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[OUR TAKE]

A promising thaw in Alberta

New Delhi and Ottawa converge on common interests to reset ties

The decision by Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi and his Canadian counterpart Mark Carney at a meeting on the sidelines of the G7 Summit to reset India-Canada relations is a welcome development, especially after the depths to which they had fallen over the past two years, following the diplomatic row over the killing of a Khalistani separatist. The meeting was preceded by a series of developments that set the stage for a comprehensive reboot of the relationship, including former Canadian PM Justin Trudeau's exit, Carney's victory in the general election and a behind-the-scenes dialogue between security agencies of the two sides that created the grounds for closer cooperation. Among the constructive steps unveiled by the two leaders to restore stability to the bilateral relationship are the appointment of high commissioners and the resumption of ministerial and other high-level engagements in different domains to rebuild trust, a commodity that has been in short supply since Trudeau alleged in September 2023 that Indian government agents were linked to the murder of Khalistani operative Hardeep Singh Nijjar. India appears to have decided to flag the Khalistan issue with Canada in a manner similar to the arrangement forged with the US, with security officials of the two sides discreetly handling the matter. In addition to ensuring the well-being of Indian diplomats often threatened by Khalistanis and addressing Canada's concerns about transnational crime and repression, this process will have to be firewalled from the criminal trial of four Indian nationals arrested for Nijjar's murder. The commitment by both sides to sovereignty and territorial integrity and the emphasis on mutual respect for concerns and sensitivities will help them to move forward.

Canada's move to enhance economic partnerships around the world in the face of US President Donald Trump's whimsical tariff policies was a key factor in Carney's outreach to India. The two leaders have decided to resume stalled negotiations for a trade deal. The India-Canada relationship is far too important to have been left to languish for several compelling reasons, primary among them being the significant potential to enhance trade in goods and services from the current level of \$20 billion, and the presence of 1.8 million Indo-Canadians and another one million non-resident Indians in Canada. As democracies committed to a rules-based global order, Ottawa and New Delhi have common interests they could pursue together at a time of great global churn. The thaw achieved in Alberta augurs well for India-Canada ties.

No thug life moment for film releases

Thug Life, the Kamal Haasan-starrer, is set for a theatre release in Karnataka after the Supreme Court observed that mobs can't decide if a film certified by the Central Board of Film Certification should have a public screening or not. A day after the Court's strong words on the matter, protestors said they will accept the Court's wisdom. Earlier, pro-Kannada outfits insisted they would allow the screening of *Thug Life* in the state only after Haasan apologised for his remark that Kannada was derived from the Tamil language. Kannada scholars contend that Kannada and Tamil are sister languages.

The apex court wisely stayed out of the language debate and rightly framed the issue as one of free speech. First, it stated that the rule of law must prevail and vigilante groups cannot be allowed to impose their will. Second, it took objection to the Karnataka High Court, which held that the situation was of Haasan's making and he should have apologised. The apex court's remark that "it is not the business of the court to seek apology from anybody just because he's expressed a view" should guide both the lower judiciary and public officials, who often side with the populist, majoritarian or conservative viewpoint on matters involving freedom of speech and expression.

Filmmakers in India are vulnerable to mob and vigilante action, especially when they engage with subjects that deal with history and identity. Movies such as *Padmaavt* (2018) have been targeted by caste and communal groups on the ground that they distorted their collective identity and lineage. The fact is those uncomfortable with a film have the freedom not to watch it but have no right to disrupt its public exhibition once cleared by a State agency. This due process can't be compromised: Any disruption would lead to the denial of Constitutional freedoms to artists.

Unfinished business of gender parity in India

Parity is about agreeing that no one gender should hold more than 50-60% of any space. But the political representation discourse remains stuck at a ceiling of 33%, as if the demand for equal space and place is itself an impertinence

Here is a truth that often goes unnoticed: India needs women to be at parity to progress. Or it will get left behind. It is already getting left behind. This is the sad inference that emerges from the dry statistics in the World Economic Forum's *Global Gender Gap Report 2025*, released recently. It ranks India a dismal 131st out of 148 countries — below every other free nation and trailing most of its South Asian neighbours. The fall is not so much due to regression as because other countries are closing their gender gaps faster. Our catch-up pace needs acceleration.

There is good news and bad news. The good news is that there have been visible gains in education and political visibility. At 97%, women's educational attainment is approaching parity. India's political empowerment score is higher than China's and close to Brazil's — thanks perhaps to the *panchayati raj* laws that insisted

on 33% women's representation. Women have 45% participation in *panchayati raj* institutions — a genuine contribution to deepening democracy. But, in Parliament, they account for just 14% of members — sadly, the highest it's ever been.

Poor economic participation drags India down to among the world's bottom five. In a scenario of high unemployment, men win: The historical female labour force participation rate, the World Bank points out, has declined considerably over the decade, and women contribute less than 20% to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), earn under a third of what men do, and hold only a sliver of decision-making roles.

This is not merely a gender issue but one aligned with economic ambition. The McKinsey Global Institute estimates that gender parity in employment could add \$770 billion to India's GDP by 2025. At current rates, that could take another 135 years. This isn't just a missed opportunity — it's an economic liability. It should alarm every policymaker into signalling a radical and urgent shift in national priorities to privilege women's participation.

No less a person than the Prime Minister has repeatedly acknowledged that progress depends on women-led development. But recognition is only a beginning. Policy and practice designed to ensure women's equal participation in economic, political, and social life must be maximised by

both the state and the private sector. Everyone has a role. But the State has the primary responsibility to showcase transformation.

At present, the commitment looks hesitant. In recent years, the pace of inclusion has indeed accelerated, but inclusion is reluctantly conceded.

Women made up 41% and 38% of recent recruits to the elite Indian Administrative Service and Indian Foreign Service, respectively — an encouraging uptick. However, their overall representation across both services remains unclear. With less than 3% women in the armed forces and 12% across all police, the bastions of defence and security remain hard to breach. Even apex institutions — tasked with ensuring equality — struggle to show commitment. At its 2021 high, the Supreme Court briefly had four women out of 33 judges; now, it is back to one. The National Human Rights Commission, in all its history, has never had more than one substantive woman member at a time. Even its law requires only "at least one woman".

There are many pathways to inclusion — some already at work. The expansion of women-led Self-Help Groups, targeted savings schemes, and access to low-interest credit have begun to shift the economic ground. State-backed programmes, from Kerala to Uttar Pradesh, have helped lakhs of rural women move from subsistence to enterprise.



Maja Daruwala

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Trump vs Musk: Perils of confronting POTUS

During Tesla CEO Elon Musk's tenure heading the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) for President Trump, their relationship was characterised by some as a bromance. Indeed, when Musk left DOGE on May 30, President Trump gave him a gold key to the White House.

The Trump-Musk relationship, which at that time appeared to be a bromance, unravelled shortly thereafter. That occurred when Musk publicly opposed Trump's major legislative initiative — the so-called One Big Beautiful Bill Act — calling it a "disgusting abomination" in a post on X on June 3. After that, there was an exchange of insults between Musk and Trump on their respective social media platforms X and Truth Social. For about one week, it appeared this war of words might go on for some time. Then, on June 10, Musk walked back his comments, expressing regret over some of his recent posts about President Trump stating that "they went too far". His post on X, which appeared at 3:04 a.m. in Washington on June 10, was not completely surprising. Trump's *Stylefile* POTUS Buddy had gone conspicuously quiet in the past few days, as he rebuffed overtures from Musk's camp seeking a rapprochement.

This public capitulation of the world's richest man before the world's most powerful individual came just a week after their alliance collapsed in such a chaotic and very public fashion. It underscores who holds the upper hand in this clash between two of the most influential people in the world today.

The Tesla CEO's backing down may have disappointed those expecting a true gladiatorial showdown between the two. But this outcome was almost always inevitable, given Musk's dependence on the US government for his businesses, which thrive on public contracts, regulatory leniency, and political access. By some estimates, his companies hold nearly a 100 contracts worth billions of dollars across 17 federal agencies.

Musk's retreat proves he is no fool. He understands that Trump can be vengeful and especially dangerous given his executive power. The President's threat last week to pull federal contracts from Tesla and SpaceX made clear what was at stake.

It definitely appears that Musk's apology was about self-preservation. It underscores an undeniable truth of Washington: When it comes down to it, political power prevails. And

Trump, for now, holds the cards. His return to the White House has re-established him as the most feared and courted figure in American politics. Musk, once a key ally of Trump, is now online and billions in market value, but he is not the commander-in-chief.

In the short-term, Trump has emerged as the clear victor in this tussle. He reasserted dominance, secured a public apology, and reaffirmed his hold over Musk's empire — that is, with consequences. This tussle may have also helped Trump politically, by putting distance between himself and Musk, he can now begin to deflect some of the backlash surrounding DOGE which has been widely criticised for the manner in which it has gutted several agencies. Creating this separation allows Trump to shift some of the blame for that, even if, as president, the ultimate responsibility still rests with him.

There is also an instructive — and cautionary — lesson for Democrats: They must welcome Musk into their fold. One of those is Indian American Representative Ro Khanna, who reportedly spoke with people close to Musk about the billionaire possibly helping the Democratic Party in next year's midterms. "Having Elon speak out against the irrational tariff policy, against the deficit exploding Trump Bill, and the anti-science and anti-immigrant agenda can help check and balance Trump's unilateralism," he said.

The Democrats need to remember that it is the same Musk who reportedly bankrolled nearly \$300 million to help secure Trump's election in 2024. He also spent millions of dollars on an April Supreme Court election in the wake of the *Trump v. Van Druden* Republican candidate who lost. Expecting that same Musk to carry their weight in November 2026, and hoping to use his shoulder to fire at Trump, is most likely wishful thinking and, given Musk's diminishing reputation, probably unrealistic.

Musk's personal approval rating is in freefall. In the most recent *EnlightenYouGov* poll, Musk's favourability is 23 points underwater — and a striking 74% of Republicans say they would back Trump over him. In addition, Musk's political activities have cast a long shadow over his company Tesla. The company went from being ranked eighth in 2021 to 95th now, in the Axios Harris corporate reputation poll of America's most visible companies.

Another major reason Democrats should keep their distance from Musk is that he remains beholden to Trump's positions on many things. For example, before his public *mea culpa*, he enthusiastically supported Trump's crackdown on immigration protests in Los Angeles. Even with Musk's apology, it remains unclear whether Trump will ever welcome him back into his inner circle. Perhaps he will — if the Tesla CEO pours hundreds of millions more into Trump's political machine. Or, if he makes a deal with the Trump family regarding business ventures.

In closing, there is no question who won this tussle. It was Donald Trump, not Elon Musk.

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Frank F Islam

GIDEON SA'AR | MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, ISRAEL

There are no negotiations. The operation will continue until we achieve our objectives

On Israel's conflict with Iran



In South Korea, continuity with cautious progressivism

Earlier this month, South Korea elected a new president, Lee Jae-myung, in a snap election, ending the six-month political crisis that had engulfed the country. This crisis began with then-President Yoon Suk Yeol's declaration of martial law in December last year, followed by his impeachment by the parliament and subsequent removal from office by the constitutional court. The high voter turnout — nearly 80% — illustrated the public's deep concern over democracy and desire for change. Lee Jae-myung, representing the opposition Democratic Party, won with an 8-percentage vote margin against the ruling People's Power Party candidate, Kim Moon-soo, and Lee Jun-seok, the conservative Yoon camp's pick, who secured 41% and 38.3% of the vote, respectively.

Lee's victory marks a notable comeback, considering he had lost to Yoon in the 2022 election by less than a single percentage point. The backlash against the declaration of martial law undoubtedly played a crucial role, galvanising support for the opposition. Internal divisions within the People's Power Party, particularly concerning Kim Moon-soo's candidature, further weakened its position. The Reform Party, a splinter group from the People's Power Party, led by Lee Jun-seok, also siphoned off conservative votes.

President Lee faces a daunting array of challenges. The most pressing need is to unify a deeply divided political nation. Notably, significant segments of the population remained supportive of Yoon Suk Yeol through his impeachment and removal. Fostering a sense of national unity will be a critical task. Economic uncertainties also loom large. South Korea's economy has seen a growth slowdown amid the impact of US President Donald Trump's tariff war and an intensifying trade war between the US and China. On the positive side, unlike Yoon, who believed his agenda was stifled by the Opposition's supermajority in parliament and resorted to the extreme measure of declaring martial law, Lee will likely benefit from his party's dominance in the parliament.

Beyond domestic issues, Lee will also have to navigate a complex, shifting regional environment in the wake of Trump's return to office, an intensifying US-China rivalry, and a reinvigorated North Korea with its close security alignment with Russia. Over the last three decades, government transitions in South Korea have been marked by dramatic shifts in foreign policy. While both conservatives and progressive camps view Seoul's alliance with the US as central to security policy, they differ on the extent to which Korean foreign policy is centred on the alliance, with the progressives seeking more

(president during 2017-22), adopted a region-focused foreign policy approach that prioritised engagement with North Korea, balancing relations with the US and China, and diversification of South Korea's diplomatic ties beyond its traditional partners. Amid deterioration of Korea-Japan relations and a cautious engagement with the US's Indo-Pacific strategy, the New Southern Policy put renewed focus on ASEAN and India. However, the conservative Yoon administration adopted a globally-oriented foreign policy agenda with the alliance with the US at its core and an outreach to NATO amid its Russia-Ukraine war. While significantly improved ties with Japan paved the way for US-Japan-South Korea trilateral security cooperation and a proactive Indo-Pacific strategy, he took a principled reciprocity-based approach to China and a hawkish stance towards North Korea.

The temptation to continue with the progressive foreign policy template will be quite natural, but President Lee is likely to be more pragmatic with the changed regional and international environment. His choice of experienced, retired diplomats as advisors and during the campaign and likely for key foreign policy positions in the administration signals this.

A pragmatic foreign policy will entail a moderate stance on North Korea, less engagement-focused than Yoon's, but still maintaining ties with Seoul. However, there will be significant continuity from the Yoon presidency on the US-Korea alliance, building a forward-looking partnership with Japan, and promoting US-Japan-Korea trilateral cooperation. Instead of a broader Indo-Pacific focus, Lee will likely concentrate on the role of the US-Korea alliance and the US-Japan Korea trilateral to address Korean Peninsula issues, particularly North Korea's nuclear programme. This allows flexibility in improving relations with China and Russia. During the campaign, Lee also articulated the need to strengthen ties with the Global South. This might look like an expansive version of Moon's New Southern Policy driven by twin objectives of diplomatic and economic diversification and reducing Seoul's dependence on the great powers.

The six-month-long political upheaval — from the declaration of martial law to a peaceful snap election — illustrates the ability of Korean democracy to withstand internal shocks. Only time will tell how and whether President Lee can successfully unite the country and adjust South Korea's position within the evolving regional and global landscape.

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Jojin V John



There is also an instructive — and cautionary — lesson here for Democrats eager to welcome Musk into their fold.

● IMPROVING AGRICULTURE

Union agriculture minister Shwajir Singh Chouhan

We've seen remarkable work happening, but challenges persist. Our focus must now be on increasing productivity, reducing input costs, and ensuring that agriculture becomes a profitable and sustainable livelihood for every farmer

Reset in Kananaskis

Modi-Carney meeting during G-7 summit augurs well for Indo-Canadian ties

PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA Modi's productive meeting with his Canadian counterpart, Mark Carney, on the sidelines of the G-7 summit at Kananaskis is a harbinger of a reset in bilateral relations that hit rock-bottom during the last couple of years. Indo-Canadian diplomatic relations deteriorated after Justin Trudeau, then Canada's premier, stated on the floor of Parliament in September 2023 that his country's security agencies were investigating "credible allegations of a potential link" between Indian government agencies and the killing of a Khalistani Sikh leader, Hardeep Singh Nijjar, on Canadian soil. India has strongly rejected these charges. At Kananaskis, both leaders affirmed the importance of Indo-Canadian ties based on mutual respect for concerns and sensitivities, rule of law, and a commitment to upholding the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity. They agreed to designate new high commissioners with a view to returning to regular services for citizens and businesses in both countries. Both leaders also discussed the historical relationship between the two nations, including strong people-to-people ties and significant bilateral commercial relations and the need for partnerships in the Indo-Pacific.

While India and Canada thus attempt to restore stability to the relationship, it does not imply that the Nijjar problem has gone away. Far from it. In its annual report tabled in Parliament, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service has warned that India remains a persistent foreign interference threat to the country, according to *The Globe and Mail*. Carney, for his part, declined to tell the media whether he raised Nijjar's killing in his meeting with Modi. But when he invited India's PM to the G-7 summit, the read-out of the call from his office mentioned the agreement to continued law enforcement dialogue and discussion of security concerns. The question obviously is whether the calibrated steps to restore normalcy in the bilateral relationship can be ring-fenced from the judicial process regarding Nijjar's killing. Prima facie, this appears to be the case with Delhi and Ottawa reportedly engaged in negotiations to create a joint working group to deal with transnational crimes. This mechanism enables Canada to raise issues related to the judicial process while India can bring up Khalistani separatism and extremism-related concerns, including sharing information on fugitive gangsters and terrorists with Canada.

The reset obviously reflects the compulsions of Canada and India to engage more with one another as the global economy is being disrupted by the weaponisation of tariffs and trade wars. Both nations should resume ministerial-level dialogues on trade and investment that were last held on May 8, 2023. An Early Progress Trade Agreement must be concluded as early as possible as 10 rounds of discussions have been held so far. Last year, Canada's two-way trade in goods and services with India hit US \$23 billion. Canada has invested \$3.9 billion in India from April 2000 to June 2024, much of it from portfolio investors. Pension funds have invested over \$75 billion. India's outbound investments to Canada were more modest at \$2.1 billion. Around 600 Canadian companies have a presence in India, while 30-odd Indian firms have operations in Canada. However, the deepest link between the two nations is the Indian diaspora with 1.8 million Indo-Canadians and another 1 million non-resident Indians. Many of our students have gone for educational opportunities and hope to work in Canada. These people-to-people ties must be nurtured as the bilateral relationship is set to improve.

ISRAEL-IRAN CONFLICT

GROWING TEMPTATIONS TO LAUNCH PRE-EMPTIVE STRIKES AGAINST ADVERSARY'S NUCLEAR FACILITIES

End of a nuclear order

IN THE NIGHTS of June 12 and 13, the Israeli Air Force launched a massive air assault against Iran. The targets included nuclear scientists, Iranian generals, missile batteries, radars, military installations, and above all, nuclear facilities. The latter set of targets were a red line that hitherto nations avoided breaching.

Yet, despite expectations of the same from Israel, Tel Aviv pushed ahead with strikes against all of Iran's nuclear installations — Natanz, Bushehr, Isfahan, and the deep subterranean Fordow nuclear uranium enrichment facility, where Iran is believed to have stored a few nuclear weapons or at least possess all the technical accoutrements necessary to assemble nuclear bombs at short notice. Indeed, it has been noted that Iran was days away from assembling at least 10 nuclear bombs — a key factor that may have precipitated the Israeli attack, which Tel Aviv has dubbed a pre-emptive strike. This is the first time a country struck another country's operational nuclear facilities where active enrichment and radioactivity was underway, and the latest Israeli strikes have caused radiation to remain underground at the Natanz and Isfahan facilities. Evidently, the last time a state struck another's nuclear installation was when Israel bombed Iran's Osirak nuclear reactor facility in 1981, which was not loaded with fuel, obviating the release of radiation.

Israel's prior destruction of Iranian air defences set the stage for the first wave of Israeli attacks — the cost inflicted by Israel against Iran's nuclear and military infrastructure is substantial, but hardly devastating to the point of crippling Iran's nuclear enrichment programme. Penetrating the Fordow nuclear enrichment

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ment installation is the real test for the Israelis. It is buried well beneath the mountain terrain, in a facility reinforced by concrete at 60 m or more. Only the United States Air Force B-2 stealth bombers can deliver, at most, two GBU-57 Massive Ordnance Penetrators or "bunker busters" that are capable of penetrating up to 60 m or more, and they too would have to be delivered in a succession of attacks if the depth of the enrichment facility at Fordow is greater than that. Further, the Arak Heavy Water Facility has also shown no visible signs of serious damage as yet. Hostilities have continued into the fifth day. Israel has claimed that it has complete control over Tehran's airspace. If the latter is true, it allows Israel to expand its target list to secure its objectives.

Following Israel's very audacious assault, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps has retaliated with dozens of missiles and drone attacks against striking targets in Tel Aviv and Haifa. These strikes and counter-strikes, which are still underway, represent a significant departure from the past. Previously in April 2024, Iran and Israel exchanged air and missile salvos, but did not cross

vital thresholds. In that instance, Iran especially relayed advance warning of an impending attack. This time, the consequences are more minatory not simply because of the range of targets that Israel struck and the magnitude of the destruction it has inflicted, but equally owing to the scope of Israel's ambitions and aims that involve a regime change. This could very well catalyse a widening of the war and accelerate Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons, which, as noted, Tehran was on the cusp of doing. Of course, that could happen unless Israel is able to — unambiguously or with absolute certitude — destroy Iran's nuclear capabilities, and possibly topple the revolutionary regime or force its capitulation. That would allow an internationally enforced termination of its enrichment programme and bomb-making capacity.

Since hostilities are still underway, Israel's technological prowess is more than offset by Iran's geographic strategic depth as well as its large stockpile of 2,000 odd ballistic missiles — a sizeable number of which Tehran has already launched against Israel. The key factors that paved the way for Israel's latest

assault against Tehran was the Israeli Defence Forces methodically and brutally dismantling Iran's proxies such as Hezbollah, Hamas, and, to a considerable extent, weakening the Houthis in Yemen. Second, the Trump administration deceptively concealed its true intent by tacitly greenlighting the latest Israeli attack notwithstanding the fact that President Trump did give a 60-day window during which the US negotiated with Tehran, only to be frustrated by Iran's delaying tactics to end its nuclear enrichment programme and cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency. Consequently, Tel Aviv became more optimistic and seized the opportunity to mount the attack. Yet, the Iranian response with ballistic missile attacks, which have claimed several Israeli lives, has proved to be a formidable foil to Israeli successes, reflecting how demanding it is going to be for Tel Aviv to subdue its mortal adversary.

More consequentially and regardless of the denouement of the current Israel-Iran war, there are real implications for regional proliferation as well, because it could compel other countries such as Saudi Arabia (with Pakistan assistance) to quickly acquire an atomic capability that is rapidly deployable or something akin to a launch on warning posture. Egypt and Turkey too may reconsider their commitments under the Non-proliferation Treaty as non-nuclear weapon states. We are witnessing not only an end of the post-World War 2 nuclear order but also, most likely, the growing temptations to launch pre-emptive strikes against an adversary's nuclear facilities. More hair-trigger nuclear postures might ensue among countries in the region and beyond.

How CFOs can drive personal branding

THE ROLE OF a chief financial officer (CFO) has been redefined after evolving at an unprecedented pace. Chief executive officers (CEOs) and board members now expect CFOs to act as strategic leaders, with a forward-looking perspective on technological innovations, societal transformation, and environmental challenges. The modern CFOs called to move beyond traditional financial stewardship and embrace a broader mandate. In a world where macro forces are reshaping value creation, the CFO must become an exponential leader, driving innovation, resilience, and long-term impact.

Personal branding becomes a critical strategic asset for CFOs in this magnified leadership landscape. As they step beyond the confines of finance into broader enterprise leadership, a well-crafted personal brand can amplify their influence, attract top talent, and drive transformation. A strong personal brand positions the CFO as a trusted voice, solidifying credibility with boards, investors, employees, and external stakeholders. This visibility is essential for CFOs leading cross-functional change initiatives and fostering organisational alignment.

CFOs who establish themselves as thought leaders can attract high-performing talent. Their brand reflects the organisation's leadership philosophy and cultural aspirations that resonate with the modern workforce.

Authenticity and clarity in one's personal brand make it easier to lead innovation, champion digital transformation, and advocate sustainability. Moreover, personal branding can serve as a stepping stone for CFOs aspiring to the CEO role, strengthening their visibility and influence across all enterprise levels.

How CFOs can build a compelling personal brand

Clear, confident, and consistent communication: A compelling personal brand is not built easily. It is shaped, refined, and revealed through the stories CFOs choose to tell. It begins with clarity: a deep understanding of one's strategic strengths, financial acumen, and the impact one is determined to create. It is essential to have answers to questions such as "what do you stand for when no one's watching?" and "what do you want to be remembered for in rooms you have not yet entered?"

Strategic and intentional networking: Relationships are the currency of leadership. Networking grounded in authenticity and not an agenda builds trust that no great pitch ever could. From industry panels to meaningful one-on-one dialogues, these are the spaces where reputations are born and alliances are forged.

Authentic sense of self: At the heart of it all lies character. Leadership is nothing but having a set of values. Authenticity, humility, and emotional intelligence speak louder than business forecasts. A leader demonstrating integrity sends a message stronger than any strategy slide: leadership can be both smart and human.

Thought leadership: Thought leadership is no longer optional. It is a core responsibility. The CFO who contributes ideas helps shape the financial future of industries. Whether through bold articles, forward-looking blogs, or strategic commentary, thought leadership turns expertise into influence and foresight into credibility.

Being future-ready: The most powerful brands are forward-facing. A future-ready CFO does not merely anticipate; they anticipate. By leaning into ESG, digital transformation, talent strategy, and AI, they become architects of change — leaders who do not just survive disruption but define what comes next.

Practising mindfulness: Mindfulness equips CFOs to manage their thoughts and emotions with clarity and composure. This enhances their ability to lead with empathy and influence those around them. In high-pressure environments, a mindful leader brings calm, focus, and presence to every decision.

In today's dynamic business landscape, personal branding is no longer optional for an exponential CFO. It is a key enabler of leadership, influence, and impact. CFOs have long been recognised for their ability to drive business performance. Now, it is time for them to be equally acknowledged for the strength of their personal brand, which is a potential differentiator between a good CFO and a genuinely great one.



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OVER THE PAST few years, the Securities and Exchange Board of India has made commendable strides in liberalising the framework for take-private transactions involving listed companies. The 2021 amendments to the Takeover Regulations enabled consolidated takeover and delisting offers. More recently, last year's introduction of a fixed-price delisting regime in the Delisting Regulations addressed a long-standing industry demand. However, the absence of a reliable squeeze-out mechanism continues to frustrate controlling shareholders aiming for full ownership. This gap is particularly stark in the context of delisted firms where minority shareholders linger despite multiple exit opportunities.

Recent cases underscore the problem. In September 2024, the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) in Kolkata rejected Philips India's capital reduction scheme that would have resulted in the Dutch parent increasing its shareholding from 96% to 100%. Philips India has since filed an appeal before the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT). In contrast, Bharti Telecom secured a favourable NCLAT ruling in April to purchase the 1% stake held by minority shareholders, overturning a 2019 denial by the NCLT, Chandigarh. However, the spectre of further appeals and delays remains even for Bharti Telecom. Both companies have been delisted for over two decades, but the controlling shareholders, despite providing numerous exit opportunities, still face hurdles in achieving full ownership. Other companies like Syntega and Cadbury have faced similar delays previously.

The primary reason for the uncertainty and delays can be attributed to the exclusive reliance on the capital reduction mechanism under Section 66 of the Companies Act to compulsorily buy out public shareholders who choose not to sell in a delisting offer. Capital reduction schemes are required to follow an elaborate process involving an application to the NCLT, representations from statutory authorities and interested parties, and finally an NCLT approval. Given the contentious and drawn-out nature of NCLT proceedings, capital reduction is not effective as the default mechanism for controlling shareholders seeking to acquire 100% shareholding in their delisted subsidiaries.

Unfortunately, the alternative mechanisms under the Delisting Regulations and the Companies Act involving a direct acquisition of the minority shareholding are not adequate to reliably ensure a full sell-off. The Delisting Regulations provide a "right" — but not an "obligation" — for the remaining shareholders to sell their shares to the controlling shareholder at the delisting price for up to one year from the delisting date. Section 236 of the Companies Act, which ostensibly allows controlling shareholders holding 90% or more to acquire minority stakes, is riddled with ambiguity. Besides providing that the minority shareholders "may" — rather than "shall" — sell their shares, its placement within the chapter on schemes of arrangement further clouds its applicability post-delisting. The need of the hour

is a clear mechanism akin to Chapter 3 of the UK Companies Act, 2006, which provides for a structured squeeze-out mechanism to be triggered by a controlling shareholder upon reaching the 90% threshold in a takeover offer. India would benefit greatly from a similar calibrated approach that balances rights and obligations on both sides.

Valuation disputes are the most contentious obstacle in minority buyouts. While controlling shareholders rely on independent valuers and fairness opinions, minority shareholders often counter with their own inflated valuations. Despite clear judicial precedents which limit the role of courts and tribunals in valuation scrutiny, in practice, valuations for capital reduction are frequently challenged and overturned. Minority shareholders often use the valuation exercise as a negotiating tactic to extract a bargain from controlling shareholders. The variance of the order of several multiples in contested cases, a result of the valuation methods that are deployed (discounted cash flow, net asset value, comparable multiples, etc.) and the varying underlying valuation assumptions.

The Delisting Regulations offer some relief by anchoring post-delisting exits to the delisting price for one year. Subject to the rules being amended to provide a corresponding right for the controlling shareholder to purchase the shares of minority shareholders, the delisting price serves as

The absence of a reliable squeeze-out mechanism continues to frustrate controlling shareholders aiming for full ownership

a benchmark to avoid potential valuation mismatches. But a shorter window — say, three months rather than one year — would better balance certainty for acquirers and fairness for minority shareholders.

While the Companies Act requires capital reduction schemes to be approved by way of only a special resolution (that is three-fourths majority), in practice the extent of minority shareholders' support often influences the NCLT. For the sake of consistency in dealing with capital reduction schemes, it would be prudent to avoid insisting on a "majority shareholder" approval from the shareholders.

In contrast, the Delisting Regulations already require two-thirds approval from voting public shareholders. Accordingly, no further approval of shareholders would be necessary to approve the purchase of the remaining shares by the controlling shareholder in the limited window period post-delisting. Only controlling shareholders who choose not to acquire the remaining shares during such a period would risk any subsequent attempts being subject to the vagaries of a capital reduction exercise.

The divergent outcomes in recent cases illustrate not only a lack of judicial consistency but also the broader risks that companies face when relying on the capital reduction route. The procedural delays and uncertainties associated with NCLT proceedings serve as a deterrent, raising the transaction cost and execution risk for controlling shareholders. A bespoke mechanism allowing controlling shareholders to acquire the remaining public shareholders at the delisting price in the immediate aftermath of a delisting exercise cannot come any sooner.

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Assemblies, and modules remain key bottlenecks. High import tariffs on inputs have discouraged integration into global value chains. India must reorient its policy towards incentivising design, research, and developing local supply chains. Without this, its mobile phone industry risks remaining an assembly base rather than a hub for innovation and value creation.

—Chetan Malvi, Raipur

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Revive diplomacy

The escalating conflict between Israel and Iran has pushed West Asia to the brink of a full-scale war. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's June 13 strike on Iran — targeting nuclear sites and top officials — has ignited a dangerous tit-for-tat dynamic. The civilian toll in Israel is tragic, and the risks of wider regional destabilisation are growing. Equally alarming is the timing. The attack came just days

before the sixth round of US-Iran nuclear talks, effectively derailing the diplomatic track. While Israel aims for escalation dominance, Iran seeks deterrence through retaliation. President Donald Trump has claimed he remains open to a deal with Iran, but his insistence that Tehran abandon all nuclear enrichment is unrealistic. Iran's leadership won't yield under fire, and continued violence only hardens positions. If Trump truly sees himself as a man of peace, he must act

now — pushing both sides toward a ceasefire and reviving diplomacy. —Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

Mobile manufacturing

Apropos of "Adding value to Indian mobiles" (FE, June 18), while India has grown into a major mobile phone assembly hub, the expected value addition has not kept up pace. The over-reliance on imported components and the lack of a strong local ecosystem for parts, sub-

assemblies, and modules remain key bottlenecks. High import tariffs on inputs have discouraged integration into global value chains. India must reorient its policy towards incentivising design, research, and developing local supply chains. Without this, its mobile phone industry risks remaining an assembly base rather than a hub for innovation and value creation.

—Chetan Malvi, Raipur

Modi's 11 years: Major feats accompanied big minuses

THE assessment of Narendra Modi's 11 years as Prime Minister, however fair and balanced, runs the risk of being disparaged by one ideological camp or the other. Yet, a nuanced and objective analysis of such an important person is imperative, particularly given Modi's significant impact on India's political, economic, and social landscape. One cannot deny that his tenure has seen several notable achievements, particularly in areas like economic management, infrastructure development, national defence, and internal security. From the outset, his administration emphasised fiscal prudence. Despite global headwinds, including the Covid-19 pandemic, the Indian economy has shown resilience. Major economic reforms such as the implementation of the goods

and services tax (GST) and the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code were important structural steps, even if their execution faced challenges. The push for digital payments, particularly through the Unified Payments Interface (UPI), has made India a global leader in fintech innovation. Infrastructure development has also been a cornerstone of Modi's governance. Highways, airports, and railways have seen major expansion, and the electrification of villages has proceeded at an impressive pace. The Gati Shakti initiative aimed at integrating infrastructure planning and execution is one of the more ambitious and strategic moves in recent years. In terms of national defence, Operation Sindoor and earlier surgical strikes in response to cross-border terrorism reflect a more assertive

and services tax (GST) and the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code were important structural steps, even if their execution faced challenges. The push for digital payments, particularly through the Unified Payments Interface (UPI), has made India a global leader in fintech innovation. Infrastructure development has also been a cornerstone of Modi's governance. Highways, airports, and railways have seen major expansion, and the electrification of villages has proceeded at an impressive pace. The Gati Shakti initiative aimed at integrating infrastructure planning and execution is one of the more ambitious and strategic moves in recent years. In terms of national defence, Operation Sindoor and earlier surgical strikes in response to cross-border terrorism reflect a more assertive

of the government often face intimidation, legal harassment, or worse. The space for dissent has noticeably shrunk, with prominent civil society organisations and activists finding themselves under scrutiny, raids, or incarceration. Individual freedoms and civil liberties have also faced challenges. In Jammu and Kashmir, the abrogation of Article 370 was a significant political move, but the prolonged communications blackout and detentions that followed raised serious questions about democratic norms. Equally troubling has been the apparent weakening of institutions. The autonomy of the Election Commission, judiciary, and investigative agencies like the Enforcement Directorate (ED) and Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) is being questioned.

The agencies like ED and CBI have frequently been accused of targeting Opposition leaders. In conclusion, Modi's tenure as Prime Minister has been a complex and consequential chapter in India's history. His government has made undeniable progress in economic modernization, infrastructure, national security, and internal order. Yet, these gains have come amid concerns over shrinking democratic space, erosion of institutional independence, and constraints on freedoms. Whether history ultimately judges his legacy favourably will depend on which of these competing forces—development or democratic regression—ends up defining the long-term trajectory of the nation. For now, a fair assessment would characterize his record as mixed but remains satisfactory.

MEDLEY



LETTERS

Revanth's call for a cow protection policy is praiseworthy

THIS has reference to the call given by Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy seeking a cow protection policy. This is indeed a noble decision. Hundreds of stray cows roam around on the roads or rest under trees. As an immediate step, the Chief Minister should instruct the concerned officials and give wide publicity about securing stray cows. Even citizens should shoulder this responsibility and inform officials whenever they spot stray cows. The officials can duly relocate the animals so that the intended purpose is served.

G Murali Mohan Rao, New Bowenpalli, Secunderabad-11

Don't bar licensed bike taxis

THE decision of the Karnataka government forbidding bike taxis without registration is a step in the right direction. Incidentally the High Court of Karnataka, considering the merits of the case, rightly did not stay the order of the state government. In fact, the government instead of coming out with an order on banning bike taxis without a valid licence should have first appointed an exclusive authority to oversee implementation of the ruling. This would have helped eliminate all unauthorised operated taxis. Unfortunately, the order has put a stop on plying of bike taxis having a valid licence. The government should give the nod to licensed bike taxis to be back on the roads to ease the sufferings of many commuters, especially of bike-goers, who rely on them on an everyday basis.

K R Srinivasan, New Biohrida, Secunderabad-3

Need to regulate bike taxi operations

KARNATAKA government's move to ban bike taxis is akin to throwing the baby out with the bathwater. The government is so embroiled in the freebie culture that the Congress ruled state is unable to fathom the feelings of the public, who avail the bike taxi service for reaching destinations that neither a cab nor an auto can achieve. The ban smacks of an administrative arrogance that is devoid of any logic. It is abundantly clear that the government is unable to gauge the sentiments and feelings of citizens who are putting up with countless inconveniences by way of bad roads, and deliberate apathy of the government. The High Court's refusal to stay the order is a sad demonstration of being insensitive to the plight of the commuters. The state government can easily regulate bike taxi operations by putting a foolproof registration process and thereby avoid taking such unwarranted steps.

S Lakshmi, Hyderabad

Ban on bike taxis is an unwise move

THE Karnataka government's ban on bike taxis is a hasty decision that disregards the welfare of gig workers and commuters. With over 600,000 workers and countless commuters affected, this ban will have severe consequences. The government should consider regulating bike taxis instead of imposing a blanket ban. Bike taxis provide essential last-mile connectivity and are a safer option in Bengaluru's traffic.

Raju Kolluru, Kakinada

FASTag annual pass is laudable

THE proposed ₹3,000 FASTag-based annual pass for private vehicles is a progressive move as it ensures seamless highway travel. It will ease toll congestion and encourage digital use. For broader impact, the scheme must ensure pan-India acceptance and app-based tracking. Importantly, special concessions for electric vehicles (EVs) should be included to promote green mobility and support India's sustainability goals.

Dr Vijaykumar H K, Raichur-584170

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BENGALURU ONLINE

KMF to open 8 Nandini outlets at Metro stations: DKS

BENGALURU: Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar announced on Wednesday that Karnataka Milk Federation (KMF) has been instructed to open Nandini outlets at eight Metro stations in Bengaluru. This follows after BMRLC had floated a tender inviting applications to open stores at 10 metro station locations, to which only Amul responded.

Speaking to reporters near his official residence at Kumar Park, Shivakumar clarified that KMF had not applied in the initial tender process. "BMRLC had floated a global tender for setting up retail outlets at metro stations. Only Amul submitted a bid and has been granted permission to open two outlets. Since it wouldn't be appropriate to shut down already opened stores, we have now asked KMF to apply, and I have directed BMRLC to allot the remaining eight locations to Nandini outlets," he said.

Shivakumar also spoke about a range of social and governance issues, including an upcoming special meeting of party MLAs in Bengaluru. Discussions covered party organisation, the upcoming BBMP elections, and the reorganisation of municipal wards under the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA).

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

Accuracy of scientifically generated weather forecasts remains limited



DR MOHAN KANDA

► Early philosophical texts like the Upanishads discuss cloud formation, rain processes, and seasonal cycles, as long back as 3000 BCE

► Agriculture is a tricky area and what is a good thing for one place can spell disaster for another

entific organisation, it quite rightly puts out predictions based on studies of weather patterns using various instruments in different types of technology. The forecasts, excellent as they are from a technical point of view, however, are more relevant at the global level and have difficulty in relating to grassroots level requirements. I have for long argued that disaggregated and locally relevant short term forecasts ought to be the objectives which the agency needs to espouse.

Agriculture is a tricky area and what is a good thing for one place can spell disaster for another. Likewise, what is a good event at one time in a given place can, at the wrong time, have extremely adverse consequences—the sauce for the goose not being the same for the gander, in other words.

Take, for example, Anantapur district in Andhra Pradesh, where I began my career in civil service. Groundnut is a common crop there. If it does not rain in the first week of July, it is difficult to plant the seed. Another spell of rainfall is required a few weeks later, to whet the appetite of the growing plant for nourishment. Much later, when it is time for harvesting the crop, a shower, makes it easy for the groundnut to be plucked out of the ground. If any of these events happens at the wrong time, production and productivity will both suffer substantially. When the IMD says, for example, that rainfall is expected to be normal this year, it can very well mean

When the IMD says, for example, that rainfall is expected to be normal this year, it can very well mean that there may be floods in Bihar, eastern UP and West Bengal and severe droughts in Vidarbha or in the western parts of Rajasthan. The average of the two can satisfy the prediction of IMD, although there is disaster everywhere!



that there may be floods in Bihar, eastern UP and West Bengal and severe droughts in Vidarbha or in the western parts of Rajasthan. The average of the two can satisfy the prediction of IMD, although there is disaster everywhere!

As a member of the NDMA, I found that my earlier feeling, that it is difficult, if not almost impossible, to predict the occurrence of earthquakes had, in fact been scientifically validated. Forecasting, however, is possible in the case of other natural calamities, such as cyclones, floods and droughts.

In the case of cyclones, I was aware that a technology was in vogue in other countries like the USA, by which aircrafts are sent into the eyes of cyclones, to study parameters such as the radius of maximum wind and temperature, which are crucial for anticipating the likely structure and intensity of the storms.

I remember having taken it up with IMD with a view to seeing whether it could be used in India too. It is indeed gratifying that, subsequently, IMD did buy the appropriate technology from the USA.

They are waiting to see if the Indian Air Force (IAF) can spare one of the aircrafts available with them, which are known to be suitable for the purpose, could be spared, so that they can also commence the process.

In the meanwhile, it is understood that Taiwan has also started using the method, with the help of the USA.

Despite all the mostly unjustified criticism against them, the weather forecasters, when all is said and done, do a reasonably good job. It is no fault of theirs, after all, that phenomena such as the butterfly syndrome, make it well-nigh impossible for accurate predictions of the manner in which the climate in the world or the weather in a local situation will behave.

We live in a world which today undoubtedly is free from any gender bias, a world in which women have, quite rightly, and on their own steam, proven their ability to occupy the highest positions in various walks of life, from politics to space travel, and acquitted themselves much better than their male counterparts. William Shakespeare, however, belonged to

another era, not quite as enlightened. He would probably have assigned to the entity of weather the feminine gender. In order to correspond with his saying, as Hamlet said, in the play with the same name, "Truly thy name is woman." There is, in fact, also a Telugu equivalent expression, reflecting the same spirit, "Kshanakshanikamul javarandra chittamul", or freely translated, a moment is all that a lady needs to change her mind! A spirit, no doubt, that belonged to a less emancipated times!

There are, after all, limits to even the most scientifically generated weather forecasts. There is this well-known butterfly syndrome in climate, a concept in chaos theory that describes how a small change in the initial conditions can lead to significant and unpredictable outcomes. The fluttering of the wings of a butterfly in Paris, for example, can lead to a super cyclone in the Bay of Bengal!

Talking about weather forecasts reminds me of the time when in the early 1970s, P.V. Narasimha Rao, as Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, travelled to Chittoor district to acquaint himself with the devastation caused by a severe drought. And as the Collector of that district at that time, a senior and respected colleague, Valluppan told me later, bursting with laughter, the Prime Minister went around in pouring rain!

(The writer was formerly Chief Secretary, Government of Andhra Pradesh)

Scientist decodes use of uranium enrichment in making nuclear bombs

KATEEN COOK

LATE last week, Israel targeted three of Iran's key nuclear facilities – Natanz, Isfahan and Fordo, killing several Iranian nuclear scientists. The facilities are heavily fortified and largely underground, and there are conflicting reports of how much damage has been done.

Natanz and Fordo are Iran's uranium enrichment sites, while Isfahan provides the raw materials, so any damage to these sites would limit Iran's ability to produce nuclear weapons. But what exactly is uranium enrichment and why does it raise concerns?

To understand what it means to "enrich" uranium, you need to know a little about uranium isotopes and about splitting the atom in a nuclear fission reaction. What is an isotope? All matter is made of atoms, which in turn are made up of protons, neutrons and electrons. The number of protons is what gives atoms their chemical properties, setting apart the various chemical elements.

Atoms have equal numbers of protons and electrons. Uranium has 92

protons, for example, while carbon has six. However, the same element can have different numbers of neutrons, forming versions of the element called isotopes. These isotopes have different chemical reactions, but their nuclear reactions can be wildly different.

Difference between uranium-238 and uranium-235: When we dig uranium out of the ground, 99.27 per cent of it is uranium-238, which has 92 protons and 146 neutrons. Only 0.72 per cent of it is uranium-235 with 92 protons and 143 neutrons (the remaining are the other isotopes).

For nuclear power reactors or weapons, we need to change the isotope proportions. That's because the two main uranium isotopes, only uranium-235 can support a fission chain reaction: one neutron causes an atom to fission, which produces energy and some more neutrons, causing more fission, and so on. This chain reaction releases a tremendous amount of energy.

In a nuclear weapon, the goal is to have this chain reaction occur in a fraction of a second, producing



ing a nuclear explosion. In a civilian nuclear power plant, the chain reaction is controlled. Nuclear power plants currently produce nine per cent of the world's power. Another vital function of nuclear reactions is for producing isotopes used in nuclear medicine from Australia). But commercially, enrichment is currently done with a centrifuge. This is also the case in Iran's facilities.

What is uranium enrichment?

To "enrich" uranium means taking the naturally found element and increasing the proportion of uranium-235 while removing uranium-238. There are a few ways to do this (including new inventions from Australia). But commercially, enrichment is currently done with a centrifuge. This is also the case in Iran's facilities.

Centrifuges exploit the fact that uranium-238 is about 1% heavier than uranium-235. They take uranium (in gas form) and use rotors to spin it at 50,000 to 70,000 rotations per minute, with the outer walls of the centrifuges moving at 400 to 500 metres per second. This works much like a salad spinner that throws water to the sides while the salad leaves stay in the centre. The heavier uranium-238 moves to the edges of the centrifuge, leaving the uranium-235 in the middle. This is so effective that the spinning process is done repeatedly, building up the percentage of the uranium-235.

Most civilian nuclear reactors use "low enriched uranium" that's been enriched to between three to five per cent. This means that 3-5 per cent of the

Iran has enriched large quantities of uranium to 60%. It's easier to go from an enrichment of 60% to 90% than to get to that initial 60%. That's because there's less and less uranium-238 to get rid of. This is why Iran is at extreme risk of producing nuclear weapons.

tal uranium in the sample is now uranium-235. That's enough to sustain a chain reaction and make electricity.

Level of enrichment and nukes:

To get an explosive chain reaction, uranium-235 needs to be concentrated significantly more than the levels we use in nuclear reactors for making power or medicines. Technically, a nuclear weapon can be made with as little as 20 per cent uranium-235 (known as "highly enriched uranium"), but the more the uranium is enriched, the smaller and lighter the weapon can be.

Countries with nuclear weapons tend to use about 90 per cent enriched, weapons-grade uranium. According to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Iran has enriched large quantities of uranium to 60 per cent. It's easier to go from an en-

richment of 60 per cent to 90 per cent than it is to get to that initial 60 per cent. That's because there's less and less uranium-238 to get rid of. This is why Iran is at extreme risk of producing nuclear weapons, and why centrifuge technology for enrichment is kept a secret. Ultimately, the exact same centrifuge technology for making power or medicines. Technically, a nuclear weapon can be made with as little as 20 per cent uranium-235 (known as "highly enriched uranium"), but the more the uranium is enriched, the smaller and lighter the weapon can be.

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(The writer is from the Australian National University)

Deadlock in Kananaskis

Mr Trump's departure ended meaningful progress at G7

If proof were needed, the 51st meeting of the G7 in the idyllic setting of Kananaskis, Alberta, hosted by Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney, offered the most visible evidence yet that the Western consensus on rules-based democracy and trade has fragmented under United States (US) President Donald Trump. The two-day meeting had an elaborate agenda that included such lofty themes as "strengthening partnerships for financing development and shared prosperity", an AI (artificial intelligence) initiative for growth and building critical mineral supply chains, and migrant smuggling, apart from discussions on Iran and Ukraine. The fact that a joint communiqué was off the table underlined the disarray in the ranks, although there were some joint statements on individual topics. Mr Trump's abrupt decision to abandon the summit and return to Washington DC on the first day due to developments related to the Iran-Israel war ensured that the summit ended in stalemate.

With the Iran-Israel war overshadowing proceedings, a minimalist statement urging a "de-escalation of hostilities in the Middle East, including a ceasefire in Gaza" was issued but did not mention a ceasefire between Iran and Israel. A joint statement of support for Ukraine was also dropped under American objections, though the inclusion of a clause in the chairman's summary statement expressing the intention to explore "all options to maximise pressure on Russia, including financial sanctions" was included over Mr Trump's objections. As for the trade deals that Mr Trump sought from the summit, neither Canada, nor Japan, nor the European Union was able to advance its agenda.

Notably, it was Prime Minister Narendra Modi who derived some value from the event, having accepted Mr Carney's invitation to attend. An Indo-Canadian thaw was one of them. The meeting between the two leaders offered the first evidence of the possibility of a reset after months of strained relations between the two nations during Justin Trudeau's premiership. As a first "calibrated step", the two leaders agreed to a restoration of high commissions. The two Prime Ministers also agreed to resume senior and working-level mechanisms and discussions in a host of areas related to trade, people-to-people contact, and connectivity. More diplomatic steps are expected to follow. The Canadian readout of the meeting said the discussion also reaffirmed "transnational crime and repression, security, and the rules-based order".

These are undoubtedly positive signs between two countries that share deep cultural ties — approximately 5 per cent of Canada's population are of Indian origin — but key questions remain. For one, the state of play on Ottawa's accusation that the Indian government agents had been involved in the killing of a Sikh separatist leader on Canadian soil — the key cause of the breakdown in relations in 2023 — is unclear. Mr Carney is also likely to face pressures within his own country from the powerful political lobby of Sikh Canadians. Sikh protesters held a protest rally in Calgary, the city closest to the G7 venue, against Mr Carney's decision to invite Mr Modi. Meanwhile, Mr Modi's 35-minute phone-call with Mr Trump appeared to have yielded some progress, with the US President accepting the Prime Minister's invite to the next Quad summit in New Delhi later this year. Given that the Quad had stalled under previous President Joe Biden, this must be seen as a major gain. How much this grouping will achieve under a maverick world leader is an open question.

Empowering farmers

Technology adoption will increase productivity

The Indian agricultural sector is rapidly embracing innovations that promise to enhance productivity, reduce input costs, and empower farmers. Among these, two interventions, namely agri-drones and digital agriculture, stand out. Recent developments, including a national conference organised by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare on Agri Stack and the launch of Garuda Aerospace's agri-drone indigenisation facility in Chennai, are therefore important in this regard. The facility will be capable of manufacturing over 100,000 drones over the next two years. Additionally, 300 Centres of Excellence (CoE) were inaugurated to foster skill, and research & development in drone manufacturing. With plans to train self-help groups (SHGs) and young people in operating and maintaining drones, the programme aims to create both rural employment and enable greater technology penetration in farming.

The use of drones in agriculture is now being scaled up with speed. Agri-drones can cover 10 times the area of manual sprayers in a day, drastically cutting the use of pesticides and fertilisers, reducing water consumption, and minimising farmers' exposure to hazardous chemicals. The ministry has rolled out targeted subsidies under the Sub-Mission on Agricultural Mechanisation, offering up to 100 per cent assistance for demonstration drones and 75 per cent support for farmer-producer organisations (FPOs) purchasing drones for farmers' fields. Further, the government's Drone Didi initiative aims to provide 15,000 drones to women-led SHGs by 2026, equipping them with drone technology to provide agricultural services. Drone indigenisation is important for India also because it strengthens the country's position by reducing reliance on imports and allows for the design of drones tailored specifically to domestic agricultural conditions.

Equally vital is the ongoing effort to digitise Indian agriculture through the Digital Agriculture Mission and the creation of Agri Stack, a database integrating land records, farmer IDs, and crop data. Digital tools can enhance transparency, improve credit access, and help target subsidies and insurance schemes more effectively. Pilot projects already underway have issued digital farmer IDs and conducted geotagged crop surveys across 436 districts. When integrated with artificial intelligence models and real-time satellite data, this digital infrastructure can help in crop monitoring, early warning systems, and provide precision farming recommendations. The combined use of drones and digital interventions can inform timely, targeted interventions in the field.

But to realise the full promise of these technologies, the country must address structural and policy challenges. High costs, poor rural connectivity, and a lack of trained operators continue to limit access. Most small and marginal farmers have fragmented land parcels, making drone usage inefficient without shared infrastructure. Data privacy and ownership are also legitimate concerns. Many farmers remain unfamiliar with digital tools, and the benefits of these innovations are often skewed towards better-resourced regions or groups. There is thus a need to focus on decentralised capacity building and farmer trust. This means investing in last-mile training, ensuring that SHGs and FPOs can own and operate drones, protecting farmers' data rights, and strengthening digital infrastructure in underserved areas.

Building a credible carbon market

Not including all hard-to-abate sectors in carbon emission intensity targets will reduce market size and impact liquidity. Offset mechanism isn't a solution



ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA

The Carbon Credit Trading Scheme (CCTS) was notified by the Government of India in June 2023, and several steps have since been taken to operationalise it. Trading is expected to begin in 2026, with market stabilisation expected by 2027.

This article analyses the government's approach to developing a carbon market and highlights key challenges in making it a successful initiative. Admittedly, this is a complex and evolving subject, and several additional issues will need to be addressed going forward.

Let's begin with the basics. A genuine and fairly estimated demand is essential for the development of a market for any commodity. Suppliers then come into the picture, make their own estimations of demand and pricing, and take the necessary actions to meet that demand. This applies to carbon markets as well.

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) has recently notified carbon emission intensity targets for a few identified entities in certain sectors. Broadly speaking, the obligated entities will have to reduce their greenhouse gas (GHG) emission intensity and achieve these targets, or face penalties and other legal actions.

Naturally, each of the notified entities would face its own challenges in terms of existing technology, the need for upgrade, or fuel choices, and analyse the financing costs to bring in the required changes. Different entities would face varying marginal costs to lower their emission intensity. An economically efficient solution to meet the overall emission intensity reduction would be to have a well-functioning carbon market, wherein entities with relatively high marginal costs could explore the option of purchasing carbon credits from the market to meet their targets.

On the supply side would be entities with relatively low marginal costs, which see an opportunity to make money by overachieving their targets and selling carbon credits. The most crucial element for this to work would be the carbon credit price, and how transparently and credibly it is determined.

This is the basic pre-requisite for a successful carbon market to come up.

The emission intensity targets set by MoEF&CC are both sector-specific and tailored for the obligated individual entities in that sector. The overarching guiding principle for fixing the targets has been India's nationally determined contribution (NDC) commitment to reduce the emission intensity of its gross domestic product (GDP) by 45 per cent by 2030, compared to 2005 levels. For individual entities, historical emissions — with 2023-24 as the baseline — have also been taken into consideration.

The MoEF&CC ought to have included all "hard to abate sectors" in one go while fixing the emission intensity targets, to be subsequently followed by obligating entities in the other sectors. Why has the steel sector — which contributes the most GHG emissions among all industries — been left out? Furthermore, the thermal power sector, which has the highest carbon footprint across all sectors, has presumably been excluded on the grounds that it is already covered under the Perform, Achieve and Trade (PAT) scheme.

It is a wrong presumption as improvement in energy efficiency does not necessarily lead to a corresponding reduction in GHG emission intensity. Besides, running two schemes with similar objectives parallel has its own problems. More on the PAT scheme later in this article. Suffice it to say that limiting the obligated sectors in the scheme will not only reduce the market size but also impact liquidity.

For individual entities, fixing the targets based on their historical emissions is an erroneous approach. This shows a lack of ambition in lowering GHG emission intensity and is unlikely to generate sufficient demand for carbon credits. Why give a long rope to entities with a poor emission history? The right approach would be to categorise similarly placed entities within a sector — say, based on a range of production capacity — and the same target for all entities in that bucket. This would lead to benchmarking and push the industry to utilise resources efficiently, adopt optimal technologies, and make



AJAY TAVGI

Avoiding panic in tier-2 growth

The geography of opportunity in India is slowly shifting. Tier-2 cities are fast emerging as the focal point of India's next wave of urban and economic expansion. For decades, the country's economic growth story has been shaped — and often symbolised — by large cities. Metropolises like Mumbai, Delhi, Bengaluru, and Hyderabad became magnets for capital, talent, and infrastructure investment, transforming into dense engines of commerce and innovation. Yet this urban concentration has come at a price — congested roads, unaffordable housing, overstretched public services, and declining air quality have become defining features of life in these booming centres. This dynamic is beginning to shift.

Recent data from the Randstad Talent Insights Report 2025 has been making the rounds for revealing a decisive outward movement in job creation. Between September 2024 and February 2025, tier-2 cities recorded a 42 per cent increase in job openings — more than twice the 19 per cent rise seen in tier-1 metros. This surge is not an anomaly but the result of broader structural transformations across key sectors such as banking and financial services, manufacturing, information technology, retail, and healthcare. As economic activity disperses beyond traditional urban centres, it also presents an opportunity for deliberate urban planning.

Tier-2 cities like Chandigarh, Vadodra, Gandhinagar, Bhubaneswar, and Aurangabad, which were once peripheral job markets, are now emerging as prominent growth centres. Not only are these cities catching up, but they are pulling ahead in some areas. Vadodra, for instance, has posted strong growth in the energy and utilities, pharmaceuticals, and automotive sectors. This shift is being driven by a mix of economic necessity, digital infrastructure, and employer pragmatism. Companies are recognising the cost-benefits of operating outside congested metros. Hybrid work models, enhanced broadband

access, and the narrowing urban-rural tech divide have all played a role. Crucially, India's growing tier-2 workforce is proving itself to be skilled and aspirational. The real estate market, too, is responding. With land becoming increasingly scarce and unaffordable in major metros, developers and investors are setting their sights on smaller cities.

India's housing demand is projected to reach 93 million units by 2036, with much of it expected to arise in tier-2 and tier-3 cities, where land is more readily available and affordable. The rise of real estate investment trusts has further catalysed interest in commercial and residential development outside the traditional urban core. Metro and rapid transit networks now operate or are under construction in 29 cities, spanning nearly 2,000 km. These systems are helping redistribute urban density and ease pressure on overburdened city centres. Such connectivity is crucial — not only does it make tier-2 cities more liveable, but it also integrates them into broader regional economic corridors.

This decentralisation does not automatically translate into balanced growth. If anything, India's metro cities are cautionary tales. Delhi is choking under the weight of air pollution and traffic. Chennai and Bengaluru consistently face water stress. Even Pune lost 34 per cent of its carbon sequestration capacity between 2013 and 2022 due to urban sprawl and mismanaged growth. These thriving metros are often buckling beneath their own weight. To avoid repeating these mistakes, tier-2 cities must approach growth deliberately, not reactively. Infrastructure must not just catch up with demand but must also anticipate it. That means investing in integrated urban transport, zoning that protects green spaces, and data-backed city planning.

India's urban development toolkit is richer than ever before. Schemes like the Smart Cities Mission,



AMIT KAPOOR

CONURBATION

appropriate fuel choices. That's how a carbon market would develop.

The CCTS has also come up with an "offset mechanism" to allow participation of non-obligated entities in carbon credit trading. However, based on global experience of emission trading schemes (ETS) in different jurisdictions, including EU-ETS, allowing voluntary participation can lead to carbon leakage and compromise data integrity, thereby impacting the very credibility of the scheme itself.

Recall the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) experience. It was plagued by serious issues, including double counting of carbon credits and poor verification. The off-used argument to allow voluntary participation to facilitate market liquidity in the initial phase of the scheme, to be tapered down later, isn't a sound one. This is like erecting a building on a weak foundation. Instead, let there be a sizeable number of obligated entities from the very beginning, supported by a robust monitoring, reporting and verification mechanism and strict enforcement. Reportedly, the offset mechanism has already been banned under EU-ETS.

Coming to the all-important issue of the interlinkage between the existing PAT scheme and the CCTS. The CCTS is largely modelled on the PAT scheme, which has been operated by the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) since 2012 as a market mechanism to improve energy efficiency among obligated entities. However, there are implications to following this approach.

Will the PAT scheme, covering sectors also identified under the CCTS, continue in parallel? The PAT Cycle VIII has already been notified for 2025-26. How will this coexistence work? Why fragment the market? Instead, why not only have CCTS, which directly targets the reduction of GHG emission intensity?

The PAT scheme has come in for criticism in the past, including for fixing lax targets, an excessive supply of energy saving certificates (ESCERTs) in the market leading to a drop in certificate prices, unsatisfactory implementation, and poor enforcement.

Apparatus under the PAT III cycle onwards, the required actions to close various rounds are still pending. Remember that the PAT III cycle was for the 2017-2020 period, and subsequently, PAT IV to VIII cycles have been notified. Will the obligated entities covered in these rounds be allowed under the CCTS only after those rounds are closed? What would be the mechanism for converting outstanding ESCERTs under PAT carbon credits under CCTS? Considering the poor MVR practices prevalent under the PAT regime, what is the credibility of these ESCERTs? Will they be considered as normal carbon credits, or will there be a different categorisation and a separate trading segment for them on the exchange?

All these issues need to be properly thought through and thrashed out to realise a robust and credible carbon market in the country.

The author is a distinguished fellow at the Observer Research Foundation, and former chairman, Sebi

AMRUT, and the Urban Infrastructure Development Fund are designed to help cities build more liveable, resilient futures. As of early 2025, the Smart Cities Mission had completed 7,479 projects worth ₹1.5 trillion, including over 1,700 km of smart roads, 9,540 Wi-Fi hotspots, and more than 18,000 affordable housing units across 100 cities. Yet execution, particularly in smaller municipalities, remains uneven.

One of the most pressing needs is capacity building at the urban local body (ULB) level. Municipal authorities in tier-2 cities often lack the financial and human resources needed to translate vision into tangible outcomes. To scale sustainably, these cities need not just funding but also institutional reform, digital governance systems, credible regulatory frameworks, and the ability to attract and retain talent in public administration. Beyond bricks and mortar, tier-2 cities must also evolve how they think about regulation and innovation. As hiring in sectors like fintech and logistics expands in smaller cities, regulatory flexibility will be critical.

That is why it's time to think of this shift not just in terms of hiring statistics but as a structural urban transformation. India has a rare window: It is urbanising, digitising, and decentralising simultaneously. Each of these trends can reinforce the others — if the right institutions, incentives, and frameworks are in place. This will require difficult reforms: Empowering ULBs with financial autonomy, setting enforceable building codes, integrating land-use and transit planning, and rethinking how cities measure success. Metrics like job creation, air quality, commute time, and public service delivery need to take precedence over sheer construction volume or gross domestic product growth. For now, the signs are promising. Employers are willing to bet on smaller cities. Talent is willing to stay. But without a governance model that matches the pace of economic change, the gains may prove fragile.

The author is chair, Institute for Competitiveness. With inputs from Meenakshi Ajith

Under the veil of Iran's theocracy



AKANISHYA ABISMRUTA

In September 2024, a 22-year-old Kurdish-Iranian tourist in Tehran, Jina Amini, was arrested by the morality police for wearing her veil loosely. She died in a hospital a few days later from a brain haemorrhage. The killing of Jina Amini led to an uprising that reverberated with the words "Woman, life, freedom" — a slogan of the revolutionary women from the marginalised lands of Kurdistan — across Iran as women took to the streets to burn their veils in protest

against the Islamic Republic of Iran.

In *Woman! Life! Freedom! Echoes of A Revolutionary Uprising in Iran*, translated from the French by Maya Judd, anthropologist Chawra Makaremi highlights the unique differences between the 2022 *Jin, Azadi, Anshar* insurrection and the Iranian people's movements during the 1979 revolution and the Green Revolution in 2009. In doing so, she revisits her family history through her grandfather's diary, which she turned into a book earlier, *Aziz's Notebook: At the Heart of the Iranian Revolution* (2011). Her mother and aunt were killed in prison in the aftermath of the establishment of the Islamic Republic, their histories and existence, like that of many others who dared to stand up to the government, erased by the state.

Ms Makaremi provides a comprehensive history of Iran's presidents and Supreme Leaders, setting the context for

the people's movements against theocracy. She regards the 2022 uprising as the turning point where the terror inflicted on the ethnic and religious minorities such as Kurds, Balochis, Arabs, entered mainland Iran. She writes, "The damaged body of the young girl with the Mona Lisa smile [Jina Amini] lay at the crossroads of several forms of domination and impunity: her death made their entwining visible and obvious."

The fear of violence engulfed generations of citizens in Iran after the 1979 revolution. They feared sudden disappearances, executions, rapes, forced confessions and prolonged imprisonment. People who inherited the fear without knowing what to fear came face to face with it in 2009, which gave way to a subtle and quiet rebellion bubbling under the surface. It all came to fruition with Gen Z. As Ms Makaremi writes, "The children of the 2000s didn't inherit this

fear — or how or why, who knows, but generation Z abandoned the transmission chain. It took to the streets, middle fingers raised in the air." Moreover, young girls in school began tearing up pictures of the Supreme Leader from their textbooks, an act that was unprecedented and unimaginable by previous generations. Many of them disappeared and were found dead.

This outrage against the morality police, at its heart, was feminist. Many women in their 20s and younger took to the streets to free themselves of the veil by burning it. It was a direct challenge to the obligatory dress code imposed after 1979 to demonstrate the extent of state's control over the public space, "intimate, total, enforced by physical repression." Men came out in support of women in equal numbers, and women took the lead for freeing themselves —



Woman! Life! Freedom! Echoes of a Revolutionary Uprising in Iran
by Chawra Makaremi
Published by
Yoda Press
778 pages | ₹599

demanding justice. They not only sought legal resolution of crimes, they also reminded us that memory... is one of the faces of justice." It is especially important because the state has systematically erased the history of massacres.

Ms Makaremi reveals the workings of the military and the cyber police in extracting forced confessions. When Jina Amini's parents were allowed to take their daughter's body for a funeral, their ambulance was re-routed. By the time they arrived at their destination, they had "confessed" that her prior illnesses led to her death, not police brutality. Meanwhile, cyber police worked towards arresting anyone who showed signs of dissent, which led to the death of the young artist Shervin Hajipour who uploaded a song, "Baraye" that became the anthem of the movement.

With genocide, war, hate-crimes and growing fascist power across the globe, this book uncovers the inner workings of a theocratic authoritarian state. *Woman! Life! Freedom!* is an important book for the times we live in, a must read for anyone losing hope in humanity's future.

The reviewer is an independent writer based in Sambalpur. @geekyliterati on Instagram and X

A policy problem: what afflicts chopper ops in Uttarakhand

AISWARYARAJ
DEHRADUN, JUNE 18

SEVEN PEOPLE, including an infant, died after their helicopter flying from Kedarnath crashed near Gaurikund in Uttarakhand on Sunday amid bad weather.

The incident took place just weeks after five passengers and the pilot were killed when their chopper plunged into a gorge while flying to Gangotri in May.

Such accidents have put private helicopter operators, especially those operating during the Char Dham pilgrimage seasons – between May and June, and September and October – in Uttarakhand under the scrutiny of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), the regulatory body for civil aviation in India.

After the incident on Sunday, Aryan Aviation, which operated the helicopter that

RECENT AVIATION ACCIDENTS IN UTTARAKHAND

JUNE 15: Seven people are killed after a helicopter crashes near Gaurikund.

MAY 8: Six people die after a chopper plunges into a gorge near Gangotri.

APRIL 2024: An Uttarakhand government official gets killed after being hit by the moving tail rotor blade of a helicopter he was about to board in Kedarnath.

OCTOBER 2022: Seven people die after their helicopter collides with a hill and crashes in Rudrapurayag.

AUGUST 2019: Three people are killed when a helicopter engaged in rescue operations in cloud-burst-hit areas of Uttarakshi crashes in Arakot.

JUNE 2017: A helicopter engineer in Badrinath dies and two pilots are injured after the chopper meets with an accident on its way to Haridwar.

due to reduced pilgrim traffic is allowed only after the operator has obtained written approval from the UCADA.

Note that UCADA is not liable for any consequences arising out of any accident involving helicopters flown by private operators.

The problem

Experts suggest that these terms and conditions are at the heart of what make helicopter rides dangerous in Uttarakhand.

For instance, the royalties imposed on landing and capping of ticket prices (which are meant to be on par with pony rides), private operators race to complete the as many sorties as possible to maximise profits.

Veteran aviator Cdr K P Sanjeev Kumar told *The Indian Express*: "In a region already loaded with capricious weather that pushes man and machine to its limits, unreasonable contractual clauses, extortionate landing charges, and royalties are imposed on helicopter operators in the Char Dhams by

EXPLAINED DIPLOMACY

HOW INDIA-ARMENIA ALLIANCE IS PAYING OFF AMID IRAN-ISRAEL CRISIS



logistical challenges facilitating evacuations through this frontier. The border with Iraq, on the other hand, lies directly in the line of fire between Iran and Israel. While it remains open at the moment, most of Iraq's airports are shut due to the conflict. The Iran-Armenia border is thus the most viable option for Indian evacuees, especially since Tehran and the Nurdz-Agarak crossing, some 730 km apart, are well connected by a major highway.

EXPLAINED ECONOMICS

Revising the GDP base year

Revisions in base year and the broader updates in the methodology of estimating the GDP go together, and have the same ultimate objective: to provide a clearer picture of the state of the economy

CHART 1


WEIGHTAGE (IN %) OF DIFFERENT SECTORS, OLD vs NEW SERIES

Sectors	2004-05 Series	2011-12 Series
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	17.9	18.4
Mining and quarrying	2.7	3.2
Manufacturing	14.7	18.1
Electricity, gas, water supply & other utility services	1.6	2.4
Construction	8.2	9.4
Trade, repair, hotels and restaurants	17.4	10.8
Transport, storage, communication & services related to broadcasting	7.3	6.5
Financial services	5.7	5.9
Real estate, ownership of dwellings & professional services	10.7	12.9
Public administration and defence	5.9	6
Other services	7.8	6.5
Total	100	100

Source: MoSPI

CHART 2

HOW NOMINAL GDP (IN RS CRORE) CHANGED BETWEEN OLD & NEW SERIES



ARJUN SENGUPTA
NEW DELHI, JUNE 18

AMID ESCALATING hostilities between Iran and Israel, the Indian Embassy in Tehran on Tuesday placed at least 110 stranded students leave the country, facilitating their passage into Armenia through the Nurdz-Agarak border crossing. A special flight carrying evacuees from Yerevan will land in New Delhi in the early hours of Thursday.

UDIT MISRA

SAURABH GARG, Secretary to Government of India in the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, recently said in an interview to *The Indian Express* that the ministry is revising the "base year" for the calculation of Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

The GDP is the central metric to assess the overall size of an economy; the "base year" is the year that serves as the starting point for calculations. At present, the base year is 2011-12. The new base year will be 2022-23. Revised series of data with this base year will be released on February 27, 2026.

The base year for Index of Industrial Production (IIP) will also be revised to 2022-23, while the base year for Consumer Price Index, used to assess the rate of inflation faced by consumers, will be revised to 2023-24.

18 as the base year. The government had hoped to use the results of Consumer Expenditure Survey (CES) as well as the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) was an annual survey replacing the quinquennial Employment-Unemployment Surveys, both of which were slated in 2017-18, to update the GDP data.

However, both the surveys ran into trouble, with the government raising data quality questions. The PLFS for 2017-18 had shown that the unemployment rate had risen to a 45-year high and the CES for 2017-18 showed that poverty had risen (as evidenced by a fall in spending) since 2011-12, a historic reversal of trend. After the election results of 2019, the government accepted the PLFS findings, but the CES results were never accepted.

Eventually, these data gaps led to the government dropping 2017-18 as the new base year because it wasn't "normal". It must be noted that 2017-18 experienced the ramifications of key policy-led disruptions, such as the government's decision to overnight devalue 86% of India's currency base in November 2016, and the introduction of a Goods and Services Tax regime (replacing multiple indirect taxes) in July 2017. India's GDP growth rate registered a sharp deceleration starting 2017-18, falling from more than 8% in 2016-17 to less than 4% in 2019-20.

Since the start of 2020, the Covid pandemic-induced disruptions have meant that neither 2020 nor the years immediately after it could be treated as "normal" years.

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What is the rationale behind these revisions?

The short answer is: to more accurately understand and report the state of the economy. GDP promises to capture the vast and varied reality of an economy in just one number. It can be calculated in different ways; say, either by looking at how much people spend on, or

alternatively, how much they earn. Spending some time on the definition of GDP, it becomes clear that it is not easy to calculate. On paper, GDP measures the current market value of all final goods and services produced within a country in a given period of time (say a quarter or a year). The word "final" is crucial. For instance, a cricket bat is a final good. It is made of many things – the rubber grip, the wood, the adhesives, the labour used to make the bat, etc. – each of which likely went through its own production process.

The use of the word "final" in the GDP definition means that only the final monetary value (in current day prices) will be used for calculations. Even if all the data is available (it isn't always), the complexity of calculations is quite apparent.

Moreover, the economy itself undergoes fundamental change as years pass. India started off as a predominantly agrarian economy. Today, most of the GDP (around 55%) comes from the so-called "services" sector while agriculture contributes less than 20%. However, the number of people involved in agriculture has not fallen in a commensurate manner. Estimating GDP from the farm and from the services sector requires different data sets and different methodologies.

Further, these methodologies change with the improvements in data as well as understanding of the linkages in the economy. For instance, up until 1999, India saw the GDP series being revised once in a decade, changing the base to a year that ended with 1. This

WhatsApp to introduce ads: How it quickly makes money, what will change

KARAN MAHADEK
NEW DELHI, JUNE 18

AFTER YEARS of remaining ad-free, WhatsApp, one of the world's most used communication apps, will soon be placing advertisements on its platform.

The Meta-owned platform on Monday announced that it would be introducing ads in its status feature, where users can share photos, videos, and text messages that disappear after 24 hours. Now, users will see sponsored ads while browsing through Status updates.

WhatsApp will also let users pay to promote their Channels, the one-to-many broadcasting feature to share textual or visual content with followers. Moreover, followers will also have the option to pay a monthly fee and subscribe to individual Channels for exclusive content.

Note that these new features will be sequestered to WhatsApp's 'Updates' tab, which is reportedly being used by 1.5 billion people a day. WhatsApp will not show users ads in personal chats or the calls tab.

The rollout of ads in the Updates tab marks a turning point for a platform deeply woven into the social, economic, and political fabric of countries across the world. It could signal the start of Meta's broader push to monetise WhatsApp's two-billion-strong user base, with India as its largest market.

How does WhatsApp currently make money?

In its early days, WhatsApp had a subscription-based revenue model where users had to pay \$1 every year to access the app. For some countries, WhatsApp was free for the first year with the \$1 charge applying from the second year. In 2014, Meta (then Facebook) bought WhatsApp for \$19 billion. It scrapped the annual subscription fee two years later. At the time of the acquisition, both companies were unequivocally against in-app ads and sharing user data with commercial entities.

While Meta does not report platform-specific revenue, estimates suggest that WhatsApp accounts for less than 1% (\$1.3 billion) of the big tech company's yearly earnings. Here is how WhatsApp has been generating revenue so far:

Business API: This is WhatsApp's primary revenue stream, where it essentially makes money from government and enterprise customers looking to communicate with users at scale. This includes e-commerce sites updating users about their purchases, airlines and travel apps using WhatsApp to share boarding passes and travel alerts, etc. The pricing is dependent

on the region and volume of messages.

Click-to-WhatsApp ads: Businesses can pay to include a link in their ads that opens a WhatsApp chat with users when they click on it, connecting them directly to the business. These click-to-messages ads appear on feeds and stories on Instagram, Facebook, and Facebook Marketplace. In 2023, Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg said click-to-message ads had reached a \$10-billion revenue run-rate globally.

WhatsApp Pay: It is a way for users to send money directly through the app. While it is free for individual users, businesses need to pay a fee for payments received through WhatsApp, similar to other digital payment processors. WhatsApp Pay has only been rolled out on a large scale in select markets such as India, Brazil, and Singapore.

In addition to these direct revenue streams, WhatsApp also collects metadata on user behaviour which could be of significant value in the digital advertising space. As the familiar adage goes: "if you are not paying for the product, you may be the product."

How will WhatsApp ads work?

Ads will be served to users within WhatsApp using Meta's technology. The company said it would not draw from users' personal messages, calls, and statuses to target ads as that content would remain end-to-end encrypted.

Instead, WhatsApp said it would rely on data points such as a user's city, country, and language to determine what ads to show them, along with tracking user behaviour such as the Channels they followed and the way they interacted with ads.

The company will also engage in cross-platform profiling of users who have cho-

THE IDEAS PAGE

A good old conversation

It is a tall order. But all-party delegations sent to world capitals after Op Sindoor open up space for government and Opposition to get back on talking terms



SUHAS PALSHIKAR

AT AN INFORMAL interaction with parliamentarians who went abroad in all-party delegations to present India's case after Operation Sindoor, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is reported to have expressed the opinion that such exercises needed to be institutionalised. How does one understand this observation, given that this idea could soon be added to the list of innovations by the PM?

The experience of single-party dominance tells us that, among the Opposition, there are always groups, parties and individual leaders who seek spaces for collaborating with the ruling party in the "broader national interest" in the hope that this will create goodwill. It is indeed a dilemma. Asking questions and occasionally pushing the government to modify its course of action is the basic job of the Opposition; joining hands with the government in times of national crisis is its occasional duty. Similarly, a ruling party — more so, a dominant party — is supposed to be magnanimous in building consensus. But by its very nature, the politics of dominance means that the ruling party is expected to dominate the Opposition in order to perpetuate dominance. The current season of cooperation and "listening" needs to be situated in this context.

In the 11 long years of the BJP's current rule, there have been very few occasions of cooperation between the top leadership of the ruling party and the Opposition. After a long period of acrimony and distrust, this year's summer witnessed a rare moment. Not only did the entire Opposition support the government in its action post-Fahalganj, the government, too, extended an olive branch by sending multi-party delegations across the globe to plead India's case. For this spirit of sudden bonhomie to turn into a democratic practice, and if one were not to be swayed by the almost naive enthusiasm of many non-BJP parliamentarians who participated in these delegations, this development requires that two sets of critical questions be addressed.

The first set of questions pertains to the specific case of the current cooperation. In the noise over a diplomatic coup in sending multi-party delegations, we forgot to ask why the entire establishment became so sincere both during and after the May campaign that a number of minor criticisms are being branded inappropriate, anti-national or seditious. There is no record of the parliamentarians who went abroad having asked this question before joining the delegations. There does not seem to have occurred any tough questioning on why the PM chose not to address the all-party meeting to take everyone into confidence. Even as the delegations were presenting India's case across countries, the government and the ruling party were busy hurling abuse at the main Opposition party for asking questions re-



CR Sasikumar

garding India's losses during the conflict. These questions suggest that the idea of all-party delegations was informed less by the government's wish for consensus and more by domestic tactical concerns.

To match this weak spirit of cooperation, the debriefing after the international visits, which could have taken place at an all-party meeting, did not involve even the LoP. It almost looks, right from the beginning, as if the entire exercise was aimed at marginalising the leadership of the Opposition parties and including in a charm offensive to which quite a few parliamentarians seem to have succumbed. Predictably, such questioning will be brushed aside in the current ethos of ultra-sensitive nationalism but one must make a distinction between the "national interest" of presenting India's case about terrorism and Pakistan on the one hand, and the national interest in evolving a genuine consensus in times of crisis on the other hand.

But in a sense, the issue is not about India's international image alone. It is also about a routine exchange of ideas and explorations into possible areas of non-acrimonious politics. The PM's reported view that such a practice (of all-party delegations) needs to be institutionalised seems confined to the arena of foreign policy, but one can expand it to domestic politics as well.

There are at least three ways in which the PM can think of initiating dialogue with the Opposition. One is a very general dialogue that might be institutionalised — say, listening to all chief ministers once a year and/or having a one-on-one meeting with the Leader of Opposition in every quarter. The other is a more specific conversation on irritants in federal practices — like the role of governors or the questions of resource-sharing. Third is a more crisis-driven conversation. Whenever complicated issues arise, such as the crisis in Manipur, or deep concerns emerge, such as over delimitation, or when issues of longstanding relevance to the quality of democracy arise, such as the quality of public rhetoric by political leaders, the PM may invite Opposition parties for a conversation.

The experiment of all-party delegations may have suggested that such gestures have both limited partisan gains for the ruling

The experiment of all-party delegations may have suggested that such gestures have both limited partisan gains for the ruling party as well as broader gains of consensus building. Eleven years after assuming power, the PM may have had enough of adulation and narcissism. So, it will not be a bad idea to build on the spirit of cooperation that the ruling party has adopted in the current instance and the virtue of cooperation that many Opposition MPs have discovered.

party as also broader gains of consensus building. Eleven years after assuming power, the PM may have had enough of adulation and narcissism. So, it will not be a bad idea to build on the spirit of cooperation that the ruling party has adopted in the current instance and the virtue of cooperation that many Opposition MPs have discovered.

At one level, this is a tall order because, right from the 1990s, the rise of the BJP has been predicated on an adversarial style of politics — it has pitched itself against something or someone. The penchant for calling anyone opposed to it anti-national represents that constant self-image of being encircled by enemies of the country. At least in formal pronouncements, the all-party delegations have been praised by the government, indicating the possibility that Opposition parties are not necessarily anti-national. While it is unlikely that this spirit of cooperation will endure the routine humdrum of competitive politics, this moment has given the BJP a chance to overcome its obsession of being the sole upholder of national interest.

At another level, this is a challenge for Modi the person. The history of the past decade threw up multiple opportunities for Modi to become a statesman, overcoming his natural flair for being a deeply acrimonious politician. He let go of most of them. Given the angulosity of the Hinduia ideology, there will be limits to any conversation that might possibly take place between the ruling party and the Opposition.

But as reported by this newspaper, the PM "listened intently" to many non-BJP MPs. It might not be a bad idea for those MPs to persuade the Prime Minister and convince him to bring the good old idea of conversation back to Indian politics — a deep ideological chasm notwithstanding.

The writer, based in Pune, taught Political Science

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"What is collapsing in Gaza is not just infrastructure. It is the principle that even war has rules. When those rules are waived for allies, no one is safe."

— THE GUARDIAN

Onus on poll body

Election Commission doesn't share adequate voting-related information with people. That prevents a meaningful analysis of electoral process



JAGDEEP S CHHOKAR

ON JUNE 8, this newspaper carried a report ("Rahul's attack on EC doesn't match poll data, officials say bid to 'defame'") contradicting an op-ed on its Ideas Page ("Matching Maharashtra II, June 7). The report was accompanied by a "Special To The Express" article by the Chief Minister of a state governed by a political party different from that of the op-ed writer.

In the June 7 op-ed, the writer claims to have provided various instances of irregularities in the 2024 Maharashtra Vidhan Sabha elections. While this op-ed attributed the irregularity to the Election Commission of India (EC) and the ruling party/coalition in Maharashtra, this paper's analysis quoted EC reports and "sources". Both articles have been somewhat economical with the truth. They have chosen to tell a part of it.

Let us consider the first issue raised in both the op-ed and this paper's report. The op-ed subtitles this "Step 1: Big the panel for appointment of umpires". The report calls this "Appointment of Election Commissioners". The op-ed states, "The 2023 Election Commissioners Appointment Act ensured that Election Commissioners are effectively chosen by the Prime Minister and the Home Minister by a 2:1 majority since the third member, the Leader of the Opposition, can always be outvoted. These gentlemen are also the top contestants in the contest whose umpires are being chosen..." The relevant section of the report starts with: "The fact is that successive governments across party lines — including the UPA — had opportunities to institutionalise a more transparent appointment mechanism but failed to do so." After quoting two recommendations, made in 2007 and 2015, which were not accepted by the government, it quotes "a senior EC official" as saying, "Now for the first time, a law made by Parliament under Article 325 is in place since 2023 for the appointment of CEC and ECs. Which is better — the earlier system or the new one?"

It is a fact that successive governments across party lines did not avail themselves of opportunities to institutionalise a more transparent appointment mechanism, and Parliament did make a law in this regard for the first time in 2023. There is, however, more to it. The entire truth is a little more than these two "facts" combined. The Supreme Court, in a 378-page judgment on March 2, 2023, said, "The refusal of Parliament, despite what was contemplated by the Founding Fathers, and what is more, the availability of a large number

of reports, all speaking in one voice, reassures us that even acting within the bounds of the authority available to the Judicial Branch, we must lay down norms." It added, "We declare that as far as appointment to the posts of Chief Election Commissioner and the Election Commissioners are concerned, the same shall be done by the President of India on the basis of the advice tendered by a committee consisting of the Prime Minister of India, the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha and, in case there is no such leader, the leader of the largest party in the Opposition in the Lok Sabha having the largest numerical strength, and the Chief Justice of India. This norm will continue to hold good till a law is made by the Parliament."

The chronology of the events indicates that the law had to be made because the Supreme Court took the matter into its own hands and decided to "lay down the norms". Just for the record, a petition challenging the constitutionality of the law, which is clearly tilted in favour of the executive, is pending in the Supreme Court.

The entire truth about the first of the five issues is quite clear. It needs to be revealed for the remaining four issues raised in the op-ed as well.

Elsewhere, I have described in detail what I call the National Electoral System, which has four aspects: Voter/electoral rolls; poll scheduling; post-poll activities, electronic voting machines. Possibilities of manipulation or mischief exist at every one of these major stages. It is impossible to prove beyond doubt that they did not actually happen. That's because physical access to all the components of the system is exclusively with the EC, and the agency is less than willing to share information with voters. When pushed, it has maintained that laws and rules exist for everything and it scrupulously follows them. But things may not actually work this way.

A case in point is Form 17C, which contains the details of the total number of votes recorded on the day of polling, and the total number of registered voters. The EC maintains that it follows the Conduct of Election Rules and provides copies of this form to all candidates or their polling agent. What often happens on the ground is that all candidates do not have polling agents — only candidates representing major political parties, or who are rich themselves, can afford to have polling agents. So, in fact, not all candidates get copies of Form 17C.

In addition, voters do not have access to this form. Therefore, citizens interested in the electoral process cannot use the form from all polling booths and all constituencies to meaningfully analyse the integrity of the electoral process. Now is the time to disclose the entire truth that is known only to the Election Commission of India. Not doing so would mean that arguments would rely on incomplete information.

The writer is a founder-member of the Association for Democratic Reforms

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

ESCALATION LADDER

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "Abyss stares back" (IE, June 18). The conflict between Israel and Iran has pushed West Asia to the brink of a war. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's June 13 strike on Iran has ignited a dangerous tit-for-tat. Iran's barrage of over 370 missiles in response underscores how miscalculated this act of aggression was. The civilian toll in Israel is tragic, and the risks of wider regional destabilisation are growing. Equally alarming is the timing. The attack came just days before the sixth round of US-Iran nuclear talks, effectively derailing the diplomatic track. While Israel aims for dominance, Iran seeks deterrence. This spiral benefits no one. Donald Trump has claimed he remains open to a deal with Iran, but his insistence that Tehran abandon all nuclear enrichment is unrealistic. Iran's leadership won't yield. Trump must act now.

Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

DEAFENING SILENCE

THIS REFERS TO the article, "Missing: Global leadership" (IE, June 18). The article is in total sync with the editorial today. The silence of the world's regulatory bodies is deafening and we all watch with agony the mindless loss of life and property in West Asia and elsewhere. Humanity and common sense have been dumped in some obscure abyss and the world is sliding towards total annihilation.

Sanjeev Raina, Greater Noida

LET IT SCREEN

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "Show

must go on" (IE, June 18). Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution guarantees freedom of speech and expression to every citizen so that the vox populi cannot be stifled by the establishment. Besides, in this case, if Kamal Haasan has said anything inflammatory, he can be taken to court. But halting any movie, which is the outcome of the hard work of numerous people, is ridiculous. Such arm twisting by vigilante groups should be dealt with sternly so that their move to gain cheap popularity at the cost of constitutional ethos is curtailed.

Devendra Awasthi, Lucknow

HISTORIC MOMENT

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "Code name M6" (IE, June 18). Espionage has always remained a vital instrument in influencing the development of civilisations. The appointment of Blaise Metreveli as the first woman chief of M6 is a historic moment. In ancient India, the stories of Vishkanyas found in texts such as the *Arthashastra* and *Kathasaritsagara* often portray the role of women spies. In medieval times, women like Usha Mehta and Noor Inayat Khan were crucial in the Indian freedom struggle to gather information on resistance movements against colonial rule. The role of Mitali Madhumita in Kabul is admirable as well. We have many such stories of Indian female spies like Anita Dutt, Kamla Bhagwat, among others, who defied gender norms and exhibited extraordinary bravery and resourcefulness in their pursuits and missions.

Vaibhav Goyal, Chandigarh



AAKASH JOSHI

For America, Israel first

Trump's blind backing of Netanyahu takes a toll on the US

UNTIL A WEEK before Israel attacked Iran, there was a note of quiet triumphalism in the Gulf and out of Washington. US President Donald Trump's visit in May to the region did not include a trip to Israel. He received with some delight a \$400-million Boeing 747 from Qatar as a "gift" he was gushing about. Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, he visited Syria and praised its new president, Ahmed al-Sharaa (once a proscribed person by the US), and sought to draw support for an expansion of the Abraham Accords. In June, the US Committee on Foreign Relations reportedly removed Syria from a list of proscribed nations, "rogue states". All this in addition to ongoing negotiations with Tehran on a fresh nuclear deal, which would have struck a balance between non-proliferation and Iran's civilian nuclear needs.

These gains could have been steps towards the elusive goal of "peace in the Middle East". Instead, they are now, at least for the foreseeable future, footnotes in American companies and labs continue to lead the technology and innovation race. Second, by becoming the educational destination of choice for elites from around the world, including and especially India and China, they ensure cultural and even political goodwill from "leaders" and "influencers" in these countries in decades to come. Third, universities were symbols of

the promise of the "American dream" in a way that was more than just material. They said to the world that, unlike China, it is possible to speak your mind, protest and receive an education that could give you a better life. America's wealth and power come not despite the freedoms that it provides but because of them.

Israel's reprisal for the October 7, 2023, terrorist attack by Hamas has claimed 55,000 Palestinian lives so far. The suffering of civilians, including being on the brink of starvation, the killing of children, and the refusal to let aid through, has been witnessed by the world in real time. Students and faculty in American universities have protested these atrocities and the US's support for the regime that is behind them. The Democrats and Joe Biden certainly lost at least some votes due to this certainty. But the political cost has another dimension as well. Trump has attacked Harvard and other universities, almost barring foreign students, in response to these protests. The man who sought to "Make America Great Again" is undermining the source of that greatness.

This may be due to his attitude to domestic politics and dissent. But it's being done in the name of and for Israel.

Diplomatically, leaders both "weak" (like Biden) and "strong" (as Trump imagines himself to be) seem unable to control Israel and Netanyahu. There is no cost, no consequence for Tel Aviv for crossing the "red lines" laid down by Washington, as it

did with the Rafah offensive last year. Even when it undermines Trump's attempts at diplomacy in the Middle East, it gets America's support. Netanyahu's actions say to the world that he can take the US for granted, that even a leader as mercurial as Trump will back him no matter what.

The question is: Why? Whether in terms of trade, as a regional guarantor of US interests or even political capital expended, Israel takes more from America than it gives. As political scientist John J. Mearsheimer said during an AEX Exchange with this newspaper last year: "The US has a remarkably close relationship with Israel... Why is this? The answer is the Israel lobby. You have this group of institutions and individuals in the US who work overtime to make sure that it supports Israel no matter what... The Israelis know full well they can do whatever they want, and the Israel lobby will protect them on the American home front."

Part of Trump's appeal to his MAGA base is that he is anti-war. Many Americans are tired of spending their blood and treasure overseas, as things seem to get worse at home. Trump is fond of making deals — on trade, security and much else. His agenda, he claims, is America First. Unfortunately, the "rogue state" of Israel under Netanyahu is making him put the Israeli government's agenda ahead of the US national interest.

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12 THE EDITORIAL PAGE

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

POINTED & NEEDED

PM Modi reiterates that India charts its own course, brooks no third-party mediation. Breakthrough with Canada is welcome

WHEN US PRESIDENT Donald Trump announced a "ceasefire" between India and Pakistan in May — claiming he had used trade to nudge both sides — New Delhi issued a sharply worded rebuttal. It also released a chronological account of the diplomatic exchanges in that fraught period to say that there had been no US mediation. One month on, in a phone call with Trump — who left the G7 summit in Canada early, ostensibly due to America's involvement in the Iran-Israel conflict — Prime Minister Narendra Modi has surely and firmly set the record straight, Washington played no role in the suspension of hostilities with Pakistan, he said. No discussions had taken place at any level regarding trade, and Operation Sindoor is still ongoing. According to Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri, PM Modi underlined that "India has not accepted any mediation in the past, doesn't accept it at present and will not accept it in the future". Historically, India has refused to accept third-party mediation and successive Indian governments have worked to ensure that Islamabad's attempts to internationalise Kashmir find no traction. Today, with far greater national power and a stronger presence on the global stage, India charts its own course in navigating the unpredictability of the Trump era, and other challenges. PM Modi rightly kept terrorism centre-stage during his G7 Outreach Session address, calling on all countries to take firm action.

Apart from being his first foreign tour after Operation Sindoor, and other than his call with Trump, PM Modi's presence at the G7 summit in Kanakasis was significant for another reason. It came amid a detente in India-Canada relations, which had been severely strained during the final 15 months of former Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's tenure. The breakthrough with Canada is a welcome development. Under Trudeau, who had publicly accused India of involvement in the killing of Khalistani separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar on Canadian soil, diplomatic ties hit rock bottom. The de-escalation process with Canada began with the election of Mark Carney in March. At the G7, both sides agreed to restore their high commissioners and resume trade talks that could pave the path towards a comprehensive economic partnership agreement. Negotiations are also underway to establish a joint working group on transnational crime. That said, Carney's government would need to do much more to address New Delhi's concerns about Ottawa's attitude towards Khalistani separatists. Separating domestic politics from diplomacy — something Carney's predecessor failed to do — could expedite the process of repairing ties.

This G7 summit was held in anxious times, amid the escalating Iran-Israel hostilities. It is a moment when global powers, including India, need to come forward to push Tel Aviv and Tehran towards a ceasefire. By not stepping up to that imperative — the joint statement urges "de-escalation" but stops short of calling for a ceasefire — the G7 missed an opportunity and showed how limited its leverage may be.

NOT EITHER/OR

Focus on vulnerable ecosystems in revamped Green India Mission is welcome. Improving livelihoods is also important

THE GOVERNMENT'S DECISION to revise the Green India Mission (GIM) and focus on restoring vulnerable landscapes, such as those in the Aravalli range, the Western Ghats and the Himalaya, is welcome. Framed in 2014 during the last days of the UPA government, the mission is not only crucial to meeting India's climate commitments, it is also important for biodiversity conservation and food and water security. The initiative has resulted in an appreciable increase in the country's tree cover. However, it has been criticised for taking a plantation-centred approach and not doing justice to the mission's broader goal of ecological revival. The GIM's revised document attempts to course correct. Especially salient is its emphasis on zeroing in on micro-climatic zones through "regionally conducive best practices". This initiative should be combined with addressing another concern of the original GIM, which has largely remained on paper — creating income-generating opportunities for people who rely on these ecosystems.

The Western Ghats, the Aravalli range and the Himalayan region face various challenges including deforestation, human-wildlife conflicts and changing rainfall patterns. Infrastructure development and unregulated tourism have added to their vulnerabilities. Last year, the catastrophic landslide in Wayanad underlined that the depletion of green cover and erratic rainfall had made the area susceptible to disasters. The new GIM document also notes that the Western Ghats ecosystem has degraded due to the felling of trees and illegal mining. Similarly, several studies have shown that the destruction of large chunks of the Aravalli ecosystem — especially its hills — has brought the Thar Desert close to the National Capital Region and this desertification has aggravated the area's pollution problem.

The restoration of most ecological hotspots in the country has been trapped in the environment-development binary. In 2011, a panel chaired by ecologist Madhav Gadgil underlined the need to regulate developmental activities in the entire 1,60,000 sq km stretch of the Western Ghats. Its recommendations were met with resistance across the political spectrum. The suggestions of the K Kasturirangan panel have also remained on paper. Similarly, illegal quarrying has persisted in the Aravalli range despite several SC orders, including the late as May 29. The problem is also that green initiatives have rarely taken people along. The challenge for the revamped GIM will, therefore, be to find ways to sustain and improve people's livelihoods while enhancing ecological security.

LATE RETURN

It took a while but the British Library reinstating Oscar Wilde's reader pass is welcome news

QUOTING OSCAR WILDE is usually an exercise in creative writing, a test of one's aphoristic talents; if there's nothing handy, just make something up. In that spirit, here's how he might have reacted to his British Library reader pass being reinstated 130 years after its cancellation following his conviction for "gross indecency": "Always forgive your enemies; nothing annoys them so much." That's one of those wild/witticisms, of uncertain lineage, that prove the drawing rooms of the internet.

Wilde was convicted in 1895 and sentenced to two years' hard labour after he fell afoul of the Marquess of Queensberry, who had found out that the Irish playwright and his son, Alfred "Boisie" Douglas, were lovers and accused him of being a "sodomite". The hardships of imprisonment shaped the emotional and spiritual meditation that was *De Profundis*, written as a letter to Douglas. Exile, penury and death followed soon after his release. It would take nearly 70 years for consensual homosexual acts between men over 21 to be decriminalised in England, and another half-century for more than 50,000 people convicted of the former offence to be pardoned posthumously. The pardons were issued under a piece of legislation popularly known as the Alan Turing law — after the pioneering computer scientist who was subjected to the cruelty of chemical castration for his sexual orientation.

Whether Wilde was among those pardoned is a late ambiguous as no names were released. In any case, as his grandson told a UK newspaper, "all it would do is make the British establishment feel better about itself... History's history, and you can't start rewriting it." Nevertheless, an acknowledgement of past injustice and persecution is always welcome, and the same goes for the British Library's decision. It's a tad late, though — perhaps the library ought to pay a fine. As Wilde almost definitely said, "The public is wonderfully tolerant. It forgives everything except genius."



SYED AKBARUDDIN

IN AN AGE of climate urgency and energy scarcity, nuclear power is on the cusp of being rediscovered. This time not as a Cold War relic, but as a lifeline. It offers countries seeking low-emission, high-reliability power what few other sources can: Base load stability in an increasingly unstable world.

Yet, just as it gains renewed relevance, it's facing a new kind of threat — becoming a target. From Israel's recent strikes on Iranian nuclear sites to military activity around Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, we are witnessing the erosion of a longstanding principle: That nuclear facilities must be protected, in war and peace.

These are not isolated incidents. While echoing past precedents like the Israeli strikes on Iraq's Osirak reactor in 1981 and Syria's Deir ez-Zor in 2007, these instances also reflect a new, troubling trend. Civilian nuclear infrastructure is now being treated as a strategic target. A red line once widely respected is being crossed with frequency.

This pattern signals a slow collapse of a global understanding that, however imperfect, has helped avert catastrophe. This shift carries numerous risks not just for the countries involved, but for the world. One miscalculation, one errant strike, could spark a radiological disaster, endangering thousands and contaminating entire regions.

International law provides clear protection. Article 56 of the 1977 Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions prohibits attacks on "works and installations containing dangerous forces", including nuclear plants, from which civilian harm could result. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has, in many resolutions, condemned strikes on safeguarded nuclear facilities as violations of international law and the UN Charter.

Israel has justified its ongoing actions against Iranian nuclear sites as acts of preventive self-defence, citing Iran's history of undeclared facilities, its missile programme, and enrichment levels approaching weapons-grade. Israeli officials argue that inaction risks letting Iran cross the nuclear military threshold under civilian cover. On the other hand, Iran re-

Playing with fire

Targeting of nuclear plants in Iran and Ukraine poses global risks in an age of fragile energy transitions

These contrasting approaches highlight a deeper tension: Between the imperative to enforce non-proliferation and the need to uphold the legitimacy of international safeguards. Striking monitored sites may seem preventive, but it risks unravelling the present system designed to keep atomic energy peaceful. If internationally safeguarded nuclear sites are vulnerable to attack, will states have confidence in a multilateral non-proliferation regime that cannot guarantee protection against unilateral strikes?

This issue is not about taking sides between Israel and Iran. It's about defending a principle that protects everyone: Nuclear infrastructure is not a battlefield. Radiation cannot be deterred. Once released, the fallout spreads without regard for borders, flags or causes.

Nuclear power today is not just about weapons. It's a cornerstone of economic development and climate action. More than 30 countries operate civilian nuclear energy reactors, and many more are investing in nuclear power to reduce fossil fuel reliance and meet growing industrial needs.

According to recent news reports, even the World Bank is shifting its long-held reluctance to finance nuclear projects as part of a broader strategy to meet skyrocketing energy demand in developing countries.

India thus has a major stake in this conversation. The collapse of protections around civilian nuclear infrastructure threatens not only the nuclear order but also our energy security and development goals. India has set an ambitious target of 100 GW of nuclear capacity by 2047, up from about 8 GW today.

With rising industrial demand and a commitment to net-zero goals, nuclear power is central to India's long-term energy strategy. Plans to amend the Atomic Energy Act, 1962, and the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010, announced in the budget, are underway to encourage private investment and

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THERE WAS SOMETHING TRAGIC.

—OSCAR WILDE

scale up deployment.

As India expands its nuclear fleet, the risk calculus changes if attacks on reactors are normalised. This is not a theoretical proposition. Even amid deep tensions, India and Pakistan have upheld a rare example of nuclear restraint. Since 1991, both have observed the Agreement on the Prohibition of Attack against Nuclear Installations and Facilities that was signed in December 1988, exchanging lists of sites annually and pledging not to strike them.

Years ago, as an Indian diplomat, I had exchanged such lists with a Pakistani counterpart on a New Year's Day as part of an annual process. This confidence-building measure has endured and shows that even adversaries can respect a shared red line. India's continued commitment to this Agreement even now underscores its record of responsible stewardship and strengthens its credibility in calling for global protections.

How far can existing legal protections stretch in the face of these new threats? Current legal instruments are fragmented and lack enforcement. What's needed is a binding international convention that bans attacks on civilian nuclear facilities under all circumstances. Such a norm would promote restraint, protect lives and preserve prospects of global energy growth while also safeguarding the global nuclear framework.

In a world shaped by climate stress, digital expansion, and geopolitical volatility, nuclear power remains one of the few tools capable of delivering clean, reliable, large-scale energy. From powering AI-driven economies to electrifying rural regions, the demand for nuclear power is only growing.

But, if we allow attacks on nuclear installations to go unaddressed, every atomic plant becomes a potential threat and every regional conflict risks triggering a global crisis. It's time to reaffirm a simple, urgent principle: Nuclear infrastructure is not a target.

The writer is former permanent representative of India to the United Nations, and dean, Kautilya School of Public Policy, Hyderabad

LOVE, IN MANY COLOURS

As Kerala HC grants rights of transgender couple to be recognised as parents



KATYAYANI SANJAY BHATIA

I GREW UP in an "atypical" family. My parents were friends and confidants to my sister and me, often referring to themselves as our co-passengers — those who reached the Earth a bit earlier than we did. Whenever life threw curveballs at us, we sat down, talked, decided, and then tried to transform the stress into a symphony that only we understood. I often found it amusing when my peers gawked at how our household functioned, for no conversation was off limits, and for our aspirations, there were no limits. As a young woman, when I interact with friends and peers, now fully cognisant of how this is not the norm, I try being the friend who is a blotting paper, who listens sans judgement, who speaks sans filters, and who gives emotionally. That is my way of honouring the atypical upbringing that moulded me.

So, I read, in awe, the judgement of the Kerala High Court granting five-month-old Zabiya Zahid the dignity of calling her parents "parents", without any gender association. I revelled in what our law now recognises as atypical families. Zabiya's parents, a trans man and a trans woman, petitioned that Zabiya's birth certificate should not refer to the gendered identities of the parents as mother and father, as the "mother" on the birth certificate is leading the life of a male, and the "father", the life of a female. The HC, while observing that this was a rare and exceptional case, also invoked the SC's 2022 observation where it said, "Such

manifestations of love and of families may not be typical but they are as real as their traditional counterparts".

The HC also reiterated, "Familial relationships may take the form of domestic, unmarried partnerships or queer relationships. A household may be a single-parent household for any number of reasons. Similarly, the guardians and caretakers (who traditionally occupy the roles of the 'mother' and the 'father') of children may change with remarriage, adoption, or fostering." While reading and appreciating this progressive march of the law, I wondered whether, as parents, we let our parents be parents, without the burden of the gender binary. Despite the generation gap, we presume that our parents must occupy the moral high ground of standing by their ward in distress, of being the sacrificial elder who prioritises their ward's well-being above their own. In this process, we forget to accept their mistakes. We tend to deprive them of human fallibility.

When we look past the gender binary, we realise that the gendered mental load that our parents carry is not just theirs, but ours too. The expectations that we as a seemingly 'progressive generation' are imposing on our parents are also gender-tinted. We become complicit in the march of the gendered household norms when we sit and discuss finances with our fathers, while expecting our mothers to fend for our nutrition.

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It does not stop there. While ruminating

manifestations of love and of families may not be typical but they are as real as their traditional counterparts".

The HC also reiterated, "Familial relationships may take the form of domestic, unmarried partnerships or queer relationships. A household may be a single-parent household for any number of reasons. Similarly, the guardians and caretakers (who traditionally occupy the roles of the 'mother' and the 'father') of children may change with remarriage, adoption, or fostering." While reading and appreciating this progressive march of the law, I wondered whether, as parents, we let our parents be parents, without the burden of the gender binary. Despite the generation gap, we presume that our parents must occupy the moral high ground of standing by their ward in distress, of being the sacrificial elder who prioritises their ward's well-being above their own. In this process, we forget to accept their mistakes. We tend to deprive them of human fallibility.

When we look past the gender binary, we realise that the gendered mental load that our parents carry is not just theirs, but ours too. The expectations that we as a seemingly 'progressive generation' are imposing on our parents are also gender-tinted. We become complicit in the march of the gendered household norms when we sit and discuss finances with our fathers, while expecting our mothers to fend for our nutrition.

It does not stop there. While ruminating

endlessly on this in my own atypical family. I have come to accept and realise that blood is not the thickest of all, love is. And if love flows through a family I've borrowed, I will embrace it, for I know that partnerships and families, whether traditional or atypical, should just be a manifestation of love, not duty.

The binary is not just one we impose; it is also one we expect. When we grow up looking at life in black and white, allowing the greys to only stand out as aberrations, we forget that the beauty of living and loving is in the VIBRANCY. For my friends who are living together as a family without any vows; for those raising their kids as single parents; for those choosing not to raise kids; for those wanting to raise kids but not being supported by biology; for myself being raised now with a strong solo parent (performance, as I lost a parent) raising two fiercely independent daughters; all I see is how beautiful the spectrum is beyond the binary.

Our traditional counterparts may seem normal to us, but the euphoria of knowing you are loved and you can love without borders, legal or emotional, is empowering. The moment you look beyond the binary is the moment the rainbow appears, and you get to choose the colours.

The writer is an officer of the Indian Revenue Service (Income Tax). Views are personal

JUNE 19, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

PM ON PAKISTAN

PRIME MINISTER RAJIV Gandhi has expressed reservations about Pakistan not going nuclear despite assurances from the United States and France that they would take every step to see that Pakistan does not produce a nuclear weapon. Gandhi said that he was satisfied with the US assurance, "but it did not mean that Pakistan would give up its nuclear programme". India has to remain vigilant, he added. As for arms supplies to Pakistan, the PM said India had no objection to this as such.

NO CHINA VISIT

WHILE PRIME MINISTER Rajiv Gandhi has already visited Moscow and Washington, well-placed sources said that he had no

plans to visit

Uttarakhand — a hotbed for helicopter accidents

Fourteen crashes investigated till 2023, coupled with the spate of incidents in 2025, highlight a persistent aviation crisis

DATA POINT

Vignesh Radhakrishnan
Sambavi Parthasarathy

The latest helicopter crash in Uttarakhand — which claimed seven lives, among them a two-year-old child, during a Kedarnath pilgrimage flight — adds yet another tragic entry to the State's already long record as a hotbed of helicopter disasters.

Within a brief window of barely two months, the latest is the State's fifth helicopter accident. In May this year, six passengers en route to Gangotri Temple were killed when their aircraft crashed in Uttarkashi district. Reports reveal that the same month witnessed two further incidents — one, a near-catastrophe narrowly avoided in Badrinath, and the other, an AIIMS air-ambulance crash that, fortunately, caused no fatalities — while, more recently in June, a Kedarnath-bound chopper was forced into an emergency landing after a technical snag, highlighting a recurrent aviation crisis in the region.

This spate recalls October 2022, when three separate helicopter accidents claimed 13 lives. Two of those tragedies struck defence helicopters operating in Arunachal Pradesh, and on October 18 that year, a commercial chopper ferrying Kedarnath pilgrims crashed, killing all seven people aboard.

A conservative analysis of incident summaries filed with the Directorate General of Civil Aviation and the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau indicates that at least 14 helicopters — many assigned to ferry pilgrims within Uttarakhand's rugged terrain — crashed between 1990 and 2023. **Map 1** plots the approximate departure or intended landing sites for 75 commercial helicopters lost during that period, revealing a concentration of accidents in north-eastern hills as well.

In the 1990 and 2023 period, 165 people lost their lives in accidents

involving commercial helicopters, as shown in **Chart 2**. In these incidents, 126 people were injured, too.

Following the latest tragedy, police have charged two senior officials of Aryan Aviation Pvt. Ltd. — the operator of the crashed helicopter — with alleged negligence. Notably, the company also owned the Kedarnath-bound chopper that went down in October 2022, killing seven, and another aircraft that crashed in 2019 after striking an overhead cable.

Operating choppers in harsh weather — whether anticipated or sudden — ranks as the third-most frequent cause of helicopter mishaps in the 1990-2023 period.

Pilot error or improper handling remains the leading factor, with inadequate maintenance close behind. Other recurring causes include non-adherence to flight rules by crew, technical faults, and entanglement with cables (where a helicopter gets entangled in wires/cables used by locals in mountainous regions to transport goods). **Chart 3** shows the reasons behind accidents in the period.

Moreover, as **Chart 4** indicates, the majority of commercial-helicopter accidents occurred in broad daylight, with most such crashes taking place while the copters were cruising. A significant share of accidents also happened during the landing phase, whereas take-off or climb proved to be the safest portions of the journey, registering the fewest accidents in the period, as depicted in **Chart 5**.

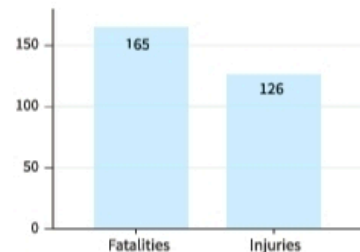
While it is true that, when analysed over time, the overall number of helicopter-related accidents in India has declined, the recent spate of crashes in Uttarakhand is a grim reminder that such tragedies continue to occur, cutting short lives. It should also be noted that in the recent safety audit by the International Civil Aviation Organisation, India had improved its "effective implementation" score to over 85% from the previously low score of 70%.

Copter crashes: a profile

The data were sourced from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation and the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau



Chart 2: The chart shows the number of fatalities and injuries from fatal commercial-helicopter accidents between 1990-2023



Compiled by B Renuka Ramakrishna, Saba Salsabeel Z, Niranjana VB, and Manaswini Vijayakumar who are interning with The Hindu Data Team

Chart 3: The chart shows the reasons for majority of commercial-helicopter accidents

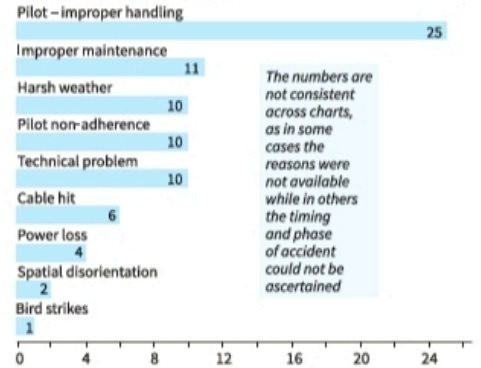


Chart 4: The chart shows the time of occurrence of fatal commercial-helicopter accidents

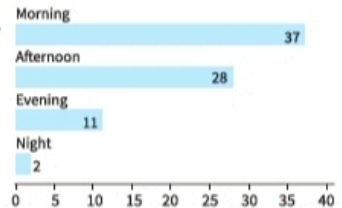
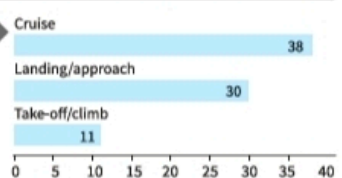


Chart 5: The chart shows the phases in which commercial-helicopter accidents occurred





Failed summit

India must reassess the usefulness of attending G-7 meetings

At 50, the G-7 – a grouping of the most advanced economies – should appear robust, cohesive and experienced in managing global conflict. Instead, the G-7 Summit and Outreach session in Kananaskis, Canada presented a disunited and ineffective force in the face of some of the most testing conflicts including an escalating Russia-Ukraine war, the Israel-Iran strife and Israel's ceaseless bombardment of Gaza. In addition, it has been unable to deal with the biggest disruptor in global trade – that of the U.S. Trump administration's reciprocal tariffs worldwide. This year's G-7 was rocky from the start as host Canada saw an unexpected election just months before the summit. The government of Mark Carney was still finding its feet, which meant leaders such as Prime Minister Modi were invited just days before the summit. Upheavals in U.S. foreign and trade policy have also caught the grouping off-guard: U.S. President Donald Trump's pivot to Russia on the Ukraine crisis, and ambiguous approach to China have been particularly noted. In Kananaskis Mr. Trump even suggested that the G-7 become the "G9, including Russia and China", much to the chagrin of other leaders, including the Ukraine President, who was a special invitee. Mr. Trump's volte face from proclaiming to be a "Peace-time President" to actively supporting Israel's aggression was another issue. The U.S. refused to sign on to a draft statement by G-7 members that called for a de-escalation or any criticism of Israel, and pushed for a statement that condemned Iran. Mr. Trump's early exit dealt another blow. Eventually, the G-7 was unable to issue a joint statement on key issues, and a Chair's Summary was issued to deal with the crises at hand, along with statements on less divisive issues such as AI and quantum computing, critical minerals supply chains, wildlife and prevention, and transnational repression, but not on terrorism, as India had hoped.

Perhaps the most productive part of Mr. Modi's trip was his meeting with Mr. Carney, and the decisions to restore Indian and Canadian High Commissioners, and to reset ties ruptured over the Nijjar case. However, the Carney government has not demonstrated any change in its position on the case or on action against Khalistani extremism. Moreover, the G-7 statement on Transnational Repression (TNR) does not name any country, but is pointed in its reference to allegations of foreign interference and TNR made by Canada against India, as well as China, Russia and Iran. Given the outcomes, the government must review the utility of India's participation in the G-7 process. To have the Prime Minister travel more than 11,000 kilometres to address one outreach session of a fractious summit may not be the most optimal use of India's resources.

A fair share

Retaining the 41% share in the divisible pool for States will be unjust

The Sixteenth Finance Commission (SFC), whose recommendations on financial devolution will be valid from April 1, 2026, faces a piquant situation. Its chairman Arvind Panagariya had noted last week that 22 out of 28 States, including many ruled by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), had asked for a larger share of the divisible pool of tax collections, from 41% to 50% – a legitimate demand. The Union government has effectively shrunk the divisible pool by disproportionately increasing its revenue through non-shareable cesses and surcharges, whose share of the Centre's gross tax revenue soared from 12.8% between 2015-16 to 2019-20 (pre-pandemic years) to 18.5% between 2020-21 and 2023-24 (Budget expenditure). Thus, the effective share of States in the Centre's gross tax revenues averaged close to 31% in the 2020-21 to 2023-24 period – it was 35% in the previous corresponding period. Compounding this is the post-GST reality, where limited avenues for States to raise their revenue, make them critically dependent on central transfers. While GST collections have been fairly good in recent years, this has still not addressed the issue of the reduced avenues for States to increase their revenue. Further, the existing formula for horizontal devolution, with a heavy weightage given to population and income distance, is seen by economically progressive States (the South), as a penalty for performance and responsible governance.

Keeping the status quo would go against the grain and the idea of cooperative federalism that the BJP-led government has emphasised. Mr. Panagariya also remarked that a sudden nine-point jump to 50% would "[upset] too many carts", indicating that the Centre would be loath to lessen its share because of rising expenditure on defence and other capital-intensive projects. This means that the Finance Commission would be less inclined to engage with States' demands, also explaining why it might keep the devolution share unchanged at 41%. Yet, doing so would be a missed opportunity to forge a new federal compact. A modest increase in the vertical devolution, meeting States' demands half-way, would be a welcome signal. The Finance Commission must also recommend a mechanism that will rein in the arbitrary use of cesses and surcharges, maybe even capping them at a fixed percentage of the gross tax revenue of the Centre and including any surplus collection in the divisible pool, as some have suggested. It must fine-tune the horizontal distribution criteria to create a more equitable balance between a State's needs, its area, and its performance. Crafting a formula that is fiscally prudent and one that strengthens the federal structure at its roots, the States, is imperative.

Resetting the India-U.S. partnership in uncertain times

Just a few months ago, India and the United States appeared poised to deepen what had been described as the defining partnership of the 21st century. Prime Minister Modi had met President Donald Trump early in his second term. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar was present at the inauguration. There was bipartisan goodwill in Washington and strategic optimism in New Delhi. The relationship seemed to rest not on convenience, but on a grander wager: shared democratic values, converging geopolitical interests, and a mutual ambition to shape the emerging world order.

A drift that is serious

Today, however, there is growing unease in New Delhi. Not a rupture, but a perceptible drift; subtle yet serious. A series of tactical and rhetorical signals from Washington suggest a partnership at risk of being undermined by volatility, policy incoherence, and a disconcerting return to older habits of mind. The sense of strategic convergence is dimming. In this context, Mr. Trump's decision to host a lunch on June 18 for Field Marshal Asim Munir, the chief architect of Pakistan's praetorian politics and sectarian rhetoric, has sent a disquieting signal to India, not least because it blurs the line between counter-terrorism partnership and political expediency.

This drift, however, is not irreversible. The structural logic of the partnership remains robust. What is required now is a reset, not of fundamentals, but of tone, clarity, and mutual commitment.

Several recent developments have triggered India's discomfort. Perhaps most jarring has been the return of outdated "hyphenation": treating India and Pakistan as equivalent strategic concerns. In the aftermath of Operation Sindoor, Mr. Trump spoke of India and Pakistan in the same breath, offered mediation on Kashmir, and warned of nuclear escalation. For Indian policymakers who have invested years in decoupling India's rise from the India-Pakistan binary, such language was diplomatically regressive.

On the economic front, signals have been equally disconcerting. Even as Mr. Trump announced that "our deal with China is done", he reportedly discouraged Apple's CEO from expanding manufacturing in India; warning that companies that "go to India" may face difficulties in accessing the U.S. market. For Indian officials advancing a "China-plus-one" strategy and projecting India as a manufacturing hub, the message was undermining.

Immigration policy, too, has become a point of friction. The H-1B visa regime, long a cornerstone of India-U.S. technological cooperation, now appears vulnerable to political posturing and protectionist rhetoric. The consequences risk fracturing the connective tissue that binds Silicon Valley to Indian innovation ecosystems.

Most concerning is the apparent warming in Washington's approach toward Pakistan. When



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the United States Central Command (CENTCOM) Commander, General Michael Kurilla, described Pakistan as a "phenomenal partner" in counterterrorism, it represented an extraordinary characterisation of an institution long associated with nurturing cross-border terrorism.

Why is this drift occurring? First, the Trump administration's transactional approach places short-term gain over long-term alignment. India's strategic culture – patient, layered, and civilisational – sits uncomfortably with Washington's preference for the quick deal. The American impulse to monetise diplomacy can often jar with India's more strategic-based lens on geopolitics. In addition, Mr. Trump's diplomatic style remains as intriguing as ever: part salesman, part strategist, and unpredictable. He may dazzle one moment and denounce the next, making it difficult for partners, even the closest, to navigate the terrain of trust and expectation.

Second, a segment of the U.S. national security establishment continues to view Pakistan as a familiar, if flawed, partner, especially in the context of Afghanistan and counterterrorism. Despite a history of duplicity, there remains a deep-seated nostalgia for the "known devil", whose strategic utility, however diminished, is still overstated. Meanwhile, India's strategic autonomy is often misconstrued as fence-sitting rather than a principled assertion of sovereignty.

Third, structural asymmetries in influence and communication persist. India's rise is real, but its institutional footprint in Washington lags behind its ambitions.

This is reflected in a troubling misunderstanding of India's strategic intentions. Critics such as Ashley Tellis argue that India suffers from "great-power delusions" and that the relationship falters because India's ambitions outstrip its capabilities. This diagnosis is flawed. India does not suffer from delusions of grandeur; it suffers from the patient weight of becoming. Its desire to chart an independent course reflects not confusion but strategic clarity shaped by history and sovereignty. The real risk lies not in India's aspirations but in Washington's impatience with partners who do not mirror American methods or priorities.

India must take the lead

What then must be done? Both countries must act decisively to prevent further drift.

India should not overreact. Tactical irritants must not obscure deeper strategic alignment. Defence cooperation, Quad initiatives, intelligence sharing, and convergent interests from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific remain strong foundations. But dramatic responses will only exacerbate misunderstanding. Quiet, persistent, and calibrated diplomacy must remain the preferred method. India should broaden and deepen its engagement in Washington beyond traditional diplomacy, leveraging Congress, policy think tanks, and Indian American diaspora as vectors of strategic advocacy.

Domestically, India must accelerate internal economic reforms, not to satisfy any foreign expectations but to reinforce the logic of investment, manufacturing, and long-term confidence. Regulatory clarity and infrastructure modernisation remain the best arguments for India as a global production hub. On the trade front, officials on both sides are cautiously exploring a modest but meaningful bilateral arrangement before the July 9 deadline.

Immigration concerns must be reframed as shared opportunities. The H-1B regime is not a concession to India, but an instrument of mutual innovation. The movement of skilled talent, the collaborative ecosystems of tech entrepreneurship, and the potential for co-creating the next generation of frontier technologies should be at the centre of the India-U.S. conversation.

The need to rediscover the basis of ties

For the U.S., the burden is equally significant. Washington must abandon Cold War framings and recognise that treating Indian manufacturing and talent mobility as threats is self-defeating. If the Indo-Pacific strategy is to endure, it must be matched by concrete investments in India's regional capacity-building initiatives.

More fundamentally, both countries must rediscover the moral purpose of their partnership. This is not merely about balancing China or accessing markets. At its best, the India-U.S. relationship is about shaping a democratic, pluralist, and rules-based world order. The arc of India-U.S. relations has never been linear. In 1998, after the Pokhran tests, who could have imagined the level of alignment achieved just a decade later? By 2005, the two countries had stunned the world with the landmark civil nuclear agreement: an audacious act of strategic trust that rewrote the rules of global diplomacy.

That moment reminds us of what is possible when political courage meets mutual respect. As U.S. President Bush once said, "The world will see what two great democracies can do when they trust each other." It is precisely that spirit we must summon again today. As this writer wrote in the introduction to *Engaged Democracies* (co-edited, more than two decades ago), "the real test of the partnership is not how it behaves in moments of celebration, but how it endures in times of stress".

The question then is not, as Walter Russell Mead provocatively asked recently, will Trump lose India? The better question is: will both countries squander a generational opportunity to build a democratic concert in Asia? The answer must be no. This turbulence should serve not as an epitaph, but as a summons to renewal. If clarity, commitment, and candour return to the conversation, the arc of the India-U.S. relationship can still bend – not just toward engagement, but toward enduring partnership and, perhaps once again, toward history-making trust.

While the structural logic of the partnership remains robust, what is needed is a reset that is marked by clarity and mutual commitment

The legality of Israeli actions under international law

While many nations may demur from taking a clear position on the legality of Israel's unparalleled military strikes against Iran for a multitude of reasons, an inescapable question confronting the global community is whether these strikes are legal under international law. It is axiomatic to state that Article 24 of the UN Charter prohibits the use of force in international relations, allowing narrow exceptions such as self-defence under Article 51, which permits a state to use force "if an armed attack occurs", adhering to necessity and proportionality. According to international lawyer Marko Milanovic, the legality of a country's use of force hinges on the legal conception of self-defence. If self-defence is limited to repelling armed attacks, Israel's current use of force is illegal, as there was no armed attack from Iran or non-state actors whose actions were attributable to Iran. Consequently, as per this interpretation, Israel's use of force is illegal and would amount to aggression, which is a war crime under international law.

Pre-emptive self-defence

What about the contention that Israel's military actions against Iran can be justified under pre-emptive self-defence, i.e., the right of the states to use force against an 'armed attack' that is yet to occur? The argument is that Iran is close to acquiring the capability to develop nuclear weapons, and once it receives the said capability, it will destroy Israel, as its leaders have vowed. Indeed, Israel justifies its war against Iran by claiming that its actions are pre-emptive self-defence against Iran's nuclear programme.

Pre-emptive self-defence in international law is contentious because arguing for the use of force against an anticipated armed attack contradicts Article 51. On the other hand, international lawyers such as Rosalyn Higgins argue that



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requiring a state to wait for an armed attack to occur before it can defend itself would be impractical. Notwithstanding the disputable nature of pre-emptive self-defence, for the sake of argument, let us assume that such a right exists. The question, then, is how to define it, keeping in mind that an overtly broad articulation of such a right would violate not only the letter but also the spirit of the UN Charter. Arguably, a country has a right to pre-emptive self-defence if an armed attack has not occurred but is imminent. A better phrase for this is anticipatory self-defence. Support for this proposition is often drawn from the famous Caroline incident of 1837. This incident involved a pre-emptive strike by British forces in Canada against the American ship, Caroline. This ship was used by Americans who empathised with the rebels fighting British rule in Canada to ferry arms to the rebels. Over the years, this incident led to the emergence of what is known as the Caroline doctrine for the use of force. As in this doctrine, a state claiming pre-emptive self-defence would have to show that the necessity of self-defence was "instant", "overwhelming", "leaving no choice of means, and no moment of deliberation". Further, the force used should be proportionate. In simpler terms, a valid use of force as part of pre-emptive (or anticipatory) self-defence would require an armed attack that is imminent.

Grave violations by regimes must be called out as international law still remains the primary framework for determining the legitimacy of state conduct

Meaning of imminence

However, there is no consensus on the meaning of 'imminent'. As Milanovic argues, the first meaning of 'imminent' is a restrictive one that has a temporal dimension. In other words, an 'imminent' attack means one that is temporally proximate, i.e., about to happen. The second meaning is expansive, where an attack may occur at some point in the future. Allowing a state to

use pre-emptive self-defence, relying on the expansive meaning of imminent, would imply giving a licence to powerful states to act unilaterally merely based on conjecture. It would be an open invitation to armed aggression, which would surely defeat the very objective of forbidding the use of force under the UN Charter. Moreover, this broad meaning would also not be consistent with the Caroline doctrine, which amply limits the use of pre-emptive self-defence through qualifiers such as 'instant', 'overwhelming', and 'leaving no room for deliberation'. In short, there is abundant support for a narrower interpretation of 'imminent'.

Applying this legal understanding to Israel's use of force, it is clear that for Israel to make a credible case for pre-emptive self-defence, it must demonstrate that an attack from Iran was imminent, meaning an attack was about to occur. The argument that Israel acted in pre-emptive self-defence because Iran is closer to acquiring nuclear weapons, which could pose an existential threat to Israel, relies on a broader interpretation of "imminent", which is not supported by international law.

It is the primary framework

Cynics might argue that this debate is futile in a world where there is scant respect for international law. After all, international law has failed abjectly to stop wars despite the adoption of the UN Charter eight decades ago. However, international law remains the primary framework for determining the legitimacy of state conduct. It is the only means by which state power can be held accountable internationally. Thus, it is essential to invoke and marshal international law in the teeth of its gravest violations by regimes that believe they can act with impunity.

The views expressed are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dialogue over conflict

It is shocking and distressing that the conflict between Israel and Iran is widening. If the United States gets involved in it, the possibility of a wider war would be inevitable. Iran should give up its ambition of becoming a nuclear power and Israel

must respect the sovereignty of Iran. It is only through diplomacy and dialogue that conflict can be resolved. Not through guns and fire.

Balagopal Gopinath,
Keerikad, Alappuzha, Kerala

Incident in Australia
The bizarre treatment

meted out to Gaurav Kundi, a resident of Adelaide (Inside pages, June 16), is an example of barbaric measures undertaken by a law-enforcing agency. There needs to be action taken in consonance with the canons of law.

Mani Natarajan,
Chennai

Sports education

The BCCI has done excellent work in developing the infrastructure and coaching facilities for cricket in India. The IPL has done brilliantly in giving opportunities for young cricketers to showcase their talent. The IPL has also enriched BCCI in a big way, in having a

very large corpus of funds. However, India has still to set up world-class universities to train young men and women in the disciplines of sports medicine, sports psychology and counselling, and sports administration. It would be great if the BCCI could think big and set up a

world class university in the national interest. Collaboration with a leading university in Australia or the U.S. will ensure the best in this specialised area.

Ramesh Daga,
Chennai

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

Trade tariffs close borders but may open doors to invasive alien species

Shifting trade agreements and new ties between previously unlinked nations may further the spread of novel invasive alien species; countries may focus on relationships rather than stricter checks on imports from new trade alliances; some nations may lack infrastructure to support checks

M. Nobinraja
Priya Ranganathan

Around 1847, in colonial Calcutta, an unexpected visitor arrived, likely hidden in plant crates or trade goods from East Africa. The giant African snail (*Lissachatina fulica*) entered India without fanfare, admired at first for its size and shell. But what seemed ornamental soon revealed itself to be the country's most persistent invasive alien species.

Thriving in the region's warm, humid climate and free from natural predators, the snail spread rapidly with human help, from Bengal's gardens to the farmlands of the Western Ghats. By the mid-20th century, crops and ornamental plants had been ravaged, native snails displaced, and soil ecosystems altered. Worse, the snail had become a carrier for parasites like the rat lungworm, threatening humans and wildlife.

The giant African snail is an example of how slow-moving, unnoticed arrivals can reshape ecosystems. Poor quarantine, a lack of rigorous monitoring, and policy failures allowed this mollusc to get far and wide. A world of rising global trade and subsequent species movement increase the risk of similar invasions.

Trade and invasive alien species

The surge in global trade since the 1800s has indirectly contributed to biological invasions in both terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. The number of alien species rose 20x by the early 19th century. Bilateral trade agreements increased from 76 countries forming 5,700 trade pairs in 1948 to 186 countries forming over 34,000 pairs by the early 2000s. Now, trade tariffs mooted by the Trump administration in the U.S. are contributing to changing, reviving or initiating new trade deals between countries.

Invasive alien species are introduced by increased human activity around the globe. The introduction of these exotic species can be deliberate or accidental. For example, the introduction of cane toads (*Bufo marinus*) in Australia, *Gambusia* in India and *Poecilia reticulata* in Japan are examples of deliberate biocontrol initiatives gone wrong. On the other hand, accidental introductions often happen via the export and import of biological goods, such as timber, plant products, vegetables, fruits, and grains.

Biofouling is one such introduction scenario. When ships travel between countries without cargo, they are filled with ballast water to help the ship stay stable on the high seas. Biofouling – the undesirable accumulation of plants, animals, and algae on surfaces – sometimes occurs during the filling and flushing of ballast water, transporting exotic species from one region to another. The Asian paddle crab was introduced from the Northwest Pacific and East Asian waters to New Zealand, where it carries the white-spot syndrome virus, in this way.

When trade takes a turn

Shifting trade agreements and new ties between previously unlinked nations may further the spread of novel invasive alien species between continents. Countries may focus on forming relationships rather than imposing stricter sanctions on imports from new trade alliances. Some nations may not have the infrastructure to



India has been a major exporter and importer of exotic species. Many are introduced in the ornamental pet trade, especially the aquarium trade, or for biocontrol purposes, as in the case of mosquitofish, guppies (shown here), and angelfish. HOLGER KRISP (CC BY)

support checks on imported or exported goods given the sudden rise in new trade partners. In such scenarios, India too is at risk of letting more invasive alien species enter our borders.

India has been a major exporter and importer of exotic species. Several species are in different stages of establishment and spread in the country, making it difficult to track their entry and expansion. Many are introduced in the ornamental pet trade, especially the aquarium trade, or for biocontrol purposes as in the cases of mosquitofish (*Gambusia* species), guppies (*Poecilia reticulata*), and angelfish (*Pterophyllum scalare*). Some species are introduced through the food industry, such as Tilapia, which was brought to boost food production but instead established itself in Indian waterways, eventually outcompeting native freshwater fish species.

In another example from 1955, when food was scarce in India, the government imported wheat from the U.S. under their PL 480 ('Food for Peace') programme. But the wheat was of an inferior quality and contaminated with *Parthenium* seeds, and first entered the Pune market. Today, *Parthenium* grass is widespread in India, being found even in the remote corners of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

A 2022 study found that India has lost \$127.3 billion (\$830 crore) to invasive alien species over the last 60 years, rendering the country the second-most financially affected by invasive alien species in the world, after the U.S. But this data only stems from the calculated costs of 10 invasive alien species known from the 2,000+ alien species known in India.

Indeed, negative economic impacts have been recorded for only about 3% of

The giant African snail shows how unnoticed arrivals reshape ecosystems. Poor quarantine, a lack of monitoring, and policy failures allowed this mollusc to get far and wide. Rising global trade and subsequent species movement increase the risk of similar invasions

known invasive alien species in India; such data remain unavailable, underreported, or overlooked for the remainder. Semi-aquatic and aquatic invasive alien species pose a greater fiscal burden than terrestrial species because they often affect high-value sectors like public health, water infrastructure, and fisheries, where control and damage costs are significantly higher. Indeed, the highest monetary burden from semi-aquatic species is solely from the yellow fever mosquito, which is a financial liability as well as detrimental to public health.

One Biosecurity

To reduce the risk of importing invasive alien species, India needs to strengthen its national policy. Specifically, it means enforcing stricter biosecurity at ports and other entry points and developing real-time species-tracking and early-warning systems that can catch invasion events before they get out of control.

The country also needs greater collaboration between government departments and researchers to maximise knowledge generation about potentially invasive species and their spread given various climate change scenarios and

shifting trade routes.

Finally, India must implement mandatory post-trade biological impact assessments, typically in quarantine facilities managed by the respective department, to ensure unwelcome guests are not here to stay.

Implementing and strengthening policies to reduce the spread of invasive species is one step towards managing their consequences on the native biodiversity. In the light of the prevailing international trade agreements, the risk of these species' introduction remains high due to a lack of infrastructure, dedicated institutions, and policies focused on mitigating their spread. Freight transport between growing economies is projected to triple by 2050, especially maritime and air cargo transport, increasing invasion risk by reducing travel time and improving the survivability of alien species.

Today, we're still experiencing the effects of alien species introduced several decades ago.

Similarly the effects of alien species introduced in 2025 will only surface decades in future, when it may be too late to reverse the tide. Strengthening India's border biosecurity must be a top priority to avoid the worse consequences of invasion. Like One Health, a 'One Biosecurity' framework if implemented at the earliest will better our chances of managing invasive alien species.

(Nobinraja M. is a post-doctoral fellow at ATREE working on invasive alien fishes. Priya Ranganathan is a doctoral student at the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE), Bengaluru, studying wetland ecology and ecosystem services. nobin.raja@atree.org, rpriya.ecology@gmail.com.)



Honda R&D successfully landed its 6.3-metre-tall reusable launch vehicle after reaching an altitude of 271 metres. BORUI WANG/UNSPASH

Honda conducts surprise reusable rocket test, aims for suborbital launch by 2029

Agence France Presse

In a pleasant surprise, Japan's second-biggest carmaker Honda successfully tested an experimental reusable rocket, the company said, as it seeks to expand into the space sector. Honda, which hopes to develop the tech prowess for a suborbital launch by 2029, conducted a test flight of its rocket on the northern Japanese island of Hokkaido.

While "no decisions have been made regarding commercialisation of these rocket technologies, Honda will continue making progress in the fundamental research with a technology development goal of realising technological capability to enable a suborbital launch by 2029," it said in a statement.

"The test was completed successfully, the first time Honda landed a rocket after reaching an altitude of nearly 300 meters," the statement dated June 17 added.

Honda R&D, the research arm of Japan's second-biggest carmaker, successfully landed its 6.3-metre-tall experimental reusable launch vehicle after reaching an altitude of 271 metres at its test facility in northern Japan's space town Taiki, according to the company. The vehicle landed only 37 cm away from its designated landing spot after the minute-long flight.

Demand for satellite launch rockets is expected to increase in the coming years as expectations grow for "a data system in

Reusable vehicles are driving commercial space efforts. Led by Falcon 9, owned by Elon Musk's SpaceX. The company's U.S. rivals, including Blue Origin, also have reusable rocket plans

outer space," the Honda statement said.

"Honda has chosen to take on the technological challenge of developing reusable rockets by utilising Honda technologies amassed in the development of various products and automated driving systems," it added.

In future, the rockets could be used to set up satellite-based communication tools and to monitor environmental conditions such as global warming, Honda added.

Reusable launch vehicles have been the driver of emerging commercial space missions over the past decade, led by Falcon 9, owned and operated by Elon Musk's SpaceX. The company's U.S. rivals, including Blue Origin and companies in China and Europe, also have reusable rocket plans.

The Indian Space Research Organisation is also working on a Reusable Launch Vehicle, although it is still undergoing tests and there is no fixed launch date in sight.

Honda in 2021 had said it was studying space technologies such as reusable rockets, but it had not previously announced the details of a launch test. A suborbital launch may touch the verge of outer space but does not enter orbit.

The Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) is also on a mission to become a major player for satellite launches, including with its H3 rocket, which is not reusable.

Meanwhile, Japanese startups are vying to enter the busy field, including Space One, which in December 2024 suffered its second failed rocket launch.

For example, Tokyo-based Innovative Space Carrier last month said it will test-launch a prototype reusable rocket in the United States in December using an American engine.

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

THE SCIENCE QUIZ

Dig to go back in time

Manaswini Vijayakumar

QUESTION 1

Large stone structures or megaliths come in two board types: monolithic and polyolithic. A polyolithic structure with one horizontal stone placed on top of two vertical stones is called a _____. Fill in the blank.

QUESTION 2

Single standing stones or monoliths of the neolithic age are called _____. They can be found across Europe and many have astronomical functions. The longest and most complex alignment of menhirs can be found in a commune called Carnac in France. Fill in the blank. Hint: They also feature in 'Asterix and Obelix' stories.

QUESTION 3

Name the remote-sensing technology that archaeologists use to measure the height of a built platform or structure with respect to the earth's surface. Part of the technology was developed in the mid-20th century, just after the laser was invented, as a military tool to estimate distances.

QUESTION 4

Identify the archaeological practice in which half of a feature, like a hearth or a wall, is excavated and the other is left untouched onsite (in situ). The practice helps archaeologist understand its profile and stratigraphy.

QUESTION 5

Historical eras have types of pottery associated with them that may explain their cultures and practices.

For example, the Northern Black Polished Ware is associated with Iron Age settlements in the _____. In 700-200 BC. Fill in the blanks. Manaswini Vijayakumar is interacting with The Hindu.

Answers to June 17 quiz:

1. Mammal notorious for the stinky compounds it emits – Ans: Skunk
 2. Object that stinks due to N,N-Dimethylmethanamine – Ans: Rotting fish
 3. Odour rooted in poor oral hygiene – Ans: Halitosis
 4. Compound responsible for smells of jasmine flowers, poop – Ans: Skatole
 5. Substance whose odour butyric acid is responsible for – Ans: Vomit
- Visual: Durian
First contact: K.N. Viswanathan | Yagvesh Shukla | Joe V.R. | Mahima Sajani Jacob | Tamal Biswas



Visual: Name the city of the Harappan Civilisation famous for wells like this and for its water management practices. It was named a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2021. CREDIT: RANGA SAH (CC BY-SA)

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

BIBLIOGRAPHY



GETTY IMAGES

Airborne dangers: why breath should not be taken for granted

Writers are immersing themselves in studying aerobiology and how it impacts human lives, especially after COVID-19; others are finding out more about the right way to breathe, and a journalist travelled the world to figure out what went wrong in how human beings are breathing

Sudhiredar Sharma

At the start of 2020, a small team of scientists tried and failed to convince public health organisations that COVID-19 was spread through the air we breathe. Until then, scientists thought that respiratory diseases spread through droplets, and that these droplets had a limited range. Coughed up, these droplets fell quickly to the ground, to use the disgusting terminology of the 1990s which health officials use while speaking about tuberculosis. In reality, however, breath has been a medium of transmission of most invisible things.

Such new insights into the living atmosphere were revealed courtesy of Carl Zimmer, through his book *Air-Borne: The Hidden History of the Life We Breathe*. The text follows the research of Louis Pasteur who caught germs from the air, and pursues groundbreaking experiments by Amelia Earhart and Charles Lindbergh. It warns the world about airborne infections, and chronicles the dark side of aerobiology designed to spread anthrax, smallpox, and an array of other pathogens. Rather than be taken for granted, the importance of the natural process of human breath is once again established.

Protecting the most vital of all life processes calls for a well-thought-out strategy. Breath is in itself of immense

value – one breath in and one breath out is the manifestation of life. A breath alone brings a newborn to life, the body turns pink as the first breath gets in. And, the last breath accounts for life. The power that ripples through the whole universe comes in the form of breath.

It is an intuitive act of inhaling and exhaling, which is repeated 25,000 times a day. This natural act, often taken for granted, is counted as a necessary biological activity. It is precious and more than just an exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide. 'Breath,' says Prem Rawat, 'is the greatest mystery, out of nowhere it comes to nowhere it goes.' In his book, *Breath: Wake Up to Life*, Rawat writes that breath is the beginning of life, the sustaining of life, and when it ceases, it is also the end of life.

The invaluable gift

Breath is an invaluable gift, but only if it is taken that way. Traditional practices related to breathing value breath and even try to prolong and preserve it. Sage Patanjali has his pranayama practices that add value to age-old breathing practices that have gained popularity among the health conscious. Buddha counted breath as an essential link between the human body and consciousness. The breathing process has many hidden features that are gaining wide acceptance. That breath fuels all life forms and extinguishes it too, is a lived reality. The natural act of

breathing, now counted as a biological privilege, is a precious gift given in abundance.

Breathing must be correctly done because nine out of 10 people don't breathe correctly – aggravating a laundry list of chronic diseases, according to James Nestor. It is surprising that hospitals only deal with breathing emergencies related to specific maladies of the lungs. It is only in recent years that breathing as a branch of medical emergencies has been acknowledged.

The correct way to breathe

The way to correct breathing is an individual responsibility, but to think that it is a pretty simple act that is well understood could be a fallacy. Only by following a tough breathing regime could four hours of daily snoring be just 10 minutes. For this incredible change to happen, one has to go through an awful experience of forcefully breathing through the mouth for the first 10 days, and revert to nasal breathing for another 10 days with lips sealed with a piece of tape. The longer one breathes through the nose, the nasal cavities get clearer and bigger, writes Nestor in his new book, *Breath: The New Science of a Lost Art*.

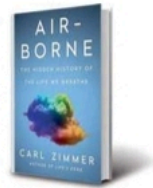
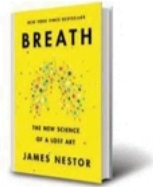
Inhaling-exhaling techniques have been around for several millennia. Over the years, however, these techniques are being rediscovered and scientifically validated. "The fruits of this once-fringe,

often forgotten research are now redefining the potential of the human body," explains Nestor. Limited but cutting-edge research in pulmonology, psychology, biochemistry, and physiology has already demonstrated that many modern maladies – asthma, anxiety, psoriasis – could either be reduced or reversed simply by changing the way we inhale and exhale.

Stories on the magical aspects of breathing abound in the world of yoga practitioners, as the popularity of yoga in the past two decades has brought a large number of huffing and puffing exponents in public spaces. Whether or not they are breathing better remains to be ascertained. From alternate nostril breathing to breathing coordination, and from resonant breathing to Buteyko breathing – all techniques of breathing impact human health and longevity.

Nestor raises hopes of revolutionising the health sector by generating a renewed interest in breathing techniques to act as a preventive medicine that helps in retaining balance in the body such that milder problems don't end up being serious health issues. However, modern medicine has yet to take serious note of this wisdom generated by Buddhist monks over two millennia ago. If face is the index of mind, breath is the indicator of human well-being.

Sudhiredar Sharma is an independent writer, researcher and academic.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know Your English

K. Subrahmanian
S. Upendran

"Why are there so many policemen outside?"
"Somebody broke into my neighbour's house and..."
"...did he forget to lock the front door again?"
"He remembers locking the front door this morning but..."
"...shouldn't you say, he remembered to lock the front door this morning?"
"That's also acceptable. But there is a difference in meaning between 'I remember locking the door' and 'I remembered to lock the front door.'"
"There is? What is it?"
"If you say, 'I remember locking the front door,' it means, you locked the front door some time ago and you are remembering the fact now."
"So I lock the front door first and then later I remember?"
"That's right."
"So if I say, 'I remember meeting Madhuri six years ago,' it would mean, I met Madhuri six years ago and now I remember the meeting."
"That's right. The meeting took place first and now you remember the fact. But if on the other hand, you say, 'I remembered to lock the front door,' it would mean, that you remembered that you had to lock the front door and because you remembered, you locked it."
"So, in this case, I remembered first and then I locked the door. Correct?"
"That's right. You locked the front door because you remembered. Here are a couple of more examples. 'I remember doing my homework' and 'I remembered to do my homework.' In the first sentence..."
"...you have already finished doing your homework. You're remembering the fact now."
"Good. So, in this case, you do your homework first, then you remember the act of doing your homework. But if you say, 'I remembered to do my homework'..."
"...you reminded yourself that you had to do your homework and then proceeded to do it."
"Exactly! So, in this case, the remembering comes first and it is followed by the act of doing your homework."
"What did your neighbour lose?"
"I'm told that the thief ran away with his new VCR."
"Poor man! I think I now understand why my father says that every door and window need to be checked before..."
"...needs to be checked."
"What?"
"Every door and window needs to be checked, and not 'need' to be checked."
"But it is 'door and window'. So, doesn't it make it a plural subject?"
"No, it doesn't. The 'door and window' is preceded by 'every'. And whenever you have 'every' and 'each' preceding a noun, you have to treat it as singular. For example, every car, truck and van is required to stop for inspection."
"I see. Is it okay to say, each boy and girl was asked to bring a sweet?"
"Perfectly o.k."
Published in *The Hindu* on December 10, 1996.

THE DAILY QUIZ

Garfield the Cat premiered on June 19, 1978. Here's a fun quiz to test your trivia of the grumpy cynical cat

Prathmesh Khur

- QUESTION 1**
Garfield's favourite food is lasagna. This bears a connection to the place of his birth. Where was Garfield born?
- QUESTION 2**
One of Garfield's favourite sayings is 'Big fat hairy ____'. Fill in the blank.
- QUESTION 3**
What is Jon Arbuckle's profession in the comic strip?
- QUESTION 4**
What is the name of Jon's brown-eared beagle, who is Garfield's best friend and usual victim?
- QUESTION 5**
Which famous comedian voiced Garfield in the 2004 live action movie?



Visual question:
This is the poster of Garfield's favourite movie. Name it.

- Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz:** 1. This submersible imploded during a dive to the wreck of the Titanic. **Ans: Titan**
2. This person was elected presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church in the United States of America. **Ans: Katharine Jefferts Schori**
3. The first American woman to fly into outer space. **Ans: Sally Ride**
4. This treaty was signed by U.S. President Jimmy Carter and Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev. **Ans: SALT**
5. This British explorer and mountaineer's disappearance on Mount Everest is one of the most-celebrated mysteries of the 20th century. **Ans: George Mallory**
6. This suffragist was fined after being convicted for voting in the 1872 presidential election. **Ans: Susan B. Anthony**
Visual: Identify this musician and the band he played for. **Ans: Paul McCartney, The Beatles**
Early Birds: Siddhartha Viswanathan| Sonali Das| Tamarnjit Bisla| Tito Shiladitya| Haridas Pal

Word of the day

Recede:
pull back or move away; retreat; become faint or more distant

Synonyms: draw back, pull away, retire, withdraw, drop off, fall back, fall behind

Usage: His footsteps receded down the hall.

Pronunciation: newsth.live/recedepr

International Phonetic Alphabet: /rɪˈsiːd/

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

EDITORIAL

BUBBLE OF RELIEF

The wholesale inflation rate in India dipped to a 14-month low of 0.39 per cent in May while retail inflation softened to 2.82 per cent—a 75-month low—presenting encouraging signs for price stability. Much of this relief has come on account of falling food and fuel prices, particularly the sharp decline in vegetable inflation and subdued prices for items like onions, potatoes, and pulses.

The inflation data for May is indeed indicative of a meaningful, broad-based easing of price pressures across primary articles, manufactured products, and fuel. Nevertheless, India's relieving tone has to be tempered by a note of caution. The global economic landscape has changed drastically in just a few days, thanks to the eruption of hostilities between Israel and Iran. The geopolitical flashpoint, situated perilously close to the Strait of Hormuz—a vital artery for global oil shipments—has already started influencing global crude prices. Oil has surged by nearly 11 per cent since the outbreak of the conflict, raising the spectre of imported inflation for energy-hungry nations including India, which imports nearly 85 per cent of its crude oil needs. For now, Indian equity markets seem unfazed. The Sensex has barely budged despite the geopolitical tremors. Economists have attributed this to a combination of macroeconomic resilience, a robust inflation trajectory, and the lack of immediate supply-side disruption from Iran, which supplies only around 4 per cent of global oil—primarily to China. Additionally, buffer mechanisms, such as domestic oil reserves and OPEC's excess capacity, have offered some cushion against volatility. But the calm may be deceptive!

Oil is rooted deeply in India's socio-economic structure. It comprises over 9 per cent of the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) basket. It also influences the trajectory of transport, fertiliser, and manufacturing costs. It is argued that a 10 per cent spike in oil prices could translate to nearly 1 per cent increase in WPI inflation. This, by all logic, would have downstream effects on the Consumer Price Index (CPI), the government's subsidy bill, as well as the current account deficit. Even if there is no direct disruption to Iranian oil supplies, continued tension or psychological market reactions could potentially nudge inflation upwards and complicate India's monetary policy planning. Adding to the complexity is the monsoon's uneven progress. The India Meteorological Department has predicted a pickup in rainfall, but spatial distribution may still be a cause for concern. Experiences in the past have demonstrated that even an overall "normal" monsoon can leave several agrarian belts parched—leading to localised shortages and subsequent price spikes in food items.

Perhaps keeping view of these latent risks, the Reserve Bank of India wisely upheld its stance to "neutral" in its policy review. At the same time, it also reduced its FY26 inflation projection to 4 per cent; the quarter-wise estimates range from 3.6 per cent to 4.4 per cent. Yet, with global oil prices swinging and domestic weather patterns unpredictable, even this cautiously optimistic projection could prove vulnerable. It is also very pertinent to note that the inflation narrative is playing out against a broader backdrop of global uncertainty. In the UK, for instance, inflation cooled to 3.4 per cent in May, but the Bank of England has been cautious due to escalating Middle East tensions and rising energy prices. Financial markets across the world are beginning to reprice expectations on interest rates, which would factor in a prolonged period of geopolitical risks. For India, the key will be to ensure proactive policy recalibration. The RBI will have to stay agile, alert and cautious. Fiscal policymakers, in the meantime, must ensure that fuel subsidies and strategic oil reserves are deployed judiciously in the case of crude spiking dramatically. Trade and shipping officials already seem to be in talks to mitigate cost escalations, which is timely. To sum up, India's inflation numbers offer a moment of respite. However, the road ahead is fraught with external vulnerabilities. The current low inflation is an opportunity—but unless protected wisely, it could slip away as quickly as it came.

Dear Editor

ABSENT ACCOUNTABILITY

A dreadful tragedy unfolded on Sunday with the collapse of a bridge over the Indrayani River in Pune, Maharashtra, resulting in the deaths of four people and injuries to 51 others. The collapse was caused by overcrowding, with 7-8 bikes and over 100 people on the bridge at the time. Who will be held responsible for these deaths? Why was adequate security not provided? It is a known tourist spot—so why was it not secured or repaired in advance to prioritise the safety of visitors? The claim that some officials arrived and dispersed the crowd, only for it to return after they left, rings hollow. Tourists are bound to return—but there should have been proper security arrangements in place. A Shiv Sena (UBT) MP slammed the Maharashtra government, calling it a "corrupt government (Punshi Sarkar)". Maharashtra Deputy CM is the guardian minister of Pune—so will he take responsibility for this incident? he asked.

—MUHAMMAD, GUJRAT via email

millenniumpost.in

Log on to write letters to the editor or send them to

letter2editor@mp@gmail.com. You can also send your comments to The Editor, Millennium Post, Pratyap Bhawan, 5 Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, New Delhi 110 002.

NEXUS OF GOOD



ANIL SWARUP

THE WRITER IS
AN AUTHOR AND
A FORMER CIVIL
SERVANT

As a result of comprehensive safety measures, the event reported zero water-related incidents, despite managing a crowd of over 30 lakh pilgrims

A Sacred Synergy

The efficient organisation of Telangana's Saraswati Pushkaralu 2025 sanctified Kaleshwaram into a spiritual hub that hosted lakhs of people in a seamless celebration of divine devotion

The Government of Telangana successfully concluded the Saraswati Pushkaralu 2025

on May 26 at Triveni Sangam, Kaleshwaram—where the Godavari, Pranahita, and the subterranean Saraswati rivers meet. Held once every 12 years during Jupiter's transit into Mithuna Rashi, the event holds immense spiritual significance. Kaleshwaram, now recognised nationally alongside Prayagraj, hosted lakhs of devotees during this sacred event. Anchored around the ancient Kaleshwara Mukteswara Swamy Temple, the 12-day festival witnessed over 30 lakh pilgrims.

The planning for Saraswati Pushkaralu 2025 began four months in advance under the leadership of the Principal Secretary, Endowments Department, and the District Collector, Jayashankar Bhupalpal, involving coordinated efforts across all line departments. A structured planning process was put in place, with multiple inter-departmental meetings to assess requirements and finalise work. Critical infrastructure works, including the construction of a dedicated Saraswati Ghat with a statue, road widening and repairs, and enhancements to water supply and electrical infrastructure, were identified. Planning also included setting up a Tent City with integrated food and decoration arrangements, guest house renovations, a Pinda Pradanam shed, and ceremonial arches at key points to reflect the spiritual and cultural significance of the event.

To ensure that all these works progressed smoothly and were completed on time, a robust monitoring mechanism was put in place. Department-wise responsibilities were clearly assigned, and regular review meetings were held to track progress. Field inspections were conducted weekly in the initial phases and intensified to daily visits as the event approached. These inspections focused on verifying on-ground execution, resolving inter-departmental coordination issues, and ensuring readiness across all fronts. The consistent and hands-on involvement of the district administration was aimed at delivering a safe, comfortable, and spiritually enriching Pushkaralu experience for all devotees.



The Saraswati Pushkaralu 2025 was a result of strong political will, visionary planning, and flawless on-ground execution

A vast infrastructure was developed. Key initiatives included:

- Development of the 86-meter-long Saraswati Ghat with a Saraswati Ammavaru statue as the spiritual centre.

- Daily harathis by Kashi Pandits, yagams, and facilities for pinda pradnam, planned and supervised by the District Collector.
- Seven Harathi platforms, named after major Indian rivers, were constructed as focal points for daily rituals.
- Navaratha Harathi, performed by pandits from Kashi, was the spiritual highlight of each evening.
- A Saraswati statue and hand sculptures were installed, enhancing the ghat's cultural and symbolic presence.
- The statue became a central point of devotion, with pilgrims offering prayers as they would at a temple.

- These elements together elevated the spiritual ambience and reinforced the cultural identity of the event site.
- Provision of changing rooms, showers, cooling sheds, and river safety measures like floating barriers and deployment of swimmers.
- Creation of a 100-room choultry, 100-bed dormitory, and a Tent City for close-proximity accommodations, all planned to handle the large pilgrim influx efficiently.
- Permanent and temporary toilets, hundreds of taps, and efficient solid waste systems.
- Drinking water stations, ORS and buttermilk counters, and cool mat walkways under intense heat.

Tent City

- For the first time in Telangana, a Tent City was established for Saraswati Pushkaralu.
- The setup included:
 - 40 general tents
 - 1 VIP tent
 - 100-bed dormitory
 - Dining hall for pilgrims and volunteers

- This provided a unique and organised accommodation solution near the event area.

Temporary Bus Stand

- A temporary bus stand was created by levelling vacant government land to manage the large influx of vehicles, which peaked at over 40,000.

- Facilities provided included:

- Shelter and seating (chairs)
- Signage and PA system
- Help desk
- Toilets and drinking water counter

- This ensured smooth transit and waiting arrangements for arriving and departing pilgrims.

To ensure pilgrim convenience:

- Free shuttle buses, a temporary bus stand, and marked parking zones were organised.
- Uninterrupted electricity supply and decorative lighting improved the nighttime ambience.
- Quality of food and water was monitored rigorously.
- Food kits for infants and pregnant women, breastfeeding counters, and medical readiness showcased inclusive and compassionate planning, directly overseen by the Collector and her team.

Innovative spiritual experiences were facilitated:

- Live telecasts of daily harathis, helicopter joyrides,

and boat rides.

- Digital enablement through a dedicated mobile app and Yatradham.org for real-time updates and online booking.

Security and Police Arrangements

- The District Collector worked in close coordination with the Superintendent of Police to implement a comprehensive safety and crowd management strategy. Key measures included:

- Deployment of 3,000+ police personnel, including traffic units from Hyderabad and Rachakonda.
- Establishment of a central command and control centre with 200+ CCTV cameras, integrated with the Hyderabad Integrated Command and Control Centre.

- Barricading, directional signage, SHE Teams, and volunteers were organised for pilgrim guidance and safety.
- Lost-and-found counters and high-visibility zones helped prevent distress or confusion among devotees.

River Safety Measures

- Floating barriers and red flags were installed across the river to demarcate safe zones and prevent pilgrims from entering deep or unsafe waters.
- Swimmers were deployed at every 50 meters beyond the floating barriers to act as first responders.
- Continuous warnings and safety instructions were broadcast via the Public Address (PA) system.
- Essential safety equipment such as life jackets, rescue tubes, and whistles were distributed among personnel and kept readily available.

uted among personnel and kept readily available.

As a result of these comprehensive measures, the event reported zero water-related incidents, despite managing a crowd of over 30 lakh pilgrims.

Challenges Handled:

1. Extreme Heat (45°C+)

When heat conditions became extreme, the following measures were activated:

- Cool mat walkways to reduce heat absorption.
- Cooling sheds, showers, temple coolers, and ORS distribution counters were set up across the site.
- Ventilation and sun protection in waiting zones were enhanced.

2. Adverse Weather

- To tackle unexpected heavy rains and strong winds that damaged infrastructure like temporary roads and the 60-acre parking area:
- Overnight repair and restoration of roads, tents, and lighting was executed.
- Alternative parking areas were readily used.
- Services resumed by early morning without disruption.

3. Network Connectivity Issues

When mobile networks collapsed under crowd load:

- A mobile booster was deployed swiftly.
- Radio sets were distributed among departmental heads to ensure real-time coordination.
- Interdepartmental communication remained uninterrupted.

The Saraswati Pushkaralu 2025 was a result of strong political will, visionary planning, and flawless on-ground execution.

Way Forward

Post-event, the District Collector initiated the following long-term measures:

- Planning for the 2027 Godavari Pushkaralu with a proactive master plan.
- Initiation of a comprehensive infrastructure development strategy for Kaleshwaram.
- Starting land acquisition processes to build multiple entry/exit routes and widen existing roads for future events.

The management of Saraswati Pushkaralu is a wonderful example of Nexus of Good. It holds lessons for all such events being organised on a large scale elsewhere in the country, where precious lives have been lost in the past.

Views expressed are personal

LEGAL WATCH



RAAVI BIRBAL

THE WRITER IS
A PRACTISING
ADVOCATE IN THE
SUPREME COURT
AND HIGH COURT
OF DELHI

Many times, culprits could be those who were themselves victims of sexual violence, requiring handholding and education

Taming the Monsters

Since even life imprisonments are failing to deter the monstrous trade in child sex trafficking, India must consider extreme penalties and deep reforms to protect voiceless victims

A serious call is needed for stringent penalties that would demolish the idea, in the minds of criminals, of indulging in child trafficking for sexual exploitation. Since even the longest of imprisonments are not creating an absolute deterrence, there is a need for even more severe penalties—perhaps even the death penalty. Perpetrators of these crimes are often serial offenders. To begin with, in cases where the victim children are voiceless—like infants or toddlers—when they are completely innocent, have no discretion, no power, no voice, and hardly any understanding, imposing capital punishment on the accused ought to be considered.

While the argument that keeping culprits alive and imprisoned is worse punishment may exist, the need for a stronger curb, widespread sensitisation, and the eradication of such inhuman individuals from our planet is imperative. Imagine any of us going through this as children, without even being able to express ourselves. Therefore, we need laws that completely knock down the very idea of a sex trade involving children.

The Government of India has attached a high degree of seriousness to the prevention and countering of human trafficking crimes. When it comes to children, the issue has been dealt with quite seriously and sensitively. There has been significant development of laws in this area, along with calls for even more stringent legal measures.

As per current laws, Section 96 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 (BNS) deals with the procurement of a child; Section 97 deals with kidnapping or abducting a child under ten years of age with intent to steal from their person; Section 98 concerns the selling of a child



There is a need to strengthen the child welfare system and prevent sexual exploitation before it begins

for purposes of prostitution, etc.; and Section 99 pertains to buying a child for such purposes. Section 143 of the BNS provides for human trafficking, while Section 144 deals with the exploitation of a trafficked person—specifically, Section 144(1) deals with the sexual exploitation of trafficked children. In addition, Section 139 provides punishment for kidnapping or maiming a child for the purpose of begging, and Section 141 prescribes punishment for the importation of a girl or boy from a foreign country for illicit sexual exploitation.

Many of these provisions were present in the Indian Penal Code (IPC)

as well, but the BNS has replaced and expanded them—an overdue and necessary reform. Trafficking is also prohibited under the Constitution of India under Article 23(1).

The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956 (ITPA) was promulgated for the prevention of trafficking and combating commercial sexual exploitation. The Immoral Traffic Prevention Act, formerly known as the Suppression of Immoral Traffic in Women and Girls Act (SITA), was revised and renamed in 1986. In 1956, SITA was enacted in response to India's signing of the International Convention

on the Prevention of Immoral Trafficking in 1950.

The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 (POCSO), regarding child sexual abuse laws in India, was enacted as part of India's child protection policies. It is an Act to protect children from offences of sexual assault, sexual harassment, and pornography. It also provides for the establishment of Special Courts for the trial of such offences and for matters connected thereto.

There are other laws as well that may be attracted, depending on the nature of the offence. India has also signed the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime (UNTOC) and its three Protocols. One of the protocols is to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children.

Even more stringent penalties need to be added in cases proved beyond all doubt—i.e., without an iota of it. As per one report, a Chinese court upheld the death sentence for a woman who trafficked more than a dozen children in the 1990s. This exemplifies how a child trafficker is a threat to many innocent lives. Florida, too, has floated a bill for capital felony charges against offenders indulging in sex trafficking of children below a stipulated age, or of persons who are mentally incapacitated.

There is also a need to strengthen the child welfare system and prevent sexual exploitation before it begins. Many times, culprits could be those who were themselves victims of sexual violence. Therefore, the right guidance, education, economic and social strategies to tackle frustration, and the eradication of evil mindsets—coupled with deterrent penalties and awareness of the laws—are urgently needed.

Views expressed are personal

Burden of compliance

New Registration Bill fails to make it easy

With dematerialised documents and digitally verifiable KYC (Know-your-Customer) identification, the transfer of financial assets in India is now a relatively smooth process. But the transfer of immovable property remains a paper-laden process requiring long hours spent at the sub-registrar office. The draft Registration Bill 2025 floated by the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India aims to modernise the transfer process for immovable property, by updating provisions in the Registration Act of 1908.



While the attempt to revamp an archaic law is welcome, the Bill doesn't go far enough in cutting red tape. As property registrations are a key revenue source for State governments, it is also moot if the Bill will have an easy passage into law. The Bill proposes three sets of changes to the property transfer process. One, it enables document submission through electronic means—in addition to physical means—to the sub-registrar/registrars. Identities of parties executing the transfer will be verified electronically through Aadhaar or other 'officially valid' documents. It is good that the Bill has specifically stated that registration cannot be refused on the grounds of lacking an Aadhaar. While electronic document submission is allowed, actual registration will still require parties to appear either physically or electronically before the registering officer and affix signatures. Therefore, the prevalence of touts and agents to 'expedite' registration and rent-seeking on this count, are likely to continue. Electronic storage could expose title deeds and other critical data of citizens to the threat of cyber-fraud and privacy violations. This requires explicit safeguards before this Bill is passed into law.

Two, the Bill lays down a hierarchy for State machinery to process property transfers. In the event of a sub-registrar refusing registration, citizens have recourse to the registrar. But both sub-registrars and registrars will still have wide discretionary powers to turn down registrations, with no dispute resolution mechanism except through the Courts.

Finally, the Bill substantially enlarges the scope of the Registration Act itself by sweeping many new transactions under its ambit. Citizens will be required to formally register gifts of property, lease agreements exceeding one year, agreements for sale, contracts for property development, promoters' agreements and mortgage transactions. This could impose a large compliance as well as monetary burden on citizens, given that States will impose stamp duty and fees on all such transactions. And it may be legally sound to require registration of mortgages or gifts to establish title, the rationale for registering biparty contracts such as leases, agreements for sale or property development is unclear. Given these loose ends, the Centre may need to extend the consultation process which ends on June 25 and seek States' feedback before tabling this Bill.

POCKET

RAVANKANTH



Consortia needed to align academia, industry talent

RESEARCH PAYS. Structured, long-term, co-located and co-funded partnerships between industry and academia are the way forward



VIPIN SONDHI
SANDEEP VERMA

As India accelerates towards a knowledge-driven economy, collaboration between higher educational institutions (HEIs) and industry must shift from aspiration to action.

Industrial research—application-oriented R&D rooted in real-world challenges—can convert our demographic dividend and academic capital into industrial strength. Despite having top institutions, vibrant industries and abundant talent, India's innovation potential remains under-leveraged.

To change this, university-industry collaboration must be embedded at the core of India's research and development (R&D) ecosystem. A structured national framework for industrial research within HEIs is now essential; not only to support initiatives like Make in India and Skill India, but to transform India's translational research capabilities. The government is taking commendable steps. The Principal Scientific Adviser's Office and the Department of Science & Technology are supporting both basic and translational research.

The newly established Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF) is a major step forward, which aims to streamline funding and strengthen mission-driven research. It also encourages co-location of industrial R&D within HEIs. These are promising developments.

What is needed now is scale, speed and a sustained national effort. A key measure of success in publicly funded research is its translation into commercially viable products, processes and enterprises. Indian institutions excel in fundamental science but often fall short in bridging the 'Valley of Death'—Technology Readiness Levels 3-7,

where many innovations fail to reach the market.

Fragmented efforts, lack of coordination and low R&D investment from industry are major constraints.

We must transition from episodic partnerships to institutionalised models that produce joint patents, co-authored publications, shared IP and spinout ventures. A strong innovation pipeline needs structured collaboration, strategic co-funding and shared goals.

RESEARCH CONVERGENCE CONSORTIA

We propose the creation of university-industry Research Convergence Consortia; neutral, co-located innovation hubs that bring academia and industry together to co-create, co-fund and co-own long-term R&D agendas.

These platforms can deliver mission-oriented, sector-specific solutions while promoting open innovation. They would also facilitate industries locating R&D units on academic campuses to access top talent and government-funded infrastructure.

Thus, drawing on the strength of both sectors and working toward the common goal of nation building.

Such consortia must be aligned with national missions and sectoral priorities to ensure focus and impact.

All sectors will not move at the same pace of innovation. Thus, co-location of industry and academia must be strategically prioritised across three innovation horizons:

Fast-moving sectors: Energy, Health, and ICT where rapid prototyping and deployment cycles demand agile collaboration and quick feedback loops.

Medium-paced sectors: Defence, Automotive, Manufacturing, Tooling, and Environment where breakthrough

Research Convergence Consortia platforms can deliver mission-oriented, sector-specific solutions while promoting open innovation

technologies can dramatically enhance national capabilities.

Long-horizon sectors: Agriculture, Climate and Food Security where sustained, long-term research programmes are needed to address grand challenges to safeguard national future and preparedness.

The National Research Convergence Consortia must be adapted to these timelines, with clear objectives and robust evaluation metrics.

ADDRESSING BOTTLENECKS

Despite broad consensus on the need for collaboration, progress is hindered by fragmented IP policies, low private R&D investment, inadequate incentives for co-location and a lack of unified platforms.

We must resolve these systemic issues by creating unified data systems, streamlined transfer offices and performance-linked incentives for industry-academia partnerships.

International examples can serve as templates. The Munich Centre of Automotive Research, a joint venture between BMW and the Technical University of Munich, is advancing next-gen mobility through co-located, interdisciplinary teams.

Further, the Eli Lilly-Purdue University showcases how deep academia-industry alignment can transform sectors like pharmaceuticals. India must build such indigenous frameworks in EVs, biotech and other priority domains.

SOME RECOMMENDATIONS

To realise the promise of industrial research in HEIs, India needs a bold and structured approach.

Launch 20 National Research Convergence Consortia: Strategically co-located centres, with a proposed ₹15,000 crore over five years, should serve as platforms for joint R&D and translational innovation.

Integrate CSR & Incentives: Industries that set up labs or research chairs on campuses should receive CSR credits. Co-mentorship models and first rights on IP can encourage deeper engagement.

A potential initiative—**"Adopt-a-Campus"**—could allow

corporations to use CSR funding to establish research labs or innovation centres on university campuses.

Create National Innovation Policy Unit: A dedicated taskforce across Ministries should align regulations, funding and research priorities to promote academia-industry collaboration.

Strengthen Technology Transfer Ecosystems: Every HEI must have a technology transfer office with real-time dashboards for sector-specific collaboration and national visibility.

Empower Academic Leadership: Institutional heads must be incentivised to drive industry engagement, with performance metrics focusing on patents, start-ups and products—not just publications.

Build Global Virtual Alliances: Indian HEIs should partner with top global universities and multinationals to access frontier technologies, talent and best practices.

Define Lifecycles and Review Frameworks: Each consortium should operate on a defined lifecycle (5-10 years), with periodic reviews, reallocation of resources and accountability mechanisms.

In conclusion, India has the world's third-largest higher education system, strong STEM talent and a growing industrial base. What is missing is alignment between academic research, industrial needs and national priorities. Structured, long-term, co-located and co-funded partnerships are the way forward. These must be supported by open innovation systems, agile tech transfer offices, and shared infrastructure. Innovation thrives in ecosystems, not silos. When academia and industry work in tandem, guided by a shared purpose, the results can transform the nation.

India stands at the cusp of becoming an innovation powerhouse. With vision, urgency and sustained investment, our HEIs can become engines of industrial transformation for a Viksit Bharat @2047.

Sondhi is former MD & CEO, Ashok Leyland; Sandeep Verma is Professor at IIT Kanpur. Views expressed are personal

Ensure judicial continuity in new income tax law

As the old law is replaced by the new, precedents set by court rulings must be preserved by explicit mention in the new law

Debarshi Chakraborty

As the monsoon session of Parliament approaches, attention turns once again to the Income Tax Bill, 2025, and the anticipated report of the Parliamentary Select Committee. While the committee's findings are still awaited, one hopes they reflect the care and deliberation that such a major fiscal overhaul demands. The Bill has been praised for its cleaner architecture and for shedding decades of legislative clutter.

Yet, in this process of statutory housekeeping, some essentials risk being swept away. Consider Clause 536—the repeal and savings clause. Though it commendably preserves actions and accrued rights under the Income Tax Act, 1961, it omits one critical safeguard: the continuity of judicial precedents developed over decades of litigation.

This silence might be benign in many statutes. But income tax law is a different animal. Few legislative domains have generated as vast and granular a body of judicial interpretation, or commanded compliance from such a wide array of taxpayers. The law functions less as a static code and more as a continuing dialogue between the legislature, the courts, and the taxpayers. To discard or

destabilise this accumulated jurisprudence would disrupt not just legal doctrine but the predictability essential for routine planning and compliance.

JUDICIAL PRECEDENTS

Consider *CIT v. Woodward Governor India* (2009), where the Supreme Court addressed whether unrealised foreign exchange losses on outstanding liabilities were deductible under Section 37 of the 1961 Act. The statute offered no express guidance on the treatment of mark-to-market losses in the absence of actual realisation. The court clarified that where such losses pertained to revenue items and were computed using closing exchange rates, they were deductible, as they reflected a real diminution in the value of a trading liability. This ruling aligned tax treatment with established accounting standards (Ind AS 21), which require such items to be recognised in the profit and loss account. Absent this clarity, taxpayers would have faced inconsistency in treatment and potential disallowances.

Likewise, in *CIT v. Excel Industries* (2013), the Supreme Court reaffirmed the 'real income' principle—ensuring that hypothetical accruals were not taxed unless their receipt was reasonably certain. Here, too, the



I-T BILL. Far reaching changes

statute was vague; it was the court's interpretation that supplied coherence. Such rulings have filled critical gaps and offered taxpayers fair and predictable standards. Where the underlying provisions are materially unchanged, the precedents ought to carry forward. But in this context even warranted? Is it not well settled that judicial interpretations continue to apply where new legislation substantially reproduces old provisions? Generally, yes. In *Punjab v. Mohar Singh* (1955), the Supreme Court held that unless a contrary intention appears, repeal does not erase settled judicial interpretations. But such continuity is presumed, not assured. In a statute as consequential and frequently contested as income tax, relying solely on implication risks avoidable

uncertainty. It also bears recalling that income tax law has not evolved in a straight line. Its trajectory reflects an ongoing negotiation between judicial interpretation and legislative response. From *McDowell & Co. v. Vodafone*, courts have clarified ambiguity, only to see Parliament respond with overriding amendments. In such a climate, silence on precedent is not a neutral drafting choice—it risks reopening settled positions and fueling fresh rounds of litigation.

Perhaps a helpful analogy lies in company law. While not as vast in scope, the Companies Act is somewhat similarly intricate in design and dense in compliance. When the Companies Act, 2013, repealed its 1956 predecessor, Section 465 expressly preserved all legal principles, practice, and entitlements under the earlier law. The result was an arguably orderly transition and continuity in business planning. That clause did not freeze the law—it ensured it evolved without discarding what had already been settled.

In that spirit, the Income Tax Bill, 2025, could have expressly preserved judicial precedents under the 1961 Act. One hopes that the select committee, in its deliberations, has recommended such a clause.

The writer is an advocate before the Delhi High Court

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Copter tragedy

This refers to the Air Explorer 'The red flags in the Uttarakhand helicopter crash' (June 18). The nation had hardly recovered from the tragedy of the Air India flight in Ahmedabad when a helicopter crashed near Kedarnath, killing all seven people on board.

The regularity with which such accidents occur in our mountainous regions implies that private entities operating these services are compromising on safety standards, with no effective institutional framework to hold them accountable. As for implementing additional safety measures, it appears that the administration has gotten accustomed to announcing them after each catastrophe.

Kamal Lodha
Bangalore

Human life in India is sadly very cheap. How can we have helicopter accidents within a short span of six weeks? Why are the helicopters not being checked before they are

allowed to fly? Why are the contractors operating helicopters not booked? The above questions will never be answered and will be forgotten over a period of time and the authorities very well know that public memory is short. However the authorities should ensure that all the pilots have valid licences to fly these choppers in difficult terrains. Secondly the helicopters should be thoroughly checked for any technical glitches. Thirdly the

authorities should ensure sufficient time gap between flights so that the pilots get enough rest. The fatigue of pilots may also be one of the reasons for frequent accidents. Finally, operators with safe flying record should be given licences.

Venka Shenoy
Thane

Clean-tech opportunity
This refers to the article 'Gaining clean-tech edge' (June 17). The current global trade shifts offer India a timely opportunity to

emerge as a clean-tech manufacturing hub. The government push through the National Manufacturing Mission, focus on R&D, waste recycling, and integration of global supply chains can boost India's position. Developing domestic demand for products like green hydrogen, solar modules, and batteries, is key. Strategic use of trade agreements to secure critical minerals will further strengthen India's position.

Chetan Mahesh
Raipur (Chhattisgarh)

Saving Himachal's apples

Developing climate-resilient varieties is vital

Ankur Jamwal
Mohit Sharma

Horticulture is a vital contributor to Himachal Pradesh's economy, with apples adding approximately 80 per cent to it. Despite not being native to the region, apples have weaved themselves into the social fabric of the State, giving Himachal Pradesh the distinctive identity of the "Apple State" of India. However, climate change has started to threaten this legacy. The apple yields have either become highly erratic or begun to show a decline in many regions. Apple farmers from lower parts of the Kullu district have already switched to alternative crops.

Apple cultivators require a certain number of cold days — called chilling hours — to bear healthy flowers and fruit. There is enough research-based evidence to suggest that climate change will reduce the future winter chilling hours in traditional apple farming zones and negatively affect apple productivity.

Insufficient winter temperature can disrupt the crucial chilling period of apple trees leading to delayed flowering, improper setting of fruit, accelerated fruit maturity, reduced fruit size and overall poor quality of fruit that could fetch poor market rate. Moreover, consumers favour apples with their distinctive red colouration; however, warmer summers with temperatures exceeding 24 °C hinder the development of this red pigment, further impacting their market value.

REVIEW FARMING MODEL

A comprehensive, multi-pronged strategy is necessary to effectively address the challenges posed by climate change in apple cultivation in Himachal Pradesh. Research and development efforts must prioritise the creation of indigenous rootstocks and climate-resilient apple varieties that require fewer number of cold days — called chilling hours — to bear healthy flowers and fruit, while also being economically viable. Reducing dependence on imported planting materials by focusing on indigenous varieties will enhance climate adaptability.

The current model of apple farming in the State may need revision. Some changes, such as high-density plantation, have already been implemented and promoted in Himachal Pradesh. Innovative, water-efficient methods, such as the Rajasthan



YIELD DROPPING. Rising temperature is hurting it

model of apple cultivation in arid conditions, could also help diversify apple farming techniques in Himachal. Apple farming in the State is heavily dependent on chemical inputs, causing degradation of soil quality, which also impacts the disease resilience of an apple tree. Establishing market intelligence systems are needed to link farmers with better price realisation. It can help in collaborative selling by connecting small-scale farmers, allowing them to pool their produce and negotiate higher prices. Additionally, supportive policies such as subsidies for sustainable practices and insurance against climate-related losses can mitigate risks.

Implementing a climate resilience strategy should extend beyond farmers and farms. Revamping agricultural education is equally crucial. Himachal Pradesh must ensure that these educational institutions receive adequate funding to integrate advanced computational and modelling facilities. The efforts to improve weather forecasting and prediction of the State and linking such facilities with the curriculum of the agricultural universities should be tried.

The 6th Dean's Committee Draft report on agricultural education emphasises the importance of introducing "new-age" courses, such as machine learning, environmental studies, and disaster management. However, these courses should not merely be nominal additions to students' transcripts. Instead, they should provide rigorous training that equips fresh graduates working in State departments with the skills needed to analyse climate data.

A collaborative and innovative approach is essential to safeguard Himachal's apple farming legacy. Jamwal is faculty at Azim Premji University, and Sharma is faculty at Dr Rajendra Prasad Central Agricultural University, Pusa, Bihar. Views are personal



GETTY IMAGES

Subsidy to public WiFi providers is justified

WAY AHEAD. The June 16 tariff capping order will not hurt telecom service providers as is feared. Public data offices are deserving of support

V SRIDHAR
SANDEEP AGRAWAL

Public Wi-Fi is one of the affordable ways by which users get access to the Internet apart from mobile or fixed line broadband services offered by the Telecom and Internet Service Providers (TISPs). However, public Wi-Fi coverage in India is poor. Public Wi-Fi hotspots per million people in the UK, the US, and China are 175, 50, and 75 times that of India. Noting the lack of public Wi-Fi infrastructure in India, the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) recommended open common specifications referred to as "Wi-Fi Access Network Interface (WANI)" in 2017. The WANI exhibits characteristics of a Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) to provide affordable broadband to netizens in India.

The model envisioned setting up of public Wi-Fi hotspots in Public Data Offices (PDOs) by local entrepreneurs with methods for monetizing Internet access and, at the same time, providing affordable Internet access to users. Subsequently, the Government of India launched the Prime Minister WANI (PMWANI) scheme as approved by the Cabinet in December 2020.

However, the PMWANI scheme has met with only limited success.

The PDOs, typically owned and operated by local entrepreneurs, need to acquire the Internet backhaul (also called as the Internet Leased Line — ILL service) from the TISPs at wholesale tariff for deploying their WANI networks. These commercial tariffs charged by the TISPs are multiple times that of the TISPs' own retail home broadband service (also called as the Fibre To The Home — FTTH) tariff, and makes it financially unviable for the PDOs. There are regulatory restrictions on the use of home FTTH retail service as backhaul for the WANI networks.

Realising the above, TRAI, after consultations, issued Telecommunications Tariff Amendment Order on June 16, allowing the PDOs to avail FTTH connections for their WANI backhaul at not more than twice the retail home broadband tariffs, subject to specified speed limits. This regulatory intervention is expected to reduce the backhaul charges for PDOs and, in turn, reduce the prices of the WANI services, thereby leading to possible increase in public Wi-Fi penetration in the country.

However, this tariff-capping regulation has been met with opposition

While technologies such as Wi-Fi, cellular and home broadband complement each other, corresponding service providers should look at this as a synergy, and not as competition

from the TISPs. They argue that the mandated offering of retail FTTH service to the PDOs will lead to migration of their existing FTTH home broadband user base to the PDOs, thereby eroding their revenue stream. Further, the drastic reduction in the backhaul tariff will also make their business unviable.

A SUBSTITUTE?

The important question is whether the WANI scheme offered by the PDOs is a substitute or complementary to the home broadband services of the TISPs. Since the PDOs cater to small subscriber base in a localised market, it cannot be considered entirely as a substitute to services being offered by the TISPs. At the same time, much like the Virtual Network Operators (VNOs), the PDOs provide access service and do not own the core telecom infrastructure. It depends on the TISP to carry the data traffic to the internet. Hence if the public Wi-Fi hotspots proliferate in the country, the TISPs benefit due to larger backhaul traffic that is generated towards monetisation.

Moreover, the PDOs can offer data service and are not allowed by regulation to offer voice, SMS, emergency calling and associated services which licensed TISPs can only provide. In summary, the public Wi-Fi service offered by the PDOs can be considered as complementary to the cellular or home broadband service provided by the TISPs.

However, since both provide the same Internet broadband service, they are partially substitutable. Hence tariff

capping regulation shall take into account the interests of both the TISPs and PDOs.

Our research on the above indicates that this level of tariff capping will make it sustainable for both the TISPs and PDOs, especially in rural areas where there is a complete absence of FTTH home broadband. However, our research indicates that even with the tariff capping, the PDO market will witness extremely limited competition with only one or two PDOs sustainably providing their WANI service in each local area.

Since promoting a competitive and sustainable public Wi-Fi scheme is one of the objectives of the WANI scheme, the TRAI and DoT shall consider other regulatory interventions. We propose a one-time subsidy to cover the initial set-up costs of the PDO. Our simulation results indicate that such a subsidy is likely to provide stimulus to the PDO market and induce competition and provide financially sustainable business for local entrepreneurs. Funding from Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF) using an appropriate methodology such as reverse auction or loss-subsidy may be appropriate for subsidy disbursement to the PDOs.

While technologies such as Wi-Fi, cellular and home broadband complement each other, it is time that the corresponding service providers look at this as a synergy and not as competition, in furthering the much-needed Internet broadband penetration in the country.

Sridhar is Professor, and Agrawal is research scholar, at IIT-Bangalore. Views are personal

thehindubusinessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

June 19, 2005

Accord at Reliance: Mukesh gets oil, petrochem

The seven-month-old dispute between the Ambani brothers appears settled. The \$500,000-crore empire will be divided between Mukesh and Anil, in a deal chalked out by their mother, Kokilaben Ambani. Mr Ambani said that Mukesh will have the responsibility for Reliance Industries and IPL, while Anil will be in charge of Reliance Infocomm, Reliance Energy and Reliance Capital.

No need for Govt intervention: Chidambaram

The Finance Minister, Mr P. Chidambaram, said he was happy that the Ambani siblings have resolved their differences amicably. Mr Chidambaram said, "Both of them continued to meet me, speak to me from time to time and kept me informed," and that there was no need for the Government to intervene now.

Former Tyco chief found guilty

Former Tyco International Ltd Chief Executive Mr Dennis Kozlowski and finance chief Mr Mark Swartz were found guilty of stealing more than \$150 million, giving prosecutors pursuing the recent wave of corporate scandals one of their biggest victories to date. Mr Kozlowski was found guilty of conspiracy, fraud and falsifying business records.

India shouldn't ignore its medium enterprises anymore

Nirmalya Bagchi
Karnak Roy
Sweety Pandey

India recently overtook Japan to become the fourth largest economy. It is an impressive achievement but severe global headwinds brought about by geopolitical factors necessitates a new thinking if India has to continue on the growth path. Micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) in India is a significant part of the Indian economy with 60 million registered units, employing 183.6 million people. They account for 29 per cent of the country's GDP and 40 per cent of its exports. Even then, MSMEs are not considered the core of the Indian industry as they are in other countries like Germany, where specific policies are designed to support them to innovate and increase their competitiveness.

The entrenched thinking is that MSMEs represent a significant vote bank, need protection, some largesse and a tonne of lip service. There are

many schemes to support MSMEs but their structure is such that they incentivise MSMEs to remain small. An analysis of MSMEs reveals that 97 per cent of them are micro, 2.7 per cent small and only 0.3 per cent are medium. It is the medium enterprises that present a fascinating picture of opportunities for the country's economic growth, rooted in innovation, R&D, and exports. Each unit generates an average of \$9 regular jobs. They significantly outpace their micro and small counterparts in both impact and output.

UNIQUE CHALLENGES

They also face several unique challenges. Typically, a medium enterprise has higher working capital requirement than micro and small enterprises, but there are no financial products/credit support that cater to this need. Out of the 18 schemes of the Ministry of MSME, only eight specifically support medium enterprises and only one provides credit support. Most of the other



LACKING. Adequate credit support

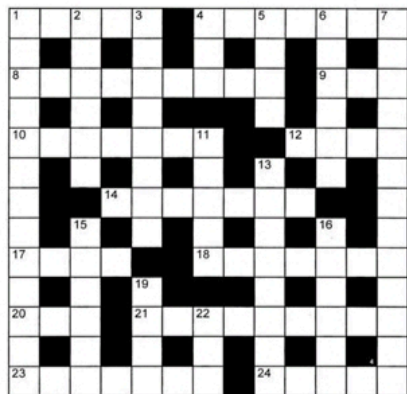
schemes are designed to support micro and small enterprises. It is therefore imperative to launch a special financing scheme under the Ministry of MSME to address this gap. A credit card facility with a pre-approved limit (of ₹5 crore) may also be considered.

R&D and innovation are the cornerstone for sustained export competitiveness. Medium enterprises innovate but limited policy support exists to strengthen their R&D and innovation. Add to this, there is no sector-specific testing infrastructure. In spite of these challenges, the track record of medium enterprises in

churning out innovative products — be it during Covid-19 in manufacturing ventilators/PPE kits, or in the defence sector in import substitution of critical items hit by sanctions, or in developing high precision components to aid in our missile and space programme — has been stellar. Medium enterprises fare much better than large enterprises in the areas of risk taking, innovation, R&D and precision manufacturing. A specific support programme like a Medium Enterprise Research Fund will go a long way in scaling this effort. "Designing a Policy for Medium Enterprises", a report by the Administrative Staff College of India and NITI Aayog that was released on May 26, brings out the urgent need for a specific Medium Enterprises Policy to unlock the full potential of such enterprises under the three main pillars of Viksit Bharat@2047 — innovation, employment and export.

Bagchi is Professor and Director, and Roy and Pandey are Assistant Professors, Administrative Staff College of India

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2721



EASY

ACROSS

- Get infected by (5)
- Science of language (7)
- Nourishment, food (9)
- The capuchin monkey (3)
- Having blood ties (7)
- A moleity (4)
- Impose (punishment etc) (7)
- 20 quires (4)
- Learned (7)
- Drawing, writing-fluid (3)
- A signed name (9)
- Not metaphorical (7)
- Turn inside out, or outwards (5)

DOWN

- Inviting argument, disputatious (13)
- Gossip (6)
- Heaving upwards (8)
- (Horse) move to the right; move on (3)
- Voice; viola (4)
- Book of the year's mass services (6)
- Additional force, assistance for troops (13)
- Make deep research (5)
- Exact (8)
- Small package (6)
- Bodily shape (6)
- One with use of something (4)
- Begin to set, to take shape (3)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2720

ACROSS 2. Batik 5. Firm 7. Hoop 8. Renegade 9. Misnomer 11. Blow 12. Short and sweet 15. Ape 17. Thresher 19. Mystique 21. Draw 22. Belt 23. Every **DOWN** 1. Abolish 2. Bap 3. Thrum 4. Kindred 5. Fag 6. Radio 10. Norse 11. Bowls 13. Antique 14. Elegant 16. Payee 18. Reeve 20. Tot 21. Dry

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

- Get one out in a round for three voices (5)
- Syntax has little weight with half the market (7)
- Food may turn, but it takes people in (9)
- Is endlessly declared to be a monkey (3)
- Told how one had familial connections (7)
- A term for a small beer (4)
- Lay it on one and make one suffer (7)
- Number of sheets are laid out on mountaintop (4)
- Being learned, has to die true to form (7)
- Sort of drawing it's certain Kipling used (3)
- The way one writes who one is (9)
- Spelling OK all-rite is a mistake in print (7)
- Turn out, always on time (5)

DOWN

- Arousing dispute over con's trial being rigged (13)
- Story about non-drinker may be just idle talk (6)
- Giving one a lift when entertaining one inside (8)
- Get a horse to move on with a whiz, say (3)
- Singer engaged in several Tosca performances (4)
- Service book shows girl'll give up (6)
- Strengthening tonic men refer to (13)
- Dig deep and find some stranded evers (5)
- Account a man of the cloth gives is precise (8)
- A lot of money to be made in a block of coded data (6)
- Work out one's vital statistics (6)
- It may be so friendly to one on drugs (4)
- Pin-up will begin to take shape (3)

The real challenge for foreign campuses

There has been much debate in India about attracting foreign university branch campuses since the University Grants Commission (UGC) established regulations in 2023. A few have set up shop: two Australian universities – Deakin University and the University of Wollongong – in Gujarat’s GIFT City, and the U.K.’s University of Southampton in Gurugram, near Delhi.

The momentum has continued to grow in recent months. Last week, Letters of Intent were issued to five foreign institutions – the University of York, the University of Aberdeen, University of Western Australia, Illinois Institute of Technology, and Italy’s Istituto Europeo di Design (IED) – to establish campuses in Mumbai.

However, early indicators suggest that Deakin and Wollongong, which began classes last year, and the University of Southampton, which is going to welcome its first batch of students, may be moving too quickly. Admissions were announced often before essential details, such as information about the faculty and other key elements, were made publicly available. While this rapid pace may signal strong intent and enthusiasm, it also raises many concerns.

Challenges to the branch idea Globally, transnational education is navigating an increasingly uncertain landscape. This may be one of the most difficult global environments for universities to establish branches. The country with the largest number of overseas university branches globally, the U.S., is in complete disarray due to attacks on higher education from the Donald Trump administration. The last thing on the minds of most American university leaders is foreign initiatives. Therefore, the Illinois Institute of Technology’s decision to establish a campus in India should be seen as an exception.



Philip G. Altbach
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Even institutions willing to enter the Indian market will have to overcome numerous domestic challenges. A major issue is navigating India’s highly competitive higher education landscape.

Most of the institutions seeking to enter the Indian market are not top-tier schools in their own countries. In India, they risk being seen as just one among several “elite” options available to students. These branch campuses follow a market-driven model, offering programmes in high-demand fields such as business, computer science, and data analytics. While this approach may be financially strategic, the narrow academic focus risks making them indistinguishable from India’s better-performing private colleges and universities.

Therefore, the real challenge is to establish a clear academic identity. Without this, they risk being perceived as little more than diploma mills, ultimately undermining the reputation of the very universities they represent. It is also relevant that most of the branches already established or planning to be established are not comprehensive universities with diverse offerings and research focus, but rather are small specialised schools.

India already boasts renowned public institutions such as the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs), which are actively expanding their global engagement and research capabilities. Furthermore, a growing number of elite and semi-elite private universities in India now offer joint and double-degree programmes in collaboration with foreign institutions. In this dynamic environment, foreign branch campuses cannot rely solely on the strength of their brand.

A concerning trend among some international branch campuses already established in India is their disproportionate

reliance on marketing strategies, often at the expense of academic investment. While marketing has its place, it cannot substitute for substance. Students and parents are increasingly discerning. They examine publicly available information on faculty credentials, curriculum design, industry relevance, and student support systems. Flashy campaigns without academic depth or meaningful student engagement will not build lasting trust.

Another key problem lies in students’ perception and the reality of campus life. Early observations suggest that most of these branch campuses operate out of vertical buildings, often renting space. If foreign universities wish to be perceived as full-fledged institutions, they must invest in essential “soft” infrastructure as well.

Need for local relevance From the Indian perspective, selecting the right partner is important. Universities from the Global North are typically interested in branch campuses for several reasons. Host countries or institutions may offer major incentives in terms of facilities or funds. In many cases, the primary motivation is to earn money, as illustrated by several branches in Dubai. Some wish to establish a presence in a country to recruit students to the home campus.

Without major incentives, top global universities will seldom be attracted. India will need to carefully evaluate whether a particular branch proposal is suitable for local needs, and whether it is from a foreign institution that is attractive.

The establishment of foreign university branch campuses in India marks a significant milestone in the higher education landscape. However, if these ventures are rushed or poorly managed, they risk becoming cautionary tales – short-lived initiatives that erode trust, dilute brand value, and stall the broader momentum toward meaningful internationalisation.

Preferential treatment raises eyebrows

Kerala’s proposed one-time amnesty for declaring wildlife trophy raises concerns

STATE OF PLAY
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The Kerala Forest Department’s recent move to approach the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change for a one-time amnesty for people possessing wildlife trophy in the State has reignited a debate over the department’s alleged preferential treatment of wildlife offenders.

The department has pushed a proposal for “granting another chance to declare wild animal articles and trophies under Section 40 of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972”. The justification for moving the proposal to the State Board for Wildlife was to offer an opportunity for the legal heirs of those who inherited wildlife trophy from their ancestors with valid ownership certificates. Senior officials noted that there had been several instances of the legal heirs failing to get the inherited wildlife trophy declared in their names on time for various reasons.

Section 40 of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, prescribes that “every person having the control, custody or possession of any animal article, trophy or uncured trophy of captive animals specified in Schedule I shall declare to the Chief Wildlife Warden or the Authorised Officer within 30 days from the commencement of the Act.” Illegal possession of a wildlife trophy can result in imprisonment for three to seven years and a fine of not less than ₹25,000.

Although forest officials argued that the beneficiaries of the proposed scheme would be legal heirs of those with the

rightful ownership certificates – and that the Union government should take a call on the request – the move brought back to discussion the conflict stands taken by the department in the case of actor Mohanlal and popular Malayalam rapper Vedan (V.M. Hiran Das), both booked for illegal possession of wildlife trophy. Officials asserted that the proposal had nothing to do with any of the wildlife crime cases currently being pursued in courts, but this has set tongues wagging.

When the department took a benevolent approach to Mohanlal, who was reportedly found in possession of two pairs of ivory fixed on a mirror stand a few years ago, it went tough on Vedan, who was found wearing a chain with a pendant allegedly made from a leopard tooth.

While it took an Income Tax Department raid for the department to know about the actor’s alleged possession of ivory, a criminal case was booked by police for alleged possession of ganja, paving the way for the action against Vedan. The department wasted no time in arresting the rapper, whereas it reportedly handled the case of Mohanlal with kid gloves. Vedan told officials that the leopard tooth was a gift from an admirer and that he was unaware of the legal intricacies.

Incidentally, both cases were booked at the Malayat

toor Forest Range office and registered at the Judicial First Class Magistrate Court, Perumbavoor.

The department chose not to remove the mirror studded with two sets of fully developed ivory to its strongroom or the State Treasury, where the material objects involved in court cases are stored. Though not illegal to leave the material objects, which are difficult to transport, with the accused after completing the legal formalities, questions on possible destruction of evidence by the accused were raised in this case.

The alleged haste with which the department acted in Vedan’s case received widespread condemnation from the public and those who had earlier led the State Forest Department. There was criticism that the department chose to ignore the alleged use of similar pendants by two other Malayalam movie actors, including a Union Minister.

Urgent need “Great injustice to Vedan. No body can be duped by a fake elephant tusk. But anybody can get confused with a tiger/leopard tooth with that of another similar animal. What a shame, especially considering the fact that the much-discussed elephant tusk case was also dealt with in the same Forest Range Office,” noted Gopinath Vallilil, a former Head of Forest Force, Kerala, in his social media account.

Preferential treatment for the mighty would undermine the foundation of the rule of law and public trust in the system. The discriminatory treatment meted out to the two accused in the wildlife crime cases calls for balanced handling of the cases to earn and consolidate public trust and fair dispensation of justice.

Uttarakhand — a hotbed for helicopter accidents

Fourteen crashes investigated till 2023, coupled with the spate of incidents in 2025, highlight a persistent aviation crisis

DATA POINT
Vignesh Radhakrishnan
Sambavi Parthasarathy

The latest helicopter crash in Uttarakhand – which claimed seven lives, among them a two-year-old child, during a Kedarnath pilgrimage flight – adds yet another tragic entry to the State’s already long record as a hotbed of helicopter disasters.

Within a brief window of barely two months, the latest is the State’s fifth helicopter accident. In May this year, six passengers en route to Gangotri Temple were killed when their aircraft crashed in Uttarakashi district. Reports reveal that the same month witnessed two further incidents – one, a near-catastrophe narrowly avoided in Badrinath, and the other, an AIIMS air-ambulance crash that, fortunately, caused no fatalities – while, more recently in June, a Kedarnath-bound chopper was forced into an emergency landing after a technical snag, highlighting a recurrent aviation crisis in the region.

This spate recalls October 2022, when three separate helicopter accidents claimed 13 lives. Two of those tragedies struck defence helicopters operating in Arunachal Pradesh, and on October 18 that year, a commercial chopper ferrying Kedarnath pilgrims crashed, killing all seven people aboard.

A conservative analysis of incident summaries filed with the Directorate General of Civil Aviation and the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau indicates that at least 14 helicopters – many assigned to ferry pilgrims within Uttarakhand’s rugged terrain – crashed between 1990 and 2023. **Map 1** plots the approximate departure or intended landing sites for 75 commercial helicopters lost during that period, revealing a concentration of accidents in north-eastern hills as well.

In the 1990 and 2023 period, 165 people lost their lives in accidents

involving commercial helicopters, as shown in **Chart 2**. In these incidents, 126 people were injured, too.

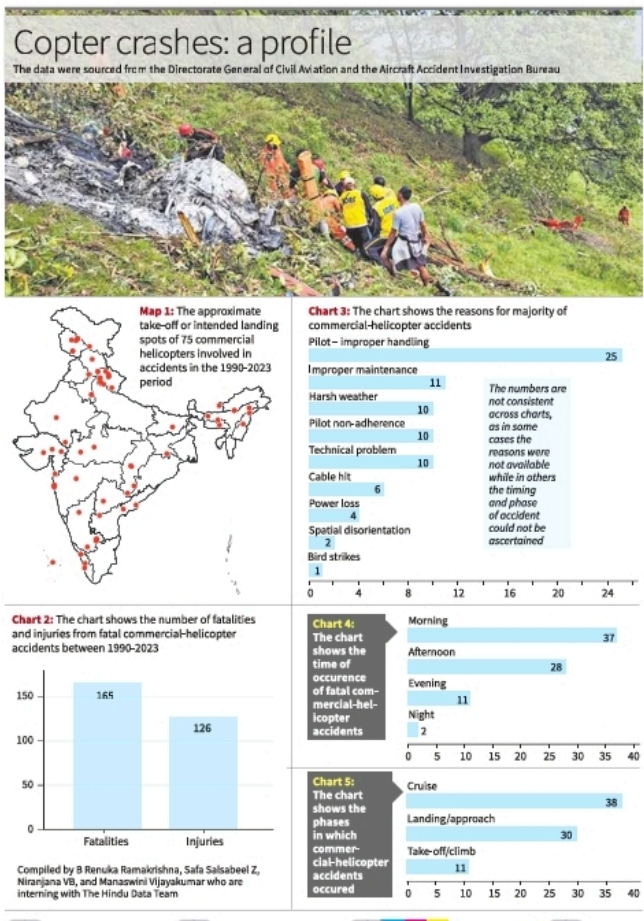
Following the latest tragedy, police have charged two senior officials of Aryan Aviation Pvt. Ltd. – the operator of the crashed helicopter – with alleged negligence. Notably, the company also owned the Kedarnath-bound chopper that went down in October 2022, killing seven, and another aircraft that crashed in 2019 after striking an overhead cable.

Operating choppers in harsh weather – whether anticipated or sudden – ranks as the third-most frequent cause of helicopter mishaps in the 1990-2023 period.

Pilot error or improper handling remains the leading factor, with inadequate maintenance close behind. Other recurring causes include non-adherence to flight rules by crew, technical faults, and entanglement with cables (where a helicopter gets entangled in wires/cables used by locals in mountainous regions to transport goods). **Chart 3** shows the reasons behind accidents in the period.

Moreover, as **Chart 4** indicates, the majority of commercial-helicopter accidents occurred in broad daylight, with most such crashes taking place while the choppers were cruising. A significant share of accidents also happened during the landing phase, whereas take-off or climb proved to be the safest portions of the journey, registering the fewest accidents in the period, as depicted in **Chart 5**.

While it is true that, when analysed over time, the overall number of helicopter-related accidents in India has declined, the recent spate of crashes in Uttarakhand is a grim reminder that such tragedies continue to occur, cutting short lives. It should also be noted that in the recent safety audit by the International Civil Aviation Organisation, India had improved its “effective implementation” score to over 85% from the previously low score of 70%.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu.

FIFTY YEARS AGO JUNE 19, 1975

Weather modification, new U.S. war weapon

New Delhi, June 18: Weather modification as a new weapon of war might have startling implications for the world, writes PTT’s Science Correspondent. A new super weapon, mentioned by the Soviet Communist Party Chief, Mr. Brezhnev, in a speech last Friday, was subsequently identified by the Soviet Communist Party Central Committee’s daily as a ghastly weather weapon developed by the United States.

According to a Geneva report, the American and Soviet experts are now negotiating a possible ban on meteorological warfare.

Military scientists have been developing techniques for dispersing fog, modifying cloud cover and lightning, handling hurricanes, and even producing rain or snow.

Prof. Edith Brown Weiss of Princeton University recently wrote in “Survival” (published by the Institute of Strategic Studies, London) that weather weapons resulting from such research are on the “horizon.”

Prof. Weiss said that the Advanced Research Project Agency (ARPA) of the U.S. Defence Department has undertaken a worldwide climate modelling programme to detect modifications in climate and to predict the likely consequences.

“Attempts have been made to calculate the impact of introducing contaminants into the atmosphere and of depleting ozone”, the Professor said.

Ozone shields people against dangerous ultraviolet rays of the sun.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JUNE 19, 1925

Unexplored continent

London, June 18: An Arctic expedition headed by Mr. Donald MacMillan has started from Boston. It consists of two ships *Bowdoin* and *Peary*, the latter carrying three aeroplanes. It will proceed to Etah (Greenland) with the object of investigating the supposed existence of a vast unexplored continent between the North Pole and the North-west passage.

The expedition, with which the United States Government is co-operating, has aroused particular interest in Canada in view of her claim to all the territory between Canada and the North Pole.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Number of NRIs from Andhra Pradesh stuck in war-ravaged Iran

100 Andhra Pradesh NRI Empowerment and Relations Minister Kondapalli Srinivas said the State government reached out to non-resident Indians from the State who are stuck in Iran. He stated that a 24/7 control room is actively monitoring developments. PH

Number of Iranians killed in Israeli strikes so far

585 Israeli strikes on Iran have wounded over 1,300, a human rights group said. State media, also a target of bombardment, have stopped reporting on the attacks. After knocking out much of Iran's air defence system, Israel says its warplanes have free rein over the skies. AP

Nissan vehicles for which engineering analysis was closed

2 In million. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said it had closed an engineering analysis on Nissan Motor vehicles. The investigation which covered Nissan Altima and Nissan Maxima vehicles looked into whether the lower control arm of the rear suspension system may separate from chassis. AP/NTS

The budget for Delhi's courtrooms digitisation project

387 In ₹ crore. The Public Works Department of Delhi government plans to rework the courtrooms digitisation project, which was approved by the previous AAP dispensation last year. The work has to be executed by the PWD, for which a fund was also approved. PH

Number of arrests made under Kerala's anti-drug campaign

769 The Kerala government is stepping up its fight against drug abuse with a large-scale campaign aimed at building a drug-free society. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said the fifth phase of the anti-drug campaign will launch on June 26. PH

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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Why are oil prices rising amid Iran-Israel war?

How much has benchmark Brent crude futures risen? How important is the Strait of Hormuz and why is its closure a threat to trade stability? How is India positioned to handle an increase in oil prices? Has it been able to diversify its import basket for oil?

EXPLAINER

Saptarnno Ghosh

The story so far:

Escalating tensions between Iran and Israel sent oil prices spiralling upwards with fears mounting about a potential disruption in oil supplies globally. The benchmark Brent crude futures had soared about 9% on June 13 to \$75.65 for a barrel after it hit an intraday high of \$78.50/barrel - a near five-month high. The paradigm however eased on June 16 when news reports suggested that Tehran has asked Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Oman to urge U.S. President Donald Trump to press Israel to agree for a ceasefire. At the time of writing (8 p.m. on June 17), Brent crude futures were about 2.4% higher from Monday at \$74.98/barrel.

Why are prices rising?

Iran has repeatedly threatened to close down the Strait of Hormuz. It is the chokepoint that connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and Arabian Sea. For perspective, chokepoints are narrow channels along which global sea routes that are utilised for transporting oil through sea. The closure of a chokepoint, even if for a temporary period, can translate to potential delays in supply, reduction in traffic and rise in shipping and insurance costs - all of which culminates into an increased price for energy fuel. Though alternatives exist for some chokepoints, they could entail significant increase in transit times. In fact, from the larger perspective of trade, Pankaj Chadda, Chairman of the Engineering Exports Promotion Council of India explained to *The Hindu* last week that the escalation of the conflict in West Asia would bar access to the Suez Canal and the Red Sea. "(This) will have a huge cost and time escalation for Indian exports by ship," Mr. Chadda held.

U.S.' Energy Information Administration (EIA) in an analysis said



ISTOCKPHOTO

that the Strait was "deep and wide enough" to handle the world's largest crude oil tankers. It further observed that the Strait facilitated transportation of an average of 20 million barrels each day (mb/d) in 2024. This is equivalent to approximately one-fifth of the global petroleum liquids consumption. Additionally, the International Energy Association (IEA) attributed the Strait to have served as an exit route from the Gulf for approximately one-fourth of the global oil supply including from major oil-producing nations such as Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates alongside Kuwait, Qatar, Iraq and Iran itself.

According to EIA's estimates, 84% of the crude oil and condensate alongside 83% of liquefied natural gas were transported via the Strait headed to Asian countries in 2024.

Can the world manage uncertainty?

IEA indicated in its June outlook report that oil markets in 2025 "look well supplied" in the absence of a major disruption. This is premised around expectations of supply being able to surpass demand. IEA forecasts world oil demand to increase by 720 thousand barrels a day (kbyd) this year whilst supply is projected to rise 1.8 mb/d to 104.9 mb/d. Additionally, it observed from preliminary data that global observed oil inventories have risen by 1 mb/d on an average since February, and 93 million barrels in May alone. However, it cautioned, "while the market looks comfortably supplied now, the recent events sharply highlight the significant geopolitical risk to oil supply security."

Furthermore, JM Financial observed in their recent sectoral report that there could be a "huge upside risk" if Iran

disrupts the supply from the Strait of Hormuz. However, it holds the scenario as "extremely unlikely" for "U.S. and Western countries are likely to take strong measures against any such disruptions given the huge risk it can pose to global oil and gas prices and, hence, inflation."

Imperative to note though that Iran's own production capacity may not have a significant bearing in the paradigm. This is owing to U.S. sanctions on import of Iranian crude oil. Tehran's major export destination is China. Refineries in the Asian country have particularly benefited from discounted fuel from the West Asian counterpart.

What about India?

Aditi Nayar, Chief Economist at ratings agency ICRA, observed that while crude oil prices have risen quite sharply over the past few days, it has been from "rather benign levels". She holds that should the price persist at the current levels, it may not lead to a "material revision" in ICRA's GDP forecast of 6.2% for the fiscal. "However, a sustained increase from the current levels would weigh on India Inc's profitability and the extended uncertainty may further delay private capex expenditure," Ms. Nayar told *The Hindu*. She summarised this could translate to a downward revision in ICRA's GDP growth projections for the second half of the fiscal. On the aspect of supply, Union Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri affirmed that India having diversified its import basket is comfortably placed to meet its fuel supply needs. The primary concern with respect to India could be about how things shape up at the Strait of Hormuz. India does not import petroleum crude from Tehran. However, Amit Kumar, Partner and Energy and Renewable Industry Leader at Grant Thornton Bharat had told *The Hindu* last week, "India imports more than 80% of its crude oil needs. Hence, even if direct imports from Iran are minimal, global price spikes due to conflict will raise crude oil import costs."

With inputs from TCA Sharad Raghavan

THE GIST

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What was decided at the UN Oceans Conference?

Why is the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction agreement important for marine conservation?

Jacob P. Koshy

The story so far:

The United Nations Oceans Conference (UNOC) concluded last week in France, with 56 of the necessary 60 countries ratifying the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) agreement, also called the 'High Seas Treaty'.

What is the UNOC about?

The third edition of the UNOC aimed to accelerate action on protecting oceans. Its main goal was to establish marine-protected areas in international waters and thereby prevent over-fishing as well as deep-ocean mining. This deals with parts of the oceans that are not under the territorial limits of countries and thus the equivalent of a global commons. A separate convention, called the Convention on Biological Diversity has the world's nations committing to

conserve 30% of the world's marine and coastal area as "protected areas" by 2030. A key objective of the UNOC is to deal with operational aspects of this aspiration, by getting countries to commit to the BBNJ. While 160 countries have signed it, ratification - or having countries align their own laws with the demands of the agreement - is a harder task. The treaty requires 60 ratifications to trigger a 120-day countdown before becoming legally binding. UNOC saw progress with 56 countries ratifying it. The U.S. hasn't ratified it as has India, though the latter has said it is in the "process" of doing so. Once in force, the treaty will create marine protected areas beyond national jurisdiction, conduct environmental impact assessments, regulate marine genetic resources, and support capacity-building for developing nations. The UN expects to reach 70 ratifications by September, with the intention of hosting the first BBNJ

Conference of Parties (COP), like the annual climate COPs, in late 2026.

What are the key hurdles to the BBNJ?

The most contentious aspect of the BBNJ is the sharing of benefits from resources. The high seas are known to have exotic life-forms. While extracting these are challenging, there still isn't a firm consensus for determining how any commercial benefits from these life-forms will be shared given that this is a territory that doesn't belong to any one entity. Given that the purpose of the conference is to preserve the ocean from wanton extraction, several environmental groups have pointed out that without a ban on extraction, the oceans are doomed.

What were UNOC's achievements?

The key takeaway is a host of voluntary commitments. The European Commission announced an investment of 1 billion euros to support ocean

conservation, science and sustainable fishing. French Polynesia pledged to create the world's largest marine protected area to safeguard its seas, covering its entire exclusive economic zone, approximately five million square kilometres. New Zealand committed over \$52 million towards supporting enhanced ocean governance, management and science in the Pacific Islands region. Germany launched a 100 million euro immediate action programme for the recovery and clearance of legacy munitions in the German Baltic and North Seas - the first of its kind. Thirty-seven countries, led by Panama and Canada, launched the High Ambition Coalition for a Quiet Ocean - a first of its kind initiative to tackle ocean noise pollution on a global scale. Italy committed 6.5 million euros to strengthen surveillance by the Coast Guard in marine protected areas and oil platforms. Canada contributed \$9 million dollars to the Ocean Risk and Resilience Action Alliance to help Small Island Developing States and coastal developing countries increase their resilience to the impacts of climate change through nature-based solutions. Spain committed to creating five new marine protected areas that would allow protection of 25% of its marine territory. A collective of UN agencies launched a co-design process for One Ocean Finance - an effort to unlock billions from ocean-dependent industries and blue economy sectors.

THE GIST

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THE ASIAN AGE

19 JUNE 2025

Canada reset, Trump talk: Key Modi G-7 takeaways

The G7 meeting may not have panned out too well for the world's richest nations with the US President Donald Trump having to cut short his visit to the Canadian Rockies to fly back to a situation room in the White House in connection with the Israel-Iran war. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's long haul to Canada's west, however, yielded two very positive developments for India.

The first was the resetting of ties with Canada that leaves all the rancour and acrimony of Justin Trudeau's time well behind. Prime Minister Carney's meeting with Mr Modi appears to have gone off swimmingly if the restoration of diplomatic ties with the appointment of high commissioners is any indication. It is forward into free, frank and fair times for both nations as the Hardeep Singh Nijjar killing gets put in its place as a criminal probe in which India might cooperate.

The second was the candid conversation Mr Modi had with Donald Trump over the phone in which the Indian Prime Minister firmly told Trump that there were no mediation talks with the US during the India-Pakistan conflict in May. Pakistan sought a ceasefire through formal military channels and India agreed. If Pakistan had listened to Trump advice on the matter, it was not mediation but pragmatism that may have led to using the DGMO route.

Mr Modi had a candid conversation with Donald Trump over the phone in which he firmly told the US President that there were no mediation talks with the US during the India-Pakistan conflict in May

But India's strategic autonomy has never been sacrificed to allow any entity, be it the UN, the UK, the US or the EU to have a say in the so-called Kashmir issue or any other bilateral matter with Pakistan. It is not India's business if the Pakistan general who sought a ceasefire is being feted with a lunch at the White House.

In a long day, Mr Modi may have prioritised the restoration of ties with Canada that also go back a long way and were cordial for decades before Justin Trudeau found a way to hang on to power in Ottawa by courting a party sympathetic to "Khalistan" which ended disastrously for Mr Trudeau and the New Democratic Party then headed by Jagmeet Singh.

The strength of face-to-face meetings may have been stressed once again as Mr Modi added to the ongoing Indian diplomatic offensive by carrying the tidings on how the ongoing Operation Sindoor went in the phase in which India dominated the military exchanges. Several bilateral meetings with leaders of nations at the summit have helped clear the air over what happened from May 7 to 10, besides mention of initiatives regarding trade deals that have become acutely necessary in the wake of tariffs threatened by the United States.

Film row: Let the law prevail

The Supreme Court's unequivocal position that the Karnataka government must facilitate the screening of Kamal Haasan starrer *Thug Life* in the state and deputy chief minister D.K. Shivakumar's statement that the government will honour the order of the court should not only pave the way for ending a confrontation between the actor and Kannada activists but also offer a valuable precedent on upholding the right to freedom of speech and expression.

Kannada activists had stated that they will allow the release of the film, originally scheduled for June 5, only if the actor apologised for his statement on the Tamil and Kannada languages. Mr Haasan's attempt to get a reprieve from the Karnataka high court had failed as the court saw merit in the argument of the language activists and suggested that the actor tender an apology. It even castigated the actor for approaching the court for relief after apparently initiating the controversy.

The Supreme Court has now made it clear that the positions of the activists, the state government which supported it and the Karnataka high court which upheld it are all faulty. The activists cannot take law into their hands and take over the streets, the apex court has asserted. Statements must be countered with statements. To the state government, it said a film with a valid CBFC certificate must be released and the state has to assure its screening. A film cannot be withheld from being screened for fear of theatres being burnt. The apex court also disapproved of the high court upholding the demand for an apology from the actor with a terse remark that it was not its business to do so.

While it is imperative that everyone respects the sensibilities of others, and makes every effort to maintain harmony among various groups of people, it is equally important that the fundamental rights of the citizen and the rule of law prevail. It is not a question of the artistic value of *Thug Life*, but about thugs' attempts to control not just art but also people's lives. The apex court has said an emphatic no to that concept.

THE ASIAN AGE

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Subhani



The Israel-Iran standoff: A war long in the making



Syed Ata Hasnain

On initiation, it seemed like just another of those rounds with missiles being fired at each other. But on its fifth day of continuing exchanges, the latest Israel-Iran spat appears something far more serious. Potentially, it could mark a new realignment in the shifting sands of West Asian geopolitics. Wars there have often redefined not just borders, but narratives. This one threatens to reorder the region's priorities and possibly relegate the Palestinian cause to a diminished place in the Arab and Islamic political imagination. The Israel-Iran animosity, translated into war, could well shape the region for the coming decade, given the Iran nuclear issue and Tehran's ambitions of being a dominant political force across the Middle East.

For long, Palestine served as the fulcrum around which Arab solidarity was declared, anti-Western rhetoric launched, and domestic legitimacy sought. In much of the Islamic world, invoking the suffering of the Palestinians was a political ritual. But the war in Gaza — and the lack of any coherent strategy by the Arabs to push the assault on its people — and now the direct escalation between Iran and Israel, have begun to push that centrality to the periphery. If this conflict endures and yields despatching outcomes, it may not remain merely a momentary distraction.

The rise of Iran as the pivot of both confrontation and assistance in the Middle East, supplanting the Palestinian issue with a broader sectarian, ideological, and geopolitical rivalry, may already be under way. Even before the current war, Iran had effectively positioned itself as the leader of a transnational "Axis of Resistance", that stretched from Hezbollah in Lebanon to the Houthis in Yemen, from Hamas in

Gaza to the militias in Iraq and Syria. It was mostly direct involvement — often veering off into sporadic kinetics. With these proxies now severely degraded through targeted killings and military pressure, Israel probably perceived this as the moment to seize and escalate what was, until now, a war long in the making.

However, Tehran too will now make every effort to sustain an asymmetric war through recalibration, likely involving a revival of its regional surrogates. In contrast, the Palestinian political movement today is sidelined. Hamas and Fatah remain divided, with neither commanding broad international legitimacy nor internal unity. The Arab League's rhetorical support has grown hollow, and countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and even Saudi Arabia continue to explore deeper ties with Israel — not just as a political threat but as an ideological and civilisational competitor.

The Sunni-Shia divide, long manipulated and sometimes displayed, is resurfacing. Tehran's projection of power is no longer contained in pan-Islamic slogans alone. It is Shia-led, ideologically anchored, and revolutionary in its vocabulary. That makes Gulf monarchies uncomfortable — some doubling down on US support, others hedging their bets. The war between Iran and Israel continues to intensify — as now seems likely — there are serious outcomes in the making. Israel, emboldened by its air superiority, by its technological efficiency and by its disregard for inter-

India may thus need to reassert its strategic autonomy — not as non-alignment, but as multi-alignment — engaging all. There may be scope for India, given its rising profile, to play a quiet mediatory role.

national opinion, may target Iran's energy infrastructure, with devastating consequences. The Strait of Hormuz and adjacent facilities are lifelines not just for Iran's economy but for global energy supply. An Israeli strike on oil terminals, refineries, or tankers could effectively paralyse the movement of energy through the Persian Gulf. The ripple effects of such an act would be global. Among the worst affected will be the energy-importing Asian economies — particularly China, Japan and India. With 80 per cent of its crude oil transiting this route, any prolonged disruption would severely impact fuel prices, inflation, and economic stability. Already, oil prices have spiked by \$10 per barrel. A regional war now risks becoming a global economic shock.

Meanwhile, the human cost of the conflict is rising. Given Israel's recent precedent of inflicting civilian casualties without remorse in Gaza and in southern Lebanon, any deeper confrontation with Iran is unlikely to spare civilian areas or critical infrastructure. Iran, too, is retaliating through missile strikes on urban areas, cyber disruptions and maritime harassment. In wars of this nature, one side often needs to blink first for a ceasefire to emerge.

There is a historical precedent. In earlier confrontations, Iran was forced to intensify rhetoric but has often stopped short of maximal retaliation, preserving room for a tactical drawdown. This time, however, Tehran's response has been stronger — unlike in earlier provocations, when it calculated restraint. For Israel, attainment of destruction of underground refinement facilities is unlikely. A par-

tial destruction of missile batteries may be sufficient incentive for a draw-down.

India's core interests — energy security, the safety of its diaspora, maritime stability, and counter-terrorism — are best served by peace and equilibrium in the Gulf. Its infrastructure investment in Chabahar, and potential access to Central Asia through the International North-South Transport Corridor, mean it cannot afford to allow tensions to dilute, especially when regional stability is at risk.

India may thus need to reassert its strategic autonomy — not as non-alignment, but as multi-alignment — engaging all, antagonising none. There may be scope for India, given its rising profile, to play a quiet mediatory role or support back-channel dialogue, especially since both Iran and Israel have historically engaged New Delhi with respect. India's credibility and ability to talk to both sides, without posturing, is an asset worth activating discreetly.

The ascendancy of Iran as an issue and the fracturing of Palestinian centrality marks a turning of the tide in West Asia. This is a conflict unlikely to end in the near term. Even if it pauses, it may resume, in a region long shaped by unflinching wars and simmering animosities. Iran's diplomatic linkages, its asymmetric leverage, and its geographical scale mean that its confrontation with Israel is not a passing phase but part of a long-term regional recalibration.

In this fraught landscape, India's quiet confidence and strategic flexibility offer it rare leverage. As the war rages across the Persian arc, it is countries like India — deeply invested in the region, yet wisely restrained — that could play a major role in shaping the region's eventual off-ramp from disaster.

The writer, a retired lieutenant-general, is a former GOC of the Srinagar-based 15 ("Chinar") Corps

LETTERS

THUGS LOSE

The Supreme Court's firm stand reaffirming the rights of filmmakers and theatre owners, as seen in its direction to the Karnataka government to ensure the screening of Kamal Haasan's *Thug Life*, is both timely and commendable.

In a democracy, artistic freedom must not be held hostage by threats of violence or mob pressure. By underlining the State's duty to protect lawful expression, the court has not only defended cinema but also upheld the rule of law.

Such judgments strengthen the spine of free speech and remind us that intolerance must never dictate what the public can or cannot watch. Kudos to the apex court!

K. Chidanand Kumar
Bengaluru

ON THE BRINK

THE ESCALATING conflict between Iran and Israel, marked by the targeted killings of Iran's top military and nuclear scientists, is rapidly reaching a dangerous tipping point. With the U.S. playing an indirect but influential role, tensions risk exploding into a broader regional war with devastating global consequences — economic disruption, energy insecurity, and heightened terrorism risks. The absence of a credible global mediator and the UN's toothless response only deepen the crisis. Without diplomatic intervention, this spiral could severely destabilize not just the Middle East, but the world at large. The stakes are rising, and yet, the world watches in troubling silence.

N. Sadhasiva Reddy
Bengaluru

RESPECT GIG WORKERS

EVERY DAY, we welcome packages on our doorstep, but do we ever pause to think about the young men (or the occasional young woman) delivering them? Delivery boys face scorching heat, pouring rain, traffic chaos and ruthless deadlines, often for meagre pay and little respect. Their struggle goes unnoticed as we scroll and shop. Accidents, mental stress and lack of job security are daily realities. Many are shell-shocked by customers' harsh words or unrealistic expectations. Is fast delivery worth their sleepless nights and broken backs? It's time we recognise them not just as delivery "boys" but as workers deserving dignity. Treat them respectfully, and show kindness occasionally.

Hasnain Rabbani
Mumbai

Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu



Centre tweaks policy to draw IAS officers to Delhi role

The Narendra Modi government has recently relaxed its rules for selecting joint secretaries to encourage more IAS officers to take on Central roles. The timing is telling. As of 2023, only 42 IAS officers were on board at the Centre versus the "required" 1,400 spots. That's a yawning gap.

By tweaking the rules, babies who've spent two years at the Centre, learn a different bureaucratic tilting, and get counted for the big leagues. One officer quipped that it's "do-or-die" — if you skip Centre postings now, your chances at JS are gone forever.

The move has sharpened the state-Centre tug-of-war. These tweaks effectively force officers to choose to stay back in a comfy district DM post, or move to the Centre, learn a different bureaucratic tilting, and get counted for the big leagues. One officer quipped that it's "do-or-die" — if you skip Centre postings now, your chances at JS are gone forever.

Still, there's a disconnect. Many observers see little appeal in moving to the under-secretary level. Who wants to go from being the local boss to a junior foot soldier at North Block, with fewer perks? So, has this really bulked up the IAS presence at the Centre? Probably not, at least not yet. There's also a fairness itch here. Babus tied up in

negotiations with their state governments over transfers feel penalised but their state is reluctant to relieve them. They are stuck. That's the system excluding them from the Centre even before they can apply.

So, while the tweak signals intent, it also smacks of top-down micromanagement. The Centre wants boots on its ground; the states want to hang on to theirs. And the individual officer? He's stuck in the middle — or caught in a bureaucratic Catch-22. The policy tweak is a step, but it might just not be enough to cross the finish line.

AMTABH KANT BOWS OUT AS G-20 SHERPA
There's something to be said about a babu who not only survives four decades of public service but manages to exit on a high, riding a train of deliverables that actually delivered. Amtabh Kant, India's G-20 sherpa since 2022 and former CEO of Niti Aayog, has stepped down from his latest assignment, marking the end of a remarkable innings that stretched across 41 years. Few officials have been so consistently at the right place, at the right time, with the right PowerPoint!

As sherpa, Mr Kant helped steer India through one of its most high-profile multilateral events — the 2023 G-20 summit in New Delhi. From consensus-building on climate and development to deftly

navigating geopolitical tightropes (remember the Russia-Ukraine language deadlock?), he brought both gravitas and good old-fashioned negotiation skills to the table. His tenure wasn't just about speculating; it was about delivering outcomes, often in rooms full of clashing national interests and veiled threats.

Of course, Mr Kant's legacy predates his sherpa status. His tenure at Niti Aayog saw the core architecture of India's start-up ecosystem, national missions on innovation, and a policy voice that occasionally managed to cut through the bureaucratic noise.

Now, as he hints at championing free enterprise, start-ups, and thinks tanks in his next avatar, one hopes he carries forward his ability to push big ideas without letting them get buried in file-cupboards. Something tells us Amtabh Kant isn't done being relevant. Not just yet.

NEW DIGS FOR OLD HABITS
The babus are on the move — literally. With three new spanking towers in the Central Vista zone ready for occupancy, ministries have been told to pack up their files (and potted plants) and head to the Common Central Secretariat. It's not just the ministry of housing and urban affairs that has kicked things off, and others — from finance to health — are bracing for their turn.

This was long overdue. For decades, government departments have been scattered across Delhi in crumbling, creaky buildings. Bringing them together under one roof should improve coordination, reduce duplication and save taxpayers a fair bit of money on inter-ministry note-carrying.

But governance isn't just about geography. Moving to a new building doesn't fix the culture of delay, turf wars or that all-too-familiar tendency to measure productivity in kilograms of paperwork. Fancy new elevators don't move files any faster. That said, symbolism matters. The Modi government has pushed the Central Vista as a visual metaphor for a more decisive, aspirational India. The buildings are meant to look like the future, and in fairness, they do. The challenge is whether the bureaucratic mindset will follow suit.

So, yes, let's welcome the move. It's clean, central, and overdue. But let's not pretend the hard part is over. The true transformation of governance lies not in where officials sit, but in how they think, act and collaborate.

Love them, hate them ignore them at national level, it is the babu guarantee and Dilli's belief.

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