

Persistent problem

Basic issues in discoms must be addressed

A key element of rapid economic growth is the availability of reliable power at a reasonable cost. India has done well in generation, including the addition of renewable power over the past several years. According to government data, power shortages dropped from 4.2 per cent in 2013-14 to 0.1 per cent in 2024-25. However, the weak link in the Indian power story has been the distribution companies, or discoms, with no real solution in sight. A group of ministers (GoM) under the leadership of Union Power and Housing Affairs Minister Manohar Lal Khattar, which also includes representatives from states, deliberated on the way forward for discoms this week. As reported by this newspaper, the group, among other things, contemplated drafting the broad contours of a new debt-restructuring scheme for distribution utilities. The unviability of discoms, too, was discussed, which has led to several unintended consequences.

The basic problem with state discoms is that they do not recover the cost of power from consumers and run persistently at a loss. They tend to subsidise a class of consumers heavily, such as households and agriculturists, and charge more from businesses, and that increases the cost for industry. At a macroeconomic level, the losses incurred by states' power utilities are a big risk to state-government finances. The Reserve Bank of India's study of state-government finances for 2024-25 Budgets — published in December last year — also highlighted this problem. It noted that discoms remained a drag on state-government finances, with accumulated losses of ₹6.5 trillion by 2022-23 — about 2.4 per cent of gross domestic product. The deliberations at the GoM suggest that things are unlikely to have improved a great deal.

Guarantees issued by the state governments have also increased significantly, partly because of the financial requirements of discoms. There have been several attempts in the past to address the discom issue, including the Ujjwal DISCOM Assurance Yojana, but not much has changed. It is thus likely that any new debt-restructuring scheme will only kick the can further down the road and not solve the basic issue of under-recovery and losses. With several state governments promising free power to households, the problem could only worsen. The situation may become more challenging for discoms as large companies buy power directly from producers. The discoms, as a result, would lose high-paying consumers.

What India needs is a broad consensus on power pricing. The way forward, also discussed by the GoM, is that tariffs need to reflect the cost of power. Once this is achieved, and if a state government intends to extend support to a class of consumers, it should account for subsidies transparently. The accumulated losses of discoms are essentially deferred or unpaid subsidies. Besides, there is no reason why industry should be cross-subsidising households and other consumers. It pushes up costs and affects the competitiveness of businesses, particularly in the manufacturing sector. Subsidies should always come from annual Budgets. Discoms must remain viable, and be able to invest adequately — for instance, in reducing distribution losses and improving metering to recover dues. This will help reduce losses and the subsidy burden. They also need to be prepared to accommodate the increasing availability of renewable power.

AI-powered economy

India needs investments in data infra and skilling

A new report by the NTTI Aayog provides a road map for accelerated economic growth through the adoption of artificial intelligence (AI). It projects an additional contribution of \$500-600 billion to gross domestic product by 2035 from productivity improvements alone, and of another \$280-475 billion by leapfrogging innovation in research & development (R&D). India's unique combination of a large tech-oriented workforce, an expanding digital infrastructure, and a growing R&D ecosystem gives it the potential to capture 10-15 per cent of the global AI value pool. But opportunity alone is not enough. A strong linkage among the government, industry and academia is needed to build a strong and inclusive AI ecosystem.

The India AI Mission, with a budget of over ₹10,000 crore, is a step in this direction. It focuses on deploying data labs and graphics processing units, or GPUs, developing India-specific large language models, and integrating AI into the national skilling agenda. This initiative lays the foundation for sovereign data infrastructure and responsible, large-scale AI adoption. Among the prospects highlighted by the report is India's potential to become the global data capital. Data can power next-generation AI models and unlock growth across sectors such as manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, financial services, and automotive industries.

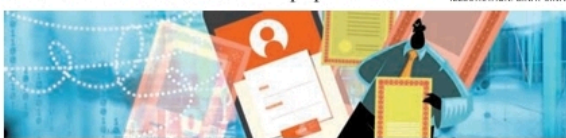
The pharmaceutical sector presents a particularly transformative opportunity. Today, 80 per cent of India's pharma market revolves around generics, given high R&D costs and long development timelines. AI offers a solution by reducing drug-discovery costs and development timelines, potentially transitioning India from a generics producer to a global innovator. Leveraging its rich genetic pool and domain expertise in pharmacology, the country can reposition itself as a hub for innovative drug development. Similarly, the automotive sector stands on the cusp of a revolution with software-assisted vehicles, where AI can drive design, testing, and component assembly. By establishing AI-ready industrial parks, combining clean-energy factories, high-performance computing labs, and skills centres, India can catalyse rapid innovation and position itself as a global leader in next-generation mobility.

However, as Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman pointed out at the launch of the report, there is a twofold challenge — accelerating technology adoption and building regulatory frameworks that safeguard citizens without stifling innovation. The upcoming detailed regulations under the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act will provide much-needed clarity on data privacy, helping address one of the biggest concerns in the AI ecosystem. Moreover, the report underscores a critical human-capital challenge. While AI is set to create several high-skilled roles, it might simultaneously displace many jobs, mainly in routine, low-skill segments. A coordinated approach is needed to upskill the workforce, reskill displaced workers, and democratise access to AI capabilities, particularly for small businesses and underrepresented regions. India must aim for responsible AI adoption. By investing in sovereign infrastructure, developing sector-specific data platforms like the manufacturing data grid, fostering an adaptable AI-skilling ecosystem, and ensuring equitable access, the country can not only unlock economic growth but also build resilient businesses.

India's great vanishing Act

Thirty years ago, an Act made physical securities disappear. Now it's time to extend it to all paperwork

ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA



September 20 marks the 30th anniversary of the Depositories Ordinance, 1995. Few imagined this quiet legislative initiative would trigger one of the boldest financial reforms in independent India. Over three decades, dematerialisation has evolved from a daring experiment to an everyday reality. Today, two depositories serve over 200 million investor accounts, holding securities of more than 100,000 companies, with a custody value exceeding ₹600 trillion. What began as a leap of faith in 1995 is now the backbone of India's securities market.

Humans are fascinated by magic, the thrill of watching something vanish before our eyes — a train, a plane, even the Taj Mahal, if only for a moment. Magicians, however, operate within limits: One trick, one stage at a time. In the mid-1990s, India attempted something more audacious — a grand illusion on a national scale. Not one object, but every share certificate. Not for seconds, but forever.

Two new institutions, National Securities Depository Limited (NSDL) (1996) and Central Depository Services Limited (1999), pulled it off. In the blink of regulatory eyes, those thick certificates with ornate borders and proud stamps disappeared. From every drawer, every almirah, every pillowcase across the land. No smoke, no mirrors, no trapdoors. The disappearance was total, final, and irreversible. No one asked for an encore.

Curiously, our "depositories" neither accept deposits nor store securities. The term was borrowed from contemporary global markets, where depositories safeguarded physical certificates while maintaining records electronically. India thought differently: Not to digitise papers, but to eliminate them. Out of the conviction was born "dematerialisation", or simply, "demat". There was no blueprint, no assurance of success. Reformers only knew that a paper-based securities system could never support the scale, speed, or integrity that India's newly liberalised market economy required.

The vision was bold. Multiple, interoperable depositories were to ensure free transferability of securities with speed, accuracy, and security. This was

achieved by (a) making securities of public limited companies freely transferable; (b) dematerialising the securities held in a depository; and (c) entrusting depositories to maintain ownership records of securities and effect transfers through book entries. After all, the framework enshrined the supremacy of the investor. The choice between physical and demat form rested with the investor, and the system was bound to honour that choice.

New Delhi wrote the script. The 1993-94 Union Budget hinted at a centralised depository. A leading custodian began constructing a vault to store securities. The following year's Budget proposed a depository system of scrip-less trading and signalled a dedicated law to establish depositories. By mid-1995, urgency set in. The finance minister and the finance secretary, who were driving broader securities market reforms, created the momentum and space for the idea to take shape.

An informal team of officials and market participants carried the idea forward. P. J. Nayak, who had demitted office as joint secretary (capital markets) in June 1995, continued to articulate the vision of dematerialisation and free transferability. R. Chandrasekaran, then managing director of the Stock Holding Corporation of India Limited, drew on global practices to design the depository architecture. T. K. Viswanathan, then additional legislative counsel, translated the vision into the Depositories Ordinance of 1995. Remarkably, the three never met in person. My role as deputy director in the capital markets division was only to weave their ideas together, often after hours and outside the office.

Mumbai staged the play. C. B. Bhavare, as the first managing director of NSDL, led the institutional and technological foundation that turned the vision into reality. Throughout, the Securities and Exchange Board of India's (Sebi's) steady hand orchestrated the market ecosystem to embrace dematerialisation, while ensuring that both the law and its implementation remained firmly anchored in investor interest.

Scepticism was rife. Some argued that if the US had not gone paperless, India surely could not. Industry feared losing its gatekeeping power over transfers.

M S SAHOO



Finance Commission can save India's cities

The story of cities and climate change is often narrated through the lens of a familiar set of hazards, from sea-level rise to flooding rivers and choking smog. While they remain grievous concerns to be addressed, Indian cities today are undergoing a quieter but more concerning shift.

New risks are emerging not as single events but as systemic dynamics, reshaping how cities grow, infrastructure holds together, and finance is mobilised. The next decade will not only be about defending against rising seas or installing air purifiers or cooling centres; it will be about managing the flows of people, systems, and capital that determine whether cities can adapt at scale.

One of the most profound of these shifts is migration. The World Bank's Groundswell initiative in 2021 estimated that as many as 216 million people could be forced to move within their own countries by 2050 due to climate-related stressors. These flows are already beginning. As droughts reduce rural viability and coastal inundation drives families inland. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Sixth Assessment Report recognises that urban areas will become magnets for climate migrants — not because they are safe, but because they promise services, employment, and the possibility of survival. Yet too many municipalities treat migration as a crisis at the margins, rather than a central feature of climate adaptation.

Without proactive planning, the new arrivals risk being absorbed into informal settlements located precisely in the zones most exposed to floods and landslides. It is important to note that what looks like migration pressure is, in fact, an opportunity. With foresight, urban growth spurred by mobility can build resilience, diversify economies, and reduce per-capita emissions.

However, the integrity of urban systems themselves is becoming more precarious. The IPCC warns that climate change no longer produces isolated shocks, but compound and cascading risks. Cities, stitched together by networks of power, water, trans-

port, and communications, are discovering that one failure often drags others down.

Studies show that mortality can spike dramatically when cooling systems fail, especially in housing stock without passive design. Flooding, too, is no longer a matter of a swollen river or a single storm surge. High tides, heavy rainfall, and river floods increasingly coincide, creating compound inundation that overwhelms defences built to handle each hazard separately.

It clearly conveys that distant hazards (like upstream floods, droughts, or power grid failures) affect cities, and the problems in the piecemeal way risks are currently managed. The future of adaptation lies in designing for interconnectivity, embedding redundancy in grey systems, integrating green with critical infrastructure, and ensuring that health and housing policy are part of the same climate conversation as drainage canals and seawalls.

Money remains the toughest barrier. United Nations Environment Programme's Adaptation Gap Report 2024 shows international public finance for adaptation reached only \$28 billion in 2022, while developing countries need \$194-\$366 billion annually. Less than 10 per cent of global climate finance goes to adaptation as mitigation dominates. Multilateral development banks committed a record \$17 billion in 2024, but only \$26 billion supported adaptation. Urban needs far exceed this: The World Bank estimates Indian cities require \$2.4 trillion by 2050 to climate-proof infrastructure, or annual flood damages could rise from \$4 billion to \$30 billion. City leaders must choose between repeated rebuilding and long-term resilience that outpaces political cycles.

The 16th Finance Commission becomes critical in this respect. The Commission's mandate to recommend how central tax revenues are shared with states offers a constitutional pathway to mainstream climate risk into fiscal transfers. A forward-looking climate vulnerability criterion would ensure that fast-growing but climate-exposed cities receive pre-

ferred transfers, and company secretaries feared their cheese moving away. Legal purists insisted that until investors had the right to hold securities in physical form, the law was unimplementable. The Ordinance passed a few times. But reformers stood firm. Through years of resistance, a wide coalition of officials, institutions, industry leaders, and countless individuals sustained the effort forward. The breakthrough came when Sebi required trading/settlement of trades on stock exchanges only in demat form, first for select shares and certain investors, then progressively extending to all. The rest is history.

Before demat, every transfer of securities required moving paper certificates to the issuer for registration, with ownership evidenced only by endorsement on the certificate. The process routinely stretched far beyond the two-month statutory limit. Many transactions ended in "bad delivery" owing to bad paperwork or signature mismatches. The risks were many: Theft, forgery, duplication, and mutilation. The issuer's right to refuse transfer added to investor misery. The system was weighed down by paperwork, costly printing, insecure custody, settlement delays, restricted liquidity, and a grievance mechanism that barely worked.

Dematerialisation swept all this away. It made markets faster, safer, and more transparent. More importantly, it became the foundation for future reforms: T+1 (and transitioning to T+0) settlements that placed India among the world's fastest markets; streamlined initial public offerings (IPOs) and rights issues; opened governance reforms, such as system-driven disclosures; effective market surveillance and monitoring; and a leap in financial inclusion, as millions of first-time investors opened demat accounts.

As India celebrates 30 years of dematerialisation, one wonders if share certificates could vanish, why not every instrument, every piece of paper that clogs our economy? Bank guarantees, insurance policies, loan agreements, warehouse receipts, land titles, and even academic certificates are all ripe for dematerialisation. Indeed, some of these are getting dematted, though only in patches. A natural progression would be to either integrate them into the demat framework or designator-made frameworks for their specific needs. This would confer legal standing on their digital existence, unlock new markets, spark innovation, and create efficiencies no paper system can match.

Dematerialisation is more than a market reform: It is a metaphor for India's digital future where trust endures without paper, scale comes without friction, and transparency displaces opacity. It is also a quiet response to climate change, sparing trees and forests from the paper chase of old systems. Three decades on, India's great vanishing act continues to inspire, is studied worldwide as a model of systemic reform, and reminds us that making the invisible visible is sometimes the best way to make progress visible.

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CONURBATION
AMIT KAPOOR

dictable, rule-based support for adaptation, rather than relying only on post-disaster relief.

The current horizontal evolution formula, while including a role for forests and ecosystems, remains essentially a static risk proxy and does not capture dynamic climate hazards or the avoided-loss value of resilient ecosystems. After thorough research, the Institute for Competitiveness, in its report "A Climate Risk Lens on Fiscal Devolution", has recommended creating a dedicated 5 per cent climate-risk weight by reducing the formula weights of population (from 15 per cent to 13 per cent), area (from 15 per cent to 13 per cent), and forest and ecology (from 10 per cent to 9 per cent). This adjustment ensures that states facing heat, floods, and low adaptive capacity receive predictable, rule-based support, a change that strengthens, rather than weakens, the current devolution formula.

Taken together, migration, cascading failures, and the adaptation finance gap illustrate how the adverse effects of climate risk is shifting. Each reinforces the other: Unmanaged migration increases exposure, infrastructure fragility magnifies every shock, and inadequate finance leaves both problems unresolved. However, if properly reformed, these are also entry points for transformation. In 2025, the challenge is to recognise the new forms of risk that are already unfolding and to build institutions, infrastructures, and financing models that match their complexity.

Nowhere is this climate risk more visible than in India, where Delhi reels from simultaneous flooding and heat emergencies, Punjab grapples with its worst inundation in decades, and fast-growing metros like Bengaluru and Mumbai confront mounting infrastructure and finance deficits. These cities encapsulate the broader global challenge: Unless adaptation planning and finance keep pace with urban growth, climate impacts will magnify inequality and systemic fragility. If they do, however, India's urban transition can also become a laboratory for resilience, offering lessons for rapidly growing cities across the Global South.

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Navigating China's imperatives



CUNJAN SINGH

This edited volume by Ashok Kantha, former ambassador to China, is an attempt to discuss how Chinese foreign and domestic policy under Xi Jinping have the potential to impact India. Despite the bonhomie displayed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit, Sino-Indian relations are riddled with mistrust and unease. The thaw that began in October 2024 at the Kazan BRICS summit after the violent Galwan clashes

of 2020, only calls for more caution in India's engagement with China. The disputed border issue, which has seen no resolution even after multiple rounds of talks, highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding of China. Other global developments — the Russia-Ukraine war, the West Asian conflict and the trade war with the US — add to the challenges in this bilateral relationship.

A detailed introduction by Mr. Kantha attempts to paint an overall picture of China and its future direction. As he argues, "It has been observed that Xi's proactive foreign policy in Asia offers a deal: China will deliver trade, investment and other economic goods, and progressively act as a net security provider to those partners who accommodate, or at least do not challenge, its core interests." In his essay, Arvind Gupta adds the perspective that, "Although Chinese leaders claim that they are not interested in exporting the Chinese

system or model of development to any country, the fact remains that China is building its own sphere of influence."

China's "win-win" narrative under its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has deepened its engagement with South Asia. Sreedhar Datta provides a detailed picture of BRI-related investments and how this affects India's position. Tilak Desai discusses China-Pakistan relations and its bearing on Indian security concerns. Still, the all-weather friendship has proved to be a major challenge for New Delhi and the Chinese inroads in the form of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has aggravated this challenge.

"Pakistan's inability to meet its defence requirements and the persisting economic crisis could make Islamabad more dependent on China in the coming years. Concessional Chinese financing could enable Pakistan to procure advanced weapons systems deemed essential for its national security interests," he contends.

This dependence became glaringly evident during the recent conflict between India and Pakistan.

The constant weaponisation of trade by China and the widening trade deficit has further reduced India's manoeuvring power. The Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdowns underscored China's centrality to global supply chains. As the trade deficit between the neighbours expands, there is an urgent need to focus on ways to reduce this gap. But doing so will not be easy. As Santosh Pal observes in his essay, "Reducing dependency on China for products for which domestic capacity and alternative sources don't exist will be India's biggest challenge in preventing weaponisation of trade ties by China."

Water is increasingly becoming a driving factor in bilateral and regional politics. The root of this lies

in Tibet, a point Jayadeva Ranade underscores, "Tibet, also known as the 'Water Tower' of Asia, is important for India and the region as it is the source of most major river systems in Asia," he points out.

The recent reports of the Chinese construction of the mega dam in Tibet and the ongoing debates surrounding the reincarnation of the 14th Dalai Lama add a thorny dimension to this relationship.

For all the domestic challenges the Chinese economy is slowing and unemployment rising consistently, putting additional strains on Xi's BRI ambitions. Discussing this, Gopal Surti highlights, "The BRI appears to be set for a continued, but limited future as China recalibrates its urban growth approach to the world amidst the changed realities of an intensified competition with the US and a slowing economy." The trade and tariff war is compounding Xi's

woes. As Ananth Krishnan argues, what Xi "is able to do will likely determine the success and failure of both his term at the helm and of China's quest for global supremacy." Srikanth Kondapalli adds that China's "geopolitical priorities have sharpened due to its hostile policies, and 'weaponisation' of trade, tourism and other coercive measures against South Korea, Taiwan, Australia, Thailand, Malaysia and other countries have also had a negative impact."

Though the book traverses a wide canvas, it offers detail and nuanced insights, the reality is that developments connected to China are so vast and immediate that it is difficult to publish a timely book. For no fault of the authors, most of the chapters seen dated when one reads them in 2025. A conclusion that ties all the debates together would have enhanced the value of a book that nevertheless is a much-needed addition to the literature on decoding China from an Indian perspective.

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DECODING CHINA
HARD PERSPECTIVES FROM INDIA

ASHOK K. KANTHA

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Consumption to capex

GST 2.0 is powering a cycle of growth

Uttam Prakash Agarwal

For decades, a middle-class Indian household has perfectly mirrored the country's economic growth and consumption patterns — the size of the toothpaste tube, the smartphone charging on the bedside table, the packet of detergent or even the sound of the television set. Now, with the recently announced GST reforms, these very items are symbolizing the start of a new consumption cycle.

But will this cycle spur a fleeting uptick or will it transform into a growth engine?

Turning this step into a durable multi-year upswing will depend on how quickly India Inc converts cheaper end-prices into capacity creation and productivity gains. The reforms, which lower GST rates across a swathe of consumer goods, signal a conscious push to use tax rationalisation as an engine of demand.

The government's message is clear: to spur consumption-led momentum that will create conditions for a higher, sustained growth path closer to 8-9 per cent.

The major consumer brands have recognised and highlighted the growth being witnessed across rural markets as compared to urban. Rural continues to drive volume-led growth and this is the time for companies to really invest.

This is where policy support plays a crucial role. In order to ensure that consumption translates into investments, the government must accelerate project clearances to shorten investment cycles, address inverted duty structures that make imports cheaper than domestic output, expand credit access for MSMEs that form the backbone of manufacturing and distribution, and implement supply-chain reforms to reduce bottlenecks so companies can plan multi-year investments with confidence.

PROMISING SIGNS

That said, the early signs look promising. Televisions, appliances, packaged goods and small cars are expected to see a sharp demand in the festive season. A virtuous cycle is anticipated with lower prices encouraging households to upgrade or expand purchases, which pushes volumes higher for manufacturers and retailers.

For instance, lower GST on television sets will reduce prices by nearly 10 per cent. This will not only drive upgrades to larger



GROWTH. Fuelled by consumption ISTOCKPHOTO

screens but also expand first-time adoption in markets, as India's TV penetration hovers at approximately 70 per cent. This benefit is expected to spill into sectors such as advertising and media, as brands compete more aggressively for consumer attention.

Advertising intensity has been rising alongside consumption green-shoots which saw television advertising spending surging 27 per cent year-on-year in the first half of 2025, even before the tax cuts took effect. But for this cycle to persist beyond the festive season, companies must pair higher ad-spend with capex on plants, automation, supply-chain and brand distribution, especially in tier-II and tier-III markets where rural volumes grew 13-14 per cent recently.

That said, the nature of this change is cyclical rather than linear. It should be coupled with mass-scale positive consumer impact to drive consumption that in turn benefits the companies as well. In fact, major brands have already started passing on the benefit of this reform to consumers in various forms.

These shifts reinforce the GST 2.0 promise: as households consume more, companies scale up production, investors gain confidence, and ancillary industries ride the wave of rising demand. What starts with a price cut quickly spirals into a broader cycle of growth.

But the message is loud and clear — consumption upswings will fade if supply doesn't follow. GST 2.0 has lit the spark of demand and can rewrite India's growth story as the inflection point that converted household spending into India's next phase of structural growth. The key opportunity lies in companies seizing this moment to invest in scaling up and productivity.

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India needs to tap into global green finance

ECO-FUNDING. The government must create an ecosystem to attract global green capital to fund its climate action goals



SUNIL KUMAR SINHA

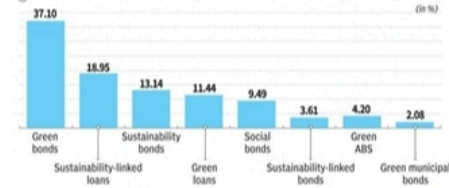
India's climate actions so far have primarily been financed from domestic resources. These include government budgetary support, a mix of market mechanisms, fiscal instruments and policy interventions. India's initial Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) under the Paris Agreement estimated that the country's climate action would require \$2.5 trillion (at 2014-15 prices) for meeting India's climate change actions between 2015 and 2030 which aims to reduce emissions intensity of its GDP by 45 per cent by 2030 from 2005 level.

In November 2022, India submitted its Long-Term Low-Carbon Development Strategy to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). There are several estimates regarding India's financial needs for Long-Term Low-Carbon Development Strategy action and they vary due to differences in assumptions, coverage, and modelling approaches.

But the estimated requirements show it will be in excess of \$10 trillion by 2050. Given India's financial needs for climate action, tapping the global sustainable/green finance and foreign private capital is expected to play a crucial role in achieving NDC goals.

The size of global sustainable/green debt finance has also been growing rapidly in response to the challenges of climate change. According to Institute of International Finance (IIF) data, the cumulative global sustainable/green debt issuances since March 2013 onwards reached \$8.86 trillion in December 2024 (up from \$1.5 trillion till June 2019). Of these mature economies accounted for \$6.05 trillion (68.25 per cent), emerging economies \$1.53 trillion (17.25 per cent), offshore centres \$0.30

Share of various instruments in global sustainable/green debt issuances (March 2013-December 2024) (in %)



Source: Institute of International Finance

trillion (3.38 per cent) and supranationals \$0.98 trillion (11.12 per cent).

GREEN INSTRUMENTS

The debt instruments used for raising sustainable/green finance range from green bonds/loans, green asset-backed securities (ABS), sustainability bonds, social bonds, green municipal bonds and sustainability-linked bonds/loans. Of these green bonds account for the largest share of 37.10 per cent followed by sustainability-linked loans (18.95 per cent), sustainability bonds (13.14 per cent) and green loans (10.44 per cent).

At \$91.2 billion, India's share in global sustainable/green debt issuances till December 2024 was just 1.03 per cent. However, when calculated as share in

the sustainable/green debt issuances of emerging economies it looks more respectable at 5.97 per cent. At \$690.7 billion, China's share in sustainable/green debt issuances of global and emerging economies though is much higher at 7.80 per cent and 45.21 per cent respectively. Clearly India has a lot of catching up to do to increase its share in global sustainable/green debt issuances.

A number of measures for climate actions were announced in the Union Budget 2022-23, including sovereign green bonds and thematic funds for blended finance. India joined the sovereign green bonds club on January 25, 2023 by raising \$80 billion.

Since then, a few more sovereign green bond issuances have taken place. Although the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) issued the 'Disclosure Requirements for Issuance and Listing of Green Debt Securities' in 2017, corporate entity in India had entered the green bonds market with Yes Bank issuing the first green bond of \$260 million in 2015. Various public and private sector corporate entities have since then raised \$76.53 billion via green bonds issuances till June 2025.

No doubt, India has been gaining traction in terms of accessing sustainable/green financing both locally

India needs to access the rapidly growing pool of global sustainable/green capital from pension funds, sovereign wealth funds, insurance funds, private equity, venture capital, infrastructure funds etc

as well as globally, yet the financing gap to meet its NDCs under UNFCCC remains huge. To bridge this gap, India needs to access the rapidly growing pool of global sustainable/green capital from pension funds, sovereign wealth funds, insurance funds, private equity, venture capital, infrastructure funds etc.

POLICY ENABLERS

The key to attract global private finance into sustainable/green projects in India is to focus on both micro and macro level policy enablers. At the micro level increasing the transparency by aligning the disclosure/reporting standards to global benchmarks will reduce the information asymmetry faced by investors/lenders. Further putting in place an integrated domestic measurement, reporting, and verification system would increase the availability and accessibility of sustainable/green finance data.

Similarly, at the macro level moving towards green taxonomy coupled with fiscal incentives and a credible domestic capital market will be crucial for accelerating the inflow of global private finance/capital into India.

In this regard, Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reporting (BRSR) being made mandatory for the top 1000 listed companies in India and the announcement to develop a taxonomy for climate finance in the Union Budget 2024-25 are steps in the right direction, but much more needs to be done to attract global sustainable/green finance into India.

For example, developing a dedicated channel for the listing of green bonds in India's stock exchanges could be a game-changer. Launching/expanding ESG performance-based equity/bond index on Indian stock exchanges and collaborating with offshore stock exchanges/index providers for inclusion of Indian green bonds into global indices could be another one.

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TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

September 18, 2005

Indian stocks are hot picks for foreign investors

Foreign investors continue to fancy large-cap Indian stocks with the flood of dollars going into these stocks remaining unabated. During the period June 2004 to June 2005, they have pumped in about Rs 28,000 crore or just more than \$6 billion.

No scam in offing, says Chidambaram

The Finance Minister, Mr P. Chidambaram, on Saturday asserted that "no scam was in the offing" as made out in certain sections with the Senses surging towards the 8,400 mark. "There is no cause for alarm," Mr Chidambaram told PTI.

After 15 years of reforms, desi firms hold their own

Homegrown companies have managed to hold their own against competition from multinationals across most sectors, nearly a decade and a half after the economy opened up to foreign competition. A comparison of the 1992 and 2004 market shares of Indian companies and MNCs across seven major consumer categories shows that desi firms have managed to hold on to a dominant 85 per cent market share in the pharmaceuticals sector and have maintained around 50 per cent market share in segments such as consumer electronics and durables and categories such as breakfast cereals.

Industry 5.0 – A glossy label for a bleaker reality

Prabir Kumar Bandyopadhyay

The recent portrayal of Industry 5.0 as a human-centred, sustainable, and resilient evolution of manufacturing (as described in Hélène Kyriakakis's Forbes article, Oct 29, 2024) would be compelling — if only it matched the reality on the ground.

We are in the midst of unprecedented churn. Across industries and continents, artificial intelligence is accelerating layoffs, displacing skilled and semi-skilled workers, and making "decent work" an elusive dream — even in the organised sector.

Massive retrenchments are unfolding quietly, and more are anticipated. Yet instead of reckoning with this crisis, we are

inventing new buzzwords. Who is really buying the Industry 5.0 story? Boards and CEOs are not measured on human-centricity or sustainability — they are judged by a singular metric: stock market performance. That, and quarterly earnings, define the incentive structures. Everything else is secondary.

Let's not be naïve. Talk of "empowering humans with technology" is comforting rhetoric, but in practice, the dominant logic is cost reduction and margin expansion. AI and automation are not being deployed to make work more meaningful — they are replacing work altogether. The promise of redeploying people to "higher value tasks" remains vague, unsupported, and often hollow.

If the world is already struggling to manage the basic trade-offs of AI and employment, is this the time to introduce yet another layer of abstraction? The pillars of Industry 5.0 — resilience, sustainability, human-centricity — are not new. They are longstanding challenges that companies have grappled with for decades. Wrapping them in a new framework does little but distract from the urgent need for hard policy, ethical guardrails, and accountability in technological deployment.

Let us stop conflating labelling with leadership. The issue is not the absence of ideas — it is the absence of will to confront difficult trade-offs honestly.

The writer is a retired Management Professor and Independent Researcher

On businessline.in

Are the missing ₹2,000 banknotes legal tender?



Except for the RBI facility for exchange or deposit, these notes, amounting to ₹6,000 crore, have ceased to be legal tender for all practical purposes, points out

Abhinam Das

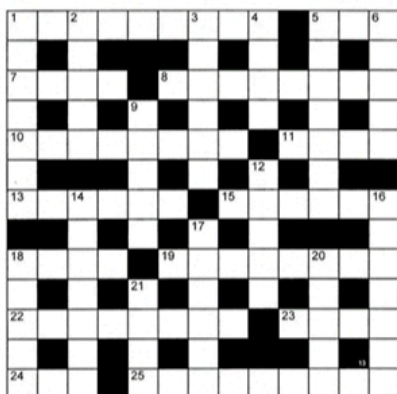
<https://tinyurl.com/yuz2u6p>

Women entrepreneurs — looking beyond the numbers

The number of women entrepreneurs has increased, but they remain trapped in low-productivity, family-based units. Policy action must focus on moving them to the high-productivity formal sector, say Rajesh Raj SN, Subash S and Yuka Nikaido

<https://tinyurl.com/4nsqjvm>

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2785



EASY

ACROSS

01. Made up, like a novel (9)
05. Moisture deposited from air on cooling (3)
07. Broadcast, televised serial (4)
08. Stirred up (8)
10. Supervisor (8)
11. Melt, as ice (4)
13. Chatter, rattle on (6)
15. Glazed wall-opening (6)
18. Knave (cards) (4)
19. Strip-tease artist (8)
22. First letters (name, etc) (8)
23. Defendant's answer to charge (4)
24. Make a knot (3)
25. Seasoning (9)

DOWN

01. To hang with garlands (7)
02. Have a yearning for (5)
03. Lump (gold, etc) (6)
04. Behindhand (4)
05. Thrown away, came down in sea (7)
06. Woman who has lost her husband (5)
09. Wedding attendant (5)
12. Polite, not military (5)
14. Suggestive of touch (7)
16. Pledge, assurance, proof (7)
17. A shoot from base of plant (6)
18. Beam supporting floorboards (5)
20. Measured beat, throb (5)
21. State treasury, public revenue (4)

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

01. It's not true it can foil any new arrangement (9)
05. Early freshness one depicted right away (3)
07. Long-running drama one can come clean with (4)
08. Upset an American soldier at being held by Edward (8)
10. One supervising Rose, ever upset by him (8)
11. What it brings about is turning ice to water (4)
13. Talk a lot about a little 18 Across, the toad! (6)
15. Time affording an opportunity one can look out of (6)
16. Small flag aimed at in bowls (4)
19. It may remove a coat, while she removes everything (8)
22. The first letters in a list one compiles (8)
23. Scottish lawsuit is sure to give gratification (4)
24. Ligature may be an obligation (3)
25. Don't mince it: put it out for seasoning (9)

DOWN

01. One soft enough to hang one with garlands (7)
02. Long to be given credit with a greeting from the past (5)
03. A precious lump a shooter is put up to obtain (6)
04. Falling behind schedule, is no longer with us (4)
05. Got rid of irritation in having died without one (7)
06. Woman left end of curtain out of 15 (5)
09. You, me and the woman found by Black Rod (5)
12. It is polite about the community (5)
14. Cat turns up on roofing component perceptible to touch (7)
16. Be sufficient grounds for authorisation of a search (7)
17. Shoot from plant base could be lost with no upturn (6)
18. Is put in a whet to support the floorboards (5)
20. Measured beat of bones, lentils and the like (5)
21. The public purse is invested in a football club (4)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2784

ACROSS 1. Cuddle 4. Stupor 9. Nervous 10. Stoop 11. Tail 12. Peke 13. Fur 15. Gear 16. Quit 19. Tor 21. Echo 22. Opus 24. Oiled 25. Curacao 26. Secure 27. Spills

DOWN 1. Constructions 2. Darning 3. Loop 5. Tasteful 6. Proof 7. Repercussions 8. Aster 14. Lavender 17. Typical 18. Shock 20. Relic 23. Trap

Fresh winds

Onus on US to keep bilateral relations on track

Not too many days ago, it seemed as if India-US ties were headed for the doghouse and set to remain there for a prolonged period. The last few days, however, have seen a tidal shift. President Donald Trump wished Prime Minister Narendra Modi on his birthday calling him "my friend", while Modi responded with equal warmth signalling the personal ties between the two leaders getting back on track.

The two countries have also re-started the trade talks, which were stalled after the US imposed an additional penal tariff of 25 per cent on India's purchases of Russian oil. A US trade negotiator was on a day-long visit to India on Tuesday. This change comes as a relief to both parties. India cannot easily contend with tariffs of over 50 per cent, given that its export products can be sourced by US consumers from alternative markets more easily than India's ability to find new markets for them. The US accounts for about 18 per cent of Indian exports, with livelihoods at stake here, particularly in textiles and leather. An impasse hurts the US geopolitically as well, given India's primacy as a countervailing force to China in this region. After the bonhomie, seen globally, between Modi, President Xi and President Putin at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation meeting in China three weeks ago, it's the US that appears to be on the back foot. It's quite likely the US State Department has finally managed to get a word in and persuade Trump that there's a lot more to the Indo-US engagement than just trade and tariff. Indeed the US Embassy in New Delhi had put out a tweet to that effect two weeks ago. The softening of Trump's approach may also be related to back channel diplomacy.

India seems intent on being both firm and amenable to talks. Not that the red lines have changed. Agriculture and dairy markets cannot readily be opened for livelihood reasons. Besides, controversies over GM food imports, as well as the use of animal feed in dairy products, cannot be overruled with a stroke of a pen. However, India can certainly bring down its industrial tariffs to zero for US goods, just as it has done for other FTA partners. It should draw the US' attention to the fact that imports of Russian oil have fallen in recent times. According to reports, India's largest private importer of Russian oil hasn't ordered any of it in September. If the US is especially keen to break the logjam, it should revoke the penal tariff of 25 per cent right away. With India's imports of Russian oil already beginning to slow down, there is no justification for the penal tariff to stay. It is also incumbent on the US not to shift its goalsposts from time to time. As for India, it is worth pursuing a deal on its terms, but not end up with a bad one which hurts its small producers in particular. A good pact is possible, provided the talks proceed in a measured, reasonable way. Birthday wishes notwithstanding, it's up to the US to shore up its reputation as a trustworthy democracy.

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POCKET

RAVIVANTH



New chapter in bankruptcy law

WIDE REFORMS. IBC (Amendment) Bill corrects judicial deviations, restores creditor hierarchy and disciplines liquidation



RAJASEKHARA VK

The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Amendment) Bill, 2025, tabled in the Lok Sabha this month session, represents the most far-reaching overhaul of the IBC since 2018. Spread across 68 clauses, the Bill touches every part of the Code — from definitions and admission procedures to liquidation, personal guarantors, group and cross-border insolvency, penalties, and regulatory powers.

At its core, the Bill is aimed at restoring order — one unsettled by judicial innovation, tactical misuse, or procedural drift. The 17 instances where the expression "clarified" has been used, signals the legislative determination to reassert original legislative design and to correct interpretive distortions that have crept in over time.

A fundamental clarification is made in the definition of "security interest". An explanation to section 3(31) makes clear that such an interest exists only if created by agreement or arrangement between parties, and not merely by operation of law. This directly reverses the Supreme Court's judgment in *State Tax Officer v. Rainbow Papers* (2022), which treated certain statutory dues as "secured" under the Gujarat VAT Act. That ruling disrupted the creditor hierarchy, elevating government dues above secured creditors and shaking market confidence. By restoring security interest to those derived by contract, the amendment re-anchors the waterfall of priorities, improves predictability for lenders, and restores investor confidence. It reaffirms that security must flow from contract, and not from legislative declaration.

OVERTURNING VIDARHA

Section 7 is amended to make the admission process mechanical: where default exists, the Adjudicating Authority must admit the petition. This neutralises the Supreme Court's decision in *Vidarbha Industries v. Axis Bank* (2022), which allowed discretion to decline admission even where default was proved. Although the Supreme Court in review described *Vidarbha* as confined to its facts, the amendment ensures that discretion is cut out once default is established. By closing the door on free-wheeling discretion at the admission stage, Parliament restores the rule first articulated in *Innovative Industries v. ICICI Bank* (2017).

ADMISSION TRIGGER

A 14-day timeline is prescribed for admission or rejection, with reasons to



WELL-CRAFTED. The changes convert scattered regulatory and judicial rulings into clear statutory protections, giving both prospective investors and creditors predictability

be recorded if the deadline is missed. But here lies a deeper challenge. The original Code already carried a 14-day deadline. Courts and tribunals treated it as directory, not mandatory. If every statutory deadline is judicially downgraded to "directory", deadlines are dead-letter. Statutory intent must be matched by adherence from adjudicating authorities, or the discipline of the Code will remain illusory.

The Bill fortifies two key principles that underpin resolution certainty. **Minimum payout for dissenting financial creditors** (s.30): Dissenting financial creditors must receive not less than the lower of: (i) their liquidation entitlement, or (ii) their proportional share under the resolution plan — a calibrated protection for minorities.

Clean-slate principle (s.31): Once a plan is approved, all prior claims stand extinguished unless expressly preserved in the resolution plan, and existing licences and permits cannot be arbitrarily terminated.

These changes convert scattered regulatory and judicial rulings into clear statutory protections, giving both prospective investors and creditors predictability.

The Bill permits transfer of the assets of personal or corporate guarantors into the resolution estate if creditors have taken possession. If the guarantor is also undergoing CIRP, then such transfer requires the approval of at least two-thirds of the guarantor's CoC. This prioritises collective resolution over fragmented recovery, and curbs unilateral races to guarantor assets.

LIQUIDATION REFORMS

Several important changes reshape liquidation:

Timely election by secured creditors: Secured creditors must now inform the liquidator within 14 days whether they will stand outside liquidation to realise security. Failure to do so results in deemed relinquishment.

This lifts the timeline from the regulations into the Code.

Collective enforcement: Where multiple creditors hold security over the same asset, enforcement requires consent from at least two-thirds by value, discouraging holdouts.

Time-bound liquidation: Section 54 now requires completion of liquidation and filing for dissolution within 180 days from the liquidation commencement date, extendable once by 90 days.

Assessment of chance of resolution: If the adjudicating authority believes resolution may be possible, it may permit the CoC to restore the CIRP with a two-thirds vote. However, such restored CIRP should be completed within 120 days, and such a chance shall be explored only once.

Liquidation or dissolution: The CoC may recommend liquidation or dissolution at any stage of the CIRP but before confirmation of the resolution plan. However, a recommendation for dissolution must comply with conditions that will be specified. Orders for liquidation shall be passed within 30 days.

These provisions reinforce the collective orientation of the Code and reduce tactical manoeuvres that delay distribution.

A new Chapter IV-A establishes a creditor-initiated insolvency resolution process (CIRP) for classes of debtors and creditors to be notified by the Central Government. A financial creditor from a notified class may initiate the CIRP, the CoC supervises the process. The Adjudicating Authority can convert a defective CIRP into a regular CIRP. The timelines are compressed (150 days, extendable once).

If constitutional courts rule timelines to be directory, the original purpose of having a timeline is lost

Exporters must gear up as US steps up fraud check

Getting tariff classification, country of origin, or product valuation wrong can trigger enforcement action

Nikhil Varshney
Kritika Agrawal

Recently, the head of the US Department of Justice (DOJ) criminal division, Matthew Galeotti, issued a memorandum titled "Focus, Fairness, and Efficiency in the Fight Against White-Collar Crime", articulating the Trump administration's white-collar priorities and revised corporate enforcement policies. The memorandum details the aggressive crackdown on trade fraud. Historically, as India has been a large exporter of goods to the US, the memorandum is poised to have a significant impact on Indian exporters.

The international trade compliance landscape has shifted dramatically since the DOJ formed the Market, Government, and Consumer Fraud (MGCFF) Unit to focus on the investigation and prosecution of tariff evasion, expanded the implementation of the False Claims Act (FCA) to pursue trade violations, as well as the establishment of a specialised Trade Fraud Task Force (Task Force) in August 2025. The DOJ is also offering cash rewards to whistle-blowers who report



VITAL. Precise documentation

trade violations. Under a new Whistleblower Awards Pilot Program, informants can receive financial compensation if their tips lead to forfeitures of \$1 million or more. This creates strong incentives for employees and competitors to report suspicious practices.

BIG IMPACT

The impact which the Task Force is going to have on the Indian exporters can very well be crystallized through some examples. In 2013, generic drug manufacturer Ranbaxy USA, which is a subsidiary of Ranbaxy Laboratories Ltd based in India, pleaded guilty to the allegations of felony in relation to manufacturing and distribution of certain adulterated drugs which were sourced from their Indian facility and

sold in the US. They had knowledge of adulteration and even then, went forward to make false claims and were eventually indicted.

In a recent clampdown by the DOJ, DRI Relays Inc, a subsidiary of TE Connectivity Corporation, faced allegations of violating FCA regarding the supply of military parts (mainly electrical relays and sockets) to the US Department of Defence, manufactured in their facilities based in Long Island, New York and Bengaluru.

These cases show how the US is focusing on the implementation of America First trade policy. Companies now face scrutiny across all sectors, with authorities demanding complete accuracy in documentation and transparency in operations.

Indian exporters are now required to accurately report three key data points: tariff classification, country of origin, and product valuation. Getting any of these wrong can result in underpaid tariffs and trigger enforcement action. With tariff rules changing rapidly, staying compliant has become imperative and increasingly challenging.

Consider a typical Indian manufacturer sourcing ingredients from China, processing them in multiple

by up to 45 days). A moratorium may only be ordered by the Adjudicating Authority.

This seeks to bypass tribunal congestion and give creditors a quicker, lower-cost route. But practical risks are real — duplication, information asymmetry, conversion into full CIRP and attendant litigation could defeat the purpose. Its success will turn on careful implementation and sufficient judicial restraint.

Two long awaited measures now appear.

Chapter V-A (Group Insolvency): provides for common Benches, transfer of related proceedings, appointment of a common insolvency professional and coordination between CoCs. Key terms such as "control", "group" and "significant ownership" are defined.

Cross-border insolvency: empowers the Government to prescribe the manner and conditions for conducting cross-border insolvencies for notified classes of debtors.

While both are welcome, much of the substance has been left to delegated legislation. Given the commercial and geopolitical stakes, the heavy-lifting deserved a place in the Code itself rather than being left to subordinate rules.

The Bill recognises and addresses the adversarial turn the IBC has taken. A new section 183A, authorises penalties ranging from ₹1 lakh to ₹2 crore for frivolous or vexatious proceedings. While financial deterrents of this order are necessary, a steep pre-application deposit with threat of forfeiture in case it was found frivolous, could have been considered.

THE CHALLENGES

The Bill is comprehensive, but its effectiveness is certainly not guaranteed. Timelines will remain notional unless the courts hold them to be mandatory. If constitutional courts rule timelines to be directory, the original purpose of having a timeline is lost.

Similarly, leaving the technical architecture of group and cross-border insolvency to delegated rules risks weakening certainty. Structural reforms of this scale should be anchored in the statute itself.

The Amendment Bill, 2025, is well-crafted and thorough. It corrects judicial deviations, restores creditor hierarchy, codifies the clean slate, disciplines liquidation, and introduces measures for creditor-initiated, group, and cross-border insolvency.

But intent alone is insufficient. The law will work only if the stakeholders approach it with the discipline Parliament has prescribed. Deadlines that are treated as directory are no deadlines at all.

The writer is a lawyer and former Judicial Member of the National Company Law Tribunal

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Support MFIs

Apropos 'Funding microfinance' (September 17), microfinance has shown remarkable resilience in the face of repeated crises, yet today it struggles for survival as banks and financial institutions tighten their lending. Starving MFIs reach only the poor households that rely on them for small, unsecured credit to sustain livelihoods. The sector does not need reckless lending but fair and timely support backed by stronger borrower assessments, disciplined handling of non-core loans, and expansion into under-served districts. Microfinance

is not charity — it is a proven engine of grassroots growth. Strengthening it with adequate funding will empower millions while ensuring financial inclusion becomes more than just a slogan.

A Mylami
Chennai, TN

Classification of REITs

This refers to the editorial 'REIT, but not enough' (September 17). SEBI's move to classify Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs) as equity investments, though seen as progressive, may fall short unless structural issues are addressed.

While mutual funds gain a new avenue for growing inflows, the inherent risks of real estate could spill into the portfolios of retail investors. Unlike conventional equities, REITs depend heavily on rental yields, occupancy levels, and the cyclical nature of the property market. Any slowdown in commercial real estate or an increase in interest rates could quickly erode returns, leaving mutual funds exposed to volatility under the guise of diversification. In India, REITs remain at a nascent stage, with only a handful of players, limited depth and liquidity compared to global markets.

By placing them under the equity category, SEBI risks overstating their risk-return profile — a misleading move. Moreover, increased fund flows into REITs may inflate valuations without a corresponding improvement in underlying assets.

Lakshmi Narayanan
Pune, TN

Crop imbalance

This refers to 'Oilseeds area down as farmers shift to maize, rice' (September 17). This trend of frequent change in cropping pattern is a cause for concern in the absence

of data-driven crop rotation and restriction policy, which Telangana successfully implemented in 2021. Agri varieties and KVKs must get down to the field and guide the farmers on the selection of crops based on market demand and geographical conditions, with due consideration for unpredictable weather.

Any decision merely based on farmers' choice may severely impact prices which in turn hurts farmers' finances, and applies to both kharif and rabi crop seasons.

Rajni Magal
Hosur, Karnataka

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

— Ramnath Goenka

INTERIM VERDICT ON WAQF AMENDMENTS OFFERS A MIXED BAG

WHEN former Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna first heard the challenge to the Waqf Amendment Act 2025 on April 16-17, he proposed interim restrictions on its contentious features that were agitating sections of the Muslim society. But the Centre dodged the bullet by buying more time to argue its case. One of the restrictions Justice Khanna proposed was that properties declared by a court as waqf would not be denotified or treated as non-waqf, whether or not it is 'waqf by user'. Second, findings by Collectors on the legality of waqf properties would not be acted upon till the disposal of the case. And finally, a few *ex officio* members can be appointed to waqf boards and councils, but all other members must be Muslims. With Justice Khanna retiring midway, the matter went to a new bench headed by present Chief Justice B R Gavi, whose interim verdict refused to stay the law but paused a few of its sections.

While Justice Khanna intended to protect the concept of 'waqf by user' at least partially, the interim verdict upheld the provision to axe 'waqf by user' prospectively. It also found the requirement of registration of all 'waqf by user' properties valid, pointing out that the provision was made mandatory in the 1923 Waqf Act itself. On the question of empowering the Collector to quash the waqf status of a property if he determines it illegal, the bench suspended the provision, saying officers cannot be judges in their own case; the adjudication has to be judicial or quasi-judicial. As for the appointment of non-Muslims to state waqf boards and the central waqf council, the bench left the door ajar with a cap on induction. Another clause vehemently opposed by the petitioners was the prescription of five years as a practising Muslim for eligibility to create a waqf. The bench did not see it as arbitrary, but hit the pause button since rules to identify a practising Muslim are yet to be framed.

A waqf is an endowment made by a Muslim individual for charity or religious purposes and is irreversible. Rampant mismanagement necessitated their regulation since 1923. Given that the interim verdict is a mixed bag, triumphalism from any quarter would be out of place. With the truncated law kicking in soon, its fallout will be keenly watched.

PREVENTION BEST WAY TO CURB KILLER AMOEBA

Naegleria fowleri, an amoeba measuring mere 10-15 micrometres in diameter, poses a potentially deadly challenge to health authorities nationwide after having taken 17 lives in Kerala this year. The amoeba is known to enter through the nose and cause primary amoebic meningoencephalitis (PAM), an infection that destroys brain tissues. That's the reason behind its common reference as the 'brain-eating amoeba'. The symptoms start a few days after the infection, with early signs presenting fever, headache, nausea and vomiting, and advanced symptoms expressing in the form of stiffness in the neck, seizures, confusion, hallucination and coma. The PAM infection is rapidly progressive and very aggressive, with patients dying between five and 18 days after the onset of symptoms. The fatality rate is as high as 97 percent, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Unfortunately, awareness about the infection is low given its limited incidence. However, the population's vulnerability to *Naegleria fowleri* cannot be underestimated. This amoeba enters the body usually during swimming or diving, activities commonly indulged in across rural and urban India wherever wells, ponds, lakes and pools exist. Many of these hold contaminated warm water—which is ideal for this amoeba to thrive—and unsuspecting swimmers would remain exposed to the threat.

Treating PAM is a major challenge. Although a combination of medicines is used to treat this infection, it is seldom successful unless done in the very early stages of the infection. This is mainly because of the blood-brain barrier preventing the drug from reaching the affected areas—a protective barrier made of tightly-packed endothelial cells in the brain's blood vessels that regulate the passage of substances. However, the *Naegleria fowleri* amoeba can be destroyed in the water itself with chlorination or ultraviolet light.

This puts the onus on prevention. But for that, the entire health machinery—at the Centre, across the states and at the taluk level—needs to be involved in systematic inspection of water bodies to test samples and treat the water, if needed, to eliminate the possible presence of the deadly amoeba. At the same time, the research for more effective drugs to treat the deadly PAM needs to be intensified. The time to act is now, in the season the threat increases.

QUICK TAKE

A MORAL RECKONING

TWO schoolfriends who opened shop in 1978 after taking a \$5 correspondence course together and went on to build a multinational brand worth hundreds of millions of dollars announced on Wednesday that they were parting ways. Ben & Jerry's co-founder Jerry Greenfield has quit their eponymous ice-cream company, partner Ben Cohen announced, as the parent Unilever had "silenced" Jerry's attempts to call Israel's Gaza carnage a genocide. As it happens, the announcement came a day after a three-member expert panel set up by the UN Human Rights Council officially recognised genocidal intent in Israeli leaders' and forces' actions in the Palestinian enclave. Even if agonisingly slowly, the long arc of the moral universe might just be bending towards justice.

IN the complex tangle surrounding the conflict in Ukraine, things are moving in the direction that Russian President Vladimir Putin would have, conceivably, told Prime Minister Narendra Modi in strictest confidence during their 50-minute conversation while travelling together in the Aurus Senat, the presidential limousine retro-styled after the legendary ZIL used by Soviet leaders. They were heading towards their September 1 meeting at the American luxury hotel Ritz-Carlton in Tianjin, China, where the Russian delegation was staying.

For Putin, it must have been a moment out of the *Psalms*: "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputes no guilt, in whose spirit is no deceit." As a deeply religious man, it must have been of the utmost criticality for Putin to hold Modi's hands away from the prying eyes of western intelligence at a sensitive juncture when India had come under immense pressure "just as in the colonial era", as he later told a small group of Russian journalists in Beijing.

Putin told the journalists, "You know, when people from outside say 'We are going to make things hard for you and punish you...' How are the leaders of these countries (India and China)—large economic powerhouses which have lived through very rough periods in their history, periods of colonialism and attacks on their sovereignty over a long historical period—supposed to react to that?"

Anyway, it took just a few days after the ride in Putin's limo for the US President Donald Trump to make his first overture to Modi on September 5, when he told reporters at the White House, "I will always be friends with Modi. He is a great prime minister. India and the United States have a special relationship. There is nothing to worry about." That was an incredible turnaround in international diplomacy. But clearly, Trump's mind was already turning and turning in a widening gyre as he had written on his Truth Social post the previous day that India and Russia had been "lost" to "deepest, darkest China"—adding, unflappably, in his characteristic prose style of massive ellipses that often give his words the ring of an oracle: "I don't think we have. I get along very well with Modi. As you know, he was here a couple of months ago, we went to the Rose Garden."

Modi kept his part of the bargain with Putin and is skipping the UN General

Things have turned around remarkably since Putin and Modi rode together in Tianjin, with Trump warming up towards India soon after. Much depends on how the US manoeuvres Europe

FROM A LIMO CHAT TO A SPECTACULAR DIPLOMATIC TURN

M K BHADRAKUMAR

Former diplomat



eral Assembly, which Trump is certain to address. Highlighting Delhi's close ties with Moscow, an Indian contingent is participating in the Russia-Belarus Zapad-2025 military drills to test the two countries' combat readiness amid growing tensions with NATO.

The events surrounding Ukraine are in a torrential flow. Trump has cracked the whip at the European Union and NATO, who were punching above their weight since his meeting with Putin in Anchorage on August 15, which was a turning point. Trump and Putin had agreed that a ceasefire in Ukraine should be sequenced after a peace settlement, rather than be a 'standalone' putatively heart-warming pause in the fighting, fragile and fraught.

So, the fighting in Ukraine may likely run its course through the year—

that is, unless the regime in Kyiv collapses, or has a change of heart and engages with Russia. The latter is predicated on the willingness of the Machiavellian interventionists of Western Europe to let Kyiv go, or are driven out militarily from Ukraine.

Trump is striving hard to put the EU and NATO on the defensive.

The European allies aimed to disrupt the momentum of the Anchorage accord and pull aside Trump from his agreement with Putin by floating the idea of a US-led 'security guarantee' for Ukraine. But Trump saw through the EU ploy to prolong the war and shot it down. Thereupon, the EU came up with Plan B in the nature of imposing draconian sanctions against Russia, in coordination with Washington, with the expectation that it will

enrage Moscow and prompt it to escalate the conflict, which of course eminently suits NATO and the hardliners in EU leadership.

But Trump already had a riposte in mind. Sensing that the EU and NATO hardliners in Brussels are moving in tandem to undermine any Russian-American 'entente cordiale' in the endgame in Ukraine, Trump switched to what New York business houses might call the 'judo business strategy'—that is, no biting, punching, kicking, gouging, or even head-to-head struggle, but to simply move sideways to bring the highflying Brussels hawks 'in'.

In a stunning manoeuvre, Trump threw his weight behind Plan B to impose "very strong" sanctions on Russia but added a caveat—the EU should first stop all energy imports from Russia; impose 100 percent secondary sanctions on China; and all NATO member countries should also fall in line. There lies the catch, since out of the 27 EU member states only 23 are in NATO, and six European states are NATO members but not of the EU (and they include Turkey, which is heavily dependent on Russian energy supplies).

In reality, Trump's offer to the EU is a feint, a zigzagging, a manoeuvre—what you will—designed to distract and mislead. His conditions are unlikely ever to be met. *Politico* has run a scorecard on Trump's ruse, as things stand at the moment, and predicted that the conditions are actually deal breakers. Trump's game plan is to create space and time to navigate the peace process with Putin, going forward. He intends to speak with Putin shortly. There's going to be a formal ministerial meeting on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York as well.

Meanwhile, Fortuna, the ancient goddess of luck in Roman religion, is smiling at Trump, as the troika that masterminded Europe's forever-war strategy in Ukraine—France, Germany and the UK—are descending into political and economic chaos.

Trump judged correctly that even 80 years after the Second World War, Europe's security still rests on the American president to backstop it. He has forced the EU to postpone indefinitely its package of sanctions against Russia. Having tasted success, Trump hopes to frog-march Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to the negotiating table. On Tuesday, he insistently repeated several times like an oracle: "Zelenskyy's gonna have to make a deal."

(Views are personal)

FEAR AND LOATHING IN KIRKLAND

KAJAL BASU

Veteran journalist

F the conservative estimate of 80 political assassinations that have been committed in the US since 1815—things were relatively quiet in the four decades after independence—some stand out as infernally consequential. "Infernally" because nothing good has ever come of assassinations, a simple historical lesson that seems to continuously elude Americans who dip into their stash of weaponry—with arms outnumbering citizens 1.2:1—whenever the rage of reflex and reflection descends upon them.

Of the six assassination attempts and two successful assassinations of American political figures in the 21st century, the recent killing of alt-right maven Charlie Kirk stands out as the second-most consequential: the first being the attempted assassination of Donald Trump, which arguably propelled him into the Oval Office.

Kirk's murder is important not only for the *brutalité des citoyens* it has re-introduced into the public arena, but also for the range of truly *outré* reactions it has elicited from public figures and the social-media populace.

There are cautionary words from leftist and centrist luminaries, awkward carousing from liberals, remissness of prudence from rightist commentators asking to blame less the king on whom Trump routinely calls "the radical left Democrats", and outright incendiaryism from rightwing trolls who seem to have been energised into an uncharacteristic anti-Israelism by Kirk's putative *ante-mortem* disenchantment with Israel's genocide in Gaza and, more importantly, by the fear that Netanyahu's trademark confidence in himself but also taken over Capitol Hill itself.

Following Kirk's assassination, the US is a mess of belief vs belief, opinion vs opinion, conviction vs conviction—all precariously perched over the precipice of interecne conflict unheard of in a century. A 2009 study 'Hit or Miss? The Effects of Assassinations on Institutions and War' (*American Economic Journal: Macroeconomics*), examined the assassinations of national leaders between 1875 and 2004. It found that the US, the Dominican Republic and Spain vied for the highest number. There was an assassination of a world leader in nearly two out of three years 1950 onwards. But the US has had the maximum number of sig-

nificant political assassinations—four presidents, 12 members of Congress, four governors, 34 state legislators, nine mayors, three city council members, and three politicians who held no office.

The day after Kirk was shot, the common refrain among commentators was variations of "This is not who we are." This refusal to see assassinations as endemic cut across the political spectrum. Liberal politicians such as Bernie Sanders, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Joe Biden and Barack Obama were as guilty of self-acquittal as Republican fire-breathers. The influential and respected performer Whoopi Goldberg, not



attacks that inspired fear among European royalty. The period was rife with rumours of assassination. The mere hint of conspiracy to commit political murder caused distress and anxiety at every European court. As monarchs, state ministers and police authorities grew concerned, so too did society at large. Assassination attempts provoked mass public demonstrations of loyalty to the state, with crowds gathering in their thousands to sing patriotic hymns, to illuminate and flag their streets, and to convene religious services and vigils."

All this reads so post-Kirkish. Charlie Kirk was a chilling public figure—a smooth-talking racist, white supremacist, gun advocate, homophobic, transphobic, misogynist, anti-abortionist, Israelist, genocide-denier. Every ill of illiberality could be traced to his doorstep. But he was a Trumpista par excellence. Trump ordered flags at half-mast following his killing; he will give him the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the US's highest civilian honour; a statue of his will be erected in Washington DC.

Meanwhile, a right-wing website has revealed the names, addresses, and other private details of 40,000 critics of Kirk. Doxing is illegal across the world. The website was shut down once, but has cropped up again and promises to keep alive by skipping across the pond of legality.

The superfactory of 'othering' in the US is ratcheting up. Even as the Indian American director of the FBI, Kash Patel, borrowed neo-Nazi symbolism to declare he would meet Kirk 'in Valhalla'—the white supremacist heaven of eternal boozing, booze and battle—Utah Governor Spencer Cox went full racist: "For 33 hours, I was praying that if this had to happen here, that it wouldn't be one of us—that somebody drove from another state, somebody came from another country. Sadly, that prayer was not answered the way I hoped for."

Anti-immigrant, Islamophobic dog-whistling parading as a requiem is Kirk's America.

(Views are personal) (kajalbasu@gmail.com)

MAILBAG

WRITE TO: letters@newindianexpress.com

Women's right

Ref: Political parties can't wash their hands of PDSH (Sep 17). The apex court's dismissal of the plea runs contrary to the spirit of the 106th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2023 (Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam). The absence of an independent grievance redress mechanism significantly hampers the freedom to voice dissent.

Anwesha Mishra, Bhadrak

Hate crimes

Ref: Extend protection to Indians abroad (Sep 17). US President Donald Trump's unrelenting anti-immigrant rhetoric might have fuelled the recent brutal crime in Texas. This barbaric warrants immediate attention on immigrants' safety abroad. While thinking the foreign countries for their reception, immigrants should also be protected from hate crimes.

DSethuraman, Chennai

Profit motive

Ref: Cricket feels chill of India-Pak freeze, other sports hang in balance (Sep 16). The India-Pakistan Asia Cup 2025 clash in Dubai wasn't cricket—it was a cash grab that mocked our nation's resolve. Empty seats in Dubai screamed boycott, yet the match went on, prioritising profit over the victims' pain.

Nikita Rhea, Bengaluru

Neighbourhood duties

Ref: Nepal's lesson: Use youth fury for renewal (Sep 17). The recent upheaval in Nepal is a clear testimony of political leadership's inability to lead the youth and address their anger. Humanitarian measures must be similar to the ones taken for Sri Lanka, as Nepal looks up to us.

Jalishan N, Kengeri

Doon doom

Ref: Science to save the Himalayas (Sep 17). The extreme climatic event in Dehradun has laid bare the ill-effects of indiscriminate and unchecked human activity in the Himalayas. The time is ripe to listen to the sound advice of experts in order to avert any such environmental tragedies.

Praveen Martis, Vellore

Personal chemistry

Ref: Trump greets PM hours after 'positive' trade talks (Sep 17). The US President's welcome to the Indian Prime Minister ahead of his 75th birthday is a good augury. This may be useful for patching up the ill will between the two countries. The bonhomie between the two leaders should be further firmed up at a tariff deal is sought.

HP Murali, email

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Modi at 75

India has made big strides under his leadership

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi's 75th birthday is both a personal milestone and a significant landmark for the country he has been leading for the past 11 years. He chose the special occasion on Wednesday to make a strong pitch for *swadeshi* goods. His request to 140 crore compatriots was simple — whatever you buy, it should be made in our country and "should bear the sweat of some Indian". *Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas, Atmanirbhar Bharat, Viksit Bharat* — these slogans have come to define his short-term and long-term goals for India. The recent GST reforms underscore the willingness to do course correction for improving the lives of people. The targeted welfare schemes rolled out by his government have particularly benefited the poorest of the poor.

A leader with tireless energy, it's the toughest challenges that have demonstrated his resilience, be it the Covid-19 pandemic, the India-China border standoff or the Uri-Pulwama-Pahalgam terror attacks. According to the highest priority to national interest, PM Modi has shown firmness, drawing admiration from major world leaders. US President Donald Trump's tariff onslaught has failed to deter India from buying Russian oil — this is because the PM has put his foot down and refused to succumb to pressure.

In a war-ravaged world, PM Modi has impressed upon the international community that India's global conduct is rooted in the principle of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (the world is one family). It is thanks to him that both India and the Global South have a powerful voice today. With the retirement debate put to rest, the PM has reiterated his determination to take the fast-rising nation forward with renewed vigour. However, even he would admit that some obstacles need to be surmounted. The ambitious march towards self-reliance and global ascendancy rests on peace, harmony and a feeling of togetherness in India, that is Bharat.

RTI woes

Vacancies, delays stall citizens' right to know

WITH the Right to Information Act, 2005, completing 20 years next month, it should have been a moment of celebration for a law that democratised governance by arming citizens with the power to demand accountability. Instead, the RTI regime stands weakened. It is plagued by vacancies, delays and institutional neglect. The Central Information Commission (CIC), the apex body meant to enforce the law, is headless for the seventh time in 11 years. Thousands of appeals and complaints languish in the backlog and appointments of commissioners remain mired in systemic delays. The RTI Act promises citizens information within 30 days — or within 48 hours if life or liberty is at stake — yet today many applicants wait over a year for hearings, making a mockery of the law's intent.

Despite repeated nudges from the Supreme Court, the Union government has shown scant urgency in filling posts at the CIC and state commissions. In practice, this has effectively denied citizens the timely information the Act guarantees. The drift is not limited to appointments. Legislative and administrative moves — from diluting the tenure and status of information commissioners to the expansion of data protection laws that could override RTI — have narrowed the scope of transparency. Technical barriers, such as clunky online portals and poor digital infrastructure, further deter applicants. The result is a regime where the burden of secrecy is once again shifting onto citizens, rather than on the state to justify non-disclosure.

Yet, the spirit of RTI remains alive in those who continue to file applications, often at personal risk. To honour that spirit, the government must restore the commissions to full strength, ensure proactive disclosures by departments and protect the Act from legislative dilution. Otherwise, one of its most important democratic achievements of the country risks withering into irrelevance.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 1925

Extorting apologies

IT has seldom been our lot to come across a more extraordinary judgment than the one delivered by Pandit Sri Kishan, Magistrate (first class), Amritsar, in the case against Bhakur Singh, editor, and Bhai Hari Singh, printer and publisher of the *Qasmi Dard* of Amritsar. The Magistrate has convicted the accused under Section 124-A, IPC, and sentenced each of them to two years' rigorous imprisonment and a fine of Rs 200, or in default of payment of fine to a further period of six months' rigorous imprisonment. The prosecution was based on a notification titled, "*Muafi mangana da nawan dhang*" (the new method of extorting apologies) issued by the Akali Dal and published in the newspaper. The article purported to describe the tortures to which Akali prisoners in Nabha were alleged to have been subjected in order to extort apologies from them. The accused pleaded that the allegations made in the article were correct and they were perfectly within their rights in publishing those facts with a view to obtaining redress for a public grievance. In order to prove the truth of the allegations about the treatment of Akali prisoners in Nabha, they filed a list of 100 defence witnesses, of whom the Magistrate refused to summon as many as 97, and called only three, two of whom were doctors who stated that they had examined the sick or injured persons who had returned from Nabha, while the third was Dr Kitchlew, who deposed to having been present at the firing at Jaito and stated that the facts contained in the article were correct.

Despair, desperation over jobs in Bihar

The state's youth find it hard to avert unemployment due to lack of opportunities



BARELY had the dust settled on Rahul Gandhi's Voter Adhikar Yatra in Bihar that Gen Z youth staged protests in neighbouring Nepal and overhrew its government. The leaderless Nepalese protesters expressed their disgust at corruption, the government's authoritarian ban on social media and a lack of concern for youth aspirations and public welfare. They targeted the 'nepo kids', the children of the rich who led an extravagant lifestyle, while the ordinary youth suffered.

In Bihar, Rahul's yatra pushed the issue of democratic accountability in the people's court, even as Bihar boys spouted the slogan of '*padhaai-kamaai-dawaai*' — education, employment and healthcare.

The similarity of issues, the timing and the geographical proximity of a state and a nation lead to several questions about resentment of the youth against indifferent rulers. Can we understand the chum in Bihar politics through the prism of the Nepal protests? Have unemployment and widening inequality, combined with democratic backsliding, emerged as decisive factors in tipping the political scales? And what lessons does poll-bound Bihar draw from the upheaval in the neighbourhood?

Drawing on three years of ethnographic work in an urban gali in Patna, I have gathered accounts of ordinary Bihar youth's struggle to avert unemployment. Youth unemployment has been very



MAKING A BEELINE: There is a mad scramble for government jobs in poll-bound Bihar.

high in Nepal — quoted to be upwards of 20 per cent — whereas it is claimed to be on the decline in Bihar and now stands at 10 per cent. Yet, Bihar youth find it hard to overcome the odds, with no opportunities for meaningful education in rural areas. They flock to urban galis in Patna, where low-cost coaching centres proliferate.

These centres lure subaltern aspirants with the guarantee of success in *bharati* (recruitment) for government jobs. The centres are run in the name of their 'sirs' — Bipin sir teaches English to rustic Biharis, Guru Rahman promises *daroga bharati* and Gaurami sir offers coaching in '*sampurna gun-it*' i.e. 'venture mathematics'. In the same gali, Samrat Ashok sir claims his lineage from the legendary Maurya dynasty ruler and offers a '*dhamaka bumper*' offer for his course pack — what was earlier priced at Rs 3,500 is now offered at Rs 500, exhorting students to enrol fast.

The king of the gali, how-

Coaching centres in Patna lure aspirants with the guarantee of success in recruitment for govt jobs.

ever, is Khan sir, a 'youth icon' who teaches with a pronounced vernacular accent, has his own YouTube channel and leads youth protests against paper leaks in exams for government recruitment. Over a thousand students sit through his lectures every evening,

while many more sit outside the classroom and pay attention to him on TV screens. Others simply hang around to beg for photocopies of his lecture notes as they cannot afford even the 'low fees' for coaching. I am told that there are millions of 'online' students who attend Khan's lectures on their mobile phones as they cannot afford the cost of living in Patna.

Dealing with unemployment is being accepted as an individual responsibility in Bihar (and elsewhere in India). Even as public sector employment is shrinking in neo-liberal India, its lure persists. It is seen as the only way out of the desperation of rural lives, immersed in hopeless agriculture.

The coaching 'sirs' themselves are unemployed young men of a senior generation, who are selling hopes to ordinary youth in a mad scramble for government jobs. Coaching is their self-employment and only avenue for self-respect in a society that stopped offering

social mobility opportunities a long time ago. Hopelessness, joblessness and desperation are all being managed in this informal coaching enterprise as a project of hope for youth aspirations.

The critical difference between Nepali and Bihar youth is the missing climate activist, the rapper, the DJ in the Patna gali. Instead, Bihar youth are drawn to markets built on the promise of success — a phenomenon in which poor people themselves accept the retreat of the State and rely on shadow markets to lead them on.

Political protests, even over genuine issues concerning the youth such as contractual entry into the Army as Agniveers, are perceived as risky ventures for unemployed Bihar youth. There is a chance that they will be arrested and get 'bad character' certificates from the police, rendering them permanently unemployable. Better to bear the ignominy and run the mile every morning as part of physical training necessary for *bharati*.

Before the break of dawn, I visit Patna's Gandhi Maidan — the city centre and nerve centre of its political history, replete with poetic calls for '*singhasan khaali karo, janata aati hai*' — lines of Rashtrakavi Dinkar which became the rallying cry for anti-Emergency youth crusaders in 1975-77. There, I find thousands being trained by physical training coaches. Many young aspirants jog barefoot in the race for employment. No songs, no poets and no time for the politics of protests for these Bihar youth. And Nepal is not even a 'guess question' in the coaching textbooks there.

In this backdrop, Rahul's yatra is an organised expression of the Opposition's voice. It occupies a civic space of dissent, foreclosing Nepal-like possibilities.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Unemployment is rarely considered desirable except by those who have not experienced it. — John Kenneth Galbraith

Homes are defined by grace & dignity

DINESH KUMAR

THE recent deluge in Punjab reminded me of the time when my village faced the fury of floods almost two decades ago. Our house stood on the outskirts, surrounded by lush-green fields, and was considered one of the safest. But as the water began rising, panic set in. Many villagers fled in search of safer ground. However, my grandmother refused to leave. She said firmly, "I would rather die in my home than leave it." We felt helpless, yet her determination prompted us to stay.

That night, when everyone was asleep, floodwater entered half of our one-acre house. As the water kept rising, our hearts sank deeper. We prayed endlessly. By dawn, the water began to recede, but what it left behind was not just mud and stains. It left scars etched on our walls, our belongings and our memories. The foul smell lingered long after refusing to leave. Finally, we had no choice but to tear the house down and rebuild.

Rebuilding was not easy. Ours was a joint family of four generations and the recent expenses of a wedding had already drained our resources. Everyone had ideas about architecture, interiors and design. But as was the unspoken rule, the final decision rested with the head of our family — my *Tanji*. His verdict was simple: the house would be rebuilt traditionally, reusing as much material as possible. There would be no extravagance.

This decision caused ripples of dissatisfaction. The eldest son in the family, deeply unhappy, left for the UK and never returned. Many criticised *Tanji* for being harsh, for not listening to others. I too, in my childish understanding, felt uneasy with his choice.

One evening, sensing my unrest, he spoke to me gently: "A person should not spend on a house to show off to society. Money once spent is gone forever. If the floods return, will we rebuild against our debt? I want to save enough so that if we must face this again, we can stand tall without fear."

At that time, I could not fully grasp his wisdom. But now years later, and with *Tanji* no more, those words echo in my heart and mind. His foresight has become my guiding light.

Today, as Punjab again grapples with devastation, I feel his advice is more relevant than ever. Families rebuilding their homes must be wise. This is not the time to be drowned by societal pressures or the temptation of showmanship. A house is not a monument to display wealth — it is a shelter and a source of dignity.

Poet Nissim Ezekiel wrote, "Home is where we have to gather grace." Grace does not come from grandeur but from resilience, simplicity and the love that binds a family within four walls. For the people of Punjab, rebuilding wisely today will ensure that tomorrow, even if nature tests us again, our homes and our spirits will endure.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Politicising cricket

Apropos of 'Silence of an India-Pak handshake': the decision of the Indian cricket team to refuse the customary handshake with Pakistan at the Asia Cup match in Dubai smacks of hypocrisy. If the intention was to register a protest against cross-border tensions, the appropriate course would have been not to play the match at all. Once the team chose to participate, avoiding a simple gesture of sportsmanship seemed unnecessary and sent confusing signals. A handshake would not have diminished our national stand; rather, it would have upheld the dignity of the sport and reflected maturity even in difficult times. True resolve should be demonstrated through clear policy decisions, not symbolic acts that risk being misunderstood. Respect on the field does not mean compromising firmness off it.

BS KAKKAR, JALANDHAR

A symbol of appreciation

Apropos of 'Silence of an India-Pak handshake': players the world over do not meddle in politics or hold any kind of bias based on race, religion, nationality, etc on or off the field. They exhibit exemplary courtesy and possess a feeling of belongingness towards the game. A victory is not everything in sports. On the contrary, the winning team or individual goes all out to extend a hand of friendship and express words of admiration for the opposing team or player for having played well as a gesture of goodwill. The BCCI should have boycotted the game if the players harboured bitterness against the rival team.

BM SINGH, AMRITSAR

Course correction to save hills

The government's decision to review certain road projects in Uttarakhand must mark the beginning of a broader course correction in the fragile Himalayan region. Unchecked road widening, tunnelling and deforestation have destabilised slopes, worsened landslide risks and aggravated the impact of extreme weather events. Roads are vital for connectivity, security and livelihoods, but they must be built with ecological sensitivity and scientific planning. The review of road projects should

therefore not be an isolated exercise but the start of a sustained commitment to balance development with conservation.

VANDANA, CHANDIGARH

Facilitate religious journeys

Apropos of 'double standards', in the arduous, devoted prayer to the benevolent God to bestow unobstructed visits to Sri Nankana Sahib and other gurdwaras. So, instead of blocking such visits, the Centre should facilitate the Sikh *jathas*' visit to Guru Nanak's birthplace and Kartarpur Sahib. Religious activities should not be viewed through a political lens but allowed keeping in view the sanctity of the faith. Whatever obstruction there is must be cleared at the earliest and such visits should be organised smoothly.

SUBHASH VAID, NEW DELHI

Selective security concerns

With reference to 'Double standards': the denial of a visit of Sikh *jathas* to Sri Nankana Sahib has hurt religious sentiments. Pilgrimage to Guru Nanak's birthplace is not leisure but a spiritual necessity for millions of Sikhs worldwide. Selective application of 'security concerns' while allowing sporting events reflects double standards. Faith must not be held hostage to politics. The Centre should urgently permit Sikh pilgrims and reopen the Kartarpur Corridor. The need of the hour is to respect sentiments of the Sikhs and Punjab to send a positive message of communal harmony.

PARVINDER SINGH, MOHALI

Same yardstick for all Waqf cases

Refer to 'Balancing act': when a government makes laws without consensus and discussions with stakeholders, the courts have to intervene. The apex court has maintained equilibrium between unreasoned religious autonomy and abuse of state regulation. There may be various disputed properties acquired by the Waqf boards or illegally occupied properties but the same yardstick cannot be used while considering different cases. There is still time to talk and build consensus.

WG CDR JS MINHAS (RETD), MOHALI

Letters to the Editor, typed in double space, should not exceed the 200-word limit. These should be cogently written and can be sent by e-mail to: Letters@tribuneindia.com

Punjab farmers need a crop insurance cover



SS CHAHAL
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UNIVERSITY OF AGRICULTURE
AND TECHNOLOGY, UDAIPUR

THE recent widespread and severe devastation caused by record-breaking floods in Punjab has once again accentuated the need for a comprehensive and sustainable crop insurance (CI) cover to adequately compensate for the damage caused to the poor peasantry, which has suffered multiple losses under challenging circumstances.

The kharif crops in about 4.3 lakh acres that were nearing the ripening stage have been badly affected. The farmers had already borne most of the input cost when the floods struck and there was no chance of sowing them again.

The Punjab government has announced an arbitrary compensation of Rs 20,000 per acre for those suffering more than 75 per cent loss. It is, however, yet to be clarified whether the limit of five acres is applicable, as was the case in 2023.

Every time, the announcement of such compensations is projected as a favour extended to the farmers; not

as their right. That is so because they have no protection by way of insurance. The reduced margins of profit due to a massive increase in the cost of cultivation discourage farmers or farmers' organisations from independently opting for crop insurance. Thus, it is imperative that the government supports CI.

In a bid to primarily save themselves from financial liability, the successive state governments have neither implemented the flagship Pradhan Mantri Rashik Bima Yojana (PMFBY) 2016 nor formulated its own crop insurance scheme for the state. The PMFBY was rejected because it assesses risk after grouping of irrigated and rain-fed areas, which results in higher premium and is to the disadvantage of the predominantly irrigated cropping areas in Punjab. Also, the condition of incurring a minimum of 40 per cent loss for initiating a claim is considered a very high threshold level. Further, the sum insured is not based on the full value of the crop; the limited amount calculated thereafter turns out to be too meagre and unviable.

Taking a village as a unit for making assessment rather than an individual insured field has also not gone well with the stakeholders in Punjab. In addition, the high premium for commercial and horticultural crops was another reason



LOSS: The kharif crops in about 4.3 lakh acres that were nearing ripening have been badly affected. PH

for the unacceptability of the Central scheme.

The present Punjab government has failed to take any decision on the implementation of the Central or its own scheme. This despite recommendations by the Agricultural Policy Formulation Committee constituted in 2023 to the state to launch its own farmer friendly scheme by generating a dedicated CI fund to support it.

Under the PMFBY — which covers risk from natural disasters during the entire crop cycle — the farmers pay 2% of the premium for kharif, 1.5% for rabi and 5% for annual commercial and horticultural crops. The remaining premium is paid by the Central and state governments. Initially, it was made compulsory for all farmers availing

Every time, such compensation is projected as a favour extended to the farmers; not as their right. That is so because they have no protection by way of insurance.

themselves of loans. But the 2020 amendments made it optional, along with introducing flexibility in calculating the sum insured, defining a timeline for the release of the premium and mandating multi-year contracts with insurers. Even then, the scheme has not gained popularity among farmers.

In 2016, as many as 27 states and UTs had implemented the scheme. This number reduced to 21 in 2024-25. Thus, while 5.7 crore farmers were insured in 2016-17, their number reduced to 4.19 crore in 2024-25. A similar shrinking trend was seen in area coverage under the scheme.

The disenchantment of the participating farmers stems from very low, frequently delayed or never-paid com-

ensation, which is usually calculated by computing the claim on the cultivation cost, not the market rates.

Pending subsidies from states is the major reason cited by the Centre for this grotesque situation. The states that have opted out or those that make delayed contributions say that it is a huge financial burden on them due to high premium rates, which many times exceed one-fourth of the state's agriculture budget of the year.

The procedure of crop cutting experiments (CCEs) for assessing crop loss has been widely criticised for its inherent inaccuracies and unreliability. Even the operational guidelines mention that the 'disputes on quality of yield data is a challenge in effective implementation of the scheme.' It is untrustworthy as the CCE process is not digitised or geo-coded and is carried out without data and photographic evidences.

Studies have highlighted that the guidelines have not been observed in letter and spirit and malpractices happen at different levels. Huge numbers of CCEs are needed to be carried out within the limited harvesting time, requiring a large number of trained and dedicated working hands; their insufficiency breed malpractices and inefficiency.

The accuracy of loss assessment is crucial for the success of any CI scheme. For that, there is a need to

upscale and introduce digital interventions and artificial intelligence technologies.

Integrating AI, GIS and satellite-based tools like YES-TECH (Yield Estimation System Based on Technology and CROPIC (Collection of Real-Time Observations and Photo of Crops) can replace unreliable manual assessments, bringing transparency, precision and timely claim settlements.

The time-consuming manual management of CCEs should be replaced with AI techniques to collect data quickly for yield estimation. It would also solve the problem of shortage of human resources. Integration of AI would also leverage the existing technology, reducing reliance on manual processes and minimising errors and, ultimately, ensuring timely and transparent claim settlements to the farmers.

Some lessons emerge from the recent floods. The extremely inadequate support extended to the flood-hit farmers negates the state government's notion of why it should pay the subsidy premium for any CI scheme when it can manage the situation through disbursement of cash or some compensation as and when required. The floods present it with an opportunity to formulate a viable and attractive CI scheme. Punjab may set an example by making it premium-free for small and marginal farmers.

When university professors stop questioning power



SHELLEY WALLIA
FORMER PROFESSOR, PANJAB
UNIVERSITY, CHANDIGARH

IN the increasingly bureaucratised and politically compromised landscape of Indian academia, institutes of higher learning present a telling microcosm. The erstwhile bastions of scholarly integrity and critical discourse have given way to a culture of administrative opportunism, wherein professors prioritise careerist advancement over intellectual pursuits.

This fetishisation of power has not only eroded rigorous scholarship and the prais of solidarity but also eroded the normative foundations of the academic profession.

What ensues is not merely a scramble for institutional prestige, but a betrayal of the university's *raison d'être* as a sanctuary of critical inquiry and moral accountability.

The ideals of academia, predicated on the pursuit of knowledge and the cultivation of dissenting voices, are being systematically dismantled, yielding to a culture of calculated complicity and uncritical acquiescence to dominant power structures.

The professoriate of today has largely abdicated its critical responsibility to scrutinise power, contest injustice and articulate unvarnished truths, regardless of their potential to disrupt dominant narratives.

Self-censorship has, therefore, emerged as a strategic mechanism for professional survival, wherein academics refrain from bearing witness against hegemonic power structures, aligning with resistance movements or contesting democratic erosion. This reticence is not born of intellectual lacunae, but of a fear that critique may imperil one's ascension in the administrative hierarchy.

Consequently, public pronouncements are circumspect, scholarly articles shorn of polemical fervour and few academics dare to venture into the fraught terrain of dissent. The resultant silence constitutes a betrayal of the professoriate's sacrosanct responsibility to interrogate power and champion intellectual freedom.

This is what Allen Benda diagnosed nearly a century ago in his landmark 1927 book, *The Treason of the Intellectuals*. He warned that when intellectuals align themselves with the political, rationalist or institutional forces of their time, they cease to be guardians of truth and, instead, become clerks or functionaries of the dominant order.

Their vision, once grounded in truth and moral universality, becomes subordinate to ambition and fear. Today, Benda's



NO DISSENT: Today the intellectual has been largely domesticated. SHANDEEP JOSHI

warning has become prophecy, with his words echoing with unsettling accuracy.

Edward Said, in *The Reith Lectures*, later published as *Representations of the Intellectual*, took Benda's thesis further, arguing that the true intellectual is not a bureaucrat of state or institution but an 'outsider' who resists 'co-optation' and speaks from a position of moral independence and critical irreverence to authority, even if it comes at a personal cost.

The intellectual is not servile to institutions but holds up the idea of dissent with a voice of moral indignation. 'The intellectual's role is to present alternative narratives,' Said insisted, 'to challenge orthodoxy to question.'

And this includes the ability to read the subtext of dominant discourses, to see through the

The resultant silence constitutes a betrayal of the professoriate's sacrosanct responsibility to interrogate power and champion intellectual freedom.

surface of official narratives and understand the structures of power and propaganda that sustain them.

For Said, the public intellectual's role is adversarial: to question received dogma and to refuse the comforts of complacency. An intellectual who chooses silence in the face of injustice, Said argues, becomes complicit in the very systems they should be critiquing.

Which brings us to Professor Noam Chomsky, whose idea of 'manufacturing consent' must be at the heart of any intellectual's ethical framework today. Chomsky, in exposing the mechanisms by which state and corporate power distort public discourse, teaches us that to accept dominant narratives at face value is itself a form of complicity.

The intellectual must resist the

seduction of consensus, looking askance and fearlessly asking what is left unsaid, whose interests are being served and what forms of violence are being camouflaged by language.

And what of the university, the site that is meant to house these intellectuals, nurture their courage and amplify their nonconformity? As Howard Zinn, radical American historian, argued, the university should never be a sanctuary for conformity.

It must be a space of widening horizons, a place where thinking moves beyond borders, beyond the code of belief and into the realm of moral possibility. Zinn reminded us that history itself must be written 'from below', from the standpoint of the oppressed, not the victors. Likewise, the university must be aligned not with state power or capital, but with the struggles for freedom, justice and truth.

Understandably, lecturing, writing and research are not neutral acts, but interventions in culture, politics and society aiming for liberation. And if not, they risk becoming handmaidens of the state.

Today, however, the intellectual has been largely domesticated. We, who would breathe life into the seminar gone sterile, the lecture apologetic, and the public statement abject.

Professors write in the language of bureaucrats, lecture like diplomats within the constraints of the overbearing

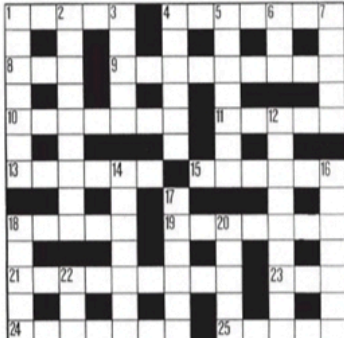
ideological environment and publish like acquiescent minions. The issues of our time demand a different response to the foundational questions of freedom and justice.

Thus, pressing questions about the role of academia in the contemporary moment, arise. How can we conceptualise freedom in an era marked by pervasive surveillance and authoritarian governance? What forms of justice can be envisioned in a society fractured by communalism and entrenched inequality? Where does the university stand in relation to such global crises as war, genocide and ecological collapse?

The absence of a robust critical voice from the professoriate is notable. If the professoriate fails to critique power and challenge dominant ideologies, the university risks becoming indistinguishable from the very structures it purports to critique. This raises fundamental questions about the purpose and function of higher education in a democratic society.

The redemption of intellectual authority necessitates a fundamental gesture of resistance, one that articulates a principled refusal to acquiesce to the dominant logic that subordinates intellectual integrity to ambition. This requires a critical interrogation of the quantification of knowledge, which reduces education to metrics and rankings and a steadfast defence of dissenting voices in the public sphere.

QUICK CROSSWORD



ACROSS
1 Swift (5)
2 Neck of land jutting into water (9)
3 Put on (3)
9 With great exactness (2,1,6)
10 Most important (7)
11 Group of eight (5)
12 Set in motion (6)
15 Be equivalent (6)
18 On the other hand (5)
19 Helicopter (7)
21 Be involved (4,1,4)
23 Double act (3)
24 Captivate (7)
25 Student (5)

DOWN
1 Far-reaching (7)
2 Neck of land jutting into water (9)
3 Discourage (5)
4 Child's bed on rockers (6)
5 Presenting unvaried appearance (7)
6 A bond (3)
7 Underground vault (5)
12 Falsely fabricated (7-2)
14 Fabled half-man, half-horse (7)
16 Utter confusion (7)
17 Hurried untidily writing (6)
18 Large enough (5)
20 Readily available (2,3)
22 Liable (3)

Yesterday's solution
Across: 1 Self-esteem, 8 Decor, 9 Regatta, 10 Verbosely, 11 Afoof, 12 Lately, 14 Height, 17 Offer, 19 Anguish, 21 Airless, 22 Armed, 23 Last resort.
Down: 2 Excerpt, 3 Foppo, 4 Survey, 5 Engrave, 6 Motto, 7 Far-fetched, 8 Devil to pay, 13 Largess, 15 Glimmer, 16 Kaiser, 18 Foul, 20 Glass.

SU DO KU

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

V. HARD

FORECAST

Yesterday's solution

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

CALENDAR
SEPTEMBER 18, 2025, THURSDAY

- Shaka Samvat 1947
- Bhadrapad Shaka 27
- Aashwin Purnimite 3
- Hijri 1447
- Krishna Paksha Tithi 12, up to 11:25 pm
- Shiva Yoga up to 9:37 pm
- Purnya Nakshatra, up to 6:33 am
- Moon in Cancer sign
- Gandmoola start 6:33 am

[OUR TAKE]

Beating tariffs with exports

Prioritising tariff mitigation and preparing for long-term economic growth is a sensible strategy at a time of global churn

Until US President Donald Trump announced his reciprocal tariffs in April this year and then went on to impose a massive additional 50% — it includes an unfair 25% tariff on account of India's import of Russian crude oil even though both China and Europe, bigger buyers of Russian energy, do not face any such tariff — India's policy focus was on export promotion. Exports were listed as one of the 10 key areas flagged in the 2025-26 Union Budget which also announced an Export Promotion Mission.

Things have changed drastically in the aftermath of the tariffs imposed by the US, which is India's largest export market and accounts for one-fifth of total merchandise exports. Any economic strategy that wants to promote exports has to first ensure that exporters suffer minimal damage. To be sure, India and the US have revived talks for a larger trade deal, and the climate seems to have improved, at least from early September.

It is in this context that HT's report about the government planning to frontload a part of the export promotion scheme announced in the budget to cushion exporters hit by US tariffs is important. While the details are still being worked out, this newspaper has reported that the programme will include both fiscal and non-fiscal (credit-related) measures, and a part of it could be targeted at protecting exporting firms from falling into crisis because of the immediate hit of the tariffs. Another part of the scheme will focus on long-term trade promotion and filling wider policy gaps going above and beyond simple mitigation from the US tariffs. Prioritising mitigation and preparing for long-term growth is indeed a sensible strategy at this juncture.

The impact of US tariffs is likely to be broad-based, and the affected parties could very well involve more than one layer of producers. These linkages must be kept in mind while designing and providing the support package. Last but not least, the ultimate relief could come not from fiscal or monetary packages, but from striking a deal with the US and expediting mutually beneficial trade deals with other important trading partners.

Gaza is burning, Israel must put out the fire

Israel has launched a ground assault on Gaza City, calling the operation "Gaza is burning". The irony is not lost on the world, including Israel's western allies, and may influence the deliberations when the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) meets in New York early next week. The UK, France, Australia, Canada and others are expected to recognise the sovereignty of an independent Palestinian State, an entity most other world nations, including India, already recognise. Tel Aviv can smugly dismiss these moves as inconsequential even as the toll mounts in Gaza. Close to 65,000 people have died since Israel Defence Forces launched a war following a terror strike by Hamas (IDF) in October 2023, and famine stalks the Palestinian homeland.

Tel Aviv has also dismissed a report by the UN's Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory that called out Israel's actions in Gaza as "genocide". Genocide is defined in the 1948 convention as the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group. Last week, the UNGA overwhelmingly backed a resolution (142 countries against 10) for a two-State solution in West Asia. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has repeatedly claimed that there will never be a Palestinian State. As of now, Netanyahu's confidence is well-founded. The UNGA resolution, the UN commission's description of IDF's Gaza operations as genocide, or the adverse rulings of the International Court of Justice will remain ineffectual unless the UN Security Council endorses them and calls for action.

That is unlikely because of the US veto: US secretary of state Marco Rubio, who visited Tel Aviv immediately after Israel's strikes within Qatar, a US ally, said that Washington backed Netanyahu's Gaza City offensive, indicating a congruence of positions. However, Washington should be advising Tel Aviv against furthering the catastrophe in Gaza if it cares for Israel. The implications of the current war are likely to extend beyond this phase and roll the region for decades, and turn Israel's own security precarious.

Big growth dreams for the country's small cities

Not all urban pockets are experiencing equally rapid growth. A common framework can help realise the "small cities as growth hubs" vision

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, at a Niti Aayog governing council meeting, urged state governments to focus on tier-2 and 3 cities as engines of sustainability and growth. He spoke of the Urban Challenge Fund (UCF) that will provide seed money. Are the small- and medium-sized cities in India ready to embrace such transformation? How can we spur, institutionalise and sustain growth in our tier-2 and 3 cities? Here, we suggest some orientations for policy, toward achieving such a goal.

The UCF, introduced in the FY26 budget, allocates ₹1 lakh crore over five years, with ₹40,000 crore set aside for the current fiscal, to fund projects in three priority areas: Cities as growth hubs, creative redevelopment, water and sanitation. The Centre will finance up to 25% of bankable projects, provided at least 50% of the funding comes from bonds, bank loans, or public-private partnerships (PPPs) via the UCF, with the remaining 25% expected from state governments. This incentivises partial public funding is likely to support many tier-2 and tier-3 cities. Budget FY24 established the Urban Infrastructure Development Fund (UIDF) with an initial corpus of ₹10,000 crore for tier-2 and 3 cities to become regional economic hubs. It covered 459 tier-2 cities and 590 tier-3 cities, with

city populations ranging between 50,000 and 9,99,999. Such a policy shift raises two pertinent questions. First, do we have a framework for identifying tier-2 and 3 cities with significant growth potential? Second, do we have a suitable operational model to bolster the urban economic growth process for making tier 2 and 3 cities India's new growth hubs? Tier-wise classification of cities is generally based on population size, which is no indicator of their growth potential. Tier-1 cities are the largest metropolises with a population of more than five million, such as Mumbai, Kolkata, Delhi, Chennai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad and Pune. Tier-2 cities have a population of one to five million, such as Visakhapatnam, Vadodra, Amritsar, Bhubaneswar, Mysuru, among others. Numerous tier-3 cities fall in the population range of 100,000 to a million.

However, all tier-2 and 3 cities are not experiencing equally rapid urban growth. They also do not have similar growth drivers, conditions of urban infrastructure and services, availability of skilled workforce, economic growth histories or governance arrangements to become growth hubs. Thus, a framework to identify tier-2 and 3 cities that can become growth hubs in the near future is needed. In the past, central schemes focused on small and medium towns that laid emphasis primarily on infrastructure development and basic services. Integrated Development Scheme for Small and Medium Towns (1979-80), Urban Infrastructure Development Scheme for Small and

Medium Towns (UIDSSMT, 2005) or Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT, 2015) are premised on infrastructure development catalysing economic growth.

Multiple factors are essential for the evolution of growth hubs and clusters, such as local specificity, availability of skilled sets, access to infrastructure-logistics, institutional arrangements including organisational capacity, enabling policy and regulatory conditions to foster private entrepreneurship, learning environments, effective planning, and resource management. The criteria for identification of tier-2 and 3 cities with growth potential must take into account multiple factors that spur and sustain growth.

A common approach to operationalise the tier-2 and 3 growth hubs programme must include the following considerations.

Growth-hub-specific planning: One-size-fits-all will not be the right approach for supporting growth hubs. All the cities falling in the two broad population size categories are likely to be different in many respects. Growth-hub-specific planning for various types of cities is necessary.

Shifting: The National Skill Development Corporation has a target for skilling 15 million disadvantaged socio-economic groups, including vocational capacity building programmes directed at continuing learning, innovation and skilling, which must be designed to meet specific skilling requirements of labour markets in tier-2 and 3 cities envisioned as growth hubs.

Access to infrastructure-logistics:

Pushpa Pathak

Champa Rajagopal



The criteria for identification of tier-2 and 3 cities with growth potential must take into account those factors that spur and sustain growth. HT ARCHIVE

Private entrepreneurship and investment potential, along with the incentive structure that would need to be put in place, are pre-requisites for the growth hubs programme.

Lessons from Niti Aayog's Growth Hub Initiative: In 2023, Niti Aayog launched the Growth Hubs Initiative in partnership with state governments. Four cities have been identified as pilots — Mumbai, Varanasi, Surat and Visakhapatnam. It will be scaled up to 16 city-regions. The design and implementation of these growth hub programmes can offer some insights for structuring and institutionalising the programme for tier-2 and 3 cities.

Technical support for investment proposals: Many tier-2 and 3 cities may not have the capacity to formulate their economic growth proposals to access funds from UCF and the UIDF. Therefore, state governments must allocate some funds in their growth hub programmes to enable these cities in getting technical assistance for this purpose, and mobilise urban research and action networks to build capacity.

Such measures can help operationalise the vision to make tier-2 and 3 cities India's new growth hubs in a way that proves fruitful and effective.

Pushpa Pathak is senior visiting fellow and Champa Rajagopal is fellow, Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi. The views expressed are personal

India-Russia ties and the heft of its history

One of the striking developments of the turbulence unleashed in the last six months, has been the re-evaluation of the India-Russia relationship. US President Donald Trump is not responsible for all of it, but he has certainly played a leading role in bringing this on. India-Russia relations have been fairly even in the past decade, and India did not allow its disquiet over the Russia-Ukraine war to affect the relationship. But now, the chill in India-US ties is generating a degree of warmth in our time-tested Russian relationship because the US coolness arises from Washington's efforts to end India-Russia ties.

Before Prime Minister Narendra Modi rode with President Vladimir Putin at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), national security adviser Ajit Doval and external affairs minister S Jaishankar visited Moscow on separate occasions in August. Their primary mission was to set the stage for the 23rd India-Russia annual summit for which Putin plans to travel to New Delhi later this year — the first time since 2021.

All this had nothing to do with the US. But it coincided with a somewhat ham-handed Trump effort to organise a ceasefire and peace deal between Russia and Ukraine. Despite bending over backwards to please President Putin, the US failed to work out a deal. In a bid to pressure Moscow, the US targeted Indian purchases of Russian oil.

Of late, White House trade adviser Peter Navarro has almost daily made wild accusations against India, including accusing the Russian campaign in Ukraine. And then there are the 25% tariffs on Indian exports to the US as "penalty" for buying Russian oil.

Despite good ties with the US and Europe, India did not join them in condemning the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Besides a long list of IOUs we owed the Russians, India was concerned that the Sino-Russian relationship cemented by this deal would be detrimental to our interests. Though India has been a major importer of Russian military equipment, its civil trade has been historically anemic, just about \$8-12 billion per annum in the years before the Ukraine war.

Since 2022, seeing opportunity in buying at discounted prices, India has increased its oil imports from Russia; this has bilateral trade rise to \$60 billion in 2024. Indian purchases were within the price-cap established by the western countries and were seen by them as serving the useful function of keeping global oil prices low.

Now, despite the heat from the Trump administration, India has sent its own signal by continuing purchases, buying some two million barrels per day (bpd) in August, up from 1.6 million bpd in July. Significantly, India has let it be known that Russian defence equipment played a stellar role in the four-day conflict with Pakistan in May.

Defence has played a major role in the India-Russia relationship. The Russians let us manufacture their

frontline Mig-21 in the 1960s, they were also the first to supply us conventional submarines. Both these items were denied to us our traditional western supplier at the time, the UK. With the help of Soviet "friendship prices", India was able to field a large and well rounded military with modern tanks, artillery guns, warships, fighter aircraft and the like. For example, the modern Kilo class submarine they sold to us for the equivalent of \$20 crore in the early 1980s, cost Iran \$200 million 10 years later.

In the 1990s, they agreed to let us manufacture their frontline Su-27 fighters and 7-90 tanks. More important was the BrahMos project for the redevelopment of their Oniks supersonic air, land, and sea-launched missile. Later, in the 2020s, India became the second country in the world to receive their highly capable S-400 surface-to-air missile system.

The making of the Arihant nuclear propelled submarine was perhaps the most important Russian assistance. Not only did the Russians help us with the design of the hull, but also the nuclear reactor to power it. They also assisted us a nuclear submarine so as to let us learn to build our own.

In recent years, the Russians have got into joint ventures to manufacture products like AK-403 assault rifles and spare parts. There is talk of the BrahMos being upgraded to a longer-range missile, based on the Sino-Russian system, and India acquiring the S-500. India is keen to make nuclear attack submarines and it is quite possible that it will once again depend on Russian "consultancy".

The weakness of commercial ties has prevented the relationship from reaching its full potential. This is evident from two long-range projects — the International North-South Transportation Corridor (INSTC) to link western India ports with Russia and northern Europe through Iran. The second is the Vladivostok-Chennai maritime corridor to link the energy-rich Russian far east with India.

The European blockade of Russia has finally begun to push it to develop its relations with the Global South, and India is seen as a bridge here. Russia has begun putting money to complete the INSTC already using the eastern arm of the corridor to promote trade with Central Asia.

Since the 1950s, relations between big powers — the US, Russia, China — and India have seen many permutations and combinations. But there is only one relationship that has been constant — between India and Russia.

All through, Moscow has backed India at key points in our geopolitical history — the Kashmir dispute, the war with China, the Bangladesh war, Kargil, and our war against terrorism. Russian policy has been to unreservedly back India in its most crucial region, South Asia. Clearly our ledger of international relations is weighted heavily on the side of Russia.

Manoj Joshi is distinguished fellow, Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi. The views expressed are personal

[POPE LEO XIV]

I renew my appeal for a ceasefire, for the release of hostages, for a negotiated diplomatic solution, and for the full respect of international humanitarian law

On the Israel-Hamas conflict

HT

Mapping the course to uplifting minority groups

India's growth story exemplifies the strength of its diverse population. As the world's fastest-growing major economy, India posted a remarkable 8.4% growth rate in FY24, despite global challenges. Further, India will be driving 20% of the world's economic growth in the next decade. Sustaining this growth demands an approach that is inclusive and empowers youth from all sections of society by providing equitable access to opportunities and resources. Minority communities, constituting nearly 19% of the population, represent an essential segment of India's growth story. This group is uniquely placed due to their aspirations shaped by their diverse socio-economic contexts. Addressing their needs is vital for ensuring equitable growth, further strengthening the nation's social fabric and economic dynamism.

The country's six notified religious minorities — Buddhists, Christians, Jains, Muslims, Sikhs and Sikhs — have been the cornerstone of all initiatives and efforts undertaken by the ministry of minority affairs (MoMA). With an umbrella of skills and education schemes, the ministry has been empowering minority groups to build an inclusive foundation for Viksit Bharat.

The recently launched PM Vikas Scheme is testament to the government's commitment to addressing the fundamental barriers faced by minorities and ensuring a path towards economic independence, educational advancement, and cultural preservation. The need for this was felt in the ministry's close engagements with minority communities, which underscored the need for targeted support for the youth, women, artisans and working-age groups in these communities.

The youth who leave formal education early for immediate wages and livelihoods are deprived of essential learning opportunities, diminishing their chances of acquiring employable skills and trapping them in low-paying jobs with limited pathways for upward mobility. By 2030, India will be home to one billion working-age adults, making employable youth a national priority. For a skilled labour pool can uplift families and, thereby, communities.

Women, often the most marginalised within minority communities, face compounded challenges such as balancing economic independence with societal expectations and domestic responsibilities. Many are deprived of education and skill development at a young age. Often

trapped in fulfilling household-centric expectations and duties, they have little opportunity to pursue personal or professional growth. Empowering minority women with targeted livelihood opportunities and avenues for self-development is crucial to breaking this cycle and fostering their socio-economic progress. India's vibrant cultural mosaic owes much to the talents of its minority communities; many members of these communities have traditionally engaged in artisanal occupations, including languages arts and crafts that are integral to India's Intangible Cultural Heritage. These crafts not only contribute to the national economy by generating employment and preserving cultural diversity, but also hold tremendous value for our social fabric. With the newer generations opting for modern occupations, ancestral skills are at the verge of extinction. Initiatives that revive traditional education and arts through an artisan-centric approach can re-position India as a global leader in the culture and heritage space.

Efforts to bring out-of-school students back into formal education through open schooling and skill development programmes can ensure that the youth make the best of the available opportunities. Notably, the school dropout rate for secondary education has declined significantly from 17.8% in 2014-15 to 12.6% in 2021-22. This improvement was realised because the Centre made bringing children back to schools and improving their career and livelihood prospects a country-wide agenda.

PM Vikas has been designed as a holistic response to challenges faced by the minorities by empowering them throughout their educational and livelihood lifecycle, providing them a solid foundation in education years, making them employable through skilling, supporting their traditional heritage and enabling them to prosper through employment and entrepreneurship opportunities with these efforts.

By addressing the challenges these communities face and providing them with the necessary tools and opportunities, the government's various initiatives, especially PM Vikas, will not only support in preserving India's rich cultural heritage but also pave the way for the realisation of Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas, Sabka Progress.

CPS Bakshi is chief commissioner of customs and joint secretary, the ministry of minority affairs. The views expressed are personal

THE IDEAS PAGE

Between profit and promise

With roots in socialism and a stake in capitalism, India's economic future lies in pragmatic reinvention



THAROOR THINK

BY SHASHI THAROOR

A RECENT GALLUP poll in the United States revealed a striking shift: Only 54 per cent of Americans now express a positive view of capitalism, the lowest since the survey began. Meanwhile, support for socialism has crept upward, particularly among younger voters. The "poster child" for this change is the front-runner for Mayor of New York, Zohran Mamdani, a self-proclaimed Democratic Socialist who swept the Democratic primary and speaks for immigrant communities and the under-class in that teeming city. The partisan divide is predictable — Republicans largely favour capitalism, Democrats are more open to socialism — but the deeper story is one of generational discontent. For many young Americans, capitalism feels like a system designed for the rich and the few, not the many.

This debate, though rooted in American politics, echoes globally — including in India, where the terms "capitalism" and "socialism" carry their own historical baggage. For decades, India's economic identity was shaped by Nehruvian socialism, a model that sought to combine democratic governance with state-led development. Public sector undertakings, planned economies, and a cautious approach to foreign investment defined the early decades of independence. The goal was not ideological purity, but national self-reliance and social equity.

Yet, by the early 1990s, the cracks were visible. Bureaucratic inefficiency, fiscal deficits, and a balance-of-payments crisis forced India to liberalise its "licence-permit-quota Raj". The 1991 reforms ushered in a new era of market-driven growth, foreign investment, and private enterprise. Capitalism, once viewed with suspicion, became the engine of India's economic resurgence. The middle class expanded, technology boomed, and India began to stake its claim on the global stage.

But as in the United States, the sheen of capitalism has begun to dull for many Indians. Rising inequality, jobless growth, and the concentration of wealth in a handful of corporate houses have sparked unease. The promise of liberalisation has prosperity for all; the reality, for many, has been precarity. Farmers protest against corporate control of agriculture. Gig workers demand basic protections. Young faces unemployment despite degrees. The system, they feel, is rigged in favour of the wealthy.

And yet, as in the American debate, the terms themselves — capitalism and socialism — often obscure more than they reveal. India today is neither a pure capitalist economy nor a socialist one. It is a hybrid, a messy amalgam of market forces and state intervention. We have private hospitals and public health schemes, multinational corporations and subsidised food grains, billionaires and welfare programmes. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), one of the world's largest social security initiatives, co-exists with stock market exuberance and



C R Sasikumar

start-up culture.

This blend is not accidental. It reflects a pragmatic recognition that neither extreme — unfettered capitalism nor doctrinaire socialism — can meet the needs of a diverse, populous, and aspirational society. The Indian state, like its American counterpart, has long socialised certain public goods — education, healthcare, food security — not out of ideological commitment, but out of necessity. The goal is not to abolish markets, but to temper them with compassion.

Still, the dissatisfaction is real. When young people in Noida or New York question capitalism, they are not necessarily calling for collectivised farms or five-year plans. They are expressing a yearning for fairness, for dignity, for a system that does not leave them behind. When they invoke socialism, they often mean a society where basic needs are met without anxiety, where opportunity is not hoarded, and where profit does not eclipse people.

This yearning is not new. The welfare states of post-war Europe were built not just to rebuild economies, but to rebuild trust. The National Health Service in Britain, for instance, was founded on the belief that healthcare should not be a commodity. Aneurin Bevan, its architect, argued that a capitalist society must socialise certain services to remain moral. In India, similar impulses shaped our early commitment to public education, rural development, and cooperative institutions.

What's changed is the vocabulary. Today's debates are less about ideology and more about outcomes. Does the system deliver? Does it protect the vulnerable? Does it reward effort without punishing misfortune? These are questions that transcend labels. And they are questions that India must confront as it charts its path forward.

The current framing of capitalism versus socialism is historically myopic. When the right warns that socialism leads to dictatorship, pointing to Venezuela or Stalinist Russia, they collapse a wide spectrum into its most extreme endpoint. When the left condemns capitalism as inherently exploitative, they overlook the ways in which modern economies have already absorbed socialist principles — through safety nets,

regulation, and redistribution. In India, the debate is further complicated by cultural and political factors. Our economic discourse is often entangled with identity politics, regional aspirations, and historical grievances. The idea of "social justice" carries different meanings in different states. The role of caste, community, and religion in shaping economic opportunity cannot be ignored. Nor can the legacy of colonialism, which left deep scars on our institutional fabric.

And yet, there is something hopeful in the very fact of this debate. It reflects a refusal to accept the status quo. It signals that people believe society can be better, that the economy can serve more than just shareholders, and that constructive change is possible. The magic of the market will not appeal to those who cannot afford to enter the marketplace. They know what it feels like to be excluded, and they know what it means to dream.

In the end, the labels matter less than the lived experience. Most societies today are hybrids — capitalist in structure, socialist in spirit. The challenge is not to choose one over the other, but to design systems that balance efficiency with empathy, innovation with inclusion, India, with its pluralism and pragmatism, is uniquely positioned to lead this conversation.

As we move forward, let us embrace the moral complexity of our economic choices. Let us resist the allure of purity and instead strive for balance. Let us recognise that satisfaction is not a threat — it is a sign of engagement. And let us remember that the goal is not to win an ideological battle, but to build a society where fewer people fall through the cracks.

In that spirit, the debate between capitalism and socialism is not a binary — it is a continuum. And India, like the rest of the world, must find its place along that spectrum, guided not by dogma, but by the lived realities of its people.

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Tharoor, fourth-term MP (Lok Sabha), is the Sahitya Akademi Award-winning author of 27 books, including *The Battle of Belonging: On Patriotism, Nationalism and What It Means to be Indian*

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The interim government, inherently weak as it is, cannot provide the long-term stability needed to tackle these challenges. Public confidence in governance in general seems quite low. The cost of a delayed democratic transition has also been evident in rising social unrest."

— THE DAILY STAR, BANGLADESH

When a poet is cancelled

West Bengal Urdu Academy should have engaged with Javed Akhtar, not closed itself off



NAJEEB JUNG

THE WEST BENGAL Urdu Academy has postponed, perhaps cancelled, a literary event that was to be attended by the Urdu writer and poet Javed Akhtar. Newspapers reported that from a section of Muslims who objected to Akhtar's past remarks. This mindless cancellation is particularly disheartening since it comes from Kolkata, a city with a long, proud tradition of argument and art.

Akhtar's personal views on religion are well known, but they have nothing to do with Urdu as a language. To link them to Islam or Muslims is a continuing folly promoted by right-wing interests that believe that Urdu's promotion in some way is promoting Islamic culture and is a continuation of the policy of Muslim appeasement that such groups believe successive governments of India have followed since independence. Therefore, the signal from a publicly funded body is chilling for curators, artists, poets, writers, public men and women. It is a tacit reminder of such groups protesting the writer Taslima Nasreen, participating in events in India, or, far worse, Hindu right-wing groups forcing MF Husain into exile. In this case, however, the loss is greater for Muslims who need greater civic and intellectual presence in the mainstream, not less. The community or those who stand by it cannot be left to constantly fight rear-guard actions against self-inflicted errors.

The Kolkata episode comes against the backdrop of some individuals, Muslim clerics, reaching out to the Hindu community, and the RSS Chief coming forward to meet these groups. The latter's speeches at a three-day conclave in New Delhi recently dealt significantly with moving forward on Hindu-Muslim relations. However, his answer to one of the questions in the Q&A that followed — that RSS members were free to follow their own wish when it came to act on the two disputed mosques at Kashi and Mathura disappointed many, in fact, causing much consternation among Muslims. Nonetheless, his initiative to improve the much-disturbed relations is laudatory and significantly different from the philosophy propagated by Sangh ideologues over the past 10 decades.

The time is high for Muslims to correct established opinions on the community. They must fight the impression that the community is conservative, parochial and lacks education, political and moral leadership. Today, there is no single voice from the community in India that Muslims will listen to. Therefore, the onus is on a collective group to keep speaking, keep writing. The way forward is to keep its own con-

trarian writers, to keep the doors open to fight the so-called "leaders" who assume that role in view of the paucity of such voices. The community is not a monolith — it includes the devout, the doubting reformists and the traditionalists; the Urdu wallahs and tech professionals and women's rights activists; left-oriented historians and intellectuals. They are all part of a magnificent collage that is struggling today because of its own contradictions. They face an unsalvageable government that seems committed to majoritarian dominance. Therefore, when an academy funded by a secular state acts as if only one theological reading confers the right to share a stage, it reduces Urdu's cosmopolitan soul and makes the tent smaller for the community.

Protecting free speech can feel uncomfortable when such speech offends. But even then, there is a pragmatic case for hosting contentious voices. Javed Akhtar's presence at the Kolkata festival would give people an opportunity to question him with vigour. A firm ground would have been set for fair, uninterrupted, tough questions, and he would have an opportunity to reply to critics and theologians point by point. Instead, now we have an unnecessary controversy and misgivings about the Muslim community, painting it with the same tainted brush as before. It bears repeating here that most of the powerful defences of Muslims' constitutional rights have come from a large liberal Hindu community, which is also embarrassed at such pointless and reckless actions. If moderate Hindus are to keep speaking up against discrimination, then Muslims must furnish them with adequate ballast to robustly defend their community.

The immediate fallout of this incident is an embarrassment for Muslims in India, Muslims in West Bengal and for the government of West Bengal that let this happen. This was a time when there was space — however contested — for national cultural power centres. Bhagwat's interactions with clerics and scholars may or may not bear fruit, and scepticism is reasonable. But engaging with those spaces, armed with data, case studies, and the moral authority of a community that permits debates within and without, gives reformers leverage. Stepping away from such engagement while simultaneously narrowing cultural participation within is a double mistake.

Here I am reminded of a couplet from Javed Akhtar's father, the late Jan Nisar Akhtar: *"Apne tareek maako se to baahar jhanko/ zindagi shayn hie dur pe khadi hai yaar"* ("Peep out of your dark homes/ life stands with a lamp at your door").

The choice before Muslims is stark. Oppose obscenity, resist nonsensical dictates and walk the path of modernity. Or, as George Santayana said: Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.

The writer is former vice chancellor, Jamia Millia Islamia, former IIT Governor, Delhi, and currently chairman, Advanced Study Institute of Asia



SHIKHA MAKAN

Carving out safety

Cinema can highlight single women's experiences in cities, broaden conversation

RECENTLY TWO INDIAN films, both directed by women, captured the attention of global audiences — *All We Imagine as Light* by Payal Kapadia and *Songs of Forgotten Trees* by Anupama Roy. Both films centre the lives of single women in Mumbai. That they resonated so widely is telling. Stories about women living unattached, outside the traditional structures of marriage and family, are finally finding their place on the world stage. For women filmmakers, this recognition is deeply rooted in the experience of exclusion, invisibility, and discrimination, especially as a migrant in a city. When I first moved to Mumbai a decade and a half ago as a single woman, I had little idea that something as ordinary as house hunting would become one of the defining struggles of my life. Landlords' suspicions, intrusive questions, and outright refusals weren't just logistical hurdles — they were humiliating reminders of how urban India polices women who dare to live alone. That personal ordeal eventually became the subject of my documentary *Bachelor Girls* (2016), echoing the voices of countless women navigating the same battle.

Privacy is never truly private. Single women are often stalked, watched, and noted. Their movements become communal property — what time they return, who they meet, where they go. A woman who

earns her salary, pays her rent, and buys her groceries should be insulated from society's intrusions. In practice, the reverse often happens. Neighbours, landlords, colleagues, and even strangers feel entitled to ask: "Why is she alone? Who visits her flat? Why does she return late at night?" A friend once confessed that she kept a pair of men's slippers by her front door, simply to ward off workers and delivery men from assuming she lived alone. Even the act of calling a plumber or carpenter can feel unsafe. Another friend talked about being blamed by the housing society for her hair clogged the drainage pipes. The urban woman may be economically autonomous, but her social standing is still subject to constant audit.

Given the scrutiny, many independent women develop a survival strategy: Stay unseen, not confrontational; blend in, don't stand out; minimise exposure. Perhaps the outsiders — migrant women who arrive in India's metro cities like Mumbai, to build their lives from scratch — are able to unravel the hidden codes behind its cosmopolitan charade. They see the fissures, the blind spots and the dualities, throwing light on subtle but exhausting negotiations women make every day. The struggle for privacy, for dignity, for the right simply to exist in public and private spaces. It is therefore no surprise that such nuanced

stories, unburdened by the "male gaze" — one-upmanship, competition, or violence — are resonating more strongly with audiences.

Amid these expressions, how much agency do women truly possess? Cities are dotted with so-called "safe zones" — pink buses, women-only compartments, women-driven cabs — that are meant to protect. But, in fact, they reinforce a more troubling idea: That the public sphere belongs to men, and that women must carve out their safety in cordoned spaces.

The 2020-21 Periodic Labour Force Survey revealed that nearly 47.9 per cent of Indian women were classified as migrants, compared to just 10.7 per cent of men. But scratch beneath the surface, and one discovers the uncomfortable truth: Over 87 per cent of women reported marriage as the reason for migration, while only about 1.9 per cent moved for employment or higher studies. In an era of economic growth and dizzying technological change, these numbers raise an unsettling question: Do women truly prefer the known safety of their family homes, or are they simply more risk-averse when it comes to shifting bases? Or is it that the risks of survival in a new city — safety, housing, loneliness — ultimately outweigh the promise of opportunity? Migration for work, after all, is rarely framed as ambition when it comes to women; instead, it can be judged as selfish,

unbecoming of those who are expected to remain the family's caregivers.

Women who migrate for jobs often describe living with an invisible armour: Scanning cab numbers, sharing live locations, rehearsing excuses to placate intrusive landlords. The question isn't whether a woman can accept herself, but whether society is ready to support her decisions and self-sufficiency. On social media, women — and increasingly men — are raging against patriarchal norms, crafting bold new narratives of independence. But beyond the electric pulse of Instagram reels, has the scrutiny of offline life really loosened its grip?

Seven years after *Bachelor Girls*, being single may no longer be an anomaly — but the perceptions around it have barely shifted. "I would still choose Mumbai over anywhere else," you often hear women say. As women creators bring their intimate relationship with the city to the screen, cinema may broaden both the experience and the conversation. Yet the paradox remains: Can a city that promises freedom ever deliver it unconditionally? For even as women in urban India live more independent lives than their mothers ever imagined, they remain tethered to a gaze they may never fully escape.

Makan is a filmmaker and writer based in Mumbai

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

RESPECT NATURE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "Heed the hills" (IE, September 17). The Punjab and Himachal floods have already caused severe devastation to humans and wildlife alike, and now the flash floods at Dehradun have only added insult to the crisis. Reckless deforestation, population explosion, rapid urbanisation and poor implementation of laws are all accountable for climate change and the concomitant calamities. These incidents must shake the conscience of the people and the governments and are a wake-up call to get their acts together. Playing with nature is akin to playing with fire.

Aanya Singhal, Noida

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "Heed the hills" (IE, September 17). The recent floods in Dehradun weren't just a natural disaster, they were a human one. Families waded through waist-deep water, heritage sites like Tapleswar temple stood submerged, and the Maldeva bridge crumbled like a forgotten promise. Locals shared food with strangers, rescued pets, and clung to hope while waiting for help. But hope alone isn't a strategy. Unchecked westernisation, poor drainage, and missing early warning turned a downpour into devastation. We owe it to those affected to demand better, stronger infrastructure, transparent planning, and real accountability. Let this not be another headline we scroll past. Let it be the moment we choose to care, act, and rebuild with conscience.

Isha Gogia, Ludhiana

TRADE & SOVEREIGNTY

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "Ease of trade" (IE, September 17). While the discussions highlight the importance of strengthening bilateral relations, certain US demands raise concerns for India's economic sovereignty. The US has urged India to reduce its imports of Russian oil and open sensitive sectors such as agriculture and defence to trade negotiations. Must indeed grow, but they should not come at the cost of India's strategic and economic independence. A balanced approach where India protects its core interests while engaging constructively with global partners is needed.

Aarchi Verma, Rajpura

CULTURAL EXCHANGE

THIS REFERS TO the article, "A different ballgame" (IE, September 16). The Pahalagam attack has understandably heightened tensions, now visible on the cricket field. Yet, in these difficult times, we must ask: Should cultural exchange between India and Pakistan continue? Despite political divides, our shared heritage, music, language, and art remain a powerful bridge. Cultural dialogues foster empathy, counter misinformation, and reminds us of our common humanity. Suspending such exchanges may offer momentary relief, but long-term peace demands connection, not isolation. Let us not allow violence to silence the voices of peace. Cultural exchange is not weakness; it is resilience.

Deepika Kataria, Chandigarh

THE EDITORIAL PAGE

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Securing valleys and slopes

A future-ready disaster management in Himalaya requires a massive technology scale-up



SYED ATA HASNAIN

THE DEVASTATING FLOODS in Dehradun have once again laid bare the fragility of our mountain states. Monsoon 2025 has affected Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab and Uttarakhand in ways that remind us of changing climate and an unforgiving terrain. Cloudbursts, landslides, and floods have brought tragedy to hundreds of families, disrupted pilgrimages and devastated crops.

Amid the grief, the disaster management apparatus has responded with speed, coordination, and innovation. Soldiers, airmen, engineers, paramilitary forces, disaster response professionals, and — perhaps most inspiring — local volunteers, have stood shoulder to shoulder to save lives. Local government officials have not been far behind. In Uttarakhand, a deputy commissioner walked over 36 hours to reach flash-flood-ravaged Dharai.

In J&K, extreme rain in late August unleashed floods across the Chenab and Tawi basins, claiming over 140 lives. Within hours, the Army laid emergency Bailey bridges, the Air Force deployed helicopters from Jammu airfield, and the NDRF surged in with specialist teams. Army, local police, CRPF, and SDRF personnel evacuated victims from Machail and Vainoh Devi. Army communication teams and service providers worked hand in hand to revive damaged fibre and mobile towers.

Punjab faced a swollen Ravi, Beas and Sutlej, with record inflows at Bhakra and Pong dams. NDMA coordinated with the Central Water Commission, IMD and BMBB to regulate releases and prevent catastrophic breaches. The saving of lives near Madhopur Headworks — where Army Aviation airlifted CRPF personnel minutes before a building collapsed — was emblematic of the agility of responders. In Himachal Pradesh, torrential rains triggered slope failures and flash floods, particularly in Chamba, Kullu and Lahaul-Spiti. Many lives were lost, but more than 10,000 stranded pilgrims of the Manimahesh Yatra were evacuated safely. The Army, IAF, ITBP and SDRF mounted difficult operations in treacherous terrain, while the BBO worked tirelessly to restore broken roads and bridges. Drone im-

agery was used extensively for damage assessment and to guide relief efforts.

In Uttarakhand, the Army built a 400-foot aerial cableway, established camps, and deployed engineers and SAR dogs. The Air Force's Chinooks lifted heavy equipment, and UCADA supplemented it with civil helicopters. SDRF and ITBP, supported by drones and satcom links, ensured swift evacuations. Temporary Incident Command Posts enabled real-time coordination across agencies.

India's disaster response today is layered and professional. The use of drones, satellite communication, OneWeb links, Doppler radars, and the IMD's nowcasting capabilities reflect an embrace of innovation. Technology is the buzzword with the Home Minister, Home Ministry and the NDMA. No doubt the response by the government was agile and professional but with the intensity witnessed, more here is actually less. If disaster management in the Himalaya is to be future-ready, technology has to be scaled up massively. The Geological Survey of India (GSI) must expand landslide mapping based on soil soaking and slope gradient, while the National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC) must monitor glacial lakes and debris flows on a 24x7 basis.

GIS-based (Geographical Information Systems) risk mapping is no longer optional. The role of drones must expand into predictive surveillance of slopes, rivers, and glaciers. Artificial intelligence, fed with localised hydro-meteorological data, can help forecast flash floods and cloudbursts with greater accuracy. Initiatives such as the Gorkhpr Model of urban flood control are worth studying and replicating.

Yet, there are limits to what governments can achieve on their own. Despite lack of warnings issued through SMS and the Sacht app, too many citizens remain unaware of what to do when alerts arrive. Pilgrimage corridors like Machail or Gangotri remain vulnerable because footfall continues even during red alerts. Construction in riverbeds, slope destabilisation by unchecked development, and disregard of building norms exacerbate the risk. Every citizen should know the local evac-

uation routes if alarms are sounded or alerts received, the location of their nearest relief shelter, and the steps to take when warnings arrive. The NDMA's Aapda Mitra (Friends in Disaster) programme is a good start, but it needs deeper penetration into schools, panchayats and resident welfare associations. Mock drills should not be seen as token exercises, but as essential community training. State governments need to demand regular disaster training and awareness events by the NDMA. Fortunately, the Armed Forces have come on board to seek better professional understanding of disaster management.

Response is only the first chapter. Recovery and reconstruction — the "build back better" phase — are equally crucial. Roads must be rebuilt with slope stabilisation in mind. River embankments must be reinforced while controlling illegal mining. The network of Doppler radars must be made more dense across valleys, and early warning systems for cloudbursts, landslides, and glacial lake outbursts must be more localised. For this, a technically oriented disaster management community of professionals will eventually be needed.

Civil society, with its local knowledge, must be integrated into district disaster management authorities. Sustainable building practices, adherence to seismic codes, and strict enforcement of "no-build zones" along riverbanks are life-saving measures. Resilience must be the cornerstone of future development in the ecologically-fragile Himalaya.

This monsoon has revealed the strength of India's disaster response and the gaps that remain. Our soldiers, responders, and civil administrators have done their duty, often at great risk to themselves. But disaster management is not the government's burden alone. Every citizen must treat disaster preparedness as seriously as voting or paying taxes. Only then can India truly be resilient in the face of climate change and infrastructure development.

The writer is a former corps commander of the Srinagar-based 15 Corps and member of NDMA. Views are personal.

MISRULE OF LAW

Wilful lapses — and lack of accountability — of police in Delhi riots cases undermine due process

FIVE YEARS AFTER more than 50 people were killed in one of the worst communal riots in the national capital, the wheels of justice appear to be moving slowly. As of August 2025, of the 695 cases of rioting, arson, and unlawful assembly filed by Delhi Police, verdicts have been pronounced only in 116, with 97 acquittals. In themselves, these figures paint a dismal picture of investigative and prosecutorial failures and judicial delays. They are, unfortunately, only a prologue to a more disturbing story. An investigation by this newspaper has found that in at least 93 of the 97 acquittals, courts pointed out procedural lapses and, in some cases, outright fabrication of evidence and witness statements by the Delhi Police. Judges have pulled up investigating officers for "padding evidence", preparing false statements to "balefully solve the case", and "dictating" witness statements. Both in themselves and as part of a broader pattern in the Delhi riots cases, the actions of the police dent the credibility of the justice system.

During the Delhi riots, questions were raised about the police's lack of action. At times, the conduct of its personnel invited even more serious allegations. Last year, for instance, the Delhi High Court accused the police of being "driven by a bigoted mindset" after no action was taken against policemen who were seen in videos beating a young man during the riots. In times when tension between communities runs high, the police must not be seen as doing anything that shows it as prejudiced — anything less also threatens to violate the fundamental promise of the Constitution and the rule of law. The Delhi Police was not always faithful to that principle during the riots in the city. As Additional Sessions Judge Parveen Singh pointed out while acquitting six people, there has been a "serious trampling of the rights of the accused... Such instances lead to serious erosion of the faith of the people in the investigating process and the rule of law." That none of the officers have faced criminal action for lying to the court points to the lack of enforcement of anti-perjury laws, and a broader lack of accountability where it is needed most — among those meant to uphold the law.

The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act has been deployed in several of the riots cases. The Act's stringent provisions relax the burden of proof and make bail for the accused extremely difficult. In some cases, the police and prosecution have sought, questionably, to link the Delhi riots with the 2020 protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), and even equated the latter with terrorism. At the same time, the poor conviction rate in the fraction of cases in which a verdict has been pronounced is a marker of the deficiencies and inefficiencies of the criminal justice system as a whole. With a cloud over the investigations, a modicum of closure for the victims will remain elusive. The Delhi Police must be held accountable for its shortcomings. It must course correct.

CHECK THE DELUGE

Flood-proofing should become a year-round exercise in Punjab

PUNJAB HAS BEEN ravaged by floods for the second time in three years. Swollen rivers have inundated areas once considered flood-proof, jolting those who earlier blamed seasonal deluges solely on topography or nature's fury. The destruction threatens to set back the state's economy by years. As the waters recede, the stench of rotting crops and carcasses suffocates local, fertile fields lie under a thick crust of silt, and the fear of disease hangs heavy in the air. The state was battered by floods in 2019, when the Congress was in power, and again in 2023, a year after the Aam Aadmi Party took charge. Then there were extreme rain events such as those of August 2017, when an hour's downpour left Mohali, Punjab's education and start-up hub, under chest-deep water. Then, as now, experts spoke of the need for mitigation and prevention.

Talk has, however, rarely translated into action. The riverbeds of the Sutlej, Beas, Ravi and rivulets such as the Ghaggar and Chakki have risen by 5 to 12 feet at several points due to siltation, reducing their water-carrying capacity to a third. Embankments, or dhussi bundhs, are often weak and poorly maintained. The Ravi breached its bundhs at 42 places this year, the highest ever in recorded history. Two gates of the more than a century-old Madhopur barrage were washed away. Rainfall, too, was extraordinary. Punjab experienced its wettest August in 26 years, while the first week of September brought nearly 200 per cent above-normal rainfall. Adding to the strain were the Bhakra, Pong, and Ranjit Saghar dams, pushed to their limits by heavy inflows from Himachal Pradesh, itself battered by torrential rains and cloudbursts.

Climate change is a reality that cannot be wished away. The state, which allowed itself just 17 days to prepare for the monsoon, must do far better. Not long ago, both the Centre and state would call their first flood-prevention meetings in February, with designated officers spending sleepless nights through the season. That culture of early preparation and vigilance has withered. As communities now band together to repair embankments and raise new ones, the government must move beyond firefighting to plugging glaring holes in its flood-prevention strategy. Barrages, sluice gates, and embankments need urgent strengthening, while desilting rivers should become a year-round exercise. The choice is stark: Punjab can either continue spending colossal sums on relief and rehabilitation every few years, or invest a fraction of that in prevention. The damage is not just economic — recurring floods carry a social and emotional cost, fueling fears that they will only hasten the exodus of young people from the state. As Punjab counts its losses, the lesson is unmistakable — prepare or perish.

A STAR, AN IDEALIST

Robert Redford brought nuance to stardom, gravity to romance, and independence to silver screen

SEES HIM with his friends at the diner she works in — upper crust, politically agnostic — attractive and infuriating in the same breath. If there's a moment that captures the essence of *The Way We Were* (1973) — two people drawn together by love, divided by the weight of who they are — it could well be this. The tender and tumultuous romance between Barbra Streisand's idealistic and political Katie Morosky and Robert Redford's talented, carefree Hubbell Gardiner spans wartime, blacklists and the slow erosion of idealism. But getting Redford to agree to the Sydney Pollack classic, Streisand wrote in her memoir *My Name Is Barbra*, was anything but easy: "Bob (Redford) asked Sydney, 'Who is this guy (his character)? He's just an object... In Bob's opinion, he was 'shallow and one-dimensional.'" And so, the character was redrafted, fleshing out the Hubbell Gardiner that Redford would eventually share to unforgettable life on screen.

In an industry dominated by pageantry, it is this artistic integrity that made Redford, who died on Tuesday at 89, stand apart. Over a career spanning six decades, Redford's contributions went far beyond his luminous presence as a matinee idol. From the moral ambiguity of *Three Days of the Condor* (1975) to the charisma of *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969), to the intensity of *All the President's Men* (1976), Redford captured the tensions of a changing America with nuance and sensitivity.

But it is behind the camera that Redford's true cinematic legacy lies. He believed in storytelling that was intimate, urgent, and often uncomfortable. In founding the Sundance Institute, he reshaped the trajectory of independent film. His directorial works *Ordinary People* (1980) and *A River Runs Through It* (1992) reflect a filmmaker drawn to the quiet complexities of human connection. In his refusal to sugar-coat reality, Redford reimagined what cinema could be — not just entertainment, but a platform for truth, beauty and change.



KEIICHI ONO

PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI's recent visit to Japan reaffirmed the enduring partnership between the two nations. It deepened mutual trust and cooperation and charted a vision of a partnership designed to last for decades. The spirit of this visit was heralded in Gujarat a few days earlier, when PM Modi inaugurated Maruti Suzuki's first Made-in-India global strategic Battery Electric Vehicle production line in Hansapur on August 26. He reminded us that our partnership is rooted in culture, and decades of collaboration. Companies like Maruti Suzuki have become "brand ambassadors of 'Make in India'", continuing to strengthen the foundation of "Viksit Bharat 2047".

PM Modi's visit to Japan took place at a critical juncture for both India and Japan. Amid today's geopolitical volatility, our partnership is not just desirable but indispensable. Among the most significant outcomes of the visit was the transformation of our "Special Strategic and Global Partnership" into one that is truly strategic in substance: There are no areas where our two countries cannot cooperate.

During the two-day visit, PM Modi and Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba delved into a wide range of areas — from defence and security to business cooperation, from cutting-edge technology and innovation to people-to-people exchange. The visit embodied the breadth and depth of our bilateral cooperation and highlighted the importance of Japan as India's trusted strategic partner.

The visit also paved the way for what Prime Minister Modi called a "golden chapter" in our relationship. The two leaders issued five leader-level documents and recognised over 180 Memorandums of Cooperation (MoCs), setting out a roadmap for future cooperation and announcing concrete initiatives across fields.



PARTNERS IN TURBULENT TIMES

PM Modi's Japan visit reaffirmed shared stake in innovation, multilateral diplomacy

These tangible outcomes, in PM Modi's words, "built a strong foundation for a new golden chapter" in the India-Japan partnership, signalling renewed momentum in our ties.

Another highlight was the visit to Miyagi Prefecture. The two leaders travelled by Shinkansen, Japan's iconic bullet train, underscoring its role as a flagship India-Japan project aimed at bringing the Shinkansen to Indian soil. At Tokyo Electron Miyagi Ltd, a leading semiconductor company, they witnessed its advanced manufacturing capabilities and collaborative projects with India. These moments illustrated the growing significance of India-Japan cooperation in critical technologies and industries where our partnership can deliver transformative results.

Looking ahead, there are five areas where sustained effort is particularly needed, among others. First, economic security: Under the new "Economic Security Initiative", we must accelerate collaboration in areas such as semiconductors, critical minerals, AI, and supply chains.

Second, Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs): Japanese MSMEs are key to accelerating "Make in India, Make for the World". Japan remains committed to supporting them as our two countries work to ward the new 10-trillion-yen (approx. \$68 billion) investment target and continued improvement of the business environment. India-Japan cooperation extends beyond central governments, encompassing a multifaceted partnership including business collaboration and state-prefecture exchanges.

Third, defence equipment: The "Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation" was revised for the first time in 17 years, reflecting the rapidly changing geopolitical landscape, strengthened security dialogues, and ex-

changed joint exercises. Based on the revised declaration, we will intensify cooperation on defence equipment and technology transfer, developing projects to follow UNICORN (naval unified complex radar antenna).

Fourth, people-to-people exchange: The two leaders announced the "Japan-India Human Resource Exchange Initiative", which sets a new target for people-to-people exchanges to promote the development, exchange, and circulation of mutually complementary human resources between our two countries.

Fifth, multilateral and multilateral cooperation: Our close partnership in the international arena — as nations sharing fundamental values and interests — plays a critical role in addressing global challenges. Japan fully supports India's hosting of the Quad Summit to promote peace, stability, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region, and will continue working alongside India in multilateral fora such as the G20, the United Nations, and global counter-terrorism efforts.

PM Modi's visit to Japan reminded us that the India-Japan partnership has never been as crucial as it is today. Looking ahead to the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations in 2027, we are celebrating September and October as "Japan Month", with events that promote India-Japan ties. This year also marks the Japan-India Science, Technology, and Innovation Exchange Year. These initiatives bring the people of our two countries even closer and strengthen our strategic partnership.

As we embark on this new golden chapter, I am confident that our cooperation will not only strengthen our nations but also shape the future of the Indo-Pacific and the wider world.

The writer is ambassador of Japan to India

SEPTEMBER 18, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

BID TO END WAR

INDIA IS LIKELY to take a fresh initiative to end the Iran-Iraq war. At the behest of the Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, the Minister of State for External Affairs, Khursheed Alam Khan, who is leaving for New York on Friday to attend the UN General Assembly session, is expected to contact Iranian and Iraqi delegations in a bid to find a common ground to end the war.

ENLF TALKS TO PM

REPRESENTATIVES OF THE Eelam National Liberation Front (ENLF) conveyed to PM Rajiv

Gandhi, his apprehension that the draft proposals evolved by the Sri Lankan government would not meet the aspirations of the Tamils.

INDO-BANGLA TIES

THE BANGLADESH MILITARY President, Lt-Gen HM Ershad, expressed the hope that some of the outstanding issues between India and Bangladesh would be solved within the next two months. The President was addressing a news conference at Ghabgabhat. "The mist is clearing," he said regarding Indo-Bangla relations. He said his government was doing its best to maintain a good relationship with India.

DRAFT SEVENTH PLAN

THE PLANNING COMMISSION has approved the draft Seventh Plan. The commission which met under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, envisaged a total public sector outlay of Rs 180,000 crore. Apart from the full-time members of the commission, the meeting was attended by the Defence Minister, P V Narasimha Rao, the Minister of State for Planning, K R Narayanan, V P Singh, the Finance Minister, and Buta Singh, the Agriculture Minister, who is also a member of the planning body.

Steely ambition

Frequent disruption of the iron ore market is a flawed policy, will thwart investments

RECENT NEW REPORTS about a plan to impose 30% export duty on low-grade iron ore (<58% Fe content) effective October evoke a sense of déjà vu. In May 2022, a 50% duty was put on outward shipments of such powdery minerals, which are not fit for direct use by domestic blast-furnace (BF) plants, but the levy had to be withdrawn in less than six months. The revocation of the levy in November 2022 followed reports of large-scale job losses, a strong reaction from potential bidders for mines put up for auction, and a piling up of sub-grade fines at mining sites. The viability of mining operations was threatened, with potentially irretrievable loss of exports markets and forex earnings.

The latest move is intended to benefit domestic pelletisers, sponge iron units, and even some BF units in terms of better feed availability, and lower input costs. A chain effect is expected to lift the short-term fortunes of downstream steel users as well. The argument for such an export tax—high-grade lumps are already subject to a 30% levy—is that policies must spur domestic manufacturing and exports of value-added stuff, rather than encourage the shipping out of raw materials, especially exhaustible natural resources. This could, however, be flawed policy, as it's not necessarily true that the maximum value creation takes place at the stage of finished products. Employment intensity of an activity must also be a crucial policy determinant.

In this case, iron ore producers warn of job losses to the tune of half a million. Mining by nature is job-intensive—it can generate jobs 13 times the agriculture sector and six times the manufacturing industry, for every 1% increase in gross value added (GVA). What the policy-makers must look into is whether the export controls are in the long-term interests of India's mining and steel industries, the assorted users of the alloy, ranging from safety-pin and white good units to automobile makers and the railways.

India is already the second largest producer of crude steel behind China, but it still has rapid strides to make. It turns a net exporter of the fundamental building material in one year, only to lose the tag in the next. The country's per capita finished steel consumption of 98 kg is 35% below the world average of 221 kg, and far lower than China's 635 kg. That and the rapid pace of infrastructure creation make it essential for the country to raise its steel capacity from 200 million tonne (mt) at present to 300 million tonne (mt) by 2030, as projected in the National Steel Policy, and even further in the subsequent years. Such a pace of capacity creation would require massive investments and involvement of foreign capital and technology. Policies that will rein in costs are central to the success of the plan to build a world-beating steel industry, and herein lies the importance of ensuring abundant supply of ore, the key raw material that is domestically available. The current policies are highly restrictive of the iron ore sector, and stifle investment potential. This is evident from the production stagnation in Karnataka for the last decade and more, and modest output from Goa, after a year of complete cessation of mining there. Steel industry has a high multiplier effect on the economy. It should not be hamstrung by short-sighted policies.

UNSTABLE REGION

INDIA'S GOAL IS TO BUILD AN INCLUSIVE, RULES-BASED, AND CONNECTED SOUTH ASIA

A dangerous neighbourhood

NIRUPAMA RAO

Former foreign secretary of India and former Indian ambassador to China and the US



INSTITUTIONS remain fragile and contested, and hopes of stability have been repeatedly dashed by factionalism, corruption, and political leaders' inability to consolidate a system that everyone can trust. The recent spasm of shockingly brutal violence is a symptom of these deeper fault lines.

India cannot be indifferent to such instability. Our long, open border with Nepal makes us vulnerable to refugee flows and cross-border crime, and our deep cultural, ethnic, religious, and economic ties mean that the government in Kathmandu will always look over its shoulder at the government in New Delhi. Moreover, China's increasing influence in Nepal's domestic politics has, as a matter of necessity, made the country a major strategic concern for India.

In Bangladesh, the interim government that has ruled since Sheikh Hasina's ouster is failing in its efforts to restore law and order or safeguard human rights. The economy, a bright spot for decades, is under pressure from domestic political jitters and US President Donald Trump's punishing tariffs. The fragile political environment has left the country's minorities feeling increasingly insecure. The stakes for India are high, because its own efforts to manage the border, migration, and counterterrorism depend on the regime in Dhaka maintaining order.

At first glance, Thailand's turmoil and

the border clashes with Cambodia may seem less urgent. But India, under its Act East policy, has been pursuing deeper economic and strategic ties with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' 10 member states and their 600 million-plus people. Any instability within that bloc will complicate this outreach. Moreover, Thailand has long served as a bridge between South and Southeast Asia. If its institutions falter, or if it disputes with Cambodia escalate despite Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim's best efforts to broker a resolution, India's vision of a connected, secure Indo-Pacific corridor could become untenable.

To describe Pakistan as chronically troubled may sound dismissive, but it is an unfortunate truth. Its civilian authorities have been consistently undermined, as when Imran Khan's elected government was

oust in 2022 at the military's behest. Extremist groups thrive when politics becomes bloodsport, and Pakistan's fragile economy only exacerbates this dynamic.

From India's perspective, Pakistan's troubles are more than a domestic issue, because they regularly threaten to spill across the Line of Control in Kashmir, fuelling terrorism, destroying any prospect for regional peace, and even introducing the spectre of a nuclear catastrophe. This continuous instability chains India to the sub-continental chessboard,

even when it wants to look outward. The Pakistan-China axis further complicates the status quo, which is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future.

All these stories point to a larger worrying trend: democracy in India's neighbourhood is in retreat. Institutions are being rewritten, and courts politicised. Sensing weakness, too many army generals see themselves as free to intervene, including by jailing or exiling political leaders.

For India—the world's largest democracy—responding to this trend demands a more assertive regional strategy. Of course, for most of South Asia, barring Pakistan, India is the first responder when crises hit. But during periods when India's neighbours don't think they need its help, they tend to shrug off its security concerns.

And as if India's neighbourhood were not dangerous enough, the wider world adds its own layers of uncertainty. Trump's policy toward the region has been arbitrary in the extreme, leading smaller states to hedge their bets. In Japan and South Korea, debates are underway about the wisdom of acquiring nuclear weapons, now that China is flexing its muscles and the US security umbrella has been called into question.

Although India has stood its ground in the face of the storm, the regional and Trump-induced volatility is making it harder to maintain the country's treasured strategic autonomy. The task now is no longer to deepen ties with America, but to maintain the strategic, technological, and economic core of the partnership while building resistance against sudden shifts in US policy.

India is not seeking dominance in South Asia. Its goal is to build an inclusive, rules-based, and connected region—and thus transform a history of recurring crises into a future of enduring stability.

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Take Altman's royal UK visit with a pinch of salt

ON HIS UK trip to dine with King Charles III this week, President Donald Trump is accompanied by Silicon Valley royalty: Nvidia Corp. Chief Executive Officer Jensen Huang and OpenAI CEO Sam Altman. Both were expected to highlight billions of dollars of investment in artificial-intelligence infrastructure, echoing similar jaunts to France and West Asia where the tech leaders have promised to help these countries establish greater "AI sovereignty." As my colleague Lionel Laurent has pointed out, the term borders on meaningless when so many American businesses rely on American cloud companies.

There's an impossibly wide gap between Britain and America on AI infrastructure—the chips, data centres, and sophisticated software models that underpin most AI tools. The US owns about 75% of the world's AI supercomputers, China has about 15%, with the remaining 10% distributed elsewhere. The UK holds around 3% of world compute capacity—about 1.8 gigawatts—with ambitions to reach six gigawatts by 2030. That would barely match the data-centre capacity of a single project by Meta Platforms Inc., which is currently building a five-gigawatt server farm in Louisiana that Mark Zuckerberg says will be the size of Manhattan.

Of course, Britain and other nations shouldn't solely rely on US data centres to store their digital wealth; it's prudent to build their own computing facilities as insurance to be able to operate normally in the midst of a global market disruption, for instance. But there are different types of data centres. The more than £1 billion (\$1.4 billion) the government has pledged in public funding on expanding the country's AI training capacity, for example, would be better spent elsewhere; when it comes to the global race to build AI's most powerful models, that ship has sailed. OpenAI, Alphabet Inc.'s Google, DeepSeek, and Anthropic already dominate the market. "At the frontier it's going to be hard for anyone besides the US or China to be competitive," says Keegan McElite, a senior policy adviser in emerging tech and geopolitics at the Tony Blair Institute, a non-profit organisation. "We're starting to see the market question whether we need to continue to build out more in the training front."

Britain should instead focus on building server facilities that run AI services, or "inference" in tech parlance. A good example is Google's funding of a data centre 20 miles north of central London, aimed at powering the company's AI consumer and business services. Rather than try and match the US on infrastructure, Britain should utilise the expensive plumbing that Silicon Valley has already spent billions of dollars developing by building companies on top. UK start-ups such as Synthesia, Poly.ai, and Wexler.ai are examples of firms selling services that address specific needs for legal firms or training and marketing.

The UK should also accelerate its efforts to open the spigots of cash from the well-heeled British finance industry to local start-ups. Across Europe, pension funds allocate just 0.018% of their assets to the venture capital firms that back new technology companies, according to research from London-based venture capital firm Atomico. By comparison, American pension funds put an estimated 2%–3% into VC, unleashing huge pools of capital for Silicon Valley to tap. Britain's Mansion House compact, in which the country's leading pension funds promised to invest much more in VC, is a good start. But it should move faster, push bigger commitments, and make sure pension money gets to ambitious UK start-ups, and not just big property or infrastructure deals.

Rather than chasing Silicon Valley's lead on infrastructure, Britain should focus on making its finance sector harder for homegrown tech. Data-centre investments make for impressive headline numbers, but there's little point trying to compete with America's entrenched dominance in AI compute or hyping the number of jobs that will be created from servicing miles of server racks. The UK, like other European nations, needs to leverage that infrastructure to create new firms—and spend more on them to fuel innovation for the longer term.

How India Inc needs to transform



ALPESH SHAH
CHAARVI GUPTA

Respectively MD and senior partner, and project leader, BCG

IN THE CLASSIC fairy tale, the evil queen famously asked, "Mirror, mirror on the wall, who's the fairest of them all?" It's a question that transcends fairy tales—echoed in classrooms, debated on sports fields, and whispered in boardrooms. Today, the corporate world asks a modern version of the same: Which ownership model is truly the best? The answer, backed by BCG's deep dive into 500+ of India's top companies (Nifty 500) and start-ups, is clear: there is no single winning model. Instead, context is everything, each ownership type—public sector undertakings (PSUs), family-run businesses, start-ups, institutional corporates, and multinational corporations (MNCs)—performs best when aligned with its sectoral environment.

Family businesses thrive in trust-driven sectors like real estate, healthcare, and mining, where legacy, long-term orientation, and deep local ties offer competitive advantage. PSUs dominate capital-intensive, policy-aligned sectors—energy, utilities, and banking—where scale and compliance trump speed. Institutional corporates lead in execution-heavy industries like information technology and communications, where governance discipline, execution rigour, and operational scalability are vital. Start-ups lead in pace-innovation and fintech—fast-paced innovation-driven domains, but are nearly absent in regulated, infrastructure-heavy domains. MNCs excel in premium, branded categories like consumer goods, yet struggle in sectors demanding high local policy sensitivity or local agility.

While India Inc is firing on all engines,

one thing is clear—yesterday's playbook will not work for tomorrow. India Inc must transform to secure India's rightful global standing.

PSUs have seen a remarkable resurgence, with the Nifty PSE Index delivering 33% compound annual growth rate since 2020. Looking ahead, PSUs need to move from reforms to reinvention. To do so, they must modernise further: invest in leadership development, innovation capacity, and governance systems that allow speed, autonomy, and risk-taking.

The next phase of PSU evolution needs more than policy push—it needs performance. Institutional firms must lead in innovation and thought leadership.

MNCs in India have long been hallmarks of brand strength, margin resilience, and capital discipline, consistently delivering high total shareholder returns (TSR) and returns on equity (RoE). Notably, the Indian arms of most MNCs enjoy significantly higher price-to-earnings multiples than their global parents, often two-three times. Yet, growth remains a weak spot, so much so that in many cases MNCs are ceding share. Success now hinges on India-first strategies—deeper localisation, faster innovation, unlocking white spaces, experimenting with alternative distribution and digital, and tapping emerging consumer aspirations in smaller towns. MNCs need to move from being premium play champions to growth-focused local players.

Unlocking potential requires each ownership model—PSUs, family-run businesses, start-ups, institutional corporates, and MNCs—to accelerate its evolution

The strength of family-run businesses lies in long-term capital commitment, continuity of vision, and deeprooted trust networks. However, global ambition requires a shift from intuitive to institutional—with better capital allocation discipline, professional boards, and globally capable leadership while retaining the entrepreneurial edge. This is not a choice between tradition and transformation, it's about building bridges between them.

Leading Indian institutional corporates have built strong reputations on consistent TSR, strong RoE, and industry leading governance. Whether it's digital finance, artificial intelligence, or supply chains, these segment leaders must move from exporting excellence to creating global benchmarks, from consistency to category leadership. With the right investments in R&D, intellectual property creation, and adjacent innovation, they have the potential to become global benchmarks not just in scale, but also influence.

Start-ups are reshaping India's business landscape dramatically, redefining how Indians consume and transact. And they are increasingly global: 40% of seed-funded start-ups are now targeting international markets from day one, a clear example of India building for the world. Yet, breakneck growth must evolve into sustainable models—from speed to sustainability. Start-ups must now focus on

governance, capital discipline, and anchor business models in unit economics and long-term viability—from unicorns of today to enduring champions of tomorrow. India Inc is firing across ownership types: PSUs are modernising and competing, start-ups are building for the world, family firms are institutionalising, MNCs are deepening localisation, and institutional corporates are exporting excellence. Combined with India's demographic dividend, digital infrastructure, capital market maturity, and vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem, this creates a moment of global inflection. After decades of dominance by the West, and the surge of Japan and China in the 80s/90s and 2000s, India is emerging as the next corporate frontier. The number of Indian companies on Forbes' Global 2000 has crossed 50, as many as China had in 2003 (today China has 350+) and the trajectory is only upward.

But unlocking this potential requires each ownership model to accelerate its evolution. MNCs must reinvent for relevance. Family businesses must scale with discipline. Start-ups must pivot from speed to sustainability. PSUs must shift from policy to performance. Institutional firms must lead in innovation and thought leadership. If each ownership model steps into its next evolutionary stage, then by 2047, as India turns 100, it won't just be participating in but reshaping the global corporate landscape. Because, the next era of global business dominance may not be about East or West. It might just be built in India.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Trade vs energy security

APROPPOS OF "Russian oil dilemma" (FE, September 17), India confronts a strategic conundrum: Should it curtail Russian oil imports to facilitate a more advantageous trade relationship with the US? Russian crude has historically provided India with economical and reliable energy supply, underpinning industrial growth and macroeconomic stability. Conversely, acquiescing

to US geopolitical expectations could enhance bilateral trade negotiations, elevate India's diplomatic profile, and reinforce strategic partnerships. But an abrupt cessation risks inflating domestic energy costs, destabilising markets, and constraining economic momentum. Policymakers must perform a delicate balancing act, weighing immediate economic repercussions against long-term geopolitical dividends. Strategic foresight is

essential to reconcile energy security imperatives with ambitions of forging deeper trade and strategic synergies with a key global ally.

—N Sachin Reddy, Bengaluru

Balancing act

TRUMP'S tariff threat to India for buying crude oil from Russia isn't going away anytime soon and India is caught in the US-Russia crossfire. The US has taken the positive step of resuming

trade talks; India should try to find a balance between Russian and other crude oil suppliers to keep Trump in good humour, but it is easier said than done. If global oil prices are expected to come down it will open up many options for India. US trade negotiators must understand such a shift won't happen overnight, but gradually.

—Bal Govind, Noida

Write to us at letters@expressindia.com

Welfare at the mercy of the machine

In American novelist, Kurt Vonnegut's novel, *Player Piano*, the author imagines a society where human labour is displaced by machines. Published in 1952, the novel shows how high levels of automation create an extremely polarised society with engineers running the machines on one side and the working class at the mercy of machines. In the novel, Finnerty, a brilliant engineer, upon realising how such automation results in dehumanisation, wryly remarks, "If only it weren't for the people, the goddamned people, always getting tangled up in the machinery, earth would be an engineer's paradise." Seven decades later, we are witnessing how welfare delivery in India is turning into a software "engineer's paradise" with a technocratic union government and its digital automation tools on the one side and frontline workers at the mercy of these tools on the other. The latest of these is the mandatory use of Facial Recognition Software (FRS) in Anganwadis.

Anganwadis were first established in 1975 to address child malnutrition as part of the Integrated Child Development Scheme. There are about 14.02 lakh anganwadis in India and every centre is meant to have at least one Anganwadi worker (AWW) and one Anganwadi helper, who are women from the local community. Along with preschool and other services, each Anganwadi is entrusted with providing legally mandated Take Home Rations (THR) for children under three years and for pregnant and lactating women (under the National Food Security Act, 2013).

Aim of verification, hurdles
In 2021, the Union government launched the Poshan Tracker, a centralised application platform, to monitor nutrition initiatives. The AWW has to install the Poshan tracker app on her smartphone and periodically upload the nutritional status of children. The



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Rations in Anganwadis should not depend on Face Recognition Software

app requires regular updates which many AWWs are not equipped to do. From July 1, the THR for pregnant/lactating women will not be given unless these women rights-holders authenticate their faces through the FRS, which is now integrated with this app. To get to this stage, e-KYC has to be first completed, where the woman's Aadhaar and biometric details are entered and verified by OTP. The purpose of these appears to be two-fold. First, that a child or woman is not faking to be somebody else to get food. Second, that a child's food is not stolen by the AWW or anyone. That is, children and AWW are pre-supposed to be guilty of wrongdoing and not pre-supposed to be innocent; which is at odds with the principles of natural justice where one is innocent until proven guilty.

Testimonies of several AWWs underscore the chaos spawned by the use of the FRS. Many phone numbers have changed, the phone is usually not with the woman, and so there are trust issues in sharing an OTP. Even once the e-KYC is completed, there are errors in matching the faces recorded in the software for reasons unclear to the AWWs. Further, the phones of AWWs do not have the capacity to process such heavy data and often hang. Network connectivity is often patchy resulting in large delays. Errors in face matching means that a photograph has to be shot multiple times, causing annoyance to all involved. Even though the AWW personally knows all the women and children concerned, and can vouch that they are authentic, she cannot give them food when the app fails to authenticate as she does not have the power to override the app. Being frontline functionaries, means that AWWs are also at the front end of facing the ire of the 'authentic women' who are unable to have their faces authenticated.

Any intervention must be introduced to address the main problems people are facing in

receiving their entitlements. In the context of THR, there are at least five major problems: poor quality of rations; irregular supply of THR; the budget for THR for children which is ₹8 per day a child has not been revised since 2018; corruption in the granting of contracts, and supply by large commercial entities despite orders by the Supreme Court of India since 2004 that the production and distribution should be decentralised and preferably through self-help groups and *mahila* mandals. Women faking pregnancy or children faking to get rations is not one of the core problems here. However, this is what the FRS appears to be solving. Similar to technological interventions in other welfare programmes, the FRS has also been introduced without any consultation with Anganwadi staff. If the government has any reports on massive fraud with 'fake beneficiaries' being registered, these must first be made public for scrutiny. The best way to verify people in anganwadis is through community monitoring.

In perspective
Technologies such as the FRS have usually been used in criminal investigations. While there are several concerns in using FRS in such investigations too, using such technologies to identify women and children from vulnerable communities appears to treat them as criminals and not as citizens. In fact, the FRS is banned even in San Francisco, U.S., the Mecca of digital technologies. Early childhood care cannot be held hostage till a software becomes better at recognising mothers. Extending Vonnegut's caution, women and children should not become laboratories in an "engineer's paradise". After all, what is at stake is a choice between authenticating and the authentic, between dehumanising and dignity, and between fracturing and fraternity.

The views expressed are personal

Hitting all the right notes

Chief Minister M.K. Stalin steals BJP's thunder in felicitation of maestro Ilaiyaraaja

STATE OF PLAY

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Tamil Nadu

The Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, M.K. Stalin, has scored a point. By taking it upon himself and the State government to honour maestro Ilaiyaraaja, on a mass scale, on his completion of 50 years in the film industry and for composing a symphony, Mr. Stalin has focused on what the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) failed to capitalise on. Instead of feting Ilaiyaraaja, a quintessential Tamil icon, and showing that if he can be a supporter of the BJP and a follower of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, so can the average Tamil, who is pious and religious, the party has done little on the ground to build on Ilaiyaraaja's popularity and acceptance.

It is not as if the BJP has not accorded Ilaiyaraaja his due. The party nominated him to the Rajya Sabha, invited him to perform at both the Kashi Tamil Sangamam (2022), and at Gaingakonda Cholapuram (July 2025) which Mr. Modi visited to mark 1,000 years since Chola King Rajendra I's conquest of the North. But the BJP's inertia in felicitating or announcing the conferment of the Bharat Ratna on Ilaiyaraaja has given Mr. Stalin a leg up and reinforce the point that the maestro transcends narrow barriers and belongs to the world of music. At a function in Chennai on September 13, Mr. Stalin made an appeal to the BJP government to confer the Bharat Ratna on Ilaiyaraaja. It is an appeal that the BJP cannot ignore.

Ilaiyaraaja said, "I am overwhelmed and overjoyed by the scale of the event...Why such love? Perhaps it is be-

cause of my music. Only he (Mr Stalin) can answer... Perhaps he considered my symphony [to be] a great achievement. I believe he must have felt [that] it was the duty of the State government to honour a Tamil who has gained world-wide fame." It was a masterstroke by Mr. Stalin. In March this year, Ilaiyaraaja had travelled to London to release his new composition – a symphony that was to be performed by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. The moment this became known, Mr. Stalin visited the maestro to offer his greetings. The government also organised a reception for the music maestro on his return. Ilaiyaraaja revealed that he had expressed his desire to Mr. Stalin to bring the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra to Tamil Nadu, and recalled Mr. Stalin's reaction – "Yes, it can be done."

Mr. Stalin is aware that Ilaiyaraaja, despite his political leanings, is a source of Tamil pride and represents cultural capital. When Ilaiyaraaja was trolled on social media by BJP supporters after he described the consecration of the Ram Temple as a "historic day" and praised Mr. Modi, Mr. Stalin intervened to stop the campaign. All his fans may not share his political ideology, but they will not tolerate any criticism made against Ilaiyaraaja. It was Mr. Stalin's late father and the longest-

serving Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, M. Karunanidhi, who had conferred the title 'Taignani' on Ilaiyaraaja. The musician, whose birthday falls on June 3 – the same day as Karunanidhi's – was astute to move the day to June 2.

At the felicitation ceremony, Ilaiyaraaja, who would usually begin his concert with an invocation of Goddess Mookambiga, by rendering *Janani Janani*, instead chose a film song, *Amuthu Tamiley Azhagiye Mozhiye Enathuriyere* ('Nectar-like Tamil is a beautiful language and my life'). It struck a chord with the audience which included Mr. Stalin, his cabinet colleagues and officials.

A day later, Ilaiyaraaja acceded to Mr. Stalin's request – that he should compose music for Sangam period literature. Ilaiyaraaja's announcement has been well accepted.

After his close association with the Communist Movement – his elder brother, Paval Varadharajan was a singer popularising the ideology and politics, with Ilaiyaraaja and his other brothers as instrumentalists – Ilaiyaraaja was politically neutral, but retained an identity of being a devotee of Ramana Maharshi of Tiruvannamalai.

Ilaiyaraaja and his brothers are admirers of writer and Communist-turned-Congress supporter Jayakanthan, another Tamil icon. Jayakanthan was a bitter critic of the Dravidian Movement, but Karunanidhi succeeded in winning him over, stunning Jayakanthan's admirers.

Mr. Stalin appears to have taken the cue from his father and done the same thing with Ilaiyaraaja, living up to the dictum of C.N. Annadurai, the founder of DMK, that "jasmine smells sweet even if it blooms in another's garden."

The hard truth about out-of-pocket health expenditure

NHA estimates of out-of-pocket health spending need wider validation beyond a single survey base

DATA POINT

Indranil Montu Bose

In India, direct out-of-pocket expenditure (OOPE) by households is the main source of financing for health care. In an OOPE-based system, when a family member falls ill, we either dip into our savings, sell assets, or borrow to meet health-care expenditures. If one is poor, the option is either to forgo care and die or get pushed into further destitution due to the costs of care. Children are taken out of school, women work longer hours to earn a little more and make do with meagre meal(s). As families cope with health shocks, the vicious cycle of poverty and ill-health intensifies.

India's National Health Account (NHA) estimates show a declining trend in OOPE as a proportion of total health expenditure as well as GDP. Various recent policy initiatives of the government of the day are being credited for this decline. A decline in OOPE, if materialised, is a positive development. However, it is prudent to scrutinise the estimates derived from the National Sample Surveys (NSS) before jumping to convenient conclusions.

We conducted a comparative analysis of the NHA estimates with other large sample surveys and National Income Accounts estimates. Our results point to the need for revisiting the argued decline in OOPE and to adopt a more cautious and comparative approach.

NHA captures spending on health by various sources, tracks the schemes through which these funds are channelised to various providers in a given period of time for a given geography. It derives OOPE estimates from various household surveys, mainly using the National Sample Survey (NSS). For some components not covered under NSS, the National Family Health Surveys (NFHS) and private

databases on the sale of medicines are used. The latest health round of the NSS was for 2017-18 (75th round), which forms the basis of the 2017-18 NHA estimates. The NHA 2017-18 reported a steep decline in OOPE as a proportion of health expenditure, from 6.4% in 2013-14 and 4.9% in 2017-18. For subsequent rounds, OOPE estimates are an extrapolation of 2017-18 estimates, adjusting them for price rise. For the latest year of NHA (2021-22), the share has come down to 3.9% (Chart 1).

The decline in OOPE, based on the NSS 75th round, however, needs further scrutiny. This could largely be on account of a decline in ailment reporting and utilisation of hospitalisation services, rather than any reduction in the cost of health-care services. Sources such as Longitudinal Ageing Study in India (LASI) show a much higher level of utilisation of hospitalisation services by the elderly.

One of the latest sources of OOPE estimates is the Consumer Expenditure Survey (CES)-2022-23. This data show that OOPE as a share of household consumption expenditure (HCE) is on a steady rise. Between 2011-12 and 2022-23, the share of OOPE in HCE has increased to 5.9% from 5.5% in rural areas and from 6.9% to 7.1% in urban areas (Chart 2). If OOPE has truly declined in this period, its share in HCE should have also declined. An increased proportion of the household budget going for health indicates that health care is becoming more expensive.

The NHA OOPE estimates have not been able to capture the massive distress caused by COVID-19. As you would note, the NHA numbers show a secular decline. Since none of the NSS rounds has data for the COVID-19 period, we have used the Consumer Pyramids Household Survey conducted by Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CPHS-CMIE), which surveys each household at least twice a year. Since the CMIE has its limitations, it may not be compared

with the NSS in absolute. To make them comparable, we have indexed both the CMIE and NHA OOPE absolute numbers as 100 (2016-17) and traced the trend over time. The NHA numbers show a steep decline in 2017-18 and then a very gradual crawling up (Chart 3). In comparison, the CMIE estimates show a steep decline during the COVID-19 years and then a 'V' shaped increase in OOPE. Current NHA estimates miss out these fluctuations completely, hence seeming unrealistic.

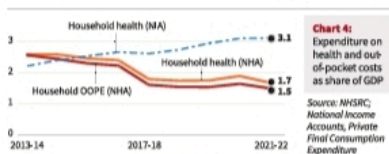
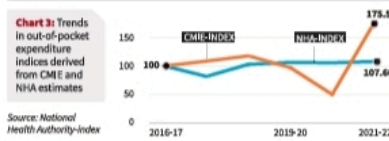
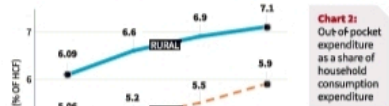
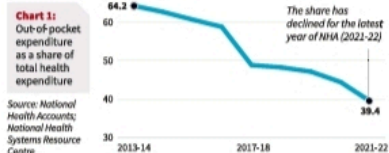
The NHA is supposed to be a satellite account of the National Income Account (NIA). NIA estimates private final consumption expenditure on health as well. NIA estimates of the share of household spending on health in GDP depict a steady increase over these years, while NHA numbers show a decline (Chart 4). Apart from direct OOPE, households also spend on insurance premiums. Even if we take both into account, we still see a steep unexplained decline in NHA estimates, while NIA estimates show a continuous rise.

Current NHA estimates remain conveniently confined within their methodological limitations and help draw politically motivated policy conclusions. The problem is that it depends heavily on one data set, which, for various reasons, has not been able to capture the reality pertaining to the hardships that households are facing in seeking health care. While medicine prices are skyrocketing, all other evidence indicates that health care is getting costlier.

The NSS Morbidity round remains one of the most important sources of details of how and where households spend money. All data sources have their limitations and challenges, including the ones we have sighted. The NSS health round estimates need to be complemented with various other data sources and methods to produce more realistic macro health policy numbers for national health accounts.

Unseen expense

The data for the charts were sourced from NHA, National Health Systems Resource Centre, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, National Income Accounts, PFCE



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindustan

FIFTY YEARS AGO SEPTEMBER 18, 1975

Dual-Colour for Cars Averts Collisions

NEW DELHI, Sept. 17.

Dual-colour cars are safer and less prone to be run into by other drivers. This is stated in a police journal report prepared by Mr. Gautam Kaul of the Delhi Police after studying data from four countries. According to the report, white is the safest for a single colour coat while black can be deceptive because of its poor light reflection particularly at night. The report says that the police had suggested to the Indian car manufacturers to bring about colour changes but the manufacturers pleaded inability because a double-colour coat would increase the prices and the consumers generally had preferences for certain colours. The report says that for good visibility at night a vehicle should reflect at least half of an approaching vehicle's lights. Eight colours come up to this standard and they are: white (84 per cent), cream (70 per cent), ivory (67 per cent), light pink (66.5 per cent), yellow (57 per cent), flesh (51.6 per cent), buff (51.5 per cent) and light grey (51.5 per cent). It said that black colour could be very effective in increasing visibility if used in combination with these colours. The report quoted a study by the University of California (USA) which showed that the colour of an approaching car "definitely influenced" a driver's judgment of how far away the vehicle was. — UNI.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO SEPTEMBER 18, 1925

Dietary Allowances in Madras Hospitals

Committee Recommends An Increase
The Hospital Dietary Charges Committee presided over by the Surgeon-General has concluded its sittings. It is understood that they have recommended an increase of annas 2 in the rate allowed for the diet of the Indian as well as Anglo-Indian patients admitted to the State Hospitals in the city, which increase will, it is expected, cover the extra expenditure entailed by the higher price for which some of the important articles for diet such as bread, milk and chicken were contracted for this year. The increase is from 8 and 10 As for Indian and Anglo-Indian diet to 10 and 12 As, respectively. It is also understood that the Committee has recommended that in future the Superintendent of the different hospitals should be given the power to contract for the supply of the necessary dietary articles independent of the Surgeon-General who this year, had contracted for all the hospitals in the city.

BIBLIOGRAPHY



Moplah prisoners go on trial in Calicut. GETTY IMAGES

A little-known resistance in Malabar region during the run-up to Independence

A new book sheds light on the 'Malabar Revolt' in an area which had a history of Muslims and Hindus collaboratively persevering in their defiance against colonial forces; other books explore its links to the Khilafat movement and why it is more than a peasant uprising

Ziya Us Salami

Growing up in Delhi, one had only a limited idea about the resistance movement in the Malabar region. The popular history books tended to treat it at best as a little outpost of the freedom movement. Noted historian Bipan Chandra in *India's Struggle for Independence* (Penguin) dubbed it as a peasant movement. "In August 1921, peasant discontent erupted in the Malabar district of Kerala. Here, Mappila tenants rebelled. Their grievances related to lack of any security of tenure, renewal fees, high rents...the impetus for resistance had first come from the Malabar District Congress Conference at Manjeri in April 1920," Chandra writes. Sumit Sarkar too, confined himself to calling it an "anti-landlord revolt" in his book, *Modern India (1885-1947)*, published by Pearson. There have been noises about the association with the Khilafat movement in academic circles, though. Just as there are historians who see it merely from a communal prism. A holistic picture had failed to emerge.

Enlightening exploration

Some belated but well-deserved attention on the resistance movement has come courtesy Abbas Panakkal's *Musalier King: Decolonial Historiography of Malabar's Resistance* (Bloomsbury). Starting off as an exploratory exercise on the 75th anniversary of the movement, Panakkal's venture transforms into an enlightening journey.

Early in the book, the author writes, "The socio-geographical landscape of our

community underwent profound transformations in the wake of the cataclysmic events of 1921-22. This epoch witnessed a staggering loss of lives, the forced displacement of families... The old mosque of Tirurangadi emerged as a veritable repository of memories and narratives, a historical bastion of ideological resistance against the British colonial apparatus." Fittingly, it was on the commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the 1921 resistance that Panakkal started his exploration, speaking to the family members of those directly involved.

Among them was Muhammad Ali Musaliar, grandson of Ali Musaliar, a luminary of the 1921 struggle. The British referred to Ali Musaliar as a king; the locals regarded him as a community and spiritual leader, calling him Musaliar Uppappa. Indeed, if Musaliar was a 'king', Malabar was his 'kingdom'.

Incidentally, the term Malabar is derived from the vernacular Mala, signifying hill, and the affix originating from the Arabic word *barr*, which means the source of all goodness. The region had a long tradition of anti-colonial resistance dating back to the 16th century. "Muslims and Hindus collaboratively persevered in their resistance against colonial forces," writes Panakkal.

This strong anti-colonial stance had unforeseen consequences. The British, with not a little help from some Indian officials, sought to undermine the movement. Among them was C. Gopalan Nair, Malabar district deputy collector, who "unabashedly deployed his literary prowess in favour of the British cause". Observes Panakkal: "The usage of terms

such as Malabar Revolt and Moplah Rebellion to delineate these struggles is emblematic of this issue. Revolt itself is a term crafted by colonial administration, characterising violent actions against a recognised government or ruler."

'Peaceful coexistence'

There were others, though, whose hearts beat for the locals, luminaries who either linked the resistance to the Khilafat movement or, in isolation, read it as an agrarian struggle. Among them were Saumyendranath Tagore, who regarded it as "an organic and spontaneous 'uprising' of the Malabar peasantry against British imperial rule" and E.M.S. Nambudiripad, who too "didn't discount the role played by agrarian discontent". There was a common thread: the oppression and exploitation meted out by colonial officials and landlords was no less severe upon the Hindu peasants as they were on their Muslim counterparts. Writes Panakkal, "The Malabar narrative heralded a rare phenomenon: the harmonious convergence of Hindus and Muslims. This coalition was underpinned by a shared objective – to oust the oppressor – and a collective aspiration for a peaceful coexistence in the region."

It is something with which even R.N. Hittchock, police superintendent of Malabar, agreed. As written by N.P. Chekkutty in *Mappila and Comrades: A Century of Communist-Muslim Relations* (Other Books). "Hittchock also reveals that Hindus were involved in the rebellion, at least in some parts of the affected areas. 'The Hindus took an active part only in the extreme south-eastern area of the Valluvanad taluk and in small

numbers for a concise time. They were then responsible for much property damage." In his persuasively argued book, with much of the focus on the post-resistance time in the late 1930s and 40s, Chekkutty also talks of the rebels not harming any substantial section of the local population before going on to document the failure of the Congress to retain local Muslim support after the resistance movement. It was a vacuum which both the Communist Party of India and the All India Muslim League attempted to fill.

The Khilafat angle

Interestingly, against this background of common cause transcending the confines of faith came the pan-Islamist Khilafat movement. Things became even more ironic as Malabar's historical tapestry of anti-colonial resistance "had been woven with threads of unity binding Muslims and non-Muslims in a shared 'jihad' to safeguard the throne of the Hindu king, the Zamorin of Calicut," as analysed by Panakkal. Khilafat, Non-Cooperation, Mappila, with seemingly disparate social elements, all fused to bring about a strong anti-colonial movement.

Indeed, here both the communities enjoyed a rare camaraderie, and there was a happy collective involvement even in religiously significant events like the *nercha* and *utsavam*. During the latter, Muslim families returned with bags full of jaggery candies, much like Ali Musaliar used to do for Amina, his daughter. Sums up Panakkal: "The experience of Muslims and Islam in South India is different from the experience in North India, and this is not trivial."



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

Uppendran

"Where are you off to?"
"To the market. I need to buy some vegetables."
"If you are planning to buy onions, you'd better take Bala. Someone told me that he knows his onions."
"Ha! Ha! Ha!"
"What's so funny?"
"To 'know one's onions' has nothing to do with buying onions. It's an idiomatic expression meaning to be skilled or well informed. For example, every office needs workers who know their onions."
"We need teachers who know their onions."
"That's true. I had a teacher who was off her onion."
"Off her onion! What does it mean? Someone who doesn't eat onions?"
"No. No! When you say someone is 'off his/her onion', it means he/she is crazy. For example, our local MP is off his onion."

"Is it an informal expression?"
"That's right."
"I have a friend who is off his onions. Gopal! He met the Principal yesterday and said that we should have a debate on Ayodhya."
"Good! What is his onion! Doesn't he know that Ayodhya is a hot potato?"
"What does it mean?"
"A subject that is controversial or sensitive that people don't want to deal with. It is called a hot potato. For example, in many countries, the subject of abortion has become a hot potato."
"Some years ago, the Mandal Commission Report became a political hot potato in India."
"That's why some people wanted to drop it like a hot potato."
"To drop something like a hot potato! Does it mean to get rid of something unwanted very quickly?"
"To get rid of someone or something that is unwanted, very quickly."
For example, when Somu realised that Sunitha didn't have any money, he dropped her like a hot potato."
"People having AIDS are often dropped like a hot potato by their friends."
"Sad, but true. Here's another example. The new committee dropped the old project like a hot potato."
"My friend Shoba called up and..."
"I like her. That girl is full of beans."
"First onions, then potatoes, and now beans!"

"... if you refer to someone as being 'full of beans', it means he/she is very energetic, lively". For example, for an 80 year old man, Suresh Rao is full of beans."
"My neighbour's six year old was full of beans this morning."
"Some people are full of beans early in the morning. By the way, what did Shoba want?"
"She wanted to know if she should tell Gopa about the surprise party we are planning for Raja."
"Gopa is sure to spill the beans."
"Spill the beans! Does it mean to reveal a secret or something?"
"That's right! When you spill the beans, you give away information intentionally or unintentionally. For example, when the man was caught, the police beat him till he spilled the beans about where the next robbery was going to be."
"I hate it when people spill the beans."
"So do I. Would you like to have some tea?"

"Tea? I thought you were on your way to buy vegetables!"
"Haven't we talked enough about vegetables? Besides, I've just realised that I haven't a bean to buy beans!"
Published in *The Hindu* on February 24, 1998

THE DAILY QUIZ

Nepal has had a tumultuous September with the fall of its government and Parliament. Here's a quiz on the country's key leaders

Srinivasan Raman

QUESTION 1

This person was the first democratically elected Prime Minister of Nepal. Name this prominent Nepali leader who staunchly believed in democratic socialism.

QUESTION 2

Considered the key founder of the communist movement in Nepal, this person played a major role in the struggles against the autocratic Ranacharya in Nepal, which ended in 1951. This person sought to align with the Nepali Congress in a democratic movement against the monarchy. Name him.

QUESTION 3

The younger brother of the person mentioned in Question 1, this leader played a prominent role in the 1990 Jan Andolan that led to the

democratisation of the country from the Panchayat system to a constitutional monarchy.

QUESTION 4

A prominent Communist leader, this person was also actively involved in Jan-Andolan I and is considered the key mover behind the largest communist party (in Nepal), the CPN-UML's doctrine of "people's multi-party democracy". This person's life was cut short in a tragic and suspicious road accident in 1993. Name him.

QUESTION 5

This former PM of Nepal is considered one of the key architects of the process of electing a popular Constituent Assembly to rewrite its Constitution and of the transformation of Nepal from a constitutional monarchy into a republic. Name him, and also what is his connection to Jawaharlal Nehru University?



Visual Question:

Identify the two prominent Nepali leaders in the picture (2nd and 3rd from left) alongside Pandit Nehru. The picture was taken in 1951. WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz: 1. In 2014, PM Modi led the BJP to a parliamentary majority. This was the first for the BJP since. **Ans: 1984**
2. Mr. Modi wrote a Gujarati-language book which describes events during the Emergency. **Ans: Sangharsh Ma Gujarati**
3. Which institution was replaced by the NITI Aayog? **Ans: Planning Commission**
4. Mr. Modi entered the Gujarat State Legislature after winning a byelection in? **Ans: Rajkot II**
5. Mr. Modi wrote a foreword to a 2014 textbook by which Indian educationist? **Ans: Dinanath Batra**
6. PM was a candidate in 2 LS constituencies in 2014. **Ans: Varanasi, Vadodara**
Visual: This image signifies the launch of a new initiative in 2014. **Ans: Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan on October 2, 2014**
Early Birds: C Saravanan | Sadhan Kumar Panda | Murari Mishra | Anubhav gupta

Word of the day

Taciturn:
tending not to say very much

Synonyms: uncommunicative, quiet, silent
Usage: She is usually taciturn, but today she was very cheerful.

Pronunciation: newsth.livet/taciturnpro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /tæsɪtɪn/

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



Letter and spirit

The Supreme Court did well to stay and uphold different Waqf Act provisions

The Supreme Court of India walked a tight-rope in its judgment delivered on September 15, on the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025, which amended the 1995 Waqf Act to regulate Muslim religious endowments, including vast land holdings across India. The Court put several controversial provisions on hold but refused to freeze the entire Act on grounds of constitutionality and other concerns. This turned out to be a rare instance where supporters and critics of the Act claimed vindication for their respective positions in the Court's order. The government views the amendments as necessary to curb the alleged misuse and corruption under the earlier Waqf Act, while critics, including the Congress, see it as arbitrary interference in the affairs of the Muslim community. The Court has now stayed the requirement that only Muslims practising for five years can create waqf, and the power vested in District Collectors to adjudicate waqf property disputes. It also capped non-Muslim members to four in the Central Waqf Council and three in State Boards, down from potentially 12 and seven, respectively. The Court also directed that CEOs of Waqf Boards should preferably be Muslims. The removal of the provision for waqf-by-user recognition in the amended law has been upheld as valid by the Court, with the caveat that waqf properties registered as on April 8, 2025, under such a claim remain protected. Restrictions on waqf status for protected monuments and tribal lands were deemed constitutionally valid.

While the order diffuses the conflict for now, the larger question of balancing religious autonomy and state regulation continues – and that is better tackled through building consensus within and between communities. Autonomy claims cannot be a facade for misuse of community resources by its own leaders; nor can any group of people lay claim over public resources in the name of faith. The state has not only the right but also the responsibility to ensure that people are not taken for a ride by anyone. The trouble arises when the state discriminates between religious groups in the application of this principle. The Court rightly went with the philosophy of presumption of constitutionality of laws passed by Parliament. But partisan politics of an extreme nature can delegitimise representative democracy. The government must consciously negotiate with the Opposition in Parliament to ensure that the laws enacted have the widest political and social acceptance. When laws affecting particular communities are made, they should be taken into confidence. None of this is easy, and complete consensus is never possible, but attempts should be made in that direction.

Genocide in Gaza

India should speak up against Israel's atrocities

The UN Commission of Inquiry, after a multi-year investigation, has concluded that Israeli authorities have committed genocide in Gaza. The finding is hardly surprising as the world's leading rights organisations, including two Israeli groups, and genocide scholars, had already accused Israel of committing what is one of the gravest crimes in international law. Yet, the finding would lend weight to such reports and resonate before the International Court of Justice, which is hearing genocide charges against Israel, and the International Criminal Court, which has issued an arrest warrant for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The UN Commission found "reasonable grounds" to conclude that four of the five genocidal acts – killing members of a community, serious bodily and mental harm, actions aimed at destroying the group, and preventing births – have been carried out since the war began following Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack. Israel, which denies allegations of genocide and war crimes, has killed at least 65,000 Palestinians in Gaza in 23 months, many of them women and children. "The responsibility for these atrocity crimes lies with Israeli authorities at the highest echelons who have orchestrated a genocidal campaign with the specific intent to destroy the Palestinian group in Gaza," says the panel's leader, Navi Pillay.

It is tragically ironic that Israel, a nation built by the survivors of the Shoah, is committing genocide against Palestinians. On the day the UN Commission released its report, Israel launched yet another ground offensive in the famine-stricken Gaza City. Israel's responses to reports of war crimes and mass killings have invariably been further escalations, killing and displacing even more Palestinians. The war, prolonged by Mr. Netanyahu for his political survival, has left a stain on Israel's national compass and deepened its global isolation. In the weeks ahead, France, the U.K. and several other countries are expected to recognise Palestinian sovereignty, while the European Commission has proposed to suspend trade concessions with Israel and sanction extremist Ministers. Yet, Israel, shielded by the U.S., shows little concern. The Trump administration is unlikely to turn up the heat on its closest ally. But Europe should start treating Israel as what it has become – a rogue state with genocidal intent and actions. India, once a champion of the Palestinian cause, has so far refrained from directly criticising the Jewish nation. But it should realise that an uncontrollable, expansionist Israel, blowing international law to smithereens, is not in India's national or regional interests. New Delhi should speak up against the genocide and use its leverage to help bring the war to an end.

A judicial nudge following stuck legislative business

The Supreme Court of India has heard arguments on the Presidential Reference in respect of the Governor's powers under Article 200 pertaining to the assent to Bills passed by the State legislature. Earlier, a two-judge Bench, headed by Justice J.B. Pardiwalla, had fixed a timeline of three months for the Governor to take a final decision on a Bill submitted to him for assent. The same timeline was made applicable to the President of India also.

The time limit fixed by the Court has raised eyebrows in the government as well in the media. The general refrain from a section of the media was that the Court cannot direct the Governor or the President, who are high constitutional authorities, to act within a specified time when the Constitution does not have any such time frame. The government had also taken this line of argument in the Court.

Reiteration of a recognised principle

Article 200 of the Constitution has four options for the Governor when a Bill is presented to him after being passed by the State legislature. These options are to assent to the Bill; to withhold assent; return the Bill to the Assembly with a request to reconsider the Bill as a whole or certain clauses, or reserve it for the consideration of the President.

A very important question which arose in the context of the Governor's role in dealing with a Bill after it is passed by the legislature is whether the Governor has any discretion in the exercise of any of the options mentioned above. Under Article 163, the Governor is required to exercise his functions only on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers except in matters specified by or under the Constitution. The Court has, in cases from *Shamsher Singh vs State of Punjab* (1974), to *Nabam Rebia* (2016), made it clear that the Governor cannot perform any of his executive functions except on the advice of the Council of Ministers headed by the Chief Minister. The Sarkaria Commission and Punchhi Commission too reiterated this well-recognised constitutional principle.

The point that has been emphasised in all the judgments of the Court and the judicial commissions is that the Governor is just a constitutional head and that the real executive power of the state is vested in the elected government. Therefore, the Governor cannot act independently.

So, the question of crucial importance in this context is whether the Governor, while exercising any of the options under Article 200, can act in his discretion. The answer to this question will become clear when we take a close look at the



P.D.T. Achary

is former Secretary General, Lok Sabha

Government of India Act, 1935. Section 75 of this Act is substantially the same as Article 200. Section 75 uses the words "the governor in his discretion" which means that giving assent or withholding it or sending the Bill back to the legislature or reserving it for the consideration of the Governor General is done by the Governor in his discretion.

This Section has been virtually reproduced in Article 200 but omits the words "in his discretion". This would show that the Constitution-makers wanted the Governor to exercise the power under Article 200 only on the advice of the Council of Ministers.

The issue of 'discretion'

The question of discretion of the Governor under Article 200 is one that has been dealt with by the Court in a number of cases. Surprisingly, the Court, in *Shamsher Singh*, discovered a discretionary power in the Governor under Article 200. It held that he must exercise it to the best of his judgement and should pursue a course which is not detrimental to the state.

But the Court, in *The State of Tamil Nadu vs The Governor of Tamil Nadu and Anr.* (2025), did not accept the idea of a Governor exercising his discretion in withholding assent or reserving the Bill for the consideration of the President. It says, "if the power to withhold assent to Bills or to reserve them for the consideration of the President is construed as falling within the exclusive discretionary domain of the governor who would be free to decide a course of action notwithstanding the aid and advice of the council of ministers it would have the potential of turning him into a super constitutional figure having the power to bring to a complete halt the operation of the legislative machinery in the state. The governor cannot be vested with such power..."

The Sarkaria Commission, while granting that, normally, in the discharge of the functions under Article 200, the Governor must abide by the advice of his Council of Ministers, said that in rare and exceptional cases, he may act in the exercise of his discretion especially when the provisions of the Bill are patently unconstitutional.

While divergence of opinion exists in Indian judicial decisions, according to D.D. Basu, the renowned constitutional authority, in the United Kingdom, the sovereign has no power to withhold a Bill without the advice of the Council of Ministers. The deliberate omission of the word 'discretion' in Article 200 of the Constitution of India compels the conclusion that this Article does not permit discretion of any kind by the Governor while dealing with a Bill passed by the legislature.

The next question is about the time limit

prescribed by the Court within which the Governor and the President are required to take a final decision on a Bill. From the arguments made on behalf of the Union Government, it is clear that it has strong objections to the time limit. It is true that no time limit has been prescribed by Articles 200 or 201. It is obvious that the Court fixed the time limit because some of the Governors had sat on Bills for years together without exercising any of the options available under Article 200. The question is whether the Constitution permits such a course of action. It does not.

So, is there no remedy available to States whose important Bills go in limbo? When a Governor sits on Bills for years, should not the Union intervene and direct the Governor to act in accordance with the Constitution? Article 355 can be creatively interpreted to mean that the Union Government can intervene to ensure that the government of a State is carried on in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution. Thwarting the legislative process by the Governor by sitting on Bills passed by the legislature for years creates a situation where in the government cannot be carried on in accordance with the provisions of the constitution. Article 355 imposes a duty upon the Union to direct the Governor to perform his constitutional duty under Article 200.

A remedy for what is now a reality

In no case has the Union intervened to direct a Governor to clear the Bills that he sat on for years. That has forced the Supreme Court to fix the time limit now. The Constitution makers could not have visualised such conduct on the part of the Governor. But now that it has become a reality, a remedy has to be found. By fixing the time limit, the Court has smoothened the legislative process.

The judgments in the two recent cases, namely, *State of Punjab vs Principal Secretary to the Governor* (2023) and *The State of Tamil Nadu vs The Governor of Tamil Nadu and Anr.* are in fact landmark judgments which struck a blow for federalism. Judges interpret the Constitution and clarify the legal ambiguities, and in that process also create new rules. Article 21 was a prisoner of the literal interpretation since 1950 (A.K. Gopalan) till the American doctrine of due process was imported into it and expanded its ambit in *Maneka Gandhi* (1978).

Therefore, it is quite out of place to argue that judges, by interpreting the existing provisions to meet a new situation which posed a serious challenge to the constitutional order, are amending the Constitution. The fallacy in this argument is too obvious to miss.

Let Geiger counters, not guesses, shape Iran actions

A new nuclear crisis is taking shape. After the United States's strikes on Iran's underground nuclear site at Fordow, in June 2025, Britain, France, and Germany (E3), on August 28, triggered the "snapback" clause of the 2015 nuclear deal citing violations by Tehran. The world has not much time to choose between diplomacy and escalation.

If this window closes without agreement, the United Nations will restore earlier measures that call for a halt to enrichment, tighten controls on arms transfers, restrict finance and shipping, and re-designate individuals linked to Iran's nuclear and missile programmes.

The stakes are global. Iran rejects the move as unlawful. Washington sees it as a test of non-proliferation. Europe views multilateral commitments on trial. Russia and China seek delay and leverage. Israel and the Gulf states weigh warning times and war risks. Oil importers worry about prices. Shipping companies reassess insurance. Banks calculate exposure. For India, the anxieties are sharper still. Its extended neighbourhood must remain stable, oil must keep flowing through the Strait of Hormuz, and the safety of eight million Indian citizens in West Asia must be ensured.

The vacuum of facts

These concerns are magnified by the absence of verified information. Since the strikes on Iranian facilities, no one has walked the rubble with a dosimeter or tested a coolant line. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) staff left Iran after its Parliament passed legislation halting cooperation without approval from the Supreme National Security Council. Rumour has replaced measurement. Every capital has drawn



Sved Akbaruddin

was an international civil servant at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) from 2006 to 2011

its own conclusions while global attention shifted elsewhere.

IAEA access is not a formality but the hinge of diplomacy. Verification replaces speculation with facts, sets a baseline on Iranian stockpiles, and anchors negotiations to data, not fears. Regular IAEA updates on Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, under Russian control, calmed jittery markets. A comparable presence in Iran could steady expectations and reduce volatility. If verification is framed as a sovereign choice, rather than a concession, it would strengthen Iran's claim that the programme is civilian while upholding the non-proliferation bargain.

Yet, Tehran's reservations are not unfounded. Iranian officials argue that sovereignty and security outweigh treaty obligations. They fear inspectors may, even unintentionally, enable targeting of sensitive sites. This is not paranoia. Strikes by Israel and the U.S. in the past closely followed IAEA disclosures. Such episodes have hardened parliamentary resistance. There is also the calculus of leverage. Revealing what survives of the programme could weaken Iran's hand in bargaining with Washington.

Since the E3 triggered its snapback, some Iranian legislators have urged withdrawal from the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty. That would strip the IAEA of legal authority to inspect Iranian sites. The crisis would then enter uncharted territory with sanctions hardening and the military option returning to the fore.

Where India fits in

India cannot stand aside. As a long-standing member of the IAEA Board, with ties across divides, it is well placed to assist. As a part of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), India,

at the Tianjin summit, has joined other nations in condemning the military strikes by Israel and the U.S. against Iran.

Within the SCO and BRICS – both of which include Iran – India can support a diplomatic call to restore technical IAEA access in a format that protects operational details while ensuring transparency. If framed as a sovereign choice by Tehran, and backed by the Global South, it may gain Iranian approval. India can also contribute technical capacity. Its IAEA-certified Tarapur facility could handle sample analysis under safeguards, showing that responsible stakeholders can provide practical support in moments of crisis. These contributions would not make headlines, but they could shift the balance toward diplomacy at a time when the risk of escalation is high.

A closing window

The window for diplomacy is narrowing fast. By allowing IAEA inspectors into Bushehr to monitor the refuelling of the nuclear power plant last month, Iran has offered a small opening. Also, last week, on September 9, 2025, the IAEA and Iran signed an agreement in Cairo, Egypt. If this extends to bombed sites, the E3 may respond by pausing the snapback. Such choices could shift the momentum back to diplomacy. The alternative is grim – sanctions, standoffs, and a cycle of strike and counterstrike.

For India, the choice is clear. Backing verification protects its interests in West Asia, its citizens abroad, and its energy security. It also marks India as a responsible global power. The way forward is simple. It is time to let Geiger counters, and not guesses, decide Iran's nuclear programme.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

'Genocide in Gaza'

The United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry says that "genocide is occurring in Gaza". However, the Commission does not speak on behalf of the world body (Front page, September 17). The accusation of genocide in Gaza, by Israel, was proven when the Defence Minister of Israel declared that "Gaza is burning" (World page, September 17). Why are world leaders keeping mum in the wake of this catastrophic military action by Israel? What is the UN Security Council doing? The U.S. President is silent

too. There is no control over war mongers.

D. Sethuraman,
Chennai

Israel does not seem to be in the mood to relent, instead, blaming world agencies for a partisan approach. It seems that the annihilation of innocents is not going to end soon. History will never pardon nations that are siding with Israel. It is very unfortunate that innocents including children are being killed.

Brij B. Goyal,
Ludhiana, Punjab

We now know that Israel 'is

committing genocide in Gaza' and 'Gaza is burning'. The implication is that the superpowers are supporting the grave massacre in Gaza being initiated by a blood-thirsty Israel. Talk of creating a Palestinian state is an eye wash. What a horrible plight it is for the people of Gaza.

A. Kaja Nazimudeen,
Eruvadi, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu

Himalayan catastrophe
The floods in Dehradun show, once again, how vulnerable the Himalayas are. Much of this is not just nature's fury but also the result of unplanned

development on weak slopes, deforestation and encroachment along rivers. What is needed is strict control over construction, restoring forests, better warning systems and more research on rainfall and glacier changes.

A. Myilsami,
Coimbatore

Party rumblings
One wonders why there is

such a din over the removal of Arambani Ramadoss by his father, Dr. Ramadoss, from the PMK. The internal problems within the party were never an issue. Heavens will not fall if there is a change in leadership.

Mani Natarajan,
Chennai

Why Cypress matters
India's IT industry is at a turning point, where speed,

accuracy and reliability in software delivery are essential. In this context, automation testing tools such as Cypress are proving far more effective than older frameworks such as Selenium. For companies adopting agile and DevOps practices, this efficiency is invaluable. As India positions itself as a global digital leader, it is vital for businesses to train their workforce in modern automation tools.

Vivek M. Jain,
Chennai

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

Corrections & Clarifications

In a report, "Rising obesity, children's exposure to ultra-processed foods", the fourth bar of Chart 2 should have read 16 instead of 103 ("Data Point" – Opinion Page, September 16, 2025).

The Reader's Editor's office can be contacted by telephone: 094-44-2027541/2027532. E-mail: read@thehindu.co.in

SCIENCE

Crosstalk: waning immunity against Japanese encephalitis worsens dengue

The Japanese encephalitis virus and dengue virus belong to the same genus; previous research had hinted at interactions between JEV immunity and dengue outcomes; to understand more, a new study examined three large dengue outbreaks in Dharan, Nepal, between 2019 and 2023

Puneet Kumar
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Mosquito-borne diseases such as dengue fever are an increasing threat to global health. Rapid urbanisation and climate change have created ideal conditions for mosquitoes to breed – while expanding global travel has accelerated the spread of these infections to new regions and populations. A new study published last week has now added an unexpected twist to this story. Researchers have found that waning immunity against infections of the Japanese encephalitis virus (JEV) can predispose individuals to more severe dengue. The finding highlights the complex interplay between related viruses and suggests a potential strategy to beat severe dengue through timely booster doses of the JE vaccine.

Both Japanese encephalitis virus and dengue virus belong to the same genus, *Orthoflavivirus*. Previous research had hinted at interactions between JEV immunity and dengue outcomes. To understand more, the present study, involving researchers from Singapore, Nepal, and the U.S., examined three large dengue outbreaks in Dharan in Nepal between 2019 and 2023.

Nepal provided a unique setting: the country has high population immunity against JE due to a successful vaccination programme launched in 2006 – yet until recently, it had very limited exposure to dengue. This made it possible to study how JEV immunity alone might influence dengue outcomes. Prior exposure to dengue itself is known to increase the risk of severe disease through antibody-dependent enhancement: where antibodies from a first infection facilitate viral entry during subsequent infections.

But in Nepal's largely dengue-naïve population, the impact of JEV immunity could be specifically isolated.

Striking results

For the study, the research team recruited dengue patients aged 15 to 65 years early in their illness, i.e. within three days of fever onset, confirmed by rapid diagnostic tests (NSI or DENV IgM). The study spanned five years and included three major dengue outbreaks. In 2019, 2022, and 2023. In total, 546 patients were enrolled and their blood samples were tested for viral serotypes, immune markers, and a biomarker called chymase. Chymase is an enzyme released by mast cells during inflammation, and it has been consistently validated in earlier studies as a marker of severe dengue. Its levels have been found to be elevated during both the acute and defervescence phases of the illness.

The findings, published in *Science Translational Medicine* on September 3, were striking.

Approximately 61% of patients had pre-existing antibodies that neutralised JEV, reflecting Nepal's relatively high level of immunity against JEV. Individuals with confirmed JEV immunity showed significantly higher concentrations of chymase compared to JEV-naïve patients.

Further analysis revealed that this effect was primarily associated with mid-range – not too low, not too high – anti-JEV antibody titres of 1:60. Patients with these titres had significantly higher



An Aedes mosquito and a coloured transmission electron micrograph of dengue virus particles (yellow). Aedes mosquitoes are known to transmit the dengue virus. CDC, NIAID

chymase levels compared to those with titres of 1:10 or 1:40. Notably, this correlation was not observed when anti-JEV ELISA titres were used, possibly reflecting cross-reactivity between DENV-specific antibodies and JEV in ELISA-based assays.

The association between mid-range JEV neutralising antibody titres and severe dengue was also reflected in clinical outcomes. The fraction of patients diagnosed with either dengue fever with warning signs or severe dengue, was significantly higher among those with titres of 1:60 compared to patients without JEV immunity.

These individuals had a 3x higher risk of developing dengue fever with warning signs. Importantly, most participants were experiencing primary dengue infections, with only 710% showing evidence of prior exposure.

These findings isolated the role of JEV immunity in shaping disease outcomes. Even after excluding cases of secondary dengue, the results remained unchanged, strongly supporting the conclusion that JEV immunity alone is sufficient to modulate dengue severity, independent of prior DENV exposure.

Echoes from other flaviviruses

These findings echo earlier observations in studies of Zika and dengue viruses, where moderate antibody levels sometimes enhanced the viral infection of immune cells and worsened disease – while very high titres were protective. This is to say, as antibody levels wane over time, populations may enter a vulnerable "middle zone" in which

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immunity is insufficient to protect but strong enough to enhance disease.

The implications are significant for Asia, where JEV vaccination is common and dengue is spreading, and for the complex and connected nature of public health in a globalised world.

Specifically, the study showed that rising temperature and extended monsoons have caused the epidemiology of dengue fever to change rapidly, with increasingly bigger outbreaks in areas where there used to be only sporadic cases. Such regions include India, which is also facing similar kinds and levels of climate change. Thus, the authors suggest, the country needs to be ready with appropriate strategies to deal with the new challenges that will sprout as a result.

Second, while the study clearly showed that moderate titres of neutralising antibodies against JEV can worsen outcomes with dengue fever, it does not undermine the importance of JE vaccination *per se*. Such vaccination has successfully lowered the incidence of JE in the population.

The findings of previous studies have shown that the titres of neutralising

antibodies against JEV wane after a few years of vaccination. After five years, for example, only around 63% of vaccinated individuals still have neutralising antibodies against JEV. Thus, the new study strongly suggests the need for suitably timed JE vaccine boosters, which could serve the dual purpose of maintaining durable immunity against JE for longer periods and protecting the population against the risk of dengue fever with warning signs and severe dengue (due to waning titres of anti-JEV antibodies).

Third, the study reinforces the importance of chymase as a biomarker of dengue fever with warning signs and severe dengue, making it a convenient tool for physicians handling the uncertain trajectories of dengue fever.

Viruses respect no borders. The new study provides critical insights into how waning immunity against one flavivirus can worsen outcomes of another. Strategically timed JE boosters could be a valuable tool not just in sustaining protection against encephalitis but also in mitigating the severity of dengue – a disease whose burden is rising sharply across Asia.

Such remarkable work ultimately underscores the importance of integrated, forward-looking approaches in infectious disease control, with insights that could save countless lives.

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A Pollock art work on display in Atlanta. AP

Cracking of the blues mystery in Pollock painting reveals new trick

Vasudevan Mukunth

Jackson Pollock's Number 1A, 1948 is one of the most famous examples of action painting, where paint is dripped, splashed, and layered onto a surface. While art historians and scientists had years ago identified the reds and the yellows in this canvas to be cadmium pigments, the provenance of the striking blue that threatened through the work remained unclear. This lacuna was not just a matter of curiosity. Knowing exactly which pigments Pollock used could help authenticate his paintings and help preserve them. The pigment has unusual properties. Once popular in the mid-20th century but later banned for its toxicity, it stood out because of its pure blue hue and chemical stability.

Now, scholars from the U.S., including the Museum of Modern Art in New York, have combined chemistry, physics, and art conservation in a September 15 paper in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* to confirm that the blue is due to a well-known, and toxic, pigment called manganese blue – and in the process also found a new way for scientists to 'adjust' the colours of inorganic pigments. The team used resonance Raman spectroscopy, which measured the vibrations of molecules when light excited them to identify the pigment, and magnetic circular dichroism spectroscopy to explore how the pigment created its blue colour.

Scholars combined chemistry, physics, and art conservation to confirm that the blue is due to a toxic pigment called manganese blue. They also found a new way to adjust the colours of inorganic pigments

By combining these approaches, the researchers could map the small electronic transitions inside the pigment – the jumps of electrons between energy levels – that determined which colours of light were absorbed and which were reflected. The team also tested the blue passages in Number 1A, 1948 directly with Raman spectroscopy to settle once and for all what Pollock had put on his canvas. The spectroscopic evidence confirmed that the blue pigment in Pollock's painting was manganese blue. At the molecular level, the colour was found to come from charge-transfer bands: when electrons moved from oxygen atoms to the manganese atom, light of certain energies was absorbed. Normally, such transitions produce muddier colours. But here, the exchange of electrons in certain orbitals absorbed, and thus filtered out, green and violet light while letting blue light through.

This result is significant for many reasons. In art, confirming manganese blue in Number 1A, 1948 will help conservators plan restoration work and give scholars more evidence of Pollock's materials and choices. It could also open the possibility of identifying the same pigment in other works by Pollock and his contemporaries, like Willem de Kooning, who was also said to favour it. For scientists, the researchers wrote, the study shows that inorganic pigments can be tuned by adjusting the arrangement of other atoms around a metal atom, thus altering its electrons' energy levels. This could inspire the design of new pigments or optical materials, perhaps even for use in technologies like lasers.

Finally, according to the paper, the findings offer a reminder that art and science aren't separate worlds. A question born in front of a canvas – "what blue is this?" – led to deeper insights into how matter and light interact, showing how creativity and chemistry work together.

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THE SCIENCE QUIZ

When sound gets on the move

Vasudevan Mukunth

QUESTION 1

Grains of sand on a vibrating plate often shift into precise, geometric shapes that depend on the vibrations. These patterns also change when the frequency changes. What name is given to this visualisation of sound and vibration?

QUESTION 2

An aeroplane traveling faster than sound forces pressure waves to accumulate in front of it. When the vehicle starts to move faster than the speed of sound in that medium, a sudden explosive noise is heard. What is this dramatic event called?

QUESTION 3

Vibrations in a guitar string or a vibrating

column of air inside a pipe can sometimes 'lock' themselves into a stable pattern. As a result, certain points in the string or column stay still while others vibrate vigorously, creating nodes and antinodes. What are such waves called?

QUESTION 4

When a swing is pushed at its natural frequency, it soars higher with little effort. If you push it at the wrong time, even a strong push may not lead to a big change in its motion. Bridges and glass objects have been known to shatter when they're perturbed at their natural frequencies. Name the phenomenon that causes vibrations to amplify when stimulated at the natural frequency.

QUESTION 5

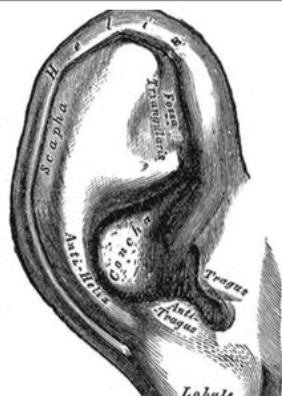
Some artificial materials can guide or block sound in ways that nature can't.

These materials can even 'cloak' objects such that they don't emit or reflect any sound. What are such advanced materials called? Hint: Their name means "subsequent to" or "after" materials.

Answers to September 16 quiz:

1. Material dropped into Hurricane Esther's eyewall – **Ans: Silver iodide**
 2. Process that silver iodide induces in clouds – **Ans: Heterogenous nucleation**
 3. Country that objected to cloud-seeding typhoons – **Ans: China**
 4. Hurricane whose properties rejected Project Stormfury – **Ans: Allen**
 5. Leader who alleged Stormfury was a US attempt to weaponise storms – **Ans: Fidel Castro**
- Visual: **Hurricane Nine (King)**
First contact: K.N. Viswanathan |
Harilakshmi M. | Anil Yadav | Anmol Agrawal | Tamal Biswas

Please send in your answers to
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Visual: What's the name for the part of the human ear visible outside the head? It's called the pinna in non-human animals. PUBLIC DOMAIN

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subject 'Daily page'