, it is argued that the rules could adversely impact U.S.-India bilateral trade and legal engagement, as they may discourage Indian corporations from undertaking transactions involving U.S. laws, owing to a dearth of legal professionals who are skilled in U.S. laws.

A reality check

First, the BCI is not a trade body, but a statutory body to maintain standards of professional conduct and safeguard the interests of legal professionals across India. Second, constitutionally and technically, the practice of law cannot form part of a trade agreement, as it is governed under Entries 77 and 78 of the Union List, unlike entries dealing with trade and commerce under the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution of India. Second, in *Bar of Indian Lawyers Through Its President Jasbir Singh Malik vs D.K. Gandhi* (2024), it was held that it was a contract of personal service, thereby segregating it from trade and business practices. Third, India recently chose not to include legal services in the United Kingdom-India Free Trade Agreement, despite facing significant international pressure. This reflects India's consistent position that legal services require a distinct regulatory framework.

Fourth, the impugned rules do not bar foreign law firms and practitioners but liberalise the Indian legal ecosystem, albeit in a structured and regulated manner. For instance, Rules 3 and 4 permit foreign law firms to operate in India, subject to registration and compliance with ethical and professional conditions. Further, the fly-in, fly-out model, under the proviso to rule 3(i), allows temporary visits, subject to an aggregate stay not exceeding 60 days within a 12-month period. Fifth, Indian legal professionals lack universal access to the U.S. legal system and

are subjected to rigorous, state-specific, examination-based licensing regimes. The reciprocity requirement under the rules, subjecting the U.S. counterparts to similar regulatory compliances, merely establishes equivalence. Sixth, rule 4(b), which mandates a certificate of "good standing at the bar", has been flagged by U.S. stakeholders as problematic, owing to its decentralised ecosystem. However, this limitation stems from the U.S. regulatory structure and cannot be attributed to the BCI or India.

Notably, rule 6 of chapter III allows for flexibility, empowering the BCI to verify such credentials holistically and on a case-by-case basis, thereby ensuring an accommodating approach, subject to an adherence to basic ethical and professional standards. Seventh, the requirement to disclose the nature and the extent of legal work does not dilute client confidentiality, as the objective is to obtain general information about the legal work or transaction. This ensures that the activities of foreign legal professionals remain within the permitted contours of legal practice in India.

There has been debate and discussion

Finally, the criticism regarding lack of consultations or a transition period before the operationalisation of the rules holds no ground. Debates and discussion have been ongoing for over two decades, encompassing expert committee reports, global consultations, and key judicial decisions such as *Lawyers Collective vs Bar Council of India* (2009) and *Bar Council of India vs A.K. Balaji* (2018) which have collectively laid the foundation for the present regulatory framework.

Far from being a barrier, the rules aim to create a cooperative bridge liberalising the Indian legal landscape in a measured manner, while safeguarding professional integrity, client confidentiality, and upholding the vital principles of reciprocity and ethical accountability.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Eleven years in office

The description of the 11 years of rule under the Modi government as a "golden" period is mere rhetorical flourish (Inside pages, "Modi provided a responsible and accountable govt.: Nadra", June 10). Catch-phrases, acronyms and alliterations have been liberally used to construct and sell the narrative of "good governance". The Modi government has changed the political complexion of the country and has erased the fine line between democracy and majoritarianism. Rising unemployment and inflation reflect its performance on the economic front. The government has conveniently forgotten its promise to create two crore jobs every year. The blatant misuse of central agencies to target political opponents has tarnished the government's public image. The step-motherly treatment of "single engine" governments and "good favouritism" towards "double engine" governments have shown the central government's inability to rise above party politics. G. David Milton, Maruthakudi, Tamil Nadu

There is absolutely no

doubt that under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the NDA-led government has scored high in development. In almost every sector, the achievements are remarkable and inspiring. At the same time, it is a pity that the fire in Manipur is being allowed to burn. N. Mahadevan, Chennai

A fallout

Donald Trump and Elon Musk are alpha personalities, with transactional world views and individual ambitions, and who demand control over their narratives. While Mr. Trump seeks dominance

in the media, politics and public perception, Mr. Musk does the same, albeit in the tech and innovation spaces. By straying into politics, he set up a wild ego clash. Given this innate fragility, the "bond" could sustain only so long as mutual benefit was to be accrued. N. Narayanan, Narvath, Mumbai

Television today

Gone are the days when television serials had good value-based content, which could be watched by the entire family ("Open page" – "Tyranny of soaps", June 8). These days, serials are scary to watch, with most being aired for several months.

There need to be checks before serials are aired. With most serials occupying prime time, there is characterisation that shows women in a bad light. Even children are justified in the plot. TV serials reach one's home directly and are watched by the young and the old. The impact on people needs to be examined. Why cannot the script writers think of plots that motivate and inspire every group of people? Balasubramaniam Pavan, Secunderabad

The shadow of apps

Online exploitation and abuse are on the rise, with

children and youngsters increasingly being exposed to online content of an explicit nature. Young minds are bound to be corrupted, with their behaviour, academic performance and emotional well-being being severely affected. Moral values are on the decline and students are losing focus. We risk a future of growing crime and violence. Why are governments silent about the widespread availability of undesirable apps? Dr. Arunachalam, Nagercoil, Tamil Nadu

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