

THE ASIAN AGE

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Cracks widen in America as Trump on destructive path

There is a confrontation going on between US President Donald Trump's hard line immigration agenda and the nation's biggest state ruled by Democrats that does not augur well for the word "United" in the abbreviation, USA. Hundreds of people have been detained in Los Angeles even as the civil unrest has spread to many other cities, including in Republican-majority states, leading to arrests of demonstrators there too.

The cracks in a polarised America are widening even as the National Guards and the Marines have been put on duty to tackle what is essentially a law and order problem. This is proving politically explosive as Trump had sent federal forces without extending the courtesy of consulting the affected state and California's governor Gavin Newsom, who is emerging as a leading contender to run for President, has taken the matter to court. Sending troops in to curb domestic protests and riots must be considered every nation's right, but Trump is doing it in a way that shows he has edged ahead in his authoritarian ways. Behind his reasoning is perhaps the fact that there is a resonance among voting Americans about the dangers of unchecked immigration across America's southern land border although immigrants have historically helped the US flourish as the world's largest economy by lending their shoulders to the wheel for centuries.

It is incontestable that rioters should be brought to book and civil disturbances dealt with an iron hand if law and order is not to be sacrificed for arguments in favour of illegal economic immigrants looking for a better life. Active raids by the immigration authorities force ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) on the most likely places of migrant gatherings may be inflaming the situation further with Trump determined to stop "invasion by a foreign enemy", and dealing with protesters he describes as "animals".

The clash between the liberals and the radical among the right is what is being highlighted here, aided in no mean measure by the symbolism of sending in federal enforcers though the violence in Los Angeles had been confined to downtown areas, where curfew was clamped too. Federal overreach by Trump's orders and his threats to use inspection laws against protesters come in sharp contrast to what he did as President in pardoning January 6 rioters who did far worse like striking police officers on Capitol Hill.

Sending in federal forces is just another step in a chaotic second Trump term in which the "Don" has upended the rules of global trade with sweeping tariffs, hit schools of learning in half a dozen universities like Harvard, run ducks and drakes with administration departments when his now-frenemy Elon Musk tried to run riot with downsizing, and pursued action against students and even those with valid visas with a viciousness not associated with American exceptionalism.

Autocratic is the word most often used to describe Trump though he appears to have done little homework before attempting radical reforms of the American system as frequent U-turns have shown up. But a headline immigration policy is something he is bound to pursue as it has political profit written all over it. It drips with irony that an authoritarian who may be out to disrupt every democratic tradition still uses his actions to further the Republican hold on the electorate as 2026 looms when the midterms may be crucial for control of the Senate and the House.

Fertility falls, challenges remain

India's fertility rate has declined to 1.9, which is well below the replacement level of 2.1. The fertility rate is a metric that shows how many babies each woman is having on an average in a particular country. A fertility rate that is below replacement level means India is on the path of controlling population, which is a welcome relief for the world's most populated country. However, beneath this statistical achievement lies a ticking demographic time bomb.

A declining fertility rate without adequate economic advancement would be disastrous for any country. If India's population declines before it becomes rich, it will have a large elderly population, which a relatively smaller base of working population cannot support. This is a dangerous trap. Nevertheless, India still has a window of opportunity where the working-age population outnumbers the dependents. However, this window is rapidly closing as the country's population is expected to peak in 40 years — by the year 2065 — from now and decline subsequently. The warning signs could already be seen in states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu, where ageing is accelerating.

The conventional response to declining fertility has often been short-sighted going remarks made by chief ministers of several states — offering cash incentives or tax rebates to encourage childbirth. However, India does not need more babies, rather it needs better-prepared people.

The real challenge is not the number of people but the quality of the workforce. India's large youth population could become a liability, not an asset, if it remains unskilled or underemployed. Our focus must immediately shift from maintaining population numbers to creating human capital, which could smoothen the country's transition to an ecologically-sustainable population.

The country, therefore, does not need token schemes, which are merely aimed at people's sustenance. It should implement a nationwide coordinated push for high-quality education and skill development, which could help it in supporting an extraordinarily large aging population.

THE ASIAN AGE

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Subhani



Trump crackdown: Ending the free ticket to paradise?

Indranil Banerjee

US President Donald Trump's decision to clamp down on the intake of foreign students has produced a flurry of commentary, both outside and within the United States. India, which will be the worst hit, has responded with extreme gloom and prophecies about the end of the "American Dream".

The fear and censure stems from President Trump's recent executive orders cutting short students' academic terms in the United States, deporting some forcibly and halting new student visa interviews. He has also banned Harvard University from enrolling foreign students, a move that has been criticised in the courts.

The US President's critics have pointed to the potential for immense damage his foreign student related decisions could wreak on the economy and the country's larger cultural landscape. They claim that the open-door policies of American academia attracted the best and the brightest from around the world and helped maintain the country's innovative edge.

Some argue that the rich cultural milieu fostered by continued immigration will crumble while others, more mindful of their pockets, bemoan the diminution of the billions that foreign students annually bring in.

The stringency of the critics has a lot to do with the fact that the more progressive elements of American society tend to be virulently anti-Trump and align his conservative politics that often seem to border on jingoism and xenophobia. His critics view him as a person single-handedly wrecking American institutions, especially those intrinsic to the nation's liberal character.

His attacks on hallowed US institutions such as Harvard and Columbia universities have only hardened liberal positions. President Trump's justification for the crackdown is ostensibly based on what he considers to be rampant anti-Semitism and other anti-national activities, including espionage, on US campuses. While various additional arguments have been propounded to explain Mr Trump's crackdown on foreign student intakes through visa refusals, deportation threats and visa revocations, the move could be part of a larger plan to end the apparently free inflow of immigrants through various routes into the country.

At one end of the immigration spectrum are the foot-sloggers marching to the US borders to climb over fences to become part of the American dream, while on the other are legal immigrants, many of whom arrive as students and then almost automatically acquire jobs to settle down in the country. Legal immigration accounts for about 77 per cent of inflows and Indian students constitute the majority of this type. According to official US data, one in four international students entering the US every year is an Indian. This figure has only been increasing in recent years. Since 2009, Indian students have outnumbered their Chinese counterparts, growing a record 11.8 per cent between 2023 and 2024. Last year, 42 lakh Indian students arrived in the US universities, with the majority opting for programmes that would allow them to stay on indefinitely in the country.

Mr Trump's conservative and working-class supporters do not consider unchecked immigration to be worthy of celebration, especially since foreigners have been competing for jobs both at the lower and the hi-tech ends of the employment ladder.

In many urban areas, institutional nostalgia coupled with management prowess. If he can keep Air India from nosediving (well, almost) and coax a smile from a steam locomotive, he might just manage the trickiest task yet presented by India's political history without sparking a coalition crisis in the galleries.

Let's hope the souvenir shop sells irony by the pound.

GRAFT IN ED A CADRE PROBLEM? When a senior Enforcement Directorate (ED) officer gets caught in a graft case, eyebrows go up. But when insiders start whispering about deeper rot, it's time to take notice.

The ED, which handles the heavy-lifting on money laundering investigations under the PMLA, has had its share of limelight in recent years. But lately, that spotlight has begun to flicker. Not because it's overworked or under-resourced, but because of who is steering it, and whether they know how to drive.

Traditionally, the ED's top echelons were manned by seasoned IPS officers trained to deal with criminal statutes, investigative pressure, and courtroom scrutiny. Over the years, a more impactful shift happened. Revenue and finance services officers — often with little exposure to criminal law — began occupying senior posts. Think bean counters suddenly being handed

According to official US data, one in four international students entering the US every year is an Indian. This figure has only been increasing in recent years.

they have also been out competing locals for basic amenities such as housing and schooling. This cannot but fuel immense resentment, especially since the problem has only mounted in recent times.

It is estimated that in 2023 America's foreign-born population reached a historical high of 48 million, growing by a staggering 1.6 million in one year alone. Pew Research points out that "immigrants today account for 14.9 per cent of the American population, a roughly three-fold increase from 4.7 per cent in 1970". Traditionally, Mexicans have been the largest immigrant group, which is understandable since they are neighbours, but in recent years it is the Indian population that has been growing the fastest.

Middle class families in India have been shipping off their offspring to the United States in record numbers even if it means selling off family assets or taking massive bank loans. For many Indians, one family member "settled" in the US translates into a gilt-edged investment which will ensure lifetime security for parents, and at times, the entire extended family.

Not surprisingly, President Trump's efforts to strangle the flow of foreign students has evoked widespread dismay in India. As one Bloomberg correspondent reported: "The worries are pouring in on my parent chat groups. Many have already spent thousands of dollars preparing children for a future at a prestigious American university — hiring expensive college counsellors, visiting campuses, and investing countless hours navigating complex application processes."

Hundreds of thousands of students, not just in India, but across the world waiting to join US universities, are anxiously following the Trump administration's decisions and skirmishes with academia and the judiciary. Many believe this is the end of easy access into America.

Despite the panic and uproar over President Trump's moves to curtail foreign student intakes, the case seems to be one of more smoke than fire. To begin with, there is nothing to indicate that he plans to end all student intakes or end immigration completely. All his actions are designed to reduce the flow of foreigners into the country, not to block it.

Trumpian stratagems favour a disruptive approach to change; the idea is to coerce his targets through shock and awe. This often causes more consternation and condemnation than real transformation. In the United Kingdom, on the other hand, tightened immigration rules led to a record number of deportations last year, which included students who had taken up jobs and were happily residing in the country.

There was no hue and cry there because the entire process was carried out in an orderly and judicious manner. Like Chinese emperors who expanded and fortified the Great Wall of China for centuries to stem the flow of barbarians into their country, Mr Trump has started a process of filtering physical and virtual walls around his country. His barrier might not prove leak-proof, but it will greatly reduce the surging thousands who want free entry into the US.

President Trump's blitzkrieg-like tactics is a form of deterrence. The deportation of handcuffed illegal immigrants being off-loaded from a military plane in an airfield in Punjab has made a message: only a handful of Indians, but more importantly it drove home a message: a passage to America should no longer be considered a free ticket to paradise.

The writer is an independent commentator on political and security issues

LETTERS WHY FEEL GUILTY?

The sight of a young Indian student, spreadeagled on the ground and handcuffed by American police like some dangerous criminal or terrorist has made all Indians angry. They are demanding an explanation from the Indian government and an apology from America. India has been swallowing one insult after another without once raising its voice against the kind of treatment its citizens are being subjected to. Smaller nations have shown their resentment against this type of treatment meted to it students, but not India. Self-respect demands a retaliation by India. If we cannot respect ourselves, who will?

Anthony Henriques
Mumbai
NORTH-SOUTH GAP

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC gap between southern and northern India is a visible reality, shaped by historical, political and cultural factors. Southern states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu have excelled in literacy, healthcare and governance due to sustained planning and civic awareness, while many northern states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar continue to face challenges rooted in systemic neglect and rapid population growth. However, this divide is not insurmountable; with fair, performance-based resource allocation and inclusive policies, the nation can bridge this gap effectively. India's true strength lies in its diversity, and progress depends on transforming regional differences into collective potential.

Ms Asad
Mumbai

WHOSE TEST?

ENGLAND will be hosting the final of the World Test Championship between Australia and South Africa. This will be the third final of WTC hosted by England. If England is not a participating team, holding a final at the Lords is void of all logic, particularly when Test cricket is facing an onslaught from the T20 format in terms of spectator foot-fall. It has become increasingly difficult for organisers to bring in crowds to watch a Test match. It is not more so then when one's own nation is not a participating country. Thus, it will be prudent to host the final in one of the two countries that qualify.

D.B. Madan
New Delhi

Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu



Planes, trains & PMs: Ashwani Lohani's career comes full circle

Only in India can a steam engine enthusiast end up curating the country's highest-octane political museum — and somehow, it makes perfect sense. Ashwani Lohani's appointment as director of the Prime Minister's Museum and Library isn't just a career twist; it represents a full circle.

This is the man who introduced glamour (and a touch of grease) to the National Rail Museum, then went on to lead Air India, where he was expected to perform miracles on a shoestring and a prayer. He chaired the Railway Board, too, juggling budgets, bottlenecks, and boardroom blues with that uniquely Indian blend of optimism and pragmatism.

Now, Mr Lohani finds himself back on familiar tracks, though the engines at Teen Murti run on ideology, not diesel. The museum, which seeks to house the legacies of all of India's Prime Ministers under one roof without spontaneous combustion, could benefit from a steady hand. Mr Lohani's been appointed for a three-year term, though if past precedent is anything to go by, he might just become the next long-term exhibit.

It's a clever appointment. The museum, which was established not without controversy, remembers the murmurs about it being a "power play against Nehruvian memory" — now gains a director who's neither a political insider nor a legacy warrior. Lohani possesses that rare trait:

time, and wrap up within an hour. District-level officers are expected to join virtually unless there's a compelling reason to be physically present. But here's the thing: While the intentions are commendable, the success of such reforms hinges on execution. With departments adhere to these guidelines, or will they become just another set of rules that look good on paper but are ignored in practice? Baku inertia is a formidable force, and without a robust mechanism to enforce these changes, we might find ourselves back to square one.

Moreover, while the focus on efficiency is laudable, it's essential to ensure that the quality of discussions doesn't suffer. Some issues are complex and require in-depth deliberation. A rigid one-hour cap might lead to rushed decisions or superficial discussions.

In the end, the effectiveness of this reform will depend on the commitment of all stakeholders to genuinely embrace the change. If implemented earnestly, it could set a precedent for other states to follow. If not, it risks becoming just another well-intentioned initiative that failed to make a real impact.

Love them, hate them ignore them at national level, is the bahu guarantee and Dilip's belief. Share significant bahu escapades dilipcherian@hotmail.com

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{ OUR TAKE }

Behind the bleak growth scenario

World Bank paints a grim picture of the global economy. However, the solutions it proposes to address this are underwhelming

Downward revision to global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth, thanks to the trade policy uncertainty unleashed by US President Donald Trump, has become the norm for multilateral institutions this year. The World Bank's Global Economic Prospects (GEP) report, released on Tuesday, has kept with the trend bringing down its global GDP growth forecast for 2025 by almost half a percentage point to 2.3%.

Where GEP paints a grim picture, however, is in drawing attention to the fact that things were exactly great even before Trump 2.0 shocked the world. Statistics speak for themselves. Global growth has been falling for a long time. This trend is in keeping with a slowdown in global trade, foreign direct investment (FDI) to emerging market and developing economies (EMDEs), and their income convergence with advanced economies. The EMDE story becomes bleaker once China and India are taken out of the picture.

When read with the fact that most things turned south after the global financial crisis of 2008, there are two key takeaways to be drawn. The first is growth and development — the latter in the sense of egalitarian economic progress in the world — are critically linked and development cannot be achieved without growth.

The second is that the world has been struggling to find a stable growth anchor in the aftermath of the 2008 crisis. The 2008 crisis itself was the result of a Ponzi scheme in the garb of financial innovation to boost growth. It is also important to underline that the political factors that have triggered the trade wars of today have their roots in the asymmetric incidence of the gains and losses of the nature of growth in the advanced economies. Unless this political sentiment is catered to sincerely, there is little hope of things returning to normal.

On this front, GEP's three-fold prognosis on how to make things better — it suggests trade liberalisation, fiscal balance, and employment generation — is underwhelming. The core of the economic problem facing the world at the moment is whether or not the advanced countries have the political appetite to absorb large exports from EMDEs. Solving this problem requires a rebalancing of not just the international division of labour and income but also the balance within advanced economies. Not engaging with this problem will not make it go away.

Budget tailored to please Pakistan's armed forces

The Pakistan government has proposed an outlay of 2.55 trillion Pakistani rupees or more than \$9 billion as the defence budget for fiscal 2025-26, marking the highest annual increase (20.2% over the last fiscal) in military spending in more than a decade. This comes at a time when the country is grappling with a host of economic issues, including dwindling foreign exchange reserves, a balance of payments crisis and perpetual reliance on handouts from international financial institutions and benefactors such as China.

Officials in Islamabad have justified the enhanced defence spending by pointing to tensions with India and New Delhi's targeted military strikes on terrorist infrastructure within Pakistan in May. However, Pakistan's latest allocation gives the military 1.97% of the country's GDP after almost a decade of decline in defence spending. In marked contrast, Pakistan's spending on health and education fell in the previous fiscal to less than 1% of the GDP.

These developments only point to the outsized role of the Pakistani military in shaping policies that should be in the hands of the civilian government. The Pakistani military establishment is already involved in a wide range of business operations but now development allocations are being slashed to meet defence needs. India has already expressed concerns about the aid provided to Pakistan by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) being diverted to sectors other than development. Given that the Pakistani military still does not make public all aspects of its budget, there is a need for multilateral

Breaking a promise made to the children

In 2016, when the UN adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the world promised to end all forms of child labour by 2025. The world did not keep its commitment

Today is the 24th International Day Against Child Labour. This day was a hard-won victory in the movement against child labour. But today, my heart aches. I can hear the desperate cries of millions of children who are still trapped in forced labour, toiling in fields, factories, and homes.

At this time in 1998, I was surrounded by hundreds of children who had been rescued from similar conditions. I remember their fearless faces as they walked with me across 103 countries in the Global March Against Child Labour. At the end, we were invited to speak at the International Labour Organization (ILO) headquarters in Geneva, where we placed a simple but urgent demand: "No more tools in tiny hands. We want books, we want toys!" It was not just my voice. It was the voice of millions of children who wanted freedom and education.

The march made history. In 1999, the ILO adopted Convention 182, the first international law against the worst forms of child labour, including slavery, trafficking, and bonded labour.

The first 16 years of the convention

ignited a wave of hope as we witnessed remarkable progress. Between 2000 and 2016, the number of child labourers dropped drastically from 250 million to 152 million. It showed that change was possible. But this was not enough, because in the case of children, every moment matters. One day without school is an opportunity lost, one minute in slavery is a childhood stolen.

An opportunity to revive the movement came in 2016, when the UN adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We spearheaded a campaign to make sure eliminating child labour was included as an SDG. We believed that including child labour into the global development agenda would bring much-needed support. Our efforts bore fruit. The world promised to end all forms of child labour by 2025. The youngest member of our global march was Basu Rai, a boy of 10 who sat on my shoulder as we marched. Despite being only eight, his calls were thunderous: "Who will stop child labour? We will!" But today, with months left until the 2025 deadline, I think of millions like Basu as I say with a heavy heart: We are failing our children.

In the first four years of the SDGs, until 2020, the number of child labourers increased for the first time in 20 years, reaching 160 million. In Africa alone, 10,000 children are being pushed into labour every day. During the same time, the world became \$10 trillion richer, creating at least one new billionaire every week. This was a sign of a lack of compassion. Can we really

call this development? Years ago, rereading the United Nations, I had said with confidence that we would end child labour by 2025. But recently, someone asked me, "Sir, when will child labour end?" I had no answer.

We learnt valuable lessons before 2016 about what truly makes a difference in the movement against child labour. Progress was driven by sweeping public momentum and moral leadership with political will. People raised their voices for children, and governments listened. Many countries invested heavily in education. Brazil, India, Kenya, and South Africa upheld compulsory education as a fundamental right and saw results.

Social protection programmes were expanded for the most vulnerable. Corporations and industries, too, came under pressure, as strong political voices, particularly in Europe and the US, demanded that child labour be removed from supply chains. All these efforts worked together.

Today, the global drive has weakened. The SDGs were meant to align efforts to tackle issues like poverty, gender, and education. Such an approach would expedite progress towards all goals as they are connected. But efforts remain siloed, and departments fail to collaborate. We also treated child labour as a side issue, as only a labour problem, and not a crisis of justice and human rights. So, it didn't receive the attention it deserved.

There are other deeper problems. Many poor countries, especially in Africa, are trapped in unfair tax sys-



Kailash Satyarthi



The climate crisis directly impacts the most vulnerable populations, leading to an increase in child labour. HT PHOTO

tems and crushing debt. Corruption, weak governance, and conflicts deepen the crisis. Every dollar lost to injustice is money that could have built a school.

What worries me even more is a dangerous trend I am seeing. In the US, over 30 states have introduced laws to weaken child labour protections. In the EU, a law to hold companies accountable for child labour in supply chains was diluted after member States protested. And in Brazil, similar discussions are ongoing.

Still, there are small but meaningful sparks. The UNICEF recently introduced a global child protection fund. But the support is inadequate. The fund met only about 30% of its target, which has affected the availability and quality of child protection services. Without money, how can we help children in need? The world is also facing more conflicts than ever before. The percentage of children living in war zones has doubled since the 1990s. As I write this, 473 million children are living in conflict zones. These children are at high risk of dropping out of school, losing their homes, and being forced into exploitation. Covid-19 intensified the tragedy. The climate crisis directly impacts the most vulnerable populations, leading to an increase in child labour and perpetuating the cycle of poverty and injustice. But hope per-

sists. Many countries have successfully reduced child labour. People across the world are still raising their voices.

I believe India can lead this movement. We have strong laws, good welfare schemes, and political consensus. There is minimal resistance from industry. All the pieces are in place.

What we need now is urgent action. First, laws must be enforced. A law that exists only on paper is meaningless. Second, child labour must be treated as a cross-cutting issue, connected to education, health, and poverty, and departments must work together towards this goal. Third, investment in education is critical. Quality schooling is the strongest shield against child labour.

Importantly, all efforts must be rooted in a sense of urgency stemming from the deep conviction that these are all our children. They must be rooted in compassion. Compassion is the force born from feeling the suffering of others as one's own and taking mindful and selfless action to end that suffering. We believe that everyone is born with an inherent capacity for compassion. We owe our children a better world. Let us not break our promise again.

Kailash Satyarthi is founder, Satyarthi Movement for Global Compassion. The views expressed are personal

Pakistan's budget reflects a State under the military

According to a recent World Bank report, the poverty rate in Pakistan is above 45%. Pakistan was saved from default by the 25th International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout package last year. Amid recent hostilities with India, the IMF made a fresh commitment of \$1.4 billion as part of its climate resilience fund. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has also approved a \$800 million loan. These funds are likely to be diverted to defence. It is against this backdrop that Pakistan's budget for fiscal year (FY) 2025-26, presented on Tuesday, has slashed development outlay by 50%, while the defence budget has been increased by 20%.

The budget for FY2025-26 reflects the interests of the military and Pakistan's elite. It has increased the defence outlay, while the overall budget has been reduced by 7%. The defence allocation is shown as 2,557 trillion Pakistani rupees (\$9.05 billion). However, this figure does not include the military pension of \$2.6 billion. Taking this into account, the actual outlay for the military is \$11.65 billion. This represents an increase of 17% over the previous year. While the defence budget has been increased, the federal development budget has been slashed by half to \$3.54 billion.

This will affect the education and health sectors. Despite pressure from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), agriculture and retail remain outside the tax net, as they represent the interests of the powerful landed gentry and businessmen. Pakistan's budget for the current year ending in June was predicated upon a GDP growth rate of 3.2%. The actual growth rate has been only 2.6%. Surprisingly, the budget for the new year projects a sharp increase in the growth rate to 4.2%. Higher projections help minimise the deficit.

Two major projects that have escaped cuts are the Diamer-Bhaskra dam in Gilgit-Baltistan in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and highway construction in Balochistan. The former is a China-assisted mega hydro power project. Both are driven by strategic considerations. The construction of the 4,500 MW Diamer-Bhaskra dam will strengthen the Chinese presence in this strategic area. The highway project will consolidate the army's hold over the province, where it is facing insurgency.

Pakistan's gross financing requirement for FY2025-26 is \$19.316 billion, up from \$18.813 billion last year. Its foreign exchange reserves of \$11.5 billion are made possible by the rollover of debt service payments of \$16

billion by friendly countries. If they called the debt, the country would go into default. The largest budget item is interest payment, for which a provision of \$29.1 billion has been made. This, together with the defence outlay, exceeds the net revenue of the federal government of \$39.23 billion by a margin of \$5.52 billion. The rest of the government will have to run on the basis of fresh borrowings.

This disproportionate allocation to defence is in line with the recent chain of events in that country. It is rather unusual for a general to get a promotion after losing a war. Pakistan had sought the ceasefire on May 10, after Indian air strikes destroyed a large chunk of Pakistan's air defence and severely damaged a critical facility near Nur Khan airbase in the country's capital. But the general who led the forces got promoted. General Asim Munir's elevation to Field Marshal was a calculated move to preserve the narrative that Pakistan had won the war.

The Pakistan armed forces' legitimacy has been seriously challenged in the past two years. On May 9, 2023, supporters of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf ransacked Jinnah House, the Lahore Corps Commander's residence, and attacked Army GHQ (General Headquarters) in Rawalpindi, following the arrest of their leader, Imran Khan. Senior generals were sacked after the riots. Most recently, former Inter-Services Intelligence chief Lieutenant General Faiz Hameed was court-martialled.

All these have exposed the rift within the army. Add to this the raging violent insurgency in Balochistan, and Islamabad's strained relations with Afghanistan and India. Clearly, Munir's sagging authority needed shoring up. And, he chose to wave the flag of ideology.

In his April 16 speech, Munir reminded his audience of overseas Pakistanis that they belong to a superior ideology. He referred to Balochistan, the two-nation theory, and Kashmir, which he described as Pakistan's jugular vein. The Pahalgam terror attack followed a week later. The slogan that Kashmir is the jugular vein of Pakistan reflects Pakistan's interests, not Kashmir's aspirations.

The two-nation theory, based on faith, was never accepted by Balochistan. The Khan of Kalat had declared independence in 1947, which was supported by the tribal assembly (Loya Jirga). Pakistan initially recognised Baloch independence, but later dispatched the army to suppress the Balochs. Bizenjo, a member of the Loya Jirga, who later became chief minister of the province, said that if Baloch were to join Pakistan because they were Muslims, then Afghanistan and Iran should also be part of Pakistan.

The fact is Pakistan's military strategies on both its eastern and western fronts lie in tactics. Not only is it at odds with what it claims as "Hindu India", but there have been armed clashes with Sunni Afghanistan as well as Shia Iran. But that's the last fact the likes of Munir would admit to. And, Islamabad will allow public funds, much of it borrowed, to be squandered by Rawalpindi in pursuit of flawed military strategies and ideologies.



DP Srivastava

JAMIESON GREER | US TRADE REPRESENTATIVE



We would very much like to find an agreement that makes sense for both countries. After the two-day high level talks between the US and China to ease trade tensions

Funding think tanks is a strategic imperative

India's increasingly assertive role in international affairs necessitates a robust and independent intellectual foundation. In a world where geopolitical and geo-economic complexities are reshaping alliances and policies, India's voice must be clear, confident, and rooted in its own insights. As Joseph Nye said, true power transcends mere resources; it lies in the capacity to shape ideas, influence perceptions, and set the terms of debate. This is the precise domain where independent think tanks prove invaluable. While India is home to over 600 think tanks, placing it among the top three nations globally in terms of numbers, a significant challenge remains. Few Indian institutions are influential in shaping global policy or offering truly transformative thought leadership. The issue is not one of quantity, but of quality, strategic vision, sustained credibility, and consistent long-term support.

The prevalent model of project-based funding, often reliant on short-term assignments and foreign philanthropic or corporate donors, severely limits the capacity of Indian think tanks to undertake deep, long-term research. This dependency poses legitimate questions regarding their perceived independence and influences the trajectory of their work.

A critical question arises: Why has India Inc. largely remained disengaged from consistently supporting domestic think tanks, especially when foreign counterparts benefit from strong governmental and corporate backing? Several factors contribute to this gap.

One, some Indian think tanks are viewed as too closely aligned with the government, undermining perceptions of their independence. Others are seen as lacking the scale or capacity to generate significant impact. Two, corporate social responsibility (CSR) funds are frequently directed towards highly visible, immediate-impact initiatives like health care or education, which offer clear, tangible, and communicable results. Policy research, conversely, is perceived as having a less immediate impact and being harder to quantify or communicate.

Three, many businesses believe that can influence policymakers without the intermediation of a think tank. Four, many think tanks operate in silos, lack interdisciplinary collaboration, and struggle with effective communication strategies. A shortage of dedicated fundraising, communications, and marketing teams often means their valuable research insights are

less visible and less influential. Funding think tanks to significantly increase their investment in domestic think tanks. Foreign research, however rigorous, often fails to fully capture the unique complexities of India's social, economic, and political realities. Domestic think tanks provide invaluable, nuanced perspectives essential for robust policy development.

For India to effectively navigate and influence the intricate global political economy, it requires strong, indigenous intellectual voices. Think tanks serve as crucial platforms for projecting this leadership and shaping international discourse. Investment in think tanks fosters a vibrant public policy ecosystem, bridging the critical gap between government, academia, and industry, and attracting talented individuals to the public policy space. Diversified domestic funding sources enhance the credibility and perceived neutrality of think tanks, reducing reliance on single or foreign recurring donors and ensuring that Indian perspectives remain independent and authentic. Think tanks are vital convenors, linking government, business, civil society, and academia; they facilitate collaborative approaches to address complex national challenges, from economic development to climate resilience.

Short-term, project-specific grants are insufficient to unlock the full potential of Indian think tanks. What they fundamentally require is core funding. This enables them to support their staff, cover operational costs, and engage in long-term strategic planning. Core funding allows think tanks to attract and retain top intellectual talent, invest in advanced data analytics and research methodologies, develop robust communication strategies to disseminate their insights effectively, move beyond individual-led models to build sustainable institutions, and cultivate resilience, providing the freedom to pursue innovative ideas and offer independent perspectives without being constrained by immediate funding cycles.

India's journey towards true global leadership hinges not just on its economic might, but on its intellectual prowess. There are two critical gaps currently facing Indian think tanks: A significant funding deficit and a need for greater strategic vision. Indian companies are uniquely positioned to bridge both. By supporting domestic think tanks, India Inc. can play a transformative role in shaping the nation's future, fostering an intellectual ecosystem that



Ajay Khanna

A fresh start

Base revision will better inform policy decisions

Several crucial economic indicators that inform policy decisions are set for a comprehensive overhaul. As reported in this newspaper and elsewhere, the Union government's statistics department is working on new series for the consumer price index (CPI), index of industrial production (IIP), and gross domestic product (GDP), which are likely to be released next year. For a rapidly developing economy like India, it is extremely important that key indices are regularly revised and adjusted. Revision in recent years was delayed partly because of the pandemic and the long gap between household consumption expenditure surveys. As a report in this newspaper on Wednesday showed, the government is now planning to undertake household consumption surveys more frequently, which must be welcomed. The base for the current GDP series, for instance, is 2011-12. For context, the Indian economy's size in 2025 is expected to be about 2.3 times in dollar terms than it was in 2011. India has changed significantly since the last revisions, and it is likely that key indices are not reflecting the actual picture of the economy.

The expected revision will not only change the base year but also include new data sources, which should help make these indices more robust. The new CPI, for instance, will reflect price data from about 2,900 physical markets, as against 2,300 in the present series. The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation will also collect online data from 12 cities to account for the changes in the e-commerce space. Although e-commerce now has significant reach in urban India and some parts of rural India, its adoption among consumers will only grow as the country urbanises. It was reported earlier this year that the government was evaluating the possibility of a separate e-commerce index, aimed at tracking household consumption through this medium. It will be well advised to construct such an index. Depending on the depth and the coverage, it will provide important information such as consumption patterns and shifts in demand. In fact, following the e-commerce space closely could also enrich the GDP data. A monthly release of such an index could serve as an important lead indicator for the economy. Furthermore, as reports suggest, the GDP estimates in the new series will incorporate data from the Goods and Services Tax Network and the National Payments Corporation of India. These sources were not available during the previous base revision.

The importance of accurate data for both policymaking and decision-making in the private sector cannot be overstated. For instance, based on the latest consumption data, some economists have argued that the weighting of food could drop significantly in the CPI. The composition within the food basket may also change in favour of perishables. All this will influence the headline inflation rate in different ways, with implications for monetary policy. For the inflation-targeting framework to be effective and useful, it is important that the data is accurate and reflects the actual position on the ground. Nevertheless, the upcoming revision could still be hampered by the fact that survey data is still based on samples drawn from the 2011 Census. In the context of GDP data, the ministry should also aim to address some of the criticisms of the present series. One such critique is that of the conversion of nominal to real GDP. In this regard, it is worth noting that India also needs a producer price index to address such issues. There have been reports of such an index being contemplated, it is unclear whether it will be ready and used in the new series.

Balancing act

India needs a practical framework for gig workers

The gig economy is likely to become a major job creator in the foreseeable future. A study by the VV Giri National Labour Institute (VGNLI), which is affiliated to the Union labour ministry, has estimated that by 2047, the gig and platform workforce will grow to 61 million, accounting for 15 per cent of India's non-agricultural workforce. The study is based on estimates in a 2022 report by the NITI Aayog, which had projected that the number of gig workers would touch 23 million by 2030, and would comprise 7 per cent of the non-agricultural workforce as against 3 million in 2020. In fact, the VVGNLI study suggests that under certain factors—rapid technological advancement, and regulatory or policy changes—the sector is capable of delivering 90.8 million jobs in the next 22 years. From one perspective, these numbers are worth celebrating in a country where, in the absence of robust private-sector investment in manufacturing, India's innovative information-technology (IT) sector has stepped up to create categories of new jobs. From marketplace delivery to ride-sharing, food delivery to super-speed grocery delivery, the range of app- and platform-based jobs has undoubtedly offered India's semi-skilled youth livelihood opportunities that leavened the Covid-induced economic disruption.

The key issue here, however, is the quality of jobs and gig workers' access to welfare. In a labour landscape riddled with a shortage of good-quality jobs—ie those that come with benefits—gig workers are not to be envied. In India, workers affiliated to platform-based apps fall between employees and contract workers. This puts them outside the purview of benefits such as health insurance, paid leave, or long-term savings (such as provident fund). They are worse off than even unorganised-sector workers, who potentially have access to some measure of government social-security schemes under the Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act. Surveys since 2020 have consistently highlighted the precarious working conditions of gig workers—including the fact that almost one in seven earns less than the minimum wage. While the Industrial Relations Code, 2020, addresses some welfare issues, it has not been implemented. The informal relationship with workers offers promoters of platform services the opportunity to optimise costs and cash in on strong demand for their services to garner decent valuations in the funding market.

With more and more work being delivered by the gig economy, the dilemma facing governments lies in ensuring sustained welfare delivery to this cohort without deterring the expansion and innovation of the vibrant IT platform-based industry. India, thus, needs to evolve a framework consistent with evolving realities in dealing with labour-related issues. Two major regulation can kill opportunities. The fragmentation of the textile sector from large integrated mills to unorganised small powerlooms is a case in point. Unable to cope with the rising demands of powerful politically-backed labour unions, many large mills closed down, with the result that India lost the critical advantage of scale in global markets just as China started setting up its mammoth garment factories. Similarly draconian laws governing retrenchment in factories with more than 100 workers dented big manufacturing for decades; the relaxation of the ceiling to 300 workers is still to gain traction in the states. How imaginatively federal and state administrations balance the dynamics of worker rights and the booming potential of the IT business will determine India's future socioeconomic fabric.

Avoiding the growth mirage

A sustainable march towards 2047 calls for urgent governance and judicial reforms



ILLUSTRATION BY BINAY SINHA

The release of the World Economic Outlook in April by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has brought in much rejoicing and enthusiasm among those concerned with India's development. The chief executive officer of NITI Aayog might have jumped the gun when he declared that India has become the fourth-largest economy surpassing Japan, which has also been echoed by the Prime Minister.

The IMF report shows India's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2024 at \$3.91 trillion, against Japan's \$4.03 trillion, but it is projected to surpass the Japanese GDP by a slender margin in 2025 (\$4.197 trillion vs. \$4.196 trillion). Of course, this is no mean achievement. An average annual growth in the range of 6-7 per cent over the past two decades has helped to make this possible. Despite some setbacks and global uncertainty, the economy has shown remarkable resilience and is poised to surpass Germany before the end of the decade to become the third-largest.

In terms of per capita income, however, India ranks near the bottom in global rankings. It has a long way to go before achieving developed country status by 2047—an ambitious target set by the Prime Minister. At \$2,878 in nominal per capita GDP, India ranks 141st out of 197 countries; in per capita terms adjusted for purchasing power parity (PPP), it ranks 191st.

The growth rate required to achieve this target ranges from a real rate of 7 to 10 per cent, depending on assumptions about inflation, exchange rate depreciation, and changes in the norms for determining the "developed country" category itself. What is clear, however, is that a "business-as-usual" approach will only confine India to the middle-income trap.

Therefore, serious structural and governance reforms need to be implemented expeditiously to reach this goal. Besides, it is not just about reaching the milestone of the targeted income levels, but also about creating gainful employment opportunities for the millions joining the workforce. With India's population projected to stabilise only around 2045, trans-

ferring surplus labour from agriculture to more productive sectors such as manufacturing and services poses a significant challenge.

Critical to accelerating growth in GDP is an appreciable increase in investments. Even if we assume that productivity will improve with the induction of new technology and better practices to improve the incremental capital output ratio (ICOR) from 5 to 4—achieving a nominal GDP growth rate of 10 per cent would still require raising gross domestic capital formation to 40 per cent of GDP from the current 30-31 per cent. A massive increase in the rate of investment is needed from both the government and the private sector. While the past three years have witnessed a substantial rise in public investment, private investment remains sluggish.

It is also important to create the ecosystem for foreign direct investment (FDI), as with such investments, the country can gain from more advanced technology. Recent reports state that India industries rather than reinvesting their earnings in the country are repatriating their profits abroad. The net FDI in India in 2024-25 was just \$0.35 billion, even though gross FDI was \$81 billion. This was because \$51.3 billion was repatriated and \$29.20 billion was the outward FDI. Some introspection into the reasons for this trend and undertaking the required corrective action is called for.

Increasing the investment-to-GDP ratio in the country requires concerted efforts to reduce the cost of capital and minimise transaction costs through governance and institutional reforms. The inflation-targeting framework has helped tame inflation—and hopefully, a benign rate will continue in the medium term to keep interest rates low.

The sharp reduction in the policy rate by 50 basis points on June 6 will reduce the cost of borrowing substantially, while the 100 basis point cut in the cash reserve ratio will inject liquidity into the financial

system to help faster transmission of the lower rate.

On the fiscal policy front, however, we need a clear action plan to curtail the fiscal dominance of macro-economic policies and expand the borrowing space for businesses. The time is ripe to rethink the deficit and debt targets and implement an action plan. Similarly, we need to move towards greater openness in trade and investments, irrespective of the threats posed by the Trump-era tariffs. This will require reforms to impart greater competitiveness to the Indian economy.

Much has been discussed about the reforms needed to free the factor markets, particularly land acquisition and labour market reforms. What has not been highlighted as much are the governance and institutional reforms required to fulfil the primary function of the government—namely, providing public services such as ensuring the safety and security of the people, protecting their property rights, and expeditiously enforcing contracts. These are the basic public goods that create the necessary conditions for businesses to thrive.

In a democracy, we cannot afford to have the "roving" and "stationary" bandits that Mancur Olson referred to in his seminal article ("Dictatorship, Democracy and Development", *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 87, No. 3 (Sep. 1993), pp. 567-576), because credible commitments to protect property rights and enforce contracts are necessary for broad-based growth.

A neglected aspect of reform urgently needed is governance, including the judicial system. Fixing the administrative, regulatory and the judicial system has not received the attention it deserves. In this context, a recent report in *The Economist* (How to fix India's sclerotic justice system, May 24, 2025) underlining the ineffectiveness of India's judiciary is instructive.

Of course, we believe in the philosophy that justice will be done in the next life if not in this, but businesses do not believe in that, nor would they wait that long. The backlog of cases in the Supreme Court at the end of 2024 stood at 82,496 and the pending cases in the High Courts in early February 2025 was 62,30,000 and in district and subordinate judiciary, a staggering 437 million.

According to the World Justice Report, India ranks 151st among 142 countries in justice delivery, below even Pakistan and Sudan. According to the Indian Justice Report, the backlog in courts is expected to increase by 15 per cent by 2030. The World Bank estimates that enforcing a contract in India takes, on average, 1,500 days—compared to fewer than 300 days in developed countries and in China. As the Indian courts fail to resolve disputes in time, the judicial system becomes dysfunctional, and those who can afford—and have the means—resort to informal systems of justice. Unless we fix this problem, accelerating investment and achieving sustained economic growth will remain a mirage.

The author is chairman, Karnataka Regional Imbalances Redressal Committee, Government of Karnataka. The views are personal.

POLICY PILLARS
M GOVINDA RAO

Multi-partisanship for economic reform

Following the global multi-party outreach to articulate India's response to Pakistan's state-sponsored terrorism, the Prime Minister spoke of institutionalising the idea. The idea of multi-partisanship is undoubtedly inspired. It is a pity no one has thought of applying the concept in other critical areas of governance. For instance, a multi-party consensus on economic policy would be splendid, especially since much of stalled next-gen reform requires buy-in from state governments ruled by parties in opposition to the ruling coalition at the Centre.

Right now, a majority in Parliament thanks to its allies means that the ruling dispensation does not need to take anyone in the Opposition on board to fulfil its political agenda. With Operation Sindoor, Narendra Modi was pushing at an open door when it came to multi-partisanship. Getting a consensus on economic reform is a different matter. It requires negotiating contradictory political calculations. It may not always work but the consequences of a lack of political consensus has proven a significant hurdle for private investment in the kind of job-creating greenfield manufacturing projects that India urgently seeks.

Consider land acquisition. All private companies struggle to acquire land at scale because of the stiff stipulations in the Land Acquisition Act requiring 80 per cent prior consent from affected families (70 per cent in the case of private-public partnership projects) plus a social impact study. As a workaround, corporations employ land aggregators as intermediaries to pool in parcels of land, but the process is cumbersome, expensive, and ultimately self-defeating. Yet, difficulties in acquiring land have been a key reason India has struggled to make a success of its nearly two-decade-old Special Economic Zones policy, which was supposed to provide the rocket fuel for India's

economic growth à la China. Instead, the government has successively scaled down rules governing minimum SEZ size, a change that has not made an appreciable difference to investor interest.

When the Modi government first came to power, it brisily sought to underwrite its business credentials by passing an ordinance easing the land acquisition pre-conditions in some cases and doing away with the social impact study. The amendments were passed in the Lok Sabha but stalled in the Rajya Sabha, where the ruling party did not have a majority. Though the ordinance was re-promulgated three times, it was allowed to lapse. The political furor that clipped away at the Bharatiya Janata Party's "common man" positioning did not encourage the party to reintroduce it in its second or third terms.

Ructions over land acquisition for private investment burst into contemporary political consciousness in the 2000s in West Bengal and reflects how competing political interests can stall progress. An attempt at consensus between the belatedly reforming Left Front government in West Bengal and Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress over the Tata Nano plant in Singur would have been a sensible route. Had the plant come up, it would have been a game changer for a declining state. But Ms Banerjee's decision to co-opt a traditional Left Front bastion—peasants and cultivators—land losers in the Singur project—weakens the prospect of negotiating with a regime backed big business. The same impulse encouraged her to back land-losing protesters opposing a chemical hub proposed by the Left Front government in Nandigram and Nayachar.

Landowner championship brought Ms Banerjee to power in the state but this recent history has not inspired business and industry. The thing is, this situation, openly calling Kashmir disputed territory. Mr Dulat moved minor mountains to persuade the government to see reason and bring Farooq back to the fold. This was done by making Farooq part of an all-party delegation to clarify to the world that no human rights violations were taking place in Kashmir as alleged by Pakistan. Farooq was superb. Not only did he speak as an Indian, he also challenged Pakistanis to speak to him in Kashmir.

The 1996 Assembly elections in Kashmir were a turning point for the state and for Farooq himself—not the least because of kindly, understanding and benevolent statesmen in power in Delhi for however short a

tenure, such as H D Deve Gowda and I K Gujral. When Aal Bibar Vajpayee came to power the Jammu & Kashmir Assembly passed a resolution seeking autonomy. Mr Dulat emphasised that the demand was for autonomy, not independence.

At around this time, Farooq was made an offer that made his eyes sparkle. What if he were made vice-president of India? Vajpayee was agreeable, and things might have been different if that had happened, Mr Dulat says. It didn't and one more betrayal was added to the layer of mistrust. The National Conference lost the 2002 polls. By now, Omar Abdullah was set to replace Farooq. But as with the Sheikh and Farooq, Omar and Farooq too had their ups and downs.

Now Farooq Abdullah is in his 90s, still full of beans, the light of battle in his eyes undimmed despite health challenges. This book has cost Mr Dulat, in terms of his personal relations with Farooq, especially after 2019. But it brings out the essential Farooq Abdullah and through him the essential Kashmir.

Farooq Abdullah: A victim of mistrust and betrayals



BOOK REVIEW

ADITI PHADNIS

Anyone who knows A S Dulat will know that there cannot be a more unlikely spy: He is amiable, friendly, and open to trust. His book about his friendship with one of Kashmir's tallest leaders, Farooq Abdullah, is as much a window into some of the most tumultuous and defining decades in the politics of the state as it is a gentle and non-judgemental appraisal of a complex and unpredictable political personality.

Sheikh Abdullah and Farooq Abdullah have been the subject of many fasci-

nating studies, including an outstanding biography of the Sheikh by Chitralekha Zutshi (though Mr Dulat differs with Zutshi on some facts and interpretations of events). The relationship between the father and son is important as it is part of Farooq's political inheritance. A mistrust of Delhi and a perennially thorny relationship with Pakistan which never forgave the father or the son for siding with India. The book explores Farooq's relationship with New Delhi under different dispensations. But on one point it is unequivocal—that he never, ever considered independence of Kashmir as a solution. The book describes his meeting with secessionist leader Yaseen Malik of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) at which Farooq lambasted him for violence against Kashmiris and about the JKLF's dreams of "azadi", telling him he was naive and living in a fool's paradise. Given this reality, the book argues,

Delhi should have trusted Farooq unquestioningly—which it did not. In full knowledge that Farooq's succession had not been smooth and was challenged by his brother-in-law, Gul Mohammed Shah, in 1988, Delhi put its weight behind the Gul Shah faction of the National Conference, deposing Congress leader Muzaffar Ahmad Sayeed to support a coup against Farooq's government, dislodging him. There was a background to this, as there always is. But Mr Dulat notes regretfully that Kashmir ought to have been kept out of the kind of power politics that was in place elsewhere in India—it was too important to be trifled with. Farooq got the full-throated support of the Opposition. But it was, at the end of the day, the Opposition. He felt he had been betrayed twice over. Mr Dulat writes: Once by his family and then by the Congress led by Indira Gandhi, his extended family. Other betrayals followed. His right

hand man, Saifuddin Soz, was working to undermine him by conducting a dialogue with the Kashmiri underground and the government. Rajiv Gandhi had little time for him, though the two were good friends. The V P Singh years came and went but Farooq did not get his due. The problem was: No one knew whom to talk to in Kashmir. Dialogues with separatist leaders of the Shabir Shah variety were the flavour du jour. But Mr Dulat says he knew that the only currency that would work, both for Delhi and Srinagar, would be Farooq Abdullah.

In 1993, P V Narasimha Rao's government installed the Department of Kashmir Affairs, headed by Rajesh Pilot. In 1994, the US changed its



THE CHIEF MINISTER AND THE SPY

by A S Dulat

Published by Juggernaut

289 pages, ₹799

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Opinion

THURSDAY, JUNE 12, 2025

EMPLOYABLE YOUTH

Union labour minister Mansukh Mandaviya

We are creating a vibrant Education to Employment ecosystem, bringing together universities, industry partners, and skilling centers at a common platform to provide career opportunities to our youth driven by real market demand



US-China trade truce

The deal could pave the way for an agreement with India even though the negotiations have been tough so far

AN AGREEMENT BETWEEN the US and China on a framework that will de-escalate trade tensions is great news as it could ease the way for many more bilateral trade agreements (BTA). US President Donald Trump himself has tweeted that a deal with China "is done", subject to final approval from President Xi Jinping and himself. The US will get the rare earth metals it needs, while Chinese students can take up their places at American colleges. Last month, Washington and Beijing agreed a temporary trade over trade tariffs but each country has since accused the other of breaching the deal. A deal with India could be next in queue, even though negotiations in the latest trade talks in India have been tough over a few sticky issues—farm products, digital trade, and intellectual property. It was always expected the US would bargain hard. As such, even if an interim deal comes through before the July 9 deadline kicks in, India could consider it a win. This agreement would probably address the US' demands for lower tariffs on some industrial goods, possibly some farm goods and cover non-tariff barriers such as quality control regulations. A final BTA may be signed only in the last quarter of 2025 and come into effect early next year.

That is not necessarily a bad thing, as long as the current high tariffs proposed are avoided, because any BTA must be both durable and workable. Indeed, China's ability to hold its ground against the US appears to have inspired the Indian team to be more assertive; in the midst of the talks, New Delhi has formally taken on the US on the imposition of higher auto tariffs at the World Trade Organisation. Moreover, in response to the US' doubling of tariffs on steel and aluminium, India has warned of retaliatory duties on some US goods.

This should not impact the talks; the US will persist in its efforts to try and narrow its \$40 billion trade deficit with India by not just getting New Delhi to slash tariffs on a range of goods, but by also pushing for open access to areas like dairy. New Delhi, for its part, will resist yielding to the US' demands for liberal tariffs on food grains like rice and wheat and dairy products. That is understandable, not merely because farmers are a large constituency, but also because if farmers shift away from growing essential food crops, it could, at some point, hurt the country's supplies of grains. Dairy has always been a tricky issue in trade agreements and in the past, players like Amul have lobbied against imports from countries like New Zealand.

However, according to some think tanks, New Delhi should consider giving the US access to markets for some agri-products and the dairy sector. Washington has always been keen that India open up the dairy sector while New Delhi has been pushing back with demand for a balanced agreement that safeguards vital sectors. Indian negotiators now navigate political and economic complexities related to sectors vital to rural livelihoods and food security amid the hardened US stance. That, no doubt, puts India in a difficult situation and the negotiators are understood to be ready to lower import duties on automobiles, alcoholic beverages, chemicals, and some fruit and nuts. While it's important to clinch a deal at the earliest, India must not give away too much.

VOTER'S DEJECTION

TRUMP SPEAKS FOR A RISING NUMBER OF AMERICANS WHO BELIEVE THAT GLOBALISATION HAS HARMED THEM

Trump's curious rise

ATANU BISWAS

Professor of Statistics, Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata



Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman.

Trump, like many revolutionaries, was not an overnight sensation. He actually speaks for a growing number of Americans who believe that free trade and globalisation have harmed them the most. There's no denial that innovative technology helped American businesses looking to increase profits by hiring cheap foreign labour.

Trump vowed to Make America Great Again. Indeed, the term "Again" plays a crucial role in this motto. "The myth of the Great Yesterday" is a fantastic phrase by the renowned Polish writer Ryszard Kapuscinski. As the majority of Trump's supporters are white, blue-collar men without college degrees whose actual income has stagnated or decreased in recent

after World War II was the catalyst for the racial, ideological, political, and economic trends in American society. By the time Barack Obama was elected President in 2008, they had reached a tipping point. Obama's election and presidency drove discontent to a breaking point. To his credit, Trump could capitalise on it to win the 2016 presidential election.

The protests against Communist rule in Europe were characterised as

"rejection" revolutions by the distinguished Australian scholar Leslie Holmes, who said that although citizens were aware of what they opposed, they were unsure of what they wanted instead. The recent emergence of far-right parties in different European countries can be explained by the fact that

electorates rejected the political parties that have characterised the "left" and "right" political stances since the end of World War II. Does such a "rejection" revolution account for Trump's rise to the presidency? Remember that Trump's broad socio-economic base appears to include more people in lower income brackets and a greater proportion of older men.

The real lesson of the 2016 US election was that "grassroots voters have lost faith in elected officials and a government that isn't living up to the promise of 'by the people'", according to Elise For-

Trump's victory can be attributed to the racial and ideological convergence that has changed American voters since the 1960s

Regulatory approval: Time is of the essence



SHRIRAM SUBRAMANIAM

Founder and MD, InGovern Research Services

Delays in regulatory clearances can erode shareholder value, cause loss of strategic opportunities, create uncertainty for all, and increase costs

Alphabet's AI critics asking the wrong questions

A SMALL GROUP of Alphabet Inc. shareholders made strange bedfellows recently when they demanded the company pay more attention to artificial intelligence risks.

The National Legal & Policy Center (NLPC), for instance, was worried about AI's impact on privacy rights. Inspire Investing—a shareholder that backs "biblically responsible investing"—and sometimes targets so-called woke corporate policies—complained it could censor religious and political speech. And the Shareholder Association for Research & Education (SHARE) said Google's AI could inadvertently erode human rights and fuel discrimination.

That Alphabet's wider shareholders voted down the proposals on the company's urging doesn't particularly matter, since they would have done little to help prevent AI hazards. The reason: The trio wanted Alphabet to keep grading its own homework.

The NLPC called on Google to report on whether it was stealing people's data to train its AI systems. Inspire wanted an assessment of AI bias against religious and political views, and SHARE wanted the company to write a human rights impact study of AI-driven advertising, according to Alphabet's 2025 proxy statement.

Alphabet stated none of that was necessary since it was conducting adequate research into risks. "We regularly publish AI Responsibility reports, which provide detailed insights into our policies, practices, and processes for developing advanced AI systems," the company said in a statement.

It would certainly be a good thing to shine a spotlight on whether Google is misusing personal data alongside the other proposals, but all lack any substance by calling on such disclosures to be commissioned by Alphabet itself, and crucially not by independent regulators or researchers. That makes these shareholder proposals look more like performative activism than an effort to create meaningful change, not least because some groups like NLPC have filed similar proposals at several other tech companies this proxy season.

Silicon Valley has long mastered the art of what you might call transparency washing, releasing glossy reports—like this one from Meta Platforms Inc. on hateful conduct on Facebook, or these from Uber Technologies Inc. on safety statistics—that aren't audited by a third party. The lack of laws requiring disclosures means the companies keep decisions around content moderation, algorithm design and now AI model design entirely opaque, pointing to their detailed reports whenever lawmakers and civil society groups press them with questions.

When OpenAI Chief Executive Officer Sam Altman was asked about AI safety risks during his May 2023 Senate testimony, he similarly talked up the research the company conducted, as well as the "independent audits by independent experts of the models' performance on various metrics." But a key ingredient to AI models is their training data, something that OpenAI has for years kept secret. If regulators or researchers could access that data, they could better scrutinise OpenAI's technology for security flaws, bias or copyright violations. The company has pointed to trade secrets as its reason for keeping that under wraps, but liability is just as likely why.

If Alphabet's shareholders wanted to go down the challenging road of pushing for real change, they would demand external oversight: independent, technical auditors to evaluate the company's systems before they get deployed. Meta made a start in this direction a few years ago by hiring Ernst & Young LLP to audit part of its transparency reports for Facebook, but it could go much further.

Alphabet's trio of activist shareholders are relatively small and so perhaps don't have the kind of leverage to influence the financial setting of an annual general meeting. But they're—and the NLPC's in particular, given its conservative leanings—might carry more weight if they pushed for some of these regulatory ideas through other political channels. They could, for instance, lobby for lawmakers to set up something like the Food and Drug Administration but for AI, forcing companies to meet certain standards before releasing their tech to the public. Until then, all that bipartisan consensus is being drowned out in a system that will always favour the status quo.

IN INDIA'S DYNAMIC corporate landscape, mergers, demergers, acquisitions, schemes of arrangement, de-listings, and bankruptcies are critical levers for growth, efficiency, and stakeholder value creation. While the process—board approval, shareholder and debt holder consents, and regulatory clearances—appears straightforward, the reality is often far more complex, with regulatory delays posing significant risks to transaction values and business certainty.

Timeliness is not just a procedural concern; it is central to the success of corporate transactions. Delays can erode shareholder value, create uncertainty for employees and business partners, and result in missed opportunities. Asset quality deterioration has been a concern in Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) cases. In mergers and acquisitions, the business environment changes and stock prices move rapidly. Protracted regulatory approval processes can undermine the very benefits these transactions are designed to deliver.

There are some key authorities in the regulatory landscape which should be considered before moving forward. First, Reserve Bank of India (RBI) approval is crucial for transactions with cross-border elements, foreign investment, or those involving banks and non-banking financial companies. Its oversight ensures compliance with foreign exchange and sectoral regulations, but it can add weeks or months to timelines, especially as regulatory scrutiny has increased in recent years.

Second, Competition Commission of

TRANSACTION APPROVAL TIMELINES

Stage	Simple Transaction	Contested Transaction
CCI Approval	Phase I: ~30 working days	Additional reviews, may exceed 210 days
Sebi Process	60-90 days	Extended due to disclosures/objections
NCLT Approval	4-6 months (uncontested)	Multiple hearings, appeals, >12 months
RBI Approval	Few weeks	Prolonged due to scrutiny/revisions
Total Duration	4-8 months	12-24+ months

India (CCI) reviews mergers, acquisitions, and combinations to prevent anti-competitive outcomes. Transactions above certain thresholds require CCI clearance, which can take up to 210 days for complex cases, though recent reforms aim to reduce this to 150 days. The "Green Channel" mechanism now allows for automatic approval of low-risk combinations, but most deals still face lengthy reviews, especially if market dominance is a concern.

Third, Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) regulates all M&A, delisting, and schemes of arrangement involving listed companies. Its remit is to ensure transparency, minority shareholder protection, and fair market practices. Sebi's protracted delisting regime, such as the introduction of fixed price delisting, is designed to streamline processes, but significant delays still occur in approvals for all transactions.

Finally, National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) is the main adjudicating authority for approving schemes of arrangement, mergers, demergers, and corporate restructurings under the Companies Act, 2013. The process involves stakeholder meetings, hearings, and addressing objections. Appeals possible to the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT)—often extending timelines, especially in contested cases.

Several high-profile transactions illustrate the potential and the pitfalls of India's regulatory environment. For instance, Vedanta's ongoing demerger, Jet Airways' failed Etihad investment, the protracted Vodafone-Idea merger, and the lengthy ICICI Securities delisting all faced significant regulatory hurdles despite strong stakeholder support. These cases demonstrate how delays in approvals can erode value, create uncertainty, and

sometimes undermine the very objectives of the transaction, underscoring the need for greater regulatory agility and streamlined processes.

Delays in regulatory clearances can erode shareholder value due to market uncertainty and falling stock prices; cause loss of strategic opportunities to faster-moving competitors; create uncertainty for employees and business partners; and increase costs due to extended legal, regulatory, and administrative processes. Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman recently highlighted that such delays are closely watched by global investors and can affect India's position in international negotiations, underscoring the need for regulatory agility.

Regulators have recognised these challenges. The CCI's Green Channel and Sebi's streamlined delisting regime are steps in the right direction. The ministry of corporate affairs is also working to simplify rules and enable fast-track M&A for low-risk transactions. However, balancing robust oversight with timely execution remains crucial. Companies, regulators, and stakeholders must collaborate to ensure that value-creating transactions are executed efficiently, with robust safeguards but without unnecessary delay. Only then can India's corporate sector realise its full potential, delivering value to shareholders, fostering innovation, and driving economic growth. Time is of the essence.

Views are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Stepping up defence manufacturing

Apropos of 'Fuselages for Rafales' (FE, June 12), while fuselages are the body of the aircraft, the engines are the soul. The transfer of fuselage technology will not doubt help in not just creating employment opportunities, but also giving a boost to defence production in other allied areas. It could also reduce dependence on foreign

suppliers in the long run. It would be foolish to expect transfer of tech in other areas as the companies must have spent a fortune in developing them. However, delays in executing orders are the biggest bugbear of production of defence equipment. It should not be a great problem to get the logistics in order for timely delivery. Companies will need to streamline operations and stick to schedules.

—Anthony Henriques, Maharashtra

Modi 3.0 and progress

Apropos of 'A continuum of progress', (FE, June 12), indeed, Modi 3.0 has had a good start, right from developing infrastructure with digital and artificial intelligence technologies dominating the socio-economic growth. Keeping Operation Sindoor—a counter attack for the Pahalgam civilian assassination via destroying nine terrorist bases in Pakistan—going to face our neighbour's terror gimmicks further

shows India's military preparedness with domestic technology and prove that India no more a helpless nation against terror attacks. The caste census fulfills the promise to the marginalised to have their due economic sources and social upliftment. In sum, Modi 3.0 is progressive with steady constructive moves, despite global uncertainties.

—NR Nagarajan, Sivakasi

Write to us at letters@expressindia.com

Tale of audit watchdogs

US' PCAOB vs India's NFRA — similarities, differences

Mohan R Lavi

After the Enron episode in 2001, US lawmakers established the Public Company Accounting Oversight Board (PCAOB) to look into the audit quality of accounting firms and mandate companies to review their internal control over financial reporting annually.

As part of the strategy to improve the efficiency of US regulators, it is proposed to merge the PCAOB with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). This proposal, outlined by the leadership of the House Committee on Financial Services, is under consideration for inclusion in the tax and spending bill currently before Congress.

Proponents of audit quality and good governance would be hoping that Trump chickens out on this proposal. The draft legislation would eliminate a levy on listed companies and broker-dealers that currently funds the PCAOB, transferring the organisation's responsibilities to the SEC.

Over the last 24 years, the PCAOB has conducted more than 4,100 inspections of the work done by audit firms. Many firms have been penalised, some have been advised to improve the documentation of their audit quality while a few firms have been barred from auditing listed companies.

PCAOB has also issued auditing standards and has developed content on accounting standards as per US GAAP. However, of late, the agency has faced criticism from accounting firms, for imposing stringent standards and record fines.

The move to abolish the PCAOB is expected to face opposition from Democrats and may not gain full support from audit firms. Some organisations have advocated for the agency to be more responsive to the accounting profession.

It is natural for a regulatory body that has been in existence for over two decades to draw criticism for showing signs of "regulatory ennui". Yet, merging them with other regulatory bodies is not an ideal solution in an era of regulatory specialisation. Oversight models may evolve, but what should not change is the accounting profession's accountability to all stakeholders.

INDIA'S NFRA

The National Financial Reporting Authority (NFRA) in India has been modelled on the PCAOB. If PCAOB was the US reaction to



ACCOUNTING. For accountability

Enron, NFRA was the Indian reaction to Punjab National Bank and other accounting accidents. Though NFRA took some time to be up and running (conceptualised in 2013 but opened offices only in 2017) they have issued disciplinary orders against some accounting firms, finalised audit quality review reports, issued financial quality review reports and put out a few Circulars on accounting matters.

More recently, NFRA has issued a series of documents that list out matters that members of the audit committee need to ask their statutory auditors. Over the last two years, some audit firms have filed petitions against the NFRA stating that it cannot empower itself with the dual responsibility of inspecting audit firms and also penalising them. The Supreme Court has agreed with this but has also confirmed that the powers of NFRA are in no manner restricted due to this.

One question that is being asked is whether NFRA could also be a victim of regulatory ennui.

NFRA has done enough and more to sensitise the Indian accounting profession and auditors on the need to maintain a certain minimum level of audit quality. Proof of this can be seen from the fact that audit reports over the last few years have been calling out matters that previously could have been parked in the disclosures to the financial statements. Some have stated that the Serious Frauds Investigation Office (SFIO) is also another regulator.

However, the mandate of NFRA and SFIO are completely different. Unlike the PCAOB, the NFRA is not dependent on the fines it imposes for its running. The government should think of audit quality as a journey and not a destination and empower the NFRA to become neutral, fair, rigorous and assertive. Empowerment should be both budgetary and non-bureaucratic.

The writer is a chartered accountant

Monetary policy, way too loose

POLICY ISSUES. The heavy rate cut may end up fanning inflation. Credit growth cannot be engineered through expansionary policy



GURBACHAN SINGH

The Reserve Bank of India cut its repo rate by 50 basis points from 6 per cent to 5.5 per cent on June 6. With this, there has been a cut by 100 basis points in the repo rate since February, 2025. Also, the RBI has been reportedly pumping in liquidity aggressively in one way or another in the last few months.

Also, the RBI has announced a cut in the cash reserve ratio (CRR) from 4 per cent to 3 per cent. This will reportedly release additional funds of about ₹2 lakh crore from September to December 2025, which is when the policy change will come into effect. The timing of this otherwise desirable change makes the monetary policy in the near future also very expansionary.

INFLATION WORRIES

What is wrong with all this? It is true that the inflation rate touched a six-year low of 3.2 per cent in April 2025. This is an important reason why the RBI has been using an expansionary monetary policy for a while. However, there are some other facts as well. The inflation rate came down close to the 4 per cent target a few times in the last five years but then shot up again. The average inflation rate has been somewhat stuck for about five years at more than 5 per cent.

So, it is premature to say that the inflation rate has come down in a sustainable way. In any case, the

inflation rate at 3.2 per cent has not fallen very low relative to the target of 4 per cent.

All this implies that while some loosening of the policy was indeed a good idea, the aggressive loosening was not warranted. This is the situation in the absence of any cost-push factors like a jump in oil prices, or some disruption in supply chains. If we allow for some such serious possibility in the next few quarters, then the inflation rate can get even higher — more than what can happen due to just the very loose monetary policy.

Does higher inflation matter? Yes. Even if the allocation of resources is not affected, the people tend to lose. On the other side, the government gains through, what economists call, the inflation tax.

It is a different matter that this has been masquerading for a very long time as a part of the dividend income from the RBI to the government! The story does not end there. The inflation tax is, like other taxes, distortionary. So, there is also a loss in welfare for the economy as a whole.

GROWTH IMPERATIVE

We come now to another important

Monetary policy can be useful for macroeconomic stabilisation over an economic cycle but not for long-term structural or persistent issues

reason why the RBI has loosened monetary policy. This is about the gross domestic product (GDP). However, there is no "growth recession" at all in India. It is true that the estimated growth rate of GDP at 6.5 per cent is below the potential and the aspired growth rate but this matter is in the domain of development/growth economics and not in the field of monetary economics.

Monetary policy can be useful for macroeconomic stabilisation over an economic cycle but not for dealing with long-term structural or persistent issues or those related to the "new normal" in GDP growth for a significantly long time now. So, again a very expansionary monetary policy is questionable.

What is needed here is very different and it is in the purview of the Centre and the State governments, and not the RBI. And, it goes well beyond even fiscal policy.

CREDIT-DEPOSIT GROWTH

We come now to another aspect which is even less well appreciated. Some argue that credit growth in India has not been high and accordingly it helps to have an expansionary monetary policy so as to improve credit growth.

But we need to be careful. Credit growth is not high because it is related to deposit growth, which is not high in India. This is, in turn, due to the changing preferences of the investors from banks, etc. to financial markets, directly or indirectly, at a fast pace or a relatively slow pace, for the last few years.

It is true that the existing bank deposits, by and large, nevertheless, simply change hands so that the level of

deposits does not fall as a consequence of a shift in asset preferences. However, it does make the path of bank deposits relatively flatter. Accordingly, the growth of credit gets affected.

In this context, the RBI cannot engineer or force a higher rate of growth of real credit in the economy through an expansionary monetary policy. The main effect of the policy under the circumstances can be on nominal credit. These can indeed "improve" but this is an accompaniment to the plain and simple higher inflation, which can follow a very expansionary monetary policy.

In any case, relatively slow growth of real credit does not imply that the growth rate of real funding is low in the economy. The reason is simple. Bank credit is one kind of funding but there are other kinds of funding. Since investors have been shifting from banks to financial markets, the funding is also, at the end of the day, shifting from bank credit to funding for, say, the initial public offerings (IPOs).

So, there is, broadly speaking, a change in the kind of funding for a given path of funding in the economy. This is not to say that the kind of funding does not matter. It does but that is a separate story. It does not really help here if the RBI uses a very loose monetary policy.

In conclusion, it is, indeed, hard to predict when so much can change over time but it is also important to spell out where logic and facts are, at present, pointing.

With a very loose monetary policy, we can have higher inflation once again though there can be a significant lag.

The writer is an independent economist. He has taught at Ashoka University, ISI (Delhi) and JHU

China will supply rare earths in 'Done' trade deal: Trump

Josh Wingrove
Skylar Woodhouse

US President Donald Trump said a trade framework with China has been completed, with Beijing supplying rare earths and magnets "UP FRONT" and the US allowing Chinese students into its colleges and universities.

The US and China will maintain tariffs at their current, lower levels following negotiations between the two nations this week in London, Trump said Wednesday. The US President said Chinese President Xi Jinping and he must still formally sign off on the agreement.

"OUR DEAL WITH CHINA IS DONE, SUBJECT TO FINAL APPROVAL WITH PRESIDENT XI AND ME," Trump posted on social

media. "WE ARE GETTING A TOTAL OF 55% TARIFFS, CHINA IS GETTING 10% RELATIONSHIP IS EXCELLENT!"

Trump's comments prompted fresh questions about the terms of the pact negotiators reached Tuesday in London.

In a later post, Trump said Xi and he "are going to work closely together to open up China to American Trade. This would be a great WIN for both countries!!"

His post suggested China may have to restart rare earth shipments before the US agrees to lower export controls on key technology. And his comments left doubt about whether Beijing could negotiate tariff rates even lower.

The figure Trump posted includes a 10 per cent baseline duty, a 20 per cent charge tied to fentanyl trafficking and



TRUMP. Trade triumph XAVIUS

roughly 25 per cent from preexisting levies from his first term as well as most favoured nation rates, according to a White House official — though the precise total remained unclear.

China's Ministry of Commerce did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The US and China reached an agreement on Tuesday following marathon negotiations to implement

the terms of a tariff truce reached last month in Geneva.

The plan reassured investors, who had feared that recent tensions could spiral out of control and reignite open trade warfare between the world's two largest economies.

Still, details of the agreement were scarce at the conclusion of talks late Tuesday and Trump rushed to fill in the void.

"FULL MAGNETS, AND ANY NECESSARY RARE EARTHS, WILL BE SUPPLIED UP FRONT BY CHINA," Trump said in his post. "LIKEWISE, WE WILL PROVIDE TO CHINA WHAT WAS AGREED TO, INCLUDING CHINESE STUDENTS USING OUR COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES (WHICH HAS ALWAYS BEEN GOOD WITH ME!)"

thehindubusinessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

June 12, 2005

Disclosure norms for India Inc may be eased

The Union Government is keen to provide further relief to the corporate sector in the areas of directors' remuneration, disclosures of particulars of subsidiaries in the balance sheet of the holding company and compliance with disclosure requirements in the balance sheet and profit and loss account. Indications are that the Government may simplify the procedures involved in availing exemptions on disclosures mandated by company law in these three areas.

Infosys may consider share split suggestion

The Infosys Technologies AGM saw shareholders proposing and seconding resolutions, waving the reading of the auditors' report and even suggesting that the top management gives itself a raise, based on the company's performance.

Board composition: Govt to consider stakeholders' interest

The Company Affairs Minister, Mr Prem Chand Gupta, made it clear that the Bhrati Committee's submission that one-third of the board of a listed company should comprise independent directors was only the view of the committee and not of the Government. "We will take a decision on the matter keeping in mind the interests of all shareholders," he said.

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2716



EASY

ACROSS

01. Outliving of others (8)
04. Moving picture (4)
08. Assistance (3)
09. Peak of cap (5)
11. Mine shaft (3)
11. Proper name for a hen (7)
12. Hoarder of wealth (5)
13. Favourable estimation (4,7)
17. Number of cars, ships (5)
18. Meditation (7)
20. Greek long 'e' (3)
21. Ability to communicate freely in speech (5)
22. Anger (3)
23. Make long hard journey on foot (4)
24. Lacking in moral and physical vigour (8)

DOWN

01. Sharp, quick-tempered (6)
02. Locating device (5)
03. Something well worth having (5)
05. Heavy application of oil paint (7)
06. Grown up, fully developed (6)
07. A headland, high cape (10)
09. Checking of correctness of input data (10)
14. Do surgical procedure (7)
15. Act upon; move the feelings of (6)
16. Bear witness (6)
18. Commerce (5)
19. Book of information for tourists (5)

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

01. Fact of getting over virus trouble with small girl or boy (8)
04. The firm changes sides to make a movie (4)
08. Help a girl to remove her top (3)
09. Eyeshield for caller who left it out (5)
10. Get the stone out of a mine (3)
11. Region leased to Chaucer's hen (7)
12. He's being mean about me, Sir (5)
13. Favourable view of op 10: go in no other way (4,7)
17. Ships that are left out around the East (5)
18. Considered it should follow this half (7)
20. When one's due to arrive with a letter from Greece (3)
21. Skill in self-expression, but nothing risqué (5)
22. Keen resentment starts in relative equanimity (3)
23. A long journey on foot back in bleaker times (4)
24. Lacking in moral vigour for ten years, but not heartless (8)

DOWN

01. Is quick to be smart, as a dresser (6)
02. Direction-finder that's going up and down (5)
03. Changing seats for something worth having (5)
05. Thickly applied paint for map is to be changed (7)
06. Can take rum with tea when fully developed (6)
07. One left possible promotion on railway and made for the cape (10)
09. Ratification is, to invalid, a change (10)
14. Do surgery on ear poet has torn (7)
15. Make a show of the way it will influence one (6)
16. Give proof of attending an international match (6)
18. Swap it for a skilled occupation (5)
19. A dragonar is soundly made fun of (5)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2715

ACROSS 1. Marauding 5. Lob 7. Crow 8. Splinter 10. Interest 11. Feat 13. Earlob 15. Stayed 18. Dole 19. Barnyard 22. Practice 23. Rope 24. Hie 25. Gallantry

DOWN 1. Machine 2. Roost 3. Impose 4. Grin 5. Lottery 6. Burst 9. Brook 12. Stunt 14. Release 16. Doodley 17. Cancel 18. Depth 20. About 21. Stag

A needless controversy over 'Bharat Mata'

Recently, an unexpected and unwarranted controversy erupted in Kerala in connection with World Environment Day, which is observed annually on June 5. Unfortunately, it was triggered by Raj Bhavan.

In Kerala, World Environment Day is widely observed every year. There is massive participation from the people, who plant thousands of saplings across the State. The day has become an occasion for the people to enrich their understanding of the environment and commitment to the cause of it.



Binoy Viswam
Secretary, Communist Party of India National Council, and former Raja Saibu MP

The proposal

This year, the Department of Agriculture decided to conduct the inaugural function of World Environment Day at the premises of Raj Bhavan. The Governor, Rajendra Viswanath Arlekar, graciously agreed to inaugurate the event. On the eve of the function, while communicating the details of the programme to the Agriculture Minister's office, Raj Bhavan proposed that a new practice be followed and floral tributes be paid to a painting. On receiving this proposal, the Minister's office requested for more clarification. The Governor's office responded by sending a photograph of the painting, claiming it was the image of 'Bharat Mata'. Surprisingly, the image was the same one used by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) during its functions. Raj Bhavan's version depicted Bharat Mata sitting on a lion and holding a saffron flag, which resembled the flag of the RSS. In the backdrop of the painting was a map — and it was certainly not the map of the Indian Republic.

After some consultations, the Minister informed the Governor's office that it is improper to use and glorify such an image at an official function organised by the government. But due to reasons known only to him, the Governor insisted that the function would not be conducted without that

The RSS cannot foist its ideological and political preoccupations upon official functions

image and with his participation. The government was forced to change the venue to the premises of the Secretariat. Every dignity participated except the Governor.

Reportedly, during the function conducted in Raj Bhavan, the Governor glorified the saffron flag-holding Bharat Mata. He argued that it is the symbol of India. He also criticised the Kerala government and all those who were not ready to uphold his concept of Bharat Mata.

Under the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government at the Centre, controversies between the Governors and State governments have taken place not just in Kerala but also elsewhere. The Supreme Court has intervened in some of these instances. Now, thanks to Governor Arlekar, even Bharat Mata has taken centre stage in these controversies.

A dynamic concept

Bharat Mata is a concept with deep roots in the collective consciousness of the people of India. During the anti-colonial struggle, it was used by various groups with different sociopolitical orientations to inspire and unify all sections of society in the struggle for Independence. Nobody can argue that any particular version is the 'real' expression and face of Bharat Mata. This is a broad concept.

Bharat Mata has been interpreted by many according to their own concepts of nation, nationality, and world view. Over the course of time, the RSS, for its own purposes, may have come up with its own idea of Bharat Mata. Governor Arlekar as an individual has the right to believe that the Bharat Mata of the RSS is the only true portrait of the concept. Those with a particular ideological persuasion have the right to think that Bharat Mata should be holding a saffron flag. They would also appreciate finding her seated on a lion. For them, it is also befitting to have a specially drawn map in the backdrop of the painting of their Bharat Mata.

As per its ideological and organisational framework, the RSS has come up with a particular image of Bharat Mata that suits its dream of a 'Akhand Bharat' and its militant aggressive nationalism. In RSS shakhas, this version of Bharat Mata may be eulogised. But concepts of Bharat Mata are abstract and varied. It is futile to impose any one version as the only acceptable and authentic version. The matter becomes even more complicated when the RSS tries to foist its ideological and political preoccupations upon official functions. Governor Arlekar, who has great experience in public life, is expected to know this basic principle. Those who hold constitutional positions cannot show their political leanings. The dividing line between their political commitment and official responsibility should be deeply inscribed in their minds.

What Nehru said

The Governor, and the people who follow his ideological track, may not be happy with former Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru for various reasons. But Nehru must be remembered on this occasion. He wrote, "Sometimes as I reached a gathering, a great roar of welcome would greet me: Bharat Mata ki Jai — Victory to Mother India. I would ask them unexpectedly what they meant by that cry, who was this Bharat Mata... India was all this that they had thought, but it was much more. The mountains and the rivers of India, and the forests and the broad fields... were all dear to us, but what counted ultimately were the people of India, people like them and me, who were spread out all over this vast land. Bharat Mata, Mother India, was essentially these people. You are parts of this Bharat Mata, I told them, you are in a manner yourselves Bharat Mata, and as this idea slowly soaked into their brains, their eyes would light up as if they had made a great discovery."

Father, son, and a war of words

The rift between S. Ramadoss and Anbumani Ramadoss is fuelled by desperation

STATE OF PLAY

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In 2011, during the run-up to the Tamil Nadu Assembly elections, Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) leader S. Ramadoss visited DMK leader M. Karunanidhi at his Gopapuram residence to invite him for a family wedding. Karunanidhi did not miss the opportunity to rope the PMK into the DMK-led alliance, even though the PMK had contested the 2009 Lok Sabha elections as part of the AIADMK alliance. The PMK had failed to win a single seat in that election, despite being considered a powerful ally capable of tilting the scales of victory for any alliance. Yet, this perception of the party being a strong ally led Karunanidhi to generously allot 30 seats to the PMK and seal the alliance. However, the PMK managed to secure only three seats, proving that its decline had actually begun as early as 2009.

Dr. Ramadoss, a medical doctor by qualification, has always played his political cards carefully, switching alliances from one election to another, but failing to gauge the shifting sands of Tamil Nadu politics. In 2009, the PMK suffered defeat by aligning with the AIADMK. It was routed again in the 2011 polls. The emergence of the Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam, led by actor Vijayakant, in 2005, also eclipsed the PMK's influence in many areas.

The party has never been able to reclaim its past glory, despite having been part of the Union government from 1998 to 2009. During that time, Anbumani Ramadoss, Dr. Ramadoss's son, held the health portfolio (2004-09).

Today, despite its organisational strength and the support of the Vanniyars, its core base, the party finds itself at a crossroads due to the growing rift between Dr. Ramadoss and Dr. Anbumani Ramadoss.

In the 1980s, Dr. Ramadoss mobilised the Vanniyars by championing their claim for Most Backward Class status. After the DMK government led by Karunanidhi granted 20% reservation by grouping together several communities, including the Vanniyars, Ramadoss founded the PMK. In a symbolic gesture reminiscent of Pilo Mody, Dr. Ramadoss sent Panruti S. Ramachandran, the PMK's lone MLA in 1991, to the Assembly riding an elephant — the symbol on which he won. The party performed well in the 1996, 2001, and 2006 Assembly elections.

The PMK entered the national stage when Dr. Ramadoss joined the AIADMK-BJP alliance in 1998 and secured a Union Cabinet berth for Dalit Ezhilmalai, the party's general secretary. He remained with the BJP even after Jayalitha toppled the Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led government. This paid off as the BJP-DMK combine made good gains in 1999. The PMK was allotted two ministerial berths in the BJP-led government. In 2004, along with the DMK, it joined the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance, and Anbumani Ramadoss became a Union Minister in the Manmohan Singh

government.

Dr. Ramadoss, who once acted as a bridge between the Vanniyars and Dalits, also sought to shed the image of being a solely Vanniyar party by espousing Tamil identity and working closely with Viththalai Chiruthalaik Katchi leader Thirumavalavan and Tamil nationalist leader Pazha Nedumaran. However, successive electoral defeats forced him to take refuge in caste-based politics. He even ran a campaign targeting the Scheduled Castes (SCs), accusing their youth of wearing jeans and sunglasses and luring girls from other communities for their wealth. In 2012, the tragic death of Dharmapuri Lavarasana, an SC man, who married Divya, a Vanniyar woman, caused deep damage to the PMK's image. Since then, it has not been able to shed the 'Vanniyar party' image.

The current war of words between father and son has crossed all limits and shocked observers who have followed the PMK for decades. Dr. Anbumani Ramadoss had always said that his father is his role model and has acknowledged his organisational skills.

The absence of political power and influence seems to have made Dr. Ramadoss desperate and angry. He is probably making a last-ditch effort to secure a stable future for the party as the Tamil Nadu political space is too crowded. His ego does not permit even his son to interfere with his schemes. He knows well that Dr. Anbumani Ramadoss, who rose swiftly within the party ranks, could overshadow him, and he is not prepared for that. Neither his family members nor outsiders, including Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh ideologue S. Gurumurthy, can convince the unreconstructed Dr. Ramadoss.

Violent crimes by juveniles have increased in India

In 2022, nearly half the juveniles apprehended in India were accused of violent offences

DATA POINT

Sambhavi Parthasarathy

Adolescence, a British mini-series released a few months ago, tells the chilling story of a 13-year-old boy, Jamie, who murders his classmate, Katie. It was critically acclaimed for its single-take format, powerful performances, seamless direction, and excellent storytelling.

More importantly, the series sparked conversations not just in the U.K. but worldwide about issues such as cyberbullying, involuntary celibate (incel) subculture, casual online misogyny, the behavioural shifts in adolescence, and the increasingly complex world that boys find themselves navigating today.

The series sought to examine why a young boy committed a violent crime. This is an important attempt as data shows that violent crimes by juveniles are rising across the world, including in India. Violent crimes include sexual offences such as rape, acts of physical violence such as murder, bodily injury or attempted murder, and other offences such as arson, dacoity, and robbery. Offences such as rash driving, causing death by negligence, forgery, cheating, trespassing, fraud, pickpocketing, thefts, and obscene acts in public places have been excluded from this analysis as they are all considered mostly non-violent in nature.

Chart 1 shows the share of youth apprehended for violent crimes out of all the youth apprehended for criminal offences in select countries between 2016 and 2020. Even in the brief period considered, the share of youth apprehended for violent crimes rose considerably. For instance, in the U.K., the share increased from 50% to 57% among juveniles.

The pattern is the same in India too. Last month, a 13-year-old boy in Hubli, Karnataka, was taken in

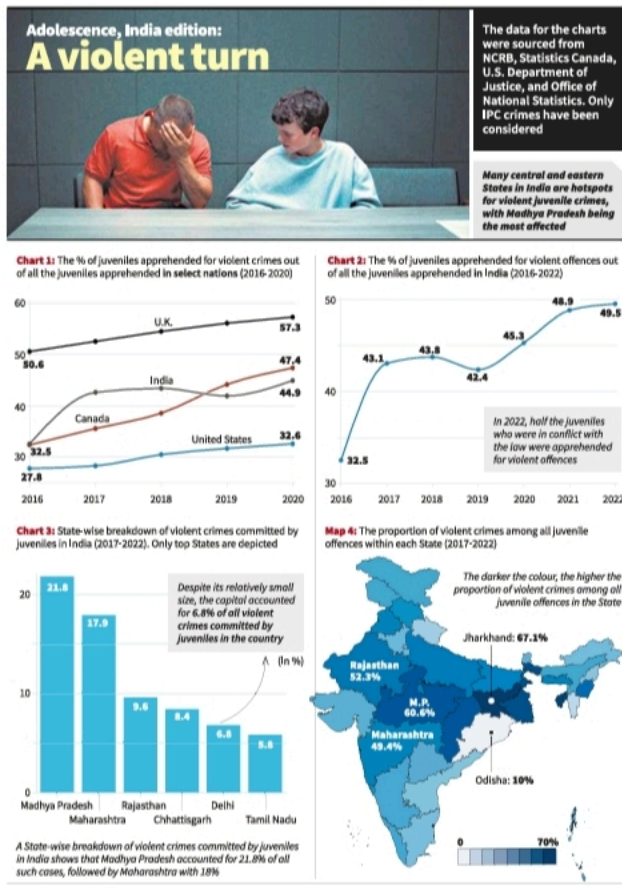
to custody for stabbing his 15-year-old friend following an argument over chips. In another incident last month, police in Chennai arrested 12 people — seven of them minors — for the alleged rape and sexual assault of a 13-year-old girl.

While the total number of juveniles in conflict with the law declined from 37,402 in 2017 to 33,261 in 2022 in India, the share of those apprehended for violent offences steadily increased (**Chart 2**). In 2016, of all the juveniles apprehended, 32.5% were caught for committing violent crimes. By 2022, this figure had risen to 49.5%. This means that half the juveniles who were in conflict with the law were apprehended for violent offences.

A State-wise breakdown of violent crimes committed by juveniles in India shows that Madhya Pradesh accounted for 20% of all such cases between 2017 and 2022, followed by Maharashtra with 18% (**Chart 3**). Rajasthan (9.6%), Chhattisgarh (8.4%), and Tamil Nadu (5%) ranked third, fourth, and fifth, respectively. Delhi stood out. Despite its relatively small size, the capital accounted for 6.8% of all violent crimes committed by juveniles in the country, possibly due to better policing and reporting of such cases.

Regarding the proportion of violent crimes among all juvenile offences within each State, Jharkhand had the highest share (67%) in the 2017 to 2022 period. In Tripura, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh, over 60% of the juvenile offences can be classified as violent in the same period.

Map 4 shows the proportion of violent crimes among all juvenile offences within each State. In Tripura, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh, over 60% of the juvenile offences can be classified as violent in the same period. **Map 4** shows the proportion of violent crimes among all juvenile offences within each State. In Tripura, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh, over 60% of the juvenile offences can be classified as violent in the same period.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu.

FIFTY YEARS AGO JUNE 12, 1975

Proposals to attract remittances from Indians abroad

New Delhi, June 11: The Union Finance Ministry is examining the feasibility of making it obligatory for Indians taking jobs abroad to remit to the country a certain proportion (about 10 per cent) of their earnings every year. The remittances may be made either to their relatives in the country or credited to a bank account maintained in India.

This is among the three proposals which the Reserve Bank of India has been asked to examine in detail and comment upon. The other proposals are: (i) The feasibility of permitting non-resident Indians living abroad to maintain bank accounts in India in the unit of a convertible foreign currency, either the pound sterling or the dollar and (ii) permitting them to invest in company shares in India. The Reserve Bank is already stated to have commented on these proposals in detail. The contents of its note to the Finance Ministry are not known, but they seem to be by and large favourable.

The Finance Ministry was prompted to consider the question of permitting non-resident Indians living abroad to keep their remittances to India in the unit of account of a foreign currency to protect their savings from any erosion on account of the fall in the rupee value. Under the existing banking laws, this is not permissible.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JUNE 12, 1925

Railway terminal facilities

Calcutta, June 11: In reply to the communication received from the Railway Board on the 18th April, regarding the Calcutta Railway terminal facilities, the committee of the Bengal National Chamber of Commerce state that in their opinion Sealdah would be a more convenient terminus for the East Indian Mail and passenger trains. They observe that the existing Howrah Bridge and the roads on either side of the river approaching it cannot conveniently carry the heavy traffic that passes over the bridge and that it will be a long time before the construction of the bridge may be completed. The Committee are aware that to give effect to the above recommendation it will be necessary to enlarge and remodel the Sealdah Station and they consider the change advisable.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Why C. Sankaran Nair's legacy cannot be compartmentalised

The political appropriation of Sir C. Sankaran Nair's legacy by both the BJP and the Congress is deeply problematic, given his complex historical positioning

Faisal C.K.

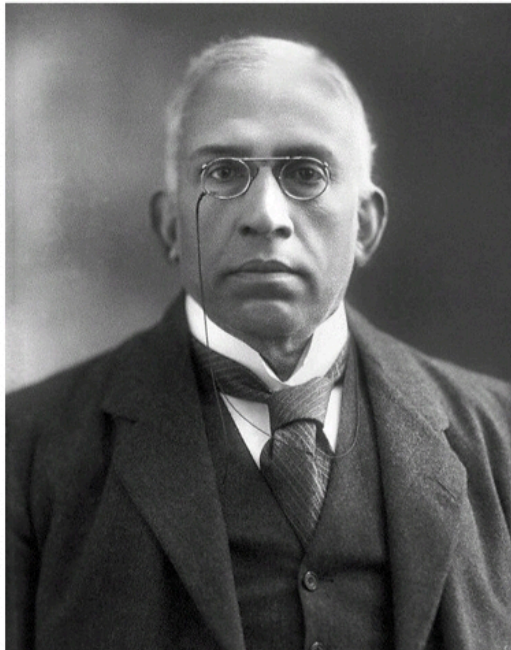
Recruiting historical figures – particularly stalwarts of the Indian National Movement – into contemporary political narratives has become a recurring strategy employed by Indian politicians. After deftly appropriating icons like Sardar Patel, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the BJP has recently “discovered” a long-forgotten hero of the freedom struggle: Sir C. Sankaran Nair, the only stalwart from Kerala to have presided over the Indian National Congress. Not to be outdone, the Congress has scrambled to reclaim its former president – a man it had buried in to oblivion for nearly a century. The recent film *Kesari Chapter 2: The Untold Story of Jallianwala Bagh*, which portrays Sir C. Sankaran Nair as an unsung hero, has now brought him into the limelight.

The political appropriation of Sir C. Sankaran Nair's legacy by both the BJP and the Congress is deeply problematic, given his complex historical positioning. The BJP highlights Nair's criticism of Mahatma Gandhi, particularly in his later work *Gandhi and Anarchy* (1922), where he questioned Gandhi's non-cooperation movement. By portraying Nair as a “forgotten nationalist” sidelined by the Congress due to his opposition to Gandhi, the BJP reinforces its broader narrative of the Congress “erasing” leaders who dissented from the Gandhi-Nehru line. However, reducing Nair's legacy to mere anti-Gandhism is a disservice to his multifaceted contributions. On the other hand, the Congress appears clueless in deciphering Nair's colossal personality, having ignored him for decades.

The *Autobiography of Sir C. Sankaran Nair*, published by his daughter Lady Madhavan Nair in 1966, is a treasure trove for enthusiasts of modern Indian history. His prelude aptly underlines the historical significance of his memoirs, “Reminiscences are sometimes regarded as the harmless hobbies of the advanced age [...] I believe that interest in these reminiscences is not merely personal but historical. To be an octogenarian in a land where this species has become a rarity and to have spent over half a century in front ranks of public life forms perhaps a sufficient excuse for recapturing one's memories [...] This has become all the more necessary on account of the publications of such books as the late Mr Montague's *An Indian Diary* and Sir Michael O'Dwyer's *India as I Knew It* which contain jaundiced versions of incidents of which I was once spectator and actor”.

A liberal humanist

Sir C. Sankaran Nair was a cosmopolitan thinker who loathed parochialism and ethnic nationalism. A lifelong member of London's National Liberal Club, he was a staunch advocate of universal liberty and equality. Even during his college days, he boldly challenged British racial supremacy. Once, when Justice Holloway, an English judge, asserted that the English were the only people never conquered, young Sankaran Nair refuted him by citing French historian Adolphe Thiers, who noted that the Normans – descendants of a French duchy – had conquered and enslaved the English.



A portrait of C. Sankaran Nair, NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY LONDON

Holloway retorted that Normans and Saxons were of the same stock. “By that logic,” Sankaran Nair shot back, “we are all descended from Adam, rendering your argument meaningless!” This exchange epitomised his unwavering commitment to humanist ideals – principles that today's politicians, eager to exhume Nair for political gain, would likely find indigestible.

Despite his differences with Gandhi, Sir C. Sankaran Nair shared some common ground with him. Both admired India's autonomous village republics; as a member of the Madras Legislative Council, Nair opposed the Village Cess Bill, fearing it would erode the traditional village system. He expressed hope that a future nationalist government would revive these republics. And similarly, like Gandhi, he was a passionate social reformer and eventually became president of the social reform movement. For Nair, political independence was not an end in itself but a means to achieve social regeneration. He made unsuccessful attempts to reform the matrilineal system among Kerala's Nairs and actively fought against caste oppression and gender disparities in Hindu law.

Despite his disagreements with Gandhi, Nair acknowledged his global stature, remarking, “Thanks to him, India has become a world problem.” However, in *Gandhi and Anarchy*, Nair sharply criticised the contradiction between Gandhi's doctrine of Ahimsa and his support for the caste system, which,

according to Nair, helped align the reactionary elements of Hindu society with Gandhi's movement: “The caste system is entirely opposed to the ‘Ahimsa’ (Non-injury) principle. The former has dedicated one of the main castes to death. Its function is to kill and be killed.”

Stalwart of secularism

Nair was neither a social conservative nor a status quoist. In his presidential address at the Amavart Congress, he articulated his vision for a secular India: “To break down the isolation of the Hindu religion, to remove the barriers preventing free social intercourse, to extend education to the lower classes, and to elevate women to equality with men, we require a strictly secular government in thorough sympathy with liberal thought and progress.” He initially opposed sectarian universities like the Banaras Hindu University, fearing they would foster communal strife. Mixing religion with politics repelled him, and extreme nationalism was anathema to his principles. Nair firmly believed in constitutional methods and rejected political fanaticism. This conviction led him to oppose Gandhi's non-cooperation movement as well as the Khilafat agitation. As Gandhi's influence grew, Nair receded from active politics, accepting his role with stoicism.

In 1911, he wrote in *The Contemporary Review* (London): “English law recognises the equality of all human beings, while Hindu law, rooted in caste immutability, divides society into rigid compartments.

English law is individualistic; Indian law is communalistic. Under English law, England progressed astonishingly; Hindu law perpetuated a stagnant society, hastening its enslavement.” Nair admired Buddha and Christ, and even published an article on the Biblical sisters, Mary and Martha of Bethany, contrasting the West's action-oriented ethos (epitomised by Martha) with the East's contemplative tradition (symbolised by Mary). As the Viceroy's council member in charge of education, he advocated English as the medium of higher education, believing it essential for India's political progress, social reform, and women's emancipation. It is doubtful whether the BJP, with its conservative social outlook, can genuinely embrace Nair's liberal secularism.

Protector of free speech

Nair was a fearless practitioner of free speech. As the third Indian appointed to the Viceroy's Executive Council, he oversaw education, health, and land. During World War I, as the member in charge of ecclesiastical affairs, he was presented with a draft prayer for churches, seeking Allied victory. Nair refused, stating: “Christ does not take sides in war. He who lives by the sword shall perish by the sword” – that is His teaching.” His defiance cost him the ecclesiastical portfolio, but he never compromised his principles for political expediency.

Even the Viceroy felt the sting of his candour. After resigning from the Viceroy's Council in protest against the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, Nair had a final interview with Viceroy Chelmsford, who asked if he had a successor to recommend. “Yes,” Nair replied, pointing to his pen. “What?” exclaimed the shocked Viceroy. “Why not? He is tall, handsome, wears his livery well, and will agree to everything you say. An ideal council member!” This fearless wit contrasts sharply with today's political climate, where the BJP nurtures an ecosystem of “repressive tolerance” – mirroring the Congress's authoritarianism during the Emergency.

A thorough pragmatist

K.P.S. Menon, Independent India's first Foreign Secretary and Nair's son-in-law, wrote in *Builders of Modern India: C. Sankaran Nair* (1967), “Once, I remarked to Nair: ‘Your time in the Viceroy's Council must have been the most fruitful period of your life.’ ‘Fruitful?’ He exclaimed. ‘It was hellish... hellish.’ After a pause, he added: ‘Still, perhaps it was fruitful. I would have no regrets if I advanced Indian unity as I did Indian freedom.’ Nair's tenure – hellish for him but fruitful for India – cemented his place among the nation's builders. Unlike many of today's politicians, whose careers are fruitful for themselves but hellish for the nation, Nair embodied selfless service.

He was a political realist. As Menon noted, “The vision of ‘Mother India,’ with its emotional overtones, held no appeal for Sankaran Nair. He never romanticised a golden past, nor did he see India as a mystic entity, as Jawaharlal Nehru sometimes did. To him, India was a land of millions – ignorant, illiterate, half-starved, superstitious, and shackled by caste.”

Tragically, India's reality remains as deplorable today as in Nair's time. If politicians genuinely care for the masses, they should learn from Nair's selflessness and integrity rather than exploit him for propaganda fodder. Sir C. Sankaran Nair was a visionary liberal, a secularist, and a fearless advocate of justice – qualities scarce in today's political landscape. Reducing him to a partisan mascot insults his legacy.

Faisal C.K. is Deputy Law Secretary to the Government of Kerala.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

K. Subrahmanian
S. Upendran

“Did you go to Gopa's house to study?”
“No. Because of the bus strike, I was incapable of going.”
“You mean you were ‘unable’ to go. Not ‘incapable’ of going.”

“‘Incapable’, ‘unable’, what difference does it make? The fact is...”
“...it makes a big difference. There is a big difference between ‘He was unable to walk’ and ‘He was incapable of walking.’”
“There is? They sound the same to me. In both cases, the person doesn't have the ability to walk.”

“True. But when you say, ‘he was unable to walk’, it means that he didn't have the ability to walk temporarily. Maybe, he was so tired that he couldn't take another step.”

“I see. So can I say, because I was in the bathroom, I was unable to answer the telephone?”

“You can. Here's another example. I was in Mumbai only for a day. I was unable to meet my cousin.”

“I was feeling ill yesterday. I was unable to do my homework.”

“You always have some excuse for not doing your homework.”

“Hey, I always do my homework. Let's not get into an argument, o.k? Now tell me what ‘incapable’ means?”

“When you say somebody is ‘incapable’ of doing something, it means that he/she doesn't have the ability to do it. It is a permanent condition. For example, after the operation the doctors told Rajesh that he would be incapable of walking.”

“Does that mean that he would not be able to walk the rest of his life?”

“Yes, that's right.”

“Can I say I am incapable to get a...?”
“...‘incapable’ is always followed by ‘of’ and not ‘to’. You're incapable of getting a hundred in a physics exam.”

“That's true. I think that's something that I have to accept. I am incapable of doing well in science.”

“Your father would hit the roof if he heard you saying that!”

“Hit the roof? Hit the roof with what?”

“Hit the roof” is an expression which means “to get very angry”. For example, when Surabhi caught one of the children stealing her roses, she hit the roof.”

“When I told my father that I had failed in Physics, he hit the roof.”

“That's a good example. You can also use the word ‘ceiling’ instead of ‘roof’. For example, the Minister hit the ceiling when he was informed that he had lost in the elections.”

“I hit the ceiling when my sister told me that she had lent some of my cassettes to her friends.”

“I don't like lending my cassettes to other people either. By the way, cassette is pronounced caSETTE and not CaSette.”

“You mean the stress is on the second syllable?”

“Yes, that's right. The ‘a’ in the first syllable sounds like the ‘a’ in ‘China’ and ‘about’. And the second syllable sounds like the word ‘set’.”

“I didn't know that. You learn something new every day.”

Published in *The Hindu* on November 19, 1996.

THE DAILY QUIZ

The Women's Prize for Fiction, previously called the Orange Prize for Fiction, will be announced today. The prize also celebrates its 30th anniversary this year. A quiz on the prize

Radhika Santhanam

QUESTION 1

In 2014, the Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction launched the #ThisBook campaign to find out which books written by women have had the biggest impact on readers. X is one of the books listed. The protagonist of X has the surname of a bird. X was also adapted into a film that won the Academy Award. Name X, which is considered a classic.

QUESTION 2

This influential writer, who has won the Women's Prize for Fiction, published her latest book this year. A TED talk by her on feminism became a worldwide

as a book. An essay she wrote about losing her father was also published as a book. Name her.

QUESTION 3

This novel re-imagines Sophocles' play *Antigone*. Name the book, written by a Pakistani-British novelist.

QUESTION 4

Not too long ago, a book by a U.S. writer was longlisted for the Prize. An anonymous letter addressed to the Prize argued for the book's elimination from the contest. What issue did the letter-writers have with the novelist?

QUESTION 5

Grizel Niven is a British sculptor. What is the name of the sculpture she created that is presented to the award



Visual question:

This bust motif is of an Italian archaeologist and architect. His name

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz 1.

- The Hall of Fame was launched in 2009 in association with which body. **Ans: Federation of International Cricketers Associations**
- There were three Indians in the initial intake of 55 inductees in the Hall of Fame apart from Sunil Gavaskar. **Ans: Bishan Singh Bedi and Kapil Dev**
- Of the 11 Indians on the list, these two were women cricketers. **Ans: Diana Edulji and Neetu David**
- The first to receive his special cap. **Ans: Australia's Rodney Marsh**
- The only siblings to get this coveted honour. **Ans: Ian and Greg Chappell of Australia**
- This Test nation has no inductees as yet. **Ans: Bangladesh**
- These many players have been inducted into the Hall of Fame. **Ans: 122**
- Name this legend. **Ans: Andy Flower**
- Early birds: K.N. Viswanathan| Sonali Das| Dodo

Word of the day

Nosegay:

an arrangement of flowers that is usually given as a present

Synonyms:

bouquet, corsage, posy

Usage:

She put out her hand and took the nosegay.

Pronunciation:

newth.live/nosegaypro

International Phonetic Alphabet:

/ˈnoʊzɡeɪ/

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

Sourcing blues

DoT should review dilution of local sourcing norms

The recent proposal by the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) to review norms on local value addition for telecom equipment can prove to be a serious setback to India's ambition to become a global manufacturing hub. The DoT has raised concerns about the challenges faced in achieving 50-60 per cent local sourcing for telecom products due to India's limited component ecosystem.



While these constraints are valid, the proposed dilution of local sourcing norms undercuts the Centre's multi-decade effort to promote indigenous manufacturing. Under the current rules, telecom equipment manufacturers must ensure that 50-60 per cent of their total bill of materials is sourced locally to be classified as Class-I local suppliers. This classification is critical, as it gives such suppliers preference in tenders floated by public sector undertakings and ministries. Diluting these requirements will tilt the playing field in favour of foreign giants with established global supply chains, putting Indian firms, many of which have invested heavily in local capabilities, at a disadvantage. Some global equipment makers argue for a short-term relaxation due to India's dependence on imported components like semiconductors. But this view overlooks the strategic imperative of creating a robust domestic supply chain, given the current volatility in global supply chains and the influence of geopolitical factors on trade flows. The proposal comes at a time when domestic companies, using open-source platforms to build 4G and 5G equipment, are struggling to gain a foothold in the market. Despite technological competence and innovation, their gear has only been deployed by a public sector operator. Lack of industry-wide support has made it hard for local manufacturers to scale up operations or compete globally.

The contradiction between the DoT's latest notice to stakeholders and the government's past efforts is stark. From the establishment of Indian Telephone Industries Ltd in 1948 and the Centre for Development of Telematics in 1984, to the National Telecom Policies of 1999 and 2012, the focus has been on promoting local production. The Make in India initiative and the Production Linked Incentive scheme underscore the Centre's resolve to strengthen domestic manufacturing. Instead of diluting value-addition norms, the DoT should focus on building an ecosystem that encourages telecom operators to buy locally made equipment. This would enable manufacturers to invest in component-level production.

Unfortunately, several key proposals from the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India to support local production remain unimplemented. These include the suggestion to lower the licence fee for operators purchasing equipment from local manufacturers. TRAI had also proposed a 10-year income tax holiday for domestic manufacturers with turnover under ₹1,000 crore, similar to earlier incentives for the software industry. Such fiscal support would have given small and mid-sized manufacturers a leg-up.

OTHER VOICES.

The Guardian

Labour's nuclear bet: Big questions remain unanswered

The government's decision to invest £14.2 billion in nuclear power, on top of existing funds, marks a return to significant state funding of nuclear power after Hinkley Point C, financed by the private sector, was dogged by delays and cost overruns. It is also a decisive shift in energy policy. Ministers have high hopes of a nuclear energy renaissance. Ed Miliband, the energy secretary, described the prospect of a new reactor in Suffolk, Sizewell C, combined with new money for modular reactor development and fusion research, as a "golden age". This was a striking choice of words from the greenest voice in the cabinet. The Climate Change Committee's latest advice to the government took a more restrained view of nuclear, which drew industry ire. Mr Miliband's commitment to renewable energy is not in doubt. (JORDON, JUNE 10)

The Island

Titanic clash of egos

The Trump-Musk bromance is over for sure, and the US is now caught up in a titanic clash between the most powerful leader and the richest man in the world; the media is in a feeding frenzy. Not long ago, billionaire Elon Musk's money talked, and Donald Trump listened. Today, President Trump's power is doing all the talking, but Musk won't listen. Trump is reported to have ended Musk's service on a high note. Musk received a special White House send-off before returning to his business empire, wherein lies his real strength. But their differences have since come to a head, with the duo trading swipes in public. Tensions flared over Trump's One Big Beautiful Bill (OBBB) proposing sweeping tax cuts, which are expected to add as much as \$3 trillion to the US debt. (COLANINNO, JUNE 11)

How households are driving growth

They account for bulk of the bank deposits and contribute through equity, debt and other assets too

POINT BLANK.



LOKESHWARRI SK

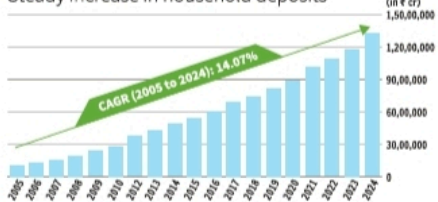
There were lots of debates and discussions around the decline in household financial savings a couple of years ago. Data collated by the RBI had showed that net financial savings of Indian households had registered a precarious drop from 7.8 per cent of national income in 2018-19 to just 5.1 per cent by 2023-24.

Various theories were put forth to explain the dip, ranging from increasing debt of Indian households to the higher purchases of physical assets such as homes, motor vehicles and gold. While these may be partly responsible, it is also quite possible that the data being compiled by the RBI on household savings is incomplete. The data is not capturing the shift in investment patterns of Indian households accurately. The savings of the Indian families appear to have been on an even keel over the last two decades, if we consider their investments in bank deposits. These deposits have grown at a compounded average growth rate of 14.5 per cent between 2005 and 2024; higher than the average growth in nominal GDP in this period. This suggests that households have been able to generate enough surplus and park a substantial portion of it in banks. This is good news for the economy since households are the biggest owners of bank deposits with over 60 per cent share.

These deposits are used to lend to other sectors, making *aam admi* the biggest driver of credit growth in the economy. They held 55 per cent of term deposits and 81 per cent of savings deposits, thus helping boost banks' net interest margins too. This was underlined by former RBI deputy governor Michael J Patra, in a speech: "In India, the household sector typically generates surplus saving relative to its investment which it lends to other sectors... For India, domestic savings have largely financed the overall investment requirements of growth, with external financing playing a supplemental role as reflected in largely modest current account deficits."

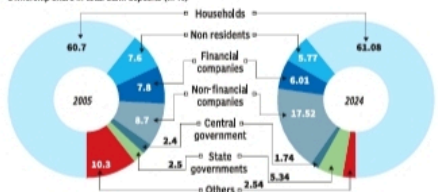
OWNERSHIP OF DEPOSITS
The share of bank deposits held by Indian families amounted to ₹10.8 lakh crore in 2005, accounting for 60.7 per cent of total bank deposits. The share

Steady increase in household deposits



Bulk of bank deposits with households

Ownership share in total bank deposits (in %)



Source: RBI

ranked between 58 per cent and 59 per cent until 2013, when it started moving higher, in line with domestic interest rates. The highest share was seen during Covid when households had more surplus due to curtailment of travel and mobility. Though a gradual decline is seen in recent years, it still stands at 61.08 per cent of total bank deposits, valued at a whopping ₹132 lakh crore, in 2024. Even as households held their share in bank deposits steady, the Central government has witnessed a reduction in its share from 2.4 per cent in 2005 to 1.74 per cent in 2024. This shows the tight ship the Centre has been running, limiting its borrowing to the deficit, so that there is minimal surplus parked in banks. State governments have been laxer, increasing their share from 2.5 per cent to 5.34 per cent in this period. The segment which has witnessed a large increase in share of bank deposits between 2005 to 2024 is

The individual investor has evolved quite fast over the last five years, moving money into assets that generate higher returns

the corporate (non-financial) sector. This sector more than doubled its share of bank deposits from 8.7 per cent to 17.53 per cent. This is indicative of the large savings they have generated due to higher profitability and corporate tax cuts in the last few years.

The annual growth in deposits held by households has, however, not been even. It was extremely high between 2007 and 2012, averaging 24 per cent. The high repo rate of 7-9 per cent, coupled with distress in the economy during that period seems to have played a role in this increase. There is, however, a marked deceleration in household deposit growth in recent years. The CAGR in bank deposits has slowed to 10.3 per cent between 2020 to 2024. This is even below the growth in total bank deposits of 11.4 per cent. This recent slowdown could be due to channelling of investments to other avenues.

DIVERSION OF SAVINGS
The increased participation of individual investors in equity markets, mutual and insurance funds since the pandemic is well chronicled. The individual investor has evolved quite fast over the last five years, moving money into assets that generate higher returns. But the RBI's

data on financial savings does not capture much of this change.

For instance, the stock of household financial assets compiled by the RBI does not include direct holding of Indian investors in the stock market. This currently amounts to ₹42.8 lakh crore. Alternative investment funds and PMS schemes have assets under management of ₹18.8 lakh crore, which is predominantly held by Indian families. Individuals also hold direct stakes in REITs, InvITs, crypto assets, NFTs, etc.

While collating the stock of financial assets held by the households, the RBI considers bank deposits, non-bank deposits, life insurance funds, currency, mutual funds, public provident fund, pension funds and small savings. But the assets mentioned above are yet to be included in the RBI's compilation.

This gap was also pointed out in a SEBI working paper: "In the existing methodology, RBI is considering the actual data relating to mutual fund investments sourced from SEBI and AMFI... certain segments and products in the Indian securities market are not considered in the existing computation."

FOCUS ON HOUSEHOLD SURPLUS

The data shows that not only are Indian households the main lenders to other sectors through the surplus invested in bank deposits, but they are also fuelling growth through their investment in the primary and secondary markets for equity and debt and through indirect investments in mutual funds, pension funds, insurance funds etc. The total financial assets of households, per the RBI, was ₹254 lakh crore as of March 2024. This figure will be much higher if the other asset classes, which have been omitted from the computation, are also considered. How are household financial savings increasing while income is stagnating? Though salary income is growing at a sluggish pace, the non-salary income such as business income or income of the more affluent agricultural households could be more resilient, reaping the benefits of the fast-paced growth in the economy in the last two decades. The frugality of many Indian households, which believe in saving before consuming, could also be responsible for this.

The Centre is doing well to put more money in the hands of the common man through income tax rate cuts, pay commission revision, etc. This may be the right way to increase saving, which will eventually translate into a growth booster for the economy.

A low-down on the new land registration Bill

It aims at an enabling legislative framework for secure, efficient and citizen-centric registration practices across the country

bl.explainer

Shishir Sinha

What is the need for a new land registration Bill, which is expected to be tabled in the monsoon session of Parliament?

Land registration is currently governed by the pre-Constitution, the Registration Act 1908. This Act provides the legal framework for registration of not just immovable properties, but other transactions as well. With the passage of time, not only has the requirement for registration widened but the role of registered documents has also grown significantly in both public and private transactions, often forming the basis for financial, administrative and legal decision-making. It is, therefore, essential that the process of registration is robust, reliable and capable of adapting to evolving societal and technological developments. Keeping this in mind, the Land Resources Department under the Rural Development Ministry has made public the draft of 'The Registration Bill 2025' to seek views from the public by June 25. Post that, the draft will be finalised and the Bill will be introduced in Parliament.

What are the key areas it seeks to address?

The purpose of enacting a new legislation to replace a nearly 117-year-old law is "to align it with a modern, online, paperless and citizen-centric registration system." The draft has five key features: facilitating online registration; expanding the scope of compulsory registration; reinforcing legal and procedural rigour; institutional strengthening and governance reforms; and accessible and citizen-centric processes. The draft aims to promote drafting the deeds in plain language, digital enablement and transparent procedures to make the registration process more accessible, especially for individual citizens and small businesses. It encourages simplification without compromising on legal certainty or procedural safeguards.

Is land registration a State or Central subject under the Constitution?

Entry 18 of the State List in the 7th Schedule of the Constitution lists 'Land, that is to say, rights in or over land, land tenures including the relation of landlord and tenant, and the collection of rents; transfer and alienation of agricultural land; land improvement and agricultural lands; colonization.' However, Entry 6 under the Concurrent List mentions 'transfer of property other than agricultural land; registration of deeds and documents.'



FOCUS AREA. Digitisation of land records

Keeping these entries in mind, while the Centre can provide an enabling law for the registration of land (other than agricultural land), immovable properties and others, States can have their own rules and can also fix the rate of Stamp Duty to be levied on transaction of land or immovable properties besides others. Each State is governed by its own legal rules and regulations regarding the purchase and ownership of agricultural land.

The legal framework for land (except agricultural land) and immovable properties involve two main laws — The Registration Act, 1908 (any sale of immovable property such as land or buildings worth more than ₹100 should be registered) and the Indian Stamp Act, 1889 (rules and procedures vary from State to State or Union Territories (with or without legislatures). Now the proposed legislation aims to provide a

harmonised and enabling legislative framework to support secure, efficient and citizen-centric registration practices across the country.

What are the challenges in digitising land records?

Most important of them is clear title of land. Also, in many families, land has been distributed on an understanding, noted on a paper and signed by concerned parties including some witnesses but not notarised. All these are likely to pose challenges in digitising.

How will this Bill address the issue of benami transactions in land registration?

One provision under the proposed Bill says: "Every person presenting any document for registration may undergo consent-based Aadhaar authentication, or offline verification or consent-based verification through officially valid documents or equivalent e-documents under applicable law." Such a move aims to curb benami transaction. However, experts such as Sonam Chandwani, Managing Partner at KS Legal & Associates, have doubts: "The enhanced documentation requirements and digital audit trails could, in theory, arm agencies like the Income Tax Department with the tools to sniff out benami transactions, but the absence of explicit provisions targeting such practices leaves a gaping hole."

✉ **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, Kasturi Buildings, 859-860, Anna Salai, Chennai 600002.

Boosting EV demand

The editorial 'Low gear' (June 11) largely discusses policy framework for global electric car manufacturers and various constraints related to it. Despite climatic action imperatives, abundant availability of electric cars in all segments and even cost effective operation of EVs, the key factor discouraging potential buyers is the lack of facilities for installation of EV chargers. Several societies don't permit installation of chargers, while the local electricity department place several technical barriers in installation of higher load meters for EV chargers. These issues

have to be addressed if EV manufacturing and sales are go grow.

Vinod Jothil

Bhub

Curbing plastic waste

This refers to 'Plastics pollution can no longer be ignored' (June 11). Statistics on per capita discharge of plastic waste into the sea are alarming. The worst affected are small island countries and nations that thrive mainly on seafood. In India, the Centre had introduced Single Use Plastic (SUP) Regulation Bill 2024 aimed at the complete elimination of plastic waste by 2050.

Promoting sustainable alternatives to SUP through research can help eliminate plastics to a large extent.

R V Baskaran

Bhub

Poverty estimates

India lacks an official estimate of poverty and it is imperative to incorporate income or expenditure metrics in poverty measurement. According to the World Bank, a person should earn \$3 per day to be free from extreme poverty. India can get the income data and expenditure details of every household in the country and arrive at the correct

poverty figure. It is undoubtedly a time-consuming exercise. But then, it is needed for planning, not socio-economic programmes and, thereby, eradicating poverty. With the cooperation of States and local governments, the Centre can get this done.

S Ramakrishnasayee

Chennai

Construction workers

This refers to 'Centre working on welfare plan for construction workers' (June 11). Construction workers generally work under unfavourable conditions. Their lives

should, therefore, be adequately insured by the employers as well as the government so that in case of any untoward incident, their families can get compensation. They should be brought under government insurance/medical schemes like Ayushman Bharat, Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana, Atal Pension Yojana and the National Pension System. The employers should apprise the workers about the various schemes and ensure that they are adequately insured.

Veena Shenoy

Thane

EXPLAINED GLOBAL

ANTI-IMMIGRATION RAIDS: BEHIND MASSIVE PROTESTS IN LOS ANGELES

THE LOS ANGELES Police Department (LAPD) said they were arresting protesters en masse after a curfew came into effect in downtown LA on Tuesday night. The 10-hour curfew was announced by Mayor Karen Bass after days of protests against President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown and military deployment.

Hundreds of US Marines have arrived in LA under orders from Trump to help protect federal personnel and property. There are already thousands of National Guard troops in the city. The move to deploy such a large number of troops has been criticised by California Governor Gavin Newsom, who called it an "assault" on democracy.



A protester is taken into custody in Los Angeles on Sunday. NYT

The trigger

The demonstrations are driven by anger over the Trump administration's stringent enforcement of immigration laws which critics have said are tearing apart immigrant families. The protests erupted on June 6 after Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials began combing the garment district in Los Angeles in search of people suspected of being in the US without legal permission.

The ICE raids took place in areas with large Latino populations.

For instance, operations were carried out in the Westlake district and Paramount in southern LA — places where more than 82% of the population is Hispanic, the BBC reported.

The protesters chanted and threw eggs at the agents carrying out the raids. In response, law enforcement officials unleashed tear gas, flash-bang explosives, and pepper balls.

The escalation

The situation worsened after the Trump administration on June 7 ordered the deployment of the National Guard, claiming the limited protests were a "rebellion" against the US government.

This is the first time since 1965 that a US President has mobilised American military forces in a domestic political situation without the request of the state's

governor. Subsequently, hundreds of US Marines were ordered to arrive in LA to quell the protests.

As Governor Newsom condemned the Trump administration's move, demonstrations escalated, with thousands of protesters gathering in downtown LA on June 8. ICE officers and federal agents used tear gas and pepper balls in an attempt to disperse the crowds. Isolated episodes of vandalism emerged, and a line of spray-painted Waymo driverless cars were set on fire.

On Wednesday, several cities across the US including New York and Seattle braced themselves for a new round of protests, indicating a likely expansion of demonstrations that began in LA.

Newsom vs Trump

On Tuesday, Governor Newsom, in a public address, said Trump's actions were the start of an "assault" on democracy. "California may be first, but it clearly will not end there. Other states are next. Democracy is next," he said.

The Governor alleged that Marines and National Guard troops were being used to assist with immigration raids in LA. Photos posted by ICE showed troops standing guard around officers as they made arrests.

Governor Newsom also filed an emergency motion in federal court seeking to limit them from guarding federal buildings. The court has set a hearing for Thursday.

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

PEOPLE'S SENSITIVITY TO ENVIRONMENT MAY BE GENETICALLY INFLUENCED: STUDY

A STUDY has revealed the genetic factors that may make some people more or less sensitive to the environments they experience. These factors can also trigger symptoms of mental disorder, according to the analysis.

An international team of researchers, led by ones at King's College London, UK, analysed nearly 10,000 pairs of identical twins from 11 studies and examined how changes in sensitivity to environment can influence one's chances of presenting symptoms of ADHD, autism, anxiety and depression, psychosis and neuroticism.

Findings, published in the journal *Nature Human Behaviour*, show that genes related to molecules important for neurodevelopment, immune function and the central nervous system were related to autistic traits.

Genes that influence how one reacts to stress were found to be linked with depressive symptoms.

Further, genes involved in regulating catecholamines — hormones, such as dopamine and adrenaline, involved in responding to stress — were linked to psychotic-like experiences, the researchers found.

"Differences in individuals' sensitivity to life experiences can explain why the same negative or positive experiences may have varying effects on people's mental health, depending on their genetic make-up," lead author Elham Asay, a researcher at King's College London, said.

"Our findings suggest that specific genetic variants influence how environmental exposures impact psychiatric and neurodevelopmental symptoms," Asay said.

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Drone warfare & India

Ukraine's Op Spider's Web and recent India-Pakistan hostilities during Op Sindoor underline how drones, specifically cheaper ones sent out in swarms, pose significant challenges to traditional militaries

EXPLAINED DEFENCE

DEEPTIMAN TIWARY
NEW DELHI, JUNE 11

ON JULY 1, 2021, then Army Chief General M Naravane had warned: "While we pursue our quest for niche technologies, including AI, it would be prudent to remember that future wars will also involve low technology, which is easy to obtain but difficult to defeat."

These words ring truer than ever in the context of two recent events.

On June 1, Ukraine bombed five airbases deep inside Russia using cheap First Person View (FPV) drones, underlining the need to fundamentally reimagine air defences in the age of asymmetric drone warfare.

Weeks earlier in May, during the hostilities in the wake of Operation Sindoor, Pakistan had attacked towns and military facilities across India's western front with swarm after swarm of relatively low-cost, low-tech drones for four straight days. Apart from inflicting damage, these attacks were meant to overwhelm India's air defences, clutter radars, exhaust ammunition, gather intelligence, and probe for vulnerabilities.

Drones, a brief history

Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) date back to World War II and the Korean War, where they were used to train anti-aircraft gunners and in specific offensive missions. Their modern military usage took off in the 1990s, especially after the Gulf War of 1991.

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict of 2020 was a turning point in drone warfare: Azerbaijan's use of Turkish Bayraktar TB2 and Israeli Harop drones devastated Armenian defences, decisively shifting the conflict's dynamics in favour of Baku.

Since then, drones have featured in:

- Yemen, where Houthi rebels targeted Saudi oil infrastructure using drone swarms;
- Gaza, where both Israel and Hamas have used drones for surveillance and strikes; and
- Ukraine, where both Moscow and Kyiv have deployed commercial quadcopters (drones), military drones (Bayraktar TB2, Orkan-10, Shahed-136), and loitering munitions.

Ukraine has notably used "first-person view" (FPV) racing drones to target tanks, chase individual soldiers and small units, and, most notably, bomb Russian air bases.

On June 1, Ukraine carried out Operation Spider's Web, one of the most sophisticated drone operations in history, using 100-150 FPV drones, transported clandestinely in trucks deep into Russia. The target: five key Russian airfields. Ukrainian officials claim to have hit more than 40 Russian aircraft, including strategic bombers like the Tu-22 and Tu-95, and inflicted losses of around \$7 billion.

Meanwhile, Russia throughout the war has used Iranian-made Shahed kamikaze drones in swarms to overwhelm Ukrainian air defenses, and target critical infrastructure such as energy grids.

Not one, but two...

Swarm drones are autonomous or semi-autonomous UAVs that operate in coordinated groups, much like swarms of birds. They communicate via wireless networks and adjust in real time to achieve shared objectives.

Swarms are more resilient than traditional drones due to in-built redundancy — even if one drone is intercepted, others can continue on the mission. Drone swarms are thus used to saturate air defences (a few payloads may sneak through even robust defences), gather intelligence, and attack high-value targets.

Countries are already developing even more lethal AI-driven swarm drones, capable of making real-time decisions, adapting tactics mid-mission, and coordinating more complex manoeuvres. These are expected to become integral to combined arms warfare in the near future.

According to *Fortune Business Insights*, the global military drone market stood at \$14.14 billion in 2023, and is projected to hit \$47.16 billion by 2032.

A FEW NOTABLE SWARM DRONE SYSTEMS

IRAN	RUSSIA
System: Shahed-136 (swarms)	System: Lancet & Shahed
Type: Loitering munition	Type: Loitering + fixed-wing
Swarm Size: 10-50	Swarm Size: 5-20
Range: 2,000 km	Range: 40-300 km
Features: GPS-guided, low radar signature, low-cost	Features: Used in layered attacks with multiple decoys

USA	CHINA
System: LOCUST	System: Drone Swarm (Airborne)
Type: Micro UAV swarm	Type: Micro drones
Swarm Size: 50-100	Swarm Size: 100-200+
Range: 30-60 km	Range: 10-30 km
Features: AI coordination, launched from tubes	Features: Released from drones (see picture) or trucks, AI-powered

WHY SWARM DRONES MATTER

Asymmetry: They let low-tech actors hit high-value targets.

Low cost: They are cheap while being expensive to deter.

Saturation: They overwhelm even sophisticated defence systems.

Autonomy: Reduced reliance on GPS or real-time human control.

Threat of swarms

Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan, in a lecture in Pune, flagged the rising drone threat: "Now we have drones as small as water bottles — and in swarms," he said, calling these "undetectable" and "unharmable".

Air Marshal Anil Chopra (ret), former head of the Centre for Air Power Studies, said that while drone swarms deployed by Pakistan were not particularly effective, the Ukraine example offers some major learnings.

"When you use very cheap drones that carry warheads barely weighing a kilo — like Pakistan did — nothing much happens. They're jammed easily," Chopra told *The Indian Express*.

But swarm drone attacks can be carried out anywhere, and at any time. "If someone moves a truck full of drones near an airbase and launches them (like in Op Spider's Web), defending becomes very difficult. In countries like India, with porous borders and diverse populations, the threat is real," he said.

Chopra emphasised upon the need for integration across the security establishment.

"Your intelligence section, even the local police, matter. Even a traffic constable could make a difference," he said, adding that the success of the Ukraine op was predicated on Kyiv being able to transport its drones thousands of kilometres inside Russia undetected.

"Strategic thinking, inventory management — everything must evolve. A \$1,000 drone damaging a \$200 million aircraft is our new reality," Chopra said.

Countering drone threats

Defence against drones begins with detection. Modern systems employ a mix of AESA radars, electro-optical and infrared sensors, acoustic detectors, and AI-powered systems.

Once detected, one option is for drones

to be neutralised through kinetic means, that is, with missiles and anti-aircraft guns. But traditional kinetic air defences, especially surface-to-air missiles (SAMs), are costly, and less effective against swarms. Automated gun systems such as C-RAM and Phalanx, which track targets and fire autonomously, are preferred in this role.

More cost-effective alternatives include:

- **Directed Energy Weapons (DEWs):** Lasers and microwave pulses that disable drones by damaging sensors or frying electronics;
- **Electronic Warfare (EW):** Jamming GPS signals or communication links;
- **Spoofing:** Misleading drones about their location or issuing false commands;
- **Cyber Attacks:** Taking control of drones and crash them by exploiting software vulnerabilities; and
- **Interceptor drones & nets:** For close-range neutralisation, protecting critical assets.

The asymmetry in cost remains the central challenge in anti-drone warfare. A drone swarm costing roughly \$100,000 might take millions of dollars to neutralise using current technology. This is why nations, including India, are investing in more cost-effective solutions like EW and DEWs.

The ideal defence is a layered system, integrating multiple modes of interception for redundancy and cost-efficiency purposes. Examples include Israel's Iron Dome and the US's Directed Energy M-SHORAD.

India's capabilities

Since 2020, India has ramped up its counter-drone infrastructure, deploying a layered defence that blends indigenous technology, EW, and air defence systems.

Key systems include:

COUNTERMEASURES AGAINST DRONE SWARMS

KINETIC
System/Technology: Phalanx CWS, C-RAM
Description: Anti-aircraft guns with radar-guided targeting (used on land/sea).

ELECTRONIC WARFARE
System/Technology: Jammers, GPS spoofers
Description: Disrupt drone communication and navigation systems. Widely used in Ukraine.

DIRECTED ENERGY
System/Technology: High-Energy Lasers (HEL), microwave weapons
Description: Rapid-target engagement, low cost-per-shot. Israel's Iron Beam and American THOR in testing/deployment.

DRONE-ON-DRONE
System/Technology: Interceptor drones
Description: Drones designed to chase and disable other drones. For example, US-made Forearm Drone Hunter.

NET SYSTEMS
System/Technology: SkyWall, DroneCatcher
Description: Launch nets to physically capture small drones. Effective only at short ranges.

Data compiled by The Indian Express from multiple sources

Akasheer Air Defence Control System: Developed by Bharat Electronics Ltd, it integrates with the Indian Air Force's integrated command network for real-time tracking.

Bhargavastra: Solar Defence and Aerospace Ltd's system fires 64 micro-rockets in salvo to eliminate drone swarms;

DRDO's Anti-Drone System: It offers 360-degree radar coverage, with both jamming (soft kill) and laser (hard kill) capabilities. Drones can be detected up to 4 km away, and neutralised within a 1 km radius; and

Indrajaal: An AI-powered grid from a Hyderabad startup that combines jammers, spoofers, and intelligence to protect areas up to 4,000 sq km. Already deployed at naval sites in Gujarat and Karnataka.

During the May 2025 swarm attacks, the IAF activated its Integrated Counter-UAS Grid, alongside conventional radars, guns, and missiles, neutralising attempted strikes on 15 military bases and several urban targets.

Looking ahead

There is currently a race to develop both drone and anti-drone capabilities. "Even the Iranians are producing more than 200 Shahed drones per day. And these are powerful. India too has set up an ecosystem with 550 startups in the field. Some tech is acquired, but we're developing our own tech too," Chopra said.

The future of warfare is here, and it's unmanned. AI-driven and asymmetric. India's response to the May 2025 drone swarms signals it is rapidly adapting to this future.

As CDS Chauhan put it: "We are at a cusp where war may be between humans and machines — and tomorrow, between machines themselves... We may need a layered and resilient defence system (to counter) this."

WITH INPUTS FROM AMRITA NAYAK DUTTA

Why the Census 2027 is critical for India's economic growth & development

UDIT MISRA
NEW DELHI, JUNE 11

AFTER A delay of six years, India is set to conduct the Census in two phases over 2026 and 2027. Among other things, Census data — meant to provide a snapshot of the country's population as on March 1, 2027 — will be of critical importance for the functioning of the Indian economy.

A needed reality check

The Census is not a simple population count. It collects data on a long list of socio-economic indicators including age, gender, family status, economic status, unemployment, language, education, disability, and migration.

As such the Census is a reality check: one which not only tells us how the country has changed over the last 10 years — in this case 16 years — and what the next decade may

look like. As such, this forms the fundamental statistical basis for all future surveys, socio-economic analysis, and policymaking. Here are two examples.

■ **Inflation control & interest rates**

The Monetary Policy Committee of the Reserve Bank of India sets interest rates based on the retail inflation rate — the rate at which the general price level in the economy went up from one year to the next — in the country.

This rate is based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI), essentially, the weighted average price of a basket of consumer goods and services. Food articles, for instance, have a weight of 46% in the total index. In other words, 46% of all the money spent by an average Indian is on food items.

The weights used for calculating the CPI are allocated based on a consumption survey done by a government agency. But surveys collect data only from a representative sample of the population. How do we

know that a sample is truly representative? This is where the Census comes in. By establishing a "reality" of the population, the Census provides the basis for all subsequent economic surveys, and in turn, policymaking. But the Census only provides the image of the country at a specific point of time.

This means over time, Census data moves further away from reality. And as a result, so does all other data which relies on the Census to establish a baseline.

For instance, if over the past 16 years, an average Indian's consumption on food has fallen to only 30% of her total expenditure, the CPI would be over-estimating food and overall inflation, and Indian policy makers would be running a tighter monetary policy than required, unintentionally holding back India's economic growth.

■ **Migration & governance**

Population projections are often based

on fertility (birth rate) and mortality (death rate) assumptions. But there is a third variable that is critical: migration.

Contrary to popular perceptions, interstate migration accounts for barely 12% of total internal migration in India, with intra-distric (62%) and inter-distric (26%) accounting for a majority. Moreover, most internal migration is between one rural area to another (almost 48%). The second biggest category — and also the fastest growing one — is from one urban to another urban area.

As revealing as these statistics are, they are based on Census data from 2011. The story of India's internal migration could have undergone a complete change since then, one which only a nationwide Census can capture.

As such, migration data has wide-ranging policy implications — from affecting Budget allocations for rural and urban ar-

reas to policies regarding education, employment and social welfare.

No alternative to Census

No survey will be able to capture the reality of India if it is modelled on outdated Census data. This holds true for both public and private sector surveys.

In fact, with each passing year that we do not have the latest Census data, it becomes more costly to get an accurate picture of reality.

While Centre and State governments are collecting an ever-increasing volume of administrative data on a whole host of variables, from water and electricity availability to education and disability, this data is not a substitute for the Census.

For one, there is a problem of comparability when looking at data from one department to another, and even more so from one state to another. This is because of differences in data collection methodologies, definitions, etc.

Moreover, data collected by departments (and officials) are fundamentally more unreliable due to perverse incentives that those collecting data have to exaggerate policy successes and hide failures.

For instance, the latest round of National Family Health Survey in 2020-21 showed that contrary to government's claims that India had become "Open Defecation Free", 30% of the households surveyed did not have toilets. Of course, the NFHS is a survey, not a Census.

While the six-year delay is likely to create problems during analysis and comparison with data from previous Censuses, it will nonetheless be a welcome development. Every passing year India and its policymakers have been progressively failing to get a clear picture of India's actual reality.

The Census 2027 will thus provide a critical reset not just for India's economy and its policymakers, but also its citizens.

EXPLAINED ECONOMICS

THE IDEAS PAGE

Don't scroll past the magic

Algorithms may be shaping our screens, but they can't recreate the thrill of watching stories unfold — together, in the theatre, where cinema truly belongs



ANUBHAV SINHA

WHY ARE WE not watching films in theatres as we used to? What has gone wrong with that thrilling, joyous collective experience? Why has the business of screening films in theatres been struggling in India?

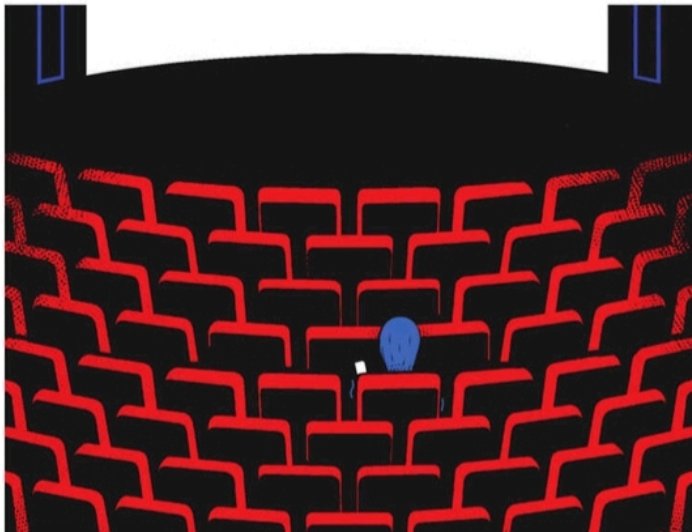
I have been writing and directing for 30 years, and producing films for around 15 years. I have made films with unknown, first-time actors, with big stars and superstars. I have made out-and-out commercial films and rather grim, deliberately discomforting political films. And for the past two years, I have been trying to understand why fewer and fewer people watch a film in a theatre. I don't have a definitive answer but I do have some clues.

Since the Lumière brothers screened eight of their short films on December 28, 1895, at the Salon Indien du Grand Café in Paris, since the first film theatres were set up in 1910, the relatively young art of filmmaking has grown through a collaboration of several older art forms — writing, theatre, music, painting, sculpture, and photography. Its practitioners and critics have debated for a century its various aspects but the singular aspect of the business that has never been in doubt has been the collective experience of the audience. And so it remains.

Watching a film with a group of strangers and friends in a theatre is somewhat like eating with family or friends at a fine-dining restaurant. You can order the same food home; the ingredients and the recipe would be the same but you wouldn't have the ambience, the chatter, the energy. That is what collective experience is about. Food is experienced with the five senses. Cinema, too, demands that.

In popular conversation, cinema is wrongly lumped with television, and increasingly, with streaming platforms. But it is different. To create a "new" experience every time you go to a theatre for a collective experience is cinema's inherent endeavour. That's where it earns its joy and money from. Streaming platforms and television are a different experience, a different recipe. They play in a domestic or personal space, on a television, computer or phone screen. I have written, directed and produced for both over the past 30 years. They are less about your experience and more about your attention. They earn their joy and money from how long you were watching. Experience is a priority, too, but only to make you stick around longer.

How do they know how long you will stick around? Well, the algorithm. Before we speak of algorithms, however, we must speak of samosas. Our collective experience of samosas is that we have our favourite roadside shops that we think make the best ones in the world. When a food giant decides he will be the biggest samosa company in town, he will buy and hire all the existing samosa manufacturers. He will conduct a survey. Why do people like samosas? Why do some people eat more samosas than others? Why do some samosas sell more than others? He will collect data from across the city about the patterns and scales of samosa consumption. He will build an algorithm. And he will use this database to "standardise" the production and taste of samosas across



CR Sasikumar

the city. The samosa company is driven to maximise profits. The individual artistic innovation of samosas across the city — more green chilli at the Chowk, more coriander at the Ghataghar — holds little value for it.

The algorithm understands you. You watch three reels about strength training and you are inundated with similar reels. You shape the algorithm but eventually the algorithm shapes you. The algorithm wants you to stay longer, makes you stay longer, makes you follow a predictable pattern. It is a cage. It tries to standardise art and that is the death, or near-death, of it. You stop taking chances.

That's the reason cinema should relentlessly try to create new experiences. Art wants you to experience new ones. The leap of faith doesn't tell you where you will land. You may crash but that is the fun of the flight.

Sadly, we are atomising as a society and the idea of collective experience is declining. At bus stops, on trains, in restaurants, at home, in parks, people are just not together. They are on their devices cage inside their bespoke algorithms. Money is shrinking, upward. The budget for entertainment, let us assume, remains the same. The avenues for entertainment are increasing and so is the idea of entertainment. Attention spans are declining. Going to a movie theatre is a big investment, not only financially but also in time. Devoting yourself for three hours to a movie is a big deal. The audience will slowly exhibit a pattern, the producers will see it. The filmmaking economics will change. It'll be in chum at the moment. Some films will be Friday films, some will need a longer run. The exhibition sector, too, has to hold the hand of both kinds of films. Hopefully, in time to come, money will trickle down better and we will all venture out more.

What should worry us more is protecting and nourishing the idea of being with each other. Holi, Eid and Diwali aren't quite the social glue they were; in bigger cities, they are increasingly becoming occasions for

Watching a film with a group of strangers and friends in a theatre is somewhat like eating with family or friends at a fine-dining restaurant. You can order the same food home; the ingredients and the recipe would be the same but you wouldn't have the ambience, the chatter, the energy. That is what collective experience is about. Food is experienced with the five senses. Cinema, too, demands that.

out-of-town holidays. We need to rediscover and rekindle the joys and frustrations of sitting together, talking, arguing, laughing, and eating together.

Cinema will find its new equilibrium. There will always be big-ticket films that aspire to hit the jackpot and there will always be films that innovate, experiment and say the unpopular. Sometimes they will land, sometimes they will crash. Films will have different intentions and different box-office results. Both La Nouvelle Vague (French New Wave) and Dogme (Danish avant-garde film movement) had seminal impacts. It is not very wise to compare the box-office collections of *Miss India* (2022), or *Ohaneva* with *Laapataa Ladies* (2023). Some films are easy to fund; some are not.

The audience will be surprised to know the way films are funded but that is not their business. Their business is to like films or not. Let it be ours to keep trying to find a balance between the films you like and the ones we want to make. The film business is attractive from the outside and treacherous from the inside. Even the most seasoned businessmen do not get it. Only those who have played it long enough begin to understand how super-strong equations on paper end up losing money and the improbable ones win.

Films have very unconventional revenue streams. It is not the business of the audience to figure out which one is a hit or a flop. You don't care whether your favourite restaurant, shoe brand, ice cream or mobile phone company makes profits or losses. You like them and you consume them. Films are no different. Not every film will do 100 crore at the box office. Not every film that does 100 crore is a hit. Not every film that does 30 crore is a flop. There is so much more data nuance that will never reach you. Simply sit back, relax and enjoy the movies. It is that simple.

The writer is a filmmaker and producer

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"We urge the international community not to forget the plight of the Rohingya and to come forward with aid."

— THE DAILY STAR, BANGLADESH

Fuel for a green Viksit Bharat

Conversations on optimum use of uranium and thorium hold the key to the success of government's nuclear mission



ANIL KAKODKAR

INDIA'S ASPIRATION TO be "viksit" by the centenary year of its independence, while adhering to the net zero carbon emissions target for 2070, needs a strategy for sustained per capita energy use. The strategy also needs to focus on achieving a Human Development Index of 0.95, which is characteristic of advanced countries, and provide clean energy for this purpose. This corresponds to around 28,000 TWh of total energy annually. The available clean energy sources to address this need are renewable energy, large hydro power and nuclear. Among them, nuclear energy's contribution would need to be at least around 20,000 TWh annually since the other two together are unlikely to exceed 8,000 TWh. Today, India consumes around 9,800 TWh annually with around 96 per cent coming from fossil resources. Clean energy needs to increase 70 times and around 70 per cent of it needs to come from nuclear in 45 years.

After Independence, Homi Bhabha had advocated a three-stage nuclear power programme aimed at long term energy security and autonomy for the country. We seem to be losing that focus. Surely, there are constraints and challenges, some of which are external. However, a sharper focus on our end goal, despite the strong foreign vendor-driven narratives that seem to be gaining currency of late, is something we cannot afford to lose sight of.

Any nuclear programme has to necessarily begin with uranium — the only natural source of fissionable material. While our uranium resources were modest to begin with, the emphasis on exploration has led to an increase in stocks. The ore grades, however, are very low. These reserves, despite the higher cost they entail, are a key source of energy security, especially in a situation when uranium imports are disrupted. Access to foreign uranium markets has enabled the first-stage nuclear programme to grow well beyond 10 GWe, a threshold that was envisaged earlier. However, the second-stage programme of fast breeder reactors is yet to take off.

We must, however, celebrate our domestic pressurised heavy water reactors (PHWRs), the proven and competitive technology that meets global benchmarks. While the 100 GWe nuclear mission launched by the government would still leave us about twofold below the nuclear capacity required for a net zero "Viksit Bharat", realising it within the specified timeframe requires accelerated deployment. This, in turn, depends essentially on proven technologies — domestic PHWRs being the primary workhorse, supplemented by proven large light water reactors (LWRs). We must also bring in multiple deployment agencies, beyond NPCIL and now NTPC. The PHWR technology must be seen as a com-

mon national good and made available to potential domestic agencies for accelerated deployment with a mentoring approach. Efforts to minimise the costs are necessary in the case of LWRs by following the Make in India approach.

100 GWe capacity would need around 20,000 tons of uranium annually. This could be around 15 per cent of global uranium production. Given the constraints of geopolitics as well as potential demand-supply mismatch in a growing nuclear energy scenario, this may well become a major energy security challenge of a dimension that is more serious compared to oil and gas today. The three-stage programme, which involves recycling nuclear fuel, enables 60-70 times more energy from the same quantity of mined fuel. A quick shift from mined uranium to recycled uranium and plutonium in fast reactors has thus become an energy security imperative. In view of the delay in deploying fast breeder reactors (FBRs), irradiating thorium, of which we have the largest reserves, in our PHWRs has become crucial. That we are now leveraging much greater quantities of uranium than envisaged earlier also enables large-scale introduction of thorium in our PHWRs. This would help us in preparing to address the energy security challenge by recycling thorium-based spent fuel in molten salt reactors (MSR) and advance the third stage despite delays in the second stage. While the plan to introduce thorium in fast reactors to lead us into the third stage should continue, this would enable a faster route to thorium MSRs. One could also link high-power GeV range proton accelerators with subcritical systems based on such configurations to facilitate capacity growth.

SMRs, which are dominating the narrative today, would take at least two decades to mature before deployment at scale can begin. Not only is this inconsistent with the 2047 timeline, the uranium required will also be harder to access at that time. Instead, we would be better off devoting our R&D resources to developing thorium MSR-based MSRs as well as other technologies relevant to the second and third stage that would take us closer to our thorium goal.

High Assay Low Enriched Uranium (HALEU) and irradiation qualification of thorium fuel for high burn-up performance are prerequisites to introducing thorium in PHWRs. They also have several advantages with respect to economics, safety, waste management and proliferation resistance — the move would be attractive without any significant change in the cost of HALEU. It is also fast becoming the choice for many advanced power reactor systems just as it has become so for research reactors. This is an area for international cooperation benefiting not just India but also the emerging economy countries. ANEEL fuel, which is under development, aims to achieve just that.

One should expect the 100 GWe nuclear mission to be a forerunner to the much larger nuclear energy deployment needed for net zero Viksit Bharat and not reach a virtual dead end.

The writer, a nuclear scientist, was director of Bhabha Atomic Research Centre

The full frame

By sharing her wedding photos, Mahua Moitra chose the lens for her own story



PAROMITA CHAKRABARTI

IN A COUNTRY where women in public life are expected to be circumspect about personal milestones — especially those that might provoke commentary — Mahua Moitra did the opposite. By sharing vignettes from her private wedding with fellow politician Pinali Misra of the BJP in Berlin on social media, the 50-year-old Trinamool Congress MP made it clear that she will not edit herself to fit into anyone else's frame.

In Indian politics, where women often shrink themselves into acceptability, even a simple act such as this can seem radical. Mahua has been at the receiving end of misogynistic trolling in the not-so-distant past. Her personal life, her choice in men ("terrible", she had confessed in an interview with *The Guardian* in November 2023), her wardrobe — none of it has been off-limits. In October 2023, following cash-for-query allegations, Moitra was hailed before the Lok Sabha Ethics Committee. The complaint against her, raised by BJP MP Nishikant Dubey, was grounded in documents received from Jai Anant Dehadrai, Moitra's former partner. The tone of the inquiry that followed was heavy with moral judgement, light on due process. When she

stormed out of one of the hearings, refusing to legitimise what she called a "kangaroo court", Moitra was swiftly expelled, dismissed as uncooperative, arrogant, and that lazy shorthand for women who defy labels — difficult.

To be "difficult" as a woman is often to carry the weight of collective discomfort with female autonomy. It is an idea at odds with the culture of conformism that most women are raised in, with the ecosystem that demands compliance over confrontation. And so, when a woman refuses to bend, it is easier to seek her dismissal as unreasonable, hysterical, deranged, even dangerous. As British writer Rebecca West put it over a century ago: "I only know that people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat, or a prostitute."

Since 2009, when she gave up her job as an investment banker to enter politics, Moitra has refused to trade her sharpness for likeability. Termining her expulsion from Parliament "the most tenacious witch-hunt of a woman MP" and a "weaponisation of Parliament" committees, she declared that she would continue to fight the BJP "inside Parliament, outside Parliament,

in the gutter or on the streets".

This defiance does not, of course, elevate Moitra to a pedestal. What it does achieve, however, is to make her less of a cliché, all distinguishing features and sharp angles sanded down to perfect conformity. In the same *Guardian* interview, Moitra had said, "I'm not going to make excuses for who I am. I am not going to change who I am to fit the paradigm. Let the paradigm shift with me. When I returned to India to enter politics, I was clear that I wanted to be in public life, but by being myself." Moitra's refusal to be written out of her own story is what makes her interesting — and, often, such a challenge to the status quo. In her defiance, she offers an alternative to women who are told that their dignity depends on how little space they take up.

From M Karunanidhi to George Fernandes to Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Indian politics is replete with instances of male politicians with complicated personal lives that have barely caused a ripple in public discourse. Their romantic entanglements are seen as footnotes, not defining traits of a public servant. But for a woman politician, every choice becomes a referendum on her character. This double standard

doesn't merely tilt the scales, it builds imbalance into its structure. What Moitra has demanded is what every woman, including those in public life, deserves: The right to be judged by her politics, not her presence; the right to be messy, to love badly, to choose again, to own her story — privileges her male colleagues inherit without question.

Months after her very public expulsion, Moitra returned to Parliament after winning her seat from the Krishnanagar constituency in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. To attribute her victory to any one reason would be reductive. But it indicates that Indian politics — in which *nari shakti* has become an affirmative slogan and women's political representation is set for a boost — might need to make room for the difficult woman. The one who can forge connections while being herself; who doesn't apologise for her ambition or affection, who demands to be held to the same standards as her male peers.

Here's to Moitra then — fierce, unfettered, on to a new beginning. Long may she remain difficult.

paromita.chakrabarti@expressindia.com

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

TRUMP'S OVERREACH

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "Trump unchecked" (IE, June 11). Lagging behind the view that the US President is escalating a crisis of his own making in Los Angeles. It's quite intriguing to observe that he continues to cross swords with California Governor Gavin Newsom, unimpressed of the fact that his (Trump's) move to deploy additional California National Guard troops along with 700 Marines to unseat federal overreach. Trump seems bent on scoring an own goal. He should revisit his extant immigration policy rather than trying with the idea of involving the dreaded Insurrection Act.

S K Gupta, via email

LONG WAY TO GO

THIS REFERS TO the article, "From dreams to deeds" (IE, June 11). The BJP's low-key celebration of the Modi government's 11 years in office has evoked no great public interest, reflecting a certain fatigue and realisation about unrealistic expectations. Catchphrases and acronyms have been used to construct a narrative of "good governance". The Modi government has changed India's political complexion and erased the line between democracy and majoritarianism. Unemployment and inflation figures show its economic performance in a poor light. The government has conveniently forgotten about the promise to create 2 crore jobs every year.

David Milton, Maruthachand

WAR ON TERROR

THIS REFERS TO the article, "A new T20 for the win" (IE, June 10). Consider events like the Taliban coming back to power in Afghanistan after the United States' 20-year war, America's new attitude towards Syrian rebel groups, or Vladimir Putin's calibrated silence on Op Sindoor. All these complications would hardly allow a developing country like India to act as a leader in the fight against a globalised war like terrorism, fraught with utterly regional dissensions. Countries may leverage the void of a universally agreed-upon definition of "terrorism" in order to maximise their regional interests.

Pratishtha Saini, via email

FACT IN FICTION

THIS REFERS TO the editorial "Master of precision" (IE, June 11). Frederick Forsyth made a colossal contribution to the political thriller genre. His service in the RAF gave him first-hand experience that helped him as a war journalist and later as a bestseller author. Apart from *The Day of the Jackal*, his novel *The Dogs of War* exposes neo-colonialism by showing how coups are stage-managed by external forces for massive business interests. Young writers, intelligence professionals and policymakers all draw inspiration from his work. Marring fact with fiction was his forte. The standard of thriller writing that he set will be followed for a long time.

SH Quadri, Bikaner

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, THURSDAY, JUNE 12, 2025

12 The EDITORIAL PAGE

WORDLY WISE
IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO UNDERSTAND THE NATURAL
WORLD; THE POINT IS TO DEFEND AND PRESERVE IT.
— EDWARD ARBERRY

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL



JAWED ASHRAF

A new axis of stability

As global rifts widen and multilateralism weakens,
India and Europe can anchor a multipolar world

SLOWING DOWN

World Bank report underlines continued uncertainty, India's performance holds hopes of imminent trade deals

THE 2020s HAVE already seen major shocks to the global economy such as the Covid pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine conflict. There is now another shock to contend with. According to the World Bank, "increased trade barriers and heightened policy uncertainty" are causing "a notable deterioration of the outlook". In its latest Global Economic Prospects report, the Bank has revised downwards its forecast for global growth this year to 2.3 per cent, down 40 basis points from its January estimate. To put this growth estimate in perspective, excluding periods of global recession, this is the "weakest performance in 17 years". In April, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) also estimated global growth to slow to 2.8 per cent in 2025. In its report, the World Bank has also projected global growth to average just about 2.5 per cent between 2020 and 2027 — this is the "slowest pace of any decade since the 1960s". This is a remarkable deceleration.

The report's stark warning that "many of the forces behind the great economic miracle of the last 50 years... have swung into reverse" is worrying, particularly for developing economies. This group of countries has already seen a steady slowing in economic momentum — growth has come down sharply from averaging 5.9 per cent in the 2000s to 3.7 per cent in the 2020s, as per the report. It should perhaps not come as a surprise that this is in line with the slowdown in global trade. And the "upheaval", which has caused the drastic slowing down of global growth and trade expectations this year, continues. After another round of talks in London, the US and China are now said to have agreed to a "framework". Deals with most countries remain a work in progress. India is "hopeful" that an agreement with the US will be reached before the 90-day pause on the Liberation Day tariffs ends in the second week of July. Amid this uncertainty, the Bank now expects global trade volume to grow at just 1.8 per cent in 2025, a steep scaling down of 1.3 percentage points from its January projections.

The World Bank report projects India to grow at 6.3 per cent in 2025-26, with both investments and exports expected to remain subdued. This forecast is in line with that of the IMF, which had in April pegged the country to grow at 6.2 per cent in its World Economic Outlook. These assessments are only marginally lower than the RBI's most recent projection of 6.5 per cent. Expectations of a sharp uptick in the near term appear muted — the World Bank has pegged growth to average 6.6 per cent over the following two years.

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS MINISTER S Jaishankar's second visit to Europe within a month reflects a deepening India-Europe engagement even as the two sides deal with volatile US policies, era-shaping geopolitical shifts, terrorism from Pakistan and escalating conflict in Europe. Highlights include Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to France to co-chair the AI Action Summit and the visit by the re-elected European Commission President, Ursula Von der Leyen, and the college of commissioners to India in February. The MEA-supported Raisina Dialogue also makes a debut this week in the strategic port city of Marseille.

Europe faces extraordinary challenges. War has returned. Economic difficulties, concerns over security and immigration, and rising issues of identity and culture are reshaping politics. The European Union's (EU's) many internal stresses and faultlines have made managing the European project more complex, though Brexit has dissuaded even the most nationalist governments from abandoning the EU.

The external challenges are greater. Europe must contend with US President Donald Trump's disdain for NATO and near dismantling of long-adrift transatlantic relations, the rupture in relations with Russia, and the geopolitical and economic strain in ties with China. Multilateralism, Europe's refuge for order and its instrument of international influence, is crumbling. Europe risks strategic irrelevance and a rising gap with the US and China in innovation and competitiveness. The world's most open major economy faces an upturned global trade regime. And, as it happens in continental landmasses, to Europe's east, the lines that define the political and cultural geography of what constitutes Europe are perennially contested.

But the EU has shown remarkable cohesion and resilience in its response to Covid, the Ukraine war and Trump's onslaught. Its project of horizontal and vertical integration continues. Relations with the UK are improving. Europe is waking up to the need for independent foreign and security policy, the pursuit of industrial and digital sovereignty, a resilient internal supply chain and a stronger defence industrial base. It has the intellectual, industrial and investment capacity for that. But Europe cannot do it by itself. It needs new patterns of alignment. Equally, global uncertainty has reinforced India's traditional proclivity for a di-

versified portfolio of partnerships.

The EU is a leading and growing trade and investment partner for India. According to a Institut Montaigne study on the EU's ties in the Indo-Pacific, Eurostat data shows that between 2015 and 2022, EU27 FDI stock registered the strongest growth in India at 96 per cent, exceeding Taiwan's 93 per cent and China's 52 per cent. From France alone, the FDI stock grew a whopping 373 per cent. In trade, too, between 2015 and 2023, EU27 exports to India grew 47 per cent, behind 83 per cent to Taiwan and 54 per cent to China. EU imports from India grew by over 100 per cent, second behind Taiwan from the Indo-Pacific. Surveys indicate a trend toward diversification away from China, though less than that of US companies.

The EU must conclude the EU-India trade and investment agreements quickly, starting with an early harvest, and also waive the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism for India in view of India's progress in green energy. These will accelerate IMEX, the great new strategic initiative that replaces an old India-Europe corridor, and will survive the current instability in the Middle East. It aims to be not just a trade route but a new global corridor of investment, innovation, enterprise and energy. India must invest more in Europe.

India and Europe converge on the public character and purpose of digital technology and in preventing a global duopoly. As Modi said at the AI Action Summit, we can collaborate in innovation, application, regulation, governance, standards and serving public good globally. That also applies to digital public infrastructure. India can benefit from Europe's leadership in deep tech, digital manufacturing, enterprise technologies and key areas of the semiconductor chain.

Indeed, science, technology and innovation should drive our partnership — to lead industries of the future and address global priorities, including diverse clean energy sources, climate resilient health and food security, biodiversity and the sustainability of Earth and its oceans. This also requires a comprehensive mobility programme of higher ambition for students, scholars and scientists.

Europe is a significant source of armaments for India. Europe, seeking to rearm itself, and India pursuing amaninbhartha, must prioritise collaboration and full transfer of technology in joint design, development and manufacturing of defence equipment. We have robust cooperation in the areas of maritime, underwater, space and cyber security, as also in counter-terrorism with many European partners. Beyond technical and intelligence cooperation, Europe, hit by Islamist terrorism, and sometimes with the provenance of Pakistan, needs to do more to penalise Pakistan for terrorism.

Great powers believe they can bend the world to their will but often cause chaos. Middle powers need to leverage partnerships and institutions to resist and maximise their roles. India and the EU have a broader global agenda that rises beyond differences on Ukraine or Pakistan. India and a united, cohesive Europe, with an independent voice and capabilities, can build a stable multipolar world, anchored in international law, underpinned by the discipline of multilateralism and free from territorial ambitions.

India and Europe approach challenges through coalitions, not unilateral initiatives or the use of asymmetric bilateral power. That calls for collaboration, not the EU's prescriptive approach to its norms. For the Global South, partnerships can protect our interests against mounting competition and also mitigate global fragmentation. In the Indo-Pacific region, while France is a key security partner for India, working with others and the EU, India can help countries avoid coercion by one hegemon or a forced choice between two major powers.

Attention and time, imagination and ambition, and sensitivity to each other's concerns transform relationships. Europe and India need more of that despite other immediate preoccupations in Brussels, Delhi and European capitals. We must involve all stakeholders and also reshape media stereotypes and public perceptions.

The author is a retired Indian ambassador

MISPLACED KINDNESS

Deaths caused by tigers in Ranthambore should push wildlife authorities to reflect, focus on creating healthy ecosystems

A RELATIVELY UNUSUAL human-animal conflict is playing out in the vicinity of one of India's premier tiger reserves, and much of the blame should be laid at the doors of the wildlife authorities in charge of the protected area. In the past two-and-a-half months, tigers have killed three people, one of them a forest officer, on the outskirts of Ranthambore National Park in Rajasthan. As reports in this paper have underlined, in at least two cases, the animals' natural tendencies went awry because the park authorities provided live bait to their ailing mother. They lost the inhibition tigers usually have towards humans and became a risk for the forest staff and visitors to Ranthambore.

Offering live bait to injured or old tigers is not banned, but the National Tiger Conservation Authority's standard operating procedure deems it "not advisable". The manual says tigers "need to be managed with minimum human intervention". Artificially feeding wild tigers to ensure their longevity "goes against the basic tenets" of conservation, it underlines. Live baiting predatory animals is known to impair their natural survival skills. It's natural for old and infirm animals to die of starvation or in a fight with their adversaries. This fundamental precept of nature seems to be lost on wildlife managers in several parts of the country. The problem is not just limited to providing food to infirm animals. It's not uncommon today for wildlife authorities to nurse animals injured in territorial fights or medically care for tigers past their prime. This goes against nature's way of managing tiger demographics. The animal no doubt evokes awe and at times, it's difficult to barricade emotions from conservation. But there's a fine line between respecting the fundamentals of conservation and misplaced kindness for an individual member of a majestic species. Artificial interventions, such as those in Ranthambore, boost tiger numbers in pockets, worsen conflicts among them and eventually push some of the animals to stray close to human habitats.

The understaffed and ill-equipped forest departments in most parts of the country deserve compliments for bringing the tiger back from the brink after the 2005 crisis. But conservation should not be just about numbers. The Ranthambore crisis betrays an attitude of overcautiousness among park managers. Authorities, instead, need to initiate conversations on the carrying capacity of the country's national parks and settle on a viable population of the tiger — especially because a sizeable percentage of tigers live outside protected areas today. The focus should be on creating and maintaining healthy ecosystems where the tiger can thrive without endangering the lives of humans.

LET THE KIDS ROT

The West has just woken up to the joy of unstructured time for children. But doing nothing has always had its own charm

ONCE UPON A very real time not so long ago, Indian summers were about watching the clock slow down. As schools broke for the holidays, children shed their baggage of schedules and slipped into long lazy days filled with mangoes, mischief and that rare thing — unsupervised time. Days of chasing dragonflies and inventing games out of thin air, of lying on cool floors under creaking ceiling fans and watching the play of sunlight through the curtains, of turning cardboard boxes into doll's houses, of fighting and making up with siblings and cousins all in the span of an afternoon. It was, as the nostalgics would say, the golden age of boredom, and it was beautiful.

The age of overachievement, however, transformed summer from a season of wonder into a gap to be filled with workshops, boot camps and other skill-building, prospect-enhancing activities, ranging from mindful movement to creative writing sessions. Screens crept in, too — glowing, addictive companions that turn idle time into something far more passive and far less magical. In chasing productivity, the poetry of those long days was slowly written over. Now, scarred by overpacked summer camps and stress-inducing hyper-structured productivity plans, the West has finally cottoned on to the joy of letting children do nothing for a few precious weeks. In the US, the phenomenon is being branded as "summer kid rotting", a variant of "bed rotting", that celebrates the unhurried and the purposeless while coaxing the modern parent, with her emphasis on over-optimisation, to step back and take a deep breath.

The gentle rhythms of idle days, however, have always held a quiet wisdom. It allows friendships to steep into rich life-long bonds, teaches children how to sit comfortably with themselves and makes room for curiosity and joy. Perhaps, the greatest gift adults can give children, then, is this freedom to waste a little time. After all, the best memories are often made not when everything adds up, but when nothing needs to.



BURHAN MAJID

THE CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHT to free speech — a fundamental democratic principle — is often misinterpreted. The editorial ("Whose free speech?", June 3) circumscribes the context, interest and impact of free speech by defining Sharmistha Panoli's inflammatory social media post, targeting Islam and the Prophet, as a legitimate exercise of free expression.

An important disclaimer: My disagreement with the editorial is not a defence or endorsement of the carceral state. Rather, beyond the over-simplistic binaries, the focus here is on recognising hate speech as a form of violence. While the editorial rightly criticises the overzealous police action in arresting the 22-year-old law student — she was later released on bail — it ignores the context that enabled Panoli's remarks and fails to acknowledge the target of her outburst. Panoli's words are far from being an act of reckless indiscretion; they feed into the volatile environment, increasingly marginalising, vilifying, and disproportionately targeting Muslims.

The editorial, too, acknowledges that Panoli's post echoed "some of the most hurtful anti-minority tropes in circulation". However, more than the troubling content of Panoli's post, one should be wary of the political sentiments that consider Muslims to be demographic threats. Condemning arrests for online posts is crucial, but one must differentiate between freedom of expression and provocative speech that perpetuates targeted

HOW FREE IS FREE SPEECH

Discourse must be shaped by consistent legal principles, not selective outrage

DEAR EDITOR, I DISAGREE

A column in which readers tell us why, when they differ with the editorial positions or news coverage of 'The Indian Express'

More than the troubling content of Sharmistha Panoli's post, one should be wary of political sentiments that consider Muslims to be demographic threats. One must differentiate between freedom of expression and provocative speech that perpetuates targeted hatred against marginalised communities.

hatred against marginalised communities.

The editorial failed to realise the essence of *Shreya Singhal vs Union of India* (2015). The judgment upholds freedom of speech but doesn't legitimise hate speech. On the contrary, the SC has clearly defined the boundaries between protected free expression and punishable hate speech. In *Shreya Singhal*, the court established a crucial framework by distinguishing three categories of speech: Discussion, advocacy, and incitement. It held that "mere discussion or even advocacy of a particular cause, however unpopular, is at the heart of Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution", and is therefore protected.

However, as the court noted, once such speech crosses the line into incitement — particularly incitement to violence, hatred, or public disorder — Article 19(2) applies, and restrictions become constitutionally valid. By drawing this line, *Shreya Singhal* underscores a crucial principle: The right to free speech does not encompass a right to incite harm or hatred against others. Many judicial precedents affirm this critical distinction. Notably, in three rulings in 2018 — *Tehseen Poonawalla vs Union of India*, *Kodungallur Film Society vs Union of India*, and *Shakti Vahini vs Union of India*, the SC went a step further, laying down guidelines to prevent and address hate speech and vigilante violence. However, these directives have largely remained on paper, with little to no meaningful implementation.

The antidote to overzealous state action cannot be universal imposition. The editorial rightly points out that young Muslims have often been arrested for social media posts and labelled "anti-national" or "pro-Pakistan", often with little evidence of real harm. But to use that injustice to suggest that no one should be held accountable for incendiary speech is a fallacy. The discourse on free speech must be shaped by consistent legal principles, not by selective outrage and the use of legal machinery by those in power. The solution to the wicked problem of protecting free speech lies in equal and principled application of law, and not in abandoning accountability altogether.

In a system that disproportionately targets minority voices while mostly excusing and sometimes even celebrating those who vilify them, the overwhelming defence from all political cadres for free expression is amusing. The double standard is made evident through the ruling party's sudden invocation of the principle of freedom of speech and expression, championing Panoli's right to free speech while silencing dissenting voices from marginalised communities — the latest, the arrest of Ashoka University professor Ali Khan Mahmudabad, is a case in point. Defending insidious speech on the grounds of constitutional liberty risks defending the right to hate, a right not promised by the Constitution.

The writer teaches law at Jamia Hamdard



JUNE 12 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

TRIPURA VIOLENCE

AT LEAST 10 people were injured in bomb explosions and a lathi charge during the 24-hour statewide bandh called by the Tripura Youth Congress (T) today. Around 100 youth Congress (T) supporters were arrested for picketing in front of various government offices in Agartala. Seven KC (T) supporters were injured when police resorted to a lathi charge as the demonstrators broke the southern gate of the secretariat.

HOTEL BLOW UP

TAMIL MILITANTS BLEW UP a luxury beach-

front hotel on Sri Lanka's east coast, senior government sources said. The sources said the 66-room Moonlight Bay hotel in Trincomalee was shattered and three quarters destroyed, but no casualties were reported.

INDIRA MURDER TRIAL

ADDITIONAL SESSIONS JUDGE Mahesh Chandra, trying the Indira Gandhi assassination case, ordered the framing of charges of murder against Santwan Singh and of criminal conspiracy to murder against him and the other two accused, Kehar Singh and Balbir Singh. The charges will be framed by the court on July 8, and the prosecution will

lead evidence on July 9

CHINA'S PROPOSALS

CHINA HAS MADE several proposals to improve bilateral relations with India. An external affairs ministry spokesman, however, would not confirm a report that China had offered to reopen India's consulates in Urumqi and Shanghai in exchange for reopening the Chinese consulates in Calcutta and Bombay. The proposals that China has made may not be in the context of the ongoing dialogue on the still unsettled Sino-Indian border issue. China had in 1983 permitted Indian pilgrims to visit Mount Kailash in Tibet.

Editor's TAKE

A diplomatic victory over Pakistan

The All party delegations return home after presenting Indian side of the story of Operation Sindoor

The return of the high-profile, multi-party Indian parliamentary delegation, led by Congress MP Shashi Tharoor, marks the successful conclusion of a strategically significant five-nation diplomatic tour. The delegation was part of a larger Indian diplomatic initiative launched in the aftermath of the April 22 Pahalgam terror attack and prompted India's robust counter-response — Operation Sindoor. The delegation's objective was twofold: to present a unified Indian stance on cross-border terrorism and to directly counter Pakistan's international narrative. By all accounts, the mission has been a resounding success. The delegation's mandate was to explain the rationale behind Operation Sindoor — a series of precision strikes conducted by India on terror infrastructure across the border — and to build international support by underscoring Pakistan's long-standing complicity in cross-border terrorism. The presence of MPs from across the political spectrum — including leaders from the BJP, Congress, Shiv Sena, TDP, and JMM — signalled a powerful message: India is united on matters of national security. This bipartisan unity was crucial in demonstrating that India's foreign policy and its fight against terrorism transcend party lines.

The five-nation itinerary included Guyana, Panama, Colombia, Brazil, and finally the United States — a diverse mix of emerging powers and global influencers. Over three weeks, the delegation engaged in over a hundred high-level meetings with presidents, prime ministers, vice presidents, lawmakers, policy experts, think tanks, journalists, and members of the Indian diaspora.

In Washington DC, the team held crucial discussions on Capitol Hill, where lawmakers not only echoed India's concerns but also praised the country's restraint in its military response. Perhaps the most significant strategic gain came in the arena of perception. Pakistan's attempts to portray itself as a victim of terrorism — even as its territory shelters terror outfits — were met with scepticism and, in many cases, outright rejection by international stakeholders. Apart from exposing Pakistan's complicity, the tour generated substantial goodwill for India. India's message was not merely one of retaliation, but of restraint, resolution, and responsibility. The timing, co-ordination, and unity behind the diplomatic push have added a new layer of credibility to India's global image — not only as a regional power but as a mature democracy tackling the complex issue of terrorism within the bounds of international law.

As the delegation returns home, India can count the tour as a diplomatic victory on multiple fronts — exposing Pakistan's faltering narrative, reinforcing international support, and affirming India's stature as a responsible global actor. In a world where perception often rivals facts, this all-party effort has served its purpose — not only in countering propaganda but in projecting India's strategic maturity and political unity. With more such outreach initiatives planned as part of India's 33-capital diplomatic effort, this tour sets a benchmark in bipartisan foreign policy action and international strategic messaging.



Highways to prosperity and growth

With game-changing projects like Greenfield expressways, aerial buses, and the Gati Shakti platform, the Modi Government is rewriting the narrative of development — one road at a time

When Narendra Modi took oath as India's Prime Minister in 2014, the BJP-led Central Government prioritised infrastructure development above all else from that very moment. In this direction, the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways became the focal point of infrastructure growth.

Under Modi's leadership, this Ministry has not only accelerated the country's economic development but has also given it a new dimension over the 11 years since 2014. The construction of highways — both completed and upcoming — has played a significant role in changing the trajectory of the country's growth.

Efficient highways, waterways, and railways can reduce logistics costs and boost the economy. Prime Minister Narendra Modi dreams of making India a 'Vishwaguru' (World Leader). India has emerged as the world's third-largest economy and a \$5 trillion economy.

To fulfil this dream, we need to increase exports, which will, in turn, boost growth in agriculture, services, and industrial sectors. In the past 11 years, the roads built have already reduced our logistics costs from 16 per cent to 10 per cent, and next year, we aim to bring it down further to 9 per cent. This will enhance our exports, make us more competitive, and help India advance more powerfully toward becoming a 'Vishwaguru'.

The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways is building 25 new Greenfield Express Highways across the country. Over 3,000 km of highways are also being built to connect ports and promote religious tourism. The Government's efforts to boost religious tourism are also taking shape. The Buddhist Circuit project, completed at a cost of ₹22,000 crore, has significantly increased the number of tourists visiting the birthplace of Lord Buddha from South Asia, Indonesia, Malaysia, China, Singapore, and Japan.

Simultaneously, the number of pilgrims visiting the Char Dham sites — Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri, and Yamunotri — has tripled. A ropeway worth ₹12,000 crore is being constructed to connect Kedarnath. About 90 per cent of the work on the road linking Kalash Mansarovar in Uttarakhand to Pithoragarh has been completed. In India, particularly in the national capital, the dream of 'flying buses' is on the verge of becoming a reality.

This includes aerial buses, flash-charging electric buses, and double-decker flying buses for hilly regions. The aerial bus service from Dhaulai Kuan in Delhi to Manesar, based on a skyway system, is almost in its



final stages. I am confident that this experiment will be crucial in resolving the persistent traffic congestion on this special road. Nagpur will soon see the launch of the first flash-charging electric bus. It will have 135 seats, executive class, front TV screens, and bus hostesses like air hostesses.

This bus will have a maximum speed of 120 km/h and will stop every 40 km for just 30 seconds to fully charge before resuming its journey. Such work cannot be achieved by merely sitting in an office preparing DPRs — it requires wholehearted effort! A recent study by IIM-Bangalore on road construction revealed that

every ₹1 spent on National Highway (NH) construction has led to a ₹3.21 increase in India's GDP, a multiplier effect of 3.2 times. Consequently, domestic production has grown by 9 per cent and car sales by 10.4 per cent. The work done by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has not only boosted economic activity but also created numerous job opportunities. Here are some

figures worth noting: In 2014, India had only 91,000 km of national highways. By 2024, this network has expanded by nearly 60 per cent to 1.46 lakh km.

The daily pace of road construction has increased from 12 km/day to 28–30 km/day. Under the ambitious ₹5.35 lakh crore Bharatmala project, the target is to build 65,000 km of roads, including economic corridors, international border roads, and border area connectivity.

This plan is a decisive step toward reducing India's logistics costs further. The 'Gati Shakti' and multimodal connectivity initiative integrates roads, railways, air, waterways, and ports into a single digital platform, which has helped ensure timely project completion.

Our ministry has also started implementing road development projects through public-private partnership (PPP) models, which has attracted significant private investment. Under this model, road projects worth over ₹12 lakh crore have been undertaken. This journey, which began in 2014, is not just about roads; in a way, it has become the lifeline of India's progress.

The expansion of the highway network has not only made travel easier but also boosted domestic trade, industry, tourism, and safety. From day one, our Government has

been working tirelessly to ensure inclusive development reaches every person in the last row of society. We are committed to accelerating this work even faster in the coming years to achieve this goal as soon as possible. We now have a clear vision of building world-class infrastructure and making our national highways network superior to even that of the United States by 2047, so that India becomes an economic superpower. "America does not have good roads because it is rich; America is rich because it has good roads." This quote by former US President John F. Kennedy, displayed in my office at the Transport Bhavan in Delhi and earlier in Maharashtra when I was a minister, is not there by chance.

This has been our guiding mantra for the past 11 years under the leadership of Modi ji. We are determined to carry this work forward even faster in the future. In the coming years, India's road infrastructure will be better than that of the United States — this is not a dream, but a reality taking shape. By maintaining a balance of quality, speed, transparency, and environmentally-friendly policies, India's national highway network will be recognised at the global level.

(The writer is the Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways. Views are personal)

The Unavoidable Journey of Learning

SECOND Opinion

As conscious beings, we have five sense organs which are also called doors of knowledge. Hence it would not be a wrong statement to make that, because of every nature, we cannot be without learning. Like, our ears are always open, so we are constantly listening. The words that go through our ears to our brains are like lessons that we receive constantly. Similarly, we see the whole world through our eyes which also results in learning good things as well as bad things.

The electrical impulses that we receive through our skin or taste buds, reach our brain which is also a kind of learning for us. However one must understand the fact that all the above-mentioned processes of learning take place by awareness or consciousness that is present in our brain without which learning is next to impossible.

In this context, we should know that our sense-organs are only the doors, learning is a process that is undergone by the consciousness. It may be called 'mind-intellect-memory-feeling' combined or we may simply call it a 'Soul'. So, all bits of information or all messages that we receive influence the Soul.

And they give good or bad experiences to the soul. Further, we must know that there are two kinds of

information or knowledge we acquire.

One is the knowledge of material things; the other is about the soul, karma, supreme etc. The latter kind of knowledge, when put into action, results in some sankaras or as we call it personality traits.

Most of our actions performed again and again under the influence of a sankara, result in experiencing happiness or sorrow. Throughout our journey of life, we constantly learn some such lessons that result in the formation of sankaras according to our karma.

Hence, if we know clearly that learning is unavoidable and that we are always learning good or bad things, resulting in good or bad sankaras that lead to happiness or sorrow, then we will never say that we have no time or no interest in learning.

Likewise, if we know that our sankaras go along with our life after, then we will be more careful in learning good things and in giving up bad things because education seems to be an elixir that can bring us a healthy mind & body along with a lasting fruitful life.

We all know this fact very well that in the present day life, nobody is perfect as far as goodness and virtues are concerned. Hence, it cannot be denied that we all need to be enlightened and we urgently need to improve the quality of our thoughts, speech and actions.

Since we cannot avoid learning, even if we wish, why don't we then learn to inculcate, in us, moral values, virtues or good qualities so that we may make progress towards perfection? Why do we wish to carry a heavy load of rubbish on our heads? Why do we want to delay our march towards our goal? What do we gain by making lame excuses, saying that we have no time or that we are not interested? What is it that we are interested in?

We are interested in our downfall, decay or doom? In sinking and drowning deep down in the quagmire of vices, evils and mud? Remember!! The more we delay, the worse will be our condition and the more difficult it be to rectify our ways.

The process of learning, as was said earlier, is ceaseless and continuous and hence someone has rightly said "I learn everyday & shed the ego and the perception that I know everything".

Hence we cannot stop it even if we try our best, putting all our might into it. So why not we remain alert & follow the right path that saves us from tragedies, traumas, tensions and turmoil of life?

Right learning is important what we learn defines us. It is simple yet a profound change we go through. Right learning can make us a better person, someone who has right frame of mind and is aware about his responsibilities and strives to make this world a better place.

(The writer is a spiritual educator and popular columnist. Views are personal)



A flock of painted storks at Pulicat Lake, in Srikalahasti, PTI



RAJYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR NIKUNJ JI

Letters to the Editor

INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT: AN ISSUE THAT NEEDS URGENT ATTENTION

We are confronted by innumerable challenges on the local, internal and external fronts that every nation finds it difficult to ascertain what its priorities should be. However, internal crises are difficult to categorise as policies and laws are more focused on immigration and the refugee problem, leading to the neglect of internal displacements caused by nature's fury.

The recent report published by the Geneva-based Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre recorded that 22.3 million Indians faced the threat of internal displacement on account of natural disasters, primarily due to floods and storms, between 2015 and 2024. The global scenario is even more grim as 210 countries registered 264.8 million forced movements, with East Asia and South Asia being the most adversely affected during the period.

It also highlights that about 90 per cent of global displacement is the outcome of floods and storms, which

must stir nations into action. China, the Philippines, and India (5.4 million) are the leading countries in terms of domestic displacements. It is worth pondering over the state of legal procedures, which lack teeth and enforcement.

The biggest obstacle is global indifference when it comes to tackling the myriad aspects of climate change, as autocratic or populist Governments are hell-bent on dismantling frameworks meant to mitigate climate change.

The Paris climate conference of 2015, aimed at reducing global temperatures, with targeted and time-bound measures agreed upon by countries, and meeting the Agenda for Sustainable Development by 2030, can only be achieved if all countries take equal responsibilities and work for the betterment of human society by taking concrete steps. The oft-quoted phrase "Hero fiddled while Rome burnt" still haunts mankind to take a lesson from history.

VIJAY SINGH ADHIKARI | NANTAL

Calls for parliament debate

The question is arising whether Prime Minister Narendra Modi, having met the members of the seven parliamentary delegations that were sent abroad, will agree to have a full debate in the Monsoon Session of Parliament on the country's post-Pahalgam security and foreign policy challenges.

Will the Prime Minister chair a meeting or a set of meetings of leaders of all political parties and take them into confidence on India's future strategy towards both China and Pakistan? Prime Minister Modi on Tuesday hosted the members of the multi-party delegations, comprising parliamentarians and former diplomats, who travelled to various world capitals over the past few weeks to convey India's message on the need to eradicate the menace of terrorism following the Pahalgam attack and Operation Sindoor.

If the Prime Minister agrees to have a full debate in the forthcoming Monsoon Session of Parliament on the country's post-Pahalgam security and foreign policy challenges, it is welcome, since the request of the INDIA bloc parties for a special session has been most unfortunately rejected. The Prime Minister's efforts to bring the Pahalgam terrorists, who were reportedly involved in three earlier terror attacks in Poonch (December 2023), and Gagangir and Gulmarg (2024), to justice.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

Israel's allies impose sanctions

The question is arising: are Britain and its handful of allies changing their attitude towards Israel? Under this changed attitude, can Israel be put on the back foot just by criticising the genocide being committed in Gaza? On Tuesday, five countries, including Britain, banned two people close to Netanyahu and ministers in the Government. Israel's Ben-Gvir and Smotrich will be subjected to travel bans and property confiscation for 'inciting violence' against Palestinians. The pair, who live in illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, have been major supporters of the destruction and expulsion of Palestinians, expansion of illegal settlements and annexation of Palestinian land during their time as ministers in Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Government.

As long as America is with it, Israeli atrocities and its expansionist tendencies will not be stopped. Immediately after this announcement by England and its allies, America itself has criticised it. Israel's Foreign Minister Gideon Saar said that this step is "humiliating," and his Government will hold a special meeting early next week, in which it will be decided how to respond to this "unacceptable decision." It is possible that in retaliation, Israel may also announce the end of its diplomatic relations with these five countries, because it needs only America's support to continue its dictatorship in the Middle East.

JANE BAHADUR SINGH | JAMSHEDPUR

Why everyone needs to learn

The present era can truly be called the age of artificial intelligence (AI). AI is now 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.

Therefore, we sincerely urge the media to give greater importance to spreading awareness about this transformative technology so that society at large can stay informed and empowered. There are misfeelings about AI and its applications. Better use of an additional intelligent value can be placed at the highest level to achieve best results.

DEVANATH CHIDAMBARAM | J. RAJENDRAN

SCIENCE

Human oversight key to safe use of AI in healthcare, say experts

From foetal dating and high-risk-pregnancy guidance to virtual autopsies and clinical chatbots, AI tools are matching expert accuracy; yet their promise comes entwined with the systemic challenges of automation bias and weak regulation, exacerbated by sensitivities of the sector itself

Sayanant Datta
SRI CITY

Researchers at IIT-Madras and the Translational Health Science and Technology Institute in Faridabad are developing an artificially intelligent (AI) model to use ultrasonography pictures to predict the age of a growing foetus. Called Garbhini-GA2, the model was trained on scans from about 3,500 pregnant women who had visited the Gurugram Civil Hospital in Haryana. Each scan labelled different parts of the foetus, its size, and its weight – measures that can be used to predict a foetus's age.

After the training, team members tested it with (unlabelled) scans from 1,500 pregnant women who had visited the same hospital and around 1,000 pregnant women who had visited the Christian Medical College Vellore. They found Garbhini-GA2 erred on the age of the foetus by only half a day. This is a significant improvement over the most common method today: using Hadlock's formula. Because the formula is based on data from Caucasian populations, it has been known to miss the age of the foetus in India by up to seven days, according to the IIT-Madras team.

The team now plans to test its model in datasets from around India.

Promise with pitfalls

This is just a glimpse of how AI tools are quietly reshaping Indian healthcare. From foetal ultrasound dating and high-risk-pregnancy guidance to virtual autopsies and clinical chatbots, they are matching expert accuracy while accelerating workflows. Yet their promise comes entwined with the systemic challenges of data and automation bias, privacy, and weak regulation, often exacerbated by the sensitivities of the healthcare sector itself.

Almost half of all pregnancies in Indian women are high-risk pregnancies (HRPs), according to a 2023 study in the *Journal of Global Health*. In HRPs, there is a high chance of the mother and the newborn taking ill or dying. The conditions that cause these outcomes include severe anaemia, high blood pressure, pre-eclampsia, and hypothyroidism. The risks are higher for women with no formal education, those from rural areas, and those belonging to marginalised social groups.

Experts say routine monitoring is the best way to reduce maternal and perinatal mortality in HRPs. In rural areas, this task is often carried out by auxiliary nurse-midwives (ANMs), female health workers who are the first point of contact between a pregnant woman and the medical system. ANMs are trained by medical professionals to recognise HRPs and advise women on their options.

Mumbai-based NGO ARMMAN started such a training programme in 2021 in partnership with UNICEF and the Governments of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. It has been training healthcare professionals, including ANMs, in "end-to-end management of HRPs." ARMMAN's director of innovation Armita Mahale said.

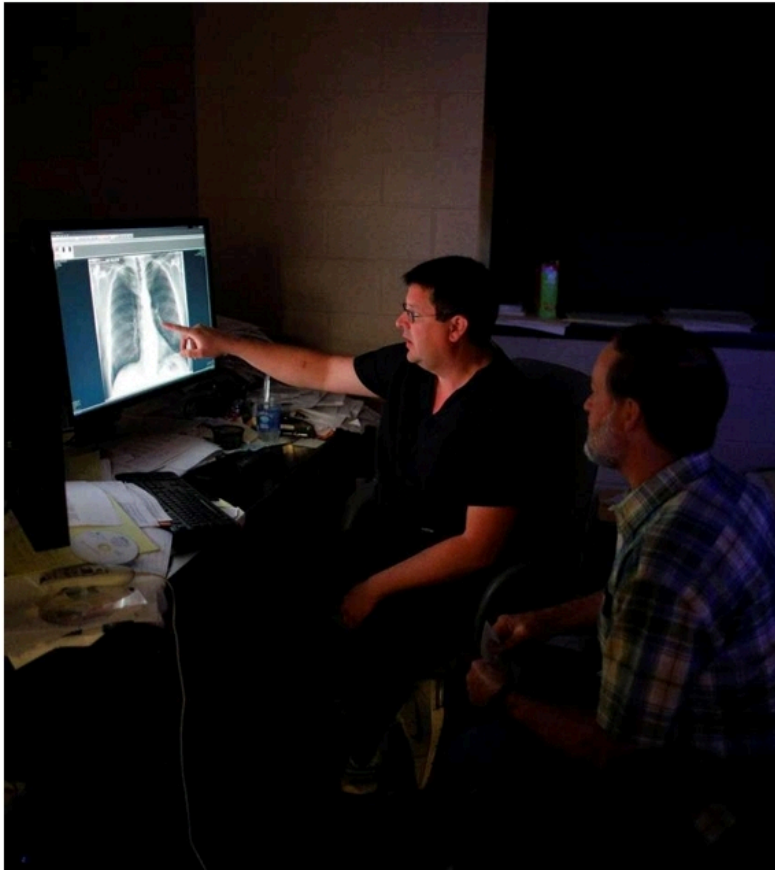
The NGO trains ANMs to track and manage HRPs through "classroom training and digital learning," Ms. Mahale said, adding that ANMs are also supported through a WhatsApp helpline "for doubt-solving and hand-holding as they go through the learning content and apply it to real-life high-risk pregnancy cases."

When in doubt, ANMs are encouraged to reach out to their trainers with queries. However, "the trainers themselves are overworked and do not always prioritise responding to ANM queries," Ms. Mahale said. So ARMMAN adopted an AI chatbot earlier this year. It recognises both text and voice-based queries from ANMs and responds in the same medium with clinically validated answers.

Medical professionals now "act as humans-in-the-loop who step in when the chatbot cannot answer a question, or if the ANM is not satisfied with the chatbot's response," Ms. Mahale said. Currently being tested with 100 ANMs, the chatbot has received "94% positive feedback" from its users, Mahale added. "A domain expert has rated 9% of the answers to date as accurate and satisfactory."

But she also flagged a problem: "The current lot of speech [recognition] models struggle with Indian languages, especially regional variations and accents."

This means that the chatbot might fail to understand about 5% of the queries



Tech breakthrough: A doctor reviews chest X-rays with a coal miner diagnosed with black lung disease in Kentucky, U.S. FILE PHOTO

Amar Jyoti Patowary heads the Department of Forensic Medicine at the North Eastern Indira Gandhi Regional Institute of Health and Medical Sciences. He is one of India's few "virtual autopsy" experts.

Autopsies don't have a good public reputation. When Dr. Patowary and his team asked the relatives of 179 deceased people who had undergone an autopsy at the department, about 63% expressed fears of the body being mutilated and delays in conducting funeral rites. Similar issues have been reported from rural Haryana, too.

In a virtual autopsy, or vortopsy, a body is scanned with CT and MRI machines to generate detailed images of its internal structures. Then a computer creates a 3D image of the body. Physicians feed this image into convolutional neural networks (CNNs) – deep-learning models adept at extracting features from one set of images and using them to classify images in others.

In 2023, researchers from Tohoku University in Japan built a CNN that could distinguish individuals who had died of drowning from those who had died of other causes using chest CT scans. The model was 81% accurate "for cases in which resuscitation was performed and 92% for cases in which resuscitation was not attempted," the authors wrote in their paper. In 2024, Swiss scientists developed a CNN that could say whether a person had died of a cerebral haemorrhage based on postmortem CT images.

While conventional autopsies take about 2.5 hours to complete, a vortopsy can be finished in about half an hour, Mr. Patowary said.

In conventional autopsies, once the body has been dissected, a second dissection may be required if the first one has been inconclusive. This is harder. But vortopsies allow as many dissections as required since the scans can be used to reconstruct the body multiple times.

In 2019 a digital healthcare company experimented with an AI bot that could chat with a patient and present them to a doctor. Nine of the 15 doctors who tested this said it was helpful

details – and a visual examination of the body and its cavities, these challenges can be overcome.

Privacy concerns

These cases indicate that the best use of AI might be as a healthcare professional's assistant. In 2019, MediBuddy, a digital healthcare company that provides online doctor consultations and other services, experimented with an AI bot that could chat with a patient, extract clinically relevant details from the conversation, and compile and present them to a doctor along with suggested diagnoses. Nine of the 15 doctors who tested this app said it was helpful while the rest remained "sceptical", said Krishna Chaitanya Chavati, MediBuddy's head of data science.

He flagged data privacy as a key concern. In India, digital personal information, including an individual's health information, is governed by the Information Technology Act 2000 and the Digital Personal Data Protection Act 2023. Neither Act specifically mentions AI technologies although lawyers suggest the latter could apply to AI tools. Even then, the "DPDP Act lacks clarity on AI-driven decision-making and accountability," lawyers wrote in a May 2025 review.

To allay these concerns, Mr. Chavati said strong data security protocols are necessary. At MediBuddy, the team has deployed a few, two of which are a personal identifiable information masking engine and role-based access. A masking engine is a programme that identifies and hides all personal information from specific algorithms, preventing unauthorised users from tracing the data to a single individual. Role-based access ensures no one individual within the company is able to access all of an individual's data, only the parts relevant to their work.

Digital Information Security in Healthcare Bill, said "automation bias" is also another cause for concern. Ms. Rai is currently the deputy coordinator of the Centre for Health Equity, Law & Policy in Pune.

Automation bias is "the tendency to overly trust and follow the suggestions made by an automated system, even if the suggestions are incorrect," Ms. Rai said.

This happens when the "human in the loop", such as a doctor, banks too much on the judgement of an AI-powered app "rather than their own clinical judgement".

In 2023, researchers from Germany and Netherlands asked radiologists with different degrees of experience to evaluate mammograms (X-ray scan of breasts) and assign them a BI-RADS score. BI-RADS is a standardised metric radiologists use to report the malignancy of cancerous tissue observed in mammograms.

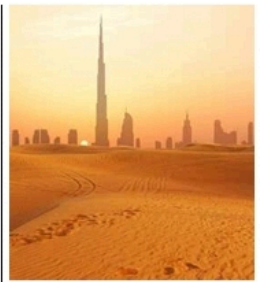
The radiologists were told that an AI model would also parse the mammogram and assign a BI-RADS score. In truth the researchers had no such model; they arbitrarily and secretly assigned a score to some mammograms.

The researchers found that when the 'AI model' reported an incorrect score, the radiologists' own accuracy fell drastically. Even those with more than a decade of experience reported the correct BI-RADS scores in only 45.5% of such cases.

The researchers reported being surprised that "even highly experienced radiologists were adversely impacted by the AI system's judgments," the study's lead author said in 2023.

For Ms. Rai, this study is evidence of a pressing need to train "doctors on the limits of AI" and to constantly test and reassess "AI tools being developed for and used in healthcare".

India's rapid adoption of medical AI has illuminated a path to cheaper, faster, more equitable care. But algorithms inherit human fallibility while also further obfuscating it. If technology is to augment and not supplant ethical medicine, medical AI will need robust data governance, clinician training, and enforceable accountability. (Sayanant Datta is a faculty member at



Soaring heat: The UAE endured its hottest April on record this year. FILE PHOTO

In UAE, Indian expats longing for monsoon find rain

Agence France-Presse

After Mohammed Sajjad moved from India to the United Arab Emirates a decade ago, he missed his native Kerala's monsoon season, so he embarked on an unlikely quest: finding rain in the desert.

Using satellite imagery, weather data and other high-tech tools, the amateur meteorologist tracks potential rainfall spots across the desert country and, along with other Indians nostalgic for the monsoon season, chases the clouds in search of rain.

"When I came to UAE in 2015, in August, it ... was peak monsoon time" in Kerala, the 35-year-old estate agent said, adding that he had struggled to adjust to the change of climate.

"So I started to search about rainy conditions in the UAE and I came to know that there is rain happening during peak summer," he said. "I started to explore the possibility to chase the rain, enjoy the rain."

Each week, he forecasts when and

Despite the use of advanced cloud-seeding technology, the UAE has an average yearly rainfall of just 50 to 100 mm

where rain might fall and posts a suggested rendezvous to the 130,000 followers of his "UAE Weatherman" page on Instagram.

He regularly posts footage of his rain expeditions out into the desert, hoping to bring together "all rain lovers who miss rain".

Last weekend, he headed out into the desert from Sharjah at the head of a convoy of about 100 vehicles.

Nothing is certain. The rain "may happen, it may not happen," Sajjad said. But when it does, "it is an amazing moment".

After driving in the desert for hours, the group arrived at the designated spot just as a downpour started. The rain lovers leapt out of their vehicles, their faces beaming as the rain droplets streamed down their cheeks in a rare reminder of home.

Most UAE residents are foreigners, among them some 3.5 million Indians who make up the Gulf country's largest expatriate community.

Despite the use of advanced cloud-seeding technology, the UAE has an average yearly rainfall of just 50 to 100 mm. Most of it falls during short but intense winter storms.

"While long-term averages remain low, the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events has been increasing and is due to global warming," said Diana Francis, a climate scientist who teaches at Khalifa University in Abu Dhabi.

In the summer, the country often gets less than 5 mm of rain, she said, usually falling away from the coastal areas where most of the population lives. So rain-seekers must drive deep into the desert interior to have a chance of success.

The UAE endured its hottest April on record this year. By contrast, April last year saw the UAE's heaviest rains in 75 years, which saw 259.5 mm of rainfall in a single day.

Four people died and the commercial hub of Dubai was paralysed for several days. Scientists of the World Weather Attribution network said the intense rains were "most likely" exacerbated by global warming.

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

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Number of persons affected by diarrhoea outbreak in Jajpur

250 The death toll in the diarrhoea outbreak in Odisha's Jajpur district rose to two, with officials confirming the death of another person. Official reports said the disease was first reported from the Dharmasala area. Out of the affected persons, 40-50 have recovered. **m**

Number of IPs linked to cybercrimes taken down in Singapore

1,000 Singapore has taken down more than a thousand internet protocols (or IPs) believed to be linked to cybercrimes. Officers from the Cybercrime Command worked with the Cyber Security Agency of Singapore to take them down. **m**

Number of fighter jets to be exported by Turkey to Indonesia

48 Turkey's defence sector, including the famous Bayraktar drones, accounts for a significant share of the country's export revenues. The contract, valued at \$10 billion, includes the production and delivery of the Kaan fighter jets to Indonesia over a 10-year period. **xv**

Uttarakhand villages to be revitalised under Vibrant Village 2.0

40 These villages are located in six development blocks spread over three districts of Uttarakhand including Champavat, Pithoragarh and Udham Singh Nagar. Additional Secretary and Nodal Officer for the Vibrant Village programme in the State, Anuradha Pal said. **mi**

The increase in Sri Lanka's power tariff ahead of IMF visit

15 In per cent. Sri Lankan authorities on Wednesday approved a 15% increase in electricity tariffs, effective from Thursday, aiming to address the financial challenges faced by the state-run Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB). **mi**

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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A different approach to the caste census

What have the Bihar caste survey and Telangana's 2025 caste survey revealed? How is a social management approach different from top-down welfare models? Would a caste census deepen social divide and undermine national unity? What about democratic accountability?

EXPLAINER

Sony Kunjappan
Amal Chandra

The story so far:

The Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs, chaired by Prime Minister Modi, has decided to conduct caste enumeration in the upcoming Census. As per Article 246 of the Constitution, the Census is a Union subject listed in the 7th schedule. The caste census must be viewed beyond binaries of "for or against" to envision a more transformative idea – as a foundational tool for what might be called a social management approach to governance.

What were the findings from State-level caste censuses?

The Bihar caste survey (2023) found that Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and Economically Backward Classes (EBCs) together make up over 63% of the population, with EBCs alone at 36.01%. Scheduled Castes (SC) account for 19.65%, and Scheduled Tribes (ST) for 1.68%. The general category comprises only 15.52%. Additionally, over 34% of Bihar's families live on less than ₹200 per day, with nearly 44% of SC households below that line.

In Telangana's 2025 survey, Backward Classes (BCs) constituted 56.33% of the population, with BC Muslims forming a substantial 10.08%. These numbers reveal a stark reality: India's marginalised communities form the majority but are significantly underrepresented in education, employment, and governance.

Data shared by the Union Minister of State for Education in Parliament reveals that only 4% of professors and 6% of associate professors in 45 Central Universities are OBCs, while 85% are from the general category. This imbalance exists despite the Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Teachers' Cadre) Act, 2019.

Yet, the policy response is hindered by



Important numbers: An enumerator collects information for the caste census in Bihar in 2023. **mi**

the absence of reliable data. India hasn't conducted a full caste census since 1931. The 2011 Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) was marred by data inconsistencies and its findings were withheld. Without up-to-date caste data, affirmative action and development policies remain speculative.

What is a social management approach?

Top-down welfare models in India have failed to adequately address layered inequities of caste, gender, and class. A social management approach does the opposite: it starts with data, targets need-based interventions, and treats caste as a developmental variable rather than a stigma. If we know who needs what, and how need is shaped by historical disadvantage, we can design policies with greater equity and efficiency. Caste data

becomes a lens to understand inequity structurally, rather than as isolated cases. Tamil Nadu offers a model, using data from the Backward Classes Commission to adjust policies on reservations, scholarships, and governance. Karnataka's caste survey is being used to recalibrate reservation policies in education and jobs.

A national caste census would enable such models at scale. It could inform disaggregated budgeting, where funds are allocated, not just based on geography or income but on caste-based gaps in healthcare, infrastructure, and education. It could enable diversity audits in institutions, showing who occupies power and who doesn't.

It could also track how schemes like PM Awas Yojana or Skill India are reaching caste groups, ensuring that the most marginalised aren't left out.

Are there global precedents?

Critics argue that a caste census deepens social divides and undermines national unity. However, the reality is that caste endures not because it is counted, but because it shapes how opportunity, and wealth are distributed. Ignoring caste does not erase it. It merely obscures structural inequality behind ignorance. A caste census does not create casteism; it reveals it. Other democracies don't shy away from identity-based data. The U.S. collects race and ethnicity data every 10 years and uses it for civil rights enforcement. South Africa and Brazil do the same by tracking race and language categories. If these nations can use such data to address inequity, so must India, home to the most enduring and hierarchical caste system in the world.

What about transparency?

The value of a caste census extends beyond policymaking. It is also a vital instrument of democratic accountability. Disaggregated data enables civil society, the media, and citizens to know whether public resources are being equitably shared. A publicly accessible caste census would empower citizens to demand transparency. It could expose intra-caste inequalities and where welfare benefits are monopolised by elite sub-groups, leaving the truly disadvantaged behind.

Ultimately, the caste census is not about counting caste. It is about recognising injustice and correcting it. Thus, a caste census rooted in social management would be linked to a wider agenda of social emancipation. This includes constitutional literacy, land rights, housing, labour protections, and justice for Dalit, Bahujan, and Adivasi women who face intersectional exploitation. A caste census done right could offer India a data-driven democratic transformation.

Prof. Sony Kunjappan is the Head, Department of Studies in Social Management, Central University of Gujarat. Amal Chandra is an author, policy analyst, and columnist

THE GIST

▼ A social management approach starts with data, targets need-based interventions, and treats caste as a developmental variable rather than a stigma.

▼ Top-down welfare models in India have failed to adequately address layered inequities of caste, gender, and class.

▼ Critics argue that a caste census deepens social divides and undermines national unity. However, the reality is that caste endures not because it is counted, but because it shapes how opportunity, and wealth are distributed.

Why was Malta's 'golden passports' scheme scrapped?

Does the 'citizenship by investment' scheme commodify EU citizenship?

Garimella Subramanian

The story so far:

In late April, the European Court of Justice (ECJ) struck down Malta's 'golden passports' scheme – a 2020 scheme which authorises the naturalisation of foreigners in the country, and consequently the European Union, in return for hefty financial investments in the country. Brussels had launched infringement proceedings against Malta, as it persisted with its own scheme, blocking access only to Russians and Belarusians consequent to Russia's war against Ukraine.

What are CBIs and RBIs?

Citizenship by investment (CBI), known as golden passports, and residency by investment (RBI), or golden visas, enable third country nationals to live and work in host countries in exchange for financial investments. The European Parliament

and the Commission have called for both forms of mobility to be abolished in view of the inherent risks to security, such as money laundering, organised crime, tax evasion and corruption. Between 2003 and 2019, about 1.32,000 persons had obtained entry into the EU through CBI and RBI schemes, generating financial inflows of over €20 billion, as per a 2022 European Parliament Research Service report. The risks from CBI and RBI have been highlighted by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development and the Financial Action Task Force. Principal among the beneficiaries of such migration are nationals from China, Russia and West Asia.

Why is the EU against the scheme?

Within the 27-member bloc, the acquisition or loss of nationality falls within the exclusive jurisdiction of each country. That said, the historic 1992 Maastricht Treaty inaugurated common

EU citizenship. That is to say, nationals of an EU state are simultaneously common EU citizens. Therefore, the matter of the grant or rejection of nationality must accord with EU law.

The European Commission contended that the attractiveness of Malta's CBI scheme did not lie in the acquisition of Maltese nationality per se, but instead in the rights that accrue from the complementary EU citizenship. The implicit assumption here being the unique appeal of the absence of internal frontiers, the right to free movement and work across the bloc, the right to vote and to be elected in local as well as European parliament elections. The Commission President Ursula von der Leyen made a pointed reference to golden passports in the 2020 State of the Union address, declaring that "European values are not for sale." Brussels further argued that the grant of nationality in return for investments – a commodification of

citizenship – was incompatible with the principles of membership of the bloc. These are sincere cooperation, fairness and non-discrimination – codified in Article 4(3) of the 1992 Maastricht Treaty and under Article 20 of the 2009 Treaty on the Functioning of the EU.

What did the ECJ verdict state?

Upholding the Commission's claims, the court reasoned that the pillars of European citizenship are dependent on mutual trust among member states and mutual respect for national decisions. The bond of nationality of a given state is underpinned by a "relationship of solidarity, good faith and the reciprocity of rights and duties between the state and citizens," the court added. These principles are infringed upon once citizenship is sought to be granted as a commercial transaction in exchange for an investment. The 2020 Maltese scheme is tantamount to the commercialisation of the grant of nationality of a particular state, and by extension, of the entire bloc. This is incompatible with EU treaties.

What next?

In theory, Malta could exercise its authority to confer nationality to those who availed the CBI scheme, minus union citizenship. This would risk diminishing its appeal as a destination state.

The writer is Director, Strategic Initiatives, AgnoShin Technologies.

THE GIST

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Film Festivals and the 3C Mantra: Creativity, Culture, Commerce

In an era marked by technological acceleration and cultural fluidity, film festivals serve as vital spaces of connection and creation. They are where artistic vision finds commercial grounding and where the business of cinema becomes inseparable from the soul of storytelling.

FIRST Column

The 3C's mantra that defines the film festival ecosystem — Creativity, Culture, and Commerce — has become the cornerstone of a global cinematic renaissance. Today, film festivals are not just glamorous red-carpet affairs or celebrity-driven events; they are transformative platforms unlocking new opportunities for content creation, cross-cultural collaboration, global networking, strategic partnerships, and narrative innovation. In short, they are the modern-day crucibles where storytelling meets strategy.

From Cannes to Berlin, Venice to IFFI, Locarno to Sundance, film festivals have evolved into sophisticated arenas that redefine cinematic expression. They are reshaping the celluloid experience through experiential storytelling, sustainable creative roadmaps, and tech-enabled narratives that resonate across boundaries. Their evolution reflects a collective aspiration to reimagine the medium, not just in how films are made, but in how they are shared, discussed, and remembered.

The world's most celebrated film festivals have retained their traditional flavour while courageously stepping into new territory.

The Cannes Film Festival, for instance, remains a symbol of glamour, yet now actively promotes ecological awareness and inclusivity through programs like the "Cinema for the Climate" section. Similarly, the Venice Biennale embraces innovation through its Virtual Reality section, while TIFF (Toronto International Film Festival) has become known for elevating social-issue films into the awards circuit. These examples highlight how the 3C's are no longer abstract ideals; they are tangible, operational principles shaping programming and policy.

The unified objective is clear: visualise the future of cinema through the lens of commercial viability, cutting-edge technology, and artistic innovation. And festivals, in balancing these objectives, are becoming incubators of excellence, where ideas are born, refined, and launched into the world.

Film markets are an integral part of this new cinematic landscape. Events such as Marché du Film at Cannes and Film Bazaar at IFFI serve as value-creation platforms where creativity meets investment. These markets offer a single — window ecosystem for distributors, producers, and emerging talent to forge deals, secure financing, and explore global collaborations.



You could feel this unfolding in real-time at Cannes 2025. The atmosphere wasn't just about premieres; it was about presence, about ideas landing with impact.

Mission Impossible: The Final Reckoning opened to packed houses, but it wasn't just a franchise flex anymore. There was something more grounded beneath the action, a sense of purpose, and the co-production buzz around it was loud, American spectacle meeting European strategy. And then there was Homebound, that small, aching film about displacement and the idea of home, which left people silent after the credits. It was the kind of film that didn't shout but stayed.

Meanwhile, the Marché du Film pulsed like its own beating heart. Pavilions were fuller; deals more layered. Conversations spanned multilingual co-productions, AI-led storyboarding, and even climate-conscious filmmaking.

It wasn't transactional; it was transformative. Countries like India, South Korea, and Nigeria didn't just showcase films; they showed up with vision, and with intent. Cannes 2025 made one

6
THE CANNES FILM FESTIVAL, FOR INSTANCE, REMAINS A SYMBOL OF GLAMOUR, YET NOW ACTIVELY PROMOTES ECOLOGICAL AWARENESS AND INCLUSIVITY THROUGH PROGRAMS LIKE THE "CINEMA FOR THE CLIMATE" SECTION. SIMILARLY, THE VENICE BIENNALE EMBRACES INNOVATION THROUGH ITS VIRTUAL REALITY SECTION

thing abundantly clear: creativity doesn't get diluted by commerce, it grows because of it. And culture? Culture was the thread running through it all, holding it together, making it matter.

Today's commercial landscape at festivals is populated by accredited agents, pavilions, exhibitors, and stakeholders who are not just selling films; they're shaping the business of storytelling. Co-production deals, project financing, distribution arrangements, and IP partnerships are negotiated in these spaces, affirming the financial architecture of the festival ecosystem.

Notably, the commercial value of festivals is no longer transactional but transformational. They're redefining how cinema is monetised and how stories are positioned globally. In the age of OTT, film festivals have also become spaces for digital content negotiations, IP marketing, and branded storytelling ventures. Each global festival has carved a distinct identity. While Cannes stands for glamour and auteur prestige, Berlinale champions political cinema, and Locarno thrives on experimentation. These brands have emerged from con-

sistent visual language, storytelling themes, fashion statements, and strategic stakeholder engagement.

In this ecosystem, branding is not just about logos or campaigns; it's about shaping a cinematic culture. It's the deliberate interplay of Creativity, Culture, Content, and Consistency, the 4Cs of festival branding. The buzz, the air lights, the curated installations, and even the architectural design of venues contribute to the festival's emotional and cultural memory.

India's growing role in the global cinematic discourse is exemplified by the Bharat Pavilion at Cannes, designed by the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad.

Titled The Sutradhara, or storyteller, it reflects India's fusion of tradition and innovation. With its 2024 theme, Create in India, the Pavilion spotlighted India's vibrant cinematic heritage, technological readiness, and openness to global partnerships. More than just a national representation, the Bharat Pavilion has become a diplomatic and cultural bridge; connecting India's storytellers with producers, buyers, critics, and policymakers from across the world. It's a space where artistry meets policy, and where culture is leveraged for creative diplomacy.

The Bharat Parv, an integral part of the Pavilion experience, adds a further dimension to celebrating Indian cuisine, music, craftsmanship, and diversity. This new format of global storytelling mirrors the idea of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam: the world as one family. And importantly, it sends a clear message: India is not just a content provider, it's a creative force and co-production hub.

Film festivals today function as living ecosystems, nurturing visions, encouraging risk-taking, and building transnational communities. Their role in shaping public perception, fostering policy discourse, and enabling commercial success is more relevant than ever.

Whether it was Cannes' "Cinema for the Climate," Venice's Virtual Reality section, or IFFI's mainstream-indie convergence, the new festival circuit is breaking boundaries with purpose. It's showcasing new cinematic languages, driven by talent, diversity, and digital disruption. As the film festival landscape continues to evolve, the 3C's — Creativity, Culture, and Commerce — remain the North Star.

With countries like India building immersive, multi-stakeholder pavilions and enabling co-creation through policy and soft power, the red carpet is no longer just about glitz; it's about vision, value, voice, and who gets to tell the next global story.

(The writer is former Civil Servant, writes on Cinema and Strategic Communication. Views are personal. Inputs provided by Zoya Ahmad and Vaisnavi Srinivasan)

RBI shields India from global turbulence, spur domestic growth

In an assertive policy pivot aimed at shielding the Indian economy from both internal slowdown and external headwinds, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) report and Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR) cut decisions reflect an urgency to fortify domestic demand and build monetary buffers ahead of any external shocks.

The repo rate was cut by 50 basis points to 5.40 per cent and slashing the CRR by 100 basis points, releasing a substantial ₹2.5 lakh crore in systemic liquidity. This move goes far beyond textbook monetary easing — it's a calculated shift toward growth insulation, driven in part by global trade volatility, slowing capital flows, and protectionist rhetoric resurfacing from the West, especially from the United States. The RBI is shifting its dependence on foreign portfolios to domestic investment.

The RBI's sweeping rate and CRR cuts are not just a response to slowing growth — they are a strategic counter to global turbulence. As trade dynamics harden and election rhetoric in the US turns more inward — looking India is sending a clear signal: we'll build our growth engines at home, and we won't wait for the world to stabilise.

Banks and non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) are now better placed to grow loan books despite global capital uncertainty. The ₹2.5 lakh crore liquidity injection, through CRR cut, is a strategic play to strengthen domestic credit capacity, in case foreign investment inflows taper due to US-centric policy shifts. In a world potentially heading toward deglobalisation 2.0, the RBI is quietly laying the foundations for an India that is credit — rich, demand-driven, and less vulnerable to foreign tantrums.

This is crucial for raising industrial production. In April 2025, IIP slowed to 2.7 per cent against 3.2 per cent growth in March and 5.2 per cent in April 2024. The growth was primarily driven by a 3.4 per cent rise in the manufacturing sector. The core sector, which comprises eight key industries, grew by 0.5 per cent in April 2025, according to the National Statistics Office.

While headline inflation has remained within the RBI's comfort band of around 4 per cent, the lurking risk of imported inflation — rises to 31.1 per cent in February 2025 from 1.31 per cent in June 2024 — stemming from global prices, shipping costs, geopolitical instability, and currency value decline, continues to be a concern. The RBI appears to have weighed these risks but is now betting on economic expansion as the bigger imperative, especially as private investment and consumer demand remain below pre-pandemic trajectories.

Financial markets immediately responded to the RBI's policy announcement with optimism. Sectors such as real estate, banking, automobiles, and financial services rallied. This is preceded by a severe fall in the stock markets all through May and before, causing severe losses.



The value of currency in circulation was around ₹16.5 lakh crore in November 2016. It has risen to ₹38.35 lakh crore on May 30, 2025, up from ₹34.70 lakh crore on September 6, 2024, rising 0.2 per cent a week or 7.4 per cent in a year.

The overall reserve money (RM) rose by 0.4 per cent on the week, to ₹49.62 lakh crore. The RM, the physical cash held by the public, including banknotes and coins as well as the CRR and other banks' deposits with RBI play a crucial role in regulating the money supply and influencing economic activity. It's the starting point for the money creation process, where banks can create more money through lending. A more aggressive Trump-driven trade stance, if it materialises, could raise the cost of imports and dent export competitiveness — just as India is trying to recover its industrial mojo. India is hurrying through deals for more imports from the US, including shale oil adding to further costs.

The rate cut is also likely to spur affordable housing uptake, shielding the sector from any fallout in foreign investment or imported material cost spikes. Stocks such as Godrej Properties, DLF, and Kotak-Pati Developers surged after the policy, buoyed by hopes of a demand revival and better liquidity for developers.

Stocks like HDFC Bank and Bajaj Finserv jumped, reflecting optimism around stronger credit demand and a proactive central bank. The Nifty Financial Services index rose nearly 2 per cent, reflecting investor belief that India's financial ecosystem will now be less dependent on foreign portfolio flows and more driven by internal credit momentum.

Imported inflation occurs when the cost of imported goods and services rises, leading to higher domestic prices as currency weakens. Gold and major components of India's imports, significantly contribute to this inflation. Higher import costs

raise production expenses for companies causing overall price increases.

While consumer price inflation remains under control, the risk of imported inflation is rising. A Trump-style economic strategy could mean higher tariffs on Chinese goods, pushing up global commodity prices. For India, this could translate to costlier imports of electronics, machinery, and chemicals, feeding into core inflation. The RBI seems to be pre-emptively countering this by stimulating growth now before such inflationary pressures creep in. In many ways, the RBI is borrowing a page from Trump's manual: act boldly, defend your domestic economy, and expect volatility.

Rising imported inflation could lead to a depreciation of the rupee, which would further exacerbate inflationary pressures. The RBI might need to intervene in the currency markets to manage volatility. Certain sectors, such as those reliant on imported raw materials, might face increased costs due to higher import inflation. This could impact their profitability and pricing power. This could flare up prices of imported raw materials or goods hiking costs leading to higher prices for goods and services. It could impact economic growth if consumers and businesses reduce spending in response to higher prices. The RBI's sweeping rate and reserve ratio cuts are not just a response to slowing growth — they are a strategic counter to global turbulence. As trade dynamics harden and election rhetoric in the US turns more inward-looking, India is sending a clear signal: we'll build our growth engines at home, and we won't wait for the world to stabilise.

India is not immune to global shocks, but this move ensures it isn't caught unprepared. Overall, the RBI's rate cut decision is aimed at supporting growth, but a significant rise in imported inflation could alter the policy landscape and require adjustments to ensure price stability. Still, the new policy if done properly could ensure Growth First, Global None Later.

(The writer is a senior journalist. Views expressed are personal)

From Myth to Mission: The Untold Story of India's Women Warriors

Traditionally, across civilisations, women have not played a direct role in wars and battles. In early societies, the preservation and safety of women were seen as vital to the survival and continuity of communities. Yet history offers many powerful exceptions — women who defied convention and proved themselves as exceptional warriors.

Take, for instance, the Amazons, the legendary tribe of female warriors in Greek mythology, celebrated for their archery, riding skills, and battlefield acumen. Closer to home, the Rigveda mentions Vishpala, a warrior who returned to combat with a prosthetic leg after losing her limb in battle — a testament to resilience and courage. Indian tradition reveres Shakti, embodied as Maa Durga, the warrior goddess armed with weapons and mounted on a lion — symbolising feminine strength in its most powerful form.

In more recent centuries, figures like Mai Bhago Kaur and Rani Durgavati stood against the Mughal armies, while Rani Lakshmbai of Jhansi and Kittur Chennamma fought valiantly against British colonial rule. These women were not mere outliers — they were trailblazers whose legacies continue to inspire.

The participation of Indian women in the military began formally with their induction into nursing services under the British Indian Army. Thousands served with distinction during the World Wars. After independence, women were granted regular commissions in the Armed Forces Medical Corps in 1958. Since then, more avenues have gradually opened. In 1992, women were inducted into various non-medical branches of the Indian Army under the Short Service Commission. By 2008, they were eligible for permanent commission in the Legal and Education Corps, and in 2020, this opportunity was extended to eight more branches. Over the last decade, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, there has been a conscious and concerted effort to promote the inclusion of women in the armed forces. Iconic milestones — such as Captain Tania Shergill leading an all-male contingent at the 2020 Republic Day Parade, or Lieutenant Colonel Sophia Qureshi heading an all-male contingent in a multinational exercise — have inspired a new generation of young women to envision careers in uniform. The opening of the National Defence Academy to women marked a significant milestone.

As of July 2023, there are close to 4,000 women officers in the Indian Armed Forces. Including the medical corps, the number rises to around 5,800. Additionally, there are approximately 1,000 women in other ranks and 4,600 female nursing

staff. These figures are steadily increasing as policies evolve to encourage wider participation.

Importantly, there is now no distinction in the deployment and working conditions of male and female officers. Assignments are based on operational requirements, and employment rules are gender-neutral, ensuring equal opportunities for both men and women.

Modern warfare is increasingly technology-driven, and women have emerged as critical assets in domains like communications, cyber warfare, and intelligence. Women scientists and engineers are making vital contributions to defence technology and innovation — creating new systems, refining operations, and boosting India's defence preparedness. They serve as role models, inspiring younger generations, and challenging traditional stereotypes.

Earlier, we were inspired by pioneers like Dr. Tessy Thomas, who led India's missile development programs. Today, we draw inspiration from the women who played pivotal roles in Operation Sindoor — a mission that not only avenged the lives lost in a terror attack but also marked a milestone in gender-inclusive defence operations.

From visible faces like Wing Commander Singh and Colonel Qureshi to the many unsung women who formed the backbone of the Integrated Air Command and Control System (IACCS), their contributions were critical. The IACCS is an advanced command and control system that integrates real-time data from various air defence assets to detect, identify, intercept, and neutralise hostile threats. It is estimated that women constituted 25-30 per cent of the IACCS team involved in Operation Sindoor. The mission's success, in many ways, was a sisterly salute to those who had lost their husbands in the line of duty.

The story of India's women in defence — be it at DRDO, ISRO or in operational command — remains one of the most compelling yet untold narratives of our times. It is heartening to witness women rightfully occupying critical positions in service to the nation.

Their increasing presence in leadership roles is not just a matter of representation; it is a strategic imperative. With a Government committed to their empowerment, their role is only set to grow. As India embarks on the most compelling yet untold narratives of our times, it is heartening to witness women rightfully occupying critical positions in service to the nation.

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(The writer runs Sangini Saheli, a non-profit organisation focused on the empowerment of women and is the General Secretary of the BJP Women's Wing in Delhi. Views expressed are personal)



SHIVAJI SARKAR



PRIYAL BHARDWAJ