

Enabling growth

Structural reforms are needed in manufacturing

The Annual Survey of Industries (ASI) 2023-24 data, released on Wednesday, indicates that India's manufacturing sector is growing, but structural concerns persist. Gross value added (GVA) rose 11.9 per cent at current prices in FY24, but overall output grew about 5.8 per cent, which is a sharp slowdown from FY23, when output had expanded by 21 per cent on the back of the post-pandemic rebound. Employment, too, grew 5.9 per cent, but output per person engaged declined. For a labour-abundant country such as India, where manufacturing must support incomes, these are not an encouraging set of numbers.

The deeper challenge lies in the sector's role in the economy. Despite years of policy attention, manufacturing contributes just 17 per cent of gross domestic product and only about 12 per cent of jobs. This is far short of what India needs. Millions of semi-skilled and low-skilled workers continue to enter the labour force every year. Without more factory jobs, people may have no choice but to take up low-paying informal work. The spread of industrial activity is also concentrated. The top five states alone account for nearly 54 per cent of manufacturing GVA and 55 per cent of employment in the sector. Further, output remains dominated by just five industries — basic metals, motor vehicles, chemicals, food products, and pharmaceuticals. Such concentration restricts inclusivity and undermines the potential of manufacturing to serve as a broad-based engine of growth.

From a policy perspective, Indian manufacturing is highly fragmented, dominated by small firms with limited access to technology and finance. This keeps productivity low and costs high. It is well accepted that institutional rigidities tend to affect investment. India's labour laws, for example, offer little incentive for entrepreneurs to scale up their operations. Fear of compliance burdens and disputes discourage enterprises from hiring at scale, especially in labour-intensive industries such as textile, footwear, and food processing, where India should hold a comparative edge.

It is thus important that policy must go beyond tax breaks and production-linked incentive schemes to push the scale in labour-intensive industries. Expanding the pool of skilled labour in line with evolving technologies and incentivising geographic dispersal is also important. A balanced strategy that aligns investment with jobs and wage growth is crucial for manufacturing-led development. Thus, India must encourage scale in labour-intensive sectors. This means easing rigidities that discourage hiring and creating industrial clusters, which can deliver cost competitiveness. New labour codes, for example, have been passed but are awaiting implementation. Further, skills must be aligned with the new realities of technology, where digital tools, automation, and green manufacturing are reshaping workplaces. Finally, investment support should be linked with employment. To be fair, trade tensions with the United States have increased uncertainties for the manufacturing sector, and output may suffer in the near term, particularly in labour-intensive sectors. However, the policy must focus on medium- to long-run prospects. India needs wide-ranging reforms in land, labour, and capital to boost manufacturing output and create conditions to generate employment for its growing workforce. A delay in implementing reforms at this stage can affect growth disproportionately in the coming years.

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Down the learning curve

Govt schools need greater accountability

The latest findings of the National Statistics Office's Comprehensive Modular Survey on Education have underlined the well-known fact that the government-schooling system is failing, a development that has a bearing on demographic trends. The survey reveals a decline in attendance in government schools in rural and urban areas since 2017-18. The decline was worryingly sharp in rural India, with a nearly 10 percentage-point drop in the number of higher-secondary students attending government schools from 68 per cent to 58.9 per cent in 2025. In urban areas, the drop was smaller from 38.9 per cent to 36.4 per cent. New enrolment, too, has fallen across all levels — primary, middle, and secondary — with the sharpest fall recorded in the first two cohorts.

The striking point about this exodus from government schools is that private education is not cheap. The survey shows that average education expenses in government schools are a fraction of what parents spend on educating their children in private schools. In rural India, the disparity is seven times. Ironically, evidence suggests that private schools are not necessarily imparting a higher standard of education. The survey revealed that roughly 27 per cent of students took private coaching — 31 per cent in urban areas and 25.5 per cent in rural areas. This substantial shift from government to expensive private schooling could partly be viewed as the result of growing relative prosperity and smaller families, which enable more Indians to send their children to what they perceive as superior private schools, though many private schools are known for extractive practices in terms of providing textbooks, uniforms, and so on.

But the steadily deteriorating standard of government schools has played a key role in providing the impetus for this preference. The basic problem lies in the systemic lack of accountability, which translates into poor infrastructure and variable teaching standards. Nowhere is this more evident than in the level of teacher absenteeism. Teachers in government schools in India are among the best-paid in the developing world, especially after the Sixth and Seventh Pay Commissions. Yet nationwide surveys reveal that teacher absenteeism can be as high as 25 per cent — in some states it can be as high as 46 per cent. Adding to the problem of teachers not doing their job is the high level of vacancies in government schools. This is rarely an issue in private schools though salaries may not necessarily be higher, nor linked to pensions and other benefits.

One long-term result of this divergence between private and public education is growing social inequality. The shift to higher fee-paying private schooling by those who can afford it means that the government-schooling system, with all its deepening infirmities, will be limited to poorer and marginalised sections of society. Their emergence from a grossly underperforming education system will push them further out of better-paid employment opportunities and trap them in minimum-wage jobs. State schooling has been one of the cornerstones of the success of the Asian Tigers and China. By receding from the field, the government is doing its people a disservice.

GST reform in two steps

Rate rationalisation can be the long-term goal, while a unilateral reduction in central GST could boost domestic demand in the short term

ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA



The economic environment facing Indian business has received a new shock. The punitive tariffs announced by the United States government came into effect on August 27, levying a 50 per cent import duty on a range of Indian exports. The impact of these tariffs is expected to be felt across sectors, including garments, footwear, gems and jewellery and shrimp exports. Significant second-round effects are also anticipated, such as a reduction in imports related to exports of goods. Gems and Jewellery is one such sector, where exports are closely linked to the import of raw diamonds.

While diplomatic channels continue to explore the possibility of returning to a regime with more modest tariffs, the responses by the Government of India will clearly encompass a range of initiatives, including the exploration of new markets and designing policies to support exporting units in the short run. Apart from policy initiatives targeting the export sector, it is also possible to conceive of more broad-based measures to stimulate domestic demand as an alternative to export demand. Reform through the rationalisation of goods and services tax (GST) rates could be one such measure. We explore some design questions and options in utilising the proposed change to address the short-run as well as the long-run expectations of the economy.

Reforms in the GST regime can have two broad objectives at the present juncture. First, honouring the long-standing commitment to rationalise the rate structure and reduce the number of tax slabs, the re-

forms need to focus on an optimal structure. This process of rationalisation is oriented towards the long-term needs of the economy, and should aim to establish a regime that can be sustained. Second, in the short run, given the shock to the economy and the uncertainty prevailing in the world economy, a stimulus to domestic demand can be an objective. Two components to this demand are household consumption and expenditure by governments, preferably capital expenditure by governments. In designing the proposed regime, an attempt needs to be made to keep both these factors in perspective.

Some issues to consider while designing reforms can be:

- To stimulate demand, a reduction in tax rates would be recommended. A positive impact on demand would require that the lower taxes be passed through to lower prices. Anti-profiteering provisions were used at the time of GST introduction to induce a timely pass-through.

Given the contentious nature of such provisions, it is desirable to rely on market forces. However, such a process might take time to play out, which in turn implies the boost to demand will happen gradually.

- The impact of a reduction in tax rates depends on the price elasticity of demand. When demand is highly elastic, a reduction in the tax rate can support an increase in revenue collection by stimulating higher demand. For elasticities below one, the impact on revenues can be adverse. The net effect on GST rev-

enues, therefore, remains uncertain.

- GST constitutes an important part of the revenues for state governments. With Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management commitments and limitations on the borrowing space available to states, any short-term adverse implications on state revenues would have direct implications for capital expenditure by state governments. It should be kept in mind that the Finance Commission is currently finalising its recommendations, perhaps based on the existing tax regimes in place. Any change in the rates, through the impact on Central revenues, can have second-order impact on state finances as well.

- In a federal economy, macro-stabilisation responsibility rests with the Union government, supported by its ability to borrow in the event of economic uncertainties. Short-term uncertainties should therefore be shouldered by the Union government.

Given these considerations, one possible way to structure GST reforms to address both sets of considerations can be summarised as follows. GST reforms can be undertaken in two parts. The first part relates to the long-term objective of reducing the number of tax rates, with the goal of remaining broadly revenue neutral — that is, raising the same amount of revenue as the present rate structure yields. A useful benchmark for this is to look at revenues as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) — we should aim for a stable ratio. Such convergence requires raising tax rates on some commodities while reducing them on others. For instance, a range of goods, currently exempt, can be brought into the tax net at a lower rate. Alternatively, some of the goods in the 12 per cent slab could be moved to the higher slab. A suitably structured two or three rate regime could be sustainable in the medium term and provide a degree of policy certainty for investors.

The second component of the current reform agenda can be a short-term unilateral reduction in tax rates by the Union government — reducing the Central GST without changing State GST. This would be similar to the reduction in central excise duties undertaken to mitigate the impact of the global financial crisis. The incentive so provided can be reversed once the system has stabilised. The impact on state finances would be smaller if the adjustment is undertaken by the Union government. Clearly, some relaxation in fiscal prudence norms would be required to ensure that the demand stimulus from government expenditure is not undermined by the tax stimulus measures. In other words, short-term increase in fiscal deficits might be called for.

Such a two-part reform process could build bridges with state governments and provide greater policy certainty — some food for thought!

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The views are personal



R KAVITA RAO

India's double-certification trap

Quality control orders (QCOs) were meant to protect product quality, but now they manipulate competition in India's market. Earlier, anyone could import goods by paying import duty or obtaining a licence. Now, the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) decides who can import and from which factory — and the rules can change overnight. This makes compliance costly, reduces the number of suppliers, and risks creating a system even worse than the old licensing raj. Small businesses lose out to bigger companies with more influence.

A recent example is the steel ministry's June 13 order. It requires not only finished and semi-finished steel products, but also the raw materials used to make them, to have a BIS quality certificate. The rule took effect with barely one working day's notice, causing shipments to be stuck at ports, contracts to be cancelled, and court cases to be filed.

The steel order is not a one-off — it's part of a growing trend where QCOs are used to shape markets and favour certain players. Let's examine the steel order through a case study.

Case study: A small Indian firm imports stainless-steel products from Factory X in Indonesia. Such imports fall under India's Foreign Manufacturer Certification Scheme (FMCS), which allows the BIS to inspect and certify foreign factories exporting to India. Under FMCS, BIS auditors visit the overseas facility to verify that production processes and raw materials meet Indian Standards (IS). Once satisfied, BIS issues a licence allowing the factory to affix the BIS mark, subject to regular surveillance.

Factory X sources hot-rolled coils from a Thai supplier. Previously, the supplier's certification status did not matter; as long as Factory X's final products met BIS norms, they could be exported to India.

However, the June 13 order changes the game. Now, every upstream raw material supplier — even if located in a third country — must also be BIS-certified. This means the Thai mill must also secure a BIS licence. Without it, Factory X cannot export to India, regardless of its certification.

Certification burden: This policy imposes a double-certification requirement. The first certification — the one that matters — is for the final product, which is already in place under FMCS. The second, newly mandated certification is for upstream raw material suppliers, often in third countries far removed from the Indian market.

Getting BIS certification takes 6 to 18 months, involves substantial fees, and requires performance guarantees and compliance audits. Small overseas mills producing modest volumes for an intermediary exporter have no incentive to invest the time and money needed for certification. This means limiting the number of foreign suppliers for Indian buyers.

India consumes about 1.5 million tonnes more stainless steel each year than it produces, and even its biggest maker imports over 30 per cent of what it sells. By restricting suppliers and putting imports under BIS control, the steel order makes business impossible for small players and shifts business in the hands of a few dominant players.

Legal dimensions: The order has already been challenged in court. On July 17, the Madras High Court granted an interim stay, as the order was issued without consultation or reasonable transition time. The Ministry of Steel appealed to the Supreme Court, arguing the measure was necessary to ensure parity between domestic producers and importers and to prevent the dumping of substandard steel. On July 30, the Supreme Court vacated the stay but sent the case back to the High Court for a fresh consultation and judgment.

Yet the ministry's arguments don't hold up. FMCS already requires that raw materials used in BIS-certified factories meet Indian standards. Additional licensing for raw material suppliers adds no meaningful quality assurance. Existing safeguards — mill test certificates, port-level Positive Material Identification (PMI) tests, and customs inspections — already prevent substandard imports.

WTO risks: No major steel-producing economy — the United States, European Union, or Japan — requires separate raw material certification if the

final product meets national standards. Instead, they rely on traceability through Mill Test Certificates, accredited third-party testing, and mutual recognition agreements.

India's double-certification model diverges sharply from these norms and risks being classified as a non-tariff barrier (NTB) under World Trade Organization (WTO) rules. That could expose India to trade disputes or retaliatory measures. Nepal has already voiced concerns over the disruption this causes to regional supply chains.

The timing and selective nature of the order have raised suspicions of regulatory capture. One dominant stainless-steel producer reportedly secured BIS certification for its foreign suppliers just before June 13, then raised prices soon after the order's release.

The exemption for the medical device sector — secured after industry lobbying — shows that the government recognises the harm this policy can cause. Yet other industries, from auto components to construction, remain trapped in a regulatory chokehold. **A poorly conceived policy:** By forcing upstream suppliers with no commercial interest in India to undergo a burdensome certification process, the government has added avoidable costs, and jeopardised India's reliability as a manufacturing partner. If the government believes this approach is necessary, where does it stop? Will iron ore and coal mines be required to obtain BIS licences next? How many layers of regulation can be added before the system collapses under its weight?

Way forward: India needs an urgent top-level review of the order. The June 13 order should be paused until the review is complete. The government must consult all affected groups before making significant policy changes, and the Competition Commission of India should investigate any signs of collusion in the steel supply chain.

With US markets almost shut to Indian goods and the EU becoming more protectionist, India cannot afford more uncertainty. QCO rules must be predictable, transparent, and balanced.

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AJAY SRIVASTAVA

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For art's sake



NEHA KIRPAL

Musicians often choose their path not out of choice, but from a persistent inner calling, a driving need for their being. In her latest book, reputed Hindustani classical vocalist Priya Purushothaman traces the experiences of eight singular voices in Hindustani classical music that have deeply inspired her. As a musician, the journeys of these individuals reminded Ms Purushothaman of the hardships that artists have endured purely for the sake of their art. "Their stories, some heard and some unheard, form the

contemporary landscape of this art," she writes in the book's introduction.

During the pandemic, Ms Purushothaman felt an urgent need to document the inner stories of serious practitioners of music, many of whom are not in the limelight. Accordingly, she chose to include selected Hindustani musicians across a spectrum of ages in the collection.

"What a young artist may lack in experience, they may compensate for in freshness of perspective," she explains. Each chapter in the book reads like a detailed biography, recounting incidents from the lives of the musicians. Ms Purushothaman devotes two chapters of the book to her own guru, Sudhindra Ishaumik, whose story was one of the first that motivated her to put together this collection.

Alam Khan carries the legacy of his legendary father, Ustad Ali Akbar Khan,

with modesty and responsibility. Growing up in California in the 1980s, he inhabited his musical world at home along with a starkly American culture outside. Having spent large amounts of time at the Ali Akbar College of Music, which his father founded in 1967, it became an extended musical family that was a huge part of Alam's formative years. From his early teens, Alam began accompanying his father on tours to Europe, India and the US. Suhail Yusuf Khan, a sarangi player who has performed globally and collaborated across genres, is the youngest musician in the collection. The first heir to the title of a PhD in ethnomusicology, he talks about issues of caste and discrimination as a Mirasi musician. "Beyond technique, materiality and pedagogy, the core of Suhail's research is a critical analysis of the Mirasi experience," writes Ms Purushothaman.

With conviction and effort, world-renowned violinist Kala Rannath innovated on an instrument that was

introduced quite late into the Hindustani music space. A child prodigy, Ms Rannath gave her first major public recital in Mumbai at the age of 18. A year later, she received the coveted A grade from All India Radio. Having faced several hurdles in her career, including many instances of gender discrimination, she speaks openly about issues, such as unequal pay, that have become normalised in the professional ecosystem of Hindustani music. "Sincerity, coupled with tremendous focus and discipline, form the foundation of Kalaji's musical journey," writes Ms Purushothaman. In similar vein, Shubhada Paradkar challenges ideas of gender in music. "She has walked the world of womanhood and musicianship, creativity and personal innovation, quietly shifting gender norms and barriers through her music and way of being," writes



The Call of Music: Stories of Hindustani Musicians

by Priya Purushothaman

Published by

Hachette

276 pages ₹699

lifetime to mastering various forms of Hindustani music. Shubha Joshi analyses ideas of the feminine voice and carves her own unique sound. Blessed with a voice that was always somewhat unique, she did not conform to societal expectations. "Though she has toured internationally and performed around

Ms Purushothaman. Through his experience in music and activism, the queer transgender man Rumi Harish thoroughly questions perceptions of gender and voice. Another "star child," he began performing from the age of 11. Over the years, Rumi's engagement with activism deepened alongside multiple musical transitions. "Throughout a lifetime of music making and activism, Rumi has been in a continuous process of self-negotiation about his gender and sexuality," writes Ms Purushothaman. Dedicating

India, in general she found that organisers in India were heavily biased towards presenting classical music," writes Ms Purushothaman. Further, the author had the opportunity to accompany tabla artist Yogesh Samsi as he travelled to various cities as a soloist and co-artiste with renowned vocalist. "The author shares many insights into the genre, such as the fact that imitative learning is a common method used in Hindustani music for the initial portion of training. "It is a phase of skill building, knowledge assimilation, voice culturing and honing of listening," she writes.

The reviewer is a New Delhi-based freelance writer



Opinion

FRIDAY, AUGUST 29, 2025



● CALL FOR REFORMS

Former RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan

Let us not become dependent on any single country to a large extent. Let us look east, to Europe, to Africa, and continue with the US, but unleash reforms that will help us achieve the 8-8.5% growth needed to employ our youth

Pushing Indian MNCs

The govt's advice to industry to set up permanent rather than camp offices abroad is sound

AT A TIME of adverse tariff headwinds and geopolitical uncertainties, there is no doubt that India Inc must seize opportunities to increase its global footprint. To be sure, leading conglomerates like the Tatas, Aditya Birla Group, Mahindra & Mahindra, Bharti Airtel, among several others, already have a presence in several countries. The government's push to create many more multinational corporations (MNCs) is definitely to be welcomed. Top officials have indicated to FE that this idea is being shared with India Inc. Industry is being encouraged to look beyond participating in global tenders and setting up camp offices to execute these orders. The emphasis is more on setting up permanent establishments in countries where they see opportunities that can be seized with agility. The government's advice to India Inc is to hedge risks, tap global talent, and integrate into global value chains. The ministry of external affairs has created three permanent desks in its embassies in all major countries to help firms set up permanent establishments.

The government's push to India Inc to look outwards comes when outbound investments have risen 79% on-year to \$25.8 billion in FY25 and 164% to \$5.4 billion in April-May this fiscal, according to the Department of Economic Affairs. While an uptrend is underway—with 419 firms announcing green-field projects abroad in 2024—the ruling regime thinks this is the best time to impart further momentum to this process. The government is not worried that this outbound drive is at the expense of investing domestically to bolster the India growth story. The thinking is that when companies invest overseas, they keep a buffer, as a result of which their domestic investments are bound to remain stagnant. The rationale behind the creation of more Indian MNCs is not only that they would see returns in terms of dividends and royalties coming in by the 2030s but also create more opportunities for two-way trade flows.

The government must therefore urge India Inc to leverage opportunities in all countries with whom we are inked trade deals, including regions where there is a declining foreign direct investment (FDI) footprint. Outbound FDI from April 2023 to May 2025 has largely gone to the city-state of Singapore and Mauritius which together account for one-third of such investments. More welcome is that 14% of outbound FDI went to the US. Another 9% and 6% of FDI headed to the UAE and the UK with whom India has already signed deals. It would be tempting to infer that India Inc's investments in Singapore are a base to foray into the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). But that does not seem to be the case as the bulk of FDI into India from ASEAN is also from the city-state.

The two-way flows of investments between India and Singapore have led researchers to investigate whether there is round-tripping. India Inc has not followed the footsteps of the Aditya Birla Group that made pioneering forays into Thailand and other economies of ASEAN in the late 1960s and 1970s. The Tata Group has exited from its manufacturing presence in the region. At a time India is reviewing its free trade agreement with ASEAN to make it work better, India Inc must be encouraged to set up permanent establishments in these economies to seize emerging opportunities to integrate with global value chains.

INCREASE OF CAPITAL STOCK, RELOCATION OF LABOUR, AND IMPROVEMENT IN TOTAL FACTOR PRODUCTIVITY ARE KEY

Shift growth trajectory to right

**R GOPALAN
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The authors are former civil servants



tax, non-banking financial company crisis, coming out of the twin balance sheet problem, etc. could be behind some investment decline. But consumption has seen mild improvement. Exports post-2017 has seen an increase. Financial institutions have been recapitalised, assets quality has improved, there is an upward move in profitability, and policy support is more pronounced, yet the rate of fructification of intentions has declined from over 45% in FY14 to under 10% in FY23 (as per Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy data). There is some frustration on account of other non-policy factors, besides anticipated policy changes not materialising.

The second issue that needs addressing is productivity improvement. Slowing productivity growth could be partly due to labour quality issues, but it is largely due to lack of investment in upgrading and innovating technology and production processes. Indian producers seem happy with sustained rate of profit to capital employed rather than improving technology

and processes. We see fewer patents, product development, reengineering and modifications. A sharp decline in the average rate of total factor productivity growth in the overall economy, manufacturing and services validates this. The 2003-2010 period witnessed technology boom, some relocation of labour from agriculture to more productive sectors, and small productivity growth in manufacturing and agriculture. Subsequently introduced schemes didn't result in a growth of total factor productivity on a sustained basis.

The third significant issue for a shifting growth trajectory is relocating labour. In 2023-24, according to the latest Periodic Labour Force Survey report, less than 15% of the total workforce is engaged in sectors with moderate technology. Nearly 46% is engaged in agriculture, with GVA per worker engaged being 38% of the national average. Another 30% was engaged in trade, hotels, transport, and construction with average value added nearly 85% of the national average. Around 85%

workers were having GVA below the national average. Only 2% was in financial institutions, real estate, and professional services with average value added per person engaged at over 1.1 times the national average. Post-Covid, while the overall growth in workforce averaged 2.2%, household activities, construction, trade, transport, and hotels saw higher than the average growth. These were the resting places then due to pandemic related dislocation and a decline in the number of micro, small, and medium enterprises. Manufacturing recorded employment growth of 1.36%, lower than that of agriculture (1.67%). In finance and professional services, which saw growth close to 3.5%, there was hardly an upsurge in employment given digitisation and a move to formal economy post-demonetisation. The reasons for this state of affairs are stickiness of sectoral employment, lack of opportunities as intention to invest declined sharply, and lack of appropriate skill sets among new entrants to the labour force and those seeking sectoral shifts.

The problem outlined above is more structural than cyclical. We are already facing external headwinds. To tackle the problem, we need policy stability, increased investment, reduced complacency and regulation, new reforms, ease of doing business, skill development, strategic intent for the future, wellbeing improvement, and reduced inequality.

MODERATION IN GROWTH

Average annual (growth rate in %)	Agriculture & allied		Manufacturing		Services		Overall economy	
	2003-04-2010-11	2011-12-2022-23	2003-04-2010-11	2011-12-2022-23	2003-04-2010-11	2011-12-2022-23	2003-04-2010-11	2011-12-2022-23
Employment	-1.05	0.79	2.36	1.98	2.75	3.31	2.72	2.73
Labour quality	0.36	0.31	0.79	0.46	0.76	0.39	0.63	0.38
Capital stock	4.51	4.29	8.9	5.75	9.54	8.62	8.75	7.10
Capital composition	0.65	0.50	0.24	0.32	0.75	0.79	0.56	0.56
Total factor productivity	1.69	1.20	1.33	0.22	0.78	-0.06	0.74	0.09

China gets closer to finding its own Nvidia

A NEW CHINA-BUYS-CHINA narrative is taking shape as Beijing steps up its tech rivalry with the US. The world's second-largest economy not only wants to build generative AI models, but power them with its own hardware, redrawing a supply chain dominated by Nvidia Corp.

There certainly is an opening after Nvidia reportedly halted production related to its H20 AI chip tailor-made for the Chinese market. Beijing had told tech companies to stop buying them due to national security concerns. Last week, DeepSeek released an upgrade to its flagship V3 model to accommodate the next generation of home-grown chips.

Nvidia still dominates the supply chain with chips essential for the complicated work of training AI models. But as the industry evolves, a bigger market is in selling chips used for inference, which creates responses from pre-trained models and produces texts as well as images for people who use generative AI tools.

These chips are less complex. Nvidia's H20 model sold in China, which US commerce secretary Howard Lutnick said was "not even our third best", is arguably more suited for this purpose. So it's not hard to imagine that over time, Chinese companies that design application-specific integrated circuits, which are less powerful but more cost-efficient and specialised, can close the performance gap with Nvidia.

The question is how. Beijing has tried for years to fund tech advancement and foster national champions. But past practices have led to waste, debt accumulation, and scandals. The bankruptcy of Tsinghua University Group Co. in 2021, the closest thing China had to Samsung Electronics Co., and the subsequent corruption investigation at the China Integrated Circuit Industry Investment Fund, known as the "Big Fund", come to mind.

These past failures only make the AI chip designer Cambricon Technologies Corp's success all the more heartening. Founded in 2016, it went public four years later on the Shanghai Stock Exchange STAR board, a pilot programme championed by President Xi Jinping to speed up the listing process of tech start-ups.

Cambricon has become a stock market darling, precisely because investors recognise China has a good chance to take market share in inference chips. As a result, the company can rely on stock sales to finance future R&D spending. It recently announced a plan to raise nearly 4 billion yuan (\$560 million) for AI chip and software development. Despite a sharp jump in sales, the young start-up is still burning cash.

In retrospect, fundraising via the stock market is a lot simpler than the labyrinth of financial support privately-held Unigroup received from various state backers, including the Big Fund.

It was never clear who was really in charge and which entity would ultimately pick up the hefty bill of building next-generation memory chip plants. It's no surprise that Unigroup went bust.

China is rethinking how it will fund the next round of AI development. Increasingly, the government is going for "early, small, hard" favouring venture capital in small companies working on core tech, according to Gavekal Dragonomics' Tilly Zhang. Cambricon is a good example. As of June, 40-year-old founder Chen Tian-shi had a 29% stake, while an affiliate of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, where he used to work as a researcher, held 16%.

Meanwhile, less prosperous regions are being discouraged from funding hard tech. Last month, Xi issued an unusually blunt warning to local governments against over-investment in AI.

These are all good developments. But most important by young start-ups should be encouraged to go public as soon as possible. As investors look for their own version of Nvidia, they will naturally do due diligence for the government. They will find and foster real national champions.

The heroes of US central banking

STEPHEN S ROACH

Faculty member at Yale University and former chairman of Morgan Stanley Asia

IN THE LONG history of US central banking, Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell stands out as a hero. His speech at this year's Jackson Hole Economic Policy Symposium was focused and disciplined, demystifying the central bank's role and its well-reasoned judgment in shaping monetary policy. And he managed all of this while facing unprecedented political pressure from President Donald Trump that has since metastasised into an attempted firing of Fed Governor Lisa Cook.

As a fierce defender of the Fed's longstanding independence, Powell is worthy of joining Paul Volcker and Alan Greenspan in the Pantheon of US central banking. Volcker earned his place through political courage: he tightened monetary policy to tame double-digit inflation, despite knowing it would push the US economy into a severe recession. As I wrote in my endorsement of Joseph Treaster's 2004 biography of Volcker, "His courage as a central banker in leading the assault on the Great Inflation of the 1970s was the single most important step on the road to economic renewal in the United States."

Greenspan, for his part, took an expansive view of the challenges to sustaining disinflation in the post-Volcker period, introducing a risk-management approach to monetary policy that allowed the Fed to factor asset bubbles and productivity into its decision-making. From my perch at Morgan Stanley, I was critical of Greenspan for not staying true to the concerns he courageously raised in his famous

"irrational exuberance" speech of December 1996. But he deserves enormous credit for having the mettle to challenge markets at a time of great froth.

Powell appears to have drawn inspiration from Volcker and Greenspan's steely nerves and political focus. Volcker faced political pressure from both sides: farmers blocked the headquarters of the Federal Reserve Board (where I worked at the time), and senators and congressmen were outraged. Greenspan's concerns over irrational exuberance generated a strong backlash from Wall Street. Likewise, there was nothing subtle about the political pressure bearing down on the determined Powell as he ambled up to the podium at Jackson Hole on August 22.

Financial markets roared their initial approval of Powell's message that a shifting balance of risks "may warrant adjusting our policy stance." With futures markets already pricing in an aggressive easing trajectory, the surprise was less in the implications of Powell's words for the next few meetings of the Fed's Open Market Committee. Markets reacted more to the rigorous framework that Powell provided as a guide for the future conduct of US monetary policy.

He expounded on the complexities of Fed decision-making, identifying two basic issues: the factors affecting "mandate

compliance," and the considerations shaping the process that the Fed uses to achieve those objectives.

The dual mandate, price stability and full employment, has created a tough balancing act for the central bank. Powell methodically laid out the factors currently weighing on both, from tariffs and immigration policy (which are affecting supply as well as demand) to the recent underlying loss of momentum in employment and GDP growth. He drew comfort from a still-low unemployment rate but emphasised a "curious kind of balance" in the labour market. That is, Fed speakers for "precautions" in that it could quickly give way to higher joblessness. I take this as a key factor in assessing the shifting balance of risks that will guide future policy actions.

Powell's discussion of policy-framework considerations was somewhat more academic and less of immediate relevance for interest rate setting than shifting labour-market considerations. But this is the area where an independent Fed can exercise the greatest discretion.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, the central bank does not set its own mandate. That comes directly from congressional authority, initially the Employment Act of 1946, with the so-called Humphrey-Hawkins Act of 1978 later adding infla-

tion control. While the Fed has the authority to interpret the objectives of maximum employment and price stability, it enjoys the most freedom in setting the framework by which it aims to comply with legally mandated targets.

Powell put considerable effort to explain the Fed's updated thinking on framework considerations. In the Fed's earlier framework review in 2020, real, or inflation-adjusted interest rates were assessed relative to two thresholds: the effective lower bound (ELB) on the downside and "neutrality" on the upside, the latter being an interest rate that neither restricts nor stimulates economic growth or inflation. The current review removes the ELB as a primary consideration and abandons an average inflation-targeting strategy that allowed the Fed to make up for earlier downside surprises on inflation by permitting a period of overshooting. The updated framework also makes a similar adjustment to potential shortfalls from maximum employment and reaffirms an inflation target of 2% as "most consistent with dual-mandate goals." Powell's disciplined performance at Jackson Hole was an extraordinary, Volcker-like act of political courage. By staying on mission in a toxic era of political interference, he is an inspiration for Cook and the rest of us. We witnessed nothing short of a valiant act of a great American public servant. Welcome to the Pantheon, Jerome Powell.

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**SHULI
REN**
Bloomberg

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Facing tariff challenge

Apropos of "From trust to tariffs" (FE, August 28), the 50% Trump tariff has caused major concerns for our exporters, both in terms of investment and employment. It seems there is no fruitful negotiation with the US to lessen the tariff. India, with its experience of sustaining the 2008 crisis and the pandemic, must face the challenge with resilience. It will be a tough task

to manage the crisis with diplomacy. Exploring new markets, increasing domestic demand, helping exporters with working capital support, interest subvention, moratorium on repayment of bank loans, etc. are the way forward. As a trial by fire, a close aide of Trump, Sergio Goro, has been nominated as US ambassador to India. For India, facing the problem is wiser rather than yielding to unjust orders. —NR Nagarajan, Sivakasi

Trump vs India

In Trump's view, India represents a disquieting asymmetry: a nation that presents itself as America's "natural partner" yet withholds the reciprocity expected. India talks the language of shared values and strategic alignment, but wags its tongue, and its commitments deliberately vague. Unlike Europe or Japan, it does not

pay an alliance premium; unlike China, it is not a rival powerful enough to command respect. This posture, benefitting from partnership without fully embracing it, makes India run contrary to Trump's transactional instinct. New Delhi's balancing act may impress diplomats, but to Trump it looks like opportunism. —R Narayanan, Navi Mumbai

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THE IDEAS PAGE

DIS/AGREE
THE BEST OF BOTH SIDES

A fortnightly column, which offers not this-versus-that, but the best of both sides, to inform the debate



CR Sasikumar

The government has banned real-money gaming online. Is this the way to address problems of addiction and financial distress?

New Gaming Act corrects a wrong

Arguments against banning overlook the statistics on gaming-related suicides and broken homes



SANDEEP DWIVEDI

SOME TIME BACK, there was this tiny, skinny boy at our office who served tea. He liked cricket but his relationship with the game, like millions in the country hooked on fantasy league cricket during IPL, was transactional. He was no cricket nerd, he couldn't tell a Gill from a Gidchrist. A school dropout, he and his phone, both smart, were inseparable. Like Candy Crush, cricket gaming was another mobile game with cash involved.

Before one IPL season, he came to know about us reporters on the sports desk who had spent half their lives covering and analysing cricket. The poor little boy thought he had stumbled upon a gold mine and we, the witnesses to countless matches, were to lead him to the path of millions that the TV ads promised after every over.

That dream didn't last long; we weren't to be the messiahs who would help him quit his arduous job and have a tea shop of his own. The persuasive boy would ask our help to pick players he could punt on and part with a tidy sum from his hard-earned salary. As it turned out, he would invariably lose money. He learnt about cricket's glorious uncertainties the hard way.

Once he knew that his guess was as good as ours, most times even better, he distanced himself from the sports desk. The trust he had in our skill to read the game, the awe that his eyes once exuded in our company, faded in an instant. He soon left the job with empty pockets and a puzzling question: Was fantasy league actually a game of skill or was it the courts told the world when giving legitimacy to this incredibly profitable business venture, or was it something his parents never allowed him to do?

At a very basic level, cricket fantasy leagues are about winning and losing money when predicting the runs and wickets of individuals in a match. How can that ever be a skill-based call and not a throw of dice? Sports has a knack of proving the pundits wrong on an everyday basis. The pull and promise of sport is its volatility.

What expertise can a human have to predict Don Bradman's duck in his last innings, India's 1983 World Cup triumph, or Shane Warne's Rajasthan Royals fairy-tale IPL story? It is the power that believers say only God can have, or a mortal with access to the Maker's book of fate.

That's why banning online real-money gaming is correcting a wrong in a country where gambling on sporting events isn't illegal. What is a societal taboo and not something even the courts allowed was being rampantly advertised during live matches. It needed to stop. So, how was this allowed for several years?

The roots of this misadventure can be traced to 1957, when while hearing the R.M.

D Chamarbaugwala vs Union of India case, the Supreme Court differentiated between games of skill and chance to determine legality. The court held that competitions where skill was the predominant factor would be protected under the Constitution.

According to leading sports lawyer Nandan Kamath, this created the legal distinction between games of skill and chance. Decades later, in 2006, in *K.R. Lakshmanan vs State of Tamil Nadu*, the SC applied this precedent to hold that betting on horse racing was a game of skill. The court noted that in horse racing, the ability to evaluate the horse and the jockey was the relevant skill needed on the part of the bettor. So far, so good, relatively. In 2017, the Punjab and Haryana High Court relied on the Lakshmanan case to rule that fantasy sports were predominantly a game of skill. This was the first ruling in India where fantasy sports games were deemed to be based on skill. What was good for horses was true for humans, too.

This opened a window that cricket had been awaiting for years. The underground betting market is as old as the game in the country. Several match-fixing scandals have red-flagged the menace of millions trying to predict the runs and wickets of players — not too different from what our tea seller was doing through a legitimate app from his bonafide UPI account. The corporates saw this as an opportunity and so did offshore investors with deep pockets. A cricket-crazy nation of over a billion with free data — this was the ultimate destination of any sports betting entrepreneur, their El Dorado.

Since there was an overwhelming whiff of gambling, a veneer of legitimacy was needed. So, famous faces and credible voices in the Indian cricket system were now on the payrolls of these new

dream-makers, who promised millions on every match day. India's greatest captain, Sourav Ganguly, while being the BCCI president, would promote fantasy leagues. Virat Kohli had a stake in one. With no qualms or guilt about the constant news stories, from around the country, of real-money gambling driving cricket watchers to suicide and debt, they kept coaxing fans to loosen their purse strings and keep making fantasy teams.

And then one fine day, the government woke up and the dream was over. There are those who say that banning is no solution to any problem. They also quote the potential loss to the exchequer but are silent on statistics of gaming-related suicides and broken homes. In many cases, money meant for schooling and a healthy diet was flowing into the coffers of gaming tycoons, with part of it reaching the government as taxes.

The "nothing-should-be-banned" argument can work if this was a discussion about lifting the ban on sports betting, but it can't in a debate over real-money gaming, which is just a fancy euphemism for gambling. And in a country that doesn't allow sports betting, it deserves to be banned.

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MALAVIKA PRASAD

LAST WEEK, PARLIAMENT passed the Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Act, 2025, after only a few minutes of debate. The law ostensibly aims to promote online gaming and protect individuals with respect to social, economic and privacy-related concerns. The Gaming Act goes on to completely ban online games involving real money, such as rummy and poker. Perhaps the foremost question on everyone's mind is this: Why do we need the government, and the Union government no less, deciding whether adult citizens in a free country can play games?

Generally, the Union government's legislative powers extend to either the provision of public goods that require scale, such as defence or communication, or coordination for policy measures, such as welfare, that require some uniformity or equalisation across states. In India, the Union's powers are enumerated in the Constitution.

Games and sport are neither public goods reliant on economies of scale nor count as welfare. Legally, sport is enumerated alongside "entertainment and amusements" as a field of regulation left to the states. States are thus free to enact laws as they see fit, keeping their policy programmes in mind, as was the practice so far.

The Union government is no doubt aware that it does not hold the power to regulate either gaming or gambling. It declares, in the preamble of the Gaming Act, that it is "expe-

diat in the public interest for the Union government to assume legislative competence over the online gaming sector... to secure a safe, innovation-friendly digital environment while addressing the public health, public morality and financial sovereignty risks of online gaming. What the government means is clearer in the press release on the Gaming Act.

Gaming addictions and disorders abound among players of online real-money games, it says, citing the World Health Organisation. Indian youth are noted to be fast descending into financial precarity and a mental health crisis through the allure of these "predatory gaming platforms". The only trouble is that even public health is a field of regulation assigned to states. Moreover, the law is already cognisant of the difference between gambling and gaming. The field of betting and gambling — which would cover online speculative games like fantasy cricket played for real money, for instance — is also left to the states to regulate.

The government also raises financial fraud, money laundering and cybercrime as risks associated with online real-money games. It is apparent that its claim to regulation, in an override of the states' powers to regulate gaming, gambling, public health, and even trade and commerce, is over real-money games played online. But why must the same games that are kosher offline be

subject to a prohibition online?

Governments in the past have worried about online money games because they are, ultimately, just software written through code. Offline, games like rummy or poker, although played for real money, are constrained by the mathematical possibilities of the deck of cards. There are also other constraints like the game-play impossibility of the dealer manipulating the unopened cards or the players faking their identity to defraud other players. Online, the same games are unconstrained by the rules of the game. The dealer is software created by the gaming company, and players can theoretically hide behind the internet to engage in fraud or other kinds of cybercrime. Playing rummy or poker and other such games online for real money signals to the government a sure-fire way to blow up one's financial life against odds that are coded to be stacked against the players.

Of course, to defend the law in court, the government will have to demonstrate these claims with evidence on the architecture of online money games. But let us for a moment assume the truth of the government's case, that online and offline poker or rummy may be differently treated in law. In constitutional law, the ends do not justify the means. Not only should the means be rationally related to the object of the Gaming Act, they should also be necessary, suitable and proportionate to achieve the objective of the Act. If not, there is no real way to justify why adults in a free country cannot have the liberty to play games of their choice for real money online, especially if they can play the same games offline.

Here are some questions that went unanswered given the scant debate in Parliament when the law was passed. Does an outright ban on online real-money games have a "rational nexus" to the object of the Gaming Act, which is to prevent a mental and financial health crisis among the Indian youth? Is the

ban going to kill the existing appetite for online gaming? Is it perhaps more likely that these online money games will just go underground, unregulated, untaxed and ultimately unaccountable? What is the determining principle underlying the classification between online and offline real-money games. If there is no real way to strictly enforce a limit on play and control over online money games that go "dark", and become accessible otherwise, like through VPNs?

Why not regulate the way gaming companies set up and offer online real-money games, say through licensing requirements? Is there no way to strictly enforce a limit on who gets to play these games or a limit on the stakes they choose to play for? Would stringent fiscal controls over gaming companies not achieve these very same goals?

Isn't the real need of the hour to offer mental health support to those who might be drawn to squandering their youth on online real-money games due to a gaming disorder? Or to perhaps generate employment opportunities for those who seek to make money online for lack of better alternatives? At what point do free adults get to choose what games they play — and take responsibility for the consequences of those choices — without the paternalistic state stepping in to guide their hand?

The writer is an advocate based in Bengaluru

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Does Donald Trump, who has the unique power to halt this war, believe he can one day win a Nobel peace prize when he lauds the man subject to an international criminal court warrant as 'a war hero' and refuses to intervene to stop the slaughter in Gaza?" — THE GUARDIAN

Story of another washout

Rushing bills and rejecting discussions on issues of national importance have become the norm in Parliament



ZERO HOUR
BY DEREK O'BRIEN

FOR ONE FULL month — the entire Monsoon Session — Parliament was virtually washed out. Who created the logjam in both the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha? What left Opposition MPs with no option but to raise slogans and repeatedly enter the well? Why were the government's floor managers uninterested even in holding back-channel talks with representatives from major parties in the Opposition? It was a combination of arrogance and defensiveness. This is a government so unsure even of its hubris that it doesn't feel confident enough to stand up for its actions. Instead, it resorts to a serial sabotage of Parliament.

Here are the facts of how it was done. i. Reject every single notice given by the Opposition to discuss any issue of national importance (including the Special Intensive Revision).

ii. Come up with two "reasons" to avoid having a meaningful discussion on the floor of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. Excuse number one: The matter is sub-judice. Excuse number two: The Election Commission cannot be discussed on the floor of Parliament.

iii. Even when the Opposition made a sincere effort to make Parliament function, the government dug in its heels. Let me tell you, the Opposition was even open to the idea of taking up a discussion on this subject: "Urgent Need to Strengthen the Electoral Process in the Mother of Democracies". Dwell on the wording of this notice. No mention of the SIR. No mention of the EC. And yet the Union government refused to have a discussion.

iv. Rushing bills. In the Lok Sabha, six bills (IM Bill, Manipur GST Bill, Online Gaming Bill, Manipur Appropriation Bill, Income Tax Bill, and Taxation Laws Bill) were passed without discussion; only the minister spoke. On the last day of the session, when the Online Gaming Bill was being discussed in the Rajya Sabha, the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs, interrupted a Member and said: "No one can speak, or hear anything in the disturbance, so we request you to pass the bill." I am not making this up!

v. The Business Advisory Committee (BAC) decides the time allocated to each item of business in Parliament. All scheduling and planning is driven by this committee. Your columnist is a member of the BAC. This Monsoon Session, the opening meeting of the BAC was rescheduled five times in the first two days! A dubious

record, Jagdeep Dhankhar, then the Vice President and Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, chaired the first meeting of the BAC on July 21 at 12:30 PM. In attendance were the Leader of the House, J P Nadda, and the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs, Kiren Rijiju. However, the two government representatives did not attend any subsequent meetings. By the end of the day on July 21, the Vice President had tendered his resignation. Inexplicable.

vi. According to parliamentary rules, a member may, at any time, raise a "point of order" to a decision taken by the Chairman. During this Monsoon Session, members of the Opposition raised multiple "points of order". At least 17 such "points of order" were disallowed.

vii. At the end of the session, Home Minister Amit Shah introduced three crucial bills. He also moved motions in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha to constitute a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) to look into these bills. What is the track record of JPCs? Are they an effective and transparent mechanism? You decide. Members of the JPC are nominated by parties based on their strength in the House. So the ruling party or coalition, with larger numbers, dominates. Also, the recommendations of the JPC are only advisory in nature and the government is not bound to act on them.

In 1987, a JPC was constituted to investigate the Bofors contract scam. Six major Opposition parties boycotted the JPC since the majority of the Committee's members were from Congress. Two of the parties are still the BJP's allies: The Telugu Desam party (TDP) and the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP). The Committee's report, presented in 1988, was rejected by the Opposition (non-Congress) for being biased.

The JPC report on the "Irregularities in Securities and Banking Transactions" presented in 1993, gave 273 recommendations. Only 87 were actually implemented. The JPC report on "Allocation and Pricing of Telecom Licences and Spectrum", presented in 2013, gave 74 recommendations. How many were implemented? We do not know because the "action taken" report was not laid.

A motion for the appointment of a JPC to investigate the acquisition of August-Westland VIP choppers were passed in the Rajya Sabha in 2013. Opposing the motion, the then leader of the Opposition, Arun Jaitley, had said the JPC would be an "exercise in futility" and was a "diversionary tactic" by the government.

Between 2014 and 2024, Parliament set up 11 JPCs. The motion for constituting a JPC was adopted on the last day of the session in seven cases. In contrast, between 2004 and 2014, three JPCs were set up. None were set on the last day.

Overheard at the Parliament cafeteria: JPC, Joint Parliamentary Committee or Just Political Camouflage.

The writer is MP and leader, All India Trinamool Congress Parliamentary Party

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

MAINTAIN UNITY

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'The big picture' (IE, August 28). Ultimately, the tariffs have become a reality. The question is: Are our countermeasures real and effective? Time will tell. It is time to rise above the rhetoric and be realistic. India has the potential to face any adversity as long as Indian citizens stay united. PM Narendra Modi's call for swadeshi should have been taken up long ago. It is still not too late. We must all fulfill our obligations for the cause. Sanjeev Raina, Greater Noida

A THRIVING EVIL

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Dowry didn't go away' (IE, August 27). The article rightly reminds us that dowry is not a relic of the past but a systemic evil thriving under new guises, despite decades of legislation. What is alarming is how social mobility and education have not diluted this practice but often inflated its scale, with higher incomes translating into higher "demands". Studies published in the *Economic and Political Weekly* point out that dowry persists not only in rural belts but also among the urban middle class. Criminalisation is not enough; reform requires reshaping social aspirations. Zainab Irshad, Patna

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Dowry didn't go away' (IE, August 27). Nikki

Bhati's tragic death is not an isolated incident — it is a mirror reflecting the deep rot in our society. Dowry, now disguised as "gifts," continues to destroy lives. Nikki was reportedly harassed, humiliated, and ultimately killed because her worth was measured in money. How long will we keep calling this tradition? We must stop sugarcoating abuse. Every time a family demands "gifts," they're feeding the system that killed Nikki. Laws exist, but they're ignored. What we need is outrage, public shame, Accountability. Let Nikki's name be a turning point — not just another headline. Harshita Singla, Rajuru

PMJDY HIT & MISS

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Inclusion is empowerment' (IE, August 27). The Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana initiative has been a game-changer for millions of people, mostly from the lower socioeconomic strata. However, since a huge number of accounts were opened during the early days just to meet the targets, there has consistently been a high number of inactive and zero-balance accounts. It demonstrates that many account users lack the required financial literacy to continue their accounts, or that they simply do not require them. This has considerably limited the scheme's objective of fostering entrepreneurship and emergency financing. Kamal Laddha, Bengaluru



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If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to explained@indianexpress.com

Samudrayaan: Indian aquanauts' exploration of the deep

ANONNA DUTT
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 28

EARLIER THIS month, two Indian "aquanauts" travelled deep into the Atlantic Ocean aboard the French vessel, Nautilus. This was in preparation for deep-sea exploration under the upcoming Samudrayaan Project, where India plans to send three humans to depths of 6,000 metres by 2027.

Cdr (Retd) Jatinder Pal Singh and Ramesh travelled to 5,002 metres and 4,025 metres below the sea level, respectively. Just as astronaut Shubhanshu Shukla's learnings from the recent Axiom-4 mission will aid India's Gaganyaan programme for human spaceflight, the dives will inform the deep-sea project.

What does the project aim to do?

With India's 11,098 km-long coastline, the government has long pushed for a blue economy policy which harnesses ocean resources for economic growth. The deep ocean is home to several unexplored minerals, fu-

els, and biodiversity resources. It is also where a crucial medium of modern global telecommunications is found in the form of undersea cables, which are laid on the ocean floor.

Only a few countries, such as the US, Russia, China, Japan, and France, currently possess deep-sea exploration capabilities. India will join this select group of nations with the Samudrayaan Project, which is among the six components of the Deep Ocean Mission approved by the Union Cabinet in 2021.

EXPLAINED SCIENCE

At the cost of Rs. 4,077 crores over five years, the mission will:

- Develop technologies for deep sea mining and underwater vehicles and robotics, including a crewed submersible;

- Develop an ocean climate change advisory service, with observations and models for future projections of climate variables;

- Look for technological innovations to explore and conserve deep-sea biodiversity;
- Conduct deep ocean surveys, mainly to look for mineral deposits, specifically, polymetallic nodules, which comprise layers of iron and manganese hydroxides and are found

on the ocean floor, often containing materials such as nickel, rare earths and cobalt;

- Develop technologies to derive energy and freshwater from the ocean; and

- Establish an advanced marine station for developing capacities in ocean biology and engineering.

The National Institute of Ocean Technology, as the coordinating agency, is developing the submersible for the Samudrayaan Project.

What is Matsya-6000?

It is the vehicle that will take the aquanauts into the deep. Designed somewhat like a big fish, it will comprise a "personnel sphere" with a diameter of 2.1 metres to house the humans. The vehicle will be capable of sustaining three humans for 12-hour missions (in case of emergencies, systems aboard can sustain them for up to 96 hours).

For the initial test, carrying humans to a 500-metre depth, a steel sphere will be used. A wet test was conducted off the coast of Chennai in February.

Steel, however, is not strong enough to bear the atmospheric pressure at 6,000 metres un-



The Matsya-6000 will dive to depths of up to 6,000 m. [PIB](https://www.indianexpress.com)

der the sea, which is 600 times that on the surface. The actual personnel sphere for Matsya-6000 will be made of a titanium alloy.

What are the challenges of deep sea exploration?

In the depths of the ocean, environmental conditions are extremely inhospitable for hu-

mans. Several factors have to be considered:

Vessel development: The first challenge is developing a vehicle capable of sustaining life in the deep sea. A titanium alloy with 80 mm thickness was chosen due to its strength. But titanium is rare, and not many countries are willing to share their reserves.

Dr M Ravichandran, Secretary of the Ministry of Earth Sciences, said, "When we say 80mm thickness, it has to be precisely the same across the sphere. Even a 0.2mm deviation could lead to the collapse of the structure under such intense pressures."

The sphere is to be fabricated through a precise technique called electron beam welding, where a focused beam of high-velocity electrons melts and joins the materials. The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) will carry out this process.

Maintaining environment: Given that the aquanauts will be restricted to the personnel sphere, life-support systems will be needed to maintain the environment within. They must ensure that the oxygen levels remain at a certain level and the carbon dioxide levels are managed, with equipment known as scrubbers absorbing the harmful gas.

The spheres will also be equipped with packed re-breather oxygen systems, which will be deployed during an emergency. They can recirculate exhaled air after removing carbon dioxide and adding oxygen, similar to systems used by deep-sea divers.

Aquanaut health: The aquanauts must be physically fit to conduct the missions well and handle any emergencies. They also tend not to eat or drink a lot before and during their mission as they cannot access washrooms. During his nine-hour-long dive, Cdr Singh limited his diet to some dry fruits.

Acoustic communication: Radio waves, the basis of day-to-day communications, cannot be used for deep-sea communications. Acoustic telephones, which carry information-laden sound waves to a receiver placed just underneath the surface of the water, are used instead of bilateral ties.

Given other countries' reticence to share this technology, India has developed its own acoustic telephone. An initial test at a harbour failed because factors such as the temperature and salinity of the water also impact its efficacy. But the indigenous acoustic phone worked well in the open ocean.

EXPLAINED WILDLIFE

FLORIDA'S PYTHON PROBLEM: CAN 'ROBOT RABBITS' BE THE SOLUTION?



A juvenile Burmese python in the Everglades in Florida. [Wikimedia Commons](https://www.indianexpress.com)

STRUGGLING To control the population of Burmese pythons, authorities in Florida have turned to robot rabbits.

The giant snakes are not native to Florida, and have no natural predators there. For the past three decades, they have been feasting on the local fauna, and today, they threaten the entire Everglades ecosystem.

With the pythons' camouflage making them difficult to catch, authorities have been forced to look for creative solutions: they have sanctioned bounty hunts, held an annual Florida Python Challenge with hefty prizes for those who catch the most pythons, fixed trackers on male snakes so they can lead the capturers to egg-laying females and nests, and even brought in specialist snake-catchers from Tamil Nadu's Irula tribe.

Now, the South Florida Water Management District has adopted robot rabbits.

Lure, trap & kill

These toy rabbits move, emit body heat, and smell like an actual rabbit. Authorities hope that once placed in the forests and swamps in and around the Everglades National Park, the decoys will help bring the pythons out of their hiding spots, leading to their capture.

According to a report in the Smithsonian Magazine, these animatronic rabbits are "outfitted with motors and internal heaters designed to replicate the behaviors and body temperatures of live marsh rabbits (*Sylvilagus palustris*), which Burmese pythons love to eat."

They are also fitted with a camera, which sends an alert to the monitoring team when a Burmese python approaches, so a removal team can be dispatched. Previously, actual rabbits were used, but these animals needed a lot of looking after, making the process impractical.

While it is too early to determine how successful the robot rabbit project will be, officials say initial results are a cause for optimism.

"It could be a bit of a game changer," Mike Kirkland, lead invasive animal biologist for South Florida Water Management District, told The Palm Beach Post. "Removing them is fairly simple. It's detection [that is the challenge]," he said.

Once caught, the snakes are killed "in a humane manner" as per guidelines set by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

Existential threat

Burmese pythons (*Python bivittatus*) are native to Southeast Asia, and arrived in Florida mainly through the exotic pet trade in the 1990s and early 2000s. Many then escaped into the wild, or were abandoned by their owners after they outgrew 'pet animal' dimensions.

The climate and vegetation in Florida, plus the lack of predators, has helped the python population thrive. And with their voracious appetites — these snakes eat pretty much anything, from rabbits to birds to even alligators — pythons have been devastating for the local ecosystem.

According to the United States Geological Survey (USGS), "Severe declines in mammal populations throughout Everglades National Park have been linked to Burmese pythons, with the most severe declines in native species having occurred in the remote southernmost regions of the Park where pythons have been established the longest. A 2012 study found that populations of raccoons had declined 99.3 percent, opossums 98.9 percent, and bobcats 87.5 percent since 1997. Marsh rabbits, cottontail rabbits, and foxes effectively disappeared over that time."

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

SHUBHAJIT ROY
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 28

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi left for Japan on Thursday night for the 15th India-Japan Annual Summit with his Japanese counterpart Shigeru Ishiba.

The August 29-30 visit will be Modi's eighth trip to Japan, and his first since Ishiba took office last year. The two leaders have met earlier on the sidelines of the ASEAN Summit in Vientiane last October, and on the sidelines of the G7 Summit in Kanagawa this June.

Modi last travelled to Japan for the Annual Summit in 2018; he has since visited the country for multilateral engagements such as the G20 summit in Osaka in 2019, and the G7 summit in Hiroshima in 2023.

From Japan, the Prime Minister will travel to China for the Heads of State Council meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in Tianjin.

Old ties, shared vision

Japan and Russia are India's two oldest Annual Summit-level mechanisms. India-Japan bilateral relations were elevated to Global Partnership in 2000, Strategic and Global Partnership in 2006, and Special Strategic and Global Partnership in 2014.

The Annual Summits between former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and PM Modi gave a strategic edge to the ties.

Ahead of the PM's visit, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misra said India and Japan "share values, trust, and strategic outlook".

The India-Japan partnership is rooted in civilizational ties that have been reinforced by convergence in their regional and global outlooks. India's Act East Policy and Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) align closely with Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) policy. Japan leads IPOI's connectivity pillar, and is India's largest Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) donor.

Cooperation between the countries extends to multilateral platforms such as the Quad, International Solar Alliance (ISA), Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), and Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI).

A joint statement and a vision statement will be issued during the PM's visit. Sources said the two sides will exchange notes on the current global scenario, specifically, in the wake of the tariffs imposed by the Donald Trump administration, and in the context of



Ishiba (left) with Modi at Vientiane, Laos, last October. [X/@narendramodi](https://www.indianexpress.com)

STORY OF FRIENDSHIP OVER PAST TWO DECADES

2007: Japan PM Shinzo Abe delivers the landmark "Confluence of Two Seas" speech in Parliament.

2013: Emperor Akihito & Empress Michiko visit India.

2014: Abe is Republic Day chief guest; ties elevated to 'Special Strategic and Global Partnership'.

2019: President R N Kovind attends

Emperor Naruhito's coronation

2022: Kishida visits India, pledges JPY 5 trillion in investment

2023: Modi attends G7 Summit in Hiroshima, unveils Gandhi statue near Peace Park

2024: Modi meets Japanese PM Shiro, marking 10 years of Special Strategic Partnership

uncertainties about US security commitments in the Indo-Pacific.

Realms of cooperation

Defence and security
Key agreements on defence and security include the Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation (2008), Defence Cooperation and Exchanges MoU (2014), Information Protection Agreement (2015), Reciprocal Provision of Supplies and Services Agreement (2020), and co-development of the UNICORN naval mast (2024).

EXERCISES: Malabar (with the US and Australia), Milan (multilateral naval), JIMEX (bilateral maritime), Dharma Guardian (Army), and Coast Guard cooperation are held regularly. 2024-25 saw the participation of service chiefs in India and Japan, strengthening interoperability.

DIALOGUE MECHANISMS: Defence Ministers' meetings, Chiefs' visits, and Joint Service Staff Talks (2024) have consolidated trust.

India and Japan will move towards upgrading the 2008 Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation, and will review progress in defence and technology transfers.

Trade and investment

TRENDS: Bilateral trade reached \$22.8 billion in 2023-24. In Apr-June 2024-25, trade reached \$21 billion, demonstrating stability. Imports from Japan continue to outweigh exports. India's main exports are chemicals, vehicles, aluminium, and seafood; imports include machinery, steel, copper, and reactors.

INVESTMENT: Japan is India's fifth-largest source of FDI, with \$43.2 billion cumulative investment up to December 2024. Annual inflows have been strong — \$3.1 billion in 2023-24 and \$1.36 billion in 2024-25 (Apr-Dec). Japan has consistently ranked India as the most promising long-term investment destination.

BUSINESS PRESENCE: Around 1,400 Japanese companies with nearly 5,000 establishments operate in India; more than 100

Indian companies are present in Japan. Profitability is high.

EMERGING FOCUS AREAS: Digital cooperation; semiconductors, startups, clean energy, supply chain resilience, industrial competitiveness, and skill development.

Modi and Ishiba are likely to launch an economic security initiative focused on semiconductors, critical minerals, AI, telecommunications and clean energy. The two sides are expected to frame economic and science and technology cooperation as the "backbone" of bilateral ties.

They will also encourage the unsalting of Japanese investments in India. The original target of 5 trillion yen in public and private investments and financing by 2026 has been achieved, and the two sides will look to revise it to 7-10 trillion yen, sources said.

The two sides are expected to start a digital partnership involving AI and semiconductors, and focused on public infrastructure. They are also likely to promote a bilateral energy partnership in hydrogen and renewable energy projects.

Development and Infrastructure

Japan has been India's largest ODA donor since 1958, supporting critical infrastructure and human development projects. ODA disbursement stood at about JPY 580 billion (\$4.5 billion) in 2023-24.

HIGH SPEED RAIL: The flagship Mumbai-Ahmedabad High Speed Rail is the flagship project symbolising advanced technology transfer and skill development. The latest tranche of JPY 300 billion (\$2.2 billion) was signed in March 2023.

In view of Japanese involvement in the Ahmedabad-Mumbai bullet train project, the two sides are considering launching a mobility partnership encompassing railways, roads, and bridges across India. Modi and Ishiba are expected to travel to Sendai, a city known for its semiconductor prowess, in a bullet train.

Multilateral and Regional Cooperation

QUAD & OTHER INITIATIVES: India and Japan coordinate closely with the US and Australia to ensure a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific. The two sides will discuss the future of Quad in view of Trump's decisions.

The two countries are looking to diversify and secure supply chains through the Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI), which also involves Australia.

LONGER VERSION ON [indianexpress.com/explained](https://www.indianexpress.com)

Looking for Prithu, the Assam king said to have defeated Bakhtiyar Khilji

SUKRITA BARUAH
GUWAHATI, AUGUST 28

EARLIER THIS month, the Assam Cabinet decided that a new flyover being constructed in the heart of Guwahati would be named after Prithu, a 13th-century ruler of Kamrup. This would be a "timeless reminder that Assam has always stood as the defender of Bharat's soul", Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said.

"When Bakhtiyar Khilji destroyed Nalanda, the symbol of our ancient civilisation, he believed India's spirit could be broken. But in the sacred soil of Assam, Maharaja Prithu of Kamrupa rose in valour and struck him down, avenging that desecration," he said.

Today, Prithu is being projected as an Assamese icon, much like the Ahom general Lachit Borphukan, who is credited with defeating the Mughal Army in the 1671

Battle of Saraighat. But unlike Borphukan, who has long been central to Assam's historical imagination, Prithu's emergence is relatively recent.

Bakhtiyar Khilji in Assam

Bakhtiyar Khilji was a military general of the invader Muizzuddin of Ghori. He led a series of campaigns in eastern India, and is most commonly associated with the sacking of the Buddhist monastery in Nalanda. Historians agree that the first Turk-Afghan incursion through modern day Assam in 1206 CE was thwarted. But the identity of the local ruler who defeated Khilji's armies is unclear.

The most direct local written reference is a rock inscription in Kanai Barasi Bowa, an archaeological site on the river bank in North Guwahati. The inscription states that the Turks who entered Kamrup were destroyed in the Saka era 1127 (1206 CE) but does not name any local ruler.

The Persian chronicle *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri* contains details of a military defeat at the hands of the "Rae of Kamrup" (Kamrup), and refers to a ruler named Bartu.

Based on these two facts, and later material referring to a ruler called Prithu, historian Kanai Lal Barua in his 1933 book *History of Kamrup* wrote that "it is very probable that this Prithu Raja was the king of Kamrupa who caused the destruction of Bakhtiyar's forces in 1206 AD".

"The capital of Prithu was North Guwahati in the vicinity of which he repulsed... Bakhtiyar," Barua wrote.

However, the broad consensus among scholars, as noted by historian Nirode Barua in his 2011 paper 'Kamrupa to Kamata: The political transition and the new geopolitical trends and spaces' had been that "the identity of Prithu is very difficult to establish."

Product of RSS project

The emergence of Prithu as a notable historical figure is, in no small part, due to the efforts of Raktim Patar, a historian from Assam associated with the RSS-affiliated Akhil Bharatiya Itihas Sankalan Yojana (ABISY), and his 2021 book *Maharaja Prithu: The Unsung Warrior King Who Annihilated Bakhtiyar Khilji*. Patar joined Jawaharlal Nehru University's Centre for Historical Studies last year.

"Many people have said many conflicting things. Some historians have grudgingly mentioned who the individual is, but it has been clouded by confusion. But the sources were there, they were overlooked," Patar told The Indian Express.

These sources, he said, include references by 19th century Scottish surveyor Francis Buchanan-Hamilton of the remains of a fort in present-day Rangpur division (Bangladesh) and an oral tradition that this was a capital of

King Prithu, multiple gazetteers, and discovered remains of a stone bridge that is believed to have been instrumental in a battle between the Turk-Afghan and Kamrup armies.

Nilanjana De, the state secretary of the ABISY's Assam chapter, said that his organisation is "working on aspects [of history] that have not been popularised". De spoke about multiple seminars and articles about Prithu, including in *Organiser*, the Sangh's weekly magazine.

"Now people are aware that there was this great ruler of Assam. But there is more work to be done, especially among younger children. Even primary school children know about Lachit Borphukan and we want the same in the case of King Prithu," he said.

A historian from Assam who did not want to be identified said, "There have been a series of seminars held with attendance by senior RSS functionaries. And the importance is understandable. The 12th century was a very important period for the rise of Islam in the

Bengal frontier. In a similar context, a king in Assam successfully challenging Khilji is very important to Hindutva history writing."

More research needed

Some historians are still unsure of the status of the ruler who had defeated the Turk-Afghan army. S. S. Kantara Khatri, who retired from Gauhati University's Department of History and focuses on medieval history, said, "the challenge is that there is no indigenous record from that time on this figure."

But as archaeologist Manjil Hazarika puts it, "the absence of evidence should not be treated as evidence of absence". "I think we should try to find more inscriptions and more texts on this person (Prithu), because it is also not enough to establish that someone has defeated someone. We ought to know more about the state and the society. More research on this period will be a contribution in the history of Assam, we should fill up the gaps," he said.

The
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[OUR TAKE]

Measuring land with red tape

Assam's new rule on land transfers will only empower the bureaucracy

The Assam government's new rule that mandates police scrutiny of all land transfers between people belonging to different religious communities is bad in law and mischievous in intent. It is a piece with the current polarising political mood in that state and militates against the ethos of the Constitution. Worse, the addition of another layer of bureaucratic red tape will, in the long run, work against Assam's economic interests. The state government needs to rethink this policy.

The policy is premised on chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's conviction that the above-mentioned land transfers need to be scrutinised from a "national security angle", considering the "sensitive nature of the state". In practice, the new rule will make land transactions tedious and complicated and facilitate rent-seeking. The policy risks the threat of being weaponised by a bullying bureaucracy and has the potential to empower local politicians and turn them into deal-makers or deal-breakers. If the aim is to regulate the state's demography or local culture, traditions or land ownership, there are better ways, for sure. In any case, culture and tradition are not prisoners of religion, but fluid entities often shaped by multi-faith interactions. The right to property is a constitutional right, albeit with reasonable restrictions to protect the interests of vulnerable sections such as the scheduled tribes. The introduction of religion as a new filter hardens identities and can lead to the making of single-faith ghettos.

The identity question has been central to politics in Assam for some time. There are historical, economic and geographical reasons for this. Political parties have stoked fear and spread insecurity by citing demographic changes that are more a result of colonial labour and settlement policies, climatic factors like floods and river erosions, and poverty than any conscious plot or conspiracy. The fear of cross-border infiltration led to controversial initiatives such as the 1983 Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act and the National Register of Citizens — steps such as border fencing and patrolling may have had better outcomes in curbing illegal migration — and furthered polarisation in the state. Recent steps by the Sarma government to evict settlers from what is deemed revenue land, and even facilitate arming of a section of the population, have the potential to divide people on religious lines.

Assam, a border state with a 34% Muslim population (as per the 2011 Census), needs to transcend the religious, ethnic and linguistic faultlines and embrace an inclusive vision of development to make the most of its potential as the gateway to East Asia. Less red tape and a non-intrusive State can also ensure that all boats rise despite the ebb and flow in the Brahmaputra.

The 2030 CWG push for the 2036 Olympics

The Centre has pitched Ahmedabad as a potential host for the 2030 Commonwealth Games (CWG), and while the pitch isn't unexpected, it is interesting as it foreshadows the city's pitch to host the Olympics in 2036. The Union cabinet, headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, named Ahmedabad as the "ideal" venue because of its "world-class stadiums, cutting-edge training facilities, and a passionate sporting culture". With a newly minted national sports policy, the government wants to raise the profile of Indian sports, and the attempt to emerge as a host for high-profile global events is also aimed at that. It will also hopefully help local talent, generate spectator interest, and boost real estate.

Most importantly, the bid for the 2030 CWG may also help India fulfil two key requirements for the 2036 Olympic bid — infrastructure and success on the sporting field. The 2010 CWG held in Delhi is mostly remembered for the delays and corruption, but beyond that, the construction of new sports complexes alongside major renovations to venues helped Indian athletes greatly. The funding given to athletes and sporting federations also led to India claiming its best-ever medal tally of 101 medals, and the first-ever gold medals in women's wrestling and gymnastics. It made the public and the athletes aware of what it took to succeed in major sporting events. It was this push that led to India starting to make a mark at the world level. The 2030 and 2036 bids have the potential to take this start and make it a push for sustained excellence. It could herald an era that will see Indian sport truly come of age on the global scene.

Flight safety regulation needs reform at the top

From financial and administrative autonomy to hiring practices, there are many areas where DGCA needs a serious rethink

Lost the Air India crash in June, India's civil aviation regulator, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), the airlines it regulates, and their safety practices, have all been facing intense public scrutiny in Parliament and in the media. Every minor development in the civil aviation sector is now being dissected, leading to paranoia creeping into the minds of the ordinary flyer.

Recently, on a flight from the national capital to Goa, a woman seated next to me prayed for such a long time at take-off that I thanked her for praying on behalf of both of us. Ever since she saw the video of the June crash, she said, she prays harder than she did earlier upon boarding an aircraft — which, she added, is thankfully not often. In a gesture of warmth one comes across while travelling in India, she insisted on sharing some of her homemade food with me.

Thanks to the enhanced scrutiny, two things have become very clear: One, the functioning of DGCA needs a dramatic overhaul, and this writer has thoroughly discussed in these pages even before the accident. And two, airlines need to adopt a

more proactive approach to violations and transgressions by their staff, many of which are a direct threat to passenger safety, as highlighted in reports of the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AIB).

A recent report on safety by the parliamentary standing committee on civil aviation makes a slew of recommendations. Many of the suggestions have been highlighted by the media in the past, but have been water off a duck's back as far as the authorities are concerned. Coming against the backdrop of the June catastrophe, and from a parliamentary committee, the public may yet hope that the recommendations will be taken more seriously by the powers that be.

While many of the reforms suggested have merit, I will highlight a few that should have been undertaken long ago.

The first is setting up an independent civil aviation economic regulatory authority. With flyer numbers swelling (domestic air passenger traffic declined 2.94% in July year-on-year, presumably because of the Ahmedabad crash), and in the absence of an authority looking after the interests of passengers, DGCA is pulled into managing/solving every controversy/problem, big and small, affecting the sector — from rising fares to passenger misbehaviour, delays to operations, etc.

It has willy-nilly become the nation's favourite punching bag for all its afflicting the sector — a safety

threat in itself, given that the body in charge of keeping flying incident- and accident-free is perpetually distracted by matters unrelated to it.

As someone who has observed this space for over 25 years now, I maintain that we need to start from scratch and establish a brand new regulator rather than trying to reform the existing one.

The report prescribes full administrative and financial autonomy for DGCA — which, at 85%, has a far lower International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) audit score than peer organisations in the US, UK or UAE (all well above 90%). This, the report says, will allow it to fill the shortage of critical technical staff —

DGCA is presently functioning with just 50% of its technical staff requirement — and upgrade the technology it uses, in keeping with today's needs.

The second is rethinking the regulator's personnel requirements and hiring practices. While this article cannot highlight all the sub-optimal practices being followed by the regulator, let me delve into one: the sad history of one of the most critical positions at DGCA, the flight operations inspector (FOI). FOIs keep track of flight operations of the airlines from a safety perspective.

Unable to find talent ready to join on the government's terms and remuneration, DGCA, decades ago, started inducting senior commanders from Air India and Indian Airlines on "secondment" from the government-owned airlines. These



The safety regulator needs to be headed by a highly experienced and technically qualified individual for its culture to change. **BLOOMBERG**

commanders were paid by their airlines but were deputised to the safety regulator to aid with inspecting flight operations.

This perhaps explains why they were often found bating on behalf of their airlines rather than the regulator. It was only after the US Federal Aviation Authority (FAA) downgraded India in 2014 that DGCA started paying the salary of these commanders. Even so, most perks such as flight tickets, insurance, and other benefits still come from the airline from which they are "on loan" to the regulator.

Even the airline's top managers — despite the clear interest in continuing with the status quo — can see the flaws in the present system and argue that DGCA needs to offer these inspector-commanders a package that exceeds market remuneration

by a wide margin and, ideally, have them on its rolls, with fixed tenures. With the better work-life balance such a job can offer, many will apply, and the regulator will get the best of the pick, who can then work free of biases.

But before we take this plunge or others that are needed, we need to start at the very top to correct recruitment practices that have remained deeply flawed for decades. The safety regulator needs to be headed by a highly experienced, technically qualified, and incorruptible individual for its culture to change.

It might be a cliché but change truly must begin at the top.

Anjali Bhargava writes about governance, infrastructure, and the social sector. The views expressed are personal

States need to own national sports policy for it to deliver

For too long, Indian sport has relied on flashes of individual brilliance. The foundational ecosystem of talent identification, coaching, grassroots facilities and governance remained neglected. Against this backdrop, and that of the National Sports Day (August 29), it is worth taking a look at the potential of the National Sports Policy (NSP) 2025. The policy is an attempt to fix the structural issues that act as a sideshow but as being essential to a healthy, confident, and competitive India.

By setting clear targets, aligning incentives across ministries and inviting private capital into the game, it recognises that medals are lag indicators of deeper systems. In doing so, it reframes sport as a tool for public health, education reform, and soft power. To appreciate why this shift is overdue, we need to revisit the arc of Indian sport since independence.

When India became independent in 1947, sport was more theatre than policy. The first decade was glided by hockey's golden run of six consecutive Olympic golds between 1928 and 1956. However, the medals masked the absence of systems. Cricket's 1983 World Cup win brought a surge of national pride, yet it also cemented the disproportionate attention and resources channelled to a single sport.

The 1982 Asian Games in Delhi briefly showcased what central planning, infrastructure spending and global exposure could achieve. Stadiums were built, volunteers trained, and urban transport upgraded — but the momentum faded as the Games ended. In the 1990s, liberalisation brought television, corporate sponsorships and professionalism to cricket, while other sports languished in underfunded federations plagued by governance issues.

There were flashes of resilience, like Karnam Malleswari's weightlifting bronze in Sydney 2000, Rajyavardhan Rathore's shooting silver in Athens 2004, Abhinav Bindra's historic gold in Beijing 2008, all achieved despite, and not because of, the system. The 2010 Commonwealth Games left behind world-class infrastructure, yet corruption allegations overshadowed the gains. The 2018 Rio Olympics exposed gaps in athlete preparation, support staff quality and grassroots talent pipelines.

Recent initiatives like Khelo India and Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS) have begun to systematise talent scouting and athlete funding. But the absence of a unifying vision meant these remained islands of excellence in a sea of mediocrity.

Earlier sports policies collapsed under their own ambition. They read like mission statements with grand objectives but lacking resources to enforce. They were marred by fragmented mechanisms to align sporting federations, State, and capital. Governance was porous, execution patchy, and success anecdotal. Federations remained opaque fiefdoms, the private sector at best chequered writers, tech was an afterthought, and outcomes were rarely measured with the consistency required to drive continuous improvement.

NSP 2025, on the other hand, rests on five pillars: Excellence, Inclusivity, Sustainability for Economic Development, Sports for Social

Development, Sports as a People's Movement, and Integration with Education (NEP 2020). But unlike past efforts, this policy does not confine intentions to words. It proposes a legal and regulatory framework to enforce governance standards. Models like Australia's AusCycling reform in 2020 — hailed by experts like Marie Pernefer as "one of the largest governance reforms in sport" — show how to integrate structural entropy is addressed head-on. On funding, NSP 2025 responds to a maturing sports startup ecosystem in India. Sports-tech startups raised over \$139 million between 2014-2022, with 2025 alone seeing over \$9.5 million in the first half.

Companies like KhiladiPro, which recently secured \$1 million in funding, are proof that private capital is ready — if public frameworks can de-risk and scale their impact. Technology, once a double-edged sword, is now a multiplier. Tools built for elite athletes are now powering AI-based health monitoring, predictive injury recovery systems, and even education performance dashboards.

Investing in digital sports technology is investing in national productivity infrastructure. And for the first time, there's a National Monitoring Framework. Drawing from successes like the Olympic Monitoring Framework (OMF) and the Public Finance Monitoring System (PFMS) in social-sector programmes, NSP 2025 sets clear key performance indicators, dashboards, and time-bound targets that compel rigor and transparency to every rupee spent.

NSP 2025's pan-government architecture makes it structurally different. It is not just the youth affairs and sports ministry mouthing buzzwords. The policy integrates sport into education, health, tourism, manufacturing, governance, and urban planning. That holistic thrust makes sports a functional lever of nation-building.

Ultimately, policies don't succeed because of what's written. They succeed because of who owns them. And while the new NSP may be authored in Delhi, it will be delivered — or derailed — in the states.

The real field of play is the school playground in Sikar, the girls' training centre in Bantewadi, the ice rink in Imphal. United States adopt, adapt and embed this policy within their own machinery — aligning budgets, staff and metrics — the most elegantly written strategy will remain a file. The Centre can provide the framework, but it is the states that control infrastructure, school education and local sports promotion.

Globally, nations have used sport to sculpt national identity, attract investment, and catalyse change. NSP 2025 embraces this thinking. It doesn't just want to win medals, but to reshape India's economic, health, tourism, industrial acceleration and human development. It sees sport not as recreation, but as an economic and social engine by fuelling entrepreneurship, health, inclusion and innovation. It encourages India to envision not just hosting the world's largest sports event, but global admiration for how a country of 1.4 billion institutionalises excellence.

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ANTONIO COSTA | PRESIDENT, EUROPEAN COUNCIL

The EU will not be intimidated. Russia's aggression only strengthens our resolve to stand with Ukraine and its people

In response to the latest Russian drone and missile strikes on Kyiv

The Lal Babu touchstone for the Bihar SIR exercise

Bihar's Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the electoral rolls is like a bank extinguishing your account and then demanding you prove it existed in the first place. Only, it is not happening at the bank, but at the ballot.

In June, the Election Commission of India (ECI) rolled out the SIR to "purify" the voter list by requiring those whose names were missing from the 2013 rolls to prove their citizenship. Aadhaar and Voter IDs, issued by the State itself, were not accepted as proof. Over 65 lakh voters were struck off the rolls, many without adequate notice, explanation, or opportunity to respond.

That's roughly 8% of Bihar's electorate erased, just months before the 2025 Assembly elections. Many are daily-wage workers, migrants, and citizens who were already on the margins of the system. Now, they are outside it. But remember, we have seen this before. In 1995, a slum dweller in Mumbai named Lal Babu Hassen discovered his name (along with 1.67 lakh others) had quietly vanished from the voter rolls as part of a mass exclusion drive. What began as a personal fight for citizenship exposed a broader pattern of disenfranchisement — and Hussein became the face of a landmark Supreme Court case that would go on to redefine voter rights.

In a stinging rebuke, Chief Justice AM Ahmadi (grandfather to Insiyah Vahanvati), rapped the authorities — the police and electoral officials — for acting outside the bounds of the law and natural justice. Stating down ECI's directive, the Court held that once a person is on an electoral roll, the burden shifts to the State to prove why they should be removed. Any such action must be based on individual suspicion, must follow proper notice, and must allow the person to respond.

Making a clear distinction between new registrants and existing voters, the court ruled that ECI may demand proof of citizenship from the former as a matter of routine diligence, but not from the latter, except in exceptional cases. The Court also rejected the idea that citizenship can be proven by only a limited set of documents. It specifically ruled that authorities must consider a wide range of evidence and documents. The judgment firmly ring-fenced ECI's authority in determining citizenship.

In Bihar's SIR, the State twisted this principle by treating even long-registered voters as

guilty until proven innocent. As such, it violates the principles of a binding Supreme Court order. In a stunning twist of legal irony, Lal Babu Hassen's 1995 case is cited by both sides in the Supreme Court battle over the SIR.

In recent hearings, the petitioners have argued that the SIR violates every safeguard laid out in the Lal Babu ruling. They pointed out that long-standing voters were not given the presumption of legitimacy; that deletion notices were often absent or unclear; and that accepted documentation was unimpeachably narrow. Absurd errors, such as living voters declared deceased, were highlighted as systemic flaws. Senior advocates pointedly questioned the evening-before-the-election timing of the exercise.

ECI, for its part, maintains that it is acting within the bounds of the judgment. It says the judgment allows for scrutiny where records are unclear or inconsistent, and that it is not targeting voters indiscriminately, but simply ensuring accuracy.

But it misreads the precedent. And it has drawn heat from political parties, who warn of a troubling déjà vu in the SIR's methods. They argue that the exercise bears a striking resemblance to the draft National Register of Citizens (NRC) process in Assam, which ended up excluding nearly two million people, many of whom later turned out to be genuine citizens. That process, too, was framed as a technical clean-up. In the courtroom, too, senior advocates have warned that the SIR must not become a civic citizenship test.

On August 14, the Supreme Court tried to course-correct. It ordered ECI to publish a searchable, booth-wise list of all voters deleted under the SIR, along with reasons. It instructed officials to accept Aadhaar and other documents for re-enrollment. And it has extended the deadline for objections.

But still, fundamental questions persist. The Lal Babu verdict's clairvoyance lies in its clarity: The law cannot allow a revolving door to citizenship. Once determined, it is open to routine suspension. The Constitution does not permit that — and neither should ECI.

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The Indian EXPRESS

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RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

WARNING FROM HILLS

Increasing toll from floods in J&K should alert authorities to the need for systems that alert people in advance

THE IMPACT OF climate change on Western Disturbances has been noticeable for at least a decade. The low-pressure system originates in the Mediterranean Sea and typically moves eastward across Central Asia and northern India during the winter and spring seasons. However, it has begun to occur with increasing frequency lately during the summer and monsoon seasons. Its presence during the Southwest Monsoon often leads to extreme rainfall, flash floods, and landslides in the Himalaya. There have been at least 14 such disturbances in the current monsoon season. As a result, extreme rainfall events have taken a toll in parts of the Northeast, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Jammu and Kashmir. In the latest monsoon-related tragedy in the Himalaya, more than 40 people, most of them Vaishno Devi pilgrims, were swept away by flash floods and buried under rocks in Jammu as the region recorded its highest-ever 24-hour rainfall on Wednesday. The calamity should be a lesson for authorities to step up vigilance and prioritise safety on roads that see heavy traffic, even during peak monsoon — pilgrim routes, for example. More importantly, the Centre, state governments in the Himalayan region, and research institutions should come together to create warning mechanisms that alert people to weather vagaries.

The constant reworking of rocks in the world's youngest mountain chain aggravates the fragility of the Himalaya, and increases the vulnerabilities of the people who live in the mountain states. Last week, the government told the Lok Sabha that J&K was among the more landslide-prone regions of the country, with 12 per cent of its "mapped hilly area falling under the highly-susceptible category". The Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Earth Sciences, Jitendra Singh, told the House that the Geological Survey of India (GSI) has completed landslide susceptibility mapping of the Himalayan region. Much of this information is available on the GSI's portals. It is now up to planners, governments, and disaster management authorities to use this information in their climate adaptation programmes. Priority should be given to monitoring the most vulnerable zones with a dense population or large traffic movement — regions hit in the last two days, for example — and a large built-up area.

It is, however, also correct that flash floods cannot be predicted with pinpoint accuracy. For instance, it's now apparent that the disaster in Dharali in Uttarakhand, earlier this month, was not preceded by heavier-than-usual rainfall. Experts have counselled building up knowledge to take on such vagaries. Creating a council of Himalayan states, for instance, could be the first step towards a coordinated effort to gauge the stress on the region's ecosystem, especially the pressure on the rocks, and create more detailed repositories that could help understand the rainfall thresholds of individual slopes. Such knowledge should inform the framing of building codes in the mountains. Building up people's resilience to climate change will require constant information updating. The toll taken by the rains this year frames the challenge for policymakers and experts.

OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

In the staggering number of Classes XI and XII students taking tuition, a story of disenchantment, anxiety over opportunities

IN CITIES ACROSS India, the school day now extends well beyond classroom hours. For nearly half of urban students in Classes XI and XII, learning continues across coaching centres, where futures are rehearsed through mock tests and multiple-choice drills. According to data published by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation's (MoSPI) Comprehensive Modular Survey: Education, 2025, 44.6 per cent of urban students are taking private tuition. At 33.1 per cent, the proportion is slightly lower for students in rural areas. Overall, the figures stand at 37 per cent for all students in Classes XI and XII who have enrolled for private tuition this year. The numbers underscore more than academic ambition — they highlight the growing chasm between aspiration and opportunity.

The implications of this trajectory are troubling. At one level, it reflects deep public mistrust in the quality and sufficiency of school education. Once seen as supplementary support for struggling students, private coaching has now morphed into an essential component for competitive success, driven by ambition and anxiety, a middle-class survival strategy amid a narrowing of higher education opportunities. As classrooms hollow out in significance, commercial tuition centres — shadow schools — are turning into preparatory ground for competitive examinations and elite institutions. This not only undermines the vision of the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020 to foster an inclusive academic model that values innovation and adaptability but also exacts a steep financial, emotional, and social toll. According to data, urban students in Classes XI and XII are spending Rs 9,950 per year on average on private coaching, more than twice as much as their rural counterparts at Rs 4,548. For many families, this means spending a significant share of household income on coaching. Students who cannot afford private tuition are often left navigating a system that undervalues them, widening the gap between the resourced and those with limited means.

The last years of school give shape to the future course of a student's life. Instead of being a journey of discovery and anticipation, the relentless pressure to excel turns education into an endurance test, measured in scores and achievements, pockmarked by stress and burnout, and in many instances, death by suicide. Regulation of the coaching industry is critical — in 2024, the Centre issued guidelines on the regulation of coaching centres — but that is only a part of the solution. Unless the metrics of academic success are diversified, seats in higher education expanded, and the school curricula strengthened not just in infrastructure but relevance, coaching will remain not just an option, but a perceived necessity in the rush to get a head start in life.

FOLLOW THE BEES

A recent study has found that they follow a balanced diet. What's your excuse?

THE NEWEST STUDY that shows adults need less than 10,000 steps a day to stay on top of their health; the neighbourhood auntie who insists her *ghar ke nudle* (home remedies) are all one needs. These are all answers to that one question human beings struggle with: How does one stay healthy? One staple response that has stood the test of time is a balanced diet. Turns out, it is not limited to human beings. A recent study, published in *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, noted that eight species of wild bumblebees "strategically visit different flowers to balance their intake of protein, fat and carbohydrates".

The research, conducted over eight years in the Colorado Rockies, shows that bees do not collect pollen at random. Different pollens carry different compositions of macronutrients — some are packed with protein, "like a steak", others are more "like a salad". What enables bees to get the nutrients they need is a "remarkable collective intelligence". Colonies of bees work together, with the larger-bodied ones consuming pollen high in protein and bees with shorter tongues seeking pollen richer in carbohydrates and fats. A similar study on elephants' dietary habits, published in the *Royal Society Open Science*, showed how they, too, have a varied diet, informed by nutritional, psychological and social needs.

Today, spoiled for choice, with contradictory advice coming from a hundred different quarters, the path to a healthy life has become needlessly complicated. Smart watches, smarter diets, and an endless scroll in search for the smartest solution have left human beings more confused than ever before. But the answer could be rather simple: A balanced diet, rest and exercise. Oh, and one piece of advice: When in doubt, follow the bees.



PRATAP BHANU MEHTA

THE INDIAN STATE must brace itself against the new imperialism taking shape in the emerging world order. It was blindsided by its own assumptions; to its credit, it has not yet buckled under the pressure. Yet, it has also failed to summon the sense of purpose and reform that this moment demands. Much of the public debate focuses on what the state must do. But there is another, more disquieting question: Can Indian capital rise to the challenge?

For decades, the state has shackled Indian business with excessive regulation, bureaucratic inertia, and policy volatility. But the reverse question is unavoidable: Is Indian capitalism capable of playing its part in national renewal? Private investment has been virtually stagnant for a decade. India's business elite appears to lack confidence in its own economy. Admittedly, India remains a difficult place to do business. Yet, independent surveys consistently show that conditions on several parameters — credit, logistics, energy, routine corruption — have improved or, at least, not worsened. If the environment has become more enabling, why then has private investment not picked up?

Two possibilities present themselves. The first is that the business environment has, in fact, deteriorated more than official accounts suggest, and business leaders are too intimidated to speak openly. The second is that Indian capital, with a few notable exceptions, lacks the capacity to compete globally. In this case, blaming the state becomes a convenient form of self-exoneration. Either way, the conclusion is inescapable: Indian capital itself is part of the problem.

History reinforces the suspicion of Indian capitalism. It emerged largely from trading classes, unmatched in their capacity for arbitrage but less adept at building. Much has been written about the state's allocative discipline in the 1950s and '60s, when licences and state finance were distributed with little regard for efficiency. But the other half of the story is how Indian capital exploited this system. Entrepreneurs misused finance and extracted resources from the state without producing globally competitive firms, as a recent paper by Mausam Kumar shows. The contrast with East Asia is telling. Their states were also corrupt, but their subsidised entrepreneurs, for all their flaws, actually built things — firms that

Failure of India Inc

Businesses could once blame a stifling state. Now they reveal an innate inability to build, or imagine the future

The cultural dimensions of Indian capitalism compound the problem. Business leaders often complain of weak human capital. Yet, they were historically unwilling to invest in building it. Unlike American firms, which helped establish research universities and an R&D infrastructure, Indian capital largely sought a free ride. The record on labour is equally dismal. Having comprehensively defeated the bargaining power of workers, most firms still have not learned to manage labour with dignity, or to upgrade skills in ways that enhance productivity. The notoriously poor quality of construction in India, for instance, is inseparable from the neglect of construction labour.

went on to become Samsung, Hyundai, or TSMC. India's entrepreneurs did not. Companies like those of the *Birlas* were never going to be global leaders, free enterprise or not. They were content to milk the credit system rather than transform it into productive capacity. The deeper problem may not be, as a recent paper by economist Siddharth George and others has argued, that public sector banks lend disproportionately to less productive firms. The problem may be that the supply of truly productive firms has always been thin.

Liberalisation should have marked a turning point. New entrepreneurs entered, and some new sectors emerged. But in several respects, Indian capitalism became weaker. Capital concentration has intensified, and dominance by conglomerates such as Ambani and Adani has redefined the field. Their execution capacity is formidable. Yet, their rise has distorted competition and made India globally vulnerable. If these national champions were propelling India into technological or product leadership, perhaps the bargain would be worth it. But they are not. The striking fact is that Indian business has been unable to mount even a pro-capitalist critique of monopoly power. It has acquiesced in the consolidation of oligarchic dominance, even when that dominance rests on the expropriation of rivals.

Equally debilitating is the culture of finance. Conversations in India's financial sector reveal a startling lack of ambition to back companies that might make world-class products for the Indian or global market. The imagination of Indian capital is dominated by arbitrage — quick gains from the stock market, financial engineering, or speculative manoeuvres. This creates the illusion of dynamism: Media coverage of finance makes Indian capitalism appear like a vibrant powerhouse. In reality, in global terms, it is a damp squib.

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workers, most firms still have not learned to manage labour with dignity, or to upgrade skills in ways that enhance productivity. The notoriously poor quality of construction in India, for instance, is inseparable from the neglect of construction labour.

Outbound foreign direct investment illustrates the same lack of confidence. Much of it functions as a hedge against India itself, often in the form of brand acquisitions. Buying Hamley's or Peter England is less about creating global products than about signalling that foreign labels carry more credibility than Indian ones. These acquisitions have generated little technological spillover at home. Outside a few sectors such as pharmaceuticals and medical supplies, Indian capitalism radiates a culture of defeatism.

Indian business also ralls against populism. But the misallocation of capital it engineered is comparable in scale to the fiscal costs of populist handouts. The complaint rings hollow. More troubling still is the relationship between Indian business and media. With control over large sections of the media, business has the opportunity to create an ideological environment conducive to long-term capitalist development — promoting regulatory accountability, honest debate on policy, and a vision of enlightened self-interest. Instead, much of business-owned media has become a purveyor of faux nationalism and communal distraction. This may serve sectional or partisan objectives, but it does not serve the long-term interests of Indian capitalism. It narrows, rather than expands, the space for sensible discussion about how to create a competitive, innovative, and globally respected capitalism.

The irony is sharp. For decades, Indian business blamed the state for stifling its potential. Today, when the state is more open than before, Indian capital shows little appetite for risk, no courage, little ambition for leadership, and little confidence in its own ability to build. The new imperialism of the global order requires both state and capital to pull together. But Indian capital is conspicuously absent. It is often said that people get the government they deserve. The same is true of Indian capital. It is getting the government it deserves.

The writer is contributing editor, The Indian Express



DEVDUPT PATTANAIAK

MANY SANATANI HINDUS do not like the idea of Krishna, the beloved of women. They prefer Krishna, the warrior, admired by men. Krishna allows such interpretations because we are looking at a deity who has evolved over at least 2,000 years. Over time, new stories and layers were added, and traditions were woven together. Some scholars even argue there were multiple Krishnas in different parts of India whose ideas gradually amalgamated.

Broadly, the wrestler-warrior Krishna comes from the Gujarat-Rajasthan region, the romantic Krishna from the Odisha-Bengal-Bihar end, the prankster baby Krishna from the south, and from the Kurukshetra region in the north comes the philosopher Krishna of the Bhagavad Gita, who has become especially popular since the freedom struggle as Hindu politicians thought one holy book would help homogenise their vote banks.

In temples of Kerala (Guruvayur), Karnataka (Udupi), Tamil Nadu (Srirangam), and Andhra Pradesh (Tirumala), Krishna is worshipped as Gopala or Govinda, the cowherd god. The Radha-Krishna tradition thrives especially in Bengal and Odisha, through Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda* (12th century) and Chandidas and Vidyapati's songs. By the 16th and 17th centuries, Raas-leela performances were organised in Mathura's Braj by poet-saints of the Bhagavata tradition, with Chaitanya's followers emphasising Krishna as

ONE DEITY, MANY IMAGINATIONS

Krishna is about several traditions, stories and layers added over 2,000 years

the divine lover. This was in times when Mughal queens from Rajput families encouraged Hindu celebrations in the palaces.

Vallabhacharya's (15th-16th century) followers preferred Krishna as Yashoda's child. The Vallabha and Chaitanya sects were rivals in Vrindavan. During Aurangzeb's rule, the Govind-Devi temple, built by Raja Man Singh in Akbar's time, was broken. That is when Vallabha followers took icons from Vrindavan to Rajasthan for safekeeping, transforming the Rajputs into guardians of the Krishna culture. While Krishna and Radha were worshipped, the *Gita Govinda*'s influence was downplayed as many believed sensual traditions made Hindus weak. This was how the British explained Islam's success. Sanatani historians agree with this colonial hypothesis.

In Assam, Shankaradeva (15th-16th century) worshipped Krishna as the supreme God, but there was no reference to Radha or the gopis. He feared the influence of the Shakti cult, and introduced vegetarian practices. This tension between meat-loving Kail and milk-loving Krishna pervades ancient India even today. By contrast, in Manipur (17th century), the local king instituted the Raas-leela dance as a ritual offering to Krishna — today famous as the refined Manipuri dance.

At Pandharpur, Krishna's consort is Rukhmani, or Rukmini. The poet-saints saw him as the cowherd friend who offers liberation from

suffering and rebirth, a liberation theology strongly aligned to Sufi mystical movements. In Islamic mysticism, the divine is generally not visualised. But there are Sufi poems where the divine is visualised as a shepherd boy.

The Krishna story tells us he was raised in Mathura, where he killed his tyrant uncle Kansha. This provoked Kansha's father-in-law, Jarasandha, king of Magadha, to attack and eventually destroy Mathura, forcing Krishna and the Yadavas to migrate west and establish Dwarka on the Gujarat coast. According to the *Jaina Puranas*, composed in the Gujarat and Karnataka region (eighth century), the Mahabharata war was Krishna's struggle against Jarasandha. In this reading, Krishna was a refugee who rebuilt power in Gujarat, defeating the tyrants of Mathura (modern UP) and Magadha (modern Bihar) with the help of the rulers of Indraprastha (modern Delhi).

The earliest images of Krishna appear when trade flourished between Magadha and Mathura, along the Yamuna and the Ganga, and on routes along the Aravalli hills to the western coasts. Krishna is first mentioned in Indo-Greek sources, on their coins and epigraphy. Some even argue that Krishna's story of being prophesied to kill his uncle is derived from Greek myth. No Sanatani historian, however, will like that interpretation.

Pattanaik is a writer and mythologist



AUGUST 29, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

LOKPAL BILL REFERRED

THE LOK SABHA referred the controversial Lokpal Bill to a joint select committee of the two Houses of Parliament following a sudden government decision to push the legislation. Apart from sharp disagreement between the government and the Opposition on major provisions of the bill, several members of the ruling party are also understood to have expressed their reservations about the bill in its present form. The most controversial issue was the exclusion of the Prime Minister from its purview.

AKALIS BOYCOTT POLLS

THE "UNITED" AKALI Dal of Baba Joginder

Singh has decided to boycott the parliamentary and Punjab vidhan sabha elections slated for September 25. Surjit Singh Khalsa, secretary of the United Akali Dal, announced this decision in a press release handed over to newsmen at a press conference held at the Akali Dal headquarters. He refused to give any indication on any unity move between the two rival Akali Dals.

EXCISE DUTY CUT

THE FINANCE MINISTER, Vishwanath Pratap Singh, in a surprise move, announced in Parliament a steep reduction in the excise duty on manmade fibres and yarn to promote the production and sale of blended fab-

rics. The retail prices of cheaper varieties of blended fabrics are expected to come down as a result by 10 to 15 per cent. The mid-year concessions are expected to cost the exchequer Rs 77 crore in the current year and Rs 131 crore in a full year.

BEIRUT BOMBING

A SUICIDE BOMBER slammed a TNT-laden car into a checkpoint in South Lebanon, killing or wounding at least 60 people, the Arab Socialist Baath Party said. A party communiqué issued in the southern city of Sidon said the attack took place near the village of Barti, about 14 kilometres from Sidon.

IN THE LIMELIGHT



The music room portraits from 'Dandadan' season 2. CRUNCHYROLL

Why yōkai refuse to die: Japanese folklore reimaged in the age of *Dandadan*

Yukinobu Tatsu's hit series scavenges the detritus of Japanese folklore, reanimating the occult as a maximalist punk-rock spectacle for the 21st century; it transforms traditional yōkai and urban legends into outrageous, hyper-stylised characters that thrive in the digital age

Ayaan Paul Chowdhury

For centuries, Japanese folklore has seethed with shapeshifters, grotesques, tricksters, vengeful ghosts, and objects that come alive when left alone too long. But the word *yōkai* – a neat compound of two kanji meaning “suspicious” and “doubtful” – has resisted the simple taxonomy of goblins and ghouls. They are not quite demons, not quite gods, but emissaries of animism, or the belief that anything and everything might house a restless soul. Priests developed rituals to pacify these forces, separating the benevolent *nigimitama* from the violent *arimitama*. When the latter went untamed, they curdled into *yōkai*, requiring rites of *chinkon* to soothe them back into balance.

Sometimes they're mischievous foxes or long-necked women, sometimes a sandal or a teapot that suddenly develops eyes and limbs. Edo-period artists such as Toriyama Sekien catalogued these *yōkai* into detailed bestiaries, while scholars like Kunio Yanagita famously collected tales of such entities in *Tōno Monogatari*, but the truth is that the line between invention and tradition has always been blurry.

By the 20th century, modernisation eroded the daily intimacies that once made *yōkai* seem plausible. Many of the old spirits relied on a pre-industrial familiarity with land and ritual. Who, after all, still feared a haunted inkstone, or the bucket that drew water from a well? Yet new technologies were quick to refill the vacuum. Kamishibai storytellers, penny manga rental shops, and television carried *yōkai* into mass consciousness. Shigeru Mizuki, creator of *GeGe no Kitarō*, codified an entire new bestiary in print. Others, like Arifumi Sato, conjured fresh monsters – like the skeletal *gashadokuro* or the vampiric *jubokko* –

and sold them to children in encyclopedias. Purists grumbled that such inventions cheapened tradition, forgetting that Sekien himself was guilty of the same game.

Rather than ossifying, Japanese occult lore has proven remarkably elastic. Old ghosts jostle beside new urban legends, with schoolgirls whispering about Hanako in the bathroom, or Kuchisake-onna, the slit-mouthed woman asking if she's beautiful. Today, for most young Japanese, *yōkai* live in phone screens and horror manga panels.

Hyper-stylised punk folklore

It is precisely in this atmosphere of constant mythological remix that Yukinobu Tatsu's *Dandadan* felt inevitable. The manga, and its riotous anime adaptation, operate as a series of carnivalesque dances. Ghost stories, UFO conspiracies, exorcism rites, and juvenile romance all collide at maximum decibel, producing a hyper-stylised punk folklore for the 21st century. Where earlier storytellers sought to render spirits legible, *Dandadan* thrives on exaggeration, spectacle, and the absurd impossibility of it all. It is a story about how superstition survives in the digital age by remixing itself until it feels contemporary again.

Among its rogue's gallery of spirits, there's Turbo Granny, a hag-turned-drag racer who skewers the old Japanese famine-era practice of abandoning the elderly in the mountains. She's crass, vindictive, and impossibly quick, but also oddly protective – doling out tenderness to the ghosts of abused girls and castrating any man foolish enough to trespass on her turf.

Meanwhile, the Acrobatic Silky is a red-draped mother in a plate-like bonnet, leaping rooftops in search of her lost child. It's an Edo-period legend re-skinned for the parkour generation.

Then there's the vertical pupils and serpentine dances of the Evil Eye, reducing mortals to suicidal impulses.

The *yōkai* doubles as a riff on the Internet-era specter of the *Kunekune* – a thin, writhing figure spotted from afar that supposedly drives onlookers insane if they approach.

One of the oldest schoolyard rumours in Japan is that the portraits in the music room – of Beethoven, Mozart, Chopin, etc. – watch you after dark. *Dandadan* takes the joke literally, turning them into tulpa assassins who hurl weaponised symphonies. Also soon to make an appearance in the anime is Reiko Kashima, *Dandadan*'s version of the Kuchisake-onna, re-imagined as a muscular, crown-wearing rival with a complicated relationship with vanity.

The series digs deeper into cryptid territory as well. The rural snake-thing Tsuchinoko gets a *Dune*-inspired makeover as the Mongolian Death Worm, worshipped as Orochi-sama and fed with human sacrifice. The Loch Ness Monster or “Nessie” drifts in too, reborn in the radioactive image of *Shin Godzilla*. And when the real-life pulp journal *Super Mystery Magazine* MU pops up, the show knows it's part of the same cottage industry of curated weirdness.

One recent episode from the anime features the HAYASHI – parodies of traditional *hayashi* festival musicians – recast as leather-clad headbangers channeling a Slipknot-like bombast. Their exorcism is powered by decibels alone, with feedback, double-kick drums, and shrieking guitars that rattle *yōkai* into submission. The English dub doubles down on the gag with tracks laid down by members of DragonForce and Megadeth, turning the ancient *chinkon* rite meant to soothe restless souls into a full-blown death-metal séance that doubled, accidentally, as an homage to the late Ozzy Osbourne.

The anime's viral opening theme from its first season, *Otonokoe* by Creepy Nuts, also captured this mood board of contemporary occultism perfectly. It's crammed with Easter eggs and references to modern horror stories like Sada-chan and Kaya-chan, Internet legends like “Kinkisaki”, and numerical taboos around 4:44 AM. Even M. Night Shyamalan manages to sneak in.

'Esoteric doctrine'

The title itself plays with the suffix *-dan*, meaning “story”, recalling *kaidan* (ghost stories) or *kidan* (strange tales); and its repetition – “Dan-da-dan” – has the rhythm of a chant, a drumbeat, or the stutter of a retro anime sound effect. Later revelations in the manga even tie its cosmology to Buddhist texts on the Womb Realm and enlightenment. In other words, the show shifts seamlessly from pop-cultural parody to esoteric doctrine.

This willingness to collage is, in its way, faithful to how *yōkai* have always worked. Most of the creatures we think of as “traditional” today were popularised by artists, novelists, and kabuki playwrights. Folklore was always protean. It was imagined to be consumed, laughed at, feared, and recycled. The sense that it functioned as a closed canon is a modern illusion. *Dandadan* simply continues the process, updating the imagery for a generation that spends more time on YouTube than in Shinto shrines. Where *yōkai* were once invoked to explain why crops failed or children fell sick, they now serve as vessels for adolescent anxieties about friendship, sexuality, and belonging. They are alive because they are believed in, and because they are still fun to tell stories about. Which, for folklore, is the only kind of immortality that matters.

Dandadan is currently streaming on Crunchyroll

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

THE DAILY QUIZ

Michael Jackson was born on August 29, 1958. Here is a quiz on the 'king of pop'

Vignesh P. Venkitesh

QUESTION 1

Name the music group with which Michael Jackson began his music career.

QUESTION 2

Name Jackson's autobiography, which is also one of his iconic dance moves.

QUESTION 3

In which music video did Jackson first feature the step that his autobiography is named after?

QUESTION 4

Which of Jackson's works, one of his biggest hits, features zombies?

QUESTION 5

Name the movie studio that Jackson is reported to have almost bought, and the superhero character from the studio which he wished to play.



Visual Question:

Name the sporting event where the viewership attracted by this performance by Jackson in 1993 marked a turning point and paved the way for a popular trend. GETTY IMAGES

Questions and answers to the previous day's daily quiz:

1. It is the only championship not cancelled for any reason since its inception. Other championships were cancelled for which reasons in history? **Ans: World Wars I and II, COVID-19**

2. From 2022, revised tiebreak rules were initiated and standardised in the final set for all four majors. What is this extended tiebreaker? **Ans: First to ten points, win by two**

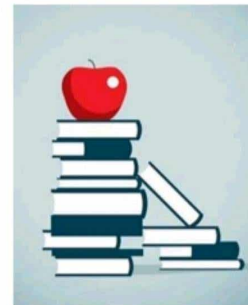
3. In 1973, the championship became the first to do this with the winners. **Ans: It became the first Grand Slam tournament to award equal prize money to men and women**

4. Who is the only individual to have won the U.S. Open singles titles on all three surfaces? **Ans: Jimmy Connors**

5. In the Open Era, three players have won the most Singles titles, at five. **Ans: Jimmy Connors, Pete Sampras, Roger Federer**

Visual: Identify this player. She has also achieved another feat, tied with Serena Williams. **Ans: Chris Evert, most Singles titles in the Open Era**

Early Birds: K.N. Viswanathan | Mahendra Singh Charan | Tamal Biswas | Erfanally Osmany | Sumana Dutta



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

K. Subrahmanian
S. Upendran

Let us look at some Australian terms and the normal usual terms in English.

General

* backblocks/outback: remote country areas;
* billabong: waterhole in a drying river;
* bludge: to shirk; to scrounge; an easy task; a period of idleness;
* bombora: submerged reef, or the turbulent water above it;
* brumby: wild horse;
* chunder: vomit;
* cobber: mate, friend;
* coolgardie safe: dampened box or cupboard for keeping food cool;
* digger: Australian soldier, Australian;
* dilly bag: bag of woven grass or reed fibre;
* dinkum: genuine; honesty;
* drongo: fool; worthless or clumsy person;

* furphy: unfounded rumour;
* galah: fool, dunce;
* glory box: bottom drawer, trunk for a trousseau;

* kelpie: sheepdog breed;
* larrikin: hooligan;
* the mallee: bush country;
* ocker: matey, unpolished Australian male;

* pavlova: meringue cake with fruit;
* Sheila: woman;
* Shiralee/swag/bluey: tramp's bundle of belongings;

* skite: to boast;
* squatter/pastoralist: large-scale sheep or cattle farmer;

* strine: broad Australian English;
* swagman: tramp, vagrant, or itinerant worker;

* tucker: food;
* waddy: club or stick;

* warrigal: dingos, or wild horse;
* wobble board: fibreboard sheet that booms when shaken, used as a musical instrument;

* wovver: puritan, killjoy, prude
Plants and wildlife

* bandicoot: rat-like marsupial;
* barramundi: long edible lungfish;
* casowary: large flightless bird;

* coolabak: eucalyptus tree on river banks;
* dingo: wild dog;

* echidna: burrowing, egg-laying mammal, the spiny anteater;
* emu: large flightless bird;

* eucalyptus: gum tree;
* galah: pink and grey cockatoo;
* goanna: monitor lizard;

* kookaburra/laughing jackass: raucous kingfisher;
* kurrajong: evergreen tree;

* lorikeet: small, brightly coloured parrot;
* lyrebird: pheasant-like bird;

* platypus: egg-laying mammal with a broad bill and webbed feet;
* taipan: venomous snake;

* tasmanian devil wombat: small, fierce, flesh-eating marsupial furry burrowing marsupial.
Published in *The Hindu* on November 11, 1997

Word of the day

Altruism:

the quality of unselfish concern for the welfare of others

Synonyms: compassion, kindness, generosity

Usage: She showed altruism by helping the poor.

Pronunciation: /æltruːzəm/

International Phonetic Alphabet:

/æltruːzəm/

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

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Land sanctioned for new IIM in Pimpri Chinchwad

70 in acres. The Maharashtra government has sanctioned the land in Moshi, Pimpri Chinchwad, near Pune, to set up a new Indian Institute of Management (IIM). Revenue Minister Chandrashekhar Bawankule said the decision followed directions from Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis. **PH**

Number of Gazans facing famine conditions

5.1 in lakhs. The World Food Programme (WFP) says it currently delivers 100 aid trucks daily into Gaza which is far below 600 trucks that entered during the ceasefire. WFP chief Cindy McCain warned that the modest food aid increase is "not nearly enough" to stop starvation. **AP**

Deaths in northern Thailand from Typhoon Kajiki

5 Typhoon Kajiki has killed five people and injured 15 in northern Thailand, where flash floods and landslides have struck 12 provinces. More than 6,300 residents and 1,800 households have been affected, with at least seven people reported missing. Authorities warn water levels may rise as heavy rain is forecast to continue through next week. **AP**

Civilians including children killed in Kyiv attack

14 The overnight barrage also damaged the European Union mission's building in Kyiv. Residents sought shelter in subway stations. Ukraine's air force reported Moscow launched the second-largest overnight barrage so far. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy condemned the strikes as "deliberate killings". **AP**

Number of persons displaced in eastern Pakistan due to floods

2.5 in lakhs. Rescuers in boats raced to reach stranded families in Pakistan's populous eastern Punjab province on Thursday, after three major rivers burst their banks because of heavy rain and the release of water from overflowing dams in neighbouring India. **AP**

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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Which sectors are worst hit by tariffs?

How high are the new U.S. tariffs on Indian exports? Which sectors are likely to feel the most pain? What has been the immediate impact on shrimp, textiles, and jewellery? Which sectors are likely to face only a modest impact? What short-term support is the government planning?

EXPLAINER

T.G.A. Sharad Raghavan

The story so far:

The 50% tariffs imposed by the U.S. on imports from India came into effect on August 27, sending ripples through the Indian economy and the government. Several sectors, many of them labour-intensive, have the U.S. as a major export destination, and many are already seeing a significant dip in demand. The government is cognisant of this and is devising a plan to support these sectors, at least in the short term.

How do we know which sectors will be worst affected?

The intensity of the impact of tariffs can be arrived at by looking at three metrics in combination: the amount exported to the U.S. in absolute terms, the share of the U.S. in that sector's total exports to the world, and the final tariff that sector is facing.

If a sector exports a large amount to the U.S., the U.S. forms a major part of its total exports, and the tariffs are high, then the pain felt by that sector will likely be high. However, if the U.S. forms a small share in a sector's total exports, then the impact is likely to be limited.

Which sectors are likely to see a severe impact?

According to data from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, India exported about \$2.4 billion worth of shrimp to the U.S. in 2024-25, making up 32.4% of its total shrimp exports. Earlier, the U.S. only imposed a 10% countervailing tariff on shrimp from India. However, the addition of the 50% tariff now takes this total to 60%.



Major impact: Several sectors, many of them labour-intensive, have the U.S. as a major export destination, and many are already seeing a significant dip in demand. GETTY IMAGES

Reports indicate that exporter purchase prices of shrimp in Andhra Pradesh – the source of the majority of India's shrimp – fell by about 20% following the 25% tariff imposed on August 7. Prices are likely to fall further due to the current 60% tariff.

India exported \$10 billion worth of diamonds, gold, and jewellery to the U.S. in 2024-25, accounting for 40% of total exports in this sector. Tariffs have now risen from 2.1% to 52.1%. Reports from hubs like Surat already show that production cuts are underway. Surat's diamond polishing industry itself employs about 12 lakh people.

One of the worst-hit sectors is likely to be India's textiles and apparel exports sector. These exports to the U.S. stood at \$10.8 billion in 2024-25, with apparel alone accounting for \$5.4 billion. Further, the U.S. accounts for 35% of India's apparel exports. The sector now faces a 63.9% tariff, up from the previous 13.9%.

"Tiruppur exporters are rushing shipments while cancelling new styles," said the Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) in its report. "Noida-Gurgaon has frozen planned capacity expansions and is considering downsizing. Ludhiana reports a slump in yarn and fabric demand, with working capital under stress, and Bengaluru units are preparing for shift cuts as buyers push for offshore production."

India exported \$1.2 billion worth of carpets to the U.S. in 2024-25, which makes up 58.6% of total carpet exports. Tariffs have increased from 2.9% to 52.9%.

Other significantly affected sectors include handicrafts, leather and shoes, furniture and bedding, and agricultural products such as basmati rice, spices, tea, pulses, and sesame.

Which sectors will see a more modest impact?

India's export of organic chemicals to the

U.S. stood at \$2.7 billion. This made up 13.2% of India's total exports. The sector now faces 54% import tariffs, up from the previous 4%. The exporters' body, CHEMEXCIL, and industry bodies have already approached the government for some intervention.

India exported \$4.7 billion worth of steel, aluminium, and copper to the U.S. in 2024-25, about 17% of India's total exports of these metals.

"While the U.S. is not the largest market for Indian metals, it is critical for hundreds of SMEs in the Delhi-NCR engineering belt and eastern foundry hubs," GTRI said.

"The tariff threatens to disrupt jobs in stainless steel, aluminium casting, and copper semi-finished goods, putting severe pressure on small and medium exporters reliant on U.S. orders."

India exported \$6.7 billion worth of machinery and mechanical appliances to the U.S. in 2024-25, making up 20% of its total exports. This sector is also expected to face a drop in demand.

Is the government planning to help these sectors?

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Commerce and Industries Minister Piyush Goyal have been repeating the 'swadeshi' mantra and asking Indians to 'go vocal for local', so that the economy can reduce its dependence on exports. Apart from this, the government is working on a multi-ministry plan to ease the short-term pain of exporters.

In the medium to long term, the government is working with exporter bodies to diversify their export destinations and make better use of existing free trade agreements. The Reserve Bank of India Governor Sanjay Malhotra has also said that the central bank stands ready to provide whatever help it can.

THE GIST

Severe impact is expected on shrimp, diamonds and jewellery, textiles and apparel, and carpets due to tariffs rising up to 60%, with reports of production cuts, price falls, and downsizing.

Moderate impact will be felt in organic chemicals, metals, and machinery exports, with SMEs and exporters' bodies seeking intervention.

The government is working on a multi-ministry plan, promoting the 'swadeshi' and 'vocal for local' push, while also aiming to diversify export destinations.

Why U.S. is ending duty-free imports of low-value goods?

What does this mean for global trade and businesses?

Garimella Subramanian

The story so far:

Postal and courier services worldwide are bracing for logistics disruptions, as the U.S. eliminates duty-free imports of low-value goods, effective August 29. Set at a maximum purchase threshold of \$800 per person per day, shipments of merchandise ranging from textiles to toys, cosmetics, and electronic accessories have until now been covered under the de minimis exemption – Latin for "too small to be trifled with". These imports will now face tariffs based on the country of origin. The duty exemption was reversed in May for imports from China, which accounts for over 50% of de minimis imports, according to the U.S. Customs and Border Protection agency. This dealt a severe blow to the country's leading e-commerce platforms, like Temu, and textile retailers such as Shein. The latest move is part of the barrage of measures the Donald Trump administration has embarked upon to narrow the U.S. trade deficit with the biggest economies,

prevent intellectual property theft, and block the influx of counterfeit products. Opponents claim that the abolition of the duty exemption would reduce aggregate welfare by between \$11-\$13 billion and disproportionately hurt the poorer, citing a National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) study.

What is the de minimis regulation, and how did it work?

The de minimis regulation, rooted in Section 321 of the 1930 Tariff Act, allowed American tourists to send home souvenirs without incurring taxes. In the 1990s, the rationale of the provision was recast as a trade facilitation and liberalisation tool designed to reduce transaction costs for businesses and consumers. When Congress quadrupled the value of exempted goods from \$200 to \$800 in 2016, the number of items that were eligible for coverage was also expanded.

An important consideration behind the move was to balance administrative costs with potential revenue earnings in the wake of the exponential rise in imports into the country in recent years. Fresh

tariffs during President Trump's first term may have paradoxically contributed to the proliferation of trade via the postal route. About four million deliveries were estimated to be processed daily under the de minimis exemption scheme. The volume of imports had increased from \$34 million in 2015 to \$1.36 billion in 2024, according to the White House.

How does this fit into previous international agreements?

The removal of the duty-free exemption recalls a 2019 bargain that Mr. Trump extracted from the 192-nation-strong Universal Postal Union (UPU) 2019 in a bid to block other nations from free-riding on the American economy.

The UPU conceded to the U.S. demand to hike postal rates applicable for exporters from developing nations, which Washington maintained were substantially lower than the costs incurred by domestic customers. The administration further reasoned that the anomaly had incentivised the flood of Chinese goods into the U.S., putting domestic importers at a disadvantage.

Are there international parallels?

The European Union has proposed a handling fee of €2 for products directly imported by individuals, and a €0.5 fee received by warehouses. The aim is to crack down on dangerous and illegal goods flooding the single market and distorting competition in the 27-country bloc. Crucially, the reform shifts responsibility for direct purchases made by individuals onto Chinese e-commerce platforms, which must furnish additional data to customs officials for closer scrutiny. In a related move, imports into the EU last year of 4.6 billion low-value parcels – a four-fold increase over 2022, 90% of which were from China – have brought to the fore the termination of the €150 duty-free threshold, offering greater protection to consumers and businesses.

What does this indicate about global trade?

Together, the U.S. and EU actions on low-value imports are a most telling statement that the basic pillars of the post-war world order, exemplified among others by the World Trade Organization, are being systematically undermined by its founding architects.

Evidence that the multilateral framework is near collapse can be gathered from the inability of sovereign and independent nations to formulate a concerted response to Mr. Trump during recent negotiations over bilateral trade agreements with Washington. Most notable of these is the EU's trade pact with the U.S.

The writer is Director, Strategic Initiatives, Agnash Technologies

THE GIST

Postal and courier services worldwide are bracing for disruptions as the U.S. eliminates duty-free imports of low-value goods, affecting shipments of merchandise such as textiles, toys, cosmetics, and electronic accessories, and impacting e-commerce platforms like Temu and retailers such as Shein.

The actions signal that the basic pillars of the post-war world order, exemplified by the World Trade Organization, are being systematically undermined, as sovereign nations struggle to coordinate responses to these unilateral trade measures.

Should States be compensated for revenue loss from GST reforms?

**Manoj Mishra**

Partner at Grant Thornton Bharat

**Pratik Jain**

Partner at Price Waterhouse & Co LLP

PARLEY

During his Independence Day speech, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a "Deepavali gift" to the people in the form of next-generation Goods and Services Tax (GST) reforms. The Ministry of Finance subsequently said that a large part of these reforms involved moving GST from the current mainly four-tier system to a predominantly two-tier structure of 5% and 18%, along with an overall lowering of the average tax rate. What impact will this proposal have on revenues? And should the States be compensated for revenue loss? Pratik Jain and Manoj Mishra discuss these questions in a conversation moderated by T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan. Edited excerpts:

With the average tax rate set to come down, how do you think the government will maintain revenue?

Manoj Mishra: Whenever we talk about GST rate cuts, there is always an immediate concern of how much revenue we are really giving up. If you look at the proposals on the table, whether it is rationalising multiple slabs into just two, or cutting the 28% or 12% slab to 18% or 5%, the short-term impact is real. As per current estimates, that cut may impact ₹60,000 crore-₹1,00,000 crore per year, which is roughly 0.2-0.3% of India's GDP. In the first year of implementation (FY2025-26), when the new structure may only apply for part of the year, the likely hit would be closer to ₹45,000 crore. But this is not a permanent loss. A higher rate of around 40% on sin goods and luxury goods will help recoup some of the revenue. Second, when tax rates go down on essential goods and durables, consumption generally goes up. If you put more people into the formal billing system, you reduce leakages. We have seen this before. So, in my opinion, initially there will be a dip, but growing compliance and an increase in demand will make up for it to a large extent.

About 70% of GST revenues come from the 18% slab. That slab is not going to change materially, so the impact from these overall rate cuts is not likely to be very big. Do you agree?

Pratik Jain: You are right. That is the reason why the 18% slab is not being changed. One of the proposals was to merge the 12% and 18% slabs. But that is not happening because the government did not want to touch the 18% slab, given the revenue implications.

There are revenue implications with items moving from the 12% slab to the 5% one, and



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK PHOTO

with many products moving from the 28% slab to the 18% one. But these implications would not be as severe as if the 18% slab was reduced to, say, 13% or 14-15%.

What would the average rate of GST be after the cuts?

PJ: Before GST came in, the average tax incidence was apparently around 15%. This got reduced to around 11.5% after GST came in and after the rate cuts. Currently, it is around 11.5%. The estimate is that it will be close to 10% after the rate cuts proposed by the Centre are implemented. That puts India with the best of the developed economies. To my mind, 10% is a very moderate rate. That should really put us in good stead, as we want to attract more manufacturing over a period of time.

GST revenues are divided between the Centre and the States. But are they divided equally among the States? In other words, will the revenue hit from the tax cuts be divided equally?

MM: The revenue distribution is not equal. When we talk about GST rate cuts, the impact is never going to be uniform. For example, States such as Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu are manufacturing and service-heavy States with strong urban centres. If GST is reduced on appliances or electronics, the immediate revenue collection from GST for these States would take a visible hit. On the other hand, States that are more dependent on agriculture, such as Bihar or Uttar Pradesh, may not see the same proportion of dent in revenue. This is simply because their consumption basket



As far as taxation is concerned, the States will have to start looking at their own systems and processes. They need to think of how they can plug leakages, increase the tax base, and attract more investment, so that they are self-sufficient in tax.

PRATIK JAIN

is tilted towards essentials, which are already exempted or are at a lower slab. When the GST Council cut rates in July 2018, there was an almost 3-4% dip in the monthly collections of States such as Maharashtra and Karnataka. But the smaller States, such as those in the north-east, barely felt any impact because their tax base is narrower.

Should the States' revenues be protected?

PJ: When GST was launched in July 2017, the Centre provided to the States a compensation guarantee for five years. At that point, they believed that five years is a long period for a transition and so, the States would start standing on their feet after that period got over. Five years have gone by and therefore, technically, there is no compensation (to be given). I think it is very difficult for the Centre to keep compensating the States for a regular tax. There are, of course, ways of looking at allocating more funds for, say, infrastructure development. But as far as taxation is concerned, the States will have to start looking at their own systems and processes. They need to think of how they can plug leakages, how they can increase the tax base, and how they can attract more investment, so that they are self-sufficient in tax. For a country such as ours, a regular compensation provided to the States for any loss on taxation is perhaps not an option.

MM: Whatever Pratik is saying is absolutely correct, but we have to understand that there is no equal distribution of GST revenue. So, the bigger States with larger manufacturing facilities receive a larger share of GST, while the smaller, less industrialised States receive a negligible share of total GST collections. There has to be some mechanism by which these States are compensated. Not necessarily by means of a compensation cess or something like that. There could be another mechanism. There could be a mechanism within the Consolidated Fund of India. I think in many of the developed countries which implemented a GST, initially this kind of process was followed. On the one hand, these countries provided a compensation

that came from GST itself, such as the compensation India's Centre gave the States, and on the other, these countries also provided support through their consolidated funds in the form of special packages.

PJ: I think that a separate fund could be created. A few years ago, Kerala had imposed a flood cess to raise funds for recovery. So, maybe a part of GST could go to a contingency fund where, depending on the specific situation in a State, the GST Council may decide to allocate funds. I think the States will have to see this (the rate cuts and rationalisation) as a larger reform: as a step towards ease of doing business in India and attracting more manufacturing and more investment into India. Yes, economic theories and past experience will tell you that when you reduce the tax rate, your tax base increases. But, obviously, the States will really want to see how this evolves. So, at this point in time, of course there will be some nervousness, but they must come together and appreciate and understand the long-term benefits of any tax reform.

So far, the GST Council has taken all decisions by consensus save maybe twice in its history. How optimistic are you that the GST Council will actually go ahead with the changes that the Centre is proposing and that it will not get derailed by the States which are not agreeing to this?

MM: I believe that they have already done their homework. Otherwise, the Prime Minister would not have announced this in his Independence Day speech. So, it is highly unlikely that GST Council will oppose these rate cuts. There could be some discussions around the compensation to make up for the losses, but the possibility that they will not go ahead with the rate cuts seems highly remote to me.

PJ: The Prime Minister made this statement and then it was reiterated by several government officials, so there already seems to be some consensus. I think that there could be discussions about some products, about whether they should fall in the 5% or 18% slab, for instance. Or there could be discussions about when this should be made effective. But I think they will go ahead with the decision – if not with a consensus, maybe with a vote. I see a very strong possibility of it happening in the next upcoming GST Council meeting.



To listen to the full interview
Scan the code or go to the link
www.thehindu.com

NOTEBOOK

Coding, community, and collaboration

Learning to code, being part of Open Data movements, and using Gen AI tools are all important for data journalists

Srinivasan Ramanji

The first line of code that I ever wrote was in a language called BASIC. That was more than three decades ago, at a summer class in Salem in Tamil Nadu, conducted by college graduates who wanted to teach code during their free time. The instructor, a woman in her twenties, was thrilled to see my excitement at the output – the first 50 numbers of the Fibonacci series.

While I was fascinated with coding then, it took me a few more years to become a software programmer. That career lasted four years. The fascination persisted even when I was bit by the journalism bug. However, after I became a journalist, code was no longer a routine job requirement; it became a side hustle.

As a data journalist, though, knowing how to program is a decisive advantage for extracting structured data from web sites, such as the Election Commission of India's, which publishes detailed electoral data. But to be a good coder/programmer, a journalist had to stay in touch with the activity. It was not easy to remember syntax, programming techniques, and procedures to repeat tasks much after they were done the first time. This is why data journalists always leaned on full-time programmers and coders to help with more difficult tasks.

In India, the free and open source (FOSS) movement has always allowed for voluntary help by enthusiasts in public interest. In line with the FOSS ethos, another voluntary group emerged in the mid-2010s, the 'Open Data' community, which included programmers, data scientists, GIS experts, and hobbyists besides journalists. The Indian community dedicated to promoting Open Data is Datameet. While programmers in the community help retrieve data for journalists, journalists help them in turn by publishing data-based stories in public interest.

My colleagues and I not only relied on the Open Data community to access data sources, but also took the help of talented

programmers to create web interactives and do investigative journalism. Prominent examples of these collaborations include several 'Data Point' stories on these pages, hosting the live State-wise vaccination tracker from the CoWIN database, and downloading data and analysing it to calculate excess deaths during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Today, journalists have been further assisted by Gen AI tools. It is no longer necessary to remember exact syntax or procedures to write robust programs; we have to think algorithmically. By using Gen AI prompts effectively, we can 'vibe code', that is, ask a Gen AI model to write code according to specific instructions.

Vibe coding has helped journalists like us scale new heights. We can now write intricate interactive code in JavaScript to analyse in depth the Lok Sabha election results, learn how to leverage open source hardware (Arduino Nano) to collect primary data on issues such as the heat impact in Chennai, and scrape thousands of image PDFs of recent electoral rolls for aggregated information.

Does that mean we no longer need to leverage the help of the Open Data community? Certainly not. When we found that it took hours to parse image PDFs of one Assembly Constituency (and its nearly 400 parts) using OCR (Optical Character Recognition) libraries recommended by Gen AI large language models, we reached out to a Datameet volunteer who promptly optimised the code to significantly speed up the process.

The lesson? It helps to have learned to code to function as a journalist, particularly a data journalist, today. It helps to partake in the AI revolution by using Gen AI to help with coding tasks. But it is even more gratifying to have been part of the FOSS and Open Data movements and to lean on volunteerism for the sake of public interest. My first coding teacher, wherever she is, would be even more proud today.

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PICTURE OF THE WEEK

Swept away



A vehicle damaged by the flash floods triggered by heavy rainfall near the Peer Kho area in Jammu. Over 40 people, mostly pilgrims, have died in landslides and flash floods in the past few days in Jammu and Kashmir. Though waters have started receding in most of the rivers, schools will remain closed in Jammu region till August 30. [ANI](#)

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO AUGUST 29, 1975

Details of IT raid on Gwalior palace

New Delhi, Aug. 28: Income-tax raids at the premises belonging to Mrs. Vijaya Raje Scindia of Gwalior and other members of the former ruling family have revealed "extensive tax evasion and concealed wealth", says an official press release.

The Hindu

Documents indicating transfer of "substantial amounts" of funds in a "surprising manner" out of India have been seized.

During the search of the Gwalior Palace, the tax men discovered silver and silver articles weighing 53 quintals, which would be worth about Rs. 53 lakhs.

The jewellery found in the strong room in the palace is being valued by the registered valuer from a reputed firm. So far about 40 per cent of the total quantity of jewellery found has been valued at Rs. 35 lakhs.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO AUGUST 29, 1925

Unani exhibition

Chief Minister opens

An interesting function was witnessed this morning when the Hon. Chief Minister performed the opening ceremony of the Unani Tibbi Exhibition at the Shadi Mahal, Triplicane. The exhibition is the first of its kind in Madras and has been got up in connection with the South India Unani Tibbi Conference which commences its sittings tomorrow under the auspices of the Eastern Medical Association of Southern India.



War cry

In Bihar, the electoral process itself is an election issue

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's 'Vote Adhikar Yatra' in Bihar is drawing crowds and is turning out to be a platform for Opposition unity. In 16 days, the campaign would cover 1,30,000 kilometres across 20 districts and is to conclude in Patna on September 1. On August 27, the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, M.K. Stalin, joined Mr. Gandhi, RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav and CPI(M) leader Dipankar Bhattacharya in Muzaffarpur. Mr. Stalin has accused the BJP of turning the Election Commission of India (ECI) into a puppet. NCP leader Sharad Pawar, SP leader Akhilesh Yadav, senior leaders of the TMC and Left parties will be in Patna on the concluding day. Its merits apart, the allegation that an ECI scheme favours the BJP and disadvantages the Opposition has rattled India's political landscape. This alleged 'vote chori' (vote theft) has become the Opposition's central rallying cry. Mr. Gandhi's speeches consistently accuse the BJP of 'manipulating institutions' and using the ECI as a puppet for its political ends. The Opposition has long been complaining about various aspects of the electoral process that have become less transparent and more partisan. Political battles should have been on the issues of governance and livelihoods, and not on the integrity of the elections at all.

The Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Bihar and the demonstrable loopholes in electoral rolls, exposed by Mr. Gandhi through an analysis of one Assembly constituency in Karnataka, have given the Opposition allegation a strong handle. The ECI, through its conduct and responses, has added credence to the allegations. It has claimed that over 98% of the voters in the existing list have submitted an enrolment form as required in the Bihar SIR. Around 65 lakh names from the previous list have been removed from the draft list published. It took an order by the Supreme Court for the ECI to accept the Aadhaar card as an acceptable document for establishing identity. Mr. Gandhi alleges that the names being removed are predominantly those of the poor, Dalits, OBCs, Extremely Backward Classes and minorities, a larger proportion of whom vote for non-BJP parties. Electoral malpractice has united the Opposition, but the charges, much of them overblown, are a sign of institutional distrust and rot. The Opposition space has been severely restricted by the brazen and arbitrary use of central law enforcement agencies, and the ECI has done little to demonstrate its impartiality. All of this has left the Opposition with an approach of discrediting the electoral process, which in itself is a sad commentary on India's democracy.

Déjà vu

India must cut monsoon vulnerabilities, not just build response abilities

Heavy rain has left a trail of destruction across North India. Several districts have been cut off across Himachal Pradesh. Jammu and Kashmir reported over 40 deaths while swollen rivers breached flood marks in Srinagar and Anantnag. In Punjab, entire villages have been inundated and farmland has disappeared. The national capital, too, reported excessive rainfall and a surging Yamuna. The intensity and the volumes of the southwest monsoon have been swinging sharply between the extremes. August's rain has arrived in concentrated bursts, overwhelming fragile slopes in the Himalaya, bursting banks in the plains, and inundating low-lying regions. This erraticism has cut across geographies in a sign of the monsoon's increasing unpredictability. The consequences go beyond immediate damage. Intense rain over short periods amplifies local erosion. Mountain slopes destabilise and raise risks for settlements far removed. Relief, in this context, cannot be confined to reactive measures. The knowledge that concentrated, destructive rainfall is now a recurring possibility makes it imperative for States and the Centre to invest in preventive strategies. Continuing to treat such events as unforeseeable emergencies is to deny the evidence already at hand.

Indeed, framing each calamity as "unprecedented" distracts from the lessons that should already have been learnt. In Himalayan States, forest clearance and road-widening continue sans adjustments such as slope-safe engineering in eco-sensitive zones despite experts warning of irreversibly weakened slopes. As catchments' buffering capacity shrinks, the chance of slope failure rises while silt accumulates in dams and rivers downstream, worsening the flood load. Yet, despite repeated disasters, the early warning and evacuation architecture remains underdeveloped. The capacity to forecast heavy rain has improved but it is not being translated into reliable ground-level warnings. Relief agencies mobilise once the damage has occurred, but systematic drills, pre-positioned supplies and community preparedness remain insufficient. Sadly, States and the Centre continue to pursue strategic road projects and urban expansion with urgency, even in landscapes repeatedly flagged as unstable, while climate-resilient infrastructure lags. Compensatory afforestation and rehabilitation rarely match the qualitative attributes of what has been lost. The cumulative effect is visible as denuded slopes, shrinking catchment areas, and populations at increasingly higher risk. Relief operations command headlines and budgets but unless sustainable infrastructure, landslide mitigation and early-warning systems are pursued equally seriously, the next monsoon spell will launch another cycle of loss. Shifting from acclaiming resilience, post facto, to systematically reducing vulnerabilities beforehand remains overdue.

India's demographic dividend as a time bomb

Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore once said, "Don't limit a child to your own learning, for she was born in another time." In the context of India's education system, this quote is particularly resonant today. India's education system is outdated. We are preparing students for jobs that are rapidly disappearing or evolving.

Meanwhile the future of work is being shaped by emerging technologies, led by Artificial Intelligence (AI), being the most disruptive of them all. AI is reshaping how we work and think, with our research suggesting that up to 70% of current jobs, globally, will be impacted, and up to 30% of tasks in many current jobs will get completely automated. A plethora of new jobs related to AI development and implementation are being created as we speak. This technological shift via AI is already changing the world and the job market, whereas the curriculum update cycle in our schools and colleges runs in three-year cycles. This is incremental at best, leading to many students being left behind if we do not up-skill, cross-skill and re-skill them.

India's 'demographic dividend' has long been touted as a key driver of the nation's future growth. With more than 800 million people below the age of 35, the country boasts of having one of the largest youth populations anywhere. This demographic 'asset', however, is increasingly under threat of becoming a 'liability', as the gap between education and real-world skills, and degrees and employability widens. If this gap is not addressed, India's demographic dividend could morph into a demographic time bomb — a paradox at scale.

The stark reality is that while India is producing millions of graduates every year, many of these graduates remain underemployed and are increasingly becoming unemployable. Despite popular belief, this is not merely a problem facing social science or non-STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) students. Over the past decade, data show that 40%-50% of engineering graduates from Indian universities have not been placed in jobs, highlighting the worrying gap between academic education and industry requirements. More and more youngsters are going to college or university, yet employers report increasing difficulty in finding talent with the right skills. Belatedly, educators are acknowledging the problem, with 61% of higher education leaders today agreeing that curricula are not aligned with rapidly changing job market needs.

The mismatch begins in high school

As the AI revolution accelerates, India faces a deepening skills crisis. According to McKinsey, nearly seven out of every 10 Indian jobs are at risk from automation by 2030. This means a massive

Insurance as the foundation of affordability Pooling risk remains the most effective way to make costly care accessible. Even modest premiums — ₹5,000 to ₹20,000 for individuals or ₹10,000 to ₹50,000 for families — can unlock coverage worth several lakhs, shielding households from catastrophic financial shocks. Yet, penetration remains low: only 15%-18% of Indians are insured, with the premium-to-GDP ratio at 3.7% compared to the global average of 7%. The gap is significant, but so is the opportunity, as gross written premiums already stand at \$15 billion in 2024 and are projected to grow at over 20% CAGR till 2030.

Affordability cannot rest on insurance alone. True impact comes when payers, providers and patients partner, expanding coverage, embracing prevention and making insurance a tool for everyday health security, not just a crisis shield. India's health-care system has mastered something that the world is only now beginning to appreciate — delivering quality care at extraordinary scale. Where an MRI in the West may handle seven to eight scans a day, in India the same machine manages many times that volume. This ability to stretch resources without diluting quality is not coincidence. It is the product of decades of ingenuity in doctor-patient ratios, workflow design, and infrastructure use.

The next leap is clear: extend this efficiency to India's vast heartland. Tier-2 and tier-3 cities remain underserved, yet they represent the true



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India's demographic 'asset' — its large youth population — is in danger of becoming a 'liability' as the gap between education and real-world skills and degrees and employability grows wider

and unprecedented change could be affecting the nation in just the next few years. Of course, it is not all bad news. The World Economic Forum predicts that AI and other new tech will create 170 million new jobs by 2030. The problem is that in the same period, more than half of this number of newly created jobs (92 million) will be displaced. Consequently, skilling must become a critical national priority.

The challenge lies in how Indian youth are entering the workforce. A significant number are doing so with outdated or irrelevant skills. This misalignment begins in high school, where students are largely unaware of the multitude of career paths that exist. A Mindler Career Awareness Survey from 2022 revealed that 93% of Indian students between classes 8 to 12 are aware of only seven career options, most of which are traditional roles such as doctor, engineer, lawyer, or teacher. In contrast, the modern economy offers over 20,000 career paths. Surprisingly, a mere 7% of students report receiving formal career guidance during their schooling years. This lack of awareness leads to millions of our best and brightest, pursuing degrees that do not match their aptitudes or market needs. Do not take our word for it. According to the India Skills Report 2024, more than 65% of high school graduates pursue degrees that are not aligned with their interests or abilities. This alarming reality means that students emerge from their degrees ill-equipped for the rapidly changing job market, further exacerbating India's unemployment crisis.

Digital tools, but analog mindsets

While most students in India now have access to some technology as smartphones have become much cheaper, and the government has also tried to roll out computer and AI labs, most schools still follow traditional, examination-centric curricula. There is limited focus on career exploration or the development of job-ready skills. As a result, students graduate with degrees but lack the practical experience required by employers. In fact, the Graduate Skills Index 2025 produced by Mercer-Mettl found that only 43% of Indian graduates are deemed job-ready. In our experience with interns and fresh graduates, this figure, if anything, underestimates the scale of the problem.

EdTech platforms primarily focus on test preparation and rote learning, rather than career discovery or skill development. Coursera, Udemy and other look-alikes have tried to address this problem, but the certificates obtained from these are becoming increasingly commoditised. School curricula remain disconnected from the evolving job market, leaving students unprepared for the challenges ahead. Only a few State boards and central bodies have introduced career readiness

frameworks, and even fewer integrate emerging career pathways into their curricula.

The Indian government, to its credit, has launched several initiatives that are aimed at bridging the skills gap, the most prominent being the Skill India Mission, which aimed to train over 400 million individuals by 2022. Despite large-scale funding, the mission fell far short of this target. Multiple systemic issues have contributed to this failure: besides the Skill India Mission, an acronym soup of other policies has also been launched which includes the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Kendras (PMKK), Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSS), Pradhan Mantri Yuva Yojana (PMYY), Skills Acquisition and Knowledge Awareness for Livelihood Promotion (SANKALP), Prime Minister's Internship Scheme, and many others.

What India needs is a cohesive strategy that aligns education and skill development with industry demands. We have undertaken deep research and devised a platform for just that. We are in conversations with NITI Aayog, the Association of Indian Universities (AIU), and the Skill Ministry to translate this solution into reality. Collaboration between the government, private sector and educational institutions will be essential to create a robust ecosystem for skill development.

The decisive decade

India's ambition to emerge as a global digital powerhouse rests on its ability to integrate technology, education and employment into a coherent national framework. India's youth will either be equipped with the skills to thrive in an AI-driven world or be left behind. This is not just an education or employment crisis; it is a crisis where our entire social contract could come undone. The student civil disobedience during the Mandal Commission days in 1990 bear witness to the havoc that youth-led protests can create, escalating into violence, clashes with police, property destruction, and, in some cases, fatalities due to police firings. If India fails to act now, it risks creating a generation of highly literate, even educated but unemployable youth that can become a ticking time-bomb. The World Bank Economic Review has aptly captured this paradox at scale in an article by Lant Pritchett, "Where Has All the Education Gone?". The ramifications of such a crisis are dire. The good news is that this is an entirely fixable problem. India must prepare its youth not for the jobs of yesterday, but for the careers of tomorrow. The clock is ticking and it is up to us to convert India's demographic dividend into an asset or a liability.

Ritu Kulkarni supported the initial stages of the article, specifically with data content and drafting

Building health for 1.4 billion Indians



Sangita Reddy
is Joint Managing Director, Apollo Hospitals Group

Health care in India is at an inflection point and must move from being a privilege to becoming every Indian's right

frontier. If India can replicate its urban efficiency in these geographies, it will not just close the access gap. It could set a global benchmark for how scale, innovation and inclusion can reshape health care.

Schemes such as Ayushman Bharat (Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana, or PM-JAY) have redefined access. Covering nearly 500 million people, with ₹5 lakh a family for advanced care, PM-JAY has enabled millions of cashless treatments in both public and private hospitals. Its impact is visible: timely cancer treatments for beneficiaries have increased by nearly 90%.

Expanding private hospital participation in government-backed schemes is essential to reach the next 500 million. But this must be anchored in fair reimbursements and transparent processes, ensuring viability for providers and real value for patients.

Prevention as the most powerful cost-saver

A study in Punjab revealed a stark reality — even insured families faced catastrophic expenses on diabetes, hypertension, and other non-communicable disease (NCD) outpatient care. The solution is two-fold: redesign insurance to include outpatient and diagnostics, and launch a nationwide push for prevention. But this is incomplete without public participation.

Alongside payers and providers, people must embrace a preventive mindset — controlling risks, staying alert and raising awareness. Every rupee in healthier lifestyles saves multiples in treatment. If schools, employers, communities and citizens rally behind prevention, India can blunt the looming tsunami of NCDs and secure a healthier future.

India was early to adopt telemedicine and is now pushing boundaries with Artificial Intelligence. Tools that detect early signs of sepsis, triage diagnostic reports, or enable remote consultations are already in practice. These innovations not only improve patient outcomes but also optimise the productivity of doctors and nurses.

Digital health is also democratising access.

Remote consultations mean that a cardiologist in a metropolitan city can guide treatment for a patient in a village that is hundreds of kilometres away. Combined with the government's Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission, such innovations could enable universal health records and continuity of care across the country.

Regulation and trust as the missing link

Health-care innovations are promising, but challenges persist. Insurers in New Delhi are considering a 10%-15% premium hike due to pollution-driven respiratory illnesses which shows how environmental factors raise health-care costs. Without safeguards, such pressures could hit affordability for millions. This is where regulation is crucial. The Finance Ministry has urged the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) to strengthen claims of settlement and grievance redress, recognising that trust drives insurance penetration. Without confidence in fair and transparent claims, households will not prioritise health insurance. Robust regulation, paired with fair pricing, is essential to deepen coverage and build confidence.

In 2023, India's health sector drew \$5.5 billion in private equity and venture capital, fuelling digital health, pharmacy networks, and hospitals. But capital remains skewed toward metros. The true test is directing this to tier-2 and tier-3 cities, building primary networks, and training specialists so that growth translates into inclusion.

India's health care is at an inflection point. Insurance must cover everyday care, providers must scale efficiently, prevention must cut long-term costs, and technology must drive access. With aligned investment and bold public-private partnerships, we can design a system that is not episodic or exclusionary, but universal, resilient, and sustainable. Health care must move from being a privilege to becoming every Indian's right.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The shock of U.S. tariffs

While India fervently believed that U.S. President Donald Trump would roll back his plan to slap a 25% tariff for the second time, it is disappointing that he has gone ahead with his decision. It only shows that Mr. Trump is obdurate and is fuelled by arrogance. He does not seem to take

considered decisions. United States-dependent Indian exporters will face a serious financial crisis. The situation is disconcerting as it would take them years to neutralise their financial losses. This decision of Mr. Trump will put all nations on notice that the United States is not dependable.

He has not realised that the United States is getting increasingly isolated which is not, in the long run, good for the Americans. His demands are outrageous.

V. Lakshmanan,
Tirupur, Tamil Nadu

In Mr. Trump's view, India represents a disquieting asymmetry: a nation that

presents itself as America's "natural partner" yet withholds the reciprocity expected of one. India talks the language of shared values and strategic alignment, but keeps its markets closed, its diplomacy hedged, and its commitments deliberately vague. Unlike Europe or Japan, it does not pay an

alliance premium. Unlike China, it is not a rival powerful enough to command respect. This in-between posture, benefiting from partnership without fully embracing it, makes India run contrary to Mr. Trump's transactional instinct. New Delhi's balancing act may impress diplomats, but to Mr. Trump

it looks like opportunism. He finds the pinch sharp enough to whip up tariffs and keen to extract concessions.

R. Narayanan,
Navi Mumbai

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

SCIENCE

Centering elderly women: caring for the quiet majority

To truly support and empower elderly women in their health-seeking behaviours, India needs to move to more inclusive gender-sensitive health systems. Policies need to acknowledge the gendered path of Indian women and how these factors shape their ageing

Sathya Sriram

India is ageing, rapidly. And it is women who are living longer, but with poor health.

According to the *India Ageing Report 2023* as published by the International Institute for Population Sciences and the United Nations Population Fund, there will be a significant decadal increase in India's elderly population, with people aged 60 and above estimated to comprise over 20% of the population by 2050.

The average lifespan of women is more than that of men by 2.7 years, resulting in a demographic tilt favouring more elderly women. However, the McKinsey Health Institute estimates that women are likely to spend 25% more time in poor health compared to men, much of those in their later years, highlighting a health gap to be bridged.

Despite these sobering figures, the conversations about elderly women and their health stay in the shadows, with society treating them as passive dependents rather than as individuals with distinct needs and challenges. Add to this their care-giving and self-sacrificing instinct, and we have a large majority of elderly women, navigating public spaces in silence.

Care-seeking behaviour

The social determinants of women's health go well beyond medical causes to include socio-cultural, economic, and structural factors. Health-seeking behaviour is defined as action an individual undertakes to obtain medical attention, what type of care they seek, and how they continuously manage that condition. Typically, this is influenced by access to information, disease perception, demographics, economic status, access to facilities, perceived quality of services, and socio-cultural beliefs. In the case of women, we need to layer on additional factors such as education, social conditioning, marital status, financial and digital dependency, and lack of gender-sensitive care facilities.

Indian women are socialised to prioritise family wellbeing over their own, and therefore, tend to deprioritise their health needs. In many patriarchal households, the spouse or adult children tend to be gatekeepers of the decision about when and whether an elderly woman seeks care.

Financial insecurity is a significant vulnerability among older women. A UNFPA study from 2011 reported that almost 60% of older women have no personal income. And, few elderly women have health insurance coverage. Less than 20% of women are able to pay



The conversations about elderly women and their health stay in the shadows, with society treating them as passive dependents rather than as individuals with distinct needs and challenges. FILE PHOTO

their own medical bills, compared to 44% of elderly men. This high economic dependency tends to hold women back from seeking appropriate early medical care.

The digital gender gap is accentuated amongst the elderly, with far fewer women having access to digital devices, which impacts their access to health information and services.

An UNFPA study to understand the needs and challenges of older women in India, uncovered that two-thirds of older women are accompanied by their children or grandchildren (versus 41% among older men), indicating a higher level of dependency.

Insufficient access to female health providers as well information and diagnostics for women's health issues can delay care even if one reaches the facility. Once within the health system, women often need support in navigating its complex processes, which also deters them from accessing health services.

The more commonly discussed ageing-driven chronic conditions are cardiovascular (heart), cancers, and neurodegenerative (brain) diseases. However, the nuances of how women experience these conditions due to their physiological transitions and caregiving burdens are less acknowledged and far less studied.

In order to experience healthy ageing, women should have access to affordable

and adequate healthcare throughout their lives. In India, healthcare expenditure is far less on women than men across all ages and socio-economic groups, further worsening health conditions later in life that are more likely to impede quality of life and cause disability.

Due to the hormone shifts post menopause, loss of muscle mass and nutritional deficiencies, the non-communicable diseases of hypertension, diabetes and cardiovascular illnesses tend to have more severe outcomes and complications in women. Furthermore, the decline in bone health is a substantial risk for osteoporosis and arthritis, which are much more common in women, yet under-diagnosed. The risk of fractures from falls is also significantly higher in women and can result in disability or limited movement that affects their mental well-being.

Once women move past the reproductive phase, the healthcare system barely considers their uro-gynaecological health. In lower income settings, women rarely have a gynaecological examination post childbirth. Cancers of the breast, cervix, ovaries, and uterus disproportionately affect older women and often go undiagnosed until late stages. Over 50% of breast cancer cases in India occur in post-menopausal women, yet screening awareness drops sharply with age.

A study analysing treatment patterns in Indian women aged 65 and above with breast cancer found that on average, treatment was less aggressive, but appropriate therapies (surgery and chemotherapy) could improve survival rates and lead to favourable outcomes.

The awareness and availability of vaccines is helping reduce the risk of cervical cancer amongst younger women; however, older women are still susceptible with limited access to, and frequency of, pap smears. Worse still is ovarian cancer, the most lethal gynaecological cancer, with a five-year relative survival rate of 17% for a patient diagnosed at an advanced stage.

Certain neurodegenerative diseases, Alzheimer's and other dementias, are more likely to develop in women, both due to biological factors (oestrogen decline) and social conditions (longer lifespan, isolation due to loss of spouse). According to the Longitudinal Aging Study in India (LASI), women aged over 70 report higher levels of cognitive impairment yet are less diagnosed and treated compared to men.

Mental health issues among elderly women are under-reported, under-diagnosed, and under-treated.

As per HelpAge India, only 1 in 10 elderly women with depressive symptoms seek help – due to stigma as well as limited access to mental health services for the elderly.

Better care

Despite the many systemic challenges, elderly women in India proactively engage in many activities that enhance their well-being.

Socially, elderly women tend to be deeply embedded in family and community networks. These social engagements are potential protective factors against loneliness and cognitive decline.

Many women also find joy and purpose in routines that keep them physically and mentally active, such as walking groups, yoga classes, or taking up new hobbies such as painting or music.

Finally, educated women avail of better outpatient care, both in public and private facilities, making years of schooling the primary driver of choice.

To truly support and empower elderly women in their health-seeking behaviours, India needs to move to more inclusive gender-sensitive health systems. Policies need to acknowledge the gendered path of Indian women and how these factors shape their ageing.

(Sathya Sriram is a healthcare strategist working to make care more accessible, preventive, and people centred. sathya.sriram@gmail.com)

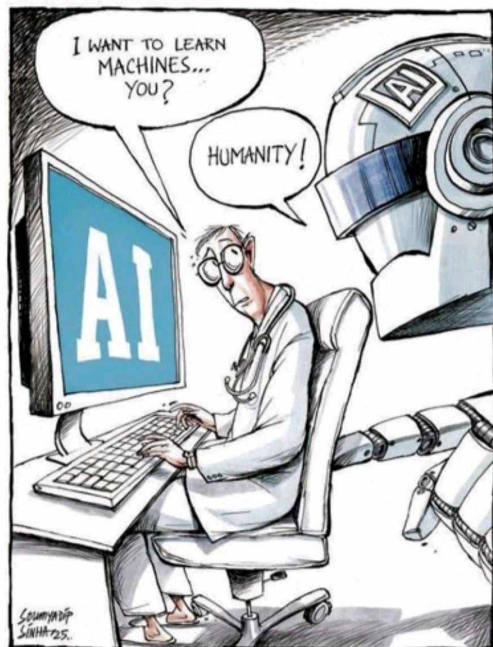
THE GIST

▼ A 2011 UNFPA study found that fewer than 20% of women could pay their own medical bills, limiting access to early care

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HUMERUS



Beyond science fiction: artificial wombs and real progress of fertility treatments

Gita Aravamudan

According to reports that surfaced on the internet last week, a Chinese firm announced plans to create the world's first pregnancy robot with an artificial womb. It was fake news, and all the major news outlets bought it. Because it made flashy sci-fi headlines especially in a world where anything seems possible with omnipresent Artificial Intelligence (AI).

It was fake news, and all the major news outlets bought it. Because it made flashy sci-fi headlines especially in a world where anything seems possible with omnipresent Artificial Intelligence (AI).

My book on surrogacy, *Baby Makers*, which came out in 2016 had a chapter called *Virgin Birth and Womb Banks*, where I discussed the possibilities of sexless reproduction and artificial wombs which could be enabled by cutting edge technology.

It sounded then like science fiction. And it still remains in the realm of science fiction. But though we are nowhere near producing an artificial womb which can gestate and nurture a human being, the research in this field has been on-going for quite a few years now.

More than 10 years ago when



Though we are nowhere near producing an artificial womb which can gestate and nurture a human being, the research in this field has been on-going for quite a few years now. STOCKPHOTO

I was researching my book, I read about Hung-Ching Liu, Professor of Reproductive Medicine at Cornell University, U.S., who had engineered endometrial tissue by prompting cells to grow in an artificial uterus. Apparently, he was also able to successfully implant and grow the embryos of a mouse. In another experiment, Liu used cultured cells collected from a woman's womb and created an artificial womb using a scaffolding. Inside this womb he planted fertilised embryos left over from IVF cycles. In six days, the eggs implanted in it just as they would in a real womb. But his experiment had to end just 14 days later as

researchers were not allowed to grow foetuses in the lab for more than 14 days. In other parts of the world too, exciting research was going on in this field. In Japan, goat foetuses were grown in a prototype womb. In New South Wales, an artificial womb designed to give birth to live sharks was successfully tested.

Womb replacement surgery Meanwhile, by 2014, womb replacement surgery had become a reality. Five women from Sweden and 11 from the U.K. had their wombs replaced. Two of the women had wombs donated by their mothers.

The first baby born from a

womb transplant was in Sweden in 2014. Since then, around 135 such transplants have been carried out in over a dozen countries, including the United States, China, France, Germany, India, and Türkiye. Approximately 65 babies have been born as a result of such transplants. Galaxy Care Hospital in India has also achieved success with uterine transplants and has delivered babies from transplanted wombs.

As of now, artificial wombs are being used mainly to nurture preterm babies. The babies are placed in bio bags and float in a liquid mimicking the amniotic fluid found in natural wombs. An artificial placenta, which is connected to the umbilical cord, provides oxygen and nutrients.

Experiments are also on to try and produce eggs and sperm from stem cells.

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



THEIR VIEW

MINT CURATOR

The best way forward for India's trade policy amid Trump's tariffs

New Delhi must not get provoked and should continue focusing on its strategic priorities that will outlast the US president



SUDIPTO MUNDLE
is chairman, Centre for Development Studies.

America's punitive tariff has kicked in. It is now time to take a step back and calmly consider India's best way forward in dealing with Donald Trump's America, keeping in view the fact that Indo-US economic and geopolitical partnerships long precede the current US president and will continue after him.

On the immediate issue of US tariffs, setting aside exempted items, about 70% of Indian exports to the US will be impacted by the 50% tariff rate. That works out to about 7.4% of total Indian exports and less than 1.6% of India's GDP. Estimates suggest that the adverse impact on India's GDP growth would be to the tune of 0.5% or less. In other words, the macroeconomic impact of the 50% tariff will be quite limited. The problem is that its impact is concentrated on a few employment-intensive export sectors, like textiles and apparel, gems and jewellery, and agricultural and marine products, especially shrimp. To avoid bankruptcies and worker layoffs in these sectors, the government must immediately launch special assistance packages for affected enterprises. Of course, there will be winners as well as losers. The Indian consumers will benefit from the lower prices of affected products in the domestic market: cheaper jeans, jewellery, shrimp, etc. They would similarly enjoy lower prices if India lowered its import tariffs under US pressure. Conversely, if India retaliates with steep tariff hikes on US imports into India, it will expose Indian consumers to higher prices while extending even higher protection to local producers already protected by high tariffs.

On the US side, US consumers will be paying higher prices, since tariffs have been hiked for all countries, if not as much for India. Prices would be higher even for import-substituted products because high-cost domestic US production will survive only thanks to drastically raised tariffs. US inflation will rise and the adverse income effect of higher prices on aggregate demand will lead to a reduction in domestic production, adjusted for import substitution. There is a high probability of the US economy suffering stagflation—high inflation and negative growth.

Returning to India's options, beyond a special relief package for the most-affected sectors, India's response should be embedded in a broader revision of its trade policy to adapt to the upended global trading system. The huge size of the US economy, accounting for over a quarter of global GDP, has emboldened Trump to indulge in disruptive policies. However, the US accounts for only about 1% of global trade. If all other members of the World Trade Organization (WTO) continue trading with one another in full compliance with WTO rules, 90% of global trade could continue as before—more so if countries diversify their trade away from the US, as is already happening. But this cannot go beyond a point because of strategic geo-political



considerations. Instead, trade will mostly continue to be increasingly channelized through regional free trade arrangements like the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) or the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). India needs to become part of at least one of these as a top priority in trade policy reform, while simultaneously pursuing free trade agreements (FTAs) with the UK, EU, Qatar and others. This will require a significant reduction in India's high tariffs, which should be its second trade policy priority. Maintaining high protectionist tariffs at the cost of consumers and exporters will severely hurt India's economy in the present global environment. Eventually, that will translate to a high cost in domestic politics. Third, much must be done to strengthen India's trade competitiveness.

The government's focus on infrastructure and logistics is welcome. But it also needs to significantly lower the compliance burden of doing business and nudge enterprises—public and private—to invest in cutting-edge technologies. Finally, it should work to rapidly improve the very low skill profile and low productivity of the average Indian worker.

In the broader geopolitical domain, Trump's quixotic behaviour goes with a clear recognition of power. He is tip-toeing around Russia and China, which he clearly respects, perhaps because they could incinerate US cities if he provokes them to war. But he is concerned about a potential threat from Brics. He has hit the other two major Brics

economies, Brazil and India, hard because they lack such strike capacity or a monopoly over strategic goods like rare earth magnets and rare minerals. He shows scant respect for G-7 allies because they depend on the US umbrella for their security. Most of them have been grovelling, but some have stood up to his bullying. India has no such dependence and can pursue its policy of strategic autonomy. It needs to strengthen strategic cooperation with the US in the Indo-Pacific and needs US investments and cutting-edge technologies. It should work towards these goals, ignoring Trump's provocations. Russia and China have reached out and will seek to strengthen ties at the forthcoming SCO summit, with Russia helping to improve India-China relations.

While welcoming such initiatives, especially if a reset in ties with China helps secure supplies of special magnets and rare earths, India must stay vigilant. Russia is a reliable friend, as seen during its intervention to block the 7th fleet when former US president Richard Nixon deployed it to threaten India

in the 1971 war. It is also a reliable supplier of defence equipment and oil. China, though, uses every opportunity to keep India down and has increasingly encircled us, not just through its partnership and defence alliance with Pakistan—as seen in the recent India-Pakistan war—but our economic and strategic cooperation with all its other neighbours: Nepal, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and the Maldives.

These are the author's personal views.

QUICK READ

India should retain its focus on strategic priorities and not get provoked into knee-jerk responses to Trump's tariffs. We have greater geopolitical space than many developed countries.

Beyond a relief package for affected sectors, we should reform our trade policy, with membership of regional trade groups one aspect of it, and raise the productivity of our workers.

We need more dads than duds to fix the global baby shortage

Claudia Goldin argues that fertility depends on dependable dads



DANIEL MOSS
is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist covering Asian economies.

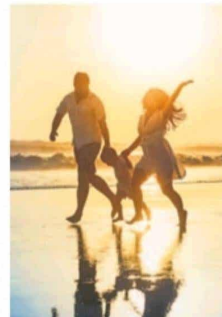
Peak population is coming for all of us. Sensible measures can respond to the strains imposed by smaller families, but cultural norms matter as much as policy outcomes. While Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell was undoubtedly the main attraction at Jackson Hole, there were other weighty issues on the table. The role of men and societal values in declining fertility was among them. Nobel laureate Claudia Goldin told the Fed's conference that it's important not to overlook tradition when explaining low fertility, and when governments canvas ways to revive it.

There are reasons to pay attention. In most of the world, birth rates are dwindling. In developed countries and some major emerging markets, the total fertility rate, roughly defined as the number of children a woman will bear in her lifetime, has slipped below 2.1. That's generally recognized as the level required for a population to replenish itself. South Korea, Japan and China get headlines, though many UN members are below this marker.

There are implications for prices, budgets, safety nets and GDP. Those already born are living longer, while the state has limited scope to raise fertility. Incentives for couples haven't produced sizeable gains. Singapore had hoped for an increase last year, but its TFR remained just below 1.1. Ultimately, couples make their own decisions. Those choices will certainly be influenced by the cost of bringing up children. But the priorities of would-be parents and individuals who might forgo families for an array of reasons matter too.

Fathers are an important part of the puzzle, according to Goldin's paper. Yet, compared with a couple of generations ago, women have far more choice and vastly better access to education. They aren't foregoing the professional aspirations they have worked so hard for. But that alone doesn't explain fewer kids. The desires of males and females have become mismatched, according to Goldin. Men benefit more from upholding traditions than women; when chances are slim that men will ditch such conventions, women will be inclined to skip or postpone motherhood.

Women need to be assured they can reap the rewards of having a career and raising children. "The more men can credibly signal that they will be dependable 'dads' and not disappointing 'duds,' the higher will be the birth rate," Goldin wrote. "Therefore, even though the major factor in the decline of fertility is increased women's agency, the real downside or obstacle is the need for husbands and



Women may postpone or skip having kids if it hampers their agency. **istockphoto**

fathers to reliably demonstrate their commitment."

The challenge may be more pronounced in emerging markets. Swift industrialization coupled with healthcare and educational advances made East Asia, for example, prosperous. Socio-cultural norms haven't evolved as quickly. Births out of wedlock in Korea, which has the lowest TFR in the world, are frowned upon. Single mothers are considered taboo in Japan. In Malaysia, which is on track to morph into an aged society, unwed mothers are stigmatized—and sometimes even flogged. Prospective buyers of Singapore's Housing & Development Board flats must typically be married for engaged, or be at least 35. "If the countries that had rapid advances in economic development maintained various marriage and conjugal traditions, the fraction of childless women would increase with fertility declines," Goldin said. "The rationale is if the age at marriage increases with economic development as women seek more education and employment opportunities, but [it] is difficult or impossible to have a child outside marriage, then childlessness will increase."

The ageing society, a byproduct of retreating fertility, presents many challenges. AI can do some lifting and there is clearly a role for immigration. But this can be delicate. Bank of Japan Governor Kazuo Ueda, who is counting on a labour shortage to put deflation behind the country, acknowledged the role played by foreign workers even as politics around it can be combustible. While they made up just 3% of Japan's workforce, they accounted for more than half its growth from 2023 to 2024.

Diminishing fertility doesn't have many cheerleaders, certainly compared with the 1970s, when constraints on population growth were seen as a good thing. Now, the chatter is about a bust. Chad Jones of Stanford Graduate School of Business worries about unintended consequences of population decline: Stagnating living standards and a dearth of research and ideas among them. The world's headcount will peak at around 10.3 billion in the 2080s, based on UN projections, and then start to head down. Government incentives and rules are unlikely to profoundly alter the trajectory. The real work may be to take a good hard look at ourselves. **©BLOOMBERG**

MY VIEW | PEN DRIVE

A final boarding call for our demographic dividend

TULSI JAYAKUMAR



is professor of economics and policy and executive director, Centre for Family Business & Entrepreneurship at Bhavan's SPIRIR.

The flight from Mumbai to Bangkok was not what I expected. For one, it was an IndiGo flight—technically an international leg, but it felt like a Mumbai-to-Delhi hop. Same cabin crew uniforms, same boarding announcements, same scramble for overhead cabinet space. For another, the cabin was overwhelmingly Indian—and I don't mean "slightly more." The ratio was highly skewed.

Most of my fellow passengers were clearly salesmen—first-time abroad enthusiasm radiating from every seat. The signs were unmistakable: company-logo backpacks, reels playing at full volume because "who needs Bluetooth," and the call button for the cabin crew being pressed with the confidence of someone ordering room service. Laughter erupted in generous bursts, often at jokes that would never pass HR training. It was a boys' outing with just enough corporate sponsorship to ensure that their WhatsApp group would later be flooded

with photos captioned "Living the Dream." It's not the first time I've been on a flight abroad where the Indian presence is impossible to miss. It's just that these days, the scale of it feels... different. And perhaps it's no coincidence.

Last year, the UN officially crowned India the world's most populous country. We edged past China—and in doing so, we also edged past something else: the luxury of anonymity. We are over 1.4 billion strong. Which means that wherever we go, we no longer just "show up." We arrive.

It wasn't always this way. A couple of decades ago, spotting a fellow Indian on a foreign holiday was a minor thrill. We'd exchange polite nods, maybe a *sotto voce* "Which city are you from?" before melting back into our separate itineraries. But somewhere between low-cost airlines, visa-on-arrival schemes and the relentless grind of aspirational advertising, the Indian traveller has multiplied—not just in number but in confidence, volume and visibility.

Now, we don't just form part of the crowd. We are the crowd. On the ski lifts of Switzerland, in the queue for the Colosseum, at the night markets of Bangkok—there we are, selfie sticks at the ready, haggling for fridge

memento magnets with the same zeal we reserve for buying *saris* in Chaudhri Chowk.

On one trip to Jungfrau in Switzerland, I remembered watching the snowy mountains dotted with women in colourful *sarees*, their chiffon *pallu* flying dramatically in the Alpine wind, each trying a personal Yash Chopra fantasy sequence. In the middle of this cinematic tableau, a man nearby declared loudly, with unmistakable pride: "Switzerland ka India!" It was meant as a compliment, but also stummed up the demographic shift. We weren't visiting Switzerland; we were annexing it, one Bollywood pose at a time.

A sudden escalation in our global presence has shifted perceptions. We are no longer the 'exotic other.' We are a demographic superpower, a walking pie-chart slice that represents one-sixth of humanity. That's a lot of responsibility to carry in a cabin bag. The trouble is, we don't always realize it.

Take volume control. In most cultures, a group conversation in public space stays within a polite decibel range. For us, public decibels are like GDP growth—the higher, the better. Whether it's narrating a shopping bargain or debating the price of a Thai massage, our voices travel farther than our passports. And in a crowded aircraft cabin, that can mean the entire plane learns of a struggle for a good roaming data plan.

Then there's our complicated relationship with queues. Queueing, for many of us, is not an orderly arrangement of human bodies, but a competitive sport. We're not rude; we're simply trained to spot and exploit gaps in the formation. A security check in Singapore or boarding gate in Madrid is merely a new arena for this skill set.

And, of course, the food question. The Indian instinct to inquire about "veg options" has gone global. Airline catering managers across

continents can identify us by the urgency with which we ask, "But no onion, no garlic, right?" In many ways, it's admirable: we travel with our values intact. But to the uninitiated, it sometimes comes across as mystifying—as if we've been despatched from a planet where diets are treaty-bound.

Yet here's the paradox: much of what makes us noticeable abroad—our group energy, curiosity, willingness to engage—are assets, not liabilities. The problem is one of calibration. When a nation of 1.4 billion travels, the margin for error shrinks. If one Indian is rude to a shopkeeper in Milan or leaves a mess in a Bali hotel room, it's not "that tourist" who's remembered—it's "Indians." Our statistical heft magnifies both our charm and missteps. We need to recognize that just as a whisper can carry in a small room, our collective presence carries in a global setting.

The challenge our globe-trotters face is to ensure that the world sees us as explorers, not invaders; guests, not conquerors. Because now that we are the most populous country, the world's impressions of us will form far more quickly—and permanently. We have arrived. But can we also belong? *These are the author's personal views.*



OUR VIEW

THEIR VIEW



India's swadeshi wheel has not come full circle

The PM's nuanced interpretation of this Gandhian legacy keeps India open to investment, focuses on jobs and rid self-reliance of any autarky taint. Plus, it's geopolitically savvy too

Make in India, "vocal for local" and "atmanirbharta" (self-reliance)—these have been recurring themes for Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his effort to promote Indian manufacturing. Lately, his emphasis has been on "swadeshi", especially as retail advice for Indians to buy Indian goods. Literally, it means 'of our own country', but has long borne the heritage of our freedom struggle, its spirit symbolized by Mahatma Gandhi's *charkha*, a wooden wheel for handspun cloth. Modi's recent reinterpretation of what it implies is helpful—both to thrive in a world gridlocked by links across borders and in the specific context of US tariffs skewing trade and slowing global growth. A policy obsession with self-reliance might seem to be at odds with the reality of our gains from globalized growth. Trade has notched up GDP shares in the 45-50% range, even as we make and export millions of mobile phones that use imported parts, count as a big exporter of software services and host thousands of Global Capability Centres that employ local talent and do research for foreign businesses. Yet, as a rhetorical device that harks back to a campaign against colonial rule that inspired Indians to be self-reliant, it has its uses.

India's share of manufacturing in gross value added remains stubbornly below 14%. If we literally try to go for indigenous supply chains, that share would only shrink. Hence, Modi's nuance is welcome. Speaking at the opening of an export-focused factory for electric vehicles set up by Maruti Suzuki, a subsidiary of Suzuki Motor Corp, he said: "It doesn't matter whose money is invested—dollars, pounds, black or white. What matters is that the sweat of my

countrymen has gone into production. The money may be someone else's, but the sweat is ours. The production carries the fragrance of my motherland, the soil of Bharat." This ride today's self-reliance of any taint of autarky. Clearly, it is not a throwback to our closed economy, as it seeks foreign investment for job generation; if there's any chain of value addition that delivers a good or service globally, we want a slice of it. Such an outlook can help local producers wedge themselves into transnational supply chains—especially if aided by lower import duties—while a push for fully home-made stuff would have made it harder to make export headway. Modi's pragmatism echoes that of the Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping, who said that the colour of the cat did not matter so long as it caught the mice, a dictum that drove China's rise. Entrepreneurs, of course, would take the black-or-white binary at face value only at the risk of law enforcers knocking at their doors. Figuratively, a colour-blind red carpet for investors suggests we are open for business even with hostile neighbours; here, security caveats must apply. Even so, in general, the Prime Minister has affirmed India's openness.

Modi's definition of *swadeshi* is not just about economics in today's context, but also savvy geopolitics. While calling for a boycott of US goods for shutting out our exports with a steep 50% tariff may be impolitic, urging us to buy Indian products targets nobody. Since such goods cover anything with local value addition, the signal sent overseas should nudge global investors eyeing our market to generate jobs here. So, while the spirit of *swadeshi* has been invoked in the face of US tariff aggression, our policy has not come full circle. It isn't an inward turn. Nor should it lead to one.

We need a multipronged plan to sail through this new era of trade

Diversification will help but we must also find space for negotiation with the US in win-win areas



SANJAY CHAUDHA
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In the wake of the US tariff onslaught, India recently inked the terms of reference to launch free trade agreement talks with the Eurasian Economic Union, a \$6.5 trillion economic bloc. Diversification in pursuit of new markets such as Central Asia is a necessary hedge against America's protectionist turn. But this does not obviate the need for tangible parallel negotiations with Washington in areas of strategic interest in a way that shields our domestic production in important sectors.

What began as a set of 'reciprocal' global tariffs in seeming pursuit of trade parity has morphed into a geo-economic play, with India now facing a combined 50% hit—25% baseline tariff plus another 25% penalty linked to our oil imports from Russia.

The fallout strikes at the heart of India's export engine. In garments and textiles, where margins are wafer thin, even a modest tariff bump-up pushes orders to Vietnam or Bangladesh. In gems and jewellery, consumer demand is so price-sensitive that higher duties can instantly choke billions in trade, triggering a cascade of job losses.

Engineering goods present a more uneven picture. Auto components and machinery are struggling to stay competitive, while electronics assembly could gain from the China plus one diversification push, provided exporters adapt to the onerous compliance

norms that are now standard in American sourcing. Pharmaceuticals and IT remain relatively resilient, but India's dependence on Chinese inputs for bulk drugs is an Achilles' heel, proof that no sector is fully insulated. Meanwhile, a US crackdown on transshipment through third countries has further tightened the noose, forcing importers to shorten contracts, demand digital origin certifications and embed tariff pass-through clauses in agreements.

This makes it imperative for India to go beyond the comfort of diversification and pursue targeted negotiations with the US administration. Protecting strategic interests must be the central objective. For pharmaceuticals and electronics, where India's products reinforce America's domestic supply chain resilience, an effort must be made for continued carve-outs to keep these flows open. In labour-intensive industries such as garments and gems, securing partial exemptions could help preserve millions of jobs. In sunrise sectors like semiconductors and EV batteries, where India's products reinforce America's domestic supply chain resilience, an effort must be made for continued carve-outs to keep these flows open. In labour-intensive industries such as garments and gems, securing partial exemptions could help preserve millions of jobs. In sunrise sectors like semiconductors and EV batteries, where India's products reinforce America's domestic supply chain resilience, an effort must be made for continued carve-outs to keep these flows open.

The framework for such negotiations is critical. India cannot afford to approach Washington with a one-way

plea for concessions. Instead, it must present solutions that reconcile its domestic sensitivities with US strategic interests. A Practical Instrument of Use here is the Tariff-Rate Quota (TRQ). Rather than rejecting tariff concessions outright, India can propose TRQs that allow limited volumes of sensitive imports—say, in farm and dairy products—thus giving the USA political win while protecting India's vulnerable producers from unfair competition.

The US itself frequently uses TRQs to unlock deals. For India, this tool can buy breathing space: domestic industry gets room to stabilize, retain market presence and preserve jobs until long-term reforms and diversification take effect.

But even as negotiations provide relief, Indian industry must recognize that its products need to move up the value chain. Branded jewellery withstands tariff shocks better than cut stones; design-led garments command higher margins than commoditized apparel. Compliance too is no longer optional but a condition for market entry. Exporters who invest in digital certification systems and sustainability audits will not only face fewer customs clearance delays, but also enjoy greater buyer confidence. A dedicated India-US customs verification corridor could be one such measure to reinforce these advantages.

Trump's tariff reset is not a passing storm but a structural shift in global trade. If India treats it as episodic, firefighting each new duty as it arises, it will remain perpetually on the defensive. But if this shock spurs companies to climb the technology ladder, embed deeply in trusted global supply chains and build shock-resilient export models, adversity could be transformed into lasting advantage.

Tariffs, truces and trans-shipment will define the Trump era. Whether India emerges as collateral damage or as a competitive exporter will depend less on Washington's moves and more on how decisively we seize this moment.

These are the author's personal views.

QUICK READ

We must diversify to newer markets to reduce dependence on America amid its tariff onslaught but we also need to find areas of give-and-take to keep bilateral trade going.

We could perhaps use Tariff-Rate Quotas to allow limited volumes of sensitive imports without hurting local interests. Targeted negotiations in a range of sectors will be crucial.

10 YEARS AGO



JUST A THOUGHT

Swadeshi should become our life mantra. Let's embrace swadeshi with pride. The things that will be made here by Japan are also swadeshi.

NARENDRA MODI

THEIR VIEW

Demand is at the heart of the Indian capex conundrum

DHIRAJ NIM



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India's industrial capital expenditure (capex) cycle is in the spotlight as policymakers and analysts search for answers to its persistent weakness. Many explanations have been offered over the years, but evidence points to a demand problem at the heart of this capex conundrum.

Without tackling core-demand problems by empowering wage earners, easing household balance-sheet stress and revitalizing exports, sustained growth in industrial capex will remain out of reach. To achieve this, addressing the fundamentals of India's economy is now imperative.

India's investment trends have been on a roller-coaster ride over the past decade. More than half a decade ago, investment as a share of gross domestic product (GDP) had begun to recover from a low in 2017, but only to be knocked back by the pandemic. While the post-pandemic rebound pushed investment up to 33.7% of GDP in 2024-25, outpacing the previous decade's average, it is still shy of the peak seen in 2011-12.

To drive a meaningful economic transformation, India needs consistent real GDP growth of 8%, anchored in manufacturing and exports. India must push its investment rate higher to 36-37% to achieve this goal.

A closer look at the recent investment cycle reveals a story of uneven momentum. India's capex revival has been driven by households, construction assets and the services sector. This highlights the real estate-driven nature of investments in recent years, while private corporate or manufacturing capex has remained on the sidelines. The current capex cycle is narrower in scope compared to the broad-based investment surge of the early 2000s, when services, manufacturing and public infrastructure capex surged in unison.

Underlying these investment trends is a deeper demand problem that is also reflected in industrial capacity utilization (CAPI) data. An analysis of Annual Survey of Industries (ASI) data and surveys by India's central bank indicate a troubling trend over the past two decades: after robust utilization rates of above 80% through most of the 2000s, CAPI rates have steadily declined.

That rate declined to around 70% by 2016, but then abruptly dropped during the pandemic. While there's been a notable recovery

in the post-pandemic period, with CAPI again breaching the 75% threshold by some measures, it is yet to reach and stay at levels historically needed to trigger a sustained capex wave after nearly a decade of slack. Businesses typically need to see consistently high utilization (80% or higher) and clear evidence of demand before committing funds to major new projects, something that is still lacking after years of weakness.

The big question is why demand has failed to materialize the way India needs. The answer lies in two interlinked trends: a weakening of domestic consumption and the slowing pulse of global trade.

On the domestic front, household consumption growth has trended lower in the past decade and a half, with fundamental shifts in income distribution and personal finances. ASI data shows that the profit share of industrial output has grown much faster than wages, with the gap now at its widest in years. This dynamic is prob-

lematic because wage earners tend to spend a greater share of their income than profit earners. As profits concentrate and real wage growth stagnates, overall consumption growth falters. The squeeze is especially acute for low-skill industrial workers, who make up over 60% of India's industrial wage bill and have seen the weakest real wage gains (of less than 2.5% on average) among various groups in the last five years.

At the same time, Indian households are grappling with rising debt. Personal bank borrowing has grown faster than incomes in real terms over the past

half decade, leaving households more leveraged and less able to increase consumption.

Meanwhile, foreign demand, once a key driver of India's investment boom, has also faded. In the 2000s, exports powered GDP growth and helped justify rapid expansion in manufacturing capacity.

The contribution of exports has waned dramatically since 2011, reflecting a

stagnation in global trade as well as rising global overcapacity, particularly in China.

Aggressive export strategies by foreign producers, especially in sectors like steel, chemicals and electric vehicles, are also making conditions tougher for Indian manufacturers, pressuring margins and further discouraging investment. India's services exports—particularly of information technology and other business services—have continued to impress. But their impact on physical capex is limited, as these sectors are less capital-intensive and their spillover is largely confined to commercial real estate.

Monetary policy alone cannot revive industrial capex, as lower interest rates or more liquidity do not address structural demand deficiencies arising from tight household finances and volatile export markets. Meaningful growth requires deeper reforms to boost disposable incomes, GST rate rationalization is a positive step. Raising India's investment rate will depend on how successfully we are able to unlock household demand and support Indian manufacturers locally and globally.

The 'fire' of industrial capacity expansion needs genuine demand fuel, not just sparks from cyclical policy levers. It's time for India to focus on the economy's fundamentals.

QUICK READ

Feeble industrial investment in capacity expansion can be traced to an overall demand deficiency arising from weak wage earnings, tight household finances and an export slowdown.

Monetary easing and other levers for cyclical support won't suffice. A GST rate rejig will help but we must focus on the economy's fundamentals to unlock household demand.



Education in a Burnout Society

The key necessity of the time is for higher education institutions to implement behavioural change programs and provide students with opportunities to practice sustainability, creativity, innovation, and social connection in their daily lives

FIRST
Column



ANANDAJIT
GOSWAMI

The biggest fallacy of society today is that, despite being self-proclaimed progressives, we live in a burnout society, in the words of philosopher Byung Chul Han. This is one that thrives on excess positivity borne out of a culture of overproduction and relentless achievement, and marked by a deficit in understanding psychological and emotional health.

This discrepancy is felt most in the education ecosystem. The dilemma is that we are a part of the educational process, and the further we return to the classroom and the curriculum, the higher the burnout.

The current pressures of maintaining the metrics of education — through constant exams every week, grades, and the pressure to perform in assignments, classes, case studies, and every class project relative to the other in the classroom — have transformed the classroom into a combatant space. Here, the curriculum and educational institutions themselves have only led to the production of combatants. The process naturally takes out the learner from the students and often from an educator or administrator, making them silent combatants chasing the next check or tick box. The check box is ticked regularly to either scale a class ladder or an academic ladder to be better positioned in the metrics of the educational accreditation system. Along with students, the system often makes the educators record keepers of marks, certificates, and API scores without understanding their purpose and learning value. In the record-keeping process, silent lobbying and vested — interest group lobbying of human beings from different sections of society also persist. This leads to the infusion of a mediocrity, record keeping metric of promotion which is not based on true learning, value proposition and knowledge.

Education has been replaced by a metaphor of a burning and burnt out society where every participant of the system is either a pathologist or a pathological patient. Classrooms, lecture halls and faculty rooms often turn out to be not community spaces for discussion and deliberation but spaces of subversive, combatant aggression. In such a space, faculty rooms, classrooms are not a commu-



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nity of free joyful happy learners but a bunch of combatants who are in a self-perpetuating, imploding, insecure creatures looped in the game of a metric based career. It is because they are primarily driven by the instinct of survival at any cost as a combatant in a war does. If the combatant does not implode or attack in evasive, pervasive way, he or she would be killed. In a war, even if a combatant learns, the combatant learns to kill and survive for security and not to progress. Hence such a pathological situation of insecurity has pervaded the majority of educational system being driven by a systemic structure created unknowingly post commodification of an essential public good — "Education".

The aggression is hidden within the garb of academic theorisation, procedures, guidelines, reporting, and all other processes of a system, which, in essence, is violent from within with a peaceful, polished projection. This is happening more owing to the creation of a combatant which is actually working in a space which is supposed to be education, but not less than the norms of a battlefield where you either kill to survive or you get killed. On a war front, two combatant individuals kill each other not because they are good or bad, but they kill to protect their national security, identity security, and essentially from a primal instinct of survival with training to do so. The metaphor holds equally for the educational process right now, which is supposed to be a public good but has turned out to be a war front. The projection also has a sense

of discipline of a curriculum for everyone — from the administrators to the academics to the students with a hidden string of a string puller. The puller is pulling the string by means of a changing narrative of private capital changing the meaning and purpose of something which was supposed to be a social good with an abstract perpetuity called — "Education". Education, which by its essence is a public good, has undergone a change in definition as a "Private Capital". To get education is not a right now but to achieve education is an outcome of a capitalist process of private capital accumulation by means and a platform of exchange which is a market — "New Education Market". In this new education market, a student is similar to a labourer in a capitalist process who puts in a sum of labour that generates a product that is exchanged in multiple forms of the market. Thus, private capital gets invested in this new labour called a student, who has to then create a product (which is, say, the student who has got a packaged placement outcome). The transformation of this private capital to a new labour to its transformation to a new product is driven by rules and norms of capital, surplus and wealth accumulation by the owner who is creating this transformation. The wealth is transferred from the parent who invests in the labour to the one who owns the process of transformation from labour to a product, accumulating the labour. In the entire process, what is lost is the duty to serve selflessly for the labour to learn, learn for the society, learn for values,

contexts so that finally the labour is transformed to a learner for societal change and multiplier, value creation, proposition and not for just a product transformation.

The nature of this puller is often like a "Panoptical" regulator who also occasionally becoming like a "Mephistopheles." The dual identity of the string-pullers of the education system works like the "Invisible Hand" of the market and turns the entire education ecosystem as a society of combatants. With a bit of dark humor it can also be called as a "Community of Combatants". Often these combatants are only looking at metrics and like a Mephistopheles can go to any transaction game to make and perpetually create more combatants so that the established education system of combatants, pathologists, pathogens and patients can only survive. To come out of this combatant framework towards a learning framework of education, the need of the hour is to change the nature of the puppet strings. This will need a complete reshaping of the way of seeing education, the fundamental parameter of which should not be seen as wealth accumulation but with an ethical wealth accumulation complemented by the purpose of reinvesting back in society. One of the ways of doing it is through creating a framework of learning without competing. This approach equips young people with social and scientific knowledge and skills and changes their daily behaviors toward education for progress and development (Nguyen, 2023) through a larger citizenship-based education.

Learning pedagogy must come out of curricula, academic grade-based grouping, and align with a constructivist learning approach — where learners actively participate in their knowledge and skill-building through exploration, collaboration and experimentation — by investigating how innovation, both technological and social, affects and is affected by education as they create local, national, regional and global citizenship through education. Innovative learning methods play a critical role in revealing the learner's creative potential. STEM-based education can enhance the capabilities of students in innovation, creativity, scientific thinking and problem-solving skills as well as develop mindsets oriented towards sustainability. Globally, lecture-based, exam-based, and teacher-centered pedagogy is undergoing a shift toward more active learning, in which students build their own understanding of a subject through learning activities. This is an imperative to take education out of the combatant system and prevent the perpetuation of a burnout society. The key necessity of the time is for higher education institutions to implement behavioral change programs and provide students with opportunities to practice sustainability, creativity, innovation, and social connection.

To solve sustainable grand challenges, educational institutions must embrace their role as living laboratories for providing creative solutions that can be tested, refined, and scaled up to come out of a combatant education system. A key aspect of such an emancipated education system will be that the participant of the system is a learner first. The learner can be seen as a long-term investible resource which gives back values, principles, norms, empathy, kindness, learning and re-learning to a society and a system which is becoming more of a combatant system.

Against the backdrop of an emerging society with humanoids, robotics, AI interference, and its control over our consciousness, it is imperative that we immediately change the nature of the education system. If not, we will only thrive with combatant puppets and zombies in the near future, controlled by a string pulled by AI consciousness. Such a situation will only have burnout on one side of society as human beings and string controllers with AI consciousness on the other side. Today's education has to urgently break out of self-created Frankenstein's style of combatants to imagine a more ethical, compassionate and equitable future for society.

Healing beyond the field: How yoga helps in dealing with sport injuries

Harnessing AI to build a fit and healthy, sporting nation



SHARMILA
DAS

For an athlete, injury is more than a physical setback, it can feel like the sudden dimming of a dream. The months of training, discipline, and momentum come to an abrupt pause. While medical science provides the scaffolding of treatment, surgeries, physiotherapy, medications; there is an ancient discipline stepping into the modern sports stage to aid recovery: YOGA.

In recent years, yoga has quietly become part of rehabilitation programs for athletes across the globe. Not as a spiritual escape, but as a practical, science-backed tool to rebuild strength, restore balance, and heal both the body and the mind. Cricketer Virat Kohli, who has spoken openly about yoga in interviews, credits the practice with keeping him both mentally and physically agile. "Yoga is not just about flexibility. It helps me align my body, improves my focus, and gives me calmness on and off the field," he once shared. Another cricketing legend, Sachin Tendulkar, who carried the burden of a two-decade-long career riddled with injuries, also turned to yoga to keep himself going. Tendulkar has credited yoga with improving his flexibility and aiding recovery during the later years of his career. "Yoga gave me the balance and mobility I needed. It was as much a part of my preparation as nets and gym work," he shared in a fitness interview. These are not isolated endorsements. Across disciplines, from tennis ace Novak Djokovic to football veteran Ryan Giggs, yoga is being embraced as much for rehabilitation as for performance enhancement.

The Science of Healing

Orthopaedic experts underline that yoga works because it addresses more than just the site of injury. Dr Dhananjay Gupta, Senior Consultant, Orthopaedics and Joint Reconstruction, Fortis Vasant Kunj, explains, "An injury, say a ligament tear, does not just affect the knee. It affects posture, muscle coordination, even confidence. Yoga, when introduced under guidance, restores overall balance.

Gentle asanas improve circulation and mobility, while breathing practices lower stress hormones that can delay healing." Sports injuries often come with stiffness, scar tissue formation, and a loss of range of motion. Poses like *Tadasana* (mountain pose), *SetuBandhasana* (bridge pose), and modified



The Pioneer
SINCE 1985

Bhujangasana (cobra pose) can gradually rebuild mobility without straining the injury.

Breathing techniques such as *Anulom Vilom* (alternate nostril breathing) help reduce anxiety and improve oxygenation, aiding tissue repair.

Beyond the Body — Healing the Mind

Injury is as much a mental challenge as a physical one. The sudden inactivity can trigger frustration, self-doubt, and anxiety about one's career. Yoga's greatest contribution may well be in this mental space. Through meditative practices, athletes learn to manage pain perception, quieten intrusive thoughts, and develop patience.

This inner stillness often translates into quicker, more confident comebacks. Former cricketer Yuvraj Singh, who turned to yoga and meditation during his battle with cancer, once remarked: "Yoga gave me strength to go through chemo. It also helped me find calm in the toughest phase of my life." Though not a sports injury, his testimony underlines yoga's capacity to heal the mind when the body is under siege.

Dr Gupta agrees, "The psychological impact of an injury is often underestimated. Athletes lose not just strength but confidence. Here, yoga plays a vital role — mindfulness reduces fear of re-injury, while breathing and meditation restore mental resilience. This is what ultimately determines how quickly and successfully an athlete returns to form."

Experts caution that yoga is not a substitute for medical treatment but a complementary practice. "It should never be attempted reck-

lessly, especially post-surgery," warns Dr Gupta. "But when integrated thoughtfully into rehabilitation, yoga accelerates recovery and reduces recurrence of injury." In fact, many sports physiotherapists today are partnering with yoga therapists to create hybrid rehabilitation programs. The approach is simple: use medical science for structural repair, and yoga for holistic restoration.

Rehabilitation is rarely a straight road. It has ups and downs, days of pain, and days of progress. What yoga offers is not just physical recovery but resilience — the ability to stay calm in uncertainty. For an athlete, that may be the most valuable gift. As Sachin Tendulkar once observed: "Cricket taught me discipline, but yoga taught me patience."

Yoga brings in the flexibility and helps with the suppleness on the muscles and joints, along with the ease of movement, which in turn can help the body of an athlete to deal with the trauma of an injury or even perhaps minimising the impact in situations where flexibility aids in the form of protection.

As sports science continues to evolve, yoga has found its rightful place alongside physiotherapy and surgery. Not as a trend, but as a timeless tool that reminds us of healing is more than fixing what is broken. It is rediscovering balance. And for athletes, as for all of us, that balance is often the first step towards wholeness.

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UTKARSH
YADAV

India's greatest asset is the energy of its youth. We have the largest, youngest population on the planet — a demographic dividend that holds the key to our future. Yet, this incredible asset is caught in a dual health crisis. While over half of our adolescent girls suffer from anaemia, a new epidemic of inactivity is surging. With a majority of our children failing to meet recommended physical activity levels and over 75 per cent exceeding screen time limits, we are witnessing alarming consequences: 17 per cent of our youth are now pre-diabetic, and nearly one in five is overweight or obese. This growing health crisis is a serious threat to our demographic dividend.

As we confront this, the Artificial Intelligence revolution is reshaping various aspects of our world. In an era where AI will redefine professions, the intrinsic human need for play and physical expression will be more vital than ever. While much of the discussion around AI in sports focuses on elite performance — shaving milliseconds off records or refining professional tactics — its greatest potential is not at the peak of the pyramid.

The most transformative application of this technology is in empowering the many and addressing our national health crisis from the ground up. The core challenge is not a lack of motivation in our children, but a fierce competition for their attention. The digital world is engineered to capture attention through sophisticated feedback loops and rewards. Unstructured physical activity, despite its benefits, struggles to compete in this attention economy. The question, therefore, is not how we can fight technology, but how we can use its own language to win children back to the world of movement and play. How do we convert passive screen time into active play time?

This is where AI acts as a bridge, enabling us to merge the real world with the compelling feedback loops of the digital one. First, AI makes kinetic activity measurable and rewarding. Using the camera on any smartphone, it can understand movement, count repetitions, and analyse form. This allows us to build a system where a series of jumps earns points and a well-practised skill "levels up." Suddenly, physical effort has a visible, rewarding outcome. The screen is no longer just a destination for passive consumption; it becomes the scoreboard for real-world play.

This gamification is the key to closing the engagement gap and supports the national ambition, as outlined in the Khelo Bharat Niti —



2025, to transform sports into a true "People's Movement."

Second, AI democratizes the two essential elements for development: knowledge and opportunity. For the individual child, AI acts as a "coach in your pocket," providing immediate, personalised feedback on technique that was once accessible only in elite academies. This empowers every child with a sense of mastery, the most powerful driver of sustained engagement. For the ecosystem, AI's objective analysis solves a deeper problem: the trust gap.

By replacing subjective opinion with objective data, AI builds the very kind of "robust talent identification and development system" envisioned by our national sports policy. It creates a system of true meritocracy, ensuring a talented athlete in a small town has the same opportunity to be seen and nurtured as one in a major city. This approach creates a virtuous cycle. By making play more engaging for all, we build a healthier, more active population. From this wider, more resilient base, a system built on trust and meritocracy can identify and nurture our next generation of champions. This foundational work is essential to build a truly Fit, Healthy, and Sporting Nation — a vision that will be critical in our bid to bring the 2036 Olympics to India. The true promise of AI is not just in refining the skills of the select few, but in enriching the kinetic lives of the many. It is about tackling our public health challenges at their root by making physical activity more compelling, and creating an equitable system where every child has the tools to discover their potential. This is how we harness the AI revolution: bridge the gap between the screen and the field, and empower India's greatest asset, its youth, to take a kinetic leap forward.

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Editor's TAKE

RSS and the idea of 'Hindu Rashtra'

Mohan Bhagwat's centenary address reframes Hindu Rashtra not as a blueprint of exclusion, but a vision of inclusive cultural belonging and justice

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the world's largest social organisation, turns one hundred next month. It has been a long journey, and the organisation has gone through different phases – a roller-coaster ride, for sure. Its idea of Hindu Rashtra, or its role in nation-building, has always been under scrutiny. However, on many occasions, it has sought to clarify its stance on various issues. This is exactly what Mohan Bhagwat did recently. Sarsangchalak Mohan Bhagwat sought to redefine the idea of "Hindu Rashtra" in a way that dispels some misconceptions during a special lecture series to mark the organisation's centenary.

He clarified how the RSS considers a Hindu and what is construed as 'Hindu Rashtra'. Bhagwat emphasised that the term does not imply exclusion or domination but rather justice, belonging, and harmony for all people who inhabit the country. "Hindu Rashtra does not mean excluding anyone. It does not mean opposing anyone," he said. He was categorical in explaining that the concept of Hindu identity is not restricted to religious practice or political ideology; instead, it is rooted in shared geography, civilisational heritage, cultural traditions, and devotion to 'Bharat Mata'. The timing of this message is significant as the RSS steps into its 100th year since its founding in 1925 by Dr KB Hedgewar in Nagpur. Conceived in the wake of colonial subjugation, the organisation began with the aim of instilling cultural pride, discipline, and unity among Hindus. What started as a modest gathering of a few swayamsevakhs has grown into one of India's most influential grassroots movements, with millions of members engaged in training and community work.

Though not political, its cadre fill the rank and file of the ruling party, Bharatiya Janata Party. Bhagwat called upon Hindu society to awaken to its responsibilities in the present moment, urging that selfhood, family enlightenment, environmental consciousness, social harmony, and civic duty – what he called "Panch Parivartan," or five transformations – must guide the next phase of the nation's journey. He spoke of India's role as a Vishwaguru – a moral and cultural guide for the world – arguing that the nation's heritage of spirituality, tolerance, and dharma gives it a unique place.

By anchoring 'Hindu Rashtra' in India's civilisational ethos of "unity in diversity," he sought to deflate the charge that it seeks to impose uniformity or marginalise others. Its centenary year is both a commemoration of a long journey of resilience and a declaration of intent for the century ahead – an attempt to fuse tradition with responsibility and offer a vision of nationhood rooted not in exclusion but in embracing the three maxims of justice, equality, and liberty for all.

Preparing India's Economy for Tariffs

For India, the challenge is not merely to expand GDP, but to build an economy agile enough to absorb shocks, diverse enough to spread risk, and robust enough to convert disruptions into opportunities



UTTAM CHAKRABORTY

The popular slogan, "Tariffs Are Obstacles. Trade is the Solution!" is the talk in every nook and corner of India. The US criticised India's relatively high tariffs and non-tariff barriers, particularly in agriculture, pharmaceuticals, and electronics, compared to US levels, which pulled the trigger on the contradictory tariff policy. India's growing dependence on discounted Russian crude oil led to additional punitive tariffs, given US sensitivities to sanctions.

When a key trading partner slaps a heavy tariff on your goods, the effects are instant, causing exporters worry, TV panels debate, and markets question the growth story. However, moments like this reveal something deeper: how much a nation relies on forces it cannot control.

For India, the lesson is clear. In a world shaped by trade disputes, currency swings, energy price hikes, and shifting demand, growth alone is not enough. The economy must be built to absorb shocks and keep moving forward. India's ability to withstand shocks and maintain growth is tied to its resilience through diversity in trade, robust infrastructure investments, and adaptive policies. Stability in India draws investment, protects jobs, and maintains India's position in the world economy.

Resilience means more than protecting export markets. It is about creating a multi-channel economy – where goods, services, experiences, and ideas flow freely, so no single disruption can halt progress. Campaigns like *Visit Bharat*, India's tourism and soft-power drive, are part of this vision. At this juncture, India needs to rethink and recalibrate its approach amid the tariff shock.

Diversify Export Markets

Relying too much on a few big markets leaves us exposed to their politics. For an instance, Vietnam eased US trade tensions by deepening ties with the EU and ASEAN. Chile, dependent on copper sales to China, spread risk with trade deals in 60+ countries.

In this context, India should target underserved regions: Africa's growing cities, Latin America's expanding middle class, Eastern Europe's pharma needs. It should fast-track trade pacts with GCC, UK, African Union; explore deals with MERCOSUR, Central Asia. India should send dairy exporters to West Asia, renewable energy firms to East Africa, food processors to Southeast Asia.



Strengthen Domestic Value Chains

Heavy import dependence in key components can stall production. For instance, China boosted self-reliance in steel and electronics, while South Korea did the same in shipbuilding and electronics. In this situation, India needs to localise high-value inputs such as semiconductors, specialty chemicals, textiles, and APIs. It must build industrial clusters for MSMEs with shared R&D, laboratories, and logistics. Additionally, it should upgrade infrastructure covering freight corridors, digital customs, and cold chains.

Build Macro Resilience

Tariffs are not the only threat; commodity shocks, currency swings, and capital flight can be equally damaging. Norway's \$1.6 trillion sovereign fund cushions downturns, while Singapore relies on large reserves and targeted fiscal boosts.

At this crucial time, India needs to maintain forex reserves covering 12–18 months of imports. It should also create a stabilisation fund from windfall revenues.

Drive Innovation

Competing on cost alone renders a nation replaceable. For instance, Israel leads in cyber security, medical devices, and water technology, while Finland has transitioned from timber to high-tech industries. In this context, India must invest in AI, biotechnology, clean energy, and advanced materials.

It should amplify patent filings, expedite approvals, and develop climate-friendly

industrial hubs to meet global green standards.

Inclusive Growth & Tourism

Over-focusing on goods exports can neglect stable earners such as tourism and services. For instance, Thailand and Spain treat tourism as a strategic sector for jobs and foreign exchange. India needs to connect tourism to local economies, encompassing heritage, eco, and food circuits. It should also enhance e-visas, airports, and multilingual services.

An Amalgamated Approach

Resilience is not built in a single move. Vietnam's pivot succeeded because its manufacturing was ready. Norway's fund works due to fiscal discipline. Israel's innovation thrives thanks to integration between education and defence. India's six pillars – diversified exports, stronger value chains, macro-economic buffers, innovation, fast governance, and inclusive growth – reinforce each other. A shock in one area is cushioned by strength in the others.

The Decade of Resilience

India's advantages – comprising a young workforce, rising domestic demand, and growing infrastructure – can only shine if volatility is treated as part of the plan, not as a surprise. By adapting global lessons to our scale and diversity, and linking them to initiatives such as *Visit Bharat*, India can shift from merely reacting to setting the pace. When the next tariff or currency jolt occurs, the objective is simple: Respond not with alarm, but with confidence.

The Pioneer
SINCE 1895

TARIFFS ARE NOT THE ONLY THREAT; COMMODITY SHOCKS, CURRENCY SWINGS, AND CAPITAL FLIGHT CAN BE JUST AS DAMAGING

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PICTALK



Monsoon clouds hover in the sky above a serene lake, in Nadi.

PHOTO: PTI

How do we resist oppression without surrendering?



ASHA IYER KUMAR

2ND OPINION

One word that has been weighing heavily on my mind for a while now is oppression. It is there to feel everywhere: in open spaces – like *gnats*; in private territories – like mildew; and in the inner core of every human being – like a mist that refuses to lift.

I am thinking of oppression again today, when a military strike on a hospital in Gaza wreaked another round of deadly mayhem. Power has always been a thing of dread and bewilderment; a force that can both shape worlds and crush spirits, depending on who wields it and how. No matter how credible a tool power can be to build societies and civilisations, what we have seen – and often remember from history – is how it has been misused, twisted, and hoarded. The face of power has only grown

more macabre as time has passed, and nothing seems able to retard its relentless spread. Its ability to infiltrate every corner of our lives – political, societal, personal – makes me wonder, "How do we face and fight oppression? What do we do when we feel crushed by forces bigger than us?"

These were questions I posed to my therapist last week, because the ugly fallout of power and the suffering it caused was beginning to rattle the empathy in me. It was getting to a point where watching TV became torture, scrolling through timelines brought anxiety attacks, and the overall sense of helplessness grew heavier with each passing day. My therapist said, "Deal with it in dignity. Make your oppressor feel shame." It was an unequivocal (and unapologetic) voice of resistance that was not harsh. It did not say oppression needed to be confronted with brute force.

It merely nudged me with a gentle but firm reminder: power does not always have to be met with aggression, and sometimes the most profound resistance is measured, composed, and morally unassailable. Her words lingered with me, and I began to wonder if I had not heard this somewhere in my long travails in life. Perhaps in my brief dalliances with the scriptures and religious texts that I trawled, looking for the Truth? What did the wisdom of the ages say about oppression? To

swallow it without resistance? To fight it with belligerence? Or something else, gently straddling the above two prospects? Across religions and philosophies – from the Gita to the Bible, from Buddhist teachings to Sufi thought – I found a recurring thread: true resistance is not always loud. It is rooted in courage, clarity, and conscience. Precisely what my therapist had said. The Gita tells us to stand firm in our truth and duty; the Bible to rise above the pettiness of hate; the Buddha to keep our serenity intact; and the Sufis to trust that even in hardship, hidden wisdom is at work.

None of these traditions call for surrender; they call for strength of a different kind – the strength to resist without becoming what we resist. Yielding to power would mean quietly validating it. Bending without question will only make the oppressor exercise their power with more impunity, for that is the only thing they know. Silence and softness are not a solution; they are a slow way of losing our spirit. They are a recipe for our dissolution. Yet there is no wisdom in fighting back with the same vigour as the one on the other side, for it would mirror exactly what we abhor.

The author is a Dubai-based columnist, independent journalist, and writing coach

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HEALTHY LIVING STARTS WITH DISEASE PREVENTION

In today's world, health is the greatest wealth of any nation. In a country like India, with a population exceeding 1.4 billion, ensuring the well-being of every citizen is a significant challenge. Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as diabetes, heart disease, cancer, obesity, and lifestyle-related illnesses are rising rapidly. Surveys reveal that about 63 per cent of all deaths in India are caused by NCDs. For instance, nearly 90 million people suffer from diabetes, a figure expected to rise to 110 million by 2030, with direct and indirect treatment costs reaching approximately ₹1.5 lakh crore annually. Cervical cancer alone claims nearly 75,000 women's lives each year.

These statistics highlight that treatment alone is insufficient; prevention is essential. According

to the World Health Organisation, investing just one dollar in preventive healthcare in developing countries can yield nearly seven dollars in economic benefits by reducing treatment costs. Lifestyle modifications, including 45 minutes of daily exercise or walking, avoiding harmful foods, adequate sleep, and abstaining from addictions, can help maintain long-term health. Healthy citizens form the foundation of a strong nation. Instead of spending billions on treatment, small, consistent changes in daily routines and health awareness can prevent numerous diseases. Prevention, indeed, is far better than cure, ensuring both personal well-being and national prosperity.

JITESH MORI | KUTCH

Please send your letter to the info@daily.pioneer.com. In not more than 250 words. We appreciate your feedback.

Balancing cotton import duty

The government's decision to suspend the 11 per cent duty on raw cotton imports, intended to support textile exporters, has raised significant concerns. While the measure may provide relief to the textile industry, it risks undermining the welfare of domestic cotton farmers, particularly in Gujarat, Punjab, and Telangana. Farmers who cultivate cotton rely heavily on stable market prices, and removing import duties could depress domestic prices, adversely affecting their livelihoods.

The Aam Aadmi Party's call to impose higher tariffs on US imports highlights the necessity for policies that simultaneously protect domestic industries and maintain fair trade practices. India must strike a balance between international obligations and the interests of its farmers, ensuring that no section of society is left behind in economic planning.

Policy makers must weigh the short-term benefits to exporters against the long-term impact on the agricultural sector, ensuring that both industry and agriculture thrive harmoniously. Transparent dialogue with farmers, trade bodies, and state governments is essential to prevent unintended economic consequences while promoting sustainable growth across sectors.

VJAYAKUMAR H K | RAICHUR

Protecting gig worker rights

With the festive season approaching, e-commerce and quick commerce platforms such as Swiggy, Zomato, Flipkart, and BigBasket face heightened demand. However, gig workers who deliver parcels bear the brunt of this pressure.

Their earnings depend on the number of deliveries completed daily, yet they often lack social security benefits afforded to regular employees. Many work long hours, sometimes risking their safety, to meet delivery targets.

As critical contributors to the modern service economy, these workers deserve dignified working conditions, proper remuneration, and social protection. Key stakeholders must provide mechanisms for healthcare, ID verification, and welfare support, in line with previous budget announcements promising ₹10 lakh healthcare benefits.

Ensuring the rights and safety of gig workers is not merely a corporate responsibility but also a reflection of the country's commitment to equitable and sustainable economic growth. Without addressing these concerns, the backbone of the delivery ecosystem remains vulnerable during periods of peak demand, affecting both workers and consumers.

BAL GOVIND | NOIDA

Opposition misleads voters

It is ludicrous that Opposition leader Rahul Gandhi continues to propagate contradictory and baseless claims regarding the so-called 'vote chori' issue during his "Voter Adhikar Yatra" in Bihar.

He alleges that the Gujarat model of uninterrupted BJP victories since 1995 involved manipulation by the Election Commission.

In the same breath, he claims the Commission favours the BJP, disregarding Congress's long tenure in several states and at the Centre, often overruling anti-incumbency under the same system. Such statements reveal a frustrated leader grasping at straws. Repeated attacks on the Election Commission, an independent constitutional body tasked with conducting elections for nearly a billion citizens, undermine the credibility of Indian democracy.

In today's era of 24x7 media scrutiny, EVM transparency, and extensive oversight by government officials and party agents, allegations of systematic fraud are absurd.

Gandhi's repeated claims reflect political frustration stemming from Congress's electoral setbacks. Believing falsehoods will fetch votes is a dangerous delusion that risks eroding public trust in democratic institutions.

N SAHASIVA REDDY | BENGALURU



CONTRAPUNTO

The universe is not required to be in perfect harmony with human ambition

- CARL SAGAN

Mountain Dues

A brief reminder of India's civilisational debt to Himalayas & the need to once again show gratitude

The West named India after Indus, but Himalayas would have been a better geographical descriptor. Around 50mm years ago - 15mm years after dinosaur extinction - the Indian landmass sailed 6,000km from the vicinity of Australia, rammed the Eurasian plate, and folded the intervening ground into mountains, like a newly arrived neighbour raising a fence. And the Himalayas have been more than a Great Wall to India since. They were a deterrent to invaders and a shield against biting cold winds from the north - but they kept in the bountiful monsoon, without which India would be a dry country. We might not have been a cradle of civilisation without them, nor numbered 1.4bn today.

Add to this ledger of gifts, biodiversity, natural beauty and gigawatts of hydropower. Also, their role in mythology, religion and history, and it becomes clear that we are Himalayan in more ways than we realise. That's why each report of rain-induced devastation in the mountains questions our filial love, Jammu's in the news now, but Himachal and Uttarakhand have suffered floods and landslides daily.

The northeast faced a destructive spell early in the season this year, and Arunachal has again reported rain-related distress this week.

Some of the causes of this widespread and recurring devastation are beyond our control. Jammu receiving 380mm of rain in 24 hours was unheard of until Tuesday. It's 95% of the region's long-term average of 403mm rainfall in August. And with climate change, rain events are likely to get more intense. Himalayas are the youngest major mountain range - still rising at an average rate of 1cm per year - so, like juvenile bones, they can't withstand nature's fury.

We've known this for as long as we've known the Himalayas. Traditional hill homes, temples, forts and palaces relied on a disaster-proof mud-and-timber architecture. The British, when they made the Shimla railway, took care to keep it light and avoid water buildup in the hillsides beside the tunnels. Now, we have thrown caution to the wind. We build a Dharali on a riverbed, ignore warnings at Kishitwar, raise highrises in Shimla, fell trees and commission expressways to the treetops. We dream of a rainbow with a hotel and a pot of gold at its end, only to get stuck like the 2,500 vehicles stranded across the Beas on Monday night. The Himalayas are telling us they don't like it. Pay heed.

Bihar's Migrants

They are at the centre of high decibel electoral sparring. But what does Bihar have to offer them?

Bihar's allies in govt, JDU and BJP, used Stalin's stop in Bihar - he was there to support Congress - to revive earlier DMK slurs against Bihar migrants in Tamil Nadu. Stalin and his ministers sought to focus instead on fresh MoSPI data on Thursday that crowned TN as India's most industrialised state and top employer of factory workers. Bihar and TN couldn't be further apart. Bihar remains stuck at the bottom, caste networks cementing its place in poverty and poor human development. TN, despite its own caste politics, has pushed ahead, steadily progressing economically and in inclusivity and human development performance. Certainly TN's success shines brighter also because Bihar sets the bar so low.

Poles apart - one's society led by upper castes, the other Dravidian - yet the two states are inseparable, bound by an endless stream of migrants. Bihar pushes them out, TN pulls them in. Anti-migrant politics is central to political right's appeal globally. It is no different in TN - small parties like NTK are ever-ready to whip up migrant hate. Two years ago, TN authorities swiftly tackled misinformation about attacks on Bihar migrants. Notably, Chennai and Patna together killed the attempt at stirring trouble. Now, ahead of Bihar's election later this year and TN's in about six months, the Bihar migrant finds himself, and his fate, at the centre of political sparring.

But the bigger tragedy is that these migrants - who build India's gleaming cities - barely get to exercise their vote. There are concerns that thousands of migrants' names are missing from Bihar's SIR draft rolls. Good numbers stand to lose jobs in TN's export hubs post Trump tariffs. But before rallying them to the hustings - if they're part of the voter rolls - Nitish & Tejashwi might want to spell out what Bihar has to offer.

Deva and DJs

The beats of faith, the pause of silence

Sivakumar.Sundaram@timesofindia.com



It is that time of the year again when Mumbai dons its sequins and speakers, and Lord Ganesha, remover of obstacles, patron of beginnings, arrives as the most celebrated guest of honour.

The Universal Host is welcomed as a guest into our homes, pandals, and streets, with decibel levels that ensure the city stays awake for nine days.

Sages speak of awakening supreme consciousness; DJs excel at supreme restlessness with bass-heavy beats of Deva Shree Ganesha that leave even the Lord's mouse scurrying for earplugs. The festive has, of course, evolved. Once, idols were moulded from humble backyard clay and returned gently to the waters. Now they are bought from vendors, cast in plaster of Paris and coated in glitter, stubbornly refusing to merge in the Arabian Sea much like certain wastilines that refuse to recede after monsoon season.

What was once ritual has become rave. The new commandment reads: If thy loudspeaker is not louder than thy neighbour's, thy devotion does not count. Those who now complain about noise pollution forget that it was their own youthful exuberance that turned Lord Ganesha from Nirvikaalpa (formless consciousness) into Dolby Digital. HIS elephantine wisdom of patience, tolerance, and self-control has been reinterpreted into traffic jams, self-seeking crowds, and Insta reels. And unless the new generation chooses to rediscover self-discipline, they too will inherit the same fate, limitless decibels and sleepless nights.

Still, for all its excesses, Ganesh Chaturthi is the nation's grand overture to the festive season that runs till Diwali, a reminder that life is not only about seeking purpose but about celebrating it by rhythm, resonance, and joy. So dance while the music plays, for tomorrow the streets must sleep, the idols must return to the elements, reminding us that just as clay becomes form and form returns to clay, so too does human life and the Lord, with HIS infinite patience, will return, bemused yet benevolent, to witness our encore next year. Today's generation, thankfully, is already mindful of going green to protect the seas; it is only a matter of time before they also awaken to the perils of sound pollution. That, perhaps, will be their true sound advice to the next generation to usher in a cultural change where this great festival is not about a loud awakening to sound, but about a sound awakening of consciousness.

Amber Habib



The undergraduate curriculum of Indian universities is going through a significant overhaul, in which a battered system is sought to be replaced by one whose packaging is colourful and glossy. The outer box is covered in bold: "learning outcome based", "goal-oriented", "application-based learning", "interdisciplinary relevance", "designed to empower students".

Students who study this curriculum for four years are promised to be fit for careers in education, research, software, banking, insurance, policy or anything else that takes their fancy. It is implicit in these declarations that earlier systems have not delivered on these fronts.

There is no review of the earlier goals and achievements and thus it is implied that there were none worth noting. This is surprising to those of us who were fortunate to study in an affordable and good Indian institution and later found that our education was at par with the best in the world.

Just this week, University Grants Commission has released the draft curricula for a host of subjects. I shall focus on the one for Mathematics, which seems to have been given the same close attention that was earlier bestowed on History.

For context, let us recall that the National Education Policy of 2020 extended the three-year undergraduate programmes to four years. The extra year was intended to make the student fit for a wider variety of career options, especially for going directly into jobs or into PhD programmes without the necessity of a Master's degree. Indeed, the possibility of going directly for a PhD in US has been one of the key benefits that has been highlighted by NEP proponents.

How does the actual curriculum fare when tested against these goals? The core or compulsory part of the curriculum turns out to be quite old-fashioned. It has courses on analytic geometry and mechanics that were considered obsolete 30 years ago, and whose prescribed textbooks were first published in years like 1990 and 1992. Such inclusions result in less space for more relevant mathematics. The core portion short-changes both the 'pure mathematics' that is needed for research and the 'applied mathematics' that takes a student

towards a job in industry. For example, probability and statistics get a single course, as do algebra and real analysis, while programming and numerical methods are missing. The arrangement of the courses, especially the late placement of the crucial course on real analysis, ensures that the emphasis will be on memorising methods rather than on understanding them.



The extolled 'learning objectives' turn out to be a bit of a sham. They are at best summaries of the syllabi and often they are entirely meaningless. The only objective given for studying complex analysis is "to prepare the students to take up courses on Advanced Complex Analysis". Shall we laugh, or cry?

One would hope that the faults of the core curriculum would be compensated by a good choice of elective courses that would help the student specialise in a desired direction. While some of the missing core courses do

show up as electives, the obsession with promoting 'Indian Knowledge Systems' comes into play here.

The required diversity is sacrificed to give over one-third of the slots to courses on Indian mathematics, mostly of ancient times. It is quite possible that a graduating student would know a fair bit about ancient Indian mathematics but very little about modern mathematics, where their education would end at about the late 19th or early 20th century. The truth is that tomorrow's students will be worse off after four years than earlier ones were after three.

The syllabi of the courses on Indian mathematics do not suggest that the topic would be studied with due regard to the concerns of history, such as reliability of sources, communication between cultures, or the interaction with social structures. Instead, the syllabi are lists of methods to be learnt, which will surely become drudgery.

At least two courses promote so-called 'Vedic mathematics', which is a creation of the mid-20th century and has no relation with the serious mathematics of earlier Indians. It is a collection of tricks for speeding up certain elementary calculations. It can be a fun activity in middle school but is entirely out of place in a university curriculum.

While students of mathematics are being deprived of a serious study of their subject, non-mathematicians who wish to benefit from mathematics are also bereft. They are provided with courses bearing names such as "Mathematics for Life Sciences" and "Mathematics for Meditation". It is claimed that most of these can be studied by anyone having "a basic knowledge of mathematics". Either this description stretches facts, or these courses will be mathematically trivial.

It is notable that the Mathematics curriculum document omits the affiliations of the committee members, except for the chair. One of them is associated with books on 'Vedic mathematics' and these are included in the recommended texts. It is clear that the committee has been selected and encouraged to promote 'Indian Knowledge Systems' rather than mathematics and has delivered on this goal. While we may glory in our mathematical past, we have to face its future.

The writer is professor of mathematics at Shiv Nadar University. Views are personal.

THE BULLET POINTS THAT EXPLAIN AMERICA

Yes, school shootings, like the one in Minneapolis, are frequent in US. No, there won't be any control on gun ownership. Because deep down, American society can't accept the obvious solution

Arnab Ray



Columnist based in LA

Every rainy season this happens in Indian cities: streets flood, some families lose their homes, and people die. We wonder why no one does anything about it or why it's never really a headline issue. What's even worse is that we call this the 'indomitable spirit of -insert city name here-'. As if putting up with the collapse of urban infrastructure normal rains is something glorious.

America has its own version of this death dance, except instead of water, it's bullets. Therefore, irrespective of the details of Wednesday's deadly shooting at a Minneapolis church school, every beat of its news cycle could be pre-empted.

Thoughts and prayers. Guns don't kill people, people kill people with guns. America has a mental health problem. Now is not the time to talk about gun control. We should not play politics with the grief of families. The solution to the problem of a bad man with a gun is a good man with a gun. Equip schoolteachers with guns and train them like SWAT teams, so they can shoot back. All this is not facetiousness, but actual 'serious' solutions serious people have proposed.

Like that story we read, growing up, where the king's courtiers, in order to solve the problem of the king's feet getting dirty, proposed that the entire world be covered in a leather bag, rather than the obvious solution of covering the king's feet, America will propose every kind of solution or none at all for mass shootings, except the patently obvious one.

What baffles most people watching from outside, is how a country obsessed with safety everywhere else has no problems with this clear and present danger to children. Kids can't ride bikes without helmets. But hiding under desks from gunmen in schools? That's as American as apple pie.

It makes no sense. Unless you understand something most outsiders miss about America.

Guns define a unique aspect of US culture. America was formed by people for whom individual liberty was one of their foundational beliefs. The fact that they surrendered some of these to live together as a society meant that they still demanded the right to retain the means to take back that liberty should their government or

American people bear guns not to hunt deer or bear but to fight govt, should the situation arise. Sounds



quaint now when govt has predator drones, nuclear bombs and control over every aspect of your life, but then again, what makes a nation is not logic or geographical boundaries but a shared culture and a broad alignment of morals.

What is false is the 'Oh powerful gun lobby' argument, as if in the days of FAANG (Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Netflix, Google) it is the National Rifle Association that's the sinister puppet master behind everything.

In the 1960s, the era of *Mad Men*, half of US smoked.

The tobacco lobby seemed untouchable. Then cultural attitudes shifted. Now rarely one in ten Americans smokes. When society really wants change, lobbies crumble. The fact that the gun lobby remains strong tells you something deeper is going on.

Any serious push for gun control doesn't just risk polarising the electorate, it risks unleashing something much darker. Trump happened partly because progressive politicians started feeling like cultural imperialism to traditional America.

Open borders, equity mandates, systemic racism workshops at corporate retreats, anything worst of all, the woke remaking of popular culture, made a significant number of Americans unable to recognise the 'emotion' of their country. The fact that much of this was imposed by govt and corporate flat led to a backlash and this led to MAGA.

The fact that Trump has a very short time concentrated the kind of power that he has doesn't happen 'just like that'. It shows strong popular backing, almost of the kind a messianic figure has. And don't believe the unfavourable numbers, as a lot of people will not say they support Trump but will vote for him.

Now imagine adding 'and we're coming for your guns' to the anti-trad list. That would lead to the emergence of political figures even more extreme than the current US president, because you would be striking at one of the last remaining defining aspects of traditional America.

Charlton Heston, who most Indians remember as Moses parting the Red Sea or a Ben-Hur racing chariot, once said you would have to pry his gun from his 'cold, dead hands'. The thing is, he wasn't being dramatic. For millions of Americans, that's literally true. Gun ownership's a sacred principle tied up with everything they believe about freedom, self-reliance, and resistance to tyranny.

And the reason why the problem is never solved is because American society in a way knows there can be no American solution, just as we know that same truth about our broken urban infrastructure.

Calvin & Hobbes

ANYWAY CHARLIE, I'M SORRY WE COULDN'T GO OUT TODAY BUT THIS LITTLE CREEPY'S PARENTS ARE SO DESPOTIC TO GET AWAY FROM HOME ONCE IN A WHILE THAT THEY...



FREEZING COLD AND JUSTICE SHALL RUNS FREWILL OVER TRANNY, BABY SITTER GIRL!



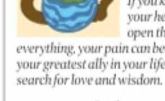
GET OFF ME, CALVIN YOU PEST! ON! LET GO! QUIT IT!



STUPIDUS MAY WAS THE STRENGTH OF A MILLION MORTAL MEN! GIVE UP!



LISTEN CHARLIE I'M GOING TO HAVE TO CALL YOU BACK. YOU MET DEEPLY ETHICAL PEOPLE OF MANY RELIGIONS, AND ALSO THOSE OF NONE. GOODNESS IS NOT EXCLUSIVE TO BELIEVERS. RESPONSIBILITY BELONGS TO ALL. THIS INCLUDES RESPONSIBILITY TO THE ENVIRONMENT.



Sacred space

Grief can be the garden of compassion. If you keep your heart open through

everything, your pain can become your greatest ally in your life's search for love and wisdom.

Rumi

The XIV Dalai Lama

We live in a time of profound global challenges - climate change, inequality, conflict, and deepening isolation. These problems know no borders. They affect us all. And so, they call for something greater than individual or national interest. They call for a sense of universal responsibility.

At its core, this responsibility arises from recognising our deep interdependence. In the past, we lived in relative separation - villages, nations, and religions existed independently. Today, information, goods, people, and ideas move freely, revealing how interconnected we truly are. The well-being of one is linked to the well-being of all.

We can no longer believe that our actions are contained within personal or national boundaries. When forests disappear in one country, the air suffers everywhere. When war breaks out in one region, it displaces people and shakes the

peace of others far away. The pain of one becomes the burden of many.

This is why we must move beyond narrow self-interest. Universal responsibility asks us to shift from 'me' to 'we' - to recognise that compassion for others is not a luxury, but a necessity.

This shift begins not with great acts, but with awareness. When we realise that others' happiness is linked to our own, compassion arises naturally. From this, action flows: to ease suffering, promote justice, and care for the world that sustains us.

Some may ask, 'But what can one person do?' The answer is: a great deal. History is shaped by individuals who chose not to be indifferent. A single act of kindness, born of courage and sincerity, can ripple outward. A warm heart can be quietly powerful.

Education is key - but it must educate both heart and mind. Knowledge alone is not enough. Without ethical

grounding, intelligence can be used to divide, deceive, or destroy. This is why I often speak of secular ethics - basic human values such as compassion, honesty, patience, and self-discipline. These are not tied to any one faith. They are universal.

Whether one believes in God or not, these values remain the foundation of a good life. I have met deeply ethical people of many religions, and also those of none. Goodness is not exclusive to believers. Responsibility belongs to all.

This includes responsibility to the environment. Earth is our only home. We cannot treat its resources as endless. We must develop ecological awareness - not only for ourselves, but for future generations. A clean river, a green forest, a clear sky - these are gifts we owe to our children.

We also carry responsibility for peace. In the modern world, violence is an outdated response to conflict. It

causes immense suffering, and rarely solves the problems it claims to address. Peace cannot come from weapons or domination. It must be built through understanding, dialogue, and respect for human rights.

Is universal responsibility realistic? I believe it is not only realistic - it is essential. Without it, division will grow, conflict will spread, and the environment will suffer. Our survival depends on cooperation.

And it begins with each of us. We all have daily chances to live this responsibility - by being kind, by acting honestly, by showing respect to parents, teachers, leaders - all can guide by example.

When we feel love for others, we find peace in ourselves. When we act from that love, we heal the world. An ocean is filled drop by drop. Let us each be one drop. Together, we can create a sea of kindness strong enough to heal even the deepest wounds. Let us not wait. Let's begin.

As told to Rajita Mehrotra

THE SPEAKING TREE

THE SPEAKING TREE

Effects of AI in medicine

There's great potential, but the rules must be clear

Indu Bhushan

India's healthcare system stands at a crossroads. With a doctor-patient ratio of 1:1,457 well below WHO's 1:1,000 and millions in rural areas lacking access, integrating AI is not just promising, it is critical. My recent visit to rural Odisha showed me first-hand the power of AI in healthcare. Field workers armed with AI applications were detecting potential TB cases simply by analysing cough recordings. Using a smartphone app trained on millions of immunograms, they were also identifying possible breast cancer cases and flagging them for tele-consultations with specialists.

DISEASE DETECTION

The potential goes far beyond this. Google's DeepMind has achieved 99 per cent accuracy in detecting breast cancer, surpassing even expert radiologists. AI tools are now being deployed to detect eye diseases, skin cancers, and neurological disorders like Alzheimer's. Indian innovators such as Wadhvani AI and Qure.ai are already outpacing human accuracy in identifying tuberculosis from chest X-rays.

These advances in AI diagnostics enable timely intervention for patients and ease the burden on overworked doctors. Beyond diagnostics, AI is driving hyper-personalised medicine. Models predict individual drug responses, reducing side effects and improving outcomes. In oncology, AI is identifying targeted therapies, boosting survival rates. For India's millions with diabetes, AI-driven wearables monitor blood sugar in real time, alerting doctors and averting crises.

AI is also revolutionising drug discovery. Developing a new drug typically takes a decade and billions of dollars. AI can slash timelines by predicting which compounds could become effective drugs. In 2020, AI helped identify a promising antibiotic against drug-resistant bacteria — a feat that would have taken years otherwise. Pharma giants are now using AI to fast-track vaccine development, critical during Covid-19.

Hospitals, long mired in paperwork, are gaining efficiency. AI chatbots handle patient queries, reduce waiting times, and free doctors for complex care.

During Covid-19, AI models flagged the outbreak weeks before



THERAPY. AI is driving hyper-personalised medicine

official alerts. Today, AI tracks disease outbreaks, analyses wastewater, and models risk populations. Governments can deploy resources more effectively, containing crises before they escalate. These transformations are happening at breakneck speed, and AI's full potential is still unfolding. But without safeguards, it could deepen inequalities and create ethical dilemmas. To ensure AI revolutionises healthcare fairly and effectively, India must act on three fronts.

First, invest in local AI models. Much of today's healthcare AI is trained on Western data, often mis-fitting Indian contexts. A skin cancer AI tuned on light skin tones may misdiagnose darker ones. Diverse datasets that reflect India's genetic, environmental, and socio-economic realities are essential for better outcomes.

Second, ensure accountability and transparency. Opaque algorithms could make biased or incorrect diagnoses without oversight. Regulations must require transparency in how AI arrives at medical decisions. Independent audits and ethical guidelines should be mandatory so that AI remains a tool for empowerment, not an unaccountable decision-maker.

Third, safeguard equity. While AI can democratise access to high-quality care, there is a risk it could widen disparities if available only to the wealthy. Government must ensure AI-enabled tools and treatments reach rural populations and marginalised groups. Access should not be skewed by geography, income, or literacy.

At the same time, regulation must avoid overreach. Excessive rules, as seen in parts of Europe, risk stifling innovation. The challenge is striking a balance: fostering innovation while ensuring equitable access and ethical safeguards.

The writer is a Senior Associate with Johns Hopkins University and was the founding CEO of Ayushman Bharat



PRACHI GUPTA
PRAJAKTA KHARE

When Japan held Upper House elections this July, the rise of the far-right anti-immigrant political party Sanseito, with its 'Japan first' campaign, became a surprising highlight of the polls. As elections drew closer, the focus shifted from real economic issues such as inflation and tax reform to immigration in a classic zero-sum faulty economic argument.

The anti-immigrant rhetoric won the party a record rise in Upper House seats. In this background, what realities define the current and future immigration ties between India and Japan?

Historically, Japan's immigrant population has remained low. Currently, it stands at 3.7 per cent — well below the OECD average of 11 per cent. This is largely due to lack of political and cultural will, rooted in Japan's 200-year-long isolationist policy called *sakoku*. While *sakoku* ended in 1854, its institutional legacy resulted in a social mindset with restrictive views about foreigners in the homogeneous Japanese society.

However, as Japan ages, it is estimated that by 2040, the share of immigrants will rise to 10 per cent.

Currently, about 70 per cent of immigrants come from four countries — China, Vietnam, South Korea, and the Philippines. Indians constitute less than 0.01 per cent of Japan's immigrant population (about 50,000), though their numbers have doubled in recent years. Japan is seeking more high-skilled Indian immigrants like the ones currently employed in IT, finance and auto sectors.

Policy shifts may also open opportunities for mid-skill Indians in construction, shipbuilding, agriculture, and care-giving.

The Japanese government recently replaced its much-criticised Technical Intern Training Programme (TITP) with a new Employment Skill Development (ESD) programme to attract and train mid-skill workers.

ESD is expected to take off in 2027, promising better enforcement and strict inspections than TITP, which received backlash for worker exploitation. If implemented as promised, the ESD may open new doors for young Indians aspiring to a life in Japan.

But how do Japanese natives and Indian migrants perceive each other? The Indian diaspora is generally viewed positively, as technically skilled with strong Math and English abilities. Professionally, they are perceived as solution-oriented and hard-working.

For Indians, Japan is a favourable place with low crime rates, ease of living, Asian value system, minimal restrictions on spousal employment, affordable and quality social services, easy access to the property market, and more importantly, a mindful and respectful society.

However, there are some persistent challenges that will define the course of



Indian immigrants' Japan dilemma

STEP UP EFFORTS. Given Japan's ageing society, it needs to attract more immigrants. For that it needs to plug many institutional gaps and foster attitudinal changes

India-Japan migration relations over the future.

LANGUAGE BARRIER

First, Japan has been significantly relaxing its visa regulations to attract skilled workers; however, language remains a strong soft barrier. It is now fairly easy to obtain a long-term visa in Japan. Permanent residency and naturalization can be obtained after merely three and five years of stay, respectively. Naturalization, however, requires near-native Japanese language skills.

People who invest in learning the language have a higher probability of staying, but this tedious investment in language learning appears cumbersome to many.

Second, Japan Inc. has been attracting an increasing number of Indian professionals by embracing English, flexible work-from-home policies, and reasonable working hours — three issues that made Japan an unpopular choice in the past.

However, Indian professionals desire career growth to mid-upper managerial positions, and the hierarchical nature of Japanese corporations that value language requirements and seniority over merit may result in migrants

People who invest in learning Japanese have a higher probability of staying, but this tedious investment in language learning appears cumbersome to many

hitting a glass-ceiling. The slow-moving, consensus-driven decision-making process at Japanese companies runs counter to India's quick, result-oriented approach.

Further, most Japanese corporations continue their policy of hiring graduates who, in the first place, are not necessarily best qualified for the job. They are then transferred around various departments every few years to make them well-rounded lifetime employees, thus creating generalists. So, the IT head may actually not be an IT specialist. This can be demotivating for Indian professionals who value specialisation and field expertise.

SAKOKU LEGACY

Third, a legacy of *sakoku* is that Japanese society views all immigrants as 'the other' homogenous group, irrespective of their social or labour-market contributions. Japan is a warm and human-centred society, yet one can encounter hidden racism. Racial profiling is not rare, and until recently, it wasn't uncommon for foreigners to be abruptly stopped by police for an ID check, albeit very respectfully.

In case of legal troubles, the language barrier can hit hard. There have been cases in the recent past where Indian professionals have found themselves wrongly detained in legal cases, including drug abuse, sexual misconduct. The Japanese system, also criticised for its 'hostage justice' detains suspects, including innocents, for prolonged periods, and the legal process could be much opaque and biased if the suspect is a foreigner.

Fourth, economic factors related to the weak yen-to-dollar exchange rate

also currently discourages migration to Japan making the West more attractive, despite the political conditions. In addition, the average salaries in Japan are about 18 per cent lower than the OECD average and 40 per cent lower than the US, which becomes a strong deciding factor. With a high salary gap and low chances of progression, Indian professionals incline westwards in the long run.

Lastly, certain aspects of the Indian diaspora related to civic behaviour influence perceptions among the Japanese community. For example, celebrating festivals at the community level sometimes draws criticism from locals when rules around timing, responsible use of public spaces, cleanliness, and acceptable noise levels are not followed. Japan, unlike some countries, does not impose penalties for such non-compliance but relies on persuasion and expects adherence with the onus eventually falling on the residents for responsible civic behaviour.

Japan acknowledges the indispensability of immigration for its economy. While it plans to attract more foreign workers it lacks or systemically avoids ways to retain them for the long term. Japan continues to view foreign workers as temporary 'guests' eventually returning to their homeland. Whether Japan can bridge these economic and institutional gaps will determine the long-run choices of Indian skilled workers in the country.

Gupta is an Assistant Professor of Economics at Temple University Japan Campus; Khare is an Associate Professor of Economics at Meiji Gakuin University, Japan

thehindubusinessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

August 29, 2005

Reliance set to acquire BP's France, Belgium facilities

Reliance Industries Ltd is zeroing in on acquiring the refinery and petrochemical facilities of BP Plc in France and Belgium. Sources familiar with the development said that the deal hinges on exercise of BP was now over. The market talk is that the deal size could be in the region of \$30,000 crore.

India, Afghanistan sign three accords

India and Afghanistan have signed three accords covering education, healthcare and agricultural research. According to the agreement in healthcare and medical sciences, India will help Afghanistan in programmes relating to family welfare, public health and hospitals.

Oil Ministry proposal for kerosene bonds rejected

The Finance Ministry has rejected the request of the Petroleum Ministry for issuing zero per cent interest kerosene oil bonds of the value equivalent to the under recoveries suffered by the public sector oil companies with a maturity period of three years. While rejecting the proposals the Finance Ministry is understood to be of the view that such bonds would neither enhance cash flows nor improve profitability of the bleeding oil marketing companies.

China's blueprint to improve life in its cities

Reuters

China unveiled a policy blueprint on Thursday aimed at creating cities by 2035 with a greater focus on quality of life, the official Xinhua news agency reported.

The move comes after Beijing in July promised to build liveable, sustainable and resilient cities in the next phase of its urban development, as the authorities shift their focus from rapid growth to stable development.

The pivot comes after breakneck urban growth that once

super-charged the world's second largest economy.

That red-hot growth led to the rise of "ghost cities", where homes were built but no-one bought them, rampant property speculation in other cities, and a nationwide binge on debt to fire up investment and development.

The blueprint released by Xinhua said that urban development was shifting from large-scale expansion to focusing on improving the quality and efficiency of existing resources.

By 2030 significant progress will have been made in the construction

of "modern people's cities", where quality of life will be "significantly improved", Xinhua said.

"By 2035 modern people's cities will be established," it added.

Features will include the development of green and "smart" houses, more elderly and child-friendly care services, and high-quality medical resources, the report said.

There will also be a focus on shared green spaces, and controlling emerging pollutants such as microplastics, as well as urban disaster prevention and response plans, it said.

On businessline.in

India's global balancing act



Facing US tariffs, regional realignments and an assertive China, New Delhi must navigate a diplomatic maze without losing face, says Parag Balakrishnan

<https://tinyurl.com/2zhf682>

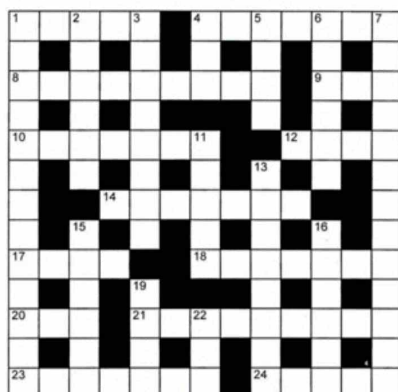
Fighting financial crime with real-time analytics



For financial institutions, AI-driven fraud tools can offer critical insight into how fraud is evolving, and thus stay ahead of the curve effectively, points out Nikhil Kurhe

<https://tinyurl.com/5gpp64>

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2771



EASY

ACROSS

1. Tree (L) (5)
4. Type of suiting material (7)
8. Likely to incur ill-will (9)
9. Dull, stupid fellow (3)
10. Heats and cools gradually (7)
11. Manner, air (4)
12. Cricet, small crown (7)
13. Chess castle (4)
14. Go back over route (7)
15. Unwell (3)
16. Decoration, ornament (9)
17. Give running commentary (7)
18. Wanting sleep (5)

DOWN

1. Expression of censure (13)
2. Pertaining to cattle (6)
3. Engine cooling-device (8)
4. To pay court to (3)
5. Got up (4)
6. Very sad, calamitous (6)
7. Not influenced by private feelings (13)
8. Track of hunted animal (5)
9. Strict disciplinarian (8)
10. Neck-part (6)
11. Rush heading (6)
12. Long, detailed story (4)
13. Spanish exclamation of approval (3)

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

1. Tree supplying American with a shady retreat (5)
4. Fine wool fabric defeated one (7)
8. Causing resentment in US, I void it anyhow (9)
9. Stupid person who gave Roman copper a shilling (3)
10. Toughened the East by entering it in the records (7)
12. One's bearing when one is among soldiers (4)
14. Small crown of gold put on in California (7)
17. Fleece one of the piece in the corner (4)
18. Go back over one's steps if Sappers react differently (7)
20. In '49 Labour leader wasn't well (3)
21. Decoration in manner Dot could have arranged (9)
23. Tell the tale of a difficult terrain one had left (7)
24. At getting so weary, gets clothed (5)

DOWN

1. Critical comment of main adviser no different from this (13)
2. Like cattle to start bleating like sheep (6)
3. Heating or cooling apparatus needs rod at air transferal (8)
4. To court one's warrant officer, having nothing on (3)
5. Got up as a symbol of the Tudors (4)
6. Extremely sad act girl almost gets involved with (6)
7. Impartial dentist with desire to make changes (13)
11. Animal track is sulphur-impooverished (5)
13. Disciplinarian could train me before term starts (8)
15. Grab one round the neck or callout for it (6)
16. Take one's progress through life at a wild rush (6)
19. Story of family history has a gap running through it (4)
22. Spanish cheer means nothing to the French (3)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2770

ACROSS 2. Groom 5. Foal 7. Frog 8. Entreats 9. Dissuade 11. Park 12. Chimeystacks 15. Fawn 17. Pintable 19. Absolute 21. Mail 22. Feet 23. Dosed
DOWN 1. Varnish 2. Gig 3. Opera 4. Matters 5. Fee 6. After 10. Simon 11. Plaza 13. Expound 14. Killing 16. Amble 18. Needs 20. Out 21. Mad

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FRIDAY • AUGUST 29, 2025

New old normal

Jackson Hole speech signals end of zero-rate era

US Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell used his annual address at the Jackson Hole symposium, to signal a material shift in US monetary policy. Three elements of his speech indicated that the Fed is open to resuming rate cuts, on a long pause since December 2024. The first is the sharp slowdown in the US job market. The US economy has created just 35,000 jobs a month from May to July 2025, compared to 1.68 lakh in the same period last year. As a booming job market and worries about a wage-price spiral were key factors behind the Fed holding rates, this opens the door to rate cuts.

Two, while the tariff effect is visible in US PCE (Personal Consumption Expenditure) inflation rising to 2.6 per cent in July, Powell said that there was a 'base-case' possibility that the tariff effect would prove short-lived. He said the shifting 'balance of risks' may warrant a change in stance. While these statements are dovish no doubt, markets are jumping the gun in expecting rate cuts to start at the very next Fed meeting in September. The speech had several caveats too. Powell observed that slower job creation is not leading to a spike in US unemployment because of labour supply also falling off (due to lower immigration). Unemployment numbers are therefore the key variable to watch. Powell also warned of tariff-led inflation turning sticky, if wages began to rise. Overall, the main takeaway for India from the speech seems to be that the Fed is not considering rate hikes as a response to US tariff shocks, as it expects the US economy to slow materially.

This is good news for India. A widening of rate differentials between US and India at this point could have escalated dollar outflows, exerting pressure on the already weak rupee. India risks a widening trade deficit this year, with the virtual breakdown of trade talks with the US, fracos over Russia oil purchases and the imposition of punitive tariffs on nearly \$45 billion of goods exports. SBI Research has warned that should the 50 per cent tariffs remain in place, India's \$41 billion trade surplus with the US could turn into a deficit. Financing the trade gap is getting more challenging too. The domestic slowdown has seen Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) pull out \$4.6 billion from Indian equities in the last two months, while bond inflows have slowed to a trickle.

Another critical part of the Powell speech, which flew under the radar, is the Fed's decision to move away from zero-rate policies of the GFC (global financial crisis) and Covid era. Reviewing the last five years, the Fed has come around to the view that artificially suppressed policy rates eventually led to runaway inflation. It thus proposes to revert to the conventional inflation targeting framework of striving for price stability with maximum employment, where monetary policy will "act forcefully" to ensure that US inflation expectations are well-anchored. As India undertakes a similar monetary policy review, it should factor in the Fed's pivot.

POCKET

RAVIKANTH



GST has benefited States

NET GAINS. In the post compensation period, the GST revenue in States has picked up with better tax compliance



GST has come under discussion once again. But the focus of this paper is to understand whether States gained because of GST.

The Goods and Services tax (GST), implemented in July 2017, replaced multiple State-level indirect taxes with the State GST (SGST). These included: value added tax, sales tax, central sales tax, luxury taxes (entertainment, betting tax, and gambling tax), and entry tax. The consolidation of these levies into SGST is aimed to streamline the tax structure and eliminate the cascading effects of multiple taxation.

Under GST, IGST is collected by the Central Government on inter-State transactions and imports. After input tax credit adjustments, the central government transfers the SGST portion of IGST revenue to the destination State. Initially, GST was expected to add 1-2 per cent to GDP and stabilise into buoyant revenue growth. It was described as a 'grand bargain' because both Centre and States gained taxation powers, with States empowered to tax services.

GST COMPENSATION

Manufacturing States feared losses as GST is destination-based, while others resisted losing fiscal autonomy. To secure consensus, the central government announced a liberal compensation mechanism, with a guaranteed revenue growth rate of 14 per cent per annum of subsumed tax for five years (over 2015-16 base year level), valid up to June 2022. This compensation was funded through a GST compensation Cess levied on luxury and demerit goods.

The compensation amount was calculated as the difference between the projected revenue (based on 14 per cent annual growth) and the actual SGST + IGST revenue. However, the Covid-19 pandemic severely disrupted the economy, leading to negative growth and sluggish GST collections. To mitigate this, the Central Government not only provided compensation but also gave loans to cover revenue shortfalls during 2017-18 to 2023-24.

Before GST (2013-14 to 2016-17), subsumed taxes grew well below 14 per cent in almost all major States, except Bihar and Haryana. Nonetheless, the central government guaranteed 14 per cent growth post-GST only to get States on board. Post-GST (2018-19 to 2022-23), 10 States recorded average GST revenue growth of 14 per cent or more. However, due to year-on-year fluctuations in the growth, nearly all major States qualified for compensation or loans for 3-4 years.

Between July 2017 and June 2022, actual GST revenue of 20 major States was \$24,21,642 crore as against the projected revenue based on 14 per cent

State GST revenue performance

States	Projected 14% growth from July 2017 to June 2022 (₹ cr)	Actual GST revenue from July 2017 to June 2022 (₹ cr)	Actual GST (incl. comp. and loan) from July 2017 to June 2022 (₹ cr)	Sub-summed taxes (Avg. growth: 2013-14 to 2016-17) %	GST without compensation (2018-19 to 2022-23) %	GST with compensation (2018-19 to 2022-23) %	Post GST (Avg. growth: 2022-23 to 2023-24) %
Andhra Pradesh	1,23,350	1,02,162	1,21,183	6.47*	13.74	15.88	14.13
Assam	53,218	44,104	51,927	11.83	16.55	13.37	18.09
Bihar	1,12,211	83,554	1,10,298	17.77	22.76	16.34	19.86
Chhattisgarh	65,412	41,297	63,651	7.71	9.95	11.39	18.5
Gujarat	2,56,567	1,78,791	2,59,847	3.05	12.13	14.4	15.41
Haryana	1,35,418	97,199	1,28,958	15.61	6.98	7.1	21.61
Himachal Pradesh	32,314	18,432	31,611	10.62	14.36	18.4	9.33
Jharkhand	56,997	41,680	55,669	12.29	15.27	13.09	13.97
Karnataka	3,21,363	2,13,660	3,19,918	11.7	12.57	14.89	19.16
Kerala	1,49,561	1,06,929	1,50,227	8.95	10.28	13.31	12.81
Madhya Pradesh	1,36,294	95,152	1,32,187	9.09	15.01	16.02	33.83
Maharashtra	5,37,956	4,19,191	5,37,783	5.18	12.92	16.74	20.73
Odisha	98,241	66,919	95,223	8.34	14.48	13.48	20.77
Punjab	1,28,671	66,869	1,33,007	7.39	9	13.87	15.96
Rajasthan	1,52,560	1,15,835	1,51,958	10.68	16.57	15.56	17.57
Tamil Nadu	2,64,835	2,01,453	2,67,122	5.75	11.29	13.84	16.68
Telangana	1,43,225	1,22,391	1,41,568	9.02*	15.54	17.4	16.86
Uttar Pradesh	2,96,857	2,42,160	2,96,903	6.91	11.95	14.79	17.33
Uttarakhand	44,111	24,468	42,497	12.24	16.09	17.17	17.89
West Bengal	1,78,692	1,39,396	1,76,248	10.43	14.2	16.46	14.57
All States	32,87,854	24,21,642	32,67,794	8.05	12.65	14.47	18.15

Source: (Data: CAG reports (various years). *Growth of sub-summed taxes are available only 2015-16 for combined Andhra Pradesh. After inflation, separate growth rates are available for Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. Combined rate and individual rates are used to get average rates.

growth of ₹32,87,854 crore. No single State matched the 5-year total projections. One possible reason could be that although some States experienced favourable GST revenue growth in the initial period, it was muted by rate cut in some items first during 2017 itself and again in 2019.

After accounting for compensation and loans, four States received more than their projected revenue: Gujarat, Kerala, Punjab, and Tamil Nadu. The excess compensation amounted to ₹665 crore for Kerala, ₹2,287 crore for Tamil Nadu, ₹3,281 crore for Gujarat, and ₹4,336 crore for Punjab.

In the remaining States, the actual revenue with compensation was slightly less than the projected revenue. The shortage of compensation amounted to ₹6,450 crore for Haryana, ₹4,108 for Madhya Pradesh, ₹3,019 crore for Odisha, ₹2,444 crore for West Bengal and ₹2,167 crore for Andhra Pradesh.

Since preliminary estimates of GST collection and not actual collections were used in computing compensation (due to non-availability of data at the end of fiscal year), some States received

Relative to pre-GST tax growth, a fact often overlooked in federalism debates. Industrial States like Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Gujarat disproved fears of losing revenue

excess while others had shortfalls. These differences would perhaps be adjusted subsequently.

GST GROWTH, POST-COMPENSATION

In the compensation period (2018-19 to 2022-23), 5-year average GST growth (without compensation) exceeded 4-year average growth in pre-GST (2013-14 to 2016-17) period in almost all States except Haryana. In 12 States, growth including compensation was even higher than 14 per cent, reflecting the support of the compensation mechanism.

In the post-compensation era (2022-23 to 2023-24), average GST growth (without any compensation) exceeded 14 per cent in all but Himachal Pradesh and Kerala. However, this growth is not equivalent to the 14 per cent growth benchmark based on the 2015-16 base year.

In 2023-24, the projected GST revenue at 14 per cent assured growth (based on base year 2015-16) for 20 States could be ₹10,54,856 crore. But actual collection was ₹7,81,105 crore and the total gap was ₹2,73,751 crore. States with largest gaps were: Karnataka (₹32,691 crore), Maharashtra (₹31,825 crore), Gujarat (₹24,773 crore), Uttar Pradesh (₹20,367 crore), Tamil Nadu (₹23,668 crore), and Punjab (₹20,479 crore). However, using the 14 per cent benchmark is misleading since the growth rate of subsumed taxes in pre-GST period was much lower in most States.

Based on the average (actual) rate of subsumed taxes during the pre-GST period, the estimated GST revenue for

20 States could be only ₹7,27,442 crore in 2023-24, with the revenue gain of ₹3,27,414 crore. Notably, actual collections exceeded estimates in Maharashtra (₹50,138 crore), Gujarat (₹20,835 crore), Uttar Pradesh (₹17,908 crore), Tamil Nadu (₹14,705 crore) and Madhya Pradesh (₹6,887 crore). However, in a few States including Karnataka, Bihar, Haryana, and Punjab the actual was below the estimated figure.

Despite initial shortfalls and unrealistic 14 per cent projections, GST revenues have strengthened, with compensation ensuring stability during the pandemic. All States benefited relative to pre-GST tax growth, a fact often overlooked in federalism debates. Industrial States like Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Gujarat disproved fears of losing revenue.

Several studies confirm GST benefited States. In the post compensation period, the GST revenue has picked up with better tax compliance. There is as yet no decision on compensation cess beyond 2025. If it is continued in some form, tax-GDP ratio will not suffer.

Recently, the Group of Ministers recommended to replace the current four rates 5 per cent, 12 per cent, 18 per cent and 28 per cent with two rates of 5 per cent and 18 per cent. While this is welcome, rates should be so adjusted that there will be no need for a compensation mechanism.

Rangarajan is former Chairman, Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister & former Governor, RBI; and Shanmugam is former Director, Madras School of Economics

India can lead in global sustainable packaging

Developing a bioplastics ecosystem through 150 million tonnes of sugarcane-derived biomass can curb plastic waste

Sundeep Singh

India's packaging industry is set to exceed \$200 billion in revenues this year, with a compound annual growth rate of 26.7 per cent. But this momentum has a hidden cost — an expanding waste stream that threatens both environmental and economic progress.

According to Packaging Reimagined 2.0, a study by PFCI in collaboration with Accenture, India currently loses nearly \$16 billion in material value each year due to unrecovered packaging waste. If unchecked, this figure could soar to \$160 billion by 2030.

But by shifting to circular packaging systems, India could unlock \$107 billion in material value by 2030. This transition will also help to generate approximately 6.5 million new jobs by 2030.

India produces 26,000 tonnes of

plastic waste daily, and packaging accounts for 43 per cent of it. The largest culprits, flexible plastics like multilayer packaging (MLP) and LDPE films, have little to no resale value and are nearly impossible to recycle effectively, accounting for 60 per cent of the total value lost annually.

Even recyclable formats like PET and HDPE bottles are often downcycled, while glass, though reusable, still ends up in landfills over a third of the time.

UNLOCKING CIRCULAR VALUE

There are three strategic levers that can help unlock India's potential in material value circular packaging:

Eco-Design and Sustainable

Materials: Redesigning packaging through mono-materials, recycled content, and bioplastics can reduce waste at the source. India's strong sugarcane production gives it a unique advantage in bio-based packaging.

Extend packaging life: Circular



RECYCLING. Key to sustainability

JESICA/PHOTO

business models are especially viable for materials like PET, HDPE, and glass.

Scale recycling infrastructure: India must urgently scale up its recycling systems, especially for low-recovery materials like MLP and films. The recently updated Plastic Waste Management Rules (2024) and Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) norms place compliance squarely on industry shoulders. By strengthening

domestic recycling capacity, India can unlock \$27 billion by 2030.

India's position as the second-largest sugarcane producer offers a key strategic edge. Developing a bioplastics ecosystem diverting 150 million tonnes of sugarcane-derived biomass could reduce fossil fuel reliance, lower emissions, and boost rural economies. India must prioritize domestic manufacturing of versatile bioplastics like Polylactic Acid (PLA) to reduce import reliance and lead the global shift toward sustainable packaging.

The transition to circular packaging entails formal roles in R&D, sustainable material engineering and packaging innovation. Realizing this potential will also require upskilling initiatives in areas like biopolymer processing. With coordinated action, India can emerge as a global leader in sustainable packaging.

The writer is Managing Director - Strategy & Consulting Global Network of Accenture in India

● **LETTERS TO EDITOR** Send your letters by email to bleditor@thehindu.co.in or by post to 'Letters to the Editor', The Hindu Business Line, Kasturi Buildings, 859-B60, Anna Salai, Chennai 600002.

Trade vs farmers

The government's decision to suspend the 11 per cent duty on raw cotton imports, aimed at helping textile exporters, has led to concerns. While the move may benefit the textile industry, it can impact domestic cotton farmers adversely, particularly in Gujarat, Punjab, and Telangana.

AAP's call to impose higher tariffs on US imports underscores the need for policies that protect domestic

industries while ensuring fair trade practices. India must strive to balance international obligations with the interests of its farmers, ensuring that no section of society is left behind.

Vijaykumar HK

Raichur

Trump, lost in transit

This refers to 'At the end of the day, we will come together to US Treasury's Bossent on India-US tariff row'

(August 28) But when will it happen? Trump's flipflops are creating a great deal of uncertainty.

Why would White House Trade Advisor Peter Navarro accuse India of funding Kremlin's campaign in Ukraine?

US supply of arms to Ukraine is hardly a 'peaceful' move. Those living in a glass house, should not throw stones at others.

Kumar Gupta

Pandhurna (Haryana)

India's options

By imposing a penalty above a 25 per cent tariff on Indian exports as a penalty for buying Russian oil, which takes total tariffs to 50 per cent, the Trump administration has made trade with the US infeasible in most segments. Shrimps, diamonds, gold and jewellery, textiles, leather, and footwear are expected to bear the brunt. India should call out US' double standards. Though China forms 47 per cent of

Russia's crude exports, US tariffs against China is less than 50 per cent. India must diversify its exports to counter Trump tariffs, though finding markets may be a challenge. While it is heartening that India resisted pressure from the US and sent a clear message that trade must be driven by national interest, domestic reform must also be on the agenda.

M Jayaram

Sholavandan (TN)

US Colleges Need the Chinese, and Indians

Trump should be wary of 'exporting' innovation

Trump's turnaround over Chinese students studying in US universities — 'Our college system would go to hell very quickly [without them]' — is an admission of excess capacity in higher education that could be stranded if foreign students are kept away. He has welcomed twice the number of Chinese students studying on US campuses. This should indicate the offer extending to the biggest group of foreign students in the country: Indians. It is pretty much impossible to set country quotas for foreign students without affecting academic outcomes. Around 15% of US college seats need foreign students who happen to be principally from India and China because of demographics. Undue US restrictions on students from either of these countries will encourage capacity build-up in the Asian neighbours.

The MAGA constituency will, of course, need to be satisfied through tighter rules on foreign students overstaying their welcome in the US. Here, too, enforcement is fairly tricky. The way the US education system works, a foreign student is allowed to climb the rungs of academia before eventually joining the workforce. Weeding out those gaming the system may involve a greater degree of administrative surveillance than what US universities may be comfortable with. Blunt tools like fixed visa durations will end up sending back trained manpower to competing economies, defeating the purpose of a skills-based immigration system. It also does not serve interests of US companies that contribute considerably to academic research.

The Trump regime will have to direct its attention to basic education to address the issue of excess capacity in higher education. Gatekeepers to jobs on Wall Street or in Silicon Valley are US colleges who have an economic bias in favour of the 1st-gen immigrant over the 2nd-gen one. There is limited traction in using foreign student enrolment as a bargaining chip in trade negotiations with either China or India. Demographic declines in advanced economies should make the US wary of exporting innovation.



A forward-looking defence acquisition policy can unlock foreign tech transfer and investments

Lean, Mean, DAP Machine



Rajiv Roy-Chaudhury

Speaking at the ET World Leaders Forum last week, Rajiv Singh announced that India will be collaborating with French defence firm Safran to make developed advanced jet engines locally for its indigenous 5th-gen stealth advanced medium combat aircraft (Amca). This came shortly after Narendra Modi's call on Aug 13 for a made-in-India fighter jet engine, which the defence minister reiterated on Wednesday at Mhow, Madhya Pradesh.

The partnership with DRDO and its Gas Turbine Research Establishment (GTRE) is expected to involve 100% technology transfer, complete IP rights, and no export restrictions under the G2G framework. This is a new defence procurement model for India.

As these announcements and projects take place, a major non-military exercise is underway within the defence ministry: Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP) 2020, which guides procurement of military equipment, is currently under review. This policy faced criticism for delays and inefficiencies, with defence secretary Rajesh Singh describing it as 'broken'. Certain procurement categories have had no programmes assigned, while others have failed to deliver results. The review process is complex, but it aims to reshape India's military-industrial landscape for the next five years or more.

India's military-industrial ecosystem has evolved through its defence



THIT to our advantage

procurement policies. Until 2002, private firms were not allowed in defence, and the sector was dominated by defence PSUs (DPSUs). This changed with the introduction of the first procedure in 2002, which set out processes for purchasing military equipment from foreign OEMs, or locally from Indian firms.

In 2003, its scope expanded to allow foreign OEMs to manufacture in India through local partners, involving transfer of technology (TOT). As India's local capabilities grew, procurement categories were added to promote Indian companies to make in India, including through licensed production.

In 2016, former defence minister Manohar Parrikar prioritised indigenous manufacturing, with a new procurement category for equipment that was designed, developed and manufactured indigenously. This marked a strategic shift from 'Make in India' to self-reliance.

Over the past decade, these policies have helped triple defence production and increase exports 30%. Yet, critics say shifting policy goals create uncertainty. For example, foreign defen-

se offsets have largely failed to deliver advanced technologies, so indigenous content is now the focus.

A committee led by MoD's DG (acquisition) has been formed to consult stakeholders for DAP 2020's review. But stakeholders often have conflicting priorities. Foreign OEMs seek higher FDI limits and lower, more flexible indigenous content, while Indian companies strive to maintain FDI limits and higher indigenous content. Where DPSUs aim to retain their dominance, private Indian firms seek a level playing field. Neither DPSUs nor private Indian firms support G2G deals, which foreign OEMs prefer.

The fighter jet engine announcements underscore benefits of TOT from foreign OEMs. Previously, MoD attempted to bring in foreign technology. The FDI limit in defence was raised from 26% to 49%, then to 74% in 2020 under automatic approval, specifically to attract investment and TOT. However, over the past five years, there has been little FDI inflow, and no significant foreign JVs have been set up for advanced weapon systems.

This indicates that foreign OEMs are unlikely to transfer cutting-edge tech without full ownership and control.

They are also hesitant to seek 100% FDI under the government approval route, as each case depends on factors like access to modern tech or other considerations. With no guidelines defining 'modern technology', conditions for 100% FDI remain ambiguous. The first approval of 100% FDI for Sweden's Saab nearly two years ago is yet another MoD order.

As an alternative, in areas lacking specific technologies, foreign OEMs could be treated equally with Indian companies, and FDI limit could be raised to 100% under automatic approval. This would allow wholly owned Indian subsidiaries of foreign OEMs from trusted partner countries to locally bid for weapon systems contracts and enable TOT.

Such a move aligns with the 'Make in India' philosophy — procurement in India, from an Indian registered company under an Indian contract and in Indian rupees. This carve-out may well lead to the creation of a new procurement category.

A forward-looking DAP 2020 review could potentially unlock TOT and investment opportunities in India. Foreign governments are also keenly awaiting the outcome of the review.

Defence industrialisation is vital for strengthening bilateral ties between governments.

With the right policy framework, foreign OEMs can become trusted partners in India's growing defence ecosystem. India has taken a positive step by appointing former DG (acquisition) Aparna Chandra as principal adviser to oversee the review process. It must continue to make sensible policy choices, as much as it has in this year of defence reforms.

The writer is former strategy director, IAF Systems India

Faith Can't Protect Crumbling Infra

Religious tourism is huge in India. And, yet, overwhelming parts of it are uncomfortable, stressful and, as landscapes and stampedes underline, dangerous. Much of this is due to the sheer volume-infrastructure mismatch. The Char Dham Yatra in Uttarakhand rose from 4.5 lakh pilgrims in 2012 to over 50 lakh in 2023. Today, as heavy rains and landslides batter the region, pilgrims (and residents) are paying the price for reckless, short-sighted development policies. The recent landslide in J&K's Reasi district, which killed at least 40 pilgrims on the Vishnu Devi route, is also part of this grim pattern in the Himalayan region is especially susceptible to. But this is not confined to mountains and hills. Tourist numbers surge. But instead of managing growth wisely, authorities approve anything that looks like business and short-term economic largesse, while ignoring the big picture. This has to stop.

Religious tourism sustains livelihoods and contributes to regional growth. But the choice can't be between economic benefits and safety/comfort, and matters left to leaps of faith. Serious, enforceable safeguards and implementable policy plans must be adopted. Caps on visitor numbers, a tourist case, stricter construction codes, robust disaster preparedness, climate-resilient planning and genuine local participation are not optional but essential.

Relentless over-tourism and mindless construction has already given tourism as a whole, and sacred gateways, in India a bad name. Protecting lives, fragile ecosystems and cultural heritage requires tough decisions now. Faith may inspire pilgrims, but it can't shield them from discomfort and danger. India needs an actionable policy that makes religious tourism safer, sustainable and resilient.



JUST IN JEST

India can make an old capitalist villain a hero through nostalgia

From Dunkel to Uncle Back to Dunkel Again

Once upon a trade deficit, a chap by the name of Arthur Dunkel was a household name in liberalised India. As DG of GATT — the ominous-sounding acronym of WTO's precursor, General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade — his version of the Ten Commandments would spread the word of the Lord of Free Trade and Global Harmony, along with the idea that tariffs should be lower than ankle-length. Dunkel was the word for 'neoliberalism' for India's 'shucks, we're socialist' then-hetty Left. So, America pushed pro-WTO, India poo-pooed pushed it back in the form of rallies and protests. Fast forward to the Age of Agent Orange in the White House. India's bete noir is no longer Dunkel but Mar-a-Lago Uncle, the impaler of multilateralism and slayer of trade. Today, Uncle is anti-WTO, while India is pro. From protesting Dunkel's draft like it was a colonial hangover, India now swipes right on WTO faster than a q-comm Delhi-very agent. So, here's a suggestion where we can mix nostalgia with pragmatism and call it nostalgia: bring our massive 80s-style rallies back across India's cities, hailing the foresight and genius of Arthur Dunkel. That way, we become the torchbearer of global capitalism, and also use a Swiss icon to bear the torch, showcasing how it's not neoliberalism that's a spanner in the works of making the world a richer place, but Uncle.

It's Not Just About Russian Oil, Stupid!



Sanjeev Choudhary

India has chosen to bear a 25% addition at tariff on its exports to the US rather than halt purchases of Russian oil. At first glance, this seems counterintuitive. Why protect refiners' big profits when thousands of export sector jobs are at risk? The answer lies less in economics than in international politics and strategic bargaining.

When Donald Trump announced the penalty earlier this month, New Delhi initially signalled refiners to pause Russian purchases. But as the 21-day window passed, it became clear GoI had no intention of bowing. Officials hoped Trump might back down. He didn't. Toward the deadline, India solidified its stand: conceding on oil would only trigger further US demands.

The penalty, India concluded, was not about depriving Russia of war funding, but about pushing India to accept contentious trade terms, particularly opening its farm markets to American products. From a purely energy perspective, India could have

walked away from Russian barrels without much pain. Global markets has hovered between \$65 and \$70, and Russian oil is not under sanctions.

If India stopped buying, refiners would lose the now \$1.20 a barrel discount (down from \$15 in the early war days), but could easily source alternatives. Buyers elsewhere would replace India with little disruption. Any price spike would be minor and temporary. Already, refiners have looked toward Russian volumes for September loading, suggesting some rebalancing is underway without price impact.

Indian refiners, meanwhile, are hardy struggling. Reliance's oil-to-chemicals operating profit rose 1% y-o-y in April-June to \$6.20 cr. State-run refineries India Oil, BPCL and HPCL posted combined net profit of \$6.38 cr. 2.5% last year's, thanks to discounted crude and unusually high retail margins. Pump prices have remained high and frozen for a couple of years, even as international prices softened, ensuring refiners and their shareholders — including GoI — pocketed the gains. In short, refiners have the cushion to absorb increasingly higher crude costs. This weakens the claim that Russian oil is indispensable for India's energy security. Or that a halt would send global oil prices soaring. Cheaper Russian oil benefits a few at



The drum is a red flag

refiners. But the unprecedented US tariff would hit numerous small exporters and their low-wage workers. Exports worth \$60 bn would effectively face tariffs of 25% or more. Labour-intensive sectors like textiles and gems and jewellery could see exports collapse by as much as 70%, according to GoI's Trade Research Initiative (TRI). Exporters' revenues, forex inflows and jobs would all shrink. Layoffs in export hubs could snowball into political trouble, especially if migrant workers return home to a blizzard of assembly elections. Alternative markets may cushion some impact. But redirecting such large volumes is no task. Meagre buying of deeper GST or extending government support to exporters may provide relief, but won't fully offset the blow.

Washington has framed the penalty as a fairness issue. Treasury secretary Scott Bessent said that China's purchases of Russian oil rose only modestly

from 13% to 16% of its imports — while India's share jumped from 1% to 42%. He argued India had pocketed \$16 bn in excess profit by buying discounted oil and reselling refined products. At the point where he implied much of this windfall accrued to India's richest families — a reference to Mulesh Ambani, whose company runs the world's largest refining complex, in Mumbai — he was wrong.

India's stance, therefore, is less about oil and more about setting precedent. Standing firm signals that India will not be strong-armed, even if that means near-term pain. The weak spot in India's stance is that its arguments about energy security and price volatility — are shaky. What strengthens its hand is something different: recognising the penalty as a blunt bargaining tool, not a moral crusade.

By daring Washington to sanction Russia oil directly and enforce it globally, India could expose US hypocrisy and limits of its economic coercion. It could also measure the willingness of its allies, just as it does with Iran oil. But failing Russian exports would lift global prices and US pump costs — colliding head-on with Trump's pledge of cheap energy for Americans.

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THE SPEAKING TREE

Sacred Echo

ANIL K KHANDELWAL

In our hurried world, where noise overwhelms nuance and people move faster than they think, conflict often becomes the natural byproduct. The epidemic of non-listening has eroded relations, clouded judgments and left many stranded in islands of isolation. Yet, most fractured situations can still be redeemed — through the timeless and sacred art of authentic dialogue.

Our quest for connection, through genuine conversations, bridges divides and fosters a profound sense of shared humanity, creating new possibilities in both personal transformation and conflict resolution. It is through this sacred exchange that we begin to resonate with the deeper truths within ourselves and others.

The Bhagwad Gita beautifully captures this transformative power. Krishna's soulful discourse in the first two chapters rescues the great warrior Arjuna from the grip of indecision and successfully bridges the understanding of duty, responsibility, and the path to enlightenment, leading the path from confusion to clarity.

Oriental philosophy further reinforces the essence of authentic dialogue. Confucius urged us to embrace moments of quiet reflection as a foundation for deeper understanding and a prelude to meaningful exchange. Likewise, Taoist sages remind us that the natural flow of the Tao is achieved not through rigid assertion but through gentle, harmonious conversation. It is in this meeting of minds and souls that dissolves the prison of ego and fixed mindsets, paving the way for genuine empathy and unity.

ALGO OF BLISS TECH

Hanging Out With Animals

There's a quiet, unspoken joy in spending time with animals, a kind of bliss that doesn't need translation or explanation. Whether it's the slow blink of a cat that says, 'I trust you,' or the tail-wagging euphoria of a dog, these moments remind us that the natural flow of the Tao is achieved not through rigid assertion but through gentle, harmonious conversation. It is in this meeting of minds and souls that dissolves the prison of ego and fixed mindsets, paving the way for genuine empathy and unity.

Hanging out with animals is like being a part of a world without judgement. They don't care about your résumé, your credentials or your mismatched socks. A pot will chew and bark at you with the serenity of a monk. A gaur might insult you, but at least it's honest. Even fish in the aquarium reminds you that repetition is not meaningless.

Animals live in the moment — not in spreadsheets, regrets or Instagram filters. They teach us to listen without interrupting, to love without conditions, and to nap without guilt. And, honestly, they're better conversationalists than most humans.

Chat Room

Don't Export Oh-so-Jurassic

Apropos Industry's Stiff Denial with RBI for Tariff Assessment by Suryakumar and Kirtika Sundar (Aug 28), Indian exporters must diversify their markets to reduce dependence on the US, and expand presence in Europe, Africa and Latin America hold promise, with impact to untapped potential exist. Europe accounts for a much higher percentage of global imports compared to its share of India's exports. The recent trade pact with Britain and the European PTA bloc will help for greater access. Further, emerging markets in Asia, Africa and Latin America hold promise, with impact to untapped potential exist. Europe accounts for a much higher percentage of global imports compared to its share of India's exports. The recent trade pact with Britain and the European PTA bloc will help for greater access. Further, emerging markets in Asia, Africa and Latin America hold promise, with impact to untapped potential exist. 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