

DECCAN Chronicle

31 MAY 2025

Modi, Mamata swap barbs: War of words going too far

Operation Sindoor was a military success which was acknowledged by the Pakistan PM too when he was speaking on ally territory in Azerbaijan. He admitted that while Pakistan was preparing for strikes after the morning prayers on May 9-10, India had pre-empted them with BrahMos missiles homing in and getting through even as far as the Rawalpindi air base, thus forcing their now-promoted field marshal to plead for a ceasefire.

The problem with India's views on Operation Sindoor getting more diverse with the passage of mere days after the ceasefire is everything in the country just tends to get intensely political. The airing of a diversity of views may be a feature of India's loud democracy. But nowhere does politics rage with greater passion than in the verbal exchanges between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee.

The atmosphere at home reeks of bitterness at a time when the country is putting so much effort into carrying the message abroad of a successful strike at religious terrorism that Pakistan sponsors while using it as an instrument of state policy. There is no denying that there seem to be two Indias — one with the all-party delegations carrying the country's message of the right to self-defence and the other squabbling in seeking the votes that feed political power.

There is no faulting Prime Minister Narendra Modi's critique of the murky Murshidabad violence or his expounding what could happen to education in West Bengal since corruption has seeped into teacher appointments, too. If there is a fault line to this public discourse, it is just that India is permanently in election mode. Such is the political rivalry that neither side cares for niceties nor the timing as the nation has just come through a crisis of confidence worth decades in handling terror coming from across the border into Jammu & Kashmir.

At a time of national salutation in having made a moral point internationally regarding how terror tears at the heart of modern civilisation and why it must be opposed, it would be ideal if Operation Sindoor were not to be politicised for electoral gains as may be sighted in the ruling alliance's approach nationally on one side and, on the other, by the Opposition wilfully suppressing its gains while permeating negativity, including about the symbolism of the name chosen for the military operation.

The deeply personal attacks, especially the one from Mamata regarding the PM who "is not the husband of every woman" as an answer to Mr Modi referring to *sindoor khatra*, are symbolic of the depths to which our netas can descend when aiming barbs in public, more often capable of maximum wounding than making the point in a civil manner. But then civility in Indian politics disappeared a long time ago with the passing of leaders of statesman-like stature.

Even at a time when it is possible to savour yet another military victory over Pakistan, it is only the polls that seem to overwhelm the thinking in politicians. Neither side is absolved of speaking as if the public vote is the only thing that ever matters in this scramble to rule India from the Centre or the states. More is the pity, for the national cause in which India unified during Operation Sindoor seems ripe to dissipate, if it hasn't already.

Heed IAF Chief's alert on delays

India's Air Chief Marshal Amar Preet Singh's remarks on the never-ending development of defence projects in India should serve as a wake-up call for the government, research institutions and end-users. While project delays are not new in India and for various reasons, his candid comments underscore the urgency of finding a solution to this perennial issue.

Referring to delays in the development of the Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) and Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA), the Indian Air Force chief questioned why an organisation would agree to build or deliver something that it knows cannot be done. In response to a similar outburst, the Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) head had offered a meek defence, citing technology apartheid among other issues.

The reason for ACM Singh's outburst is the depleting number of fighter jets that India has — around 31 combat squadrons or 556 jets against the sanctioned strength of 42 squadrons or 756 jets — showing a shortage of 200 fighter jets. This compares unfavourably with the 142 squadrons maintained by neighbouring countries — Pakistan's 20 squadrons, Bangladesh's 12 and China's 110. After Operation Sindoor, where China actively supported Pakistan, missed timelines in weapon development have moved beyond the academic realm.

While the denial of technology has played a key role in these delays, the greater contributor is the lack of killer instinct in developers such as HAL. Unlike private companies, officials in government-owned institutions like DRDO and HAL tend to be process-focused, often playing it safe by strictly following guidelines. Private companies, on the other hand, are result-oriented — which is exactly what India needs now. The government deserves credit for allowing the entry of private firms into defence production.

The government, service chiefs, researchers and academia must note that most Chinese defence projects were undertaken through reverse engineering. The government must understand that there are many paths to a destination, and all one needs is an explorer's spirit.

DECCAN CHRONICLE

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Farrukh Dhondy
Cabbages & Kings



"Yes, the king of the road
Drives down the middle
Does he have a licence?
That remains a riddle
His belt is in an English medium
School in a town called Puri
She told him the highway he rides
Was made by Sher Shah Suri
Such is our generation gap...
I've told her she can have what's mine
She says she doesn't want a truck —
Never cast pearls before swine!"

— From The Ballad of Rosemary Marlowe, by Bachchoo

Of 'Paki-bashing' in UK and the 2024 'uprising' which swept Bangladesh

Two Bangladesh memorial occasions last week in London were invited as a platform panelist. Gentle reader, you may well ask, if you speak French — "pour the hell qui?" Or what the f—aintest have you got to do with Bangladesh?

Let me count the ways. In the last few decades, the Decca Ltd Society has invited me on several occasions to speak — and then on three occasions for a few weeks at a time, I have conducted screenplay writing workshops for the Decca Film Society.

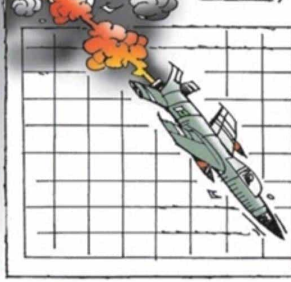
I must have made some impression on these occasions and because one of the London occasions, hosted by British MP Apsana Begum, was showing a

Subhani

INDIA: FOURTH LARGEST ECONOMY



PAKISTAN ECONOMY



Rohingya 'Corridor' poses a threat to India's Northeast

Pradeep C. Nair



A humanitarian corridor for the displaced Rohingyas of Myanmar's Rakhine state, through Bangladesh, has been an idea that the United Nations has been promoting ever since the Rohingyas crisis began. However, after UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres visited Bangladesh in March 2023, this idea has gained greater traction. The corridor's exact location has not been made public, but it would be fair to assume that it would be astride the Naf river at Teknaf (southeast of Cox's Bazar) to Maungdaw in the Rakhine state of Myanmar. The creation of such a corridor could potentially involve Bangladesh in Myanmar's internal conflicts. The interim Myanmar government readily agreed to this proposal of the UN. However, in Bangladesh, this decision came under criticism from other political parties, academics and security experts because it would lead to further cross-border movement of Rohingyas, thus increasing the risk of smuggling and trafficking of drugs, weapons and humans. The Bangladesh Army chief, Gen. Waker-uz-Zaman, has also raised strong objections, in fact he has clearly told Mr Yunus not to go ahead with the proposal. A holistic look at the stakeholders involved in this humanitarian corridor and their likely stands is, therefore, necessary.

On the Myanmar side the stakeholders are the military junta, the Arakan Army (AA), the Rohingya people (which is fighting the junta) and the people of Rakhine itself. The junta, though now not in Chennai, is still holding out from vast parts of Rakhine state (14 of the 17 cities in Rakhine state are under control of the Arakan Army). It is still holding out from key locations of Sitwe and Kyaukpadaung, the former being the important sea

port for the India-led Kaladan Multi-Modal Trade and Transit Project (KMMTTP) and the latter being the deep sea port of the Chinese (where China has invested \$7.3 billion). The junta has indulged in large-scale excesses against the Rohingyas over the years, and would surely not agree to this corridor. The Arakan Army was formed in 2009 with Chinese help, a year after the inkling of the India-led KMMTTP in 2008, possibly in order to disrupt the KMMTTP. Further, it is still largely backed by the Chinese, and has been opposing the Rohingyas and their militia. They are said to be the gatekeepers to the Chinese Kyaukpadaung port now the Rohingyas are thus unlikely to allow this humanitarian corridor. Insofar as the people themselves, they include both Buddhists and Muslims (in Rakhine, Buddhists constitute 52.2 per cent of the population, while Rohingyas are 10 per cent, who are the oppressed, constitute 42.7 per cent). The corridor would, however, have the support of the Rohingyas and their militia, which include ARSA (Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army) (its chief, Ata Ullah, was born and brought up in Karachi), the ARA (Arakan Rohingya Army) and the RSO (Rohingya Solidarity Organisation), though all three don't have the military muscle now to defeat either the junta or the Arakan Army. A Pakistani effort to arm them in the future is very likely.

For Bangladesh, a country that already has over a million Rohingya refugees, the opening of such a corridor would mean a massive influx of Rohingyas, not to mention the Rohingya Solidarity Organisation, though all three don't have the military muscle now to defeat either the junta or the Arakan Army. A Pakistani effort to arm them in the future is very likely.

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Is the corridor a ruse by the West to provide military aid to the Arakan Army at a later date, to make it pull away from Chinese influence and fight the junta? It's a question that comes to mind.

UN offer also seems to be for enabling the rehabilitation of the Rohingyas. However, this corridor would also question Bangladesh's sovereignty. Further, given the strong opposition to the Rohingyas from both the junta and the Arakan Army, it is very unlikely that they would ever see security situation in Myanmar. The estranged relationship between the junta and the Arakan Army, it is also noted, that humanitarian corridors planned and sponsored by the UN earlier have failed in most cases: Sudan, Yemen, Ukraine and Syria are some examples. So, is the corridor perhaps a ruse by the West to provide military aid to the Arakan Army at a later date, to make it pull away from Chinese influence and fight the junta? It's also a question that comes to mind.

This proposed corridor would also adversely affect Pakistan, it would be fair to say, in India's Northeast. With the increased engagements the unelected Muhammad Yunus government is undertaking with both China and Pakistan, and given the recent Operation Sindoor clash between India and Pakistan, it would be fair to assume that there would be increased collusion and vested interests between Pakistan and China to foment trouble in the Northeast. The recent killings of 10 Myanmar Buddhist monks in Manipur by the Indian Rifles on May 15 may just be a sign of things to come. A humanitarian corridor of this kind would surely not be in India's interest, given the potential that it holds for increased infltra-

tion of refugees, movement of drugs and Myanmar-based militant groups into the Northeast. Further, a corridor like this would have long-term implications of continued conflict between the junta and the Arakan Army, thereby destabilising the security situation in Rakhine, which is the only alternative to the UN's appeal for a humanitarian corridor also begs the question: Why aid only for Rakhine state? Why not the other states and regions of Myanmar which are witnessing battles between the junta on the one hand and the Ethnic Armed Groups (EAGs) and the People's Democratic Front (PDF) on the other? Surely, it is for somebody else's interest, in all likelihood, that of the United States.

The US role in parachuting Muhammad Yunus as the interim head of Bangladesh last summer is well-known and it is no surprise, therefore, that the US sees an opportunity to enter Myanmar, where the Chinese influence reigns supreme. The UN, at least the complaints and inter alia, appears to have now become an instrument for the extension of US policies in the political landscape of the country. The interim Yunus government will be a complicit handmaiden working to push the US agenda, besides the anti-India buster, the only option the Yunus government is surviving on is the support of the radicals in Bangladesh, who are invisible, but assured, US support, notwithstanding the 37 per cent tariffs and Donald Trump has raised about human rights violations in Bangladesh. The US would thus have multiple contestations. India has to be watchful and be proactive over any move that is not in its national interest.

The writer is a retired lieutenant-general who is a former director-general of the Assam Rifles and has extensively served in the Northeast

LETTERS

KAMAL NEED NOT APOLOGISE

Actor politician Kamal Haasan's 'Tamil-Kannada' remark has been blown out of proportion. It is surprising that some people even in TN have bombarded him and want him to apologise. Kamal has rightly stated that politicians have no knowledge to talk about language and its origin. Historians and archaeologists have long back presented documented proof that all southern languages may have derived from Tamil, which is the world's oldest surviving language. If South Indian languages like Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam were parts of a tree, Tamil is the root". Kamal's comments should be taken in a lighter vein. The actor-politician has not committed a grave crime nor insulted Kannada. An apology is unnecessary.

M.C.VIJAY SHANKAR
Chennai

LAST NAIL IN PMK COFFIN

PMK founder Dr. S. Ramadoss' remark that he committed a mistake in making Anbumani Ramadoss a Union Minister at 35 years is the last nail in the party's coffin. Through this observation, the senior Ramadoss has belittled himself in the political landscape of the country. Also, he has said that Anbumani does not have the maturity or composure to lead the party. But it is the senior Ramadoss who lacks composure. The saying "Blood is thicker than water" renews when ego envelops the mind.

S.Ramakrishnasayee
Chennai

COMBAT VETERANS KNOW BETTER

Our military veterans and strategy planners are more knowledgeable than those criticising and commenting from the comfort of their homes about the steps taken or to be taken against terrorists and their patrons. Critics are not going to help the Government. These people can demonstrate their patriotism by keeping aside their pens for some time until the Government of Narendra Modi finds out a suitable strategy that will get one final solution to Pakistan's continued belligerence.

Muthu Srinivasan
Coimbatore

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A consequence of our mustering this direct action was the formation of young Bangladeshis forming an army of vigilante groups to stop "Paki-bashing", the random assaults on Bengali individuals and on families on housing estates by organised right-wing gangs of white youths. It was a kind of vigilante movement that was formed and chased off the streets.

I used my experiences in the Bengali struggle to write several published fictions and a TV drama series for the BBC called *King of the Ghetto*. The books and the film were commented on by the gracious Bangladeshi-origin MP, Rupa Haq, after the session when we gathered to gossip.

A young filmmaker called Pim Rhyth interviewed the participants of BHAG and the vigilante movement and then screened the film to a packed audience and invited me to the panel discussion that followed. The such a kind would surely be celebrating the 2024 "revolution" in Bangladesh that led to the ouster of Sheikh Hasina's repressive government. The screening and discussion were held in one of the British Parliament's public rooms. On the panel with me were Shahidul Alam, the distinguished photographer and political activist, Nowshin Noor, a leading participant and spokesperson for the demonstrations that brought down the Hasina government, and Nayanka Moekjee, a professor and historical chronicler.

The session began with a film by Bangladeshi Hindu filmmaker Deepak Kumar Goswami. His film

featured, in the main, the treatment of Hindus as a minority in Bangladesh, even though I was expecting it to chronicle, through personal testimony, the oppression of the overthrown government and the growth and principles of the movement against it. There was much of that. Instead, Goswami's documentary principally attacked the "Indian media" for propaganda and "lies" against Bangladesh. I follow the Indian media but was unaware that this was a principal trend.

There followed clips from *July Women*, a documentary film featuring the women activists of the 2024 revolt. I would have personally preferred to watch and comment on the full documentary. The commentary, after the showing from Shahidul and Nayanka, was instructive, telling us about the worker and female participant in the uprising. The testimony of Ms Noor, whose brother and associates were injured as they were attacked by Sheikh Hasina's police, was very moving.

For my part, I was asked about, or at least felt obliged to tell the audience why I was there, and then, being cued into analysis of the occasion, I spoke about the fact that in a world in which "democracies" are electing right-wing and populist governments, Bangladesh's popular movement is, in our times, unique for demonstrating that a people's uprising is perhaps the greater balancing democratic force and one that can win a decisive victory.

So, wake up America! It can do more!



Rebuilding J&K

Civilians need physical and economic security to recover from the shelling

Jammu and Kashmir bore the brunt of Pakistan's response to Operation Sindoor, and Union Home Minister Amit Shah rightly focused on both security and development during his visit to Poonch, where residential areas were hit by shelling from across the border. A comprehensive relief package is planned alongside the construction of more underground shelters for civilians. The J&K government is still in the process of assessing damages, but Poonch was by far the worst-affected district. A preliminary report submitted by a committee set up by the BJP to the Ministry of Home Affairs identified 1,500 houses – 690 in Poonch and 534 in Uri – that were damaged in the indiscriminate shelling. At least 18 civilians – 14 in Poonch alone – lost their lives. Pakistani shelling hit towns in Poonch, Baramulla, Kupwara and Rajouri, and the damage to civilian infrastructure was considerable. Mr. Shah on Friday visited the affected regions, expressed solidarity with the people, and handed out job appointment letters to the kind of those who lost their lives. Earlier, the Leader of the Opposition, Rahul Gandhi, and representatives of the Trinamool Congress visited the victims.

These border residents felt heard, their sense of fear dissipated to some extent, and their morale boosted by these visits. The Indian Army's statement on the India and Pakistan ceasefire "not having an expiry date" is reassuring for the border residents. Life is limping back to normalcy with residents returning to their homes, many of them shattered by the shelling. The J&K government is struggling to meet the demands of the affected population. This was evident from the relief amount approved up to ₹1.2 lakh to fully damaged houses. The affected and displaced residents described it as "insufficient" for them to return to their once-concrete and multi-storey houses. Against this backdrop, Mr. Shah's promise of a relief package is a ray of hope. Around 9,500 bunkers – 8,000 in the Jammu division and 1,500 in the Kashmir Valley – have been built by the Centre so far. However, there is a growing demand for individual bunkers in sparsely located populations in border areas of J&K, especially in the Kashmir Valley, to ensure civilians manage to shift to safer locations immediately in case of shelling by Pakistan. The Centre and the elected government in J&K should work in tandem to help border residents who are in distress.

Steep decline

Rural consumption remains poor despite the lowering of inflation

India's factory output performance measured monthly by the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) and released by the Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation (MoSPI) slowed to an eight-month low of 2.7% in April, at the start of fiscal 2026. It also marked a steep decline, almost halving from last April's 5.2% growth. This correlates with the monthly gauge of the eight core sectors by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, which posted a 0.5% growth in April, also an eight-month low. More significantly, it is a steep decline from last April's 6.9%. The eight core sectors make up about 40% of the weight of items included in the IIP. This comes on the back of a 4% growth in industrial output for the last fiscal, which was the lowest in the past four years. Of particular concern is the contraction in mining by 0.2%, the first since August 2024. While the absolute value of mining exports has risen in the past decade from \$25 billion in FY15 to \$42 billion in FY25, its share in exports has fallen from 8.1% to 5.1%. This still constitutes a not-so-insignificant share in India's overall goods exports at a time of great trade volatility. However, both manufacturing and power production also slowed to 3.4% (4.2%) and 1.1% (10.2%), respectively, in April.

While trade and tariff-related uncertainties are most likely to have impacted goods output, the continuing contraction in consumer non-durables' output for the third consecutive month suggests persistently low rural consumption, as essentials such as food make up a significant portion of consumer non-durables. This is a clear indication that despite retail inflation hitting an almost 6-year low at 3.16% in April, it has not translated into higher spending power for rural communities, where consumer non-durables have the most demand. Food prices contracted for the sixth straight month to 2.14%, which led to below MSP rates for most staples at mandis. The government must focus on raising rural incomes by implementing MSPs for farm produce more systematically. This would aid in increasing rural consumption. However, a surge in capital goods output to 20.3% in April, albeit from a low base, indicates confidence in the domestic economy as investors continue with their plans to diversify exports, attempting to rely less on the U.S. With trade-related sectors expected to continue to stay volatile in the near-term, the Centre must push the private sector to increase capital expenditure at home. This will increase incomes, and aid in raising consumption demand. Export-oriented sectors must also aim to ring-fence themselves from tariff, price and supply chain shocks by ensuring a robust domestic presence, while also diversifying outside the traditional export regions of the U.S. and the EU.

As India reflects on the outcome of the brief military conflict with Pakistan in early May, it may be worthwhile to ponder over the current reality that even as India's cultural diversity and sweep of history may be unparalleled in a civilisational context, it remains prone to attacks from countries in its vicinity and beyond. An incorrigible Pakistan is continually finding ways and means every few years to provoke a conflict, and despite being worsted in every one of these conflicts and wars, remains undeterred, seeking to 'bleed India by a thousand cuts'.

The very existence of a secular democratic India appears to be anathema to Pakistan. As India progresses towards becoming a global power (it is already the fourth largest economy in the world), Pakistan is descending into near anarchy. Yet this neighbour of ours, dominated by a military mindset, is contriving to find ways and means of undermining India's progress. Peace for India, hence, depends on who rules Pakistan, which almost invariably is the military. There are no easy solutions to this problem, and India needs to prepare for war at all times.

The Pakistan of today

Today, it is fashionable to talk of the disintegration of the world order. The deafening silence of the world to the 'genocide' taking place in Gaza, with innocent civilians being killed at an alarming rate, contrasts with the din and noise – and the numerous efforts at peace – being made to end the Ukraine conflict. This dichotomy of approach stems from a grim truth or reality, viz., that the world has different standards when it comes to the killing of Asians and Europeans. If there is any further evidence needed to demonstrate that the international order is crumbling and that 'might is again becoming right', one has only to look at the recent conflict provoked by Pakistan, which the West scrambled to end once they found Pakistan was the loser.

A crucial 'sub-text' to how bigger nations intervene to end a conflict between smaller entities is also now becoming available. For instance, Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has bartered his critical mineral resources to gain U.S. support in the war against Russia. In the Pakistan context, it is now being surmised that U.S. interest in claiming to have brought peace between Pakistan and India (notwithstanding denial by the latter) stems from U.S. interest in Pakistan's store of critical minerals, such as lithium, copper and rare earths. Also, intrinsic to this is the fact that the military in Pakistan, which is and has been, the critical player in the regional sweepstakes, is unlikely to forget the U.S. President's 'gesture' even if there is little substance to his claims.

Peace in the subcontinent is the major casualty today, and not solely because of the short (recent) India-Pakistan conflict. India, and the region itself

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M.K. Narayanan

Former Director, Intelligence Bureau; former National Security Adviser; and former Governor of West Bengal

What to expect next

It might, hence, be useful to surmise what one might expect from the recent India-Pakistan conflict. It is certain that there will be a recrudescence of religious nationalism, not only in Pakistan, but across parts of South and West Asia. Next, is the impact of the technological revolution – limited though the conflict might have been. The conflict has demonstrated the criticality of ensuring 'escalation dominance' in the shortest possible time. Furthermore, one should view the recent conflict as a kind of 'proxy conflict' between hi-tech military suppliers on either side. Each has been more anxious than the other to know how their equipment performed – the Rafale versus China's J-10C, for instance – hoping to find better answers to their respective electronic signatures during future operations.

Also, India and Pakistan have demonstrated their ability to flood the heavens with inexpensive expendable reconnaissance and strike vehicles. Above all, there is a realisation that there is more to drones' warfare than was known till date.

Reams have been written about Pakistan's use of Turkish Söngür drones and China's J-10C during the recent conflict. India is said to have responded by using Kamikaze drones and the like. What is evident from all this is that air defence today involves several multi-layered air defence systems. Unproven, however, is whether Pakistan could integrate a Pakistani ground radar illuminating an Indian target enabling a Chinese J-10C fighter to launch its missile to hit its target at both China and Pakistan propaganda make out. The latter is solely in the realm of speculation – essentially by Pakistan and China – though what comes out loud and clear is the versatility of airborne early warning systems and the kind of

Pakistan, dominated by a military mindset, is contriving to find ways and means of undermining India's progress



Gourishankar S. Hiremath

Teaches Economics at IIT Kharagpur. Views are personal

Viewing education as a social contract that guarantees a meaningful connection between learning and livelihood is essential

Don't merely enrol students, but equip them with skills

As the admission season for colleges and universities begins, institutions across India are once again promoting their programmes under banners promising knowledge, transformation, and research excellence. This growth in enrolment at the undergraduate, postgraduate, and PhD levels suggests a dynamic academic landscape full of potential. Yet, beneath this expansion lies an important challenge: degrees are proliferating faster than meaningful job opportunities.

A gap that needs attention

According to data released by the Ministry of Statistics, the unemployment rate in India tends to increase with higher education levels. This paradox reveals a critical gap between academic achievement and employability – a gap that requires urgent attention.

This challenge is particularly acute in India's vast network of non-elite institutions in Tier 2 and tier 3 colleges, where most students pursue BA, BCom, or BSc degrees and their corresponding master's programmes. These institutions often face resource constraints and limited industry connections, operating with curricula that have not kept pace with the evolving job market. While elite colleges make headlines for placement challenges, the gradual erosion of employability in everyday colleges often goes unnoticed.

In many such institutions, instruction remains largely theoretical, with limited emphasis on real-world skills. For example, an English literature student might study Shakespearean tragedy yet miss out on learning practical skills such as writing professional emails. Similarly, an economics graduate may understand complex

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A setback for Trump
U.S. President Donald Trump's sweeping tariffs have left most countries of the world, especially the smaller ones, shaken. The ruling by the federal court comes as a major relief to them now ("Major setback for Trump as U.S. court blocks tariffs," May 30). It shows that no one, not even the U.S. President, is beyond questioning.
Balasubramaniam Pavan
Secunderabad

All hype, no substance
The article, "A hype comes crashing down" (May 30) exposes the truth behind massive infrastructure projects. While corruption and substandard construction practices have always been prevalent, we have the added problem of hype in the age of social media. Whether it is about the government's initiatives or a company's performance, the media goes overboard in its

coverage, often to the point of propagating falsehoods. There is no need to cover ministers posing for selfies against the backdrop of infrastructure projects, or press conferences about projects that are in the nascent stage. Instead, we need to ask where taxpayers' money is going.
Sharada Sivaram
Enakulam

Tharoor, an asset
Shashi Tharoor's experience

as a former diplomat, writer, and an intellectual with distinct opinions has established him as an independent thinker. His selection as the leader of one of the seven all-party diplomatic delegations on Operation Sindoor is thus justified. His global stature is hardly matched by any other leader from the Congress. Mr. Tharoor is a strong advocate of India's soft power on the global stage. The Congress should

theories but struggle with everyday tools such as Excel. This disconnect means millions of educated young people find it difficult to translate their degrees into career opportunities. This situation stems partly from a deeply entrenched academic culture that values scholarship and abstraction over practical application. Within many academic circles – even prestigious ones – higher education is often celebrated as an end in itself, while immediate employment is sometimes subtly undervalued. Postgraduate degrees and PhDs are frequently pursued not just for intellectual fulfilment but as a refuge from the job market, creating a cycle where many graduates end up teaching in the very colleges that perpetuate the same system.

It is important to recognise that successive governments have acknowledged this issue. Initiatives such as Skill India, Start-Up India, and the National Education Policy have pushed for skill development, vocational training, and entrepreneurship. However, the transformation remains incomplete. Many undergraduate and postgraduate programmes continue to emphasise rote learning over practical skills. While new courses in AI or entrepreneurship are being introduced, they often lack depth, and integration into the broader curriculum.

A broader societal challenge

Countries such as China and Japan have successfully aligned education with economic strategies by elevating technical and vocational education to a central role in workforce development. In India, vocational training is still often perceived as a fallback option, both within academia and society. This stigma limits the

system integration in place. All this has brought a new dimension to airborne warfare. Today's 'noise' is, hence, all about air-to-air engagement, with speculation being rife as to whether Chinese-origin weapon and air defence mechanisms have the measure of India's Rafale fighters and Western equipment. To equipment manufacturers, it is the effectiveness of the 'kill chain' that matters, or is more important, than the capabilities of specific fighters.

What is, however, proven is that the Aakash Quick Reaction Surface-to-Air Missile alongside Russia's S-400 and the Barak (jointly developed with Israel) provided India with more than adequate cover. India possibly did not need to employ or demonstrate its ultimate weapon, the Brahmos (jointly developed with Russia). Pakistan clearly has no answer to it. Both sides did, however, show an improved capability for electronic counter-counter measures to penetrate enemy jamming and evasion tactics.

Technological warfare of the future

The conflict, however, demonstrated in no uncertain terms that future wars will essentially be technological in nature. Technological dominance and the speed with which escalation takes place will dictate the course of future wars. Currently, India has an edge over Pakistan as far as escalation dominance is concerned, but this need not always be the case. It is also important to remember that in a fragmented, multipolar, geopolitical environment, there will be little scope or time for imposing restraint on a party, once a major conflict begins. Arms control agreements also may have little relevance in future wars. Worse, it is already the best known secret that new nuclear warheads and cruise missiles are being designed and kept in readiness for use. The realisation needs to dawn that the nuclear threshold is narrowing rapidly.

It germane to mention here that while India's position on land, sea, and air is more than adequate to deal with a Pakistan, the situation could alter in the event of a two-front war involving both China and Pakistan. In such a situation, India will need to balance the combined capabilities of Pakistan and China and this will throw up some neglected aspects such as India's lack of a dedicated satellite system and satellite-based surveillance network. It bears repetition that modern warfare increasingly depends on space-based assets to act as an early warning system and for a variety of tasks, apart from tracking and communication. This lacuna will need to be overcome in real time before the next outbreak of a major conflict, whether with Pakistan, China, or any other country, occurs. To reiterate, India cannot afford to overlook its inadequacies as far as space-based capabilities are concerned. Space is the new domain of warfare, and India must be fully prepared for this eventuality.

appeal and effectiveness of skill-based education, despite its vital role in economic empowerment.

This contradiction highlights a broader societal challenge: degrees are highly valued as symbols of upward mobility, but they increasingly fail to guarantee it. This is not a call to abandon liberal education or abstract learning – they remain essential for critical thinking and creativity. However, education must also provide tangible economic benefits. Degrees should offer pathways to agency and dignity, especially for students from smaller towns and under-resourced institutions.

A far forward lies in integrating practical skill modules – communication, digital literacy, budgeting, data analysis, hospitality, tailoring, and health services – into general degree programmes as core elements, not optional extras. Doctoral education should be diversified to prepare candidates for policy, analytics, consulting, development, and industry roles, not solely academia. Research remains vital, but it must be pursued by those inclined towards it.

Finally, the widespread aspiration for government jobs reflects the limited opportunities graduates currently perceive. While these roles remain important, expanding private sector and entrepreneurial pathways through improved employability will offer youth a broader range of options. Enhancing skills and opportunities can reduce the over-dependence on competitive exams. India's growing economy demands an education system that not just enrolls students, but equips students with skills. Viewing education as a social contract that guarantees a meaningful connection between learning and livelihood is essential.

read the public mood on Operation Sindoor and treat Mr. Tharoor as an asset ("No let-up in war of words between Congress leaders and Tharoor," May 30).
Nagarajamani M.M.
Hyderabad

No love lost
The Prime Minister had recently said that the Union and State governments must work together as a team. How can he expect States to cooperate with the

Union government if he keeps berating them? ("Modi, Mamata spar over riots, school recruitment exam," May 30)
V. Padmanabhan
Bengaluru

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GROUND ZERO



Manepalli Ankamma holds her employer's daughter. Ankamma's nine-year-old son was taken away from her as 'collateral' for a debt and was later found dead. G.N. Rao
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A nine-year-old bonded labourer

Last week, a duck farmer was arrested on charges of keeping a child from Andhra Pradesh as 'collateral' for a loan and then killing him in Tamil Nadu. Though bonded labour has long been banned by law, it continues to be practised, say activists. **Nellore Sravani** reports on how the boy's mother, Ankamma, a woman from a tribal community, tried in vain to bring her child back home

Two years ago, Manepalli Ankamma, a woman from a tribal community in Andhra Pradesh, who does not know her age, decided to work for N. Muthu, a 60-year-old duck farmer. He promised her a salary of ₹24,000 a month for herding cows and helping him run a sweet shop in Satyavedu, a town in the Tirupati district of Andhra Pradesh. Ankamma took an advance of ₹15,000 from him. When she was unable to repay the amount, Muthu took away her youngest son, M. Venkatesh, as 'collateral'. He also allegedly inflated the amount she owed him to ₹42,000.

On April 9, Ankamma spoke to Venkatesh over the phone. The nine-year-old boy told her that he was busy tending to Muthu's ducks in Kancheepuram district in Tamil Nadu. Ankamma lives in Thurakapalle village in Duttalur mandal of Nellore district in Andhra Pradesh, where she works in her current employer Siva Reddy's lemon orchard. She assured her child that she would be there in two days with ₹42,000 of cash in hand. She promised that he would be home soon.

Before ending the call, Ankamma asked Venkatesh what he had eaten for lunch. Curd-rice, he said, an improvement over the previous day's meal of rice mixed with water.

That was the last time Ankamma spoke to him.

Buried by the river

A week later, clutching wads of cash, Ankamma travelled to Satyavedu, about 270 kilometres from her village. But Muthu refused the money.

"He used casteist slurs against me," she recalls. "He also told me that my son had run away with his phone and some cash." Dejected, Ankamma returned home.

When a month passed and there was still no word from Venkatesh, Reddy helped her file a First Information Report (FIR) at the Satyavedu police station on May 19.

The police began their investigation. On being questioned, Muthu told them that Venkatesh had died of jaundice on April 12 at a private hospital at Dudupalayam in Tiruvannamalai district of Tamil Nadu. He confessed that he had buried the boy near the Palar river.

The police found Venkatesh's decomposed body and informed Ankamma. "I knew it was him. He was wearing a vest and shorts. I knew it was my boy though he had become unrecognisable," says Ankamma, her cheeks wet with tears.

While the medical officer from the Chengalpattu Government Medical College declined to share the post-mortem report, the Puttur police quoted the report and said that the stated cause of death was "blunt force injury to the head by (a) heavy weapon". The injuries were "sufficient to cause death in ordinary course of nature".

At first, Muthu, his wife, and son were arrested under the provisions of the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976; the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986; the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2016; and the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989.

On May 24, Deputy Superintendent of Police G. Ravi Kumar, who probed the case, said Section 103 (1) (murder) under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, was also added to the FIR.

Bonded labour is a system where creditors force debtors to repay debts through labour. The Act prohibits any person from making advances

It was my fault that I accepted a loan of ₹10,000 from a creditor. At the time, we had no work, no food, and no access to drinking water. So, I took the money

KOTTAIAH
Former bonded labourer

under, or in pursuance of, the bonded labour system. It also prohibits compelling a person to render bonded or forced labour. However, the practice continues till date, say activists.

A debt that cost a son

Sitting on a flat rock outside Reddy's house on the outskirts of Thurakapalle village, Ankamma cries softly. Thurakapalle is 8 km from Duttalur town. A narrow muddy pavement leads to the village. The silence of the surroundings is broken by the crowing of roosters.

Reddy's house stands in the midst of a vast expanse of lemon orchards. Ankamma and her husband Prakash get paid ₹15,000 a month for taking care of Reddy's 12-acre orchard, tending to 10 buffaloes, and doing other odd jobs for him.

Ankamma and Prakash do not have a house. "This is home," she says, pointing to a small hut-like structure, perched precariously on four logs. The logs are covered on top by a tarpaulin sheet.

When Reddy is around, Prakash and Ankamma sit on the ground. "They are Reddulu (Reddys). They are 'big' people," Ankamma says with a reverential tone. She believes that what happened was all her fault. "We will not leave Siva Reddy until our last breath. We had left him to work for Muthu and that is why this happened to us. From now on, we will be loyal to him."

Two years ago, Ankamma and Prakash went to work for Muthu after Ankamma's mother told her that he may pay more. Taking an advance of ₹15,000 from Muthu, they began taking his ducks for grazing. Though he promised them a salary of ₹24,000 a month, Muthu did not give them anything more than the advance amount.

The couple slept in the fields under the sky. They often stayed awake at night, fearing snakes and scorpions. They moved from place to place every week, foraging for feed. They offered to repay the debt in instalments, but Muthu refused.

Ankamma has three children from her previous marriage — Chenchu Krishna (15), Ravi

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Lakshamma (12), and Venkatesh. When her first husband died last year, she and Prakash left for Guduru, near Tirupati district, for his final rites. When they did not return, an enraged Muthu went in search of them. He took Venkatesh away, saying the boy was 'collateral'.

"Everyone says we will get some cash (compensation)," says Ankamma. "But we will not demand anything except justice for my son."

The Central Sector Scheme for Rehabilitation of Bonded Labourer - 2021 states that immediate financial assistance of up to ₹30,000 is guaranteed to individuals rescued from bonded labour. Once the accused is convicted, the aid can go up to ₹3 lakh, depending on the severity of the case.

Ravi Kumar, the administrative officer at the Revenue Divisional Officer's (RDO) office in Sullurpeta, says the Tirupati administration is considering providing a housing site and compensation to the family. Satyavedu falls under the purview of the Sullurpeta RDO.

Activists say the administration should also issue a 'release certificate' to Ankamma's family. "Release certificates can be issued only to those in bonded labour. Technically, only the boy was a bonded labourer. Since he is dead, the family is not eligible for the certificate," Kumar explains.

'Poor, unlettered, and fearful'

'Poor, unlettered, and fearful' is both a source and a destination for bonded labour. "The problem is not as prevalent as it used to be, but many cases do not come to light these days. In addition to migrant labourers from Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, and Chhattisgarh, the most marginalised locals fall prey to the system," says Raavi Sunil Kumar, convenor of the Vetti Vimochana Coalition, a group of NGOs working on bonded labour issues. According to data compiled by the group, 402 people have been rescued from bonded labour in the State from January 2023 to date. Most of them, including Ankamma, belong to the Yanadi community.

A report from the National Commission for Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes, published in 2008, says the Yanadis are one of the 59 Denotified Tribes and 60 Nomadic Tribes of Andhra Pradesh. As per the 2011 Census, there were more than 5 lakh Yanadis in the composite State of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

Noorbasha Babavali, a research assistant at the Centre for Study of Social Inclusion at Andhra University in Visakhapatnam, says the Yanadis are extremely poor. Only 35.35% of them are literate. "They have been exploited as they don't know about the legal system. Their fear of society keeps them away from the mainstream. They don't own any assets and stay on the canal bunds and in hilly areas," Ankamma says she did not know that *vetti chakiri* (bonded labour) is illegal.

"Many Yanadis do not open up to strangers even if they are offered help," says Ch. Venkateswarlu, a Yanadi leader from Alluru, a village near Ongole in Prakasam district. "Unlike Ankamma,



In addition to migrant labourers from Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, and Chhattisgarh, the most marginalised locals fall prey to the system

RAAVI SUNIL KUMAR
Convenor of the Vetti Vimochana Coalition

others do not share their troubles. They fear being beaten up by their employers."

He recalls another incident in which two bonded labourers died of electrocution while working in a field in Palnadu district. "Though this happened a few months ago, the labourers' families still work as bonded labourers," he says.

Kotaiiah's escape

Katti Kotaiiah, 56, who also belongs to the Yanadi community, escaped the clutches of his employer at Chilakaluripeta town.

Kotaiiah lives in a Yanadi colony at Alluru, a village near the Korapattam beach in Prakasam district. About 400 Yanadis live in the colony. At least 10 members live in one hut.

Like Ankamma, Kotaiiah blames himself for what happened. "It was my fault that I accepted a loan of ₹10,000 from a creditor in Chilakaluripeta in Palnadu district. At the time, we had no work, no food, and no access to drinking water. So, I took the money," he says.

To repay that amount, his family of seven, including three children, had to work as bonded labourers for around 20 years. "We set out to work when my son's three children were toddlers. Now they are between 16 and 20," he says. By the time of their release last year, that debt of ₹1,500 had risen to ₹15 lakh. The family was sold more than thrice, and worked as bonded labourers under different employers, says Kotaiiah.

He says their job was to cut Subabul logs, used primarily in the pulp and paper industry. He and his wife cut two tonnes of logs every day. "In a week, if we cut 14 tonnes, we would get ₹1,500," he says. As per current rates, a worker is supposed to get around ₹500 for cutting one tonne.

"These jobs were always fine in the first five months. Then, our employers would not give us wages daily. They would give us just ₹1,000 a week. We had to work even when we fell sick. They restricted our movements," he says.

Kotaiiah says a policeman asked him to leave the employer during the pandemic. "But I told him that I owed my employer ₹2 lakh," he says. Kotaiiah sold his house, received as part of a government scheme, for ₹1 lakh to clear the debt.

It was only when Kotaiiah's friend died that he decided to leave. "We told our employer that we have to vote in the election (June 2024). He let us go. We never went back, despite warnings." This year, too, the employer created a ruckus in Alluru demanding that they all come back, he recalls. District officials of Prakasam intervened and gave the family protection and release certificates.

Venkateswarlu says that while the government hands out release certificates to survivors, the rehabilitation takes place so late in some cases that a few people, who find themselves without land and work after their release from bonded labour, go back to their old employers.

Today, Kotaiiah lives in a spacious hut with a sofa, cot, and cooler. He says civil society members got him these necessities. Kotaiiah sells fish for a living. "Some days, I get ₹200 and some days I make ₹400. Today I got only ₹100. But at least no one is torturing us," he says.

No action plan in place

Apart from duck-rearing units, bonded labour cases are reported from areas where Subabul is grown extensively," says Ramesh, who belongs to the Rural Organisation for Poverty Eradication Services, a registered NGO.

In duck-rearing units, children are mostly chosen as labourers. "One has to be agile and quick to stop the ducks from escaping. Duck farmers, mostly Yerukulas (another Scheduled Tribe community), hire Yanadis to work for them. The conditions are harsh, with no electricity and no proper food," says Ramesh.

In his report 'Bonded Labour in India: Its Incidence and Pattern', former Jawaharlal Nehru University professor Ravi S. Srivastava says that the Supreme Court directed all the States to collect information on the prevalence of bonded labour in India. The survey was held in 1996. No cases were identified in Andhra Pradesh. However, the government subsequently identified and released 37,988 bonded labourers till 2004.

"Since then, no systematic survey has been carried out. Bonded labour persists both in the agricultural and non-agricultural sector, although vestiges of hereditary bondage only exist in traditional sectors," he says.

Of the 402 people who have been rescued in the past two years by the Vetti Vimochana Coalition, members say FIRs have been booked only in seven cases. "There is no Standard Operating Procedure or State action plan for the identification, rescue and rehabilitation of bonded labourers in Andhra Pradesh. On the other hand, States such as Tamil Nadu and Delhi have a robust system in place," explains Kumar.

While the Bonded Labour Act provides for punishment for up to three years, there is no data on how many people have been punished. The law mandates a district-level vigilance and monitoring committee to be in place. "This was formed in Prakasam only last year," Kumar says. Officials of the Revenue, Tribal Welfare, Social Welfare, and Labour Departments say they are not sure which of them is responsible for enforcing the Act.

"It is important to identify bonded labour as an organised crime," says Venkateswarlu. "The government should have a nodal department to deal with pre- and post-rescue operations. It should also have a toll-free number for people in distress. If there had been one, Ankamma would not have lost her son."

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Katti Kotaiiah, 56, who also belongs to the Yanadi community, escaped the clutches of his employer at Chilakaluripeta town. Kotaiiah and his wife Katti Gangamma (in the centre), depend on fishing for their livelihood these days. G.N. Rao





Stone crushers drive nilgai into fields, damaging crops

- Stone-crusher operations and mining activities have disturbed the nilgai habitat in Palamu district of Jharkhand.
- This has led to the nilgai venturing into agricultural fields for food and water and damaging crops which in turn leads to farmer distress and a growing cycle of debt and migration in affected villages.
- Weak enforcement of mining regulations, insufficient buffer zones, and under resourced forest guards have allowed legal and ill legal crushers to worsen habitat degradation and escalate wildlife incursions.

Sirajooden Ansari, a sixty-five-year-old farmer, has watched season after season of hard labour go to waste. "First, I cultivated paddy, but it was completely ruined. Then I planted maize. Again, it was completely destroyed. And when the rabi season arrived, and I sowed wheat, not a single grain was spared by the nilgai," says the farmer from Murumdag village in Chhatrapur block, Palamu district of Jharkhand.

Ansari is not alone. In this arid patch of Palamu, where water is scarce and the soil unforgiving — farmers wage a nightly vigil over their fields. For two and a half months, they lie awake, patrolling the wheat under the moonlight, yet any momentary lapse, "even the blink of an eye," as one farmer puts it, is enough to miss the speedy descent of the nilgai (*Boselaphus tragosimus*) that strips the crop bare. Protected under Schedule III of the Wildlife Protection Act 1972, these animals move with impunity.

Mahfooz Alam, another resident of Murumdag, describes their makeshift defence mechanisms, "I would take four dogs into the fields and tie them at the foot of my charpoy (rope cot) so that if any nilgai comes, the dogs would bark, and it would wake me." Despite such precautions, Alam lost his entire harvest this year to destruction by the nilgai, sustaining a loss of - 1 lakh.

Just ten years ago, such devastation was unheard of. "Back then, the land yielded so much lentil that after saving enough for our own needs, we used to sell five quintals," Alam recalls. "There were no nilgai to worry about; we simply planted and harvested."

The turning point came with the onset of stone-crusher mining in the area, the village residents complain. As heavy machinery tore through the earth, it disrupted the animals' natural habitat and drove them onto farmland.

For farmers like Ansari and Alam, the toll is more than financial; it is a loss of security and dignity. "How long can we guard our fields?" asks Alam. "If I stay awake all night, I must sleep during the day — and then the nilgai strikes," referring to the extent of the problem where they are now concerned about nilgai attacking their fields at all times of the day.

Both the farmers have borrowed money from relatives to meet their farming expenses, and they are now trapped in a cycle of debt. With their farms being run over by the nilgai, they have lost any hope of repayment. With mounting debts and diminishing yields, the farmers face an uncertain future. "Forget about the next generation; from this year, I will not do farming," says Alam in anger.

Alam and Ansari are among the last handful of farmers in their village who are still farming. "The rest have either left farming and migrated to work as labourers or are doing some other work," explains Ansari.

But these individual losses are part of a much larger trend. According to the latest data obtained by Mongabay India from Jharkhand's District Forest Department, since 2000, when the state of Jharkhand was formed, Palamu district has recorded 4,787 human-animal conflict incidents, with - 38.9 million paid in compensation so far. Of these, 586 were crop damage cases — destroying over 300 hectares of farmland — while 23 involved livestock losses and 54 were incidents of house damage. So far, these conflicts have claimed 10 lives and injured 22 people.

In case of death due to a nilgai attack, there is a provision for compensation of - 400,000. For crop damage, compensation ranges from - 10,833 per hectare to a maximum of - 21,666. However, neither Alam nor Ansari was aware of this compensation.

Stone mining fuelling conflict

There are several reasons for the increasing human-



animal conflict: population growth, infrastructure development, and mining activities," says Satyam Kumar, Divisional Forest Officer (DFO), Medinipur, the administrative headquarters of Palamu district.

"Population growth and infrastructure development are purely push factors, but mining acts as both a push and a pull factor," he adds. He means that mining not only destroys ecosystems and pushes wildlife out but also draws human settlements and activities deeper into forest areas, increasing the likelihood of conflict.

The Medinipur Forest Division, which covers all seven forest ranges of Palamu district — Chhatrapur, Chhatrapur East, Chhatrapur West, Kundri, Manatu, Mohammad Ganj and Patan — spans over 154,000 hectares. "We have a large, notified forest area, but the quality, density and canopy cover of the forest land itself are not very good," says Kumar.

Of the seven forest ranges in Palamu, only Manatu and Kundri still have healthy tree cover. "In those two ranges, human-animal conflict is very low," Kumar explains. "But in the other ranges, there are so many stone crushers." Where crushers and mines break up the forest, wildlife moves closer to villages, looking for water and grazing land.

"For tree regeneration, you need water and good soil. You do not want pollution." When dust from mines settles on leaves and soil, young shoots cannot grow. The hard, polluted ground cannot hold water, and seeds fail to sprout.

The mining industry brings more than dust. "Habitat fragmentation is taking place," says Kumar. "The water table is dropping, so forest productivity is going down. Natural ponds and streams are drying up. Even the nilgai cannot find water." With fewer rainy days and polluted soils, forests lose their natural balance. Plants die, animals wander into farmland, and conflict rises.

Early findings link illegal mining to biodiversity decline

To assess the impact of mining and crusher operations on local biodiversity, the Medinipur Forest Division has launched a pilot study at the beginning of 2025 at sites with the highest concentration of extractive activity — Itakdag, Murumdag, Bachkoma, Chharai, and others in Palamu dis-

trict. Under the chairmanship of the DFO, a dedicated team — guided in part by Indian Forest Service (IFS) probationer Navaneeth B.R. — is conducting a preliminary evaluation using Forest Survey of India reports, recent satellite imagery, and on-the-ground observations.

"The initial findings reveal that mining and crusher operations have had clear negative effects on flora, fauna, and water bodies — damage that is already exacerbating human-wildlife conflict in the region," says Navaneeth B.R.

As part of this preliminary investigation, a comparative study is being carried out between villages located in mining zones and those outside them. Initial observations indicate that areas with rampant illegal mining have experienced greater biodiversity loss, reduced water bodies, and increased human-animal conflict. In contrast, villages without illegal mining have shown improvements in biodiversity, an increase in water bodies, and a decline in human-animal conflict.

Mongabay India also visited three villages where the study is being conducted, Murumdag, Chharai, and Bachkoma and documented the same patterns of habitat degradation and biodiversity loss.

As one crossed the rural roads of Chhatrapur block, clouds of dust, the distant roar of crushers, and convoys of laden lorries made it impossible to ignore the scale of disturbance to both wildlife and local communities.

Current mining laws aren't strict enough

Kumar says current mining laws aren't strict enough. Companies only need to stay 250 metres from the forest edge — too small a distance since dust still drifts in and stops young trees from growing. He argues the buffer should be at least one kilometre.

The law also calls for a green belt around each mine and sprinklers to control dust. In Palamu, though, most mines and crushers ignore these rules: they remove green belts, skip dust systems, and over-pump groundwater, says Satyam Kumar. Without strong oversight, forests bear the full brunt of mining.

"And with only a 250-metre buffer, the forest remains under constant pressure from illegal mining," he adds. The

impact is visible. According to Forest Survey of India (FSI) data, between 2011 and 2021, Palamu's water bodies shrank from 6,929.21 ha to 4,985.54 ha — a decline of 1,943.67 ha (about 28.1%). Over the same decade, very dense forest cover fell from 5,369.35 ha to 5,149.01 ha, a loss of 220.34 ha (about 4.1%).

When asked about the decline in very dense forests, Harsha Kumar — a GIS expert with the Palamu Forest Division — points to deeper structural issues. "It's not just about dense forest — there's hardly any regeneration happening," he says. "Let's say in 2011, there was open forest, and plantation work was underway. The division covers 1,688 sq km, but how much can we realistically plant? Even if we manage one sq km per year, in ten years, that's only 10 sq km added through plantations. Meanwhile, mining can destroy 25 sq km in the same period. So even if we gain ten square km through planting, we lose far more to mining."

Forest guards are also ill-equipped to deal with illegal mining. "Each forest guard is responsible for nearly 30 sq km of forest territory, but it isn't one contiguous block — 2 sq km here, 4 sq km there, 8 sq km elsewhere... that's how fragmented it is," says Kumar.

Most guards are unarmed and poorly equipped, leaving them vulnerable to periodic attacks by the mining mafia. In one recent incident, five forest guards were brutally beaten, according to the FIR registered at the Chhatrapur Block Police Station on March 23, 2025.

When contacted, forest guard Ashutosh Tiwari explained, "All of us live in fear of the mafia — none of our attackers have been arrested. We have no weapons, so when we're beaten, there's no justice."

Palamu currently has over 300 legally registered stone-crusher units, according to the Jharkhand Department of Mines and Geology.

But those official numbers may only be the tip of the iceberg. Village residents and Satyam Kumar both estimate that unlicensed — or outright illegal — crushing units could outnumber the legal ones by a wide margin.

"All night, you can hear tractors roaring from the forest edge, blasting loud music and crushing stones," says Kanhai Prasad of Chharai village. He shows the damage, and even his mesh netting can't stop. "Ours was once a prosperous village, but not anymore." He has set up a mesh net around a plot near his house to protect the vegetables he is already growing from nilgai.

The 64-year-old farmer owns six acres of land, but it isn't all in one place. As the nilgai invasion intensified in his village, his cultivated area kept shrinking. Now, he can only farm the three bighas (about 2.2 acres) right next to his home. "How can I possibly guard all of it by myself?" he says in frustration.

A way forward

To combat man-animal conflict, we're zoning the entire Medinipur Forest Division into three distinct areas. First, zones that are comparatively richer in biodiversity and already have water sources will be developed further to create even better habitats," says Kumar.

Second, in the scrub and open-forest zones, we will carry out massive plantations of native species under the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) and Green Credit Scheme, alongside grading operations and the creation of new water bodies.

Third, for the completely rocky areas, we will consult expert institutions — such as the Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE) and the Institute of Forest Productivity in Ranchi, as well as other specialised bodies — to advise us on the best grading techniques.

"Even if the government gives us nothing more," Ansari sighed, "just enough mesh fencing per acre — and we'd stand a chance."

SC diktat will have little bearing on other courts

FIRST the spine-chilling facts about the state-of-affairs in India vis-a-vis the judicial delivery system. A startling reality is that presently there are over five crore cases pending disposal across all courts in the country. Even more bizarre is that many have been 'pending' for decades together. It is mindboggling to think that the bail applications pending in High Courts are approximately between 1.25 and 1.3 lakh, which is a substantial increase considering that it hovered around 60,000 to 65,000 cases before 2020. There has been a considerable increase in the bail appeals filed annually, which stands around 4.3 lakh today as against the above 3.4 lakh a few years back. Given this precarious situation, many take potshots at

the 'lethargic' legal delivery system in the country, which, many opine, remains the bane. This applies to all types of bail, including regular, anticipatory, default and interim bail. Let one forgets, the Supreme Court has established clear guidelines for the expeditious disposal of bail applications, recognising the importance of personal liberty under Article 21 of the Constitution. As per its ruling, regular bail applications should be resolved within two weeks, and anticipatory bail applications within six weeks, unless situations dictate otherwise.

However, despite such constitutional mandates and rulings by the apex court, there has been no relief for the people given that 'speedy disposal' seems like a term that

is yet to see the light of the day, as regards Indian courts, where delays are becoming increasingly common. Of course, the legal fraternity has its own points of view. While on the one side there has been a steady increase in bail appeals across High Courts with each passing year, a dearth of judges and other judicial staff, on the other hand, are unable to handle the overload of pending cases as regards hearing and disposing of cases. In some instances, the pending bail applications are leading to prolonged detention of the applicants, which reflects poorly on the system. The general presumption is that such inordinate delays in disposing bail applications could eventually lead to a situation whereupon fairness and

efficiency could take a backseat. This being the situation on the ground, one wonders if the Supreme Court's latest 'diktat' will have any bearing on the functioning of other courts. This is not the first time that High Courts have been given guidelines as regards handling bail applications. The earlier such 'firm' directions by the apex court have had little to zero impact as the figure of pending bail applications keeps mounting. Against this backdrop, one wonders the effect of the Supreme Court's reiteration that bail matters should not be delayed even by a day. "We have time and again emphasised the importance of the liberty of citizens. There should not be a single day's delay in deciding liberty of citizens in bail matters,"

said a bench of Chief Justice of India Bhushan R. Gavai and Justice AG Masih, while hearing the bail plea of one Vedpal Singh Tanwar in a money laundering case. In the Srikanth Upadhyay v State of Bihar (2024) case, Justice Ravikumar, heading a Division Bench, ruled that while bail is the general principle in criminal cases, this does not extend to anticipatory bail, which needs an exceptional power. It was likewise regarding the Satendra Kumar Antil v. CBI (2022) case.

Although all courts have been asked to follow the Supreme Court directions and expeditiously dispose of bail applications, the common man, caught in the 'justice delayed is justice denied' syndrome, remains doubtful.

LETTERS

A 'World No Tobacco Day' resolve

MAY 31 is observed as World No Tobacco Day by the World Health Organization every year. The theme for 2025 is 'Burning products, exposing bad intentions', which primarily aims to make people aware of the harmful impacts of tobacco consumption and its various other products on our health, including increasing the risk of cancer, respiratory diseases and heart-related illnesses. According to a survey, 42 per cent of men and 14 per cent of women in India consume tobacco. Products like bids or plain tobacco are so inexpensive that the poor and labour class easily fall into the vicious trap of addiction. India has the highest number of cancer patients among men. While, globally, lung cancer is the most common cancer among men, in our country, oral cancer, also caused by tobacco consumption, takes a heavier toll among men due. We must take immediate steps—especially through various community groups, NGOs, and government initiatives—to reduce tobacco consumption. Only then can we save our country's poor and youth from this grave threat.

Dr. Jitesh Muthi, Gujarat

Two women from Indian Navy create history

TWO women from the Indian Navy's sailing team aboard INSV Tarini returned after completing their mission, Navika Sagar Parikrama II. Commander Dilna K and Lt Commander Roopa A created history by becoming the first Indian women to circumnavigate the globe in a sailing vessel in double-handed mode—relying solely on each other, sails, and wind power. They also created several other records—their yacht Tarini becoming the first Indian sailing vessel to cross Point Nemo, the oceanic pole of inaccessibility; the crew also crossed the Roaring Forties, Prime Meridian, and the Cape of Good Hope, enduring some of the toughest sailing conditions on Earth. They have demonstrated that Indian women are ready to take up any ventures and prove their mettle. Indian women are gradually moving from a conservative nutshell into a progressive and liberal one, which augurs well for a fast-changing society. By defying all accompanying odds, Commander Dilna and Lt Commander Roopa have become role-models for the younger generation, especially our girls.

M Pradyum, Kannur

Kudos to first NDA women batch

THE first batch of women from the NDA has proven that they are second to none. Their achievements inspire countless others, embodying resilience and dedication. They've made our nation proud, ensuring that the tricolour continues to soar high. Hope more girls take up this wonderful career in the future.

TS Karthik, Kilpauk, Chennai-10

RBI surplus: What's there for the people?

THE RBI's record surplus transfer of ₹2.11 lakh crore to the government has made the headlines—but will it reach household kitchens is the million-dollar question. In times of high inflation, job insecurity, and falling savings, numbers alone don't inspire hope. Unless this fiscal windfall is directed towards public welfare, employment generation, and economic revival, it's just ink on a ledger. Real growth isn't measured in reserves but in relief. Before the government puts itself on the back, it must answer: how does this gain benefit the struggling citizen? After all, surplus without support is a hollow celebration.

Hassam, MMERC, Mumbai

50% of IPL earning should go to defence fund

WE suggest that 50 per cent of the IPL earnings should go to the Union Government, or PMO's 'Border-defence expenditure Fund'. This money should exclusively be used to e-monitor the border like installing CCTV cameras, drones, satellites, fencing walls wherever feasible around Pakistan and Bangladesh and to cover other military-related expenses.

However, the priority should be 'peace talks' with Pakistan and put an end to all terrorist camps in Pakistan.

In addition, every citizen of India (143 crore population) should pay at least one rupee to the defence fund. The revenue so generated can go a long way in becoming self-reliant.

Sreelekha PS, Boudhnagar, Secunderabad-61

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BENGALURU ONLINE

Bengaluru among global tech powerhouses, says CBRE report

BENGALURU: Bengaluru, long celebrated as India's IT capital, has now earned a place among the world's top 12 technology powerhouses, according to a report by global real estate consulting firm CBRE. The report, titled Global Tech Talent Guidebook 2025, reveals that the city has surpassed 1 million tech professionals—making it one of the largest tech talent hubs in the Asia-Pacific region, alongside Beijing and Shanghai. The report evaluates 115 global markets based on the availability, quality, and cost of tech talent. These markets are categorized into three groups: Powerhouses (12 major hubs with deep and competitive talent pools), Established (63 mature markets with steady pipelines), and Emerging (40 growth-focused markets with development potential). Bengaluru has been ranked among the elite 'Powerhouse' category, joining the likes of Beijing, Boston, London, New York, Mexico, Paris, San Francisco Bay Area, Seattle, Shanghai, Singapore, Tokyo, and Toronto.

CBRE highlights Bengaluru's vast and growing tech workforce as a key factor for its global recognition. With over 1 million tech professionals, the city has become a leading destination for innovation, digital transformation, and artificial intelligence.

"Bengaluru's emergence as a global tech superpower reflects India's strategic depth in digital innovation, AI readiness, and talent capability," said Anshuman Magazine, Chairman and CEO of CBRE for India, Southeast Asia, West Asia, and Africa.

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

We can prevent many people with disability dying from cancer



Clinics need to be physically accessible, information needs to be available in a range of accessible formats, and extra time needs to be allocated to get genuine informed consent ensuring people with disability have a voice - cancer care needs to be tailored to an individual person, as - everyone's needs are different.

YIVYANG, GEORGE DISNEY AND KIRSTEN DEANE

PEOPLE with disability are missing out on screening programmes that could help detect cancer early, and after diagnosis, are less likely to survive, our study shows. Overall, this means people with disability are more likely to die from cancer than people without disability. We draw together evidence showing the striking inequity at the heart of current approaches to controlling cancer. But there are ways to improve access to the types of screening programmes and cancer services many people with disability use routinely. What we did and what we found: We reviewed evidence from 73 studies from around the world. These studies compared cancer outcomes in people with disability to those without.

Let's start with cancer screening, one way to prevent deaths from cancer. Screening picks up early signs of cancer or can prevent it from developing into a problem if found early enough. Early detection usually means more treatment options and higher chances of a good outcome. However, our review found people with disabilities are missing out on these life-saving screening programmes all around the world, including for breast, cervical and bowel cancer.

In fact, some studies in our review showed these cancers are more likely to be diagnosed at an advanced stage in people with disability. Once diagnosed, people with disabilities are still at a disadvantage.

We found lower survival rates than cancer patients without disability. This could be because of delayed diagnosis and inaccessible treatment, and we need further research to be sure. But we do have relevant evidence from some studies. A UK study of cancer deaths in people with intellectual disability found more than a third had their cancer diagnosed after going to the emergency department. Almost half of the cancers in the study were already at an advanced stage when diagnosed. Another review of global evidence found cancer patients with disabilities receive poorer quality cancer care. This included delays in treatment, being undertreated or having excessively invasive treat-

ment. People with disability also had less access to in-hospital services and pain medication.

From diagnosis to treatment, global evidence shows people with disability are being excluded from health services that many people without disability routinely access and benefit from. The situation is no different in Australia and it is costing lives. In previous work, we found cancer is a leading cause of earlier deaths among Australians with disability. It's the cause of about 20 per cent of the extra deaths we see in people with disability compared to people without.

Why is this happening?

We clearly need to do more to improve health care for people with disability. But we also need to act in other areas to address underlying issues. People with disability are more likely to be poor and live in disadvantaged circumstances than the rest of the Australian population, which may put them at higher risk of cancer. Many factors that cause cancer—for example, smoking, unaffordable healthy food, and drinking high levels of alcohol—disproportionately impact disadvantaged groups, including people with disability. Many people with disabilities are missing out on these life-saving screening programmes all around the world, including for breast, cervical and bowel cancer.

Buildings where services are provided and medical diagnostic equipment is located are not always accessible for people with disability. The health system itself can be inaccessible, with little support to help people with disability access services. For instance, navigating cancer care can be overwhelming, especially for people who need support for daily activities, transport, or communication. People with disability, especially with intellectual disability, need extra time and support to give informed consent to screening, treatment or procedures—resources and time particularly overstretched in public health systems. People with disability can also experience both direct and indirect discrimination in health care, which lead to poorer outcomes.

(The writers are from the University of Melbourne)

Congress in tatters, India in the ascendant: The story Modi wrote



Vadnagar to Global Vanguard: Modi's saga of boldness

guished diplomat but to India's collective pride.

Their outbursts aren't mere gaffes; they're a declaration of their frustration at being outclassed and outmanoeuvred by a leader with the spine to act decisively.

Congress, once the custodian of national aspiration, has now become the chief opponent for anti-national rhetoric. Leaders like Shashi Tharoor, who dare to articulate a vision of unapologetic nationalism, are derided as "super BJP spokespersons." It's saying that Congress punishes its own for standing with the nation while fawning over dynastic mediocrity. Their contempt for nationalism is matched only by their disdain for the armed forces and India's democratic institutions.

When Modi honours soldiers or praises national resilience, Congress dismisses it as "jungle." When Modi projects India's strength, Congress resorts to petty mockery, hiding behind the martyrdom of Indira and Rajiv Gandhi as though no other Indian has made sacrifices for the nation.

And then there's Mamata Banerjee, West Bengal's Chief Minister declared there was "no war"—merely a "small incident"—and had the temerity to object to the name Operation Sindoor. Perhaps she should direct her questions to the countless women who lost their husbands, their protectors—during this operation. Her dismissive remarks were a disgraceful affront to all those women who lost their Sindoor. It is a calculated insult that the nation will neither forget nor forgive.

Against this nauseating backdrop of an opposition mired in cynicism and self-loathing, the contrast with Modi's leadership could not be starker. When he assumed office, India was staggered under the weight of policy paralysis, corruption scandals, and a crisis of confidence sown by the UPAs' muddled coalition politics. Modi's promise of "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas" electrified a nation exhausted by incompetence.

Contrast Congress' feeling of isolation and desperation with Modi's unapologetic, assertive leadership. His policies—though polarising at times—have undeniably transformed India into the world's fourth-largest economy. Under his stewardship, the BJP has shattered electoral ceilings, expanding from the Hindi heartland into regions long dominated by opposition parties.

The "Modi wave" is not just a slogan—it's a tectonic shift in the country's political geography.

His ambitious development agenda—Make in India, Digital India, Swachh Bharat, Ujjwala Yojana—has brought tangible benefits to millions. Infrastructure projects, renewable energy expansion, high-speed rail,



The Congress party's hollow rhetoric and its political irrelevance in today's India has been exposed. It brings out their petty attempts to belittle India's military achievements and undermine national institutions with Narendra Modi's bold, unapologetic leadership over the past 11 years. From Operation Sindoor's daring success to sweeping developmental reforms and a reassertion of India's sovereignty, the piece highlights a nation transformed by decisive governance. As the opposition clings to obsolete slogans and self-inflicted irrelevance, India surges forward—confident, assertive, and determined to define its future on its own terms. This sharp, incisive analysis cuts through the noise to reveal the stark contrast between empty rhetoric and transformative action.

and digital connectivity have reinforced the image of a government that delivers. Welfare schemes like PM-Kisan and Ayushman Bharat ensure that even the most marginalised are not left behind.

Moreover, Modi's strategic mastery over communication—through social media, symbolic gestures, and "Mann Ki Baat"—allows him to bypass the opposition's clumsy narratives and connect directly with the masses.

His decisive handling of national security—from surgical strikes to Balakot to Operation Sindoor—underscores his credentials as a leader who prioritises national interests over political correctness. The revocation of Article 370 wasn't just a political statement; it was a tectonic assertion of India's sovereignty.

On the global stage, Modi has redefined Indian presence. His government has deepened ties with powers like the US, Japan, Israel, and Australia, while engaging regional forums like the Quad and BRICS. The G20 summit hosted by India in 2023 was a crowning moment, projecting India as a confident, culturally rooted, and globally engaged power.

His emphasis on civilisational pride—through initiatives like International Yoga Day and cultural diplomacy—has sent a clear message: India will not be lectured by the West.

Operation Sindoor was not just a military manoeuvre; it was a testament to Modi's decisive leadership. While opposition leaders wallowed in distractions, Operation Sindoor delivered a blow not only to enemy infrastructure but to the defeatist narratives of the naysayers. It was

a surgical assertion of sovereignty and a master class in statecraft.

Of course, Modi's tenure has not been without controversy—concerns over rising majoritarianism, demonetisation, GST, perceived suppression of dissent, and the use of investigative agencies against opponents have been raised. The abrogation of Article 370, the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), and handling of protests drew sharp criticism. But despite this, the electorate continues to repose faith in his leadership. The BJP's resounding victory in 2019, with an even bigger mandate than in 2014, underscored this trust in him.

In just eleven years, Narendra Modi has scaled political heights that few dared to imagine. And as Congress flounders in confusion, clinging to stale slogans and dynastic entitlement, Modi's leadership continues to command the confidence of a nation that knows the difference between empty rhetoric and decisive action.

The question isn't whether the opposition can recover from its current irrelevance. The real question is whether they can even comprehend the scale of their self-inflicted demise. As Rahul, Mamata, and their hapless cabal continue to sneer at national achievements, Modi marches forward—undaunted, unapologetic, and unchallenged. While they drown in slogans and scorn, he builds a new India: confident, assertive, and unfraid to confront its adversaries. History, after all, remembers not the winners and the weak, but the bold who dared—and delivered.

(The author is former Chief Editor of The Hans India)

19 BIG PICTURE



The Talented Mr Ridley

As it has always been for turtles, for the Olive Ridleys, a vulnerable sea species, life's a race – for survival. NAYONIKA BOSE visits the coastal belt of Ratnagiri to witness a unique conservation project, where an army of workers protect the turtles from natural predators and prying humans

Photographs: SANKHADEEP BANERJEE

AS THE sun sets, the quiet nights along Guhagar beach in Maharashtra's Ratnagiri district are interrupted by the crash of waves and the chirp of cicadas. On one such night in December last year, Akash Jangali and Vikrant Sangle, on a patrol along the Bazaar Peth belt of the beach, came across a noisy huddle of animals. A flash of red light – considered 'turtle-safe' – a wave of lathis and a jog down the shoreline confirmed their worst fears: a pack of dogs and golden jackals were burrowing their way into the sand to reach a nest of eggs recently laid by an Olive Ridley turtle. Shooting the predators away, the two men re-located nearly 80 eggs from the nest to a nearby hatchery.

A month later, on January 22 this year, another patrol team on the same stretch came across a female Olive Ridley nesting on the beach. The turtle had glistering metal tags, one on each of its front flippers, bearing the number '03233'.

The turtle's discovery brought to the fore many revelations. In what became perhaps the first documented instance of a turtle travelling nearly 4,500 km from India's east coast to its west, Turtle 03233 – an inspection of her flipper tag revealed – had set off from the Odisha coastline in 2021, where it had been tagged by a team of Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) researchers.

Turtle 03233's migratory feat brings into focus the conservation efforts on India's west coast – until now, a lesser known habitat of the Olive Ridleys.

It's the eastern coast, particularly Odisha, that's considered the home of the Olive Ridleys. Here, every year, between January and March, the shores are witness to an incredible sight – thousands of Olive Ridleys come together to lay eggs in what's known as *arribada* (Spanish for 'arrival'), a mass, synchronised nesting event that the species engages in. This year, a record seven lakh Olive Ridley turtles laid eggs at the Rushikulya rookery, one of the nesting grounds in Ganjam, Odisha.

Yet, in India and elsewhere, the Olive Ridleys – despite being the most common sea turtle species in the world – have steadily dwindled owing to poaching and commercial fishing activities such as trawling, among other factors. The turtles have been listed as 'vulnerable' – facing a high risk of extinction – in the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) Red List of Threatened Species. In India, they are protected under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972. According to expert estimates, for every 1,000 hatchlings, only one Olive Ridley turtle reaches adulthood.

Which is why, the recent discovery of Turtle 03233 on Maharashtra's Ratnagiri coast was a cause for cheer among the state's conservationists and the Kasav Mitra Mandal, a 146-member cohort of 'beach managers' deployed by the Maharashtra forest department for a monthly remuneration to provide a safe nesting habitat for Olive Ridleys across three districts in the state.

According to the preliminary findings of a study by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and the state forest department, Maharashtra, which has the highest number of solitary nesting sites along the west coast, accounts for nearly 20% of the country's Olive Ridley nests. The study is slated to be submitted to the Union Environment Ministry in June this year.

"While the Olive Ridley numbers are much higher on the eastern coast owing to the geographical advantages, conservation efforts cannot be neglected on the west coast," says Kanchan Pawar, Deputy Forest Officer of the Maharashtra forest department's Mangrove cell, South Konkan, which is leading the conservation efforts. "Sea turtles are the most important species in ma-



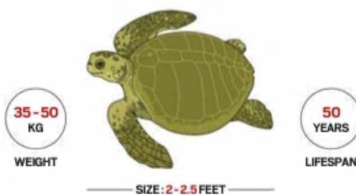
Dilip, one of the beach managers at Guhagar beach in Maharashtra's Ratnagiri district, with a tub full of Olive Ridley hatchlings that he will release into the sea; at the hatchery to where the eggs are moved, the volunteers put a label on each nest with details of the number of eggs, date of nesting etc

Join FREE WhatsApp Channel <https://whatsapp.com/channel/0029Van2V8b6RGJOKH6Bd0F>



KNOW THE OLIVE RIDLEY

They are smallest and most abundant of all sea turtle species. Other sea turtles in India include Green sea turtles, Hawksbill, Leatherback turtles, Loggerhead turtles



■ **Food:** They feed on shrimp, snails, crabs, jellyfish, other varieties of fish and their eggs.

■ **HABITAT IN INDIA**
Traditionally, Olive Ridley turtles are found in large numbers on the eastern coast of India. The highest number of mass nesting happens in Odisha, while highest solitary nesting is observed in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh.

■ **PROTECTION STATUS**
■ Categorized as 'Vulnerable' in the IUCN Red List, studies show that Olive Ridleys have experienced a 30-50

percent decline worldwide. ■ **Rate of survival is very low:** For over 1,000 hatchlings that enter the sea waters, only one survives to adulthood.

■ **The Ridleys are protected under Schedule 1 of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act,** which means they are accorded the highest level of protection with hunting and trade of the species strictly prohibited.

■ **Threats:** Fishing; exploitation of nesting beaches; illegal poaching for meat, eggs, shells, leather etc.

Source: Maharashtra Forest Department
Join FREE Telegram Channel <https://t.me/s/jUYK0A0AFBBAwMGQ1>
line and along a slope. After it finds a safe spot for its eggs, the turtle burrows the sand with its flippers and builds a pot-like nest. Over the next two hours, it lays anywhere between 80-150 eggs inside this nest, after which it uses its flippers to hastily cover the eggs and then wades back into the waters. Left behind, these eggs must overcome a host of obstacles – predators, high tide and prying beach goers – over the course of 45-50 days before they hatch naturally.

Videos that surfaced on social media in March this year showed how attempts by female Olive Ridley turtles to nest along the Juhu beach in Mumbai were thwarted at least twice in two weeks. These videos showed visitors flashing their camera lights at the turtles and poking their shells.

As he releases the newest batch of hatchlings on April 26, a visibly emotional Dilip says, "We look after them as if they are our babies. If we lose some pillu (hatchlings) during the hatching period, we get emotional."



Vikrant Sangle, who was roped in as beach manager in 2022, agrees. "Back when I first took up this work, I had no idea that such turtles would come and nest along our beaches. *Pan hallu hallu avad nirman zhala* (Slowly, slowly, my interest developed)," he says.

"With each passing year, I have seen the number of nests and turtles grow. I believe that in some years we will even see mass nesting in our village, just like in Odisha," he says.

Upadhye, who is from Velas village in Raigad district, says the conservation effort wouldn't have been possible without help from villagers. "At times, we receive calls from residents alerting us about a possible nesting. They also prevent tourists from entering the hatcheries or disturbing the process of release," he says.

Friends of turtles

But not too long ago, these coastlines weren't the safest of spaces for the turtles. Fisherfolk in the Konkani worship turtles as an avatar of Lord Vishnu – if a turtle gets entangled in their nets, they perform a *pooja* seeking forgiveness, offer coconuts and apply *kumkum* (vermillion) on its shell before releasing it back in the sea. Yet, until some years ago, the local community was unaware that the beaches in their backyard served as a nesting site for these sea creatures.

Seventy-year-old Sanjay Shankar Bhosale, who was roped in as a Kasav mitra in 2022 given his 'knowledge of the coasts', says, "I was born in Guhagar and have lived here all my life. Yet, I never knew that our beaches were frequented by these turtles."

Upadhye, who has been working to conserve turtles for the past 21 years, says, "Until two decades ago, in several villages here, people would eat turtle eggs. Not just that, female turtles were poached and turtle meat was sold in the market."

He says "true" change came only in 2002, when NGO Sahyadri Nisarg Mitra started awareness programmes along the coast. "In the survey, the NGO discovered that many villagers had no clue that the eggs on the

beaches were of turtles," he says.

The NGO, he says, started awareness drives to clear misconceptions and would often call on villagers to witness the hatching process. Slowly but surely, things started to change. "In some villages of Sindhudurg district now, villagers say that since the female turtle has returned to her *maika* (maternal house) to give birth, they should look after her babies," says Upadhye, who joined hands with the NGO in 2003.

By 2006, the Maharashtra government stepped in, with the forest department's Mangrove cell, in association with local NGOs such as Sahyadri Nisarg Mitra, launching its Kasav Mitra or 'Friends of Turtles' programme.

The conservation programme roped in villagers for a monthly pay of Rs 13,000 as beach managers across 64 coastal towns in Maharashtra's Ratnagiri, Raigad and Sindhudurg districts.

Shardul Todankar, 22, a second-generation beach manager, says his knowledge of turtle nesting came from his father Alhad Eknath Todankar, among the first beach managers in these parts. "He has looked after turtles and their nests since 2013. At 3 am every night, he would patrol the beach. Though he usually covered the entire beach all by himself, I would join him at times. That is how I learnt about turtles and grew fond of them," says Shardul, a BCom student, who decided to do the job after his father passed away in 2021.

It's 'nasha' (addiction), says Abhinay Kelaskar, 36, a resident of Anjarle beach town and a Mangrove cell researcher, about his fascination for turtles. "Usually, I wake up around 7 am. During the nesting season, I automatically wake up at 4 am and head towards the sea. The excitement I feel is inexplicable. In fact, at times, I even dream of turtles," he says.

The project has begun to show results. Over the past two years, the number of eggs laid by nesting Olive Ridleys across Maharashtra has seen a 75% spike – from 1.57 lakh eggs in 2022-2023 to 2.77 lakh in 2024-2025. So have the number of hatchlings – 1.25 lakh hatchlings released so far this season, against 84,251 hatchlings in 2022-2023.

In fact, Olive Ridleys have also made a comeback at Kihim beach in Alibaug, a popular beach town 100 km south of Mumbai, for the first time in 40 years. Around 70 hatchlings were released into the sea at Alibaug on April 26 this year.

The project has also provided a new source of livelihood for the villagers – in these coastal towns of Konkani, fishing and cash crops such as mangoes are the primary sources of income.

For the tourists who frequent these beaches, the turtles are an added attraction. Since 2006, Velas and Anjarle towns in Ratnagiri district have been celebrating Olive Ridley festivals.

A long race

Despite the positive trends, scientists, including Dr Suresh Kumar, senior scientist at the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun, who has studied the movements and migration of Olive Ridley turtles as part of his doctoral research, say it's a long road ahead for the vulnerable species.

"While it is essential to highlight the growing number of nesting sites, I would be hesitant to say that the population of Olive Ridley turtles is also growing as a large number of turtles are still dying," he says.

DFO Pawar agrees, adding that conservation work in Maharashtra is in its early stages. Yet, she is hopeful that the efforts will pay off some day. "It is possible that some of the hatchlings we released from our coast 10 years ago are now returning as adult females to nest," smiles Pawar.

17E. EXPLAINED

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, SATURDAY, MAY 31, 2025

How IMF has forced Pakistan to reform its farm sector

HARISH DAMODARAN
NEW DELHI, MAY 30

THE GOVERNMENT of Pakistan, under pressure from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), has not declared a minimum support price (MSP) for the 2024-25 wheat crop.

And Pakistan Agricultural Storage & Services Corporation Ltd (PASSCO), that country's equivalent of the Food Corporation of India (FCI), has not procured a single tonne this time.

This year's wheat crop was sown in November-December 2024, and is being marketed from April. The MSP for the 2023-24 crop was fixed at Rs 3,900 per maund (40 kg), i.e. Rs 9,750/quintal. PASSCO procured 1.79 million tonnes (mt) of wheat last year.

Reform at gunpoint

Dispensing with MSP and the government procurement of wheat is part of the conditionality linked to the IMF's Extended Fund Facility loan of \$7.13 billion to Pakistan, to be disbursed from the 2024-25 fiscal year to the 2027-28 fiscal year (FY: July-June).

The memorandum of economic and finan-

cial policies submitted to IMF by the Pakistan government for availing the loan states that in the case of wheat "we have abstained from announcing support prices and undertaking provincial procurement operations during the 2025 Rabi season and are committed to continue this approach going forward".

The memorandum has, in fact, committed to "winding down PASSCO" under an overall plan to "phase out federal and provincial government price-setting for agricultural commodities by end-FY26".

A consultancy firm, TAGM & Co, has been appointed to assess the value of the 51-year-old corporation's warehouses, offices, and other assets, and to formulate a winding-up plan "within three months".

The memorandum given to the IMF has also promised a review of all relevant legislation underpinning government interventions in commodity markets "by end-December 2025". These include the Price Control and Prevention of Profiteering and Hoarding Act, 1977 (similar to India's Essential Commodities Act, 1955) and provincial laws such as the Punjab Foodstuffs (Control) Act, 1958.

All four provinces of Pakistan — Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan

PRODUCTION OF KEY CROPS IN 2023-24 (million tonnes)

	Pak	India	Punjab	UP
Wheat	31.44	113.29	17.74	35.34
Rice	9.75	137.83	14.36	15.99
Maize	9	37.67	0.36	2.67
Cotton*	5	25.39	0.49	0
Canola	0.51	13.26	0.07	1.92

*In million bales of 480 pounds.
Source: US Department of Agriculture; Department of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare, Government of India; Cotton Advisory Board.

— have already amended their individual Agriculture Income Tax legislation to fully align with federal-level personal and corporate income tax regimes applicable to ordinary farmers and commercial agriculture respectively. The amendments will enable taxation of farm incomes "from January 1, 2025".

Contrast with India

India has not been under any IMF-guided

program since June 1993, when it borrowed the last tranche of a Standby Arrangement loan of 2,279.925 million SDR (special drawing rights), equivalent to \$2,394 million.

This loan, taken between April 1991 and June 1993 when the country was facing a balance of payments (BoP) crisis like Pakistan is today, was repaid fully by May 31, 2000. There is, therefore, no question of any reforms in India being imposed from outside.

Indian government agencies have so far procured almost 30 mt of the 2024-25 wheat crop at the MSP of Rs 2,425 per quintal. (The Indian rupee is more than 3.3 times the Pakistani rupee.)

They have also purchased 85.5 mt of paddy (equivalent to 57.3 mt of milled rice) at the MSP of Rs 2,300-2,320 per quintal.

Apart from MSP procurement and stocking of grain by FCI, India provides subsidies on fertilisers, electricity for irrigation and canal water, crop credit, insurance premium, and other farm inputs. Income from agriculture attracts no tax.

Agriculture reforms in India need to address issues such as distorted cropping patterns (more rice, wheat and sugarcane being grown at the expense of pulses, oilseeds, maize, cotton and millets) and inefficient/

excessive use of nitrogen and water.

The Narendra Modi government's repeal of the three farm laws liberalising trade in agricultural produce — which it pushed through Parliament in September 2020 — demonstrated the limitations of reform by central fiat under current political economy realities.

The impetus for farm reform in India is more likely to come from internal fiscal pressures. And that would probably be at the level of individual states (Punjab, for instance) rather than from the Centre.

Production comparisons

The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) expects Pakistan's wheat production in 2024-25 (that crop is now being marketed) to be 28.5 mt, down from last year's record 31.44 mt.

The decline is due to a reduction in area sown, from 9.6 million to 9.1 million hectares. That is attributed to the decision to discontinue MSP procurement, as well as the dry weather.

Since October 2024 and throughout the growing season, Pakistan saw below-average rainfall and above-average temperatures. While wheat is largely an irrigated crop, the 2-3 showers normally received during the winter-spring months help supplement irrigation water and positively impact yields.

Wheat is Pakistan's staple food; the per capita consumption of around 124 kg per year is "one of the highest in the world", according to USDA. The agency projects the country's consumption in 2025-26 at 31.5 mt, which will necessitate imports. Pakistan was forced to import 3.59 mt in 2023-24 (May-April) and 2.73 mt in the previous marketing year.

It's the opposite situation in rice. Pakistan's annual production of 9.75-9.8 mt is far more than the domestic consumption of 4.1-4.2 mt. That makes Pakistan an exporter of rice — the fourth largest after India, Vietnam, and Thailand. Pakistan's rice shipments were 6.49 mt in 2023-24 and 5.5 mt in 2024-25.

Pakistan's output of wheat, rice, maize, and cotton is lower than India's. But a more appropriate comparison would be with Uttar Pradesh (which has almost the same population) and Punjab (having similar growing conditions). (Table)

Pakistan scores reasonably on the above counts, although the medium and long-term impact of the IMF-imposed reforms — plus more resources going towards military spending — on its agricultural economy remains to be seen.

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EXPLAINED SCIENCE

WHY ARE MEN TALLER THAN WOMEN? NEW STUDY FINDS A GENETIC CLUE

MEN ARE taller than women, by an average of about 5 inches. But why? It's not a genetic inevitability — there are many species in which females outclass males. A new study published Monday in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* has found a partial explanation. It involves a gene called SHOX, which is known to be associated with height.

SHOX: present in both sexes...

SHOX is present on both the X chromosome (females have two X chromosomes) and the Y chromosome (males have one X and one Y). If it were to explain the height difference between males and females, SHOX would need to have a different effect on each chromosome.

To investigate this hypothesis, researchers asked if an extra Y chromosome boosted a person's height more than an extra X chromosome.

There are rare conditions in which people are born with an extra X or an extra Y, or have a missing X or Y. To find people with these conditions, researchers plucked data from three biobanks, one from Britain, and two from the US.

Looking at nearly a million individuals' data, the researchers were able to find 1,225 people with either missing or extra X or Y chromosomes. Some of these conditions, like in people with one X and no Y, were known to be associated with health issues — as well as, in this case, short stature.

And, researchers found, an extra Y did provide more height than an extra X. Their hypothesis was thus borne out.

... But more active in males

The biochemistry of the SHOX gene may be the reason.

Matthew Oetjens, a genetics researcher at Geisinger College of Health Sciences in Danville, Pennsylvania, and senior author of the study, explained.

The placement of the SHOX gene is near the end of the sex chromosomes. In



Getty Images

females, most genes on one of the two Xs are silenced, or inactive. But one region where the genes remain active is at the very tip of the X. The SHOX gene is close enough to the tip that it is not quite silenced. In men, the X, with its SHOX, is fully active. So is the Y.

This means that a woman, with her two X chromosomes, will have a slightly lower dose of the SHOX gene than a man, with an X and a Y. As a result, males get a slightly bigger SHOX gene effect.

That, the researchers calculated, accounts for nearly a quarter of the average difference in height between men and women. Oetjens said that other features of male sex hormones account for most of the rest of the difference, and other genetic factors are thought to play a role.

The work is "definitely cool," said Eric Schadt, a professor in the department of genetics and genomic science at Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York City. He said: "It is a great use of these biobanks to uncover what is still somewhat of a mystery... Even though the effect is modest, it does explain 20% or so of the height difference."

THE NEW YORK TIMES

EXPLAINED ECONOMICS

What latest economic data show

How is economic growth and national income measured? Why are the estimates "provisional"? What are the key takeaways from the data released by the government on Friday?

UDIT MISRA
NEW DELHI, MAY 30

THE MINISTRY of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) on Friday released two interrelated data sets on India's national income and the size of its economy.

The first provides an estimate of India's economic growth in the fourth quarter (Q4, January to March) of the last financial year (2024-25 or FY25). The second provides provisional estimates of economic growth for FY25.

How is national income measured?

Economic growth is measured using two metrics.

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is calculated by adding up all the expenditures made in the economy, including expenditures by Indians in their individual capacity, expenditures by governments, expenditures by private businesses, etc. This provides a picture of the demand side of the economy.

Gross Value Added (GVA) looks at the supply side. It effectively measures the contribution of each sector of the economy by calculating and summing the value added (or income) at each stage of production.

Both GDP and GVA are linked; they measure the same economic performance but through different routes. Their relationship can be spelled out using the following equation: $GDP = GVA + \text{taxes earned by government}$ — (subsidies provided by government).

MoSPI provides GDP and GVA data both in nominal terms (in present day prices) and real terms (after taking away the effect of inflation). Both nominal and real data have their own analytical significance.

Why are the estimates "provisional"?

What makes the estimates released on Friday "provisional" is that they will be revised over the next few years. For any financial year, GDP estimates go through several revisions.

In January, the government releases the First Advance Estimates (FAEs) for that financial year. At the end of February, after incorporating the data from Q3 (third quarter, October to December), MoSPI comes up with the Second Advance Estimates (SAEs). By May-end come the Provisional Estimates (PEs) after incorporating data from Q4.

The PEs are then revised over the next two years: the First Revised Estimates come a year later, and the Final Estimates two years later. For FY25, these will come in 2026 and 2027 respectively.

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TABLE 1 THE DECELERATING TRAJECTORY OF INDIA'S GDP

Year	Nominal GDP (in Rs Lakh Crore)	Nominal GDP Growth Rate	Real GDP (in Rs Lakh Crore)	Real GDP Growth Rate
2013-14	112.3		98	
2014-15	124.7	11%	105.3	7.4%
2015-16	137.7	10.5%	113.7	8%
2016-17	153.9	11.8%	123.1	8.3%
2017-18	170.9	11%	131.4	6.8%
2018-19	189	10.6%	139.9	6.5%
2019-20	201	6.4%	145.3	3.9%
2020-21	198.5	-1.2%	136.9	-5.8%
2021-22	236	18.9%	150.2	9.7%
2022-23	268.9	14%	161.6	7.6%
2023-24	301.2	12%	176.5	9.2%
2024-25*	330.7	9.8%	188	6.5%
CAGR since 2014-15	10.3%		6.1%	
CAGR since 2019-20	9.8%		5.1%	

*Provisional estimates Source: MoSPI, CMIE, Indian Express research

TABLE 2 SECTORAL HEALTH OF THE ECONOMY (IN RS LAKH CRORE)

Real Gross Value Added	2013-14	2018-19	2024-25	CAGR since 2014-15	CAGR since 2019-20
Agriculture	16.1	18.8	24.8	3.99%	4.72%
Industry	28.2	39.8	52.7	5.83%	4.81%
Manufacturing	15.6	23.3	29.5	5.97%	4.04%
Services	46.3	68.8	94.4	6.69%	5.4%

Source: MoSPI, CMIE, Indian Express research

Join FREE Telegram Channel <https://t.me/+IUYKq0AFHBAWGGQ1> or <https://t.me/+IUYKq0AFHBAWGGQ1> for more data, making GDP estimates more accurate.

What are the key takeaways?

There are four key takeaways from the data released on Friday.

1. Nominal GDP & its growth
India's nominal GDP grew to Rs 330.7 trillion (lakh crore) by the end of March 2025, a growth of 9.8% over the GDP in FY24. When converted into US dollar terms (dividing by the dollar-rupee exchange rate of 85.559) for international comparisons, by March-end, the size of India's economy was \$3.87 trillion. It is noteworthy (Table 1) that the growth

of the nominal GDP is less than 10%; at 9.8%, FY25's growth was the third-slowest since the current government took charge in 2014, and the sixth-slowest growth rate in nominal GDP since India liberalised its economy in 1991.

2. Real GDP & its growth
While the size of the economy uses nominal GDP data, international comparisons of growth rate are done based on the growth

rate of real GDP. This is because inflation differs from country to country, and only real GDP provides a genuine understanding about how many actual new goods and services were produced in a particular year.

India's real GDP grew by 6.5% in FY25 to reach a level of Rs 188 trillion. The deceleration in the pace of real GDP growth — compared to FY24, when the growth rate was 9.2% — is even more stark than in the case of nominal GDP growth. The gap between the real and nominal GDP shows the effect of inflation in prices of goods and services.

Table 1 shows the CAGR of real GDP now stands at just above 5% since 2019. India's economy has lost its growth momentum over the past decade, with the CAGR being just above 6% since 2014.

3. GVA & sectoral health of economy

Table 2 shows the real GVA across the three main sectors of the Indian economy:

- Agriculture and allied activities (such as forestry, etc.);
- Industry (including sub-sectors such as manufacturing, construction etc.); and
- Services (including fields like financial services, trade and hotels etc.)

For FY 25, the real GVA grew by 6.4%, losing a step over the 8.6% growth in FY24. But notably, none of the sectors have grown at a CAGR anywhere close to 6% since 2019-20.

The GVA data best captures the true momentum of the Indian economy; not only does it provide insight into the health of each sector, it also includes the effects of taxes and subsidies, which can distort GDP figures.

4. Manufacturing growth slower than agriculture

Since 2019-20 (Table 2), manufacturing GVA has registered a slower growth rate (CAGR of 4.04%) than even agriculture and allied activities (4.72%). This explains, to some extent, the high urban — in particular, youth — unemployment in India. It also provides an understanding of why labour has been moving back to Indian villages, and joining agriculture and allied activities.

Boosting manufacturing growth has been a cornerstone for all governments, none more so than the current one, which started the Make in India initiative in 2016. Indeed, manufacturing is the new battleground globally with the US, Europe, and China getting locked in a trade war to protect domestic manufacturing.

The weakness in the Indian manufacturing sector is the most important and worrisome takeaway from the latest economic growth data.

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DIPANITA NATH
PUNE, MAY 30

THE ABILITY of PM2.5 air pollutants to cause damage to cells increases sharply after concentration levels cross a certain threshold value, new research has found.

For Kolkata, where the study was carried out, this threshold value was about 70 micrograms per cubic metre ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$), the study found. Once the PM2.5 concentration crosses this level, its toxicity — or the potential to cause damage to the human body — increases sharply, and continues to rise until the concentration reaches about 130 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$. Toxicity stabilises after that, and further increases in concentration do not lead to an appreciable rise in damage potential.

The study, by Abhijit Chatterjee of the Bose Institute, Kolkata, and two of his for-

mer PhD students, Abhinandan Ghosh and Monami Dutta, is the first attempt at investigating how toxicity of air pollution changes with concentration levels in Indian cities. "Contrasting features of winter-time PM2.5 pollution and PM2.5-toxicity based on oxidative potential: A long-term (2016-2023) study over Kolkata megacity at eastern Indo-Gangetic Plain," *Science of the Total Environment*, December 2024.

This is not to suggest that at concentrations below 70 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ in Kolkata, air pollution is benign and does not pose any threat to human health. Pollution is damaging at lower concentrations as well, but it becomes much more toxic after crossing the threshold value.

Why this happens

At lower concentrations, the body copes better with the adverse impacts of inhaling pollutants. After the threshold level, however,

the body's defence mechanisms are overwhelmed, and the pollutants are able to cause greater damage to cells, particularly the respiratory systems which are affected first.

When pollutants are inhaled, the body's immune system tends to fight back through the release of Reactive Oxygen Species (ROS), which are chemicals used by immune cells to neutralise foreign substances. When larger concentrations of pollutants are inhaled, greater amounts of ROS are released.

The problem is ROS is damaging for the body's cells as well. Therefore, as a natural counter-defence mechanism, the body produces another set of chemicals, called antioxidants, that protect the cells against ROS.

However, antioxidants are present in small quantities, and take time to build up.

So, while they are able to effectively deal with smaller amounts of ROS, they are helpless when ROS is produced in large amounts.

This leads to an imbalance in the body, a situation called oxidative stress, which leaves the internal cells prone to damage from excess ROS. "The PM2.5 pollution level is well understood and established in every city in India. We wanted to see how the level of toxicity increases with the increase in pollution level," Prof. Chatterjee said.

"We know that when PM levels increase, there are several consequences, such as haze, dust, and visibility reduction. But how far does toxicity spread? We did not know. Though India has its standards of PM2.5 and PM10, we don't have a threshold value in terms of oxidative stress in the human body. That's where we wanted to

determine the standard," he said.

According to Prof. Chatterjee, "When the PM2.5 concentration level exceeds about 70 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, its potential to create oxidative stress increases steeply, mainly because of the presence of some specific chemical components like those coming from biomass or solid waste burning. The components from vehicular emissions also help increase oxidative stress, but this is much less compared to biomass burning."

The threshold levels at which toxicity sees a sharp rise is expected to vary from city to city, mainly due to the differences in the composition of the air pollutants. In some cities, vehicular emissions might be the biggest contributor to pollution; in other places, biomass burning might be significant.

Policy implications

Air quality standards are framed in

terms of their concentration, not toxicity. In India, for example, a PM2.5 concentration level of 40 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ averaged over a year, is considered safe. On a daily basis, a concentration of 60 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ is considered safe.

However, the harmful impacts of air pollution on human health depend not just on concentration, but also on toxicity, which takes into account factors like chemical composition of pollutants.

In Kolkata, for example, the threat that annual PM2.5 concentrations of 30 or 60 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ poses is not going to be very different from the one posed by a concentration of 30-40 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, but alarm bells must go off once a level of 70 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ is reached. In other cities, it would be different.

This study can thus make the case for toxicity-based air quality standards, which can trigger targeted warnings/emergency actions once the threshold concentration is breached.

EXPLAINED ENVIRONMENT

Going beyond AQI: study shows why toxicity matters in measuring air pollution

9 THE IDEAS PAGE

Who stole my nationalism?

A defence of Indian nationalism must also confront how it was undermined from the start. Belonging without othering was always under siege



SUHAS PALSHIKAR

THIS IS IN response to Yogendra Yadav's spirited exposition of "Indian" nationalism ("The nationalism we forgot, IE, May 27). India's imagination and practice of nationalism from the early 20th century was an audacious intellectual and political project by any standard. Its elaboration and defence in the piece by Yadav is a valuable reminder of what could have been. While agreeing with his description of Indian nationalism, it is necessary to also register a small but critical disagreement with his argument. As Yogendra bhai puts it, Indian nationalism is under assault today; it is being replaced by a "phony nationalism". And yet, he chides us that locating the problem only in the current moment would be wrong and lazy. That is where my disagreement may be located. Let me mention two disagreements. Following from them, there is a third disagreement about the trajectory of the challenge to Indian nationalism, coupled with a question on the semantics of "forgetting", in the hope that this will broaden the scope of the debate.

One disagreement, which may seem like a quibble but is crucial to understanding the death of Indian nationalism, is the point about not locating the backsliding in what the current regime has done. Indeed, any major socio-political tendency has a deeper lineage than the present. In that sense, let us agree that merely blaming the currently fashionable idea of phony nationalism is not an adequate analytical response to what has happened to the idea of Indian nationalism that promised "belonging without othering". Nevertheless, it is not possible to ignore the present moment, which has formally and frontally disbanded Indian nationalism not merely through the subterfuge of practice but through the assault of ideology.

Today, "belonging" is replaced by a conditionality: One doesn't belong, someone else decides who belongs, and who must belong, to the nation on the basis of one trait or the other. Is it not commonplace today to decide who is a Pakistani by identifying the person's religion, irrespective of whether that person is a colonel or a district magistrate? Don't we witness the othering of communities not just on the basis of religion, but also on the basis of the size of their eyes? So, one "belongs" only on the sufferance of those who claim to own this nation. Thus, the pseudo-nationalism of today doesn't allow citizens to belong without preconditions and without tests of patriotism. A politics that mixes — via vigilante violence and state patronage — forced attachment and an ideology of othering has become the lingua franca of the phony nationalism of today. Against this backdrop, the "backsliding" — or, in fact, disbandment and delegitimation — of Indian nationalism must be located in the contemporary moment notwithstanding the failures to consolidate it in the past. As a matter of fact, it is not FREEBIE that a resolute replacement of Join FREEBIE Whatsapp Channel helps (https://www.whatsapp.com/channel/0029v2VbR6R6GJKH6b0d30F)



C.R. Sasikumar

Indian nationalism

But of course, I would agree with Yadav that this process did not start in 2014 — or with Narendra Modi. December 1902 marked a major departure from the imagination of inclusion and accommodation. And as we know, December 1902 itself was a culmination of a long history of imagining the nation only through othering. This process formally took an organisational shape exactly a century ago. However, we still cannot ignore the significance and force that the decade since 2014 has brought to bear on the dramatic demise of Indian nationalism.

This long history of the gradual challenge thrown at Indian nationalism forces me to disagree with Yogendra bhai on a second point. He finds the post-Independence elite and the ruling ideology responsible for the disconnect between citizens and Indian nationalism. Again, let me begin with agreement. A section of "secular-liberal" elites did ignore the cultural dimension; it even overlooked the potential of traditions emanating from religion. But it is an exaggeration to blame this section for the crisis faced by Indian nationalism. This section was far too tiny to have any influence; worse, it was mostly English-speaking and lacked any real connection with the masses. On the other hand, not just the political class but a strong element among Indian language-speaking intellectuals were not averse to searching for sources of belonging from within Indian traditions and linguistic resources. They kept on struggling on the dual fronts of the meanings of traditions on the one hand, and the meaning of "Indian" on the other. It wasn't just Gandhians and Lohites; even among communists, there was a recognition of the fact that traditions presented both things — elements of modernity and traditionalism, inclusive ideas as well as elements of exclusion.

Moreover, we need not hesitate to admit the many failings of the elite and the political leadership of the post-Independence era, in holding them responsible for the current crisis of Indian nationalism, we may be making the mistake of ignoring the deep rivalry between Indian nationalism and its phony alternative. Throughout the 19th century, a sense of identity rooted in othering and

The audacity of the project of Indian nationalism itself signified that it would have strong challenges and many inner hiccups. A fuller history of its rise and fall may include the failings of its supporters and the inaction of its well-wishers but the limitations of the nationalist project lay in its very audacity. Because it was ambitious, it was difficult to realise and more difficult to sustain but easy to malign. Its fall cannot be explained without realising that its ideological rival always existed.

instrumental unity without genuine belonging began to emerge as the language of collective action — particularly among the upper castes. Religion was imagined devoid of religiosity. God was imagined without devotion, communities were imagined without empathy. These tendencies were alive and posed a challenge to Indian nationalism when it was nascent. While the nationalist movement succeeded in bringing an inclusive Indian nationalism to the centre stage, the alternative, too, was shaping up all through the late 19th and early 20th century.

India's elites — political, cultural and economic — were often torn between these two intellectual forces. While Mahatma Gandhi (and Jawaharlal Nehru) undoubtedly attracted many individuals from the upper castes, these same social sections were more favourably inclined to the narrow, vicious, macho and exclusionary European duplication of nationalism. Freedom in 1947 did not settle the deeper foundational dispute — it only postponed it. With occasional glimpses of superficial debates around Hindi and *gaurav* in the 1960s, the simmering debate remained alive. For a variety of reasons of social turmoil and political deviations, the foundational dispute over the meaning of nationalism entered a critical phase around the 1980s.

The larger point, therefore, is this: The audacity of the project of Indian nationalism itself signified that it would have strong challenges and many inner hiccups. A fuller history of its rise and fall may include the failings of its supporters and the inaction of its well-wishers but the limitations of the nationalist project lay in its very audacity. Because it was ambitious, it was difficult to realise and more difficult to sustain but easy to malign. Its fall cannot be explained without realising that its ideological rival always existed.

It's not that I've forgotten Indian nationalism, it was stolen. The story of Indian nationalism should, therefore, not be a story of forgetting but the story of it being stolen.

The writer, based in Pune, taught Political Science

Conservative like us

European right can take lessons from the rise of cultural nationalism in India



RAM RAJYA
BY RAM MADHAV

EARLIER THIS WEEK I was in Budapest to address the annual conference of the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), a prestigious US-based group. It is influential in US politics and has close links with President Donald Trump and other Republican leaders. In Europe, CPAC also has an important role in creating a unified voice for conservative parties and leaders.

This year's conference attracted major right-wing leaders from various countries in Europe and Latin America. Viktor Orban, the host country's Prime Minister, was there along with the Prime Minister of Georgia, several former prime ministers — including from the UK and the Czech Republic — several serving ministers. Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), MPs and commentators. President Trump delivered a brief video message. As one of the speakers, an Arab-origin Congressman from Arizona, US, commented, the CPAC has become the Mecca of European conservatism.

Through two days and dozens of speakers, the agenda of the conference revolved around the challenges faced by the European right from the opportunistic rainbow alliances that comprise traditionally centrist parties and liberal and left parties, whose sole aim is to prevent the rise of conservative politics on the continent. The last decade witnessed the unprecedented rise of right-wing parties in several European nations, including Italy, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, Austria, Slovakia and the Czech Republic. Hungary has been under the rule of Orban's right-wing

Fidesz party for the past 15 years.

In 2024, many political observers had predicted a right-wing-dominated European Parliament. However, the election results on June 6, 2024, did not provide that opportunity to the right-wing parties. They registered significant gains, but failed to emerge as the dominant force. They emerged as a strong voice and formed a pressure group called Patriots for Europe (PE), which today boasts a membership of close to 100 MEPs.

The rise of the right seems to have rattled the liberals who control the EU. Leaders like Orban have been subjected to severe criticism and his government was denied legitimate financial support from the EU on the flimsy grounds of citizens' rights and democratic downsides. When Orban took a firm stand against immigration, tightening borders and asylum laws, the EU leadership took the unusual measure of slapping a penalty of 1 million euros per day on his government. If the enthusiasm at the Budapest conference is any indication, such undemocratic and coercive measures by the EU, dominated by liberal groups, seemed to have had the opposite effect. A renewed vigour and determination to take on challenges like illegal immigration, radical Islam, globalism and woke forces was palpable through the conference, which had the "Age of Patriots" as its main theme. Speaker after speaker reiterated their determination to fight back against what many described as "liberal fascism".

Incidentally, I was the only non-Western speaker at the conference — this

highlights the fact that while Western liberals have reached out systematically to all corners of the world, Western conservatives have limited their activism to Europe and the Americas. I told the conference that while our politics may not be the same, we, too, share some of the conservative values like God, religion, family, sovereignty and patriotism. Like the Western conservatives, the Indian right, too, sees illegal immigration as a threat to national sovereignty and woke liberalism as a danger to tradition and family values.

Unfortunately, in India, the initial decades after Independence witnessed the dominance of Western liberal political ideas like socialism and globalism. A Nehruvian consensus was created, championing these ideas through not only state institutions but also the media and academia. Religiosity, cultural values, and national identity faced serious threats. Over several decades, a relentless battle was waged at the grassroots level to unshackle the country from left-liberal influences and build a strong cultural nationalist politics. It culminated in the election of the Narendra Modi government in 2014.

In the last decade, the cultural nationalist project in India achieved significant successes. The Ram Temple in Ayodhya symbolises the defeat of pseudo-secular politics in the country, while the demise of Article 370 signified the death of liberal appeasement of separatism and radicalism. While Modi's market-friendly policies have catapulted India in just 10 years from the 11th biggest

economy to the cusp of being the fourth biggest economy in the world, his zero tolerance for terror has resulted in the decimation of radical Islamist forces. The government has also clamped down on illegal immigrants, Indian media and academia, too, have turned nationalist and patriotic — substantially but not in full measure — pushing left-liberals to the fringe. In the wake of the recent terror attacks in Kashmir, Modi successfully mobilised the support of some liberals, who had been apologists for radical Islamists, in the war on terror.

Understanding the nuances of India's experience in the revival of cultural nationalist politics can help the Western conservative movement in its struggle against the left liberal onslaught. The Indian right may not fully subscribe to the agenda of their counterparts in the West. European conservatives use God and religion in the singular, while Indian nationalists use them in the plural. Indian nationalists believe in values like pluralism, statism and environmental activism, which may sound very much like the liberal agenda to the right in the West.

Yet, there is enough ground for engagement and dialogue. If the Western conservatives secure support from a big country like India, their power is bound to multiply manifold. Having India on their side is akin to having two Europe, four USAs or 140 Hungaries with them.

The writer, president, India Foundation, is with the BJP

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The good news is that the President's plans to impose tariffs on almost every country on the planet will now be subjected to something approaching the legal and constitutional scrutiny that they should have had in the first place. The rule of law, thankfully, has struck back, at least for now."

— THE GUARDIAN

Setting sail on our own

Without the ability to build marine engines, India will be dependent on foreign suppliers, creating technological chokepoints



SANJEEV SANYAL AND ADITYA SINHA

INDIA IS MAKING bold moves in shipbuilding. The 2025 Union budget laid the foundation for a maritime resurgence, with mega clusters, a Rs 25,000-crore Maritime Development Fund, customs duty exemptions, and infrastructure status for large vessels. Strategic tie-ups with global shipbuilding giants and major private investments signal serious intent to make India a top five shipbuilding nation by 2047.

To truly lead, India must build what powers the ship. A hull without an engine is just a shell, strategically dependent on foreign suppliers. Marine engines typically account for 15-20 per cent of a ship's cost and are central to its performance, emissions, and life cycle.

Presently, over 90 per cent of engines rated above 6 MW installed on Indian commercial and naval vessels are sourced from a concentrated group of five global manufacturers — MAN Energy Solutions (Germany), Wärtsilä (Finland), Rolls-Royce (UK), Caterpillar-Mak (US/Germany), and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries (Japan). This oligopolistic concentration creates a technological chokepoint. Any disruption in diplomatic or trade relations, export control regime, or intellectual property licensing can effectively immobilise India's shipbuilding programme.

These engines are embedded with proprietary ECUs, closed-source control software, and IP-protected components, making India dependent on foreign firms not just for procurement, but for diagnostics, updates, and even spares. This exposes India to rising export control risks. Key supplier countries have tightened regulations under frameworks like the EU Dual-Use Regulation, US EAR, and Japan's METI controls. These can be denied on national security grounds at any time.

India has already begun taking steps in this direction. In April, the Indian Navy signed a Rs 270-crore sanction order with Kirloskar Oil Engines Limited to design and develop a 6 MW medium-speed marine diesel engine. However, the real game is for 30 MW.

There are several challenges. First, we lack access to modern marine engine designs. Marine engine design is a critical determinant of propulsion efficiency, thermal performance, emissions compliance, structural durability, and system integration in large vessels. These designs must optimise key parameters to meet International Maritime Organization Tier III emission standards and enable integration with hybrid propulsion, waste heat recovery. India currently lacks indigenous design capabilities. This leads to dependency on foreign OEMs. This dependency restricts the ability to modify engines for military purposes, optimise for local climatic and operational conditions, or transition to fuel-flexible, autonomous maritime systems.

Second, India's most significant hurdle in building large marine engines is metallurgical, a foundational challenge that cuts across materials science, manufacturing

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precision, and component durability. Marine engines operate under extreme thermal and mechanical conditions. Components must be engineered from alloys that can withstand high thermal gradients, resist corrosion in saline environments, and perform reliably over long duty cycles. Materials like high-chromium steels, nickel-based superalloys, and thermally stable composites are essential, but India's capacity to produce such materials in large quantities remains underdeveloped. This is where we are struggling in our jet engines programme, too.

Third, "tribology", the science of wear, lubrication, and friction, is another critical bottleneck. High-efficiency marine engines demand components with tailored surface properties to reduce wear and frictional losses over thousands of operating hours. This necessitates advanced coatings like thermal barrier ceramics, diamond-like carbon and plasma-sprayed composites, which require both sophisticated application techniques and precision control. Additionally, machining these heavy components requires large-format CNC equipment, micrometre-scale metrology systems, and ultra-tight tolerances, particularly for parts like crankshafts and cylinder blocks. India's ecosystem lacks scalable industrial integration.

Fourth, it's impossible to build next-gen marine engines when our top institutes still train students on outdated models. These engines in museums, not classrooms. With India hosting the world's largest ship-breaking yard at Alang, institutes should at least source decommissioned modern engines from there to upgrade training.

To address these gaps, India must shift its strategy from relying solely on large public- and private-sector firms, which have struggled to deliver full-stack indigenous marine engines, and instead invest in a new generation of tech start-ups. Start-ups, being agile, risk-taking and cross-disciplinary innovation.

The government should facilitate this through targeted innovation missions, design-linked incentives, and dedicated funding for marine propulsion R&D, backed by defence and shipping sector demand. Institutions like IIT Madras can serve as anchor nodes, supporting venture creation with lab-to-market pipelines. Start-ups must be supported not only with capital, but also through access to testbeds, IP support, and public procurement guarantees.

To develop large marine engines, India must build a dedicated propulsion design ecosystem. Equally critical is access to domain-specific software for 3D modelling and mechanical design; combustion and thermodynamic simulation; structural and thermal stress analysis; and embedded control system development.

India has made visible strides in other areas of shipbuilding. New yards are coming up, older ones are being modernised, and maritime ambitions are growing. But without the ability to build our own marine engines, we are laying the keel for dependency. Just as the Tejas fighter still flies on imported engines, our ships risk sailing under the shadow of foreign dependency. A vessel may be built in India, flagged in India, and crewed by Indians, but unless we build the engine, we will never truly steer our own course.

Sanyal is member, EAC-PM and Sinha is a writer on state capacity, economic policy, and institutional reform.

Views are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

THAROOR'S AGENDA

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Congress vs Congress' (IE, May 29). Congress MP Shashi Tharoor has done a good job of turning the defence of India's position vis-à-vis Pakistan into an unequalled eulogisation of PM Narendra Modi. He has commended the Modi government for launching the 2016 "surgical strike" and breaching the Line of Control for the first time without batting an eyelid — "for the first time" being the operative (and inaccurate) phrase. Tharoor, now a global envoy, awards more marks to the Modi government than the previous Congress governments on dealing with Pakistan. However, he omits mentioning that the 2016 strike had the dubious distinction of having been publicised for the first time.

David Milton, Marathascode

IMF & PAKISTAN

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'A vicious loop' (IE, May 29). The IMF approving a bailout package for Pakistan on the grounds of economic recovery, despite strong protests led by India, presents a worrisome picture. It has been bailed out 24 times since 1958. This raises serious

concerns about the efficacy of such bailouts. Currently, India's influence is limited in the 25-member board of the IMF, where, unlike the UN's one-country-one-vote system, voting rights are based on the economic size and contributions of the country — a system that has been repeatedly criticised for favouring richer Western countries.

Vaibhav Goyal, Chandigarh

MUSK REPORT CARD

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'Musk quits Trump admin' (IE, May 30). The recent departure of Elon Musk from his advisory role in the federal government raises serious questions about the direction of administrative reforms and the nature of public-private collaborations. While Musk's stint was marked by ambitious goals to streamline bureaucracy, the results fell short. His aggressive approach to cost-cutting and staff reductions clashed with the broader political narrative of supporting American workers. His deep ties with China — critical for Tesla's global strategy — stood at odds with the administration's tough stance on Beijing.

Sanjay Chopra, Mohali



The Indian EXPRESS

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RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

DECODING GDP

Economy grows faster than expected in the fourth quarter.
But near-term outlook remains unclear

THE INDIAN ECONOMY grew at a robust 7.4 per cent in the fourth quarter of 2024-25, surpassing most expectations. Growth for the full year has now been pegged at 6.5 per cent by the National Statistics Office. This is in line with the office's earlier estimates. Strip away net taxes on products and value added by the economy grew by 6.8 per cent in the fourth quarter. Moreover, notwithstanding the sharp pick-up in growth in the second half of the year — the momentum slowed down sharply in the second quarter when growth collapsed to just 5.6 per cent — the Indian economy has actually slowed down significantly in 2024-25. Nominal GDP has also come in at less than 10 per cent. And forecasts for next year aren't much brighter.

The sector-wise disaggregated data shows that agriculture continued to expand at a healthy pace, driven by favourable weather conditions and remunerative prices, which induced farmers to sow more area. Growth of 5.4 per cent in the fourth quarter has put the sector's growth for the full year at 4.6 per cent — higher than its long-term average. This bodes well for rural consumption. The industrial sector, though, slowed sharply, weighed down by manufacturing. The sector grew at just 4.5 per cent in 2024-25, down from 12.3 per cent the year before. Construction, however, continued to witness steady growth, expanding at 9.4 per cent in 2024-25, after growing by 10.4 per cent the year before. The services sector also witnessed a slight deceleration, with trade, hotels, transport and communication as well as the financial, real estate and professional services segments growing at a slower pace than before. The GDP data also show that private consumption grew at 7.2 per cent last year. This is difficult to reconcile with some of the commentary from India Inc, which, through the last year, voiced concerns over a softness in demand and a shrinking middle segment. There are also questions over the sustainability of the sharp pick-up in investments in the fourth quarter — gross fixed capital formation grew at 9.4 per cent as per the latest data.

The near-term outlook is unclear. There is a possibility that lower commodity prices will impact the deflator in the coming quarters. Some analysts expect investment activity to be weighed down by the prevailing uncertainty. But a combination of tax cuts and lower interest rates could help support household consumption — there are expectations of the RBI's Monetary Policy Committee cutting interest rates further with inflation likely to stay in line with the central bank's target. But expectations for a strong pick-up this year remain muted. The central bank has pegged growth at 6.5 per cent in 2025-26 and the expectations of some analysts also range between 6.2 per cent and 6.5 per cent.

MANIPUR STANDSTILL

Push for a return to popular government is understandable.
But it must represent the interests of both Meiteis and Kukis

SINCE THE IMPOSITION of President's Rule in Manipur on February 13, the state assembly has remained in suspended animation, following the BJP's failure to reach a consensus on a successor to former chief minister N Biren Singh. As the assembly has not been dissolved, it retains the possibility of being revived when the prevailing conditions allow for the formation of a government. Reflecting growing discontent with the present standstill, a group of 10 NDA MLAs met Governor Ajay Bhalla at Raj Bhavan on Wednesday, urging the formation of a "popular government" in the state. They claimed the support of 44 legislators in the 60-member Assembly (one seat currently lies vacant). However, the revocation of President's Rule appears unlikely in the near future — almost 25 months into the ethnic conflict, it is telling that peace remains the immediate priority, not government formation.

On April 29, the same 10 MLAs, along with 11 other NDA legislators, had written to the Centre with a similar demand. Their push for a return to a popular government is understandable — after all, the BJP won a mandate in the 2022 Assembly election. The difficulty, however, lies in the nature of the proposed arrangement, which does not include representation for the Kuki-Zo communities. By their own admission, those who claim the support of 44 MLAs have not included the 10 Kuki-Zomi MLAs — seven of whom were elected on BJP tickets. The supposed consensus behind the push for a return of popular government, thus, reflects a consensus among the Meiteis, but not between the Meiteis and Kukis.

The Centre's hesitation to revoke President's Rule acknowledges the persisting instability in the state — illustrated by the unrest in Imphal less than two weeks ago between protesters and security forces, over the alleged instructions to cover the word "Manipur" on a state-run transport bus (Chief Secretary Prashant Kumar Singh has expressed regret and announced an inquiry into the incident). While there is some consolation in the fact that there has been no violent standoff between the two communities in recent weeks, significant challenges remain — of rebuilding trust, addressing grievances, and tackling the structural issues that lie at the heart of the conflict. An estimated 3,000 looted warehouses remain unrecovered. Thousands of displaced persons remain in relief camps. Kukis and Meiteis continue to be segregated between hill and valley. Only an inclusive political process that brings all stakeholders to the table can offer a path to lasting peace. Without such a process, even a well-intentioned return to a popular government risks another cycle of violence.

END OF A BROMANCE

Two plutocrats, with main character energy, came together to 'drain' the DC 'swamp'. A break-up was written into the story

How far is Silicon Valley from the White House? In miles, about 2,800-odd. But as Elon Musk's departure from the Donald Trump administration this week suggests, according to other metrics — such as ease of navigation — they are separated by light years. Musk, as head of the new Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), declared with corporate-style bombast that he would slash federal spending by "at least \$2 trillion". By the end of his 129-day tenure, the claims disappeared in a whimper. An analysis of the "wall of receipts" and the other data available on DOGE's website by BBC Verify revealed that "only about half of these... had a link to... evidence." Turns out running a country is not the same as running a company.

The Trump-Musk bromance made sense — but only to a point. Two massively rich businessmen, both with "main character" energy, came together to "drain the swamp" of Washington, DC. Like any good bromance, it offered a memorable set of images: A chainsaw-wielding Musk, boasting about "slashing" budgets; Musk toting his son to official events at the Oval Office with Trump; the President boosting the First Buddha's electric car company on the White House lawn. Yet, the relationship seems to have brought both parties bad fortune. The US government could soon be footing a long legal bill for the layoffs and Musk's company, Tesla, has taken a massive hit in sales.

As the owner of several enterprises that require a complex system to work seamlessly, Musk should have understood the complexity of government. His early exit from his DC sojourn, break-up with POTUS over a "big, beautiful bill", and complaints that DOGE was treated like a "whipping boy" make it clear that he did not. Ultimately, though, the reason for the public split (and spat) could be as simple as the fact that there was room for only one main character in this story. This round goes to Trump.



SANJAYA BARU

IN A BOUT of professional enthusiasm, the chief executive officer of NITI Aayog, the Union government's policy body for transforming India, announced that the Indian economy had overtaken Japan to become the world's fourth-largest economy, following the USA, China and Germany. He jumped the gun because, as NITI Aayog member Arvind Virmani pointed out, this is likely to happen a few months down the road. With a nominal GDP of \$4.187 trillion, India is set to move ahead of Japan's GDP of \$4.186 trillion by the end of 2025.

However, as many have pointed out, the vast gap between Japan's per capita GDP of \$33,900 and India's per capita GDP of \$2,880 sets the two apart. India remains a low-middle-income economy, a developing economy with a modest per capita income but demographics that will sustain the growth process. Japan is a developed, if an ageing, industrial and trading power.

The sustained growth of the Indian economy over the past three decades, with its ups and downs, has, without doubt, slowly but surely increased the size of the economy. Way back in July 1991, the then finance minister of India, Manmohan Singh, told Parliament, prefacing his forecast with Victor Hugo's famous words that "no power on Earth can stop an idea whose time has come", that the emergence of India as a major economic power in the world happens to be one such idea.

It became an idea that gained international recognition a few years later when the British historian Angus Maddison published his masterly survey of the world economy pointing to the resurgence of China and India. Maddison's classic study of *The World Economy* (OECD, 2002) made the point that in 1700, China and India accounted for almost half the world income and that two centuries of colonialism, combined with the fact that the Industrial Revolution had occurred mainly in Europe, contributed to the decline of these ancient and large Asian economies.

The Maddison study kindled hope in Asia that China and India were on the way to recover their lost space in the global economy and that the 21st century would once again join FREE WhatsApp Channel <https://whatsapp.com/channel/0029Vn2vRbRGJOK16oRd0f>



MRINALINI NAIK

THE GROWTH of India's digital ecosystem has transformed how millions of people communicate, shop, learn, and entertain themselves. Now, a growing number of users are facing a strange irony. The more dominant a platform becomes, the worse the experience gets.

E-platforms once promised access, speed, convenience, control, a diverse selection and affordability. For a while, they delivered. But somewhere along the way, the user became less of a priority and more of a target. What we're witnessing now is the decay of digital platforms, a process called "entification". Coined by journalist Cory Doctorow, the term refers to how online platforms degrade over time: First serving users, then business clients, and eventually just themselves.

Recently, Amazon notified its members that starting June 17, Prime Video will include advertisements, and if the members want to have an "ad-free experience" on the OTT platform, they'll have to pay an additional fee. A few days ago, Zomato Gold and Swiggy One updated their terms to include "rain-surge fees" for premium subscribers. These are not isolated incidents but part of a deliberate business model shift. As user growth plateaus, platforms start optimising for revenue per user. Loyalty is no longer rewarded, it's priced. Coupons dry up for returning customers, free delivery becomes elusive, and core features are shored off behind new paywalls.

This phenomenon is visible across India's digital ecosystem. Platforms like Spotify and YouTube constantly flood users with unskippable ads. Users are confronted with an escalating mix of non-negotiable 'platform fees' or 'handling charges' on every order. If this sounds like paying more to get less, that's because it is. Once platforms scale to achieve market dominance and user dependence to become indispensable, monetisation intensifies. Charges once optional become default.

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For India, it's more important to focus on inclusive growth that makes its economy competitive

Good diplomatic and economic relations have, in part, contributed to a benign response in Japan to the news of India's rise. Equally, the fact that India in no way poses any challenge to Japan, either as an economic competitor or as a geopolitical rival, would also explain the subdued reporting of the IMF news. When China overtook Japan, the former was viewed as a significant competitor in the global market as well as a geopolitical rival. Export-dependent Japan viewed with concern the rise of China as a global trading power. India, on the other hand, is still not viewed as a competitor in the trading world, much less a geopolitical rival.

PAYING MORE FOR LESS

As user growth on digital platforms plateaus, loyalty is mined for profit

lating mix of non-negotiable "platform fees" or "handling charges" on every order. If this sounds like paying more to get less, that's because it is. Once platforms scale to achieve market dominance and user dependence to become indispensable, monetisation intensifies. Charges once optional become default.

Entification is not just limited to fees or the push for paid subscriptions; it's about all the systemic processes that degrade user experience. One such process is device-based price discrimination done by platforms. In 2025, a storm of user complaints and reports revealed that many platforms, specifically quick commerce and ride-hailing apps, were charging more to iPhone users than to Android users for the same route and time, based solely on device data. This profiling, based purely on perceived purchasing power, occurs without consent, transparency, or recourse.

Another issue is that platforms are increasingly relying on dark patterns, that is, manipulative UI/UX, to trick users into unwanted choices: Creating "false urgency", where fake limited stock countdowns push users into hasty decisions; "bait-and-switch", which involves adding unwanted items to the cart or auto-ticking donation boxes without consent; "drip pricing", where hidden charges appear only at checkout; "sugging", where platforms send continuous notifications or requests to purchase unintended goods or services; and "subscription trap", making cancellation of paid membership difficult. These patterns are inherently opaque and designed to mislead.

The Central Consumer Protection

Authority issued guidelines under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019, identifying a range of such manipulative practices. However, the non-binding nature of Annexure-I offers guidance and not interpretation of the law. This provides a loophole for the digital platforms.

India's legal framework for digital platforms addresses several important areas through the Consumer Protection Act, 2019 and E-Commerce Rules, 2020. These mandate transparency in pricing and prohibit unfair trade practices; the Information Technology Rules, 2021 require platforms to publish terms of use and establish grievance redress mechanisms; the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 ensures user consent and privacy; and the Competition Act, 2002, prohibits practices like predatory pricing and market dominance abuse. But none of these laws directly regulate user experience or interface design and they address harm after it occurs.

What India needs is a forward-looking, ex-ante regulatory approach. Like the EU's Digital Markets Act, the proposed Digital Competition Bill in India, if passed, will address issues like self-preferencing of products by platforms, restricting users from third-party applications on their core digital services or tying-bundling of non-essential services to those demanded by users. But India still needs legal frameworks on transparency standards, clearer definitions and binding regulations on dark patterns and mandatory UX audits for large platforms.

What is, however, certain is that once India clearly establishes itself as the third-largest economy, it will remain in that place for a long time to come. Given the distance it has to travel to catch up with China, whose nominal GDP is currently around \$18 trillion. With the US and China in a race for economic space and geopolitical influence, India's best bet would be to focus on its own economic performance and ensure that it is able to sustain an inclusive growth process that makes the economy more competitive and improves peoples' lives.

The writer is founder-trustee, Centre for Air Power Studies and distinguished fellow, United States Institution of India

The writer is advocate, Supreme Court of India

May 31, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

INDIA-US TALKS

A NEW CHAPTER of cooperation between India, the world's largest democracy, and the United States, the world's most powerful democracy, is expected to begin with the visit of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to the US in the second week of June. US arms supplies to Pakistan — a longstanding irritant in Indo-US relations — are expected to figure prominently during the talks Gandhi will have with President Ronald Reagan. Much ground has already been prepared with regard to improved bilateral economic relations. A memorandum of understanding on the transfer of technology from the US to India has been signed.

IRAQ STRIKES IRAN

IRAQ SAID ITS warplanes attacked a "very large naval target" — a term applied in the past to large merchant ships — near Iran's main oil export terminal at Kharg island in the Gulf. A spokesman said the planes scored an accurate hit and returned safely to base. The raids marked the fourth straight day in the latest flare up between the two belligerents, locked in a border war since September 1980.

BRITAIN ON TAMILS

IN THE WAKE of protests by several Labour MPs, the UK government has said that it will not be harsh on Sri Lankan Tamils who are

being driven to Britain by the trigger-happy Sinhalese troops, but it insists that representations on behalf of those who are not being allowed in will have to be limited to 24 hours. Earlier, the practice was that an MP could take up a case on behalf of a person denied entry into the country within a month or two.

STORM NEARS GUJARAT

ABOUT 500 VILLAGERS were evacuated from the coastal villages of Junagadh district in view of the impending cyclonic storm which could strike the Gujarat coast. According to the latest weather bulletin, however, the cyclone had moved north and was heading towards Sind and Pakistan.



Opinion

SATURDAY, MAY 31, 2025

Slow but steady

Easing inflation, lower interest rates, and more disposable income should boost consumption

DESPITE AN UNEXPECTED 7.4% year-on-year (y-o-y) growth in the March quarter, the Indian economy grew at a modest 6.5% in 2024-25, the slowest pace in four years. Although the gross value added (GVA) rose at a decent 6.8% y-o-y in Q4 FY25, the annual momentum slowed to 6.4% — also the slowest in four years. One must appreciate that the economy has shown resilience in the face of fairly high inflation, tight liquidity, and high interest rates. Consumption demand has been particularly weak in urban India; in fact, the private final consumption expenditure slumped to a five-quarter low of 6% y-o-y in the fourth quarter, despite the Kumbh factor. To be sure, some of this could reverse in the current year as the price rise is reined in, the cost of money falls, and tax breaks leave more disposable income for many. However, it's not clear how the global economy and global trade will fare and how India's export sector will perform.

The Indian economy last year got a big push from the much smaller import-export gap than in 2023-24 with the gap being positive in Q4. However, it's uncertain whether in the current year the economy will enjoy this advantage. Much will depend on US import tariffs and whether the US economy slips into a recession, and to what extent that impacts exports of both merchandise and services. As is known, the export sector generates huge employment and, therefore, disposable incomes. Already, corporate India is cutting back on employee expenses — a study of 3,035 companies and banks shows that in 2024-25, employee expenses increased by just 7%, the slowest pace in four years. Moreover, private sector capex remains sluggish and is unlikely to pick up meaningfully in the near term; at 7.1% last year, gross fixed capital formation increased at the slowest pace in four years. Manufacturing activity continues to remain subdued and sectors such as trade, hotels, and transport — again employment-generating — are also not performing as one might have expected; in fact, very surprisingly, despite the Kumbh mela this segment grew at just 6% y-o-y in the March quarter, the slowest in three quarters. Economists attribute this to the muted urban demand caused by a slow rise in incomes.

All of this casts a shadow on both job creation and consumption. However, the good news is that prospects of a good monsoon and a bumper harvest will boost farm incomes and consumption. The agriculture sector performed reasonably well last year growing at 4.6%, albeit on a very favourable base. Also, sectors such as construction are doing well having grown at over 9% three years in a row. That said, the start to the current year has been slow with April sales of autos and cement volumes being lacklustre; experts believe that the improved growth in exports is probably due to front-loading ahead of the imposition of steeper tariffs by the US.

While a 6.5% growth rate is not to be sneezed at, the fact is it should not be taken for granted in an uncertain world. With inflation expected to remain at sub-3.8% in the current year, the Reserve Bank of India has room to cut policy rates by another 50 basis points, taking the terminal rate to 5.5%. It must also facilitate transmission of these cuts into system rates by ensuring liquidity is ample. The government too needs to spend more to ensure the momentum does not flag.

Is outbound FDI rising at the expense of domestic capex?

INDIA'S NET FOREIGN direct investment (FDI) inflows merit serious attention as they dramatically plunged to \$353 million last fiscal. This is due to record levels of repatriations and disinvestments and rising outbound FDI despite healthy gross inflows. Net FDI inflows were as high as \$44 billion in FY21 and have been sharply reducing since then, especially over the last two fiscals. While repatriations and dividends have been commented upon, less attention has been paid to India's investments abroad which rose almost threefold to \$29 billion in FY25 from \$11 billion in FY21. The concern is that Indian firms are expanding globally — which should be welcomed — while they are hesitant to invest domestically. At a time of adverse global headlines due to policy-related uncertainties, a private sector-led investment push will no doubt bolster India's GDP growth but there is no evidence so far of a virtuous capex upswing. In this milieu, India's outbound FDI is intriguingly gathering strength.

The question naturally is the why and the whereof of this process. The global expansion of India's conglomerates, however, is not of recent provenance as in the late 1960s and 1970s the Aditya Birla Group made pioneering forays into Thailand and other economies of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Analysts consider this as part of a first wave of investments by India Inc during the pre-liberalisation era. The group later targeted the US with investments of \$15 billion including a \$4-billion green-field expansion plan currently underway. Post liberalisation, the Tata Group acquired London-based Tetley Tea in 2000, Anglo-Dutch steel manufacturer Corus in 2007, and Jaguar and Land Rover in 2008. Pharma and information technology companies, too, have made acquisitions overseas.

India Inc has no doubt developed a global footprint, but the top destinations for outbound FDI are tax havens like Singapore and Mauritius. As for Singapore, it would be tempting to infer that India's investments in the city-state are a base to ferry into the rest of ASEAN. But that doesn't seem to be the case as there is a record FDI footprint. The Tata Group, for instance, has exited from its manufacturing presence. It took over NatSteel in Singapore in 2004 and Millennium Steel in Thailand two years later. To sell its pick-up trucks in the region, Tata Motors chose Thailand for its entry point in 2008, and 17 years later, it has sold its stake in NatSteel while retaining the wire business. In July 2018, Tata decided to stop assembly operations in Thailand.

Policy attention is certainly warranted by rising outbound FDI while corporates are not investing in the country. Last fiscal, official data highlights the continued subdued growth in private investments. So, too, does data of the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy. The portions for an upswing in the private capex cycle are not bright. The Union finance ministry's latest monthly review cites the results of the ministry of statistics and programme implementation's forward-looking survey on private sector capex investment, according to which intended capex is lower in FY26 than in FY25 — attributed to a "cautious approach by respondents in declaring future investment plans". Corporates are not driving overall growth as there is still a lot of excess capacity in the system as the demand environment remains highly challenging.

In manufacturing, capacity utilisation rates rose marginally to 75% in Q3 FY25 from 74.7% a year earlier. They need to go up much further to a point where private industry requires additional capacity. Private investments also depend on a more stable policy and regulatory framework. A cyclical upswing cannot be set in motion so long as investors, both domestic and foreign, face serious difficulties in doing business on the ground, especially in the various states. So, while the animal spirits of India Inc remain depressed for domestic investments, their rapidly growing overseas investments together with the disenchantment of foreign investors who are disinvesting have impacted net FDI flows.

Views are personal



N CHANDRABABU NAIDU
The writer is an economist and business commentator based in New Delhi

THE NATIONAL STATISTICS OFFICE (NSO) estimates on GDP for FY25, at 6.5%, are the same as the second advance estimates and hence due credit to its forecasting skills. Thus, there are no surprises for the market, and it will be business as usual. The NSO's accuracy in forecasts needs to be commended given that the exercise is quite mammoth due to the considerably large unorganised sector in the economy.

The internals for the year as well as the fourth quarter are quite impressive, especially as the last quarter has posted growth of 7.4%. All through the year, various high-frequency indicators such as goods and services tax collections, e-way bill issuances, purchasing managers' index, and export of services have been sending very positive signals. The high base effect of 9.2% growth in FY24 was supposed to bring down the rate, so 6.5% is an impressive number.

Agriculture has been the big winner with growth of 4.6%, which suggests a good monsoon resulting in a stable kharif crop followed by a similar rabi crop can keep the rural economy ticking. In fact, this is a necessary condition for attaining sustainable growth over a longer period. As the monsoon forecast for FY26 is positive, indications are that rural consumption should continue to tick this year. This would be the supply side of the sector, and given the increase in minimum support price across the board for the kharif season — it will probably be replicated for rabi crops — higher output should result in higher income for farmers.

Manufacturing, however, has been the only segment that has registered rel-

MADAN SABNAVIS

Chief economist, Bank of Baroda



atively much lower growth than the previous year. Growth at 4.5% comes over 12.3%, so there is a big base effect. But it is also known that corporate profits have been under pressure this year due to demand-side factors. In fact, the manufacturing story is quite skewed with infra-oriented industries like steel, cement, engineering, and energy faring well while consumer-oriented ones delivered a mixed performance. High inflation has been the main factor militating against demand. With households spending more on food items, there is less money left for discretionary spending. Thus, the fast-moving consumer goods sector has been particularly affected. This will need monitoring in FY26.

Revised consumption is expected with the government's fiscal incentives on the tax front. Related to the slower growth in manufacturing is the slight decline in the gross fixed capital formation rate at current prices from 30.4% to 29.9%. Here too, investments made by companies have been rather narrow-based with industries like power, steel, and cement showing an increase in the face of good demand. Thus, both manufacturing

Right now, the jobs are concentrated in construction, logistics, retail, etc. that do not provide the wherewithal for high discretionary consumption

growth and capital formation will be inexorably linked in FY26. The construction sector has been one of the drivers of growth — it reflects both the contribution of housing as well as the government push on capex. The housing sector has gone through difficult times with interest rates being high over the last two years. There was an uptick in premium houses while the middle class stayed away. Government spending on roads, bridges, and irrigation works has been the major drivers of construction, which has kept growth ticking. Given the spare capacity, there is immense potential to expand construction in India. This trend may be expected to prevail in FY26.

The services sector has registered growth of 7.2% against 9% last year. The trade, transport, hotels, and communication segment has grown by 6.1%, which does not adequately capture the high level of spending by people on "services experience". There has been a spike in spending on travel tourism and experiences, which should have resulted in higher growth in the segment. Financial services and real estate also registered lower growth of 7.2% on a high 10.3%,

mainly due to the slow growth in deposits and credit in FY25. The movement of savings to the capital markets did come in the way of deposit growth. Public administration and other services maintained 8.9% growth with both the Centre and states meeting revenue budgets.

The fact that the Indian economy clocked growth of 6.5% over 9.2% (FY24) reflects a rather strong foundation. This would provide sufficient buffers to counter the global uncertainty building up periodically. Being a largely domestic-oriented economy, maintaining growth in the region of 6.5% would not be a problem. The challenge would be to move to the 7% plus territory.

For that to happen, the demand side must be worked out. So far, the focus has been on the supply side, where the Reserve Bank of India has been lowering rates to push up investment. But investment is a result of higher capacity utilisation rates that can be achieved only when consumption increases and companies need to infuse fresh capital. This process normally takes at least one or two years. It can be hoped that FY26 will provide this initial push to consumption.

The heartening fact is that official data hints at the creation of more jobs. But they need to be in high-value production and services where income is typically higher. Right now, the jobs are concentrated in construction, logistics, retail, etc. which do not provide the wherewithal for high discretionary consumption. As the economy keeps growing, this matrix will change. It can be hoped that overall growth will be more broad-based with the manufacturing sector providing a major push.

Views are personal

Bracing for face-off in Dhaka



JAYANTA ROY CHOWDHURY

The writer is former resident editor-East, Press Trust of India

India, as the responsible and interested neighbour, must ensure that Bangladesh sorts out its own mess without causing a humanitarian crisis

AMIDST THE DRAMA of a tense power struggle between Bangladesh's interim government and the army and multiple political and humanitarian crises, the former South Asian "tiger economy" is experiencing a continued economic meltdown.

For India, its nearest neighbour, both the political crisis and the economic disaster in the making can have huge repercussions which need to be understood and managed in New Delhi's own self-interest. The Bangladesh army is patrolling the streets of Dhaka after a stand-off with the Muhammad Yunus regime, sparked in part by the latter's desire to grant a passage — through Chittagong to Myanmar's Rakhine state — to the United Nations at the insistence of US diplomats.

The army fears the "humanitarian corridor" through which supplies would be taken to the Arakanese people who have been rebelling against Myanmar will draw it into a regional war in which it sees no stakes for Bangladesh. It also deeply resents suspected efforts to change its power structure by replacing its chief, General Waker uz Zaman, with an ambitious pro-Islamist staff officer favoured by Yunus and by placing a newly appointed National Security Adviser who possibly holds an American citizenship over him in the chain of command.

To force out the interim government, the army has made it clear that major issues like the Arakan corridor can only be decided by an elected government and that must be put in place by end-December, a call which seems to have been heeded.

Attempts by the former banker, who is now on a tour of Japan to garner political support for his "fight" with the army, have

not proven successful. While one major party — Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) — has cold-shouldered him, the other — Awami League (banned by the Yunus regime recently) — has vowed to unseat him. Together, these parties have traditionally accounted for two-thirds to three-fourths of all votes cast in any election till date in Bangladesh. All other parties including the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami and the newly formed "king's party" of pro-Yunus students whose support he banks on, pale into insignificance in terms of political mandate.

To add to Yunus's woes, the BNP has supported the army's demand for quick polls and an immediate road map for elections. The army itself has stated that it will no longer tolerate the anarchic situation into which the nation has slid and has started cracking down on armed gangs which had made life in Bangladesh precarious, if not right down dangerous, and which were seen by many as patronised by the new crop of Islamist parties. Many members of former terror modules who were freed during the "August revolt" had made common cause with these armed gangs, though many others who were ideologically committed have been waiting in silence to start a new campaign which could cause untold misery in both Bangladesh and in nearby states of India.

Popular support for the "Gana-Ashanka" or "People's Revolution" led by Sheikh Hasina exiting Dhaka in August last year, is also fast fading with people fed up with rising unemployment, industrial decline, attacks on women and minorities, looting of households and bulldozing of symbols of the country's liberation war openly mouthed support for the previous regime.

India has said it wants early and inclusive elections — diplomatese for stating that it supports the army's and BNP's demands for elections by December

Over 140 factories have shuttered or been burnt down. Labour strikes over unpaid wages coupled with energy shortages have disrupted production and forced buyers of global readymade garment brands to hunt for other supply sources, leading to a boom in textile trade out of India, Vietnam, and Cambodia. Nearly 150,000 workers have lost their jobs so far in Bangladesh, with women being the biggest losers.

Bangladesh's GDP growth fell to 5.78% in 2023 from 7.10% in 2022. The World Bank projects a further decline to 3.3% in FY25, the lowest in 36 years. External debt has doubled from \$51 billion in FY17 to \$103 billion by December 2024, while foreign debt repayment surged 25% to \$3.5 billion in the first 10 months of FY25, straining reserves. Foreign direct investment has declined sharply to \$104.33 million in the July-September quarter of FY25, the lowest in six years. As a result, the Dhaka Stock Exchange has been in free fall since the August regime change, and has seen its index contracting by a fifth during these 10 months.

The problem for India is, of course, that with a military-led, anti-liberation war regime in Dhaka, one could face a "pincer attack" from terrorist groups going on the rampage possibly with support from the state apparatus of both Pakistan and Bangladesh. In a worst-case scenario, Bangladesh could make common cause with Pakistan and/or make the "pincer attack" scenario take on an even more sinister shape which could see India preparing for an extremely expensive three-front war.

The industrial decline of Bangladesh and the concomitant chaos there is also sure to push tens of thousands of migrants into India through the porous border, especially into the Northeast where the terrain makes fencing or policing far more difficult than elsewhere. The cost of this migration would not only be a strain on India's limited resources but also on the demographics of a sensitive region, causing its own political repercussions.

The question that policymakers must now ask is, how does India resolve the situation? India has said it wants early and inclusive elections — diplomatese for stating that it supports the army's and BNP's demands for elections by December, and that it also wants the Awami League to be allowed a level playing field in the polls.

The best option is to let Bangladesh sort out its own mess. However, weak governments have a tendency not to fall by the wayside but remain in a state of constant crisis as the Yunus regime is now displaying. His government is unlikely to walk out of power without several nudges and shoves. Actors within Bangladesh must give those shoves and nudges, but India, as the responsible and interested neighbour, must ensure that those moves occur and occur with the least bloodshed on the volatile streets of Dhaka, without causing a fresh humanitarian crisis.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Exit Elon Musk

Elon Musk's recent departure from his advisory role in the US government raises serious questions about the direction of administrative reforms and the nature of public-private collaborations. While Musk's stint was marked by ambitious goals to streamline bureaucracy, the results fell short of expectations, with widespread disruption and little sustainable progress. His aggressive

approach to cost-cutting and staff reduction, and the broader political narrative of supporting American workers. Moreover, the tension between Musk's business interests and policy positions became increasingly visible. His exit signals more than a personal shift in focus; it underscores the limitations of bringing entrepreneurial zeal into a complex, often contradictory, political landscape. Reforming government operations is a noble goal, but it must

be rooted in stability, transparency, and an understanding of the broader social context. —Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

Sports push needed

Apropos of "Are we game for collaboration" (FE, May 30), India is still lacking the sports resources and enthusiastic spirit that is needed to win a big haul of medals in Olympics and other big-ticket competitions. Improving the sports ecosystem will

take investments in state-of-the-art facilities and developing infrastructure with public-private partnership in educational institutions with a robust curriculum for sports. Talent identification programmes must spot and nurture budding young talents with refined coaching support. Above all, political intervention will hinder the selections of talented players. —NR Nagarajan, Sivakasi

Write to us at letters@expressindia.com

Bond markets are returning to normal



NIR KAISSAR

A lot of people are worried about the level of United States interest rates. "I think we should be afraid of the bond market," billionaire investor Ray Dalio said last week. To other observers, the bond market is "barfing," "shaking Wall Street," "sending a warning to Congress," "worrying that something may be breaking beneath the surface" or just plain "breaking."

I don't see what all the fuss is about.

There is nothing unusual about the current level of interest rates or their recent movement. If anything, this is a yawningly normal interest rate environment.

For perspective, the benchmark 10-year Treasury yield, at 4.5 per cent, is more than a percentage point lower than its historical average of 5.6 per cent since the 1950s. Even if you remove the period from 1980 to 1981 in which the 10-year yield was persistently above 10 per cent, that historical average declines only modestly to 5.1 per cent, still well above the current yield.

Nor is the recent interest rate volatility all that unusual. Yes, the 10-year yield has bounced around a bunch since the White House's tariff announcement on April 2. But similar — and always temporary — spikes in volatility were common throughout the 1970s and 1980s and have occurred regularly during every decade since then, including the current one.

So, why all the griping about bond yields? One reason may be that people aren't used to a normal interest rate environment. The US only recently emerged from an unusually long period of low rates — the 10-year hasn't topped 5 per cent since before the 2008 financial crisis.

Also, there's always something to dislike about interest rates. When rates were at historic lows for more than a decade after the financial crisis, critics complained that cheap debt would encourage risk taking and overinvestment in sectors that rely heavily on borrowing, such as real estate and private equity. They were right.

A normal interest rate environment should help bring out those distortions. It should also encourage the federal government to reckon with its own excesses. Deficit spending made sense when money was cheap, particularly for investment, or to bolster the economy during the Covid pandemic. Now that rates are higher and the economy is growing, policymakers should trim the deficits and shrink the US's historically high debt relative to gross domestic product.

If they don't, interest rates could rise to truly concerning levels. The Donald Trump administration is taking two big gambles on rates. One is the budget bill making its way through Congress, which, in its current form, could add as much as \$5 trillion in deficits over the next 10 years. The White House is betting that growth will more than offset additional deficits and bring down debt-to-GDP. A second gamble is that tariffs won't kick up inflation and thereby lift interest rates, either because the threat of higher levels will ultimately result in lower trade barriers or because companies will internalise the cost of tariffs rather than pass them on to consumers.

The bond market will be the judge. If

the 10-year yield drifts above its historical average and approaches, say, 7 per cent or 8 per cent, which would still be well within a normal historical range, that will be a sure sign that the market has lost confidence in Congress's ability to manage the debt or the White House's ability to execute a tariff war without stoking inflation.

As things stand, though, interest rates need not interfere with sound fiscal policy. If the US can limit deficits to 3 per cent of GDP, as Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent has pledged to do, debt-to-GDP should drop to 80 per cent by 2050 from closer to 120 per cent today.

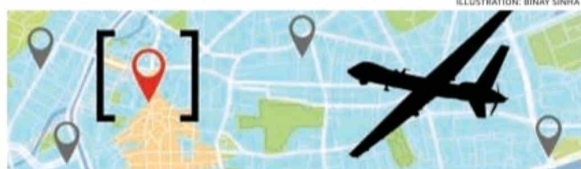
That assumes nominal GDP growth of 5 per cent a year, comprised of the Federal Reserve's 2 per cent inflation target and 3 per cent real growth, or some combination of the two.

Interest on the debt as a percentage of the federal budget would also decline significantly, even if rates stay where they are. Still, if the current 10-year Treasury yield seems too high, consider that there are good economic reasons why it has aver-

aged around 5 per cent historically. The base of that rate is inflation, which, if things go according to the Fed's plan, will run somewhere in the range of 2 per cent to 2.5 per cent long term. The Fed also aims for a short-term interest rate that is about 0.5 to 1 percentage point above the inflation rate, which closely matches the historical average yield on three-month Treasury bills. To lend for longer, investors usually demand a premium, which has averaged 1.6 percentage points for 10-year Treasuries relative to T-bills since the 1980s. The sum of those variables is a 10-year yield in the range of 4 per cent to 5 per cent, precisely where we are today.

The current 10-year yield, in other words, is a sign that the bond market is functioning normally. It may not stay that way given the gathering risks, notably credible estimates that deficits will continue to run well higher than 3 per cent of GDP. But for now, there's no reason to fear the bond market.

Bloomberg



The power of geolocation

VIEWPOINT
DEVANGSHU DATTA

One of the great accomplishments of the 21st century is the ability to determine locations very accurately. A smartphone can easily geo-locate itself inside a square with 3.5 metres or less on each side, using open location codes ("plus codes").

Plus codes simplify the representation of a given spot, using extended longitude and latitude coordinates with subdivisions of minutes and seconds. Plus codes use a Base 20 number system to convert the Lat-Long readings into shorter formats. Geometers can also add the international height reference frame to adjust differences in sea-levels with baseline "zero-height".

The matter is not conceptually hard. The accuracy of measurement is critical. That accuracy comes from 21st century's satellites, which measure time and distance with remarkable accuracy. The same spot is targeted by many satellites to ensure accurate geolocation.

Geolocation is a classic example of technology with multiple applications. Amazon, Blinkit, Swiggy, Uber, Lyft, and Google, among others, use it to locate obscure places. Emergency services like ambulances, police, fire brigade, find it useful. Civil engineers design road and sewage systems and power grids with it. Municipalities

use it to check records. Logistics services, shippers, airlines, cut millions off costs with it.

Accuracy can be refined to a much greater degree by increasing the number and quality of satellites. A normal 11-digit plus code offers accuracy to within a square with sides of 3.5 metres at the equator (it's even more accurate away from the equator). A 14-digit plus code locates a 22 cm square. Military systems use even more accurate methods, edging down to millimetres and less.

Once you've found an exact spot, getting there with the least fuss is useful. Many service providers are looking at drones and driverless cars or trucks to do the job. The average drone is far better at reading a map than the average human. The only issue is navigating traffic en route, since that traffic is largely generated by average humans.

While a drone can deliver pizza to somebody at a random location, it can also deliver kaboom. It's not so difficult to rig up a drone to carry an explosive payload, which can be set to go off at a specific place. Variations on this theme involve rockets and other missiles. In World War II, the Germans used gyroscopic timers to trigger the original cruise missile — the V-1 flying bomb. The engineers knew approximately how long a trip from the launch site to the target would take. The gyro was set to rotate for that duration, and the bomb exploded once the gyro stopped.

The 21st century equivalents of the V-1 have more sophisticated trigger mechanisms to go with far more efficient navigation. Whether it's drones, cruise missiles, or other munitions, they are all capable of finding targets with extreme accuracy and exploding at the right instant.

The defensive responses

involve attempts to scramble the electronics of the smart "bomb" (it may be an unmanned aerial vehicle, or a missile) through electronic counter-measures (ECM) to confuse it. Also the defence tries to intercept missiles in mid-flight by hitting them with other missiles (shells, rockets, and missiles). It gets more complicated with trying to work out electronic signatures and radar profiles.

The four-day faceoff between India and Pakistan saw both sides deploying lots of state-of-the-art stuff that depended on location. Both flew manned planes only from within their own borders, and launched missiles and drones beyond visual range at cross-border targets, while using their own air defence systems to intercept the opponents' "slings and arrows". Future conflicts will also see versions of this playing out. At some stage, "air superiority" will come to mean the ability to knock out satellites.

While the military tech is more sophisticated, the civilian tech — location plus drones — is good enough for military *jujitsu*. Ukraine's cottage industry produces nearly a million military-capable drones a month. The Houthis also use jury-rigged devices with open location systems to great effect. It may not be too long before terrorists across the world start using drones to carry out attacks.

A second associated area of concern is the weaponisation of artificial intelligence (AI). Human reaction speeds are useless in a 21st century war fought this way. All air defence systems and most missiles, drones and loitering munitions are likely to be AI-driven. An arsenal of autonomous weaponry sounds cool but it could have some very nasty consequences since we've yet to find ways to build judgement into AI.

Weight of the 5th star

Asim Munir has locked up Imran Khan, had his handmaiden Parliament mangle the Constitution, and given himself an extended tenure. But the additional jingle of that fifth star will not change facts on the ground

What can a Pakistan Army chief do with a fifth star that he couldn't with four? What can a Pakistan Army chief, master of all he surveys, do as Field Marshal that he couldn't as a mere General?

It's tempting to say, little more. This is just a bit more bling on his collar, cap, car, and, when he chooses, on his pulpit — a main battle tank. That must be the question also assailing his mind.

He knows that he can't have the fifth star and do nothing more with it. Should India worry?

The short answer is, India must always worry about the Pakistani army, and it does. Just that, there's this added concern and urgency with this bizarre promotion from within the "system" — or maybe from outside it, depending on where you place Shehbaz Sharif in this arrangement.

What will he do with his fifth star, only for the second time in Pakistan's and the subcontinent's history? Our three five-stars, Cariappa, Manekshaw and Arjan Singh were handed ceremonial batons. It is a phenomenon so rare for modern militaries that today, the only example in a country of some consequence would be Egypt's Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. Even the mighty Americans buried the exalted title with Marshall, MacArthur, Eisenhower and Bradley. He will surely want to do something with it. I might suggest taking a leaf out of Idi Amin's book and find some equivalent of his "Conqueror of the British Empire". But this isn't the time to be funny.

Firing his civilian government and taking over power would be so boring in Pakistan. He doesn't need that. All our politico-strategic analysis of Pakistan should henceforth be focused on this one central point. How will Field Marshal Asim Munir be different from General Asim Munir? What the General could do, we saw indicated in his speech to overseas Pakistanis on April 16 and in what happened in Pahalgaon on April 22. The one promise in that speech he's yet to fulfil is, making Pakistan "a hard state".

Victory celebrations for propaganda apart, he knows his military has suffered a severe setback. Any yet unsubstantiated claims of downing Indian planes can please the population for a while. It is just that the pictures of the battered airbases — each one of them east of the Indus — and the big Jai-Lashkar establishments reduced to rubble will endure. However much he thumps his chest, the additional jingle of that fifth star will not change those facts on the

ground. He would want to do something soon to "make amends". In fact, he would need to.

I would go so far as to wager that he will do something sooner than we might have imagined. In the past, in a phenomenon described earlier as the Pakistani Army's "seven-year itch", each major terror attack and the Indian response bought us about seven years of detente and relative peace. We will not get that kind of time now, because Munir hasn't got it. When he will act, what he will do, we can't say — but can't be sure. There's only one thing I can say with certainty. If you are looking at six or seven years, I can tell you for sure where Munir will be. Politics, culture, and history of Pakistan indicate that it won't be a good place.

Before we get there, however, the awesome powers he has amassed as a four-star deserve a look. He already had at his feet the civilian government he conjured to get "elected". Hear the fawning words, the body language, and see if there's anything prime ministerial about the younger Sharif brother in the presence of his "slipsalsar" (commander-in-chief, as he was already addressing Munir before that fifth star). Cheerleader, court-jester, or a bit of both, take your pick. Munir has already been speaking on all key issues, including the promise of a trillion-dollar economy (currently \$410 billion).

He's locked up Imran Khan, the only leader to challenge the army's exalted power. This, after he banned his party from contesting. The fact that Munir's preferred parties (the coalition led by PM-N) couldn't even win this one horse race didn't matter; he installed them nevertheless.

The judiciary has caved in, especially as it conceded to the military courts the power to try civilians for some most serious offences, especially treason. He's already got his handmaiden Parliament, elected in an institutionally stolen election to rubber stamp amendments to mangle the Constitution and give himself an extended tenure. He's got it all sewn up. So, what's next?

See it from where the field marshal sits. If he looks seven years ahead, he would dearly hope and pray that statutory warning on mutual fund advertising applies in his case: Past performance is not a guarantee of future performance. Because the past will tell him that every exalted army chief with political ambition has ended up

badly. Disgraced in defeat, or exiled, prosecuted, even assassinated and, in some cases, three of the four. Ayub, Yahya, Zia, Musharraf, the four make a straight line.

To stretch this, even Zulfikar Ali Bhutto became a dictator and shared the same fate. Munir's two predecessors, Qamar Javed Bajwa and Raheel Sharif were prudent in ultimately facing away, whatever power they exercised when in uniform. A Pakistani chief with the kind of power that Munir now has, no longer enjoys the luxury of thinking of retirement one day to play golf. That option out, Munir has the compulsion to do something with what the religious teacher in him might see as a god-given opportunity. I seem to be the chosen one, and if so, what is it that I was chosen to do?

His rise is *sui generis* even for Pakistan. The country has given us a chief who the civilian government appointed deputy and home minister simultaneously (Ayub), then made him the chief martial law administrator, and who, in turn, fired the same civilian government to become president and, soon after, anointed himself field marshal. We've seen Yahya, Zia and Musharraf as garden variety military rulers all meeting one of the criteria.

The last two also installed some kind of an "elected government". This "bolsal" phenomenon was Pakistan's unique contribution to political science. When the generals were not directly in power, they held it from outside. Again, that uniquely Pakistani phenomenon was called "hybrid" government. How would you describe what we have now? A field marshal with a captive government and his only likely challenger in jail. More than a decade ago, when Nawaz Sharif was dismissed by the military establishment, he had said to me defiantly in an interview: "What kind of system is this, *addha tittar*, *addha batar* (half a partridge, half a quail)." When he returns with a majority next, he said, he would make sure there's clarity. Either they (the army) should rule, or us (elected civilians).

I wonder how he would describe what he sees now, self-exiled from politics in his own country. How would you see this? An army chief elevated to field marshal, the most popular leader jailed for almost two years, and a farcically elected civilian government in power.

Do you remember Duck-billed Platypus from your class five biology class — the unique Australian organism with characteristics of a mammal, bird and reptile used to make the case for evolution between species? I know you are laughing, but please don't. This isn't funny. This is what Field Marshal Munir is now presiding over. He cannot have it all and do nothing with it. That fifth star is as much of a burden as the fake claims of victory. India had better be prepared. Munir doesn't have another 5-7 years. He could be back at our throats soon, even within the next 12 months.

By special arrangement with ThePrint

Plan B for the planet

EYE CULTURE
MUMAR ABISHK

Not too long ago, the idea of cooling Earth by bouncing sunlight back into space would have seemed like a fringe fantasy — equal parts sci-fi and geo-political taboo. These days, it's inching into the heart of serious climate conversations.

This is no coincidence. Climate forecasts, once laden with caveats, are now sounding more like sirens. The World Meteorological Organization has warned that global temperatures could rise as much as 2°C above pre-industrial levels in the next five years, breaching a climate red line. At that mark, we're looking at shrinking crop yields, collapsing ecosystems, and more than a third of the global population potentially exposed to extreme heat.

In this climate of urgency, Solar Radiation Modification (SRM), a sub-field of solar geoengineering, is garnering attention. The concept is simple: Reflect a small portion of sunlight back into space to artificially cool the planet. The methods vary wildly — from injecting sulphur dioxide into the stratosphere to spreading reflective glass particles over Arctic ice. Elegant in theory but risky in practice. Tinker with the global thermostat to cool one region, and you might cause drought in another. The models are incomplete, risks planetary, and governance nearly absent.

Still, money is flowing in. According to SRM360, a non-profit tracking

developments in the field, funding between 2020 and 2024 reached \$12.1 million — over 3x the \$34.9 million spent between 2010 and 2014. And the momentum isn't slowing: \$164.7 million has already been committed for the next phase, from 2025 through 2029.

A key player in this new wave is the UK's Advanced Research and Innovation Agency (ARIA), which has pledged roughly \$80 million towards real-world SRM experiments. Its "Exploring Climate Cooling" initiative is pushing boundaries: Researchers under the programme aim to test whether they can thicken Arctic ice, brighten marine clouds, or even simulate the effects of orbital mirrors. Mark Symes, ARIA's programme director, put it bluntly in a recent BBC interview: "There is a critical missing piece in our knowledge on the feasibility and impacts of SRM, and to fill that gap requires real-world outdoor experiments."

But that approach carries reputational risks. Over the past decade, several respected institutions — including Harvard and a UK university consortium involving Oxford — have launched SRM projects, only to pause or cancel them in the face of political backlash and scientific hesitation.

Not everyone is waiting for academic approval. Since 2017, the Arctic Ice Project — a privately run effort — has scattered tiny reflective glass beads across 17,500 square metres of Arctic sea ice. The move drew protests from Native Alaskan leaders. It now hopes to scale up its

deployment across 100,000 square kilometres.

Then there's the do-it-yourself crowd. In 2022, a British independent researcher launched a weather balloon that released sulphur dioxide into the stratosphere, dubbing the project SATAN — Stratospheric Aerosol Transport and Nucleation. Around the same time, Silicon Valley-backed startup Make Sunsets began launching small balloons while planning to sell "cooling credits" to fund the operation.

Critics argue that such experiments, if conducted without rigorous review, may violate international environmental laws, including the 1985 Vienna Convention, which protects the ozone layer. Some participants point to a lack of national regulation as justification. That legal vacuum, however, doesn't equal a green light. SRM360 has also flagged \$1.1 million in anonymous donations to SRM efforts, raising concerns about transparency in a field with potential global consequences.

And then, there's the spectre that haunts every SRM debate: Fossil fuel interests. Critics worry that solar geoengineering could offer a convenient excuse to avoid hard work — and more politically painful — task of cutting emissions.

For now, SRM remains what it's always been — an audacious, deeply uncertain proposition. It sits at the intersection of science, ethics, politics, and desperation. Whether it evolves into a viable climate Plan B or a cautionary tale will depend less on technological innovation and more on political will, public oversight, and a global consensus that's still nowhere in sight.

AI's singular uncertainty

TICKER
MIHIR S SHARMA

It is hard to think of any historical parallel for the technological revolution promised by the growth of artificial intelligence (AI). In both its speed and its possible scope, AI appears unprecedented.

The real issue, however, is that few technologies of the past created such uncertainty. It is true that nobody could predict what the internet would do to society. But the variation in people's expectations of AI's eventual effects is particularly wide. Here are four areas in which predictions of the impact of AI have shown this stunning divergence.

Global inequality: Many previous technologies have helped level the playing field between developing and developed nations. The information technology revolution and the internet helped those in India, for example, compete on some level with the developed world and people in the West. The economic surplus created by the new technology — for consumers or

producers — was shared between countries.

We don't know if the same will be true of AI. One view is that its spread will enable greater productivity for workers everywhere, that it will minimise problems caused by linguistic differences, and allow for more efficient provision of government services in capacity-starved developing countries. This might have an equalising effect on welfare across nations. But others point out that there is an embedded first-mover advantage to AI greater than demonstrated by previous technologies, which were more easily replicable.

Those who can possess the most computing power, who can train their algorithms earliest, may retain their lead indefinitely. The patents and proprietary information that go into most AI models are controlled by pools of finance concentrated in only a few geographies, and they will benefit disproportionately.

In other words, we can't be sure if AI will reduce the welfare gap between developing and developed countries, or greatly increase it.

Employment: All technologies, when introduced into industry, both create and destroy jobs. But with AI the predictions are particularly stark. In the Amodei, chief executive officer of Anthropic AI, told Axios this week that his best estimate is that

AI will "wipe out half of all entry-level white-collar jobs, and spike unemployment to 20 per cent in the next one to five years". He said governments should prepare for the "mass elimination of jobs across technology, finance, law, consulting and other professions".

Others claim, however, that the long-term effect is likely to be positive in terms of productivity gains, which will then open up new roles and raise wages all round. Most employers don't agree with Mr Amodei. One World Economic Forum survey-based report predicts that AI will cause 92 million jobs to be wound up, but create 178 million new ones by 2030. Their survey of 1,000 large global employers found that more than half expected to increase their salary bill by 2030, while only 8 per cent expected the salary share of revenue to decline.

Creativity: What will AI do to human creativity? Will it be more or less able to express ourselves once we have access to better and better AI engines? Few things are more divisive than this. Across social networks, AI-generated visual "art" has become ubiquitous. Most small businesses now rely on free AI image generation for basic marketing and graphic design. The creation of images — and, increasingly, music and lyrics — is only dependent on the

quality and inventiveness of the prompts given to the AI, not the inherent talent and skill of the human creator.

Human artists and designers, meanwhile, point out that this is not generative, but regenerative — an unimaginative remix of whatever real work by artists an algorithm finds online. In the absence of new artistic feedstock, derivative AI-assisted artwork will wind up being an endless circle of replication. Only humans can create novelty, and they are edged out of the creative process, creativity will grind to a halt for the first time in history.

Human survival: The industrial revolution, based as it was on fossil fuels, eventually led to global warming with its existential risk for many human communities. AI's risks are, according to some, more immediate and even higher. Even two years ago, some in Silicon Valley were warning AI-related risks were startlingly high. The Center for AI Safety said in June 2023 that "mitigating the risk of extinction from AI should be a global priority alongside other societal-scale risks such as pandemics and nuclear war". Others in the field scoff: One senior MIT researcher said that there is "no more evidence now than there was in 1950" that AI would pose an existential risk to the human race. It's hard to find a starker difference than this: One group involved with the technology thinks it may well kill us all, and another group thinks this might make us immortal.

Climate resilience must be at the core of growth

Without embedding climate and disaster resilience into its core development strategy, the nation could face escalating disruptions that threaten not only its economy but also the livelihoods, infrastructure, and future of its people

FIRST
Column

India has recently achieved a remarkable milestone by becoming the world's fourth-largest economy, surpassing both Japan and Germany. This achievement highlights the country's strong economic growth, expanding international influence, and increasing economic resilience. As India aspires to become a fully developed nation by 2047, marking the hundredth anniversary of its independence, there is a strong sense of optimism that prevails. Nevertheless, this aspiration is overshadowed by significant challenges, especially those arising from climate change and natural disasters. If India does not incorporate climate and disaster resilience into its fundamental development goals, it may jeopardise the numerous economic gains it has worked so hard to achieve.

The effects of climate change and associated disasters pose serious limitations on development, disrupting business activities, damaging infrastructure, and jeopardising supply chains — concerns that are particularly relevant for developing countries like India. With the rising frequency and severity of climate-related disasters, their impacts are being felt across multiple sustainable development goals, especially those associated with economic growth, trade, transportation, energy, environmental sustainability, and public health. These escalating risks not only slow progress but also reveal how specific development priorities can increase vulnerability to disasters and climate change through emissions, land-use modifications, and exposure to hazards. Consequently, a comprehensive and proactive strategy for climate and disaster resilience is essential.

India's distinct geography — characterised by tropical monsoon systems, a 7,500-kilometer-long coastline, and the seismically active Himalayan region — along with its socio-economic realities, makes it one of the most disaster-prone nations in the world. On average, the country encounters five to six cyclones each year, with two to three usually classified as severe. Unpredictable monsoon patterns lead to recurring floods in major river basins. Over the past two decades, India has faced significant economic losses due to extreme weather events, which have severely undermined development progress. A 2022 report from the National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM) and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) stated that India experienced economic damage of around \$80 billion between 1999 and 2020 due to floods, cyclones, droughts, and earthquakes — events whose frequency and severity have been worsened in the recent past.

Numerous high-profile disasters highlight the connection between climate — induced events and setbacks in development. The Chennai floods of 2015 impacted over three million individuals, disrupted



more than 20,000 small and medium enterprises and resulted in damages estimated at \$2.25 billion. Likewise, the Kerala floods of 2018 — considered the worst in a century — affected 5.4 million people, damaged over 10,000 km of roads, and caused losses exceeding \$4.3 billion. The tourism sector, contributing 12 per cent to the state's GDP, halted operations, and recovery needs were estimated at \$2.8 billion. In 2020, Cyclone Amphan struck West Bengal and Odisha, resulting in damages estimated at \$13 billion, disrupting infrastructure, agriculture, and livelihoods across both states.

The agriculture industry, which employs almost half of India's workforce, has proven to be particularly susceptible to severe weather. According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO)'s 2023 report, The Impact of Disasters on Agriculture and Food Security 2023 — Avoiding and Reducing Losses Through Investment in Resilience, approximately 23 per cent of the overall economic losses resulting from disasters are incurred by the agriculture sector. This highlights the sector's considerable susceptibility to natural hazards such as droughts, floods, and storms. The report emphasises the urgent need for investment in resilience to mitigate these impacts. In India, repeated droughts in states like Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and Karnataka have resulted in consistent crop failures, worsening rural hardship and leading to significant migration. According to the World Bank's Climate Risk Profile for India (2021), climate-related catastro-

phes could potentially decrease India's GDP by up to 2.8 per cent each year. Information from CRED's EM-DAT database (2023) shows that flooding constitutes nearly 50 per cent of all disaster-related financial losses in the country. The disruption of livelihoods, mass displacements, collapse of infrastructure, and halts in economic activities further strain public finances and obstruct developmental progress, particularly in regions most vulnerable to climate impacts.

Major urban centres in India, which are essential to the nation's economic development, are becoming increasingly vulnerable to extreme weather phenomena. Cities such as Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, and Kolkata frequently experience flooding, heat waves, storms, and unusually heavy rainfalls. These occurrences damage infrastructure, disrupt transportation systems and interfere with essential services. Megacities like Delhi and Mumbai, which have high population densities and depend heavily on climate-sensitive infrastructures, are particularly at risk.

Recently, Mumbai experienced its wettest May in over a century, with a month's worth of rainfall falling in just 24 hours. This record-breaking rainfall flooded roads, disrupted flights and local trains, and caused parts of the newly constructed Worli underground station on Metro Line-3 to become non-operational. Meanwhile, the National Capital Region (NCR) and Delhi faced severe, off-season rainfall and dust storms that damaged infrastructure, caused power outages, uprooted trees, and halted traffic. In May 2025, unexpected storms followed by heavy rains compromised

public infrastructure, leaving typically dry areas inundated. These events indicate a significant, climate-led transformation in urban weather patterns and highlight the pressing need for resilient infrastructure and urban planning.

The financial burden of disasters is primarily shouldered by state Governments. Relief efforts, emergency medical assistance, and evacuation costs exert pressure on public finances, particularly as revenues from sectors like tourism and agriculture decline. While states that experience fewer disasters can often manage these expenses internally, more vulnerable states typically depend on central assistance or borrow from financial markets, which increases public debt and diverts resources from long-term development goals. Procedural challenges in accessing the State Disaster Response Fund, including spending limits and bureaucratic red tape, further hinder recovery processes.

Beyond the economic impacts, disasters worsen social inequalities and obstruct inclusive development. In Chennai, major companies relocated their operations while informal workers and small exporters suffered heavy losses. In Kerala, the cancellation of tourist reservations drove small business owners and homestay operators into debt. These trends recur with each disaster, displacing vulnerable communities, often into urban areas that are similarly at risk.

There is no doubt that India has made significant progress in disaster preparedness. The nation has developed advanced cyclone warning systems and an expanding array of disaster shelters. Nevertheless, sub-

stantial policy and institutional deficits persist. Disaster risk financing in India remains largely reactive, relying on budget reallocations after disasters occur. Financial instruments like catastrophe bonds, parametric insurance, and resilience bonds — widely used in regions like the Caribbean and Mexico — are still in the experimental phase within India. Barriers such as high premiums, inadequate actuarial data, and ambiguous regulatory frameworks impede their broader adoption.

India possesses a significant opportunity to take the lead in this domain. The nation's effort to establish the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), now supported by the G20, offers a robust basis for integrating disaster resilience into infrastructure planning and development. The effectiveness of this initiative will rely on aligning it with major national programs like the PM Gati Shakti master plan, as well as state-level climate adaptation strategies.

What India requires is a development paradigm focused on climate resilience. All future infrastructure developments — such as high-speed trains, solar parks, smart cities, and coastal highways — should be assessed for their exposure to various hazards and designed to withstand the climate challenges expected by 2050 and beyond. Early warning systems need to expand beyond just cyclone notifications to include alerts for flash floods, lightning-prone areas, and cloudbursts in hilly regions. Fiscal resilience must be enhanced through a structured approach to disaster risk financing that merges strong disaster response resources with innovative financial strategies and contingent credit options. Environmental protections — including stricter land-use regulations, nature-based solutions, and ecosystem restoration — should be integral to national development frameworks.

Global research indicates that investing a single dollar in disaster preparedness can save up to seven dollars during recovery and response. However, disaster prevention and preparedness still garner only a small share of climate finance. If India harnesses its demographic advantages and advancements in technology to enhance robust infrastructure, promote community-oriented adaptation, and implement efficient risk financing, it can transform disaster risks into opportunities. This would lead to inclusive and sustainable development. The next two decades are critical. Whether natural disasters continue to drag down development or become a driving force for better planning and innovation will depend on the policy decisions made today. As India looks forward to celebrating a century of independence in 2047, embedding climate and disaster resilience at the core of its development strategy is not merely wise — it is a national necessity.

(The writer is a former Executive Director, National Institute of Disaster Management, GGI and former Director, SAARC Disaster Management Centre. Views are personal)



SATENDRA SINGH

Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar: The embodiment of dharma and good governance

The development of any country depends on the welfare policies of the Government and its good governance system. The history of India is full of stories of such rulers who did a lot for the development and upliftment of the country. One such name is Purnashuk Maharaaj, Ahilyabai Holkar.

Her welfare policies inspire Governments even today. This year is her 300th birth anniversary and the entire country is celebrating her legacy. She was born on May 31, 1725, in Chaundi village of Ahmednagar (Ahilya Nagar) district. The Bharatiya Janata Party, under the leadership of its National President Shri Jagat Prakash Nadda ji, has dedicated a 10-day campaign from 21 May to 31 May in the memory of Lokmata Ahilyabai.

Inspired by the multi-faceted personality of Maharani Ahilyabai Holkar and her life's deeds, BJP workers are working to spread the poor welfare schemes of Honourable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi and his resolution of "Vishwas se Virasat" to the people. This work is being accomplished through intellectual dialogues, exhibitions, competitions among students, cleanliness of temples and ghats, aartis and processions. State Governments and local administrations have also named many schemes and institutions after Maharani Ahilyabai Holkar.

Western scholars spread propaganda about India and said that "Hindu governance was chaotic." James Mill wrote that "India was a morally hollow and selfish society which was not governable" whereas in Western countries, terrible atrocities were being committed in the name of religion.

In India, Ahilyabai Holkar established a welfare Dharma. In India, Dharma is a broad concept which paves the way for economic and moral progress. Dharma teaches the path from earning money and development of human qualities in personal life to salvation.

For the rulers, it teaches policies and plans to increase economic prosperity and in personal life, it teaches one's relationship with mutual civil behaviour, society, nature etc.

This has been contained by sage Kanada in Vaisheshik Sutra: "Yato abhyudaya nishreyas siddhi: sa dharma" which translates to "That which leads to both Abhyudaya (material well-being) and Nishreyas (spiritual well-being), is Dharma."

In India, the rule based on religion is considered to be the ideal rule, in which everyone is happy and healthy. That is, economic prosperity from the material point of



SHIV PRAKASH

environment in which everyone can follow their religious duties, such an environment became an example of an ideal state. Such a capable ruler was given by Lord Shri Ram, so Ramrajya became an ideal and exemplary state for all. Many kings like Emperor Vikramaditya, Raja Bhoj, Emperor Harshvardhan tried to follow this ideal of Ramrajya. Rulers like Maharana Pratap, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj sacrificed their lives to protect these values during foreign invasions. Ahilyabai was also a queen who followed these eternal values.

Ahilyabai took over the rule of Malwa state in 1767 after the death of her father-in-law. Due to her devotion towards Narmada, commercial and strategic skills, she made Maheshwar on the banks of Narmada her capital. She ruled this state for 28 years till her death. Schemes for the development of farmers, providing land to landless farmers, tribal development, making her rule crime-free, employment-oriented economy, women empowerment, production of Maheshwari sarees for her and soldier welfare were the specialties of her rule. She also created a women army by forming a military contingent of 500 women. Maheshwar sarees even today reflect her women-centric industrial policy. Due to her affection towards the people, the public gave her the title of Lokmata.

Along with the economic development of her state, she also played an important role in the cultural upliftment of India. Even after being the queen of Malwa state, she did the work of

Construction of innumerable temples including all the Dhams, all the Jyotirlingas, all the Shakti Peethas, construction of river ghats, arrangement of Dhamshalas for the stay of the travelers, this is a series of incomparable works done by her.

She also had a role in the reconstruction of Badrinath, Kedarnath located in the Himalayas, Lord Shri Vishwanath located in Kashi, Somnath, Dwarka, Puri Jagannath, Ramswaram. The number of these works done by her across the country is over 12,500. Its specialty is that she got this work done from her own wealth, not from the treasury. Starting a Sanskrit school and honoring scholars reveals her deep interest in education.

Shivakamini Ahilyabai considered her rule as the rule of Shiva. For this reason, her name was not inscribed on his Government seal but "Shri Shankar: Aagye Varunah" was inscribed. She used to run her rule with full sacrifice considering service to the people as service to God. While describing a good king, Vidur Niti says: "Chakshusha Manasa Vacha Karmana Cha Chaturvidham."

Prasadihyam y lokam tam loko nu prasidati" It means "The king who pleases his subjects with his eyes, mind, speech and deeds, his subjects are pleased with him. Due to these qualities, Maharani Ahilyabai Holkar was honoured with the title of Purnashuk."

On the 300th birth anniversary of Maharani Ahilyabai, let us commit ourselves to the welfare of the world by becoming the centre of good governance and cultural renaissance. This will be a true tribute to Lokmata Ahilyabai.

(The author is the National Joint General Secretary of BJP)

India's Soaring Cooling Demand: A call for energy-efficient choices

India's rapid economic expansion and urban transition have fueled an unprecedented rise in energy demand. One of the most visible outcomes of this growth is the surge in electricity consumption, which has climbed from 136 gigawatts (GW) in 2013-14 to 243 GW in 2023-24. On May 30, 2024, the country recorded an all-time high of 250 GW in peak power demand. This trend shows no sign of slowing, with a major contributor being the increasing need for cooling solutions amid rising temperatures and expanding urban populations.

In 2024 alone, sales of air conditioners (ACs) jumped by 40-50 per cent, underscoring the growing demand for indoor climate control. Looking ahead, summer 2025 is expected to see a further 9-10 per cent rise in peak electricity demand, driven heavily by cooling needs. Already, fans and ACs contribute to nearly half of household electricity usage in urban India. Yet, despite this, only about 3 per cent of households use super energy-efficient ceiling fans. The primary barrier is affordability, as these fans typically carry a higher upfront cost. Addressing this affordability gap is not just an economic concern but also a strategic imperative. Encouraging the widespread adoption of energy-efficient cooling appliances offers India a unique opportunity to ease grid stress, reduce energy consumption, and enhance long-term energy security.

Peak Demand

Every year, India adds between 10 and 15 million new AC units. By 2035, the country could see as many as 150 million more installed. Alongside ubiquitous ceiling fan usage, this surge creates a sharp seasonal increase in electricity demand — particularly during the hottest months. This seasonal peak puts immense strain on power infrastructure, often leading to blackouts, increased procurement costs for electricity providers, and unreliable supply for consumers. In this context, improving the efficiency of cooling appliances becomes not just a household issue but a national priority. By reducing the load on the power grid, energy-efficient appliances can help stabilise the electricity supply.

Total Cost of Ownership

Many consumers hesitate to purchase energy-efficient appliances due to their slightly higher price tags. However, these appliances often save significant money over time. The concept of Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) includes not just the initial purchase price, but also the operating costs over the product's lifespan. High-efficiency appliances like 5-star ACs and BLDs (Brushless Direct Current) fans consume up to 50 per cent less power

far exceed the initial price difference. Studies indicate that the overall cost of ownership can be reduced by up to 17 per cent, making high-efficiency models not only environmentally sound but financially wise.

The 'Mileage' Rating for ACs

To help consumers make informed decisions, India introduced the Indian Seasonal Energy Efficiency Ratio (ISEER) system for air conditioners. ISEER is akin to a "mileage" label for ACs, measuring cooling output per unit of energy consumed across seasonal variations. A higher ISEER rating signifies better energy performance. For instance, a 5-star AC with an ISEER value of 5.0 or more is comparable to a car giving 30 kilometers per litre, whereas a 3-star AC with a 3.5 rating might be closer to 20 km/l. Over time, this difference translates into substantial electricity bill savings — making 5-star ACs a smart investment, particularly in climates like India's, where summer cooling needs are intensive.

Why BLDs Fans Makes Sense?

Ceiling fans are the most widely used cooling appliances in Indian homes and often operate for 15 to 18 hours a day, especially in warmer regions. Traditional induction-based fans typically consume 70-80 watts, while energy-efficient BLDs fans require only 28-35 watts. At the household level, this translates into savings of up to 15 per cent on electricity bills. While a BLD fan costs around INR 2,700 compared to INR 1,300 for a conventional fan, the difference can be recouped in under 18 months through energy savings. After that, the fan operates almost cost-free for the remainder of its 7-8 year lifespan. Widespread adoption of BLD fans could have a transformative effect. If every Indian household installed just two such fans and operated them for 15 hours daily, national savings could exceed INR 78,000 crore annually.

Debunking the Wattage Myth

One common misconception is that higher wattage means better performance. This misunderstanding is especially prevalent in the lighting space, where consumers often believe that a 9-watt bulb is brighter than a 6-watt one. While energy-efficient LEDs consumed — not brightness. Efficiency-focused technologies like LEDs produce more lumens per watt, meaning a well-designed 6-watt LED can actually outperform a 9-watt bulb. The benefits of energy-efficient cooling extend far beyond individual savings. Environmentally, these contribute to reduced greenhouse gas emissions, supporting India's commitment under the Paris Agreement.

(The writer is Chief General Manager (CGM) at Everest)



ANIMESH MISHRA

Editor's
TAKE

Int'l student's American dream on the hold

The Trump administration abruptly freezes new visa interviews for international students, disrupting their academic plans

In a move sending ripples through global academic circles, the Trump administration has ordered a temporary suspension on new visa interview appointments for international students and exchange visitors. The decision — spearheaded by Secretary of State Marco Rubio — comes as part of a broader plan to expand social media vetting of all F, M, and J visa applicants. While US officials describe the measure as "temporary," its ramifications may be far-reaching, affecting students, US universities, and America's position as a global education hub. The State Department has directed US embassies worldwide to halt scheduling new visa interviews for student and exchange visitor visas, including the commonly used F-1 (degree programs), J-1 (exchange programs), and M-1 (vocational training). No timeline has been given for when new interviews will resume. The department cites a planned overhaul of screening and vetting processes, with expanded scrutiny of applicants' social media as a central feature.

The immediate impact is on students hoping to begin their studies in the US in Fall 2025. With the visa process already requiring weeks to months, this halt could mean delayed or cancelled plans for thousands of students who have already secured admission but not yet completed their visa interviews.

In the 2023-2024 academic year, over 1.13 million international students enrolled in US institutions, a record high. A staggering 71.5 per cent came from Asia, with India and China being the top contributors. For many of these students, this sudden freeze introduces uncertainty and potential derailment of life-changing academic and career plans. US universities stand to suffer significant consequences.

Institutions like New York University, Northeastern and Columbia rely heavily on international tuition revenue and research contributions. At Harvard, Yale and Northwestern, international students make up over one-fifth of the student body. Harvard, embroiled in recent tensions with the administration, had its approval to enrol new international students revoked just last week. Losing international students would impact not only financial bottom lines but also the diversity, innovation, and global reputation of these institutions.

Research labs, graduate programs, and cultural exchange efforts could all take a hit. While the official reason for the pause is national security and vetting improvements, but it may well be politically charged. The move comes amid escalating tensions between the administration and university campuses over pro-Palestinian protests and free speech issues. Though the administration maintains its focus is on safety and screening, incidents like this suggest a blurred line between legitimate security concerns and political repression.

The feasibility of this suspension rests on a complex balance. On one hand, enhancing vetting processes may be viewed as a legitimate national interest. However, the broad and undefined nature of this pause risks undermining the US's standing as a destination of choice for global talent. For now, students, universities, and global academic partners are left in limbo.

China's modern warfare without war

Despite boasting formidable military capabilities and engaging in loud sabre-rattling, China consistently avoids direct military entanglements, choosing instead a path of deception, diplomacy and economic entrapment

Chinese philosopher, Sun Tzu (author of *Art of War*) has influenced the thinking and policies of the Chinese leadership, for eons. Amongst his most potent and famous treatise is on the military doctrine of asymmetrical warfare, which is increasingly relevant in a VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous) world of constant churn and dissonance.

One key feature of expansionist China's strategy has been to follow Sun Tzu's very cost-efficient dictum of "subduing the enemy without fighting". Much has been made of China's militaristic prowess, aggressive postures, 6th Generation technology and weaponry, "Wolf Warrior" diplomacy et al, but a quick scan of all recent global conflicts and wars will show the stark absence of Chinese boots-on-ground, despite much noise of China's positions on the conflict.

As seen, when the US-NATO abandoned Afghanistan, in the Israel-Gaza war, Russia-Ukraine war, or even very recently in the four-day Indo-Pak conflict, the much-banded intervention by Pakistan's 'iron-clad brother' i.e. China, was limited to adopting a pro-Pakistan position, diplomatically only.

In India, specifically, imagined scenarios like the "two-front war" led to much discussion and strategising to ensure deterrence and dissuasion of a simultaneous conflict along the China-Pakistan border. The sense of acute vulnerability was heightened by the reality of the already-stretched, resource-constrained, and over-deployed Indian wherewithal, which would test its ability to take on two powers simultaneously (one of which would be China). Yet again, those fears came to nought as the Chinese reaction to Indian retaliation against China's ally, Pakistan, led to support in terms of words and not boots-on-ground, as feared. Has the Chinese appetite for an all-out conflict waned or does it prefer to bide its time (with some sabre-rattling thrown in) and use other levers to push its agenda?

Despite siding with Putin on the Russia-Ukraine war, it has remained steadfastly out of militaristic presence (unlike other countries like North Korea or NATO countries who have supplied weapons and personnel). Similarly, it hasn't eagerly swooped down on the anti-West sensibilities of the Afghan Taliban or attempted to co-opt the same despite the vacuum left by the abandonment of US-NATO troops.

In the violent Middle East theatre too, China seems to please all sides, without



attempting to irate any, leaving no clear picture if it is pro-Israel, pro-Iran, or even pro-Palestine — merely mouthed platitudes and generous Chinese dollars (economic) to whichever party looks like controlling the ground, are offered. All this has ensured that China is the favourite fallback option for all illiberal, autocratic, option-less or even paralysed nations when all other doors close.

But, as the United States of America remains busy piling up the body bags and burning precious amounts of dollars to pursue prohibitively expensive wars in the Middle East, and Afghanistan, or even supporting the Russia-Ukraine war, the Chinese sit out and instead plough their resources to win over territories through economic, diplomatic and technological influence.

However the Chinese do not shy away from arm-twisting their commercial imperatives (eg. taking over Hambantota port in Sri Lanka for a 99-year lease), economic and cyber coercion (eg. "Volt Typhoon" attack on critical infrastructure in

Australia) and even cartographical expansionism (eg. making artificial islands in South China seas) — but do so, without provoking full-on conventional warfare.

Right throughout Sun Tzu's pearls of wisdom seem apparent in Chinese tactics, "All warfare is based on deception. Therefore, when capable, feign incapacity; when active, inactivity. When near, make it appear that you are far away; when far away, that you are to lunge him; feign disorder and strike him. When he concentrates, prepare against him; where he is strong, avoid him. Anger his general and confuse him. Pretend inferiority and encourage his arrogance."

Chinese have become masters at playing geopolitical mind games which may suggest a lot, but lead to rather muted material action, ultimately. Therefore, while China shows intent (typically to adopt an anti-US position to attract traction towards itself) to take a daring position, it stays away from militaristic intervention and indulges in sabre-rattling, at best.

The four-day Indo-Pak conflict may have resulted in China (along with Turkey and Azerbaijan) adopting a decidedly pro-China stance — but the support of the 'iron clad brother' did not extend to intervening militarily or even adopting an aggressive posture along its border with India,

which would have led to discomfiting dynamics for Delhi.

The Chinese seem to choose their militaristic target rather selectively as they shadow-box with the Philippines on the high seas, invoke 'Salami tactics' to creep onto Bhutanese territory, or even conduct reckless exercises in proximity to Taiwan — but remain cautious in not overstepping their belligerence.

China understands that intervening militarily could disrupt its trade, commercial and economic stability which is already under stress with the ensuing US-China trade war, domestic weakening of demand, unemployment, and demographic decline. Therefore ensnaring vulnerable countries with 'debt traps' will remain its most potent weapon to fructify its expansionist and hegemonic dreams.

Another aggressive and alternative means is via technological-cybersecurity wherewithal using companies like Huawei that have raised many suspicions, globally. China is expected to pursue its calculated "shoot-and-scoot" approach at best but perhaps not beyond that. As Sun Tzu also said, "The greatest victory is that which requires no battle".

(The writer is Lt Gen (Retd) and former Lt Governor of Andaman and Nicobar Islands & Puducherry. Views are personal)

PIC TALK



Dean Faculty of Veterinary Sciences at Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology (SKUAST) Riaz Ahmad Shah with India's first gene-edited sheep, in Srinagar, PTI

A common man's journey to God and self-mastery

SECOND Opinion

This is a normal feeling for a common man. One starts with great hopes: "I am different; I am very intelligent," which has nothing to do with intelligence as such. "I will show the world that I am superior." The "ahankar" (ego) starts to become prominent very early in one's life. Nothing much happens as life meanders. Middle age arrives, and the realisation that what was hoped for has not materialised sets in.

This affects physical health and one starts to age, with wrinkles and lines becoming more pronounced, and, yes, hair starting to grey. Mental health suffers too, with some requiring medical help. Old age starts to show its harmful effects with loss of memory, unless one is mentally active, not glued mindlessly to television. If changes are not made, the realisation comes that one has lost. The precious human life has been squandered. But we don't have to lose; I am one of those determined characters who refuses to quit. Nor will I let my close ones live an ordinary life. What did I do? I gradually underwent a complete transformation. I got used to very simple, bland foods, which had high nutritional values. It doesn't take long.

In my case, it was three months or so. Simultaneously, I started a regimen of walking and yoga exercises. Physical health started to get better. I began to cut out entertainment, which had lots of excitement and,

yes, harmful content. Slowly, I got used to healthy entertainment. And I began to do spiritual practices like chanting, 'darshana', 'namam', praying and thanking God for favours done. The realisation came that God was getting involved in my life. I began to get lots of intuitions by which God was giving me subtle hints. I was receptive and caught on. Solutions to inevitable challenges of life became apparent and life started to become smooth. I was now ready to help my near and dear ones. They were already learning from my behaviour. Don't people learn from what we do, not from what we say? If whatever we say is so good, why don't we practise them ourselves?

This fact misses almost everybody. I can lie all day and tell my children to be truthful. Surely, we get disappointed when children become dishonest. We complain, but who is listening? The question is: why don't more people do what I did? There are many excuses. "I am not sure it works" is one. It won't work unless we implement what God has instructed. It is a matter of personal experience. Nothing else will motivate me. Knowledge is great but it has to be applied. Another problem is faulty nature, which all of us suffer from. Our natures are made up of the three 'gunas' (modes), which are goodness, passion and darkness. They are present in various proportions in all of us. (The Bhagavad Gita 18.40) The more passion we have, it will be more difficult to persuade ourselves to take shelter in God. And if we have lots of darkness, we are weak and shy. Last, greed, hate, etc. will keep on rais-

ing their ugly heads, and we will succumb helplessly. God could have helped because His help is crucial in improving one's nature. But for God to help, one must take His shelter. What I have realised is that not only is my nature becoming better but my impious 'karmas' of past lives are not able to cripple me; God bails me out every time. (18.58) I feel bad for people who are busy earning for their near and dear ones even in advanced age. What happens when bad 'karmaphalas' manifest? Children put their parents in ICUs with little sympathy. This is the way the world is; we don't learn from the example of Valmiki, who changed when Naradaji made him realise the reality. He was asked to go and check with his family members if they would share his punishments on account of the bad deeds he was doing. Valmiki should be a role model for all of us. Then, everything will change. The balance of life will start to get better because God is everything. (7.19) He can help in all aspects of our lives. God begins to reform us, as only He can. God knows what our faults are, and how they are hurting.

In my case, it was done on alternate days with one fault taken up. God made me realise that if I want a superior life, I must get rid of it. And God made the next day blissful to prove it. Then, God guides us so that we don't keep on committing the same mistakes out of habit. God alerts as only He can, through intuitions. Thus we begin to make our present better and future still better. But as we are limited in what we can achieve on our own, God actively helps.

(The writer is a spiritual teacher. Views are personal)

Empowering the farmers with science

Kamini Singh, a former scientist, traded her lab coat for the fields of Uttar Pradesh, empowering over 1,000 farmers with organic moringa farming. What began with a ₹9 lakh loan transformed into a thriving business worth ₹1.75 crore, demonstrating how science and sustainability can uplift lives. Kamini Singh's journey is one that began in the halls of some of India's top research institutions — the Central Institute for Subtropical Horticulture (CISH) and the CSIR-Central Institute of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants (CIMAP). Promotion of Moringa cultivation and developed value-added products like Moringa powder, oil, handmade soap, Moringa tea, Moringa tablets etc.

CIMAP is steering multidisciplinary, high-quality research in biological and chemical sciences and extending technologies and services to the farmers and entrepreneurs of medicinal and aromatic plants (MAPs) with its research headquarters at Lucknow and Research Centres at Bangalore, Hyderabad, Pantnagar and Pura. CIMAP Research Centres are aptly situated in different agro-climatic zones of the country to facilitate multi-location field trials and research. A little more than 50 years since its inception, today, CIMAP has extended its wings overseas with scientific collaboration agreements in Malaysia.

JAYANTHI ANANDAKRISHNAN | MUMBAI

SEBI new chief's pitch for transparency

The new SEBI chairman, Tuhin Kanta Pandey, has acknowledged the gaping holes at the helm given the allegations levelled by Hindenburg Research against former SEBI chairman, Madhavi Puri Buch, for indulging in corrupt practices. Moreover, when MLAs, MPs, and even Judges of High Court and Supreme Court do not shy away from disclosing their assets and liabilities publicly, SEBI also should come out clean. In this respect, the constitution of a high-level committee for managing conflict of interests and disclosure for the regulator's board members is a step in the right direction.

At a time when millions are entering the stock market, the number of demat accounts now exceeds 170 million with account holders all over the country; their faith in the market regulator and the efficient functioning of the market must be fortified. When we consider the market regulator's wide ambit of influence, any line between the market regulator and the regulated entity must be fully disclosed.

The sooner this ambiguity is removed, the better it would be for the financial and economic health of the country. Transparency and clear separation between regulator and regulated are essential to uphold market integrity and protect India's growing base of retail investors.

VIJAY SINGH ADHIKARI | NANITAL

Monsoon drowns Mumbai

Around 250 mm torrential rains lashed India's "financial capital" and "vibrant city" Mumbai on Monday. The deluge brought sorrowful memories of 2005, 2017, and 2020 back. Mumbai is known to reel under heavy rains around July-August.

This time around, the monsoon arrived in advance but there was a clear IMD warning about the same. Visible misery caused to thousands of people due to heavy downpour, overflowing drains and waterlogging was there to see. The important message that emanates from the massive yearly rains is clear: like many major cities of the country, Mumbai is paying the price for massive urbanisation and poor planning.

Due to its geography, rainwater absorption and emptying is extremely vital for the city to secure itself from waterlogging and flooding. Unfortunately, the necessary water accumulation prevention mechanism is still to be effectively put in place. Old drainage systems require an urgent look. In more often, the old drains are clogged by waste materials. Ineffective drainage systems put a high load on the final outlets that empty into the sea. The basic groundwater absorption system has taken a hit by the concretisation of lands. Removal of encroachments, a move that can address most of the rain problems, is not forthcoming for obvious reasons.

GANPATI BHAT | ANDOLA

INDIA'S HISTORIC PUSH FOR INDIGENOUS 5TH-GEN FIGHTER

Today, India stands witness to a revolutionary shift in its strategic policy. The Defence Minister's decision to manufacture indigenous fifth-generation advanced fighter jets with active private sector participation is not merely a policy shift, but a historic leap towards India's pride, security, and emergence as a global superpower. This step breaks the shackles of foreign dependency in the defence sector, ushering India into a new era of self-reliance.

For decades, India's reliance on foreign defence equipment led to delays in supply, technical constraints, and political pressures, challenging our military strength. However, with modern technology and indigenous capability playing a decisive role in warfare, this decision is the need of the hour. Examples like the BrahMos missile, Tejas fighter jet, and indigenous air defence systems prove India's scientific and technical prowess is second to none

globally. This decision transcends the defence sector, attracting investment, creating millions of jobs for the youth, and propelling technological innovation. The surge in related companies' shares post-announcement reflects the unwavering confidence of the nation and investors. This is not just a policy but a resolve to establish India as an invincible force on the global stage.

The path of self-reliant defence will not only make India secure but also prosperous and empowered. India's decision to build indigenous fifth-generation fighter jets marks a transformative leap in defence and self-reliance. It ends foreign dependency, boosts national security, drives technological innovation, creates jobs, and inspires global confidence. This visionary step positions India as a rising superpower, determined to shape its own destiny with pride and strength.

RK JAIN ARJUNET | BARNWARI



Monsoon of hope and familiar flaws

The southwest monsoon has arrived in Kerala eight days ahead of its scheduled onset and advanced quickly along the coast to Mumbai, reaching there 16 days ahead of schedule. This marked the earliest arrival of the monsoon in recorded history in the city and is a meteorological high-water mark. There was a forecast from the India Meteorological Department (IMD) about an early onset. Combined with other unexpected climate events, the monsoon has acquired a momentum rarely seen, and the rain has been relentless. Taken by surprise, the weathermen have raised the status of the alert from yellow to orange to red in most places. The distinction between pre-monsoon and monsoon showers is only technical, and the IMD has said that there will be above-normal rains in June.

The abundance of rain would give relief to many parts of the country which were reeling under heat wave conditions caused by a torrid summer, and augurs well for agriculture. Nearly half of the country's cultivated land is dependent on the monsoon. A good monsoon means abundant crops and an increase in rural employment and income which would boost the economy. It would also help the government augment its grain stocks. Higher reservoir levels will mean stable irrigation and power production. Groundwater levels can be replenished and there is a good opportunity to make the best use of rainwater harvesting plans.

However, several parts of the country have been ravaged by the heavy rains and normal life is disrupted. Major urban centres such as Mumbai, Delhi and Bengaluru have remained susceptible to flooding, water-logging and related issues. Life in Mumbai was thrown off gear

—low-lying areas were inundated and a metro station was flooded in the last week. Bengaluru also had similar experiences. Urban India is not monsoon-ready, and civic infrastructure which is already fragile and inadequate breaks down under the onslaught of the monsoon. No city has invested sufficiently in drainage and water management, lakes have disappeared because of encroachment or disuse, there is no check on the dumping of construction debris and garbage on roads, and tree felling is rampant. The design and construction of roads, buildings and apartments are faulty and accentuate the problems of water movement. These have been perennial urban planning issues; now, even smaller cities and villages are prone to rain havoc and damage. The situation has become more dire with climate change making the weather unpredictable and bringing in extreme events like excessive rains, storms and cyclones.

Early onset promises boost to rural incomes; rains, meanwhile, batter underprepared cities

Sustainable transport: Start with the roads

The union government has done well to add a mission dedicated to "sustainable transport" to its National Action Plan for Climate Change (NAPCC), considering the importance the transport sector has in the larger scheme of climate action. This will be the first inclusion of a new mission in the NAPCC in over a decade. Some countries including in the European Union and Africa have initiated similar programmes. The new mission would address vehicular emissions and develop green policies in the transport sector to achieve net-zero targets. The plan is being prepared with the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) as the nodal body. It will have various sub-sectors such as road transport, railways, ports, shipping and civil aviation. The ministry has been working extensively on the plan and the mission will present an informed roadmap for the future.

The focus on the transport sector, especially road transport, is critical to climate change mitigation programmes. Road transport is the largest contributor to pollution in India, accounting for about 12% of the country's carbon dioxide emissions. The sector will be the last to become carbon-neutral. There are international standards for net-zero targets in other sectors such as civil aviation and shipping. The international shipping and aviation sectors aim to transition to net-zero emissions by 2050. However, there is no internationally agreed-upon net-zero plan for the roads which are the most widely used component within the transport sector. Any plan to make the sector carbon-neutral has to start with road transport.

The plans for reducing emissions in the transport sector will involve changes in logistics, design of roads and vehicles, laws, consumer behaviour, urban planning and various other factors. Emission standards that align with international norms will have to be set and alternative fuels and electric vehicles (EVs) will have to be promoted. The shift to the EV ecosystem involves many challenges. The EV industry is yet to become self-reliant and it will take many years to reach there. There are problems related to technology, charging infrastructure, investment, finances and marketing. The government's goal is to have EVs constitute 30% of the new private vehicle registrations by 2030. This is a major challenge, going by the present trends. A significant amount of freight also needs to be shifted from the roads to the railways if pollution from the roads is to be reduced. As the new mission takes shape, its proponents will have their work cut out to meet these objectives.

New mission can boost climate action but emission cuts in transportation pose a daunting challenge

A measure of growth amid deepening inequalities

India's no. 4 spot in GDP rankings must be viewed along with declining wages and subdued consumption

VISHAL R CHORADIYA

As of May 2025, India has officially surpassed Japan to become the world's fourth-largest economy by nominal GDP, according to data released by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). India's nominal GDP is projected at \$4.19 trillion, slightly edging past Japan's \$4.18 trillion. This economic milestone was formally announced by BVR Subrahmanyam, CEO of NITI Aayog, at a press briefing following the 10th Governing Council meeting of the national policy think tank. Some economists argue that the actual growth may occur closer to the end of the 2025-26 fiscal year, depending on fluctuations in exchange rates and quarterly data. Nonetheless, India's current growth trajectory suggests that it may overtake Germany to become the world's third-largest economy by 2028.

This development has been met with jubilation across the ruling coalition. Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal hailed the achievement on social media, proclaiming, "We are the 4th largest economy in the world! This is Bharat rising under PM Narendra Modi ji." Sushantada Sonawale, Union Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, congratulated the public and credited the success to Prime Minister Modi's "astute, dynamic and strong leadership" since 2014. Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu echoed this sentiment, citing the Prime Minister's "visionary leadership and strong economic governance." Similarly, Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister and Finance Minister Ajit Pawar lauded both Prime Minister Modi and Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman for steering the economy to this landmark.

While such expressions of pride are understandable in a country long yearning for global economic recognition, these celebrations are also misleading from the economic realities facing the majority of Indians. The tendency to highlight nominal GDP in isolation, without accounting for population size, creates a distorted picture of national prosperity. India's population of over 1.4 billion, nearly 11 times that of Japan. When GDP is distributed per capita, the

disparity becomes glaring.

India currently ranks 136th in the world in GDP per capita, according to the IMF's latest estimates. In contrast, Japan stands at 34th. This means that while the Indian economy as a whole may have outgrown Japan's in absolute terms, the average Indian remains far poorer than the average Japanese citizen. Per capita income remains a far more meaningful metric of economic well-being, yet it is conspicuously absent from political rhetoric. This omission is hardly surprising, as it undermines the narrative of triumph being projected by those in power.

Over the last decade, India's per capita GDP in comparison with other



countries has seen only modest improvements, failing to significantly elevate the standard of living for a large section of the population. This sluggish growth points to deeper structural issues in the economy—issues that the absolute GDP figures conveniently gloss over. Chief among these is a stark and rising inequality.

India's Economic Survey for FY24 paints a troubling picture. While corporate profits soared by 22.3%, reaching their highest levels in 15 years, employment grew by a meagre 1.5%. Wage growth remained subdued. More disturbingly, real wages for workers declined substantially between 2017-18 and 2023-24. Male self-employed workers experienced a 9.1% decrease in real earnings, while female self-employed workers saw their incomes fall by a staggering 32.2%. Among salaried employees, men and women faced real wage reductions of 6.4% and 12.5%, respectively.

A rising imbalance
The Economic Survey warned that the

disproportionate rise in corporate profits—concentrated largely among large firms—raises serious concerns about income inequality. The imbalance between profit growth and stagnant or declining wages could have serious macroeconomic consequences. If household earnings fail to rise, consumer demand may weaken, undermining the very growth that headline GDP figures seek to celebrate.

The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), in its latest National Accounts Statistics—2025 publication, also confirms a shrinking wage bill relative to GDP, even as corporate profits expand. These trends are corroborated by data from the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), which recently reported a decline in consumer sentiment, further pointing towards a potential slowdown in domestic demand.

These warning signs are not anomalies; they are symptomatic of the economic policy direction pursued over the past decade. The significant cuts in corporate tax rates, aimed to attract investment and boost growth, have not translated into proportional increases in employment or income levels. Simultaneously, social sector spending has either stagnated or been curtailed in critical areas such as education, health, and rural development. As a result, the benefits of economic growth have been concentrated among a narrow segment of the population, particularly capital owners, while wage earners and informal sector workers continue to struggle.

India's ascension to the fourth position in global GDP rankings draws attention away from the harsh realities facing millions—rising inequality, declining real wages, weak job creation, and subdued consumption. If anything, it should prompt serious introspection about the quality and inclusiveness of India's economic growth.

Celebrating nominal milestones while ignoring the foundational cracks in the economy is not just misguided—it is dangerous. Real progress will come not from overtaking Germany or Japan in GDP rankings, but from ensuring that economic growth translates into better livelihoods, rising wages, and reduced inequality. Until then, such achievements remain hollow, and their celebration premature.

The writer is an assistant professor with the Department of Professional Studies, Christ University, Bengaluru

RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE

A seat to stand up for

I don't mind being called *ajji*; feeling like one is a bother

SUDHA NARASIMACHAR

As I travel by metro these days, I'm often touched by the kindness of strangers. A young girl will stand up and say, "Auntie, please sit here," or a young man will gesture to the vacant seat beside him, saying "Aji, illi banti, koothkoll" (Grandma, come here and sit). These acts of courtesy make me feel appreciated and valued. Very rarely do some people avoid looking at me for fear of losing their seat or feeling guilty for refusing to let me sit as I struggle to balance and stand straight.

However, I'm also reminded of the times when I offered my seat to senior citizens, pregnant women, or mothers with infants while commuting to work by BTS and later BMTC buses. Though

I'd like to decline the offer and say, "Parsavallu, I can manage," my body often betrays me, and I gratefully accept the seat, feeling a mix of gratitude and guilt.

We have all heard the refrain: age is just a number; it's all in your mind; and you can feel young at any age. Although very inspiring to read, these affirmations are difficult to live by. Sometimes, there are things over which we have no control, however much we try. It is intimidating to see super senior citizens who do undertake unthinkable feats such as run marathons, climb mountains, trek miles together, travel continuously, paint, make sculptures, conduct courses, pursue studies and so many other things—and succeed. Shouldn't they be inspiring us? I don't know. Actresses Vijayanthi Mala, Hema Malini, Rekha and Helen continue to enthrall audiences with their graceful dances in their late seventies, eighties and nineties! God bless them. While mentally I want to be like

these blessed beings, physically I am unable to match their energy levels. Even as my mind drives me to do so many things, my aches and pains hold me back.

To shake off the feeling of decline, I attended Ram Navami events at my school in Secunderabad, where I reconnected with classmates. For three days, we relived our teenage years, sharing laughter and positive memories. It was a rejuvenating experience that helped us face our daily challenges with renewed enthusiasm.

Don't get me wrong. I don't mind being called *ajji*, but what puts me off is that I have started looking and feeling like an *ajji*, who needs to be shown extra care and compassion. It is a reminder of my advancing age and the times to come.

Though I don't try to hide my age or pretend to be younger, I do want to stay fit and strong so I can continue to help others. It is a universal desire that I share with many.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Karnataka govt's special action force is a reassuring step

Apropos 'Action force to curb communal unrest: Three held for Bantwal murder' (May 30), it is both timely and reassuring. The Karnataka government's decision to establish a special action force to curb communal violence in sensitive districts is commendable. The swift action taken in arresting the suspects involved in Abdul Rahim's murder demonstrates strong intent and coordination. Given the escalating tensions in Dakshina Kannada and neighbouring areas, such proactive

and specialised intervention is necessary. The deployment of a unit comprising personnel from the Anti-Naxal Force will undoubtedly act as a deterrent to miscreants and instil a sense of security among citizens. This is a laudable step towards ensuring peace and upholding the rule of law. One can only hope that this force remains apolitical, efficient, and community-friendly in its operations.

Vijay Kumar H K, Raichur

Unnecessary row

Kamal Haasan has at a promotional event of his yet to be released film in Chennai, kicked up an unnecessary controversy by claiming that Kannada was born out of Tamil. This assertion is inaccurate, as both Kannada and Tamil are Dravidian languages with their own distinct histories. Both languages have been conferred classical language status. The controversy sparked by Kamal Haasan's comments is unnecessary and unwarranted, particularly at a time when South Indian states should be presenting a united front against the imposition of Hindi.

K R Jayaprakash Rao, Mysuru

Setting the record right

RJP MP Yaduveer Krishnadatta Chamaraja Wadiyar's efforts to set the record straight regarding the founding of Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) in Bengaluru are commendable. Contrary to popular misconception, it was Walchand Hirachand who founded the company in 1940, with support from the Maharaja of Mysore, Jayachamarajendra Wadiyar, not Jawaharlal Nehru. As a HAL employee, I can attest, a host of Walchand Hirachand is proudly displayed at the entrance of HAL, and the company celebrates Founder's Day to honour his legacy.

V K Prashad Rao, Bengaluru

Eroding soft power

Apropos 'Harvard Pushback, Key to India's Soft Power' (May 27), universities are considered a soft power in America, showcasing ideals like pluralism, tolerance, and freedom of thought. However, the recent freeze on a \$2.2 billion federal grant to Harvard University and demands, including reporting students who violate laws, seem like attempts to control universities.

Gulam Rabbani, Sitamarhi (Bihar)

Our readers are welcome to email letters to deccanherald@deccanherald.com (not handwritten) — will be accepted. All letters must carry the sender's postal address and phone number.

SPEAK OUT

Pakistan wiped off the sindoor (vermillion) from the foreheads of mothers and sisters. Narendra Modi took revenge for that. Just like Operation Sindoor, we



the soldiers of BJP will carry out Operation West Bengal. We must be ready to uproot Mamata Banerjee's government and dump it in the Bay of Bengal.

Sukanta Majumdar, Union Minister

The way they talked about what happened was almost more important than what had happened.

David Duchovny

TO BE PRECISE

AS THE 'MOTHER OF DEMOCRACY', WE WOULD DEFINITELY BE TRUMP'S ENVY!



IN PERSPECTIVE

Roadmap for reconciliation

The UGC should assume an advisory role, reinstating the operational autonomy of state universities

S N HEGDE

The University Grants Commission (UGC) was established in 1956 based on the recommendations of the Radhakrishnan Commission Report (1959) through an Act of Parliament. The major mandate assigned to the UGC was to monitor the higher education landscape and to set minimum standards. In 1976, the subject of education, including higher education, was transferred from the state list to the concurrent list. Since then, the central and state governments have been administering both school and higher education.

In exercise of the powers vested in it, the UGC has been providing guidelines and promulgating regulations encompassing various aspects such as syllabi, pedagogy, evaluation, autonomy, the appointment of vice-chancellors (VCs) and faculty, new courses, and pay scales of teachers. Different state governments have incorporated some (not all) of the UGC recommendations for implementation through their Acts and Statutes. Many of these suggestions remained unexecuted, apparently, due to constraints of state universities in putting up good infrastructure apart from human, financial, and material resources. However, until recently, there has been fairly good synergy by way of cooperation and compliance between the UGC and state universities, operating in a federal setup.

The introduction of the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and its hasty implementation triggered a great deal of confusion, controversy, and contradiction as states such as Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Punjab (with non-BJP governments) are opposed to many prescriptions conceptualised by the policy. This is largely because the states insist that it is their prerogative and privilege to have educational policies of their own and hence, have bluntly rejected the imposition by the UGC. The impasse turned worse recently when the UGC circulated the draft regulations on the appointment of VCs wherein the state governments are stripped of their authority to nominate one member (who acts as chairman) of the search-committee selection committee. Exclusion of state governments is held as a direct onslaught by the UGC on the autonomy of state governments. The controversial issues have legal implications as they relate to centre-state relations in a federal setup on a subject falling in the concurrent list.

The following steps towards

a functional rapport between the UGC and state universities might pave the way for a harmonious partnership resulting in better quality of higher education not necessarily imparted only by a few islands of excellence like IITs, IIMs, NTIs, and the IISc.

The UGC should assume the role of a facilitator, advisor-mentor and watchdog, leaving to state universities the implementation of their guidelines/regulations. Universities have diverse characteristics in terms of governance, infrastructure, finances, faculty, and other requisites. Any tangible set of regulations should have an adequate timeline for higher education institutions to comply with—especially the ill-equipped ones—to explore the feasibility of the implementation. The roles of UGC and state universities should be complementary and not contradictory.

Support beyond guidelines

Mutual coordination, cooperation, and consensus should prevail instead of dictatorial approaches and consequential revolts. UGC recommendations should necessarily accompany a package of financial assistance to empower the state universities. The apex body cannot merely be ritualistically suggestive but needs to be effectively supportive as well.

The UGC should encourage state universities to have their agenda of development superimposed with the quality benchmarks set by the NAAC. Grants from the UGC could be commensurate with the academic status of HEIs. It is time the UGC adopted a new paradigm of grant distribution to ensure that well-performing state universities obtain substantial support.

All state universities should endeavour to comply with the feasible suggestions of the UGC. It should be borne in mind that there is no substitute for quality, and in the present competitive scenario, no HEI can offer poor education in a substandard setup—an exercise that will nurture intellectual bankruptcy.

The UGC should adopt a level-playing field for the expansion of higher education as the present policy discriminates between a state university and a deemed-to-be university in provisions such as opening off-campus centres.

The NEP is a good document by vision and design with novel concepts of multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary course delivery. But the stark reality is that colleges affiliated with the universities (barring a few in metropolitan areas) are unprepared for offering a four-year honours programme with multiple exits and entries.

The need of the hour is constructive interaction between the two principal stakeholders to ensure quality higher education coupled with productive knowledge and employable skills.

(The writer is a former vice-chancellor of the University of Mysore)

SMA: Debilitating and costly

'Generic drugs can bring hope'

UDHAVI BALAKRISHNA
DH NEWS SERVICE

Fifteen years ago, Rashmi Sampath noticed that her seven-month-old daughter Deeksha couldn't independently sit and stand. After multiple specialist visits, tests and treatment options explored over one and a half years, Deeksha was diagnosed with Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA) Type 2, a progressive neuromuscular disease leading to gradual muscle wasting.

"We did a DNA test, and that is how we learnt about SMA. Had we known to recognise signs earlier, maybe the treatment could have been started earlier," said Rashmi. In 2021, Deeksha, on a wheelchair since she was eight years old, started taking Risdiplam, an orally administered drug for SMA, which costs about Rs 6.2 lakh per bottle. Had her medication costs not been covered under a compassionate access program by Roche Pharma, it would have been difficult for her family to afford her treatment.

Keerthana, another child with SMA, also had treatment delays, impacting her progress. Her parents, H Nagashree and Kishore, both government employees, had to spend Rs 50-75 lakh annually for the treatment of the two-year-old. "We are getting three bottles free for the cost of two, but it is still quite expensive for us. She needs 4.4 mg of the oral solution every day. We need two bottles of 60 mg a month, since one bottle lasts about 18 days. We buy two at once and pay about Rs 12.4 lakh and get three more free with them," said Kishore. "After a year, only two bottles will be given for free. These costs will increase when Keerthana's weight increases and the dosage will go up," said Nagashree, who lamented that they had not yet received any government support so far.

The Delhi High Court's March 2025 order allowing Hyderabad-based Natco Pharma to develop a generic version of Risdiplam and rejecting the plea of patent holder Swiss pharma major F Hoffmann-La Roche Limited for an injunction has brought hope for over two lakh SMA patients. The Roche Pharma has now appealed

to the Supreme Court. If Natco is successful, it can offer Risdiplam for an estimated cost of Rs 15,900 per 60 mg bottle.

However, doctors, families of patients, and activists argued that this might not be enough. They urged the government to step in and talk with the manufacturer and bulk buy the medicine to reduce the annual costs of the families of SMA patients.

"If a family has a strong background of SMA cases, we suggest parents undergo genetic testing and counselling to rule out the possibility of SMA. Even if nobody in the family has disease manifestations at all, but we suspect SMA in the baby, we do nerve conduction studies and electromyography (EMG) tests," Dr Shiva Kumar HR, a consultant neurologist in Bengaluru, said.

Dr Kumar noted that deaths occur due to complications arising out of the disorder, not the disorder itself. "Over time, it weakens respiratory muscles, causing patients to die due to Type II respiratory failure. Life expectancy can be prolonged with gene therapy, but it cannot be called a cure because once a degeneration has begun, it cannot be reversed," he said.

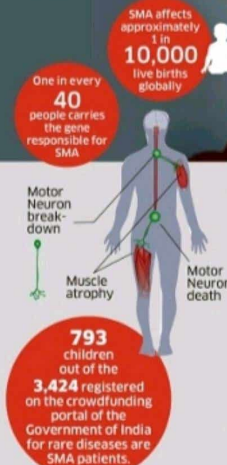
Prasanna Kumar Shirol, founder of the Organisation for Rare Diseases India (ORDI), said that although the government had the National Policy for Rare Diseases, 2021, its assistance was limited to the one-time payment of Rs 50 lakh per patient.

"Sustainable funding is the only way out. With an ICMR-led 90% treatment effectiveness for SMA, government support, regardless of the cost, is essential," he said, adding that not only the Centre but the state governments too needed to step in.

"The governments can develop a standard operating procedure for every rare condition like SMA, identifying what is the inclusion and exclusion criteria for treatment, and the criteria for extending treatment. It can then get into talks with the pharma companies, figure out drug supply for a fixed period and monitor drug effectiveness with timely reviews," suggested Shirol.

WHAT IS SMA?

Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA) is a rare and inherited neuromuscular disease affecting motor neurons due to mutations in the Survival Motor Neuron 1 (SMN1) gene, affecting muscles in the limbs, face, chest, throat, and tongue, thus impacting walking, breathing, speaking, and swallowing, causing progressive weakness and muscle wasting.



- It is the leading inherited cause of **infant mortality**
- India has **one-sixth** of the world's burden of **SMA cases**

- February 2025:** The Supreme Court stayed a Kerala High Court order for the Centre to provide medicines worth Rs 18 lakh over the Rs 50 lakh cap to an SMA patient. The Centre had challenged this order.
- March 2025:** The Delhi High Court allowed Natco Pharma to manufacture a generic version of Risdiplam, rejecting the plea of patent-holder Roche, which later appealed to the Supreme Court.
- April 2025:** The Supreme Court decided to examine pleas challenging the Rs 50 lakh cap on the Centre's assistance for treating patients suffering from rare diseases, like SMA.

EXPENSIVE TREATMENT

Zolgensma (onasemnogene APOPROVECT-XT)
One-time gene therapy, injectable. Cost: **Rs 16 crore**

Evsyrdi (Risdiplam):
Orally administered, **Rs 6.2 lakh** per bottle, **Rs 72 lakhs** per year for children, and up to **Rs 2 crore** per year for adults.

Natco Pharma's generic version of Risdiplam is expected to be available at approximately **Rs 15,900** per 60 mg bottle, and **Rs 5 lakh** for just over **30 bottles** annually.

Spinraza (Nusinersen):
(approximately **Rs 1.06 cr**) per injection, totalling **\$750,000** in the first year and **\$375,000** in the following years.

COMPILED BY UDHAVI BALAKRISHNA

How serious is the incidence of SMA?

SMA is the most common inherited cause of infant death. India bears one-sixth of its global burden. The incidence rate is about 1 in 6,000 to 1 in 10,000 births. We can estimate that around two lakh babies are affected in India at any given time.

Why is the treatment for SMA prohibitively expensive?

This is a question better addressed to those who develop these medications and the pharma companies. Yes, it is a revolutionary therapy, and those who research and develop drugs need to be remunerated, but a lot of patients' families feel as if they are being held hostage to high medication prices with no viable alternative.

What are the roadblocks to improving the accessibility and affordability of SMA medications in India?

We have a Rs 16 crore gene therapy that pharma companies sometimes gave free of cost or at a lesser price, until last year. Then we have Spinraza, which is produced by a company that is not interested in coming to India, and which is being made available to only a few in India through a humanitarian access programme. We also have Risdiplam, the cost of which has come down from Rs 2.5 crore to Rs 73 lakhs per year. Thanks to the gener-

osity of the Tata Blue Tree programme, if you buy two bottles, you get three bottles free. So, for five bottles, you pay Rs 2.4 lakh per bottle. The same bottle in China costs Rs 48,000. Some families have reported that it costs Rs 25,000 in Pakistan and Rs 50,000 in Indonesia.



Many of my patients are currently going to hospitals in China and buying it. Chinese authorities negotiated with the pharma company manufacturing Risdiplam and bought the medicines in large quantities, thus making it easily accessible for people. I hope we can make similar progress.

Can we address the problem by developing generic versions of the drugs?

Yes, that would be the way forward. We have the numbers to make these drugs accessible and still profitable or sustainable. Karnataka's Centre for Human Genetics has developed nutraceuticals for many rare diseases for one-fourth the price. Natco wants to manufacture Risdiplam at a highly subsidised price, but this is currently a matter for the courts to decide.

What urgent actions should the government take?

The government has made a lot of inroads in this field, but we need more. The government holding discussions with all the stakeholders would go a long way. The Kerala government held talks with the pharmaceutical companies and was able to offer Risdiplam at a cheaper rate. In 2021, a family had crowded Rs 48 crore for their baby, who unfortunately died. The state government negotiated with the pharma company and utilised the fund to offer the drug to other children. Rajasthan is also beginning to follow this model. This is an example that could be adopted.

SCIENCE & ENVIRONMENT

Some glaciers will vanish no matter what

A study shows that glacial ice will melt for centuries even if global temperatures stop rising now, writes **Rebecca Dzombak**

There's news about glaciers, and it's grim.

Regardless of climate mitigation strategies, the world's glaciers are on track to shrink significantly over hundreds of years, according to a new study published Thursday. They're locked into losing ice.

Even if global temperatures stayed where they are today for the next 1,000 years, essentially an impossibility, glaciers outside of ice sheets would lose roughly one-third of their mass, researchers estimated.

But there's still hope to avoid the most severe losses, the assessment said. Limiting warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, or 2.7 degrees Fahrenheit, above the preindustrial average could save about twice as much ice in a millennium as if the planet warmed by 2.7 degrees Celsius, the trajectory the world is currently on for 2100, according to the study.

"Every tenth of a degree less of warming will help preserve glacial ice," said Lilian Schuster, a glacial modeller at the University of Innsbruck in Austria who helped lead the research, which was published in the journal Science. "With ambitious climate measures, we can save a lot of ice."

The massive ice sheets that cover Antarctica and Greenland get a lot of attention in the climate change discussion; if they melted, sea levels would rise more than 200 feet, flooding coastal cities around the world.

But glaciers found in mountains and near the margins of ice sheets play a small but significant role in the climate change story, too. They make up less than half of 1% of the world's ice and, if they melt, they would contribute about 1 foot to global sea level rise.

As glaciers melt, they can also increase the risk of deadly floods and landslides. A glacial collapse in Switzerland this week destroyed most of an Alpine village. And if glaciers shrink enough, communities can lose crucial sources of freshwater for drinking, irrigation and hydropower.

Glaciers are melting much more rapidly than ice sheets in response to global warming, in part because they are smaller.



The Lewis Glacier on Mount Kenya, one of the few glaciers in Africa, in March. AFP

"Glaciers are really symbolic of climate change," said Harry Zekollari, a glaciologist at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, a Belgian research university, who contributed to the new study.

Glacier retreat has captured much attention in recent years, but the losses so far appear to be only a harbinger of bigger problems to come.

Using eight different glacial models and excluding ice sheets, the researchers analysed how more than 200,000 of the world's glaciers would respond to 80 different climate scenarios, over thousands of years, in which the planet reached a certain temperature and then stopped warming. The models showed the researchers how long it would take these glaciers to stabilise,

or stop changing in response to the initial climate warming.

Even if warming stops at 1.2 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels, the average warming over roughly the last decade, glaciers are on track to lose significant volumes of ice within a millennium, the study found. The median ice loss was about 40%, which would add about 10 centimetres to sea level rise.

Because the planet has already warmed at least 1.2 degrees Celsius, that ice loss and its resulting sea level rise are unavoidable. Bigger and flatter glaciers with more ice respond more slowly to climate change, taking hundreds, if not thousands, of years to stabilise after a temperature shift, the study found. But most climate models stop at 2100.

"We project the loss for the rest of the century, but we don't really know what happens next," said Romain Hugonnet, an Earth scientist at the University of Alaska Fairbanks who uses remote sensing to study glacier change and was not involved in the study. "It's really important to look at this way."

If warming instead stopped at 1.5 degrees Celsius, the median estimate suggests that glacial ice loss would creep up to nearly half the current global mass. And at 2.7 degrees Celsius, the Climate Action Tracker estimate for 2100 based on current climate pledges, the median value for glaciers' ice loss would be about 75% of their mass.

"A large chunk of these glaciers are going to be lost regardless of what we do," said Mauri Pelto, a glaciologist at Nichols College in Dudley, Massachusetts, who was not involved in the new study. Still, policies around mitigating climate change and reducing emissions can help avoid the most severe ice loss scenarios and save the larger glaciers, both he and the study authors stressed.

"We have time to alter the climate," Pelto said. "We have time to preserve those glaciers."

Scientists are also exploring "overshooting" warming thresholds, where the world warms beyond a given temperature and then cools down again. Another study by Schuster, published in the journal Nature this month, found that overshooting 3 degrees Celsius of warming and then returning to 1.5 degrees Celsius would cause about 11% more glacial ice to be lost by 2500, in addition to the unavoidable ice loss.

The results were about what was expected, but still alarming, Hugonnet said. Having multiple models from multiple teams around the world home in on the same outcomes, even with somewhat wide ranges, made the results more robust.

"There's probably more work to be done to see which models perform the best," Hugonnet said. "But we know there will be a substantial loss pretty confidently."

The New York Times

DID YOU KNOW?

Your cat knows your scent

For animals that are warm and fuzzy, cats have a penchant for independence and fussiness. They tend to have their own ideas about what they should be doing, which may or may not align with the wishes of their owners.

Cats' independent natures may be a factor in why research into their behaviour has lagged behind scientific explorations into those of other domesticated animals, including dogs.

However, in a study published on Wednesday in the journal PLOS One, Hidehiko Uchiyama, a professor of animal science at the Tokyo University of Agriculture and his team obtained some research findings on feline behaviour, establishing that cats respond differently to the scents of their owners than to the odours of strangers. That suggests your feline friend knows what you smell like, in addition to what you look and sound like.

Through referrals from friends and colleagues, the researchers recruited 30 cats and their owners to participate in the study. The cats' owners captured their scents by rubbing cotton swabs behind their ears, between their toes and under their armpits. Eight additional people who didn't own pets and were unaware of the cats' owners were recruited to be "odour donors."

Each of the study cats, in the comfort of its own home, was then presented with an array of test tubes containing the smelly cotton swabs from its owner, a stranger and a blank control. A camera mounted on the experimental setup recorded the cats' reactions to the test tubes.

The cats spent more time sniffing the samples from the strangers than from their owners—an indication that the cats could recognise their owners' scents and devoted more time to exploring the ones they'd never smelled before. Uchiyama and his colleagues further analysed video recordings of the cats sniffing the test tubes. They observed the cats predominantly using their right nostrils to smell the strangers' test tubes, regardless of where the tube was placed within the array. These findings seemed to corroborate previous studies of other animals, including dogs, which also used with their right nostrils when exploring strange scents.

"The left nostril is used for familiar odours, and the right nostril is used for new and alarming odours, suggesting that scenting may be related to how the brain functions," Uchiyama said. "It is likely that the right brain is preferred for processing emotionally alarming odours." Siracus urged caution in interpreting whether the cats' sniffing behaviour relates to brain function.

The New York Times

How the Left and Congress misread Operation Sindoor

Criticism of the government over its handling of the military conflict is completely at odds with the public sentiment

Not so long ago, Yogenendra Yadav, otherwise a fierce critic of the Narendra Modi government, told me that among the things those opposing the BJP got wrong was how to respond on issues of national security. The three "most precious resources we have for politics," he said, "we have gifted these away to BJP—nationalism, religion, including Hindu religion, and cultural heritage and tradition."

The responses to Operation Sindoor (and I don't mean Yadav personally) from large swathes of the Left, liberal Left, progressives (call it what you will) show this basic lesson has still not been learnt. And worse, there is complete denialism about this deracination. If anything, there is a show of superficial moral superiority to anyone who points this out. The Indian Left is, unfortunately, utterly out of touch with wider public sentiment. It remains squeamish about expressing unqualified appreciation for the armed forces. It is disparaging of war, even in times of war. And it is unable to understand the idea that the country is larger than the government. This remains a key reason that the Right wing is able to make electoral mince meat of them.

Intellectualising what comes to the Indians intuitively, a simple emotional surge for the flag, anthem and military, confines this section of the Left only to echo chambers. I was astonished to see the level of disconnect between those still trapped in textbook ideas and how most of the country thinks and feels.

I experienced this first-hand when author Sali Tripathi mocked me on X for evidently "rolling my eyes" at the statements of former Pakistan foreign minister Hina Abbasi Khan on a Piers Morgan show where I was her co-panelist. Yes, I probably did roll my eyes at one brief point when Khan obfuscated on how Osama bin

Laden was kept in hiding by the Pakistani deep State. But I also hammered home the protection and impunity offered to terror groups like the Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed in Pakistan by its army. Khan fled the show early, unable to answer anything directly. But Tripathi and his followers said I was guilty of "temporary patriotic nonsense" and that I should be very embarrassed. Everything that plagues the extreme Left's commentary on Operation Sindoor was encapsulated in that every moment.

Or take the semantics debate around the name given to the military operation against Pakistan. Or the commentary on Aishwarya Rai sporting Sindoor at her first appearance at Cannes. Mohammed Zubair, fact-checker, thought there was a big conspiracy that I shared this image of Rai, editing it into a wonder whether her image was a reference to Op Sindoor or merely a sartorial statement. He took a screenshot of my post as if he had uncovered a scandal.

Tomorrow, will the Left criticise Himanshi Narwal—who image of lifting by the body of her husband, Lt Vinay Narwal, became the defining image of the Pahalgam terror attack—for wearing the traditional red bangles or chura that signified her days-old marriage? Whatever be one's personal gender politics, it is ludicrous to ignore the cultural zeitgeist or to literalise its underlying emotion when the context is so much larger.

Shashi Tharoor gets this. The Congress party, in its current avatar, really does not. Sure, you can say that by choosing Tharoor to lead a key bipartisan delegation on Operation Sindoor, and by dis-

INTELLECTUALISING WHAT COMES TO MOST INDIANS INTUITIVELY, A SIMPLE EMOTIONAL SURGE FOR FLAG, ANTHEM AND MILITARY, CONFINES THIS SECTION OF THE LEFT ONLY TO ECHO CHAMBERS



The level of disconnect between those still trapped in textbook ideas and how most of the country thinks and feels is astonishing.

regarding the names the Congress had chosen for itself, the BJP played a hand of politics. But nothing stopped the Congress from pre-empting this by including Tharoor, among the most effective voices of Indian advocacy, alongside others in the national Opposition, such as Asaduddin Owaisi and Manish Tewari, in their own announcement. By leaving him out of their chosen delegates, so that he looked like the choice of Prime Minister Modi and not Rahul Gandhi, the Congress displayed both pettiness and insecurity. By attacking him in public now, the party displays a complete failure to read the national sentiment.

Of course, the Opposition can, and must, ask questions of the ruling government. There are legitimate concerns over where the terrorists of Pahalgam are, what lapses led to the terror attack, or why US President Donald Trump insists on claiming credit for a halt in hostilities that were unequivocally triggered by India's military victory. And, yes, there are legitimate concerns about India-Pakistan re-hybridisation in the West, thanks to Trump's bizarre rhetoric.

But surely, any serious line of questioning cannot suggest that external affairs minister S. Jaishankar gave away war plans to Pakistan? Anyone who understands military operations knows Jaishankar's statement was merely about India conveying a non-escalatory approach to Operation Sindoor. To distort that into a wild accusation of treason and then wonder aloud how many planes

India has lost, is entirely uncalled for and takes away the legitimacy of any other good point you may want to make.

Thankfully, the Congress dropped this attack a couple of days after Rahul Gandhi led it. But political damage to the party had been done.

Yes, as the main Opposition party, the Congress does not find itself in an easy position. It is damned if it does and invisible if it doesn't. The BJP will claim political points for Sindoor, and the Congress wants to contest that. Fair enough. But a can't counter the BJP by disowning its most brilliant asset on the issue—Tharoor—and other colleagues such as Tewari. And it can't counter that by using the talking points of the adversary on whether any fighter jet was shot down. Not when Air Marshal AK Bharti already answered that by saying, "in a combat there will be losses, but all our pilots are home".

Tharoor has shown that it is possible to forge a politics that is pluralistic and patriotic. Many Indians may lean centre-left on economics, many of us may identify as liberals on matters of inclusiveness and social equity, but on national security, most of us are centre-right. I know I am. The Left—and the Congress—is unable to grasp that inconvenient but obvious truth.

Barkha Dutt is an award-winning journalist and author. The views expressed are personal.

Rising defence prowess key to Viksit Bharat goal

The recent military entanglement between India and Pakistan, apart from showing India's defence sector as the new fulcrum of sovereign assertiveness, also reflects a tectonic reorientation in the strategic doctrine and economic philosophy of a new, Aatmanirbhar (self-reliant) Bharat. India's defence exports have risen 33 times in the past 10 years, from \$13 million in FY16 to \$2.8 billion in FY25, positioning India as an important player in the international defence supply chain and as a credible contender for a place in the stratified hierarchy of global arms export. India's share of global defence exports, as per the World Bank's SIPRI trend indicator, has risen from 4% in FY14 to 10% by 2023.

This quantum leap reveals a structural recalibration of India's military-industrial complex into a globally competitive entity, with supply chains extending across 80 partner nations. This reconstitution of India's martial-industrial complex has been underpinned by a dual-front approach. The proliferation of strategically positioned defence corridors such as the Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu nodes, encompassing 11 high-potential nodes, has already yielded \$6,658 crore in realised investments, with 253 MoUs facilitating a pipeline of \$53,430 crore as of February 2025. And, a deliberate pivot toward high-value platforms including precision-guided munitions, supersonic cruise missile systems such as BrahMos, and autonomous counter-drone frameworks such as the recently test-fired Bhargavastra system signal India's foray into fifth-generation, asymmetrical

warfare capabilities. Furthermore, if India sustains its current growth momentum, its defence exports are poised to cross \$5 billion by 2030.

The confluence of this industrial build-out with the Centre's allocation of ₹12 lakh crore towards domestic defence production, with more than ₹2,000 crore earmarked for the private sector, signals a transition from buyer-seller asymmetries to a collaborative co-development paradigm. This shift can elevate India's position in the global defence value chain, particularly for aerospace platforms, unmanned systems, and advanced electronics. India's FY26 defence budget registered a robust 9.5% year-on-year increase and accounts for 13.45% of the total Union Budget for the fiscal year. This marks a strategic realignment towards comprehensive military modernisation and national security preparedness.

The capital outlay of ₹180 lakh crore reflects a deliberate pivot towards indigenous defence manufacturing, bolstered by a 4% rise in the capital budget of the Indian Coast Guard and a significant ₹7,146 crore allocation to the Border Roads Organisation (BRO). Notably, defence R&D witnessed a 12% increase, with enhanced support for innovation through schemes like iDEX and Acing Development of Innovative Technologies with iDEX (ADIT). This recalibrated fiscal trajectory under-

scores a paradigm shift in India's defence sector outlook, one defined by technological infusion, strategic autonomy, and economic multiplier effects.

Amidst this, China's martial-industrial edifice, long vaunted for its scale and spectacle, appears increasingly encumbered by the weight of its own contradictions. Littered giant with feet of clay, Beijing's defence establishment has showcased its technological feats with dramatic flair, yet beneath the surface lie cracks of overreach, secrecy, and rigid strategy. It is no wonder that following the cessation of India-Pakistan conflict for the time being, Chinese defence equities are coming under serious correction, with serious doubts now being raised about the capability of their defence systems. China's share of global arms exports, at 5.9% between 2020-24 (this is as per SIPRI), is down from earlier periods. Its best-known export, the J-20 fighter, an export product shackled by political dependency. Over 63% of these exports flow to a narrow set of clients, with Pakistan as the fulcrum, rendering Beijing's ambitions of becoming a global defence hegemon contingent on a single, often unstable, axis. While China remains ensnared in the logic of gigantism projecting strength through the mass and momentum of platforms—India's emerging model privileges resilience over choreography, and co-development over coercive export pipelines.

India's recalibration also manifests in the reconstitution of its geopolitical partnerships. While historical dependence on Russian platforms remains substantial, India is increasingly pursuing joint development and licensed production arrangements with technologically advanced

yet strategically non-aligned states such as Armenia, the UAE, and Indonesia, thereby insulating its defence supply chains from great power entanglements and rendering its strategic autonomy both more credible and operationally viable. Meanwhile, policy instruments such as the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme and sectoral Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) liberalisation up to 74% via the automatic route have converged to establish a facilitative investment architecture that is simultaneously protectionist in vision yet liberal in execution. As global defence budgets continue their secular ascent in response to escalating multipolar frictions, India finds itself not just a passive observer but a participatory actor in the emerging strategic-industrial continuum, where defence is no longer a revenue draining exorbitant but a profit generating, employment intensive, and diplomatically potent sector capable of reshaping trade alignments and security cartographies.

India's defence sector is transcending its historical shackles and assuming a pivotal role in anchoring macroeconomic stability, technological innovation, and global strategic relevance in a volatile, uncertain, and increasingly securitised world order. As the government operationalises its vision of Viksit Bharat 2047, the defence apparatus is not only being fortified against contemporary security threats but also positioned as an engine of innovation-driven growth, seamlessly integrating geostrategic imperatives with industrial advancement. This perhaps could be the most fitting tribute to Indian defence forces.

Soumya Kanti Ghosh is member, 16th Finance Commission, and group chief economic advisor, State Bank of India, and Falguni Sinha is economist, State Bank of India. The views expressed are personal.

Why Kannada deserves more than apologies

Let me just come out and say it: Kannada-dalli maathadi. Which is like saying, Hindi mein baith kijiye. Or Tumhain pesu. I have chosen these three languages for a reason. This week, actor Kamal Haasan offered up a third instance of folks being caught in a Kannada language controversy. The players may be different, but the script is the same. Singer Sonu Nigam refused to sing a Kannada song in his Bengaluru concert and later issued an apology. An SBI bank manager in Bengaluru was caught on camera speaking in Hindi to a Kannada-speaking customer and then proclaiming that she would never learn Kannada. And now, Kamal Haasan who said that Kannada was born from Tamil. All three, in their own way, have cast

aspersions on the Kannada language which, by the way, boasts the largest number of Jnanpith awardees, save Hindi.

Do Kannadigas have a chip on their shoulder about their native language? They never used to. I know North Indians who moved from Delhi to Bengaluru 30 years ago and still don't speak a word of Kannada. These days though, language tensions have taken over the state. We have auto drivers who demand that their rides speak to them in Kannada. In the past year, vandals broke and removed signs in Central Bengaluru that did not have the text in Kannada. The government had to issue a directive ordering signages that included Kannada, and now, all

over the city, you see signs in Kannada. I moved to Bengaluru nearly 20 years ago. I learned and now speak Kannada. It has opened the city to me in a way that would not be possible without speaking the local tongue. What befuddles me is that this has become a controversial issue rather than the norm.

If a Kannadiga moves to Kanpur and speaks in Kannada rather than Hindi, do you think the local folks there would put up with it? Catch a Chennai auto driver giving the time of day to anyone who doesn't speak Tamil. And I can say this because I grew up in Chennai. But Kannadigas are expected to speak in Hindi, Tamil, Telugu or whatever language is thrown at them. And they do. That's the thing. Bengalureans are by and large accepting, flexible, and multilingual. This is why people from all over the world feel comfortable here. They have all been accommodated. Until now. What happened?

To paraphrase a famous historical speech, it has taken a while for the soul of the Kannadiga, long suppressed, to find utterance. To use the language of school bullies, the people of Karnataka have put up and shut up for a long time. Immigrants from all over India have populated their state and city without assimilating into their language or culture. Isn't language the real route to culture? I know North Indians who have lived in Bengaluru for 30 years and say that they cannot speak a word of Kannada. Would this be possible in any other state or city? I doubt it. Then why should a Kannadiga put up with this?

I think it is about time the state and this city get their hackles up to safeguard their language. As someone who has learned it as an adult, I can tell you that it is not a difficult language. Immigrants come, stay, make their livelihood and indeed fortunes from this state. To expect them to learn the local language is not jingoism. It is the norm in most Indian states and cities. Why should Karnataka and Bengaluru be any different?

Shoba Narayan is Bengaluru-based author. The views expressed are personal.

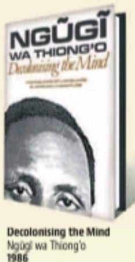
EDITOR'S PICK

HT's editors offer a book recommendation every Saturday, which provides history, context, and helps understand recent news events

CHAMPIONING DECOLONISATION

Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, who explored colonialism in his novels, plays, and essays, died this week, aged 87. His family's struggle after his father was forced off his land, and two of his brothers were killed after the Mau Mau uprising against the British, formed the backdrop of his best-known novel, *Weep Not, Child* (1964), published a year after Kenya became independent.

This week, we recommend the Kenyan writer's *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, a classic work that spoke for linguistic decolonisation. The essays in this collection explain the role of language in identity, culture, and history. With *Decolonising the Mind* (1986), Thiong'o emerged as an important theorist of language in postcolonial studies. The book offers a fresh perspective on the role of language in combating and perpetuating imperialism and neo-colonialism in Africa, which resonated in academia in post-colonial societies, including India.



Decolonising the Mind by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 1986

the hindu businessline.

SATURDAY • MAY 31, 2025

Tariff turbulence

India should proceed apace with its negotiations

The tariff plans of the Trump administration have entered a phase of dramatic, roller-coaster-like uncertainty. On Thursday, the US Federal Court of Appeals stayed a previous day's ruling by the US Court of International Trade that essentially ruled against the powers of President Trump to slap tariffs on the world at large. The latter said that the President had misused his powers under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act, 1977, by invoking a 'national emergency' clause to slap tariffs.



While the status quo on country-specific reciprocal tariffs has been restored for now, there seems to be no end to the suspense and ordeal for businesses and governments everywhere. The US Supreme Court is expected to weigh in on the subject, while more immediate hearings in the appeals court are to take place early June. This state of flux throws up some questions for India, which has been in talks to arrive at a trade deal. There has been a sense of quiet urgency in the air to arrive at a deal that holds off 26 per cent tariffs that are expected to come into effect from July 9. It is feared that such tariffs would hurt India's \$85 billion exports to the US, even as India has said that it will not compromise its interests in doing a deal. Now, with the US courts entering the picture, a bruising battle between the courts and the executive is possibly on the anvil. President Trump may or may not succeed in the courts, but he has the numbers in Congress to push through legislation, if he chooses to do so. Besides, as leading lights in his government have already said, the government can invoke other laws to bring these tariffs into effect.

To keep his stock up, Trump may pursue trade deals more aggressively. That he is desperate to show "wins" for his policy is evident from his defence in the Court of International Trade that the promise of greater trade by him is what ended the confrontation between India and Pakistan. One approach for India could be to try to leverage Trump's need for a deal to vindicate his policies, and push ahead to set the terms, precisely when he has been forced on to the backfoot.

India's negotiators should cut out the noise emanating from the legal process in the US and proceed with their negotiations keeping the July 9 deadline in mind. Given that tariffs are the most important component of Trump's MAGA agenda, it is safe to assume that he would use all means to get past the legal hurdles to his tariff policy. A pragmatic approach aimed at a quick deal that grants enough to the US for Trump to claim victory, even while protecting India's core interests in agriculture, pharma, digital rules and e-commerce, should be adopted. Tariff cuts on premium products such as almonds and Harley Davidson bikes, besides agreeing to some defence and energy imports can help India's cause. The prevailing uncertainty on tariffs is not good for India and has to be ended, irrespective of which way the court battle pans out in the US.

OTHER VOICES.

The Guardian

The courts have drawn a line. So must Congress

If one thing is more challenging to the rule of law than a genuine emergency, it is the invention of a phoney one. Since returning to the White House in January, President Donald Trump has upended global trade and international relations, wiping billions off the stock market in the process, by imposing tariffs that he claims are a necessary response to an emergency. Yet that emergency does not really exist, except in the manner that Mr Trump himself has created it. The president claimed, on 2 April, that a lack of reciprocity in US overseas trade arrangements was "an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and economy of the United States". He claimed that this justified him in declaring an emergency and governing by executive decree under the 1977 International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA). Congress, which normally has the responsibility to decide US trade policy, was thus wholly ignored. www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/may/29/trump-tariffs-emergency

THE YOMIURI SHIMBUN

ASEAN: Trump's Tariff Measures Invite Trade Revamp

The high tariff policy of US President Donald Trump's administration is causing a global tectonic shift in economic blocs. Recent moves surrounding the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) can be said to be a new development that symbolically indicates this. ASEAN held its first joint summit with China and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), a group of six Middle Eastern countries that includes Saudi Arabia, in Malaysia. The joint statement released after the summit included the importance of multilateralism and the cooperation of ASEAN, China and the GCC on promoting trade and investment. ASEAN has conventionally been wary of becoming embroiled in the US-China confrontation, and it has spent a great deal of effort in striking a balance between the two countries. <https://www.yomiuri.co.jp/economy/2025/05/29/asean-trade-revamp/>

We should teach engineering in Indian languages

MOTHER TONGUE. Embracing our linguistic diversity can produce engineering graduates who are technically competent and globally more aware

AVINASH KUMAR AGARWAL
RAJALAXMI CHOCHAN

In the heart of every engineering classroom in India, a quiet yet significant challenge unfolds each day — a challenge rooted not in technical complexity or curriculum overload but in the language of delivery of instruction and its absorption.

In a country as linguistically diverse as ours — with over 1,369 recorded mother tongues and 122 major languages, the question of how language influences learning outcomes in technical education is becoming more relevant than ever.

Does the dominance of English in engineering education create barriers for our students? Can we become Viksit Bharat solely based on technical education in English? Are we not promoting apartheid because we are obsessed with English? Are we being inclusive enough by ignoring 94 per cent of the Indian population that is not literate in English?

We must confront these questions as educators, academicians, responsible citizens, and as a nation striving to become "Vishwa Guru" and a global leader in technology and innovation.

LINGERING LANGUAGE DIVIDE English has been Independent India's language of higher technical education learning for decades. It is seen as a passport to global opportunities. Yet, for many students, especially those from rural and semi-urban backgrounds, this language is a serious obstacle rather than a tool, blocking their career growth because of

their lack of proficiency in English. We have seen this struggle first hand. Brilliant students with exceptional analytical minds falter because the language of instruction alienates them. They are not less capable, but their potential is hidden behind a wall of unfamiliar words and technical jargon delivered in a language they are still trying to master, mostly unsuccessfully.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 recognises the urgency of addressing this issue through its transformative vision. This is a bold and necessary step, as several studies show that students learn much better when taught in their *Matru Bhasha*, particularly when it comes to grasping complex concepts. The NEP's vision is to preserve linguistic diversity and give every student an equal opportunity to thrive and excel.

But here lies the paradox: while we must empower students to learn in their native languages, we cannot ignore the reality that English is the global language of science, technology, and business.

THE PATH FORWARD

Thankfully, we live in an era where technology can be our greatest ally in solving this dilemma. AI-powered tools can translate lecture content in real time, making technical concepts more accessible to students in their preferred language. Multilingual learning

English is seen as a passport to global opportunities. Yet, for many students, especially those from rural and semi-urban backgrounds, this language is a serious obstacle rather than a tool.

platforms and collaborative projects can leverage the diversity in our classrooms as a resource rather than a hurdle.

At IITs and other institutions, we continue to explore initiatives to create bilingual learning resources and encourage peer learning groups that support multilingual comprehension. The goal is to create an ecosystem where language is not a constraint but a catalyst for deeper learning.

While some might argue that insisting on multilingual education in engineering could dilute our global competitiveness, we view this challenge differently.

On the contrary, embracing our linguistic diversity can produce engineering graduates who are technically more competent, culturally more adaptive and globally more aware, who can think across literal and metaphorical boundaries.

IIT Jodhpur's bold initiative to allow first-year B.Tech. students have the option to select their first-year courses in either Hindi or English, which has produced excellent and unprecedented results in its pilot deployment in AY 24-25 Semester I.

Situated in the Hindi belt of India, with over 80 per cent of students coming from Hindi-speaking backgrounds, the option of additional choice of medium of instruction as Hindi was strategic and student-centred at IIT Jodhpur.

This initiative aimed to allow a smoother transition of students from the Hindi medium into the competitive instructional environment of an IIT. The response from students was overwhelmingly positive. They embraced this initiative with open arms, expressing deep gratitude and often sharing how this support has lifted a long-standing weight off their shoulders, giving them renewed confidence, learning experience and belonging.

As B.Tech. first-year student Kanak Khandewal puts it, "We can ask questions more easily in Hindi because we think in Hindi too". The results from the first semester have shown that students from the vernacular medium now have a great shot at getting top grades, which were inaccessible to them earlier.

India's engineers are already at the forefront of solving global challenges. Imagine the potential we could unlock if we gave every aspiring engineer all the tools to learn in the language they understand best.

Imagine the innovations that would emerge from classrooms where diverse perspectives, rooted in diverse languages, converge to create something extraordinary.

LANGUAGE, A BRIDGE

India stands at a pivotal moment. Our education system is transforming, and our choices shape our nation's future today. Multilingualism is not a challenge to be overcome; it is a resource to be nurtured. It reflects who we are: a country that thrives in diversity and finds strength in its differences.

Let us embrace this diversity in our classrooms in institutions of higher learning for the sake of inclusivity of 94 per cent of the population, which is left out of this journey of "Vikas" because of their handicap in English as a language.

As Institutes of National Importance, IITs are responsible and able to lead transformative changes. In the end, engineering is not just about formulas and algorithms. It is about building solutions, shaping lives, and creating a world where every voice in every language can be heard and contribute to nation-building.

Agarwal is Director, IIT Jodhpur, Chouhan is an Associate Professor and Head of the Center for Education & Technology for Education at IIT Jodhpur

Climate change reshaping India's monsoon clouds

It is time India invested in climate-resistant agriculture and better forecasting methods to ensure food security

Amit Kumar Mishra

As India welcomes another monsoon season, climate experts are turning their attention skyward — and with good reason. The clouds that bring life-sustaining rain to our fields are changing in ways that could have long-term implications for agriculture, weather forecasting, and climate resilience.

A recent study led by Saloni Sharma, along with researchers Piyush Kumar Ojha, Vaibhav Bangar, Chandan Sarangi, Ilan Koren, Krishan Kumar, and myself, from the School of Environmental Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, in collaboration with IIT Madras and Weizmann Institute of Sciences, Israel, offers compelling observational evidence of how global warming is reshaping India's monsoonal cloud patterns.

The research, published in *Science of the Total Environment* (Elsevier, July 2024), focuses on how the vertical structure and type of clouds over the Indian subcontinent have evolved during the first two decades of 21st century.

For a country like India, where nearly half the population depends on

agriculture, even subtle changes in monsoon behaviour can have enormous consequences. Shifts in cloud height and types affect how, when and where rain falls — affecting everything from crop yields to groundwater recharge.

Using 20 years of radiosonde data from 16 locations across India, the researchers found that the number of cloudy days during the monsoon season has increased by around 13 per cent per decade. However, this doesn't mean more low-level, rain-heavy clouds. In fact, low-level clouds have decreased by 8 per cent, while high-level clouds — which often trap heat — have increased by about 11 per cent per decade.

This shift in cloud types is significant. Low-level clouds are typically thicker and more effective at reflecting sunlight, helping to cool the Earth's surface. High-level clouds, by contrast, tend to trap heat. The study found that not only are these higher clouds becoming more common, but they are also forming at greater altitudes as the atmosphere warms and expands.

Also, lower clouds, which are declining, are typically associated with more consistent rainfall. High clouds, which are increasing, may not precipitate at all or could be associated with extreme weather events.

AGRICULTURE. Climate ready? www.bbc.com/news/india-68258881

GLOBAL WARMING

These changes in cloud structure are largely driven by global warming, which is altering the thermodynamic state of the troposphere. The study observed the greatest temperature increases in the upper layers of the atmosphere, with the equivalent potential temperature — a key indicator of atmospheric stability — rising more sharply in higher altitudes. This indicates more moisture and heat being transported upward, leading to the formation of high clouds.

The researchers also recorded a rise in tropopause height (the upper boundary of the troposphere) by 450 meters per decade, reinforcing the idea that the atmospheric column is stretching

vertically due to global warming.

To further understand the drivers of these changes, the researchers examined large-scale climate indicators such as the Global Warming Index (GWI), North Atlantic Oscillation (NAO), and ENSO (El Niño-Southern Oscillation). They found strong statistical correlations between GWI (rising temperatures) and the increase in high-level cloud frequency over India.

Their analysis revealed that cloud formation patterns are not merely a local phenomenon, but are influenced by broader, global climate systems. This reinforces the need for India to invest in climate-resilient agriculture and better forecasting models.

This research offers the clearest observational evidence yet that India's monsoon clouds are being reshaped by climate change. It calls for urgent attention to how these changes will affect our food security, water availability, and disaster preparedness in the coming years.

As the 2025 monsoon sets in, it is a timely reminder that climate change isn't a far-off threat — it's already in the air around us.

The writer is with the School of Environmental Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

✉ **LETTERS TO EDITOR** Send your letters by email to blletters@thehindu.co.in or by post to 'Letters to the Editor', The Hindu Business Line, Kasturji Buildings, 859-860, Anna Salai, Chennai 600002.

Indigenous defence tech

Agropros 'Make in India' needed for nation's security & prosperity. Rajnath Singh, (May 30). During retaliatory strikes on Pakistan, India's Make in India mission proved vital. Indigenous defence production ensured quick deployment of missiles, drones, and surveillance tech without foreign delays. The mission also fortified supply chains, keeping economic disruptions minimal during geopolitical tension. As global alliances shift unpredictably, self-reliance in defence and economy is no longer optional — it's survival. Strengthening domestic manufacturing boosts jobs,

preserves sovereignty, and builds resilience against sanctions or supply blocks. Make in India isn't just policy — it's national security strategy in action.

Nidhishiva Reddy
Bangalore

Currency notes blues

Agropros 'RBI Annual Report: Currency printing costs surgery 59% in 5 years' (May 30). It was intriguing to learn that the printing cost of currency notes has surged 59 per cent during last 5 years. While there could be several reasons for this hike, circulation of such a varied denominations of the bank notes in India is unique. The RBI must take a

look at the issue urgently. Also a reasonable deadline for the return of ₹2,000 notes must be fixed.

Kumar Gout
Pune (Maharashtra)

Economic worries

The Editorial 'Yen for growth', (May 30), echoes the sentiments of a vast majority of Indians. India overtaking Japan on the GDP count is sure, stuff for cheerleaders. Pertinent is the need for more inclusive, equitable and qualitative growth than the quantitative one achieved. The structural changes and accepted practices of economic activity have pushed millions off the mainstream. This is evidenced in the statistics of

rigorously per capita income, barely enabling survival. The rankings on human development indices are also abysmal and need corrective action. Time is running out for India to use the tempo of development deliver the fruits thereof more equitably, ensuring quality basic education and health care, potable water, hygienic living conditions are available to and affordable for its masses spread across the villages wherein resides the soul of India.

Jose Abraham
Kottayam

SIP myth

'Ownership of MFs in NSE firms hits record high of 10% (May 30) reports

on growth of SIPs. SIPs are beneficial for AMAs since they provide stable, predictable, measurable inflows and hence enable easier investment. SIPs also benefit distributors since they provide stable and long-term commission flows with one time effort. But they do not really benefit MF investors. Through SIPs, they invest at market highs and market lows too, thus cancelling out any benefit of low NAVs. Instead if investors would make lumpsum investments only on days when the markets are weak and avoid investing on days of market highs, their returns would be better.

V Vijaykumar
Pune



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

—Rammath Goenka

GROWTH-INFLATION MIX SHOULD SPUR SPENDING, PRIVATE INVESTMENTS

INDIA'S GDP growth is blowing hot and cold. If the January-March quarter saw an impressive 7.4 percent growth, beating consensus estimates, the figure for the full 2024-25 fiscal year printed at 6.5 percent—the lowest in four years. Even though the economic momentum seems to have picked up in Q4, the projections for the current fiscal are set at 6.2-6.5 percent, implying that instead of a recovery, growth may slow down sharply. The provisional estimates released Friday also show that the Indian economy's size stood at \$3.9 trillion in 2024-25, as against \$3.6 trillion in 2023-24. So it needs a run-rate of at least 6.7 percent to emerge as the world's fourth largest economy, overtaking Japan at \$4.19 trillion, anytime soon. Besides a higher headline rate, we also urgently need a broad-based growth, not the current mix of sub-sectoral surges.

While manufacturing and construction—two key employment generators—picked up pace in Q4, they ended the full year on a disappointing note. Private consumption, a key demand driver, stood at its highest in at least two decades, outpacing GDP growth last year. But analysts suspect that rural consumption was the main engine, while urban spending sputtered. Chief Economic Adviser V Anantha Nageswaran noted that the transmission of interest rate cuts and personal income tax benefits will likely boost urban consumption this fiscal. Helpfully, rural consumption, which saw an improvement due to rising agricultural wages, is expected to retain the momentum, thanks to the above-normal monsoon predicted. While private investments rose in Q4, government expenditure fell with a giant thud. Worse, it's expected to grow at a slower rate this fiscal, which means we need more private investments now.

Investment demand will likely remain sluggish due to the heightened global uncertainty. But a rising domestic demand could, in part, entice companies to expand production. Note that Friday's data includes provisional estimates and the final numbers will undergo revisions, hopefully upwards. While 2025-26 began on a sour note owing to global trade headwinds, the outlook for domestic growth seems relatively resilient. As Nageswaran noted, at a time when several countries are facing stagflation risks, India is witnessing a benign growth-inflation environment. That should spur consumption and investments, paving the way for a steady growth of 7 percent. At least, that's the hope at this point.

KEEP STATE DEVELOPMENT ABOVE PARTY POLITICS

THE pugnacious leader that he is, Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy manages to make it to the headlines often. He is also a shrewd politician who knows it takes two to tango when it comes to developing the state. As a Congressman, his instincts are in sync with that of his party on several issues. Operation Sindoor just happens to be one of those where sensitivity may serve better than sinew. His barbs against the Centre fly like missiles, and his repeated comparison between Indira Gandhi and Prime Minister Narendra Modi resonate with Congress supporters. The other day, he sought to know from the PM how many Rafale fighter aircraft were lost in Operation Sindoor. Politically speaking, he may have thought of bolstering party leader Rahul Gandhi's attacks on the Centre. What is unquestionable is that he went a step further than even his leader.

Defence matters can be tricky material to use for polemics, especially right after a war. Questions do need to be asked, but in a non-partisan way. Reddy may feel himself politically justified in attending Jai Hind rallies, a counter to the BJP's Tiranga rallies. It should be seen within the context of what should be an integrational moment, though it is unfortunate that both the national parties appear to be politicising Operation Sindoor. It is time to support the armed forces in one voice at a time when the shadow of conflict has not entirely lifted. Reddy may have no compunction in calling a spade a spade, but he is also keenly aware of the imperatives of running a state. Within a fortnight, he had a meeting with the Prime Minister, where he submitted a wishlist, and during that same period he was going for the BJP's Jugal. Presumably, he knows how to find his way around a paradox.

Telangana has set itself a roadmap that's ambitious in relation to its finances, to put it mildly. Metro expansion, regional ring road, semiconductor projects—the Centre's role is key in all these. His predecessor K Chandrasekhar Rao's visits to New Delhi to advocate for the state were few and far between. Reddy has been proactive, and rightly so. Politics must never undermine Centre-state relations. That applies as much to the Centre as to the state.

QUICK TAKE

THE LADY'S LAMP SHINES ON

PRESIDENT Droupadi Murmu on Friday honoured 15 nurses from across India with the National Florence Nightingale award for their outstanding work. The health ministry had instituted the award in 1973 in the name of the British reformer who, while healing soldiers during the Crimean War of the 1850s, became known as the founder of modern nursing. But it's the work she did afterwards that Indians should thank her for. Though she never set foot in the subcontinent, Florence analysed health data to propose a thorough revamp of sanitation in Indian cities and villages. She relentlessly advocated for a data-driven, preventative approach to healthcare, especially to ensure safe drinking water. It's a work we must rededicate ourselves to complete.

LAST year, when R Balasubramaniam's book, *Power Within: The Leadership Legacy of Narendra Modi*, was launched, one of the reviews pointed out that "while Western thought on leadership is trait-oriented, [emphasising] the importance of 'being a leader', Indian leadership offers a contrast—it focuses on the 'exercise of leadership'." The book looks at this practice as it captures Bharat's civilisational wisdom through lived experience.

One such example of the 'power within' in India comes from the life and mission of Ahilyabai Holkar, the 18th century queen of Malwa, a princely state in today's Madhya Pradesh. On May 31, the nation celebrates her 300th birth anniversary.

One of the new concepts aggressively propounded by Modi—but rarely discussed elaborately by opinion makers—is women-led development. The concept reflects an innovative, 20th-century approach as it mirrors the need for Indian society to graduate from empowerment of women to recognising their leadership.

Women-led development is not just about egalitarianism; it also carries another strong message. Men must realise that more Indian women than ever are in the driver's seat, and that they have to ensure equality. Ahilyabai Holkar stands as a powerful symbol of both women-led development and governance.

India has a long list of queens who demonstrated valour and leadership in governance. Such exemplary women can be found across the country—from north to south, and east to west. However, it is rare to find a female leader who not only had a firm resolve to uphold Indian values, but also combined courage and strength with strategic thinking, and pursued a lifelong mission of public service. Ahilyabai Holkar was one of those rare personalities in whom we witness the unique confluence of calibre, courage and compassion.

Contemporary politics in India is under the thick shadow of dynasticism. Most dynasty-driven political parties are known for special privileges enjoyed by the next-gen dynasts. As against this, history tells us as to how Ahilyabai severely reprimanded her son Malharao for illegally killing a calf. For her, the rule of law was supreme, and she chastised her son for a serious transgression—something the present-day leaders of dynasty-driven parties can learn from.

The very mention of Ahilyabai evokes memories of her historic, evocative

Ahilyabai Holkar dedicated her life to public service. Her 300th birth anniversary is an apt moment to learn from her leadership that compassion should be extended to the marginalised too

A LESSON IN GOOD GOVERNANCE FROM 18TH-CENTURY INDIA

VINAY SAHASRABUDDHE

Senior BJP leader



SOHRAJ BPT

work in temple construction as well as their restoration after being destroyed by aggressors. Temples built by her adorn key pilgrimage sites in several Indian states. But her temple construction was not merely a public project—it symbolised the externality of the Indian spirit of endurance, coupled with self-confidence and resilience.

Through the temples she built, Ahilyabai articulated an unwavering resolve to preserve cultural identity. For her, reconstruction of destroyed temples was not just installations of deities, but in a deeper sense, the consecration of national consciousness, too. She is also credited for building ghats, keeping both the aesthetic as well as utilitarian value in mind—as can be seen along several river banks across the country.

Though she formally ruled for only two years, Ahilyabai also constructed reservoirs, ponds and water bodies. She created a separate department of water conservation in her government. She was also one of the few rulers who paid adequate systemic attention to making farming an economically viable proposition. Her administration not only encouraged farming in multiple ways, but also tried to promote farm-based enterprises.

She distributed government land to poor farmers, though with conditions—they had to plant nine fruit-bearing trees along the edges of every unit of their fields for personal use, and 11 more whose produce would be deposited into the state granaries. As a skilled administrator, she institutionalised this through what became known as the 'Nine-Eleven Act'.

BORNE IDENTITY: LOOMING AI THREAT

DARIO AMODEI, CEO of Anthropic, the company that runs the Claude artificial intelligence model, has stepped out of line from his peers and confirmed a crisis hiding in plain sight.

While the industry and governments minimise the threat of AI, claiming that it will only take over manual, clerical, repetitive functions, Amodei recently said that it is very likely to wipe out white-collar jobs and deepen unemployment, especially among young people.

For example, AI seems to be better persuaders than people. In September 2024, chatbots were reported to be good at debunking fake news and persuading conspiracy theorists to see sense. It was an important finding, since urban legends are used to amp up divisive politics. In April, researchers at the University of Zurich covertly addressed the popular subreddit, r/changemyview, via AI chatbots to see how efficiently large language models can persuade people. The forum performs an important function in highly polarised times, reminding people that it is normal to have multiple viewpoints. Concealment made the experiment controversial, but its draft report found that AIs are three to six times more persuasive than humans.

In May, researchers at Lausanne pitted 900 people against human and AI debaters to discuss points like the utility of school uniforms and the value of AI. They found that when AIs know something about their opponents, they are formidable persuaders. Now that clever people know this, AIs could be deployed in prestige roles as lobbyists, political campaign managers and marketers of all things from missiles to toothpaste. Dare we say, religion, too?

This is not how it was supposed to play out. From the Industrial Revolution until the late 20th century, from the age of steam to that of silicon, machines have been presented as labour-saving devices whose most valuable product is leisure. But since mechanisation was a purely Western project, European ideas like utility applied. In the narrative about the golden age of machines, even the time freed up by reducing drudgery was supposed to have utility it would give everyone the opportunity to create art and culture. Unemployment and underemployment would be wellsprings of creativity.

But if work remains a marker of identity consider how profession is embed-

ded in South Asian caste names, and in English surnames like Carpenter and Carter; leisure spells erasure, not creation. Ironically, chronic unemployment is a feature of booming economies like India and China.

Urban families were typically bankrupted by a sole breadwinner. In the 1980s, yuppie aspiration created families called DINKs (double income no kids) and DINKYs (Y for 'yet'). Now, double income

write words and code, create images from words, analyse gigantic datasets and work in mathematics, science and music. Because they learn by mimicry, they can even write poetry and literary fiction in the manner of acclaimed writers.

But for want of manual dexterity, AIs are no good for everyday work. They can make fast food because it's standardised, but they can't make a home-cooked meal. Disappointingly, while the household robot has been a stock character in science fiction, intelligent machines can't perform any household function reliably, except for keeping floors somewhat clean.

Jobs deemed to be low-quality may prove to be durable while a lot of white-collar roles go to machines. Even industries like the press, which depend heavily on human instincts and originality, are being affected. The buzz is about 'liquid content' text, graphics and other components formatted to be widely shared, which can be decanted into various formats and channels. Until fairly recently in India, there were curbs on cross-media holdings for four that media houses would do precisely this, narrowing the variety of news sources and opinion. Besides, it was assumed that the 'nose for news' on which the whole business runs is a uniquely human attribute. But some Nordic media houses are training their own AIs by a simple process: their desk staff give a thumbs up or thumbs down to incoming news to teach the AI to be a news editor.

The most persuasive evidence that AIs could take white-collar jobs comes from changing attitudes to universal basic income. The idea dates back to Thomas Paine in the late 18th century and enjoys some popularity in times of economic uncertainty. At other times, it has been dismissed as a handout. But over the last decade, as AI has surged, it is again being talked up. Elites drive policy everywhere, including in technology, and the change could suggest that they know that their own AIs could make them redundant.

(Views are personal) (Tweets at @pratik_k)

Follow: Henry Loh Institute of Migration and Human Security, Fletcher School, Tufts University

SPEAKEASY



All industrial revolutions present machines as labour-saving devices whose most valuable product is leisure. But today, when a job is an identity, leisure spells social erasure. That makes a recent warning that AIs can wipe out white-collar jobs troublesome in more ways than one

MAILBAG

WRITE TO: letters@newindianexpress.com

Tax fallout

Ref: Western disunion: The impact of Trump's remittance tax (May 30). Any fall in remittance inflow could shrink India's foreign exchange reserves, weaken the rupee, and raise inflation. India must engage with the US diplomatically. Thoughtful, collaborative policymaking is vital in our inter-connected economic landscape. N R Jagannath, Bengaluru

Own goal

Ref: Trump's policies can harm US as much as countries like India (May 30). By retreating from climate agreements and international alliances, Trump weakens global cooperation on issues requiring collective action, not only jeopardising global security but also America's leadership position. Narayanan Kizhumbuday, Thrissur

Tharoor's statesmanship

Ref: Tharoor calls his critics 'zealots' (May 30). Shashi Tharoor has displayed statesmanship by acknowledging the Modi government's achievements. He has risen above party lines. The opposition's job is to criticise the government, but it should also acknowledge its achievements. Tharoor sets a great example of constructive politics. V Venkateshraman, Coimbatore

Defence delays

Ref: AI Chief's speech on delays in defence acquisition timelines (May 30). One knows that delays in completing public sector projects have been India's bane for decades. But this should never be the case for defence projects. They must be completed on time, as the nation's security is at stake. S Ramakrishnasayee, Chennai

Underwhelming qualifier

Ref: Royal Salute to Hazelwood, Soyash (May 30). The first qualifier IPL match between top holders Punjab and Bengaluru turned out to be a lacklustre contest. Punjab's wickets fell like ninespins and they were bowled out for a paltry 101 runs, with no fightback coming either from their middle order or tailenders. S Vaithianathan, Madurai

Tongue twister

Ref: Kamal must apologise by May 31: K'aka film panel (May 30). Asking Kamal Haasan to apologise for his statement is unwarranted. The actor would have said the same thing if Kamada were his mother tongue. The threat to ban his movies if he does not retract his statement and apologise is an overreaction. David Milton, Maruthachode

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Delivery delays

Stricter execution of defence contracts must

AIR CHIEF MARSHAL AP Singh's blunt assessment — 'Not a single project that I can think of has been completed on time' — strikes at the core of India's defence preparedness. Despite headline-making progress in indigenous production, such as the Tejas fighter or Akash missile systems, chronic delays continue to hobble operational readiness and denial modernisation. These delays, often accepted at the contract-signing stage itself, highlight systemic inertia and a culture of over-promising. With adversaries modernising swiftly and conflicts becoming technology-intensive, the price of sluggishness is steep. It's not just a matter of budgets or bureaucratic red tape, it's about national security.

The government has indeed made strides: domestic production has risen to 65 per cent of the total defence needs, defence exports have jumped to 72,000 crore and the public-private balance is gradually shifting. Schemes like iDEX are fostering innovation and the private sector now contributes 21 per cent to the total output. However, when delivery lags behind intent, strategic autonomy remains elusive. There are structural gaps that demand attention — from raw material dependencies and insufficient R&D funding to poor coordination between services. Of the Rs 6.81 lakh crore defence budget, only Rs 1.8 lakh crore is earmarked for modernisation, with R&D receiving a paltry 3.94 per cent. Until this imbalance is corrected, breakthroughs will remain sporadic.

Declaring three defence public sector undertakings (DPSUs) as 'miniratnas' is commendable, but performance should be measured not just by profits, but also timely delivery of critical systems. The Air Chief's warning must be treated as a call to overhaul the defence procurement ecosystem. Transparency in timelines, stricter contract enforcement and empowered project management must replace vague ambition. India's vision of 'atmanirbhar' in defence cannot afford to be an exercise in delay. National security deserves speed, not excuses.

Balm for Poonch

Shah visit reassuring, but more must be done

UNION Home Minister Amit Shah's visit to Poonch and his message of solidarity with those affected in the Pakistani shelling and drone attacks during Operation Sindoor provides a much-needed balm. The district recorded the highest number of civilian fatalities in Jammu and Kashmir between May 7 and 10. The border area residents in the UT have yet again paid the price. The large-scale death and destruction throws up pertinent questions that need to be urgently addressed. Why do civilians living close to the Line of Control remain so vulnerable? Could more have been done to lower the risk and prevent the losses? Was the response to evacuate those in the line of fire quick enough? Going forward, what are the new standard operating procedures being put in place to ensure that the residents are protected if there is a cross-border flare-up again?

It is time to firm up a robust compensation and rebuilding process that exhibits the nation's resolve to stand by those who are the most vulnerable in border areas across the country. The Home Minister's announcement to add to the 9,500-plus bunkers in the border areas is reassuring. The distribution of aid and appointment letters for government jobs to the kin of those affected is a sign that the J&K government, the Centre and the nation's sentiments are connected with the border residents. Developing a response framework that takes care of the unique requirements of border residents is vital. They cannot be made to feel invisible and forgotten.

It is also essential to not take lightly the civil defence drills that are being initiated at regular intervals, or the assigning of duties and imparting of training to the young volunteers. A modicum of discipline and preparedness has its benefits in times of crises.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, SUNDAY, MAY 31, 1925

'Turmoil in India'

IF Lord Birkenhead has so far failed to give any indication of that firm grasp of facts which alone could prevent the political situation in India from getting from bad to worse, there are happily other Englishmen who have had no difficulty in forming a fairly correct estimate of the present position in this country or in suggesting the only measures by which this position can be effectively remedied. One of these is Harry F Ward, whose article in the British Press on 'Turmoil in India' contains the most brilliant, penetrating and masterly analysis of the present conditions in India from the pen of a foreigner that we have recently seen. With one exception, there is no important statement or observation in this article with which any well-informed critic in India will seriously quarrel. The exception is as regards the view cautiously put forward by the writer that the exigencies of his position and the position of his country may compel Mahatma Gandhi to throw the principle of non-violence overboard. 'At present,' says the writer, 'he suspends non-cooperation for the sake of the principle of non-violence. He makes the personal surrender of political leadership, and yields his programme for his principle. Has he thereby manoeuvred himself into a position where sooner or later an emergency may arise in which love of the country may overpower his principle?' We can think of no emergency in which this can or will happen.

BJP's baffling silence in Ludhiana W

Why does no one in the BJP, not even Modi-Shah, care about a bypoll in a corner of Punjab?

THE GREAT GAME
JYOTI MALHOTRA

TWENTY days before the Ludhiana West Assembly constituency goes to the polls on June 19, the Punjab BJP is asking two questions. The first is, Ludhiana West where? And the second, Ludhiana West who?

The crisis in the party in the state is totally at odds with a juggernaut that has been caterwauling across the country over the last several months and mopping up all the governments it sets its eyes on. Haryana, Maharashtra, Delhi. Even in Manipur, the BJP folks are claiming the support of a majority of the MLAs (44) in an attempt at upsetting the local apocryph.

The BJP blitzkrieg didn't need Operation Sindoor to underline the 24x7 presence of the world's largest political party — with a 90-crore membership, the BJP claims to be even larger than the Communist Party of China. Certainly, Operation Sindoor has magnified PM Narendra Modi's importance not just in the party, but also across the country and in the international arena. He took the decision, first, to target terror infrastructure inside Pakistan. Then, when the Pakistanis struck back by raining drones and missiles on Indian military infrastructure from Baramulla to Bhuj, it was the PM who decided to escalate the air war by bombing Pakistan's 11 bases and runways.

The BrahMos missile certainly did its job well, but the credit for the decision to play eyeball-to-eyeball with Rawalpindi until Rawalpindi blinked, must certainly be given to Modi.



DISINTEREST: The BJP state president Sunil Jakhar resigned several months ago and there is no move to replace him. Capt. Amarinder Singh is far removed from the heat and dust of politics. PH

Close by his side, the powerful Home Minister and Modi's closest confidante, Amit Shah, has demonstrated how there's no sunlight between the PM and he. It's as if they complete each other's sentences. Between them, there's full control over the party and the country. The thing about Amit Shah, as has been made clear again and again, is that he doesn't leave anything to chance. It is said he fights every election, from panchayat to Lok Sabha, as if he's astride the Mahabharata chessboard, thinking through every move three moves before.

Within days of the end of the India-Pakistan conflict, as the PM travelled across the country talking to people about the conflict just ended, Shah was back in the Jammu region to assess the damage on the ground.

Perhaps, none of this is new. Modi-Shah have had the BJP and the country in their grip since the party came to power in 2014 — dividing the Opposition, influencing both society and media, invoking the gods and conflating it with nationalism, although, as we know, one of the

Perhaps, the real reason is that Punjabis, so used to resisting the idea of the Delhi Durbar, find it easy to escape the charms of the saffron party.

most enduring things about Hindu gods is that they have feet of clay. All the party presidents, both past and present, know that.

Current incumbent JP Nadda, the mild-mannered gentleman from Himachal Pradesh, must be wondering till when and how long his extended presidency is going to last.

The RSS is said to be fully on board the Modi train, its message of Hindutva being seeded across the length and breadth

of the country; what more could it want in its centenary year.

So, back to the first question. Why does no one in the BJP, not even Modi-Shah, care about a bypoll in a corner of Punjab, in Ludhiana West, considering Punjab is a sensitive, border state; has just been through a near-conflict with Pakistan, even if it was mostly an air war; and none other than the PM came to Adampur within a day of the end of the conflict because the S-400 had warded off Pakistan's Hafiz missiles?

Consider the total disinterest. The BJP state president, Sunil Jakhar, resigned several months ago and there is no move to replace him. The larger-than-life Amarinder Singh, who left the Congress to teach a lesson and joined the BJP, is far removed from the heat and dust of politics and is planning a summer of travel. Vijay Rupani, the man from Gujarat who is in charge of Punjab, hides when he rolls his eyes in boredom, but everyone can see.

Ludhiana West is a predominantly Hindu constituency, as much as 85 per cent, perfect ter-

ritory for the BJP to showcase its determination to do much better than the only two MLAs it has today. In the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, the BJP didn't do too badly, winning 18 per cent of the vote. The PM, who spent a large time in Punjab during the Emergency, is said to have a fond corner for Punjab. But a certain *je ne sais quoi* is clearly missing.

Local Ludhiana boy Vikram Sandhu is said to be a likely candidate from Ludhiana West — he had contested the election the last time too — except, the local 'sanghathan' or RSS man, Manthri Sreenivasulu, doesn't approve. Sreenivasulu, instead, likes Jeevan Gupta, another local who pays full obeisance to the 'sanghathan', but as a wage offered, 'won't get even 10 votes.'

Sreenivasulu, meanwhile, is most unpopular in the Punjab BJP. A god-fearing, Telugu-speaking gent, he earnestly clocks the miles, going from 'pind' to 'pind', village to village, but to little avail. It's not really his fault. The Punjab is mystified by him, and he is mystified by the Punjab. Newton's Third Law prevails here; every action has an equal and opposite reaction.

For sure, from Kashmir to Karnataka, via Punjab and Andhra Pradesh, India is one, but the BJP must know that some local flavour is always welcome in the Maggi.

Back, then, to the original question. Why is the BJP not interested in fighting Ludhiana West? Perhaps, Punjab with only 13 Lok Sabha seats doesn't matter that much; and without the Akali Dal, it's difficult for the BJP to enter the state's Sikh-dominated villages.

Perhaps, none of the above is true and the real reason is that Punjabis, so used to resisting the idea of the Delhi Durbar for centuries, find it easy to escape the charms of the saffron party. So, why doesn't the BJP want to change that state of being?

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Every election is determined by the people who show up — Larry J Sabato

Donald Trump and Mickey Mouse

RAJAN KASHYAP

ADRESSING economists and political leaders last week, Prof Jeffrey Sachs, a renowned international economist, condemned America's new international trade policy. Essentially, President Donald Trump claims that since most countries export more goods (in value) to the US than they import from his country, these nations are exploiting America. His policy consequently seeks to levy hefty tariffs (duties) on imports and demands that other countries reduce their tariffs on goods imported by them from the US. This policy has thrown global trade into disarray.

On many economic parameters, Sachs deems the move ill advised. He goes to the extent of questioning Trump's understanding of economic fundamentals. Scoffing at the President, the professor said even Mickey Mouse, a legendary cartoon character, was smarter than Trump. Sachs stated that the new policies would hurt both partner nations engaged in trade. He explained, on the basis of economic logic, how the new US policy was self-defeating. Understandably, the professor's comments on Trump's 'basic intelligence' have created a storm in the international media.

Many economists endorse Sachs' views that the current disruption of world trade stems from a thoughtless and impetuous initiative. On its part, the public has lapped up the Trump-Mickey comparison. Trump is notorious for the use of incoherent language in his speeches. Many people around the world, including those in the US, find the President's aggressive tone and vulgar comments on other leaders and countries distasteful.

In contrast, Mickey is portrayed as a pleasant and likable character. He is happy-go-lucky, kind and helpful to others, always maintaining a spirit of cheerfulness. Mickey does not have an aggressive personality; he is a kind individual whose harmless capers and adventures have amused and delighted children as well as adults for almost a century. Even in the face of difficulties, Mickey is never known to utter an offensive or inappropriate word. At the same time, he is imbued with sound intelligence, and his endearing skills help him overcome all odds.

Tongue in cheek, Sachs apologises for the comparison between Trump and Mickey Mouse, remarking that the latter is endowed with more brains than the former. He refers to abusive words with which Trump demeaned other nations with whom the US is negotiating on trade as 'the presidential language.'

President Trump's avowed policies have undoubtedly stirred the world. The US is engaged with numerous countries to determine the duties on exports and imports. Currently, there is a worldwide debate on the key features of the negotiations. The impact of the new world trade order will be known after several months. In the meantime, Prof Sachs has succeeded in bringing some amusement into the dry world of economics.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Protect the republic

Apropos of 'A professor and a draconian law', the arrest of Professor Mahmudabad under Section 152 of the BNS reflects a disturbing trend to criminalise dissent. His Facebook post was a thoughtful critique, urging secularism and lawful governance. However, the court's decision to hand over the interpretation of plain English to a SIT raises concerns about judicial institutional responsibility. Moreover, the sweeping scope of Section 152 leaves citizens and minorities at the mercy of arbitrary action. Instead of punishing those who uphold democratic ideals through peaceful expression, the law must protect the republic.

AMARJEET MANN, UNA

Musk opts to focus on business

Apropos of 'Musk goes', the partnership between Donald Trump and Elon Musk made waves initially. However, Musk reportedly disagreed with Trump's reciprocal tariffs that led to a tariff bloodbath globally, particularly those levied on China. He also disapproved of Trump's package of sweeping tax and spending cuts. Musk attempted to improve government efficiency but faced challenges. His efforts included layoffs, buyout offers and cuts in grants, but saw limited success. Musk has decided to exit the US administration and focus on his companies, Tesla and SpaceX. However, the two leaders remain close personally.

BIR DEVINDER SINGH BEDI, SANGRUR

Women cadets' grit & determination

Apropos of 'NDA's first women cadets ready for tomorrow', the credit for achieving this milestone goes to the 2021 landmark judgment of the Supreme Court, which, despite opposition, opened the gates of the prestigious military academy to women aspirants. The 17 women cadets who made it through the gruelling selection process out of more than one lakh candidates definitely had to prove their mettle with academic brilliance and strong willpower. Though the physical standards had been adjusted to accommodate biological differences, the core values of integrity, discipline, courage, commitment and 'service before self' remained unchanged. Their journey has not only been about survival but also rebuilding themselves to emerge as leaders.

VAMBHAV GOYAL, CHANDIGARH

Trump arm-twisting varsities

Refer to 'Cutting financial aid to Harvard an act of self-sabotage'; for many decades, the US Government has been granting funds to Harvard and other American universities. This investment has yielded great results in the form of knowledge and innovation, that helped the US economy as well as technological advancement. The Trump government's new conditions for granting funds, including restrictions on hiring faculty and policing political views of the students and teachers, are bound to severely shrink the knowledge space. Threats of cancelling visas of students and scholars is a way of arm-twisting the universities that fail to toe the Trump line.

SK PANESAR, BY MAIL

Theatre commands not needed

Refer to 'Not a single defence project completed on time: IAF Chief flags systemic delays'; apart from delays, there is another issue that deserves attention. A brainchild of the first Chief of Defence Staff late Gen Bipin Rawat, theatre commands, which were meant to integrate the three branches of the armed forces, have been revived. Though the IAF Chief has not spoken about it, there are apprehensions that theatre commands will further divide the already depleted fleet of the IAF. Powers assigned to the theatre commanders will undermine the relevance of the service chiefs, which would be inappropriate. We already have many operational commands of all three services spread across the country. There is no need for theatre commands.

WG CDR CL SENGAL (RETD), JALANDHAR

Veteran of Punjab politics

The passing away of veteran Akali leader SS Dhindsa, 89, has left a void in the state's political arena. In his political innings of half a century, Dhindsa held such senior positions as state cabinet minister, union minister, Rajya Sabha Member, chairman of various public sector undertakings, state planning board. They testify his credentials as a veteran politician. Dhindsa represented the generation of Punjab politicians who were an important part of the polity during its momentous stages of development.

JAGVINDER SINGH BRAR, PATIALA