



## A productive visit

India and China seem ready to push behind the memory of Galwan clashes

Judging by the statements and readouts from both sides, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's two-day visit to India this week was extremely productive. While Mr. Wang was in Delhi at the invitation of NSA Ajit Doval for the 24th Special Representatives talk on the boundary question, he also met External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar for bilateral talks and the normalisation process after the four-year military standoff at the Line of Actual Control. Mr. Wang was also received by Prime Minister Narendra Modi who said that he would travel to Tianjin for the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) meeting. Mr. Modi will meet with Chinese President Xi Jinping. In Delhi, India and China agreed to resume border trade at three points, restart flights, expand the Kailash Manasarovar yatra slots for pilgrims and relax visas. While there were positive discussions on the lifting of export restrictions by China on fertilizers, rare earth products and boring machinery, it is unclear whether there was headway on China's demand that India lift its scrutiny of Chinese FDI in Indian companies. The two sides agreed to expedite the process of boundary resolution of the 3,500 km India-China border. Significantly, the Modi government agreed to build on the 2005 agreement of Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for the Settlement of the India-China Boundary Question. Meanwhile, the Chinese Ambassador Xu Feihong said that China opposes the U.S.'s "bully" move of imposing 50% tariffs on India.

The outcomes indicate that Delhi has decided it can now "move ahead" from the PLA transgressions, Galwan clashes and the standoff. While Mr. Doval said that the "borders have been quiet", the government was made uncomfortably aware that even with a stable border, other long-standing problems will continue to shadow ties. Mr. Wang later left for Kabul to work with Pakistan and the Taliban on a plan to extend the BRI and China-Pakistan Economic Corridor - India is opposed to both - into Afghanistan. He then flew to Islamabad for a strategic dialogue with his Pakistani counterparts. China's diplomatic support to Pakistan after the Pahalgalam attacks and during Operation Sindoor did not come up during Mr. Wang's visit, but provide an ominous overhang to ties, as did Ambassador Xu's contention that Pakistan too is a victim of terrorism. While the U.S.'s attack on Indian trade and economy may be surprising New Delhi's efforts, the reset with China must not come from a perceived position of weakness, and the next steps must be taken keeping in focus the strategic challenge.

# A Court order that was barking up the wrong tree

The Supreme Court of India's order of August 11, 2025, to round up and incarcerate all street dogs in New Delhi in shelters was not just a misguided attempt to solve a problem. It was a scientifically unsound, legally questionable and morally bankrupt decree that served as a convenient smokescreen for the capital's real and pressing crises. While this misguided directive was stayed by the Court on August 22, 2025, its initial pronouncement revealed a dangerous willingness to ignore both scientific evidence and constitutional compassion. Since the final hearing on the matter is still pending, it is imperative for the citizenry in India to weigh their options. The initial order was one that sentenced lakhs of sentient beings to a life of misery and eventual death, while ignoring proven and humane solutions that lie unimplemented due to sheer institutional apathy.

### A blueprint for disaster

The directive, which was hailed by some as a solution to the "stray dog menace", was, in reality, a blueprint for a public health catastrophe. The very idea that mass shelters can work in a country such as India is a dangerous fantasy. It has been a catastrophic failure even in developed nations. In the United States, the historical "pound" system, as documented by sociologists such as Leslie Irvine, evolved into a grim cycle of capture and kill. Overcrowded shelters become high-stress environments, leading to extreme psychological distress, aggression, and rampant disease transmission. A 1999 study by David Tuber on dogs in animal shelters highlighted the severe behavioural problems that arise from confinement, noting that long-term sheltering is detrimental to their welfare.

Let us imagine lakhs of Delhi's free-roaming, territorial dogs, suddenly captured and thrown together. The result would be brutal dogfights, injuries and mass casualties. These shelters, costing thousands of crores to build and maintain, would inevitably become epicentres for zoonotic diseases such as rabies and leptospirosis, posing a grave risk not just to the animals but also to the poorly-paid and unprotected staff employed to manage them. Should a disease outbreak occur, the disposal of thousands of carcasses would create an environmental and public health hazard of unimaginable proportions.

Furthermore, the Court's order defied basic ecological science. The mass removal of dogs would create a "vacuum", a phenomenon



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well-documented in studies of animal population control. Nature abhors a vacuum. Dogs from neighbouring States such as Haryana and Uttar Pradesh would simply migrate into Delhi to fill the newly available ecological niche, drawn by the same food sources. Would the Delhi government have built a great wall around the city to keep them out? Or would it have employed security guards to patrol the borders? The idea is as ludicrous as it is impractical.

The removal of dogs, which are efficient scavengers, would have also likely led to an explosion in the population of rodents and monkeys, bringing with them a different set of public health problems. This approach is in direct contradiction to the guidelines of the World Health Organization (WHO) and India's own National Action Plan for Dog Mediated Rabies Elimination (NAPRE), both of which advocate mass sterilisation and vaccination as the only scientific method for rabies control and population management.

A pernicious narrative is being spun that this is a conflict between the "dog-loving elite" and the poor, who bear the brunt of dog bites. This is a deliberate and cruel misrepresentation. As research by scholars such as Yamini Narayanan has shown, street dogs are an integral part of the urban ecosystem, living in a symbiotic relationship with the city's inhabitants, especially its most marginalised. For Delhi's vast homeless population, abandoned by the state and invisible to the society, a street dog is often their only companion, a source of comfort, and a guardian in the lonely, dangerous nights living on the pavement. To rip these animals away is to inflict another layer of cruelty on people who have already been failed by the system.

Let us be clear. The street dog issue is a carefully orchestrated diversion. It is a smokescreen to hide the spectacular failures of governance in Delhi. While the city's attention is diverted to the canines, pressing issues are swept under the carpet - these include: allegations of institutional voter theft by the Opposition, crumbling infrastructure, roads that turn into rivers every monsoon, rampant corruption, and crippling inflation. The top court should have been pulling up the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) for its abysmal failure to execute its statutory duty.

### 'ABC' is the solution

The real solution has been available for decades: the Animal Birth Control (ABC) programme. The success of this programme in cities such as Jaipur is a testament to its efficacy. A study in 2010 on

Jodhpur's dog population following an ABC programme showed a significant and stable decline in numbers and a high rate of vaccination coverage. Yet, the MCD's implementation has been a sham. Data from the Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI) over the years reveal a story of insufficient budgets, unmet sterilisation targets, and a complete lack of accountability. The problem is not the dogs. It is the dereliction of duty by the MCD.

This brings us to the profound legal flaws in the Supreme Court's initial order. The judgment, delivered by a Bench headed by Justice J.B. Pardiwala, stands in stark and bewildering contradiction to a more reasoned order delivered in 2024, by a Bench headed by Justice J.K. Maheshwari. The Maheshwari judgment upheld the Animal Birth Control Rules, 2023, which are rooted in science and compassion. It affirmed that an indiscriminate killing of dogs is not the solution. The modified order of August 22, 2025, has resolved this glaring conflict, rightly shifting the national focus towards establishing uniform protocols for humane and scientific canine management.

Furthermore, the right to challenge this order, the *locus standi*, is rooted in our constitutional and cultural fabric. Article 51A(g) of the Constitution of India imposes a fundamental duty on every citizen to have compassion for living creatures. This is not a mere suggestion. It is a cornerstone of the republic's moral and legal framework. Cruelty to animals, sanctioned by the state, is an affront to this duty and to our collective humanity.

### Adopt an evidence-based approach

No one denies that the issue of dog bites must be addressed. But the solution cannot be a "final solution" of mass incarceration. A targeted, evidence-based approach is needed. If there is clear evidence of an unprovoked attack by a specific dog, that animal should be humanely captured and observed by professionals. This is a far cry from the indiscriminate round-up ordered by the Court.

The Supreme Court's initial order was a monumental error. It was a victory for hysteria over science, for convenience over compassion, and for political distraction over genuine governance. There should be no diversion from the real problems that plague the capital. And the MCD must be held accountable for its decades of failure. The path to a safer, more humane city lies not in building dog prisons but in implementing the proven, scientific, and compassionate solution of sterilisation and vaccination.

# Set the guardrails for AI use in courtrooms

## Targeting research

Attacks on research institutions reflect India's declining academic freedoms

Mistakes and misinterpretations must not be confused with cases of malicious misinformation. The filing of FIRs against a researcher associated with Lokniti, a programme of the CSDS, and the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR)'s show cause notice to the CSDS, represent yet another troubling chapter in the recent erosion of academic freedoms in India. The trigger seems to be a post on X by Lokniti co-director Sanjay Kumar, which had erroneous data about reductions in the electoral roll in some constituencies in Maharashtra. Expressing regret, Mr. Kumar deleted the post. Yet, the BJP governments in Maharashtra and at the Centre have weaponised what is a mistake to launch broader attacks on the institution, despite the post having no connection to the Opposition's allegations about inflated electoral roll numbers during the 2024 Maharashtra Assembly elections. The ICSSR's insinuations about the CSDS-Lokniti's funding arrangements echo the treatment meted out to other premier institutions. The Centre for Policy Research faced tax surveys that resulted in the cancellation of its foreign funding licence and tax-exempt status. This targeting suggests a coordinated effort to silence independent research voices rather than address administrative concerns. Such acts have led to India's ranking falling to the bottom 20% among 179 nations in the 2024 Academic Freedom Index published by the V-Dem Institute.

Institutions such as CSDS-Lokniti serve a vital democratic function by conducting empirical research that helps understand policy implications. Through its National Election Studies and comprehensive data archive, Lokniti has helped transform the study of Indian politics to one based on rigorous, large-scale empirical inquiry. Its survey on the verification documents listed by the ECI during its Special Intensive Revision exercise in Bihar, among voters across five States and one Union Territory, exemplifies this. Rather than acknowledging the finding that the availability of such documents is rather low among a large cohort of voters in India, and places onerous burdens on voters in the event of a country-wide SIR, the ICSSR has characterised this research as an attempt to malign the ECI. How can policy effectiveness be assessed without rigorous empirical investigations such as well-designed and transparent opinion surveys? The current government has also undermined its own statistical apparatus. The delayed Census and suppressed statistical surveys point to discomfort with independent and critical analysis. As India navigates complex development challenges, it desperately needs the kind of critical feedback and evidence-based analysis that institutions such as the CSDS provide. Silencing these voices through administrative harassment and funding restrictions serves neither good governance nor national interest.

In July this year, the Kerala High Court published a set of guidelines for Artificial Intelligence (AI) use by the district judiciary ("Policy Regarding Use of Artificial Intelligence Tools in District Judiciary"). As the first policy in the country directly addressing AI use in judicial processes and setting out strict safeguards, it is timely. AI tools, from document translation to defect identification in filings, are expected to improve speed and efficiency, which are attractive incentives for a court system which has five crore pending cases.

### There are issues

But seemingly innocuous tasks such as AI-enabled translations and transcription are not without risks. For example, a Supreme Court of India judgment reported the translation of 'leave granted' into 'chutti sweekar' (holiday approved) in Hindi. In the case of Noel Anthony Clarke vs Guardian News & Media Ltd. (2025) EVHC 550 (KB), an AI-transcription tool repeatedly transcribed the claimant's name, "Noel", as "no". OpenAI's Whisper, an AI-powered speech recognition system, was reported to occasionally make up or "hallucinate" entire phrases and sentences, especially when people spoke with longer pauses between their words.

Search engine bias in AI-enabled legal research could nudge users toward results influenced by user patterns, potentially 'invisibilising' relevant precedents. A study published in the *Journal of Empirical Legal Studies* found that legal Large Language Models (LLM) can make up case laws and cite incorrect sources to substantiate claims.

At a more structural level, AI risks reducing adjudication into rule-based inferences, overlooking the combination of human judgment, specific context, and relevance of precedents that impact judicial decision-making.

Some market tools are currently being used in courts on a non-commercial test basis, such as transcription of oral arguments and witness

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As the use of Artificial Intelligence becomes more common in courts, clear frameworks are crucial to guide its safe and responsible use

depositions. Without specified time-frames, success parameters, or framework for access, storage, and use of non-public, sensitive or personal data, such pilots warrant careful consideration. AI tools offered to courts on a test basis risk creating dependencies without clear pathways to sustainable adoption. Moreover, new technological paradigms demand essential infrastructure such as reliable Internet connectivity and hardware.

A quick analysis of publicly available tenders for AI services across courts shows that even if adoption is cautious, courts are not necessarily designing risk management frameworks to address ethical and legal risks. While human checks and balances, such as manual vetting of AI-translated judgements by retired judges, advocates and translators are in place, AI systems learn from available data, with a possibility of error as they encounter new information in new contexts. Scholars note that hallucinations in LLMs are a feature, not a bug, requiring human oversight and careful adoption in high-risk scenarios.

As courts increasingly integrate AI use in their daily work, the combination of AI's ethical risks and the complexity of the legal system requires effective guardrails to mitigate risks. Since the majority of court procedures remain paper-based, any transition to advance AI deployment must not further debilitate an already imperfect system.

First, there is a need for critical AI literacy among judges, court staff and lawyers. In addition to capacity building to use AI tools, programmes are also required to understand the limitations of the systems deployed. Judicial academies and bar associations, in collaboration with AI governance experts, are well placed to facilitate such capacity building.

Second, guidelines are needed to shape individual use of generative AI for research and judgment writing. If AI is used in the adjudication process, litigants must have a right to be

informed. Similarly, litigants and lawyers have a right to know if AI is being used in certain courtrooms. Given the potential for errors arising from AI use, courts should examine whether litigants may be permitted to opt-out of pilots or fully-deployed AI if they have any concerns about safeguards or human oversight.

Third, courts need to adopt standardised procurement guidelines to support the evaluation of a proposed AI system's reliability and suitability for the task at hand. Pre-procurement steps will also help courts diagnose the exact problem and whether AI is the best solution. Procurement frameworks can guide assessment of technical criteria around explainability, data management and risk mitigation.

### On the eCourts project

These frameworks will enable decision-makers to monitor vendor compliance and performance, which may be beyond the routine expertise of judges and the registry.

The Vision Document for Phase III of the eCourts Project (e-Committee, Supreme Court of India) acknowledges the need to create technology offices to guide courts in assessing, selecting, and overseeing the implementation of complex digital solutions, including infrastructure and software. Such scaffolding to aid and assist decision-making on AI use and adoption is one way to overcome gaps in technical expertise. Dedicated specialists can give courts clearer guidance in adopting AI tools as part of comprehensive planning.

As courts inch towards AI adoption, it is important not to lose sight of the ultimate purpose of AI in the system - to serve the ends of justice. In this rapidly evolving technological landscape, clear guidelines on the use and the adoption of AI in courts are essential to ensure that the drive for an efficient court system does not eclipse the nuanced reasoning and human decision-making that is at the heart of the adjudicatory process.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Bill blocking

The founding fathers of the Constitution may have never imagined that constitutional functionaries would resort to dilatory tactics to circumvent the prescriptions of law and keep matters pending for months without taking a decision. The actions of constitutional functionaries sitting on Bills/issues cannot be considered as 'aberrations', as aberrations are expected to be rare as well as short-lived. Even if

those actions are considered an 'aberration', the Supreme Court is expected to resolve the issues in accordance with constitutional principles. **Kasaraju Chandramouli**, Hyderabad

### Time-tested ties

The irony is that in trying to unjustly 'penalise' India, the self-styled global policeman, the U.S. President, is categorically proving that the U.S.'s relations with India are as

unpredictable as the weather. Mr. Trump is simply reinforcing the fact that India-Russia relations are more steadfast and time-tested than India-U.S. ties. The reality is that the U.S. is habituated to playing Big Brother to friendly, smaller nations and reducing them to becoming its client states such as Pakistan. Another irritant for Uncle Sam is that during Operation Sindoor, India successfully thwarted attacks from Pakistan by

using a Russian-made defence system. It is time New Delhi overlooks the U.S.'s blow-thot-blow-cold relationship and looks elsewhere for its exports. **Nalini Vijayaraghavan**, Thiruvananthapuram

### Madras Day, the MMC

The history of Madras would be incomplete without mentioning the Madras Medical College (MMC) and Government General Hospital. It was established as the first medical college

in India along with the Calcutta Medical College on February 2, 1835. But due to administrative reasons, Calcutta was opened on January 28, 1835. Government General Hospital - renamed in 2011 as Rajiv Gandhi Government General Hospital - is as old as Madras. The MMC has numerous firsts to its credit such as the first woman doctor in the English-speaking world, the first woman doctor of

independent India and the first woman doctor of Sri Lanka who graduated from this college. The first X-ray machine in SE Asia (soon after its discovery in 1895) was installed in 1900, I have strong bonds with the MMC - as an alumnus (1975) and having retired from service on superannuation. **Dr. V.K. Ramadesikan**, Chennai

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Fair share

Minimum public float norms enable good governance

India's markets often require unique laws to address challenges that arise from the way businesses are structured and run here. The Securities and Exchange Board of India's (SEBI) Minimum Public Shareholding (MPS) norms fit this description. Requiring all listed companies to have a minimum 25 per cent of their equity held by the public may seem draconian in any other developed market. In India though, this regulation was brought in to free listed companies from the stranglehold of promoters who hang on to majority stakes and wield powers far beyond their official voting rights.

It has taken 15 years of constant follow-up by SEBI to ensure that most listed companies adhere to MPS norms. SEBI must therefore tread cautiously in amending these rules to promote easier fund-raising for issuers. Securities Contract (Regulation) Rules allow graded timelines for companies making offers to achieve the 25 per cent public float. While small firms (up to ₹1,600 crore market cap) must sell 25 per cent of their shares in their IPO/OFS, those with up to ₹1 lakh crore market cap can dilute 10 per cent initially and get to 25 per cent within three years. Over ₹1 lakh crore companies need to dilute only 5 per cent initially, getting to 10 per cent in two years and 25 per cent within five years. SEBI's paper argues that despite these graded timelines, large companies are finding it tough to attain MPS thresholds. It argues that with maturing private markets, some issuers are already in the ₹1 lakh crore to ₹5 lakh crore league post-listing. Therefore, they enjoy healthy trading volumes and liquidity even without a 25 per cent public float.

Requiring them to dilute 5 to 10 per cent quickly makes it challenging for them to push through IPOs, goes the argument. To lighten their burden, SEBI proposes to reduce the initial IPO/OFS dilution for smaller companies from 10 per cent to 8 per cent and for larger companies from 5 per cent to 2.5-2.75 per cent. It also suggests allowing smaller companies five years instead of three to get to a 25 per cent float and giving larger companies 10 years' time to get to it. Given the complicated nature of these rules, it does make sense for SEBI to simplify its MPS norms. In the interests of easier compliance, varied initial dilution norms of 5, 10 and 25 per cent for different-sized companies can perhaps be done away with and a standard norm of say, 5 per cent imposed.

Companies can also be given a uniform five-year deadline to attain 25 per cent public float without intermediate milestones. However, no further relaxations are really necessary to facilitate easier fund-raising. As companies tapping markets have expanded in size over the last decade, so has the purchasing power of retail investors and institutions.

Over-subscriptions for IPOs such as NSDL show that there's no dearth of risk appetite. The 25 per cent MPS rule also serves a larger purpose beyond ensuring liquidity and trading volumes. It strengthens governance by giving retail investors and domestic institutions a voice.

POCKET



Policy lessons from Trump tariffs

**POLICY OPTIONS.** India needs to boost domestic demand by lifting rural incomes to offset the external shock, besides exploring new foreign markets



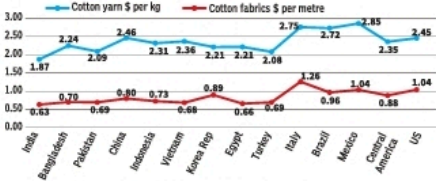
JATINDER S BEDI  
SUNIL KUMAR SINHA

Trump unveiled his 'reciprocal tariffs' on April 2 to combat US's huge trade deficit and 'Make America Great Again' by bringing manufacturing jobs back in the US. Since then, a lot of twists and turns have taken place leading to imposition of 25 per cent tariff on the Indian goods on August 1, 2025 and an additional 25 per cent tariff w.e.f. August 27, in case India fails to stop buying crude oil from Russia.

**IMPLICATIONS OF NO DEAL...** US is among the few countries with which India enjoys a trade surplus. It was as high as \$36.8 billion during FY24. In India's exports to US of \$77.5 billion, engineering goods accounted for 22.7 per cent share, electronic goods 12.9 per cent, gems and jewellery 12.8 per cent, drug formulations, etc., 11.3 per cent, petroleum products 7.5 per cent, and RMG cotton, including accessories, 6.1 per cent. India enjoys comparative cost advantage in labour intensive products, such as, fabric production as well as in items for which it was able to modernise its industry, such as, yarn. India's cost of yarn and fabrics production was found to be the lowest on August 10, 2025 compared to its major competitors as shown in Fig 1, (which has been worked out by extrapolating ITMB, 2021 data while using changes in Real Effective Exchange Rates from 2021-2025).

However, India would become non-competitive in these products in the US market in case its products are faced with 50 per cent tariff, while some of its competitors will be charged tariff less than half that sum. In case, China is also faced with similar tariff rates, then the loss would be less, as other countries would not have the capacity to fill the

India has comparative cost advantage in production of cotton yarn & fabrics



Source: Derived by Author from ITMB, 2021 by applying Changes in RER from 2021-2025

supply gap created by the absence of China and India.

Thus, these products will find their route (indirectly or directly) into US market. At the most, India's exports to US are likely to suffer by 20 per cent, which may bring down India's projected growth of 6.20 per cent p.a. to 5.85 per cent p.a. during FY2026. This loss is likely to be borne mainly by the manufacturing sector. As a result, manufacturing sector growth may come down by 2.2 per cent and 16 lakh workers would be adversely impacted. Here, the alternative is to boost its domestic demand by lowering GST rates and raising the income of the low and low-medium income groups in addition to finding alternative export markets. Also, the income of the small and marginal farmers needs to be protected by ensuring minimum returns on their marketable surplus.

Indeed, the graphic overturns the notion of India being uncompetitive in

**Trump's flip flop tariff strategy has created uncertainty for US citizens. It will be challenging for the US to ensure enough supply for meeting its domestic demand**

textiles and RMG on account of labour costs. It is the other overheads, then, that require attention. The macroeconomic implications are serious. Better wages for a workforce employed in labour intensive sectors will boost domestic demand, including demand for labour intensive manufacturing products.

**LAND OF AGREEING TO TRUMP** In case India signs a trade deal with US, the first likely implication would be to forbid the concessional oil imports from Russia. This is resulting in savings of around 0.06 per cent of India's GDP. In addition to this loss, US is asking India to give more access to its domestic market in order to curtail US' trade deficit of \$36.8 billion with India.

This is possible by raising imports from US of items such as sophisticated arms irrespective of terms for this trade, such as, transfer of technology etc., vis-a-vis other competing countries. The US is also pressuring India to accept lenient emission standards for the vehicles exported from US.

The stickiest point between India and US trade negotiations was regarding the opening of dairy and farm products to US' exporters in which India's 29.7 crore workforce (PLFS, 2023-24) is engaged. The paradox here is that Indian agriculture otherwise enjoys

comparative cost advantage, but developed countries' cost is curtailed through excessive subsidies granted to this sector. Therefore, removal of tariff restrictions on farm goods would make Indian agriculture more vulnerable.

**WAY FORWARD** Although farm income varies across the States, they are somewhat reasonable in States having MSP and other support systems.

To further enhance domestic demand, there is a need to create support system in all the States in order to ensure reasonable returns on their marketable surplus. This will lead to higher demand for industrial products and safeguard against any fall in export market due to uncertainties caused by Trump's tariffs.

Similarly, growth of MSME units should be promoted by creating required infrastructure and common facilities and tweaking GST in a way that genuinely benefits smaller units. Smaller units should also benefit from Ease of Doing Business and easy access to credit. All this will raise the mass consumption demand for both farm and non-farm products.

India needs to diversify trade and develop strategic relations with countries in East Asia, Africa and Latin America to curtail US's trade offensive. India also needs to explore a strategic alliance with China. This will allow India to enter that stage of value added in the supply chain in which it has a comparative advantage. However, given the historical friction in India-China relations, exploring and expanding India-China trade will have to be done carefully. Russia is another useful ally for defence deals and partnerships.

Meanwhile, Trump's flip flop tariff strategy has created uncertainty for the US citizens. It will be challenging for the US to ensure enough supply for meeting its domestic demand, contain inflation due to high tariffs and deal with public unrest caused by rising cost of living.

The writers are professors of Economics at Institute for Development and Communication, Chandigarh. Views expressed are personal

Need to strengthen battery recycling norms

Rigorous audits and higher penalties on fraudulent recyclers will help India achieve its Net Zero targets

Arpita Mukherjee

With India emerging as the third-largest e-waste producer in the world, the significance of a circular economy cannot be overstated. Batteries, powering electric vehicles (EVs) and various consumer electronics, constitute a significant share of this e-waste. Proper battery recycling is vital for reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by up to 98 per cent and supporting India's efforts toward achieving Net Zero by 2070.

Recognising this, India's Battery Waste Management Rules 2022 directs battery producers to meet certain obligations and targets for battery recycling and refurbishment. Particularly, the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) framework outlined under the Rules requires that producers send their collected battery waste to recyclers and ensure proper recycling and waste management. In exchange, they receive EPR certificates from recyclers attesting that producers have met their EPR obligations.

India's EPR floor price, at ₹120/kg as suggested by industry experts, is the minimum price owed to recyclers. It ensures recyclers are fairly compensated for investments and capital expenditure on plants and machinery, as well as skilled labour required for proper recycling. However, India's floor price is

benchmarked significantly lower than its global counterparts. The UK, for instance, reportedly demands approximately ₹500-600/kg for recycling EV batteries.

This disparity is not without consequences. A low floor price may lead many recyclers to cut corners or exit the market altogether. It further discourages investment in advanced recycling infrastructure and may also encourage fraudulent practices like the issuance of fake certificates.

Non-compliance with the EPR framework can, therefore, have severe repercussions, ultimately undermining India's progress towards its Net Zero goals.

**FRAUDULENT RECYCLERS**

Employing less technologically advanced and environmentally sound methods, fraudulent recyclers can price out genuine recyclers and create a "race to the bottom" scenario in pricing. Such recyclers can also issue fake certificates for producers, allowing them to inflate their recycling claims and falsify adherence to EPR obligations.

A striking example of the risks posed by fake EPR certificates emerged in 2024, when the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) uncovered a scam involving over six lakh falsified certificates in the plastics sector in Gujarat, Maharashtra and Karnataka. Recyclers had falsely claimed to process over 38 times their registered capacity,



**RECYCLING.** Tightening the norms

selling certificates to producers looking to evade compliance. The scam distorted national recycling data, deflated certificate prices, and damaged trust in the EPR system.

More alarmingly, the unchecked burning of 7,35,840 tonnes of plastic released toxic pollutants like dioxins and furans, endangering public and environmental health. In response, violators suffered penalties imposed by the CPCB totalling ₹35 crore, enumerating the cost of compliance failure in waste management. The case, therefore, makes a compelling argument for improved oversight and enforcement in India's waste management sector.

Further, producers must take responsibility for verifying the recyclers they work with, treating them not as peripheral vendors but as critical partners who must be audited and held to compliance standards.

Fake EPR certificates in the e-waste sector can undermine both compliance and the 'polluter pays' principle, increase the risk of environmental damage and health risks by improper dumping of e-waste and loss of critical minerals and economic value for India.

Lastly, fake certificates result in the loss of critical minerals and economic value for India. Foregoing legitimate recycling methods can hinder the recovery of valuable minerals like lithium, nickel, cobalt, and critical minerals, exacerbating India's mineral dependency on other nations.

Enforcement of EPR framework can be strengthened through real-time audits and higher penalties for non-compliance. Audits can also ensure more robust results by capturing sales invoice data and capex data. Creating a national digital waste tracking system with technologies like AI/ML and blockchain can increase traceability, and accountability.

The informal/non-corporate sector should be integrated into the EPR framework through formal recognition and inclusion in formal waste management systems. Incorporating these key stakeholders into India's framework can meaningfully reduce waste leakage. Such steps can bring India closer to its broader ambitions beyond our Net Zero commitment.

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**Optimising talent**  
This refers to the article "India's 'closure' problem" (August 22). The article's insistence on job ownership does not depend on individuals alone. They need a job design in which experience meaningfulness and autonomy in execution. In real public works the leaders are corporators, contractors and supervisors guided by, unfortunately, lust for money instead of zest for public service. Secondly, many of the jobs in the domain are team jobs, which need co-operation, co-ordination and

individual and collective accountability. A work culture that imbues these basic features will result in making the best use of talent India has.  
**YG Chouksey**  
Pune  
**Copper worries**  
This refers to the article "China's move will skew the global copper market" (August 22). A similar risk looms in titanium, where the choke point lies not in smelting but in purification and sponge processing. Aerospace and defence rely on

high-purity titanium sponge, and the market is overly concentrated —Russia, Japan, and Kazakhstan dominate supply, while China is expanding aggressively in TiO<sub>2</sub> pigments and alloys. India has rich ilmenite reserves and already produces synthetic rutile and small-scale sponge at IIT Bombay and KMMIL respectively but this is insufficient for domestic needs. We must urgently scale sponge production to aerospace and weapon grade, invest in chloride-rout purification, and create a domestic titanium

ecosystem. India requires at least a couple of strong producers to ensure security of supply for space and defence. Otherwise, titanium could become the next level of strategic vulnerability.  
**Nandagopal**  
Chennai  
**A good move**  
With reference to 'Game up' (August 22), the new regulation passed towards curbing the illegal betting and money laundering through online gaming is timely and protects the interests of gullible citizens out to make a quick buck. The new legislation should be implemented strictly to prohibit even lottery type of money games sponsored by some States. Though it is difficult to draw distinction between game of chance and skill and the involvement of legal challenges, the empowered list expected to bring the desired results. However, a grand fathering clause to protect the investors in online gaming platforms would have saved the interests of investor community.  
**Sitaram Popuri**  
Capriotes, US

# GROUND ZERO



About 500 people, half of them South Asian, marched through central Dublin on July 26, 2025, calling attention towards the recent spate of attacks against Indians in Ireland. PRIYANKA BORPUJARI

## Building a home amid the hostility

On July 19, an Indian man was assaulted in the suburb of Tallaght in Dublin, Ireland. Since then, there have been several attacks against Indians in the green isle, causing alarm in the immigrant community. With politicians there riding on anti-immigrant rhetoric, the situation has worsened. **Priyanka Borpujari** reports on how the transformation of Ireland as a major immigrant destination has brought many challenges

**S**owmya Paul, 44, has been working in Ireland for about two decades, but she is still perceived as an outsider. "I have been shouted at and asked to leave the country," said the nurse from Ernakulam, Kerala. Sowmya was among the 500-odd people, half of them South Asian, who marched through central Dublin on July 26, calling attention towards the recent spate of attacks against Indians in Ireland. Walking from the city hall to the gate of Leinster House, the seat of Parliament, the protesters carried placards and shouted slogans.

The march took place after an Indian was attacked in the south-western suburb of Tallaght in Dublin on July 19. The attackers allegedly removed the victim's pants and underwear and posted a video on social media, accusing him of being a paedophile. A man driving past also took a video of the victim, whose face was covered in blood. In the video, the victim can be seen trying to pull his jacket down to cover himself and the man shouting, "Get the f\*\*\* out of this state".

Jennifer Murray, 42, a resident of Tallaght, was driving when she found the victim. In a video she later shared on social media, to "debunk the rumours about him", Jennifer said he kept insisting he was not a paedophile as she covered him with a blanket lying in her car's boot.

She took him to the Tallaght University Hospital, and then to the house where he was staying with an Indian family. She learnt that he works at Amazon and had come to Ireland only a week prior. "They have a newborn. The wife there told me how he was doing all the cooking to allow her to rest after her childbirth. He is truly a kind man," she said in the video.

"The attackers were teenagers, whose frontal lobes haven't been developed yet. They have learnt the knife culture, and are influenced by online misinformation," she told *The Hindu*.

Jennifer claimed that over the last few weeks, there were four similar attacks in the neighbourhood, but they were not reported by the media.

Her video opened a can of worms. Indians living in Ireland began to share on WhatsApp groups harrowing stories of racial abuse, largely perpetrated by adolescents and teenagers.

### On the margins

Since Brexit, Ireland has become a popular destination for India's economic migrants. There are currently 80,000 Indians living in Ireland, marking a 300% jump over the last decade. According to 2023 data from the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland, 17% of nurses and midwives registered to work are Indian citizens.

The Irish government has also been wooing Indians to pursue higher education in the green isle. Earlier this year, while James Lawless, the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation, and Science, was visiting Indian cities as part of St Patrick's Day celebrations, his office issued a statement. It said that over 9,000 Indian students make up 13.1% of Ireland's international student population.

At the same time, many Irish nationals have moved out of Ireland, seeking better opportunities in the face of the high cost of living and a growing housing crisis. Alongside the influx of Indians and people of other nationalities, and the out-migration of Irish nationals, anti-migrant rhe-

**WE** have a history of denying people's experience of racism by gaslighting them

**RUTH COPPINGER**  
MP from Ireland's Socialist Party

toric and attacks have increased, especially in marginalised areas such as Tallaght.

Tallaght was once largely rural. It was developed as a town in the 1960s, but without adequate facilities or job prospects. Last year, a survey by a group of principals, describing themselves as the Deis Cluster Advocacy Group, found that nearly half the primary schoolchildren in some of Dublin's most socio-economically disadvantaged communities, in areas such as West Tallaght, Ballymun, and Dardale, have suffered major personal trauma. This includes homelessness, the loss of a close family member, or witnessing a violent death. This year, a school in Tallaght nearly shut down when funds earmarked for schools in socio-economically disadvantaged communities were cut.

Over time, expanding housing estates in Tallaght have accommodated Indians working in the Information Technology sector. The availability of nursing jobs at the Tallaght University Hospital has led to a surge in the Indian population. Tallaght became home to Ireland's first Saravana Bhavan outlet in April this year.

It is the open area surrounding Tallaght's mall where Indians have suffered violence at the hands of teenagers, said Anil (name changed), who lives in the apartment complex where the victim of the July 19 attack was staying.

Anil has been living in Ireland for over a decade. Instead of walking to the grocery store, he now takes his car. "Teenagers hang out there on Friday and Saturday evenings. Indians here have been advising each other to only step out in groups. The miscreants are sometimes as young as 10 years. They are arrogant, because nobody is teaching them to behave differently," he said.

Pradeep, who has lived in Ireland for eight years, bought a flat in Tallaght two years ago. His wife Radhika joined him later. In the last three months in particular, the couple has been hearing about violence against Indians in the neighbourhood. "We have met nurses who were attacked with water guns while returning home from work. The boys who attacked them were quite young," Radhika said. She added that the girls accompanying the boys are often seen making videos of these scenes and laughing.

### A string of attacks

Since July 19, there have been many similar attacks in Dublin. Lakhvir Singh, a taxi driver, was



The protesters walked from the city hall to the gate of Leinster House, the seat of Parliament, in Dublin. PRIYANKA BORPUJARI

attacked by his passengers on a Saturday night with a beer bottle that left his face bleeding. Data scientist Santosh Jadav put up a post on LinkedIn saying he was attacked outside his home and suffered a fractured cheekbone. The Irish media reported that Laxman Das, a sous chef, was attacked one morning by three men who also stole his e-scooter and wallet. The media also reported that in Waterford, three hours south of Dublin, six-year-old Nia Naveen was punched on her face, hit by a bicycle on her private parts, and told to go home by a bunch of older boys, when she was out playing. Except for Santosh, all the victims are reportedly naturalised citizens.

In these cases, while complaints were allegedly filed with Gardai Síochána (the Irish police), no arrests have been made yet. WhatsApp groups have been abuzz with stories of being told off by the Gardai when the attackers are teenagers.

Many also complained about how the Indian Embassy in Ireland has largely been non-responsive. It was only on August 1—two weeks after the violence in Tallaght and after similar incidents—that the Embassy issued a travel advisory saying Indians living in Ireland must "take reasonable precautions for their personal security and avoid deserted areas, especially in odd hours". The local media too reported on these attacks and mentioned the protest march in Dublin.

That march lasted close to two hours with speeches from local politicians, a few Indians and trade union leaders. Nine Indians said that this was the first demonstration they had participated in. A few men wore neon vests to indicate that they were volunteers keeping everyone safe.

Nithya Kothemmaril, a PhD researcher, has attended several anti-racism marches in Dublin. She chose to live on her university campus for safety. "But recently, two young boys sprayed me with water. I was shocked," she said. "But what shocked me more was that a white woman walking near me did not say anything. I was stressed all day that this had happened on campus."

Most of the Indian diaspora groups gathered together only for cultural events, Nithya rued. "This is unlike the black community that gets together to discuss issues of justice. Given the big number of Indians in Ireland, their participation in the march is rather low," she said.

### Fearmongering

In April 2024, Ireland's estimated population was 5.38 million, crossing the 5 million mark for the first time since the 1840s. The Central Statistics Office found that more than 1 lakh people had migrated to Ireland between 2021 and 2024. Now, 15.5% of the country's population are citizens of other countries.

Attacks on tourists, as well as targeted racist attacks, have risen in recent years. In 2020, George Nkencho, a young black man who had allegedly been suffering from mental health issues and had threatened people with a knife inside a shop, was killed by Gardai. The incident galvanised the Black Lives Matter movement in Ireland.

"During the pandemic, the far-right grew on the back of the anti-vaccine movement," explained Ruth Coppinger, the Teachta Dála (Member of Parliament) from Ireland's Socialist Party. "The shock that came with the pandemic led to an increase in anti-authoritarian sentiment. The Internet has allowed the far-right to portray migrants as criminals and people are believing this." In recent times, several politicians have won local elections riding on anti-immigrant rhetoric, by claiming that migrants have been prioritised for social housing and health benefits. Last year, a planned asylum centre was torched thrice in Coolock in north-east Dublin.

It was allegedly online rumours that led to riots in Dublin on November 23, 2023, following the stabbing of children outside a primary school in Parnell Square, a multicultural area. Rumours began to fly online about the identity of the attacker and members of the far-right urged people to take to the streets. The hashtag #IrelandIsFull went viral. That evening, a large crowd gathered in the area, vandalising shops and vehicles, and assaulting Gardai personnel. Eyewitnesses described the rioters as youth in their early 20s. By July 2024, up to 49 people, including several wo-



The attackers were teenagers, whose frontal lobes haven't been developed yet. They have learnt the knife culture, and are influenced by online misinformation

**JENNIFER MURRAY**

Resident of Tallaght who rescued a man who had been assaulted

men, were arrested in connection to the riots. No leader was booked for spreading rumours.

According to Darragh Adelaide, a councillor from the People Before Profit party, the youth wing of the far-right National Party has been specifically targeting young men who feel alienated. Darragh grew up in the working-class area of Clondalkin in the west of Dublin, which is now his political constituency. He has seen the area grow over the years, with people from different countries living there. At the same time, austerity cuts in the past few years have impacted single-parent families and access to education, he said.

"There have been times when buses have refused to ply on the streets in Clondalkin because of anti-social behaviour. The dropout rate is high, and fascist leaders prey on people for petty jobs. The far-right has somehow conveyed the idea of scarcity and the government has been silent on this," Darragh said. Growing up with a Nigerian father and an Irish mother, he said racism always existed in Ireland, but it was never this violent.

### A change in the system

During her speech at the protest on July 26, Ruth acknowledged the labour shortage, and blamed the government for bending backwards to accommodate people from Ukraine fleeing from the war, even as the number of homeless people in Ireland has been steadily increasing each year.

However, law and order measures alone won't solve racism, she said. "When people from different countries began to come here 25 years ago and faced racist slurs, Gardai would dismiss them saying this can happen to anyone. We have a history of denying people's experience of racism by gaslighting them," she said.

This year, a study by the Irish Network Against Racism reported how people of African descent and Brazilians experienced discriminatory policing, racial profiling, and a lack of trust in Gardai. Fear of not being taken seriously, potential repercussions, and previous negative experiences have deterred many from reporting crimes. Darragh said that while the government wants to bestow more power to Gardai, it is not using the power it already has to combat hate crimes.

On August 22, while speaking at a graduation ceremony, the Garda Commissioner, Drew Harris, said that the recent attacks on Indians are being driven by racism, criminality, and the targeting of vulnerable people.

Feljin Jose, a councillor for the Green Party, who moved to Ireland from Kochi in Kerala at the age of nine, emphasised the importance of reporting crimes to Gardai. "Many people are not aware of how the system works and how to respond when a crime takes place. A person must go to the Garda station and insist on filing a statement. However, there is often no evidence. When juveniles are involved, it becomes complicated. There is a lot more leniency towards them."

He explained how such violence picks up during school vacations and during long evenings. "The people committing such crimes are almost always from disadvantaged groups. There are very little youth resources and investments being made in something that could be productive for children. Even if there are such investments, change will take time," he added.

Immigration consultant Senthil Ramasamy, who has been living in Ireland for 25 years, said that he had sent emails about the recent attacks to various Ministers and the Garda commissioner. The Minister for Justice, Jim O'Callaghan, responded mentioning the government's policy on crimes committed by youth. Community-based youth crime prevention initiatives attempt to divert young people at risk of being involved in criminal behaviour. After a few steps of investigation and recommendations, an offender is referred to the Garda Youth Diversion Programme. Repeat offenders are investigated separately, and the Director of Public Prosecutions decides if a person should be charged.

Jim also told the media, "Regrettably, very many of the offences appear to be perpetrated by persons under the age of 18 and that does pose a particular challenge for us within the criminal justice system, to ensure that individuals who are under 18, who commit criminal offences, are brought before our courts, and face sanction."

### Legislating hate speech

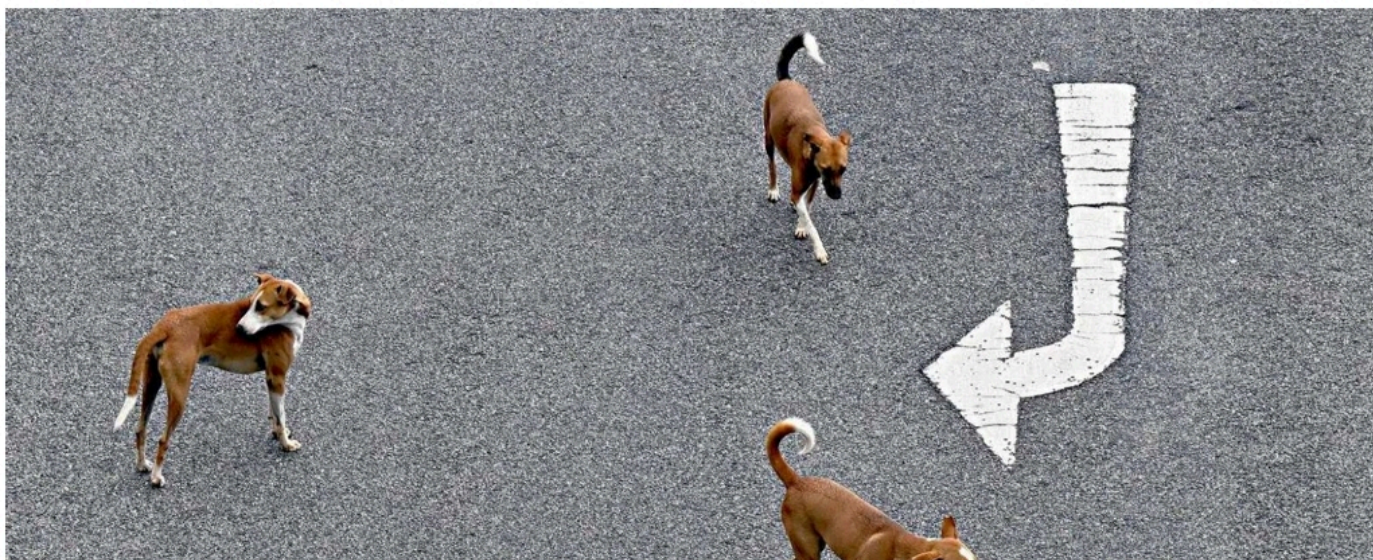
There are also no provisions to legislate hate speech, which compounds the problem. In May, the European Commission suggested that Ireland was failing to comply with European Union rules on combating racism and xenophobia.

On August 11, a delegation from the Federation of Indian Communities in Ireland and India Council met with Tánaiste (deputy Prime Minister) Simon Harris. They demanded a deeper engagement between Gardai, local leaders, and youth outreach organisations to address the racially motivated violence, as well as a review of the juvenile justice framework to ensure that serious violent behaviour, including hate-motivated actions, does not go unchecked.

Meanwhile, Jennifer is being felicitated by different groups of the Indian diaspora. "I am just a mam (mother) who helped an injured man," she said. "We don't want to believe our own people are capable of this. They do not represent the Ireland that I want my children to grow up in. We have been foreigners in other lands in the past, and our people too faced discrimination. This is our opportunity now as Irish people to make others feel safe in our presence."

Priyanka Borpujari is a freelance journalist based in Dublin

## KARNATAKA



**Who let the dogs out:** The Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike's 2023 dog census has estimated the city's stray dog population at 2.79 lakh, a 9% drop from 2019 when the count was 3.1 lakh. SUDHAKARA JAIN

# A dog's life in the city

Animal Birth Control, microchipping, and feeding programmes form part of the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike's plan to strengthen the co-existence of humans and canines in the city. But activists are not on board with all of these plans, writes **Chetan B.C.**

**I**n August 11, a Supreme Court Bench directed Delhi's local authorities to remove stray dogs from the streets of the national capital, a move that sparked nationwide debates over the right approach to deal with these animals.

The ruling came even as discussions on "dog menace" had gripped Bengaluru following incidents of dog bites. A 68-year-old man, Seethappa, was mauled to death by a pack of stray dogs in northern Bengaluru's Kodigehalli. Days later, two girls were bitten by stray dogs inside Dr. B.R. Ambedkar School of Economics University on the Jnanabharathi campus of Bangalore University in West Bengaluru.

Following the fatality, the Karnataka Lokayukta had also pulled up Bengaluru's civic body. However, the directive was centered on curbing aggression in stray dogs by confining and monitoring them for a few days in well-maintained kennels before releasing them.

## Bengaluru and dog bites

Delhi recorded 25,210 dog-bite cases in 2024, 17,874 in 2023, and 6,601 in 2022. Although smaller than Delhi, Bengaluru recorded 13,831 dog-bite cases in the first half of this year, according to Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) data. Of these, 3,472 cases involved pet dogs. Last year, the city logged 26,532 cases, including 8,000 from pet dogs (see graphics for previous years).

Officials say that the numbers may appear alarming, but context reveals otherwise. Before the

pandemic, in 2019-2020, the city reported 42,818 cases. A stronger Animal Birth Control (ABC) programme introduced after 2019 reduced the cases to 22,945 in 2023-24.

"The rise in 2024-25 is largely because of streamlined reporting. Since dog bites are now notifiable, cases are recorded more diligently than before," explained a senior BBMP Animal Husbandry officer.

Reports of a spike, presented without analysis, alarmed the public. Coupled with that, the Supreme Court's judgement echoed in the Karnataka Legislative Council, where some members urged the State government to seek a similar directive. However, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah batted for a more "humane approach."

## BBMP's approach a model?

The BBMP's comprehensive plan to address the issue involves ABC, microchipping, and feeding programmes. Activists and veterinarians believe this could serve as a "model" for other States.

Even before the Chief Minister's reassurance, the BBMP Animal Husbandry Department, headed by Special Commissioner Vikas Sularkar Kishor, had chalked out a detailed plan earmarking ₹60 crore exclusively for stray dog management in 2025-26, according to data accessed by *The Hindu*.

## Animal Birth Control

In Delhi's case, the Supreme Court pinned the blame on local authorities for failing to run robust ABC programmes, which involve capturing dogs, sterilising them, and releasing them in the exact location from where they were picked up.

Hemant Kumar Agrawal, a paediatrician and animal rights activist, emphasised the significance of sterilisation, not just in controlling breeding, but also in reducing hormonal changes that can trigger aggression in dogs.

The importance of sterilisation was reflected



We have an action plan, including establishing veterinary hospitals in all eight zones. This will not only strengthen the ABC programme but also offer wider benefits

**VIKAS SULARKAR KISHOR**, Special Commissioner, BBMP Animal Husbandry Department

in the BBMP's 2023 dog census. The survey estimated Bengaluru's stray dog population at 2.79 lakh, a 9% drop from 2019 when the count was 3.1 lakh.

Chandraiah, Joint Director, BBMP (Animal Husbandry), attributed the decline to the ABC programme gaining momentum from 2019 onwards.

Between 2020-21 and 2023-24, an average of 50,478 dogs were sterilised and 88,666 received anti-rabies vaccination annually. In 2024-25, sterilisation fell to 35,891, though vaccination numbers held steady at 88,572.

The slump in sterilisation had two main reasons. First, the BBMP suspended the licence of an NGO involved in sterilisation after a botched surgery, which led to the closure of three ABC centres in Yelahanka, Mahadevapura, and R.R. Nagar. Second, infrastructure shortcomings coupled with stricter Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) laid down by the Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI) slowed operations.

## Infrastructure issues

The SOPs require dogs undergoing sterilisation to be monitored for at least four days post surgery. With Bengaluru's current capacity limited to 550 dogs, the BBMP can manage only that many surgeries every four days. Additionally, a shortage of veterinarians and the difficulty of catching dogs have restricted sterilisation to 150 to 200 surgeries daily.

At present, the city has only six ABC centres and five companies with 23 teams carrying out surgeries.

## Five-in-one vaccination

In addition to Animal Birth Control and Rabies Vaccination (ABCRV), the BBMP has also pioneered the use of DHPPL, a five-in-one vaccine protecting dogs against distemper, hepatitis, parvovirus, parainfluenza, and leptospirosis, in addition to rabies.

The civic body also follows a "ring vaccination" strategy. When a rabies case is confirmed, all dogs in contact with the infected animal are vaccinated. In Bengaluru, 114 rabies-positive cases were reported in just six months, 13 less than last year, according to data.

"An increased awareness of our helpline has led to more reporting, which is a positive sign," said Chandraiah. He said it helps their larger cause of effective detection of positive cases to curb further spread of the disease. It is to be noted that rabies can spread across species.

Vikas told *The Hindu* that the BBMP is working to expand infrastructure and manpower. "We have an action plan, including establishing veterinary hospitals in all eight zones. This will not only strengthen the ABC programme but also offer wider benefits," he said.

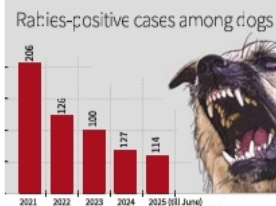
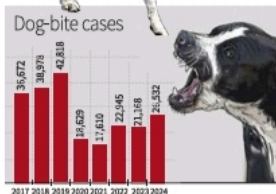
The BBMP is mulling over requesting veterinary colleges to involve graduates in ABC operations, possibly linking their degrees to performing a set number of surgeries. "This would boost manpower and vaccination coverage," he explained.

The BBMP is also considering reintroducing the Capture-Neuter-Vaccinate-Release (CNVR) technique, where dogs are captured, treated, and released within 24 hours.

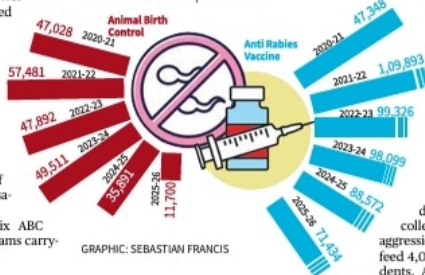
## Activists oppose move

However, activists have opposed the move, warning it risks the lives of dogs that develop post-surgery complications.

Despite these challenges, the BBMP reported progress, completing 11,700 surgeries and vac-

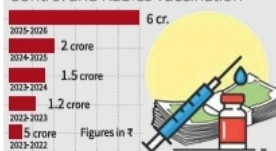


## Vaccination and Animal Birth Control accomplishment

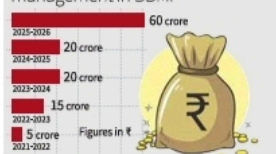


GRAPHIC: SEBASTIAN FRANCIS

## Budget allocation for Animal Birth Control and Rabies Vaccination



## Budget allocation for stray dog management in BBMP



inating 71,434 dogs in just four months (April-July) this year. To ease vaccination efforts, feeders were roped in to help catch dogs, a move that worked well. The BBMP hopes to cover 2 lakh dogs this year.

Yet, concerns remain. Activist Arun Prasad argued that AWBI rules are often flouted, especially the requirement to release dogs at the same location where they are picked up for. Relocation, he warned, often triggers aggression as unfamiliar environments cause fear.

Vikas admitted some unintentional relocations occurred, but insisted it was not deliberate.

"Even when released in their own area, anxious dogs sometimes run away, creating the impression of relocation," he explained.

Arun also stressed the need for wider vaccination, pointing out that more than a lakh dogs miss out on annual anti-rabies vaccination (ARV). While an average of 88,666 dogs are vaccinated annually, Bengaluru has 2.7 lakh strays, meaning thousands go unprotected while others are re-vaccinated unnecessarily.

To fix this, the BBMP has allocated funds for trap cages, enabling feeders to help catch dogs during sterilisation and vaccination drives. Microchipping is also planned to prevent duplicate vaccinations and track a dog's location.

## Microchipping

Currently, the BBMP relies on photographs to identify vaccinated dogs, a flawed system with no proper records. Microchipping will store details of vaccination history and location, helping to prevent relocation errors, explain BBMP officials.

The civic body is preparing tenders worth ₹3.23 crore for the project.

Arun, however, warned of possible health risks for dogs. He claims that the microchip may move in the dog's body, possibly leading to unforeseen diseases.

Officials defended the plan, noting that pilot tests showed no side effects. "The chip is just 5-6 mm, injected under the skin near the neck. It stores data such as vaccination details and location," a BBMP officer explained, adding that only five companies in India are eligible to execute the project.

While Shimla experimented with colored QR codes, the BBMP officials dismissed the idea, saying dogs quickly remove collars, often with the help of other dogs, rendering the investment useless.

## Feeding programme

To address aggression caused by hunger, the BBMP has launched a feeding programme.

Hemant Kumar explained that many bites occur when dogs feel threatened or are hungry. With garbage dumps shrinking owing to better waste collection, food scarcity has triggered more aggression. Vikas said the ₹2.88-crore project will feed 4,000 dogs in areas with frequent bite incidents. As of August 18, two contractors have come forward to participate in the tender.

Criticism arose over the inclusion of chicken rice in the meals, but the BBMP clarified it was cooked and provided for protein.

Rashmi D'Souza, former Karnataka Animal Welfare Board member, explained that only raw flesh poses a danger by triggering wild instincts in dogs. However, the BBMP is providing cooked chicken, which she noted could be a benefit for the dogs.

"We urgently need to curb meat shops feeding stray dogs because raw flesh can evoke wild instincts in dogs. The BBMP should issue stern warnings to such shops about this and caution them of revoking licences," she said.

The BBMP also plans to launch an "Each One, Feed One" campaign to promote citizen participation in feeding dogs ethically.

Hemant Kumar stressed that public awareness is vital, as cruel acts by humans often provoke fear-driven bites from dogs. To this end, the BBMP is considering awareness campaigns across schools, buses, metro announcements, and bus shelters.

By rolling out multiple projects, the BBMP is attempting to address the root causes of the dog menace which are hunger, improper ABC implementation, and vaccination.

Activists believe that the plan is comprehensive, except for the microchipping programme, and could serve as a possible model plan for other States if implemented effectively. Yet, they warn that plans must not remain on paper.

"Given the BBMP's reputation, many assume funds will be misused. Implementation is key to building true co-existence and reigning hope among people," said Hemant Kumar.

In sharp contrast, the Supreme Court, in its August 11 directive, stated, "We are conscious and sensitive of co-existence. The idea behind co-existence is not the existence of one's life at the cost of the other."



# UTTAR PRADESH



## The weight of being a mango man

A worker carrying a crate of freshly plucked Chausa in Raipur village, Saharanpur district, Uttar Pradesh. BY MOORTHY

In Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh's second-largest mango producing district, farmers face multiple issues: instability in prices after COVID-19 lockdowns, overuse of pesticides and plant growth regulators that diminish the quality of fruits, and the control of middlemen over the market, finds **A.M. Jigeesh**

**R**ao Anwar, 40, and Rao Ahsan, 36, are two farmers in Uttar Pradesh's Saharanpur district who are trying their luck at preserving their grandfather's mango orchard, which they say is over 100 years old. Anwar has a graduate degree and Ahsan an MBA. Ahsan was working in Punjab with the Milk Marketing Federation until just before the COVID-19 pandemic hit. He joined the family vocation hoping that mangoes, one of the most popular fruits in the world, would help him survive. But things were not as easy as he imagined.

The Raos took over the orchard about 10 years ago from their father. According to them, this year, "the rate was much lower than last year and consumption was also poor". They are fourth-generation horticulturists from the district known for the sweetest Chausa, Dasherri, and Langda. Mangoes are indigenous to India.

One reason for the diminishing demand could be the look and taste of the mangoes now, Ahsan says. "Earlier, mangoes were bright, tasty, and sweet. Now that taste is missing, probably because of the overuse of pesticides and chemicals," he says. The mango season, which once extended through September, is now shorter.

Saharanpur is the second-largest mango producing district in the State. In 2022-23, U.P. had 3.19 lakh hectares of mango orchards and produced 45.78 lakh metric tonnes of mangoes. The cluster with the highest yield in the State is the Malhabadi belt, including Lucknow, Unnao, and Sitapur; the second cluster is western U.P., comprising Saharanpur, Bijnor, Meerut, Amroha, and Bulandshahr. Saharanpur has about 27,000 hectares of orchards and produces about 2.6 lakh metric tonnes of mangoes every year with an average yield of 18 tonnes per hectare.

The Raos complain that they "are getting just ₹8-10 for a kg of Dasherri". Another challenge is that for Chausa, they must bag the fruit to prevent blackening of its skin during the rains.

"Each bag costs ₹3.5 and the labour cost to cover each mango is ₹1.5. The retail price of Chausa for consumers today is ₹150. Farmers get less than ₹50. Traders are fixing the price without considering all these factors," Ahsan says.

The problems, they say, began over a decade ago and reached their peak during COVID-19. Now, farmers are considering their options.

### The cost of growing a mango

About 12 years ago, farmers started using a pesticide containing the chemical paclobutrazol, a plant growth regulator. "We were told that it would create a festival of fruits. No one informed us about its side effects. We got output. Trees that used to produce 100 mangoes started giving 300 mangoes. But after 6-7 years, we realised that the taste and size of the mangoes are compromised. Plants are now addicted to this chemical. Unless we use it, they will not yield," says Ahsan.

*Kharbuza daal kaa achha hota hai, aam paal ke achha hota he:* this is a popular belief in Saharanpur, meaning watermelons will be good if they are ripened on their own and mangoes taste better if they are ripened artificially. Ripening mangoes using calcium carbide is par for the course here. This overuse has resulted in the decrease of exports and consumers shifting to organic products. But for farmers to shift to organic production will take at least 10 years. Farmers are instead shifting to poplar tree plantations, re-

**Earlier, mangoes were bright, tasty, and sweet. Now that taste is missing, probably because of the overuse of pesticides and chemicals**  
**RAO AHSAN**  
Mango farmer in Saharanpur district, U.P.

placing mango orchards. Poplars are used in the plywood and wooden board industries, and the region has a lot of those units.

Saharanpur is a green belt. *Bagh baani* (orchard management) is the major source of income here. The soil is sandy and orchards do well. This district borders Haryana, Uttarakhand, and Himachal Pradesh. The area, called the Doab (two rivers), is sandwiched between the Yamuna and the Ganga. Traditionally, farmers grow varieties such as Gulab Jamun, Dasherri, Langda, Chausa, Malka, and Ratalul. Mangoes from here go mostly to Ludhiana and Delhi.

"My grandfather had told me when we were children that it was very difficult to maintain a mango tree due to the scarcity of water," Ahsan says. The irrigation system had not developed by then. "Out of 20 trees, only two used to survive. The situation changed with the arrival of grafting in the 70s," he adds.

Lakshmi Chand, 55, has been working for more than 30 years in the Raos' orchard. He takes care of the plants and packs the mangoes at the time of harvest for a daily wage, though he has been around since their grandfather owned the land. "Maintaining a tree is difficult. None of my (four) children do this work," Chand says.

Fifteen years ago, the Raos would get ₹15 for a kg of Dasherri. "If we add inflation, it should have been at least ₹40 per kg. The input cost has increased. We spend about ₹2,000-₹3,000 just on pesticides in a bigha (6 acres) of orchard. Traders are bullies," Ahsan says, adding that the government should ensure a good rate for their crops. "We need food processing industries here. We need cold storage."

### Mangoes of old

Haji Iqbal, who owns Rana Fruit Company in Saharanpur district's Mirzapur, has been a trader since 1991. He also manages orchards on contract and owns one too. He says traders are facing big losses too.

He remembers the time, about a decade ago, when diseases were minimal. "When I started

trading, mangoes were bigger and beautiful. Now, they start ripening earlier and are not sweet. Chausa looks good, but if you slice it, it doesn't look or taste the same," he says, blaming the overuse of pesticides.

When mangoes ripened naturally, the crop in Saharanpur would be ready to harvest 15 to 30 days after the Malhabadi belt. But Iqbal says now the harvest time across U.P. is almost the same.

"Earlier, we used to see good production in alternate years. Now, Cultar (a brand of paclobutrazol made by the Swedish company Syngenta) has increased production, but has impacted taste," he says, adding that COVID-19 changed the market dynamics.

Mehmood Hasan, another trader, too believes that Cultar has destroyed the mango market. "Cultar should be regulated," he says.

Qazi Nadeem Akhtar is the *shehr qazi* of Saharanpur, who takes care of all the religious responsibilities of the Muslim community in the area. He is also a bridge between the administration and the community, and himself owns orchards.

"The best part of Saharanpur is that when the rest of India stops producing mangoes, we can give you mangoes till September 15," Akhtar says. He adds that they have been growing the same varieties for too long and some research needs to go into developing new strains. He also wishes that there had been cooperatives in the area.

"One and a half million people here are dependent on agriculture. Out of this, a few hundred thousand people have mango orchards. If we come together, we can get substantial help from the government," he says. "Cooperatives can do away with contractors and farmers can decide the value of what they produce," he says.

### Advocating for scientific use

In the traditional way of growing a mango tree, it takes 20-25 years for it to begin producing mangoes. "Sowing a tree is sacred and protecting it is another pious process. We were taught that we don't destroy a tree even in a war," Akhtar says. He uses this example to say that orchards are now run more as businesses.

Rao Talha is a member of the Progressive Farmers Club, which the Horticulture Department started in Saharanpur to push for science-backed farming, which is against the overuse of any product. "Up to 95% of the orchards are gi-

ven out on contract now. That is a big problem. I started an online platform in 2022 to reach out to customers directly. I was able to get a very good price for all the varieties, but I could not scale it up. I used to get a lot of reorders. Customers were happy," Talha says. He now sells via Facebook and WhatsApp.

That year, he began sending mangoes from his orchard for Lucknow's Aam Utsav, one of the biggest competitions for mango farmers in north India. The Uttar Pradesh government organises it and the Chief Minister attends every year. "My mangoes came first in 2022, 2023, and 2024. This year, the dates were changed and we could not get that colour and taste for our mangoes," he says, adding that he has been managing orchards since he was in college. He joined a corporate job and ran businesses in between. He came back to the field during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Talha says bagging has helped in maintaining the regular taste of the mangoes. As a member of the Progressive Farmers Club, he is in constant touch with the 95-year-old research organisation, the Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR). He sends pictures to scientists in ICAR if there are problems in his orchard. "They give correct advice," he says.

### Managing mango farming

Pesticide-based farming is money-heavy. "The amount you spend increases every year, but if you adopt the latest techniques, things will change," Talha says. He talks about mango varieties developed by the ICAR, such as Arunima, Arunika, and Ambika.

"I had some space in between my mango trees. I planted a new orchard after my college studies in 2001. That orchard is ready now with these new varieties that are dwarf varieties bearing fruits every year. They can be planted in much less space. The yield is two to three times more than traditional varieties. I have planted the American varieties Tommy Atkins and Sensation this year," he says.

L.K. Kishwaha, who holds a PhD in plant pathology and is a senior scientist in charge of the ICAR-driven Krishi Vigyan Kendra in Saharanpur, says production and cultivation of Chausa is the highest among the varieties.

The biggest problem, he says, is how the farms are managed. As they are run by contractors and not farmers, there is the injudicious use of insecticides, pesticides, and fertilizers, he says.

"Some of the issues cannot be solved, but have to be managed," he says, referring to the careful use of pesticides. He too acknowledges that the overuse of plant growth regulators is an issue.

"Mostly contractors push this medicine. Cultar has resulted in the drying of trees and crops. We have asked farmers to prepare their orchards and use contractors to harvest, not manage the orchards. Now, only 50% of the farmers use contractors to manage their orchards. Earlier, it was 95%," he says, explaining how the scientists' campaign went from village to village. "We explained to them how managing their orchards on their own will help the trees," he says.

Gampal Singh, Saharanpur's district horticulture officer, echoes Kishwaha. He adds that the "government gives subsidies up to ₹30,000 per hectare for bagging".

Chowdhury Gajendra Singh, a 66-year-old farmer from the district, has had 80 bighas of orchard land for the past 55 years. "My father planted this, but I get permission, I will plant poplars instead. Poplars are so easy to manage and farmers are getting good prices too. I have started having mango orchards," he says.

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Rao Anwar (left) and Rao Ahsan at their orchard in Raipur village, Saharanpur district, Uttar Pradesh. BY MOORTHY

# TELANGANA



**A deadly tangle:** A technician with an internet service provider inspecting the tangled cables in Hyderabad's Ramanthapur, where five men were electrocuted as their chariot touched a sagging high-tension wire during the Krishna Janmashtami procession on August 17 night; and (below) a condolence poster of the five victims of the tragedy pasted in the area. **RAMANATHAPUR**

## Where wires hang low, and accountability even lower

Hyderabad's recent spate of electrocution deaths — eight lives lost in just two days — has exposed not just frayed wires but a frayed system. Safety audits are allegedly ignored, court orders remain on paper and temporary fixes pass for reforms. Power lines cut across multiple agencies, yet none claim full responsibility. **Naveen Kumar** and **Lavpreet Kaur** uncover how the city's electrical grid is more than a mess of dangling wires

**G**rief hangs heavy in the narrow lanes of Old Ramanthapur, a working-class suburb on the eastern edge of Hyderabad. Inside the Yadav household, every corner seems to echo with the absence of 21-year-old P.Krishna, — the only son in a family of daughters, the boy everyone relied on. Days earlier, his right arm was crowded with rakhis, tied lovingly by his sisters who will now have only that memory to clutch on to.

On August 18, Krishna, fondly known among his friends as "Diamond" had stepped out into the rain to fetch his father from the Janmashtami procession. Often seen in crisp white shirts, he had put on a yellow turban and scarf on the festival day. It was the first ever Krishna Shobha Yatra in their neighbourhood. Until now, locals say, the festival revolved around the traditional *utti* or *ut-savolam*, in which clay pots filled with butter or sweets were smashed by youths forming a human pyramid. The grand procession was meant to add visual flourish and attract youth to the celebrations.

By midnight, he and four others lay lifeless on the road. The nine-foot chariot they were pulling had brushed against a sagging high-tension wire near RTC Colony. The current tore through the men in seconds. Krishna died instantly, along with Rajendra Reddy (48) of Ravindra Nagar Colony, Srikanth Reddy (35) of Sharada Nagar, Rudra Vikas (39) of Habsiguda and Suresh Yadav (34) of Old Ramanthapur.

His sister Ramya, who had stayed back at home after Raksha Bandhan, remembers him urging her not to leave for her in-laws: "Just two months ago, he had planned my wedding down to the smallest detail. He assured me that though he is younger, he would always take care of our parents. No matter what [compensation] the government gives us, they can't bring him back."

"Within seconds, it was all over. My son had come to take me home in the rain. He wanted to help move the chariot," recalls Raghav Yadav, Krishna's father, his voice breaking. "He was our support. But he is gone."

The loss rippled across households. Rajendra Reddy's wife and two school-going children are left behind. Srikanth Reddy's teenage children must now grow up without the man they relied on. The morning after the incident, Suresh Yadav's family had returned to their native place with their infant daughter, their home in Ramanthapur locked and silent. Neighbours say he was the sole breadwinner.

Among the survivors was Armed Reserve head constable V. Srinivas (55), a thick bandage wrapped around his head and his chest still marked from the CPR that saved him. "I have been friends with Vikas, Srikanth and Rajender Reddy for over a decade. We even took photos together before the procession began. When the Gypsy ran out of fuel, we started pulling the chariot ourselves. I was holding it from the back when there was a sudden spark. I collapsed. The next thing I knew, I was in the hospital. I lived, but my friends did not."

Others injured included Ganesh (21) of Golnaka, Surva Ravindar Yadav (30) and Mahesh (27) of Old Ramanthapur. Mahesh has since been dis-

charged, but the rest are still undergoing treatment.

But Ramanthapur was not the only tragedy. Within 24 hours, Hyderabad saw two more fatal electrocutions. In DD Colony, about 2.3 kilometres from Ramanthapur, labourer Ram Charan Tej (18) died while erecting a 15-foot pandal for Ganesh puja, suffering a fatal head injury. The next morning in Bandlaguda, around 16 kilometres from Ramanthapur, Tony (21) and Vikas (22) died when the Ganesh idol they were transporting touched a 33-kv line. Their friend Akshay, 23, escaped with injuries.

Eight lives lost in less than 48 hours. Since January, more than a dozen people across Hyderabad and surrounding districts have died in similar accidents — a boy near an Eidgah ground in Khairatabad, two men pulling down a signboard in Habsiguda and workers tying banners or plucking mangoes near live wires.

The series of electrocution deaths jolted the government into action. Within 24 hours, Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bharti Vikramak, who is also the Minister of Energy, ordered a fast-track shift to underground cabling in Hyderabad. He also directed the removal of unauthorised cables from electric poles, warning of strict action against operators. The move echoed Chief Minister A.Revanth Reddy's earlier call for underground networks and followed Mr.Bhathi's study of Bengaluru's cabling model.

The Uppal police of Rachakonda booked a case of accidental death and started a probe. Meanwhile, IT Minister D. Sridhar Babu announced ex-gratia of ₹5 lakh for each of the bereaved families and said the government would bear the entire medical expenses of those injured.

Yet beneath the urgency of these announcements lies a more complicated reality. Hyderabad's skyline of poles and wires is the outcome of years of neglect, weak regulation and blurred

responsibility. "In a built-up city, undergrounding is disruptive and expensive," says architect Shankar Narayan. "Smart poles are a better alternative, where electricity, internet and other utilities are integrated. Along major roads, underground cables may work. But in narrow bylanes, smart poles, like those used in Japan, are easier to maintain and can even generate revenue if properly regulated."

He adds that the electricity utility could even generate revenue by regulating this. "Internet service providers string wires haphazardly on poles, and when they are cut, households are left without connectivity. Governments should involve planners and architects before rolling out such projects," he argues.

**A knee-jerk reaction**  
Instead, haste triggered fresh chaos. Telangana State Southern Power Distribution Company Limited (TSGSPDCL), reeling from criticism, began hacking down overhead cables across Hyderabad. In the process, it left lakhs digitally paralysed.

The Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI) called the abrupt cable-cutting move "indiscriminate and aggressive." Social media was soon flooded with photos of severed wires piled on pavements. Office work was stalled, students missed deadlines

and homes fell into sudden silence. "Without internet, all our high-end devices are just bricks," says Rahul Kumar, who gave up work to watch a movie with colleagues.

**A technician with a leading ISP**

College students, struggling on patchy mobile data, fumed. "I had a deadline for my project submission and missed it as there was no Wi-Fi. And they tell us Hyderabad is becoming a smart city," rues engineering student Sridhar.

Even daily routines were upended due to the blackout. "Our smart TV went blank. My daughter asked if the internet had gone on strike," says Arvind, a software engineer from Kukatpally.

A senior official in the Department of Electrical Inspectorate admits that Hyderabad's poles were never designed for the burden they now carry. "They were meant for power and service lines. Today they carry a messy bundle of electric and broadband cables, often indistinguishable from one another. Reckless pulling of network cables can disturb an electric one, and in some cases, even turn a data line into a conductor," the official avers.

The risks, he explains, build up slowly but fatally. Constant tugging and overloading weaken the poles, while the friction erodes the insulation on power lines. "Even without a direct fault, the way these cables are fastened and dragged eats into the lifespan of our network. It is a slow, invisible erosion of safety. A single break in sheathing or prolonged contact with a signal cable can unleash a lethal charge," he says.

Eyewitnesses in the Ramanthapur case recall seeing a dangling signal line brushing a high-tension wire — the moment the chariot became electrified, causing the five young men to collapse within seconds.

Such incidents, the official points out, under-

line not just technical flaws but the absence of clear oversight. Broadband operators, mostly private players, string lines across power infrastructure with little oversight. Permission is meant to come from both municipal authorities and the power utility, but in practice it is rarely sought.

According to him, both the Central Electricity Authority regulations and Indian Standard IS:1255, which lays down norms for the safe installation and maintenance of power cables, emphasise the need to keep signal and power cables separate to ensure safety and prevent interference.

Last year, the TSGSPDCL had issued directives to cable operators and internet service providers to remove unauthorised lines from electricity poles. But enforcement is weak.

"Broadband providers must be brought under a regulatory framework, with accountability equal to that of the power network. Unless their networks are supervised, monitored and shifted to safer routes, either physically away from the power network or into underground ducts, such preventable tragedies will repeat," he warns.

Meanwhile, internet service providers (ISPs) argue that they are being unfairly targeted. A field worker from a leading ISP says that operators already pay rent to use electricity poles — about ₹50 monthly per wire per pole — a cost that is passed on to customers as part of subscription fee. "Of a ₹3,500 subscription for six months, nearly ₹500 goes to the government as tax. When we are already paying rent, how can we be called unauthorised," he asks.

Under the current arrangement, he clarifies, the Electricity Department is responsible for maintaining both the poles and the cables. He also claims that optical fibre cables are insulated and safe. "We handle them with bare hands every day. There is no risk of current passing through."

He notes that the sheer demand for broadband has driven the proliferation of wires. "Sometimes 3-4 lines hang on a single pole, some times 10, depending on the area. We try to have as many wires as we can on a single pole to meet demand and cut costs," he says.

But the sudden cable-cutting drive has been crippling. "In one night, three truckloads of wires were cut from 5,000 poles in Ramanthapur alone. Across the city, more than 10 lakh users lost internet. Restoring those networks will take weeks and massive investment. But the government is turning us into scapegoats," he says.

Technicians on the ground describe an impossible workload. "People think we just plug a wire back in and it works," says a junior ISP worker. "After TSGSPDCL's cuts, we have to trace every line and redo the connections. Our customers are calling us nonstop, but the damage wasn't ours to begin with. We don't even know when we can restore service."

### Searching for safer streets

Even as operators complain of disruption, officials stress the need for deeper reforms. With the Ganesh festival days away, experts have flagged weak joints, low-grade festival wiring and risky pandal connections as potential hazards. Suggested safeguards include insulated connectors, isolating devices, regular safety audits, CCTV monitoring of power lines, and limits on idol height and structure.

In 2016, the Telangana High Court capped idol heights at 15 feet, but the order has remained largely on paper, with affluent organisers competing to stage ever-grandier installations. Official warnings have fared no better.

But the broader challenge is structural. Hyderabad's wires are not just a tangled mass overhead; they are entangled in bureaucracy, split between civic bodies, discoms, private operators and State agencies, with no single authority taking complete responsibility. For grieving families in Ramanthapur and beyond, however, debates over underground ducts, smart poles and regulatory gaps hold little meaning. Their plea is stark: no more lives should be lost to a system so dangerously unmanaged.







THE GOAN EVERYDAY

It is amazing how complete is the delusion that beauty is goodness  
Leo Tolstoy

# Questions linger on new roadmap to app-based taxis

The State government's decision to replace the proposed Transport Aggregator Guidelines 2025 with a new State Taxi Policy marks a notable change in stance on regulating the taxi ecosystem. Interestingly, for the first time, taxi stakeholders met face-to-face with legislators, including Chief Minister Pramod Sawant, Transport Minister Mauvin Godinho, Tourism Minister Rohan Khaunte, and other MLAs, marking a significant step towards aggregator reform.

A major positive outcome of the meeting was that the government acceded to the taxi lobby's demand to scrap the Transport Aggregator Guidelines, 2025, with the chief minister and the transport minister backing down from their firm stance. If we may recall, Godinho has been firm on moving ahead with the guidelines after consulting all taxi sections, while Sawant had recently spoken tough, saying, "We are ready to take any bold decision in the interest of the State. We are ready for criticism and backlash...we are used to it...but in the larger interest of the State and for future tourism, some decisions have to be made."

This change in approach may be motivated by the acknowledgment that imposing app-based aggregators in Goa without widespread agreement could lead to negative repercussions, including legal challenges, protests, or standoffs that could adversely impact tourism. The government's acknowledgement of concerns of taxi drivers and its commitment to consider their input suggest a strategic fallback, aiming to develop a policy that is both progressive and acceptable.

Another positive that emerged from the meeting is that a draft State Taxi Policy holds promise of factoring in the objections raised to the aggregator guidelines. The question is whether the policy will genuinely streamline fares and guarantee transparency, or simply satisfy the taxi lobby in the short term?

At the top, among the list of concerns, was the question of transparency, safety, and fair pricing. There were also worries over players like Ola and Uber eating into the business. And there were other issues like a lack of adequate connectivity, etc. The Transport Department had received 3,519 objections and 455 supportive suggestions, mainly from tourist taxi operators, after publishing the draft on May 21.

On the table, none of the key issues were resolved. There should have been some consensus on the twin issues of fares and outstation players. The taxi unions have historically opposed the entry of national players, as they contend that such platforms could lead to fare undercutting, jeopardising the financial stability of traditional taxi drivers. The million dollar question is, how is the policy going to be different?

There is uncertainty about whether this policy will truly tackle the underlying problems. The government's focus on 'collaborative solutions' and the establishment of a committee to handle grievances points to an intention to consider the interests of traditional taxis. However, a major challenge lies in balancing these concerns with the need to modernize and digitize the transport sector.

The meeting concluded with the picture remaining hazy: Can Goa maintain distinct regulations that support traditional taxis while also incorporating digital platforms? The government's readiness to potentially align pricing strategies with the demands of the taxi lobby may undermine the fundamental ideals of fair competition and transparency. The dedication to digitization and the aspiration to create a 'smart' Goa are commendable, but the same old challenges remain on the taxi front. If the obstacles are not addressed, the policy could end up being merely a theoretical concept rather than a transformative change.

## OPEN SPACE >>

### Outsiders taking over taxi business with political support

It is sad to see outsiders from other states slowly taking over the taxi business of Niz Goenkar, with backing from politicians. Recently, I booked a taxi from the Taj India Tours counter at Dabolim airport. After paying the fare, the driver forced me to pay Rs 50 extra at the toll gate. He did not even know the route to Chondor, and I had to guide him. Instead of thanking me, he demanded a tip for poor service. The taxi was unsafe, with scratches, a damaged boot, and water leakage that spoiled my luggage. The driver, from Karnataka, was talking on his phone in Kannada while driving. At the airport, I noticed many taxi drivers speaking in Kannada, showing how outsider groups are increasing. This is hurting local drivers. Are they being supported by vote banks by some MLAs, while Goans are ignored? Goan taxi drivers know English, Hindi, and Konkani, and they know Goa's routes well. They provide safe service to tourists. Outsiders, however, are demanding tips and looting travellers. Goans must support our taxi drivers, who are working hard to protect their families and our traditional business.

RONNIE DSOUZA, Chondor

## GST 2.0: Simpler, fairer, faster

The proposed reform aims to simplify compliance, reduce disputes, and transform GST into a fair, growth-driven tax system



SHAILESH HARIBHAKTI

>The writer is a futurist, governance evangelist, and sustainability pioneer

This Independence Day, from the Red Fort, Prime Minister Narendra Modi called for the next generation of the GST reform. His promise was simple yet transformative: fewer rates, simpler compliance, and a tax system that truly enables business rather than entangles it.

The vision is bold—moving from four major slabs to two basic rates (5% and 18%) and one special demerit rate of 40%—but the opportunity is even bigger. This is our chance to make the GST the gold standard of indirect taxation: simple, fair, comprehensive, and litigation-free.

As someone who has watched the GST evolve from its inception, I believe the moment has come to reset it on six foundational principles. Done right, this reform can not only ease doing business but also dramatically cut the crippling load of disputes clogging our tribunals and courts.

### 1. Two Basic Rates: Certainty Over Complexity

Multiple rates have been the single largest source of classification disputes. Moving to 5% and 18%, with a tightly ring-fenced 40% rate for luxury and sin goods, will end rate arbitrage and make compliance intuitive.

The new schedule should be locked to detailed HSN codes so there is no room for interpretational chaos. Publish an official "old-to-new" mapping so every taxpayer knows exactly where they stand.

### 2. No Exemptions, No Deductions

Exemptions sound good in theory but create cascading taxes and endless arguments. The better path is universal coverage and near-full input tax credit (ITC). We must prune the blocked-credit list to the bare minimum—only for true personal consumption. Every other business expense, from capex to services, should enjoy seamless credit.

### 3. Full Coverage: Bring Every Sector Under GST

We cannot leave out massive segments of the economy and then call the GST a unified tax.

- Fuels should come in stag-



es—ATF and natural gas now, petrol and diesel in due course—while guaranteeing states their revenue share.

- Electricity should be taxed at 5% with full ITC to remove cascading costs for industry.

- Real estate needs uniform treatment and ITC flow-through to cut hidden taxes on homebuyers.

Even alcohol for human consumption—now constitutionally with states—should be part of a long-term roadmap for true unification.

### 4. Ease of Assessment: From Policing to Partnership

The taxpayer interface must become frictionless. One return, one audit, all done through risk-based, faceless scrutiny.

Pre-filled returns should be the norm for all e-invoicing taxpayers, with auto-matching and tolerance bands to avoid trivial notices. Every query must have a standard checklist and a single authority—no parallel summons from the centre and states.

### 5. Quick Closure of Open Issues

The backlog of disputes from the early GST years is staggering. We need a one-time closure scheme—call it "GST Samadhan 2026"—waiving penalties and most interest for voluntary settlement of transitional mismatches, classification confusions, and inverted duty disputes.

The newly operational GST Appellate Tribunal must be mandated to dispose of all pending appeals within strict timelines. And for contentious sectors like online gaming, we must legislate a clean prospective base and offer a closure window for past liabilities.

### 6. Genuine Ease of Doing Business

Ease of doing business is not about

slogans—it is about the daily reality for millions of enterprises.

- Refunds must be paid within 30 days, with automatic interest if delayed.

- Taxpayers must be able to correct returns within a defined window without the fear of penalty.

- Anti-profiteering, now housed under the Competition Commission, should sunset for the new regime, freeing businesses to focus on value creation.

### The Prize: Growth Without Gridlock

If we adopt this six-pillar path, the GST can move from being a compliance burden to becoming an enabler of competitiveness.

With buoyant revenues—Rs 2.37 lakh crore in April 2025—we have the fiscal room to rationalise without fear of deficit blowouts. And with strong technology infrastructure, we can enforce compliance without stifling enterprise.

Most importantly, these reforms will cut the oxygen supply to litigation. Two rates, full credit, and comprehensive coverage will remove the interpretational fog that has consumed so much time, energy, and capital.

### This is a defining moment

Just as GST 1.0 united India into a single market, GST 2.0 can unite us in a single vision—of a tax regime that is fair, fast, and future-ready.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has thrown down the gauntlet; it is now for the GST Council, the centre, and the states to pick it up and act with the urgency the economy deserves.

A simpler GST is not just a tax reform; it is a growth reform. It is time to make it real.

— FPI

## THE INBOX >>

### Madkai shootout shows Goa's slipping law and order

The recent shootout in Madkai should serve as a wake-up call for the government and police. Goa has always been known as a peaceful State, but the increasing frequency of such violent incidents shows that our law and order machinery is slipping. The fact that bullets were fired on a busy stretch with no functioning streetlights only highlights the State's failure to ensure basic safety. While politicians are busy trading blame, the people are left to live with fear.

Safety of citizens cannot be reduced to a political argument. It is the government's duty to reassure Goans that the State remains under control, and not sliding into lawlessness. The police may have responded swiftly with naka-bandis and forensic checks, but real confidence will come only when culprits are caught and punished. Too often we hear promises of "strict action" after every crime, but little changes on the ground.

ROY FERNANDES, Porvorim

### Majority of BJP ministers not from BJP ideology

With the latest entry of Digambar Kamat into the BJP government, one must ask why party members are fine with this. A majority of ministers are not originally from the BJP—six are ex-Congress, one is an independent and one is from the MGP. Except for Chief Minister Pramod Sawant, almost all senior ministers are ex-Congress leaders. Ironically, the BJP itself had once condemned many of them as corrupt or tainted by serious charges like rape or involvement in riots.

Why then is the BJP High command giving preference to "outsiders" instead of loyal members who have long followed the party's core ideology? Do BJP members have any self-respect, and do

### 'Bonderam' as state festival

Today, August 23, the vibrant island of Divar comes alive as the Piedade Youth Association (PYA) is all geared up to host the much-awaited 'Bonderam Festival', the traditional flag festival of Goa, and celebrate 50 successful years of the association. The festival recalls the centuries-old land disputes between villages on Divar Island and the Portuguese colonial authorities, a time when locals would tear down flags to protest land claims. Today, the festival transforms this history into a joyous occasion with a colourful flag parade, a fancy-dress competition, and a traditional float parade. The festival features street dancing and music festivals, with bands and performers flocking to Divar Island. It is a significant event that showcases the rich cultural heritage and unique history of Goa and its people. Initially, it was only celebrated within the community, but today people from different parts of the country and the world visit Goa specially to attend this festival.

However, Bonderam Festival is not a state festival, but rather a popular and vibrant cultural festival. While the festival is not a celebration against Portuguese colonial rule in the sense of an anti-colonial uprising, it does originate from a period of tension and resistance related to the Portuguese administration's land policies. Given the historical significance of the festival, as it reminds one of the repressive rule during the Portuguese regime which lasted for 450 years, it would be in the fitness of things for the Goa government to declare Bonderam Festival as a state festival.

ADELMO FERNANDES, Vasco

they truly understand what is happening within their party?

ARWIN MESQUITA, Colva

### Anjuna still waiting for freedom from noise

This Independence Day, while the nation celebrated freedom, the residents of Anjuna and Vagator were denied their most basic freedom, the right to sleep. Once again, clubs and restaurants along the coastal belt blared music well past midnight, despite repeated complaints and clear laws prohibiting it. It is sad

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that locals must mark the occasion of our independence by preparing a candlelight protest, not against a foreign power, but against the deaf ears of our own authorities. The Noise Pollution Rules state that music must stop at 10 pm, yet enforcement appears optional when nightlife profits are at stake. Tourists may come and go, but residents live here every day. Their health, peace of mind, and dignity cannot be collateral damage in Goa's party economy. Last year, protests forced temporary action. Must citizens really take to the streets every August to remind the administration of its duty? True independence is not just political freedom; it is also the freedom to live peacefully in one's home. It is time for authorities to respect that.

SHERWYN C, Mapusa

### Old, tired choices

Ministerial changes and new appointments, including those of a CM, always have an interesting aspect: new faces and new backgrounds, as has been seen in the BJP's CM announcements in MP, Rajasthan and Orissa in recent times. However, the Goa government's reshuffle, bringing in a political elder and another BJP loyalist, seems to suggest that the party is tired, on the one hand, and has no new blood to infuse into its cadre here. The choice of cabinet minister also suggests that all is not well within the party, and now that the elections are less than two years away, it is trying to recover lost ground and get its act together. The truth is that the state's tourism is suffering, the cabbies are an unhappy lot, environmental concerns are mounting by the day, and illegal land is being regularised with an eye on the polls. The fact that the state has India's highest unemployment rate is unacceptable. But the current dispensation has no solutions. What a shame!

BRIAN DE SOUZA, Margao

THAT the Hyderabad Cricket Association (HCA) has been synonymous with everything that is detrimental to the image of the gentlemen's game is commonplace. It has reached such lows that the moment the name HCA crops up, out spring words like corruption, irregularities, shoddy club structure, outright defilement of the guidelines and reform regulations and making a mockery of Supreme Court rulings as regards governance and administration. Though, the Association has been in the news for all the wrongs reasons for several years now, its image touched the nadir when A Jagan Mohan Rao became its President using fraudulent means despite not meeting the qualification criteria. The last

# Ray of hope for a 'clean' HCA

two years have been marred by murky deals, ostentatious at the behest of Rao and his cronies. They were carried away in their blind belief that their whims and fancies would whittle away all through the ill-gotten tenure. It was this 'I can do no wrong' arrogance that saw them rub the shoulders of Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH) on the wrong side. The flashpoint of the IPL 2025 ticketing scandal that led to SRH management threatening to relocate their headquarters to outside of RGICs was without any doubt the beginning of the end of Rao's misrule. He and his men have been arrested on charges of forgery and fraud, a development that has been hailed by some 'genuine' former administrators.

Even as the players, administrators and support staff were getting worried at the gradual downside of the sport in Telangana and the massive loss of opportunities to the budding talent, a ray of hope came last month when the Telangana High Court appointed Justice P Naveen Rao as an administrator entrusted to oversee all HCA's affairs, including Rao's malpractices. Hopes of possible better days ahead were renewed a couple of days back when the apex court of the HCA took another step towards salvaging lost pride. The council appointed Imtiaz Khan as the interim Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Association. He comes with an impressive resume, who, if given a free hand, can hopefully remove the scars and blotches and take cricket on the right path in Hyderabad and the districts that come under HCA jurisdiction. A former state-level cricketer, who represented Andhra Pradesh in the U-19 and U-25 categories, and has played for Osmania University, Khan, no doubt, has better credentials than Ram Mohan Rao. Khan must

ensure unhindered day-to-day HCA functioning, implement the initiatives drawn up in the transformation package without compromising on transparency, professionalism. In effect he must strive to bring about a semblance of the professionally run reputation that the body enjoyed till a few years back.

Meanwhile, the interim CEO must make a deeper study of the allegations levelled by the Telangana Cricket Association (TCA), which ran a massive campaign for the 'corrupt' Rao's ouster and suspension of all office-bearers. In fact, this sustained campaign

# LETTERS

**Youth getting addicted to online betting**

THIS is further to your article that highlighted the alarming rise in online betting and gaming addiction among the youth. The concern raised in the Parliament by Dr K Laxman reflects the gravity of a problem that is silently taking a toll on the younger generation. What often begins as a form of entertainment quickly spirals into an uncontrollable habit, leading to financial loss, psychological distress, and in some cases, even deaths. The fact that suicide headlines in Hyderabad reported a 60 per cent surge in calls from betting addicts is a stark reminder that this issue can no longer be ignored. Glamorisation of betting platforms by celebrities and influencers further fuels this addiction. Stronger regulations, strict monitoring, and most importantly, awareness campaigns have to be prioritised. It is time society, policymakers, and families come together to address this menace before we lose a generation to screens and illusions.

Yashavi M, St Francis College for Women

# Opposition's costly chaos-Raga & Co swap debate for drama



**BOLD talk**  
V RAMU SARMA

## Rs133 crore wasted - who's the real paisa chor?

from their own benches. Second, it fosters unrest and instability, which they hope will erode public confidence in governance.



The results of this cynical game are plain. During the just-concluded monsoon session, the House functioned for barely 37 hours out of 126. Out of a total expenditure of ₹8189 crore, an estimated ₹133.5 crore of taxpayers' money was wasted. Who gave the Opposition this right? They claim to represent 50 per cent of the people — but did these voters authorise Rahul Gandhi, Akhilesh Yadav, Stalin, Mamata Banerjee and others to squander crores by shouting slogans instead of debating issues? Leaders, who lecture about accountability, should answer whether these rules apply to them. If they call the Prime Minister a "vote chur", should taxpayers not brand them "paisa chor" for wasting public money?

Their intention is not democracy; it is opportunism. Rahul Gandhi has no word of condemnation for the left hoisting the Congress flag in place of the national flag. Both Congress and CPM dismissed it as a "local issue". Is this their idea of patriotism? No responsible party in any democracy would tolerate such an act. Yet these are the same leaders who speak of Mohabbat Ki Dukan and claim the "Constitution is under threat".

They had no time to discuss at length the historic achievement of astronaut Subhash Shukla. That discussion was wrapped up in just 25 minutes — after which the Opposition rushed out to resume their protests on the streets.

The hypocrisy runs deeper. Congress has raised a stink about social justice, even demanding quotas in beauty contests. Yet, when the NDA nominated OBC leader C. P. Radhakrishnan for the Vice-President post, the Opposition ignored its

own rhetoric and instead fielded a candidate from a privileged community. This duplicity exposes the gap between what they preach and what they practice.

When citizens elect representatives, they expect their voices to be heard inside Parliament, not drowned out by street rallies. By undermining the sanctity of Parliament, the Opposition is not just insulting the institution but weakening democracy itself.

Worse still, there may be a more sinister design. The Opposition's shift from Sanad to Sadak is not merely a sign of electoral panic — though their fear of losing Bihar is evident. It may well be part of a larger playbook of disruption, possibly with foreign encouragement.

The world has seen how Washington engineered instability in Bangladesh, paving the way for regime change. Should we not be wary when Congress and its allies oppose that India will face "fire and storm" and when Mani Shankar Aiyer says that it could lead to another Bangladesh-like situation?

But India is not Bangladesh. Ours is a democracy that has weathered storms far greater — from the dark days of the Emergency to the horrors of 1984 anti-Sikh riots where in hundreds of Sikhs were killed and some burnt alive. Indira Gandhi once declared that the office of Prime Minister was beyond judicial scrutiny. Ironically, the same Congress now opposes the political reforms bill that makes all leaders, including the PM, accountable under law. Their selective outrage is nothing but a mask for political survival.

We have witnessed how former Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal brazenly declared that even if he were jailed, he would neither resign nor relinquish control, insisting he could run the administration from prison. Such a stance is nothing short of an insult to both the Constitution and the voters who elect leaders to govern responsibly. When a government official is arrested, suspension is

## Egoistic leaders and decline of moral values

PROPOSING 'Small people & big egos' (THI, August 22), inflated egos have assumed enormous proportions in Indian society. Scarce respect for elders and teachers, dearth of chivalry, disrespect for women and girls, arrogance at workplaces, road rage and mob instincts are some manifestations of inflated egos. These can be traced to the fat salaries that professional greenhorns draw, lack of motivational role models, irresponsible misdeeds by public figures like film personalities, politicians, teachers and elders within families. The most destructive fall out of this national disease is the destruction caused to the social fabric when people in responsible positions and offices like politicians, judges, doctors, scientists and teachers themselves fall to the disease.

Dr George Jacob, Kochi

## Uphill task ahead for Vijay

YOUR editorial "Will the Tamil public bless this hero with Vijay Bhava in 2026?" (Aug 22) appears to have a soft corner for TVK party founder Thalappathi Joseph Vijay. It is quite optimistic to state that he would be the winner in 2026 when superstars like Kamal Haasan and Rajinikanth have ended up as political ducks. Vijay's party became extinct with his passing away. M G Ramachandran and J Jayalalitha had tremendous charisma and ruled the political field for a while. The enterprising new entrant TVK must reckon with the undeniable pull of the firmly established DMK and AIADMK. There is a massive difference between reel and real roles in the world of politics.

N Ramalakshmi, Secunderabad

## 'Nephew' Vijay has miles to go

THE impressive crowd that 'nephew Vijay' (I call actor Vijay 'nephew Vijay' respecting his salutation of Chief Minister M.K. Stalin 'uncle Stalin') draws at his party conferences is not quite reflective of his acceptability as a leader capable of governing the state. What impact Vijay's foray into politics will have on the 2026 Assembly election is hard to figure out at this juncture. But we can say with certainty that his confidence that the state will see change of guard is misplaced. His fledgling party Tamizha Vettri Kazhagam formed on the strength of his huge fan base is no match to the DMK, which is indisputably in pole position. Vijay is free to entertain the fond hope that St. George Fort is his for the asking. The age-conscious 'young' leader, who is yet to outgrow his "hero" role in films, is a wishy-washy politician without a proclaimed ideology and new ideas to be rock-solid in the rough and tumble of politics, chart out a politics of the future and endure as a force to reckon with. Politics is a far cry from cinema. Politically earned by histrionics in films does not make a successful political leader. Vijay's odd mannerisms and his hyperbolic dialogues in real life do not assure us that he is cut out for a niche in politics. It is very conceited of him to compare himself with the Makkal Thilagam MGR. It is immature of him to compare himself to a lion on a public stage. It is a saving grace that Vijay has ruled out any tie-up, either open or hidden, with the 'fascist' BJP, as he puts it. He must be more vocal about his opposition to the Hindutva ideology and its espousal of virulent nationalism.

G David Milton, Maruthancode (TN)

thehansreader@gmail.com

# A blueprint for systemic reform in scientific temper across Telangana



ADAMA SRINIVAS REDDY

goden reflects systemic failures in science education—not just individual lapses.

Schools should be the crucibles of scientific inquiry but many function as certificate factories. In the two Telugu states, an exam-centric marketplace has eclipsed authentic learning. Science education has shrunk to memorizing formulae and mastering MCQ strategies. We celebrate IIT and IAS ranks but ignore the erosion of conceptual understanding and scientific values.

The consequences are stark. A 2017 IIT Bombay review found many top-ranked entrants struggling with basic physics and math. IIT Delhi's former director lamented students' lack of independent thinking. At IIT Hyderabad, a 2021 survey revealed that first-year students could not perform unscripted experiments. The Telugu states' industry feedback across the nation points to a system that rewards speed and tricks over reasoning and problem-solving.

Globally, science academies have responded with bold reforms. The Royal Society (UK) and the US National Academy of Sciences have reoriented science education around inquiry, modelling, and argument from evidence. Germany's Leopoldina invests in sustained teacher development. India's own academies have defended research integrity and warned against predatory publishing. These institutions align cur-



There is a need for a phased increase in education funding, urging the government to move toward global benchmarks and prioritise teacher development and laboratory infrastructure over superficial construction. TAS should demand that AI be used as a thinking partner in classrooms—requiring students to critique model outputs, justify reasoning, and revise based on evidence.

His declaration for membership in the Society stated: "I believe that knowledge acquisition happens only through human effort, and all problems must be faced with human ethical and intellectual resources without relying on supernatural powers."

Many scientists then were unwilling to sign—an unease that, arguably, still lingers. Ironically, the same Hyderabad that once championed science temper has become a hub of exam coaching, rote-driven corporate education, and dubious journals. Purposeful research in universities is rare; school and college laboratories are often on paper only.

In public life, evidence-based reasoning is scarce, critical thinking and questioning are subdued, and manufac-

tured consent thrives on social media. Education is reduced to markets and metrics rather than memory fades; and imported ignorance erodes rights and institutions.

To reverse this decline, TAS must play a pivotal role in driving a genuine paradigm shift in science education.

As a means to catalyse a genuine paradigm shift in science education, it must assume a proactive and strategic role—pressuring institutions, influencing policy, and modelling reform. It should insist that 25–40 per cent of curriculum time from middle school to undergraduate levels should be reserved for authentic laboratory and field investigations apart from fostering practical education with open-ended problems that cultivate inquiry and reasoning. Assessment systems must be overhauled to prioritise understanding across segments. TAS can lead such reforms in collaboration with SCERT, school boards, and universities to demonstrate feasibility and impact of such reforms.

To professionalise teaching, TAS should launch a year-long and all-encompassing science teachers fellowship, including spreading its reach to the district-level.

There is a need for a phased increase in education funding, urging the government to move toward global benchmarks and prioritise teacher development and laboratory

infrastructure over superficial construction.

TAS should demand that AI be used as a thinking partner in classrooms—requiring students to critique model outputs, justify reasoning, and revise based on evidence. TAS must push for the replacement of answer-only submissions with annotated notebooks.

Beyond the classroom, TAS must engage the public to strengthen scientific temper. It should host regular town halls on pseudoscience and data literacy, featuring citizen experiments that invite community participation. Science communication bootcamps must be offered to help teachers and students translate research for lay audiences, bridging the gap between academic knowledge and public understanding.

These are not optional enhancements—they are urgent interventions. TAS must move beyond its ceremonial role and become a catalyst that rewires incentives, practices, and culture across the education ecosystem.

By setting bold but workable standards and relentlessly advocating for reform, TAS can help Telangana transition from rote to reason, from performativity to practice, and from fear of being wrong to the courage to learn.

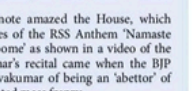
(The writer is a Chemistry lecturer and General Secretary of Society for Change in Education Telangana)

# BENGALURU ONLINE

## Deputy CM sings RSS anthem, stuns Assembly

BENGALURU: Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar, who is also the Congress state president, took everyone by surprise on Thursday when he sang the RSS anthem during a discussion in the state Assembly on the stampede near Chinnasswamy stadium, which claimed the lives of 11 people.

A sudden musical note amazed the House, which heard the first few lines of the RSS Anthem "Vande Mātaram" as shown in a video of the proceedings. Shivakumar's recital came when the BJP legislators accused Shivakumar of being an 'abettor' of the stampede as he recited mass frenzy.



The opposition welcomed the anthem by thumping the table but there was an absolute silence in the Congress camp. The BJP legislator V Sunil Kumar quipped, saying, "Hope these lines are not removed from the records".

The Deputy CM also said he grew up with Home Minister G Parameshwara. To this, leader of the Opposition BJP R Ashoka reminded Shivakumar that he once said he wore 'RSS Chaddi'.

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

# THE ASIAN AGE

23 AUGUST 2025

## Parliament losing hallowed place in India's democracy

The statistics tell the tale best: Lok Sabha functioned for 30 per cent of its allotted time and Rajya Sabha 39 per cent. The Monsoon Session of Parliament was a virtual washout except for the discussion on Operation Sindoor which, though belated, was something the Opposition as well as the government may have wanted.

The pattern is no different from what it has been in the last 16 years since when the Opposition, be it the BJP-NDA back then against the UPA or the INDIA bloc now, has believed that demonstrativeness is the answer to the government's scornful attitude towards the legislative wing of a parliamentary democracy.

The net result is that India has become far more of an electoral democracy than a functioning parliamentary democracy. A government assumes power for five years in which time it sees very little need for addressing the need for meaningful discussions in the legislature and the Opposition takes to disrupting the proceedings except in the few debates that it would like to participate in, like the Union Budget.

Every issue becomes the medium of disruption of legislative functioning even as bills are passed routinely without any discussion, including laws of some import like the Indian Ports Bill and the Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Bill.

Opposition to three amendment bills hit a high as they contained provisions that are a threat to the very foundations of democracy in a throwback to the dark days in the wake of the Emergency of 1975-77. There were serious issues like the SLR exercise by the Election Commission of India that seemed to run into excesses of omission of voters rather than an inclusive view of an Indian adult's right to vote. Instead of leading to discussion in a format that the Treasury benches and the Opposition should agree upon, the poll rolls become a vehicle for the government hid behind the specious reasoning that the EC is an autonomous body and hence cannot be discussed in Parliament.

The month-long Monsoon Session was the quintessence of the country's loud democracy in which traditions and decorum of the legislature mean less. Polarised politics has veered to such an extreme that the Opposition did not even deem it fit to share, at the end of a session, a cup of tea with the Speaker and the Prime Minister in the former's chamber, as was a custom built from days when politics was not so rife with division and discord.

The heart of legislative business must lie in issues being discussed in detail before bills are passed so that flaws may be ironed out and laws may stand up for prompt execution. The fact that 12 bills were passed in the Lok Sabha and 15 in the Rajya Sabha without much serious discussion points to how Parliament sessions have been reduced to long working vacations for MPs whose salaries and perquisites are not subject to any kind of scrutiny.

The routine promises made in the all-party meeting held ahead of every "stormy" session of Parliament are quickly forgotten as this strategy of saying and acting loudly in orchestrated defiance of procedure to simply disrupt proceedings has become the norm. This is a parliament of voters rather than an inclusive view of an Indian adult's right to vote. Instead of leading to discussion in a format that the Treasury benches and the Opposition should agree upon, the poll rolls become a vehicle for the government hid behind the specious reasoning that the EC is an autonomous body and hence cannot be discussed in Parliament.

The quality of debates has also descended into personal slanging matches, so much so that standards have plummeted beyond redemption since the halcyon days when MPs took their duties and responsibilities seriously enough to bring their concerns and their ideas to the Houses of Parliament. The very model of our democracy has been altered, courtesy the ruling coalition as well as the Opposition.

## Stray dogs order by SC welcome

Dog lovers are ecstatic. The order to send stray dogs away forever to city or town-run shelters has been modified. Strays are still to be picked up, sprayed, vaccinated and let free in their own territories. And the new order also calls for designated feeding spots for strays to be run by the authorities where the people should also be allowed to chip in.

The old order by a two-judge bench may have been well-intentioned in considering the dangers that a rising number of strays in urban settings pose. But the blanket banishment of all strays into pounds seemed to cruel to the domesticated creatures that have been humankind's good companion for about 6,000 years.

The significance of the orders of the three-judge bench lies not only in its sympathetic view of dogs as creatures that are very territorial but also in making the order applicable to all of India so there is no confusion over who oversees tackling this messily urban problem. It also makes sense that the more ferocious and rabid dogs should continue to be kept confined but who should take this call has to be defined clearly.

Metro and municipal corporations must lean on medical advice from expert veterinarians on certifying which (aggressive and rabid) dogs are to be permanently stationed in pounds, but in humane fashion. There was a recent instance of a pet Pitbull doing a man to death in Chennai. Reacting to the incident, rules for muzzling and leashing of pet dogs in public places were brought in. But, in a country whose people are notorious for disregarding or disobeying laws, enforcement alone won't bear fruit. There must be voluntary action from pet owners to ensure their dogs don't attack people and give all dogs a bad name.

Given the pressures brought by a powerful lobby of animal and pet lovers, the Supreme Court acted quickly to undo a cruel order that tried to impose an impossible condition on all stray dogs. Much needs to be done from here to ensure that the public are safe from being chased and bitten by strays and pets.

THE ASIAN AGE

KARUNA MEHTA

Kolko

B. Srinivasan

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Farrukh Dhondy  
Cabbages & Kings



"Sitting in the yard we fantasised About the shapes of floating clouds Imagining they were things disguised Or creatures covered by white shrouds You asked me for my favourite shape I said my favourite shape was you It wasn't a joke, a verbal escape It was a honest answer — and happened to be true!"

— From Moo Barrocks, by Bachchao

O n Friday the 15th of august my cup overflows — no, gender reader, not with generous presents of white wine, but literally scores of WhatsApp and email communications on two "scores" — the first being the anniversary of Indian Independence and the second which coincides with it, albeit only for the next three years, the Parsi New Year.

Why just three years and not forever? I'll tell you just that, when I've recounted two memories of India's Independence Day. It was 1982, I lived with my sister and two maiden aunts in Pune. My grandmother, my spinster aunts' mum, had died long since, but they in their inimitable compassion had brought my grandmother's elder sister from Bombay to pass her old age in their household.

This grand-aunt of mine was called Aalaan (the "n" being the Indian nasal sound and not "n" as in knot) masi (Gujarati for "mum's sister"). She was

a troublesome old personage having lived most of her life in Parsi housing estates endowed by the rich who commuted in Bombay. My aunt's house was a divided bungalow of five rooms, which followed one another and one had to pass through successive ones to get to the next one — so not much privacy.

The big wardrobe with the dressing mirror for a door was in my aunts' bedroom where Aalaan masi was also accommodated. On that day, 15th August 1982, my sister Zareen stood in front of the mirror and tied her blouse and festive sari. It was early morning, Aalaan masi was curious.

"So whose wedding is it, you're going to this morning?" she asked in Gujarati.

"It's not a wedding", Zareen replied. "I have to give a speech in college for Independence Day. So have to dress up."

"What's Independence Day?" Aalaan masi asked.

"The anniversary of the day the British left India", Zareen said.

"What?" Aalaan masi was astounded. "The British have gone? Nobody told me!"

The innocence of fifteen years?

In school, whenever we sang the national anthem, with its in the office version, one with Jaya jaya jaya jaya hey, there would inevitably be a few voices which would continue with the first syllable of the words with which Tagore concluded his composition, which was "Bha..." From

Bharata bhagya vidaata. Incidentally, the orchestral conductor Malcolm Sargent once remarked that the national anthem ended with the most unusual and inconclusive cadence. Perhaps including Tagore's last phrase in the anthem would have been a more conclusive ending?

And so, to the other messages of goodwill and good wishes that arrived on 15th August wishing me happy Parsi New Year. Lots of "Navroz Mubarakats" from cousins, friends, nephews, nieces, etc. on WhatsApp group and then some.

The concurrence between this "Parsi New Year" and India's Independence Day won't last forever, but only till 2028, which is the next leap year. In 2029, "Navroz" will be celebrated on the 14th of August and then in 2033, it will occur on the 12th of August, and so on, receding one day relative to the Gregorian calendar every four years.

Absurd? Most definitely. But why?

The Parsi Zoroastrians in ancient Persia, apart from inventing God and trousers, celebrated New Year, very astrologically on the day of the vernal equinox — 20th or 21st of March. The New Year was called Jamshedi Navroz.

Then in 641 AD Persia was invaded by the reagent conqueror, the Arab, and the Persian Persians were defeated. The Persian armies of Yazdgerd III and established Islam as the state religion, imposing a tax on those Zoroastrians who refused to convert.

Perhaps a century later a whole population of

resisting Zoroastrians fled Persia and sought refuge in Gujarat, India. As aliens in Hindu India, they must have been natural for the priesthood of this community, now collectively called "Parsis" as they originated in "Pars" — Persia — to assume its leadership in religious, ceremonial and communal matters.

Then around the year 1254 AD, some leader of this priesthood neglected to add the extra day in the leap year. The celebration of the New Year amongst the whole community shifted to the 13th of March, and in the next four years to the 10th, and so on.

By my calculation around 1574 AD, this celebration of New Year coincided with January 1st, but only for four years. It then moved on to December 1st. In my boyhood I remember it was moving through the middle of September. To coincide again with Jamshedi Navroz, the movable New Year will have to traverse 148 days. Multiply that by four to get 148 leap years and Parsi New Year will be restored to the vernal equinox in the year 2037 AD.

A sect of the Parsis known as the "Fasilis", recognising the absurdity of the miscalculation, abandoned the itinerant New Year and restored the celebrated the vernal equinox.

My cousin's Parsi family are, very sensibly, of this persuasion. My parents' families were not. But what the hell — three New Years each year means three bouts of celebration? Cheers!

## LETTERS REGULATE GAMING

The Rajya Sabha's passage of the Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Bill, 2025, springs from deep social anxiety. But in its current form, the bill swings an axe where a scalpel is needed. Its blanket ban on real-money games risks pushing players underground, emboldening illegal offshore platforms and stifling innovation at home. The same ecosystem offers glimpses of transformative promise when governed with foresight. Take Dream11, once a modest fantasy sports startup. Today, it stands valued at over \$8 billion, employing thousands and contributing substantially to GST revenues. A thriving ₹60,000-crore online gaming industry supports over 50,000 jobs, drives GST collections, and attracts foreign investment. Its survival depends not blanket prohibition but nuanced regulation.

Vijay Singh Adhikari  
Nainital  
IMMATURE INDIANS

WILL BANNING online money games save India's youth? Perhaps. When 6 crore people are reportedly losing ₹20,000 crore annually, it's less a game and more a national crisis disguised as entertainment. The government's sledgehammer approach may dent tax revenue, but it aims to save young lives teetering on the edge of addiction. India isn't Silicon Valley — our youth often live with families, not in dorms of independence. Fantasy leagues and poker rooms have quietly morphed into debt traps. Sure, VPNs may resurrect the games in shady corners of the web, but this law is less about perfection and more about protection. After all, what's worth more — GST or a generation's sanity?

K. Chidanand Kumar  
Bengaluru  
STALIN'S HYPOCRISY

CHIEF MINISTER M.K. Stalin has termed the Constitution (150th Amendment) Bill, 2025, a threat to democracy. Yet he must recognise that this bill has its origins in Tamil Nadu. The anomaly of a minister continuing in office while in judicial custody was brought to light during the Senthil Balaji case. This episode highlighted the constitutional vacuum that the present bill seeks to address. The CM should acknowledge that the bill's trigger lies in his own government's handling of that controversy.

Gopalswamy J.  
Chennai



## Romancing the monsoon: Mumbai smiles in deluge.



Shobhaa's Take

A pres le deluge... as the French say... can be interpreted in multiple ways. Historically, the accurate quote is attributed to King Louis XV of France and reads "Après moi, le déluge" (After me, the deluge) — a rather bombastic way of perpetuating oneself in history. There is another version addressed to Madame Pompadour: "Après nous, le déluge" (After us, the deluge), which phrase can be seen as impossibly arrogant or cynically nihilistic. First recorded during the Battle of Rossbach (1757), which was disastrous for the French, the implications of the phrase were largely negative. Louis XV put it down in his diary: "The deluge is here." The real work begins now.

That is, if our local kings and satraps are serious about fixing what has been an annual disaster. In all fairness, despite daunting odds, our civic staff and police force swam the extra length this year. What failed the metropolis was more to do with the absence of long-term plans and ground-level action — a Herculean task given the speed at which Mumbai is changing. There's more of everything clogging our metropolis: more people, more cars, more autorickshaws, more garbage, more sewage. Combine that with infrastructure that is overwhelmed at all levels, and what we are left to cope with is monumental chaos.

The "Mumbai drowning" story isn't new. There ought not to be any excuses for the city collapsing after three days of furious, non-stop rain. After all, we weren't facing a monster tsunami that hits without prior warning, causing mega-devastation in its wake. Our monsoon patterns are meticulously mapped... but yes, they have definitely changed. This year the rains arrived 16 days too early, catching us off guard. Most pre-monsoon precautions were in place: desilting of rivers/waterways and efficient working of pumping stations. But the rain gods have their own methods: this was an ambush! A downpour that beat a 100-year record! Come on... not even the best administration in the world can have perfect control over a megapolis under these freaky circumstances.

Look at what happened in so-called futuristic world cities like Dubai, which almost sank during heavy rains. New York was unable to deal with unseasonal flooding. Life in the Big Apple came to a standstill. Civic problems of these mega-cities are minimal compared to what Mumbai has to contend with.

Take what happened to Mumbai this week. Senior IAS officer Bhushan Gagrani took over as our municipal commissioner in March 2024. Earlier, he was the principal secretary to Uddhav Thackeray during Uddhav's tenure as Maharashtra's CM. Mr Gagrani holds the highest post in the BMC's executive wing, handling public health, sanitation and urban planning, plus BEST and the Mumbai fire brigade, besides his other responsibilities. In many ways, our municipal commissioners act as independent CEOs with almost limitless power to ensure the city functions efficiently and safely and seamlessly.

During the deluge, the buck stopped with him and his team. Abhijit Bangar, additional municipal commissioner, was candid enough to acknowledge a few lapses.

The BMC elections are overdue. The last elections were held in 2017! Currently, Maharashtra has no state election commissioner! The city is being run by an administrator... and nobody has noticed, nor cares.

In the end, it was the tide that saved Mumbai. A few more centimetres (the danger mark is 4 metres, the high tide hit 3.6 metres before receding), and we'd have truly drowned. Our civic staff acquitted themselves honourably enough, so can we please stop bashing them up? Our overworked and much maligned cops did the city proud as well, making sure collateral damage was contained.

Mumbai is work in progress. "Progress" being a debatable term. What Mumbaiers are being fed right now are fables and fairytales of a dramatic resurgence, with ambitious plans of multi-crore development projects. A complete movie star makeover.

Does any of this translate into a better quality of life for citizens? Sadly, the answer is a resounding "NO!" The BMC elections are overdue. So far, we don't have a date. With any luck, we may go to the polls in February 2026. But I can derail those plans. The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation governs Greater Mumbai, the largest city in India. The last elections were held in 2017! Currently, Maharashtra has no state election commissioner!

The city is being run by an administrator... and nobody has noticed, nor cares. The Shiv Sena had won 84 seats during the last election in 2017 and was nearly dethroned by the BJP, winning 82. The BJP seems determined to snatch power from the Shiv Sena and install Mumbai's first BJP mayor. Take a look at the numbers at stake: The BMC has reserve funds exceeding ₹8,304 crores. But its financial obligations run into ₹1,24,128.29 crores. Despite its awe-inspiring wealth, it is still wobbly and

on shaky ground. That apart, the party that controls the BMC effectively dominates politics at the micro level. This is where big money is made and political goons reign, extorting money wherever and whenever possible. Nothing, but nothing, gets done without a payout.

Our kingmakers and their touts should keep Louis XV's fate in mind before rashly selling the city, bit by bit, to venal developers. Historians say Louis XV's corruptive "embrassé the mon archy" and left France on the brink of financial disaster, after ruling it for 59 years. This marked the beginning of the French Revolution.

Mumbaiers are patient and peace-loving — up to a point. Pushed to the brink, they will rise up and revolt. As a popular chant taunted our city fathers: "Mumbai... Tu!e BMC var bhavara nahi!" (Mumbai... You!e BMC var bhavara nahi!)

This is Mumbai's main faultline. We take our devastating monsoons in our stride. But who can tackle mass-scale corruption?

On a more cheerful note, let it be said that Mumbai's social set is rocking it up, rain or no rain. There are major, high-profile events lined up as we get ready to preen and prouette through downpours. Yes, Mumbaiers do romanticise the monsoons.

Bollywood has always celebrated "baarish" with buxom heroines singing lovey-dovey songs, drenched to the skin in clingy saris, as portly love-love heroes make puppy eyes from under umbrella just large enough to accommodate two ardent lovers. A drive along Marine Drive during this weather is an absolute must. Rows upon rows of couples across ages growl can be seen huddling against the harsh lashing of the waves... Pyaar ke side effects!

The deluge is behind us. Until we face the next one in 2026... Till then, enjoy a bhutta by the sea.

Instagram handle @ShobhaaDe, Twitter handle @DeShobhaa

## EDITORIAL NECESSARY RETREAT

The great man who played a vital role in laying the foundations of this great country, once said: "The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated." It was Mahatma Gandhi, if a guesswork was needed at all! We are living today in an age of rights-based society—human aspirations and actions are driven by (and also bound by) the notion to hold rights as a non-negotiable tenet of existence, and the level of dignity that defines it. Only humans with poor moral compass and narrow intelligence would disagree on extending the rights framework to most of the living beings, including animals. The August 11 order of the Supreme Court to permanently remove stray dogs from Delhi's streets—in deviation from the Animal Birth Control (ABC) rules—was seemingly making the time needed to rotate anti-clockwise. Facing due backlash from animal rights activists and other sections of society, the apex court, well in time, has decided to rework its verdict. The decision to modify the August 11 directive acknowledges both the impracticality and inhumanity of that order. By reaffirming the Animal Birth Control (ABC) rules, and mandating sterilisation, vaccination, and release of strays back into their localities—except in cases of rabies infection or aggressive behaviour—the Court has rightly sought to correct an overreach that had sparked widespread outrage.

The August 11 order had divided Indian society, and so will its fresh modification. However, it must be noted here that people were, and are, not divided on the question of animal rights. Those in favour of the August 11 order saw the exercise of animal rights in the particular case as an antithesis to public safety. This should not necessarily be the case. It is the duty of the administration to safeguard the public while not infringing upon animal rights. This path may not be as convenient as the one which involves permanently removing stray dogs (as it requires administrative ingenuity and a fair amount of investment) but is more humane, rational, and necessary. The ABC rules—sterilisation, vaccination, and return to the locality—remain globally recognised as the only sustainable and humane method of controlling stray dog populations. By returning to this framework, the Supreme Court has embraced a course correction rooted in scientific evidence and practical wisdom. What the Supreme Court has done to allay the apprehensions of those concerned with public safety, is that it has issued strict directives around vaccination and sterilisation, and maintained that dogs still found aggressive should not be released on streets. The significance of this verdict can also be understood against the fact that the August 11 order was unlikely to achieve its stated goals. Studies show that mass sheltering of strays rarely curbs population growth or reduces conflicts with humans. On the contrary, poorly managed shelters risk becoming overcrowded, disease-ridden death traps.

What stands out most in this judgment is its expansion of scope. By centralising all stray-dog related petitions from high courts and calling for state governments and Union Territories to submit inputs, the Court has signalled its intent to lay down a pan-India policy. This is a welcome move. The challenges posed by strays—public health risks, animal welfare concerns, and civic governance failures—were the same in Delhi, NCR. A fragmented, state-by-state approach has led to uneven enforcement of ABC rules. A uniform national framework, monitored and periodically audited by the judiciary, could bring much-needed coherence to an issue that is at once local and national. The August 11 order has been modified for the better, but the underlying problem remains unresolved. Without sustained and verifiable implementation of the court's order, Delhi-NCR risks a repeat of the status quo.

## DEAR EDITOR

### A STRONG MESSAGE

This is in reference to the news report "Judicial activism shouldn't become judicial terrorism." My respect for Chief Justice of India BR Gavai was reinforced when he did not wish to see courts powerless in the event a Governor signs over Bills passed by an Assembly. If Governors and the President are allowed to sit over important Bills for an indefinite period, many social projects intended to develop the socio-economic condition of the state will suffer serious setbacks. The apex court has rightly held that a Governor is not permitted to forward a Bill to the President for consideration a second time after it has been re-passed by a State Assembly. There is no room for fresh discussion either with the Centre or the Governor to facilitate passing such Bills. I am at a loss to understand why an elected government must always remain at the mercy of the ruling party at the Centre to get all Bills passed. Why cannot the judiciary intervene when a state becomes aggrieved?

—ARUN GUPTA, KOLKATA via email

## LEGAL LEVERAGE



KDP RAO  
THE WRITER IS A FORMER ADDL CHIEF SECRETARY OF CHHATTISGARH

The Bill was shared with international bodies such as the IOC, FIFA, World Athletics, and others, and incorporated about 700 responses from stakeholders with a view to integrate Indian sport with the global ecosystem

# A New Playbook of Transparency

The National Sports Governance Act will herald a new era of accountability in India's sporting universe alongside ensuring athlete welfare, but shadows of commercialisation and politicisation still linger

The sports fraternity has much to rejoice in with the passing of the National Sports Governance Act, 2025, on August 12 by Parliament, which subsequently became an official Act when it received the assent of the President of India on August 18, 2025. While globally, various laws have been in force for decades for the regulation of sports and protection of athletes, for India this is the first time such legislation has been enacted. The Act replaces the National Sports Code of 2011, which was merely a model code lacking legal force, and addresses numerous issues hitherto pushed under the carpet, such as biased selections, mismanagement of sports bodies and federations, gender bias, exploitation of athletes, systemic corruption, and so on. Apparently, the thoughtful Central legislation is a response to various observations and directions on the matter by the Supreme Court on different occasions.

The Act is hailed by almost all as a landmark legislation since it aims to ensure transparency, accountability, and athlete welfare, which is reinforced by a provision of mandatory audits by the CAG of National Sports Federations that receive State support. The vision of the government behind the Act is to create a transparent, athlete-centric, and globally aligned sports governance framework with an ecosystem of encouragement, fair play, and justice. The Act is global in spirit, for it aligns with the Olympic and Paralympic Charters and international sports governance standards, helping mitigate the risk of derecognition by bodies like the IOC. Reportedly, the Bill was shared with international bodies such as the IOC, FIFA, World Athletics, and others, and incorporated about 700 responses from stakeholders with a view to integrate Indian sport with the global ecosystem.

The provisions are revolutionary in the history of Indian sport:

- establishment of a National Sports Board to oversee and regulate National Sports Federations (NSFs) with powers to both recognise and derecognise sports bodies;
- constitution of a National Sports Tribunal (NST) with powers equivalent to a civil court for dispute resolution, with only the Supreme Court as the forum for appeals on NST decisions;
- a mandate that every NSF's executive committee should include at least two outstanding sportspersons and four women to promote gender equality;
- compulsory Athletes' Commissions for all National Olympic Com-



The new law is a turning point in the narrative of Indian sports

mittees (NOCs), National Paralympic Committees (NPCs), and NSFs to ensure participation of athletes in policy-making and governance;

e) a mandatory Safe Sports Policy to protect women, minors, and vulnerable individuals from harassment and abuse, through provisions for internal grievance redressal mechanisms.

Most significantly, for the first time, the new law brings all recognised sports organisations receiving government grants under the RTI Act, 2005, doubly ensuring transparency.

While the legislation promises a bright future for sport in India, certain provisions could be a cause of concern. For example, the provision of three consecutive terms (12 years) for key positions like President, Secretary General, and Treasurer in sports bodies may become convenient for politicisation of the institutions, since incumbents may push for their self-serving agenda against the spirit of the Act. Instead, one term with no repetition of office could have been more effective as a disincentive for any possible shenanigans. Similarly, the exemption of sports bodies that do not receive state support and function on their own business models from the purview of the RTI Act, 2005, may lead to unfettered commercialisation of some sports.

Commercialisation—the increasing influence of business interests in sports driven by sponsorships, media rights, and profit motives—is an issue that is not sufficiently addressed by the Act. The ecosystem of sport has undergone a drastic change all over the world. Today, sport has metamorphosed into a full-fledged business industry worth Rs

5,894 crore (USD 796 million). The IPL is the pinnacle of such metamorphosis for cricket in India. There are 15 more leagues in sports like badminton, football, kabaddi, wrestling, and boxing, all with robust financial worth. A strong nexus between media, sport, and commerce has emerged as a viable model not only for business but also for the self-advancement of sportspersons. The sports industry also promotes investment and generates job opportunities such as commentators, experts, sports journalists, nutritionists, sports physiotherapists, umpires, referees, and data analysts. The industry reportedly has the potential to reach the USD 10 billion level in the next five years. Ergo, commercialisation, to reasonable limits, is necessary, for it helps in the development of infrastructure, training facilities, and athlete support, and facilitates global exposure, but the downsides often outweigh the advantages.

Commercialisation and corruption apparently have a close relationship, with serious implications for the integrity, fairness, and spirit of competition. The Commonwealth Games 2010 scandal exposed financial scams and mismanagement by organising committees. Revenue priority over athlete welfare or grassroots development, excessive focus on entertainment, and corruption nexus (such as match-fixing driven by betting syndicates) are the hallmarks of over-commercialisation. Cricket has been particularly vulnerable, with scandals like the 2013 IPL spot-fixing case involving players, bookies, and team officials. The Justice Lodha Committee (2016) report highlighted many systemic issues. Over 350 legal cases related

to sports governance were pending even as the National Sports Governance Act, 2025, was passed.

Equity has been a major issue all along. For instance, the BCCI's financial autonomy with revenues of around Rs 27,411 crore in 2024–25 contrasts sharply with struggling NSFs for sports like athletics or hockey. Selective games are marketed as products, dramatised with entertainment to create wider viewership. Data from the Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC) 2016 show that the IPL had 362 million viewers, followed by the Soccer League India (224 million), the Kabaddi League (220 million), the Wrestling League (109 million), the Hockey League (43 million), and the Badminton League (36 million).

Commercialisation, moreover, has also given rise to unethical practices under the garb of professionalism, which have become the new normal all over the world. The National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) reported 116 doping violations in India in 2022. Globally, cases like Lance Armstrong (cycling) and Russia's state-sponsored doping programme (2014 Sochi Olympics) highlight the scale of the issue.

There are no specific legislations targeting over-commercialisation of sport in India. Only the Copyright Act, 1957, and the Trademarks Act, 1999, provide remedies for IP violations, but enforcement against ambush marketing is inconsistent. The US addresses commercialisation through specific IP, anti-trust, and labour laws, with a focus on NIL (Name, Image, and Likeness) rights and streaming regulations, whereas the European Union has competition law and IP protection, with harmonised anti-doping and broadcasting regulations. Strict gambling and broadcasting laws in the UK ensure fair commercialisation while guaranteeing easy public access to major events. In Australia, stringent IP laws and anti-doping regulations are in force, even as the focus has increased on e-sports commercialisation.

To sum up, the sports fraternity has plenty of reasons to celebrate, as the new law is a turning point in the narrative of Indian sports. However, sooner or later, we also need an institutional framework with proper checks and balances to address the evils of over-commercialisation. In the meanwhile, we must make continuous efforts to check the downsides of commercialisation. Effective governance based on ethical canons is all that we need to uphold the integrity of sport.

Views expressed are personal

## AT VANTAGE



SHUTAPA PAUL  
THE WRITER IS AN AUTHOR AND MEDIA ENTREPRENEUR

# Not at Play

The online gaming ban may have finally given some clarity to the sector but risks causing job and tax loss as well as dealing a mighty blow to gaming startups

I'm not a betting woman. Lady Luck seldom shines on me, and often, that which should go my way, rudely doesn't. I will get as much as I can out of this—these were the wise words from an ageing seer doled out to me over two decades ago. With every passing year I saw that unfold and therefore, very early in life, I reconciled to my fate. I don't take chances, and the closest to an adrenaline rush for me would be calculating odds. Of course, I believe in permutations and combinations, reading people, and most importantly, listening to my instincts. But I'll bring none of these qualities into a money game. Gambling and betting are just not my thing but they are serious addictions for the purported 45 crore Indians who lose almost Rs 20,000 crore a year.

The Indian government passed the 'Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Bill, 2025' this week and banned real-money gaming. The move was aimed at curbing the growing malaise of betting and gambling in society. In the last few years, the government says that money-based games have encouraged addictions, scams, depressions, indebtedness, money laundering, and even financing of terror. The stories of financial and mental loss and destruction are innumerable. Some lost lakhs on a betting platform to stare at penny overnight while some were driven to commit suicide crushed under the debilitating burden of debt. As per news reports, 32 suicides were reported in Karnataka between January 2023 and July this year related to gambling debts. The city of Hyderabad saw a strong uptick in calls to suicide helplines during Indian Premier League (IPL). The National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS)'s SHUT Clinic recorded instances of gaming addiction at 20–22 per week, up sharply from 3–4 in 2014. Statistics from CERT-In (Indian Computer Emergency Response Team) expose a 55 per cent jump in financial fraud linked to gaming apps in 2024–25 while the Enforcement Directorate (ED) also found a gaming app laundering an



Gambling and betting are serious addictions for the purported 45 crore Indians who lose almost Rs 20,000 crore a year

estimated Rs 400 crore. With imprudent and hefty fines as deterrents, the government hopes to "curb addiction, financial ruin, and social distress caused by predatory gaming platforms that thrive on misleading promises of quick wealth".

Here's the flip side. Online gaming is big money. Flush with venture capital (VC) funds, gaming companies have spent lavishly on sports endorsements and advertisements. Valued at USD 3.7 billion, the gaming industry was pegged to touch USD 9.1 billion by 2029. And while there was always a fear of regulation and grey areas in practice, this sudden ban has come as a shock to the industry. VC funds are at risk and once-robo startups have been compelled to pivot business mod-

els by scraping money-based games. Privately, investors and startup founders are up in arms. They opine that the benefits from online gaming were enjoyed by all stakeholders including the taxmen but the blanket ban has literally robbed all participants with gaming skills in India. Publicly, most are quickly issuing disclaimers stating that they have nothing to do with real money gaming. The fear of job and tax loss looms large in a market that's already riddled with uncertainties. As per industry reports, there are 400 gaming companies in India employing over 2 lakh people, mostly techies. With Rs 25,000 crore in investments and USD 3 billion in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and about Rs 20,000 crore in GST contribution, the gaming

industry was prospering before being stopped in its tracks.

The regulatory clarification, though extremely delayed, has finally given much-needed clarity to businesses by distinguishing between "games of skill" and "games of chance" and noting that any game that pertains to deposit or money winnings will be deemed unlawful. The government has also pledged support to e-sports that involve skills and casual/sport gaming involving subscriptions or access fees. The next few months will witness hectic lobbying as invested parties strive to receive some relief. What happens to state-run lottery rings that can equally cause financial and social distress? Perhaps the government will turn its attention to that next.

Views expressed are personal

# Opinion

SATURDAY, AUGUST 23, 2025

## Coping with 50% tariffs

The grim situation demands a strong policy support for the affected MSMEs

**A** LLEYES ARE on August 27 when US President Donald Trump's secondary sanctions of 25%—besides the 25% reciprocal tariffs already in effect from August 7—on Indian goods for importing Russian oil will kick in. Despite the peace talks in Alaska between Trump and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin to end the 42-month-long conflict between Moscow and Kyiv, Russia still has not committed to bilateral talks with Ukraine. For such reasons, the pressure of secondary sanctions might remain. On Friday, Peter Navarro, the White House counsellor for trade and manufacturing, called India "Maharaja of tariffs" and "a laundromat for the Kremlin" by purchasing discounted Russian crude oil, refining it, and selling the products at a premium globally. India's external affairs minister S Jaishankar reiterated the country's stance in Moscow that India is perplexed by the logic of the US's decision to impose additional 25% tariffs as it was the previous Biden administration that wanted India to buy such oil to stabilise world energy markets. Once the 50% tariffs come into effect, this is likely to adversely impact the country's labour-intensive exports to the US worth almost \$50 billion, according to analysts.

There is no doubt that such punitive tariffs would have devastating consequences for textile and apparel exporters from Tiruppur and Ludhiana, shrimp farmers in Andhra Pradesh, diamond cutters from Gujarat, and carpet weavers in Bhadohi in Uttar Pradesh. According to T S's ground reports on how these towns are coping with the tariff shock, the relentless rhythm of looms and whirring of spindles in Tiruppur has been replaced by an uneasy silence as orders are being cancelled for small apparel manufacturers. So, too, for textile units in Ludhiana as their US shipments are on hold. Nearly 30% of such units have an exposure to the US market. The seafood sector has also been caught off-guard as the US accounts for 35% of exports. Shrimp is India's largest export with Andhra contributing 60% of such shipments. Diamond cutters in Surat face a grim scenario as stocks of rough diamonds with the companies can sustain employment for only a month and half, maybe till Diwali. Carpet making in Uttar Pradesh is big business as 98% of the product is shipped overseas. With 50% tariffs, a lot of people are likely to be idle.

On a priority basis, the need is for strong policy support to enable these businesses to cope with Trump's tariff disruption. The government must channel more budgetary resources to the affected micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), besides appropriate export promotion and trade diversification measures. Trade diversification through free trade agreements (FTAs) with many countries is an efficacious response but it will take time to work out. The requirement is for immediate financial support as MSMEs employ thousands of workers in these industrial towns. The ground reports indicate a despondent mood reminiscent of the Covid-19 lockdown when all activity ground to a halt.

There is considerable merit in demands from industry players that the government provide Covid-era measures like loan moratoriums and ad hoc 30% working capital support, expand the non-performing asset classification scheme to 180 days from 90, and reinstate the interest equalisation scheme that was scrapped last December, among several other measures. These will definitely help the labour-intensive export industries cope with 50% tariffs till such time alternative markets through FTAs are found for their merchandise shipments.

## Stablecoins cannot fund USA's deficit

US TREASURY SECRETARY Scott Bessent is wrong about a potential big new source of demand for US government debt—again. The treasury secretary expects stablecoins, the crypto tokens designed to keep a constant dollar value, to grow rapidly and gobble up huge volumes of public bonds. Both the explosion of issuance and the impact on treasuries are overblown.

It's the second time this year Bessent has gotten overexcited that rewriting financial rules will help meet the country's vast and growing borrowing needs. In April, he said his loosening of constraints on the balance sheets of big banks would increase their appetite for holding treasuries—but will only help them trade bonds and lend money to hedge funds.

This time, he's pumping up the prospects of rapid growth in stablecoins since the US passed the Guiding and Establishing National Innovation for US Stablecoins Act to give the tokens a firmer regulatory footing. Bessent told Congress in June he expects that the market could grow to \$2 trillion from less than \$300 billion now. He's now telling Wall Street that a lot of this will flow straight into treasury bills and bonds, according to the *Financial Times*.

Plenty of people are sceptical about massive stablecoin growth. But even if they take off, that doesn't deliver additional demand for US debt for a very simple reason: Any dollars invested into stablecoins come from somewhere else, and those other places are typically already owners of treasuries. Roaring success for stablecoins would mostly change who holds US debt, not magically create dollars that the government can now borrow.

With Donald Trump back in the White House, the US has formalised rules around how they should work in the hope of driving wider use beyond the cryptocurrency. The new rules stipulate that the coins must be backed one-for-one with high quality and liquid dollar assets, which includes treasury bills, but also allows bank deposits and money market fund shares. This is to ensure that people can be confident in converting coins back into dollars swiftly and reliably. The rules also ban US-issued coins from paying interest, or passing through the yield they get from owning treasuries; that's designed to protect banks, especially smaller ones, that fear losing deposit funding to stablecoins.

Teresa Hu, a senior strategist at JP Morgan Chase & Co., says it's hard to believe that the market could grow to exceed even \$1 trillion within a few years when the infrastructure and technology needed for broader adoption has yet to be built. She's also doubtful that people will see them as a sensible place to put cash.

I personally have no idea why any normal person would sacrifice deposit insurance at a bank for a coin that pays no interest. But, more importantly, Hu points out that cash investors at the corporate and institutional level are inherently conservative—their stakes need to be safe and available. "We suspect liquidity investors, whether retail or institutional, are not going to immediately jump into payment stablecoins as a cash alternative," Hu wrote recently.

Even if they do, the assets needed to back these coins won't create additional demand for treasuries. Anyone who shifts cash into stablecoins is going to be moving it from one of four places: bank deposits, money funds, physical notes and coins or overseas dollar holdings.

Money funds are big buyers of treasury bills; if they lose cash to stablecoins, they will buy proportionately fewer bills. Banks are forced to hold high-quality assets such as treasuries and agency debt to ensure they can meet withdrawals; if they lose out and start to shrink, they too will need fewer liquid assets. Even overseas dollars are still part of the wider banking system, or reserve holdings among central banks, much of which again relies on treasuries as a safe and liquid place to store cash. Switching from physical notes and coins would provide the only source of purely additional demand.

There just aren't enough good reasons for using stablecoins for anything other than betting on crypto—and what good reasons there are, banks will find ways of satisfying swiftly. Bessent's hope that this market will help cover the US deficit will turn out to be false.



PAUL J DAVIES

Bloomberg

**T**HE RESERVE BANK OF India (RBI) recently released the Report of the Internal Working Group (IWG) to Review the Liquidity Management Framework. Liquidity management operations are the nuts and bolts of monetary policy and, therefore, it is important that the framework is robust.

The report rightly suggests the discontinuation of a 14-day variable rate repo/reverse repo (VRR/VRRR) as the main operation. Banks, as the IWG report observes, are reluctant to park surplus liquidity for this duration. In addition, it is hard to make a precise liquidity forecast for 14 days as government cash balances maintained with the RBI are intrinsically volatile. Currency movements are unpredictable too, though they have predictable seasonal patterns. The main operation conducted at a weekly interval instead of 14 days, coming with the fine-tuning operations of varying tenors as and when needed as recommended by the IWG, should help smooth liquidity management.

The IWG's recommendation on the retention of the weighted average call rate (WACR) as the operating target is also appropriate. However, a reduction in the activity for the overnight call money segment, from where the WACR emerges, raises concern, as this decreases the central bank's control over short-term interest rates.

Why has activity in the call money market declined? The width of the corridor is essentially a trade-off between volatility in short-term interest rates and activity in the overnight inter-bank market. The narrower the corridor, the greater the possibility of banks dealing with the central bank than among themselves. In other words, the reduced volatility in short-term interest rates is at the expense of lower inter-bank activity. The IWG report observes that the narrowing of the corridor coincided with the declining

share of call money in the total overnight money market volume. Thus, a proper balance needs to be struck between the two. Significantly, not many emerging economy central banks have such a narrow corridor width (50 bps). Therefore, it would have been ideal if the IWG conducted a detailed empirical investigation of this critical issue and weighed the pros and cons of continuing with the current width of the corridor.

In a corridor system, the minimum reserve requirement and the averaging help stabilise interest rates in the call money market through smoothing intertemporal shocks to autonomous factors such as government cash balances and currency. For instance, banks can defer borrowing when interest rates in the call money market are high till later in the maintenance period. Likewise, they can advance their borrowings early in the maintenance period, when call rates are low. Thus, averaging is an effective instrument for diminishing the volatility of short-term interest rates. However, it seems that this mechanism has almost ceased to operate in India. This is also corroborated by an observation in the IWG report—banks rarely maintain daily reserve balances below 95% of the prescribed cash reserve ratio as against the requirement of 90%. This makes a strong case for lowering the daily minimum reserve requirement so

that banks have enough room to arbitrage. This will not only help stabilise short-term interest rates but also limit the need for fine-tuning operations. What should be the minimum daily reserve requirement? It is again a matter of detailed examination.

The IWG has aptly rejected the demand to provide access of the marginal standing facility (MSF) to stand-alone primary dealers (SPDs). However, their participation in the call money market should be reviewed urgently.

SPD operations in the call money market impart considerable volatility to call rates. There have been numerous instances when borrowings by SPDs have exerted significant pressure on call rates, pushing them at times above the upper bound of the corridor. This is not surprising as SPDs, according to the

IWG report, constitute three-fourths of the total borrowing from the call money market. Therefore, in tight liquidity conditions, there is always a risk of the upper bound of the corridor being breached, especially because they do not have access to the MSF. Likewise, in the face of large surplus liquidity, there is also a risk of the lower bound of the corridor getting violated in the absence of an access to the SDF, though this risk is less serious as the limit by SPDs in the call money market is far lower than the one on borrowing. Since operations of

### JANAK RAJ

Senior fellow, Centre for Social and Economic Progress (CSEP)



**Large structural surplus liquidity in a corridor system also makes it challenging to achieve the operating target**

SPDs in the call money market hamper effective control over the operating target, they must be gradually phased out from the call money market. As SPDs play an important role in the government securities market, other appropriate borrowing and lending facilities could be provided to them for their smooth operations.

Large structural surplus liquidity in a corridor system also makes it challenging to achieve the operating target. Even in a floor system, central banks have struggled to have a tight control over the operating target, though in theory any amount of surplus liquidity under it is consistent with an effective control over the operating target. Therefore, while liquidity provided needs to be in consonance with the monetary policy's stance, it should be ensured that it does not impinge on the operating target.

The WACR in recent years has often significantly deviated from the policy rate and on several occasions, it has hovered close to the lower/upper bound of the target. At times, the WACR has even breached the lower and upper bounds of the corridor. An ultimate test of the effectiveness of the liquidity management framework is whether it is able to align the operating target with the policy rate. If call rates are not aligned with the operating target, it creates uncertainty among market participants, thereby hampering monetary transmission.

The central bank needs to have a tight control over the operating target for monetary policy impulses to transmit smoothly across the interest rate spectrum and asset classes. It is, therefore, important to examine some of the key issues which have impacted the efficacy of the liquidity management framework and address them suitably in the revised framework.

Views are personal

## Reclaiming our leadership in safe drugs



### INDU BHUSHAN

Senior associate, Johns Hopkins University, and founding (ex) CEO, Ayushman Bharat

INDIA HAS LONG been celebrated as the "pharmacy of the World." We supply over 60% of global vaccine demand, 40% of generic medicines to the US, and 25% of all medicines to the UK. More than 200 countries import Indian pharmaceuticals. Our affordable, high-quality medicines have saved millions of lives across the globe, especially in low- and middle-income countries where access to essential drugs would otherwise remain a distant dream. Within India too, this industry has played a pivotal role in ensuring affordable medicines for our vast population, contributing to the success of initiatives like Jan Aushadhi and Ayushman Bharat.

India's pharmaceutical exports crossed \$25 billion in 2023, a testament to the strength and scale of our industry. Our manufacturers are counted among the world's largest, and over 650 Food and Drug Administration (FDA)-approved manufacturing facilities operate across the country. This global trust in India's pharmaceutical ecosystem has been a source of national pride.

Yet, that trust is now at risk. The stark reality is that the quality of medicines remains uneven, and the circulation of substandard and falsified (SF) drugs has emerged as a serious concern. A 2023 joint study by CRISIL and the Authentication Solution Providers' Association estimated that around 20% of medicines sold in India could be either counterfeit or substandard. The World Health Organization similarly warns that one in 10 medicine products circulating in low- and middle-income countries is SF.

This is not a minor regulatory issue, but a public health emergency. Behind these statistics lie real human tragedies—cancer patients receiving ineffective chemotherapy, children dying from contaminated cough syrups, and families ruined by prolonged illness and misdiagnosis. Last year, international headlines linked Indian-made cough syrups to the deaths of dozens of children in Cambodia, Uzbekistan, and Cameroon, triggering global concern and undermining India's pharmaceutical credibility.

These fake drugs not only fail to cure, they cause direct harm. They accelerate the global crisis of antimicrobial resistance, making routine infections harder to treat. They compromise treatment for chronic diseases like diabetes, cancer, and heart conditions. Most insidiously, they erode the trust patients place in the healthcare system, a trust that is difficult to rebuild once broken.

The government has begun to respond. In recent months, raids across multiple states have led to the closure of illegal manufacturing units and the seizure of thousands of fake drug consignments. The Union Health Ministry has initiated steps to strengthen surveillance—introducing mandatory QR codes on top-selling medicines, upgrading Central Drugs Testing Laboratories, and promoting digital tools like the "Track and Trace" mechanism.

But let us be clear—these are first steps, not the finish line. The scale of the challenge demands much more.

Most consumers are still unaware of the tools available to verify their medicines. Rural India, with its already fragile medical access, remains vulnerable to unlicensed pharmacies and unverified medicines. Even in urban areas, supply chain opacity and inconsistent enforcement allow counterfeit drugs to infiltrate legitimate pharmacies.

This is not just a regulatory failure, but a criminal act with deadly consequences.

Those involved in the production and distribution of fake medicines must face swift, exemplary punishment. Laws must be strengthened to treat such offences as endangering human life, not just violating technical standards. Central and state drug authorities must coordinate better, and enforcement agencies must be adequately resourced and held accountable for results.

The pharmaceutical industry has already taken important steps to enhance patient safety and product integrity. Many companies are investing in tamper-evident packaging, advanced serialisation, and real-time supply chain tracking technologies to prevent counterfeiting. Leading manufacturers are also conducting rigorous audits and quality assurance checks while actively engaging with regulators to flag irregularities and support enforcement.

**We need an all-of-government, all-of-industry, all-of-society approach and treat this as a national crisis**

These measures reflect a growing commitment across the sector to uphold the highest standards of safety. As the threat of falsified medicines continues to evolve, sustained collaboration between industry, regulators, and law enforcement will be key to protecting public health and preserving global trust in our pharmaceutical excellence. Retailers and pharmacists have a crucial role as gatekeepers. They must be vigilant in verifying the sources of their inventory and reject any stock that lacks proper certification or traceability.

The spread of counterfeit medicines threatens to undermine India's public health achievements, including the progress made through Ayushman Bharat, which aims to deliver universal health coverage to more than 500 million Indians. It also jeopardises our standing in global health markets, where trust and credibility are paramount.

India must treat this as a national crisis. We need an all-of-government, all-of-industry, all-of-society approach. Public awareness campaigns, stronger law enforcement, and deeper industry responsibility must converge to eliminate this menace. This is not the time for incremental action. The cost of delay is counted in lives lost, diseases worsened, and trust eroded. The moment demands urgency, ambition, and resolve.

India has the strength to lead the world in both quality and quality of medicines. Let us act now to ensure that every pill that carries a "Made in India" label also carries with it an unshakable assurance of safety, efficacy, and integrity.

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### Don't ban, but regulate

Apropos of "Sledgehammer approach" (FE, August 22), nearly 20% gamers worldwide are Indian, but we contribute barely 2% to global gaming revenues as India's market is powered almost entirely by online money gaming (OMG). In 2024, revenue worth ₹27,000 crore (of the ₹32,000 crore) came from these high-

risk, mobile-first platforms. Globally, money games account for 40% of revenues; in India, they dominate at 85%. The picture is clear: India is a mobile-first, revenue-light, and mostly playing with fire. Globally, regulators have faced the same dilemma. Belgium and China chose hard bans on gambling-like mechanics, while countries like Austria and the UK allowed them but with limitations. The

latter seems to be the best bet for India. India's dilemma is more about how a young, mobile-first nation balances freedom, fun, and safety.

—Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

#### Simplified GST

The recommendation to scrap the 12% and 28% slabs of the goods and services tax (GST) and consolidate them with lower rates will give

substantial relief to the indirect taxpayers, if implemented. However, 40% tax on luxury goods is exorbitant, even as it is acceptable for sin goods. At present, tax evasion is an open secret, and therefore, even the highest slab of tax should be reasonable to offset it.

—KV Seetharamaiah, Bengaluru

Write to us at [letters@expressindia.com](mailto:letters@expressindia.com)

EXPLAINED GLOBAL

## ALLIGATOR ALCATRAZ: WHY HAS A JUDGE PUT RESTRICTIONS ON IT?

A FEDERAL judge in the United States issued a preliminary injunction on Thursday halting operations at an immigration detention centre in Florida that has earned the moniker "Alligator Alcatraz".

The name comes from Alcatraz Island, a former prison located on an island near San Francisco which was deemed impossible to escape, as well as the significant alligator population in Florida.

The detention centre was set up around two months ago in Florida Everglades National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The centre has faced scrutiny for its treatment of detainees and alleged environmental violations.

The ruling has given the state 60 days to stop its operations. An appeal against the order has been filed.

### Detention centre

The detention centre was established amid the Trump administration's increased focus on targeting immigration into the US. "We had a request from the federal government to (create the facility), and so 'Alligator Alcatraz' it is," Florida Governor Ron DeSantis has said.

"Clearly from a security perspective, if someone escapes, there's a lot of alligators you're going to have to contend (with)," DeSantis said.

What was previously the Dade-Collier Training and Transition Airport for pilots was transformed into a tent city with a capacity for housing up to 5,000 people. The centre was also seen as an extension of Trump's continued fascination with the original Alcatraz prison, located on an island off San Francisco and closed more than 60 years ago. He has ordered officials to examine the possibility of reopening it, and said in May that the prison would serve as a "symbol of law, order, and justice".

### Several concerns

Several media reports have claimed that the site includes large white tents and bunk beds surrounded by chain-link cages. "Toilets don't flush, flooding floors with fecal waste, and mosquitoes and



Donald Trump at Alligator Alcatraz in Florida in June 2025. AP

other insects are everywhere," the Associated Press reported.

Meals are allegedly not provided on time or in adequate quantities, but state officials have denied these reports.

The current injunction has come as the court hears a lawsuit brought by environmental groups. Arguing to block further construction, these groups have said that such activities could adversely impact sensitive wetland ecosystems, endangered species, and essential waterways.

District Court Judge Kathleen Williams wrote in her order about a plan to aid tourism in the 1960s in the Everglades that was eventually rejected. Since then, "every Florida governor, every Florida senator, and countless local and national political figures, including presidents, have publicly pledged their unequivocal support for the restoration, conservation, and protection of the Everglades," she wrote.

The national park is located at "the interface of temperate and sub-tropical America, fresh and brackish water, shallow bays" which "contains the largest mangrove ecosystem in the Western Hemisphere", according to UNESCO.

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

## WHY NOT ALL VIRUSES LEAD TO A PANDEMIC AFTER TRANSMISSION

WHEN A disease-causing virus jumps from one species to another, most often, the infection fails to establish sustained transmission in its new environment. On the rare occasion, however, it can trigger a pandemic.

A new study has now identified some key factors which determine whether a pathogen will persist after it spills over to a new population. These are: the fraction of the exposed population that's infected (or infection prevalence); the ability to release copies of the virus into the environment (or viral shedding); and how vulnerable the hosts are to the virus (or infection susceptibility).

The study was published in the journal PLOS Biology on Thursday.

David Kennedy, researcher at the Pennsylvania State University and senior author on the paper, in a statement, said, "This work helps us figure out which out-

breaks to worry about so that we can direct our public health resources where they need to go to prevent and respond to disease emergence."

For their study, researchers induced a spillover among a species of worms by exposing them to the Ocas virus. The worms were seen to reproduce and grow for five to 13 days, after which 20 adult worms were transferred to a new, virus-free Petri dish where they could multiply and grow again. This was repeated until no trace of the virus could be detected.

Specific traits among worms remaining from the initial lot were studied including what fraction of the worms were infected and how much virus each worm shed into the air. This helped scientists determine that infection prevalence, viral shedding, and infection susceptibility play a substantial role in explaining the outcome of a spillover event.

ENS



### ADRIJA ROYCHOWDHURY NEW DELHI, AUGUST 22

SHANTANU MUKHERJEE, 46, has complained to police that filmmaker Vivek Agnihotri's forthcoming *Bengal Files* tarnishes the image of his late grandfather Gopal Mukherjee.

Agnihotri's film is about the "Great Calcutta Killing", the most violent episode of Hindu-Muslim violence in the lead-up to Partition. Between 5,000 to 10,000 people were killed in the four-day bloodbath that began on August 16, 1946, the date designated by the Muslim League as Direct Action Day.

Gopal Mukherjee, known by the moniker Gopal 'Patha' because his family owned a mutton shop in central Kolkata's College Street (*patha* is goat in Bangla), was a leader of one of Calcutta's major street gangs at the time. His group of more than 800 young men took it upon themselves to protect Hindus from gangs of Muslim rioters.

"We have no problem with a film being made on Gopal Mukherjee. But the vulgar way in which he has been depicted is very offensive," Shantanu Mukherjee told *The Indian Express*.

In the official trailer of the film, Gopal Mukherjee is seen proclaiming India to be a nation of Hindus, blaming Gandhian non-violence for the "victory" of Jinnah, and hacking frenziedly at people in the street with a sword.

### Call for 'direct action'

By August 1946, relations between the Muslim League and the Congress had frayed beyond repair. The League had committed itself to accepting nothing short of Partition and the creation of Pakistan, and its leader, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, proclaimed that there would now be "either a divided India or a destroyed India".

The League (and the Congress) rejected the Cabinet Mission Plan of May 1946, which had proposed a loose federal structure for post-colonial India, and on July 31, Jinnah called on Muslims across India to observe August 16 as Direct Action Day.

"On that day, meetings would be held all over the country to explain the League's position for a separate Muslim state," H V Hodson, who was an adviser to Viceroy Wavell in 1946, wrote in his book *The Great Divide: Britain, India, Pakistan* (1969). "These meetings and processions passed off...without more than commonplace and limited disturbances, with one vast and tragic exception," he wrote.

While Muslims were in majority in Bengal, making up 54% of the population, Calcutta itself was 73% Hindu. Muslims were

### SHYAMLAL YADAV NEW DELHI, AUGUST 22

KARNATAKA DEPUTY Chief Minister D K Shivakumar, who is also president of the Pradesh Congress Committee, unexpectedly broke into an RSS song in the state Assembly on Friday. BJP MLAs welcomed the recital, while Congress benches remained silent.

### The RSS song

The 13-line song in Sanskrit, called *Prarthana* (prayer) by members of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, starts with "Namaste sado vatsale matribhume (O sacred Motherland, I always bow you)...", and ends with "Bharat Mata ki jai".

The line before "Bharat Mata ki jai" goes: "Vijetee cha nah sanhata karyashaktir, Vidhyasya dharmasya sanrakshanam, Param vibhavam netumetai swarashtram, Samarthava vatavashishtha be bhisham" (May our victorious organisational work for the



Mahatma Gandhi with H S Suhrawardy (third from the left) in 1947. A young Mujibur Rahman, the future Father of Bangladesh, is standing behind. Wikimedia Commons

concentrated in North Calcutta and in the Metiabruz area by the Hooghly, and mainly part of the city's underclasses.

### Suhrawardy's mischief

H S Suhrawardy became Prime Minister (Chief Minister) of Bengal in April. He was a respected leader among Bengal's Muslims but reviled among Hindus who blamed him for the Bengal famine of 1943 which killed an estimated three million people (he was the Minister for Civil Supplies at the time).

Almost all members of Suhrawardy's cabinet belonged to the League. In *A History of the Bengal-speaking People* (2001), historian Nitish Sengupta wrote that Suhrawardy's cabinet without a single upper caste Hindu was for the *bhadralok* class, "a forerest of what was likely to happen to them if the whole of Bengal went to Pakistan".

Many historians blame Suhrawardy for the carnage in Calcutta in August 1946.

On Direct Action Day, he addressed a gathering of an estimated 100,000 Muslim youth in Maidan (a vast open space in central Calcutta). What Suhrawardy told the crowd remains disputed — it is said that he announced he had taken steps to restrain the police, which was understood as an invitation to loot and murder — but his speech was followed by a massive outbreak of violence in the city.

Suhrawardy himself "spent a great deal of time in the Control Room in Lal Bazar [police headquarters], often attended by some of his supporters", Frederick Burrows, Governor

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If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to [explained@indianexpress.com](mailto:explained@indianexpress.com)

EXPLAINED HISTORY

## Direct Action & Gopal 'Patha'

Between 5,000 and 10,000 people were killed in Calcutta in a four-day bloodbath in August 1946. Gopal 'Patha' Mukherjee, a local strongman, took it upon himself to protect Hindus from Muslim rioters

what was new in Calcutta was the sheer scale of the phenomenon," he wrote.

For a long time, Calcutta remained divided between Muslim and Hindu zones with very little movement between them. Historians of Bengal believe that the Calcutta riots of 1946 were by far the most cataclysmic event leading to the partition of the province a year later. And they would be a harbinger of the horrors yet to come.

### Mukherjee's role

Much of the street violence during the Great Calcutta Killing was "a pogrom between two rival armies [of Muslim and Hindu and Sikh] of the Calcutta underworld", Burrows wrote to Wavell.

What is known of Mukherjee and his role in the violence comes primarily from the 1996 book *The Goodies: Towards a Reconstruction of the Calcutta Underworld* by Jayanta K Ray and Suranjan Das, and an audio interview that Mukherjee gave to Andrew Whitehead of the BBC in 1997.

According to Ray and Das, Mukherjee was born in 1916 and lived in Malanga Lane in Bowbazar in central Kolkata. He was "5 feet 4 inches in height, wore long hair like ladies, sported a moustache and long beard", Ray and Das wrote.

In his interview to Whitehead, Mukherjee said that on August 16, 1946, he was sitting at his meat shop when he saw a party of Muslim League volunteers marching with sticks in their hands and raising slogans of 'lad ke lenge Pakistan' (We will fight and snatch Pakistan).

After riots began in Bowbazar, Mukherjee shut his shop and gathered some "boys" to protect the neighbourhood. "I realised we had to save the country. If the whole area went to Pakistan, there would be more torture and bloodshed," he told Whitehead.

He said that he instructed his boys to retaliate ferociously to any violence against Hindus. "If you come to know of one murder, you should commit 10 murders, that was my order to my boys," Mukherjee said, adding that his grandfather "attacked only those members of the Muslim League who were spreading violence. He did not attack anyone from their families, women, children or the elderly."

"Has he not attacked the rioters from the Muslim League, this (Kolkata) would have been Bangladesh. The whole map of India would have been different," Shantanu Mukherjee told *The Indian Express*.

Asked by Whitehead during the interview if he felt proud of his actions in 1946, Gopal Mukherjee said: "It was not about pride. It was about duty. I believed that I had a duty to help people in distress."

## The RSS prayer, its history and significance



Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar speaks in the state Assembly on August 19. PTI

in 1939, where Dr Hedgewar asked for a prayer that could be recited at RSS activities around the country.

Prof Bhide wrote the lines, which were subsequently composed into song, based on what the RSS believed was the spirit and essence of its work.

### Need for a prayer

The tradition of commencing the day's activities by saluting the *Bhagwa Dhwaj* (Saffron Flag) and concluding with a prayer had taken firm root in the RSS within a year of its founding in Nagpur on September 27, 1925, Vijayadashami day.

This prayer was in Hindi and Marathi, and ended with an invocation to Samarth Guru Ramdas, the guru of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, the lines in Hindi, which were recited by swamyas in North India, were: "He prabho Shree Ram date, sheel humko dejeeye..."

But as the RSS and its activities expanded across the country, Hedgewar felt the need for a uniform Prarthana for all its events.

protection of this religion through your blessings be successful in taking our nation to supreme glory".

### Sung since 1939

The song has been sung at RSS gatherings since 1939, with one swamyasewak leading and the others following him.

The daily one-hour *shakhas* of the RSS usually conclude with the singing of the song; at events where the general public is present, it is sung at the beginning.

It is expected that everyone should stand

in their places during the singing of the song, with their right hand raised to the chest and folded parallel to the ground, with the palm facing downward.

### Author of the lines

The Prarthana was written by Nagpur-based Professor Narahari Narayan Bhide, a friend of Dr KB Hedgewar, the founder of the RSS. Prof Bhide taught English, but was well-versed in Sanskrit as well.

The Prarthana emerged from a week-long meeting of swamyasewaks in Wardha district

## Row over 'film on Yogi', and why Bombay HC judges want to watch movie

### OMKAR GOKHALE MUMBAI, AUGUST 22

THE BOMBAY High Court has said judges will watch a film purportedly based on the life of Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath that the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) has been accused of delaying.

The court said on Thursday that it would watch *Ajee: The Untold Story of a Yogi* before passing an order on a petition filed by the producers of the film. The case will be taken up again on August 25.

### The film in question

The producer, Samrat Cinematics India Pvt Ltd, has said the film is inspired by Shantanu Gupta's book *The Monk Who Became Chief Minister: The Definitive Biography of Yogi Adityanath* (2017), officially endorsed by the UP Chief Minister's Office.

The purpose of the film is "not only to depict the journey of a leader in public service but also to motivate and inspire the youth of the nation through a narrative grounded in fact and integrity", the makers have said in their plea.

### In the Bombay HC

Samrat Cinematics has alleged that it applied for certification of the film on June 5 this year. Under the rules for certification, CBFC was required to scrutinise the application within seven days and refer it for screening before the examining committee within 15 days, it has said.

However, after CBFC took no action for more than a month, the petitioner applied again under the "priority scheme". CBFC then scheduled the screening on July 7, but it was cancelled, according to the plea.

Since they received no further correspondence from CBFC, the filmmakers were com-

pelled to approach the HC to seek a direction to CBFC to decide on the release of the film at the earliest.

The producer has said the delay by the Censor Board in processing the application for the film, its teaser, trailer, and promotional song, is "unreasonable and" "unexplained".

On July 16, a Bench of Justices Revati Mohite-Dere and Neela K Gokhale orally remarked that CBFC was mandated to issue the certification within the stipulated time under the law. The next day, the Board assured HC that the application would be decided within two working days, following which the court disposed of the filmmakers' writ plea. The film was scheduled for release in theatres on August 1.

### The second writ plea

On July 21, CBFC wrote to the filmmak-

ers saying their application for certification had been rejected. This prompted them to file a second writ plea in the court.

On August 1, the HC observed that CBFC had taken its July 21 decision without viewing the film, and only because it was based on a constitutional post (UP CM) and the Information and Public Relations Department of UP had raised a "serious objection" saying it may "affect the public at large".

CBFC assured the HC that the panel would watch the film before deciding on certification. Thereafter, on August 6, it passed an order refusing to certify the film on the ground that it violated the Guidelines for Certification of Films for Public Exhibition.

According to CBFC, the film violated clauses requiring that the medium should remain responsible and sensitive to the values and standards of society.



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Centre	English Medium	English Medium
Karol Bagh	25 August   6:00 AM to 11:30 AM	28 Aug   6:00 PM
Noida	22 August   6:00 AM to 11:30 AM	22 Sep   11:30 AM
Lucknow	28 August   6:00 AM to 11:30 AM	28 Aug   6:00 AM
Prayagraj	19 August   6:00 AM to 11:30 AM	18 Sep   5:30 PM
Jaipur	27 August   6:00 AM to 11:30 AM	27 Aug   6:00 AM
Indore	5 August   6:00 AM to 11:30 AM	2 Sep   6:00 AM

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**OMKAR GOKHALE**  
MUMBAI, AUGUST 22

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# THE IDEAS PAGE

## WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The suffering and death of Palestinians is multiplying. Seizing and occupying Gaza City would only deepen the horror."  
— THE GUARDIAN

# The necessity of bridges

India's strength lies in accommodating complexity — allowing multiple identities to coexist without fear. That balance is under strain



NAJEEB JUNG

FOUR YEARS AGO, in an increasingly polarised India, five friends took an unusual step. Concerned about the steady deterioration of communal relations, especially between Hindus and Muslims, they decided to meet the chief of the Rashtriya Swamasevak Sangh (RSS), Mohan Bhagwat.

This was a personal initiative born out of anxiety over the country's social fabric. The decision to meet Bhagwat was deliberate. For all the public claims about the independence of the BJP from the RSS, the Sangh remains the ideological mother body, with undeniable influence over the BJP's thinking and approach.

The five friends did not claim to represent Muslims. They were concerned citizens, moved by the community's growing alienation from the state. Years of inflammatory rhetoric and targeted policies had left many feeling cornered in their own country. They believed passivity was not an option. So even if there was a faint chance that dialogue could yield understanding, it was worth the effort. Initially, their step drew mixed reactions — cautious support from some, criticism from others, who saw it as legitimising an exclusionary organisation.

Undeterred, they clarified their outreach, meeting Muslim clerics, Sikh leaders, Christians, social activists, and educators. Across communities, one truth emerged: The absence of conversation was only deepening the mistrust.

The RSS's history is no secret. Its literature contains ample anti-Muslim and anti-Christian rhetoric. Generations of its leaders have portrayed minorities as "outsiders" or obstacles to a vision of Hindu Rashtra. Against this backdrop, the question loomed: Could there be a change of heart, or were these talks futile?

Surprisingly, the meetings were direct. Bhagwat candidly outlined Hindu concerns about Muslims; the group raised Muslim concerns without hesitation. The tone was not always comfortable, but it was honest. And he kept his promise to try and reduce differences. From time to time he has spoken on the need for unity, to reduce hate and learn toleration.

From these conversations came several practical recommendations: One, sustained dialogue — regular platforms for Hindu and Muslim scholars, clerics, community leaders, and activists to meet locally and nationally to address misconceptions quickly. Two, joint social action — collaborating in disaster relief, literacy campaigns, and public health initiatives to create shared ownership of society. Three, shared cultural spaces — updating madrasa syllabi to include shared histories, holding joint cultural festivals, and celebrating major religious occasions together. Four, insisting on making the country *amir-bihar* (self-reliant) in these areas. If the government first shares a draft and seeks gen-



C R Sankar

ture feedback. Imposition without consultation, as seen with the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025, invites resistance. Five, noise sensitivities — Muslims could limit loudspeaker use for the five daily calls to prayer (*azan*) to reduce friction with neighbours.

Six, respecting Hindu sentiments on cow slaughter — while rare among Muslims, a visible campaign against it could ease one of the most sensitive communal flashpoints. Seven, managing Friday prayers — avoiding road blockages by staggering timings or finding alternative venues. Eight, community conduct — actively addressing lawlessness among some youth in Muslim-majority areas, with leaders promoting civic responsibility. Nine, both communities must refrain from using derogatory terms such as "*kafir*" for Hindus and "*jihadis*" for Muslims or other such terms that generate hate.

Many Muslim-majority countries have reformed to meet modern realities. Tunisia, Morocco, Turkey, Egypt, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia and Algeria have adapted laws on family, education and public life. Indian Muslims, too, can pursue reforms that respect faith while accommodating the sensitivities of a plural nation. Yet no internal reforms will succeed without reciprocity from the Hindu community and the state. Trust cannot be one-sided.

Over the last decade, many Muslims, Christians and Sikhs have grown deeply suspicious of the executive and judiciary. Laws perceived as discriminatory, selective justice, and the endorsement of majoritarian rhetoric have eroded faith in the state's neutrality. There is enough evidence of law enforcement agencies favouring Hindus, particularly during festivals. A very good example is the Kanwar festival.

Over the last decade, many Muslims, Christians and Sikhs have grown deeply suspicious of the executive and judiciary. Laws perceived as discriminatory, selective justice, and the endorsement of majoritarian rhetoric have eroded faith in the state's neutrality. There is enough evidence of law enforcement agencies favouring Hindus, particularly during festivals. A very good example is the Kanwar festival.

There is enough evidence of law enforcement agencies favouring Hindus, particularly during festivals. A very good example is the Kanwar festival, with state police officials welcoming the pilgrims with flowers, touching their feet or showering petals from helicopters. Such actions in a secular country shake the confidence not just of minorities but also the very large secular society.

Confidence-building also requires the government to step back from polarising politics, apply laws equally, act against hate speech, and show in action, not just in words, that every citizen has an equal stake in India. Demonstration of equal action has been sadly lacking.

India's strength lies in accommodating complexity — allowing multiple identities to coexist without fear. That balance is under strain. The choice is stark: Let mistrust harden into permanent division, or take the harder path of conversation, reform, and mutual respect.

This initiative with the RSS chief may have been just a drop in the ocean. Therefore, more citizens and institutions must commit to long-term, genuine engagement. India can still reclaim the pluralistic spirit that is its trust inheritance. Trust, once broken, takes time to rebuild. But, it can be rebuilt. And in this time of suspicion, the smallest bridges matter.

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

# Holding monitor to account

BJP is setting up a circus where government chooses its voters. INDIA bloc is committed to reclaiming a level playing field



K C VENUGOPAL

"THE HOUSE WILL realise that franchise is a most fundamental thing in a democracy. No person who is entitled to be brought into the electoral rolls... should be excluded merely as a result of the prejudice of a local government, or the whim of an officer. That would cut at the very root of democratic government."

These were the historic words of B R Ambedkar in the Constituent Assembly on June 15, 1949, when Article 289 of the Draft Constitution (now Article 324), which ensured that elections would be conducted under a single, impartial authority, was introduced. Ambedkar envisioned the Election Commission of India (ECI) as the guardian of democracy, immune to the poisons of caste, culture, or linguistic discrimination, and above all, beyond the reach of partisan bias.

Since then, the ECI has presided over every general election. For decades, it commanded respect as one of India's most sacred institutions. But today, that sanctity has been brutally compromised. The BJP has systematically reduced it to an extension of its party machinery, betraying the constitutional values Ambedkar so fiercely defended.

At a time when institutions are under siege, the Indian National Congress and the INDIA bloc have taken the battle to the people. The Voter Adhikar Yatra, launched in Bihar by Rahul Gandhi, marks the first decisive step in this battle to save democracy.

Covering over 20 districts in 16 days, this yatra will inform every voter about the risk of their fundamental power in a democracy being stolen, going beyond TV screens and to every street and corner of the state. Our yatra is a resistance against the ECI's SIR in Bihar, which it wishes to conduct as a trial run before rolling it out across the country.

The BJP is setting up a circus where the government chooses its voters. In the guise of the SIR, 65 lakh citizens have been struck off the rolls, while raising suspicions that names favourable to the ruling party were conveniently retained or added. Instead of taking the time and effort to do a thorough, meticulous and transparent sanitisation of electoral rolls, the ECI conducted a purge behind closed doors on unrealistic timelines, with the entire machinery rushing to meet deadlines and scrambling for documents. The SIR, conducted amid floods, is fraught with errors and counter-productive for the stated objectives — all pointing to an effort to nullify voters' rights.

This is only the latest example of the BJP's agenda of compromising India's electoral process. Through legislation in 2023, the Modi government overruled a Supreme Court ruling to now stipulate that the CEC and ECs would be appointed by the President on the recommendation of a selection committee consisting of the PM, a Union cabinet minister, and the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha. The CJI was replaced by a hand-picked Union minister. This was the first step towards eliminating

the ECI's impartiality.

The new law also grants unprecedented immunity to the CEC and ECs, and even retired commissioners by shielding them from civil or criminal proceedings. What necessitated this? Is it because the BJP had planned voter manipulation after getting the chance to handpick ECs? By extending to Election Commissioners the same sweeping protections that apply to sitting judges, the BJP has created a shield not for independence, but for impunity.

The consequences are obvious. When Rahul Gandhi recently exposed irregularities in voter lists, the ECI's immediate response was to deny, dismiss and cast aspersions instead of welcoming impartial scrutiny. For days, BJP leaders were seen defending the ECI, instead of the ECI itself. Meanwhile, the BJP found sensitive electoral data through "unknown" sources in an attempt to level similar allegations against Congress. But as with all things BJP, these foolish attempts collapsed under their own weight when investigations proved that claims of "fake voters" in Wayanad were fabricated.

Worse, the ECI has demanded an affidavit from Rahul Gandhi for raising these concerns, but not from BJP leaders who made reckless allegations about voter lists. When the CEC finally addressed the press, he came across as nothing more than a BJP spokesperson, skirting critical questions and responding to serious accusations with an absence of logic and juvenile, trumped-up allegations.

What the CEC didn't answer was: Why the haste in conducting the SIR hardly three months before elections? How did Maharashtra witness an inexplicable surge of over 70 lakh voters between the Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha elections? Why did the ECI decide to extend COs for polling booths after 45 days? Why has it not acted on the massive revelations made by Rahul Gandhi?

Was it not its guilt that forced the ECI to vehemently oppose the Supreme Court's directions to publish details of the deleted voters from the Bihar SIR in a searchable format and to allow Aadhaar as proof of voter identity?

Clean voter lists are the first steps towards building an honest constitutional democracy. When their legitimacy is under suspicion, the people's trust erodes. Today, two forces in India refuse to recognise the ECI's duty of impartiality: The BJP, and the Commission itself. Has the ECI taken any decision that could suggest it is acting on its own accord, treating the BJP in the same manner as other opposition parties? Surely, if so, the BJP would have tried to raise public awareness. Its selective targeting of the Opposition shows its true agenda — to sideline those who stand between its authoritarian tendencies and the Constitution's fiercely democratic character.

The fight to protect the Constitution is not symbolic. It is a living struggle to defend democracy itself. The INDIA bloc is determined never to allow this destruction. The battle to reclaim the ECI's sanctity, restore fairness in our elections, and defend the very idea of India's democracy is afoot — and will continue until all threats are decisively dealt with.

The writer is general secretary (organisation), All India Congress Committee



RAM RAJYA

BY RAM MADHAV

# Reforming the steel frame

Success of India's deep-tech push requires removing bureaucracy's colonial roots

ON INDEPENDENCE DAY last week, Prime Minister Narendra Modi delivered an important address from the Red Fort's ramparts. There was greater emphasis on a grand vision for the future of the nation this time compared to the past, especially the direction the country should take in the coming years. PM Modi focused a lot on areas in frontier technology and insisted on making the country *amir-bihar* (self-reliant) in these areas. He talked about semiconductors, nuclear energy, clean energy, critical minerals, oil exploration, EVs, even jet engines, and asked, "Should the jet engine for our Made in India fighter jets be ours or not?"

The Prime Minister promised citizens that the country will shed dependency in the next two decades by making the country self-reliant — not confined merely to imports and exports, or to rupees, pounds, and dollars, but "linked to our capability", calling upon countrymen to "preserve, maintain, and enhance our capability, it is imperative to be self-reliant."

Modi's technology push is not new. His efforts in that direction have yielded commendable results, with India becoming a go-to nation for many developing countries in areas like fintech. Technology has become the mainstay of most activities for the common person in the country. India has become the world's largest per capita data consumer (32 GB), overtaking China (29 GB) and the USA (22 GB). With growing digital awareness and education, and the increasing number of smartphone users and availability of cheap data,

India will continue to grow in that area.

However, most of this digitisation came from low-tech and mid-tech areas of basic computing and social media. In high-tech areas, India has registered some advancements in the last two decades, with cities like Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Pune, Gurgaon, and others emerging as hubs of such technologies. Yet, several high-tech areas remain heavily import-dependent. Meanwhile, as we race ahead in mid-tech and high-tech areas, the world has moved on to the next level of deep-tech, Web 4.0, for instance. PM Modi wants the country to focus on areas such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing, robotics, blockchain technologies, genetics and bioengineering, aerospace and defence, space and outer space and crypto and other digital currencies.

It is a tall order. It's not that India lacks capability. Global leaders in deep-tech like Nvidia and IBM have R&D facilities in India, benefiting from the country's talent pool. But there are some fundamental challenges that the country needs to address to achieve *aman-bharata* in deep-tech. PM Modi appeared conscious of that imperative. A day after his Independence Day address, PM Modi called a high-level meeting of his senior cabinet colleagues and others to discuss "next-generation reforms".

Next-generation reforms are crucial. But what is more crucial is for the government to look at the pending basic reforms in three important sectors — the bureaucracy, regulatory bodies, and the judiciary. In his address from

the Red Fort in 2022, PM Modi had called on the people to shed "all traces of the colonial mindset". Incidentally, these three institutions continue to dominate governance in our country. Not that the individuals who work in these institutions — bureaucrats and judicial officers — are incompetent. Many of them have proved to be outstanding and won laurels for the nation. But the challenge is with the systems we inherited from the British colonisers.

The Westminster bureaucracy we adopted without change after Independence was created by colonial administrators to perpetuate British rule in India. Nearly every civil servant came from London till the first two decades of the 20th century. To increase the demand for them, the Public Service Commission was created in 1926 to train Indians for bureaucratic positions. But the Indian Civil Service's design, the "steel frame", continued to ensure that Indians remained subservient to an unelected and unaccountable institutional framework. Incidentally, 2026 marks the centenary of this British vintage institution. There cannot be a better occasion to overhaul the UPS.

There have been several attempts at administrative reforms in the past. The Veerappa Moily Committee, appointed during the UPA government in 2005, was the last. Its important suggestions include introducing "direct appointment of specialists with domain expertise for high-ranking government positions" and "establishing a code of ethics for public officials and a mechanism for account-

ability". However, not much has happened in that direction. Prime Minister Modi's efforts to encourage the lateral entry of experts, too, have met with limited success in cracking the "steel frame". Earlier this year, the government formed a Deregulation Commission to identify and eliminate redundant compliance obligations in various sectors. Its aim was to end regulatory red tape. PM Modi's grand vision depends on how he tackles these tough bureaucratic and regulatory roadblocks.

Two countries that lead the world today, China and the US, have different bureaucratic models. But one common feature between them is the supremacy of the political leadership. Even in the UK, from where we inherited the Westminster model, a major debate erupted a few years ago over the steel frame's efficacy. Dominique Cummings, chief advisor to the then UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, led the campaign for reformist reforms. Objecting to the internal promotion model, he pushed for opening senior appointments to outside competition. Besides fixing accountability, he also advocated for greater ministerial control over the administration.

There can be a debate over the merits of these suggestions. But for Viksit Bharat to become a reality, an undeniable imperative for India is to shed its colonial bureaucratic model and replace it with a more accountable and responsive institutional arrangement.

The writer, president, India Foundation, is with the BJP. Views are personal

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### STEADY PARTNER

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "Three plus one" (IE, August 22). In global diplomacy, few relationships have been as steady as India's with Russia. The US story has been one of shifting bargains, transactional at the core, irrespective of who presided over the Oval Office. With China, the reality has been stark. An adversarial relationship running for six decades, occasionally punctuated by telenovelas. With Russia, it has been less about deals and more about durable trust. The Russian saga carries the weight of shared history, of reliability through wars, crises, and the evolving global order.

R Narayanan, Novi Mumbai

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, "Three plus one" (IE, August 22). Though India-China relations seem to have thawed since the 2024 border agreement, mutual suspicions continue to mar the bilateral relationship. But, at a time when New Delhi's ties with Washington are facing turbulence and there is an upswing in India's ties with both Russia and China, there are high chances of the Russia-India-China (RIC) troika being revived. It has made limited progress, but it can now become a platform to exchange views. India should make full use of RIC dynamics.

Vaibhav Goyal, Chandigarh

### DRACONIAN BILL

THIS REFERS TO the article, "Against Opposition, not corruption" (IE, August 22). The Constitution (130th Amendment) Bill is flawed on several counts. It goes against the proposition that everyone is entitled to the presumption of innocence until they are proved to be guilty. It itself. The INDIA bloc is determined never to allow this destruction. The battle to reclaim the ECI's sanctity, restore fairness in our elections, and defend the very idea of India's democracy is afoot — and will continue until all threats are decisively dealt with.

David Milton, Marathnandode

THIS REFERS TO the editorial "Dangerous & wrong" (IE, August 21). The bills, which have been referred to a select committee of the Lok Sabha, are unconstitutional and have been conceived with a hidden agenda. They are mainly aimed at Opposition parties, particularly in states where the ruling party at the Centre intends to destabilise the parties in power. It is inconceivable that a PM will be arrested. The bills have been brought to distract the people from the SIR controversy.

Deepak Sethi, Pune

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY RAMNATH GOENKA BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

ABOUT CREDIBILITY

Inflation targeting regime has worked well. Changes that undermine RBI's monetary policy framework should be avoided

IN 2016, INDIA shifted to an inflation targeting regime. The inflation target of 4 per cent with a band of plus/minus 2 per cent was initially set for a five-year period ending in 2021. Subsequently, in March 2021, the government retained the inflation target for another five years. With the second review of the framework due early next year, the RBI has now released a discussion paper on the monetary policy regime. The paper examines how inflation targeting has fared in India over the past nine years, and also raises several questions over its structure.

On balance, shifting to this framework has "served India well". Inflation has averaged 4.9 per cent after the shift, as compared to an average of 6.8 per cent in the period before that. The framework has provided the Monetary Policy Committee the flexibility to deal with challenging economic situations — during the pandemic years, for instance, it allowed for greater weightage to be attached to growth priorities in the decision matrix. The regime has also brought about accountability — when inflation stayed above the upper threshold of 6 per cent, the RBI was required to send a report to the government detailing why the target was not met and the corrective action that needed to be taken. Alongside, publication of the minutes of the committee meeting, which are released with a gap of two weeks, has brought about transparency in the decision-making process by detailing the thinking and rationale for the decisions of each committee member. Further, by putting in place a six-member committee to decide on policy, more voices have been incorporated in decision-making.

The questions raised by the discussion paper centre around whether the 4 per cent target is optimal, if it should be replaced by a range, if the tolerance bands should be changed or done away with and whether headline or core inflation is the best guide for policy. Each of these has been explored in great detail. The paper notes that across the world, while 48 countries have adopted this framework, with differing targets and ranges, "no major country" has ever shifted away. The framework has been tweaked on occasion, however, to reflect changing domestic and global conditions. On the issue of targeting headline vs core inflation, RBI continues to veer on the side of headline inflation. "Any attempt to anchor inflation expectations should not ignore shocks to food and fuel," it says. Globally, too, headline inflation is favoured. In fact, the paper notes that "Uganda is the only country that targets core inflation". It takes time to build credibility. Any changes that are perceived as either undermining or diluting the current framework, such as raising the target or shifting to range targeting, run the risk of "eroding policy credibility". These are best avoided. As the central bank notes, "the conduct of monetary policy frameworks needs both policy certainty and credibility".

THINK IT THROUGH

SC's revised order on stray dogs opens up space to calm tempers and work out long-term solutions

IF THE FUROR following the Supreme Court's August 11 order, which directed that all stray dogs in Delhi-NCR be removed to shelters, showed a deep polarisation of attitudes, then its modification of the order on Friday is an opportunity to tackle a serious issue in a more thoughtful, scientific manner. The three-judge bench, to which the matter was reassigned after the original order was reserved, strikes a balance between established animal welfare laws and public safety concerns. Among other directions, the Court has said that while sterilised and vaccinated dogs are to be released where they were picked up from, the ones that have rabies or are suspected to have it, or display aggressive behaviour, are to remain in the shelters. The new order opens up space for tempers to calm down, so that a sustainable and humane solution to a stubborn problem may be found.

What this requires, in the first place, is an acknowledgement of, and introspection over, the reasons for the failure of the Animal Birth Control (Dog) Rules. Both a paucity of resources and a lack of will on the part of local governance have hobbled efforts to manage the stray dog population. In its order on Friday, the Court asked municipal authorities to give a full picture of the resources available, including the number of pounds, veterinarians, dog-catching personnel and cages/vehicles required for compliance with the ABC Rules. With the Court now expanding the scope of the matter to include all states and Union Territories, these hard numbers can help plug holes and be used to formulate a more realistic solution. They can help local bodies in other parts of the country, especially those that may not have the kind of resources that Delhi-NCR does, to form a clearer idea of the challenges, and develop a more targeted approach. Numbers can also help make a stronger case for why the vast community of those who care for "streets" must be included if there is to be a lasting solution. Their help can be sought, for example, in ensuring that each dog in a locality is kept up-to-date with vaccinations, including for rabies — something that may be beyond the capacity of resource-poor municipal bodies.

That the problem of stray dogs is deeply linked to unmanaged solid waste cannot be ignored; like so many other species, such as pigeons, crows and cats, dogs too have come to depend on overflowing rubbish bins and garbage dumps for food. Tackling the trash problem can go a long way towards controlling the stray dog population. In addition to correcting other past mistakes, municipal authorities should not delay addressing this problem.

PLAYING LOCAL

BCCI has reminded top players to participate in the upcoming Duleep Trophy. That's a good thing

IN JANUARY, THE Arun Jaitley Stadium was packed when Virat Kohli played his first domestic game in 12 years. The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) had made it mandatory for centrally contracted cricketers to appear in domestic matches when not on national duty. The BCCI's decision was first issued in early 2024 and reiterated following the 3-1 loss in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy Series in Australia, which came on the heels of a shocking 0-3 loss to New Zealand at home. It's a welcome sign that despite the Shubman Gill-captained Test team giving a good account of themselves by earning a hard fought 2-2 series draw in England, the BCCI has reminded top players to play in the upcoming Duleep Trophy.

While Gill and Yashasvi Jaiswal will turn out for North Zone and West Zone respectively, the BCCI mission was aimed at Test players who were not part of the South Zone squad, including opener KL Rahul and fast bowler Mohammed Siraj, both heroes of the England series. BCCI's general manager (cricket operations) Abey Kuruvilla reminded the state associations, who pick the Duleep Trophy squads for their respective zones, "that it's imperative that all currently available India players are selected for their respective zonal teams". This is not a case of the BCCI blindly throwing the rule book at players.

The focus of the men's team will now turn to the T20 World Cup to be jointly hosted by India and Sri Lanka early next year and the Asia Cup that is around the corner, also a T20 format tournament. But lest we forget, there are four Test matches that are part of the World Test Championship cycle to be played at home; two each against the West Indies and South Africa. Taking lessons from the loss to New Zealand, when the Test team was out-played and batsmen found wanting against spin and pace on home wickets, pushing top cricketers to play long-form matches like the Duleep Trophy will help them gain valuable red-ball game time. The team carries the momentum from the series in England. But being out in the middle and playing is better than sitting on laurels too long.



SUJAN CHINOY

US PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP's recent policy pronouncements towards India have sent ripples across the political, economic and strategic firmament no less than China's actions in Galwan in 2020.

Today, India is dealing with uncertainty in relations with both the US and China. It is ironic that China is now speaking out in support of India's strategic autonomy. Pakistan, meanwhile, has struck up a new relationship with Trump, nominating him for the Nobel Peace Prize, and offering deals in crypto currency and critical mineral assets.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has expressed his firm resolve to protect the interests of Indian farmers and others dependent on the dairy and fisheries sectors. Much is at stake in a vital bilateral partnership. The US is India's largest trading partner. Bilateral trade touched \$131.84 billion in 2024-2025 with India enjoying a trade surplus of \$41.18 billion. India's exports to the US account for approximately 20 per cent of its total. Eighty per cent of this is produced by MSMEs. The whiplash effect could affect sensitive sectors of the Indian economy. The EU, with stricter quality standards, is not an alternative.

Remittances from the Indian diaspora in the US account for 30 per cent of the total of \$135 billion. If work visas for Indians are targeted next, remittances will drop sharply. Given that the service sector accounts for over 50 per cent of India's GDP, any downsizing would result in significant layoffs.

The number of student visas issued by the US had decreased substantially even before the 50 per cent tariff was announced. Noticeably, there was a 44 per cent drop in F-1 visas for Indian students in the first half of 2025 compared to the first half of 2024. It could deprive those with a STEM background from accessing high-tech education. The US benefits from the \$12-17 billion spent by Indian students annually.

Defence and security cooperation has surged in recent years following the con-

India-US, despite Trump

The recent rough patch in bilateral ties shouldn't dilute past gains or close doors for future cooperation

clusion of an array of foundational agreements such as LEMOA, COMCASA and BECA. The Security of Supply Agreement (SOSA) has also been concluded. A finalisation of Reciprocal Defence Procurement (RDP) would elevate ties to the next level. The two sides conduct a large number of joint exercises. Military hardware imported from the US boosts India's defence capabilities, particularly when its military-industrial complex is still maturing. US analysts argue that India has overestimated its global influence and that India cannot deter China without a tandem with the US. One must also carefully examine the fallout of the recent contretemps on the renewal of the 10-year Indo-US Defence Framework Agreement.

Both India and the US have invested considerable political capital in deepening multidimensional engagement. Yet, the points of friction are self-apparent. India's emphasis on multipolarity is clashing today with Trump's desire to maintain the US's global pre-eminence. The US needs to appreciate that for India, multipolarity implies that Asia without domination. The "Make in India" programme does not contradict the MACA push for onshoring because manufacturing costs are not comparable. India's firm commitment to "strategic autonomy" rubs up against US efforts to reset the terms of its global engagement.

US demands for access to India's agriculture and dairy sectors will impact the livelihood of vulnerable sections of the Indian population. Oil, on the other hand, is a fungible product. It should be relatively easier for India to reduce its offtake of Russian oil, as long as the alternatives are broadly competitive. Legacy issues, however, make it difficult for India to shun Moscow altogether. India will also have to avoid creating new dependencies.

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moderation in that grouping.

Earlier this year, the two sides unveiled fresh initiatives such as the US-India COMPACT (Catalysing Opportunities for Military Partnership, Accelerated Commerce and Technology) for the 21st Century and TRUST (Transforming the Relationship Utilising Strategic Technology). The challenge is to preserve such collaboration despite Trump's techno-nationalism and the ruckus created by punitive tariffs. There is also the matter of India's digital and data sovereignty versus US tech dominance.

Trump is keen to claim credit for the May 10 India-Pakistan ceasefire. At that time, many countries were following the military hostilities with concern, the US among them. A few well-wishers may have urged Pakistan to approach India for a ceasefire through established military channels, as required by India. This is well appreciated, but it is not tantamount to mediation, on which India has a longstanding and principled position. One may recall that former President Bill Clinton had put pressure on Pakistan during the Kargil War, but that was not mediation.

Where does that leave the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad)? There have been calls for India to step up its participation in the Quad's activities, including in the South China Sea. India has a strong commitment to the four-way alliance. The Indian Navy has recently carried out joint naval exercises with the Philippines in the South China Sea.

The bilateral kerfuffle has reached "high noon" proportions but there need not be any showdown. India and the US must engage at multiple levels to preserve the gains made so far. A mutually acceptable trade deal could pave the way for an enduring partnership in the interest of peace and security in the Indo-Pacific.

The author, a former ambassador, is currently director general of the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses. Views are personal.



PAYAL MALIK, NIKITA JAIN AND SHAILLY GUPTA

ENABLER, NOT DISRUPTOR

India's policy challenge is to ensure AI supports small businesses, workers

BEHIND THE HEADLINES of layoffs, attributed partly to the deployment of artificial intelligence (AI), there is a more fundamental question: How will India shape the trajectory of AI in ways that its impact on jobs, productivity, and economy is inclusive?

Estimates from the ServiceNow-Pearson AI Skills Research 2025 report indicate that agentic AI could reshape over 10.35 million jobs and create 3 million new tech roles in India by 2030, placing the country ahead of Singapore and Australia in AI transformation. A 2025 ILO study highlights that, as new tasks emerge in AI deployment, jobs are likely to evolve rather than disappear. This optimism must be tempered with a clear-eyed view of India's structural challenges. The farm sector, which employs the most people in India, has limited exposure to AI. Labour-intensive services, especially services, which contributed 55 per cent to GDP and 31 per cent to employment in FY24, could, however, be impacted. Compounding this is the slow pace of skilling and low adoption of evolving competencies, especially among informal workers. How these structural gaps interact with AI adoption in India will determine whether technology exacerbates existing employment gaps or helps close them.

Economist and Nobel Laureate Daron Acemoglu has argued that AI's impact is not destiny but a choice. The central dilemma lies between two distinct AI pathways — automation and augmentation. Automation entails using AI to replace human workers, boosting efficiency but risking job losses. Augmentation involves using AI to complement human effort, enhancing productivity while preserving or expanding employment. India must avoid

the automation trap and prioritise three interlinked pillars — skilling workers, reducing inequality through inclusive, non-extractive infrastructure, and fostering entrepreneurship through support for innovation.

These shifts are underway in some sectors. Tata Steel uses AI co-pilots to support engineers rather than displacing workers. Infosys has launched large-scale reskilling efforts. Siemens is deploying generative AI to enhance productivity and worker well-being. These examples point to a path where AI acts as a chariot (saurhi) and not a destroyer (vinashaki).

To scale such models, a focus on lifelong learning is essential. Digital and AI-related competencies should be embedded across schools, universities, industrial training institutes, and vocational centres. Strengthening academia-industry-government partnerships is equally vital. Flagship programmes such as the Atal Innovation Mission, Startup India, Future Skills PRIME, Youth for Unnati, and Vikas with AI must be scaled up.

Emerging evidence shows that generative AI tools can help narrow skill gaps, particularly for workers with low skills, by serving as collaborative tools. With AI transforming both low- and high-skill jobs, success increasingly hinges on developing the cognitive and social-emotional skills that machines cannot replicate.

To realise AI's augmenting potential, India must ensure markets remain open and competitive. As highlighted in the ICRIER AI Markets and Competition report, the growing dominance of vertically integrated firms risks replicating platform-era distortions. Infrastructure-led bundling of services, self-preferencing and proprietary standards could

restrict smaller players from participating in the AI economy. If unchecked, these structures will place critical decisions about AI deployment in the hands of a few firms. Employers, driven by cost efficiencies, may default to automation-first approaches. AI infrastructure providers, be they foundational models, storage, or computing, may shape AI's trajectory.

The policy challenge, therefore, is not merely enabling AI access but also ensuring that AI ecosystems remain contestable and worker-supportive. This will require competitive access to cloud and edge computing, open APIs, and interoperable systems, and supporting indigenous development of Small Language Models, domain-optimised AI models or domain-specific agents, and vernacular tools to democratise AI innovation.

Computing, storage, and access to datasets should be treated as public goods. India's digital public infrastructure model should be anchored in shared infrastructure, open standards, and interoperability to make sure that innovators are not locked out. Public investment in incubators, accelerators, and mentorship should not be limited to scaling a few unicorns but to building an ecosystem of sustainable enterprises. When empowered with the right digital tools, computing access, and tailored skilling, MSMEs can become powerful engines of employment-rich growth.

AI may displace some jobs. But with the right policy choices, institutional support, and infrastructure, it can become a driver for inclusive growth.

The writers are at the ICRIER Prusac Centre (IPCIDE)

AUGUST 23, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

PUNJAB POLLS

ELECTIONS IN PUNJAB will be held on September 25 instead of September 22, the Election Commission has announced. It is evident that the government has stuck to its decision to go ahead with the elections despite opposition from the Akalis and other national parties. The EC had asked the Punjab chief secretary to assess the situation afresh in the wake of the assassination of Akali Dal chief Harchand Singh Longowal, and also to know the views of other political parties.

AKALI SPLIT THREAT

WITH THE BODY of the assassinated Akali

Dal president, Harchand Singh Longowal, still warm, a war of succession has broken out in the party, threatening a vertical split in the rank and file. The war was signalled when a meeting of Akali cadre leaders "appointed" Sujit Singh Barnala, former minister and a close lieutenant of Sant Longowal, convenor of the party barely 10 hours after the latter's pyre was lit.

UK PLANE DISASTER

A BRITISH AIRCRAFTS jetliner packed with vacationers burst into flames and crashed at the end of the runway at Manchester Airport, killing 54 of the 137 people on board, police said. Passengers among the 83 survivors reported a

mass panic in the crowded aisle of the aircraft as people tried to escape down emergency chutes when the flaming plane stopped.

THIMPHU TALKS

THE THIMPHU PEACE talks between the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil groups have adjourned with no immediate scope of resumption. The Indian high commissioner, N Dixit, announced the adjournment at a news conference in Colombo. It was India's assessment that the talks had to be adjourned because of the resurgence of violence and because there was "some gap" between the Tamil delegations' expectations and what the government offered.