DECCAN Chronicle
16 MAY 2025

Court FIR on MP minister good step in war on hate

The intervention of the Madhya Pradesh high court ordering the registration of a first information report against the state's tribal affairs minister Vijay Shah for what the court called "cancerous, dangerous and disparaging" comments against an officer of the Indian Army is a welcome step that could go a long way in mitigating the effects of the hate campaign a section of the right wing in the country has been engaged for quite some time now.

The court was categorical that the minister's comment that India has "taught a lesson to those responsible for the Pahalgam terror attack by using their own sister", a disparaging reference to Col Sofiya Qureshi who briefed the media on Operation Sindoor, attracted several sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, including those covering acts that endanger the sovereignty and integrity of India, adversely affect mutual harmony between communities, are likely to cause public unrest, and targeting a member of a particular community.

What makes it heart-warming is that the court had insisted on initiating legal proceedings against the minister instead of customarily expressing its disdain for his remarks and leaving it at that. It went on to issue a deadline for the registration of the FIR and cautioned the police that they will face contempt of court proceedings should they fail to execute its order. The court displayed the seriousness it attached to the issue when it commented that the FIR did not reflect the seriousness of the crime the minister allegedly committed. The Supreme Court also found the case not to be one warranting an immediate intervention and instead reminded him of the language he ought to use while being in office.

That India survived the diabolic design of terrorists to create a religious divide by condemning to death innocent, unsuspecting people and summarily executing them because of their faith is no less than a miracle, even as the relatives of several of the victims came out in the open refusing to subscribe to a tit-for-tat hate agenda. But together they defeated the terrorists and their nefarious designs. There were, of course, a section of hatemongers who could not stomach this and launched their own hate campaign against them instead. A united India ultimately beat the unholy alliance of the terrorists and the hate-mongers.

It is India's misfortune that a section of the ruling dispensation survives and thrives on communal propaganda, and the Madhya Pradesh minister undoubtedly belongs to this group. It is unimaginable for a sane Indian to call an Indian soldier kin of a terrorist with no proof to substantiate the outrageous claim. The minister was simply branding the community to which the soldier belonged under the guise of opposing the terrorists. It was a dogwhistle for his followers. The judicial intervention has fortunately stopped this group in their tracks.

It is unthinkable that a person holding a constitutional post should blithely throw a soldier under the bus simply because she was doing her job. The Madhya Pradesh chief minister must sack his colleague for this wrongdoing. An FIR was lodged against Mr Shah late on May 14. There is no scope for half-measures in this case.

Target Turkey, but show maturity

Pakistan's sponsored terror hit in Pahalgam has been adequately responded to with Indian missile strikes hitting its air defence and airfields to a point that Pakistan initiated the calls for the ceasefire within four days of hostilities erupting. India also drew a line in spelling out its doctrine that its response would be as firm to any aid for a terror act that would be construed as an act of war.

It would seem logical then for the emotions surrounding the events to die down and make way for normal life. But they haven't as evidenced in the call for boycotting Turkey because of its authoritarian leader Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his unyielding support for Pakistan "in good times and bad."

Turkey has, however, become more of a public target because it took part in offensive operations against India with drones and personnel to operate them from Pakistan. In military terms, the drones meant nothing as 350 of them were shot down by the Indian integrated air defence system.

In a mature democracy, people would understand how things work in geopolitics. If they feel offended at a people's support for an enemy, it is up to them to boycott, as they may choose to do with Turkey for tourism, imports and films, etc., as much as they do with Azerbaijan for the same reasons.

But, for a government to put under scrutiny all projects involving Turkish firms would mean abandoning what is commonly thought of as a proportionate response. The boycotts are meant to send a social message rather than a political one as many of them die a natural death with the passage of time as we saw happen with Maldives in the past.

There can, however, be no compromise on national security. Things may be reassessed if a Turkish company, running 70 per cent of the ground operations in the Mumbai international airport and operating in nine other Indian airports, can become a security threat in view of the changed circumstances after India-Pakistan hostilities. Some economic distancing may become inevitable because of geopolitical divergence but boycotts have limited effect.

DECCAN CHRONICLE

KAUSHIK MITTER
Editor

K. SUDHAKAR
Printer & Publisher

R. MOHAN
Resident Editor

DECCAN CHRONICLE offices are located at:
Chennai: SP 3 Developed Plot, Industrial Estate, Guindy, Chennai 600032. Phones: (044) 22254750 , 22254751
Coimbatore: No. 2/22 Sengalipalayam Road, N.G.G.O. Colony Post, Kurudampalayam Village, Coimbatore-641022. Phone: (0422) 2231255, 2231256
Hyderabad: 36, Sarojini Devi Road, Secunderabad 500 003. Phone: (040) 27803930-4. Fax: (040) 27805256.
Visakhapatnam: Survey No. 1/3A Beach Road, Near Kailasagiri Ropeway, Sector-9 MVP Colony, Visakhapatnam - 530 017. Phones: (0891) 2552333/2552334, Fax (0891) 2755285
Vijayawada: No. C 3 & 4, Patamata, Industrial Estate, Auto Nagar, Vijayawada (A.P.). Phones: (0866) 2555284/ 2555287. Fax (0866) 2555234
Rajahmundry: Vemagiri, Dhavaleswaram Rd, Rajahmundry 533125. Phones: (0883) 2417208, 2417618
Anantapur: Thapovan Colony, Bangalore Bye-Pass Road, Anantapur 515004. Phones: (08554) 276903, Fax: (08554-276904
Nellore: Survey No. 527/2, Burranpur Village, Venkatachalam (M), Chemuduguntа Panchayat, Nellore. Phone: (0861) 2348381/ 82. Telefax (0861) 2348380
Karimnagar: H. No. 1-21-12/1, Cherukabbuthur Road, Mugadhampur Village, Karim Nagar - 505186 Phone : 9121181123

Subhani



The conundrum of caste calculus in India's polity



Parsa Venkateshwar Rao Jr

Many OBC groups have made huge strides through social mobility and emerged as dominant castes like the Lingayats and Vokkaligas in Karnataka and the Reddys and Kammas in undivided Andhra Pradesh

The political compulsions of the Opposition parties to demand a caste census, and the ruling BJP's eventual decision to make the caste census a part of the decennial census, to take place sometime in 2026, marks a capitulation as the party and the Narendra Modi government were strongly opposed to the idea. Not enough analysis has been done on what lay behind the BJP's U-turn on the issue, and it is not without reason that the Congress claims that it forced the government to accept its demand. It is easy to get drawn into the whirlpool of arguments about the political advantages each party wants to gain from the exercise. The speculation among some analysts is that the BJP wouldn't do anything significant with the caste census, and that it was simply a tactical move to deflect the Opposition parties from gaining electoral advantage from the demand. Whatever may be the Opposition's strategy and the BJP's counter-strategy, the caste issue will remain a problem — whether with the caste census and without it.

While India has evolved rapidly into a middle-income country, a far cry from the high levels of poverty seen in the 1950s, and our society is much less segregated on caste lines in schools and universities, in government jobs and other spheres, caste continues to cast its shadow over society and the polity. But caste games are played at various levels and in various guises.

Caste analysts, both in academia and outside, continue to see it as a simple contest between the upper castes and lower castes. The upper castes are cloaked under the generic label, while the Scheduled Castes or dalits are the victims who are identified by name. But there is more happening between the two poles of upper castes and dalits. And it is this adversarial interplay in the unnamed and label-less middle ground — and it is a large one — that the inadequately named caste contest is happening.

The middle ground is that of Other Backward Classes (OBCs), and the fight is inside the many groups of various intermediate castes to be included in the OBC list that is at the forefront of the caste census issue. A caste census was not demanded by the Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes. It is also an indirect fight against the Supreme Court judgment in the Indira Sawhney case of 1992, where the court called for the exclusion of the "creamy layer", which said that total reservations cannot exceed 50 per cent. This meant that while reservations for SCs stands at 15 per cent, and that of STs at 7.5 per cent, the OBCs will have to be content with 27 per cent. The claim is that OBCs comprise 70 per cent of the population. It is an indirect demand that the government should overturn the 50 per cent ceiling set for reservations by the apex court. It is understandable that the BJP and the Congress, and their allies, should maintain a tactical silence about OBCs while discussing the caste census issue. Powerful castes like the Patidars in Gujarat, the Marathas in Maharashtra, the Kapus in Andhra Pradesh, the Gujjars in Rajasthan and the Jats in Haryana are loudly demanding to be included in the OBC list so they could access reservations in educational institutions and in government jobs.

Many of the OBC groups have made huge strides through social mobility — this phenomenon goes back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries — and many have emerged as the dominant castes like the Lingayats and Vokkaligas in Karnataka and the Reddys and Kammas in undivided Andhra Pradesh. And in a majority of instances, the continued oppression of the dalits is by the dominant castes. Academics and public intellectuals use the anodyne term "upper castes" to describe all those who target the dalits. Some of the academics, out of a sense of being inaccurate, venture to use the term "upper castes".

There are, then, two battles going on in the caste arena. One is that the excluded upper middle castes seeking inclusion in the OBC list be part of the reserved category. And the other is the fight between the intermediate caste groups and the dalits. This is best exemplified by the bitter political and social rivalry between the Yadavs, represented by the Samajwadi Party (SP) in Uttar Pradesh, and the Dalits, represented by the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). Social liberals who are ardent supporters of the caste census and who believe, rather naively, that a caste census is a way to identify exploited castes from the oppressive upper castes, fight shy of seeing the many caste groups, each fighting the other for political representation and social empowerment.

Apart from the political battles, there is the caste factor in the social arena. In the student associations across colleges and universities in many parts of the country, caste assertion is part of the public culture. In the Delhi University Students' Union elections, it is a fight between the Jats and Gujjars for domination. In the Osmania University in Telangana, it is the Reddys who openly identify themselves with the caste label, and in Andhra University it is the Kammas. The minority Brahmins held sway in undivided Andhra Pradesh and in Tamil Nadu much before the 1920s, but they have been rightly edged out.

The caste struggle, however, remains. According to observers, the NRI associations of Telugus in the United States are divided along caste lines. In the social sphere, the dominance of caste is harmless. But it needs to be recognised that it exists.

The conspicuous presence of caste in the social sphere makes it necessary that it cannot be ignored. It also cannot be eliminated in the political sphere unless people get tired of the divisions and boycott everyone who steps forward in the name of caste. Political leaders will not defang caste because it serves their purpose. There is the issue of caste beyond politics, divisions and battles. It is the social features of caste groups that make society diverse as much as language, and shapes culture in a variety of unnamed ways. Caste is sure to die out in due course, but even as it dies out, the sociologist and the anthropologist should study caste diversity. There is no need to explain. It is enough if it is described in an ethnographic sense. The caste census should be the first step in this direction.

The writer is a Delhi-based commentator and analyst

LETTERS

CONSTITUTIONAL CHESS

President Droupadi Murmu has invoking Article 143 posing 14 searching questions to the Supreme Court is a rare constitutional moment. At stake is not just the procedural question of assent to bill but the very choreography between the judiciary and the executive. This is no institutional skirmish but a test of constitutional maturity. The questions cut both ways: they expose executive inaction, while also testing the limits of judicial supervision. The likely outcome? A careful Supreme Court advisory that reaffirms the separation of powers, urges timely executive action, yet resists codifying rigid judicial oversight. The long-term impact may be constructive — bringing clarity, balance, and urgency where ambiguity has festered. Democracy, after all, doesn't weaken when its pillars question each other. It fortifies. Especially when they do it through law, not rivalry.

Gopalaswamy J
Chennai

TRUMP CHALLENGE FOR INDIA

As rightly stated in your editorial, US President Donald Trump poses a major challenge for India considering his statements and acts in recent times. As stated by you, India will never discuss the Kashmir issue with Pakistan allowing Uncle Sam to act as an unwanted mediator and your comparison of the UN as a " guard" of a " slow moving goods train " with least power is not only hilarious but true. The cartoon of Subhani wherein Trump is seen peeping through a bedroom window of a quarrelling couple and enquiring whether his " mediating services" is required to " patch them up " speaks volumes.

M.C.VIJAY SHANKAR
Chennai

Mail your letters to
chennaidesk@deccanmail.com

Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu



If there's a strike, those near LoC can still survive, in civilian bunkers

Hostilities between India and Pakistan have ceased, for the moment, but when your neighbour has a history of lobbing more than just cricket metaphors across the fence, you'd better have a plan. India does. And it's not all missiles and meetings — it's bunkers.

Those underground shelters are scattered across Jammu and Kashmir, especially near the LoC. Built well before the current tensions reignited, these bunkers aren't just military prep — they're pure, no-nonsense civilian protection — a rare win for bureaucratic foresight.

Though of not much help in the Poonch region, as we discovered during the recent battle, babus say that civilians living along the border now have somewhere to run when the skies turn loud. These aren't luxury basements; they're reinforced, stocked-up life pods. And thanks to early safety drills, folks know exactly what to do when the sirens wail.

According to sources, these bunkers aren't just for conventional shelling. India's also got its own Cold War-style strategic shelters — massive, fortified command bunkers meant to survive the unthinkable — a nuclear strike. Not the kind of infrastructure you brag about at dinner, but exactly the kind you want quietly waiting in the wings.

The takeaway here? Sometimes security doesn't look like fighter jets and high-level talks. Sometimes, it's just a reinforced concrete room with supplies, a lock, and a plan. In a world that feels one bad headline away from chaos, these bunkers are a sobering reminder that real defence starts underground — and it's not just for the military anymore.

IAS POWER PLAY: TALE OF TWO BATCHES

While civil servants are competitive about reaching top administrative posts, there's also camaraderie among officers from the same batches. And nowhere is this more evident than in the subtle flexing between the 1989 and 1991 IAS batches.

Let's start with the 1989 batch. Not content with just holding high office, they've strategically planted themselves in the country's hot zones — Delhi and Jammu & Kashmir, for starters. Atal Dulloo manages the sensitive J&K terrain, while Dharmendra navigates the bureaucratic minefield that is Delhi. Add Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, MP, Bihar and Karnataka to the mix, and you've got a batch that clearly didn't come to play — they came to control.

Now, the 1991 batch may not have Delhi or Srinagar, but they've spread themselves across seven states — an administrative juggernaut. From the polarised politics of Tamil Nadu and West Bengal to the election-bound buzz of Kerala and the strategic edges of Arunachal and Nagaland, the 1991 officers are navigating tough terrain, both politically and geographically.

So, who wins this round? The 1989 batch has a strategic edge, managing key Union Territories and border states with high-stakes implications. But the 1991 lot has gone wide, overseeing a broader slice of India's messy federalism.

Either way, one thing's clear: governance in India isn't just about policy — it's also about positioning. And sometimes, it takes a little batch rivalry to keep the bureaucratic engine humming.

AIS RULES OR POLITICAL WILL, WHAT WINS IN KERALA?

Kerala's babudom has just served up a case study in how *not* to inspire public confidence. The state government's decision to extend the suspension of IAS officer N. Prasanth till October 31, 2025, isn't just unusual, it's downright opaque.

Here's the twist: there were *two* meetings of the suspension review committee within two weeks. The first, on April 23, chaired by the outgoing chief secretary Sarada Muraleedharan, reportedly recommended lifting the suspension. The second, just days later, chaired by the new CS, A Jayathilak, who, incidentally, is known to be at loggerheads with Mr Prasanth, recommended extending it. Guess which one the final government order conveniently ignored?

Spoiler alert: The one that didn't suit the script.

Now, according to All India Services (AIS) rules, suspensions beyond six months need the Centre's green light. But in Mr Prasanth's case, it's radio silence — no word on whether the Union government's nod was sought or received. That's a big deal. Ignoring statutory requirements isn't a procedural lapse; it's playing bureaucratic roulette.

At best, this is a mess of procedural ambiguity. At worst, it smells like vendetta dressed up as governance.

Civil servants aren't above the law, sure — but neither should the system that governs them be. If rules are to mean anything, the state has to walk the talk on due process. Right now, it looks like Kerala's government has opted for selective memory and creative silence instead.

Love them, hate them ignore them at national peril, is the babu guarantee and Dilip's belief. Share significant babu escapades dilipcherian@hotmail.com.

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

EXPLAINED LAW

The President's reference

Rashtrapati Bhavan has invoked the Supreme Court's advisory jurisdiction under the Constitution, asking for its opinion on questions of law drawn from the court's April 8 judgment in the R N Ravi case. But the reference also raises some wider issues on the way the SC exercises its discretionary powers



President of India Droupadi Murmu and Chief Justice of India B R Gavai after the latter's swearing-in at Rashtrapati Bhavan on Wednesday. *PTI*

APURVA VISHWANATH
NEW DELHI, MAY 15

PRESIDENT DROUPADI MURMU has invoked the Supreme Court's advisory jurisdiction on whether timelines could be set for the President and Governors to act on Bills passed by state Assemblies.

Under Article 143(1) of the Constitution, the President may refer a "question of law or fact" to the Supreme Court for its opinion. The opinion, unlike a ruling, is not binding.

The reference was made on May 13, five weeks after the SC's April 8 ruling in which it fixed a three-month deadline for the President to clear Bills reserved for her consideration by the Governor.

That ruling, by a two-judge Bench headed by Justice J B Pardiwala, set aside Tamil Nadu Governor R N Ravi's decision to withhold assent to 10 pending Bills.

What is the SC's advisory jurisdiction?

The Constitution extended the provision in the Government of India Act, 1935 to seek the opinion of the Federal Court on questions of law to questions of fact as well, including certain hypotheticals.

A question under Article 143 may be referred if it "has arisen, or is likely to arise", and "which is of such a nature and of such public importance that it is expedient to obtain the opinion of the Supreme Court".

Article 145(3) requires any such reference to be heard by five judges, after which the SC returns the reference to the President with the majority opinion.

Under the Constitution, the President acts on the aid and advice of the Cabinet. The advisory jurisdiction allows her the means to seek independent advice to act on certain constitutional matters. It is a power that the President has invoked on at least 15 occasions since 1950.

Can the SC decline to answer a presidential reference?

Article 143(1) states the court "may, after such hearing as it thinks fit, report to the President its opinion thereon". The word 'may' indicates that it is the court's prerogative to answer the reference. The SC has so far returned at least two references without answering.

■ In 1993, then President Shankar Dayal Sharma asked the SC "whether a Hindu temple or any Hindu religious structure existed prior to the construction of the Ram Janma Bhumi-Babri Masjid…in the area on which the structure stood."

The SC unanimously refused to answer this as a civil suit on the dispute was already pending before the courts.

Justices Aftab Ahmedi and S P Bharucha declined to answer also on the grounds that the reference was against secularism, and hence unconstitutional. The judges also expressed apprehension that the government could use the SC opinion as a springboard to politically negotiate the issue.

■ The SC did not answer a 1982 reference made by President Giani Zail Singh on the constitutionality of a proposed law that sought to regulate the resettlement or permanent return of individuals (or their descendants) who had migrated to Pakistan between March 1, 1947 and May 14, 1954 to Jammu and Kashmir.

However, after the President's reference, the Bill was passed for a second time, and the Governor gave his assent. Petitions challenging the validity of the laws were also moved before the SC.

Since advisory jurisdiction is not binding as a precedent, even if the SC had held the law to be unconstitutional in the Article 143 reference, it would still have to decide its validity in the other batch. The SC's opinion would also be futile since the issue was no longer before the President.

Can the SC overturn its April 8 decision through the presidential reference?

In its 1991 opinion on the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal, the SC said that Article 143 is not a mechanism for the executive to seek review or reversal of established judicial decisions of the Supreme Court.

"When this Court in its adjudicatory jurisdiction pronounces its authoritative opinion on a question of law, it cannot be said that there is any doubt about the question of law or the same is *res integra* so as to require the President to know what the true position of law on the question is," the opinion said.

The SC also said it could not "countenance a situation" where a question in a reference "may be so construed as to invite our opinion" on a settled decision of the court.

"That would obviously be tantamount to our sitting in appeal on the said decision which it is impermissible for us to do even in adjudicatory jurisdiction. Nor is it competent for the President to invest us with an appellate jurisdiction over the said decision through a Reference under Article 143…," the court said.

The government can, however, file for a review of the April 8 ruling, and can move a curative petition in an attempt to reverse it.

Since the judgment was by a two-judge Bench, and similar cases from other states, including Kerala and Punjab, remain pending, it is possible that another Bench might refer it to a larger Constitution Bench.

Is the presidential reference only about the April 8 ruling?

The reference contains 14 questions of law *(see left)*, which are mostly drawn from the April 8 ruling, but are not limited to it. The last three questions raise larger issues on how the SC exercises discretionary powers provided by the Constitution.

■ Question 12 asks whether the SC must first determine if a case involves a "substantive question of law" or requires "interpretation of the Constitution" that only a larger Bench can hear. This question essentially asks whether smaller Benches can hear such important matters.

■ In Question 13, the reference raises questions on the use of Article 142 of the Constitution, which is the discretionary "power to do complete justice".

■ The last question asks the SC to define the contours of Centre-state disputes that can be heard by any court. Article 131 states that "subject to the provisions of this Constitution, the Supreme Court shall, to the exclusion of any other court, have original jurisdiction in any dispute."

What is the broader context behind the presidential reference?

The issues in the R N Ravi case essentially arise out of the interplay of powers between the Centre and Opposition-ruled states. Governors, who are appointed by the Centre, are seen to be undercutting elected state governments by their refusal to clear Bills passed by the Assembly.

While the SC addressed this issue in its April 8 judgment, it extended its scrutiny to the powers of the President as well, and set a three-month timeline to clear Bills reserved for her consideration by the Governor. Governor Ravi, under fire from the SC for withholding assent, had referred 10 Bills to the President.

The SC in its ruling allowed states the right to seek a "writ of mandamus" from the SC against the President. This is essentially a right to knock on the doors of courts seeking a directive against the President if she does not decide on the Bills within the prescribed time limit.

The government used the ruling to argue that the judiciary was undermining Parliament or the people's mandate. Attorney General for India R Venkataramani said the President "was not heard" before the SC passed directives for her office to follow.

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar criticised the ruling. He has raised the issue of "Parliamentary supremacy" on several occasions, and called for limited judicial review and greater adherence to the separation of powers.

That said, such tussles between Parliament and the judiciary are as old as the Constitution itself.

In the first three decades after Independence, courts and the government sparred on the interpretation of the right to property, leading to constitutional amendments and adverse court orders. Eventually, in the landmark 1973 Kesavananda Bharati ruling, the court allowed land reforms, watering down the fundamental right to property, but severely restricted Parliament's powers to tinker with any other fundamental right.

THE 14 QUESTIONS PRESIDENT MURMU HAS ASKED SC

1. What are the constitutional options before a Governor when a Bill is presented to him under Article 200 of the Constitution of India?
2. Is the Governor bound by the aid & advice tendered by the Council of Ministers while exercising all the options available with him when a Bill is presented before him under Article 200 of the Constitution of India?
3. Is the exercise of constitutional discretion by the Governor under Article 200 of the Constitution of India justiciable?
4. Is Article 361 of the Constitution of India an absolute bar to the judicial review in relation to the actions of a Governor under Article 200 of the Constitution of India?
5. In the absence of a constitutionally prescribed time limit, and the manner of exercise of powers by the Governor, can timelines be imposed and the manner of exercise be prescribed through judicial orders for the exercise of all powers under Article 200 of the Constitution of India by the Governor?
6. Is the exercise of constitutional discretion by the President under Article 201 of the Constitution of India justiciable?
7. In the absence of a constitutionally prescribed timeline and the manner of exercise of powers by the President, can timelines be imposed and the manner of exercise be prescribed through judicial orders for the exercise of discretion by the President under Article 201 of the Constitution of India?
8. In light of the constitutional scheme governing the powers of the President, is the President required to seek advice of the Supreme Court by way of a reference under Article 143 of the Constitution of India and take the opinion of the Supreme Court when the Governor reserves a Bill for the President's assent or otherwise?
9. Are the decisions of the Governor and the President under Article 200 and Article 201 of the Constitution of India, respectively, justiciable at a stage anterior into the law coming into force? Is it permissible for the Courts to undertake judicial adjudication over the contents of a Bill, in any manner, before it becomes law?
10. Can the exercise of constitutional powers and the orders of/ by the President / Governor be substituted in any manner under Article 142 of the Constitution of India?
11. Is a law made by the State legislature a law in force without the assent of the Governor granted under Article 200 of the Constitution of India?
12. In view of the *proviso* to Article 145(3) of the Constitution of India, is it not mandatory for any bench of this Hon'ble Court to first decide as to whether the question involved in the proceedings before it is of such a nature which involves substantial questions of law as to the interpretation of constitution and to refer it to a bench of minimum five Judges?
13. Do the powers of the Supreme Court under Article 142 of the Constitution of India limited to matters of procedural law or Article 142 of the Constitution of India extends to issuing directions / passing orders which are contrary to or inconsistent with existing substantive or procedural provisions of the Constitution or law in force?
14. Does the Constitution bar any other jurisdiction of the Supreme Court to resolve disputes between the Union Government and the State Governments except by way of a suit under Article 131 of the Constitution of India?

STATES THAT HAVE APPROACHED SC ON PENDING BILLS

TAMIL NADU: After SC's April 8 order, stalled Bills in DMK-ruled Tamil Nadu were deemed to have become law. Among them:
- ***TN Fisheries University (Amendment) Bill, 2020***
- ***TN Universities Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2022***
- ***TN Dr Ambedkar Law University (Amendment) Bill, 2022***
- ***TN Dr M G R Medical University, Chennai (Amendment) Bill, 2022***
- ***TN Agricultural University (Amendment) Bill, 2022***
- ***TN (Second Amendment) Bill, 2022***
- ***TN Universities Laws (Second Amendment) Bill, 2022***
- ***TN Fisheries University (Amendment) Bill, 2023.***

Madras University (Amendment) Bill, 2022 and TN Veterinary and Animal Sciences University (Amendment) Bill, 2023, did not receive assent due to technical reasons.

KERALA: LDF government approached SC in March 2024 against the President and then Governor Arif Mohammad Khan.
- ***University Laws (Amendment) (No. 2) Bill, 2021***
- ***University Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2021***
- ***Kerala Co-operative Societies (Amendment) Bill, 2022***
- ***University Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2022***
- ***Kerala Lok Ayukta (Amendment) Bill, 2022***
- ***The University Laws (Amendment) (No. 2) Bill, 2022***
- ***The University Laws (Amendment) (No. 3) Bill, 2022.***

KARNATAKA: According to government sources, among the Bills pending with Governor are:
- ***Karnataka Rural Development and Panchayat Raj University Bill, 2024***
- ***Karnataka (Mineral Rights and Mineral Bearing Land) Tax Bill, 2024***
- ***Mysuru Development Authority Bill, 2024***
- ***Karnataka Co-operative Societies (Amendment) Bill, 2024***
- ***Karnataka Souharda Sahakari (Amendment) Bill, 2024***
- ***Karnataka State Universities (Amendment) Bill, 2023.***

WEST BENGAL: The TMC government moved SC in July 2024, accusing Governor C V Ananda Bose of blocking seven Bills "without explanation".
- ***WB University Laws (Amendment) Bill***
- ***WB University of Animal and Fishery Sciences (Amendment) Bill***
- ***WB Private University Laws (Amendment) Bill***
- ***WB Krishi Viswavidyalaya Laws***
- ***WB University of Health Sciences (Amendment) Bill***
- ***Aliah University (Amendment) Bill***
- ***WB Town and Country (Planning and Development) (Amendment) Bill.***

TELANGANA: In April 2023, BRS government approached SC, accusing then Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan of withholding assent to 10 Bills. The case was closed after the Centre told SC that June that the Governor had returned the Bills with her comments.

PUNJAB: The AAP government moved SC in October 2023, accusing then Governor Banwarilal Purohit of sitting on key Bills.
- ***Punjab Police (Amendment) Bill, 2023***
- ***Sikh Gurdwaras (Amendment) Bill, 2023***
- ***Punjab University Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2023***
- ***Punjab Affiliated Colleges (Security of Service) Amendment Bill, 2023.***

In November 2024, SC said the Governor could not "keep the Bill pending indefinitely without taking any action whatsoever". Purohit had by then given his assent to one Bill; other three remain pending.

Before Murmu, other Presidents and their references to SC

EXPLAINED POLITICS

MANOJ CG
NEW DELHI, MAY 15

BEFORE PRESIDENT Droupadi Murmu, several Indian heads of state have taken the presidential reference route to resolve vexed legal issues with political undertones, seek clarity on important Supreme Court judgments, or simply lob uneasy political questions into the SC's domain. Some notable instances.

Cauvery water row, 1991

In June 1991, the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal issued a directive to Karnataka to release 205 thousand million cubic feet of water to Tamil Nadu. This prompted the Congress government in Karnataka, led by S Bangarappa, to issue the Karnataka-Cauvery Basin Irrigation Protection Ordinance (later legislated into an Act) which effectively overrode the authority of the Tribunal.

In July, President R Venkataraman sought the opinion of the top court on whether a state government could refuse to implement an order of a tribunal set up by the Centre, at the time also under Congress. Among other things, the presidential reference asked whether the Karnataka ordinance is "in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution" and whether the Tribunal was "competent to grant any interim relief to the parties to the dispute".

In its 1992 response to the President, the Supreme Court concluded that the Karnataka act was beyond the legislative competence of the state, and thus *ultra vires* the Constitution. It held that the Tribunal was competent to grant interim relief to the parties to the dispute, when a reference for such relief was made by the Centre.

Ayodhya, 1992

In the wake of the demolition of the Babri Masjid in December 1992, the Congress-led P V Narasimha Rao government acquired "all areas in dispute in the suits pending in the Allahabad High Court (on the matter)", and promised to rebuild the razed structure while also taking appropriate steps for the construction of a Ram temple.

On January 7, 1993, the very day that the Centre issued the Acquisition of Certain Area at Ayodhya Ordinance to acquire 67.703 acres in the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid complex, President Shankar Dayal Sharma made a reference to the SC asking "...whether a Hindu temple... existed prior to the construction of the... Babri Masjid... in the area on which the [Babri Masjid] stood?".

This was seen as Rao's attempt to get a Ram temple built by the Ramalaya Trust — rather than an organisation directly affiliated to the Sangh Parivar — and thus co-opting the Ram Mandir issue from the BJP and VHP while "firing from the shoulders of the SC".

However, the apex court did not allow itself to be dragged into the row, saying that the reference was opposed to secularism, and thus did not serve a Constitutional purpose. This was one of the rare cases in which the SC "respectfully" returned a presidential reference unanswered.

Interestingly, the SC said its observations were not in any way a reflection on President Sharma himself. "We have the highest respect for the office of the President of India and for its present incumbent; his secular credentials are well known," the court said.

Gujarat elections, 2002

In the aftermath of the 2002 riots in Gujarat, the BJP government in the state wanted to hold early Assembly elections. While polls were due in March 2003, Governor S S Bhandari — acting on the recommendation of the state Cabinet under then Chief Minister Narendra Modi — dissolved the Assembly in July 2002. This meant that the last sitting of the Assembly before dissolution had been held on April 3.

However, the Election Commission (EC) said it was not in a position to conduct elections before October 3, the day on which the six-month deadline to have a sitting of the Assembly would expire. Article 174(1) of the Constitution says that "six months shall not intervene between its last sitting in one session and the date appointed for its first sitting in the next session".



(From left) **Presidents S D Sharma, APJ Abdul Kalam, Pratibha Patil.** *Archive*

This prompted Atal Bihari Vajpayee's government at the Centre to seek the opinion of the SC. President A P J Abdul Kalam asked whether "Article 174 (was) subject to the decision of the EC under Article 324 (which gives EC the powers to conduct elections) as to the schedule of elections of the Assembly", and whether the EC was required to "carry out the mandate of Article 174".

Upholding the EC's position, the SC said there was no Constitutional mandate to hold elections within six months of the last sitting of an Assembly if the House was prematurely dissolved. "The provisions of Article 174 are mandatory in character so far as the time period between two sessions is concerned in respect of live Assemblies and not dissolved Assemblies. Article 174 and Article 324 operate in different fields," the SC said.

Within an hour of the SC verdict, the EC announced that polls in Gujarat would be held on December 12.

2G telecom licences, 2012

In April 2012, during the second term of the UPA government led by Manmohan Singh, President Pratibha Patil sought clarity from the SC on its order cancelling 122 2G telecom licences — an issue that had been a political flashpoint between the Congress-led Centre and the BJP-led Opposition.

The first of the eight questions of the presidential reference asked whether "the only permissible method for disposal of all natural resources... is by the conduct of auctions?", seeking clarity over the SC's verdict in February which held that resources should be allotted through auctions.

The SC opined that "auctions are not the only permissible method for disposal of all natural resources across all sectors and in all circumstances" since this mode was merely an economic policy and "not a Constitutional mandate", that could be applied in absolute terms. It said the court respected the mandate and wisdom of the Executive on such matters.

"The methodology pertaining to disposal of natural resources is clearly an economic policy. It entails intricate economic choices and the Court lacks the necessary expertise to make them," it said.

LONGER VERSION ON indianexpress.com

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Trump doesn't believe in submission to rules of any kind. He recognises no distinction between business conducted in the White House and deals done at Mar-a-Lago."

— THE GUARDIAN

DIS/AGREE
THE BEST OF BOTH SIDES

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



C R Sasikumar

The Kohli era embodied the essence of Test cricket. With his retirement, can the next generation rise to the demands of the red-ball format?

A Virat space, difficult to fill

Gill, Jaiswal, and Rahul have the talent. Can they summon the tenacity and technical discipline?



KAUSHIK DAS GUPTA

IN VIRAT KOHLI'S first Test as captain, India chased 360-odd runs in the fourth innings at Adelaide and fell short by 48. The Indian batsmen could have pulled down the shutters on the last day and the team could have eked out a draw against the world's top team. The target of close to four runs an over was going to be a tough ask, even though the fifth-day Adelaide pitch held no demons. But audacity was the new captain's signature. For most of the day, in the company of Murali Vijay, he had Australia on the mat. At 240 for 2, India sensed a famous win. But after Vijay's departure, Nathan Lyon spun a web, and by the time Kohli was the seventh out, the writing was on the wall. Nevertheless, the team had made a statement: It would not back off from a challenge. It would approach Test cricket the way it is meant to be played: Ball by ball, over by over, session by session. With Kohli hanging up his Test boots, the question that will be asked of those being heralded as his successors is this: Do they have the same tenacity?

There can be little doubt of their talent. Like the King — and the Master Blaster before him, Sachin Tendulkar — Shubman Gill gave indications of his talent in his first series in Australia. A 90-odd in the famous Gabba fortress breach of 2021 made the pandemic-hit world look up at an exciting new player. Even though he had announced his abilities with greater aplomb before, Yashasvi Jaiswal's return Down Under earlier this year among the team's ruins, too, led a section of the Australian media to hail him as "The New King".

But do the new lot have the hunger to give their best in arguably the most demanding format, when the instant versions demand equal, if not more, attention? Gill has been around for more than four years, a little more than Kohli when he donned the captain's mantle. His ODI numbers are impressive. Pedigree is also writ large on almost all his 1,800-odd test runs. Yet, an average of 35 indicates that the longest format has not seen the best of the man reckoned as the frontrunner to replace Rohit Sharma as India's skipper and perhaps take Kohli's place at number 4 in the batting order.

There are fears that Gill's career arc could follow the trajectory of K L Rahul, another player with undoubted technical finesse. Every now and then, he produces an innings of great concentration — like in South Africa in 2023 and then in the early part of the Australia series. But the Rahul purple patch is yet to arrive.

Some of the current players could perhaps take a leaf out of the King's book. Kohli is arguably the country's greatest ODI player. He scored at more than 48 with a near-140 strike in T20Is. Yet, Kohli has always said that "the purest form of the game" received his utmost. Nothing captures his devotion better than the effort he put in after the horrors of the England tour of 2014. It was his third year in the whites and he was being seen as one of the players to watch out for. But as James Anderson and co exploited his frailties against the moving cherry, Kohli battled depression. He worked hard to make changes in technique, treating every overseas tour like an "engineering exam" he had to pass. A few months after England came the monumental effort at Adelaide.

One of the beauties of team sport is that the greats are greats because several others go about their job quietly, feeding into and thriving with the success of their comrades. Cheteshwar Pujara at the peak of Kohli's career, for example. Pujara scored more than 7,000 runs — the value of each of them magnified by the impact it had on his teammates, while the doughty technician was absorbing all the pressure at the other end. Indian cricket today would give anything to have an enabler like him. Remember, however, that Pujara had a near-zilch presence in the instant format.

> Test cricket demands minor but critical adjustments. Pitch conditions require bowlers to vary their lengths and lines. The team comprising Kohli, Pujara, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Shami, Ishant Sharma, R Ashwin, and Ravindra Jadeja had players who were attentive to this imperative.

Nevertheless, as Kohli retires, there is much to look forward to. Jaiswal, for instance, willed himself to play close to his body after being dismissed for a duck in his first innings in Australia. The 170 in Perth had every Jaiswal stroke, and more. Nudged on by Rahul, Jaiswal would put his head down after every audacious shot, sometimes admonishing himself after a false one.

Test cricket demands minor but critical adjustments, almost every match, sometimes every few overs. Pitch conditions require bowlers to vary their lengths and lines. The team comprising Kohli, Pujara, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Shami, Ishant Sharma, R Ashwin, and Ravindra Jadeja had players who were attentive to this imperative. Shami and Jadeja are in the twilight of their careers. Will the likes of Rahul step up? Will Gill fulfill the Brisbane promise? Where are the bowlers to fill in if Bumrah or Shami get injured? More importantly, given the pulls today, does the current lot have the drive to abide by Test cricket's dictum of one ball at a time? The coming months will raise such questions.

kaushik.dasgupta@expressindia.com

A lot of talent waiting in wings

There will be bumps along the road but there is no need to fear for the future of Indian cricket



VINAYAKK MOHANARANGAN

ALL THROUGH HIS career, Rahul Dravid was a walking, talking textbook for batting technique and knew how to time the ball well. And, on the day he retired in March 2012 with a press conference and not on the field, many believed he got the timing spot-on once again. Cracks were beginning to form in that foolproof defence and he didn't want to drag it out further. He sat down with the media and reflected on his career with great articulation, but also spoke of the future of Indian cricket. A nera of true greats of the game was coming to an end, but Dravid looked to the future with confidence. One line stood out: "When I was 23 years old and when I played for India, and I look at some of the talent that's on show, I just know that I was nowhere as talented as some of these kids."

Fast forward seven years, and Virat Kohli, still the captain of the side and retirement nowhere on the horizon, spoke after a match against New Zealand in January 2019: "I saw him bat in the nets and I was like, 'Wow, I was not even 10 per cent of that when I was 19'. That's the confidence that they carry and it is great for Indian cricket if the standard keeps going up and the guys coming in can make impact performances straight away and we would be more than happy to give them the chances and help them grow." Kohli was talking about Shubman Gill.

> The systems in place have changed. Teenage talents are not an exception but the norm. This year's IPL has thrown up names like Vaibhav Suryavanshi, Ayush Mhatre, Digvesh Rathi, Vipraj Nigam — all youngsters who have hit the ground running with the confidence that Kohli spoke of.

It's the natural cycle of sports. Rohit Sharma's and — to a much larger extent — Kohli's retirements are bound to have an impact on the Test team, but there is no need for Indian cricket to fear who takes over. That is not to say Gill is the answer to "who next?". But his presence, among many other talented players is already well established in the Indian cricket conscience. Like Sunil Gavaskar made way for Sachin Tendulkar, like Tendulkar made way for Kohli, Indian cricket will always move on. The game, as they say, is always bigger than the individuals.

When Tendulkar retired, Kohli was only 20 matches into his Test journey and had overcome an iffy start to recently establish himself in the longest format, which he went on to elevate for the rest of his career. His average at that point was 41.16 and he had scored four centuries. As Kohli calls time, Gill has already played 32 Tests, scored five centuries and — like Kohli — has already experienced the pressures of the format too, facing success and failure in tough conditions around the world.

Then there is Yashasvi Jaiswal, off to a flying start in his Test career, averaging 52.88 after his first 19 Tests with four centuries already and all set to occupy the top of the order for a long time should he continue in this trajectory. In Australia, tough as the series was, Nitish Kumar Reddy shot himself into the spotlight with a sensational century in Melbourne. He showed that a star can emerge at any given time with the right backing.

Why must the next big superstar be a batter, anyway? Indian cricket is already blessed to have an all-time great contender in Jasprit Bumrah, who — fitness permitting — can continue to win matches for India around the world.

Sure, there will be bumps along the road, but in the decades since Tendulkar broke through as a baby-faced prodigy, the systems in place have changed, too. Teenage talents are not an exception but the norm; the Indian Premier League as well as the robust domestic system and the Under-19 World Cup pathway have ensured they are spotted early and groomed with adequate guidance. This year's IPL has thrown up names like Vaibhav Suryavanshi, Ayush Mhatre, Digvesh Rathi, Vipraj Nigam — all youngsters who have hit the ground running with the confidence that Kohli spoke of. The processes in place automatically dictate that the probability of finding future stars is higher than before.

Of course, in the aforementioned post-match chat, Kohli had mentioned Prithvi Shaw's name in the same breath as Gill. There is a cautionary tale in it, too, that not all talents blossom into finished products. Dravid, too, had said that back in 2012: "Just being talented doesn't necessarily mean you will have a successful Test career. There are a lot of things that go with it, how you face the challenges, how you deal with things sometimes that are internal more than external. It will be interesting... to sit back on my couch and watch some of these young talents as they try to establish themselves over the next two-to-three years."

Kohli might just do the same as he takes a spot on his couch when India go to England.

vinayakk.mohanarangan@expressindia.com

A trail that will guide justice

CJI Sanjiv Khanna's legacy lies in firm interim orders to protect constitutional rights, especially those of minorities



PRASHANT BHUSHAN

JUSTICE SANJIV KHANNA stepped down as the Chief Justice of India with the honour and distinction he well deserves. A packed courtroom bid him farewell at the ceremonial bench that marked his last working day. The mood was sombre but spirits were high, as Justice Khanna, during his short tenure, paved the way for a fairer and more transparent court, committed to the rule of law and the Constitution. Where much was left ado, he assumed the mantle of leadership with judicial integrity and courage, navigating a court riddled with challenges.

Justice Khanna's judicial legacy does not lie in many exalted judgments or displays of erudition as we saw from his predecessor, but in brief yet firm interim orders that breathed life into the Constitution. He took office at a time when the executive was riding roughshod over fundamental rights. Bulldozers were being used to demolish houses, particularly those of minorities, on the pretext and allegation of some illegality committed by them; suits were being filed in courts across India claiming mosques as Hindu properties on the ground that the mosque was built centuries ago over some temple. This, despite the Places of Worship Act, 1991. The government brought in the Waqf (Amendment) Act seeking to take over properties of Muslim religious trusts through various subterfuges. The Enforcement Directorate (ED) was arresting Opposition leaders, journalists and activists. Bail was being denied as a result of agencies levelling charges under the PMLA or the UAPA.

Confronted with this, during Justice Khanna's tenure, the assignment of benches to deal with important and sensitive cases appeared more fair and rational, leading to more just outcomes. Justice Khanna's orders on the Places of Worship Act and the constitutional challenge to the Waqf amendments are particularly significant. While it is argued that these challenges could have been dealt with more firmly to put an end to governments trampling minority rights, his interim orders brought much respite. While the Court, at times, was seen as giving in to the executive during his predecessor's tenure, Justice Khanna's order effectively stayed a large number of suits seeking to change the character of hundred-year-old mosques. He also effectively stayed the implementation of several objectionable clauses of the Waqf (Amendment) Act and affirmed the Court's secular character when he countered the government by asserting, "When we sit here, we lose our religion. We are absolutely secular." Under his leadership, a bench of justices B R Gavai and K V Viswanathan pronounced an important judgment on the abuse of bulldozers, largely putting a stop to this illegal practice. These orders, for the time being at least, stopped in its tracks the government's assault on the rights of minorities. Many cases involving the ED were heard by a liberal and proactive bench headed by Justice A S Oka, who cracked the whip on the agency's rampant practice of arresting Opposition leaders for alleged money-laundering.

Justice Khanna, while being a silent worker, displayed a pragmatic approach to law and justice that came in sharp contrast to his predecessor's speeches and public appearances. He authored several landmark judgments as well. He illegalised the practice of governments (Andhra Pradesh in that case) allotting prime land on a preferential basis to VIPs such as ministers, MPs, MLAs, etc, holding it to be largesse and discriminatory. Invoking Article 142 (the SC's power to do complete justice), he authored a Constitution Bench judgment making it possible for the SC to directly grant divorce in marriages that had run into irreconcilable problems. He also wrote a separate and stronger judgment in the electoral bonds case highlighting the need for transparency in political funding and the role large political donations could play in destabilising democracy.

Not all his judgments are considered progressive or laudable. He was a co-author of the judgment approving the abrogation of Article 370 and the conversion of Jammu and Kashmir from state to Union Territory. He also led a judgment effectively refusing to count all VVPAT slips in elections conducted using EVMs.

It was in his administrative role as Chief Justice where we saw major strides in the Court's transparency and accountability. He reinstated the virtually defunct principle of judges declaring assets and making them public. The disclosures of proposals for judicial appointments approved by the SC collegium but pending with the government are critical, as they lay bare the reality of the government sitting on recommendations of candidates it does not see as pliant. In the case regarding the cash found at a judge's residence, Justice Khanna acted with extraordinary swiftness by putting in the public domain the information making out the allegations against the judge. He then ordered an inquiry by a panel of three judges, whose report remains to be publicly disclosed. These measures have been exemplary and in keeping with his earlier judgment that the CJI's office was a public authority and thus open to scrutiny under the RTI Act, and that transparency is important for judicial independence.

While demitting office, Justice Khanna has asserted that he will not accept a post-retirement job, which is welcome in the light of many former judges having compromised their independence by taking such positions. On his retirement day, he made an important statement that judicial respect must be earned and cannot be commanded. This is a truism that judges often forget while wielding the whip of contempt jurisprudence to enforce respect. Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, "Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail." Justice Khanna leaves a trail of fairness and judicial integrity that I hope will guide future justices for years to come.

The writer is an advocate practising in the Supreme Court of India

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

NATIONAL OUTRAGE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Fire the Minister' (IE, May 15). Madhya Pradesh minister Vijay Shah's statement and the trolling of our foreign secretary and his daughter are the manifestation of the hidden hate for minorities and secular citizens. Every institution, including the judiciary and Parliament, is trapped in this "cancerous" and dangerous environment. The less I say about the electronic media, the better . It's high time for the government, the ruling party and the judiciary to put an end to this trend.

Vasant Nalawade, *Satara*

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Fire the minister' (IE, May 15). Colonel Sofiya Qureshi, who led the briefing on Operation Sindoor, has become a symbol of strength and resolve against terrorism. The comments of Madhya Pradesh minister Vijay Shah deserve the harshest condemnation as he has targeted the core values of the Indian Army, an institution that transcends religion, caste, language and colour. The Madhya Pradesh High Court has rightly ordered an FIR against him. But the biggest shock has come from the BJP, which has failed to initiate strong action against the minister, and thus, scored an own goal. All political parties need to rein in their motormouths as they embarrass not only their own leaders but also the country.

Manoj Parashar, *Ghaziabad*

SCHOOL FEES

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'DPS Dwarka expels 29 students for not paying fees, angry parents protest' (IE, May 14). More and more children are admitted to private schools these days, even from families that are not able to afford it due to the quality of education they provide, which has been lacking in government schools. ASER 2023 shows government school students lag behind in basic reading and arithmetic. Around 50 per cent of Class 5 government school students can't read a Class 2 level text. Parents want only the best for their children and the best should be accessible enough not to burn a hole in their pockets.

Shreya Purohit, *New Delhi*

TRUMP'S CLAIMS

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'Encourage direct India, Pak communication: US walks back on mediation' (IE, May 15). Why was US President Donald Trump presenting both countries as aggrieved, when 26 tourists were killed in Pahalgam by Pakistan-sponsored terrorists? All three countries are answerable with respect to the terms and conditions of the ceasefire. Our Prime Minister, too, should make things clear, especially given the statements from the US. There should not be any more doubts in the minds of the Indian public.

Ravinder Kumar Jain, *Ludhiana*

WORDLY WISE
THRILLERS ARE LIKE LIFE, MORE LIKE LIFE THAN YOU ARE. — GRAHAM GREENE

The Indian EXPRESS
FOUNDED BY RAMNATH GOENKA
BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

QUESTIONS FOR BENCH

President's reference to SC should enrich discourse on state-Centre balance. That needs good faith, not suspicion

CHIEF JUSTICE BHUSHAN Ramkrishna Gavai, who was sworn in to the highest judicial office Wednesday, the first Buddhist and only the second Dalit to be elevated to this position, begins with a plateful. President of India Droupadi Murmu has sent the Supreme Court a list of 14 questions sparked by the Court's April verdict. The SC had declared the action of Tamil Nadu Governor RN Ravi in reserving 10 bills for the consideration of the President, after they had been reconsidered by the state legislative assembly, to be "illegal" and "erroneous". In the process, it prescribed timelines for the Governor's decision in the lawmaking process — three months when a bill is first sent, a month when it is resent. More controversially, it laid down a three-month deadline for the President as well. Unsurprisingly, this was seen as contentious. It could be argued that guardrails for the exercise of gubernatorial discretion were needed, and especially so in a political context where, in several states, governors appointed by the BJP-ruled Centre are seen to be locked in open and perpetual conflict with the non-BJP elected government, smudging lines of accountability and creating obstacles in governance. But by asking the President to adhere to a deadline, by prescribing the manner in which she must exercise the power given to her by Article 201 — in other words, by seeking to limit the President's constitutional discretion — the court invited questions of overreach.

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar articulated those concerns by overstating them. Article 142, which empowers the SC to pass "any decree or order necessary for doing complete justice in any case or matter pending before it", a power it exercised in the case against Tamil Nadu Governor Ravi, had become a "nuclear missile against democratic forces", he said. Now, the President's 14 questions — even though the Court is not obliged to answer them, and in spite of the fact that its opinions are not legally binding — are an opportunity. They can lay the ground for a calmer dialogue and deliberation on the issues that lie at the core of the matter — the constitutional doctrine of separation of powers; the boundaries of executive discretion and judicial review (can the latter, for instance, kick in even before a bill becomes law?); the balance between the executive, legislature and judiciary in a framework of federal democracy.

Going ahead, such a dialogue will be complicated by the political context in which it occurs — an aggressive executive has been facing off with the judiciary, with the waqf law that has been passed by Parliament and taken up by the Court for a pointed questioning being the latest flashpoint. The process of deliberation will also be made more fraught by the fact that among President Murmu's 14 questions to the Court are those that challenge its broader powers under Article 142 — going much beyond the questions of justiciability of gubernatorial and presidential discretion. That the President chose to make a reference to the Court under Article 143, which concerns the SC's advisory jurisdiction on critical constitutional questions, instead of merely seeking a review of its April ruling, has also sharpened the stakes. For it to be fruitful, the to-and-fro between the President and the Court will need to be conducted in a climate of mutual trust and respect, not suspicion.

SEND THE MESSAGE

US State Department backtracking on Trump's claims on Kashmir is welcome. Delhi must hold firm on its line

US PRESIDENT DONALD Trump is not known to be circumspect. In 2019, during his first term, he claimed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had asked him to mediate between India and Pakistan on Kashmir. Then, Washington backtracked and said the US would step in only if asked to do so by both countries. A similar script played out after the agreement between India and Pakistan to stop military action last week. First, Trump announced the ceasefire on his social media handles even before Indian and Pakistani authorities could do so. Second, he had used "trade", he suggested, as a way to pressure Delhi and Islamabad. Third, the claim that the US "mediated" an end to the conflict. On Wednesday morning, the US State Department all but walked back on the theory that Washington was looking to play a part in the Kashmir issue. "We also welcome the ceasefire between India and Pakistan... We urge both sides to maintain direct communication to preserve regional stability," its spokesperson said.

Earlier, Delhi had already put paid to any suggestion that the Kashmir issue was being internationalised. It provided a detailed timeline that showed it was Pakistan that first approached it to end the cycle of escalation. India reiterated that it would not give in to "nuclear blackmail" and the only issues to be discussed bilaterally were cross-border terror and the illegal occupation in PoK. That said, it is also important to understand that "internationalising" the Kashmir issue is easier said than done. For the better part of 75 years — especially in the last three decades, as India outpaced Pakistan economically and de-hyphenated itself diplomatically — Delhi has thwarted Islamabad's attempts to make Kashmir a global talking point. Today, India's national power is far greater, as it carefully navigates the Trump era.

Less than five months into his second term, Trump has thrown the global order into flux. He has reversed the US position on the Ukraine conflict, imposed and reduced tariffs, lifted sanctions on Syria and even claimed that the US and Iran are close to a nuclear deal. India has done better than most in negotiating the challenges thrown up by this uncertainty, ensuring that its relationship with the US continues to deepen and widen. As the hostilities with Pakistan ebb, Delhi must continue to wait and watch. It need not overreact to Trump's claims but it must keep underlining its message to him.

DARK NIGHT RISES

In a newly discovered story by Graham Greene, an invitation to reassess a familiar author through an unfamiliar lens

THE WIND KEENS outside the window, the rain a whiplash on the shutters. Inside a rented apartment on the French Riviera, a solitary traveller reads to pass the interminable hours of the storm. The posthumous discovery of Graham Greene's ghost story 'Reading at Night', possibly written in 1962 and only just published in *Strand Magazine*, a Michigan-based quarterly, offers more than just a literary footnote. It reveals the elasticity of a writer best known for his Catholic guilt-laced thrillers and political novels. Discovered in the archives of the University of Texas at Austin, the story's haunted atmosphere, the tension between memory and perception, its spectral uncertainty, reveal a writer attuned to the darkness that lingers just beyond the reach of reason.

One of the finest writers of the 20th century, Greene is not alone in genre detours. The same edition of the magazine also carries a short story by Ian Fleming about a faded journalist grappling with the summons from a media baron, a departure from his flamboyant *James Bond* series. From Henry James's eerie *Turn of the Screw* (1898) to the genre-bending fiction of Margaret Atwood and Kazuo Ishiguro, writers have often strayed from familiar ground to pursue artistic reinvention. These forays reflect not inconsistency, but range — and a willingness to engage with a broader emotional spectrum of storytelling.

There is also something magnetic about "lost" stories. When forgotten works surface, they invite readers to reassess familiar authors through unfamiliar lenses. They serve as time capsules, preserving the anxieties, experiments, or ambitions that didn't fit neatly into a writer's canon. For a new generation, these offer a chance to encounter literary titans not through weighty reputations but through more intimate pieces. 'Reading at Night' may be a ghost story, but its real power lies in re-animating Greene, reminding readers that even great storytellers can live outside their legacies, experimenting on the margins.

A treaty under water



In the Indus Basin, and elsewhere, India and Pakistan will have to find ways to manage water better

ASIT K BISWAS AND CECILIA TORTAJADA

ON APRIL 24, Debashree Mukherjee, secretary, Ministry of Jal Shakti, informed her Pakistani counterpart, Syed Ali Murtaza, that the Government of India had sent several notices to the Pakistan government to seek modifications to the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT). This is because fundamental changes have taken place since the treaty was signed some 65 years ago — these changes "require a re-assessment of obligations". She went on to point out that "sustained cross-border terrorism by Pakistan... has directly impeded India's full utilisation of rights under the treaty". The Government of India, therefore, decided to keep the treaty in abeyance.

The decision was a result of terrorists killing 26 innocent tourists in Pahalgam. Following the attack, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi vowed to "identify, track and punish every terrorist and their backers". The more than three-day-long hostilities between the neighbours ended with a ceasefire on May 17.

There has been much rhetoric in both countries about what may happen to the flows of the Indus, Jhelum, Chenab and their tributaries, which were allocated to Pakistan under the treaty. Rhetoric aside, the simple fact is that if it decides to stop water flowing to Pakistan, India does not have the infrastructure to store the flows for a few days, let alone a long period. Construction of necessary water infrastructure will take at least a decade, if not more.

It's a miracle that the IWT has lasted some 65 years, even though, over the past three decades, there have been increasing signs that the pact was becoming less and less relevant for both countries. During the last decade, it was evident to any objective observer that the treaty needed major modifications to become relevant to both countries.

This is due to many reasons. First, India and Pakistan were very different countries in 1960, compared to now. In 1960, India's population was 445 million. It is now 1.46 billion, an increase of nearly 3.25 times. In 1960, 17.94 per cent of Indians lived in urban areas. Today, urban areas are home to 36 per cent of the population — and this proportion is increasing rapidly.

The Green Revolution started in Punjab, both in India and Pakistan, after the treaty was signed. While it increased food production significantly, water demands on both sides of the border went up concomitantly. Water tables in both Indian and Pakistani Punjab are declining by over 50 cm per year. In many parts of both the Punjabs, water levels have declined by over one metre. Such unsustainable practices cannot continue, especially as the farm sector accounts for around 85 per cent of India's water requirements, and 90 per cent of Pakistan's.

Similarly, Pakistan's population in 1960 was 45.7 million. It is now 255 million, an increase of nearly 5.5 times. In 1960, well under 20 per cent of Pakistanis lived in urban areas. Now, it is nearly double that figure. In 1960, India's per capita GDP was significantly lower than Pakistan's — $312.78 to $411.16, almost 31 per cent less. Sixty-four years later, in 2024, India's per capita GDP was $2,698, against Pakistan's $1,647, almost 40 per cent higher. India's economic performance during the past 65 years has been significantly better than Pakistan's.

Increases in population, urbanisation and economic activities and improvement in living standards have led to a very significant escalation in water demands. Poor management practices have exacerbated water problems in both countries. Neither country has given much attention to managing demand and maintaining water quality. The main focus has been to increase supply availability.

The Green Revolution started in Punjab, both in India and Pakistan, after the treaty was signed. While it increased food production significantly, water demands on both sides of the border went up concomitantly. Water tables in both Indian and Pakistani Punjab are declining by over 50 cm per year. In many parts of both the Punjabs, water levels have declined by over one metre. Such unsustainable practices cannot continue, especially as the farm sector accounts for around 85 per cent of India's water requirement, and 90 per cent of Pakistan's.

Not only in the Indus Basin, but all over India and Pakistan, water and farm practices have to be re-imagined. Water use in the agricultural sector needs to be significantly reduced, but at the same time, food production needs to be substantially increased. China has achieved similar objectives. Between 1975 and 2005, it reduced irrigation water use per hectare by 40 per cent, and increased agricultural production 12 times. During this period, agricultural water use in China declined from 84 per cent of total water use to 61 per cent. Since 2005, it has made more progress. India and Pakistan, too, do not have much choice.

The IWT was signed in 1960, when concerns like climate change, heat waves, glacier melt, and rising sea levels were not recognised. The water management practices of that time have become outdated. There was little understanding of the complex linkages between water, food, energy, and environmental securities.

Himalayan glaciers, which feed the Indus river system, have been melting for several years, leading to increased river flows during spring and summer. This trend could reverse after 2050, with the likely melting of most glaciers. Droughts and floods in the basin are becoming more frequent and intense. Meanwhile, the northern Indian Subcontinent is experiencing unprecedented heat waves. This year, Jaipur has already touched 44 degrees Celsius, while Shaheed Benazirabad in Sindh, Pakistan, recorded 50 degrees Celsius. Extreme temperatures have caused a surge in electricity demand to run air conditioners and fans. Since thermal and nuclear power plants require significant quantities of water for cooling, water demand for electricity generation has also increased. This situation is expected to worsen after 2030, as global warming continues to intensify. The IWT does not include such important considerations.

The treaty was on the sickbed by 2000. Both countries must decide how to negotiate a treaty that should have built-in mechanisms to make adjustments when necessary. Unfortunately, not a single institution in either country is conducting serious research as to how such a living treaty could be negotiated. Now, Pakistan has belatedly indicated that it's open to re-discussing India's concerns about the IWT.

Irrespective of what happens to the treaty, both countries will need to address serious water problems. They have to re-imagine the management of water needs, including in the Indus River Basin.

Biswas is a leading international authority on water. He is a winner of the Stockholm Water Prize. Tortajada is honorary professor at the University of Glasgow. They are visiting research professors at the Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi



A PLAN, NO CRYSTAL BALL

In uncertain times, resilience is the financial superpower every parent needs

LAVANYA MOHAN

IF I WERE to draw up a list today of things that scare the living daylights out of me, being a parent to an eight-year old tops the list. When my husband and I decided we would be parents, we did not have the imagination to foresee the future we'd be living in.

We're parenting in a world with shaky geopolitics; AI is threatening to end academic routes as we know them, our costs of living are spiking daily, and climate change feels like it could throw a spanner into any financial projection. How exactly does one plan for a future this uncertain?

As someone who works in personal finance and is raising a child, I know the cocktail of anxiety and aspiration that fuels every financial decision we make. We want to give our children security. But more than that, we want to give them a choice — the freedom to say yes to the college they want, the job they believe in, the city they dream of living in.

At a time like this, when the world is changing faster than ever, the goal is not to predict. It is to build resilience. Financial resilience means that your investments can absorb shocks, cushion your (and your child's) future and withstand uncertainty, not crumble in the face of it.

The first step towards building resilience is also the most obvious — start early. Time is your biggest asset because not only does it activate the power of compounding, it also gives you the power to absorb risk. So if you start a mutual fund SIP of Rs 10,000 a month in a large-cap equity fund (which has historically delivered over 10 per cent in the last decade) when your child is five, and keep increasing the SIP amount by 10 per cent every year, you will be sitting with a corpus close to Rs 80 lakh when they're 20.

We're parenting in a world with shaky geopolitics; AI is threatening to end academic routes as we know them, our costs of living are spiking daily, and climate change feels like it could throw a spanner into any financial projection. How exactly does one plan for a future this uncertain?

A disclaimer — past performance doesn't guarantee future returns, and investing in equities when the world is in tumult may not seem wise. But remember that in the past half decade alone, we have survived a global pandemic, a crypto boom and crash, AI and global conflict. So it's worth keeping the faith.

Second, consistency over cleverness. In a world full of Telegram tips and viral Instagram reels promising triple-digit returns through technical trading, boring is underrated. The best portfolios are not necessarily the most aggressive or complicated — they are the ones that survive. A mix of equity mutual funds, low-cost index funds, gold, fixed and recurring deposits will be both balanced and robust. Don't chase trends; put money in what you know and understand — regularly.

Third, consider inflation your permanent opponent. The Rs 20 lakh college fund you thought was generous might only cover one semester in a foreign university by 2035. Education inflation, in particular, tends to outpace general inflation. One way to counter this is to keep reviewing your goals every couple of years and adjusting your SIP amounts as your income grows. Financial planning isn't a one-time act. It's an evolving relationship.

Fourth, don't forget protection. It's easy to ignore term and health insurance, but if the pandemic has taught us anything, it's that we are not invincible. Sudden deaths continue to rise with alarming frequency. Data shows that between the years 2000 and 2016, the rate of heart attacks in the under-40 age group climbed by 2 per cent every year. With adequate health and term insurance, you can be prepared for whatever the future throws at you.

Finally, the most underrated form of investment you can make for your child is in their financial literacy. Helping your child understand how money works — how to earn, save, spend, and grow it — will give them a confidence no corpus can. Whether it's giving them an allowance and letting them make spending decisions, or talking to them about why you chose a particular insurance plan, involving your children in age-appropriate money conversations builds lifelong habits.

If all this feels overwhelming, let me offer some comfort: There is no perfect plan. You will revisit your decisions, course-correct, make mistakes. That's okay. Financial planning is about giving yourself enough room to respond to the world, not react in panic.

Your child's future doesn't need a crystal ball. It needs calm, consistent action. That's a lesson worth investing in.

The writer, a chartered accountant, is the author of Money Doesn't Grow on Trees


INDIAN EXPRESS

MAY 16, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

TERROR PLANS

INVESTIGATING AGENCIES WERE hotly pursuing possible connections between the plot to kill the Prime Minister in the US and the arrest of terrorists in New Delhi. There are common themes to the US plot and the Patel Nagar arrests. The FBI has determined that the plotters planned to create "loss of confidence through bombing strategic locations". Here, Mohinder Singh Oberoi confessed to the police that there were plans to blow up a public building and create terror.

DRUG SHORTAGE

THE LIVES OF thousands of patients in the country, who have successfully undergone kidney transplant operations, now hang in the balance, because of the failure of the government to make available a life-saving drug at a reasonable price. Ever since the multinational drug company Burroughs Wellcome (India) stopped the manufacture of the drug, Imuran in India last year, the patients have been appealing for a regular supply of the drug. But their efforts have so far not borne fruit.

CLASHES IN SRINAGAR

AT LEAST 20 persons were injured in fresh clashes with the police in three places in Srinagar. The injured also included a few policemen. The police fired a few tear gas shells at Khwaja Bazar, when lathi charge failed to disperse the stone throwing demonstrators. Clashes were also reported from Nowhatta and Bohri Kadal.

TAMILS LYNCHED

CURFEW WAS REIMPOSED in Anuradhapura town in north-central Sri Lanka, following mob violence over the massacre of about 150 Sinhalese by the Tamil militants. At least 30 to 40 Tamils were lynched and their houses and shops burnt. Many Tamils were fleeing the town for Vavuniya, about 48 km away from Colombo, the reports said, and that about 25 people had been taken into custody by the police for looting.

Hypertension: Silent threat

Policy action with clinical intervention is crucial

Manohar Agnani



HYPERTENSION. Early detection helps ISTOCKPHOTO

Hypertension, often dubbed the "silent killer," typically progresses without symptoms, gradually damaging the heart, brain, and kidneys.

Its risk factors include both modifiable behaviours — such as unhealthy diet, physical inactivity, alcohol and tobacco use, and obesity — and non-modifiable factors like age, genetics, and coexisting conditions such as diabetes.

Hypertension is both preventable and controllable. Even modest reductions in blood pressure can significantly reduce the risk of stroke, ischemic heart disease, and heart failure.

In India, hypertension is an escalating public health concern. According to *NFHS-5*, 21.3 per cent of women and 24 per cent of men aged 15 and above have elevated blood pressure — rates that are slightly higher in urban than in rural areas.

A study conducted between 2019 and 2021 revealed that over one in four Indian adults has hypertension.

Of these, only one-third are diagnosed, fewer than one in five are treated, and a mere one in 12 have their blood pressure under control.

NATIONAL INITIATIVES

The government initiated population-based screening for non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in 2016.

A year later, the India Hypertension Control Initiative (IHCI) was launched — a collaboration between the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), WHO India, and Resolve to Save Lives.

The initiative focuses on evidence-based protocols, uninterrupted medicine supply, task-sharing, and decentralised care at the primary health level. IHCI demonstrated that ensuring continuum of care for hypertension was operationally feasible.

The IHCI's best practices have been integrated into the National Programme for Prevention and Control of NCDs (NP-NCD), enabling health systems to track screening, treatment, and control rates down to the village level.

India's commitment to the '75 by 25' initiative — bringing 75 million individuals with hypertension or diabetes under standard care by 2025 — is commendable. With over 71 million patients already enrolled, the target appears achievable.

Despite visible progress key implementation gaps remain. A major bottleneck is the delay between screening by Community Health Officers (CHOs) and follow-up by Medical Officers (MOs). Strengthening MO outreach and integrating teleconsultations can bridge this gap.

Availability of essential medicines at Ayushman Arogya Mandirs must be ensured to facilitate continuous care. Equally critical is the widespread use of validated, automated blood pressure monitors, which offer greater accuracy and consistency.

The ABHA (Ayushman Bharat Health Account) ID offers a promising tool for improving continuity of care, enabling patient tracking across facilities.

Incentivising frontline teams to screen individuals aged 30+ for hypertension, diabetes, and common cancers is already underway. Aligning these incentives with outcomes — such as treatment initiation and control rates — and ensuring robust drug procurement can significantly enhance impact.

With adequate training, remuneration, and supervision, ASHAs can play a transformative role in improving adherence and promoting lifestyle changes.

Clinical interventions alone are not enough. Policy-level actions are equally essential. Increasing excise taxes on tobacco and alcohol, banning their advertisement, reducing salt in processed foods, eliminating trans fats, and promoting healthy eating and physical activity are all evidence-based interventions that can reduce the population burden of hypertension.

Hypertension may be silent — but its consequences are not. The time to act is now.

The writer is former Additional Secretary, Union Ministry of Health



GETTY IMAGES

Trump's tariff thrust fizzles out

TARIFF ROWS. History shows that the concept of reciprocal tariffs has never worked and it will hurt the US economy all the more



NILANJAN BANIK

Nobel laureate Robert Solow was once asked if having a trade deficit is bad for an economy. He said he would always have a trade deficit with his barber and would always run a trade surplus with his students. Such is the nature of economic transactions. Some countries are better at producing certain goods and services, which they export, and they gain by importing those they are not as good at producing.

Arguing that the US should impose equal reciprocal tariffs is fundamentally flawed. It contradicts the principle of comparative advantage — the very foundation of international trade since the beginning of modern civilisation.

If the US were to implement reciprocity in tariffs, it risks a short-term recession and, potentially, a trajectory resembling that of Argentina — an economic miracle at the beginning of the 20th century that ultimately declined as a result of protectionist measures.

Beginning in the 1930s, Argentina imposed restrictions on labour immigration and sharply increased tariffs, resulting in long-term consequences that have contributed to its current status as a struggling and underperforming economy.

So it is not surprising that on May 12, the US and China agreed to a significant 90-day suspension of tariffs, with both nations committing to reduce duties on each other's goods.

The US tariffs on Chinese imports will decrease from 145 per cent to 30 per cent, while China's tariffs on US products will drop from 125 per cent to 10 per cent. China on its part has also agreed to remove all trade restrictions, including the ones they imposed on rare earth materials, crucial for the US electronic, defence, and green energy sectors.

If China, according to the US, successfully addresses the fentanyl crisis by strengthening domestic regulations on synthetic opioids, then the 30 per cent tariff will be reduced further to 10 per cent at the end of the 90-day period. Fentanyl, a powerful and often lethal drug, has fuelled a public health crisis in the US, contributing to tens of thousands of overdose deaths annually.

TRUMP'S PLOY

US President Donald Trump, being an astute businessman, always believes in the principle of testing the waters first, negotiating aggressively, and ultimately settling somewhere in between.

But in this case, China seems to have the upper hand. China was always defiant, as it had little to lose.

Last March, a Chinese spokesperson stated, "If war is what the US wants, be it a tariff war, a trade war, or any other kind, we are ready to fight until the end".

US tariffs were never been effective in containing Chinese imports. The average annual trade deficit between the US and China went up from $311 billion during Obama's tenure (2009–2016) to $361 billion under Trump 1.0 (2017–2020), despite his aggressive stance toward China.

There are ways to evade tariffs. Since tariffs target a country's exports, the

One way the Chinese have beaten US tariffs is by setting up production bases outside China — mainly in South-East Asia and Mexico — and export from those regions to the US

simplest workaround is to shift the production base and export from a third country — something the Chinese have mastered. The loss in exports from China to the US is increasingly being offset by exports from countries in South-East Asia, with US imports from the region rising by 14 percentage points between 2018 and 2023.

Vietnam, Malaysia, and Thailand have emerged as primary beneficiaries. Vietnam's exports to the US surged by 40 per cent between 2018 and 2023, reflecting the broader trend of Chinese manufacturers shifting final assembly to third-party countries in order to bypass tariffs.

Similarly, to benefit from the US-Mexico-Canada trade alliance, Chinese firms are relocating their production base closer to the US. In April 2024, the US Trade Representative Katherine Tai accused China of disguising its steel products as Mexican steel to enter the US market.

In 2023, US imports of Mexican goods totalled $475 billion, approximately, $20 billion more than in 2022. During the same time the US imports of Chinese goods amounted to $427 billion, around $10 billion less. An estimated $3.7 billion of Chinese FDI came to Mexico in 2023, significantly higher with an average flow of $1.3 billion during the past decade.

At least 30 Chinese firms now operate out of Mexico including Chinese automobile giants such as BYD and Cherry International. The flow of Chinese FDI to Mexico has also increased by 30 per cent during the last two years.

On the contrary, trade interdependence between the US and China has decreased during the past decade. Between 2018 and 2024, China's share in US imports in value terms fell from 22 per cent to 14 per cent (UNCTAD database).

Since China has already diversified its export routes by channelling products to the US through third countries, US non-tariff measures have also become less effective. The Global Trade Alert database, reveals US has initiated more than 4,525 protectionist measures against Chinese exports. However, the US trade deficit with China continued to rise.

CHINA'S STRATEGY

China has enhanced the competitiveness of its manufacturing exports by continuing to shift production to locations with lower input costs. Much of the Chinese investment in the Greater Mekong Subregion is driven by lower land and labour costs in countries such as Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Vietnam. China has invested around $1 trillion in Africa, Latin America and Asia. This has helped reduce China's energy requirements, allowing Beijing to secure cheaper foreign energy sources (oil and power) and minerals. Chinese companies have built six hydropower plants and one thermal power station in Myanmar and invested in power transmission and copper processing units in Vietnam.

In countries like Sri Lanka (Hambantota port), Pakistan (Gwadar port), and throughout the Middle East, Africa, and South-East Asia, Chinese investments are being used to develop port infrastructure, so that the cost of shipping Chinese products falls.

The concept of reciprocal tariffs will never succeed, as it assumes that a tariff on China will not impact US imports from any other third-country. Retaliation by trading partners can also impact US exports, and value of dollars which can again impact trade balance. Economics 101 states, real world does not operate with *ceteris paribus* (holding other factors constant) assumption, and sooner Trump understands this the better it is for the US economy.

The writer is Professor, School of Management, Mahindra University

thehindu**businessline.**

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

May 16, 2005

Shalimar Paints plans unit in South

Shalimar Paints is planning to commence operations in the southern region of the country in order to strengthen its position in the region. "We will take a decision in the next few months on whether to set up our greenfield facility or acquire an existing unit in the region. For setting up the unit, in case, we decide to do so, would require an investment of Rs 20 crore. We will be focussing on the southern region this year to increase our market share," said Mr Sandeep Sarda, COO, Shalimar Paints.

Solvency margin: Pvt insurers feel the pinch

Private life insurance companies fear that the 150 per cent solvency margin stipulated by IRDA is quite hefty and may affect their growth. According to them, IRDA norms will affect companies which have lower capital base and those offering conventional products.

Hinduja Group may foray into film production

The Hinduja Group, which has a long stint in film financing and trading of film rights, is planning to foray into film production. InNetwork Entertainment Ltd, a subsidiary of Hinduja TMT Ltd, will look at film production.

Why Strata SM REIT surrendered its licence

bl.explainer

Janaki Krishnan

On May 14, the Securities and Exchange Board of India came out with a cautionary notice pertaining to Strata SM REIT, which has surrendered its registration as a small and medium REIT.

What is Strata SM REIT

Strata Property Management is a fractional real estate ownership platform co-founded by Sudarshan Lodha, who is also its CEO. It is backed by institutional investors like Kotak Investment Advisors, Gruhas Proptech, Sabre Investments Elevation Capital, Mayfield and PropStack.

In 2024 SEBI had come out with a detailed framework for small and medium real estate investment trusts, which could invest in commercial as well as residential properties and pay regular income every quarter to investors from the rental income earned from these properties.

Accordingly in May 2024, Strata filed an application for a SM REIT licence and obtained it in January this year. It had plans to launch up to six SM REIT schemes in FY26 with monthly schemes to follow. Strata has a portfolio of real estate assets across cities such as Mumbai, Bengaluru, Pune, Hosur, Hyderabad, Chennai, Jaipur, and Mehsana, with an area of over 4 million square feet and assets under management of over ₹2,000 crore.

Has it launched any schemes?

No, it has not launched any schemes so far nor migrated any existing fractional real estate entities as a SM REIT scheme.

What went wrong?

According to reports that were verified



Strata has a portfolio of real estate assets across cities REUTERS

from Strata, there was a complaint filed against Lodha by a warehousing developer, accusing him of impersonating a SEBI official's ID and getting sensitive information. The complaint was filed in the Madras High Court earlier this year. The asset of the warehouse developer was part of Strata's portfolio.

In April the HC granted anticipatory bail to Lodha, who is also the CEO of Strata.

What is Strata's response to the issue?

In an emailed response Strata said, "In light of the ongoing matter, we have voluntarily surrendered our SM REIT licence, without admitting or denying any wrongdoing, as a measure of abundant caution. Upon the conclusion of the current litigations, we intend to apply for a fresh licence at a future date. This matter does not affect the existing investments with Everstrat (this is the new name of Strata)."

What was SEBI warning about?

The regulator said it has accepted the surrender of the registration licence by Strata SM REIT and had engaged with its independent director, compliance and other officers and the trustee.

The advisory was about investors exercising caution "while dealing with the entity."

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2697



EASY

ACROSS

01. Keen on being challenged in sport (11)
07. Scottish chief magistrate of burgh (7)
09. Run, as river (4)
11. The white-poplar (5)
12. Go back to type (6)
14. Type of cabbage with inflorescent head (11)
18. Not present (6)
20. Divine messenger (5)
22. To converse (4)
23. Type of cigar (7)
24. Pungent root used as condiment (11)

DOWN

02. Fish-shaped float used in minesweeping (7)
03. Clicks the tongue (4)
04. Worth (5)
05. Give utterance (5)
06. Band made by mower (5)
08. Across-country (8)
10. Forsaken, forlorn (8)
13. Behind (at sea) (3)
15. Take up one's whole attention (7)
16. Religious belief (5)
17. Metal engraved for printing (5)
19. Simultaneous discharge of guns as salute (5)
21. Mark left by cut (4)

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

01. Being keenly priced, is relishing the challenge in sport (11)
07. No English stopover arranged for mayor from Scotland (7)
09. How river will run at setting in of the tide (4)
11. Be in the drink, but find a tree (5)
12. Go back to the way one was right, and always on time (6)
14. Vegetable that gives one wolf a cruel upset (11)
18. Is not there when Naval rating gets posted (6)
20. Theatrical backer may bring one a heavenly message (5)
22. Conversation held in a hospital kitchen (4)
23. In bed a valiant man needs something to smoke (7)
24. Hot root of hers, or a dish made from it (11)

DOWN

02. Fish-shaped float may be used in poor sea (7)
03. Expresses disapproval of some famous tutor turning up (4)
04. Say what's it's worth to find uranium in the valley (5)
05. Give voice to first Sherpa on the mountaintop (5)
06. Band of ground mown showing what's amiss (5)
08. Across the country– without leaving the shore? (8)
10. Forlorn way tale does unfold (8)
13. If it produces fat, a sailor puts it behind him (3)
15. To prepare a legal document may absorb one completely (7)
16. Trust the soccer organisation to bit out (5)
17. Give a metallic surface to a denture (5)
19. Clause saving discharge from the artillery (5)
21. A cliff may leave its mark (4)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2696

ACROSS 1. Offence 5. Gulch 8. Skipper 9. Nomad 10. Ephemeral 12. Hue 13. Axiom 17. Aid 19. Debenture 21. Cower 22. Enchant 24. Dryad 25. Hothead

DOWN 1. Oyster 2. Flighty 3. Nap 4. Error 5. Gentleman 6. Lymph 7. Hidden 11. Meandered 14. Courage 15. Rancid 16. Vetted 18. Dowry 20. Beech 23. Cut

Without internal reservation, ST quotas fail the most excluded

KRISHNAMURTHY K V

In the cluttered noise of electoral politics and policy debates, the voices of forest-dwelling Adivasi communities in Karnataka have long been drowned out—by design, not by accident. The state government's decision to introduce internal reservation for Scheduled Castes (SCs), ostensibly in the interest of social justice, raises a pressing question: Why does this commitment stop short when it comes to Scheduled Tribes (STs), particularly the forest-dependent, numerically small, and structurally excluded Adivasi communities?

There is no legal bar preventing internal reservations within the ST category. On the contrary, the Supreme Court of India has left such decisions to the discretion of state governments. Then why has Karnataka chosen to ignore Adivasis, whose claims are among the most compelling? This is by no means a call for charity; it is a demand for rightful access to the promises of our Constitution. For decades, numerically dominant communities within the ST category have overwhelmingly cornered the benefits of reservation.

Of the 50 Scheduled Tribes in Karnataka, a single community (listed as No 38 in the ST schedule) accounts for over 77% of the ST population. That means 32.96 lakh out of Karnataka's total 42.48 lakh, according to the 2011 census. The remaining 49 tribal communities, including Jenu Kuruba, Soliga, Iruliga, and Paniya, together make up barely 10 lakhs. Among these, there are 28 tribal communities with populations under 1,000. At least 21 of them have fewer than 500 members. Forest-based communities such as the Iruliga, Kudiya, Paniya, Jenu Kuruba, and others remain almost entirely absent from even the lowest government jobs in Group C and D jobs. More than seven decades after the introduction of reservations, these communities have seen little to no benefit.

This is not merely a policy failure — it is a continuing humanitarian crisis. In 2025, villages in Chamarajanagar district like Keredimba and Kokkabare received electricity for the first time. Incredibly, this means our villages got or are getting electricity 125 years after power came to Karnataka. In Kodagu, Mysuru, and Ramanagara districts, Adivasi families still drink water from stagnant rock crevices, cook on firewood outside leaf huts, and lack basic documents like Aadhaar cards, caste and income certificates. The idea of competing for government jobs is a distant dream when survival itself is in question.

And yet, as Adivasis, we are told we must wait. Wait for research studies, commissions, and expert recommendations; while other numerically dominant groups are promptly granted sub-reservation. This repeated exclusion, even by governments claiming to speak for the most oppressed, amounts to a quiet but cruel erasure.

The Congress party, at national forums, proclaims its commitment to Adivasi welfare. But in Karnataka, its government has failed to act. Why is there hesitation to implement internal reservation within STs? Is it because Adivasis are not a vote bank? Because we lack political clout? Or because our numbers are too few to matter? In truth, our exclusion is deeply systemic. Dominant ST groups not only control the lion's share of the 7% ST reservation in Karnataka but have also secured significant representation—including 15 MLAs, 3 MPs, and numerous IAS, IPS, and university positions. Meanwhile, Adivasis like us remain invisible.

The Constitution envisioned social justice as an instrument to uplift the most marginalised and deprived. For many Adivasi communities, independence itself remains incomplete. The continued denial of internal reservation within STs is not just a policy oversight; it is a denial of dignity, identity, and future.

This is a call from communities still living in temporary settlements without electricity or potable water, walking miles to reach schools or access health centres, and who are yet to receive even the most basic recognition as citizens. Adivasi children grow up malnourished, uncounted in policy, and unrepresented in governance. If this is not the definition of systemic neglect, what is?

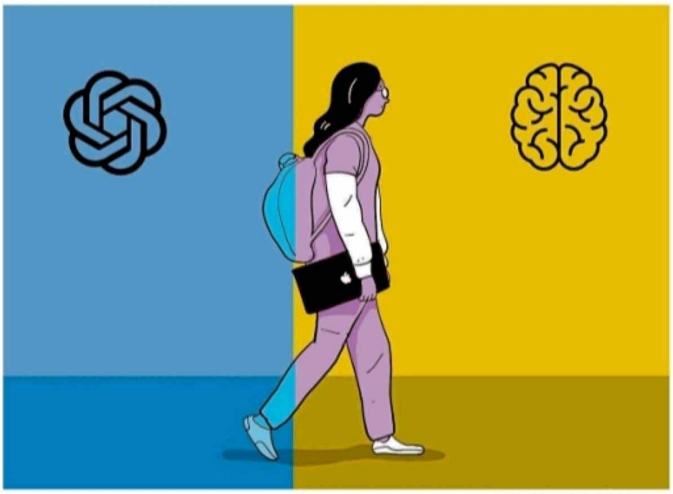
The question to the Karnataka government is simple: if internal reservation can be granted to Scheduled Castes, why not to the Scheduled Tribes who need it most? The state has both the constitutional authority and the moral responsibility to act. Forest-based Adivasi communities are not asking for special treatment or privileges, only for the opportunity to live with dignity. Internal reservation within the ST category is not just a social justice measure. It is a survival strategy.

The time to act is not after another census or another 10-year committee report. The time is now.

(The writer, the first PhD graduate from the Iruliga community in Kanakapura, advocates for Adivasi rights and inclusion in public policy)

Students call it hypocritical. A senior at Northeastern University demanded her tuition fees back. But instructors say generative AI tools make them better at their jobs

KASHMIR HILL



DH ILLUSTRATION: DEEPAK HARICHANDAN

Professors are using AI, and students aren't happy about it

In February, Ella Stapleton, then a senior at Northeastern University, was reviewing lecture notes from her organisational behaviour class when she noticed something odd. Was that a query to ChatGPT from her professor?

Halfway through the document, which her business professor had made for a lesson on models of leadership, was an instruction to ChatGPT to "expand on all areas. Be more detailed and specific." It was followed by a list of positive and negative leadership traits, each with a prosaic definition and a bullet-pointed example.

Stapleton texted a friend in the class.

"Did you see the notes he put on Canvas?" she wrote, referring to the university's software platform for hosting course materials. "He made it with ChatGPT."

"OMG Stop," the classmate responded.

Stapleton decided to do some digging. She reviewed her professor's slide presentations and discovered other telltale signs of artificial intelligence: distorted text, photos of office workers with extraneous body parts and egregious misspellings.

She was not happy. Given the school's cost and reputation, she expected a top-tier education. This course was required for her business minor; its syllabus forbade "academically dishonest activities," including the unauthorised use of AI or chatbots.

"He's telling us not to use it, and then he's using it himself," she said.

Stapleton filed a formal complaint with Northeastern's business school, citing the undisclosed use of AI as well as other issues she had with his teaching style, and requested reimbursement of tuition for that class. As a quarter of the total bill for the semester, that would be more than $8,000.

When ChatGPT was released at the end of 2022, it caused a panic at all levels of education because it made cheating incredibly easy. Students who were asked to write a history paper or literary analysis could have the tool do it in mere seconds. Some schools banned it while others deployed AI detection services, despite concerns about their accuracy.

But, oh, how the tables have turned. Now students are complaining on sites like Rate My Professors about their instructors' overreliance on AI and scrutinising course materials for words ChatGPT tends to overuse, such as "crucial" and "delve." In addition to calling out hypocrisy, they make a financial argument: They are paying, often quite a lot, to be taught by humans, not an algorithm that they, too, could consult for free. For their part, professors said they used AI chatbots as a tool to provide a better education. Instructors interviewed by *The New York Times* said chatbots saved time, helped them with overwhelming workloads and served as automated teaching assistants.

Their numbers are growing. In a national survey of more than 1,800 higher-education instructors last year, 18% described themselves as frequent users of generative AI tools; in a repeat survey this year, that percentage nearly doubled, according to Tyton Partners, the consulting group that conducted the research. The AI industry wants to help, and to profit: The startups OpenAI and Anthropic recently created enterprise versions of their chatbots designed for universities.

Generative AI is clearly here to stay, but universities are struggling to keep up with the changing norms. Now professors are the ones on the learning curve and, like Stapleton's teacher, muddling their way through the technology's pitfalls and their students' disdain.

Making the Grade

Last fall, Marie, 22, wrote a three-page essay for an online anthropology course at Southern New Hampshire University. She looked for her grade on the school's online platform, and was happy to have received an A. But in a section for comments, her professor had accidentally posted a back-and-forth with ChatGPT. It included the grading rubric the professor had asked the chatbot to use and a request for some "really nice feedback" to give Marie.

"From my perspective, the professor didn't even read anything that I wrote," said Marie, who asked to use her middle name and requested that her professor's identity not be disclosed. She could understand the temptation to use AI. Working at the school was a "third job" for many of her instructors, who might have hundreds of students, said Marie, and she did not want to embarrass her teacher.

Still, Marie felt wronged and confronted her professor during a Zoom meeting. The professor told Marie that she did read her students' essays but used ChatGPT as a guide, which the school permitted.

Robert MacAuslan, vice president of AI at Southern New Hampshire, said that the school believed "in the power of AI to transform education" and that there were guidelines for both faculty and students to "ensure that this technology enhances, rather than replaces, human creativity and oversight." A do's and don'ts for faculty forbids using tools, such as ChatGPT and Grammarly, "in place of authentic, human-centric feedback."

"These tools should never be used to 'do the work' for them," MacAuslan said. "Rather, they can be looked at as enhancements to their established processes."

After a second professor appeared to use ChatGPT to give her feedback, Marie transferred to another university.

Paul Shovlin, an English professor at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio, said he could understand her frustration. "Not a big fan of that," Shovlin said, after being told of Marie's experience. Shovlin is also an AI faculty fellow, whose role includes developing the right ways to incorporate AI into teaching and learning.

"The value that we add as instructors is the feedback that we're able to give students," he said. "It's the human connections that we forge with students as human beings who are reading their words and who are being impacted by them."

Shovlin is a proponent of incorporating AI into teaching, but not simply to make an instructor's life easier. Students need to learn to use the technology responsibly and "develop an ethical compass with AI," he said, because they will almost certainly use it in the workplace. Failure to do so properly could have consequences. "If you screw up, you're going to be fired," Shovlin said.

The Times contacted dozens of professors whose students had mentioned their AI use in online reviews. The professors said they had used ChatGPT to create computer science programming assignments and quizzes on required reading, even as students complained that the results didn't always make sense. They used it to organise their feedback to students, or to make it kinder. As experts in their fields, they said, they can recognise when it hallucinates, or gets facts wrong.

There was no consensus among them as to what was acceptable. Some acknowledged using ChatGPT to help grade students' work; others decried the practice. Some emphasised the importance of transparency with students when deploying generative AI, while others said they didn't disclose its use because of students' scepticism about the technology.

Most, however, felt that Stapleton's experience at Northeastern — in which her professor appeared to use AI to generate class notes and slides — was perfectly fine. That was Shovlin's view, as long as the professor edited what ChatGPT spat out to reflect his expertise. Shovlin compared it with a long-standing practice in academia of using content, such as lesson plans and case studies, from third-party publishers.

To say a professor is "some kind of monster" for using AI to generate slides "is, to me, ridiculous," he said.

Rick Arrowood, her professor, was contrite about the episode. Arrowood, who is an adjunct professor and has been teaching for nearly two decades, said he had uploaded his class files and documents to ChatGPT, the AI search engine Perplexity and an AI presentation generator called Gamma to "give them a fresh look." "In hindsight, I wish I would have looked at it more closely," he said.

He put the materials online for students to review, but emphasised that he did not use them in the classroom, because he prefers classes to be discussion-oriented.

The New York Times

Digital education a powerful equaliser

PRATEEK MADHAV

Today, the world stands at the pinnacle of scientific, technological, and digital progress. Yet, despite these rapid advancements, millions of persons with disabilities in India continue to face significant barriers to accessing basic necessities such as education, employment, and financial services. Traditional systems remain not only physically inaccessible but also slow, inefficient, and exclusionary. As India transforms into a digitally driven economy, it is imperative to ensure that persons with disabilities are not left behind. Digital access is no longer a luxury—it is a necessity that can empower them to lead independent, dignified, and fulfilling lives.

When we speak of true inclusion, education forms the bedrock on which livelihood, empowerment, and independence are built. Despite the surge in digital learning—especially post the Covid-19 pandemic—persons with disabilities, who number nearly 1.5 billion globally, remain significantly under-represented in this expanding digital education space. While platforms like Coursera have seen widespread adoption, their usage is still largely concentrated among the able-bodied. That said, Coursera and other such platforms are working to ensure learners with visual, hearing and other impairments can succeed in courses on their platform.

GLOBAL ACCESSIBILITY AWARENESS DAY

Now imagine the transformative impact if even half of this global disabled population, over 500 million, could access digital learning. For individuals with mobility, visual, or hearing impairments, online education offers unmatched flexibility, affordability, and the freedom to learn from home and from highly reputed institutions like Columbia University. But access alone is not enough. The critical question is: Are these platforms truly accessible to everyone?

To bridge the gap, digital learning platforms must be designed with accessibility at their core—from screen-reader compatibility and captioning to visual contrast and navigation simplicity. Just as important is ensuring that learners themselves are equipped with the right Assistive Technologies (AT): screen readers, Braille displays, sign language plugins, speech recognition tools, and adaptive input devices. Inclusive digital learning is not just about reaching more people—it's about reaching all people. To ensure that persons with disabilities are not left behind in today's rapidly evolving job market, it is essential to equip them with accessible, affordable, and tailored education. With the right support, employability and livelihood naturally follow.

Employment is not merely a source of income—it represents independence, dignity, and identity. As job opportunities have shifted from traditional print media to dynamic digital platforms, digital literacy has become a non-negotiable skill. Targeted digital skilling programmes must be designed with inclusivity at their core—offering content in accessible formats such as screen-reader compatible text, sign language interpretation, captioned videos, and simplified interfaces. Assistive technologies like speech-to-text software, screen magnifiers, AI-powered voice assistants, and adaptive hardware (like alternative keyboards or eye-tracking devices) play a vital role in enabling persons with disabilities to access and engage with digital learning and workspaces.

India's digital economy, with growing investments in artificial intelligence—currently at $1.4 billion—is creating new career avenues. But without proactive inclusion, disabled individuals risk being sidelined. By providing digital and AI-related training that leverages AT, we can empower persons with disabilities to not only apply for jobs but also excel in them—fostering true economic independence and a life of dignity on their own terms.

In the financial space, due to the government's push for a less-cash economy, digital payments are thriving and evolving. Payment systems like UPI have seen a massive growth in the past few years. In 2024, UPI transactions reached a staggering 172 billion, a 46% increase from 2023. With over 14.96 billion transactions per day, UPI has revolutionised how Indians handle money. But beyond the numbers lies a deeper impact—ease of access for people with physical disabilities. No longer do they have to travel to banks, wait in long queues, or manage cheque books. UPI allows users to send or receive any amount right from their homes. For the disabled, this saves not just time and energy, but also the physical and emotional strain of navigating public spaces. When paired with assistive technologies like voice commands, and screen readers, digital payments become even more inclusive. A digital payment system is more than a mere advancement—it is a powerful equaliser.

Ultimately, beyond education and employment, persons with disabilities deserve to live with comfort and joy. Technology can and should assist in the everyday—walking, sitting, listening to music, cooking, reading, even relaxing. The goal isn't just functionality—it's happiness. Digital access, when inclusive, doesn't just solve problems. It creates opportunities.

(The writer is the co-founder and CEO of the AssisTech Foundation)

OUR PAGES OF HISTORY

50 YEARS AGO: MAY 1975

Call to free nation from corruption

Hubli, May 15
A clarion call to the people and youth of the country to rise against the *thana shahi* (authoritarian reign) of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and build a new India was given today by Mr. Jaya Prakash Narayan. Mr. Narayan emphasised the need to mobilise the people into a vigilant, live force to root out corruption rampant in Government and public life. Mrs. Gandhi had failed in delivering the goods and her magic slogan, "Garibi Hatao," had flopped, he said.

25 YEARS AGO: MAY 2000

Kashmir minister, four others killed in landmine blast

Chamran (South Kashmir), May 15
Minister of State for Power Ghulam Hassan Bhat and four others were killed in a powerful IED explosion here this morning at around 9:35 am when they were on their way from Mandipora, the ancestral village of the minister, to the neighbouring Bajru village in a bullet proof Ambassador car. Militants had planted the IED in a pipe underneath Dooru-Qazigund road here. When the minister's car reached the spot, they triggered off a powerful explosion.

OASIS | SUDHA DEVI NAYAK

Influence as power

Influence is seen as a power until it is actually exercised. It hangs like an aura , a halo that surrounds the influencer and we visualise the feats that can be performed with such influence. Influence may not always work and more often it may backfire. When exercised towards a selfish goal or undeserving material benefit in violation of ethics, even while yielding temporary results it could end unfavourably and the recipient of such favours may be left without recourse. In life it is often seen that things happen or they just don't . Every event has a cause and effect, a trajectory of it's own set in train by the sum total of circumstances and reactions which we may or may not be able to control thereby resulting in different outcomes. We must learn to command and control forces that are unleashed by our own behaviour and action before we ask someone to influence the result



Where we have the will power to direct our destiny through fair and just means there is no need for an external influence to turn the tide in our favour. There may be turns and twists on the path , perhaps even detours and we take them or leave them as warranted by our discretion, intuition, native wisdom and a prayer to the Supreme Intelligence. Even with a few misadventures or aberrations we may arrive at our destination successfully. Someone who looks at an influence to favour her, compromising her integrity and moral sense might never be happy with the outcome. Nor will one have that sense of self worth and competence to function effectively. Worse still , the results could boomerang and one may suffer untold pain and humiliation and be back at square one to start afresh.

Nor does it mean life is mere mindless meandering that carries us where it will, rather we should take the bull by the horns and lead it where we want with virtue at the centre of all our efforts. Influence need not always be negative. You can influence people even without formal authority by virtue of strong relationships, effective communication, above all with compassion and empathy. When we see someone treading the wrong path, someone who feels lost out on life,or suffering from the weight of guilt or resentment unable to forgive herself or others, is where the good influencer steps in and marks a change.

DECCAN HERALD
ESTABLISHED 1948

Bigotry check: Errant minister must go

The comments made by Madhya Pradesh Tribal Affairs Minister Vijay Shah on Colonel Sofiya Qureshi, who was part of India's official team that conducted media briefings during Operation Sindoor, are not only inappropriate but hateful. The minister said at a public meeting that the terrorists in Pakistan had been taught a lesson "using their own sister". He said: "Those who widowed our daughters, we sent a sister of their own to teach them a lesson."

The comments have rightly attracted criticism and opprobrium and demands have been made for action against the minister. The MP High Court has taken cognisance of the remarks, called them "cancerous" and "dangerous", and ordered the filing of an FIR against Shah. The state BJP has reprimanded him and the party president J P Nadda is reported to have sought an explanation on the matter from the state unit. The minister has tendered an apology and said he did not mean what was said – a familiar excuse that cannot be accepted on a serious matter such as this. The fact that he approached the Supreme Court against the High Court's order shows how sincere the apology is. Shah's comments, in effect, cast aspersions on the armed forces which, as the court noted, is a great institution that reflects the best qualities of public service, and defamed a woman and an officer who has served the country well. The comments also show a disturbing tendency to associate and identify any Muslim name with terrorism. This makes the minister's utterance hate speech. He made the remarks at a time when the Prime Minister said that "every citizen, every community, every class, every political party, unitedly spoke in one voice for strong action against terrorism". Shah should be dropped from the cabinet – that would be the appropriate response, assuring the nation that exemplary action has been taken and the law should be allowed to take its course.

Action against Vijay Shah on his remarks about a serving soldier must not stop at a party reprimand

The minister's comment is not an isolated instance. Earlier this week, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri and his daughter were attacked and abused online following Misri's media briefing where the announcement of the ceasefire between India and Pakistan was made. He had to lock his personal account on X in the wake of the trolling. Misri was only conveying the government's decision to the nation but was vilified on social media. It is unfortunate to note that the government did not respond to the attack on one of the country's premier diplomats who was only carrying out his duties.

New rice strains mark promise, concerns

Two varieties of rice developed in the country by using genome-editing technology – DRR Dhan 100 (Kamala) and Pusa DST Rice 1 – are expected to increase yield and reduce the crop's dependence on water. Developed by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), these rice strains promise yield increases of up to 30% and a reduction of water consumption by over 40%. They are also claimed to be climate-resilient and resistant to environmental degradation. The rice varieties have been pitched for other agronomic advantages as well. They require 15-20 days less to mature than conventional varieties and therefore, facilitate a quicker crop rotation. There is also the promise of higher nitrogen-use efficiency and resistance to drought and salinity. These varieties are different from genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and are classified as crops outside the GMO regulatory framework which has expedited the approvals. However, there is criticism and apprehension regarding their impact.

The two varieties address some of the concerns in Indian agriculture which is still largely dependent on the monsoon and limited underground water resources. Groundwater extraction has reached unsustainable levels in Punjab and Haryana, the two major rice-growing states in the country. The new varieties may be recommended for states such as Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Odisha, and Maharashtra where productivity is low because of soil and climatic conditions.

The two genome-edited varieties can boost yield but are the farmers ready yet?

Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan recently launched the two new varieties and announced the government's plan to reduce the area on which paddy is sown by 5 million hectares (mha). This is because production is estimated to increase from 127.86 million tonnes to 135.84 million tonnes because of the adoption of the new varieties. The minister announced the formula of 'minus 5 and plus 10' which means an increase in production of 10 million tonnes even when the cultivation area is reduced by 5 mha. The plan also involves the use of the area freed of paddy cultivation for the cultivation of pulses and oilseeds, the production of which is much less than what is required. However, farmers and traders' organisations have expressed concern over the plan because the farmers need an adequate supply of safe seeds apart from support and training in modern farming before a new variety is introduced. They have expressed the apprehension that both the rice crop and the pulses crop may suffer if adequate preparations are not in place. Seeds and farm practices cannot be introduced entirely by government diktat. Farmers' trust, acceptance, and cooperation need to be ensured. Hasty implementation of the measures can be counter-productive.

FINE PRINT

The spectacle of war distracts us from real issues

Beyond nationalist assertions and optics on grand justice, the real test will be in ensuring absolute deterrence

PRASENJIT CHOWDHURY

Going by another act of provocation and another war, it is a no-brainer that the rivalry between India and Pakistan has proven to be one of the world's most intractable international conflicts. The provocation came at a time at the peak of the tourist season, at a time of apparent complacency as there has not been a significant upsurge of violence after the revocation of Article 370 in 2019 which, many thought, was largely due to the iron fist of a repressive internal security dragnet.

The terrorists delivered a body blow to any pretension of normalcy harboured by the security establishment. They chose and hit targets with an abandon that beggared belief that Kashmir happens to be one of the most militarised zones of the world. By communalising the targets by hand-picking them, they wanted to plant seeds of discord in a country where secularism is being constantly challenged as its founding principle. India's secular claim over Kashmir within the spirit of a secular federal multicultural polity had always challenged the two-nation theory; now due to many insurgencies arising from within, Pakistan is threatened with dismemberment. While Pakistan's subcontinental Muslim nationalism based upon the ideology of pan-Islamism and the two-nation theory has always coveted Kashmir as part of the homeland created for the Muslims of South Asia, the Indian nationalist leadership chose to hold on to this Muslim-majority state to prove that minorities could thrive in a plural, secular polity.

The problem of this rivalry for a far wealthier and more plural country with democratic roots such as India is that the time of an Indo-Pak face-off breeds a hysteric brand of nationalism that almost distracts our attention away from the more real problems that bedevil us. Swept up by a maniacal frenzy, we wish for a nuclear Armageddon, even though Pakistan has been diminished from its promising origins as the world's largest Muslim state into an almost failed fragment of itself. However much we recall the attempt to flee their ancestral homes by more than ten million terrified Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs, one million of whom died before reaching safety, in a mad act of communal frenzy, we are steadfast in carrying an unbroken legacy of hatred and engaging in chronic everyday vituperation as a matter of our national pastime. The routine sabre-rattlings about destroying each other, with dark hints of nuclear annihilation from both sides, are bandied about with gay abandon whenever there is a face-off on the horizon.

Besides hatred, there is always a spin.



Pakistan, incidentally, celebrates Defence Day on September 6 to honour the soldiers and civilians who fought for it during the 1965 India-Pakistan war. The war ended in a stalemate with neither side achieving a decisive victory yet claiming it. It was primarily over Kashmir and resulted in a UN-sponsored ceasefire. This time as well, the leading daily of Pakistan *The Dawn* reports that Pakistan is treating the outcome of the conflict as a victory.

History lends context

The unfortunate thing is that when winning the perception war becomes more important than realising the implied objectives of a military operation, or when optics become more important than substance, we don't address the disease. The larger question is if such cross-border and aerial strikes by India and spectacles of grand justice can achieve its goals. Since India's retaliatory strikes in 2016 and 2019, the threshold for escalation has shifted dramatically – a departure from the days when India produced dossiers of documents to establish the complicity of Pakistan, usually with little effect. However, there is no guarantee that Pakistan will behave responsibly in the future even after such punitive airstrikes since the trail is bloodied by a seemingly endless cycle of standoffs, severely strained diplomatic and economic relations, a savage proxy war, and a looming nuclear threat. The assumption that the nuclearisation of the subcontinent neutralised any possibility of open conflict and that Pakistan would continue with "infiltration" of militants into Kashmir but would not attempt a military "intrusion" was proved wrong during the time of Kargil.

Can Operation Sindoor force Pakistan to reconsider its audacious strategies? Such actions, if history is any guide, have not stopped cross-border attacks in the long run. The electorate in the sub-continent seems to thrive on mutual hatred and optics, as a military victory is sure to reap rich political dividends; therefore one feels wary that the short-term gain will precede over the long term. In late 2001 and 2002, New Delhi responded to a reckless Pakistani-supported terrorist attack on the Indian parliament by fully mobilising its military forces on the international border and the Line of Control (LoC) in Kashmir. It proved that a spectacle of bravado or a policy of coercive diplomacy alone would not work.

We have come to the brink of more lethal wars before. In 1984, the Indian government considered launching preventive air strikes to destroy Pakistan's nuclear capabilities. Pakistani leaders warned that they would respond to such an attack by ordering air strikes against India's nuclear facilities, and thereby spread lethal radioactive materials into populous areas. At that time, both countries restrained themselves and subsequently, reached an agreement not to attack each other's nuclear sites. This time, India launched a missile strike on Rawalpindi's Noor Khan Airbase, perhaps to drive home the message that it has the wherewithal to decapitate Pakistan's Nuclear Command Authority (NCA), the body overseeing its nuclear arsenal.

The real test of whether we won would surely be to have Pakistan desist from another misadventure both in the short and the long term by raising the stakes unsustainably high.

(The writer is a Kolkata-based commentator on geopolitics, development, and culture)

RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE

Kindness in the blackout

Even in the darkest times, shared humanity shines through

ANANTHA PADMANABHAN

The 1971 Indo-Pakistan War is etched in my memory; even for a ten-year-old, the unsettling realities of conflict were ever-present. Life in our defence establishment township transformed overnight.

Shrouding windows with dark paper became the norm, a stark reminder of the unseen threat. Headlights underwent a strange metamorphosis, mostly blacked out, leaving only a sliver for a meagre beam. Air raid sirens frequently wailed, followed by abrupt power cuts that plunged us into darkness.

One such evening, the familiar shriek of the siren sliced through the air as my school bus trundled along. The streetlights flickered and died, leaving us in an eerie twilight. The driver abruptly told us to get off the moving bus. My young legs tangled, and I tumbled onto the sharp baby gravel meant for road extension, instantly stinging my palms.

The usually gruff but not unkind driver helped me up, offering the strange advice to run a few steps after jumping. He then took me to the company dispensary where my grazed palms were bandaged, throbbing dully.

Stepping into the inky blackness, disorientation overcame me. Lost and increasingly frightened, my wanderings felt endless. Perhaps two hours crawled by before the streetlights briefly flickered back on, only to be swallowed by darkness as another siren wailed. The fear, a cold knot in my tummy, finally gave way to tears.

Just as despair crept in, my father's familiar voice repeatedly cut through the darkness. A figure emerged from the gloom: a man in military uniform. Noticing my distress, he reassuringly offered to guide me home. Our trek began, a seemingly endless crisscross of shadowy lanes. In the blackout, every house was identical, a silent, indistinguishable form.

Guided by his anxious calls and torch beam, we finally reached our house. Relief washed over me, quickly followed by a fresh wave of emotion at my father's panicked face. The sight of a military man escorting his bandaged son clearly caused him alarm. The officer patiently explained, his words transforming my father's initial worry to profuse gratitude.

Huddled safely at home that night, the pain in my palms was a dull echo compared to the vivid memory of being lost and a stranger's unexpected kindness. The blackout, meant to obscure us from an unseen enemy, inadvertently illuminated the fundamental goodness in people. The gruff bus driver's unexpected care, the military man's selfless guidance, and my father's frantic relief – moments of fear and uncertainty – underscored the enduring power of human connection.

Even in the darkest times, shared humanity can shine through, offering solace and a path to safety and belonging.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

MP minister's remarks expose deep-seated bias

The derogatory remarks made by Minister Vijay Shah against Colonel Sofiya Qureshi, a highly accomplished Indian Army officer, are condemnable. Colonel Qureshi was one of the two women officers who briefed the media on 'Operation Sindoor' with impeccable clarity. Shah's scurrilous comments not only cast aspersions on the officer's integrity but also reflect his mindset against women in general, demoralising our armed forces. The court's characterisation of his remarks as "language of the gutter" is apt. The National Commission for Women has strongly condemned Shah's comments, which is also a welcome move. As a BJP leader and tribal minister, Shah should be held accountable for his objectionable remarks and punished accordingly. Such comments highlight the prevalent bias against women in our society.

H R Bapu Satyanarayana, Mysuru

Punish the minister

The Madhya Pradesh Minister Vijay Shah's remarks against Colonel Sofiya Qureshi, a senior Army officer who briefed media on Operation Sindoor, are totally unwarranted and unbecoming of his position. The Army is above caste, community, and party politics, and the Centre's choice of Colonel Qureshi for this sensitive task is a testament to her credibility. Shah's comments, described aptly by the court as "gutter words," spread hatred and demoralise the Army. The High Court's *suo motu* action is commendable, and Shah should be asked to resign or be dismissed forthwith. At the same time, it is lamentable that Foreign Secretary Misri was brutally trolled online.

S V Venkatakrishnan, Bengaluru

Hit China where it hurts

Apropos 'China needles India on Arunachal again' (May 15), India should retaliate firmly against China's provocations. We should declare that we no longer recognise China's suzerainty over Tibet and recognise the Dalai Lama as the Head of the Independent Government of Tibet in Exile. This move would not only be a fitting response to China's aggression but also acknowledge the emotional bond between India and Tibet, given the significance of Mount Kailas and Manasarovar to Indians.

V V S Mani-Swaraj, Bengaluru

Our readers are welcome to email letters to: **letters@deccanherald.co.in** (only letters emailed – not handwritten – will be accepted). All letters must carry the sender's postal address and phone number.

SPEAK OUT



The SP's national general secretary's act of binding a brave daughter within the ambit of caste is not only a display of his party's narrow-mindedness but is also a grave insult to the valour of the army... This is the same mentality that divides even patriotism in the name of appeasement and vote bank politics...

Yogi Adityanath, UP CM

Living on hypocrisy is not a healthy diet for patriots.

Tom Tancredo

TO BE PRECISE

India offered US a zero tariffs deal: Donald Trump



IN PERSPECTIVE

Lessons from Kham, for Bengaluru

A restored river in Aurangabad shows why planners should see Bengaluru as part of its living river systems

MADHURI MANDAVA

In a city quite different from Bengaluru, a river began to breathe again. Aurangabad (now Chatrapati Sambhaji Nagar) may not be known for active citizen movements, scientific institutions, innovators, or the scale of CSR funding that Bengaluru sees – but when viral videos of a cleaned-up river flowing through the city began circulating, it caught our attention.

Bengaluru has no shortage of initiatives to revive its water systems – large public STPs, decentralised treatment plants, citizen-led solid waste efforts, and lake and well restorations. Many organisations and not-for-profits have been working to map river systems, gather data, and advocate for change. However, despite all this, our rivers remain in distress. Referred to as *mori* or *nala*, they are mostly forgotten or seen as drains.

That's why the Kham river's transformation sparked hope and curiosity. Visuals of clean river stretches prompted us to reach out to EcoSattva, the eco-consultancy that is the driving force behind Kham's revival. In April, we spent two days in Aurangabad learning from their efforts. We were glad to see the Kham, a seasonal river, flowing lean in the summer months without any visible trash.

Kham's revival began with a detailed drone study to map the problem – identifying where the waste was entering the river and addressing it at source or through treatment. Solid waste traps were installed, untreated sewage was rerouted to existing STPs, a modular plant was added, and settling ponds helped manage minor sewage inflows. When textile waste emerged as a major pollutant, a recovery facility was set up to tackle it upstream.

Alongside this, EcoSattva worked across city wards to streamline solid waste collection with the help of Safai Saathis and an MRF centre. Their experience in waste management helped scale up the effort. An awareness campaign "*Takatak*" – Marathi for clean and thriving – spread the message that managing wet, dry, and hazardous waste properly is key to a better city. Leadership played a crucial role. Then municipal commissioner Astik Pandey didn't just sign off on the plan – he joined the clean-ups and walked the river. On the ground, retired officer Asadullah Khan appointed by Pandey led desilting operations with a five-member team and an earth-mover. He also repurposed stones from the construction debris to pitch the riverbanks – a low-cost, effective solution.

Citizens were at the heart of it all. They showed up in large numbers for the Saturday clean-ups and planting drives. Soon, they began referring to the river as *aapli* Kham (our Kham), a reflection of renewed ownership. Eco-parks were built in former dump sites and walking paths were created along the river using recycled debris – spaces that now encourage people to reconnect and take pride in their river.

While much of the revival of Kham has focused on stretches within the city, challenges continue downstream. The river flows over 70 km, and the work is far from over. But what stands out is the shift towards seeing and treating the river as a whole. The project now extends to 20 villages along the river's path – MoUs with panchayats are set to help improve waste management systems and facilitate planting drives. In Narayanpur, one such village, we saw what this looks like on the ground. The villagers proudly showed us a detailed record of recent efforts, while ASHA workers led us through clean streets lined with painted hygiene messages. It was a quiet but powerful reminder – when communities take ownership, change takes root.

Bengaluru needs a perspective shift

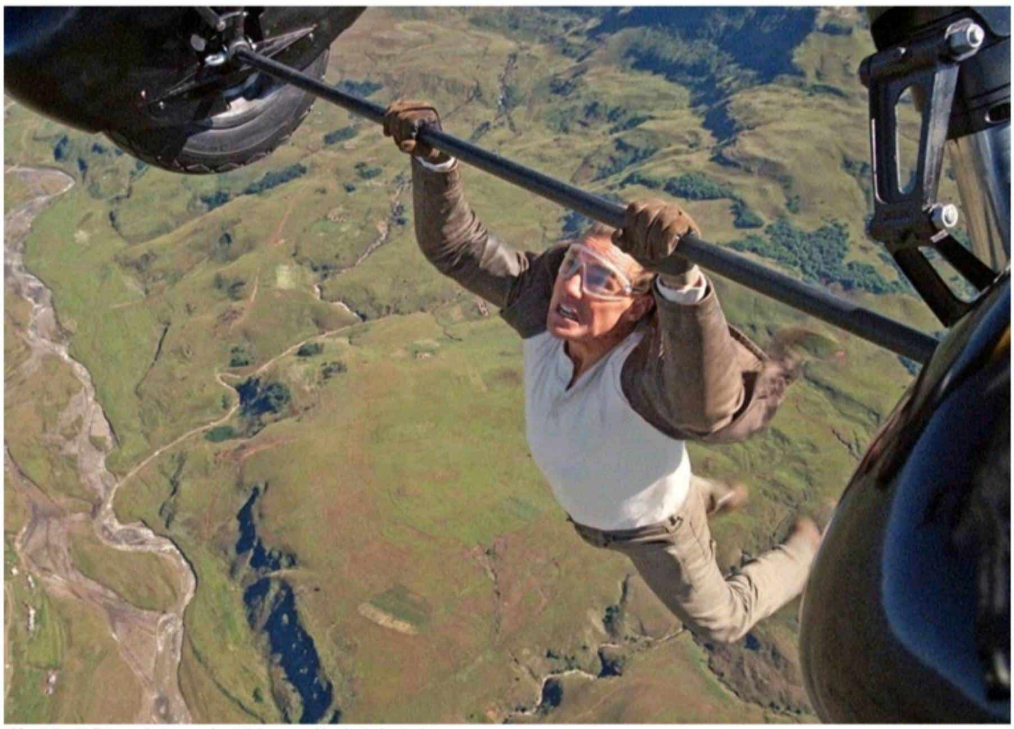
Kham's revival happened at just 3% of what many river restoration projects cost. So, if budget isn't the problem, what is? Bengaluru already has a lot going for it: active citizen groups, committed government officials, and judicial orders that, if implemented, can stop pollution at source. What we need now is not more scattered projects or infrastructure-heavy solutions that don't address root issues. We need to pause, assess what's working, what's missing, and act with clarity.

Perhaps the most important shift is this: to stop seeing the city as just roads and buildings and begin recognising it as part of living river systems – the Arkavathi and the Dakshina Pinakini. That perspective matters.

Kham reminded us that restoration is possible. Many of the elements are already in place for Bengaluru. What's needed is for them to come together – for our rivers. That is the hope we carried home.

(The writer is a co-founder of Paani.Earth)

IN THE LIMELIGHT



Ultimate daredevil: Tom Cruise in a scene from 'Mission: Impossible - The Final Reckoning'. AP

Mission (im)possible: how Tom Cruise is running to keep our dreams alive

Unlike 'No Time to Die', in which Daniel Craig coldly killed our collective agent-running-in-the-field fantasies, the Mission Impossible films, from 1996 to 2025, has an untiring Tom Cruise racing on trains, planes and automobiles to serve our favourite comfort food

Mini Anthikad Chhibber

Tom Cruise is a bonafide movie star, probably the last of a dying breed. Whether he is gifting the famous white chocolate coconut Bundt cake in the holiday season to his loved ones, or standing on top of London's BFI IMAX Cinema, or doing a charming Namaste, he grabs eyeballs and mind space. He works hard to keep the magic alive, doing his hair-raising stunts, producing, and otherwise being completely involved in his movies.

While Cruise has been part of innumerable blockbusters, and a few franchises, it is the *Mission: Impossible* movies that have cemented his place in Hollywood heaven. *Mission: Impossible*, released almost 30 years ago on May 22, 1996, was directed by the sultan of style, Brian De Palma. A reboot of the eponymous 1966 television series, *Mission: Impossible* was Cruise/Wagner Productions' first project.

Beginning of the saga

The film was enormous fun, blindingly successful, and laid the template for the movies that followed, from the music and mission briefs to the masks and Macguffins. Lalo Schifrin's *M:I* theme, probably using Morse code as the starting point (the code for M.I. is two dashes followed by two dots, which could translate to the five-beat rhythm Schifrin used), provided the adrenalin rush.

As technology evolved, so did the way the mission briefs were delivered to Ethan Hunt – from video cassettes to sunglasses and then going retro in an old fashioned phone box. Whatever the means of delivery, the message would "self destruct in five seconds", calling for solid speed reading and comprehension skills.

And then there were the stunts. In the first film as Cruise's Hunt hung suspended inside the secure CIA building, we held our collective breath, dreading the bead of sweat will drop, which would set off all kinds of alarms. There was the rodent in the shaft and Hunt saying "toast" to add the right timbre to the tension. And how about the meeting with the smiling arms dealer, Max (Vanessa Redgrave), on the TGV to exchange the 'NOC' list, which ends with a helicopter crashing in a tunnel with its propeller blade mere inches from Hunt's throat?

Better and better

John Woo's *Mission: Impossible 2* in 2000 came with the director's trademark slo-mo, pigeons and flying coats and had a suitably ludicrous plot involving killer viruses and their antidotes, their names taken from Greek myth – Chimera and Bellerophon. J. J. Abrams made his directorial debut with *Mission: Impossible III* in 2006. The film was darker and grittier thanks to a brilliant Philip Seymour Hoffman as yet another arms dealer, Owen Davian.

Brad Bird's *Mission: Impossible - Ghost Protocol* came out in 2011 and will be mainly remembered for Anil Kapoor's weird maharaja turn, sets in Vancouver dressed to look like Bengaluru and of course, Cruise's antics on the Burj Khalifa, where "blue is glue and red is dead," in the immortal words of Christopher McQuarrie, who has directed all the *M:I* films since.

Mission: Impossible - Rogue Nation in 2015 saw the introduction of Rebecca Ferguson's disavowed MI6 agent, Ilsa Faust. *Mission: Impossible - Fallout* (2018) revealed a duplicitous CIA agent in Henry Cavill's August Walker.

Hunt shares a moment with ex-wife Julia (Michelle Monaghan), while Max's daughter, Alanna (Vanessa Kirby), continues the family business as the White Widow.

Mission: Impossible - Dead Reckoning Part One (that is a mouthful) in 2023 was meant to be the first of a two-part conclusion to the adventures of Ethan Hunt and the IMF, but Cruise has said if Harrison Ford can play Indiana Jones in his 80s, there is no need to slow down Ethan Hunt on the basis of his age.

A series that stands out

Recent spy thrillers on streamers, including *The Agency* and *The Day of the Jackal*, or movies such as Steven Soderbergh's *Black Bag*, walk a shadowy path of false identities and lies. The *M:I* brand of espionage thriller, on the other hand, has a lightness of touch, the masks notwithstanding. Hunt is working tirelessly to keep the world safe unlike Michael Fassbender's Martian in *The Agency*, who has doubts of whether he wishes to save the country or the woman he loves.

The Daniel Craig James Bond movies started off as a grittier take on Ian Fleming's superspy but by the fifth film, *No Time To Die* (2021), had become rather self indulgent and dour.

Cruise on the other hand has not lost sight of his one and only mission, which is to keep us entertained, and no mountain or airplane is too high for him to jump off from to achieve that.

THE DAILY QUIZ

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

On this day in 1966, the Chinese Communist Party's Central Committee issued a circular that outlined Mao Zedong's ideas on the Cultural Revolution. A quiz on that period

Radhika Santhanam

QUESTION 1

In November 1965, a review of a play about a Ming dynasty official who criticised the emperor, titled "Hai Rui Dismissed From Office", was seen as a spark for the Cultural Revolution. Where was this review published?

QUESTION 2

The agents of the Cultural Revolution were students. These shock troops were deployed to terrorise and persecute those seen as enemies of the Revolution. What was this cohort called?

QUESTION 3

One of the early objectives of the Cultural Revolution was to wipe out old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits. What were these collectively known as?

QUESTION 4

During the Cultural Revolution, more than 16 million young people were sent to the countryside to work. Among them was a boy who was sent to a remote area in a province in northeastern China. He earned a degree in Japanese and went on to serve as China's Ambassador to Japan. Today he is a prominent figure in China and in the world. Name him.

QUESTION 5

During the Cultural Revolution, various techniques were deployed to reform the thought process of citizens. One of them was to publicly humiliate people who were accused of being "class enemies". What was this technique called?



Visual question:

For five years during the Cultural Revolution, this place, an embodiment of ancient values, was closed. What is its name and which leader issued the directive to close it and protect it by deploying soldiers?

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz: 1. From May 11 to 13 in 1998, India conducted a series of five nuclear tests called Operation _____ in Pokhran. **Ans: Shakti**

2. During the series, the shaft for the first device was codenamed _____ _____, the second 'Taj Mahal' and the third 'Kumbhkaran'. **Ans: White House**

3. The impetus for the Pokhran II tests were led in 1996 by A.B. Vajpayee, and was delayed because he couldn't contact _____ _____. **Ans: Abdul Kalam**

4. India's decision to test nuclear weapons became all but clear when it became increasingly critical of this Treaty. **Ans: Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty**

5. Following Pokhran II, Pakistan conducted multiple nuclear tests by this name on May 28 and 30, 1998. **Ans: Chagai**

Visual: Name this noted Pakistani nuclear physicist. **Ans: Pervez Hoodbhoy**

Early Birds: Siddhartha Viswanathan| Erfanally Oosmany| M. Suresh Kumar| Dodo Jayaditya| Sunil Madhavan



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

K. Subrahmanian
S. Upendran

"Is there a difference in pronunciation between the noun 'prophecy' and the verb 'prophesy'?"

"Yes, the 'cy' in the noun is pronounced 'si' as in 'sit' and the 'sy' in the verb is pronounced like 'sigh'."

"What is the difference between 'impunity' and 'immunity'?"

" 'Impunity' means 'with freedom from punishment or injury'. He breaks the law with impunity as he is related to the Chief Minister. 'Immunity' is the ability to resist infection, disease, etc. He has developed immunity to criticism. He has been a politician for several decades."

"Is it incorrect to say 'He ran fastly'?"

"Yes. 'Fastly' doesn't exist. He ran fast and not fastly."

"How do you pronounce 'example'?"

"It is 'ig Zammpl'. The first 'e' is pronounced 'i as in 'fit', 'x' is pronounced 'g' as in 'give', 'a' is pronounced 'a' as in 'path', 'ple' as in 'people'. The stress is on the second syllable.

"Look who is coming. My batch-mate Ramu."

"You mean your class-mate? 'Batch-mate' is not used in British English. 'I belong to the 1962 batch of IAS candidates.' In British English, 'batch' is used with non-human referents. I have received a fresh batch of books. When you use it to refer to a group of people, you use the word 'group' and not 'batch'. But in India 'batch' is used widely instead of 'group'."

"What is the difference between 'Ram should have posted the letter' and 'Ram must have posted the letter'?"

" 'Ram should have posted the letter means that Ram did not post the letter. He was expected to but he didn't. 'Ram must have posted the letter' means your conclusion is that he would have posted the letter. You gave the letter to him about two hours ago and you assume that by now he would have posted the letter."

"What is the meaning of 'germane'?

"It means 'relevant to a subject under discussion'. What you are saying is not germane to what we are discussing. The 'g' is pronounced like the 'g' in 'gentle', 'jger' is pronounced like 'jer' in 'Germany', mane rhymes with 'sane'. The stress is on the second syllable.

Published in The Hindu on July 16, 1996.

Word of the day

Decadent:
luxuriously self-indulgent; marked by excessive self-indulgence and moral decay

Usage: *I spent a decadent day at the spa.*

Pronunciation: newsth.live/decadentpro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /dɛkədənt/

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

India's cough syrup crackdown — what prompted it and what follows

Paediatricians across the country welcome the move to restrict use of a common cold drug combination for children under the age of four, while pharmacists flag confusion over whether prescriptions can be honoured and what should be done with existing stock

Zubeda Hamid

Last month, the Central government restricted the use of a common cold drug combination for children under the age of four, and also asked manufacturers to include a warning on the label, in package insert or the promotional literature of these drugs.

This fixed drug combination (FDC), present in several popular brands of cough syrups for children, consists of chlorpheniramine maleate and phenylephrine hydrochloride. While chlorpheniramine is an antihistamine, used to relieve allergy-like conditions such as a runny nose, watery eyes and sneezing, phenylephrine is a decongestant that works by narrowing small blood vessels, providing temporary relief from inflammation.

In a gazette notification issued on April 15, the Union Ministry of Health stated that this FDC was likely to involve risk to children below four years of age and safer alternatives to this drug are available. The matter was examined by a Subject Expert Committee, following which the restrictions were imposed.



Strict instructions: After restricting the use of a common cold drug combination, the Centre has also directed asked manufacturers to include a warning on the label, in package insert or the promotional literature of these drugs. GETTY IMAGES

Good news for paediatricians

For paediatricians across the country, the ban is a welcome move. Rajath Athreya, lead neonatologist and senior consultant paediatrician at Rainbow Children's Hospital, Sarjapur Road in Bengaluru said the combination of a sedative antihistamine like chlorpheniramine maleate along with phenylephrine was irrational in the first place. "Phenylephrine, which is a decongestant, can also have effects on heart beat and blood pressure. These effects are unpredictable in young children and hence, there has been concern about the use of the drug in this age group," he said.

T.U. Sukumaran, a specialist in paediatric pulmonology and behavioural medicine from Kerala, pointed out that first-generation antihistamines – drugs that block the action of histamines that can cause a fever, itching, runny nose, and watery eyes – such as chlorphenaramine should not be given to children aged less than four in any case, as they could produce complications in this age category.

Explaining further, Vibhu Kawatra, paediatrician, pulmonologist and allergy specialist based in New Delhi said that the main issue with first generation antihistamines is that of respiratory depression and apnoea. Many over-the-counter syrups and drops however, contain chlorpheniramine due to its antihistamine properties as well as its side effect of drowsiness to calm the child, despite the risk of sudden death that could occur with its use. Over a period of time, he said, a newer generation of antihistamines evolved making chlorpheniramine redundant.

Paediatricians pointed out that second-generation antihistamines such as cetirizine and fexofenadine were safer alternatives.

For pharmacists however, some amount of confusion has prevailed over whether or not prescriptions can be honoured and what can be done with existing stock. This was complicated by petitions moved by several pharma companies in the Delhi High Court praying for the quashing of the gazette notification. The court however ruled on April 24 that the restriction would apply prospectively, and not retrospectively, and also directed the pharma companies to issue notices in national newspapers and issue advisories to doctors, chemists and retailers with regard to the ban. However, no coercive action would be taken with respect to the stock manufactured and/or in circulation on or before April 15, the court stated.

B. Thirunavukkarasu, president, Bangalore District Chemists and Druggists Association, raised serious concerns over the communication of the ban to pharmacies, "While we welcome the government's move to protect children's health, the way this ban has been communicated and managed has caused widespread confusion and risk within the pharmaceutical supply chain," he said. Pointing out that there was a lack of formal communication from manufacturers and wholesalers to retailers, Mr. Thirunavukkarasu said retail chemists, who are expected to comply immediately, have not even received circulars from many companies or the State Drugs Controllers' office. As a result, stocks are still available in pharmacies.

"It is the responsibility of manufacturers to collect the banned stock through their medical representatives or to officially instruct their authorised distributors to retrieve the same. Retailers cannot bear the financial or legal brunt for holding stocks they procured legally before the ban," he added.

A.N. Mohan, president, All Kerala Chemists and Druggists Association, however said that chemists have been allowed to sell their existing stock of this FDC, in line with the Delhi High Court judgement. M. Anandan, general secretary of Tamil Nadu Pharmacists Welfare Association, pointed to a wider problem: inadequate drug inspectors to enforce regulations. In T.N., for instance, where there are 90,000 pharmacies, the State has just 200 drug inspectors, he said. He also noted that many pharmacies were not run by qualified pharmacists which contributed to the problem of proper drug dispensation.

Paediatricians said it is important to know what is causing the cough or cold rather than rushing to medicate the child.

Mohandas Nair, professor, department of paediatrics, Government Medical College Hospital, Kozhikode, explained that the most common type of cough in children is associated with viral upper respiratory tract infections that only last for a few days. In such cases, symptomatic treatment was not essential – the FDC would only add to the cost of treatment apart from its undesirable potential side effects, he said.

Other causes of a cough could be: asthma, gastro-oesophageal reflux, or post-nasal drip – secretion in the back of the throat or nose. For asthma, doctors recommend inhaled salbutamol, while occasionally inhalers or nebulisers are prescribed, while for post-nasal drip, proper positioning while sleeping could help. Across the board, doctors say simple home remedies such as warm water and honey can go a long way.

Colds too, could be caused by viral infections, and in most cases, do not require aggressive treatment, they said. As a senior paediatrician in Chennai noted: "The coughing disturbs the parent more than the child. We have tried to reduce prescribing medicines wherever possible." Dr. Kawatra said that parents must also be responsible: they must refrain from buying cough syrups without prescriptions.

Disseminating information

While the restriction has been welcomed, doctors also point to the need for widely disseminating information about it. Madap Karuna, a paediatrician based in Hyderabad said that professional bodies should use their continuing medical education programme platforms to share updated protocols and it was essential for information to be circulated to all associations of doctors and pharmacists. She also noted that there needed to be stringent protocols in place to ensure no banned medications were available in the market at all.

(With inputs from Afshan Yasmeen in Bengaluru, A.S. Jayanth in Kerala, R. Sujatha in Chennai, Bindu Shajan Perappadan in Delhi and Siddharth Kumar Singh in Hyderabad.)
(health@thehindu.co.in)

THE GIST

- A fixed drug combination (FDC), present in several popular brands of cough syrups for children, consists of chlorpheniramine maleate and phenylephrine hydrochloride. The Union Ministry of Health stated that this FDC was likely to involve risk to children below four years of age and restrictions were imposed
- Paediatricians pointed out that second-generation antihistamines such as cetirizine and fexofenadine were safer alternatives. While the restriction has been welcomed, doctors also point to the need for widely disseminating information about it. Pharmacists too raised similar concerns
- Paediatricians said it is important to know what is causing the cough or cold rather than rushing to medicate the child. They advice parents to be responsible and refrain from buying cough syrups without prescriptions

HUMERUS



Raising healthy hearts: reimagining school nutrition to tackle childhood hypertension

Anuja Agarwala

It is easy to think of high blood pressure as something that happens later in life. But in India, that assumption is starting to look dangerously outdated. More and more children are being diagnosed with elevated blood pressure, and many of them do not even know it. It is not until adolescence or adulthood that the signs become too loud to ignore.

The numbers tell a worrying story. The Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey (CNNS) from 2016-18 found that 7.3% of Indian adolescents had hypertensive blood pressure levels. That number climbs to 9.1% in urban areas. Then there is the National Family Health Survey-5 (NFHS-5), which shows that 12% of teens aged 15-19 already have elevated blood pressure. These are not isolated cases. This is a trend. And it points to one very clear takeaway: if we want to tackle hypertension, we have to start early. Really early.

There are a few things feeding into this trend – rising childhood obesity, less physical activity, and a lifestyle that has shifted indoors and online. But if we had to name the biggest culprit, it would probably be the food our children are eating.



Structured food education and balanced menus can transform lunch into a launchpad for lifelong health. FILE PHOTO

Walk into any grocery store or school canteen, and the reality hits you. Processed snacks that promise flavour and convenience in seconds. And they are taking a toll. On average, Indian adolescents are consuming more than 8 grams of salt a day. That is almost double the World Health Organization's recommended limit for adults. Most of it comes from packaged snacks, fast foods, and street-side treats that are heavy on salt and low on nutrition.

Over time, children develop a preference for these hyper-palatable foods, while their tolerance for healthier options drops. They create habits, and those habits are forming early.

India's mid-day meal scheme (PM POSHAN) can become a pathway to break these habits early. As of 2025, the scheme now feeds approximately 120 million children across over 1.27 million schools, making it the largest school meal programme globally.

As the programme scales, there's an opportunity to evolve beyond basic nutrition. Can these meals also be a gateway to healthier food habits and greater food literacy? For many children, these meals are not just their main source of nourishment but also their first exposure to structured eating.

What if the next phase of PM POSHAN combined nutritional targets with efforts to cultivate a more joyful, educational relationship with food? Could we introduce regionally-inspired menus, fresh produce, or even involve students in food preparation and learning?

For inspiration, we can look to Japan, where the concept of *ShoKuiku*, food education, is woven into school life. Children help plan meals, learn where their food comes from, and serve lunch to their classmates. They study nutrition and food origins. It is a simple yet powerful approach, which helps children understand how to make better choices. And the results speak for themselves: lower rates of childhood obesity and a healthier relationship with eating. If Japan seems too far removed from India's realities, consider Vietnam. Their Ministry of Education teamed up with Ajinomoto to improve school lunches by adapting the *ShoKuiku* model in 2012.

We need to bring that same ambition into our schools. We can do this by elevating PM POSHAN scheme into a food-literacy engine, and reshaping habits, palates, and minds.

(Dr. Anuja Agarwala is a senior genetic metabolic nutrition consultant and national vice-president, Indian Dietetic Association
anujaaiims@gmail.com)

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

Text&Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Amount approved to reconstruct fire-gutted shops at Dilli Haat

49.8 In lakh. The reconstruction work, which includes civil and electrical repairs, is expected to be completed within 45 days, they said. On the night of April 30, a major fire broke out at Dilli Haat — one of the national capital's most popular open-air markets. PTI

Number of startups approved for income tax exemption benefits

187 The income tax benefit scheme is designed to support emerging businesses in their formative years, encouraging innovation, job creation, and wealth generation. Over 3,700 startups have been granted exemptions since the scheme's inception. PTI

The drop in U.S. wholesale prices in the month of April

0.5 in per cent. U.S. wholesale prices dropped in April for the first time in more than a year despite President Trump's sweeping taxes on imports. Economists had expected that producer prices will rise modestly in April. A 0.7% drop in services prices brought the index down. AP

Amount approved by Delhi Cabinet for CM Development Fund

1,400 in ₹ crore. The Delhi Cabinet has approved the setting up of a Chief Minister Development Fund (CMDF) with a ₹1,400-crore corpus for 26FY to boost the city's civic infrastructure and public facilities, officials said on Thursday. PTI

Number of training jets Japan grounded after the crash

200 Japan's Air Self-Defence Force has begun emergency inspections of all of its military training aircraft following a crash on Wednesday. The T-4 aircraft crashed into a reservoir in the Aichi prefecture. AP

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

Follow us facebook.com/thehindu twitter.com/the_hindu instagram.com/the_hindu

Does Article 21 include right to digital access?

What approach does the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016 take? Why do banks and other financial and government institutions mandate collecting KYC details? How does the current digital KYC framework exclude visually impaired individuals and acid attack survivors?

EXPLAINER

Kartikey Singh

The story so far:

On April 30, the Supreme Court (SC) directed revisions to Know-Your-Customer (KYC) digital norms to ensure accessibility for 'persons with disabilities' (PwD), reinterpreting Article 21 of the Constitution to encompass the 'right to digital access'.

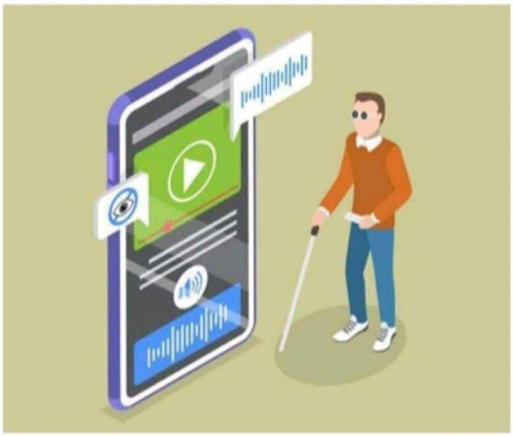
What laws safeguard rights of PwD?

The Constitution, through its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, and Directive Principles, alongside disability statutes, obligates the state to adapt laws, policies, and infrastructure which allow PwDs to exercise their rights on par with others. Advancing these guarantees and giving effect to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), India enacted the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016, which adopted a 'social-barrier' approach that defines disability as arising from impairments, along with physical, mental, intellectual, social, and psycho-social obstacles which make full participation in society difficult.

Crucially, Section 42 of the RPwD Act, 2016, mandates 'government measures' to ensure that all audio, print, and electronic media are accessible; that electronic media includes audio description, sign-language interpretation, and captions; and that everyday electronic goods and equipment follow 'universal-design' principles.

Are KYC details mandatory?

To curb illegal finance and money laundering, the Prevention of Money-laundering Act, 2002 (and its 2005 Rules) mandates every bank and financial institution to verify client identities, maintain comprehensive records, and report relevant information to the Financial Intelligence Unit. Consequently, digital KYC verification has become indispensable for a wide range of essential services – from opening a bank, demat or trading account to accessing SIM cards, pension schemes or insurance policies. It also unlocks government benefits – from national scholarships to Aadhaar-linked 'direct benefit transfers'.



GETTY IMAGES

Building on this mandate, the RBI's 2016 Master Direction on Know Your Customer (KYC) rules prescribe a Customer Due Diligence (CDD) framework and, via Clause 18, introduces Video-based Customer Identification Process (V-CIP), enabling remote customer verification through secure, real-time video interaction. Customers can prove their identity online by clicking a selfie; signing on a paper physically or digitally; printing and rescanning, or clicking a photo of the filled-in form; verifying OTPs in 30 seconds; and reading a random code flashed on the screen.

How does it affect PwDs?

Acid-attack survivors left with permanent 'facial disfigurement' and severe eye burns – and individuals with complete blindness or low vision – have filed writ petitions seeking directions to respondents, including RBI, the Department of Telecommunications and SEBI, to devise alternative digital KYC, e-KYC and video-KYC methods to make remote identity checks inclusive for all PwDs as they face significant hurdles under the current framework.

Currently, each 'regulated entity' has to devise its own tests. Methods such as eye-blinking, reading a flashing code, or writing it down and taking a selfie exclude blind users. Despite clear mandates in the 2021 and 2022 Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Accessibility Standards, most KYC apps and websites flout them – there is no screen-reader prompt for camera alignment, no audio cues for lighting or focus, and no way to differentiate document sides during upload. Additionally, thumb impressions, commonly used by visually impaired users, are not accepted as valid signatures, nor are PAN cards issued with them. Aadhaar-based biometric systems worsen the exclusion. Scanners and interfaces lack basic 'accessibility' features such as 'text-to-speech' or 'self-verification'. As a result, blind applicants are frequently asked to appear in person or are rejected on vague technical grounds. The RBI's Master Directions also bar any form of 'prompting' during KYC verification, leaving users without assistance.

How has the SC intervened?

The SC has consistently held that accessibility for PwDs is a 'constitutional imperative'. In *Rajive Raturi versus Union of India* (2024), it ruled that 'accessibility' is central to the right to life, dignity, and freedom of movement under Article 21. During the COVID-19 vaccination drive, the court emphasised that digital registration must be fully accessible to prevent exclusion. In the instant case, the top court held that 'digital barriers' blatantly violate the rights of PwD under the UNCRPD and India's disability laws. Anchoring its judgment in the principle of 'substantive equality', it directed that digital KYC guidelines be revised with 'accessibility' at their core. It flagged that the digital divide affects not just PwDs, but rural users, senior citizens, the economically disadvantaged, and linguistic minorities.

Relying on Articles 14, 15, 21, and 38, the court affirmed that 'digital access' is inseparable from the 'right to life and liberty'. It mandated the state to ensure that all digital infrastructure is accessible, especially for marginalised communities.

Kartikey Singh is a lawyer based in New Delhi.

THE GIST

- To curb illegal finance and money laundering, the Prevention of Money-laundering Act, 2002 (and its 2005 Rules) mandates every bank and financial institution to verify client identities, maintain comprehensive records, and report relevant information to the Financial Intelligence Unit.
- Methods such as eye-blinking, reading a flashing code, or writing it down and taking a selfie exclude blind users.
- The SC has consistently held that accessibility for PwDs is a 'constitutional imperative'.

Should NOTA be included in all elections compulsorily?

When was NOTA first introduced? What is the Election Commission's position on NOTA?

Sanjay Kumar

The story so far:

Recently, the Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy filed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) for including NOTA as an option compulsorily in every election, even if there is only one single candidate.

When was NOTA introduced?

NOTA or the 'None of the Above' option was introduced in Indian elections for the first time in 2013 on the PIL filed by the People's Union for Civil Liberties which sought a mechanism to "recognise the right of a voter not to vote, but still the secrecy of his having not voted is not maintained in its implementation..."

Is NOTA relevant in Indian elections?

It is true that not many voters have opted for NOTA during the last national election and the other subsequent State-level elections. However, not holding an election in a constituency because there is only one candidate, would mean denying voters the chance of expressing their opinion (through NOTA) against that single candidate who will anyhow get elected unopposed. The Election Commission (EC) has argued against NOTA stating that it has not brought in the desired results as not many voters have opted for NOTA in past elections. But one should not forget that NOTA is a way through which our electoral system can become more responsive to people.

What is the EC's argument?

The EC is completely opposed to the idea of making NOTA a compulsory option in all constituencies even if there is only one candidate contesting the election. The Election Commission presented data that in all the Lok Sabha elections held since 1971, there have been only six uncontested elections. Another data point cited by the EC was that since 1952, there have been only nine cases of candidates getting elected unopposed. The EC's lawyer said that, "the chance of election being uncontested has become a rarity which is also proven by statistical data; hence Supreme Court should not even entertain such a PIL". They went on to argue that "treating NOTA as mandatorily contesting candidate in all direct uncontested elections does not find a place in the statues and same would require legislative amendments in the provisions of Representation of the People Act 1951, and the conduct of Election Rules 1961".

Since it is such a rarity, the EC should not have its hands full. If the EC can conduct elections in such a large number of constituencies given its resources, holding elections in constituencies, with a NOTA option, even if there is only one candidate, should not amount to a lot of additional work.

Are NOTA voters a minority?

It is true that looking in terms of per cent only little more than 1% of voters, voted for NOTA in the three Lok Sabha elections (2014, 2019 and 2024) held since NOTA was introduced. But given the size of the electorate in one Parliamentary constituency, each having on an average about 25 lakh voters, even these numbers are not small. There are many State assembly elections where little more than 1% opted for NOTA over the last decade, the highest being in Bihar with 2.48% during the 2015 Assembly election, followed by Gujarat with 1.8% during the 2017 Assembly elections. If one looks at the NOTA votes over the years in different States, one sees that it was slightly higher in the very first election held in the State after NOTA was introduced but declined in subsequent elections, although the trend is not linear.

What next?

Some reforms are needed. One can be by fixing the minimum per cent of votes to be polled by the candidate as a benchmark for getting elected depending upon the size of the constituency. The other method could be by giving legitimacy to NOTA votes and voters, by making a provision for re-election if certain percentage of voters opt for NOTA in an election.

Sanjay Kumar is Professor and Co-director Lokniti-CSDS.

THE GIST

- NOTA or the 'None of the Above' option was introduced in Indian elections for the first time in 2013.
- The EC is completely opposed to the idea of making NOTA a compulsory option in all constituencies even if there is only one candidate contesting the election.
- It is true that looking in terms of per cent only little more than 1% of voters, voted for NOTA in the three Lok Sabha elections (2014, 2019 and 2024) held since NOTA was introduced.

Is Bihar's high replacement rate a consequence of poverty?

PARLEY



Saswata Ghosh
Associate Professor at the Institute of Development Studies, Kolkata



Prasenjit Bose
Economist and activist

According to the Sample Registration System report for 2021 released by the Registrar General of India on May 7, the Total Fertility Rate (TFR), which is the average number of children that a woman is expected to have in her childbearing years, in India was 2.0 in 2021, the same as in 2020. While Delhi and West Bengal reported the lowest TFR of 1.4, Bihar reported the highest at 3.0. Is Bihar's high replacement rate a consequence of poverty? Saswata Ghosh and Prasenjit Bose discuss the question in a conversation moderated by **Shiv Sahay Singh**. Edited excerpts:

What does a TFR rate of 3.0 mean for Bihar? Does it have any association with poverty?

Saswata Ghosh: The TFR has hovered around 3.0 for the last 6-7 years in Bihar. According to the Expert Committee on Population Projection, Bihar will achieve the replacement level of fertility (2.1) only in in 2039. Bihar is the only laggard State in terms of the fertility transition.

Bihar's infant mortality rate has actually declined and stands at 27 per 1,000 live births from 42 in the past. Other indicators such as women's educational attainment have improved as well, but the State's TFR remains high. High TFR has some linkage with poverty. But poverty is not the only reason for it. In Bihar, there is a culture of high fertility. As per calculations made of unique level data of the National Family Health Survey of 2019-21, across the country, 67% of women said that the ideal number of children for them is two, whereas in Bihar, only 49.6% of women said so.

There are a number of government reports, including NITI Aayog's Multidimensional Poverty Index, which state that poverty in Bihar is also declining. But despite the improvement in the poverty rate, the fertility rate in Bihar continues to be high.

Prasenjit Bose: These are complex socio-economic questions and the multi-dimensional poverty estimates themselves are far from perfect. I agree with Saswata that cultural factors have an important causality in determining fertility rates. But I would also like to add that there are other economic factors in terms of urbanisation, employment opportunities, and livelihood opportunities, which are not really captured by the MDP (multidimensional poverty) estimates. Therefore, I would not read much into this divergence between TFR and MDP. It could be over simplistic in understanding a complex phenomenon. Ultimately both the estimates are moving in the same direction – poverty is coming down and so is the TFR.



A woman with her children in Patna. RANJEET KUMAR

The SRS figures make a distinction between urban and rural TFR. Across the country, the urban TFR is 1.6 and the rural TFR is 2.2. Is there a wide gap between the TFR in the urban areas of Bihar, which stands at 2.3, and in the rural areas, pegged at 3.1?

SG: If we see the gap between the TFR of rural areas and urban areas across the country, it is 0.6 percentage points, whereas in Bihar, the gap is 0.8 points. There isn't a big difference between 0.6 and 0.8. But what is startling is that the all-India urban TFR is 1.6, while in Bihar it is 2.3. That is puzzling. Why is the TFR so high in urban areas, where the affluent and educated sections of society live? Why is it above the replacement level of fertility?

The demographer Ansley J. Coale had said that human fertility behaviour is a 'calculus of conscious choice'. So if the fertility rate is higher than elsewhere, it is because of the conscious choice of the people. Even if the infant mortality rate has declined and there is higher use of contraception, if the fertility in urban areas continues to remain high, it is a conscious choice. Until and unless the people think that low fertility size is actually beneficial for them, the TFR will continue to be high in Bihar.

Do factors such as a preference for sons, the State being primarily an agricultural economy, and having a relatively small female workforce affect the TFR?

PB: Yes, significantly. In fact, poverty and lack of livelihood and income opportunities have a huge impact on cultural choices, including the number of children people have. Poor people tend to have a cultural preference not only for sons, but for more children. They want more labour, which will lead to more income. Poverty has been the reason why the fertility rate has historically been high everywhere. Cultural choices are intricately linked to the process of social and economic development. But in the case of Bihar, I would specifically point to a few economic factors. Despite being large, Bihar is among the least industrialised States. There is surplus labour and migration, which are related to the question of very high degrees of illiteracy and a dysfunctional primary education system.

> Poverty and lack of livelihood and income opportunities have a huge impact on cultural choices, including the number of children people have. Poor people tend to have a cultural preference not only for sons, but for more children. They want more labour, which will lead to more income.
>
> PRASENJIT BOSE

The literacy rate in Bihar, particularly the female literacy rate, remains low. In the 2011 Census, female literacy was about 53%. Is there a direct correlation between female literacy and TFR or fertility?

SG: Chief Minister Nitish Kumar has consistently pointed out that if we educate women, the fertility rate will go down. He has announced many schemes for girl students, including providing bicycles for them. There is a positive correlation not only between education and TFR, but also between household affluence and higher educational attainment. Upper caste and somewhat affluent households generally send at least one son for higher education to better off regions. However, in affluent and landed households in rural areas, the parents prefer at least one son to stay back with them to take care of their property and support them. So, families ideally prefer two sons. If we look at the data more carefully, we will find that among those who say the ideal number of children is three, 88.2% want two sons. However, since the probability of having two sons successively is only about 26.4% according to a paper by Clark in 2000, a significant share of families ultimately end up with a large family size.

Professor Ghosh, in one of your papers, you had pointed out how mother-in-laws act as mediators between women of reproductive age and ASHA workers who visit them during pregnancy. Can you shed more light on this?

SG: Women are getting educated more and more. Several programmes in this regard are being implemented by the State government. Many of these women are first-generation learners. But they have low employability and their exposure to the outside world is limited. They have lower bargaining power and autonomy in the family, and social mobility. In our study, based on a primary survey of 2,250 women in six districts in Bihar, we found that women in the reproductive age group of 15-49 years were not allowed to directly interact with ASHA workers. These interactions were restricted by their mother-in-laws.

We have empirical evidence now that certain States in the north have a high fertility rate while the fertility rate is declining in the south. Where does this lead us to, particularly in the political context, with the question of delimitation looming large?

PB: I don't think that this problem should be discussed only in the context of Bihar, but also other States in what we call the Hindi heartland – Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan. These States now account for a disproportionately large share of the country's overall population. We have a system of representative democracy where 'one person, one vote, one value' is a basic principle. As the delimitation debate opens up, which is likely to happen only after the next Census, we will come across a hugely disproportionate size of parliamentary and Assembly constituencies across the north and the south. We will come across parliamentary constituencies in States with a high TFR with a disproportionately large number of people (25 lakh to 30 lakh voters) being represented by a single MP, whereas the case will be different in States where the TFR is already low or is showing a falling trend. The question is whether they (the States with low/declining TFR) are going to pay the price for bringing down the TFR rate. Will they get rewarded or punished for social and economic progress and policy successes? Because the allocation of resources by the Finance Commission is based on the population size. The onus is on policymakers to bring about some course correction and bring in a convergent trend. If the divergent trend (between States with a high TFR and low TFR) continues, we are looking at a disaster which could pose serious questions for our democracy.

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

NOTEBOOK

Farewell, Justice Khanna

A quiet man at work, Justice Sanjiv Khanna did not want a voice separate from the institution

Krishnadas Rajagopal

Days before Justice Sanjiv Khanna was to be sworn in as the 51st Chief Justice of India (CJI), reporters as usual began scrambling for an exclusive interview with him. Calls and texts to his staff were met with silence or a non-committal "will let you know".

It was strange – the man who was then serving as the top judge made news almost everyday. Justice D.Y. Chandrachud was articulate, suave, and charismatic. A reporter who attended a blood donation camp recounted how he spoke for 10 minutes on the subject. He even sang Christmas carols on camera at an event in the Supreme Court. During his tenure, Aamir Khan and other film personalities attended Court. Judges from other countries visited to watch the Supreme Court in action. The Court felt truly global, and it basked in the attention.

This changed on November 11, 2024, when Justice Khanna was sworn in as the 51st CJI in a short ceremony. He took oath, signed the order, acknowledged the distinguished audience at the Rashtrapati Bhavan with folded hands, and went back to his seat with hardly a smile.

At 11 a.m., the Court was back to work. A sobriety had descended on the courtroom. Chief Justice Khanna hardly spoke, except for an occasional "no, no, no" to a lawyer whose submissions he disagreed with. In the evening, I made a last-ditch, though-half hearted, effort to get an interview, worried that a worthier journalist may have already got it. Instead, there was a surprise. There came an official statement from the Supreme Court – the institution, not the man helming it – about the judiciary's commitment and responsibility as "protectors of citizens' rights and dispute resolvers". Chief Justice Khanna did not want a voice separate from the institution.

In the following months, it became clear that he was a quiet man at work. He seemed to like being missed in the crowd, though his constitutional position thrust him into the public glare. When he spoke in Court, the comment would be brief yet send a ripple. During the Waqf hearing, he told the government side that judges lose their religion when they sit on the Bench. With a few words, he made sure that communal violence did not return to Sambhal. He stopped civil courts from passing orders on suits bent on "reclaiming" temples destroyed by Mughal "invaders" in the 16th century. Lawyers who came ill-prepared were not admonished; they were told gently to prepare better next time. Public interest petitions were distributed among the Benches. Collegiality among the judges was apparent – the judges took a work holiday together.

A crisis loomed when a High Court judge was reported to have made communal remarks. The judge was called by the Collegium and asked to apologise at a public forum. A fire in another High Court judge's official residence led to the discovery of "sacks" of half-burnt currency. Accusations of corruption and lack of transparency in the judiciary gathered momentum. Chief Justice Khanna responded by publishing the preliminary inquiry report on the Supreme Court website, complete with photographs and a video. An in-house inquiry was held. The report remained confidential, but a statement was issued that he had forwarded it to the President and the Prime Minister for action. This was followed by a Full Court decision to disclose the assets of Supreme Court judges on the official website. The list of candidates recommended by the Supreme Court Collegium was also published along with a document detailing the judicial appointments process.

On his last working day, Chief Justice Khanna was invited to share a cup of tea with journalists at the press lounge. A reporter asked him whether the legacy of his illustrious uncle, Justice H.R. Khanna, popularly described as the "best Chief Justice India never had", weighed on him. Pausing for a moment, he shrugged and said, "We cannot compare like that". Retirement, he said, was not bittersweet for him. He was "simply happy".

krishnadas.rajagopal@thehindu.co.in

PICTURE OF THE WEEK

Fishing in choppy waters



Fisherfolk make most of the pre-monsoon conditions at Shangumugham beach in Thiruvananthapuram on Wednesday. The Southwest monsoon has advanced into some parts of the south Bay of Bengal, the south Andaman Sea, Nicobar Islands, and parts of the north Andaman Sea, said the India Meteorological Department. NIRMAL HARINDRAN

FROM THE ARCHIVES — The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO MAY 16, 1975

U.S. recovers ship, crew after naval-land-air operation

Washington, May 15: The United States' forces recovered the American freighter Mayaguez and its 40 crewmen to-day after an attack on Cambodian gunboats in the Gulf of Thailand, a landing on an offshore island and air attacks on airfields on the Cambodian coast. Defence sources said two U.S. Marines were killed and eight others wounded in the attack on Koh Tang island, where the ship was anchored.

Three U.S. helicopters were shot down, while a U.S. strike force wiped out 17 planes on the Cambodian mainland in a covering operation.

The U.S. President, Mr. Gerald Ford, who ordered the attack, gave a one-minute nationally televised and broadcast speech declaring the air-naval-land operation a success.

All U.S. Marines who took part in the operation were evacuated from Koh Tang island. A Defence Department spokesman, Mr. Laitin, said that "heavy and intermittent" small arms fire by the Khmer Rouge had delayed the evacuation of the Marine landing force.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MAY 16, 1925

Indian coal committee

Calcutta, May 15: The Indian Coal Committee was appointed to inquire and report generally on "what measures can be taken by the Government, the coal trade, the Railways and the Ports whether singly or in combination to stimulate the export of suitable coal from Calcutta to the Indian and foreign ports – and in particular whether effective measures can be taken for the pooling and grading of Indian coal for export and for bunkering and how the cost of such measures must be met".

Under control

Low retail inflation is good news for consumers and policymakers

April's 69-month low retail inflation and 13-month low wholesale inflation should come as a relief to the public and policymakers alike. For the public, it shows that the easing of prices in the first few months of the year is continuing. For policymakers, it goes a step further in confirming that last year's alarming levels of inflation are well and truly under control, and that the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) was right to cut interest rates twice in a row. The fall in retail inflation was driven by a contraction of nearly 11% in vegetable prices, and 5.2% in the price of pulses. However, it is important to note that although vegetable prices are lower than last year, this contraction is mainly due to a very high base – vegetable inflation was in the 27%-30% range in the February-April period of last year. Inflation at the wholesale level, too, was driven down by easing vegetable prices, which contracted 18.26% in April. This, too, was on a relatively high base of nearly 12% last April. The base effect aside, it does look like the government's efforts to bolster buffer stocks of essential food items, conduct open market releases, and ease imports during supply shortages have helped in easing inflation. The other – less positive – factor could have been the liquidity crunch that banks were facing in the first few months of the year. Lower liquidity results in lower amounts left to lend, which squeezes money with companies and the public, and thus can lower inflation. As things stand, even though retail inflation has been decreasing for six consecutive months, its trajectory for the rest of the year will significantly be determined by the monsoon and its vagaries. Similarly, the ongoing tariff uncertainty and threats of retaliation by India will also play a part.

The latest inflation data does have some policy implications. The first and most obvious one is that it will likely encourage the RBI's Monetary Policy Committee to cut interest rates again in June. However, an important consideration for it will also be how the latest GDP growth data – to be released this month end – will look. The other, more immediate step for public sector oil marketing companies is to finally cut fuel prices in line with crude oil inflation in the WPI coming in at a 22-month low. If not, then the government should officially abandon its dynamic pricing policy, where prices are supposedly revised daily. That fuel prices have been virtually unchanged in three years, despite oil prices falling 42% over the period, means the policy is a sham in any case.

New beginning

Syria should dismantle armed groups and adopt inclusive constitution

Until six months ago, Abu Mohammad al-Jolani was a specially designated global terrorist, with a $10 million bounty fixed on his head by the U.S. government. A native of Syria's Golan Heights and a former member of al-Qaeda in Iraq, one of the group's most brutal branches, Jolani founded Jabhat al-Nusra, the al-Qaeda's Syria affiliate, in 2012, during the early stages of the civil war. Thirteen years later, on May 14, Jolani – now known as Ahmed al-Sharaa – met with U.S. President Donald Trump in Riyadh. Mr. Trump, who earlier in the week lifted America's decades-long sanctions on Syria, praised Mr. Sharaa, saying he was "a tough guy. Strong past... Fighter". The meeting was a diplomatic victory for Mr. Sharaa, whose Islamist Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) captured Damascus in December 2024 by toppling the secular dictatorship of President Bashar al-Assad. Mr. Sharaa met Qatar's Emir in Doha in April, seeking support for his fledgling Islamist regime. He enjoys the strong backing of Türkiye. He was welcomed by French President Emmanuel Macron earlier this month at the Élysée Palace in Paris. And in Riyadh, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman played a key role in facilitating his meeting with Mr. Trump. With regional and international recognition, Ahmed al-Sharaa appears poised to shape Syria's present and future.

The lifting of American sanctions opens the door for Syria to join the global economic mainstream and attract foreign investments. Mr. Sharaa has already invited American companies to invest in Syria's oil and gas. Money could flow from wealthy Arab monarchies to war-torn Syria for reconstruction and other business opportunities. But one question remains: what kind of Syria are Mr. Sharaa and his fellow Islamists planning to build? Mr. Sharaa has promised to uphold the rule of law, respect women's rights and protect religious and ethnic minorities. Yet, ever since the HTS captured power, Syria has seen instances of targeted violence against minority communities. In March, hundreds of Alawites, the sect to which ousted President Assad belongs, were killed by Islamist gunmen in the coastal Latakia region. Sectarian tensions remain high in central Syria, where targeted killings and abductions are frequently reported. In recent weeks, Syria's Druze minority has come under sustained attacks, with community leaders describing the violence as a "genocidal campaign". The Kurds in the northeast have called for a decentralised, democratic Syria, firmly opposing the HTS's centralised style of governance. The removal of sanctions and international recognition present a historic opportunity for Mr. Sharaa to steer Syria toward recovery and prosperity. But to that end, he must first stabilise the country internally, dismantle extremist armed groups and adopt an inclusive constitution that guarantees the rights of all citizens. If not, Syria risks following the path of Libya or Afghanistan.

The paradox of the approach to the Manipur issue



Kham Khan Suan Hausing

is a Professor and former Head of the Department of Political Science, University of Hyderabad. He is also an Honorary Senior Fellow, Centre for Multilevel Federalism, Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi

As the stalemated conflict in Manipur completes two years, the veritable wait for the Godot of political settlement continues to remain elusive. Despite unleashing a trail of devastation, the loss of over 250 lives and an unfolding human tragedy which compelled thousands of internally displaced persons to live in sub-human makeshift relief centres for over two years, Manipur's violence has not secured a high-order-of-national-priority. This is gallingly evident as Prime Minister Narendra Modi maintains his stoic refusal to visit the State and offer a definitive road map to break the impasse. This compares starkly with the topmost-priority accorded by him to the Pahalgam terror strike on April 22, which led to the curtailment of his official visit to Saudi Arabia and the announcement of policy measures.

The very short military stand-off between India and Pakistan and the swift response made eminent sense given the overwhelming and dominant mood of the nation that something decisive had to be done not only to decimate terrorist infrastructure across the Line of Control, but also penalise Pakistan for its alleged sponsorship of cross-border terrorism. As the stand-off and the terms of the understanding/ceasefire likely to be agreed upon by the two nuclear powers continue to take centre-stage, it is highly unlikely that Manipur's continuing human tragedy and political impasse will get the serious attention it deserves.

The approach to the northeast

What explains this paradox? And in what way does this follow a broader pattern of New Delhi's engagement with Manipur, and, by extension, Northeast India?

A clue lies in making a long-term assessment of New Delhi's approach to the Northeast, and for that matter Manipur, which is underscored by its obsession with national security and regime consolidation. Unlike Kashmir, which is the focus in a series of triangular conflicts with Pakistan and China, Manipur's case does not present an imminent threat to India's national security despite concerted efforts over the past two years to make this as such. Although both of India's adversaries were involved in the training of armed independentist groups such as the Naga National Council and its progeny, the NSCN-IM, the Mizo National Front, the United Liberation Front of Assam, and the United National Liberation Front, in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, their support to these groups remains remote and diminished.

However, because the policy mandarins in Delhi best understand the language of national security, concerted attempts had been made by certain quarters of valley-based civil society groups and self-professed national security experts to squarely blame Manipur's violence on 'lungi-clad' Kuki armed militants across the India-Myanmar border. A case in point is the failed attempt to amplify this threat by the then Chief Minister's office in mid-September 2024 by invoking credible 'intelligent inputs' which forewarned imminent crossover and attack by over '900 Kuki militants' based in Myanmar with the capabilities to launch rocket launchers against Meitei villages. On hindsight, this security bluster was a half-clever ploy to whip up a majoritarian sense of insecurity and used that as a pretext to prepare the grounds for a series of offensive strikes against Kuki-Zomi-Hmar villages beyond the 'buffer zone' on the pretext of combing operations.

The stance on what is also a national security issue is problematic

Interestingly, the protagonists of national security remain conspicuously muted on the more serious threat posed by the large-scale mobilisation of valley-based insurgent groups, or VBIGs and their foot soldiers in the wake of this violence since May 3, 2023. One immediate consequence of this is the outsourcing of law and order to these groups on the pretext that the State fails to protect villages which remained exposed to transgressions and offensive attacks across the buffer zone. This zone, ideated and enforced by the Indian paramilitary forces after Home Minister Amit Shah visited the State towards the end of May 2023, lies in the foothills and marks the point of territorial and demographic separation between the Meiteis and Kuki-Zomi-Hmars.

Such a problematic stance on a national security issue has also effectively neutralised the security gains obtained by India since it successfully flushed out VBIGs from their safe havens in the valley areas in Operation All-Clear (2004). Instead of prioritising substantive security issues such as an upscaling of intelligence-gathering capabilities, counterinsurgency skills, modernisation and professionalisation of the Indian Army and police, the Indian security policy continues to be stuck in a time-warp of political optics.

The case of fencing as an obsolete outlook

The unusual zeal with which New Delhi pushes the agenda of revoking the free movement regime and spending over ₹31,000 crore for fencing the 1,643 kilometre India-Myanmar border, including the 398 kilometre-long Manipur-Myanmar border, is clearly an instance of an obsolete security overdrive. While this may simultaneously cater to the perceived sense of insecurity whipped up by majoritarian groups based in the valley and eminently suit the pork-barrel brand of politics with promissory collateral benefits to contractors and brokers, the lines of divide are clearly apparent as the Naga, and Mizo, among others, have registered their staunch opposition. Unless such a policy framework is tailored to win the hearts and the minds of transborder people – which seems to be the case here – it is neither likely to augment India's national security nor promote India's neighbourhood first policy via the Act East policy across the India-Myanmar border and beyond.

Unfortunately, a longitudinal assessment of India's national security policy framework across political regimes demonstrates that it is driven more by political optics in ways which help consolidate political regimes, rather than being hard-wired in upskilling security infrastructure. This explains why beyond the public spectacle of holding piecemeal arms surrender events, no sincere effort is made to recover sophisticated arms (numbering over 6,000) and ammunition (numbering over 5,00,000) given away to armed groups since the outbreak of violence. Notwithstanding this, barely around 4,000 of the 6,020 arms snatched away from the State armouries have so far been deposited in response to the State government's call. Interestingly, 894 of these were deposited in response to two deadlines – announced by Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla, on February 28, which was extended to March 6, 2025.

The self-congratulatory and nonchalant way in which voluntary arms surrender was pressed for political optics became evident on February 27, a day before the first dateline, when a cavalcade of the Arambai Tenggol, an armed militia accused of perpetrating atrocities against several Kuki-Zomi-Hmar villages, marched across the streets and surrendered 246 weapons at a police station in Imphal. Even though many of these so-called surrendered arms are country-made guns, there is neither a persistent follow-up action after the second deadline passed on March 6, nor any serious attempt to nab and prosecute defaulting individuals under the Arms Act.

An incremental approach such as this may be the key to gradually stabilising law and order. However, the easy and abundant availability of arms and ammunition in the hands of armed groups in the State is likely to perpetuate the ethnic security dilemma even as there is no sustained and credible security guarantee from the State. The reluctant imposition of President's Rule on February 13, 2025 as a convenient escape route to an imminent and inglorious fall of the Bharatiya Janata Party government, after an open revolt within its ranks, and the change of political guard in the State seems to have signalled a subtle, yet stern, message to armed groups across the divide that violence is not going to be tolerated.

Looking ahead

A halting, yet incremental return to normalcy may, however, impel serious political engagements with rival stakeholders in ways that simultaneously accommodate legitimate demands and promote trust and legitimacy to state institutions. As rival parties respectively commemorated May 3 as 'separation day' and a 'day of remembrance and reflection' to push their divergent political agendas, breaking the political impasse and stabilising law and order require substantive policy reorientations that transcend political optics and regime consolidation.

The views expressed are personal

The yearly 'thank you' to nurses is not enough



Meena Putturaj

is an Assistant Professor, DBT/Wellcome Trust India Alliance Fellow at the Institute of Public Health Bengaluru

May 12 has passed, an annual day where we honour Florence Nightingale and celebrate the unsung heroes of health care – nurses. We praised nurses on this day (International Nurses Day), but the urgency to truly empower the stars of our health-care system quickly fades.

Nursing beyond tradition

Nurses and midwives form nearly 47% of India's total health workforce, yet remain under-represented in leadership, policymaking, and autonomous clinical roles. The perception of nurses as being mere assistants to doctors still prevails, limiting their potential, despite global trends that prove otherwise. The role of Nurse Practitioners (NPs) as independent, advanced care providers capable of addressing health-care gaps has been embraced in Australia, Botswana, Brazil, South Africa, Thailand, the United Kingdom, the United States and Zambia.

NPs are advanced practice registered nurses (such as clinical nurse specialists, certified nurse midwives and certified registered nurse anaesthetists) with specialised training, usually at the master's level. They are certified to diagnose, treat, and prescribe independently in many settings. India has recognised the need for NPs, particularly to expand health-care access in underserved areas. The National Health Policy 2017 has acknowledged that mid-level providers, including NPs, are crucial to primary care. Despite the Indian Nursing Council (INC) initiating structured NP programmes, notably the Nurse Practitioner in Critical Care (NPCC) in 2017 and also the Nurse Practitioner in Primary Health Care (NPPHC), integration remains slow. Initiatives such as the NP in Midwifery programme (2002) in West Bengal and similar efforts in Telangana and Kerala have struggled in the absence of a clear legal framework, defined roles and protected titles. Although some institutions have developed in-house training for extended roles (stoma nurses, diabetes educators, stroke nurses), these positions lack regulatory backing and national recognition.

More needs to be done in India's health system so that nurses are seen not only as caregivers but also as leaders

India's NP education programmes are designed to focus on advanced clinical skills, diagnosis, treatment, limited prescribing authority, and community engagement. However, there are challenges, a key barrier being the absence of a clear legal framework defining the NP scope of practice, including prescriptive rights. Resistance within some in the medical community, driven by fear of losing power, complicates integration. The curriculum emphasises clinical skills but leaves regulatory frameworks, licensure clarity, and career pathways murky. Who will licence NPs? Will they be recognised legally? Will they be absorbed into public systems or left out? This ambiguity is not just administrative, but is also existential for nurses.

Lessons from Australia

The NP movement in Australia is instructive, having begun with a clear goal to improve access in underserved areas and provide clinical autonomy to qualified nurses. But what made it work was more than just policy; it was politics. Nursing movements were part of the policy dialogues. Legislation protected the NP title. Licensure was formalised. Career ladders were created. Importantly, nurse-led models such as walk-in centres demonstrated that care does not always need a physician's stamp to be effective, safe, and appreciated.

Resistance to nurse autonomy in India stems not only from policy gaps but from entrenched cultural, gender, and hierarchical biases that position nurses, predominantly women, as subordinates to doctors. This mindset influences policy decisions, including opposition to NP roles by the medical community, despite global evidence of their effectiveness. There is also a crisis in the nursing education sector due to lax regulation and corruption. Although the National Nursing and Midwifery Commission Act, 2023, signals reform, its real impact remains uncertain. Compounding these challenges is the lack of strong, unified nursing movements, limiting the profession's power to engage in policy processes.

Let nurses lead

NPs are formally recognised in a number of high-income, low- and middle-income countries. Ironically, while Indian nurses excel abroad in NP roles, their potential remains untapped at home. Evidence shows NP-led care matches those with physician outcomes, with high patient satisfaction and lower costs. For India, adopting a collaborative, team-based care model, where nurses practise to their full scope, is progressive and essential to delivering equitable and quality health care.

Realising NP roles in India demands urgent reforms in nursing education, regulation and nursing leadership. This includes closing substandard colleges, enhancing faculty competency, bridging the theory-practice gap, and integrating ethics and leadership, and policy engagement components into nursing curricula. Legal recognition of NPs, with defined licensure and accountability, is crucial. Clear career pathways, fair pay and advancement opportunities must replace the stagnation in nursing roles. Addressing the gender-based undervaluation of nursing is also essential. Critically, nurses must lead nursing reforms through sustained policy engagement. Given their lived experiences, nurses are uniquely positioned to advocate change and challenge medical hierarchy. To achieve this, grassroots nursing movements that are bolstered by strategic alliances and driven by courage, commitment, and the capacity to speak truth to power are needed.

A yearly "thank you" is not enough. India needs a health system that sees nurses not just as caregivers but also as leaders. Honouring them means confronting hard truths about power and privilege.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Tasteless remarks

Of late it has become a 'new normal' in the nation, where political figures, under the cover of free speech, voice disgraceful comments, backtrack and tender an apology after the eruption of public outrage. It is time that there are strong measures put in place to act against such statements and persons. Irresponsible comments directed against our security forces who sacrifice much to ensure our safety and well being must be acted against.

S. Seshadri,
Chennai

Mission completed

People tend to glorify war without fully understanding what war hysteria conceals. Conflict escalation reflects a jingoistic mindset. India's 'Operation Sindoor' has delivered a strong message to the neighbour. A full-fledged war would only result in irreparable damage.

Apoorva Tomar,
Dehradun

Gulf trip, Gaza's plight

U.S. President Donald Trump is on a whirlwind tour in the Gulf, clinching, striking and hunting for business deals worth billions of dollars. Meanwhile, a precisely executed agenda of genocide is taking place in Gaza. But who has the time and the inclination to care for this mammoth tragedy?

C.G. Kuriakose,
Kothamangalam, Kerala

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

DELHI
businessline.
FRIDAY - MAY 16 - 2025

thehindu businessline.
FRIDAY - MAY 16, 2025

Strange brew

UK-India FTA raises a cocktail of questions

The India-UK free trade agreement, arrived at after three years of talks, comes at a time of great churn in the global trade order. The concessions made by India to the UK are likely to set the base for its trade talks with the US, the EU and others. Therefore, the terms of this FTA assume importance, even though the trade volumes involved are small.

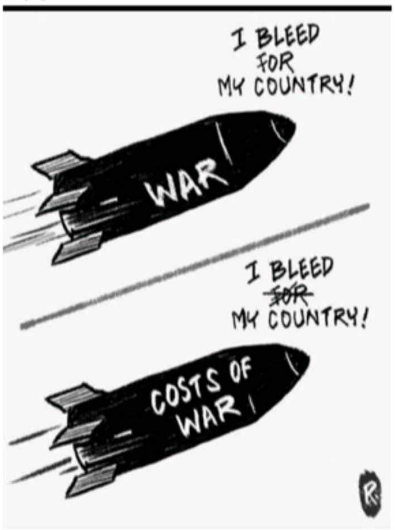
Here, the goods side looks adverse for India, but not the services side. India might have secured some market access in textiles, footwear, seafood and fruit (where duty cuts are significant), but the grand-sounding tariff reduction by the UK on 99 per cent of tariff lines covering almost all of India's exports is not as great as it seems. This is because, according to analysts, of the $13.5 billion goods exports to the UK (in 2024), $7.5 billion comprises items that were zero-rated, anyway (medicines and petroleum). India's goods trade surplus of $5 billion and an equally large one in services (on exports of $18.4 billion in 2024) is slated to fall over time, according to the UK government's 'technical note' on the deal. But bilateral trade deficits alone cannot tell us whether a deal is working for India or not, as there could be larger positive economic fallouts.

Amidst controversy, India has agreed to a phased reduction in car import duty from 100 per cent to 10 per cent, with a quota in place. While it is true that the auto sector contributes a third of manufacturing GDP, it is unlikely that high-end British cars will upset the industry too much. In a future trade deal, auto sector (now mature and confident) and professional services may well be used as bargaining chips to secure access in other sectors or to protect sensitive ones such as dairy. The same holds true for 'beverages', such as whisky and gin. As for gains in services, Indian service providers who are temporarily in the UK and their employers need not pay social security contributions for three years after the FTA comes into force. Easier mobility has been promised for corporate and independent professionals. There have been "significant commitments" secured in digitally delivered services.

India has a basic problem in structuring any trade deal. Since its simple average tariffs at about 17 per cent are generally much higher than its counterpart (in the UK's case it is less than 4 per cent), a sudden drop in tariffs to zero implies a sharper concession to the other side, with consequences for jobs and output. This strengthens the case for protecting sensitive sectors. The decision to allow UK participation in government procurement (12-15 per cent of GDP) may infuse competition and technology, but MSMEs should not be denied opportunities to participate. Government procurement was opened up with the UAE FTA, raising some valid concerns. It would now be hard for India not to offer this space in other FTAs. India should proceed cautiously on 'TRIPS plus' provisions in future talks while keeping its red lines intact. It is, after all, offering its immense market, and should not be chary of putting a price tag on it.

POCKET

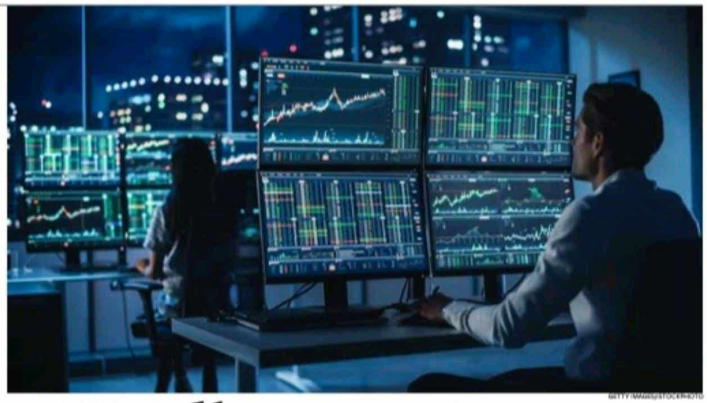
RAVIKANTH



POINT BLANK.



LOKESHWARRI SK



GETTY IMAGES/STOCKBYTE

Needless worry over retail investors in F&O

Only 9 per cent of investors are trading in F&O and they form less than 1 per cent of working age population

How do you visualise a typical trader in equity futures and options segment? If you thought he was a geek sitting in front of a laptop full of numbers and charts, putting through trades in a nervous frenzy, you would be wrong.

A report put out by SEBI helps us etch a more accurate profile of the supposedly hapless individual traders who are burning money in the equity derivative market and need to be protected from the sharks.

The typical trader is more likely to be male, since only 14 per cent of these traders are women. He could be staying in a smaller city such as Bhiwandi or Tirunelveli or Bhilai. The study shows that 72 per cent of F&O traders come from beyond the top 30 cities. He is likely to be punching trades on his smartphone, while working in his shop or while watching a movie or hanging out with friends.

Most of these traders do not have much capital to burn. Around 75 per cent of the individuals trading in stock derivatives had income of less than ₹5 lakh. This could imply that many traders used derivative trading to supplement their existing stream of income. Four out of ten traders were quite young, less than 30 years old.

Given This background, why is SEBI worried about individual investors in F&O?

WHY IS SEBI WORRIED?

The stock market regulator is taking its primary objective, "to protect the interests of investors in the securities market", rather too seriously. It has concluded that derivative trading is harmful for the finances of small investors, and they need to be kept away from here. This conclusion was reached based on studies done by SEBI. One such study revealed that between FY22 and FY24, 1.13 crore unique individual traders had incurred net loss (including transaction costs) of ₹1.81 lakh crore in F&O. Around 93 per cent of individual traders had made an average loss of ₹2 lakh per person in the three years.

Individual investors entering the stock market have been the counterparty to large brokers and foreign portfolio investors who made big bucks in This period. The SEBI study shows that proprietary traders (brokers trading on their own account) recorded profits of ₹33,000 crore in FY24. They were followed by foreign portfolio investors who recorded profits of ₹28,000 crore. While NRIs and PMS schemes also incurred losses in FY24, individuals made the largest loss of ₹41,500 crore.

NOT SUBSTANTIAL ENOUGH

Despite these numbers, there is a strong case for SEBI to not spend too much time worrying about individual investors in F&O.

One, the total number of retail traders in F&O is not significant enough to warrant so much alarm. There were 96 lakh individuals in equity derivatives in FY24, according to SEBI. The number of total unique registered investors on the NSE, including cash and derivative segment, was 10.9 crore as of December 2024. The numbers suggest that only 9 per cent of the total investor pool is dabbling in futures and options and 91 per cent are participating in the cash segment only. Most of the investors in the cash segment are long term investors.

Two, if we consider the number of derivative traders as a proportion of total population in the working age, they account for less than one per cent.

Given that the worker population ratio in India is just 58 per cent, the remaining 42 per cent of the population could benefit from some occupation that keeps them engaged on a part-time or full-time basis.

Stock market trading is a kind of entrepreneurial activity, which has the potential to become a significant channel of income generation going forward. For instance, once the trader becomes familiar with the nuances of stock market, he could become a sales personnel for large brokers, mutual funds, initial public offering, he could also engage in educating others about stock market activity, etc.

Forty per cent of F&O traders are under 30 years of age. This suggests that unemployed youth are turning to stock trading, probably in the period, before landing a permanent job

Three, over 40 per cent of these traders are less than 30 years old and over 70 per cent have less than ₹5 lakh as income. This suggests that unemployed youth are turning to stock trading, probably in the period, before landing a permanent job. This is not a bad thing. Data also shows that only the top 3.5 per cent of loss-makers, faced an average loss of ₹28 lakh per person during FY22 to FY24. The losses of the majority may not be too big, given their limited capital.

Four, it is important that stock markets have more participants to impart depth and improve price discovery. Individual investors currently account for about a third of the derivative trading volume. But they form the largest cohort, as 99.8 per cent of total traders in the futures and options segment are individuals.

Five, India is a free country, and its citizens have the right to work in whichever sphere they choose. Trading in a regulated atmosphere such as stock market is much better than trading on unregulated platforms for cryptocurrencies, forex trading, online gaming, etc. Given that it is difficult to curb the human propensity to take risks, it may be better to allow trading in SEBI regulated stock exchanges.

MAKING GOVERNMENT RICHER

It is also important to note that the increase in trading by individuals is making the government richer.

As equity derivative volumes boomed in the last three years, securities transaction tax collection has also been surging. STT amounted to ₹55,000 crore in the revised estimate for FY25, as against the budgeted figure of ₹37,000 crore. Further, the Centre expects STT to grow to ₹78,000 crore in FY26, bolstering its tax revenue.

SEBI data reveals that between FY22 and FY24, ₹50,000 crore was paid as transaction cost by individual investors, of which, half was paid as brokerage to stockbrokers and ₹13,800 crore was paid to the government as securities transaction tax. The stock exchanges collected ₹10,200 crore as their fee.

Stock exchanges such as the NSE have also been beneficiaries of this increase in retail participation. Over 70 per cent of the turnover of the NSE is derived from transaction charges collected from investors. Of this, the equity options segment contributes 78 per cent with the cash and equity futures segments accounting for the rest.

Given the limited participation of the overall population in equity F&O, SEBI could stop worrying about investors incurring losses in this segment. It could the rites of passage for becoming a seasoned stock market trader

Trade skirmish will affect the US the most

The panic associated with Trump tariff is gradually receding, thanks to US administration's recent climbdown on duties

Barendra Kumar Bhoi

The Trump-Tariff ('TT'), unfolding since January 2025, is widely perceived as counter-productive public policy. A tariff threat to force countries to come to the negotiating table is fraught with severe limitations. Even if small countries yield to the threat, negotiations to reduce tariffs take time.

Many systemically important countries preferred to retaliate sooner or later. A tariff war between China and the US led to unprecedented uncertainties and disruptions in the global trade/supply chains.

The US economy is likely to bear the heaviest burden of TT. Within two days of its announcement on April 2, the US stock market lost $5 trillion. The US economy is heading for a deep slowdown, if not a recession, evidenced by a fall in consumer confidence and economic outlook.

In its April 2025 World Economic Outlook, the IMF predicted that the US economy would grow by 1.8 per cent in 2025 compared to 2.8 per cent in the previous year. Even a 1.8 per cent US growth in 2025 has become doubtful due to negative growth in January-March 2025. Escalating a trade war for a new global order seems too expensive and unaffordable for the US economy.

A lack of coordination between monetary and fiscal policies would harm the economy further. Despite an impending growth slowdown, the Federal Reserve preferred to pause the rate cut due to prevailing tariff-related uncertainties and their impact on US retail inflation.

The US dollar typically appreciates during global uncertainties due to a flight to safety. However, this did not happen following the recent tariff war. The dollar index has declined below 100 since mid-April 2025, from nearly 110 on January 13, 2025. Although dollar depreciation benefits US exporters, US importers have to pay more, which has implications for domestic inflation.

A sudden spurt in the US yield was the turning point, which seemed to have forced the US President to pause the reciprocal tariff for 90 days, possibly for a graceful exit from the tariff tantrum by encouraging some countries to negotiate bilateral trade agreements with the US.

The US trade deficit of $1.2 trillion in 2024 was alarming. This was partly due to the profligate fiscal policy pursued by the US administration for a long time. The US consumers enjoyed imported products from the least-cost producers, mainly because the dollar dominates as a reserve currency. After the trade war, many countries would like to explore the possibility of settling their trade balance under alternative arrangements. This will expedite the process of de-dollarisation to US' detriment .



TARIFFS. Change of tack REUTERS

According to the US administration, China adopts unfair trade practices like exchange rate manipulation, dumping, export subsidies, etc., to sustain a large trade surplus.

This may not be true for all countries. Hence, treating them alike leads to global economic destabilisation.

The 90-day moratorium on reciprocal tariffs is fast approaching. Despite the prevailing uncertainty, the panic associated with TT is gradually receding. The stock markets have recovered globally. The US administration's recent relaxation of duties on auto parts is perceived as a climb-down from a threatening situation. Moreover, the credibility of TT is questioned due to frequent U-turns. Hopefully, sanity will prevail, and a new global order can be multilaterally negotiated.

INDIA'S PATH

To navigate the reciprocal tariff problem, instead of retaliation, India is actively engaged in trade negotiations with the US. The direct impact of the trade war on India is likely to be less than that on neighbouring countries, as the additional reciprocal tariff imposed on India is relatively lower at 26 per cent.

India will benefit from possible trade diversion and a shift in the supply chain, particularly from China. However, India may be indirectly hit by a fall in global demand due to a growth slowdown.

The writer is the former Head of the Monetary Policy Department of the RBI. Views expressed are personal

LETTERS TO EDITOR

Send your letters by email to bleditor@thehindu.co.in or by post to 'Letters to the Editor', The Hindu Business Line, Kasturi Buildings, 859-860, Anna Salai, Chennai 600002.

Trump's tariff gambit

This refers to 'Chinese checkers' (May 15). President Trump's handling of global tariff disputes was a calculated mix of business acumen, political theatre, pressure tactics, and persuasion. His approach varied depending on the posture of individual trade partners — ranging from aggressive threats to protracted negotiations. Countries like India witnessed a relatively softer stance, with efforts made to resolve issues through extended dialogue. At the peak of the US-China trade war, the Trump administration floated the idea of imposing tariffs as high as 100-145 per cent on certain categories of Chinese imports, primarily as a strategic tool to extract concessions. In retaliation, China was reported to have considered tariffs of up to 125 per cent on select US goods. Following months of escalation, a 90-day cooling-off period was introduced to ease tensions and restart negotiations. Over time, tariff levels are expected to stabilise in the range of 15-30 per cent for US duties on imports from key trade partners, with other countries likely maintaining tariffs of 10-20 per cent on US goods. This sequence of events suggests that Trump's objective was not prolonged tariff conflict but strategic leverage aimed at securing more favourable trade terms through bilateral agreements and broader frameworks like FTAs and RTAs. The episode underscores his use of bold, high-pressure tactics to reshape trade relations in America's favour.

Srinivasan Velamur
Chennai

Project finance

This is with reference to 'RBI may lower project finance loan provisioning to 1-2.5%' (May 15). Project finance means long terms funding for infrastructure creation, industrial development, etc. Accordingly, banks have to make provision on on these loans while preparing their balance sheets every year. For 2024, the percentage proposed by the RBI was 5 per cent, as per the then guidelines on project finance. The RBI now seems to be convinced that this provision should be reduced to 1- 2.5 per cent, which will enhance the liquidity position of banks substantially. Bank will have more money for tapping other viable lending opportunities.

Katuru Durga Prasad Rao
Hyderabad

Cricket veterans retire

Apropos 'Rohit,Virat and the red ball's future' (May 15), indeed the sudden retirement announcement by two cricket veterans Rohit and Virat creates big vacuum in the Indian test cricket arena.
The mistake the selectors make is of depending on few established players for years together.
Now India is constrained to send a young test squad with only a few experienced players for the England series, which will definitely be a challenging one.

NR Nagarajan
Sivakasi, TN

Published by Nirmala Lakshman and Printed by Praveen Someshwar at HT Media Ltd. Plot No.8, Udyog Vihar, Greater Noida Distt. Gautam Budh Nagar, U.P.201306, on behalf of THG PUBLISHING PVT. LTD. Chennai-600002. Editor: Raghuvir Srinivasan (Editor responsible for selection of news under the PRP Act). ISSN 0971 - 7528

The Hindustan Times
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

{ OUR TAKE }

Questions from the President

This saga could have been avoided if some Raj Bhavans had kept to spirit of the Constitution

The presidential reference is a rarely used constitutional tool; only 14 times since Independence has the President asked the top court of the land for its opinion, and then too, only in high-profile instances such as the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute. Hence its deployment, in the context of the Supreme Court's landmark verdict fixing timelines for governors and the President to clear state bills, only underlines the high stakes involved for the executive branch of government. President Droupadi Murmu has raised important issues of constitutional bounds and separation of powers in her 14 questions posed to the top court. Key among these are clarifications on the powers of the governor, her discretionary role, whether the powers of the presidential office are justiciable, and whether timelines can be imposed on Raj Bhavans and the Rashtrapati Bhavan in the absence of such a clause in the Constitution.

There are three issues of note. First, the top court's April verdict on the timelines expanded the space for federalism against the backdrop of governors either sitting indefinitely on bills or referring these to the President even when the legislature had re-passed a bill and sent it back, especially in states not controlled by the BJP. The court's declaration that pocket veto by governors was not permissible counteracted the regrettable phenomenon of Raj Bhavans overstepping their constitutional bounds. The apex court and the presidential office must take note of this and ensure that political considerations don't become an impediment for governance. The court's timeline for governors in this regard only appears to be welcome.

Two, the court's decision to extend the timeline discipline to Rashtrapati Bhavan raises some questions that will have to be carefully parsed. Can a state government take the President to court over not giving assent to a bill? And will the court be in a position to pass a verdict against Rashtrapati Bhavan? In this adjudication, primacy will have to be given to governance over politics and cooperation over obstruction, but without compromising the unique powers of the President. Neither the court nor the President should allow discretionary powers to be wielded as a political tool. Any movement in this regard will have a profound impact on federalism, judicial activism, and executive accountability.

And three, the presidential reference itself raises the spectre of a crisis. If the top court decides to respond — it has declined only once, in the Ayodhya case — its opinion will be non-binding, implying that the President or Parliament may choose to disregard it. But, such a development may risk a constitutional crisis and a confrontation between two branches of the government. All this could have been avoided if some Raj Bhavans were less obstructionist and acted in the spirit of the Constitution — or if the cart had stopped at Raj Bhavans.

A small big step for transgender inclusion

The Supreme Court has rightly underscored the element of discrimination in transgender persons being barred from donating blood while urging the Centre to consult experts on the issue. Trans-persons are categorised as a "high risk" group for transfusion-transmitted infections (TTIs) such as HIV, and Hepatitis B and C, among others, under the 2017 guidelines governing blood donation. Other high-risk groups are men having sex with men, female sex workers and persons with multiple sexual partners. Their sexual activity is considered to make them particularly prone to blood-borne infections.

The import of the apex court's observation that barring the entire demography fosters greater stigmatisation and pushes them further to the margins is hard to miss. There is an umbilical link between such marginalisation and high-risk behaviour. Struggling for survival without mainline livelihood opportunities, transgender persons often get forced into sex work. The need is to address stigmatisation and engender inclusion in the mainstream. Progress has been made over the years, with enabling legislation and changing societal attitudes, but much ground remains to be covered. The apex court has pushed for their inclusion without losing sight of science-based non-negotiables, such as the risk of TTIs. The fact remains that all donated blood is rigorously screened before use in transfusions. Trans inclusion will thus likely be a question of increasing testing capacity — at no great cost, given their small headcount.

What the court is not expected to tell media

The Supreme Court's remark in Wikipedia case offers a moment of clarity in the relations between two important institutions



The courts should avoid becoming a forum for people to have critical analysis about themselves on Wikipedia taken down. HINDUSTAN TIMES

On May 9, the Supreme Court handed down an important judgment in a long-running litigation between Asian News International (ANI) and Wikipedia (and its parent organisation, the Wikimedia Foundation). ANI had originally sued Wikipedia on the ground that the Wikipedia page for ANI had certain disparaging remarks about its independence and impartiality. A single judge of the Delhi High Court (HC) — which was hearing the case — had initially passed an interim order requiring Wikipedia to disclose its subscriber details.

To those familiar with how an online, crowd-sourced encyclopaedia works, what followed should not be surprising. Considering the public importance of the case, a fresh page was created on Wikipedia chronicling the legal developments, the contents of which were debated on the website's *Talk* forum. ANI's lawyers complained about this to the division bench of the Delhi HC, which was hearing Wikipedia's appeal against the single judge's order. The Division Bench noted that the page's observation that the single judge's order amounted to "censorship and a threat to flow of information" amounted to "an interference in judicial proceedings" that bordered on "contempt". It directed Wikipedia to take down the pages within 36 hours.

It should be obvious that the Delhi HC's numerous orders betrayed a complete lack of understanding of how an online encyclopaedia like Wikipedia works, and how a system of internal peer-review and community checking (through Wikipedia's *Talk* page) functions. Matters were not helped by numerous intemperate oral remarks made by the Bench during the hearings, such as telling Wikimedia's counsel that Wikipedia could leave the India if it did not "like" India and that the Court would ask the government to block the Wikipedia website.



Gautam Bhatia

It is, therefore, clear that the direction that the HC was going in presented a clear and present danger to the freedom of speech and expression, and to the dissemination of community knowledge in India. Anyone who has used Wikipedia even once in their life can testify to how, despite all its flaws and imperfections, the encyclopaedia is a sterling example of a vast community of human beings coming together regardless of borders and identities and contributing to the global knowledge commons. Wikipedia is a testament to how the open internet, at its best, can work.

In the present case, the Wikimedia foundation was, therefore, constrained to approach the Supreme Court. In a short and closely reasoned judgment, a two-judge bench of the apex court, comprising justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan, set aside the HC's interim order directing the take-down of the Wikipedia pages. After surveying the Supreme Court's precedent on this point, which counselled judges to exercise reticence before issuing contempt orders, the Court concluded that "courts, as a public and open institution, must always remain open to public observations, debates and criticisms. In fact, courts should welcome debates and constructive criticism". This was a timely rebuke to the Delhi HC, which — it would appear — could not abide even the mildest critique of its own orders. As the apex court went on to note in blunt terms, "it is not the duty of the court to tell the media" to "delete this, take that down".

The Court's plain-speaking here is both salutary and much needed. Even though judicial precedent is clear that take-down and postponement orders should only be used as a last resort, where there is an imminent threat to the fair administration of justice, these words and terms are vague enough to allow for extremely subjective interpretation by judges across the country. Indeed, this is why this case needed to come to the Supreme Court in the first place: It was because of an unconscionable interpretation of the law by the Delhi HC that forced Wikimedia to appeal to the apex court. Clear reminders of the legal position, therefore, seem to be regrettably necessary from the highest Court.

It is also important to remember that ANI's main case against Wikipedia is continuing in the Delhi HC. This is a case that deserves close and continuing scrutiny. Any publicly created encyclopaedia that covers current events will, inevitably, annoy and offend a great number of people. That is the nature of impartial and even-handed analysis. In such circumstances, the Indian judiciary should avoid becoming a forum of choice for people to have critical or unflattering analysis about themselves on Wikipedia be taken down by a judicial order. This would amount to a distorting influence upon the free exchange of ideas, which is one of the greatest contributions of the internet.

There is a reason why Wikipedia's *Talk* page exists, and why Wikipedia has a great number of volunteer-moderators: It is to ensure that all the information in the encyclopaedia is based on public sources and is thoroughly vetted. Wikipedia is not perfect in this regard; nothing is. However, the very extent of its use reveals how successful it has been, and its value to the global quest for free and open access to information. It would be a pity if this quest was irreparably damaged in India due to heavy-handed judicial orders.

Gautam Bhatia, a Delhi-based advocate, is the author of Offend, Shock or Disturb: Free Speech Under the Indian Constitution. The views expressed are personal

Air India's flight plan & its hits and big misses

I recently wrote about the horrifying experience of 180-odd passengers bound for Bengaluru from Delhi on an Air India flight on the night of Delhi's unexpected dust storm that threw schedules into disarray. The flight in question remained attached to the aerobridge and on the tarmac for 10 hours, a nightmarish experience. Many readers expressed horror and some in the government declared, as they are apt to do, that Air India was better managed under their control — a refrain that reeks of bureaucratic insecurity and seems to have stuck since the Tatas took charge of the airline in January 2022.

I also received at least five messages from readers on the airline's improved services on both domestic and international routes. Although in dribbles rather than a flood, many reports of the airline's improvements on both in-flight service standards, including food quality, and on-time performance are coming in, albeit mostly with respect to the newer-leased planes.



Anjuli Bhargava

Almost universally, the reports are positive on the airline's in-flight cabin crew and their handling of passengers and situations. Given the airline's losses have fallen (as per recent reports), I beg to differ with those who argue that the government was managing the airline better than the Tatas.

The we-did-it-better brigade also conveniently forgets the fact that under government control, you and I were footing the bill for the airline's inefficiencies and inability to compete, not to forget all the excesses and frills employees, MLAs, MPs, and their kith and kin enjoyed. Now that it is the Tatas, it sounds better to me as a taxpayer. Nobody is denying that it has taken inordinately long to get here, but Air India does seem to be on the path to some sort of recovery.

There is no denying, though, that almost no week goes by without some politician, celebrity, or business or media personality taking to social media to air grievances against perceived unfair treatment or poor-quality service. The barrage of complaints has been incessant since the beginning of the year. Many members of the Air India senior management privately believe that there is a sustained campaign to malign their efforts, but even they can't deny that things are far from perfect.

I believe Air India is currently going through a phase of bipolarity wherein, on some days and certain aspects, things seem to have fallen in place, while on others, all heli breaks loose from time to time. The latter is particularly acute when other factors that need to be in harmony and do their bit go awry — such as a dust-storm or dense fog or torrential rains. In short, the airline's standard operating protocol seems to fall apart in crises, and the carrier resembles a headless chicken at such times. This, despite a new state-of-the-art emergency control centre and integrated operational control centre.

To understand the problem, I spoke to some former and present management members, and here is what I gathered. The overwhelming consensus appears to be that the carrier is yet to fully get a grip on its operations — particularly, in crisis situations. The two mergers, the breakneck speed of expansion, and several changes at the management level are yet to settle into an equilibrium.

While Air India did have SOPs in place before the sale, those have been upended now, to some extent. Those vested in the airline say that the top management seems more preoccupied with fighting the perceptions battle and is excessively focussed on visible and on-the-surface changes rather than on taking the bull by its horns. The massive, expensive rebranding exercise undertaken in 2023 was labelled by most as putting the cart before the horse.

An even bigger problem identified is the failure to fix responsibility and establish a clear line of accountability: Who takes the final call and are they available to take it during crisis situations? During the Delhi dust storm fiasco, the head cabin crew member said that she had no clear instructions and they were unable to get hold of those who could take the final call.

A more serious failure to fix responsibility within the airline was cited by sources recently when the airline fired a simulator trainer instructor and removed 10 pilots trained under him from flying duty after finding evidence of poor training practices and flouting of standard procedures. Many argued that the instructor was made a scapegoat while those senior to him, who were equally culpable, went scot-free. Observers say that fixing responsibility has never been a strength for the airline, and this aspect has not changed despite the new ownership: Old habits die hard.

What has flummoxed many is the studied silence from the Tata stable on the never-ending bloopers since these reflect directly on the group.

Why the Tata leadership has given the airline such a long rope and for how long this would continue is the question many ask, but no answers are forthcoming — at least yet. If the screws are indeed being tightened on the Air India management, it is happening behind closed doors and with plenty of discretion.

The group's role in the whole exercise has come into sharp focus with respect to another aspect. Many aviation industry insiders question the filling up of several top-level positions with people from non-aviation backgrounds — Tata-trusted aides and professionals, most of whom don't know too much more than a regular flier about the business. Other airlines have demonstrated the benefits of putting the right people in the cockpit — and the cost of putting the wrong ones. The Tatas don't need to look too far: AirAsia India is a glaring case in point.

AIR INDIA SEEMS TO BE GOING THROUGH A PHASE OF BIPOLARITY WHEREIN, ON SOME DAYS AND CERTAIN ASPECTS, THINGS APPEAR TO HAVE FALLEN IN PLACE, WHILE ON OTHERS, ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE FROM TIME TO TIME

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

{ VOLODYMYR ZELENSKYY | PRESIDENT, UKRAINE

Our delegation is at the highest level ... in order to make any decisions that can lead to just peace

On the Ukrainian side that arrived in Istanbul for talks with Russia



HT

Foreign policy lessons post Operation Sindoor

The dust has somewhat settled in Jammu & Kashmir and the bordering areas of Pakistan. It would be naïve, however, to believe that our truculent neighbour will mend its ways, even after the battering it received in Operation Sindoor.

New Delhi cannot afford to lower its guard. Pakistan has proven itself to be an untrustworthy actor, ready to discard the script of responsible Statehood and resort to gruesome theatrics on the world stage. All lessons and realities appear lost on its military and political leadership.

The real question, therefore, is not what lessons Pakistan refuses to learn — but what lessons India has absorbed from Pahalgam and its aftermath, particularly in the realm of foreign policy. These are uncomfortable questions that defy straightforward answers, but they are critical to building a credible and resilient India.



RK Raghavan



Ajay Goyal

Pakistan, while lacking credibility as a serious State, is utterly predictable. History suggests that it will not reform; it will double down on its terror infrastructure, continue proxy wars, and even pick fights it is certain to lose.

Despite the broader Arab and Muslim world rejecting Pakistan's religious narrative, Islamabad continues to play the victim card. The only constituencies still buying into this story are segments of the Muslim populations in Europe and North America — and the politicians dependent on their votes. The only country offering unqualified support to Pakistan is Turkiye. Emboldened by its campaigns in Syria and the Caucasus against Armenia, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has aligned himself firmly with Pakistan. That said, goodwill towards India and Indians runs deep in Turkish society. Indian diplomacy must build on this public sentiment and prepare for a recalibrated relationship once Erdoğan exits the political stage.

With Bangladesh, whose military elite seem increasingly enamoured with a Pakistani-style approach, a firmer hand is necessary. Indian diplomacy must also engage with global financial institutions to halt the flow of IMF bailouts and international funding that emboldens Islamist and militarist elements. Pakistan and Bangladesh are not merely envious of India — they are persistently malevolent. India is contending with what Shakespeare once called "the motive-hunting of motiveless malignity."

China, too, received a clear message during Operation Sindoor: The Chinese-made air defence systems deployed by Pakistan were neutralised by India in a matter of minutes. Indian diplomacy must work to convince pragmatic Chinese leadership that Pakistan is neither a reliable nor worthy partner. China should be made aware of the risks of associating with a nation that indulges in nuclear blackmail. We must seize even the smallest opening for improved Sino-Indian engagement and build on that stability.

The UK and Europe have been among the greatest disappointments in the wake of Pahalgam. Not one country, media outlet, or political leader stepped forward with humanitarian sympathy for the victims, or condemned Pakistan's role in sheltering extremists and provoking the conflict. The growing influence of Muslim electorates across Europe explains this calculated silence — Left-wing politicians clinging to razor-thin majorities often shy away from condemning Islamist extremism.

These nations would do well to learn from the warmth extended to India by West Asian nations — particularly Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, and others. India's relations with the Arab world are strong and must be nurtured, especially as Prime Minister Narendra Modi prepares to complete his State visit to Saudi Arabia, previously interrupted by the Pahalgam attack.

US President Donald Trump's brash and exaggerated claim of having brokered peace between the two nations, coupled with his creation of a false equivalence between India and Pakistan, is both jarring and disappointing. However, we need not take such off-the-cuff remarks too seriously — Trump is known for them. The Indo-US relationship remains stronger than ever, and the personal rapport between Modi and Trump will likely smooth over such irritants.

India must now recognise that it is no longer a nation seeking validation — it is a nation others must learn to reckon with. Operation Sindoor revealed the power of decisive leadership, technological superiority, and national unity. These elements must define India's forward trajectory. The age of seeking endorsement from old powers is over. The most important lesson: While India must remain open to partnership, it must be prepared to move forward alone. Ekla Chalo Re (walk on alone) is the mantra — a nation with clarity of purpose and confidence in its mission does not wait for validation from fading powers. They need to come along for the sake of their own future.

RK Raghavan is a former high commissioner to Cyprus and a former director of CBI and Ajay Goyal is a geopolitical risk strategist. The views expressed are personal

R. N. I. No. 503/1957 • Postal Reg. No. DL(ND)-11/6058/2018-19-20 'Licensed to post without prepayment' LICENCE No. U(C)-110/2006-08; AIR SURCHARGE: Raipur and beyond by Rail or Road - Rs. 5/-, Ahmedabad, Bangalore, Coimbatore, Chennai, Cochin, Goa, Hyderabad, Khajuraho, Mumbai, Trivandrum, Visakhapatnam, Vijayawada and beyond by Rail or Road - Rs. 10/-;

PRINTED & PUBLISHED BY MANHAR KAPOOR for and on behalf of HT Media Ltd. 18-20, Kasturba Gandhi Marg, New Delhi-110001 and printed at HT Media Ltd. Presses at Plot No.-8, Udyog Vihar, Greater Noida, Distt. Gautam Budh Nagar. (UP). Pin-201306.
BOARD: (011) 23361234 • EDITORIAL: (011) 66561234 Extn. 1254, 1268 • CIRCULATION: (011) 66561111 • ADVERTISING: (011) 66561389 • FAX: (011) 66561270.

EDITOR: JOSE MARTIN THARAKAN • Responsible for selection of news under PRP Act, @ All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission of Publisher is prohibited.

The new agents

The IT sector will have to prepare for different labour needs

News that Microsoft will lay off about 6,000 of its employees has focused attention on how labour requirements in the software and information technology-enabled services (ITeS) sectors are shifting due to explosive growth in generative artificial intelligence (Gen AI). Microsoft is well known for easing its movement towards new growth and research areas by pruning its workforce and transferring resources to novel technologies. This appears to be occurring in this case, with a planned investment of $80 billion this financial year creating a need to constantly reduce the company's salary bill. Its competitors have already taken similar action. They include Alphabet, the parent company of Google, though they mostly do it a few hundred at a time, focusing on specific divisions. Microsoft, by comparison, is reportedly planning to axe 3 per cent of its workforce at one go this time. However, whether done in dribs and drabs or in larger instalments, the direction of travel is clear: To survive, large tech organisations will need to focus on AI developments, and they may have to do so at the cost of reducing their headcount.

There are important implications for the sector in India. As this newspaper has reported, the effects of AI are being felt in the information technology (IT) business, which has long been a major employer and export earner. The age of old-style call centres and human-run support is passing, if it has not already passed. Generative AI allows for each employee to do more and Agentic AI — which is sometimes empowered to take action previously done by humans — will reduce each employee's required tasks. In January, AI entrepreneur Sam Altman said that this year would see the first AI agents "join the workforce and materially change the output of companies". Corporations in multiple consumer-facing sectors have seen the proportion of customer queries that AI can deal with increasing rapidly. This newspaper has reported that one ITeS firm that provides customer service for leading domestic conglomerates now has AI agents handling between 30 and 40 per cent of interaction across voice and digital domains. This might bring the support cost down by an equivalent proportion. It has also reduced resolution time in many cases, again by 30-40 per cent. For many customers, this is an important gain in efficiency; for many shareholders, it is a useful increase in value.

However, the broader impact of this growth in AI must also be prepared for. Estimates suggest there are 1.5 million call-centre agents in India. Contrary to popular belief, this number has in fact grown rapidly in recent years, and is almost double of what it was when the pandemic hit. Many of these are focused on serving domestic demand as Indian consumers become more conscious of their rights and expectations regarding support. The question is what will happen to these jobs. There is a possibility that they will evolve and get more productive, with some call-centre employees coming to a position where they can train AI agents. If local software behemoths play it right, then new jobs will also be created in AI development. But there will be less call for entry-level tasks, and it may become harder to be employed in the ITeS sector without specific skills. Both the corporate world and the government need to carefully examine what will be needed to prepare the Indian workforce for the transition in requirements and human capital that will follow in the train of generative and agentic AI.

Today in history

National unity must be preserved

The events of the past three weeks or so will find a special place in India's contemporary history. The April 22 terrorist attack in Pahalgam, in which 26 persons were killed, shocked the nation. Although the actual perpetrators of the attack have not been caught, the security establishment had enough to connect the dots to Pakistan and Pakistan-based terrorist outfits. The political Opposition chose to support the government in any action it deemed appropriate. In the early hours of May 7, Indian armed forces launched Operation Sindoor and targeted terrorist infrastructure in nine locations in both Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Jammu & Kashmir. The operation was precise, targeted, and non-escalatory in nature. However, Pakistan escalated the situation, forcing Indian forces to respond. Indian forces inflicted significant damage to military assets in Pakistan. Since the Indian armed forces had attained the initial objectives, India decided to suspend the operations on Pakistan's appeal.

All aspects of events since April 22 are being analysed and discussed, including on these pages. It is reasonable to assume that the security establishment is also assessing every aspect to plug gaps, if any, and further improve preparedness for the future. Notably, besides the success of the armed forces, India also displayed absolute national unity. It is worth remembering that the terrorist attack in Pahalgam was targeted, and tourists were killed after verifying their faith. It is now widely acknowledged that, among other objectives, the attack was intended to flare up communal tensions in the country. It did not work. As Prime Minister Narendra Modi noted in an address to the nation on May 12: "... the entire nation, every citizen, every community, every class ... unitedly stood up for strong action against terrorism." However, unfortunately, some individuals don't want this unity to hold. A sitting minister in the Madhya Pradesh government, for example, has made derogatory and communal remarks against a woman army officer who, among others, briefed the media during Operation Sindoor. Although the courts have taken notice and legal action is being taken, there is a need to send a clear political message. The state government and the political leadership must show that such acts have irreversible costs.

Unfortunately, what the minister has said is merely a reflection of a divisive polity and society, and it was not an isolated instance. The widow of the navy officer who was killed in the Pahalgam attack was heavily trolled online for her appeal not to target Muslims or Kashmiris. Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri and his family, particularly his daughter, were trolled online after he made the ceasefire announcement. Trolls apparently found a communal angle in Mr Misri's daughter's professional engagements as a lawyer. Such things should be simply unacceptable in India's public discourse. The unity shown by the country over the past weeks is worth preserving. Operation Sindoor should not go down in history solely as a military success, but also as a moment that united the country for times to come. Thus, it is incumbent upon the political leadership across parties to refrain from indulging in divisive politics for electoral gains, and the Indian state must not tolerate those inciting such divisions. This will also enable internal harmony and faster economic development.

Do expert committees matter?

Reforms are the result of research and shared beliefs, as shown by the quiet and continuous changes in the financial sector

ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA





AARTHIKAM CHINTANAM

K P KRISHNAN

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) last week uploaded an innocuous-sounding document on its website called the "Framework for Formulation of Regulations". It went largely unnoticed. In the field of regulation, however, it is a development of profound significance.

The essence of the state is its monopoly on violence and the exercise of coercive power. In democracies, state coercion is permissible only with the authority of law — and that law is required to be backed by democratic legitimacy. Democratic legitimacy in coercion is born of legal procedures and norms. The Indian Constitution prescribes an elaborate process through which state coercion can take place. Alongside this, norms such as expert and parliamentary committees, and consultations with stakeholders also shape the outcome.

Statutory Regulatory Authorities (SRAs) are a major author of law in India today. They have been given the power to legislate — that is, to write legal instruments that demand certain behaviour of private persons, with penalties associated with non-compliance. The impact of this power on regulated entities is exactly like the impact of laws made by legislature.

For example, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) has made regulations on the subject of insider trading. Violating these regulations can result in severe penalties, including fines of up to ₹ 25 crore, imprisonment, and restrictions on trading in the securities market. In the financial sector alone, it is estimated that about 10 "laws" are released every working day by all financial agencies put together.

The exercise of such power by SRAs contains an inherent "democratic deficit". In a liberal democracy, unelected officials ordinarily should not have the power to write law. To take an example, the Sebi Act requires that these regulations be made by the Sebi board. However, it is silent on how these regulations are to be written. As a consequence, laws are regularly being promulgated by regulators such as Sebi without the rigour of a democratically legitimate legislative process.

Fourteen years ago, in 2011, the Government of India (GoI), constituted the Financial Sector Legislative Reforms Commission (FSLRC). Chaired by a retired Supreme Court judge, its members included economists, bankers, lawyers, and public administration experts. The FSLRC submitted its report in March 2013. This was put through a process of public consultation, and two additional years were taken in responding to the volume of public comments. Overall, the FSLRC was a four-year project that led up to one high-quality draft law.

This law contains three components: (a) About 140 sections of law, which define how regulators must work; (b) an improved financial agency architecture — of the agencies that must exist and the work that must be allocated to them; and (c) a detailed statement of the tasks that must be carried out for financial and monetary economic policy by the various financial agencies.

This high-quality draft law — the draft Indian Financial Code (IFC) — was not enacted as law. The simple theory of change — that a vast effort by the research and reform community would lead to one draft law getting enacted — proved not to work. However, the work of the FSLRC has had enormous influence and has reshaped the paradigm of financial economic policy in India. One by one, building blocks from it are turning into reality.

The FSLRC had envisioned unification of the regulation of all organised financial trading. This required the merger of the erstwhile Forward Markets Commission into Sebi. This was done in 2013. The FSLRC had envisioned a modern system of accountability for monetary policy — that is, inflation targeting, with dispersion of power — that is, the monetary policy committee with greater non-government presence. This was done in 2015-2016. The FSLRC had envisioned the Securities Appellate Tribunal (SAT) would be the forum where appeals against all financial SRAs would go. This has been done for all financial SRAs other than the Reserve Bank of India.

For the legislative function of SRAs, the FSLRC recommended that the democratic deficit should be overcome through the role and composition of the board, through expertise, and through consultation. The regulator must articulate the objective of a regulation, the market failure that the regulation seeks to address, and show cost-benefit analysis of multiple possible interventions leading to the choice of the lowest-cost intervention. Public consultation is required, and then only the board (which should have a majority of non-civil-servants) can authorise all laws. Such a process would improve the content and legitimacy of the law.

As noted, the FSLRC's IFC was not enacted as law. But there are ways to make progress nonetheless. The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India was the first off the block and established a self-imposed mechanism for framing regulations in June 2016. The newly constituted Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India issued a mechanism for this purpose in 2017. The Pensions Fund Regulatory and Development Authority issued this mechanism in 2024. Sebi waited one more year, and got there three months ago. Finally, the RBI issued this framework last week.

This gives us insights into the theory of change. Practical people in government often say that they don't need advice of external experts as they have knowledge of real-life conditions and are not ivory-tower, armchair theorists. The actual history of economic reforms in India is entirely the story of the research and reform community, a procession of expert committees.

The FSLRC itself represented the fruits of the labour of a research and reform community that had been in motion since the early 1990s. Great progress was made on the ideas in the 2011-2015 period, with debates and consensus within the FSLRC. The ideas were translated into documents, papers, blog articles, videos, and more. The ideas gradually persuaded people and reshaped the environment. The norms on democratic legitimacy in regulation in India have changed, through this long journey. The next 10 years will now be about refining these self-imposed processes for writing regulations, building capability inside each financial SRA to live up to the thorough procedure, and codifying these procedures into parliamentary law.

The author is an honorary senior fellow at the Isaac Centre for Public Policy, and a former civil servant

Leading private capital to social infra

In the Union Budget for 2025-26, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman earmarked ₹11.21 trillion for infrastructure capital expenditure — just slightly above last year's ₹11.11 trillion. The messaging was clear: In the last 25 years, core infrastructure (especially transport and energy) had matured, and other sectors now required attention.

Key among them is clearly the social infrastructure sector — health care, education, tourism, housing, sanitation, water, skilling, and digital. These sectors also have a direct impact and visibility among the voting public, in contrast to core infrastructure. The Budget Speech mentioned that central ministries are required to come up with a three-year pipeline of projects that can be implemented in public private partnership (PPP) mode. States are also encouraged to do so, and can seek support from the India Infrastructure Project Development Fund scheme to prepare PPP proposals. So, this is clearly the time to focus on social infrastructure.



INFRATALK

VINAYAK CHATTERJEE

Public spending on social infrastructure is constrained by the government's commitment to fiscal consolidation. Since most of these sectors cannot generate market returns on capital deployed, enabling private capital to step in becomes crucial. The government's role should focus on providing partnering and de-risking mechanisms, such as viability gap funding (VGF) for de-risking the otherwise non-remunerative PPP projects.

VGF is typically a capital grant for projects that does not need to be returned to the government. It is neither equity nor debt, but a grant that goes to reduce the extent of capital to be serviced. Since 2005, VGF has been the primary tool for supporting PPPs. Revamped in 2020, it now includes three targeted sub-schemes:

1. Sub-scheme 1 provides 60 per cent VGF (30 per cent each from the Centre and the state) for water, waste management, health, and education projects.
2. Sub-scheme 2 supports pilot projects in health and education, with up to 80 per cent VGF and 50 per cent operational cost support for five years.
3. Other sectors receive 40 per cent VGF.

VGF does indeed offer a strong "bang for the buck" on government expenditure. For instance, if five large hospitals were to be built entirely with public funds at ₹1,000 crore each, the total outlay would be ₹5,000 crore. However, under a 20 per cent VGF scheme, if the private sector steps in, the government's share would drop to just ₹1,000 crore. The ₹4,000 crore saved could then be used to support the construction of 20 more such hospitals.

VGF is often paired with the hybrid annuity model. It has been used in the Clean Ganga Mission for constructing and operating sewage treatment plants. Structured as a PPP, the government pays 40 per cent of the capital cost upfront, and the operations & maintenance (O&M) costs over the life of the project through annuity payments. This aspect of life-cycle O&M responsibility by the private sector is important, as it is a major weakness in the management of public projects by the state.

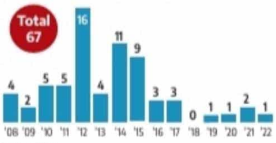
District hospitals present another major opportunity. The NITI Aayog has advocated PPP schemes to link functional district hospitals with new or existing private medical colleges. A model concession agreement (MCA) is available on its website. Successful examples of such PPPs include projects in Chittoor (Andhra Pradesh) and Bhuj (Gujarat).

On tourism infrastructure, the 3.65 km Varanasi Ropeway project is funded by VGF — 20 per cent by the Centre and 20 per cent by the state. VGF is being encouraged for other ropeway projects too.

Under the "Scheme of Upgradation of Government ITIs through PPP", 1,227 government-run ITIs have been covered, each with an associated industry partner. Such schemes need much higher outlays — and a scaling up in both ambition and reach.

One of the largest VGF allocations in recent times has been extended to the Tata Group for its semiconductor manufacturing project in Dholera, Gujarat. The VGF, termed a "fiscal support agreement" in reports, covers 50 per cent of the estimated project cost of ₹91,000 crore.

Viability-gap funded projects



Source: DEA

PPPs in social infrastructure sectors in India still remain relatively limited, partly due to the lack of sector-specific MCAs. Projects with MCAs see faster approvals — as was seen in the oft-quoted and oft-discussed MCAs for the roads sector crafted by the late Gajendra Haldea. Since 2005, 67 VGF projects worth $5.45 billion have been approved, with 86 per cent in transport and logistics, 6 per cent in energy, water & sanitation, but only 8 per cent in social infrastructure.

VGF need not be purely monetary. Land and external development of utility linkages provided by a government body can itself be a form of VGF. Such "in-kind" contributions constitute a valid mechanism of public support.

A broader interpretation of VGF is crucial at this stage of our economic development for social infrastructure projects. Only then can India strive forward with both core and social infrastructure acting as twin engines — powered by private capital and operational involvement — to deliver much higher levels of quality-of-life services.

The author is an infrastructure expert. He is also the founder & managing trustee of The Infravision Foundation. Research inputs from Vrinda Singh

The women of a vanished Punjab

BOOK REVIEW

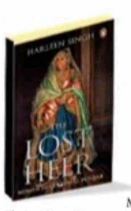
ANANYA SINGH

The narratives of Punjab have often been constructed through the prisms of empire, masculinity, and political sovereignty, leaving little space for the textured, and often silenced experiences of its women. In *The Lost Heer*, Harleen Singh undertakes the task of reorienting this gaze, recovering from the margins the unnamed and forgotten *heers* eclipsed by the dominant masculinist historical imagination. Drawing on archival material, memoirs, periodicals, and lesser-known biographical fragments, Mr Singh has created a polyphonic narrative of women who lived not just under the duress of British imperialism but within the dense latticework of patriarchy, caste hierarchies, religious orthodoxy, and class constraints. From the latter half of the 18th century, well into Partition, Mr Singh traces a subterranean trajectory — a counternarrative of Punjab's past led by the countless women, who walked the fault lines of gender and empire with an astonishing, if often unacknowledged, fortitude.

Take Rani Nur-un-Nissa of Ludhiana, whose engagements with authority—colonial or princely — were marked by political cunning. Or Rani Lachhman Kaur of Firozepur, who, following her husband Dhanna Singh's death, assumed control of the chieftaincy in the early 19th century. She sustained her domain for 16 years, grappling with rebellious subjects who, as she bitterly noted, held "little respect for the rule of a woman." Mr Singh also gives due space to the under-remembered widows of Ranjit Singh.

He also turns his gaze to the shifting ideological terrain within the Indian subcontinent, especially as reform movements gained momentum in the shadow of imperial modernity and indigenous moral anxiety. Zainab Khatun, among Muslim women, stands as a particularly resonant figure — a pioneer who led a deputation to Syed Ahmed Khan demanding access to education for Muslim women. Similarly, Hyat Bibi, a Syed woman, founded her own girls' school for Muslim children. He carefully distinguishes between the moral energies of indigenous reform and the Victorian ideological residues they often internalised. While women like Leelawati, who organised the Mahila Samaj, created women-only congregations within Brahmo spaces to tell stories of moral heroism, others, like Peero, a fiery poet, rejected the very frameworks of respectability these movements promoted.

Perhaps one of the most radical texts in the narrative is that of the *Seemnatini Updesh*, an 1880s book attributed to an anonymous woman writer, in which the author directly asks why women should yearn for offspring who would bear only the father's name. In her critique of the *pativrata dharma*, the idealised moral code of a wife's devotion, she urges women to challenge the double standards of male sexual freedom, going so far as to propose that if a husband visits a prostitute, the wife should inform him that she too will seek companionship among men. Such rhetorical inversion is incendiary, especially when contrasted with the rising class of reform-minded, English-educated Indian men who sought to construct a domesticated image of Indian womanhood—modest, literate, spiritually noble. In this climate, they scorned the raucous, assertive, and carnivalesque *sithnian* songs sung by women in the bride's household—songs which irreverently mocked the bridegroom and his kin. Mr Singh crams into this volume a sweeping constellation of women — Sufi mystics and reformers like Bibi Makhfi, Hardevi also referred to as India's first Punjabi editor, Manorma Bose, Begum Ashraf-Un-Nisa, doctors like Premdevi, and the countless unnamed women.



The Lost Heer: Women in Colonial Punjab
by Harleen Singh
Published by Penguin
544 pages ₹1,299

The book's intellectual vitality lies in its refusal to follow rigid categorisations. Mr Singh resists the urge to ossify "Punjabi" as a culturally or ethnically homogeneous category. Instead, he conceives of Punjab as a space inhabited by, and shaped through, a rich and mutable mix of actors— a fluid and evolving category, capacious enough to include not only the native-born but also the missionary women, diasporic figures, and trans-regional radicals who participated in and were shaped by Punjab's socio-political landscape. Mr Singh explores the cross-cultural female encounters— introducing us to Emily Eden, the artist, traveller, and sister of Lord Auckland, Governor-General of India. Eden's interactions with the women of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's *zenana*— though filtered through the orientalist lens of her time— nonetheless constitute important recorded attempts at social exchange between a European woman and the cloistered elite of Punjabi womanhood.

To Mr Singh's credit is his depth of research—an achievement made all the more remarkable given the paucity of archival material. The author's curatorial and narrative labour is evident in the breadth of his inquiry — from the vividly known personalities to the almost spectral figures who flicker on the margins of state records and personal letters.

The reviewer is a writer. X: @anannnya_s

Opinion

FRIDAY, MAY 16, 2025



ART OF THE DEAL

Union external affairs minister S Jaishankar

"Any trade deal has to be mutually beneficial; it has to work for both countries. That would be our expectation from the trade deal. Until that is done, any judgement on it would be premature

Hasten slowly

There is no need for India to try to hastily conclude an early bilateral deal with the US

COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY minister Piyush Goyal heads to Washington this week to take forward the putative bilateral trade agreement (BTA) with the US. There is a warrant to tamp down expectations of any speedy conclusion of the first tranche of this deal which in any case is targeted for autumn. External affairs minister S Jaishankar gave a hint of the challenges on Thursday when he said the ongoing negotiations are complex and far from final. His comments came shortly after US President Donald Trump, speaking at a business forum in Qatar, asserted that India had offered a trade deal with zero tariffs. "It is very hard to sell in India. India has offered us a deal where basically they are willing to literally charge us no tariff," Trump claimed, without offering further details.

In any case, there is no sense of urgency for early results to avert the threat of reciprocal tariffs being imposed by Trump. Trade negotiations are easy to start but hard to finish. Look no further than our free trade agreement (FTA) with the UK as progress stalled on a few important unresolved issues but it crossed the finishing line due to the support it received from the highest political levels. Scarcely a day passes without further details of that FTA — most of it is still not available in the public domain — which does not indicate a beneficial outcome for us.

The US trade czars who Goyal will meet — notably, secretary of commerce Howard Lutnick and United States Trade Representative Jamieson Greer — have also indicated that the BTA will take time. As 7,000 tariff lines are involved, it takes work, stated Lutnick, who added that the just-concluded US-UK FTA will act as a blueprint for upcoming trade deals. Incidentally, the US-UK deal has been criticised for being rushed through to escape Trump's tariffs on steel and cars — a pact that is closer to a "protection payment to a mob boss than a liberalising agreement between sovereign countries", argued Alan Beattie of the Financial Times. So if the US-UK deal is the template for our BTA, there will be pressure not only for massive tariff cuts but also strategic commitments.

Goyal's agenda in the forthcoming negotiations includes providing greater access for US goods, rules of origin, and addressing non-tariff barriers like licences, standards including quality control orders and intellectual property rights (IPRs). India, for its part, has warned the US that it may impose retaliatory tariffs on certain US products in response to American tariffs on steel and aluminium. There is a need for similar strategic intent to ensure that we retain policy space on non-tariff barriers like IPRs. Taking lessons from our UK FTA, there is no need to agree to rules that weaken our patents regime and threaten the industry's ability to produce affordable generic drugs. We have also provided far-reaching access to UK firms to participate in government procurement. The UK was supposed to provide concessions on greater access for Indian professionals but there are serious doubts regarding the number and duration of business visitor visas on offer. A major gain no doubt was the Double Contribution Convention under which our professionals will be exempt from paying social security contributions for three years. All of this has a bearing on India's BTA negotiations in Washington. There is no need to push for an early deal that entails surrendering policy space.

ENERGY EQUATION

CHINA, LIKE INDIA, HAS INCREASED COAL-BASED CAPACITY, BUT IT HAS PURSUED RENEWABLE WITH EQUAL VIGOUR

Pursuing fossils differently

SOMIT DASGUPTA

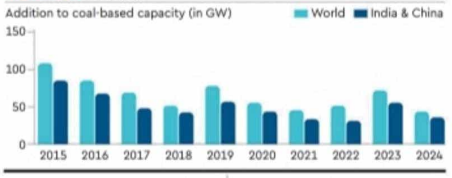
Senior visiting fellow, ICRIER



AS WE ALL know like the back of our hand, during the 21st Conference of Parties (COP21) at Paris in 2015, it was decided that we should try and limit the rise in the earth's temperature to 1.5 degrees centigrade by 2100 when compared to the pre-industrial era. Of course, 1.5 °C is the mean temperature, which implies that certain parts of the planet would be above 1.5 °C. The fact is that we have already crossed the mean temperature of 1.5 °C in 2024 as reported by some organisations. Each successive report of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) paints a picture that is more grim when compared to the previous one. Similar concerns have been raised by other organisations, such as the World Resources Institute and the United Nations Development Programme in their publications titled the State of Climate Action and Climate Inequality Report, respectively. In order to give a fillip to renewable power generation, it was agreed (during COP28) that renewable capacity should be trebled and that energy efficiency should be doubled by 2030. These are noble thoughts but not easy to implement due to various reasons; however, it is not the objective of this piece to elaborate on this.

Instead, one will try and give a picture of what has really happened when it comes to fossil fuel-based electricity generation after the Paris Agreement. Globally, coal-based generation capacity has seen an increase of about 661 gigawatts (Gw) since 2015. India and China alone account for 76% of this increase although China's role is more dominant. While China has added about 419 Gw since 2015, India has added 87 Gw. So effectively, since 2015, China has added to its coal-based generating capacity, which is almost five times of what India has done. This data has been sourced from the website of the Global Energy Monitor, an organisation which analyses data for a sustainable energy future. This mammoth increase in capacity in China has enabled a yearly generation of about 8,000 billion units with a per capita consumption of a little more than 6,000 units. This, incidentally, is better than the European Union's average.

A LION'S SHARE



Although both India and China have added substantial coal-based capacity, there is a difference. China, along with adding to its coal-based capacity, has made huge addition to its renewable-based generating capacity as well. China added 389 Gw of solar capacity during the period 2015-2024 while the corresponding figure for wind power is 322 Gw. In sharp contrast, India added only 66 Gw in solar capacity and about 19 Gw of wind capacity in the same period. Speaking of the share of coal in the total generation of electricity, one sees a decline in China from 70% to 61% in the last 10 years or so, whereas in the case of India the share of coal is almost static at about 75%.

There is yet another difference between the Indian and Chinese coal-based generating capacity and that is related to technology. China has about 380 Gw of ultra-super critical units and about 311 Gw of super critical units. Together, these two technologies comprise about 60% of its total coal-based capacity. The Indian case is very different. India has only about 3.6 Gw of ultra-super critical units and about 70 Gw of super critical units. Together, they account for about 33% of the total coal-based capacity. Further, ultra-super critical technology has been deployed in China for more than 20 years but India has had ultra-super critical units since the last 10 years only. For the benefit of readers, ultra-super critical technology and super critical technology have a higher efficiency rate (about 46% and 42% respectively) compared to sub-critical technology (about 35%) and hence, they burn less coal and allows one to economise on carbon emissions.

Coming to environmental norms for the power sector, China introduced very strict environmental norms way back in 2011. The norms, especially for new plants, were as good as or even stricter than what was prevalent in the developed world. As far as flue gas desulphurisers (FGDs) are concerned, Chinese plants had started installing them much earlier (2006) and consequently, by 2013, the country had installed FGDs practically for its entire fleet of coal-based generating capacity.

India introduced its revised environmental norms in 2015, which were also comparable to world standards except that we faulted when it came to execution. We kept on postponing compliance on some pretext or the other and in some cases even diluted the norms. Installation of FGDs is pathetic and almost no state generator has installed it. Coming to central sector plants too, the compliance rate is less than 5% of the capacity. The private sector plants are somewhat better as about 13% of the capacity has installed FGDs. The irony is that one of the leading engineering institutions in India has questioned the efficacy of installing FGDs since their study (conducted in 2023) revealed that in an attempt to capture sulphur oxides (which is the job of FGDs) carbon dioxide is being released, implying that FGDs is causing enhanced carbon footprints.

To sum up, although China has added to its coal-based generating capacity manifold, it has pursued renewable generation with equal vigour. Also, steps have been taken to contain carbon emissions through the adoption of superior technology and also by adopting strict environmental standards and implementing them in letter and spirit.

Views are personal

Nissan is dying, taking globalisation with it

IN RETROSPECT, YOU can put a date on the moment globalisation peaked: January 24, 2018. In the rarefied winter air of Davos, Switzerland, Carlos Ghosn — then boss of the sprawling alliance of Nissan Motor, Renault, and Mitsubishi Motors — was asked what he thought of a tentative initial round of tariffs on washing machines and solar panels imposed by President Donald Trump.

Flush with the confidence of delivering sales results confirming the alliance was the world's biggest car group by volume, and with his eye on a unification of the business under a single corporate roof, he seemed untroubled. "I don't see anything that is going to lead to a heavy significant burst of protectionism," he told *Bloomberg Television*.

The tectonic plates were already shifting. Within weeks, Nissan insiders had started the internal investigations that would lead to his arrest later that year and dramatic escape from Japan in 2019. The fractured group has since spent the best part of a decade trying and failing to finalise the separation of its French and Japanese limbs. With Nissan's announcement of a ¥670.9 billion ($4.5 billion) loss on Wednesday alongside a promise to close seven of its 17 factories, one of the world's great carmakers may be approaching its endgame.

The stock is now trading like scrap metal, at less than a quarter of the value of the assets on its books. Its debt is also junk, in the view of all three major ratings firms. Its ¥1.3-trillion market cap is less than the ¥1.5-trillion value of its net cash.

New CEO Ivan Espinosa, just months into the job after his predecessor Makoto Uchida stepped down following an abortive merger attempt with Honda Motor, is touting the third restructuring plan in five years. It's mostly a reheated version of the last programme Uchida put forward six months ago. It won't be enough to stanch the bleeding.



DAVID FICKLING

Bloomberg

The opportunity to fix this was during the previous seven years, when the global car industry was undergoing its most dramatic revolution since the dawn of the internal combustion engine. But Nissan was consumed by the fratricidal bitterness left over from Ghosn's ouster. Even now, roughly one-sixth of the latest annual results announcement was consumed with updates on his case. At that 2018 Davos meeting, Ghosn could claim to be running the world's biggest maker of electric cars. Nissan has barely grown EV sales since.

Espinosa's latest plans to revive its China unit seem like a bad joke, too: Sales there have fallen by about half since 2019. He's hoping to turn this around with a focus on plug-in vehicles, but Nissan is starting from so far back it's barely visible. The company sold 12,641 EVs and plug-in hybrids in China last year, giving it less than 0.1% of the local market and failing to crack the top 60 local new-energy vehicle brands. Detroit has dealt with the turbulence of the past decade by retreating to its home market to lick its wounds. That won't work for Nissan, which is still too global for the protectionist competitive landscape we're living in.

It's a Japanese business in name only: Despite accounting for 45% of jobs and about 35% of manufacturing assets, just 16% of sales are at home. More than half of revenues are in North America, and about 30% of the vehicles produced in its Japanese factories are exported to the same market. Trump's 25% tariff on auto imports are more than sufficient to wipe any profits from that trade.

Nissan's revival since 1999 by a superstar French-Brazilian-Lebanese executive was a parable for the successes of globalisation. Ghosn himself was felt for years to embody "Davos Man", the globe-trotting bosses who made a pilgrimage to a Swiss ski resort for the annual World Economic Forum. Under the surface, though, nationalism never really went away. For all the purely corporate failures that led to its downfall, a shadowy proxy war between factions of the French and Japanese governments contributed just as much.

Its rivals don't have much chance to enjoy the schadenfreude. A world where the major carmakers hibernate at home will be an unfriendly one for almost every national champion except those from China, the one place with the scale, manufacturing expertise, and technological edge in EVs to dominate all others. The world's best chance of holding back this competitive onslaught was to work together across borders. The collapse of Nissan extinguishes all remaining hope of that future.

A winning formula for digital inclusion



TV RAMACHANDRAN

Hon. fellow, Institution of Engineering and Technology, and president, Broadband India Forum

The BharatNet-PM-Wani combo can bridge our digital divide, empower local economies, and secure India's place as a leader in people-centric digital innovation

BHARATNET, THE world's largest rural optical fibre roll-out project, has quietly been laying the groundwork for India's digital future. Covering about two lakh gram panchayats, with a target of connecting every village, BharatNet delivers high-speed, scalable broadband infrastructure deep into the hinterlands. On top of this backbone for last-mile connectivity, the Prime Minister's Wi-Fi Access Network Interface (PM-Wani) decentralises this broadband access. Powered by unlicensed spectrum and light-touch regulations, it is envisioned to offer affordable, open Wi-Fi services through millions of public data offices (PDOs) — local entrepreneurs, kirana shops, and small businesses.

A huge opportunity awaits us in public Wi-Fi. The ruling telecom policy, the National Digital Communications Policy 2018, targeted 10 million hotspots by 2022 and the National 6G Vision has asked for 50 million public Wi-Fi hotspots by 2030. France, a smaller nation, is reported to have 13 million public Wi-Fi hotspots, according to data from the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India. Against these benchmarks, India has barely 0.5 million — quite depressing. However, deploying the synergistic duo of BharatNet and PM-Wani, India can be quite optimistic because of the following advantages.

Last mile connectivity, at last within reach: In many rural areas, the economics of mobile towers or private broadband extensions simply don't add up. Sparse populations and difficult terrains deter investments. Using BharatNet and PM-Wani, where once there were connectivity black holes, there can now be Wi-Fi beacons lighting up villages, bus stops, community halls, and marketplaces.

Empowering India's digital citizens: Digital public infrastructure (DPI) initiatives like Unified Payments Interface (UPI), DigiLocker, e-Shram, Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission, and the upcoming Open Network for Digital Commerce are only as powerful as the connectivity that enables them. PM-Wani hotspots, mini Digital India centres in themselves, can act as the ramps to India's DPI highways, enabling citizens to access banking and government services without travelling long distances, tap into telemedicine consultations, enrol in digital education and skilling programmes, sell products in national digital marketplaces, and more.

With policy action, public-private collaboration, and strong community engagement, the challenges can be overcome

Boost to rural entrepreneurship: Through a decentralised army of PDOs, PM-Wani localises ownership of India's digital infrastructure through micro-entrepreneurs, a critical factor for durability.

A Wi-Fi access point can cost as little as ₹10,000-20,000. Even modest user fees or bundled service offerings (like selling phone top-ups, digital goods, and content access) can create viable rural businesses if backhaul cost is kept reasonable.

Leapfrogging the mobile-only model: India's mobile data revolution has been remarkable but has led to a somewhat lopsided digital infrastructure. Mobile broadband alone cannot provide the desired level of quality consistency, sustainability, and resilience essential for the next level of digital evolution.

Fixed wireless access (via public Wi-Fi) can deliver higher bandwidth at lower cost; enable richer applications like video-based learning, telehealth diagnostics, and smart agriculture; and support larger, fixed devices like smart TVs, PCs, and Internet of Things hubs. One former communications minister appropriately termed every public Wi-Fi hotspot as a mini data centre by virtue of the amount of data that would be handled by them. The BharatNet-PM-Wani combo allows India to leapfrog beyond mobile-centric access, building a richer, multi-device digital ecosystem.

Resilient and widespread networks: Unlike centralised mobile networks vulnerable to congestion or disaster-related failures, distributed public Wi-Fi powered by BharatNet creates a resilient, multi-node network. Even if one node fails, others nearby can continue to serve users. In times of crisis — floods, pandemics, disruptions — this decentralised model can be a lifeline for information dissemination and emergency services.

Hurdles remain, such as improving BharatNet's quality, strengthening PDO business models through bundled services and incentives, rationalising tariffs for PDO connections, and enhancing general awareness about public Wi-Fi among users. However, the good news is that none of these are technological dead ends. Solutions are readily available but unused, possibly due to blockages by some incumbents. However, mobile operators need to increasingly use public Wi-Fi to manage the exponentially growing data traffic, not as a fallback but as a strategic component of their networks. AT&T's new partnership with Helium is a shining example. The public looks to the regulator and policymakers to lead the way to affordable, ubiquitous broadband in India. With policy action, public-private collaboration, and strong community engagement, the challenges can be overcome.

If leveraged correctly, the BharatNet-PM-Wani combo can bridge our digital divide, empower local economies, and secure India's place as a leader in people-centric digital innovation. India has rightly earned global admiration for visionary initiatives like UPI and Aadhaar. Now, BharatNet and PM-Wani offer the next leap. A vision emerges of an India where every village has multiple Wi-Fi hotspots bustling with users accessing healthcare, education, entertainment, banking, and digital commerce; lakhs of rural entrepreneurs run small but profitable digital services businesses; and DPI reaches every Indian, not just the urban elite. The common man is waiting for this vision to be realised.

Research inputs by ***Shubhika Saluja****, deputy director, communications & policy, Broadband India Foundation*

Views are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Reducing medical costs

Apropos of "Wrong medicine" (*FE*, May 15) Donald Trump's latest policy is going to impact both medicare and Medicaid. Trump tried to bring drug prices down towards the end of his first tenure but could not succeed. The middlemen like United Health and Cigna will feel the heat as the US President wants drugmakers to sell more products directly to patients. In any case, they have been under the scanner for lack of transparency and not passing the benefits of rebates. The President's move, if implemented successfully, will reduce medical costs significantly and bridge the gap with European prices. Indian manufacturers may find it favourable if they get to sell directly to Medicare and Medicaid.

—Bal Govind, Noida

Bitter pill for pharma

Treating pharmaceuticals like any other commercial industry is wrong. Under the guise of spending huge sums to bring out a new molecule, patent right is given for 20 years to exclusively manufacture and market a new medicine. The exorbitant price at which such molecules are sold deprives the ailing masses of their benefits. Further, the patent holder utilises the statutory provisions to make it an evergreen patent by effecting insignificant changes in the dosage, usage, etc. Instead of just compelling pharma companies to reduce prices a scientific system of pricing a product with reasonable profit may be brought in. Though Donald Trump's order is a bitter pill for the pharma manufacturers, it is a welcome move for the ailing people. Indian pharma companies, who are enjoying the benefits of competitive pricing, should make a serious plan to sustain their generic market in the US.

—AG Rajmohan, Anantapur

●Write to us at feletters@expressindia.com

Regd. No: DL -21048/03-05. R.N.I. No.26750/74. Printed and Published by Ramesh Chander Malhotra on behalf of The Indian Express (P) Ltd and printed at The Indian Express (P) Ltd Press, A-8, Sector-7, Noida - 201301 and published at The Indian Express (P) Ltd, Mezzanine Floor, Express Building, 9 & 10, Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, New Delhi-110002. Phone: 0120-6651500. (Cover price: Patna:₹12, Raipur: ₹12, Srinagar ₹15.) Chairman of the Board: Viveck Goenka, Editor: Shyamal Majumdar, Editor (Delhi) Shobhana Subramanian* (*Responsible for selection of News under the PRP Act.)

©Copyright: The Indian Express (P) Ltd All rights reserved. Reproduction in any manner, electronic or otherwise, in whole or in part, without prior written permission is prohibited. The Financial Express®

Editor's TAKE

A bold voice at the helm of the judiciary

Justice BR Gavai known to be fair and frank, becomes the 52nd Chief Justice of India

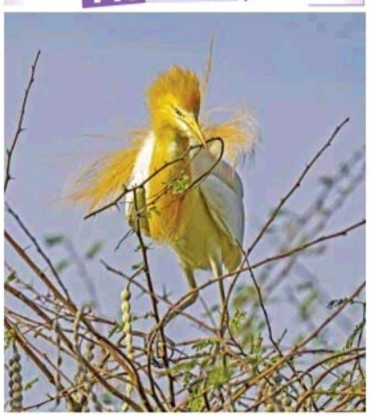
On May 14, 2025, Justice Bhushan Ramkrishna Gavai was sworn in as the 52nd Chief Justice of India in a ceremony held at Rashtrapati Bhavan, marking a historic moment for the Indian judiciary. Sworn in by President Droupadi Murmu, Justice Gavai etched his name into history not just for his judicial achievements, but also as the first Buddhist to ascend to the position of Chief Justice of India. His rise signals both a deep personal legacy and a broader societal progression.

Born on November 24, 1960, in Amravati, Maharashtra, Justice Gavai's journey to the highest judicial post in the country has been one of steady perseverance and service. His father, Ramakrishna Suryabhan Gavai — fondly remembered as 'Dadasaheb' — was a respected Dalit leader and former Governor of Bihar. The values of social justice and constitutional fidelity clearly found resonance in the life and work of his son. Justice Gavai began his legal practice in 1985 and soon established himself in the field of constitutional and administrative law. After practicing independently at the Bombay High Court and later primarily at its Nagpur Bench, he was appointed as an Additional Judge of the Bombay High Court in 2003 and became a permanent judge in 2005. His elevation to the Supreme Court came in May 2019.

Known within legal circles as a bold and decisive judge who does not hesitate to speak his mind, Chief Justice Gavai brings a strong judicial temperament to the bench. He has been part of several landmark verdicts, including: The upholding of the abrogation of Article 370, a pivotal constitutional decision redefining Jammu and Kashmir's status. The striking down of the electoral bonds scheme, reinforcing transparency in political funding. A ruling allowing states to sub-classify Scheduled Castes for more targeted affirmative action — an affirmation of social justice within the bounds of constitutional federalism. His swearing-in was not just ceremonially grand but emotionally resonant. Taking the oath in Hindi, Chief Justice Gavai underscored his rootedness and accessibility. Though Chief Justice Gavai's tenure is relatively short — ending on November 23, 2025 — it is expected to be eventful. Crucial hearings lie ahead, particularly concerning challenges to the Places of Worship Act and the Waqf (Amendment) Act of 2025. His leadership during this period could significantly shape the court's approach to questions of religious identity, minority rights, and constitutional interpretation. In the days following his appointment, Justice Gavai is expected to convene a meeting of all Supreme Court judges to articulate his vision and gather their insights.

Even with the court's upcoming summer recess, at least three benches will continue to function — indicating his intent to maintain judicial momentum. Chief Justice Gavai's elevation is more than just an administrative succession — it is a moment charged with the promise of clarity, conviction, and inclusivity. His ability to balance assertive judgments with constitutional humility will define his months at the helm.

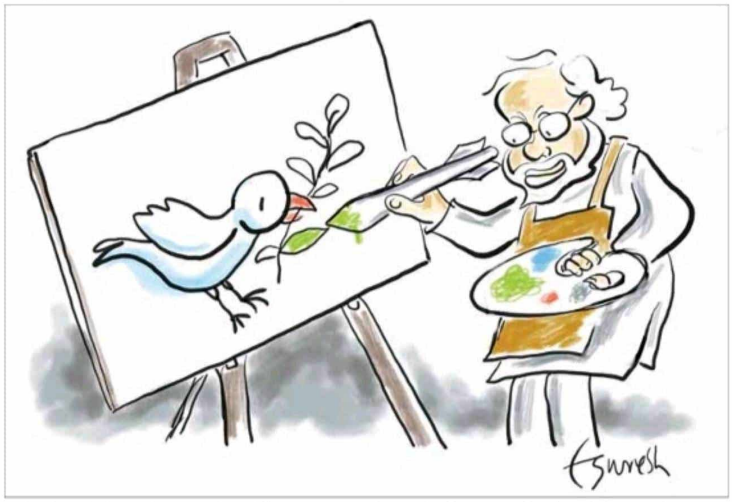
PIC TALK



In Ajmer, an egret is building its nest on a tree. It works carefully, gathering twigs to make a safe home for its family, high up where it feels safe.
PTI

The symphony of retribution

Through calculated strikes and unwavering resolve, Prime Minister Modi delivered not just punishment, but a message: the canvas of Indian resolve is not to be misread



Be it the history of Europe, or that of Asia, it is difficult to find an instance of what one might arguably be artistry in the conduct of a battle, leaving aside a war. This is not surprising. Art is usually associated with the practice or creation of a work of beauty, aiming for perfection; for example, the Taj Mahal.

The dome is flanked by the four minarets, which, as it were, seem to support the dome and provide a frame to the main structure of the Mahal, from a distance. For my part, I cannot think of anyone worthy of mention who practices this art on the battlefield except for Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who is no professional military general.

Also to be borne in mind is the fact that the scope of modern conflict is not confined to land, but covers the sea and skies, outer space, cyberspace and artificial intelligence.

The horrific outrage committed on the afternoon of April 22 at Pahalgam was unusually barbaric in the spectre of terrorism. The Prime Minister, therefore, condemned it unequivocally, as well as touchingly. He then went on to promise that the barbarians who did this would soon meet appropriate punishment of such severity that they would remember it for life.

The PM did not move away from the canvas of terrorism and repeatedly reminded the perpetrators that their just punishment and swift retribution were soon coming; they ought not to think otherwise even if it took a few more days to happen.

Some of the terrorists and their masters in Pakistan did begin to feel that India's PM was perhaps easing off from the issue. A lot of people at home too might have felt that perhaps the PM was beginning to forget.

After all, the head of a country's Government has files upon files of work pouring in every day from the secretariats.

I met three persons on the evening of May 6 who told me to forget any punishment or retribution; the issue was "becoming too old", they told me. Come 1:30 in the morning the same night nine centres of terror in the territory of Pakistan and Pak-occupied Kashmir (PoK) were reduced to ashes by India's cruise missile attacks.

Any number of merchants of terror and murder were targeted and struck, leaving innumerable dead and others wounded. In less than 25 minutes, the heart of Pakistan was destroyed by Indian armed retribution. According to reliable information, more than 200 terrorists have been killed.

They were also mourned, for their 'service' to their ideology and state, as that country's seniormost military officials did not forget to be present to offer their salutes before the funerals. Pakistan's behaviour has proved its umbilical ties to all such elements whether with or without a uniform.



PRAFULL GORADIA

In any other country, the coffins of the terror merchants would not have seen such official attendance.

Come the morning of the 8th, the dispensing of punishment continued by the Indian armed forces continued unabated, with the terrorists being the only target. No civilian was targeted and hit; only the purveyors of terror were sent to their graves. By early evening, up to a total of 200 terrorists had been rewarded with burial ceremonies, but only them and no others. Apart from this, 11 of Pakistan's elite air force bases and its Chinese-made air defence systems were destroyed in devastating Indian missile strikes, with Islamabad reduced to pathetic helplessness.

There are few artists whose arms are strong enough to not veer from the art master's desire.

Long before a mistake was made, the enemy's pleading for a ceasefire was chivalrously conceded. That is art, where an artist paints on, without fault or anger. So much so, that even the enemies' cries are answered with chivalry.

To leave PM Modi alone and isolated wouldn't make a symmetry. If one were to think of a peer, one can think of only Otto von Bismarck, who made himself Chancellor of Germany from that of only Prussia.

There were any number of principalities and cities, such as Hanover, Saxony, Hesse-Cassel, Dresden, Schweig, Nassau, Frankfurt, Altenburg, Coburg, Weimar, Sondershausen, Rundstedt, Mecklenburg Strelitz, Oldenburg, Braunschweig, Hamburg, Lubeck, etc. Patiently and systematically, Bismarck persuaded, pressurised, threatened, and charmed but managed to amalgamate them into what was his dream of a united Germany. Surprisingly, it is not very different from its map even today.

No doubt, after the defeat of Adolf Hitler in World War II, East Germany, i.e., most of Prussia was forcibly incorporated into the Soviet bloc as the German Democratic Republic (GDR).

By its good fortune, East and West Germany were reunited when the Berlin Wall was brought down by common folk in 1991. Otto Von Bismarck's "blood and iron" policies of the 1860s did not go to waste.

In a somewhat different way to India's, German history in this context can be described as artistic. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Otto von Bismarck have often been compared by historians as architecturally admirable.

Sardar Patel of course, was in the context of integrating the subcontinents princely states? 563 of them into the Indian Union with hardly any bloodshed.

(The writer is a well-known columnist, an author and a former member of the Rajya Sabha; views are personal)

Tackling climate change with green mobility

SECOND Opinion





DEVNDRA CHAWLA

Climate change is no longer knocking on our doors — it's inside our homes. From Delhi's smogchoked air to Mumbai's unpredictable monsoons and the scorching heatwaves sweeping across the country, the evidence is all around us. The only question that remains is: how quickly can we respond? One of the most immediate and impactful ways to address this crisis lies in how we travel.

Transport contributes nearly 23 per cent of global carbon emissions (Source: IEA). In India, road transport alone accounts for over 12 per cent of energy-related CO2 emissions (Source: RMI), a number that is growing rapidly with increasing urbanisation and rising vehicle ownership. India's mobility story needs a decisive shift toward sustainability.

Electric vehicles (EVs), efficient public transport, walking, cycling, and shared mobility cannot remain niche solutions — they must become the new normal.

This isn't just a strategy to lower emissions; it's a vision for cleaner air, healthier communities, and more liveable cities. Currently, our roads are dominated by petrol and diesel — powered vehicles. The consequences are all too familiar: deteriorating air quality, rising carbon levels, and escalating public health risks. A report by the Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) warns that if we do not act, transport emissions in India could increase sixfold in the coming decades. These issues are more than abstract concerns — they pose tangible risks to the daily lives and well-being of millions."

There is cause for optimism. India's electric vehicle transition is gathering momentum. The Government has set clear and ambitious goals: by 2030, 30 per cent of new cars and 80 per cent of two and three-wheelers sold should be electric. Encouragingly, in Q1 of 2025, EV sales grew by more than 50 per cent compared to the previous year — an unmistakable sign that public acceptance of clean mobility is gaining ground. However, the real gamechanger lies not just in private electric vehicles, but in electrifying public transport — especially buses. These are the lifelines of our cities, connecting millions every day across socio-economic lines. An electric bus does far more than reduce tailpipe emissions.

It eases noise pollution, lowers urban congestion, and replaces dozens of individual vehicles on the road. Brands like NueGo, GreenCell Mobility's electric intercity bus service, are already demonstrating how clean, comfortable, and safe electric transport can become a mainstream reality in India. Addressing climate change is not the sole responsibility of Governments or large corporations — it requires collective effort. Industry must lead with innovation, policymakers must create the right incentives, and citizens must embrace sustainable choices. Together, we must rethink how we move. Sustainable mobility is about more than clean fuel. It's about building a fairer, healthier, and more liveable India — for ourselves and for future generations. The path is clear. The technology exists. The time to act is now.

(The writer is MD & CEO, GreenCell Mobility. Views are personal)

Letters to the Editor

The ongoing human crisis in Gaza

The situation in Gaza is very painful. Many innocent children are dying because of hunger and lack of medicine. It is reported that more than 57 children have already died from starvation. The pictures of weak and starving children are heartbreaking. This is not just a war, it is cruelty. Cutting off food, water, and medical aid is a huge injustice. It is very regretable that the world is silent. I suppose we must speak for the people of Gaza. All humans, especially children, have the right to live. The world should help them quickly. This is the time to show real humanity.

QA QASMI | KATHMANDU

The Houthis stroke of luck

The Houthis had a stroke of luck, managing to down fifteen US MQ-9 Reaper drones using locally modified missiles. Adding to America's woes, two costly F/A-18 Hornets were lost — one mistakenly shot down by its own fire and the other slipping off the aircraft carrier Truman during a sharp sea maneuver. Additionally, a stealth F-35 and an F-16 were shot down by the Houthis. These incidents highlight not just technical vulnerabilities but also a worrying lapse in operational discipline. and poor coordination.

RS NARULA | PATIALA

China renames Arunachal Pradesh

India on Wednesday (May 14) rejected China's attempt to assign names to more locations in Arunachal Pradesh, asserting that such "creative naming" would not change the fact that the state is an integral part of the country. On Sunday, China's Ministry of Civil Affairs released the fifth batch of standardised geographical names for Arunachal Pradesh.

This follows previous releases, including 30 names in March 2025, In April 11, 2023, 15 in an earlier batch, and six in the first list issued in 2021 and 2017, respectively. Chinese Foreign Ministry Lian Jian reiterated China's claim that the region, referred to as 'Zangnan' by Beijing, is part of Chinese territory. Zangnan is part of China's territory. The Chinese Government has standardized the names of some parts of Zangnan. This is within China's sovereign rights. The fifth list released on Sunday included 27 geographical features, covering mountains, rivers, lakes, mountain passes, and residential areas.

India has firmly rejected China's repeated attempts to rename locations in Arunachal Pradesh, reaffirming the state's integral status within India. Despite China's release of five name lists since 2017, including 27 new entries, India maintains that such symbolic actions cannot alter established facts or undermine its sovereignty over the region.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

Silent sufferings of migrant workers

When will the various forms of torment inflicted upon Indian citizens — by both State and non-State actors — finally come to an end, right here in a country that claims to belong equally to people of all languages, religions, regions, and communities?

Why must hardworking migrant labourers from Bengal, seeking an honest livelihood, face humiliation and violence? Why are they heckled by local goons in Odisha and forced to flee without their belongings or hard — earned wages?

Why are their counterparts in Sikar, Rajasthan, detained for days in police custody under the pretext of "interrogation" and "identification," simply for working at a brick kiln?

If their authenticity as Indian citizens is to be questioned despite possessing Aadhaar and Voter ID cards, then the Government must come clean.

On one hand, Aadhaar is made compulsory for countless procedures; on the other, its validity is conveniently challenged whenever it's time to harass the marginalised. This duplicity must end. And let the bigoted and the intolerant answer honestly: is it now an unpardonable crime in "New India" to be born into the religious community of Kazi Nazrul Islam, to speak the language of Rabindranath Tagore, and to come from a region that has sacrificed the most in blood, land, and lives for India's independence?

KAJAL CHATTERJEE | KOLKATA

IRRATIONAL DRUG PRICES



Treating the pharmaceutical industry like any other commercial sector is flawed policy. Allowing it to function purely on market dynamics contradicts the Government's welfare role. The 20-year patent protection, justified by high R&D costs, often leads to exorbitant pricing, putting life-saving drugs out of reach for many.

Moreover, patent holders exploit legal loopholes to extend monopolies through minor modifications — a practice that needs urgent reform. Rather than merely incentivising R&D, the Government should consider funding it as part of public welfare. The current pricing system lacks transparency, enabling pharma companies to reap excessive profits. The stark difference between branded and generic drug prices illustrates this.

A rational, scientific pricing model ensuring reasonable profit must replace the existing setup. While Mr Trump's pricing reforms may be a bitter pill for manufacturers, they are a welcome relief for patients.

His approach — pegging drug prices to the lowest global rates — contrasts with India's method of averaging top-brand prices, which keeps costs high. His policy prioritises people over profits and deserves appreciation.

AG RAJMOHAN | AMBALA

MP Minister's hate speech underlines toxicity in public life

THE Madhya Pradesh High Court must be lauded for taking suo motu cognizance of the shocking and disgraceful remarks made by state Minister Vijay Shah against Colonel Sophia Qureshi. In a move that underscores the judiciary's role in upholding constitutional values, the court has ordered the Director General of Police (DGP) to register a First Information Report (FIR) against the minister for his derogatory, communal, and sexist comments. The court's directive was clear and urgent: the FIR must be filed by the evening of the same day, or the DGP could face contempt proceedings.

Shah's remarks were not only deeply offensive but also dangerous in their communal undertones and misogynistic framing. Referring to Operation Sindoor, Shah said, "They stripped Hindus and killed them, and Modi-ji sent their sister to return the favour. We couldn't undress them, so we sent a daughter from their community… You widowed sisters of our community, so a sister of your community will strip you naked." He went on to declare, "Modi-ji proved that the daughters of your caste can be sent to Pakistan to take revenge."

Worse, the reprehensible speech was made in the presence of several prominent BJP leaders, including Union Minister of State for Women & Child Development Savitri Thakur and MLA and former Cabinet minister Usha Thakur. Their presence and silence during the speech have raised serious questions about complicity and the normalization of hate speech in political discourse.

Colonel Qureshi, the officer targeted by Shah's remarks, has served her country with distinction. Alongside Wing Commander Vyomika Singh, she has been the public face of the Indian military during briefings on Operation Sindoor. These two women officers regularly accompanied Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri in press conferences, exemplifying professionalism and courage under pressure. Yet, instead of being celebrated, they have been subjected to vile attacks and derogatory insinuations for their role in a sensitive military operation.

By the by, Misri and his daughter also became the targets of some other saffronites. They were subjected to social media trolling and abuse for his 'sin' of announcing the ceasefire between India and Pakistan—as if he decided to stop the hostilities between the two nations! In response to the online harassment, the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) Association issued a strong statement condemning the personal attacks on Misri, reaffirming their support for civil servants who carry out their duties with integrity.

The two episodes highlight a deeper malaise in Indian public life: the increasing acceptance of communal, sexist, and inflammatory rhetoric in political speeches and the toxic targeting of civil and military officials. The role of the judiciary, in this case, becomes even more critical. By demanding accountability and setting strict deadlines for police action, the Madhya Pradesh HC has sent a strong message that hate speech will not be tolerated under the shield of political privilege.

It is high time the Central government, as well as leaders from the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party and its ideological parent, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), took concrete steps to cleanse the political arena and the public sphere of such venom. Democratic societies thrive not on intimidation and divisiveness, but on respect for the Constitution, equality, and the dignity of all citizens. The country owes its officers—civil and military—not only protection but also the respect their service deserves.

BEING A LOW-TRUST SOCIETY!



K. KRISHNA SAGAR RAO



A low-trust society is one where suspicion overshadows cooperation. People don't trust their neighbours, coworkers, leaders, and even their own family members to act with integrity or fairness. Institutions, governments, courts, and media are seen as corrupt or self-serving. This isn't about healthy scepticism but a pervasive expectation of betrayal. It's like living in a game where everyone's playing defence, hoarding resources, trying to cheat, and guarding their backs.

Our civilisation has driven societies of the past to be of high trust. The Hindu way of life and its culture have ensured honesty, integrity, truth, and simplicity amongst the citizens of this nation for centuries. However, after our society started moving away from our own culture, ethos and its behavioural guidance, our families and societies are heavily impacted by borrowed culture and lack of any value guidance. Globalisation, hyper-capitalism have transformed our society into a greedy, self-serving entity bereft of trust and cooperation.

Imagine walking into a neighbourhood where everyone locks their doors, avoids eye contact, and hesitates to help. That's the vibe of a low-trust society, a place where people assume the worst about each other, institutions, and systems. It's not just about scepticism; it's a deep-rooted belief that others can't be relied upon, and this mindset shapes everything from daily interactions, workplace issues, family conflicts and all the way to how a nation functions. So, what exactly is a low-trust society, and have we turned into one?

A low-trust society is one where suspicion overshadows cooperation. People don't trust their neighbours, coworkers, leaders, and even their own family members to act with integrity or fairness. Institutions, governments, courts, and media are seen as corrupt or self-serving. This isn't about healthy scepticism but a pervasive expectation of betrayal. It's like living in a game where everyone's playing defence, hoarding resources, trying to cheat, and guarding their backs. The result? A fractured community that struggles to co-exist, co-operate, collaborate, innovate, or even feel emotionally and physically secure.

You can spot a low-trust society by its tell-tale signs. First, there's rampant cynicism. People assume politicians are liars, businesses are exploitative, and even strangers have ulterior motives. This shows up in everyday life: think of the person who triple-checks their bill at a restaurant or avoids sharing personal details with colleagues. Second, all social interactions become transactional. Relationships, whether with family, friends, colleagues, neighbours, or service providers, lack warmth or goodwill.

You will notice less help, fewer favours exchanged, less volunteering, lower collaboration, and a reluctance to engage in community activities. It's every person for themselves. Another indicator is overreliance on rules and enforcement. In low-trust societies, people demand rigid contracts, heavy-handed laws, or constant surveillance because they don't believe others will act ethically without force. Another indicator is sheer loudness, noise, and high decibel level communication in family and workplace settings. Individuals of any age and role tend to be loud, noisy, and at times even abusive to get their point across, as they believe gentle communication will not yield expected outcomes.

When trust is absent, people justify bending rules, bribes, nepotism, or cutting corners become normal because 'everyone's doing it.' As we advance, low-trust societies normalise lies, deceit, and fraud, leading to progressive degeneration.

Economically, low-trust societies build walls, not bridges. Businesses hesitate to invest, fearing unfair competition or unreliable partners. Entrepreneurs face hurdles securing loans, finding reliable partners, excessive litigation, and a lack of social and financial support systems. In addition, low-trust environments breed inefficiency, resource wastage, low-quality delivery, and high attrition; think of the time wasted haggling over every single interaction, plan, deal, or resolving an unending loop of disputes.

Living in a low-trust society feels like navigating a maze blindfolded. It's exhausting, helpless, and at times quite lonely. The key indicators of a low-trust society are chronic cynicism, normalized deceit, random fraud, transactional relationships, brazen corruption, bureaucracy, economic stagnation, and social isolation. Recognising that we are living in a low-trust society is the first step towards rebuilding social trust, one small act of collective goodwill at a time, if we intend to reverse this degeneration.

How a society transforms into a low-trust society: 6 Key Drivers

As stated earlier, a low-trust society is characterized by widespread scepticism and suspicion towards institutions, individuals, and systems, leading to social distrust, fragmentation and reduced cooperation. This transformation doesn't occur overnight; it results from a confluence of systemic, cultural, and historical factors. Below are six key drivers that propel a society toward low trust, eroding the social glue that fosters confidence.

Institutional failure and corruption: When institutions, government, judiciary, or media consistently fail to deliver on promises and are plagued by corruption, public faith erodes. Scandals, nepotism, or perceived bias in decision-making breed cynicism. For example, repeated instances of unpunished corruption among political elites can make citizens distrust not only leaders but also the systems they represent. This distrust spills over into everyday interactions, as people assume others are equally untrustworthy.

Economic inequality and exclusion: Stark economic disparities fuel resentment and suspicion. When a significant portion of society feels excluded from opportunities or believes the system favours the wealthy, trust in both institutions and fellow citizens diminishes. In highly unequal societies, people may view others as competitors rather than collaborators, fostering a zero-sum mindset. For instance, when basic needs like healthcare or education are inaccessible to many, faith in societal fairness collapses, deepening mistrust.

Polarisation and social fragmentation: Ideological, cultural, or ethnic polarization fractures social cohesion. When groups are pitted against each other, whether through political rhetoric, media echo chambers, or historical grievances, empathy and mutual understanding erode. In polarized environments, people increasingly view those outside their group as adversaries, reducing trust across social lines. Social media often amplifies this by creating bubbles that reinforce biases and demonize others, further entrenching division.

Historical trauma and betrayal: Societies with a history of oppression, conflict, or betrayal, such as colonialism, oppressive foreign invasions like in our case, often carry lingering distrust. Past injustices, if unaddressed, create a collective memory of scepticism toward authority and even other social groups. For example, communities that experienced state-sponsored violence in many third-world nations may remain wary of institutions, passing this distrust across generations. Without reconciliation or restorative justice, these wounds fester, undermining social trust.

Weak rule of law and insecurity: A society where laws are inconsistently enforced or justice is inaccessible to all becomes fertile ground for mistrust. If citizens feel unsafe or believe that disputes won't be resolved fairly, they may resort to self-reliance, vigilantism, or extremism, weakening communal bonds. For instance, in areas with high crime rates and ineffective policing, people may distrust both authorities and strangers, assuming no one will protect their interests. This insecurity breeds suspicion in all daily interactions.

Erosion of civic engagement and community ties: Trust thrives in communities where people interact, collaborate, and build relationships. When civic engagement declines due to urbanisation, individualism, or digital isolation, social networks weaken. Without regular, positive interactions, people become strangers to one another, fostering suspicion. In societies where communal activities like social get-togethers or religious gatherings fade, individuals lose opportunities to build trust through shared experiences, leading to alienation.

These drivers often interact, creating a vicious cycle. For instance, corruption may exacerbate inequality, which fuels polarisation, further weakening institutions. The result is a society where individuals prioritize self-interest over collective good, cooperation dwindles, and distrust becomes the default.

Reversing this trend requires addressing these root causes through transparent governance, equitable policies, and efforts to rebuild community ties. Only by tackling these drivers can a society hope to restore the trust that underpins social cohesion.

Restoring trust and harmony: 6 Key Measures to build a high-trust society

Transforming a low-trust society into one where mutual confidence and harmony thrive requires deliberate, sustained efforts to rebuild social bonds and institutional credibility. By addressing the root causes of distrust, societies can foster cooperation and unity. Below are six key measures to achieve this transformation, promoting a high-trust society.

Strengthen transparent governance: Trust hinges on institutions that are accountable and open. Governments must prioritize transparency by publicizing decision-making processes, budgets, and policies. Anti-corruption measures, such as independent audits and whistleblower protections, can curb misconduct.

Promote economic equity: Reducing inequality is critical to fostering trust. Policies like progressive taxation, accessible education, and universal healthcare can ensure broader access to opportunities. When people feel the system works for everyone, not just the elite, resentment fades. For instance, affordable housing initiatives can bridge divides between classes, encouraging a sense of shared progress and mutual reliance.

Foster dialogue to bridge polarisation: Polarization erodes trust by deepening divisions. Creating platforms for constructive dialogue—town halls, community forums, or mediated discussions—can humanize opposing views. Media outlets should be encouraged to avoid sensationalism and promote balanced reporting. By emphasizing shared values, such as safety or prosperity, societies can rebuild empathy and reduce hostility across ideological or cultural lines.

Address historical grievances: Healing past wounds is essential for trust. Truth and reconciliation processes, public apologies, or reparative policies can acknowledge historical injustices, whether from conflict or systemic oppression. For example, community-led initiatives to document and educate about past atrocities can foster understanding and closure, allowing societies to move forward with mutual respect rather than lingering suspicion.

Uphold the rule of law: A fair and consistent legal system rebuilds confidence in justice. Strengthening judicial independence, ensuring equal access to legal recourse, and improving law enforcement accountability are vital. When citizens see impartial resolutions to disputes, such as transparent investigations into police misconduct, they trust institutions and each other more. A reliable rule of law reassures people that fairness prevails, reducing fear and suspicion.

Revive civic engagement and community ties: Trust grows through interaction. Encouraging civic participation via local organizations, volunteer programs, or cultural events strengthens social networks. Governments and NGOs can support community centres or initiatives that bring diverse groups together, like shared public spaces or festivals. Regular, positive contact such as neighbours collaborating on local projects—builds familiarity and mutual reliance, countering alienation.

These measures, when implemented cohesively, create a virtuous cycle. Transparent governance and equitable policies reduce polarisation, while strong communities and historical healing reinforce institutional trust. Over time, these efforts cultivate a culture where people assume good faith in others, cooperation flourishes, and harmony prevails. Building a high-trust society demands patience and collective commitment, but the result, a cohesive, resilient community, is worth the effort.

How can individuals contribute to a high-trust society?

While systemic changes are vital for transforming a low-trust society into one of harmony and mutual confidence, individuals play a pivotal role in sparking and sustaining this shift. Through intentional actions, personal accountability, and community engagement, individuals can foster trust and drive societal change.

Model integrity and accountability: Trust begins with personal behavior. Individuals can build trust by acting with honesty, keeping promises, and owning mistakes. Whether in professional or personal interactions, demonstrating reliability, such as delivering on commitments or being transparent about mistakes, sets a powerful example. When one observes consistent integrity, they inspire others to reciprocate, creating ripples of trust.

Engage in community building: Individuals can strengthen social bonds by participating in local activities, such as volunteering, joining civic groups, or organizing neighbourhood events. These interactions foster familiarity and mutual reliance. For example, hosting a community cleanup can bring diverse people together, breaking down stereotypes and building connections that counter alienation and suspicion.

Promote open dialogue: Bridging divides requires conversation. Individuals can initiate or participate in discussions that encourage understanding across ideological or cultural lines, whether through book clubs, community forums, or informal gatherings. Listening actively and sharing perspectives respectfully humanizes "others," reducing polarization. By modelling empathy, individuals can inspire others to engage constructively.

Advocate for fairness: Individuals can push for equitable systems by supporting policies or organizations that address inequality and injustice. This might involve voting for transparent leadership, signing petitions for anti-corruption measures, or volunteering with groups that promote access to education or healthcare. Grassroots advocacy amplifies the demand for systemic change, reinforcing trust in institutions.

Educate and inspire others: Sharing knowledge about trust-building through social media, conversations, or mentorship can motivate others to act. Individuals can highlight success stories of reconciled communities or transparent governance to show what's possible. By educating peers about the benefits of trust, they cultivate a culture of optimism and collective responsibility.

By embodying trust in their actions, individuals create microcosms of the high-trust society they seek. These efforts, though small, compound over time, influencing others and pressuring systems to change. Through persistence and collaboration, individuals can transform suspicion into harmony, one interaction at a time.

(The Author is the Chief Spokesperson of BJP, Chairman of the Nation Building Foundation, a Harvard Business School-certified Strategist & a Leadership Coach.)

LETTERS

Remembering Sir Arthur Cotton

ON May 15, on his birthday it is apt to remember the eminent British engineer, Sir Arthur Cotton who played a pivotal role in the construction of the original anicut on the Godavari River at Dowaleswaram near Rajahmundry. This anicut, completed in 1852, is often referred to as the Dowleswaram Barrage. it's more accurately known as the Dowleswaram Barrage, which was later replaced and upgraded to the Sir Arthur Cotton Barrage (also sometimes called the Godavari Barrage) in the latter part of the 20th century. Sir Arthur Cotton's initiative and engineering skills were crucial in transforming the Godavari delta into a fertile Agricultural Region, protecting it from floods and famines. His contributions are still remembered and honoured in the region today.

Kantamsetti Lakshman Rao, Visakhapatnam

MP Minister has goofed up

THE MP cabinet minister, Vijay Shaw, has made a grave mistake! His remark on Col.Qureshi deserves to be condemned without any reservations and second thoughts, because Vijay Shaw should note that he is not an ordinary man on the street to talk disparagingly against anybody more so, when that anybody is an "active" officer of the armed forces. The High Court did the right thing, by taking up a suo motu case against the erring minister and got FIR registered against him. Caught on the wrong foot, Vijay Shaw tried to down play his remarks against Col.Qureshi, but the damage has been done. The opposition got a good handle to beat the ruling BJP with Vijay Shaw's remarks. By demanding the sacking of Vijay Shaw, the opposition parties are apparently overdoing everything about it.

Govardhana Myneedu, Vijayawada

Turkey faces Indian boycott now

After Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), Delhi's Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI) and Hyderabad's Maulana Azad National Urdu University (MANUU) suspended of their Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with educational institutions in Turkey, due to national security.

This move comes amid an intensifying boycott of Turkish goods and services in India, spurred by Turkey's vocal support for Pakistan following India's military action under Operation Sindoor. The use of Turkish-origin drones by Pakistan to breach Indian airspace has triggered widespread public and political backlash within the country.

The university stated that the MoU had been signed on 2 January, 2024, for a period of five years, under which a diploma course in Turkish language was introduced at the School of Languages, Linguistics, and Indology.

The services of a Visiting Professor were engaged for this programme. It is also worth noting that the Visiting Professor from Turkey has already returned to his country. There is also growing demand for a tourism boycott of both Turkey and Azerbaijan, following Ankara and Baku's support for Islamabad and their criticism of India's strikes on terror camps in Pakistan.

Bhagwan Thadani, Mumbai

Is Tharoor BJP man in Congress?

IT is time the Congress lets Shashi Tharoor go where he belongs. It should facilitate what he wishes to do. The Thiruvananthapuram MP has made it clear time and again that he agrees with the BJP and disagrees with his own party on a host of issues. He has said enough to be called a BJP man in the Congress. Erudite and articulate that he is, Tharoor would make a good spokesperson for the BJP. Or he could be elevated to the position of Minister of State for External Affairs to assist S. Jaishankar.

For all his espousal of secularism in his writings, the BJP mentality in him surfaces and resurfaces and reveals what kind of a nationalist he is, again and again. While refusing to toe his party's line, Tharoor ends up kowtowing to the BJP. His strong defence of the Modi government on the Sindoor Operation is an exertion no BJP spokesperson can ever do better. He spoke, to use his words, "as an Indian and in the national interest". If his unqualified praise of Modi is anything to go by, it can be safely said that he suffers from what can be described as "Modi worship syndrome".

G David Milton, Maruthancode

thehansreader@gmail.com

BENGALURU ONLINE

Guv gives assent to Greater Bangalore Administration Act

BENGALURU: The Greater Bangalore Administration Act has received the Governor's assent and will be implemented from today. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said that the Greater Bangalore Authority will be formed instead of BBMP. Speaking to the media at the Vidhana Soudha on Thursday, he said, from now on, Bangalore will become Greater Bangalore. At least three corporations are likely to be formed in the Greater Bangalore area. The Chief Minister of the state will act as the chairman of the authority and an appropriate decision will be taken in this regard in the coming days, CM Siddaramaiah said.

However, all functionaries will continue to have the same powers and duties as conferred under the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) Act, 2020, until the new law comes into effect fully.

Until multiple corporations are created, the BBMP will continue to work under the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA), which is expected to be constituted soon, official sources said. The Act provides 120 days to establish the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA).

The Greater Bengaluru Governance Bill, which was passed by both houses of the state legislature recently despite opposition from the BJP, proposes restructuring the BBMP by splitting it into a maximum of seven city corporations, in the Greater Bengaluru Area.

It also provides for a constitution of a Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) for coordination and supervision, and 30-month term for the Mayor and the Deputy Mayor.

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

Printed and Published by K. Hanumanta Rao, on behalf of Hyderabad Media House Pvt. Limited, Flat.No.609, 6th Floor, Kirti Shikhar Building, Plot.No.11, Dist.Center, Janakpuri, New Delhi- 110058. and Printed at M/s. Marutinandan Printers & Publishers, A-15, Bara Bagh, G.T Karnal Road, Industrial Area, New Delhi - 110033. **Chief Editor:** V Ramu Sarma. RNI No: DELENG/2017/74095

EDITORIAL



Under peaceful conditions, the warlike man attacks himself — Freidrich Nietzsche

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

— Ramnath Goenka

US-CHINA ROLLBACK IS WELCOME, BUT TRADE CHAOS FAR FROM OVER

IN an unexpected turnaround that has pulled the US from the brink of recession, the Trump administration and China have agreed to pause their mutually devastating tariffs. The US will now reduce import duty on Chinese goods from the absurdly high 145 percent to 30 percent, while China will scale down on US goods from 125 percent to 10 percent. The declaration of the world's two largest economies that they "are in agreement that neither side wants to decouple" has come as a shot in the arm to weakening economies round the world. Retail prices in the US had already begun to creep up as Chinese ships stopped berthing at American ports. Manufacturers scrambled and supply chains began to teeter. In China, factory output slowed as firms laid off workers after US orders began drying up.

As investors cheered, equity markets rebounded. As trade between the two giant economies begins to flow again, there will be a multiplier effect on other economies, too. However, those countries that did not retaliate with reciprocal tariffs have been left with a raw deal. For instance, Vietnam and Thailand, which had accepted tariffs at 46 and 36 percent, respectively, could now see manufacturers targeting the US markets, move to China where tariffs are down to 30 percent.

However, the world is not yet free of jitters since there is no final settlement, and the pause is only for 90 days. In all the Trump-induced chaos, it is China that has emerged as a far more reliable trading partner. For India, which currently faces a baseline 10 percent tariff on exports to the US, the scaling down of hostilities between the US and China is, in a way, a setback. China getting priced out of the US market was a huge opportunity for Indian exporters; but for now, that edge has vanished. Trump's move to slash pharmaceutical prices in the US will also hit Indian exporters who supply about 40 percent of the US's generic drug needs. At a broader lever, this puts a question mark on the China+1 formula—the business strategy of multinationals shifting to alternative hubs in Mexico, Vietnam or India, to cushion against the volatile tariff regime China faces. The tumult in global trade is far from over, and India would do well to clinch a deal with the US at the earliest.

PROTECT WILD HABITATS WHILE BOOSTING TOURISM

A proposed hotel project in the vicinity of Odisha's Similipal Tiger Reserve (STR), among the first notified tiger habitats of the country, has raised concern over its location. Green activists flagged the issue citing its proximity, barely 700 metres, from the reserve's boundary. Though it's a designated national park, the STR has not yet been notified as an ecologically-sensitive zone (ESZ). It's the only habitat in the state to have a stable tiger population and so needs robust protection. The ESZ classification is critical because it marks protected areas where some activities are prohibited or regulated, depending on the region's fragility. In many ESZs, new commercial projects are barred within a kilometre of the protected areas. Not in every case, though. A draft ESZ for Satkosia, Odisha's second tiger reserve, saw the government propose something drastically different—permission for new commercial hotels within 1 km of its boundary. With the state government trying to push the tourism sector, there is a rush for private hotel and resort projects. In its last single-window clearance meeting, it approved six such projects worth over ₹400 crore. Many of these are being planned around prime wildlife habitats.

Odisha was among the few states that recorded a marginal increase in forest cover in the latest nationwide survey. A little above 5 percent of the state's geographical area is marked as protected. These biodiverse hotspots provide immense ecological services to the state and must be preserved at all costs. Building tourism infrastructure is a laudable move to bring in revenues and employment, but those planned near national parks and sanctuaries would sustain only if the wildlife is allowed to thrive and the carrying capacity of the protected area is maintained. The state might feel it has missed the bus so far as wildlife tourism—tiger-spotting, in particular—is concerned, the benefits of which have long been reaped by other states. But it must not be lost on the government that tiger reserves are governed by stringent laws and require stronger conservation efforts. While tourism projects are welcome, critical wildlife habitats must be spared, which is why the ESZs should institute the required safeguards. Odisha must see to it that its protected areas are not compromised for short-term benefits.

QUICK TAKE

TOP PRIORITY IS UNITY

WHEN someone conflates Pakistan-supported terrorists with Indian Muslims, they play into the terrorists' gameplan of deepening India's communal faultlines. And when they relate terrorists with members of our armed forces, they threaten the nation's unity and security. It's in this light that Madhya Pradesh's senior minister Kunwar Vijay Shah's comments on Colonel Sofiya Qureshi, who has been articulating details of Operation Sindoor, should be seen. Calling his comments "gutter language", the Madhya Pradesh High Court directed the police to file an FIR against the eighth-term BJP legislator; even the Chief Justice of India upbraided Shah. The state government and the BJP must take exemplary action against the politician to deter others from such dangerous comments.

Caste identity is often fluid, making reliable data collection difficult. Add to it the lobbying by communities for favourable classification, and it becomes nearly impossible to paint the correct picture

CASTE CENSUS: WILL IT CLEAR AIR OR MUDDY WATERS?

SUGATA SRINIVASARAJU



Senior journalist and author of *Strange Burdens: The Politics and Predicaments of Rahul Gandhi*



SOURAV ROY

NOT long ago, the Union government announced it would conduct a caste census along with the regular census. However, it has not told us explicitly as to why it plans to conduct the caste census after opposing it for a prolonged period. Since social justice is the idea associated with it, one has to assume this decision serves that singular end, notwithstanding that the phrase 'social justice' is a much-trampled term in Indian politics. It can mean a whole set of things without actually meaning anything for the truly oppressed.

Of course, the timing of the government's decision has been attributed to political expediency–the Bihar assembly polls. But beyond Bihar, it speaks to a certain vulnerability and inevitable accommodation of a coalition set up. It also allows for other Mandal and Dravidian parties and their electorates to look at the BJP more favorably in the near future. In a sense, it could cause power realignments where necessary.

More than snatching away an obsessive plank from the Congress, caste census could be the BJP's move to strategically delink Mandal parties from the former. It may want to smash the idea of the caste-narrative as a binary opposite of the religion-narrative that it commands. With this move, the BJP comes across as an all-encompassing behemoth. No narrative is outside its purview anymore. The Congress on the other hand looks like it has shrunk its worldview, and surrendered its pan-national appeal. All this said, one has to still confront the toughest and the most basic question about the caste census. It may offer abundant data, but how does one really enumerate caste in present-day India? How does one verify that data, and how does one interpret it when uncertainties exist about its very accuracy?

Caste is such a thing that gives a feeling of certainty as long as you do not have to pin it down under one category or the other. The moment one is asked to be specific about one's caste, the confusion begins right from the name; its alignment to the varna categories, and the googlies that specificities of a sub-caste would hurl. Now is not the age of caste anyway, it is the age of sub-caste. After these many decades of reservations, the competition is between sub-castes. The conflict is more between sub-castes—one dominated by another, placed in the same quota category.

When it comes to caste or sub-caste, one identifies oneself in relative terms, to an immediate social setting as well as a certain aspirational or political setting, never to what one really is. There is a fluidity to caste/sub-caste identity that we hardly recognise, but that can make a mockery of the caste census. Social science in India has predominantly borrowed a western model, which has never attempted a model to enumerate caste. That could also be due to an upper caste or leftist bias in academia.

The general census works on a verifiable binary reasoning or response model to determine socio-economic distress or flourish. Questions like, do you own a house, do you have a degree, do you live in a joint family etc., elicit a definite 'yes' or 'no' response, but caste cannot be enumerated with such definitiveness because it carries ifs and buts in its belly.

In the last caste census that was conducted in 1931, J H Hutton, the census commissioner wrote that "the term 'caste' needs no definition in India." He meant it in the sense that it was omnipresent, but it could also mean it cannot be defined conclusively because there are too many variables at play. Hutton honestly stated in his report the complications that were involved in enumerating caste, and those complications have acquired greater complexity today.

For instance, Hutton wrote: "There is... a tendency towards the consolidation of groups at present separated by caste rules. The best instance of such a tendency to consolidate a number of castes into one group is to be found in the grazier castes which at combining under the terms Yadava, Ahirs, Goalas, Gopis, Idaiyans and perhaps some other castes of milkmen." He also spoke about "the desire of the artisan castes in many parts of India to appear under a common name." He added that in "some cases a caste which had applied in one province to be called Brahman asked in another to be called Rajput," and there were "several instances at this census of castes claiming to be Brahman who claimed to be Rajput 10 years ago."

In summation, Hutton wrote: "It is obviously impossible for the census authorities to do anything other than accept the nomenclature of the individuals making the return, since to discriminate and to allot to different groups would involve entering into discussion on largely hypothetical data. Experience at this census has shown very clearly the difficulty of getting a correct return of caste and likewise the difficulty of interpreting it for census purposes."

One has to only come to Karnataka, as the Dalit census for internal reservation is underway (ending May 17), to realise how these complexities are playing in the present day. Caste lobbies and organisations are issuing advertisements and holding conventions to request their respective caste brethren to identify themselves before enumerators under specific names. The consolidation of numbers under a certain name would eventually lead to higher quota and greater political representation, they argue.

If one advertisement instructed people not to list themselves as Adi Karnataka or Adi Dravida or Adi Andhra but call themselves Madiga, another appealed to consolidate under the name Bhovi Vaddar. This is not different from the enterprise that Hutton recorded in 1931. People culturally think of themselves as one thing but politics dictates another name.

Any caste data collected is likely to lead to an irresolvable disputation, as the recently leaked caste numbers in Karnataka have proved. Castes, sub-castes want the perception of themselves and their size, historical or otherwise, to be reflected in the data, and that is terribly tough. This makes all data "hypothetical", as Hutton said. Caste data is collected in the privacy of homes, not in town halls where caste claims can be contested by competing communities. Such town halls cannot exist, and also migration has hugely upset the geo-specificity and nomenclature of castes. Traditional caste-based professions too have largely dissolved. The BJP perhaps realises the eventual outcome of a caste census–small concessions but more confusion. *(Views are personal)*

(sugata@sugataraju.in)

HOW THEY SHRUNK THE DRONES

KAJAL BASU



Veteran journalist

DREAMS have been written about the strategies in the recent India-Pakistan border conflict. But fewer words have been expended on a core aspect of this war: drones—their use; their different deployments by the two countries; the cost to each country centred on the kinds of drones used; and, most importantly, how the war drones in this conflict fit into various streams of global developments in warfare.

The credit for 'the first drone war' goes to the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian conflict. The India-Pakistan faceoff was just another bead in a long chain that began 176 years ago, when pilotless hot-air balloons bombed Venice during the 1848-49 Italian revolution. It took 68 years to progress from the wind to radio-control—an 'aerial torpedo' against zeppelins and submarines designed by Archibald Low, the 'father of aerial guidance systems'. In 1935, the de Havilland DH.82 Queen Bee made its debut—a yellow-and-black liveried, radio-controlled biplane that not only became a testbed for future designs but also fathered the appellation 'drone'.

During the Second World War, the US Navy converted four-engined B-24 Liberator bombers to radio-control for bombing missions. During the Cold War, the US used AQM-34 Firebee for photography missions over China and Vietnam, with China shooting down one in 1964. Iraq first used its ubiquitous Mohajer-1 for battlefield surveillance in 1986, explosively multiplying the use of drones in West Asia.

But these were large and spottable, and therefore more stoppable. Today, drones come in all shapes and sizes, from palm-width playthings to quadcopters and hexacopters that can be assembled by non-state actors—such as guerrillas in Myanmar and insurgents in Syria. In Myanmar, the Karenni Nationalities Defence Force uses drones made with 3D printers and mechanics stripped from Chinese pesticide-sprayers. In Syria, the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), now in power, began producing winged drones in 2019. In Gaza, Hamas used hobbyists' first-person-view (FPV) drones to scope out Israeli border posts.

Drone development is now official across the conflict ecosystem, from militaries to militias. The HTS's Al-Shaheen (Falcon) Brigade, which reports directly to now-president Ahmed Hussein al-Sharaa, specialises in the "production, manufacturing and development of advanced drones and weapons". In February 2024, the Ukraine government established the Unmanned Systems Forces, the world's first branch of a military dedicated to drone warfare.

The research focus is now on repurposable drones, small drones, drone swarms, and the cost benefit. Ukraine's sub-$400, explosive-packed FPV quadcopters inspired by racing drones square off against Russia's Iranian-made $20,000-100,000 Geran-2 drones (essentially, Shahed-136/131s). Ukraine can afford to toss buckets of them



AFP

Before India-Pakistan, the Russia-Ukraine conflict saw the world's first drone warfare. In recent years, the focus has shifted to building smaller, disposable and cheaper models. Militaries and militias alike are interested in deploying them

at Russia, as it did in May 2025, using 524 drones to disrupt 350 commercial flights across Russia; Russia has thrown 10,000 Shaheds at Ukraine since 2022. So Ukraine can afford to lose an estimated 50-80 percent of its deployed drones; but Russia is financially crimped by a 50 percent loss. Drones are now all about the money.

In the recent India-Pakistan duel, Pakistan lobbed 300-400 low-cost drones at India like confetti, testing India's defences and perimeters. India says it intercepted 90 percent of them, while Pakistan claims it shot down 25-77 Indian drones. The wild figures suggest that, in typical war scenarios, drone launches and casualties are difficult to estimate for now. But this much is true: Pakistan's Turkish-made Asisguard Songar and NESCOM Burraq drones, the latter based on the Chinese CH-3A, are far less expensive than India's IAI Harop and Heron Mark-2.

Pakistani quadcopters were used in small swarms. India used targeted and loitering drones that were not in packs. The countries had different intentions, and their drones had differing utility. As everywhere, the competition is as much between rival entities as it is between two arms of a single technology.

And there is more mayhem waiting on the wings: sea drones, amphibious drones, mesh networks of low-tech kamikaze drones, high-speed return-to-base bomber drones, those targeting body heat, autonomous facial-recognition ones and AI-enabled interceptors.

The global drone arms race is fundamentally between China and the US. The US, as ever, is pursuing monumentalism: large drones such as the Boeing MQ-25 Stingray and the MQ-9 Reaper. China's focus is on aircraft carrier-based drones, 'mothership' drones—or swarm-carriers such as the Jetank with a 6-tonne payload capacity for missiles, bombs and 'isomerism hive modules' of hundreds of drones for swarm reconnaissance and strike—and drones that can split into smaller autonomous units. The pace of development is frenetic. China demonstrated in Shenzhen a balletic swarm of 10,197 light-show drones on September 26, 2024, up from 7,998 on September 4, and 8,100 a day later. A dark horse, Vietnam, broke this record with 10,518 coordinated drones on April 28, 2025.

These drone swarms are one step from weaponisation—maybe not even that far, because China's drone weaponisation programme is enmeshed with civilian drones, what with the Shenzhen DJI Sciences and Technologies owning 70 percent of the global civilian drone market share. The record-breaking Shenzhen drone swarm was controlled by a single laptop, which the US's Autonomous Multi-Domain Adaptive Swarms-of-Swarms (AMASS) project is not even close to replicating.

At the end of the day, drone development is backed by the human desire to wage war but not to be caught in its midst. To destroy with unbloodied hands. The days of warriors with the PlayStation mentality are upon us. *(Views are personal)*

(kajalrbasu@gmail.com)

MAILBAG

WRITE TO: letters@newindianexpress.com

Nuanced perspective

Ref: *India-US partnership: Momentary ripple, not fundamental rupture* (May 15). Trump's attempt to internationalise Kashmir and claim credit for the India-Pak ceasefire have angered many Indians. Shashi Tharoor's column offered a nuanced perspective. His analysis of Trump's infamous tweet and India's principled stance during the conflict is praiseworthy.
M Sureshkumar, Chennai

Restore trust

Ref: *Repair breaches in judicial conduct, discard opacity* (May 15). It is unfortunate that complaints against judges, including allegations of corruption, are steadily increasing. When those entrusted with upholding justice face repeated allegations, it risks undermining the faith in the judiciary.
Jayaprakash Reddy, Nalgonda

Guide adolescents

Ref: *Adolescent mind: Battleground of identities* (May 15). I grew up in Kerala, where political parties often lure teenagers into organising bandhs. Many students are drawn to revolutionary literature that often pushes them down a radical path. Teachers and parents have a role to play to ensure they are guided to the right path.
Sreenivasan Raman, Bengaluru

Bold move

Ref: *Plans for more Indus Basin projects readied for cabinet* (May 15). India's decision to consider three new hydroelectric projects in the Indus river basin, is a bold step. The government should disregard threats from Pakistan and China and prioritise the swift completion of these projects.
S Vaithianathan, Madurai

Politics out

Ref: *Identify Agamic temples in TN, SC directs HC panel* (May 15). The Supreme Court's directive to the panel appointed by the Madras High Court to identify Agamic temples in Tamil Nadu, and halt the appointment of priests, is a significant step. Agamic temples follow unique traditions and practices, and political intervention in their affairs must be avoided.
R Pichumani, Kumbakonam

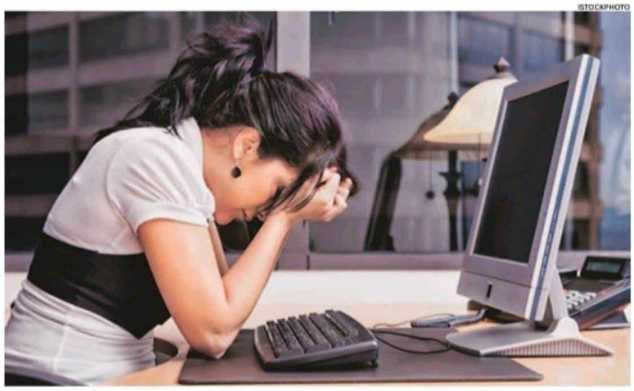
Pedestrians' rights

Ref: *Constitutional right: SC asks states to frame norms for pedestrian walkways* (May 15). Indian roads often lack proper footpaths due to poor urban planning and the prioritisation of motorised traffic. Consequently, pedestrians are forced to walk on roads, increasing the risk of accidents and traffic congestion.
P V Prakash, Mumbai

THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS
Chairman of the Board: **Manoj Kumar Sonthalia** Editor: **Santwana Bhattacharya**
Resident Editor (Tamil Nadu): **Anto T Joseph** • Printed and Published by **R K Jhunjhunwala** on behalf of Express Publications (Madurai) Private Ltd., at Express Press, 'Express Gardens', 29, Second Main Road, Ambattur Industrial Estate, Chennai - 600 058. **Chennai:** Vol. 95, No. 116. RNI Reg. No. TNENG/ 1002/57. Phone: 044-23457601, Fax: 044-23457619. • Responsible to decide the matter under the PRP Act. **Copyright:** Express Publications (Madurai) Private Ltd. All rights reserved. Reproduction in any manner, electronic or otherwise, in whole or in part, without prior written permission is prohibited.

OUR VIEW

ISTOCKPHOTO



Employers of the world, unite to protect brains

A South Korean study has shown a likely link between long work hours and brain changes. It needs deeper studies but should still nudge businesses to collectively enforce safety limits

Even if unevenly, Karl Marx stays in popular memory for his 1848 clarion call asking workers of the world to unite as they had nothing to lose but their chains. Unevenly because we have come a long way since the days of chimney sweeps in Europe. Or have we? Uneven workloads persist. A recent study by South Korean researchers, published in the journal *Occupational Health and Environmental Medicine*, says some of us may be working too many hours for our own good. This is not just work-life balance stuff. These scientists, from South Korea's Chung-Ang University and Yonsei University, who followed 110 healthcare workers split into 'overworked' and 'non-overworked' groups, found basic shifts taking place in the physiology of those who had their noses to the grind. Workers putting in 52 hours or more per week, who were also younger and more highly educated on average than the other lot, showed structural changes in their brain volume, as mapped over time. The parts of this vital organ that control our cognitive abilities, executive functions and emotional processing were found to be enlarged among them. This indicates a likely link between overwork and brain work—which could include anything from our short-term memory and attention span to our ability to solve problems at hand. The study's authors suggest further research to grasp "the long-term cognitive and emotional implications of overwork."

The study's sample was tiny and drawn from a single field, but any correlation between weekly work and altered brains must push science to delve deeper for answers that can inform policy. Just how safe or unsafe is it? Apart from what these brain changes might imply, whether and how they can be reversed need to be explored too. The study nudges future studies to explore the risk of cognitive decline or mental health disorders. In general, long hours are observed to have adverse effects and face legal limits in many countries. In South Korea, a work-week longer than 52 hours is illegal. This is rather high in global comparison. The International Labour Organization (ILO) standard is a 48-hour week. The legal limit under India's Factories Act of 1948 is 48 hours per week, with a maximum of nine hours per day and one day off per week. The South Korean finding needs to be read alongside other research. A study by Oxford academics examined the relationship between long hours and middle-age cognitive function among British civil servants working full-time. Compared with those doing 40 hours per week at most, those putting in 55 hours plus scored lower in vocabulary and reasoning tests. A study of 194 nations by the ILO and World Health Organization, published in 2021, said that 488 million people in 2016 were exposed to 55-hour work weeks, resulting in 745,194 deaths from heart disease and stroke. The Western Pacific, South-East Asia (including India), men and older folk bore the brunt of it.

Today, trade unions have mostly withered, Marx's economic ideas have failed and market forces play a key role in the expansion of our economy. India Inc must never unite in pursuit of profit, as the implied lack of rivalry would serve markets badly, but on the issue of overworked workers, it well could. If India Inc's work debate tilts in favour of people's health, as this new study suggests it should, business self-interest could spell better self-regulation of work hours. It might be a good time for employers to unite, but to safeguard brains.

MY VIEW | FARM TRUTHS

A caste census should help India identify and tackle deprivations

This enumeration must be done with enough care to ensure it yields useful data for policy responses



HIMANSHU
is associate professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University and visiting fellow at the Centre de Sciences Humaines, New Delhi.

The recent Cabinet decision to include caste as a category in India's upcoming population census is an important milestone in the quest for social justice. But it is also relevant for multiple other reasons. While the push for a caste census, or inclusion of caste in the national headcount, gathered pace on the back of a spirited campaign run by the opposition Congress party and its leader, a near consensus on its necessity has always existed among political parties. Still, there has never been a serious attempt to carry out the exercise. It was this frustration that led states to conduct their own caste counts. While these are called 'surveys' for legal reasons, for all practical purposes and statistically, the caste surveys of Bihar, Telangana and Karnataka qualify as caste censuses. But only partial information is available from these surveys and the absence of detailed data defeats their very purpose. A national caste census is likely to put an end to the multiple caste surveys done by states with varying methodologies, questionnaires and time-frames. A common methodology will allow comparisons across states on the basis of publicly available information.

The decision, however, is only a statement of intent. While it puts an end to speculation over a caste census, no details have been made available on its questionnaire, design and methodology. Introducing caste as a category is not just an academic exercise. It flows from an essential requirement under Article 340 of the Constitution, which mandates the government to analyse the socioeconomic conditions of various castes, primarily those classified as 'backward.' This has been reiterated by all backward class commissions set up by states and the Centre. A natural corollary of this is that the caste census is not just a count of the population; it should also allow a proper analysis of the socioeconomic and educational deprivations of various classes/castes.

In fact, this was the intention behind collecting caste data under the Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) of 2011. While the data so collected allowed such an analysis, it was never attempted in a serious manner. Part of the reason was the way the SECC's caste data was collected, which allowed castes to be reported by individuals in whatever manner they felt appropriate. On the other hand, this learning proved useful in the cases of Bihar and Telangana, where caste categories were pre-decided and left no space for ambiguity. Since caste data is already part of the census exercise for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), it can easily be done for Other Backward Classes (OBCs), for which such a list exists at both the state and central levels. The only ambiguity would be for the rest of the caste groups, but even these can be classified based on a general understanding of which major groups live in each state. The foremost task before the Registrar General of India (RGI), who must carry out the caste census, will be to reach a consensus on the list of castes. Since most data collection by statistical agencies is now done through digital devices such as computer tablets, pre-filled caste lists will allow quick data generation and analysis.

The use of tablets for data entry also allows a larger number of questions to be asked than paper-based canvassing would allow. The old paper-based questionnaire limited the number of questions to only two pages. Both the Bihar and Telangana surveys use a much larger set of questions. For an all-India caste census to stay true to the spirit in which it was sought, it should feature a large and detailed set of questions that can enable a meaningful understanding of caste-wise deprivation.

While the classification of castes based on relative deprivation will remain the primary objective of such an exercise, expanding the set of questions is also important for other purposes. A well-designed set of questions will yield granular data that could be used for policymaking. Given that the Census is our only source of data on district and sub-district level measures, this data would be an asset for regional planning and policymaking in assorted local contexts. Despite the challenges of such an exercise, the benefits of an expanded census exercise far outweigh the costs.

While the much-delayed population Census may or may not resolve the vexed issue of how castes should be classified and categorized, it will offer us an opportunity to use its findings as an essential input for evidence-based policymaking, given the complexity of all the social, economic, educational and other related deprivations in a diverse country like ours.

QUICK READ

While political parties have long agreed on the need for caste enumeration, the idea languished till some state governments began conducting such surveys of their own.

The questionnaire needs to be sufficiently detailed for this exercise to uncover various forms of deprivation in India that may potentially be correlated with caste identities.

10 YEARS AGO


mint

Sebi may ease more start-up listing norms

There is no cap for a green head, says Piyush Goyal

JUST A THOUGHT

"No work is worse than overwork; the mind preys on itself—the most unwholesome of food.

CHARLES LAMB

THEIR VIEW

In search of thought leadership: The game has flipped

RITA McGRATH & M. MUNEER



are, respectively, professor at Columbia Business School and founder of Valize; and co-founder of the non-profit Medici Institute for Innovation. X: @MuneerMuh

Once upon a time, a best-selling book would grant its author guru status. Having your name embossed on the hardback cover was an unofficial badge of expertise, whether you were an aspiring management thinker, a boardroom sage or a speaker-circuit regular. Unlike keynote invitations, books delivered credibility and had intellectual cachet. Not anymore. In an era where everyone seems to have published something, has the gold standard of thought leadership lost its lustre?

To understand how this happened, flash-back to 1982, when *In Search of Excellence* by Tom Peters and Robert Waterman hit retail shelves with evangelical zeal. American businesses, battered by stagflation, oil crises and the rise of Japan Inc, were in search of reassurance. The book offered exactly that: proof that US companies could still thrive, and more importantly, a codified playbook for success: eight easy-to-recall traits, apparently data-driven and actionable enough for managers to feel empowered. Critics later pounced on its methodological flaws and Peters allegedly even confessed to having "faked the data" in retrospect. But the damage was done. A new genre was born: the business bestseller. And with it, a new mantle: of the business thought leader.

From that point on, books were no longer just idea containers. They became platforms for corporate wisdom. Successful authors got lucrative speaking engagements, management consultancy gigs, corporate board seats and media publicity. Business books became business. High stakes meant new tactics. Michael Treacy and Fred Wiersema, authors of *The Discipline of Market Leaders*, reportedly spent over $250,000 buying their own books across the US to get into the *New York Times* bestseller list. It could let them hike their speaking fees and get bigger consultancy and book deals.

In India, many business authors, especially those who were already well known for their professional success, have become public figures. Gurcharan Das's *India Unbound* transformed him from a former CEO into a public intellectual. Nandan Nilekani's *Imagining India* served not just as commentary, but as a policy guide. Raghuram Rajan's *Fault Lines* earned him stardom beyond the field of economics.

Today, the business book has become something of a glorified business card. Many are padded essays stretched to 200 pages, bloated with anecdotes, loaded with buzzwords and dressed in covers screaming for attention. With an estimated 12,000 business books published every year, the genre is suffering a global glut.

Few books offer a breakthrough idea. Many are simply checklists. And in a world of digital content overload, thought leadership is shifting to more dynamic platforms. Podcasts, newsletters, X threads, LinkedIn posts and short videos are shaping professional discourse faster than traditional publishing cycles can churn out books. A book can take two years to write and publish. A podcast can go live right away and viral soon after. Publishers are adapting: Simon & Schuster recently announced it will reduce reliance on expert reviews on back covers. This isn't merely administrative; it's an acknowledgment that curated praise doesn't drive sales. Another brutal reality for authors is that a book that takes four years to write can vanish in four months, even before it gets a chance to appear in a cheaper paperback edition.

This doesn't mean books are obsolete. They allow for depth, with slowly built and layered arguments. Jonathan Haidt's *The Anxious Generation*, which explores the profound impact of digital life on young people, is a case in point. The book format allowed him to explore a cultural phenomenon in a way no blog post or tweetstorm ever could. Books are also timeless. They endure in libraries, sit on shelves and signal intellectual gravitas. But their monopoly over idea dissemination is over.

QUICK READ

Fame for management expertise used to be conferred by the success of a book. But now with an estimated 12,000 business books published every year, this genre is suffering a global glut.

Books are not obsolete but their monopoly over idea dissemination has been broken by online engagement platforms without which nobody can aspire to thought leadership today.

Today, thought leadership is an ecosystem. Books are part of it, but so are newsletters with subscriptions, viral LinkedIn posts, Substack essays, X threads and, yes, 30-second videos on Instagram or YouTube Shorts. Political influence has gone the same way.

So, what should a would-be thought leader do? Write that book with a big idea, yes. But don't stop there. Treat it as one gear in a larger machine. Build an audience through diverse platforms that use voice, video and short-form text. Share ideas in real-time. Experiment. Engage. Books are for depth. Podcasts are for reach. Newsletters are for loyalty. Tweets are for traction. Master the digital mix.

Books will still matter especially in policy, academia and legacy media, but they no longer offer an automatic key to the kingdom of influence. In a world oversaturated with information, clarity is currency, velocity is value and reach is power.

So, have we reached 'peak book' point *à la* 'peak oil'? Quite possibly. The hardcover may no longer be the sovereign badge of authority it once was. But in the age of agile content and restless attention, thought leadership is no longer about a singular polished manuscript. It's about being present, persistent and plural.

Anyone who writes a book now to get an important idea across must also embrace digital channels. Because in the new world of ideas, it's not just about being read. It's about being ubiquitous—heard, shared, seen and of course remembered.

GUEST VIEW

American exceptionalism might have suffered irreparable harm

It won't be easy to turn the clock back now that Trump has undermined the very institutions that made the US so successful



BARRY EICHENGREEN
is professor of economics and political science at the University of California, Berkeley, and the author, most recently, of 'In Defense of Public Debt'



AFP

American exceptionalism has had a long and successful run. Gauged by the growth of GDP per capita and other statistical measures, the US economy has outpaced its advanced-economy rivals since the turn of the century. America is home to the world's leading high-tech firms. It is at the forefront of artificial intelligence (AI). And investors have cashed in on that outperformance: as of late 2024, US large-cap markets had yielded an average annual return of 13% over the preceding ten years, compared to just 6% for European markets.

The question is whether US President Donald Trump's destructive policies have now brought this economic exceptionalism to an end. That prospect was reflected in the stock market in April, when the S&P 500 fell more than 17% from its record high after Trump's inauguration. While the market has since recovered most of those losses, volatility remains high.

Important voices, not only in the administration, insist that this is just one of those market disturbances that happen from time to time. The wellsprings of American economic excellence—high-tech dominance, a business-friendly environment, deep and liquid financial markets, and a culture of entrepreneurship—remain intact. Just give it time, say the optimists, and Trump's aberrant policies will be reined in by the bond market, mid-term US elections and the courts.

This Panglossian take underestimates how recent events tear at the fabric of US economic exceptionalism and how difficult that fabric will be to mend. America's dominance of high technology derives not just from a vibrant business sector, but also from basic research done in universities and government, and from close public-private sector collaboration. It is no coincidence that the garage in which Hewlett-Packard originated was in Palo Alto, California, close to Stanford University. Nor is the fact that the internet emanated from the US Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), with an assist from the National Science Foundation.

The Trump administration's attack on university and government research funding pulls the rug from under this collaboration. US researchers who have seen their funding cut and their academic and intellectual freedom curtailed are being actively recruited by other countries.

The same is true of the administration's hostility to immigration. The excellence of America's universities and innovation hubs, such as Silicon Valley, depends on scientists and entrepreneurs who come to the US to study and decide to stay. Given what has been revealed about the way Trump's America treats immigrants, they will now think twice about studying and staying.

Much has been written about how Trump's tariffs will disrupt US companies' supply chains and raise production costs. To be sure, companies will adapt, for example by re-shoring some production. But adapting to Trump's arbitrary trade regime will also mean offering under-the-table favours in exchange for concessions. A transactional president has revealed the US to be a transactional society, where the highest returns accrue to rent seeking and cronyism rather than initiative and innovation.

A business environment in which access to the Oval Office is the key to success may increase market concentration, since only a few billionaires have such access. The US has seen how rising market concentration is accompanied by increased price mark-ups over costs, declining market-entry rates, falling job re-allocation and a growing gap between leading and lagging firms. Sooner or later, productivity growth will become a casualty.

Ultimately, economic growth depends on the rule of law, as proponents of the 'Washington Consensus' have told developing countries for decades. That, in turn, depends on a separation of powers and a system of checks and balances to prevent the arbitrary exercise of executive authority.

All of this was well understood by framers of the US Constitution. But recent political events in the US have shown that constitutional and statutory safeguards are weaker than previously supposed. A president who seeks to amass power can use executive orders to override the spending decisions of Congress and the regulatory decisions of supposedly independent government agencies. He can fire independent government administrators at will. He can stare down spineless members of Congress with political threats.

Such a president can also disregard court rulings. If the bond market threatens to misbehave, he can lean on the Fed. As for the disciplining effect of the ballot box, he can dismiss the results of free and fair elections.

In this environment, neither property rights nor contracts are secure. And as generations of political scientists have taught us, secure property rights are a fundamental determinant of investment, while reliable contract enforcement is the foundation of commerce and trade.

Some observers expect the next US president to turn the clock back to pre-Trump days, making secure property rights, reliable contract enforcement and equality under the law facts of American life again. But some lessons, once learnt, are not easily unlearnt.

Many investors, like house cats, will not jump onto a hot stove twice.

©2025/PROJECT SYNDICATE

QUICK READ

The Trump administration's attacks on university and government research funding, immigration and the autonomy of institutions will have a harsh impact on America's future.

American exceptionalism has had a good run but may find it hard to survive the Trump presidency as future leaders would struggle to undo much of the damage that's been inflicted.

MINT CURATOR

Tariff whiplash: The US truce with China offers hollow relief

Supply disruptions and recession fears will keep US demand low



ANDREA FELSTED
is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist covering consumer goods and the retail industry.



Retailers, suppliers and consumers will still have to bear significant pain. REUTERS

The interim trade deal between the US and China struck in Switzerland marks a dramatic *volte-face* after weeks of simmering tensions. But don't expect an equally breathtaking about turn from US consumers. Amid the uncertainty about economic growth, job cuts and inflation, it will take time for shoppers to regain their confidence. Even if they do, there are some reasons why the pain for retailers and consumer goods groups may be prolonged.

Under the latest US-China agreement, the combined 145% US levies on most Chinese imports were set to decline to 30% by 14 May. The new rate is still unhelpful, but it's a lot better than the threatened levy, which would have made some products, including toys and Christmas decorations, simply uneconomic to sell in America.

Retailers, suppliers and consumers will still have to share some pain. For Americans, that means some level of price inflation on the mostly non-food items that come from China. Take clothing, for example. At 145%, retail prices for the mid-market knitwear and coats that are typically manufactured in China may have had to increase by 20% to 30%. Price hikes should now be less.

The accord should encourage retailers to restart paused orders, or ship goods they've been holding in China in anticipation that a deal would be reached. Even before Monday's announcement, there were signs that trade had begun to pick up; that should mean fewer gaps on shelves this holiday season.

But the disruption will take time to work its way out of the system. Take toys. Many should have been manufactured by now. Even if production restarts immediately, Santa might not be bringing some items. The bigger risk is a tsunami of goods arriving in mid-market department stores when they're no longer welcome; heavier-weight spring jackets and knitwear, for example, after temperatures have already risen as summer approaches.

This is exactly what happened in 2022, when supply chain snarl ups in the approach to the 2021 holiday season led to loungewear and small appliances landing six months later, when consumers had already moved on. This led to a mountain of inventory that stores were forced to discount. If the same happens now, it will test the resolve of retailers to resist markdowns.

It doesn't help that consumers have rushed to purchase over the past few months in anticipation of higher prices. Cars were the favourite target of those seeking to beat the hikes. But Americans also shopped for home furnishings, electronics, clothing and footwear. Big expensive purchases like a car or sofa won't be repeated, and may sap the funds available for other types of outlay.

When it comes to clothing, shoppers typically spend to a budget. If they've bought sneakers or a patchwork quilted jacket already, many won't buy again.

Some US consumers may be reluctant to splurge for a different reason: they still feel nervous about a recession. Across the income spectrum, it's clear that many are cutting back. The most pressed are already acting as if the worst is here: for example, reusing cooking oil one more time.

But the more affluent are feeling the pinch, too. McDonald's said the pressure from inflation and interest rates that's been hurting poorer Americans for the past few years was now "spilling over" into middle-income customers.

Last week, for example, Sweetgreen cut its annual guidance; clearly $16 salads are off the menu. Chief financial officer Mitch Reback said same-store sales were positive in March, but turned negative in April "coinciding with the tariff announcements." He told *Bloomberg News* that April has traditionally been a month when the chain's performance picks up as temperatures rise; "this is the first time we haven't seen that lift."

US luxury goods demand has also weakened, according to Citigroup's monthly credit card data, turning negative in February, March and April after recovering in December and January.

While the S&P 500 has bounced back from its 'Liberation Day' lows, we splurge on a Gucci handbag or Rolex watch when we feel wealthy and upbeat about life. After the dislocation, it will take time for any feel-good factor to return.

Meanwhile, we must remember that this accord with China is only temporary. And let's not forget that levies on other important manufacturing nations, such as Vietnam, are only paused rather than being completely off the table.

An escalation of the trade war may have been averted. Not so the tariff whiplash for consumers.

©BLOOMBERG

MY VIEW | PEN DRIVE

Line of conscience: Why were luxury brands silent?

ABHAY GUPTA



is the founder of Luxury Connect LLP and Luxury Connect Business School.

I remember the first time I stepped into a Hermès boutique in Paris. It was 2007, and I was visiting the French capital on a research trip as part of my career transition from conventional retail to luxury strategy. The space was hushed, reverent. Scarves were arranged like manuscripts. Every gesture from the staff was theatrical yet effortless. It wasn't just a store. It was a shrine.

Back then, I was enchanted by the craft. The heritage. The obsession with detail. But over the years, as I've worked to bring global luxury brands into India and mentored a generation of professionals, something else began to emerge: a subtle discomfort with the silence of luxury.

The luxury industry likes to position itself above the noise—untouched by the messiness of politics, conflict or crisis. It speaks of elegance and aspiration, not activism. But what happens when the world becomes too loud, too unjust and too morally urgent to ignore?

That's the question I've been asking myself lately. And I think it's time the global luxury industry asked it too.

What Russia taught us: When Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, I watched the industry act faster than I had ever seen before. LVMH shut down its boutiques in Russia. Chanel pulled out of e-commerce. Hermès closed shop. For the first time, heritage houses—known all along for their silence—took a stand. It was refreshing. Even admirable. Finally, luxury wasn't just about where you shop. It was about what you stood for.

And yet, here I was, three years later, reading about yet another brutal attack by Pakistani-sponsored terrorists on Indian civilians, and what did we hear from the global luxury community? Nothing.

No solidarity posts. No symbolic gestures. No brands standing with India. Silence.

Silence isn't neutral: This is not the first time, of course. Gaza, Sudan, Myanmar—the luxury world has become selectively responsive to crises. When Western media amplifies the event and Western consumers demand a reaction, brands respond. When the tragedy is quieter, more complex or located in a less 'critical' market for the industry, the silence returns. But here's the problem: silence is no longer neutral. Not in the age of Gen Z. Not in the era of conscious consumption.

I have spoken at global forums, taught luxury strategy to students from Milan to Mumbai, and worked with CXOs across India's luxury ecosystem. One thing is consistent: today's luxury consumers aren't just buying status. They're buying alignment. They want to know what the brand stands for, even when it's not convenient to speak.

The India question: Let me say it bluntly: India deserves the same moral consideration from global luxury brands as Europe and North America.

India is among the world's five largest economies. Our luxury market is projected to grow to $200 billion by 2030. Our diaspora shapes global pop culture, from Met Galas to Marvel movies. We are no longer a side story. In many ways, we *are* the story. So when Indian lives are lost to terror and luxury brands that proudly advertise themselves in Delhi and Mumbai stay silent, the message is loud: some tragedies matter more than others.

As someone who has spent two decades trying to position India as a strategic rather than symbolic luxury market, this stings.

Conscience as a competitive edge: A few weeks ago, I was speaking to a group of MBA students about how trust is becoming the new currency. Not product trust, but moral trust. If your brand speaks out for some lives but not others, it's not being neutral. It's being inconsistent.

And inconsistency has consequences. Would you still sport a brand that stood against one injustice but ignored another? Would you still feel pride in a label that shows selective concern? In luxury, perception is everything. And the perception here is that luxury brands are picking their battles based on a public relations calculus, not principle.

A chance for Indian luxury to lead: Here's where I see opportunity. Homegrown Indian luxury brands—in fashion, beauty, hospitality and more—have a chance to do something different. To lead not just with product excellence, but with perspective.

When global luxury players hesitate, Indian brands can speak. When others stay silent, we can show that a conscience is not at the other end of luxury—it is the soul of it.

Maybe that's how we start defining Indian luxury on our own terms—not just through craft and culture, but through courage. I don't write this to shame the industry I've spent a significant part of my career in. I write this because I believe in its power—to influence, uplift and shift culture.

Luxury is no longer on a distant pedestal. It is a mirror of the times. And in times like these, silence doesn't necessarily protect a brand's appeal. It could erode it.

As someone who has helped luxury succeed in India and watched it grow from a whisper to a roar, I say this with love, not anger: If luxury wants loyalty from India, it must show loyalty to India. And it must go beyond a few boutiques and billboards.

QUICK READ

When Russia invaded Ukraine, global luxury brands acted in solidarity with the latter. After the horrific Pahalgam attack, however, all we got was silence from this industry.

A brand's conscience can serve as a competitive edge but selective responses expose a problem. If global labels want the loyalty of Indians, they should display loyalty to India.



CONTRAPUNTO

The factory of the future will have only a man and a dog. Man will feed dog. Dog will keep man from touching the equipment

– WARREN BENNIS

Factory Act

Trump wants US firms to make only in America. He should get real

Before flying out of Doha on board his US-taxpayer-paid Air Force One – not the Qatari gift – on Thursday, Trump mentioned his "little problem" with "friend" Tim Cook's plan to make iPhones in India. "We're not interested in you building in India," he claimed to have told Cook. It's not a new line. In Feb, he had told "first buddy" Elon Musk that building a Tesla factory in India would be "unfair to us".

Four months into Trump's presidency, it's clear that manufacturing is at the centre of his vision to make America great again. He wants America to make, and the world to buy like it's the 1940s or '50s. Only, it isn't. US passed the manufacturing baton to China decades ago, mainly because China could make things cheaply. Analysts say manufacturing in America may push up iPhone costs by 25% on account of costlier labour alone. And a finished phone might cost up to $3,500 in US, up from $1,199 now. It would be too expensive for US buyers, and impossible to sell abroad.



So, Trump's belief that manufacturing will help correct America's trade balance is fallacious. Nor will his other weapon – tariffs – work. While he's struck a favourable trade deal with UK, and a seemingly favourable one with China, he claimed on Thursday India is "willing to literally charge us no tariff". In the absence of an Indian confirmation, the claim's doubtful because India has to protect its farmers. And after the way Trump claimed credit for the India-Pak ceasefire last week, salt is a recommended garnish.

Trump flew out of Qatar with an order for 160 Boeings under his belt. That's a win for American manufacturing, but Boeing, although America's biggest exporter, is worth only around $150bn. Some of the biggest American corporations – Microsoft, Alphabet, Amazon, Meta, Berkshire Hathaway, all of them in the world's top 10 – are leaders in services. Apple, world's largest and worth $3.6tn, also derives 25% of its revenue from services, its fastest growing revenue segment. Trump should accept that services is America's strength now, and stop trying to board the manufacturing bus – or plane.

Vijay Can't Win

His party must punish the MP minister for his comments on Col Sofiya Qureshi, set an example

Supreme Court will hear today Madhya Pradesh state minister Vijay Shah's appeal to quash a case against him filed on the direction of MP HC's Jabalpur bench. The bench had strongly, and correctly, reacted to Shah's derogatory and "dangerous" comments – "speaking venom" – about army officer Colonel Sofiya Qureshi. It observed Shah's public comments "encourage feelings of separatist activities by imputing separatist feelings to anyone who is Muslim." The court listed "prima facie", Shah's offences. Thus, the FIR – filed six hours after HC's deadline – included BNS sections 152 (acts endangering India's sovereignty, unity, integrity), considered the provision of 'sedition', as well as disturbing public tranquillity, acts prejudicial to social harmony, and causing feelings of enmity or hatred. Penalty for any of these includes at least a three-year prison term. If found guilty, Vijay Shah will automatically be disqualified from the House. Yet, the FIR – HC noted with alarm on Thursday – was "obscure". It had *no* reference to Shah's comments. HC called it "gross subterfuge on the state's part."



Whatever SC decides, Jabalpur bench did well to act on Shah's comments. It must be noted that the minister's delayed apology was made worse by his calling the colonel "my sister". It is time desi politicians understand India's women are not *all* their relatives – women are individuals, citizens. Coming especially after his appalling comments, the 'sister' descriptor devalued the army officer. To hammer home the message that communally-charged behaviour is a political red line, BJP must make Vijay Shah pay. It is for party leadership to establish disincentives for this brand of politics by exemplary punishment for Vijay Shah. Post-Pahalgam, all of civil society and India's political class have demonstrated admirable unity. Their collective outrage and collective support for the military have been a balm for a wounded nation. Such solidarity is a lesson for those, like Vijay Shah, who would damage India's social fabric. Seeds of all communal rifts are sown by politicians. Swift and exemplary action by party leadership can put a stop to such divisive and communally charged politics.

The other Pakistan

There is a different country within the country that is our hostile neighbour

Jug Suraiya



I haven't met Hasan for many years, but I'm sure he lives in the other Pakistan.

Bunny and I first met Hasan in Calcutta in the 1970s. He lived in Dhaka in East Pakistan, and would visit Calcutta for medical checks, and to shop in the city's New Market. He had a dry wit that made him an engaging conversationalist, and we spent many engaging evenings together.

We never discussed religious matters, but I gathered that he was a free spirit, unfettered by rigid dogma.

Shortly before the liberation of Bangladesh, Hasan went to UK, and when the new nation was born, he got a special scholarship to Oxford University.

When Bunny and I went to UK in 1972, to find temporary work there which would enable us to save travel money to see Europe before returning to India, Hasan got me a clerical job at Harrods, where he was working during a college break.

He was our friend, philosopher, and guide in London, introducing us to Leicester Square, and Piccadilly Circus.

jugular*vein*

A couple of months ago, I got one of his occasional WhatsApp messages saying that he had moved from London to Karachi.

Separated by a physical border neither of us can cross, following the escalating tension between the two countries in the aftermath of the murderous assault in Pahalgam inspired by Pakistan's ISI, I think of Hasan, and of others like him who have friends or family living in India.

What do Hasan and those who have associations of friendship or kinship with us feel about the Pakistan which, behind the cynical mask of democracy, is a military dictatorship with a one-point agenda of perpetuating an institutionalised hatred of India, that has brought it to the brink of moral and financial bankruptcy?

I believe that so as not to be complicit in the assassination of innocents as happened in Pahalgam, Hasan and those like him inhabit a space of mind and heart, of common decency, and a sense of a shared humanity, which is the other Pakistan.

RECEP FOR TROUBLE

Türkiye president, who fashions himself as a neo-Ottoman sultan, also has a ruthless pragmatic streak. His support for Pakistan is strategic foray into South Asia to counter headwinds in Ankara & West Asia

RudroneelGhosh @timesofindia.com



Indians are cancelling their travel plans to Türkiye in droves. Travel websites are no longer selling holiday packages to picturesque Cappadocia or Antalya. For, it didn't go unnoticed in India that during Operation Sindoor Pakistan military was using Turkish weapons to escalate the conflict. Initial investigations suggest that the hundreds of Pak drones deployed against India were of Turkish make.

So, there's a growing demand now to boycott everything Turkish, from apples to Turkish delight. Ankara has solidly backed Islamabad in the military hostilities with New Delhi. And while Pak army chief Asim Munir and the military-ISI complex were seen to be the architects of the conflict, the figure who may have been egging on Rawalpindi GHQ is Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

But what could possibly be his gameplan here? What's Türkiye cooking in South Asia, a region not traditionally part of Turkish foreign policy-security calculus? Look closer and a potential recipe for trouble emerges.

There are Brotherhood ties | Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP) are from the Muslim Brotherhood family. This makes him Pakistan's natural ideological cousin.

There are two strands to his politics – Islamist conservatism and Turkish nationalism. With Erdogan effectively burying Ataturk's secular Republicanism, Pak leadership has long viewed his Islamist project in Türkiye as a template. Think Ertugrul redux.

Strategically, therefore, a compact between the two Sunni Muslim nations – one a nuclear state, the other a Nato member – smoothly fits with Erdogan's plans for enhancing regional Turkish influence from the Bosphorus to the Indus.

An Ottoman play on Kashmir | Erdogan fully backs Pakistan's position on Kashmir. This plays well with his conservative vote base. And he likes to play the neo-Ottoman 'caliph' for them. It also aligns with his regional power tussle with Gulf Arab monarchies, particularly Saudi Arabia. The latter has long seen Pak nukes as an insurance against Shia Iran. In fact, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has reportedly said that if Riyadh ever needed a nuclear bomb, he could buy one from Islamabad.

It's against this backdrop that Erdogan's moves in South Asia need to be seen. With Gulf Arab monarchies strengthening their ties with India in recent years (driven by a powerful economic-security logic) and becoming more sensitive to New Delhi's position on Kashmir, Erdogan sees an opportunity to undercut the Arabs by staunchly standing with Pakistan in its disputes with India. This is Erdogan playing out his own Ottoman-Mamluk war.

Plus, given the emerging Gulf-US-Israel dynamic in West Asia, as exemplified by the Abraham Accords, Erdogan is looking at South Asia to cultivate leverage. And Islamabad is only too happy to oblige – it needs as many foreign stakeholders in Pakistan as possible so that it doesn't become the vassal of any single player.



Uday Deb

Arms and the family | Another factor driving Erdogan's foreign policy is the domestic Turkish arms manufacturing industry that is closely tied to his family. His son-in-law Selcuk Bayraktar is the chairman of Turkish defence contractor Baykar, the maker of Bayraktar drones. Erdogan apparently likes to keep strategic businesses within the family.

But other Turkish defence companies too have benefitted from substantial govt contracts and investments in R&D. Erdogan uses this new depth in Turkish defence industry to push a militarised foreign policy. In fact, Turkish defence industry has emerged as a key pillar of Turkish economy, serving as a stabiliser in times of turmoil.

Therefore, Turkish arms flow to regional actors such as Qatar, UAE and groups in Syria to serve multiple agendas. Türkiye, incidentally, is Pakistan's second-largest arms supplier after China. Hence, Erdogan's defence assistance to Islamabad is part of his military-strategic regional play.

Kurds to IMEC, local polls to far politics | Much of Erdogan's long political survival is down to his pragmatism. Case in point, he now seems to be making a pitch to Türkiye's Kurds. The imprisoned leader of Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), Abdullah Ocalan, recently gave a call to end the armed struggle against the Turkish state.

This comes after Erdogan and his allies made a wily move late last year and dangled the possibility of a compromise. PKK has now said that it will indeed follow through on Ocalan's call and dissolve its guerrilla units.

This has significant ramifications for Türkiye and its neighbours. Erdogan needs a deal with the Kurds to extend his political tenure, which is looking vulnerable after substantial reverses in Turkish local polls last year. But a deal with the Kurds will also entail compromises that may not be acceptable to his hardcore, conservative, nationalist vote base.

Sultans, after all, don't make compromises. Plus, accommodation of Kurdish demands could also revitalise Turkish democracy to the detriment of Erdogan's strong-arm authoritarian tactics.

But the need for political survival brings out the pragmatist in Erdogan. And it is this ruthless pragmatism that the Turkish president also brings to his foreign policy. With Israel dealing a body blow to Hamas and Hezbollah, Trump looking to revitalise the Abraham Accords, and given the possibilities held out by the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor, Erdogan knows he needs to maintain Türkiye's position as the gatekeeper to Europe.

Hence his plan to dabble in South Asia to counter headwinds in West Asia. But should those winds become favourable for Ankara, sultan Erdogan might change his positions yet again. Change, after all, is the Erdogan doctrine.

After Op Sindoor: Don't Do Another Simla

If Pakistan wants India to rethink the suspension of Indus Waters Treaty, it must crack down on terror networks and extradite Masood Azhar & Hafiz Saeed

Arjun Subramaniam



In July 1972, India and Pakistan signed the Simla Agreement that paved the way for the return of 93,000 Pak POWs by India. As against pre-talk expectations that India would extract a suitable price from Pakistan for the return of the POWs, India backtracked from its original demand for the resolution of the Kashmir conflict once and for all.

In response to a plea made by Pak PM Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto to India's PM Indira Gandhi that he needed more time, with a 'Bharosa Rakhiye' (trust me), India came away from Simla with little that a victor ought to have come away from the negotiating table. Fifty-three years later, Kashmir still remains the raison d'etre of the Pak army's existence and the principal bone of contention between the two countries.

As the initial embers of Operation Sindoor subside and the tenuous ceasefire holds on a delicate thread, India will have to navigate the coming weeks with firmness and finesse. There will be multiple pressures on India from different constituencies, particularly from international players and organisations to stand down from the other measures short of war that it took against Pakistan after the Pahalgam massacre.

Foremost among these will be calls for India to rescind its abrogation of the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT). Humane inter-state behaviour is governed by mutual reciprocity, a factor that has been consistently thrown out of the window by Pakistan for decades via its strategy of state-sponsored terrorism – Parliament attack of 2001, Mumbai terror attacks of 2008, Uri (2016), Pulwama (2019) and Pahalgam (2025) being just a few of several such attacks.

Notwithstanding Pakistan's recent appeals to India to rethink the suspension of IWT, under no circumstances should India backtrack unless it extracts a suitable quid pro quo from Pakistan. What should be the nature of such a move? Three simultaneous strands merit immediate attention.

- The first is to extract a general commitment from Pakistan that it would cease to support and that it would crack down on anti-India terror networks of the kinds that have mushroomed all over Pakistan.
- The second strand is to galvanise international support to designate Pakistan as a state sponsor of terror based on all the evidence that is currently available.
- The last and most important one, albeit a more difficult one, is the extradition of Maulana Masood Azhar and Hafiz Saeed, who may no longer add any value to Pak Deep State considering their vulnerability after Operation Sindoor.



While many within India too would question such a demand as being unrealistically hawkish, such a posture would convey intent and resonate closely with recent articulations of India's political leadership of 'zero tolerance for terrorism'.

India's counterterrorism posture in the past has often been diffident and thrown up credibility gaps. Since 2016 serious attempts have been made to bridge the gap between posturing, intent and execution with Uri, Pulwama and Pahalgam offering progressively scaled-up responses. India's declaratory punitive policy that links all terrorist acts with even an iota of evidence pointing at Pakistan as an act of war marks a significant shift in bridging the existing credibility gap.

Terrorist networks, particularly those that are state-sponsored and nurtured, can vanish into thin air for years and then suddenly strike again at a point and time of their choosing and when target systems such as vibrant democracies like India demonstrate vulnerabilities that can be exploited.

Such a scenario was enacted in Pahalgam after exactly six years of only low-level terrorist activity. Pahalgam can well happen again. What this means is states such as India on the trajectory of growth and development, which are locked in a continuous battle against such networks and entities, have little choice but to develop the capabilities and resilience to play the long security game, even if that means assigning large resources for both internal and external security – such is the price we must pay.

With regard to Kashmir, which General Asim Munir called jugular vein, there will be no easy way out following the Pahalgam episode and the ensuing trauma that has been created for more than just the civilians from across the country who lost their loved ones in Pahalgam.

Two lines of action must be immediately rolled out. The Pahalgam episode has revealed how deeply embedded the 'Over Ground Workers' network still is in J&K. This constituency must be exposed and isolated even as the counter-infiltration grid is tightened. Concurrently, the ongoing 'Winning Hearts and Minds' strategy must gain momentum to build on the realisation that may have dawned on the common Kashmiris who briefly saw the fruits of peace with tourists flocking to the state in droves, and then experienced the misery of conflict.

The writer is a retired Air Vice Marshal and a military historian

Calvin & Hobbes



Sacredspace



It takes a great deal of character strength to apologise quickly out of one's heart rather than out of pity. A person must possess himself and have a deep sense of security in fundamental principles and values in order to genuinely apologise.

Stephen Covey

Between The Serpent And Rope, We Sweat

Uma Ram and KS Ram

The serpent and the rope are standard metaphors in Indic thought, used to connote the unreal and the real in creation. These metaphors have been used from vedic times to the present day. Hence, it is important to explore how these metaphors were conceived.

Suppose you are walking on a half-lit path at a dusky hour. A rope is lying on the path. In the dim light, you mistake it for a serpent. You are seized by mortal fear. Then you muster the courage to check on it, cautiously, of course. You fling a stone at the 'serpent'. The stone hits the target, but there is no response. You go closer for a clearer view. You try to nudge the 'serpent' with a stick. You discover that what you mistook for a serpent is a harmless rope. You begin to breathe easily. You thank your stars. The threat has been averted. You move on.

This incident encapsulates existential fear. There never was a serpent except in your mind. The serpent was 'unreal'. It was imposed on the rope that was 'real'. Imposing the unreal on the real constitutes the fundamental folly in life. The Sanskrit term for the unreal world, the world of mental projection, is 'prapancha'.

Much of the fears and anxieties that torment life owe to such 'folly' of mistaking the mithya, unreal, for the real satya. This confusion arises from smriti-bhransha, blurred memory. Call it spiritual dementia. To see the unreal for what it truly is to rise above spiritual short-sightedness. This leads to a correction of inner vision and clarity in life.



THE SPEAKING TREE

Another common analogy often used to demonstrate the 'absurdity' of fear and joy, loss and gain, is the maxim of the missing gold chain. You wear a gold chain around your neck. Even amid party chatter and laughter, you gently run your fingers on your neck to check that the chain is safe once in a while. One such time, your fingers miss the necklace. The gold chain is gone. You are miserable. The party talk and laughter come to a halt. Everyone gets down to help you find the chain. Then somebody points out that, 'Oh! It is there, around your neck, just slipped out of position.' You are happy to 'recover' the lost chain. The 'loss' as also the 'recovery' was unreal, a mental construct, like the metaphorical serpent.

The serpent and the rope, connoting the unreal and the real, are excellent metaphors. DV Gundappa, the Kannada poet of Mankuthimmana Kagga, goes a step forward in Kagga 391. He agrees it was your 'folly' to mistake the rope for the serpent. But was that moment of mortal fear unreal? So intense was the fright that you saw the rope-serpent slithering. Were you not then 'really' scared? Sweat beads of fear had shown upon your forehead.

The poet emphasises that the world may be mithya, but the suffering it induces is real!

Safe Haven Status Takes a Bit of a Dent

Need for tax-induced consumption revival

Indian corporate earnings continued to remain under pressure during the latest results season, underscoring the need for tax-induced consumption revival later during the year. Headline inflation, too, is on the desired trajectory, raising expectations of further interest rate cuts. Stock valuations are being proposed up by a systematic switch of household savings to equity, smoothening in the process volatility in foreign capital flows. The markets have moved beyond security concerns in India's neighbourhood and are expected to stabilise after the US and China began a meaningful engagement to avert a trade war. Still, Indian equity valuations remain stretched, and the fundamentals suggest limited upside till earnings don't revive.

India's status as a safe haven in an increasingly uncertain global environment has taken a dent last week. The country contributed to geopolitical vulnerability in its



effort to deter cross-border terror from Pakistan. Its attractiveness in providing steady growth in an environment of fragmenting trade has also dimmed with de-escalation by the US over reciprocal tariffs. Washington is on course to seeking constructive engagement over balanced trade with most of its principal trading partners. Return to normalcy will restore focus on Indian stock valuations, and the scope for a turnaround in domestic consumption.

Rural spending has made fair progress of late. But urban households have turned cautious. Further recovery in rural consumption is dependent on the progress of the monsoon that has been predicted will be normal this year. Income-tax giveaways announced in the budget will take some time to work their way through the system. Easier credit will have a more immediate impact, but is constrained by high household debt levels. The 8th Pay Commission will also buoy urban consumption through the timing of its award. On the upside, the outlook for exports has improved with the dialling down of trade tension. But it will take a while for India to regain immunity provided by domestic consumption.

Time Has Come for Samaynishth Bharat

Time and tide, we are told, wait for no man. And, yet, time, if not tide, is a sensitive topic for time-agnostic Indians across the socioeconomic and occupational spectrum, from president to the delivery agent to the government school teacher. Not too long ago, a Supreme Court ruling set timelines for governors and the president to grant assent to Bills passed by legislatures. The idea was to counter delays — unavoidable or otherwise — and pile-ups of pending laws. Neither governors (ex-governors, included) or president seem to have taken kindly to the court's timely concern regarding timelines. While commentaries have spouted on the impropriety of the court trying to impose deadlines on these statutory worthies,



there is a real need to recognise the efficacy of having timelines in place — and repairing the well-entrenched cultural notion of IST, or Indian Stretchable Time.

IST is a malaise cutting through occupations, professions and sectors, and its normalisation — indeed, defence — is a blot on our society. The bane of systemic tardiness affects consumers and users of entities from Urban Company and Zomato/Swiggy, to airlines and public infrastructure. Bengaluru alone reportedly suffers an annual loss of ₹20k cr due to traffic congestion-related delay. Time *is* money, and delayed justice can, indeed, be its denial.

This week, the same apex court that has miffed elements of the executive, indicated that it could ask Supreme Court lawyers to furnish a timeline in advance within which they would conclude their arguments in cases. This is well within its remit. But punctuality must become mission mode beyond courts. Like Swachh Bharat pertaining to public hygiene, India needs a 'Samaynishth Bharat' programme. As soon as possible.



JUST IN JEST

Self-described 'real' patriots also have America as a no-go destination

Not Just Türkiye and Azerbaijan, It Seems

There are patriots, who are thoughtfully cancelling their vacations to Türkiye and Azerbaijan, because these two countries aired their support for Pakistan during Operation Sindoor. And then there are *real* patriots, who refused to ever go to the US — on vacation, to study or to stay — not just because that country has been instrumental in okaying the latest IMF loan to Pakistan, or equalised India and Pakistan even after the Pahalgam terrorist attacks, but because, for decades, America has been rogue-supportive through weaponry and money supplies.

Never mind President Jimmy Carter describing in 1980 President Zia-ul-Haq, responsible for Pakistan taking on a distinct anti-India Islamist turn: 'I found him a competent personality to bear the beacon of light that the free world expects of him to bear.' Never mind that post-9/11, Washington found Islamabad to be a 'partner in terrorist crime-busting'. But, even now, as Pakistan has moved closer to a Chinese orbit, Trumpland shows that it has 'feelings' for Pakistan. 'Maybe we can even get them together a little bit… where they go out and have a nice dinner together,' said the American president last week about the two countries that nearly went to war. So, New York, Grand Canyon, Napa Valley, Niagara Falls… along with Istanbul and Baku, the super patriots will give these places, too, a miss.

EYES WIDE SHUT Thousands of Indians see illegal migration to the US as investment

Is the Dunki Work Worth It?



Neeraj Kaushal



GETTY IMAGES

AMERICA AND BUST: Illegal migrants from Gujarat at border patrol in Arizona, 2024

New York: 'Dunki' migration — illegal methods of emigration/donkey flights by hopping from place to place — has received a severe beating on social media after Donald Trump deported several hundred migrants who had entered the US illegally. The common portrayal of dunki migrants is that they are gullible young people, duped into taking highly risky journeys to rich countries, via some of the world's most dangerous and crime-ridden terrains. Agents charge anything between ₹40 lakh and ₹60 lakh. That's 40-60× a typical air ticket to the US.

Surely, there must be better ways of investing such large sums? Yet, clearly, thousands who have taken the route do not think so. If they succeed in reaching safely and don't get deported — and those are two big 'ifs', especially in Trump's America — the maths also works out in their favour.

Twice, in the course of last week, I rode in taxis of Indian migrants in New York City, who by their own admission came to the US via the dunki route. They were shocked when I called them gullible, and found my disdain of dunki migration naive. They did not think they were duped into undertaking their journeys. Both described the stupendous cost of their journeys as *investments*.

Satinder, who has been in the US for 2½ years, said that he has saved through his earnings over this period to cover the entire cost of his trip. He now owns the yellow cab in which we were riding, and a taxi medallion — a transferrable permit that allows operating a taxicab in NYC. He told me his family and friends helped him buy the taxi and the medallion for $2 lakh (about ₹1.6 cr). In the US, he declared, 'Sky is the limit to how far you can go if you are willing to work hard.'

Kapil Dev, driver of the second taxi I rode, has had a less spectacular stay than Satinder. But he, too, thinks it has been a worthwhile investment and he'll be able to save the cost of his trip within 2-3 years. His did not speak good English and was bored, he added. His plan is to work for 5 years, make a lot of money, and then return to India.



Dunki migrants are entrepreneurial youth, undertaking risky, yet, on average, rewarding, migration. Agents design travel routes that combine legal and illegal means

For close to 400 Indian nationals who have been deported from the US since January, illegal emigration has been a disaster. For thousands of others, that has not been the case.

There is a growing sentiment, partly fuelled from Rajkumar Hirani's 2023 Shah Rukh Khan-starring movie Dunki, that Indians who are using the dunki route are unpatriotic towards India. The character of Hardy, played by Khan, refused the offer to stay in Britain to make the point that he was a true patriot. His fellow migrants, who accepted the offer to stay, by this logic were unpatriotic.

This is Bollywood bunkum. Dunki migrants are not unpatriotic. They are entrepreneurial youth, and the sort of migration they undertake is risky, yet, on average, rewarding. Agents design travel routes that combine both legal as well as illegal means.

Dunki migration from India to the US typically involves first going to a South American country that is relatively open to granting tourist visas to Indians, and then using multiple transports to travel all the way to the southern border of the US — crossing some international borders with visas, and some stealthily. Sections of these routes are harrowingly dangerous, including the Darién Gap — 96-km terrain of dense rainforest, swamp and mountains located between Panama and Colombia — which connects South and North America, where migrants are also at high risk of facing drug cartels and criminal gangs.

We don't know how many Indians who take the dunki route actually succeed. What we know is that thousands are charmed by the success of these migrants, and are ready to take similar risks. While the actual number is not known, data on individuals captured gives an idea of the scale. In 2023, 96,917 Indians were caught trying to cross into the US, up from 30,662 in 2021.

Both Kapil and Satinder claimed that their trips involved several months of planning, and that they were not duped into draining their family wealth to some cunning agents. Why did they not apply for visas? 'Some apply for student visas. But that requires prior admission in an American university, and there is no guarantee of receiving the visa even if you are admitted,' Kapil replied. His cousin who lives with him in NY had arrived on a student visa and is enrolled in a college.

Trump has decided to stop illegal immigration. He is treating illegal migrants as hardcore criminals, deporting them to their origin countries in chains, or sending them to prisons in the US, El Salvador, or Guantánamo Bay Naval Base in Cuba. So far, his policy has worked: the number of migrants entering the country via the US' southern bor-



der has fallen significantly.

But will his government increase legal channels of migration to meet the US' demand for medium- and low-skilled workers that irregular migration filled in the past? If not, conditions that create illegal emigration will thrive, as will illegal immigration.

The writer is professor of social policy, Columbia University

ChatGPT **SHAIRI OF THE DAY**

Qatar sent a jet with some bling,
Said, 'For Don, who wants to be king!'
While Nato just winced,
And Putin Rasputined,
Xi said, 'Tuh, now he won't do a thing!'
•••

Forced Out of Homes

Globally, a record 83.4 million people were forced to move out of their homes because of disasters or conflicts in 2024, according to the Global Report on Internal Displacement 2025. This **internal displacement of people** (within the country's own borders) was more than double recorded a decade ago. The report also counted **internal displacements** - a forced movement of people in the year (65.8m in 2014), where each movement of a person forced to move multiple times is counted separately...

The number of IDPs* continues to rise

2015 40.5 million → 2024 83.4 million

73.5 million displaced by conflict & violence		9.8 million displaced by disasters	
Sudan	11.6m	Afghanistan	1.3m
Syria	7.4m	Chad	1.2m
Colombia	7.3m	Philippines	1m
DR Congo	6.2m	Ethiopia	7,57,000
Yemen	4.8m	Somalia	7,33,000
Others	36.5m	Others	4.9m

Source for both: IDMC

65.8 million internal displacements (movements) recorded in 2024.

By disasters*: 45.8m
By conflict & violence: 20.1m

*Across 163 countries/territories

*Across 117 countries/territories

Note: Numbers of internally displaced people (IDPs) are counted at year end. Internal displacements are the total number for all of 2024

SANJEEV RAJ JAIN

Bell Curves ≡ R Prasad



Affording to Age Better



Rajesh Shukla

The share of India's population aged 60 and above is projected to rise from 8.6% in 2011 to nearly 20% by 2050, according to UN Population Fund (UNFPA). Consumption varies among households with elderly members across economic groups, with stark contrasts between households comprising the rich (20%), middle (60%) and poor (20%).

Urban and rural differences, and family structures — joint vs nuclear — further influence spending behaviours. These changing consumption patterns are set to shape the structure of society in the decades to come.

▶ **Healthcare** Households with elderly members allocate 12% of their total consumption expenditure to healthcare, compared to 5% in households without them. Access to quality healthcare remains a concern, with 60% of elderly patients opting for private hospitals despite higher costs. The financial strain of such expenses often forces seniors to prioritise medical needs over other aspects of their lives.

Wealthier seniors can afford private hospitals, specialist doctors and premium health insurance plans, particularly in urban areas. The middle segment relies on a mix of private and government healthcare, balancing out-of-pocket (OOP) expenses with insurance coverage.

The poor, especially in rural areas, face critical healthcare limitations. Treatments are often delayed due to financial constraints, and depend on government hospitals and welfare schemes.

▶ **Nutrition choices** Affluent seniors, particularly in urban areas, prioritise organic foods, specialised diets and dietary supplements for longevity and wellness. Middle-income groups try to balance home-cooked meals with occasional healthy foods and supplements. Low-income groups, especially in rural regions, rely on staple grains and local produce. This limited variety increases the risk of nutrient deficiencies.

Elderly individuals living in joint families tend to receive more consistent nutritional support, as family members contribute to caregiving. In contrast, nuclear families, especially in urban settings, may lead to greater reliance on processed or convenience foods.

▶ **Tech adoption** While over half of Indian seniors now use smartphones, this trend is largely driven by the rich. The middle class is increasingly adopting digital tools. But many elderly members still rely on younger family members for assistance. The poor have limited access to smartphones, the internet and digital literacy programmes. Elderly individuals in joint families, however, are often introduced to tech by younger relatives.

▶ **Housing choices** Rich seniors are increasingly moving into luxury senior living communities that offer caregivers, recreational facilities and wellness programmes. Middle-income groups remain in traditional joint family setups or self-owned homes, adapting spaces informally for ageing needs but without professional care.

Low-income groups often live in shared or substandard housing, with little or no elderly-friendly infra. They rely on state-supported housing schemes for shelter. In urban areas, the shift toward nuclear families has led to more seniors living alone, increasing their dependence on paid caregivers. In contrast, rural joint families often continue to provide intergenerational support.

▶ **Financial security** The rich maintain financial independence through pensions, FDs, real estate and stock market investments. The middle classes often struggle with financial planning, juggling pensions, small savings and family support, while worrying about inflation and escalating medical costs.

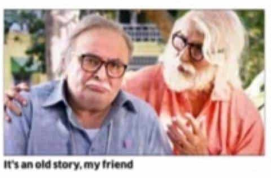
The poor remain economically vulnerable, relying almost entirely on government pensions, daily earnings or financial assistance from family. Rural seniors in this group generally have limited access to pension benefits and formal financial services, further widening the economic gap.

▶ **Leisure and travel** The rich engage in international travel, wellness retreats and luxury experiences tailored for senior citizens. The middle opt for domestic vacations, occasional leisure trips and religious tourism, depending on savings and family involvement. The poor primarily participate in religious tourism and community-based events, such as temple visits.

Urban nuclear family seniors tend to travel more independently. Those in rural joint families often undertake religious pilgrimages together, maintaining traditional forms of social engagement.

Bridging the gap between the rich, middle and poor, between urban and rural elderly populations, and different family structures requires affordable healthcare solutions, accessible tech education, sustainable pension schemes and inclusive housing policies.

As the country moves toward an ageing economy, addressing these disparities will be essential for fostering a sustainable and inclusive future for all senior citizens.



It's an old story, my friend

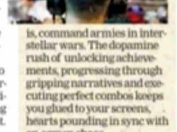
The writer is MD-CEO, PRICE

ALGO OF BLISSTECH

Binge Gaming

There's a special kind of exhilaration that comes with binge gaming — a state where time melts away, reality fades, and you become utterly consumed by quests and a relentless pursuit. It's not merely about playing a game; it's about being *in* it, navigating intricate storylines, mastering mechanics and feeling the triumph of overcoming impossible odds.

The thrill begins with the sheer immersion. A game can transport you to fantastical realms, where you grapple mythical beasts, destroy Naz-



is, command armies in interstellar wars. The dopamine rush of unlocking achievements, progressing through gripping narratives and executing perfect combos keeps you glued to your screens, hearts pounding in sync with on-screen chaos.

But the real bliss is found in the freedom binge gaming offers. There's comfort in repetition, in the rhythmic grind of upgrading gear, hypnotic loops of music and movement. It's a retreat from the mundane, where friendships are forged in online lobbies.

Of course, 'too much' can blur the boundary between passion and obsession. Yet, when done right (weekends?), binge gaming is a rush like no other, a marathon of strategy, storytelling and skill.

THE SPEAKING TREE

Winners Take It All

CHETAN SAVLA

In Negotiation Theory, one of the tools for success is reimagining the scope of negotiation. In a typical bilateral negotiation, when, say, one party is buying, another is selling, the normal thinking of each party would revolve around finding out how badly the other party wants to do the trade, figuring out the price point at which they would possibly walk away from the deal, and then squeezing the best deal from the other side. However, most smart negotiators will treat that thing or service as amorphous and redefine the scope of the trade to accommodate a winning outcome for both sides of the transaction.

This ability to think outside the box, add lateral dimensions to the discussion, and embrace the concept of a win-win solution is part of a larger vision of our existence beyond the limitations of our possessive, competitive spirit.

In chapter 15 of the Bhagwad Gita, Krishn describes our existence as an inverted banyan tree, whose roots are Paramatma, the supreme soul, trunk is the creator Brahma, branches are living beings, and leaves are our knowledge. It is an integrated whole, in which there is no concept of me or mine, and there is no scenario in which one branch can gain at the cost of another, since they are extensions of the same tree. Keeping this integrated existence in mind, it is possible to imagine infinite ways in which parties on either side of a bargaining table can design the scope of a negotiation so that both walk away winners.

Chat Room

When Terriers Chase Terror

Apropos 'India Inc, Ready, Def-Tech, Go' by T K Arun (May 15), Operation Sindoor proved that India does not believe in braggadocio but in performance. Unfortunately, a country named Pakistan born out of India has always acted inimically against it. Despite Donald Trump's vainglorious sound bites, India stopped warring after achieving its objective of sending a message to Pakistan to stop backing terrorists. India was cautious not to harm anyone but the terrorists. However, rightly, India should be prepared to face any ferocious attack by its neighbour and be ready with ammunition build-up within, and propel the forces to remain ready for glory.

K Rajendran
Chennai

A Blistering Biz Blitzkrieg?

This refers to the Edit, 'First Bell Rings, Boxers Brace Even' (May 14). In the long run, tariff war can not be the solution to favourable trade balance. In a limited sense, the US might have succeeded in reducing its trade deficit, in February and March, but entered a recession phase. During January-April, treasury yield, consumption expenditure and investment indicated re-



cession driven by trade war. The stock market bounce-back immediately on a 90-day pause on high tariffs shows what the US market expects from the Trump administration. Now, Trump cannot sing the MAGA song for too long, or maybe it's a technique to increase bargaining power in tariff negotiations (and find new trade partners like Syria), but the policy will lead to the dollar losing its global supremacy.

Shishir Sindekar
Nashik

Ride from Crown To Crown Jewel

Apropos 'JLR Buyers Hit the Brakes, Wait for More Clarity on FTA with UK' by Ljee Philip and Kala Vijayraghavan (May 14), quite a few British brands assemble imported components or import fully built cars from Britain to India. Buyers seeking these cars are waiting for the slashed duty to take effect. JLR, too, assembles various models at its Pune plant with imported components. The components could also be subject to lower duty. The FTA's 10% duty would be applicable even for importing pre-1975 vintage cars from Britain that GoI has recently allowed.

Anjan Chatterjee
Nagpur

Letters to the editor may be addressed to **editet@timesofindia.com**